

The Sustainable Development Goals:

A blueprint or a meaningless sketch? Process tracing of the SDGs and a case study in the city of Nijmegen.



Colophon

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Acknowledgements

Herewith my master's thesis. This is the final piece in completing my master's degree in Environment & Society Studies and specialization in Corporate Sustainability. After getting my bachelor's degree in America, it was time to come back to this wonderful country. In America, where I lived in the green mountain state of Vermont, I started to love the subject of sustainability and therefore decided to specialize in it. During my master, I learned a lot about this subject and my interest was piqued by its implementation process. Hence, I started exploring how the SDG framework can realize sustainable development.

However, the completion of this research went through several ups and downs. But now it is really here: my own master thesis.

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I hope you enjoy reading this research, and that it can bring some clarity to the complicated world of sustainable development implementation. And who knows, maybe this clarity will motivate you to see what you can do in achieving the SDGs and become a stakeholder yourself.

Summary

Purpose: This research aims to map out the implementation process of the SDGs on all levels of society and the relevant governmental structures involved. To achieve this objective, this research seeks to investigate the policies and practices for implementing the SDG framework on the global, national, and local scale, with particular emphasis on its connection to the local environment. focus on the relation of the framework to the local environment. Therefore, this study will utilize SDG 11 as the basis of analysis to examine if SDG implementation is experienced at the local level. This research seeks to provide new insight into where the process of SDGs does or does not contribute toward a universal roadmap to a more sustainable future, thereby reducing the research gap regarding the government structures involved in SDG implementation.

Design/methodology/approach: A process-tracing method is applied to map out the SDG implementation procedure at the UN level, the EU level, and then the Netherlands. This involved comprehensive desk research, as well as expert and case interviews. This was followed by a single-case study on the city of Nijmegen to examine the SDG implementation on the local level. This involved case interviews, a content analysis of important policy documents, and a survey conducted by residents. To do so, mediating variables which stimulate the two-way SDG implementation process were distinguished. These mediating variables will help to analyze the approaches of SDG implementation on the different levels of society.

Findings: The research findings indicate that the stimulating variables mentioned in the research are adopted in Europe, and the Netherlands has incorporated them into its national policies. However, upon examining the sub-national and local levels, some of these factors are no longer observable. Thus, the implementation approach of the SDGs at the local level in the Netherlands does not align with the implementation approach aspired by the United Nations. This observation can be attributed to the emergence of implementation-related challenges at the sub-national and local levels.

Originality/value: The mediating variables chosen for this study have never before been used to examine the implementation process. Furthermore, a complete overview of the SDG implementation process on all levels of society has rarely been given of government structures in SDG implementation. By linking the selected variables to a single case study, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the implementation approaches of the SDGs, thereby making it possible for stakeholders across the Netherlands to understand the SDG framework. The SDG framework is meant for all people, and a better understanding of the SDG implementation process can help ensure that the SDGs' objectives are achieved for all people.

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Abbreviations

SDGs = Sustainable Development Goals

UN = United Nations

UNCED = United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

HLPF = High-level Political Forum

MSP = Multi-Stakeholders Partnerships

MDG = Millennium Development Goals

MSI = Multi-stakeholder initiatives

SSEN = Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment of the city of Nijmegen

SDSN = Sustainable Development Solutions Network

PMO = Prime Minister's Office

MGoS = Major Groups and other Stakeholders

VNR = Voluntary National Review

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

For years now, sustainable development has been a concept mentioned by politicians. In 1997, the Brundtland Report introduced this concept to a wide audience. With this report, the political and environmental landscape changed permanently (Sneddon et al., 2006). The most recent sustainable development agenda is introduced in September 2015, by the United Nations. This is Agenda 2030 which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals consist of 17 goals and come with accompanying targets and indicators to make the goals measurable. Biermann et al. (2017) describe the SDGs as the most all-encompassing global goals yet, which brings together the agendas of both global development and environmental sustainability into one encompassing framework. Another crucial aspect of the SDGs is that they are created to be implemented on every single scale of society; thus on the global, national and the local scale. This expected multi-level implementation of the goals brings up many questions, and considerable focus has been directed toward the scientific barriers presented by the SDGs. However, there is a research gap present on the attention to governance challenges posed by the SDGs (Bowen et al., 2017). Arrangements for national SDG implementation in the Member States are missing and were not included in-depth in the negotiation phase. This can be unfolded by the fact that Agenda 2030 is extremely broad, which makes it difficult to define implementation responsibilities (Personn et al., 2016).

When we measure sustainable development through the SDG framework, a problematic outcome can be discovered: Sachs et al. (2019) state that four years after the adaptation of the Agenda 2030, not one country is on track to meeting all 17 goals. More researchers such as Moyer and Hedden (2020) state that the progress toward all the SDGs at a global scale has been slow. Because of the significant involvement of diverse actors and stakeholders at every level, a major challenge remains present in developing a single comprehensive implementation framework. Yunita et al. (2022) question whether the current policy systems can realize the implementation of the SDGs. Key players in implementing sustainable development are the United Nations (UN), governments, the private sector, and civil society. This research seeks to explore how governmental actors on different scales are engaging with the necessary responsibility for implementing the SDGs. According to Mastrángelo et al., (2018), the SDGs cannot be achieved without an improved understanding of the effectiveness of governance systems, and the effect institutions have on the social distribution of ecosystem services. In other words, there is a knowledge gap, because there is not enough understanding about the crucial role governments can play in addressing the current socio-ecological issues humanity faces. Hák et al., (2018) emphasize the idea that a concept or a policy becomes more emotionally important and meaningful to an individual when it is understood better. The authors highlight the need for a graspable narrative, therefore well described sustainable development or policy themes should become a priority. This study aims to describe these themes by focusing on the overall implementation process of the SDG framework on the global, national, and finally local levels. Currently, 55% of the world's population lives in cities, by 2050 this percentage is expected to be 65% (Chen, 2022). The Agenda 2030 aims to realize its goals on all levels of society, however, many challenges arise when the implementation of the SDGs on a local level is considered (Krellenberg et al., 2019). At the local level, the SDGs are increasingly being used to assess sustainable development, while they were originally designed to increase global sustainable development. Therefore, this study will eventually

investigate whether the concept of sustainable development is implemented through the SDG framework and thus to see if the SDGs are not only being used for the assessment of sustainable development at the local level. After all, global change and sustainable development are not only executed by large government instruments, with the large growth rate of urbanization, cities have become important agents for sustainable development (Zinkernagel et al., 2018). This makes local governments essential stakeholders on the issue. One of the objectives of this research is to discover which mediating variables can strengthen the local implementation of the SDG framework. Ultimately, this research aims to help fulfill the knowledge gap by clarifying the government systems around SDG implementation and by doing so also helps to fulfill the research gap on government challenges. This will make it possible to find out whether the SDG framework is utilized as a roadmap to the future we want, or seen as a meaningless sketch by government stakeholders.

1.2 Research Objectives and Research Question

The research objective is to map out the implementation process of the SDGs on all levels of society and the relevant governmental structures associated with it. To do so, this research seeks to investigate the policies and practices for implementing the SDG framework on the global, national, and local scale, with a special focus on the relation of the framework to the local environment. Therefore, this study will utilize SDG 11 as the basis of analysis to be able to examine if the implementation of the framework is realized on the local level. This research has two main objectives, and several sub-objectives accompany these. In this section, an overview of these objectives is given. To be able to achieve the research objective, the following research question will be answered:

How are the SDGs implemented from the UN to the local level in the Netherlands, and is their SDG implementation approach similar to the implementation approach the UN aspires?

Main objective 1:

To map out how the implementation of the SDGs goes into effect on the various levels of society, thus on the UN level, the EU level, and the national level.

Sub-objectives for objective 1:

- To find out which mediating variables stimulate the implementation of the SDGs.
- To examine how the different governmental stakeholders engage with the necessary responsibility for implementing the SDGs, and if these mediating variables are visible.

Main objective 2:

To examine if the implementation of the SDG framework is realized on the local level in the Netherlands.

Sub-objectives for objective 2:

- To utilize the discovered mediating variables to examine whether the SDG implementation is approached similarly in the city of Nijmegen.
- To examine whether SDG 11, the urban development goal, is implemented by the city board on a local level.

- To discover whether people on a local scale actually experience the implementation of SDG 11.

To achieve these objectives, mixed methods will be utilized. Desk research, interviews, and content analysis will be included to create a large variety of qualitative data. To realize the second main objective, a case study on a local case will be performed. Quantitative data will be gathered from surveys filled in by residents of Nijmegen. Further elaboration on the methodology employed in this study can be found in Chapter 3.

1.3 Scientific Relevance

The current global sustainable development agenda raises a lot of interesting questions about how to implement the framework on all levels of society. Finnveden & Gunnarsson-Östling (2017) state that the SDGs are not very specific and in need of contextualization. Kirst and Lang (2019) also state that more experiential knowledge about policies and strategies in relation to achieving sustainable development on the local level should be introduced. But despite this, they conclude that the SDGs have the ability to serve as a basic model for cities to find out opportunities for sustainable development in a city. Krellenberg et al. (2019) state that “Although works recognize the importance of SDGs, there are few academic publications dealing with the practice of SDG implementation in cities.” (p. 2) By working toward a case study on a local level, this research endeavors to illustrate the practical application of SDG implementation in cities. Specifically, on the role of governmental stakeholders in this process. The aim of this study is to contribute to the contextualization of the SDG framework on various levels.

According to Ylönen & Salmivaara (2021), the aspect that makes the SDGs transformative is that *all* member states are expected to implement the SDGs. The countries of the Global North now have a bigger responsibility than just the financing of programs or policies in the Global South. The literature on the SDGs has not yet comprehensively examined the full consequences of the multi-level policy collaboration for sustainable development.

This study aims to investigate the degree of policy collaboration that is present in the implementation of the SDGs, by examining the overall process with a special focus on the local level. This aims to decrease the research gap around governmental aspects of SDG implementation on the local level. Although the implementation of SDGs has already been studied, this study will hopefully provide new insight into where and how the process of SDGs does or does not contribute toward a universal roadmap to more sustainable development.

1.4 Societal Relevance

“ The only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it. ”

- John Locke

An enormous amount of research has already been done on the SDGs, yet the overview of SDG implementation on all levels and the connection of this implementation approach to a case study can be very relevant to our society. This way of research is encouraged by SDG expert and professor Frans de Man (2022) during an interview. Despite the ambitious reach that the framework aims to

have, some people on a local scale cannot even properly tell what the SDGs actually are. This can be connected to something John Locke once said, “the only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it.” In this case, the world reflects the consequences of environmental, social and economic challenges the world currently faces and the fence is the knowledge of sustainable development. The desired societal benefit of this study is to increase people’s knowledge of the concept of sustainable development and especially the most all-encompassing global framework ever introduced. By helping to decrease the knowledge and research gap regarding SDG implementation, the understanding of the SDG framework will increase. A better understanding of how implementation works has the potential to help stakeholders implement the SDGs more efficiently.

Through my first research objective to map out how the implementation of the SDGs goes into effect on the various levels of society, stakeholders will develop an idea of where improvements can be made. Since Agenda 2030 (2015) includes “all people” to engage in achieving the SDGs, it astonished me to observe that individuals within my personal circle lack familiarity with the SDGs. This research is designed to be understood by stakeholders on all levels and aims to be socially beneficial to Dutch stakeholders, as well as everyone who aims to get a better understanding of the SDGs. The real-life example of the member state toward a city level will hopefully function as a way to simplify the complicated implementation approaches, so that “all people” in the Netherlands have the opportunity to understand this global framework for achieving sustainable development.

By taking a critical look at every level of society and linking all levels together, this study hopes to show the implementation process through a unique lens. This research aims to form a bridge between the theoretical and complicated side of the SDGs and the social and actual implementation in a city.

1.5 Thesis Outline

After explaining the aim of my research, the theoretical framework will be presented in Chapter 2, consisting of a historical overview that contains relevant events that influenced the implementation of the SDG framework. This overview will also aim to cover relevant theories and concepts from existing literature. After this historical overview, relevant literature pieces regarding the SDGs will be explained. Following this theoretical background, my conceptual framework will be introduced. In Chapter 3 the methodology will be shown together with an explanation of why the particular methods have been chosen. This chapter will include the research methods used, outline the data collection, and the data analysis. It will conclude with a comprehensive explanation of the validity and reliability of the research. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the targeted process tracing analysis of the implementation of the SDGs, which tracks the policy processes from the UN level down to the local level. Additionally, the results of the case study conducted in the city of Nijmegen will be presented. In Chapter 5, findings will be discussed, and matching conclusions will be drawn. Finally, there will be a discussion on the limits of my research and a recommendation for the involved governmental stakeholders in the Netherlands

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to give a short and comprehensive historical overview of the SDGs, to bring understanding around the concept of sustainable development and the framework, and the relation to the urban environment. This research focuses on the implementation process of sustainable development at different levels of society and takes a critical look at the role of the SDGs in this process. The SDG framework consists of goals set by the UN on a global scale and is also meant as a blueprint for stakeholders on the national scale and regional scales. Since many stakeholders are involved, it is impossible to implement the SDGs in the same way for every country.

2.1 Sustainable Development

Sustainability is often used as a synonym of the term sustainable development, and can therefore be used simultaneously. Nonetheless, many researchers are not advocates of this contradictory term. They argue that the development part relates to growth, and this is impossible to achieve sustainably (Redclift, 2005). According to Redclift (2005): “sustainable development needs to be linked to new material ‘realities’, the product of our science and technology, and associated shifts in consciousness.” (p.225) Examples of new environmental approaches which are still used today are concepts such as of “buen vivir” or “degrowth.” In this research, the term sustainable development refers to sustainability and does not necessarily mean growth. The concept of sustainable development is frequently related to three forms of sustainability. Moldan et al. (2012) for example distinguish three forms of sustainability: economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability. This is called the “three pillars” concept of sustainability. These three pillars are typically portrayed in three circles that overlap in the middle; here we can find overall sustainability and thus sustainable development. (see Figure. 1). These three pillars have also been translated into the motto “People, Planet, Prosperity” (Elkington, 1998). Sustainable development is also used in critical documents of the European Union (EU) and has been used so frequently over the past years that we can take it as common sense.

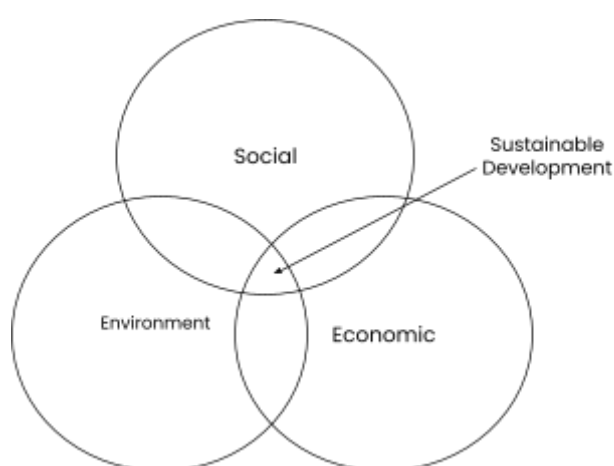


Figure 1. The three pillars of sustainability

2.2 Historical Overview of Sustainable Development

Presented below is a concise overview tracing the historical development and progression of sustainable development over time. An important milestone that brought sustainable development onto the map was the creation and introduction of the Brundtland Report (1987). The concept has traveled a long way and has become popular in scientific research as well as the essential role it has within global development agenda and policy (Ruggerio, 2021). There are a plethora of definitions of sustainable development, which can make it difficult to find one clear meaning for it. However, a well-known definition and the most often cited definition of the concept is the one used many years ago from The Brundtland Report (1987) (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). Here sustainable development is stated as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p.15). This definition is still a popular definition of sustainable development. The UN, for example, relies on this term. The Brundtland Report triggered more action for sustainable development and possibly induced the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also known as the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (Jain and Islam, 2015). At first, the meaning of sustainable development mainly referred only to environmental aspects, but after the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, the concept developed a deeper understanding and became a dominant definition. From there on it showed up in international constitutions, international treaties, and laws (Luke, 2005; Redclift, 2005). The outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit resulted in Agenda 21. The history of involvement with Multi-stakeholders Partnerships (MSPs) for sustainable development started during this summit as well. Here, the first chapters on Major Groups and other Stakeholders were integrated, and thus began the integrated nature of sustainable development together with this Agenda (Hemmati & Dodds, 2016). Major Groups and other Stakeholders are distinguished into nine sectors of society, to create joint action through these main channels related to sustainable development. Agenda 21 provides a set of international expectations and norms regarding sustainable development, which have the potential to influence government policy. The agenda covered several issues and emphasized what is called liberal environmentalism, which is the unity between economic growth and environmental protection (Bernstein, 2001).

In 2000 the next summit was held, namely the UN summit on the Millenium Development Goals. Here, naturally, the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) were drafted. These goals were recommended to have 2015 as a deadline for implementation. The MDGs are shown in Figure 2 (Chasek et al., 2016). The MDGs are focused on developing countries and lack important underpinnings in areas such as human rights, economic development, and intergovernmental negotiations. It was also too vague as to how these goals should then be implemented. The summit that followed was the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), known as Rio 10+, held in Johannesburg. The purpose of this summit was to provide feedback on the implementation of expectations and norms set in Agenda 21, ultimately resulting in the Johannesburg Plan. This was a comprehensive plan of implementation for the actions set out in Agenda 21 (Mensah, 2019).

Box 1 The Millennium Development Goals

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Global partnership for development

Figure 2. Chasek et al. 2016., The Millennium Goals.

Ten years later, in 2012, Rio+ 20 was held. Two themes received the most concern in the preparatory process. Namely, the green economy and the institutional reform agenda. During this conference, they agreed to negotiate, among all 193 countries, a broad agenda. Three years later, the UN Member States agreed. A promising and ambitious agenda was created. This agenda has the potential to strengthen international aspects of all planetary and human well-being in the post-2015 period, which would hopefully push all people to a sustainable way of living (Chasek et al., 2016). In Figure 3. Important milestones toward this agenda are virtualized.

Figure 0.1: Important milestones on the road to the Agenda 2030

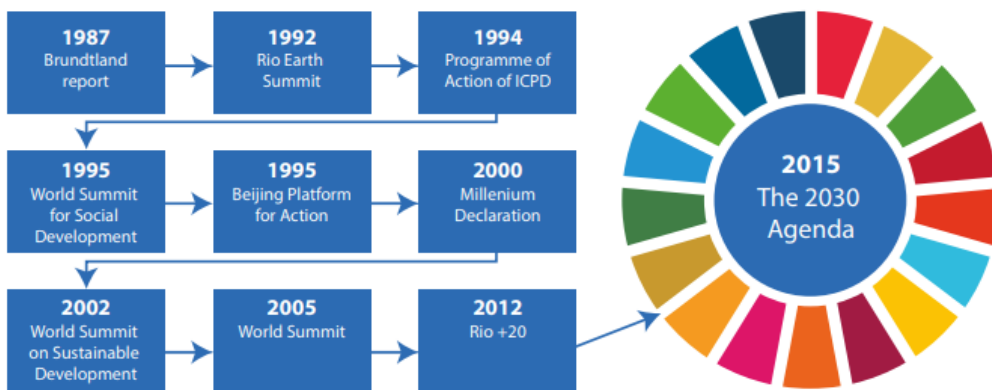


Figure 3. Important milestone on the road to the Agenda 2030 (European Commission, 2020).

This study will analyze the newest framework for sustainable development introduced by the UN to achieve sustainable development on all levels of society. As said before, the UN’s vision of sustainable development corresponds with the definition given in the Brundtland Report.

2.3 The Sustainable Development Goals

2.3.1 Three scales

In September 2015 the 193 member states of the United Nations agreed on a mandatory action plan: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve sustainable development. In *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the goals and targets are clearly stated. Two years later another important milestone was the introduction of a renewed Resolution (A/RES/71/313) which includes indicators to realize the targets and eventually the goals. This Resolution thus consists of an overview of the 17 goals and targets of the SDGs together with its indicators. These indicators make the compass of the SDGs more tangible and form a framework for the implementation of sustainable development on three different scales: the global, the national, and the local scale. Between the national and local scale, a regional or sub-national scale can be observed. In this research, this scale is analyzed as a bridge between the other levels.

Every year, a review takes place at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), where member states can present their voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Typically, only a selection of the SDGs will receive priority during the annual meeting. Every four years, this meeting transforms into an SDG summit, where governmental stakeholders review overall progress in the SDG implementation and determine the priorities for future years (Widuto, 2020).



Figure 4. The three scales which the SDGs recall upon.

In the agenda, the three dimensions of sustainable development are prioritized. In the resolution, it is stated that the goals and targets “are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development.” (p. 5) Besides the more traditional characteristics of sustainable development, as introduced in the historical overview, the UN also emphasizes other characteristics of sustainable development. The 5 P’s: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership are prioritized. Thus, the UN emphasizes the necessity for peace and the eradication of poverty in all of its forms to be able to achieve sustainable development. The eradication of poverty is necessary for all three dimensions, which is crucial for the promotion of sustainable, equitable, and inclusive economic growth. This is expected to create more chances for everyone and thus result in sustainable development. The partnership component of the agenda is determined to connect all means needed for the implementation of the agenda. Among other things, this will be done through a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. This partnership includes a Partnership Platform, which is a global registry of multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary agreements on achieving the SDGs and allows all stakeholders to connect (UN General Assembly, 2015).

According to van der Heijden (2013), actual structural or design aspects of new governance arrangements have the following characteristics: *flexibility, soft law mechanisms and target and results orientation*. When connecting these aspects to the SDGs, all these aspects are present. The

wide range of actors included in achieving the SDGs asks for a flexible approach; there is not one form of implementing this framework. Governmental actors on the national, sub-national, and local levels are free to come up with their implementation strategy. The non-legally binding aspect of the frameworks makes it hard to give sanctions to stakeholders and indicates that this framework is mostly based on soft law mechanisms. The presence of the 169 targets and the deadline of 2030 to achieve them is evident for the target and results orientation of the framework. The question is whether this form of new governance arrangements can truly bring about the transformational changes that are hoped for. All in all, this framework has the potential to harmonize the way the people on this planet should work together on creating a sustainable future on all three scales of society.



Figure 5. An overview of the Sustainable Development Goals. (UN.org, n.d.)

2.3.2. SDG Framework

The UN aims to establish the SDGs to be used as a primary overarching principle in states, provinces, cities, and even private enterprises worldwide. They are calling upon *everyone* to get involved and seek to achieve this through the establishment of global networks around the world (UN General Assembly, 2015). Frans de Man (2022) states in the explanatory interview that the UN maintains a two-way approach, this is visualized in Figure 6. This overlaps with Niestroy et al., (2019), who state that there is a need for a multilevel governance mechanism. It is emphasized that this approach works both ways, from the top-down but also bottom-up. The bottom-up approach can start at the local governments and then reach up to the member state level, which then can affect the EU level. The foundation of these two approaches in SDG implementation down to the local scale is the evidence-based target and indicator framework, or in other words the SDG framework. On the one hand, there is a track that utilizes a top-down approach, and another track that utilizes a bottom-up approach.

The top-down approach aims to implement SDG policy at all levels and is focused on the *policy*. The bottom-up approach aims to operationalize the *monitoring* aspect of the framework. The UN realizes this by providing comprehensive ways of measuring progress on every level of society (UN General Assembly, 2015). Figure 8, for example, shows the set of indicators associated with achieving SDG 11.

Monitoring progress provides insight into the implementation process and can therefore impact policy regarding the implementation of the SDGs. So this means that SDG implementation occurs at every

level of society when the two sides are optimized. This optimization can be stimulated through the presence of several stimulation factors regarding the SDG implementation. These factors will be illustrated later in this chapter and will be part of the conceptual framework of this study.



Figure 6. Top-down and bottom-up approach of the SDGs.

2.3.3 Stakeholders involved with SDGs

The UN often recalls the importance of the full participation of all stakeholders. It states that the SDGs are: “to be implemented by all countries and stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership,” (General Assembly, 2017, p.1). Important stakeholders to which they lay claim include member states, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, United Nations entities, indigenous people, business and industry, children and youth, farmers, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, women, workers and trade unions. In conclusion, they acknowledge that everyone plays a significant role in creating a sustainable future for all (UNEP.org, n.d.). The UN (2015) recognizes this to be the strength of the framework: “It is an Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.” (p. 12) The UN calls upon the responsibility of humankind. There is, however, a certain concern about this call for Multi-stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs) by researchers, because they do not always have the most efficient performance. This fact, together with the call for a large collaboration of stakeholders on three different scales, strengthens these concerns (Fowler & Biekart., 2017).

In the urban environment, many of the previously mentioned stakeholders live and work together in the same area. One significant stakeholder related to SDG realization is the government body present in a city or community. Hughes et al. (2018) highlight that the operationalization of neighboring or national governments has a significant influence on how SDG implementation is shaped on the local

level. This shows the unavoidable entanglement of the multiple scales in combating the challenges emphasized by the SDGs.

The urban environment is rapidly changing and is becoming more complicated, which results in problems with the ability of a wide range of stakeholders in achieving cooperation. Thus, while literature emphasizes the unconditional importance of inter-institutional harmony at the regional level, this is a challenge because of the rapidly changing environment. All the more reason to take a critical look at what is necessary to implement sustainable development and to focus on different levels of society.

2.4 SDG Localization

Researchers are positive about the SDGs and admit that engaging with the SDGs on a local level can influence, sustainable development. Despite the resource constraints present in some local areas, local governments are already motivated to implement sustainable development into planning. The Agenda 2030 does recognize the crucial role of local action in addressing the SDG progress (Saiu & Blečić, 2022). According to Bilsky et al. (2021), a bottom-up approach plays a crucial role within the framework of multi-governmental mechanisms and can play a bigger part in the implementation process than only the monitoring of the goals. Localization enforces a multi-level governance mechanism. The outcomes of various local policy initiatives already align with many SDG targets (Hartley., 2019; Lucci and Lynch., 2016). Also Finnveden & Gunnarsson-Östling (2017) state that the goals can be useful for example urban planning. They admit that there can be discussion around how the goals can be implemented, but the fact that the goals themselves are agreed upon allows urban development to start from a common perspective on sustainable development. According to Niestroy et al. (2019), the implementation of the SDGs at the EU level and Member State level may have the ability to re-enforce each other, this is most likely to succeed under the following conditions.

An example of an initiative that can stimulate overall SDG implementation is the preparation of Voluntary Local (VLRs) and Subnational Reviews (VSRs), these are reporting efforts by local or smaller stakeholders that triggered change and created a pathway for institutions toward a more sustainable vision. The majority of the evaluation work should be tailored to local conditions (UN General Assembly, 2015, §75). Bilsky et al., (2021) state that “In general, bottom-up reporting efforts have progressively opened up channels for the recognition of local governments in the achievement of the SDGs and enhanced multilevel governance approaches.” (p.719). An example of a bottom-up approach is visible in Europe, where local governments already did have a fostering environment for local governments and have some experience in self-government. Here, policies and strategies were developed to implement the SDG framework and were able to promote local ownership of this global task.

McKenzie & Abdulkadri (2018) state that: “Localizing the 2030 Agenda is essential to raising public awareness and creating national ownership of the SDGs.” (p.13). Krellenberg et al. (2019); Krantz & Gustafsson (2019); Fox & Mcleod (2021); use the term SDG localization for SDG implementation on a local scale. This touches upon “a process of integrating these global goals into global planning procedures and calibrating them with the city scale.” (Leavesly, 2022) (p.1417) SDG Localisation is a widely researched concept and still is an ongoing issue. Hartley (2021) states that “Governments that operate following the global narrative join a well-resourced and deeply institutionalized movement that has the support of mainstream scientists.”(p. 2) This implies that when local stakeholders use the SDG framework they can perform as harmonized actors and can give more transparency to the people living in the cities. The United Nations state as well that regional and sub-regional levels are critical in

realizing the SDGs. In the resolution A/RES/71/313 the evident-based framework can support these stakeholders into concrete plans and create forceful sustainable development policies at the national level, but also on a smaller, more regional scale (UN General Assembly, 2017). It is concluded that national governments play an essential role in the implementation of the SDGs, but they do carry not all responsibility. Cities can be change agents by creating pathways for sustainable development (Bowen et al., 2017; Parnell, 2016).

2.5 Sustainable Development Goal 11

One goal of the SDG framework is to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. This goal is also referred to as the Urban Sustainable Development Goal 11 (USDG11) which is directly aimed at the city's sustainable development. After all, global change and sustainable development are not only executed by large government instruments such as the European Union, with the large growth rate of urbanization, cities have become important agents for sustainability (Zinkernagel et al., 2018). The targets and indicators of this goal (visible in Figure 8), are directly aimed to increase sustainability on the local level. SDG 11 is the most related goal to the urban environment and has a strong correlation with city conditions, as well as its interconnectedness with other SDGs. In the figure below this linkage is illustrated. This suggests that progress made toward achieving more inclusiveness, resilience, sustainability, and safety in cities will lay the groundwork for accomplishing the objectives of the SDGs (Osman et al., 2021).



Figure 7. Interlinkages between SDG 11 and other SDGs. (Adapted from Un Habitat, 2018).

Pradhan et al. (2017) examined the synergies between indicator pairs. They define synergies as positive correlations between indicator pairs, and they indicate that a high score on one indicator can result in a high score on another indicator of another goal. For SDG 11 the synergies strongly outweigh the trade-offs of implementing this particular goal. This stresses the interrelation between the achievement of the SDGs. While the 2030 Agenda recognizes the relationship to urban areas in

achieving SDG 11, it should be noted that the local level is crucial for the successful implementation of all SDGs (Zinkernagel et al., 2018; Krantz & Gustafsson, 2020).

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

<p>11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums</p>	<p>11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing</p>
<p>11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons</p>	<p>11.2.1 Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</p>
<p>11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries</p>	<p>11.3.1 Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate</p> <p>11.3.2 Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically</p>
<p>11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage</p>	<p>11.4.1 Total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, natural, mixed and World Heritage Centre designation), level of government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship)</p>
<p>11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations</p>	<p>11.5.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population</p> <p>11.5.2 Direct economic loss in relation to global GDP, damage to critical infrastructure and number of disruptions to basic services, attributed to disasters</p>
<p>11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management</p>	<p>11.6.1 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities</p> <p>11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)</p>
<p>11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities</p>	<p>11.7.1 Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</p> <p>11.7.2 Proportion of persons victim of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months</p>

Figure 8. Targets and indicators of SDG11.

2.6 Best practices: Finland

In this section, a member state example of a best practice is explained to zoom in on the implementation approach on a national level. The literature review will serve as a foundation for the subsequent presentation of the conceptual framework, which will continue into a thorough analysis of the relevant variables in the context of the case study.

The country with the highest overall score on the total progress toward achieving all 17 SDGs is Finland, and the Netherlands follows further down in the 17th place (*Sustainable Development Report 2022, n.d.*). This section provides a review of the best-performing member state when we take a look at the SDGs implementation from a governmental perspective. According to Ylönen & Salmivaara (2020), Finland has a strong institutional structure which increases the potential for cross-sectoral coordination of sustainable development and thus increases the collaboration between relevant stakeholders on this matter. In 2016, one year after the 2030 Agenda was introduced, the Society's Commitment strategy was updated to be consistent with the SDGs. Since they already had government bodies who are responsible for sustainable development, it was a bit easier to lay the SDG implementation on the national government. However, the partnerships in Finland include a broad range of stakeholders.

The key actors committed to the implementation of Agenda 2030 in Finland have been the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the National Commission on Sustainable Development, and the parliamentary Development Committee. The PMO was appointed for the coordination of Agenda 2030, this was a huge step toward the implementation of the SDG Framework. The office now manages an inter-ministerial working group that measures the progress made toward SDG implementation. Added to this are the regular meetings and debates of civil servants, politicians, and other stakeholders by the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In Finland's Voluntary National Review 2020, it is stated that there currently is a strong existence of an official structure to reinforce the dialogue between the Parliament and the Government. In Finland, the parliament supervises the government. Other relevant actors in the implementation of sustainable development are the National monitoring network, the Prime Minister's Office / Ministry of Environment, the Expert Panel on Sustainable Development, and the 2030 Agenda Youth Group.

On the monitoring side of the SDGs, Finland was the first member state to have an independent strategy to evaluate the national implementation of Agenda 2030 (Räkköläinen & Saxén, 2022). This is called PATH2030 and is meant to analyze and assess the implementation of the Agenda. Finland created its own sustainable development indicator baskets and adapted them to Finland its context. There is a substantial difference in these indicators which makes Finland score better on the international level (SDG Index) than on the national level (Berg et al., 2019). Which indicates that there is still progress to make. In the further future, Berg et al. (2019) state that a "sustainable development policy in the form of a policy segment or separate policy should become obsolete, and striving for sustainability should be more extensively integrated in the function of all policy segments." (p. 56) This evolution suggests that the current structure of sustainable development policies have potential in the first phase of implementation, but eventually sustainability should be integrated into all levels of policy.

All in all, even though Finland has the highest overall score on the SDG process, they acknowledge that their political approach to the SDGs is not yet sufficient and requires a more integrated approach. This is unfortunately not yet possible. Currently, there is still a lot of work to be accomplished in terms of establishing the best targets and pathways for change, as well as, determining the best operating approaches to reach them.

According to Niestroy et al., (2019) a feature that can create policy collaboration between the national and local levels is the front-runner approach. This indicates that when a member state is motivated to implement the SDGs, it should set a positive example for other member states to follow. By doing so, others can compare their progress and see if they can follow the front-runner in the implementation progress. This concept is also known as “benchmarking”. This concept is a commonly used approach, that involves the comparison of practices and performances to learn from the best (Gudmundsson, 2005). This is a form of a soft law mechanism and can be a way to ensure that participants or in this case stakeholders follow new governmental arrangements. Other forms of these soft law mechanisms are the sharing of guidelines and proven methods (van der Heijden., 2013) However, benchmarking asks for a large understanding of governmental structures on the various levels of society. Nevertheless, the UN still utilizes this method by sharing the best performances on the SDG implementation and Niestroy et al., (2019) see great potential in this approach.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

After having introduced the concept of sustainable development and the relevant literature regarding the SDG framework in the preceding section, it is now meaningful to focus more closely on the implementation process. The question is whether the two-way implementation approach designed and introduced by the UN (see Figure 5) is similar on the different levels and if the SDG implementation takes place on the local level in the Netherlands. The predicted causal relationship implied by the UN is that the adoption of the SDG framework by the EU will result in the implementation of the SDG framework on a local scale. Thus, if the framework has the large scope the UN aspired for. Subsequently, in other words, whether the signing of the global agreement on the SDGs by the EU (X) indeed encourages local stakeholders to integrate these goals into local agreements and thus facilitate implementation of the framework at a local level (Y). Figure 9 shows the causal relationship explained.



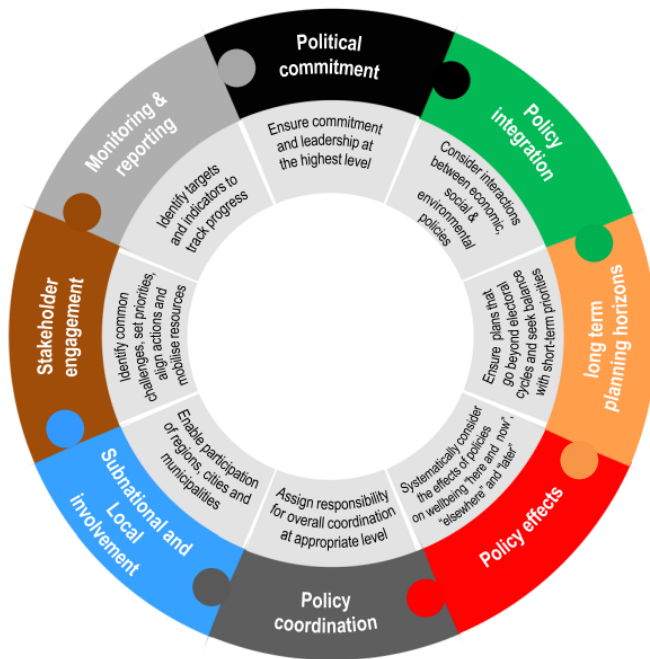
Figure 9. The causal relationship the UN aspires to achieve.

Now follows an overview of the mediating variables which will be distinguished in this research. These mediating variables will help to analyze the approaches of SDG implementation on the different levels of society, and thus give a better understanding of the various implementation

processes. As said in the introduction there is a research gap present in the attention to government challenges. By distinguishing the mediating variables that stimulate implementing of the SDGs and examining whether the governmental stakeholders utilize them, data on the governmental structures and challenges will be gathered. My research aims to bridge the gap between the theoretical and complex aspects of the SDGs and their practical implementation in an urban setting. Therefore, in this section, there will be various theories covered that enhance implementation approaches, subsequently, these will be summarized into mediating variables for the implementation of the SDGs.

The first theory is developed by The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. They developed guidelines for preparing a national sustainable development strategy (UN DESA, 2002). Although the SDG framework did not exist yet, there is a red line visible in the conditions of sustainable development implementation and recent approaches. An OECD review (2020) identified successful practices regarding sustainable development implementation in OECD countries. These successful practices are *policy integration; intergenerational timeframe; analysis and assessment; coordination and institutions; local and regional governance; stakeholder participation; indicators and targets*. Many of these stimulating practices overlap with the eight practice areas presented by the 2030 Agenda Mainstreaming Reference Guide. Here, the areas are seen as opportunities for mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in the national context (UNDG, 2015). This guide is originally created for UN Country Teams, which are teams that are realized to support SDG implementation in developing countries. The eight mainstreaming guidance areas, as defined by the UNDG are intended to support the SDG implementation in situations that are considered complex. Although the Netherlands or other OECD countries might not account for these complicated situations, there is an opportunity in recognizing these implementation approaches and to distinguish the areas through which SDG implementation could be realized. The eight mainstreaming areas are *raising public awareness; applying multi-stakeholders approaches; adapting SDGs to national, sub-national, and local contexts; creating horizontal policy coherence, creating vertical policy coherence; financing and budgeting for the future; monitoring, reporting, and accountability; assessing risks and fostering adaptability* (UNDG, 2015). Many of these areas align with the eight building blocks for coherent implementation of the SDGs. These are visible in Figure 10. These building blocks represent processes, structures, and working methods that can strengthen policy coherence and according to target 17.14 enforce the SDG implementation (UN General Assembly, 2015). The power of these building blocks is that they apply to countries regardless of their political traditions.

Figure 2.1. Eight Building Blocks of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development



Source: (OECD, 2017^[41]).

Figure 10. Eight building blocks of Policy Coherence for sustainable development.(UNDG, 2015)

Another large research that is conducted by Niestroy et al. (2019) designed an assessment scheme which is created by the European Parliament to assess the implementation level of the SDGs at the national level. In this study, an assessment of all 28 member states of the European Union is presented. The seven governance elements utilized in this research as a measurement for SDG implementation are *commitment & strategy, leadership & horizontal coordination, stakeholder participation, monitoring & review, knowledge input & tools, institutions for the long term, and activities of parliaments.*

Upon careful examination of these guidelines, mainstreaming areas, building blocks, etc. for implementing sustainable development or SDGs, it becomes clear that there are numerous overlapping factors and responsibilities that a stakeholder group must take into account during the implementation process. The SDG Getting Started Guide (2015) distinguishes primary responsibilities on how the SDGs could enhance a strong SDG implementation. They include and cooperate with a great deal of the above-mentioned factors in an efficient yet simplified way that is understandable for the majority of society.

Therefore, the mediating variables adopted in this research to compare the approaches of SDG implementation on the different levels of society are:

1. To develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies
2. To develop a national monitoring framework and accompanying set of national indicators
3. To consult with key stakeholders
4. To compile or update an annual sustainable development report
5. To prepare for regional and global dialogues on SDG implementation

Retrieved from: SDG Getting Started Guide. (2019)

These mediating variables can optimize the SDG implementation on different scales. Academic research with these mediating variables is not yet performed, therefore this study is going to reduce the research gap on governmental implementation of the SDGs. Noticeable is the fact that one variable can only be operationalized at one level of society: variable number two can only be realized at the national level. However, at the local level, it is possible to examine whether this national monitor framework will be utilized by local stakeholders and therefore this variable can still be examined at this level. Other variables however are applicable on the EU, national and local level. Therefore, this research will examine if the mediating variables are present on the EU level, the member state level, and finally the local level. The presence of these variables will positively affect the (Y) Local implementation of the SDG framework because the SDG implementation will be stimulated by the EU and national stakeholders. Hence, the existence of these variables at the EU, national, and sub-national levels increases the likelihood of successful implementation of SDGs at the local level. However, when mediating variables are missing on the EU, national or sub-national scale, then there may be a weakening in the SDG implementation process as intended by the UN.

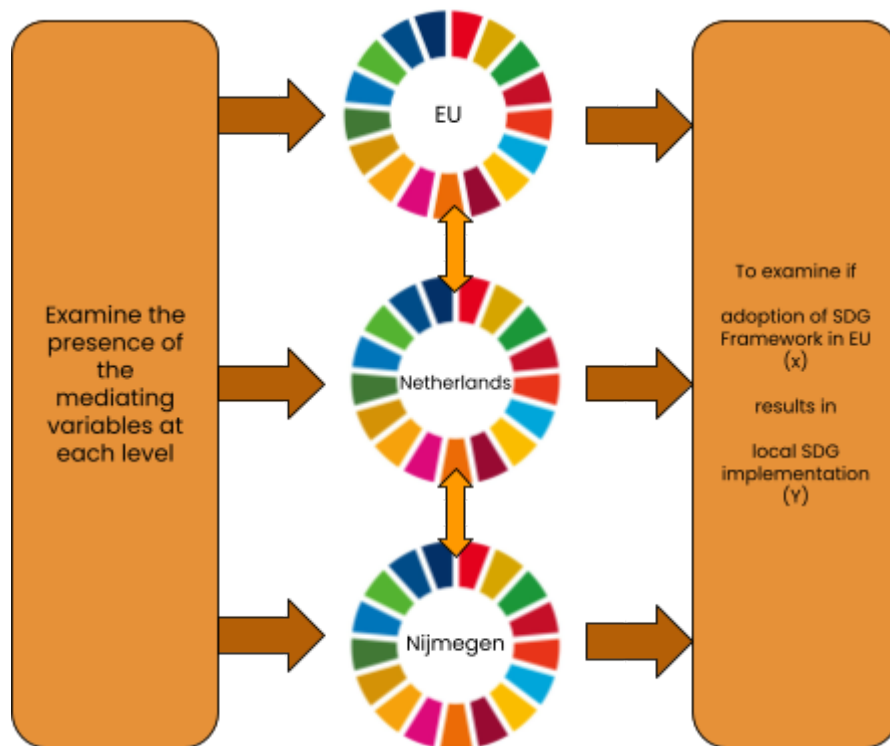


Figure 11. Designed to show how the mediating variables influence the local SDG implementation.

The SDG framework is transformative and there is no unified plan for the changes a country needs to make toward implementation, which makes this task often still a difficult one to carry out (McKenzie & Abdulkadri, 2018). These mediating variables however have the potential to strengthen the realization of this transformation from the UN level to the local level. Biermann et al., (2022) explain that transformative impact occurs when three different types of effects take place. One type of effect is the institutional effect, which is defined as indications for the reorganization of existing institutions or the development or coordination of new departments, committees, programs, or offices which are

linked to the achievement of the SDGs. The other type of effect is discursive effects, these are present when global and national debates overlap more with the objectives of the SDGs. The third type of effect is normative effects, which indicate the presence of actual modifications in regulatory and legislative frameworks and policies. Hence, for the SDGs to be transformative and to achieve the potential impact of the EU's commitment to the SDGs (X) on local stakeholders' integration of these SDGs into their agreements (Y) it is useful to connect Biermann's theory to the variables.

2.7.1 Develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategy

The first mediating variable, is to develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies. This will increase the SDG implementation on all levels of society because when coordination of implementation is present, then there is an increase in the ability on policy coherence on implementing and prioritizing the SDGs. This is the responsibility of the governmental institutions. This corresponds to what Biermann et al., (2022) defined as institutional effects. This mediating variable can imply that whole new ministries need to be created. Another effect that this variable takes into account is the normative effects of SDG implementation. This effect corresponds more with the building block for policy commitment, and thus the actual implementation of policy that motivates the responsibility of stakeholders. And as the OECD (2018) states that political commitment, when communicated transparently, and thus publicly expressed from the top, is an important foundation for prioritizing policy goals.

2.7.2 Development of a national monitoring framework

Furthermore, for SDGs to trickle down into national and regional policies, it is critical to adjust targets and indicators at the national level (Gasper, 2019). Bossel (2001) stated that the utilization of indicators to "indicate" sustainable development are efficient, and purposeful to measure the progress of sustainability in the urban system. The companionship of these modified frameworks together with indicators could make it more efficient to facilitate policy frameworks that align with the SDGS. Therefore, the mediating variable is the development of a national monitoring framework with a national set of indicators. However, if local stakeholders utilize the monitoring framework designed by the UN, or local stakeholders utilize the national monitoring framework to create their own, this is seen as a stimulating factor toward SDG implementation.

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) states that "Indicators will also serve as a report card to measure progress toward sustainable development and to help ensure the accountability of all stakeholders for achieving the SDGs. The monitoring framework and indicators for the SDGs should reflect the lessons learned from the MDGs, namely that timeliness is crucial for the indicators to inform decision-making." (p.25)(SDSN, 2015) Therefore if the measurement of indicators can be obtained then there is a higher chance of the insurance of accountability of all stakeholders for achieving the SDGs. For this, an extensive range of approaches and tools to support decision-making in the field of SDGs is proposed. These frameworks and means include benchmarking, indicator-based assessments, system analysis techniques, and target mapping, and are all techniques to incentivize the ability to monitor the level of implementation (SDSN, 2015; UNDG, 2015).

2.7.3 Consult and collaborate with stakeholders

Additionally, the SDSN (2015) states that because the SDG framework is integral in nature, it requires a great deal of cooperation and agreements between national and local municipalities, multiple ministries, and other government institutions. It is essential to maintain accountability and transparency across all levels, and therefore new regulatory measures are necessary to guarantee the collaboration of the variation of stakeholders. According to Hemmati & Dodds (2016) the goal to strengthen implementation is to enable, strengthen and optimize the sustainable contribution that Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) have on all the different levels of society. MSPs are voluntary agreements between distinctive stakeholders. The linkage between different stakeholders is of enormous importance for the implementation to make it to the local level. The third mediating variable is to consult and collaborate with other stakeholders. If this stakeholder engagement is present, then the policy coherence will have a larger chance of success (OECD, 2018). A lesson learned from Finland is to encourage the new generation to debate on the SDGs as well, Finland reinforces this through the Agenda 2030 Youth Group. Berg et al. (2019) even mention that this aspect should become increasingly important and needs more mandate and budget from the Finnish top.

2.7.4 Update a sustainable development report

Another mediating variable is the promise to compile or update a sustainable development report on the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the value of a follow-up and review framework for achieving the SDGs (*Building partnerships and strategies*, n.d.). If a stakeholder group compiles a SDG report, then the chance of a situation in which member states and all involved stakeholders will work together to achieve a common goal: the SDG implementation.

For this, the General Assembly puts great responsibility on the shoulders of governance. They state: *“Our Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the Goals and targets over the coming 15 years. To support accountability to our citizens, we will provide for systematic follow-up and review at the various levels, as set out in this Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.”* (p. 11) (UN General Assembly, 2015) According to SDSN (2015), monitoring and evaluation include deployment of data and indicators, VNRs, progress reports and HLPF. Beisheim & Fritzsche (2022) state that if the High Level Political Forums (HLPF) are *“used wisely, the HLPF could be a key node for an UN-led inclusive and networked multilateralism, bringing together and engaging the different parts of the UN system, countries, and stakeholders.* (P.7)

2.7.5 Preparation of dialogues

Biermann et al. (2022) state that discursive effects are present when there are shifts in global and national debates that result in the dialogues being more aligned with the objectives of the SDGs. According to Bexell & Jönsson (2019) governments increasingly indicate the SDGs in their policy documents. This indicates this could be seen as a first step into the implementation of the SDGs and the transformative nature the SDGs imply to have. The MSP can also gather data and therefore support the existence of a strong review on the progress of SDG implementation. Therefore mediating variable five is the preparation of SDG dialogues and debate on the SDGs. According to the German Council on Sustainable Development (n.d.) the preparation for debate and dialogues on the framework

will increase the chance of higher level of awareness among all stakeholders as to what sustainable development truly means. The dialogues and debates will enforce this awareness by brainstorming about possible solutions and by illustrating the consequences of social action. Thus, if there is preparation of a debate, then the awareness around the concept of sustainable development will increase.

All these five mediating variables greatly influence the aforementioned causal relationship that will be examined in this research. Namely, whether there is indeed eventual implementation at the local level. Financial considerations are acknowledged to play a crucial role in the implementation of the SDG framework. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that for the purposes of this analysis, financial considerations will be deliberately excluded to make this research feasible within the desired timeframe. The total budget of a country has the ability to influence the local implementation of the SDG framework. However, this mediating variable shall not be included in the conceptual framework as it may deviate from the intended focus of the research.

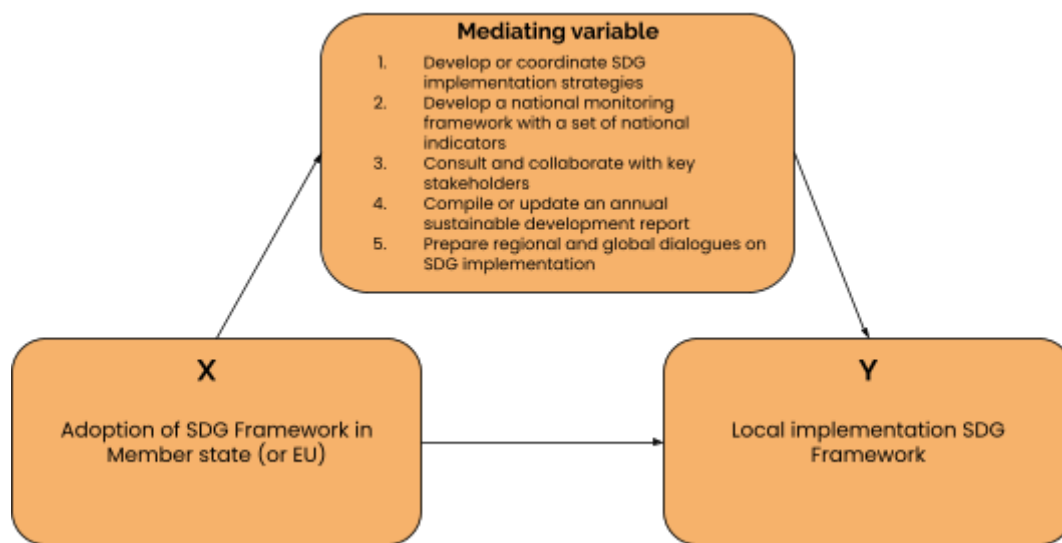


Figure 12. My conceptual framework

2.8 Current challenges and limitations of the SDGs

Despite many advocates of the SDGs, many authors point out weaknesses, especially in the targets and indicators of the framework (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). Despite their widespread adoption, the SDGs have faced criticism for their broad scope, which encompasses a wide range of issues, and for the challenges associated with measuring progress toward their achievement (Swain, 2018). Yunita et al. (2022) question whether the current global policy structure can realize the implementation of the SDGs. Spangenberg (2019) took a look at the implementation of the SDGs in institutions. He refers to institutions as governments and as businesses. He states in his research: “The effectiveness of institutions is mentioned, but not what they should be effective in doing - concluding from the SDG imperatives, overcoming poverty might be an objective as the social targets indicate, but accepting limits seems to be none of their purposes.” (p.317) (Spangenberg, 2019). With this he points out that

the goals of the UN might be too ambitious and contradict one another; for example, the goal is to end poverty but there is no sign of a transformation on a smaller scale in the way we make and distribute money. He concludes that the SDG framework falls short of the greater vision and thus does not include a strong enough strategy to realize the grand promises that need to be implemented in the policy of a country. Besides this, there have been many other criticisms of the SDGs including the fact that there are too many targets and indicators, that the targets included are not the right ones or that the wording is not sufficient enough (Nicolai et al., 2016).

The danger local governments might face when adopting global or national goals such as the SDGs is that the local government becomes more of a promoter of what the central government wants to realize, without considering and realizing the wishes of the local people (Hughes et al. 2018). For this reason, there is a necessity for transparency and improved communication (Guha & Chakrabarti., 2019). An example can be monitoring reports on the implementation efforts done by local stakeholders. This will create a harmony of interest, and this will improve the ability of a local government to make the right decisions related to the implementation of sustainable development. There currently is a clear link established between sustainable development and urban areas (Kickbusch, 2016; Watts, et al., 2015). Nonetheless, criticism around the SDGs suggests that there does not appear to be enough understanding of the concept of spatial planning in the SDG framework in urban areas. A study performed by Giles-Corti, B. et al. (2020) implies this as well. As many as nine goals were not accompanied by indicators relevant to city planning. This shows that there is still a missing connection between important aspects of local policies and the SDG framework.

3. Methodology

In order to answer the main research question, an appropriate methodology is necessary. This section will cover the research philosophy, research strategy, research design, case selection, sampling method, research methods, and data collection, and explain the data analysis. These components all depend on the research paradigm, which will be explained at the beginning of this section. This chapter will end with considerations of the reliability and validity of this research.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The research aims to develop knowledge in a particular field, and for this, it is essential to explain my research philosophy. The ontology of the research is objectivism. According to Saunders et al. (2009) “the objectivist view is how social entities exist independent of social actors.” (p. 110) Although naturally, I am a subjectivism thinker, for my research I believe that the objective aspects of stakeholder group structures are more important than the way individuals connect their meanings to the implementation process. However, governmental structures have a notable impact on how individuals perceive and perform their obligation toward implementing sustainable development.

In my opinion, it is yet too easy to say that the culture of an organization is something that it ‘has’, and thus it is more something that the organization ‘is’ (Saunders et al., 2009). Still, when examining this research topic, I recognize the existence of a culture within the different stakeholder groups, and that it is created and constantly changed through various factors such as social interactions.

Nevertheless, I maintain a strong belief that to effectively address my main question, it is more relevant to focus on structural elements of the EU, the national government, or a local stakeholder group rather than dive deeper into the social interaction between individuals in those groups. The impact of these structures has a noteworthy effect on the decision-making of social actors, thereby exerting influence on the implementation process of the SDGs. The social and more subjective aspects of this phenomenon present an area of great interest for future research. Although the cultural aspects are not irrelevant to my research question, understanding the governmental structure is fundamental with such a large implementation process.

Epistemology is concerned with what is sufficient knowledge in a particular field of study. My research reflects on the philosophy of realism. According to Saunders et al., (2009), there are two types of realists. The critical realist and the direct realist. I am a critical realist and therefore I “*argue that what we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the things directly.*” (p. 590) To connect this to my research I will perform a multi-level study because this supports the idea that different experiences can be recognized on various levels of society. The fact that there are many stakeholders involved in the implementation process results in the fact that there is not one clear implementation framework. The dissimilar actions of stakeholders with the SDG implementation can come from the differentiation in experiences and responsibility taken regarding the framework.

3.2 Research Strategy and Research Design

This research will take a look at the implementation of sustainable development and the SDGs process from a governance perspective. The most appropriate variables are chosen, which will play a leading role in achieving the research objectives. Due to the academic lack of formulating the bigger picture

of the implementation of the SDGs and the existence of a clear and straightforward implementation framework on a local level, this study implemented the design of mixed and multiple methods. Central in this research is the aim to answer the main question: *How are the SDGs implemented from the UN to the local level in the Netherlands, and is their SDG implementation approach similar to the implementation approach the UN aspires?*

This question makes this research deductive in nature. Saunders et al., (2009) state that deductive research concerns the involvement of a theory that is exposed to a thorough examination. This research question asks for qualitative and quantitative methods.

To complete the puzzle visible in Figure 13 multiple methods and actions were performed. When this puzzle is completed both main objectives will be achieved and the main question can be answered. Both the top-down and the bottom-up approaches were examined with the support of the mediating variables. To achieve all this firstly an extensive examination of available literature was performed to gather crucial information. Subsequently, a process-tracing method was applied to map out the SDG implementation procedure at the UN level, the EU level, and then the Netherlands. Then the third puzzle piece was a single-case study on the examination of the implementation process in Nijmegen which involved mixed methods, which will be further discussed in the data collection section. After this, the study was concluded with data analysis on the SDG implementation in the EU, national and local implementation. In the following paragraph, the methods were explained in deeper detail.

Initially, a desk-based inquiry was executed, followed by the implementation of interviews as a component of the process-tracing methodology. Schimmelfennig (2014) states that: “As a within-case method focusing on the causal mechanism linking factors or conditions to outcomes, process tracing occupies a unique position among observational research designs.” (p.5). Process tracing is a necessity to get a deeper understanding of how causal mechanism is or isn’t realized. This method focuses on achieving the first research objective: to map out how the implementation of the SDGs goes into effect on the various levels of society, thus on the UN level, the EU level, and the national level. The process tracing will be concluded by examining a critical case in the Netherlands.

The samples for the interviews were not random but were chosen carefully to involve different governmental or other relevant stakeholders from the UN, the Netherlands, and Nijmegen. These two forms of data collection (interviews and desk research) within the process-tracing method formed a large part of the puzzle this research aims to complete.

Upon completion of process-tracing the implementation of the SDGs in both the EU and the Netherlands, a comprehensive single-case investigation was conducted on the city of Nijmegen, located in an EU Member State. This functioned to explore how the causal mechanism, which the UN hopes to achieve through the introduction of the SDGs, goes into effect. And thus to examine if the implementation of the SDG framework is realized on the local level in the Netherlands, which is my second main research objective.

Noor (2008) explains a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence.” (p.1602). In this case, the contemporary phenomenon would be the implementation of the SDG framework by ‘we the people’. This design provides the opportunity to focus closely on a particular phenomenon, enhancing a thorough understanding of the explaining mechanisms (Gerring, 2007). The case study will consist of interviews, content analysis, and surveys. The content analysis and the surveys will function to “test” the city of Nijmegen on the implementation of SDG 11, which is the urban development goal. The reason for this focus on SDG 11, is that this goal translates many existing SDGs to the local level.

Through an analysis of SDG 11, an evaluation of which other SDGs are represented within the context of Nijmegen. Due to the timeframe of this research, it was not feasible to test all of the SDGs.

The aim is that these puzzle pieces will be able to form a complete picture of how and if the SDG framework will make it to the local level and if the concerning global, national, and local governmental or other relevant stakeholders, can indeed live up to the expectation of a top-down and bottom-up approach.

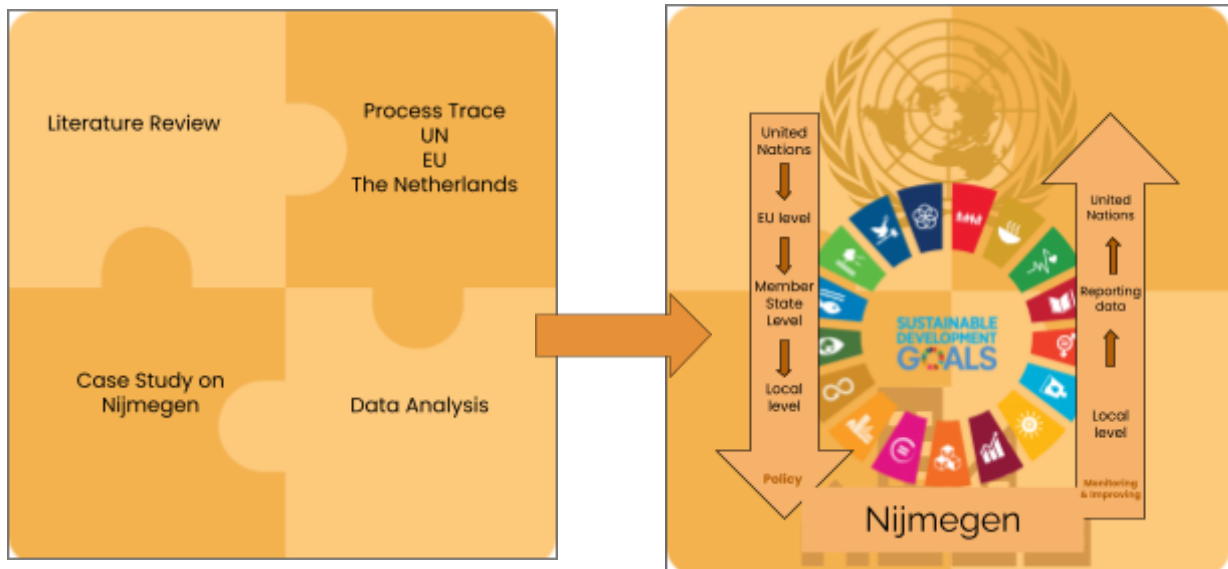


Figure 13. The jigsaw puzzle that must be solved.

3.3 Case selection and sampling method

According to Saunders et al., (2009) many people are suspicious about the utilization of a case study strategy, because it has an ‘unscientific feeling’. The authors defend this by saying that this strategy has the potential to be highly valuable when exploring existing theories. For the purpose of the present case study, the city of Nijmegen was chosen, situated within the jurisdiction of the Province of Gelderland. The Netherlands might be a small country, but is a leading trading nation. The policy around sustainable development, therefore, lies at the intersection of worldwide concerns and national interests (Knapen et al., 2011) Therefore, the Netherlands is an eligible case to examine which policy coherence is implemented in response to Agenda 2030 (Yunita et al., 2022). On the local level, the city of Nijmegen is known for its attention to a greener environment and sustainability. In 2018 the city received the Green Capital Award, which gave the city the title of Sustainable Capital of Europe. This initiative has been brought into the world by the European Commission. This award is given to cities that consistently meet environmental standards, exhibit ongoing innovation towards sustainable development, and serve as a positive example and inspiration for others. This happened three years after the introduction of the SDG framework. It would be intriguing to examine the degree to which the SDGs have contributed to Nijmegen's sustainable development trajectory, and whether they have functioned as a guiding framework towards a more desirable future. Nijmegen has repeatedly positioned itself as an exemplar of a sustainable city, and therefore offers an interesting case for analysis in this regard. Conversely, the city of Nijmegen confronts challenges in the economic sector,

compounded by a substantial shortage of housing (Rieken, 2022). This situation, compounded by the expectation to uphold its reputation as a sustainable city, presents a critical case for investigating the potential role of the SDGs in addressing this issue.

The case study aims to find out if the SDGs are visible in the legislation, actions, and initiatives taken by the governmental or other relevant stakeholders. Thus, if this framework does indeed function as a blueprint for sustainable development in Nijmegen.

For the case study, desk research, interviews, surveys were performed. I also carried out a content analyses on policy documents. The samples for the interviews are an example of non-probability sampling. The samples were not random, but were chosen carefully to involve different governmental stakeholders from the city of Nijmegen. The samples for the surveys are an example of probability sampling, because they were selected more randomly.

3.4 Research methods, data collection and data analysis

3.4.1 Data Collection

The data for this research is gathered from primary sources as well as secondary sources. In the following section, a separate overview is given for each form of data collection. Since this study employs mixed methods, this section aims to give a clear overview of what research method was used to collect the desired data.

3.4.1a Desk research

This method is used for the analysis of the implementation process in the UN, the EU, and the Netherlands and for the case study, and thus to examine if the mediating variables are present on the different levels of society. Examples of primary data used in the desk research are resolutions, European briefs, studies performed for the European Commission, voluntary national reviews, monitoring systems, SDG guidance, etc., and relevant city plans.

3.4.1b Interviews

The interviews were conducted for the same reason as the desk research. The structure of the interviews differs slightly, the interviews conducted with the UN experts interviews, visible in Table 1a, functioned more as explanatory interviews, which is why they were in-depth interviews. Alternatively, the interviews for the process tracing on the national level and the interviews conducted in the case study were designed to be more semi-structured. The data collected from the interviews serve as an additional observation to the desk research.

They include one participant from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water and two interviewees who work in the national SDG team. Then to formulate a bridge between the national and local level Pieter Den Broek was interviewed, who is working on the sub-national level. On the local level, two individuals, visible in Table 1b, were interviewed. These city officials are concerned with sustainability in Nijmegen on a daily basis. The same interview guide was used for all interviews conducted. However, this research method gave the ability to vary the questions and themes from interview to interview. It also gave me the opportunity to build upon responses given in previous interviews. The experts, their function, and the date the interview was conducted is listed below in Table 1.

Expert	Function	Level	Date
Felix Dodds	SD consultant and one of the senior officials of the global NGO movement for SD, The United Nations Department for Public Information (DPI).	UN	14/12/2022
Frans de Man	Tourism for Sustainable Development expert	UN	1/12/2022

Table 1a. List of experts I interviewed for my research.

Case interviewees	Function	Level	Date
Dirk Krijgsman	SDG Focal Point for Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management	National	25/01/2023
Lieke Willemse	Coordinator of SDGs for Ministry	National	31/01/2023
Luka Gabreëls	Intern in SDG coordination group for Ministry	National	31/01/2023
Peter van den Broek	Concern Strategist for the Province of Gelderland	Provincial	22/12/2022
Rik Ploeg	Project Manager at VNG	National	22/12/2022
Tessa Dool	Project Manager Social Goals	National	23/01/2023
Tara Hehusius	Consultant Sustainability	Local	06/12/22
Wander Hendriks	Strategic Urban Planner	Local	09/01/23

Table 1b. List of case interviews conducted.

Since the EU works closely with the UN, this research did not include any interviews with EU experts. Instead, the researcher saw desk research as adequate to monitor the implementation process at this level.

3.4.1c Content Analysis

The archival records and documentation will be downloaded and will be scanned for specific terms with the search function. These terms are related to the targets and indicators of SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The aim of this content analysis is to discover whether aspects of goal 11 are visible in the most recent archival records and documentation of the Nijmegen city board.

The following documents will be scanned: *de omgevingsvisie (an environmental vision)*, and *the coalition agreement*. These documents and plans are of great importance for the future of Nijmegen. They also contain the three dimensions in which the Netherlands wants to achieve sustainability: the economic, environmental and social dimension.

First, there will be taken a critical look at the indicators and targets of SDG 11, during this process the focus will be particularly on which concepts are of relevance to the Netherlands. In Chapter 4, it is explained that the Netherlands itself combined the SDG Framework with the *Monitor of Well-being*.

They distinguish two main areas in the field of SDG 11: *housing* and *living environment*. Table 3 shows the targets derived by Dutch politics from the current SDG 11 targets.

Housing	Vertaling Nederlands
number of available dwellings	aantal beschikbare woningen
actual housing rent	werkelijke woninghuur
price index spending on purchase and ownership of own home	prijsindex uitgaven aanschaf en bezit koopwoningen
median ratio of selling price to asking price	mediane radio verkoopprijs/ vraagprijs
housing costs	totale woonquote (huur en koop)
rent disproportionate income	goedkope scheefhuur
overcrowding	te klein behuisd
average household mortgage debt	gemiddelde hypotheekschuld huishoudens
home ownership	wonen in koopwoning
housing costs burden	ervaring van de woonlasten
housing quality	kwaliteit van woningen
neighbourhood nuisance	geluidshinder verkeer en burens
satisfaction with residential environment	tevredenheid met woning

Table 2.1 targets derived by Dutch politics from the SDG Index.

Living environment	Vertaling Nederlands
area per person	oppervlakte per persoon
government expenditure on environment protection	overheidsuitgaven aan milieubescherming
municipal waste	gemeentelijk afval
emissions of acidifying substances	emissies van verzurende stoffen
urban exposure to particulate matter	stedelijke blootstelling aan fijnstof
victims of crime	slachtofferschap van misdaad
social cohesion in the neighbourhood	sociale cohesie in de woonbuurt
trend urban bird population	vogels in de stad
noise nuisance caused by traffic and neighbours	geluidshinder verkeer en burens

often feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood	vaak onveilig voelen in de buurt
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Table 2.2 targets derived by Dutch politics from the SDG Index.

3.4.1d Surveys

I used secondary data collection with the survey strategy to collect quantitative data. This quantitative data has another objective than the interviews, content analysis and desk research. This last form of data collection gives the opportunity to discover if SDG implementation did occur. The data gathered in these surveys can be defined as ranked ordinal data or numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009).

Limesurvey was used to create the surveys for the residents. The questions are attached in Appendix E. To gain the final survey descriptive statistics through the program LimeSurvey and this data is further analyzed by using excel.

The sample amount will not be large enough to draw any major conclusions, but it will give a basic understanding on if residents experience SDG11. The two neighborhoods chosen for this purpose are Lent and Hatert. The reason for this is that there is a big difference between these two districts, which gave an honest picture of the presence of SDG 11 indicators. The samples were random because the link was set online through various platforms such as Instagram, Facebook groups, LinkedIn and Whatsapp. However, people could only participate when they lived in Hatert or Lent. Again, the aim is not necessary to compare the two cities, but rather to form a larger picture on the SDG implementation. The Dutch SDG index comprises 22 indicators with a specific focus on measuring progress toward the achievement of SDG 11. Two of these indicators are identical. For the survey, three of them were non-applicable to ask residents and are therefore not included in the survey. The results of the surveys aim to provide an overview about which indicators of SDG 11 are experienced by residents of Nijmegen.

These 41 samples together with desk research will achieve one of my sub-objectives:

- *To discover whether people on a local scale actually experience implementation of SDG 11.*

Since the goals and targets are prompted to be interdependent, indivisible and have the potential to be applicable everywhere and on every level of society, it is crucial to examine the process of implementation. The objective of this section is to examine the implementation of the SDGs from the global level to various relevant actors including the EU, member states, provinces, civil society organizations, and local authorities. During the analysis, attention is paid to the mediating variables that are extensively mentioned in Chapter 2. By recognizing or discovering these variables at different levels, or by finding that they are missing, it is possible to discover whether there is indeed a two-way implementation approach visible.



Figure 14. Conceptual Framework with methods.

3.5 Data Analysis

The research question requires a qualitative and quantitative data. Most of the data (the literature review, the desk research, the interviews, and the content analysis) gathered will be analyzed by means of a thorough thematic analysis. These particular themes are the factors that stimulate SDG implementation will be looking for are all explained thoroughly in Chapter 2. These will help me discover whether the mediating variables are present and thus if there is a strong implementation possible. The last two sub-questions do however require a quantitative data analysis. The quantitative data of the content analysis will still serve to look for mediating variables.

3.6 Validity and reliability of the research

According to Kimberlin et al. (2008), validity is often specified as “the extent to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure.” (p.2278) The instruments that are utilized in this research are the methods explained in the previous section. The majority of them are qualitative in nature, and one of them is quantitative. Their nature depends on what they aim to measure. This research starts significantly broad, to be able to achieve the first objective. The completed expert interviews, case interviews, and desk research aim to gather large pieces of information. This makes it possible to map out and explain the SDG implementation process on multiple levels. These results can be generalized, given that the theoretical framework of the main concept is broad in scope. The data gathered from the case interviews serve as an additional observation to desk research. For the examination of the implementation of SDG 11 on a local level a case study was conducted, Because this research aims to

ensure its validity, other SDG implementation processes on a local level will not be generalized. Besides validity, I will also aim to achieve reliability.

Becker (2012) states: “Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept.” (p.212). This paragraph will explain how consistency, and thus reliability, is ensured in this research. Because the comparison of the same process must be performed at multiple levels, consistency is of great importance. The utilization of the chosen mediating variables will create this consistency. The mixed methods approach can produce various types of data. However, incorporating mediating variables can aid in integrating this data. This simplifies a difficult implementation process.

4. Results

Consequently, the present section summarizes the findings of my desk-based research and interviews, which serve to further form a complete picture of the implementation process and thus follow the two implementation approaches presented in the next paragraph.

4.1 The United Nations

4.1.1 Two routes

There are two important routes distinguished by the UN which move simultaneously in the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. The first route is through *the achievement of legislation and the accountability taken by national parliaments* and the second route is through *public institutions, regional and local authorities, humanitarian organizations, academia, volunteer groups and others* (UN General Assembly, 2015). This is achieved through the assigning of responsibilities for policymaking, monitoring, and improvement of the SDG framework to the national parliament, governmental institutions, and regional and local authorities. Which aligns with the mediating variables in this study.

As a result, the realization of the two different implementation approaches is of crucial importance and the efficient implementation of the five mediating variables in this research ensures that these two approaches can be implemented at any possible level. Further sections aim to give an exuberant but clear overview of how this works in reality.

The first route differs drastically across the member states. Lee et al. (2017) state in the Implementation Guide for the Sustainable Development Goals that “*A common recurring theme in each of these interrelated mechanisms is that SDGs are a government led process. It is crucial that national ownership is established in, for example, creating strategies for mobilising various resources in development financing, establishing effective monitoring systems, and choosing to participate in the voluntary global review mechanism.*” (p.15)

Then there is also an action agenda to facilitate support to national governments. This is an explicit implementation strategy designed from the top. *The Action Agenda* was endorsed by the General Assembly, in its resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015 and has the objective to create a global framework for financing development post-2015. The main focus of this Agenda is however on how to get financial support for the implementation of the SDGs and not particularly on “how” the agenda should be implemented on different scales in society.

The second route is through *public institutions, regional and local authorities, humanitarian organizations, academia, volunteer groups, and others* (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). This aligns with the prospect articulated by Bilsky et al. (2021), regarding the potential for smaller-scale implementation to have a significant impact through a bottom-up approach. There are many resources available by the UN to enhance the SDG implementation through these stakeholders. In this route, the focus of this research is mainly on the regional and local authorities and the local governments. The UN implies that these local stakeholders have the ability to be flexible and come up with their own implementation strategy to localize the SDGs. The case study will give more clarity on how the Netherlands and Nijmegen operate this route to SDG implementation. In the explanatory interview with Dodds (2022) does admit that an extensive amount of stakeholders makes the

implementation process on a local level difficult. Stakeholders do not always have the same level of commitment to localizing the SDGs. There is however a crucial resource provided by the UN for stakeholders for this matter. It is called the Toolkit for localizing the SDGs. This includes a large database with expanded plans and strategies to implement the SDGs on a local level created by different stakeholders. The database exists of resources made available by different stakeholders, including local stakeholders. A noticeable component of this database is the *Inspiration Guide: Integrating the SDGs into your multi-annual policy plan (n.d)*. It states that the inclusion of the SDGs into a coalition agreement will strengthen the implementation process since it will support the ability of stakeholders to acquire political approval. This refers to the link between different national stakeholders and the presence of legislation by national parliaments. This toolkit does bring up an important question: Will this database and thus the implementation approach presented by the UN make it to the city of Nijmegen? This question will be answered later in this section when we cover the results of Nijmegen.

4.1.2 Other resources

Although the two tracks are clear, an overarching framework for the governmental implementation of the SDGs remains missing. But to support the implementation of the SDG framework by all stakeholders, thus through the two tracks, there are different UN bodies in charge of the SDGs indicators. Consequently, the responsibility for shaping and guiding the implementation process of a specific target (Man, 2022). Due to this, there is metadata available for each indicator, which gives them a measurable character. This resource stimulates the realization of the development of a national monitoring framework with an accompanying set of indicators, thus the implementation of mediating variable number two. For more clarification and the purpose of this research, the next paragraph will zoom in more on SDG 11. This aims to show how specific goals can be monitored by all stakeholders who have access to the relevant tools.

UN Bodies who are in charge of the implementation of SDG11, and thus making the indicators measurable, are the UN-Habitat, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS), the United Nations for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). A complete document is available for each specific indicator. This contains the definition, concepts, classifications, data source and data collection, other methodological considerations, and how to compare the comparability of the implementation of an individual indicator (United Nations Statistics Division,n.d.).

An example of indicator 11.6.1 which is the *Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities* is visible in the figure below (unstats.org).

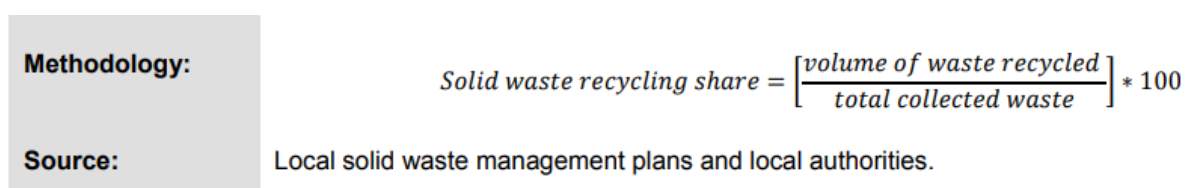


Figure 15. A methodology for indicator 11.6.1 Retrieved from: unstats.org

This shows a concrete methodology for the implementation of this specific target and thus allows local governments to take actions that can promote the achievement of target 11.6. The existence of these tools aligns with the importance of variables two and four. Without measurement instruments, it would be close to impossible for stakeholders to create a national monitor framework with an accompanying national set of indicators or to compile a sustainable development report, with comparable data.

The United Nations General Assembly (2015) stated that: “The high-level political forum under the auspices of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council will have the central role in overseeing follow-up and review at the global level.” (p.11) Therefore, a crucial part in the implementation of sustainable development is the HLPF. This is a separate body of the UN where countries can monitor their progress. A meeting takes place once a year organized by the aforementioned governmental body where all countries can discuss and come to terms on the next steps toward implementing the SDGs. Another important part of the implementation is the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS). As such, their active participation is essential to ensure that the SDGs are effectively integrated into policy frameworks, and they also play a significant role in the inclusion of other key stakeholders in the implementation process. This aligns with the stimulation of variable number three.

Currently, a method exists for determining which indicators are clearly formulated and thus have the potential to be utilized by member states. The UN Stats department distinguishes three different tiers to be able to monitor the implementation of these indicators in all countries. The most recent classification was made by the inter-agency and expert group on SDG indicators (*Tier classification for Global SDG Indicators*, n.d) following the 13th meeting in Bangkok in November 2022. The most recent classification shows that there are 148 indicators in the category tier I, 77 in the tier II category, and only 6 indicators fall under more than one tier category (some components of the indicator are classified into various tiers). The tier classification is shown in Table 3. Thus, about 64 percent of the indicators are conceptually clear and have an internationally established methodology and standards available. The data is regularly produced by countries for at least 50 percent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d). SDG 11 has eight indicators in Tier I and seven indicators in Tier II, which means that there is still more improvement to be made according to this classification system since ideally, every indicator should be in Tier I.

Tier I	Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 percent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.
Tier II	Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries
Tier III	No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested. (As of the 51st UNSC, the global indicator framework does not contain any Tier III indicators)

Table 3. The tiers' classification for indicators. Information retrieved from: [IAEG-SDGs — SDG Indicators](#)

All in all, this desk research and the explanatory interviews show that the UN has developed the model extensively and has made many resources available to facilitate implementation at all scales. It is safe to say that the UN implementation process supports the enforcement of most mediating variables (2 to 5). They have developed a monitoring framework with targets and measurable indicators to give member states the opportunity to develop their own monitoring mechanism. The UN also designed the MGoS and the HLPF to stimulate the ability to consult with other key stakeholders. The indicators create the opportunity to compile or update an annual sustainable development report on the progress made toward achieving the SDGs. The official name for such a document is a Voluntary National Review. The HLPF provides the opportunity to present this to other stakeholders. The last variable that the UN stimulates is the preparation for regional and global dialogues on SDG implementation. The Local Toolkit for localizing the SDGs includes many different stakeholders across the globe to be able to prepare for regional and global dialogues. On different platforms, stakeholders can show their best practices and others can learn from these methods. The operationalization of one mediating variable that might be considered weak is the first one: to develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies. Because of the large flexibility of the framework, the desk research and interviews did not discover one implementation strategy applicable to all levels of society. Nevertheless, this is also a form of an SDG implementation strategy: to lay the responsibility of the implementation in the hands of stakeholders in the member states.

The UN's two-way approach toward achieving its objectives through two distinct routes is aligned with its available resources and policies. In Figure 16 a simplified but efficient visual model is designed in order to better understand the implementation approaches operated by the UN.

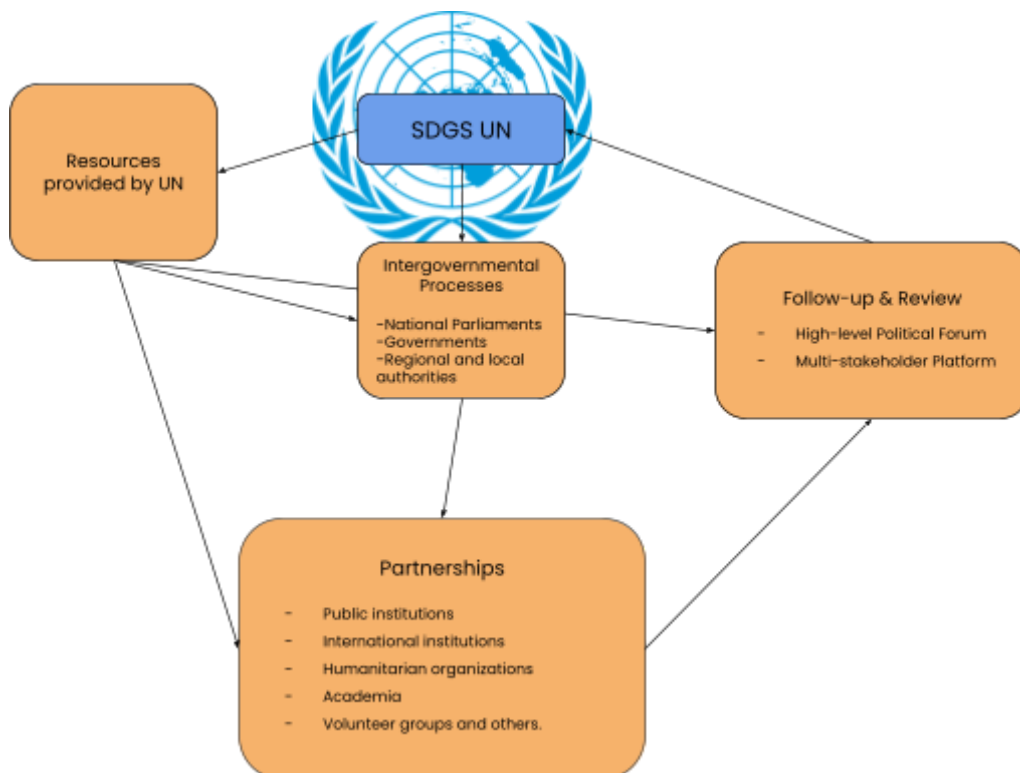


Figure 16. SDG implementation process on the global level.

4.2 Results: The European Union

For this section, secondary sources are obtained through a desk research methodology. Sustainable development is a core principle of the Treaty of the European Union. The SDGs are not specifically an EU policy on their own, but more so one of the objectives of the European Union or a policy framework adopted by the European Union (Lafortune et al., 2020). Having an understanding of the interconnectedness of the SDGs with numerous EU policies is crucial for effectively monitoring the implementation process of the SDGs and mapping out the two-way approach of the UN. The aim of this research is not to cover every single policy the SDGs are a part of, but rather to find out whether these policies and actions are still visible on a local level. Therefore, only relevant policies regarding the SDGs are covered in this section.

The European Union was actively involved in shaping the 2030 Agenda for Sustainability. For this reason, the goals are fully consistent with the vision the EU wants to achieve (European Commission, 2016). The European Commission is, together with the European Council, the executive of the European Union. The Commission differs from other European institutions, because it has legislative initiatives. Therefore, it has the power to propose laws and initiatives to set high standards in the field of sustainability in Europe. The European Commission announces in a reflection paper: *“We need an agenda that has a global impact, and that agenda is best captured by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 193 states signed up to, including the European Union and its Member States. These SDGs plot out a route on how to overcome the challenges we face, and to improve our habitat, our economy and our lives.”* (p.3) (European Commission, 2019) This shows that The European Union does acknowledge the necessity for an overarching framework to support their path to a more sustainable future.

The European Commission (2016) declares that the EU’s realization of the 2030 Agenda will include two work streams. The first work stream is to fully integrate the SDGs in the European policy framework, which indicates the presence of the mediating variable number one. The EU wants to achieve the implementation of an SDG strategy. An important part of this integration is the assessment of the position of Europe in achieving the goals and identifying the most urgent sustainable concerns (Commission, 2016). The second track is focused on the longer implementation of the SDGs, and it will be centered on sectoral policies after 2020. These scenarios are outlined in the reflection paper published by the Commission. Widuto (2022) summarizes these three long-term scenarios from the reflection paper: *“1) a new overarching EU sustainable development strategy would be introduced, with the EU and its Member States committing to action; 2) the Commission would mainstream the SDGs in all EU policies, without this having a binding effect on the Member States; and 3) enhanced focus would be placed on external SDG action while pursuing improvements at EU level.”* (p.3)

The European Commission wants to bring the 2030 Agenda into reality through several critical government elements and key actions. A short overview of these implementation aspects is visible on the left side of Table 2. Noticeable is that these implementation components align with the mediating variables of this research. Represented below, an overview is presented to show which mediating variable corresponds with the implementation approach of the EU.

Implementation aspects EU	Mediating variables
<i>The Commission will mainstream the SDGs into EU initiatives and policies. Sustainable development will be an essential leading principle for all the policies the EU composes. It stresses that existing and new policies should take into account the three pillars of sustainability.</i>	<i>To develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies (1)</i>
<i>The Commission will offer regular reporting of the progress that has been made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, starting in the year 2017.</i>	<i>To compile or update an annual sustainable development report (4)</i>
<i>The mission reckons the importance of close collaboration with external partners to stimulate sustainable development around the world, it also wants to support efforts of implementation in developing countries.</i>	<i>To prepare global dialogues on SDG implementation (5)</i> <i>To consult and collaborate with other stakeholders (3)</i>
<i>The Commission wants to press the implementation of the 2030 Agenda ahead with the Council and the European Parliament as the co-legislators and budgetary authority of the EU. It also recognizes the importance of collaboration with other European institutions and other non-governmental organizations.</i>	<i>To consult and collaborate with other stakeholders (3)</i>
<i>The Commission will launch a platform for stakeholders to promote communication about the implementation process of the SDGs. This will be for Member States as well as on the EU Level.</i>	<i>To prepare global dialogues on SDG implementation (5)</i>
<i>The Commission will perform reflection work to be able to create a longer term vision in a post 2020 perspective. (see the second work stream)</i>	<i>To develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies (1)</i>

Table 2. EU implementation approaches linked to mediating variables. Adopted from: European Commission (2016)

Additionally, the European Union acknowledges the importance of efforts to localize the SDGs. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2020), 65% of the targets of the SDG framework necessitate the cooperation of regional and local authorities. Europe acknowledges and allows the flexibility needed for local stakeholders in the implementation of the

SDG framework. And in subsequent sections of this chapter, this flexibility will recur several times on the various levels of society.

The European Union is one of the most urbanized areas worldwide. SDG 11 is also prioritized in the following documents written by the EU: *The Urban Agenda for the European Union* and *The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy* (European Commission, 2016). The Urban Agenda defines climate adaptation as one of the major themes (Rossi et al., 2021). Urban areas will play a major role in achieving the SDGs and could potentially help to answer many pressing challenges. The Urban Agenda for the EU is a non-legally binding initiative. Remarkable in this initiative, is that the ministers of the EU agree upon the fact that the international dimension of this Urban Agenda is linked to the SDGs (European Commission, 2016). Even though the explicit use of the term SDGs is only used once in the Agenda and SDG 11 is not used at all. Nonetheless, many of the initial priority themes are indeed in line with the SDGs. The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy is a voluntary initiative and is not legally binding. Likewise, the initiative does not explicitly name the SDGs or particularly SDG 11 but is focused on the environmental pillar of the SDG framework.

The European Commission has a tool called: SDG Policy Mapping, here they find out how the EU Policies address the SDGs. As for the implementation of SDG 11; between 2019 and 2024, 258 legal acts can be counted in which goal 11 is addressed. The overall number of legal acts in which SDGs are covered in the EU is 6197. It should be noted that this database does not necessarily indicate a direct and explicit focus on achieving the SDGs in these policy documents. Rather, the database implies a certain degree of relevance or association with the goals, although they may not be the primary focus of the policy in question (European Commission, 2022). Five out of the eight most sustainable cities in the world are European municipalities, which could indicate that the EU is on the right track in implementing SDG 11. Thus, the SDGs and, as previously demonstrated, SDG 11, are intertwined in EU policy.

In the analysis of the study performed by the Policy Department (Niestroy et al. 2019) on the implementation of the SDGs, it is shown that EU Member States are using the SDGs as a blueprint for national strategies. Although the EU cannot compile a national framework, the emphasis of the EU to assess the SDGs on a member-state level is evident in the monitoring of the goals. The body that is responsible for the monitoring of SDG data is Eurostat. They have devised different indicators than the original ones from the UN framework. These indicators are relevant to the member states of the European Union (European Commission, 2022). It is not a national monitoring framework they use, but it is more a European monitor framework which can be seen as a factor to stimulate the implementation of the SDGs and does show the presence of mediating variable two. It is also visible that the Member States do show an increasing amount of action taken on the SDGs. They use SDG budgeting, stakeholder participation mechanisms, and science-policy interface to implement strategies for a more sustainable future. The European Parliament could benefit and learn from this collaboration.

All things considered, the implementation approach of the European Union can be assessed as strong according to the mediating variables and because it overlaps significantly with the UN's implementation approach. As discovered from the desk research, the approach does include all mediating variables this study focuses on, as illustrated in the previous paragraph and Table 2. This enforces the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Their approach is comprehensive and advanced, and they are committed to connecting the SDGs to the already existing policies and to designing policies for longer implementation of the SDGs. The presence of Eurostat is evident in the

responsibility taken for the monitoring of the SDGs. Although the EU has pledged to work toward achieving the SDGs, there is no indication that there are specific policies in place to ensure their implementation is legally enforceable in the member states. The figure below shows a visual overview of the implementation process by the EU.

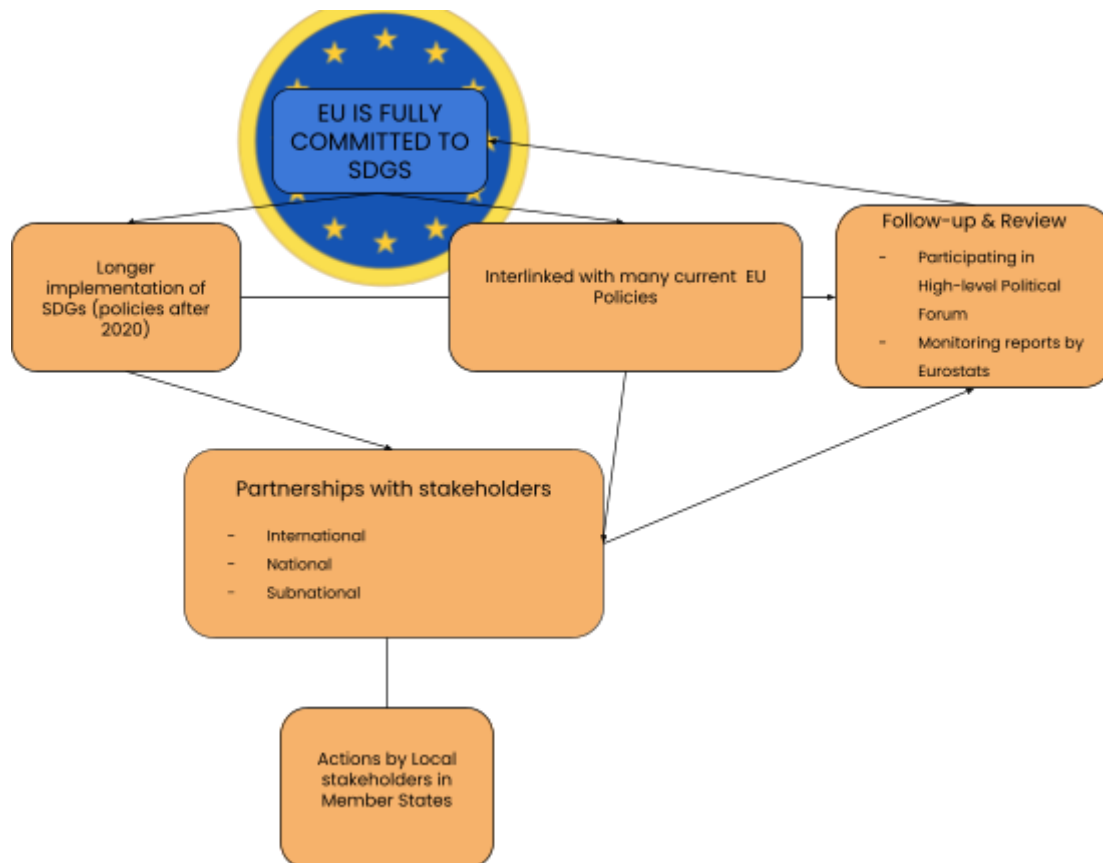


Figure 17. SDG implementation process on the European level.

In the next section, the implementation process in the Netherlands is mapped out. The UN emphasizes that stakeholders all have joint ownership in realizing the SDGs. Member states do play an important and leading role to realize ambitious steps toward implementation. *“We encourage all member states to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the SDGs and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate.* (UN General Assembly, 2015, p.28)

4.2 Results: The Netherlands

In this section, the implementation process on a member state level is mapped out. This last phase before going to the case study is needed as the next piece of the puzzle this research aims to complete. This section will continue to map out the implementation processes and it will examine if the implementation of the SDG framework is realized on the local level in the Netherlands. As previously stated, the framework is highly adaptable and can be applied in various manners. To determine the effectiveness of its implementation on a local level, it is fundamental to first have an overview of the

larger picture in the Netherlands before delving into a more particular case. This was done by gathering primary and secondary data from desk research and interviews. The interviews held for this section are visible in *Table 1*. The Dutch economy relies heavily on reliable imports and growing its export markets, and wealth and well-being are linked to impacts on the environmental and social dimensions. As a result, global sustainable development and inclusive growth are seen as important matters to Dutch stakeholders to ensure the welfare of the country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013; Lucas & Wilting, 2018).

4.2.1 National responsibilities

For the Netherlands, the Dutch government acknowledges that the SDGs have become the new broad sustainable agenda for all countries and that the responsibility for achieving a sustainable future is now in the hands of each country. However, they choose to not make the agreements made in the framework binding for the Netherlands, but more an obligation of effort. Unlike for example Finland, the Dutch government made the decision not to implement the SDGs through a governmental plan. Every four years the Netherlands creates a Coalition Agreement, this document is the foundation of policy in the Netherlands for the next four years. One crucial global deal which gives strict guidelines to the Dutch policy named in the Coalition Agreement is the Paris agreement and the objective to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. In the most recent Coalition Agreement from 2021, the SDGs, however, were only named once. They were connected to development cooperation policy, and not connected to national policy strategies (Coalition Akkoord, 2021). Instead, the Dutch government decided to decentralize the SDG implementation and put the responsibility on the shoulders of the 388 municipalities (Bachus et al., 2018).

In the Netherlands, the SDGs do however guide multiple policies, examples include the international sustainability policy, the national sustainability policy, and the development policy. Next, the PBL (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency) has explored in an early assessment what the SDGs can mean in a Dutch context. In this early assessment of the consequences of the framework, the analysis done by Lucas et al., (2016) concludes that: “As our analysis shows, defining the national ambition level for environment-related SDG targets can build on a broad range of existing policy targets to which the Netherlands has already committed. Many of these existing policy targets have been agreed at EU or UN level; targets agreed at the national level are often a further specification of European or global targets.” (p. 21) Despite that, the Netherlands must adjust existing policy targets in terms of target horizon and ambition level. Ultimately this should also be done by the EU since most of the targets are derived from their goals (Lucas et al., 2016). The first step stated by the PBL is in line with mediating variable two. The report (2016) endorses that the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands calls for a translation of the global SDG targets to national policy targets and appropriate indicators. It is also important for the Netherlands to figure out what role it wants to play in addressing the SDGs, and decide on the priorities and strategies accordingly.

After seven years, it is essential to assess the progress made toward achieving the SDGs and determine if efforts to localize the SDGs have been successful, and if so, how. This involves examining what additional actions have been taken to implement the SDGs. Dirk Krijgsman (2022) points out in the interview that the coordination of SDG operationalization is done by the international

department of the national government and the ministry of foreign affairs. Niestroy et al., (2019) state that: “In some of these cases, such as in the Netherlands, participation or representation of local government often takes place through one representative for all sub-national governments, despite vast regional differences.” (p.45) Currently, this representative is Sandra Pellegrom, she is part of the SDG team together with 4 other individuals who are responsible for coordinating the SDGs in The Netherlands. However, this SDG team is primarily accountable for coordinating the SDGs and not for implementing the SDGs. Remarkable is the fact that this team is a part of the ministry of foreign affairs, but the team is responsible for coordinating the SDGs at the national level. Additionally, every ministry does have an individual or a so-called focal point who is responsible for the integration of the SDGs into ministries, they have the responsibility to report back to the SDG team. Within the governmental structure, there is thus a presence visible coordination of SDG implementation strategies by the SDG team. This indicates the presence of mediating variable one.

Let us now examine the current policies or political documents to map out how the implementation of the SDGs goes into effect on the national level in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, there is an integral consideration framework, which is a legal framework with which all new policies and legislation in the Netherlands must comply. In this framework, there is an SDG test included which means that all new legislation or policy proposals must meet certain conditions regarding the SDGs. This framework is still in progress to simplify the implementation of the SDGs (Willemse & Gabreëls, 2022). Krijgsman (2022) states that the Netherlands prioritizes three major transitions: sustainable mobility, climate adaptation, and sustainable economy. These themes have direct links to multiple SDG goals, such as SDG 11, SDG 9, SDG 8, SDG 7, etc. This alignment gives long-term guidance to SDG policy because these goals go beyond the timeline of the SDGs, namely to 2040-2050. Another implementation indication is the utilization of the SDGs in Voluntary National Review reports.

In the interview Willemse & Gabreëls (2023) explain that the CBS, which is the main scientific department of the Dutch government, was one of four research institutions that helped in producing this metadata, hence the CBS does use these indicators in monitoring the SDGs. National reports on Dutch well-being did not include the SDGs until 2019. On recommendation by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in the Netherlands combined the SDG framework with an already leading framework for information on well-being; the Monitor of Well-being. This indicates the connectedness of the EU and the Netherlands, and that effects can indeed be exerted on member states from the top.



Figure 18. How the SDGs connect to three main well-being themes.

The CES pointed out that the previously used framework lacked integration of pressing issues which refer to international current political or social debates, which complicated the process of comparing European situations. As a result, in 2019 CBS published a report that provides a thematic perspective on well-being based on the Sustainable Development Goals which translated the SDGs to the Dutch context. The latest update of this report is the Monitor of Well-being & the SDGs 2021. Here an SDG^{Plus} dashboard is created. The CBS (2021) states that: “Where possible, indicators from the UN SDG agenda have been included, provided they are relevant to the current Dutch policy debate. This builds on earlier work by CBS in the area of the SDGs. However, additional data research would be needed to include more indicators.” (section 4.3). This indicates the presence of variable two; a national set of indicators and monitoring framework. The SDG team produces an additional report, known as the VNR, which is presented at the HLPF. Remarkable in this report is that the SDG team utilizes other indicators to measure implementation progress than the one created by CBS (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). The VNR is more quantitative in nature, as opposed to the quantitative nature of the Monitor of Well-being & the SDGs 2021 (Willemse & Gabreëls, 2022). The VNR is presented during the HLPF. A third report is the Sixth Dutch National SDG Report. This is an annual report that is submitted to the Parliament of the Netherlands to provide an account of the Dutch policies and the overlapping with SDGs. This annual report is evident in the presence of mediating four on the national levels. Many stakeholders such as the Dutch government, the VNG, sub-national stakeholders, youth organizations, and educational organizations all collaborated together to produce this report. The VNG is introduced later in this research because the Dutch government has shifted implementation efforts largely to local governments, and the VNG is an umbrella organization comprised of these governments. In order to provide a clearer overview of the monitoring aspects of the SDGs, the goals have been segregated into two separate dashboards – one for housing, and another for the living environment. The set of indicators chosen for this dashboard is visible in Tables 2.1 & 2.2. Krijgsman, 2022 also mentioned that the Dutch government is now coupling its budget reports to the Dutch well-being and SDGs indicators. This allows the government to assess the impact of the themes that receive funding and attention on the implementation of the SDG framework. In the previous paragraphs, the coordination and the monitoring of the framework are explained, and the discussion will now proceed to the practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, the actual operationalizing of the SDGs in the Netherlands presents a challenging scenario to delineate. The Dutch government decided to decentralize the implementation of the SDGs. The primary responsibility for the SDG implementation was assigned to governments, 388 municipalities, and the provinces together with the water authorities (Bachus et al., 2018). The main bodies to implement the SDGs are the VNG and SDG Nederland, which will be covered later in this chapter.

4.2.2 Decentralization strategy

VNG

The VNG stands for de Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten or in English the Association of Netherlands Municipalities. They have established in 1912 and in 1950 every Dutch municipality was a member of the organization. In the VNR of the Netherlands, the VNG is pointed out as one of the major driving forces through which local implementation should be realized (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). The VNG is what is called a semi-structured government organization, this indicates it is for a large part financially dependent on the local governments since it is an association of all 388 municipalities. The VNG aims to achieve local SDG implementation through a campaign called Gemeenten4GlobalGoals or in English Municipalities4GlobalGoals. Every municipality has the voluntary choice to participate in this campaign (Ploeg, 2022). This campaign recognizes the opportunities and strength of SDG localization (*Over Gemeenten 4 Global Goals*. VNG, n.d.). The goal is to involve as many municipalities as possible in operationalizing the SDGs. They do this through workshops together with providing resources to increase knowledge about the SDG framework. This collaborative approach provides evidence of variable five since it boosts the regional and local dialogues on SDG implementation. The campaign also increases the awareness around the topic of sustainable development in the Netherlands. At present, the campaign encompasses 122 municipalities, thereby designating them as Global Goal municipalities. According to the VNG, the municipality's interpretation and adoption of the Global Goal municipality status is entirely dependent on their discretion and decision-making. And again, there are no legally binding conditions connected to the SDG implementation. Nijmegen, for example, is a part of this campaign and thus a Global Goal municipality and later in this chapter the case study will present how the local government stakeholders fulfill this status. Some city boards give the operationalization of the SDGs an external completion, while other city boards use the SDG framework to implement measurable indicators into their policy documents. Ploeg (2022) also sees an opportunity for city boards to utilize the SDGs as a connection of the various policy areas within a local government.

All in all, the VNG is an association that saw a lot of opportunities in the framework. The VNG provides evidence for the increment to consult and collaborate with other stakeholders such as local authorities, thus mediating variable three is present. This supports the policy coherence in the Netherlands. Mediating variable two is also present because the VNG implements the development of a local set of targets and indicators, and thus a more local monitor framework. Although this is not a national monitoring framework, it is a set of indicators for the implementation of the SDGs adapted to the local level. This framework can be used by for example Nijmegen to measure how they are performing on the SDG implementation. The desk research examined this dashboard for presenting data on the SDGs. This impressive yet complicated tool presents local indicators and the accompanying data available for a municipality. There is however a complication that makes the ability to prepare SDG dialogues and debate or the effectiveness of this local monitoring framework debatable. This is the fact that the date of the relevant data varies per indicator. This represents a

problematic observation; the development or coordination of an SDG implementation strategy and the agreement to monitor regularly did not trickle down through the local scale when we take a look at the data from the VNG (*Jive*, n.d). Prominent was also the fact that the SDG 11 indicators differentiated from the indicators that the CBS is monitoring for the Netherlands on a national level. Which indicates a lack of coherence from the national to the local level.

SDG Nederland

Another way for the Dutch government to decentralize the SDG implementation is by an organization called SDG Nederland. This organization includes 1.250 social organizations, youth groups, financial organizations, education institutions, resident networks and governments. The main objective is to motivate each other to take the next step toward a more sustainable future. They have seventeen alliance coordinators who are each responsible for one goal. However, the organization only exists of six full-time employees. Their mission is to unite individuals and organizations, motivate joint actions and create cooperation around the term. They are funded by the ministry of foreign affairs (sdgnederland.nl). They are what is called a public foundation and therefore have the aim to be transparent in their actions. This is an important aspect of local SDG implementation according to Guha & Chakrabarti (2019). But the question now is does SDG Nederland strengthen the operationalization of the mediating variables? During the interview with Van Dool (2023), who is a project manager on implementing the social SDGs at SDG Nederland, admits that SDG Nederland is a small organization. She states that they work closely with the SDG team within the ministry of foreign affairs. When asked about the concrete implementation of the SDGs, she explained that the primary goal is to engage in extensive dialogue and cooperation with partners, proving the presence of mediating variable five. The organizations designed workshops and presentations to help partners to implement and understand the SDGs. Another implementation step SDG

the Netherlands aims to achieve is the introduction of certain strategies on a provincial or local level or even for businesses. When asked about the progress of these strategies, Van Dool (2023) admits that their implementation of them depends highly on the attitudes of the individuals in a stakeholder group. The degree to which an individual embraces the plan is highly dependable on the person, which is a shame according to Van Dool. She does however say that in the Netherlands a lot of people are working on implementing sustainable development, but if they utilize the SDG framework for this is another question. This foundation is not responsible for the operationalizing of mediating variable four, thus the monitoring of the SDGs.

All in all, the implementation process at the national level in the Netherlands according to the mediating variables, can be evaluated as very strong because they are all present on the national level. However, the first variable, which is to develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies, has been carried out in a specific way. The Netherlands choose to coordinate the SDGs into already existing government structures and to create an SDG Team. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the team can be judged as inadequate considering the substantial scope of their responsibilities. The Dutch government also decided not to include the SDGs in the Coalition Agreement. This leads to a situation where failing to achieve the objectives does not entail any sanctions. The actual implementation of the framework is largely the responsibility of the two main bodies: The VNG and SDG Nederland. Together, they operationalize the other mediating variables. The campaign Gemeenten4GlobalGoals recognizes the strength of the SDGs and aims to implement these in municipalities in the Netherlands. This motivates regional debates and thus is evident for variable five. The VNG also has its own set of monitors to measure local SDG implementation which indicates the presence of variable two on the

local level. The campaign also brings the VNG and city officials together to consult and collaborate on the implementation of the SDGs which indicates the presence of variable three. They are co-writers of the National SDG Report that is presented annually to the chamber. So variable 4 is also present at the national level. Contributors from the VNR are joint authors of the National SDG Report, which is submitted on an annual basis to the legislative body. As such, it should be noted that variable four is also included in the report at the national level.

4.2.3 Sub-national responsibilities

The next step in this research is to see how the SDG implementation is realized on a sub-national level. The city of Nijmegen is located in the Province of Gelderland. During the case interview, Van den Broek (2022) states that all responsibilities on the social domain moved to the local governments, and so, among other municipalities, to the city board of Nijmegen. Examples of this are issues about public space, mobility, soil, water, climate and also sustainability. He explains that the local governments collaborate, and the province of Gelderland has a monitoring role on these issues. They also assess the financial well-being of municipalities. Their primary duties pertain to physical environmental concerns. The Coalition Agreement for the Netherlands is for the Province of Gelderland the guidance on sustainable development implementation. Van den Broek (2022) states that individual initiatives can come a long way when he explained examples of some municipalities that did use the SDGs in their framework. However, he admits that for the Province of Gelderland, the framework was never used as an overarching leading mechanism within the government body. He does know that some SDGs were used separately to see if they could be implemented in some strategies. In the environmental vision of the province, seven ambitions are emphasized: energy transition, climate adaptation, circular economy, biodiversity, accessibility, business climate, and living environment. Again, themes are overlapping with the SDGs, but the implicit use of the framework is not visible. All in all, this sub-national level does not have a clear SDG implementation strategy to operationalize. Since the Dutch Coalition Agreement guides political action, there is initially little implication of the implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, in the Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment for the Province of Gelderland, the SDGs are not mentioned explicitly. Again themes are overlapping but a true evident use of the SDGs are not evident. There was however an event centered around the SDGs organized in the Province of Gelderland. During the event, the province entered into cooperative agreements with international stakeholders who share a border with the province of Gelderland. This event is evident in the presence of variables number three and five. The event aimed to engage individuals who were inspired by the SDGs and sought to deepen their understanding of them, thereby making it accessible to a diverse audience, or in other words, all people. This allowed for the gathering of key stakeholders to collaborate and generate ideas regarding the implementation of the SDGs, which is evident for variable three. Because this debate was held on a regional scale and included stakeholders from across the border, it can be inferred that there is a presence of variable five. Van den Broek (2022) however did not know of this event, which indicates a problematic knowledge gap in what is being done to implement the SDGs. And this fact however shows the absence of interregional dialogues on SDG implementation.

All in all, on the sub-national, the implementation approach can be evaluated as very weak since many variables are absent. The sub-national government body does not develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies. They have a monitoring role, however, they do not monitor the SDG progress on the regional level, they do however monitor on the themes they prioritize. This indicates

that already three out of five variables to optimize SDG implementation are missing. The brainstorming with other key stakeholders was present in an SDG event co-organized by the Province of Gelderland, but the fact that not all people within the government body know of this is a problematic observation. Nevertheless, this SDG event, together with the fact that some sub-national officials experimented with linking the SDGs to strategies, is evident in the presence of variable three. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the event also represents the existence of variable five on the sub-national level.

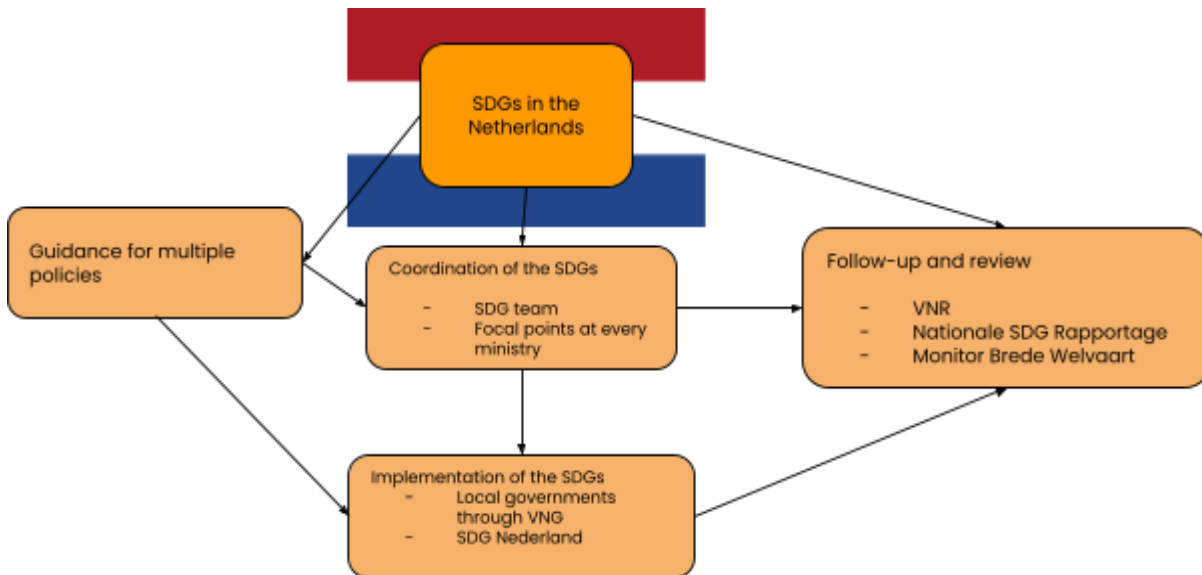


Figure 19. The SDG implementation process on the Dutch level.

4.3 Case Study on Nijmegen

To form a clear picture of the SDG implementation in the city of Nijmegen, it was necessary to gather primary data from local officials who are engaged daily in prioritizing sustainability at a local level. For this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two city officials (see Table 3). In these questions, particular attention will be focused on the utilization of the SDG framework as a whole. Nonetheless, in this analysis, there is a linkage made to SDG11 to make the results more feasible and better to compare to each other. More qualitative data is gathered from the desk research on local policy plans. Subsequently, to be able to achieve my second main objective surveys were conducted with residents and a content analysis was performed.

4.3.1 Interviews

In all interviews with these city officials, recurring and comparable themes emerged. Hehusius, a sustainability consultant for the city of Nijmegen (see Appendix C) admits that on the municipal level, the SDGs are not necessarily utilized. However, she does state that many themes in the policy of Nijmegen align with the SDGs, but she never directly coordinates the SDGs into a sustainable strategy. This is also visible when analyzing the *Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment* of the city of Nijmegen (SSEN), themes such as sustainable mobility, energy tasks, social and healthy

city do overlap in priorities. In the Coalition Agreement, themes such as climate and biodiversity, energy and transition, and good living for all, also align with SDG themes (see Appendix D).

When questions were asked in the interview with Heshusius regarding the monitoring or operational procedure of an SDG report, she could not completely confirm that this is applicable to the city of Nijmegen. After asking this around, she did indeed confirm that this is not happening in Nijmegen. From this interview, it also becomes clear that the SDGs are not integrated. She explains that there are often multiple disciplines such as sustainability, safety, mobility, etc. These topics all fall under the theme of sustainability in the SDG framework and are all reflected in SDG11 as well. The specialization of Heshusius as a sustainability consultant in the areas of circularity, climate adaptation, and energy transition indicates that the concept of sustainability is less broadly interpreted than in the SDG framework. For municipal tasks, she does work together with people on the themes that the SDG framework prioritizes in SDG11 but admits to not using the SDGs as their premise. Hendriks (2023), another city official, does state that the city board of Nijmegen does not utilize the SDG framework explicitly. However, the themes of the policy in Nijmegen match the themes in the SDG framework and there is a great desire for integrated policymaking. He also states that many commercial parties work with the SDGs. Hendriks (2022) continues that he thinks the Netherlands has already put its own filter of the SDG framework on the policy plans, to recognize what is important for their stakeholders. The government of Nijmegen is already focusing much more on these themes selected in the Netherlands. So "inside" he admits that it's not being used the way it may have been initially intended. Ultimately, the government does everything through policy and so they have to do the tasks at hand and with that, they can reach the depths. He cites as a drawback that the SDGs are less suited for that. Hendriks states that the SDGs are not the "source" of the policy that is made in Nijmegen, the Paris Agreement is what is in his opinion the foundation. Hendriks admit that the monitoring of the SDGs is not realized within the city board of Nijmegen. And the reason for this is in his opinion the fact that they base their policy on the Dutch coalition agreement. Hendriks is not aware of one leading framework in the field of SDG implementation.

4.3.2 Content Analysis

Willemsse & Gabreëls (2023) pointed out that the SDGs are not explicitly addressed within a multitude of relevant policy documents. This content analysis confirmed that this deficiency is also evident in the city of Nijmegen. When terms are used more than 20 times that indicate the presence of a Dutch SDG indicator in the local strategy, then the box is colored green. If these terms are only used 5–20 times the box is colored orange and eventually if these terms are only mentioned 0–5 times the box is colored red. Figure 20 shows a visualization of the presence of SDG 11 indicator terms in the Coalition Agreement and the Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (SSEN) of Nijmegen.

Foremost, SSEN, the word SDG (in Dutch: duurzaamheidsdoelen) or Agenda 2030 is not mentioned once. The content analysis does however show that there are terms related to the Dutch SDG Indicators. Based on the results of the content analysis, it has been established that only two indicators of the SDG framework are mentioned with a frequency surpassing 20 times. These indicators are; *the number of available dwellings and the area per person*. This implies that the city of Nijmegen does prioritize the fact that everyone should be able to live in a residence and with that also should have the ability to move around and have enough living space. Then there are five indicators who are mentioned 5 or more times. In this relevant strategy plan of Nijmegen *actual housing rent, government expenditure on environment protection, urban exposure to particular matter, noise nuisance caused by*

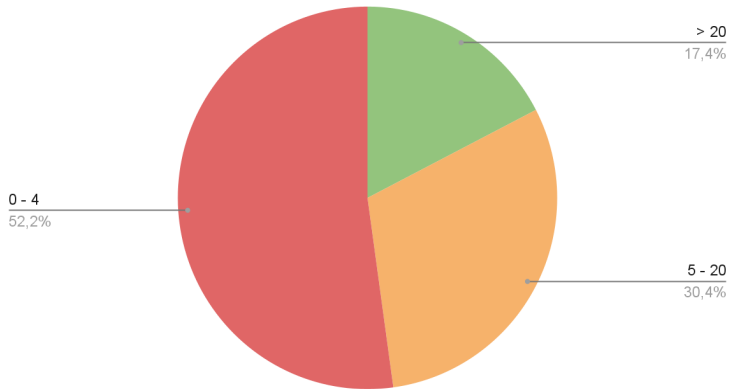
traffic and neighbors and feeling safe in the neighborhood are indicators that are being prioritized. A note is that the expenditure on environmental protection is not mentioned but there are many references regarding the environment, for example, the word green is mentioned 131 times. Thus it seems to be that the city board of Nijmegen puts great emphasis on the city becoming greener. This is another representation of the fact that the themes might correspond, but this does not automatically stimulate debate or dialogues around the SDGs, since they are not mentioned in the policy document.

The main themes as stated in the table of content of the SSEN are also translated and visible in the content analysis. These themes do match with the Dutch SDG Indicator Framework and this is something that will also stand out in the interviews. Officials from the Dutch government will admit that many of the themes will correspond to the SDG framework, but the SDGs will not be explicitly mentioned in the strategies and everyday business on the local level.

For the analysis of the Coalition Agreement, the word SDGs or Agenda 2030 is not mentioned once. However, the content analysis again suggests that there are themes that align with the indicators of the Dutch SDG framework. There are however four indicators of the Dutch SDG framework which are referred to several times. These are the number of available dwellings, actual housing rent, area per person, and feeling safe in the neighborhood. Other indicators that did get noteworthy consideration in the agreement are; homeownership, housing costs burden, housing quality, municipal waste, emissions of acidifying substances, urban exposure to particulate matter, and noise nuisance caused by traffic and neighbors. Thus, the same observation applies to the Coalition Agreement's discussion of the principal themes; they overlap significantly with the SDG framework. The board of Nijmegen prioritizes environmental issues, social issues, and economic issues. The main themes are also corresponding to the Dutch SDG Index: good housing, mobility, climate & biodiversity, and energy & transition.

All in all, based on the findings of this case study, it can be inferred that the approach to implementing the SDGs can be regarded as weak. Now after this content analysis, the interviews, and the surveys something remarkable is discovered: Nijmegen does not implicitly refer to the SDGs in their policy document, and thus does not coordinate SDG implementation, which is evident in the absence of variable one. They also do not utilize the national set of indicators framework designed by CBS, or utilize their own monitor framework. Hence, variable two is absent. In policy documents about the rebuilding efforts of the station district, the SDGs were not mentioned as well. Hendriks (2023) noted that while there exist, non-governmental stakeholders who engage with the SDGs, they do not currently engage in collaborative efforts with local governments to alter urban planning strategies. Which also refers to a lack of variable four. The commitment to produce or compile a sustainable development report is non-existent, as there is neither a designated department nor a city official responsible for this task. Despite the presence of some overarching themes in the Coalition Agreement, only one of the mediating variables appears to be present; Nijmegen signed up as a City4GlobalGoals and thus collaborates with VNG, which indicates the consultation with other stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is not clear what Nijmegen does to be a City4GlobalGoals. According to Ploeg (2022), some municipalities use the SDGs to form a bridge between 'the islands in a governmental structure'. It is safe to say according to the findings that Nijmegen is not one of them. However, the outcomes of the research suggest that it would be incorrect to classify Nijmegen as one of these municipalities. The subsequent analysis will investigate whether local residents share this observation. However, one of the sub-objectives of this research was to discover whether people on a local scale actually experience the implementation of SDG 11.

Coalition Agreement



Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment of the city of Nijmegen

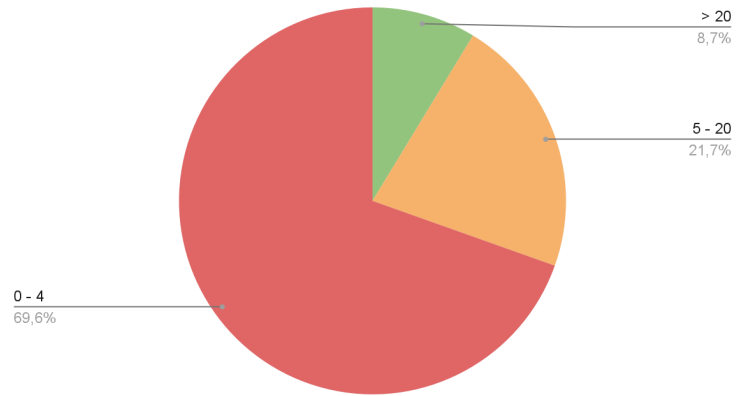


Figure 20. Results from the content analysis.

4.3.3 Surveys

Hatert (see Figure 21.1) is an older neighborhood, most of which was built between 1955 and 1965. The neighborhood has a densely populated structure and its own identity. There is little variation in architecture; there are mainly low-rise houses with flat roofs and rectangular apartment buildings. Given the property value and economic position of residents, Hatert ranks among the neighborhoods of Nijmegen in a low housing market segment.

Lent (see Figure 21.2) is a new neighborhood, located across the Waal. It used to be a gardeners' village. In the 1960s, mostly low-rise houses were built. But in the following years, large detached houses were added. Considering the economic position and the real estate value of residents, Lent is among the neighborhoods of Nijmegen in the highest housing market segment.



Figure 21.1 Hatert



Figure 21.2 Lent

In Appendix F the findings obtained from the online survey are presented and made visible. From the 69 surveys completed, only 41 participants have completed the questionnaire. From these completed surveys, 32 residents live in Lent and 9 in Hatert. The average number of answers per question was 39. This sample suggests that residents in Nijmegen do experience some implementation of SDG 11

in their neighborhoods. When taking a more detailed look at the survey results, the Dutch SDG indicators that have the highest score on being implemented in neighborhoods in Nijmegen are: feeling safe in neighborhoods (with a score of 3.93), the area per person (3.9) and the quality of housing (4.15). The SDG indicator with the lowest score is air pollution in an urban area (2.54). In Figure 22.1 the variation between the mean of the housing indicator and the mean of the living environment is visible. A difference can be observed, which is that the mean of the housing indicators is lower. Thus this means that residents in Lent and Hatert experience less of the SDG housing indicators. This may indicate differences in the priorities set by the Nijmegen municipality. However, the difference is not significant enough to draw any major conclusions.

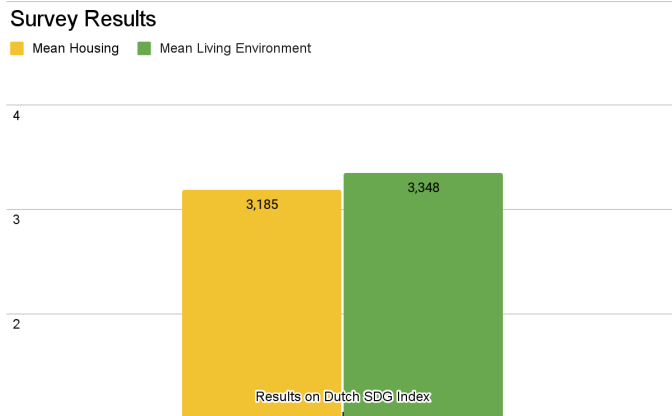


Figure 22.1 Survey Results

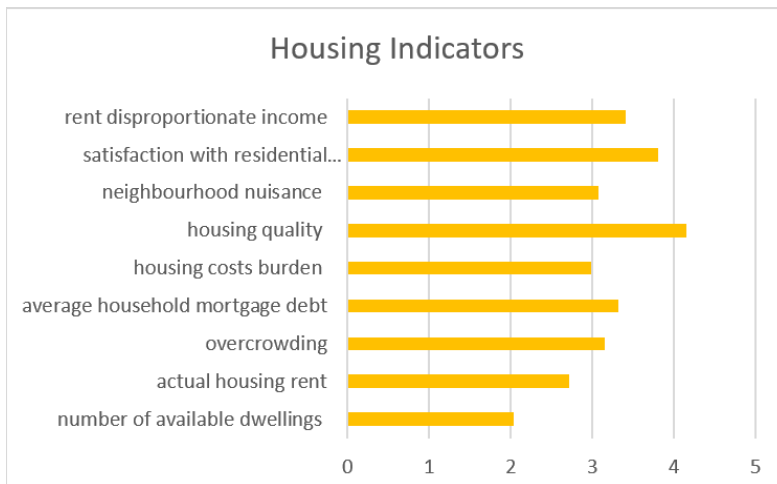


Figure 22.2

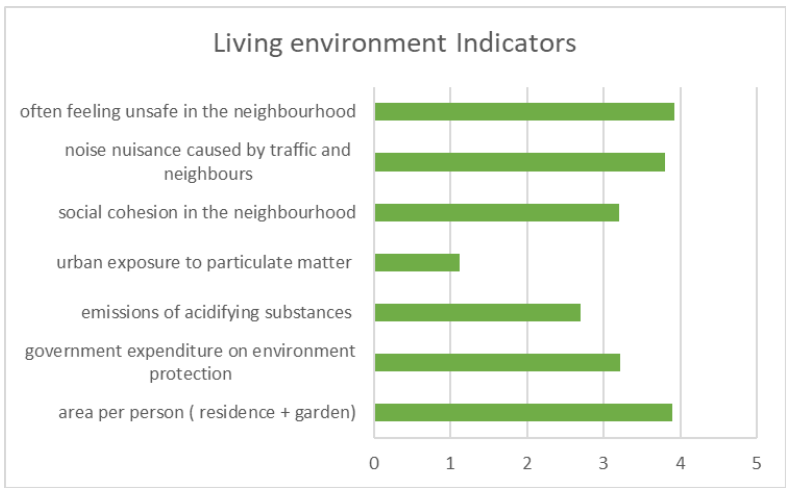


Figure 22.3

However, the analysis indicates that in Lent and Hatert many of the SDG Dutch Indicator themes are experienced by the residents. With an overall mean of 3,166 out of 5 on the survey questions, it can be inferred that the residents in this survey have cognizance and sensibility of the SDG 11 themes. This is interesting given the fact that only four variables of SDG implementation are present in the city of Nijmegen.

5. Recommendation and conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This study was designed to map out how the implementation of the SDGs affects the various levels of society, and to examine if the implementation of the SDG framework is realized on the local level in the Netherlands. To accomplish these objectives, it was necessary to adopt a multi-level perspective, which entailed examining the various level of society, including the global, national and local levels. The five mediating variables employed were expected to enhance the execution of the SDGs. Therefore, they served to assess, visualize and compare implementation processes at different levels. The results of the process tracing of SDG implementation are illustrated in Table 3. In this chapter, key results will be summarized and interpreted. There is a clear research gap on the consideration to governmental challenges around implementing the SDGs. By employing the process-tracing methodology, which entailed both desk research and interviews, the researcher was able to map out what was happening so far at each level and what impact that ultimately has on SDG implementation at the local scale. Upon conducting the case interviews for the case study, it quickly became clear that the SDG framework is not being used in the way the UN envisioned. As a result, the researchers' curiosity grew about at what societal level the SDG implementation approach diminished, and the potential absence of mediating variables.

5.1.1 UN Level

Looking at the global scale, it became clear that the structure of the SDG framework does enforce the implementation. This is done through the opportunities and means the UN designed to operationalize the implementation of the SDG framework. The two routes on how the UN aims to include stakeholder participation are through the achievement of legislation and the accountability taken by national parliaments. The second route is through public institutions, regional and local authorities, humanitarian organizations, academia, volunteer groups, and others (UN General Assembly, 2015). The way the UN wants to motivate these routes is by creating strong partnerships and the creation of a strong evidence-based framework. Ideally, this will seek to effectively integrate both top-down and bottom-up methodologies, with the ultimate goal of assuring widespread implementation across all UN member states. The UN endeavors to encourage stakeholders at all societal levels to operationalize the various mediating variables. By creating this evidence-based framework they hope to encourage national governments to create strong SDG strategies and enhance implementation from a top-down approach. Despite this, the implementation of the SDG framework allows for a certain degree of flexibility and personal interpretation. As a result, significant variation may exist in the execution of these initiatives.

The presence of the High-level Political Forum and the Multi-stakeholder Platform shows the extensive possibilities in the follow-up of SDG implementation and thus the bottom-up approach. The UN statistic department has the large responsibility of monitoring the global process of SDG implementation. However, the emphasis of the UN to delegate a substantial responsibility to national governments is not coupled with any legally enforceable policies. This endows a degree of flexibility that, in my perspective, may not always yield favorable outcomes. This non-binding aspect of the SDG framework does potentially undermine the level of policy coherence due to the disparate approaches taken by various stakeholders. Furthermore, the desk research, content analysis, and other interviews came to the surface that governmental stakeholders tend to skip variable one; development

or coordinate SDG implementation. This will be discussed further in this section regarding the city of Nijmegen.

But all in all, the design of the SDG framework on a global level can be seen as a strong comprehensive framework. It can reinforce sustainable development on all scales of society and has the potential to create a unified language for all stakeholders determined to create the future we want.

5.1.2 EU Level

When continuing to the European Union, a similar conclusion can be drawn. The desk research shows a strong presence of all mediating variables in the EU policies and governmental structures. Implementing the SDGs is a core principle of the EU. They adapted the monitoring framework to targets and indicators more related to pressing issues for the EU. The desk research does also show that the EU did not connect any legally binding agreements to the SDGs, member states again are not forced to promote SDG implementation or for example, to report on the progress being made. And the desk research shows that the implementation on the local level is not implicitly mentioned in important policy frameworks such as the Urban Agenda. However, many themes are purposefully aligned with the SDGs. The presence of Eurostat again shows the ability to report data to the UN, and thus the bottom-up approach is enforced by the EU. To summarize, the implementation strategy and adaptation of the SDG framework by the EU can be analyzed as strong. Nevertheless, there is still not a binding factor attached to the SDGs, and thus is the flexibility of interpretation for the implementation strategy of the framework still present for EU member states.

5.1.3 The Netherlands

Now that the implementation strategies of the EU and UN can be seen as strong according to the mediating variables, the question still is where the SDG implementation stagnates. This stagnation can influence the SDG implementation progress by the local government of Nijmegen. The Netherlands put the SDG coordination in the hands of a small national team, the actual local implementation tasks were put into the hands of two main organizations: The VNG and SDG Nederland. Together they enforce the operationalization of the preparation of SDG dialogues and debates, and they create a network that motivates collaboration with other stakeholders. The VNG designed a monitor framework and adapted the targets and indicators to the local level. Regrettably, this framework presents an observable divergence from the monitoring framework developed by the national statistical office, namely the CBS. This does question whether variable two is operationalized effectively on the national level. The Dutch government does however participate in the HLPFs and does develop an annual SDG report. These two aspects of implementation are evident in the presence of mediating variables two and four. The only variable which is practically absent is the coordination of the SDG framework. The SDG team is small (5 members) and much of the responsibility of SDG implementation is put on the shoulders of SDG Nederland, which also only consists of six full-time employees and the VNG. This indicates a decentralization of the SDG implementation, which can complicate the local SDG implementation in for example Nijmegen.

Regarding sub-national implementation, I can provide concise information about the implementation guidelines. The interview and desk research did not show evidence of the mediating variables one, two, and four, there is no monitoring role for the province of Gelderland and there is no SDG strategy present. The reason for this is that the Province of Gelderland utilizes the national Coalition Agreement as a foundation for further policies. However, the desk research and the interview did not provide sufficient information to exclude the presence of collaboration with other stakeholders and the preparation of SDG dialogues.

5.1.4 Nijmegen

After examining the implementation of SDGs in Nijmegen, some intriguing findings have emerged. Four out of five mediating variables were absent in the SDG implementation process after conducting interviews and performing the content analysis. The city board of Nijmegen does not develop or coordinate SDG implementation strategies, they do not report annually to the Dutch government, they do not prepare for regional or global dialogues in SDG implementation and there is no sign of monitoring SDG implementation. The city board of Nijmegen fails to utilize the national database developed by CBS, which is a regrettable situation.

A single variable identified in Nijmegen is the engagement with other stakeholders, as they participate in the initiative by the VNG, which is the campaign for global goals. Nevertheless, the residents the sample did experience SDG implementation in their neighborhoods. This is interesting given the fact that only one of the variables was found to stimulate the SDG implementation in the city of Nijmegen. Therefore, it appears that the experience of this SDG implementation might not be a by-product of the thorough execution of SDG governance in the city of Nijmegen. As learned from the interviews, desk research, and content analysis on the local level, many themes from SDG 11 correspond with the current priority themes of the local government. This could be a plausible explanation for the experience of SDG 11 implementation by the residents in my sample.

To conclude, after doing the literature review, the desk research, the interviews, the content analysis and the surveys, it is now possible to answer the research question. The main question was: *How are the SDGs implemented from the UN to the local level in the Netherlands, and is their SDG implementation approach similar to the implementation approach the UN aspires?*

The SDGs are implemented through the evident-based framework developed by the UN. This framework sets in motion two approaches: namely, the top-down and the bottom-up approach. To optimize the efficacy of these approaches, there are crucial factors that strengthen the implementation of the SDGs. These are; the coordination of an SDG strategy, the development of a monitoring framework, the consultation with other stakeholders, the establishment of an annual sustainable development report, and the preparation for regional and global dialogue. This research demonstrates that the aforementioned factors are prevalent within Europe and that the Netherlands has implemented them at the national level. Despite that, looking at the sub-national and local levels, some of these factors disappear entirely. Therefore, the SDG implementation approach on the local level in the Netherlands is not realized in the way the UN would aspire. This outcome can be explained by the fact that on the sub-national and local levels, issues regarding implementation start to come to the surface. In the Province of Gelderland, the presence of variables drops from four to only one variable. The remaining variable is the consultation with other key stakeholders. The choice of the Dutch government to decentralize the responsibility of SDG implementation did not effectively facilitate the SDG implementation for the city of Nijmegen. The flexibility of the framework and the lack of binding policies leave the local implementation open for interpretation by the local governments. This makes the framework too dependent on individuals. In my opinion, this can in some cases transform the ‘roadmap to a more sustainable future’ into a ‘meaningless sketch’.


	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 3	Variable 4	Variable 5
UN Level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EU Level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
NL Level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provincial Level	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
Nijmegen Level	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗

Table 3. The assessment of the operationalization of each variable on the various scales of society.

5.2 Critical reflections on limits of own research

One limitation of the present study pertains to its timeframe. Given the vast amount of information available on the SDGs, it is possible that an investigation of this nature could have extended beyond the current timeframe. This would have given me the time to analyze even more resolutions, European briefs, academic literature, voluntary national reviews, monitoring systems, SDG guidance, and relevant city plans. On the other hand, the timeframe served as a helpful constraint in the selection of pertinent information, as it forced the researcher to make wise choices regarding which areas to investigate and which to exclude.

Another limitation of my research is that the sample population primarily consists of individuals who are residents of Lent. Regrettably, a lack of equivalent representation of participants from both neighborhood groups was observed in the questionnaire despite utilizing the same platform for data collection. This made the aim to form a larger picture of the residents less successful. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, the survey results remain viable in achieving my sub-objective, as 41 respondents provided valuable insights regarding the implementation of SDG 11 in Nijmegen.

One additional limitation of this study can be the omission of other relevant stakeholders in the SDG implementation. This highlights the incomplete perspective of the SDG implementation progress. Nevertheless, the decision was made after careful consideration, as this partial picture is crucial, given the existing knowledge gap regarding this perspective. When the knowledge gap is bridged and stakeholders possess a thorough comprehension of the policies and strategies underpinning the framework at various levels of society, the likelihood of successfully achieving the SDGs is increased.

5.3 Recommendations for praxis

After conducting a thorough analysis of the implementation process at the global, national, and local scale, several remarkable findings can be identified. Upon reviewing Table 3, it is readily apparent that the mediating variable is no longer discernible, especially at the sub-national level, particularly in the Province of Gelderland. The study has highlighted crucial aspects that necessitate a recommendation for national stakeholders, namely the national government and the relevant authorities. In the conclusion, it has been posited that the approach of designating the responsibility of executing the SDGs to local governments may not have been the optimal strategy. This is due to the inherent risk of varying interpretations of the SDG framework by those stakeholders. Furthermore, the efficacy of policy implementation at the local level may have been hindered by the lack of obligatory regulations founded by the central government.

Many significant recommendations are currently being proposed to clarify and enhance the aforementioned aspects. The implementation of the SDGs can be highly effective at the local government level in Nijmegen, given the already existing alignment of numerous themes. Such a framework could facilitate the development of more cohesive policies, which is an objective that Nijmegen is eager to pursue. Elevating the significance of SDG implementation could establish a shared language among officials and between officials and the public.

The expansion of the SDG team within the Dutch government would be a logical measure to strengthen its coordinating function, given the role played by both the SDG team and focal points. This would enable the Dutch government to assume greater responsibility for encouraging the achievement of the SDGs. This can greatly enhance the implementation of variables three and five, the consultation with other stakeholders, and the preparation of global and regional debate around the SDGs, allowing the knowledge about the implementation framework to grow. This can have the ability to strengthen the sense of responsibility of the 388 municipalities in the Netherlands and facilitate the work now being done by the VNG and SDG Nederland. Enhancing collaboration between these two implementing organizations would also reinforce the implementation of SDGs. A distinct opportunity for this is the already existing Global4Goals campaign. This campaign can be tightened with stricter rules, that a local government must comply with. This does make the threshold for participation a bit higher, but if the Dutch government makes more incentives for implementing the goals, this campaign will gain more prestige. The result is that local municipalities like Nijmegen can no longer simply join, without the further implementation of the SDGs into their local strategies. The prerequisites for a municipality to join in the campaign can be the promotion of all mediating variables in this study. Only when all these stimulating factors are visible, a city can join this movement.

“ The only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it. ”

– John Locke

All in all, this study mapped out the complete SDG implementation process at various levels of society, and assessed the alignment of the SDG framework with the local policies and strategies in Nijmegen. Therefore, the prudent hope is that these achieved objectives may raise the fence against urgent global challenges, by contributing to the reduction of a knowledge gap.

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7 Appendix

Appendix A Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Hallo, kunt u uzelf even voorstellen en zeggen wat uw functie is binnen deze organisatie/gemeente/institutie?
2. Wat valt er onder duurzaamheid voor jullie organisatie?
3. Hoe implementeren jullie deze duurzaamheid in Nederland? (Leg de stappen en acties uitvoerig uit).
4. Wordt er direct gebruik gemaakt van de SDGs? En wat is de reden hiervoor?
5. Werken jullie ook samen met andere stakeholders op het gebied van SDG-implementatie?
6. Zijn jullie verplicht om resultaten te leveren over de voortgang van de implementatie van de SDGs?
7. Zo niet (vraag 3), wat gebeurt er dan wel om duurzaamheid te implementeren? Noem voorbeelden van modellen.
8. Welke indicators gebruiken jullie om de duurzaamheids implementatie te monitoren?

English Version

Semi-Structured Interview Master Thesis

1. Hello, could you please introduce yourself and say what your position is within this organization/municipality/institution?
2. What does sustainability include for your organization?
3. How do you implement this sustainability in the Netherlands? (Please explain the steps and actions in detail).
4. Are the SDGs being used directly? And what is the reason for this?
5. Do you also work with other stakeholders on SDG implementation?
6. Are you required to provide results on the progress of SDGs implementation?
7. If not (question 3), what is happening to implement sustainability? List examples of models.
8. What indicators do you use to monitor sustainability implementation?