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Pathways for a future cadastral system: A socio-technical approach

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Abstract

A vast array of trends and innovations, such as drones and person-to-person trust solutions, have been proposed to revolutionize the task of recording land and property rights. There is, however, a gap in current research regarding how to approach systematically the future(s) of cadastral systems. This paper introduces socio-technical transitions theory and multi-level perspective (MLP) framework in particular as a way to structure potential pathways for cadastral systems. The approach emphasizes the role of institutional rules of the game – the regulatory, normative and cognitive institutional elements – in socio-technical transition processes. Using the Finnish cadastral system as a case study, we illustrate the approach by forming three alternative transition pathways: (1) a cadastral system under digital transformation, (2) differentiating urban and rural cadastral systems, and (3) a cadastral system facing new data management challenges. After describing each transition pathway with a narrative storyline, we reflect them in light of previous discourses of the cadastral domain. Thereby, the study provides new insights into discussions about the future of cadastral systems and land administration in general.

1. Introduction

In parts of the world where cadastral systems exist, they are often based on a model of centralized recording of land and property rights, restrictions, and responsibilities (RRRs). The status quo is, however, increasingly challenged both by the academia and industry. For instance, the technological potentials of blockchain technology and volunteered geographic information (VGI) in recording land rights have been under vivid discussion lately (e.g. Anand et al., 2016; Rahmatizadeh et al., 2016). Further, anticipation should not be limited only to new potential technological solutions. Social aspects should be included into the discussion as well: How do changing demographics affect land use, and in turn, land administration operations? What kind of (public) services are expected in the coming decades? When all these questions are asked simultaneously, understanding the associated dynamics becomes a key issue. Hence, we believe, it is meaningful to explore in a more detailed manner alternative future pathways for cadastral systems and try to better understand their connections to the current day.

This study seeks to understand potential future pathways for cadastral systems, and therefore, to help to prepare for the uncertainty related to future. The study is explorative by nature and envisions how the future cadastral system might evolve going forward in time. Thereby we also provide new insights, perspectives and ideas to discussions about the future of cadastral systems and land administration in general. The study focuses on long-term, narrative explorations of futures (i.e. explorative scenarios, see e.g. Börjeson et al. (2006) or Banister and Hickman (2013) for a typology of scenarios). It adapts a 10 to 15-year time horizon to leave enough room for consciously different choices and directions of development. Exploratory scenarios are often constructed within a two by two matrix, where after the recognition of axes the process continues by filling the storylines in each quadrant of the matrix\textsuperscript{1}. Critics have argued that these kinds of typical scenario techniques are too simplistic and linear and “lack attention for actors, their decisions, interactions and learning processes, and the way these shape twisting transition paths” (Hofman et al., 2004). To better account for this kind of endogenous dynamics of transitions, the approach taken here is instead based on insights from socio-technical transition theory.

While not much research has been done in this area, we connect to the work by Otten and Stubkjær (2008), who have proposed that cadastral systems can be described and analysed as a socio-technical system. They have described cadastral systems followingly: “on the one hand they are technology-based representations of land units, but on

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\textsuperscript{1}This kind of approach for explorative scenario building was recently applied also in the context of land administration by Zetterqvist (2019).

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the other hand they are part of the institutional arrangements relating to land and its functions within the societies they serve". Other authors have also advocated adopting a systemic view in describing and analysing systems of land registration (e.g. Zevenbergen, 2004). Moreover, we find a connection to the work by Ho et al. (2013, 2015) who have explored institutional issues within the land administration sector and especially regarding a 3D cadastre and suggested that institutional elements underpinning the cadastral system might be the key for better understanding cadastral innovation. Most importantly, our study links to future-oriented studies conducted within the cadastral domain (Riekkinen et al., 2016; Krigsholm et al., 2017), as these studies provide a starting point for understanding the driving forces of cadastral systems.

A well-known heuristic approach, the multi-level perspective (MLP) framework2 (Geels, 2002), is used as a conceptual and theoretical starting point here. In the MLP a socio-technical system consists of three analytical levels: landscape, regime and niche levels (see Fig. 1 in Section 2 for a graphical description of the MLP framework). The landscape level presents the broader political, social and cultural processes of society that are expected to change slowly and outside the control of socio-technical regimes (Smith et al., 2010). The regime level presents the stable and dominant way of realizing the societal function that the particular socio-technical system aims to fulfill (Geels, 2011). The socio-technical regime consists of actors, systems (resources, material aspects) and formal, cognitive, and normative rules (van Bree et al., 2010). These highly institutionalized yet not necessarily coherent rules orient and coordinate the activities of the actors that reproduce the various elements of socio-technical systems (e.g. Fuenfschilling and Truffer, 2014). The niche level completes the framework and its role is to "provide 'protective spaces' for path-breaking, radical alternatives whose performance may not be competitive against the selection environment prevailing in the regime" (Smith et al., 2010).

The MLP posits that regimes are subject to influence by pressures stemming from both the niche and landscape levels. Interactions between the levels may result in a system transition, when transition is defined as a change from one sociotechnical regime to another. The main objective of this study is to illustrate how the MLP heuristic and related concepts can be used as an alternative way to help to understand in which direction the land administration sector and cadastral systems in particular could be heading. By setting up a case study of the Finnish cadastral system – an example of a reliable and well-functioning cadastral system (NB, 2019) – this research answers two questions. First, how is the regime described in the case of the Finnish cadastral system and which niche and landscape level factors are challenging the regime? Second, based on the MLP analyses, what kind of alternative pathways can be recognized for the Finnish cadastral system?

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews briefly the theoretical and conceptual grounds. In Section 3 we present the research process, methods used for material collection, and the case study subject. In Section 4 the landscapes and niches of the Finnish cadastral system are reviewed, followed by a description of the Finnish cadastral system regime and a formulation of three alternative pathways for the system in Section 5. Then, in Section 6 we discuss the drafted pathways in comparison to previous cadastral literature. The paper concludes with a summary and proposals for future research.

2 Conceptual and interpretive frame: the multi-level perspective and socio-technical change

This study draws theoretically on the MLP framework (Geels, 2002) around which an extensive branch of research has developed during the past decade or so (Genus and Coles, 2008; Smith et al., 2010). The MLP heuristic (Fig. 1) helps to structure societal dynamics into 'levels' that put pressure on the socio-technical system. The regime level forms the backbone of stability for the socio-technical system through dominant cultures, structures, and practices embodied in both physical and immaterial infrastructures (such as routines, actors, networks, regulations, etc). It is often described as 'dynamically stable', referring to the path-dependent yet over time gradually changing nature of the regime (e.g. Genus and Coles, 2008). On the landscape level dominant trends and evolutions that are extremely difficult to deviate from and nearly impossible to change, put external pressure on the system in place. Both slow-changing trends and exogenous shocks like wars and economic crises are considered landscape developments (Geels, 2018). Finally, the niche level describes narrow, protected segments of society where novelties (new technologies, rules, organizational arrangements, or their combinations) are created and tested. These novelties challenge the stabilized way of realizing the societal function, though many of them never break through to the regime.

2.1. The socio-technical regime and the institutional rules of the game

The socio-technical regime – the 'deep structure' that accounts for the stability of an existing socio-technical system – is a key concept in the MLP framework (Fuenfschilling and Truffer, 2014). The regime ultimately determines the pace and direction of transition processes (van Welie et al., 2018). This, as Konrad et al. (2008) propose, makes the regime a particularly appropriate subject to analyse ‘co-evolutionary transformation processes’. We also note that both the niche and landscape levels are defined in relation to the regime and can be thus seen as derived concepts in the MLP (Geels, 2011). It has been noted, however, for instance by Fuenfschilling and Truffer (2014) that empirical studies often present the regime as homogenous and coherent, which in the majority of cases does not match reality. To avoid this pitfall, we zoom in on the regime concept next.

The socio-technical regime consists of (1) a network of actors and social groups, (2) rules that coordinate and structure the activities of actors, and (3) material and technical elements (Verbong and Geels, 2007). The rules can be further divided into regulative, normative, and cognitive ones, following the well-known 'Three pillars' framework' of Scott (1995, 2001). In this literature, rules equal institutions in which technologies are embedded (Sutherland et al., 2015). Geels (2004) for instance explains that he prefers to use the word 'rules' to avoid confusion between institutions and (public) organizations. Further, it is good to keep in mind that socio-technical studies mostly borrow the concept of institutions from neo-institutional economics, where institutions consist of formal rules (hard institutions), informal constraints (soft institutions), and their enforcement characteristics (e.g. North, 1990, 1994). Both formal and informal institutions are considered part of the regime.

The MLP literature commonly recognizes five regime dimensions or ‘sub-regimes’ – technology, science, policy, socio-cultural, and user and market regime – that each have their own set of rules and trajectories for those rules (Geels, 2002, 2004; Ghosh and Schot, 2019). While the sub-regimes have their own dynamics, they also co-evolve together (Geels, 2011). The regulative rules include explicit regulatory processes such as laws, formal rules, policies, and standards. In the case of cadastral systems, formal regulations of technology, technical standards like LADM (ISO 19152, 2012ISO 19152, 2012), and competition rules are examples of regulative elements. The normative pillar comprises rules like values, expectations, norms, responsibilities, and duties. Therefore, normative rules prescribe what is considered as appropriate behaviour, but they are not necessarily formalized in written documents (Raven et al., 2019). Instead, they internalize in the behaviour of actors through social interactions. For instance, expectations of technological development and actors’ role perceptions are considered as
normative rules. The cognitive pillar refers to rules like shared conceptions, guiding principles, symbols, and paradigms. Perhaps the most obvious example for cadastral systems is the prevailing 2D paradigm, i.e. that maps, drawings and surveying practices support the 2D representation of cadastral units. The actors might not even be aware of the cultural-cognitive elements, but they are fundamental and constitutive to social life. Though there is no definitive hierarchy for the rule types, regulative rules can be seen as less fundamental than cognitive and normative rules in the context of socio-technical change (Ghosh and Schot, 2019). Further, we note that the rules of the normative and cognitive pillar are not tied to the trajectories of particular sub-regimes but instead often guide the operation of the whole regime.

2.2. Socio-technical change

When shifting the discussion from the MLP framework and related concepts to future socio-technical systems, it is necessary to define first some of the most important terms. As mentioned, in the MLP literature transitions denote shifts from one socio-technical configuration to another over time1. Pathways, then, conceptualize the complex processes and patterns involved with transitions (Rosenbloom, 2017). Though the majority of the MLP studies focus on the analysis of historical transitions, the framework has also been applied to the exploration of future transition pathways for domains like electricity (e.g. Elzen et al., 2004; Foxon et al., 2010) and urban mobility (Moradi and Vagnoni, 2018). The theoretical considerations of the forward-looking studies are often formulated in a way that they are in line with elements familiar from foresight and scenario methods, such as uncertainty, surprise, and presentation of alternative futures (Markard et al., 2009).

Foxon et al. (2010) present an approach for outlining transition pathways that is highly cited and indeed a good starting point for building qualitative pathways (Fig. 2). Their approach, in short, builds on three steps: (1) characterization of the existing regime, its internal tensions and landscape pressures on it, (2) identification of dynamic processes at the niche level, and (3) specification of interactions giving rise to or strongly influencing transition pathways. It is also more widely acknowledged that socio-technical storylines should be guided by a logic that draws on socio-technical theories such as the MLP (e.g. Pathways project, 2016). Moreover, there should be an endogenous logic for the transition storylines that is based on the choices, decision, strategies, and beliefs of the actors (ibid). This means that a pathway does not emerge out of the blue – instead, there should be a clear reasoning available to why it develops.

Ghosh and Schot (2019) provide a slightly different perspective on socio-technical change and regime change in particular, which builds on the regime dimensions and rules. They note that three types of regime change exists: (1) regime optimization, (2) regime transformation, and (3) regime transition. In all cases regime change starts from within, i.e. a regime becoming less coherent and susceptible to tensions between actors. Regime optimization is characterized by changes in regulative rules within one or two regime dimensions. The latter two, in contrast, depict a deeper impact on the regime, and include changes also in cognitive and normative rules. What should be noted as well is that, by definition, the trajectories of different regime dimensions are aligned and connected with each other under regime transformation and transitions (ibid).

To summarize, we conceptualize the socio-technical change occurring through interactions between the landscape, regime, and relevant niches. The interactions take place between the rules, actors and networks, as well as the technologies of the regime and niches. Opportunities for transition may come either from landscape pressures or new radical innovations breaking through to the regime. The regime must be, however, receptive to change in both cases.

3. Research context and methods

The empirical findings of the paper are based on a case study. In this section the research process and methods used for material collection are explained, followed by characterization of the case study subject, the Finnish cadastral system. It should be emphasized that the findings presented in this study are illustrative and oriented towards presenting narratives of a few possible transitions. Hence, we cannot provide an exhaustive assessment of all imaginable change processes that cadastral systems might face in coming years.

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1 Hence, socio-technical transitions differ profoundly from technological transitions since they include, in addition to technological dimension, changes in user practices and institutional structures (Markard et al., 2012).
3.1. Research process

The main objective of the paper is to test how the concepts of MLP framework and socio-technical change can assist in the challenging task of understanding the future(s) of the Finnish cadastral system. To accomplish that, we set up a process consisting of following steps: 1) review of landscape pressures and niche level innovations, 2) characterization of the regime and its dynamics, and 3) formation of alternative pathways (Table 1).

The empirical data is collected through literature (reports, peer-reviewed publications) and two focus group discussions. For identification of ‘cadastral system relevant’ landscape and niche level factors we rely on literary sources, whereas the focus group discussions were targeted to (1) build understanding of the current cadastral system regime and its dynamics and (2) support the formation of pathway variants (see Table 1 for further details). Following the principles of focus group methodology (Stewart et al., 2007), the group was purposely selected and consisted of four land administration professionals with extensive experience within the domain. It should be stressed that the sampling follows the principle of segmentation that ensures more fluent facilitation of the discussions as the participants share similar features (Morgan, 1996), in this case shared professional background in the field of land administration. One participant has professional background in research and particularly in remote sensing applications, the second one also in research but with specialization in land policies and real estate valuation, the third one in cadastral surveys and in leading the productional processes of the cadastral agency, and the fourth one in governance and land administration jurisprudence. Therefore, the aim was to compensate the rather low number of participants by gathering together professionals with different backgrounds. Since the expertise of recruited participants covered the regime dimensions reasonably well, no additional candidates were contacted. Adding a collaborative element to pathway development was motivated by the premise of building a broader and more integrated perspective of the potential transitions. Before the discussions, the participants were introduced to the basic concepts of the MLP framework and especially the socio-technical regime and its five dimensions. The discussions were recorded as well as documented by writing down the notable aspects brought up during the session. Both sessions lasted approximately three hours.

3.2. The Finnish cadastral system characterized

Like in many western countries, in Finland the cadastral system has evolved from a fiscal to juridical system, and further towards a multi-purpose one during the past rough four hundred years. In addition, Finland provides a good example of a country that has a well-established and reliable land administration (WB, 2019).

The current form of cadastral system in Finland can be summarized

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<td>Step 1: Landscape and niche level scanning</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Review of literary sources to conduct lists of relevant landscape pressures and niche innovations</td>
<td>Four landscape developments and twenty-one niche innovations</td>
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<td>Step 2: Current regime and its dynamics, factors challenging the regime</td>
<td>Focus group discussion</td>
<td>Discussion on regime dimensions, main drivers and challenges</td>
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as follows: public authorities (NLS and municipalities) maintain comprehensive registers (cadastre and land register) as well as the cadastral map and perform the cadastral surveys. Hence the Finnish system follows the German type of cadastral system, where the land register and cadastrale are closely connected. Real property rights are allocated into either the cadastral or the land register component\(^4\). The land register enjoys full positive and negative faith and credit. The cadastral, in contrast, does not have the same level of faith and credit due to known shortcomings, e.g. unreliable accuracy of boundary marks and differences in practices of registering rights of use, easements and restrictions. Land parcel is the basic spatial unit (a real property unit can consist of several parcels) of the Finnish cadastral system, and built properties are currently not listed in the cadastral. In this study cadastral surveys are considered a part of the cadastral system as well. Subdivision is by far the most common cadastral survey procedure in Finland. Some 12 408 subdivisions were carried out in year 2018 and the average duration was 0,41 years (NLS, 2018). The Finnish land information system (FLIS) is the main deliverable of the above registers. FLIS information is used for instance to support land use planning, exchange of real properties and several type of juridical decisions (Krigsholm et al., 2018).

4. Landscapes and niches of the Finnish cadastral system

In this Section we review the landscape and niche levels of the Finnish cadastral system. Considering the future-oriented perspective taken in the study, it is reasonable to utilize recent megatrend studies and reports for the identification of land administration relevant landscape developments. Krigsholm et al. (2017) have studied megatrends in the context of the Finnish cadastral system (original source of megatrends Z punkt, 2016). According to the definition of a megatrend (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014), each respective megatrend should appear as long-standing and influential as observed today. Hence, even though we cannot state future landscape developments with absolute certainty, using widely recognized trends that previous evidence supports as particularly relevant for cadastral systems seems like a justified approach here. To reduce the complexity of study in Section 5, we compress the eight megatrends that are considered to be of key importance for the Finnish cadastral system (Krigsholm et al., 2017) under four landscape developments: (1) technological landscape, (2) economic landscape, (3) political landscape, and (4) social landscape (see Table 3). To validate the relevance of the aforementioned megatrends, we go through recent grey literature on trends and megatrends (e.g. EY, 2018; EEA, 2015; KPMG, 2014) and list the supporting sources in Table 2 as well.

To describe promising niche innovations is a greater challenge. A large variety of alternatives is developed simultaneously and each of them provides some sort of promise to break into the regime level, but it is impossible to predict upfront which alternatives work in practice. Nevertheless, some sort of selection mechanism is needed for choosing the most potential niche innovations. Since the geographical focus of the study is in Finland, we use publications of the Committee for the Future of the Finnish Parliament that focus on foresight and especially on technology anticipation (TuVJ, 2014, 2016, 2018). These reports have been conducted by futures studies professionals and they reflect the expectations of a large pool of experts and therefore summarize a broad view of future technologies and innovations and their anticipated impacts on the society. For the purpose of our study, however, a list of hundred innovations is too long. Thus, we need some criteria to cut down the list. The reports are structured under 20 value-producing networks, and we looked for value-producing networks that share some similarities with the land administration sector. Particularly, similarities in industry characteristics (e.g. the level of regulation, type of services provided), in nature of work (e.g. the average level of required expertise), and in societal impact of the value-producing network were looked for, and as a result, we focused on innovations that were listed under the following value-producing networks: (1) Work and earnings, (2) Built environment, (3) Exchange, (4) Observations and knowledge, (5) Safety, (6) Power structures, (7) Ability to co-operate, and (8) Know-how and its demonstration.

A second criteria used here is the so-called ‘general impact’ score calculated in TuVJ (2018) that aims to condense the expected breadth and extent of impact for each innovation. We include only innovations that receive the highest or second highest score (on a scale 1–4). Using these criteria, a list of nineteen niche-level innovations was compiled (Appendix). The list includes many innovations and technologies familiar in cadastral discourse, like quadcopters and drones, sensor technologies, virtual and augmented reality, and person-to-person trust solutions, but also some more surprising innovations such as gamification of collaboration and society.

5. Towards transition pathways for the Finnish cadastral system

This section presents the findings of focus group meetings. In the first focus group meeting, outputs of the landscape and niche level scanning phase were used as a source material. First, all five regime dimensions were discussed, and their key characteristics were identified (Section 5.1.). Simultaneously, the linkages between dimensions were discussed. The main goal of the first focus group session was to (1) identify the key drivers at both landscape and niche level, and (2) collect their potential impacts across the regime dimensions. These results are reported in Section 5.2. At the end of the session, the pre-conditions for alternative pathways for the Finnish cadastral system were determined, i.e. the focus group participants decided which landscape and niche developments were considered as main drivers for the pathway variants.

In the second meeting the focus was on the formation of pathway variants. Based on the findings of the first focus group meeting, initial drafts of the pathways were formulated before the session. The drafts acted as guidelines for the discussion, and the focus was on enriching and complementing the alternatives. Hence, the pathway narratives are results of group discussions, not participants’ or researchers’ individual perceptions. The goal was that, by the end of the second session, three alternative pathways with logical and coherent storylines were drafted that all participants agreed upon. The pathway variants are described in Section 5.3.

5.1. The current regime and its dynamics

The focus group discussions indicated that in the case of the Finnish cadastral system it is more reasonable to handle technology and science as a one instead of two separate regimes. Characteristic for the science and technology regime (hereafter ST regime) is to create new knowledge and research used to develop and justify technological decisions. In particular, it is crucial that these decisions enable the realization of quality requirements coming from the user and market regime. Further, the (dis)proportionality between technology-oriented studies and legal or social-oriented cadastral system studies were brought up in the discussion. The ST regime and policy regime have a prevailing connection as policy directions can either hinder or advance the deployment of new practices developed within the ST regime. For instance, in Finland geoinformatics – both research on geoinformatics and practical applications – has been heavily on the policy agenda during recent years (MMF, 2018). This is just one example of a policy goal arching the two regimes. The policy regime also produces the formal regulations (laws,
decrees), and this function makes it connected to all other sub-regimes. It should be noted, however, that in the case of the Finnish cadastral system the formal regulations control only the content of the cadastre and land registry, not the technological solutions.

The socio-cultural regime (SC regime) lays the ultimate foundation for the cadastral system: rules such as acceptance and reliability of cadastral information, and perceptions of land and land ownership in the society have an impact on the willingness to invest in land and property. Hence, the rules of the SC regime contribute to the prosperity of the whole economy and make it less prone to frictions. Moreover, the taxation of land and property and perceptions related to it are considered a feature of the SC regime. Regarding the user and market regime (UM regime), the question of what the market in the case of the Finnish cadastral system in the first place is, was discussed. The discussion did not lead to an unambiguous definition for the market of the Finnish cadastral system, but it should be clarified that in the rest of the paper the market is understood as any structure where the exchange of goods or services is somehow connected to cadastral information. Therefore, in addition to real estate transactions for instance many public services such as land use planning or environmental protection are part of the market. We can say with certainty, however, that the high volume of the Finnish real estate and property market (9,3 bn euros in total in 2018 according to KTI, 2019) translates to high expectations about the quality and accessibility of information and the convenience of services in land administration. What comes to expectations about the quality and accessibility of information and the convenience of services in land administration. What comes to expectations about the quality and accessibility of information and the convenience of services in land administration.

5.2. Characterisation of drivers and barriers at landscape, regime, and niche levels

Next, we are particularly keen on understanding the potential changes taking place along the regime dimensions. Leaning against the MLP framework the focus group considered how the landscape developments (Section 5.2.1.) and new radical innovations from the niche level (Section 5.2.2.) challenge the current regime, to gain more understanding of what the most significant drivers and barriers for the potential transitions are.

5.2.1. Landscape-regime anticipation

First the potential changes to regime dimensions deriving from the relevant landscape developments (Table 2) were considered. Table 3 lists the potential changes identified during the focus group discussion and denotes the related regime dimension with a letter or a letter combination. The role of the third column in Table 3 is to demonstrate how widely the potential implications affect the regime.

The pressure from the technological landscape was assumed to lead to multiple changes. First, stricter requirements for quality and accuracy of information were supposed. Although the Finnish cadastral system performs well in international comparison in this respect, for instance the forest sector already in present day would benefit from reliable, higher accuracy information of the property division. Related to new frontiers created by technological development, a coordinate-based cadastral challenging a boundary-marked cadastrum paradigm was seen as a potential change. A more digitalized environment could lead to an emergence of new service chains and a more networked register authority. In addition, mobile services being preferred over electronic services and the end of traditional transaction services were considered changes affecting user practices and preferences. Finally, a requirement of automated upkeep of registers was seen as a likely new policy goal.

Economic landscape developments and their potential impacts were considered a more difficult subject of speculation. Just two potential shifts were brought up, though both could induce grand implications to the cadastral system regime. First, the emergence of a new ecosystem type of thinking was seen as a possible outcome, though the conservativeness of actors causes some uncertainty on the scope and pace of this change. Furthermore, the focus group emphasized that the emergence of business or service ecosystems is linked to technological development as well, even though here they are categorized under the economic landscape. Second, one very likely development related to the management of complexities in the context of cadastral systems is the increasing complexity of commodities market. This would imply that real estate transactions turn into asset transactions or something similar. It should be noted, however, that the Finnish real estate market is polarized (e.g. BoF, 2018), and the new transaction types are likely to
develop at those areas where the real estate is valuable.

The pressure from the political landscape was thought to have implications especially on data protection. The participants anticipated that new technical protection mechanisms are needed to secure that the information in registers remains unchanged. Continuing with the security issue, the role of cybersecurity must be acknowledged to be much stronger in the future – considering that the cadastral data in Finland is already digital apart from historical records. The increasing – yet somewhat contradictory – requirements of both higher open data access and personal data protection are changes already taking place in the context of land administration. Their impact and importance are expected to increase in the future. Moreover, there was a consensus among the group that the government needs to adapt the role of service provider, i.e. learn to act in a more agile and customer-friendly manner.

Social landscape discussions mainly focused on the urbanization-led changes to the regime. The share of urban population is growing in Finland (OSF, 2019a), and if this trend continues during next decades, it is apparent that real property owners (i.e. owners of land used in agriculture of forestry, or other type of inherited property) will live in the city as well, thus managing their property from distance. Longer distances to owned property could mean looser emotional ties to land, which could lead to lesser active management interests and increasing popularity of new forms of land ownership such as jointly owned forests and real estate investment funds. This in turn would mean that users of cadastral information are more often professionals in the field of real agriculture of forestry, or other type of inherited property) will live in the city as well, thus managing their property from distance. Longer distances to owned property could mean looser emotional ties to land, which could lead to lesser active management interests and increasing popularity of new forms of land ownership such as jointly owned forests and real estate investment funds. This in turn would mean that users of cadastral information are more often professionals in the field of real estate. The remaining two innovations, MyData and GDPR, and encrypted and anonymous communications, generated a different kind of speculation among the focus group. Their potential impacts to the Finnish cadastral system were considered to be limited only to transactions, not to the cadastral system as whole. Augmented and virtual reality and imaging and positioning through sensor technologies, respectively, were accounted as probable technologies to break through to the regime level, but they will likely contribute to regime optimization rather than transformation or transition. Overall, the focus group participants strongly emphasized that the above innovations may provide possibilities to new services as well as to new ways of organizing production processes. They were seen, however, as means to enhance the current processes rather than as factors that have the potential to shift the whole course of the Finnish cadastral system.

The remaining two innovations, MyData and GDPR, and encrypted and anonymous communications, generated a different kind of speculation among the focus group. Their potential impacts to the Finnish cadastral system were considered to be more profound. MyData and GDPR, in particular, was rated as a potential re-former of the underlying normative and cognitive rules of the cadastral system regime. The central notions of this innovation, a right to be forgotten and a right to control personal information to be stored (more about MyData: LVM, 2018), bring up many interesting aspects to speculate. As stated above in the discussion about the political landscape, already now it is evident that growing calls for open (government) data and personal data protection on the other hand create contradictions. The MyData concept as a human-centric approach to the managing and processing of personal information takes this development much further and makes the current logic of personal information management of public register authorities no longer functioning. Encrypted and anonymous communications could, in an extreme case, shake the very core of a cadastral system and make its reliability and credibility questionable. The core issue is the safety of the system as weaker telecommunications imply more hacking attempts.

### Table 3

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<tr>
<th>Landscape development</th>
<th>Potential implications</th>
<th>Related regime dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technological landscape</td>
<td>Strict requirements for quality and accuracy of information; Mobile services preferred over electronic services; Boundary-marked cadastre paradigm challenged; Traditional transaction ‘services’ challenged; New service chains and more networked register authority; Automated upkeep of registers</td>
<td>ST, UM, SC, ST, UM, SC, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic landscape</td>
<td>Emergence of ecosystem type of thinking; Real estate transactions turn into asset transactions</td>
<td>UM, P, SC, UM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political landscape</td>
<td>Technical protection mechanisms: the information needs to remain unchanged; Role of cybersecurity must be emphasized; Increased requirements for both openness and personal data protection; Government must adapt the role of service provider</td>
<td>ST, P, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social landscape</td>
<td>Increasing popularity of new forms of land and property ownership; Higher responsibility of the legality of official actions; ‘Professionals’ as customers; Register keeping concentrated to a government authority</td>
<td>SC, P, UM, P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.2. Niche-regime anticipation

We complement the above discussion by considering a group of niche innovations relevant for the Finnish cadastral system. From the anticipation point of view, the relevant questions related to niche-regime interaction are: Which innovations show most potential to disrupt the regime? And more importantly, what will they do to the regime? A list of nineteen niche innovations (Appendix) was presented to the focus group. First each participant was asked to individually pick the five most influential innovations, after which those innovations that were mentioned at least twice were discussed more closely as a group. The following six innovations were selected by more than one expert but were also collectively agreed upon before the discussion on niche-regime anticipation was opened: MyData and GDPR, quadcopters and drones, augmented reality and virtual reality, P2P-trust solutions, encrypted and anonymous communications, and imaging and positioning through sensor technologies.

There was a strong consensus among the participants that four out of six innovations; quadcopters and drones, augmented and virtual reality, P2P-trust solutions, and imaging and positioning through sensor technologies were seen primarily as enabling innovations or technologies. For instance, quadcopters and drones were seen as a means to provide reliable information cost-efficiently – limiting the impacts to regulatory and normative rules of the regime. The impact of P2P-trust solutions (including blockchain technology), was considered to be limited only to transactions, not to the cadastral system as whole. Augmented and virtual reality and imaging and positioning through sensor technologies, respectively, were accounted as probable technologies to break through to the regime level, but they will likely contribute to regime optimization rather than transformation or transition. Overall, the focus group participants strongly emphasized that the above innovations may provide possibilities to new services as well as to new ways of organizing production processes. They were seen, however, as means to enhance the current processes rather than as factors that have the potential to shift the whole course of the Finnish cadastral system.

The remaining two innovations, MyData and GDPR, and encrypted and anonymous communications, generated a different kind of speculation among the focus group. Their potential impacts to the Finnish cadastral system were considered as more profound. MyData and GDPR, in particular, was rated as a potential re-former of the underlying normative and cognitive rules of the cadastral system regime. The central notions of this innovation, a right to be forgotten and a right to control personal information to be stored (more about MyData: LVM, 2018), bring up many interesting aspects to speculate. As stated above in the discussion about the political landscape, already now it is evident that growing calls for open (government) data and personal data protection on the other hand create contradictions. The MyData concept as a human-centric approach to the managing and processing of personal information takes this development much further and makes the current logic of personal information management of public register authorities no longer functioning. Encrypted and anonymous communications could, in an extreme case, shake the very core of a cadastral system and make its reliability and credibility questionable. The core issue is the safety of the system as weaker telecommunications imply more hacking attempts.
5.3. Transition pathways for the Finnish cadastral system

Next, storylines for three transition pathways for the Finnish cadastral system in light of the priorities and challenges identified above are developed. The presented storylines are an outcome of focus group discussions and following aspects were considered for each pathway: (1) What are the key changes overall? (2) Which concepts relate to these changes? (3) Who are the key actors, and what are their roles and interactions? (4) What are the major implications to the design and operation of the Finnish cadastral system? and (5) What are the key challenges to the realization of the pathway? The aspects stem from the theoretical background and their main role is to assist in structuring the discussions. Following aspects were considered for each pathway:

Pathway 1: Cadastral system under digital transformation

The first pathway variant develops under a strong pressure from the technological landscape and digitalization in particular. Some substantial steps towards a more digital and automated cadastral system have been already taken in Finland. For instance, the purchase of real estate can be done electronically, and the process for a registration of title to a property starts automatically after a property is transferred from one owner to the next. Eyeing forward in time, this kind of development is expected to increase incrementally further – and to extend to a full automation of (at least the relatively simple) cadastral survey proceedings. In addition, the pathway envisions a shift towards the management of a wider digital ecosystem where the governmental authority produces and stores the cadastral data, on top of which (private) service providers create different kinds of services. This kind of ‘system resistance’ might be difficult to overcome. Another challenge, considering this is the most technologically-oriented variant of the pathways, might be recognizing the relevant niche innovations from a large pool of emerging innovations. Even currently we can list a plethora of innovations, starting from virtual and augmented reality that could potentially enhance the digital transformation of cadastral systems. Further, in the discussions it was stressed that the challenge lies in recognizing the effects of digitalization in all processes, not just on the obvious ones like optimizing the workflow or digitizing the old archives.

Pathway 2: Differentiating urban and rural cadastral system

The second pathway originates from more comprehensive changes in social structures and development. In the discussions, it was expected that an increasing share of the population concentrates in a few larger cities, which would denote an increasing intensity of land use for these areas. This, in turn, denotes a diverging development of property prices, i.e. decreasing or even negative property values in remote locations and rising values in those where people accumulate (this kind of price development is already evident in Finland, OSF, 2019b), as well as an emergence of new more complex land and property interests (RRR’s) to record in urban areas. Due to the increasing complexity, data models of land administration need to be updated as well. As sort of a branching point for this pathway we assume that the described divergence leads to dual development for the cadastral system as well. For urban areas, more accurate position information is produced and also the available information content is wider to answer the needs of more intense land use. For rural areas, where lower financial interests fall upon the land and property, the accuracy and ‘breadth-of-content’ requirements are not on the same level.

Besides the urbanization development, this pathway connects to a cadastral system, more attention to management of diversity is needed – after all, the main feature of this vision is the shift to a substantially more networked environment. Also, the reliability of the technical solutions will face higher requirements. Before any drastic reconfigurations can be made, some extensive knowledge on networks and the new business ecosystem environment is needed. This could imply for instance a full account of the economic and technical requirements of the digital service ecosystem. Finally, compared to the current situation, more resources need to be directed to the upkeep of the system.

The greatest challenge related to the above described shift to a new era of closer networks and business ecosystems must be to overcome the actors’ perceptions of their own roles and a need to hold on to traditions and established practices. This kind of ‘system resistance’ might be difficult to overcome. Another challenge, considering this is the most technologically-oriented variant of the pathways, might be recognizing the relevant niche innovations from a large pool of emerging innovations. Even currently we can list a plethora of innovations, starting from virtual and augmented reality that could potentially enhance the digital transformation of cadastral systems. Further, in the discussions it was stressed that the challenge lies in recognizing the effects of digitalization in all processes, not just on the obvious ones like optimizing the workflow or digitizing the old archives.

Pathway 3: Cadastral system facing new data management challenges

Increasing importance of cross-national regulation; Cross-national back-up mechanism; Users with stronger control (or interest of having control) over their own data; International co-operation and coordination; Safety and data management

Centralized solutions; Increasing maintenance costs

Besides the urbanization development, this pathway connects to a cadastral system, more attention to management of diversity is needed – after all, the main feature of this vision is the shift to a substantially more networked environment. Also, the reliability of the technical solutions will face higher requirements. Before any drastic reconfigurations can be made, some extensive knowledge on networks and the new business ecosystem environment is needed. This could imply for instance a full account of the economic and technical requirements of the digital service ecosystem. Finally, compared to the current situation, more resources need to be directed to the upkeep of the system.

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call for more efficient use of public finances, which seems inevitable considering the ageing population and declining number of taxpayers. Hence, this vision demands some recasting of financial and human resources. They need to be targeted to the areas where the cadastral information is most valuable. It should be noted, however, that the objective is not to diminish the level of services for any areas – rather to be more cautious about the sufficient efficiency of the use of resources.

Considering these changes together, it seems apparent that also the customer base will look different compared to the current day. It is anticipated here that the percentage of so-called professional customers will increase as more of the owners or right holders will either live far away from their holdings or for other reasons choose a jointly owned forest or similar as the form of ownership. Overall, the ‘connectivity’ to land and owned property is assumed to decrease.

Responding to increasing complexity is the key task for design and operation: in addition to data models that are able to handle the complexity of RRR’s, also the interoperability with BIM and other models used in sectors intersecting with land administration should be acknowledged. A more specific issue related to the Finnish case is the manner of integrating properties and buildings as part of the cadastral system as currently this information is collected and maintained by a different authority. Challenges include, besides the complexity and its management, anticipating how fast and broadly the land ownership norms change. Presumably it takes some time before new forms of tenure become more common, and the ‘professionalization’ of the customer base sets out. High dependence on political decision-making is, still, probably the biggest a challenge/uncertainty: regional politics and the political atmosphere in general have a strong control over the re-allocation of resources – which is in a major role in this pathway.

Pathway 3: Cadastral system facing new data management challenges

The rationale behind this vision is that the current rules of data management hold no longer in the future. They are challenged both by the increasing threat of cyberattacks, and citizens’ increasing interest of having control over their own data, manifested by the MyData movement. These developments have apparent impacts on the cadastral system, since information management is one of the main functions of land administration (Dale and McLaughlin, 1999). The key changes in this pathway are the increasing importance of cross-national co-operation and responding to the growing importance of personal data management. Co-operation presents itself in the form of European Union level regulation as well as creation of a safety backup mechanism. Hence, this vision presents that the conception of cadastral systems up to the degree this study does. In particular, the spreading of the effects of cybersecurity attacks if they materialize – and their impacts on a narrow aspect such as cadastral survey proceedings, data models and database structures, or legislation. Although these kinds of images of the future are valuable as they help us clearly picture what the future might hold, our findings indicate that very few niche innovations might have the potential to change the rules of several or all regime dimensions, which would denote that relying on a limited number of innovations or technologies as a source of transformative change is not a very fruitful starting point.

Hence, in this paper we argue that more nuanced ways of understanding and analysing potential changes of cadastral systems are needed. Through interpreting the pathways in terms of the MLP approach we identified a variety of societal dynamics and challenges that are usually excluded from publications concerning the future of cadastral systems. First, even though many studies stress how continuing urbanization intensifies land use in urban areas and therefore creates more demand for creation and registration of 3D RRR’s (see e.g. Atazadeh et al., 2017; Paulsson and Paasch, 2013), few – if none – studies have speculated on the wider effects of demographic changes on cadastral systems up to the degree this study does. In particular, the suggestion of differentiating urban and rural cadastral systems have been rarely brought up. In Finland in recent history the direction has been in fact the opposite, as the regulation regarding the keeping of a cadastre in urban and rural areas was harmonized in 1985 (Lappalainen, 2002). Second, to best of our knowledge, none of the previous studies has brought up the question of how cyberattacks and new directions in personal data management challenge the functioning of cadastral systems. Also related to the third pathway, the (very broad and general) solutions presented here are new to the discussion: In Europe continent-level collaboration has thus far focused on the exchange of knowledge and practices between the actors, and the common back-up system proposed would take the co-operation to a completely new level. Third, one distinct dissimilarity is the lack of emphasis given on volunteered geographic information in the pathways. Perhaps this relates to the fact that the cadastre covers the whole country in Finland, even though some known inaccuracies for instance
in the location information exists. Therefore, improving the quality of register data with the current available technology is not seen as a priority in the coming decades since the focus lies in the complexity of possible emerging use right solutions. Further, it could be argued that the automation development described in the first pathway extends also to the collection of cadastral information, making the volunteered data collection less indispensable in the long run.

Many similarities with previous studies can also be detected. Calls for more networked register authorities and reasonably organized spatial data infrastructures (SDI) with shared values have been raised many times before (e.g. Macharis and Crompvoets, 2014; Crompvoets et al., 2004; Enemark et al., 2005). The platform management concept in case of spatial data is, however, a less examined topic (Jabbour et al., 2019). We discuss the concept of a land administration service ecosystem in a vague manner here but note that the business logic and the roles in the system are difficult determine up front. We do, still, essentially talk about a transition to a sustainable funding mechanism as do Jabbour et al. (2019) in their work. In addition, several authors have brought up the need to find new tools to manage the growing number of increasingly complex RRR’s. Continuing with data management, also the requirement of interoperability across different sectors and increasing quality requirements have been regularly mentioned in the literature. (Williamson et al., 2010, p.443; Kalantari et al., 2008.)

Considering the theoretical grounds and the concept of socio-technical change, an important question arises: What is the suitable transition pattern in the case of cadastral system? Optimizing the existing regime and respecting the long-standing traditions and practices seem to have been the strategy in most countries with developed cadastral systems. But whether this is enough for the future is probably the relevant question to be asked next. Ho et al. (2013) also underlined the inertia stemming especially from the cultural-cognitive elements in case of 3D property registration. The same inertia of cultural-cognitive elements holds – equally strong if not stronger, we believe – when the whole cadastral system is considered instead of just the property registration function, which makes the speculation about future transitions challenging.

6.2. Limitations of study

We recognize that there are limitations to our approach. First, the focus group contained only a small number of experts. Hence, lack of diversity in views brought up during the discussions must be brought up as one potential limitation. We note, however, that the aim of this study was not to conduct quantitative scenarios, but to exploit expert knowledge to illustrate the applicability of the MLP framework in the context of land administration. Therefore, a focus group method that aims to produce unexpected insights through group interaction was selected as a research method. Another limitation relates to the limited number of landscape and niche level factors considered in this study. Had we used different sources or criteria for conducting the lists used in focus group working, the outcome could have been different. In particular, the identified niche-innovations could be argued to be technology-oriented, and higher versatility in that regard would be desirable. Limiting the complexity of analysis by sticking with a non-exhaustive list of factors is necessary, though.

There are some limitations regarding the theoretical framework, too. The question of spatial scale, or rather an implicit treatment of spatial dimensions in MLP applications, is often brought up in sustainable transition literature. Some recent studies emphasize that territorial embeddedness has a larger impact on shaping the co-evolution of technologies, actors, and institutions than the original MLP framework suggests (e.g. Coenen et al., 2012). We discuss the alternative pathways on the national scale, and the scalability of our findings to other countries and further to the continental (European) and global scale should be weighted carefully. Transferability of the findings is always a debatable matter in qualitative approaches, but here we argue that the findings transfer best to contexts where some similarities in cultural and judicial background and in land registration tradition can be found. In other words, the findings should be best transferable to country contexts where mature, multipurpose cadastral systems exist.

Another often mentioned criticism towards the MLP framework is the homogenous description of regime, and following that, the too linear depiction of transitions that are mainly based on alternative technological innovations (Fuenschilling and Truffer, 2014). This paper intentionally focuses on the regime concept to avoid such small-scale portrayal of the potential transitions and emphasizes the importance to focus on wider developments rather than single technologies that were seen more as enablers than system disrupters. Nevertheless, providing a realistic enough picture of the regime, its dynamics and dimensions, which are particularly prone to change of rules, is a challenge.

7. Conclusions

In this study concepts that are more familiar from studies on sustainability transitions have been exploited to build alternative transition pathways for cadastral systems. The empirical part presents an illustrative case study of the Finnish cadastral system. The process of drafting the pathways did not start with a fixed normative goal like most studies on socio-technical transitions do. Instead, they were formed based on a review of topical niche and landscape level factors, followed by a description of the current cadastral system regime and its dynamics. Then, a limited set of interactions between the three levels were anticipated and speculated to form plausible transitions for the Finnish cadastral system. Considering the similarity of central values, technologies, actors and organizational forms in land administration throughout the world, the findings of our study should be interesting outside Finland as well.

This study contributes the land administration literature on several fronts. First, it advances the conceptual understanding of the cadastral system as a sociotechnical system and as a subject of sociotechnical change. We emphasize the description of the resistant and path-dependent regime level in our analysis, which is backed up also by the historical development of cadastral systems (e.g. Lin et al., 2015; Divithure and Tang, 2013). Second, we illustrate with an MLP based approach how to build pathway variants in a systematic manner. The current discourse is marked by plethora of new technologies, innovations, and megatrends that potentially shape the whole industry. However, a systematic approach for anticipating the impacts of these developments from a cadastral system point of view has been missing so far, and this study addresses this gap. Last, the study provides new and fresh insights about the future of cadastral systems for both academia and practitioners. We believe that at a time of constant change, new openings and debates are more than welcome also within the land administration domain.

We also detect many interesting future research avenues. First, this study completely neglects the feasibility and probability assessment of the pathway variants. The selection of a preferred future state, a common practice in scenario studies, is left aside here too. Moreover, moving to operational level scenarios, i.e. concentrating on the design and policy implications of the variants, should be interesting. Such results could provide some concrete support to policy and strategy development for different land administration actors.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Pauliina Krigsholm: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal
analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. Kirsikka Riekkinen: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Supervision, Validation. Pirjo Ståhle: Conceptualization, Supervision.

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Appendix A

Table A1

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<th>Innovation</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Neural networks and deep learning</td>
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<td>2. P2P - trust solutions, blockchain</td>
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<td>3. Cloud computing and storage services</td>
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<td>4. Conveyance of commercial platforms</td>
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<td>5. Automated vehicles in passenger and commodity transport</td>
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<td>6. MyData and GDPR</td>
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<td>7. Ubiquitous environment and IoT</td>
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<td>8. Rapid development of computing power</td>
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<td>9. Verbot/chatbot – dialogic and literary robots</td>
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<td>10. AR&amp;VR -platforms and standards</td>
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References


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