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To cite this article: Lucy Kimbell & Lucia Vesnić-Alujević (2020) After the toolkit: anticipatory logics and the future of government, Policy Design and Practice, 3:2, 95-108, DOI: 10.1080/25741292.2020.1763545

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2020.1763545>



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Published online: 15 May 2020.



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After the toolkit: anticipatory logics and the future of government

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ABSTRACT

Introducing a special issue of Policy Design and Practice on designing future governments, this article draws on growing interest in the concepts and practices of anticipation, foresight and design among policy makers in international bodies, think tanks and governments. Building on the concept of anticipatory governance, we aim to show how approaches associated with foresight and design produce a capacity for future uncertainties to be made visible and graspable, with the potential to open up participation and reflexivity in discussions about public policy issues and anticipate ways to address them, beyond public administrations. The special issue includes six papers sharing insights about scenarios, workshops, public innovation labs and co-design projects from Europe, Latin America and Australia. Some are speculative—based on a small-scale intervention or experiment—while others are based on a larger scale project with the participation of relevant stakeholders such as public service providers, public administrations and local residents. Together, the contributions to the special issue suggest that futures and design approaches enact an anticipatory logic which is necessary for public administrations to achieve their goals, in the face of many uncertainties and in a context in which new forms of expertise, data and infrastructures are opening up government.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 April 2020
Accepted 26 April 2020

KEYWORDS

Design; futures; foresight; public policy; government; scenarios; anticipation; anticipatory governance

Published the year that societies, economies, organizations and governments around the world were all suddenly forced to adapt and change in a matter of weeks owing to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, this special issue explores the work of imagining, designing and realizing future forms of government. It examines how dilemmas associated with the future of (democratic) government and public policies can be productively engaged with and harnessed to open up dialogs, debate and deliberation about some of the major challenges facing today's policy makers and the citizens and stakeholders they are accountable to. Building on the concept of anticipatory

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governance (Guston 2014), we aim to show how approaches associated with foresight and design produce a capacity for these uncertainties to be made visible and graspable, with the potential to open up participation and reflexivity in discussions about public policy issues and anticipate ways to address them, beyond public administrations.

There is growing interest in the concepts of anticipation, foresight and design among policy makers in international bodies, think tanks and governments (e.g. European Commission 2020; Nesta 2019; OECD 2020; Service Design in Government 2019; UNESCO 2019). However as contributions to this special issue show, there is relatively little academic literature to date about the use of strategic foresight and design practice within and for government, although there are broader literatures about policy design, innovation and experimentation to which such developments can be connected (e.g. Huitema et al. 2018; Nair and Howlett 2016). In a discussion that linked studies of policy design and anticipation, Bali, Capano, and Ramesh (2019) argued that policy designers should be able to anticipate how decision-makers and implementers, and policy evaluators, including the public, will react to their interventions. In a context of high levels of uncertainty and non-linear complexity, policy-makers now operate as “continuous policy-fixers” shifting roles and “adjusting” policies in response to changing conditions over time. Anticipation in policy making, seen as proactive, is in contrast to reactive policy making—responding to issues after their appearance (DeLeo 2015).

Foresight and futures thinking (from here on, “futures”) and design thinking, design-enabled innovation or service design (from here on, “design”) are being deployed in diverse government settings. This special issue includes practical examples showing how these approaches can be used to address topics such as innovation policy, welfare and digital transformation. But alongside this, we aim to reflect too on the context in which these capabilities have been built up and the implications for policy-makers. How might we make sense of the emergence of an anticipatory logic in public administrations and policy making practice? What risks and consequences might accompany its development?

To explore these questions, the special issue includes papers written by a mix of researchers and practitioners, often working in or discussing a specific area of public policy and trying to co-construct with specific publics future forms of government and government action. They share insights and perspectives from using futures and design approaches to explore and address a public policy challenge. Some are speculative—based on a small-scale intervention or experiment—while others are based on a larger scale project with the participation of relevant stakeholders such as public service providers, public administrations and local residents. Across them, a picture can be identified which highlights growing awareness of, and investment in, building capabilities in futures and design to open up issues through new framings for government and new forms of experimentation and participation in public life.

In this introduction, we aim to sketch a wider landscape within which these various projects and accounts exist. To do this, we first outline a context in which approaches, methods and tools associated with the fields of futures and design have become more visible in the toolkits of policy makers. We note that while futures and design appear to be welcomed as an additional methodology for those working inside public

administrations (and beyond), there is more to them than just methods and tools. We look beyond the toolkit, to the infrastructures, expertise, know-how and narratives that have the potential to anticipate new connections and forms of practice—resulting in “disclosing new worlds” as researchers and practitioners Flores, Dreyfus and Spinoza (1997) put it. By so doing, we hope to provoke new practical experiments, and new dialogs between those with roles in public administrations and people with methodological expertise in futures and design, as well as linking policy design literature with research in design and futures.

Connecting futures and design with government and governance

The field of futures has a long-standing relationship with public policy recognizing the need for elected leaders and officials in public administrations and intergovernmental bodies to make decisions shaping futures in the context of complexity and uncertainty (Urry 2016). It builds on decades of work by governments, international bodies and businesses using futures approaches to explore, analyze, make decisions and prepare to address futures.¹ For example the RAND Corporation used future scenarios and war games for strategic planning in the 1950s (Ramirez, Bhatti, and Tapinos 2020). These developments included preparation for military planning with links to systems thinking (Maffei et al. 2020). There is growing understanding of the need for “futures literacy” informing policy making and intergovernmental dialog (e.g. Miller 2018).

In terms of government use of futures, Australia started exploring futures in 1985 with the foundation of the Commission for the Future; Canada adopted strategic foresight in 1990s; the Finnish Parliament’s Committee on the Future was founded in 1993; and the UK government’s Government Office for Science has published foresight on topics dating back to 2003.² Similarly, companies like Shell have been using foresight for several decades. The European Commission’s Joint Research Center started using foresight at the end of the 1980s with a technology monitoring function as well as producing thematic foresight studies, building on several European-commissioned futures projects.³ As the ongoing crisis related to the COVID-19 virus shows, there is a need for the further development of anticipatory capacities in governments around the world that could contribute to a more resilient society.⁴

Studies of the strategic use of futures by officials have suggested that the capacity to anticipate changes in the broader environment, exploring systems and their multiple interdependencies, is valuable for policy makers (e.g. Fuerth 2009; Volkery and Ribeiro 2009; Habegger 2010). The systemic approach to generating future scenarios is particularly important for dealing with complex modern policy issues in a structured way (Wright, Stahl, and Hatzakis 2020). Organizational or social learning is well-established as a means to do foresight and a rationale for using futures approaches (e.g. Inayatullah 2006; Ramirez and Wilkinson 2016).

In discussions about how futures can be understood, there is growing use of the term “anticipation” (e.g. Poli 2014, 2019) understood as a collective capacity to imagine and use futures in the present, to inform and aid decision making and action. There are resonances here with the concept of “socio-technical imaginaries” (Jasanoff and Kim 2015) and “socio-technical futures” (Konrad and Böhle, 2019) understood as

ongoing, contested and emergent outcomes which many different actors are involved in producing. Noting use of the term anticipation in literatures including biology, cognitive studies, anthropology and socio-ecological systems, Boyd et al. (2015, S157) offer a working definition of anticipation as “both an active sense-making force and a way to anticipate dimensions of the present, with potentially important implications for the decision-making and choice-related questions at the heart of collective action (and inaction).”

Such discussions are not limited to the actions of governments; the concept of “governance” recognizes the broad range of bodies involved in governing, that extend beyond public administrations and those with formal roles in public policy.⁵ For example, Fuerth (2009, 29) defines anticipatory governance as “a system of institutions, rules and norms that provide a way to use foresight for the purpose of reducing risk, and to increase capacity to respond to events at early rather than later stages of their development”. Offering a genealogy of anticipatory governance from a Science and Technology Studies perspective, Guston (2014) makes linkages between the concept of anticipatory governance and the challenge of managing emerging technologies, such as nanotechnology, as a form of responsible innovation informed by the social sciences. While emphasizing anticipatory governance as a broad-based capacity extending across society, Guston (2014) notes criticism that such a capacity can be too close to what it is governing, which is to say it can be too close to the technology itself, to the publics on whose behalf it claims to work, and to forms of knowledge and expertise it is implicated in. Lehoux, Miller, and Williams-Jones (2020) emphasize the ongoing work of building capacity in moral imagination and the need for participants to remain reflexive about the way these inputs inform the future.

Anticipatory governance is relevant to the aims of this special issue in two ways. First, these discussions articulate a collective capacity of bringing potential futures into view in the present, in ways that open up and integrate dialog, learning and participation and recognizing the consequences of how such framings about pasts and futures inform action in the present. Second, they suggest such a capacity is broad-based, extending across different societal actors but with a collective consequence of governing action—in which public administrations and public policies are important but not necessarily determining parts.

In contrast to the field of futures, design has only recently become more visible as a domain of practice and research engaging with government and public policy. Over recent decades interest in design has grown outside of manufacturing and business in relation to new opportunities and challenges such as digitalization and globalization. New specialisms have emerged including interaction design (e.g. Zimmerman et al. 2007), participatory design (e.g. Simonsen and Robertsen 2012) and service design (e.g. Sangiorgi and Prendiville 2017). Design expertise, approaches and methods have been used in many public policy contexts, from healthcare (e.g. Robert et al. 2015) to social innovation (e.g. Manzini 2015) to government (e.g. Bason 2014, 2017). Additionally, there has been interest in “design thinking”, understood as a process that allows non-designers to use design methodologies to achieve organizational goals, typically associated with business innovation (e.g. Elsbach and Stigliani 2018). While associated with “problem-solving” the capacities associated with professional designers can also be

characterized as proposing new relationships between people and material and digital things, in ways that are constrained by but also disrupt institutional logics and social norms (Fisher and Gamman 2019) by opening up uncertainty and possibility (Pink, Ama, and Sumartojo 2018).

Our brief review of such studies of design notes core concepts as: focusing on people's experiences; emphasizing materiality and esthetics; involving diverse participants in designing; iterative learning by trying out partial solutions; exploratory and generative ways of exploring uncertainties. With its focus on bringing people's experiences into view as they interact with systems, design opens up issues and provides an inventive experimental space to explore and assess potential future responses. For example, the UAE Prime Minister's Office organized temporary exhibitions in Dubai in 2014 and 2015 to bring to life innovative (and in many cases as yet unrealised) perspectives on the future of government services.⁶ In the UK, the Policy Lab team in the Cabinet Office used creative design approaches to help officials tasked with exploring the future of maritime shipping to stimulate debate and discussion about possible ways forward (UK Government 2019). As with futures, design as a capability has the potential to change policy making practice but is also hampered by deep-seated institutional norms and political realities (Bailey and Lloyd 2016). With growing interest in design and the arts among foresight practitioners and researchers, and vice versa (e.g. Selin et al. 2015; Selkirk, Selin, and Felt 2019; Candy and Potter 2019; Mazé 2019), the boundaries between futures and design are blurring.

As new futures and design practices emerge, it is timely to assess their capacity to anticipate and explore in the present people's future experiences of and interactions with governments and the potential and consequences for future government action. Whereas evidence-based policy emphasizes producing valid and reliable evidence about things in the past to guide future action, anticipatory governance emphasizes strategic reframing and mutual learning between producers and consumers of insight in relation to dynamic and ongoing change. Futures and design can be seen as forms of "inventive" research that constitute publics, data and problems in ways that open up discussion of change, whose consequences cannot be assessed by antecedent frames (Marres, Guggenheim, and Wilkie 2018). Viewed through the lens of inventive social research, futures and design can be seen as a capacity to bring publics and policy issues into view and open them up. Instead of modernist design conceived of as generating novel "solutions", the material practices of futures and design pluralize and problematize understandings of issues and uncertainties, raising questions about different ways forward. As the contributions to this special issue demonstrate, such a capacity can aid exploration of futures by policy makers and citizens, and anticipate future forms of government, but this is not a simple or certain outcome.

About the special issue

The origins of this special issue lie in a practical research project exploring the future of government 2030, initiated by the European Union's Joint Research Center (JRC) as part of its efforts to build an EU Policy Lab. The EU Policy Lab uses its competences in support of achieving the goals of policy makers in the EU's various directorates,

including building methodological expertise in foresight, modeling, behavioral insights and design. JRC's future of government project (2017–2019) used a mixed methods approach to anticipate possible changes in the landscape facing governments, in particular focusing on the potential and implications of citizen participation in government and digital transformations (Vesnić-Alujević et al. 2019). Its methods included co-organizing citizen and civil society workshops in seven countries to identify key uncertainties and dilemmas, developing four future scenarios of 2030, commissioning six European design higher education institutions to work with students to explore aspects of futures, discussing the implications of the project results with stakeholders, producing a participatory “serious game” tool, and organizing an event in Brussels to bring together project participants and other stakeholders to discuss project results and reflect on the future of government in Europe. We both played roles in the project, Lucia working with other colleagues in JRC to set the direction of and deliver the project, and Lucy as a consultant supporting this through all stages. Several of the papers in this special issue stem directly from the involvement of design researchers in EU Policy Lab's project.

The contributions to the special issue look at and anticipate innovative government practices and new government models from a range of novel perspectives. The issue starts with two articles examining in detail the notions of anticipatory governance, one focusing on democratic participation and citizen engagement through participatory design, and one on big data. These are followed by two articles that explore experimentation in policy making through the use of policy and innovation labs with the involvement of different public bodies. This is followed by more concrete discussions on social welfare policies and the influence of digital transformation, through the development of foresight and speculative scenarios. Having introduced each of these in turn, we then try to pull together some implications and risks of such futures and design approaches in relation to the future of government.

The paper by Per-Anders Hillgren, Ann Light and Michael Strange (2020) emphasizes the importance of worldviews in policy development. Taking ongoing practical experiments and discussions about new forms of policy making as a starting point, the authors provide a detailed grounding of how practices associated with design allow people to participate in “world-making,” building on the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design. Working with people to construct utopias (or dystopias), here the authors describe workshops they ran with local policy makers, researchers and members of civil society organizations and businesses in Sweden. Their approach, which they call “counterfactual world-making” helped facilitate reflection on worldviews and the shape of future forms of governance. While not “practical” or even necessarily desirable, the future worlds developed through this methodology enabled participants to articulate and consider the dilemmas they may face, as well as building up futures literacy among participants. Developing and considering alternatives—future worlds that may unfold—through such anticipatory approaches can contribute to being better prepared for unexpected futures.

An insightful discussion of the role of data in policy making is offered by Stefano Maffei, Francesco Leoni and Beatrice Villari (2020). Reviewing the ongoing digital transformation and datafication of society, they explore the use of big data and

potential implications for governance. The paper opens with a discussion on anticipatory governance, seeing this as a capability which government bodies can develop, by deploying the data gathering associated with digital platforms to track and assess developments in near real time. By reviewing a number of projects which attempted to bring this to life, the authors identify three different models of governance in which data, technologies and social and organizational responses play out differently. The use of data, in combination with futures thinking and design, could lead to shaping better policies and improving democratic legitimacy—but any evidence for policy resulting from such processes can vary greatly from case to case.

The opportunities and challenges of participatory policy making are increasingly discussed by policymakers, practitioners and academia (e.g. Chwalisz 2015). The potential to co-design innovation policies is central to the project described by Alessandro Deserti, Francesca Rizzo and Melanie Smallman (2020). Here the focus is on innovation and its value for society, aiming to forge better connections between Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) policy in Europe, and the communities or publics to which future innovations are addressed. Present in EU policy discourse since 2011, RRI is based on strong public engagement with science and technology practices. Here, co-creation replaces consultation and brings more opportunities for citizen engagement. Describing a European project that included several policy labs throughout Europe, the authors present the initial results of this project and reflect on management of co-creation in science, technology and innovation policymaking.

Many governments today are experimenting with new approaches, through the development of either policy labs or innovation projects, often introducing design methods and tools (van Buuren et al. 2020). While several of the papers in this issue discuss projects which sit outside government, the paper by María Ferreira and Andrea Botero (2020) examines the public innovation labs that have emerged in recent years in national and local governments. These examples of design spaces in public administration have been seen as limited and more restrictive compared to those in the private sector (van Buuren et al. 2020). Specifically looking at 10 labs in Latin America, the authors identify characteristics associated with these new ways of working and the implications for the future of government in contexts with different traditions of government and public services and distinct social and economic challenges to the labs in Europe and North America. They note that such experimentation in Latin America seems to concern not only flexibilization, engagement and public policies; it also includes juggling with the tensions arising from budgetary constraints, the need to weave together networks of regional labs to collaborate and to align their agendas to those of other institutions, while being accountable to different levels of society.

The opportunities for innovation in public policy design brought by using digital tools may lead to more efficient policies and more agile government. The potential of digital transformation to address the public policy issue of welfare is the topic of a paper by Giulio Pasi and Gianluca Misuraca (this issue). Here, the authors draw on their research into using the potential of social innovation along with digital transformation, as a means of addressing issues in delivering affordable and sustainable welfare. In this paper, the approach taken is to construct four scenarios outlining different ways that welfare provision might play out in the future. Discussing these possible futures in

the present surfaces key tradeoffs and uncertainties for discussion among public servants, politicians and actors involved in service provision, as well as the publics who vote, pay tax and are served by such developments. The authors conclude that future welfare policy needs to take into account the interplay between digital and economic models, in order to improve quality of life and well-being for citizens.

Concerns about changes to welfare systems and the potential implications of digital transformation also appear in the paper by Lizzie Coles-Kemp, Debi Ashenden, Amelia Morris and Jeremy Yuille (2020). In contrast to the previous article, the authors question fundamental changes to welfare that might impact on the wellbeing of society through digitizing services. Here, using research insights about "security" opens up discussions of trust, identities and the kinds of citizen, claimant or service user that are built into or required for these technology-enabled services to function. The authors look at two cases, Universal Credit in the UK and Robo-Debt in Australia, that both use data-driven, automated decision-making and digitized interactions with claimants. By constructing speculative scenarios based on different ways of understanding "security," the authors suggest distinct ways to frame digital welfare services, providing food for thought for public servants, politicians and stakeholders. They call for the use of technology as a means to empower welfare claimants and create more inclusive policies.

Anticipatory logics in government

The public policy issues in these papers, and the national settings they discuss, are varied. While mostly located in European countries, with strong traditions of democratic government and infrastructures for public services supported by well-established tax bases, the issues raised and the projects described may be resonant elsewhere. In different ways, and with varying results, the contributions to this special issue suggest that futures and design approaches enact an anticipatory logic which is necessary for public administrations to achieve their goals, in the face of many uncertainties and in a context in which new forms of expertise, data and infrastructures are opening up government.

Digital platforms, big data, open data, AI technologies and deliberative formats have become more visible as resources for policy makers to use within policy making and government practices. For example, big and open data are necessary for e-government and the improvement of public services; transparency, accountability and openness of the government; as well as interactions between governments, citizens and businesses (Pencheva, Esteve, and Mikhaylov 2020). But more data and more interactions with citizens do not on their own result in "better" policies or intended changes happening, however "good" the data or engaging the interaction. Capacities to capture and use data and insight to reflexively construct framings and generate pathways for action, through dialog and deliberation with the citizens, residents, public administration bodies, businesses, civil society organizations and other stakeholders implicated in such changes, may result in intended changes being realized, but require remaining attentive to the unintended consequences of intervention. Developments such as behavioral insights teams inside or working with government are one way of theorizing and

building capacities linking evidence and action. However as different governments' responses to the COVID-19 virus have seen, such forms of "evidence-based" policy may quickly fall out of favor in response to public criticism.

At first glance, the potential of futures and design as forms of expertise and knowledge is to enhance the anticipatory capacities of policy makers, alongside conventional forms of doing research and consultation to inform policy making. In these accounts, futures and design capabilities are complementary and provide a service to aid officials and politicians. One of their main characteristics is that they are participatory and thus open to broader stakeholders including citizens. For example, workshops involving participants in imagining future worlds, and designing and reviewing potential solutions through co-design labs, enable officials to connect people's lived experience with abstract policies, and reveal some of the barriers to potential ways forward. Such activities can be understood as fitting within a process of policy design in which design spaces are set up, agendas are set and publics are engaged (e.g. Howlett and Mukherjee 2018).

However building on the accounts in the articles gathered here, the expertise, methods, tools and know-how associated with futures and design are not reducible to a "toolkit" for government. They draw on or produce ways of understanding, imagining or framing the world, and discussions about what counts as reliable or valid evidence, which often do not fit with current ways of working and embedded narratives. Further, they are tied directly to the democratic traditions which invite diverse perspectives into decision making. While deliberative and participatory democracy are not new concepts in political and communication science (e.g. Habermas 1990), they have been coming to the forefront of political agendas in Europe and globally (Chwalisz 2015; European Commission 2020). The examples discussed in this special issue include workshops that invite people to imagine a future parliament in which natural phenomena are participants, and future scenarios which situate financial and social capital in different ways in addressing public policy issues such as welfare. Such examples suggest that opening up participation in the work of anticipating and making futures results may no longer be a "nice to have," but an essential requirement of policy design work.

But this special issue shows that the potential and implications of employing futures and design as methodologies are complex. If these approaches are part of the repertoire for anticipatory governance, they share with this concept the emphasis on broad-based collective action and reflexivity, distributed across different sites, forms of expertise, data and types of object or interaction. As well as offering resources—critical perspectives on interactions between government, citizens and stakeholders; opening up to a range of potential actors and futures; bringing dilemmas into view; embracing uncertainty; building futures literacy—futures and design also introduce new—political—questions. In particular they ask participants to explore define what kinds of world(s) they want to live in, what such worlds are made up of, what narratives they are tied to, and what is required for them to come into being. They also generate forms of knowledge and insight that are not always reducible to "evidence" that can be deployed to legitimise particular proposals or decisions. In short, they often do not fit with taken-for-granted assumptions about how policy making is done, or should be done.

The growing visibility of futures and design approaches is sometimes accompanied by claims that such methodologies can address the perceived democratic deficit, because they engage and address people as citizens, expert in their own lives, in exploring issues, and co-producing potential solutions and longer-term futures. We note, however, that with any new approach comes assumptions, narratives and logics entangled with its origins. In the case of design methodologies, their close association with technology and consumer firms have led to concerns about resulting inequalities and assumptions built into industrial technological design (e.g. Sloane 2019). In the case of futures, while engaging diverse perspectives is central to approaches such as scenario planning, future workshops, or citizen panels,⁷ the different access to resources and competing agendas during the development and use of futures and hence the ability to drive change raises questions about whose visions are dominant (Mazé 2019). However, researchers note that the inclusion of a large number of experts avoids having dominant voices in the debate and gives more legitimacy to such processes (Georghiou et al. 2009). Rather than arguing normatively that futures and design can benefit the work of public officials, we seek—however partially—to acknowledge such claims should be considered carefully.

In summary, we have argued that the fields of research and practice known as futures and design can be seen as enacting an anticipatory logic relevant to many of today's complex public policy issues and forms of government action. By bringing together different perspectives on ways governments can understand as well as respond to uncertainties and emergent phenomena such as COVID-19, we opened up questions of anticipatory sense-making, creativity and learning capabilities required for governments to navigate and adapt to futures, in order to identify and design adequate policy responses. Contributions to the special issue bring insights from the perspective of futures and design to policy designers, with a particular emphasis on the interactions between participants outside of government with officials within public administrations. The papers in this special issue highlight opportunities as well as challenges stemming from different ways these methodologies can be used to build anticipatory capabilities, prompt policy innovation and stress-test policies. Together, they provide a practical contribution to discussions about how policy makers can benefit from these innovative approaches with positive impacts on public administrations, policies and public services.

Notes

1. For examples of foresight outputs, see the European Foresight Platform community and portal at <http://www.foresight-platform.eu> and also recent examples from the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovation-tag/futures-and-foresight/>, accessed 1 April 2020.
2. See Dawson (2018).
3. See European Commission (2020).
4. See for example an interview with medical organisational scholar Kathleen Sutcliffe <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/03/20/sutcliffe-covid-19-q-and-a/>, accessed 1 April 2020.
5. The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault shifted understandings of government towards networks of relationships and activities linking those that govern, and the

- governed, or put another way, the genealogy of the state, with the genealogy of the subject (e.g. Foucault 1977).
6. See a summary of the Museum of Future Government Services, a temporary exhibition in Dubai in 2014, written up by a contributor, <https://www.aiga.org/cased-2015-winner-museum-future-government-services>.
 7. For an overview of futures methods, see <https://rafaelpopper.wordpress.com/foresight-methods/>, accessed 1 March 2020.

Acknowledgements

We thank the authors and anonymous reviewers for their work during a challenging time. We also acknowledge contributions from discussions with Eckhard Stoermer, Jennifer-Ellen Rudkin and Fabiana Scapolo during the JRC project exploring the future of government.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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