Universität Konstanz

Master Thesis

Why Governance matters – The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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July 2017

Content

List of tables

List of figures

Abstract

In 2015, the UN member states committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that puts forward 17 comprehensive sustainable development goals (SDG) to be achieved by 2030. The success of this universal Agenda will depend on national implementation of each state that needs to deduce and implement own goals and indicators. However, since the Agenda is a non-binding agreement with no legal obligation, the question of why and under which conditions states comply with the Agenda is at stake. Since compliance at this early stage cannot be assessed yet this thesis approximates *compliance* with *commitment to comply*, indicating states' motivation and effort to implement the SDGs. My theory puts forward the role of good governance and argues that states with better governance structures are more committed to comply with the Agenda 2030. To test this hypothesis, good governance structures from 77 countries were analyzed on the basis of qualitative surveys and expert interviews. By quantitatively testing the effect of good governance structures on states' commitment to comply in all OECD countries this thesis finds empirical evidence that states with better governance structures are more committed to comply with the Agenda 2030. The findings imply that more focus should be put on establishing and improving good governance structures that institutionalize states' effort to drive national implementation of the SDGs.

1 Introduction

In September 2015, the general assembly of the United Nations (UN) adopted resolution A/RES/70/1 "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (henceforth: Agenda 2030) (UN, 2015). The Heads of States committed to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with 169 associated targets, by 2030 (see Annex I) that should "stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet" (UN, 2015: 3)."

The Agenda builds on the old pre-2015 system on sustainable development, represented by the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (Kloke-Lesch, 2015). However, in terms of scope, nature and mechanisms, the Agenda 2030 follows a more comprehensive approach. In contrast, to the MDGs, it applies universally to all states, addresses all three dimensions of sustainable development and needs them to be addressed in an integrated manner due to the strong interlinkage between the goals. As the title of the document says, the aim is nothing less than "transforming our world" to achieve sustainable development (UN, 2015).

Its success will depend on the rightful implementation of the goals within all countries. However, the Agenda 2030 is a non-binding agreement that put governments under no legal

obligation to implement the goals. Therefore the question of why and under which conditions states comply with the requirements of the Agenda 2030 is at stake.

Due to the complexity of the issue, setting up governance structures that steer the process, are considered to be the first important step for the implementation of the SDGs. As Frans Timmermanns (2015) put it during his speech at the Post-2015 Development Summit in New York in 2015:

"Ultimately, this [the implementation of the Agenda 2030] is all about governance"

The theoretical concept of governance for sustainable development is not new. In fact, previous commitments, such as the Agenda 21 and the MDGs have already emphasized its importance and encouraged the implementation of good governance elements. However, due to the enhanced and more comprehensive nature of the Agenda 2030, the debate on how to steer the implementation of sustainable development has raised considerable attention (Scholz, 2017). The question, to what extent states have good governance structures in place is therefore highly relevant.

The contribution of this thesis is twofold: In the first part, the governance structures in 77 countries worldwide, including all members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), will be assessed, and compared with good governance principles. I generate a governance index, capturing to what extent states have good governance structures for sustainable development in place. Compared to other existing indexes it is tailored to the special requirements of the Agenda 2030 and includes quantitative as well as qualitative variables. My descriptive analysis shows that most of the countries in my sample fulfill basic governance requirements.

In the second part, I test the governance index and its effect on the states' commitment to implement and comply with the Agenda 2030. I argue that good governance structures provide incentives that drive the implementation process. Therefore, the better states' governance structures the more committed to comply with the Agenda 2030. By testing the effect of governance structures on the commitment to comply in all OECD countries and comparing it with other potential explanations I find empirical evidence for my hypothesis.

The concept of governance for sustainable development has been developed and discussed for many years[1]. The term encompasses "the steering requirements and mechanisms that

[1] *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* (UN, 2002);
Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: Managing sustainability in the new millennium (ECOSOC, 2002)

enable the formulation of concerted and adaptive policies that foster the cooperation of diverse actors in delivering sustainable development." (Pisano et al., 2015: 58). Most countries already have governance structures in place. The first national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) were developed and adopted in the 90s (e.g. Sweden in 1994; Switzerland in 1997, Finland in 1998). In the following years many countries put in place sustainable development councils and ministerial committees to steer the implementation of sustainable development on national level (Pisano et al., 2013; Scholz et al, 2016).

The normative literature outlines various governance principles that are considered to be crucial in order to effectively pursue sustainable development (Kemp et al. 2005). This thesis focuses on four governance principles for steering sustainable development. The way these (normative) principles are implemented in the national institutional frameworks thereby varies greatly across countries.

First, there is a need for a common vision including strategic objectives. Promoting sustainable development is a complex endeavor that requires a long-term strategy which specifies necessary steps, goals, and how they can be achieved. Already in 1992, the UN called for the implementation of NSDS to stimulate short-term action for achieving sustainable long-term goals. Many countries have responded accordingly, and have adopted own NSDS (Jacobs & Niestroy, 2014; Meadowcroft, 2007; Pisano et al, 2015; Steurer 2007).

Second, implementing sustainable development requires integration and coordination mechanisms across different policy sectors and levels of governance. Since sustainable development addresses a large range of issues that are interlinked, there is a need for coordination mechanisms and institutional bodies that allow for creating a communicative environment between actors of all levels. Integration thereby addresses a vertical and horizontal dimension. Vertical integration means the integration of all political-administrative levels, such as local, regional, national and supranational levels, whereas horizontal integration refers to coordination between different ministries and administrative bodies (Mackie et al., 2017; Stafford-Smith et al., 2016; Steurer, 2007).

Third, the incorporation of stakeholders, such as civil society, businesses and academia into decision-making processes is central for the implementation for sustainable development. In this regard, Jordan (2008) argues that in the absence of a "centrally determined blueprint for sustainable development, its practical meaning will necessarily have to emerge out of an interactive process of societal dialogue and reflection" (Jordan, 2008: 18). The role of stakeholders thereby varies greatly across states. Participatory activities can be informational,

consultative or decisional, and institutional forms range from permanent Councils to ad-hoc informative or consultative actions. (De Vries, 2015; Kates et al., 2005; Sachs, 2012)

Fourth, since promoting sustainable development is a long-term process, the inclusion of reflexive processes is considered to be crucial. National strategies need to be constantly adapted to current developments and new challenges. For this purpose the implementation of sustainable development thus requires quantitative and qualitative monitoring mechanisms (Kloke-Lesch, 2015; Lange, 2015 Pisano et al., 2015).

The Agenda 2030 revived the international debates on sustainable development and brings these governance issues back on the table. Due to the universal nature of the Agenda every country faces the challenge on how to implement the more comprehensive sustainable development approach. While the governance research primarily focuses on identifying normative characteristics for governing sustainable development, there has been little systematic, empirical research on how and why governance structures matter for the implementation of sustainable development. This thesis aims to close this gap.

The research question of this thesis is thus twofold:

1. <u>In what way have states implemented good governance structures for sustainable development</u>

Due to the interlinkage of the goals, affecting every policy area (economic, social, environmental pillar), actors (governmental bodies, NGOs, private-sector, civil society, science) and levels (national, regional, local), the implementation of the SDGs requires a whole-of-government approach. This paper aims to analyze the current institutional-administrative governance structures with regard to the four governance principles long-term, participation, integration and reflexivity.

For this purpose, I generated a dataset containing information on the governance structures for sustainable development in 77 countries worldwide, including all members of the OECD. By using and aligning information from various sources, I expect my data to be valid and reliable. First, I evaluated the results from a qualitative survey from the German Foreign Office on the state of implementation of the Agenda 2030 in over 50 countries. The information was collected by German embassies and foreign representations in the respective countries. Second, I extracted information from national reports of countries that participated in the voluntary review process of the high-level political forum (HLPF). The HLPF was established by the UN to monitor national implementation processes of the Agenda 2030 (Bernstein, 2013). To date, 66 states have presented their national efforts to achieve the SDGs (Beisheim, 2016). Third I use information from the database of the European Sustainable Development Network

(ESDN). The ESDN brings together government officials of all European countries that are responsible for sustainable development strategies and policies in their countries with the aim to facilitate the exchange of good practices (ESDN, 2011). Fourth, I complemented my dataset with information from five semi-structured expert interviews with policy makers and researchers in the field of sustainable development.

2. Why and how do governance structures affect states' commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030?

Governance structures are considered to be crucial but its effects have been barely tested. Thus, I analyze why and how governance matters with regard to the compliance with the Agenda 2030. Compliance is defined as "a state of conformity or identity between an actor's behavior and a specified rule" (Ruastiala 2002: 539). With regard to the Agenda 2030 compliance cannot be assessed yet, since the goals have only been recently adopted. I therefore approximate this variable by putting forward states' *commitment to comply* (C2C), measuring, in what way governments are committed to achieve the SDGs on national level. Since C2C is a latent variable, it is operationalized by a number of indicators, such as a state's self-commitment to participate in the international review process of the HLPF; whether it has revised/renewed its national strategy, adjusted administrative structures or prominently put the issue under the prime minister's responsibility. I thereby assume that a state that shows a high level of commitment at this early stage is more likely to comply with the Agenda 2030 and achieve the goals in the end.

Why are states committed to comply with a non-legally binding agreement, such as the Agenda 2030? In contrast to other environmental agreements, the SDGs put no legal obligation on governments to formally transfer the goals into their national legal system. I approach this issue by reviewing and discussing existing theories from two disciplines: international law (IL) and international relations (IR). Both literature strands provide different explanations that are distinct from each other.

In my theoretical part I put forward good governance structures to be the main driver for commitment with the Agenda 2030 (H1). Previous decisions to promote sustainable development create a domestic bureaucracy with a vested interest in compliance (Raustiala, 2002). States with better governance structures thus have a higher propensity to comply with international commitments. I compare the effect of governance structures with other potential explanatory factors, such as stage of development (H2), level of democracy (H3) and states' capacities (H4). Figure 1 summarizes my theoretical framework.

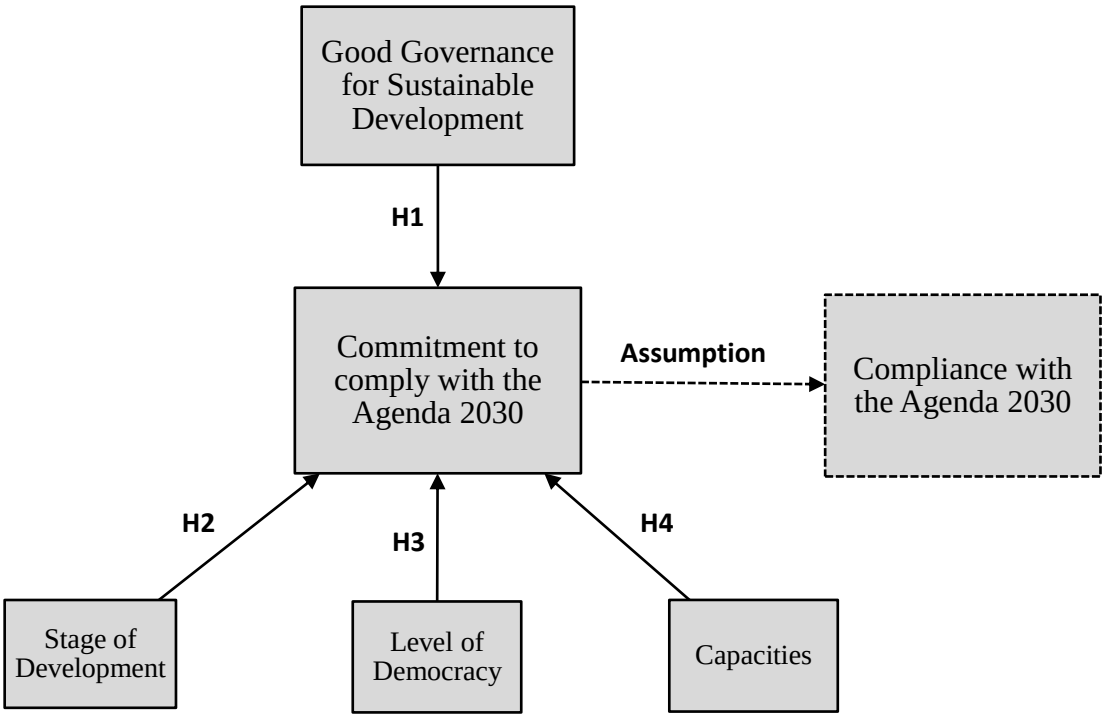

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research questions of how governance structures affect states' commitment to comply this thesis is divided into four chapters.

In the first chapter I give an overview of the formation process of the Agenda 2030. Sustainable development has been on the global agenda for more than 30 years. However, with the adoption of the Agenda 2030, this issue has gained momentum and revived a genuine debate on how to universally promote sustainable development all over the planet (De Vries et al., 2015). Based on existing governance literature, I outline the four principles that are considered to be crucial for the implementation of sustainable development: long-term, participation, integration and reflexivity (Pisano et al., 2015). I argue that, while the normative concepts of governance for sustainable development are already well explained in the literature there is a lack in systematic comparative research on how these requirements are actually implemented.

These questions are addressed in my second chapter. I develop a theoretical framework on compliance by putting forward the role of good governance and comparing its effect with potential explanatory factors from international law and international relations scholars. The Agenda 2030 is a voluntary commitment and thus not-legally binding. I argue that good governance structures drive domestic implementation processes.

In my third chapter, I explain the data collection process and the choice of my analytical method. I generated a dataset that captures information of governance structures in 77

countries. My fourth chapter is dedicated to explaining the results and findings of my analysis. By quantitatively testing governance structures in all OECD countries I find evidence for my hypothesis that good governance structures increase states' commitment to comply.

2 Governance for sustainable development

In this chapter, I provide an historic overview on the international efforts to pursue sustainable development and outline how the Agenda 2030 differs from previous commitments such as the Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In fact, achieving sustainable development has been on the global Agenda for over 30 years. The debate emerged during the 1970s when the Club of Rome suggested that resources, responsible for our growth are limited and called for a transformation of our economic system. It was then the Brundtland commission in 1987 that brought this issue on the agenda of the UN. Since then, sustainable development has become a top priority in global governance, peaking to the adoption of the Agenda 2030 in 2015.

I then discuss the role of good governance for the implementation of sustainable development. Based on existing literature, I outline four principles that are considered crucial for achieving sustainable development on national level. Lastly, I argue that while the normative concept of governance for sustainable development is already well-developed in the literature, there is a lack in empirical cross-country comparison, in order to analyze how the governance requirements have been implemented. This is useful to analyze how they matter regarding the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030.

2.1 From Rio to New York: What is sustainable development?

The formation of the Agenda 2030 can be seen as a path dependent process that builds on past achievements. Some of the key principles, such as considering economic, environmental and social dimensions, addressing them in an integrated manner and stressing the need for transformation have already been raised in previous agreements. However, although the Agenda 2030 does not reinvent the wheel, it constitutes the most comprehensive approach for pursuing sustainable development to date (Lee et al., 2016).

For the first time, the issue of sustainable development raised considerable attention in 1972, when the Club of Rome published a report on the limits of growth. The authors Donella and Dennis Meadow assumed that while population and industrial capital would grow exponentially, the supply of non-renewables resources, particularly oil, are finite. This

contradiction would eventually lead to a “rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity” (Meadow et al., 1972: 23). The oil crisis in 1973 has further fueled the debate and emphasized the necessity of transforming our economic system.

Since then the concept of sustainable development has become more complex and comprehensive. In 1983, the UN established the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), also known as Brundtland Commission, in order to develop a common international approach for pursuing sustainable development. In their report “Our Common Future of the World Commission on Environment and Development” they broadly defined the concept of sustainable development as meeting the “needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The report mentioned all dimensions of sustainable development and suggested to address them by means of an integrated policy approach (Beisheim, 2014).

However, in the following years, the three dimensions where addressed separately through multiple international conferences and agreements. Most of the attention was thereby put on environmental issues with a geographical focus on developing countries (Pisano et al., 2015).

In 1992, the general aims of the Brundtland Commission were translated into an agenda of political action on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, taking place in Rio de Janeiro. The conference adopted two influential outcome documents, which set the direction for future efforts in this field. The Agenda 21 defined the basis of action, objectives, activities and means of implementation to pursue sustainable development. It was complemented by the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which specified 27 general principles (Lafferty & Eckerberg, 2013).

The outcome documents were the first to mention that states have “common but differentiated responsibilities” to implement sustainable development (Principle 7). Developing countries were given priority due to their “special situation and needs” (UN; 1992: Principle 6). In this regard, the eradication of poverty was mentioned to be the “indispensable requirement for sustainable development” (UN 1992: Principle 5).

The three dimensions of sustainable development were not yet equally addressed and balanced. Environmental issues were the “dominant motif” (Porras, 1992: 245), and considered to be the “integral part of the development process” (UN, 1992: Principle: 4).

The next major step on the way to the Agenda 2030 constituted the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) on the Millennium Summit in 2000. The MDG specify eight measurable goals in the field of sustainable development to be achieved by 2015. However, the MDGs mainly targeted the various dimensions of poverty, such as income poverty, nutrition, education, and access to water, instead of addressing the whole range of

sustainable development. Due to the missing link to other policy fields they failed to create ownership in industrial countries. They were thus "reduced to an agenda to be implemented by developing countries in the South and development agencies in the North" (Scholz, 2016:2) and can rather be seen as "consensus framework of international development" (Fukudparr, 2013: 59).

Although not all goals have been achieved by 2015, the instrument of setting clearly defined targets to promote sustainable development has proven to be an effective instrument for future accords. Notably, it has increased states' commitment, public awareness, and mobilization of financial means (Sachs et al., 2012).

The idea for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged during the Rio +20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Its outcome document "The Future We Want" initiated an "inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process" (UN, 2012: 63) with the aim to develop a larger post-2015 agenda to succeed the MDGs. Negotiations took place within an open-working-group consisting of UN member states, including public consultations and engagement with civil society and other stakeholder. The result, a set of 17 SDGs with 169 targets, was embedded in the Agenda 2030 and adopted in 2015 during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, taking place in New York (Stevens, 2016). It stresses the urgency of transforming the world towards sustainable development. By reaffirming previous milestones, such as the Rio principles and the Millennium Declaration, the Agenda 2030 builds up on existing achievements. However, its key messages slightly differ from previous documents.

First, the Agenda 2030 is intended to be universal, in a sense that the SDGs need to be implemented by all countries. While the MDGs only targeted developing countries, focusing on the eradication of hunger and poverty, the Agenda 2030 requires every country to promote sustainable development on national level. Every country needs to pursue sustainable development within their country, while considering "different national realties, capacities and levels of development, respecting national policies and priorities" (UN, 2015). This means that all countries are required to derive own ambitious goals and indicators that fit their national circumstances and implement them on national level. As put by David Nabarro (2016), United Nations Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate:

> *"Every country is a developing country"*

The Agenda 2030 thus shifts the focus from development countries to a global responsibility for sustainable development of all countries (De Vries et al., 2015). In this regard, a recent

study undertaken by the Bertelsmann Stiftung indicates that the Agenda 2030 also poses challenges to industrialized countries. The study examines the situation of the different OECD countries in relation to each of the SDGs. It shows that performance regarding sustainable development highly deviates among countries and only a handful is on the right track for achieving their goals (Bertelsmann, 2015)

Second, the new Agenda expands and broadens the scope of sustainable development. The SDGs now include 17 instead of 8 goals that cover additional environmental (climate change, protection of terrestrial ecosystems and the oceans), economic (industrialization, infrastructure, labour markets) and social (inclusive institutions, gender equality) areas (Terama, 2016).

Third, the SDGs are "integrated and indivisible in nature" (UN, 2015). For a long time, previous commitments treated the dimensions of sustainable development separately in different conferences. The intention of the Agenda 2030 is to "make sure that the three dimensions of sustainable development are balanced, where not a single one of them is too prevailing over the others" (Pisano, 2015: 11). This interlinkage-principle acknowledges that goals are highly intertwinned and can only be achieved in an integrated manner. For instance, fighting poverty (SDG1) is not a one dimensional problem but needs to be addressed from multiple perspectives, such as improving education (SDG4), improving health care (SDG3), reducing inequalities (SDG5) and fostering growth and employment (SDG 8). In this regard, studies have illustrated the various correlations between the SDGs (see Annex III).

2.2 Implementation of sustainable development: The role of governance

Since the emergence of the debates on what is needed to ensure a sustainable future, the question of how it can be achieved has become equally important. The importance of good governance structures has thereby been widely acknowledged (Ayre & Callway, 2013; Glasbergen et al., 2007; Jordan, 2008; Pisano et al., 2015; Meadowcroft, 2007; Van Zeijl-Rosema 2008).

Implementing sustainable development on national level faces various challenges, which is related to its conceptual characteristics: First, sustainable development is a normative concept. In terms of content, its objectives can be seen as wicked problems, meaning that they are ill-defined and unstructured. The ultimate goal of the Agenda 2030 to transform our world is quite broad and does not imply specific measures to pursue. Moreover, the definition and focus of what needs to be done might shift over time.

Second, implementing sustainable development is a complex endeavor. Its process includes multiple policy areas (environmental, social, economic), actors (governmental bodies, NGOs, private-sector, civil society, science) and levels (supranational, national, local). With regard to instruments it requires a holistic change in thinking, tools and methods. Sustainable development thus highly deviates from other policy problems in terms of complexity and comprehensiveness (Van Zeijl-Rosema, 2008).

Third, sustainable development is weakly institutionalized since it can be conceptualized as a public good that faces a collective action problem. Pursuing sustainable development is non-rival and its benefits are non-excludable for members (Biermann, 2017). According to public choice theory, individuals thus have little incentives to engage in the promotion of sustainable development since its returns are non-excludable and indivisible (that is, the result of the cost of engagement does not become directly visible and a lot of people benefit from it). Moreover, sustainable development is a contested concept which sometimes collides with positions of special interest groups. For instance, environmental measures might negatively affect personal benefits of various actors. Those groups are often well-organized and very powerful to oppose such measures (Rydin et al., 2000).

Wicked problems, social complexity and weak institutionalization "undermine the rationale of 'traditional' governing with governments as institutions with hierarchical power" and shift the focus to the concept of governance (van Zeijlma-Rosema: 411). In contrast to *government*, *governance* rather describes a *mode of interaction* "in which government, other public bodies, private sector and civil society participate, aiming at solving societal problems" (Meulmann, 2008: 11). The issue of governance is therefore of central importance for the implementation of sustainable development and constitutes the first step towards achieving the objectives of the Agenda 2030 (Jordan, 2007).

Consequently, the question of how sustainable development can be steered has been addressed in multiple international outcome documents and influenced a large bulk of the governance literature.

Already in 1992, the main outcome documents of the Rio World summit included important pillars of the governance framework to be adopted by the UN member states (Scholz, 2017). The Agenda 21 called for the development of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) and the integration of stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Within the EU, the European Council, invited EU member states to "draw up their own national sustainable development strategies" (Gothenburg Strategy, 2001) and requested the European Commission to "bring forward proposals for a coordinating European Sustainable

Development Strategy" which resulted in the adoption of the EU 2020 strategy (De Vries et al., 2015: 8).

The Agenda 2030 explicitly dedicates two SDGs to governance. SDG 16 addresses governance on national level and calls for the establishment of "inclusive societies for sustainable development" and to "provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" (UN, 2015: 25). SDG 17 stresses the importance of global partnership. States should support each other in the implementation of the SDGs by establishing South-South and North-South cooperation.

2.3 Analytical framework: Good governance principles for sustainable development

Within the governance literature two strands have emerged, focusing on either empirical or normative aspects. While the empirical strand conceptualizes the process of how policies *are* governed, the normative strand makes prescriptions of how policies *should* be governed.

I argue that while there is a lack in empirical theory the normative concept of *governance for sustainable development* has already been well developed (Jordan, 2008). The main contribution of the empirical governance literature is the conceptualization of ideal types of governance: hierarchical, market and network-governance. Hierarchical governance is characterized by top-down rules, that are monitored by government authorities; Market governance uses efficiency and competition as regulating mechanism; Network governance, is built on consensus and agreements between societal partners in which the government only plays a mediating role (Pisano et al., 2015).

However, the proposed classification is not able to capture the governance style of sustainable development. Therefore, more advanced contributions distinguish between different issues and sectors of sustainable development and research has moved to develop more differentiated theoretical classifications. Van Zeijl-Rosema's (2008) analytical framework proposes a classification along two continuing axes to capture the governance style. The first axes describes the mode of governance, ranging from hierarchical (top-down) to deliberative (bottom-up). The second distinguishes between two different (extreme) perspectives on sustainable development: The ecological perspectives, puts emphasis on the environmental aspects of sustainable development, while the well-being perspective sees it as a holistic way of life, that includes all three perspectives of sustainable development.

Meuleman and Niestroy (2012) introduce the concept metagovernance, which describes the combination of "different governance styles into successful governance frameworks"

(Meuleman & Niestroy, 2012: 6). Other authors developed concepts of reflexive (Voss et al, 2006), transformative governance (Chaffin, 2016) or transition management (Loorbach 2007, 2010). They all stress the role of governance in creating feedback loops to constantly adapt their approaches to current developments.

However, the attempts to theoretically capture governance of sustainable development are rather weak and lack in practical application. Only few research papers have compared modes of governance with actual performance, for instance in terms of capacity (Jordan and Schout, 2006) and efficiency (Steuer, 2007). It seems that the policy field of sustainable development is too broad and complex to be captured and classified by one model. Moreover, testing differences between models and applying to performance has shown little additional informative value.

Principles	Rationale	Operationalization
Long term	Need for **long-term vision and strategic view** on how to pursue sustainable development	Existence of **National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)**
Integration	Need for **coordination and integration** of economic, social and environment policies **across and between different levels of governance**	**Mechanisms of vertical integration** that promote policy integration across multiple political-administrative levels
		Mechanisms of horizontal integration that support and foster policy integration between different ministries and administrative bodies
Participation	Need for the **incorporation of stakeholders** into the decision making-process	**Participatory arrangements** of different stakeholders, such as civil society, business, academia, etc. in policy-making process
Reflexivity	Need for **reflexivity process** based on continuous monitoring and feedback	Effective **monitoring and review mechanisms**

Table 1: Governance for Sustainable Development (Pisano et al., 2015: 24)

While there is a lack in empirical theory the normative concept of *governance for sustainable development* has already been well developed (Jordan, 2008). The term "encompasses the steering requirements and mechanisms that enable the formulation of concerted and adaptive policies that foster the cooperation of diverse actors in delivering sustainable development." (Pisano et al., 2015: 58).

Therefore I borrow aspects from the normative discourse and empirically compare the proposed good governance elements to the actual state of implementation. In a second step I analyze and test its effect on the states' compliance with the Agenda 2030. The governance for sustainable development literature suggests taking into account four good governance principles that are considered to be crucial for the implementation of sustainable development. The principles are presented in the following and summarized in table 1.

2.3.1 Long-term Principle

First, there is a need for a common vision that includes strategic objectives. Promoting sustainable development is a complex endeavor that requires a long-term strategy which outlines necessary steps, goals, and how they can be achieved. Sustainable development needs to be persistently pursued over a long period of time despite potential changes of government. Jacobs (2011) shows that governments are usually reluctant to take short-term measures if benefits are only visible in the long-term due to two main reasons: First, unpleasant short-term measures involve the risk of not being reelected. Second, its effects are hard to predict due to the complexity of the issue. A long-term strategy might overcome this dilemma and detach sustainable development from political election cycles. Moreover, formulating concrete goals helps stakeholders and civil society to constantly remind, question and push governments to take action in order to achieve national goals (Jacobs, 2011).

Already in 1992, the Agenda 21 called for the adoption of a country-driven national strategy for sustainable development (NSDS) (UN, 2002: paragraph 8.6(d)). This requirement was repeated and stressed by the following UN summits and became one of the major pillars for governance framework for sustainable development. Most countries have responded accordingly. In 2008, 82 percent of the UN member states have implemented some sort of NSDS (Scholz, 2017).

2.3.2 Integration Principle

Second, the Agenda 2030 requires integration and coordination mechanisms across different levels of governance. Since the goals of the Agenda address a large range of issues that are

interlinked, there is a need for coordinating mechanisms and institutional bodies that allow for creating a communicative environment between the political actors involved. Integration thereby addresses a vertical and horizontal dimension. Vertical integration refers to the integration of all political-administrative levels, such as local, subnational, national and supranational levels. In many countries the integration of subnational levels is arranged by consultation activities, institutionalized mechanisms or a mix of arrangements (e.g. Hungary, the Netherlands, Germany, and Spain). With regard to institutionalized mechanisms, national or regional councils for sustainable development play an important role by integrating subnational levels in decision-making processes (De Vries, 2015).

With regard to the supranational level, I briefly discuss the role of the EU. The EU sustainable development strategy (SDS) was adopted in 2001 and revised in 2006 and 2009. However, the strategy has been widely criticized for "lacking ownership and governance mechanisms for implementation" (Gregersen, 2016:8). Consequently, it has not been actively pursued since then. Instead, the Europe 2020 strategy was identified as the key document to implement the SDGs. However, the growth-centered Europe 2020 strategy cannot be seen as a sustainable development strategy that pushes implementation of the SDGs in the member states. Some of the key challenges for sustainable development are either poorly or not addressed at all (Hackenesch, 2016). The role of the EU thus cannot be seen as coercive in a sense that it actively drives the implementation of the SDGs in the member states. It is rather engaged in streamlining and coordinating the process of implementation. In this regard, the European commission conducts annual growth surveys to monitor national efforts and gives country specific recommendations (Pisano et al., 2015).

Horizontal integration refers to coordination between multiple sectors, such as economic, environmental and social, within the governments. The achievement of the SDGs requires breaking up silos and achieving better policy coherence between different ministries (Niestroy, 2016).

Horizontal integration mainly addresses the issue of policy coherence. The Agenda 2030 shifted the understanding from policy coherence for sustainable development (PCD) to policy coherence for *sustainable* development (PCSD). Although both terms sound similar their concepts differ from each other. PCD was developed to achieve the aid-centric approach of the Millennium development goals. It calls on states to review their national policies with regard to negative externalities on development countries. Policies should do "no-harm" and not counteract development processes in low- and middle-income countries. This principle mainly targeted western trade policies such as export subsidies that were criticized to undermine local markets in development countries and to jeopardize development processes.

Consequently, policy coherence was understood to be one-directional, meaning that all policies should be subordinated under the axiom of achieving the millennium development goals (Gregersen, 2016).

The new PCSD concept regards policy coherence to be multi-directional and acknowledges that sustainable development has many dimensions that need to be addressed in a balanced and integrated manner. Ministries thus need to cooperate with each other beyond thematic silos. The new concept puts states under pressure to improve communication platforms between ministries and to follow a "nexus-approach", meaning to find thematic interrelations between issues and to address them in a cooperative manner. Achieving policy coherence is considered to be one of the biggest challenges of achieving the Agenda 2030 (Mackie et al., 2017, Pisano et al., 2015).

To ensure the process of horizontal integration countries developed rather "comparable forms of inter-ministerial and cross-departmental mechanisms" (De Vries, 2015: 11). Most countries have inter-ministerial working groups in place in order to overcome silo-thinking. Additionally, many countries have sustainable development councils or committees that actively steer the implementation of sustainable development across different policy sectors. Responsibility for this process is usually assigned to a national ministry. In most countries the ministry for environment fulfills this task (e.g. France, Belgium, the Netherlands), whereas in most development countries, a dedicated ministry of planning is put in charge. However, there are some important exceptions. In some countries the implementation process is led by the presidential administration (e.g. Germany, Austria, Mexico). This is an indicator that sustainable development is treated as a salient issue that receives special attention and political support.

2.3.3 Participation Principle

Third, the implementation of sustainable development requires participation mechanisms for stakeholders, such as civil society, businesses and academia. The ambiguity of the concept of sustainable development requires constant adaptation to changing circumstances and redefinition of goals and targets. In this regard, civil society is an important driver for national implementation. Good governance structures integrate stakeholders in decision making processes and foster interactive processes of societal dialogue and reflection.

Moreover, the implementation of sustainable development addresses the whole society. As Timmermanns put it in his speech at the sustainable development summit in 2015: "Societies will only accept transformation if people feel their voices have been heard." (Timmermanns, 2015)

The integration mechanisms for stakeholders thereby vary across states. Participatory activities can be informational, consultative or decisional, and institutional forms range from permanent Councils to ad-hoc informative or consultative actions. In the EU nine member states have implemented institutionalized Councils for sustainable development to integrate all stakeholders in the decision making process (De Vries et al. 2015).

2.3.4 Reflexivity Principle

Fourth, since promoting sustainable development is a long-term process, the implementation of reflexive processes is crucial to ensure "continuous reflection and policy learning" (Pisano et al, 2015: 27). The reflexivity principle basically needs to be translated into effective monitoring and review mechanisms (Lange, 2015). These mechanisms allow adjusting the strategy to current developments and new challenges. Moreover they are important to assess the level and quality of implementation, identify gaps, and share best practices (Lange, 2015). In this regard I distinguish between two monitoring mechanisms.

First, there is a need for a quantitative monitoring. States need to translate sustainable development into concrete quantifiable targets. Usually this task is undertaken by a statistical office that also provides regular progress reports (e.g. Belgium, Portugal, Germany). In some countries the process of monitoring is embedded ion national law (e.g. Belgium, Hungary). Less stringent and more flexible procedures are on place for instance in Ireland and the Netherlands.

Second, there is a need for qualitative monitoring. The government should regularly publish qualitative reports on their efforts to promote sustainable development on national level. I consider this to be an important mechanism that incentivizes governments to take action and gives other stakeholders leverage to push governments to meet their goals. In most countries the government has to publish reports every two years (e.g. Germany). Annual reporting is required for instance in Norway, Switzerland or Latvia.

3 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I outline my governance-centered theoretical framework on why and under which conditions countries comply with the SDGs. To approach this question, I first draw from existing theories from international law (IL) and international relations (IR) scholars that deal with the question of why states comply with non-binding international commitments. The Agenda 2030 is a voluntary commitment and thus does put governments under no legal obligation to implement the goals in their national legal system (Biermann, 2017).

From IL perspective, one of the major contributions to compliance theory of "soft law" is the reputational approach (Guzman, 2002). It argues that reputational concerns are the principal mechanism for a high level of compliance (Downs, 2002). The underlying logic is the following: "a state that violates international law develops a bad reputation, which leads other states to exclude the violator form future cooperative opportunities. Anticipating a loss of future gains, states will often comply with international rules that are not in their immediate interests" (Brewster, 2009: 231).

From IR perspective we can distinguish between two theoretical strands: Constructivism and rationalism. According to rationalism, states are self-interested and base their decision to comply on a cost-benefit calculation. In contrast, constructivism stresses the importance of norms. Compliance is considered to be an international norm where norm-deviant behavior is punished with shaming by other states.

I argue that while these scholars are strong in explaining compliant behavior, they lack in explaining variation between countries. IL and IR theories mainly treat compliance as a dichotomous variable. However, in the case of the Agenda 2030, we observe a general high commitment of countries to comply. In order to capture country-specific differences compliance therefore needs to be treated as continuous variable, since defection does not seem to be an option for most of the countries. Moreover, explanatory variables are mostly contextual, such as capacities, legitimacy and reputation and neglect the impact of governance frameworks (Wai Hang, 2014).

In my theoretical framework, I therefore focus on the governance structures and explain why and how they matter with regard to compliance of the requirements of the Agenda 2030. I argue that they provide incentives for commitment to comply that drive the implementation process. Good governance structures provide material or immaterial incentives. They can occur as pull or push factors such as international reputation (pull) or endogenous pressure on domestic level (push). I argue that good governance structures are a good indicator for commitment to comply since they allow to internalize the goals and to create incentives for driving the implementation process.

3.1 Literature review: Why do states comply with non-legally binding international agreements?

3.1.1 Definitions

Compliance is defined as "a state of conformity of identity between an actor's behavior and a specified rule". Some authors go further and link the concept with the level of influence an

agreement has on state behavior (Downs et al., 1996). Compliance is closely related to two concepts: implementation and effectiveness. Implementation is the process of putting international commitments into practice and adopting domestic regulation to facilitate compliance (Ivanova et al., 2013). This includes the passage of legislation, creation of institutions and enforcement of rules. Effectiveness is associated with the degree to which a rule induces actual changes in behavior, or a policy objective has been achieved (Raustiala, 2002).

Regarding compliance with the Agenda 2030, I primarily focus on the implementation dimension. Considering its recent adoption two years ago, the evaluation of effectiveness of the states' measures cannot be assessed yet and requires extensive, additional research in the future.

At this early stage, I approximate compliance with the Agenda 2030 with *commitment to comply*, which captures a state's engagement and motivation to implement the requirements of the Agenda 2030, in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030. I assume that states that are already committed to comply will in the end more likely comply with the Agenda 2030 and achieve the sustainable development goals.

By reviewing contributions from international law (IL) and international relations (IR) scholars I outline and assess theoretical mechanisms that might foster and explain states' commitment to comply. A special focus is thereby put on environmental accords due to their similarities to the Agenda 2030.

3.1.2 International Law theory

In contrast to IR, IL scholars traditionally distinguish between compliance with treaties and compliance with commitments or soft law driven by different factors (Guzman, 2002). While the former often prescribes legal obligations, including some sort of enforcement mechanisms, the latter does not provide such mechanisms and non-compliance cannot be sanctioned (Howse & Teitel, 2010).

A large bulk of the IL literature thus deals with the questions of what mechanisms explain compliance with non-legally binding commitments. In this regard, mainly two strands emerged, focusing on the (1) nature of the commitment and (2) the characteristics and activities of the state.

With respect to the nature of the commitment several authors focus on the legitimacy of agreements as mechanism that drives compliant behavior of states (Brunée, 2010; Chayes & Chayes, 1993, Franck 1990; Jacobsson & Weiss, 1995; Krumm 2004, Raustiala, 2002,). The legitimacy of an agreement can exert a "compliance pull" (Raustiala, 2002: 541) on

governments if it fulfills certain criteria: First, legality, implying that addressees of international law obey to it; second, subsidiarity, implying that the hierarchical level is the most suitable to deal with the issue at stake and third, adequate participation during the formation process.

Applying those criteria to the Agenda 2030, I expect a high legitimacy. The targets are voluntary and put the addressees under no legal obligation. However, sustainable development is a global matter and the UN therefore the adequate institution to deal with this issue. Moreover, participation in the forerun to the SDGs was high. The SDG were formatted by an open working-group in which 49 countries participated (Pisano, 2015). Compared to the former MDG, that were conceptualized by the UN secretary, the more inclusive formation process of the SDG has increased ownership within countries and thus legitimacy. Based on the legitimate theory, I therefore expect a general high commitment to comply.

With regard to characteristics and activities of a state, reputation is considered to be one of the key drivers for compliance. Guzman (2002) puts forward a model that is explained as follows: “A reputational model of compliance suggests that international commitments affect state’s behavior because other states believe that the first state has a commitment that it must honor. A failure to honor that commitment hurts a state's reputation because it signals that it is prepared to breach its obligations. This implies a definition that turns on the existence of an obligation in the eyes of other states rather than the conventional requirements of state practice and a sense of legal obligation felt by the breaching state” (Guzman 2002).

By analyzing international monetary law, Simmons (2000) supports his hypothesis and finds regional patterns of compliance. Governments comply if other countries in their region do so. According to his analysis, competitive market forces lead to a “race to the top” within one region and are more significant explanatory variable than exogenous policy pressure from international organizations.

With regard to the Agenda 2030 I consider reputational concerns to be rather low. On the one side, the global governance structure relies strongly on partnership, international cooperation and review process by international organizations, which increases international visibility and comparability between countries. However, this effect should not be overestimated. Downs (2002) provides evidence that reputational consequences in case of non-compliance are rather weak and suggests to not to overestimate its effect. Since the Agenda does not yet have a high saliency on international level, it is doubtful that countries have to fear consequences in case of defection. I therefore regard reputation as an incentive for states to increase their international visibility rather than a push factor that puts international pressure on states to comply. However, I test whether regional patterns play a role and EU member states are more committed to comply than other countries.

3.1.3 International Relations theory

IR scholar provides a variety of approaches to explain states' compliance with international commitments, including rationalist, constructivist and institutionalist perspectives (Lutmar et al., 2016). They vary with respect to the examined explanatory variables. While rationalists focus on preferences, power and saliency, constructivists emphasize the role of norms whereas institutionalists stress the importance of domestic structures.

Rationalists assume that states are generally willing to comply and regard non-compliance as the deviant behavior than the other way around. Keohane (1992) and Chayes and Chayes (1993) argue that most commitments are convenient for states, since they were already made based on calculation of interests. States only engage in a commitment if they are consistent with their interests. A large bulk of the literature thus focuses on the conditions under which states do not comply. Chayes and Chayes (1993) suggests three "causes of non-compliance": First, ambiguity and indeterminacy of treaty language, implying that goals are not clearly states and leave room for interpretation; second, limitations on the capacity of parties to carry out their undertakings, implying that states need to provide sufficient bureaucratic capacities and financial resources to implement the requirements, and third, the temporal dimension of the social and economic changes, which recognizes that transition needs time, especially if nationally embedded economic and social interests are at stake (Chayes and Chayes, 1993).

All three criteria can be applied to the Agenda 2030. The targets and goals are quite ambiguous and need to be translated into concrete national targets. This requires considerable capacities, especially since pursuing sustainable development is a long-term process and requires strategic planning and persistence. Moreover, implementing sustainable development might yield benefits in the long run but requires unpopular decisions in the short run. For instance, necessary measures might involve increasing costs for unsustainable conventional means of transports, such as gasoline cars.

I argue that good governance structures are less vulnerable to these factors. The better the governance structures, the better the capacities to translate the ambiguous goals into the national context and to create incentives to overcome necessary economic and social changes despite vested interests. These mechanisms will be further explained in my theoretical framework.

The role of norms has equally been widely discussed. States can comply with norms instrumentally to signal that they have adapted to a social environment following a logic of consequence (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Norms can also lead to changes in state interests, behavior and identity, following a logic of appropriateness. In this regard, Checkel (2005)

provides a similar dichotomy. He distinguishes between two types of internalization. Type I describes whether actors know what is socially accepted in a given setting. Type II goes further and describes whether actors do not only adopt appropriate behavior but also the interests and identity of a given issue.

The causal mechanism through which norms operate is defined as socialization which in turn results "from long-term participation in a norm governed process" (Rustiala, 2002: 546). With regard to the Agenda 2030, norms play an important role. The resolution itself can be considered as norm but the question in what way these norms are internalized and implemented into national law by states is at stake.

International socialization occurs most likely within institutions (Checkel, 2005). Kelley (2015) argues that normative internalization mainly comes through social pressure and stresses monitoring to be the critical mechanism. Systematic monitoring allows ranking and comparing states with each other which in turn induces social pressure. Since conventional enforcement mechanisms, such as coercive sanctions or coercive, do not apply to voluntary commitments, monitoring can expose norm-deviant behavior and raise social pressure through shaming .

On UN level, the relevant monitoring mechanism for the Agenda 2030 is the high-level political forum (HLPF). It was established in 2016 to monitor and review states' efforts to implement the Agenda 2030 on national level and replaced the old UN's Commission on Sustainable Development." (UN, 2013: para. 2).

The HLPF meets annually at the ministerial level under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). During the meetings, states can voluntarily report on their efforts to implement the Agenda. At the first round, 22 countries have volunteered to present their national implementation efforts to the HLPF. In 2017 and 2018, 59 more states are expected to participate in the review process (Beisheim, 2016). The considerably high number of countries participating exceeded the expectations. However, this number has to be put into perspective: The 81 participating states by 2018 only represent 41% of the countries that have committed to the Agenda 2030.

The influence of the HLPF has been discussed controversially. Some authors regard the institutional construction of the HLPF as relatively weak. Beisheim (2015) criticizes the lack of institutional capacities and authority to conduct a credible review process. Others have argued that the HLPF exerts other kinds of influence such as orchestration (Abbot et al. 2015): The theory implies that stakeholders use the mechanism indirectly to use soft modes of influence to put pressure on states (Abbott et al., 2017).

I consider the HLPF to be a pull factor that indicates commitment rather than a push factor. The social pressure to participate on countries is relatively weak. However, participation can

increase international reputation. I therefore expect countries that already have made efforts on national level to implement the SDGs to be more likely to volunteer in the review process. I underpin my argument by consulting voluntary club theory (Potoski & Prakash, 2005). Due to its universal nature, the Agenda 2030 and implementing sustainable development can be seen as a club, which provides non-rival but excludable benefits for members. Participating in the HLPF can signal commitment to the Agenda 2030. It becomes more attractive for outsiders to join the higher the reputation within the club. I therefore expect the HLPF to become more important in the future the more members that are highly respected on international level are engaging.

In my theoretical framework I primarily focus on good governance structures. Institutionalists have focused on domestic structures as explanatory variable for a long time (Cortell, 2000; Simmons, 1998; Koh, 1997,).

IR theory has already focused on domestic structures as explanatory variable for compliance (Koh, 1997; Cortell 2000). Koh (1997) analyzes the "process of interaction, interpretation, and internalization of international norms into domestic legal systems" and argues that this is "pivotal to understanding why nations "obey" international law (Koh, 1997: 2603). Her institutionalist research yields that the interpretation of global norms, and internalizing them into domestic law, leads to reconstruction of national interests, and eventually national identities.

3.2 Hypotheses

Why are states committed to comply with the Agenda 2030? In my analysis I focus on good governance structures as explanatory variable and test it against different approaches that have been brought up in the literature.

My first hypothesis therefore focuses on the effect of good governance structures as main driver for commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030:

H1: The better a state's governance structures, the higher the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030

I argue that good governance structures provide certain compliance mechanisms, which are defined as "any institution or set of institutions (formal or informal) established by a public authority for the purpose of encouraging compliance with one of more behavioral prescriptions" (Young, 2013: 5). The Agenda 2030 can be regarded as a behavioral prescription for UN member states to implement the SDGs on national level. In this regard, Young (2013) specifies three compliance mechanisms: (1) punishment or rewards, (2) inspection systems

operating to reduce the probability of subjects engaging in undetected violations and (3) the keeping of public records so that subjects violating prescriptions will "subsequently be burdened with records of noncompliant behavior" (Young 2013: 5). On national level, good governance structures institutionalize these mechanisms. A long-term vision outlines the government's strategy to implement sustainable development. In this context, defection or non-action to achieve these goals can be punished through shaming by stakeholders. This effect is assumed to be stronger the better stakeholders are incorporated into decision-making processes. Integration of different policy sectors and levels can be seen as inspection system. Since the implementation of sustainable development needs to operate beyond silos, every ministry or policy level concerned can double check whether a measure meets or contradicts the premise of promoting sustainable development. Reflexive processes allow for keeping record of progress and can expose (missing) governmental action. Even the existence of regular reporting mechanisms can incentivize governments to take action, since they anticipate that they have to deliver. All these principles combined constitute a comprehensive compliance system that is expected to increase a state's commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030.

In addition, I test three alternative hypotheses, that might explain high commitment to comply. First, I add the post-materialist hypotheses that more developed countries are more committed to comply:

H2: The higher a state's stage of development, the higher the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030

The argument is the following: "under conditions of continuously expanding economic and personal security, younger generations will be less oriented to acquiring material goods and more committed than their older peers to attaining postmaterial social goals such as increased free self-expression and a healthy natural environment" (Booth, 2017:1). I expect sustainable development to be a more salient issue in highly developed countries, who should therefore be more committed to comply with the Agenda 2030.

Secondly, I test the effect of democratic structures on the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030:

H3: The higher a state's level of democracy, the higher the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030

Simmons (1998) argues that regime type matter and suggests that liberal democracies tend to be more willing to internalize international rules since they more likely "depend on the rule of

law for their external affairs." (Simmons, 1998: 11). By quantitatively testing commitment towards environmental agreements, Neumayer (2002) provides empirical evidence for his hypotheses that democracies show a stronger environmental commitment than non-democracies. I will include these findings into my model.

Thirdly, I test whether a state's capacities make a difference with regard to commitment to comply:

H4: The higher a state's capacities, the higher the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030

Many authors bring forward the important role of capacities for the implementation of environmental policies (Jänicke, 2002; Schwartz 2003). A common definition of capacity is the ability of states "to implement official goals, especially over the opposition of powerful social groups, or in the face of difficult economic circumstances" (Evans et al., 1985). By analyzing the implementation of environmental policies in different regions Schwartz (2003) finds empirical evidence that state capacity plays an important causal role for compliance.

Thirdly,

Additionally I test the EU's influence on the likelihood to comply with the Agenda 2030. Although the EU does not exert coercive pressure it has a normative influence and puts social pressure on its member states to pursue sustainable development. In this regard, Anaya et al. (2015) find evidence that within poorly institutionalized issues such as human rights, member states converge towards the discursive and normative agenda of their organization.

However, within the EU, I expect socialization effects to be relatively weak. The European Commission has failed to take ownership of the Agenda and has not adopted a new sustainable development strategy that adequately meets the requirements of the Agenda 2030. Many authors therefore do not regard the EU as a driver that puts social pressure on its member states to implement sustainable development (Niestroy, 2016).

4 Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of my methodological approach, including the data collection process, the operationalization of my variables and the use of methodological instruments. In order to analyze in what way states have implemented good governance structures for sustainable development and how they affect commitment to comply I generated a dataset on governance structures in 77 countries worldwide, including all OECD and EU countries. I thereby combined information from different kind of sources. Capturing

and measuring the many dimensions of the independent variables *good governance for sustainable development* and the dependent variable *commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030* is thereby of crucial importance for my research and receives special attention in this chapter.

4.1 Data collection

For the data collection of my thesis I combined multiple primary as well as secondary sources. In order to get country-level information on governance structures for sustainable development I particularly relied on the four types of sources.

Firstly, I evaluated the results from a qualitative survey of the German Foreign Office on the state of implementation of the Agenda 2030 in 53 countries of all continents worldwide. Table 2 provides an overview of the sample:

Continent	Country
Europe	Finland, UK, Italy, Norway, Poland, Turkey, Sweden
Africa	Egypt, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Kenya, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South-Africa, Tanzania. Tunisia, Uganda
America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa-Rica, Guatemala, Canada, Mexico, Peru, USA
Asia	Bangladesh, China, Georgia, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, South-Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Singapore. Thailand, Viet Nam, United Arab Emirates
Oceania	Australia, New-Zealand, South-Pacific Islands

Table 2: Countries covered by survey

The surveys targeted the German foreign representations and embassies in these countries that were asked to answer questions on governance structures for sustainable development and the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the respective countries. To provide adequate information, the foreign representations consulted government officials as well as public sources. The surveys were returned in March 2017 and thus reflect a very recent state of implementation. I was fortunate to be allowed to use this data for this thesis. The survey offers a unique opportunity to get access to data from countries, where it is usually difficult to obtain valid information due to language barriers, poor media coverage or non-responsive public institutions.

Secondly, in order to complete information on governance structures in European countries I consulted the database of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN). The ESDN brings together government officials of all European countries that are responsible for sustainable development strategies and policies in their countries with the aim to facilitate the exchange of good practices. The database provides information on every European country (not only EU) and is regularly updated by the research institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (ESDN, 2017).

Thirdly, I analyzed national review reports of countries that have already actively participated in the high-level political forum (HLPF). The HLPF is the international review mechanism of the UN to monitor the implementation if the Agenda 2030. In this context, countries can voluntarily report on their efforts to comply with the Agenda 2030 once a year. To date 66 countries have presented national reports on the implementation of the Agenda 2030 that include information on the domestic governance structures to implement sustainable development (Beisheim, 2015).

Finally, I completed my dataset by conducting semi-structured expert interviews with three researchers and two high-level policy makers. The consulted researchers work in the field of governance for sustainable development and could provide profound knowledge on governance structures in different countries. The high-level policy makers provided insights on the effect of governance mechanisms and the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed in order to extract information and quotes for this thesis. Upon request, I warranted anonymity to my sources which is why I refer to my interview partners as respondent 1,2,3,4 and 5.

The number of interviews might to seem small. However, for my research I mainly rely on quantitative data and use the interviews for additional background information and to get insights on the measured phenomenon. For this purpose I consider the number of interviews to be sufficient. Their contribution of the interviews to this thesis is threefold:

Firstly, in case where information of the surveys was fragmented or ambiguous, my interviewees provided valuable information to complete my dataset on governance structures. Since the surveys did not cover most of the European and OECD countries in my sample, I particularly relied on the qualitative interviews in these cases. Secondly, the interviews served to get qualitative insights in order to understand underlying mechanisms and motives behind the sheer numbers of my quantitative data. In particular, deviant country-cases sometimes leave questions that cannot be answered without having further insights. Explanations and insights from the interviews are therefore included into the analytical part. Thirdly, my variables of interests, good governance for sustainable development and commitment to

comply are both complex concepts that need to be operationalized through measurable indicators. Through my interviews I verified and tested whether my indicators are adequate. For this reason, I included questions whether the interviewee thinks that the proposed indicator captures well the concept of interest.

4.2 Operationalization of variables and choice of method

The operationalization of my dependent and independent variables is of crucial importance since I measure latent constructs. This means that they cannot be observed but need to be composed.

In order to answer my first research question to outline to what extent states have good governance structures for sustainable development in place, I descriptively analyze the governance structures of the 77 countries in my sample. For this purpose I generated the *Governance for SD Index*, which also serves as independent variable in my second research question.

The Index draws on the analytical framework I outlined in chapter 2.3. I argued that good governance structures need to respect four principles such as providing a long-term strategy, ensuring horizontal and vertical integration of different policy sectors and levels, fostering participation of civil society and guaranteeing reflexivity by establishing quantitative and qualitative monitoring mechanisms. I identified a number of measureable indicators for each principle and argue that combined they capture and adequately reflect the governance structure. The indicators are thereby mostly binary and coded with 0 or 1. The added value is devised by the number of measured indicators and yields a number between 0 and 1. All values combined from each indicators yield the governance for SD index. The exact composition and choice of indicators is outlined in the following:

The long-term principle is operationalized by two indicators: Firstly, I evaluated whether a state has a national development strategy (NSDS) in place. A strategy that defines long-term goals and measurable targets is crucial to pursue a complex and long-term goals such as sustainable development and to make it independent from electoral cycles. Secondly, I analyze whether the NSDS corresponds to the current definition of sustainable development. Fur this purpose, I assessed whether the NSDS sufficiently regards sustainable development as interlinked target system, meaning that it addresses all three dimensions, such as environmental, social and economic.

For the integration principle, I analyzed states' institutionalized governance structures to steer sustainable development across all policy levels and issues. States naturally vary with regard to

their governances structures due to historical and cultural reasons. However, I identified certain governance elements that arguably facilitate policy integration and communication between relevant actors. The elements correspond to common viewpoints in the governance literature and were confirmed by my interview partners to adequately measure the dimension of interest.

With regard to the horizontal integration, I first assess whether institutionalized inter-ministerial working groups to discuss issues of sustainable development are in place. The existence of such mechanism is an indicator that governments incentivize working across different ministries in order to break up "silo-thinking". Many countries have inter-ministerial working groups in place. They constitute the minimum requirement for fostering policy coherence. Secondly, the existence of a steering committee or council that actively drives the implementation of the NSDS is taken into account and added to the index. The benefit of an institutionalized steering committee for policy integration is evident. It usually includes officials from every ministry and is in charge of proposing concrete measures across all levels to achieve the national targets. In Germany, this task is assigned to the states' secretary committee for sustainable development. It is chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery who is in charge of implementing the NSDS (Bundesregierung, 2016). Thirdly, some countries have an additional technical committee, which supports ministries in fulfilling their duty to promote sustainable development. With regard to vertical integration, I analyzed whether states provide institutionalized mechanisms for vertical integration of sub national administrative entities. These mechanisms include awarding seats in relevant councils and committees or regular meetings to align national and sub-national efforts.

For the participation mechanism, I assessed in what way states are including civil society and stake holders into decision-making processes. In this regard I included three items: First, whether civil society is regularly consulted before decisions are taken, second, whether the government regularly organizes conferences to give civil society a platform, third whether there is an institutionalized mechanism, such as a national council for sustainable development. The latter is considered to be a driver on national level by constantly pushing the government to take action.

For the reflexivity principle, I analyzed two distinct mechanisms that foster continuous reflection and policy learning. First, I assessed whether states have a quantitative monitoring mechanism in place. States need to translate sustainable development into quantifiable targets that are constantly monitored. Usually this task is undertaken by a statistical office that provides regular reports on the progress. Accordingly, my first reflexivity item captures whether a statistical office exists and meets these normative requirements. Secondly, I

assessed whether states have a qualitative monitoring mechanism. The government should regularly publish qualitative reports on their efforts to promote sustainable development on national level. I consider this to be an important mechanism that incentivizes governments to take action and gives other stakeholders leverage to push governments to meet their goals. My second item therefore captures if and how frequently governments have to submit regular reports on sustainable development.

For the second research question I test the effect of governance structures on the commitment to comply with the Agenda. I test the effect by running an OLS regression and account for potential confounding variables that might have an effect on states' commitment to comply. Particularly, I test the confounding effect of a state's level of development (H2), level of democracy (H3), state's capacities (H4) and membership of the EU.

Measuring and operationalizing my dependent variable commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030 is a complex endeavor. Commitment can express in multiple ways and has many facets. As with the *governance for SD index* I operationalize this latent construct by consulting different variables that indicate commitment which are illustrated in table 3.

Indicator	Operationalization
High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)	Participation in the HLPF (2016-2018)
Administrative Changes	State has made adminsitrative changes in response to the Agenda 2030
Commitment of Head of State	Prime minister actively steers the implementation of the Agenda 2030
Revision of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)	State has adjusted its NSDS to the Agenda 2030

Table 3: Indicators for the Commitment to Comply Index

Most importantly, I consider the participation within the high-level political forum (HLPF) to be a strong indicator for commitment. The HLPF is the recently established UN review mechanism to monitor national progress to implement the Agenda 2030. In 2016 it replaced the annual ministerial review (AMR) that reviewed progress of the MDGs. According, to one of my interview partners the old mechanism was a lot of showcasing of developing success. The UN secretariat chose a number of developing countries that were asked to report on their national progress towards the achievement of the MDG (respondent 4). The new mechanism is much

more driven by the UN member states. Participation is on a voluntary basis and not conditional for receiving any aid or support. Thus, a state's decision to participate in the HLPF can be seen as a valid sign for commitment. For the indicator I take into account the years 2016 to 2018.

As a second indicator for commitment I use whether a country has made any administrative-institutional changes in response to the Agenda. I argue that administrative-institutional changes are necessary in order to comply with the Agenda 2030. They are thus a first sign that states are committed to the new Agenda. Administrative changes include setting up structures or institutions, adopting new strategy paper, programs or projects, changing national legislation if necessary, appointing responsible agents for the implementation or making budgetary changes. Administrative changes are reacting to the Agenda and indicate that they take the implementation seriously. I do not weigh these changes nor evaluate the efficiency or necessity of the taken measures.

The fourth commitment indicator captures whether a state has renewed or revised its NSDS in response to the Agenda 2030. I thereby take into account that states might have anticipated the Agenda and already revised their NSDS shortly before its official adoption in 2015.

Lastly, I consider a state's decision to put the responsibility for the national implementation of the Agenda to be a strong indicator for commitment. It implies that a state regards the implementation of the Agenda 2030 as a key priority that should be dealt with at the highest political level.

Regarding the interpretation of the values it is important to note that I treat dependent and independent variables as interval-scaled continuous variables. The underlying assumption is that the differences between points on the index are equal, which implies that the difference between a value of 0,7 and 0,8 has the same meaning as between 0,5 and 0,6. However, I can only interpret the intervals of the values but not the ratio. For instance, it is not accurate to argue that State A with a score of 0.8 does have twice as good governance structures as state B with a score of 0.4. The treatment as continuous variables allows computing relevant statistical measures such as the mean or the standard deviation.

4.3 Reflection on reliability and validity of the data

In this section, I briefly reflect on the quality of my data and how I dealt with methodological challenges. Firstly, my dataset contains information of 77 countries from all continents. Although this seems to be a fairly high number of cases it barely covers the entire population of 193 countries that have committed to the Agenda 2030. In order to draw conclusion from this sample to the overall population, my country cases would have needed to be chosen

randomly. However, this is not the case. Considering the complicated data generating process in some countries I had to rely on the available data from the survey to which I added additional country cases from the remaining OECD and EU countries. Information is not equally well accessible in every country, which is why I decided to rely on the cases for which I have valid data. Due to this trade-off (valid data vs. high sample size) my sample is slightly biased which is why my analysis faces a considerable limitation. Nevertheless, the country cases cover every continent and can be used descriptively to get an impression on how states have implemented good governance structures for sustainable development.

Secondly, due to the slightly biased sample I decided to only include countries that are members of the OECD for my quantitative analysis. As a result, the explanatory power of my results is low for the whole world population but high for countries within the OECD.

Thirdly, the sheer existence of governance structures does not necessarily imply efficiency. My governance for SD index however only considers whether a certain mechanism is in place and does not account for how effectively it is used. Therefore, in order to increase validity of my index, I included qualitative indicators for each governance principle. I thereby consulted information from the Sustainable Governance Index (SGI) from the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Every two years, the Bertelsmann Stiftung gathers qualitative data on governance structures from all OECD countries. It assesses three different dimensions such as Governance, Policy Performance and Democracies in all OECD and EU countries. For each dimension the SGI collects multiple indicators and ranks countries on a scale from 0 to 10. The data is thereby provided by two experts per country. The SGI allows including a qualitative dimension in my sample for every OECD and EU countries. I consider this to be an important asset since the sheer existence of good governance elements only restrictively captures whether the efficiency of a governance framework (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016).

Considering the precautions taken, I consider my data to be highly reliable and valid.

5 Findings

In this chapter I test my hypotheses and present the results of my analysis. The chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first is dedicated to a descriptive analysis of all countries in my dataset. I coded 77 countries worldwide, including all OECD countries. My descriptive analysis reveals that most countries already have decent good governance structures in place. However, there are differences among regions and governance issues. States from Europe and America tend to have better governance for SD structures than states from Asia and Africa.

Especially African states often lack in good governance structures that would be required for implementing the Agenda 2030. However, due to the relatively low number of cases in some continents, this thesis cannot make any more general claims about the link between continents and governance structure.

For my predictive analysis I only include states from the OECD due to the poor data situation in many of the other country-cases. My OLS regression provides empirical evidence for my hypotheses that governance structures affect states' commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030. The effect of good governance proves to be a strong and more accurate predictor than other variables, such as state of development, capacity, level of democracy or SD tradition. My findings therefore emphasize the importance of governance for the implementation of the SDGs.

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

I start off by outlining and reflecting on the data I used for the descriptive analysis (see Figure 2). My case selection contains 77 countries which I broadly assigned to five continent categories based on their origin. As seen in Figure 2, the sample is slightly biased. It includes significantly more countries from Europe (32), than America (10), Asia (23) or Africa (12). For this reasons and since cases have not been selected randomly, it is not representative for the overall population of countries in the world. However, I consider the selection to be adequate to provide an impression on the different state of implementation of governance structures among countries. A comprehensive list of countries can be found in Annex IV.

I consider the Europe category to be fairly homogenous, since it contains all members of the EU, plus non-members with a similar cultural background, such as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Turkey. By contrast, other categories tend to be more heterogeneous. The America category incorporates countries from North (USA, Canada), Middle (e.g. Mexico, Guatemala) and South-America (e.g. Argentina, Brasil, Peru). Equally, the other categories include various regions that vary with respect to their cultural-historic background. Asia encompasses countries from the Middle-East (e.g. Iran, Israel), Central Asia (e.g. China, Mongolia) and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific Islands). Africa includes Arabic (e.g. Tunesia, Egypt) and non-Arabic countries (e.g. Tanzania, South-Africa). However, a more differentiated classification would have led to more categories containing even fewer cases. That would have made the categorization into continents or regions obsolete and decreased explanatory power.

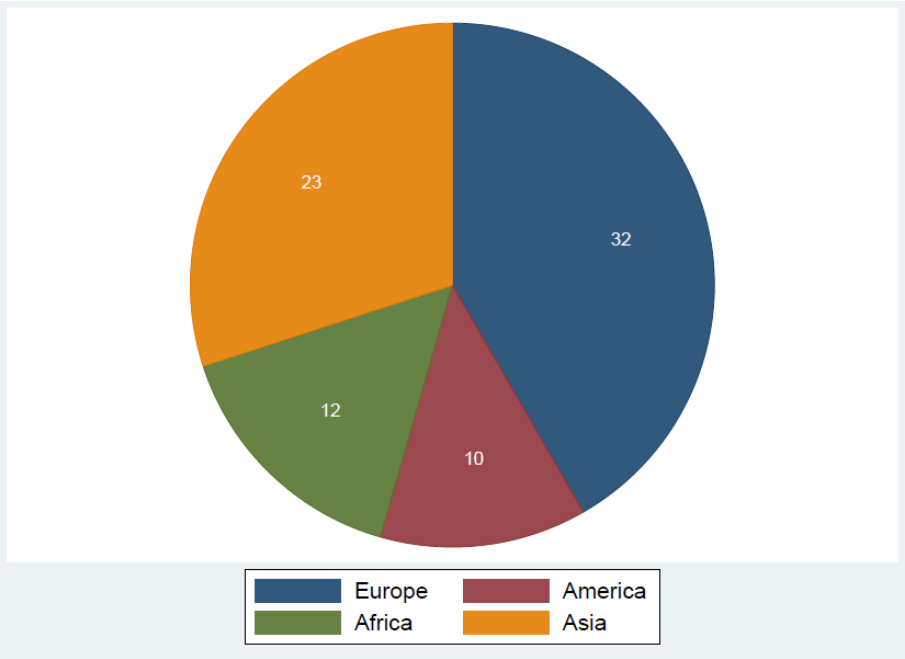

Figure 2: Observations in the sample by continents

This section provides a descriptive analysis in what way good governance structures that are considered to be important to pursue sustainable development on national level are in place. I thereby apply my analytical framework (Chapter 2.3) that suggests four good governance principles: long-term, integration, participation and reflexivity. I counted the number of governance structures in place for each of those principles and calculated the average for each continent in my sample. The presented score does not contain any information on how well these principles are embedded in the political system.

Table 4 provides an overview of the existence of governance structures within the five continents of my analysis. It shows the number of cases (N), mean and standard deviation (sd) for each principles by continents.

With regard to the long-term principle my indicator captures whether a state has implemented a long-term strategy to pursue sustainable development on national level and whether it fulfills basic qualitative standards such as the interlinkage of all dimensions of sustainable development.

The descriptive analysis yields an almost perfect score for the European countries. The clear result is however not surprising since the European Commission has already prescribed its member states to adopt a NSDS in 2007 and conducts regular follow-up evaluations since then. Also in states from other continents the long-term principle has been quite consistently implemented on national level. Asian countries thereby rank second (0,86), followed by America (0,8) and Africa (0,7).

Continent	Statistics	Long-term Principle	Integration Principle	Participation Principle	Reflexivity Principle	Governance for SD Index
Europe	**N**	32	32	32	32	32
	Mean	0,97	0,57	0,77	0,82	0,78
	SD	0,12	0,16	0,2	0,15	0,11
America	**N**	10	10	9	9	9
	Mean	0,8	0,67	0,7	0,9	0,8
	SD	0,25	0,23	0,32	0,08	0,14
Africa	**N**	12	12	12	6	6
	Mean	0,7	0,25	0,45	0,8	0,55
	SD	0,25	0,25	0,33	0,4	0,26
Asia	**N**	23	22	23	14	14
	Mean	0,86	0,55	0,59	0,72	0,68
	SD	0,2	0,21	0,3	0,35	0,18
Total	**N**	77	76	77	61	61
	Mean	0,86	0,52	0,65	0,82	0,74
	SD	0,21	0,23	0,29	0,24	0,17

Table 4: Governance for SD principles by continent

The integration principle captures in what way states have governance structures in place that allow for coordination among the ministries involved (horizontal integration) and the sub-national levels (vertical integration). Compared to the other principles, it produces on average the lowest score within all continents.

This result is in line with statements from many states that consider achieving policy coherence to be one of the biggest challenges on their way in achieving the SDGs (Bundesregierung, 2016, Mackie et al., 2017).

Africa scores particularly low (0,25), which might be related to the political systems in most African countries that barely foster communicative formats between ministries. The implementation of sustainable development in most African countries is steered by a dedicated Ministry of Planning, which is in many cases directly subordinated the precedent's administration. Inter-ministerial working groups are less pronounced which hampers policy coherence for sustainable development.

Surprisingly the countries from the American continent on average score the highest value on the participation principle index among all countries (0,67). Especially South-American countries put high efforts in ensuring integration between the ministries. Besides inter-ministerial working groups and steering committees, some countries of my dataset such as Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Chile additionally have technical committees in place. They provide

technical expertise for the implementation of sustainable development and coordinate between the different ministries.

With regard to the participation principle, I measured in what way states provide mechanisms to include civil society into their decision making processes. Mechanisms can include ad hoc or institutionalized consultations and conferences with stakeholders as well as permanent councils for sustainable development. My descriptive table suggests that especially the European countries on average provide adequate participation mechanisms to include a large range of stakeholder in their national efforts to promote sustainable development.

However, especially African (0,45) and Asian countries (0,59) score low on the participation principle. This might be explained by an overall lack of democratic participation processes and a less active civil society. Generally the standard deviation is relatively high which suggest a large dispersion of participatory arrangements among countries.

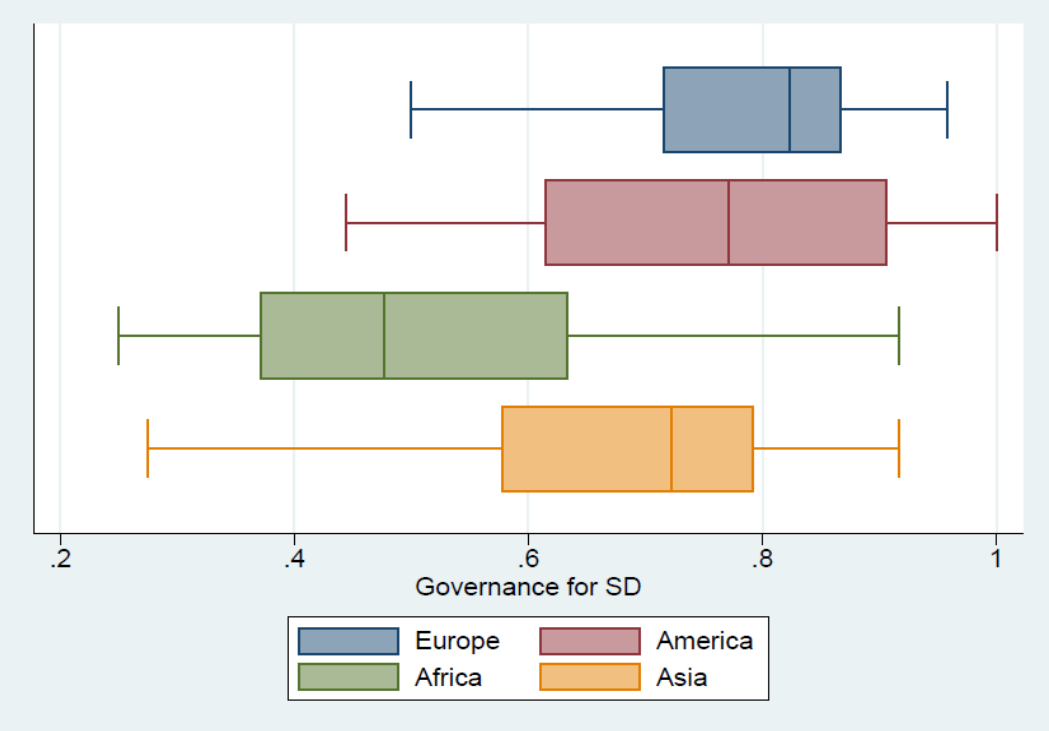

Figure 3: Distribution of Governance for SD by continents

The reflexivity principle addresses the monitoring, evaluation and strategic renewal of the national sustainable development strategies. I measured whether countries have established statistical offices or dedicated institutions to monitor quantitatively monitor national indicators for sustainable development. In this regard, the overall score is quite high, suggesting that monitoring mechanisms are in place in most countries. However, I have to be cautious about this conclusion, since only 61 out of 77 country cases were assessed with

regard to monitoring mechanisms. This is due to a lack of information in many countries. No information could indicate that no monitoring mechanisms are in place. However, to be more certain I coded these cases as missing.

The governance for SD index that puts together all principles is general quite high on average (0,74). However, I observe considerable differences between principles and regions. According to my data, there is a lack in integration (0,52) and participation mechanisms (0,65) compared to other principles.

Figure 3 graphically illustrates the distribution of the Governance for SD index for each continent through box plots. The vertical line indicates the median value. The both sides of the rectangle represent the lower and upper quartiles. The box plots show a similar high median value within the European, American and Asian categories. The median within the Africa category is much lower. This suggests that African countries on average poorly meet the good governance principles I presented in the second chapter. The standard deviation within the categories is thereby relatively high in all categories, which suggests high variation of governance structures within one category. This, however, is not surprising, considering the aggregation of countries with various political backgrounds.

5.2 Predictive Analysis

In this section, I conduct a predictive analysis on the effect of good governance structures on the commitment to comply. Thereby, I include only countries that are member of the OECD due to three reasons:

First, the standard deviation within the OECD countries is much lower than in non-OECD countries. As showed by Figure 3, the overall standard deviation within the country groups is relatively high, which suggests high variation regarding existent governance structures within one group. The Europe category thereby displays the lowest standard deviation, which indicates that cases cluster more densely around the mean. Since I conduct a quantitative analysis with a low number of cases I want my sample to have low standard deviation. Extreme cases on both sides combined with a low number of cases can strongly bias my results. In this regard, OECD countries represent the group with the lowest standard deviation (see Figure 4). Within that group, countries seem to be fairly comparable to each other. Due to this fact, I consider my results to have a higher explanatory power within the smaller group of OECD countries.

Second, I assume the data within the OECD country group to be more reliable. That means that the applied variables measure the same phenomenon within all countries of my sample. With

regard to the governance for SD index I measure in what way countries meet good governance principles by counting existent governance elements. However, the elements between countries might not necessarily be comparable to each other. For instance, it might be the case, that an inter-ministerial working group in one country is crucial for ensuring policy coherence, while in another country a ministry of planning can have the same effect. Therefore, I want the political cultures within my sample to be comparable. Countries within the OECD to some extent represent the "western" political culture and thus guarantee such comparability.

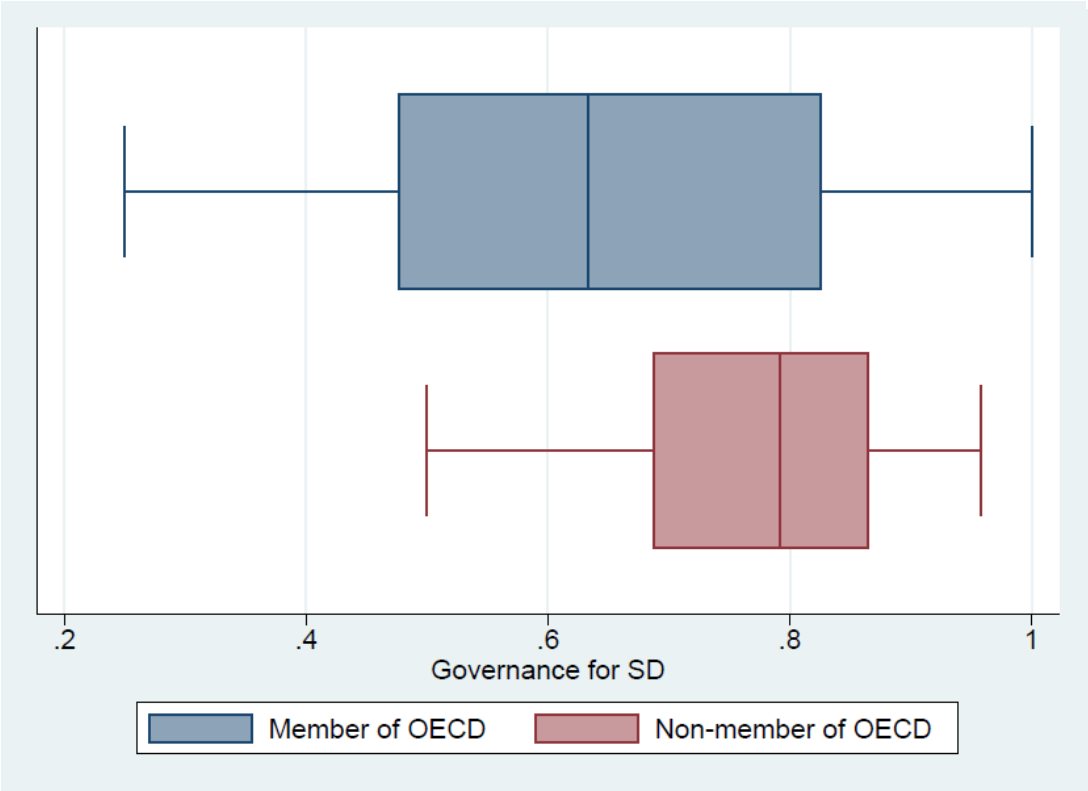

Figure 4: Distribution of Governance for SD by OECD

Third, focusing on OECD countries allows to add qualitative information and thus to increase validity of the data. The value of information I gathered on governance structures highly varies among countries. The information situation for OECD countries is much better comparable to most development countries, where information is difficult to obtain. Moreover, previous studies have already made efforts to qualitatively evaluate governance structures in OECD countries with regard to sustainable development. In 2016 the Bertelsmann Stiftung analyzed Policy Performance, Democracy and Governance structures within 41 OECD and EU countries. The data was gathered by two expert interviews for each country. For my quantitative analysis I draw on these findings to improve validity of my dataset.

My decision to only include OECD countries thereby faces a trade-off. On the one hand my results are barely applicable to non-OECD countries in the world. On the other hand, the results have a higher explanatory power for the analyzed sample.

Figure 5 compares the value of the governance and the C2C index for each country in my sample. It already includes qualitative data drawn from the Bertelsmann SGI. My index suggests that the countries with the best governance structures are Finland, Luxemburg Switzerland, Chile and Germany. Especially, Finland, Germany and Switzerland were identified as drivers for the implementation process by all of my interview partners (respondent 1,2,3,4 and 5). Accordingly, all these countries have voluntarily participated in the first HLPF review in 2016.

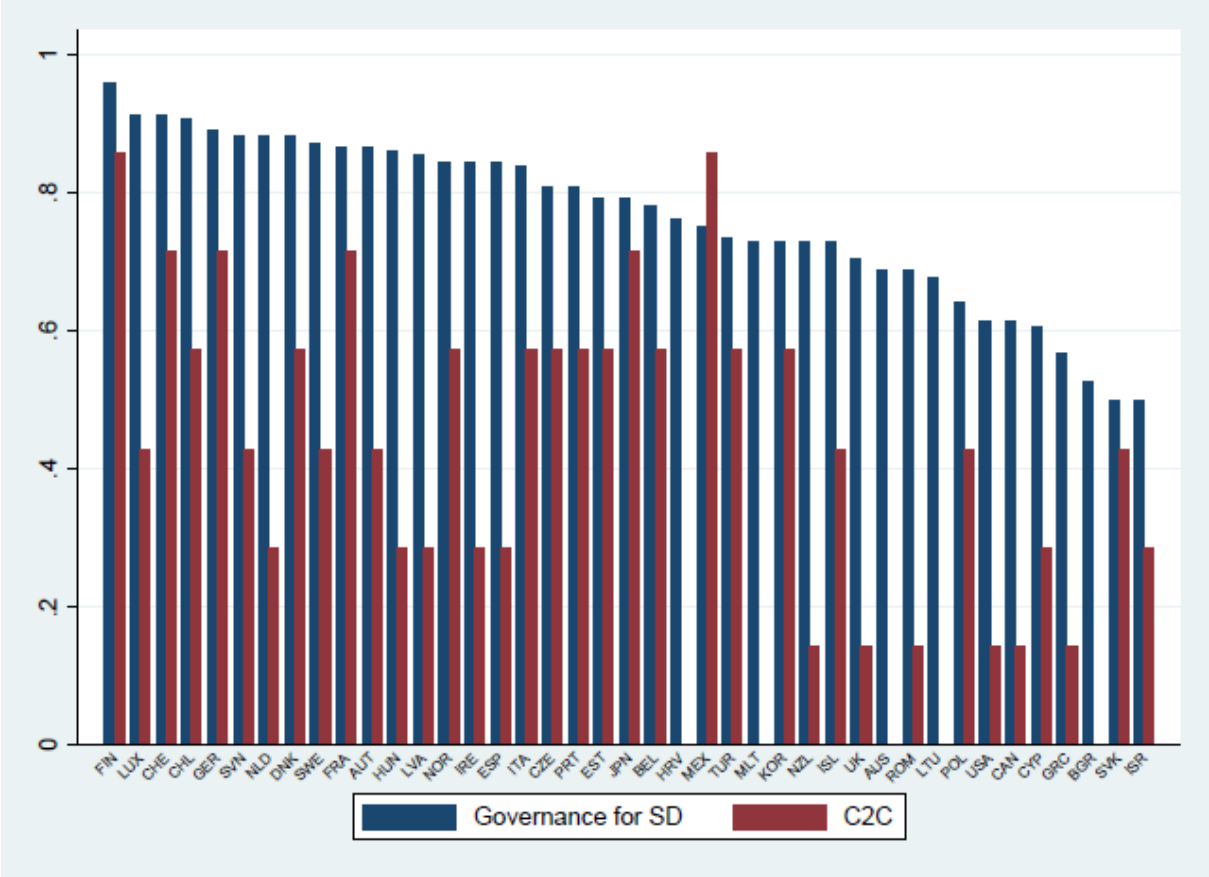

Figure 5: Governance for SD Index and C2C Index by countries

Interestingly, the Anglophone countries in my sample, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK seem to have weak governance structures and show low commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030. My interviews provide some potential explanations for the overall low engagement. On the one hand, Anglophone countries lag behind since they traditionally have weak governance structures for SD and attach low saliency to the implementation of the Agenda 2030:

New Zealand:

"*The government line has focused on "countable" outcomes for years, such as jobs, growth, and employment and on increasing performance of public institutions. The SDGs and associated targets are formulated quite vaguely. This should result in low commitment of New Zealand to the SDGs."* (respondent 4)

Australia

"With regard to the implementation, the Australian government is still in the process of preparing an overview of existent government initiatives that help or foster the implementation of the Agenda 2030." (respondent 4)

Additionally, recent elections and political changes in some countries impeded commitment to foster sustainable development:

USA

"After the presidential election, the US administration is still in the process of transformation. During the campaign sustainable development or the Agenda 2030 has only been addressed by Hillary Clinton, without triggering further public discussions. On the one side, I do not reckon that the US will now distance itself from the Agenda but I do not expect high dynamics on this issue either, since other priorities have been set" (respondent 4)

UK

"British politics is currently almost exclusively concentrated on the implementation of the Brexit referendum, the preparations of the EU exit talks and the resulting domestic problem structures. This leaves less energy for other areas. Besides, the new government around prime minister May seems to set quite different socio-political priorities." (respondent 4)

Canada ranks quite high in almost all sustainable development indexes that measure states' stage of development (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016). In response to the Agenda 2030, the Canadian government has adopted a new strategic framework until 2019 for pursuing sustainable development. However, when applying my analytical framework, Canada scores quite low, since many good governance elements are missing. For instance, there is no committee to foster dialogue between different ministries and to guarantee policy coherence. Moreover, no institutional body steers the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Instead, the strategic framework mentions concrete measures that are assigned to different ministries to be responsible for the implementation. Considering the high level of development in Canada,

my results suggest that the efficiency of promoting sustainable development is not always linked to good governance structures (Government of Canada, 2016).

Since it is difficult to assess the link between the existence of good governance structures and the commitment to comply from Figure 5 I graphically present the results in Figure 6. I plotted the country-cases in the sample along the two proposed variables Governance for SD and Commitment to Comply (C2C) with the Agenda 2030. The graph does not include context variables and thus can only be analyzed descriptively in order to assess the link between governance and commitment to comply. The fitted value suggests a positive linear correlation between good governance structures. The correlation is 0.53 which is a fairly good value considering that commitment to comply can have many motives that vary among countries.

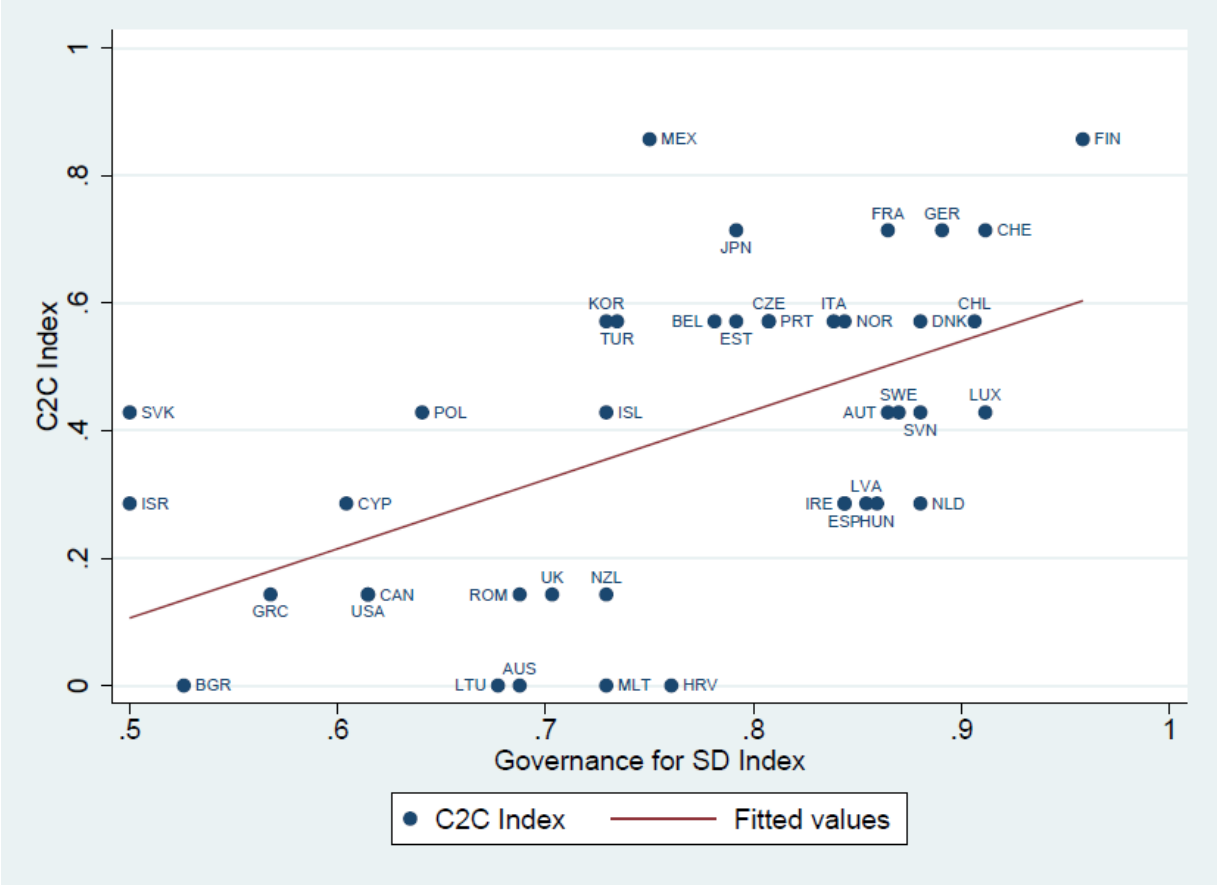

Figure 6: Scatter Plot over Governance for SD and Commitment to Comply

However, while some countries cluster around the fitted value line, some of the cases deviate quite strongly. Mexico for instance ranks high on the C2C index but only medium on the Governance for SD index. My interview respondents confirm these findings:

According to my respondent, the implementation of the Agenda in Mexico is of "high priority" and "takes a leading role in the international and regional discussions on the Agenda 2030." (respondent 5)

"Mexico is a forerunner with regard to the Agenda 2030 and wants to play an active role within the international discussions. […] It is planned to link expenditures of the annual budget with individual SDGs, to support the implementation of the Agenda 2030 with concrete programs and a solid financial basis." (respondent 5)

However, although commitment seems to be quite high, the domestic governance structures face some serious challenges, such as lack in capacities, weak institutions and impaired cooperation with civil society.

"Within the presidential administration there is a lack in personnel on the one side and technical know-how on the other side, to effectively coordinate the implementation process.

[…]

The relation between the government and civil society is generally speaking quite tense. Even if there is a comparably higher degree of trust in the area of the Agenda 2030 between public and non-public institutions and organizations, the presidential administration has an obligation to deliver and to foster and further develop this relationship.

[…]

Weak institutions in Mexico impede people's reliance in the government and lead to inefficient governmental activities" (respondent 5)

The Mexican case shows that commitment to comply is not only based on good governance structures but might have different underlying motives.

In order to outline the actual effect of good governance structures and to test my hypotheses I ran four OLS regression models, including all OECD countries (see table 5). I test the potential explanatory variables Governance for SD (H1), stage of development (H2), level of democracy (H3) and capacity (H4) on the likelihood to comply with the Agenda 2030 and accounted for two context variables such as SD tradition and EU membership in all models.

Model D which combines all variables has an R-squared of 0.36, suggesting that the model explains around 36% of the variation in the dependent variable. The number might appear quite low. However, considering that commitment has a multiple number of potential reasons and motives that vary across countries, the R-squared is fairly good.

H1 postulated that better governance structures increase the likelihood to be committed to comply with the Agenda 2030. All OLS regression models provide evidence for H1 and show a strong effect of Governance for SD on the commitment to comply. The effect is thereby

significant at a 1% level. I can therefore accept my hypothesis that states with better governance structures are more committed to comply.

I also test three other potentially explanatory variables, such as the effect of stage of development (Model B), states' executive capacity to comply with the Agenda 2030 (Model C), and the level of democracy (Model D).

Model B tests the post-materialist hypothesis that the stage of development increases the likelihood of complying with the Agenda 2030 (H2). The argument is that in affluent and wealthy societies, people focus less on material goods and care more about post-material social goods such as the environment and sustainable development. However, none of the models provide empirical evidence. The effect in all models is almost non-existent and even slightly negative (-0,01). This would rather suggest that less developed countries within the OECD are more committed to the Agenda 2030. However, the effect is not significant. H2 therefore needs to be rejected.

	Model A		Model B		Model C		Model D	
Commitment to Comply								
Main Effects:								
Governance for SD	1.08**	(0.31)	1.16**	(0.34)	1.18**	(0.36)	1.21**	(0.37)
SDG Index			-0.00	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)
Democracy					0.02	(0.04)	0.04	(0.05)
Capacity							-0.03	(0.05)
Context Variables:								
SD Tradition (ref. No tradition)								
No tradition	0.00	(.)	0.00	(.)	0.00	(.)	0.00	(.)
After 2006	-0.01	(0.18)	-0.03	(0.18)	-0.03	(0.19)	-0.01	(0.19)
2001-2006	0.06	(0.19)	0.06	(0.19)	0.06	(0.19)	0.06	(0.19)
Before 2001	0.02	(0.19)	0.02	(0.19)	0.02	(0.19)	0.02	(0.19)
EU Member (ref. Non-member)								
Non-Member	0.00	(.)	0.00	(.)	0.00	(.)	0.00	(.)
Member	-0.12	(0.08)	-0.12	(0.08)	-0.13	(0.09)	-0.15	(0.10)
Constant	-0.39	(0.23)	-0.10	(0.59)	-0.11	(0.61)	-0.04	(0.62)
Observations	40		40		40		40	
R^2	0.344		0.350		0.350		0.363	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5: Regression Table

H3 is tested by Model C. I argued that the level of democracy has a positive effect on the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030. Democracies tend to be more dependent on the rule of law than non-democracies. Therefore, I expect them to respect international agreements and have a sense of obligation to implement them. Since I only analyzed OECD

countries, my sample only includes democracies. I therefore chose a qualitative indicator that captures nuances of the democratic processes within a country. Model C indeed suggests a small positive effect from democratic level on the commitment to comply (0,04). However, the coefficient is not significant, which is why I have to reject H3. However, it would be interesting to test this effect with countries outside of the OECD, where democratic differences between countries are more pronounced.

Model D tests whether executive capacities increase the likelihood of being committed to implement the Agenda 2030 (H4). The variable capacity thereby qualitatively measures governments' steering capabilities which I suppose should put them in a better position to implement an international agreement such as the Agenda 2030. Surprisingly, the effect is also slightly negative. The reason could be the same as with regard to H2. Stage of development and executive capacities are fairly correlated (0.54) and might measure the same dimension. Less developed states usually also have low capacities. In this case, the message would be that generally less developed countries are expected to be more committed to implement the Agenda 2030, since it might be seen as an instrument to catch up in terms of development. However, since the predictor is not significant, the result does not allow for further interpretation. Therefore, H4 also needs to be rejected.

Moreover, I tested two context variables, SD tradition and membership of the EU throughout all models. SD tradition indicates how a long a country has been dealing with sustainable development on national level. The underlying argument is that the longer a country is politically pursuing sustainable development, the more committed it might be to the Agenda 2030. SD tradition is operationalized by the year of the first adoption of a national strategic framework for sustainable development. I assigned the countries to three groups, indicating a certain timeframe in which a strategy has been adopted. The category of countries that by today do not have such a strategic framework (SD tradition = 0) in place thereby constitutes my reference category. Unsurprisingly, country groups with a certain tradition are more committed to comply with the Agenda 2030 than countries in the reference category with no tradition. Interestingly, the models indicate that countries that have adopted a strategy before 2001 are less committed than countries with no tradition on that field. This indicates that a long tradition does not necessarily imply stronger commitment to the Agenda 2030. For instance, Australia has adopted its first NSDS already in 1992 but has failed to update and adjust it since then. Sustainable development remained a non-salient issue. Other countries, such as Slovenia have adopted their first strategy 13 years later but have credibly pursued this issue since then. On the Bertelsmann Index indicating progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, Slovenia even ranks before Australia (even though this does not indicate a higher

stage of development in Slovenia than Australia). However, due to the insignificance of the results I cannot be confident about the explanatory power of the actual effect (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016).

Additionally, I tested whether EU member are more committed to comply than non-EU members. In chapter 3.2 I explained that the European Commission is engaged in fostering sustainable development within the member states but only plays a limited role. My results confirm this impression. The negative coefficient even suggests that EU members are in general less committed than non-EU members.

My interviews confirm this finding and provide some further background information on the underlying reasons.

"The European Commission is not very much engaged in the implementation of the SDG. […]There is not much pressure on the member states" (respondent 2)

However, the weak role of the EU seems to be mainly linked to two reasons: First, it seems that there is a lack in active entrepreneurs within the Commission that take up this issue. The Agenda 2030 is currently within the responsibility of Vice-President Frans Timmermanns. However, neither he nor any other high-level EU official from another Directorate-general (DG) seems to be willing to take ownership of the Agenda and to actively drive the process:

"There is a lot of disappointment because there have been high hopes that the whole process would have triggered the EU to revise their own European sustainable development strategy which they had planned to do in 2014 but which never happened. Germany pushed a lot in the last years to convince the Commission to be more active. But they [European Commission] do not have someone inside that drives this process like Segolène Royale [France] or Stefan Bauernfeind [Germany]" (respondent 4)

On the other side, the member states itself seem to be split on that issue, which prevents the Commission to be more active:

"[Within the EU] we see a huge divide that we have always seen when it comes to environmental and other questions. Some countries are always committed like Scandinavian countries […]. Others that have always been laggards like Poland and other Eastern European countries. And also south European countries are not really committed .They have [financial] problems that are so huge that they do not push in this kind of processes" (respondent 5)

6 Conclusion

This thesis aimed at testing the effect of good governance structures on states' commitment to comply with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. For this purpose I operationalized and analyzed good governance structures of 77 countries worldwide and quantitatively tested the effect within all OECD countries.

In the first chapter, I approached this issue by providing an overview on the international efforts to promote sustainable development, explaining the relevance of good governance in this context and proposing an analytical framework to analyze governance structures for sustainable development.

Although sustainable development has already been on the international Agenda for over 30 years, the Agenda 2030 constitutes the most extensive approach to date and significantly differs from its predecessors. First, the Agenda 2030 proposes 17 comprehensive sustainable development goals (SDG) with 169 associated targets that address all three dimensions of sustainable development such as environmental, social and economic. Second, the SDGs are highly interlinked, implying that goals need to be addressed in an integrated manner. Third, and most importantly, the Agenda 2030 is meant to apply universally to all countries worldwide. While previous efforts mainly targeted developing countries, the Agenda 2030 requires all countries to implement the goals on national level.

With regard to the implementation, governance plays a crucial role. Since sustainable development is a complex issue that addresses all policy sectors, actors and levels, administrative-institutional structures are needed to steer the implementation process. By reviewing the normative governance literature I outlined four principles that are considered to be crucial in this context. The long-term principle implies that states need a strategic vision or strategy; the integration principles requires the coordination between different policy levels and sectors by integrating horizontal and vertical integration mechanisms; the participation principles calls for participatory arrangements to incorporate stakeholders into decision making processes; the reflexivity principles puts forward the role of effective quantitative and qualitative monitoring mechanism to constantly review and revise the strategy. I employed these principles to analyze states' governance structures and compare them with the normative requirements.

In the second chapter I put forward theoretical explanations of why and under which conditions states comply with the Agenda 2030. The success of the universal Agenda will depend on national implementation of the SDGs in the UN member states. However, since the

Agenda is a non-binding agreement with no legal obligation, the question of why and under which conditions states comply with the Agenda is at stake. Since compliance at this early stage cannot be assessed yet, this thesis approximated *compliance* with states' *commitment to comply*, indicating a state's motivation and effort to implement the SDGs. I thereby assumed that states that are already committed to comply at this early stage will be more likely to achieve the SDGs in the end. My theory puts forward the role of good governance and argues that states with better governance structures are more committed to comply with the Agenda 2030. Additionally, by reviewing international law and international relations scholars I identified three other potential factors, such as stage of development, level of democracy and capacity that might also explain states' commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030.

In the third chapter, I outlined my methodological approach. In order to answer my research question in what way good governance structures are in place and how they affect states' commitment to comply, I generated a dataset containing information on governance structures of 77 countries worldwide. I thereby mainly relied on qualitative surveys from the German foreign office and five semi-structured expert interviews with policy makers and researchers. To operationalize my independent variable I generated the *governance for SD* index that captures governance structures of 77 countries with respect to the normative requirements of my analytical framework. To operationalize my dependent variable I generated the *commitment to comply* index that builds on relevant indicators such as a state's self-commitment to participate in the international review process of the HLPF, whether it has revised/renewed its national strategy, adjusted administrative structures or prominently put the implementation under the prime minister's responsibility.

In the fourth chapter, I presented the findings from my descriptive and predictive analysis. My descriptive analysis reveals that on average states in my sample have decent governance structures in place. However, my results suggested that there are considerable differences among regions and governance principles. States from Europe and America tend to have better governance for SD structures than states from Asia and Africa. Particularly, the latter scores poorly compared to the other regions. With respect to the principles, I showed that the integration principle is the least pronounced in all regions. This is in line with assessments from policy makers and researchers that consider this area to be one of the key challenges for the implementation of the SDG.

In my predictive analysis I quantitatively tested the effect of good governance structures on commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030. My OLS regression provided empirical evidence for my hypotheses that governance structures affect states' commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030. The effect of good governance proved to be a strong and more accurate

predictor than other tested variables, such as state of development, level of democracy or capacity.

Surprisingly, being a member of the EU does not predict higher commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030 and even produces a negative effect. Accordingly, my interview respondents confirmed a large divide between EU countries with regard to both, the quality of governance structures and the commitment to comply with the Agenda 2030. I therefore conclude that compliant behavior with the Agenda 2030 is not a norm in the EU yet. I partly explained this finding by emphasizing the weak role of the European Commission that failed to take ownership and to drive the process.

My findings showed that governance structures are a key factor for the implementation of the Agenda 2030. The better states' governance structures for sustainable development the higher the commitment to comply. With regard to the success of the Agenda this is an important implication. Implementing sustainable development is a global matter that requires action by all countries. The Agenda 2030 can thus only be successful if all states deduce own goals and implement the SDGs on national level. Governance structures thereby foster national implementation dynamics and thus contribute to the success of the Agenda. Therefore states should be more encouraged to set up and improve their institutional-administrative framework. Future research could thereby focus on how states can be incentivized to implement good governance structures.

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Annex

Annex I

List of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals	
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Table 6: Sustainable Development Goals

Annex II

List of the 8 Millennium Development Goals	
Goal 1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Goal 2	Achieve universal primary education
Goal 3	Promote gender equality
Goal 4	Reduce child mortality
Goal 5	Improve maternal healt
Goal 6	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
Goal 7	Ensure environmental sustainability
Goal 8	Develop a global partnership for development

Table 7: Millennium Development Goals

Annex III

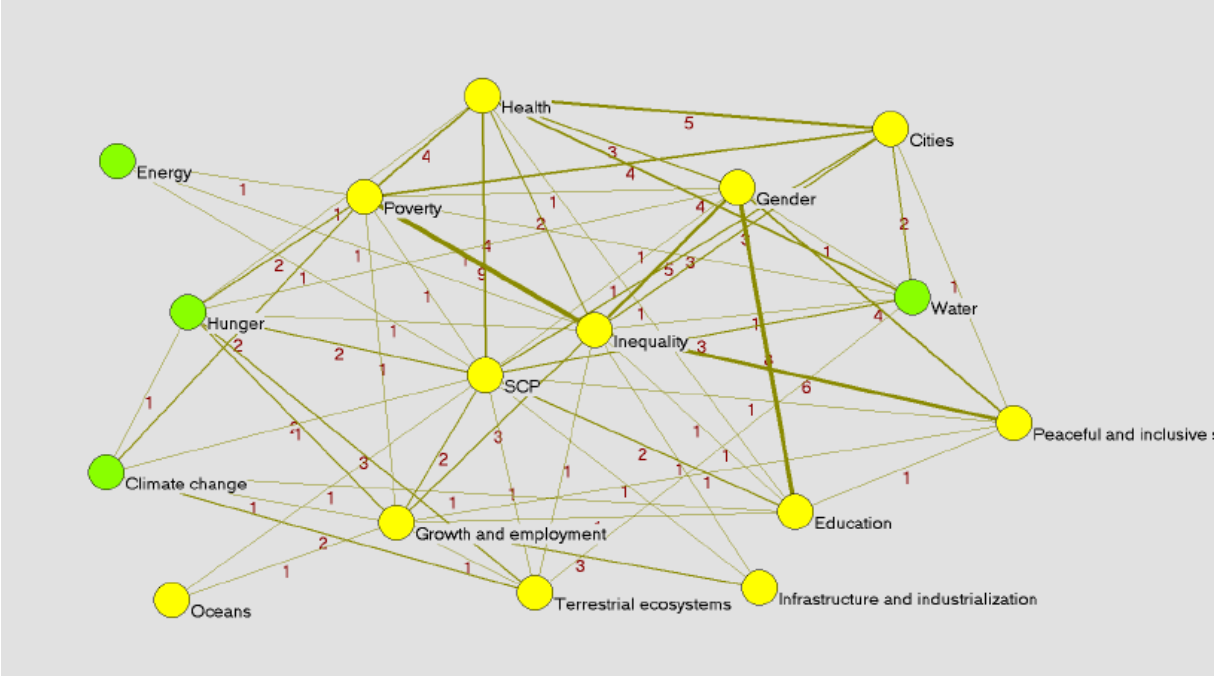

Figure 6: Links between the SDGs (Le Blanc, 2015: 5)

Note: the numbers on the map indicate the number of targets linking different goals.

Annex IV

List of countries in dataset
Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Switzerland, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Croatia, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Iran, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Cambodia, South Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Morocco, Mexico, Malta, Mongolia, Malaysia, Namibia, Nigeria, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Singapore, South Pacific Islands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Tanzania Uganda, United Kingdom, USA, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, South Africa

Table 8: List of countries in dataset