

Governing for the Future: An Analysis of the Welsh Approach to Protecting the Interests of Future Generations

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this Research Paper to my loving parents, Bassam and Samar. Their hard work and sacrifice brought our family to Canada. Their love and support sustained us through tough times. They laid the foundation for a better life for myself, my sisters, and our future generations.

ABSTRACT

It is widely believed that democratic governance faces challenges when it comes to long-term planning and sustainability. Given the lack of representation of future generations in government decision-making, elected officials are incentivized to favour the concerns of current voters over future ones. Short-termism in government decision-making leads to the neglect of the interests of future generations resulting in exacerbating intergenerational crises like climate change and environmental degradation. The *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* (WFGA) enacted by the Welsh government in 2015 is landmark legislation that aims to address short-termism by placing balancing the interests of current and future generations as the central organizing principle of Welsh government. Based on existing research on short-termism in democratic governance and other case studies around the world, this paper seeks to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh approach to protecting the interests of future generations in public sector decision-making through a focus on the role of the Future Generations Commissioner (FGC). Through a direct logic analysis, it first identifies the logic model behind the WFGA; second, it provides a conceptual framework for the evaluation of institutions representing future generations; third, it applies the conceptual framework to the evaluation of the Welsh FGC role. The research findings indicate that the FGC's design incorporates several structural resilience elements that are beneficial to the success of such institutions. The FGC's statutory independence, cross-party and public support, cross-cutting future-oriented scope, and legislative backing provide a strong basis for the longevity and impact needed to achieve its mandate. However, vague goals and definitions, weak enforcement powers, and a lack of appropriate resourcing/leadership from the Welsh government could hinder the success of the FGC and the WFGA more broadly. Ultimately, achieving the culture change needed to shift democratic governments away from short-termism is a major undertaking and requires a difficult balancing act between impact and longevity.

Keywords: Future Generations; short-termism; democratic governance; well-being; long-term; Wales

INTRODUCTION

Favouring short-term rewards at the expense of long-term gains is a common phenomenon observed within every facet of human life. Individuals, companies, stock markets, and governments all exhibit a tendency to over-value short-term gains while discounting the future (Irving, 2009). This intertemporal conflict, also known as ‘short-termism,’ is likely rooted in human evolutionary development where survival often hinged on immediate consumption of resources in the face of an uncertain future (Irving, 2009). On a macro level, short-termism can be linked to a number of cross-cutting global crises with major impacts on future generations, such as climate change and environmental degradation. However, this evolutionary predisposition is not a justification for inaction as this short-termist tendency can be either magnified or minimized based on structural conditions (Irving, 2009). Long-term oriented public policies and systems of governance could play a role in shaping an environment that curtails short-termism and safeguards the interests of future generations.

Of particular importance to securing the interests of future people is addressing short-termism within democratic governance. For all the known benefits of democratically-elected governments, such as accountability to voters, these systems tend to face challenges when it comes to long-term planning and sustainability. Given the lack of representation for future generations in government decision-making, elected officials are incentivized to favour the concerns of current voters over future ones (Boston, 2021). This issue is exacerbated by the tendency of current voters to discount the importance of the future (Boston, 2021). The result is often reactive rather than proactive policy-making constricted by the short-term political pressures of the electoral cycle. Emergencies such as natural disasters, global pandemics, and financial crises further amplify short-termism by distracting governments from addressing long-term policy challenges (Boston, 2021).

Recognizing this gap within democratic governance, policy-makers worldwide are beginning to take steps towards balancing short-term and long-term needs. Arguably the most notable of these measures is the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* (WFGA) enacted by the Welsh government in 2015. The WFGA is landmark legislation that places balancing the interests of current and future generations as the central organizing principle of Welsh government. The WFGA designates a Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) to oversee the implementation of the Act's requirements across 44 public bodies, including the Welsh government itself (Welsh Government, 2021). The Act also defines a future vision for Wales through 7 well-being goals that encompass broad environmental, economic, social and cultural policy areas (Welsh Government, 2021). In a speech about the WFGA, Nikhil Seth, the Head of Sustainable Development for the United Nations, stated, "What Wales is doing today, we hope the world will do tomorrow, action more than words is the hope for our future generations" (Public Health Wales, 2016).

Given that Wales has taken a bold step towards protecting the interests of future generations and counteracting short-termist pressures, an analysis of their approach can help inform the development and implementation of similar measures in other advanced democracies.

Research Question and Objective

Based on existing research on short-termism in democratic governance and other case studies around the world, this paper seeks to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh approach to protecting the interests of future generations in public sector decision-making. While there are many components to the WFGA's design, this research focuses specifically on the role of the Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) as a key piece of the legislation.

This research makes a number of contributions to the literature on short-termism and protecting the interests of future generations. Through a direct logic analysis, it first identifies

the antecedent conditions and presents the logic model behind the WFGA; second, it provides a conceptual framework for the evaluation of institutions representing future generations; third, it applies the conceptual framework to the evaluation of the Welsh FGC role. The logic model lays the groundwork for future evaluations of the WFGA by clearly articulating the intervention theory behind the Act. Similarly, the conceptual framework facilitates future evaluations of institutions representing future generations by providing the common design and contextual factors that can influence the success of these interventions; and finally, the evaluation of the FGC role provides insights to inform the design of similar interventions in other advanced democracies.

SECTION I: METHODOLOGY

Using a form of direct logic analysis, a theory-based evaluation method for complex interventions presented and applied by Brousselle & Champagne (2011), Rey et al. (2011), and Hudon et al. (2020), I evaluated the intervention theory behind *the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* (2015), with a focus on the design of the role of the Future Generations Commissioner.

Logic analysis is a post-positivist evaluation approach grounded in the evidence-based design of interventions (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). In conducting a logic analysis, the evaluator critically examines the validity of a complex intervention's theory by first highlighting the mechanisms with which it intends to achieve its desired outcomes and then judging those mechanisms through expert consultation or a literature review (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). This analysis evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the theory behind an intervention and not the success of the implementation or impact (Hudon et al., 2020).

Logic analysis can take two forms: direct or reverse. Direct logic analysis is formative as it judges whether an intervention is designed appropriately to achieve the desired results and provides important insights into how it could be improved (Rey et al., 2011). Reverse logic analysis is summative as the evaluator starts with the intended results and then searches for the best ways of achieving them, identifying an array of alternative interventions, and in the process either confirming or invalidating the intervention under study (Rey et al., 2011).

Direct logic analysis is particularly well-suited for the evaluation of WFGA given the complexity, uniqueness and long-term implementation horizon of the intervention. The WFGA has only been in effect since 2016, and its full multigenerational impacts may not be seen for years to come. An evaluation of the intervention theory is most informative at this early stage of the Act's implementation while also serving as a helpful precursor to future evaluation efforts. Complex interventions like WFGA can pose a challenge for evaluators as they are systems that evolve over time and are subject to changing and unpredictable future conditions (Rey et al., 2011). Evaluators may find determining an appropriate evaluation design for complex interventions to be difficult without an understanding of the ways in which it is intended to produce its outcomes and the conditions necessary for its success (Rey et al., 2011). Direct logic analysis can show which factors are most important for obtaining the desired results of an intervention and, in the process, help identify areas of focus for its implementation and subsequent evaluation designs (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011).

The logic analysis was conducted in three phases: building the logic model of the intervention, developing a conceptual framework for the specific mechanism of the intervention to be evaluated, and evaluating the theory of that mechanism (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). These phases are elaborated further in the next sections.

Identifying the Logic Model

The first phase of direct logic analysis is to represent the intervention theory through a logic model that illustrates how the intervention intends to achieve its desired results (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). The logic model shows the links among the resources, process, and end results of the intervention (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). Once the model is built, the evaluator determines which key mechanism or mechanisms to focus on for the development of the conceptual framework in the next section (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011).

The logic model of the WFGA was constructed using an adapted version of Renger's (2010), and Renger and Titcomb's (2002) approaches for constructing and verifying program theory. Accordingly, the logic model was developed in three steps:

1. Gathering documentation: WFGA annual and 5-year reports, promotional material, legislative text, and existing research on WFGA were compiled.
2. Identifying the antecedent conditions and how they are targeted by the intervention: Determined what the WFGA is trying to change and the mechanisms it is using to influence that change.
3. Sequencing the logic model: Created a visual representation of the act's theory by displaying the relationship between the outcomes that the Act intends to achieve and how it intends to achieve those outcomes. The long-term outcomes were placed on the far-right side of the page, and an if-then methodology was used to establish sequencing, or the relationship between immediate and intermediate outcomes.

The 4th and final step in this approach to logic modelling involves validating the logic model with key stakeholders to help create acceptance of the results of the evaluation and ensure that there is consistency between what is written in the documentation and implementation. I decided to forego this step as time constraints and limitations of resources did not allow for stakeholder consultations in this study. In addition, I did not have approval from the

University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board to conduct primary data collection with human subjects.

Developing the Conceptual Framework

The second phase of direct logic analysis is developing a conceptual framework based on a literature review into the components of the intervention to be evaluated (Hudon et al., 2020). This phase involves studying the literature that analyzes and documents mechanisms similar to those attributed to the intervention. The aim is not to conduct a systematic literature review but rather to provide a representative synthesis of the most recent knowledge in relevant and meaningful fields of research (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011).

For this phase, case studies of institutions representing future generations from around the world were used to draw generalizable conclusions for the framework based on their successes and failures. The literature review identified ten such institutions comparable to the Welsh Future Generations Commissioner. Among these, the five most prominent cases with sufficient documentation in the literature to draw useful conclusions for the framework were highlighted and analyzed. Cases from Finland, the UK, Israel, Hungary and Singapore were evaluated to identify the tenure, institutional design, contextual factors and outcomes of their guardian of future generations roles. Through this evaluation, independence, public and political engagement, broad future-oriented scope, and legislative backing were identified as the key components of the conceptual framework.

Evaluating the Intervention

The third and last phase of direct logic analysis involved reviewing the intervention in light of the conceptual framework developed in the previous step by comparing the intervention theory of the role of the Future Generations Commissioner to the model that emerged from the literature analysis (Brousselle & Champagne, 2011). Given the foundational importance of the Commissioner role to the WFGA more broadly, this comparison helped determine the

strengths and weaknesses of the enforcement mechanism of the Act, providing insight into possible areas of improvement to achieve the desired effects. The evaluation also considered the contextual factors in Wales that may or may not support the design of the intervention.

SECTION II: BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A survey of the current literature on protecting the interests of future generations within democratic governance reveals a focus on three inter-related themes: 1) Defining the moral obligations of current generations towards future generations; 2) Explaining the relationship between democratic governance and short-termism; 3) Proposing and evaluating ways to reform current democratic governance for future interests.

An in-depth evaluation of all three of these complex subjects is beyond the scope of this paper; however, a cursory view of the current discussions in these areas will help to situate this study in relation to the wider literature.

Moral Obligations to Future Generations

While there is increasing global recognition that the decisions we make today should be taken with the interests of future generations in mind, the current literature on intergenerational justice explores many unsettled debates around the moral obligations and entitlements between generations. In a survey article of contemporary theories of intergenerational justice, Campos (2018) highlights two main areas of discussion in the literature: 1) Is there justification for claims of justice among non-overlapping generations? 2) What standard should be applied to determine what present generations owe future generations? The answers to these questions lay the philosophical groundwork for policy interventions aimed at protecting the interests of future generations.

Is there justification for claims of justice among non-overlapping generations?

In answering the future question, the “non-existence” and “non-identity” problems are frequently cited as the main challenges to theories of intergenerational justice. The “non-existence” problem argues that future generations should be excluded from claims of justice or rights because they do not exist to represent their interests (Beckerman, 2006; De George, 1981; Macklin, 1981). The “non-identity” problem argues that people cannot justifiably claim to have been harmed by the actions of their ancestors since, without those actions, they would have never existed (Parfit, 1984). According to this view, there cannot be a direct link between harmful actions done today and the individuals harmed by those actions in the future as any changes to current actions will impact the moment of conception of future people leading to “disappearing victims” (Tremmel, 2009).

Rebuttals to both the “non-existence” and “non-identity” problems challenge the assumption that specific future individuals need to be identified in order for standards of justice to apply. Nelson counters the “non-existence” problem by arguing that while we may not know the exact needs of specific future people, we can reasonably assume that they will have the same fundamental interests as current people in living in a healthy environment and having access to medical services, food, clothing, housing, social services and other needs as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Nelson, 2015). Nelson suggests that common intergenerational human interests could be given physical legal representation in the present through a commissioner or an ombudsperson (Nelson, 2015).

Similarly, responses to the “non-identity” problem argue that we should examine our impact on future generations as a whole rather than linking present harmful actions to the specific identities of future people. Tremmel questions the logic of the “non-identity” problem by highlighting the weak causal link between harmful intergenerational actions such as emitting greenhouse gases and the moment of conception of future people (Tremmel, 2009). In contrast, Nelson (2015) avoids engaging with the moment of conception principle

altogether by simply pointing out that people born in the future, regardless of their individual identities, will have their rights to life and health jeopardized by our harmful actions.

Skillington (2019) further supports this position by arguing that scientific knowledge has given us unprecedented foresight into our future impact on the planet, placing a heavy moral responsibility on us to change our behaviours for the benefit of future generations.

What standard should be applied to determine what present generations owe future generations?

While establishing that present generations have obligations towards future generations is relatively simple, establishing what those obligations should be is a more complex endeavour. Different conceptions of intergenerational justice offer varying normative frames of reference over the just allocation of intergenerational goods (technological, institutional, environmental, cultural, relational) (Campos, 2018). These standards of justice provide competing approaches for managing the temporally distinct and conflictual relationship between present and future people.

While it is not possible to apply intergenerational standards of justice based on direct reciprocity, it may be possible to create a chain of intertemporal duties where current generations are expected to give the next generation as much as they were given by their ancestors (Campos, 2018). Along these lines, Tremmel (2009) presents a Rawlsian “veil of ignorance” approach to intergenerational justice through a golden rule standard of do unto other generations as you would want them to do unto you. Tremmel (2009) then pushes this standard further by calling for “intergenerational justice as enabling advancement” (p. 228), arguing that the present generation is obligated to promote the continuous improvement of conditions for the subsequent generation.

Nelson takes a different approach by suggesting the application of the Precautionary Principle. The latter states that if there is a risk of serious and irreversible negative outcomes in the future as a result of actions taken today, then those actions should be avoided (Nelson 2015). Using the example of climate change, Nelson (2015) argues that even if scientific predictions are inexact, the Precautionary Principle would compel us to prioritize measures aimed at reducing carbon emissions due to the consequences of serious environmental degradation. In this way, the Precautionary Principle can help to define the duties, both negative and positive, that current generations have towards future generations (Nelson, 2015).

Deciding how costs and benefits should be distributed intertemporally is foundational to the underlying goals of any public policy measure aiming to protect the interests of future generations.

Relationship between Democracy and Short-Termism

The second theme in the literature is exploring short-sightedness within democratic governance. In a study of political presentism, Thompson (2010) explains that while accountability to voters is a positive feature of democracy, it also makes democratic systems partial towards the present. Since future generations do not hold any electoral power, elected officials favour the interests of present people (Thompson, 2010). Thompson argues that Democratic responsiveness to the needs of current citizens amplifies humanity's innate short-sightedness by embedding a bias towards the present into law-making (Thomson, 2010). A study by Irving (2009) supports Thompson's claim by highlighting humanity's deep biological and evolutionary predisposition towards the short-term, even on an individual level. For instance, research shows that one tends to favour the present self-versus the future self (Irving, 2009). Importantly, Irving's (2009) study also highlights that humans have the

unique evolutionary capacity to plan ahead, which can be influenced and fostered under the right environmental conditions.

Another often-cited source of democratic neglect of the future is the fact that leaders are only in power for limited periods of time before facing re-election (Thompson, 2010). Consequently, representatives are incentivized to pass policies that produce results within the limit of their time in office. A study conducted by Garrì (2010) compares a two-period model wherein each period the electorate has to choose between a politician who invested in a public good with an immediate payoff, and a politician who invested in a public good that will only pay off in the second term. The study found that the electorate is likely to consider the politician who invested in a long-term public good to be a bad politician and seek not to re-elect them (Garrì, 2010).

While certain common features of democratic governance favour the present, it is important to note that there is substantial variation in how well different democracies plan for the future. A study by Jacobs (2016) investigates the sources of variation in democratic long-term decision-making. Jacobs finds that three main features of policy-making negatively impact democratic policy investment in the long-term: 1) lack of voter information on long-term outcomes compared to short-term outcomes; 2) lack of voter trust that governments will maintain their long-term commitments and deliver promised results; 3) powerful interest groups that oppose certain long-term policies that may impact their interests (Jacobs, 2016). Jacobs found that how well different governments manage these three factors has a significant impact on their ability to make long-term policy investments (Jacobs, 2016).

While there are undeniable ways in which democracies tend to favour the present at the expense of the future, it would be wrong to assume that authoritarian regimes are necessarily more future-oriented. In fact, more corruption and less accountability to voters

likely exacerbate short-termism. A study by Hendriks reveals that while certain democratic institutions like elections foster policy myopia, the extent to which democracies can generate public legitimacy, accountability and equitable outcomes can have a major positive effect on long-term policy planning (Hendriks, 2009). This conclusion is supported by Povitkina's study, which compared efforts at tackling climate change across both democratic and authoritarian countries and found that democracies exhibit stronger commitments to mitigate climate change and generally emit less carbon dioxide (accounting for other factors like economic output) than non-democratic regimes (Povitkina, 2018). Povitkina's study points to corruption as being the biggest variable impacting climate change mitigation in democracies, with more democracy associated with lower CO₂ emissions in low-corruption contexts.

Therefore, the focus on democratic blind spots in the context of short-termism should not be construed as an appeal to authoritarianism. Rather this research is concerned with enhancing the quality of democratic decision-making.

Ways to Reform Current Democratic Governance Structures for the Long-term

The literature contains a wide range of potential interventions for countering democratic short-termism; however, many of them have yet to be implemented or empirically evaluated. At this time, the effectiveness of proposals for tackling the presentist bias in democratic governance remains somewhat speculative, but there are early studies to draw from. The results of these studies will be explored further later in this paper when evaluating the WFGA.

Boston (2021) catalogues a comprehensive list of 68 potential reforms for addressing democratic myopia ranging from constitutional, institutional, policy-oriented and analytical solutions. Reviewing the intervention logic behind these proposals, Boston divides these interventions into six theories of change: 1) changing the values and goals of policy-makers

to be more future-oriented; 2) incentivizing policy-makers to give greater weight to future considerations; 3) enhancing the foresight capacity of policy-makers; 4) constraining the formal decision-rights of policy-makers when the interests of future generations are at stake; 5) shielding policy-makers from short-term political pressures; and 6) enhancing the capacity for coordination across levels of government and policy areas (Boston, 2021).

On the other hand, Bührs (2012) focuses less on specific interventions and more on the broad categories of cognitive, policy and institutional proposals. He argues that these categories of interventions support and reinforce one another, and therefore a multi-pronged approach would likely be most effective at dealing with democratic myopia (Bührs, 2012). Citizens need to have the cognitive framework with which to understand the need for institutional reforms towards the long term, institutions in turn guide and influence policies, and policies both educate and provide the means for institutional reform (Bührs, 2012).

Some authors have focused on evaluating specific interventions using multiple existing case studies as the basis of their analysis. Smith (2019) evaluated the use of independent offices for future generations in Israel, Hungary and Wales as an institutional design for improving short-termism in democracies. Similarly, Jones et al. (2018) use case studies from interventions in Singapore, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Scotland and Wales to draw lessons for representing future generations in UK policy-making. Kokimaa et al. (2021) evaluate the drivers of Finland's success in implementing long-term environmental policies in the face of typical short-termist democratic pressures.

When it comes to evaluating the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (WFGA), arguably the most ambitious and comprehensive intervention in this area, there is a gap in the literature around evaluating the design of the intervention and the likelihood that it will achieve its aims. For instance, Messham and Sheard (2020) evaluate the development of the

WFGA and the conditions that have allowed for the Act to pass into law that could be replicated by other countries. Similarly, Nesom and MacKillop (2020) focus on evaluating the implementation of the Act but do not comment on the underlying intervention logic. Meanwhile, Davies (2016) (2017) does comment on the Act's design, but his analysis focuses primarily on the enforceability of the legal duties to protect the interest of future generations.

This study fits within this third category of literature. It aims to fill this evaluation gap of the WFGA by pulling from some of the previous studies cited in this literature review and other sources evaluating the role of representative institutions for future generations to develop a conceptual framework for analysis of the intervention logic. While the WFGA should be commended for the ambitious scale of change that it intends to bring to its public service, it is important to examine the likelihood that the intervention will have the desired impact on the future. By focusing on the Future Generations Commissioner as a mechanism used to enforce the Act's requirements, this paper contributes towards bridging the gap between aspirations of the WFGA and the practical impact by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh approach.

SECTION III: IDENTIFYING THE LOGIC MODEL

The logic model of the WFGA illustrates the connections between the problems that the Act was designed to address, the ways in which it was designed to address them, and the outcomes it was designed to achieve. Adapting program theory development techniques presented by Renger (2010) and Renger and Titcomb (2002), the logic model was developed in three main steps: 1) Identifying the antecedent conditions targeted by the WFGA; 2) Identifying the resources, strategies, and activities mobilized by the Act to target the antecedent conditions; and, 3) Identifying the outcomes that the Act intends to achieve.

Following a narrative discussion of the findings of these steps, a visual representation of the logic model is presented.

Identifying the Antecedent Conditions

Renger (2010) describes the process of identifying antecedent conditions as determining the problem and the underlying issues that an intervention is designed to target. Antecedent conditions could be a variety of existing contextual challenges, including risk factors, behavioural conditions, or environmental problems that can be targeted by an intervention for change (Renger & Titcomb, 2002). In the case of the WFGA, examining the context under which the Act was developed provides important clues as to the antecedent conditions it was designed to target.

As part of a 2020 study by Messham and Sheard, key policy-makers involved in the development of the WFGA were interviewed to identify the factors that facilitated the passing of the Act. Interviewees indicated that rather than addressing one specific problem, development of the WFGA was initiated in response to a broad set of intergenerational issues and the failure of existing government actions to address them (Messham and Sheard, 2020). Worsening climate change, neglect of the Welsh sustainable development duty, and inadequate public services were among the main drivers of the Act's development (Messham and Sheard, 2020).

In 2007, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) published "One Planet Wales," a sobering look at the global consequences of Welsh's unsustainable ecological practices. Notably, the report found that if every country in the world consumed natural resources at the same rate as Wales, three planets would be needed to support this consumption (WWF, 2007, p.3). The emergence of increasingly dire environmental projections along with numerous international

commitments to address them placed climate change as a central driver of the development of the WFGA (Messham and Sheard, 2020).

Existing schemes for promoting sustainability in Wales had also proven to be ineffective. In 1998, a sustainable development duty was included within the Government of Wales Act, requiring the National Assembly to promote sustainable development within all its decisions (Government of Wales Act, 1998). After nearly a decade of implementing the duty, several evaluations found that the Welsh Government failed to adequately promote sustainable development and that the existing schemes and reports were not producing substantive change (Messham and Sheard, 2020). Furthermore, the UK government's disbanding of the Sustainable Development Commission left a gap in sustainable development promotion at the national level (Jones et al., 2018).

Another contributing factor to the development of the WFGA was the release of the Williams report evaluating public services and governance in Wales. The report found that public services in Wales were too complex, crowded and poorly governed (Messham and Sheard, 2020). The timing of the report's publication coincided with the development of the WFGA (Messham and Sheard, 2020). While initially focused on sustainable development in a narrower environmental sense, the Act soon expanded to encompass a broader idea of "wellbeing;" a term that had begun gaining popularity politically and captured the interconnected economic, social, and environmental nature of the intergenerational policy challenges facing Wales (Messham and Sheard, 2020). This expansion meant that improvements to public service delivery and a host of other economic, social and cultural issues could also be addressed within the framework of the WFGA.

The architects of the WFGA went beyond a top-down approach to defining the scope of the Act by incorporating extensive public consultations into the development process

(Messham and Sheard, 2020). In 2014, the Welsh Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Jeff Cuthbert, launched a year-long national consultation called “The Wales We Want” to help shape the focus of the upcoming future generations bill (Cynnal Cymru, 2015). Led by Peter Davies, then Commissioner for Sustainable Futures and key policy-entrepreneur behind the WFGA, the initiative consulted 7000 people across Wales representing a variety of communities and interests. Participants discussed the challenges that they faced and envisioned the Wales that they wanted to leave behind for future generations (Cynnal Cymru, 2015). Among the report’s findings were:

- Climate change was cited as the single most critical issue facing future generations. Overall, unsustainable environmental, economic, educational and health practices ranked at the top of the list of threats to future wellbeing.
- The public expressed a feeling of alienation between government decision-making and local communities, calling for a focus on local consultation, ownership and empowerment to employ a holistic approach to addressing long-term challenges.
- A lack of a coherent vision and targets for the future, along with ineffective long-term accountability measures, were cited as major barriers to protecting the interests of future generations.

Upon publishing the “Wales We Want” report, Davies highlighted the main systemic barriers to addressing many of the long-term challenges facing Wales: “Our democratic system is driven by short term agendas around electoral cycles. The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Bill aims to balance the nature of this short-term accountability with the need for a long-term framework if we are going to deal with the major intergenerational challenges” (Davies, 2015).

Finally, the Welsh government published an online “Essentials Guide” to the WFGA that summarizes the broad purpose of the Act by stating: “Wales faces a number of challenges now and in the future, such as climate change, poverty, health and wellbeing, coronavirus, and jobs and economic activity. To tackle these, we need to work together. To give current and future generations a good quality of life, we need to think about the long-term impact of the decisions we make. This law will make sure that our public sector does this” (Welsh Government, 2021).

Drawing on these sources, it is possible to broadly identify the following main antecedent conditions targeted by the WFGA:

- Short-sighted public-sector decision-making driven by the agendas of short-term electoral cycles.
- Existing mechanisms for embedding sustainability into public sector decision-making failing to produce substantive change, even after nearly a decade of implementation.
- Growing intergenerational challenges rooted in unsustainable present actions, most notably the rising threat of climate change.
- Lack of long-term vision for the future coupled with a lack of appropriate metrics to gauge and track progress.
- A siloed approach to public sector problem-solving that is often reactive rather than proactive and neglects the interconnected social, economic and environmental nature of intergenerational challenges.
- Alienation between public sector decisions and the local communities that they serve.

Identifying the WFGA Activities that Target Antecedent Conditions

Examining the design of the WFGA as laid out in the contents of the legislation allows us to determine how the Act intends to change the antecedent conditions identified in the previous section. The different components of the WFGA can be grouped into the following categories:

- Well-being goals
- National Indicators, Milestones and Future Trends
- Well-being duty
- Sustainable development principle
- Local well-being
- Accountability

Well-being Goals

The WFGA names and broadly defines seven well-being goals for a future Wales under part 2.4 of the Act, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Seven Wellbeing Goals

Goal	Definition
A prosperous Wales.	An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.
A resilient Wales.	A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).

A healthier Wales.	A society in which people’s physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.
A more equal Wales	A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).
A Wales of cohesive communities	Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.
A globally responsible Wales.	A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

The purpose of the well-being goals is to provide a cohesive vision for the future of Wales and define the long-term outcomes that the Act intends to achieve (Welsh Government, 2021). These goals also inform the smaller well-being objectives that public bodies are required to work towards, as explained later on in this section.

National Indicators, Milestones and Future Trends

To track progress towards the Wellbeing Goals, the WFGA requires Welsh Ministers to set concrete and measurable national indicators. The Act sets specific requirements around what qualifies as a national indicator, such as the ability to measure outcomes quantitatively or qualitatively over time (WFGA, 2015, part 10).

In addition, the Act requires Ministers to set milestones to establish expectations around what the national indicators should show at different points in time (WFGA, 2015,

part 2.10). At the start of each financial year, Ministers are required to publish an annual well-being report detailing the progress made over the last year (WFGA, 2015, part 2.10).

To further facilitate long-term and proactive decision-making, the Act requires Ministers to exercise foresight by investigating future trends. Twelve months after an Assembly election, Ministers are required to publish a “Future Trends Report” forecasting future social, economic and cultural well-being trends in Wales (WFGA, 2015, part 2.11).

Well-being Duty

The Act places a duty on public bodies to carry out sustainable development. The Act defines sustainable development as “the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals” (WFGA, 2015, part 2.2). At the time of writing, 44 public bodies are included in the Act including Welsh Ministers, Local authorities, and local health boards (WFGA, 2015, part 2.6).

The well-being duty requires each public body to set and publish well-being objectives that contribute to achieving each of the seven well-being goals, and to take “all reasonable steps (in exercising its functions) to meet those objectives” (WFGA, 2015, part 2.3).

Sustainable Development Principle

The Act puts in place a ‘sustainable development principle’ which requires public bodies to balance the needs of the present with the needs of the future when making decisions (WFGA, 2015, part 2.5). To guide public bodies in applying the sustainable development principle, the Act establishes five ways of working:

1. Long-term: balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability of future people to meet their own needs.

2. Prevention: acting to prevent problems from occurring or getting worse.
3. Integration: considering how public bodies' well-being objectives impact the seven well-being goals, or other objectives set out by the public body or other public bodies.
4. Collaboration: working with other groups (within the public body or externally) to achieve the well-being objectives.
5. Involvement: involving a diverse set of people in achieving the well-being objectives, reflecting the diversity of the community that the public body serves (WFGA, 2015, part 2.5).

Local well-being

To ensure that the WFGA engages local communities in sustainable development, the Act establishes public services boards (PSBs) for each local authority area in Wales. PSBs must include the local authority, the local health board, the Welsh fire and rescue authority for that area, and the natural resources body for Wales (WFGA, 2015, part 4.29). In addition, other local parties must be invited to participate, including Welsh Ministers, the police and crime commissioner, representatives of voluntary organizations, or other people who carry out public functions as needed (WFGA, 2015, part 4.30).

Accountability

Enforcement of the requirements established in the Act falls to the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and the Auditor General for Wales.

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

The Commissioner for Future Generations is a guardian role with statutory independence from government. The general duty of the commissioner is divided into three parts: 1) promote the sustainable development principle and act as a guardian of the ability of future

generations to meet their needs; 2) encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of their decisions; and, 3) assess the extent to which the well-being objectives set out by public bodies are being met (WFGA, 2015, part 3.18).

As such, the commissioner's role is primarily advisory/promotional, with the ability to conduct evaluations and make recommendations. The commissioner can advise and encourage public bodies and PSBs to assist them in meeting their well-being objectives.

The commissioner can conduct research and reviews into the wellbeing goals, the national indicators and milestones, and how the sustainable development principle is being applied. The commissioner can review how specific public bodies are taking account of the long-term in their decision-making and make recommendations accordingly. The Act states that public bodies are required to "take all reasonable steps to follow the course of action set out in a recommendation made to it by the Commissioner...unless: (a) the public body is satisfied that there is good reason for it not to follow the recommendation..., or (b) it decides on an alternative course of action in respect of the subject matter of the recommendation" (WFGA, 2015, part 3.22). A year before each scheduled election, the commissioner must publish a Future Generations report containing their assessment of the improvements public bodies should make to achieve the well-being goals (WFGA, 2015, part 3.23).

Supporting the commissioner's work is an advisory panel including other Wales commissioners, the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, and representatives from Natural Resources Wales, the Trades Union, and business (WFGA, part 3.26).

Auditor General for Wales

The Auditor General for Wales evaluates the public bodies listed in the Act to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives and working towards meeting those objectives (WFGA,

2015, part 2.15). The Auditor General conducts examinations of each body's performance at regular intervals and reports the findings to the National Assembly (WFGA, 2015, part 2.15).

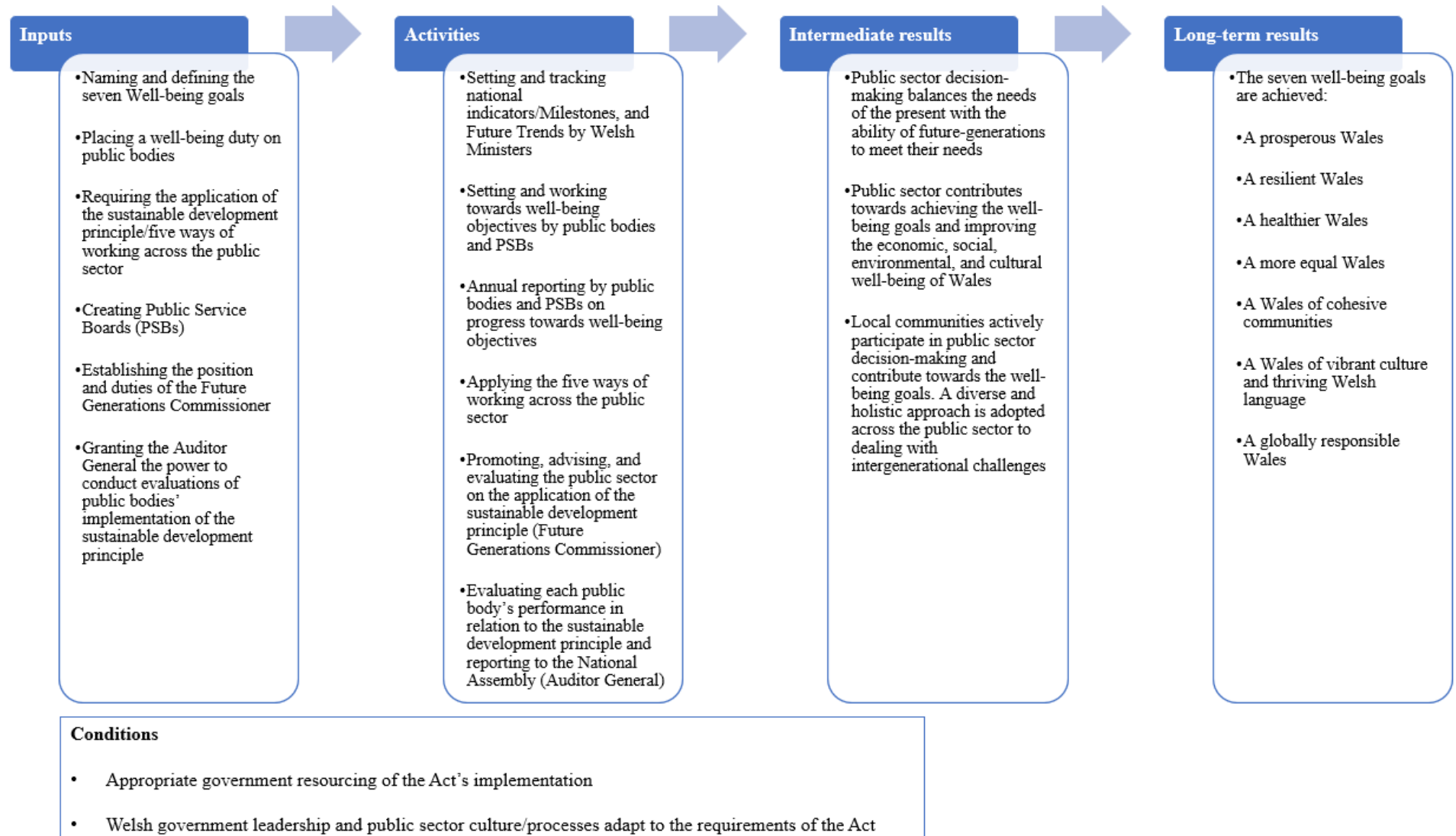
Conditions

Analysis of the design and early implementation of the WFGA point to two broad critical conditions for the Act to produce its intended results:

Appropriate government resourcing of the Act's implementation: The capacity of the public bodies bound by the Act to deliver on the legislation's requirements necessitate public funding that reflects long-term ambitions. While the WFGA is focused on delivering long-term outcomes, inadequate and/or short-term government funding and financial planning can hinder the capacity of public bodies to deliver on their future-oriented mandate (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020a). This includes appropriate resourcing of the role of the Future Generations Commissioner to carry out substantial oversight and accountability functions (Davies, 2015).

Commitment, leadership and involvement of the Welsh government to enable public sector culture change: The WFGA provides a transformative framework for public sector decision-making from the short-term towards the long-term. Implementation of the Act's requirements necessitates a major shift in public sector culture enabled by leadership from the Welsh government (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020a). In particular, government requirements for corporate planning, reporting, and performance management across public bodies will need to shift from short-term to long-term to facilitate compliance with the Act and the recommendations of the Future Generations Commissioner (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020a).

Visual Representation of WFGA Logic Model



SECTION IV: DEVELOPING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The second step in the logic analysis is conducting a literature review to develop the conceptual framework that will be used to evaluate key mechanisms of the Act's logic model. As the scope and the interventions within the Act are broad, the literature review is focused on one key component: representing future generations within democratic institutions. This component was chosen for the evaluation for two main reasons: 1) The Future Generations Commissioner is a foundational accountability piece for the legislation's implementation; therefore, the success of the Commissioner role has a major impact on the success of the intervention as a whole; 2) there are many relatively recent examples of similar institutions around the world with documented successes and failures that can be used as case studies to develop the conceptual framework.

Literature on other institutions around the world that aim to represent the interests of future generations in government decision-making was analyzed to inform the conceptual framework. The institutional design of these interventions, along with the contextual factors that likely informed their design, were documented. The following keywords were used in various combinations for the search: future generations; short-termism; public sector; office; commissioner; guardian; representation; democratic governance; long-term; sustainable development. An initial review of the titles and abstracts of the articles found with these keywords helped to identify relevant references. Other references were identified from the bibliographies of the relevant articles.

Institutions Representing Future Generations

Many national and subnational governments across the world have set up institutional representation of future generations with varying levels of success. These institutions have taken many structural forms and have varying mandates, scopes, and contextual factors. The

review identified many examples of such institutions past and present. This section will focus on the five most prominent cases with sufficient documentation in the literature to draw useful conclusions for the framework.

Two main criteria were used to evaluate the success of these interventions based on a framework developed by Jones et al. (2018):

- 1) **Longevity:** Given the common goal of these institutions is representing future interests in present decision-making, the ability for this representation to last long-term, especially through electoral cycles and changes in political leadership, is a key indicator of success.
- 2) **Impact:** It is not sufficient for these institutions to be long-lasting without having a substantive influence on government decision-making or the political discourse. While there is no agreed-upon measure of impact for these interventions and direct causal connections can be difficult to establish, nonetheless, clear inferences can be made from the literature on the broad effectiveness of these measures.

The review below presents notable institutional design, contextual factors, and outcomes from each case. The cases are listed in the order each institution was established from earliest to latest.

Finland – Committee for the Future

Institutional design

Finland's Committee for the Future has been a Permanent Committee of the Finnish Parliament since 1993 and consists of 17 parliamentarians from different political parties, chosen in proportion to their representation in parliament (The Parliament of Finland, n.d.).

Among the Committee's primary functions are acting as a 'think tank' for government by analyzing research regarding the future and identifying implications for the work of

parliament; collaborating with other governmental bodies on any long-term policy or program issues affecting their work; preparing responses to Government reports on the future of Finland; and engaging in public outreach (Groomsbridge, 2006). Aside from these required functions, the Committee has the ability to choose its own methodology and the scope of issues that it would like to focus on (Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, 2004).

Notably, the Committee has little legal power to intervene in legislation or policy decisions and has no power to receive and act legally upon complaints from the general public (Jones et al., 2018). The Committee deliberates with Parliament only upon request and submits input to other committees on policies that have an impact on the future (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

Contextual factors

The Committee was able to establish strong legitimacy from the beginning due to widespread cross-party and public support during its creation (Jones et al., 2018). At the time the Committee was created, Finland already had a historical foundation of futures studies and was known as a top-performer in international comparisons of successful, future-oriented environmental policies. In 2021, Finland was ranked number 1 among all 193 UN member states for progress towards achieving the 17 UN sustainable development goals (Sachs et al., 2021).

There are a number of contextual factors that have predisposed Finland to long-term planning. While still facing the same potential short-termist pressures from electoral cycles and competing present interests, Finland's public sector decision-making has built-in future-oriented protections. Among these are adherence to binding environmental legislation at the EU level, which provides a consistent mandate at the national level to meet environmental policy requirements regardless of the government in power; the strong role of an independent

and professional public administration in policy-making which allows for continuity in planning through electoral cycles; and an inclusive and participatory policy preparation process which builds consensus among different civil society interests (Koskimaa et al., 2021).

Outcomes

Despite limited powers and lack of independence, the Committee appears to have had substantial impact. It has demonstrated agenda-setting power in the Parliament, and the government has tended to adopt the Committee's recommendations (Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, 2004). Out of the institutions assessed, Finland's Committee is the longest-running institution which indicates that it has achieved a stable relationship and balance of power with government (Jones et al., 2018), and the longevity needed to have a long-term influence on issues impacting future generations. Despite the lack of significant independence from government, it has enjoyed the flexibility to set its own agenda, allowing it to challenge a wide scope of issues it sees as relevant to future generations (Jones et al., 2018).

While at first glance, the institutional design of the Committee raises concerns around independence and impact, the office appears to be well-designed for the Finnish context. Given that Finland's policy-making process has more safeguards against short-termism as compared to other advanced democracies, strong enforcement powers and independence may not be as necessary to its overall impact. Furthermore, the fact that it is composed of parliamentarians allows its influence to extend naturally into other areas of the government's work, lends its findings political weight, and integrates its proceedings with those of the rest of parliament (Jones et al., 2018). This design has likely also contributed to the long-lasting tenure of the institution, which is critical to the effective representation of future generations.

Institutional design

The United Kingdom's Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) was established in 2000 and was tasked with monitoring the government's progress on achieving sustainable development commitments and building cross-sectoral consensus on actions needed to achieve the UK's sustainable development goals (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The SDC was established as a Non-Departmental Public Body independent from the work of other government ministries but lacked overall statutory independence as it was accountable to the UK government, and also to the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Jones et al., 2018).

Contextual factors

The Commission was established as part of a wider program of sustainable development action of the incoming Labour government in 1997, which included a Deputy Prime Minister role focused on sustainability issues (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). That year, the incumbent governing Conservative Party was defeated in a historic landslide election where the Labour Party won the biggest majority held by any UK government since 1935 (BBC, 2005). The establishment of the SDC lacked cross-party support, leaving it particularly vulnerable to future changes in government.

Outcomes

The Commission provided generally gently phrased and cooperative analysis of Government Departments' 'Sustainable Development Action Plans' taking a cautious approach to critiquing government actions due to the institution's lack of statutory independence and precarious funding arrangement (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The Commission often aimed to work cooperatively with government departments, attempting to persuade them to follow through on their sustainable development responsibilities (Institute

for European Environmental Policy, 2015). However, there were times when the SDC intervened publicly in a wide range of Government policy areas, often in response to consultation papers, and even taking the risk of outlining major disagreements with Government policy (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The Commission launched some ground-breaking policy work, such as the publication of the report 'Prosperity without Growth', which challenged conventional wisdom on the centrality of economic development to the role of Government (Jackson, 2009).

Overall, the absence of statutory independence limited the SDC's ability to be critical of Government policy and made it relatively straightforward for a new Government elected in 2010, with less of an interest in sustainability policy and less sympathy of unaccountable advisory bodies, to remove funding from the SDC (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). Despite the devolved administrations showing interest in maintaining an institutional role in this area, it was not possible for them to do so at the UK level (Jones et al., 2018). The ensuing debate in Wales led to the creation of a Commissioner for Future Generations (Jones et al., 2018).

Israel - Commission for Future Generations

Institutional design

The Israel Commission for Future Generations was established in 2001 by Israel's parliament (Jones et al., 2018). The focus of the Commission was raising awareness among the legislative branch of the future consequences of legislation and secondary legislation in Israel across a wide variety of policy areas (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

The Commission was an organ of parliament headed by a Commissioner chosen by an ad-hoc parliamentary committee and appointed by the Speaker of the Parliament (Jones et al., 2018).

To safeguard the independence of the role, the Commissioner could not be someone who in the last two years had been active in political life or a member of any political party (Jones et

al., 2018). The Commissioner was assisted in its role by a Public Council (an advisory committee), which consisted of scientists, intellectuals, clergymen and other public figures (Jones et al., 2018).

The Commissioner had the authority to weigh in on bills and secondary legislation brought before parliament if they believed it concerned future generations (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The Commissioner also had the power to initiate its own bills and held an effective veto power over the passage of legislation it felt was not in the best interest of future generations (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The Commissioner's scope of responsibilities was broad, stretching across 12 policy areas, including environment, development, science, and technology (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The Commission was required to submit an annual report on its activities each year to ensure transparency (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

Contextual factors

There are some factors intrinsic to Israel that likely influenced the creation of a Future Generations Commissioner. Among these are feelings of national insecurity due to its youth, size, location, conflicts, and lack of natural resources that fuelled the desire for future-oriented oversight of its legislation (Jones et al., 2018).

Outcomes

Despite strong legislative powers and a wide scope of operation, the Commission's impact was short-lived as it was dissolved by the Israeli parliament in 2006 after only one term (Göpel & Pearce, 2018). A Knesset Research and Information Centre review suggests that "Members of Knesset raised two primary reasons for the dissolution of the Commission during deliberations on the topic: the cost of its operations and their feelings that the Commission received too much authority to interfere in their work" (Teschner, 2013). The

Commissioner considered this move to be backlash against his strong influence and public criticism of Knesset legislation (Teschner, 2013). As commonly observed with offices for future generations, it appears that the institution's powers were not proportional to its structural resilience to political pressures, making it vulnerable to dissolution, particularly following the election of a new government

Hungary - Commissioner for Future Generations

Institutional design

The Hungarian Commissioner for Future Generations was established in 2008 through an amendment to Act LIX of 1993, which created the institution of Parliamentary Commissioners (Jones et al., 2018). The Commissioner was elected by parliament for a six-year term and was required to be a lawyer with expertise in environmental protection and/or nature conservation law (Jones et al., 2018). To ensure the independence of the role, anyone who had held public office or been a member of a political party within the last four years or had any other financial conflicts of interest was ineligible to hold the position (Jones et al., 2018).

The main task of the Commissioner was to uphold the right to a healthy environment as enshrined in Hungary's constitution (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The office had three mechanisms with which to fulfil this duty: 1) responding to public complaints and carrying out investigations with respect to issues that impact the constitutional rights of citizens to a healthy environment, 2) advocating on behalf of future generations within legislative decision-making and 3) acting as a future-oriented think tank, proactively identifying issues of concern (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The Commissioner's office consisted of a multidisciplinary team including lawyers, economists, scientists and engineers; and a multidisciplinary approach was applied throughout the Commissioner's work (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

Out of all the institutions studied for this review, the Hungarian Commissioner had some of the strongest enforcement powers, including the power to call for termination of activity damaging the environment, backed up by police and law enforcement bodies (Jones et al., 2018). The office-maintained transparency and open relationships with all stakeholders during investigations and reported annually on its work (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

Contextual factors

While discussions around the role of Commissioner for Future Generations began in the 1990s, it took an extensive campaign by civil society led by Hungarian NGO “Protect the Future!” to achieve cross-party support for the position (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). Strong support from civil society and across the political spectrum, along with a constitutionally enshrined right to a healthy environment, boosted the legitimacy of the role while providing a buffer against competing political interests.

Outcomes

Between 2008 and 2012, the Commissioner’s investigations resulted in over 200 substantive legal cases a year, many of which led to major successes in protecting the interests of future generations (Jones et al., 2018). The Commissioner’s achievements included preventing the privatization of state-owned forests and playing a key role in the passing of a forest law with stringent nature conservation requirements, halting the privatization of public water utilities, and protecting thousands of hectares of green areas from construction plans (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

However, the Commissioner had a fairly narrow scope limited to environmental concerns and not the broad range of issues that could impact future generations. It also appears that the Commissioner had expended the majority of the office’s resources on legal

pursuits in response to individual complaints, rather than broader advocacy, research and public outreach (Jones et al., 2018).

Most importantly, the institution did not see the longevity essential for long-term representation of future interests. The role was significantly weakened in 2011 following the election of a new right-wing government and the passing of a new constitution. Hungary's four commissioners (on different subjects) were amalgamated into one position, the powers, mandate and budget of the Commissioner were vastly reduced (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). It is likely that, given the Commissioner's notable interventions in private and governmental interests, there was significant political pressure to reduce its level of power. Despite the fact that originally the Commissioner was brought about by support from across the political spectrum and from civil society groups, there was likely insufficient political understanding of, or sympathy for, its goals and methods to support its level of intervention (Jones et al., 2018). Whilst the Commissioner did engage with citizens through the complaints role, the office may have failed to secure the ongoing public awareness needed to garner support for tackling intergenerational issues and prevent dissolution by other political interests.

Singapore – Centre for Strategic Futures

Institutional design

The Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF) is a government think tank established in 2009 within the Strategic Policy Office as a part of the Prime Minister's Office of Singapore (CSF, n.d-a). CSF's overall goal is to encourage and improve governmental and cross-department strategic thinking on future-oriented issues (CSF, n.d-a). CSF acts as a think tank for government and the civil service, building capacity for long-term planning (CSF, n.d-a). The Centre has also developed and applied frameworks for thinking about future trends, risks and opportunities (Jones et al., 2018).

CSF encourages and facilitates future thinking across policy-making platforms. In addition to encouraging individual departments to engage in strategic thinking about the future, the Centre aims to facilitate wider ‘whole-of-government’ thinking and coordination on future issues since long-term risks and opportunities do not necessarily fall into distinct public service areas (Ho, 2010).

Contextual factors

Singapore has a history of valuing strategic thinking and scenario planning that dates back to the 1980s (Jones et al., 2018). Similar to the Israeli context, Singapore’s youth and national insecurities contribute in part to its future-oriented principles (Jones et al., 2018).

Furthermore, an increased cultural emphasis on collectivism and the diminished value placed on individualism create more favourable conditions for long-term planning and strategy (Jones et al., 2018).

Politically, Singapore does not face the same short-termist pressures as most other advanced democracies. Partly as a consequence of the design of the parliamentary system, the ruling People’s Action Party has maintained power for over 50 years, making a substantial change in government and strategic direction unlikely (Jones et al., 2018). The government has acted favourably towards strategic future thinking since the 1980s, and there is little indication that it will deviate from that path in the near future (Jones et al., 2018).

Outcomes

Under most other democratic systems, the CSF’s position within the Prime Minister’s Office would raise major concerns around independence. The proximity of the CSF to the government leaves it open to political pressures on agenda setting and risks of dissolution if it is critical of government actions. However, Singapore’s unique future-friendly environment secures the CSF’s position while also allowing it to benefit from the legitimacy and authority of government power.

Through its work, the CSF implicitly represents future interests in government. In this aspect, CSF has been broadly successful and holds a strong position within the civil service and government more broadly (Jones et al., 2018). Its approach to coaching the government on strategic thinking on the future has enabled it to disperse its workload and enhance its scope (Jones et al., 2018). It has reached a wide audience through educational and networking methods within the civil service (Jones et al., 2018) as well as engaging other departments through smaller projects, such as the implications of automation on the Singapore workforce (CSF, 2015). Through concerted outreach efforts, along with the annual publication of its Foresight reports, the Centre maintains transparency and accessibility to individuals across the public sector (Jones et al., 2018).

CSF lacks any substantive powers to intervene in the legislative process or take corrective action against those acting against the long-term interests of future people. However, this has not been an issue given its broadly successful role in promoting long-term, strategic thinking, which mainly requires positive action on its part (Jones et al., 2018). Furthermore, although the Centre has not engaged in extensive outreach work with the general public, it has made efforts to engage with relevant professionals from a range of backgrounds “through incoming visits, overseas trips, paid consultancies, interviews and curated events” (CSF, n.d-b).

Conceptual Framework

Analysis of prominent case studies around the world of offices for future generations reveals a variety of overlapping institutional design and contextual factors that likely impact the success of these interventions within advanced democracies. These factors show that the impact and longevity of these roles often hinge on a balancing of the power to intervene in government decision-making with an institution’s vulnerability to having its powers diminished or abolished.

Given that offices for future generations frequently face challenges to their status due to the same short-termist pressures that they are enacted to address, the conceptual framework below outlines institutional design elements that act as buffers against threats to an institution's survival, particularly following changes in government. While according to this analysis, the simplest path to longevity may be to have minimal influence on decision-making, longevity without impact is insufficient for securing the interests of future generations. The conceptual framework is designed to allow for maximizing the impact of the representation of future generations on government decision-making by enhancing the institution's resilience to short-termist pressures.

While there are commonalities across advanced democracies, it is important to note that the context and needs of each jurisdiction vary. It is not necessary for all of the elements of the conceptual framework to be present, or to be present to the same degree, in order for the representation of future generations to be successful. For this reason, the discussion of each institutional design element also incorporates a discussion of any relevant contextual factors that allow for the calibration of the institutional design to the specific needs of the jurisdiction.

Independence

Generally, institutions that are designed to be at arms-length from the government (not government units or parliamentary committees) are better able to avoid conflicts between present and future interests. Specifically, a lack of independence is a limiting factor in an institution's ability to evaluate a government's performance objectively. This can be illustrated through the case of UK's Sustainable Development Commission (SDC). Despite being designed to act as a watchdog of the government's sustainable development policies, the SDC often opted to take a cooperative approach to its oversight role and carefully

moderated its criticisms of government due to fears of budget cuts. Indeed, its lack of statutory independence made it particularly easy for a new government with less sympathy for the SDC's role to cut the institution's funding, ultimately abolishing the office.

On the other hand, the Hungarian and Israeli examples illustrate that a degree of independence creates the space needed to carry out the office's mandate without interference. While in the Hungarian and Israeli examples, the extent of the offices' interferences in government decision-making exceeded their resilience to weakening or dissolution, they were nonetheless able to impactfully deliver on their mandates during their operation. These examples show that independence is an important success factor but requires the proper institutional and contextual resilience to support it over the longer term.

It is important to note however that despite the advantages of independence, under the right conditions, proximity to government power can provide worthwhile benefits to a future generations institution's authority and legitimacy. As seen in the examples of Finland and Singapore, unique contextual factors, like an established future-oriented predisposition due to governmental structure, policies, history, and/or culture, can offset the potential drawbacks of lack of independence. In these cases, the relative lack of short-termist pressures allows for a more cooperative approach with government without sacrificing impact as there is less conflict between present and future decision-making.

Public and Political Engagement

The legitimacy of, and public support behind, an institution is a key factor to securing its longevity. The public and politicians alike need to perceive an institution as legitimate, and its functions and powers must be proportional to this perceived legitimacy. Public and political (especially cross-party political) support for future representative institutions is essential for representative institutions to have meaningful power. Therefore, it is imperative

for any such institution to be transparent and accessible in its work, as well as taking initiative to promote the cause of intergenerational rights and issues to the general public and decision-makers. Furthermore, civil society movements and support can be very advantageous in the success of implementing long-term thinking in policy. Cross-party support can act as a buffer against changing governments seeing the institution as someone else's initiative and therefore being more inclined to weaken or abolish it.

In the Hungarian example, despite being established in large part due to efforts from civil society that eventually achieved cross-party support, the Commissioner's role did not have the widespread public understanding needed to act as a barrier against challenges to its status. This is due in part to its limited public outreach beyond its complaints role. In the Finnish example, the long-lasting run and impact of the institution are due in large part to established legitimacy due to widespread cross-party and public support during its creation. Meanwhile, the Committee has engaged in continual public outreach to sustain this legitimacy.

Broad Future-oriented Scope

While sustainable development is often thought about in terms of environmental concerns, offices for future generations that focus on the broad array of policy issues facing future peoples are better equipped to counteract short-termist pressures. In the Hungarian example, the Commissioner had a narrow mandate focused on the environment. While the office was able to secure victories within this focus area, it also neglected to intervene in cross-cutting issues that include the economic and social components of challenges facing future generations. The office spent a large amount of resources addressing a narrow slice of concerns. On the other hand, the Israeli, Finnish, and Singaporean examples in particular demonstrate that a broad future-oriented scope allows for more holistic interventions that

address the interconnected nature of future policy challenges, creating a more robust representation of future interests.

This broad approach can also help secure cross-party and public support for the institution. Political parties and constituents have differing policy interests and may not all be easily mobilized behind environmental concerns. By taking a broad policy approach, these institutions can ensure that they are speaking to a wider base of support by addressing a wide variety of concerns.

Legislative Backing

The creation of a future generations office should be backed by sound legislation to strengthen the institution's position in the face of short-termist threats. The UK example shows that a lack of statutory backing can lead to quick cuts in funding and dissolution when there is a change in government. Similarly, in the Hungarian example a change in constitutional support facilitated the weakening of an institution that previously held significant power over decision-making.

Legislative backing combined with other safeguards against short-termist pressures explored here are key, particularly in contexts where there may be frequent misalignment between present government priorities and the interests of future generations. Each of these design elements acts as a barrier against the tendency for governments to take politically expedient actions against the Guardian role. Combined, these elements provide sound structural support for the powers of the position. The stronger the underlying structure, the stronger the ability of these institutions to intervene and fulfil their future-oriented mandates.

SECTION V: EVALUATING THE INTERVENTION

In this section, the conceptual framework is applied to the role of the Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the office's design within the WFGA, considering some of the main contextual factors in Wales that could influence the success of the institution.

Independence

The FGC is legally independent from elected government and all public bodies governed by the Act (WFGA, 2015, part 3.18). As the primary enforcement mechanism for the WFGA, the Commissioner employs “name and shame” powers to draw attention to unsustainable actions by public bodies and make recommendations to promote compliance with the sustainable development principle (Davies, 2017). The role's statutory independence gives the office the space needed to assess government actions openly and critically. This is particularly important given that the role lacks more direct intervention powers in government decision-making, such as overturning decisions by public bodies or vetoing legislation.

This independence appears to be well-suited to the Welsh context. As explored in the section on the antecedent conditions that drove the development of the WFGA, Wales has a history of unsustainable practices long-unaddressed by previous attempts at embedding a sustainable development duty within government decision-making. These conflicts between short-term and long-term pressures indicate that a significant culture change is needed within the public sector to achieve the goals of the WFGA. Thus, the distance between the role of the FGC and the public bodies governed by the Act facilitates the exercise of the accountability function of the role. However, that is not to say that relationship between the Commissioner and public bodies is necessarily antagonistic. The FGC has recognized the

changes needed for public bodies to comply with the Act's requirements are substantial and has expressed that her role is to take a cooperative yet critical approach to facilitating that change by coaching public bodies on applying the sustainable development principle (Future Generations Commissioner, 2020a). This is likely an effective approach, particularly as public bodies have the final say as to whether or not to comply with the FGC's recommendations.

While the office has statutory independence, the lack of appropriate resourcing of the role by the Welsh government impacts the FGC's ability to intervene on behalf of future generations. Despite having the far-reaching mandate of overseeing the implementation of sustainable development as the central organizing principle of Welsh governance, the FGC is consistently the lowest funded Commissioner in Wales. In 2019-20, the office was allocated £71,000 less than the Children's Commissioner and £1.648m less than the Welsh Language Commissioner, despite having a significantly wider remit (Future Generations Commissioner, for Wales 2020b). Meanwhile, the office has seen consistent growth in requests for the FGC's support and advice (up by 44% in 2019-20 from 2018-19) by the 44 public bodies bound by the Act (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020b). Furthermore, the public bodies themselves have been found by the Auditor General to be not well resourced to accommodate the culture change required by the WFGA (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, 2020b). With the Welsh government having the ability to significantly underfund the role of the Commissioner, this calls into question the office's ability to truly act independently and have the broad impact required to achieve the WFGA's ambitious goals.

Public and Political Engagement

Strong cross-party political and public support were critical to the development of the FGC and the WFGA more broadly. The formation of the FGC was in part a response to the dissolution of the UK Sustainable Development Commission (Jones et al., 2018).

Environmental and social awareness are more prominent in Wales than in mainstream UK politics, thus when the UK government deprioritized sustainable development enforcement, Welsh politicians were eager to differentiate themselves from English MPs by pushing for a bold sustainability agenda (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015). The WFGA passed with broad cross-party support in the Welsh Assembly, despite the presence of the two parties involved in the coalition government that had voted in favour of the dissolution of the Sustainable Development Commission in 2010 at the UK level (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

In addition, the extensive public consultation process involved in the creation of the WFGA and the FGC role as captured through the Wales We Want report bolstered the legitimacy of the legislation and the role of the FGC. However, there are reasons to doubt whether the Commission has the capacity to maintain public support for the institution long-term. Given that the FGC's limited resources may already be spread thin promoting internal culture change within the public sector, the role's public engagement efforts may be limited. While the FGC does provide a pathway to receive comments or inquiries from the public, the role does not have a public advocacy or casework function. Issues submitted by the public are used to identify common themes and emerging issues to inform the FGC's recommendations to public bodies, but the Commissioner does not comment on specific public concerns or complaints (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, n.d.). While the FGC's mandated annual and five-year reporting cycles provide transparency, there is a question as to whether the FGC's public engagement efforts are sufficient to maintain broad support behind the role and the Act more broadly.

Broad Future-oriented Scope

The WFGA takes a broad future-focused view of sustainable development as defined by the sustainable development principle and the seven wellbeing goals, which cross economic,

environmental, cultural, and social policy areas. The FGC's role is explicitly focused on protecting the interests of future generations within the overarching sustainable development principle, which requires public bodies to make decisions in a way that ensures the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To this end, public bodies are required to set objectives for their contribution to the seven Well-being Goals.

However, the Act is fairly ambiguous in how it defines 'long-term' and the seven Well-being goals, which leaves significant room for interpretation as to what the overarching vision for a future Wales is and how to achieve that vision. In publishing its wellbeing objectives, the Welsh Government celebrates publishing one-year revenue plans and four-year capital budgets as a means of striking a balance between the short and long-term interests of future generations (Davies, 2017). However, most theorists of intergenerational justice have a much longer-term view of protecting the interests of future generations (Davies, 2017). Given the short-termist pressures on the Welsh government, there is a risk that long-term actions and definitions will be constrained to fit the limitations of the political cycle, thus undermining the overall purpose of the Act.

Another limitation on the scope of the FGC's powers is the bounds of the devolved powers of Wales. This means that some issues with long-term dimensions that fall under the UK's jurisdiction, like foreign policy, immigration and trade, fall outside the scope of the WFGA and the FGC's powers. There is a question as to how much of a broad view of sustainable development the WFGA and the FGC can encompass in the absence of protections for future generations at the UK level. However, this limitation is contextual rather than a critique of the design of the WFGA itself, as this issue is beyond the scope of the Welsh government.

Legislative Backing

The role of the FGC is backed by legislative powers outlined within the WFGA. The legislative backing of the role of the FGC was developed in part as a reaction to the fragility of the purely administrative UK Sustainable Development Commission, which lacked any support from constitutional or legislative powers (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2015).

Though the power of the FGC to enforce the requirements of the WFGA is circumscribed within the legislation, the role's enforcement powers have weaknesses. In response to the FGC's recommendations, public bodies have the discretion to decline to implement the Commissioner's advice as long as they can provide justifications for inaction or decide on an alternative solution (Davies, 2017). Given that the Act leaves open the question of what constitutes proper justification for disregarding the FGC's recommendations, the FGC's ability to enforce compliance with the sustainable development duty is unclear. This ambiguity places a good degree of discretion in the hands of the public body. While the FGC is not the only enforcement mechanism of the Act's requirements, other mechanisms such as the Auditor General and Welsh Ministers also appear to have primarily procedural enforcement powers that fail to place any real sanctions on public bodies that are found not to comply with the sustainable development principle (Davies, 2016).

Given the emphasis that the WFGA places on sustainable development as the central organizing principle of Welsh governance, one would expect that the FGC and the Act it oversees would have stronger enforcement powers. Yet, given the tendency for such guardians of future generations roles to be dissolved in cases where their enforcement powers are perceived as too strong by stakeholders, weaker enforcement may be a prudent design choice in order to safeguard the longevity of the institution. Whether these powers are sufficient to ensure impact in addition to longevity within the Welsh context is an open

question but one that will be key when observing the long-term outcomes and success of the FGC and the WFGA more broadly.

Discussion

Applying the conceptual framework to the role of the Wales Future Generations Commissioner (FGC) reveals a number of potential strengths and weaknesses in the design of this institution. On the one hand, the architects behind the WFGA and the FGC, more specifically, have implemented strong structural supports behind the role that are well-suited to the Welsh context. The Commissioner's statutory independence, cross-party and public support, broad future-oriented focus, and legislative backing provide a good foundation for weathering the short-termist pressures that have weakened or abolished similar institutions in the past.

At the same time, ambiguities around long-term goals and definitions, weak enforcement powers, and limited resources/support from the Welsh government to carry out the ambitious vision of the Act could prove to be significant barriers to the FGC and WFGA's success.

Evaluating the role of the FGC once again highlights the major challenge of securing the interest of future generations within democratic systems. Institutions representing future generations must perform a delicate balancing act by providing enough pressure to influence change but not enough pressure to face weakening or dissolution in favour of short-term interests. Whether the design of the FGC and the WFGA manages to strike that balance is an open question that will be answered as more results around the Act's outcomes are released. Early indications based on the FGC's five-year report are that progress is being made, but a lack of leadership from the Welsh government and appropriate resourcing of the FGC and public bodies are major barriers to achieving the massive culture change required by the Act.

That being said, monumental public sector change on the scale envisioned by the WFGA undoubtedly takes time. While progress may be slow, the WFGA is a step in the right direction for protecting the interest of future generations. Issues such as ambiguous long-term vision, vague definitions, weak enforcement, and underfunding could improve with time as Wales achieves a foundation of long-term thinking in the public sector to build on. The question remains, however, as to whether this pace of change is too slow to impact looming intergenerational crises such as climate change.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to analyze the Wales approach to securing the interests of future generations as defined within the ground-breaking *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015)* by examining the strengths and weaknesses of the Future Generations Commissioner role as the main enforcement mechanism of the Act's requirements. This was achieved through a direct logic analysis that first identified the logic model behind the Act, then developed a conceptual framework through a case study analysis of other institutions representing future generations around the world, and finally used that conceptual framework to evaluate the role of the Future Generations Commissioner.

The research findings indicate that the FGC's design incorporates a number of structural resilience elements that the conceptual framework identified as beneficial to the success of such institutions. The FGC's statutory independence, cross-party and public support, cross-cutting future-oriented scope, and legislative backing provide a strong basis for the longevity and impact needed to achieve its mandate. However, vague goals and definitions, weak enforcement powers, and a lack of appropriate resourcing/leadership from the Welsh government could hinder the success of the FGC and the WFGA more broadly. Ultimately, achieving the culture change needed to shift democratic governments away from

short-termism is a major undertaking and requires a difficult balancing act between impact and longevity.

Insights from this paper could help inform future evaluations of the WFGA, as well as the design of other measures aimed at safeguarding the interests of future generations. This study was focused primarily on the role of the FGC, but future studies could examine other mechanisms within the WFGA to provide a fuller picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the Welsh approach. As the results of the Act's implementation become clearer, this will provide an opportunity to revisit some of the findings of this research to further validate them against the impact of the WFGA. As more governments around the world search for solutions to short-termism, contributing to this body of evidence is invaluable to finding lasting ways to secure the interest of future generations.

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