

# Futures knowledge, foresight and long-term spatial planning

VASAB webinar on spatial resilience and planning

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## FINLAND FUTURES RESEARCH CENTRE

Making sense of futures

The **FFRC** is one of the few university departments devoted to futures in the world. We are a transdisciplinary unit carrying out academic research, education and development.

We are a permanent advisor of the Committee for the Future of the Finnish Parliament.



### Established in 1992

Department at the Turku School of Economics (TSE), University of Turku, Finland. The TSE is an accredited member of the AACSB International.



### Offices in Turku, Helsinki and Tampere

50+ staff members, 26 doctoral students and 77 masters students.  
41 personnel years in 2021.



### Turnover in 2021: 2.74 M€

35–40 ongoing research, development and education projects per year.  
75% of funding comes from external sources.



[www.utu.fi/ffrc](http://www.utu.fi/ffrc)



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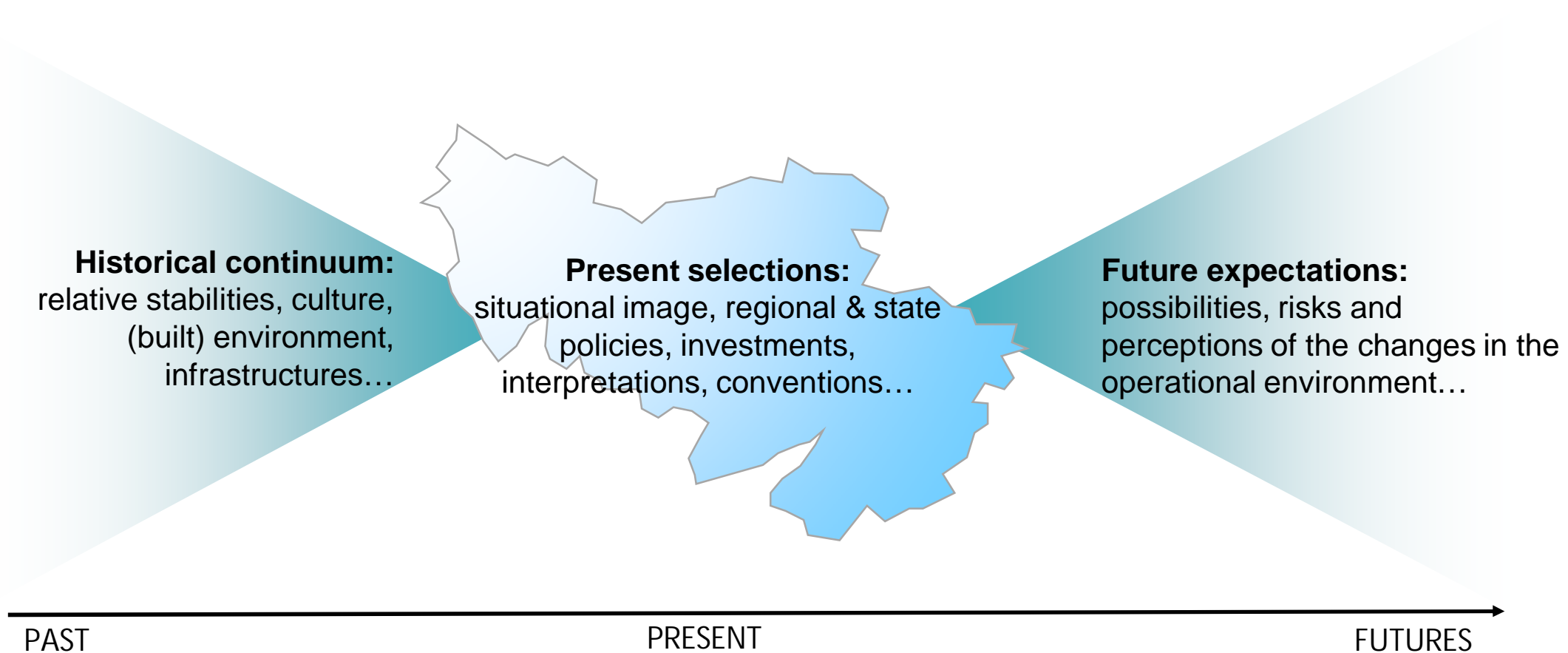


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# Temporal dimensions of regional development



# Systemic complexities of futures knowledge

- Several trend-like trajectories are **interwoven**
  - Climate change
  - Pandemic(s)
  - Narrowing of biodiversity
  - Global scarcities and inequalities
  - Militarisation and changing geopolitics of power
- Interactions catalyse **systemic consequences**, e.g.
  - Energy crises and energy prices
  - Shortages of natural supplies
- There is an abundance of “generic futures reports” – **how to make relevant interpretations and selections?**



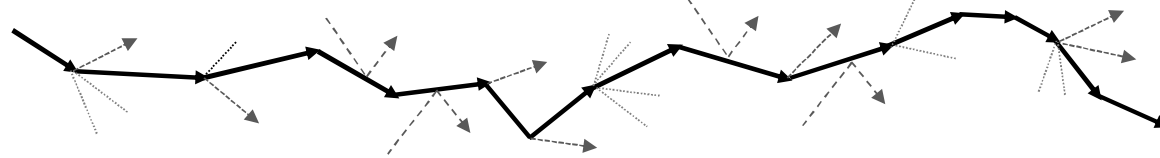
# Regional foresight

- Analysing and understanding the **possibilities and impacts of potential future changes in the context of a region, through a “regional lens”**
- In a situation of high uncertainty and complexity the regional foresight capacity is based on following competences:
  - Use of up-to-date and diverse **data**
  - **Continuity** and regularity
  - Systematic scoping of **alternatives**
  - Analysis of potentially **surprising change factors** (weak signals, wild cards)
  - Construction **spatially sensitive and contextually embedded interpretations**

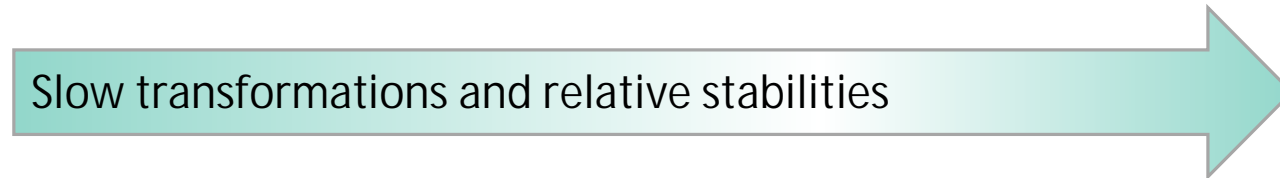


# Three perspectives to futures of regional development

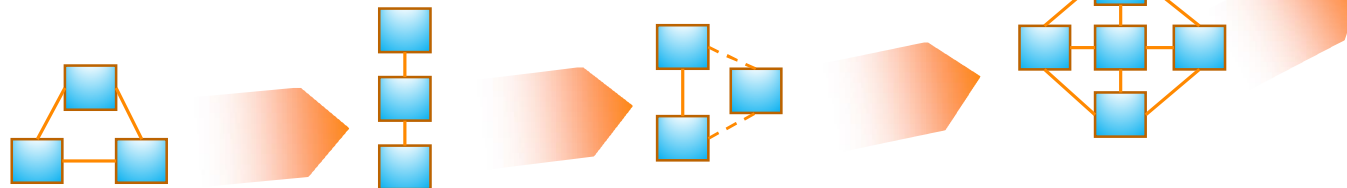
Linking of rapid development tendencies



Slow transformations and relative stabilities



Changes in external environment and governance



TIME

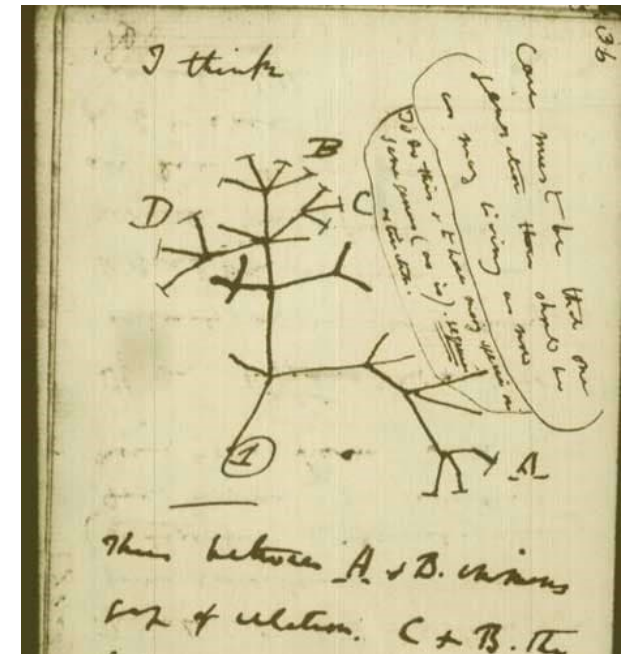
Ahlqvist 2017



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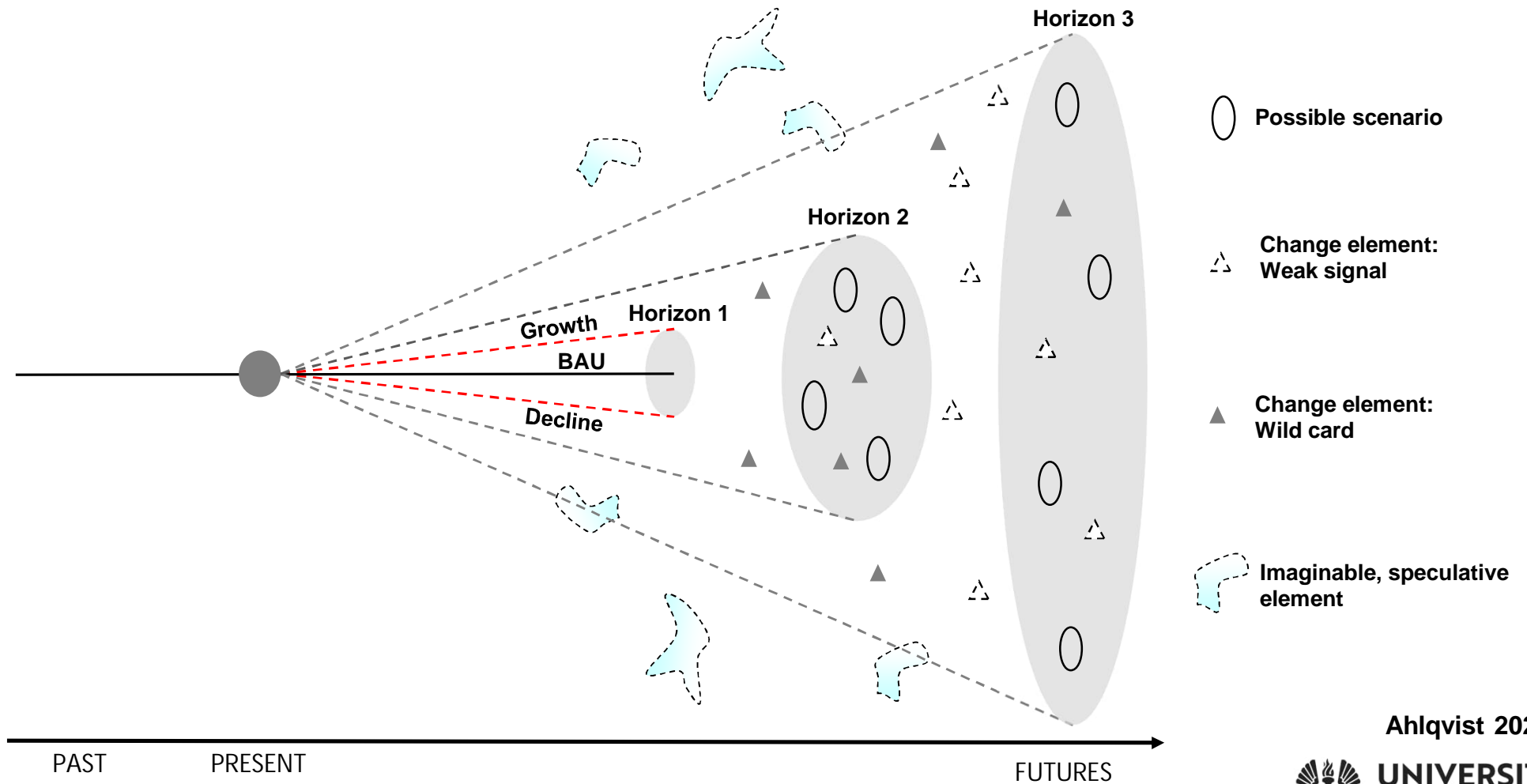
# Scoping of future alternatives is crucial!

- **Outlining alternative development trajectories**
  - Plausible/non-plausible, possible/not-so-possible, preferable, potential, surprising...
  - Spatially sensitive scenarios – not just based on linear trends!
- **Learning from the options in the past**
  - Conditional evolution of historical path dependencies
  - Regional examples of e.g. industrial or technological changes
- **Work through the possible discontinuities**
  - **Weak signals** (first rudimentary signs of changes)
  - **Wild cards** (low probability, but potentially high impact events)
  - **Black swans** (speculative surprising events – can they be foreseen?)
  - **“Unknown unknowns”** (knowledge and information are always bounded)



Darwin's sketch of the tree of life  
(<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2009/jan/21/charles-darwin-evolution-species-tree-life>)

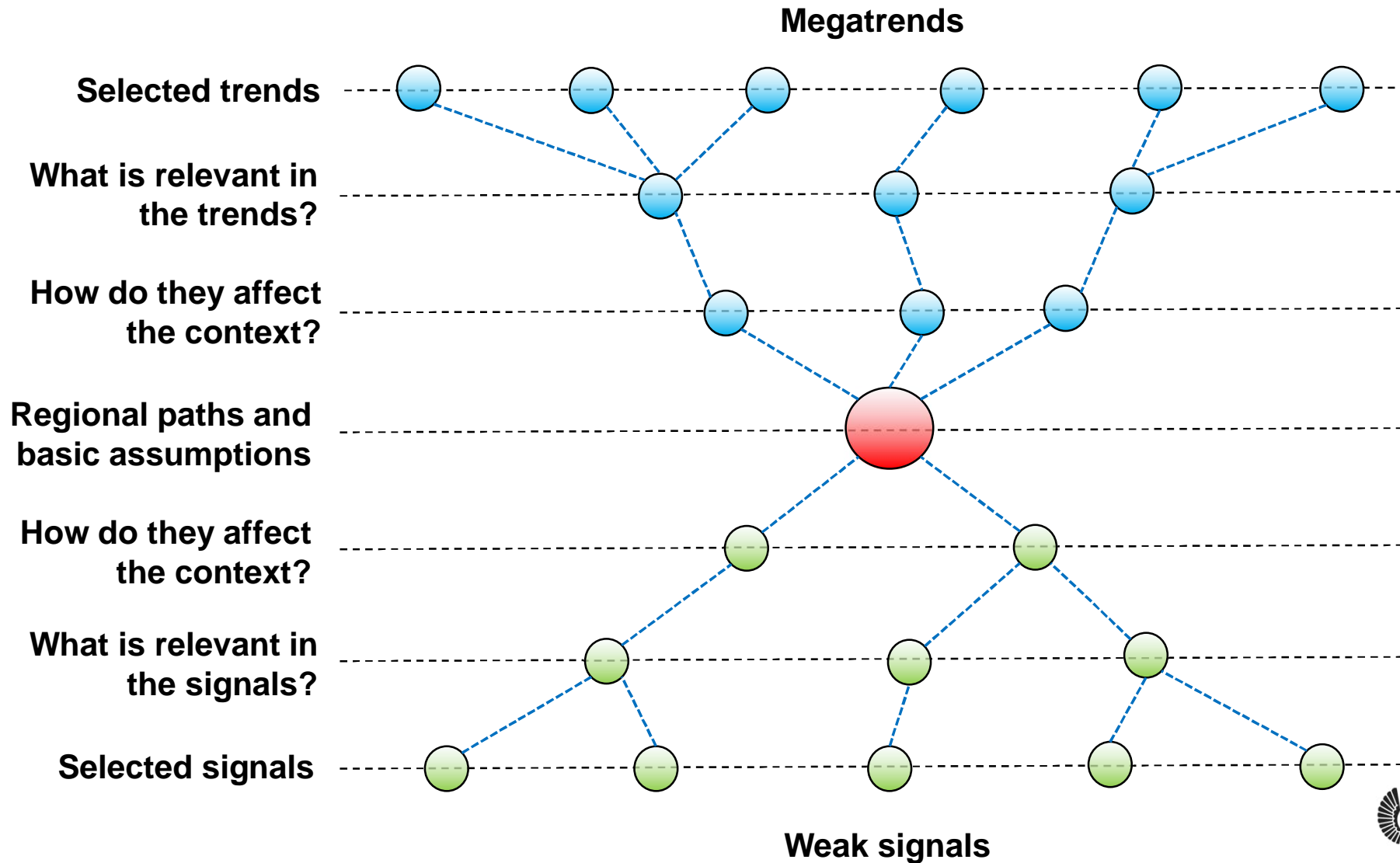
# Three horizons of expectations



Ahlqvist 2022



# Embedding futures knowledge in a regional context



Ahqvist 2022

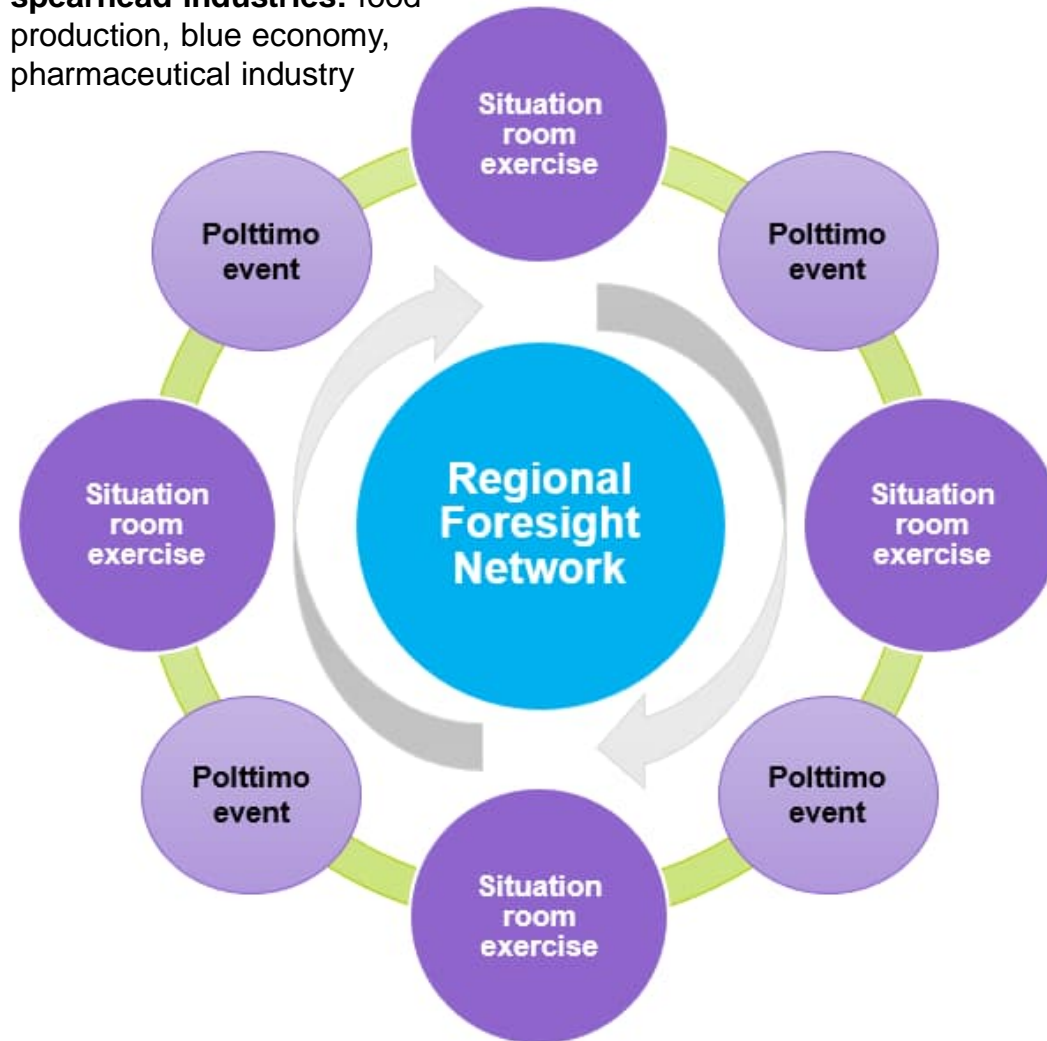


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# Regional Foresight Network in the region of South-West Finland

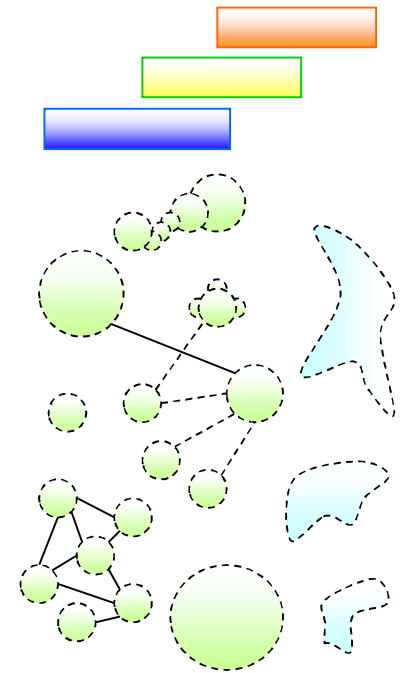
1. Process is based on an ICT platform that operates as a **future data repository**
  - Production of signal data that can be used to test the **basic assumptions** and build **alternative scenarios**
2. In **Situation Room exercises** and **Polttimo events** the signals and observations are interpreted and signified
  - Jointly produced **situational image**
  - Integration of different industries, organisations and sciences for **identification of new opportunities**
3. Process is **continuous and adaptable** if targets change
  - State of the art analysis
  - Opening of alternatives: probably, possible, radical
  - Construction of scenarios
  - Building regional pathways
  - Assessment

The focal points are **regional spearhead industries**: food production, blue economy, pharmaceutical industry



# Foresight for building spatial resilience

- **Foresight process competence:** process planning, methods, relevant data, coherent results and packaging
- **Embedding of futures knowledge:** strategic selections and prioritisation based on the knowledge
- **Connecting futures knowledge to operational activities:** activities based on knowledge, implementation of knowledge
- **Securing continuity and impacts of knowledge:** integration of futures knowledge in management systems, metering and following of impacts





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**Thank you!**

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