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Published in:
Environmental Science and Policy

DOI:
[10.1016/j.envsci.2021.11.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.11.024)

Published: 01/02/2022

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Please cite the original version:
Salo, H. H., Berg, A., Korhonen-Kurki, K., & Lähteenoja, S. (2022). Small wins enhancing sustainability transformations: Sustainable development policy in Finland. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 128, 242-255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.11.024>



Small wins enhancing sustainability transformations: Sustainable development policy in Finland

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Transformative governance
Sustainable development policy
2030 Agenda
Small wins
Sustainability transformations

ABSTRACT

No country is on its way to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030. The expectations for rapid transformations have not materialized, and hence a strategy combining both incremental and more radical changes is needed. Such strategies have been discussed in other fields, but they have been largely unaddressed in relation to sustainable development. This article seeks to increase understanding of how changes of various sizes interact in sustainable development policy. Here, we utilize the concept of small wins as concrete, implemented and often incremental changes that can create momentum for larger-scale changes. By analyzing key government documents and reports, interviews, questionnaires and workshop material, we study Finland's sustainable development policy. We focus on changes in the realms of the 4Is, meaning institutions, interests, information and ideas. Based on the research, Finland has been particularly successful in building multi-sectoral institutions and mainstreaming the idea of sustainable development. There is a vast information base available. In practice, however, various conflicts of interest remain unsolved. We conclude that while a sustainable development policy based solely on small wins can be too slow and incremental to meet the major sustainability challenges of our time, it would pave the way for more transformative reforms. These include, for example, the current Government Programme based on the idea of sustainable development and challenging the status quo on various fronts.

1. Introduction

Sustainable development (SD) is the shared goal of every nation in the world. The agreement on the 2030 Agenda (2015) provided, for the first time, goals that define what SD would mean for all countries. Relying on the traditional three pillar approach of SD (see e.g. WCED, 1987: 41) – people, planet and prosperity – the Agenda calls for transforming the world in order to reach the goals. Indeed, transformation for sustainability is needed since no country has reached sustainability as yet, and none are on the way to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (O'Neill et al., 2018; Sachs et al., 2021). In particular, there is an urgent call for mechanisms to guide the nations to the pathway towards sustainability.

Governance for SD concerns renewing the governance practices so that they encourage shifts towards more sustainable patterns (WCED,

1987; Meadowcroft, 2009). Stimulating and orchestrating transitions towards SD requires transformative governance approaches that enable, support and push different actors towards the same goal, while avoiding the most serious pitfalls (Meadowcroft, 2009; Patterson et al., 2017; Johnstone and Newell, 2018). Different forms of governance are considered to create conditions for the emergence of transformations by defining, negotiating, prioritizing and implementing policies and measures (Turnheim et al., 2015; Johnstone and Newell, 2018).

Wicked problems, such as SD, are associated with a multiplicity of goals, long-term frames and large systemic transformations (Turnheim et al., 2015; Hajer et al., 2015; Alford and Head, 2017; Termeer et al., 2017; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). It makes SD prone to unrealistic expectations. Despite being commonly agreed targets, SDGs as policy goals remain vague and oftentimes too universal for a specific country context. Policymakers may find it hard to address such broad topics or

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.11.024>

Received 21 June 2021; Received in revised form 22 November 2021; Accepted 30 November 2021

Available online 7 December 2021

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be tempted to make promises beyond their reach and overestimate their ability to solve the problems (Hajer et al., 2015; Alford and Head, 2017; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019).

So-called small wins are concrete, implemented and often incremental changes that can accumulate, scale up, broaden or deepen, and create momentum for larger-scale changes (Weick, 1984; Ansell and Gash, 2007; Urpelainen, 2013; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Alone they might seem unimportant, but numerous small wins can yield transformative change towards unified goals. Small wins that alter routines, values and beliefs in depth may bring about transformative potential and achieve radical changes in the long run (Weick, 1984; Plowman et al., 2007; Vermaak, 2013; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019).

For the moment, the academic literature on sustainability transformations has been ill-equipped to understand and analyze the governance dynamics needed for transformations (Patterson et al., 2017; Linnér and Wibeck, 2021). Enabling different forms and sizes of changes to contribute to transformations is crucial. Such a relationship has been discussed in terms of climate change adaptation (e.g. Kates et al., 2012; Pelling et al., 2015; Kulovesi and Oberthür, 2020), energy transitions (e.g. Meadowcroft, 2009; Johnstone et al., 2020) and the evaluation of wicked problems (Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Yet it is largely unaddressed in relation to SD, although a two-fold strategy combining both incremental and radical changes could overcome the lock-ins that prevent sustainability transformations (Meadowcroft, 2009).

This article seeks to contribute to this research gap by analyzing the transformative capacities of SD policy by drawing on the 4Is framework (Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012). The aim of the 4Is framework is to analyze the current situation and changes taking place in the realms of institutions, interests, information and ideas as drivers towards sustainability. Thus, it provides a fruitful framework for showing where the key dynamics for policy development lie. For example, it may point out that while there is, in principle, a robust institutional framework to support a policy goal, there is not enough information about the novel challenges that have emerged along the way – or vice versa.

The article aims to increase understanding of how transformative governance and change take place by focusing on the ability of different types of wins to overcome sustainability governance challenges over time. We pay special attention to small wins but also take note of changes of all sizes, including the larger and more transformative ones (cf. Weick, 1984; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). We use Finland as a case example of national SD policy and analyze its transformativeness by combining the 4Is and the small wins frameworks. In international sustainability comparisons, Finland has been one of the top performing countries (Sachs et al., 2021; PMO, 2020b) and has long traditions in SD policy. Its governance model has been highlighted in various international settings (Berg et al., 2019; PMO, 2020b; Rouhinen, 2014). More specifically, we ask:

- a) What is Finland's SD policy scene like according to the 4Is framework?
- b) How have small wins been manifested in the recent SD policy development in Finland?
- c) What kind of potential have SD small wins had to contribute to sustainability transformations?

The paper starts with a description of the background of our research regarding transformative governance for SD policy, the 4Is and small wins. The subsequent section presents the methods and materials used. Section 4 analyzes the results that are discussed further in Section 5 in relation to the small wins and transformative governance literature. The paper concludes with a summary of the main results.

2. Transformative governance for sustainable development and the small wins framework

2.1. Transformative governance for SD

The general aim of studying transformations is to explore how change processes take place in societies and how societies are enabled to carry out changes that go beyond incremental technical developments (Westley et al., 2011). Transformation is generally understood to denote a profound, substantial and irreversible change (Brown et al., 2013). Scoones et al. (2015) classify the multiple forms of transformation as 1) shaping and resisting structures, 2) reframing knowledge, 3) realizing institutions and incentives, and 4) mobilizing and networking.

Meanwhile, "transformations towards sustainability" refer to fundamental changes in structural, functional, relational and cognitive aspects of socio-technical-ecological systems that lead to new patterns of interactions and outcomes (Patterson et al., 2017). When studying these transformations, Patterson et al. (2017: 2) state that there is a need to place governance and politics at the centre of the research. Effective governance of transformations needs to appreciate complexity, uncertainty, emergence and asymmetries of power (Turnheim et al., 2015). Therefore, sustainability transformations are inevitably political because they are constantly horizontally and vertically negotiated with different actors, their values, aims and interests, and affect different groups of actors unequally (Meadowcroft, 2009; Nordbeck and Steurer 2016; Patterson et al., 2017).

SD policy is founded on international agreements and jointly set goals (Nordbeck and Steurer 2016; Sachs, 2015; Allen et al., 2018). SD strategies, such as the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015), describe principles for governments to help them plan and implement cross-sectoral and long-term governance (Nordbeck and Steurer 2016). However, there are several challenges inherent in the SD concept, and these challenges may arise when seeking to implement its lofty principles in real terms. The challenges include the imbalance between the ecological, economic and social pillars, lack of synergies and integration between the pillars, SDGs and sectors, and cherry-picking those aspects that support policymakers' interests (Turnheim et al., 2015; Allen et al., 2018; Forestier and Kim, 2020).

When implementing SD in practice, states often innovate various new governance models. These models deal with integrating SD into national strategies and their implementation. Currently, for example, several EU member states are developing SD budgeting, science-policy interfaces, and various stakeholder participation mechanisms. (Niestroy et al., 2019).

In political economy research, a variety of different frameworks have been used to study the rules and power relations under which the political arenas operate. Hall (1997) introduced the framework of institutions, interests and ideas, and Brockhaus and Angelsen (2012: 16) added information as a fourth element to the framework, which they call the 4Is framework. It covers *institutions*, entailing formal and informal institutional arrangements, path dependencies, and potential resistance to change (Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012). Meanwhile, *ideas* describe how the idea of SD is understood and discussed in politics. Ideas arise from policy discourses, ideologies and beliefs that directly or indirectly affect the actors. *Interests* refer to actors in the policy field and their potential material benefits. The interests of various stakeholders influence the type of policy that is being promoted. Finally, *information* entails the types of information used in decision-making and its ability to guide the direction of policy. Information includes data and knowledge, how they are formed and used, and by whom.

2.2. Small wins as an SD policy approach

Sustainable development is often associated with long timeframes and large transformations, making it overwhelmingly broad and challenging to interpret, predict and achieve. Addressing wicked problems,

like SD, may entail unrealistic expectations of rapid, radical and comprehensive solutions (Plowman et al., 2007; Meadowcroft, 2009; Turnheim et al., 2015; Alford and Head, 2017; Termeer et al., 2017; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Yet, policymakers may be tempted to make grand promises and overestimate their capabilities to solve the problems (Hajer et al., 2015; Alford and Head, 2017; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019).

A small wins framework can offer useful tools for concrete, implementable and often incremental changes that can accumulate, scale up, broaden or deepen and create momentum for larger-scale changes (Weick, 1984; Ansell and Gash, 2007; Urpelainen, 2013; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Small wins are considered to be less overwhelming, be more achievable, and have fewer trade-offs than larger-scale changes (Lindblom 1979; Weick, 1984; Termeer et al., 2017). They are seen as “only” small steps with no need to postpone decision-making to the point where full analyses would be available, as such perfectly informed conditions are inherently impossible for wicked problems (Urpelainen, 2013). Examples of small wins include successful joint fact-finding processes that lead to discovering more acceptable solutions and improved communication between parties (Saarikoski, 2000; Ansell and Gash, 2007), game-changing pilots like leasing working clothes in the Netherlands (Termeer and Metze, 2019), and setting an energy conservation program with increased cooperation (Urpelainen, 2013).

The strengths of small wins include the ability to react to the constantly changing, dynamic conditions around them, and to deepen trust, commitment and understanding among people (Weick, 1984; Ansell and Gash, 2007). Hence, they can facilitate progress and interfere with old routines by bringing about small steps that may result in continuous transformational change and generate radical changes in the long run (Weick, 1984; Plowman et al., 2007; Vermaak, 2013; Termeer et al., 2017; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Active propelling mechanisms are needed to reinforce the initial small changes by energizing, learning by doing, the logic of attraction, the bandwagon effect and coupling (Garud and Kumaraswamy, 2005; Plowman et al., 2007; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019).

At the same time, incremental small wins do not necessarily achieve

the transformational potential if they remain sporadic, small and superficial (Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Small changes can be viewed as “muddling through” by taking incremental, continuous steps (Lindblom, 1979; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019) or as directed incrementalism connecting long-term goals with incremental decisions (Grunwald, 2000, 2007). Several authors have criticized incremental changes for not being able to cope with complex issues with adequate speed and depth, while radical shifts are seen as a necessity for destabilizing the deep, unsustainable structures (e.g. Grin et al., 2010; Köhler et al., 2019; Johnstone et al., 2020). Small wins are also less evident than radical and/or larger-scale changes and are thus often overlooked by policymakers (Termeer and Metze, 2019). Yet reported small wins have the potential to be noticed as they are compact, upbeat and relatively rare (Weick, 1984). Here, risks arise if policymakers and people in general believe that a single small change could serve as a final solution and resolve the complex issue, resulting in no further actions being taken (Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). It should also be noted that not all steps are wins, and a win for one person or stakeholder group could be a loss for others.

2.3. The analytical approach of this article

Building on the literature reviewed above, our analytical approach focuses on transformational policy changes towards sustainability in Finland (Fig. 1). The 4Is entail elements that are important for effective policy change at a high level. The paper pays special attention to small wins but also acknowledges more transformational, larger-scale wins (cf. Weick, 1984; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Here, wins are defined as changes that are considered to contribute to sustainability transformations. For example, fixed-term information campaigns on social media are seen as small wins, whereas the novel and evolving SD budgeting practices would count as larger-scale wins.



Fig. 1. The analytical frame reflects different dimensions of the SD policy according to the 4Is and small wins frameworks. Small and larger-scale wins are seen to contribute to sustainability transformations located at the center.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. SD governance in Finland

Finland provides a unique case for studying SD policies; it leads the global SDG Index comparison (Sachs et al., 2021), and its SD policy has a tradition spanning decades (Rouhinen, 2014; Niestroy et al., 2019). Finland's key strengths include competence, quality of education and the development of skills, strong institutions and societal stability. However, many environmentally relevant systems still need attention from a sustainability point of view, including energy, forests, aquatic ecosystems, food and the global footprint of consumption. In addition, social inequalities have increased, although Finland is doing well by international comparison (Berg et al., 2019; PMO, 2020a).

A special feature of Finland's SD governance is wide participation through multiple different forums and panels. SD policy is coordinated from the core of the government, namely the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) (OECD, 2018). All ministries have their representatives in the Coordination Network. The Finnish National Commission on SD has acted as a coordinating body at the national level since 1993. The Commission has been chaired by the Prime Minister and co-chaired by another minister, and its members have broadly represented various sectors from political decision-making to ministries, research institutes, interest groups and NGOs. In addition, SD work is complemented by the science advice of the Expert Panel on SD and the views of young people through the 2030 Agenda Youth Group.

The Finnish National Commission on SD published "The Finland We Want By 2050" strategy in 2016. Its purpose is to motivate and engage the public administration with other agents to promote SD. It includes eight national targets: 1) Equal prospects for well-being, 2) A participatory society for citizens, 3) Sustainable employment, 4) Sustainable society and local communities, 5) A carbon-neutral society, 6) A resource-wise economy, 7) Lifestyles respectful of the carrying capacity of nature, and 8) Decision-making respectful of nature.

The government is responsible for implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda in Finland and published an implementation plan accordingly in 2017 (PMO, 2017). The plan has two focus areas: 1) Achieving a carbon-neutral and resource-wise Finland, and 2) Securing non-discrimination, equality and a high level of competence in Finland by 2030. However, the implementation plan has been criticized for mainly including the targets in the Government Programme and other strategies of that time (Berg et al., 2019). Thus, its added value can be questioned.

3.2. Materials and methods

Overall, the research was carried out in two phases: 1) literature review and assessment of multiple policy documents in relation to SD, followed by 2) interviews, surveys and workshops. The data collection and initial analyses were conducted in the PATH2030 evaluation on Finland's SD policy in 2018–2019 (Berg et al., 2019). It was the first comprehensive SD evaluation after a long while, with the novel aim of assessing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It was an independent study, albeit commissioned by the PMO and steered by a broad group of experts and ministry representatives.

In this study, we firstly analyzed and assessed the current SD policy in Finland, focusing on policy developments that have mainly taken place since 2015. The documents included the Government Annual Reports for 2015–2017, the Government Action Plan 2018–2019, the 2030 Agenda report (2017) and draft budgetary plans for 2018 and 2019. Previous evaluations were also considered (e.g. Lyytimäki et al., 2016, 2017). In addition, we analyzed key Finnish SD policy documents, the Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2020 (PMO, 2020b), and the Government Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Towards a carbon-neutral welfare society (PMO, 2020a). The VNR describes Finland's actions and progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda

for the United Nations (PMO, 2020b). Meanwhile, the Government Report (PMO, 2020a) encapsulates the state of the 2030 Agenda implementation from the perspective of the current government.

Following the document analysis, interviews, surveys and workshops were conducted and analyzed (see Appendix A). First, interviews were conducted with 78 people representing all ministries, the Expert Panel on SD, and key stakeholders during August–November 2018. The interviews dealt with changes in the Finnish SD policy, the governance model, as well as challenges and needs for improvement. Second, a closed survey for key actors (N = 27) and an open poll (N = 211) were organized between September and October 2018. The respondents were asked to evaluate the present state of SD, its achievement, and needs for improvement. Finally, two stakeholder workshops were organized to evaluate the Finnish SD policy (October 2018, 68 participants) and to co-create recommendations (December 2018, 19 participants).

The materials were analyzed in ATLAS.ti 9. The main purpose of the content analysis was to deepen the understanding of how various challenges and opportunities for sustainability transformations in Finland have been met with real-life wins. Content analysis allowed us to clarify and (re-)structure the material for the purpose (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017). The coding process is described in more detail in Appendix B. In the end, more than 3400 quotations were coded according to 69 codes in total. The coding showed that the VNR (PMO, 2020b) and the Government Report (PMO, 2020a) focused more on positive aspects describing more than 2100 changes and 260 challenges (Appendix D). The survey, interview and workshop materials partially balanced the bias with a more multi-voiced picture about the Finnish SD policy. Out of the over 800 text excerpts coded in this material, almost half reflected challenges (Appendix C). Further, we returned to the interview material and analyzed it through the lens of transformativeness.

4. Results

4.1. SD policy scene in Finland

We begin by setting the scene with a description of the Finnish SD policy and then elaborate on the recent small wins and their transformativeness. In this subsection, we seek to answer the first research question on the SD policy scene. The aim is to understand the state of SD governance in Finland by applying the 4Is framework. It should be noted that the main focus of the analysis was on the specific SD governance model of Finland and that the 4Is are interconnected.

4.1.1. Institutions

Finnish SD policy has strong institutions (cf. Ylönen and Salmivaara, 2020) with long traditions spanning over 10 different government coalitions of various political parties. The institutions present a whole-of-government approach with multi-stakeholder engagement across various sectors (cf. Lepuschitz, 2014). For example, the National Commission on SD has operated for almost three decades and has brought together representatives from the government, parliamentary committees, business, local authorities, civil society organizations and academia. Showcasing the cross-sectorality, all ministries participate in the National Commission and the SD Coordination Network. Many ministries have also integrated SD into their strategies and internal coordination networks. However, some key sustainability issues, particularly the food system and the global footprint of consumption seem to lack overarching institutional mechanisms to adequately balance between various sustainability concerns.

4.1.2. Ideas

SD has become a broadly shared and accepted aim (cf. Lepuschitz, 2014). The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are particularly well known among different actors. However, the multiple varying goals for SD in Finland were considered confusing by many of the research participants.

For example, one interviewee explained that “the eight national sustainable development objectives, 17 SDGs and two national 2030 Agenda focus points make sustainable development hard to communicate”. This is especially problematic when SD is already seen as an ambiguous and vague concept that covers everything and nothing at the same time (cf. [Ylönen and Salmivaara, 2020](#)). Further, the clear environmental edge and history of SD, which has remained visible in some discussions and publications, has been off-putting for some. Thus, for certain ministries and experts, the SDGs have offered a more appealing packaging of the SD.

4.1.3. Interests

The shared goals and joint processes have mainstreamed SD at the level of values and attitudes into multiple sectors, as described in relation to ideas. To some extent, this has also helped to settle conflicts of interest. However, when moving from the conceptual level in a more concrete direction, disagreements have often arisen. For example, based on the interviews, major contradictions between the objectives and measures of different administrative sectors, interest groups and governing parties have emerged over questions such as bioenergy, forestry and environmentally harmful subsidies (cf. [Lyytimäki et al., 2021](#)). Such conflicts have hampered policy coherence and impact (cf. [Ylönen and Salmivaara, 2020](#)).

4.1.4. Information

There is plenty of information available on SD, its state in Finland and solutions in multiple formats, including indicators, reports, databases, assessments and discussions (cf. [Lyytimäki et al., 2020](#)). However, the existing information has been insufficiently used in decision-making, according to the interviewees (cf. [Rosenström, 2009](#)). There has been a particular need for independent, multidisciplinary and synthesizing research data and policy evaluations that could be used as a basis for decision-making. For example, several ministry representatives asked for the SD indicators to be closely included in political decision-making. Yet, they criticized the imperfect picture that they paint of issues such as social well-being or the sustainable use of fertilizers. In addition, knowledge should flow both ways, so that SD could be implemented in practice and mainstreamed throughout society as a whole. ([Table 1](#)).

4.2. Small wins in the Finnish SD policy and their transformative potential

In this section, we provide insights into the second and third research questions on how small wins are manifested in the recent SD policy development in Finland, and what their transformative potential has been in the long run. We seek to understand what kind of small wins are evident in the Finnish SD policy regarding the 4Is, the challenges they have faced and their transformative potential.

In the analysis, roughly 660 mentions about small wins were found in the key documents and 110 in the interviews, surveys and workshops. Thus, it can be stated that small wins flourish on the SD policy scene in Finland. Quantitatively, most of the small wins depicted information

and interests. [Fig. 2](#) presents some of the most important small wins along with key transformative changes.

4.2.1. Institutions

Regarding institutions, some of the clearest small wins include the fact that SD is broadly integrated into the strategies of the ministries today. Further, SD has also been successfully mainstreamed and incorporated into policy cycles in planning, budgeting, and reporting – at least on a rough level. However, some ministries have been more proactive, while others have taken steps only during the past few years. In general, ministries have recently “been pushed” by the wave of “SD coming simultaneously from multiple directions, including the preparation of the Government Programme, budgeting and Government annual reports especially since 2017”, as one interviewee put it. Further, many of the current institutional structures of the SD governance model of Finland have been established as small wins. For example, “[t]he Expert Panel for Sustainable Development and the 2030 Agenda Youth Group have taken a prominent role” ([PMO, 2020b: 9](#)), although they began as experiments.

The mainstreaming of SD into key governing institutions has been supported by the relocation of the coordination secretariat from the Ministry of the Environment to the PMO in 2016. The relocation took place after decade-long discussions. Previously, the secretariat had focused on environmental sustainability due to its station, which some interviewees felt was “a vault”. Several factors were against the relocation: the PMO lacked knowledge and resources, and the Ministry of the Environment was not willing to give up its remit. Added impetus was provided when the Commission on SD visited the secretariat of a corresponding commission in Germany. Since the relocation, “the importance of sustainable development policy has increased and cross-sectoral practices have been improved” ([PMO, 2020b: 90](#)). It has also “raised the credibility of the secretariat”, “given it broader shoulders” and “mainstreamed the SD agenda”, as mentioned in the interviews. However, the SD model in general has been poorly resourced compared to the amount of work required on multiple fronts. For example, the coordination secretariat has recently consisted of only two and a half full-time public servants. The civil servants of ministries who participate in the networks and Commission often do so alongside other work. Limited resources have led to prioritization and hence “suffocated horizontal work”, to quote one interviewee, strengthening the silos between various actor groups.

Another major downfall has been that the governance efforts specifically targeted to enhance SD, such as multiple strategies, have largely been based on voluntary and informational instruments that “live on appraisal”. However, many policy fields with key importance for SD, such as climate change, human rights, land use and employment, are covered by national and international legislation. In these fields, for example, the Climate Change Act ensures “a coherent, long-term approach to climate policy” ([PMO, 2020a: 77](#)), and corporate responsibility legislation is under preparation to be met by Finnish companies. To overcome the lack of concrete SD actions, the government will, for example, “carry out a tax reform for sustainable development” ([PMO, 2020b: 50](#)), which is expected to enhance the power of the SD policy and its impact.

To sum up the meaning of small wins for the potential sustainability transformation within institutions, small wins have had importance at least at the level of strategy and reporting. Of the numerous small wins in this realm, *the relocation of the SD coordination secretariat to the PMO seems to have had special symbolic importance and to have signaled a new age in the institutional mainstreaming of SD*. However, a full-scale sustainability transformation would require, inter alia, more binding and coherent policies.

4.2.2. Ideas

Some recent small wins have also taken place with regard to ideas. For example, the government has adopted novel approaches to

Table 1

Main results depicting the SD policy scene in Finland according to the 4Is analysis framework.

Institutions	Interests
A multi-faceted and inclusive operating model with long traditions. SD is not institutionalized enough throughout the administration.	Shared goals and processes help to settle conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest still challenge policy coherence and impact.
Ideas	Information
SD has become a societally shared and accepted goal. Ambiguity of the SD concept and multiple SD goals in Finland.	A lot of information is available regarding the state of SD and different solutions. The use of indicators and research information in decision-making is insufficient.

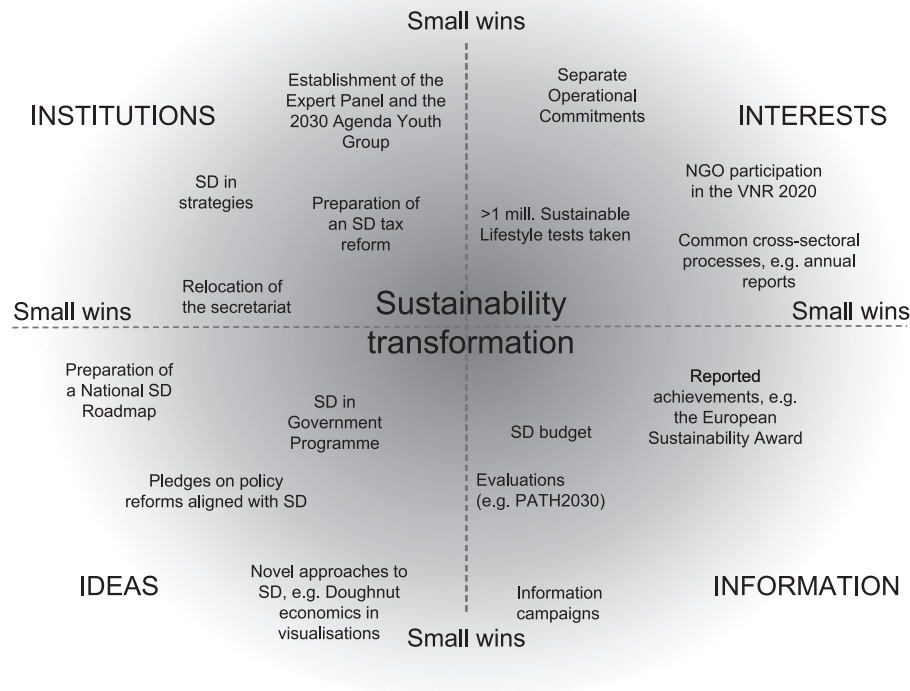


Fig. 2. Key small wins and transformative changes of the Finnish SD policy according to the 4Is framework.

considering SD. They include, for example, appraising doughnut economics (Raworth, 2012; PMO, 2020b: 72) as a visualization tool to understand SD. Further, the government has given six pledges to citizens on policy reforms that are very much in line with the policy principles of SD. The pledges concern fair and equal treatment across generations, a new kind of interaction, continuous learning, long-term policymaking, knowledge-based policymaking, and non-discrimination.

While ideas such as doughnut economics and pledges on policy reforms may turn out to be very influential over time, they are currently weak from an institutional perspective. As one interviewee explained: “the need for actions comes from elsewhere, but SD is used as one of the reasons and the actions are checked to be in line with the 2030 Agenda”. The current government and secretariat have been reacting to this criticism and have kick-started preparations for a National Roadmap on the 2030 Agenda to describe the measures and timescale for action. The roadmap aims to encapsulate a plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda objectives beyond government terms.

Based on our study, the biggest win for SD as a policy idea has been its role in the current Government Programme. The Programme of the Government of Prime Minister Sanna Marin (2019) is manifested to be built on SD. The aim of the Programme is to “transform Finland into a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society by 2030” (Finnish Government, 2019: 8). The Paris Agreement and the SDGs are considered to be the grounds for international cooperation and Finnish actions in the coming years. The Government Programme pursues an “Inclusive and competent Finland – a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society” (PMO, 2020a: 8). It has also set several potentially very transformative targets, such as a carbon-neutral Finland by 2035. As *Government Programmes play key roles in Finnish politics, using SD as the main organizing principle of the current programme can be considered a major push towards sustainability transformation.*

4.2.3. Interests

In the field of interests, common processes and participatory actions have sought to alleviate conflicts. They have often taken the form of small wins. Recently, for example, all ministries have participated in the

preparation of the government annual reports and budgeting and the writing process of the Voluntary National Report (VNR). For the VNR, civil society actors, cities and businesses, and regional authorities were invited to write parts of the report instead of mere consultations, and a peer dialogue with Switzerland and Mozambique was organized. The novel approach of inviting these actors to write specific sections and case descriptions gave rise to multi-voiced and sometimes critical perceptions.

Further, the Operational Commitments given by organizations and citizens since 2014 have celebrated small wins and aimed to enhance participation and ownership. Commitments seek to “create something new, be measurable and follow the principles of sustainable development” (PMO, 2020b: 28–29). A new feature was added in 2018 to allow citizens to calculate their carbon footprint in the Sustainable Lifestyles service. By April 2021, over one million Finns, namely almost one-fifth of the whole population, had calculated their carbon footprint and almost 1500 Finns had drawn up a plan to cut their footprint in half by choosing suitable actions from a provided list (Sitoumus2050, 2021). All plans contribute to the national emissions reduction target and making “every action count” (PMO, 2020b: 30).

In general, the broad understanding of SD appeals to many, and various actors are committed to promoting it. As remarked in an interview, “all political parties accept SD and present their own actions as sustainable. Even the opposition does not resist SD.” However, at times, policymakers have been unwilling or have lacked the courage to raise difficult topics for political consideration. Thus, in actual decision-making, other goals, such as short-term financial interests, have regularly bypassed SD. Other key challenges include the fact that actors and sectors of the government continue to work in silos. Further, some voices have not been heard enough in the processes, especially those of young people and NGOs. This has been tackled to some extent by the establishment of the 2030 Agenda Youth Group, for example, and other participatory methods, like the writing process of the VNR.

Considering the big picture, it can be stated that the participatory approach, as manifested by various small wins, has been able to ease conflicts of interest inherent in the real-life implementation of SD, and

has made SD acceptable in principle. Further, the extent to which Commitments have been made and particularly the Sustainable Lifestyles service used would give reasons to consider the role of the Operational Commitment tool potentially transformative. *The Commitment has built a popular movement, creating the momentum for broader transformation.*

4.2.4. Information

Small wins related to information have been common in the Finnish SD policy. Two-thirds of all the mentions about small wins in the research material concerned information. These included, for example, commissioning studies, surveys, research projects and experiments, international comparisons and rankings, assessments, and reports on actions and achievements. Further, mainstreaming into the broader society has taken place through various informational events such as the State and Future of Sustainable Development event organized annually, and campaigns such as social media influencers promoting SD for young people through Instagram.

Linking information and institutions, Finland has committed to evaluate its SD policy once per government term, publish SD insights into the Government Reports on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and report the SD activities as Voluntary National Reviews for the UN. However, in some cases, there are still data deficiencies, for example concerning trade-offs and spillovers. In addition, difficulties have arisen when crystallizing information to describe large entities and slow changes, inherent to SD. Even when information has been available, it has sometimes been insufficiently and selectively used in decision-making, thus hampering mutual understanding.

As regards the recent developments, one evident achievement has been the SD budget analysis, portrayed as “ascending, relevant and influential” in the interviews. It was initiated by the then Minister of Finance in 2017. Shortly after the initiative, SD was introduced into the main title justifications of the state budget proposal for 2018. The budgeting practices have evolved gradually through participatory brainstorming sessions, for example. In the 2019 budget proposal, SD obtained its own general justifications chapter, a detailed description of the main title justifications for each administrative branch, a quantitative analysis of the appropriations, and a qualitative description of environmentally harmful subsidies. Ministries reported the information on their administrative branch and evaluated their actions.

According to the interviews, SD budgeting has “brought SD more concretely to different ministries and also to the desks of people who did not previously work with sustainability”, and increased awareness of SD. However, in reality, the budget merely lists or analyzes actions that either support or work against SD. Hence, it has not meant planning the budget with SD as its premise, which has hindered its transformativeness. It also focuses on environmental sustainability, as “the linkage between the 2030 Agenda and social sustainability has been more difficult to discover” (PMO, 2020b: 48). To encapsulate the meaning of small wins in the field of SD-related information, the strong tradition to produce information and conduct evaluations has had an influence on finding common ground for policymaking. This has also paved the way for powerful information production at the heart of political decision-making – the yearly budget process. While much remains to be done to enhance the quality and use of SD-related information, *steps such as the SD budget analysis can be considered potentially transformative.*

In summary, the Finnish SD policy has essentially been about achieving a myriad of small wins. These wins have paved the way for more transformative and even radical changes, including the relocation of the SD coordination secretariat to the PMO (institutions), the utilization of SD as an organizing principle in the current Government Programme (idea), the major amount of Sustainable Lifestyle tests taken (interests), and the yearly sustainability analysis of the state budget (information). The wins are discussed in more depth in the next section.

5. Discussion

Quantitatively speaking, small wins in the Finnish SD policy have been manifested particularly in relation to information and interests, while being rare especially in terms of ideas. This resonates with earlier findings as visible results, achievements, new practices and experiments are seen as typical examples of small wins in the literature (e.g. Weick, 1984; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019; Termeer and Metze, 2019). In the Finnish SD policy, they have emerged, for example, in the form of a participatory writing process for the VNR, evaluations, and the establishment of the Expert Panel. As small wins are concrete and implemented actions, they exceed the level of promises and creative ideas according to Termeer and Dewulf (2019). However, to gain sustainability transformations, small wins need to contribute to a more or less shared ambition at a higher level (Meadowcroft, 2009; Urpelainen, 2013; Patterson et al., 2017; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019).

The results of this paper showed that the Finnish SD policy has been built on both small and larger wins. Some of the more transformational policy changes seem to be accumulating from small wins especially since the adoption of the SDGs in 2016 and the new government term since 2019. In these cases, several propelling mechanisms were observed (Plowman et al., 2007; Termeer and Dewulf, 2019). Overall, the Finnish SD policy seems to enjoy the *logic of attraction* (cf. Weick, 1984), as previous small wins have provoked larger and more transformative changes, culminating in the Government Programme on SD. Of those small wins, the Operational Commitments, for example, have *energized* people by empowering and convincing them that they can make a difference towards the shared SDGs. At the same time, the gradual integration of SD into ministry strategies demonstrates a *bandwagon effect* with the more proactive ministries attracting the less active ministries to adopt SD. Moreover, the relocation of the coordination secretariat to the PMO has supported *coupling* across sectors. Finally, the Expert Panel and the SD budgeting practices showcase *learning by doing*. They have evolved and broadened in recent years, yet continue to face some challenges. The challenges include a lack of resources appointed to the Panel or subsequently analyzing which parts of the budget relate to SD, rather than using it as a mechanism to allocate resources to initiatives that are most relevant for sustainability transformation.

Many challenges also impede the transformativeness of SD policy, some of the most evident ones being the lack of binding policies, short-term goals overruling SD in real-life decision-making, and the numerous promises and high-level ideas with a shortage of actions. Such weak leverage points have been typical of SD as a policy idea, meaning that initiatives have been easy to develop but have had limited transformational potential (Abson et al., 2017; Allen et al., 2018). We can also argue that the Finnish SD policy – as widely accepted by all actors as a goal, may also represent symbolic politics which in reality may “sustain the unsustainable” (see more, Blühdorn, 2007). Political actors may state that they are acting according to the SD goals as they are vaguely defined, and thus create a sense of unity for providing a shared narrative about the political goals that seem to be sustainable, but in reality, continue with business as usual. The “management of SD” type of governance approach is also challenged by Swyngedouw (2007), who conceptualizes it as “post-political”, meaning the growth of a managerial approach to government. Government is reconceived as a managerial function and deprived of its proper political dimension. These dimensions can indeed be seen in the Finnish SD policies.

The small wins could help overcome these weaknesses by, for example, legally establishing the Expert Panel on SD, adjusting and inserting articles supporting SD into the existing legislation, taking the SD budget to the heart of policymaking to increase the weight of SD, as well as promoting political discussion where SD will be taken as a serious and genuine political goal and not as a symbolic rhetoric. Some of the challenges are already being tackled, for instance by the SD tax reform and the Roadmap describing the measures and timescale for action beyond government terms.

Our results support [Ansell and Gash's \(2007\)](#) perception of small wins as being essential for building momentum, and [Meadowcroft \(2009\)](#) proposition of a two-fold strategy combining incremental and radical changes for transformations. Although such a strategy has been increasingly discussed in the literature for more than a decade (e.g. [Meadowcroft, 2009](#); [Kates et al., 2012](#)), in reality policies have tended to evolve incrementally ([Johnstone et al., 2020](#); [Kulovesi and Oberthür, 2020](#)). To overcome the tendency to support separate incremental changes, a series of small wins should be incorporated more into the policies together with more radical changes.

Small wins have helped to lay the groundwork and provide concretism to overcome the vagueness of SD in Finland, for example by using the doughnut model as a visualization tool instead of the three separate pillars or circles formerly used to illustrate SD. The series of small wins, such as the Operational Commitments, Sustainable Lifestyle tests and integration of SD into multiple strategies, are able to continually adapt to changing conditions, stimulate people, and gradually contribute to the same direction ([Weick, 1984](#); [Vermaak, 2013](#); [Termeer et al., 2017](#)). On the other hand, radical changes can disrupt the structures with more immediacy and lead to fundamental transformations ([Meadowcroft, 2009](#); [Turnheim et al., 2015](#); [EEA, 2019](#)), like the SD budgeting could do if used as a genuine steering mechanism instead of an analyzing tool. Nevertheless, radical changes may cause chaos as well, which is indeed sometimes needed for transformations. However, chaos could also have unexpected consequences that may not serve the sustainability targets, whereas transformation induced gradually by small wins might be more coherent and controlled.

Our paper has analyzed how small wins enhance sustainability transformations. The research was limited by the lack of longitudinal in-depth material on small wins to elaborate further on their transformative potential. The small wins framework is based on plausibility rather than causality ([Termeer and Dewulf, 2019](#)), and it may be impossible to draw conclusions on causality. Tracking the evolution of small wins into transformativeness is also difficult because “it is about the whole system and it is hard to define what leads to what”, as one interviewee stated and because the wins do not take a linear form. Still, it is important to look for progress and evolution to increase understanding of how sustainability transformations take place and what role governance has and could play in them. In our research, this challenge was partially tackled by several interviewees disclosing the history behind various SD policy outcomes. Thus, future research could include a longitudinal analysis of how small wins have appeared and evolved in relation to transformations more thoroughly. A comparison of SD policies of multiple countries would also be fruitful. Lastly, analyzing small wins together with low-hanging fruit and other closely related concepts ([Weick, 1984](#); [Vermaak, 2013](#); [Termeer and Dewulf, 2019](#)) could be beneficial to increase understanding of their differences.

6. Conclusions

At the moment, no country is on a path to meet the SDGs by 2030,

Appendix A. Interviews, surveys and workshop materials

Interviews

78 people were interviewed in August–November 2018. The interviewees represented all twelve Finnish ministries, the Expert Panel on sustainable development and key stakeholders. A member of the Sustainable Development Coordination Network of the ministry in question was interviewed together with relevant civil servants identified by that member. In the ministries, group-interviews included two to five interviewees. The seven Expert Panel members were interviewed individually. Other key persons were interviewed either in pairs or individually. The twelve key persons included the former and current coordination secretariat, coordinators of the Expert Panel and developers of the Operational Commitment. The interviews lasted for one to two hours and were held either physically or over the phone. The list of the main themes and 10–20 questions depending on the role of the interviewee were sent beforehand. The interviews dealt with changes in the Finnish SD policy over time, the SD governance model, challenges and needs for improvement, and, with the ministry representatives, the role of SD in the administrative branch.

calling for more transformative governance to overcome the vagueness of SD and unrealistic expectations for radical changes. Hence, the article studied transformative governance for SD with a combination of the 4Is analytical framework of institutions, ideas, interests and information and the small wins framework. A key aim was to elaborate on the relationship between small wins and transformativeness.

The findings reinforced the need for a two-fold strategy for sustainability transformations. Based on the research, SD policy should strive for both small, continuous wins as well as larger, more revolutionary wins to truly contribute to sustainability transformations. Neither of the approaches is considered to be appropriate alone. Furthermore, one type of win is not adequate, as they should also broadly cover the key realms of policy change, including institutions, interests, ideas and information. The wins also need to address and overcome challenges to break lock-ins and achieve more far-reaching change. By challenging the status quo on various fronts, small wins pave the way for more major reforms, such as the Government Programme based on sustainable development. When the time is ripe, for example politically or technologically, transformations can take place in a well-coordinated and coherent manner if a small wins SD policy has been applied in the long term.

Funding

We gratefully acknowledge the two projects – “Developmental evaluation of the Finnish sustainable development policies and transformation pathways (PATH2030)”, funded by the Finnish Government unit of analysis, assessment and research activities, and “Towards Eco-Welfare State: Orchestrating for Systemic Impact (ORSI)”, funded by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland (grant no. 327768) for their financial contributions to this study.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Hanna Salo: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Methodology, Analysis, Data curation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Annukka Berg:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition. **Kaisa-Korhonen-Kurki:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition. **Satu Lähteenoja:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Surveys

Two surveys were carried out in Webropol in September–October 2018 with 238 respondents in total. The surveys included a closed survey for key actors in SD policy (N = 27) and an open poll (N = 211). The first survey was distributed through a personal link to key stakeholders in sustainable development policy and the second survey was distributed as an open questionnaire in social media and email lists. Both surveys included the same content, but different distribution channels. Respondents were asked eight substance-related questions about the present state and political dimensions of sustainable development in Finland with space for open comments at the end.

Workshops

Two stakeholder *workshops* were organised to evaluate the Finnish SD policy and to co-create recommendations. The workshops were held physically in the House of Estates in Helsinki. The evaluation workshop was organised in October 2018 with 68 participants. They were asked to evaluate the challenges of sustainable development in Finland and build transition pathways on what needs to be solved if Finland aims to achieve systemic change and become the leader of sustainable development. The workshop participants were divided into six thematic groups according to their expertise and interests. The groups were 1) Sustainability of Finnish water ecosystems and food systems, 2) Sustainable use of forests and the sustainability of the energy system, 3) Equality and participation, 4) Sustainable Development in cross-sectoral foreign policies of Finland, 5) Reform of work and economical thinking, and 6) Leadership of the politics and mechanisms of sustainable development. Following the identification of challenges related to the theme, the participants were asked to identify who should do and what to contribute to sustainability transformations, and what needs to be changed and how to achieve the listed actions.

The co-creation workshop was organised in December 2018 with 19 participants. The workshop applied a wikicafé method with four tables and the participants going around each of them. The themes were: 1) Achievement of the 2030 Agenda and global leadership, 2) Global impacts of Finland and windows of opportunity, 3) Sustainable development indicators and science-policy interface, and 4) Implementation of sustainable development policies in NGOs, cities and companies. The participants discussed the preliminary recommendations and identified who the recommendations concern, who plan and implement them, what needs to be solved and on what timescale.

Appendix B. Coding

The coding process

The coding process with ATLAS.ti took place as follows: First, all relevant text excerpts were identified from the material and coded on the basis of the previous literature described in [Section 2](#) and organised according to the 4Is. Second, the direction of change of the actions was identified. Positive developments were coded as "transformative", whereas negative developments or factors were considered as "hindering". In some cases "no change" had occurred, for example the starting level may have been good or problematic. As the analysis took place, also "diverging change" was acknowledged describing contradictory developments, such as the high level of literature with decreasing level of skills. Third, the timeframe was coded. Text excerpts entailing actions that are implemented or have happened in the past were coded as "conducted", whereas aims, targets and plans were "planned". Fourth, as the small wins are implemented actions (e.g. [Weick, 1984](#); [Termeer and Dewulf, 2019](#)), "conducted" text were analyzed into small and larger wins as appropriate, while "planned" text excerpts were coded into "Not applicable (N/A)".

In the end, more than 3400 quotations were coded according to 69 codes in total. Each text excerpt was coded into at least four codes and the majority of quotations considered more than one domain of change. Further, we returned to the interview materials and analyzed them through the lens of transformativeness. We looked for evolutions in the SD policy to provide insights for the third research question on the linkage between small wins and sustainability transformations.

The code book

Domain of change.

- Institutions
 - o Novel and alternative governmental mechanisms
 - o Novel public-private relationships
 - o Multilevel and multisectoral governance
 - o SD coordination
 - o SD is outlined in strategies
 - o Legal power
 - o Mainstreaming
 - o Path dependency
 - Resistance
 - Continuity
 - o Distribution of power
 - o Human resources
 - o Plans of implementation
 - o Budget and funding
 - o Budget for SD
 - o Phenomena-based budgeting
 - o Various synergies
 - o Policy coherence

- Interests
 - o Political will
 - o Ownership of SD
 - o Multisectoral recognition for SD
 - o Measures in alignment with the SDGs
 - o Silos
 - o Cooperation
 - o Participation
 - o Reconciliation
 - o Have overcome barriers and resistance
 - o Description of barriers and difficulties
 - o Description of positive developments
 - o Incentives for SD
 - o Conflicts of interest
 - o Responsibility
 - o Prioritisation
 - o Proactiveness
- Ideas
 - o Signs of paradigm shift
 - o Sight
 - o Strong / clear direction of policies
 - More of the same
 - Conflicting targets
 - o Shared and accepted aims
 - o Consideration of SD as a whole
 - Isolation of individual SD goals / Cherry-picking
 - o Provocative ambitions
 - o Ideas of solutions
 - Ideas and promises only (No plans of implementation)
- Information
 - o SD reporting
 - o Adequate information flow
 - o Cross-sectoral information
 - o Feedback loops from actions
 - o Decisions made based on (research) information
 - o Solid knowledge base
 - o Evaluation
 - o Learning
 - o Intermediate results
 - o Visible results and experiences

Direction of change.

- Transformative
- Hindering
- No change
- Diverging change

Timeframe.

- Conducted
- Planned

Size.

- Small
- Larger
- Not applicable (N/A)

Appendix C. Descriptive analysis of the evaluation materials

N = 833.

Direction: Change: 459, hindering: 353, diverging: 7, no change: 14.

Time: Conducted: 524, planned: 309.

Size: Small: 74, larger: 431, N/A: 328.

Institutions (n = 427).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Planned
Budget and funding	30	1	0	14	0	14
Budget for SD	38	22	2	5	0	11
Phenomena-based budgeting	2	2	0	0	0	0
Distribution of power	15	6	4	1	0	8
Human resources	65	7	4	29	11	27
Legal power	22	1	0	6	0	14
Mainstreaming	66	22	4	24	4	20
Multilevel and multisectoral governance	42	24	3	11	2	6
Novel and alternative governmental mechanisms	10	3	2	0	0	7
Novel public-private relationships	0	0	0	0	0	0
Path dependency	1	0	0	1	0	0
P: Continuity	4	3	1	1	0	0
P: Resistance	33	1	1	30	1 -	2
Plans of implementation	3	1	1	0	0	2
Policy coherence	33	2	1	20	0 -	11
SD coordination	56	29	5	11	2	15
SD is outlined in strategies	5	3	1	0	0	2
Various synergies	2	0	0	1	0	1

Ideas (n = 439).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Planned
Consideration of SD as a whole	36	5	0	20	0	10
C: Isolation of individual SD goals / Cherry-picking	11	0	0	11	1	0
Ideas of solutions	239	2	1	1	0	237
I: Ideas and promises only	26	0	0	26	1	0
Provocative ambitions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shared and accepted aims	16	9	1	4	0	3
Sight	39	2	0	27	2	10
Signs of paradigm shift	16	5	0	2	0	9
Strong / clear direction of policies	9	2	1	2	0	5
S: Conflicting targets	38	0	0	38	0	0
S: More of the same	45	1	1	37	2	2

Interests (n = 869).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Planned
Responsibility	5	0	0	4	0	1
Conflicts of interest	42	0	0	41	1	1
Cooperation	32	9	5	4	1	18
Description of barriers and difficulties	329	0	0	325	26	2
Description of positive developments	127	123	28	1	0	2
Have overcome barriers and resistance	4	2	1	0	0	3
Incentives for SD	26	0	0	5	0	21
Measures in alignment with the SDGs	33	5	2	10	1	17
Multisectoral recognition for SD	57	24	3	13	0	20
Ownership of SD	32	12	6	10	0	8
Participation	76	26	8	16	1	30
Political will	23	8	1	8	1	7
Prioritisation	7	0	0	2	0	5
Proactiveness	20	3	1	3	0	14
Reconciliation	19	2	0	3	0	14
Silos	37	1	1	32	0	3

Information (n = 284).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Planned
Adequate information flow	119	15	6	41	2	64
Cross-sectoral information	19	4	1	5	0	10
Decisions made based on information	23	0	0	16	0	7
Evaluation	22	2	1	5	1	15

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(continued)

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Planned
Feedback loops from actions	11	0	0	4	0	7
Learning	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intermediate results	6	2	1	1	1	3
SD reporting	18	9	3	6	2	3
Solid knowledge base	29	1	0	18	4	10
Visible results and experiences	37	23	19	7	1	9

Appendix D Descriptive analysis of the key SD policy documents

N = 2620

Direction: Change: 2167, hindering: 260, diverging: 64, no change: 129

Time: Conducted: 1793, planned: 827

Size: Small: 693, larger: 1013, N/A: 914

Institutions (n = 1489).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Diverging change	No change	Planned
Budget and funding	104	52	16	17	5	1	6	28
Budget for SD	27	18	7	0	0	3	0	6
Phenomena-based budgeting	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Distribution of power	23	18	6	0	0	0	1	4
Human resources	32	12	7	6	3	2	1	11
Legal power	124	51	15	7	3	1	14	51
Mainstreaming	93	72	35	7	4	2	2	11
Multilevel and multisectoral governance	104	77	23	1	0	1	7	18
Novel and alternative governmental mechanisms	71	51	36	0	0	0	0	20
Novel public-private relationships	35	25	16	0	0	0	0	9
Path dependency	9	3	0	2	1	2	1	1
P: Continuity	149	101	42	6	0	1	11	29
P: Resistance	24	1	1	12	4	3	7	1
Plans of implementation	341	165	102	2	0	3	0	170
Policy coherence	217	115	32	8	0	2	4	90
SD coordination	26	22	11	0	0	2	0	2
SD is outlined in strategies	53	41	25	0	0	3	0	10
Various synergies	52	27	10	4	0	1	1	19

Ideas (n = 1010).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Diverging	No change	Planned
Consideration of SD as a whole	132	65	17	11	0	1	2	53
C: Isolation of individual SD goals / Cherry-picking	27	13	7	8	2	1	2	3
Ideas of solutions	296	35	14	5	2	3	3	255
I: Ideas and promises only	21	0	0	9	8	3	9	0
Provocative ambitions	55	15	4	0	0	0	0	42
Shared and accepted aims	167	69	22	1	0	3	2	91
Sight	108	52	12	4	0	4	4	45
Signs of paradigm shift	32	21	2	2	1	0	0	9
Strong / clear direction of policies	159	68	18	0	0	1	1	91
S: Conflicting targets	4	0	0	4	2	0	0	0
S: More of the same	9	0	0	6	5	1	2	1

Interests (n = 2463).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Diverging	No change	Planned
Responsibility	81	60	7	1	0	0	1	19
Conflicts of interest	10	2	1	6	1	1	1	1
Cooperation	318	236	92	9	1	1	6	68
Description of barriers and difficulties	304	6	1	232	44	32	26	11
Description of positive developments	385	313	107	0	0	16	54	5
Have overcome barriers and resistance	41	35	12	0	0	3	1	3
Incentives for SD	77	20	12	2	1	0	4	51
Measures in alignment with the SDGs	517	305	148	13	1	12	41	150

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(continued)

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Diverging	No change	Planned
Multisectoral recognition for SD	141	117	52	5	3	2	4	15
Ownership of SD (feeling of being able to contribute)	52	43	24	1	0	1	2	6
Participation	195	160	116	6	1	2	9	19
Political will	116	75	17	1	0	1	3	38
Prioritisation	76	44	15	2	0	0	2	28
Proactiveness (e.g. international initiatives)	121	96	49	0	0	0	2	24
Reconciliation	19	9	2	2	0	0	0	8
Silos	10	1	0	5	1	1	2	1

Information (n = 878).

Code	Count	Conducted AND change	Small wins	Conducted AND hindering	Small challenges	Diverging	No Change	Planned
Adequate information flow	206	132	80	26	6	1	9	39
Cross-sectoral information	18	13	11	0	0	0	0	5
Decisions made based on (research) information	48	16	11	1	1	0	1	30
Evaluation	146	100	74	10	1	1	1	33
Feedback loops from actions	24	14	5	2	2	0	0	8
Learning	15	15	12	0	0	0	1	0
Intermediate results	19	13	9	0	0	0	0	6
SD reporting	122	110	68	5	2	1	1	5
Solid knowledge base	88	49	28	14	6	5	4	16
Visible results and experiences	187	171	111	13	5	2	1	1

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