Steering in Governance: Evolutionary Perspectives

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Editorial

Steering in Governance: Evolutionary Perspectives

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Abstract

Steering has negative connotations nowadays in many discussions on governance, policy, politics and planning. The associations with the modernist state project linger on. At the same time, a rethinking of what is possible by means of policy and planning, what is possible through governance, which forms of change and which pursuits of common goods still make sense, in an era of cynicism about steering yet also high steering expectations, seems eminently useful. Between laissez faire and blue-print planning are many paths which can be walked. In this thematic issue, we highlight the value of evolutionary understandings of governance and of governance in society, in order to grasp which self-transformations of governance systems are more likely than others and which governance tools and ideas stand a better chance than others in a particular context. We pay particular attention to Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) as a perspective on governance which delineates steering options as stemming from a set of co-evolutions in governance. Understanding steering options requires, for EGT, path mapping of unique governance paths, as well as context mapping, the external contexts relevant for the mode of reproduction of the governance system in case. A rethinking of steering in governance, through the lens of EGT, can shed a light on governance for innovation, sustainability transitions, new forms of participation and self-organization. For EGT, co-evolutions and dependencies, not only limit but also shape possibilities of steering, per path and per domain of governance and policy.

Issue

This editorial is part of the issue "Steering in Governance: Evolutionary Perspectives" edited by Kristof Van Assche (University of Alberta, Canada / University of Bonn, Germany) and Raoul Beunen (Open University, The Netherlands).

1. Introduction

This thematic issue on steering in governance brings together a diversity of contributions that explore, each in their own way, how an evolutionary understanding offers new insight about steering in governance. The shift from government to governance has inspired an ever-growing diversity of theoretical reflections on the phenomenon of governance. Both in academia and policy practices, many voices have questioned the steering powers of governments as well as the legitimacy of states' steering ambitions (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009; Pierre & Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998). In conjunction, the scientific reflections on policy, public administration and steering have shifted from what is often labeled as traditional or hierarchical forms of policy making in which governments play pivotal roles, towards a myriad of alternative forms of governance that for example emphasize networks, economic instruments, and the role of private actors (Marais et al., 2021; Niedziałkowski & Putkowska-Smoter, 2021; Umbach & Tkalec, 2021). New concepts were developed to label and describe the processes and mechanisms through which societies aim to direct and steer, such as orchestrating, learning, adaptation, meta-governance, or network governance.

Discussions and reflections on steering in governance often revolve on the quest for control. This quest reflects an ongoing search for policy approaches, instruments

and strategies through which actors, subjects and the future can be directed into a desired state and an ongoing adaptation of policies and strategies to changing circumstances (Van Assche et al., 2020). Within such endeavor one can build on more recent literatures about adaptive governance and institutional change, but also on older lineages of literature that provide insights in the ongoing dynamics of society and the structures through which societies organize and govern themselves, such as social systems theory, actor-network theory, and post-structuralist ideas about the interplay between knowledge and power, between ways of understanding and ways of organizing. Combining and integrating these different theories and their key concepts, one can create an evolutionary perspective on governance that allows for more refined analyses of steering.

2. An Evolutionary Perspective

Governance broadly concerns the coordination of collectively binding decisions in a particular context (cf. Pierre, 2000; Van Assche et al., 2014). These contexts can be small groups, organizations, states or even the international domain. Governance can take many different forms. Actors, networks, and institutions are all part of governance and can be coupled in different ways. Governance is always multi-actor and often multi-level. All these aspects can be studied through specific theories, but aspects cannot be on a par with the broader governance phenomenon of which they are part. And while studying these aspects enables a valuable translation into an understanding of specific ways of organizing governance, e.g., through networks or markets, such courses of action evolve within a broader web of processes and mechanisms, which may yield very different effects than what was initially intended. Governance, in other words, is a matter of systems which deserve to be studied as a whole, because, as systems, their emerging logic creates its own effects (Hartley & Howlett, 2021; Mölders, 2021; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Governance understood as a broader evolutionary phenomenon reveals, also empirically, a multiplicity of perspectives and prescriptions and hence their development and use should be part of a theory of governance (cf. Mielke & Cermeño, 2021; Voß & Freeman, 2016). One can speak of a necessary second-order observation of evolving recipes for good governance, under changing names, rather than a quest for a new recipe.

Governance processes are subject to varying dynamics, meaning that their constitutive elements and structures rely on a diverse host of temporal frameworks and related action repertoires (Gross, 2010). Governance configurations may therefore appear as stable for a while, but even stabilization requires ongoing processes through which elements and structures are constantly constructed and reconstructed (Beunen et al., 2017; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Here one can think of the constant work to reproduce discourses or the need for insti-

tutional maintenance (Lawrence et al., 2009). Without ongoing reproduction, discourses would disappear and institutions would become meaningless. Leaning on Machiavelli, one can invoke as illustration the idea of 'democracy': Each example of democracy is de facto a different organization of politics, embedded in a different organization of society, and it takes both institutional design and maintenance, continuous work, to prevent it from backsliding into authoritarian or other non-democratic forms.

Understanding governance as a constant co-evolution of different elements and structures has implications for steering. It implies that steering attempts are produced and introduced in an ever-changing context. As such, the success of steering depends on both the fit and adaptive capacity within a given context. First, concerning the fit, a good understanding of the context and dependencies that shape its further evolution is important when developing forms of steering (Alves Rolo et al., 2021; Marais et al., 2021; Van Assche et al., 2021). Second, the success of steering depends on the constant adaptation of steering strategies to changing circumstances (see for example Marais et al., 2021; Mielke & Cermeño, 2021; Niedziałkowski & Putkowska-Smoter, 2021; Umbach & Tkalec, 2021). Steering is a continuous effort that does not stop once a policy is formally introduced. Analyzing what works, responding to shifting strategy patterns by actors involved, and adapting to new circumstances are all part of the steering repertoire. It requires identifying the effects of steering and distinguishing these from the effects caused by other factors (cf. Hartley & Howlett, 2021). Some effects might go unnoticed, some may only be observed by certain actors or in specific discourses, while other effects might just be observed, but not contribute to steering efforts (Mölders, 2021). Conversely, it is possible that the effects caused by other factors are considered to be successes or failures from steering. Alvesson and Kärreman (2016) provide a striking analysis of over-reliance on success stories in management, and over-attribution of success to steering (by managers). Hence linking forms of steering, strategies and effects to each other is a matter of observation (cf. Luhmann, 2018). Actors in governance need to make decisions based on a specific understanding of the world and a future that is largely unknown. Given the inherent limits to observation and anticipation, a full overview of the possible range of consequences of decision-making is in fact unattainable.

3. Consequences for Governance

The different contributions show that steering works better if there is a thorough understanding of the evolutionary path of governance and the different dependencies that structure any further evolutions (Marais et al., 2021; Mielke & Cermeño, 2021; Niedziałkowski & Putkowska-Smoter, 2021; Van Assche et al., 2021). Such understanding makes it easier to predict the possible

chain of changes and adaptions that might occur as a consequence of steering attempts. If people in a particular place tend to follow rules made by the government, it is more likely that they will act according to new rules, compared to places or cultures with a tendency to ignore or circumvent rules made by the government.

An important aspect of the evolutionary path concerns the relation between the actor that aims to steer and the object of steering (Hartley & Howlett, 2021; Mölders, 2021). A long list of questions quickly emerges, many of which are addressed by the contributors to this thematic issue: Is the object of steering a product of the actor or of the interplay between actors in governance? Is it a pre-existing, or reinterpreted object? Are other actors convinced of its existence and importance? Did a new object 'impose' itself from the environment, triggering a response in governance? Which cognitive and organizational resources does the actor have to grasp the object, its susceptibility to steering, and to translate these insights into steering strategies in governance and through governance?

Steering often works because people believe it to be working and hence act accordingly. Once that belief in steering gets eroded or even lost, it becomes much more difficult to steer and to direct things on a certain path. The loss of belief in the modernist ideals of the welfare state was partly driven by overly high expectations that simply could not be met. This created an environment in which failures and problems gained more attention than successes, in which a loss of confidence in the state and its institutions were increasingly emphasized, and in which alternative models, often focusing on a smaller state, market mechanisms, and deregulation were increasingly promoted. Such alternative perspectives gradually altered the governance system whereby new ideals and perspectives were translate into new forms of organizing, new institutions, new actors and so on. Within those evolving and further diverging governance systems it became harder and harder to restore a belief in steering by and through governments.

Things become more unpredictable and less susceptible to control because of the involvement of more actors and institutions, more perspectives, and because it is difficult in decentralized systems to: a) coordinate governance strategy and steer, b) centralize expert and political observations of the issue at hand, and c) match cognitive and organizational resources in smaller domains of governance. In other words: What might be gained in legitimacy, through de-centralization, participation, localism, can easily be lost because problems become invisible, poorly understood and because actors intent on steering do not have the adequate tools to do so.

One of such problems is that of adaptation. Several contributors to this issue enter this terrain and one observation is that there are likely to be trade-offs between more effective forms of steering and possibilities for adaptation (cf. Alves Rolo et al., 2021; Niedziałkowski & Putkowska-Smoter, 2021; Umbach & Tkalec, 2021;

Van Assche et al., 2021). As with centralization and decentralization, steering and adaptation are less incompatible than it looks, and this partial compatibility is a result of the diversity of forms both steering and adaptation can take, and it is related to the diverse effects of each form of steering and each type of adaptation. Indeed, 'adaptation,' is not one thing, not one activity and one mechanism in governance, and adaptation to one thing implies ignoring something else, while some forms of adaptation require long-term perspectives, strong steering, and central coordination (Hartley & Howlett, 2021; Mielke & Cermeño, 2021; Umbach & Tkalec, 2021).

We can conclude this introduction by emphasizing that different steering options create different effects in different contexts and at different moments in time. Furthermore, the effects of steering change because of the effects of previous steering. Steering can change the context in which the next steering attempt, or simply the next step in the same plan, will land. Our authors demonstrate that the contexts can be cultural, economic, institutional, and, last but not least, material. If changes are observed, actors might again adapt their strategies and actions, for example to enhance or alter the effects of steering.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Raoul Beunen is Associate Professor of Environmental Governance at the Open University, The Netherlands. His research explores the potentials and limitations of environmental policy and planning in the perspective of adaptive governance and sustainability. It focuses on innovation and evolution in governance, paying attention to the dynamics of policy implementation and integration, multi-level governance, stakeholder involvement, and the performance of institutional structures.

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Article

Steering as Path Creation: Leadership and the Art of Managing Dependencies and Reality Effects

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Abstract
We develop a perspective on steering in governance which understands steering as intended path creation. Inspired by evolutionary governance theory, critical management studies and social systems theory, we argue that steering is shaped and limited by co-evolutions, disallowing for any formulaic approach. In order to illuminate the space for steering in governance, we analyze the interplay between different dependencies. Those dependencies are not just obstacles to path creation, they can also be pointers and assets. The steering discussion is further complicated by always unique sets of couplings between a governance system and its environment. After introducing the ideas of reality effects and governance strategy, we further develop our concept of steering and present it as the management of dependencies (in governance) and reality effects (outside governance) towards path creation. This management is ideally strategic in nature and requires leadership in a new role.

Keywords
dependencies; governance; leadership; path creation; reality effect; steering

1. Introduction

Societal steering through governance is a highly debated topic. Questions regarding what can be changed in society by means of planning, policies and law have been discussed for centuries and have received many divergent answers. Divergence in ideas has been tied to different disciplinary traditions, schools of thought and ideologies (Hillier, 2002; Scott, 1998; Willke, 2014). Whereas severe critiques of steering have developed since the 1960s in a variety of disciplines, very strong steering ambitions re-emerged with the rising popularity of transition thinking (Kemp et al., 2007; Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009), innovation thinking (Beckert, 2016; Bledow et al.,

2009), social-ecological systems perspectives (McLain & Lee, 1996) and climate change adaptation theories (Paschen & Ison, 2014; Rip, 2006). In parallel, one can observe the survival of modernism in policy, planning and administration, where the promise of social engineering remains alluring (Czarniawska, 2002; Gunder & Hillier, 2009; Lindberg et al., 2015; Luhmann, 1990; Seidl, 2007).

Rather than re-summarizing the defenders and critics of modernism, we present a perspective on steering which gives due weight to processes of co-evolution. Taking cues from evolutionary governance theory (EGT) we intend to explore the middle ground between naïve steering optimism and cynicism (Van Assche et al., 2013).

EGT retains the possibility that action is strategically oriented while questioning modernist assumptions. By modernist assumptions we refer to ideas of objectivity, universality, longevity of the knowledge underpinning steering, perfect knowledge integration and the susceptibility of realities to steering attempts (Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014; Van Assche et al., 2020a). Steering remains possible but will encounter unique enabling factors and obstacles in each governance system and each project.

Governance powers are always unique, as governance paths are unique. Intention and strategy are constrained by different sets of dependencies (Beunen et al., 2015; Tadajewski et al., 2011). Those dependencies affect how actors and institutions are formed, how they interact and how the governance configuration transforms itself over time. EGT distinguishes between path dependencies, interdependencies, goal dependencies and material dependencies. *Path dependencies*, theorized and recognized in several disciplines (David, 2007; Pierson, 2000), are legacies from the past affecting the functioning of the governance configuration. *Interdependencies* are current relations between elements of governance which shape and constrain the transformation of the system while *goal dependencies* are the effects of envisioned futures on the governance system. Goal dependencies can take forms wildly different from 'implementation' (cf. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984) and can stem from futures embraced or feared by actors in governance, from futures visibly or implicitly encoded in institutions (policies, plans, laws) (Hoch, 2016) and from interactions between those futures and the other elements in the configuration. Finally, the theory recognizes *material dependencies*, the effects of natural and human made physical environments and infrastructures on governance (Duineveld et al., 2017; Van Assche et al., 2020a).

Path creation refers to the agency through which actors create and exercise alternative options in a governance path (Garud & Karnøe, 2001a, 2001b; Garud et al., 2010). We develop the concept of path creation within an EGT perspective and argue that steering has to be understood as a process of deliberate yet not necessarily strategic path creation. This claim will be unpacked in the rest of the paper. The distinctive character of the EGT version of steering will gradually become more pronounced as will the distinction with modernist understandings of steering.

Within an evolutionary understanding of governance, strategies in governance are strategies addressing communities bound by the decisions taken in the governance system (Van Assche et al., 2020b). They connect a vision of a desirable long-term future with policy tools and function as an institution themselves. In other words, they have a narrative and institutional dimension. The strategizing envisioned here is the strategy *by* and *for* a collective. In our analysis of path creation and steering we will need to consider what this means for notions of leadership, as leaders have been traditionally associated with both path creation and strategy (Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff, 1991; Garud & Karnøe, 2001a; Young, 1991).

In the next section we first specify the theoretical perspective of EGT and its implications for a new understanding of path creation. We then analyze what steering, as intended path creation, could look like in terms of the types of change which can be produced according to EGT. Here we introduce the concept of reality effects, changes in the experienced reality of the community to be steered. This leads into a discussion of the system relations which have to be invoked to explain the possibilities and limits of steering. For communities as well as for organizations and their leaders, we draw out the implication that steering is an art, requiring considerable skill in managing dependencies and managing the reality effects of policy and planning.

2. Path Creation

Both path dependence and path creation have received considerable attention in several disciplines (Bakken et al., 2010; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Lovio et al., 2011; Schienstock, 2004; Stack & Gartland, 2003). Focusing here on path creation, we can say that the most influential theorists on path creation can be found in the modernist camp and prefer to take a rather formulaic approach (Garud & Karnøe, 2001a, 2001b; Garud et al., 2010). Usually there is a belief in the objective possibility of path creation, and in its predictability and susceptibility to engineering. Conditions of the governance system might be specified as an enabling context for path creation (if X and Y are the case in governance, then path creation will ensue).

Co-evolving elements in governance, however, make it hard to anticipate or engineer path creation. The idea of co-evolution in governance introduces unpredictability, knock-on effects and the notion that the emerging path is contingent on the actions and decisions made by many. Those actions can include strategizing against intended path creation. In governance, actors co-evolve with institutions, with each other, with narratives and forms of knowledge. In addition, formal and informal institutions shape each other over time and material infrastructures can have institutional and cognitive effects which are not entirely observable from within the governance system (Beunen et al., 2013; Jacobsson et al., 2015; Kjaer & Vetterlein, 2018; Van Assche et al., 2013). The presence of path creation might therefore not be easily agreed upon by internal observers. Moreover, governance can create actors, institutions, forms of knowledge and materialities that can affect what is possible in terms of steering later on (Duineveld et al., 2017; Frederiksen, 2016; Van Assche et al., 2020a). The goal dependencies can entail entirely unanticipated reactions to steering attempts (Tadajewski et al., 2011; Teubner, 1998). These reactions can then trigger path creation which might not be expected nor observed (as it was not

expected in the first place). Taking into account these limitations, path creation is nevertheless possible as a result of contingent events and because of the agency and leadership of actors (Alvesson et al., 2016; Van Assche et al., 2013; Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014; see Figure 1).

The interplay between different dependencies creates rigidities but also flexibility. This flexibility is possibly a counter-intuitive feature of governance evolution. On second inspection, it is not so strange as path dependencies and interdependencies can also be leverage points and assets for change (cf. Schienstock, 2004). Whether or not they become obstacles for change depends on context, perspective and goal (Harrison et al., 2019; Hautz et al., 2017). Novelty can arise and path creation can occur through the interplay of dependencies (Schirmer & Hadamek, 2007). A different way of understanding this is to emphasize the modification of dependencies by each other. A material dependency can reinforce or weaken a path dependency; a goal dependency is modified by material dependencies and the result of those modifications can be, in some cases, path creation (Duineveld et al., 2017; Van Assche et al., 2021). Managing this complexity is never perfect and can be viewed as managing dependencies as opposed to eliminating them. Ultimately, managing the other dependencies is needed to make goal dependencies more predictable and manageable. In order to maximize the effects of a governance strategy in the community, its internal effects within governance have to be grasped first.

Steering as *intended* path creation can take many forms and follow many routes. Considering the variety in governance paths empirically observed by anthropologists (Gledhill, 2009), by EGT and others, a diversity of steering mechanisms and pathways seems natural (cf. Flyvbjerg, 1998). Path creation can be a fast or a slow process. It can involve a long-term vision, an ad hoc adaptation or shorter-term goals, and it can focus on changes in governance or in society at large.

Thus, steering does not necessarily involve strategy (cf. Garud et al., 2010; Teubner & Willke, 1984). Intention is present in all the forms of steering listed above, even where steering is triggered by tactics rather than strategy, even if it is the result of an adaptation that is felt as necessary. In any case, goals still need to be set, time horizons need to be defined and action needs to be coordinated. There are however clear benefits to adopting a form of strategy: a greater degree of coordination and the promise of managing effects in the longer run (cf. Bledow et al., 2009; Clegg et al., 2004). The diversity of forms of path creation predicted by EGT and observed empirically by many (Alvesson, 1993; Alvesson & Spicer, 2016; Beckert, 2016; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Van Assche et al., 2020b, 2021) marks a clear difference with modernist ideas of steering.

3. Goals and Reality Effects

For EGT, goals engender dependencies. Therefore, steering attempts also have this effect. As we know, goal dependencies are effects of goals within the governance system. Because governance binds a community to its own decisions, internal effects of those decisions can also have external effects. Goal dependencies can translate into external effects that are not necessarily in line with the intentions behind a steering attempt. When external effects are in line with the steering intention, this can reinforce the belief in 'implementation' (Barrett, 2004; MacKenzie et al., 2007). More often, effects are not obviously aligned with intentions. The effects of goals within governance can vary widely because of the diversity of interactions in the governance network: between actors, between institutions (both formal and informal), between power and knowledge, and between knowledge and actors. All these interactions influence the relation between goals and their effects.

Goals thus trigger goal dependencies depending on the structure of the governance configuration and the behaviour of the actors. The translation of goal dependencies into external effects will hinge on the same factors. Beyond a similarity or conformity with the goals set, there can be affinity in spirit (Barrett, 2004; Faludi, 1973), the resistance touched upon and a variety of other effects (Brans & Rossbach, 1997; Luhmann, 1989, 1990).

Of particular interest for our present discussion are those effects that set in motion the creation of new realities, what we call *reality effects* (cf. Van Assche et al., 2020a; Žižek, 1989). We distinguish between two types
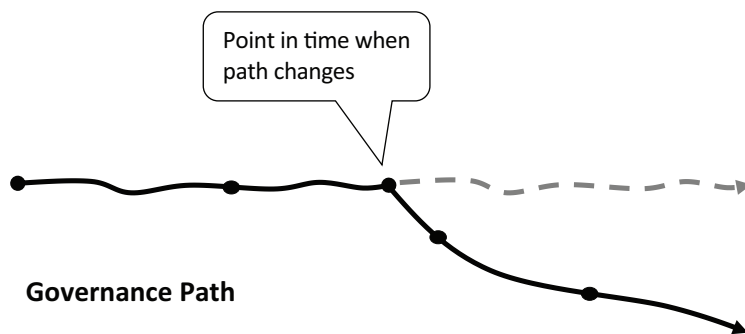
Figure 1. Path creation in governance. Path creation can be intended or not intended, it can be strategic in nature or nonstrategic. The point where the path changes and dependencies are reshuffled is sometimes recognized only in hindsight.

of reality effects: discursive and material. Discursive and material changes affect each other. An infrastructure project can embody a new future and convince citizens that this future is real (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Scott, 1998). Conversely, a new belief in social engineering, pervading society and governance, can generate new infrastructures (Figure 2).

If reality effects are in line with the initial intention of those steering, we can speak of *performativity* (Beunen et al., 2013). This does not always mean however, that the world has become as was intended by the policy or plan or that the world has been changed at all. This is possible but whether performativity can indeed be ascribed to implementation has to be diagnosed for each situation (cf. Willke, 2014). Often, the result of steering attempts is convincing for other reasons. Actors in governance might believe in steering success and convince others. Or they might perform success by reinterpreting the current situation as positive and as resulting from policy intentions (Seidl & Becker, 2005; also cf. Luhmann, 1995, 1997). Both citizens and actors in governance might believe the story anyway, so no performance of success is even needed. Experts can play a role by providing measurements of policy outcomes, through accounting systems, indicators and assessments (Carter et al., 2010). These measurements and tools can be used to render narratives *more* true (Turnhout et al., 2007; Verschraegen, 2015).

Another path to performativity appears when discursive or material realities have shifted, even without performance of success. Consider severe flooding events that portray climate change more clearly; imperceptible shifts in the notion of democracy (changes in discursive reality) might erode the belief in the current leadership and governance systems. Leadership and steering systems are reinforced when contingent events make it look like the world is as intended by those steering. Interpretation is always involved, as direct causality between steering and effects can almost never be established (Paterson & Teubner, 1998; Seidl, 2016). Both organizations (in governance) and the function system of politics (governance being politics in the broad sense) rely on a posteriori ascription of intention, causality and success of steering (Alvesson et al., 2016; Luhmann, 1990, 2018; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Performativity is an effect of discourse. Discursive configurations and discourse coalitions, entrenched narratives and ideologies and deeply rooted metaphors can make performativity more likely (Beunen et al., 2013; Hillier, 2002; Rap, 2006). However, classic steering theory and modernist policy theories are not always wrong and straightforward implementation *is* possible under certain conditions. Some of those cases can entail path creation, can be considered steering. Performativity does not always have to be invoked. One can think of situations marked by limited steering ambitions, smaller projects, shorter term goals. Even more complex schemes for the long term can work through the logic of implementation, as when people are dependent on the strategizing authorities or coerced by them (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016; Ferguson, 1990) or when discourse on is widely shared and steering power is widely accepted. Such sharing and acceptance together generate legitimacy, which offers further support for implementation (Van Tatenhove, 2011). What differs in our perspective is quite simply that one cannot assume as a rule that central steering and implementation will work. Positing the existence of a general rule in a situation marked by complexity, co-evolution and contingency simply makes the situation harder to manage (Alvesson, 1993; Alvesson et al., 2016).
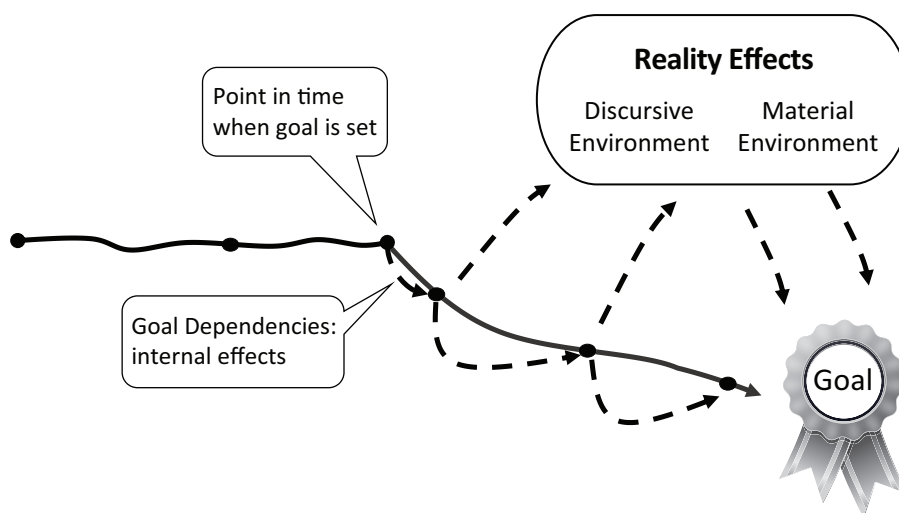
Figure 2. Steering as intended path creation. Goal dependencies and reality effects align. The set goal triggers goal dependencies in governance and those dependencies are predictable enough to maintain the course. The effects of governance on discursive and material environments (reality effects) align as well. The result is performativity of the most desirable sort, i.e., coming about through intended path creation, through steering.

4. Systems Relations and Reality Effects

Material dependencies are effects of the physical world on governance (Van Assche et al., 2020a). Material dependencies, just as the goal dependencies discussed above, can lead to reality effects—but not necessarily. A wetland might resist any attempt at land reclamation, independent of any effect the struggle against flooding might have had on the discourses pervading land policy (cf. Valentinov, 2017). Other things might be happening in the place supposedly steered. Other policies might have led to interventions in the local landscape. Ongoing landscape changes, whether induced by policy or not, might entwine with the intervention envisioned in steering (Lovio et al., 2011). Finally, it can happen that ambitious steering schemes produce sub-goals which can contradict each other, reinforce each other or otherwise interact in their material effects, more generally in their reality effects (Hyysalo et al., 2019; Jacobsson et al., 2015).

Reality effects will likely be greater when governance system and community share goals and values, perhaps grounded in narratives on what the good life or good community is. Reality effects will also be reinforced if beliefs about governance itself are shared. That is, if people believe in particular procedures and routines, in particular forms of hierarchy and authority, it is easier to exercise that authority. Luhmann (1997) already revealed the best recipe for successful planning: people who are accustomed to planning. In a similar vein, Alvesson and Spicer (2016) mention how organizations' religious belief in leadership leads them to seek for solutions to all their problems by strengthening leadership. Shared discourse can contribute to local understandings of steering interventions as logical, natural and legitimate (Bakken et al., 2010; Bartel & Garud, 2009; Hüther & Krücken, 2013). Technocracy, with expert groups taking a central place in governance, can function more easily in either very authoritarian societies or places with great respect for expertise (Ferguson, 1990; Scott, 1998).

Each governance path embodies a particular set of relations with the surrounding systems. It embodies a governance path shaped by a unique set of environments (Valentinov, 2014). Each path, in its unique set of environments, can enable particular forms of steering, can make them imaginable, possible to articulate and translate in terms of actors and institutions, power and knowledge (Schirmer & Hadamek, 2007; Seidl, 2016; Willke, 2014). The dependencies shaping governance will also shape the effects of governance action in the environment as they modify the translation of decisions into other more specified decisions and into action outside governance. Referring to the dependencies is not enough though, as the nature of the couplings with the surrounding environments enables certain decisions to have more impact than others. Dependencies shape and are shaped by the couplings with the environments they exist in.

A steering attempt crystallizing in a particular path will receive responses from its unique set of coupled and co-evolved environments. It can be associated with a unique matrix of possible interventions and a matrix of possible reactions to those interventions. In other words, the reality effects of steering attempts will be modified by the features of both system and environment (cf. Luhmann, 1989). Reality effects result from a slowly individualized history of a system in an environment. Sometimes the constraints to steering, the limits to intervention and to performative reality effects can be located, first of all, in the possibilities within the system to observe, imagine and coordinate. In other cases, the constraints are more a matter of environments remaining opaque or systems relations disallowing a particular form of coordination (Lindberg et al., 2015; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999).

4.1. Systems Relations and Leadership

Leadership in such context thus requires knowledge of both the governance system and the relevant environments (Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009; Van Assche et al., 2020a). Understanding the couplings between governance and its environments is understanding informal institutions, as these are often the basis for, or alternative to, the formal institutions developed in governance (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Leaders therefore cannot identify uniquely with the governance system and cannot derive their knowledge entirely from within the system. They need insight in the interplay between formal and informal institutions (Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014), an insight which more easily develops when one can shift easily between insider and outsider perspectives.

The choice to pursue discursive versus material reality effects, in articulating strategy, and the crafting of the performance towards performativity, requires leadership. Neither a checklist nor a recipe will deliver the strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Whittington, 1996). Judgment is required, inspired by knowledge of system and environment (Flyvbjerg, 1998, 2001; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Voß & Freeman, 2016). Positive or negative reinterpretations of previous steering attempts are part and parcel of this kind of leadership (Czarniawska-Joerges & Wolff, 1991). Convincing people that previous interventions were a success (or not) sets the tone for the next cycle of problem definition, choice of tools and goals. It frames the narratives that are more likely to be persuasive (Beunen et al., 2013; Rap, 2006).

4.2. Steering as Self-Steering

Steering in this perspective emerges as self-steering (cf. Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Brans & Rossbach, 1997; Teubner & Willke, 1984; Willke, 2014). Without understanding the mechanisms of governance, without grasping the potential to anticipate and to strategize for a given governance system, it is hard to be successful in steering outside governance (cf. Alvesson, 1993; Kjaer &

Vetterlein, 2018; Seidl, 2007; Van Assche et al., 2020b). We encounter again the double nature of strategy: strategizing actors in governance and actors coordinating in the articulation of collectively binding strategies. Reality effects of steering come about through strategic use, first of the resources of the governance configuration itself and next the resources of the community the steering is destined for.

Sometimes new governance modes are necessary in order to pursue a particular steering ambition. Whether internal reshuffling or governance reform has to precede steering is a matter pertaining to individual cases and strategies (Van Assche et al., 2017, 2020a). The same goal might be reached with or without governance reform while reformed governance might still reproduce rigidities standing in the way of path creation. One can then again distinguish between an EGT perspective on steering and modernist understandings. An EGT perspective can be more sensitive to the multiplicity of environments affected by and affecting steering. This understanding of steering is also more alive to the importance of history: unique co-evolutions create unique possibilities for steering. Due weight is given to the detours through the internal environment of governance, needed to achieve external effects (Willke, 2007).

5. Art of Steering

All the above brings us to the idea that steering is more art than science. It is an art in the sense that design is an art—we could add management to the list (Colander & Kupers, 2016). Both steering and management require judgment more than skill or science (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Hautz et al., 2017). Steering, design and management require insight in a specific system, in specific system-environment relations, which can then help the practitioner to anticipate the system state after intervention and the possible interventions leading to a particular system state (cf. Newig et al., 2013; Van Assche et al., 2019).

5.1. Art of Steering and Complexity

Science can produce recipes for partial and simple problems of design, management and steering but not for those which combine competing knowledges, values, perspectives and entanglements of past, present and future (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Schirmer & Hadamek, 2007; Seidl, 2016). Steering of complex systems, in this case complex governance systems aiming to reshape their communities, is not a matter of further developing techniques that worked on partial problems. This is the case because complex problems cannot always be reduced to a set of simple problems—the classic issue of reductionism. Complex problems, as complex systems, are characterized by *processes* of emergence (Von Bertalanffy, 2015). A problem can slowly emerge as something qualitatively different from its constituent parts (Seidl, 2007; Van Assche et al., 2019). A new logic of problem repro-

duction might emerge which is not grasped by decision-makers (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Hood & Peters, 2004). Which implies that the timing of intervention makes all the difference—an insight eluding modernist versions of the steering concept.

Luhmann (2018) and the organization theorists inspired by him (collected in Seidl & Becker, 2005) would add that management, design and steering are about *decisions* and that decisions cannot be reduced to the reasoning or the knowledge used to come to them. A decision cannot be deduced. Adding more knowledge or rendering the decision formulae more complex does not eliminate this gap. The gap remains and the jump remains necessary. Any decision is underdetermined by the preceding knowledges: No knowledge necessarily leads to a particular decision. This is true for organizations (Alvesson, 1993; Bakken et al., 2010; Bledow et al., 2009) and it is true for steering through governance. Moreover, in governance, the embedded combination of knowledges is under continuous political pressure (Hillier, 2002). This is understandable, as political preferences change and as the situation changes (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Lindberg et al., 2015; Scott, 1998). The usual instability of knowledges in governance further limits the possibilities for formulaic versions of strategy and steering (Grabher, 2004).

More hurdles for steering can be found in limitations on transparency in complex governance systems. These limitations stem from the nature of governance as an intricate web of actors, many of which are organizations, not entirely transparent to each other. Strategizing in governance is often invisible, as is part of the resistance within the community. Informal institutions might not be acknowledged or understood (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; McFarlane, 2012). On the other hand, governance configurations exert power, beyond that of any actor. So, with myriad limitations to steering and a great distance from scientific problem-solving or engineering, comes a world of new possibilities, if steering is exercised as an art. That art of steering requires a deep familiarity with the tools of governance, its possibilities of storytelling, its internal strategies, its modes of persuading and regulating the collective (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008; Czarniawska, 2002; Kjaer & Vetterlein, 2018; Throgmorton, 2003; Van Assche et al., 2020b).

5.2. Leadership and Temporality

Leadership, both in organizations and in community governance, is constrained in ways not fully recognized by most management literature. Alvesson and Spicer (2016) masterfully analyzed many of these unrecognized constraints and prevalent mythologies. Our perspective does reveal new roles and new tools for leadership. We argued that what needs to be managed are *dependencies* and *reality effects*. Managing reality effects naturally entails managing dependencies, as knowledge of the dependencies is knowledge of the fine mechanics of governance.

Jumping between system and environment in the continuous assessment of steering options has to be an art, per definition imperfect. Steering demands a creative shifting between system and environment and between what is and what could be (Van Dijk, 2011). Rules, routines and decision-support systems cannot replace judgment (*phronesis*, to borrow a term from Flyvbjerg, 1998). Steering in governance is more than deciding between alternative futures. It can be more aptly likened to constructing a new future based on opaque preferences in imperfectly understood environments.

The same EGT-inspired perspective which thus emphasized steering problems can still accommodate a variety of steering tools for leadership. A vast repertoire of stratagems can be useful in the management of reality effects and dependencies. Without any ambition to present an exhaustive list we can mention: modifying materiality, inventing discourse, altering system relations, sharing semantics, sharing goals between systems, using bridging organizations, crystallizing new modes of observation, building meta-knowledges and narratives, inventing "sticks and carrots" schemes, creating new organizations and/or institutional work, creating conflict or consensus, modifying patterns of inclusion and exclusion in governance, creating new actors, de-coupling and re-coupling systems, using episodes of decision making and delineating sites for conflict or increased ambition (Beunen & Patterson, 2019; Brans & Rossbach, 1997; Grabher, 2004; Hyysalo et al., 2019; Newig et al., 2013; Rotmans & Loorbach, 2009; Seidl, 2007; Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008).

In the use of those tools, timing is of the essence. Windows of opportunity have to be grasped, in governance, its environments and in the pattern of couplings. Knowledgeable and creative leadership is more likely to observe such windows. Creativity enters the story again since a window is only a window if something is seen. In the choice of tools also timing and deep familiarity with system and environment are important. The hands of time mould policy instruments as well as their effects (Van Dijk, 2006). Tools can work in a particular environment yet lose their coordinative power when values, ideologies, actors change or when a perceived failure taints the tool and its users (e.g., Innes, 1989).

Our analysis seems to produce a dilemma in this regard. On the one hand stable leadership is beneficial because it takes time to learn about the governance system, its modes of self-transformation, its informalities and power relations and to learn about system-environment relations and the history of previous steering attempts. On the other hand, the time it takes to develop such knowledge may conflict with the pace of change which increased because of technological and environmental shocks (Folke, 2006). The various sources of radical uncertainty and opacity diagnosed aggravate the situation because they seem to undermine the value of knowledge and timing and seem to increase the value of rapid adaptation and likely of new leadership—a fresh perspective.

This dilemma is real, we would argue, and we would add that it is a dilemma that will always be there. Familiarity can breed identification, routine solutions, rigidity and blind spots. A long tenure can dissipate creativity and erode authority by creating a web of dependency relations around the leader (Orpen, 1996). Time also gives opportunity for opponents to elaborate their own strategies and for opponents to form (Van Assche et al., 2020b, 2021). At a given moment, the skill set and personality of a leader can fit the circumstances. As those circumstances are never fully grasped, unobserved changes might render that leader less effective over time (Jay, 1967). The dilemma is a version of the insider/outsider dynamic often remarked upon. Insiders and outsiders are always observing different things and both positions come with pros and cons in terms of understanding and organizing (Louis & Bartunek, 1992; Wagner et al., 1998).

In practical terms, this state of affairs does not render leaders redundant, nor does it make steering impossible. The benefits of knowledge and stability are there, as are the risks. This does not amount to a general argument for avoiding knowing, for speed in decision-making or for unstable leadership (Alvesson et al., 2016). In governance, leadership can be distributed, institutional memory can be helpful and trusted advisors can play a key role in the learning process of new leaders. One could even say that the dilemma is something that can be managed collectively in democratic forms of governance, where stakeholders outside governance can signal change or disaffection and can trigger a change in leadership. The dilemma, its non-reducibility, underlines that managing path creation is an art, with no artist capable of pleasing all patrons. Still, it is an art requiring and recognizing skill and experience.

6. Conclusion

We presented a perspective on steering in governance which understands steering as deliberate path creation. Taking a distance from modernist ideas of path creation and of steering in policy, administration and planning, we rely instead on insights from EGT, critical management studies and social systems theory to place path creation in the context of evolving governance configurations. Each governance path is marked by dependencies and rigidities. Path creation is not merely the overcoming of such rigidities but the thoughtful use of them. Dependencies might be constraints, but they are also just features, aspects of the identity of the configuration. This means that they need to be taken into account. They can guide steering and can become major assets, an insight presaged by Goethe's saying that mastery is managing limitations.

The outside, the world of community and society, of other function systems and organizations is always shaping and being shaped by governance. Managing couplings, knowing both the inside and the outside is

therefore of the essence if steering is the intention. For deliberate path creation, leadership needs to be steeped in the stories and forms of coordination prevailing in governance and the environment that is supposed to be coordinated by it. While our analysis highlights the benefits of experience and knowledge on the part of leadership, it also acknowledges that complete identification with a particular governance tradition is a risk, a rigidity and limitation.

Leadership for path creation is risky as path creation involves risk. Any substantial change in governance and its effects is likely to provoke resistance inside and outside the sphere of governance. Dealing with such resistance requires great sensitivity for what is felt in the governance system and the community. Management of reality effect requires the same kind of observational skills and wide range of communicative, interpretive, negotiation and coalition building skills that is required for managing dependencies and which can be summed up as strategy skills. The impossibility of scientific management does not preclude management.

Steering as path creation is thus management of dependencies in governance and reality effects of governance. Steering is more than techne, it is art. It requires *phronesis* more than calculation or deliberation and it is conducted by leadership in governance systems that are themselves continuously transformed by their previous operations. Steering can be path creation for the short-term and it can also be quickly decided. Circumstances might demand such course of action. Yet, ambitious steering attempts, those emerging as response to major challenges the world is facing, do require strategy. That is, they demand the construction of a long-term future and its translation into coherently connected institutions. Strategic action by individual actors can hinder or enable such collective strategy.

The world that emerges from our analysis is one where steering is possible, where leadership is needed and where outsiders can sometimes become leaders and take big and fast decisions reshaping a community. Sometimes, slow deliberation and careful scientific planning will deliver strategies that are implementable and put a community on a different course. In most cases however, neither of those options will work out well and leadership of the sort argued for here, aware of context, of its own limitations and of the contingencies of strategy in governance, will be better suited.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Economic Transitions in South Africa's Secondary Cities: Governing Mine Closures

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Abstract

Many South African secondary cities depend on a single economic sector, often mining or manufacturing. This makes them vulnerable to economic change and national decision-making. We describe change in three secondary cities—Emalahleni, Matjhabeng and Newcastle—all at different phases of economic transition due to imminent mine closure. We investigate the way local governance and planning are dealing with the change. We draw on concepts from institutional economics and evolutionary governance theory, material from strategic planning documents, and approximately 50 key informant interviews. We show how difficult it is to steer economic planning during economic transitions, and we demonstrate how both economic change and governance are path-dependent. Path dependency in South Africa's mining towns has several causes: the colonial influence, which emphasised extraction and neglected beneficiation; the dominance of a single sector; the long-term problems created by mining; and the lack of the skills needed to bring about economic change. The local governments' continuing reliance on the New Public Management paradigm, which focuses on steering as opposed to building networks, compounds the problem, along with poor governance, inadequate local capacity and inappropriate intergovernmental relations. Of the three towns, only Newcastle has shown signs of taking a new path.

Keywords

economic transition; path dependency; secondary city; steering; New Public Management; mine closure

1. Introduction

Research on secondary cities in the developing world has focused mostly on their economic role and the spatial distribution of their population. These cities play important regional development roles and have strong links with the global economy. But many of them lack economic diversity and have global connections in only one economic sector. Because of the global volatility in mining and manufacturing on which many of them depend, their future is not clear. This is true of South African secondary cities, whose smaller economies (in comparison with those of the country's metropolitan cities) make them vulnerable to changes in technology and in local and national government decisions (Marais, 2016; Marais et al., 2016). Governing a secondary city and managing its economic transitions is indeed a challenge.

Avis (2016, p. 1) defines urban governance as the "process by which governments (local, regional and national) and stakeholders collectively decide how to plan, finance and manage urban areas." However, the literature on governance outlines a variety of approaches to governance (Klijn, 2008; Rhodes, 1997) and there is substantial debate about the meaning of the concept. We do not have space to elaborate on these but we emphasise three critical attributes relevant to this article: Governance has become increasingly complex and difficult as multiple actors play a role; governance changes are mostly slow; and because of the complexity and slowness it is questionable whether governance can steer transitions.

The challenge for many of South Africa's secondary cities is to shift from their dependence on manufacturing and mining to more diverse economies, to overcome their vulnerability to national government decisions, and to adjust to a global economy that requires high-level technological skills. These changes will require appropriate governance approaches. Consequently, all South African municipalities must develop strategic plans (called integrated development plans [IDPs]). These usually include specific sector plans for spatial, housing and economic development. The idea for these plans was, as Harrison (2001) explains, to a large extent based on the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, which emphasises 'steering' (setting objectives) rather than 'rowing' (implementation).

We make two main arguments in this article. We argue that South Africa's governance approach is still primarily rooted in NPM, underplaying the relationship between actors and overemphasising steering. The NPM reinforces the existing path dependency and the rigidity associated with interdependencies and creates governance informalities. This, coupled with inadequate local capacities and inappropriate intergovernmental relations, makes local economic transitions difficult. We argue further that economic transition is particularly difficult for mining towns attempting to diversify their economy, because the mines create a false sense of security and interdependency. The article contributes by linking the literature on economic transitions and governance. In many cases, this literature appears in journals with different theoretical and disciplinary approaches.

2. Evolutionary Governance Theory, Economic Transitions and Steering

This literature review brings together studies on economic transitions (North, 1990, 2005; Van Assche et al., 2014, 2016) and on governance (Dunleavy et al., 2005; Garud & Karnoe, 2001; Klijn, 2008; Kuhlmann et al., 2008; Stoker, 2006). In discussing the institutional context ('the rules of the game') in this article, we borrow extensively from North (1990, 2005). For North, institutional change (or rule change) and technological change are the foundation of economic change. He

asserts that change is slow, path-dependent and usually leads to lock-ins. He describes 'path dependence' as the way institutions and beliefs from the past influence choices in the present and maintains that constraints on choices in the present result from historical experiences (North, 2005, p. 21). For new institutional economists, the history, societal beliefs and institutions are central to understanding economic change and society's response. In its simplest form, path dependency means that institutions constrain the future; more comprehensively it means that "the institutions that have accumulated give rise to organisations whose survival depends on the perpetuation of those institutions and which hence will devote resources to preventing any alteration" (North, 2005, p. 51). North (1990) says path dependencies associated with institutions are usually more complicated than those associated with technology. Path dependency develops because there is a gap between intentions and outcomes and because it is difficult to reverse long-term directions. North (1990) uses the term 'lock-in' to describe slow change and the inability to escape history. Lock-ins occur when change is not just slow but virtually impossible.

Building on the ideas of North, evolutionary governance theory describes slow change in governance (Van Assche et al., 2014, 2016). It links economic change and governance. It draws its ideas from biological evolution and from social theories like new institutional economics (from the work of North), complexity theory and actor-network theory. Key concepts are slow change (although it can sometimes be abrupt), non-linearity, power relations and governance seen as evolving. Evolutionary governance theory sees governance as a central aspect of politics and distinguishes three types of dependency: path dependency, goal dependency, and interdependency.

In this article we are interested in two of these dependencies: interdependencies and path dependencies. Interdependencies can originate from path dependency and can be constructive or damaging. Current organisations and their rules and associations originate from historical interactions and expectations (Greif, 2006). On the negative side these relationships can lead to rigidity, conflict and power plays, preventing change, but on the positive side to collaboration, partnerships, expertise and resources (Van Assche et al., 2016). Generally, interdependencies depend on cooperation, responsibility and trust. They can also contribute to governance networking or what Klijn et al. (1995) refer to as 'policy networking' or 'network steering.' Network steering assumes an understanding of actors and their relationships, resources, institutions and perceptions. Klijn et al. (1995, p. 439) say the main consequence of policy networking or network steering is that "when a (governmental) actor tries to govern policy processes, he has to take the characteristics of this network into account." In addition to obliging actors to understand the network, network steering is also dependent on resource

distribution, the rules of resource distribution within the network and perceptions within the network.

Understanding the sources of path dependency is crucial for planners. They need to take cognisance of the historical nature of governance systems and their interlocking chains of causation. Many governance systems reproduce themselves in complex ways, along a multiplicity of paths that all have different possible outcomes. Earlier studies of path dependency were mainly at the national level or on specific issues like technology change (North, 1990). Increasingly there is a tendency to study it at the local level, and evolutionary governance theory has integrated the concepts of economic change and politics.

The question now is what role strategic planning and governance play in path dependencies and interdependencies. Garud and Karnoe (2001) emphasise that it is possible to create new paths (through strategic planning) despite path dependence. Klijn (2008) identifies four ways in which governance can contribute to strategic planning: good governance and administration, the NPM paradigm, intergovernmental relations, and networks. In this article we are primarily interested in contrasting governance that relies on the NPM paradigm with governance that relies on networks. However, the other two approaches (good governance and administration, and intergovernmental relations) remain a central part of our framework for understanding the governance of economic transitions. Intergovernmental relations and the varying levels of interdependence are crucial for understanding governance in South Africa. Good governance remains a challenge here.

The rise of NPM in the 1980s was a prime example of prioritising steering in the public sector. NPM emphasised setting goals, developing outcomes-based programmes, distinguishing between politics and administration, making government more business-like, instituting performance-based payments and delinking policy and implementation (creating implementation vehicles; Stoker, 2006). The German government called their model of NPM the 'New Steering Model' (Neues Steuerungsmodell; Kuhlmann et al., 2008). Many governments have used this approach to 'modernise' their public service and to move away from the Weberian bureaucratic model of public administration (Stoker, 2006, p. 45). Evaluations point to a range of achievements, such as savings and efficiency gains, customer orientation and service quality (Kuhlmann et al., 2008). But concerns remain, among them the inability to achieve an appropriate separation between politics and administration, resistance to implementation, inadequate cost savings in staff and time, failure to contribute to better decision-making despite the rhetoric, continued conflict between centralised and decentralised management, little reduction in political interference, and only partial efficiency gains (Dunleavy et al., 2005; Kuhlmann et al., 2008). In their evaluation of the New Steering Model, Kuhlmann et al. (2008, p. 859) conclude that "with its

schematic dualism of politics and administration, [it] is conceptually misleading and stands in stark contrast to the reality of political decision making," and Stoker (2006, p. 46) argues that it requires politicians "to be separated from their party and other political colleagues and connections to exercise good judgment." The NPM paradigm has also been criticised for limited theoretical grounding, not taking historical evidence into account, and using evidence selectively (Hood & Peters, 2004).

In contrast, other understandings of governance stress the relationships between institutions like networks (Klijn, 2008; Klijn et al., 1995). Stoker (2006, p. 41) argues that the state should "steer society in new ways through the development of complex networks" and use "more bottom-up approaches to decision making." He says the trend towards using networks in governance means that a wider range of participants will be seen as "legitimate members of the decision-making process in the context of considerable uncertainty and complexity." This kind of governance differs from NPM in not pre-setting targets but negotiating them with the actors, and in emphasising rights and responsibilities rather than targets. However, policy networking or network steering is not an appropriate response per se. Klijn et al. (1995) say the margins are not wide; only limited resources are available and self-interests prevail. There is no guarantee that network steering provides better outcomes than other processes, but this indirect steering could have some benefits in contrast to direct policy approaches.

Above, we discussed how governance interacts with or steers economic transitions by focusing on formal governance and transition processes. However, governance also interacts with political transition and vice versa and can be formal or informal. Informality is now a core component of urban governance worldwide (Sarmiento & Tilly, 2018; Van Assche et al., 2013). In a book review, Bejacovic (2016, p. 464) writes that "unofficial production, nonregistration of economic activities and/or corruption may be deemed the solution rather than the problem because such practices might be seen as the only way in which the state can be made to work." Informality can play a range of roles, such as replacing the state by providing services the state should deliver, blurring the lines between the state and the community, getting involved in confrontations with the law (not following procedure), and engaging in institutionalised corruption (Polese, 2016). Furthermore, notions of formality and informality change frequently, making such a distinction difficult and influence other institutions in complex interactions (Van Assche et al., 2013)

3. The Case Studies

Our discussion in this article is based on case studies of three secondary cities—Emalahleni, Matjhabeng and Newcastle—chosen to represent three stages of economic transition. Emalahleni, in the Mpumalanga Province, a coal-mining town and the heart of South

Africa's coal-generated electricity system, is facing probable major economic transition in the next decade because of the global and local need for cleaner energy. Matjhabeng, a gold mining town in the Free State Province, has seen three decades of decline in gold production and been unable to find an alternative economic base. Newcastle, a coal-mining town in northern Kwazulu-Natal, has managed an economic transition away from coal and steel and towards manufacturing but has lately struggled to keep up the momentum. The case studies were conducted between 2017 and 2019, using data from Statistics South Africa and Global Insight, planning documents, and 52 interviews with key informants: political role players, mining company staff, municipal officials responsible for planning, and representatives from NGOs. The informants were selected via snowball sampling. We used thematic analysis to analyse the interview transcripts.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of seats that the African National Congress (ANC), which has the majority in South Africa's parliament, obtained in local government elections in these three towns.

In Emalahleni and Matjhabeng, the ANC's support has declined since 2006, with the ANC holding 60% of the seats in Emalahleni and nearly 65% in Matjhabeng. In Newcastle, the ANC has increased its share of seats since 2000 and now has 61% of the seats. The decline in the first two was the result of a national trend, while the rise in Newcastle was primarily due to the Inkatha Freedom Party's disintegration. Historically the ANC in Newcastle had to form coalitions with other parties or collaborate with them, because its majority was slim; since 2016 it has not had to do this.

4. The Three Cities

Secondary cities in South Africa, referred to as 'intermediate cities,' have no specific legal status as such. South African legislation recognises Category A municipalities (eight metropolitan areas), Category B municipalities (226 local municipalities) and Category C municipalities (44 district municipalities). A district municipality usually consists of three to six local municipalities. Recent policy development has established the Intermediate City Municipality Support Programme (2018). The programme subdivides the 39 secondary cities into five categories: large/semi-diverse (4), manufacturing (9), mining (10), service centres (10), and low GVA and high-density areas (6; South African Cities Network, 2020) and requires these cities to provide appropriate strategic plans and sound financial management.

The local strategic plans (IDPs) for municipalities in South Africa include, among other things, sectoral plans for housing, spatial development and local economic development (LED). The IDPs are usually very good at setting targets and providing plans for steering, in line with NPM ideas. This approach to strategic planning, coupled with political power play and local governments' severe capacity constraints, lies at the heart of the problem when it comes to economic transition. Deteriorating municipal finances, inadequate municipal financial management (Auditor General of South Africa, 2020) and the large number of local protests point to serious governance problems (Westoby & Botes, 2020).
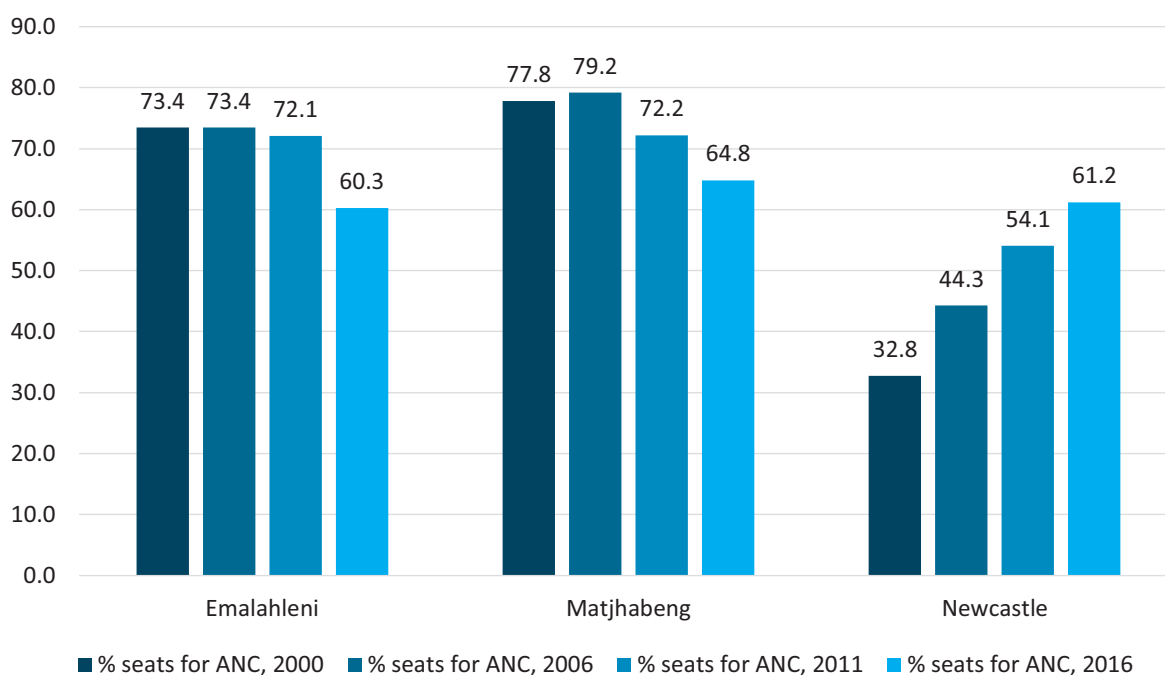
Figure 1. Local government election results in Emalahleni, Matjhabeng and Newsactle, 2000, 2006, 2011 and 2016. Source: Electoral Commission of South Africa (n.d.).

4.1. Emalahleni

Witbank, later renamed Emalahleni ('place of coal'), was declared a town in 1903. A rail link with the goldfields on the Witwatersrand opened shortly after that, enabling the mines to provide coal at scale and for low prices. By the early 1930s the first coal-fired power station was operating. In the 1960s Anglo American created Africa's first private steel mill in Witbank. Today about 70% of South Africa's coal is used locally in coal-fired power stations and the rest is exported via Richards Bay. The local economy depends on coal and the coal-fired power stations that provide approximately 40% of South Africa's energy. But the pollution associated with mining and the power stations has made Emalahleni one of the country's pollution hotspots. Economic growth between 1996 and 2018 averaged 1.4% per annum and the area benefited from the commodity boom of the 2000s. The population grew by 3.3% per annum and totalled 460,000 people in 2016. Despite these high levels of economic growth, the local government is struggling to provide services and cannot pay its electricity bill with Eskom, the national electricity utility (Campbell et al., 2016, 2017). Emalahleni Local Municipality has not received unqualified audits for the past five financial years. The current state of municipal finance makes it unlikely there will be any contribution from the municipality to help manage mine closure (Hendriks, 2022). The provincial government had to appoint an administrator on two occasions to manage the municipality on behalf of the Council. A previous administrator noted that municipal councillors and officials had stolen from the municipality and driven it into bankruptcy (Campbell et al., 2016, 2017).

The municipality also struggles to provide adequate services and housing. The result is the construction of large numbers of informal dwellings to counter the municipality's inability to deal with the housing problem. None of the seven key performance areas in the IDP takes into account mine decline and closure as a future threat. The IDP uses the word 'closure' only once (Emalahleni Local Municipality, 2021). In their social and labour plans the mines responded by setting up a closure reference group. Beyond this structure, no real plans are available. Interviewees seldom raised the issue of possible mine closure and its implications, as the main concern was dealing with the effects of mining growth. Instead, we heard comments like "the municipality is not coping," "there are problems with growing informal settlements because of mine employees," and "the mines should fix the potholes." They also referred to the large influx of people. Because of these problems, one of the mining companies is now selling water to the municipality.

With the worldwide shift to renewables and cleaner forms of energy, the local and international demand for coal is likely to decline. The dollar price of coal was at a global high at the end of 2019 but has declined steadily since then (the deteriorating value of the rand to the dollar has buffered this slightly). Like most other nations, South Africa has signed the Paris Agreement. Consequently, the Department of Energy is actively promoting renewable energy and Eskom is likely to scale down its old coal plants. These decisions will have devastating effects on the economy of Emalahleni, but there has been no concerted effort at the local level to manage the risks. The municipality largely ignores the potential consequences of mine and power station closure. A national effort to plan a just transition (ensuring that renewable energy does not create unemployment among mineworkers) is underway, but it is not clear to what degree these plans consider the complexities of the local governance (Marais et al., 2022).

4.2. Matjhabeng

The South African Government and Anglo American established the town of Welkom in 1947, when mining companies started to sink shafts in the area. This initiated the Free State Goldfields, which became Matjhabeng under the post-apartheid dispensation (after 1994). At its height in the mid-1980s the area produced more than 25% of the gold in the free world and employed 180,000 mineworkers (Marais, 2013a, 2013b). However, mine decline and closure became a reality from the early 1990s, because of the depletion of the gold reserves, the cost of deep mining, a rise in wages and stricter health and safety requirements. Although mining and mine employment is still dominant in the area, there are only about 25,000 mineworkers left (Denoon-Stevens, 2019). Between 1996 and 2018 the economy declined by 3% per annum, but gold mining was still contributing 45% of GVA in 2018 (down from 62% in 1996). The size of the economy in 2018 was only 55% of what it had been in 1996. Economic decline has had detrimental social consequences in the area (Sesele et al., 2021) and has also resulted in a drop in the population from 480,000 in 1996 to 430,000 in 2016.

Over the years, various governance approaches have tried to revamp the economy of the area (Marais, 2013b). In the 1960s, the provincial government established a commission to prevent the development of a ghost town once mining ended (Marais & Nel, 2016). In the late 1980s, several of the towns in the Goldfields area established a separate development unit—in line with the NPM approach—which emphasises that implementation should take place outside the ambit of local government (Marais, 2013b). The new political rulers in the post-apartheid dispensation dismantled this institution in the mid-1990s, but a similar attempt followed in the early 2000s. These attempts have been hampered by political infighting and unrealistic plans. Many mayors did not complete their terms and the turnover of municipal managers has been extraordinarily high (Sesele, 2020). Like Emalahleni, Matjhabeng Local Municipality has not received unqualified audits for the past five financial years. Today, a regional development agency is operating at the district level, but it is not clear how successful

it is. The economic development function is within the ambit of the Matjhabeng Council.

In 2019, with the financial aid of the mines, Matjhabeng contracted a private service provider to create a LED plan to form part of the IDP. However, the plan assumes a large percentage of funding from other spheres of government as Matjhabeng's financial situation is dire. Most respondents were extremely proud of this plan that had been produced to deal with the economic situation. In most interviews, it was the first topic raised by interviewees. One interviewee, referring to this dependence on other spheres of government, asked, "When will the provincial and national government take us seriously?" Another said: "We have a plan now; the national government should now come to the party"— emphasising the importance of having a plan or steering and the need for national government support based on the plan. The interviewees seemed to believe that having a plan automatically means that action will result. Implementation will be hindered not only by lack of government support but also by lack of institutional capacity. Furthermore, the plan does not refer to the regional service role developed around Welkom (the municipality's main urban area), which is central to strategic plans for intermediate city municipalities (Marais et al., 2016). The need to find an alternative 'big' plan for mining makes the planners overlook the role of regional services. The LED directorate's capacity in the municipality is limited, with not enough staff members and without a single economist. A functional directorate should create networks within the government and between the government and the private sector. Although relationships with the business community have improved lately, there is scant evidence of joint projects and programmes outside managing an increase in crime.

Despite the ANC's majority in the Council, Matjhabeng has been politically unstable, as is evident from the fact that none of the mayors in the last three terms (2001–2006, 2006–2011 and 2011–2016) completed their terms. The municipality has had more than ten municipal managers over the last 20 years, suggesting a constant conflict between the political office bearers and the technocrats.

4.3. Newcastle

The discovery of coal near Newcastle in 1865 laid the foundation for the establishment of the town. By the 1960s coal mining was the main reason why Iscor (a previous state corporation manufacturing steel in South Africa) created a new steel mill in 1968. Iscor was also prominent as an estate developer and constructed hundreds of houses for its employees in Newcastle. By the mid-1980s Newcastle's manufacturing sector (mainly steel) was contributing about 50% of the Gross Geographic Product. By the end of the 1980s the government had privatised Iscor, which meant that many people working in the steel and coal industries lost their jobs.

In response, the local government and business obtained subsidies that the apartheid government made available for decentralised industries and settled several Chinese industries in the textile industry in the area in the early 1990s (Todes, 2002). By 1994 there were approximately 140 Chinese companies (mainly textile and plastic manufacturing) operating in Newcastle. However, as the post-apartheid government systematically reduced the industry subsidies and textile-related import taxes from 1994, the textile industry also came under pressure. Nonetheless, the municipality managed to retain many of the textile industries, developed an excellent relationship with the existing industrialists and marketed the area well in China. Newcastle also slowly built capacity in other manufacturing subsectors and actively pursued other economic sectors (Binns & Nel, 2003).

The Newcastle municipal area is home to 390,000 people. Annual economic growth was only 0.2% per annum between 1996 and 2018. Despite this slow growth, Newcastle has avoided decline and, to some degree, managed a transition from mining to textiles to the manufacturing of niche materials (chemicals and paper). Interviewees in our study were quick to point out that coalition governments and good governance were central features of managing these transitions between 1994 and 2016. A common response during interviews was "local government and business had excellent relationships." The good relationship with the chamber of commerce and industrialists in China (evidenced, for example, by a long-standing LED official learning Mandarin) contributed to this success. However, the value of these governance and network gains has come under pressure as the local government has struggled to maintain good governance since 2016. After the 2016 local government elections, the ANC had a majority and no further need for a coalition. The new majority government did not comply with good governance principles and did not value the earlier economic partnerships. High staff turnover, the retirement of the LED official mentioned above, political infighting in the ruling party, weak leadership (because of failure to appoint a permanent municipal manager and chief financial officer) since 2016 have further complicated matters. Ensuring Newcastle's economic viability has become far more challenging than it was five years ago. The editor of the local newspaper said that, because of the "lack of strategic ways to deal with problems, people of Newcastle started working in silos"). This silo mentality stands in contrast to the early attempts to create networks inside and outside the municipality to deal with the economic transition. An official at the municipality explained the problem since 2016 as "a lack of engagement between the municipality and business elite" and "a lack of network governance because there are no relationships across sectors, no political leadership." The failure to build appropriate networks also contributed to industrialists considering alternative locations. The former economic development manager at the Newcastle municipality

said: "The factories are also all moving to Lesotho and Swaziland because they comply with the African Growth and Opportunities Act to export to the US." To deal with the financial shortfalls created by the ANC-led local government, council raised property taxes by nearly 100%. This has been greeted with outrage by firms and individual households. This decision will probably force many industrialists to consider relocation. The hike in tariffs and limited engagement with economic development issues have created a unified opposition from business chambers, rate payers and concerned residents.

Local politics have been unstable, and some prominent ANC leaders and councillors in KwaZulu-Natal have been assassinated. This rivalry in the province has also played itself out in Newcastle. In May 2019 a witness in the trial of the Newcastle mayor, who had been charged with the murder of an ANC youth league leader in 2016, was gunned down—the charges against the mayor have since been dropped (Mavuso, 2019). The political rivalry and murders have not helped the local government prioritise economic development and manage the economic transition.

5. Discussion

Table 1 compares the profiles of the three case study cities and the different ways they have dealt with mine decline. Newcastle has mostly been successful in finding

Table 1. The case study cities.

	Emalahleni	Matjhabeng	Newcastle
Original name, date founded	Witbank (1903)	Welkom (1947)	Newcastle (1865)
Population 1996	455,228	476,763	287,659
Population 2016	167,361	429,113	389,117
Annual economic growth, 1996–2018	1.4%	−1.6%	0.2%
Number of households living in informal housing, 2016	34,845	22,004	5,804
Main economic sector	Coal mining and coal-fired energy generation.	Gold mining.	Originally coal and steel, now textiles and other manufacturing.
Main economic risk	Declining demand for coal and transition to renewables.	Depletion of gold reserves, cost of deep mining.	Initially, decline in demand for coal, privatisation of ISCOR. Later, reduction of import tax on textiles.
Economic nature of path dependency	Historical development based on coal mining. Belief that coal reserves are inexhaustible. Long-term environmental problems, e.g., acid mine water. Historical low-level technological skills.	Historical development based on gold mining. Planned in between mine dumps. Historical low-level technological skills.	Has succeeded in switching from mining to manufacturing but remains dependent on international markets. Historical low-level technological skills.
Governance nature of path dependency	Planning system focusing on steering and not rowing. National government support promised, but nothing has materialised.	Planning system focusing on steering and not rowing. Long history of limited support from national government.	Despite planning system focusing on steering and not rowing, municipality built industrial networks. Government support for the first transition. Further national government support unlikely.

Table 1. (Cont.) The case study cities.

	Emalahleni	Matjhabeng	Newcastle
Nature of inter-dependencies	A national plan for a just transition dependent on national government funding and the buy-in of the private sector.	A local plan for revitalising the economy dependent on the national government and private-sector funding.	Historically managed to benefit from national government interdependencies.
State of 'good governance'	Financial management and service delivery problems.	Financial management and service delivery problems.	Up to 2016 ample evidence of good governance. Since then a series of problems.
Intergovernmental governance	National plan for economic transition exists, but with little local buy-in.	Various plans have assumed intergovernmental funding but it has not materialised.	First transition heavily dependent on using a national instrument to help switch from mining to textiles.
Nature and effectiveness of local governance and planning	Local plans do not consider mine closure and a post-closure economy.	Much emphasis on finding a single alternative to mining. Value of regional services function lost.	Local plans have always included, or been driven by, industrialists and the local chamber of commerce.
Network governance	Virtually no reference to this in local planning. Some evidence in national planning for a just transition.	Absent. Expectation is that national government will provide investment for a transition.	Historically, excellent example with links to China and excellent relationships with local chamber of commerce. These aspects have been under pressure since 2016.
Presence of informality	Informal settlements, private sector providing water, and allegations of corruption.	Informal settlements and allegations of corruption.	Breakdown of relationships with the private sector. Private sector mobilising with other spheres of society.

alternatives to coal mining and the related steel manufacturing industry. In contrast, Matjhabeng, despite setting up various bodies outside the ambit of government, has failed to develop an industrial alternative to mining. In Emalahleni there is scant local recognition of the looming mine closure, though there have been some national responses aimed at ensuring a just transition in this city.

Several factors affect the potential economic transitions in these three case study cities. Firstly, the colonial economic emphasis on resource extraction, as opposed to local beneficiation (creating high value goods), persists in the three cities, although some beneficiation did occur in Emalahleni and Newcastle. For example, coal production in Emalahleni is directly associated with power generation and a steel industry did initially develop but failed in 2015. South Africa has seen very little beneficiation of gold. Some attempts were made in Matjhabeng, such as creating a jewellery hub, but the outcomes have been dismal. Neither Emalahleni nor Newcastle has been able to sustain initial attempts to create a viable steel industry (although the steel mill in Newcastle, now owned by ArcelorMittal, still functions).

Secondly, these cities have long been dependent on a single industry. The adverse effects that mining can have

on a country, referred to as the 'resource curse' or the 'Dutch Disease,' are well known. At a local level, the effect can be to make local decision-makers overconfident and unable to anticipate decline (Marais & De Lange, 2021). Matjhabeng is a prime example. The first retrenchments in 1991 came as a surprise to many, although the decline in the gold reserves and an 'overheated' global market were evident. The worst scenario Matjhabeng imagined at the end 1989 was not nearly as bad as the reality on the ground 10 years later (Marais, 2013b). The long dependence on gold has blinded the municipality to the possibility of decline and the need to choose a new path. Many of Matjhabeng's plans focus on finding a single large industry to replace mining. The latest plan does not consider the value of the regional service function of Welkom. The plans assume a magical replacement for mining instead of thinking about the economic diversification that has already occurred or focusing on a range of small initiatives. The inability to imagine potential change is also evident in Emalahleni. Despite national attempts to achieve a just transition in this city, little effort to deal with the risk of decline can be seen at local level. The Emalahleni IDP underplays the risk of coal demand falling. The historical focus on a single sector in

both Emalahleni and Matjhabeng seems entrenched in future planning, blinding the governance structures to more viable alternatives. Newcastle, on the other hand, shows evidence that it is indeed possible to break the path dependency.

Thirdly, all three cities need to develop plans that consider the long-term implications of mining (Erikson, 1994). The environmental and health risks of living between the mine dumps remain a reality. A prime example is the Merriespruit disaster of 1994: A slimes dam from a non-operational mine burst during a flash flood and killed 17 people in the Merriespruit suburb in the town of Virginia in Matjhabeng. Although the closure of the mines and the coal-fired power stations might reduce air pollution, the effects of acid mine water and underground fires will be a reality in Emalahleni for a long time. People in all three of these cities will have to live with the adverse effects of mining on economic and spatial potential for a long time.

Fourthly, all three cities' economic transitions depend on old skills. In Newcastle, the transition from coal and steel to textiles helped to ensure that low-skilled workers did find work. In Matjhabeng this was more difficult. Mineworkers' skills are not conducive either to finding work in other sectors or to creating new entrepreneurs. Economic transitions require new skills sets and the secondary status of our three case study cities means that although they have some satellite campuses of universities in the metro cities, they do not have mainstream universities to fall back on, to build the skills needed for economic transition. At the same time, many of their Further Education and Training colleges are dysfunctional and do not align well with the local demand for skills.

In addition to the problems associated with economic transition, there are also governance problems. The NPM-based focus on steering results in IDPs that have many goals but lack an understanding of the current economy and how difficult it is to change it. The focus on steering means that the plans are over-idealistic, making implementation extremely difficult. Matjhabeng has made various unrealistic plans, such as the idea of building an international freight airport or, more problematically, the Phakisa racetrack, which was constructed but has become dysfunctional. The steering approach also leads to ignoring an existing problem, as Emalahleni does. Neither Emalahleni nor Matjhabeng have functional partnerships with the business community. Newcastle's success in breaking path dependency contrasts with the NPM steering approach, as can be seen in the actions of the LED official who created partnerships with the local business chamber and even learned Mandarin to create partnerships with Chinese businesspeople. A further problem caused by the focus on planning and steering is that it blinds decision-makers to the economic transitions that occur spontaneously without much planning. All three cities have developed regional services functions as part of a natural process. Yet existing plans often

ignore the value of this and do not consider using it as an economic asset for the future.

The problem becomes bigger with capacity constraints. It is this lack of capacity, in conjunction with a steering-focused planning approach, that underlies the inability at local level to find appropriate economic alternatives, as has happened in Emalahleni and Matjhabeng. Those two towns have had very long periods of poor governance, reflected in the lack of unqualified audited financial statements, being run by an administrator, high levels of corruption, and high staff turnover and political appointments.

Economic transitions require an understanding of interdependencies and network steering. However, the rigidity of intergovernmental relationships and the inability to manage networks are evident from the three case studies. Newcastle benefited from the apartheid government's decentralisation subsidies in the early 1990s, but there is currently no national support for economic transitions in Emalahleni and Matjhabeng. There is an expectation that the current national focus on a just transition will provide a framework to help Emalahleni. Again, the focus is on a plan that emphasises steering rather than building the networks that would facilitate a transition. In Matjhabeng, the dominant thinking is that a new plan (an example of steering) will revitalise the economy. This plan is heavily dependent on the national government and private-sector investment, neither of which has been actively sought by decision-makers in the area. In both Emalahleni and Matjhabeng, there is a lack of network steering and the focus remains on a plan. Furthermore, the secondary cities tend to simplify co-operative governance to a process of acquiring funding from other spheres of government. Matjhabeng's LED plan depends mainly on this assumption. And the transition plan that the national government is developing for Emalahleni is a danger because it might be inappropriate to the local situation. To some degree, Newcastle has managed to find appropriate intergovernmental funding for its first transition from mining to textiles. Managing the second transition away from textiles, as the lifting of import taxes will make the industry in Newcastle vulnerable, might be more difficult. A focus on planning can make planners overlook the need to work with nearby municipalities. Furthermore, the planning approach described above depends on national targets. In practice, municipalities and provincial governments must align their plans with the National Development Plan. This requirement means that much emphasis is on the planning process (steering) rather than finding practical local ways of managing an economic transition.

Poor governance and an increase in informality are evident. Newcastle had a stint of good governance up to 2016, but good governance needs to be maintained. Newcastle showed how a municipality could use its municipal finance to help economic transitions by finding a balance between basic infrastructure and infrastructure for business development. Coalition

governments enabled political parties to contribute to economic development in Newcastle. However, in 2016 one party received a council majority and did not see the value of engaging the other parties in decision-making. Governance problems also include being managed by an administrator (in Emalahleni), a high turnover of municipal managers (in Matjhabeng) and mayors not completing their terms (in Matjhabeng). Evidence of governance informality can be seen in the growth of informal settlements in Emalahleni as a result of the municipality's inability to deal with the large influx of job seekers, and the alleged cases of corruption in all three cities.

6. Conclusion

The future of many secondary cities depends on their ability to manage economic transition. Governing a city in the course of economic transition is difficult. This article looked at evidence from three secondary cities in South Africa that have been, or are, mine dependent. The three case studies illustrate path dependency, interdependencies and governance informality.

The economic path dependencies include the historical colonial structure of the economy that emphasised extraction rather than beneficiation, the long dependence on a single economic sector, and the low-level technology associated with mining that does not foster local technological change. The effects of living with the environmental damage caused by mining are beyond the scope of this article to discuss, other than to note that they obviously compound the three cities' problems. The path dependency in governance and management (associated with the NPM paradigm) is inappropriate for managing economic transitions. The emphasis on 'steering' (as opposed to 'rowing'), coupled with severe capacity constraints and a lack of good governance, has had unintended consequences. This result has been large-scale unrealistic projects in the case of Matjhabeng and simply ignoring potential economic transition in the case of Emalahleni. The Newcastle municipality, driven by a LED official, offered some encouraging evidence of a network approach to governing the city's economic transition, building relationships with the chamber of commerce and with investors. This city managed to go some way towards a successful economic transition but now looks like losing the initial gains.

Interdependencies developed in these three cities because of the focus on steering in the local government planning system. Some of these interdependencies result from rigid intergovernmental relations, but also from the IDP system, which emphasises steering and not networking and naively assumes that the national government and private sector will automatically offer support.

Governance informality is increasing, with people or organisations replacing the state or taking matters into their own hands. This is evident in the growth of informal settlements, private companies having to do the work of the municipality, for example by providing water, and allegations of corruption. Governance rules have become irrelevant for some.

Rigidity, interdependencies and governance informality are making economic transition difficult for these three cities. We believe that the underlying problem is a planning system that focuses primarily on steering and reinforces these hindrances to good governance. On top of this, the false sense of security created by the mines discourages economic diversification, making economic transition particularly difficult for mining towns such as these.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Irritation Design: Updating Steering Theory in the Age of Governance

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Abstract

Is steering still a viable concept? The article answers this question with a conditional yes. On the one hand, its conceptual core remains intact. Getting others—who are considered to be idiosyncratic—to solve rather than pose societal problems is no less relevant for recent governance analyses. On the other, steering as a concept needs some updates in terms of subjects, objects, and ways of steering. Beyond merely extending the list of possible subjects and objects of steering, the concept of irritation design is proposed. It stresses that making communication hard to ignore can be a matter of design. Modern society seems to be crowded with steering entities, many of which displaying smart irritation designs. This leads to complex constellations. Yet it remains valuable to analyze strategies of influence because despite all dynamics and happenstance, different chances of impact correlate with different irritation design. Still, we have to account for two aspects: 1) Capacities (beyond money or power) needed for designing irritations are unequally distributed; 2) material effects and empirical boundaries have their share in a decreased ignorability.

Keywords

communication; control; environment; functional differentiation; governance; irritation; responsivity; steering; translation

1. Introduction

The governance paradigm has replaced steering theory (Bora, 2017). It questioned whether especially systems-theoretical design thinking "is still relevant to today's governance discourse and corresponding empirical analyses or, as a 'sunken cultural asset,' belongs more to the spectrum of the history of ideas" (Lange, 2007, p. 176, author's translation). Leaving uncommented whether the history of ideas could nevertheless be a place worth existing for concepts, the contribution at hand rather focuses on the question whether differentiation theoretical thinking can add something to understand current attempts at solving grand societal problems, such as environmental issues.

Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) is trying to strike a balance by using systems-theoretical design thinking and governance concepts complementarily. Inter alia, the paradigm change towards governance was claimed to be due to the growing importance of ever more players having a stake in collectively binding decisions. This adaptation to empirical conditions comes at a price which EGT aptly coined: "Part of the complexity is that other players anticipate each other's strategies, the direction of a collective strategy, and after enactment, do not stop strategizing" (Van Assche et al., 2020, p. 5). Thus, there are more players as well as elaborated sets of strategies which even take into account an environment full of other strategizing players. Instead of just calling this complexity and abandoning concepts of control, EGT remains interested in strategies. A strategy is defined as "a vision for a desirable longer-term future, coupled to an idea of how to get there" (Van Assche et al., 2020, p. 2). The contribution at hand proposes the concept of *irritation design* to systematically describe such ideas. The claim is: different degrees of effectiveness or chances of influence correlate with different irritation designs.

It starts by introducing a result special to differentiation theory: to conceive of societal differentiation as a

cause for major societal problems as well as a reason for problems in tackling those issues (Section 2). The loss of a societal center of steering is one huge obstacle from this perspective. An even more severe aspect could be that such grand problems do not translate into action seamlessly. In order to become socially relevant, societal consequences have to be transformed from an irritation into information. As this observation is no less valid as in times preceding governance theory, the article does not conceive of differentiation theory as an outdated concept. Yet this leaves open whether this also applies to steering.

There are other authors, sharing a systems-theoretical point of view, who are no longer interested in steering, but propose to direct the view to 'responsivity,' i.e., to observe how autonomous systems respond to grand societal problems their environment poses. In this view, systems cause the need for correction *and* take over the correction of such self-produced problems. This perspective will be discussed under the heading of 'auto-correcting society' (Section 3).

Briefly summarizing three decades of differentiation theoretical steering concepts, Section 4 discusses different subjects, objects, and ways of steering. By focusing on how communications are prepared to make them hardly ignorable, irritation design goes beyond the previous literature. This concept is further illustrated along the three dimensions of meaning (factual, social, and temporal; Section 5).

In accordance with EGT, Section 6 concludes that it is worthwhile to focus on strategies and not to exclusively look for systemic responses toward grand societal problems. Another aspect that the concept of irritation design might benefit from is EGT's emphasis on the distinction between material and discursive effects. On the one hand, an ever-smarter irritation design by ever more entities might explain modern society's stability or inertia. On the other, we have to take into account that the ability to stimulate others to translate is unequally distributed in world society.

2. Differentiation as Correction Cause and Correction Problem

This contribution's first thesis is that steering deals with two different kinds of societal consequences of functional differentiation. The first one refers to "the incorrigible operational autonomy" of functional systems:

The best known is certainly the failure of the world economic system to cope with the problem of the just distribution of wealth….By focusing on schools and universities, the education system leads young people to spend far too long hanging around in institutions of higher education to improve career prospects, when they could long since have been married and in productive employment. Through the political parties, the political system attracts people

into politics who then, merely because they have to keep busy, bestow unaffordable blessings on the nation. The expectations set in intimate relationships (under the heading of marriage for love) are now so heightened—because motives are, after all, needed for getting involved—that the ensuing marriages keep the therapists and divorce courts busy, and new attempts are frequent. (Luhmann, 2013, p. 124)

This means that a system's exclusive attention to its own processes has led to challenging consequences for themselves, but also, and at the same time, for society. Differentiation, specialization, and a focus on high performance equipped systems with blinkers that kept them from considering such societal consequences. As a result, corresponding societal environments can be "seen only as irritating noise, as disturbances or opportunities" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 66).

Luhmann distinguishes a second problem area that affects the environmental relations of society: ecological problems. Rather casually, an enlightening shift is taking place here. For it is no longer just a matter of differentiation as the cause of these problems, but rather of differentiation as an explanation for the difficulties in dealing with them, especially the lack of a central societal authority, it operates without apex or center (Luhmann, 2013, p. 125). Before dealing with societal problems such as environmental pollution there has to be a transformation of irritations into information, which is the task of each functional system (Luhmann, 2013, p. 126). Luhmann concedes that economy, science, or politics could be imposed to orient on such problems, especially if addressed by mass media or protest movements. But even successful imposition would not change the fact that each system reacted in its very own way: "politics rhetorically, the economy by raising prices, science with research projects, which with every advance in knowledge reveal still more ignorance" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 127).

The processing issue of both of Luhmann's problems due to functional differentiation's societal consequences—the formation of blinkers of systemic stubbornness and the lack of a central authority in environmental questions—is thus primarily based on the difference in functional systems' information processing. All irritations referring to societal problems only become information through functional systemic transformation, in this case then different information.

In terms of steering, there seems to be a crucial question: Can this transformation of irritations into information be triggered? Moreover, some accompanying questions come up: Is the level of functional systems the only relevant one? Who is irritating whom under what conditions—and how? Before we can turn to these questions, we have to acknowledge that there is a recent trend in differentiation theory that points into the opposite direction. Instead of asking how systems might be irritated, some scholars focus functional system's own

preparations for societal problems. Therefore, I propose to call this development society's auto-correction.

3. The Auto-Correction of Society

Claiming society's auto-correction to be a recent trend might obscure that there have been corresponding contributions for a while. Dirk Baecker (1994) proposed to think of 'social work as a functional system' (*Soziale Hilfe als Funktionssystem*). He distinguishes between a primary and a secondary society. The former means functional differentiation. A secondary society is the result of functional differentiation and refers to the fact that large sections of a population are only concerned with survival, and that participation in the economy, politics, education, religion, art, or science is in any case blocked (Baecker, 1994, p. 95). Apparently, this diagnosis refers primarily to modern society's inclusion problems. The same society now responds to these problems by differentiating a functional system of social assistance. Without the consequences of functional differentiation, this system formation would not exist.

Correction phenomena are rather explained as the result of functional differentiation than to ask for how working on its consequences is stimulated: The functionally differentiated society not only creates its own problems; it also produces forms of correction that respond to these problems.

Responsivity is the latest conceptual development in this area. Rudolf Stichweh (2014, pp. 17–18) considers autonomy and purity semantics ('pure' and 'fundamental' science, '*l'art pour l'art*,' etc.) and the formation of a collective singular (e.g., *the* law, *the* economy, etc.) to be essential for the beginning of differentiation processes. Formulas of autonomy and detachment were sought and found until it became a matter of course from the middle/end of the 18th century that science, for example, did not have to take other spheres (above all: religion) into consideration. This was followed by internal differentiation and thus a stabilization of autonomy—the formation of disciplines in the case of science (Stichweh, 1992).

After this phase of interior orientation, however, Stichweh (2014, pp. 17–18) identifies a 'trend change.' Functional systems, he argues, become responsive and expansive. In this sense, they want to be effective and important and they also want to be supported from the outside. Accordingly, systems incorporated a multitude of external perspectives, whose multiplicity was a guarantor of autonomy. Other functional systems and society as a whole are identified as the most important reference contexts (Stichweh, 2016, p. 11). It is understood as a consequence of functional differentiation that the functional systems themselves take major social problems into account. Where the impetus for the development of responsive structures and mechanisms comes from remains unresolved. Krichewsky (2021) asks for how problem formulations emerge and refers to ways

of, and collectives involved in agenda-setting. But the identification and processing of problems encountered in other functional spheres still becomes reconstructed in terms of responsive systems, in his case as political responsiveness, leaving irritations unconsidered.

Such approaches ('auto-correction of society') seem to conceive of functional differentiation as an infinite cycle of self-produced problems and self-produced solutions related to them. Before the following section reverses the direction to focus on the stimulation aspect, a third way appears: Problems impose themselves physically.

Joren Jacobs and Kristof Van Assche (2014) pursue this very line with the concept of 'empirical boundaries.' These are defined as "boundaries that function as boundaries but do not originate in the internal semantics of the observing system" (Jacobs & Van Assche, 2014, p. 194). Functional systems could, this is the conclusion, be irritated by spatial differences. 'Hit the wall' then denotes the moment of an irritation by the impact of 'hard boundaries.' The consequential problems discussed most thoroughly by Luhmann, ecological hazards, are exemplary here. For Jacobs and Van Assche, however, empirical boundaries describe all obstacles that "may be produced by the physical context without communication making any explicit reference to this matter of fact by means of boundary concepts. The empirical boundary… is a pre-social (or post-social) boundary, existing in the environment of society" (Jacobs & Van Assche, 2014, p. 199). Luhmann's (1989, pp. 28–29) well-known dictum thus appears as half the truth:

> Fish or humans may die because swimming in the seas and rivers has become unhealthy. The oil-pumps may run dry and the average climatic temperatures may rise or fall. As long as this is not the subject of communication it has no social effect.

Where the environment does not impose itself (whether ultimately as a result of social or natural evolution remains to be seen), it only becomes a social phenomenon when it is communicated. But the other half would then include the assumption that physical or spatial aspects are able to impose themselves on a thematization. Marcelo Neves (2017, p. 393) drastically describes that social systems have a tendency to overload their environment with garbage: "Not only in the form of the wave of terrorism and global criminality does the garbage come back, but also, and above all else, through the uncontrollable refugee flows caused by war, hunger and oppression."

Even though this approach differs significantly in the dimension just described from other concepts discussed above, one common feature remains: Once again, it is not a matter of imposing a social (i.e., communicative) correction on society. The fact that exactly this kind of stimulation is needed, that one cannot rely on increased reflection capacities of autonomous

systems, characterizes the following line of tradition of differentiation-theoretical steering concepts.

4. Beyond the Limits of Steering

One of the major obstacles posed by functional differentiation is that there is no central authority for dealing with its societal consequences. This configuration is worsened by a systemic autonomy that leads to the fact that every irritation pointing to social problems must be transformed into system-specific information. Luhmann's consequence was to emphasize "limits of steering." He defines steering as "a very specific use of distinctions, namely the attempt to *reduce the difference*" (Luhmann, 1997, p. 43). In order to move the economy closer to a politically preferred state, for instance, the political system can prohibit something, it can create costs, or the like. "When closely examining these possibilities one will probably establish that in most cases the point is to interfere in the relative attraction of the programmes" (Luhmann, 1997, p. 53). In short, a translation of originally political conditions into business-specific programs is likely if it (literally) pays off economically—if it is relatively attractive. In this case, however, it is still an economic program and this does not coincide with the political one. In the best case, both benefit: Politics can show success if pollutant levels improve after the implementation of a corresponding regulation and this is reflected in increasing voter favor. The economy can also score, for example if a company can strengthen its market position by presenting itself as a particularly green producer and this manifests itself in sales figures. Significantly, however, Luhmann (1997, p. 53) continues his argumentation in the opposite direction. Environmental regulations could also lead to the bankruptcy of certain companies. It is in this respect that this article aims to push the limits of steering.

In doing so, it joins the neighborhood of other authors who thought in a more constructive way about steering under the condition of functional differentiation. If operational autonomy and idiosyncratic information processing hinder dealing with the consequences of functional differentiation, reflection could be the key (Teubner & Willke, 1984). With regard to dealing with functional differentiation's consequences, Helmut Willke (1992, p. 374) put forward that reflection:

> Induces actors to realize that they cannot avoid being possible (that is: viable) environments of other systems. Reflecting this, systems may decide to restrict the range of their options to the few or even to the single one which complies with the conditions of productive—or at least non-destructive—system-environment-ecology.

Thereby, Willke specified steering (in his translation: guidance) in terms of an attempt to reduce a certain difference, namely reducing options to those complying with the system-environment-ecology. In other words, autonomous systems should be made to be a viable environment for other systems, and thus also to meet the overall system/environment interplay. But this is not expected to just happen or to be the next stage of functional differentiation, as the concept of responsivity assumes. Rather, this view must be the result of an irritation that was transformed into an information. There are countless communications that surround systems. Only a tiny fraction of it succeeds to become an irritation that is transformed into information. Consequently, it is even more unlikely for this information to stimulate a reflection which then, again, leads to productive (or at least non-destructive) outputs. What these remarks clearly show is that everything begins with an irritation. Systems-theoretical accounts continued this debate by asking who irritates whom in what way.

4.1. The Who (Subjects of Steering)

In the beginning, reflexive law is considered to be best equipped to provide mechanisms and procedures to induce reflection. Willke continues his thoughts by viewing the political system as a primus inter pares and in form of the 'supervision state' (Willke, 1997) or in terms of 'lateral world systems' (Willke, 2007). In his latest account, he proposes 'reflexive representation' (Willke, 2019): Special problems become delegated by elected parliaments to special senates made up of experts, e.g., central banks or regulatory agencies. Although the political system remains in charge, Willke (2014, p. 158; author's translation) recognizes a lot of helping hands: "Citizens' movements, committed NGOs, ecologically and sustainably oriented foundations, think tanks, expert committees and related institutions that think and act beyond national borders and are able to recognize and deal with global problems."

Teubner, too, embraces the extension of possible and already visible subjects of steering. He does not leave it at adding further players but emphasizes: "In no way are these extralegal mechanisms inferior to legal sanctions" (Teubner, 2011a, p. 37). In a globalized and digitalized world, steering theory should be aware that "societal forces are more relevant than nation states. Civil societal countervailing forces—the media, public debate, spontaneous protest, intellectuals, social movements, NGOs, trade unions, professions—exert considerable pressure on the internal constitutionalisation of transnational regimes" (Teubner, 2013, p. 51), their power pressures have proven to be crucial (Teubner, 2011a, p. 37).

At the beginning of systems-theoretical steering concepts, responsibility was clearly assigned to politics and/or law. Also due to the conditions of globalization and digitization, this clarity has given way to a much broader spectrum. But the fundamental question remains the same: How can stubborn systems be brought to reflection? With regard to the objects of steering, however, the tendency is more towards a narrowing.

4.2. The Whom (Objects of Steering)

We also witness a remarkable shift regarding whose decisions are conceived of as most detrimental for the system-environment-ecology. In the beginning of systems-theoretical concepts of steering, it is all about self-referential systems in general. When it comes to examples, it is striking that it is expected that the objects of steering might strike (respectively: steer) back. On the one hand, the political welfare system can hardly escape the pressure to intervene in practically all societal domains (family, schooling, science, traffic, home building, energy consumption, etc.). "But also, the economy or religion, military, health, technology or other systems try hard to guide societal processes in an effort to intentionally change their respective societal environment in a preferred direction" (Willke, 1992, p. 374).

René Marcic, an Austrian philosopher of law, remarked as early as 1970 that in:

> A constitutional state, everyone controls everyone else….Not only 'state powers' but also other social powers are kept under control. This is a major problem of the contemporary state. Yes, even individual, particularly well-developed personalities, wealthy people or otherwise influential private individuals can exercise 'power' and must be controlled. (Marcic, 1970, p. 182; author's translation)

His list of possible controllers beyond the state—business associations, the scientific community, the church, the media of public opinion: press, radio, television, film, theater, cabaret—resembles Teubner's enumeration of civil societal countervailing forces. Whereas there is a consensus towards an extension on the subject side, we find an interesting focus on one societal context on the object side: The economy, to be precise, transnational corporations (Teubner, 2011a, 2011b). These are assumed to be particularly myopic and leading to extraordinary harmful societal consequences—which became even more visible after the last big financial crisis (Kjaer et al., 2011).

If we stick to the intuition that steering is a concept worth pursuing, it seems advisable to do both: 1) look for which societal context shows the deepest impact on the system-environment ecology; and 2) be open for possible objects of steering on any level and type of differentiation. In his pragmatist differentiation theory of translations, Joachim Renn (2006) proposes to add "integrative units" (Fuchs, 2009) underneath the abstract levels of functional systems and organizations, namely milieus and persons in terms of cultural differentiation. This leads to the assumption of a multiply differentiated society, meaning that there is functional as well as cultural differentiation which cannot be integrated by the means of one single type of coordination be it abstract-systemic or concrete-cultural. In a nutshell and with regard to the subject at hand, this means that

even if an irritation is transformed into information by a functional system, it has to be re-specified by organizations. Within an organization, milieu's, and person's horizons interfere in concrete situations, translating the very abstract information coming from the level of functional systems. As an example, we might think of authorities or administrations with public access. Consider a law that directs compliance with climate targets, but then must be implemented in an administration by staff from a particular milieu and with a certain horizon of experience. This type of translation is called re-specification (Besio & Meyer, 2015). Yet this process can take the other way around, starting in a concrete situation, maybe initiated by a single person, to become an explicit, standardized rule that organizations may increasingly generalize. But a cascade of translations can be expected in this direction as well. Multiple differentiation thus implies accounting for multiple subjects as well as objects of steering. In this perspective, civil societal countervailing forces are only a small part of the picture. In Marcic's terms this constellation—everyone controls everyone else—is the best a constitutional state can get. Pragmatist differentiation theory systematizes this 'everyone' into four integrative units: persons, milieus, organizations, or functional systems. We will revisit this in Section 5.

4.3. The How (Ways of Steering)

Finally, it does not come as a surprise that more than three decades of working on this particular perspective on steering also discussed different ways of making idiosyncratic systems reflect. When the law and the political system were seen in charge, it was searched for mechanisms and procedures, such as round tables. In any case, it seemed clear that they had to be interactions.

Again, taking into account the conditions of world society and media change led to a remarkable shift, this time with regard to the medium of steering attempts, in short: from face-to-face interactions to media-diffused communication. Especially if the target is to force transnational corporations to adapt their programs to be a viable environment, Teubner (2011a, p. 19) considers "the heavy public criticism globally disseminated by the media and the aggressive actions of protest movements and civil society, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)" to be superior to the public codes of the state world. Reputation and 'public credibility' (Ku, 2000) are valuable currencies.

If the major objects of steering—entities following purely economic imperatives—can escape national laws by settling elsewhere, other means are required. This makes the shift towards public pressure as an essential source of irritation understandable. Summarizing these developments, there are many possible ways for many subjects to try to steer many objects. Yet there is one thing that remains unchanged: If it is all about making others reflect that continuing established routines can be disastrous for systems themselves as well as their social

and natural environment, this has to start with an irritation. This does not mean to decide whether interactions or publicity rather bear reflexive capacities but to show a general interest in the process of making others reflect (Mölders, 2014, 2019). Moreover, neither any interactive format nor any type of publicity will equally suit this target. These differences call for considering design. And of course, opting for interaction or publication is not an aspect of choice for any irritating body. It may be easier than ever to publish communications. However, that is not equally true for getting the attention of sites deemed most relevant (Mölders & Schrape, 2019).

The review of the development to the How-question can end here because this exact question is in the center of the now to be introduced concept of irritation design. This is still concerned with sounding out the possibility of steering without believing in direct transmissions without translation. What is new in this respect is, on the one hand, to focus on irritation as a necessary and formable first step and, on the other hand, to illuminate 'irritators' who already reckon with the impossibility of direct intervention.

5. Designing Irritations

If we stick to the postulate that autonomous systems can only be stimulated to make sense of communications that point to a change, the concept of irritation is at play:

> In order to be open to irritation, meaning structures are built to form expectation horizons, which count on redundancies, hence with repetition of the same in other situations. Irritations are then registered in the form of disappointed expectations. Positive and negative… surprises can be involved. On both cases it is a matter, on the one hand, of momentary inconsistencies, which can also be forgotten; one sees the consequences or represses them. On the other hand, irritation can also assert its own repeatability and on this level runs counter to the expectation structures of the system. (Luhmann, 2013, p. 117)

This quote does not say anything about which characteristics communications must show in order to work as an irritation. From a constructivist perspective, there seems to be no other way; irritation is the condition of a different system, therefore there is no such thing as a direct intervention. However, the puzzling formulation is noticeable, irritations could assert their own repeatability. As puzzling as this statement may seem, it must be cases in which it becomes more difficult for a focused system to treat such communications as merely momentary inconsistencies. Exactly this is the anchor point for the concept of irritation design: to orientate communications at the expectation, to make it as difficult as possible for the addressee, to fade them out as situational and ignorable. How this can be made more difficult is the moment of designability.

In principle, corrections can start at any point in a translation cascade—persons, milieus, organizations, and functional systems. But sooner or later, correction requests end up on the attention screens of organizations. It need not stop at this principled argument. Instead, it can be argued that it is organizations where translation work is done. Besio and Meyer (2015) even argue that it is precisely organizations that mediate between different logics and can thus cushion differentiation consequences. External influences are segregated, filtered, and assimilated by organizations, which is addressed by the term re-specification introduced earlier. In this way, they make the incoming environment readable for themselves and, in turn, change and shape their environment.

The pragmatist differentiation theory calls organizations 'distribution heads' (*Verteilerköpfe*). In them, functional-systemic imperatives are worked into small pieces; in the opposite direction, it is organizations that ensure that impulses put forward by individuals or milieus are translated in a systemically generalizing way. This speaks for a special position of organizations for steering theory. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the exemplary sketches of the next sections all refer to organizations.

5.1. Three Dimensions of Meaning: Factual, Social, Temporal

The moment of repeatability already points to the *temporal* dimension. Timing seems to be an obvious aspect. If there is a massive global event, say, Olympics or the World Economic Forum, it may make sense to wait—or, which belongs into the factual dimension, to connect a potentially irritating communication to this event. In very rare cases, one-off-communications succeed. It seems more promising to be persistent while not boring, which meant to be easily ignorable, again. As 'grand challenges'—such as the societal consequences of functional differentiation—are there to stay, any sort of solution that combines persistence with variation seems reasonable. For investigative journalism, to give an example of a recent countervailing force, this gets visible in cases of big leaks. As it is almost impossible to publish everything at once, journalistic consortia or comparable organizations may make a virtue of necessity by reminding of a topic at certain time intervals. This runs counter to the usual way of processing information in media organizations, to publish something as soon as possible and as long as it is a novelty, i.e., an information. Modern media ease to do that in a more interesting way, something might be best suitable for a podcast, for a blog, for a magazine, etc. Yet irritation design along the temporal dimension also means to account for the temporality of the focused system or addressee. For the political realm this might mean to synchronize one's own messages with election terms or the like.

In terms of the *factual* dimension, it seems reasonable to think of what Conversation Analysis coined

'recipient design' (Sacks et al., 1974). This refers to compose communications along the expectation of what could be intelligible or readable for a focused addressee. We may associate this with attempts at translating one's own language into another, e.g., from a mass media language into a political dictionary. But we may also think of presenting communication in a way that is easier to digest. In order to convince lawmakers from limiting the power of big tech platforms, as investigative data journalist Julia Angwin from the tech watchdog organization *The Markup* puts it, one has to translate big data into 'small data,' i.e., providing them with concrete evidence of wrongdoing (Schwab, 2018). Teubner's (2020, p. 17) remark that irritations can also be aimed at the recognition of added or surplus values extends into the factual dimension, too. Such communications could, for instance, consider what is assumed to establish rather than to undermine public credibility.

How to reach lawmakers, is a crucial question for an irritation design that aims at making an addressee reflect to restrict the range of options to the few or even to the single one that an irritator sees in accordance with the common good. The way to get there leads to the *social* dimension of meaning. In this sense, structural couplings denote the ideal form (Luhmann, 2013, pp. 108–115). They are such firmly established intersystemic channels of interference that one can speak of "regular irritations" (Amstutz, 2013, p. 383). Communications can be relied upon to be delivered. The processing of scientific advice, for example, is then still subject to the filtering rules of politics. For journalism, for instance, there is no direct way to talk lawmakers into preferred changes. Therefore, they choose the medium of publicity to exert pressure, i.e., to make their communications hard to ignore. If the direct way is blocked, it must be about finding the shortest detour. Therefore, it can be of particular importance to find out what (public) communicative places a target (system) usually consults if in a state of uncertainty or just in search of valuable information. For some lawmakers, this might be a local newspaper with comparatively small print run, for judges this might refer to legal comments or journals. Furthermore, the social dimension can ask for who is considered to be a valuable coalition partner. This might be publication partners or persons sharing the same milieu as a relevant decision-maker.

All of this must not disqualify procedures taking the form of face-to-face interactions. Although not an option available to everyone, some entities can try to talk others into reflection in the above defined sense. Michael Hutter shed light on the microlevel of such formats. He notes that attracting attention of a self-referential entity means to find messages which become valuable information: "New information implies that the screen of the communicating system has to be conditioned in a way which makes it receptive to available new messages. Only the response of another system shows whether the attempt has been successful" (Hutter, 1992, pp. 271–273).

Making others reflect to choose an option not picked voluntarily, is obviously a tough business. The argument made in the preceding chapter does not mean to cast doubt on these difficulties but to acknowledge that irritation can be systematized not least by taking into account different temporalities and meaning processing rules. Because this is conceptually possible as well as empirically observable, the term irritation design was proposed. This concept is also suitable for explaining different chances of influence, e.g., when an irritation was incomprehensible, premature, or not even 'deliverable.' The concluding chapter will show that this solution sheds light on new problems, too.

6. Conclusions

The contribution at hand started by proposing steering to be an answer to the question how the societal consequences of functional differentiation could be tackled—and how this can be observed. Differentiation was claimed to be both, a cause of major societal problems as well as a major problem of working on them. If differentiation is displayed in many different kinds of information processing, it becomes clear that any communication that aims at working on such problems gets translated in very different ways and with very different consequences.

Therefore, some differentiation theoretical contributions turn the table and propose to rather look at systems' responses to problems originating elsewhere in society (without having been forced to). Because of the underlying assumption that systems start to work on problems caused by themselves, this line of research was called the auto-correction of society. In contrast to this, the point of departure for steering theory has always been that problems worsen if it is relied on systems' autonomy. The major question being how to make autonomous entities reflect to keep an eye on 'the big picture.' Explicitly, the assumption is that systems, at least, have to be triggered to do so.

To resurrect steering as a valuable concept, some means of modernization seem to be due. We have to account for several subjects of steering beyond the legal and the political system, be it from civil society, philanthropy, or a Fifth Estate in terms of networked citizens exerting pressure spontaneously, even disappearing when the issue is settled (Dutton et al., 2015, p. 19). Regarding the objects of steering, it seems advisable to assume many powerful instances of different sizes (from single persons to whole systems). If everyone controls everyone else (Marcic, 1970), things become ever more dynamic and therefore harder to control. Many steering subjects seem to be aware of that but to stop strategizing is not considered an option. It does not seem exaggerated to claim a 'control society' fueled by the rise of Big Data in terms of finding patterns in huge amounts of data which exceeds by far personal and organizational capacities (Elish & boyd, 2018; Trish, 2018).

Therefore, it seemed plausible to put forward the notion of irritation design and to focus on aspects of strategy. Even though autonomous addressees might only be irritated and never reached directly, making information more or less hard to ignore—this has been the bottom line—can be an aspect of design. While this might hold true for public relations or related sorts of strategic communication, too, the relation to steering comes in whenever an irritation design is led by the (regulative) idea to positively promote only those options out of an array of contingent possibilities that take into account future necessities, prerequisites or possibilities which comply with the conditions of the system-environment-ecology (Willke, 1992).

This emphasis on strategy is a shared concern for both EGT and the concept of irritation design. The latter is interested in communicative means able to trigger the transformation of irritations into information. Yet it can hardly be overseen that there are material effects which concern changes in the physical environment that seem to trigger communications (Van Assche et al., 2020, p. 6). Distinguishing between material and discursive effects is essential for the EGT perspective (Van Assche et al., 2014). The concept of irritation design stresses that problems do not draw attention to themselves automatically (or: naturally). Making others deal with problems (as big as the societal consequences of functional differentiation) is not left to chance alone but can be an aspect of design. Leaning on EGT, it can learn to be sensitive with regard to both directions: Not to underestimate the (organizational) work of making others reflect but also to consider the relevance of what EGT calls 'material effects.'

Control attempts already expect the control attempts of others and this reciprocal permanent observation would lead in the result to a far-reaching stabilization of present conditions. This implies a continuation of the systems-theoretical steering pessimism described at the beginning, which is not what we are aiming at here. What seems certain, though, is that no solution will prevail without irritation design. Even a supposedly irresistible solution idea does not flow barrier-free to implementation but has to pass through numerous translation stages. Viewed in this light, it seems hardly surprising that articles advocating the enforcement of technical solutions to address climate change, such as direct air capture, are at the very same time already considering methods of political persuasion (Hanna et al., 2021).

Further research should take into account that the capacity to stimulate others to translate is unequally distributed in the world society (Renn, 2006, p. 497). This inequality has not only to do with differences in power or money, but above all with how decisions are made about the use of power and money. The example of large-scale philanthropic organizations illustrates this particularly well (Mölders, 2020). Here, projects are monitored in such a targeted manner and their re-specification is controlled so systematically that the frequently described impacts of 'philanthrocapitalism' (Bishop & Green, 2015) cannot be explained by power or money alone, but as an organizational effect (Mair & Hehenberger, 2014; Reiser, 2018).

Moreover, it seems worthwhile to compare different irritation designs, e.g., along different societal contexts (science, arts, economy, religion, etc.), different guiding principles (evidence-based, technocratic, communitarian, etc.) or types of collectives (Dolata & Schrape, 2018). All this also speaks in favor of taking an interest in strategies. It is easy to hint at strategies failing their targets. But this should not lead to overlooking impacts strategies—smart irritation designs—have.

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Article

Social Investment Policies in the EU: Actively Concrete or Passively Abstract?

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Abstract
Against the historical-conceptual background of EU social policy and evolutionary governance, this article analyses the approach with which the EU propagates social investment policies. Social investment, understood as an active rather than passive way of social protection, has become a salient instrument for reinvigorating the EU's social dimension, especially in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis. By means of a large-scale document analysis, we develop four EU social investment propagation approaches (reference, objective, tool, and action) according to how active (passive) and concrete (abstract) the EU's intervention in social investment is. The results show that the EU mainly propagates social investment with an active approach, i.e., policy recommendations targeted at national governments. In terms of substance, the EU's treatment of social investment is based on labour activation policies backed by skills development and job search support policies, which is consistent with the main purpose of social investment.

Keywords
co-evolutionary governance; EU social policy; labour market activation; social investment

1. Introduction

In January 2021, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen scheduled the 2021 tripartite EU Social Summit. As von der Leyen underlined, the summit needed to particularly address the younger generation with a focus on solidarity. Concretely, it should "focus on how to strengthen Europe's social dimension to meet the challenges of climate change and the digital transition, in order to ensure equal opportunities for all and that no one is left behind" (European Commission, 2021, p. 1). The summit should therefore enhance support for the EU's social dimension with the general objective of improving people's well-being to add to the recovery path from the hardship

of the Covid-19 pandemic. This summit's mission is in line with the March 2021 Commission communication on the European Pillar of the Social Rights Action Plan, which aims to reinvigorate the EU's social dimension (see European Commission, 2021). The need to improve the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) shows that the EU has not yet realised the commitments made at its adoption in 2017.

This article addresses this inertia concerning social issues as compared to macro-economic policies and reforms (Graziano & Hartlapp, 2018; Moreno and Palier speak of a "European social model... a kaleidoscope of sediments and peculiarities" [Moreno & Palier, 2005, p. 2]). It asks how, if at all, the EU can deliver on its bold promises. It starts with the question of whether the EU's socio-economic co-evolutionary governance

armoury offers enough steering potential to turn its EPSR commitments into reality. To operationalise this question, we focus on the propagation of social investment by the EU in its policy documents and activities across different levels of governance as a way to address social concerns. The main idea of social investment is that "social policy should no longer focus on 'passively' protecting people from the perils of the market by means of cash benefits, but rather prepare or 'empower' people in order to maximally integrate them into the market" (Jenson & Saint-Martin as cited in Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013, p. 553). Social investment has been well-developed in the academic literature, notably from the theoretical-conceptual (Hemerijck, 2015; Kvist, 2015), critical (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013) and (national) case study (Bouget et al., 2015; Cantillon, 2011; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003) perspectives. In the EU context, Vandenbroucke et al. (2011) discuss the need for a social investment pact.

Building on the above, this article offers an empirical analysis exclusively from the EU perspective. The main objective is to analyse the ways in which the EU propagates social investment policies. To this end, we define four propagation approaches, depending on whether they actively discuss and promote social investment and whether they involve concrete EU intervention in social investment (see Figure 1). The *reference* and *objective* approaches relate to the paradigmatic dimension of the EU's treatment of social investment, while the *tool* and *action* approaches refer to the level of intervention. The propagation approaches are inspired by the conceptual framing of social investment put forward by Bouget et al. (2015) in their analysis of national social investment policy practices. In the context of the present analysis, conceptual framing concerns which

policy fields and sub-fields are integral components of social investment.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. We first discuss the development of EU social policy governance and its co-evolutionary patterns across governance levels. We then focus on the role of social investment in the EU especially in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis. Subsequently, we describe our methodological approach based on the analysis of textual data. Finally, we present the results of the analysis, focusing on the EU's social investment propagation approaches.

2. EU Social Policy Governance

In terms of the EU's steering potential, political steering theory (Börzel, 2005, p. 617; Burth & Görlitz, 2001; Mayntz, 1987, 2003; Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995), multilevel governance approaches (Héritier, 2002; Hix, 1998; Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Kohler-Koch, 2003; Marks et al., 1996; Peters, 2002; Sandholtz & Stone Sweet, 1998; Umbach, 2017; Wallace, 2005) and Evolutionary Governance Theory in particular (Beunen et al., 2016; Van Assche et al., 2014; Yagi, 2020) inform us that multilevel governance arrangements involve co-evolution across levels of governance—vertically (supranational, national, regional, local) and horizontally (various actors, including markets, institutions, and civil society). Such multilevel co-evolutionary governance and steering logics—ranging from regulatory (state) intervention in political coordination and negotiation systems to competition mechanisms and self-regulation—are particularly relevant to EU social policy.

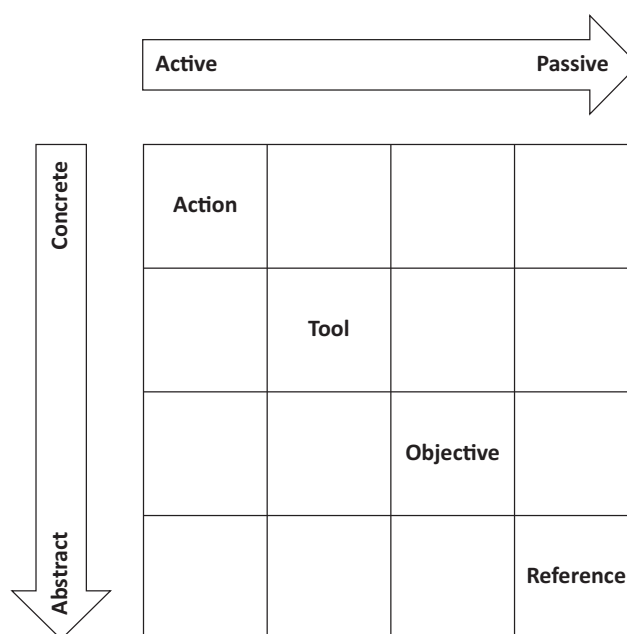EU social policy is therefore an exemplary field of governance co-evolution across systemic levels given that

Figure 1. The EU's social investment propagation approaches.

its progress is based not only on vertical cooperation between the EU level and member states but also on horizontal cooperation among individuals, markets, and the public sector. In legal terms, Arts. 2 and 3 in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) define different social dimensions of the EU's multilevel political system (prominently equal rights and non-discrimination; the social market economy; economic, social, and territorial cohesion; social justice; social protection, and solidarity; TEU, 2012). Titles IX, X, XI, XII, XIV, and XVIII in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) specify EU social policy areas (TFEU, 2012). This multi-faceted social fabric is reflected in the multilevel governance patterns of EU social policy. As Art. 4 in the TFEU states, social policy predominantly resides in the realm of shared competences (TFEU, 2012). This means that both the EU and its member states can adopt legislation. EU member states legislate where the EU does not exercise its competences. Art. 6 in the TFEU locates questions of protection and improvement of human health, education, and vocational training in the realm of supporting competences, in which the EU is limited to complementary action while EU member states legislate (TFEU 2012). This combination of legal competences impacts on how EU social policies are co-designed and it reflects the fact that no exclusive legal authority has been transferred to the EU. This constitutes the starting point for the governance co-evolution arena at hand and impacts on how EU social policies are made within the EU's multilevel system. From a governance perspective, EU social policy is steered by various policy instruments, depending on the legal basis applied and ranging from regulatory approaches to policy coordination. This variety of governance modes materialises the multilevel steering patterns of the EU's social dimension (Scharpf, 2002) and further strengthens the co-evolutionary governance potential in the area.

The development of EU social policy over time explains the multidimensionality of its legal and governance basis. Defined as a matter of national sovereignty with limited room for manoeuvre for the European Economic Community in the Treaty of Rome, social policy remained shaped by national policy priorities and regimes with a noticeable opposition to further Europeanisation. Liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare regimes continued to co-exist and two approaches to EU social policy emerged: the (neo)liberal idea of 'Market Europe' with little room for European social policy; and the 'Social Europe' approach aiming at further communitarisation beyond the European Social Fund, common vocational training policies, and equal pay provisions. A lack of consensus and concern about negative repercussions of social integration on the economic development of the Community prevailed, hampering the development of a European social policy (Dodo, 2014). As a result, coherence is missing in EU socio-economic policies as "European integration has created a constitutional asymmetry between policies promoting market efficiencies and policies promoting social protection and equality" (Scharpf, 2002, p. 646).

A fundamental moment for the definition of social rights at the EU level was the 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (European Parliament et al., 2012). This unites different layers of individual rights (human, economic, civic, and social) that EU citizens are subject to in the EU. Again, a result of governance co-evolution in the area, the sources of this basic rights catalogue are dispersed across different levels of governance (European Convention on Human Rights, constitutional provisions of EU member states, international instruments, and the case law of the Court of Justice of the EU). Another relevant step in EU social policy development was the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit. The summit inter-institutionally proclaimed the EPSR, which defines three target areas for socially sustainable labour markets (equal opportunities and access; fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion; European Parliament et al., 2018). Legal competences for achieving the EPSR targets, however, again remain divided. The member states are legally empowered to design governance solutions, whereas the EU is attributed a supporting action role. Moreover, in 2019 the Commission reinstated the EU social pillar in its policy guidelines, highlighting the need to "reconcile the *social* and the *market*" and to "put forward an action plan to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights" (von der Leyen, 2019, p. 9). In this climate of sluggish but necessary implementation of the EPSR, the EU's social agenda requires reanimation in 2021, not least because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In sum, the development of EU social policy can be encompassed under a slow and lagging "governance path" (Van Assche et al., 2014, p. 29).

3. The EU Social Investment Approach

On this slow 'governance path,' the 2007/2008 financial and economic and the 2010–2012 sovereign debt crises increased the pressure on both EU member states and the EU level to become bolder on the social dimension of European integration. The crises "reinforce[d] the need to modernise social policies to optimise their effectiveness and efficiency, and the way they are financed" (European Commission, 2013, p. 2). To this end, in 2013 the Commission defined the cornerstones of social investment in its communication on Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion (see European Commission, 2013). Linked to the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the Commission stated that social investment policies, combined with protection and stabilisation as functions of welfare regimes, were essential welfare state instruments to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of social policies (European Commission, 2013).

A series of documents attached to the Commission's communication form the 'Social Investment Package'

(SIP), which should redirect "Member States' policies, where needed, towards social investment throughout life, with a view to ensuring the adequacy and sustainability of budgets for social policies and for the government and private sector as a whole" (European Commission, 2013, p. 3). As a supranational stimulus, the SIP has had governance consequences at the EU and national levels, requiring interlinkage among social policies, the European Semester, the EU's Employment Package, pensions coordination, cohesion policies, and EU funding policies. As such, it inspired and required the European Semester's co-evolutionary governance process to adapt in terms of framing of policy paradigms (i.e., *reference* and *objective* propagation approaches) and intervention types (i.e., *tool* and *action* propagation approaches).

As a result, the EU's social investment approach created vertical and horizontal adaptation stimuli for EU member states and across the different levels of the EU system. Borrowing from the Europeanisation literature, such stimuli can stem from various co-evolution dynamics between levels of governance: down-loading and adaptation of national governance by transfer of European provisions (top-down Europeanisation); up-loading and establishment of European governance (bottom-up Europeanisation); and cross-loading and transfer of governance approaches between national and subnational levels based on EU stimuli (vertical transfer; Howell, 2004a, pp. 5–6, 2004b, pp. 54–56). Feedback loops between the different dynamics accompany co-evolutionary governance developments (Bomberg & Peterson, 2000, p. 20; Börzel, 2003; Börzel & Risse, 2000, pp. 1-2, 2003, p. 57; Giuliani, 2003, p. 135; Olsen, 2002, p. 932; Radaelli, 2003, p. 30) as this "pattern of couplings between systems creates a space for change and for possible intervention" (Van Assche et al., 2014, p. 19; see Beunen & Van Assche, 2013). For our analysis, stimuli deriving from top-down dynamics seem particularly relevant as they highlight inspiration for adaptation through EU level reference points, policy paradigms and intervention types.

Against this historical-conceptual backdrop, this article focuses on *how*, *when* and *in what form* the EU propagates social investment, creating stimuli and reference points for other levels of governance through top-down dynamics. The *in what form* aspect constitutes the nucleus of our analysis and evolves around the categorisation of social investment policies (in terms of flow, stock, and buffer characteristics; see Table 1). By choosing this perspective, we focus on the treatment of contemporary social investment at the EU level as a potential way of instigating co-evolutionary governance dynamics in policy areas that do not fall under the exclusive competence of the EU. To this end, we understand social investment as a mode of aligning national policies with the EU's governance approach in its post-sovereign debt crisis policy agenda and its 2020 strategy.

4. Data and Method

We use document analysis as the main method. The analysis involves manual coding of documents and quantitative interpretation of textual data. Our sample consists of 293 EU documents from the period from 2010 to 2020 (except for the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights from 2000). The selection of EU document types is based on their potential relevance regarding social investment policies (see Appendix 1 in the Supplementary File). The documents refer to social investment within the notions of policy development (e.g., the Commission's White Papers), policy objectives (e.g., Annual Growth Surveys), and policy recommendations (e.g., Country-Specific Recommendations [CSRs]).

The main unit of analysis is the (grammatical) sentence. Sentences in the selected documents that mention social investment policies (see Table 1) are coded in terms of: a) the specific policy field they refer to (e.g., upskilling, unemployment benefits); b) the social investment policy category (flow, stock, or buffer); and c) the EU propagation approach. It should be noted that the three social investment policy categories (flow, stock, and buffer) indicate which policy sub-fields are considered in the analysis. Nevertheless, they also inform social investment from a policy implementation standpoint. Concretely, an effective social investment strategy ought

Table 1. Social investment policy categories.

Category	Flow (labour market)	Stock	Buffer
Specific policy field	• Participation • Activation • Access • Flexibility • Flexicurity • Life-course transitions • Relevance of skills	• Human capital • Education • Upskilling • Vocational training • Lifelong learning • Gender equality • R&D • Childhood care	• Health • Unemployment benefits • Career support • Job search assistance • Social housing • Minimum income support

Note: Due to our efforts to reflect the content of the raw data (i.e., sentences) as closely as possible, the number and labels of specific policy fields used in the analysis slightly differ from those listed in the table (cf. Figure 4). Source: Authors' adaption from Bouget et al. (2015).

to combine and integrate policy interventions from all three categories. The interventions need to consider a life course perspective as social investment entails a continuum of measures rather than one-off and/or ad-hoc policy actions. Moreover, the interventions need to be mutually reinforcing to account for the different objectives of different social policy categories (Bouget et al., 2015). To illustrate, changes in unemployment benefit schemes (buffer) bolster incentives for labour market participation (flow). The cost of such intervention can be mediated by, for instance, re-qualification opportunities (stock). From this demand for mutual reinforcement also follows the relevance of vertical co-evolutionary governance in the implementation of social investment policies.

In our text analysis, a single sentence can be coded multiple times (i.e., if it mentions manifold social investment policies and/or entails multiple EU propagation approaches). A total of 2068 coded segments are included in the analysis. While coding the sentences, in addition to their meaning, we consider specific word types and/or specific words that help indicate to which propagation approach the coded segments belong (see Appendix 2 in the Supplementary File).

EU social investment propagation approaches reflect the EU's framing and treatment of social investment in its documents. Specifically, four propagation approaches reflect: a) how active (or passive) the EU is in proposing and promoting social investment policies; and b) the level of concreteness of the EU's intervention in social investment (see Figure 1). The *reference* approach concerns mere mentioning and/or factual description of social investment policies in EU documents. As such, it is passive and abstract. The *objective* approach includes propagation of social investment policies as a desirable policy aim/objective, incentivising social investment policies and placing social investment on policy and political agendas in EU politics. Therefore, it is more active and concrete than the *reference* approach. The *tool* approach understands social investment policies as policy tools that help achieve another policy objective, which may or may not be related to social investment. It is therefore both active and concrete in terms of the EU's propagation of social investment. Finally, the *action* approach includes the EU's recommendations for policy actions regarding social investment. The policy *action* is directly targeted at national governments. Therefore, it is the most active and concrete propagation approach.

Broadly speaking, we expect the *reference* and *objective* approaches to be relatively less prominent. The momentum of the *reference* approach may have decreased due to the overall development of the supranational social policy armoury since the early 2000s (e.g., European Employment Strategy; the open method of coordination). Concerning the *objective* approach, the legal basis of EU social policy (shared competences in many and supporting competences in some areas) discussed above makes it potentially less attractive for the

EU given that the normative (steering) intensity of defining policy aims and objectives is not negligible. Hence, we expect *tool* and *action* approaches to be more prominent as they reflect the main mission of the European Semester policy coordination cycle and its increased relevance to the social policy realm. The Semester involves monitoring and recommendation practices in order to foster policy reforms at the national level (i.e., the *action* approach) and, to a lesser degree, it offers the means to achieve such reforms (i.e., the *tool* approach).

5. Results and Discussion

We focus on three aspects of the analysis which provide insights into *how*, *when* and *in what form* the EU propagates social investment. First, the *how* aspect directly concerns the EU propagation approaches. As Figure 2 shows, the EU propagates social investment predominantly through *action* (recommending policy actions to member states) and *tool* (utilising specific social investment policies as a means to achieve social investment or other policy goals) approaches. Therefore, the EU's treatment of social investment is active and concrete. As such, it institutionally directly targets national governments. Hence, it could be argued that active propagation of social investment is well-integrated in the EU's social investment policy narrative expressed in its policy documents.

The second aspect of the analysis concerns the temporal dimension (the *when*) of the EU's propagation of social investment. As Figure 3 shows, there is no evident linear trend in terms of use of the four propagation approaches from 2010 to 2020. The use of the *action* approach steadily increases from 2011 and peaks in 2014. This is followed by a decline from 2015 to 2020. The use of the *objective* approach is relatively constant over the entire time period. This also holds for the *tool* approach, yet with an obvious decline in 2020. The *reference* approach was used more frequently from 2010 to 2013, whereas from 2013 to 2020 use of it was relatively negligible with the exceptions of 2016 and 2017.

The temporal aspect of the analysis implies that social investment persistently appears as an integral policy *objective* and a *tool* to achieve other (non-)related policy objectives at the EU level. Although the *action* approach is most frequently employed (see Figure 2), from a temporal perspective its use by the EU is somewhat periodical. References to the *action* approach predominantly derive from CSRs. Considering this, a significant decline in use of the *action* approach in 2015 coincides with the introduction of the streamlined European Semester, under which recommendations have become simpler, shorter, and fewer (Alcidi & Gros, 2017). Hence, explicit references to social investment may have been 'absorbed' by other more targeted policy recommendations, potentially signalling a shift of supranational steering to these tools. Moreover, this
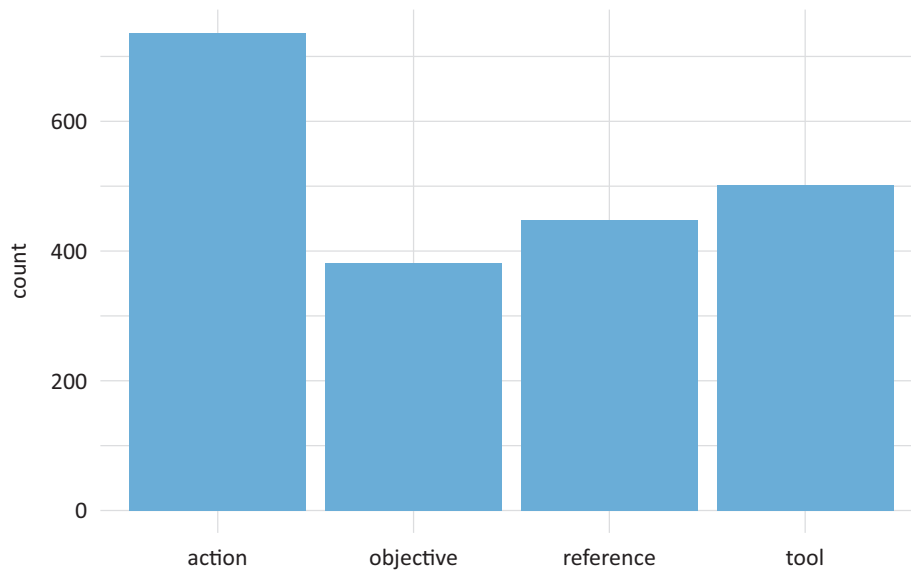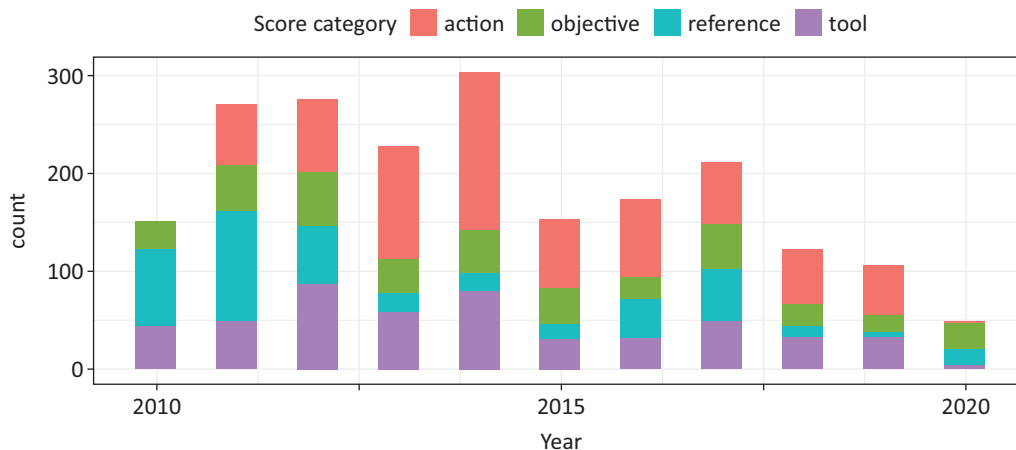
Figure 2. Occurrence frequency of EU social investment propagation approaches.

decline may have occurred due to a successful implementation of social investment-related policy recommendations at the national level. Nevertheless, the present analysis cannot support such claims as it does not consider changes in CSRs content and their implementation at the national level. Therefore, and due to the secondary importance of the *when* aspect of the analysis, we do not elaborate further on this.

Finally, the *in what form* aspect is the core of our analysis. It concerns categories of social investment policies (flow, stock, and buffer; see Table 1) and their specific policy fields. Put differently, it unfolds the substance of the EU's social investment propagation approaches. As such, it underlines the characteristics of social investment in the EU. Policies in the *stock* category are prevalent with a particular emphasis on skills (e.g., upskilling, addressing skills mismatches) and training-related (e.g., vocational training, lifelong learning) policies. Enhancing (labour market) skills is predominantly propagated as a policy *objective* (see Figure 4, row 4, column 2),

while, correspondingly, training-related policies mainly serve as policy *tools* (see Figure 4, row 4, column 4). Therefore, from the EU perspective, professional development appears as a prominent channel for using social investment. Interestingly, human capital and gender equality are relatively underrepresented in the EU documents and are mostly propagated through the descriptive *reference* propagation approach.

Policies in the *flow* category exclusively concern the labour market. Labour market activation policies appear most often in the documents (see Figure 4, row 1, column 1). From a broader economic perspective, relatively frequent references to the flexibility (including flexicurity; see Bekker, 2018) of labour markets (see Figure 4, row 2, column 1) feed into the prominence of activation policies. Activation-focused policies—reducing disincentives to work (Raffass, 2017) and encouraging individuals to search for employment aiming at a re-entry in employment (after the initial encounter with unemployment)—are pervasively communicated

Figure 3. Occurrence frequency of the EU's propagation approaches over time.
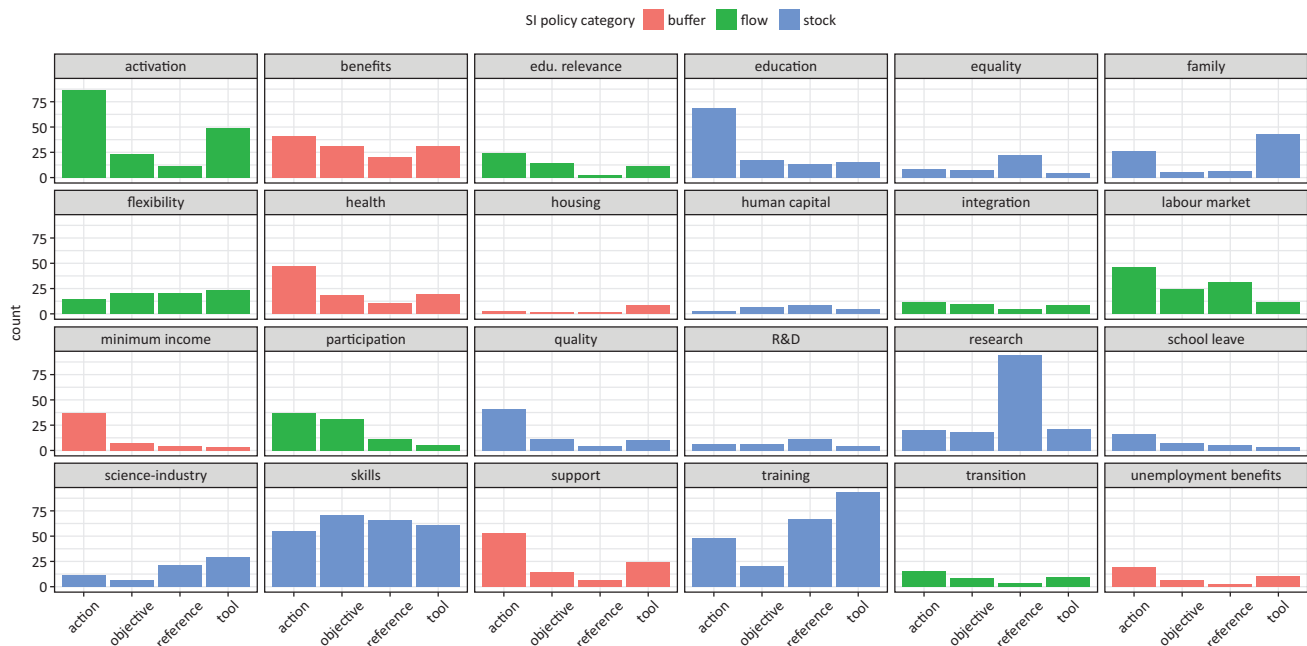
Figure 4. Distribution of the EU's propagation approaches across social investment policies. Note: education, labour market, and benefits policies are generic and encompassing in nature due to difficulties or inability to specify a policy field in some coded segments.

through active and concrete social investment propagation approaches (i.e., *tool* and *action*).

The treatment of unemployment benefit policies by the EU in the *flow* category complements the prominent role of activation policies. Mentioning of unemployment benefits appears relatively less frequently in the EU documents and is mostly communicated through the *action* propagation approach (see Figure 4, row 5, column 6). This means that the EU (in annual CSRs) recommends policy action to governments concerning their unemployment benefit schemes. Some unemployment benefit-focused policy recommendations entail reducing their duration and generosity. For example, in 2015 the EU recommended that the French government should "[t]ake action in consultation with the social partners and in accordance with national practices to reform the unemployment benefit system in order to bring the system back to budgetary sustainability and provide more incentives to return to work" (Council of the EU, 2015, p. 7). Such policy recommendations complement and reinforce the main aim of the prevalent references to activation policies.

Insights from the other two categories of social investment also build on the salience of activation policies. In the *stock* category, although relatively underrepresented, family policies (e.g., improving childcare services) are among the main policy *tools* (see Figure 4, row 1, column 6) to achieve activation. References to family policies mainly highlight the need to enable (equal) female labour market participation after childbirth. For example, the 2019 Annual Growth Surveys states that "[w]ider access to high-quality care services (e.g., childcare and long-term care) would ensure more

opportunities for women to enter or stay in employment" (European Commission, 2018, p. 12). In terms of policy recommendations, the EU recommended Austria, for instance, to "[i]mprove labour market outcomes for women also through the provision of full-time care services" (Council of the EU, 2017, p. 6). Moreover, in 2019, Italy was recommended to "[s]upport women's participation in the labour market through a comprehensive strategy, including through access to quality childcare and long-term care" (Council of the EU, 2019, p. 12).

Policies in the *buffer* category are overall relatively less represented in the selected corpus of EU documents. Nevertheless, relatively frequent mentioning of (job) support policies (e.g., public employment services, efficiency and coordination of job centres, individual career counselling) through *action* and *tool* approaches strengthens the general emphasis on activation policies (see Figure 4, row 4, column 3). In this context, support policies act as an intermediate step between unemployment and re-entering employment. To this end, from a broader perspective, the Commission states that "[p]ublic employment services and sectoral organisations also play an important role in retraining workers who have to change occupation or sector, thus facilitating reallocation of labour between firms and sectors" (European Commission, 2012, p. 16). Concerning related policy recommendations, the EU recommended to "[e]valuate the effectiveness of the public employment service, notably on career guidance and counselling services, to improve the matching of skills with labour market needs" (CSR 2011 for Slovenia; Council of the EU, 2011, p. 6). Therefore, job support systems have the potential to enable smoother implementation

of labour market activation policies (see Black et al., 2003; Heidenreich & Aurich-Beerheide, 2014). Table 2 summarises the main findings of the document analysis.

Overall, the dominant policy themes through which the EU propagates social investment are enhancing the labour market and education skills (*stock*), labour market activation policies (*flow*), and job support policies (*buffer*). These themes are complementary and interconnected. Their interaction reflects a dynamic treatment of contemporary social investment at the EU level. Enhanced labour market and education skills enable more efficient implementation of labour market activation policies as skilled individuals are seemingly more competitive and have a higher capacity to adjust to labour market demands. Therefore, they are more likely to switch from unemployment to re-employment in a timely manner, which is the overarching aim of activation policies. In this context, job support policies underpin skills development through, for example, state-sponsored professional (i.e., re-qualification) or soft skill training and/or individual career counselling that aims to make the job search a confidence-boosting experience. Moreover, job support policies reinforce activation policies (assuming they are effective) as they reduce the cost of and demand for unemployment benefits.

In sum, regarding the above-discussed co-evolutionary governance and adaptation stimuli, contemporary social investment in the EU broadly reflects top-down dynamics in so far as the EU uses an active approach to foster reforms at the national level. The core idea is to stimulate national governance adaptation through recommendations that create a supranational reference point for policy change. Our findings largely support this as the EU mainly treats social investment through the *action* propagation approach, which entails direct policy recommendations to national governments and it is consistent with the idea of 'governance by objectives' (see Vandenbroucke et al., 2011). Moreover, social investment based on activation policies reflects the existing division of competences between the EU and its member states concerning social policy as broadly understood and fits into the EU's post sovereign debt crisis and Europe 2020 Strategy policy agenda with competitive and knowledge-based economies as overarching goals. It is also consistent with its main purpose to 'transform' welfare provision from the passive collection of benefits (protection from the market) into active participation in and adjustment to the labour market.

However, one should be wary of the broader implications of activation-centred social investment. First, studies on activation policies contend that they are conducive to socio-economic policy outcomes such as decreasing poverty levels and unemployment, and social inclusion (see, e.g., Perkins, 2010; Raffass, 2017). Second, such apparent incompatibility between economic and social policies also concerns EU economic governance under the European Semester, in which social concerns are subjugated to their economic counterparts (see Bekker, 2015; Spasova et al., 2019; Zeitlin & Vanhercke, 2018). Therefore, the EU's commitment to traditional social policy outcomes appears feeble. Consequently, social investment as a novel instrument for social policy may be undermined, considering that it "cannot and will not ensure social progress for all if it is not complemented by a firm commitment to traditional forms of social protection" (Cantillon & Van Lancker, 2013, p. 561). In other words, governance co-evolution for social progress derives from a complementarity of (activation-centred) social investment and traditional welfare provision. The EU has been somewhat engaged with the former yet (still) lags with the latter, which remains a competence of EU member states.

6. Conclusion

Against the historical-conceptual background of EU social policy and Evolutionary Governance Theory, we have analysed the ways in which the EU propagates social investment, using large-scale document analysis as the research method. The results show that active propagation of social investment is well-integrated in the EU's social investment policy space. Using a well-established instrument of EU economic and social policy coordination, the EU propagates social investment mainly through active and concrete approaches communicated through annual CSRs to national governments, which confirms our initial expectations. This propagation approach hence adds to the EU's socio-economic co-evolutionary governance armoury of the European Semester to contribute to the implementation of the EPSR. The EU's treatment of social investment is based on active labour market policies backed by skills development and job support policies, echoing 'Market Europe' ideas, the Europe 2020 Strategy's focus on a knowledge-based competitive economy, and the European Employment Strategy's focus on increased employability and adaptability (Umbach,

Table 2. Summary of the main findings of the document analysis.

Social investment policy category	Dominant specific policy field(s)	Salient EU propagation approach
FLOW	Labour market activation	Tool; Action
STOCK	Skills Training (vocational and lifelong)	Objective Tool
BUFFER	Job support	Tool; Action

2009, pp. 196–198). In terms of co-evolutionary governance, this treatment of social investment points to the use of top-down stimuli by the EU. Activation-centred social investment is consistent with its inherent purpose, yet it alone may not prove effective enough to substantively advance 'Social Europe,' considering the 'tension' between economic and social policy priorities and outcomes in EU governance.

Although our analysis is empirically compelling, it has limitations. Concretely, it does not consider the national level, which is crucial for the implementation of social investment policies on EU recommendations, and, more importantly, it does not discuss potential socio-economic effects of the dominant policy themes in the EU's treatment of social investment. Nevertheless, the analysis offers an empirical validation of the definition of social investment in the EU context, which constitutes one of the article's main contributions. In addition, the findings of the analysis give insights into the EU's role in social policy, which historically has a strong national character. The fact that the EU's treatment of social investment is active and concrete potentially indicates an increased role of the EU in the social field. The EU's increasingly important role in social investment unravels through policy coordination under the European Semester, the latter itself a governance mode of aligning member states' policies with the EU's governance approach that instigates co-evolutionary governance dynamics in EU socio-economic policies. Such developments have already occurred in other areas of social policy, including pensions (see, e.g., Guardiancich & Guidi, 2020; Tkalec, 2020). Moreover, from a practical point of view and in the context of existing studies on social investment, an exclusive empirical focus on the EU level and (reusable) operationalisation of large-scale textual data are the article's further contributions to deepen the understanding of social investment in the EU context.

From the theoretical perspectives of Europeanisation and multilevel governance, this article may add to the long-present notion of national de-structuring without supranational re-construction (Ferrera, 2005), which depicts the EU's role in social policy. In the current EU multilevel governance context, national de-structuring unwinds through down-loading and the top-down dynamics of the European Semester, which has embraced social policy issues and has enabled a more prominent role for the EU in social affairs. Active and concrete propagation of social investment by the EU exemplifies such a development also in areas that do not fall under the exclusive competence of the EU. Nevertheless, (positive) integration towards a more 'Social Europe' through up-loading and bottom-up dynamics in social affairs has remained somewhat minor. The EPSR signalled a positive move in this respect, but, as we noted in the introduction, the EU has not yet fully realised its commitments under the Pillar. In other words, social investment to some extent potentially entails a 'Europeanised' dimension achieved 'through the back door' of economic and fiscal policy coordination under the European Semester. However, it is vital to emphasise that our analysis does not directly imply this; it instead offers a descriptive framework that can serve as a starting point for unravelling such arguments further. To this end, causal relationships concerning the magnitude of pressure exerted by the EU on national governments in terms of social investment ought to be contemplated in future research efforts. Such analyses have the capacity to empirically demonstrate the plausibility and validity of such arguments. In our future research, we aim to focus on social investment at the national level and the role of the EU in it.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Article

Strategy and Steering in Governance: The Changing Fates of the Argentine Planning Council

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Abstract
Based on a detailed study of the return of national-level planning in Argentina as embodied by COFEPLAN, the national planning council, we develop a conceptual framework to analyse the possibilities and limits of steering in governance. We lean on the theoretical apparatus of evolutionary governance theory and use the concepts of goal dependency, interdependency, path dependency and material dependency (effects in governance) to analyse the reality effects of strategy (effects of governance). Methodologically, our study relies on archival work and semi-structured interviews with planning scholars and public officials from different levels of government. We show that, although material and discursive reality effects were abundant in the evolution of Argentine planning policies, dependencies and discontinuities undermined both the central steering ambitions of the government and the innovative potential of the new planning schemes. The dramatic history of the Argentine planning system allows us to grasp the nature of dependencies in a new way. Shocks in general undermine long-term perspectives and higher-level planning, but they can also create windows of opportunity. The internal complexity and the persistence of Peronist ideology in Argentina can account for the revivals of national-level planning in very different ideological contexts, but the recurring shocks, the stubborn difference between rhetoric and reality, the reliance on informality, created a landscape of fragmented governance and often weak institutional capacity. In that landscape, steering through national-level planning becomes a tall order.

1. Introduction

Planning in Argentina has undergone many transformations in its roughly 75 years of existence. Changing powers, shifting ideologies and fluctuating stakeholder configurations redefined what planning is and what it could do (Müller & Gómez, 2013; Settimi & Audino, 2008). As such, Argentina is a good place to study the potential and limits of planning as steering, especially since national-level planning was attempted several times. And it came back in recent years. In the more recent manifestations of national-level planning, the Federal Council for Planning and Territorial Ordering (COFEPLAN) is one of the most significant organisations. We study how this organisation evolved, as it sheds a light on the changing fates of national-level planning, and, with that, central steering ambitions in Argentina. One can thus speak of a nested case study, with COFEPLAN enabling

us to grasp the difficulties of (re)introducing national planning, and national planning shedding a light on planning-as-steering.

Theoretically, our work is framed by evolutionary governance theory (EGT; Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014). EGT offers a unique perspective on the non-linearity of transformation in governance by giving central place to processes of co-evolution and the dependencies which develop. It offers a distinct picture of continuity and discontinuity in governance and, at the same time, an explanation of limits and possibilities for steering. We combine the EGT-derived concepts with a version of strategy thinking which owes to the strategy-as-practice perspective (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 1996) and critical management studies (Adler et al., 2007; Alvesson & Willmott, 2011). As steering in governance can be understood as strategic in nature, strategy thinking enters the picture quite naturally.

Methodologically, our study relies on archival records regarding the evolution of COFEPLAN and, more broadly, the history of national-level planning in Argentina. Consultancy reports, minutes of Council meetings, national plans for economic development, and other documents complemented these sources. We also conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with national and international planning scholars and public officials from different levels of government.

The next section introduces key concepts from EGT which will feature in the case analysis, as well as our strategy concept and its sources. We then present a brief historical account of national-level planning policies in Argentina. After which we position COFEPLAN in the Argentine system of planning and governance. A retrospective gaze at the making of COFEPLAN becomes a vantage point from which to rethink recurrent steering ambitions within a shifting governance environment. We analyse the functioning of COFEPLAN in a governance environment scarred by a series of economic and political shocks, yet also by remarkable continuities. Finally, we consider implications for the broader topic of (central) steering in governance.

2. Theoretical Framing

2.1. Evolutionary Governance Theory

EGT understands governance as radically evolutionary. That is, all constituent elements of governance configurations transform each other over time in a process of co-evolution. This means that a governance path is never entirely predictable, while each step in its evolution is constrained by the previous state of the system. Path dependency is thus a central concept, one that is not new. It has been analysed in institutional economics (David, 1994; Dopfer, 1991; North, 1990, 2005), political science (Greener, 2005; Pierson, 2000), economic geography (Boschma & Martin, 2007; Martin & Sunley, 2006),

public policy (Liebowitz & Margolis, 1995; Torfing, 2009) and other disciplines. What gives EGT its distinct theoretical flavour is that present and future similarly affect the reproduction and thus evolution of a governance system.

For the present, this is understood through the idea of interdependencies, between actors, between institutions (policies, plans, laws), between actors and institutions. And it is understood as an effect of power-knowledge configurations. Understandings of reality embedded in the governance configuration, either through identification (in the case of actors), or through codification (ideas coded into the rule system of institutions) shape and constrain the continuing game of interactions within governance. This idea of interdependence affecting the evolution of governance stems from systems theory (Luhmann, 1995; Teubner, 1993, 2011) and institutional economics (Greif, 2006; Seabright, 2010).

To grasp the influence of the future, EGT coined the concept of goal dependencies. Goal dependencies are the effects of images, narratives or visions of the future on the reproduction of governance in the present (cf. Beckert, 2016). The images of the future produced in the system affect the current functioning of the system. This can be towards 'implementation,' but also in very different and indirect manners. Such insight is compatible with both systems theory (e.g., Luhmann, 1990, 2008) and post-structuralism, especially in the Foucauldian tradition. Both utopia and heterotopia, and every dream in between, can affect the thought and action of actors, the use and interpretation of institutions and the production of new ones (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986).

A fourth dependency which has been recognized more recently (Birchall, 2020; Schlüter et al., 2020), partly under influence of recent developments in geography, is that of material dependencies. The most recent version of transition studies (e.g., Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016; Hoffman, 2013) similarly came to recognize the importance of materiality for the shaping of transition pathways. Material dependencies are the effect of material objects and environments on the functioning of governance. These effects can be recognized and acted upon in governance, but not necessarily so—as routinely recognized in the environmental policy and climate change literatures (Beunen & Lata, 2021).

Of particular importance, to grasp the unicity and explanatory power of EGT, is the idea that governance evolution never stops, whatever key decisions are taken or whatever momentous event takes place. Because of its radically co-evolutionary character, EGT sees—here in parallel with actor-network theory (Latour, 2005)—potential transformations (and conservatisms) coming from many directions. So, an idea can shape an actor who clashes with other actors over the creation of a new institution but comes to understand that a reinterpretation of an existing institution, a new narrative publicly framing this reinterpretation can create a discourse coalition (cf. Hajer, 1993). And she comes to understand that this coalition can further the initial goal

by transforming it into a more public goal. The configuration of co-evolving actors and institutions, of power and knowledge, keeps itself in motion through this diversity in pathways and connections. EGT, which was developed not in opposition to classic public policy literature on continuity and change in governance (e.g., Streeck & Thelen, 2005) but emerged from a distinct set of sources (institutional economics, post-structuralism, social systems theory), thus comes to a distinct understanding of continuity and change.

Certainly, future work can explore a partial integration, especially as some of the sources of EGT have also found an audience within public policy (especially institutionalism, and, to a lesser degree, post-structuralism) and as some of the key authors in mainstream public policy come to similar insights on certain points—especially on path dependencies (Schreyögg & Sydow, 2009) and, to a lesser extent, on power (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Richardson, 1996; Seabrooke & Wigan, 2016). We wholeheartedly embrace such aspirations, but for our present purposes, it suffices to point out that EGT offers a distinct and cohesive perspective on change in governance, and on deliberate and strategic attempts at transforming governance. EGT speaks of rigidity and flexibility in governance evolution, with dependencies helping to explain rigidity, and flexibility coming from deliberate path creation but also from the interplay between the dependencies. In keeping with systems theory and complexity theory (Byrne, 1998; Thrift, 1999), the pattern of feedback loops which can emerge from such interplay creates its own unanticipated effects, and these can be exploited by actors to shift the path of governance.

2.2. Strategy, Goal Dependencies and Reality Effects

Goal dependencies become especially relevant when shared visions for the future are articulated discursively and become explicitly or implicitly encoded in policies, plans, project or laws. Such encoding more likely affects the power/knowledge nexus and the actor/institutions configuration (Djanibekov et al., 2018; Van Assche et al., 2014). Furthering goals cannot fully avert nor abruptly suspend the 'stickiness' created by path dependencies and the interdependent web of actors and institutions in the governance regime.

Goal dependencies become central to the understanding of a particular governance path when strategies emerged in that path, aiming for societal steering. This insight requires us to introduce two more concepts into our conceptual frame: strategy itself, and secondly, reality effects. Strategy has been studied primarily within the confines of private organisations, within management studies. There is a tradition of strategic (long-term) spatial planning (e.g., Albrechts, 2004), and an emerging tradition of strategic management in public organisations (e.g., George, 2020). Both provide valuable insights in governance for the long term and in the necessity for public actors to think strategically. Yet, few have con-

sidered the possibilities and limits of strategy at community level, strategy in and through governance, and thereby taken on board recent insights in both strategy and governance.

We argue that the ideas on strategy espoused in the so-called strategy-as-practice literature (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007), and the strategy literature inspired by social systems theory can be utterly useful here. For the strategy-as-practice thinkers, and for Mintzberg (1978, 1987), one of their key sources of inspiration, strategies emerge as a result of ongoing bricolage of intention and unanticipated effects. For the systems-inspired thinkers (some of them also versed in strategy-as-practice theory, as e.g., Seidl, 2007) strategies are constantly reinterpreted, as organisations evolve, as situations can be reinterpreted as success or failure, and results can be reinterpreted as resulting from strategy or not. Furthermore, and this also resonates with the critical management literature (Grey & Willmott, 2005), strategy concepts are also evolving, with new strategy concepts continuously emerging and affecting the functioning of organisations and administrations (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004).

Strategy at community level has to pass through governance. If we adopt the EGT understanding of governance, it transpires quickly that a functioning strategy has to be both an institution linking other institutions and a narrative on the future (cf. Wittmayer et al., 2019). The production and effects of strategy are shaped by the pattern of flexibility and rigidity as diagnosed by EGT. Rather than speaking of implementation vs. non implementation, we can speak then of *goal dependencies triggered by strategies* (see before). While the goal dependencies concept focuses on the system of governance itself (effects of futures on current governance), the concept of 'reality effects,' draws our attention to the effect outside the sphere of governance, e.g., in the environment, the community for which the strategy is destined. Reality effects are those effects of the strategy which alter discursive realities or materiality, insofar as noticed. Here, 'noticed' means taken up in discourse. Material effects, on the one hand, refer to changes in the physical environment that "matter in governance as reality effects only after they are observed and interpreted, and hence only if their meaning is constructed in social systems" (Van Assche et al., 2020, p. 700). Discursive effects, on the other hand, refer to "hanging ways of understanding stemming from the strategy" (Van Assche et al., 2020, p. 700). Policies, plans and projects can create reality effects and trigger goal dependencies, yet only on rare occasions they bring the envisioned reality into being exactly as it had been imagined.

In the next sections, we deploy this conceptual frame to analyse the evolution of COFEPLAN in the context of an Argentine governance system marked by both shocks and strong continuities (see Alves Rolo, 2021). The existence of COFEPLAN itself is taken as a sign of re-emerging steering ambitions.

3. Planning in the Governance of Argentina

3.1. A Brief Review of Argentine Planning

In order to understand the role of planning in the governance system of Argentina, we need to mention first the history of dramatic shocks in the 20th century. Economic crises, military coups and changes in ideologies made the development of a stable planning system virtually impossible. The maintenance of long-term perspectives as such was hard at times. Nevertheless, Argentina did embrace rather ambitious planning schemes, and something of a national planning tradition developed. We refer to Figure 1 for an overview of these discontinuities in governance, with implications for discontinuities in planning.

National-level planning in Argentina can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th Century (Elena, 2005). Larger cities were the primary target of planning interventions, as they were expected to drive economic development. The choice can be explained by the rapid urbanization of Argentina, as well as the sheer size of the country (Cerrutti & Bertoncello, 2006). Guided urban redevelopment and expansion were strategies for addressing social problems, by providing housing for the poor (Crot, 2006), and giving them a fresh start in a new environment. Most of the funding, however, went to infrastructure. Infrastructure investment aimed at spurring economic development in the main urban nodes and was intended to visibly legitimize the narrative of national development (Ciccolella, 2006). Despite the initial rhetoric of more comprehensive planning, over time planning became seen as infrastructure development, and planners and non-state actors (e.g., architects, urbanists, engineers) learned that plans were more likely to have an impact if presented as 'public works' (Rigotti, 2014).

After the Second World War, the central government became more ambitious. National-level planning was still seen as promoting economic development through infrastructure projects, but those projects were now spread throughout the country. Meanwhile, resource extraction and urban development in more remote areas were encouraged (Gómez & Lesta, 2008). The National Planning Council, created in 1951 as part of the Peronist state apparatus, was responsible for the elaboration of the Second Five-Year Plan (1952–1955) that would define the orientation of Perón's second term (Official Bulletin of the Argentine Republic, 1951). However, the Council was dissolved after the coup of 1955 (Undersecretariat of Territorial Planning of Public Investment, 2015). Emerging state-backed monopolies (builders, developers) and networks (landowners, industrialists) were not backing the planning council, while the political opposition and key stakeholders were absent and recurring economic crises reduced the scope of state planning.

By the 1960s, the negative effects of rapid urbanisation were becoming clear and the push towards development across the regions was intensified. In this context, a renewed emphasis on planning was endorsed by the Alliance for Progress, a development aid organization promoted by the Kennedy administration in 1961. The agreement provided funding to encourage spatial planning and proposed a set of economic, political and social measures. Redistribution of wealth and improving the living standards of the working classes were the main goals. This impulse resulted in the creation of the National Development Council (CONADE) and the National Planning System in 1961.

CONADE was theoretically informed by ECLAC, a regional commission of the UN that accompanied the reforms proposed by the Alliance for Progress and focused on development of peripheral regions. CONADE intervened in a multiplicity of policy domains: agriculture, industry, transport, housing, health, energy, etc. One of the main CONADE initiatives was the National Development Plan (1965–1969), during the administration of President Arturo Illia (1963–1966). Its implementation, however, was interrupted by the military coup by General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966), who did not dissolve CONADE but reoriented its work towards security policies.

In 1970 the toppling of Onganía by General Roberto Levingston (1970–1971) spurred the implementation of a National Development Plan in an attempt to improve the dynamism of the internal market. Against the background of a messy urbanisation process driven by massive rural-urban migration, the plan proposed the creation of development poles. The state would support relocation of industries to peripheral regions. Although the plan as a whole did not succeed, development poles did appear, particularly in Patagonia (Álvarez, 2016).

Perón's return as President in 1973 gave a new impulse to planning through the Triennial Plan for Reconstruction and National Liberation (1974–1977). This plan sought to mobilize economic policy towards social justice, 'rebuilding' the state, economic independence and Latin American integration. It came with a political strategy for implementation that included agreements with various political parties, unions, governors, and others. Public forums hosted by unions, were organized in factories and at universities to discuss the plan. However, the economic situation after the international oil crisis (1973) and clashes between the right and left wings of the Peronist movement after Perón's death in 1974, among other factors, made this agreement untenable. In this convoluted political and economic situation, on March 24, 1976 Argentina suffered its sixth coup.

The crisis of the welfare state and the incipient rise of neo-liberalism as a new order in the mid-1970s were accompanied by a process of de-legitimization of the steering state. The concept of a small, efficient, and enabling state gained traction (Marengo, 2008). This resulted in a profound reform of the political and institutional structure of the country. Historically national competences were decentralized. The new development
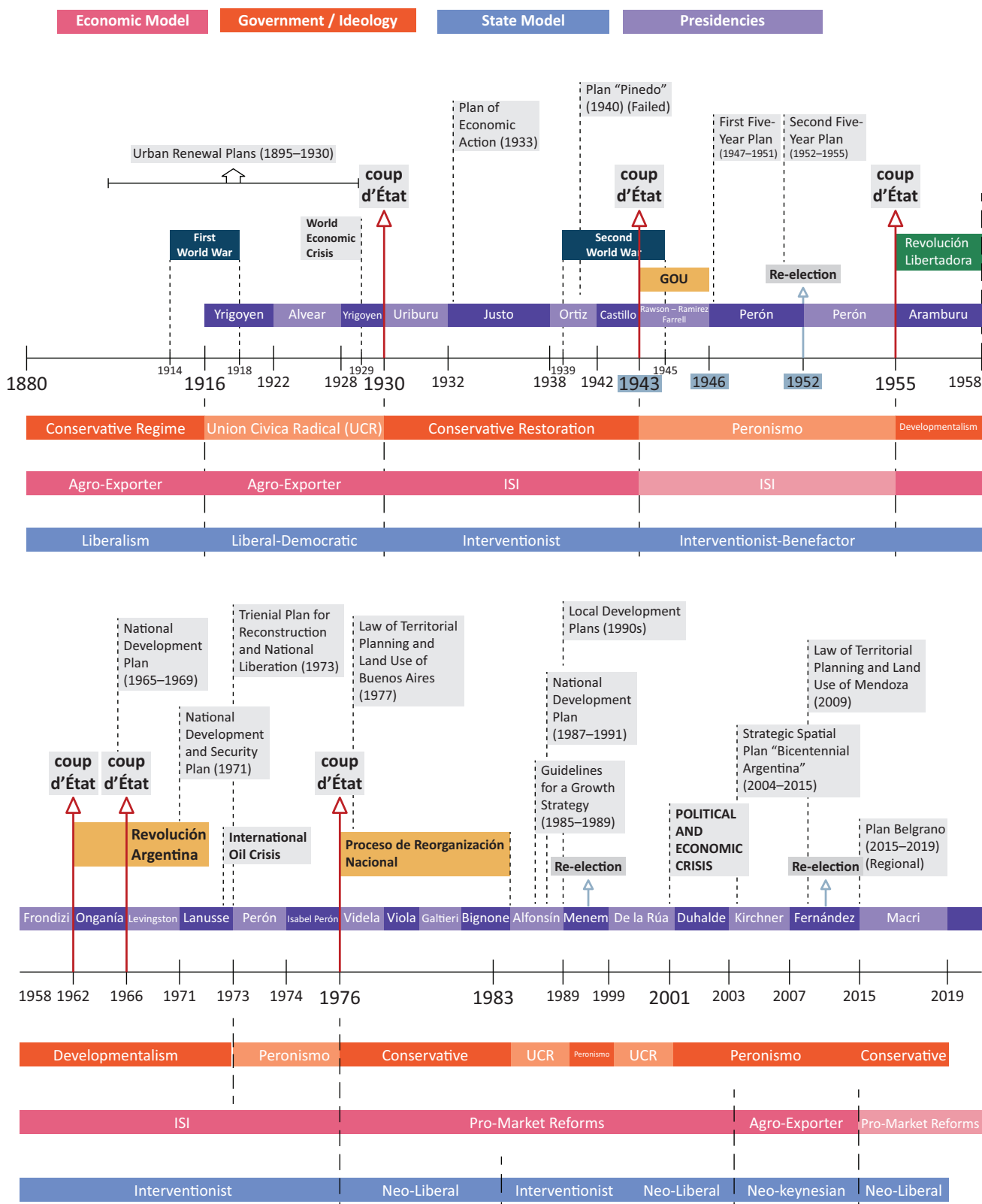
Figure 1. Continuities and changes affecting the evolution of governance in Argentina.

paradigm reduced the role of the national government in promoting a balanced and inclusive development. The main cities, such as Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Rosario and Mendoza, were presented as vigorous, agile and largely self-sufficient productive entities, capable of innovation and strong enough to boost economic growth nationally. Whilst competition grew among municipalities to attract foreign investment, the local scale became the main focus of planning (Catenazzi et al., 2019). International organisations (UNDP, OECD, World Bank,

among others) sponsored 'Local Development Plans' in the belief that decentralised planning policies would encourage more efficient and innovative interventions. Thus, since the mid–1970s and especially during the 1990s, planning in neo-liberal Argentina was basically concentrated in ad hoc projects without a coherent national spatial strategy.

The 1990s were characterized by economic stability, with inflation kept in check. In the early years, privatization of state companies and public utilities made it possible to reduce debt. However, 1998–2002 were years of recession, with long-term effects on both politics and spatial organisation. In December 2001, President Fernando de la Rúa had to resign and was succeeded by five presidents in two weeks. The legacies of that recession are still visible: Infrastructure deteriorated, the shrinking economy relied more on informal jobs, undermining the potential for recovery. Inequality between classes and between regions grew.

The government of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) decided that the nation needed a long-term perspective again. Strategic guidelines for national development were articulated. Infrastructure investment, under the Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services, was pivotal. The Under-secretariat for Spatial Planning of Public Investment was created to recover planning as a governance tool at the service of all levels of government. Its key achievement was the implementation of the Strategic Spatial Plan 'Bicentennial Argentina.' The plan devised a model of multi-level governance which was to guide the public investment process. Provinces participated through political representatives—mainly ministers of development, infrastructure and public works—in the elaboration of a national planning agenda.

3.2. COFEPLAN and Its Preceding Steering Organisations

The federal organisation of the country implies that spatial planning is a responsibility shared by the national, provincial and local political authorities (Erbiti, 2011). However, the national government lacks a legal framework to guide planning. With exceptions such as Buenos Aires and Mendoza, the provincial regulatory frameworks have great difficulty overseeing municipal land use planning. At the same time, provincial administrations create planning difficulties for municipalities.

Provinces over time delegated limited responsibilities to municipalities and where they did, sometimes resources did not follow responsibilities, in other cases, land use planning authority was not combined with local authority over other policy domains. This prevented municipalities from integrating land use planning with transportation systems and from developing long-term strategies for public works (Muzzini et al., 2017). Municipalities were granted greater planning autonomy through the 1994 constitutional reform, but they still lacked technical capacity and financial incen-

tives to update land use regulations—another reason why provincial planning offices remain significant (Goytia et al., 2010). As a result, new planning initiatives involve coordination between different tiers of government. The COFEPLAN was created in December 2008 to address this coordination problem.

COFEPLAN is a national agency under the Ministry of Planning which brings together the City of Buenos Aires and the 23 provinces at least twice a year to discuss the development and harmonization of planning policies. Composed of three working committees, this Council "was given a mandate to issue guidelines that would address planning bottlenecks in the specific legal framework of each province" (Muzzini et al., 2017, p. 180). Those frameworks, in other words, were supposed to remain intact and remain guiding. COFEPLAN was not initially expected to produce policies, plans or projects, nor a national planning law. It was intended to promote knowledge dissemination, legislative work and consensus-building among decision-makers. Nevertheless, it did participate in the drafting of several versions of the National Planning Law, versions presented to the National Congress in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2018. However, some provinces put up strong resistance and the law has not yet been enacted (Muzzini et al., 2017).

Praised as innovative (Corti, 2008), COFEPLAN was not entirely a first. Different steering organisations promoting national policies for land management and territorial development predated the organisation. In order to understand the functioning of COFEPLAN, its possibilities and limits of steering, we need to understand the evolution of national steering organisations leading to COFEPLAN. Figure 2 summarizes the development.

The National Postwar Council (CNP) was created by the military regime after the coup d'état of 1943 with the aim of conducting "studies on the social and economic ordering of the country…its coordination, planning and implementation" (Official Bulletin of the Argentine Republic, 1944). This Council was part of a network of planning and economic management organisations—some already installed since the 1930s—promoting State interventionism and centralized decision-making (Gómez & Tchordonkian, 2010). Domestic industry had expanded during the War and the government was worried about normalization of international trade. The CNP produced a Plan for Social and Economic Ordering which was supposed to help the country facing stiffer competition after the war. It created agencies to analyse the socio-economic conditions of each province. Public and private sector actors competed for influence over the definition of priorities for public investment (Belini, 2009).

Coordination of sectorial interests through a network of public agencies was the main form of national-level planning, while institutional capacity developed through absorption of academic experts, private sector specialists and already existing technical units. The CNP was

remarkably ambitious. It intended to coordinate the activities of several ministries towards national development goals (Gómez & Tchordonkian, 2010). Studies conducted by the CNP gave shape to the First Five-Year Plan, a development strategy combining economic and spatial planning (as in socialist countries).

In September 1948 an Inter-ministerial Coordinating Council was established in order to overcome the administrative problems encountered during plan implementation. This Council was responsible for "comprehensive planning, coordination and verification of the evolution of the plan within all state agencies" (Falivene & Dalbosco, 2007, p. 13). Additionally, the Federal Coordinating Council was launched to manage problems arising between the national government and the provinces. Later, in 1950, the National Planning Direction was organized under the Ministry of Technical Affairs with the task of studying and proposing a "scientific organisation of government and administration" (Official Bulletin of the Argentine Republic, 1949). In 1951, the Inter-ministerial Coordinating Council became the National Planning Council (see Figure 2).

MAIN NATIONAL PLANNING COUNCILS

1944–1946
NATIONAL POSTWAR COUNCIL

1948
INTERMINISTERIAL COORDINATING…

1948
FEDERAL COORDINATING…

1950
NATIONAL PLANNING DIRECTION

1951
NATIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

1959–
FEDERAL INVESTMENT COUNCIL

1961–1966
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT…

1965–
CIMOP

2008–
COFEPLAN
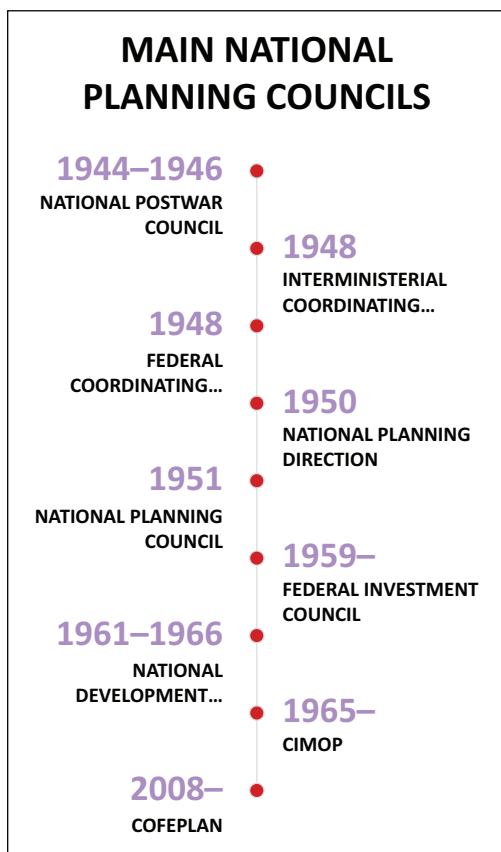
Figure 2. The main planning councils that preceded COFEPLAN.

The Federal Investment Council—created in 1959—is also an early reference for what COFEPLAN would later be, dating back to the so called 'golden era' of planning in Argentina (Canelo, 2012). The mission assigned to the Federal Investment Council was very similar to that of COFEPLAN: To promote the harmonious and comprehensive development of the country based on solidarity and decentralization. At the same time, the influence of Buenos Aires never really abated, and the collaboration between ministries, and between ministries and provinces, was never easy (Keeling, 1994; Loew, 1977). The Federal Investment Council was behind the establishment of CONADE, in 1960, which then led to the adoption of the 'National Development Plan' of 1965. That plan in turn was supported by a new organisation, the Inter-provincial Council of Ministers of Public Works. The organisation still exists and brings together top officials of Public Works and Services of the provinces. The Inter-provincial Council of Ministers of Public Works opened up intra-governmental processes of participation and became a precedent-setting organisation that has been instrumental in positioning COFEPLAN as a main steering organisation.

3.3. COFEPLAN and Its Results

Despite the difficulties inherent to a fragmented and fragile institutional framework, COFEPLAN achieved progress in several areas. It increased the political clout and technical capacities of local planning offices. This enabled them to develop a more integral territorial approach to administration. In addition, COFEPLAN created administrative mechanisms to promote inter-sectorial and inter-jurisdictional collaboration between government agencies. This often benefited the coordinated expansion of infrastructure networks. COFEPLAN further assumed responsibilities in the regulatory scaffolding of planning, even when law-making in planning is reserved for the provinces under the terms of article 121 of the National Constitution (Maldonado, 2010). Moreover, as shown in Table 1, the Council has contributed on several occasions to different Drafts of the Framework Law and, at present, is working on a draft Law of Territorial Planning and Habitat.

4. Analysis

Argentina has a unique history of governance. Economic recessions, currency collapse, military coups and ideological shifts were major shocks to society and to the governance system (Duit & Galaz, 2008). In this situation, it is not evident that long-term perspectives and strategies can develop, be maintained, and adapted. Resources could evaporate after a crash, hierarchies reshuffled after a coup, and lower-level governments and regions abandoned.

Nevertheless, dependencies in the evolution of governance and planning can be distinguished. In terms of spatial planning the most dramatic system shock was the period 1975–2002, a generation where the national ideology seemed decidedly anti-planning (Müller, 2011). In that period, provinces had not given up on economic and spatial planning, and even de-centralizing policies

Table 1. Main results achieved by COFEPLAN.

Year	Results
2009	Survey of the situation of the provinces
	Comparative analysis of planning and development laws in different countries
	Draft Framework Law on Territorial Planning (first sketch)
2010	Training agreement with national universities
	National and international forum on spatial planning and land use planning
	Training of provincial technical teams
	Diagnosis of progress in the development of geographic information systems and spatial data infrastructure in each province
	Diagnosis of the relationship between provincial planning teams and the provincial cadastres
	Draft Framework Law on Territorial Planning
	Reports on the state of affairs of provincial legislation regarding land use planning
	National Meeting 'Territorial Planning as State Policy'
2011	'Declaration of Iguazú' on the need to strengthen COFEPLAN, promote the draft law, support provincial and local legislative initiatives, spur institutional strengthening and contribute to making territorial problems visible
	Discussion forum on the Draft Framework Law on Territorial Planning
2012	Foresight workshops 'The territories of the future'
	Modification of the Draft Framework Law on Territorial Planning
2013	Formation of a federal planning network
	Modification of the Draft Framework Law on Territorial Planning
	Creation of a system of territorial indicators
2014	Creation of the Identification and Weighting System for Strategic Projects
	Bases for the elaboration of provincial laws
	Border Territorial Integration program
	Planning and Territorial Ordering Guidelines document
	Contribution to the Spatial Data Infrastructure of the Argentine Republic (IDERA)
	Characterization of territories based on the law of environmental protection of native forests
	Regional Commission of the Colorado River Basin
2015	Act of agreement on the Preliminary draft of the Framework Law on Territorial Planning
2016	Agreement for institutional strengthening between the Secretary of Strategic Planning, Land Management and Habitat, the Under-secretariat of Planning and Infrastructure and the Under-secretariat of Territorial Planning of Public Investment
2017	Act of adhesion to the Program of Institutional Strengthening for Territorial Planning whereby the national government would provide financing for equipment and training
	Creation of the Federal Urban Observatory
	Seminars on urban issues and Disaster Risk Reduction
2018	Draft Framework Law on Territorial Planning
2019	Implementation of the Prosperous Cities Index (UN methodology)
	Reconstruction Process in Comprehensive Risk Management (book)
	Study of the expansion of the urban area

aiming to empower local governments, often ended up empowering provinces (Ardanaz et al., 2014). In addition, the instabilities at national level caused a slow accumulation of power at the provincial level. The national crises did not only make planning more difficult, but they also caused a recurring demand and hope for planning. When Argentina finally emerged out of the crisis of 1998–2002, that response, the call for planning, was not an isolated event, but depended on the institutional memory in governance, and in academia. That a 'golden age' of planning

is recognized in the 1950s–1970s indicates the nostalgia for and identification with national level planning projects. The provinces had to be acknowledged in any revival of such project (Calvo & Escolar, 2005). While the fragmentation of local power had to be addressed, if any national strategy wanted to have the territory-wide effects envisioned. The Inter-provincial Council of Ministers of Public Works survived as the kernel of a coordination mechanism.

In the case of Argentine planning, an enabling factor, or a positive path dependency, is clearly the Peronist legacy. In Peronist ideology territorial integrity, integration, and development were primary aims. A strong state apparatus was considered the locus for national strategies towards those aims (Berrotarán, 2003). Several regimes identified as Peronists and a simple left-right ideological label cannot be applied to the movement and the discourse. Within the same regime, there could be signals and state actors which can be interpreted as far left and others as far right, while many actors would simply consider themselves 'Peronists.' The 'golden age' of planning was a period where economic and spatial planning (in socialist tradition) was integrated in national strategies. Different from socialist states, such as the USSR, Peronist Argentina did not develop the stability and the detailed hierarchical organisation which would allow for the local implementation of a national planning strategy.

The reality effects of previous national strategies were overall weak therefore, with few exceptions in peripheral regions, where the national planning agencies could engage in relatively unchecked development projects. When national planning re-emerged, and COFEPLAN emerged, acceptance of a national planning strategy therefore was strong. Yet, strong provinces and fragmented local institutions—legacies of the history of instability—could not be ignored (Benton, 2009). The legacies make it hard to coordinate between levels, between places, and between sectors and policy domains, while such coordination is all the more necessary because problems became more complex over time. The prevalence of informal institutions, settlements, and jobs—also responses to continued instability and state absence—aggravates this institutional weakness, makes it harder to recover economically and to steer from the centre.

Even in times of decentralization and in periods focusing on peripheral development, the general assumption in national politics was that what is good for Buenos Aires is good for Argentina. As the population of the capital also boomed, and as economic capital and elites concentrated in the capital, the city became harder and harder to ignore. It could not be treated as just a city. The constitutional reform of 1994 granted the city an autonomous regime. Hence its presence in COFEPLAN, together with the provinces. The pattern of interdependencies which developed is thus rather complex, with national agencies depending on provinces less willing to accept national strategies, on Buenos Aires, which

sees itself as the country. Provinces are dependent on municipalities but also unable to push through comprehensive strategies because of institutional fragmentation and weakness at the local level (Tommasi, 2002). Growing municipalities might not have had the means to organize this growth, while places with plans did not see much growth, and whatever happened tended to be disconnected from those plans.

At the national level, the planning agencies competed with other actors, often with other ministries. Those ministries had their own projects, sometimes strategies, their own relations with provinces and local governments. The rhetoric of policy integration thus never fully resonated with reality, even when national planning strategies had broad support and were enacted. Elite competition, which included segments of political, economic, military and sometimes academic elites, transpired in the competition between ministries and their projects (Van Gunten, 2015). It undermined the reality effects of any overarching strategy for spatial development. One seeming constant was the emphasis on infrastructure works, often not under the auspices of a national planning authority, but at least associated with national administration. When COFEPLAN was formed, this looked then as a natural terrain, an initial core, for a national *spatial* policy. On the other hand, other national actors were not interested in handing control to COFEPLAN, and, without far-reaching policy coordination with local and regional governments, infrastructure could not function properly as a driver of economic development.

Social housing, also close to the COFEPLAN mandate, proved even more difficult (Catenazzi et al., 2019). Social housing is arguably even more important for inclusive economic development, but notoriously expensive and hard to coordinate. The meagre achievements of COFEPLAN on this terrain are not surprising, therefore. That the even harder task of coordinating housing, infrastructure and land use, where most added value for any national planning strategy ought to be found, could not be fulfilled, is not surprising either. The path creation that became possible after the prolonged shock of 1998–2002 could not create an entirely new path.

The effects of earlier strategies on governance are thus far from a history of 'implementation.' Goal dependencies slowly crystallized, modified by external shocks which diverted them from producing strong reality effects. The fragmented institutional landscape that now hinders a national planning strategy cannot be attributed merely to those external shocks. It should also be considered a result of older goal dependencies in the landscape of multi-level governance, a history of diverse responses to national steering attempts. An oscillation between belief in central planning ambitions, and, on the other hand, a cynical distrust of any planning initiative, further hampers the formation of reality effects in the direction intended by the national strategy (Müller & Gómez, 2013).

5. Conclusions

The creation of COFEPLAN signalled a renewed central steering ambition in Argentine planning. It was enabled by path dependencies which included the existence of a coordinating organisation linking to provincial public works ministries. There was the memory of a golden age of national planning, a lingering modernist-Peronist idea of territorial development and integration. The steering ambitions were hindered by other path dependencies, including weak and fragmented local governance, and provinces which emerged as more powerful from the history of ups and downs in Argentina (Ardanaz et al., 2014). That same fragmented landscape can be interpreted partly as a result of old goal dependencies. Infrastructure projects across the country, interpreted as a sign that the centre could steer, can be seen as a material dependency, yet not in the direction intended by the new strategy. Dependencies undermined both the central steering ambitions of the government and the innovative potential of the new planning schemes.

Ideologies of national planning, as discourses underpinning steering attempts, can lose and regain explanatory power in relation to an environment that adapts to new narratives. Society in Argentina responded to shocks, to a sometimes devastating oscillation between great expectations and dashed hopes. National planning is an unlikely survivor of such structural instability. National-level planning in Argentina re-emerged out of a set of (in)formal rules that have been re-assembled multiple times under different ideological influences and in relation to a shifting governance environment (Müller & Gómez, 2013). A core of shared Peronism fits a core planning goal of addressing 'territorial imbalances,' which could be embraced under different regimes, and formed an argument for planning as such. While the difference between ideology and reality in Peronism created an eternal return of implementation problems for any national planning strategy. Elite competition, left–right cracks within the ideology, reduction of planning to infrastructure projects, the dominance of Buenos Aires, were all part of reality from the beginning, while flying in the face of an ideology of inclusive, integrative development under national auspices.

A more general lesson transpires here. Steering through managing the reality effects of strategy is dependent on both the legacies and the memories of previous steering attempts. This we knew from the history of the high modernist state, as studied by Scott (1998), but also by Luhmann (1997), who observed that steering is made easier first of all by a history of steering. We can add that, in a revival of steering, several features of that history are relevant in understanding the fate of future attempts. First there is the balance between continuity and discontinuity in governance, with discontinuity generally undermining enabling legacies for steering, but sometimes creating windows of opportunity, by creating a new appreciation of stability and of long-term futures (cf. Van Assche et al., 2021). Second, there is the relation between formal and informal institutions in the governance system, with a reliance on informality generally indicating fragmentation, weak governance, and low reality effects of strategy. Third, there is the internal cohesion of the steering ideology. When cohesion is weak the difference between rhetoric and reality will be significant, and this contributes to the divergence between intention and actual effects. Certainly, these internal cracks might be forgotten and old problematic decisions can be repeated. In terms of goal dependencies, this can be translated not as a typology of dependencies, but as a typology of contexts which will shape those dependencies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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COGITATIO

Article

What Is the Role of the Government in Wildlife Policy? Evolutionary Governance Perspective

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Abstract
With the growing populations and range of large wild mammals in Europe, wildlife governance has grown in importance and provoked social conflicts, pressuring policy-makers to provide adequate policy responses. Some countries chose decentralised approaches, while others retain traditional top-down mechanisms. However, evolutionary mechanisms behind those changes and their impact on steering have attracted relatively little attention. We investigated the evolution of the governance of three wildlife species (European bison, moose, and wolf) in Poland (1945–2020) to map their existing paths and explore external and internal factors influencing steering patterns. The results suggest that despite the persistent dominance of state-centred governance and top-down hierarchical instruments characteristic for a post-socialist country, steering involved intense and often informal communication with influential actors. A growing diversity of actors and discourses in wildlife governance increased the state's steering options and improved conservation outcomes. Concurrently, the government's steering shifted from concrete policy results to managing tensions and interests within the field. These transformations helped to retain the effectiveness of steering in the changing context, while retaining state-dominated governance.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, the populations of large mammals in Europe have increased in range and numbers, leading, in some areas, to a perception of overabundance (Carpio et al., 2020; Chapron et al., 2014). These processes were associated with a number of socio-economic factors, such as new pan-European regulations, structural changes in rural areas opening new habitats for wildlife, improved hunting management and a supportive public opinion (Boitani & Linnell, 2015; Navarro &

Pereira, 2015). Increasing wildlife populations exacerbated human–wildlife conflicts, and translated into calls for more participatory governance (Redpath et al., 2017). The responses of the European states differed depending on their policy-making styles, legislation, political history and traditions of wildlife management (de Boon et al., 2020; Putman, 2011; Stöhr & Coimbra, 2013). The level of state intervention permitted in legislation and acceptable to the people can range from almost complete state control to practically no involvement (Putman, 2011). Although most countries adopt state-dominated

governance, some took steps to decentralise decision-making (Bjärstig et al., 2014; Sandström et al., 2018). In federal countries, wildlife governance is dominated by regional authorities (de Boon et al., 2020; Stöhr & Coimbra, 2013).

Literature on wildlife governance tends to focus either on existing governance arrangements or on the transformation from one mode of governance to another, while evolution within the modes is much less frequently explored. This involves the question of how the dominant state government responds to the changing context of policy-making while retaining its steering role and the effectiveness of interventions. This article aims at addressing this gap by exploring changes in the governance of three species (the European bison, the moose, and the wolf) in Poland. In contrast to Nordic and Western-European countries, the wildlife policies of post-socialist states have only been analysed to a limited extent, although these countries, depending predominantly on representative mechanisms and top-down, hierarchical steering (Börzel & Buzogány, 2010; Niedziałkowski et al., 2016), have been successful in preserving some key charismatic wildlife during the turbulent 20th century. We used the Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT; Beunen et al., 2015) as an organising perspective to explore the determinants of the stability of wildlife institutions and the role of the state in their dynamics, as well as to investigate challenges and opportunities connected with state steering in the context of socio-political transformations.

2. Wildlife, Steering and the Evolutionary Perspective

Literature advocating for more bottom-up governance of wildlife constitutes a strain of broader research that points to the growing complexity of environmental problems and highlights the inadequacies of centralised, hierarchical, expert-based models of decision-making (Armitage et al., 2012). Instead, it emphasises the need for decentralised, polycentric, cross-scale modes of inclusive governing involving state, market and society actors (Gunningham, 2009; Newig & Fritsch, 2009). Particular attention is devoted to stakeholder participation that should facilitate the diversity of values and knowledge (Reed, 2009; Renn, 2006). The initial vision of governance as the 'hollowing out' of the state (Rhodes, 2007) was increasingly replaced with recognition that the state's role remains central as governments blend hierarchy with new collaborative approaches and engage in 'metagovernance': 'steering at a distance,' mobilising resources of various groups, and overseeing the process, while maintaining participants' autonomy (Kooiman, 2003; Meuleman, 2008).

'Steering' can be understood as "governing by setting the course, monitoring the direction and correcting deviations from the course set" (Crawford, 2006, p. 453). It requires: (1) being explicit about the direction and communicating it to those rowing; (2) establishing mech-

anisms for verifying performance; (3) using knowledge and resources of other actors; and (4) installing regulatory mechanisms to stimulate and respond to the performance of rowing actors (Crawford, 2006). In governance literature, steering is seen broadly as the inclusion of various actors into governing through networks and soft law, in order to improve the process of policy formulation and implementation, but also in response to the growing bottom-up pressure of non-state actors (Capano et al., 2015; Meadowcroft, 2007). As the numbers of actors with various, often incommensurable goals increases, steering becomes more complex, especially concerning the need to coordinate policies across public sectors. The state's steering interventions can cover a spectrum from no steering at all, through various forms of participatory, decentralised and devolved networks, where governments 'steer at a distance,' to increasingly direct state interventions in representative systems, where policies ('steering') are implemented through the 'rowing' of public hierarchies and command-and-control instruments (laws, policies, administrative control) with little participation. Still, even in the latter, some forms of bottom-up influence and consultations with non-state actors may occur, and governments' steering may be bound by forces within and outside of particular policy sectors (Olsen, 2009).

In wildlife governance, the calls for more bottom-up approaches to mitigate human–wildlife conflicts resulted in many approaches stimulating stakeholder engagement: education and information, collaborative planning, community-based management, etc. (Nyhus, 2016). The record of such initiatives regarding environmental goals and social cohesion is mixed (Hansson-Forman et al., 2018; Kellert et al., 2000). Despite their focus on a wide range of stakeholders, participatory approaches require regulations, public policies and the involvement of the state for their effectiveness (Meadowcroft, 1998), and need to be crafted individually without blueprint solutions (Ostrom et al., 2007). Concurrently, the field for such designs is limited by the history or interactions between stakeholders, power structures, discourses and the dominant governance mechanisms (Sullivan, 2019; Voss et al., 2007). Another thing is, the state can be viewed not only as a powerful actor in wildlife governance but also as arenas of collective action, where key stakeholders vie for control of public policy (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2016; Paavola, 2007).

The EGT (Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2013) conceptualises governance as the process of taking collectively binding decisions, that are continuously evolving in various locations and communities across scales through constant interactions between heterogeneous actors (public and private), representing different discourses, confirming or contesting formal and informal institutions (rules and tools of the game), and adapting to or altering the transforming materialities. At the same time, the evolution of governance is structured by dependencies: path dependencies (cognitive, organisational,

material), current interdependencies between actors and institutions, and goal dependencies, associated with the impact of visions of the future on the reproduction of governance in the present. In the EGT, steering options are conditioned (both restricted and enabled) by co-evolutions in dialectical relationships between actors/institutions and knowledge/power. According to Beunen et al. (2015), steering always involves the participation of various actors, as successful steering requires the balancing of interests, although it is not always formally acknowledged. Understanding current steering options requires mapping of the governance path by exploring historical interactions between actors, institutions, power and knowledge, as well as the mapping of the wider socio-economic and environmental context of these interactions.

In the following, informed by EGT, we will trace the long-term development of Polish wildlife governance and the role of government steering based on the case studies concerning the governance of the European bison, the wolf and the moose. Our research questions are as follows: (1) How and in which context were the configurations of actors/institutions and knowledge/power evolving over the last century in Polish wildlife governance? (2) What was the impact of major historical shifts on the evolution of the policy domain? (3) How were the steering options of the state influenced by the evolution of governance and existing paths? (4) What were the steering goals of the state?

3. Methods

The research material came from two projects realised between 2015 and 2020, the results of which were published in three papers, where more detailed information and sources can be found (Niedziałkowski, 2019; Niedziałkowski & Putkowska-Smoter, 2020; Putkowska-Smoter & Niedziałkowski, 2020). The cases address three species representing different approaches to wildlife: (1) the European bison died out in the wild in 1919, and since then have been treated as a vulnerable species in need of protection; (2) the wolves were for the most part of the 20th century perceived as a harmful species (pest) requiring strong lethal control; (3) the moose were treated as a game species. We mapped the

governance paths concerning these species and identified key events, groups of actors involved and recurring story-lines through the analysis of various texts published between 1920 and 2019 concerning their management. These included legal regulations and their official justifications, parliamentary proceedings, official policy documents and reports, publications in leading journals specializing in forest management, hunting, and nature conservation (e.g., *Aura*, *Chrońmy Przyrodę Ojczystą*, *Łowiec Polski*, *Dzikie Życie*, *Las Polski*, *Przyroda Polska*), and articles from popular press (e.g., *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Newsweek*).

Additionally, in 2015–2019 we carried out 50 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (Table 1), which helped us to identify informal rules in the analysed sub-domains and to clarify some parts of the discursive background not evident in the written material (e.g., the meanings of categories such as 'nature' and 'protection,' personal identities and interpretations of events). The interviewees were selected based on written sources and snowball-sampling. The interviews took between 25–130 minutes, and were assisted by an interview guide (see Supplementary File) with open-ended questions regarding: key events, key groups of actors involved, their discursive positions and impact on policy-making, and key challenges for wildlife governance. The interviews were transcribed and anonymised. We analysed the data collected through desk research and interviews with Atlas.ti software through theory-driven coding (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), in order to reconstruct the evolution of wildlife governance focusing on key events, actors, discourses, and institutions. This allowed us to identify and interpret patterns and differences in our case studies in a comparative manner.

4. Results

4.1. The European Bison

The European bison became extinct in the wild in the aftermath of World War I. Since 1923, various groups of actors collaborated both on a national and international level to reintroduce the species. In Poland, this collaboration involved state and non-state actors: zoologists, veterinarians, breeding specialists, foresters, hunters, and

Table 1. Number of interviewees by group of actors and by case.

	The European Bison	The Moose	The Wolf
Scientists	8	7	7
Foresters	5	2**	—
Hunters	—	1	2***
Public Officials*	9	2	1
Activists	2	2	2
Journalists	—	1	—
TOTAL	23	15	12

Notes: * including national park staff; ** both foresters were also hunters; *** both hunters were also foresters.

public officials. The state's involvement, perceived as crucial, was encouraged by framing bison restitution as a patriotic obligation. The bison were portrayed as requiring the constant support of experts in animal husbandry and breeding. Knowledge of actors involved and their learning-by-doing translated into successful and largely informal practices (e.g., feeding, transportation, veterinary work) and organisational arrangements contributing to bison restitution. Those institutions created a material and organisational legacy (e.g., breeding centres and organisations operating them) thus strengthening the path dependency. Formal rules were introduced only in 1938, when the bison became legally protected. Considering the steering options of the state, in this formative period, they were largely restricted to informal networking and the mobilisation of state resources to facilitate the bottom-up initiatives of the key groups, and restricted to the goals suggested by those groups. The members of these groups encouraged the state's steering, perceiving it as a guarantee for bison conservation in the long term.

After World War II, the role of the state's steering in bison governance strengthened, together with a general trend toward state dominance in public life, which is characteristic for the communist societies. The adopted goals were implemented by means of hierarchical, top-down governance and public organisations (national parks and state forest service). Still, some specific objectives (e.g., an optimal number of bison in the key site of the Białowieża Forest) were established informally by a wider range of actors, including various government departments with different preferences. As recalled by an interviewed bison manager:

> There was a memo signed by Prof. Karpiński [director of the Białowieża National Park], Mr. Jaroński [government official], and Dr. Żabiński [expert in zoology] stating that the main goal of bison breeding in closed reserves would be releasing them into the wild, setting them free. And, obviously, it could not have been done so straightforwardly. It had to be intensively consulted with the State Forests Holding, because it was their territory. At some point one of the directors or ministers approved it, and after four years we could release two bulls [from the reserve] to see how they would behave.

In the mid-1970s, the government representatives and scientists from the ministerial advisory body decided to start controlling the population lethally. This was stimulated by pressure from the forestry administration as well as limited infrastructure. Stakeholders, operating largely within public organisations, negotiated the implementation details of this goal through informal conflicting, and the state became an arbiter of these internal struggles. Some steering institutions formalised in the form of administrative government consent for bison culling by forest and national park administrations. Despite the

formal strict protection and the dominant discourse of bison as a vulnerable symbol of nature conservation, the species became lethally controlled and its population stopped growing.

After the democratic transition in 1989, the government became more environmentally conscious, mostly owing to new environmental NGOs and the expected EU accession. It developed an informal practice of allowing for less bison culling in the Białowieża Forest than requested by the managers. The population again started increasing and dispersing, but there was no clear goal of bison policy. Such new visions were presented shortly before Poland's EU accession by specialists in wildlife ecology, who criticised traditional arrangements, informed by zootechnical knowledge. They proposed expanding a few controlled populations and rewilding them to become more resilient to new risks associated with human interventions and climate change. They also lobbied the government and collaborated with other actors (foresters, local communities, NGOs) to install a new goal and create interdependencies (e.g., farmers receiving money for feeding bison). Bison management was supposed to be more adaptive, and based on scientific evidence provided by wildlife ecologists. The state welcomed these initiatives as an opportunity to improve bison governance and mobilise external resources for bison conservation. The new set of goals also increased the policy options that the government could pursue. Its consent, required for the application for EU resources, became an additional steering tool within the state's toolkit.

However, dominant actors defended the traditional paradigm and practices. One of the central figures, a professor of animal genetics and breeding, partially employed at the Ministry of Environment, established a bison conservation NGO and co-authored a bison conservation strategy, accepted by the ministry in 2007. It followed the traditional conservation discourse focused on the mitigation of conflicts with agriculture and forestry, and continuing proven practices but on a larger scale. The bison conservation NGO, with the government's consent, initiated new conservation projects with EU funding, which strengthened the community of bison managers and the resilience of existing approaches. The government, retaining control measures, allowed public and non-public actors to operate within the sub-domain and negotiate both the goals and the means to implement them within the existing legal framework (both national and European), as well as to seek external resources for these purposes. The new EU context proved favourable to this mode of steering. The final shape of the actor/institutions and power/knowledge parameters of the sub-domain of bison policy depended on the effectiveness of different groups in mobilising resources and creating coalitions that the state acknowledged. Additionally, the state's support was also conditioned by the political situation—the liberal government supported the new discourse while the conservative one,

in power since 2015, backed the traditional approach, strengthening the path.

4.2. The Moose

After World War I, the moose in Poland was close to extinction. The restoration of the species, legally considered to be game, was delegated by state authorities under hunting legislation to hunters and foresters who dominated the field of hunting. The former, associated within the Polish Hunting Association, were perceived as experts in wildlife management. The latter, employed by the public State Forests Holding, managed moose habitats. Their efforts increased moose population from a few individuals in the 1920s to 1372 in 1938. This success in the formative period of the moose policy in the newly established Polish state proved important for the further evolution of the sub-domain as it legitimised the key groups involved. After World War II, the restoration started from scratch, this time in the communist context. Again, foresters and hunters led the process as experts, and the steering of the state was restricted to the formal control of the activities of the dominant groups and goals that they prioritised. These groups, however, in the new socio-political context, became closely aligned with the state as part of the hierarchical public bureaucracies. The cooperation of foresters and hunters was facilitated by the shared discourse perceiving the moose as an object to be hunted in the future and the pre-war restitution as an inspiration and obligation. The moose was legally considered to be game, as the hunting regime was considered more effective in preventing illegal poaching than the conservation one. Restoration included guarding moose reserves and informing local communities about penalties for poaching. The moose population quickly increased to around 700 in 1967, and the hunting press started advocating selective shooting. In 1967, the dominant actors convinced the government that the moose was successfully restored and could now be hunted.

The moose numbers continued growing (to approx. 5100 in 1979) despite increasing hunting bag. Moose hunting, perceived as a unique experience, was profitable for local hunting clubs who could sell meat for exports. It also limited damages in forest plantations. Consequently, in the 1970s, the hunting pressure grew. In the early 1980s, the quotas reached around 1500 moose annually and remained at 1200–1300 moose throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, although some wildlife and game biologists argued that it was unsustainable. In the late 1980s, scientists started criticising the lack of proper rules around moose hunting, pointed to alleged overestimating of official moose numbers, and proposed changes in the management of this issue. Socio-political changes in Poland after 1989 further increased harvesting, as hunters, uncertain of the prospective reform of game management, secured immediate gains. The state did not intervene in the hunting policy as the dominant groups of actors in the field did not see the problem as requiring intervention.

At the same time, socio-political changes in Poland after 1989 made the government more open to the arguments of actors traditionally sidelined within the sub-domain (NGOs and conservation biologists) and to the use of new steering instruments from the field of nature conservation, rather than the hunting policy. The establishment of the Biebrza National Park (BNP) in 1993 could be seen as a key example of such a steering intervention in moose governance. The BNP included areas with the highest density of moose in Poland and significantly limited access to game. For the first time, a large moose population was protected, not for hunting but for conservation. Park managers implemented new rules without the involvement of foresters and hunters, which proved difficult to accept by those groups. However, the BNP was not enough to stop the population decline. In 2000, there were only approx. 1900 animals left, which challenged the effectiveness of hunting in sustaining moose populations. Responding to the crisis, hunters urged the government to introduce the proven tool of a moratorium on moose hunting, retaining its game status. It was to last 3–10 years until the moose population recovered. In 2001, the government introduced the moratorium but without specifying its duration, which could be interpreted as strengthening the state's steering beyond the traditional responses advocated by the dominant actors. After a few years, foresters started indicating growing damage in forests and increasing road accidents with moose. Perceiving the prolonged moratorium as a government failure to take responsibility for moose management, they also increasingly pressed authorities for some lethal control. In the meantime, environmental activists, whose influence grew after 1989, challenged the domination of the foresters and hunters—they called for open debates, wider public participation and the involvement of external experts and media. They portrayed the moose as a national treasure which should be accepted in Polish forests, despite the damages involved, and interpreted the 2001 moratorium as a failure of the traditional approach. The activists were supported by conservation biologists, who challenged the dominant actors' knowledge concerning moose management. This diversity of discourses and groups that represented them put the government in the position of an arbiter, which could pick policy options and steer the policy depending on the perceived state of the population and the socio-political context of the sub-domain.

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 and the pressure for more participatory environmental policy-making strengthened the moratorium. In 2009, the government, looking for new policy options, commissioned an expert group, led by a wildlife biologist and including foresters and hunters, to prepare a strategy of moose management. The final document recommended limited hunting in four provinces, preceded by 3–5 years of partial

protection under the nature conservation law. Also, it proposed a new government advisory group, including various stakeholders, to guide moose management. The strategy was not practically implemented, because it was vetoed by foresters and hunters, who associated the protected status with a passive approach towards nature, and did not trust that it would lead to the restoration of hunting. Still, the strategy became a reference point for the environmental actors, who considered the moratorium as a sub-optimal solution, but preferred it over the traditional hunting approach. The environmental actors were successful in publicising attempts to restore hunting by the government in 2014 and 2017, and mobilising public opinion against such initiatives. As recalled by an interviewed forester:

> We started writing proposals [to the Ministry] to restore the moose hunting season and the Ministry always responded evasively. So we pointed out that a number of moose counts had been carried out and such-and-such a scientific expert authorised them. They responded that restoring the hunting season was out of the question but some moose could be shot for scientific purposes….And this scientific harvesting was cancelled after public outcry….Suddenly there was a phone call from the Ministry of the Environment: 'Stop moose shooting, because someone wrote something in the press.'

These attempts revealed the limits to the steering capacity of the state and the impact of foresters and hunters. It also showed that in order to set the direction and implement it practically, the state needed to engage to a larger extent in negotiation with different groups in the domain. So far, it has failed to do so and the moose policy can be characterised as drifting without clear policy goals.

4.3. The Wolf

In the formative period of wolf policy in Poland after 1918, the species was considered to be game that that could be hunted throughout the year, and its governance was dominated by hunters. During World War II, the wolf population increased and hunters perceived this as a major problem affecting game resources and farm animals. They advocated a strong reduction of the species and pressed the government to organise an extermination action to limit losses for the national economy. In their view, the recognition of the problem by the state and its organisational and financial involvement was indispensable:

> In order to plan and prepare this action [against the wolf] properly, it is necessary to recognise the importance of this issue at the governmental level, discuss, agree and issue a number of ordinances by the state authorities, ensure that these ordinances

are properly understood by the executive branches and, finally, to prepare the Polish Hunting Association to complete tasks that it will be entrusted with. (Żebrowski, 1952, p. 8)

The government responded in 1955 using top-down, command-and-control steering instruments oriented at reaching the goals advocated by hunters. It proclaimed a comprehensive extirpation programme to be implemented by dedicated hierarchically organised public officials, and supported by high bounties. Its progress was assessed in hunting press, putting pressure on public authorities to strengthen their efforts. The programme proved successful, and by the mid-1970s, only around 60 wolves survived (less than 10% of the post-war population) in a few pockets in eastern Poland.

Since the 1960s, some game and wildlife biologists started suggesting that the wolf should not be exterminated because of its useful role in ecosystems. Their position was supported by international developments—in 1973, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published guidelines on wolf conservation urging for the restoration of wolf populations based on scientific evidence. In 1975, the government listed the wolf as a game species and curtailed the eradication efforts. The population started growing, and by 1990 it reached almost 900 individuals. The wolf was perceived as a competitor over the game and a prestigious prey, which needs to be kept at a 'reasonable' level through hunting. Wolf management was administered within hunting districts, either by the Polish Hunting Association or by the State Forests Holding, while supervised by the Ministry of Forestry. Specialists in game management provided scientific advice.

The socio-political transformation of Poland in 1989 stimulated the growth of environmental NGOs and, supported by the prospect of the EU integration, put environmental issues high on the political agenda. Because of personal connections with the new people in power and the greater accessibility of democratically elected politicians, environmental actors could intensively lobby for wolf protection. Wildlife biologists provided new data on wolf biology, challenging assumptions informing the dominant wolf governance—they highlighted the positive role of wolves in ecosystems and advocated their natural recovery. This provided the government with new steering options in terms of the goals of wolf governance and instruments that could be used—e.g., already in 1989, the hunting of wolves in the Białowieża Forest, a key biodiversity hotspot, was stopped. As explained by an interviewed wildlife biologist:

> After 1989 our academic tutor became a deputy minister of the environment in the new [democratically elected] government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. We informed him that wolf numbers were overestimated and that, in fact, in such areas as the Białowieża Forest wolf hunting should be banned

altogether....Being a biologist and an ecologist, he understood this very well and implemented [the hunting ban].

In 1991, a new Nature Conservation Act gave regional government representatives a legal avenue to protect wildlife. Wildlife biologists and NGOs started pressing them to list the wolf as a protected species. Consequently, several of the 49 provinces introduced wolf protection or strongly limited hunting. Activists were also lobbying the government to protect wolves across the country. Formally, the government could do this by means of executive regulation, but this would involve shifting wolf governance from the domain of hunting to the domain of nature conservation. Considering the position of hunters, the state was not ready to do this. In the view of environmental activists, government officials did not perceive the need to protect wolves, which the activists associated with their hunting background. To facilitate legal changes, some activists were even providing public officials with written justifications for new provisions. In 1995, faced with an increasing number of provinces transferring wolf governance to the nature conservation domain and recognising demands of the environmental actors, the government issued a regulation designating the wolf as a protected species in all but three provinces with high wolf densities. Two of these provinces soon introduced regional protection, and wolves could be hunted regularly only in the Krosno province. Despite the pressure of the activists, the Krosno governor retained hunting because of the opposition from hunters, foresters, herders, and some game specialists. Concurrently, the Polish Hunting Association tried to convince the government to restore wolf hunting in several provinces. While the government had various steering options at its disposal (either in the direction of protection or hunting), it did not implement them, due to opposing demands from the groups involved in the governance of the species.

The general election in 1997 proved critical for resolving the impasse. NGO activists convinced the new minister of the environment to protect wolves across the country. The official justification highlighted the wolf's role in balancing ecosystems and regulating ungulates. The government also introduced a compensation scheme for the farmers affected by wolf depredation. The new laws influenced the roster of groups involved in wolf management, transferring responsibilities from the hunting authorities to regional conservation offices and to the conservation department in the government. Some of the most vocal wildlife biologists prepared a wolf management strategy, commissioned by the ministry in 1998. In the following years, wolf populations grew rapidly, reaching around 2000 individuals in 2020 and inhabiting practically all major forest areas in Poland. Despite government changes and occasional pressure from hunters, foresters, herders, and supported by some game and wildlife biologists, the policy path initiated in 1998 has been followed. Its stability was facilitated by Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 and the conservation legislation it involved. After an administrative reform in 2007, which was supposed to improve the implementation of the Habitat and Birds Directives, the management of the wolf was transferred to a new state organisation—the General Directorate of Environmental Protection and its 16 regional branches. Compared with its predecessors, the new organisation had more responsibilities, more resources, and was more centralised. It also closely collaborated with various actors to fulfil its legal remit. Consequently, the steering capacity of the state in wolf governance strengthened, while its goals became limited to nature conservation priorities.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In the preceding sections, we analysed the evolution of governance paths regarding three species of large mammals, focusing on the role of the actor/institutions and knowledge/power constellation and their impact on the various forms of steering involved. Despite apparent differences (management status, key actors involved) these paths shared many similarities, shedding some light on the evolution of the role of government steering. In each case, the government was legally and administratively the key actor formally responsible for the management of wildlife species defined as *res communis* (Putman, 2011) and, unlike in some other countries with state-dominated wildlife governance (Jacobson, 2008; von Essen et al., 2017), this position has been widely accepted by the key groups involved. It executed its mandate through hierarchically subordinate public organisations (the State Forest Holding, national parks) or by delegating some authority to the quasi-public Polish Hunting Association. Despite these typical command-and-control, top-down arrangements, the steering possibilities of the government in terms of setting policy goals, monitoring the direction, and correcting deviations from the course, did not have a top-down character and, despite legal opportunities, were not unlimited. Instead, as suggested by the EGT (Beunen et al., 2015), they were a matter of informal negotiations and conflicting between various public and non-public groups in particular policy sub-domains. Their results depended strongly on the ability of competing groups to mobilise different forms of resources (political, financial, interpersonal, organisational, cognitive). Knowledge turned out to be a key component in the struggles as it legitimised actors, their expert position, and gave them arguments to influence wildlife institutions.

As noted by Pierre and Peters (2019), much of the governance literature has ignored the question of who defined the goals of governance. Our study suggests that such goals should be considered at the level of concrete policy objectives and at the level of 'metagovernance.' In all cases, in formative periods, the sub-domains included one guiding discourse

including particular constructions of animals and policy goals. These discourses, however, did not come from the government, but from the actors dominant in policy sub-domains. Such actors were able to convince the state that particular policy options were preferable and that they should be involved in their implementation. Consequently, together with government actors, they formed close policy communities (Rhodes, 1997), involved both in steering and rowing. In a relative conflict-free environment, these communities proved effective in reaching established policy goals (bison and moose restitution, wolf reduction). With the evolution of the governance paths, as foreseen by the EGT, the discursive landscape within the sub-fields diversified. This was stimulated by new international discourses (the wolf case), new fields of expertise connected with new conservation stages (the bison case), or by credibility crises of existing approaches (the moose case). Discursive changes were accompanied by the growing diversity of actors in policy sub-domains resulting from the divisions within the existing groups (e.g., scientists) and from new groups joining the discussions (e.g., environmental NGOs after 1989). Consequently, the networks involved in governance increasingly started resembling issue networks (Rhodes, 1997) with diverse groups of stakeholders representing different interests, views and values that problematised 'the future of nature' (Keulartz, 2009, p. 446).

Major socio-economic and political critical junctures (Collier & Collier, 1991), especially the wars and the fall of the communist rule in 1989, as well as the EU accession in 2004, turned out to be particularly important for the pace of the evolution. First, these events influenced the state of the targeted populations, which subsequently led to increased efforts at species restitution or reduction. Secondly, they influenced the socio-political context of evolving governance structures that had an effect on the relationships between the actors in the field and on the shape of wildlife policies. The introduction of communism after 1945 strengthened the role of public hierarchies in the governance of wildlife due to the centralisation of administration and nationalisation of forests. The democratisation after 1989 and European integration opened windows of opportunities for new groups of actors in the sub-domains, influenced the responsiveness of the government, increased the access to resources and provided new venues where the conflicts could potentially be resolved (e.g., the European Court of Justice in the case of the species protected by the Habitat Directive). Consequently, the role of non-state groups in governance became more pronounced. Still, some paths initiated in the communist past have persisted, and include largely uncontested acceptance for the dominant role of the government in wildlife governance, as well as material legacies that encourage state steering, e.g., due to nationalisation, around 80% of forests in Poland (constituting key wildlife habitats) are state-owned.

The increasing complexity of wildlife governance after 1989 contributed to a transition of state steering towards meta-governance (Meuleman, 2008)—balancing interests and managing relations between diverse actors in the sub-domains to use their resources and achieve results that would present the government as competently dealing with policy problems, complying with its international obligations and satisfying the general public. This could be seen as a reflection of greater aligning control and accountability of the state for particular policies and orienting public policy by the larger collective interests, rather than by the interests of self-referential actors in the network (Pierre & Peters, 2019). New actors problematised the role of science in wildlife management—it was still important, as it gave different groups credibility, but was rather supportive than essential for policy making (Rocheleau, 2017). In our cases this was because: (1) various groups had different epistemic communities they could reach to for evidence and it was difficult to establish one uncontested scientific assessment; and (2) the government tried to reach politically sustainable policy options rather than those best supported by scientific evidence. One of the manifestations of this co-evolution was the fact that the government ceased to produce clear wildlife policy goals, e.g., in the form of official strategies. Such strategies seemed to limit the state more than facilitating policy implementation. Consequently, one of the key aspects of the state's steering—being explicit about the objectives, norms and values and communicating it to those rowing (Crawford, 2006)—was compromised.

At the same time, growing diversity of actors and discourses, within the same formal framework, increased the capacities of the state to perform other requirements for steering—using resources of other (rowing) actors and verifying and responding to their performance (Crawford, 2006). The government did not depend on one dominant group of actors to define the problem and implement it, but could increasingly consider a wider spectrum of goals and implementation tools suggested by the competing coalitions and coming from the fields of game management and nature conservation. Furthermore, its monitoring capacities grew, as it could use the resources of other groups to verify information provided by dominant actors (e.g., wolf counts by hunters, bison damages in forest plantations assessed by foresters) and make more informed policy choices. This resembled the challenges to the 'monopoly of information' of 'subgovernments' in US wildlife politics after the rise of the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which helped government agencies to position themselves as 'intermediaries' between competing groups and gave them some leeway in choosing policy options (Nelson, 2001). Finally, due to co-evolutions in the sub-domains, the state could correct deviations from policies more effectively, going further than preferred by the dominant groups (e.g., prolonging the moose hunting ban).

However, increasing steering options did not mean that the state could use them at will. Its approach

was influenced by wider structural factors: the socio-economic context (e.g., socio-economic transition after 1989), legal context (e.g., EU directives), and the political situation (liberal vs. conservative governments; bottom-up societal pressure, e.g., against bison and moose hunting). Our cases also showed that the government was not always uniform in its approach, particularly with conservation, hunting and forestry departments representing different rationalities and policy communities. As noted by Peters (2011), governments often simultaneously steer toward several, sometimes incommensurable goals, which makes the process more complex, especially when policy goals change from relatively straightforward and undisputed (restitution of endangered species) to debatable (e.g., favourable conservation status). These external and internal factors limited the government steering capacity and opened windows of opportunity for new actors to influence policies.

The state was hardly a leader of policy innovation, yet its position as an ultimate-decision maker was not undermined due to powerful path dependencies and interdependencies—a vertical distribution of power, traditional top-down governance patterns, superior administrative capacities, legal powers, and ownership of key resources. Consequently, our cases problematise the assertion of Pierre and Peters (2019) that states are still capable of steering society, but less based on legal powers and more on the control of critical resources and shaping of collective interests (e.g., through new environmental policy instruments). We suggest that in post-socialist wildlife policies, both formal and material aspects of state governance have been crucial for government steering. Concurrently, steering and rowing turned out to be an 'interactive occupation' (Kooiman, 2003, p. 117), where goal seeking outweighed goal setting. Using the distinction of Voss et al. (2007), the state's steering increasingly moved from a problem of goals and knowledge to steering as a power problem, involving negotiation in networks, and as a problem of moderating co-evolution and reflexive governance to facilitate adaptation. Within existing legislation and political and cultural history, this mode of governance proved effective and contributed to the overcoming of gridlocks on wildlife issues often encountered in other countries (Rocheleau, 2017). Largely informal adaptations of the state's steering facilitated retaining the central role of government in wildlife governance despite significant socio-economic and political transformations that Poland experienced in the analysed period.

At the same time, the lack of clear policy goals from the state and associated policy instruments sustains tensions in the sub-domains, which contribute to increasing conflicts. This is particularly visible in the moose case, where the State Forest Holding notes growing damages in forest plantations, and in the wolf case, where growing wolf numbers concern local communities, especially in the newly established wolf territories. It is apparent that these conflicts will soon require adequate steering

efforts from the state. Crucially, the state will need to identify the actors responsible for the management of these species locally. It can either restore previous hunting institutions informed by the utilitarian discourse and a sense of human control over the natural processes, or create new institutions and strengthen existing organisations (e.g., environmental agency) that would implement a more ecosystem-oriented and adaptive perspective on the ground. The international discourses and policy initiatives concerning biodiversity conservation (UNEP, 2021), EU priorities and legal framework, as well as considerable societal opposition to the lethal control of charismatic wildlife seem to create favourable conditions for the latter option. However, as suggested by the EGT, existing dependencies and power relations within the field might compromise more ambitious attempts at policy innovation. The political situation in Poland and the orientation of the Polish government at conservative or progressive values are also likely to play an important role in the future dynamics of wildlife governance.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Article

Mitigating Pro-Poor Housing Failures: Access Theory and the Politics of Urban Governance

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Abstract

Looking at evolving urban governance and planning practices in the city of Lahore, Pakistan, the article aims to understand—from an Evolutionary Governance Theory perspective—to what extent these practices steer paths and modes of service provision and housing for low-income residents. With a focus on the endurance and transformations of urban governance practices and institutions, we first explore the influence of the changing development discourse and the impact it has had on the (re)configuration of urban governance and housing policies in Lahore. Second, drawing on extensive fieldwork and empirical data collected between 2012 and 2016, we highlight three vignettes depicting the development of different housing options for low-income residents in Lahore, i.e., a government-steered subsidised housing scheme, a privately developed 'pro-poor' settlement in the peri-urban fringe of the city, and residential colonies already—or in the process of being—regularised. By analysing the relationship between governance frameworks, the establishment of the three types of settlements and how residents manage to access housing and services there, we demonstrate how purposive deregulation in governance and policy generates a disconnect between urban normative frameworks (i.e., urban planning tools and pro-poor housing policies) and residents' needs and everyday practices. We argue that this highly political process is not exclusively path-dependent but has also allowed the creation of liminal spaces based on agency and collective action strategies of low-income residents.

Issue

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1. Introduction

When Pakistan was created in 1947, the city of Lahore typified differentiated urban qualities and socio-economic disparities in the planned civil station versus indigenous settlements (Qadeer, 1983). The effects of colonial development such as the morphological differences between newer districts and older areas of native habitation, the socio-spatial segregation, the

exclusionary patterns of housing and service provision, as well as the British-Indian urban governance regulations and institutions, constituted a specific legacy for post-colonial Lahore (Alvi, 1997; Malik, 2011). When about five million Muslims sought refuge in West-Punjab due to partition politics that resulted in the greatest displacement of the 20th century, Punjab's capital Lahore bore the brunt of the mass influx, and ever since, the question of housing provision—especially for

low-income residents—has been pertinent and highly politicised. The current government, for instance, rolled out the "Naya (New) Pakistan Housing" programme in 2018, promising 'affordable housing' for low-income populations. Against a current estimated national housing backlog of 11 to 12 million housing units—four million only in urban areas—the "Housing for All" (sub)programme claims to provide five million housing units within a "100 Days Agenda" (Government of Pakistan, 2018). Similar previous steering attempts to mitigate the increasing housing backlog have largely failed. In Lahore, Pakistan's second-largest city with an estimated population of approximately 11.1 million inhabitants in 2017 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017), the fast-paced development of housing schemes in the peri-urban fringe has hardly contributed—if at all over the years—to addressing the housing needs of low-income and vulnerable populations (Anjum & Hameed, 2007).

In this article, we analyse the transforming modes, practices, and strategies of planning and urban governance in Lahore for pro-poor housing from an Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) perspective (Van Assche et al., 2014) that understands governance and its constitutive elements as relational and in constant flux. We focus on how actors and institutions involved in spatial planning over time have dealt with, perpetuated and/or undermined path dependencies, and become entangled through goal- and interdependencies. Although these dependencies can constrain the evolution of planning perspectives over time and lead to the reproduction of already existing modes of planning and governance—and their underlying mechanisms of power and control—we intend to scrutinise to what extent and under which conditions they become productive in the sense that they create opportunities for alternative governance paths. We argue that the combination of EGT perspectives with access theory is conceptually fruitful to understand: a) the extent to which these dependencies ultimately steer modes of access to housing and service provision for low-income residents; and b) if and how path creation might shape modes of beneficiaries' agency and collective action strategies from below.

For evidence, we turn to three steering processes in pro-poor urban housing governance: A government-initiated subsidised housing scheme, a privately developed pro-poor settlement in the peri-urban fringe of the city, and residential colonies in the process of regularisation. For each of these case study vignettes, we analyse how different actor/institution configurations governed the respective pro-poor housing scheme and how steering affected low-income families' ability to obtain houses and services. The individual governance paths are highlighted for each case study by outlining first the planning aspiration and steps taken for implementation, followed by an access mapping (Ribot & Peluso, 2003), i.e., the analysis of mechanisms by which the supposed beneficia-

ries are enabled or constrained in sustaining low-income housing and services. In a third empirical step, we draw attention to existing path dependencies, interdependencies, and mechanisms of non-linear path creation characteristic for each case study context. The analysis is based on extensive qualitative social science research conducted between 2012 and 2016. The insights from a synthesis of all three case studies enable us to derive conclusions regarding the wider effects of steering, i.e., whether and how sustained access to low-income housing is ensured and could thus be evaluated as a meaningful contribution to mitigating the housing crisis for Lahore's poor. In the conclusion, we reflect on the added value of combining EGT and access theory for the theory and practice/s of steering and for understanding the politics of low-income housing provision in and beyond Pakistan.

2. Bringing Access Theory into EGT to Account for Power Relations in Governance Analysis

Steering comprises both planning and efforts at implementation that manifest in governance effects. We understand governance (paths) as histories of steering attempts. As EGT scholars have pointed out previously (Beunen et al., 2017), social engineering effects are most likely to take shape in autocratic or centralised societies; yet overall, they are overestimated in particular, "[i]f on the other hand, localism, individualism and legalism dominate the governance path, it is unlikely that a plan does much outside the planner's office" (Van Assche et al., 2014, p. 90). The quote hints at the empirical reality that where no top-down management enforces governance visions, they fail in practice—from the perspective of those governing. However, from an analytical perspective, non-linear path creation can be considered as productive because it has the potential to open spaces for dissent, innovation and adaptation. Since EGT conceptual frameworks have largely disregarded power relations between governance actors and institutions so far (Beunen et al., 2015, p. 332), it has remained inconclusive why steering attempts fail to meet their intentions. We argue that access theory has an important contribution to make in clarifying this relationship.

Access theory locates power in social relations and ongoing struggles within them (Peluso & Ribot, 2020, p. 300). These relationships between actors and institutions or sets of relationships (bundles of powers) constitute access mechanisms that determine who can benefit from resources—in our case low-income housing and services. Access itself is defined as the ability to benefit from a certain resource (Peluso & Ribot, 2020; Ribot & Peluso, 2003) which does not presume ownership or require property rights as a precondition for benefit. The focus on the ability (to benefit) extends beyond rights. Mechanisms of access are subsequently differentiated between rights-based mechanisms (based on the observation or ignorance of law, thus including,

e.g., 'illegal' access through force) vs. structural and relational mechanisms that shape how benefits are gained, controlled, and maintained—possibly facilitated utilising technology (physical barriers), capital/finances, knowledge, authority, identity, and social relationships. Access analysis comprises the identification of access mechanisms and underlying power relations in actor/institution configurations. For our case, the conceptual merger of both strands of scholarship allows us to investigate to what extent evolving planning perspectives and governance frameworks ultimately shape, constrain, or limit residents' ability to access housing and related services.

By combining access theory with selective EGT concepts (e.g., non-linear paths and dependencies), we extend EGT conceptually (Van Assche et al., 2014) and illustrate how an analysis of governance paths that accounts for the analysis of power relations that underlie access mechanisms will reveal limits of steering (Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008) and social engineering. This is based on the premise that power relations shape governance arrangements, outcomes, and the evolution of governance itself. EGT research illustrates that actor/institution configurations and their respective planning visions, once established, tend to reproduce themselves (Beunen et al., 2017, p. 102). Planning perspectives—specific narratives, specific ways of reading, and managing socio-spatial realities—tend to reinforce their own constructions of reality, existing power relations, and actor/institution configurations. In doing so, they create path dependencies i.e., legacies of the past in different forms that affect governance evolution over time, contribute to the rigidity of planning (Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014) and constrain its adaptation to an otherwise changing environment. Strong path dependencies can not only lead to higher levels of resilience to change but also tend to foster oversimplified planning perspectives. As path-dependent planning, governance frameworks and development discourses can no longer cope with the transformation of society and the increasing complexity of urban realities, they might gradually result in a larger disconnect between the perceived problems and suggested strategies from the planning perspective and the actual societal needs (Beunen et al., 2017).

The underlying aims and future visions of many planning and development interventions are likewise embedded with goal dependencies. These refer to the shared visions for the future within a given actor/institution configuration that contribute to how governance practices and mechanisms of control, such as plans, policies, and laws are delineated (Beunen et al., 2015). The more linear and homogeneous the vision of the future is—such as in modernisation paradigm in development theory—within a given actor/institution configuration, the less flexible and adaptable the governance framework will be, and the less able it is to shape non-linear, alternative creative paths to tackle context-specific and emerging socio-spatial challenges.

3. The Evolution of Lahore's Urban Governance Framework

The trajectory of pro-poor housing governance and related urban steering in Pakistan and specifically in Lahore has evolved through close entanglements between development planning at national and sub-national levels and international development discourses ('fashions'), funding institutions, and consultancies. The multifarious mutual relations between international discourses and national steering intentions in the policy field of housing—besides representing de facto goal dependence—have produced specific actor/institution configurations in Lahore's pro-poor housing sector. From its infancy years, Pakistan's administrations were linked to modernisation theory-inspired development planning and related aid disbursements, e.g., through the "Truman's Four Point" programme and the first Five Year Development Plan (1955–60) prepared by Harvard University academics. In the tradition of Walter Rostow's 'stages of economic growth,' Ayub Khan's government (1958–69) emphasised high industrialist–capitalist development under the tutelage of a military bureaucracy. While the World Bank and the government itself viewed the process favourably and the latter was preparing for grand celebrations of the 'decade of development' in 1968/69, many parts of the country were in the grip of popular protests by those who did not benefit from economic growth. Already in the 1970s–80s, about 75 percent of Lahore's population could not afford land at market price (Alvi, 1997; Qadeer, 1983). Large parts of the population could not afford to own housing and had to resort to renting options, adding progressively to existing housing to host new family members or encroaching on state land. The authorities either demolished or ignored irregular housing, locally referred to as *katchi abadis*, for many years. The large proportion of the urban and rural population that depended on irregular housing formed a veritable political constituency, increasingly able to formulate political demands. These resonated initially with Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's leftist party in the 1970s, which won elections with the prospect of granting the poorest housing and ownership rights, captured in the slogan "*Roti, Kapra aur Makan*" ("Bread, Cloth and Shelter"). Even though the success of the Bhutto government (1971–77) in addressing the housing question was limited, the politicisation of the issue mobilised the urban poor around the cause of urban housing and the subject of *katchi abadis* so that all political parties included housing as a subject in their election manifesto by 1977 (Alvi, 1997).

In this context, the Lahore Urban Development and Traffic Study 1980 (LUDTS, 1981–2000) was compiled as a "structure plan" (Javed & Riaz, 2020, p. 155) with an inherent focus on providing access to services and supporting informal housing for low-income groups. In line with the development paradigm at that time, the LUDTS focused on the neighbourhood (*mohalla*) level,

mirroring the international trend to prioritise structural plans and action planning approaches (Jenkins et al., 2007). As it attributed a decisive role to local level planning and implementation—in this case, the successor authority of the colonial Lahore Improvement Trust that was revamped as Lahore Development Authority (LDA) in 1975—it also incorporated the World Bank's focus on homeownership and security of tenure in land and housing for the urban poor. In addition, other 'travelling ideas,' rooted in the basic needs and redistribution of growth development theories of the 1970s (Jenkins et al., 2007; Qadeer, 1983, p. 255), manifested in aided self-help housing programmes and progressive development strategies (such as 'sites and services').

The military government of Zia-ul-Haq (1978–88) addressed the issue of access to low-income housing in the 1981 National Housing Policy (NHP) and the establishment of provincial *Katchi Abadis* Directorates financed by loans of Structural Adjustment Programmes (Gera, 2007). The "One Million Houses" programme that promised to construct 1.5 million housing units by 1993, projecting to have the first 300,000 units ready by 1988, i.e., within two years (Alvi, 1997, pp. 74–75), remained far behind expectations with just about 35,000 units constructed. Subsequent public sector initiatives for pro-poor housing schemes followed this precedent (Rana, 2013). Until the late 1990s, master plans and housing and development programmes rolled out in Pakistan and Lahore in particular failed to address the housing problem for low-income populations. Regularly, ambitious public sector pro-poor housing programmes, aligned with international aid and development funding lines, were announced as flagships of newly established governments, then delayed and ultimately abandoned with the coming of a new administration. An insufficient allocation of funds for low-income housing and services among development authorities and local governments hindered implementation. Moreover, early subsidised sites and services programmes in Lahore in the 1950s (e.g., in Samanabad and Gulberg) simply lacked a pro-poor focus or experienced gentrification (Alvi, 1997, p. 57; Qadeer, 1983). Consequently, planning scholars and practitioners in Pakistan eagerly picked up the turn to an affordability approach to low-income housing, which was also promoted by the World Bank (Ahsan, 2019; Fariha et al., 2018). This paradigm shift ascribed the private sector the central role for housing development. Accordingly, the NHP-2001 merely established guidelines for developing provincial housing policies and the coordination between federal, provincial and urban local bodies, but de facto had little impact on low-income housing planning. Recently, the global trend of corporatisation was accounted for in Lahore when public sector companies owned by the provincial government or its public sector departments entered the market to provide public utilities and consultancy services.

Although the effort to comply with the Millennium Development Goals on urban poverty reduction and slum improvement can be traced in the NHP-2001 and the later Task Force Report on Urban Development 2011, on the provincial level, it has mainly translated into regularisation programmes for informal settlements (*katchi abadis*). After their initiation under Bhutto's government, subsequent alternating civilian and military governments continued with the regularisation of *katchi abadis* as their main and most resilient government strategy for low-income housing. With an inherent property rights approach (de Soto, 2001), however, these policies raise questions about their effectiveness in improving access to housing and adequate services for low-income and vulnerable populations.

The evolution of the urban governance framework and the urban planning regulatory instruments and institutions has followed a non-linear transformation process, in which interdependencies, gaps, overlaps, and failures characterise actor/institution configurations. Even the devolution of powers to the provincial level from 2010 onwards has not eased fragmented planning. Local urban governance has evolved, closely interlinked with Local Government Acts of the day, which time and again reshaped administrative boundaries and institutional-jurisdictional mandates with each new incoming government. Actor/institution configurations operating under the Ministry of Defence blurred the urban governance framework further (Cermeño, 2021). As a result, a myriad of governing bodies responsible for planning and implementation coexist. The largest one, the LDA—an autonomous body under the provincial Secretary of Housing Urban Development & Public Health Engineering Department (HUD&PHE)—covered the Lahore Metropolitan Area, approximately 1,760 square kilometres in the 1980s, and gradually expanded to around 2,306 square kilometres in 1988, before it expanded further to include four districts: Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, and Kasur in 2013 (Javed & Riaz, 2020). In contrast, the Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency, also under the HUD&PHE, is responsible for the overall spatial planning in Punjab Province, the implementation of the NHP, and the development of social housing projects on public land, such as the current government's "Naya Pakistan Housing" programme.

4. Evolution and Path Creation in Three Pro-Poor Housing Projects

In the following, we will investigate three vignettes as examples of pro-poor urban housing governance projects: A government-initiated subsidised housing scheme, a privately developed incremental pro-poor settlement, and informal residential areas under regularisation. We conducted qualitative research in all sites discontinuously between 2012 and 2016 as part of two larger research projects on: (1) social mobilisation processes in peri-urban low-income areas of Pakistan; and (2) access to housing and services in the neighbouring cities of Amritsar and Lahore, across the India-Pakistan

border. Recurrent field research periods in Lahore lasted on average three to four months and covered the time before and after the elections in Punjab province, enabling us to locate the development processes in the three sites in the broader political context. General elections in Pakistan were held on 11 May 2013. As a result, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) became the first party in the federal government with Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister. In Punjab, the PML-N provincial government was re-elected with Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif as Chief Minister of Punjab.

In all three sites, we employed ethnographic fieldwork methods, including informal and in-depth interviews of residents and staff members of the different agencies and companies involved in governance to explore the effect of steering, namely whether and how access to low-income housing is gained, controlled, and maintained. We conducted follow-up interviews with key respondents over the years, which allowed a better understanding of the evolution of governance in the studied housing projects. These methods were complemented by walk-alongs—a combination of selective participant observation with informal interviews with residents in the respective field sites. Our analysis is, therefore, based on observations and interviews gathered as ethnographic fieldnotes, as well as additional documentary materials (e.g., evolving housing policies and regulations, local and national newspaper clips, beneficiaries' allotment letters and payments slips, official newsletters, brochures or reports on the housing projects, among others).

4.1. Case I—Ashiana: A Public Pro-Poor Housing Scheme

Ashiana-e-Quaid Lahore is the name of a pro-poor housing scheme initiated in March 2011 by the Punjab provincial government in Lahore. The project was assigned to the Punjab Land Development Company (PLDC) and aimed to provide roughly 2,750 affordable housing units for low-income and vulnerable beneficiaries. PLDC had been set up in 2010 with a specific pro-poor housing mandate by the provincial government (PLDC, 2011; Saeed, 2013) even though entities with similar mandates already existed. Under the direct supervision of the Chief Minister of Punjab, Ashiana received not only land transferred to PDLC but also direct seed funding from the Punjab Government (Ur Rahmaan, 2017). With the land subsidised, low-income residents were to cover the cost of the house only. A bilateral financial agreement between PLDC and the Bank of Punjab (BOP) facilitated access to loans for successful allottees (PLDC, 2012). After the first keys were handed over to residents in late December 2011, the inauguration of the second phase in Ashiana-e-Quaid followed in February 2012, and a new low-income scheme with 10,000 flats—Ashiana-e-Iqbal—was launched by PLDC (2012) in cooperation with the LDA preceding elections in 2013. By this time, the Chief Minister of Punjab also acted as LDA chair-

man (Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, 2013). After his party (PML-N) won the elections, the speed of work almost froze while Ashiana transformed into a public–private enterprise as PLDC and LDA partnered with construction companies (e.g., NESPAK, Bahria Town) and investors for the scheme's development (LDA, 2015). By March 2016, about one-third of the initially planned low-income houses were still to start construction, while many more remained either unfinished or under the control of the constructors despite previous allotment.

To be selected, eligible candidates—those with an individual income below Rs. 20,000 (Kahloon, 2011, p. 4; PLDC, 2011, p. 43), Rs. 30,000 per household (interview with PLDC officer, December 6, 2014), or with proof of belonging to a specific quota—were included in a lottery draw for provisional allotment letters in August 2011. However, for some potential beneficiaries, the necessary 25 percent down payment for the house was too high despite BOP loan provisions. Furthermore, residents indicated that monthly instalments increased by one-third as they had to pay interests to the BOP in the process (interviews, December 8, 2014). Months after first allottees had moved in, construction remained incomplete, and developers lagged behind with the provision of basic facilities such as water from overhead reservoirs. Instead, water trucks were organised to fill individual houses' water tanks (interviews, May 6, 2012) until water was provided on a regular basis. In consequence, many residents denied paying service charges to what they suspected were fake PLDC employees because they had heard an announcement by the Chief Minister that no service fees would be required until the entire scheme was fully developed (interviews with residents, November 29 and December 6, 2014). However, the slow pace of completion in Ashiana-e-Quaid hindered many allottees from accessing their houses, even though they had paid the down payments. Others who had not, but lost interest in the rights-based access to allotted houses, stopped paying instalments, which reportedly affected the funding sources of the PLDC. PLDC subsequently attracted affluent buyers ready to take over the liabilities of low-income defaulters at negotiated prices close to market value. In another contradiction to the set-out principles for Ashiana's development, PLDC sold and rented informally (interviews with residents, December 6 and 8, 2014). Residents who had moved to Ashiana in 2015 noted that their connections with politicians or influential people enabled them, for example, to trade an allotment letter of a house with a specific number in a specific block that was yet to be completed against another allotment letter in an already finished sector (interviews, September 23, 2015).

The scheme's failure to provide pro-poor housing solutions originates in deeply engrained dependencies of the governance actor/institution configuration, related power dynamics, and underlying planning visions. The strategic mobilisation of the pro-poor housing discourse before the 2013 elections as a top-down,

fast-track, low-cost housing vision caused fast-paced steering, including early implementation in 2011–12. The LDA/PLDC tandem demonstrated a dominant path-dependent position of provincial development actors in the urban governance framework to the detriment of (lower-tier) local governance institutions. Despite subsidies, the adverse purchasing arrangements for low-income families led to the exclusion of eligible applicants. The disconnect between the market-driven corporatisation, manifest in the interdependence between LDA/PLDC, and construction companies owned by politically influential persons (Dawn, 2016; Siddiqa, 2007) on the one hand, and the slow pace of construction and transfer of completed houses to beneficiaries on the other, points to informal mechanisms of purposive deregulation guided by profit-interests of the actors involved. The leadership of PLDC, together with BOP and Bahria, as well as other contractors, strategically calculated the loss of government property and the benefits of turning Ashiana into a middle-class neighbourhood up for purchase on the open housing market. This allowed exploiting the gap between the real estate value on-site (subsidised due to free land allocation) and the market value that middle-income clients pay in comparable locations where the land plot costs more than the construction of the house. However, allottees practised purposive deregulation, too, when they increasingly perceived allotment arrangements as insecure and denied payment of fees and further instalments. The discretionary decisions and transfers to allottees without a house, in spite of submitted down payments, led to access failure rather than enforcing allottees' rights. Subsequently, they chose access paths through relational mechanisms to realise their rights by investing in relations with politicians and PLDC representatives to secure or maintain access to housing and services.

4.2. CASE II—KKB-Lahore: Sites and Services Approach

Khuda Ki Basti Lahore (KKB-L) is the name of a replicated Incremental Housing Scheme (IHS) initiated first by the Pakistani NGO Saiban in Hyderabad Sindh (KKB-1) from 1986 onwards. The founder and chairman of Saiban refers to it as an experiment (Siddiqui, 2014) for providing affordable housing to the urban poor, developing infrastructures on a progressive self-financing model (based on instalments and development charges paid by residents), and for enabling low-income groups, generally excluded from the formal housing market, to access small loans. This IHS approach was initially inspired by the Latin American-origin sites and services schemes (Turner, 1977) that came to be promoted globally by the World Bank from the 1970s onwards.

KKB-L was launched in 2005/06 in the northern periphery of Lahore beyond the River Ravi. One major reason for this remote location was that unlike for KKB-1, where the Hyderabad Development Authority provided the land at subsidised rates, Saiban had to pur-

chase the land for KKB-L from private owners at market value. Accordingly, KKB-L was planned on a very small scale, limited to eight hectares for 460 plots. A plot for low-income residents was to cost Rs. 90,000. The authorities approved the plan in exchange for a certain number of mortgaged plots, and since the land was purchased with the help of a Rs. 10 million loan, premium location plots for Rs. 125,000 apiece were integrated in the planning. Potential residents who did not own property already, had a maximum income of Rs. 15,000 and agreed to construct a house and inhabit it for a minimum of five years were accepted as allottees. Given that the plot price was already beyond the means of many, the expenses for constructing the house was the main factor deterring potential settlers, besides issues like the distance to urban Lahore and lack of transport from the settlement to the main road. To counter this, Saiban accepted 25 percent of the cost of the land as a down payment and the rest in monthly instalments. Of those residents who acquired a Rs. 200,000 loan from the Housing Building Finance Corporation for the construction of the house, many, however, opted to construct minimal structures or poor-quality houses and saved the loan for other purposes. By 2014, only about 200 of 460 planned plots were occupied, of which 50 percent remained in default of payment. Moreover, the small socio-spatial scale of KKB-L inhibited the development of economic activities in the settlement, thus leaving constructed shops without leases in the planned commercial sites (interviews, December 13, 17 and 27, 2014).

Residents' ability to benefit from infrastructure and service provision remained limited: Water supply was not yet centralised and proper roads were still not built after ten years of development. A portion of the park was transformed into premium plots, and the community centre laid out in the KKB-L plan was never constructed. Other services such as schooling, a mosque and medical care (dispensary) were available selectively. On the one hand, access to such services depended on outreach and relations ('self-management') of individual block representatives to NGOs and social welfare organisations, the mandates of both were limited. On the other, service provision became linked to identity traits, community cohesion in housing blocks, and location and time of settlement. For example, the NGO-run dispensary and gynaecologist assistance were based on the work of volunteers and could only offer scattered service to residents; the financing of the mosque by donors from a specific Muslim sect excluded the larger part of the settlement population, and road construction was advanced most where residents had settled down and paid service charges longest. This indicates struggles between different interest groups among residents and Saiban for the control over resources and their management and points to underlying webs of power relations. Especially community managers and elected representatives of block committees aspired to become brokers in the development process by attempting to

monopolise access to developmental charges and NGOs' funds to ultimately control the distribution of benefits for their own constituencies. Rifts between block resident populations emerged, for example, because Pashtuns—who originated from western Pakistan and do not usually have relatives and family support in Lahore and its surroundings—had a clear incentive to establish themselves a home in KKB-L in aspiration of social upward mobility. The decision of many Punjabi families to move to KKB-L mostly from Lahore proper, on the contrary, seems to have been motivated primarily by investment purposes (interviews, December 17 and 21, 2014; November 29, 2015).

While the initial conditions under which KKB-L came into being triggered strong path dependencies, the interplay of dependencies created unanticipated effects for Saiban and hampered the development of the housing scheme. Goal dependencies manifested in the disconnect between the incremental housing discourse that guided the planning of KKB and the fact that some residents did not, or could not, share the idea of communal self-financing and stopped paying instalments. Even where settlers benefitted from Saiban-facilitated loans and payment concessions, these access mechanisms failed to ensure the quality of constructions because of strategic calculations of residents related to the prospect of land speculation (access seizure). It is noteworthy that, despite sanctions, some residents succeeded in acquiring up to eight plots utilising relatives' names that in fact had no intention to move to the settlement; here, initial constructions merely happened to prevent the cancellation of the plots (interviews, December 21, 2014). The low occupation rate and the increase of defaulters affected the cost recovery of instalments and the development of self-financed services causing residents to mobilise relational access opportunities within their immediate community or identity groups or through tapping NGOs and social welfare organisations for facilities and service provision. As a result, each residential block has undergone a different development path based on specific sets of power relations that manifested in different usages of relational access mechanisms and evolved from goal dependencies linked to the different motivations for settling in KKB-L. Taken together, this case exemplifies a failed steering attempt that largely overestimated the ability and willingness of low-income residents to construct and consolidate housing and services on their own. As a result, different urban qualities evolved within the settlement.

4.3. CASE III—Inchoate Regularisation of Katchi Abadis on Federal Land (Pakistan Railways)

Mughalpura is the name of an area in Lahore that historically consists of land from the British-Indian North Western State Railway and, after 1947, of the Pakistan Government Railway Transport Company (Pakistan Railways). Refugees arriving from India in 1947 established several irregular colonies (*katchi abadi/s*) on the vacant land starting from encroachments and makeshift constructions, e.g., Al-Noor Colony, Miraj Colony, Jamilabad, and Dars Bare Mian. Pakistan Railways have tried to evict irregular settlers from its land since the 1950s. Only under Zia-ul-Haq's military government (1978–88), an initial form of regularisation came into effect, entitling *katchi abadi* dwellers who could prove residence from 1 January 1978 to ownership rights and a subsequent legalisation of status (Government of Punjab, 1987). After a Punjab government survey identified 34 *katchi abadis* on Railways' land in 1986, these sites were registered for transferral from the Ministry of Railways to provincial jurisdiction for planned regularisation. Without waiting for the necessary non-objection certificates (NOCs), LDA reportedly started to implement development measures and charged service fees and property tax while the transfer of rights was delayed. Even after the provincial government issued the Punjab Katchi Abadis Act 1992 (Government of Punjab, 1992) that newly enacted a 1985 cut-off date, and provided that only the Directorate General (DG) Katchi Abadis Punjab (created in 1987) would have the power to carry out evictions, the Railway Ministry continued to schedule demolitions. During the military government of Pervez Musharraf (1999–2007), the government of Punjab issued a protection order in 2001 to halt demolitions and evictions unless clearance was obtained from the District Coordination & Monitoring Committee on Katchi Abadis (Government of Punjab, 2001). Furthermore, dwellers were to be compensated in case of necessary relocation. Despite the recognition of *katchi abadis* as legitimate in the NHP of 2001 and the issuance of the Punjab Katchi Abadis (Amendment) Ordinance 2007 (Government of Punjab, 2007)—enacted later as the Punjab Katchi Abadis (Amendment) Act 2009—that determined the cut-off date 31 December 2006, the reluctance of Railways officials to issue NOCs for LDA and thus to effectively cede land to *katchi abadi* dwellers remained high. Eviction notices were issued continuously in 2011 and 2012. By early 2012, 36 *katchi abadis* throughout Lahore were still waiting for NOCs from the Railways. This number included 24 of the 34 that existed before 1985 (interviews, February 28, 2012).

The dwellers of the different *katchi abadis* in Mughalpura secured access illegally when they first settled on vacant government land. With eviction notices against them and government interventions in their favour, residents navigated steering attempts and increasingly became confident to rely on their own actions in the local governance set-up. For example, when Pakistan Railways targeted Al-Noor and few other colonies in 2000, they mobilised widespread protests based on the collective action infrastructure of the newly founded All Pakistan Katchi Abadi Alliance (APKAA) and the Lahore-wide Muttahida Action Committee that had existed as a wing of the Social Welfare Society Dars Bare Mian Mughalpura since its registration in 1983 and

whose president was born in Dars Bare Mian Katchi Abadi as a son of refugees from India. In 2001, APKAA petitioned the government to complete the regularisation of *katchi abadis*, including the transfer of rights and the implementation of development works, and to put a stop to the Railways' demolition attempts. However, while the share of transferred land in Dars Bare Mian Katchi Abadi amounted to 193,000 square metres of a total of 280,500 square metres by 2014 (Salahuddin, 2014), only 250 out of the 3,500 houses were registered and had attained the legal title. The reason was twofold: Hardly any family could pay the amount of money DG Katchi Abadi staff reportedly requested illegally for titling (Rs. 30,000), and subsequently, residents settled for transfer notification as good-enough tenure security. At the same time, residents' access to services (water, electricity, gas) and infrastructure expanded continuously. With an estimated population of more than 200,000 residents, Mughalpura has regularly had candidates for the National and Provincial Assembly elections line up to pave streets and lanes, finance sewerage systems and erect schools to secure votes (interviews: April 13 and 21, 2012).

This case of pro-poor housing governance did not originate in comprehensive plans but exemplifies responsive steering due to large-scale illegal encroachment on government land. Poor settlers were able to maintain their ability to live on that land through three types of relational access mechanisms: Paying rents to Railways employees, lobbying the government through resistance activities to enact regularisation policies, and serving as vote banks for candidates in political elections in exchange for infrastructure and service development that conversely aided dwellers' access claims. Even though the protests of Railways' *katchi abadi* dwellers succeeded—especially with the military governments under Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf—thus forging a kind of goal dependency with the joint aim at regularisation, the policies were not enforced, and residents never gained access control. Incentives for adverse power relations prevailed; especially the increase of real estate prices during the property boom of the 2000s incentivised Pakistan Railways employees to urge evictions and lease out land illegally to interested tenants for personal benefit rather than to have it transferred to LDA for regularisation. Even where land was transferred and title deeds were issued, Railways officials still exercised control through racketeering, i.e., by enforcing fees for any action (extensions, titling, repairs) related to individual houses. This does not only subject *katchi abadi* dwellers' full tenure security to uncertainty and undermines state policy but also fails to provide sustainable pro-poor housing.

5. Discussion

In each of the three case studies, a unique combination of path dependencies, interdependencies, and goal dependencies constituted governance paths and their linear and non-linear specific manifestations. We detected that the different phases and components of steering corresponded with the prevalence of certain forms of dependencies. In a planning stage, actor/institution configurations presented themselves as highly path-dependent, and the development of local visions for pro-poor housing schemes in close relation with international discourses constituted an indicator of goal dependency. It dominated the translation of vision into strategy in a second phase. While thus path and goal dependencies structured the framework for pro-poor housing policy implementation, this crucial phase was characterised by the interplay of power relations—actors negotiating the enforcement of their interests—that manifested in numerous interdependencies. These were mainly responsible for steering outcomes and the extent to which non-linear governance paths evolved. However, all three types of dependencies amplified each other and determined the outcome of steering attempts.

Modes of access to low-income housing in all three cases were determined by strong path dependencies linked to the initial conditions in which the respective project was set. We found path dependencies in Ashiana in the institutional LDA/PLDC tandem overriding local government structures, a mechanism manifest in the evolution of Lahore's urban governance frameworks, where government institutions are entangled at multiple levels and paths of governance simultaneously. The role of the PLDC in Ashiana's actor/institution configuration, the trend towards corporatisation in goal-dependent alignment with the latest development discourse, and subsequently evolved market-driven motivations for the development of the scheme plus profit interests of individuals tangible in speculative strategies, all perpetuated the path dependency. In effect, the steering of pro-poor public housing sector activities derailed. Similarly, in the KKB-L case, goal dependencies manifest in the disconnect between the IHS's 'travelling idea' and the beneficiaries of the communal self-funding model's lack of endorsement limited the target groups' ability to gain and maintain houses and services. The case showed, too, that actors, once established in a specific actor/institution configuration within a highly dependent governance path, found it difficult to alter the direction of governance. When they attempted to do so through informal beneficiary-targeted deregulation via concessions, they produced further dependencies, for example a larger number of defaulters. In the case of *katchi abadi* colonies, employees of Pakistan Railways (a powerful federal institution with an asset range of land and properties inherited from colonial times) constrained residents' ability to secure access control of housing despite government efforts of 'responsive steering' to regularise low-income informal settlements. The very idea underlying those regularisations can be considered goal dependent, as different governments, civilian and military alike, have aligned, uncritically, to

the international discourse of granting property rights (de Soto, 2001) to the urban poor—with the assumption that rights-based mechanism alone would ensure access.

The analysis of access mechanisms at work in the three case studies enables us to point out interdependencies that manifest in power relations underlying the respective actor/institution configurations. In all three schemes, rights-based mechanisms (legal and illegal) secured access mostly in connection to other mechanisms. Property rights alone—when available—would not necessarily translate into full access to services. Structural and, particularly, relational access mechanisms proved more influential in enabling or constraining low-income residents' ability to gain, control or maintain access. In Ashiana, connections to politicians and/or the urban development agency could expedite housing delivery and transfers of allotments. In KKB-L, residents could ease the financial effort of purchasing a plot and building a house through formal and informal funding arrangements with the managing NGO. Facilities and service provision could be lobbied via identity-based collective action or by reaching out to NGOs and welfare organisations. In *katchi abadi* colonies, residents maintained their ability to benefit from housing and services through informal payments, strategies of resistance such as intermittent social mobilisation, and by mobilising their bargaining power as voter bank with politicians. Adverse power relations or structural aspects, however, also constrained benefits from the housing projects and the regularisation programmes. In Ashiana, unfavourable purchasing arrangements operated as powers of exclusion, and the protracted construction process—engrained in the entanglements between urban development actors and their conflicting interests and calculations—hampered the delivery of houses. In KKB-L, the lack of cohesion undermined the equal distribution of benefits. In *katchi abadis*, the threat of evictions and the strategic pressure tactics by Railways employees through bribes, intimidation, and coercion sustained residents' uncertainty.

The amplifying effect of entangled dependencies in Ashiana was obvious in linkages between the elections and the pace of construction—a combination of goal-, interdependence, and path dependence. Similarly, KKB-L illustrated how the development process was contingent on the payment of fees and the number of beneficiaries willing to reside in KKB-L—and this in return was dependent on the way the NGO managed (or not) to translate the idea of incremental housing into practice. Likewise, in *katchi abadis*, modes of access were steered by the idea of granting property rights in combination with interdependencies between *katchi abadi* dwellers through building alliances for social mobilisation and between residents, Railways officers, and development authorities—i.e., DG Katchi Abadis and LDA. Here it also becomes evident how an institution such as LDA can be part of different actor/institution configurations and influence different governance paths simultaneously. It also points to the existence of multiple governance paths, the entanglements of which are of differentiated quality and extent and non-linear in nature.

Although failures in all three steering attempts responded in one way or another to the interplay of dependencies producing rigidity in the envisioned plans and their implementation, our analysis revealed an alternative path creation that proved flexible and productive. Unanticipated effects were particularly dominant in KKB-L's case since the governance path strongly depended on translating and implementing a largely de-contextualised vision—the IHS—into reality. Beneficiary-targeted deregulation from above and purposive deregulation (by defaulting in payments) from below opened a space of negotiating evolutionary governance where access mechanisms continued to be adapted and experimented, thus leaving scope for innovation and improvement. In Ashiana, informal arrangements from above in the allocation of houses also developed and were consequently countered with purposive deregulation by residents refusing to pay fees, selling, and renting houses before legally entitled. However, in this case, the effects of alternative path creation benefited mostly specific—well connected—individuals or well-off bidders and, therefore, progressively abandoned the goal to provide pro-poor housing. In the case of *katchi abadi* colonies, the failure of responsive steering—since access control was never obtained—has shaped spaces of civil dissent, resistance, negotiation, and cooperation that require constant re-mobilisation to secure good-enough tenure.

6. Conclusion

Actor/institution configurations in Lahore pertaining to urban governance and specifically low-income housing have changed over time with transforming political economies. Along with this, possibilities, mechanisms, and strategies to access low-income housing and services have also evolved through rights-based and structural-relational access mechanisms. While the politics of promise by different political regimes in Pakistan created an environment of optimism and political mobilisation for the urban poor, they also led to political and bureaucratic appropriation through various state-led or -supported policies and steering attempts. The process of negotiating these different interests not only 'from below' and 'from above' but also in their mutual interdependencies and continuing path dependencies exemplifies what we call the politics of evolving urban governance.

In this article, we combined access theory with an evolutionary governance approach to analyse how steering attempts get derailed and produce non-linear governance paths. We have demonstrated how the attention to power relations between different urban governance institutions and actors reveals the politics of access to low-income housing and services with three case vignettes from Lahore. Gaining and maintaining

access was shown to be highly contested among the stakeholders involved. The failures of low-income housing provision—as well as the mitigation strategies to counter these—can therefore be conceived as access struggles, highly political open-ended processes. Once opened, alternative governance paths turned out to be productive for aspiring low-income property owners who, for example, employed civil dissent, social mobilisation, and strategies of resistance ('collective action strategies from below') in the broader sense, and, in this framework, most meaningfully by pursuing informal mechanisms of purposive deregulation. These were guided by profit interests of actor/institution configurations that discouraged low-income occupancy and by allottees and residents' motivations to gain access even if it meant to default on formal rules. In our cases, when the low-income residents employed relational access mechanisms instead of rights-based ones, this contributed to non-linear path creation with ends even more lose, seemingly unpredictable, and in effect pushing evolving urban governance beyond (stated) initial steering intentions. This finding frames the emerged disconnect between urban normative frameworks manifest in urban planning visions and pro-poor housing policies on the one hand and residents' needs and everyday practices on the other. Our insights explain the dismal prospects for resolving the housing crisis in Lahore and in the wider context of Pakistan.

Abstracting from the specific case of Lahore and low-income urban housing governance in Pakistan, we see the added value of the theoretical merger of access theory and EGT in investigating steering failures in urban governance contexts of other societies—in the so-called Global South, Global East, and Global North. We argue that an EGT-access approach allows tracing the mechanisms underlying the processes through which low-income populations manage to benefit from housing and services across culturally or politically specific contexts. The attention of planners should also be directed towards mutually amplifying dependencies at work. As our cases showed, diverse types of governance dependencies and their interplay constrain the evolution of the planned visions over time, which ultimately risks leading to the reproduction of existing actor/institution configurations, unequal mechanisms of access to housing and services and bundles of powers. Strong path dependencies need to be balanced with calculated non-linearity in path creation to avoid statism and allow productive flexibility to confront challenges and regain shared visions of urban futures. In cities of the Global North, access cum EGT analyses can help to shed light on gentrification mechanisms that often entail the dismantling of public housing and/or the uprooting of low-income residents from renewed and revalued neighbourhoods. In urban agglomerations of the Global South and Global East, these types of analyses can probe further into why different pro-poor housing projects do not deliver stated objectives, i.e., access to housing and ser-

vices for low-income and vulnerable populations. Last but not least, the conceptual approach outlined in this article also provides a lens to capture the productive dynamics of evolving non-linear urban governance paths by taking into account forms of agency and collective action strategies of low-income and vulnerable people.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Policy Assemblages and Policy Resilience: Lessons for Non-Design from Evolutionary Governance Theory

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Abstract

Evolutionary governance theory (EGT) provides a basis for holistically analyzing the shifting contexts and dynamics of policymaking in settings with functional differentiation and complex subsystems. Policy assemblages, as mixes of policy tools and goals, are an appropriate unit of analysis for EGT because they embody the theory's emphasis on co-evolving elements within policy systems. In rational practice, policymakers design policies within assemblages by establishing objectives, collecting information, comparing options, strategizing implementation, and selecting instruments. However, as EGT implies, this logical progression does not always materialize so tidily—some policies emerge from carefully considered blueprints while others evolve from muddled processes, laissez faire happenstance, or happy accident. Products of the latter often include loosely steered, unmoored, and 'non-designed' path dependencies that confound linear logic and are understudied in the policy literature. There exists the need for a more intricate analytical vocabulary to describe this underexplored 'chaotic' end of the policy design spectrum, as conjuring images of 'muddles' or 'messes' has exhausted its usefulness. This article introduces a novel metaphor for non-design—the bird nest—to bring studies of policy design and non-design into lexical harmony.

1. Introduction

Policy design "involves the purposive attempt by governments to link policy instruments or tools to the goals they would like to realize" (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2017, p. 140). Dimensions of policy design, including processes and outcomes, have been viewed as existing along a spectrum from ordered (designed) to disordered (non-designed). While the ordered end of the spectrum is well studied and theorized, there is little useful analytical language to describe the less-ordered end of the spectrum. Metaphors like 'muddles' (Lindblom, 1959), 'messes'

(Roe, 2016), 'garbage cans' (Cohen et al., 1972), and 'anthills' (Czarniavswka, 2009) have either exhausted their value or fail to capture the level of nuance required for a deeper analysis of 'non-design.' More intricate and nuanced analytical vocabulary is needed to resolve the ambiguity plaguing such metaphors, particularly regarding their ability to go beyond rudimentary descriptive issues to capture intangible forces (e.g., habits and institutions) that hold policies together in the absence of structuring intent.

This article takes mixes of policy goals and instruments (hereafter labeled 'policy assemblages') as

units of analysis in the study of non-design from an Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT) perspective; this unit of analysis is more analytically meaningful in exploring policy processes and outcomes than are individual policy instruments. Drawing from EGT, the article explores how the emergence, endogenous evolution, and proactive refinement of policy assemblages are the product of a complex mix of factors including policy ideas, political ideologies, and habits of governance ossified over time.

Non-designed policy assemblages are increasingly common amidst growing complexity in the nature of policy problems and efforts to address them. However, studies of policy formulation and design have struggled to systematically engage with the concept of non-design. Indeed, scholars increasingly see policy change as a contested, negotiated, and constructed phenomenon shaped by a diverse mix of actors, ideas, institutions, and contiguous subsystems (Bemelmans-Videc, 1997; Bressers & Klok, 1988; Capano & Lippi, 2017; Fischer, 2019; Howlett et al., 2009; Linder & Peters, 1991; Peters, 2002; Zittoun, 2009). Such factors conceptually introduce instability and disruption into what design-based theories would posit is a rational and logical policy process, thus requiring additional efforts to better theorize and empiricize both design and non-design. As Van Assche et al. (2014, p. 46) argue with respect to EGT, the "continuously shifting discursive environment" of governance invites a deeper incorporation of evolution and related concepts as alternative metaphors for policymaking.

The practical exigencies of policymaking are often constructed and given effect in accordance with an historically dominant instrumental-rationalist epistemic (Hartley & Kuecker, 2021). Reconciling the embedded legacy of epistemic determinism with the emergent concept and reality of epistemic fluidity or liminality—more art than science—is necessary in an era of increasingly complex problems and contested problem understandings. However, this reconciliation is deeply uncomfortable for policy practice due to the monopolistic influence of formalism on 'serious' analysis and to political demands for policy outcomes that are immediate and measurable only through prevailing epistemics and their methods. These circumstances reward perfunctory and expedient efforts like patching while abhorring the sluggishness and hassle of systemic transformation and associated epistemic reckoning. As the complexity of policy problems and evolving governance structures can undermine the practical and epistemic coherence of policy assemblages, deeper scholarly contemplation of non-designed policymaking processes and outcomes is warranted (Adam et al., 2019).

This article addresses the evolutionary nature of policy non-designs for complex problems by drawing from the natural world a metaphor concerning how elements of policy assemblages cohere amidst complexity, contestation, and even chaos in their creation and opera-

tion. The article proceeds by discussing the potential usefulness of a new metaphor for policy non-design—the bird nest—that is inspired by a recent study in applied physics. It continues by specifying the metaphor along four analytical dimensions that explain the durability of non-designed policy assemblages: structural integrity, diversity of constituent elements, capacity to absorb stress, and boundary elements as containment mechanisms. The article concludes with reflections about how the metaphor can support efforts to strengthen the methodological specification of non-design in the policy sciences.

2. Towards a More Complete Metaphor for Policy 'Non-Design'

Historically, the process of policy design has been conceived as one in which policymakers obtain evidence and facilitate interactions among stakeholders in the process of arriving at authoritative decisions about the course of government activity ('policy'; Colebatch, 2018). Despite the allure of this elegant conceptualization, rational and technically deterministic processes are often absent from policy processes. The resulting policy assemblages bear this imprint by assuming characteristics of 'non-design' in their adoption and implementation, leading them to appear deficient in conceptual 'elegance' and parsimony (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014).

Capano and Howlett (2020) have highlighted the dearth of scholarly attention given to the connection between sectoral politics and ideational paradigms, and to their links with the content and trajectories of policy assemblage choices. Nevertheless, contemporary studies of wicked problems in areas such as climate change show that instances of non-design appear to be more frequent as sectoral boundaries and process routines no longer condition how policymakers and publics think about complex policy problems (Hartley et al., 2019; Head, 2019; Nair & Howlett, 2017a; Peters & Tarpey, 2019). These studies suggest that non-designed assemblages can be the product of a variety of a-rational phenomena including malfeasance, accident, and unproductive or incomplete negotiation of conflicting interests. Furthermore, such processes and practices can frustrate the efforts of many policymakers and analysts to conceptually rationalize the function of policies (Head, 2010; Howlett, 2020; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014).

From a mechanical perspective, non-designed policy assemblages differ from those of designed assemblages in notable ways. For designed assemblages, policy instruments and the mechanics of connecting them are comparable to the ordered and interlocking structural elements of a building (e.g., where beams, walls, and joints cohere). Further, the political aspects of decision-making that facilitate the formal adoption of a particular design can be compared to those that shape the aesthetic preferences of architects, engineers, and city planners (e.g., choices about a building's size, style, materials,

and associated zoning limitations). Nevertheless, such metaphorically straightforward conceptualizations do not fully capture the less rational and deterministic aspects of policy assemblages. The natural movement towards complexity and disorder in society, a type of entropy assumed by EGT, invites an alternative perspective for holistically understanding the shifting contexts and dynamics of policymaking. Critics of excessive formalism in policy design often argue, in accordance with EGT, that macro-conditions and local contextual idiosyncrasies often impede efforts to hermetically rationalize and analyze policy problems and calibrate solutions, particularly as overlapping and contingent systems co-evolve and policy legacies become entrenched (Van Assche et al., 2017).

An emerging line of research examines the potential for fresh understandings about policy change at the intersection of complexity and evolutionary governance; for example, Bubak's (2021) 'structure-in-evolution' approach emphasizes distinct evolutionary and adaptive patterns in particular types of policy systems. EGT argues that these governance and policymaking outcomes emerge amidst the functional differentiation, complex subsystems, and varying temporal dimensions of policymaking contexts that render instances of non-design inevitable (Van Assche et al., 2017). Examples of common processes that lead to such outcomes are cases in which time and knowledge are limited (e.g., Covid-19 pandemic response) and in which conflict among actors in subsystems pervades deliberations and decision-making processes (Weirich, 2004).

From this view, non-designed policy assemblages can lack the logical functionality that in some evolutionary perspectives is often assumed to terminate in evolutionary dead-ends or failures. However, empirical observation shows that non-designed assemblages can endure over considerable lengths of time despite their structural heterodoxy. Many such assemblages are complex and durable systems that emerge from processes in which components are often woven together strategically but also opportunistically or accidentally. These 'naturalistic' systems (resembling phenomena that occur in nature) are reflective of seemingly disordered but functional phenomena such as the anthills that Czarniavswka (2009) uses as a metaphor to describe the development of complex organizations through the entrepreneurial activities of self-interested actors.

A similar metaphor—that of a bird nest—has been used by research in applied physics to describe the structural mechanics of complex component assemblages emerging from interdependent and disorganized building processes. In their study of the functionality of bird nests from the perspective of materials science, Weiner et al. (2020) identify the presence of an instinctive evolutionary or 'natural' logic that draws on the characteristics of materials, their inter-relationships, and the stabilizing role these materials play in a structural system. The authors argue that "real bird nests have inspired

scientific study for hundreds of years, but the underlying logic from a practical, physical perspective is coming closer to focus with research into both nest structure and building behavior" (p. 11).

From a policy perspective, both the anthill and bird nest metaphors acknowledge that complex structures can emerge in the absence of a 'blueprint' and can thus be applied to understand the many instances of policymaking and policy design where formal or structured intent is missing. However, the bird nest metaphor adds deeper analytical nuance than do metaphors such as 'anthills' by considering the characteristics of policy assemblage structure (e.g., components used to construct nests) as reflective of the diversity of 'materials' available 'at hand'—that is, instruments, tools, and norms coalesce to form a disordered but effective and durable policy assemblage. The bird nest metaphor and its implicit invocation of 'bricolage' (Levi-Strauss, 1966) lends itself better to the analysis of non-designed processes than do architectural metaphors, because using formal architectural language in non-design settings generates the expectation that a structure improperly engineered or constructed would simply collapse under duress rather than endure indefinitely.

3. Four Analytical Dimensions of the Bird Nest Metaphor Applicable to Policy (Non)Design

The bird nest metaphor helps resolve the otherwise paradoxical image of a long-lasting but unstructured edifice (e.g., a non-designed policy assemblage). A bird nest can be seen not simply as shorthand for the chaotic, disordered, and clumsy mélange of disparate elements but as a product of evolutionary wisdom and instinct; such dynamics can also exist among policymaking institutions and actors, whose effectiveness is evident in their survival (if not in their formal design). The practical insight emerging from this metaphor is that evolutionary wisdom and instinct in policymaking—the products of tradition, policy styles, and path dependencies (Howlett & Tosun, 2018; see also Enkler et al., 2017; Haydu, 2010)—fills gaps left by the absence of formal design, intent, and rationality. Accordingly, non-designed assemblages may be seen as structurally resilient despite lacking many of the characteristics demanded by the logics of formal design.

As it is applied here, the bird nest metaphor takes inspiration from Weiner et al.'s (2020) natural-experimental work in the field of applied physics. That work, as previously mentioned, examines the resilience of structures from the perspective of mechanical integrity, diversity of constituent elements, capacity to absorb stress, and boundary elements as containment mechanisms against which to load a structure's outward-pressing 'force chain.' The latter is illustrated by Weiner et al. (2020) as reflecting the difference between a bird nest and a grain silo: Both are structurally coherent and finite, but only the latter has externally imposed

containment mechanisms—the walls of the silo—that offset relatively weak cohering friction among the materials (individual grains) being contained. This is a crucial dimension of the metaphor, as policy assemblages often lack such a structuring mechanism but hold together through internal frictions and dependencies. According to Weiner et al. (2020), filaments—sundry items and 'dis-ordered meta-materials' collected by birds for building nests—can, when randomly and tightly packed, enhance structural resilience; the authors label this resilience an "elastoplastic response to oedometric compression" (p. 1).

The bird nest metaphor in the policy realm conceptualizes material packing density and frictions, mechanical response to stress, and internal boundary elements as, respectively, the characteristics of policy instruments within an assemblage, their collective resilience against stress, and their coherence as largely independent of exogenous threats and constraints. The resulting policies are often regarded as weak and inefficient but, like a bird nest, their ad hoc and unstructured nature provides some redundancies that allow them to absorb unanticipated stresses and ultimately to exhibit resilience.

As such, the metaphor has potential usefulness in capturing the chaotic but functional side of a Levi-Straussian continuum referenced by Howlett and Mukherjee (2014): The formal and deterministic techne of policy design being informed by evidence, best practices, and first principles, as against the bricolage of policy non-design seen as ill-informed by knowledge, cobbled together somewhat randomly, and layered non-strategically over time (Johnson, 2012; Levi-Strauss, 1966).

Methodologically, within the policy sciences the defining characteristic of such 'non-designs'—their absence of macro-stylistic cohesion—has eluded the application of common metaphors in the field that rely on assumptions about formal design.

Analyzing the individual components of such a policy or policy assemblage through an EGT perspective invites use of the bird nest metaphor because policy components in isolation—such as a subsidy or a penalty—often have less complexity than the entity they combine to form. The bird nest metaphor captures the processes of randomness, stochasticity, and even chaos common to

many natural and social systems and characteristic of much policymaking (Feldman, 2019; Kiel & Elliott, 1996; Young, 1991). The random packing of components in a nest, for example, bears similarity to the kinds of log-rolling and mutual support that legislators and decision-makers often use in negotiating the particulars of policy initiatives that, once enacted, can remain in place to 'cement a deal' for an extended period (Dyckman, 2018; Lindblom, 1959).

To more clearly illustrate how the metaphor is applied, Table 1 provides a comparison of the metaphor's vehicle (bird nest) and tenor (policy assemblage) across 'components' (as constituent elements comprising the whole), 'resilience' (as the structural capacity and capability of the assemblage), and 'coherence' (as a qualitative characteristic of the assemblage). The remainder of this section elaborates on this content by discussing each of the aforementioned analytical elements and their function within the metaphor: structural integrity and diversity of constituent elements (components), capacity to absorb stress (resilience), and boundary elements (coherence).

3.1. Dimension 1: Structural Integrity Emerging from Disorder

Recognizing, if implicitly, the applied lessons of Benyus' (1997) work on 'biomimicry,' Weiner et al. (2020, p. 2) argue that conventional theories about humanly design can learn from natural ones, and that "our [humanly] intelligent, prescriptive design process has proven successful, but could only stand to benefit by emulating strategies of naturally-selected design, which rely on emergent properties of disordered matter."

Applied to public policy, the bird nest metaphor implies that the collective strength of multiple policy instruments generates time-fortified interdependencies and complementarities that can produce an endogenous logical coherence matched to a given setting, even amidst exogenous stress and the failure or alteration of constituent instruments to meet formal standards of coherence and consistency. In the policy realm, cognate processes such as decision accretion, patching, and layering often result from conflicting or inconsistent priorities

Table 1. Summary comparison of bird nest and policy assemblage concepts.

	Bird nest (Weiner et al., 2020)	Related 'policy assemblage' concepts
Components	Characteristics, loadings, and friction points of nest packing materials	Characteristics, choices, designs, interactions, and inventories of policy instruments
Resilience	Mechanical response to stress and potential for 'reproducible behavior' (reversion to original form)	Durability of policy assemblage amidst uncertainty, systemic disruption, and incidental exogenous shocks
Coherence	Boundary effects, bricolage, 'jammed' state	Policy coherence, path dependence, policy layering, policy ossification, institutional stasis/inertia

over time, as policymaking bodies come under the control of a rotating mix of political or ideological regimes seeking to make their own institutional imprint (Howlett & Rayner, 2013; Weiss, 1980). Under such circumstances, internal redundancies and contradictions in a policy can sometimes enhance its resilience, serving as institutionalized checks-and-balances on the tendency towards over- and under-designing policies that commonly characterizes formal policymaking processes (Maor, 2020). Although such policy assemblages can have occasional micro-dissonance in the form of short-term incoherence or inconsistencies, they may also have longer-term macro-durability, enabling the survival of the assemblage amidst stress.

3.2. Dimension 2: Diversity of Constituent Elements

The bird nest metaphor helps to better conceptualize the diverse characteristics of elements constituting policy assemblages. According to Weiner et al. (2020), nest materials can be assessed on their physical characteristics and shape types (e.g., spheres/discs, ellipsoids/spheroids, high/low aspect ratio cylinders, and flexible/frictional rods) rather than on purely structural functions. The authors argue that "the evolutionary value of the bird nest appears to be in the mechanical properties of its jammed state, specifically those emerging from a subtle interplay between geometry, elasticity, and friction between its slender, flexible elements" (Weiner et al., 2020, p. 2). The collective coherence of these aggregated nest materials is derived in part from the capacity of flexible rods to be packed in ways that maximize density and volume through random 'reorientations' (passive repositioning that declines over time and leads to materials settling into a stable state).

These characteristics are again reflected in similar dynamics found in many non-designed policy assemblages. Unlike in a more formally designed building, for example, these assemblages become more layered and complex as they evolve (as do wines and cheese, to invoke other metaphors deserving additional research). Inconsistencies arise but over time the policy assemblage achieves equilibrium or stasis through its 'jammed state.' This state emerges as instruments are repositioned to adapt to changes not only externally under contextual circumstances (e.g., macro-economic, geopolitical, and environmental) but also internally within a mix of complementary policies (e.g., shifting political preferences for instrument choice, redesign or introduction of new instruments, and resource or funding alterations). Both types of repositioning can lead to a serial progression of momentarily 'settled' states, each of which is a consequence not of strategic visioning but of novel and fleeting circumstantial mandates. This dynamic is reflective of reiterated problem-solving policymaking processes described as 'process sequencing' (Daugbjerg, 2012; Haydu,1998; Howlett, 2009).

3.3. Dimension 3: Capacity to Endure External Stress

Bird nests are capable of absorbing substantial external stress, as are policy assemblages. According to Weiner et al. (2020), the repeated compacting (through laboratory-induced mechanical stress) of the aggregate materials of a bird nest leads to the nest's decreasing plasticity over time. The authors describe this plasticity as a 'meta-material property' in which the structural integrity of materials is maintained even as the policy assemblage evolves from a loosely packed state to a 'random close packed limit.' The authors state:

> As the aggregate loads and deforms, a given inter-particle contact experiences shear. Upon overcoming static friction, the contact slides to a new equilibrium position. The contact returns to its original position(s) as the load is relieved but only after overcoming static friction in the opposite direction. The return trip is less 'springy' because the previous deformation is still temporarily stored in the network of frictional contacts. (Weiner et al., 2020, p. 7)

These descriptions suggest vivid and useful connotations for policy assemblages that accord with recent studies of policy resilience and agility (Capano & Woo, 2018; Howlett, 2019). Through repeated stress, the accumulated effect of incremental adjustments to the characteristics of a policy assemblage and its constituent elements leads to progressively higher degrees of statutory specification and thus more institutional rigidity (that is, the endurance of existing institutional structures and practices amidst external forces pressuring them to change). Components of the assemblage co-evolve into mutual dependence and stability, even in the absence of *ex ante* engineering, and static friction becomes the ossifying force that induces policy stasis and equilibrium.

A policy assemblage thus may begin with disparate and random instruments, but these instruments can collectively congeal into a stable entity over time. Through processes such as patching and sequencing of new instruments, the mechanisms and institutions that connect them strengthen, while supportive ideologies and normative goals may become more coherent and gain political strength as internal interests and dependencies among actors solidify (Howlett & Rayner, 2013). At the same time, transformative stress events can induce permanent changes in constituent instruments or in their relative position within the assemblage—such as the permanent adoption of distance learning platforms after the Covid-19 pandemic (Liu et al., 2020). During such a stress event, instruments may shear relative to one another in a liminal state of transitory plasticity and mutual adjustment. After the stress and in accordance with observations about the bird nest under laboratory induced pressure, the new state can stabilize and become sticky and slower to revert to its previous state while still harboring some imprint of its previous form.

3.4. Dimension 4: Boundary Elements as Mechanisms of Coherence

Internal stress effects and boundary elements are common to both bird nests and policy assemblages. Nests can be physically manipulated and stressed without losing their structural coherence. According to Weiner et al. (2020), a bird nest's jammed state holds together independent of external mechanisms: "One plausible explanation involves the additional role of flexibility in the construction process. If sticks are forced to bend while packing, some of this bending stress could be stored in the system, held by frictional contacts" (p. 8). The authors compare the intangible boundary elements resulting from internal tension and cohesion in a nest with the tangible boundary elements of an imposed structuring mechanism such as the walls of a grain silo. In the former, sticks hold their collective form without an encasement; in the latter, a pile of grain would disintegrate and sprawl outward without containment walls.

For policy assemblages, such boundary coherence can develop over time even without the imposition of meta-strategic order, as instruments mutually adjust and settle (e.g., through complementarities, concurrent resourcing, interdependencies, and value to an organizational or bureaucratic culture focused on survival through stability). This process is facilitated through repeated iterative policy cycling (Daugbjerg, 2009; Howlett, 2009), while external forces like political pressure and global crises struggle to break the institutional rigidity and coherence (Howlett & Rayner, 2007); even outlier events like Covid-19 have proven incapable of making a more substantive policy imprint in some cases (Capano et al., 2020). Indeed, structural dissonance within an assemblage is often, paradoxically, a source of durability as the process of mutual adjustment and pruning is continuous; assemblages, like nests, often bend but do not break.

Finally, rhetorical patching and frame-building can be deployed to safeguard the political legitimacy of policies and policy assemblages by providing rationalizations of existing policy outcomes. This action is what the bird nest metaphor analogizes as the application of 'mud,' providing narrative cohesion in the absence of *ex ante* logical order and design. Technical and rhetorical exercises in non-design settings are often applied less to analysis of policy assemblages than to incremental and *ex post* adjustments for resolving problems that arise from inadequate conceptualization and absence of cohesion (Howlett & Rayner, 2013; Wellstead et al., 2016). Various types of layering, patching, and bricolage are used to fill gaps and correct deficiencies for which no anticipatory provisions may have been conceived. As such, efforts to technically or rhetorically harmonize elements of an originally non-designed assemblage function as 'structuring mechanisms' that resemble boundary elements.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Analyzing the apparent paradox of long-lasting and durable policy assemblages lacking any immediately recognizable logic or coherence eludes the application of formal structural metaphors. This conceptual puzzle invites creative new heuristics and cognitive devices that embrace nuance, fluidity, and even contradiction in moving beyond the description of such assemblages as simply 'non-designs.' There is scant analytical purchase in metaphorizing non-design only as a hopeless and random mess or failed architectural endeavor. The intentionality guiding a design process for many existing policy assemblages is quixotic; political contestation, managerialist accretion, and policy layering often yield policy patchworks that elude purely 'rational' analysis (Feindt & Flynn, 2009; Wellstead et al., 2016). The evolutionary character of many policy assemblages in politically contested settings embodies contradictions, inconsistencies, and inefficiencies. As such, applicable descriptors or metaphors must also offer corresponding analytical depth, and the naturalistic metaphor of the bird nest is one such option. Decision-makers must work with the materials at-hand in crafting policies, and often incoherent or less rational political factors and ideologies constitute the adhesive agent ('mud') that binds together policy elements ('twigs' and 'sticks'). Although apparently rudimentary and lacking aesthetic quality, the resulting policy assemblage can be unexpectedly durable.

Rapid and haphazard policy responses to systemic crises exemplify the type of non-designed assemblages for which the bird nest metaphor provides analytical insights. For example, Covid-19 policy responses emerged from a patchwork of public health interventions, with gaps in logic and knowledge apparent and evolving over time—from the initial panic-demand for personal protective equipment and hospital ventilators to mixed messaging about mask-wearing, lock-downs, contact-tracing, and vaccine roll-outs (Capano et al, 2020). The bird nest metaphor provides the basis for a potentially richer description of how policy assemblages developed in a case like Covid-19 than do more rational descriptions based on classical notions of rational and evidence-based policymaking.

The bird nest metaphor illustrates how systems appearing to defy the directives of rationality may actually hide their own inherent order and achieve desired outcomes, even through different logics than those of formal design (Dobuzinskis, 1987). Indeed, instrumental-rationalist ways of conceiving policy assemblages have a limited field of epistemic vision that can impede the analysis of policymaking in complex settings experiencing unanticipated stresses and threats (Hartley et al., 2019). This limitation has implications not only for policy design (or the lack of it) at the 'chaotic' end of the design spectrum, but also in settings where formal intent and strategy exist but must negotiate high levels of uncertainty and complexity (Walker et al., 2013).

In a more reflective sense, as EGT suggests, disorder need not be considered an insult to reason but can be an unrecognized driver of durability that falls outside the gaze of technocratic instrumentalism and determinism. According to Weiner et al. (2020, p. 9), "architects and artists have recently demonstrated the elegance and practical versatility that comes with embracing disorder and self-assembly instead of prescriptive control to build reconfigurable structures of emergent stability." Policymaking amidst chaos and uncertainty, for example, should embrace rather than eschew disorder as a pathway for learning, adaptation, resilience, and the avoidance of policy myopia (Nair & Howlett, 2017b). According to Van Assche et al. (2020, p. 703), "tracing reality effects of strategy is pushing [analytical] observation to cross the boundary of inside and outside, of governance and its social-ecological environment." Even where traces of design formalism endure, the external social-ecological context often limits the predictability and deterministic function of strategic intent; conversely, an inherent institutional order can give apparent formal effect to policy assemblages that congeal in otherwise haphazard or non-designed ways.

Pursuant to this point, the practical insight of viewing policy assemblages as a bird nest is that the metaphor helps emphasize how both internal and external forces act upon policy design formation and endurance. This dynamic and the often non-designed response to policy problems are not fully articulated in, for example, Lindblom's metaphor ('muddling through') but strongly implied by EGT and theoretical work inspired by it. An example is Simon's (1969) notion of 'artificial' empirical phenomena, which are characterized by their adaptation to environmental settings and their mediation of inner and outer factors (obscuring endogenous complexity while reflecting exogenous complexity).

With reference to a bird nest, internal complexity exhibits little of what formalism or instrumental rationalism would recognize as logical, but its outward manifestation reflects imperatives visited upon it by external forces and shocks (with effectiveness exhibited by its structural resilience). In a type of evolutionary pruning, elements of the nest—as in a policy assemblage—absorb external shocks and adapt by endogenously reordering themselves and their relationships. In a policy setting, this may occur through the active re-commissioning of policy initiatives or systems that had been abandoned as a dominant pathway unfolded, or through a passive phenomenon in which elements of an assemblage are so deeply institutionalized via their interdependencies that they are under little threat of alteration or elimination by external forces.

In examining the practical usefulness of the bird nest metaphor, of particular note is how it highlights the potential resilience of non-designed policy assemblages—which need not be seen always as unfortunate accidents in need of repair but occasionally as unvarnished expressions of collective intent or situational imperatives interpreted through prevailing institutional settings (and gaps or inconsistencies therein). As such, better understandings about how non-designed policy assemblages materialize, operate, and endure is a useful analytical insight for policy practitioners operating within a constellation of overlapping and often contradictory institutional settings (Turnbull, 2018). Formality in intent and design may appear to be a requisite for the endurance of policy assemblages, but this endurance can be the product also of policy components that ossify from path dependence and mutually settle into equilibrium through a process lacking design (Djanibekov & Valentinov, 2015; Hayoz, 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014).

In closing, translating an appreciation of the informality inherent in an evolutionary system into policy practice, however uncomfortable and challenging it may be for practitioners, can be undertaken in several ways. Straightforward and immediately actionable efforts, for example, are promoted by studies urging policymakers not to 'over-design' or 'over-prescribe' policies and assemblages (empirical examples of the role of informality in the survival of institutions can be found in Boin et al., 2020). A longer-term perspective would involve the refashioning of policy design's legacy instrumental-rationalist mindset to better accommodate notions of uncertainty, precarity, precaution, and epistemic contestation (Hoppe, 2017). The latter is a fraught and complicated undertaking because it is more political than technocratic, requiring a radical interrogation of the relationship between policy and society and calling into question not only what the policy field already knows but how the field knows it and how it generates new knowledge. Given that such a reckoning has the potential to destabilize the epistemic hegemony of rationalism and the many policy structures and processes built on it, the prospects of an evolutionary enlightenment remain uncertain but warrant further scholarly and practical contemplation.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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