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The sustainable development policies of Quebec and Flanders

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Content

Executive summary and policy recommendations (in Dutch)

In deze paper worden twee casestudies van project 3 in detail geanalyseerd, met name Québec en Vlaanderen. Dat gebeurt op basis van de drie beleidsdimensies die in het project werden gedefinieerd: beleidsframing, beleidsdoelstellingen en beleidsinstrumenten. Vervolgens geeft de paper een eerste aanzet tot verklarende conclusies op basis van de vier factoren die in het onderzoek aan bod komen: internationale invloed, graad van autonomie, politieke context en sociaaleconomische omstandigheden.

Het beleid in Québec en Vlaanderen is op vele punten gelijkaardig. Zo werd duurzame ontwikkeling in beide cases geïnstitutionaliseerd door middel van een strategie duurzame ontwikkeling en een wet duurzame ontwikkeling. In beide gevallen staat een coördinatiebureau in voor de dagelijkse opvolging van het beleid, dat als een transversale opdracht voor alle beleidsdomeinen gezien wordt. In de twee gevallen werden ook specifieke instrumenten ontworpen voor overleg en horizontale beleidsintegratie. Daarnaast is het zo dat de beleidsdoelstellingen in beide cases verschillende zwakke kenmerken vertonen (terwijl Vlaanderen wel uitblinkt door de recente ontwikkeling van de langetermijnvisie). In de twee casestudies werd opgemerkt dat het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid steunt op een minimalistische interpretatie van het holistische beleidsmodel, dat uitgaat van een vrijblijvend engagement voor duurzame ontwikkeling, en waarbij verschillende instrumenten er *de facto* op gericht zijn om niet in te grijpen in bestaande processen en lopend beleid, wat in tegenspraak is met enkele strategische beleidsdoelstellingen.

De analyse heeft ook een aantal verschillen tussen Québec en Vlaanderen blootgelegd. Zo valt het op dat de Noord-Zuiddimensie van duurzame ontwikkeling volledig ontbreekt in het Québecse beleid, zowel in de gehanteerde definitie van duurzame ontwikkeling als in de beleidsacties. Het is verder frappant hoe het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid van Québec gekoppeld wordt aan het leiderschapsdiscours van de huidige regering, terwijl het beleid in Vlaanderen, zeker in de beginjaren, eerder bescheiden voorgesteld werd. Een ander opmerkelijk verschil is dat het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid in Québec de volledige publieke sector omvat (in totaal meer dan 140 verschillende instanties), terwijl men zich in Vlaanderen vooral richt op de dertien beleidsdomeinen van de Vlaamse overheid.

Hoewel er ook in Québec problemen aan het licht gekomen zijn met de uitvoering van bepaalde instrumenten, heeft de analyse toch aangetoond dat sommige elementen van het beleid er beduidend sterker zijn. Met het oog op het trekken van lessen, kunnen vooral de volgende drie punten nuttig zijn in een Vlaamse beleidscontext:

1. Een van de belangrijkste bouwstenen van het beleid in Québec zijn de zestien **principes voor duurzame ontwikkeling** die gedefinieerd worden in de wet duurzame ontwikkeling. De wet bepaalt dat de gehele overheid in al haar acties rekening moet houden met de principes. Terwijl ook andere overheden zich hebben laten inspireren door de beginselen van de *Rio Declaration*, is de uitgebreide aanpak in Québec uitzonderlijk. Het formuleren van de principes is een antwoord op een algemeen gevoel dat duurzame ontwikkeling als begrip moeilijk is om te concretiseren en in beleid te vertalen. Een dergelijk gevoel werd ook vaak in Vlaanderen geuit tijdens interviews. Vlaanderen kan zich laten inspireren door het voorbeeld van Québec om duurzame ontwikkeling concreter te maken en te koppelen aan duidelijke principes die de besluitvorming moeten oriënteren. De VSDO vermeldt ook wel het belang van de Rio-principes, en geeft bijzondere aandacht aan vijf ervan, maar in Vlaanderen is het niet duidelijk hoe die principes in het beleid doorwerken.

2. Met de **Commissaris Duurzame Ontwikkeling** heeft Québec een onafhankelijke en permanente instantie die het overheidsbeleid auditeert op het vlak van duurzame ontwikkeling. Met een team van twintig werknemers evalueert de Commissaris of de overheid in al haar verschillende acties voldoende rekening houdt met de wet duurzame ontwikkeling en met de zestien principes. Hij waakt er ook over dat duurzame ontwikkeling niet enkel aandacht krijgt in het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid zelf, maar in alle plannen en beleidsdomeinen. De Commissaris, die valt onder de Auditeur-Generaal van Québec, rapporteert rechtstreeks aan het Parlement en heeft een autoriteit die vergelijkbaar is met het Belgische Rekenhof. De instelling in Vlaanderen 'kopiëren' zou onrealistisch zijn, maar de analyse wijst wel op het nut van een permanent evaluatie-instrument, dat onafhankelijk van de overheid opereert. Hoewel de vernieuwde VSDO nieuwe monitoringsinstrumenten voorziet, en hoewel de VSDO door elke regering opnieuw geëvalueerd moet worden, bestaan er in Vlaanderen nog geen instrumenten die het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid permanent evalueren, of die de doorwerking van duurzame ontwikkeling in andere plannen en domeinen controleren.
3. In vergelijking met Vlaanderen investeert de overheid van Québec veel meer in **capaciteitsopbouw** voor duurzame ontwikkeling binnen de administratie. Ondermeer doordat het Coördinatiebureau in Québec zestien ambtenaren telt (in vergelijking met zes in Vlaanderen) heeft het verschillende tools kunnen ontwikkelen voor de departementen en organismen. Het gaat bijvoorbeeld om een leidraad om de zestien principes te integreren in beleidsbeslissingen. Het gebrek aan capaciteitsopbouw werd in Vlaanderen vaak als pijnpunt aangehaald en wordt ervaren als een rem op de integratie van duurzame ontwikkeling in de verschillende beleidsdomeinen.

Deze drie aandachtspunten zullen verder meegenomen worden in het project. In het najaar van 2011 zullen uitgebreidere beleidsaanbevelingen geformuleerd worden, die gebaseerd zijn op de vijf casestudies en op de eindconclusies van project 3.

1. Introduction

This paper is situated in project 3, which compares the Flemish sustainable development policy with that of four other subnational governments, i.e. Wallonia, North Rhine-Westphalia, North Holland and Quebec. The paper focuses on a detailed comparison between two cases: Quebec and Flanders. It reflects the research I conducted while holding a two-month visiting position at the Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Research Chair of the *Université du Québec à Montréal* (UQÀM).[1]

The research is framed in the growing literature on governance for sustainable development, which is concerned with the question of how governments and other actors, at all levels, can steer societal development along a more sustainable path. My interest goes out to the policies of subnational governments, which have not yet been extensively researched. Nonetheless, they constitute a vital link in the multi-level governance of sustainable development, since in many countries they are responsible for a large part of the implementation (or even formulation) of policies directed towards sustainable development (OECD, 2002: 19). Sustainable development is approached as a *meta-policy*, 'a policy designed to guide the development of numerous more specific policies' (O'Toole, 2004: 38). I investigate how subnational governments interpret sustainable development, and how they translate it into policy-making. Since sustainable development is a contested concept (Bruyninckx, 2006: 270; Jacobs, 1999; Zaccaï, 2002: 35-36) that has given rise to multiple policy interpretations (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000a: 426-427), it is my endeavour to explain how and why policy choices with regard to sustainable development are made at the subnational level. In doing so, this research aims to contribute to a more systematic understanding of sustainable development at the subnational level of governance, where the current scientific knowledge is least advanced.

The next section gives an overview of the theoretical and analytical choices that guide the research (2.). The remainder of the paper is dedicated to a comparative policy analysis of Quebec and Flanders. In a first step, a within-case analysis of Quebec (3.) and Flanders (4.) is presented. Subsequently, the two policies are systematically compared (5.). The observed similarities and differences are then explained (6.). Conclusions are presented in a final section (7.). The analysis presented in this paper is based on a broad study of policy documents, on a series of semi-structured interviews, and on secondary literature. The interviewees are political and administrative officials, as well as non-governmental stakeholders and experts, at both the subnational and the national level in both cases. They are listed at the end of this paper.

2. Explaining subnational sustainable development policies: theoretical and analytical considerations

2.1 Explanatory factors of subnational sustainable development policies

Considering the lack of scientific studies that have been conducted with regard to subnational governments, despite their important role in governance for sustainable development, I want to find out how they deal with the policy concept, and contribute to a more systematic understanding of sustainable development policies at that level of governance. In order to explain what determines sustainable development policies of subnational governments, the theoretical framework of the research is aimed at identifying those explanatory factors. Since there is no

[1] A previous version of this working paper will be published in the research collection of the Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Research Chair (see Happaerts, 2011).

over-arching 'theory of sustainable development' (Jordan, 2008: 24), I adopt a broad theoretical approach, in which a selection of perspectives is combined into a sound foundation from which the most relevant explanatory factors can be distilled.

The footing of the theoretical framework is constituted by the literature on policy convergence and divergence. Situated in the field of comparative policy analysis, it offers causal explanations on the similarity or dissimilarity among policies. On the one hand, it studies international factors such as international commerce or international law as reasons for policy convergence (Bennett, 1988; 1991). It also pays attention to international policy issues resulting in soft law, and to mechanisms of 'transnational communication' which presuppose nothing but information exchange with other governments or international organisations (Holzinger & Knill, 2005; Holzinger et al., 2008). On the other hand, the literature on policy convergence and policy divergence shows how domestic features, such as the specific political or socioeconomic context of governments, are responsible for differences or similarities between policies (Heichel et al., 2005; Lenschow et al., 2005).

Second, the literature on governance for sustainable development is added to accommodate policy-specific factors. Scholars emphasise the fact that sustainable development is different from many other policy issues, e.g. because of its intrinsic vagueness or because it requires vertical and horizontal policy integration (Jordan, 2008; Lafferty, 2004a; Steurer, 2009). The literature also offers insights on how specific features of societies influence their governments' implementation of the concept. For instance, it shows how socioeconomic conditions affect how governments deal with sustainable development (Kern, 2008: 136-137; Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000a: 423). It also points towards the importance of the distribution of competences between levels of governance (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000a: 427; OECD, 2002: 20-21). Yet most important is the presence of political will, which ultimately determines whether governments put sustainable development on the agenda (Jordan &Lenschow, 2008; Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005: 461, 465; Swanson & Pintér, 2007).

The previous two theoretical traditions were developed mainly on the basis of analyses of national policies. Since the study of subnational policies requires a specific approach, the framework is completed by insights drawn from the literature on comparative regionalism and federalism. That theoretical tradition takes into account the particular situation of subnational governments. It attaches large importance to the specific competences that are enjoyed (or not) by different subnational governments (Hooghe et al., 2008b; Keating & McEwen, 2005). Moreover, scholars demonstrate how some subnational governments conduct policies with an explicit or implicit strategy of identity politics (Keating, 1999; Paquin, 2004).

Those three theoretical literatures point towards a variety of potential explanatory factors. Four clusters of factors appear most significant: international factors (2.1.1), the degree of autonomy of subnational governments (2.1.2), their political context (2.1.3) and their socioeconomic conditions (2.1.4).

2.1.1 International factors

Sustainable development was conceptually developed at the international level, and a significant part of policy-making still takes place in multilateral organisations such as the UN, the OECD or the EU. International negotiations on sustainable development mainly result in soft law measures (e.g. political declarations, policy recommendations, guidelines) rather than in legally binding obligations. A useful mechanism to study the international influence of soft law is *transnational communication* (cf. Happaerts & Van den Brande, 2011), which refers to a set of mechanisms that presuppose nothing but information exchange and communication with

international organisations or foreign governments (Holzinger et al., 2008: 559). A first mechanism is the promotion of policy models by international organisations. Through the dissemination of information, guidelines, best practices and benchmarks, they exert legitimacy pressures on their members to adopt certain policies (Holzinger & Knill, 2005: 785). Of significant importance in this context are global summits such as the ones in Rio and Johannesburg, at which policy solutions are promoted by international organisations. A second mechanism of transnational communication is policy copying. That can involve lesson-drawing, which denotes rational learning processes through which governments use foreign experiences to solve domestic problems, or policy emulation, meaning that governments, driven by a desire of conformity, adopt a certain policy because they observe others around them doing the same (Holzinger & Knill, 2005: 783-785). Third, transnational communication is stimulated by networking activities, through joint problem-solving and information-sharing. In the area of sustainable development, subnational governments have created specific transnational networks (Happaerts et al., 2010b).

2.1.2 Degree of autonomy

In all countries, whether federal or unitary, sustainable development cuts across different levels of governance (Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005: 462). When looking at the policies of subnational governments, their degree of autonomy is an important factor to consider. Degree of autonomy contains both *shared rule*, the capacity of subnational governments to shape national decision-making, and *self-rule*, their independence to exercise authority within their own borders (Marks et al., 2008: 114-115). It is assumed that especially the degree of self-rule of subnational governments influences the content of their sustainable development policies. Self-rule is measured here by a recently developed index by Hooghe et al. (2008b).[2] Governments with a high degree of self-rule will be able to conduct self-designed policies with a large thematic scope and with a range of different policy instruments, while governments with a low degree of self-rule might rather be limited to the implementation of national policies.

2.1.3 Political context

While the theoretical literature points towards a variety of factors relating to the political context of a government, the analysis is limited to certain factors that are most likely to influence the choices with regard to sustainable development policies. One of those is political will. Although it has been labelled as a 'trash can' variable in political science (Nilsson et al., 2009: 145), all previous studies of sustainable development policies identify it as a very significant factor (e.g. Steurer & Martinuzzi, 2005: 461, 465). Especially the political weight that is given to sustainable development at the highest level of decision-making is of relevance. That usually translates in the political capital that is invested in the policy. A second factor that I look at is party politics. The question there is whether the ideological orientation of a government is decisive in its sustainable development policy. Finally, in an analysis of subnational policies it is relevant to verify whether so-called identity politics play a role in sustainable development.

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[2] In the *Regional Authority Index*, 'self-rule' is an aggregated subindex of four indicators. 'Institutional depth' measures the extent to which the administration of the subnational government is independent from central government control. 'Policy scope' indicates in how many policy areas the subnational government can operate. 'Fiscal autonomy' refers to the autonomy to decide on taxes. 'Representation' shows whether the citizens of a subnational entity elect their representatives in a direct way (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 124-131).

2.1.4 Socioeconomic conditions

The presence of similar socioeconomic conditions is often used to explain policy convergence across cases (e.g. Holzinger et al., 2008: 582). For instance, the specific economic situation in which a government operates is said to determine its willingness to commit to a sustainable development agenda and the kind of commitment it attaches to it (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000a: 423; Lenschow et al., 2005: 802). Socioeconomic conditions are particularly relevant in the context of this topic, since sustainable development aims specifically at adapting prevailing economic and social institutions (Bruyninckx, 2006: 268; Lafferty, 2004b: 19-20; Meadowcroft, 2008: 110). Furthermore, the overall socioeconomic structure of a society is decisive in the context of sustainable development as well (e.g. the degree of urbanisation or industrialisation). An important factor here is population density, which impacts a society in several different ways (transport, infrastructure, housing, ...).

2.2 Subnational sustainable development policies: three policy dimensions

The research is concerned with the questions how the four explanatory factors that are withheld determine the sustainable development policies of subnational governments. The concept of 'policy' now needs to be operationalised. I define a *governmental policy* as an intentional course of action or inaction designed by governmental bodies and officials, that consists of a set of interrelated decisions concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them, in dealing with a problem or a matter of concern (based on Adolino & Blake, 2001: 10; and Howlett & Ramesh, 2003: 5-8). The concept is broken down into smaller, observable elements called 'policy dimensions'. That is a technique frequently applied in the literature on policy convergence and divergence (Heichel et al., 2005: 828). I withhold three policy dimensions: policy framing, policy goals and policy instruments. It has to be emphasised that they are not three separate or delineated categories. Rather, they are different elements of a single reality that serve as analytical lenses to approach a complex reality in a concrete and accessible way. For their operationalisation, insights are drawn from the combination of two of the theoretical literatures used in the theoretical framework. On the one hand, the policy literature has a long tradition of analysing the main policy dimensions. On the other hand, the literature on governance for sustainable development is a necessary complement, in that it focuses the attention on the specificities of sustainable development as a policy issue. Those specificities make that certain characteristics of the policy dimensions are less relevant, while others need to be added in the operationalisation.

2.2.1 Policy framing

Governmental policies deal with a specific problem or matter of concern. Governments need to identify that problem before designing a policy. *Policy framing* refers to the process of interpreting a concept and to give meaning to a problem. It involves the use of available knowledge and information in order to select, name, emphasise or organise certain aspects of a policy problem (Daviter, 2007: 654; Schön & Rein, 1994: 26; Ward et al., 2004: 291-292). The conceptual vagueness and the complexity attached to sustainable development open up the possibility to frame the concept in different ways (Dryzek, 1997: 8; Harrison, 2000: 2). Previous analyses have shown that, because of different policy framings, governments emphasise distinct aspects of sustainable development and have diverging policies (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000b: 340-341). The selection of a certain framing involves subjectivity on the

part of political actors (Harrison, 2000: 2). It has even been stated that political actors deliberately 'spin' sustainable development into a framing that suits their political ideology or preferred solution (Blühdorn & Welsh, 2007: 192).

A question that is related to policy framing, is what Bachus et al. (2005) refer to as 'governance models for sustainable development'. They found that governments organise their sustainable development policies within a small number of different models. The choice of a governance model goes hand in hand with policy framing. Four ideal-types of governance models for sustainable development are identified:

- the *holistic governance model* defines sustainable development as an overarching concept, with equal consideration of economic, social and environmental objectives. In its policy translation, sustainable development has implications in all policy domains. Typically, the sustainable development policy consists of an overarching plan with actions to be taken in all policy areas, without prioritising any area above another (Bachus et al., 2005: 96-97);
- in the *policy principles model*, the integration of sustainable development is based on a given set of principles. That requires institutional adaptations, such as the creation of instruments to integrate the principles into decision-making (Bachus et al., 2005: 97-98);
- the *environmental integration model* uses a conventional definition of sustainable development, but opts to attain it through environmental policy integration. New policy instruments are used to integrate environmental concerns into other policy domains (Bachus et al., 2005: 97);
- when applying the *ecological interpretation of sustainable development*, a government explicitly chooses a strategy with an environmental emphasis. The sustainable development policy wants to improve environmental policy and to assess it with economic and social parameters (Bachus et al., 2005: 97).

2.2.2 Policy goals

A government's policy goals can be divided into strategic policy goals and operational policy goals (Bouckaert et al., 2003: 11; Joyce, 1999). *Strategic policy goals* are goals which express a government's vision on the future. Typically, they are abstract rather than concrete, and can sometimes express nothing more than ideas or core values. Strategic policy goals are associated with the intended end result or effects (outcome) of a policy. *Operational policy goals* are goals through which a government concretises its strategic policy goals. They are usually more concrete and measurable than the strategic policy goals and can include performance targets. They refer more to output (the immediate tangible effects) than to outcome. Furthermore, much has been written in the public management literature and in the literature on governance for sustainable development about how policy goals *should* look like (De Peuter et al., 2007: 43; Lundqvist, 2004: 100-102; OECD, 2001a: 27). I withhold the following characteristics to analyze strategic and operational policy goals across cases:

- which *thematic areas* are targeted by the policy goals? This is an important characteristic to analyze in the context of sustainable development. Sustainable development policies should encompass different policy domains (Meadowcroft, 2008: 115; Spangenberg, 2004: 6), but its conceptual vagueness facilitates different interpretations (cf. supra). This characteristic is thus related to policy framing;
- are the policy goals *clear and specific*? Is the intended outcome (strategic) or output (operational) of the goals unambiguous? The potential variance is wide, from extremely abstract and vaguely stated ambitions to very concrete objectives linked to specific indicators

(Lundqvist, 2004: 102). The more specific and explicit the goals, the stronger the steering capacity of the sustainable development policy (Lundqvist, 2004: 102);

- related to specificity of the goals and to the distinction between strategic and operational goals, what is the *timeframe* of the policy goals? Do they target long-term and/or short-term results? In the context of sustainable development, it is widely believed that governments should formulate a long-term vision, but also determine concrete goals to intervene on a short term (OECD, 2001a: 27);
- are the goals *based upon an analysis of the current situation*? Goals of a sustainable development policy should be founded on a sound analysis of local and global trends and challenges, depending on reliable information (OECD, 2001a: 27);
- what is the *backing* of the policy goals? Backing refers to the 'acceptable' character of policy goals and gives an indication of their authority and democratic legitimacy. Policy goals for sustainable development should be backed politically (by all political parties, preferably endorsed by parliament) and societally (by non-governmental stakeholders). Policy goals can be formulated by a single government department behind closed doors or they can be unanimously agreed upon by all political parties and enshrined in law after an extensive societal consultation process (Lundqvist, 2004: 101-102). The latter option might imply weaker ambitions but holds a stronger chance for continuity and lasting support.

2.2.3 Policy instruments

Policy instruments are defined as 'the actual means or devices governments have at their disposal for implementing policies, and among which they must select in formulating policy' (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003: 87). The analysis looks at the specific type of policy instruments that is used in the sustainable development policies of subnational governments. The following types are retained:

- *institutional instruments* are applied when a government uses its organisational powers or planning activities to achieve its policy goals. Obvious examples are the reorganisation or creation of government departments, units or agencies. In the case of sustainable development, the introduction of the policy concept sometimes triggers an administrative reorganisation or the creation of new institutions. The adoption of planning or strategy documents to organise policy-making is also grouped within this category. Moreover, governments can create public enterprises or voluntary organisations outside the governmental sphere (Berger & Steurer, 2008; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003: 90-102);
- *legal instruments* use a government's law-making powers. These instruments include the use of regulations, laws or constitutional provisions to attain policy goals (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003: 90, 103-107; Kaufmann-Hayoz et al., 2001: 36). The use of legal instruments for sustainable development was introduced by Agenda 21 and was further stimulated by the Johannesburg Summit (Cordonier Segger, 2004);
- *economic instruments* use money or market mechanisms as their main resource. This category contains the most traditional of government tools, i.e. taxes, as well as the 'new' market-based instruments that are described by the literature on 'new environmental policy instruments', such as tradable permits. Under this heading it is also important to point at the significant role of governments as clients and consumers themselves, who can choose to influence markets with their procurement strategies (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003: 90, 108-113; Jordan et al., 2005: 482; Kaufmann-Hayoz et al., 2001: 37-38; OECD, 2001b: 134-135);

- with *information instruments*, governments rely on nothing but information to get things done. These instruments include public information campaigns, mission statements, research activities, ... (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003: 90, 114). Efforts to use certain types of information (such as scientific studies or statistical data) to monitor, evaluate or benchmark policies also fall within this category when they are applied to attain policy goals. Recommended by Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992a: §40.4), indicators for sustainable development are widely regarded as one of the essential policy tools for sustainable development. Other prominent examples include the increasingly popular use of eco-labels for products and services (Jordan et al., 2005: 482);
- finally, instruments for sustainable development can be based on *voluntary approaches*. Those intend to introduce new rules or norms through 'soft steering'. They mostly involve agreements between government and the private sector. They are meant to involve businesses in the government's sustainable development policy, or to incite the private sector into engaging in self-regulation (e.g. environmental management systems) (Baker & Eckerberg, 2008: 12; Bressers & Hanf, 1995: 309; Jordan et al., 2005: 482-483; Lyon, 2009: 56-61). Transition management also falls within this category, as it is mostly based on a voluntary cooperation between government, civil society and market actors (Paredis, 2008; 2010) and can involve market-based mechanisms (Loorbach & Rotmans, 2006: 195). It is important to note that some of these voluntary approaches are applied by private actors without any interference by governments. I only look at those voluntary approaches which are used by governments as instruments in their sustainable development policy.

In the remainder of this paper, the sustainable development policies of Quebec and Flanders are analysed using these three policy dimensions as analytical lenses. The findings are then elucidated in light of the four explanatory factors.

3. The sustainable development policy of Quebec

3.1 Historical overview

The government of Quebec was among the global pioneers to put sustainable development on the political agenda. In 1988 it was the first Canadian government to create a Round Table on Environment and Economy (*Table ronde québécoise sur l'environnement et l'économie*). The instauration of such round tables was a recommendation of the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers[3] - more particularly of the Quebec representative in it (Mead, 2005: 67-68) - and a direct consequence of the visit of the Brundtland Commission to Canada in 1986[4] (Toner, 2000: 58; Toner & Meadowcroft, 2009: 84). The Round Table had the task of making the idea of sustainable development concrete for Quebec. As a direct consequence of the activities of the Round Table, the Environment Ministry in 1989 announced the creation of a division for sustainable development (*Sous-ministériat au développement durable et à la conservation*). It was the first entity within the Quebec administration to be formally dedicated to sustainable

[3] The Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers is one of the sectoral councils that assemble the federal and the provincial level. It is one of the typical instruments of intergovernmental relations in Canadian federalism.

[4] The activities and the report of the Brundtland Commission had great resonance in Canada (Toner & Meadowcroft, 2009: 78). The secretary-general of the WCED, Jim McNeill, and one of its members, Maurice Strong, were Canadians.

development. At the initiative of the head of the division - the Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable Development and Conservation - the government in 1991 launched the Inter-ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (*Comité interministériel sur le développement durable*), an administrative body for horizontal coordination which represents all departments at the level of assistant deputy ministers,[5] chaired by the Environment Ministry. Those early steps to put sustainable development on the agenda were triggered by Quebec's involvement in the international activities on sustainable development since the mid-1980s. That is marked by the decision of the government to fund the French edition of the Brundtland Report in 1988 (Gouvernement du Québec, 1992: 47).

Table 1 Governments in Quebec since 1985[6]

Political term	Party in office	Prime Minister	Environment Minister
1985-1989	PLQ	**Robert Bourassa** (PLQ)	**Clifford Lincoln** (PLQ)
1989-1994	PLQ	**Robert Bourassa** (PLQ) as of 1994: **Daniel Johnson** (PLQ)	**Pierre Paradis** (PLQ)
1994-1998	PQ	**Jacques Parizeau** (PQ) as of 1996: **Lucien Bouchard** (PQ)	**Jacques Brassard** (PQ) as of 1996: **David Cliche** (PQ)
1998-2003	PQ	**Lucien Bouchard** (PQ) as of 2001: **Bernard Landry** (PQ)	**Paul Bégin** (PQ) as of 2001: **André Boisclair** (PQ)
2003-2007	PLQ	**Jean Charest** (PLQ)	**Thomas Mulcair** (PLQ) as of 2006: **Claude Béchard** (PLQ)
2007-2008	PLQ	**Jean Charest** (PLQ)	**Line Beauchamp** (PLQ)
since 2008	PLQ	**Jean Charest** (PLQ)	**Line Beauchamp** (PLQ) as of 2010: **Pierre Arcand** (PLQ)

Also during the period of the sovereigntist governments between 1994 and 2003 (see Table 1), Quebec was active in the international debate. Yet under those governments led by the *Parti québécois* (PQ),[7] no horizontal initiatives to advance the institutionalisation of sustainable development were taken. That is surprising, since the concept had a prominent place in the PQ's election programme. That programme for instance announced that a PQ government would include economic, social and environmental considerations in its decision-making processes (PQ, 1994: 34-36). In the 1996 party programme, the PQ even announced the creation of new governmental structures for sustainable development (PQ, 1996: 104), but that was never acted upon when the party was in office. An exception is the creation of the Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development (*Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable*) in 2000, which could be seen as a soft version of the electoral promises. Yet, according to interviewees

5 Within the Quebec administration, an assistant deputy minister (*sous-ministre adjoint*) is the head of a directorate-general of a ministry (each ministry consists of a number of directorates-general). A ministry is lead by a deputy minister (*sous-ministre*). Those are administrative, not political, positions.

6 The official denomination of the minister having the Environment portfolio varies (since 2005: Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks).

7 In Quebec politics, two parties are dominant, the sovereigntist PQ and the liberal PLQ. They have alternated in power since 1970. The main ideological separation between the two refers to the question of Quebec's sovereignty from Canada, rather than to a left-right distinction. A third party is sometimes represented in parliament, but due to the winner-takes-all electoral system their weight is low. An exception is the 2007-2008 term, when the ADQ (*Action démocratique du Québec*) came ahead of the PQ and formed the official opposition (Hepburn, 2011: 531).

that only happened because of a budget surplus that the PQ did not want to invest in debt reduction.

The major event triggering the institutionalisation of sustainable development was the return to power in 2003 of the Liberals (PLQ, *Parti liberal du Québec*). The leader of the party and new Prime Minister Charest was a former federal Environment Minister. Having been responsible for an initiative at federal level to launch a multistakeholder partnership for sustainable development in keeping with the Rio commitments, Charest mandated his own Environment Minister in 2003 to launch a similar 'green plan' in Quebec.[8] The idea to do so formed part of the Liberals' election programme (PLQ, 2002: 24). The PLQ promised the 're-engineering' of the state, including the environmental reorientation of governmental activities (Audet & Gendron, 2010). However, according to observers, the new government's Environment Minister Mulcair had overly ambitious intentions with his green plan, for instance regarding 'green' taxation measures. As a consequence, his green plan was blocked by ministers with an economic orientation (Audet & Gendron, 2010; Gendron et al., 2005: 23). The initial green plan was then turned into a sustainable development plan, which Mulcair laid down for public consultation at the end of 2004, together with a draft Sustainable Development Act and a strategy and action plan on biodiversity (Gendron, 2005: 23). The Act was passed in 2006 and intends to promote sustainable development by embedding it into public administration (Assemblée Nationale, 2006). It calls for a sustainable development strategy (SDS) and for the development of sustainable development action plans by each ministry and a series of public organisms (governmental agencies and public enterprises), almost 150 in total. The Act also creates the position of a Sustainable Development Commissioner within the office of the Auditor General of Quebec. The Commissioner has to audit the government with regard to sustainable development and report to Parliament on the implementation of the Act, including on the compliance of the 16 sustainable development principles that are defined in it. Furthermore, the Act creates the Green Fund and adds the right to a healthful environment and one in which biodiversity is preserved to Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

In the analysis, the emphasis is put on Quebec's sustainable development policy as it was institutionalised by the consecutive PLQ governments after 2003. Earlier events are included where appropriate. Initiatives taken by the government after 2010 were not taken into account.

3.2 Policy framing

As sustainable development has been on the political agenda in Quebec since the activities of the Brundtland Commission, the policy framing of sustainable development has known a significant evolution. That is why, in this section, I also pay attention to previous framings, in order to better understand the policy framing that is dominant since the institutionalisation of sustainable development by the PLQ governments.

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8 At the Rio Summit, federal Environment Minister Charest (until 1998 member of the Conservative party) presented the Green Plan as Canada's approach to sustainable development (Tarasofsky, 2007: 4). The Green Plan had been developed by his predecessor in 1990, as a response to the Brundtland Report, and had the ambition of being the first comprehensive environmental policy plan in Canada. Although it was backed by significant financial resources, it was mostly aimed at information measures and it was criticised for lacking substance (Gale, 1997; Hoberg and Harrison, 1994). After Rio, Charest launched his own *Projet de société*, intended to transform the existing Green Plan into a proper Canadian SDS. The process failed after the disappearance of political momentum and because of organisational difficulties (Tarasofsky, 2007: 6; Toner, 2000: 61-62). As a reference to Charest's federal experience, the SDS of Quebec is surtitled *Un projet de société pour le Québec*.

3.2.1 The WCED's legacy: reconciling environment and development

The first mention of sustainable development in the policy discourse of Quebec was in 1988, in the same year that the government sponsored the French edition of the Brundtland Report. The mention was made in a strategy document of the Environment Ministry, presenting a new approach in environmental policy focused on protection and conservation. In the document, sustainable development was presented as a new social contract between environment and development (see Baril, 2006: 70). Although no definition is given, the influence of the WCED is evident, framing sustainable development as the reconciliation of environment and development.[9] In the document, development is understood as economic progress (Gouvernement du Québec, 1988: 16).

The interpretation of sustainable development as the conjunction of environmental protection and economic development is noticeable in other initiatives that were taken during this period. It is manifested in the name of the institution that was mandated to define the reach of sustainable development in Quebec (the Round Table on *Environment* and *Economy*, cf. supra). Furthermore, when sustainable development was mentioned for the first time in the government's opening address to Parliament in 1989, it was linked to the same idea. In that speech the government also stressed that environmental protection would have a major stake in its economic development policy (Assemblée Nationale, 1989: 9).

3.2.2 Moving toward a three-pillar model

After the initial period of growing awareness for sustainable development, ten years followed in which the government of Quebec, led by the PQ, took no major transversal initiatives for sustainable development. Sustainable development, then, was largely absent from the main political discourse as a meta-concept. But that does not mean that the themes central to it received no attention. The tone for that trend was set in the government's opening address in 1994, marking the PQ's return to power after ten years. In his speech, Prime Minister Parizeau talks about the Rio Summit, about biodiversity and about climate change, but sustainable development is not mentioned (Assemblée Nationale, 1994). The PQ's election programme, however, said that the economy must take a necessary bend (*virage*), and that environmental protection must be a factor of economic growth (PQ, 1994: 35).[10] While no initiatives were taken to institutionalise sustainable development, the creation of the FAQDD did allow the government to state that sustainable development was one of its economic priorities (Baril, 2006: 71).

The only transversal document that can be considered to express the government's view on sustainable development in the 1990s, is a report prepared by the Environment Ministry and the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development in 1996. The report, written for the UN General Assembly's special session on 'Rio+5', was meant to give an overview of the actions taken in Quebec since the Rio Summit. The themes developed by it are clearly inspired

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9 Interestingly, in the English version of the document, '*développement durable*' is translated as 'lasting development' (Gouvernement du Québec, 1988: 16). The consciousness with regard to the concept in that period should thus not be overestimated.

10 In its 1996 programme, the PQ also offered an interesting definition of sustainable development, as 'economic development that can be extended to all inhabitants of the planet without compromising the equilibrium of the biosphere, that does not compromise the development of future generations and that exploits the resources of the planet in such a way that they can be renewed' (PQ, 1996: 101, my translation).

by Agenda 21.[11] The approach on sustainable development taken in the document reflects the three pillars of sustainable development and stresses the carrying capacity of ecosystems. Furthermore, it is the first document by the government of Quebec that mentions objectives of sustainable development. Those objectives are: ecological integrity, equity between nations, individuals and generations, and economic efficiency (Gouvernement du Québec, 1996: 4).

While the PQ governments have taken no transversal initiatives to institutionalise sustainable development, during their reign the concept frequently emerged within sectoral policy areas. That is said to be the merit of the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001: 16). Three examples are given here, concerning environmental, energy and economic policy. The examples show that although the concept of sustainable development is present in many domains, there is no real integration.

In 1994, the Ministry of the Environment was restructured and given a new mandate, aimed at environmental protection and conservation 'in a perspective of sustainable development' (Baril, 2006: 67, my translation). According to Baril (2006: 68), that same phrase surfaced in many other texts at the time. It was never specified, however, how such a perspective should be understood. Subsequently, in the Ministry's strategic plan of 2001, sustainable development is presented as a necessary 'bend' that society needs to take. In doing so, it adopts the wording of the PQ's 1994 election programme (cf. supra). The plan further states that the principles of sustainable development demand a new type of environmental, social and economic policies. It also reconfirms environmental protection as an added value to economic growth (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001: 16).

In the 1990s sustainable development also enters the discourse of Quebec's energy policy. The energy profile of Quebec is very specific. The province's major source of electricity consumption is hydropower. Because hydroelectricity does not emit greenhouse gases it is traditionally put forward by Quebec as a contribution to sustainable development (Sérandour, 1998: 60), but the massive scale of its production has significant repercussions on the environment and on local populations. The territory of Quebec encompasses the astonishing proportion of 16% of the world's freshwater reserves (compared to only 0.1% of the world's population) and many areas - very often the ones inhabited by indigenous people - are fit for hydroelectricity production. The state-owned enterprise Hydro-Québec is the largest producer of hydroelectricity in the world. Although the importance of the energy sector in Quebec's economy is decreasing, its share is still significant. The contribution of Hydro-Québec to Quebec's GDP is estimated at 3% (Hydro-Québec, 2009b: 34). The company's profits are a large source of revenue for the government, despite the low electricity price in Quebec. In 1996 the government adopted a new energy policy entitled 'Energy at the Service of Quebec: A Sustainable Development Perspective' (Gendron & Vaillancourt, 1998: 30). During the same period, Hydro-Québec adopted the discourse on sustainable development (Sérandour, 1998: 62). The interpretation of sustainable development used in the plan and applied by Hydro-Québec is based on the need for economic growth, with the condition of safeguarding environmental quality and equity. Gendron and Vaillancourt (1998: 41) suggest that such an economically oriented interpretation was put forward in order to legitimise electricity installations with a large environmental impact. Sérandour (1998: 62) confirms that Hydro-Québec made no changes in

[11] The themes elaborated in the report are the quality of life on Earth, the efficient use of natural resources, the protection of common global resources, the management of chemical products and waste, sustainable economic development, the reinforcement of partnership, and the implementation of Agenda 21 (Gouvernement du Québec, 1996). They mirror to a large degree the chapters of Agenda 21.

its operations after its adoption of the sustainable development discourse. In short, the 1990s saw a reframing of Quebec's energy policy into a discourse on sustainable development, but the policy itself underwent no significant changes.

A last example elaborated here is economic policy. In 1998, sustainable development was presented as one of the three main goals of the government's economic strategy. Sustainable development was defined narrowly as 'meeting the current needs of Quebecers without compromising future generations' (Gouvernement du Québec, 1998: 169, my translation). Several principles common to sustainable development were cited, but the operationalisation of some of them raises serious questions. For instance, equity towards future generations was interpreted narrowly as having no budget deficit (Gouvernement du Québec, 1998: 173). With regard to the environmental dimension, the preface of the strategy reads that the most pressing issue is the cutback of bureaucracy. Furthermore, the strategy depicts a very instrumental picture of the environment, stressing its needed capacity to meet the needs of citizens and to process their waste (Gouvernement du Québec, 1998: 171), which stands in sharp contrast with the emphasis on conservation in the government's environmental policy.

Those three examples show that, although sustainable development entered many sectoral policies of the government, there was no common vision on the concept. Interviewees confirm that during that period there were many conflicts between the Environment minister and his colleagues. In general, Sérandour (1998) suggests that in the 1990s the sustainable development discourse was adopted by the government mainly to promote Quebec's economic assets.

At the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, Quebec presented a report that defined sustainable development as 'the harmony between economic development, environmental sustainability and social equity, in short between the elements that assure the quality of life of the Quebec nation' (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002: 65). It also states that sustainable development implies a change in behaviour and in modes of production and consumption (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002: 5). The report puts a large emphasis on the indigenous peoples of Quebec, but does not mention the rest of the world. Even when discussing the theme 'sustainable development in a globalised world', the North-South dimension is not mentioned (the theme merely deals with the ambition of Quebec to be present on the international scene).

As a general trend, the framing of sustainable development during the PQ's reign moved from the reconciliation of environment and economy towards the universal three-pillar model, with a social dimension that is mostly understood as equity among Quebecers. The economic dimension is interpreted as a need for economic growth. As there was no common governmental vision on sustainable development, interpretations by different sectors often contradict each other, for instance regarding the relation between economy and the environment.

3.2.3 The current framing of sustainable development

The institutionalisation of Quebec's current sustainable development policy started when Environment Minister Mulcair of the newly elected Liberal government presented his sustainable development plan in 2004. The plan contained a draft Sustainable Development Act and expressed the government's vision on a transversal sustainable development policy. It is considered as a watered-down version of Mulcair's initial green plan, which was blocked by other ministers, and it is said to accommodate more easily the economic priorities of the PLQ government (Gendron et al., 2005: 23-24). Nevertheless, the plan contained some very interesting elements, such as the framing of sustainable development in which a prioritisation of the three pillars is presented. It states that 'the environment is the condition of a sustainable development, society is the ultimate goal of development and the economy is the means to get there'

(Gouvernement du Québec, 2004: 10, my translation). In contrast to earlier framings, the economy was thus interpreted as a means rather than as a goal of sustainable development. Yet in contrast to that strong wording, the definition of sustainable development in the plan was much weaker. It defined it as a

> *'continuous process of improving the conditions of existence of current populations without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same, and which harmoniously integrates the environmental, social and economic dimensions of development' (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004: 19, my translation).*

The unusual replacement of 'meeting the needs' with 'improving the conditions of existence' distances the definition from Brundtland (Gendron et al., 2005: 32).

Although the sustainable development plan was meant to present the government's common vision on sustainable development, the weight of the plan was limited. For instance, on the same day that the Environment Minister made it public, the Minister of Economic and Regional Development stated that the plan would not prevent the government from funding polluting industries (Audet & Gendron, 2010). In general, Gendron et al. (2005: 24) denounce that the government presented its sustainable development plan while at the same time taking countless decisions opposite to the spirit of sustainable development.

After an extensive consultation phase, the Sustainable Development Act was deposited in parliament, and unanimously approved in April 2006. The Act frames sustainable development as an urgent need to change the current course of development, saying that it is aimed at realising a necessary bend (*virage*) in society with regard to non-viable modes of development (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §1).[12] That sense of urgency also translated into a stronger definition of sustainable development as opposed to the previous plan. The Act states that

> *"sustainable development' means development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is based on a long-term approach which takes into account the inextricable nature of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of development activities' (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §2).*

The first part of the definition is more loyal to the Brundtland definition than in the plan, which is a reaction on the critiques that emerged during the public consultation (Halley and Lemieux, 2009: 100). Also the second part of the definition, reflecting the three-pillar model, stirred up a debate. The previous wording of the plan ('harmonious integration') was seen by many as a way to avoid arbitration between the three dimensions (Audet and Gendron, 2010). The new wording ('inextricable nature') is considered to be stronger (Halley and Lemieux, 2009: 100), but the plan's previous prioritisation of the environment was not withheld. Moreover, the sixteen sustainable development principles (cf. infra) are said to subordinate the social and environmental dimensions to the premise of economic growth (Gendron et al., 2005: 34, 40). Audet and Gendron (2010) suggest that it might be the consequence of influence by business actors. The economic elite of Quebec favours formulations of sustainable development that avoid arbitration (Gendron, 2006: 170), and the PLQ is often perceived as the political arm of Quebec's business milieu (Boismenu et al., 2004: 13).

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12 While the French version repeats the word '*virage*' - which appeared for the first time in the 1990s in the PQ's discourse (cf. supra) - the English version of the Act talks of a 'change' (National Assembly, 2006), a notably weaker choice of words (Mead, 2009: 149).

The constant variation in the framing of sustainable development continues during the implementation of the Act. At the end of 2007, the government issued its first SDS.[13] It repeats the definition of the Act and then translates it into the following societal vision:

> *'A society in which the citizen's quality of life is and remains a reality. A responsible, innovative society able to excel in all of its achievements. A society based on harmony between economic vitality, environmental quality and social equity. A society inspired by a government whose leadership inspires and guides towards this vision' (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007c: 18).*

It is surprising that the Act's image of an 'inextricable nature' is again replaced by the wording of 'harmony' that was put forward in the plan of 2004. Subsequently, with the adoption of the sustainable development indicators in 2009, the government again proposed a different framing of sustainable development (Gendron et al., 2009: 25), this time according to five types of capitals (human, social, production, financial and natural), instead of three pillars. It seems as though at each step of the institutionalisation process, the government of Quebec feels the need to reinvent the wheel with regard to the interpretation of sustainable development. That only reinforces the idea that the concept of sustainable development is too vague to put into practice.

3.2.4 Governance model

The governance model for sustainable development put in place by Quebec after 2003 should be interpreted as a combination of two of the models developed by Bachus et al. (2005). On the one hand, it shares many features with a typical holistic governance model. The horizontal character of the Act and of the Strategy commits all departments and public organisms to the same degree. The policy aims to give equal consideration to the three dimensions of sustainable development. The holistic character is also reflected in the mandate of the Sustainable Development Commissioner (cf. infra), who can comment on the entirety of public policy in Quebec in the light of sustainable development. However, it is rather atypical of the holistic governance model that the coordination role is assumed by the Environment Ministry (since 2005 renamed the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks). On the other hand, the Quebec approach is a clear application of the policy principles model. The sustainable development policy is operationalised by a list of sixteen principles, which are enshrined in the Act. All departments and public organisms must apply those principles, and to help them the government has developed specific integration instruments (cf. infra).

3.2.5 Concluding remarks

Sustainable development has been on the political agenda in Quebec since the very start of the activities of the Brundtland Commission. It is thus understandable that its policy framing has known a significant evolution. In the first few years, sustainable development was framed as the marriage between environmental conservation and traditional economic development, which was in accordance with the purpose of the WCED and more broadly with the major dynamics in international environmental politics since the 1972 Stockholm Conference. Subse-

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13 It should be noted that in 2006 (after the development of the Act, but before the issuance of the Strategy), Environment Minister Mulcair - who had shown personal leadership on the issue of sustainable development - was discharged because of public statements against his own government's environmental policies (Audet and Gendron, 2010).

quently, during the 1990s and in the run-up to the Johannesburg Summit, the bipartite interpretation gradually made way for the tripartite version that was popularised by the Rio Summit. Yet the lack of a transversal governmental vision was responsible for multiple, sometimes conflicting sectoral interpretations. After 2003, the government of Quebec installed a new management framework based on sustainable development. The new policy is based on an interpretation of sustainable development that is inspired by the Brundtland formulation and by the linkage of the three pillars. Yet with regard to the relation between those three pillars, the interpretation shifts from one document to another. In the discourse a trend can be discerned that favours the economic dimension above the two others. Although the framing of sustainable development still manifests some differences in interpretation, the new policy is now supported by a common vision, most notably put forward by the 2006 Sustainable Development Act.

Despite the fact that the framing of sustainable development has evolved over the years in Quebec, some elements have always remained constant. In contrast to intergenerational solidarity, which is sometimes mentioned, it is very striking that the North-South dimension is completely absent from the government's sustainable development discourse. With the exception of the PQ's 1996 party programme (see footnote 10), the rest of the world is never mentioned in Quebec's sustainable development policy. The issue is viewed exclusively as a problem that needs to be resolved within Quebec, stressing equity among Quebecers and solidarity with future generations in Quebec, as if the province was completely isolated from the rest of the world. That element of Quebec's policy framing is particularly surprising, since the government traditionally claims a participating role in the global sustainable development debate, where the North-South dimension has arguably been the most prominent element in the discourse since the policy concept appeared on the agenda.

3.3 Policy goals

I now turn to the analysis of the goals of Quebec's sustainable development policy. The discussion is limited to the current sustainable development policy, as it has gradually been put in place by the government after 2003.

3.3.1 Strategic policy goals

As I put forward in the analysis on policy framing, since the 1990s sustainable development is commonly identified with the three-pillar model. The pillars are not only framed as the content of sustainable development, they are frequently presented as Quebec's strategic policy goals. For instance, a recent document mentions the three following priorities of Quebec's sustainable development policy: maintaining environmental integrity and preserving the ecosystems, ensuring social equity, and aiming at economic efficiency (Gouvernement du Québec, 2010: 3). Moreover, the strategic goals of Quebec's policy approach are most evidently manifested in the 2006 Sustainable Development Act. According to the Act, the ultimate goals of the policy are to install a new management framework that achieves policy coherence and that integrates sustainable development in governmental policy-making. That should allow Quebec society to take the 'bend' that is needed (Assemblée Nationale, 2006). Strategic policy goals, furthermore, can display the intended end result of a policy. Quebec's intended end result is reflected in the vision formulated in the Strategy (cf. supra). The vision again stresses the three pillars of sustainable development. It does not explicitly mention future generations, but it is assumed the vision is precisely addressed at them. It is also interesting that the vision presents the leadership of the government as a goal. With regard to sustainable development and related issues such as

climate change, Quebec is increasingly profiling itself as a leader in North America and as an example to learn from (e.g. Gouvernement du Québec, 2004: 6; 2006: 1). That leadership discourse with regard to sustainable development has been prominent since the return to power of the Liberals in 2003, and it is a recurrent theme in the PLQ's political language (e.g. Assemblée Nationale, 2007; PLQ, 2007: 5, 61). It is also fanatically displayed in the government's external policy (e.g. Québec International, 2009; 2011).

Quebec's sixteen sustainable development principles constitute a final element of its strategic policy goals. Indeed, strategic goals do not always have to be explicitly formulated as goals but can also be expressed in values and norms, and that is what the principles defined in the Act basically are. The principles, which form one of the most particular elements of the Act, have to be taken into account in all actions taken by the administration.[14] They are said to be Quebec's response to the 27 principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004: 21). Indeed, ten of the sixteen principles bear very close resemblance to the Rio principles, while six others appear to have been added to accommodate domestic priorities, e.g. subsidiarity or protection of cultural heritage. They can be regrouped into economic, social, environmental and governance principles (Gendron et al., 2005: 33), disclosing the interpretation that sustainable development contains four dimensions (an institutional dimension besides the three traditional dimensions). While the list of principles and their definition reflect an effort and an ambition that are rather remarkable compared to many other sustainable development laws, Gendron et al. (2005: 34, 40) suggest that the principles imply a subordination of the environmental and social dimension to economic growth. That judgment is justified when the principles are juxtaposed with the 27 Rio principles. Indeed, some of the most compelling Rio principles regarding the environmental dimension, such as environmental legislation (UNCED, 1992b: §11) or environmental impact assessment (UNCED, 1992b: §17), were not withheld. Moreover, Quebec does not repeat the principles that refer to the North-South dimension of sustainable development, such as the eradication of poverty (UNCED, 1992b: §5) or the special needs of developing countries (UNCED, 1992b: §6), although it is laudable that the rest of the world is, for the first and only time, mentioned in the principle on intergovernmental partnership and cooperation. That principle states, very vaguely, that actions taken in a territory must take into consideration the impact outside that territory (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §6.h). The government did not clarify why some Rio principles were not withheld and why new ones were added. While the influence of international texts is undeniable, the way in which the influence was anchored is obscure.

3.3.2 Operational policy goals

While the strategic policy goals are mostly laid out by the Act, the SDS was intended to concretise the ambitions. The most striking aspect of the Strategy and the subsequent departmental action plans, is the stratification of goals, which makes the whole framework a rather complex puzzle. The Strategy defines three fundamental issues, nine strategic directions (of which three are priority strategic directions) and 29 objectives (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007c).

[14] The principles are: Health and quality of life, Social equity and solidarity, Environmental protection, Economic efficiency, Participation and commitment, Access to knowledge, Subsidiarity, Inter-governmental partnership and cooperation, Prevention, Precaution, Protection of cultural heritage, Biodiversity preservation, Respect for ecosystem support capacity, Responsible production and consumption, Polluter pays, and Internalisation of costs (National Assembly, 2006: §6)

Those objectives are further translated into 1,184 actions by the departments and public organisms in their action plans (MDDEP, 2009d: iii).

The three main issues are to 'develop knowledge', to 'promote responsible action', and to 'foster commitment' (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007a). Those goals are in the first place aimed at the public administration, and at the Quebec society by extension. The issues imply a noncommittal interpretation of the holistic governance model. They depict an image in which the government, represented by the coordinating Environment Ministry, is responsible for capacity-building, for sensitisation and for stimulating initiatives, while relying mostly on other entities for real action. That image is confirmed by interviews. If the three main issues defined in the Strategy are to be considered as the operational policy goals, that would mean that the government's strong ambitions for the future (reflected in the strategic goals) are translated into a rather weak concretisation for the first years (2008-2013), focusing mostly on capacity-building and on the hope that the government's departments and public organisms will take action.

The nine strategic directions and the 29 objectives have a more operational character than the three main issues. However, they show no strong link to the strategic policy goals and it is unclear how they were defined. Some interviewees suggest that the strategic directions do not constitute new goals, but reflect an inventory of existing governmental priorities that could be considered as elements of sustainable development (see also Audet and Gendron, 2010). That could explain the disconnection between them and the strategic policy goals. The fact that the orientations and objectives offer no clear vision on how the government intends to achieve sustainable development in Quebec, is one of the most common critiques on the Strategy (Gendron et al., 2007). In the next section, some of the characteristics of Quebec's policy goals are analysed in more detail.

3.3.3 Goal characteristics

3.3.3.1 Thematic areas

The nine strategic directions, in which the 29 objectives are enclosed, broadly cover these thematic areas: research and education, health, consumption and production, economy, demography, spatial planning, culture, participation and social integration.[15] While the logic behind the definition of the themes is said to be opaque (Gendron et al., 2007: 42), they all relate to issues that were explicitly discussed in Rio (with the exception of culture). At the same time, many of the themes developed in global documents such as Agenda 21 have not been withheld in the Strategy. Some of the most pressing environmental issues (e.g. water) are notably absent. In fact, one of the most recurrent critiques uttered by stakeholders during the public consultation, was that they were looking for the environment in the Strategy (Audet & Gendron, 2010). A reason could be that the Strategy is an amalgam of existing governmental priorities rather than a formulation of new goals. Additionally, my analysis suggests that the Strategy's silence with regard to environmental themes is, paradoxically, due to the leading and coordinating role of the Environment Ministry. The Act indeed changed the mandate of the Ministry, previously

[15] The exact strategic directions are: (1) inform, make aware, educate, innovate; (2) reduce and manage risks to improve health, safety and the environment; (3) produce and consume responsibly; (4) increase economic efficiency; (5) address demographic changes; (6) practice integrated, sustainable land use and development; (7) preserve and share the collective heritage; (8) promote social involvement; (9) and prevent and reduce social and economic inequality. The three priority strategic directions (1), (3) and (6) (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007a).

only responsible for environmental protection, to include the coordination of the new sustainable development policy. That means that in theory the Act has given the Environment Ministry -which is not perceived as a powerful department in Quebec (Gendron, 2005: 25) - some form of supervision over the other departments (although it has no say over the content of departmental action plans). If the Strategy would have given the priority to environmental issues, its interface with other departments would have been limited. That could explain, I argue, why the Environment Ministry emphasised non-environmental themes in the Strategy. This argumentation is confirmed by some of my interviewees, and it is corroborated by the discourse of the Ministry, which in its communications is generally swift to stress that environmental concerns are only one part of sustainable development (e.g. MDDEP, 2008). In line with the nine strategic directions, the 29 objectives refer very little to the environmental domain. The operational policy goals are thus not only a weak translation of the more ambitious strategic policy goals. They are also an incomplete concretisation of them, since the strategic goals stressed environmental integrity and the preservation of the ecosystems.

Even if the directions and objectives defined in the Strategy are delineated, in the broader political discourse other themes are frequently associated with sustainable development. It is striking, for instance, that the Prime Minister's message in the consultation document of the 2004 plan mentioned objectives that did not form part of it: 'In a context of strong pressures on public finance, we want to stimulate the creation of wealth and to ensure our energy security' (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004, my translation). Another example is the press release that accompanied the Strategy, which evoked themes such as climate change and transport, that are not reflected in the Strategy itself (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007b). The government of Quebec has a climate change action plan that is not strongly linked to the sustainable development policy. However, following an increasing global trend, in the government's discourse the issue of sustainable development is often narrowed to climate change. The same trend was noticeable in my interviews with political officials in Quebec. In recent years, sustainable development is increasingly framed as an application of climate change. It is due to the fact that climate change is a top priority on the global political agenda, and the government of Quebec, notably proud of its reputation in hydroelectricity (cf. supra), misses no occasion to put its climate change policy in the spotlight (e.g. Québec International, 2009).[16] That shows the power of sustainable development as a legitimating concept.

3.3.3.2 Specificity

The strategic policy goals and the intended outcome (expressed in the vision) of the government's sustainable development policy are very vague and abstract, which is rather typical for strategic goals. With regard to the operational policy goals, the character of the 29 objectives varies. They range from extremely abstract statements (e.g. enhancing the demographic balance of Quebec), over relatively clear but abstract ambitions (e.g. periodically drawing the portrait of sustainable development in Quebec) to concrete objectives (e.g. increasing schooling and the number of graduates). Yet in general the operational goals are not specific. It appears that the Strategy intentionally has a high degree of abstraction, so that the departments and public organisms have the maximum opportunity to relate to the Strategy's goals in their action plans. Interviews reveal that among the 1,184 actions proposed in the action plans, some are new

[16] In addition, the government's international activities in the name of sustainable development mostly concern climate change. Most notable are the Prime Minister's activeness in The Climate Group and the recent accession of Quebec to nrg4SD, which focuses on climate change in recent years (Happaerts et al., 2010b).

while others are just 'recycled' actions that had been initiated before. The departments and public organisms are also free to choose which indicators accompany their actions.[17] The Strategy merely contained 'sample indicators', to be used as examples. The holistic governance model is thus applied through noncommittal coordination and with a large degree of freedom to the other departments and organisms. The final list of sustainable development indicators has only been developed when the Strategy and the departmental action plans were already issued.

3.3.3.3 Timeframe and analysis of current situation

As for the strategic policy goals, the government remains silent on the question when they should be attained, but it is rather clear that they are thought of as very long-term goals. Also with regard to the operational goals it is hard to establish their target date, because it is not made explicit. But one can assume that their target date is 2013, when the Strategy, which is aimed at the achievement of the objectives (Gouvernement du Québec, 2007c: 20), is due to be revised. With regard to the timeframe of the sustainable development policy, it is also important to point out that the government did not comply with the deadlines it set for itself in the Act. For instance, although the government was legally required to adopt sustainable development indicators by the end of 2008 (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §12), they were only released in the autumn of 2009.

The government has developed sustainable development indicators on three levels. A first level is constituted by the 1,585 follow-up indicators defined by all departments and public organisms in their action plans. A second list is meant to measure the achievement of the 29 objectives of the Strategy. Third, a set of indicators has been developed to measure the progress of the Quebec society as a whole with regard to sustainable development. That third set is built on the 'capital approach'. It is criticised for supporting a 'weak' representation of sustainable development, in which the different kinds of capital are substitutable (for instance, a loss of natural capital can be compensated by an increase of financial capital) (Gendron et al., 2009: 23). Furthermore, the approach is completely disconnected from the existing elements of the policy. Not only does it frame sustainable development in a different way, it bears no link to the strategic or operational policy goals.

The indicators will be used as an evaluation tool when the Strategy is revised in 2013. Ideally, the goals of the next strategy will thus be based on an analysis of the current situation. Since no such evaluation took place when the Strategy was adopted, that cannot be set of the current goals, which adds to the perception that they were 'randomly' formulated based on existing departmental actions and priorities. It is also striking that the 2004 sustainable development plan contained no substantive analysis whatsoever of the problems that are related to sustainable development. It only contained an overview of how sustainable development emerged on the international agenda.

3.3.3.4 Political and societal backing of the goals

With regard to the legitimacy and authority of the policy goals, both the political and societal backing raise some questions. First, it is important to point out that the Act, which contains most of the strategic policy goals, was unanimously approved in parliament. That manifests a large political backing among the three parties represented at the time (PLQ, PQ and ADQ),

[17] The action plans contain a total of 1,585 indicators (MDDEP, 2010: 5).

and is promising for the continuity of the sustainable development policy in case of a change of government. Within the executive, although the different stages of the policy are led by the Environment Ministry, the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development should assure the political backing. Yet the political backing of the government's sustainable development policy is overshadowed both by certain actions of the government that oppose sustainable development in practice, as well as by the negative statements of certain Ministers with regard to the sustainable development policy (cf. supra).

Second, as for the societal backing of the policy, the different elements that were put in place since 2004 have been subject to a varying degree of public participation. The sustainable development plan has known a consultation phase that was exceptional in Quebec. On the one hand, Environment Minister Mulcair travelled all around the province in 2005 to personally consult with stakeholders on the content of the plan. On the other hand, the plan was heavily discussed within a parliamentary commission, for which input was given from many interested parties, including NGOs, local authorities, indigenous peoples, unions, employers' organisations and academics. Subsequently, two similar parliamentary commissions were held to discuss a draft of the Strategy in 2007 and the first list of indicators in 2009. While the consultation on the plan in 2005 was broadly applauded, critique has been uttered on the subsequent parliamentary commissions. Those are said to be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition to take into account the preoccupations of all citizens, environments and conditions of life, as is suggested by the Act (Gendron et al., 2009: 8). In any case, based on the public consultation through the different parliamentary commissions, the government generally states that its sustainable development policy has a broad societal backing. The question remains whether the input given during the consultation phases has also been taken into account by the government. In that regard, Gendron et al. (2007: 70-77) show that near to none of the 21 recommendations made by the Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Research Chair on the draft Act has been followed by the government.

3.3.4 Concluding remarks

Similar to the conclusions made with regard to Quebec's policy framing, the analysis of policy goals shows a continuing variation. For instance, the distance between the strategic and the operational policy goals is remarkable. The strategic policy goals, especially as they are reflected by the Act, are quite strong and express the political will to make some ambitious changes to orient policy-making towards sustainable development in the long term. The operational policy goals, especially how they are presented in the Strategy, express a much weaker ambition and are an incomplete concretisation of the strategic goals. Furthermore, most goals are very vague, the indicators designed for their measurability are disconnected from the rest of the policy, and the political and societal backing leaves much to be desired.

3.4 Policy instruments

3.4.1 Institutional instruments

3.4.1.1 Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development

As explained before, the creation of the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development in 1991 was one of the first steps taken by the government of Quebec towards the institutionalisation of sustainable development. According to interviewees, the initiative was meant to build a network of administrative officials throughout different departments that were im-

portant to sustainable development, thus broadening the scope of the issue beyond the environmental domain. In 1992, the government mandated the Committee to coordinate the follow-up of Agenda 21. The Committee then took the initiative to take stock of all governmental initiatives that were in line with the outcomes of the Rio Summit (Gouvernement du Québec, 1996). The Committee is now the main mechanism for information-sharing, coordination and promotion with regard to the government's sustainable development policy (MDDEP, 2009a). Gathering a few times a year, it orients the implementation of the Sustainable Development Act. The Committee assembles the main governmental departments at the level of assistant deputy minister (cf. supra), and is chaired by the assistant deputy minister for Sustainable Development of the Environment Ministry. After the development of the SDS, the membership of the Committee was extended to the public organisms that are subject to the Act. In addition to the governmental departments, 32 organisms are now represented on the Committee (e.g. Hydro-Québec). While the Committee is one of the most important instruments of the sustainable development policy, it is surprising that it was not mentioned at all in the Sustainable Development Act.

Interviewees are critical about the recent work of the Committee. They denounce that many members rarely attend its meetings, or send technocratic backbenchers instead. Those are symptoms of a low political will of the departments and organisms. As a result, the Committee hardly exceeds the status of information-sharing platform, and its weight is perceived as rather low.

3.4.1.2 New management framework: Strategy and Action Plans

The Sustainable Development Act calls for 'a new management framework within the Administration to ensure that powers and responsibilities are exercised in the pursuit of sustainable development' (National Assembly, 2006). The new framework intends 'to better integrate the pursuit of sustainable development into the policies, programs and actions of the Administration' and to make sure 'that government actions in this area are coherent' (National Assembly, 2006). The most important elements in the architecture of that new management framework are the Strategy and the Action Plans of the departments and public organisms (cf. Audet & Gendron, 2010).

The government's first SDS, which has already been analysed in previous sections, is valid until 2013. With regard to the other ministries and public organisms (governmental agencies and public enterprises), a total of 146 entities are compelled by the Act to issue a Sustainable Development Action Plan (MDDEP, 2009c: 8). In that action plan, they have to publicise which actions they intend to pursue to contribute to the Strategy (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §15). Those actions must not be copied from existing objectives, but should be constituted by new or revised initiatives (MDDEP, 2007b: 8; 2009c: 15). The entities also have to refer to those actions in their yearly activity reports (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §17). The public organisms subject to the Act are very diverse actors, ranging from museums to public enterprises such as Hydro-Québec. In total, the Act's stipulations cover the entirety of the provincial public administration, with the exception of the judiciary, health institutions, educational facilities and local authorities.[18] The Act explicitly states that the council of ministers is also

[18] However, the Sustainable Development Act states that at any given time the government can decide that local authorities, health institutions and/or educational facilities also need to comply with it (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §4).

subject to it (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §3), although that vision is not shared by all interviewees.

In my interviews, government officials express an optimistic view on the new management framework, convinced that in time it will engender a significant change in the decision-making processes of all departments and public organisms. It is indeed laudable that Quebec has chosen to include all governmental agencies and public enterprises in its approach, while most other governments traditionally only target their own ministries and departments. Yet it remains to be seen which impact the new management framework really has, considering that the government applies no enforcement mechanisms on the public organisms. There is no governmental oversight on the content of the actions included in the action plans or on their implementation, so entities can basically say whatever they want in them and do whatever they want with it. As it turns out, not all organisms have actually issued their action plan before the deadline put forward by the Act (MDDEP, 2009c: 3). Several of the Strategy's objectives are met by less than a handful actions (MDDEP, 2009d: 8). Moreover, interviews with non-governmental stakeholders suggest that many of the actions concern decisions that were taken anyway. For instance, Hydro-Québec's action plan states that, contrary to the government's stipulations, every action is connected with an existing objective of the company (Hydro-Québec, 2009a: 2). Moreover, the action plan does not mention the sustainable development principles, although that was an explicit demand of the government (MDDEP, 2007b: 8). The Sustainable Development Commissioner furthermore identifies many problems with regard to the accountability of the public organisms and how they report on the achievement of their actions (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2011). It thus seems that the political weight of the new management framework is relatively low.

3.4.1.3 Ministry, Assistant Deputy Minister and Coordination Bureau

In Quebec, it has always been the Environment Ministry that has taken the lead in the sustainable development policy. After the presentation of the sustainable development plan in 2005, the Ministry was renamed the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks. In accordance with how the concept and the policy historically evolved, the Act anchors the central role of the Ministry in the new management framework. The Ministry has the tasks to promote and coordinate the sustainable development policy, to improve the knowledge of it and to provide expertise in order to advance the integration of the objectives and principles of the Act (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §13). Yet the Act does not assign any new resources to the Ministry to accompany those additional tasks. The assignment of the lead role to the Environment Ministry without new financial means is one of the most ardent criticisms on the policy (cf. infra).

As mentioned before, an Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable Development, and an a corresponding directorate-general for sustainable development, was installed within the Environment Ministry in the late 1980s. That directorate-general now contains the Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau, which is the instance that executes the Ministry's mandate under the Sustainable Development. The Bureau, a team of sixteen officials, concentrates on coordination, expertise, sensitisation and capacity-building.

To coordinate the new management framework, the Bureau has built a network of so-called 'sustainable development officers' within the public administration. Each of the 146 entities targeted by the Act was asked to design an official as its main contact point with regard to sustainable development. In most cases the officer is also responsible for the development of the entity's Action Plan. The network of sustainable development officers is the lower-level

equivalent of the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. The Bureau organises events where all the officers can meet (those events were particularly held in the period before the development of the action plans), and it has developed an internal website for information-exchange. In many entities, the function of sustainable development officer was just one more supplementary task for a certain official. Yet in others, the initiative has really made an impact. The Ministry of International Relations, for instance, has created a new, relatively high-level function to manage all transversal policy issues, including sustainable development.

The Bureau also undertakes studies to accumulate expertise with regard to governance for sustainable development, for instance on sustainable development indicators (MDDEP, 2007a). In addition, it monitors the progress of the government's sustainable development policy (e.g. MDDEP, 2009c) and reports on the implementation of the Strategy (MDDEP, 2009d). It wants to improve the knowledge on sustainable development within the public administration, and is preparing a plan on sensitisation and formation on sustainable development. Interviewees indicate that a large part of the Bureau's energy is dedicated to explaining what the sustainable development policy consists of.

The Bureau has developed several tools to advance the capacity-building with regard to sustainable development within other departments and organisms. It has developed guidelines on the development of the sustainable development actions plans (MDDEP, 2007b). Although a government decision stipulates that all entities must take the guidelines into account, they leave extensive freedom of movement with regard to the content of the action plans. Another tool developed by the Bureau is a guide meant as to assist entities to take into account the sustainable development principles defined by the Act (MDDEP, 2009b). That guide ultimately wants to improve decision-making. Yet, surprisingly, it does not call for the consideration of the principles into all actions and decisions. In a first instance, it merely invites entities to consider the effects of the sustainable development principles in the decisions that they take (MDDEP, 2009b: 7), thus taking a distance from the Act. Entities are encouraged to select certain actions that can be relevant in light of the principles and to reflect on how those actions can be improved when the principles are taken into account. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development, the Bureau has developed another guide, with a similar method, for the integration of sustainable development preoccupations into procedures to grant subsidies or finances (MDDEP & FAQDD, 2009).

While the Environment Ministry is already considered to be a weak department in Quebec (cf. supra), the Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau does not have a powerful position within the Ministry. Interviewees confirm that the Bureau's cooperation with other partners is easier than with other divisions of the same Ministry. Furthermore, it is clear that the huge tasks put aside for the Bureau are not in proportion with the resources it has at its disposal. It has not prevented the Bureau from developing pertinent tools for coordination and capacity-building. Yet it is unfortunate that, in the tools that it develops, the Bureau takes a very weak stance vis-à-vis the other departments and public organisms. In contradiction with the Act, the tools only 'invite' or 'encourage' to take action on sustainable development, but they never compel the entities to take sustainable development into account. The Bureau's noncommittal attitude might be a consequence of its weak position within the administration. The effect is that the theoretically strong character of the Act is worn down by the weak approach promoted by the Environment Ministry in practice. Nothing guarantees the compliance of the other entities. The sustainable development policy of the government thus relies completely on their goodwill.

3.4.1.4 Sustainable Development Commissioner

The Act creates the position of a Sustainable Development Commissioner within the office of the Auditor General of Quebec. The Auditor General is a typical institution of the democratic systems of the Westminster model. It is dedicated to auditing the government and reports directly to Parliament. The Sustainable Development Commissioner is nominated by the Auditor General and serves as his deputy. He has to report on a yearly basis on the implementation of the Act and on the general progress of the government with regard to the pursuit of sustainable development (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §31-34). He supervises a team of about 20 people. The position was copied from the federal level - where the position of Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was created within the office of the Auditor General of Canada in 1995 - despite the common critique on the weak position and low impact of the federal Commissioner (Tarasofsky, 2007: 8; Toner and Meadowcroft, 2009: 85).

The Auditor General nominated Harvey Mead as the first Sustainable Development Commissioner of Quebec in 2007. Mead had previously been the first Assistant Deputy Minister for Sustainable Development in the Environment Ministry and is a prominent member of the environmental movement in Quebec. Mead's first report to Parliament was given great visibility and media coverage, because it included the calculation of the Ecological Footprint of Quebec. In absence of an analysis of the situation in Quebec with regard to sustainable development (cf. supra), the Commissioner wanted to establish the extent of the needed 'bend' foreseen in the Act (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2007: 20). The report concluded that Quebec's Ecological Footprint is 6 global hectares (gha) per capita. It is smaller than the average Canadian Footprint (7.6 gha/capita)—due to the fact that Quebec's electricity consumption emanates to a large degree from hydropower—but still much larger than the Footprint of the average world citizen (2.2 gha/capita), and more than three times larges than what the world's biocapacity allows (1.8 gha/capita) (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2007: 8). Mead also announced that in his next report he would calculate the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) for Quebec (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2007: 20), as an alternative indicator for GDP. Yet an end was put to his mandate before that second report was completed.[19] Many interviewees invoke the announcement of the calculation of the GPI as the reason for Mead's discharge and they qualify it as a political move. In my analysis, Mead's approach inspired by ecological economics was probably perceived as problematic by the government. Indeed, Quebec's high Ecological Footprint does not match with the government's preferred image of Quebec as a sustainable development leader. Moreover, the Footprint emphasises the external dimension of sustainable development, and the repercussions of Quebec's modes of production and consumption on the rest of the world. That does not correspond with the framing of Quebec's sustainable development policy, in which the North-South dimension is largely ignored.

Because of what happened with the mandate of the first Commissioner and because of the fact that the position is still relatively recent, it is hard to establish its impact. What is certain, is that the Commissioner's reports are an excellent source of information, and that they can help broaden the support for sustainable development, in the first place among members of parliament. Besides an analysis of the progress of the implementation of the Act, the reports contain wider analyses on sustainable development in Quebec. The first Commissioner's report contained an analysis of Quebec's agricultural production and on sustainable production and consumption, in addition to the calculation of the Footprint (Vérificateur général du Québec,

[19] Mead went on to calculate Quebec's GPI independently, and published his results in a book (Mead, 2011). According to his findings, the progress measured by the GPI is only half of that indicated by GDP.

2007). The second report - presented by the Auditor General himself in the absence of a Commissioner - scrutinised Quebec's mining sector, transport in Montreal, and Quebec's housing policy (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2009). The third report, written by newly appointed Commissioner Jean Cinq-Mars, focused on demographic changes and biodiversity (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2010). His fourth report investigated the environmental performance of the industrial sector, the exploitation of shale gas and regional development (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2011). In his analysis of those different policies, one of the Commissioner's most salient observations is that the government does not take the sustainable development principles sufficiently into account, which is in breach with the Act (e.g. Vérificateur général du Québec, 2010: §1.24; 2011: §1.12).

3.4.2 Legal instruments

The legal instruments put in place by the government of Quebec are quite strong. The Sustainable Development Act is the cornerstone of the entire sustainable development policy. Furthermore, a new right was inscribed in Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

3.4.2.1 Sustainable Development Act

The Sustainable Development Act, adopted in 2006, has resurged many times in this analysis, because it really is the principal element of Quebec's sustainable development policy. As I have repeatedly shown, the majority of the instruments and the strategic policy goals is enshrined in it. Most importantly, the voluminous Act defines the sixteen sustainable development principles that need to be taken into account by the entire public administration. The Act should thus be considered as the most important instrument of the sustainable development policy. It can be invoked by citizens and by courts, in order to compel the government to respect the spirit and commitments of sustainable development.

3.4.2.2 The right to a healthful environment in which biodiversity is preserved

In 1975, the parliament adopted the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, a so-called 'quasi-constitutional' or fundamental law that contains the basic rights of Quebecers (Assemblée Nationale, 2010). The Sustainable Development Act inscribes the following new right in the Charter: 'Every person has a right to live in a healthful environment in which biodiversity is preserved, to the extent and according to the standards provided by law' (National Assembly, 2006: §19). The right to a qualitative environment was already enshrined in another law, but the inclusion in the Charter is stronger (although it was not withheld as a fundamental right, but as an economic and social right). Because of the superiority of the Charter vis-à-vis other laws, Halley (2005: 70, 76) considers the inclusion of this right as one of the most important elements of the sustainable development policy.

3.4.3 Economic instruments

In contrast to the legal instruments, the economic instruments put in place by the government of Quebec are quite weak. The government of Quebec relies very little on economic instruments to achieve its policy goals for sustainable development. No specific budget item is allocated to the sustainable development policy, and besides the Green Fund no new resources were designated by the Sustainable Development Act. That is problematic, since the Environment Ministry is said to be chronically underfinanced (Gendron, 2005: 25). Other than that, the sustainable development actions undertaken by the departments and public organisms rely

completely on their existing resources. Although a large effort is thus demanded from the administration, the government invests no new financial resources in the sustainable development policy.

3.4.3.1 Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development

The Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development deserves some mention here. It is an association without lucrative purpose that promotes behavioural change for sustainable development by funding projects of cooperatives and of associations without lucrative purpose. It evolved out of one of several funds created by the PQ government in 2000 as a result of a budget surplus. It is thus an economic instrument, with sensitisation as its main aim, that was created by the government but that has become independent of it. In accordance with the political priorities of the current government, the Action Fund recently focuses above all on climate change. Several interviewees believe that the Action Fund has positively contributed to the growing awareness for sustainable development in Quebec. The scope of its means is, however, relatively small and certainly not sufficient to achieve the goals of the sustainable development policy.

3.4.3.2 Green Fund

The Sustainable Development Act created the Green Fund, through which the Environment Ministry can financially support environmental projects initiated by local authorities or by associations without lucrative purpose (Assemblée Nationale, 2006: §26). It is the only element of the Act that directly involves local authorities. Critics denounce the creation of such a Fund by the same government that cancelled many subsidies to environmental groups. In addition, according to Gendron et al. (2005: 48-49), the financial sources of the Green Fund do not emanate from governmental sources, but originate mainly from some existing environmental taxes (e.g. on packaging and waste).

3.4.4 Information instruments

Many of the institutional instruments previously discussed also serve as information instruments. The reports of the Commissioner, some of the tools developed by the Coordination Bureau, and the outputs of the new management framework (the Act, the Strategy and the action plans) are all partly intended as instruments that rely on information to attain policy goals. They supply the governmental departments, the public organisms and the broader population with information on the sustainable development policy, to stimulate initiatives that will help to make the necessary changes. Besides the ones already mentioned, the eco-responsibility policy and the sustainable development indicators also serve as information instruments.

3.4.4.1 Policy for an eco-responsible government

The administrative policy for an eco-responsible government, issued in 2009, defines guidelines to promote the exemplary role of the government as a buyer and a consumer (Gouvernement du Québec, 2009). In line with the sustainable development policy, it contributes to one of the strategic directions of the Strategy, i.e. produce and consume responsibly. Procurement policies usually involve economic instruments. However, the guidelines are not enforceable, the policy merely 'invites' the departments and public organisms to adopt them

(Gouvernement du Québec, 2009: 1). That is why the policy functions as an information instrument only.

3.4.4.2 Sustainable development indicators

The sustainable development indicators that were mentioned before also serve as information instruments. In combination with the Commissioner's reports, they should provide an assessment of the condition of sustainable development in Quebec. First, a series of indicators was developed to measure the achievement of the 29 objectives of the strategy (ISQ, 2010b). Second, the list of indicators using the capital approach intends to measure the general progress of the Quebec society as a whole towards sustainable development. The Environment Ministry defends the choice of the capital approach, as opposed to a more traditional 'objective approach', by stating that it was inspired by the publications of international organisations (the UN, the OECD and the EU) and by the experiences of other governments (such as Belgium, Norway and Switzerland) (ISQ & MDDEP, 2010a: 20; MDDEP, 2010: 7). Yet Gendron et al. (2009: 19-22) show that Belgium, Norway and Switzerland indeed use indicators according to the capital approach, but that those are not their main indicators. Moreover, the indicators are much criticised because of their discontinuity with regard to the other elements of the policy and the fact that they support a weak interpretation of sustainable development. For instance, observers denounce that they promote a very economically-oriented vision of the environment (RNCREQ, 2009: 12-14).

3.4.5 Voluntary approaches

Quebec's approach is predominantly aimed at the public administration. That was suggested by the Act, and is reinforced by the current implementation of the policy. That being said, it is true that the concretisation of the administration is a broad one, with almost 150 public organisms in total. However, as soon as all those organisms had adopted their first sustainable development action plans, the government showed some signs of wanting to broaden the policy, in a voluntary way, to actors that are not primarily targeted by the Act. The intention to include those actors is in accordance with the government's application of the holistic governance model, in which the government mainly stimulates, while relying on others for real action. An example of such a voluntary initiative is the Advisory and Council Table of Private Sector Enterprises (*Table d'accompagnement-conseil des entreprises du secteur privé*). It is a group that brings together the Environment Ministry and other ministries and public organisms that regularly work with the private sector. The sector is not directly involved. The initiative is aimed at considering ways to promote the respect for the sustainable development principles, and for the broader policy, among the private sector (MDDEP, 2011b). For instance, the Table inventoried existing governmental guides, trainings and programmes aimed at the private sector which can be used in the pursuit of sustainable development (MDDEP, 2011a). Interviewees state that similar tables are set up with departments and organisms in the sectors of education, health and local authorities, i.e. the entities of the public administration that are not targeted by the Act (cf. 3.4.1.2).

3.4.6 Concluding remarks

The sustainable development policy of Quebec accords an important place to institutional policy instruments, that employ organisational structures and planning activities. But also other types of instruments are applied. The most important tool is the extensive Sustainable Development Act, which obliges the entirety of the public administration to take into account six-

teen principles of sustainable development, and which installs a new management framework intended to generate a fundamental change with regard to non-viable modes of development. Yet in general, many instruments that were put in place *de facto* weaken the strong character of the Act. In addition, no enforcement mechanisms are created to oversee the implementation of the Act by the departments and public organisms.

4. The sustainable development policy of Flanders

4.1 Historical overview

After the Rio Summit, Flanders was still getting used to its new powers and competences as a young federated entity of Belgium. The concept of sustainable development gradually emerged in several policy areas, such as environment, economy, agriculture, transport and development cooperation. Yet the degree and manner in which it was integrated in policies differed starkly in each domain and from minister to minister. For instance, sustainable development became one of the principal leitmotivs of environmental policy, but was considered only as an external trend to be reckoned with by the Economy department (Bachus et al., 2005: 122-123). In many cases, the integration of sustainable development meant not much more than the addition of the word 'sustainable' in the policy discourse.

The first time that the Flemish government gave horizontal attention to sustainable development was in 1999, when the concept was prominently included in the coalition agreement of the new government of Liberals, Socialists, Greens and Nationalists (see Table 2) (Vlaamse Regering, 1999: 4). That happened especially under the impulse of the Green party (*Agalev*), which was in office for the first time in Belgium and which delivered the Environment Minister. The Greens attached particular importance to the sustainable development agenda. For instance, they invested much political capital in the preparation of the Johannesburg Summit. In that context, is important to mention that between 2002 and 2004 they also delivered the Minister for Development Cooperation.

Table 2 Governments in Flanders since 1999[20]

Political term	Coalition	Prime Minister	Environment Minister
1999-2004	VLD-SP-Agalev-VU	**Patrick Dewael** (VLD) as of 2003: **Bart Somers** (VLD)	**Vera Dua** (Agalev) as of 2003: **Ludo Sannen** (Agalev) as of 2004: **Jef Tavernier** (Agalev)
2004-2009	CD&V/NVA-VLD – SPA/Spirit	**Yves Leterme** (CD&V) as of 2007: **Kris Peeters** (CD&V)	**Kris Peeters** (CD&V) as of 2007: **Hilde Crevits** (CD&V)
Since 2009	CD&V-SPA-NVA	**Kris Peeters** (CD&V)	**Joke Schauvliege** (CD&V)

The new coalition that took office in 1999 - the first ever in Flanders not to be led by the Christian Democrats - wanted change. One of its main objectives was to reorganise the Flemish administration. It initiated the process called Better Administrative Policy (*Beter Bestuurlijk Beleid*), a restructuring of the entire public administration that would take several years to be finalised. In 2001, the government decided that in the new administrative structure, sustainable development should be anchored as a horizontal issue. It also decided to attach particular attention to sustainable development in its long-term socioeconomic strategy Colourful Flanders (*Kleurrijk Vlaanderen*) (Vlaamse Overheid, 2001b). That decision, pushed by the Greens, was provoked by the debate that arose when Belgium was ranked at an astonishingly bad 79th position in the second Environmental Sustainability Index, which received much attention in national and international media (e.g. De Tijd, 2001).[21] The Colourful Flanders project resulted in the Vilvoorde Pact, a convention between the Flemish government and its main socioeconomic partners. The Pact, which formulated 21 goals for the 21st century, had sustainable development as its point of departure (Vlaamse Overheid, 2001a).

During the same period, around the turn of the century, some policy domains started to experiment with transition management. Flanders thus became the first testing ground for those innovative governance processes outside the Netherlands, where they originated (Paredis, 2008: 5). Transition processes were set up in two areas, sustainable housing and living, and sustainable material use. The processes operated for several years without any reference to the Flemish sustainable development agenda (Paredis, 2008: 13). It was only recently that they were included in the sustainable development policy (cf. infra).

The single most significant event triggering the institutionalisation of the Flemish sustainable development policy was the Johannesburg Summit. Because of the fact that Belgium presided the EU in the second half of 2001, and because of the large constitutional access to international decision-making that Flanders enjoyed since 1993, Flanders was closely involved in the preparation of the Johannesburg Summit and in the negotiations of the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EUSDS) that was drafted at the time (Happaerts & Van den Brande,

20 The Flemish party landscape is complicated and fragmented. Some basic clarifications are needed to interpret the data shown in Table 2. The Socialist *SP* was renamed *SPA* in 2001. In 2004, the Nationalist *VU* split into two parties: the right-wing *NVA* and the left-wing *Spirit*. Both parties entered into an electoral 'cartel' in 2004, respectively with the Christian Democrats (*CD&V*) and with the Socialists (until those cartels ended in 2008).

21 The Environmental Sustainability Index and its successor the Environmental Performance Indicator are annual rankings of countries according to their environmental performance, published by Yale University and Columbia University (see Happaerts, 2009).

2011). A large Flemish delegation was also present at the Johannesburg Summit itself, where Environment Minister Dua negotiated and signed the Gauteng Declaration (Happaerts et al., 2010a: 136). In the aftermath of the Johannesburg Summit, administrative officials from within the Environment department took the initiative of creating an interdepartmental working group to consult with officials from other policy domains on sustainable development issues. The creation of that group brought the government in 2004 to think about a future Flemish SDS, to comply with the international commitments. Several studies were commissioned and different recommendations were issued (cf. infra). In the same year, the government prepared the final phase of the administrative reform Better Administrative Policy. In that context, it was decided that the coordinating responsibility of certain transversal issues, such as sustainable development, should reside with the prime minister.[22] That logically followed from the coalition's earlier decision that sustainable development should be anchored as a horizontal issue in the new administrative structure.

The formal assignment of sustainable development to the prime minister was confirmed by the new coalition of Christian Democrats, Liberals and Socialists that took office in the summer of 2004 (see Table 2). New Prime Minister Leterme thus became the first to have 'sustainable development' in his official portfolio. He immediately took steps to pursue his new responsibility, and to institutionalise sustainable development in Flanders. A very small administrative team was created in 2005 within the Prime Minister's administration. The team took over the lead of the interdepartmental working group, which was refurbished. At the same time, the Prime Minister's cabinet[23] drafted a Flemish SDS, which was presented for consultation and adopted by the Flemish government in 2006. The Strategy is above all a framework text laying out strategic objectives. A series of twelve operational projects was subsequently approved to concretise the Strategy. Two years after the adoption of the Strategy, a law (the Sustainable Development Decree) was passed in the Flemish Parliament that obliges every Flemish government to issue a new SDS document. In 2010, after the Flemish elections that installed a government of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Nationalists, the government proceeded towards a revision of the Strategy.

Because the renewed Flemish SDS was only approved by the government in April 2011, it could not be taken into account in this paper, as the core of the within-case analysis was finalised before that date. The remainder of the analysis focuses on the Flemish policy before the renewed strategy, taking into account events and initiatives before 2011. However, at some points I do refer to the renewed SDS for reasons of completeness.

4.2 Policy framing

This section tracks how sustainable development was framed by the Flemish government before the institutionalisation in 2004, and how the policy framing progressively evolved afterwards. I also assess how sustainable development is framed in sectoral policy areas and in the government's horizontal policies. Finally, the governance model applied by Flanders is analysed in this section.

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22 Although I prefer this general term for comparative purposes, the term used in Belgium to refer to the heads of government of the Communities and Regions is 'minister-president'.

23 At both the federal and the subnational level in Belgium, ministerial cabinets—personal advisors of each minister—are principal actors in policy-making and tightly control the main decisions (Brans et al., 2005: 218; Happaerts et al., 2012).

4.2.1 Before the institutionalisation

In the period before 2004, Flanders had no established policy or agreed vision on sustainable development. It was a period in which the follow-up of international developments on sustainable development was spontaneously cared for by the Environment department and in which the concept increasingly surfaced in other policy domains. Most importantly, it was included as a basic principle in the 1999 coalition agreement. The new government stated that it would pay attention to sustainable development in all policy areas, in order to govern in a future-oriented and innovative way. Sustainable development was defined as

> *'meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the possibilities of future generations. Sustainable development occurs within the ecological limits, and pays attention to the less fortunate in our society' (Vlaamse Regering, 1999: 4, my translation).*

It is a clear reference to the Brundtland definition, including to the focus on needs and on limitations that is also present in the Brundtland Report. In other texts, however, sustainable development was identified with the three-pillar model. In a speech opening the 2000-2001 parliamentary session, Prime Minister Dewael interpreted sustainable development as an attempt 'to bring together economic welfare, environmentally sound quality and social justice in a win-win-win approach' (Dewael, 2000: 7, my translation). In other documents, the win-win-win approach is replaced by a mere 'equilibrium' between the pillars. The Vilvoorde Pact prescribes that 'there is a balance in the attention to and distribution over economic, social and ecological goals' (Vlaamse Overheid, 2001a: my translation).

Before the institutionalisation of sustainable development in Flanders, the concept was interpreted in different ways across policy domains. That was the conclusion of a study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The report studied the use of the term 'sustainable' in the Flemish administration, and affirmed that it was incorrectly employed in three main senses: 'renewable', 'qualitative' or 'lasting' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007: 138-139). Similarly, Bachus et al. (2005: 145-152) found that sustainable development was interpreted in various ways in different policy domains. The reason for the diverging interpretations was possibly the fact that each policy domain had a different vision on sustainable development, and that some departments were more advanced than others in the development of that vision, as was suggested by the interdepartmental working group after it inventoried the existing applications of sustainable development within the administration (WGDO, 2004). The working group also recommended that guidelines would be developed on the use of the term 'sustainable' within the Flemish government (WGDO, 2004: 14).

4.2.2 After the institutionalisation

During the institutionalisation phase of the Flemish sustainable development policy, most documents define sustainable development by referring to the Brundtland definition, to the three-pillar model, to the long-term horizon and to the North-South dimension. The first political formulation of the concept was given by the Prime Minister's first policy note[24] on sustainable development in 2004. The note talks about the 'amalgamation of economic growth,

[24] Since the 1990s, Flemish ministers develop sectoral policy notes which express their plans within a certain policy domain for the political term ahead (Vancoppenolle & Legrain, 2003). Typically, the policy notes of each policy domain are presented to parliament during the first months of the parliamentary session that follows the elections.

social progress and ecological balance' (Leterme, 2004: 5, my translation). It says that solidarity with future generations and with deprived regions in the world are essential, and that sustainable development strives for the quality of life 'not only in Flanders but also in the rest of the world' (Leterme, 2004: 5, my translation). The definition given in the SDS repeats the same elements (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 11), supplemented by the view that sustainable development adds a fourth pillar, i.e. the institutional dimension, to the three traditional pillars (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 26). The most authoritative definition was subsequently given by the Sustainable Development Decree, which defines sustainable development as:

> *'a development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the possibilities of future generations to meet their own needs, through which attention is given to the integration of and the synergy between the social, the ecological and the economic dimension, and the realisation of which demands a process of change in which the use of resources, the destination of investments, the direction of technological development and institutional changes are adapted to future as well as to present needs' (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §2.1, my translation).*

The definition reiterates the Brundtland formulation and the three-pillar vision, and repeats another sentence ('a process of change…') taken from the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987: 46). While the Decree stresses the importance of the international dimension of sustainable development, North-South equity was included only in the memorandum that accompanied the Decree (Vlaams Parlement, 2008b: 7). In short, the main texts that lay down the Flemish sustainable development policy present a rather complete definition of it. Yet it is not clear how the relation between the three pillars is to be understood exactly. The early texts talk simultaneously of a 'balance', of an 'amalgamation' and of 'win-win-win situations' (Leterme, 2004: 5; Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 10, 34; 2007: 11). The original text of the Strategy mentions 'synergy and integration' (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 38). However, that was removed from the public version of the SDS, a brochure published in 2007. In the brochure, the relation between the pillars is understood as follows: 'Whenever measures are taken in one of the pillars, the other pillars must be taken into account. For instance, for an economic measure, the ecological and social consequences must also be estimated' (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 11, my translation). That is a very weak relation, since it does not oblige anything other than an estimation of consequences. Moreover, the Strategy stresses that the fourth, institutional pillar is put in place to guarantee the 'balance' between the other three pillars (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 11). However, the Decree in 2008 reiterated the wording of 'synergy and integration'. Moreover, the government's memorandum that accompanied the Decree emphasises that the integration between the three pillars should be more than a balance, without further specification (Vlaams Parlement, 2008b: 9).

Despite the relatively strong definitions in the texts, the interpretation of sustainable development appears much weaker in the discourse of the main political actors. In general, they interpret sustainable development narrowly as the balance between the three pillars (e.g. Vlaams Parlement, 2006). Moreover, as soon as they discuss issues that transcend the sustainable development policy as such, the framing changes. For instance, in his speech opening the 2005-2006 parliamentary session, Prime Minister Leterme - a year after he presented his first policy note on sustainable development - defined sustainable development as 'the sustainability of our economic development' and associated it only with environment, energy and transport (Leterme, 2005: 8). He did not mention the transversal or integrative character of sustainable development.

Policy framing assumes the identification of a certain problem that justifies the policy in question. In the context of the sustainable development policy, the framing of the problem at hand by the Flemish government refers to four main issues: the ageing of society, the scarcity of natural resources, climate change and globalisation. According to the government, those are the global trends that justify a sustainable development policy in Flanders (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 5, 11). Yet besides those trends, the argument that is most invoked to legitimise the Flemish sustainable development policy consists of Flanders's international commitments, either through the Belgian state or on its own. Most importantly, the Rio and Johannesburg Summits, the EU's sustainable development policy and the Gauteng Declaration are cited (Leterme, 2004: 6; Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 14-17, 31; 2008: 2-4). Flanders's policy framing makes a very strong link between the sustainable development policy and the international involvement of Flanders.

What is also striking in the policy framing between 2004 and 2009, is the fact that the leading political actors stress the low ambitions of their sustainable development policy. In the parliamentary debate on the Prime Minister's first policy note, he stated that he did not want to promise any miracles, and that his policy options were not groundbreaking[25] (Vlaams Parlement, 2005: 4, 6). In 2006, he said that with regard to sustainable development, he wants to 'govern soberly' (Vlaams Parlement, 2006: 4, my translation). Furthermore, Joke Schauvliege, a Christian Democrat member of parliament, stated that 'real pioneering work does not need to happen anymore' (Vlaams Parlement, 2005: 8, my translation). Those seemingly low ambitions point towards two main political choices. On the one hand, interviewees explain that Prime Minister Leterme, in all policy areas, wanted to respect previous engagements and build as much as possible on existing plans and structures. As a consequence, he refrained from launching big new initiatives. On the other hand, considering that Flanders's international commitments to a large extent justify its sustainable development policy, those pronouncements give the impression that the ambition of the sustainable development policy was merely to comply with international engagements, and not much more. After a reshuffle of the government in 2007 (due to upcoming elections at the federal level), the lack of ambition became less straightforward in the policy discourse. New Prime Minister Peeters put more emphasis on the fact that Flanders wants to belong to the top regions in Europe, mostly with regard to economic indicators, but also in other domains such as environmental issues (e.g. Peeters, 2009: 25).

4.2.3 Sustainable development in other policy areas

Since there were large differences across policy domains in the interpretation of sustainable development before its institutionalisation, it is interesting to assess the situation after a common governmental vision was developed. First, it is noted that 'sustainability' is one of the three main elements of the future vision of the Pact 2020. That Pact, the successor of the Vilvoorde Pact mentioned above, was the broadly publicised outcome of the Flemish socioeconomic strategy called Flanders in Action. It is an agreement between the Flemish government, its main socioeconomic partners and major civil society organisations. The Pact 2020 expresses the government's strategy to make Flanders one of the economic top regions in Europe by 2020 (Vlaamse Regering, 2009b). The Pact is important as it will inform the objectives of several more specific policy plans. The framing of sustainable development in the discourse sur-

[25] Surprisingly, the title of the Flemish SDS is *Samen grenzen verleggen*, which can be translated either as 'breaking new grounds together' or as 'raising the bar high together'.

rounding the Pact is completely disconnected from the sustainable development policy, and it bears close resemblance to the incorrect use of the term 'sustainable' in the period before 2004. The Pact states that '*sustainability* means that our economy and our society develop in a way that lasts on a longer term' (Vlaamse Regering, 2009b: 6, my translation). The Pact does express the ambition of reducing the use of resources and space in the economy and limiting its impact on the environment and on the rest of the world. In the rest of the Pact and in the discourse surrounding Flanders in Action, the emphasis lies on a 'sustainable economy', associated with smart choices regarding energy, material use, transport and spatial planning. Furthermore, the term 'sustainable' arises in front of many words in the Pact ('sustainable logistics', 'sustainable cities', 'sustainable solutions', ...). Although references to the concept of sustainable development are thus multiple, it is very striking that no mention is made to the Flemish sustainable development policy, despite the fact that the same Prime Minister leads both processes.

Furthermore, the inconsistencies that were found across policy domains before the institutionalisation have not disappeared. As I explain in the next section, the governance model installed by Flanders rests on the idea that each minister decides how he or she applies sustainable development in his or her policy domain. In reality, the opposite happens. Instead of translating sustainable development to their policy domains, the ministers reinterpret their existing initiatives in the context of sustainable development. What I mean by that is that, since they are all expected to do their part in the implementation of sustainable development, they are quick to stress that what they are doing in their portfolios, actually contributes to sustainable development already. For instance, when asked what she would do to contribute to the sustainable development policy, the Minister of Wellbeing, Health and Family replied: 'within my policy domain, I try to give more visibility to the social pillar of sustainable development' (Vervotte cited in Leterme, 2006b, my translation), after which she went on to display all policy initiatives that she had taken in her portfolio. That way, the integration of the concept of sustainable development has no added value whatsoever. Furthermore, it is striking that sustainable development becomes the décor of certain turf wars between ministers or political parties. For instance, the main initiative of Employment Minister Vandenbroucke (of the Socialist party) in the area of sustainable development between 2004 and 2009 was his programme called Corporate Social Responsibility (*Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen*). At the same time, Economy Minister Moerman (of the Liberal party) took many initiatives under the denominator of 'sustainable business', such as the programme Sustainable and Ethical International Business (*Duurzaam en Ethisch Internationaal Ondernemen*). Although covering closely related sectors, the two programmes were not related to each other (see Leterme, 2006b). Instead of finding synergies, it seems that both ministers preferred to use a personal frame of reference for 'their' initiatives. The impact of the Prime Minister's coordinating role in the area of sustainable development seemed minimal, or even non-existent, in that case.

A final illustration of the diverging interpretations of sustainable development in particular policy domains is offered by Renglé (2009), who conducted an in-depth study of the integration of sustainable development in the Flemish policy on development cooperation. The study showed that the framing of sustainable development changes frequently according to the priorities of subsequent ministers. The institutionalisation of the sustainable development policy as from 2004 has not triggered a uniform vision on the concept in the area of development cooperation. On the contrary, the interpretation of the concept before 2004 was more true to the real meaning of sustainable development than afterwards. For instance, in the 1999 policy note, the emphasis is put on the three pillars of sustainable development, while the 2004 policy

note only concentrates on the economic dimension of sustainable development, for instance on fair trade, sustainable business and microfinance (Renglé, 2009: 82-90). In general, from my interviews it appears that for policy domains that have been active on sustainable development long before 2004, such as development cooperation or climate change, the institutionalisation of sustainable development made no significant changes.

4.2.4 Governance model

The Flemish government explicitly proclaims that its sustainable development policy applies the holistic governance model (Vlaams Parlement, 2008b: 6). The major characteristics of the holistic model can indeed be recognised. Flanders adopted a horizontal definition of sustainable development with equal consideration of the three pillars. It approaches the concept as an overarching principle with implications in all policy sectors. In its policy translation, sustainable development is conceived as a horizontal policy line with its own policy instruments, notably an overarching strategy which demands concrete actions in different policy domains. As evidence of its support for a holistic interpretation, the Flemish government placed the overall responsibility of sustainable development with the prime minister. The government calls its application of the holistic model an 'inclusive policy' (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §4). That is defined as 'a policy in which a transversal policy line agreed by the Flemish government is translated by each Flemish minister in his/her own way in his/her policy domain' (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §2.2, my translation). In practice, the government promotes the idea that every department is in charge of integrating sustainable development, and that the prime minister provides minimal coordination only (see also Bachus and Spillemaeckers, 2010). That means that the degree of freedom accorded to individual ministers and departments is very large. In the SDS they were merely 'encouraged' to take initiatives for sustainable development (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 17, my translation). Furthermore, in line with Prime Minister Leterme's general preference, the government relies as much as possible on existing structures and procedures, and does not want to create new planning duties (Vlaams Parlement, 2008d: 6; Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 37).

In short, Flanders chose to frame its sustainable development policy in a holistic governance model, but its application of the model is minimalist. It prefers to make as little changes as possible to existing policy-making practices, which is in contradiction with the spirit of the holistic governance model (Bachus and Spillemaeckers, 2010).

4.2.5 Concluding remarks

Before the institutionalisation of the Flemish sustainable development policy, many different interpretations of the concept were used, some of them having not much in common with what sustainable development is really about. Now, the Flemish sustainable development policy promotes a relatively strong definition of sustainable development, which echoes the Brundtland formulation, stresses the synergy of the three pillars and emphasises the attention for the rest of the world and for future generations. Yet in specific policy domains and in the policy discourse of political officials, the institutionalisation has not produced many effects up to now. Different, often incomplete and sometimes incorrect interpretations are still used. The situation is not put right by the government's hollow application of the holistic governance model, which implies minimal coordination by the prime minister and maximum freedom of movement (and framing) by the individual ministers.

4.3 Policy goals

4.3.1 Strategic policy goals

Ever since the mention of sustainable development in the 1999 coalition agreement, the policy concept has repeatedly been framed as an overarching goal of the Flemish government. It is said that sustainable development must become an added value for environmental protection, economic activity and social (re)distribution (Leterme, 2004: 5; Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 12). The government's sustainable development policy presented first the 'balance', and later the 'integration and synergy' between the three pillars as its main strategic policy goal. In the Strategy, the three pillars are formulated as three fundamental goals. 'Quality of life' presents the environmental dimension. It entails that Flanders must contribute to the preservation of biodiversity, to the respect of the carrying capacity of natural resources, and to environmental quality and protection. 'A caring society' refers to human rights, cultural diversity, equal opportunities, ... The economic pillar, 'entrepreneurship and activity', aims at a high activity rate and standard of living, and is presented as the foundation of the other two pillars (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 32). The strategic policy goals thus move away from a mere equilibrium between the three pillars, by giving prioritised weight to the economic dimension.

The Strategy also states that the 27 Rio principles lie at the basis of its sustainable development policy. Five principles in particular are highlighted: equity (understood as intra and intergenerational solidarity), common but differentiated responsibilities, participation, the precautionary principle, and horizontal policy integration (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 35). The latter is not a principle that was mentioned as such in the Rio Declaration, but it is commonly considered as one of the main policy principles of sustainable development (Bruyninckx, 2006: 268-269). The principle for horizontal policy integration is translated into the government's goal to realise synergies with regard to sustainable development in the Flemish administration (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §3).

Besides the three fundamental goals and the five priority principles, the analysis accounts for three other strategic policy goals that are commonly formulated. First, the Flemish sustainable development policy aims at correcting historically rooted non-viable practices, for instance with regard to spatial planning, social injustice or certain forms of environmental pollution (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 29). The definition of the Decree specifies that sustainable development demands a change with regard to resource use, investments, technological development and institutions (cf. supra). The government further stresses that sustainable development requires a change in attitudes, behaviour and practices of everyone; and by 'everyone' it means policy-makers, business and consumers (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 11; 2010c). Second, the Flemish sustainable development policy refers to a double goal with regard to international developments. On the one hand, in order to maintain and strengthen its welfare and wellbeing, Flanders should adapt to global trends such as climate change, the ageing society or globalisation (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 11). That adaptation should happen in the fields of economy, energy, environment, spatial planning, transport, education, ... (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 28). It also means that Flanders must comply with its international commitments regarding sustainable development (Vlaamse Regering, 2004: 81; 2007: 12). On the other hand, the Flemish government wants to actively participate in the decisions that govern those global trends (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 28). In line with its ambition for an active foreign policy (Vlaamse Regering, 2004: 80; 2009a: 91), Flanders aims at a greater visibility and presence in the global

and European sustainable development debate (Leterme, 2004: 16; Peeters, 2009: 28).[26] On some aspects - although it is never specified on which ones - Flanders must play a leading role and export 'best practices', products and processes to other countries (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 8, 32; 2007: 12), 'since the leaders are the ones that help to determine the path' (Vlaamse Regering, 2007: 12, my translation). Third, the Flemish government itself must set a good example. That means that the government will take initiatives to promote sustainable development in its roles as legislator, employer, consumer, investor and international decision-maker (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 44-45).

Addendum: the new long-term vision

Since the adoption of the new Flemish SDS in 2011 (cf. infra), the strategic goals of the sustainable development policy are complemented with a new long-term vision - the creation of which was proscribed by the Decree (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §5.1.3). Based on international goals and existing Flemish priorities, and defined after a broad stakeholder consultation, an extensive vision on how Flanders should look like in 2050 is included in the SDS (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 32-42). It thus represented the intended end result of the policy on a long term. With that new time horizon, the Strategy could constitute an important added value to the government's main mid-term socioeconomic strategy Pact 2020.

The long-term vision departs from the observation that sustainable development requires deep changes in rooted practices, culture, technologies, ... It presents transition management as the guiding framework. Transitions are put forward in six sociotechnical systems: energy, transport, alimentation, housing, health and materials. Furthermore, the long-term vision presents strategic goals within six dimensions that are considered to be intrinsic to each system: the economic, social, ecological, knowledge, institutional and international dimension (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 35).

4.3.2 Operational policy goals

Initially, the operational goals that were formulated in the sustainable development policy were of an institutional rather than a substantive character. As Prime Minister Leterme's policy ambitions were modest (cf. supra), the main goals of the policy for the political term 2004-2009 were to issue an SDS, to propose a law to parliament, to create administrative support for sustainable development, and to initiate talks with the other governments in Belgium on institutionalised cooperation on the topic, among other things (Leterme, 2004: 14-17; Vlaams Parlement, 2005: 5-6). The Prime Minister's initial priorities did not include any reference to the substance of sustainable development. After the initial phase and with the reshuffle of government, the discourse of Prime Minister Peeters displayed more ambition and placed greater emphasis on action in a few priority areas. The reason is that many of the goals with regard to the institutional dimension had been achieved, and increased attention could now be given to the more substantive goals. The greater ambition is also in line with the aspiration to belong to the 'top regions' in Europe.

Turning now to content-related goals, the Strategy translates the strategic policy goals into seven priority themes: poverty and social exclusion; ageing society; climate change and clean energy; transport; land-use management; management of natural resources; and public health.

[26] The involvement of Flanders in international decision-making on sustainable development is analysed at length by Van den Brande (2009a; b; 2010) and Van den Brande et al. (2011).

As the government indicates, the themes are copied from the first EUSDS, the only difference being that it decided to treat transport and land-use management as two separate themes, which the EUSDS does not (European Commission, 2002; Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 9). The government also specified that the North-South dimension - absent from the first EUSDS but included as the seventh theme of the second EUSDS (Council of the European Union, 2006: 20) - would be integrated within each theme (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 43). In line with the principle of equity, the government recognises its share in the responsibility to contribute to the quality of life of everyone, both within and outside of Flanders (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 32). Within each of the seven themes, the Strategy formulates a long-term ambition statement, one or more long-term goals and a total of 47 short-term objectives. The long-term goals are derived from the various international commitments by which Flanders is bound (cf. Vlaams Parlement, 2005: 9). The short-term goals refer to existing Flemish plans strategies, and in some occasions to international commitments resulting from hard law, such as the Kyoto Protocol. The operational policy goals are thus entirely recuperated from existing objectives, most importantly the Vilvoorde Pact and existing sectoral plans, and framed within international goals. Hence, the Strategy reads as an inventory of existing societal challenges and as a list of goals with which Flanders intends to address them. The government invokes OECD guidelines to justify its decision to not formulate new or additional goals, but rather to use the Strategy as a means to streamline existing goals and find synergies between them (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 43).

4.3.3 Goal characteristics

4.3.3.1 Thematic areas of the goals

Flanders's policy framing advances sustainable development as a challenge having four pillars, i.e. the three traditional pillars complemented with an institutional pillar. The goals of the sustainable development policy can be subdivided into two groups: institutional or governance-related goals on the one hand, and goals with regard to substantive policy areas on the other hand. The governance-related goals concern the administrative, legal and budgetary institutionalisation of sustainable development and the nuts-and-bolts regarding decision-making and participation. Those goals received the lion's share of the government's attention between 2004 and 2008. The goals with regard to substantive policy areas, as I explain above, are formulated according to the themes of the EUSDS. Those themes reflect a relatively broad range of social issues, environmental problems, and issues that touch upon all pillars of sustainable development. The broad choice of the themes logically follows from the holistic governance model that Flanders seeks to apply. A characteristic of that model is the equal consideration of all dimensions of sustainable development.

While the seven themes defined in the Strategy are clearly recognised as important areas for sustainable development, it is remarkable that they do not seem to play a major role in the actual sustainable development policy. The operational projects that are defined in the context of the Strategy (cf. infra) do not refer to the themes and some do not fit in either of them. The themes are not reflected in recent policy choices either. At the start of the 2009-2014 term, the Prime Minister emphasised his intention to prioritise. Two main projects are highlighted: sustainable housing and living and sustainable public procurement (Peeters, 2009). After 2009, those two issues, together with education for sustainable development (cf. infra) were commonly presented as the current priority themes of the Flemish sustainable development policy (e.g. De Saegher, 2009).

4.3.3.2 Specificity and timeframe of the goals

Although it is implicit, the expected timeframe for the operational goals with regard to institutional output was the end of the political term 2004-2009. Within that first term, the Prime Minister wanted to have completed the major steps towards the institutionalisation of the sustainable development policy. Regarding the content-related policy goals, the Strategy defines both long-term and short-term goals. The timeframe of the long-term goals is not specified. They have a rather vague character, e.g. 'anticipating the economic, budgetary, social and health consequences of an ageing society' or 'achieving a decarbonised and energy-efficient society' (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 56, 58). The timeframe of most short-term operational goals is 2010, because that was the target year of the Vilvoorde Pact from which most were copied. 2010 is also the year in which the renewal of the SDS was due. The specificity of the short-term goals varies. Some are just as vague as the long-term goals, e.g. 'Flanders approaches the problem of poverty in a more integrated way' (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 53), while others are very specific, e.g. 'at least 12.5% of inhabitants between 25 en 64 participates at permanent formation in 2010' (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 54). The variation in the specificity of the short-term goals is a consequence of the fact that they were recycled from existing sectoral plans and strategies, which each had their own timing and logic. Furthermore, many of the 47 short-term goals are rather weak. They do not aim at more than the execution of existing laws, or they just want to see a relative improvement of the Flemish performance vis-à-vis neighbouring countries. In short, the Strategy presents a messy collection of goals of a diverging nature.

The policy goals displayed in the Strategy are not linked to indicators. The Flemish administration originally had the intention to issue two series of sustainable development indicators, including a set to monitor the progress of the Strategy. Yet those indicators have never been developed (cf. infra).

4.3.3.3 Analysis of the current situation

The goals that are formulated in the Strategy are based to some extent on an analysis of the current situation. In order to contextualise the government's policy, the Strategy develops an extensive description both of global challenges and of specific characteristics of Flanders. The global challenges concern socioeconomic trends (globalisation, poverty, social exclusion, increased mobility and the ageing society), some environmental problems (climate change, biodiversity and depletion of natural resources) and the global and European governance response with regard to those challenges (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 10-25). The specific characteristics of Flanders that the Strategy describes, are its limited space, its high population density, its function as a central transit area in Europe, its economic focus on services albeit with an important industrial activity, the decreasing family size, and the high tax burden in Belgium (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 25-27). Those characteristics are not presented for the benefits that some of them might bring about (e.g. in terms of mobility, energy distribution or economic revenues), but rather as 'limits' or 'preconditions' for a Flemish sustainable development policy.

Besides the analysis of the current situation provided by the Strategy, it is common in Flanders that the government performs some sort of analysis of current trends ('*omgevingsanalyse*') before formulating new policy goals. Such analyses are included, for instance, in the policy notes that the subsequent Prime Ministers have presented at the beginning of their term (Leterme, 2004: 6-11; Peeters, 2009: 22-24).

4.3.3.4 Political and societal backing of the goals

The societal backing of the policy goals is best analysed by looking at the genesis of the first SDS. As I mentioned above, the Strategy was drafted by the Prime Minister's cabinet. At that time, of course, the administrative support was still minimal. However, the cabinet advisors were supported by input from the administration, by recommendations from civil society and by scientific studies. The reflection on a Flemish SDS already started within the interdepartmental working group in 2003 and 2004, and was fuelled by the two main advisory councils in Flanders, the Flemish Strategic Advisory Council for Environment and Nature (*Minaraad*) and the Social and Economic Council of Flanders (*SERV*), who both called for the development of a Flemish SDS (Minaraad, 2004; Minaraad & SERV, 2004).[27] After the shift of governments in 2004, the cabinet of the Prime Minister took the lead. A small group of stakeholders close to the Prime Minister's party was established to informally guide the process. Subsequently, the process was influenced by the results of an academic study by Bachus et al. (2005), which had been commissioned by the Environment department, and by a joint recommendation of the two advisory councils (Minaraad & SERV, 2005). Furthermore, the cabinet sought the advice of officials within the Environment department, which was then still recognised to have most expertise regarding sustainable development, and it organised a stakeholder consultation moment. The Strategy that was thus drafted, was adopted by the government in 2006 after final recommendations by the advisory councils (Minaraad, 2005; SERV, 2005).

Hence, the societal backing is relative due to the low transparency of the Strategy's genesis. Some decisions were clearly inspired by the different recommendation, and were in line with the ideas that were generally accepted in Flanders regarding a Flemish sustainable development policy, such as the central responsibility of the prime minister, the establishment of a proper budget and administration, and the choice to focus on a set of priority themes. However, the Strategy did not respond to many of the more fundamental requests. With regard to policy goals, Bachus et al. (2005: 38-39) had stressed that at least two thirds of the proposed actions should be new. Also the advisory councils deplored the fact that the draft version of the Strategy contained 'recycled' goals only (SERV, 2005: 2). They also suggested that regarding the institutional dimension, the government should reform existing institutions and decision-making procedures and reorient them towards the principles of sustainable development (Minaraad & SERV, 2005; SERV, 2005: 2). Since the start of the policy, the two advisory councils have defended the vision that sustainable development in Flanders is strongly associated with better public governance (Van Humbeeck, 2010: 13).

Concerning the political backing of the policy goals, the Flemish Parliament - and by extension the political parties that are not represented in the government - was only involved in the formulation process of the sustainable development policy in 2008, when the Decree was debated. At that time the Strategy was already finalised. During the parliamentary discussions, the Prime Minister stated that the political backing of the Decree was important to him, as it would help Flanders to adopt strong positions with regard to sustainable development in international forums (Vlaams Parlement, 2008d: 4). The Decree was passed after a short debate in a parliamentary committee. All parties voted in favour, except the Green party. The Greens judged the Decree too little ambitious and they deplored that the government refused to in-

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[27] Since 2008, three advisory councils are explicitly mandated to give advice on the Flemish sustainable development policy (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §5.3), the third one being the Flemish Foreign Affairs Council (SARiV), which is asked to especially oversee the North-South dimension. Other advisory councils can always act at their own initiative.

clude their amendments with regard to stronger institutional instruments, such as a sustainability impact assessment (Vlaams Parlement, 2008a: 7; 2008d: 4). Given that the Green party had only six out of 124 seats, the political backing was still very broad. But since the Decree does not include any content-related policy goals, that political backing only refers to the continuity of the sustainable development policy as such, not to any of its substantive goals.

4.3.4 Concluding remarks

The strategic goals of the Flemish sustainable development policy are ambitious but have a very vague character. Many of the operational policy goals are purely focused on the institutional dimension and do not refer to the content of sustainable development. Those that do, are completely copied from existing plans and strategies, and it is not clear how they decline the strategic policy goals. In general, the goals are unspecific, not accompanied by indicators, and their backing leaves much to be desired for. Furthermore, the thematic areas of the operational policy goals are disconnected from the other elements of the policy.

4.4 Policy instruments

4.4.1 Institutional instruments

4.4.1.1 Prime Minister and Team Sustainable Development

The creation of the so-called 'Sustainable Development Coordination Cell' in 2005 was one of the first initiatives of Prime Minister Leterme in his quality as Minister for Sustainable Development. It followed from the decision, made in the context of the process Better Administrative Policy, to anchor sustainable development within the administration of the Prime Minister (cf. supra). Two officials started working in the unit in 2006. It has been extended to three people in 2008, to five in 2009, and to six in 2011 - with the value of five full-time equivalents (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 26). Since 2010, it officially goes by the name 'Team Sustainable Development'.

The Team Sustainable Development is a section of the Department of the Services for the General Government Policy. That department supports the government, in particular the Prime Minister, in the preparation and execution of several transversal policy issues (e.g. equal opportunities, communication). The Team oversees the follow-up, the evaluation and the revision of the SDS. More generally, the principal task of the Team is to coordinate the Flemish sustainable development policy. In accordance with the 'inclusive' governance model, it is not the Prime Minister who imposes a policy upon the other ministers and departments. The Flemish approach rather relies on the personal initiatives, and thus on the goodwill, of individual ministers. The Team provides capacity-building and sensitisation. Its aim is to divulge a common view on sustainable development within the Flemish administration. The Team is at the disposal of other departments who have questions regarding how they can better integrate sustainable development into their sectors. It functions as the main contact point for actors within and outside of the Flemish administration. The Team also coordinates the formulation of Flemish positions for national, European and global negotiations on sustainable develop-

ment (Van den Brande, 2010).[28] One of the major tools that the Team uses for its tasks is the interdepartmental working group (cf. infra).

The Team Sustainable Development has been criticised for being too small and for not having enough weight in the Flemish administration (see also Spillemaeckers, 2009: 24-25). Although the Flemish government strives for minimal coordination only, the tasks that the Team needs to perform are not in proportion with its size. The government has responded to that criticism by gradually extending the personnel of the Team. While that was accompanied by an increasing number of policy initiatives, it is still said to be insufficient for the effective follow-up of the policy and for the needed capacity-building in the Flemish administration. Interviewees confirm that the Team lacks the time (and according to some, the expertise) to respond to the capacity-building needs of the different departments. The low weight of the Team within the Flemish administration is a consequence of the minimalist interpretation of the holistic governance model and the 'inclusive' character of the policy. It prevents the Team from taking a more proactive stance, and makes that not much more resources can be invested in it. Furthermore, Bachus and Spillemaeckers (2010) denounce that the Team's comings and goings are entirely controlled by the Prime Minister's cabinet, which takes most of the major decisions.

4.4.1.2 Interdepartmental working group

As explained before, the creation of the interdepartmental working group was a spontaneous, bottom-up initiative by some highly motivated civil servants in the aftermath of the Johannesburg Summit. At the time it was mainly meant to support the Environment department in its increasing demands to supply input for national, European and global forums on sustainable development and the newly created network nrg4SD, and in its follow-up of the negotiations at all those levels. The creation of the working group also signalled a turning point in the Flemish administration. While in the past sustainable development was considered relevant only for the Environment department, after Johannesburg almost every department assigned someone to at least keep track of the sustainable development debate (Bachus et al., 2005: 120).

After the 2004 elections, the working group was formally re-established by the Prime Minister (Leterme, 2004: 14). That meant that the coordination of the group moved from the Environment department to the Team Sustainable Development.[29] The working group is in principle composed by one representative from each 'policy domain'.[30] That representative is at the same time his or her department's main contact for sustainable development. In reality,

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[28] Recently, officials of the Team have been representing Flanders in international forums (Van den Brande, 2010). In the early years after the creation of the Team, an informal agreement was made that the international developments of sustainable development remained the responsibility of the Environment department, which has a historical expertise in the follow-up of global and European sustainable development forums. Recently, a new subgroup of the interdepartmental working group (cf. infra) was established, in the form of a mailing list, to coordinate international matters regarding sustainable development.

[29] Previously, the working group had been co-presided by an official from the Environment department and by an official from the Foreign Affairs department. According to Bachus et al. (2005: 141), that co-presidency had been installed to increase the support of non-environmental departments for the working group.

[30] The thirteen policy domains (or departments) of the Flemish administration are: services for the general government policy; public governance; finance and budget; foreign affairs; economy, science and innovation; education and formation; wellbeing, public health and family; culture, youth, sports and media; employment and social economy; agriculture and fisheries; environment, nature and energy; transport and public works; and spatial planning, housing and heritage.

some departments mandate more than one representative. Although the membership of the group often changes, it is in general composed by around 15 people. Interviews point out that most members are junior officials (see also Spillemaeckers, 2009: 29). The reunions of the working group are prepared by a 'daily management', in which the Environment, Economy, Employment and Foreign Affairs departments are represented.

The working group is the only institution that deals on a regular basis with the horizontal coordination of sustainable development issues in the Flemish administration. Its main task is to coordinate between the Team Sustainable Development and each individual department on the one hand, and among different policy areas on the other hand. It is explicitly not a decision-making body. Regarding the coordination, interviews point out that the aim is not only to look for potential synergies, but also to verify whether initiatives of the Team are not in conflict with existing sectoral policies. That endeavour is in disagreement with the strategic policy goal that states that sustainable development requires a change in attitudes, behaviour and practices. The working group is also charged with conciliating possibly diverging views with regard to sustainable development. In rare cases, the matter is transferred to the highest government level. That happened for instance with regard to a Flemish position on the EUSDS, for which the views of the Environment and the Economy departments were directly opposed. During the meetings of the working group, most time is spent on the execution of the operational projects and on the allocation of the subsidies (cf. infra). Other agenda items are less important, for instance regarding the preparation of the website or of reports to parliament.

Since the working group is the only institution that deals with coordination, all critique regarding horizontal policy integration on sustainable development is targeted at it. First, interviewees suggest that the group was initially overshadowed by many a turf war between the Environment department and the Team Sustainable Development, but those disagreements faded into the background as the Team's role became more prominent. Second, it appears that its dynamism is rather low and that in reality only four or five meetings take place a year (cf. Spillemaeckers, 2009: 26), while the intention was to meet monthly. Third, doubts are expressed about the commitment of some policy domains (Van Poeck et al., 2011). Fourth, a former member divulged that very little is actually coordinated by the group, and that it mostly deals with unimportant issues (Debruyne & Calcoen, 2008: 26). Fifth, interviews denounce the fact that very little of what is discussed by the group is actually put into practice.

4.4.1.3 Sustainable Development Strategy and policy briefs

As the Flemish SDS was already extensively discussed above, it suffices to add here that the Strategy as such is put into place as a new planning instrument. Starting in 2009, each newly elected government has to issue a new or revised Strategy within the ten months after its swearing-in (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §5.4). Moreover, it was decided in 2006 that each Flemish minister has to report on his or her sustainable development activities in his or her yearly policy briefs[31] (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 76). However, a scan of the policy briefs of 2007 points out that virtually none actually contain such a report, even not those written by the Prime Minister himself. In 2008, only a handful complied with the decision (e.g. Environment, Development Cooperation and Social Economy).

[31] In Flanders, the policy briefs presented to parliament report on a minister's achievements within a certain policy domain during the previous year, and they announce policy intentions for the coming year. Policy briefs are thus annual concretisations of the policy notes (Vancoppenolle and Legrain, 2003).

It has to be emphasised that the Strategy, as it was approved in 2006, was presented as the 'first phase' of the Flemish SDS. It was completed by a series of operational projects, which were presented as the 'second phase' (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 77).

4.4.1.4 Operational projects

The 'second phase' of the strategy consists of a series of projects for which twelve themes were decided at the moment of the adoption of the SDS. Surprisingly, the themes of the projects do not correspond with the seven themes of the Strategy (cf. supra).[32] The philosophy behind the projects was to stimulate synergies and transversal cooperation, in order to concretise some of the strategic goals of the policy. Moreover, the projects were intended to stimulate cooperation with lower levels of governance (mostly provinces and municipalities) and with non-governmental stakeholders, so as to extend the scope of the sustainable development policy beyond the Flemish administration (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 77-78; 2010a). A good example is the project 'sustainable housing and living', associated with the transition arena that exists since 2002 (cf. 4.1). The project contains several actions that link a large variety of actors (departments and public agencies of the Flemish government, municipalities, provinces, the federal government, the construction sector, energy companies, NGOs, research institutes, ...). Also in most other cases, the projects refer to initiatives that already existed. For instance, the project on HIV/Aids was already a priority of the Flemish policy on development cooperation before 2004 (cf. Renglé, 2009: 92).

The implementation of the projects happens by the involved departments. The Team Sustainable Development offers minimal support only, which is interpreted by interviewees as making sure that the projects do not overlap or encroach upon one another (e.g. sustainable agriculture versus sustainable water use). Therefore, while synergy among actors and sectors is promoted in the implementation of each project, it is not encouraged between the different projects. After the definition of the twelve themes in 2006, the leading departments were asked to develop a concrete proposal for each project. However, for years nothing happened. In fact, the final project proposals - a description of each project containing goals and action - were only approved by the government three weeks before the 2009 elections.

The operational projects are heavily criticised. First, observers denounce that they mostly concern existing initiatives (Debruyne & Calcoen, 2008: 26), and thus do not contribute to the strategic policy goal of realising a change in practices and behaviour. Second, the fact that they were approved only weeks before the end of the political term - despite the fact that most initiatives were already ongoing - has caused major dismissal (Minaraad, 2009: 4; SARiV, 2009: 2). The Social and Economic Council of Flanders even refused to formulate a substantive advice for that reason (SERV, 2009: 3). The late adoption of the operational projects could partly be due to the fact that up to 2008, the scarce resources of the Flemish sustainable development policy were mainly directed towards the 'governance-related' goals (cf. supra). But it is certainly a manifestation of the low political weight that the government attaches to its sustainable development policy. Third, it is denounced that the projects are presented as 'budget neutral' and that no financial means are attached to them (SARiV, 2009: 2). Fourth, despite the fact that the administration had years to prepare them, several of the approved projects are poorly

[32] The themes of the operational projects are sustainable housing and living, corporate social responsibility, education for sustainable development, sustainable agriculture, environment and health, sustainable transport, sustainable water use, sustainable production and consumption, scientific research and innovation policy, sustainable spatial planning, gender, and HIV/Aids (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 79; 2010a).

designed. Some project descriptions read as preliminary and incomplete proposals, with very low ambitions, and there is no coherence between them (Minaraad, 2009: 4; SERV, 2009: 5; SARiV, 2009: 3). Moreover, although much reference is made to global and European goals, most projects lack a North-South dimension (Minaraad, 2009: 4), although that was a specific constraint of the Strategy. Throughout all that criticism, two projects are notable exceptions: sustainable housing and living, and education for sustainable development. Those projects concern initiatives that have been initiated by the Environment department outside the context of the sustainable development policy. They have been running for years, with only loose connections to the SDS. The government gradually advanced them as the thematic priorities of the sustainable development policy. While education for sustainable development is still led by the Environment department,[33] sustainable housing and living became one of the principal activities of the Team Sustainable Development. Together with the new sustainable procurement policy (cf. infra), they are the current priorities of the policy (De Saegher, 2009; Peeters, 2009: 9).

The criticisms on the operational projects are no negative judgments of the several concrete sustainable development initiatives that are ongoing, and that are led by individual departments in cooperation with other partners. The critique is mostly directed towards the government's coordinated sustainable development policy, which fails in creating the necessary support and synergies for those initiatives.

4.4.2 Legal instruments

4.4.2.1 Sustainable Development Decree

The only real legal instrument of the Flemish sustainable development policy is the law that was adopted in 2008, called the 'Decree for the promotion of sustainable development' (*Decreet ter bevordering van duurzame ontwikkeling*). I already mentioned that the Decree defines what sustainable development means for the Flemish government, and that it obliges each new coalition to revise the Strategy. The Decree also gives a legal character to some of the characteristics of the Flemish sustainable development policy, stating that it is inclusive, coordinated and participative and that it has an important European and global dimension (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §4-5). Finally, it obliges the government to reserve a post on sustainable development in its budget (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §7). The Decree's main merit is the guaranteed continuity of the sustainable development policy, but besides the definition it has no content-related stipulations. Most of the policy instruments (e.g. the working group) are not mentioned in the Decree. Arguing that the concretisation of sustainable development is evolving, the Prime Minister did not want to enshrine in law the instruments that are used to govern it (Vlaams Parlement, 2008b: 8). In contrast, the Decree does fix the inclusive character of the Flemish sustainable development policy. While the scope of the Decree is already very limited, one can even question the legal enforceability of the obligations that it does have. The failure of the government to respect the deadline for the first revision of the Strategy is a case in point.

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[33] Since the start of the implementation of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, there have been disputes on the division of responsibilities between the Team Sustainable Development and the Environment department. In 2009, a compromise was crafted according to which the Environment department would retain the coordination of education for sustainable development, while the Prime Minister would be entitled to the political validation of it (Van Poeck et al., 2011).

4.4.2.2 Belgian Constitution

In 2007, an article on sustainable development was added to the Belgian Constitution under the title 'general policy goals of federal Belgium, the Communities and the Regions'. Although it is not specifically a Flemish instrument, it needs to be mentioned here, because the Flemish government is also bound by it and can be obliged by judges to take it into account. The article reads:

> *'During the execution of their respective competences, the federal State, the Communities and the Regions pursue the goals of a sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental aspects, taking into account the solidarity between the generations' (Belgische Senaat, 2010: §7bis).*

In 2008, the article was invoked by the provincial authorities of Antwerp to refuse a licence for an power plant. It judged that the plant, which would work on palm oil originating from Malaysia and Indonesia where it is a factor of deforestation, was not in agreement with the general policy goal of sustainable development (De Morgen, 2008).

4.4.3 Economic instruments

4.4.3.1 Budget

The decision that a specific budget post would be created for the sustainable development policy, was one of the first that the Prime Minister took when he institutionalised sustainable development in 2004. The budget was to be used above all for the administrative support of the policy, for the formulation and follow-up of the SDS, and for the Flemish presence in European and global forums (Leterme, 2004: 15). Since 2005, the budget indeed contains an entry on sustainable development, of around 1 million EUR. About half of that amount goes to the subsidies.

4.4.3.2 Subsidies

Since the adoption of the Strategy in 2006, the Team Sustainable Development allocates a certain amount of subsidies to projects submitted by civil society and by local or provincial authorities. The subsidies represent a very small amount of money (cf. Spillemaeckers, 2009: 25), but are only meant to initiate good initiatives, and not to offer permanent funding. The projects must fit within one of the seven themes of the Strategy, or be aimed at education, sensitisation or communication for sustainable development. Moreover, private companies can be granted subsidies for 'exemplary projects' (Leterme, 2006a: 5). An additional condition is that the projects have to be associated with more than one policy area of the Flemish administration, because each department already has its own subsidy policy for sectoral issues (Vlaamse Overheid, 2009: 4). Through the working group, departments guard against the fact that the interdepartmental subsidies would interfere with their own subsidy policies.

4.4.3.3 Sustainable procurement policy

A few days before the 2009 elections, the government approved an action plan on sustainable procurement ('*duurzame overheidsopdrachten*'). It is an answer to the strategic policy goal of the government's example function with regard to sustainable consumption (cf. 4.3.1). Interviewees have indicated that the Prime Minister's interest in the topic was stimulated by the observation that different ministers were leading incoherent initiatives on corporate social responsibility and sustainable business (cf. 4.2.3). Appealing to his coordinating responsibility on sus-

tainable development, he pulled the issue towards him, and decided to conduct a more coherent policy on it. The sustainable procurement policy thus became an example of the added value of the Prime Minister's coordination role.

The action plan was prepared by an interdepartmental task force in cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders (cf. Peeters, 2009: 24). The goal set by the government is to achieve 100% of sustainable procurement by 2020. That means that by then all public organisms must have included environmental, social and economic criteria in their purchases of constructions, supplies and services, so as to promote products and services that are environmentally, socially and ethically responsible (Vlaamse Regering, 2009c: 8). Public investments are not included, despite the government's goal to set an example in that area too (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §2.1; Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 45). In order to achieve that goal, four consecutive three-year action plans will be issued. The first action plan, covering the years 2009 to 2011, is mainly aimed at setting the stage and at taking the necessary steps to find the right indicators and reporting mechanisms for sustainable products and services. It also provides a clear overview of existing sustainable procurement policies at the federal and at the EU level. As a pilot project, the government made the commitment to make the Flemish part of the 2010 Belgian Presidency of the EU completely 'sustainable'.

4.4.4 Information instruments

Some of the previously mentioned instruments, although information is not their principal resource, are also applied as information instruments (e.g. the Strategy, the policy briefs, the operational projects, or the action plan on sustainable procurement). They are used to promote sustainable development within the Flemish administration and beyond, and to divulge information about the government's policy. In that regard, the project on education for sustainable development merits special attention, as it promotes knowledge and skills of sustainable development in the Flemish education policy (see Van Poeck et al., 2011). Those instruments are not repeated in this section, but three additional instruments are developed here.

4.4.4.1 Sustainable development indicators

In 2006, the Flemish administration wanted to develop sustainable development indicators for Flanders, after the examples of many other governments and international organisations. The initial idea was to develop two sets of indicators, a first one (process indicators) to evaluate the Strategy, and a second one (descriptive indicators) to track Flanders's progress towards sustainable development more generally. Eventually, only the second set has been developed. The Research Centre of the Flemish Government has published three reports so far of those descriptive indicators (Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering, 2006; 2008; 2009a). The reports consist of a few dozen indicators borrowed mostly from Eurostat,[34] on which Flanders is compared with Belgium and with the EU as a whole. Although there is some overlap between the

[34] The first version of the indicators was also inspired by a policy paper on indicators by nrg4SD (see Happaerts et al., 2010a: 138), which was a request of the working group, but those indicators were not withheld in subsequent versions, because they were deemed little relevant or easily replaceable by Eurostat indicators. The selection of the first version of the indicators was done in consultation with representative from different policy domains. As to the selection criteria, the indicators had to be internationally applied, and allow the comparison of Flanders in time and with other countries and subnational entities (Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 1)

issues targeted by the indicators and the themes of the SDS,[35] the indicators are not linked to its goals. The indicators are not meant as an evaluation instrument, but mainly to track Flanders's progress in time and in comparison to others. According to interviewees, the instrument was initially intended to support internal discussions within the working group, which is why it is not used for policy preparation or evaluation. Moreover, it is not applied for broader information purposes, and very few people actually seem to know it, even within the Flemish administration. It rather seems that, after the publication of the first report, the annual revision of the barometer has become an obligated procedure without any resonance.

It is also pertinent to mention here the benchmarking exercise that was made by the government's research department in the framework of the project Flanders in Action (Pact 2020). The study identified 15 so-called 'benchmark entities' that would be used to compare Flanders's socioeconomic progress with, in order to track its development towards a European 'top region' (Vlaamse Overheid, 2007). Although the exercise includes sustainable development as a topic, no reference is made to the Flemish sustainable development policy, and the indicators that it used do not correspond with the sustainability barometer (Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering, 2009b: 31-32; Vlaamse Overheid, 2007: 64-71).

4.4.4.2 Instrument for a More Sustainable Policy

The Team Sustainable Development has developed an instrument which should help the administration to better integrate sustainable development in policy-making. The 'Instrument for a More Sustainable Policy', which will soon be made available to all departments (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 136), evolved from an earlier instrument, the 'sustainable development maturity model', that PricewaterhouseCoopers had developed for the government (Peeters, 2010: 28).

The instrument is a guideline rather than an impact analysis. The Flemish government is awaiting the results of a scientific study (cf. infra) to consider the creation of a proper sustainability assessment in Flanders (Peeters, 2010: 29; Vlaams Parlement, 2008d: 13).

4.4.4.3 Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development

In 2001, the government created the 'policy research centres for policy-relevant research' (*steunpunten voor beleidsrelevant onderzoek*). Those policy research centres are consortiums of different Flemish universities that conduct research over a period of five years on a certain topic. The themes are considered as priorities for the Flemish policy, but in need of relevant scientific support. At the same time, the programme was intended to give structural support to academic research in Flanders. The 'second generation' of policy research centres was established in 2007. Sustainable development was among the fourteen selected themes. The Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development is a collaboration of four research groups from the universities of Leuven, Ghent and Brussels. While its establishment manifests the 'recognition' of sustainable development by the Flemish government, it is the smallest of all fourteen centres, with only 4.5 full-time equivalents fulfilled by 8 different researchers.

The research conducted by the Policy Research Centre has three main axes (Steunpunt Duurzame Ontwikkeling, 2011). The first axe, 'governance for sustainable development', focuses on the Flemish governance model, studies the interaction of Flanders with other levels of

[35] The Eurostat indicators are based on the renewed EUSDS of 2006, while the themes of the Flemish SDS translate the themes of the first EUSDS of 2001.

governance, and keeps track of the sustainable development policies of other subnational governments. The axe 'system innovation and transition management' explores how those innovative policy approaches can be applied by Flanders. The third axe, 'instruments for sustainable development', studies the possibilities of three specific policy instruments for the Flemish sustainable development policy: green taxation, sustainability assessment and sustainable management systems. Nine long-term projects are conducted within those axes (the research for this PhD is funded by a project of the first axe, cf. 1). Furthermore, the Policy Research Centre fulfils short-term projects at the request of the Prime Minister. An example was its scientific guidance during the development of the SDS's renewal and the long-term vision. The research is closely followed-up by the administration and by civil society. The projects have advisory committees composed by officials from different departments, by federal and EU civil servants, and by non-governmental stakeholders. The Policy Research Centre has a yearly budget of about 450,000 EUR. Two thirds of that are taken from the budget of the Economy, Science and Innovation department, one third is derived from the sustainable development budget.

4.4.4.4 Sensitisation and communication

The Strategy labels sensitisation, education and communication as important transversal tools (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 45). The website of the Team Sustainable Development[36] functions as the government's main portal for all information on its sustainable development initiatives. Furthermore, the Team organises occasional activities for sensitisation purposes, such as the 'Sustainable Development Day' for civil servants.

4.4.5 Voluntary approaches

The Flemish sustainable development policy includes voluntary approaches in its policy instruments, i.e. the two applications of transition management. As mentioned before (cf. 4.1), Flanders was the first testing ground for transition arenas outside the Netherlands. Two in particular were set up and later lodged within the Flemish sustainable development policy. *Plan C* is a network of governmental actors, businesses, scientists and consumers, dedicated to sustainable material use. *DuWoBo* is the transition arena built around sustainable housing and living (cf. supra). Those transition arenas are voluntary mechanisms to promote new norms on waste and construction policy, and embed them in the mainstream practices of the actors in the relevant sectors. The two arenas have yielded many positive experiences, and although the Flemish sustainable development policy is only partly accountable for it, they are counted among its most significant successes. That is why the Flemish government will experiment with transition management in other areas too, and why it has been chosen as the guiding principle of the new SDS (cf. infra). That shift was furthermore facilitated by recent personnel changes in the Team Sustainable Development and by the influence of the Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development, which provided scientific guidance for the new SDS.

4.4.6 Concluding remarks

Although the policy instruments used by Flanders represent a varied mix of instrument types, the institutional instruments dominate. Since the end of the 1990s, the government has associated sustainable development policy with an institutional reform of the administration, and it is still strongly linked to the discourse on 'better governance'. That is why a large part of the

[36] http://do.vlaanderen.be

operational policy goals during the 2004-2009 were 'governance-related'. A new institutional structure has indeed been created, but the dominance of the institutional dimension makes that few instruments are actually aimed at fulfilling the content-related policy goals. For instance, no instrument has been developed to take into account the five priority principles in policy and decision-making. At the same time, with regard to most operational policy goals, it is not surprising that few instruments of the sustainable development policy are directed at them, since those goals have been copied from other strategies and policies. Furthermore, some of the instruments are only weakly linked to other elements of the policy (for instance the indicators).

While the sustainable development policy has been given legal continuity in 2008, most policy instruments are not mentioned in the Decree. As a consequence, they are hardly enforceable, they do not have a permanent character, and their political weight is reduced. That is manifested, for instance, in the non-compliance by most ministers to report on their sustainable development initiatives in their yearly policy briefs, or in the low profile and dynamism of the working group. Most of the instruments are in fact very weak. Exceptions are some of the operational projects which, although their link to the sustainable development policy is weak, realise concrete results on the ground.

Despite the ambitious strategic policy goals, my analysis puts forward that many policy instruments are in practice used to keep things as they are and to demarcate, instead of coordinate, policy domains and initiatives. The holistic governance model is thus reduced to a minimum and realises the opposite of what it should, in that the search for synergies is interpreted as making sure that no one trespasses on each other's initiatives.

Nevertheless, some signs of change are observed in recent policy choices. For instance, the development of the sustainable procurement policy, with its goal of achieving 100% of sustainable procurement by 2020, is interesting. But most importantly, the new SDS promises some interesting improvements to both the goals and instruments of the Flemish sustainable development policy.

Addendum: the renewed Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy

In accordance with the stipulations of the Decree, each newly elected Flemish government has to adopt a new SDS document within the first ten months after its swearing-in (Vlaams Parlement, 2008c: §5.4). While the new coalition took office in July 2009, the administration took the lead on the renewal of the Strategy early 2010. In close cooperation with the Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Development, it drafted a first version of a new SDS, including a long-term version (cf. supra). Two stakeholder consultation events were then organised in April and May 2010, to discuss the long-term vision and the concrete actions respectively. Subsequently, the proposed text was approved 'in principle' by the Flemish government in July 2010, and sent to the advisory councils for formal advice (Vlaamse Regering, 2010b). All advisory councils formulated an advice in the autumn of 2010. The Team Sustainable Development then adapted the text according to the recommendations (cf. Vlaams Parlement, 2010: 10). The new draft was referred to the ministerial cabinets for final discussions. The renewed Flemish SDS was finally approved by the Flemish government in April 2011, 21 months after it took office.

Besides the new long-term vision, the new SDS is to a large extent built on existing goals and plans, much like its predecessor. It refers, for instance, to the EUSDS and to Europe 2020, the EU's new socio-economic strategy. Mostly, the new Flemish SDS refers to Pact 2020, which confirms the Pact's character as the leading framework for the Flemish government (cf. 4.2.3). However, the SDS also formulates new goals, aimed at the realisation of the transitions

proposed in the long-term vision. Transition management thus becomes the main cross-cutting theme of the Strategy. The operational goals of the SDS are accordingly structured according to the six systems and the six dimensions put forward in the long-term vision. Additionally, goals are proposed with regard to spatial planning (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 141). Furthermore, following the previous focus on synergies, the new SDS advances 'smart links' between policy areas as an important means to book progress (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 145).

The new Flemish SDS contains several elements that are remarkably stronger than the first one. First, the adoption of a long-term vision provides an exceptional new policy framework for all policy areas. It also gives a more concrete end result with regard to the strategic goal of realising a change in attitudes, practices and beliefs. Second, through the adoption of transition management as a new frame, the SDS now has the real potential to become an added value for new and existing policy processes. Third, some pertinent new instruments are intended, such as the development of a monitoring system for the goals of the SDS (Vlaamse Regering, 2011: 53). The Prime Minister also announced that the 'sustainability barometer' should be adapted in view of the long-term vision (Peeters, 2010: 20). Fourth, through the stakeholder consultations that were organised and the numerous advices that were formulated, the societal backing of this SDS is definitely wider than before.

While the new Strategy is thus promising, it still shows several shortcomings. For instance, the bulk of short-term actions calls into question the practicability of the Strategy. Furthermore, with no new enforcement instruments, it remains to be seen whether the goodwill of individual departments to commit to the Strategy will increase.

5. Quebec and Flanders: two policies cast in the same mould?

After the detailed analyses of both cases, the results can now be compared and explained. In this section, comparative results of the two within-case analyses are presented. The presentation of the results follow the three policy dimensions: policy framing (5.1), policy goals (5.2) and policy instruments (5.3). The comparison shows that the sustainable development policies of Quebec and Flanders are to a large extent similar. Yet some important differences can be noted, some of which point towards a more pronounced ambition and a greater effort made in Quebec. Both cases, however, show disconnections between different policy dimensions.

5.1 Policy framing: leadership versus frugality

The policy framings of Quebec and Flanders are very similar. They are both principally based on the Brundtland definition and on the three-pillar vision that was popularised by the Rio Summit. The idea that sustainable development aims simultaneously at environmental quality, social equity and economic prosperity, is particularly emphasised. Those policy framings seem to reflect a universal trend of governments all over the world who interpret sustainable development in such a way that economic growth is not compromised.

A difference in framing is the complete absence in Quebec of the North-South dimension. In Flanders, that dimension of sustainable development has always been an integral part of the policy framing (although it is not systematically extended to all actions). Several factors lie at the basis of it. First, the Foreign Affairs department has been closely involved in the Flemish sustainable development policy from the start (e.g. by co-chairing the informal working group in 2003 and 2004). In that department, the link between sustainable development and international development cooperation has always been emphasised (Renglé, 2009). It is one of the policy areas in Flanders where sustainable development receives constant attention. Second,

the North-South dimension is one of the most crucial elements of all global negotiations on sustainable development and Flanders is often at the front row of those negotiations (for instance in the run-up to the Johannesburg Summit). Third, the link between environment and international development cooperation was an important issue for the Flemish Greens, whose Environment Minister played a large role in Johannesburg and who also controlled the Development Cooperation portfolio between 2002 and 2003. In the case of Quebec, similar inducements were not present. In Quebec, sustainable development has mostly been interpreted as a problem for Quebec. Intra and intergenerational solidarity are chiefly understood as solidarity with other Quebecers or with future generations of Quebecers. The political will to move sustainable development beyond the borders of the province seems minimal.[37]

A slighter difference between the two framings is the level of ambition displayed in the policy discourse. In Flanders, especially in the initial period, the political leaders expressed modesty with regard to their sustainable development policy. Flanders wanted to govern soberly and it did not want to promise any miracles. Yet still, the Strategy stated that Flanders should be an international leader with regard to certain products and policies. Afterwards, the policy discourse put more emphasis on the fact that Flanders wants to pertain to the 'top regions' in Europe, in line with the ambition of the Pact 2020. In Quebec, a strong leadership discourse has continuously been prominent since the return to power of the Liberals in 2003.

The governance models put in place by Quebec and Flanders are similar to a certain extent. Quebec applies a mix of the holistic and the policy principles model, while Flanders puts the holistic model into practice. Possibly as a consequence of the different level of ambition, Quebec's model is innovative with regard to the important role accorded to the sixteen principles (which is one the most interesting elements of the entire policy approach). Flanders's application of the holistic model is more modest. Yet both policies are in practice based on a minimalist interpretation of the governance models. Although both Quebec and Flanders passed a law which imposes certain procedures, their policies *de facto* enforce very little, and leave a considerable freedom of movement to individual departments and organisms. They thus rely to a large degree on the goodwill of other actors.

5.2 Policy goals: aim for change, but leave everything the way it was

Some of the strategic policy goals are very similar at both sides of the Atlantic. The Flemish policy intends to achieve a change in behaviour and attitudes and to correct historically rooted unsustainable practices. Similarly, Quebec wants to realise a 'bend' in the non-viable development of its society. In both cases, the strategic policy goals are ambitious and reflect the messages put forward in international declarations. Most of those ambitious goals, however, are relegated on a long-term horizon and have a very vague character. The operational policy goals are not always conform with the ambitions of the strategic goals. They are to a large extent recycled from existing sectoral policies. The concrete objectives of the policies are thus not measured up to the challenges of sustainable development. Especially in Flanders, the aim is to work largely with existing tools and planning mechanisms instead of creating new structures. In both cases, the policies that are put in place cannot live up to the ambitions of the strategic goals. The governments want change, while leaving everything the way it was.

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37 Very similarly, the North-South dimension is absent in the Canadian sustainable development policy. Gale (1997: 101) shows that the 'equity' dimension was dropped very early in the policy framing of sustainable development at the federal level.

A comparison of the thematic areas covered by the policy goals shows that the policies of Quebec and Flanders both extend to a broad range of social, environmental and economic issues. While the selection of themes is opaque in Quebec (and contains some odd topics such as cultural heritage), in Flanders it is a faithful copy of the themes proposed by the EUSDS. In the Flemish case, however, the seven selected themes are not extrapolated in the rest of the policy and thus have little significance.

One of the recurrent elements in the policy goals of Flanders is the international dimension. In contrast to Quebec, an explicit goal of the Flemish policy is to weigh on the international debate on sustainable development. The government of Flanders - which has unrivalled access to national and EU decision-making (Van den Brande et al., 2011) - wants to achieve high visibility at the international scene, and it wants to influence global and European negotiations. Quebec is also very active in the international arena on issues such as climate change, but it does not have the high degree of access to international decision-making that Flanders has. Its sustainable development policy does not express such a strong aim to influence international policies.

There are some other differences regarding goal characteristics. The goals in Flanders seem based on a stronger analysis of the current situation, while in Quebec their definition is less transparent. Yet in the future, Quebec's goals will potentially have a stronger analysis behind them, since the government has by now developed different sets of indicators. The government in Flanders has been unable to do so. Furthermore, Quebec's policy was supported by a much broader public participation than in the Flemish case. The question remains, however, whether the actual societal backing is broader, since it is not clear to which extent the different stakeholders' recommendations have been taken into account.

5.3 Policy instruments: institutions without enforcement

Both Quebec and Flanders use a varied mix of instruments in their sustainable development policy, with a certain preference for institutional instruments. The analysis shows that several instruments are remarkably stronger in Quebec than they are in Flanders. Four examples stand out. Quebec's Sustainable Development Act is far more comprehensive than the limited one in Flanders. The Act in the Quebec case is an example of how elaborate such a legal instrument for sustainable development can be (although it is never a guarantee for a successful policy). Furthermore, the indicators that were developed by the government of Quebec, although they raise much criticism, outshine the failed effort in Flanders. Third, Quebec has managed to develop several tools aimed at capacity-building (such as the guides developed by the Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau), while such output is not produced in Flanders. Finally, Quebec has a potentially strong evaluation instrument with the Sustainable Development Commissioner, which Flanders has not. The reason behind those stronger instruments seems a more pronounced political will put forward at the time of the institutionalisation, especially by Environment Minister Mulcair (who stepped down after the development of the Act). Moreover, Quebec's ambition to emerge as a leader has pushed the government to develop stronger tools.

The coordination units that are responsible for the administrative follow-up of the sustainable development policies in Quebec and Flanders display an important formal difference. In Quebec, it is housed by the Environment Ministry, as a consequence of the early structures that were put in place in that department after the publication of the Brundtland Report. In Flanders, the unit falls under the authority of the prime minister. That is the result of the administrative reorganisation that took place when sustainable development was institution-

alised, and of a large consensus among academics and civil society actors that the leadership should come from the prime minister. Yet the role of both units is very similar and in practice they both have a low political weight. The minimalist interpretation of the applied governance model reduces the actual authority of the units. Yet in Flanders the situation can easily change, depending on the political commitment of future prime ministers. Until now, however, the unit in Flanders is still much smaller than the one in Quebec, and it produces less capacity-building and coordination tools.

Another point where Quebec scores significantly better than Flanders, is on the scope of its policy instruments. In Flanders, horizontal coordination is limited to the departments of the Flemish government. Only some of the operational projects reach external actors, such as local authorities, civil society or the private sector. In Quebec, the entire public administration, including almost 150 ministries and public organisms, is targeted by the Act. They all have to issue sustainable development action plans, and several of them are represented in the Inter-ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development. In general, the sustainable development policy of Quebec reaches a larger number of people. That is a consequence of the goal of installing a new management framework for the entire public administration.

Regarding some other instruments, both cases are equally weak. The SDSs of Quebec and Flanders represent not much more than reference documents containing a large number of recycled goals on a variety of themes, without having much impact. In addition, both governments have designed only very humble economic instruments, which are not measured up to the challenges of sustainable development. Yet Flanders did manage to enshrine a separate sustainable development budget in its Act, so those financial resources can easily be increased in the future, depending on the government's political will.

A final point that Quebec and Flanders have in common, is the low enforcing character of their policy instruments. The design of their governance models leaves much leeway to individual departments and organisms regarding how they interpret sustainable development and translate it into their actions. But even the leading political actors do not always respect the definition and principles of sustainable development when other policies are at stake. Furthermore, in both cases the government itself does not fully respect its own sustainable development law. In Quebec, the indicators were issued almost a year after the legal deadline. Similarly, in Flanders the government failed to revise its Strategy before the deadline imposed by the Decree.

6. Explaining the sustainable development policies of Quebec and Flanders

In this section, the comparative results are explained by means of the factors that were withheld in the analytical framework: international factors (6.1), degree of autonomy (6.2), political context (6.3) and socioeconomic conditions (6.4).

6.1 International factors: triggering the institutionalisation

In both cases, international developments were the initial trigger of the institutionalisation of sustainable development. In Quebec, the first foundations for a sustainable development policy (e.g. the Interministerial Committee on Sustainable Development) were laid as a direct consequence of the activities of the Brundtland Commission. Moreover, the administration built up expertise by preparing reports for important multilateral summits. Those foundations were decisive when the return to power of the Liberals in 2003 signified the start of the current

sustainable development policy. In Flanders, the trigger of international policy developments was more direct. The considerable Flemish involvement in the Johannesburg Summit resulted in the creation of an administrative working group, which played a decisive role in the institutionalisation of the sustainable development policy shortly afterwards. The analysis shows that the triggering function of international developments is subject to two conditions. First, subnational governments are only influenced to a significant degree by those developments that they participated in. That is why the government of Quebec was already impacted by the activities of the Brundtland Commission, to which it actively contributed (e.g. by financing the French version of the Brundtland Report). Flanders was only majorly affected by the Johannesburg Summit, because it did not have a major access to international decision-making before the state reform of 1993. Second, while in both cases the first steps were taken at the personal initiative of committed civil servants, the political will of leading political actors is needed in order for the international influence to materialise. In Quebec, that political actor was the PLQ, who promised action on sustainable development in its 2003 election campaign, and whose new Prime Minister was previously responsible for the implementation of the Green Plan at the Canadian federal level. In Flanders, the first (and only) participation of the Green party in the coalition between 1999 and 2004 explains why attention was given to sustainable development in the coalition agreement, why much resources were invested in the Flemish presence at the Johannesburg Summit, and why sustainable development was anchored as a horizontal policy issue in the context of the reorganisation of the Flemish administration.

Both Quebec and Flanders invoke global commitments to develop 'national' SDSs to legitimise their policies (Gouvernement du Québec, 2004: 12; Leterme, 2004: 6; Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 14, 16, 31). However, while in Quebec and especially in Flanders references to international policy documents on sustainable development are omnipresent, their influence on policy content is less straightforward. International organisations, through the promotion of policy models, have had a clear impact on the policy framing of the two cases, on their choice of a sustainable development definition and on the selection of leading principles. In the case of Quebec, moreover, international influence played a role in shaping some of the policy instruments. That happened also through policy copying. The government has been inspired by work of the UN, the OECD and even the EU[38] in designing some of its instruments. It also studied several other subnational and national governments, to learn from their experiences. Seeing that international factors strongly explain several elements of the sustainable development policy of Quebec, it is all the more surprising that that policy remains silent on the North-South dimension.

In Flanders the international influence on concrete policy instruments is less strong. However, the policies of international organisations, and especially the EU, play an important role in framing the Flemish policy. That is for instance reflected in the EU's influence on the choice of thematic areas in Flanders's Strategy. The EU traditionally has a strong normative power in Belgium (i.e. what the EU says or does is rarely criticised or even questioned by Belgian politicians - unlike in many other EU member states). That is because in many cases it is easier to agree on external requirements than to rely on intra-Belgian negotiations (Happaerts et al., 2012). Among the Belgian subnational governments, especially Flanders is very receptive for

[38] That finding shows the value of applying a qualitative research method in the study of transnational communication processes. In quantitative studies, in contrast, the membership of an international organisation is often used as a leading variable. That masks learning processes such as the one where the government of Quebec is influenced by EU policy (Happaerts & Van den Brande, 2011).

EU policies. The constitutional access to international decision-making that Flanders enjoys, and extensively applies, brings along a positive and open attitude towards international developments. Yet in the case of the Flemish sustainable development policy, the international influence has until now been limited to policy framing and strategic policy goals. It seems that, in the case of sustainable development, the Flemish government applied a 'no gold plating' strategy, meaning that Flanders must comply with all the formal international commitments that apply to UN and EU member states, and nothing more.

Finally, despite Quebec's investment in policy copying, and despite Flanders's open attitude to international policy-making, in both cases most operational policy goals are still motivated by their domestic policy context.

6.2 Degree of autonomy: enabling quasi-national policies

Both Quebec and Flanders have a high degree of self-rule (see Table 3). According to the index developed by Hooghe et al., Flanders scores 13/15 while the Canadian provinces with 15/15 have the highest degree of self-rule of all subnational governments worldwide (see Hooghe et al., 2008c). The high autonomy of both cases is reflected in the thematic areas of their policy goals and in the variety of their policy instruments. Since they both have important competences in many of the most fundamental areas of sustainable development, their policies cover a broad range of areas. In the case of Quebec, the high degree of self-rule has even made it possible that the environmental dimension is almost lost between the other areas that the policy covers.[39] With regard to policy instruments, neither is strongly limited by their degree of autonomy. Both their policies use a mix of institutional, legal, economic and information instruments. Yet in the Flemish discourse, references are sometimes made to the competences that are (still) detained by the federal government. In any case, compared to other subnational governments, the policies of Quebec and Flanders mostly resemble 'national' policies - including the fact that they respond to international commitments and display the ambition to be involved in international decision-making.

Table 3 Degree of self-rule of Quebec and Flanders (data from Hooghe et al., 2008c)

Components	Quebec	Flanders
Institutional depth (0-3)	3	3
Policy scope (0-4)	4	3
Fiscal autonomy (0-4)	4	3
Representation (0-4)	4	4
total (0-15)	**15**	**13**

While it is thus clear that the degree of self-rule is an important factor determining the content of sustainable development policies of subnational governments, I found only minor differences as a consequence of the difference in self-rule between Quebec and Flanders. Flanders's score is two points lower than the one of Quebec. The first point is related to 'policy scope', and refers to the fact that, although both have a broad and deep range of competences, Quebec additionally has authority over immigration (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 126). That explains the relative emphasis on immigration challenges within the theme 'address demographic changes'

[39] In contrast, the sustainable development policy of the Canadian federal government has a much more limited scope, focused on environmental issues. It is an area where competences are not always clearly divided in Canada (Happaerts, 2012).

in Quebec's Strategy. Flanders also has a demographic theme in its Strategy ('ageing society'), but that does not address immigration issues. Moreover, it is the only theme where Flanders indicates that part of the answer lies at the federal level in Belgium (Vlaamse Regering, 2006: 55). The second point where Flanders scores lower than Quebec is on 'fiscal autonomy'. The difference is related to the fact that Quebec can set the base and rate for certain taxes, while Flanders can only set the rate (Hooghe et al., 2008a: 129). It is a difference that can potentially materialise in the sustainable development policies, but until now it did not, because both governments chose only weak economic instruments for their policies.

As a consequence of the characteristics of Canadian and Belgian federalism, the policies of the federal government in principle do not impact on the subnational level. In both cases, each level of governance conducts a sustainable development policy within the framework of its own competences, and without many references to one another.[40] Yet also in both cases, the federal government had a sustainable development policy in place before the subnational governments did. In Quebec, that did push the government to learn from the (good and bad) federal experiences. In Quebec's lesson-drawing efforts, several characteristics of the federal sustainable development policy were copied, while the government also learned from some of the weaknesses of the federal model. In Flanders, the existence of a federal sustainable development policy did not lead to lesson-drawing, as interviews point out that the federal policy is mainly perceived as a failure in Flanders (see also Vlaams Parlement, 2008d: 6, 8-9).[41] But Flanders does give regular input for the federal policy, through the various intergovernmental coordination mechanisms that characterise Belgian federalism (Happaerts, 2012).

6.3 Political context: lack of political will favours weak policies

Political will, party politics and identity politics were withheld as important factors under the umbrella of 'political context'. In the case of Quebec, the institutionalisation of sustainable development was a consequence of the return to power of the Liberals in 2003, whose election programme promised to take action on sustainable development (PLQ, 2002: 24). The PLQ promised the 're-engineering' of the state, including the environmental reorientation of governmental activities (Audet & Gendron, 2010). It is reflected in the government's recurrent leadership discourse, which has also impregnated the sustainable development policy. Quebec's will to emerge as a leader in North America has made that certain elements of its policy display more ambition, as the analysis puts forward. Although the leadership is to a large part limited to policy framing and policy goals, several policy instruments are remarkably stronger than in Flanders. Moreover, the general scope of the policy in Quebec is broader. Wanting to be seen as a leading 'state' in North America is a definite outing of identity politics. In the absence of Canadian leadership on issues such as climate change (Séguin & Chaloux, 2011), Quebec eagerly uses its 'green' policies to promote itself and its assets to the international community. While the initial dose of political will of the PLQ, and its Environment Minister at the time, was indispensable for the institutionalisation of sustainable development, it is noted that the government lacks the commitment to move beyond the administrative framework towards the genuine integration of sustainable development in socioeconomic policies (Audet & Gendron, 2010). Moreover, the failure to include the North-South dimension should be seen as a lack of

40 That poses several problems with regard to vertical policy integration (Happaerts, 2012).

41 The reluctance of the Belgian subnational governments to accept a federal model probably also plays a role here.

political will to move the policy framing beyond the closed context of Quebec. Seen from that perspective, the ambition to emerge as a leader in North America with regard to sustainable development might be not much more than skilful public relations.

In Flanders, the Green party played a large role in putting sustainable development on the agenda between 1999 and 2004, when the decision was taken that the responsibility for sustainable development during the subsequent term would reside with the prime minister. The Greens did not form part of the coalition after 2004, when the actual sustainable development policy was designed. The two subsequent prime ministers (of the Christian Democrats) showed little leadership on sustainable development. That is the conclusion of earlier research (Bachus & Spillemaeckers, 2010; Spillemaeckers, 2009: 22; Van Poeck et al., 2011) and it is confirmed by interviewees. Identity politics in the Flemish case are strongly observed in the international dimension of the sustainable development policy (Happaerts et al., 2010a: 137; 2010b: 14), but much less with regard to other elements. Flanders's ambition to be present and visible in global and European decision-making is the reason why those international goals have such a strong emphasis in its sustainable development policy.

In both cases, the lack of political will is responsible for a limited investment of means, for a poor concretisation of strategic policy goals (through the use of largely recycled operational goals), and for a policy with a very weak enforcing character. It also translates in a minimalist interpretation of the holistic governance model. In theory, it depicts a governance model where sustainable development is integrated into all policy domains. In practice, it presents the sustainable development policy as a loose collection of existing sectoral goals.

6.4 Socioeconomic conditions: enabling policies, but preventing change

The theoretical framework shows that a government must have the necessary economic strength to put sustainable development on the agenda and to invest means in dealing with it. Both Quebec and Flanders knew relative economic prosperity when they decided to conduct their own sustainable development policies.[42] Yet, as a consequence of the lack of political will, the means invested in it are rather low in both cases. Furthermore, socioeconomic conditions are important in the context of sustainable development, since in theory sustainable development presupposes a structural adaptation of economic institutions, among other things. In their strategic policy goals, both Quebec and Flanders call for a 'change' of existing development patterns. Yet in their actual policies, dominant economic practices are not questioned. Moreover, when leading political actors talk about day-to-day policy-making, sustainable development is still mostly understood as 'sustainable economic growth'.

In many respects, the socioeconomic conditions are very different. Quebec, for instance, occupies an extremely large territory at the edge of the American continent, rich in natural resources which represent strategic economic assets. Flanders, in contrast, is a very small and urbanised entity at the heart of Western Europe, with an economy focused mostly (but not exclusively) on services. A large difference is population density, which is advanced by the theoretical framework as an important factor in the context of sustainable development. Quebec has little over 5 inhabitants/km², while Flanders has about 450. In Flanders, the high population density is often invoked among the factors that pose limits or preconditions to a

[42] The importance of this factor becomes apparent in the comparison between Flanders and Wallonia. In Wallonia, which has been struggling with economic revival for decades, several initiatives to mount a sustainable development policy have failed as a consequence of the exclusive investment of political capital in plans for economic recovery (Happaerts, 2010).

sustainable development policy. In contrast, in the case of Quebec, interviewees stress how difficult it is to sensitise a population for sustainable development issues, in a province with such a low population density where there is no feeling of limits to the carrying capacity of the environment. Population density is thus a welcome excuse, and it does not really matter whether it is very high or extremely low.

7. Conclusions

Subnational governments have an important role to play in the multi-level governance of sustainable development. Quebec and Flanders both pertain to the club of subnational governments that address that challenge, and that have taken serious steps towards the institutionalisation of sustainable development. The comparative analysis shows important resemblances between their approaches. The similarity is manifested, for instance, in the policy framing, in the applied governance model, in certain strategic policy goals and in their instrument mix. Important differences include the fact that the Flemish government applies a more complete interpretation of sustainable development (including the emphasis on the North-South dimension), or that the policy of Quebec has some notably stronger elements than the Flemish policy (such as the sixteen principles or the Commissioner).

The explanatory factors that were withheld for the analysis have appeared very significant. The influence of international factors is apparent, as in both cases the institutionalisation of sustainable development - as an 'outside-in' policy - was triggered by international developments. That is facilitated by the fact that both Quebec and Flanders are subnational governments with a strong international identity and an open, receiving attitude for international policy-making. Yet, the international influence is mostly limited to policy framing and to the strategic policy goals, especially in the Flemish case. The operational policy goals and the policy instruments of Quebec and Flanders are principally determined by domestic factors, mostly by their political context and their socioeconomic conditions. As for the degree of autonomy of Quebec and Flanders, their high degree of self-rule imposes few limitations on policy-making with regard to sustainable development. Finally, in both cases it is clear that there is a lack of political will, which prevents the investment of a sufficient amount of political capital in sustainable development. Although both governments have taken the necessary and laudable, first steps towards the institutionalisation of the policy concept, they seem to lack the will to push through for real reforms and innovations in favour of sustainable development.

The analysis of the policy content, by means of the three policy dimensions, has allowed the identification of several disconnections in both policies. With regard to policy framing, even after the institutionalisation of sustainable development there is no uniformity in the interpretation of the concept, and certain attempts to operationalise it (e.g. the principles in Quebec) are not always respected. Furthermore, ambitious strategic policy goals are not declined into fitting operational goals, and the instruments that were designed are until now insufficient to reach most policy goals. Both Quebec and Flanders have opted for governance models inspired by the holistic governance model, meaning that sustainable development - and additionally, in the Quebec case, a series of sustainable development principles - should be integrated into all governmental policy-making. Yet their operationalisation of that governance model relies on a hollow interpretation. The horizontal coordination by the sustainable development units is either limited to procedures and not content-related, or relies on minimal interference. Although serious efforts for capacity-building are made (more so in Quebec than in Flanders), it is in both cases insufficient compared to the challenges of sustainable development or even to the proper ambitions of the governments. Although other departments or actors are, ap-

propriately, called upon to join forces in the government's pursuit of sustainable development, they are given maximum freedom in their commitment to and application of sustainable development. The governments have not put in place any control mechanisms or enforceable instruments. As a result of that minimalist interpretation of the governance model, Quebec does not move beyond the bureaucratisation of sustainable development, and Flanders has a sustainable development policy that is conducted in the margins of day-to-day policy-making.

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List of interviewees

Quebec

Boisclair, André	11 May 2009	minister of the Environment and Municipal Affairs (Parti québécois) at Government of Quebec (between 2001 and 2003)
Bourke, Philippe	9 November 2010	director general at Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l'environnement du Québec
Cinq-Mars, Jean	11 November 2010	sustainable Development Commissioner at Auditor General of Quebec
Désy, Geneviève	8 May 2009	sustainable development officer at Ministry of International Relations; Government of Quebec
Ferguson, Andrew	5 May 2009	principal at Office of the Auditor General of Canada
Fournier, Maryse	13 May 2009	director at Direction of the Sustainable Development Commissioner; Auditor General of Quebec
Giguère, Serge	13 May 2009 and 11 November 2010	principal director at Direction of the Sustainable Development Commissioner; Auditor General of Quebec
Jampierre, Véronique	12 May 2009	director general at Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable
Lacroix, Daniel	12 May 2009	director at International Organisations Division; Ministry of International Relations; Government of Quebec
Lambert, Janique	13 May 2009	director at Direction of the Sustainable Development Commissioner; Auditor General of Quebec
Lauzon, Robert	8 May 2009	director at Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau; Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks; Government of Quebec
Levert, France	9 November 2010	principal advisor on sustainable development at Hydro-Québec
McKay, Scott	7 May 2009	member of parliament (Parti québécois) at National Assembly of Quebec
Mead, Harvey	7 May 2009	sustainable Development Commissioner at Auditor General of Quebec (between 2006 and 2007)
Mulcair, Thomas	5 May 2009	minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks (Parti libéral du Québec) at Government of Quebec (between 2003 and 2006)
Royer, Vincent	12 May 2009	climate change coordinator at International Organisations Division; Ministry of International Relations; Government of Quebec
Turgeon, Alexandre	13 May 2009	director general at Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable – Capitale nationale

Vachon, Martin	8 November 2010	advisor on sustainable development at Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau; Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks; Government of Quebec
Vézina, Luc	8 November 2010	director at Sustainable Development Coordination Bureau; Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks; Government of Quebec
Wilburn, Greg	4 May 2009	director Sustainable Development Strategies at Sustainable Development Policy; Strategic Policy Branch; Environment Canada; Government of Canada

Flanders

Baetens, Ine	19 April 2011	policy adviser at Sustainable Development Team; General Governmental Policy Service; Flemish Government
Bas, Luc	26 July 2007, 24 September 2008 and 12 January 2010	head of government relations Europe at The Climate Group
		adviser at cabinet of State Secretary for Sustainable Development and Social Economy; Belgian Federal Government (between 2006 and 2007)
		policy adviser at the Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government (between 2001 and 2006)
de Beer de Laer, Hadelin	19 August 2009	president at Federal Public Planning Service Sustainable Development; Belgian Federal Government (between 2002 and 2009)
De Mulder, Jan	25 May 2009	policy adviser at Public Governance Department; Flemish Government
		public governance attaché at Flemish Representation; Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU
		legal adviser at Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government (between 1994 and 2006)
De Saegher, Tom	4 May 2011	vice head of cabinet at cabinet of the Prime Minister; Flemish Government
De Smedt, Jan	29 August 2007	director at the secretariat of the Federal Council for Sustainable Development Belgium
De Smedt, Peter	5 October 2009	scientific officer at Sustainable Development Unit; Environment Directorate; DG Research; European Commission
		adviser at Research Centre of the Flemish Government (between 2003 and 2007)
Dua, Vera	27 November 2009	minister of Environment and Agriculture (Agalev); Flemish Government (between 1999 and 2003)
Gijsel Marjolijn	19 April 2011	policy adviser at Sustainable Development Team; General Governmental Policy Service; Flemish Government

Maenaut, David	18 June 2008	representative of the Flemish Government to the multilateral institutions in Geneva
Merckx, Remy	31 July 2007	head of division at International Environmental Policy Division; Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government
Poppelier, Guido	12 October 2009	adviser at cabinet of State Secretary for Sustainable Development and Social Economy; Belgian Federal Government (between 2004 and 2007)
		environment attaché at Flemish Representation; Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU (between 2001 and 2002)
van de Walle, Cédric	25 August 2009	adviser at cabinet of Minister of Climate and Energy; Belgian Federal Government
		policy officer at Federal Public Planning Service Sustainable Development; Belgian Federal Government (between 2006 and 2007)
		policy officer at secretariat of Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development; Belgian Federal Government (between 2002 and 2006)
Vaneycken Sven	22 September 2009	adviser at cabinet of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Service, Public Enterprises and Institutional Reforms; Belgian Federal Government
		policy officer at Federal Public Planning Service Sustainable Development; Belgian Federal Government (between 2003 and 2008)
Van Mierloo, Joris	4 June 2008	policy adviser at International Environmental Policy Division; Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government
Van Ongeval, Ludo	30 July 2008	policy adviser at Environmental, Nature and Energy Policy Division; Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government
Van Weert Els	9 September 2009	state Secretary for Sustainable Development and Social Economy (Spirit); Belgian Federal Government (between 2004 and 2007)
Verbeke, Griet	31 July 2007	policy adviser at Multilateral Environmental Policy Unit; International Environmental Policy Division; Environment, Nature and Energy Department; Flemish Government
Vergeynst, Thierry	2 September 2008	adviser at Research Centre of the Flemish Government

Verheeke, Jan	28 August 2009	secretary ad interim at Minaraad
		adviser at cabinet of Minister of Environment and Nature; Flemish Government (between 2004 and 2009)
Walpot, Oda	31 August 2007	task holder at Sustainable Development Team; General Governmental Policy Service; Flemish Government