THOUGHT PROVOKING IDEAS OF THE GLOBAL ESSAY COMPETITION 2022

Collaborative Global Future Committees to Make Intergenerational Justice a Standard Part of Legislative Scrutiny

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Introduction

Confronted with the human and economic carnage of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closing window for action on climate change, we cannot deny there exists a system that disproportionately favours a select few, as many societies globally are facing a lack of social mobility, indebtedness, a problem of generational wealth accumulation and the underfunding of social security and healthcare.

Human history shows our social instincts have been evolutionarily aligned with kin tribes. However, inherent human collaboration has scaled poorly as the operating system of sociality in a global era (Yun et al., 2019, p. 7). As societies age, the problem of intergenerational equity is being further exasperated by the risk of a pro-elderly spending bias by governments, coupled with an increasing marginalisation of young people in the democratic process.

Despite the acknowledged fact that short-termism in policymaking underlies many questions of intergenerational equity, there is no global coherent structure guiding long-term thinking and addressing the system's risks to intergenerational justice. As such, a mechanism that delivers effective collaborative, intergenerational dialogue that promotes a more equitable future is necessary.

Existing Efforts for Future Generations

To promote a more equitable future, two possible types of mechanisms can be used. First are constitutional provisions focusing on limiting the power of current generations using codified constitutions and courts to prevent the enactment of policies that may harm future generations (Tremmel, 2006, p. 21). At the multilateral level, the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations towards Future Generations (1997), adopted by the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), most explicitly stresses the responsibility of current generations to safeguard the future. Regarding the impact of ageing on intergenerational solidarity, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) might be most explicit in addressing solidarity as a prerequisite for social cohesion and a foundation for formal public welfare. However, no binding international instrument exists to grant future generations enforceable rights (OECD, 2020).

A second avenue is more political and legislative in nature, namely designing policymaking procedures that give due concern to future generations. Several legislatures have set up temporal commissions to safeguard the environment for future generations, yet only a few have been sustained throughout time and held an actual mandate to study the future. The following list provides illustrative examples of the most comprehensive ideas thus far:

Committees for Future Generations

Commission for Future Generations (Israel, 01'– 06'). With the authority to interfere in any bill that it reasoned would have a significant impact on future generations and to provide its opinion on a bill, this commission focused on raising the legislative branch's awareness of the future consequences of legislation in a variety of fields. Furthermore, it provided data and reports on topics with particular interests to future generations (Teschner, 2013, p. 3).

Committee for the Future (Finland, 1993). Established to generate dialogue with the government on major future issues, this committee is the only permanent parliamentary committee in Europe with a specific mandate to study the future. Consisting of 17 members of parliament, it serves as a think tank but does not process draft bills. Government-opposition cleavage is not that important, thus presenting the dilemma of the need to prove its worth to members of parliament (MPs) to ensure continued existence (Parliament of Finland, 2020).

Future Generation Tests

Living Standard Framework (LSF; New Zealand). This framework offers a measurement tool that analyses different dimensions of well-being and the distributional implications across age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2019, budget bids submitted by government agencies were assessed using the LSF. From an intergenerational perspective, the most interesting feature of the LSF is its capacity to make inequalities across age cohorts visible (The Treasury, 2021).

Generation Test (The Netherlands). The Dutch cabinet is currently conducting a generation test for the legislative process to better understand the effects of policies on young people and consider their interests more systematically in policy design (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2020).

Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIA; Switzerland). This framework presents another innovative example of the operationalisation of sustainability along 15 criteria, partially through the lens of intergenerational fairness (OECD, 2012).

Limitations of Existing Efforts for Future Generations

As of 2020, no OECD countries had adopted a standalone national or multilateral strategy dedicated to advancing intergenerational justice. Existing solutions are either limited in their effectiveness by concentrating the task to one representing individual, which may not accurately reflect a diversity of mindsets and age cohorts, are reactive in nature instead of proactive in designing the future or lack multilateral collaboration characteristics. Collaboration, however, is key to creating political will and shifting mindsets (Stern, 2013).

To understand why existing efforts continue to fall short and why large-scale systems produce perverse outcomes relative to what they should and could produce, one must look beyond the disciplines of economics and politics and into human nature. Neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky (2012) identified three human oddities—relativity, sociality and short-sightedness—all closely related to the concept of markets. Relativity entails that the human brain strongly reacts to one's own position relative to others'

but fails to accurately measure and respond to absolutes. Sociality is essential to enable alignment with a shared goal, yet in a global era, direct relationality is removed. Furthermore, myopic strategies have been reinforced by evolution to enhance survivability and now affect our ability to estimate future trade-offs. Markets are adept at expressing people's sense of relativity while erasing sociality and creating a short-term balance between supply and demand. The fundamental theorem of welfare economics assumes a model that only takes instantaneous frames in time and assumes a static population and amount of traded and consumed resources. However, markets are prone to failure with uncertain futures. Due to short-sightedness, people seldom worry about future uncertainties and issues. Regardless of future uncertainty, some may argue that one only needs to examine the discount value that connects the present and future. However, the bigger the discount value, the less people worry about the future, as it costs less in present terms. Another problem is that the market lacks any mechanism that distributes resources between current and future generations. (Tatsuyoshi & Hamasaki, 2010) Thus, regulating markets, changing democracies and controlling optimism bias in a way that makes 'the future' a question of 'now' should be the objective of new intergenerational contracts.

Ideal Situation: A Novel Approach to Inclusive Stakeholding through Future Design

The interdisciplinary field of future design offers an ideological framework for responsible economic development and social progress, thus allowing for the comprehensive management of intergenerational justice. Encompassing insights from economics, psychology, ethics and neuroscience, this field can account for the aforementioned human oddities. Future design can ensure that governments globally could give mandates for a country in 50 to 100 years' time, assessed by a select committee representing a diverse set of knowledge backgrounds and age cohorts. Furthermore, these governments would need to justify their policies publicly and in collaborative exchange with other nations to share proposals and learnings.

Future design research has led to significant findings supporting this vision as a viable method for constructing a new intergenerational contract. Researchers created imaginary future generations by assigning stakeholders in the decision-making process with the responsibility of advocating for the interests of future generations and standing in for generations who would be active in 2060. Through mock collaborations and negotiations, participants were expected to gain significant knowledge of what may benefit the future. (Kamijo et al., 2017)

Multiple studies have revealed that creating imaginary future generations caused participants to systematically favour much more transformative plans, their discount rate diminished and they started putting more weight on the welfare of future citizens. Among the positive outcomes, some opted to leave resources for future generations, even if that meant reducing present benefits. Short-sightedness was thus overcome, and

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researchers found significant changes in the psychology of these participants. Interviewed half a year later, these participants said they had engaged in objective self-reflection, reconciled conflicting interests between their two selves (present and assigned future self) and accessed new ways of thinking. (Kamijo et al., 2017; Kobayashi, 2018; Hara et al., 2019)

Conceptual Foundation: Building Collaborative Global Future Committees

Internal institutionalisation

To conceptualise a future design committee, the idea of 'institutionalisation' as a theoretical framework can be used. According to Huntington (1968), this is 'the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability' (p. 12). Institutionalisation has been utilised from organisational studies to sociology to describe and examine governance systems. Institutionalisation is achieved through developing internal stability, external legitimacy and durability. Internal institutionalisation refers to routines and patterns of behaviour that are not reliant on individuals. This can be operationalised along the following elements:

Composition. These global future committees would be composed of acting politicians and citizens across different age cohorts, countries, educational backgrounds and scientific expertise. The inclusion of standing parliament members is essential, given their status and ability to re-emphasise future issues in policy decision-making. Moreover, the psychological mindset shift resulting from future design scenarios would allow for the education of political leaders about future phenomena and would significantly affect their political priorities.

Split into four groups, two would stand in as representatives of future generations, allowing for a multi-angled ideation process. This allows for a way to overcome standing committees' poor exercise of long-term planning as part of standard legislative scrutiny, as they are currently not representing a diversity of mindsets, age groups or use future research scenario-building methods.

Routines. Members would be appointed for an average four-year electoral period. The local and multilateral dialogue on intergenerational equity would form the formal institutional 'backbone' of the committees. Through open seminars, workshops and international discussions, committees form their agenda of topics, build contextual intelligence and exchange key insights, adding a democratic element to the process of education and intergenerational mindset formation. The committees would deliberate salient questions, such as immigration or climate change, and would be obliged to report findings publicly.

Tasks. Past rejections of the establishment of permanent future committees quoted a lack of legislative or budgetary duties (Arter, 2000; Boston, 2017, pp. 407–408). Therefore, alongside the primary task of setting an agenda on a number of pressing topics and investigating them with research spending through a future design lens, the committees could also directly issue statements regarding government bills with a significant future impact.

External Institutionalisation

Because an organisation must be perceived as relevant and legitimate by outside actors, the following elements are considered:

Legitimacy. To justify creating an intergenerational mindset and an imaginary future generation in the current landscape of democracy, one may draw on the social contract advocated by Rawls (1971)

using the 'veil of ignorance'. If people were to agree to a social contract without knowing which generation they would be born into, they would be afraid of being born into the most unfortunate generation and would therefore support the creation of an imaginary future generation to reduce the burden of this generation.

Accountability. Through public statements and reports, these committees would not only gather wider media interest and civic reputation, but also quantify the benefits of their suggestions and justify their unique ability to solve future problems, leveraging the advantages of cross-generational and multilateral collaboration.

Durability

Finally, for their sustained existence, future committees must be equipped with suitable enforcement mechanisms and become interlinked across policy bodies and geographies.

Enforcement Mechanisms. While the mere existence of a parliamentary think tank can 'nudge' decision makers towards forward-oriented thinking, the root cause of political myopia cannot be curbed only via its future design approach, unless directly connected to parliamentary work (Caney, 2016). Accordingly, committees would hold the authority to interfere with any bill that they reasoned would have a significant detrimental impact on future generations, be invited to government deliberations and receive information from all supervisory bodies to then form a response argument for improvement.

Multilateral Collaboration. To not only gain more valuable insights by exchanging with future committees multilaterally, but also ensuring durability through accountability and visibility in the public, the different committees could meet at regular intervals and present their solutions live to a global audience, making 'future' a standard part of legislative scrutiny in a global, collaborative setting.

Impact on Intergenerational Equity and Collaboration

The suggested framework 1) comprehensively grasps the structure and cause and effect relationships of intergenerational problems, 2) proposes visions of a sustainable society, 3) describes and designs future scenarios to fulfil those visions, 4) integrates and formulates knowledge for fulfilling the created visions and 5) offers cross-disciplinary, multidimensional assessments of sustainable socioeconomic and technology systems.

The integration of an intergenerational justice lens into government budget cycles could shape national development plans, sector strategies, policies and programmes. Horizontal inequalities, distributional effects of budget allocations across different age cohorts and actual trade-offs faced by policy makers are also highlighted. Truly redefining the idea of 'collaborating with future generations', the outlined future committees can create unparalleled cross-national insights, reframe mindsets and support long-term thinking.

Conclusion

Not only must we predict the future, but we must also design it. To build a truly sustainable society, future generations' viewpoints must be considered. Only then can practical new methods of overcoming intergenerational conflicts of interest be developed through present decision-making processes. The proposed future design process offers a novel approach to this challenge by creating imaginary stakeholders of future generations who participate in negotiation and decision-making with the present generation.

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