

Is it possible to promote experimental culture top-down? – Finland's quest to become an experimentalist society

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Sustainability experimentation: interplay between grassroots and institutions, 14th October 2015

The structure of the presentation

- **A short history** of Finland's quest to become an experimentalist society
- **The first steps** taken
- **Reflections:** How to implement experimental culture? Is it possible top-down?

Disclaimer: This is not a piece of academic research – but rather some **personal notes** about a process that is currently taking place



Stockholm's Congestion Charge Experiment – A love story

- **PhD on national sustainable consumption and production programmes (2006-2012)**
 - **Frustration**
 - What if all the limited resources would have been directed to action?

- **Stockholm's congestion charge experiment (2005-2006, 6 months)**
 - Well evaluated
 - Communal referendum

- **Idea developed 2007-**
 - NGO project: Visions on sustainable development



A photograph of a wooden building with a red roof and a white sign in the foreground, set against a blue sky with clouds. The building has a classic wooden facade with a prominent overhanging eave. The sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, there is a white rectangular sign with a thin horizontal line near the top. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

**A short history of Finland's
quest to become an
experimentalist society**

Foresight Reports & Parliament's Committee for the Future

- The **Foresight Reports** of the Prime Minister's Office
 - On **energy and climate policy** (2009)
 - On sustainable growth and well-being (2013)
- In the legislature 2011 - 2015, **Juha Sipilä the vice-chair** of the Parliament's Committee for the Future
 - Hearing on experimentative culture

Hearings in Parliament's Committee for the Future 2012

- Ideas on experimental culture **met with enthusiasm** across political party lines
 - A way to shift from (mere) **planning to action**
 - Combatting extensive “**normative burden**”
 - Regaining respect for **doing (vs. knowing?)**
 - Supporting **democratic development**

“Time to Experiment!” - A report

- **A follow-up project:** “Time to experiment! – Finland on its way to become an experimentalist society”(Berg, 2013)
- Based on **interviews** with 14 Finnish experts from e.g. Tekes, Sitra, Aalto University + **14 case studies**
 - An environmental focus
- Presented in a press conference chaired by Juha Sipilä in the spring 2013



"Time to Experiment!" – Key recommendations

- An **office/ombudsman** for experimentation and innovation
- High profile experimentation **hubs**
- **Seed money**
- **Counselling** services
- A program



Other pioneering work in Finland (examples)

- **Sitra:** Various experiments and the quest to promote experimental culture
- **Tekes:** experimentation a key theme in the innovation research call of 2013
- **Ministry of the Environment & Ministry of Transport and Communications:** Sustainable consumption and production experiments & Traffic Lab
- **Valo:** the idea to use experimentation as a way to make the whole nation exercise by 2017

-> **On international level**, e.g. increasing urban experiments, living labs and transition experiments + **literature** on the topic 9

Programme of Prime Minister Sipilä's Government (Chapter 8, p. 28)

“A culture of experimentation will be introduced

Experimentation will aim at innovative solutions, improvements in services, the promotion of individual **initiative and entrepreneurship**, and the strengthening of **regional and local decision-making** and cooperation. Experiments will make use of citizen-driven operating practices...”

Programme of Prime Minister Sipilä's Government

(Chapter 8, p. 28)

- An **experimentation programme**, including extensive trials and several smaller experiments, will be implemented.
- Systematic experimentation will be introduced and **a legal basis** will be created to make the arrangement of experiments easier.
- Experimentation will **reduce response times and improve anticipation** during the process of solving social problems, and the Government's strategic aims will be promoted.

A cyclist wearing a black helmet and a black backpack is riding a bicycle on a dirt path that winds through a vast, green field. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The cyclist is seen from the side, looking forward along the path. The path is made of light-colored soil and gravel, and the surrounding fields are a vibrant green. In the distance, there are rolling hills and a few trees. A wind turbine is visible on the horizon to the left. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day.

The first steps taken

The triangle model of experiments

Experimentation hubs:

- For various purposes: research, technological and service innovation, governance modes and practices
- Require special resources
- Design and evaluation as pragmatic for the actors

Governments strategic experiments:

- Relatively few
- Aim at developing governments policies
- Well designed and evaluated (legitimacy)

Grassroots experimentation:

- Everywhere: workplaces, NGOs, individual citizens...
- Need for small seed money?
- Aim at developing their own operations and the society around (grassroots innovations!)
- Potentially light to implement



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Kohti uudenlaista kokeilukulttuuria

Kokeilukulttuuri syntyy halusta ja rohkeudesta kokeilla uudenlaisia toimintatapoja.

Hyvin kokeiltu on puoliksi tehty



muutoksen tekijöinä.

Ihmisillä on luontaisesti kykyä ja halua kehittää omaa elinympäristöään. Kokeilukulttuurin avulla voimme antaa tälle voimavaralle luvan muuttua ideoinnista toiminnaksi.

Kokeilukulttuurin vahvistamiseksi tarvitaan yksilöitä ja yhteisöjä, jotka haastavat uudennaisella rohkealla ajattelulla vanhat toimintatavat. Kokeilut tarjoavat jokaiselle mahdollisuuden toimia yhteiskunnallisen

Ajankohtaista

[Ministeri Vehviläinen: Kokeiluilla ideat ratkaisuksi](#)

VNK Tiedote 9.10.2015 13.22

[Kunta- ja uudistusministeri Vehviläisen vastuulla olevat toimintatapojen uudistamisen kärkihankkeet](#)

VM Tiedote 1.9.2015 13.30

[Hallitus esitteli muutosohjelmansa pääkohdat](#)

VNK Tiedote 31.8.2015 20.13

[Hallitus haastaa kunnat mukaan ideoimaan uudistuksia](#)

VNK Tiedote 27.8.2015 10.15

A participative process

- Minister Anu Vehviläinen leads the process together with the **Minister group on public reforms**
- Two **expert workshops** including officials from different **ministries**
- The Parliament of Finland informed and consulted in a special hearing
 - **Parliamentary Advisory Council**



The next steps

- Plans to establish an “**office**” to promote experimentation
 - Part of the Prime Minister’s Office
- A project to find out whether there should be a **special fund** for experiments, and if so, what kind of design it should have
 - SYKE takes part
- The design process started on the **basic income experiment**

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Reflections

Reflections on the process

- Genuine enthusiasm and will involved in the process
 - “Getting things **done**”
 - **Citizen** empowerment
 - Removing **barriers** for action (regulations)
- Possibilities for the experiments to meet the expectations?
 - Risk for **hype**
 - Risk for **scattered actions** that are not able to challenge governance structures, company operating systems or long-term practices of individuals and organizations
 - Yet, evidence that **learning by doing can be an effective, efficient and democratic** way to change things

Open questions

- What kind of **approaches and tools** could/should be used to support the flourishing of experimental culture on different levels?
 - **Promotion:** educational programmes?
 - **Implementation:** financing (seed money!)?
 - **Evaluation:** criteria (stringent vs. loose)?



Open questions

- What could/should be **governments role**?
 - To what extent is it possible to promote **experimentative culture top-down**?
 - Addressing **fears** related to action and **failure** a big question



A photograph of a balcony. In the foreground, a bright blue plastic chair is partially visible. Behind it, a long planter box filled with green foliage and white flowers sits on a grey concrete ledge. To the right, a terracotta pot contains a plant with white flowers and several white, rounded objects. A silver watering can is on the ground next to it. The background shows a white metal railing and a grey wall.

Thanks!
Questions? Ideas?

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Disappointments caused by broad policy programmes

- **Implementation** criticised
 - E.g. local climate programmes, Finland's programmes on sustainable development and sustainable consumption and production...
 - **A gap** between the great challenge/vision and the few actions taken
- The key question: How to proceed when...
 - **(structural) change** would be needed **BUT**
 - there is **little political will and resources?**
- Strategic experimenting an **alternative** to vague programme work



Strategic experiments

- Local experiments on low-carbon solutions **widely applied**
- Definition: 1) making something **new and concrete** that is 2) **restricted** in terms of time, space, scope and/or actors but that 3) has the **potential** of having wider societal relevance through various up-scaling mechanisms
- Some experimentalist localities (e.g. HINKU communities) have managed to make **impressive cuts of CO2 emissions**
- Need for their in-depth analysis
 - **Capacity to contribute to systemic change?**

Strategic experiments can refer to...

- **Governance** experimentation
 - E.g. trials of laws or novel ways to govern
- **Socio-technical** experimentation as part of **sustainability transitions**
 - Development of innovations within protected niches
 - E.g. promotion of novel solar panels by special R&D support and public procurement arrangements
 - Also “grassroots innovations”, e.g. sahkoautot.com
- **Living laboratories** taking place at local level
 - E.g. the testing of a new intelligent heating system in an interested neighbourhood

Hypothesis 1: **Because acting is a powerful tool for individual change**

- actions -> attitudes vs. attitudes -> actions
- The meaning of different sensations and feelings (vs. reading and thinking): personal experiencing a profoundly human way to gain information, learn and comprehend
- The power of practices and non-reflexive behaviour

Hypothesis 2:


Because leading by example is a way to say you are serious about change

- Strong communicative function
- But also a way to gain personal experience

Hypothesis 3:

Because making something new together can have broader consequences

- Learning, networking, the birth of new practices and symbolic embodiments of alternatives
- Sparking grist and finding common ground
- Up-scaling and broadening the influence

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a blue knitted hat with a green floral pattern and a red shirt with a dark pattern. The person is holding a small white cup in their hands. To the right, a red object, possibly a traditional instrument or tool, is partially visible. The background is blurred, showing an outdoor setting with a wooden table and greenery.

**strategic experiments as
a governance approach
- a research agenda**

Possibilities of experiments

- The role of action for personal change in low-carbon transition processes
 - Does **personal experience** make difference? If so, how?
- The power of example in **climate leadership** on different levels and in varying contexts
 - The different pathways of personal example to bring about change
- Focus on experimenting as a broader **societal/governance phenomenon**
 - How strategic experiments materialize and challenge existing systems?

Challenges of experiments (1/2)

- Risk to bring about **scattered and piecemeal** results with little power for structural change.
 - **Effectiveness** of experimenting?
- Experimenting may require **new skills and capacities** that have not been required in traditional policy development
 - Are the people holding e.g. key public sector positions able to adapt? Will the adoption of this new tool require too much resources? How (cost-) **efficient** is it?
- What are **legitimate, fair and equitable** ways to govern the experiments themselves?
 - How to make experiments **socially sustainable**?