

# **The Bridge Builders**

Party Programme

## Introduction

Finland is living through an era in which slowly developing changes and sudden crises intertwine in a way we have not experienced before. Economic structures are changing faster than decision-making can respond, demographic shifts challenge the foundations of the welfare state, and the international security environment is more tense than it has been in many decades. At the same time, people experience uncertainty in their everyday lives, reflected as a decline in trust towards politics, institutions, and the future itself.

Amid these upheavals, there arises a need for stabilising and unifying social policy. The kind that is not based on quick temptations or momentary advantages, but on the ability to look further ahead. Politics built around moderation, prudence, and shared responsibility can strengthen Finland's backbone at a time when social cohesion is no longer self-evident.

The Bridge Builders want to bring precisely this kind of long-term thinking to politics: constructive solutions that build bridges and restore respect and deliberation to the common conversation.

Although Finland's challenges are real, they are not insurmountable. The economy, security, education, the environment, and regional equality are issues that require continuous effort, yet precisely the kind of effort Finnish society has always been capable of when there has been the will. The future can be approached with hope when decisions are based on knowledge, responsibility, and the desire to ensure that wellbeing endures for future generations as well.

The purpose of this party programme is to open up our movement's way of understanding Finland: not merely through individual political issues, but as a whole in which the various areas of society are interconnected. We do not see Finland as mere budget spreadsheets or ideological formations, but as a place where people work, raise children, build businesses, care for loved ones, and seek opportunities for a better life. The task of politics is to support these aspirations, not to hinder them.

At the same time, we emphasise that social cohesion is built on values. These cannot be outsourced to markets, nor can they be delegated to a single authority. Responsibility for the community arises from how we encounter one another in everyday life: at workplaces, schools, housing cooperatives, cities, and villages. A shared Finland is born from actions that may be small individually, but powerful together.

The Bridge Builders does not wish to promise too much, but it does wish to promise what is essential: the use of reason, deliberation, and practical solutions that can actually be implemented. Value-driven orientation is not a decoration for us, but a cornerstone. We believe in the inviolability of human dignity, social justice, the significance of work, security, and in the idea that a society built on moderation is stronger than any extreme.

This programme is a call to common work. Work in which Finland is not torn apart, but brought together. Work in which strengthening the economy is not in conflict with wellbeing, and strengthening security does not come at the expense of values. Politics can be constructive. Finland deserves precisely such politics.

## Chapter 2: Values and Worldview

The political thinking of the Bridge Builders is based on a stable conception of the individual, the community, and the state. We understand that politics must be rooted in values, but values must not be detached from reality. Values guide direction, but practicality determines how far one can travel in that direction. In this sense, the worldview of the Bridge Builders is situated on a continuum of responsibility, moderation, and communal progress: it is at once social and realistic, capable of renewal yet respectful of its foundation.

Human dignity is the bedrock of our thinking. We do not see society as a competition where only the strongest succeed, but as a whole in which everyone has the opportunity to build a meaningful life. However, society cannot function if responsibility is seen only as the right to receive, not the duty to participate. Therefore, we emphasise the importance of work, inclusion, and shared responsibility. A society where everyone contributes is stronger than one in which some feel left out and others collapse under an excessive burden.

A key part of our value base is also stability. Stability is not rigid immobility, but the ability to make long-term decisions without changing course with every political trend. When decision-making fluctuates, people lose faith in the future. When the direction is clear and predictable, people dare to invest, to try, to have children, to retrain, and to build their lives forward. Stability is both economic and mental security, and Finland needs more of both than ever.

Community is a value that cannot be restored by administrative decisions, but can be squandered through political mistakes. In Finland, community has traditionally been built around strong institutions such as schools, libraries, voluntary work, and associations. In recent decades their role has weakened; people are lonelier, and the common structures of everyday life have become thinner. The Bridge Builders want to strengthen those places and practices where people encounter one another — not by coercion, but by creating conditions that make community a natural part of life.

Our politics does not aim to chase every trend. Reforms are not a value in themselves, but neither are traditions a reason to avoid change. Our worldview is based on the idea that Finland is a nation that can renew itself without losing its roots. We have learned from our history that moderate progress takes us further than hasty leaping between extremes. This is reflected in our approach to economic policy, security, environmental issues, and social structures: we do not promise easy solutions, but we believe that reasonable and considered decisions carry us further than loud slogans.

The Bridge Builders also values the continuum of Finnish culture: language, customs, traditions, and the mundane everyday practices that form the roots of national identity. At the same time, we understand that identity is not a monument tied to the past, but a constantly evolving whole. Finland is part of the European community and the global world, yet at the same time it has its own starting point and its own story. The task of politics is not to reshape identity, but to ensure that Finns can feel it as their own.

At the core of our worldview is trust. Trust in institutions, trust in authorities, trust in decision-making, and above all, trust in one another. Trust is not born through force or proclamations, but through decision-making that is consistent, transparent, and comprehensible to people. Finland has long had an exceptionally high level of trust, but in recent years it has begun to erode. Stopping this development and rebuilding trust is one of the greatest political tasks of the coming decades.

The value base of the Bridge Builders is not an ideological outer edge, but a compass whose purpose is to guide decision-making towards moderate and implementable politics. For us, politics is not a battle between winners and losers, but a common project whose aim is to

strengthen Finland. Our values reflect faith in human dignity, community, responsibility, and moderation. On these we build our policy positions concerning the economy, security, and social cohesion.

## Chapter 3: Economy and Public Finance

Finland's economic foundation has been on solid ground for decades, but maintaining it has not been self-evident for some time. Economic growth has slowed, the population is ageing rapidly, and the expenditure pressures of public finance are growing in a way that challenges the very structure of the welfare state. At the same time, global competition has intensified, and international investments flow more sensitively than before to countries that can offer a predictable operating environment and a skilled workforce. Finland cannot build its future on the past alone; it must be able to critically examine the structures of its economy and make decisions that endure beyond electoral cycles.

Central to economic policy is long-term thinking, which in Finland has at times been overshadowed by short-sighted expenditure competition. The sustainability problems of public finance are not born from individual decisions, but from longer-term developments: the distortion of the population structure, the decrease of the working-age population, and the growth of service demand. This means that balancing the economy cannot consist solely of adjustment or expenditure cuts. Above all, we need the ability to grow the economy, strengthen productivity, and utilise technological opportunities in a way that increases the wellbeing of the whole society. The economy is not a detached reality, but a means of ensuring that people have the opportunity to live a secure and dignified life.

Public finance forms the backbone of the welfare state, but its sustainability requires structural changes. Finland invests a considerable amount in public services by international comparison, which has long been a strength; however, the increasing complexity of systems and the layering of administration have diverted resources away from actual service work. The public sector has a significant number of tasks that are not directly related to care, education, or security, yet which are maintained due to structural inertia. A reassessment is needed of what the public sector does itself and where the private or third sector could serve as support without jeopardising the equality of services.

At the same time, it must be understood that saving without investing in the future is short-sighted policy. Finland's economic growth has been weak for a long period because productivity has not developed at the pace of other developed countries. Technological solutions, research and innovation, the energy transition, and high-quality education are key when we build the next phase of the economy. These cannot be developed solely according to market logic; the state needs an active yet considered role. Properly targeted investments can generate growth that reduces the financing pressures on the welfare state in the long term.

The tax system is part of the economy's functionality. Finland's strength has traditionally been a broad tax base that enables the financing of services. At the same time, however, it must be recognised that taxation must be predictable and incentivise work. We need a system that does not penalise accepting work, growing businesses, or domestic investments. The significance of taxation is not only the collection of funds, but also signalling what kind of activity society wishes to support. Moderation is the decisive principle: taxation must enable welfare services while leaving room for the meaningfulness of work, entrepreneurship, and saving.

Economic policy must also not forget the regional perspective. Finland is a vast country with a sparse population, which makes regional accessibility and infrastructure essential prerequisites for economic growth. Road connections such as the E18 between west and east, the E12 as a corridor between the coast and the south, and the E75 from Lapland all the way to the capital region are more than mere traffic arrangements: they are the veins of the economy. When people, goods, and information move smoothly, Finland's competitiveness as a whole improves. At the same time, developing infrastructure is part of

supply security and crisis resilience, which have risen to new prominence in the changed geopolitical situation.

Economic policy cannot, however, be merely the management of structural reforms and investments. It is also the building of trust. When people feel that economic policy is consistent and predictable, they dare to make choices: to buy a home, start a business, retrain, or hire an employee. Uncertainty, on the other hand, paralyses the economy, as it reduces the willingness to commit to the future. Building trust is as important as individual economic policy measures.

The economy and public finance are ultimately means, not ends. Their task is to enable the realisation of the basic values of Finnish society: work, education, security, and reasonable wellbeing. The purpose of the Bridge Builders' economic policy is not to build a new ideological model, but to strengthen Finland's fundamental solutions in a way that responds to the challenges of the 2020s and 2030s. We need an economy that is simultaneously stable and capable of renewal, cohesive and competitive, just and responsible. The balance between these does not arise by chance, but through considered, long-term decisions that build a sustainable future.

## Chapter 4: Working Life and Education

Finland's success has for decades been built on two mutually reinforcing structures: a skilled workforce and a high-quality education system. They have given Finns the opportunity to rise to the forefront of the world's developed nations and build a society in which education is not merely an instrument of individual success, but the foundation for the ascent of an entire nation. In recent years, however, this strong foundation has faltered in a way that has not been treated with sufficient seriousness. The transformation of working life, digitalisation, demographic change, and regional divergence have together created a new situation in which the models of past decades are no longer sufficient.

Working life is changing faster than the education system can adapt. This is not the fault of any single actor, but a consequence of the global economy, in which technology and production structures are renewing at an accelerating pace. An increasing number of jobs require skills that were not considered essential even ten years ago. At the same time, some traditional professions are declining or disappearing, which places a dual demand on education and the labour market: to support people in acquiring new skills and to ensure that society does not leave anyone behind in the midst of the transformation. The future of working life is not merely a technical question, but a profoundly human challenge that concerns the meaning of work, livelihood, and inclusion.

The strength of Finland's labour market has traditionally been a functioning negotiation system that has balanced workers' security and employers' predictability. In recent years, however, this balance has been strained as trust between the different parties has weakened and negotiation structures have fragmented. Industrial peace and predictability are essential so that businesses dare to invest and expand their operations in Finland. At the same time, workers must have a genuine experience that their contribution is valued and that working life offers opportunities for growth and coping. In the future, competitiveness will not arise solely from costs, but from the ability to build a working life where people can work safely, healthily, and meaningfully.

Improving the quality of working life is not merely a wellbeing question, but an economic reality. Companies that invest in the coping, competence, and working conditions of their employees perform better in the long run than those relying on short-term solutions. Workplace wellbeing is not an expense, but an investment that increases productivity and reduces sick leave. At the same time, it must be recognised that the burden of work is not the same in all sectors. Care, education, security, and heavy industrial work all impose different kinds of strain, and this requires tailored employment policy that takes into account the reality of different sectors. No society can function if its key sectors are exhausted or permanently lose their professionals.

The education system is Finland's greatest competitive advantage, but its situation is no longer self-evidently strong. The decline in PISA results, the divergence of learning outcomes, and the differences between schools all indicate that the system needs reform. This is not a problem at a single educational level, but a broader development in which basic education, upper secondary education, and higher education form a continuum that no longer works seamlessly. The strength of basic education has been equality and high-quality teaching, but insufficient resources and weakened support services have increased differences between pupils. This development is not inevitable; it is the consequence of choices that can also be corrected.

In vocational education, the problem has been an excessive pace of reforms and insufficient resources relative to increased demands. Workplace learning is a valuable part of education, but it should not replace thorough teaching and guidance. High-quality vocational education is vital for Finland's entire economy, as it produces professionals in fields without which

society cannot function: care, technology, construction, logistics, and maintenance. Strengthening vocational education is not an option, but a necessity.

Higher education institutions are crucial for Finland's future, but their funding and strategic direction are too variable. The roles of universities and universities of applied sciences have developed in recent years, but the division of labour between them is not always clear. Higher education institutions need stability and long-term perspective so they can focus on their core tasks: research, teaching, and innovation. At the same time, teaching and research environments must be sufficiently attractive for Finland to compete internationally for the quality of professionals and investments. The funding of higher education must not be at the mercy of a political pendulum; it must be based on a realistic assessment of what skills Finland needs over a 10–20 year horizon.

The importance of lifelong learning is constantly growing. The transformation of working life means that an increasing number of people must update their skills several times during their lifetime. This cannot be solely the responsibility of the individual, since the interests of the economy, businesses, and the public sector are all linked to maintaining a skilled workforce. We need a system that enables flexible study paths without unreasonable costs and that gives people the opportunity both to deepen their competence and to redirect towards a new career. Maintaining skills is no longer a competitive advantage, but a precondition for survival.

Education and working life are an inseparable whole. Finland cannot succeed in the global economy if these two worlds drift apart. Education must respond to the needs of working life, but working life must also support education by providing internship placements, learning opportunities, and a realistic picture of what skills are needed in the future. This requires close cooperation between educational institutions, businesses, and the public sector.

Working life and education ultimately tell us what kind of view society has of the individual. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, work should be meaningful, safe, and valued, and education should be a tool that opens doors, not closes them. The task of politics is not to dictate what kind of work people should do or in which field they should operate, but to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow, and build their future. A society that values both practical skills and academic learning is stronger than one that divides people into artificial categories. Finland's future is built on work, skills, and education, and these are structures that must be strengthened in all circumstances.

## Chapter 5: Social and Health Services

Finland's social and health services are part of the core of the welfare state, but they are undergoing a profound transformation. The ageing of the population increases the need for care and healthcare at the same time as labour shortages and funding pressures intensify. The change is not happening evenly: some regions suffer from deteriorating access to services and under-resourcing, while in large cities the burden manifests as long waiting times and treatment queues. Finland's system has long been known for its equality, but over the past couple of decades, this principle has started to slip. The availability of services increasingly depends on place of residence, socioeconomic status, and the ability to utilise private services alongside public ones.

The problems of social and health services cannot be solved by individual decisions, since it is a whole in which care, public health, preventive work, and the service structure form an interconnected network. The strength of this network has been a characteristic of the Finnish model, in which primary healthcare has served as the backbone of the system. In recent years, however, this structure has deteriorated. Primary healthcare waiting times have lengthened, the doctor shortage has worsened, and the parallel system built around occupational healthcare has in practice created a two-tier healthcare system. Correcting this development requires strengthening primary healthcare in a way that restores its role as the cornerstone of the entire service system.

Specialised healthcare in Finland is at a high level by international comparison, but it cannot compensate for the shortcomings of primary healthcare. Queues grow when health centres cannot relieve the pressure on basic services. This leads to a system where patients end up in specialised care too late, treatment costs increase, and the effectiveness of care diminishes. The Bridge Builders' line emphasises that basic services — especially mental health and substance abuse services as well as early support in child welfare — must be brought to the forefront. Care and health are not separate areas; they are interconnected structures that require the functionality of the entire service chain.

Mental health challenges have grown strongly, particularly among young people. This is a development that cannot be left to individual campaigns or projects. Permanent structures are needed that bring low-threshold mental health services to schools, workplaces, and as part of basic services. Concentrating services in specialised units alone is not enough, as many mental health problems develop slowly and require support at an early stage. Substance abuse services must also be easily accessible, without problems accumulating and leading to more serious situations before help is received. Investing in these is not only socially just but also economically sensible, as prevention reduces the need for heavier services.

The future of care services is one of Finland's defining questions. As the population ages, the need for care grows, but at the same time the shortage of carers threatens the system's capacity to function. The treatment of carers, working conditions, wages, and career development opportunities directly affect how many stay in the field, how many change careers, and how many seek better conditions abroad. Care work is emotionally and physically demanding, and therefore the system must bear responsibility for managing the workload, ensuring sufficient staff, and providing working conditions that support coping. The system cannot rely on the assumption that workers will stretch indefinitely, since no service is sustainable if its foundation is staff burnout.

In the organisation of social and health services, it is essential to also recognise regional differences. In a sparsely populated country, it is not possible to offer every specialised service in every region, but the accessibility of basic services must be equal. Digital services and remote consultations can support service availability, but they must not replace in-person services in situations where interaction and presence are essential. Technology

should be a tool, not an end in itself, and its use must be built according to people's actual needs, not administrative wishes.

The position of child welfare and family services is particularly important, as childhood and youth are periods when even small differences in the support and service system can compound into lifelong effects. The Finnish system has traditionally been strong in providing early support, but the thinning of resources and the fragmentation of services have weakened this foundation. Solutions are needed that strengthen clinic and family services, support parenthood, and prevent the accumulation of problems. Family wellbeing is not an individual service; it requires a functioning whole in which early childhood education, school, social services, and leisure environments work together for the child's best interest.

The funding of social and health services must be sustainable and predictable. The funding model for wellbeing regions is currently tight and structurally vulnerable to, for example, fluctuations in care needs and population ageing. The system's financing cannot be based on continuous lurching from one crisis to the next; it must be such that services can be planned over the long term. At the same time, it is important that funding encourages effective care, not merely cost minimisation or the maximising of outputs. Care must be a value in itself, and its funding must reflect this.

Social and health services tell a great deal about what kind of society Finland wants to be. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, this is not merely about the efficiency of the system, but also about human dignity, trust, and society's ability to look after its members. The social and health system cannot function if it is seen as an expense item; it must be an investment in the future, in people's wellbeing, and in the social cohesion of society. The welfare state is not self-evident, but a subject of continuous effort, requiring reforms, courage, and the ability to look further than the next budget year.

Finland's social and health system can still be the best in the world, if it is allowed to develop in a controlled and long-term manner. This requires resources, structural clarity, and a value choice in which the significance of care and health is recognised as a central part of the societal whole. People are not for the system; the system is for people. This principle must be kept clear in all decision-making.

## Chapter 6: Immigration Policy

Immigration policy is one of those issues on which Finland must make clear and honest choices. The Bridge Builders does not consider strict immigration policy to be contrary to values, but a responsible solution in a situation where public finances are under strain and the carrying capacity of the welfare state is limited. Policy must serve the whole of Finnish society, and it must be based on a realistic assessment of what Finland can sustainably absorb.

Our party advocates a strict and selective immigration policy. Immigration must be based on a controlled system in which the background, skills, and integration prospects of arrivals are assessed according to clear criteria. Immigration must serve Finland's needs and must not become a burden that cannot be borne. The predictability and consistency of the system build trust for both arrivals and the existing population.

Finland should take its lead from Denmark and Japan, where immigration has been restricted purposefully to safeguard national cohesion and the welfare society. Denmark has shown that a policy based on strict integration requirements and selective immigration is possible even in a liberal society. Japan, for its part, is an example of how a society can maintain its cultural cohesion and economic capacity without large-scale immigration. Finland is not obliged to repeat other countries' mistakes; it has the right and the responsibility to choose its own path.

The economic reality must be taken into account without equivocation. Finland is accumulating debt at a rapid pace, and balancing public finances requires difficult choices. In the current situation, we are unable to finance an immigration policy whose integration results are weak and costs are high. Every euro spent on ineffective integration is taken away from Finnish elderly, families with children, and the ill. This is not cold calculation, but responsibility towards those who have built this society.

During difficult times, Finland must focus on the wellbeing of its own citizens. This means that the volume of immigration must be limited and integration requirements must be tightened. Social cohesion cannot be maintained if the number of arrivals exceeds what the system can sustainably handle. The Bridge Builders believes that a humane and functional immigration policy is one that is honest about its limits and is committed, within those limits, to helping in the best possible way.

## Chapter 7: Internal Security

Internal security is the foundation of society, but its true significance often becomes visible only when it begins to falter. In Finland, security has long been taken for granted, but changes both domestically and in the international environment have shown that a safe society does not come into being without continuous effort. The scarcity of police resources, the growth of organised crime, street violence phenomena, disruptive behaviour in city centres, and the accumulation of social problems are all signs that internal security cannot be regarded as a permanent state. It is a delicate whole that requires proper leadership, sufficient resources, and clear structures.

The role of the police in Finnish society is unique. Finland is one of the few countries in the world where the police are broadly trusted across party lines and socioeconomic differences. This trust has not come about by accident; it is the result of the police's long history as an impartial, professional authority operating close to the citizens. In recent years, however, this trust has been tested — not because of police conduct, but because the police's capacity to respond to a growing workload has diminished. The resource deficit has led to the police being unable to respond to all tasks; in sparsely populated areas, response times are increasing, and the crime clearance rate has decreased, particularly for property crimes and street violence cases.

The scope of police duties has expanded at the same time that resources have not been increased in proportion. Phenomena previously foreign to society, such as street gangs, organised youth violence, and disruptions organised via social media, have become part of police work. The growth of mental health and substance abuse problems and the weakening of social services have also led to the police handling tasks that do not originally belong to their core role. This reduces the opportunities for preventive policing — the very thing that has been a strength of the Finnish model. When the police are forced to continuously respond to urgent tasks, they cannot be present where safety is built: in schools, residential areas, at events, and in public spaces.

The problems of internal security are increasingly related to social and economic changes. When young people's mental ill-health, mental health problems, and substance use increase, disruptive behaviour also increases. Insecurity is not born solely from crime, but from the experience that the everyday environment is not under control. Therefore, security policy cannot be merely crime prevention; it must also be social policy. The presence of schools, recreational opportunities, family support, and well-functioning social services have a direct impact on security. A society that prevents root causes needs fewer coercive measures.

At the same time, one must be prepared for the changing structure of crime. Organised crime, narcotics crime, and financial crime are increasingly international. Criminal networks do not recognise regional or national borders, and the digital world offers them new channels. The police must be able to operate effectively in an environment where crime is more fluid and technically sophisticated than before. This requires expertise, technology, and the allocation of resources to the right places. It is not enough for the police to be visible on the streets; they must be equally strong in the cyber environment and in the investigation of financial crimes.

Safety is also an experience. Many Finns do not perceive an immediate threat, but they encounter disorder, disruptive behaviour, or a lack of clarity about who is responsible for public safety. This affects people's everyday life, commutes, leisure time, and how they experience their own city. The weakening of the sense of security is not always a consequence of an increase in the number of crimes, but of the fact that the structures maintaining order are not visible or do not function consistently. Here, security guards, the

police, and social services have a shared task: to bring predictability and reliability to everyday life that restores trust in public spaces.

Finland must also prepare for crises whose nature has changed. Pandemics, cyberattacks, hybrid influence, war in Europe, and economic uncertainty have shown that internal security is not separate from external security. Cooperation between the police, Customs, the Border Guard, and the Defence Forces is more important than ever, so that Finland can respond to situations where the boundary between internal and external threats blurs. Security is not a single sector, but the whole society's ability to act together under pressure.

Internal security tells a great deal about how society views its citizens. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, security is not fear, control, or confrontation, but trust that people can live their everyday lives without a constant threat. This requires a strong police force, skilled security guards, functioning social services, and a society that does not leave anyone alone. Safety is built at the everyday level — where people live, move, and spend their free time. The work of the police and other actors is valuable precisely because it protects this everyday life.

Finland can continue to be one of the safest countries in the world, but this will not happen without clear choices. Political will is needed to strengthen police operational capacity, to acknowledge the importance of other actors, and to build structures that restore the experience of safety throughout Finland. Internal security is not an expense, but an investment in a functioning society where people can live with confidence. A safe Finland does not happen by itself — it is built through action.

## Chapter 8: Regional Policy and Transport

Finland's regional structure is exceptional by European standards. A large country, a sparse population, and long distances set special requirements for both the organisation of services, mobility, and economic vitality. Regional policy is not merely an administrative sector, but a question of Finland's entire future: of how the country remains inhabited, how people's everyday lives take shape, and what opportunities different regions can offer. The success of one area does not come at the expense of another. Finland needs a cohesive regional development model that recognises the strengths of different areas and gives them the opportunity to develop from their own starting points.

However, the regional structure is changing rapidly. Urbanisation continues, but alongside it there is a counter-trend in which people are seeking spaciousness, affordability, and a better quality of life in housing. The spread of remote work has increased the significance of this mobility, as work no longer ties people as tightly to a physical location. At the same time, the economic structure has changed: alongside traditional industrial concentrations, new growth sectors have emerged that are not necessarily tied to large urban areas. This transformation creates opportunities for the entire country, but only if infrastructure and service structures can support these choices.

The transport system has a key role in securing regional equality. In Finland, distances are long, and therefore the significance of road, rail, and air connections is greater than in many other European countries. The motorway network is not merely traffic infrastructure; it is the main artery of the economy, through which workers, products, raw materials, and services flow. The E18, which runs from Turku via Helsinki towards the eastern border, is Finland's most European route — it is a connection from west to east and one of the most important logistical corridors in the entire country. Its significance extends from ports to industry and trade, and its development is essential for Finland's competitiveness.

The E12, which connects the west coast, Tampere, and central Finland to more eastern areas, is a route that enables movement and freight traffic along Finland's internal cross-axis. Its significance grows especially when we speak of inter-regional cooperation and how Finland functions as a whole. The E75, which runs from Helsinki all the way to Lapland, is not only a lifeline for tourism but also part of the supply security structure: the connection between north and south is not merely a road, but an instrument through which labour, freight, and services move. Highways 5, 6, and 9 also have a central significance particularly for the accessibility of eastern and northern Finland; they are connections that enable habitation, work, and business activity throughout the country.

The development of transport infrastructure must not be left to individual projects. A long-term and clear vision is needed of what kind of Finland we are building decades ahead. The condition of the road network is a concern, as the under-resourcing of maintenance leads to slow deterioration that is reflected in both safety and the economy. A road in poor condition is not merely a travel inconvenience; it is a cost for businesses, a risk for logistics chains, and a factor that complicates citizens' everyday life. Maintenance and development of the road network are investments that pay for themselves through increased productivity and safety.

Public transport is an essential part of regional policy, but its role varies by region. In large cities it is the foundation of transport, while in rural areas its task is to provide basic connections for those who cannot or do not wish to rely on their own car. Public transport models cannot be identical in different parts of Finland, but they must be sufficient to ensure equal opportunities for mobility. Alongside this, rail transport requires long-term development especially where population and employment naturally move along the rail network. Developing the railway network is not merely regional policy; it is part of climate policy, energy efficiency, and international connections.

The transformation of mobility is also visible in urban structure. As cities grow, they must prepare for the fact that traffic flows are no longer one-directional in the morning and evening, but are distributed unevenly throughout the day. Cities need safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists, functioning local transport, and an environment in which living and working can mix flexibly. Urban development is not, however, the opposite of rural development. Finland succeeds only if the relationship between cities and rural areas is seen as complementary rather than mutually competing.

Regional vitality arises from opportunities, not from centralisation. Every region has its own strengths — industry, tourism, food production, digitalisation-based services, the mining sector, maritime clusters, energy, forestry, the influence zones of higher education institutions — but these have not always been utilised as a whole. Regional policy has traditionally been a balancing act between compensatory support and investment-seeking development. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, future regional policy is neither of these, but the strengthening of structures: creating an operating environment in which regions can grow from their own strength without their role being perceived as a need for external support.

Digitalisation and remote work are also changing the service structure. Public services need not be tied only to physical locations, but they must also not disappear behind digital solutions. Many citizens still need in-person meetings, counselling, and government services, but at the same time, digitalisation can replace earlier travel needs and bring services closer to remote areas. This requires functional telecommunications connections, as without them regions cannot take advantage of the opportunities offered by modern society.

As a whole, regional policy and transport are not separate policy sectors, but part of Finland's economic, social, and security policy foundations. They affect where people can live, how businesses can operate, how the country is accessible, and how well society functions in crises. Regional equality has not been created merely because Finland is a small country, but because Finland has been willing to invest in regions that may not be economically the strongest, but which are an essential part of the national whole.

Finland's future is built on the principle that the entire country is kept vital. This is not a nostalgic idea from the past, but a realistic view of what Finland needs to cope with the economic, social, and security changes of the future. Regions are not competitors, but partners in a common country — a Finland whose strength is based on its diversity, accessibility, and ability to keep everyone included.

## Chapter 9: Environment, Energy, and Nature Conservation

Finland's nature is part of the national identity, but it is also the foundation for wellbeing and the economy. Biodiversity, clean waters, and vast forest areas have given Finland a strong position in both tourism and the bioeconomy, but these strengths are not permanent without purposeful protection and sustainable use. Environmental policy is not a separate sector, but at the core of the economy, energy, supply security, and regional development. The decline of nature and the deterioration of the marine environment are questions that affect every Finn in a way that can no longer be regarded as an abstract future threat.

Finland's forests have long been both an economic and an ecological resource. They sequester carbon, provide livelihoods, and enable the production of renewable materials. The use and protection of forests have sparked broad debate, and the balance between them is an essential question for future policy. The Bridge Builders sees forests as part of a whole in which economic realities and the safeguarding of biodiversity are intertwined. Forest policy should not rely on extremes; it must recognise both the role of the forestry industry in the Finnish economy and the necessity of protection. Sustainable forest management is not a contradiction, but a part of the whole in which the rights of future generations are just as important as the needs of the present.

Energy production and consumption are at the centre of environmental policy. Finland's energy system is in transition, as fossil fuels are being replaced by renewable energy sources and the role of nuclear power is growing. Energy policy is not merely an environmental issue, but also a matter of supply security and safety. The geopolitical events of recent years have shown how important it is that Finland is not dependent on unreliable energy sources. Therefore, realism is needed in energy policy: renewable energy sources are the future, but the transitional phase requires stable and sufficiently broad-based energy production. Nuclear power is part of this whole, as are wind power, solar energy, hydropower, and future technologies such as small modular reactors.

The decline of biodiversity is one of the greatest long-term threats. In Finland, this is visible not only in forests but also in agricultural environments, wetlands, and water bodies. The loss of species in agricultural areas is particularly concerning, as it indicates the simplification of ecosystems and changes in the landscape. Biodiversity is not merely an aesthetic value; it directly affects pollination, nutrient cycling, water quality, and soil resilience. Therefore, the task of nature conservation is not only to preserve individual species, but to safeguard the wholes that sustain both the wellbeing of nature and of people.

The Baltic Sea is Finland's defining question. It is one of the world's most polluted and vulnerable sea areas, and the reasons for this are well known: it is shallow, its water exchange is slow, and millions of people live in its catchment area. Therefore, even small emissions have a powerful impact, and the sea's recovery takes decades. The condition of the Baltic Sea is simultaneously an ecological, economic, and political question. Finland bears a significant responsibility for securing its future.

Eutrophication is the greatest environmental threat to the Baltic Sea. It is caused by nutrients — especially phosphorus and nitrogen — that enter the sea from agriculture, wastewater, and industry. Eutrophication causes blue-green algae blooms, oxygen-depleted seabeds, and the deterioration of fish stocks.

The problems of the Baltic Sea are not limited to eutrophication. Maritime traffic, especially oil and freight transport, poses risks that can lead to serious environmental disasters. Although safety has improved, the Baltic Sea remains one of the busiest sea areas in Europe, and its congestion increases risks. Microplastics and chemicals are an emerging threat that affects ecosystems slowly but surely. In Finland, particular attention should be

given to urban stormwater, industrial storage, and consumer product microplastic emissions that are carried via rivers to the Baltic Sea.

The protection of the Baltic Sea cannot succeed without international cooperation. Finland cannot solve the sea's problems alone, as pollutants travel across borders. Cooperation with Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, and Denmark is essential. At the same time, EU-level regulation plays a key role, for example in reducing shipping emissions. International cooperation does not, however, relieve Finland of responsibility; on the contrary, Finland must act as a defender of the Baltic Sea both in maritime areas and at diplomatic tables.

The state of the Baltic Sea also affects the economy and everyday life. Fishing, tourism, maritime transport, and coastal cities all depend on the sea being healthy. An eutrophied or contaminated sea does not offer the same opportunities for industries, nor is it an attraction for residents. Therefore, protecting the Baltic Sea is not a romantic environmental project, but an economic policy investment that secures the future of coastal areas and strengthens Finland's international credibility as a pioneer in nature conservation.

The Baltic Sea is our shared heritage and responsibility. Its protection requires decisions that are not always easy, but which are necessary. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, the future of the Baltic Sea is a measure of how seriously Finland takes environmental protection. The state of the sea tells what kind of a planet we leave to the next generations, and we cannot accept that this inheritance deteriorates because we did not act in time.

Nature conservation, however, is not only about protecting seas, forests, and animal species. It is part of society's moral narrative: of what we consider valuable and how we treat the environment that is the prerequisite for our lives. The decline of biodiversity is not only an ecological crisis; it is also reflected in the economy, health, and security. The protection of forests, peatlands, water bodies, and urban nature creates the foundation for a healthy and vital society. In Finland, proximity to nature has always been part of people's identity, and therefore its preservation is not an externally imposed demand, but an innate obligation.

The task of environmental policy is not to create confrontations between the economy and nature. Sustainable economic growth requires clean water bodies, diverse ecosystems, and predictable climate policy. Companies that operate responsibly are the winners of the future; they are able to meet increasingly stringent environmental requirements and benefit from consumers' growing interest in sustainable products and services. At the same time, Finnish cleantech expertise, the circular economy, and energy efficiency are opportunities that strengthen the economy and create jobs.

Energy policy, nature conservation, and the economy must not be separate from one another. They must form a whole in which the environment is respected, energy is produced sustainably, and economic growth is built on long-term stability. The Bridge Builders believes that Finland can be a country where these goals do not compete with each other, but support one another. The environment is always part of Finland's story, and its future is more important now than ever.

## Chapter 10: Housing and Urban Development

Housing and urban development constitute one of the fundamental elements of society: they determine where people live, what kinds of communities are formed, what services are available, and what everyday life looks like. In Finland, housing has long been a symbol of stability, but in recent years it has become a source of uncertainty for an increasing number of people. The regional divergence of housing markets, rising construction costs, fluctuations in loan interest rates, and increasing housing costs have together created a situation in which ensuring affordable housing is no longer self-evident. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, housing is not merely an economic question, but essentially also a social and societal question that affects equality, family wellbeing, and regional vitality.

The growth of cities in Finland has been exceptionally rapid relative to population development. Growth itself is not a problem, but its management has been inadequate. Cities have expanded vigorously, but infrastructure and services have not kept pace with development. This is visible in school capacity problems, congested public transport, and the densification of urban areas without sufficient green spaces. Urban development should not be based solely on increasing building rights, but on a broader understanding of how cities function: how people move, where they spend their time, and how life is built in residential communities.

Dense and sustainable urban structure is an important goal, but it must not become an end in itself. Excessively dense construction easily leads to the narrowing of urban space and declining residential amenity. In Finland, cities have traditionally grown on the principle of spaciousness, and this tradition need not be abandoned in the name of modern planning. Urban space must be functional, pleasant, and safe. This requires parks and green areas, diverse neighbourhoods, routes suitable for walking and cycling, and public space where people find it pleasant to move. A well-designed city increases social interaction and reduces feelings of insecurity, as spaces are visible, open, and easy to comprehend.

Housing construction is a key part of the housing whole, but construction in recent years has drifted into cyclical instability. Rising construction costs, market uncertainty, and interest rate fluctuations have reduced developers' willingness to invest. This has led to a significant decline in housing production precisely when urbanisation and migration are increasing demand. Finland's housing policy needs long-term perspective and predictability that give the market the opportunity to function stably even in uncertain times. The role of the state is not to replace the market, but to create conditions in which affordable construction is possible.

Affordable housing is especially important for young people, families with children, and those on low incomes. Rising housing costs hit these groups most sensitively and determine what kind of life they can build and where they can settle. Ensuring affordable housing is not only a social policy question but also an economic policy question: labour moves to where housing is possible. Cities where housing is too expensive lose their attractiveness and their labour markets suffer. Finland needs housing policy that enables the coexistence of different housing forms: owner-occupied housing, rental housing, shared ownership models, and communal housing solutions.

Housing, however, is not limited to large cities. Rural areas, small towns, and townships are an important part of Finland's regional structure, and their vitality depends on housing being attractive and services accessible. The spread of remote work offers the opportunity to balance regional development, but only if infrastructure and digital connections work. People are increasingly choosing their place of residence for lifestyle reasons, and Finland could benefit more from this trend if the attractiveness factors of different regions are highlighted. A peaceful environment, nature, affordable housing costs, and community are factors for which demand is growing.

In urban development, social cohesion is a central factor. Cities must not split into areas where wellbeing accumulates and others where problems accumulate. The diversity of residential areas, high-quality public environments, and even availability of services are means of combating this development. This means strengthening local services, building pleasant urban environments, and ensuring safety together with the police and communities.

Housing and urban development ultimately tell us in what kind of environment people can live a good life. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, the goal is not to create a single model for the whole country, but to ensure that everyone has the opportunity for dignified and safe housing, regardless of background, income level, or place of residence.

## Chapter 11: Culture, Education, and Identity

Culture and education form the foundation upon which Finnish society is built. They are not mere hobbies or leisure content, but part of society's memory, thinking, and direction. Education is the ability to understand the world and one's own place in it, and culture is a way of expressing that understanding. The significance of these two does not diminish in an era of technology or globalisation; rather, it grows: the more the world changes, the more important it is that people have roots on which they can build their identity and their future.

Finnish culture has always been diverse, even though its external image has often been narrowed to stereotypes of nature, tranquillity, and resilience. In reality, Finland's cultural history is a rich tapestry: influences from the west and the east, Nordic heritage, international interaction, and local distinctive features. Literature, music, architecture, visual arts, film, and theatre have shaped generational experiences of who we are. At the same time, popular culture, digital art, and subcultures have created new ways of belonging to communities. Culture is continuously alive, and it must be allowed to develop without unnecessary direction or narrow limits.

Education is not only a product of schooling, although school plays a central role in transmitting it. Education is above all an attitude towards the world: a desire to learn, the ability to think critically, an understanding of history, and a readiness to assess the future. Education is an antidote to populism, black-and-white thinking, and rapid emotional reactions that spread quickly in modern times. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, education is not elitism, but the backbone of society. A principle on which Finland's success has been built and which must be visible in education, culture, and public discourse.

The core question of cultural policy is not the amount of funding, but its long-term nature and predictability. Arts and culture practitioners cannot build their projects, repertoires, or structures if funding changes with every electoral cycle. Culture needs stability just as much as the economy does. Artists and cultural institutions create content whose value often becomes apparent only years or decades later. Therefore, cultural policy must safeguard their ability to operate, not direct content or forms according to political fads.

Finnish identity is neither unambiguous nor unidirectional. It is built from traditions, language, and history, but also from modern thinking and continuous change. While Finland is a vital part of Europe and the international community, it has its own unique story — a story born from the diversity of languages, regions, customs, and values. Finland's identity is at its strongest when it understands its own roots but is open to the world. National self-confidence is not built through insularity, but through the ability to be oneself in a changing world.

Language is a central part of identity. Finnish, Finland-Swedish, and the Sámi languages are not merely communication tools, but bearers of cultural continuity. Society must support their status in a way that respects both tradition and practical needs. Strengthening the position of language does not mean opposition to internationalism, but a conscious choice to take care that our cultural roots are preserved. Language creates community, and without language, a community loses a significant part of its identity.

Cultural polarisation is one of the phenomena of our time. Different value systems and lifestyles collide more frequently both in the media and in everyday life, which weakens social trust. The task of cultural policy is not to choose winners or losers in these cultural struggles, but to build shared spaces and experiences where difference can be a resource rather than a dividing line. Joint events, public spaces, libraries, cultural centres, and art institutions are places where the layers of society naturally meet. Finland needs culture that unites, not divides.

Digital culture is part of modern identity, and its significance must not be underestimated. Gaming culture, social media communities, virtual worlds, and digital art are, especially for young people, central forms of expression. They are also a growing economic sector and the cultural core of the future, in which Finland has shown unique international success. The task of cultural policy is to recognise this potential and not regard digital culture as less valuable than traditional art forms. Education does not exist only in libraries and schools. It is also online, in communities, and in new ways of creating cultural content.

At the heart of culture and identity is the idea that society is in continuous change. Change is not a threat if, at its centre, we know who we are and where we belong. In the Bridge Builders' view, identity is not built from above, but arises from people's own experiences, history, and choices. The task of culture and education is to support this process and provide tools that help people understand themselves and the world around them.

Culture, education, and identity are not separate tasks of the public sector, but part of society's intellectual capital. Strengthening them creates the foundation for an open, trusting, and democratic society. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, culture is not an expense item, but an investment in people's wellbeing and the sustainability of society. Education does not come into being on its own; it must be nurtured — in schooling, in art, in discussions, and in everyday choices. Identity is not a ready-made mould, but a living whole that renews with each generation.

Finland's future is built on how we are able to combine tradition and modernity, diversity and community, the global and the local. Culture and education are the keys to this combination. They give us the means to understand change and to build a common direction at its centre. Identity, in turn, provides the foundation from which this direction derives its meaning. Therefore, culture, education, and identity are not separate areas of politics; their significance extends to everything that society does and values.

## Chapter 12: Digitalisation, Data, and Technology

Digitalisation is one of the greatest upheavals of our time. It is not merely a technical change, but a societal transition that redefines work, the economy, services, and even interpersonal relationships. Technology is not a neutral force; it reflects the values and choices that guide the direction of society. In Finland, digitalisation has long been considered a national strength, but in recent years development has been uneven. Some sectors have developed rapidly, while others have fallen behind, and the digital divide between citizens threatens to widen. Digital development must not lead to a society divided into those who keep up and those who permanently fall behind.

Technological development is changing the structures of the economy faster than legislation and administration can adapt. Data, automation, artificial intelligence, and machine learning create new opportunities, but they also carry new risks. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, digitalisation is neither good nor bad. It is a tool that, when used correctly, can improve services, strengthen democracy, and create new jobs. When misused, it can weaken privacy, increase discrimination, and widen economic inequality. Therefore, the development of technology needs a clear direction that combines innovation with responsibility.

Data is the raw material of the digital world. Its value is constantly growing, and its utilisation determines future services and the economy. In Finland, a great deal of data is collected, but its utilisation is fragmented and often slow. The public sector has collected information for decades, but information systems do not communicate with one another, and data is not always accessible in a way that benefits service development. The Bridge Builders' line emphasises that data is a societal resource: its use must be guided ethically and openly, but at the same time its possibilities must be harnessed in healthcare, education, transport, security, and research.

The impact of digitalisation on working life is profound. Automation replaces routine tasks, but at the same time it creates new professions and skill requirements. The change is not linear, and its effects cannot be examined at the level of individual professions, but as a broader whole. Working life does not split merely into low and high skilled work, but into how well workers are able to adopt new technology and apply it in their own work. This requires continuous learning and opportunities to update skills at different career stages. Digitalisation must not create a division between those who receive the benefits technology offers and those whose labour market position permanently weakens.

Artificial intelligence and autonomous systems are the next great step in development. They change the way decisions are made, services are provided, and security is maintained. AI can bring solutions to healthcare backlogs, crime prevention, traffic management, and the personalisation of teaching, but it can also cause new ethical problems. Society must ensure that the use of AI is transparent, fair, and supervised. People must know when their data is being used and on what basis systems make decisions that affect their lives. This is not a technical detail, but a question of democracy and legal protection.

Cybersecurity is the cornerstone of digitalisation. Finland is a country of high expertise, but at the same time it is highly dependent on technological systems. Attacks no longer target only individual organisations, but entire services, infrastructure, and even the internal systems of states. Cyber threats can paralyse power grids, disrupt banking systems, shut down hospitals, and undermine citizens' trust in government activities. Cybersecurity cannot be merely a technical issue, but part of a national security strategy in which authorities, businesses, and citizens work together. Every critical system needs strong protection — not because the threat is immediate, but because it can be unexpected.

Digitalisation must also be accessible. Not everyone naturally keeps up with development, and therefore society must support those for whom the digital world is unfamiliar or difficult to grasp. Digital skills are not merely a technical competence, but a civic skill that affects employment, education, healthcare, and administrative obligations. If people are excluded from digital services, they gradually become excluded from society. Therefore, digital services must be clear, user-friendly, and accessible through alternative means when needed.

Digitalisation also offers the opportunity to reform public services. In Finland, there has long been an effort to move services online, but the results have been variable. Some services work excellently, while others are complex, difficult to use, and disconnected from one another. The public sector must take the role of designer of digital services, not merely a procurer. Services must be uniform, user-friendly, and built around people's needs, not administrative structures. The greatest opportunity of digitalisation is to make services smoother, faster, and clearer — not to transfer existing problems from paper to screen.

The development of technology also affects democracy. Social media, algorithms, and online discussions are shaping public discourse in a way that could not have been foreseen even a decade ago. Fake news, manipulation, and information influence are threats that can weaken citizens' trust in decision-making and institutions. Therefore, democracy needs both technical safeguards and education that supports critical thinking. Society must be alert so that digital development does not lead to a decline in the quality of information or an escalation of the discourse climate in a way that threatens societal cohesion.

Digitalisation is ultimately a story of how society meets change. It can create enormous wellbeing, but only if its benefits are distributed fairly and its risks are managed responsibly. Technology must not direct people; people must direct technology. The Bridge Builders' view is clear: Finland can be a leading country in the digital world, but only when development is ethical, open, and serves all citizens. Digitalisation must strengthen society, not erode it.

## Chapter 13: Economic Growth, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

Economic growth is a measure of society's vitality, but its significance extends far beyond mere numbers. It determines the capacity to fund welfare services, build infrastructure, ensure people's security, and create jobs. The economy is not a separate sector, but part of a broader whole in which people, businesses, and institutions work together. In Finland, economic growth has been slow in recent years, and its structures have begun to show symptoms. An ageing population, a lack of investment, weakened productivity, and a declining level of education are factors that threaten long-term wellbeing. Therefore, the task of economic policy is not merely to balance the budget, but to build the conditions for sustainable growth.

Sustainable economic growth is born from investment, skills, and innovation. Finland has traditionally been a strong country in research and development, but over the past decade R&D investment has weakened relative to competitor countries. This trend is not immediately visible, but its effects carry far into the future. Innovation does not arise solely in laboratories, but within the framework of the whole society: in education, research, businesses, and everyday needs. The R&D system must be long-term and predictable so that businesses dare to invest and researchers can develop solutions whose impact only becomes visible years later.

The role of businesses in the economy is central. Without businesses, there are no jobs, investments, or tax revenues. In Finland, however, entrepreneurship is not as attractive a career option as it should be. The uncertainty associated with entrepreneurship, heavy administration, bureaucracy, and complex regulation are barriers that limit the birth of new companies and slow their growth. At the same time, the Finnish labour market has traditionally relied on stable employment relationships, which has reduced the appeal of entrepreneurship. Growing international competition shows, however, that innovative and agile businesses are a prerequisite for the future.

Entrepreneurship is not merely an economic choice, but a question of values. It is based on the desire to create something new, to bear risk, and to build a community around oneself that benefits from the business's success. Supporting entrepreneurship does not mean favouring individual persons, but strengthening the entire national economy. Finland needs both small local businesses and large growth companies that can expand into international markets. Growth entrepreneurship requires courage and resources, but above all it requires an operating environment in which the entrepreneur knows that infrastructure, taxation, and regulation support their work rather than slowing it down.

The relationship between economic growth and innovation is bidirectional. Innovation increases productivity, and productivity increases economic growth. However, productivity is not born from the amount of work but from working conditions, technology, and skills. In Finland, the need to improve productivity has been discussed for a long time, but concrete measures have remained fragmented. Business investment appetite has weakened, and the public sector's ability to support growth has diminished due to economic pressures. Economic policy must find ways to strengthen productivity in a manner that is not based on cuts or increasing working hours, but on developing new things.

Digitalisation, automation, and artificial intelligence are the foundation of future growth, but their benefits do not arise automatically. They require skills, infrastructure, and regulation that supports development while protecting citizens. Finland has strong technological expertise, but its utilisation has been fragmented. Too many innovations are born in research institutions and universities but do not transfer to business use or markets. Cooperation

between research, businesses, and the public sector needs a profound reform in which barriers are removed and opportunities are placed at the centre.

A key question for economic growth is also the significance of regions. Finland cannot rely on only a few growth centres; it needs growth throughout the country. Regional innovation clusters, cooperation between universities of applied sciences and universities, and local economic structures are part of this whole. Growth often arises from local needs and opportunities, not from centralised planning. Therefore, in regional policy, one must see the potential of innovation: every region can specialise in its strengths and create jobs that are not dependent on individual national trends.

In promoting entrepreneurship, the social dimension must also be taken into account. Entrepreneurs bear a risk that affects their livelihood, but at the same time their contribution benefits the whole of society. Improving entrepreneurs' social security and occupational wellbeing is not merely a question of justice, but an economic policy investment. If an entrepreneur does not have the opportunity to be ill, take leave, or receive support in difficult times, entrepreneurship is not a sustainable career option. Finland needs an entrepreneurship policy that recognises the diversity of entrepreneurs. Solo entrepreneurs, micro-enterprises, growth companies, and businesses aiming at international markets each need their own forms of support and structures to succeed — not only in Finland, but globally.

The future of economic growth and innovation also depends on how Finland relates to changes in the world. International competition, geopolitical uncertainty, and technological disruption directly affect the economy. Finland cannot isolate itself, but it must build its own competitiveness on the basis of values, skills, and a responsible economy. Economic growth must not be based on cheap labour or operating at the expense of the environment, but on high expertise, technological leadership, and strong social sustainability.

The economy is not merely flows of money or budget tables. It is a fabric between people, businesses, and society that requires trust, predictability, and courage. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, economic growth is not an end in itself, but a means by which a society can be built in which wellbeing, justice, and opportunities are distributed equitably. Innovation and entrepreneurship are parts of this whole. They give Finland the ability to renew itself, to respond to the challenges of the future, and to maintain its position as a prosperous, stable, and competitive country.

## Chapter 14: Agriculture, Supply Security, and Self-Sufficiency

Agriculture, supply security, and self-sufficiency form a structure that determines Finland's ability to cope with crises and safeguard the basic needs of its citizens. They are not merely an economic sector or an administrative entity, but a strategic question that extends to regional policy, the environment, energy, the economy, and security. In Finland, agriculture has long been part of national identity and culture, but in recent years its position has weakened under the pressure of many simultaneous forces. Producer prices have fallen, costs have risen, the number of farms has decreased, and uncertainty about the future has grown. The situation is not the fault of individual farmers, but a consequence of structural problems that have accumulated over the years and for which sufficiently comprehensive solutions have not been found.

Agriculture is the foundation of supply security. Without a functioning agricultural sector, Finland cannot be self-sufficient in terms of food, nor can it secure the population's access to nutrition in exceptional circumstances. Self-sufficiency is not a romantic idea or a return to the past, but a practical and necessary principle in a world where supply chains are long and vulnerable. Geopolitical events in recent years have shown how quickly the international situation can change and how important it is that Finland has its own production capacity for essential foodstuffs. Supply security does not come from stockpiles, but from the fact that agriculture is alive, functioning, and capable of operating even in crises.

A distinctive feature of Finnish agriculture is its challenging climatic location. The northern climate, short growing season, and difficult conditions mean that production is inherently more expensive and riskier than in many other countries. Despite this, Finnish agriculture produces some of the world's purest food products and maintains a vast countryside that is part of Finland's landscape, identity, and biodiversity. Therefore, agricultural policy must acknowledge these conditions and bring solutions that support the specific needs of Finnish agriculture, rather than evaluating it by the same criteria as Central European agriculture.

The profitability of agriculture has weakened in recent years in a way that threatens the entire sector's future. Many farms operate effectively at a loss or at zero profit, and investments are left unmade when the future looks uncertain. This weakens not only production but also renewal, since without investments there are no new solutions that would improve productivity and reduce environmental impact. Agriculture cannot be a permanent state of emergency in which farms scrape by year after year without stability. A structural reform is needed that enables long-term operation and gives farms the opportunity to develop and grow.

Finnish agriculture is more diverse than is often understood. Grain, pig, cattle, poultry, and dairy farms make up the majority of production, but alongside them there is a growing number of specialised farms, organic producers, and local food operators. Rural vitality is not built on a single form of production, but on a diverse structure in which different sectors complement one another. This diversity is also a strength of supply security, as it makes production more resilient and reduces dependence on individual supply chains. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, the future of agriculture does not rest on a single model, but on the coexistence of many parallel models.

The environment and agriculture are intertwined in a way that cannot be bypassed. Agriculture causes nutrient loading and a decline in biodiversity, but at the same time it maintains landscapes, creates habitats for many species, and plays a central role in Finland's climate policy through carbon sinks. Sustainable agriculture requires solutions that take both of these sides into account. The development of cultivation methods, nutrient cycling, soil health, the importance of grassland farming, and animal welfare are part of the

whole in which production efficiency and environmental protection are not opposites. Finland can be a pioneer of sustainable agriculture, but this requires both science-based policy and a realistic understanding of what Finnish agriculture can and cannot do for climate targets.

Self-sufficiency concerns not only food, but also energy, fertilisers, seeds, feed, and the operational capacity of farms in crises. Farms are increasingly dependent on global markets, and this dependence brings both risks and vulnerability. Energy self-sufficiency, in the form of biogas and renewable energy, can be a key factor in agriculture's future. It reduces farm costs, supports climate goals, and increases supply security. Similarly, domestic fertiliser production and nutrient recycling are critical for future security. Supply security is not merely government stockpiles; it is the practical ability to keep production running even when necessary inputs cannot be obtained from abroad.

The countryside is part of supply security, but also part of the Finnish way of life. Rural services, infrastructure, and vitality are factors that determine whether Finland can maintain its self-sufficiency in the long term. Emptying villages, closing schools, and deteriorating services affect whether people want to live and work in rural areas. From the perspective of supply security, this is critical, as without people there are no producers, and without producers there is no self-sufficiency. The countryside is not a relic of the past, but a resource for the future — one that needs political attention with the same seriousness as cities.

Supply security is a whole that extends to food, energy, logistics, and technology. Strengthening it is not merely a defence policy question, but also an economic and social one. Crises reveal society's vulnerabilities, but they also show how important it is to anticipate and build strong structures even before crises. In Finland, a strength of supply security has been broad cooperation between the state, businesses, and organisations, but this cooperation must continue to deepen. An economy reliant on global markets needs alongside it a structure that ensures Finland can operate independently, at least in terms of basic commodities.

Agriculture, supply security, and self-sufficiency are not separate sectors, but part of a whole whose task is to ensure Finland's competitiveness and security even in uncertain times. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, these themes tell how Finland bears its responsibility for its own citizens and the environment in which it operates. Agriculture is not merely a form of production, but a way of life, a part of culture, and a part of society's backbone. Supply security is not merely preparing for the worst, but peacetime policy that builds stability in all circumstances. Self-sufficiency is not insularity, but the ability to operate independently when the world becomes unpredictable.

## Chapter 15: Foreign and Security Policy

Foreign and security policy determines how Finland operates in the world, how it secures its own borders, and how it bears responsibility for the international order. The world has changed profoundly in a short time: the era of stability in Europe has ended, geopolitical tensions have increased, and authoritarian states challenge the principles of open society. War in Europe, upheaval in energy policy, the increase of cyber threats, and economic uncertainty have demonstrated that Finland's security can no longer rely on traditional solutions alone. A comprehensive vision is needed — one that unites defence, diplomacy, the economy, supply security, and international cooperation into a single coherent direction.

Finland's NATO membership has fundamentally changed its security policy position. After a long period of military non-alignment, Finland now operates as part of a collective defence structure whose foundation lies in collective security guarantees and shared decision-making. However, NATO membership does not diminish Finland's own responsibility for its defence — on the contrary, it underscores it. Every member state must be able to defend its own territory and participate in joint operations. Even before membership, Finland had a strong national defence will and a modern defence system, and now these strengths form part of the alliance's broader whole. NATO membership does not mean that Finland outsources its own security; rather, it is an additional layer of protection whose foundation remains national defence.

The significance of the Defence Forces has grown in a way that is evident at every level. Finland's defence solution is based on the defence of the entire country, universal conscription, a regional defence system, and the breadth of the reserve. These structures give Finland an exceptionally strong defence capability relative to the country's size. At the same time, modern warfare requires technological expertise, strengthened air defence, long-range strike capability, intelligence, and cyber defence. Defence policy cannot be based solely on traditional weapons systems; it must be prepared to respond to hybrid threats, disinformation campaigns, and cyberattacks that can paralyse society without a shot being fired.

Internal and external security are no longer separate worlds. The protection of critical infrastructure, cyber defence, intelligence, and cooperation between authorities form a safety net that is essential in the modern security policy environment. Hybrid influence can target energy networks, water supply, electoral systems, the media, or public sentiment. Such threats are not repelled by military force alone, but by societal resilience — through citizens' trust in institutions, through authorities operating cohesively, and through proactive decision-making. Finland needs structures that withstand pressure and keep society functional in all circumstances.

Diplomacy is as much a part of security as the defence forces. For a small country, international relations are vital, as they form the network through which Finland can influence, protect itself, and receive support. The European Union is the central framework of Finland's foreign policy, as it is not merely an economic union, but also a security community. The EU's ability to act in unity is essential at a time when competition between great powers is intensifying, and Finland must be an active contributor to this decision-making. EU policy is not a sideshow of Finland's foreign policy, but one of its central arenas, where energy, economy, security, technology, and border security are defined.

Finland's position in the Arctic region will become increasingly prominent in the years ahead. The Arctic environment is extremely sensitive, and its protection requires international cooperation. Finland must prepare for the fact that the Arctic region is in the future both an opportunity and a risk: resources, shipping routes, and security are objects of future competition. Therefore, foreign policy must be clear, consistent, and realistic regarding Arctic development.

Energy security is part of foreign policy in a way that was not previously sufficiently recognised. Finland's earlier energy dependence on foreign suppliers has shown how vulnerable energy and supply chains can be. Energy self-sufficiency, security of supply, and the protection of infrastructure form the foundation on which the entire economy and security are built. Nuclear power, wind and solar energy, hydropower, and energy storage solutions are part of the whole that makes Finland less dependent on geopolitically uncertain sources. Energy policy is no longer merely environmental policy; it is part of Finland's foreign policy security strategy.

Part of foreign policy is also a value base: what Finland represents in the world. Finland has built its identity on peace, diplomacy, human rights, and international law. These values remain central, but defending them is no longer self-evident. Authoritarian states challenge the liberal order, and information influence seeks to blur the distinction between right and wrong. Finland must be able to defend its own values both in practical policy and in diplomacy. This does not mean moralistic foreign policy, but a consistent direction in which Finland is a small but principled actor.

The task of foreign policy is also to prevent conflicts and build relationships with other countries in a way that increases stability. This requires an active role in the Nordic countries, the EU, the UN, and other international organisations. Cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries is now more important than ever. Joint exercises, energy and data infrastructure, intelligence cooperation, and border security are key structures of the next decade that strengthen the security of the entire region. Finland cannot and must not act alone. Nordic cooperation is part of its geopolitical backbone.

At the core of security policy is ultimately the question of how Finland ensures its own capacity to function in crises. This means preparedness, continuity planning, and the strengthening of society's critical structures. Supply security, cybersecurity, border security, rescue services, and civil protection form a whole that is not visible in everyday life, but whose significance is decisive in exceptional circumstances. Preparedness is not scaremongering, but responsible policy based on the idea that society protects its citizens in all circumstances.

Foreign and security policy is not a separate island, but part of the narrative that defines Finland's future. From the Bridge Builders' perspective, it must be based on realism, cooperation, and principle. Realism in the sense that the world has become more challenging. Cooperation in the sense that Finland cannot secure itself alone. And principle in the sense that Finland does not abandon its own values even in the most difficult times. Security is above all trust: trust that institutions function, that international systems endure, and that Finland can protect its citizens in all situations.

## Chapter 16: Taxation and Public Finance

Taxation and public finance form the economic foundation of society's functioning. They do not merely fund services and structures; they determine the direction of the entire society: what kind of wellbeing we aspire to, how strong a safety net we build, and how fairly society treats its citizens. Taxation is not only a technical system, but also a value choice. It indicates what kind of society we wish to support. In Finland, taxation has traditionally been based on a broad tax base, moderate differences, and system predictability. In recent years, however, the structural pressures on the economy have made it clear that the tax system must be reassessed from the perspective of the coming decades.

The state of public finances has been worsened by prolonged deficits, indebtedness, and demographic change. An ageing population increases expenditure at the same time as the share of the working-age population shrinks. This development is not the result of any single political decision, but the inevitable consequence of demographic trends that cannot be managed by short-term measures. Therefore, balancing public finances requires a long-term strategy that extends beyond government terms and is based on a realistic assessment of what Finland can sustain and where it can invest. Public finances cannot withstand sudden cuts or continuous indebtedness; they need stability and predictability.

The tax system is part of the economy's dynamics. It must incentivise work, entrepreneurship, and innovation, while simultaneously securing sufficient revenues for welfare services and infrastructure. A longstanding challenge in Finland has been that the tax rate is high, but the system is complex and in places burdensome. The emphasis of taxation remains strongly on work and consumption, which has created tensions particularly among middle-income earners who pay a large amount of tax. At the same time, corporate taxation is moderate by international comparison, but regulation and administrative burden are at times heavy. The taxation of the future must be able to combine fairness, competitiveness, and simplicity.

From the perspective of public finances, it is also essential where money is spent. Merely cutting expenditure is not enough if cuts target structures that produce long-term wellbeing and economic growth. Education, research, healthcare, and infrastructure are investments, not expense items. Weakening them is only visible with a delay, but the effects can be permanent. Therefore, balancing public finances must not be based on short-term cuts, but on structural reforms that ensure the sustainability and efficiency of services. The public sector cannot do everything, but neither must its role be shrunk to a minimum.

One of the central challenges of public finance is productivity. The public sector has a vast number of tasks, and the efficiency of its operations directly affects the overall productivity of the economy. However, efficiency is not improved merely through staff reductions or centralisation of administration. Instead, it requires functional information systems, clear divisions of responsibility, functioning processes, and the ability for employees to focus on their core tasks. Digitalisation can be a decisive factor in improving the productivity of the public sector, but its utilisation in Finland has been uneven. System incompatibility, slow procurement processes, and unclear direction have prevented the full potential from being achieved. The public sector must be a forerunner of digitalisation, not a follower.

Tax policy must also take into account the international environment. The economy is global, and capital moves rapidly. No country can build its tax policy entirely in isolation from the rest of the world. In Finland, the extremes of tax competition have traditionally been avoided, but competitiveness must be assessed realistically. The business operating environment must be on a stable footing, and taxation must be predictable. At the same time, tax evasion and harmful tax planning that undermine the fairness of the system and divert funds from the public sector must be combated. Taxation must be such that it treats honest actors fairly and actively addresses abuses.

The future of public finances also depends on the functioning of the labour market. Work remains the most important source of revenue for the state, and strengthening employment is part of economic balance. Labour market rigidities, labour shortages, skills gaps, and regional differences are factors that weaken public finances in the long term. Labour market reforms must not be one-sided; they must be based on dialogue and a balance between workers' security and businesses' flexibility. Well-functioning labour markets are not the opposite of a strong social safety net; they complement each other.

Taxation and public finance are ultimately a question of trust. Citizens accept a high tax rate only if they feel they are receiving value for their money. The quality of services, the efficiency of administration, and the transparency of the political system determine how people relate to taxation. If public finances appear inefficient or unfair, trust erodes. Therefore, openness, clear decision-making, and the ability to justify economic policy solutions are essential. Tax policy must not be unpredictable or inconsistent; it must be long-term and grounded in expertise.

From the Bridge Builders' perspective, taxation and public finance are not mere numbers, but the foundation of society's functionality. Taxation enables shared wellbeing, public finance builds stability, and investments create growth. The system must not be burdensome or unfair; it must be clear, incentivising, and just. Strengthening public finance is not merely an economic policy task; it is part of society's moral duty: to leave to future generations a country that is debt-free, stable, and vital.