

Narratives Behind Climate Strategy in Finland

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ABSTRACT:

The 2015 Paris Agreement (PA) represents a profound change in global climate governance becoming a blueprint for other governance arenas. However, the varying success of reaching the national climate targets, unstable security, and growing right-wing populism poses a question of which direction the EU climate policy is moving after ten years of PA. The success of this agreement depends heavily on the effectiveness of national climate change policies wherein political parties have a critical role in developing these policies while also impacting public attitudes on climate change.

We use the case of Finnish climate strategy as a case of national climate strategy. We analyzed Finnish climate policy documents by using Ostrom's IAD Framework and Multiple stream framework analysis to create the narratives behind the Finnish climate strategy. The Institutional Analysis and Development framework (IAD) is a conceptual tool that Ostrom and her colleagues developed to analyze and understand the complex interactions and dynamics within institutions that govern common-pool resources. Our research question is: What are the narratives behind the Finnish climate strategy?

Key words: Climate strategy, narrative, IAD framework, Multiple stream analysis framework

1. Introduction

According to the national climate and energy strategy, Finland aims to reduce greenhouse gases by 60% by 2030 compared to the 1990 baseline and to be carbon neutral by 2035. Since 2005, emissions have decreased in all sectors except agriculture. However, Finland is not on track to achieve this climate target. According to the Climate Change Performance Index Finland ranks lower than other Nordic countries in climate action (CCPI, 2024) while having more ambitious target than EU. The EU It has enhanced its capabilities for a proactive 'grand climate strategy' (Oberthür et Dupont, 2021) This strategy also called 'The European Green Deal (EGD) has been proposed as a mission for Europe to become the world's first carbon-neutral continent by 2050 (von der Leyen, 2019). The strategy can only be successful if it shifts the economy to a new development path that fairly generates broad social and political opportunities. Our question here is can Finnish climate strategy lead the economy to a new path? While looking at large geographic areas such as Finland, from an economic perspective, it will be most attractive if some regions act as sources while others act as sinks. It would make sense for communities to have different strategies. (Riahi et al, 2021)

A study by Fekete et al has suggested the development of comprehensive policy packages with financial incentives, focusing on the long-term security and technologically underdeveloped sectors to improve climate strategy (Fekete et al, 2021) The scope of the goal; adequateness and fairness; and concrete road maps towards and beyond net zero are essential (Rogelj et al, 2021). Also, transparency and easily tracked targets have been requested. (Wei et al, 2021) This study provides insight into narratives leading to Finnish

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climate strategy by exploring the most significant climate policy documents with an IAD framework and Multiple stream framework analysis. Our research question is: What are the narratives behind the Finnish climate strategy?

2. Materials and methods

The most significant policy documents (Table 1.) were collected for analysis. They were collected from the webpage of the Parliament of Finland. We searched documents only with the keyword "climate" and left out documents related only to biodiversity or nature restoration.

Table 1. Documents retrieved from the webpage of the Parliament of Finland

Document	
The EU's 2040 climate goal and progress towards climate neutrality by 2050	Ministry of Environment of Finland
Response to a written question about the protection of old forests	Parliament of Finland
Response to the written question about the land use sector's climate plan updating	Parliament of Finland
Oral question about getting green transition investments in Finland	Parliament of Finland
Oral question about climate commitment	Parliament of Finland
Carbon-neutral Finland 2035 – national climate and energy strategy	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland
Medium-term climate policy plan	Ministry of Environment of Finland
Final report of the Citizens' Council Evaluating Climate Action	Ministry of Environment of Finland

The IAD framework consists of actors, norms, institutional settings, incentive structures, and rules affecting policies (Fig.1). Social scientists have widely adopted the IAD framework to study institutional arrangements over time. Here we use it to create processes and narratives. The action arena includes actors and action situations. Actors are influenced by conditions and institutional arrangements leading their actions to form patterns of interaction creating evaluation criteria for policies. (Polski and Ostrom, 1999)

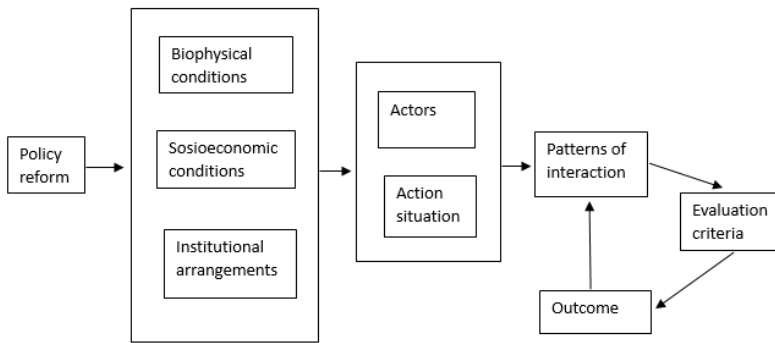


Figure 1. The schematic presentation of the IAD framework. Source (Polski and Ostrom, 1999).

Qualitative data analysis is the process of examining non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. Here we use qualitative data analysis to study policy documents and decisions. (Yin, 2015). This allows a deep understanding of the subject matter, uncovering underlying meanings, relationships, and social processes. The collected codes were categorized according to the components of Ostrom's (2009) (IAD) framework. (Table 2)

Table 2. Definition of the five aspects of the IAD framework for this study and considered variables for data collection per aspect. Adapted from Sattler et al. (2023)

No.	Aspects of the IAD framework	Definition	Considered variables for data collection	Material
(1)	Action situation	Climate change-related policies, strategies and political discussion in Finland	Implementation stage, initiation (top-down vs. bottom-up), timeline	Policy documents
(2)	Context condition	The general, biophysical/ environmental, socioeconomic, or political/legal context conditions of Finland	Biophysical/ environmental: Existing Environmental issues Socio-economic: Existing socio-economic issues Political/legal: Existing political/legal issues	Literature review
(3)	Interaction	The targeted interactions the actors	Social system: Participating actors Criteria for participation Roles of the actors	Policy documents
(4)	Outcomes	The measurable results/ outcomes of the policy reform	Benefits for actors	Policy documents and policy discussion

(5)	Evaluation criteria	The criteria used for evaluating the outcomes of the policy reform	Major themes risen in the discussion	Political discussion
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Finally, we use the Multiple stream framework to analyze the strategy. The multiple streams framework states that policies are formulated when the problem, politics, and policy streams converge, creating a 'policy window'. The 'problem stream' examines how issues gain attention on the agenda through indicators like reports and evaluations that monitor changes in the situation. The 'policy stream' focuses on the development and proposal of policy initiatives and solutions. The 'politics stream' considers how governmental actions, public sentiment, and campaigns by interest groups affect whether an idea becomes a priority on the agenda. (Mauti et al, 2019)

3. Results

The analysis starts with exploring the targeted actors for participation. Climate actions are often targeted at environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) and relevant administrative bodies (Tobin et al, 2023). According to the Medium-term climate policy plan various organizations and individuals have been engaged in climate actions (Table 3). A citizen's survey was organized as a part of the preparation process to enlighten views on emission reduction measures. In addition, a citizen council was formed to discuss the new measures and consult strategy work in coordination with the climate and energy policy ministerial working group.

Consumers are engaged in climate strategy which promotes the participation of consumers in the energy market as enablers of consumption flexibility. This emphasizes the role of the individual consumer as both an energy producer and consumer. In recent years, companies have become more active in climate policy. They are also subject to even more ambitious emission reduction measures. Private consumption shares around 60 % of all emissions, but no actions were planned to decrease private consumption excluding awareness raising and advertisement.

The Finnish climate strategy is aiming for wide-ranging dialogue between citizens, businesses, non-governmental organizations, researchers, labor market partners, and interest organizations, including industry and the agricultural sector with representatives. Policy measures mainly target male-dominated sectors and men's consumption habits. In male-dominated sectors such as construction, transport, and forestry, the overall effect on economic activity and employment is nevertheless positive, even though male-dominated tasks related to fossil fuels will disappear. Women and young people are more willing to support climate-friendly decisions. Along with technical solutions, measures that increase women's participation in climate policy should be emphasized. For example, healthcare and social service sector is less involved in climate strategy.

Table 3. Actors for participation

Targeted actors for participation	Role
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The Ministry of economy and employment	Planner
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Business Finland	Planner
Energy companies	Executor
Metsähallitus	Executor
Municipalities and communes	Executor
Regions	Executor
Universities, Research institutes	Advisor
Unions	Advisor

Evaluation criteria of the strategy include the Do No Significant Harm-principle, cost efficiency, impact on the cross-domestic product, employment, and sustainability criteria. The sustainability criteria here include human health, use of natural resources, air pollution, biodiversity, soil and water bodies, and quality of living conditions. However, flexibility is highlighted in how this criteria is adapted. The evaluation of sustainability in different policy areas is not consistent from the perspective of sustainable development. Climate actions are always expected to have economic and other benefits in addition to emission reductions. However, because climate actions costs, unstable economy leads to unstable climate policy while unstable climate policy leads to unstable economy. Motivations for implementing climate actions for communes are cost-efficiency, financial support, the well-being of the citizens, and image (Lehtonen ym.2020b). The Finnish climate strategy highlights the role of forestation as a carbon sink and technology export.

3.1 Operationalized framework

The operationalized framework (fig.2) demonstrates how the processes of constitutional choice influence the overall environment for making policy decisions. Additionally, the results produced by action situations establish the particular conditions for implementing operational choices. Here the operationalized framework helps identify certain key processes and narratives behind the climate strategy. Material-based economy seeks financial instruments to solve problems. What stands out from the strategy is that the economy and financial instruments are the main catalyst for climate action, instead of science or security.

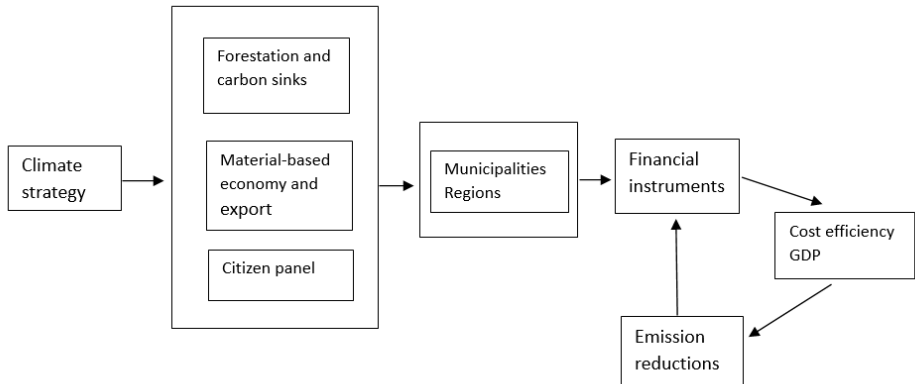


Figure 2. The operationalized framework of the climate strategy

3.2 The Multiple-stream analysis framework

The Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) is a theoretical model used in social science to enlighten how policies are formulated and how certain issues gain the attention of policymakers. Here we use it to explain how the Finnish climate strategy was developed.

1. Problem stream – What problems are being sought after as a policy solution in the Finnish climate strategy?

The Finnish climate strategy focuses heavily on the costs of climate change actions by highlighting emission trading and support for the companies and investments. (Table 4) Other problems arising from the strategy include risks of climate change, lack of awareness, and security of supplies. The theme of security has strongly risen in the Finnish climate strategy.

2. Policy stream – How has climate strategy been adopted in Finland?

Finnish climate strategy highlights voluntary actions instead of laws and regulations. Technical innovations and electrification funded through regional actors are the main actions to tackle climate change. The investments and financial instruments are the main tool for adopting the climate strategy. (CCPI, 2024)

3. Politics stream – What are the political factors for or against the adoption of climate strategy in Finland?

A main political factor against climate strategy is the uncertainty of political decisions. For example, the decisions from the EU are not always predictable. However, the issue of security is wide of top interests in both Finland and the EU, and climate change is seen as a larger issue of security, which might enhance the strategy.

Table 4. Themes from the material

Themes	Subthemes
Low-carbon roadmap for industries	Emission trading Power purchase agreement Energy efficiency agreement Energy surveys and consultation
Electrification	The new Electricity Market Act (588/2013) Support for electric cars Charging infrastructure Electrification support for companies Permit process eased
Support for RE investments	The sustainability criteria Eco tax deduction for households Phase-out of coal Sea wind power
Traffic	Wrecking reward Distribution obligation for traffic fuels Congestion charges
Sustainable product design	The transition to more energy-efficient technologies Public procurement Ecodesign Energy label
Nuclear power	
Risk assessment in the land use sector	Act on the evaluation of environmental impacts of plans and programs, (200/2005)
Uncertainty	Decisions based on incomplete information Security of supplies
Food and Agriculture	Support for domestic plant based protein National policies Forestation Biogas production Food waste Carbon sinks

The themes derived from the material suggest that the strategy is based on technological development instead of the development of the economy and consumption habits. These results suggest that the Finnish climate strategy is not prone to change the economy or consumption habits.

4. Discussion

The instability of the world has affected the Finnish climate strategy and the actions face significant delays. In politics, delay discourses can be categorized into four main types: (1) shifting responsibility elsewhere; (2) advocating for superficial solutions; (3) highlighting the negative aspects of climate policies; and (4) surrendering to climate change. Policy statements often turn into delay discourses when they propose ineffective solutions, diverting attention from more meaningful and effective measures (Lamb et al.,

2020). Improving energy efficiency is seen as the primary action for achieving the climate change mitigation target. The share of renewables is growing faster than expected in previous scenarios but so is the total energy consumption. Investments in RE are highlighted even if RE is fast becoming profitable (IEA, 2022). However, the Finnish strategy is very clearly stuck in the narrative that reducing emissions is expensive and reducing consumption is not convenient.

Ideas and representations of climate policy are part of climate policy reform. (Kern et al, 2014) Therefore we studied the results of the citizen panel to gain more insight on the idea about climate change and how it should be governed. This panel commented on climate actions and was allowed to present new ideas. However, our results find that the panel did not make any new suggestions to shift to the more sustainable economy not depending on overconsumption. Their narrative is still derived from a fossil economy with a high focus on sustaining the consumption level. This is supported by the fact that voluntary actions were more supported than "sticks" or pricing tools. Public procurements are not utilized enough to change the business environment in favor of climate-friendly products such as plant-based protein. The traffic sector is left without a clear roadmap for reducing emissions and buying a new electric car is encouraged. Addressing the costs of inaction would improve the climate strategy. (Wei et al, 2020) Focus on energy efficiency technology or carbon sinks may lead to a narrative that reducing consumption or emissions is not essential. One of the issues that emerges from these findings is that the Finnish climate strategy is led by the narrative of advocating technical solutions and highlighting the costs of climate policies.

The interplay between political factors and societal attitudes in Finland creates a policy environment for climate change mitigation. The multi-party system with coalition governments necessitates compromise and consensus-building while government poses larger authority in climate change mitigation than in other sectors such as economy or security. This can result in moderate and balanced policy approaches but may also slow down decision-making slowing down the decision making also in climate change mitigation.

The political consensus does not always lead to equitable policy measures across different sectors, addressing gender and class disparities. The political latitude should be limited to avoid ineffective climate decisions. The policy-making process should ensure, that decisions are grounded in robust research. Public and political support for climate initiatives might be enhanced by positive narratives instead of highlighting the costs of climate actions.

The challenges for climate policy implementation are listed below:

1. Focus on economy instead of scientific facts
2. Focus on political consensus instead of scientific facts
3. Focus on maintaining the current level of consumption and lifestyle instead of scientific facts

The EU climate policy has shifted to direction of making independent ambitious policies regardless of the U.S and Chinese policy (Wennick, 2024) Therefore, the EU seems to be the main advantage for effective climate policy.

In the future it's crucial to further discuss how public participation can influence policy development, including exploring innovative methods to actively involve citizens

and how regulatory frameworks can support this engagement. Also, further research could explore the balance between economic incentives and regulatory measures, examining how regulatory frameworks might more effectively guide climate action. The study relies mostly on existing policy documents. More profound results would be received with a large interview data among politicians, authorities and citizens.

5. Conclusions

The present research aimed to examine the narratives behind the Finnish strategy. This study has identified climate change to be seen mostly as a financial and security problem that could be tackled with technology and financial instruments. The political narrative is still very different from the scientific narrative of climate change which requires a profound change in economy and consumption habits. The results of this research support the idea that the Finnish climate strategy is also based on the slightly outdated idea of renewable energy needing massive financial support instead of regulatory push.

In order to change the political narrative, we need to fully understand the narratives. Motivating narrative should not only critique the current situation but also provide a hopeful vision for the future. Therefore, efficient narrative can not be based solely on costs of climate change policy. Changing a political narrative is about influencing the conversation and perceptions, and ultimately, shaping the way people think about issues.

While renewables and energy efficiency are the main tools climate change mitigation, new tools are desperately needed. However, it seems that citizen panel and seek for political consensus are not able to push for for more ambitious climate strategy that would lead to decrease of consumption. What can be clearly seen is that there is no clear goal for society to move from overconsumption to sustainable society. EU may play a vital role in bringing about new regulatory tools to control the consumption.

The question raised by this study is how do we move from economy economy-driven strategy to a regulatory-driven strategy? Future studies should explore how to engage citizens in to valid regulatory-based climate strategy. This could be done with a political economy analysis. What stands out here is general perception of climate change is limited by political consensus. However, the narrative is shifting slowly to cover all important emitting sectors in the society. It is possible, that when the general narrative of climate change has improved the citizen panel would be more efficient to push for more efficient climate policy.

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