

This report sends a straightforward message against a simple backdrop. The discussion on climate change abounds with expert analyses and political views. But what does an ordinary person make of climate change? How do individuals construct their views, where do they get their information, and who do they trust? This report also canvasses their views about the future, whether they think anything can be done and who should take action.

In a matter of a few years, climate change has established itself on our minds. Rather than dividing us, the issue brings us together regardless of our age, education, gender or political affiliation. Even drastic measures seem acceptable to stop climate change.

The report lets us into the minds of Finns. Given that an integrating Europe shares the same concerns, this extensive study can be used both in the individual countries and on European-level explorations of climate change.



It would not have been possible to publish this study without the British Council.



e2 — thinking ahead

A proactive think tank, e2 draws on liberal values to generate debate and provide fresh solutions to major social issues.

Our work comes under four main headings:

- 1) societal ability to change and sustainable development,
- 2) equality of opportunity and prevention of social exclusion,
- 3) the strengthening of ordinary citizens' political participation, and neighbourhood democracy and
- 4) Finland as part of the EU and international community.

For details, see: www.e2.fi



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How Much Are People Willing to Do

– Finns and Climate Change

Peter Ekholm · Karina Jutila · Pentti Kiljunen

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To the reader

A study released in January 2007 by e2, the new Finnish think tank, drew attention to Finnish attitudes on climate change. What follows is an English summary of the results of this study.

Political decision makers, businesses, organisations and ordinary people globally are waking up to the problem of climate change. What we need now is knowledge, information and public debate about the issue and its possible solutions. This study is our contribution to opening up perspectives to climate change from the point of view of the ordinary citizen.

The new Finnish think tank e2 was set up in the spring of 2006 to provide alternative solutions to major social issues through proactive debate.

e2 draws on progressive liberal values yet remains politically independent. Our work is marked by an interdisciplinary focus, approachable style and forward-looking perspective. We also seek collaboration with think tanks internationally.

I wish to extend my warmest thanks to my colleagues Peter Ekholm and Pentti Kiljunen for their expertise and hard work on the study and this summary.

I would also like to thank the British Council for their collaboration in publishing this summary. Special thanks go to Tuija Talvitie, Director of the British Council in Finland, for her encouragement and support in the first months of our work.

Helsinki, March 16, 2007

Karina Jutila
Director
Think tank e2

1. Introduction

Two new concepts have made their way into European parlance over the last fifteen years. As ubiquitous as 'globalization' and 'climate change' are, we don't seem to have adequate or effective tools to manage them. At the same time, they are both hard to understand.

For a long time, climate change remained an academic debate. It was the Kyoto Treaty which made politicians and authorities aware of its significance in the latter half of the 1990s. Ordinary citizens were more concerned with 'traditional' threats such as the pollution of water systems. Today, we have a radically different situation. Not a day goes by without prominent coverage of climate change in the European media. We need to go to great lengths to escape the concept.

It was only a few years ago that we could sit down in our air-conditioned meeting rooms for a civilized discussion on whether climate change was really taking place. More and more of us were becoming convinced it was. Europe woke up to the fact that concerted political action was in order and the European Union proved active in securing the Kyoto Treaty. The United States instead put their trust in market economics: businesses would accomplish more than politicians.

Debating went on in the air-conditioned meeting rooms about whether the development was caused by man or whether it was merely normal variation over millions of years. The huffing and puffing came to an end at the publication this winter (2007) of the momentous Assessment Report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which showed that climate change was real and for the most part human-induced. The climate is warming up to such an extent as to send chills down our spine.

Climate change promotes European integration

Europeans are united by traumas. We hope that the horrors of the past are behind us. Now it seems that it is not only the threats of the past but also the fears for the future that bring Europeans together. The first show of unity came over globalization. Climate change, the second external threat, seems to unite Europeans even more.

What can we do? Here is another typical feature of European discussion – in addition to trauma control: when Europe decides on an issue, a long debate follows about what it was that we actually decided. The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), a case in point, agreed on the Maastricht Treaty. Following the decision, its significance was debated both in the member countries and at EU level. The same happened with the Kyoto Treaty and emissions trading. Nor has the debate abated. The United States is different: once a decision has been made, it is time to act, to send a man to the moon! What obstacles there are will be cleared if and when they appear. Businesses take care of many of the things that Europeans need political decision making for.

That climate change is real is a major problem in need of swift action. It puts sluggish European decision making to test. Globalization alone has taken a toll on jobs in Europe. We wouldn't welcome a further loss of jobs in the wake of global climate change. Politicians find it hard to act, particularly when there is an election looming – and there always is. This is also a confusing situation. If we have to balance between controlling climate change and keeping jobs in Europe, decisions are hard to reach. As Tip O'Neil said, all politics is local. Climate change, however, is global.

Climate change brings citizens and states together. This is where the EU can prove itself. What we have here is a major mission for an organization struggling with its credibility. Climate change is clearly seen as important by people, but it is also an issue where action by an individual state is not enough. If the EU was not already in existence, we would now be seeing the rise of a European Union against Carbon and Greenhouse Emissions.

What do people think, then? Europe-wide studies have picked up that most people are extremely concerned about climate change. This study is an extensive survey of Finnish attitudes, examining the causes and consequences of the widespread concern. The aim is to look beyond the fears.

Great Finnish laboratory

Finland is an opportune place to assess climate change for many reasons. We have a vulnerable nature and an abundance of fresh water. Our energy consumption peaks during the cold winters, while energy-intensive traffic is needed to cover the long distances. Heavy industries, guzzlers of energy resources, are a major employer. We have 1,300 kilometres of common border with Russia, a country not known for energy-saving use of clean energy. Finland has taken a proactive stance in the EU in curtailing the impacts of climate change. And finally, we also bond with nature.

International comparisons reveal that Finns are well-educated and they're among the most avid readers of papers in the world. Finns read on average three newspapers and eight magazines. What do they make of climate change? What should be done? Can anything be done? And if the answer is yes, who should take action?

Europeans come together under climate change. They also have the same information available to them. This study surveys the views and ideas of a European sub-group of the significance and impact of climate change.

2. Climate change is real

We have all come across information and views on climate change which are contradictory. Also, not all key countries have ratified the so-called Kyoto Treaty, which seeks to limit the emissions contributing to climate change. Those outside the treaty, the United States in particular, have been slow to acknowledge the full extent of the problem, or even its very existence. However, in this study the key question is how climate change is viewed by Finns.

Finns take climate change seriously. The interviewees were asked whether they saw climate change as a reality. Nine out of ten respondents (90 per cent) agreed wholly or said that it at least appeared to be real. Only one in ten expressed some doubt.

These views are based not only on personal experiences of hot summers and heavy rains, as three out of four Finns (76 per cent) are both interested in and actively follow issues related to climate change. Once again, we have to acknowledge that it would take a great deal of effort to avoid information on climate change, because the issue crops up on a daily basis in the media, both on television and in the papers.

The fact that climate change is real says nothing about what it means. A great majority of the respondents (85 per cent) feel that climate change poses a serious threat to mankind. (**Figure 1.**)

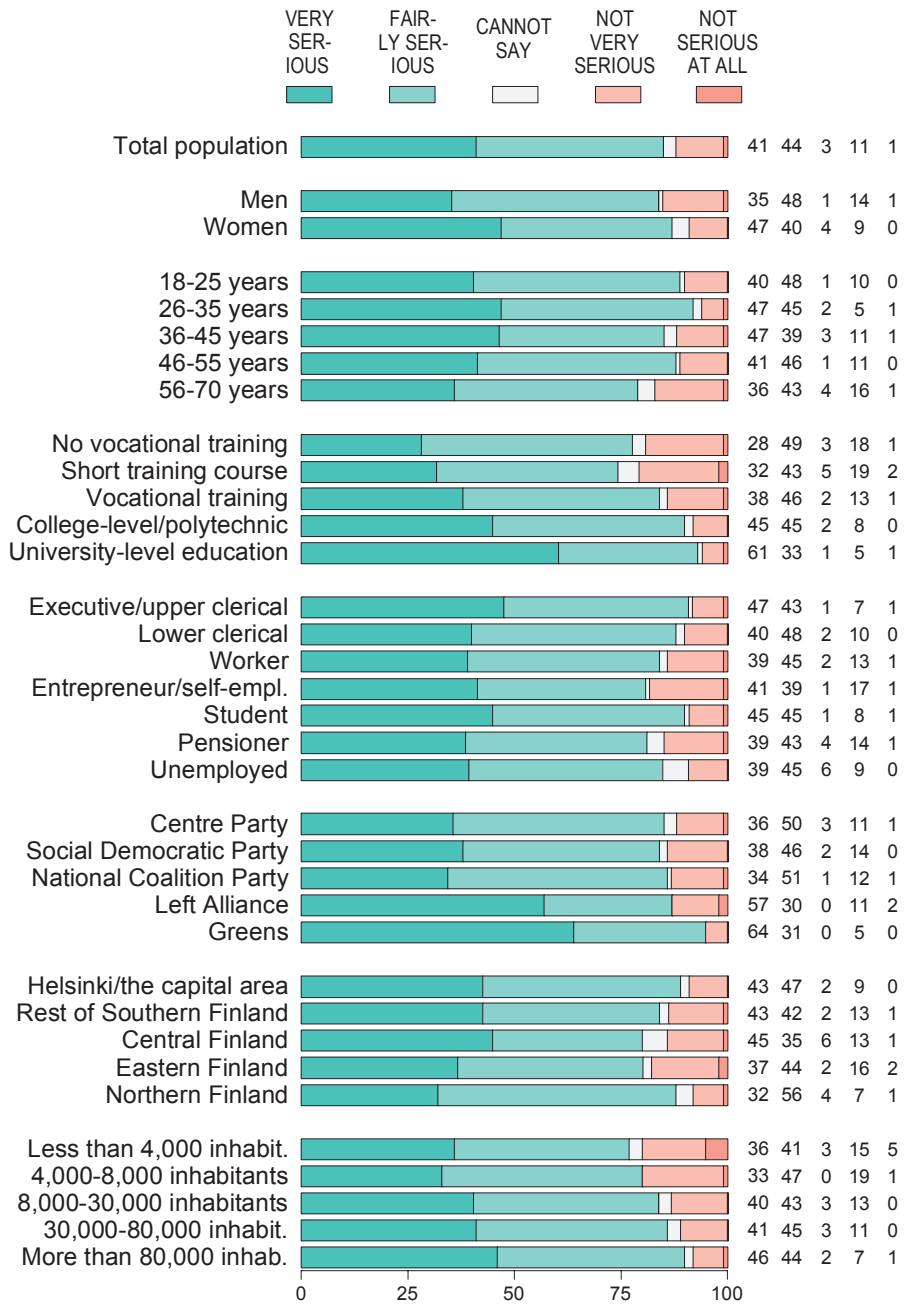
Thus, a great majority of Finns believe that climate change is real and that it is a serious threat to mankind. Hardly any other social issue brings forth such widespread consensus. While the citizens may be divided about European integration, the concern about climate change brings them together.

3. We are to blame

Public views and attitudes are gauged step by step. The phenomenon is real, the phenomenon is serious, but who is to blame? Some experts claim that a warmer climate falls well between the normal range of natural variation over the course of hundreds of thousands of years. However, a growing body of experts maintain that nature is being overly burdened with human action. The Finnish 'jury' has not reached a unanimous verdict, but it comes close: as many as 84 per cent of Finns think that climate change is wholly or partly human-induced. (**Figure 2.**)

Climate change and Finns

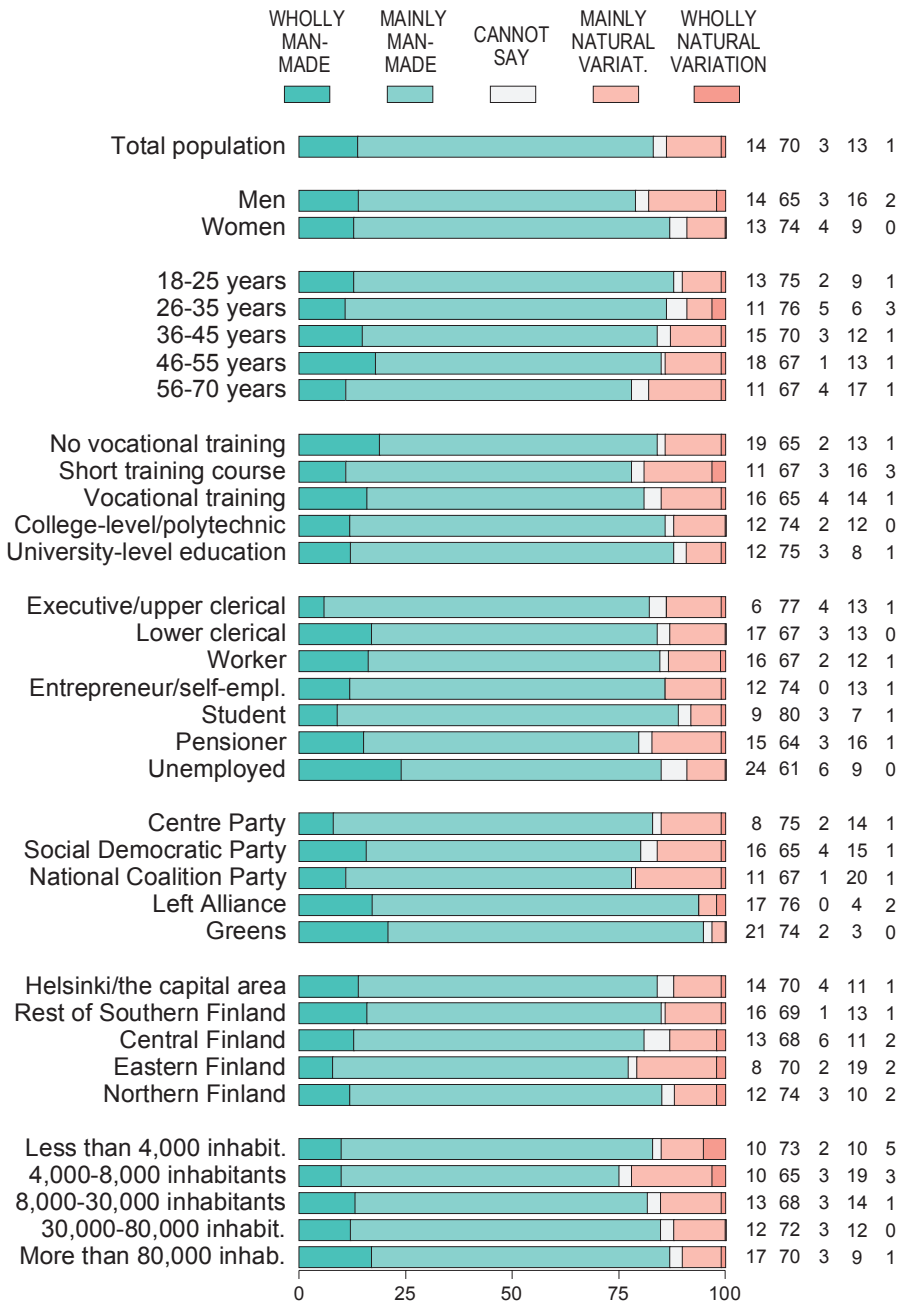
Figure 1. IF WE THINK THAT OUR CLIMATE IS CHANGING, HOW SERIOUS IS THE CHANGE FOR MANKIND (%).



Ajatuspaja e2 / Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2006-2007

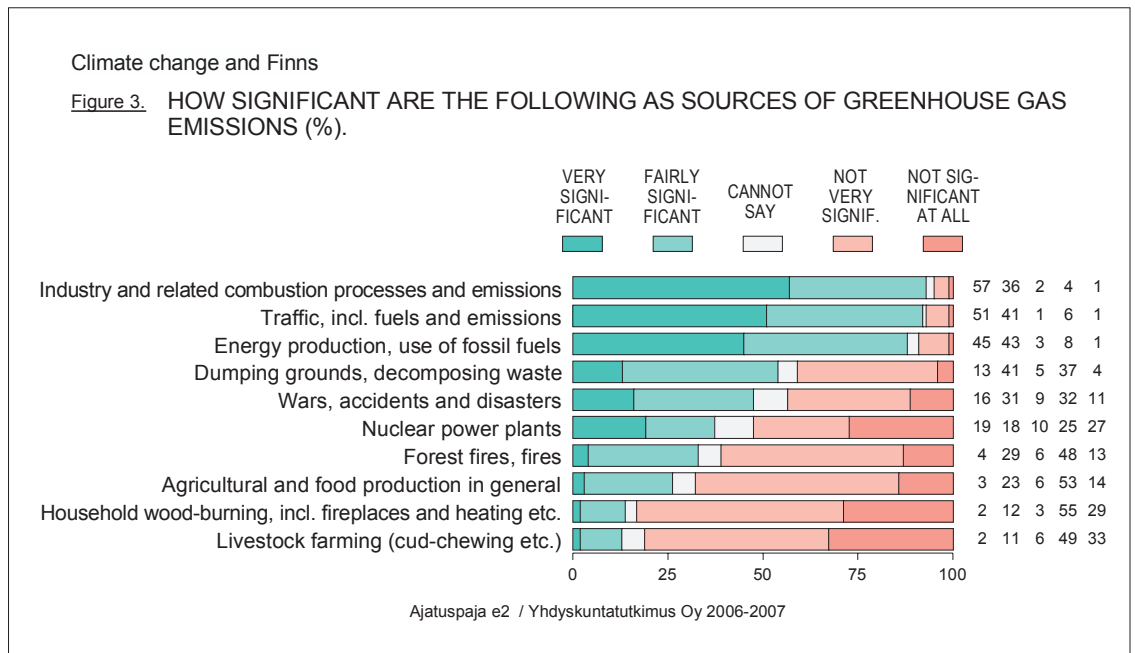
Climate change and Finns

Figure 2. IS CLIMATE CHANGE MAN-MADE OR IS IT JUST NATURAL LONG-TERM VARIATION (%).



Ajatuspaja e2 / Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2006-2007

The puzzle begins to come together. If man is to blame, which of our actions are the most culpable? Three contenders rise above others: industry and related combustion processes and emissions (93 per cent); traffic, including fuel and emissions (92 per cent); and energy production and the use of fossil fuels (88 per cent). This makes sense, as these are the much-publicized emission sources also in the media. Most people see tall chimneys in their neighbourhood and in tandem with urbanization more and more of us are spending our mornings and afternoons in traffic jams. The only surprise in the survey is that more than a third (37 per cent) of Finns consider nuclear power a significant source of emissions. Half of the women (48 per cent) believe this is the case. (Figure 3.)

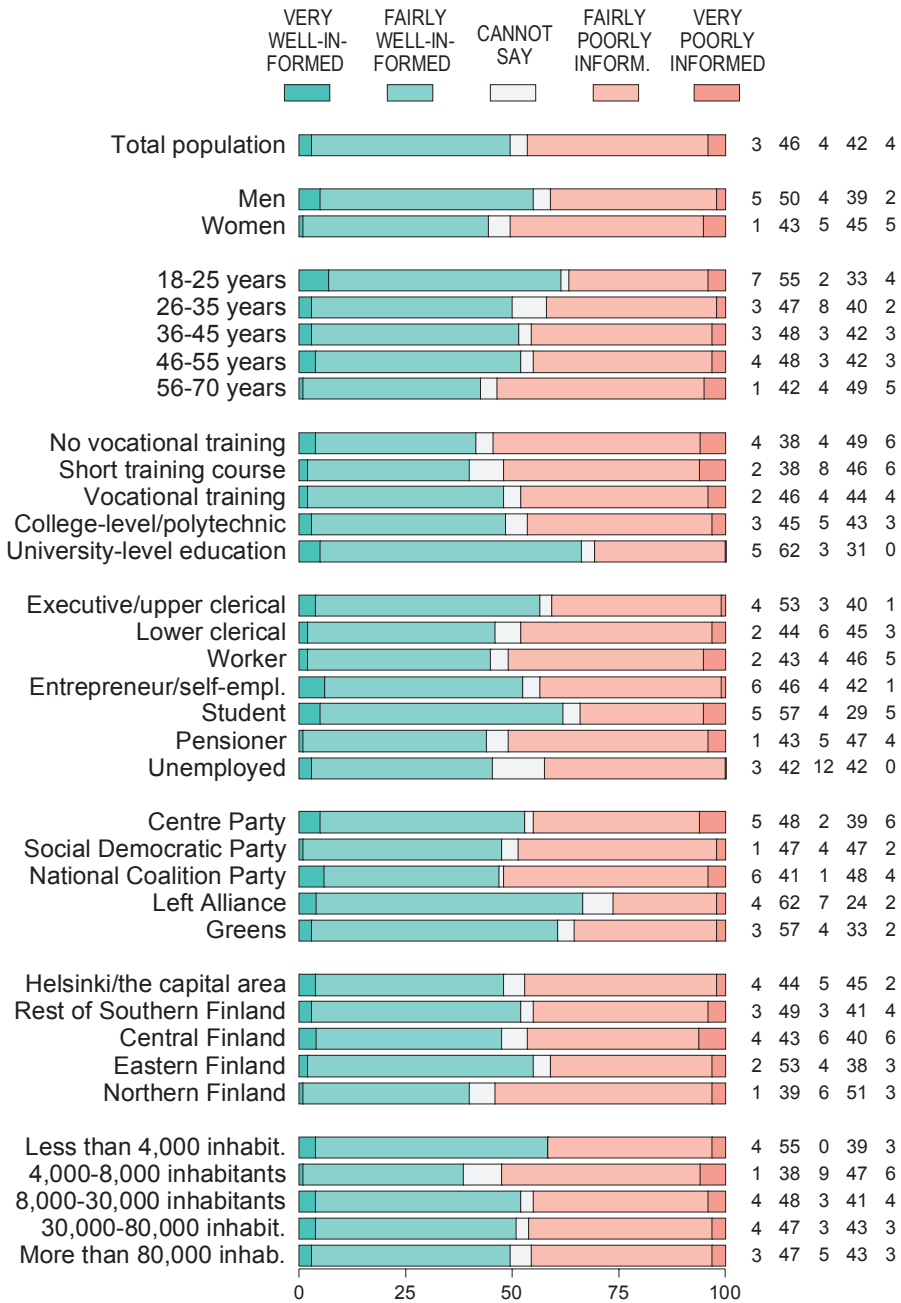


4. Knows it, knows it not, knows it . . .

We asked the interviewees how well-informed they considered themselves to be about climate change. The views divided into two, as half of the respondents (49 per cent) regarded themselves as very or relatively well-informed, while almost as many (46 per cent) thought otherwise, considering themselves relatively or very poorly informed on climate change. Those who saw themselves as either very well or very poorly informed were in a minority. (Figure 4.) This highlights an intriguing feature in the public opinion. Both those who think that they are well informed and those who find themselves poorly informed are nevertheless concerned. The concern has, as it were, become distinct from the knowledge and information that people have.

Climate change and Finns

Figure 4. HOW WELL-INFORMED DO YOU THINK YOU ARE ABOUT ISSUES RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE (%).

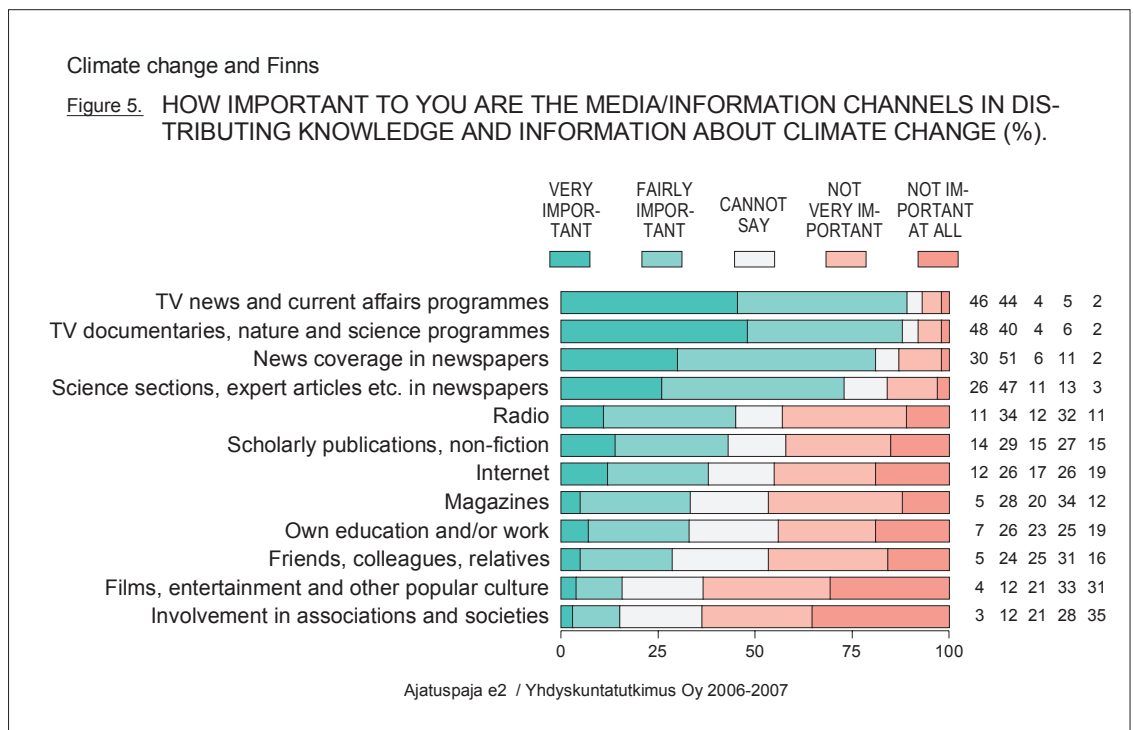


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Where do people get their information? When a great majority of the people maintain that they follow issues related to climate change, what does it mean in practice? Where do they go for information and knowledge? In European societies, the main source is the media. While the youth also get information at school, adults rely on the media.

The media not only disseminates knowledge and information but also has a great deal of influence over issues such as climate change. Knowledge production is usually the responsibility of others. This is why we included separate questions on the significance of those who disseminate information and on the reliability of those who produce knowledge.

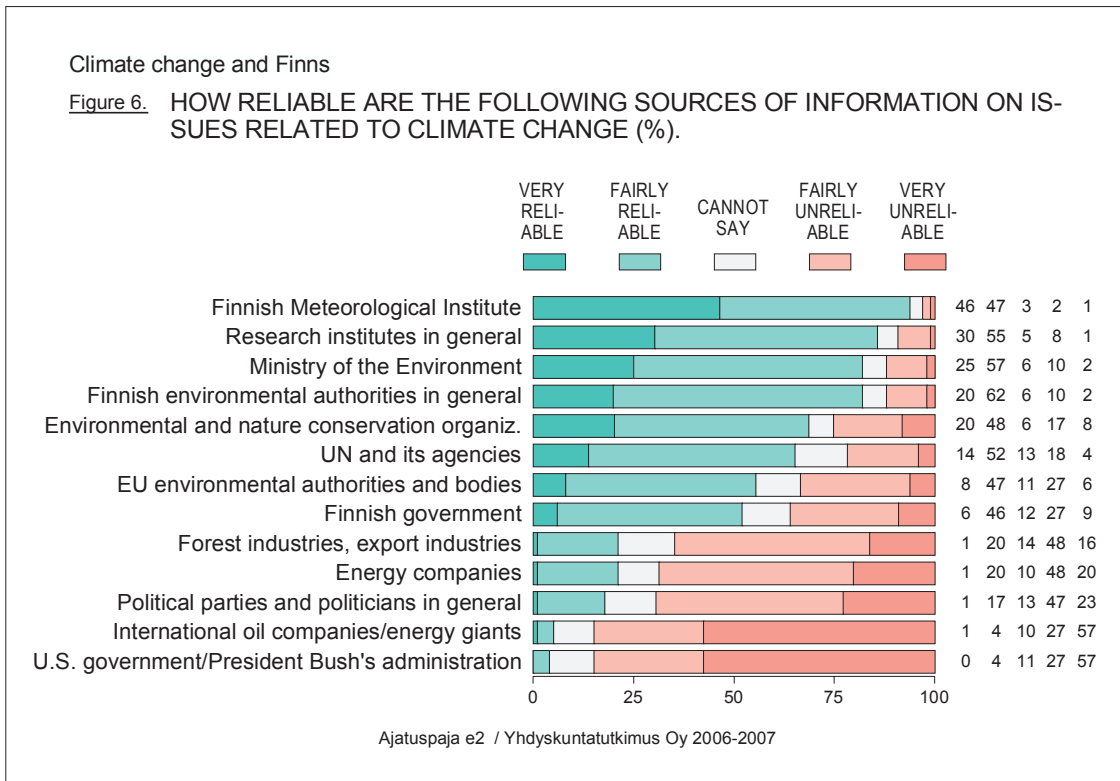
Figure 5 makes it clear that television and newspapers are in a league of their own as sources of information. As practically all Finns can be reached by both television and newspapers and as climate change figures prominently in both, we end up with a circle of good as far as the awareness is concerned. It pays to bear in mind that we are also much more receptive to information if it reinforces our preconceptions.. The worrying news coverage therefore reinforces the concern felt by the Finns.



The reliability of knowledge producers is another matter. Finns are great believers in authority, although other nations may also share this trait. What is peculiar to our age is that experts stand in competition with one another. There are professors for and against every conceivable issue. The set-up seems familiar. Ever since the Enlighten-

ment, we have questioned the authority of the church and clergy. What we are doing now is question the authority borne out of the Enlightenment.

Despite this, Finns are ready to trust scientific research. Information labelled as official is readily trusted by the surveyed Finns (Figure 6). Knowledge production that seems to carry even a trace of an agenda of its own does not pass muster with the discerning respondents. Particularly suspicious information sources are the international energy giants and the United States leadership, which only began to give in to the issue of climate change cautiously after this survey was made.



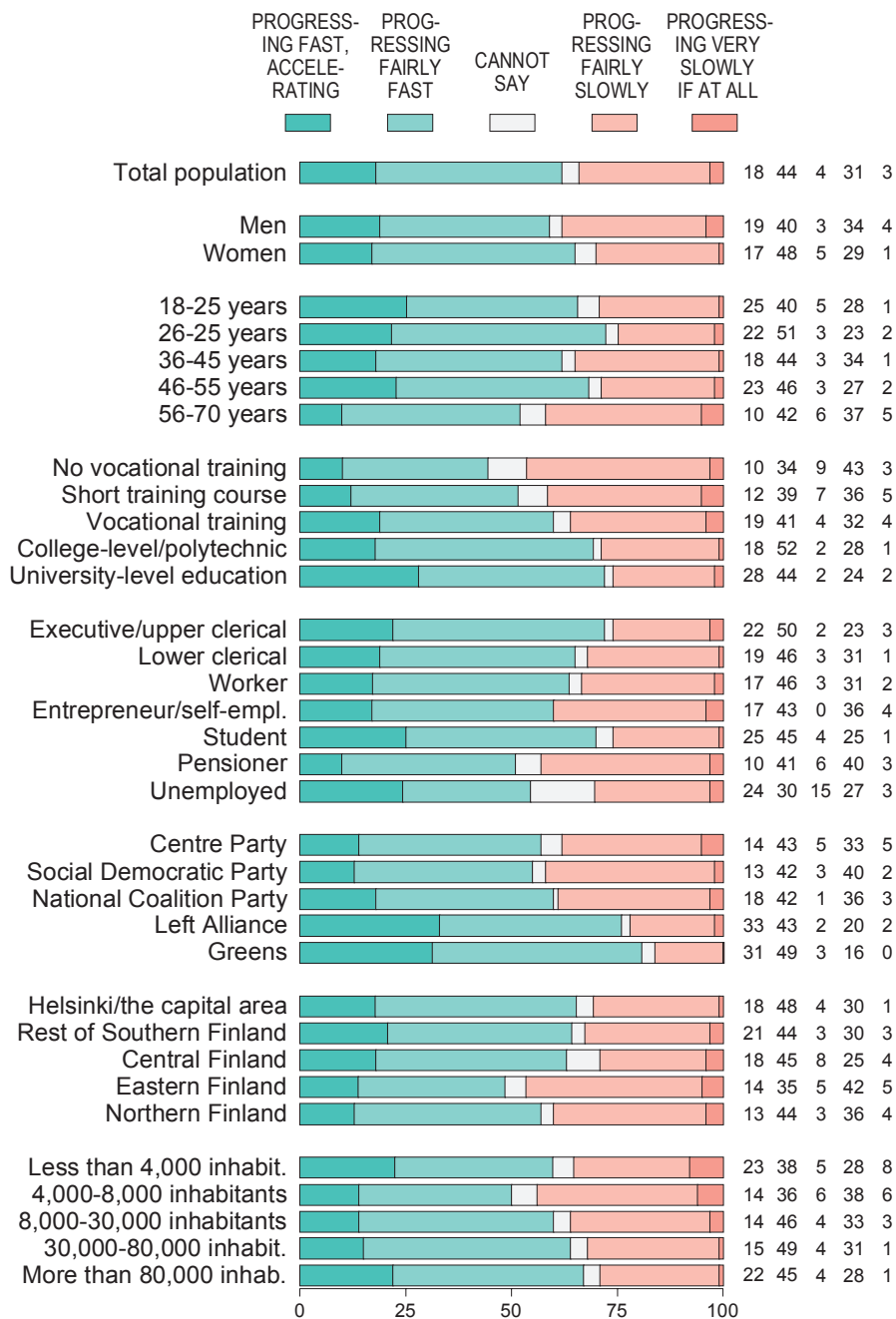
5. What next?

The debate on climate change is littered with the 'if' word: if it is true . . . if nothing is done . . . if we don't change our habits It is of course true that the longer-term future we are talking about, the less use there is for the 'when' word. But it is equally true that the future does not just happen; it is also made. This is why it is interesting to know what people think about the future.

Finnish minds are preoccupied with climate change. And once this core concern is there, it is only natural that they also anticipate climate change to advance in the future, the majority (62 per cent) expecting a rapid pace. (Figure 7.) While the views correlate with the level of education, the rest of the logic is less clear.

Climate change and Finns

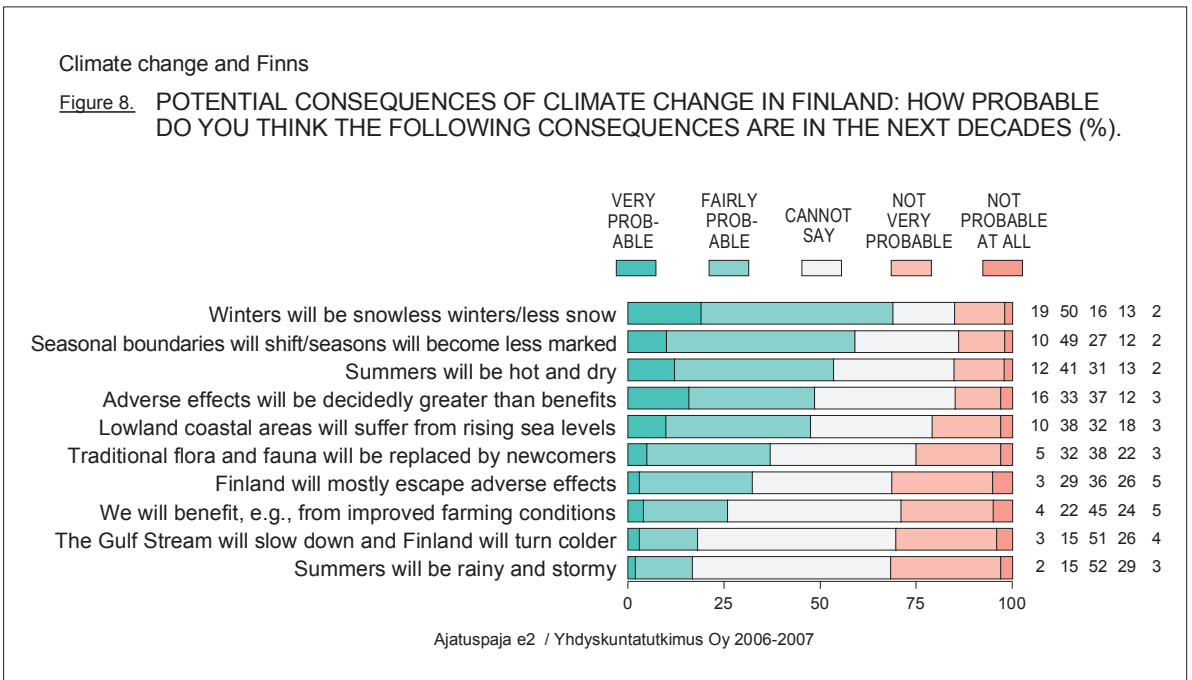
Figure 7. VIEWS ON THE PACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE NEXT DECADES (%).



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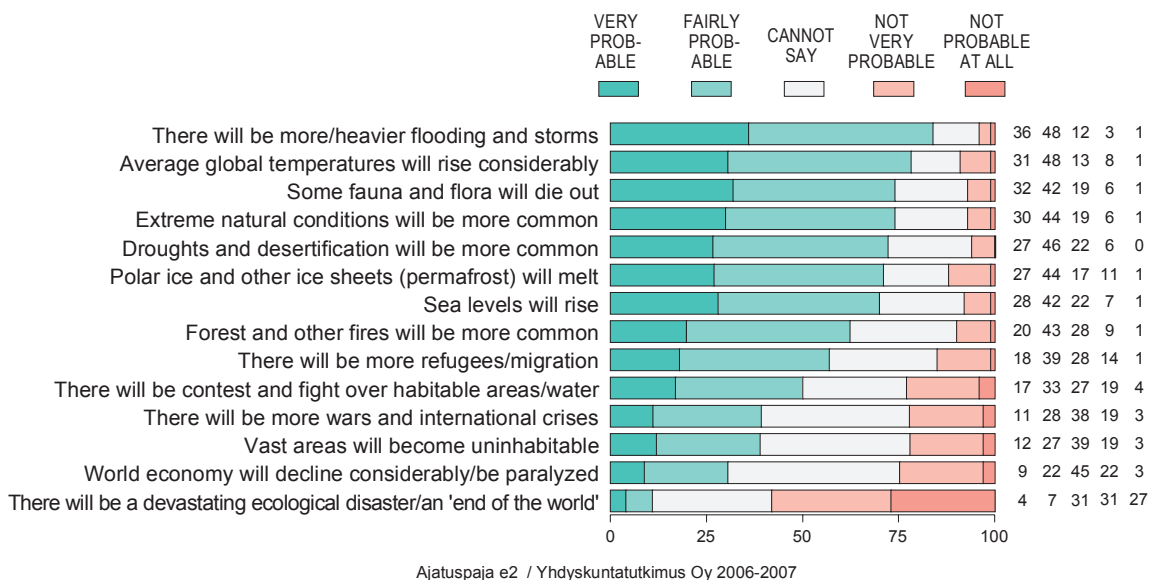
What do Finns expect will happen? Consequences and consequences of consequences abound. If our climate does get warmer, farming conditions will change, but at the same time we will be introduced to new harmful fauna and diseases. This demands major research investments etc. There is no end to the list of causes and consequences, causing us to lose heart.

The respondents' views on the impacts of climate change were examined through a set of questions in two parts, one on the consequences in Finland, the other on the global impacts. Both sets applied to views about the immediate future over the next decades. It would have been uninformative to ask for views on a longer-term future. Our aim was to explore what people thought would happen if climate change was not combated (Figures 8-9).



The responses show certain differences. The Finns are more ambivalent about changes in Finland than about the global consequences. It is possible that tornadoes and other distant disasters have featured more prominently in the media. Climate change is a relatively new issue in the public debate, and people do not yet have enough information to apply it to their own environment. It also seems that the responses betray wishful thinking: surely we won't be hit hardest, minding as we are our own business. Climate change is different from many other issues in that nobody can remain indifferent to it.

Figure 9. POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE: HOW PROBABLE DO YOU THINK THE FOLLOWING CONSEQUENCES ARE IN THE WORLD IN THE NEXT DECADES (%).



6. Somebody has to take the responsibility

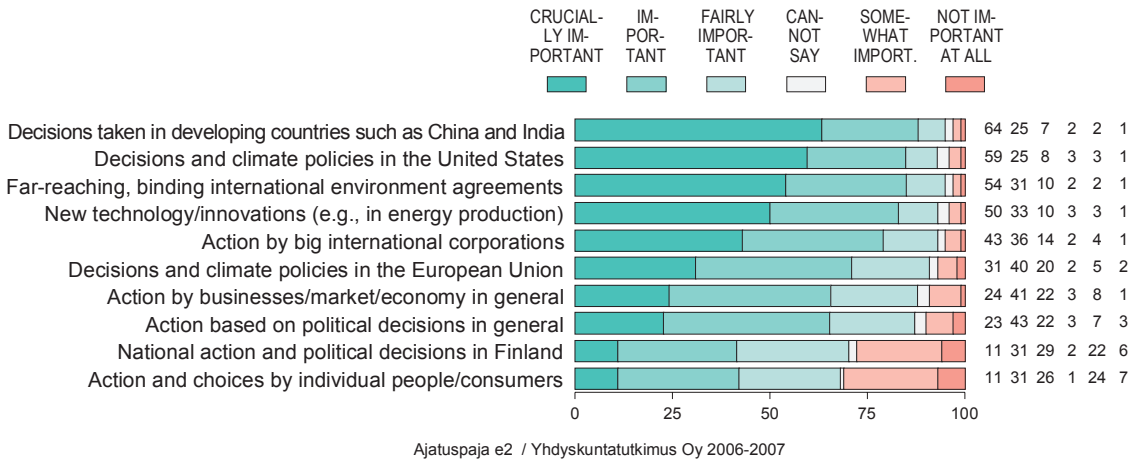
The results above show that Finns are gravely concerned about climate change, but they also believe that something can be done. Who do they expect should act and what should be taken into account in addressing the issue? To investigate this, we asked the respondents for a list of actors and actions and an assessment of their importance. We also included questions in statement format in this section.

A majority of the respondents identified wide-ranging international action and the big international actors as key players. What the surveyed Finns saw as crucial were the decisions made by big developing countries such as China and India; action by the United States; far-reaching, binding international environment agreements; and the opportunities of new technology in, for example, energy production. These were felt to be important or crucially important by more than 80 per cent of the Finns. (Figure 10.)

International discussion keeps coming back to the role of developing countries in climate change. Should they, too, do their share or should they be allowed the same kind of recklessness which helped the current rich countries to get where they are today? According to the surveyed Finns the situation is so grave as to demand action by all (Figure 11).

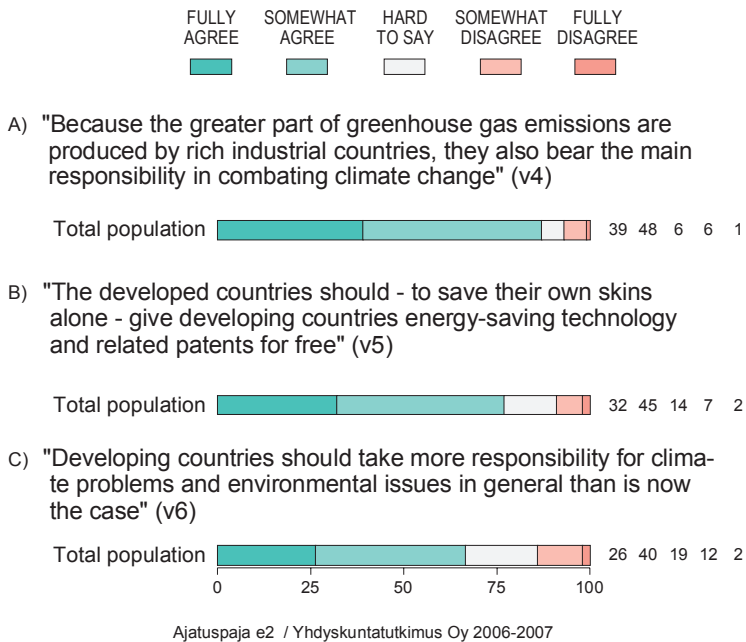
Climate change and Finns

Figure 10. HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING ACTORS/ACTIONS IN SEEKING TO CONTROL THE WORLD'S CLIMATE PROBLEMS (%).



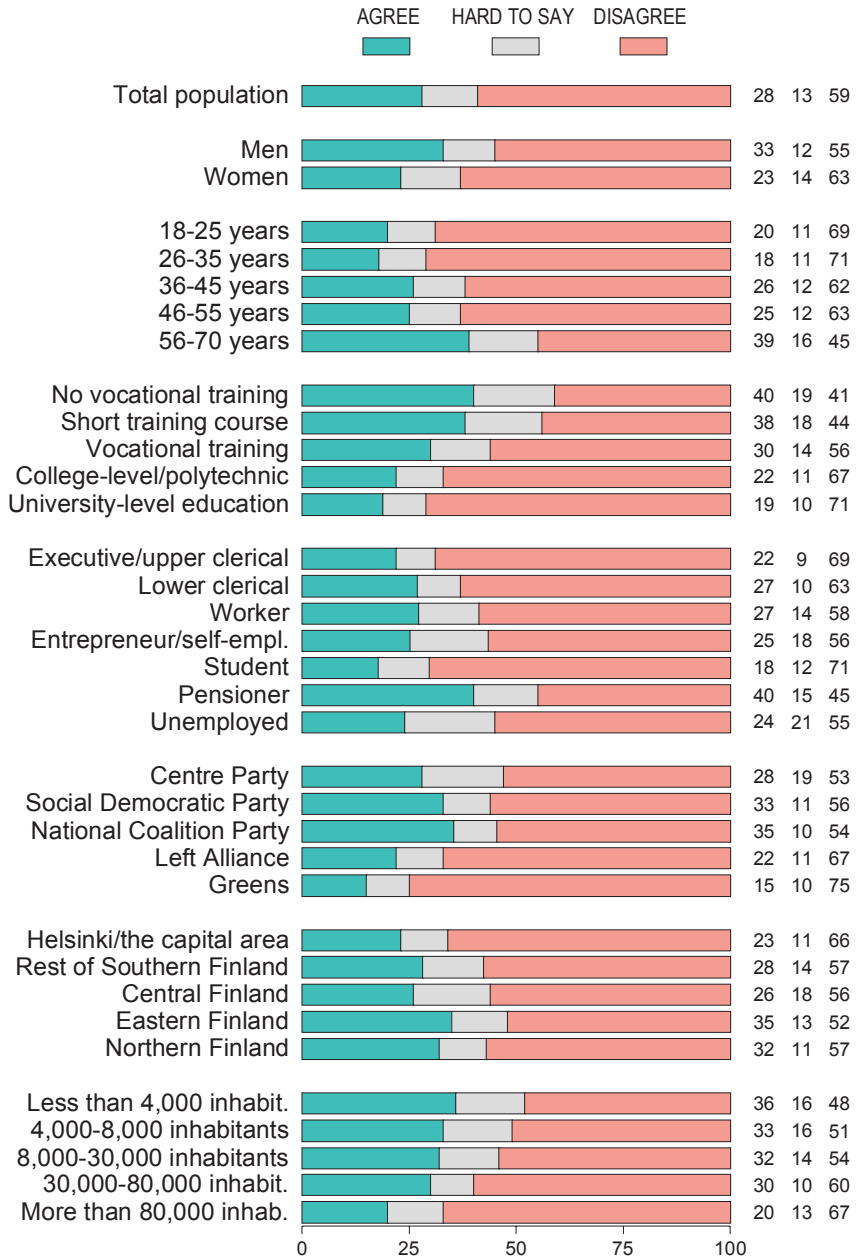
Climate change and Finns

Figure 11. VIEWS ON STATEMENTS ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN CLIMATE CHANGE (%).



Climate change and Finns

Figure 12. "EU COUNTRIES SHOULD NOT AGREE TO REDUCE EMISSIONS UNILATERALLY, IF OTHER COUNTRIES DO NOT COMMIT THEMSELVES TO DOING SO (Kyoto treaty, emissions trade, etc. (%)).



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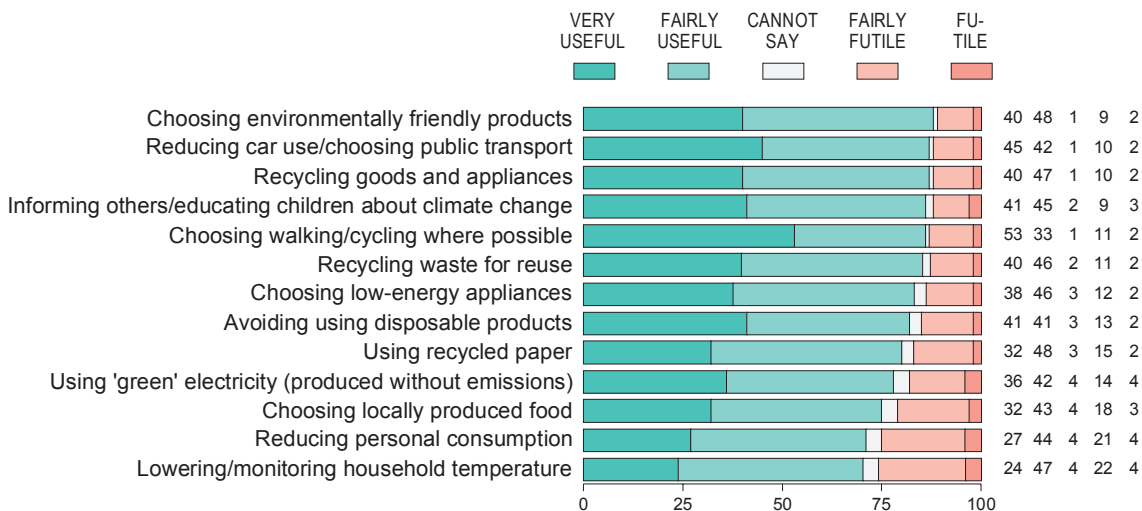
Another pan-European topic has been the role of the EU. The union has been proactive on climate change, as proven by the Kyoto Treaty. Debates over the last few years have asked whether the EU should forge ahead on its own regardless of what other continents do. Businesses have responded by stating that extra costs will be a strain on their competitiveness and therefore result in further mass unemployment.

The Finns are so concerned that most of them are in favour of unilateral EU action (Figure 12). In this world of ours, things connect. Finnish jobs have been transferred to China, which is fast becoming the worst polluter in the world. Perhaps, subconsciously, we think that the EU can lead the way – maybe even force others to follow the lead. Perhaps, subconsciously, we think that climate change is so significant that there is no time to wait for others. In short: every single action, big or small, has to be taken.

This trust in using every available tool is evident in what Finns think of their own role. Small actions can be effective (Figure 13). In the winter of 2007, big British department stores promised to reduce the use of plastic carrier bags, which is proof of the same belief: people can make a difference with small choices. Added up, we can do a great deal of good by giving up plastic bags, walking short stretches instead of taking the car, avoiding using disposable products and so on.

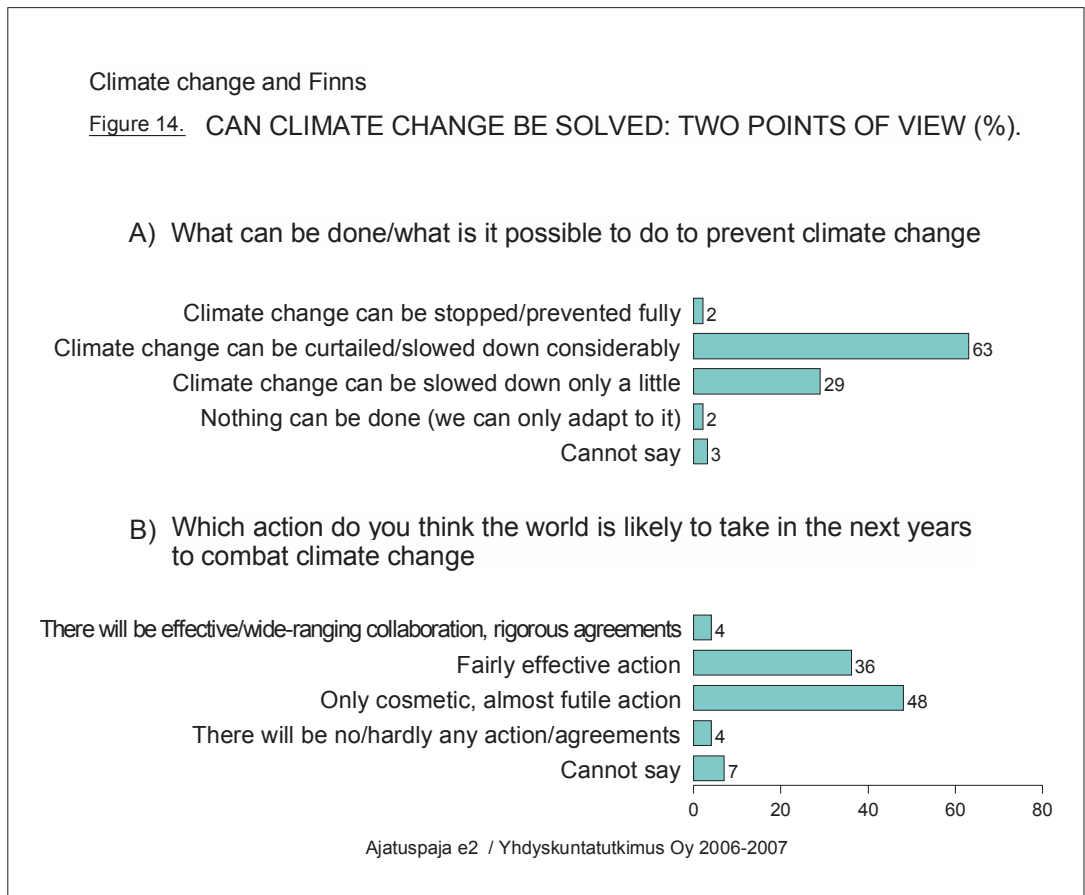
Climate change and Finns

Figure 13. WHAT CAN WE DO AS INDIVIDUALS TO HELP TO CONTROL CLIMATE CHANGE: VIEWS ON THE UTILITY OF VARIOUS MEANS/ACTIONS (%).



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Finns believe that they can have an impact on the development. If states, businesses and individuals get their act together, the circle of evil can be slowed down. This amounts to optimism. On the flip side of the coin is fatalism. We have options, but mankind, selfish as it is, is not able to act decisively. (Figure 14.)



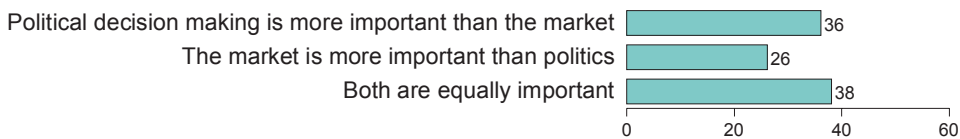
International, or should we say global discussion has also questioned how we should respond to development as such. There is the American view of the market and technological advancement as key movers, while the so-called European view has preferred to steer development by political decisions.

Both sides have their virtues. In the aftermath of the 1970s oil crisis, technology did rise to the occasion. In a short space of time it was possible to reduce cars' fuel consumption drastically. Maybe this lies behind American ideological thinking today? However, the Kyoto Treaty and the many national-level decisions in the EU countries have also proven effective.

Finns see the future as a mixture of two trends (Figure 15), which can also be summed up in a cry of help: Somebody do something!

Climate change and Finns

Figure 15. POSITION OF ACTORS IN ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE WORLD'S CLIMATE PROBLEMS (where are the keys to the solution; typology based on sum variables, %).



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7. How the study was made

The results of the study are based on the responses given by 1,112 Finns. The material was collected in a written postal survey between October 17 and December 4, 2006. The research participants were randomly picked from the population register.

The research material is structurally representative. The key demographic, social and regional factors correlate fairly closely to the Finnish demographic structure. We have not applied weighting coefficients to the analysis of the material. The range of the results – the so-called margin of error – is 1-3 percentage points either way as applied to the whole material and depending on the total percentage. Sub-group results have a bigger margin of error, depending on the size of the group. For example, in a group of 100 people, the range is 3-10 percentage points. The rule is naturally applicable to all questionnaire materials.