5

A METAGOVERNANCE APPROACH TO MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND VERTICAL COORDINATION FOR THE SDGS

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Introduction

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda have been designed as a comprehensive set of goals and targets because the social, economic and environmental systems they aim to transform or preserve, are connected and influencing each other (Kamau, Chasek, and O'Connor, 2018). It is generally understood that these systemic interlinkages should be reflected in how governments at all levels and within a whole-of-government approach relate to each other and collaborate to attain the SDGs. One of the implications is the need to have effective horizontal coordination across policy sectors; another is about effective coordination between the governance frameworks used by public authorities across administrative levels. The latter approach is called multilevel governance (MLG).

This chapter builds on literature and practice examples on MLG from an SDG perspective, and with the conceptual glasses of metagovernance ('governance of governance'). It addresses governance mechanisms between government levels (linked to the second research question of this volume, as regards power asymmetries between stakeholders from different levels), and political-institutional preconditions that are conducive to the establishment of effective governance mechanisms to manage SDG interactions (research question 5), from a MLG perspective.

Conceptual Framework

In order to analyze the different variations of multilevel governance, a conceptual framework is needed based on specific definitions of governance, governance styles, governance frameworks and metagovernance. This framework is presented in Figure 5.1.

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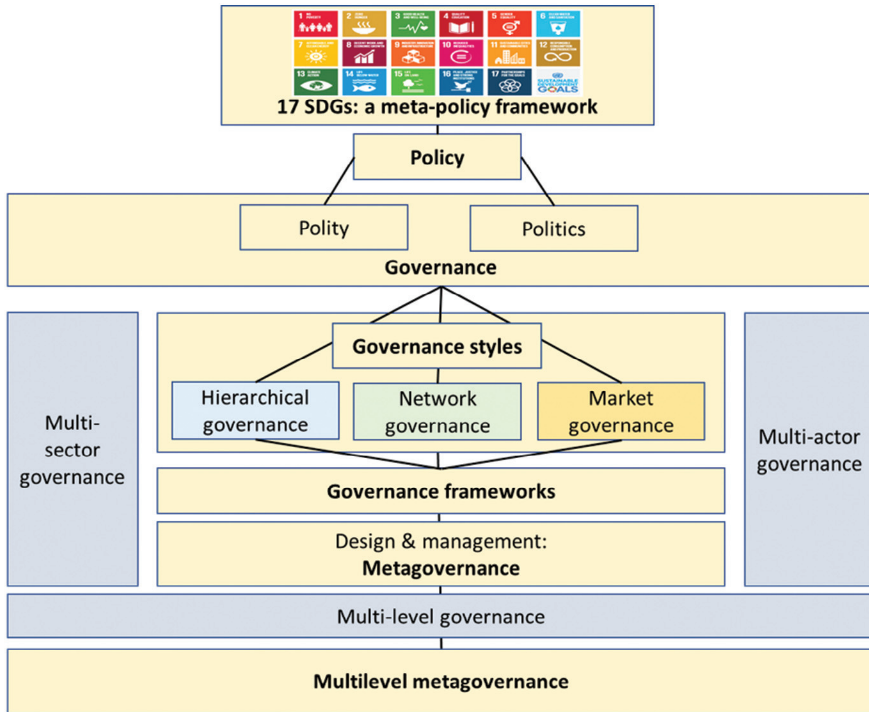

FIGURE 5.1 A conceptual framework: from SDG policies to multilevel metagovernance
Source: Author's own elaboration

In Figure 5.1, the key terms defined above are linked in a conceptual framework. The 17 SDGs cover virtually all areas of public policy, and therefore constitute a policy of policies or 'meta-policy' (Meadowcroft, 2011). In a classical political science tryptic, policy (goals, targets, timelines) is supported by polity (institutions, rules) and politics (processes, actors). Together, polity and politics are covered by the term governance, as will be explained below. Governance for sustainability has a multi- or cross-sector dimension, a multi-actor dimension and a multi-level dimension. Governance frameworks are concrete approaches for specific policies. Design and management of governance frameworks with a sensitivity for the governance environment, including the administrative and societal values, cultures, and traditions in a geographical area, requires a concept 'over and beyond', or 'meta' governance. Multilevel metagovernance is thus about creating actionable mechanisms to foster effective relationships between different levels of authority.

The central terms can be defined as follows:

Governance: What multilevel governance (MLG) means depends on how governance is defined. MLG can have as many different meanings as there are definitions of the term governance. To tackle the various ways in which multilevel relations can materialize, governance has to be defined broadly. Fukuyama's (2013) definition of governance as a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and

to deliver services, covers a lot already, but leaves it unclear whether under 'services' also the engagement with societal stakeholders should be understood. An even broader approach is that, if policy is about *what* and *when* (the goals, targets, milestones), then governance is about *how* (which tools, instruments, processes) and *who* (actors, stakeholders) (Meuleman, 2021). The rationale behind this is that if a policymaker defines governance only as involving stakeholders, or as promoting accountability, or as focusing on cost-efficiency, she or he would limit the range of potential policy options. Therefore, only if governance covers all these perspectives, well-reflected choices are possible and governance frameworks can be designed which are contextualized.

Case study research (Meuleman, 2008) revealed that policymakers often understand this intuitively. A broad definition of governance that covers all typical governance styles and the whole repertoire of institutional mechanisms, rules, tools, and forms of actor involvement is: "Governance is the totality of interactions in which government, other public bodies, private sector and civil society participate (in one way or another), aimed at solving public challenges or creating public opportunities" (Meuleman, 2008, p. 11).

Based on this definition of governance, three other concepts can now be defined: governance styles, governance frameworks, and metagovernance.

Governance styles: Many scholars distinguish three ideal-typical governance styles which have their own values, logics and tools (see e.g. Kooiman, 2003; Meuleman, 2008; Peters, 1998; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). The styles are normative as they are carriers of values: network governance embraces consensus and empathy, market governance entrepreneurship and competition, and hierarchical governance authority and control (Meuleman, 2018). Hierarchical, network and market governance usually occur in combinations but some of their characteristics are incompatible and could undermine the effectiveness of a specific governance style combination. The three styles differ in at least fifty features (Meuleman, 2018). How effective they are in practice largely depends on the context. For multilevel governance, the following features listed in Table 5.1 below seem crucial, because they focus on relations, including conflicts, between actors.

The last example (suitability for problem types) is also illustrative: for crisis management a certain/high geographical level might be necessary, for dealing with very complex problems, being close to citizens might help understanding the challenge better, and certain routine issues should not be dealt with bureaucratically or in a long-lasting dialogue, but might benefit from outsourcing to an efficient operator.

There is no blueprint for successful multilevel governance of the transitions needed to implement the 17 SDGs. Rather than that, any combination of elements such as those shown in Table 5.1 is in theory possible. But when a central government relies on a hegemonic, top-down and power-based approach, one cannot expect subnational governments to risk stepping out of their (narrow) comfort zone and develop innovative approaches. At the same time, when a national government relies solely on informal arrangements with subnational authorities, reaching national policy targets might become very difficult. As Fleming and Rhodes (2005, p. 203) have stated

TABLE 5.1 Selected features of hierarchical, network and market governance relevant for multilevel governance (based on Meuleman, 2018)

Feature	*Hierarchical. Governance*	*Network governance*	*Market governance*
Relational values	Hegemonism	Tolerance, pluralism	Individualism
Relation types	Dependent	Interdependent	Independent
Roles of government	Government rules society	Government is a partner in a network society	Government delivers societal services
Orientation of organizations	Top-down, formal, Internal	Horizontal, informal, open-minded,	Bottom-up, Competitive, external
Public sector reform approach	Top-down	Inclusive	Outsourced expertise
Conflict resolution types	Classical negotiation, power-based (win-lose)	Mutual gains approach to negotiation (win-win); diplomacy	Classical negotiation, competition based (win-lose)
Suitability for problem types	Crises, disasters	Complex, multi-actor issues	Routine, non-sensitive issues

Source: Author's own elaboration

pointedly: "The future will not lie with either markets, or hierarchies or networks but with all three. The trick will not be to manage contracts or steer networks but to mix the three systems effectively when they conflict with and undermine one another".

Governance frameworks: A governance framework can be defined as "*the totality of instruments, procedures and processes designed to tackle a societal problem*", followed by a normative recommendation that "(t)hey should be adapted to legal, cultural, and physical conditions of the problem environment and internally consistent; the normative assumptions (values, hypotheses) should be clear" (Meuleman, 2014, p. 978). Governance frameworks are necessary to support implementation of a policy.

Multilevel governance: According to (Pierre and Peters, 2021), multilevel governance has long been thought of as "central, regional and local government neatly organized in a hierarchy", but there are many different forms of MLG – some indeed hierarchical, others more based on collaboration and/or more on an ad hoc basis. In the EU system, the European Commission is a powerful fourth level. The UN can be seen as a fifth level, which is more influential than powerful. Liesbet and Gary (2003) distinguished two types of multi-level governance. In one type, every citizen is "located in a Russian Doll set of nested jurisdictions, where there is one and only one relevant jurisdiction". The other type is fragmented into functionally specific pieces, for example selecting a particular software standard or monitoring water quality of a particular river. The EU has often been described and analyzed as a MLG system, with a combination of a classical hierarchical polity and other, more informal forms of governance (e.g., Kull, 2016). The balance between formal and informal MLG is tricky. Peters and Pierre (2004: 76) warned that "the absence of distinct legal frameworks and

the reliance on sometimes quite informal negotiations between different institutional levels could well be a "Faustian bargain" where actors only see the attractions of the deal and choose to ignore the darker consequences of the arrangement".

Governance failure: In terms of the triptych policy – polity – politics, governance is about polity (structures) and politics (processes). In this view, governance and policy are two sides of the same coin namely of the functioning of public administration. This might be logical from a theoretical perspective, but it is not always clear in the often ambiguous (Noordegraaf, 2015), complex, dynamic and 'wicked' (Termeer, Dewulf, and Biesbroek, 2019) reality of public administration, at all levels, especially in a political environment such as a ministry. Policymakers might be so much driven by policy objectives and targets imposed by political leaders that they neglect the governance dimension. A case in point is perhaps the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019). This is a comprehensive policy programme with a range of strategies and legislative proposals, which itself has no governance section. Some of the Green Deal deliverables such as the EU climate and energy package (*EU 2018 – Regulation (EU) 2018/1999) do include a paragraph or section that contains recommendations regarding the necessary tools and instruments to implement the deal but others lack such a dimension altogether. For example, the 2020 EU Biodiversity Strategy (European Commission, 2020) did not include a governance section, but announced it as separate deliverable.

It is important to distinguish policy failure and governance failure. When a policy is unsuccessful, the reason might seem policy failure, but the underlying cause could well be governance failure. Mark Bovens and 't Hart (2016) observe three types of policy failure: farce (weak results but political success), tragedy (strong results but no political acknowledgement) and fiasco (weak results and weak political credits). Governance failure, in turn, can be defined as *"The ineffectiveness of governance goals, a governance framework or the management thereof, to achieve policy goals"* (adapted from Mark Bovens, t'Hart, & Peters, 2001). We can distinguish three types of governance failure, with a different action perspective (Meuleman, 2018). First, governance design failure that results from a mismatch between problem context and governance style, for example when a governance style (or combination of different styles) is incapable to successfully address a specific problem type. Second, governance capacity failure that results from the mismatch between governance style and governance capacity. Third, governance management failure that results from ineffective management of governance frameworks.

The analysis of governance failure from a multilevel perspective might show that the bottleneck is mainly on a certain administrative level. For example, a national governance framework to support preservation of biodiversity might be ineffective, when subnational authorities do not have the capacity to implement the necessary rules, collaboration and incentives, and/or when local authorities lack mechanisms to collaborate effectively with neighbouring cities and communities. For another example, Srigiri and Scheumann in this volume show that the integrated governance of the water-land-food nexus in Ethiopia is severely hampered by financial, technical, and human capacity deficits at the district and local levels.

Metagovernance – The complexity and dynamics of the governance environment require permanent reflection and management of governance frameworks. This 'governance of governance' is called metagovernance (Jessop, 1997; Kooiman, 2003). It can be defined as:

> "*a means by which to produce some degree of coordinated governance, by designing and managing sound combinations of hierarchical, market and network governance, to achieve the best possible outcomes from the viewpoint of those responsible for the performance of public sector organizations: public managers as 'metagovernors'*"
>
> *(Meuleman, 2008, p. 68)*

Metagovernance thinking can be integrated in the standard policy cycle by adding particular emphasis on mapping the governance environment and having the capacity and skills to know which governance features might be synergetic when combined, and which could be undermining the effectiveness of a governance framework. Applying metagovernance in a methodical way could follow seven steps (Meuleman, 2018): (1) Map the governance environment; (2) Evaluate the current situation; (3) Define, reframe, refine the problem; (4) Formulate context-specific goals and options; (5) Design a governance framework; (6) Metagovern the governance framework; and (7) Review the effectiveness of the governance framework.

Many examples of metagovernance practice have been observed in the EU's regional development and environmental policy. EU laws and policies need to be designed as packages that contains various approaches, instruments and tools. In some EU countries, informal institutions and a relative norm-free approach might work better, while in others the governance mix could require a strong legal basis that prescribes what needs to be done and how. UN conventions are, unlike EU law, rather self-binding. Still, also UN member states try to negotiate sufficient room to navigate effectively within their own implementation systems and make it possible to use metagovernance. International organizations may also establish rules for their engagement in partnerships, such as conditions for the registration of partnerships, e.g. in UN databases, and the provision of associated benefits like material and non-material resources (Beisheim, Ellersiek, Goltermann, and Kiamba, 2018).

An example of a metagovernance intervention by an international organization which has more executive power than the UN, is the establishment of the European Commission's Environmental Implementation Review (EIR) (Meuleman, 2018). In 2016 the European Commission observed that its extensive European legal framework for environmental protection with dozens of directives and strategies was not implemented sufficiently in many member states, causing economic, social and environmental damage of around €55 billion per year (European Commission, 2016). The existing governance framework combined two approaches: legal procedures (infringements) against countries, which could result in large fines, and financial support in the form of the EU's structural funds for regional development. As a response, in 2016 an informal dialogue tool was introduced: the EIR. This is a two- or three-yearly cycle of analytical country reports

specifying where countries are with regard to environmental implementation, accompanied by bilateral high-level dialogues between Commission and countries, and a peer-to-peer tool that finances exchange of experiences and mutual learning between Member States. The peer-to-peer mechanism[1] was picked up at all levels: workshops were organized between national ministries, regions, and cities, based on their own demand. Although the third cycle has now started, after first rounds in 2017 and 2019, it is still too early to conclude how much the revision of the governance framework has resulted in better implementation. But the framework has now more options, owing to a combination of hierarchical, market- and network-style governance tools. And the country reports and dialogues, as well as the peer-to-peer tool have opened new avenues for navigating multilevel governance. The EIR is an example of a governance mechanism to manage SDG interlinkages and addressing power asymmetries between stakeholders from different sectors and levels (second research question of this volume).

Multilevel metagovernance: Finally, metagovernance can be applied in a multilevel context, for example by managing the balance between the three different multilevel approaches which will be distinguished in section 4. Multilevel metagovernance could be defined as designing and managing actionable and situationally adapted mechanisms to foster effective relationships between different levels of authority.

If multilevel metagovernance is not well-embedded in policies of the involved government levels, it can result in fragmentation. An example is the EU Urban Agenda (European Union, 2016) with 12 informal, voluntary partnerships of EU, national, and city officials to assess the appropriateness of existing policies for urban areas. According to Pazos-Vidal (2019), this was about EU and Member States mobilizing "with" and "for" subnational government rather than "by" urban authorities. He argued that it was a case of policy fragmentation because this exercise of subnational better regulation was not structurally integrated in the wider Better Regulation process of the European Commission.

Although most of the examples in this section are from EU countries, the non-normative definitions of the analytical and design concepts of governance, governance frameworks and metagovernance make them a good basis for tailor-made application in many different national political-administrative cultures and traditions, as research has shown. Metagovernance has been analyzed in Australia (Eberhard, 2018), Canada (Doberstein, 2013), China (Li, Homburg, de Jong, and Koppenjan, 2016), Colombia (Bonivento, 2014), Kenya (Beisheim et al., 2018), Nigeria (Agu, Okeke, and Idike, 2014), Tanzania (Lauwo, Azure, and Hopper, 2022), and The Netherlands (Hooge, Waslander, and Theisens, 2021), for example. In addition, there are examples of comparative research using a metagovernance lens on Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, China, and South Africa (Pahl-Wostl, 2019), on Chile, China, Denmark, Netherlands, Portugal, and Vietnam (Monteiro, do Rosário Partidário and Meuleman, 2018), and England, The Netherlands and Germany (Meuleman, 2008). Another example is a research on the metagovernance of fair trade and sustainable forestry challenges (Murphy-Gregory and Gale, 2019).

There is not yet much research published the application of metagovernance on the multilevel dimension of SDG implementation, but there is no reason why that field of application would be an exception. Some first examples include research in Brazil (Kull, Pyysiäinen, Christo, and Christopoulos, 2018; Martin, Teles da Silva, Duarte dos Santos, and Dutra, 2022), Denmark (Engberg, 2018), Belgium (Temmerman, De Rynck, and Voets, 2015), and Norway (Tønnesen, Krogstad, Christiansen, and Isaksson, 2019).

Multilevel (Meta)governance and the SDGs: the Rise of the Local Level

Although the SDGs have been adopted by national governments, the goals and targets often mention that action is needed "at all levels". Since subnational governments have begun adopting Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) on their progress on implementing the SDGs, and national governments have committed to produce a Voluntary National Review (VNR)_ every several years, it would be useful to see whether and how the existence of such a two-level self-reporting mechanism is able to stimulate effective MLG.

In the 2030 Agenda agreement, national governments were invited to prepare VNRs of their national planning to implement the SDGs, as part of the global follow-up and review mechanism for the Agenda. These VNRs are presented during the UN's annual sessions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The UN keeps track of progress on their webpages dedicated to the VNRs, issues guidance for its member states, and annually presents reviews of the VNRs presented that year. The regional UN offices organize workshops to help countries to improve their VNRs.

Subnational governments have become increasingly involved in the SDG discourse since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015. Cities have their own international networks, such as the Covenant of Mayors on climate action. Many cities have become frontrunners on addressing climate change, other environmental issues and social challenges. Front-running big cities often complain that national governments are frustrating innovation and blocking progress. This points at least at a lack of effective collaboration and communication in a multilevel setting.

In 2018 local and regional governments started to engage in sub-national reviews of SDG implementation, the VLRs. Four VLRs were launched during the July 2018 meeting of the HLPF, by Kitakyushu, Shimokawa, and Toyama in Japan, and New York City in the US (Koike, Ortiz-Moya, Fujino, and Kataoka, 2020). This practice is stimulated by the UN with guidance and a series of events. In 2021 the UN website showcased more than 60 examples of VLRs.[2] The European Commission's Joint Research Centre published a handbook to support local-level authorities in preparing reviews of VLRs, with examples from 14 reviews presented since 2018. This 'European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews' provides examples of official and experimental indicators that municipalities can use to monitor local SDG implementation (Siragusa, Vizcaino, Proietti,

and Lavalle, 2020). The indicators can help local-level authorities establish baselines for their communities, compare action with that of other cities, and monitor their progress on addressed specific challenges. Other guidance was issued by United Cities and Local Government and UN Habitat (Ciambra, 2020).

A comparative analysis of 16 VLRs (Ortiz-Moya, Koike, Ota, Kataoka, and Fujino, 2020) concluded that a VLR: i) allows the local government to listen to the needs of its people and reflect them into local policymaking; ii) invites self-reflection; iii) provides for a process that is data-driven and can be used to plan for action to achieve the future we want; and iv) gives a local take on the global conversation on sustainable development. The fourth point has a clear multilevel dimension. As the authors of this study argue, local and regional governments rarely have all necessary means to achieve the SDGs: "Fiscal transfer, energy source, setting up financial regulations, tax intervention, and many other policies require the national government to take action". Ortiz-Moya et al. (2020) recommend that all VLRs should include messages directly addressed to the national governments. Such messages should include policy demands, and good practices that could be scaled up and shared through the national government channels.

Besides that sub-national level often do not have the legal or political 'license' to apply policy and governance tools that could best tackle their sustainability challenges, sub-national authorities also often lack technical capacities and skills. The real possibilities and capacities of subnational governments are generally not at par with the complexity of the 2030 Agenda with its interlinked targets (Zarrouk and Rodas, 2022). This is an important part of the challenge identified in the theoretical introduction chapter in this book, about state capacity as an influencing factor for integrated implementation of the SDGs, and is connected with the fifth research question of this volume, on political-institutional preconditions.

Having Voluntary Local Review reports, and the (usually inclusive) preparation processes as empowering and mobilizing mechanisms, could improve the dialogue between the different levels, and at the same time bring the lack of resources, capacities and ability to use policy tools on the national strategic SDG agenda. Moreover, producing VNRs and VLRs in the same country and at the same time could be a good accelerator of effective multilevel (meta)governance for the SDGs. VLRs are a good means to reinforce vertical coherence and with this complement the VNR process (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020).

In addition, because of its pluralistic view – the same policy challenge may be governed by a specific governance framework at each level – metagovernance might help making MLG effective (Kull, 2016). Each level of government should have the possibility to develop sustainability governance arrangements which are tailor-made to both the area and to the type of challenges. Metagovernance is able to provide coherence between the increasingly fragmented landscapes of governance, where new sub-national governance bodies are created at different scales and with different mixes of policy mandates (Christopoulos, Horvath, and Kull, 2012).

The multilevel dimension is relevant in all SDG implementation processes, but there are differences, not only as regards the specific SDGs, but also concerning the typical governance cultures in countries and for specific policy areas. SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities is a key example. Cities are hotspots of innovation, wealth and at the same time extreme poverty. They are to some extent independent but need excellent collaboration with national governments to address many of their larger challenges. Cities have formed international networks and communities of practice that might make them slightly less dependent from national governments and their often primarily hierarchical governance approach to multilevel relations. Other SDGs such as SDG 4 (health), SDG 6 (education), and SDG 7 (energy) are characterized by challenges in many countries, owing to privatization of these formerly public services. Privatization implies that (national) governance have given up their governing capacity – and this will have an impact also at the subnational level. These issues are touched upon in Meuleman (2018) for example, but probably deserve more in-depth analysis.

A Typology of Multilevel Governance Aligned with the Three Governance Styles

Effective governance for the SDGs depends to a large extent on the quality of horizontal (multi-sector), inclusive (multi-actor) and vertical (multi-level) mechanisms and how they are functioning (Dewulf, Meijerink, and Runhaar, 2015). In addition, as Köhler et al. (2017) have shown, multilevel governance challenges can differ widely between policy sectors, because actor constellations and path dependencies, to name two factors, are not the same. With the three classical governance styles as point of departure, three different and partly incompatible types of multilevel governance can be distinguished (Figure 5.2).

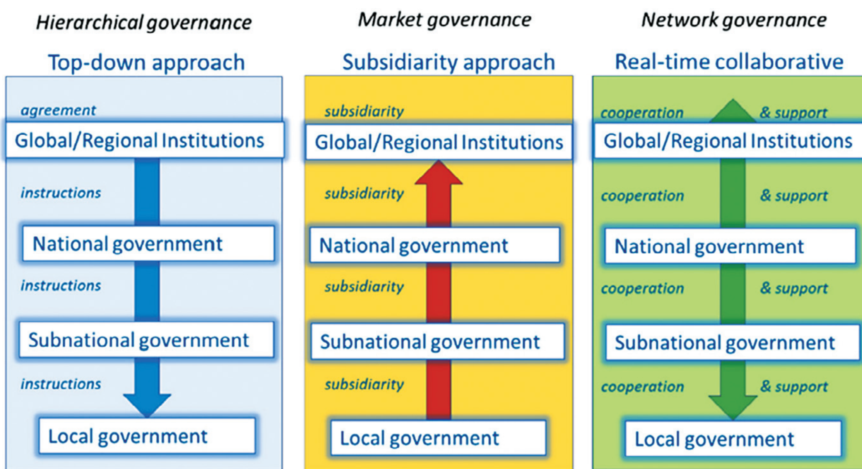

FIGURE 5.2 Three types of multilevel governance
Source: Author's own elaboration

1. The first style is most compatible with a hierarchical mindset and can be characterized as 'top-down'. This approach might be fast in times of crisis, as became clear during the eCOVID-19 pandemic, but is otherwise typically slow. National laws and policies might require years of preparation and even more time before they become local practice. For example, the implementation of new EU legislation by local authorities can take up to six or seven years after the initiative was taken by the European Commission, among others because the rules first need to be translated into national legislation and related tasks then delegated across the different government levels.
2. The second type is based on the principle of subsidiarity: decisions should be taken at the lowest level that can handle them. This principle has led to many innovations at the local level, but scaling up successful local sustainability practices is generally a challenge, for which some have suggested that national sustainable development councils could become catalysers (Cornforth, Niestroy, and Osborn, 2013). In any case, also the second type can be characterized as slow.
3. A third approach has emerged in some countries, referred to as 'real-time collaborative multilevel governance' approach (Meuleman, 2019). The Netherlands with its centuries-old network governance culture (Kickert, 2003) has a general multi-level governance mechanism that is also used for collaboration on SDG implementation (Meuleman, 2021). For strategic policy issues, so-called 'Inter-governmental Dossier teams' are established to discuss what each of the three tiers in the Dutch administrative system (national, provincial, local) can contribute. This means that in real-time the different governance levels get together to discuss about how to tackle a specific pressing problem. It is an addition, not replacement of the bottom-up subsidiarity style or the classical top-down hierarchical style of governance. In other countries, the approach could be different: comparative research on urban sustainability transitions has shown that multilevel relations can differ, according to national governance cultures (Ehnert et al., 2018). This third MLG approach is an example of the governance mechanisms mentioned in the 2nd research question of this volume.

A crisis is a good moment to observe "real-time" collaborative multilevel governance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the German federal government used a two-level pandemic crisis management mechanism: the Conference of Premiers of the German federal states (Ministerpräsidentenkonferenz, MPK) with participation of the German Federal Chancellor (Bundeskanzler). The MPK took a leading role during the pandemic, a role that was unusual when compared to normal times (see e.g. Schnabel, Freiburghaus, and Hegele, 2022), holding frequent meetings and taking decisions, some of which were implemented successfully but others were not. As a result, citizens felt at times confused by the complex results, and the outcomes were mixed.

Each of the three types of multilevel governance represents a dominant governance style. Top-down multilevel governance represents hierarchical values. The bottom-up

subsidiarity approach relates to the principles of devolvement and empowerment of market governance. The real-time approach requires mechanisms from network governance. The network style is underused and adding the 'real-time collaborative' approach is an example of a 'metagovernance' response to close the gap.

However, metagovernance implies a situational approach. Scaling up local innovation does not have to be (only) based on the collaborative style. Governance interventions for scaling up local innovation, can have three different forms, congruent with the three typical styles: Coercive, rule-based mechanisms such as impact assessment mechanisms, usually required by law and containing legal guarantees with regards to transparency and consultation; collaborative mechanisms such as peer reviews and (multi-level) stakeholder participation; and voluntary and market-based mechanisms to induce decision/behaviour change (Cornforth et al., 2013).

Thus, three specific challenges of multilevel (meta)governance are:

- How effective (and how fast) are national objectives and instructions being translated into subnational responses? This is a question in the context of classical top-down multilevel relations.
- How effective (and how fast) are subnational observations, solutions and needs landing at the relevant desks in a national administration? This is about the effectiveness of the subsidiarity role of subnational governments.
- Are there effective mechanisms to bridge the levels effectively and fast enough for important and urgent challenges which regard more than one level? This links to 'real-time participatory multilevel governance'.

A metagovernance perspective to tackle these questions is among others about whether and how each of the three above-mentioned questions could be answered better when ideas or tools from the other styles are integrated. The compatibility between the three MLG types and the three ideal-typical governance styles which are the material with which metagovernance works, suggests that metagovernance could help making MLG more reflexive, diverse, flexible, adaptive, and pluralist.

Multilevel (Meta)governance and Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

Multilevel governance or 'vertical coherence' is not an island, isolated from other governance challenges. It is one of the eight dimensions (sub-indicators) of the SDG indicator 17.14.1 on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) (UN Environment Programme, 2020). This is formulated in the indicator as follows: "The country has mechanisms in place for aligning priorities, policies and plans between various levels of government." Responding to a growing demand of both member and non-members about guidance on how to deal with the "how" of coherent 2030 Agenda implementation, in 2019 the OECD adopted eight principles of PCSD. The need for increased vertical coherence is addressed by the principle of "*Engaging appropriately sub-national levels of government in areas where they have a role in policy*

coordination " (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019, lll.2), under which the OECD countries have committed to "Promote synergies among national, regional and local policies to better align with and contribute to relevant economic, social and environmental goals, including international commitments (…)".

Federal states often have a powerful second government level. The three Belgian Regions are a case in point, but also Germany's and Austria's Laender, and the Spanish Regions, are part of a MLG system that is not primarily hierarchical, as important responsibilities in relation to the SDGs have been put at the second, regional level. This illustrates how important effective multilevel metagovernance is to attain the whole SDG agenda.

In fact, the challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda have inspired several countries to improve their mechanisms for multilevel governance. Belgium, for example, revitalized its Inter-Ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD), which gathers ministers in charge of sustainable development and development co-operation at different levels (Federal, Communities, and Regions) as the central co-ordination mechanism for SDG implementation. The IMCSD is used as a central coordination mechanism for PCSD at all levels. In addition, all SD actions undertaken at a local level are collected by the Advisory Council for Policy Coherence for SD and publicly displayed online.[3] (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018).

However, as shown in the comparative analysis of 137 national government SDG bodies by Breuer, Leininger and Malerba in this volume, the creation of such mechanisms to ensure multi-level PCSD SDG implementation still constitutes the exception rather than the norm as the majority of countries has chosen an institutional design whereby sub-national governments are not represented in national SDG government bodies.

Another important principle formulated by the OECD refers to "Defining, implementing and communicating a strategic long-term vision that supports policy coherence (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019, ll.2). Having a long-term strategy or plan for sustainable development at the national level is one thing, but mobilizing subnational governments to become part of the action is also important. In 2016 the Republic of Korea, for example, established a mechanism to implement the alignment of national sustainable development policies at subnational and local levels. Local governments voluntarily established their own implementation strategies for sustainable development and drafted evaluation reports to measure their progress at the local level. This provided a strong basis for the local implementation of the SDGs (Government of the Republic of Korea, 2016).

Another example of a strategic long-term vision suited to foster multi-level PCSD is Colombia's National Development Plan, which includes a territorialization approach. Regional pacts for productivity and equity define development visions and strategic projects prioritized by the regions themselves to boost their economies and take advantage of their capabilities. Each regional pact presents a roadmap for a

coordinated investment approach in the territory, as well as the articulation of efforts between levels of government. All indicators and targets of the regional pacts are linked to one or more SDG targets; this enables alignment of national and subnational plans (Alvarez, 2020).

These examples illustrate that how MLG can support, or slow down SDG implementation depends on a multitude of factors. It is no exception to the global observation that national administrative cultures and traditions might lead to very different institutional solutions to the same challenge: governance styles are normative – they are characterized by specific sets of values. Effective metagovernance of MLG therefore requires a minimum amount of cultural sensitivity (Meuleman, 2013).

Another category of states with specific challenges for effective MLG is formed by fragile states. A generally weak rule of law, the aftermath of a violent conflict, and the results of natural disasters might all result in, or exacerbate the fragility of the state at all levels. Further research could bring together examples of re-establishing the state at the different levels.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

This chapter explored how multilevel governance and -metagovernance can contribute to effective public governance of implementing the SDGs.

Concerning the second research question of this volume on governance mechanisms to manage SDG interlinkages and power asymmetries between stakeholders from different levels, it can be concluded that new governance mechanisms for MLG are indeed needed. One example mentioned is the European Commission's Environmental Implementation Review which aims at improving environmental multilevel governance.

An emerging mechanism is the 'real-time collaborative multilevel governance', with specific institutional arrangements to bring all levels together on important and urgent issues. This approach does not replace but complements the traditional top-down and bottom-up mechanisms of MLG.

The real-time approach reflects a network governance style, while the other MLG approaches can be linked to hierarchical and market governance. Combining the three approaches is an example of multilevel *meta*governance.

The need to have more effective mechanisms for MLG could trigger the beginning of a much wider use of the hybrid concept of multilevel metagovernance (MLMG), almost 20 years after it was coined (Jessop, 2004). Research projects on MLMG should, however, take into account that the term MLMG is not often used, which is not an indication that the practice is not there. Long before the term metagovernance was coined, it was already practiced by public managers. The same applies to multilevel governance: the term was coined after the relevant practice was 'discovered'.

Because metagovernance is a concept 'above and beyond' governance, it can help setting up the conditions and rules that can foster MLG systems with 'good

governance' characteristics (Daniell, Hogan, and Cleary, 2017), and with the CEPA principles of effective governance for sustainable development (UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, 2018).

The pandemic as well as other recent crises have made clear that different levels of government cannot provide the necessary services and protection to citizens if they work in 'silos'. As part of their crisis management, many countries have created ad hoc multi-level committees or other forms of collaboration, between national government and the tiers of subnational government. In global regions where supranational rules or agreements apply, that regional level is part of the multilevel governance architecture. These new institutional mechanisms for fast and effective collaboration between government levels should not be completely abolished after a crisis but remain at least in a kind of 'stand by' mode, ready to be used when again necessary. This would add to the institutional resilience of governments and societies as a whole.

A structured approach to improve multilevel governance for the SDGs should not only follow the fifth OECD principle of policy coherence for sustainable development on 'subnational engagement', but also the other seven principles. For example, the silos between policy sectors and government departments hamper multilevel (meta)governance in many ways. Improving working across silos is the aim of the fourth principle.

As regards the fifth research question of the volume on political-institutional preconditions to manage SDG interactions, it is clear that sub-national level often lacks the legal or political 'license' to apply the necessary policy and governance tools, and the technical capacities and skills. The real possibilities and capacities of subnational governments are generally not at par with the complexity of the 2030 Agenda with its interlinked targets.

Notes

1 https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/p2p/index_en.htm.
2 https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews.
3 www.SDGs.be.

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