

The Quiet Revolution

Policy integration in national implementation of
the Sustainable Development Goals

By

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

With the exception of Chapter 1 (Introduction) and Chapter 6 (Conclusions), this thesis consists of a series of manuscripts that are published in peer-reviewed journals. Each manuscript is presented here as it appears in the relevant journal with the exception of minor changes in style and formatting. Because the key chapters of this thesis are manuscripts developed for independent publication, some repetition between chapters was unavoidable.

- A variant version of Chapter 2, co-authored with Jeroen van der Heijden, is published in *Sustainable Development* (2019); doi: 10.1002/sd.1944
(The author's contribution to the material is 95 percent.)
- A variant version of Chapter 3, co-authored with Jeroen van der Heijden, is under review in *Environmental Policy and Governance*
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- A variant version of Chapter 4 is published in *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2019); doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.117928
- A variant version of Chapter 5 is published in *Sustainability* (2019); doi: 10.3390/su11164498

The author's name appears as Ryan Wong in the publications. The extensive process of article review is documented in Appendix E.

Acknowledgement

My PhD dream started with the proof reading of my Godsister's thesis on the dynamics of articulators in patients with dysphagia post-stroke. I thank her for allowing me to peek into the life of a researcher. Curiosity and discipline in abundance. As a 21 year old undergraduate student in rehabilitation science, I was told by my professors that I was not quite good enough for academia. I thank them for saying no because it fuelled my determination to pursue the prohibited.

My very first research project was conducted under the tutelage of Professor Helen Keleher who tolerated my naivety. She spoiled me, and then I grew very quickly. In my eight years serving in various planning roles, I became fed up with not being able to delve much deeper into any subject. Single-minded about the potential of reaping depth from a PhD, I wrote my thesis proposal on Saturdays at a shopping mall. I thank my supervisors for coming on board: Jeroen van der Heijden for taking me in, Sharon Friel for keeping me in check, Howard Bamsey for injecting gentle doses of realism, and Ibi Losoncz for making methodology fun.

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Abstract

The bureaucrats in the sustainability institution have been plotting a quiet revolution, weaving a 'new pattern of strategy formation'. To break ministerial silos and facilitate policy integration, the sustainability agenda has activated a series of reforms such as inter-ministerial structure and sustainability appraisal. These reforms have a long history but short performances. However, the new momentum from the Sustainable Development Goals has created a surge in publishing reviews that have identified a long list of facilitators for policy integration, which are problematically generic. Facilitators, like political will and resourced capability, are as relevant to policy integration challenges as any other institutional problems.

This thesis pursues the quest of identifying *unique, nuanced and measurable* facilitators of policy integration. It does not draw heavily on the generic descriptions in glossy policy documents and polished public speeches. Instead, I interviewed 65 sustainability actors in four European countries to investigate the engaged and avoided conflicts that may not be apparent in the publicly available information. The interviews focused on the attempts to facilitate inter-ministerial integration in the process of developing the National Strategy on Sustainable Development. Four major themes arose: conflict avoidance, political commitment, responsive coordination, and networked hierarchy.

The disappointing result of the quiet revolution can be partially explained by bureaucrats not confronting the necessary conflicts. They could not place on the inter-ministerial negotiation table issues that were too political, uncertain and consequential. Much of their effort has been to secure political commitment for keeping their institutions afloat, especially when threatened by the possibility of a change of government. To keep the inter-ministerial machinery together, the coordinating agency of the sustainability agenda – however powerful – has to maintain their neutrality and feel their way based on the ministries' feedback. The sustainability institution needs a good balance of order in hierarchy, deliberation within network, and competition at marketplace. These four facilitators of policy integration can be

further developed into an analytical framework for large-scale comparative research program by following the footsteps of Elinor Ostrom.

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1 Research background

1.1 Introduction

The whole thesis relies on the quest to identify fresh perspectives on institutions for policy integration – with the vision of translating qualitative observations into *unique, nuanced, and measurable* factors. As a thesis by publication, it presents four articles in Chapter 2-5 to tackle the broad research question of ‘What facilitates policy integration?’ Policy integration, as the ‘holy grail of public administration’ (Peters, 1998), expects the linking across siloed interests for tackling cross-sectoral challenges. It has remained desirable but unachievable so far. The integration story is probably best told through the lens of sustainability, which facilitates the convergence of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. The 1987 Brundtland Commission proposed the foci on intergenerational equity and the interdependency across the three dimensions, of which the latter gained more operational traction (Kanie, Bernstein, Biermann, & Haas, 2017)

Sustainability governance has been featured in international forums, national policies, city plans, company strategies and social movements. Visions were set, chatters were made, and institutions were built. Missing in this ideal is real actions with transformational outcomes. What has gone wrong? We know very little about the malaise of inactions.

Calling for global actions, the international sustainability community has cooked up a game-changer; one that would include all ambitions imaginable; one that rallies 193 nations behind it; one that engages with all sectors. The United Nations orchestrated a platform of aspirations that encourage national governments to translate abstract goals and concrete indicators into policy actions. Considered novel, it governs sustainability through flexible goal setting and monitoring (Biermann, Kanie, & Kim, 2017). This is the Sustainable Development Goals agenda (United Nations, 2015) .

The defining feature of this Agenda is *policy integration* (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). The national governments saw the opportunity to facilitate more interactions between the

ministries and develop more ambitious cross-ministerial plans. This seemingly straightforward institutional aspiration is complicated by the long history, the short performance, a new momentum, and the dark corners. These four themes will be elaborated in the next section.

Many facilitators of policy integration were identified (e.g., Cejudo & Michel, 2017; Nilsson & Persson, 2017; Runhaar, Driessen, & Uittenbroek, 2014), but they were described in generic terms. Factors such as political leadership, supportive structure, and common framework are not unique to the policy integration scholarship. The point of departure in this thesis is more in-depth analysis of these generic factors, bringing fresh perspectives to the puzzle of underperforming sustainability institutions despite a long history. The nuances will be identified in the context of the new momentum from the Agenda through shedding light on the dark corners of making sustainability policies.

Looking for fresh and nuanced perspectives, I have studied the sustainability policies of four countries closely, and interviewed 65 sustainability actors about the making of these policies behind the scene. Similar studies on policy integration via sustainability institutions have relied heavily on the analysis of public documents (Allen, Metternicht, & Wiedmann, 2018; Breuer, Janetschek, & Malerba, 2019; Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016; Okitasari et al., 2019; Tosun & Leininger, 2017; Xue, Weng, & Yu, 2018). Documents analysis may not allow close access to the politics behind the sustainability institutions. It is uncommon to have access to the insider knowledge of how sustainability institutions for policy integration operate within the well-protected compound of bureaucracy. I focus on horizontal integration that allows ministries to work with each other, link goals and indicators, and produce a consensus on cross-sectoral policies (e.g., climate change, migration crisis, and food security).

This thesis engages with and contributes to three areas of scholarship. First is the aggregated understanding of factors that facilitate policy coordination, integration, or coherence in the absence of a comprehensive theory (e.g., Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Persson & Runhaar, 2018; Peters, 2013)). Second is the empirical evidence on sustainability institutions, including the implementation of SDGs (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016; Russel & Turnpenny, 2009; Xue et al., 2018). The third is the application of regulatory studies on the 'collaborative' relationship

between the coordinators and the coordinated (e.g., (Braithwaite, 2017; Gunningham & Sinclair, 2017; van der Heijden, 2015).

1.2 Research context

The long history and the short performance of sustainability institutions provoked doubt about their effectiveness until the new momentum of the SDGs Agenda arrived in 2015. I will introduce the context in these terms and finalise with the need to peer into dark and unknown corners of the sustainability institutions.

Two worlds are operating here. The first world belongs to the comprehensive institutions with grand visions most suitably exemplified in many United Nations initiatives related to sustainable development. This includes the long-standing institutions that emerged out of the Rio 92 conference, and the formative institutions nourished by the 2030 Agenda. The second world belongs to the sector-specific policy communities with targeted measures and desires for mainstreaming of sustainability ideas to neighbouring policy areas. This includes climate mitigation plans and local nexuses. The sustainability institutions here are from the first world, which arguably can only be termed *sustainability* due to its comprehensiveness.

1.2.1 Long history of sustainability governance

There are three main turning points in the long history of sustainability governance. The Silent Spring marks the first turning point, sending a severe warning to humanity not to exploit and neglect the environment to the extent that it threatens our livelihoods (Carson, 1962). Subsequently, decades of international discourse created the will to integrate environmental considerations into the economy and society (Creech, 2012). This was further strengthened by the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme that has been anchoring global environmental governance since 1972 (Ivanova, 2007).

However, the environmental policy discourse did not amount to progressive institutions and policy implementation until the new paradigm of sustainable development emerged (Janicke, Jorgensen, Jorgensen, & Nordbeck, 2001). This second turning point supports national

governments to take environmental policies more seriously through nesting pro-environment interests in the broader sustainability framework. The idea about the integration of economic, social and environmental interests has sparked a plethora of formal institutions. The sluggishness of the institutions was met with more concrete prescriptions for the states to formulate a National Strategy on Sustainable Development (UNCED, 1992). The international forums in 1992, 1997, and 2002 have continuously reinforced this message, with more stringent criteria each time. However, the plans are merely plans. There were no formal processes for inter-ministerial deliberation.

The third turning point is that the National Strategies have created bureaucratic institutions for implementing and monitoring the Strategies. It gave a glimpse of hope when new or modified bureaucratic structures were in place across several European countries in the early 2000s. The texts on public documents have stimulated discussions in internal forums. These forums are flexible, cross-sectoral, and learning networks within the hierarchical administration; together, the mixture of the old and new governance represents the 'strategic public management' – a new way of doing policies (Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005).

1.2.2 Short performance of sustainability institutions

The optimism was to be short-lived; the evaluation of sustainability institutions concluded that these are merely symbolic processes that did not amount to much meaningful change (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). In fact, the national governments continued the status quo of discounting environmental concerns in policy-making. Key environmental initiatives (e.g., *Energiewende*) and climate mitigation plans seemed to have developed in parallel with the core activities of sustainability institutions (Casado-Asensio & Steurer, 2015; Stigson et al., 2013). This realization was the fourth turning point that struck an arrow through the heart of sustainability aspirations.

For a while, sustainability institutions of some countries were dismantled without reservations, and others have withered away in irrelevance. A small number of stronger institutions continued producing the national strategies and carried out the formal integration procedures. Nevertheless, it was clear to the scholarship that after a decade of institutional

experimentation, sustainability effort has come to a dead-end, forcing an adjustment to expectations and reframing of sustainability discourse (Bulkeley, Jordan, Perkins, & Selin, 2013; Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Policy practitioners should no longer expect transformational changes, but incremental changes that can only afford the outcome of capacity building. These capacities in the most indirect way may effect policy changes that acknowledge the environmental concerns under the sustainability framework. Beyond this framework, transformational collaboration between ministries on many other cross-sectoral issues was also found to be near impossible; the inter-ministerial deliberation tended to end in 'mutual non-interference' (Radtke, Hustedt, & Klinnert, 2016).

1.2.3 New momentum of sustainability vision

Amidst the gloomy outlook of sustainability governance, the joy arrived when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda was adopted by 193 member nations. The United Nations has reignited the passion for institutional experimentation in Europe, starting with 26 out of the 28 EU nations reporting on their institutional progress so far through the Voluntary National Reviews (SDGWatch Europe, 2019). The optimism ensued when SDGs has been framed as a turning point in global governance. It was celebrated for its novelty in adopting the flexible goal-setting approach especially when compared to the rigid multilateral environmental agreements (Norichika Kanie & Biermann, 2017). The Agenda even created a 'platform for partnership' – the High Level Political Forum with a stronger mandate on monitoring implementation and a more inclusive design to stakeholder participation than its predecessor – the Commission on Sustainable Development (Abbott & Bernstein, 2015).

The SDGs is also different from other agendas and agreements in its operationalization of policy integration as a governance concept. Since the inception of the agenda, the sustainability community has developed new frameworks and techniques to make policy integration as explicit as possible. It has developed a network analysis method to show interlinkages between goals and targets (Le Blanc, 2015), a likert scale to describe the nature of the interlinkages (International Council for Science, 2017), and an institutional framework for policy coherence (OECD, 2016). These conceptual innovations show how serious the

sustainability community has been with implementing the central feature of the agenda - policy integration.

1.2.4 Dark corners of sustainability policies

To date, a fragmented body of knowledge has illuminated how institutions attempt to realise policy integration. This knowledge space has received significant attention especially after the adoption of SDGs. The intense spotlight has made the dark corners of the knowledge space clearer by looking into the methodological issues: transparency, data source, and factor identification.

The first area is grey literature, which is primarily based on short case studies and personal anecdotes from policy practitioners. Well-known pieces include the OECD Policy Coherence Framework (OECD, 2016) and the Metagovernance for Sustainability Framework (Meuleman, 2019). Without methodological transparency, it is difficult to ascertain what these authors of the frameworks had access to, and therefore where the potential dark corners of policy integration would be.

The second area is more systematic and transparent use of case studies in the evaluation of sustainability institutions. The whole knowledge base has recognised multiple insights about the institutional evolution. Sustainability governance has become increasingly more institutionalised – from brainstorming among strong advocates in the environmental discourse to the ratification of the most ambitious international agendas. This line of inquiry has relied heavily on the analysis of publicly available data from documents and fora. It has missed a large part of the policy integration process – the undocumented fights over the policy documents, the bureaucratic tricks in policy coordination, and the institutional experimentation that has failed but offered lessons. None of these exists in the glossy public documents and showy public speeches. The dark corners can only be accessed by getting close to the bureaucrats behind-the-scene.

The third area relates to the case studies on cross-sectoral institutions that are less comprehensive than sustainability institutions. It has a broader scope because of more

intensive research activities such as climate change and food security. It also has a more in-depth database for accumulating more case studies in numbers and varieties. The factors for facilitating policy integration were systematically identified (Adelle & Russel, 2013; Tosun & Lang, 2017), and frameworks have been developed (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Persson & Runhaar, 2018). However, these factors and frameworks were described in such generic terms that they are hardly unique to the policy integration challenges (Candel, 2017). Potentially, when the dark corners are unveiled, the concepts related to policy integration can be nuanced further.

1.3 Research gap

The research gap lies with the identification of facilitators that are sufficiently unique to policy integration. Firstly, I will provide an overview of the facilitators identified in the literature. This will be presented as the logic of designing institutions to cope with integration challenges. Secondly, I will examine four major facilitators, demonstrate their generality and thus justify the need for making the facilitators more *unique, nuanced and measurable*.

1.3.1 Institutions rely on the hardware of integration

Broadly speaking, policy integration requires hardware (e.g., procedures and documents) and software (e.g., trust and power). Administrative structures can be inflexible, which is likely to preserve the status quo of keeping policy-making within individual ministries. Inter-ministerial committees are useful for bringing actors to the same negotiation table. The negotiations, however, tend to reach a highly compromised consensus (Radtke et al., 2016). Even if they could achieve a transformational consensus, the resultant policy action tends to be vaguely framed (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Facilitating inter-ministerial deliberation in the formal committees alone may be a weak instrument for policy integration. Stronger instruments of legislative enforcement are suggested to make the implementation of integration unquestionable (Candel, 2017), but it has not been effective either in the case of environmental impact assessment enshrined in the legislation (Adelle, Jordan, & Turnpenny, 2012).

Rather than creating new structures, the public servants can reform old structures of the administration. Most illustrative is the integration between the energy and environment portfolios. After failing to deliver commitment towards energy transition, the new Spanish Government attempted to resolve the long-standing fights between the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Environment by merging two sets of policy portfolios under one roof – the Ministry of Ecological Transition. A similar move was made in the UK government for creating the Department of Energy and Climate Change (UK National Audit Office, 2015), and in the Australian government for the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (DCCEE, 2012). The institutional designers saw mergers as a strategy for policy integration, which may or may not influence the deliberation of the National Strategy on Sustainable Development.

On policy documents, some countries have published a whole-of-government strategy on sustainability. The sustainability community articulated their priorities such as bio-economy, circular economy and green growth. These priorities call for the more demanding technical analysis across sectors, which have been oversimplified so far (Candel, 2017). These documents provide the substance for holding the ministries accountable as long as follow-up is undertaken properly (Nilsson & Persson, 2017). More pivotal is that the documents can generate reflections on sustainability in everyday politics and further stimulate the discourses society-wide (Meadowcroft, 2007).

1.3.2 Institutions rely on the software of integration

Apart from bureaucratic structures, procedures and documents, the institutions for policy integration are made up of relationships and ideas. Sustainability policy asks of ministerial representatives to deliberate ideas with trust and reciprocity. The precondition for these qualities is a significant overlap in policy objectives on the inter-ministerial issue at hand (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). Typically, the National Strategy on Sustainable Development articulates the broader consensus on overlapping objectives across the ministries (Meadowcroft, 2007).

Under this overarching framework, the bureaucrats can attempt to integrate policy substances by identifying the potential synergies and confronting the difficult trade-offs (OECD, 2016). The power relations between bureaucrats within the hierarchy of ministries are manifested in this inter-ministerial deliberation. The more powerful ministry may choose to pressure or ignore the weaker ministry. Another source of authority is the political commitment to policy integration or the lack thereof (Candel, 2017). Strong support from the politicians can transform the hierarchy of ministries to the extent that the weaker ministries get a more even playing field during inter-ministerial deliberation.

The role of public awareness and support in sustainability initiatives has been much neglected (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). The institutional designers may decide to involve the citizens in the deliberation of cross-sectoral policy issues. Tokenistic or not, the appearance of public consensus may be used by bureaucrats and politicians to steer the integration of policy portfolios.

1.3.3 More systematic and refined analysis can inform institutional design

Many reviews on policy coordination, integration, or coherence (Adelle & Russel, 2013; Candel, 2017; Cejudo & Michel, 2017; Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016; Persson & Runhaar, 2018; Tosun & Lang, 2017) aggregate the lessons and identify the facilitators. Their empirical frameworks describe facilitators in generic terms, such as political will, organizational provisions, and stakeholder support. They are not institutional factors unique to the policy integration challenges (Candel, 2017) and therefore their usefulness is questionable. On the other hand, normative frameworks (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Persson & Runhaar, 2018; Peters, 2013) describe facilitators in slightly more specific terms, such as frame rigidity, transaction cost, and subsystem participation.

The facilitators from both empirical and normative frameworks remain too generic for theory testing or case comparison. This thesis dives deeper to establish *unique, nuanced and measurable* facilitators. I am grouping the extensive range of facilitators from the literature into four main areas for refinement: turf protection, political commitment, centralised coordination, and network governance.

Firstly, turf protection is blamed for creating divisions between ministries (Bardach, 1998). Public servants fought for the policy interests of their ministries exclusively. The interests are translated into conflicts between the turfs. A significant portion of literature is dedicated to conflict engagement (Weible & Heikkila, 2017) and management (Mcguire & Agranoff, 2011); little is known about conflict avoidance. The closest concept, which is mutual non-interference (Radtke et al., 2016), merely expressed that actors chose not to step on each other's toes. Its descriptions remain fairly generic. If self-interests indeed were driving these turf protecting and non-interfering behaviours, then what are these interests? Why would public servants keep the conflict level as low as possible?

Secondly, political commitment and leadership is perhaps the most frequently mentioned facilitator of policy integration. However, none of them delved deeper than simply stating that political commitment needs to be abundant (Carey & Crammond, 2015), consistent (Adelle & Russel, 2013), prioritised (Storbjörk & Isaksson, 2014) at a high-level (A. Jordan & Lenschow, 2010; Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005), found in policy statements (OECD, 2016), and event attendance of key actors (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). It provides legitimacy for any bureaucratic activity, especially activities that require deep institutional reforms such as inter-ministerial integration. Hence, the kind of political commitment for sustainability governance differs from that for other policy areas. Its uniqueness lies in the longer time-lapse; sustainability actors are considering issues that relate to the next many generations, that attract more complex analysis for crossing multiple sectors, and that require inter-ministerial consensus to move forward. The current literature has not traced the fluctuations of political commitment and to what extent the sustainability institutions depend on its stability (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). How does long-term commitment or the lack thereof influence the survival of sustainability institutions?

Thirdly, policy coordination has always been described as either centralised or decentralised (Peters, 2013). The central coordinator could impose directions or the self-organised ministries could interact autonomously. However, it might be a messy combination of the two (Russel & Jordan, 2009) within the same coordination system at any given point in time. A close examination of the tug-of-war between the coordinating agency and the ministries may

reveal a more nuanced coordination process. The nuances, however messy, can suggest behavioural patterns of actors muddling through the integration ideals and the *realpolitik* (Lindblom, 1979). How can the coordinator adapt responsively to the ministries' level of compliance? Which agency is best positioned as the responsive coordinator?

Finally, networks are essential for achieving the deliberative processes of policy integration (Kardos, 2012). The sustainability institution creates inter-ministerial networks to harmonise interests of different policy portfolios. These networks coexist and even rely on the administrative hierarchy. Another area to be nuanced is the idea that network is inevitably collaborative (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). The exchange of ideas within the network can bring about cooperation and competition, almost like a market. A metagovernance framework can subsume the balancing of hierarchical, network, and market features when designing institutions for policy integration (Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015). How does an inter-ministerial network with a competitive marketplace of ideas nest within the coordinating hierarchy? What mixture of these institutional features will deliver optimal policy integration?

To summarise, I would like to frame each of the four research gaps identified above as a corresponding goal of the institutional designers. In achieving greater policy integration, they may find it important to: a) generate productive fights between ministries (Chapter 2), b) secure long-term political commitment (Chapter 3), c) ensure coordinators gain compliance of ministries (Chapter 4), and d) create a 'balanced' institution for integration. While acknowledging previous ventures on cracking the code of siloism and departmentalism, the quest of this thesis is to go beyond generic terms and describe the facilitators of policy integration in more *unique, nuanced and measurable* terms.

1.4 Research questions and thesis structure

The central research question is "*what facilitates policy integration?*"

Chapter 1 introduces the puzzle of designing institutions that facilitate policy integration. It situates this challenge within the context of implementing SDGs. This agenda comes with a long history, short performance, new momentum, and dark corners.

Corresponding to the four research gaps mentioned in the previous section, the following four sub research questions are tackled one chapter at a time. Chapter 2 for Question 1, so on and so forth.

Question 1: How are conflicts of inter-ministerial integration managed? (Chapter 2)

Article 1: Avoidance of conflicts and trade-offs: a challenge for the policy integration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Question 2: What helps the integration regime to survive? (Chapter 3)

Article 2: How to keep the sustainability regime alive? Assessing long-term political commitment to implementing Sustainable Development Goals

Question 3: How do coordinators implement inter-ministerial integration? (Chapter 4)

Article 3: What makes a good coordinator for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals?

Question 4: Why is balancing governance modes important for inter-ministerial integration? (Chapter 5)

Article 4: Balancing institutions for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through 'Network Within Hierarchy'

Chapter 6 summarises the key findings and conclusions of the four article chapters. It offers my reflections on the methodological and conceptual limitations of this study. It ends with my projections of potentially fruitful research directions. Much of these arose in my engagement with the 15 reviewers of my journal articles.

1.5 Methodological reasoning

This section presents the method and the methodological rationale. I shall briefly introduce the main steps of the research methodology as the details can be found in the method

sections of Chapter 2-5. Then, I will focus more heavily on the assessment of my methodological choices.

This thesis seeks to understand the conditions for making policy integration possible. I studied the publicly available policy documents and evaluation reports on the institutions that develop National Strategy on Sustainable Development. I have interviewed 65 sustainability actors who are public servants, civil society leaders, or academics. They come from four European countries - Germany, Finland, Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. Some interviewees also provided internal documents to support their arguments. I then transcribed and coded the interviews based on the ADICO syntax (Watkins & Westphal, 2015). Four main themes or factors – conflict avoidance, political commitment, responsive coordination, and networked hierarchy were identified. Each theme or factor provides a detailed typology as a way to make the factors more *unique, nuanced and measurable*.

In the following, I will be systematically assessing these methodological choices based on a recent methodological review of public administration research (Ospina, Esteve, & Lee, 2018). It expects three broad characteristics when researchers provide methodological rationale: (1) the study fits within broader epistemic and qualitative traditions; (2) the criteria of case and sample selection are provided; (3) there is a strong link between methodology and data collection or analysis decisions.

1.5.1 Epistemological fit

This thesis adopts a critical realist approach. It does not aim to test hypotheses or quantify the extent that certain factors contribute to policy integration. Nor does it subscribe to thick descriptions of realities that are so contextualised that no general pattern across settings can be drawn. Differing from the positivists and interpretivists, I believe that what I have observed in my study is only a tip of the whole iceberg of reality (A. Fletcher, 2017). Through reflections after every interview, I always had to keep my professional experience as a former bureaucrat in check. Situating myself within the critical realist ontology, I am more humble in the face of new and ambiguous realities. Such reflexivity contains some personal biases and improves trustworthiness of the study (Meyrick, 2006).

It is inherent in the broad research question that I seek to explain what facilitates policy integration. This is not in the strictest sense that policy integration is the dependent variable, and the factors are independent. However, I see the importance and usefulness of identifying factors that are *unique* to policy integration. A unique factor is specific and sensitive enough to detect changes that explain the integration successes. I also see the relevance of describing the details of these factors to produce more *nuanced* factors. The factors can then acquire a level of specificity that ensures *measurability*, which is consistent description within the scholarship. The refinement towards more unique, nuanced, and measurable factors has a practical objective. Apart from the refinement of individual factors, the scholarship will also benefit from understanding what combinations of factors (even if they are generic) create distinct pathways for producing successes in policy integration. The thesis attempts to analyse the social problem of bureaucratic silos and suggest institutional solutions of policy integration. All of these fit well within the ontology and epistemology of critical realism.

The thesis follows the qualitative tradition of case studies due to its versatility in the research process (Yin, 2018), especially when compared to hermeneutics and grounded theory. The versatile case studies can accommodate the abductive reasoning in my research. I was motivated by the surprise of the lack of action in policy integration despite a long institutional history of attempting to do so. This is particularly relevant in the case of engaging with background literature that is rich but atheoretical. On the one hand, the rich literature offers some general patterns for explanation. On the other hand, these patterns are not clearly consolidated and therefore should not be too certain that new themes would not emerge from new case studies. This kind of flexibility is consistent with the stances of critical realism. (A. Fletcher, 2017).

1.5.2 Meaningful sampling

Germany, Finland, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom were selected for building case studies. I was looking for rich cases that can offer the 'best case scenario' to examine the impossibility of policy integration. I am arguing that given the best resources and situations, these cases should thrive. If they do not, then policy integration may indeed be too difficult to achieve. In that case, any factor will not help. Therefore, I have selected two

countries (i.e., Germany and Finland) based on two criteria: a long history of sustainability governance and significant enthusiasm in implementing the SDGs. This is evidenced by their willingness to be the first batch of countries for presenting their Voluntary National Reviews at the United Nations High Level Political Forum. The level of details shared in the Reviews demonstrated their institutional capacity. I have purposively kept the other two countries unselected at that stage. The interviewees from Germany and Finland then recommended the inclusion of the rising star – the Czech Republic which has received European Union funds for SDGs implementation, and the dying star – the United Kingdom which has a long history of sustainability governance but ‘back-flipped’ on their commitments to the SDGs. The four countries are at different levels of institutional maturity. The diversity is necessary for ensuring the factors of policy integration can be broadly applied to the same institutional settings of different European countries.

On interviewee recruitment, I initially planned to interview 20 participants from each of the first two countries, which could offer rich data due to their capacities. The other two countries could offer 10 participants each. Additional to these rules of thumb, I have also assessed the data saturation by reflecting on whether the latest interviews offered new insights. I decided to stop the recruitment after conducting 65 interviews. A copy of the information sheet used for recruitment can be found in Appendix A. Sometimes, tentative interview questions (see Appendix B) were provided to the interviewees beforehand at their requests. The snowball sampling worked effectively as those sustainability communities are relatively small and tightly knitted. It perhaps also helped that the scope of my research focused exclusively on the internal activities of the bureaucracy, which are typically undertaken by a small group of bureaucrats who knew each other well. While it is justified to recruit sustainability bureaucrats primarily, I was acutely aware of the potential of single-mindedness within the bureaucratic community. To overcome the blind spots, I also approached civil society leaders and academics who had a working relationship with the bureaucracy but could be highly critical of its actions or inactions. The data triangulation involves either a direct verification during the interview or a cross-checking of observations during data analysis.

1.5.3 Robust processing

The data analysis process was highly abductive. I started uninformed about relevant theories in the field, engaged lightly with a broad framework during data collection, and read more intensively into the theoretical literature to select the appropriate theories for explaining the factors of policy integration that emerge out of the data.

Before conducting the interviews, I was well-read about the empirical claims on the institutional dilemmas when facilitating policy integration. I have also studied the public documents and media reports extensively. The intention was to get as close to the public understanding of policy integration as possible. The literature at the time did not offer any coherent theory on policy integration, which demonstrates its fragmentation. I deliberately did not seek out potential theoretical frameworks from neighbouring scholarships such as collaborative governance and polycentricity that could help structure my interview questions and mental analysis. Given that there was scant evidence in policy integration within sustainability institutions based on interview data, I wanted to maintain the openness to new ways of understanding the problems of policy integration.

It was however useful to make light references to the broadly framed Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework to help me pay attention to potentially important explanations of integration behaviours. This Framework is particularly relevant because it is designed to diagnose collective action problems like policy integration. For example, the Framework spotlights the information flow, actor incentive, delegated position, decision scope, and system boundary. They served as a mental check when I was actively engaging in an interview. The IAD Framework offers an even more generic way of structuring textual data. This technique called ADICO syntax requires the researcher to identify 'institutional statements' that consist of *who does what to whom for what consequences under which circumstances*. This consistent way of identifying integration activities from the messy descriptions in the interview transcripts was attractive. A small sample of this data structure is provided in Appendix C, which provides the 'audit trail' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audibility here means another researcher can trace the central part of my reasoning process from raw interview transcripts to coded statements within the same template. The audit trail would be

more complete when the twelve iterations of the coding scheme and multiple revisions of the typologies are provided.

I also decided to transcribe the interview recordings myself to ensure sufficient immersion in the data. It allowed me to identify four main factors that facilitate policy integration confidently. On the second reading of the structured interview data, I produced a set of codes for each of the four factors (see Appendix D). The codes signposted key messages of the narratives, which then allowed me to search for the most appropriate theoretical frameworks to explain the observations. This inductive process turns deductive when I lifted the key concepts from these frameworks and applied to the codes in order to sharpen the focus of my narratives. For example, I realised that coordinator in the sustainability institution sometimes centralised their decision-making and other times left it up to the network. They are minimalist in their interventions but would ramp up their interventions over time when the ministries' non-compliance would severely threaten the final policy output. This kind of flexibility and smartness reminds me of the responsive regulation theory. I then found out that there are different types of responsiveness from John Braithwaite's writing, which helped me to bring out these responsive behaviours in much clearer and precise ways. This abductive process was undertaken for Chapters 2, 4 and 5 too.

1.5.4 Effective presentation

I have decided to build the narratives of my four article chapters mainly with the interview content. In fact, I have included as many direct quotes as possible without running the risk of corrupting the anonymity of the interviewees. Presenting the findings as they really were is a strategy for ensuring a high level of trustworthiness in my study (Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008).

I also chose to present my key findings in the form of typologies. Each Chapter describes a factor, which is underpinned by a typology of integration behaviours. For example, the conflict avoidance narrative in Chapter 2 presents four types of conflicts and their implications on policy integration. The networked hierarchy narrative in Chapter 5 spells out the interactions between three governance modes. These typologies are my attempt to make facilitators more

unique to policy integration literature, *nuanced* for institutional designers, and *measurable* for future comparative research.

2 Conflict avoidance

Nachhaltigkeit – the German word for sustainability was first used 300 years ago (The Federal Government of Germany, 2017). For the past couple of decades, the German government has tried to mainstream sustainability concepts by facilitating integration across ministries. The Germans also articulated the selfishness of government ministries in a seminal book on siloed policy-making published in 1975 (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1975). It warned that:

The initiating unit will analyse policy problems and propose policy solutions, very often without regard to their consequences for other areas. But other units, responsible for connected problem areas, will be consulted and they will examine the initiative strictly from the perspective of their own jurisdictions.

In this chapter, I will be introducing the first set of integration challenges. In sustainability governance, a policy scholar may anticipate that policy disintegration is the result of irresolvable conflicts between government ministries (Weible & Heikkila, 2017). My perspective here clarifies how conflicts are avoided rather than engaged along the inquiry line of ‘negative coordination’ (Scharpf, 1993) and ‘mutual non-interference’ (Radtke et al., 2016).

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Statement of Contribution

This thesis is submitted as a Thesis by Compilation in accordance with https://policies.anu.edu.au/pp/document/ANUP_003405

I declare that the research presented in this Thesis represents original work that I carried out during my candidature at the Australian National University, except for contributions to multi-author papers incorporated in the Thesis where my contributions are specified in this Statement of Contribution.

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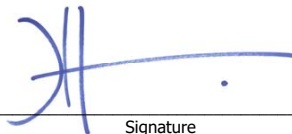
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07 October 2019
Date

Endorsed

Prof Jeroen van der Heijden

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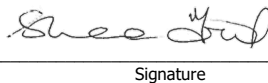
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2.1 Introduction

When 193 member nations signed up to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, it was the first time the policy community had seen such a significant opportunity for mainstream sustainability ideas across policy sectors. The academic community proactively concentrated its efforts on raising critical research questions across the Goals (Oldekop et al., 2016), setting normative directions for effective implementation (Biermann et al., 2017; Boas, Biermann, & Kanie, 2016; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017), and consolidating decades of research on policy coordination and integration (Candel, 2017; Cejudo & Michel, 2017; Peters, 2018; Tosun & Lang, 2017).

The soft, non-binding agenda attempted to make the commitments concrete by offering a shopping list of 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators. Some people criticised the agenda for its weak enforcement of imprecise commitments: the agenda was missing the following: (1) clear lines of delegation for implementation (Persson, Weitz, & Nilsson, 2016); (2) a hierarchy for strengthening accountability (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Dahl, & Persson, 2018); and (3) an understanding of enablers for successful implementation (Spangenberg, 2017). A few researchers have indicated that the soft measures uphold the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities*, allowing countries to chart their own sustainability paths and make adaptations based on their institutional learning (Xue et al., 2018) and their interpretations of policy integration (Tosun & Leininger, 2017). The sustainability path may include political commitments to adapt existing institutions for developing long-term and transnational priorities (Fourie, 2018). However, the literature lacks empirical studies on the national implementation of SDGs that go beyond the analysis of public documents; such documents may present questionable data.

Crucial to the national implementation of the SDG agenda is the idea of breaking sectoral silos and facilitating policy integration. Conceptual and technical tools have been developed to operationalise policy integration through the identification of inter-linkages between the targets and the indicators of the SDGs (Le Blanc, 2015; Nilsson, Griggs, & Visbeck, 2016).

The institutional framework presents the building blocks for promoting coherence in policy actions (OECD, 2016). The underlying assumptions for the tools and framework are manifested in the basic definition of policy integration, which is the maximization of synergies and the minimization of trade-offs (Griggs et al., 2014). This definition encourages or reflects two types of strategies that could be adopted by bureaucrats in inter-ministerial integration: (1) identifying and consolidating the low-hanging fruit of naturally obvious synergies; or (2) negotiating on policy conflicts to minimise trade-offs by reaching newly framed synergies (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016).

This definition could generate a third strategy, however. It is argued that sustainable development should no longer be the result of synergies across dimensions, but also 'constraints on human behaviours' including economic-centric policy decisions (Holden, Linnerud, & Banister, 2017). The desire to achieve synergies might encourage bureaucrats to hide the conflicts that require policy actors to compromise to achieve better sustainable development outcomes, as such conflicts are inherently trade-offs (Kambites, 2014; Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). When actors are not willing to compromise, they will exclude these conflicts at the start of the negotiation, abandon them in the middle, or reach a consensus that accepts the lowest common denominator (Radtke et al., 2016) in order to maintain 'mutual non-interference' among ministries (Hustedt & Danken, 2017). The results of conflict avoidance are observed in, for example, the National Sustainable Development Strategy that has not been able to translate a vague and general vision into a concise and concrete policy programme across any European country except Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016).

Our empirical study systematically investigates such conflicts and the avoidance of these conflicts in the SDG integration regimes of Germany, Finland and the Czech Republic. These regimes have a stable set of actors and rules for implementing inter-ministerial processes (e.g. Committees on Sustainable Development) and producing policy outputs (e.g. National Strategies on Sustainable Development). In honouring the international commitment to the SDGs, the regimes identify gaps in domestic and international affairs, set indicators and targets for narrowing the gaps, and resolve conflicts in policy integration across ministries.

We ask the broad question of what explains conflict avoidance in policy integration in the implementation of the SDGs. We answer this question through interviews with bureaucrats who have central roles in the implementation of the SDGs in the countries mentioned. In the remainder of this article, we describe the processes of data collection and analysis, four types of conflict avoidance behaviours, and our contribution to an understanding of the role of conflicts, and particularly conflict avoidance, in SDG integration regimes.

2.2 Research design and methodology

For this qualitative comparative study, we attempt to strike a balance between sufficient consistency to demonstrate dominant patterns across the three countries and sufficient diversity to assess the validity of dominant patterns in the implementation of SDGs at the national level (Mahoney & Goertz, 2004). Based on the Synthesis of Voluntary National Reviews (UNDESA Division for Sustainable Development, 2016), we have identified two illustrative cases of early adopters of the SDG agenda that demonstrate mature practices of policy integration across ministries (Germany and Finland). During the fieldwork, the interviewees recommended the Czech Republic as an emerging example of a country that is pioneering the implementation of the SDGs and investing significant EU funds in sustainability governance. The integration regimes of these three countries are rich cases with a history of sustainability discourse that is long enough for illustrative examples of conflict avoidance to be identified.

Table 2-1 Interview participants by country and sector

| | Public service (B) | Civil society (C) | Academia (A) | Total |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Germany (G) | 19 | 2 | 2 | 23 |
| Finland (F) | 17 | 2 | 2 | 21 |
| Czech Republic (C) | 7 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Europe (E) | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 45 | 5 | 6 | 56 |

A total of 56 interviewees, including public servants, academics and civil society leaders, participated in the study (see Table 1). As we relied on snowball sampling, the interviewees recruited are by no means statistically representative of the whole group of key actors in the sustainability governance of the respective countries. The number and type of interviewees involved does, nevertheless, open a window on the implementation of the SDGs in the three countries that is large enough to enable conclusions to be drawn across the countries. The one-letter codes displayed in Table 1 are strung together to form unique identifiers for individual interviewees. For example, '#G17B' illustrates that the interviewee is the 17th participant in the study, comes from Germany (G), and works as a bureaucrat in the public administration (B). The interviews addressed existing conflicts across government ministries and conflicts that were not present but that the interviewees considered should exist. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition, we collected publicly available reports and interviewee-supplied documents, including policy strategies, evaluation reports, terms of reference for committees, internal assessment templates, and presentation slides.

The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework, a variant of rational choice institutionalism, guided the analysis. It is operationalised in three ways. First, we used key elements of the IAD to understand the institutional context; this involved mapping the actors, forums, and group characteristics. Secondly, we structured the data in compliance with the standard ADICO syntax detailed by (Watkins & Westphal, 2015). This codifies 'who does what to whom under what conditions and with what consequences' as individual rules. From approximately 57 hours of interviews, 1,135 rules were identified via the ADICO syntax,

coded with theoretical guidance, and aggregated to form themes on avoidance behaviours. Thirdly, we used the rule typology to code the conflict avoidance behaviours. From the elements codified through the ADICO syntax, the regime operation includes conflicts that were avoided (see Table 2) and the way in which conflicts were avoided (see Table 3). At this stage, it is not possible to undertake a comparative case study to associate different levels or types of conflict avoidance with the performance of integration regimes, because commonly agreed success indicators for policy integration are yet to be developed (Peters, 2015b). Instead, the analysis focuses on identifying themes shared across Finland, Germany and, as much as possible, the Czech Republic. Sometimes, differences in conflict avoidance behaviours will be highlighted to demonstrate a complicated pattern that may only be clarified with further research.

2.3 Findings

The analysis found that significant levels of conflict avoidance occurred across the three countries in this study, especially during the development of national strategies and position papers. The participants nominated a list of conflicts (see Table 2) that either did not attract sufficient attention during the deliberation or were excluded early on from any kind of deliberation. The long-standing conflicts that were avoided tend to be environmental protection issues and issues with short policy windows including trade agreements. The trade-offs between economic growth and environmental protection are difficult decisions that are 'covered up and avoided' under the flexible concept of sustainable development (Kambites, 2014). Our data point to four distinct types of conflict avoidance. In what follows, we will introduce these types, their associated rules, their contributing factors, the reasons for the conflict avoidance and the strategies for sustaining the avoidance. For each type, examples from the three countries will be given in comparative terms where possible. Table 3 provides an overview of the types of conflict avoidance.

Table 2-2 Avoided conflicts by country

| |
|---|
| <p>Finland</p> <p>'bio' section of bioeconomy (forestry management)</p> <p>General interactions across Ministries of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Environment</p> <p>Technical measurement of resource efficiency</p> |
| <p>Germany</p> <p>Human rights and environmental protection issues in TTIP</p> <p>Ambitious targets on water for agriculture</p> |
| <p>Czech Republic</p> <p>Sale of military weapons overseas</p> <p>Distribution of agricultural land</p> <p>Transition into low-carbon economy</p> |

Table 2-3 Conflict avoidance behaviours across stages of policy integration

| Stage | Type (Rule) | Subtype (Factor) | Reason for avoidance | Perpetuating strategy |
|----------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| | Purposeful conflict avoidance | Highly political | Dealt with by the politicians and major committees | Exclude SD community |
| | | Subtly political | Dealt with by SD community | Push over to SD community |
| | <i>Boundary / Scope</i> | | | |
| Prioritization | Ignorant conflict avoidance | Not knowing | Uncertain about outcome, fearful that there is low return on investment | Develop own siloed analysis capacity |
| | | Knowing | Certain about outcome, confident about low return on investment | Monitor explicitly or secretly |
| | <i>Information / Payoff</i> | | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Deliberation | Substantive conflict avoidance | Abstract not concrete | Concrete commitments provoke more conflicts | Regurgitate abstract commitment |
| | <i>Choice / Scope</i> | Process not substance | Substantive commitments provoke more conflicts | Deliberate institutional innovation |
| Resolution | Strategic conflict avoidance | Unanimity not majority | Everyone needs to agree to the final decision | Present a united front |
| | <i>Aggregation</i> | Balance not challenge | Everyone needs to be included in the process | Water down commitments |

2.3.1 Purposeful conflict avoidance

This type of conflict avoidance relates to who has access to the issue (a boundary rule) and what outcomes can be decided (a scope rule) (McGinnis, 2011). Boundary rules determine which actors can get into and out of situations in which problems can be solved through negotiation and ‘fight’ (Raco, 2005). Scope rules limit the set of outcomes that the actors can influence. Rules on political sensitivity, and neoliberal ideology, preclude certain conflicts. The level of political sensitivity is a crucial boundary rule for determining which actors can access specific policy spaces. Politicians and major sector-specific parliamentary committees can access spaces for deliberating highly political issues, whereas less political issues are left to the sustainability community and policy technocrats (#F25A, #F28B, #F31B, #G12C, #G56B). The former group excludes the latter group, leaving the latter group powerless to determine the outcomes of more political, and therefore more impactful, issues.

In Germany, for example, each ministry has a dedicated permanent parliamentary committee, which ring-fences a stable suite of sector-specific policy issues. These committees (e.g. the Committee on Food and Agriculture) push policy issues with a sustainability label to the supplementary Committee on Sustainable Development. These issues do not have high political relevance or resource implications. On the other hand, the Committee on Sustainable Development is often unable to settle highly political issues, and will force these issues into

parliamentary sessions to achieve some progress or resolution. 'Sustainability can be easily pushed down and then off the agenda' (#G17B). The powerful ministerial silos have, in effect, created a powerless silo for cross-sectoral issues that are managed by the sustainability community. Another example can be seen in relation to TTIP. The central coordinating team described TTIP as a 'big deal' that was highly political because the 'NGOs were against it'. The team 'saw some information circulated on this issue, and saw how things unfolded but never discussed in depth' (#G56B). For less political issues, ministerial actors 'would just talk to [their] colleagues responsible for the portfolios' (#G56B), and they would reach an agreement more easily because they were 'closer to the facts' (#G10B).

Another boundary rule is the neoliberal ideology. Proposals from ministerial actors that favour economic growth tend to crowd out the voices in favour of environmental protection. Priorities are priorities because they contribute to economic growth. Ironically, the sustainability agenda can be neoliberalism in disguise or can have legitimacy in the decoupling context (R. Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals agenda is an inclusive agenda that 'leaves no one behind', including capitalist projects (Weber, 2017). It is also a pro-growth agenda that oversees eco-efficiency and green growth, advancing the 'sustainable development of neoliberalism' rather than ecological sustainability (Wanner, 2015). The data shows that actors from civil society and academia are more likely to warn against neoliberalism without and within the sustainability agenda. Many in Germany and Finland are deeply disappointed by the lack of transformational actions in the National Strategy on Sustainable Development. They feel that unless neoliberalism is confronted and the mindset of bureaucrats shifts, policy integration is not possible (#G12C). Bureaucrats continue to avoid confrontation with discourses and projects, leaving environmental and social conditions unsustainable. The politics of growth remains hegemonic. This hegemony defines the self-interest of politicians (#C48C), which quarantines highly political issues within individual sectors.

2.3.2 Ignorant conflict avoidance

The second type, *ignorant conflict avoidance*, is characterised by a lack of exchange of information, or situations where 'the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing',

preventing the mixing of epistemic communities (Zito, 2001). Information exchange supports the identification of problems and the clarification of roles and responsibilities during inter-ministerial deliberation (Radtke et al., 2016). Guided and constrained by institutions, actors filter out issues as they prioritise, deliberate and resolve. What is prioritised will determine what gets deliberated and resolved. After much filtering at each stage of integration, there are only a handful of issues that can be truly deliberated and resolved in order to achieve greater policy integration, and they are arguably less impactful. Through such institutional filtering, *purposeful conflict avoidance* will spare from exclusion issues that are not highly political and not against neoliberalism. These spared issues undergo a second layer of institutional filtering. *Ignorant conflict avoidance* will help actors decide their level of involvement in the deliberation, based on what they know and how they perceive the incentives. There are two kinds of ignorance here – knowing too little and knowing too much.

First, without proper inter-ministerial mechanisms, actors will have little chance of sharing information about their views, interests and positions. 'Everything is organised along the information silos, which are difficult to break' (#G19B). Knowing too little about each other pushes ministries back into their ministerial silos to develop analysis capacity based on siloed and incomplete understandings of policy issues (#F22B). They also develop ministry- and portfolio-specific indicators. When the central coordinator asks individual ministries to 'dig deeper' and 'do structural analysis with a longitudinal perspective', no single ministry has the whole-of-government view that is necessary for cross-sectoral issues through policy integration (#C42B). In effect, ministries for decades maintain the status quo of building their capacity for siloed ministry-specific analysis. The analysis outputs continue to reinforce the ministry-specific interests and worldviews.

Secondly, with proper mechanisms, individual ministries will develop capacities for monitoring the movements of other ministries on top of the siloed analysis capacity. This monitoring capacity can be undertaken individually or in collaboration with like-minded ministries in a coalition (#G13B). They can develop intelligence through analysing the formal policy documents of other ministries, and information shared in inter-ministerial forums. Ministerial representatives prioritise issues together in formal preparatory meetings (#G20B), or have

private conversations with confidants from other ministries (#G8B), or send in 'spies' to work in other ministries (#C46C). Getting information on any internal movement in the other ministries gives the upper hand in inter-ministerial deliberation. With this intense monitoring, the ministries know so much about each other that they cannot imagine much benefit, let alone a satisfactory outcome, in deliberating over serious conflicts (#G15A, #G19B) within a specific time constraint (#G1B, #G15A). 'We are pragmatic about what we can and cannot do, at least that is true in writing' (#G20B). For example, Finland has a long tradition of sustaining inter-ministerial dialogue (#F34B). Ministries maintain a high level of familiarity with each other's core beliefs and relatively stable positions (#F29B). The Finns took less than half the time taken by the Germans and Czechs to produce their report on the implementation of the SDG agenda (#F28B). While the Finnish report was relatively succinct, it articulated concrete commitments to tackling climate change and inequality. Actors attested to the relative ease of reaching a whole-of-government consensus (#F30B). However, such long and frequent inter-ministerial exchanges can make bureaucrats feel frustrated by the highly repetitive conversations in multiple forums (#F32B). Also, this may prevent the Finnish actors from entering conversations about issues about which they see no chance of the other ministries compromising at all (#F35B). Knowing too little contributes to actors feeling uncertain about how fruitful the outcome of the deliberation may be. Knowing too much makes actors overly confident that no fruitful outcomes will eventuate. With little expected return, actors will divest from deliberation strategies and invest in strategies for avoiding conflicts.

2.3.3 Substantive conflict avoidance

The third type of conflict avoidance relates to commitments in the National Strategy on Sustainable Development that are frequently framed in superficial and abstract terms. These vague commitments were just a regurgitation of the old, or a new and improved version of the insignificant (Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005). *Substantive conflict avoidance* is a strategy of convenience that allows politicians to bend the narratives of their commitment later on (Candel, 2017). Through institutional filtering, *ignorant conflict avoidance* will spare from exclusion issues that are well known but are not perceived as unchangeable. The spared

issues undergo the third layer of filtering – *substantive conflict avoidance*. The lack of substantive integration can be explained by two factors.

The first factor is abstract deliberation. Ministerial representatives can agree on vague and broad terms and not on concrete and specific commitments, knowing that these bring concrete threats such as implementation disputes (#C45C, #G6B) and resource loss (#F24B). The natural position of individual ministries is to defend the erosion of their ministerial or party turf (#G20B). If the compromises are considered too radical or political for an individual ministry, the deliberation falls back on the regurgitation of abstract visions (#F25A). In mature integration regimes such as those of Finland and Germany, actors are committed to long-term dialogue and concrete deliberation. Sustainable development presents opportunities for easy consensus at the abstract level, and risks empty commitment at the concrete level (#F34B). There is a consensus in Finland to ‘make societal commitments concrete’ (Government Administration Unit of Finland, 2017) to improve their perceived relevance among members of parliament (#F28B, #F22B), and a consensus in Germany to confront ‘competing objectives and interests’ (G. Jordan & Halpin, 2006) in explicit terms with monitoring capacity (#G56B). Nonetheless, actors remain more comfortable with joint visions that are vaguely framed (The Federal Government of Germany, 2017) and therefore politically harmless (#F28B). Provoking political conflicts may implode the integration regime (Meadowcroft, 2009) because greater decision-making power can attract even greater resistance, which is ‘beyond its original objectives’ of setting guidelines and influencing policy actors (#G13B; #G8B similar).

The narrowing and fixing of the agenda excludes emerging trends that appear abstract (#F27A). Abstract concepts and principles also help with formulating good arguments for defending concrete proposals (#C45C). Some even argue that the National Strategy on Sustainable Development is not designed to implement concrete measures because ‘life is big and you cannot steer the whole life with a single strategy’ (#G57B). The strategy ‘provides a reference for steering the government’ (#G57B). ‘Criticism has been that SD community is another layer of structure but we need that to take a broader view to see the bigger picture that is easily acceptable by many parties combined with practical and concrete actions’ (#F32B). ‘Czech Republic 2030 is about vision, not means and money. Conflicts are more

likely to arise after the Strategy is developed', when concrete terms are deliberated (#C48C; #C47C similar).

Deliberation is more concrete when it is focused on a particular nexus (#G24B) and indicators (#F36B). However, when pragmatic sustainability actors make concrete proposals, the ministerial actors may tell them 'we wouldn't even talk about it except in general terms about policy coherence' (#C47C). Even if actors start to deliberate in concrete terms, the second factor will still produce conflict avoidance. Actors tend to focus their deliberation on institutional processes rather than substantive policy. Actors believe that unless the institutional processes are right, there will be little substantive improvement in inter-ministerial conversations (#F39B). Without establishing the institutional capacity for policy analysis and stakeholder engagement, it will be difficult to initiate inter-ministerial dialogues about 'burning issues' such as the 'export of military weapons, transition to low-carbon economy, and distribution of agricultural land' (#C47C; #G6B similar), but exchanging perspectives on substantive issues through existing inter-ministerial structures is still highly acceptable to the actors (#C44B).

A well-known example in Germany is the limited power of the Parliamentary Committee on Sustainable Development. This committee can only determine whether ministries have completed a Sustainability Impact Assessment for their legislative proposals. It cannot comment on the quality of the substance of the Assessment (#G5C, #G6B, #G19B, #G56B). Moreover, the committee has been able to produce position papers only on institutional reforms, rather than on policy reforms, because papers on the latter will provoke unmanageable political conflicts and therefore make it harder to reach consensus (#G19B). However, when reflecting on the shift from an ecological paradigm to an inclusive agenda, the German regime has been able to focus on substantive issues around gender, wages and social protection (#G8B). Critically, ecological limits remain the most difficult group of substantive issues for deliberation. The Ministry of the Environment proposed more ambitious targets on water management, which, as expected, were resisted by the Ministry of Agriculture in order not to 'blame the farmers' (#G56B). The German experience suggests that targets are the most concrete and substantive topic of discussion, and therefore attract

intense conflict (#G1B, #G8B). The Finns admitted that individual ministries nominated their usual sets of indicators and targets (#F24B) and therefore that the process of developing their Implementation Plan was almost free of inter-ministerial conflicts (#F32B). Some wished that there had been more substantive conflicts (#F30B). Despite the lack of substantive changes, the Finns – in a description given by outsiders – are diligent in building institutional capacities while pushing for the airing of concrete and substantive disagreements openly in forums (#E60C).

This finding on the lack of substantive changes is consistent with the broader literature on policy integration, which has been more interested in enablers such as strong institutions, political backing (Cejudo & Michel, 2017), process reforms (Tosun & Lang, 2017), the exchange of information to achieve shared goals, the ability to adapt instruments (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016), decentralised leadership, and multilateral and simultaneous negotiations (Radtke et al., 2016). The evaluations of policy integration efforts have been nothing more than the assessment of the effectiveness of coordination processes (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). An exception is the consideration of policy substance in the processual framework, which highlights the importance of holistic policy frames and shared policy goals (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016). This study exemplifies attempts for reforms beyond bureaucratic institutions; actors devised their own heuristics to process policy substance, which included the German Twelve Management Rules (The Federal Government of Germany, 2017) and the Finnish Five Spearheads (Finnish Expert Panel on Sustainable Development, 2016).

2.3.4 Strategic conflict avoidance

The final type of conflict avoidance is *strategic conflict avoidance*, which relates to how inter-ministerial decisions are made in accordance with the aggregation rules. Two types of rule produce conflict avoidance, making transformational integration less possible. The first rule is on unanimity for arriving at a resolution. Sustainable development is a broad agenda that does not just require consensus from two or three parties, but sometimes needs up to ten or more ministries to agree. The bar for integration becomes exponentially higher as the number of deliberating partners increases, and the rule of unanimity cannot be compromised. Involving a handful of ministries, the inter-ministerial committees on cross-sectoral issues

such as migration and climate change struggle with producing transformational integration (Radtke et al., 2016), let alone with the larger integration regime for implementing the sustainability agenda, which involves the whole of government across all ministries. The joint strategies that project a seemingly united front are full of escape clauses that exempt specific ministries from particular whole-of-government commitments (#G11B). The German Parliamentary Advisory Committee on Sustainable Development adopts the unanimity rule (#G19B, #G20B), which requires all committee members to agree on the same priorities at the same time, and for those priorities to be deliberated in the same ways with the same kind of materials presented. The members then have to agree on the same position to be presented through the same channels to the same recipients for the same purposes. Therefore, the end goal of finalizing an official joint statement compels the actors to stay 'silent on disagreed positions' (#F35B). The alternative model of majority voting, which is the common approach among the permanent parliamentary committees, is claimed to have produced vicious fights between members (#G20B). However, deliberation based on personal ties drives inter-ministerial negotiation into the race towards the 'lowest common denominator' (#C48C). The unanimity model is claimed to promote collegiality, but at what cost?

The second rule asks coordinators to balance the interests across the table (#C47C, #F34B), and refrain from picking clear winners, so that 'everyone complains a little'. This litmus test ensures that the balancing process gives, as far as possible, equal weight to each party's view – except the extreme views (#F41B). This highly inclusive deliberation avoids challenges to the positions of actors with lower commitment. More aspirational actors have to align with the lowest common denominator (#G15A) because they 'just want to go forward and make compromises, even if they are small steps – despite it is not most desirable' (#F36B). Scarce resources further exacerbate this, encouraging coordinators to use time pressures to 'force a consensus' among the ministries (#G2B, #G13B, #G15A). Therefore, many integration commitments are watered down so far that nothing is transformational. The coordinator needs to balance the stability and progress of indicators (#G1B), changes to current pro-sustainability practices and new sustainability concepts (#G7C), flexibility of sustainability concepts and concreteness of institutional adoption (#G8B), creation of necessary new processes and maintenance of efficient government (#G11B), effective security and

environmental protection (#G11B), the technical robustness and political significance of indicators (#G14B), mandated common issues and differentiated interests (#F33B), and the effectiveness and simplicity of Sustainability Impact Assessments (#G57B).

This is a common phenomenon in the inter-ministerial committees of all three countries with a structure like this. In both Finland and Germany, bureaucrats state that ministries have explicit policy bottom-lines that will not be on the agenda for deliberation (#G11B) or will be 'fought till the last battle' (#F35B). The ministries threaten to leave inter-ministerial negotiations altogether if the bottom-line issue is, even in the faintest way, discussed. In many circumstances, these bottom-line issues are the more transformational ones. Despite bottom-line issues being avoided, the unanimity rule can be positive in the long term. The Germans introduced escape clauses in order to push through a particular joint statement in the National Strategy on Sustainable Development (#G11B). However, the Finns insist on everyone agreeing to statements, and avoid using escape clauses (#F28B); they see deliberation of sustainability issues as a long-term dialogue for understanding each other rather than a short-term exercise for producing agreements. 'We let all the flowers bloom; we sometimes say that when there is no dispute within the sustainable development family, SD [sustainable development] is dead. There cannot be consensus around sustainable development' (#F28B). When making recommendations on concrete actions, ministerial actors can 'display disagreements among themselves in the annex section', but a solution must have been proposed (#F34B). The Finns are comfortable with disagreeing with each other, while they are committed to building the capacity for reaching a consensus much later when a better window of opportunity arises. Such confidence that conflicts will eventually be resolved through more deliberation (#F34B) is not reflected in the German regime. Germans are more proactive negotiators who offer deals and use procedural tricks to achieve inter-ministerial agreement. This may overcome an immediate conflict, but avoids the necessary deliberation over difficult conflicts (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Whilst acknowledging that policy coordination is no panacea and that reaching transformational consensus is difficult (Candel, 2017), no study has pointed out that the aggregation rules, requiring unanimity in decision-making and the balancing of interests, are crucial in the formation of conflict avoidance.

2.4 Discussion and Conclusion

In the previous section, we complemented our data insights with the extant literature. The discussion on the findings can be extended in the following areas: (1) turf protection, (2) institutional filtering and (3) positive characteristics.

First, our data feature coordinators who respect ministerial autonomy and support self-organised negotiation among ministries on joint commitments in the National Strategy. Under such decentralised arrangements, ministries practise four types of conflict avoidance. These four drivers add to the dominant understanding of conflict avoidance, which presumes that avoidance behaviours are driven by turf protection only (Hustedt & Danken, 2017; Radtke et al., 2016). Attributing the failure of policy integration to turf protection places the blame on individual ministries who are seen to be guarding against any erosion of their portfolios – speculative or real.

Secondly, however, avoidance behaviours in this study relate to issues over which policy actors have no direct control. Alternatively, we see avoidance as the doing of broader institutions, and we tentatively call it institutional filtering. Conflicts are avoided or filtered when (1) the issues for deliberation are too political, (2) the actors know too much or too little about the issues, (3) the deliberation is too abstract, or (4) the bar for consensus is too high. Such institutional filtering pushes many issues out, leaving fewer and fewer issues available for integration as the issues move across the stages of policy integration. There should be further research to explore whether the sequencing or combination of these four types of conflict avoidance matter.

Finally, at the heart of this analysis are the tenets of the rational choice model, which can only partially explain conflict avoidance. The model helps analysts consider the calculation, selfishness, and insecurity of actors. Although negative characteristics may be the main theme of the interviews, actors occasionally rise above the rational exchange by considering collective long-term interests without asking for individual short-term return. Future analysis could focus on positive characteristics such as trust and altruism within the sustainability communities, and how these might ward off conflict avoidance.

A limitation of the study is the purposeful and non-random sampling of the interviewees. The interviewees who agreed to participate in this study may have been highly motivated to promote positive changes to the national implementation of the SDGs in their countries. Therefore, it is possible that the insights of some key stakeholders who have been involved in serious conflicts on sustainability issues have not been adequately captured in this study. The findings in this study may thus only serve as a general scan of conflict avoidance behaviours, rather than a comprehensive investigation of conflict management. Future studies using random samples may wish to address this issue.

In sum, policy integration provokes conflict of interests between ministries. In supporting the movement of policy conflict from a background concept to a foreground concept (Weible & Heikkila, 2017), this study highlights conflict avoidance behaviours to be researched alongside conflict engagement. It provides a targeted but deep understanding of conflict avoidance in 'a treatise of policy integration' (Tosun & Lang, 2017). As one piece in the bigger puzzle of policy integration, it is intended to ease the talk about the 'elephants in the room'. Avoidance of conflicts, even in pioneer regimes, has been documented as more common than expected in inter-ministerial activities (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Confronting difficult conflicts might just give us a better chance of making more transformational changes to sustainability issues.

3 Political commitment

The institutional filters have tied the hands of sustainability bureaucrats. It may seem like they were passively accepting the state of the institutions to the extent that they actively avoided conflicts. However, they have not been compliant all the time. The bureaucrats would resist the turn and churn of the machinery of government when they had to keep their work alive. They would even use institutional tactics to secure political commitment for continuing their work.

Securing political commitment to sustainable development has been the revolving door of sustainability actors. Following up the Brundtland commitments, the Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development – Razali Ismail steered the Rio Forum of 1992 away from the highly scripted speeches. He opened it up for free and frank exchange between political leaders. The Australian environment minister at the time, Ros Kelly did not hold back (Khor, 1994):

There was a growing sense of disillusionment that the political commitment at Rio had been lost in a bureaucratic maze and rhetoric. Environment concerns had 'gone off the boil' in the past year as wars and recession received more attention. Political commitment and leadership were required and that ministers must keep involved in the UNCED follow-up process, or lese the environment would return to being treated with low priority and goodness knows what will happen to our next generation.

Political commitment to sustainable development has to be long-term. Minister Ros Kelly may be right that bureaucracies and formalities can blur the real goal. Ironically, it is exactly these formalities that have saved sustainability institutions from the razor blades in periods of weak political commitment.

This chapter² is the following article that is currently under review:

Wong, R., & van der Heijden, J. How to keep the sustainability regime alive.
Environmental Policy and Governance



Statement of Contribution

This thesis is submitted as a Thesis by Compilation in accordance with https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppf/document/ANUP_003405

I declare that the research presented in this Thesis represents original work that I carried out during my candidature at the Australian National University, except for contributions to multi-author papers incorporated in the Thesis where my contributions are specified in this Statement of Contribution.

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Senior author or collaborating authors endorsement: [For Jeroen]

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Signature

07 October 2019
Date

Endorsed

Prof Jeroen van der Heijden

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21 Nov 2019

Date

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25-11-19

Date

² As the primary author of this article, Ryan Wong has contributed 95% of the effort to prepare for and complete its publication.

3.1 Introduction

Sustainability governance has a long history dating back to the Our Common Future Report of 1987, outlining the urgency to integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development. Many subsequent international forums have aimed at compelling nations to commit to integrating sustainability principles and ideas into their policy ecosystem (Creech, 2012) at least normatively if not concretely (Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2007). At the national level, such political commitment has been made in events, speeches, budgets, institutions and policies. It is the main driver of policy development, without which policy makers will not make a move.

Political commitment is especially needed for 'activating' (Peters, 2013) and 'sustaining' (Rouhinen, 2014) the development of regimes that counter dominant 'departmentalism' (Russel & Jordan, 2009). Policy makers need to deal with cross-sectoral issues through policy integration in both procedural and substantive terms (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Procedurally, regimes such as inter-ministerial committees can be set up to harmonise the differences between siloed agencies. Substantively, policies of specific ministries for specific sectors should consider interests and understandings of other ministries and sectors. Most importantly, the improvement to procedural and substantive integration should be viewed as an ongoing process and that there is no end point to integration (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016).

The continuous process of integrating policies in the predominantly siloed public service organisations asks for commitment beyond the ordinary. Long-term political commitment provides stability to regimes for policy integration (OECD, 2016). For liberal democracies, particularly those which have shown to promote weak sustainability (Ward, 2008), the challenge is to achieve long-term political commitment for a continuous process of policy integration beyond an election cycle; and its intention has to be sustained for any meaningful deliberation and implementation to occur (Ypi, 2016). For example, an election that brings about a change of leadership or government could reshuffle the cards of sustainability commitment.

Political commitment, as 'sustained intention', provides the stability for policy making to take its course especially in the face of political distractions that can pull attention away from the intention (Ypi, 2016). This emphasis on long-term and ambitious intention can be illustrated in the implementation of the recently ratified Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. It features a long list of seventeen goals to be implemented in integrated ways within a time frame of fifteen years (UNDESA, 2015). This Agenda would give sustainability governance a much-needed renewal of political commitment (Van Alstine, Afionis, & Doran, 2013). Having said that, some are pessimistic about what any sustainability agenda could achieve in terms of real policy actions (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Political commitment may appear expectedly in speeches and policy documents – merely as a symbolic gesture. Technocrats behind the scene are forced to avoid conflicts that require actionable integration commitments due to political sensitivity (Author's article).

At question is, how to secure such commitment not for an election cycle but a whole generation? In what follows, we compare the commitments towards SDG governance across three European countries: Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and Finland. Our empirical study indicates that the differences in commitments may explain whether and how the SDG regime will survive and develop over time. Conceptually, we propose that political commitment is the result of involving politicians in the development of institutions for keeping the sustainability regime active. We will then outline the methodology for coding and analyzing 56 interviews with stakeholders and public documents from the three countries. The findings section will present these components with illustrative examples for each country individually; in the discussion section, we draw lessons across the countries. We conclude with the main lessons learnt and potential future research directions.

3.2 Conceptual framework

In day-to-day conversations, 'commitment' is an expressed promise or an expressed decision by an actor or actors to give time and energy to do something. In the literature on sustainability governance, the concept of political commitment has been used alongside phrases like political will and leadership. However, it is difficult to identify a summative

definition of the concept, mainly because there is no coherent theory on political commitment in the broader political science literature (Fox, Goldberg, Gore, & Bärnighausen, 2011). The concept has been described to be 'high-level' (Turnpenny et al., 2008) and 'widespread'. It can 'wane over time' (A. Jordan & Lenschow, 2010) and 'fluctuate' (Adelle & Russel, 2013). It is often associated with 'priorities' (Storbjörk & Isaksson, 2014). It is required to build a collaborative platform and initiate a series of policy processes (Ansell & Gash, 2018). It is used to evaluate how dutifully will an agenda be implemented (Nilsson & Persson, 2017). In sum, political commitment is dynamic and it necessitates actions. It is not a static concept, which may explain the difficulties of coming to a precise definition. That said, perhaps rather than defining what it precisely *is*, it may be more helpful to empirically observe *how* and *where* commitments are expressed.

One would find commitments easily in speeches and policies. Firstly, political actors announce their intentions in public speeches. The media, civil society and the general public assess whether these intentions are truly sustained; a commitment is shown credible when the political leaders do not reverse their promises (Jan, 2003). Political leaders who address the public on a particular issue as frequently and as early as possible will be considered committed to the issue (Nattrass, 2008). These statements are frequently rhetorical but they are a precursor to more serious institutional actions (Baker et al., 2018). Beyond the speech, one can imagine that a political leader expresses commitment by attending events and participating actively in meetings. Even without actively expressing commitment in speeches or writing at these events and meetings, the mere presence of a political leader has an important symbolic meaning.

Secondly, political actors also demonstrate their commitments by reforming the institutions or using them to produce policy outputs (Fox et al., 2011). They will form new working groups and committees with accompanying policy frameworks to signify that the intention remains alive. After signing up to an agreement or initiative, the publication of short or long term plans demonstrates more serious intentions; it confirms that rhetoric is translated into actions that will be carried out by the institutions (Lozano et al., 2015). The majority of policy integration literature focuses on the analysis of institution to assess policy impact rather than political

commitment per se (Candel & Pereira, 2017; Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). In these assessments, the statements in speeches and plans are taken as good evidence for political commitment. However, this could turn into a bureaucratic exercise that feeds into the 'low-priority cycle' whereby political actors are only willing to keep sustainability on the agenda without making impactful commitments (Baker et al., 2018).

Political commitment is more than a transient statement. A handful of research studies have identified transient commitment as a barrier to substantive policy integration. However, they expected leadership from the top-level politicians and bureaucrats to secure commitments towards the sustainability agenda (Russel, 2007). Neglected were the role of technocrats who had a vested interest to see their work continue, and the issue of changing political leadership after an election. Needless to say, the sustenance for an agenda like the SDG needs to be longer than usual – at least beyond an election cycle. It is only if the regime treats policy integration as a continuous process as alluded before that it will have a chance to make an impact on the siloed institutional structure. A significant threat to regime continuity is a change of government that brings about a change in political commitment.

Political involvement and institutional development interact with each other to form a more nuanced understanding of political commitment than the description in policy integration literature. More explicitly, political involvement is assessed in public speeches and events whereas institutional development is found in policy documents and internal procedures. We propose here that the politico-institutional interactions are crucial for explaining regime continuity. Politicians express their support for an idea or initiative, which tends to go along with the establishment of institutions. From there, resources will be allocated for institutional development, building capacity for delivering commitments, and simultaneously securing political involvement (Peters, 2015a). More political involvement in turn provides more legitimacy to the institutions, forming a virtuous cycle for entrenching themselves in the broader ecosystem of policy making. This cycle increases the chances of propelling the regime forward when the bureaucrats resolve sustainability challenges and the politicians gain popular votes – simultaneously (Tils, 2007).

This study acknowledges that the sustainability governance effort so far has not resulted in transformational changes. Without transformation, the sustainability policies are modestly reframed as mechanisms for 'reflexive governance' (Meadowcroft, 2007) and 'capacity building' (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). On this predicament, the analysis of this study only seeks to clarify how bureaucrats try to secure continuing political and institutional commitments to keep the regime alive. Another acknowledgement is that this study focuses on the bureaucratic forces behind the policy documents that shape the way commitments extend the sustainability regime. It is not difficult to imagine there are other forces from other national agendas such as the climate change policies (Nash & Steurer, 2019) and other governance levels such as the European Consensus on Development (Cardwell & Jančić, 2019). For the sake of keeping the narrative of regime continuity understandable, we try to articulate the perceptions and actions of policy bureaucrats in their quest to extend their sustainability advocacy as long as possible – however minimal the impact and narrow the effort.

3.3 Methodology

To clarify the relationship between political commitment and regime continuity, we contrast the implementation of the SDG agenda in three countries: Germany, the UK, and Finland. We have selected these cases based on an assessment of the Voluntary National Reviews. For this study, Germany and the UK are what may be considered 'typical cases' and Finland is a 'deviant case' (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). That is, in Germany we observe an expected pattern of sustained commitment for the SDGs resulting from a high level of political involvement and a long continuous regime; and, in the UK we observe an expected pattern of interrupted commitment resulting from changes in political involvement from high to low after an election and a discontinued regime later. The Finland case challenges this expected pattern, however. Its regime has weathered through several changes of government and remained capable of securing political involvement. Adding this deviant case to the set of typical cases may therefore help to gain richer insight on the relationship between political commitment and regime continuity. In the case descriptions that follow, we attempt to strike a balance between sufficient consistency to demonstrate dominant patterns across the three

countries and sufficient diversity to assess the validity of dominant patterns of implementing sustainability agenda at the national level (Mahoney & Goertz, 2004).

Table 3-1 Number of interviewees by country and sector

| | Public service | Civil society | Academia | Total |
|--------------|----------------|---------------|----------|--------------|
| Germany | 19 | 2 | 2 | 23 |
| Finland | 17 | 2 | 2 | 21 |
| UK | 6 | 2 | 1 | 9 |
| Europe | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 44 | 6 | 6 | 56 |

To gain an in-depth understanding of the three cases, we have carried out original interviews and collected existing documentation. A total of 56 interviewees participated in the study, including public servants, academics and civil society leaders (see Table 1). Interviews addressed the factors that have contributed to regime continuity or discontinuity, focusing on times of uncertainty around political commitment. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition, we also collected publicly available reports and interviewee-supplied documents, which include policy strategies, evaluation reports, terms of reference for the committee, internal assessment templates, and presentation slides. Following the conventional practice for this type of research, data were coded using a coding scheme. The coding allowed identification of the “repetitiveness” and “rarity” of the experiences across interviewees and documents (Silverman, 2015). Interviewees remain anonymous in the remainder of the article, but unique codes are used for individual interviewees. For example, ‘G17B’ illustrates that the interviewee is the 17th participant in the study, from Germany (G), and worked as a bureaucrat in the public service (B). Other identifying codes are Finland (F), UK (U), EU (Europe), Civil society (C), and Academia (A).

The transcripts were coded in iterative rounds. In the first round, we identified two sets of activities – political involvement and institutional development that contribute to the survival of the regimes. In the second round, we developed codes (e.g., event attendance and gap analysis) for linking the two sets together. Finally, we make the codes more explicit by

describing the concrete tactics for securing commitments. The overarching theme that emerges from the data analysis is the reinforcing loop between political commitment and institutional commitment as illustrated in the conceptual framework in the previous section. This consideration gives the structure to the following Findings section, whereby each country will be described in terms of its regime continuity, political involvement and institutional development.

3.4 Findings

The general propositions unfold in three main steps. Firstly, political involvement from the highest level of leadership confirms the establishment of the sustainability regime, which has clearly identifiable institutional structures. Secondly, dedicated public servants may develop these structures further to implement the commitments as announced by the political leaders. Thirdly, the institutions may anticipate potential changes in political commitment right before an election and use tactics to secure continuous commitment. Table 2 introduces key measures for describing the outcome variable (regime continuity) and explanatory variables (political involvement and institutional development).

Table 3-2 Summary of descriptions on key variables

| | | Germany | United Kingdom | Finland |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Regime continuity | Number of leaders | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| | Number of changes of government | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| | Length of survival | 21 (ongoing) | 15 (terminated in 2009) | 26 (ongoing) |
| | Starting year | 1998 | 1994 | 1993 |
| Political involvement | Event attendance | United Nations High Level Political Forum | United Nations High Level Political Forum | United Nations High Level Political Forum |
| | | Annual event on sustainable | Discussion forum of civil society | National Commission on Sustainable |

development

Development

Launch of National Strategy

Launch of National Strategy

Acceptance of independent peer review report

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|--|---|---|
| | Public speech | Refugee crisis and its long term consequences Renewal of National Strategy One of the first to report on progress in SDGs implementation | Issues of developing countries Trade is a major solution to those issues. No pledges towards domestic issues or institutional reforms | Refugee crisis as it relates to development assistance and private sector involvement Renewal of National Strategy National commission has been developed for 22 years uninterrupted. |
| Institutional development | Output | National strategy | National strategy | National strategy |
| | | Impact assessment | Critical reports from Commission | Implementation report |
| | | Basic law proposal | Parliamentary inquiries | Scientific panel's reports |
| | | Sustainability management principles | Departmental plans | Sustainability budget statement |
| | | Critical pieces from Council | | |

3.4.1 Germany

Regime continuity

The sustainability regime in Germany emerged from the parliamentary inquiry into appropriate sustainability management practices. After reflecting on two major pieces of policy papers before the Committee on Protection of Mankind and the Environment, the 1998 *Concept of Sustainability* marked the beginning of a regime. A long deliberation resulted in the distillation of sustainability thinking into ten principles, which coincided with the establishment of the German Council on Sustainable Development in 2001 and the State Secretary Committee in 2002. With politics and institutions on their side, the regime has survived through 17 years of stable leadership by Chancellor Angela Merkel primarily. The regime has been further legitimised by the ratification of the Sustainable Development Goals, to which Germany pledged to 'align its domestic policies to the international norms' (G8B). This has created 'moments of creativity' (G7C) in reframing policy objectives in terms of sustainable development (G8B, G11B, G20B) without a radical 'redistribution of resources' (G18B). The public servants aimed to secure the continuity of sustainability policy (G1B) alongside a 'good track record of environmental policies' (G6B).

Political involvement

Under Chancellor Schröder's leadership, the red-green coalition was crucial in the initial stage of institutional development (G8B), which helped 'stabilise changes' in the operating environment of the regime (G7C). The 'loss of Green Party in the Coalition' in 2005 could have dented the progress of sustainability regime (G7C). It did not because of Chancellor Merkel's 'general support' for the 'high-level principles' of the sustainability regime, especially around inter-ministerial collaboration (G7C). Her commitment also showed in her direct involvement in appointing the Chair of the Board for the German Council on Sustainable Development (G17B). Without fail, she has attended every annual Council-led event in Germany (G12C). She made public speeches as prepared by the regime coordinator to demonstrate her unwavering support (G56B). Her commitment legitimised the regime's work to the extent that no actor can say that 'this is rubbish' (G57B). The Chancellor could be accompanied by more than one minister to the Council-led annual event, which signified the importance of sustainability works and inter-ministerial collaboration (G3B). Events generated

positive publicity for politicians, cajouling them to 'make above and beyond commitments' that would otherwise not have been made (G2B).

Institutional development

The clear and consistent signals from Chancellor Merkel provided the necessary continuity for the sustainability regime to create and preserve institutional memory and capacity, and in turn secure more political involvement. The institution is designed to engage repeatedly with targeted groups: the State Secretary Committee gathered the collective will across the ministries; the working groups under this Committee brought in technocrats to develop policy papers; the Parliamentary Advisory Committee engaged with politicians in impact assessment, the Council of Sustainable Development represented public voices through developing proposals, and the scientific panel merits academic inputs. These committees 'competed' with a significantly large pool of committees for the 'attention of policy makers' in a big government (G7C, similar G57B). The normal operation of the sustainability regime has been reproducing the perception of political commitment towards the cause. Elections could disrupt this normality.

Public servants would use tactics to secure as much political commitment as possible. The first tactic involved creative modification of the strategy development processes before the election. The election cycle in Germany coincided with the renewal of the National Strategy. The potential of a change of government or leadership might discontinue the regime – so much so that the Department of Sustainable Development in the Chancellery accelerated the drafting of a new National Strategy in response to the ratification of the 2015 SDGs Agenda. It decided not to conduct a gap analysis, which might delay the publication of the Strategy. The regime launched directly into the negotiation between ministries and the assignment of chapters of the Strategy to individual ministries. The Strategy was finally published in January 2017 – 6 months before the election to stabilise the regime. The second tactic was used for securing commitment right after the election. The public servants from the sustainability regime would seek ways to include clauses that signify commitment towards sustainable development in the Coalition Treaty (G57B). The third tactic was securing long-term political support from more than one side of politics. They have considered modifying the basic law to

acknowledge sustainable development as a governing principle (G1B) and a 'reference point' for policy making (G12C). The modification ranged from 'small-scale insertion of phrases' to 'large-scale review of governance' (G12C). The fourth tactic saw the regime expanded its capacity by assigning more formal positions and titles such as the sustainability coordinators that were nominated by individual ministries to represent their interests in developing and implementing the National Strategy. The capacity continued to expand when these bureaucratic insiders leveraged civil society advocacy and public pressure to advance internal debates (G12C). The final tactic involved the regime presenting itself as the frontrunner of sustainability governance, which provides them some immunity against discontinuation from politicians who did not want to lose that position (G16B). Equally appealing to the politicians, the regime's work also offered a 'positive narrative in times of nationalism, protectionism and terrorism' (G57B).

The effectiveness of these tactics is difficult to assess. However, it is clear that the institutions can be creative in securing long-term political commitment to strengthen the institutions further. Despite the lack of influence over major infrastructure projects, the 'micro-steps of institutional strengthening' were warranted for keeping the regime alive (G16B, similar G21B). The slow evolution from the 'ecological protection agenda to the socially inclusive agenda' was not imaginable a decade ago, but the flexible institutions have allowed such adaptation to ensure relevance and therefore survival (G8B). Some public servants seemed to be confident about their ability to entrench an institution to the extent that politicians might find difficult to remove (G7C, G8B, G16B, G21B), especially when institutional memory is preserved through careful management of workforce transition and knowledge transfer (G4A, G17B), through leadership at all levels (G18B), and through 'keeping the ideas alive' (G8B). The institution provided a routine for actors, and reassurance that sustainable development was no longer nascent or volatile (G57B). The entrenchment was also made possible by allowing a more loose definition of sustainable development to facilitate shifting interpretations when political commitment had changed (G6B).

3.4.2 United Kingdom

Regime continuity

The UK sustainability regime operated for 15 years since the publication of its very first National Strategy in 1994. The international community considered the UK to be at the forefront of sustainability governance when it showed significant political commitment at the United Nations forum. The regime weathered through four political leaderships and two changes of government. The Labour government provided stability for institutional development from 1997 to 2010. There was no threat to the continuity of the sustainability regime until the Conservative Party won the election in 2010. David Cameron as the new Conservative Prime Minister ordered the slashing of 'quangos' (i.e. publicly funded independent advisory bodies to the government) including the Commission on Sustainable Development. The change of government meant a change of political commitment from sustainable development towards austerity measures and vague commitments (U51A, similar U52B).

Political involvement

The axing of the Commission did not end all commitments towards sustainable development – at least not immediately. The subsequent debate surrounded options for preserving the institutional memory of the Commission. The void of political involvement was not filled until David Cameron showed significant interest in the ratification of the SDG agenda. The UK government offered substantial technical and diplomatic expertise in the process. Cameron's speech at the United Nations reassured domestic actors that sustainable development might be back on the political agenda. However, the international commitment was not met with proportionate domestic actions. An alliance of numerous civil society organizations has organised an advocacy event to discuss SDG implementation. While the Minister of Department of International Development attended, the other government officials pulled out last minute, representing a 'lack of political will' in tackling the issue (U59C). Out of desperation, the civil society would 'forever cling onto' the mentioning of 'leaving no one behind', which is a headline on the SDG agenda, in the Theresa May's speech (U59C). Without further signals from the top political leader that could filter down the government hierarchy, the development of the sustainability regime was once again stalled (U53B). The signals had to be as strong as the mandate given by the then Prime Minister John Major and

Secretary of State for Environment Michael Howard to groom the UK as the pioneer in sustainable development. For the SDG agenda to be taken seriously, there had to be a 'political push from the top' to ensure government departments recognised that it was a priority (U55B).

Political commitment to sustainability governance in the UK is tied to party philosophy. Labour party is much more aligned with the sustainability principles – a foundation that was translated into leadership that was hugely supportive of the sustainability agenda (U51A). It is evidenced in the commitment to set up a Sustainable Development Commission in the 1997 Labour Party manifesto (U55B). The Tories, on the other hand, are less interested in 'grand strategies' in the way that the SDG agenda would offer (U49A). It was even questioned whether John Major, the then Conservative Prime Minister, was truly committed to the cause if it had not been the push from the environmental secretary (U55B).

Institutional development

The 1994 National Strategy on Sustainable Development was the first of its kind in the world. Despite its watered-down texts, the Strategy provided a strong basis for institutional development. The Labour Government set up the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1999 as an independent watchdog that holds the government accountable for its commitments. The removal of the Commission brought the sustainability regime to a halt. A national strategy was not produced. No voices in the policy making process of individual ministries. The national discourse on sustainable development stifled. The National Statistical Office had to chase after indicator inputs from individual ministries several times (U53B). The Environmental Audit Committee, which was tasked with the Commission's monitoring functions, was not able to strike the close relationships with the government departments that the Commission had (U50B). It struggled with significant understaffing despite multiple attempts to secure more resources for policy analysis and monitoring (U55B). With limited resources, it managed to keep some debates on sustainability issues alive – within the Parliament and in public (U50B). Brexit saw Theresa May occupied with negotiations for a deal that was focused on the economy and job protection – with no mentioning of the

environmental commitments (U51A). Sustainable development had 'lost its currency' on May's agenda (U59C).

A decade since the disbandment, contemporary sustainability actors in the UK could not recall much of the Commission's legacy; the 'institutional memory has been lost' (U55B, similar U59C). It remains unknown why the effort to salvage the sustainability regime was insufficient to secure political involvement from the new government. The easy observation is that the structure of the sustainability regime has been severely reduced over time, paralyzing policy capacity (U52B, similar U55B). Without the capacity to carry out routine procedures, monitoring of commitments would be 'left to chance' (U55B). Even if the public servants wanted to secure more institutional capacity, there was 'little that they could do'; they could only advise, but major decisions on the design of institutions lied in the hands of the politicians, making the UK government more 'top down' than other European governments (U55B).

Ever since the cessation of the Commission, reports after reports from the Select Committees have been making the same suite of institutional recommendations (U50B) as if the works of the Commission had been completely wiped out. What is left of the institution is the impact assessment and carbon reduction measures, which were 'ad hoc, piecemeal and powerless' (U49A). The select committees have attempted to hold the government to account but the unconvincing and sluggish responses from the government was a telling sign of their level of commitment towards the Agenda (U53B). However, the consensus about the future of sustainability governance in the UK was the urgency of developing a healthy relationship between the political machine and the general public. Specifically, the publication of parliamentary reports was expected to provoke public debate (U52B, U55B), and the general public could organise through the civil society to demand greater actions from the government (U59C).

3.4.3 Finland

Regime continuity

The sustainability regime in Finland presents a ‘miracle’ story of surviving four changes of government and seven political leaders (F28B). In 26 years, the regime has produced three major outputs – the Programme for Sustainable Development in 1998, the Towards Sustainable Choices Strategy in 2006, and the Society’s Commitment in 2013. Overseeing the development of all these outputs has been the National Commission on Sustainable Development since 1993. Very much a grass root movement, the Commission was a product of civil society leadership (F34B) and later became an unshakeable foundation of the sustainability regime. The SDG agenda ‘strengthened the development’ of the regime (F27A), especially when the international norms were clearly articulated (F33B). It prompted the sustainability actors to reflect on the ‘abstract’ social contract – the Society’s Commitment – in light of the new Agenda, and produced a ‘concrete’ implementation report (F28B).

Political involvement

The Prime Minister would hold the chairmanship of the Sustainability Commission, creating the perception that he or she was leading the works of the sustainability regime (F28B). His or her appearance at the meeting of the Commission could further confirm that perception. For example, when the Prime Minister failed to do so, his commitment to sustainable development had been questioned (F36B). The Minister of Environment has been the primary politician attending domestic events related to sustainable development, including the Commission’s planning activities (F34B).

Every election is a threat to the regime (F33B, F28B), especially those after the 2008 financial crisis, which fed the political narrative of austerity measures (F34B). During the election, political candidates would have announced their targets, giving the regime actors a sense of where they fit in (F31B). The Prime Minister could set whole-of-government targets, which might activate discussions on potential inter-ministerial collaboration around sustainability issues (F24B). When ministries had a strong sense of ownership of the agenda, continuity became more achievable (F32B). However, the regime left to its own long and unfruitful deliberation about policy directions among the sustainability actors might not achieve much; it could therefore benefit from the top down leadership that provided a clear direction, making the public servants implementers in a less messy world (F33B). The stable political leadership

stemmed from a consensus in the society that might have helped secure commitments from almost all sides of politics; “it would be political suicide for a politician to declare that sustainable development is not an important agenda in Finland during the election” (F25A). This was possibly due to the country’s proximity to nature and the citizen’s common understanding of sustainable development as imparted in their school curriculum (F24B).

Institutional development

The regime actors understood the risk of simply hoping the citizens would keep electing politicians that were pro sustainability. “Normally, the politicians come and go and the civil servants are here to stay” (F34B). Institutional memory was carried forward when it was expected that the ministries would keep filling the role of the ministerial representative for sustainable development (F37B). The memory also entailed ‘long-term debates’ about specific issues such as circular economy, on which policy makers could depend to advance decision-making (F28B, similar F32B). Sustainable development agenda has been perceived as abstract, and therefore harmless or even irrelevant (F28B, F36B). The recruitment of ministerial representatives from the right level of the bureaucratic hierarchy means that institutional memory would be preserved as long-term permanent staff was kept. Civil servants could promote the sustainability agenda by ensuring that it was the talking points of ministers in forums and meetings (F38B). They inserted the agenda into as many discussion spaces as possible, raising the awareness to a level that helps easy adoption after the election (F38B). All of these were to change the minds and mental models of decision makers (F33B). The narrative of Finland being a success story in sustainable development would provide the good arguments that could be cascaded down the hierarchy of governance (F34B).

The sense of threat motivated them to take more control over their regime’s continuity. The first tactic for securing political involvement was changing the rules to avoid politicization. Most illustrative was, after the ‘97 election, the regime actors were unsure if the new Prime Minister would like to take up the chairmanship of the Commission. The Secretary General of the Commission found an informal way that did not trigger the political process to amend the term of the governance committee from four to five years. Instead of aligning with the four-

year election cycle, the new term created a misstep, providing the sustainability actors ample time after the elections to convince the new governments of their relevance.

The second tactic required the sustainability actors to ensure the unambiguous support for the sustainability regime and its works were explicitly acknowledged in the government program. After the election, the government program was finalised to 'set the agenda' that defined all the major policy works within that term of government (F27A, similar F36B, F39B). The sustainability regime 'pushed proposals upwards' through the administrative hierarchy as part of the 'competition of ideas' with other regimes (F35B), locking down the direction, scope and resources of the sustainability regime for the next four years (F26A).

The third tactic involved forward-looking initiatives that did not fall within the scope of the government program. The drafting of foresight report provided an opportunity to bring inputs from across the ministries together (F34B). This all-encompassing work aligned well with the broad agenda of sustainable development. Compared to the government program, the report for implementing the SDG agenda had a longer time horizon and a broader policy scope – with a strong emphasis on the ecological dimension (F36B). The foresight report, which had a higher readership among the policy makers, was another channel for the sustainability actors to saturate as many corners of the machinery of government with sustainability ideas.

The fourth tactic involved associating organizational identity with the centre of power. The coordinating secretariat for the sustainability regime, after many attempts, had finally moved from the Ministry of Environment to the Prime Minister's Office to get 'bigger muscles' for implementation (F30B). The proximity to the centre of power sent a message about political commitment that was as powerful as the Prime Minister holding the chairmanship of the Commission,

The final tactic relates to the regime's ability to innovate and offer refreshing and useful perspectives. The sustainability regime was particularly active and influential in the early 90s and 2000s. When the political commitment has died down, the regime responded by developing a succinct and high-level strategy that had a time horizon of 37 years called Society's Commitment 2050 (F34B). As a 'significant boost in support' (F26A), the SDG

Agenda has given the regime another opportunity to publish an implementation report which identified two concrete priorities in light of their high-level strategy. The founding father of sustainability regime who oversaw two decades of the rise and fall in political commitment remarked that keeping the regime alive meant 'making things interesting for policy makers' (F34B).

Despite the absence of impactful actions, political commitment has never dropped to a level that threatened the existence of the sustainability regime. The 'strong personalities with their enthusiasm' and tactics have kept the agenda going (F37B). This continuity might have been reinforced by the positive feedback loop between political involvement and institutional development. This may explain why the sustainability institutions of Finland have weathered through four changes of government in 25 years, emerging as an innovative community with good international reputation.

3.5 Discussion

So far, we presented the interactions between political involvement and institutional development in three countries. The interactions are political commitment that contributes to the survival or the death of a regime. Regime survival was described as how long the sustainability regime and its associated outputs continue. The surviving regimes have withstood the stress test of a change of government. This study shows that the German regime has survived with stable political involvement and the UK regime did not survive without it. It may seem that political involvement is all that is needed. However, unlike the UK, the Finnish regime demonstrated that fluctuating political involvement due to changes of government did not always end the regime. Robust institutions found creative ways to maintain political interests even when they were low or absent. This study provides unique insights into the public servants' tactics in adapting the institutions for keeping the regime alive.

Grounded in data, the relationship between political commitment and regime continuity can be described in this way. Political involvement influences institutional development when politicians make announcements, internally or externally, their support for an idea or

institution. The established institution in turn influences political involvement by using tactics to secure commitment. This then provides more legitimacy to the institutions, which will grow in capacity over time to secure more commitment. The self-reinforcing cycle can be changed by external events; the cycle accelerated with the support of SDG Agenda and decelerated or even broke after a national election. Elections only break the cycle when there is a change of government and governance philosophy. Increasingly, the wind of austerity that sweeps through Europe may be underpinning the governance philosophy. This discussion compares similarities and differences across the three countries under four main themes: tactics for securing political commitment, institutional memory that provides narrative and database, austerity measures that reduce institutional capacity, and lethargic support that was revived.

Firstly, the tactics for securing commitment can be grouped into three categories. Public servants can craft events in a way that will attract politicians to attend, speak, and commit. The events range from repeated annual update forum to one-off launch of initiative or publication. Public servants can also use documents to secure commitments for a while to stabilise the regime. The German's Coalition Treaty, the UK party manifesto, and the Finnish Government Program are political documents that define works of policy regimes. Sustainability regimes will find every way possible to squeeze a line or two into these documents. Public servants use procedures to buy windows of opportunity for convincing politicians of their relevance. The Germans sped up their development of National Strategy, the UK public servants implemented parliamentary inquiries to keep the discourse alive, and the Finns created a misalignment between the Commission's term and the election cycle. The tactics strive for regime continuity, preserving institutional memory and capacity. The ability of public administration to manipulate the policy regime against political intentions is not new as illustrated in concepts such as double government (Glennon, 2014) and street-level policy entrepreneurship (Arnold, 2015). Public servants have expertise in policy technicality and bureaucratic procedures, giving them the advantage over the new and generalist politicians. Empowering public servants was considered a more effective strategy than gaining public support around sustainability commitments (Hysing, 2013; Ward, 2008).

Secondly, sustainability leaders pass on institutional memory in technical and political terms. These leaders can be champions that inspire the whole regime with their visions, and ministerial representatives that communicate ideas effectively. The Germans and the Finns had identifiable champions that were public servants who have engaged with the sustainability work for at least a decade. It was significantly more difficult to identify champions in the UK public service. These champions worked hard to ensure institutional memory were generated and preserved. Part of that effort is framing sustainability works as positive narratives, offering politicians reasons for their continuous support. Technically, the analyses and arguments exist in three places: archives, websites and humans to prevent 'institutional amnesia' (Heideman, 2016). The UK had a whole battery of policy plans and commissioned reports and several key websites that illustrate significant sustainability discourses. However, the human memory, which held much of the tacit knowledge, had been wiped out or rendered inaccessible since the disbandment of the Commission. Together, the political narrative and the technical database could provide the capacity for responding to threats to the regime. It was clear that the UK regime capacity has dwindled when there was no champion and no memory to secure political commitment effectively, and any amount of pressures from the Select Committees did not improve it significantly.

Thirdly, austerity as a governing principle can kill institutional capacity. Coming out of the 2008 financial crisis, governments implemented austerity measures, weakening institutional capacity. The UK Conservatives targeted the 'quangos' in 2010, and the Finnish Liberals in 2011 and the centrist Juha Sipila since 2015 implemented administrative reforms. On the other hand, the Germans enjoyed a high-performing economy, and therefore could afford to expand its regime capacity slightly. Spending cuts may not always result in significant changes to institutional capacity, especially when public servants can find creative ways to redesign essential programs and services (Lowndes & McCaughie, 2013). In the case of sustainability governance, it might be more than just a cut to the expenditures for maintaining the institutions but also to policy ideas that are not compatible with the philosophy of the new government.

Fourthly, there has also been a general lethargy in the support for sustainable development work. The SDG agenda is an external event that seemed to have turned around the trajectories of sustainability governance for all three countries. Political leaders in the three countries – Angela Merkel, David Cameron and Juha Sipilä made speeches about their strong commitment towards the newly ratified Agenda. With renewed political involvement, the subsequent institutional development in the three countries were all revived but in different ways. The Germans produced a voluminous 257-page National Strategy, brought in a scientific panel, and formalised the sustainability coordinator role. The Finns also produced an implementation plan – short and focused, moved its secretariat into the Prime Minister's Office, and continued to engage every level of the society. There was a dearth of institutional development in the UK since the disbandment of the Commission. The SDG agenda, to which the UK signed up, has prompted two parliamentary inquiries into the government's implementation plan or the lack thereof. The Agenda was supposed to emerge as the new international norm for influencing political leaders (Simmons & Elkins, 2004) and pressuring national governments to comply with it – knowing that their international reputation was at stake (Lieberman, 2009) especially if there was a peer-review mechanism to name and shame the less committed (Spangenberg, 2010).

The pre-Agenda effort has clearly disappointed the staunchest supporters of sustainability governance (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016); the post-Agenda impact may look equally pale (Spangenberg, 2017) but we would caution that it remains too early to tell. Nonetheless, the fact that some sustainability regimes have survived despite changes in political leadership says something about the strength of these institutions that the previous leadership had left behind. Illustrative of this is the failure of the most prominent pioneer, the Norwegian government, to institutionalise the political commitment of Gro Harlem Brundtland before she stepped down; this missed opportunity was worsened by the rise of the petroleum economy (W. M. Lafferty, Knudsen, & Larsen, 2007). One could ask what went wrong with the strategists in the sustainability regime? This study has provided a glimpse into how the ardent bureaucrats have played the game of commitments, and in return saved their regimes from fading out of relevance.

3.6 Conclusion

Integrating policies to achieve sustainability outcomes is a long-term endeavor. The institution for policy integration needs to deliberate, trial, reflect and adapt. In this process, it is vulnerable, for example to austerity measures, especially when it cannot show immediate results valuable to the political world. It is also vulnerable to a change in governing philosophy in the event of a change of government. The regime seeks to continue its work, and therefore relies on long-term political commitment.

This article aimed to shed light on the question of how to achieve long-term commitment to sustainability goals including the SDG by exploring the relationship between political commitment and regime continuity. We interviewed 56 sustainability actors across three countries, and analysed their experiences along with relevant documents against an existing conceptual framework of political commitment. Whilst our findings should be understood within the limitations of the method applied and data collected, the data indicate that political commitment starts when there is political involvement to legitimise institutional development. The regime then builds sufficient institutional capacity to keep securing political involvement to ensure the work continues. Germany is an illustrative case that shows how long-term political involvement can protect a regime from being discontinued even when it might not be producing tangible political outcomes. The UK regime, on the other hand, lost its political involvement after a change of government, paralyzing all the regime functionaries built over a decade. Finland defied the common understanding; it too experienced changes of government – four in 25 years – but survived them for two main reasons. The Finnish institution had a strong capacity and creative leadership to use tactics for securing political involvement. Also, the Finnish consensus around sustainable development is so strong that political support for it is almost unquestionable.

The relationship between political commitment and regime continuity needs to be further clarified. We have started to elaborate on two main topics. To promote regime continuity, the quality of the institutional capacity seems to be highly important. At the heart of this was the autonomy and creativity of the public servants in devising tactics for securing political

commitment. They steered the generation and preservation of political narratives in support of their regime. They have accumulated technical expertise that makes their services relevant. Future research can formalise the different aspects of this institutional capacity, especially the ability to frame and reframe a narrative to make sustainability governance appealing. The second topic is on institutional exhaustion (van der Heijden & Kuhlmann, 2017) whereby political support grows lethargic and austerity measures may deliver the final blow. Researchers may be interested in how regime actors can tell that political interest is waning, especially in times of austerity that is linked to economic crises.

Keeping the regime alive is hard work. It does not happen by chance. For sustainability actors, there is no alternative but to make themselves relevant, interesting, or even indispensable in the face of volatile politics. The saying of 'politicians come and go, and the public servants are here to stay' paints the dilemma of liberal democracies, which are deprived of long-term political commitment. Resolving this dilemma gives the long battle of policy integration through the sustainability agenda a chance.

4 Responsive coordination

To ensure policy integration is *transformational* and *continuous*, bureaucrats need to confront necessary conflicts and secure political commitment. So far, it may seem like the inter-ministerial network is either fighting among themselves as equals within the network or struggling with the political class beyond the network. The third type of relationship is between the coordinators of the policy integration process and the inter-ministerial network.

The coordinators may be legitimised to pull the inter-ministerial network across the line, producing the whole-of-government strategy. However, ministerial autonomy is typically strong. Coordinators will have to dip their toes in the inter-ministerial network and formulate coordination tactics based on the ministries' feedback. Flexible adjustment in policy coordination was acknowledged by Charles Lindblom, who is known for the concept of incrementalism. He postulated that (Lindblom, 1965):

A set of decisions is coordinated if adjustments have been made in it such that the adverse consequences of any one decision for other decisions in the set are to a degree and in some frequency avoided, reduced, counterbalanced, or outweighed.

Lindblom made explicit that the adjustments are *mutual*. The coordinators and the coordinated co-evolve the policy integration processes. This highly iterative process can be traced all the way back to Adam Smith's idea of mutual emotional adjustment as the mechanism for cultivating moral norms and virtues (Smith, 1759). Mutuality is at the heart of the responsive regulation theory in which the regulator and regulatee respond to each others' actions or inactions. I will be applying these concepts to clarifying the relationship between the coordinating agency and participating ministries in the development of National Strategy on Sustainable Development.

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4.1 Introduction

As a triumph of coordination, 193 member nations pledged to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda. This flexible agenda upholds the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, allowing governments to determine responses appropriate for their countries. They could rely on the existing bureaucratic capacity to self-organise without a delegated coordinator. Alternatively, they can assign a ministry or agency as the coordinator for aggregating ministerial inputs systematically into policy deliverables.

In the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia, the Parliament held inquiries into SDGs implementation, expecting thoughtful coordination (Parliament of Australia, 2018; UK Environmental Audit Committee, 2017; UK International Development Committee, 2016). Implicit in this expectation is that, without a coordinator, self-organisation among ministries for proper implementation would not take place. Looking across Europe, many governments have long established institutions for inter-ministerial integration to produce policy output (e.g., National Strategy on Sustainable Development), policy process (e.g., inter-ministerial forums), and monitoring system (e.g., Sustainability Impact Assessment). These achievements, however incremental (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016), are not a result of self-organised networks. These institutions appoint a coordinator that has to be responsive to the ministries’ resistance to coordination because (1) the bureaucracy supports ministerial autonomy, and (2) the SDGs Agenda is a soft measure.

Firstly, the coordinator is typically legitimised to regulate the coordinated ministries who can choose to either comply with or resist the regulation. Resistance from the ministries is common and understandable, given the level of ministerial autonomy in national governments (Fleischer, 2011). To overcome resistance, the coordinator can impose the SDGs onto the ministries but doing so requires significant political capital from the coordinator (Peters, 2013).

Therefore, as the authority, it has to learn how to respond to ministerial resistance—proportionately. The coordination strategies can vary from mandating the inclusion of sustainability commitments in the ministerial plans (Government Administration Unit of Finland, 2017) to inviting scientific inputs into the inter-ministerial deliberation of sustainability targets (The Federal Government of Germany, 2017). These coordination strategies were clearly stated as isolated and static processes in policy documents but not as a dynamic set of strategies that represented the coordinator's responsiveness towards ministerial resistance.

Secondly, the SDGs agenda may be globally significant, but it is possibly the softest of all global governance tools (Tosun & Leininger, 2017). It can use norm-setting opportunities such as progress reporting in the Voluntary National Review to compel ministries to participate in the implementation of SDGs. However, the ministries can merely report on the alignment of their existing work with the SDGs without making more ambitious commitments (Persson et al., 2016). The absence of strong enforcement internationally and domestically weakens the coordinator's legitimacy, forcing it to engage with the ministries responsively. The Voluntary National Reviews indicate the coordination capability of the countries in terms of coordination outcomes (e.g., establishment of inter-ministerial structure and agreement on cross-ministerial joint priorities). However, little is known about the dynamic and responsive processes of coordination required to maximise the participation of ministries in the soft SDGs Agenda.

Constrained by ministerial autonomy and soft Agenda, this article asks *what makes a coordinator responsive to ministerial resistance?* This study aims to understand coordinating agencies in integration regimes of Germany, Finland and the Czech Republic. It combines insights from the policy coordination literature (Peters, 2013) and the responsive regulation theory (Braithwaite, 2017). This lens of responsive coordination is applied to the analysis of the coordinator's behaviours. Through coordination, ministries have closer interactions with each other, provoking clashes of interests. The coordinator needs to ensure the integration regime weathers the storm and emerges at the other end with some level of cohesiveness. The data in this study suggests different types of responsiveness for managing different

coordination challenges, including doing just enough (pyramidal), caring from a distance (meta), and influencing through peers (networked). Being responsive does not always mean taking actions or sides; it may mean maintaining neutrality as the coordinator, which makes the centre of government the most suitable candidate.

4.2 Literature gap

This section aims to identify the literature gap of non-dynamic understanding of policy coordinators and hence present a framework that describes responsive coordination. It combines insights on the essential tasks of *policy coordination* and those on the dynamic strategies of *responsive regulation*. The literature on policy coordination attempted to clarify the relationship between the coordinator and the coordinated within systems of different centralization level. By definition, 'coordinated decisions' may 'avoid, reduce counterbalance, and outweigh' the negative consequences of one decision on another (Lindblom, 1965). Structurally, decentralised coordination functions better (Scharpf, 1993) because the coordinators are spared from spending heavy political capital to impose solutions that can be developed through information exchange and position bargaining between ministries (Peters, 2013). However, if the 'locus of coordination' is unidentifiable (i.e. decentralised coordination), these activities may translate into government departments paying lip service to their commitments (Russel & Jordan, 2009). Moreover, a coordinator can activate the inter-ministerial collaboration (Peters, 2013), facilitate inter-ministerial processes (Tosun & Peters, 2018), convene collaborative meetings (Gjoksi, Sedlacko, & Berger, 2010), aggregate ministerial inputs, catalyses institutional reform (Ansell & Gash, 2018), and set and follow-up whole-of-government indicators (O'Connor & Mackie, 2016).

So far, the coordination system is described as dichotomous (centralised or decentralised) rather than continuous (levels of centralization). In practice, coordinators are likely to be responsive in selecting from a range of strategies based on the ministries' reactions. The following three points help justify the relevance of responsive coordination. Firstly, institutional designers ought to ask 'who is more responsive as a coordinator'. In coordinating environmental policy integration, the Ministry of Environment may not be as good a candidate

as the more traditionally powerful agencies such as the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Finance that guarantee unquestionable political commitment (Nilsson & Persson, 2017). Moreover, the coordinator role is best 'owned' by one agency and not shared across multiple departments (Russel & Jordan, 2009). It can be speculated that a single powerful coordinator may have more leeway to influence, which has not been investigated in depth. Secondly, an innovative study has attempted to measure how centralised the coordination system is for implementing SDGs with simple indicator on the countries' level of democracy (Tosun & Peters, 2018). No clear pattern was detected, which may suggest that this type of categorization is too crude for a subject as dynamic as coordination. A more refined categorization would account for the way coordinators select strategies. Thirdly, the Metcalfe Scale lays out a continuum of coordination (Metcalfe, 1994), from the minimal state of preventing overlaps in functions to the maximal state of complete control over all information flow and planned activities (Peters, 1998). It is a model more dynamic than the previous two; however, coordination is described more as an end state, rather than a process of movements between different levels of coordination.

In short, this article deals with two inter-related gaps in the literature. To date, scholars have not addressed the question of whether the centre of government is the best coordinator for implementing SDGs. More crucially, this coordinator should be flexible enough to respond appropriately to different coordination situations. The literature does not describe how coordination can be responsive. It is necessary to clarify that this article does not intend to suggest new theoretical constructs for responsive coordination. Staying as close to the data as possible, the analysis borrows existing concepts in responsive regulation to describe the observations of policy coordination from behind the glossy public documents in ways more systematic than the existing studies.

4.3 Conceptual framework

Theoretically, this article applies concepts from responsive regulation to policy coordination challenges. There are three main types of responsiveness. The first type is the pyramidal responsiveness approach, which provides coordinators access to a suite of coordination

strategies. The coordinators can choose as appropriate. Figure 1 demonstrates a modified version that adopts (a) the structure of the regulatory pyramid, and (b) the content of the Metcalfe Scale. Structurally, the different levels of coordination strategies fit well into the pyramidal responsiveness framework. From the perspective of the ministries, the coordinators will start with persuasion and capacity building before reaching for more interventionist approaches (Braithwaite, 2017). Each level up is a level more interventionist, imposing greater threats to ministerial autonomy. Ministries would prefer, as minimal as possible, the coordinator's interference in their portfolios. The coordinator responds by selecting strategies from the lower end of the scale. An effective coordination system will be consistent at responding to ministerial resistance to the extent that ministries will be 'educated' over time to expect escalation if non-compliant and de-escalation if compliant. When the feedback mechanisms are clear, ministries will perceive the coordination system as less coercive, less threatening, more respectful (Pettit, 1997) and fairer (Murphy, 2016). Clear feedback mechanisms may lower perceived threat and anxiety. The Metcalfe Scale lays out a suite of strategies, ranging from minimal coordination that has little control over interactions between coordinated agents (i.e. government ministries) to maximum coordination that instructs agents to move coherently under common priorities and strategy.

The second type is networked responsiveness, which follows the basic principles of pyramidal responsiveness. However, when interventions at one level fail, the coordinator would seek support from networks within that level before escalating to a higher level of interventions. Beyond the vertical escalation and de-escalation on the pyramid, this horizontal move of networked responsiveness is strategic in recruiting additional actors more powerful than the coordinator for the specific coordination issue at hand in order to persuade the ministries to comply (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2000). It is not until all options from the networks are exhausted that the coordinator will shift to the next level of interventions (Braithwaite, 2008). The primary motive of the coordinator is no longer to control the activities of the ministries but to build their capacity in inter-ministerial coordination (Braithwaite, 2017).

Pyramidal responsiveness relies a fair amount on the control from the coordinator despite the overarching principle being minimalism. Networked responsiveness is even more minimalist

by encouraging more creative problem-solving among actors in the network before escalating the coordinator's response. The third type is meta-regulatory responsiveness, in which the coordinator governs at a distance, allowing ministries to find ways to 'critically self-reflect' (Parker, 2002) on their inter-ministerial coordination. The encouragement of self-reflection can include standard-setting and timely feedback from the coordinators. The coordinators have devolved inter-ministerial coordination responsibilities to the ministries who may know best about their respective policy portfolios and the range of possibilities for inter-ministerial integration. With trust, commitment and loyalty towards the cause of inter-ministerial integration (Gunningham & Sinclair, 2009), enlightened ministries may hopefully move towards greater integration without constant intervention from the coordinator. However, such a decentralised system may be more effective if coordinators are capable of escalating to highly coercive coordination but rarely get to do so. In effect, the coordinators are perceived by the ministries to 'walk softly and carry a big stick'. The dilemma is whether the coordinator can restrain itself from using the stick (Braithwaite, 2014).

The analysis framework combines useful concepts from two bodies of literature. Firstly, the three types of responsiveness (i.e., pyramidal, networked and meta) can be matched with different kinds of coordination challenges. Secondly, pyramidal responsiveness (Braithwaite, 2017) when combined with the Metcalfe Scale (Metcalfe, 1994) can offer details on the levels of coordination. The Scale replaces the list of punitive strategies in the original regulatory pyramid to form the basis for the concept of pyramidal responsiveness to be used in this study.



Figure 4-1 Scale of pyramidal responsiveness for policy coordination

4.4 Methodology

Coordinators work closely with ministries to develop a whole-of-government strategy on sustainability. To probe the messy world of strategy development and the tug-of-war between the coordinator and ministries, it is necessary to capture the personal experiences of public servants behind the façade of the policy documents. Their motivations and less tangible factors are best studied through qualitative studies (Rosati & Faria, 2019). The methodological design attempts to strike a balance between sufficient consistency to demonstrate dominant patterns across the three countries being considered and sufficient diversity to assess the validity of dominant patterns of SDGs implementation at the national level (Mahoney & Goertz, 2004). Based on the assessment of Voluntary National Reviews, two early adopters of the SDGs agenda demonstrated strong ability in articulating relevant administrative structures with clearly defined functions (i.e., Germany and Finland). During the fieldwork, the interviewees recommended the Czech Republic as an emerging leader that has received significant resources from the European Union dedicated to implementing SDGs.

Table 4-1 Interview participants by country and sector

| | Public service (B) | Civil society (C) | Academia (A) | Total |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Germany (G) | 17 | 4 | 2 | 23 |
| Finland (F) | 17 | 2 | 2 | 21 |
| Czech (C) | 7 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Total | 41 | 7 | 5 | 53 |

A total of 53 interviewees participated in the study, including public servants, academics and civil society leaders (see Table 1). The public servants provided the richest data, which were then triangulated against the experiences of other actors to improve the trustworthiness of the analysis. The single-letter codes displayed in Table 1 are strung together to form unique identifiers for individual interviewees. For example, 'G17B' means that the interviewee is the 17th participant in the study, from Germany (G) and worked as a bureaucrat in the public service (B). The semi-structured interviews focussed on two aspects of the coordination: which agency or ministry is an effective coordinator, and how can coordinators gain cooperation from ministries. The interviews tested the scenario of a coordinator that is given more resources and legitimacy to implement the SDGs. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. In addition, the author also collected publicly available reports and interviewee-supplied documents, which include policy strategy, evaluation report, terms of reference for the committee, internal assessment template, and presentation slides.

The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework acknowledges the institutional diversity and various rules that actors create to maintain consistency in how people relate with each other (Ostrom, 2005). It can be used to systematically diagnose problems of 'collective action' among resource-dependent actors, which includes policy coordination among public servants (Peters, 2013). Firstly, the author used key elements of the IAD to understand the institutional context, which involved mapping of the actors, forums and group characteristics based on the publicly available documents mentioned above. Secondly, the author structured the data in compliance with the standard ADICO syntax detailed in a study on collective action for natural resource management (Watkins & Westphal, 2015). It codified 'who (Attribute) does (Deontic) what (alm) to whom under what situations (Condition) for what consequences (Or else)' as individual rules. From approximately 53 hours of interviews, 1135

rules were identified via the ADICO syntax, coded against the responsive coordination framework, and aggregated to form themes on avoidance behaviours. A comparative case study of coordinating institutions has been difficult because commonly agreed process and outcome indicators for policy integration are yet to be developed (Peters, 2015b). Instead, the analysis focuses on identifying themes shared across Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic.

4.5 Findings

The findings are presented in two ways: the consensus and the experiences of interviewees. Firstly, an overview of the data in Table 2 will be provided by showing the extent to which interviewees across the three countries agree or disagree with four ways that the coordinator responds to the coordination situations. Across countries, the first and fourth types of responsiveness received a high level of consensus, whereas the second and third types were not as widely agreed upon among the interviewees. The lack of consensus is not due to disagreements but a sizeable group of interviewees describing at length the first and fourth types of responsiveness and not the other two. Furthermore, the temporary types that relate more to the development of National Strategy are more commonly mentioned than the permanent types that involve a longer period of observations by the interviewees. When comparing across the countries, the Finns appear to have greater consensus around how their coordinator behaves than the Germans and the Czechs. Bearing these in mind, the next section will introduce the types of responsive coordination as the interviewees experienced them. Notably, the following presentation is not unusual in the literature on policy coordination (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2017; Russel, Turnpenny, & Jordan, 2018).

Table 4-2 Level of consensus in interview data

| | | Temporary procedural / pyramidal | Permanent procedural / pyramidal | Permanent substantive / Meta | Temporary substantive / Networked |
|-------|---------|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Agree | Germany | 17 (73.9%) | 13 (56.5%) | 15 (65.2%) | 23 (100.0%) |
| | Finland | 20 (95.2%) | 17 (81.0%) | 14 (66.7%) | 19 (90.5%) |
| | Czech | 7 (77.8%) | 5 (55.6%) | 5 (55.6%) | 9 (100.0%) |

| | | Republic | | | |
|---------------|---------|----------|---|---|---|
| Disagree | Germany | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | Finland | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| | Czech | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | | Republic | | | |
| Not mentioned | Germany | 0 | 9 | 8 | 0 |
| | Finland | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| | Czech | 2 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| | | Republic | | | |

4.5.1 Responsive coordination

The second part of the findings presents the pattern of coordination experiences. Coordinators selected the appropriate strategies according to whether the coordination challenge was temporary or permanent, and whether it was procedural or substantive. The author has grouped the challenges into four types based on these two dimensions. For each type of challenge, the author will explain the coordinator's motivation, the coordinator's response, and the range of strategies – as summarised in Table 3. Coordinators were frequently constrained by 'strong and autonomous' ministries (G14B) that would resist any form of 'coordination' and 'centralisation' (G57B). Therefore, responsive coordination was needed.

Table 4-3 Types of responsiveness for inter-ministerial coordination

| Type | Why coordinate? | How to coordinate? | Example |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| Temporary procedural | Implement inter-ministerial <i>processes</i> for <i>developing</i> Sustainability Strategy | Pyramidal responsiveness: Coordinator starts with the least intrusive processes and escalates proportionately to secure compliance of ministries. | Interministerial working groups Rules for target setting |
| | Implement inter-ministerial <i>processes</i> for <i>implementing</i> Sustainability Strategy | Pyramidal responsiveness: Coordinator starts with the routine processes and could either escalate or de-escalate depending on the compliance of ministries | Sustainability impact assessment Sustainability coordinator |
| | Mainstream sustainability <i>ideas</i> across ministries when <i>implementing</i> Sustainability Strategy | Meta-responsiveness: Coordinator refrains from intervening and can only govern 'at a distance' | Sustainability Management Rules |
| | Mainstream sustainability <i>ideas</i> across ministries when <i>developing</i> Sustainability Strategy | Networked responsiveness: Coordinator nudges the ministries to stretch their level of commitments and will not escalate the level of interventions without engaging the peer ministries to influence | Monitoring framework on SDG indicators and targets |

4.5.2 Temporary procedural integration

The coordinator designed temporary procedures to influence the processes of information sharing and strategic bargaining between ministries. These procedures started on the first day of developing the National Strategy and Sustainability Guideline and ended once the policy outputs are produced. The coordinator supported these procedures by preparing policy materials, structuring discussions around indicators (C44B), drafting the joint documents

(F24B), setting tangible milestones, and enforcing strict timelines (G13B, G21B) in order to encourage greater participation of individual ministries.

Proportionate to ministerial resistance, the coordinator adopted the *pyramidal responsiveness* approach. The coordinator started with the least interventionist strategies and escalated up the pyramid of intervention (see Figure 1) only if the ministerial resistance had increased. The first example is that the coordinator gave ministries complete autonomy for drafting sections of the National Strategy on portfolios nominated by the ministries themselves. If the ministries resisted, the coordinator would draft their sections in unrealistically ambitious terms, forcing the ministries to at least respond to the first draft (G57B). After much reframing of the early drafts, the coordinator would then facilitate more 'brutal' and 'realistic' deliberation to produce an implementable Strategy (G5C). The escalation up to much more coercive interventions were thought to be necessary by some (G18B) and unwarranted by others, who preferred a longer and more diplomatic deliberation to ministerial commitments (G9B, G10B). The second example is on enforcing the new rules for how indicators and goals should be used – specifically on clustering multiple indicators and goals rather than focusing on them individually (C44B, F29B) or ensuring all ministries nominated at least one indicator for each of the 17 goals (G8B). When a couple of ministries had difficulty reaching consensus on new targets within their ministries, the coordinator would set deadlines (G14B), of which if not met, the coordinator would 'come down hard' on non-compliant ministries (G9B). As frustrated as the ministries were with the near impossibility of moving fast to achieve ambitious consensus in a fragmented system, they tolerably complied with and did not 'rubbish' (G57B) the temporary processes implemented by the coordinator (G9B, G10B, G13B).

4.5.3 Permanent procedural integration

The coordinator needed to create procedures that will continue beyond the production of the National Strategy, which were more permanent, and therefore the coordinator has less control over. These new routines can include legislative instrument (e.g., sustainability impact assessment) (G20B), capacity building (e.g., sustainability coordinator) (G21B), and bureaucratic reporting (e.g., inclusion of sustainability activities in ministerial plans) (U52B). This challenge required the central coordinator to ensure the striking of consensus on

recurring integration procedures; it was difficult to achieve because these permanent measures imposed a drain on bureaucratic resources, especially when ministerial representatives are already 'running from one meeting to another' (F32B).

Accordingly, the coordinator adopted a *pyramidal de-escalation* approach that starts with the coordinator proposing an idea on permanent procedure in search of agreements from all the ministries. From here onwards, it could enter into one of the three scenarios depending on ministerial resistance. First, if the resistance were manageable, the coordinator would compromise on their ideas. For example, the Chancellery proposed the permanent procedure that requires ministries to appoint a senior level official as the Sustainability Coordinator. Met with resistance from the ministries, the Chancellery settled with officials from a lower-level rank, which was seen as a 'big mistake [of the coordinator] for allowing such flexibility' for the ministries (G2B). The second scenario shows that de-escalation was not required if the ministerial resistance was low. For example, the coordinator assigned a ministry to design platforms for bringing science into the deliberation of sustainable development (G9B). The coordinator proposed the idea, expecting a de-escalation of coordination strategies. However, the ministries accepted the proposal, which was then included in the national strategy as a permanent procedure. For the third scenario, some permanent procedures such as the reform of the long-standing issue about Sustainability Impact Assessment was brought up but remained untouched throughout the process of developing the National Strategy. Similarly, the inclusion of sustainability principles in the Basic Law (i.e. constitution) has been thoroughly debated. However, before this proposal could gain momentum, the Ministry of Interior threatened that they would not participate in the Chancellery's process should this issue be placed on the agenda (G11B). The significant ministerial resistance on changes to the Impact Assessment and Basic Law informed the coordinator that it was best to leave them to the next wave of reform (G57B).

The coordinator was only permitted to 'make their case to convince' individual ministries to adopt permanent procedural integration. It could never make decisions for the ministries (G2B). Ministries resisted against the coordinator, especially if they 'believed that their positions have the backing of the general public' (G10B). The coordinator spent the majority

of their time searching for agreements among the ministries (see Figure 1). Hence, few permanent procedures made it into the Strategy eventually.

4.5.4 Permanent substantive integration

The challenge of integration was even steeper for deliberating over substantive matters. The ministerial actors participated in the *temporary procedural integration* to produce the National Strategy that implemented the *permanent procedural integration* (i.e. routine processes for ministerial participation) for building capacity for *substantive integration* (i.e., joint policy commitments to be developed by ministries later on) (G56B, F28B, C46B).

The role of the coordinator in permanent substantive integration was 'highly contentious' (G2B). Therefore, it was safest for the coordinator to 'keep a distance' and took a *meta-responsive* approach in four ways. Firstly, the coordinator should not 'define [policy] goals through top down mechanisms' given that ministerial autonomy was strong and coordination capacity was insufficient (G18B). It would assume the leadership of procedural integration and leave the leadership of substantive integration to the ministries (G21B). When prompted to integrate policy substance, ministries nominated topics and indicators that fell naturally into their portfolios without dictation from the coordinator (G13B). If there were unresolved conflicts around substantive integration, the ministries might escalate the issues up to the Heads of Department (G8B) and approach the coordinator to mediate the unresolved inter-ministerial conflicts (G14B, G57B); the coordinator was passive. Secondly, the coordinator might proactively 'identify bottlenecks' for inter-ministerial negotiation (G14B). In the presence of the coordinator, the ministries would be 'on their best behaviours' when resolving interministerial conflicts. The ministries might even 'drop the arguments' before the mediation occurred knowing that the coordinator was involved (G56B). Thirdly, the coordinator intervened from a distance. At the inter-ministerial committees involving the highest rank officials, the coordinator followed the convention of allowing the 'state secretaries of ministries dominate over the discussion' (G12C). And the most that the coordinator can do was becoming the 'observer' and 'facilitator' (G15A) of negotiation around 'cross-ministerial issues such as circular economy, land use planning and energy efficiency' (C42B). More specifically, it meta-regulated and guided the negotiation as an authority for upholding the sustainability

principles or 'Management Rules' or 'Strategy Priorities' (The Federal Government of Germany, 2017). Non-compliance from the ministries would be questioned but not severely penalised (G8B). Fourthly, the coordinator set the pace. It balanced interests across ministries by 'pulling [champion ministries] back from moving too fast', 'standing on the middle ground between transformation and conservatism' (G14B), and 'ensuring all parties were slightly unsatisfied about the final joint agreement' (F41B).

4.5.5 Temporary substantive integration

This challenge may not be particularly common. Most of the time, substantive integration is permanent. However, the central coordinator could make the argument that the ministries might be exempted from their substantive commitment if there were a change of government after the election. Therefore ministries could be more ambitious with setting longer than usual targets and agreeing to more or less common priorities. They could move out of their comfort zone and worked more closely with another traditionally rivalrous ministry. This frame has helped some ministries in Germany to get past or 'postpone the resolution' of the seemingly un-resolvable inter-ministerial conflicts (G7C). It was also useful to test out the more risky positions that ministries take with a potential immediate exit, proving that the outcomes were not as poor as expected.

Gaining more control over the process, the coordinator builds coalitions to extend their influence, which was usually limited for substantive integration. When a lower level of coordination failed, the coordinator might not move quickly into the next level without trialling the *networked responsive coordination*, which sought to influence connectors in the network of actors to 'put a good word in'. Therefore, the coordinator needed two things: willing coalition and good idea. Firstly, weaker but ambitious ministries might form a coalition with the chancellery to push for a joint position that influenced more powerful and conservative ministries (G16B). This push, however, had to be 'gentle and not domineering' (G11B). It was also possible for the coordinator to form a coalition with 'natural partners', such as the Ministry of Regional Development and Ministry of Interior. These partners were familiar with the whole-of-government perspectives to collectively promote the adoption of the sustainable development agenda (C42B). Ministries that were more supportive of the inter-ministerial

deliberation would form a coalition and communicate in common 'bureaucratic language' (Rouhinen, 2014). However, it was important to acknowledge that the coordinator needed to invest a significant amount of resources to scan, identify and respond to emerging opportunities for temporary substantive integration across all kinds of inter-ministerial negotiations (G5C, G56B). The coordinator had quick access to high-level decision makers and therefore had some capacity to influence the political agendas. Secondly, as a 'powerful and effective communicator', it could respond to requests from weaker ministries by placing neglected issues such as energy efficiency on the agenda, which aligned well with the broader sustainability principles (C42B). The ideas ought to be seen to come from the ministries themselves rather than the coordinator (G11B, C42B, G21B). With its convening power, a fairly strong centre of government as the coordinator was able to 'introduce new ideas', 'set forth basic goals' (G11B), 'provide the big picture' (F31B), and 'help ministerial ideas gel together without defining the exact and detailed policy measures' (F31B). All of these were achieved by slipping substantive integration into procedural integration when it had significant control over the latter. It might draw ideas from champion ministries for the sustainable development agenda (G8B, G9B). The coordinator would then create a new norm around 'what was considered ambitious'. In this case, the interactions were 'not so much strategy but power play', interpreted by some ministries as collusion (G9B). Overall, if the central coordinator 'was convinced that something should happen, it would happen', including writing letters to the state secretaries of various ministries to influence the resolution of substantive integration (G10B).

4.5.6 Central coordination

In answering the research question, a good coordinator can marshal different types of responsiveness to meet the right challenges. But who can achieve that better? In this section, it is suggested that a central coordinator is more responsive based on the 53 interviews with policy actors who had inside knowledge about this issue. There were pivotal changes in the ownership of portfolio on sustainable development, and the motivations behind the changes. The analysis interrogates the rationales for Finland and the Czech Republic to move their central coordinator from the Ministry of Environment to the centre of government (i.e., Prime

Minister's Office). It also seeks to understand the perceived advantages for keeping the central coordinator in the Chancellery in Germany, namely its neutrality in the hierarchy, its power to set norms, and its access to resources.

Firstly, the central coordinator was naturally perceived as neutral in the hierarchy of ministries – relative to having a ministerial coordinator. Finland and the Czech Republic started with the Ministry of Environment as the coordinator and shifted the role to the centre of government (i.e., Prime Minister's Office), which saw greater participation of individual ministries in integration activities. The partial explanation is that ministries perceived the centre of government to be more neutral than any ministry in coordinating the SDGs agenda. Even when the lead ministry as the coordinator presented itself as neutral, the other ministries remained skeptical about what agendas they would support (F28B). When coordinating the agenda, Ministry of Environment would be accused of promoting the green agenda (F32B, F35B, F36B, F37B, C48C, G8B), and Ministry of Interior for security and terrorism (C58C, G11B). 'Location has a lot of meaning' (F37B). If the coordinator were located in the Prime Minister's Office, ministries would perceive the coordination of the agenda as more 'neutral' (F36B, C42B) or 'without an agenda' (C58C) by cutting across the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development (G14B, F29B, F37B, C43C) that were 'scientifically and politically difficult to integrate' (F34B). Such a natural advantage might have fuelled the 'dream for the move' from the Ministry of Environment to the Prime Minister's Office for many years (F33B). The assumed neutrality remained even if the coordinating personnel in the Prime Minister's Office used to be a staff member of the Ministry of Environment (F37B).

Secondly, the neutrality was also coupled with power within the hierarchy of ministries. 'We could not deny that hierarchy works. It was built in that ministries were all at the same level and Prime Minister's office was at a higher level' (F38B; similar C42B), which meant it could 'wake up' (G14B) or 'task' (C48C) the ministries. The power also came from the impression of having the Prime Minister, who could instruct ministers, to be on the side of the coordinator (C42B). Moreover, 'political leaders could then push for the topic [i.e., sustainable development]' (C43C). Coordinators at the centre of government had 'bigger muscles' (F29B) and 'sufficient clout' (U53B) for enforcing greater compliance granting the agenda greater

'institutional status', 'strategic positioning' (F25A) and 'bureaucratic legitimacy' (F35B) – without which, 'even the most charismatic secretary of state from a ministry would find leading this process a very difficult task' (U53B). These observations made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic resulted in this potential coordinator candidate opting out of the coordinator allocation process to support the centre of government taking up this role (C48C).

Thirdly, the centre of government also had a greater access to resources than the ministries. The coordinator at the centre of government formed tighter and purposive 'linkages with other policy areas' (F36B), multiple existing agendas (F32B), 'different sections of the whole administrative system' and cutting edge work such as the Futures Work (F28B). With such a level of access, the centre of government was best positioned for ensuring the mainstreaming of sustainability principles was more 'systematised' and 'automatic' (F40B). The centre of government was the 'central place for coordination' (F28B), at which ministerial representatives that coordinate particular agendas or portfolios will be informing the coordinator of sustainable development agenda of the inter-ministerial conflicts (G56B).

Fourthly, with a greater analysis capacity, the coordinator could not only aggregate ministerial inputs but also put forward a coordinator's view that might break the usual paths of siloed perspectives by 'identifying problems not known to individual ministries or having a different take on the issues' (C42B). The central coordinator could provide a 'broad picture' of the sustainable development agenda, which lacked details to be filled by individual ministries, especially at the start of the strategy development (F31B) if the analysis capacity of the coordinator were strengthened (G56B). Lastly, the adjudicating coordinator might advise on what was and was not sustainable. Compared to Finland and Germany, the central coordinator of the younger integration regime in the Czech Republic took on a more proactive role in providing sustainability impact assessment. It hoped to provide sustainability impact assessments to be fed directly to the Cabinet during crucial decision-making windows. The Germans have allocated this task to the independent Parliamentary Advisory Committee. A useful question is whether the Czech's central coordinator will lose its neutral image once it starts to criticise the substance of the policy proposals from individual ministries?

4.6 Discussion and conclusion

4.6.1 Responsive coordination in a nutshell

This study has contributed to the literature by introducing the concept of responsiveness to policy coordination. While it is true that coordinators are likely to impose ideas on the coordinated through a hierarchy (Peters, 2013), the data in this study suggested that coordinators were more responsive than that. Coordinators were cognisant of the limits of their authority over the autonomous agencies, and therefore would select the right level of interventions for the right kind of coordination challenges. Recent literature reviews on policy coordination (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Cejudo & Michel, 2017; Tosun & Lang, 2017) have described these coordination strategies individually. This study adds to the literature by highlighting that the coordinator uses multiple strategies simultaneously depending on the challenges for summoning compliance from the ministries. The rule of thumb for the coordinator is to be a minimalist and not meddle with inter-ministerial negotiations on policy *substances* that might have a *lasting* impact on the ministries. The coordinator can be bossier with implementing bureaucratic *procedures* for producing a whole-of-government strategy on sustainable development for a time period *limited* to the policy development phase. Moreover, bureaucrats were more likely to achieve consensus on procedural rather than substantive coordination (Wong & van der Heijden, 2019). Building on this understanding, this study details how coordinators use different sets of strategies for the two types of coordination.

4.6.2 Reflections on responsiveness and neutrality

Firstly, pyramidal responsiveness allows minimalist intervention to policy coordination, which is compatible with the observation that ministries resist interventions from coordinators by protecting their turfs legitimately (Bardach, 1998). Coordinators would be careful with imposing ideas that erode ministerial turfs, and therefore would spend their political capital wisely on the most necessary imposition (Peters, 2013). This study describes the coordinator as minimalist but also proportionate. It will escalate the intrusiveness of intervention one level at a time to demand eventual compliance from the ministries, especially on temporary processes for developing a whole-of-government policy output. To achieve consensus on

adopting permanent processes across the government, coordinators would set the highest bar imaginable and then de-escalate proportionately to give back just enough control to the ministries for keeping them engaged.

Secondly, meta-responsiveness offers the concept of coordinating at a distance. The coordination of sustainable development policies tends to produce institutional changes (i.e., temporal or permanent procedural coordination) but not policy changes (i.e., temporal or permanent substantive coordination) (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016) possibly due to the limited control of coordinators over the latter. However, coordinators can still influence indirectly through the development of guidelines and framing of public messages as references to which ministries can voluntarily use. Related is the coordinator's vantage point for aggregating inputs and catalyzing changes by providing a collaborative platform (Ansell & Gash, 2018). The coordinators aggregate information on interactions across ministries, and provide a bigger picture. A coordinator is required to activate such a big-picture framework (Peters, 2013). Within this framework, coordinators scan for opportunities to mediate conflicts between ministries, but not as a problem solver. Mediation keeps the coordinator at a distance and the framework alive.

Finally, the networked responsiveness complicates the pyramidal responsiveness. The coordinators could influence through their networks before escalating their strategies. This is evident in the behaviours of central coordinators who built coalitions with several ministries for improving compliance from other ministries. However, there is insufficient data to demonstrate that the coordinators practiced the minimalist principle. It is particularly clear that the German coordinator may cooperate with a weak ministry to push for a neglected policy agenda, knowing that there will be significant ministerial resistance. Therefore, the coordinator would move quickly and forcefully to impose a particular priority without going through the slow escalation up the pyramid as predicted in the original concept of networked responsiveness (Braithwaite, 2017). The nuances are to be further explored. However, the available data strongly shows that the coordinators across the three countries did not act alone and frequently presented themselves in a coalition with the coordinated ministries that were highly supportive of the sustainability agenda.

Apart from responsiveness, this study has highlighted the neutrality of the centre of government as the coordinator for implementing SDGs. Given that this central coordinator is strongly influenced by the top political leader, it is not absolutely but relatively more neutral than having ministries as the coordinator. The relative neutrality is also not objectively measured but subjectively perceived by the interviewees of this study. The relative and subjective neutrality has direct implications on whether the coordinated ministries are willing to participate in the policy process designed by the central coordinator. Practically, institutional designers need to seriously consider moving the coordinator for implementing SDGs from the ministries to the centre of government. Furthermore, new coordinators can systematically devise strategies for inter-ministerial coordination, which includes doing just enough (pyramidal), caring from a distance (meta), and influencing through peers (networked).

4.7 Limitation and unfinished inquiry

Theoretically, despite its explanatory power, the limits of responsive regulation have not been extensively discussed. While the responsive regulation theory proposes a minimalist approach to interventions, the escalation up the regulatory pyramid does not prevent the use of highly coercive strategies when interventions of one level after another fail. The frustrated and worried coordinator may be eager to see results and resort to highly coercive strategies too quickly, especially if the institutional checks and balances are not effectively in place (Braithwaite, 2014). In the German and Czech Republic cases, ministries are divided on whether the coercion of central coordinators for making ministries comply with the procedures for inter-ministerial deliberation was necessary and without negative implications. The Finnish central coordinator, on the other hand, is exemplary in 'walking softly and carrying a big stick'. It sought to move forward as fast as the consensus among ministries allowed with the authority of the centre of government but without the use of tricks and coercion. There are no formal checks here for situations whereby central coordinators 'abuse' their authorities in the name of generating desperate consensus on sustainable development commitments. It may be worth pondering in future research how central coordinators can rely more on networked responsiveness before escalating up the pyramid. Comprehensive and proactive

institutionalization of networking that permits broader consideration of public interests in the coordination process may offer a way out of the limit of responsive regulation (Hong & You, 2018).

On methodological limitations, the sample is not representative and therefore may be difficult to generalise to other countries. The three countries under investigation are European. When compared to other regions, the institutions in these countries may have particular research interests in climate-related SDGs, especially on sustainable consumption and production (Salvia, Leal Filho, Brandli, & Griebeler, 2019). How the policy content (i.e., SDGs) affects the policy processes (i.e., inter-ministerial coordination) is beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, the interviews primarily focused on the development of strategies for implementing SDGs between 2014 and 2017. The interviews have also captured the broad reflections on the long history of the sustainability community, indicating that institutions can adapt slowly and wither quickly. Therefore, the four coordination behaviours may be the result of all kinds of institutional changes, and they may not be as predictive of future behaviours.

Future research may focus on four areas. Firstly, the central coordinator oversees portfolios across the government and therefore may be perceived naturally to be more neutral than individual ministries. However, what roles, activities or decisions would diminish the perceived neutrality significantly? For example, would adjudicating the quality of policy decisions through the sustainability lens be damaging to the perceived neutrality? Secondly, it would satisfy the curiosity of policy practitioners to understand the extent that the capacity of coordinators can influence their responsiveness. How would a larger coordinating team help deployment of more appropriate level and type of coordination strategies? Thirdly, the idea of responsiveness in coordination may be related to the flexibility of sustainability concepts. Does coordination of the sustainability agenda call for greater responsiveness than coordination of other agendas? Finally, responsive coordination may be desirable to keep the bureaucracy stable and harmonious, but the responsiveness can result in avoidance of necessary conflicts, which partially explains why transformational policy changes have not eventuated. (Wong & van der Heijden, 2019). When is it appropriate for the responsive

coordinator to get into a 'good fight' in order to significantly advance the sustainability discourse?

5 Networked hierarchy

Sustainability bureaucrats avoid conflicts, secure commitments, and coordinate responsively. These behaviours are supported by an underlying institutional structure. Typically, public management scholars would describe institutions as one of the ideal types. The evolution of the desirable management model shifted from hierarchy to market and most recently to network (Goldsmith & Eggers., 2004). In reality, an institution is always part hierarchy, part network, and part market. Such an analytical viewpoint was first described extensively in a normative framework about private firms (Bradach & Eccles, 1989).

The assumption that these mechanisms (market vs. hierarchy) are mutually exclusive, however, obscures rather than clarifies our understanding. ... price, authority, and trust are combined with each other in assorted ways in the empirical world. The combinations of control mechanism have been characterized as overlapping, embedded, intertwined, juxtaposed, and nested. ... The most sophisticated mixture of control mechanisms can be seen in the plural form. ... the analytical focus must be moved away from exclusive attention to individual transactions; instead, the dynamics of whole structures must be examined ...

The structure of the sustainability institutions has been described as a hybrid between network and hierarchy, giving rise to a 'new pattern of strategy formation' (Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005). However, no study has a comprehensive map of the interactions of the hybrid structure for sustainability governance. This study attempts the mapping and includes a third dimension on the market of ideas within the public administration.

This chapter is a variant of the following published article:

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5.1 Introduction

Policy integration is the defining leverage of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda (UNDESA, 2015). Procedurally, it requires national governments to set up institutions for bringing ministries into a network to deliberate and agree on a common framework or a National Strategy on Sustainable Development (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). Substantively, ministries need to make explicit linkages across policy goals and targets, acknowledging the network of policy interests (Le Blanc, 2015). The institution that embodies the network of ministries and policy interests is predominantly hierarchical, allowing the powerful coordinator to control how ministries deliberate and link with each other. Furthermore, the hierarchy activates the network (Peters, 2013) to promote free exchange in the marketplace of ideas.

As the strong proponent of networks, the SDGs agenda describes policy integration in three ways. First, institutions that are vertically integrated will strengthen interactions across global, national and subnational levels (Young et al., 2014). Second, institutions can be horizontally integrated by making inter-linkages between the goals and targets of SDGs (Griggs et al., 2014). Third, both vertical and horizontal integration will bring about interactions of actors across the government, civil society and private sectors (Müller, Janetschek, & Weigelt, 2015). The centrepiece of this study is to capture how the national level inter-ministerial network operates within a coordinating hierarchy for achieving greater policy integration as part of the implementation of SDGs. It tackles horizontal integration across ministries rather than vertical integration across governance levels. It also focuses on the networks within the bureaucracy and not across governmental and non-governmental actors.

The broader call to follow up on SDG implementation has to attend to concepts of policy integration. It is suggested that the scholarship lacks evaluation on policy integration outcomes while a collection of process evaluation is already available (Tosun & Lang, 2017). This study assesses the processes by understanding the internal fights of the bureaucrats, not as an outsider analysing the glossy public documents but as an observer of behind-the-scene development of the National Strategy on Sustainable Development. More specifically, it investigates how small networks support collaboration and competition within the larger

hierarchical administration, addressed as *Network Within Hierarchy (NWH)*. Most importantly, it will shed light on the art of balancing the network, hierarchy and market features of the sustainability institutions.

5.2 Understanding Network Within Hierarchy

How much do we know about *Network Within Hierarchy*, especially for policy integration activities? Firstly, we can turn to national evaluations of the sustainability institutions. Peer evaluations assumed that bureaucracies did not have networking capabilities as high as the civil society (German Council for Sustainable Development, 2018) They were likely to neglect the direct evaluation of the network processes and instead focus on tangible policy outputs (Finnish Ministry of the Environment, 2009). The most comprehensive analysis of country-level evaluations reported that policy integration activities so far have not resulted in transformational changes but merely supported capacity building (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016) without making any reference to network capabilities, let alone *NWH*. Culminating a decade of lessons on integration practices, the OECD framework on policy coherence has made the establishment of an inter-ministerial structure a building block but failed to acknowledge how the structure functions as an *NWH* (OECD, 2016).

Shifting from individual empirical work to systematic review of the literature on policy integration, the understanding of *NWH* is not any clearer. Generally, these reviews make a long list of factors that influence policy integration processes including poor subsystem involvement (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016), insufficient information and legitimacy (Cejudo & Michel, 2017), low political commitment and ineffective policy instrument (Candel, 2017), centralised leadership and institutional incentives (Tosun & Lang, 2017), and public awareness and organisational provision (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). These factors are too generic to the policy practitioners and unsurprising to public administration scholars (Candel, 2017). They are not particularly useful because research on any other kind of policy processes could have made a similar list. It is therefore important to identify the defining factor unique to policy integration. Given that policy integration involves connections, the network seems to be one of the most appropriate concepts. More importantly, institutional

designers need to balance the free exchange in networks against the steady control of hierarchy. *Network Within Hierarchy* may not be entirely novel in the public administration literature (Molin & Masella, 2016), but it provides a fresh perspective to policy integration. A deeper understanding of *NWH* may then improve the specificity of what contributes to policy integration, addressing the issue of conceptual stretching of *integration* (Persson & Runhaar, 2018).

The only brief reference to the network in the vast literature on policy integration is the concept of *horizontal governance* through bottom-up coordination. It brought out issues around conflict and competition due to power struggles and clashes of interests (Tosun & Lang, 2017). More fundamentally, policy integration involves public organisations working together to reduce redundancy (Giessen, 2011). The focus on efficiency here has downplayed how necessary tedious exchange of ideas is within the network when ‘working together’. Another issue is some explanatory factors may suggest the importance of network, but they are framed broadly as ‘organisational provisions’, ‘consultation procedures’ and ‘overlapped objectives’ (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). They do not help clarify whether network arrangement is necessary for policy integration. A more explicit description of network can be found in measuring policy integration as the involvement of core and periphery actors within the networked subsystem (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016). Policy integration is a collective action among these actors to tackle ‘multifactorial’ and ‘cross-sectoral’ issues at multiple levels of government (Cejudo & Michel, 2017). Despite these descriptions, the literature still does not spell out what exactly does a network do that the hierarchy cannot provide – let alone the idea of balancing the dominant features of the hierarchical bureaucracy with the integration functions of networks.

5.2.1 Hierarchy needs network for deliberation

The hierarchy may have limited resources for coordination and information processing. It relies on the network to decentralise policy integration. Functionally, the network of ministries can regulate themselves (Moore & Hartley, 2008), build cooperative relationships (De Vries, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2016), and process highly technical information (Lupia, 2003). Most importantly, the ministries are free from the coordinating hierarchy to deliberate over

sustainability ideas that concern multiple ministries, propelling the network towards a 'rough consensus' (Crosby, 't Hart, & Torfing, 2017). The coordinating hierarchy relies on the network of ministries to come forth with their expertise and commitment in SDG implementation.

5.2.2 Network needs hierarchy for consistency

However, the network of ministerial actors as described above does not emerge out of nowhere; it has to be activated by the coordinating hierarchy (Peters, 2013). In a highly hierarchical model, coordinators of sustainability policies (e.g., Department of Environment or Cabinet Office) may choose to direct individual ministries to collaborate through routine procedures (e.g., inter-ministerial forum) or policy instruments (e.g., impact assessment). Appointed by the centre of government, the Department of Environment, which punches above its weight in the hierarchy of ministries, gains legitimacy to impose the coordinating hierarchy for sustainability portfolio on all ministries. Hierarchy desires stability and consistency, and it yields more certain coordination outcomes compared to networks and coalitions (Jenkins-smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Ingold, 2017). The network of ministries needs the coordinating hierarchy to gain the discipline for consistently producing a National Strategy on Sustainable Development, bringing ministerial actors together to deliberate over the targeted issues, and reporting on the progress of policy integration in individual ministries and the whole government annually (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). Overall, the literature above has presented administrative structures with clear procedures for developing policy outputs in cycles. However, it has not highlighted how the hierarchical structure makes this possible for the inter-ministerial networks.

5.2.3 Network needs market for competition

The previous section has argued that the institution for policy integration is an *NWH*; the networks of ministerial actors *deliberate* under the *control* of the coordinating hierarchy. The deliberative network supports not just cooperation but also competition. Bureaucrats may exchange, deliberate and compete, making the network a marketplace of ideas. The healthy rivalry between bureaucrats may weed out less useful ideas for advancing the sustainability

discourse. The competitive deliberation can incorporate diverse perspectives under a broadly agreed framework (Dryzek & Pickering, 2017), such as the SDGs Agenda. However, competition can be a double-edged sword. When more than one organisation (or ministry) are sharing the same policy portfolio (Alter & Meunier, 2009), bureaucrats may compete against each other on governance functions, resources and ideas (Frey, 2008). The competition can be directed towards turf protection and 'a race to the bottom' for collective commitments (Harrison, 2006), which prevents inter-ministerial integration (Radtke et al., 2016).

5.2.4 Hierarchy, network and market altogether

It is established that the hierarchy, network or market alone cannot achieve policy integration. The challenge for an institutional designer is finding out what mixture of the three modes provides an optimal process for inter-ministerial integration. It is anticipated that hierarchical bureaucracy may be good at aggregating technical information but struggle with creating innovative ideas (Peters, 2013). More specifically, the creativity does not lie in the centre but the network. The network deliberates over old and new ideas under a culture that respects competition of ideas. This study unveils how the network of ministries develops the National Strategy of Sustainable Development under the guidance of the coordinating hierarchy. The network deliberates and competes over ideas related to soliciting agreement on sustainability principles, setting goals and targets, implementing inter-ministerial mechanisms, framing rationales for pro-sustainability decisions, and monitoring progress against the SDGs as outlined in the Strategies (Government Administration Unit of Finland, 2017; Office of the Czech Republic Government, 2017; The Federal Government of Germany, 2017). All of these activities require a sound judgment of institutional designers to maximise the strengths of network, hierarchy and market behaviours among sustainability actors.

5.2.5 Common institutional features across three countries

Table 1 introduces broad institutional features common to all three countries despite many differences in the detailed setup of the institutions for policy integration that respond to the call for implementing SDGs. The focus of this study is on the policy integration *processes* through the *Network Within Hierarchy*. It is made up of the inter-ministerial network and the

coordinating hierarchy, which are common across the three countries under investigation – Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic. In the context of this study, the commonality in sustainability institutions overshadows the differences in governance arrangements (i.e., unitary or federalist).

The general process is as follows: the existing institution for policy integration is legitimised to implement the SDGs Agenda at the national level. A coordinating ministry or agency will be appointed to develop and facilitate inter-ministerial processes. Ministries will exchange ideas to form the basis of the National Strategy on Sustainable Development. To deliver the Strategy on time and to specification, the coordinator will use its power to steer the network of ministries through processes of setting SDG targets and securing policy commitments. When ministries deliberate on how and what integrate, they offer a whole range of ideas as products to be sold in the marketplace. Only ideas that are good enough for all ministries will make it into the Strategy.

Who are the actors behind these structures? Figure 1 illustrates three types of relationships: coordinating hierarchy, inter-ministerial networks, and hierarchy within ministries. A team of technocrats runs the coordinating agency and works closely with the ministerial representatives. The ministries can nominate either a technocrat or an executive as the representatives for the sustainability portfolio. The ministerial representatives meet with each other in the presence of relevant technocrats from their respective ministries to advise on joint policy portfolios. The inter-ministerial networks sometimes function like a marketplace, selling and buying ideas among the technocrats and executives of the bureaucracy. The executives are state secretaries and directors of large policy units who work directly with the government ministers.

Table 5-1 Three institutional features of SDGs implementers across countries

| | Finland | Germany | Czech Republic |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Hierarchy of coordination | The coordination secretariat is housed within the Prime | Five main staff from the Department of Sustainable Development at the | The Prime Minister's Office has established a Department of |

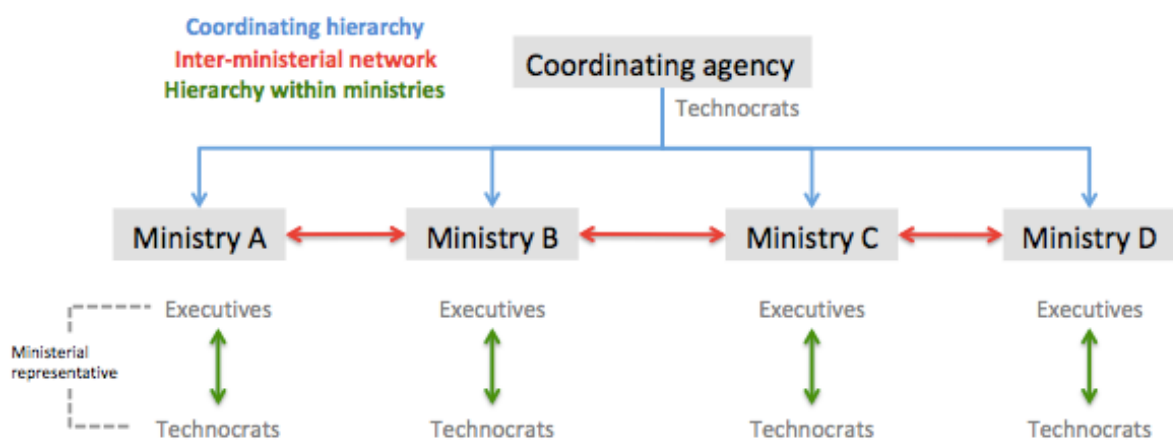
| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | Minister's Office. Three main staff provides support to the National Commission on Sustainable Development chaired by the Prime Minister. | Chancellery led the strategy development process along with the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and the Ministry of Environment. The highest-level advisory committee on sustainable development is membered by state secretaries from all ministries | Sustainable Development staffed with 16 experts. The Department also supports the Steering Committee in charge of developing and monitoring the National Strategy. |
| Network of ministries | The Development Policy Committee and the National Commission co-established a working group to provide analysis of policy substances and institutional procedures. A network is also created for indicator development and target setting. These forums are designed to be inclusive of all ministries. | All ministries participate in two working groups: sustainability indicator (led by the Ministry of Environment) and urban development (involving the sub-national governments). Temporary inter-ministerial meetings were set up to ensure coherence across the chapters of the substantial Strategy – each drafted by a ministry. | Eight sub-committees and associated working groups provide new opportunities for ministerial representatives to integrate their interests. |
| Marketplace of ideas | Informed by the shared consensus of the Societal Commitment and priorities for SDGs, the inter-ministerial forums allow regular debates of substantive topics such | The harmonisation of chapters and setting of sustainability targets brought about significant conflicts among ministries. The German coordinator decided to include all 17 Goals in the Strategy, | The labour is divided based on substantive areas related to the social, environmental and economic dimensions, and procedural areas on policy analysis, |

as circular economy and social inequality. The Finns emphasised the need to cut the rhetoric and debate on concrete actions.

creating a vibrant and competitive marketplace of ideas.

municipality engagement, and international affairs.

Figure 5-1 Relations of actors in coordinating hierarchy and inter-ministerial network



5.3 Methodology and rationale

The common institutional features illustrated above allow the consolidation of data across the three countries. This study identifies the roles of network within the administrative hierarchies. Finland and Germany were initially selected by the author due to their nimble response to the ratification of SDGs Agenda. Several interviewees later on recommended the Czech Republic as the emerging but promising implementer of SDGs. Overall, the three countries have well-established institutions that would offer rich data, especially on the inter-ministerial integration. I have also selected three countries instead of one to strike a balance between sufficient consistency to demonstrate dominant patterns across the three countries and sufficient diversity to assess the validity of dominant patterns of implementing sustainability agenda at the national level (Mahoney & Goertz, 2004).

Table 5-2 Interviewees by country and sector

| | Bureaucracy (B) | Civil society (B) | Academia (A) | Total |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Germany (G) | 19 | 2 | 2 | 23 |
| Finland (F) | 17 | 2 | 2 | 21 |
| Czech (C) | 7 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Total | 43 | 5 | 5 | 53 |

A total of 53 interviewees participated in the study between February and July 2017, including public servants, academics and civil society leaders (see Table 2). Academics and civil society leaders were interviewed to verify and critique the accounts of the public servants on the bureaucratic processes of policy integration. Recorded and transcribed, the one-hour interviews elicited experiences of working in the inter-ministerial network steered by the coordinating hierarchy. In addition, I also collected publicly available reports and interviewee-supplied documents, which included policy strategies, evaluation reports, terms of reference for the committee, internal assessment templates, and presentation slides. Following the conventional practice for this type of research, data were coded using a coding scheme. The coding allowed identification of the ‘repetitiveness’ and ‘rarity’ of the experiences across interviewees and documents (Silverman, 2015). Interviewees remain anonymous in the remainder of the article, but unique identifiers are used for individual interviewees. For example, ‘G17B’ provides three pieces of information about the interviewees: the first letter indicates the country of origin – Germany (G); the number shows that it is the 17th participant in the study; and the second letter indicates the actor type – bureaucrat (i.e., technocrat or executive) in the public service (B). Other identifiers can be found in Table 2.

The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework (Ostrom 2011) structures the data from interviews and documents to assist with the identification of themes around the function of networks. This framework is appropriate because the inter-ministerial policy integration in this study can be seen as a form of collective action similar to that of the natural resource users in self-governing communities. Contrast is made to highlight the alternative to hierarchical coordination, involving the self-organising networks of ministerial actors (Peters, 2013). The Framework informs the coding process in the following ways. Firstly, key elements of the IAD helped understand the institutional context, which involved mapping of the actors,

forums, and group characteristics. Secondly, I structured the data in compliance with the standard ADICO syntax as detailed in Table 1 of Watkins and Westphal (2016). It codified ‘who does what to whom under what conditions for what consequences’ as individual rules. Thirdly, from approximately 53 hours of interviews, 1135 rules were identified via the ADICO syntax. In reading the rules, I have observed repeated referencing of network and hierarchy features among interviewees across the three countries. Therefore, these rules were organised around the major themes of coordinating hierarchy, deliberative network, and competitive market. The third round of reading further categorised the roles that these governance modes played in supporting policy integration in the sustainability institution.

5.4 Findings on relations among hierarchy, network and market

This section presents three kinds of interactions between governance modes – hierarchy needs network, network needs hierarchy, and network needs market. These interactions bring about deliberation, agreement and innovation, respectively. These broad goals are supported by a set of processes that have an impact on policy integration for implementing the SDGs. Table 3 outlines the key points, which are then elaborated in the later part of this section.

Table 5-3 Summary of findings on interactions between hierarchy, network and market

| Interaction | Process | Impact |
|--|--|--|
| Hierarchy needs network to allow deliberation. | Network builds capacity for slow deliberation. | Policy integration benefits from the institution’s ability to exchange ideas freely for generating collective understanding with minimal pressure from the hierarchy |
| | Network builds capacity for careful consideration of evidence. | Policy integration benefits from the institution’s ability to use evidence to break the siloed knowledge base of individual |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | ministries |
| | Network builds capacity for personal engagement. | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to connect with actors from relevant sectors through their innovative ideas. |
| Network needs hierarchy to reach an agreement. | Hierarchy provides general directions | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to outline a framework under which ministries will deliberate |
| | Hierarchy steers development processes | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to implement policy development processes agreed among the ministries. |
| | Hierarchy makes final decisions | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to overcome disputes that are unresolved in the network |
| <i>Network within hierarchy</i> needs market to promote innovation. | Market provide choices for innovation | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to generate ideas |
| | Market culls back bad innovation | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to ensure the best ideas survive |
| | Market preserves specialisation for innovation | Policy integration benefits from the institution's ability to support division of labour among the ministries in order to build integrated expertise |

5.4.1 Hierarchy needs networks

The institution for policy integration relies on hierarchy to share information and make decisions. Hierarchy does not encourage deliberation beyond the ministerial boundaries. Therefore, the coordinating hierarchy needs to relax its control, allowing ministerial actors that are not at the top of the hierarchy to deliberate over sustainability ideas. In effect, the rigid hierarchy needs to be balanced with flexible networks to produce three main functions:

Firstly, the hierarchy needs the network to build capacity for slow deliberation continuously. The long-term exchange between technocrats would be routinised to the extent that they could 'use shared language and generate ideas' partially inspired by the SDGs (G8B). Conversing under the same sustainability framework, technocrats would then 'select the right strategies from their toolbox' to 'sell' their ideas (F36B). This kind of inter-ministerial exchange was possible if the executives did not selfishly 'protect their workers' from 'additional work' such as sustainable development (F37B). The deliberation within multiple networks had to saturate until the 'actors got bored with the conversation' over time (F41B). Slow deliberation between ministries was 'an investment into persuasion and empathy', which prepared technocrats and executives for unfettered adoption of the agreed policy substance when the timelines for producing policy output are tight (C46B, similar C58C). The deliberation spared the coordinating hierarchy from imposing harsh deadlines and half-baked ideas on individual ministries. In preparing for the publication of their SDGs implementation plan, the Finns ran monthly meetings on specific themes or topics to exchange information, generate ideas and trial positions – as a network of ministerial representatives. Relying more on the inter-ministerial network, technocrats and executives did not 'refer to the organisational charts' and 'box' colleagues into different camps of interests (F22B). Therefore, the *Network Within Hierarchy* could deliberate slowly and freely.

Secondly, the hierarchy needs the network for slow deliberation, which allows more careful consideration of the evidence. The network of ministries engaged technocrats who were 'closer to the facts' and therefore 'easier to come to an agreement' (G10B) without 'escalating

up the hierarchy' to seek greater authority for making a decision (G16B). Keeping the negotiation at the technocrat level prevented 'overloading' the executive level who might 'kill good ideas' too early in the deliberation (G16B). Without exposing early ideas to the executives, the technocrats provided technical advice on specific sustainability topics that interested the executives and politicians (F24B). As the ideas matured and agreed at the technocrat level, the executives would simply 'adopt them without much deliberation' because they trusted the evidence-informed advice from the technocrats (G56B). The evidence that informed the technocratic deliberation was generated differently across the three countries. The German regime relied more on the ministries to bring forth the research evidence, whereas the Czech regime had the central coordinator analysing and packaging pro-sustainability evidence to convince the ministries (C42B). The Finns, on the other hand, centralised their research funding to commission sustainability studies with extensive input from the network of ministries (F25A). The *NWH* seemed to give enough space for generating and using evidence-informed technical advice on commitments for the National Strategy on Sustainable Development.

Thirdly, the hierarchy needs the network to generate personal relationships that support slow and evidence-informed deliberation. The long-term exchange of ideas could make technocrats more aware of positions of other ministries, and the range of positions their ministries can assume. In securing support for sustainability ideas, technocrats could 'anticipate' and 'prioritise' what was more acceptable to the executive level without concrete 'top-down instructions' (G4A). However, no one could determine what should be done precisely; 'it is a democracy' (F35B). 'There is no single point' that an actor – whether a technocrat or an executive – could be sure that their ideas would be 'pushed through' (C46B). Technocrats influenced and 'smoothed things out' through 'personal relationships' that were built over a long time in their network rather than through their formal positions within the hierarchy (C45C, similar C46B, C48C, F34B). They were able to access executives who had greater political capitals to influence decision-making. Exceptional networkers among the technocrats 'knew almost everyone and could always ask what the others think about something' (F34B). It was *who* they knew that mattered rather than what ranking they were in the hierarchy because the personal relationships helped them 'worked through the system'

more effectively (F28B). These personal relationships were often built over time prior to the ratification of the SDGs.

In summary, the network of ministerial technocrats deliberated over sustainability ideas *slowly, rationally* and *personally*. The ideas were mainly related to policy integration as processes for implementing SDGs, such as the mandate of sustainability reporting among Finnish ministries (F31B), the German ‘sustainability coordinator’ (i.e., ministerial representatives) as ‘contact person’ known to the whole government (G13B), and the concept of ‘inter-ministerial networks within hierarchy’ in Czech Republic (C42B).

5.4.2 Network needs hierarchy

Networks of ministries can offer institutional features that the coordinating hierarchy alone cannot. However, the emergence and maintenance of networks within the hierarchy do not occur spontaneously; it requires intervention from the coordinating hierarchy (Peters 2013). In this section, I will detail how hierarchy supports network to function properly.

In responding to the commitment towards implementing SDGs, a national government sets up an integration regime to formalise the role of a coordinating agency. The coordinator designs processes to control how and what information and ideas are exchanged between ministerial technocrats. They have the convening power to facilitate deliberation between ministries and assign tasks to ministries with set conditions and parameters. The implication is that this will shift the regime from purely self-organised connections for responding to crisis situations, into more orderly, stable and predictable institutions. The coordinating agency can rely on the hierarchy, not the network, to *consistently* produce policy ideas. A competent coordinator has four characteristics that networks alone cannot offer:

Firstly, the network needs the hierarchy to provide general directions. The coordinators were in a better position than the individual ministries to articulate the ‘whole-of-government’ perspectives (C42B). Without the coordinating hierarchy, the network of ministries was limited by endless deliberation among their representing technocrats. If the executive level in the hierarchy did not prioritise SDGs implementation, the most networked bureaucracy would not

see significant progress in developing integrated measures (G52B). 'I could sit in the Ministry and work for years and years and, without the push from the top for system change', the other Ministries would not attend to environmental issues, which have not been one of their priorities (G55B). The hierarchy, when properly resourced, could set the broader sustainability framework under which the network of ministerial actors performed technical analysis (G56B, similar F32B). Crucially, for this to happen, the executives in the hierarchy had to agree to the general directions of the framework, and subsequently legitimise and resource SDGs implementation that might not contribute directly to the target activities of the units (F22B).

Secondly, the network needs the hierarchy to steer development processes based on the widely agreed directions around SDGs implementation. The network of ministerial technocrats 'let a thousand flowers bloom' and produced 'diversity' in approaches and preferences (F36B). The actors felt that they could freely provide technical ideas as they saw appropriate. To overcome unmanageable diversity, the coordinating hierarchy set rules for and followed up on inter-ministerial participation. Made compulsory, the ministries were given a series of tasks including the nomination of one indicator per SDG (G8B), and drafting of chapters for the Strategy relevant to their policy portfolios. When ministries had not come forth with their chapters and indicators, the coordinators would draft the chapters on which they were forced to comment. This kind of forced participation has kept all ministries on board throughout the SDGs implementation (G57B). Some ministerial technocrats preferred even more concentrated power given to the coordinator to not only steer but also 'own the agenda' which might push the sustainability commitments of individual ministries much further (G13B). 'The dream' for ministerial technocrats would be that the 'obligation' for implementing SDGs became so clear that the top level could 'demand their functionaries and guide the political decision-making'; the technocrats could then 'follow-up rather than continuously deliberate.' (F33B) So far, the hierarchy has successfully coordinated the development processes to produce 'a coherent text and similar perspectives' without over-burdening the individual ministries (C42B). However, the coordinator could push the ministries too hard and too fast, creating dissatisfaction within the network of ministerial representatives. 'The more the coordinator intervenes, the weaker is the power' (G12C). The ministerial technocrats

preferred more friendly communication for longer so that 'everyone could live with the decisions much better' during and after SDGs implementation (G10B).

Thirdly, the network needs the hierarchy to make final decisions. A network without hierarchy or authority will struggle with making up its mind. The networks can deliberate and advise, but it cannot make the final decisions for SDGs implementation. 'The job of public servants (i.e., technocrats and executives) was to provide advice; advice is advice, and politicians decide' (F24B). In cases of gridlocks within the network, 'technocrats would agree to disagree, and escalate the most controversial and irresolvable matters to the executives' (G2B). The technocrats would continue to escalate until someone with the right level of authority in the hierarchy could make decisions about the inter-ministerial conflicts. Bearing in mind that politicians decided on the government budget, they could 'override anything' that did not fit into the major narrative – economic growth at all costs (F33B, similar G12C).

The network of ministries deliberated within the general directions and the steering framework of the coordinating hierarchy. On difficult matters, the hierarchy needed to be decisive in ending the deliberation within the network. However, in deciding for the SDGs implementation, the hierarchy could still be overloaded by the multitude of ideas within a network of ministerial technocrats.

5.4.3 Network within a hierarchy needs market

In the deliberation process, resourced and proactive ministerial technocrats supply ideas on policy integration. They compete against each other to appeal to the other ministries that demand solutions for policy integration. The competition occurs in the marketplace of ideas, which offers a diverse range of ideas and culls back less useful ideas. To maintain relevance and legitimacy, the main technocrats will innovate under the pressure of competing protagonists and antagonists of the policy integration narrative. This innovation process for SDGs implementation can be described in three ways:

Firstly, network needs market to provide choices for innovation. In times of austerity, ministerial actors would compete for scarce resources to 'keep their ideas alive' (G8B, similar

F33B). In SDGs implementation, there were two types of ministries. The more passive ministries showed their commitment by setting more ambitious targets not only in their traditional policy portfolio but also in joint portfolios (G11B). More proactive ministries (such as the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) were dominant suppliers of ideas who would meet the demand from passive ministries. Collectively, they fulfil the basic mandate of SDGs implementation (G12C). The competition of ideas between the ministries was so political that insiders were reluctant to share the details with outsiders involved in the broader SDGs implementation (G12C). The ministerial technocrats cared about the ideas so much that 'choice of words could either completely block or facilitate the inter-ministerial negotiation' (G14B). Typically, at the start of the strategy development process, ministerial technocrats were brought together for a 'free and open discussion' whereby they could 'sell' their ideas in the marketplace (F25A). Ministerial technocrats had to 'prioritise which battlefield to enter', knowing that the 'healthy tensions' between ministries should not 'prevent progress' (F35B). However, to prevent overly competitive and unfruitful relations, the coordinating hierarchy has asked the network of ministerial representatives to adopt existing measures without engaging with the marketplace of ideas (F24B). Consequently, the network of ministries, that prized cooperation over competition, produced policy documents that did not 'buy into' many of the ideas in the marketplace (F30B). However, the real competition of ideas would happen at the subsequent election whereby ministerial technocrats and executives would draft and submit proposals to fight for the attention and resources of the politicians (F41B, G4A). This suggests that the marketplace of ideas for SDGs implementation within the bureaucracy was not sufficiently vibrant to offer more institutional and policy choices.

Secondly, network needs market to cull back bad ideas as more choices can be paralysing. Therefore, ministerial technocrats not only have to manage the flow of ideas but also differentiate the good from the bad. In implementing SDGs, ministries would develop their capacity to assess the quality of the ideas, and form their independent views about what the marketplace of ideas offer (G16B). However, the assessment criterion for good sustainability ideas of the bureaucrats could be as vague as inter-generational justice, which meant 'current decision does not place further burden on future generations' (G12C). To overcome the

ambiguity of sustainability work in general, the technocrats tried to be 'objective and use external experts' to assess the ideas (F24B). More concrete assessment involved 'loud discussion' among the technocrats over the indicators, which might have filtered out 'bad ideas' (F30B), produced 'realistic plans' (F32B) and 'defended sustainable development principles' (C45C). The use of indicators has shifted the discourse of the marketplace from de-growth to sustainable growth and bio-economy (F31B, F32B). The marketplace of ideas dived into more in-depth discussions for 'telling a good story' (F35B, F40B) rather than obsessing about the technicality of the SDGs indicators (C44B). Culling back the bad ideas and promoting the good ideas, the sustainability discourse has evolved from eco-centric to socially inclusive, which was 'unthinkable' a decade ago (G8B); this renewed understanding formed the basis of the actions for SDGs implementation.

Thirdly, network needs a controlled market to preserve specialisation for innovation. Chancellor Merkel did not 'show her invisible hands' and called on the competing ministries to use their specialised capacities to solve the problems themselves, especially around the long-standing tension between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment (G7C). The marketplace of sustainability ideas was never completely open and free because the coordinating technocrats would 'carefully choose actors' that could enter and supply or demand ideas (G12C). The marketplace within the coordinating hierarchy was constrained by the legislations that prescribed how ministries would divide their labour and specialisation (C43B). The existing policy frameworks also reinforced such boundaries (F35B). 'It has been relatively clear who is responsible for what.' (G8B). Technocrats 'would not dare to talk about issues that are not within their competencies'; instead, they learned how issues are debated within the ministry' (G15A). The legislation, framework and norm promoted more ministerial autonomy, which increases specialisation. In the words of the key architect of the institutions for SDGs implementation, 'silo is bad but specialisation is not' (G57B).

5.5 Discussion on a balanced bureaucracy

The evaluation of SDG implementation has to see the policy integration process beyond hierarchical coordination (Peters, 2013) and administrative structures (Nordbeck & Steurer,

2016). This article focuses on how the bureaucracy deliberated as a network, was steered by the hierarchy, and was innovated through the market. Institutional designers confront dilemmas that require balancing of these three modes. Balancing attempts to find the optimal arrangement for the best outcome. It maximises the strengths of a particular mode before the dominance of this mode works against the outcome. It also minimises the weaknesses of one mode by introducing strengths of another mode. The governance literature offers the concept of hybridity to illustrate the smarter design for mixing the three modes (Gunningham & Sinclair, 2017), involving policy actors within and *beyond* the state (van der Heijden, 2015). This study, however, applies hybridity on sustainability governance *within* the state, explaining how bureaucratic actors can demonstrate hierarchical, network and market behaviours in policy making.

5.5.1 Controlled deliberation

Networks offer deliberative capacity, balancing out the single-mindedness of the hierarchy. It has been established that deliberation takes time and that it requires multiple forms of communication, including the rational discussion of research evidence and the personal connection with the values behind the issues (Curato, Dryzek, Ercan, Hendriks, & Niemeyer, 2017). Decades of deliberative democracy research have not infiltrated the policy integration literature. One exception lies in the normative proposition on integration involving intensive bargaining in the network of ministerial actors (Peters, 2013). The hierarchy offers clear directions and decisions, balancing out the endless freedom of the network. Firstly, the network of ministries, if unguided, may participate in endless deliberation that might not amount to any meaningful policy change. Overcoming the indecisiveness of the network, top-down guidance from the hierarchy can produce a swift response with lower transaction cost and higher accountability (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). Secondly, the coordinating hierarchy is pivotal in catalysing a new network. However, every time the commands are fired, political capital of the coordinating hierarchy is spent (Peters, 2013), stirring up resistance among the network of ministries. The bureaucratic actors and evaluators need to reflect on balancing two types of risks: endless deliberation of the inter-ministerial network and coercive guidance of the coordinating hierarchy.

Additional to the structural issues of the *NWH* is personal relationships. The exchange of ideas or deliberation has been a staple concept in theories of policy process (Weible & Sabatier, 2017) and discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2017). Different from discussion, deliberation has a strong emotional dimension (Loewenstein, O'Donoghue, & Bhatia, 2015) such as open-mindedness. Not only is the content of the deliberation emotional, the process of deliberation is highly relational too. Many government-commissioned and academic evaluations of sustainability governance have neglected the significance of personal relationships (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016; Tosun & Leininger, 2017). While this study does not delve into the nuances of personal relationships, it has made clear that relationships help push ideas through the inter-ministerial processes for SDGs implementation. Arguably, relationships formed in networks are more informal and personal, and therefore may help circumvent the rigid rules of the hierarchy that determine how bureaucrats should relate to each other. Trust and reciprocity in the personal relationship are important variables that can be included in future research on inter-ministerial integration (Gunningham & Sinclair, 2009; Hong & You, 2018; McGinnis, 2011). To assess the deliberative qualities of the bureaucracy, evaluators of SDGs implementation may ask questions such as:

- How has the deliberative culture changed within the inter-ministerial network?
- What sources of evidence were used to persuade actors from another sector or ministry?
- What kind of personal relationship is helpful with generating inter-ministerial consensus?

5.5.2 Competitive deliberation

The network needs the market for establishing the supply and demand for ideas on policy integration. The ministerial technocrats assess choices of ideas, and cull back bad ideas from the supplying ministries. As presented in the findings, the institutional arrangements that promote competition of ideas could influence policy integration more than the individual ideas of particular policy entrepreneurs (Ackrill, Kay, & Zahariadis, 2013). More specifically, ideas are proposed by individual policy entrepreneurs but deliberated and tested by a collective of

technically competent bureaucrats in the marketplace. Therefore, to illustrate competition for opening up policy windows, this study has focussed on the institutions rather than individual entrepreneurs or their ideas.

Despite the competition, the marketplace portrayed in this study has only offered conservative ideas and incremental changes. Ideas that are less complicated and less threatening to the institutions and the individual minds are more acceptable for competition (Markey-Towler, 2019). These are ideas that require lower cognitive processing of the actors. Essentially, radical ideas are rarely 'fit for competition' in the bureaucratic marketplace. This may partially explain why sustainability governance is filled with changes that are not transformational in the eyes of the sustainability actors (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016); they are found to be avoiding conflicts that are too political and concrete because the competition is challenging for keeping the inter-ministerial network functional (Wong & van der Heijden, 2019). The inability to confront conflicts and adapt quickly is, however, not a phenomenon limited to the bureaucracy; in fact, large private organisations that are subjected to the brutal forces of the market of goods and services face the same challenge (Gans, 2016). Despite the slowness, bureaucracy should still be viewed as a vibrant marketplace of ideas, inching forward with innovations. To assess the competitive qualities of the bureaucracy, evaluators of SDGs implementation may ask questions such as:

- How competitive is the marketplace of ideas within the sustainability institution?
- What are the mechanisms for selecting ideas for experimentation?
- Which actors have been left out of the marketplace due to unnecessary entry barriers?

5.5.3 Balanced bureaucracy

This article attempts to demonstrate as scholars, we no longer can argue from one extreme: more centralised or decentralised, and more innovation or stability. Balancing is the act that institutional designers need to master. The trade-offs between institutional qualities, the controlling hierarchy, the deliberative network and the competitive market, is a constant struggle. A balanced design will accentuate the complementary features between hierarchy

and network; the former provides technocratic efficiency to ensure objectives are met while the latter provides governance flexibility that accounts for challenges of multiple scenarios (Rode, 2019). Therefore, evaluators can consider adopting the framework of hybrid governance as the default analysis in studies of complex policy-making (Tenbense, 2018).

5.5.4 Limited bureaucracy

How much value does the network of ministries add to policy integration? Even if the balanced bureaucracy is achieved, there is no guarantee that policies will be integrated during SDGs implementation. After all, the DNA of bureaucracy is deeply hierarchical. The *Network Within Hierarchy* – argued in this study as the central feature for policy integration – may deliberate and compete over ideas, producing plans for policy integration of the highest quality possible with the given capacity. It is still up to the top level of the hierarchy – politicians and executive public servants to make decisions that matter. As illustrated in the evaluation of environmental appraisal tools in the United Kingdom, the rational process of appraisal has largely been ignored by the messy policy-making machine (Russel et al., 2018).

Furthermore, this study is limited by the current ability of the scholarship to convert highly descriptive features of the institution for policy integration into measurable variables in terms of *NWH*. Without consistent ways of describing networks, the scholarship cannot properly examine the relationship between a set of institutional features and the policy integration outcomes through cross-country comparison (Peters, 2015b). Building on clearer concepts of policy integration processes (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Tosun & Lang, 2017), evaluators can attend more closely to the deliberative and competitive nature of the *NWH* when developing indicators for SDGs implementation.

5.6 Conclusion and relevance

Implementing SDGs by focussing on policy integration means institutionalising collective action among ministries. The institutions create processes for inter-ministerial networks under the dominant stewardship of the coordinating hierarchy. The existing literature has identified a long list of factors for facilitating policy integration such as leadership, shared goals and

resourced capacity. These factors are overly generic and therefore can be equally applicable to institutional challenges other than policy integration. Moving beyond generic factors, this study has identified and articulated the concept of *Network Within Hierarchy*, which is novel and unique to the policy integration literature. More specifically, network and hierarchy are seen to mutually influence each other in ways that require balancing to optimise the integration processes. I triangulated interviews of 53 institutional insiders and public documents to identify themes on the inter-ministerial network, the coordinating hierarchy and the marketplace of ideas.

This study has captured the deliberation and competition of ideas among ministries. The inter-ministerial network deliberated slowly to find consensus, rationally to incorporate evidence, and personally to persuade support. The network emerged from the consistent support from the coordinating hierarchy. The hierarchy controlled the network by providing directions, steering processes, and making decisions. The *NWH* had a special quality on the competitiveness between bureaucrats who are suppliers of ideas. The marketplace bought and sold ideas by welcoming diverse perspectives, killing bad options, and preserving natural specialisation. It may be necessary for policy integration to have all these conditions in place to function well, which admittedly is a high bar to aim and a complex phenomenon to evaluate. Future research can attend to the quality of personal relationships and refine the descriptions mentioned above into variables for comparative research.

Peer, self, or independent evaluations on SDGs implementation may take *NWH* seriously as the defining concept for policy integration. The balance between (1) free deliberation and fierce competition of the network and (2) steady control of the hierarchy should underpin many evaluation questions on the optimal institutional design. Policy integration is neither a panacea (Radtke et al., 2016) nor a dead-end (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016), but a middle road towards strengthening the institutional capacity for generating, refining and disseminating sustainability ideas through networks.

6 Research distillation

6.1 Key findings and conclusions

Reflecting on the findings in the previous four chapters, I will make explicit the two kinds of contributions: *insights* for the academic scholarship and the *lessons* for policy community.

Table 6-1 and Table 6-2 provide a summary of the thesis contribution respectively.

The contributions can be framed in terms of what an institutional designer would do knowing the thesis findings. This institutional designer could be: 1) an executive bureaucrat, 2) a sustainability technocrat, 3) the civil society leader who can shape government actions, 4) the academic who packages ideas to be shared wherever the science-policy interface is possible, and 5) an independent evaluator of the sustainability institution. Four main lessons can be drawn from the thesis findings.

Table 6-1 Summary of practical contribution

| Chapter | Practice puzzle | Thesis findings | Practical contribution |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| 2: Conflict avoidance | Why transformational policy integration has not been possible given all the activities of sustainability institutions? | Conflicts that are highly political or perceptively irresolvable will not be deliberated within the network of ministries. | The sustainability institutions need to support bureaucrats to confront conflicts and make policy trade-offs explicit. The institutions need to commit to integration that has policy substance (rather than procedures), and the commitment needs to be framed more concretely rather than abstractly. |
| 3: Political commitment | How do some institutions for policy integration survive and thrive while others wither away? | Bureaucrats found ways to creatively use rules and procedures to secure long-term political commitment. | Sustainability institutions need bureaucratic leadership that will minimize threats to the bureaucratic routines of long-term deliberation. These quiet and seemingly subtle tactics among the leaders should be shared within the international network of sustainability bureaucrats. |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 4. Responsive coordination | How can an agency coordinate an integrated approach to implementing the sustainability agenda from all ministries? Who is best placed for that? | The coordinator has to be responsive; it has to command with a stick sometimes and watch nonchalantly other times. The centre of government is perceived to be the most neutral in the coordination of inter-ministerial activities. | Many emerging sustainability institutions can learn from more mature institutions the sophisticated ways of playing the coordination game with the ministries. The coordinator of the sustainability agenda should not be the Ministry of Environment. The centre of government (e.g., Prime Minister's Office) is the most suitable candidate. |
| 5. Networked hierarchy | What are the key design elements of an institution for policy integration? | The hierarchy steers direction, network deliberates detail, and market provides competition of ideas. | An institutional designer needs to balance the hierarchical, network and market features to ensure coherence, cooperation and competition among ministerial actors. |

6.1.1 Lesson one: sustainability bureaucrats need to confront conflicts (Chapter 2)

The designers of sustainability institution have to answer a big question. Why have the institutions – some in operation for more than a decade – not delivered highly impactful changes to government policies? When I asked the interviewees, they seemed to agree with this assessment unanimously. Even the staunchest supporters of sustainability agenda elaborated on their frustration with the severe lack of transformations.

When asked what was holding them back, they pointed at the conflicts they have avoided during inter-ministerial integration activities. They avoided conflicts that are highly political and predictably futile. They are also more likely to relate to policy substances and require unanimity when making decisions. All of these institutional filters – conscious and unconscious – have shaped what can be deliberated among the ministries. The issues that are safe on the table tend to be non-consequential and therefore not transformational.

6.1.2 Lesson two: sustainability bureaucrats use tactics to keep it afloat (Chapter 3)

The designers also have to consider the survival of their work. This is a trouble in liberal democracies whereby elections can reshuffle the whole deck of cards. The sustainability regime that has been in existence could be axed, and its works and influence could be undone. Therefore, it can be expected that a change of government will bring new political agendas and commitments, threatening the survival of the sustainability institutions.

In the United Kingdom, the change of government from Labour to Tories has weakened the well-established sustainability institution and led to its eventual demise. Political commitment is equally relevant in the German case, whereby the stable long-term political commitment from Angela Merkel has allowed the sustainability institution to survive and even thrive. However, Finland has experienced four changes of government in 25 years and still survived. The sustainability bureaucrats could save themselves because of their strong institutional capacity and their creative leadership around using tactics to secure long-term political involvement. Regime continuity can be explained through the interactions between political involvement and institutional development.

6.1.3 Lesson three: sustainability coordinators dip their toes in the water (Chapter 4)

Apart from processes for confronting conflicts and securing commitments, institutions need to clarify the multiple dimensions of the coordinator and the coordinated ministries. It was found that the integration regime is neither centralised nor decentralised. The institutions are responsive and balanced.

The regime coordinators are armed with a range of strategies to ensure compliance from the ministries. Dipping their toes in, they test the water and adjust their response according to the feedback of the ministries. The more permanent and more substantive the issues, the less control that the coordinator will have over the inter-ministerial deliberation process. In these cases, the coordinator will 'care from a distance', letting the ministries cooperate or fight with each other. For issues that are more temporary and more procedural, the coordinators have more control. Even so, they still tread fairly carefully by adopting a minimalist approach to

coordination. They will start with the least interventionist strategies and work their way up the 'pyramid of coordination'. Whenever possible, they will use the peer ministries to influence the less compliant ministries before escalating up the pyramid and deploy more invasive strategies.

In all of these, the coordinators need to maintain their neutrality to gain legitimacy from the ministries. Naturally, the centre of government (e.g., Prime Minister's Office), rather than individual ministries, is more neutral in the coordination of inter-ministerial response to the sustainability agenda.

6.1.4 Lesson four: sustainability institutions balance the hierarchy, network and market features (Chapter 5)

Moving away from the focus on the coordinators, the institutional designers can focus on the broader functions of the integration regime. Much of the analyses on sustainability institutions have been focusing on one governance mode at a time. Some looked at how top-down directions were translated on the ground in an administrative hierarchy. Others looked at how actors negotiated with each other to achieve consensus in the network. Some saw administration units rivalled against each other for resources and power.

I pose a hybrid analytical framework that examines how the three governance modes interact with each other. More importantly, the institutional designer needs to balance features across the modes. Ideally, a balanced regime needs to preserve as much as possible the strengths of different governance modes. It relies on the coordinating hierarchy to set directions, the inter-ministerial networks deliberate slowly and incorporate evidence, and the marketplace of ideas produces options and weed out bad ideas.

These concrete recommendations to institutional designers can have academic relevance. The academic literature on policy integration is highly fragmented. It has offered a rich discourse that grapples with what works, but not a solid scholarship that builds on each other's highly defined concepts. It has offered a list of factors that promote policy integration,

but not a coherent framework for explaining the processes. It is unlike mature scholarships with concrete frameworks such as the policy process theories and new institutionalism.

Within the fragmented body of work, there are seminal pieces that either summarise the state of the literature or propose a normative and realistic framework. These pieces include:

1. the review on environmental policy integration, which categorises the factors into internal or external as well as into policy development or implementation (Persson & Runhaar, 2018);
2. the summative observations of more than a decade of empirical studies on sustainability governance in Europe (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016);
3. the normative framework that contrasts hierarchical coordination against the self-organised network of ministries relies on bargaining rather than imposition (Peters, 2013); and
4. the conceptual framework that has incorporated key ideas such as subsystem, frame and capacity from policy studies (Candel, 2019).

These four pieces are mountains by themselves that oversee their surrounding landscapes of rich cases on policy integration. These four summits, each with its own vantage points and blind spots, have been developed in parallel. For the first time they are brought together this way not to formulate a grand theory but a loose framework for examining the findings of my study as potential contributions to the fragmented policy integration 'scholarship'. The examination considers the thesis goal of making facilitators of policy integration more *unique, nuanced and measurable*.

Moving onto the next type of contribution, Table 6-2 offers a summary of the thesis contributes to the academic literature. It presents the research gap drawn from the four seminal pieces mentioned above. It also specifies which line of inquiry has been pursued. Finally, I put forward the academic contribution of my findings on the facilitators of policy integration, especially in refining what is to be measured here.

Table 6-2 Summary of academic contribution

| Chapter | Literature gap | Conceptual inquiry | Academic contribution |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 2: Conflict avoidance | <p>Understanding of conflict avoidance is less in-depth than conflict engagement.</p> <p>Turf protection among government ministries may not be the only driver of conflict avoidance</p> | <p>Negative coordination (Scharpf, 1994)</p> <p>Non mutual-interference (Radtke et al., 2016)</p> | <p>Conflict avoidance is as important as conflict engagement.</p> <p>Conflicts are avoided because they are highly political or perceptively irresolvable..</p> |
| 3: Political commitment | <p>Political commitment has been repeatedly identified as a facilitator without elaborating on how it translates into institutional development.</p> <p>It is not known how sustainability bureaucrats can secure long-term political commitment.</p> | <p>Conceptual framework of political commitment:</p> <p>HIV research (Fox et al., 2011)</p> <p>Nutrition research (Baker et al., 2018)</p> | <p>Long-term political commitment that goes beyond an election cycle is particularly relevant to sustainability governance research.</p> <p>Supported by strong institutions, sustainability bureaucrats could creatively manipulate bureaucratic processes to secure long-term political commitment.</p> |
| 4. Responsive coordination | <p>The role of coordinating agencies has not been properly acknowledged.</p> <p>The coordinators do not either order the ministries to compliance (centralised coordination) or vacate out of the inter-ministerial negotiation entirely (de-centralised coordination). It is not known how coordinators can be flexible.</p> | <p>Responsive regulation (Braithwaite, 2017)</p> <p>Coordination scale (Metcalf, 1994)</p> | <p>Policy integration research may find it more useful to see coordination system as responsive to the agencies' feedback, rather than simply as centralised or decentralised coordination.</p> <p>The centre of government as the coordinator is both responsive and neutral. Previous research has not considered the importance of neutrality in coordination.</p> |
| 5. Networked hierarchy | <p>Sometimes, coordination involves hierarchy to impose and other times network to negotiate. The literature does not explain why that is the case.</p> <p>Hybrid governance, in which the hierarchy interacts with the network, has not been applied as a lens to understand the complementary functions of each mode.</p> | <p>Hybrid governance (Tenbensen, 2018)</p> <p>Hybrid model of policy integration (Rode, 2019)</p> | <p>Hybrid governance may be useful to comprehensively assess an institution in terms of its hierarchical, network and market features. Furthermore, the design of an effective institution is an act of balancing across the features.</p> <p>The concept of hybrid governance is advanced by highlighting the market features within the bureaucracy. Bureaucrats not only cooperate within networks, but also compete</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|------------------------------|
| | | | at the marketplace of ideas. |
|--|--|--|------------------------------|

6.1.5 Insight one: Conflict avoidance is as important as conflict engagement.

The seminal pieces are in two minds about whether conflicts should be engaged or avoided to achieve policy integration. During policy coordination, actors can avoid conflicts about prioritising the environmental objectives (Persson & Runhaar, 2018) especially in the absence of 'integrative leadership' (Candel, 2019), compatible policy frames (Peters, 2013), and concrete consensus (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016).

My thesis chapter on conflict avoidance has shown that a well-established sustainability regime with supportive leadership and collaborative framework may not produce concrete consensus. To complement the seminal pieces, I have incorporated the line of inquiries around 'negative coordination' (Scharpf, 1994) and 'non mutual-interference' (Radtke et al., 2016) among government ministries. Indeed, the sustainability actors are more likely to agree unanimously on more abstract policy goals and more procedural integration among ministries.

I took a step further by asking why. The interviewees told me that many of the highly conflictual issues were also strategically impactful and politically sensitive. Therefore, these issues are quickly ring-fenced for deliberation at the executive level of the bureaucracy. Conflicts were avoided due to the nature of the subject. Another interesting observation is that policy disintegration occurs when the ministries work within information silos. It is assumed that they do not know what the others are doing and thinking. However, my study showed the opposite was true: knowing too much about each other makes them assume that there was no point in arguing their cases because any argument would not bear consensus. They then avoid any conflicts they considered not worth having. Conflicts are avoided because they are highly *political* and *irresolvable*. Therefore, I argued that conflict avoidance should be studied alongside conflict engagement in policy integration 'scholarship'. A more nuanced reflection here introduces the notion of epistemic ambiguity, which is similar to the ignorant behavior due to lack of information as described in Chapter 2. It has been suggested that national governments can delegate international organisations to overcome epistemic ambiguity and

represent their interests properly (Hall, 2017). This is partially applicable to the national context whereby individual ministries could delegate knowledge authorities to do the same. However, the ministries without the support of the whole government would find it inappropriate to reach out to the international organisations. Nationally relevant civil society organisations tend to be rivalrous towards the government. A preferred knowledge authority could be the independently governed sustainability commissions such as the well-established German Commission, the disbanded British Commission, the expert panel of Sitra in Finland, and the university-based think tank in the Czech Republic.

6.1.6 Insight two: Political commitment should go beyond an election cycle.

The four seminal pieces are clear that political commitment matters but it is unclear on how to get it. The commitment needs to be (1) initiated and imposed by high-level decision makers (Peters, 2013); (2) institutionalised to operate without constant political support; and (3) complemented with implementation resources (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). It is associated with leadership but can be viewed more as a symbolic gesture that prioritises particular portfolios (Candel, 2019). However symbolic it may be, there is commitment to the agenda if it is part of the 'political process' that involves 'struggles and bargaining' (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016).

The policy integration literature does not offer concrete definitions of political commitment. Therefore, I had to borrow conceptual frameworks from the discipline of public health. The HIV research has suggested that there are three types of commitments: political, institutional, and budgetary (Fox et al., 2011). A broader view has been taken by including embedded commitment and system-wide commitment (Baker et al., 2018). The authors acknowledge the potential of commitments in one policy area spilling over to other areas. My thesis chapter drew on these conceptual frameworks and focused on the interactions between political / rhetorical commitment and institutional commitment. Moreover, it looks specifically at the research gap around commitment that sustains beyond an election cycle. This long-term commitment may be symbolic but it certainly does not end at the initiation phase. It was found that political commitment activates the institutionalization of policy integration through the sustainability agenda. The sufficiently strong institutions would then allow for creative use of

rules to secure political commitment especially when the threat of change of government looms over. I argued that this understanding of longer-term commitment is unique to the policy integration 'scholarship'.

6.1.7 Insight three: Coordination is neither centralised nor decentralised but responsive

The seminal pieces have not addressed the flexibility or responsiveness of the coordinators. Some literature saw the need to (1) reform procedures for coordinating inter-sectoral collaboration (Persson & Runhaar, 2018) and (2) build integrative capacity that provides information, procedures and resources for holistic management (Candel, 2019). The role of coordinators is not mentioned in these two pieces, but it is theorised and observed in the next two pieces. To lower the transaction cost of inter-ministerial integration, coordinators extract information out of unwilling ministries and proposes unifying ideas to conflict-stricken ministries - in both cases through imposing hierarchy (Peters, 2013). The coordinator might need the weight of the hierarchy, of which the Ministry of Environment does not have, to manage the power struggle between ministries (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). On the other hand, these two pieces also claimed that centralised hierarchy of coordination might not deliver policy integration without decentralised networks of ministries.

The simple question is whether the coordination system should be centralised or decentralised. It depends. The nuanced understanding is which type of coordination is more helpful for what kind of coordination challenge. The policy integration literature describes the generic roles of the coordinator as fixed, rather than responsive. Emerging from my empirical data is the understanding that coordinators do not barge in and ask for unquestionable compliance from the ministries. The authority of coordination is acquired as much from the hierarchical status of the coordinator and the network consensus of the ministries. When does the coordinator use force and when does it use diplomacy? My chapter discussed about the coordinator determining the temporary procedures and institutionalising them into more permanent integration structure. However, on matters of policy substance – temporary or permanent, the coordinator backs off from the actual inter-ministerial negotiation and creates meta-frameworks for steering the process at a distance. Knowing this, policy integration

scholar may need to be more cautious of labeling coordination systems as either centralised or decentralised in future research. The nuance lies in how the coordinator responds to the feedback with a whole suite of centralising and decentralising strategies.

6.1.8 Insight four: The institution for integration balances across hierarchy, network and market

Building on the micro-responses of coordinators, I moved on to analyzing the institutional structure of policy integration, which has received piecemeal attention that does not bring together a comprehensive analysis. Reviews on the rich compendium of empirical studies have identified generic factors like organizational provision (Persson & Runhaar, 2018), instrument mixture, and flexible management (Candel, 2019) without opening the black box of integration process. A normative framework has peered into the box and theorised that while hierarchical coordination has been the norm, self-organised bargaining may also achieve consensus for integrating policies across ministries (Peters, 2013). This is concurred by the empirical observations of sustainability regimes. Structurally, the hierarchy steers and the network negotiates (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016). However, this hybrid model remains in the dark, especially if the observations are based entirely on document analysis.

A useful lens emerges out of the hybrid governance literature (Tenbense, 2018). When applied to sustainability issues, key scholars have also used the hybrid governance framework to make the point on balancing the three modes rather than advocating for one over the other (Meuleman, 2019). Institutions are as diverse as populations. The many possible genetic combinations of institutions gives rise to their unique characteristics. However, the basic make-up of the institutional genome remains as the governance modes – hierarchy, market, network and community. Moreover, the agents within the institutional ecosystem can shape the combination and re-combinations of these modes. It is on these assumptions that I applied the hybrid governance model to institutions for policy integration. We understand that hierarchy commands, network cooperates and market competes. However, this understanding has only been applied to the triad of policy actors altogether – state, private and civil society sectors. The application in my study uses the same logic on the state itself, arguing that within the bureaucracy there are hierarchical, network and market

features (in the absence of private and civil society actors). This complementary nature between hierarchy and network has been demonstrated in urban planning (Rode, 2019). I have necessarily complicated the interactions by not seeing these governance modes as equally influential but striking the path of *networked hierarchy*. In the article, I explained how hierarchy remains the predominant mode in the bureaucracy, in which a controlled network emerges and potentially thrives with some market features that allow competition of ideas.

6.2 Study limitations

The limitations specific to the different thematic lessons are elaborated in the individual articles. This section will elaborate on the limitations of the study as a whole, mainly focusing on the methodological constraints.

This study sets out to understand facilitators of policy integration. Its observations are limited in three ways. Firstly, the data collected were primarily in European countries, and therefore generalization to the other countries with significantly different governance arrangements would not be possible. For example, more authoritarian governments may not experience the same set of issues. They may still present conflict avoidance behaviours in the context of not having any room for negotiation. A more top down system would also make the responsiveness in coordination redundant. Authoritarian governments may enjoy long-term commitment or rejection towards the sustainability agenda without much resistance from anywhere. They may also balance various features of the sustainability regime, with a heavier reliance on the coordinating hierarchy to direct collective actions and prohibit excessive deliberation between ministries. These are merely speculations in the absence of real data on policy integration of SDGs in countries more authoritarian than the four European countries. For middle-income countries that have a short history of democracy (e.g., Mexico and Indonesia), the institutions may not be as mature as high-income countries. However, the economic growth narrative and justifiable need for developments of all kinds would make the four themes relevant. Conflict avoidance, political commitment, responsive coordination and networked hierarchy may be much less applicable in low-income countries (e.g., Pacific Island and sub-Saharan countries) that have less developed formal institutions. Their

commitments to sustainable development can be much stronger than the developed world. However, policy conflicts, political rhetoric, and coordination capacity would look quite different when the relational aspect of the informal institutions becomes significantly more important.

Secondly, snowball sampling was the most practical option for interviewee recruitment. The first batch of interviewees has typically recommended stakeholders within the immediate vicinity of their network. When asked to recommend stakeholders who might disagree with their views, a small number of interviewees would provide alternative interpretations of the same bureaucratic events. I have also attempted to seek views that are as diverse as possible by engaging with highly critical civil society actors and academics. Despite all the effort, there remain silent voices from non-participating ministries. For example, key actors in the Ministries of Finance in Finland and the Czech Republic have categorically refused to be interviewed. Other ministries refrained from speaking about their activities. It is through the high-level representative from the German Ministry of Finance that this ministry can determine the life or death of a sustainability idea given its role in gatekeeping the government budgeting process. Sustainability finance has not been featured anywhere in this thesis simply because of the lack of data from the other countries. Therefore, it is highly possible that other important themes such as parliamentary scrutiny and international pressure are buried within silent voices.

Thirdly, this study has identified some facilitators of policy integration that are more specific than what the existing literature offers. However, they are not yet ready to be translated into measurable indicators. All interviews finished with the question of 'how policy integration should be evaluated'. Almost all interviewees struggled to suggest anything concrete. They seemed to find policy integration an elusive concept that has loose meanings for flexible use but may not be consistently applied by different actors within the same country, let alone across different countries. The SDGs agenda will have to develop a way of measuring policy integration as a process and an output consistently to allow cross-setting comparison. This thesis has offered *nuanced* typologies for four major facilitators that are relatively *unique* to the policy integration challenge (i.e., conflict avoidance, political commitment, responsive

coordination, and networked hierarchy). They need to be adapted and tested as *measurable* indicators.

6.3 Future research

The next herculean task in the policy integration scholarship is to summarise the past and build a testable framework. I propose to learn from Elinor Ostrom's research program. We have similar starting points. Ostrom looked for ways to resolve the seemingly intractable Tragedy of the Commons whereas the policy integration scholarship has thrown everything at silos in policy making and implementation. In the 80s, Elinor Ostrom found that there was a rich repository of case studies on irrigation facilities in self-organised communities from all over the world. She thought that it would be insightful to synthesise and compare the findings across these individual cases. The coding of these cases required specification of variables and filling in data gaps of individual cases. She then hit a bottleneck when she could not identify the specific patterns across the highly diverse range of cases on irrigation. She lifted her gaze and identified broad rules that are commonly important across the cases. The rule typology was later on incorporated in her Institutional Analysis and Development framework. The full story of her framework development is captured in the seminal book – Understanding Institutional Diversity (Ostrom, 2005). Her coding approach was formalised into the ADICO syntax, which is still applied and advanced today (Siddiki et al., 2019). She also pursued multi-method research that requires researchers to work across disciplines as the gold standard. For her, any source of data needs to be triangulated (Poteete, Janssen, & Ostrom, 2010). The policy integration scholarship has much to emulate: the coding of disparate case studies and the development of an analytical framework.

Scholars might like to join up existing frameworks that are descriptive (Lafferty & Hovden, 2003), normative (Peters, 2013), abstract (Candel & Biesbroek, 2016) and generic (Persson & Runhaar, 2018). A descriptive framework can elegantly present rich observations but does not provide conceptual tools for understanding the behavioural patterns. Normative assertions pose an ideal of how seemingly effortless inter-ministerial negotiations should occur but do not reflect the everyday struggles of the actors. The abstract framework borrowed analytical

concepts such as policy subsystem from existing policy process theories but may not be sufficiently nuanced for policy integration challenges. The generic framework offers variables common across the empirical cases of various contexts but they are not unique enough to form the trademark of policy integration scholarship. More importantly, none of these frameworks have put forward quality indicators (Peters, 2015b). The research goal is to develop an analytical and empirical framework that is *unique, nuanced and measurable*.

The research literature on the implementation of SDGs has increased exponentially since the ratification of this UN Agenda. From day one, there have been worries of burying the supposedly central feature of the Agenda – policy integration underneath layers of Goal-specific activities (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). One of the turning points is the inclusion of a composite indicator under section 17.14 of the SDGs indicator set. Countries are encouraged to report on their mechanisms for policy coherence. Researchers can leverage this publicly available data to undertake a comparative analysis of country case studies on effective mechanisms for policy integration.

So far, we understand policy integration as bureaucratic procedures, policy substances (Persson & Runhaar, 2018), and power relations (Nilsson & Persson, 2017). This thesis relies on the basic assumption that policy integration is a worthy goal to pursue. However, a more sophisticated understanding of these aspects of integration has not resulted in more transformational changes to cross-sectoral policies. Therefore, an in-depth critique of sustainable development and policy integration would supplement the defined scope of this thesis. The critique can focus on sustainable development as a concept of governance, a motivation for the institution, and a solution to the worldly ills. More specifically, the analysis can break down the unhealthy obsessions with policy integration (as counter-narrative to this thesis), the achievable contribution of siloed actions (as an extension of the normative prescription of Nordbeck & Steurer, 2016), and the democratic struggle of sustainability institution (as a normative challenge to Chapter 3). Some argued that sustainability had not produced meaningful policy changes because the minds of decision makers have not changed. The dominant ideology of capitalism runs against the pro-environment sustainability agenda. Controlling the influence of capitalism may require a shake-up of everything we know

that produces wealth. It infiltrates every corner of the modern society, including the sustainability agenda itself (Wanner, 2015). Decoupling economic growth from its environmental damage through the SDGs is a 'fantasy' if the inherent contradictions between the two are not resolved (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017). Worse is 'reverse integration' whereby environmental supporters need to account more than ever the interests of the economic and social sectors (Jordan & Lenschow, 2010). Researchers can diagnose the ideological fights and the pretend harmony. The ideologies may be nebulous to some, but they influence policy actors so profoundly that we cannot afford to neglect them.

Four streams of research areas are articulated here: the culmination of case insights, the development of analytical framework, the comparison of integration via SDGs, and the examination of sustainability ideologies. The streams converge into the steady and continuous flow of policy integration scholarship. This thesis raises the potential of framing facilitators of policy integration in more *unique, nuanced, and measurable* terms. This is the starting point of the great convergence of which the destiny is unclear but the journey is necessary.

7 References

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8 Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

1. Researcher

I am Ryan Wong, a primary investigator of this research study and a PhD scholar from the School of Regulation and Global Governance at the Australian National University.

2. Project Title

Policy coherence in the age of sustainable development

3. General Outline of the Project

3.1 Description and Methodology

This study aims to understand how internal coordination mechanisms resolve competing objectives and interests to achieve policy coherence within a national public administration. I am interviewing individuals who have been involved in these coordination mechanisms to understand what has made policy coherence possible. I am also sourcing relevant documents that illustrate aspects of the coordination mechanisms.

3.2 Participants

The interviews will be conducted face-to-face or over the phone with bureaucrats, civil society leaders, and academics.

3.3 Use of Data and Feedback

The data will be used and presented in journal articles. I will send you a summary of the research and can send you published articles, should you request them.

4. Participant Involvement

4.1 Voluntary Participation & Withdrawal

The project is voluntary. You may decline to take part or withdraw from the research without providing an explanation at any time. Note that the withdrawal will only apply until the publication of results or research findings. Your decision will be respected. During the interview, you can also refuse to answer a question. If you withdraw from this study, you will be given the option of whether you want your data to be destroyed and not used, or to be used confidentially.

4.2 What does participation in the research involve?

You will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. If you wish to see the interview transcript, I will send you a copy for your perusal. The interview questions relate to your work in your current or previous capacities. Your responses will help me and the readers of my work understand the culture of your workplace.

4.3 Location and Duration

You can choose where to have the interview. Interviewing through Skype will also be an option. The interviews will take 45-60 minutes. If I need to further clarify certain aspects of the first interview, I may ask for a second interview. This will rarely happen, and if it does happen the follow-up interview should not take more than 30 minutes. The whole process should not take more than 1 hour and 15 minutes.

4.4 Risks

This study is interested in your experience in policy coordination. As the study does not delve into matters out of your routine, it is unlikely that you will be subjected to a high level of risks. I will not seek any information that is particularly sensitive or confidential. The main risk that may relate to you is third-party identification. Your organisation will be identified in publications. It is possible that others may guess the source of information because the number of individuals who work closely with policy coordination in your professional community is not large.

To minimise this risk, your name and position title will not be used in relation to any of the information that you provide. Instead, you will be asked to select a pseudonym as an identifier for data storage. In any publication, generic descriptors such as a senior public servant will be used especially alongside quotes that illustrate important research insights.

4.5 Benefits

It is unlikely that you will personally benefit from participating in this result. However, the interviews will promote reflection on the way your current coordination mechanisms work. This may prompt discussions among your colleagues about what aspects your organisation has done well, and what aspects can be improved. Your insights may be useful to many national governments in their attempts to institutionalise coordination mechanisms.

5. Confidentiality

Only the primary investigator will have access to the material provided by the participants. To minimise your risk of third-party identification, a series of activities will be undertaken during data collection and publication of results as stated under 4.4. It is important to note that confidentiality will be protected as far as the law allows. There is no guarantee in maintaining confidentiality and you may choose to minimise your risk by avoiding the provision of sensitive information.

6. Privacy Notice

In collecting your personal information within this research, the ANU must comply with the Privacy Act 1988. The ANU Privacy Policy is available at https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_010007 and it contains information about how a person can:

- Access or seek correction to their personal information;
- Complain about a breach of an Australian Privacy Principle by ANU, and how ANU will handle the complaint.

7. Data Storage

7.1 Where

The audiotape will be stored securely at the Australian National University. The contact details of the participants will be stored securely and separately from the transcripts in a locked filing cabinet in a lockable office. Electronic transcripts will only be accessible via password-protected computers.

7.2 How long

The audiotapes and the electronic transcripts will be stored for five years after publication arising from this research.

7.3 Handling of Data following the required storage period

At the end of the storage period, both the audiotapes and electronic transcripts will be destroyed.

8. Queries and Concerns

8.1 Contact Details for More Information

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study please feel free to contact any of the following people:

- a. Mr. Ryan Wong, primary investigator and PhD candidate
RegNet School of Regulation and Global Governance
+61 423 901 809
ryan.wong@anu.edu.au
- b. Associate Professor Jeroen van der Heijden, PhD candidate's supervisor
RegNet School of Regulation and Global Governance
+61 2 6125 5465
j.j.vanderheijden@anu.edu.au

Ethics Committee Clearance

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol 2016/669). If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics Manager
The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee
The Australian National University
Telephone: +61 2 6125 3427
Email: *Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au*

Appendix B: Sample interview guide for German interviewees

Project Policy coherence in the age of sustainable development

Expert

Researcher Mr. Ryan Wong

Time / date

Potential questions

1. Can we start by understanding how your unit – the Division of Sustainable Development manages competing interests and objectives within the administration to ensure policies are coherent in the end?
2. What are the measures in this new Sustainability Strategy that may change the way competing interests and objectives are managed within the public administration?
3. How will the Sustainability Coordinator contribute to policy coordination and management of competing interests and objectives?
4. What do you think of the idea of including Sustainability as a principle in the constitution? How may that change the way competing interests and objectives are managed?
5. The consultation process for drafting the National Strategy would have surfaced some tensions –expected and unexpected – due to competing interests and objectives. How do you understand these tensions?
6. In Australia, the tensions that are more political may escalate quickly and get the attention of the top level bureaucrats and the politicians. I would imagine they occur in the German bureaucracy too, and how has this kind of tension been resolved?
7. Can you please describe the Division's relationship with various sections of the Sustainability Architecture (i.e. Parliamentary Advisory Committee, State Committee)
8. If you were an external peer reviewer for evaluating the sustainability architecture's ability to manage competing interests and objectives, what kind of performance criteria will you be looking at?
9. If you had all the political and human resources that you want, how would you change the ways that competing interests and objectives are managed?

7:35

1. The Voluntary Review for the High Level Political Forum report states that:

“Regularly, government action requires prior consultation among all relevant federal ministries and the Federal Chancellery. This procedure, although time-consuming, ensures that the German Government resolves problems of conflicting objectives internally, and that the entire government then backs the actions of every ministry.” (Paragraph 1, Page 8)

Can you please tell me more about this **process**? How was this done in the past? What are the **consequences** to individual ministries if they do not play by the rules?

National Strategy is a plan. “We are fully aware that in German politics the term plan reminds many people of the kind of soviet-style economic plans and therefore evokes rejection.”

7:40

2. Apart from the consultation process for drafting the National Sustainability Strategy, where else within the Federal Government would require management of conflicting interests and objectives related to sustainable development across Ministries?

What are the **consequences** to individual ministries if they do not playing by the rules?

7:50

3. Can you please describe the capacity of the Division that you work in? In what ways is your Division involved in the areas that you nominated in Question 2?

I have heard that the ministries have a high level of autonomy, and the Federal Chancellery does not normally intervene in policy matters – once or twice a year maximum. The deep involvement of the Chancellery in bringing ministries together this time around – for drafting the National Strategy is quite rare.

What is your view on this?

What are the times when policy coordination happens between ministries and the conflicts were resolved amongst the ministries without the involvement of the Division at the Federal Chancellery?

7:55

4. To what extent has the Ten Management Rules for Sustainability (especially Rules 1, 2, 5, 6 and 8) been used to guide the management of conflicting interests and objectives? What are the consequences for not following these rules?

Rule 1: Each generation must solve its own problems itself without passing them to the next generation. At the same time, it must make provision for future foreseeable problems.

Rule 2: Renewable natural resources (such as forests or fish populations) may be exploited in the long term only within the scope of their ability to regenerate.

Rule 5: The structural change triggered by technical developments and international competition must be structured to be economically successful, as well as ecologically and socially compatible. To this end, policy fields must be integrated in such a way that economic growth, high employment rates, social cohesion and environmental protection go hand-in-hand.

Rule 6: Energy and resource consumption, as well as transport performance, must be decoupled from economic growth. At the same time, the aim must be for the growth-induced increase in demand for energy, resources and transport services to be more than outweighed by efficiency gains. A decisive role in this context is played by the creation of knowledge through research and development, together with the communication of knowledge through specific education measures.

Rule 8: Sustainable farming must be not only productive and competitive, but also environmentally compatible, while at the same time paying attention to the demands on welfare-oriented animal husbandry and preventive consumer protection, especially as regards health.

What other rules of thumb (written or conceptual) are used when managing conflicting interests and objectives?

What do you think of the proposal from the Council for Sustainable Development to make the Principle of Sustainability constitutional? This involves writing the rights to sustainability and the national objective of sustainability into Basic Law so that court decisions and legislative changes will require consideration of the sustainability dimension.

8:00

5. Thinking about each area that you have nominated, has there been major changes in the way things are done? What were the changes?

8:05

6. What changes in the future will be very helpful for managing the conflicting interests and objectives across Ministries? (capacity, culture, practice, bureaucratic process, tool, leadership)

8:10

7. In terms of managing conflicting interests and objectives, what does success look like to you and your Division? (Process, output, outcome)
How do individual ministries understand what they are losing and gaining in the process and outcome of inter-ministerial work?

Appendix C: Extract of the coding with ADICO syntax

| No | ID | Summary | Transcript | Code 1 | C 2 | C 3 | C 4 | C 5 | Attribute | Deontic | Aim | Object | Conditions | Or Else |
|-----|------|---|--|--------|-----|------|------|-----|------------------------------|----------|--|--|--|---|
| 975 | F41B | Individual ministries will communicate their interests and positions frequently with X - to the extent that bureaucrats are spotting the repetitions in their conversations across forums and agendas other ministries ; when developing and implementing core policies ; Sense of being understood that leads to trust and reciprocity will not be built | I don't know, I just manage it; I know what people think; I can understand the positions of the interest groups; and they know that I understand them. Ministry of Environment has been involved in writing the Forestry Strategy; they actually do not think that differently; they want to highlight what is important to them; what they are responsible for; we cooperate very closely. The government is not going in two different ways. The conversations across the National Forestry Strategy, the 2030 Agenda implementation report and the national indicator network are similar; I am getting bored with having the same conversations. We communicate with each other a lot, and we do things together. | RC1 | RC2 | DD1 | DD13 | IP5 | Individual ministries | will | communicate their interests and positions frequently with X - to the extent that bureaucrats are spotting the repetitions in their conversations across forums and agendas | other ministries | when developing and implementing core policies | Sense of being understood that leads to trust and reciprocity will not be built |
| 976 | F41B | Individual bureaucrats will speak on their deviations from the official positions of their ministry, which can always be resolved over long periods of deliberation other ministries ; when negotiating ; | There are differences between Ministry of environment and Agriculture; depending on who you ask, and who they are; the official positions are not too different; but there are individual public servants who hold strong views that deviate from the official positions; hence, the conflicts; but we can always talk and find solutions. Having two ministries allow us to keep deliberating over differences in opinion and positions; whereas if there is only one ministry, we will be forced to come to a common point much more quickly. | DD5 | DD6 | DD13 | | | Individual bureaucrats | will | speak on their deviations from the official positions of their ministry, which can always be resolved over long periods of deliberation | other ministries | when negotiating | |
| 977 | F41B | Individual bureaucrats will not talk about new elements during strategy implementation, and more likely to if there is a change of government, right before election, and drafting of new strategies other ministries; when managing core policies ; Adaptation of policies may dilute the effectiveness of implementation | It depends whether we have a new government, or are we close to the election, or we are writing a new strategy, we would open up new things; things that we did not account for in the previous strategy. When we are in the implementation phase, we do not talk about new things. | HI3 | HI9 | | | | Individual bureaucrats | will not | talk about new elements during strategy implementation, and more likely to if there is a change of government, right before election, and drafting of new strategies | other ministries | when managing core policies | Adaptation of policies may dilute the effectiveness of implementation |
| 978 | F41B | The SD implementation report will support elements that are not articulated in the government report Elements such as the Society's Commitment and institutional processes for continuous discourse on SD throughout the year ; when developing SD strategy ; Government program will be rigid and not inclusive of new ideas | 2030 Agenda did not add that much new ideas and actions; because we already have that in the government program and strategies; one of the reasons is that the PM would like to take elements out of the government program. The Society's Commitment is a new element; not committed by the government in the government program. Another new element is the institutional processes that encourages public servants to think about SD throughout the year. | RC1 | RC5 | DD5 | DD11 | IP2 | The SD implementation report | will | support elements that are not articulated in the government report | Elements such as the Society's Commitment and institutional processes for continuous discourse on SD throughout the year | when developing SD strategy | Government program will be rigid and not inclusive of new ideas |
| 979 | F41B | Bureaucrats will write papers to push their new ideas into the agenda for upcoming government program with incremental changes during stable periods and transformative changes during crisis New government ; when exercising bureaucratic influence ; Government program will lack technical expertise and innovation | We are currently preparing for the next government/election (which is occurring 2 years). All the ministries are writing their own papers so that the next government could pick up something; we are writing a new forestry strategy; this is when we can think new. When the whole forestry sector is involved in writing the paper, we have good projects / policy, it will become part of the government program. If we already have a good policy in place and the operational environment hasn't changed, we continue to implement without much changes made to the policy; Changes to the operational environment include changes to world economy, rapid changes to environmental conditions. Only crises that will prompt changes; other times, you only add small changes to the paper. | DD8 | IP5 | HI3 | | | Bureaucrats | will | write papers to push their new ideas into the agenda for upcoming government program with incremental changes during stable periods and transformative changes during crisis | New government | when exercising bureaucratic influence | Government program will lack technical expertise and innovation |
| 980 | F41B | Trustworthy bureaucrats will make small changes - quietly - without intentionally engaging the politicians, media and citizens - based on scientific evidence and personal passion with support from internal circle of public servants and externally the interest groups expressed in the media later ; when bureaucrats believe that they know what the public / interest groups want; | When the politicians are busy responding to media outcry, expert public servants can quietly make little changes; the small changes could be meaningful; I had discussions with my boss, and have the backup of the ministry; the discussion is about the sustainability of the forests; it is kind of healthy; we can do things better. The discussions are at the public servant level; we do not participate in the public discussion; interest group, media engagement etc. We know what people think . The interest groups do not need prompting; they will emerge in the public discourse; the discussion and viewpoints projected in the public; we do not have to tell them. Their messages in the public supported public servants' internal move in advocating for new funding and new projects with their bosses. In providing advice, I draw on scientific evidence and personal values/passion. When I say something needs to be done in particular ways, my bosses tend to believe in me. The more experienced public servants, and that the performance is good, there is a strong trust from the executives. | RC2 | RC4 | DD1 | DD8 | | Trustworthy bureaucrats | will | make small changes - quietly - without intentionally engaging the politicians, media and citizens - based on scientific evidence and personal passion | with support from internal circle of public servants and externally the interest groups expressed in the media later | when bureaucrats believe that they know what the public / interest groups want | |
| 981 | F41B | Bureaucrats will balance the interests and views by ensuring that all stakeholders have some complaints, but can accept the proposition not so enthusiastically stakeholders; when attempting to reach consensus among stakeholders on a piece of policy ; Extreme views are articulated, and clear winners are born - at the expense of huge losses of the | The Forestry Strategy, we collect all strategies that have a link to our work. Someone in our Department would know the Strategies well; we check and cross check each other's texts. I use a good way of getting different view points; I am responsible for the soft things in the Strategy. I went to talk to people in different steering groups or coordination networks. For example the coordination network for the SD and biodiversity, I presented the planned strategy and asked what they thought about them. I gathered more new viewpoints; We looked at what the common opinions were; which ones only come from one interest group. When everyone complains a bit, then the views are more balanced; if all the typically rivalrous organisations and interest | RC1 | RC6 | DD5 | DD12 | | Bureaucrats | will | balance the interests and views by ensuring that all stakeholders have some complaints, but can accept the proposition not so enthusiastically | stakeholders | when attempting to reach consensus among stakeholders on a piece of policy | Extreme views are articulated, and clear winners are born - at the expense of huge losses of the others |

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|-----|------|--|---|-----|------|------|--|--|---------------------------|--------|--|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| | | others | groups said "it's Ok" meaning that they can minimally accept the proposition; then that's a balanced position; any extreme views that are not echoing with most of the groups are imbalanced and should not be adopted) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 982 | F41B | The Finnish institution will tolerate and encourage X to speak their minds, and attempt to integrate conflictual or opposing values/positions within one organisation bureaucrats; when creating a culture of openness in bureaucracy; Bureaucrats are overly tactful about what they can and cannot say to their colleagues and bosses | I was once in one EU conference that was about migration. I was the only one from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the rest are from Ministry of Environment, environmental organisations. | DD5 | DD6 | DD13 | | | The Finnish institution | will | tolerate and encourage X to speak their minds, and attempt to integrate conflictual or opposing values/positions within one organisation | bureaucrats | when creating a culture of openness in bureaucracy | Bureaucrats are overly tactful about what they can and cannot say to their colleagues and bosses | | | | |
| 983 | F41B | SD works do not influence core policies of ministries which draw their principles from international guidelines and citizen lifestyle/values that are already pro-sustainability individual ministries; when developing core policies; SD community should acquire more power | In the Forest policy, we don't talk much about SD. I have been drawing the main ideas and suggesting them to my boss; the links are the people that are working in those bodies. The policies are becoming more coherent over time; we are advancing more ... Rio declaration? There are Forest guidelines in which sustainable development principles are articulated. Not because of the Commission on SD. Some people ... In Finland, the Forestry has always been multi purpose. Private ownership - profit generation, recreational purposes etc. wanting to protect that. Many Finnish own the forests; everyone has access to the Forests. We have in our values an appreciation of the nature. | IP1 | IP6 | HI6 | | | SD works | do not | influence core policies of ministries which draw their principles from international guidelines and citizen lifestyle/values that are already pro-sustainability | individual ministries | when developing core policies | SD community should acquire more power | | | | |
| 984 | C42B | SD department will run committees, draft frameworks, implement plans, and undertake analysis to provide Centre of Government views on various issues individual ministries; when developing SD strategy; No one is willing to bear such big cost | There are 16 people in our Department; many external experts helping; Government Council for SD; helps runs the nine committees; drafting the new strategic frameworks, and the implementation plans. The big change is in the Ministry of Environment was there was only one person working on this. Strategic framework 2010 was put together by inputs from individual ministries; ministries said what they wanted to say; we hired our own experts; it is important to have the Centre of Government's point of view because ministries have their own siloed perspectives; we are able to identify problems that might not be known by the individual ministries; we have a slightly different take of different issues; it is paramount to have your own analytical capabilities. | DD2 | RC6 | | | | SD department | will | run committees, draft frameworks, implement plans, and undertake analysis to provide Centre of Government views on various issues | individual ministries | when developing SD strategy | No one is willing to bear such big cost | | | | |
| 985 | C42B | Experts will negotiate with X based on good data and arguments with understanding of the root causes other experts; when developing SD strategy; Highly politicized issues | In drafting the strategic framework, it would be down to expert discussions; experts were able to convince the others based on own data, that this is the way to go; with good arguments and data ... When it comes to interpretation and political questions, it becomes more difficult to make the ministries comply. It was our tasks to find the root causes of the problems, and what ideal principles are used to devise the solutions. | DD4 | | | | | Experts | will | negotiate with X based on good data and arguments with understanding of the root causes | other experts | when developing SD strategy | Highly politicized issues | | | | |
| 986 | C42B | PM office - SD Department will work more closely with X due to familiarity with crossing-cutting issues and administrative reforms natural partners (e.g. Ministry of Regional Development and Ministry of Interior); when working across ministries; Neglect of ownership by the other ministries | We consult the individual ministries; Ministry of regional development is in charge of the European fund and therefore has a more cross cutting view of the issues - understanding the overview. Ministry of Interior deals with public administration in general. We cooperate with them because they are our natural partners. Speaking of ownership, ministries need to be more involved to ensure better implementation of the strategy. | RC5 | DD2 | | | | PM office - SD Department | will | work more closely with X due to familiarity with crossing-cutting issues and administrative reforms | natural partners (e.g. Ministry of Regional Development and Ministry of Interior) | when working across ministries | Neglect of ownership by the other ministries | | | | |
| 987 | C42B | PM office - SD Department will bear the transaction cost of analysing whole-of-government issues and drafting the strategy, especially when individual ministries do not have the overview and the capacity to break out of their silos individual ministries; when working across ministries; Collective action is not possible | In Czech, the Centre of Government kicks out the first draft because we need to have a coherent text and similar perspectives; the ministries adopted them. You don't get them to write the stuff for you, because it is extra burden for them. I don't think you can get the whole of government perspectives from the individual ministries anyway. In 2010, individual ministries were being asked to dig deeper. They wouldn't be able to do structural analysis with a longitudinal perspective. The Strategic Framework does not follow the structure of the ministries; the 6 key areas ... | RC6 | DD1 | | | | PM office - SD Department | will | bear the transaction cost of analysing whole-of-government issues and drafting the strategy, especially when individual ministries do not have the overview and the capacity to break out of their silos | individual ministries | when working across ministries | Collective action is not possible | | | | |
| 988 | C42B | Techocrats will facilitate the presentation of scientific evidence from independent and trustworthy sources to convince ministries to compromise on their positions individual ministries; unless it is highly political issues that involve the political parties and other levels of government, the head of department will intervene; Ministries will resort to usual practices of policy making which is less rational and scientific | My colleagues would be deep in the resolution of the interministerial conflicts; I would only come in when there is a big issue. Sometimes, there is an acute political issue; family policy - the Christian Democrat and Social Democrat about the future of family policy; for regional issues - the management of woods - Agri and Environment; municipality are unhappy. Management of interministerial conflicts comes down to how much trees are left in the forest; Ministry of Environment had studies done by the Academy of Science; in the end Ministry of Agriculture found softer versions of formulation; but they in the end they couldn't say much. It was an expert discussion and therefore it could be more scientific and rational. but when it comes to policy making, it is a different matter. | DD4 | DD13 | | | | Techocrats | will | facilitate the presentation of scientific evidence from independent and trustworthy sources to convince ministries to compromise on their positions | individual ministries | unless it is highly political issues that involve the political parties and other levels of government, the head of department will intervene | Ministries will resort to usual practices of policy making which is less rational and scientific | | | | |
| 989 | C42B | PM office - SD Department will require goal setting to be non-sectoral and underpinned by more than one indicator individual ministries; unless insufficient data; Perpetuation of silos | Our indicators are trying to describe the level of achievement of the goals; sometimes we realise we don't have the data to support them. The goals we have are non-sectoral; we require the goals to be described by more than one indicator; | DD2 | DD7 | IP6 | | | PM office - SD Department | will | require goal setting to be non-sectoral and underpinned by more than one indicator | individual ministries | unless insufficient data | Perpetuation of silos | | | | |
| 990 | C42B | PM should demonstrate political commitment for the agenda, instruct ministers and ministries to cooperate in the process, and support the outcomes produced by the SD Department that is centrally | Governed by the Prime Minister and political advisors. SD is not always the priorities for politicians. Showing the benefits of the system; point out the inefficiencies that arise if the government is interested in the fiscal issues. It is very much about whether there is continual political support - in a way that we can extend the agenda, and keep working on it. Political support means that the highest | RC2 | IP2 | HI1 | | | PM office - SD Department | should | demonstrate political commitment for the agenda, instruct ministers and ministries to cooperate in the process, and support the outcomes produced by the | individual ministries | unless political leader stops seeing the value of SD community in pointing out inefficiencies in the system | No policy continuity, and therefore not able to keep accumulating knowledge, social capital and influence | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|------|---|--|-----|-----|--|--|--|---------------------------|------|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| | | located and therefore politically neutral. individual ministries; unless political leader stops seeing the value of SD community in pointing out inefficiencies in the system; No policy continuity, and therefore not able to keep accumulating knowledge, social capital and influence | authority reiterates that this is a priority, and that individual ministries should cooperate, and he or she will support the outcomes of these processes. The shift from Environment to PM Office; Office of Government has a different position; we do not have an agenda to support; ministries see us as the neutral actor; the PM is always a good figure to have; he is the one who can 'instruct' ministers of what they should be doing; | | | | | | | | SD Department that is centrally located and therefore politically neutral. | | | |
| 991 | C42B | PM office - SD Department will take over an issue that is complicated, and the ministry that is primarily responsible for the portfolio does not have the power to coordinate individual ministries; when tackling issues that are clearly important and not on track; Reliance on the power of one ministry will result in patchy delivery | Issues that are difficult to resolve such as energy efficiency; Czech is fallign behind the targets set at the EU level; the ministry in charge does not have the power to coordinate efforts. Office of PM can assume the role of the coordinator and become both generalists and specialists. become good communicators; and respected. The ministries tend to see us as somebody who does not have a stake in the usual. They would respect us as the mediators in the issues - circular economy, landscape, spatial planning, energy efficiency. | DD2 | IP2 | | | | PM office - SD Department | will | take over an issue that is complicated, and the ministry that is primarily responsible for the portfolio does not have the power to coordinate | individual ministries | when tackling issues that are clearly important and not on track | Reliance on the power of one ministry will result in patchy delivery |

Appendix D: Early draft of coding scheme

Q1. How to overcome gridlocks?

Rational choice institutionalism

RC-1 P: types of gridlocks³

RC-2 P: types of interests and roots of conflict

RC-3 S: selective benefits for contributors⁴

RC-4 S: promotion based on passion and altruism⁵

RC-5 S: short- vs. long-term interests as collective identity⁶

RC-6 S: transaction cost⁷ for coordination and partnership

RC-7 S: mediation from coordinators with no direct interest

RC-8 S: forum shifting⁸ to take advantage of different rules

RC-9 S: trading deals to maximize utility of all parties

Q2. How to overcome ignorance?

Discursive institutionalism – deliberative democracy

DD-1 P: types of omniscience⁹

DD-2 S: process centralization¹⁰ – centre of government

DD-3 S: process centralization – ministerial representative

DD-4 S: rationality and evidence-based arguments¹¹

DD-5 S: inclusivity, openness, explicitness

³ Including concerns about free riding and credit claiming; as a result of cost-benefit calculation; intense monitoring of positions

⁴ If politically unimportant, costs and benefits of activities are not high

⁵ based on personal and collective values – abandonment of interests; giving without asking for returns; acting out of public interests and values

⁶ Coalition formation – shared belief/interest

⁷ Centre complains about lack of resources

⁸ by broadening the stakeholder base or narrowing the number of decision-makers; with the danger of creating a responsibility void; cost of turf protection can cover transaction cost for partnership

⁹ as a result of centralized decision-making; self-censorship prevents effective information dissemination

¹⁰ Conditions for creating the market of ideational exchange

¹¹ reason overcomes ministerial lines or party lines

DD-6 S: untapped knowledge as currency¹²

DD-7 S: indicators as price¹³

DD-8 S: ministerial representatives as entrepreneurs

DD-9 S: ministerial autonomy and expert independence

DD-10 S: structured session with facilitation¹⁴

DD-11 S: time pressure and non-threatening exchange¹⁵

DD-12 S: heuristics as principles for decision-making¹⁶

DD-13 S: competition of ideas

Q3. Where does real power lie?

*Discursive institutionalism*¹⁷ – ideational power

IP-1 P: division of the two worlds¹⁸

IP-2 S: power over ideas – position¹⁹

IP-3 S: power over ideas – shame

IP-4 S: power over ideas – resistance

IP-5 S: power through ideas – deliberation, knowledge/expertise

IP-6 S: power in ideas (politicization of SD)

IP-7 S: shadow hierarchy²⁰

IP-8 S: formal hierarchy²¹

IP-9 S: competitive and cooperative relations

¹² more transactions, more vibrant economy; better match of supply to demand/need

¹³ Indicator in exchange of ideas is analogous to price in market

¹⁴ Balanced against openness of deliberative encounters (scope issue)

¹⁵ Balanced against never-ending deliberation (time issue)

¹⁶ Distilled from intensive, long-term, and fruitful deliberation; eases communication of complex ideas

¹⁷ bridged through ideas within hierarchies

¹⁸ reproduced by self-fulfilling or –defeating prophecies

¹⁹ should this be discouraged?

²⁰ Linked to power over ideas – position; Hierarchy as understood socially within the administration; for negotiation and approval purposes; power through positions; hierarchy of ministries and coalitions depending on issues

²¹ Linked to power over ideas – position; Hierarchy as found in organizational charts or formal documents; Escalation through formal channels to resolve conflicts

IP-10 S: multiple channels of scrutiny

Q4. How to survive austerity?

Historical institutionalism

HI-1 P: dilution of commitment/ negative feedback²²

HI-2 P: institutional shrinkage/exhaustion²³

HI-3 P: critical juncture²⁴ – election²⁵

HI-4 S: critical juncture – highly uncertain and uncontrollable crises²⁶

HI-5 S: critical juncture – SDGs²⁷

HI-6 S: critical juncture – EU²⁸

HI-7 S: constitutional support

HI-8 S: institutional redundancy

HI-9 S: institutional innovation²⁹

HI-10 S: public awareness, pressure and consensus

HI-11 S: ideologies that compete against austerity³⁰

²² Ideologies of sustainable development and austerity; innovation during war and peace - keep the regimes alive by (1) making it relevant and non-threatening to politicians; and (2) making it interesting to public servants; Interests at political and bureaucratic levels wane over time; implementing austerity measures

²³ Loss of institutional and public memory on sustainable development governance; non-continuity of expertise and social capital

²⁴ evaluation as a form of feedback that calls for a change, complementing the forces of critical juncture

²⁵ describe initial conditions, nature of the shocks, and institutional responses (i.e. drift, layering, conversion, displacement) :to potential and actual changes of government

²⁶ irrelevant critical juncture due to the division of two worlds: economic, social and environmental crises – propose how it can be relevant, and therefore what should the institutional responses be

²⁷ revitalization of the agenda due to commitment towards SDGs

²⁸ irrelevant critical juncture due to the division of two worlds – propose how it can be relevant, and therefore what should the institutional responses be

²⁹ not just to adapt to new challenges, but also to keep things interesting

³⁰ core ideologies of political parties

Appendix E: Publication of articles

The documentation of the process of submitting, reviewing and publishing my four articles serves two purposes. Firstly, I would like to present the robustness of the process. Secondly, I would like to demonstrate that choosing to complete one's thesis by publication is feasible and therefore should be encouraged.

In the following, I am presenting the events related to the review process chronologically. It demonstrates the number of revisions made and number of reviewers involved to produce Chapters 2-5 in this thesis.

| Date | Article | Journal | Event |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| 11 Oct 2018 | 1 | Public Administration | First submission of manuscript |
| 14 Nov 2018 | 1 | Public Administration | Received rejection letter from the editor |
| 14 Dec 2018 | 1 | Sustainable Development | First submission of manuscript |
| 04 Jan 2019 | 3 | Journal of Cleaner Production | First submission of manuscript |
| 21 Jan 2019 | 1 | Sustainable Development | Received letter from the editor to undertake minor revision |
| 09 Feb 2019 | 1 | Sustainable Development | Revision and resubmission of manuscript |
| 23 Feb 2019 | 1 | Sustainable Development | Accepted for publication |
| 11 Mar 2019 | 2 | Environmental Politics | First submission of manuscript |
| 01 Apr 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | First submission of manuscript |
| 02 Apr 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Provision of main supervisor's letter of support for the submission as requested by the journal editor |
| 03 Apr 2019 | 3 | Journal of Cleaner Production | Received letter from the associate editor to undertake a 'substantial major revision' based on comments of three reviewers |
| 07 Apr 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Received rejection letter from the editor but was encouraged to resubmit after a major revision based on comments of three reviewers |
| 24 May 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | First resubmission of manuscript |

| | | | |
|-------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 27 May 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Received letter from editor to undertake major revision based on comments of three reviewers |
| 31 May 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Second resubmission of manuscript |
| 31 May 2019 | 3 | Journal of Cleaner Production | First resubmission of manuscript |
| 04 Jun 2019 | 2 | Environmental Politics | Received rejection letter from the editor |
| 17 Jun 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Received letter from the editor to undertake revision |
| 03 Jul 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Third resubmission of manuscript |
| 08 Jul 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Received letter from the editor to undertake further revision based on comments of three reviewers |
| 08 Jul 2019 | 3 | Journal of Cleaner Production | Received letter from the associate editor to undertake further revisions based on comments of three reviewers |
| 15 Jul 2019 | 2 | Environmental Policy and Governance | First submission which was heavily revised based on the comments of three reviewers from the submission to the <i>Environmental Politics</i> |
| 18 Jul 2019 | 3 | Journal of Cleaner Production | Second resubmission of manuscript |
| 26 Jul 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Fourth resubmission of manuscript |
| 30 Jul 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Received letter from the editor to undertake minor revision |
| 02 Aug 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Fifth resubmission of manuscript |

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|-------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 04 Aug 2019 | 3 | Journal of Cleaner Production | Accepted for publication |
| 12 Aug 2019 | 4 | Sustainability | Accepted for publication |
| 29 Aug 2019 | 2 | Environmental Policy and Governance | Received letter from managing editor in which he apologised for the delay in seeking reviewers and the review process was under way. |

Article one: conflict avoidance

The manuscript was rejected by *Public Administration* on several grounds. I have taken these into account and revised them accordingly. Firstly, the manuscript was read as a making the assumptions that Sustainable Development Goals matters to the domestic policies when they are largely ceremonial. That was not the intention, and therefore I have modified parts of the manuscript to reflect my views that are aligned with the reviewer. Secondly, country selection was not clearly elaborated. I added the rationale and the practical progression of interviewee recruitment to the manuscript later on. The heavily revised manuscript was then resubmitted to a different journal: *Sustainable Development*. The revised manuscript received a recommendation of minor revision and an 'unusually positive' review from a reviewer.

Article two: political commitment

The manuscript was rejected by *Environmental Politics* on several grounds. I have gone through the reviewers' comments thoroughly and attempted to address every concern raised. Firstly, the reviewers were expecting a more concrete definition of political commitment. I therefore reconfigured my analytical framework to align with the conceptual framework of a recent narrative review article. Secondly, some reviewers thought that political commitment without budgetary actions is not considered a commitment. Such symbolic gestures were not useful in sustainability research. Given this misconception, I have made

it clear in my revised manuscript that budgetary actions are not considered, and they are almost impossible to consider in the area of sustainability governance. This is because the attribution of sustainability commitment to budgetary changes would be very tricky. Thirdly, the reviewers disagree with each other on the robustness of the study methodology. One reviewer thought that the systematic coding of the data was a strength. The other thought that the systematic coding creates confusion as he or she expects that the coding approach which draws from the IAD framework should extend into the formulation of the conceptual framework for analysis. I understand the concern and therefore made it clear in the revised manuscript that the IAD framework is only used as a way to systematically structure data, whereas the conceptual framework on political commitment has to come from somewhere else. This is not an unusual practice. The heavily revised manuscript was resubmitted to a different journal: *Environmental Policy and Governance*, which is currently under review.

Article three: responsive coordination

The manuscript was met with highly critical reviews initially. A 'substantial' major review was recommended. The first lot of comments focussed on the presentation of findings. I have improved the section by creating clear tables for summarizing findings and reducing the number of explanatory branches that stem from the core concepts. The second lot of comments focused on theoretical clarity. I have dedicated a substantial section to addressing the misconceptions from the reviewers, which is coupled with modification to the manuscript to improve theoretical clarity. Professor John Braithwaite has also kindly read into the theoretical/ conceptual section, which uses his responsive regulation theory. He provided the assurance that the application of the theory on my case sufficiently robust. The third lot of comments focused on the presentation of interviewee responses. A reviewer specifically requested the proportion of interviewees who would agree with the four major findings of this article. I took on a significant piece on plowing through the data again to 'calculate' the level of consensus. This information was added to the manuscript in the form of a table.

Article four: networked hierarchy

This original manuscript has also been heavily criticised for its conceptual clarity, presentation of findings and most importantly the framing of the whole article. First of all, one reviewer disagreed with the framing of the article as hybrid governance. The manuscript was almost completely rewritten by drawing out more of the interactions between hierarchy and network. In the second round of review, a new reviewer was introduced to the process. This reviewer thought that the new framing of networked hierarchy was clumsy and therefore recommended to use hybrid governance as the main lens. I had to provide lengthy explanations to both reviewers on the fact that both frames are very similar to each other. I have chosen to use the frame of networked hierarchy because the interactions are essentially about those two governance modes. The third mode, I argued in the revised manuscript, is embedded within the network. The network facilitates a marketplace of ideas to allow competition between bureaucrats in the context of striking cooperation. There were also significant adjustments to clarify the roles and positions of different actors in the organizational hierarchy. I later included a new diagram on that. Many concepts drawn from policy process theories were suggested by the reviewers to better capture the different institutional and behavioural observations. I also spent significant amount of time explaining to the reviewers that the focus of this article was the structural aspect of sustainability institutions that try to integrate policies. Therefore, while there are remnants of policy entrepreneurship and advocacy coalition in the narrative, the main thrust remains to be about the mixing of three governance modes. One of the reviewers has highlighted that my statement in the discussion on balancing the three modes is something 'refreshing'. Therefore, I have pursued that angle more and structured the whole manuscript to accentuate the idea that institutional designers need to balance the three governance modes.