Strategy for collectives and common goods : coordinating strategy, long-term perspectives and policy domains in governance

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Figure 1. Governance takes place in configurations of actors and institutions which might include governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as actors not visible

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External influence

Governance Configuration

Material Environment

Community

Strategy

Discursive Environment

Narratives within the community

Governance Path

Figure 3. Strategy is both an institution and a narrative. As an institution it coordinates
other institutions (I1, I2, I3) within the governance system or governance arrangement

Figure 4. Strategy is both an institution and a narrative. It coordinates institutions and narratives existing in governance within different policy domains. This could lead to
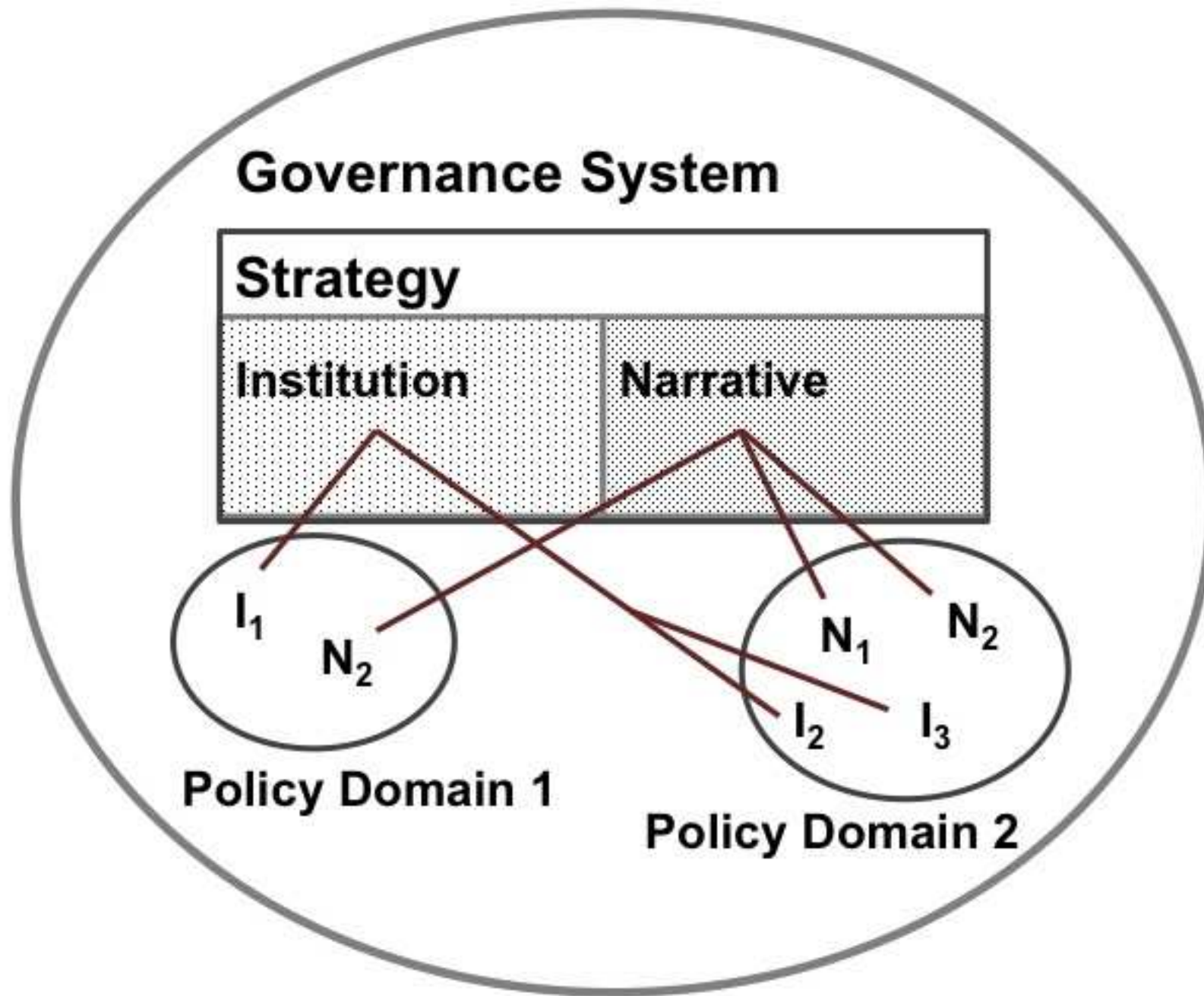
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Captions for figures

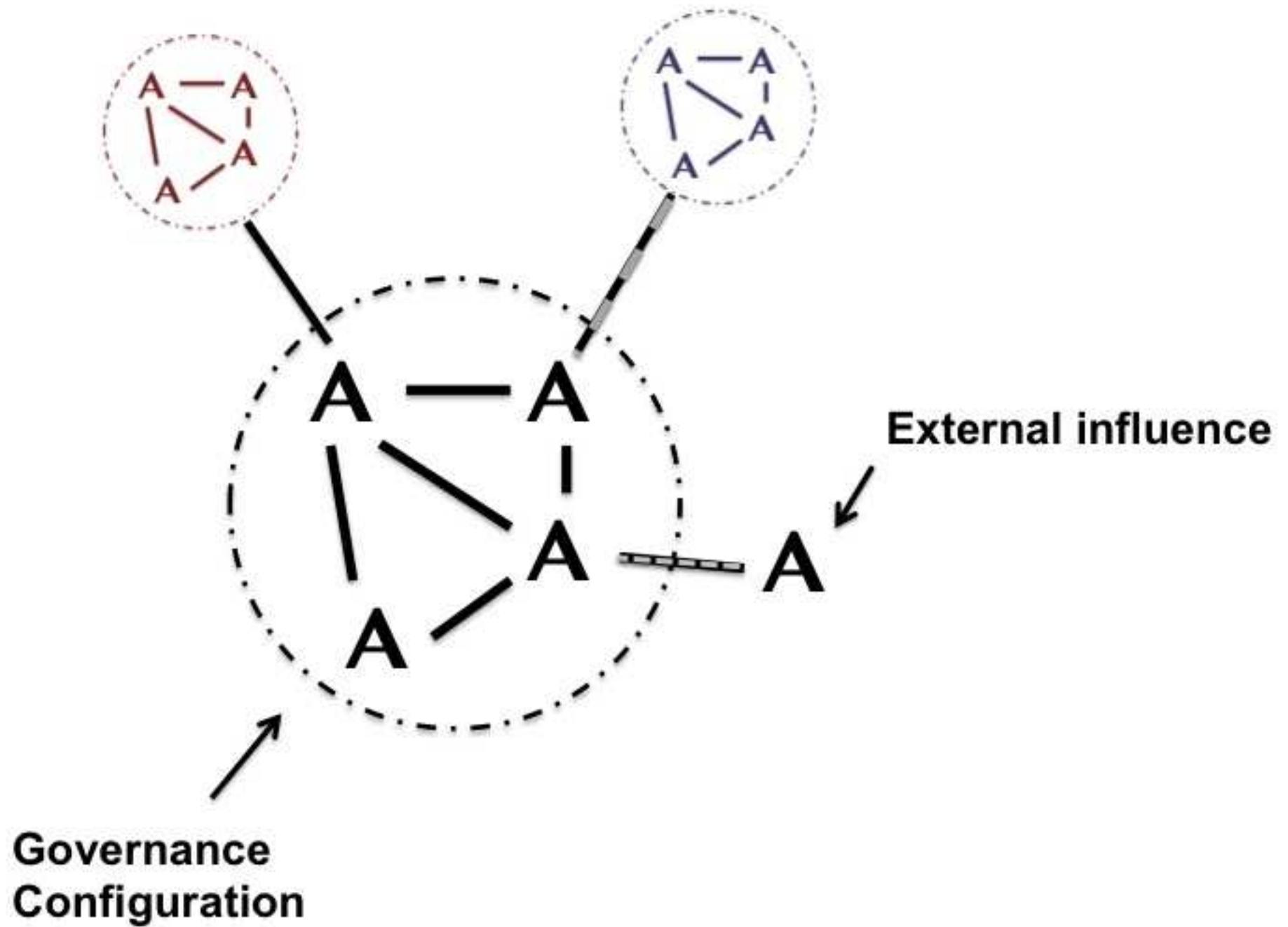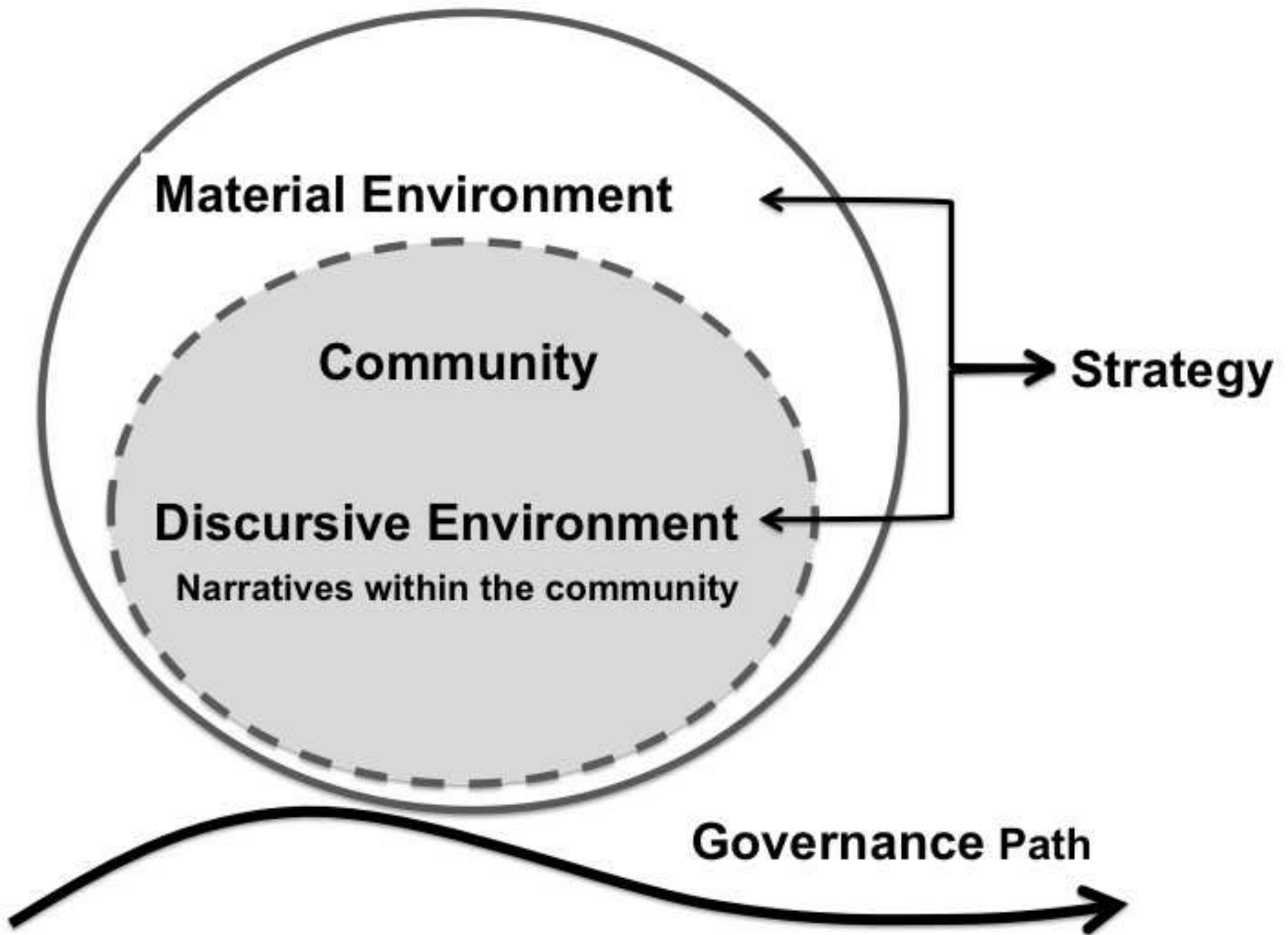Figure 1. Governance takes place in configurations of actors and institutions which might include governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as actors not visible on any official flow chart of decision-making; or actors outside governance arrangements. Lines connecting actors (A) represent institutions, some connections are strong while others might be weak.

Figure 2. Long-term perspectives emerge out of interactions within governance at a particular point in time, out of histories of interactions (the governance path) and out of narratives in the wider community. We might find long-term perspectives being created through strategy or being influenced by strategy. The creation of strategy implies a coordination of discourses, actors and policy domains within the community.

Figure 3. Strategy is both an institution and a narrative. As an institution it coordinates other institutions (I_1, I_2, I_3) within the governance system or governance arrangement in the community. As a narrative it brings together, synthesizes and/or coordinates different discourses or narratives within the community.
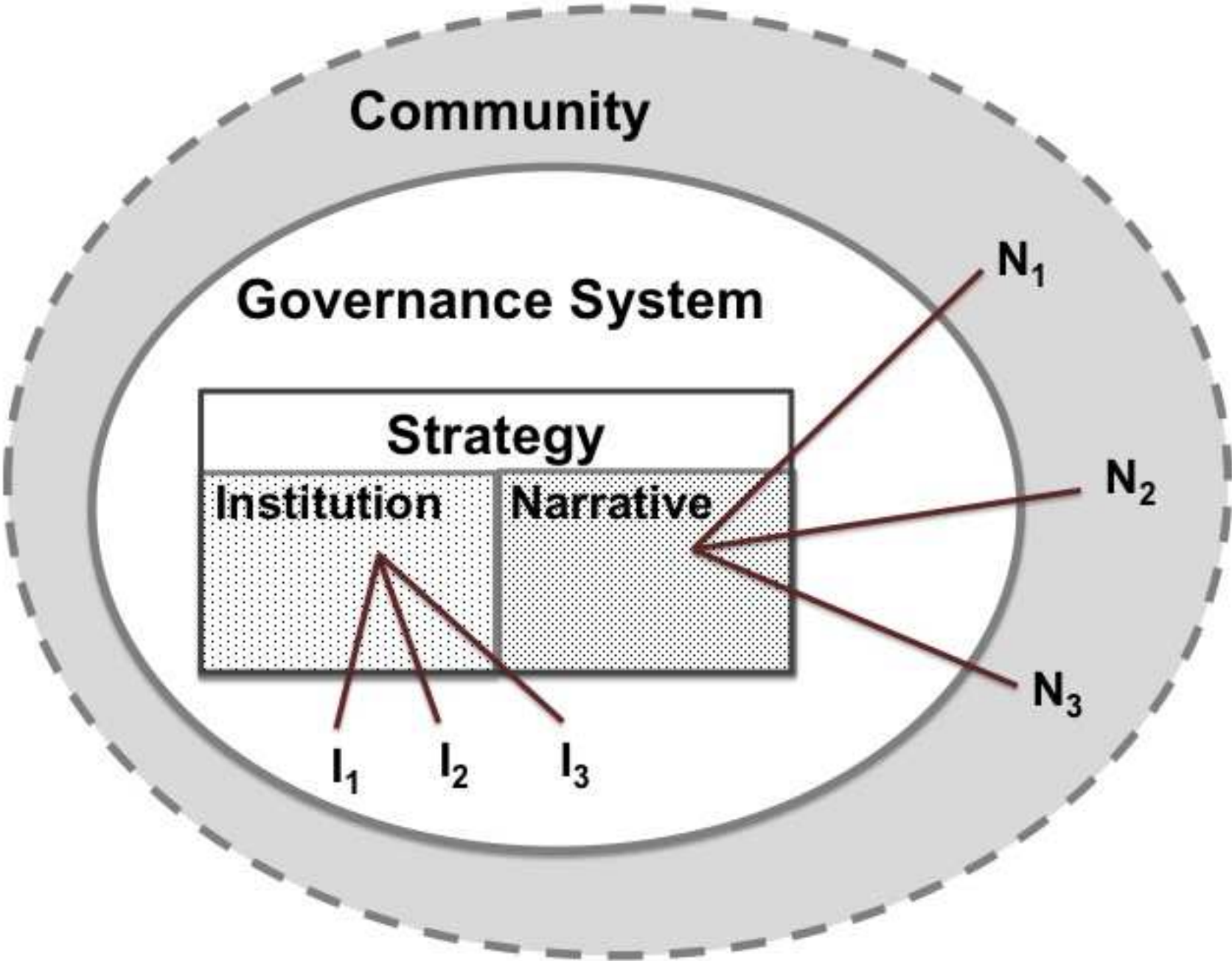
Figure 4. Strategy is both an institution and a narrative. It coordinates institutions and narratives existing in governance within different policy domains. This could lead to coordination and perhaps even integration of different policy domains. Some policy domains share narratives (N_2) and can coordinate different institutions (policy domain 2) within the governance system.

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Abstract

We investigate the nature and potential of strategy in governance and emphasize the importance of understanding strategy in its (potential) relations to long-term perspectives or narratives about the long term. Strategy is understood as both a narrative and an institution itself. Narratives about the long term, both inside and outside the sphere of governance, have to be mapped and acknowledged. This can inspire, in strategy formulation, a link to such existing perspectives or the production of a new one. Such strategy ought to be persuasive enough to coordinate action and create reality effects. We focus on strategy which aims to guide complex governance configurations associated with a set of actors, institutions and collective goals. The double nature of governance strategy enables it to coordinate other institutions and narratives, and from there, to coordinate, even integrate policy domains. That might be a *sine qua non* for dealing with long-term threats and the pursuit of public goods. The longest term might be the most relevant yet the least knowable and the most difficult to steer towards with existing governance tools. Nonetheless, evolving strategy, evolving assessment of linkages to long-term perspectives and possible forms of policy integration might be our best way forward.

Key words

Governance, strategy, long-term perspective, policy integration, reality effects, productive fiction

Introduction: strategically governing for the long term

While many societal and environmental problems appear at first to be urgent and short term, the most important challenges such as climate change, clean energy, pension reform or global peacekeeping stretch over many generations and typically require long-term governance settings and policy solutions (e.g. Meadowcroft 1997). Over the past decades there has been a growing recognition that a series of worldwide 'grand challenges' require sustained and long-term governance strategies; but how to do so? In a manifestly complex world of accelerating innovation "the knowledge of the future is progressively moved closer to the present, while long-term futures recede ever further" (Nowotny, 2016: 8).

In this paper we argue that giving long-term futures a concrete shape requires an orchestrated and concerted governance approach. Long-term governance challenges are known to be highly demanding, not only because of tensions between long-term goals and short-term concerns, but also because they are entangled with an array of complex, interacting and non- linear systems of

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which our understanding is incomplete. Climate, for instance, is a set of highly complex and partly unpredictable systems coupled by non-linear dynamics, which means small changes in initial conditions will lead to cumulatively larger and larger changes. Addressing such long-term governance challenges hence implies a notion of societal 'steering' that accepts that our capacities to anticipate or to determine the future are severely limited. Important decisions have to be taken and coordinated in domains where prediction is inherently difficult and mostly has a very limited temporal range. Furthermore, most of these challenges involve common goods that are linked to a wide range of human activities. Governance strategies will therefore have to consider how networks of organizations, systems or communities can cooperate to reform societal subsystems or institutions with a view to long-term goals, even in the face of radical uncertainty and indeterminacy (Underdal, 2010). It is this wider challenge of strategically guiding complex governance configurations to long-term futures that will form the primary focus of this paper.

We do not intend here to provide a thorough review or critique of what is in any case a diverse and quickly evolving literature but aim to reflect on the interlinked notions of long-term governance and strategy. This paper is hence primarily of a theoretical nature; it argues that the long-term might be the most relevant yet the least knowable and the most difficult to steer towards with existing governance tools. We contend, however, that an *evolving* strategy might be our best way forward. It will be argued that the effectiveness of such strategy has to be assessed on an ongoing basis and that adaptation of the strategy means first of all adaptation of linkages to long-term perspectives and possible forms of policy integration. Links to long-term perspectives enable strategies to persuade (cf Selin, 2006 in this journal) and precise use of policy integration mobilizes the machinery of administration.

More specifically, this paper intends to open a new conversation on what 'strategy' could be at higher levels, meaning within networks of organizations, systems or communities. We argue that it is essential to understand strategy as linked to long-term perspectives and to acknowledge the existence of a variety of long- term perspectives in the community (Gunder and Hillier, 2016; Kelly, 2012). Some of these futures are inclusive while others not, some of them are associated with tactics while others not and not all of them are embedded in institutions (Beckert, 2016; Jasanoff and Kim, 2015). A second assumption we test and develop in this paper is that a strategy for a larger unity will entail coordination of partial strategies, or at least of governance of the parts (Candel and Biesbroek, 2016; Yearout et al, 2001; Voss et al, 2009). This can mean coordination of policy domains, but it can also imply policy integration into an over-arching strategy (Briassoulis, 2011; Farhoodi et al, 2009).

Thus, in short, we take the initial position that strategy at the level of governance is possible, that it requires systematic linkage to long-term perspectives and that it will come about through linking partial, topical strategies. Partial strategies can be those emerging from subordinate organizations or elsewhere, from sets of actors or, at state level, policy domains -consolidating existing sets of tasks and coordinating sets of actors (Mintzberg, 1994; Levy, 2000). Strategy at higher levels has to deal with pluriformity, which is never merely negative, so the push towards integration and unity has to carefully calculate these benefits (Duit and Galaz, 2008; Mintzberg, 2000). One can coordinate towards a shared future, yet at a larger scale the idea of sharing will require a real buy-in either through persuasive new futures or by borrowing from existing and already persuasive futures (Beckert, 2016; Fischer, 2009; Callon, 2007). At larger scales complexity will increase requiring coordination and integration to steer towards a shared future and yet at the same time being cautious not to erase the benefits of differentiation and complexity (Luhmann, 1989).

Collective visions and expectations for the long- term future shape and influence what kind of governance strategies are used. These strategies encode, perform and transform the meaning of 'long-term' governance challenges and perspectives (Whittington, 2004; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008). The unique character of linkages between long-term perspectives and strategies per institutionalized policy domain is something deserving investigation: water governance and pension policy each envision a long term but are different and the translation into strategy follows different paths (Lyall and Tait, 2004; Shanahan et al, 2011).

This investigation can shed a light on the possibilities and limits of strategies which link policy domains, which transcend their topical or geographical boundaries. Such strategies in some cases can materialize an imagined future for a community, the community associated with the governance system, a community which to a certain extent is always imagined but can nevertheless transform and be transformed by governance (Van Assche et al, 2013; Keefer, 2004). Climate change policy can address an imagined world community, attempt to both create and change that community by strategy which aims to coordinate states and many policy domains within them (Haas, 1992; Nilson and Swartling, 2009). Locally, a comprehensive plan can aim to guide the development of a city, and pursue policy coordination through a spatial frame (Friedman, 1971). We make a link here with 'community strategy' which intends to delineate what is necessary in order to establish strategy in communities, whether defined at the level of a city, governance system or wold community.

In the next sections, we introduce basic concepts properly and after that we present limits to strategy and to linking long-term perspectives, strategy and policy domains. We argue that these limits as well as the enabling conditions will differ per case and per governance path and

configuration. This reflection on limitations then prompts a revisiting of strategy in community context, its relevance in the face of an always-incomplete coordination and always-imperfect management of uncertainty and agony. We then elucidate the importance of traces and legacies of older perspectives and strategies and the big promises of numbers; from indicators to 'big data'. Concluding, we present areas for further investigation and the value of integrated strategies in a world screaming for diverse direct participation, localism and evidence based grand strategy at the same time.

Basic concepts

Governance.
'Governance' is the coordination of collectively binding decisions by actors through means of institutions; which are understood as the coordination tools; policies, plans, laws and include also informal institutions. Leaning on evolutionary governance theory (EGT) we consider governance as taking place in configurations of actors and institutions, including governmental and non-governmental actors, as well as actors not visible on any official flow chart of decision-making (Van Assche et al, 2013; Beunen et al, 2015) (figure 1). Governance can pertain to an area, a topic, a group, an organization and/or a political/administrative structure (eg a type of government). Usually a configuration combines several of these features (cf Jessop, 1997; Klijn and Skelcher, 2007). Configurations of actors and institutions and of power and knowledge co-evolve in governance. Such idea of co-evolution entails that governance configurations are constrained in the production, adoption and implementation of strategies by rigidities appearing in the governance path (cf Duit and Galaz, 2008; Haynes, 2015). We develop this rigidity idea in the next section.

The long-term future
The category of the 'long-term future' emerged in the decades from 1945 to the 1970s. After World War II the progress in statistical analysis contributed to consolidating visions of the future; "computer led simulation and modeling in a range of fields seemed to give long-term developments empirical and observable shape" (Andersson, 2018: 3). In the context of the Cold War world both capitalist and communist systems became inherently interested in these different epistemic tools hoping they could allow them some control on the future (Andersson and Rindzviçiute, 2015). While communist systems took the road of long-term plans aiming to linearly steer societal change, capitalist systems rather explored how to facilitate desired social changes by developing new foresight tools. These tools included for example, long-term indicators, technology assessment, scenarios, (ei. Delphi method) and the analysis of interrelated social, economic, and political trends – and by incorporating them in decision-making.

From the 1970s onwards, the category of the long-term future became increasingly related to environmental problems that began to spill out of local and national contexts. Spurred by new techniques of data generation the planetary environment became an object of worldwide study and concern. New technologies for viewing Earth from airplanes and eventually satellites partnered with new techniques for manipulating and representing data through advanced computing and modeling (Edwards, 2010). In the course of last decades, especially the idea of the Earth's climate system helped give credence and influence to a new governance system which links long-term futures to social and political reconfiguration on multiple scales. This has led to long-term goals in fields such as climate change and clean energy, which have been incorporated in international agreements such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2015 Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC).

Long-term perspectives
To the extent that the long-term future becomes a central focus of governance, collective visions and expectations for the long- term future increasingly shape and influence what kind of governance strategies are used. We use the term 'long-term perspectives' broadly as perspectives on long-term evolutions and challenges yet also precisely that is, as those images and narratives of the long-term future (positive and negative) which circulate in governance and which are accessible to the actors participating in governance. Long-term perspectives is a broad concept that resonates with other terms, each of which is rooted in its own intellectual and disciplinary context; such concepts include imagined futures (Beckert, 2016), aspirational futures (Appadurai, 2013) socio-technical imaginaries (Jasanoff and Kim, 2015) and visions, ideals or narratives of the future (e.g. Barry and Elmes, 1997; Levidow and Papaioannou, 2013). Each governance system will produce its own distinction between long-term perspectives and short or middle terms as it produces its own temporality and its own tools of orientation towards that temporality (Cumming et al, 2006). Long-term perspectives emerge out of interactions within governance at a particular point in time, out of histories of interactions (the governance path) and out of narratives in the wider community (Bialogun et al, 2014; Gunder and Hillier, 2009). They can emerge from an identity narrative, from a particular version of the past or opposition to it (lessons learned, etc)(Eriksen, 2002; Czarniawska, 2004; Gittell and Vidal, 1998)(figure 2).

Long-term perspectives exist in society at large (e.g. long-term perspectives relating to global climate change), within the governance system as a whole (the climate governance system) and within distinct domains of governance (e.g. renewable energy). In addition, new long -term visions, for example those dealing with the challenges posed by climate change, can reshuffle policy domains and their own perspectives (Levidow and Papaioannou, 2013; Wyborn et al, 2019). One can observe that long-term challenges perceived in society are not always

institutionalized (or not yet) and that those long- term perspectives (the challenges) affect the established policy domains, their temporalities and strategies in myriad ways (Scheffer et al, 2003). The selectivity of futures (and research on futures) can also be underlined as most institutionalized future perspectives have a clear focus on the political system and the economy, which points at implicit presumptions about the relative importance of these function systems (Roth and Kaivo-Oja, 2016).

This also points to possible discrepancies between what is considered to be an important future issue (e.g. in policy) by strategizing organisations (e.g. firms) on the one hand and stakeholders in their environment on the other hand (e.g. NGO's, media actors, etc.) (Valentinov, Roth and Will, 2018). In fact, different actors mostly struggle and clash over how the long-term future presents itself (e.g. what are the most likely prognoses and forecasts and how to align our strategic decision-making?). For these actors the outcome of the struggle can have real consequences as dominant perspectives of the long-term can affect the distribution of power and resources (and thus prevent the realization of alternative futures). When long-term perspectives are altered they can provide legitimating support or delegitimizing criticism for specific developments in the governance system. Yet, long-term perspectives not only yield struggle between actors, they can also be created to bring actors together, to create cohesion and even community identity (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Walzer, 1996; Kelly, 2012). Therefore, it is misleading to think of a general rule or pattern where a pre-existing narrative, or a negotiated one in governance, is translated into strategy which then requires implementation (Carter, 2013; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011).

Strategy in this role can aspire to precede governance capacity or, in more extreme cases, it can precede the existence in practice of a governance configuration. A long-term perspective can create a strategy but a strategy can also create and disseminate a long-term perspective in governance and beyond; it can bind actors to a collective future and make them invest in it. Important variation between scales and policy domains can be observed here. A particular domain of policy (for example agriculture, innovation, water, health, etc.) can affect long-term perspectives for the future of societies and broader strategies beyond the topic of the policy domain of origin (cf Jasanoff and Kim, 2015; Van Assche and Hornidge, 2015). One can think of water policy shaping spatial planning which shapes general development policy or comprehensive economic development. We state this under the premise that nothing can be entirely comprehensive and that no strategy can completely steer governance in the direction that it intends to (Friedmann, 1971; Luhmann, 1997). We do not assume that all domains of policy or governance are susceptible to the same degree of coordination with others or that all domains of policy or governance are as likely to be the origin of strategies creating broader orientations for a community (however defined or narratively constructed).

Strategy

Strategy has received much attention since Roman times (and before that) first of all in military terms but also in terms of governance; how to seize and exercise power or to the benefit of the community (Kane, 2013). Since the rise of management schools strategy research became focused at the level of organizations yet in our view the disciplines interested in policy, planning, administration and governance have not paid much attention to this area of research (cf. Carter, 2013; Heuser, 2010). Interest in 'implementation' of policies, plans, laws, without a grasp of strategy in and through governance is likely to stumble (Albrechts, 2004). Simultaneously, the management research on strategy misses a grasp of governance, which then renders some of their analyses lacking (Bakir and Bakir, 2006; Balogun et al, 2014).

The translation of long-term perspectives into strategy is challenging and requires the context of governance since governance is where collectively binding decisions can be taken and where new institutions (policies, plans, laws) can be articulated (Van Assche et al, 2013). In this way, it is through governance that perspectives can be translated into steps or topics and linked to institutions thus enabling coordination (Albrechts, 2004). We believe 'strategy' at scales beyond that of the single organization requires a new analysis and it has to be understood as an institution (coordination tool), a collection of other institutions (coordinated in the strategy) as well as a narrative, which can enhance coordination and persuasion (Van Assche et al, 2019; forthcoming). A strategy at community level will be more persuasive if it is also a narrative and if that narrative links to existing ones, and is able to coordinate existing institutions (Fischer, 1990; Cabantous et al, 2018). The sensemaking of a strategy at higher levels, where some always lose, where many actor's behaviour is constrained, will be tough if there is no narrative and if this narrative cannot be connected to existing interpretations of reality, to embedding discursive configurations (Throgmorton, 1996; Van Assche et al, 2012b; Khakee, 1988).

Strategies at larger scales can be found within and beyond the confines of government. We are especially interested in strategy which aims to guide complex governance configurations, associated with a collective and collective goals and speak here of communities. These strategies can tie (or not) into long-term perspectives or be very selectively (Jessop, 1997; Lane and Maxfield, 2018). They can internally accomplish policy integration or pursue policy integration without explicitly regulating or organizing it. They are always selective in focus, in terms of narrative and in terms of institutional emphasis (Hardy and Thomas, 2014), yet they are also comprehensive, as in, persuasive enough to convince actors in governance that they can and have to move in the direction presented (Eaton et al, 2014; Whittington, 2014; Kelly, 2012). Strategies are distinct from long-term perspectives in that they are articulate in steps and/or topics recognizable for politics and administration (Luhmann, 1989; 1997) and to link to policy tools which can then aim at implementation (Fischer, 1990)(figure3).

Strategy can work beyond governance, and yet by means of governance, in creating community. This is the case of nation states but also regional, local, group and organizational identities (Seidl, 2016; Eriksen, 2002; Scott, 1998). 'Community' then reveals itself more clearly as always a productive fiction, as in a discursive construct, which can precede governance, be its side-effect or the result of strategy (cf Anderson, 2006). At the level of organizations, the creation of identity is often an explicit goal, just as the creation of a 'community' of customers, as shared identity, can be aimed at (Czarniawska, 1997; Barry and Elmes, 1997). In more complex configurations, identity creation can similarly be an explicit goal of or a by-product of strategy, as opposed to a given, pre-existing and presumed stable (Ruef, 2000).

An additional complication that has to be introduced at this point is that strategy is not always intended and not always recognized in the moment. Following Mintzberg and later strategy-as-practice theorists (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Mintzberg, 1994; 2000; Golsorkhi et al, 2010), we distinguish between intended strategy and emerging strategy, where cohesion and coordination can evolve and be recognized at a later point (e.g. Seidl, 2016). We further recognize that strategy can be projected on a history of governance even if it was clearly *not* there. What happened (in the absence of strategy) can be re-coded as strategy so one can deliberately attempt to repeat the contingent path. For strategy in complex systems this is all the more relevant, as strategy is harder to come to (negotiation is needed) and harder to implement -given higher internal and external complexity and uncertainty (Valentinov, 2014; Voss et al, 2009).

Linking
What a strategy can do in a particular governance configuration hinges on a variety of couplings (Luhmann, 1995) or contexts (Rose et al, 2006). Understanding those contexts and couplings thus takes on special importance. We already mentioned the couplings between long-term perspectives and strategies and those between policy domains and their strategies. Tight coupling can take on the form of integration, integration into more comprehensive strategies, policy integration and mergers of governance configurations (Cejudo and Michel, 2017). There is always a multiplicity of couplings and contexts involved.

Policy domains are coupled to others, meaning that they co-evolved, and what functions as one domain hinges on the evolution of all the others and their interactions (Fox and Miller, 2015). This then shapes the options for and obstacles towards coordination. Discourse in governance co-evolves with other discourse (including versions of the future) and with discursive configurations in society more broadly, where the pattern of coupling stems from the patterns of access to governance in society. More privileged groups usually have their futures tended to (e.g.

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Jasanoff and Kim, 2015). Within one policy domain (or other sub-set in governance) actors and their discourse can co-evolve more or less in autonomy (if the domain is more or less autonomous) or their co-evolution can be heavily constrained by input from other domains or from a coordinating center or higher level (Briassoulis, 2011; Eaton et al, 2014). In any case, the impetus for change will differ per discourse and per actor, as will the possibility to coordinate (Balogun et al, 2014). If rigid identities are involved coordination (requiring most likely compromise) will be harder.

Whether perspectives can be coordinated or not into a larger strategy or whether actors are willing to collaborate or not can depend on small differences in a parameter of governance (Tewdr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Complications may come from many places, for example; stories might not be very credible, actors can be enemies, politics can be identity politics, resources can be scarce in addition knowledges can go unrecognized because of disciplinary bias or disqualified methods or local knowledges held by marginal or unrecognized locals.

Perspectives are coordinated and leaned upon to produce strategy, while strategy can produce long-term perspectives but coordination in this case is never a matter of linking existing pieces. Rather, there is always an aspect of translation, which implies another selectivity introduced, and principles of translation and transformation which are learned and which can travel (Bal, 2002)(figure 4). Consultants can dismiss specific futures, as can politicians and experts (Porter, 1996; Scott, 1998), and those same people can translate a vision back to old tools, to old narratives, to different goals (Fischer, 2009; Miller and Fox, 2015). It is also possible that solutions arrive first, in the sense of strategies copied from elsewhere, while the analytic process requires new bricolage in the receiving system (Seidl, 2007; Shanahan et al, 2011).

Coordination of policy domains is possible and, as previously mentioned, can go from loose coupling to full integration (e.g. Van Assche, Verschraegen, 2008). Important to consider here is the key structuring principle of modern society; functional differentiation. The dynamics of the distinct social systems in our society are autonomous yet structurally connected differentiating, for instance, self-referential legal communications in law from payments in the economy and collectively binding decisions in the political sphere. This causes the challenge of coordination to drastically increased (Luhmann, 2012). Functional differentiation creates a multiplication of horizons for decision-making (Roth, Sales and Kaivo-oja 2017), this however is counterbalanced by the increased 'multifunctionality' of organizations, meaning that they can simultaneously refer to several function systems (e.g. economy, health, science, law, etc.) (Will, Roth and Valentinov, 2018; Roth et.al, 2019). From a systems theoretical perspective, the role of organizations can hence be explained in terms of tasks that the function systems are poorly

suited to solve (Valentinov, Roth and Will, 2019). Unlike specialized function systems, organizations such as universities, hospitals or firms are able to loosely couple different functional logics as they form decisions using the codes of the respective function systems (Luhmann, 2012). An architectural firm, for instance, not only makes economic decisions concerning payments and future profits, it also makes aesthetic decisions about design, legal decisions on the basis of building law and it might even aim to influence political decisions if it doesn't receive a building permit (Van Assche, Verschraegen, 2008). It also tries to balance these different logics with each other by taking into account, for instance, economic and legal restrictions when developing architectural plans. In line with the multifunctionality argument, organizations are even able to adapt their 'function system preferences' to changing organizational requirements and environment; for instance when governments are failing in the delivery of crucial tasks such as providing social security or health infrastructure corporations "may assume political roles and thus pay attention to those stakeholders whose needs the government fails to address" (Will, Roth, Valentinov, 2018: 840).

From the point of view of policies and policy development a similar logic applies. In some cases, policies are specialized and clearly oriented to the mono-functional logic of a specific function system, yet usually policies have to compensate for the rigidity and blindness of function systems. This will mostly imply polyphonic or multifunctional governance (Andersen, 2003; Roth, et.al, 2019) which means that governance actors should be able to switch flexibly between different functional logics; for instance, depending on changing environments and circumstances, governments can follow political logics or make economic or legal constraints predominant. In fact, one can observe different degrees of 'policy integration' allowing for a range from loose coordination to comprehensive integration (Candel and Biesbroek, 2016; Van Assche et al, 2012a). Yet, coordination between policy domains can be intense even if it does not lead to policy integration. In other words, the policies can remain distinct, clearly belonging to one domain, while they do not refer to each other or strive towards shared goals; the coordination of domains may take place at higher level. Biodiversity policy coordination eg can happen from the ground up, starting with various departments, but it can also take place at inter-ministerial level, by knowledgeable bureaucrats and politicians who see opportunities to harness *existing* administrative resources and policies towards a new and unified goal, i.e. conservation. Similarly, coordination of domains and integration of policies can happen at different spatial scales (Jordan and Lenschow, 2010). It can take place in a context of an imagined community, for example, that formulates common goods and goals requiring coordination or in the context of governance decoupled from social identities, but formulating goals nevertheless.

Limits proliferate with complexity

As any student of strategy knows, the perfect strategy does not exist (Seidl, 2007). Uncertainty has to be brought up here as a key concept, as uncertainty cannot be reduced entirely by any tool of governance, including strategy (Luhmann, 1997). Uncertainty enters governance from every point, comes in with each actor and each long-term perspective. The larger the ambition the longer the time frame; the broader the topic or the more participatory the process the more actors and institutions need to be coordinated and in all these cases the greater the uncertainty (Lyall and Tait, 2004). Moreover, tools to manage uncertainty create new uncertainties, as each discourse comes with new blind spots, each management tool creates its own steering weaknesses and each policy intervention comes with unanticipated effects (DeLeon, 1984; Haynes, 2015).

One can distinguish between types of uncertainty and proceed with a discussion of forms and limits of strategy in those terms, a valuable exercise (eg Gross, 2010). One can also bring in additional concepts to delineate limits of strategy and further structure the environment strategy has to operate within. We introduce the concepts of *observation, reflexivity, transparency and reality effects* to that purpose.

The quality of strategy can be linked to the quality of *observation*, of internal (governance) and external (community, physical) environments (Van Assche et al, 2020). In line with systems theory, we would further link the quality of observation with the quality of self-observation or reflexivity (cf Voss and Bornemann, 2007; Voss et al, 2009). While reflexivity and observation enables the system to observe itself, limits exist (cf Luhmann, 1989). One can refer here to the insights of mathematician Kurt Gödel and biologist and early systems theorist Ludwig von Bertalanffy as sources for different theories highlighting the limits of any system to observe itself in its entirety and the need for every system to project its own categories of interpretation on its environment (von Bertalanffy, 1968). This means that any understanding automatically blocks alternative understandings or, in Foucaultian terms, that each discursive construction renders alternative constructions opaque (Thomas et al, 2013; Shanahan et al, 2011; Rose et al, 2006). In organizational and governance settings transparency has a different set of limits just as opacity has a different set of benefits: there are distinct disadvantages to rendering an organization or governance system maximally transparent (Seidl, 2016). The logic of leadership cannot be made transparent for each and every decision, as necessity might be different from what can be communicated, and as internal contradictions might require opacity to enable continuity (Van Assche et al, 2016), while contradictory or impossible expectations within the community might not be contradicted openly yet managed discreetly (Cunha et al, 2013).

Limits to transparency, observation and reflexivity thus affect each other, can reinforce each other and at the same time each can be considered a source and a form of uncertainty (Haynes, 2015; Miller and Fox, 2015). No strategy can eliminate them and ambitious long- term strategies will require ambitious attempts, not necessarily to reduce uncertainty but to *manage* it and to make its sources as visible as possible. This entails that strategy will have to be adaptive strategy (cf Olsson et al, 2006) and comes with a new limit to policy integration, as adaptation always exists in tension with policy integration (Duit and Galaz, 2008).

Reality effects of strategy meanwhile are those effects of strategy which alter the understanding of reality by the community at large (Van Assche et al, forthcoming; cf Gunder and Hillier, 2016; Garud et al, 2018). One can distinguish between shifts in discursivity and changes in the physical environment. Reality effects are not always intended (Bal, 2002). They are likely to affect the response to strategies in the environment, thus affect the further implementation of the strategy and its continuing power to coordinate internally and externally by altering its persuasive character (Caldart and Ricart, 2004; Van Assche et al, 2014; Hardy and Thoms, 2014). While reality effects might be for the most part the result of the strategy and its communication and implementation, in some cases they can ensue from external changes that have nothing to do with the strategy *per se* or even with the current state of governance (e.g. environmental change, shifting ideologies, newly emerging identities)(Czarniawska, 2004; Barry and Elmes, 1997). Reality effects are thus not *per se* limits to strategy yet their own unpredictability can make them both obstacle and enabler. Ongoing observation of reality effects and adaptation based on those observations are hence to be recommended as part of adaptive strategizing.

A rather different set of limits to strategizing emerges from the unique features of each governance path, mainly its rigidities. EGT speaks here of 'dependencies': path dependencies, interdependencies, goal dependencies and material dependencies (Beunen et al, 2015; Van Assche et al, 2020). Material dependencies are effects of the material environment, both human made and natural, on the reproduction of governance. One can think of infrastructures, but also of landscapes, climates, physical properties of important resources. Interdependencies are mutual dependencies between actors, between actors and institutions, between institutions and forms of knowledge. Goal dependencies, meanwhile, are effects of visions for the future (beyond the assessment of conformity and non-conformity) on the functioning of current governance. For example, a plan might create resistance or tension leading then to a new plan or the rejection of planning as such. We can understand the cultivation of reflexivity in governance as a way to illuminate dependencies thus illuminating them or rendering them less rigid (Luhmann, 1989). Understanding rigidity can enhance flexibility. Just as is the case with reality effects, we would caution against understand them only as obstacles. Indeed, dependencies are features of governance systems which are assets as much as obstacles: a prominent discourse, associated

with a powerful and interdependent set of actors is only an obstacle if the only way forward is understood as breaking the power of that discourse (Van Assche and Hornidge, 2015; cf Jasanoff and Kim, 2015). The same situation can also provide a platform for implementation of strategies that might not be implementable elsewhere.

Path dependencies are the most varied ones and the other dependencies can also be considered versions of path dependencies, i.e. legacies from the past. For our present purposes we would distinguish between legacies of the past in the discursive arena and institutional and actor related legacies. One goal of a strategy might be to change the composition of actors in a certain governance configuration, to alter the pattern of inclusion and exclusion, when this is the case the starting point has to be the existing set of actors; at the same time the current tools of governance, i.e. institutions, and the current manner to produce new institutions have to be taken into account (Whittington, 2004; Mintzberg, 1994, 2000). In the governance of communities, more than at the level of organizations, legacies can be coded and entrenched in a variety of institutions which might keep each other in place: laws refer to each other, plans refer to policies, laws and other plans (Teubner, 2011; Candel and Biesbroek, 2016). Old versions of the world, old values and old futures might be encoded in the institutions. If actors are not aware of this, the influence of these ideas will persist and and will form an unconscious limit to strategizing (Rose, 2006; Zizek, 1994). We can speak of a non-erasure of old ideas through the embedding in governance and we can add that not only features from the past can haunt current governance and strategizing but also strategies from the past (Ocasio and Joseph, 2008). Officially discarded strategies can leave a variety of traces that can function as obstacles for strategizing. Those traces can be discursive fragments or half -forgotten institutions as well as internal consistencies in current institutions, lacking resources (as shifted by previous strategies), but also excluded discourses and actors or methods of constructing reality and measuring success (Porter, 1996; Verschraegen et al, 2017). Again, reconstructing governance paths and cultivating reflexivity can help in tracing the remnants and managing their effects.

Limits to strategizing and limits to the linking of long- term perspectives and strategy can reinforce each other. For a particular governance system it might be impossible to recognize a long- term perspective in the community- to recognize it as relevant- while at the same time it might be impossible to forge a new long-term perspective by means of internal discussion and by means of strategy because of missing tools (Jessop, 1997; Gunder and Hillier, 2016). Additional limits to integration of strategy and long- term perspectives stem from discursive dynamics in the community and within governance: such is the case when a strategy might be universally linked to a narrative that is highly persuasive within the community. That persuasive character might falter (Seidl, 2007) but there can also be a reinterpretation of the strategy as narrative (Thomas et al, 2013; Lapsley et al, 2010) with new suspicions de-coupling the narrative and

institutional parts of the strategy, now interpreting it merely as a tool of control, maybe marginalization (Walzer, 1996). Changing use of the strategy by new actors facing new demands and identifying differently might create different reality effects of the strategy and might also de-couple long-term perspective and strategy (Voss et al, 2009; Lane and Maxfield, 2018).

Limits to strategizing, limits to linking futures and strategies and limits to policy integration coexist. The more ambitious the strategy and the attempt at policy integration through strategy, the more delicate the balance between different interests, perspectives, and temporalities will be. Full policy integration can force the merger of temporalities, which can disrupt the internal logics of the different policies (or policy domains) that are to be integrated (Luhmann, 1995). A good and well-known example is infrastructure policies that often require grand economic investments. Such investments in transport or energy infrastructure need to be insulated from short-term political interference. As infrastructure decisions are characterized by long-term implications and costs (e.g. a new nuclear reactor or high speed train connection) market actors need relatively stable conditions to take such investment decisions. Reducing the high uncertainty of future costs requires that governments make 'credible commitments' concerning the regulatory environment of infrastructure investments (Levy and Spiller 1994), which is easier in a relatively 'depoliticized' decision-making environment. Not surprisingly the governance of privatised industries, which rely on long-term investments, is often delegated to independent regulatory agencies, informing governments on needs, requirements and conditions.

This shows that policy integration is not always possible and not always beneficial and the benefits of developing specialized policies and policy domains can be manifold. In any case, the existence of specialized policies can be considered an evolutionary achievement, enabling governance systems to deal with external complexity by creating internal complexity (Valentinov, 2014). The specialization, for example, allows different temporalities to coexist with a difference between faster and slower changing policies and with the possibility to shield policy domains requiring stability from the instability of politics. Strategies aiming at integration can thus risk to lose the benefits of differentiation in temporalities and in long-term perspectives. For Luhmann, this would entail a risk of de-differentiation through strategy.

Strategy revisited: positive values of some obstacles

Whether we use the more common terminology of uncertainties and side effects in policy or the terminology proposed in the previous paragraphs, there is a strong case to present strategy in governance as something that can never entirely fulfill its promise. Nevertheless, it can obviously fulfill many positive functions, as attested by theory and practice, so one can speak with relative ease about strategy as a productive fiction. Strategically anticipating the long-term future in

present action leads to decisions about how to make the envisioned future a reality. This is obviously a process, not a fixed idea. Strategy takes place only in the present, in which different future paths are "imagined, evaluated and contingently reconstructed by actors in ongoing dialogue with unfolding situations" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 966). This process is productive in the sense that it is not a mere reaction on a situation that already exists but a continuous dialogue of different expectations and projections about the future within an ever-changing environment. As there is a fundamental uncertainty engendered by the openness of the future, expectations and strategies are continuously adapted. There are thus limits to all governance strategies. These limits will differ in each case just as will the enabling conditions per governance path and configuration. The productivity can be managed to a certain extent and can be understood in terms of reality effects, in terms of efficiencies and in term of steering power towards public goods or in averting collective risks (thinks the pressures towards integrated policy for climate change adaptation).

The label of productive fiction can be used to dismiss analyses such as ours or to dismiss the utility of strategy at scales beyond the organization, since difficulties multiply at higher levels of organization or complexity. However, it is also possible to interpret *any* strategy, *any* plan and *any* attempt at management as productive fiction with successful management understood as optimizing productivity and as being aware of its partly fictitious character (in line with Gunder and Hillier, 2016). Actors in a governance system have to build expectations about the future in order to devise strategies, plans and yield collectively binding decisions. Expectations are fictional in the sense that those who rely on them treat them as if they will likely become reality. This creates an incentive for actors to try to influence the expectations of others by creating credible accounts of future states of the world (e.g. Beckert, 2016). For systems theories of organization (e.g. Seidl, 2016) and for the Scandinavian institutionalists (e.g. Czarniawska, 2004), this productive role of future expectations and observing other actors' future expectations is self-evident just as it is obvious that the steering capacity of management in any complex organization is deliberately overestimated; narratives of leadership, of steering capacity, of transparency serve various goals without being necessarily true (insights shared by Luhmann and Machiavelli). At an even smaller scale, one can consider the imperfection of each institution, an imperfection not necessarily leading to disappointments and loss of coordinative capacity (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; Teubner, 2011). Informal institutions can extend the impact of formal institutions and the reality of people breaking the rules (including laws) coexists with the reality of those rules, usually functioning without enforcement. Trust in institutions and trust in strategies (as institutions and as narratives) can exist even under difficult circumstances (Luhmann, 2018). We argue that the linkage with long-term perspectives can underpin such trust, if those long- term perspectives are recognized as pertaining to the community, as close to its identity, as achievable. Once again, long-term perspectives (perhaps underpinning identities)

can come first, and strategies can come first, yet not linking them makes each of them more vulnerable.

We know by now that imperfect coordination is not only a result of problems in governance, of people breaking rules and hiding intentions, and not only stemming from internal complexity, or the match between internal and external complexity. Problems for coordination can arise from positive functions in governance. Increasing participation makes coordination harder and the same holds for localizing governance, for institutionalizing multi-level governance with more autonomous levels, for reinforcing checks and balances more generally (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Duit and Galaz, 2008; Briassoulis, 2011). Integrative strategy thus balances the powers of steering with risks of undermining differentiation and checks and balances. From a different angle, either more ideological or more Machiavellian, one can stress the productivity of conflict, and the importance of agony, in defining contextual versions of 'good governance', thus introducing more reasons to be careful with policy integration and grand strategy (Van Assche et al, 2016).

The promise of numbers

In the 21st century a discussion on strategy, long-term perspectives and policy integration cannot omit a discussion of 'governance by numbers'. As in previous paragraphs, insights from organization theory are useful for analyses of policy, planning and administration as well as for analyses of governance. Whereas in organizations, theories of accounting have become more and more ambitious promising more and more in terms of rendering the organization transparent to itself and measuring its performance. A similar quantification has taken place in governance practice (and studies) not entirely initiated but at least accelerated by the rise of new public management (NPM; Hood and Peters, 2004). A whole array of indicators, targets, benchmarks and numerical models have become crucial for the structuration of entire governance fields and particularly expectations about the future within these fields. Sustainability governance institutions, for instance, have come increasingly to rely on metrics such as indicators, goals and targets to define and pursue sustainability objectives. The adoption by the United Nations (UN) of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), succeeding and expanding upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) project, is a clear example of this.

Numbers enter governance with a set of promises (Porter, 1996). For our purposes some disentangling has to take place in order to assess (maybe not in numbers) the promises made and the utility for strategy. Numbers promise to render governance transparent to itself (enabling self-assessment) and to external parties: politicians, citizens (under the label 'accountability'). Numbers can promise to make a long- term perspective more tangible and help

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the translation into strategy (goal setting, definition of steps) and at the same time they can present goals as easily recognizable. Finally, they promise (at least in NPM rhetoric) to enable policy integration: different policies can work towards the same goal, which then (goal dependency) produces policy integration. Each policy (or policy domain) can produce numbers, either as accounting or as goal setting, which subsequently allow for a calculus producing an overarching goal, which, again through reverse engineering, integrates policy.

It might seem that governance by numbers does all the things we argued for so laboriously. However, taking a closer look at each of these promises reveals a different story.

First let us take a look at the promise of transparency of governance systems. Indeed, numbers can be useful but lets not forget that each form of measurement introduces an interpretation of systems procedures and results as well as a reduction of the functionality of the organization (e.g. Valentinov, Verschraegen and Van Assche, 2019). Yet, even in specialized organizations (for example an environmental policy council), the functions, goals and 'products' are often not easily defined and attempts at imposing such interpretation can bring about a restructuring which reduces the quality of analyses and decisions. It can also make actual deliberation difficult, favouring speed over imagining paths towards collective goods. Indeed, a reduction of governance to 'service delivery' is not promising for collectively envisioning desirable futures and strategy to get there (Rose et al, 2006).

The second promise is that of the concretization of futures and the translation to strategy. This too, might work, yet the disadvantages of reducing futures to numbers are just as obvious. A focus on numbers can minimize attention to the original intention and the actual situation. In often incentivizes a reorganization of governance aimed at obtaining the "right" numbers as well as certain actors to game the system by manipulating the numbers. Moreover, if the numbers are goals, those goals are likely more fictitious than descriptive goals since numbers are never deducible from the current situation and do not allow for ambiguity and reinterpretation. Soviet economic planning was entirely based on numeric goals and the production targets. Rather than sharp observation of the actual situation (and continuous adjustment to it), this numerical focus led to generalized cheating and an economy of scarcity, even where it could be avoided (Kornai, 1979). If goals or indicators are highly synthetic, that is, if the numbers include a set of partial goals or indicators, the opacity increases and the series of interpretations underlying the production and integration of different numbers into one value becomes less transparent. While a number as a clear goal might be motivating and rousing, it can also translate a future into a strategy that eventually strays further away from the initial long- term perspective, possibly further away from what any strategy can realistically achieve. If this happens in a governance context which also becomes restructured because of the operations and ideals described in the

previous paragraph (reduction of governance functions to products), then such straying becomes more likely since additional selectiveness is introduced; the translation process from images, ideals, narratives on good governance as procedure and result to a limited set of numbers. Moreover, if this is institutionalized then switching back to a general idea of governance strategy as envisioning public goods becomes harder and a whole class of possible strategies is a priori excluded.

Numbers producing policy integration is the third promise of numbers. Indicators and other metrics can be usefully understood as 'boundary objects', co-produced by scientists, policy makers and other actors and can enable a meaningful integration between policies (Ellis, 2020). Yet, once more, it cannot be presumed for each case and the drawbacks cannot be forgotten. If policy integration is integration of numbers or if it is general goal setting and reasoning backwards, then rethinking relations between policies to achieve those numbers and the opacities mentioned in the previous paragraphs are all at play. Moreover, the focus on the numbers shifts the focus away from policy integration as a *design problem,* where a wide array of institutional design options exist, each with pro's and con's that can be evaluated, that can be compared to performance in terms of more than one value and public goods, an assessment which ought to take the character of a deliberation.

Governance by numbers, in short, is not the panacea promised by NPM nor can it be dismissed as a neo-liberal conspiracy. Quantification, goal setting, assessment and indices can all help in articulating public goods, in assessing and defining 'good governance', as governance in tune with existing values and desires and able to accommodate existing long- term perspectives and bring them closer to implementable strategy. At the same time, the transparency promised comes with new opacity and the simplicity which seems to enable steering comes at the cost of complexity reduction, including a reduced insight in all the governance options and designs available.

Concluding

Strategy in governance and its inherent relation to long-term perspectives has not received enough attention. A history of modernism in administration, planning and policy has overestimated systematically the possibilities of strategizing, as trying to move collectively in the direction of a desirable future, trying to materialize collective goods, trying to avert collective disaster. Strategy at any level higher than that of an organization will introduce new complexities, fissures and uncertainties. A recent history of neo-liberal influence in the set of disciplines looking at governance has systematically underestimated the possibilities for strategy.

This paper, and the collection of papers it introduces, makes a strong case for strategy in governance and for avoiding overestimation and underestimation in visioning power and steering power in governance. Finding the right balance there entails discerning more clearly the limits and the possibilities of strategy, the enabling factors and obstacles. This is possible only if we come up with new conceptual tools to analyze strategy particularly in the context of governance. We argued for the utility of a model of governance, borrowed from evolutionary governance theory, which understands governance as always marked by its path, as always marked by dependencies emerging out of co-evolutions of actors and institutions, power and knowledge. Placing strategy in that context is not enough, however, a more refined analysis of strategy in that context requires new concepts. We therefore introduced and related the concept of strategy as productive fiction; the productivity including its reality effects and its quality hinging on the quality of observation and self-observation.

Essential for the argument made here and helpful in managing the obstacles and enabling factors for strategy in governance is the linking of long-term perspectives and strategy which is likely to make the strategy more stable and productive (cf Skjolsvold, 2014 in this journal). If a strategy is not only an institution but also a narrative, then a persuasive and shared long-term perspective has to mark the strategy. If the strategy intends to be persuasive, it needs either to include existing narratives with persuasive power or produce a new one which is associated enough to concerns and beliefs in the community (outside governance) to make it persuasive enough to coordinate actors.

Further, in the complex environment of governance and certainly the way it is understood in EGT, a new strategy with the ambition to move the community in a particular direction or to further common goods which transcend subsystems or factions or policy domains, has to link to existing narratives, institutions, actors and resources. This also means that it will most likely be a strategy that coordinates existing partial strategies or at least coordinates policy domains and integrates policies emanating from those domains. Understanding strategy at larger scales is therefore also understanding policy coordination and integration as well as its limits and risks.

A major difficulty for our current investigations of governance strategy is that both the benefits and risks are enormous. Many are screaming for grand strategy to deal with climate change, new diseases, inequality, innovation, energy transition, grand strategy assuming policy integration at high level, production of new policy tools (plans and other institutions) with enormous steering power and encoding scientific ideas on how to deal with these problems. Yet, grand strategy and concomitant policy integration, even if embedded in widely shared long- term perspectives, are risky for maintaining checks and balances. We might end up in a situation where cliques of academics/experts take over, administrative and political actors might entrench themselves in

decision-making processes while openings for corruption might be created. Meanwhile many others scream for localism, for participatory development, for more direct democracy, policies rooted in local and indigenous knowledge and for loosely coupled multi-level governance. Balancing these two perspectives is a challenge.

What might be 'good governance' has to be decided per case, per topical discussion, per community and per governance path (Voss and Bornemann, 2011; Van Assche and Hornidge, 2015). Risks and benefits of strategy, of particular linkages between long-term perspectives, strategy and particular forms of policy coordination and integration have to be assessed per case. The framework presented here can assist in such effort. At the most basic level, even without invoking any of the concepts mentioned earlier, one has to advocate for an understanding of strategy as narrative and institution. One has to advocate for the consideration of narratives of the long-term both inside and outside governance when building governance strategy. In parallel, not afterwards, it is advisable to map out existing forms of policy integration and coordination and easier and more difficult options for new patterns of integration, as starting from the existing governance configuration. Such exercise can then feed into the strategy building at different points in the process.

The perspective adumbrated here could be developed to provide new insight in the possibilities and mechanics of so-called place based development, here not restricted to local, participatory, 'community based' development but understood as development articulated in and pursued by governance in a particular spatial frame, either inside or beyond the sphere of local / regional / national government. It can help to assess the contextual value of collaboration vs competition in governance and of consensus vs. conflict (Feuer et al, 2021).

Further research in this line could also shed a light on the possibilities and limits of community reinvention. Understanding of course that 'community' is never an unproblematic concept, that it is never monolithic, never possesses an essence and always relates to governance structures in complex manners. It is in and through governance that groups recognize themselves as groups, organize themselves, turning themselves into 'actors' or in other cases 'communities'. Analysis of these cases also reveals limits of strategy, of the strategy concept and of the concept of community. Long-term perspectives can be associated with groups that when participating in governance can see this perspective transformed into strategy (or into aspects of strategy) keeping in mind that at the same time identities might change in the process.

Very ambitious strategies or limit cases of strategizing (as in place- based development and community reinvention) are helpful beyond the scope of the limit question and refine the understanding of strategy in governance, couplings with long-term perspectives and the

necessary forms of policy coordination and integration. As long as we believe in the relevance of larger units of governance and as long as we believe that governance can do more than service provision, that it is possible to articulate and pursue public goods through governance and that some of these goods require and represent a long-term perspective, we have to embrace strategy in governance. Risks and limitations notwithstanding, we have to take it seriously and also rediscover its rousing, even utopian potential. Fictions create realities and strategies can be highly productive fictions.

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