

Navigating between fragmentation and cohesion

Citation for published version (APA):

Pekdemir, C. (2018). *Navigating between fragmentation and cohesion: theory and practices of global governance for sustainable development*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. ProefschriftMaken Maastricht. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20181218cp>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2018

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20181218cp](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20181218cp)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Valorisation

Article 22 of the Maastricht University *Regulation Governing the Attainment of Doctoral Degrees* prescribes that a doctoral candidate adds a valorisation addendum to the dissertation. In this regulation, knowledge valorisation is described as referring to the “process of creating value from knowledge, by making knowledge suitable and/or available for social (and/or economic) use and by making knowledge suitable for translation into competitive products, services, processes and new commercial activities” (adapted definition based on the National Valorisation Committee, 2011, p. 8). In the following sections, three main issues in relation to valorisation of this dissertation are addressed. The first section relates to the social relevance of the research results that go beyond its scientific relevance. The second section concerns the societal groups other than the scientific community for which the research results may be of interest. The third section details the concrete activities in relation to disseminating research relevance and results beyond those activities that have specifically been undertaken for the scientific community.

Social relevance

The governance of sustainable development is characterised by a growing number of standards. In international and regional value chains, standards, regulations, and certification schemes from public, private and public-private actors and partnerships, have gained prominence. This trend can be observed in various policy domains and sectors of trade. The governance of some issue areas demonstrates more regulatory cohesion than others. It has been argued in this dissertation that the assessment of regulatory cohesion and fragmentation is pivotal in understanding whether the system of governance is conducive to realise sustainable development. One of the research results presented in this dissertation has been a mapping of different policy mechanisms that, based on the organisational, normative and collaborative context of a sustainability concern, can be considered desirable for creating policy cohesion. In this way, this dissertation offers a basis for making an assessment on whether a proposed policy mechanism for cohesion can be considered conducive to realise sustainable change.

More generally, the social relevance of the research results is to inform policy and decision-making for sustainable development. Particularly the role of collaboration and coordination (and the absence thereof in policy domains), both between but also across actors from the different societal domains, may specifically inform actors on the current drawbacks and future possibilities for policy and decision-making for sustainable development. The research results of this dissertation may be used as leverage points, that is, as an indication of places within various governance systems for sustainable development where policy is considered either too fragmented or too cohesive for the

conducive realisation of sustainable change. In the following paragraphs, the various societal groups for which this dissertation is of particular relevance will be detailed.

Societal groups

The results of this research are of interest to those who govern, those who are governed, as well as those who are affected by sustainability standards more generally. Here we identify three particularly relevant societal groups, namely public actors from governmental or intergovernmental organisations, and private actors from civil society groups and the business domain. The first group of public actors increasingly deal with governance actors from the private sphere. Since the origins and solutions to sustainability problems transcend national boundaries, in an ever-globalising world, public actors must be informed on international, transnational, regional, and various national sources of authority. In advancing the public good, public actors must also recognise the ways in which fragmentation or cohesion in global governance may advance or impede their objectives. As for instance the case on tensions in global governance systems (chapter 5) illustrated, fragmentation or the choice for an ill fitted policy mechanism to foster cohesion – which may (un)purposefully be stimulated by public actors – can counter affect the efforts of public policy. This dissertation provides insight on the fact that tensions not only arise on basis of system characteristics of a policy domain, but may equally arise through the ways in which cohesion is sought. The concluding chapter of this dissertation offers an overview of various policy mechanisms actors can endorse to advance sustainable development.

The research results are also relevant for civil society groups. The case on private fair labour arrangements (chapter 2) showed that standard-setting and particularly certifying non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may diffuse and counteract the fulfilment of sustainability goals as some governance arrangements deviate from well-established standards and regulations. Coupled with the fact that certifying NGOs compete for market share and offer different compliance and enforcement mechanisms, the transformative capacity of certifying NGOs is questioned. Civil society groups which engage in standard-setting and certification may take from this that deviation on the content of standards, may very well be a way to self-preserve the organisation, but can counteract the broader goal of inducing transformative sustainable change. In addition to the case on private fair labour arrangements (chapter 2), which illustrated that advocacy groups not only raise awareness on misconduct or try to influence public opinion, the case on regional standards for organic production (chapter 3) also illustrates that the standards of civil society groups can be normative in international and transnational standard setting.

Actors from the business domain are also a societal relevant group in relation to this research. In general, the objective of businesses is creating an environment that is suitable for business conduct, which may or may not be aligned with values for sustainable development. Present day, it is not abnormal for businesses to engage in partnerships with public or civil society actors, and an increasing number of businesses see a value for business in participating in governance arrangements and certification schemes as the case on fair labour arrangements (chapter 2) and the case on private metagovernance (chapter 4) has shown. The research results of this dissertation may inform businesses on the type of governance arrangement they want to align with, as well as inform them on possible private metagovernance mechanisms of change. As the case on private fair labour arrangements (chapter 2) showed that standard-setting and particularly certifying NGOs can deviate from well-established standards and regulations, the research results can raise awareness amongst businesses in understanding how their engagement in such certification schemes may diffuse and counteract the fulfilment of sustainability goals.

Activities

Research progress and results have been presented at academic conferences and international journals. However, I have also participated in a couple of debates in which I have communicated my research results to a wider academic audience. One such occasion was an event in April 2015 organized by Amnesty International students from Maastricht University, entitled '*Should I buy fair-trade products?*' Here I participated as a panellist, presenting information on the case on private fair labour arrangements (chapter 2) and detailing the different approaches by fair labour arrangements. The student audience was particularly interested in finding out, which certification schemes in general are to be trusted and understanding whether buying certified products contributes to sustainable development. One of the key messages I brought to the table was that there is reason for some optimism on the work of fair trade labels, although we cannot assume that they hold the answer to bring about the necessary systemic change to alleviate fair labour violations on a global level. Another critical part of the discussion centred on the recognition of the audience that there may be trade-offs in the consumer choices they make, e.g. organic or fair trade products from distant countries as opposed to local produce.

Another event for which I was invited as a panellist was a debate café on responsibility and sustainability in December 2018. Organised by Studium Generale in close collaboration with the Green Office students of Maastricht University, the event was entitled 'Whose responsibility is it anyway? Making a sustainable world' and attendance was open for the academic community, as well as residents of the Maastricht area. The central themes of the debate concerned the relation between individual action towards a sustainable world, the

responsibility of governments and big companies, the ways individuals can make impact through individual actions, and collective action to influence companies. In relation to the topic of this dissertation, the cases on private fair labour arrangements (chapter 2) and on tensions in global governance systems (chapter 5) have been relevant. These include the positions that: 1) all actors, whether public, private, individual or collective identities, are responsible for making this world more sustainable; 2) both individual and collective action is important for raising awareness and inducing change on corporate level; 3) although some levels of fragmentation in global governance can be conducive in striving for sustainable change, fragmentation also leads to adverse effects, such as regulatory uncertainty. In this regard, it is important that all actors adhere to well-established international norms and standards so as not to diffuse and counter the effective realisation of sustainable change.

Another way in which knowledge is disseminated is through education. For example, in a lecture for the course Governance for Sustainable Development, several aspects of this dissertation are used to explain and exemplify issues concerning partnerships and standard-setting by public and private actors. In the future, educational tasks can possibly be further developed specifically relating to the fragmentation and cohesion debate in global governance.