

THE DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

Master thesis in Global studies and Cultural Encounters

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Abstract

This paper looks at the problem of the short-term response by democratic institutions to global issues. I view this short-term response as a result of the shaping of our contemporary society, used by states to address pressing issues such as those described in the Sustainable Development Goals. The result so far has been a worsening of these global issues, which instead require a future-focused perspective. The latter is an approach to the problems of modern society that young people are loudly calling for, and that some states have begun to incorporate into their institutional apparatus, but without being able to overcome the short-term focus of today's political decisions.

The paper develops as a philosophical discourse among various authors who have addressed the theme of social justice, particularly in relation to future generations. It is evident that theories of contractualism and utilitarianism fail to ensure intergenerational justice. I then present sustainability ethics and intergenerational ethics, the two main contemporary ethical theories that consider the question of future generations, as fundamental elements in including future generations in our democratic institutions, thus ensuring greater social justice.

In accordance with Michael Kates' "Non-reformist reforms" model, future-focused institutions emerge as potentially functional in taking future generations into account and promoting the application of sustainability ethics and intergenerational ethics in the democratic system. Examples of countries that have future-focused institutions as part of their institutional apparatus and "The Network of Institutions for Future Generations" highlight, however, the lack of veto power as a key factor in states' inability to overcome the short-term perspective of political decisions.

Kates lists four possible theoretical models of future-focused institutions with veto power that states can implement. These models are not concrete but open up the possibility for future assessments and considerations. Furthermore, these models demonstrate how the inclusion of future-focused institutions within the democratic state apparatus is essential in order to represent the rights of future generations, thus ensuring social justice.

Keywords: future generations, social justice, sustainability ethics, intergenerational ethics, The Network of Institutions for Future Generations, Sustainable Development Goals, future-focused institutions.

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Introduction

The society in which we live today has overlooked the effects of global issue such as climate change for several decades, proposing a type of response to catastrophic events focused on short-term solutions. In fact, today's democratic institutions are tied to mechanisms for the survival of a society based on the global value chain, the free market, and globalization. Today's society only sees and increasingly accelerates in exchanges and interconnections, leading to such rapid changes that require quick and immediate actions from democratic institutions.

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations decided to adopt The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs serve as a global framework for addressing various social, economic, and environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development worldwide. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the 17 SDGs, was agreed upon by all 193 member states of the United Nations.

However, to date, the situation is alarming. According to the 2023 *Report for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, cascading and interconnected crises are seriously endangering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and thus humanity as a whole. Specifically, the combination of crises, including COVID-19, climate change, and conflicts, is generating collateral impacts on all SDGs (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023).

One of the most alarming examples is Goal 1 - No poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the progress made in poverty reduction over the past 25 years. Now, rising inflation and the impacts of the war in Ukraine could further hinder progress. According to the report, it is estimated that in 2022, there been an additional 75-95 million people living in extreme poverty compared to pre-pandemic projections. Given current trends, 575 million people (nearly 7% of the world's population) will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030 compared to 800 million in 2015 (or 10.8%). Currently, the world is not on track to achieve the goal of ending poverty by 2030 (ibid).

Another example is Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy. According to the report, the world continues to progress towards sustainable energy goals. However, the current pace of progress is insufficient to achieve the target by 2030. In fact, in 2010 there were 1.2 billion people in the world without electricity, which decreased to 733 million in 2020. If the current pace continues, about 660 million people will still lack access to electricity and close to 2 billion people will continue to rely on polluting fuels and technologies for cooking by 2030. The report emphasises that improvements in energy efficiency, for example, will need to accelerate to achieve the climate goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Hundreds of millions of people still lack access to electricity, and slow progress towards clean energy solutions puts the health

of 2.4 billion people at risk. In 2019, the share of renewables in total final energy consumption was only 17.7%. Enormous disparities in access to sustainable and modern energy persist, leaving the most vulnerable even further behind. In some countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened or reversed the progress already made. Rising commodity, energy, and shipping prices have increased the costs of producing and transporting solar photovoltaic modules, wind turbines, and biofuels worldwide, adding uncertainty to a development trajectory that is already far from the goals of the target. Additionally, international financial flows to developing countries for renewables declined for a second year in a row, decreasing from \$14.3 billion in 2018 to \$19.9 billion in 2019. The report states that achieving energy and climate goals will require continued policy support and a massive mobilization of public and private capital for clean and renewable energy (ibid).

Not least example is Goal 13 - Climate action. The report states that our planet is on the brink of a climate catastrophe, and the window to prevent it is rapidly closing. Heatwaves, droughts estimated to displace 700 million people by 2030, and increasingly frequent floods, which will see sea levels rise by 30-60 cm by 2100, caused by climate change, are already affecting billions of people worldwide and causing potentially irreversible changes in global ecosystems. According to the report, in order to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as established in the Paris Agreement, global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2025. Subsequently, they must decrease by 43% by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations body responsible for scientific assessment of climate change. In response, countries are formulating climate action plans to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts through nationally determined contributions. However, current national commitments are insufficient to achieve the 1.5°C target. Based on these commitments, greenhouse gas emissions are projected to increase by almost 14% in the next decade. The report argues that immediate and profound emission reductions are needed across all sectors to shift from a turning point that leads us towards a climate catastrophe to a turning point towards a sustainable future (ibid).

Those kinds of global problems cannot be addressed with short-term responses. The result can be seen in the management of climate-related problems in the past or the management of migration flows, resources distribution etc. which has seen the failure of democratic governments to initiate effective policies, leading us to live in the anticipation of an uncertain future. More precisely, the actions of today's democratic institutions might conflict with the democratic interests of future generations, influencing today's decision with the quality of life of future generations and their ability to govern democratically. Political decisions, in fact,

touch on various aspects of our society, ranging from the purely economic sphere to the need for a cultural perspective shift. The response of democratic institutions, recognising the urgent and pressing need to implement a policy for the implementation of the SDGs, faces difficulty in delineating the priorities to follow in order to achieve the goals. The 2030 Agenda focuses on defining objectives to be achieved by, but there is no clear structure for how to reach them (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017).

This gray area in the structure and therefore in the approach to current global issues by democratic institutions has contributed over the years to bringing climate change to its critical point. Today, we cannot rely solely on the hope that governments will implement incremental paths or a gradual transition to a more sustainable model, but we need concrete institutions to take charge. In this regard, I am intrigued to understand how we can adapt our current democratic system to make it more future-oriented and effectively ensure social justice for future generations.

Problem formulation

What are the ethical arguments for prioritizing future generations in our institutions?

How can we reform the democratic system to take future generations into account?

Methodology

The writing is divided into three sections.

The first section – “Future generation, a problem of social justice” - addresses the ethical arguments for prioritizing future generations in our institutions. To answer the question posed in the problem formulation, I began by examining the epistemology and ontology of social justice in relation to future generations. This allowed me to identify the obstacles that our democratic society faces in including future generations in matters of social justice. Drawing from Nussbaum's critique (2006) of classical theories of justice, I then highlighted how contractualism and utilitarianism fail to meet the needs of future generations. This is primarily due to four barriers - the Concept of Non-existence, the Concept of Asymmetry, the Concept of Indeterminacy, and the Concept of the Primacy of Present Temporality - identified by Westra (2012) as concepts that impede the inclusion of future generations in the discourse on social justice.

Contractualism and utilitarianism, as well as Nussbaum's critique of classical theories of justice, have always interested me and are topics I had the opportunity to explore during my bachelor's studies. The idea of addressing the issue of social justice in relation to future generations stems from Ludvig Beckman's (2008) paper *Do global climate change and the interest of future generations have implications for democracy?* This led me to discover Westra (2012) and subsequently Frohock (1972) in terms of integrating ethical values and principles into political theories to ensure social justice and overcome the barriers identified by Westra in relation to future generations.

There are two contemporary ethical theories that directly address the issue of future generations: the ethics of sustainability and intergenerational ethics. I chose to delve into the thoughts of Becker (2012) and Groves (2014), respectively. This choice was driven by the fact that both authors have proposed contemporary ethical theories that directly address the issue of future generations and social justice.

Frohock emphasises two components to ensure social justice within the representative democratic political system. I chose this political system because it is the framework within which the question of how to reform the system to consider future generations is being explored. I also considered its advantages and disadvantages as highlighted by Fishkin (1993). The second section - “Non-reformist reforms of future-focused institutions” - addresses the necessary reforms that the democratic system should implement to consider future generations. Kates (2015) provides valuable insights and proposals regarding the representation of future generations within the democratic system. Kates' concept of "non-reformist reforms" presents

a potential solution to the lack of representation of future generations in democratic decision-making processes. This concept suggests the establishment of dedicated institutions or ombudsmen for the future. Interestingly, many democratic nations across the world have already adopted Kates' proposal, involving the establishment of institutions or ombudsmen dedicated to representing the interests of future generations. This allowed me to investigate "the network of future generations" (NIFG) and provide examples of the eight institutions from member countries and two international institutions, such as Finland, Germany, Canada, the UK (with a focus on Wales), New Zealand, Israel, Norway, Hungary, Australia, the World Future Council (WFC), and Worldconnectors. However, from this investigation, it appears that governments are unable to adopt long-term decisions even when equipped with future-focused institutions. This indicates a failure to prioritise future generations and, consequently, a lack of guarantee for adequate social justice.

The third section - "The partial reform implemented by future-focused institutions" - identifies the lack of veto power as a problem in current future-focused institutions. Kates' proposal highlighted the advantages of granting veto power to these institutions in balancing short-term interests with a long-term perspective and safeguarding the interests and needs of future generations. Additionally, I delve into how the existing future-focused institutions could contribute to the implementation of global issues, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while emphasising the issue that arises from the absence of veto power for these institutions. In concluding this section, I explore the potential framework models proposed by Kates, which could serve as future-focused institutions with veto power. These models are currently only theoretical, but they open up the possibility of developing more concrete responses on the discussed topic.

Future generation, a problem of social justice

Introduction:

To address the first question of the posed problem, this section looks at the epistemology and ontology of social justice in relation to future generations. It presents a philosophical conversation among various authors who have written about social justice, with a particular focus on how to include future generations. I will then concentrate on two main aspects. On one hand, I will delve into Nussbaum's critique of classical theories of justice, highlighting how contractualism and utilitarianism fail to consider future generations, thereby creating social injustice. I will illustrate four concepts, namely the Concept of Non-existence, the Concept of Asymmetry, the Concept of Indeterminacy, and the Concept of the Primacy of Present Temporality, which Westra (2012) identifies as barriers to including future generations in the discourse on social justice.

In order to overcome the obstacle posed by these four concepts, I will explore Frohock (1972), who emphasises the importance of integrating ethical values and principles into political theories to ensure social justice. Frohock also delves into three ways in which ethical theories can be used, integrated, or applied to the political system.

Consequently, I will present two contemporary ethical theories that address the problem of future generations: the ethics of sustainability and intergenerational ethics, as proposed by Becker (2012) and Groves (2014), respectively. In line with Fishkin (1993), I will then explore the representative democratic political system, briefly outlining its advantages and disadvantages.

The intention of this section is to contribute to highlighting some of the characteristics that represent or at least seem to represent dysfunctional points of the debate concerning political choices that affect future generations in the context of governance by democratic institutions. John Rawls states that the theme of future generations "puts any ethical theory to severe, if not impossible, tests" (Rawls, 1971, p.241). In fact, turning one's attention to the impact of current institutional choices on future generations constitutes a challenge within the challenge: because it not only deals with a theme that involves ethics, responsibility, rights, and justice, but also attacks in a radical way the arguments with which other scholars have dealt with and structured the current democratic institutional system, which in turn was created in accordance with an ethics and in response to political and social responsibilities. The objective of this section is

therefore to deepen the theme from a theoretical and philosophical point of view, leading to a rethinking of the approach used for political decisions.

From a certain point of view, the problem in question is not different from that which others have already dealt with in the past, when it was a matter of putting on the agenda the question of the boundaries of political governance: to what extent, that is, our moral and decision-making conceptions are able to account for issues that, due to their intrinsic nature, are beyond customary boundaries? These boundaries can be territorial, of species, temporal, etc. It is precisely the existence of boundaries that determines that some themes and interested parties are not taken into consideration in the discourse concerning political decisions, such as the difficulties in dealing with the conformation of the future generations.

The Rights of Future Generations and Social Justice:

In the work entitled *Frontiers of Justice*, Martha Nussbaum (2006) addresses the topic of disability from the perspective of rights and social justice, as well as issues related to citizenship and animal rights. Nussbaum's goal is to highlight how classical theories of justice, as well as the renewal proposed by John Rawls, are unable to include some of the most urgent questions of justice and therefore fail to meet the challenges posed by contemporary society. While criticizing Rawls' perspective, the American philosopher presents a perspective aimed at broadening and improving it rather than surpassing it (Segall, 2009b).

However, it is precisely the radical overcoming of established ethical perspectives that would lead to a critically new vision of justice, where the focus is on the insufficiency of traditional ethical perspectives in justifying and establishing the rights of future generations for social justice.

To do so, I will now examine the two main contemporary theories on justice that consider the issue of future generations. On the one hand, we have contractualism, a political and moral theory that asserts that the authority and legitimacy of political institutions derive from an implicit or explicit "contract" among the members of a society. According to contractualism, humans are naturally free and autonomous, but choose to give up some of their freedom and submit to political authority in order to protect their rights and ensure the peace and security of society. This "social contract" can be implicit or explicit, but in any case, it involves relinquishing some individual rights in exchange for the protection and stability that political authority can provide. Various political philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have structured contractualist theory, but the thoughts of different philosophers differ in some aspects. Hobbes believed that humans are essentially selfish and

competitive, and that the social contract is necessary to prevent violence and chaos in society. Locke, on the other hand, believed that humans are naturally good and that the social contract is necessary to protect their natural rights, including private property. Rousseau, finally, argued that society itself is the source of corruption and injustice, and that the social contract is necessary to create a political authority that represents the general will of society. The contractualist theories of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau have influenced modern politics and philosophy and have contributed to the definition of principles of justice and freedom in modern democratic societies (Sen & Williams, 1982).

The other theory is utilitarianism, a consequentialist ethical theory that asserts that the right action is the one that maximises total well-being, i.e., the maximum pleasure and minimum suffering for the greatest number of people possible. According to utilitarianism, every action should be evaluated based on the consequences it produces and its implications for general well-being. Utilitarian theory focuses on the idea that political actions or decisions should be judged on the basis of their positive or negative consequences, rather than their motives or adherence to moral rules. Utilitarianism has had a significant impact on modern ethical thought thanks to thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Bentham developed hedonistic utilitarianism, which asserts that total well-being is the sum of the pleasure and pain states of the people involved. Mill, on the other hand, developed a utilitarianism that takes into account that not all pleasures are equal, and that some pleasures are more important than others. Criticisms of utilitarianism include the difficulty of quantifying total well-being, the lack of attention to issues of justice and the needs of minorities, and the possibility that utilitarianism may justify immoral actions if they produce the maximum pleasure for the greatest number of people (ibid).

But in contemporary society, contractualism and utilitarianism have failed to take into account future generations. In fact, in the hypothesis of the contract that establishes a just society because they are, by principle, unable to negotiate, agree, and claim their rights since they do not yet exist in society, they have not yet been born. In the case of utilitarianism, since it aims to maximise total welfare, it could be argued that actions that produce the maximum welfare for the greatest number of people possible are morally right, even if it means sacrificing the interests of future generations. Specifically, utilitarianism could justify the reckless use of natural resources, such as the intensive use of fossil fuels, which could lead to negative consequences for future generations.

Therefore, contemporary times require new ethical theories that have the ability to include changes and challenges that society will face in its evolution. To achieve this, it is important to

delineate some key concepts that currently hinder future generations from actively participating in contemporary society. The goal is to incorporate future generations as active actors within the contemporary democratic institutional system and therefore accept its contractual and utilitarian conformation, but including ethical theories focused on the future.

Concept of non-existence:

As previously mentioned, one of the most problematic aspects concerning future generations is simply the fact that they are still non-existent entities. However, the concept of non-existence has a dual perspective.

On the one hand, if a person does not exist, they have no possibility of influencing or contributing to the world that will exist after their death. This can be problematic if we expect people to make responsible choices and consider the consequences of their actions for future generations. In other words, if people do not believe that their actions will have any consequences after their death, they may be less motivated to make ethical or sustainable choices. On the other hand, if future generations do not exist in the present, they cannot benefit from or influence the actions taken by the current population to ensure a sustainable future. This means that there may be little incentive to prioritise actions that benefit future generations, since they are not directly affected by them. In other words, since future generations do not yet exist, actions are taken based on the "here and now" in response to the needs of the existing population, even if they are unethical or unsustainable choices.

Therefore, non-existence poses an obstacle for future generations in different ways. Firstly, non-existence can make it difficult to identify and defend the needs and interests of future generations. Without their voices and perspectives, it may be difficult to fully understand and address the challenges they may face in the future (Woodward, 1986). For example, the invention of the internal combustion engine in 1853 was thought to benefit future generations for their well-being and for a more advanced civilization. Today, Western society believes that to reduce CO₂ emissions, we should transition to electric engines. The European Union has decided that from 2035, the sale of diesel or gasoline-powered cars (combustion engines) will no longer be possible as they are too polluting and therefore harmful to future population's well-being. Both the decisions made in 1853 and those in 2023 were aimed at the benefit of future generations, but as we can see, there is a problem between the perspective of what is right or better now in the context of the future and what is right or better for future generations. Non-existence can also be an obstacle in terms of ethical responsibility that current generations have towards future generations. If future generations do not yet exist, it could be easy for the

current generation to prioritise their own interests over those of future generations, without considering the potential long-term consequences of their actions. An example of this is the management of natural resources. If a society does not take into account the fact that future generations will exist and that natural resources are finite in its management of resources, it could be easy for the current generation to prioritise their own interests over those of future generations. They might, therefore, be in favor of extracting fossil fuels such as oil at the expense of natural habitats, because they do not recognise the importance of these actions for the survival of future generations. An example of this is the destruction of Queensland in Australia. In fact, in 2010, the Adani Group (an Indian multinational) purchased a coal mine and was granted permission to extract coal for 20 years of production, at the expense of the surrounding natural areas and biodiversity of the region (Zabyelina & Uhm, 2020). This is one of many examples of short-term responses that drive the decision-making processes of politicians in our society. Several authors have emphasised how the concept of non-existence of future generations represents an obstacle to the representation of their rights.

Laura Westra is a philosopher and environmentalist who has extensively written about the concept of non-existence in relation to environmental ethics. According to Westra, the concept of non-existence is a fundamental component of environmental ethics because it allows us to recognise the value of nature and the importance of preserving it. The concept of non-existence developed by Westra refers to the idea that the loss of a species or an ecosystem represents a real and irreversible loss, even if that loss does not have a direct impact on human beings. In other words, the extinction of a species or the destruction of an ecosystem has value in and of itself, regardless of any economic or practical benefits it may provide to human beings (Westra, 2012).

Westra argues that the concept of non-existence is important for several reasons. First, it allows us to recognise the intrinsic value of nature and the importance of preserving it for its intrinsic value. Second, it helps us to recognise the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of maintaining biodiversity. Finally, it helps us to recognise the ethical implications of our actions and the responsibility we have to protect the environment for future generations. In essence, Westra's concept of non-existence represents a rejection of the idea that the value of nature is determined solely by its usefulness to human beings. Instead, it recognises that nature has value in and of itself, and that its preservation is an important ethical imperative.

According to Laura Westra, the concept of non-existence is also important in relation to future generations. Westra argues that our actions today have the potential to affect the well-being of

future generations, and that we have a moral responsibility to ensure that they are not deprived of the benefits of a healthy and flourishing environment (ibid).

The concept of non-existence in relation to future generations refers to the idea that the loss of biodiversity or the destruction of ecosystems today can have a lasting impact on future generations' ability to enjoy the benefits of nature. In other words, if we fail to protect the environment today, we are depriving future generations of the opportunity to experience the beauty and diversity of the natural world.

Westra argues that the concept of non-existence is important in this context because it allows us to recognise the importance of intergenerational equity. This means that we have a moral obligation to ensure that future generations have the same opportunities and benefits that we have enjoyed, and that we should not deprive them of these benefits through our actions.

In essence, Westra's concept of non-existence in relation to intergenerational equity highlights the importance of reflecting on the long-term impacts of our actions on the environment and future generations. It reminds us that we have a moral responsibility to protect the environment not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all living beings, including those who are not yet born (ibid).

The concept of non-existence in relation to intergenerational equity presented by Westra highlights a second obstacle, that of asymmetry.

Concept of Asymmetry:

Asymmetry refers to the contemporary position of future generations in the dialogue with democratic institutions. In fact, due to the disparity between the power held by the current generation as a means to influence the fate of future generations, there is a lack of capacity for the latter to influence the former. Asymmetry in relation to future generations is a concept that refers to the fact that the choices and actions we make today can have positive or negative consequences for future generations, but these generations have no power to influence our decisions. In other words, there is a power asymmetry between present and future generations. This asymmetry is based on the consideration that the decisions we make today regarding the use of natural resources, pollution, climate change, and other environmental issues can have effects that will continue into the future, even for hundreds or thousands of years. However, future generations have no power to influence the decisions we make today (ibid).

The asymmetry of future generations has been highlighted by moral and political philosophy, particularly by the theory of intergenerational equality. This theory argues that we must consider the interests and rights of future generations in our planning and political decisions,

as these generations cannot represent themselves and are particularly vulnerable to environmental damage and the negative consequences of our current choices (Padilla, 2002). Westra argues that intergenerational equality breaks down the asymmetry currently present in our democratic institutions and is a fundamental principle for ensuring justice between generations. According to Westra, intergenerational equality requires that every generation has access to the same opportunities and resources, without being negatively conditioned by the choices and actions of previous generations. This means that every generation should have the opportunity to develop and realise its potential without being limited by the negative consequences of the actions of previous generations. Westra argues that intergenerational equality also requires that present generations take responsibility for their choices and actions, avoiding damaging the environment and compromising the ability of future generations to enjoy the same opportunities and resources. In other words, present generations must take responsibility for preserving the environment for future generations. For Westra, intergenerational equality is not only an ethical principle, but also a principle of social justice. Ensuring intergenerational equality means recognising the value of future generations and the need to protect their interests and rights. Moreover, intergenerational equality requires addressing environmental problems such as climate change and biodiversity loss in a fair and just way, avoiding imposing the costs of our actions on future generations. This implies the need to adopt policies that ensure the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the transition to a low-carbon economy, as well as protecting biodiversity and natural ecosystems (Westra, 2012).

Intergenerational equality has important implications for environmental policies and for the decisions we make regarding the use of natural resources. In particular, it requires us to consider the long-term effects of our choices and to ensure that future generations have access to the same opportunities and resources as present ones. The consideration of the long-term effects of our choices introduces the third obstacle, namely the indeterminacy that encompasses the obstacles of non-existence and the asymmetry suffered by future generations.

Concept of Indeterminacy:

Indeterminacy refers to the challenge of accurately predicting the future based on present information. This poses a barrier to making informed decisions about which actions may be beneficial or harmful to future generations. Therefore, the concept of indeterminacy of the interests of future generations refers to the difficulty in knowing and evaluating the interests of future generations and making decisions that take them into account. Future generations do not

yet have a voice and cannot express their interests directly, making it difficult to know what their needs and priorities will be. Moreover, many of the consequences of our actions on future generations are uncertain and difficult to predict accurately. This indeterminacy of the interests of future generations makes it challenging to make decisions that consider their rights and needs. For instance, the decisions we make today regarding the use of natural resources may have negative effects on future generations, but we are not sure what these effects will be and what their needs and priorities will be. To address this indeterminacy of future generations' interests, some philosophers and theorists have suggested adopting a precautionary approach, which means assuming that the negative consequences of our actions on future generations can be very serious and taking decisions that minimise the risk of environmental damage. This approach is based on the idea that protecting future generations should be an absolute priority, even if we are not able to know exactly what their interests and priorities will be (Padilla, 2002).

One of the philosophers who developed and supported the precautionary approach is Hans Jonas. In his work *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas argued that humanity must take responsibility for protecting the environment and future generations, even if we cannot know for sure the consequences of our actions. According to Jonas, humanity must adopt an ethics of responsibility, based on the presumption that the consequences of our actions can be very serious and that we must act cautiously to minimise the risk of environmental and social harm. Jonas's ethics of responsibility is based on the idea that humanity has a responsibility towards future generations and that we must act to protect their right to a dignified life. Jonas's precautionary approach is based on the presumption of the "precautionary principle", which states that when there is uncertainty about the consequences of our actions, we must act cautiously, that is, adopt preventive measures to minimise the risk of harm (Jonas, 1984).

Similar is the concept of indeterminacy for Laura Westra. Indeterminacy refers to the difficulty of knowing with certainty the consequences of our actions on the environment and human health. According to Westra, uncertainty regarding the consequences of our actions is an intrinsic characteristic of the environment and nature, and this uncertainty makes it difficult to make right and just decisions regarding the protection of the environment and human health. Westra argues that the uncertainty regarding the consequences of our actions and the goal of intergenerational justice require adopting a precautionary approach, which takes into account the possible negative consequences of our actions on future generations, even if we are unable to predict them with certainty. The precautionary approach, according to Westra, implies acting responsibly, recognising that our actions can have negative effects on future generations and taking responsibility for minimizing the risk of harm. Westra also argues that intergenerational

justice requires adopting an ethics of care¹, which is based on the responsibility to protect future generations and ensure them a healthy and sustainable environment. The ethics of care, according to Westra, requires considering the interests of future generations as an integral part of political decisions and adopting policies and decisions that protect the environment and the rights of future generations (Westra, 2012).

However, the difficulty is precisely in reconciling the ethics of care, taking into account the interests of future generations, with contemporary political decisions, bringing into our reasoning the fourth and final obstacle that future generations must face: the primacy of present temporality.

Concept of the primacy of present temporality:

This concept defines the obstacle represented by the inability to truly grasp the future-oriented nature of democratic decisions. This constitutes the crux of the issue of responsibility for the future and for future generations. In fact, there is an idea that present concerns and interests often take precedence over considering the impact of decisions on future generations. It is difficult to fully understand the nature of the future and how current actions will influence it, leading to a lack of responsibility for the well-being of future generations. This is a crucial issue in the democratic decision-making process, as decisions made by current leaders and policymakers have a significant impact on the lives and well-being of future generations. The concept of the primacy of present temporality therefore refers to the tendency of humans to prioritise their immediate needs and interests at the expense of the needs and interests of future generations. This tendency represents a fundamental ethical problem in the realm of sustainability and intergenerational justice. The primacy of present temporality manifests in various ways, such as in the excessive consumption of natural resources, environmental pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and waste production. All these activities have a negative impact on the environment and human health and can compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs and interests. The primacy of present temporality is often countered by the principle of intergenerational justice, which requires considering the interests of future generations in the decision-making process. Intergenerational justice involves adopting policies and decisions that protect the environment and human health, ensuring sustainability and well-being for future generations. Additionally, the concept of the primacy

¹ The ethics of care is an ethical approach that emphasises the individual and social responsibility to care for others, nature, and the environment. The ethics of care highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships, empathy, and solidarity as fundamental to individual and collective well-being.

of present temporality is at odds with the principle of intergenerational responsibility, which entails taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions on future generations. Intergenerational responsibility requires adopting a precautionary approach that takes into account the possible negative consequences of our actions on the environment and human health, even if we are unable to predict them with certainty (ibid).

Laura Westra deepens the concept by seeking to overcome the obstacle posed by the primacy of present temporality through an ethical theory on the "primacy of temporality." This theory argues that ethical justice is based on responsibility towards future generations and nature, and that the present must be oriented towards the future. In other words, the "primacy of temporality" asserts that our ethical responsibility is not limited to the present but extends to future generations and the natural world that will inherit our choices and the consequences of our actions. This theory challenges the anthropocentric approach to life and nature, which often considers humans as the centre of the universe and ignores the long-term consequences of our actions. According to Westra, the primacy of temporality implies that our ethical decisions should be oriented towards the future, not only to avoid harming future generations, but also to create a better and more just future. This means adopting a long-term perspective in our choices, evaluating the effects of our actions on future generations and on nature as a whole (ibid).

Applying ethical values, principles, to political theories:

As mentioned earlier, the concepts outlined above are a barrier to future generations' active participation in contemporary society. To overcome this obstacle, I will introduce the two main contemporary ethical theories that address the issue of future generations: sustainability ethics and intergenerational ethics. These ethical theories insert future generations as an active actor within the contemporary democratic institutional system in favour of social justice.

Bringing together ethical values, principles, and political theories can be a complex undertaking, as these are two distinct disciplinary areas that address different issues. However, both areas are closely related, as politics is often based on ethical values and principles (Nagel, 2005).

Several thinkers, such as John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, Charles Taylor, and many others, have emphasised the importance of integrating ethical values and principles into political theories (Frohock, 1972). To do so, some approaches can be considered:

- Use ethical values and principles as the basis for political theory: In this case, the ethical theory is used as a foundation for political theory. For example, one could develop a

political theory based on utilitarian ethical theory, which holds that actions should be evaluated based on their contribution to the general welfare (ibid).

- Integrate ethical values, principles, and politics: In this case, ethical and political theories are integrated to create a more comprehensive theory. For example, one could develop a political theory that incorporates ethical values such as justice and equality (ibid).
- Apply ethical values and principles to political theory: In this case, ethical theory is applied to political theory to evaluate political decisions. For example, one could use virtue ethical theory to evaluate the qualities of politicians and their decisions (ibid).

Bringing together ethical values, principles, and politics requires a deep understanding of both areas and their relationships. The ultimate goal should be to structure a political theory that is ethically sound and guided by shared moral principles.

In our case, the goal is to apply the two main contemporary ethical theories that address the issue of future generations, sustainability ethics and intergenerational ethics, to the representative democratic system, which is currently the most widespread political system in the world.

The ethics of sustainability:

The ethics of sustainability refers to a set of moral principles that guide human behaviour in order to preserve and protect the natural environment and promote sustainable development. This ethics recognises that the health of the environment is essential for human survival and the well-being of society as a whole.

In practice, the ethics of sustainability requires reflection on how our actions affect the environment and future generations. This entails a responsible and conscious approach towards the use of natural resources, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, safeguarding biodiversity, and adopting sustainable production and consumption practices. The ethics of sustainability has become increasingly important now where human activities are causing significant impacts on the environment. Combating climate change, conserving water resources, and protecting biodiversity are just some of the challenges that contemporary society must face to ensure a sustainable future for future generations (Becker, 2012).

The ethics of sustainability is based on three fundamental pillars: the economy, the environment, and society. These three pillars are closely interconnected and mutually influence each other.

- In economic terms, the ethics of sustainability require that economic activities be managed in a way that promotes sustainable economic growth, while respecting natural resources and society. This involves adopting business practices and public policies that encourage technological innovation, energy efficiency, waste reduction and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and the promotion of sustainable production and consumption models.
- In environmental terms, the ethics of sustainability involves the protection and conservation of the natural environment. This involves reducing the environmental impact of human activities, conserving biodiversity, sustainable management of natural resources, and promoting clean and renewable energy.
- In social terms, the ethics of sustainability requires that development be fair and just for all people and that human rights be respected. This involves promoting social justice, equal opportunities, democratic participation, and protecting the rights of minorities.
- The ethics of sustainability also implies a holistic approach to resource management and environmental protection. This means that the management of natural resources must take into account the interactions between the environment, economy, and society and their long-term implications.

By integrating environmental, social, and economic sustainability into our daily values and actions, this approach recognises that our interaction with the planet and with other human beings has long-term repercussions and that we must act responsibly to ensure a sustainable future for future generations (ibid).

This approach highlights the need to preserve the natural environment for future generations. This approach supports the idea that society has a moral responsibility to limit the environmental impact of human activities and to ensure that natural resources are used sustainably for future generations. In addition, the ethics of sustainability recognises the importance of intergenerational equity, i.e., the need to ensure that future generations have access to the same resources and opportunities as the current ones. To this end, the approach is interdisciplinary and involves not only philosophy and ethics but also environmental science, politics, economics, and other fields of study. This approach seeks to integrate ethical concerns regarding sustainability into our daily decisions and behaviors, as well as in broader social and economic systems (ibid).

The fundamental principle of the ethics of sustainability is responsibility for the well-being of future generations. This means that we must consider the effects of our actions on future

generations and act accordingly. This requires the protection of natural resources, the promotion of social equity, and the reduction of the environmental impact of our activities. Another important principle of the ethics of sustainability is respect for human dignity and cultural diversity. Therefore, we must consider the needs and values of different cultures and individuals and adopt practices that respect their dignity and integrity. This also involves promoting social justice and equality, as well as respecting cultural diversity and conserving biodiversity. The ethics of sustainability also requires attention to maintaining ecosystem health and biodiversity conservation. This means that we must protect natural habitats and promote the conservation of flora and fauna. This requires the adoption of sustainable farming and natural resource management practices, promotion of renewable energy sources, and reduction of the environmental impact of our activities. Finally, the ethics of sustainability requires justice and equity in the distribution of resources and benefits. This means that we must adopt policies and practices that promote social justice and equity in the distribution of natural resources and economic benefits. This also requires reducing poverty and food insecurity, as well as adopting ethical business practices and ensuring fair labor practices (ibid). The ethics of sustainability is an approach that focuses on creating a sustainable society, where people live in harmony with the natural environment, using resources responsibly and paying attention to the consequences of their actions on the health of the planet. It is based on the concept of intergenerational justice, which emphasises the importance of ensuring that future generations have access to the same resources and opportunities that we have today. This requires reflection on how our present actions can affect the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Additionally, the ethics of sustainability focuses on the importance of adopting sustainable production and consumption practices. This means reducing the use of non-renewable resources, promoting renewable energy, and adopting sustainable agricultural practices. This also involves reducing waste production and promoting recycling and material reuse. All of this is closely linked to the idea of ecological solidarity, which requires that wealthier societies and communities support and assist those less fortunate. This means that industrialised societies should support developing ones to adopt sustainable practices and protect the natural environment (ibid).

To promote the ethics of sustainability, many organizations and individuals are adopting practices and policies that encourage the reduction of the environmental and social impact of their activities. This may include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting diversity and inclusion, reducing waste, and adopting ethical and sustainable business practices.

Additionally, the ethics of sustainability requires greater attention to transparency and accountability in the actions of organizations and government institutions.

Intergenerational Ethics:

Intergenerational ethics focuses on the issue of justice between generations, that is, on the moral responsibility of present generations to ensure that future generations have a level of well-being that is similar or greater than that of present generations. This involves considering the effects of our actions on the quality of life and environmental, economic, and social sustainability of future generations. In other words, intergenerational ethics calls on us to make decisions that not only satisfy our present needs but also protect and promote the well-being of future generations.

There are several ethical issues related to intergenerational ethics, including intergenerational justice, environmental sustainability, and resource distribution. Intergenerational justice refers to the question of how resources should be distributed between present and future generations, while environmental sustainability refers to the need to preserve natural resources for future generations. Indeed, intergenerational ethics has become an increasingly relevant topic in the fields of moral and political philosophy, especially due to the environmental and social challenges that modern societies are facing (Groves, 2014).

One of the main concepts of intergenerational ethics is the "intergenerational distribution of goods." This concept refers to how resources are distributed between present and future generations. A fair distribution requires that present generations do not irresponsibly exploit resources, leaving little or nothing for future generations. Instead, resources should be used sustainably and conservatively so that future generations can enjoy a quality of life that is similar or superior to that of present generations. Another important issue of intergenerational ethics is intergenerational justice. This concerns the distribution of costs and benefits between generations. This means that present generations should not benefit at the expense of future generations. For example, present generations should not exploit natural resources in a way that causes irreparable damage to the environment or future generations. Intergenerational ethics also requires individual and collective responsibility. Each individual has a duty to act responsibly and sustainably to ensure that future generations have a liveable world. This also requires international collaboration, as environmental and social challenges are global in scope and require a global response (ibid).

Intergenerational ethics has many implications for politics, particularly for decisions on public policies and long-term investment choices. Responsible intergenerational policy must consider

the consequences of present decisions on future generations, such as when it comes to environmental policies, economic development, social security, investments in education, infrastructure, and research. For example, an intergenerational energy policy should promote clean and renewable energy sources that reduce pollution and dependence on fossil fuels. This would maintain good air and climate quality for future generations. In addition, public policies should also be financially sustainable, avoiding placing excessive debts and burdens on future generations. This requires responsible budgeting of public finances, ensuring that funds are spent effectively and invested in ways that generate long-term returns. Intergenerational ethics also calls for the promotion of policies that ensure equality of opportunity for future generations, such as investing in education and vocational training. This would allow future generations to have access to the same opportunities and have greater social mobility (ibid).

The representative democratic system:

The representative democratic system is a model of government in which citizens elect their representatives, who act on their behalf in the decision-making process. In this system, representatives are chosen through free and periodic elections and are accountable to the voters who elected them.

In a representative democracy, power is divided among different government institutions, such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. These institutions work together to create public policies, enforce laws, and make decisions on behalf of the population (Fishkin, 1993).

The representative democratic system offers several advantages, including:

- Representation of diverse interests: Elected representatives in a representative democratic system represent the interests of their constituents, which means that the voice of all citizens can be heard. This system ensures that various interest groups are represented, even if they may be in the minority, and that government decisions are the result of a compromise process between different viewpoints (ibid).
- Accountability of representatives: In a representative democracy, citizens have the power to choose their representatives through free and periodic elections. Representatives are required to be accountable for their actions and decisions to the voters who elected them. If representatives do not meet the expectations of voters, they can be removed from office through the next election (ibid).
- Stability and continuity: A representative democratic system offers stability and continuity. Since representatives are elected for a set term, the government remains

relatively stable and predictable. This allows businesses to operate without fear of political instability and individuals to plan their future with greater security (ibid).

- Protection of rights: A representative democratic system offers protection for people's rights. The constitution and laws that regulate it are written to protect the rights of individuals, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Additionally, power is divided among different government institutions, such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, to ensure that no one has too much power and that people's rights are protected (ibid).
- Better management of resources: The representative democratic system offers greater efficiency in the management of public resources. Since representatives are elected to represent the interests of the population, their goals are oriented towards the public good and not their personal interests. Additionally, the public budget system is controlled by different powers of the state to ensure that expenses are justified and used for the common good (ibid).

However, this system also presents some challenges, including:

- Political polarization: In a representative democracy, political parties represent different ideologies and interests. However, this can lead to political polarization, where parties become increasingly divided and unable to find compromises. This can lead to inefficiency in government management and compromise the system's ability to deliver positive results for the population (Sniderman & Highton, 2011).
- Unequal access to political resources: In a representative democracy, citizens have the right to actively participate in politics. However, access to political resources is not always fair. Groups with greater financial and time resources can have a greater influence on the political process, while citizens who work full-time or have limited resources may be less represented (ibid).
- Ineffective government institutions: In a representative democratic system, power is divided among different government institutions, such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. However, if these institutions do not function properly, this can lead to inefficiency in government management. Additionally, if these institutions are corrupt or mismanaged, they can compromise the system's ability to deliver positive results for the population (ibid).
- Lack of electoral participation: Representative democracy depends on active citizen participation in elections and political decision-making. However, many citizens may

feel disillusioned or disinterested in politics, which can lead to low voter turnout and compromise the representation of the population's interests (ibid).

To date, the representative democratic political system is identified as the best system to govern our society because it has certain advantages over other political systems. Firstly, representative democracy guarantees citizens' participation in political life through the right to vote and the power to elect their own representatives. This means that citizens have the opportunity to choose leaders they deem most suitable to represent their interests and to express their opinions on important political issues. Additionally, representative democracy ensures separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This guarantees that no branch of government has excessive power, preventing the risk of abuse of power and authoritarianism. Furthermore, representative democracy promotes freedom of expression and freedom of the press, allowing citizens to criticise and monitor the government and express their opinions without fear of retaliation. Finally, representative democracy promotes economic and social development, as it ensures political stability, protection of human and civil rights, and protection of private property and investments (ibid).

All of this has made democracy identified as a form that can represent and meet the needs of the population as a whole, ensuring citizens' participation in political life and protecting their rights and freedoms.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, the epistemology and ontology of social justice in relation to future generations require enrichment. I have philosophically explored and examined our knowledge of "being-future generations" in relation to the concept of social justice. This has involved exploring how we understand and acquire knowledge about social justice and the nature of existence and reality regarding the rights and well-being of future generations.

The epistemology of social justice in relation to future generations has allowed me to question how we know and understand social justice and, when related to future generations, examine its spatial and temporal limitations. I have been intrigued by the sources and methods of knowledge about the principles, values, and practices that promote social justice over time and among generations. This has led me to identify different epistemological frameworks and approaches, such as utilitarianism and contractualism, to gain an understanding of the ethical considerations on which they are based and to form knowledge related to the rights and justice of future generations in order to ultimately implement social justice.

Ontology, on the other hand, has allowed me to address the nature of "being-future generations" and its existence in relation to social justice. It has prompted me to ask fundamental questions about the nature of the political reality in which we live, the ethical and moral principles on which we make political decisions, and their intersections with the natural dynamics that shape ethical considerations and obligations towards future generations. The ontological inquiry has addressed aspects of intergenerational justice, moral rights, and the temporal aspects of social justice, examining how different ethical perspectives can contribute to improvement.

This reflection on the epistemology and ontology of social justice for future generations deepens our understanding of the ethical implications, moral responsibilities, and foundations of political choices that our democratic institutions make every day. In order to create a fairer and more sustainable world for future generations, it is therefore essential to prioritise future generations in our institutions. As I highlighted earlier, there are ethical and value-based foundations, but the political system is not adequate within our society. Consequentially, how can we reform the democratic system to take future generations into account?

Non-reformist reforms of future-focused institutions

Introduction:

Within this overarching framework, to address the second question of the posed problem, I will delve into Kates and his concept of “non-reformist reforms”. Kates proposes a possible solution to the lack of representation of future generations within the democratic system. Interestingly, many democratic countries have indeed chosen Kates' proposal, which involves having an institution/ombudsman dedicated to the future. I will then illustrate eight state institutions and two international institutions, focusing on their functioning. These eight institutions are part of “The Network of Institutions for Future Generations” (NIFG), a formal network of institutions with the goal of promoting collaboration between organizations advocating for the rights of future generations and encouraging governments to recognise the importance of representing future generations in policymaking. Finally, I will observe what results have been achieved to date by these future-focused institutions and by the NIFG.

Non-reformist reforms:

After highlighting how the representative democratic political system is identified as the best system to govern our society and emphasising the importance of sustainability ethics and intergenerational ethics in integrating future generations as active participants within the contemporary democratic institutional system for the sake of social justice, what should we do to ensure their implementation at the institutional level? In *Justice, Democracy, and Future Generations*, Kates (2015) argues for the capacity of democracies to safeguard the interests of future generations. He believes that we are now in a much better position to formulate a solution to the problem of social justice, including its intergenerational aspect. In fact, Kates takes the initial necessary steps towards a possible solution by outlining its general form and contours. Kates asserts that there is a fundamental difficulty in understanding and demonstrating the existence of a feasible path or trajectory of society aimed at expanding a morally desirable schema of social change. More precisely, according to Kates, the difficulty is twofold. On the one hand, society makes the mistake of assuming that it can ensure intergenerational justice without taking into account how the current institutional framework shapes the moral and ethical landscape we face each day. On the other hand, contemporary society overlooks the possibility of an effective strategy to achieve the necessary transition involving a change in itself. As a result, Kates argues that to devise a solution to the problem of intergenerational justice, it is necessary to specify how, in light of our current political reality (i.e., the democratic

one), it is possible to modify the institutions that require reform and/or build the institutions of the future within the society as it stands now (Kates, 2015).

Kates proposes an idea he calls “non-reformist reform”. In general, a non-reformist reform is a type of reform that focuses not only on how the existing political system should change over time but also on what changes are possible in the present. The idea is to use the current system to undermine itself, seeking short-term transformations within the existing social order that alter the terrain on which struggles for broader reforms will be fought in the future. Non-reformist reforms differ from traditional strategies of reform and revolution because they aim to challenge the existing social structure by working both from within and outside. This strategy seeks to find a compromise between politically feasible but morally flawed reforms and morally desirable but politically impossible reforms. Non-reformist reforms aim to create gradual social change over time, paving the way for more radical reforms in the future. Applying this strategy to social and intergenerational justice suggests a multi-phase strategy that aims to achieve desired objectives (ibid).

In the early stages of action, Kates argues for targeting immediate goals that facilitate a transition towards a more just society, rather than promoting future goods or preventing future harms. He proposes making indirect changes to the system of incentives and benefits faced by the current generation instead of directly addressing specific social and intergenerational injustices. These changes could involve modifications to democratic decision-making rules, the relationship between representatives and voters, and other measures that transform power dynamics. Subsequently, Kates suggests selecting a law or policy that aims to eliminate a specific injustice and is consistent with the interests of the present generation. Given the difficulties of simultaneously achieving both phases, the chosen law or policy to address a specific injustice must adhere to two additional constraints. First, it must be compatible with the incentive structure faced by the current generation and their representatives, as moral reasons alone often do not suffice to drive action on social justice. Additionally, the expected impact of the law or policy must be relatively certain or imminent in order to reduce motivational uncertainty and increase the likelihood of the proposal being adopted by a majority of representatives and accepted and respected by citizens (ibid).

However, Kates acknowledges that it could be argued that this action plan risks being insufficient and belated. But while it is true that it is uncertain whether the strategy of “non-reformist reforms” can effectively lead to the necessary transformations to ensure intergenerational and thus social justice, the alternatives are likely even worse. By completely disregarding the existing motivations of the current generation, the fact that finding a

compelling solution to the problem of intergenerational justice is primarily a problem of transition is ignored: the shift from a world characterised by injustice over time to one where justice among generations is finally realised. Furthermore, this objection overlooks the fact that the strategy of non-reformist reforms seeks to guide the transition towards a more just society through a dynamic and iterative process, wherein initially incremental changes from the current situation lead to broader reforms in subsequent stages of action, ultimately achieving the desired goal over time. Kates does not precisely specify what is required to propel our society towards social justice, but that is precisely the point; the answer depends on the particular set of empirical and institutional facts the society faces at the time of action and cannot be determined a priori or in advance (ibid).

Returning to the question of how today's society should implement a change that includes the ethics of sustainability and intergenerational ethics within the democratic system for the sake of social justice, Kates provides us with a valid approach for a transition towards a more justice society. Some democratic countries seem to have chosen Kates' proposal, which involves having an institution/ombudsman dedicated to the future.

These institutions/ombudsmen for future generations are the means that Kates identifies as crucial in his method because they promote reforms/policies and initiatives that meet the two constraints identified by Kates; reforms/policies and initiatives that are compatible with the incentive structure faced by the current generation and their representatives, and whose expected impact of laws or policies is relatively certain or imminent in time. In fact, as Kates proposes in his method, they seem to provide virtuous examples to answer my problem formulation.

Committee for the Future – Finland:

The Finnish Committee for the Future is a permanent committee of parliament. Founded in 1993, it consists of 17 members of parliament who act as a think tank for future policy, science, and technology in Finland. The counterpart cabinet member is the Prime Minister. The Committee's objective is to promote dialogue with the government on possible future problems or opportunities. To this end, at least once during its term, the government issues a report, the Government's Future Report, which investigates long-term prospects and possible outcomes to be achieved. The Government's Future Report is presented to Parliament by the Council of State Presidency. The function of the Committee for the Future is to draft Parliament's response to the report provided by the government. This practice allows the Finnish government and parliament to identify and discuss important issues for the nation at such an early stage that

various options and alternatives can be taken to outline the political line to be pursued. Another important function of the Committee for the Future is to safeguard the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since 2017, the government has submitted the 2030 Agenda to the Committee during each legislative session. Other tasks of the Committee for the Future include drafting statements and presentation drafts to other committees on economic, social, and technological issues. A very important feature that distinguishes the Committee for the Future is the power to decide its own agenda. This gives the Committee the strength to draw political lines for the future in an area where the time perspective is long and the scale of problems is increasingly broad (Eduskunta, n.d.).

Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development – Germany:

The Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development was established in 2009 as a top-down initiative in response to the challenges posed by globalization. Indeed, since 2004, the future had been a fundamental issue for the German Bundestag, which was then focused on sustainability. The Council is structured as a multi-stakeholder body that operates within the parliamentary system. Its purpose is to bring the issue of sustainability for future generations to the level of decision-making, directing the choices. Thus, in parliament, the advisory council assumes the role of a "watchdog." As the guarantor of future generations, the council takes charge of demonstrating when an initiative does not take into account the National Sustainability Strategy. Hearings and positions taken allow debates to be initiated, making the advisory council an important and lively part of parliament. The main functions of the council include presenting recommendations on medium and long-term planning, conducting sustainability impact assessments, and developing goals, measures, and tools on issues related to social cohesion, quality of life, and intergenerational justice ("Deutscher Bundestag - Parlamentarischer Beirat Für Nachhaltige Entwicklung," n.d.).

Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development – Canada:

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada is a commission within the Canadian political system that is responsible for providing reports to Parliament regarding environmental protection and sustainable development. In particular, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development provides parliamentarians with objective and independent analysis and recommendations on the government's efforts to work towards considering future generations. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada conducts research and performance audits of government and is responsible for evaluating federal government departments'

achievement of sustainable development objectives and consideration of environmental protection. The Office of the Auditor General of Canada consists of three main positions: the Auditor General of Canada, who is an officer of Parliament; their term lasts for 10 years and is non-renewable. The Deputy Auditor General performs the duties of the Auditor General in their absence and has a coordinating role. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development is a Vice Auditor General who handles all environmental and sustainability matters. These three positions lead a group of specialised auditors who prepare independent analyses and recommendations that are free from government's political line (Government of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada., 2017).

Commissioner for Future Generations – Wales:

The position of a Commissioner for Future Generations was established in Wales after the Welsh Assembly approved the Well-being of Future Generations Act in 2015. The law binds 44 public bodies in Wales, including Welsh government ministers, local authorities, and a wide range of other national bodies, to pursue seven well-being goals that public bodies must work towards. The seven goals are a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a fairer Wales, a more cohesive Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales. The law also establishes five ways of working that public bodies must follow to achieve the goals set by the law. These ways of working focus on long-term thinking, preventive action, integration of government objectives, collaboration with other public bodies, and finally, engagement with stakeholders and citizens. The commissioner's task, according to the establishment appointment, is to be the guardian of future generations, promoting the principle of sustainable development; advising and guiding public bodies in using the five ways of working to maximise the achievement of the goals. The commissioner also has the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating that the country's institutions work consistently with the 2015 law (“The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales – Acting Today for a Better Tomorrow,” n.d.).

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment - New Zealand:

New Zealand has had an environmental commission within the Ministry for the Environment since 1972. But it wasn't until 1986 that a parliamentary commissioner was appointed following the Environment Act. The 1986 reform was enacted following a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) regarding New Zealand's environmental policies. The function of the commissioner is to conduct analysis and produce

recommendations on environmental impacts and sustainable development. The role of the commissioner is independent in order to make it impartial from the government's political line. The Commissioner is responsible for reporting to Parliament what his office has analysed regarding the environmental management of the public sector. The function of critically and proactively reviewing the country's political decisions, particularly those of the executive, has made the advisory role of the commissioner influential on the government's policy direction (NV Interactive, n.d.).

Former Commissioner for Future Generations – Israel

Israel's Commission for Future Generations was established in 2001 after approval by the Knesset. The commission is outlined as an interparliamentary body with control functions. The commission is tasked with analysing how the government implements laws and the resulting impact on future generations. This organ of the Israeli government system has a five-year term to give the office time to defend the needs of future generations, including a political guideline focused on the future within the primary and secondary legislation of the State of Israel. The law that led to the creation of the Commission within the Israeli government apparatus also defined which policy areas were of particular interest to future generations. This resulted in a main work macro-area focused on sustainability, from which 12 other policy micro-areas were delineated that correspond to the main components of sustainability. The function of the Israeli commission is therefore a control one, with a veto power over the government's legislative process. The veto power gives the commission the ability to obstruct legislation on behalf of future generations if a law does not take into account environmental sustainability or put the future of Israeli generations at risk. Unfortunately, since 2006 the Israeli government has changed, and for budget reasons, no new commissioner has been appointed. To date, no one has been appointed to fill the role of Chairperson of the Commission for Future Generations (Knesset Committees, n.d.).

Ombudsman for Children – Norway:

Norway established in 1981 the first office of the Ombudsman for Children in the world. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, enshrined in Norwegian national legislation, the office of the Ombudsman for Children supports the rights of today's children and young people. The mandate of the office is to ensure that Norwegian authorities respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Ombudsman is thus defined as an independent office, appointed by the king for a six-year term. The office of the Ombudsman for Children

has the task of outlining and proposing opinions on areas of interest for future generations. The Ombudsman has statutory decision-making powers regarding areas such as education and cultural rights, children with disabilities, exploitation and sexual abuse, family and foster care, and many others. The office also has a monitoring and investigation function on individual complaints from individual citizens, as well as carefully monitoring the legislative and policy line of the government. Thanks to its advisory role, the Ombudsman can influence legislation and decisions regarding the welfare of children. Unlike similar institutions in other countries, the office of the Ombudsman for Children does not have a veto power over decisions made by government authorities. The institution, in fact, is defined as a provider of positive influence or good practices, thanks to the use of various proactive means such as conferences or seminars aimed at personnel working in children's services, or through interviews or activism on social media, providing information on children's rights. This promotes the development and maintenance of personal connections with children and young people in order to collect experiences and transmit recommendations and perspectives to legislative leaders (“Barn Og Unges Rettigheter,” n.d.).

Ombudsman for Future Generations – Hungary:

The Hungarian parliament recognised in 2007 the need for an Ombudsman for Future Generations. In 2011, the parliament also established the need to protect natural resources at the constitutional level, including agricultural land, forests, and reserves of drinking water, biodiversity (particularly native plant and animal species), and cultural assets in the common heritage of the nation. The 2011 law thus outlined the state and every citizen as responsible for natural resources, obliging interested parties to protect, support, and conserve them for future generations. By promulgating this type of direct connection between natural resources and civic responsibility, the Hungarian parliament established an essential connection between the environment, future generations, and fundamental constitutional rights, including the right to a healthy environment and the right to physical and mental health. The office for future generations has seen its own evolution and many changes over the years, but the institutional function and modalities have not changed. The Ombudsman for Future Generations is elected by Parliament following a vote where he or she must receive the approval of two-thirds of the votes. The Ombudsman has the power of investigation and complaint; in cases of violation of the Fundamental Law by national legislative acts, the office can appeal to the Constitutional Court and request access to all relevant documents. The Ombudsman for Future Generations also has the power to examine national and local legislative acts as well as monitor political

developments and legislative proposals to ensure they do not represent a serious or irreversible threat to the environment or harm the interests of future generations (“Névtelen Webhely - AJBH,” n.d.).

Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment - Australian Capital Territory

Following the Sustainability and Environment Commissioner Act of 1993, the Australian state established the statutory role of Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. It is defined as an independent role with monitoring and guarantee functions for sustainability and the interests of future generations. The commissioner has powers to investigate complaints about environmental management by the Territory or a territorial authority, as well as to monitor the ecological and sustainable development that Australia must implement as stipulated in the ACT. In addition, the commissioner has the function of preparing reports on the state of the environment and providing them directly to parliament. To date, reporting on the state of the environment (SoE) has been one of the main roles of the Commissioner (“Office for the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment – an Independent Voice for Sustainability and the Environment in the ACT,” n.d.).

World Future Council (WFC):

The World Future Council (WFC) was founded in 2007 by Jakob Johann von Uexküll. The WFC is a politically independent institution that operates as a charitable foundation. Its aim is to create a healthy planet governed by fair and peaceful societies. To achieve this goal, the WFC identifies, develops, and disseminates future-just policies for the current challenges that humanity is facing. It advocates for the rights of current and future generations, focusing on their interests. The council is composed of leaders from governments, parliaments, civil society, universities, arts, and businesses who have already created and implemented virtuous changes in favour of the environment in their work or study practices. These 50 leaders are tasked with identifying urgent issues in order to shape the WFC's agenda. The WFC is headquartered in Hamburg, and representatives from the WFC are present in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and the Pacific region. The council collaborates with international organizations, experts, and parliamentary networks to shape and implement sustainable and future-appropriate policies and measures worldwide. The WFC has the ability to communicate directly with political leaders from different countries. So far, the WFC's work has favoured environmental education, supporting decision-makers in implementing the best policies (World Future Council, 2022).

Worldconnectors:

Worldconnectors was founded by Ruud Lubbers, Dutch statesman and former UNHCR. It is outlined as an intergenerational network in the Netherlands composed of members from various sectors of society, including government and politics, media, non-governmental organizations, private sector, and scientific, research, and spiritual communities. The goal of Worldconnectors is to develop new strategies and visions for international issues that concern different areas of competence. The aim is to achieve an open, tolerant, optimistic, proactive society that can therefore position itself as a global actor as a virtuous example of a sustainable society. Worldconnectors' vision and work are rooted in the United Nations Millennium Declaration² and the Earth Charter³. Worldconnectors organises four discussion tables per year to address relevant social issues and to take stock of the network's ongoing activities. The topics addressed often involve the business sector, NGOs, government, academia, media, politics, and represent youth. Once a year, the Council proposes potential new themes and, together with Worldconnectors members, decides which themes to address through their activities. Throughout the year, Worldconnectors members divide into thematic working groups where they assess what contribution the working group can make regarding the theme. The goal is to develop new perspectives and initiatives together that provide practical solutions related to international cooperation and the global community (Worldconnectors, 2013).

The Network of Institutions for Future Generations:

“The Network of Institutions for Future Generations” (NIFG) is a network of institutions around the world that promotes collaboration between organizations advocating for the rights of future generations and encourages governments to recognise the importance of representing future generations in policymaking (Network of Institutions for Future Generations - AJBH, n.d.).

The independent network was initiated by the Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations, tasked by the United Nations Secretary-General's report with the special responsibility of promoting the needs of future generations. In 2014, he organised a conference to bring together the institutions mentioned in the final document "Future We Want" of the Rio+20⁴ Summit.

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/united-nations-millennium-declaration>

³ <https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/>

⁴ The 2012 Rio+20 Earth Summit recognised the need to promote solidarity between generations and invited the then United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, to produce a report on intergenerational justice. The report "Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations" by the United Nations Secretary-General established that the concept of intergenerational solidarity must be incorporated into the idea of sustainable development and is a universal value of humanity.

According to the document, promoting the sharing of experiences and best practices for the implementation of sustainable development was one of the tasks of the High-Level Political Forum (ibid).

The conference entitled "Model Institutions for Sustainable Futures" took place from April 24 to 26, 2014. The aim of the event was to contribute to closer cooperation between national institutions that play a pioneering role in implementing sustainable development and intergenerational solidarity at the national level. In the preceding years, there had been slow progress in international law relating to an institutional model for a sustainable future. Therefore, deeper cooperation between national institutions committed to protecting the interests of future generations could potentially contribute to the development of international legal principles and shape relevant state practices under the United Nations. Given the unique nature of competent national bodies, as well as the legal principles and processes underlying their decision-making work, the working groups focused on the various constitutional and environmental law principles underlying the work of these bodies from both professional and academic perspectives. Thanks to the participation of experts with diverse skills, discussions developed from theory to practical implementation (ibid).

The event therefore saw a desire on the part of the participants to formalise the cooperation of current institutions in order to create a network of national future-focused institutions. The result was the "Budapest Memorandum"⁵, which formalises the spread of institutional solutions to protect the needs of future generations and invites member states to appoint a representative for future generations to the United Nations (ibid).

NIFG groups together the institutions highlighted in the report "Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations" and all other institutions around the world that carry out similar activities or are interested in creating institutional tools for protecting future generations in their countries (ibid).

Therefore, NIFG is outlined as an independent and informal network of institutions working together towards the goal of sharing knowledge and spreading best practices of its member institutions committed to promoting responsible and long-term governance, taking into account the well-being of our descendants and their natural environment. The network represents the need and opportunity to safeguard the interests of future generations through different means and across various disciplines.

⁵ https://futurroundtable.org/documents/2238847/0/Budapest_Memorandum.pdf/0b6c83e2-5217-4ef7-8a62-01156974fd8d

It is important to emphasise that NIFG is based on two fundamental principles. The first is that there is an undeniable need for democratic institutions to protect the interests of those who have yet to be born. This necessitates an undeniable need to halt the acceleration of human actions on the natural world by institutions over the last few decades. In fact, these actions by institutions have fundamentally impacted the lives of future generations, creating long-term repercussions on environmental, social, and economic changes, such as alterations in climate conditions, radioactive pollution, ocean acidification, or massive indebtedness of future generations (ibid).

NIFG maintains that the creation of future-focused institutions within the state apparatus will improve a theoretical and practical long-term vision in governance, integrating the principles of intergenerational equity and sustainability into the political and social fabric of a particular state. Future-focused institutions aim to interact in legislative and policy decision-making processes, directly bringing future generations to influence the final outcome of decisions. This allows for the promotion of principles such as the conservation of views, quality and access to resources and opportunities for future generations (ibid).

NIFG has a triple purpose (ibid):

- Share best institutional practices among its members for the development of effective means and practices.
- Provide innovative ideas for other establishments working at various levels worldwide.
- And channel external perspectives, successes, and lessons learned into the work of existing organizations.

What future-focused institutions and NIFG have achieved till now:

These future-focused institutions and NIFG are described to be at the forefront to defending the rights and well-being of future generations. It seems that these institutions and the network apply the ethical principles of sustainability and intergenerational ethics to the political system; thus, promoting fair, balanced, and respectful political decisions that uphold human rights and dignity. This results in a decision-making process that takes into consideration the impact these decisions will have on citizens, their future lives, and their rights (Perry, 1973). An example of the application of intergenerational ethics to the political system is the Israeli Commission for Future Generations. The commission has played a crucial role in institutionalizing the concept of future generations, their rights, and human dignity at all levels of government. This has led to a different approach in the decision-making process, which must consider the impact on citizens. In particular, the commission has emphasised the importance of incorporating the

concept of sustainable development into government decisions. The Israeli Commission has been able to engage in any topic on the parliament's agenda, selecting the issues where it would have the greatest margin of effectiveness, including education, health, environment, national economy and budget, and science and technology. Unfortunately, today the Israeli Commissioner for Future Generations has been abolished due to the cost of its operations and the government's feeling that the commission had received too much authority to interfere in their work (Knesset Committees, n.d.).

Similarly, but promoting the ethics of sustainability in the political system, the Australian Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment has published several special reports, including the State of the Environment report, which has helped raise awareness of major environmental issues. In particular, the Australia State of the Environment 2021 combines scientific, traditional, and local knowledge from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations for a holistic assessment of the state of the environment in Australia. The report aims to contribute to policy and action, influence behaviours and evaluate the actions of Australian environmental managers. Environmental ethics awareness work such as the 2021 report highlights the practical functionality of future-focused institutions within the state apparatus. In fact, the Australia State of the Environment 2021 represents present responsibility for future generations, there is long-term thinking, it promotes public participation and community engagement, thus promoting accountability, pays attention to communities and their specificities including vulnerable groups, and finally, it promotes the articulation of requirements arising from SDGs related to the environment (“Office for the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment – an Independent Voice for Sustainability and the Environment in the ACT,” n.d.).

Ethical values at a theoretical level are those that guide people's behaviour and therefore should direct government decisions. Therefore, applying ethical values to the political system increases the legitimacy of government decisions, as citizens are more likely to accept and respect the decisions of governments that respect ethical values (Perry, 1973). NIFG and the future-focused institutions presents the ethics of sustainability and intergenerational ethics within its mandate and translates them into its objectives. Thanks to this formation of the network, NIFG has been very successful over the years in pursuing its mission, both nationally and internationally. Its members are active in various activities. For example, the network's president, Sophie Howe, has been a regular speaker at global events such as the United Nations Youth Environment Summit, the Global Government Summit, the High-Level Political Forum, and COP26. Through her participation, she has been able to raise awareness of the network's

objectives and promote its agenda on a global scale (UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) at the SEC – Glasgow 2021, 2021).

NIFG and the future-focused institutions advocates for the application of ethical principles of sustainability and intergenerational ethics to decision-making processes, promoting decisions that are balanced and fair for all people involved. Future-focused institutions help governments make decisions that do not only favour the rich or influential, but also take into account the interests of all citizens, including the most vulnerable ones (Perry, 1973). In Germany, the German Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development has included intergenerational equity in its monitoring framework following protests from younger generations about their uncertain future due to climate change. For the German government, the goal is to follow the guiding principle of sustainable development by translating it into work for state policies that meet the needs of current and future generations, allowing them to live a life of dignity. According to the German Sustainable Development Strategy 2021 report⁶, this requires economically efficient, socially just, and environmentally sustainable development for a dignified life for all, without poverty and hunger, and a life where all people can realise their potential with dignity and equality (“Deutscher Bundestag - Parlamentarischer Beirat Für Nachhaltige Entwicklung,” n.d.).

The application of ethical principles of sustainability and intergenerational ethics requires that governments be responsible for their actions. Commissions for future generations, such as those belonging to the NIFG, often have the role of ensuring that governments act transparently and are accountable for their decisions and actions to citizens. Commissions for future generations often favour the development and adoption of transparent processes (Perry, 1973). Canada is an example of this, where the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was instrumental in developing the Federal Sustainable Development Act⁷. This law aims to provide the legal framework for the development and implementation of a federal strategy for sustainable development. In particular, it focuses on making the decision-making process related to sustainable development more transparent and accountable to Parliament, promoting coordinated action throughout the Government of Canada in the interest of sustainable development that respects national and international obligations. This law aims to ultimately improve the quality of life, the future, and the rights of Canadians (Government of Canada, Office of the Auditor General of Canada., 2017).

⁶ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1940716/1c63c8739d10011eb116fda1aecb61ca/german-sustainable-development-strategy-en-data.pdf?download=1>

⁷ <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/f-8.6/>

The application of sustainability values and intergenerational ethics to the current political system is not a quick or easy process to pursue. This is due to the subjectivity of both governments and individual citizens, as well as cultural, social, environmental, and economic contexts. Additionally, democratic states often have to deal with different parties involved in complex situations with conflicting interests, making it difficult to find a balance between them (Perry, 1973). In order to direct governments towards greater awareness and assist them in applying sustainability values and intergenerational ethics to decision-making processes, the NIFG has published several programmatic documents. These documents include the SDGs and a programmatic document on future generations, which was presented at the UN HLPF38. To date, the NIFG has published 16 documents that cover different areas of the democratic political system and various aspects of society, including economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues. These publications have contributed over the years to guiding political decisions and ensuring that the interests of future generations are duly considered (Network of Institutions for Future Generations - AJBH, n.d.).

In recent years, the NIFG has promoted national and international collaborations, such as the collaboration with the Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations and the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment on developing sectoral relations focused on intergenerational issues or the promotion of sustainable restoration policies by the Gibraltar Commissioner (*ibid*).

Notably, the German Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development has included intergenerational equity in its monitoring framework, while the Dutch Ombudsperson for Future Generations and the Lab Future Generations have created a series of tools for businesses and governments to incorporate long-term thinking into their decision-making (*ibid*).

Conclusion:

The institutions presented and the NIFG represent, in my opinion, a variety of solutions that different states have implemented to respond to short-term social and political issues related to the environment and protect the interests of future generations. Among these institutions are parliamentary commissions, advisory councils, and committees with similar roles but different institutional structures. For some, the area of interest is sustainable development as a conceptual basis for the development of policies focused on fundamental rights; other institutions are structured on the foundations of protecting fundamental rights as a platform for legislative development focused on sustainability. Looks like that the future-oriented

institutions mentioned above take into account future generations but not following Kates' proposal. As defined in the Brundtland report⁸, future generations are at the heart of sustainable development. This report places future generations at the centre of sustainable development. Specifically, the report defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland report, 1987, p.15). Hence, it would be natural to wonder, if these future-focused intuitions are taking into account future generations, why are we stuck in a short-term mindset when it comes to achieving the SDGs and a sustainable future?

⁸ <https://www.are.admin.ch/are/en/home/media/publications/sustainable-development/brundtland-report.html>

The partial reform implemented by future-focused institutions

Introduction:

The eight state institutions, the two international institutions, and “The Network of Institutions for Future Generations” only partially respond to Kates' proposal. Unfortunately, it seems that they do not possess the veto power as theorised, so they are not as strong as anticipated. I will then outline the advantages of granting veto power to future-focused institutions. Subsequently, I will illustrate how existing future-focused institutions can aid in the implementation of the SDGs, highlighting the issue stemming from the lack of veto power for these institutions. Finally, I will delve into the framework models that Kates lists as potential models of future-focused institutions with veto power.

Institutions for Future Generations work and veto power:

At a theoretical level, future-focused institutions address the importance of overcoming the short-term perspective that is currently used to make decisions, at the expense of future generations, the planet, and the prosperity of our society. In the other hand, the Agenda 2030 sets sustainable development goals that recognise the close link between human well-being and economic prosperity in a healthy environment. The combination of these two factors, which should produce an implementation of the SDGs. Yet, despite countless efforts, political interventions and actions taken for sustainable development still fail to identify long-term choices or unified solutions that will endure over time to address the problem. The current governance structure is in stark contrast to the aspirations of future generations, interconnected with the decisions made today but too transformative and long-term and therefore often at odds with the needs of the population “here and now”. Unless we seek to improve governance structures and systems, we risk not only failing to achieve the SDGs by 2030, but also passing on a world to future generations with fewer opportunities.

According to the mission of the future-focused institutions and the NIFG, future-focused institutions must strive to develop innovative solutions that are both cross-cutting and horizontal in the interest of both present and future generations to achieve the SDGs.

In particular, by overcoming the rhetoric of “decisions made with good intentions” that permeates the way decisions are made today, an intergenerational lens needs to be applied to the decision-making process. Thus, as seen before in the “*What future-focused institutions and NIFG have achieved till now*”, working alongside young people and public authorities, connecting with communities and citizens, future-focused institutions represent a means of

stimulating different approaches to social, economic, and environmental challenges. According with Kates, that future-focused institutions that represent a bridge with communities and the wider society and are able to promote and ensure inclusivity and participation for the implementation of the SDGs but only if equipped with an indispensable tool: the veto power. Kates believes that the inclusion of a veto power within future-focused institutions is crucial, “Included among these are administrative bodies or agencies authorised to veto laws or policies contrary to the interests of future generations; upper houses or second chambers of parliament designed to act as “guardians” to the young or unborn; commissions or ombudspersons empowered to intervene in the legislative process on their behalf; and the constitutional entrenchment of either a “right to an adequate environment” or the “precautionary principle” (Stein, 1998; Mank, 1996; Tonn & Hogan, 2006; Shoham & Lamav, 2006; Agius & Busuttil, 1994; Hayward, 2005; in Kates, 2015, p.18).

Without veto power, these future-focused institutions may not have the necessary authority and influence to effectively advocate for the interests and rights of future generations. According to Kates, the veto power would allow these institutions to prevent short-term, unsustainable policies and ensure that long-term considerations are taken into account in decision-making processes (ibid).

Kates emphasises the significance of granting veto power to future-focused institutions in order to address the pressing issues facing future generations. He argues that without such power, these institutions may struggle to bring about meaningful change and ensure the long-term well-being of societies. By having veto power, these institutions can actively challenge and block policies that prioritise short-term gains over sustainable development. They can act as a check on governments and decision-making bodies, ensuring that decisions are made with consideration for the interests of future generations. The veto power enables future-focused institutions to play a proactive role in shaping policy agendas and influencing the trajectory of societal development. It empowers them to advocate for the incorporation of sustainable practices, environmental protection, and social equity in decision-making processes (ibid).

Imagine a hypothetical scenario where *the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment* in Australia had veto power back in 2016, when the Australian government authorise a coalmine project led by the Indian mining company, Adani, at the expense of the Great Barrier Reef (Bødker & Morris, 2021). Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment is responsible for overseeing policies related to sustainable development and, in our hypothetical scenario have also the duty of ensuring the representation of future generations in decision-making processes trough the veto power.

In this scenario, if the Australian governments was initializing large-scale infrastructure project that involves the construction of a coalmine the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment would intervene. The project was driven by short-term economic considerations, as it promises to create jobs and meet immediate energy demands. However, the project posed significant long-term environmental and health risks due to its high emissions at the expense of the Great Barrier Reef.

the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment in Australia, empowered with veto power, would have evaluated the project's potential impact on future generations. It considers scientific evidence on climate change, health risks associated with pollution, and the long-term sustainability goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda. After analysis, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment would have determined that the negative consequences of the project outweigh the short-term benefits, particularly with regards to exacerbating climate change and compromising the well-being of future generations. Based on this assessment, the future-focused institution would have blocked the project.

However, Kates argue that it is worth noting that the implementation of veto power within future-focused institutions may face challenges and debates. There may be concerns about striking the right balance between respecting democratic processes and ensuring the long-term interests of future generations. The extent and scope of veto power and the mechanisms for its exercise would require careful consideration to avoid potential misuse or undue concentration of power. An example is the *Former Commissioner for Future Generations* in Israel, the only future-focused institution with veto power, that from 2006 no new commissioner has been appointed. The Israeli government state that it is for a budget reason but informal news claims due to too much power in the hands of the commissioner.

Kates, in his proposal, advocates for inclusion of veto power within future-focused institutions as a means to effectively address intergenerational issues and promote sustainable development. He believes that by empowering these institutions, societies can take meaningful steps towards achieving greater social and environmental justice for both present and future generations such as the SDGs represent.

How already existing future-focused institutions would assist in SDG Implementation:

The already existing future-focused institutions would play a key role in implementing the SDGs for several reasons (Network of Institutions for Future Generations, 2019):

- These institutions represent present responsibility for future generations. Thanks to their guaranteed structure, based on their election or appointment rules, they are

independent and play a very important informational role. Thus, these future-focused institutions enjoy great visibility and trust among citizens, constituting great examples of truly effective, responsible, and transparent institutions, following their mandate and institutional position established by public laws (ibid).

- At the heart of the mandate of future-focused institutions is long-term thinking. This essential characteristic integrates long-term considerations into decision-making processes, the very essence of Agenda 2030. Therefore, future-focused institutions help interested government parties to carry out decision-making processes. In addition, they can help to implement the SDGs on the political agenda of different nations where governments are struggling to take timely, effective, and transformative long-term actions (ibid).
- As previously mentioned, future-focused institutions enjoy great trust among citizens thanks to their particular structure within the institutional landscape. This allows such institutions to promote public participation and community engagement, thus promoting responsibility. In addition, they can successfully work to provide a neutral forum for discussion, negotiation, and consensus between the scientific community, experts, NGOs and interested government parties. The result is therefore the effective channelling of public comments, thoughts, and concerns and the opinions of the scientific community on legislative processes, achieving optimal results (ibid).
- Institutions for future generations implement future generation advocacy. This type of advocacy is influenced by various contextual factors such as the environment, social, economic, and cultural interests, and many others. These factors are contextual because they vary based on the geographical area, society of belonging, and much more. Therefore, advocacy cannot be universally defined but only abstractly. In line with the requirements for national implementation of the SDGs, it is possible to better define the interests and needs of future generations at the local level, through greater attention to communities and their specificities. Therefore, national, and local spokespersons are essential in translating SDG objectives into national requirements and supporting the adoption of effective actions at the local level (ibid).
- Institutions for future generations promote the connection between individual needs and the involvement of particular stakeholders, thus facilitating the identification of vulnerable groups in the decision-making processes of a state apparatus. This allows for the inclusion of all perspectives, even if in disagreement, in line with the obligation to ensure that no one is excluded. By relatively translating the SDG objectives, these

can prove essential for defining necessary measures or specific actions aimed at legislative changes that, by including vulnerable groups, can provide guidance to legislators. Future-focused institutions raise awareness about the bi-directional process that, by including both relative and more generalised needs, leads to a generalised improvement of the state apparatus and thus favours the implementation of the SDGs (ibid).

- Institutions for future generations with the mandate of protecting and defending the environment promote the articulation of all the requirements deriving from the SDGs related to the environment. The Danish Institute for Human Rights has shown an apparent gap in international recommendations by United Nations monitoring bodies regarding SDGs related to the environment⁹. In particular, there is a lack of recommendations on practices such as logistics, energy production, and much more that are closely connected to environmental protection. This suggests that some environmental aspects of the SDGs can be defined and addressed more effectively at the local level if there are future-focused institutions to promote their articulation. In fact, regional or national guarantors of future generations can play an essential role in addressing territorial issues in line with the SDGs (ibid).^[1]_{SEP}

All this key feature highlights the functionality and relative necessity of governments including future-focused institutions in their democratic state apparatus, but, without the power of veto, it is not possible to overcome the short-term perspective with which political decisions are currently made. This means undermining the efforts and work carried out by the previously described institutions. It also results in an inability to address globally relevant issues and ultimately leads to social injustice.

Future-focused institutions with veto power:

Returning to what Kates lists as possible models of future-focused institutions with veto power, four paths can be identified that democratic countries can follow.

Kates states, “Included among these are administrative bodies or agencies authorised to veto laws or policies contrary to the interests of future generations;...” (Stein, 1998; Mank, 1996; in Kates, 2015, p.18). This model is structured as legal recognition. Governments can enact laws or adopt constitutional amendments that explicitly grant veto power to specific institutions or bodies representing the interests of future generations. This legal recognition ensures that

⁹ <https://www.humanrights.dk/our-work/sdgs-human-rights>

decisions impacting the long-term well-being of society require the consent or approval of such institutions.

Kate continues by saying “...upper houses or second chambers of parliament designed to act as 'guardians' to the young or unborn;...” (Tonn & Hogan, 2006; in Kates, 2015, p.18). This approach involves the creation of dedicated institutions. Governments can establish specific institutions geared towards the future, with the explicit mandate of safeguarding the interests of future generations. These institutions can be empowered with the authority to exercise veto power over decisions and policies that could have significant long-term implications.

Kates adds “...commissions or ombudspersons empowered to intervene in the legislative process on their behalf;...” (Shoham & Lamav, 2006; Agius & Busuttil, 1994; in Kates 2015, p.18). This approach suggests independent evaluation and review. Governments can establish independent bodies or agencies responsible for conducting rigorous assessments of policies and projects. These bodies may have the authority to block proposals that are deemed harmful to the interests of future generations based on thorough analysis and evaluation.

Lastly, Kates proposes “...and the constitutional entrenchment of either a 'right to an adequate environment' or the 'precautionary principle’” (Hayward, 2005; in Kates, 2015, p.18) This approach involves constitutional revision. Governments can include principles or rights in their constitution to ensure the safeguarding of future generations. These principles or rights serve to block proposed laws that may be harmful to the interests of future generations, based on the principle of unconstitutionality.

I would also add a fifth approach that, in my opinion, manages to integrate the structure of existing future-focused institutions with the power of veto: collaborative decision-making processes. Governments can adopt participatory and inclusive decision-making processes that involve representatives from future-oriented institutions. By including these representatives in political discussions and decision-making bodies, their perspectives and concerns can be taken into account, effectively granting them veto power over decisions that could have a negative impact on future generations. This approach is similar to Kates' proposal of legal recognition but is structured in a less invasive manner within the current institutional framework of democratic countries. In fact, there is no legal recognition of veto power for future-focused institutions, but instead, representatives from these institutions are involved in specific situations that require the power of veto over a political decision, and only then is the power conferred.

Conclusion:

The question posed in the problem formulation was how we can reform the democratic system to take into account future generations. To answer this, I began by examining the existing institutional proposals in our current democratic society. The focus was on how these institutions could redesign democracy to overcome the barriers that affect future generations, as described in the section - Future generation, a problem of social justice - and ensure better social justice. The scenario presented a positive trend towards the inclusion of future generations in the democratic system but with a fundamental weakness. It emerged that one of the key premises described by Kates, the power of veto, is foreign to the functions of the currently existing future-focused institutions. This is an important problem that both Kates and the examples mentioned in this paper emphasise as crucial for the democratic system to consider future generations. To that end, and thanks to Kates' observations on the subject of veto power, there is the possibility of providing a more comprehensive yet still theoretical response on how to proceed in implementing future-focused institutions. I am also confident that once it is understood that there are various possibilities to address the issue of social justice in the democratic system regarding future generations, it will become less difficult to develop more concrete responses on the topic discussed.

Conclusion

In light of the above sections, I conclude by emphasising the indispensable need for long-term thinking to become a practice in the political decision-making of democratic institutions. Future-focused institutions with veto power according to Kates' proposal as part of the political apparatus of different states respond functionally to this pressing need, representing a fundamental tool to be incorporated into our democratic systems in order to make state capacity more future-focused. This can be achieved, as previously mentioned, through the ethics of sustainability and intergenerational ethics, which are the key to developing and maintaining this type of future-oriented thinking. I believe that their incorporation into decision-making practices will create an improvement in our current democratic system.

Future-focused thinking is essential to address trends and scenarios that may seem distant and irrelevant to our current reality but will be at the centre of political discussion in the future and will require an immediate response. If these types of trends and scenarios are not addressed now, the response to these problems may be haphazard and inadequate to the severity of the situations, leading to state incapacity in their management, a lack of political representation, and the failure of the democratic system.

By looking at the current trends in demographic change, we can already hypothesise future scenarios. Although many countries, such as Italy, France, Spain, and many others, are experiencing an aging population, the pace and type of demographic change vary considerably from continent to continent. Scientific studies indeed show that the next decades will see a drastic change in the regions where people will live and in the ways in which society will develop. In particular, there will be an increase in the centrality of cities, which will see an almost exponential increase in population. This phenomenon will be more relevant for the African and Asian continents, where it is predicted that 85% of the population will live by the end of the century¹⁰. Future-focused institutions are essential now for a future that does not see, in practical terms, wars or unmanaged or even hindered migration flows, and even more importantly for the representation of the Global South in international political decisions.

Demographic change goes hand in hand with socioeconomic and ecological inequalities. There is a growing inequality of the socioeconomic and ecological systems of many countries and geographical areas. This phenomenon risks overturning the system from its foundations, leading to an irreversible crisis of the democratic system. It is not possible to build a democratic system that aspires to intergenerational equity without reducing social, ecological, and regional

¹⁰ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.unfoundation.org/2021/11/Future-Thinking-and-Future-Generations-12Nov211.pdf>

inequalities that primarily contrast equality. The future-focused thinking of democratic institutions will have to propose compromises and put present needs and future needs in dialogue. Future-focused institutions must work towards solutions that create hope for both.

Another topic that in my opinion requires long-term thinking and therefore work from future-focused institutions is the digitalization of social and work relations. Digitalization is a process that presents both opportunities and challenges today, and even more so in the future. The issue of digitalization and the job market is already causing great fear and new concerns about job loss, stemming from its ability to automate a range of rapidly expanding productive activities and the potential of Artificial Intelligence to influence every sector of the economy¹¹. At the same time, the continuous restructuring of global value chains presents the potential to impact job markets around the world, and in the future, this impact may become even more pronounced. However, digitalization also allows us to connect with others, creating a global network and global peer-to-peer learning. Nevertheless, this changes our perception of place, belonging, and the way we live and work.

The scenarios just described are all within a framework of uncertainty that characterises the current and probably future geopolitical system. An example of this is climate change, which causes sudden changes and creates uncertainty in many regions of the world. Democratic systems must, therefore, be able to make decisions developed to work with uncertainty, complexity, and future thinking in order to cope with our current turbulence. This is a necessary skill for both the present and the future.

In order to achieve this, today there are multiple international opportunities to promote and achieve the future-focused institutions equipping them with veto power. The first will be the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which will take place from Monday, July 10 to Wednesday, July 19, 2023, in New York, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. This includes the three-day ministerial segment of the forum from Monday, July 17 to Wednesday, July 19, 2023, as part of the high-level segment of the Council. The last day of the high-level segment of the ECOSOC will be Thursday, July 20, 2023. The theme will be “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”. In the forum, participants will further discuss effective and inclusive recovery measures to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs and explore actionable policy guidance

¹¹ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/7c895724-en.pdf?expires=1683290357&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=FDBE259A95D7598C981C3BDC4524916A>

for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at all levels. The HLPF in 2023, subject to the integrated, indivisible, and interconnected nature of the SDGs, will also take an in-depth look at Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on clean and affordable energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The July HLPF will also support the mid-term review of SDG implementation and preparations for the 2023 SDG Summit - the HLPF will be agreed upon under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023.

Another opportunity will be a week where the high-level of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023, heads of state and government will gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2022 called on the summit to “mark the beginning of a new phase of accelerated progress towards the sustainable development goals”. The SDG Summit marks the midpoint of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will bring together political and thought leaders from governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders in a series of discussions. The Summit aims to conduct a comprehensive review of the status of the SDGs, respond to the impact of the multiple and interconnected crises that the world must face, and provide high-level policy guidance on transformative and accelerated actions that will lead to the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs. The SDG Summit will be presided over by the President of the General Assembly. The outcome of the Summit will be a negotiated political declaration. The Summit, in particular, will focus on people and aims to engage governments, the UN system and other international and regional organizations, the private sector, NGOs, youth, cities and many other actors and people. The goal is to benefit from proposals from an independent group of scientists through the Global Sustainable Development Report, the Secretary-General's SDGs progress report, and analysis of the UN system, think tanks, and others.

The SDG Summit 2023 offers an opportunity to initiate the discussion on forefront future-focused institutions and announce a revitalised network strategy, plan, organizational configuration, and mandate. Looking ahead to the future, the original deadline for the SDGs (2030) is quickly approaching, and renewed political commitment is needed to meet them, as well as a discussion on how to achieve them. I believe in the possibility of connecting the agenda of future generations and long-term thinking with a possibly renewed or updated strategy for future-focused institutions with veto power, in a single and compact national and international policy line. This, I believe, would guarantee social justice for future generations.

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