

The role of governance in shaping EU agri-environmental policies

9th of October 2026

PhD defence – Diana Borniotto

PhD on governance & agri-environment in shifting times



Slow Food

EU policies on environmental protection

- Environmental protection is an EU objective written into the EU Treaties
- Two ways to decide and act on environment:
 1. Environmental laws in their own right (e.g. Nature Restoration Law)
 2. Integrating the environment into other policy domains, as Environmental Policy Integration (EPI)
- Agriculture as key EU policy (with almost 1/3 of EU budget)

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027

Pillar I

€ 198 bn

Pillar II

€ 109 bn

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Pillar I



Pillar II



EU



Design & fund

Member States



Design, fund & *implement*

Eco-schemes

- Voluntary scheme for farmers
- Mandatory for Member States
- Annual contract
- 100% EU funding
- 25% minimum of most of Pillar I

Wallonia



Long soil cover

Environmental-friendly
crops

Ecological networks

Permanent grassland

Inputs reduction

AECMs

- Voluntary scheme for farmers
- Mandatory for Member States
- Multi-annual contract (5-7 years)
- Co-financed: up to 80% EU and minimum 20% national
- 35% minimum Pillar II

Wallonia



Grassland

Flower strips

Threatened local breeds

Agri-environmental plans

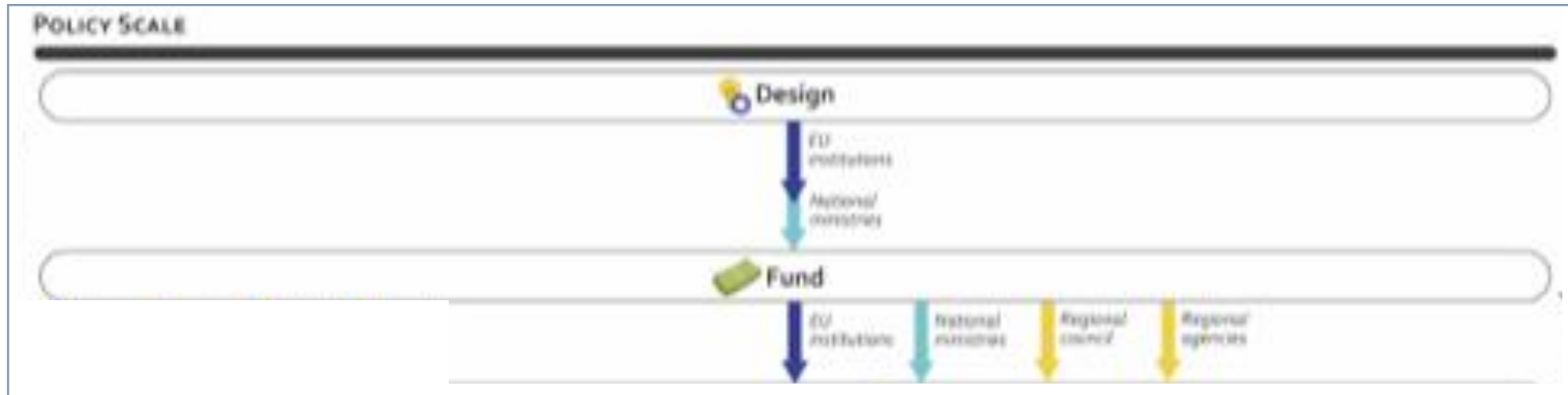
Soil

How are AECMs implemented in practice ?

Hauts-de-France



DESIGN

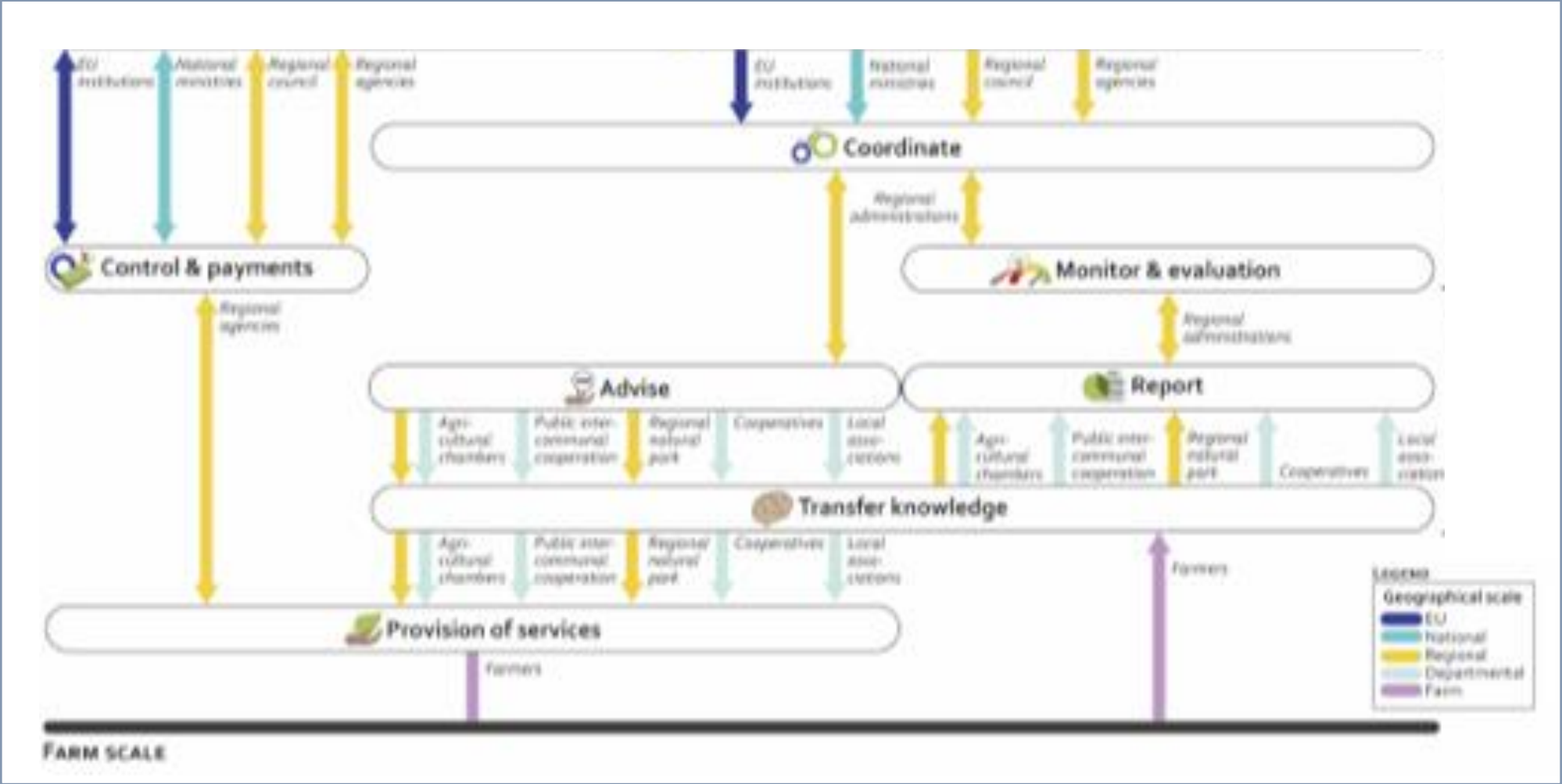


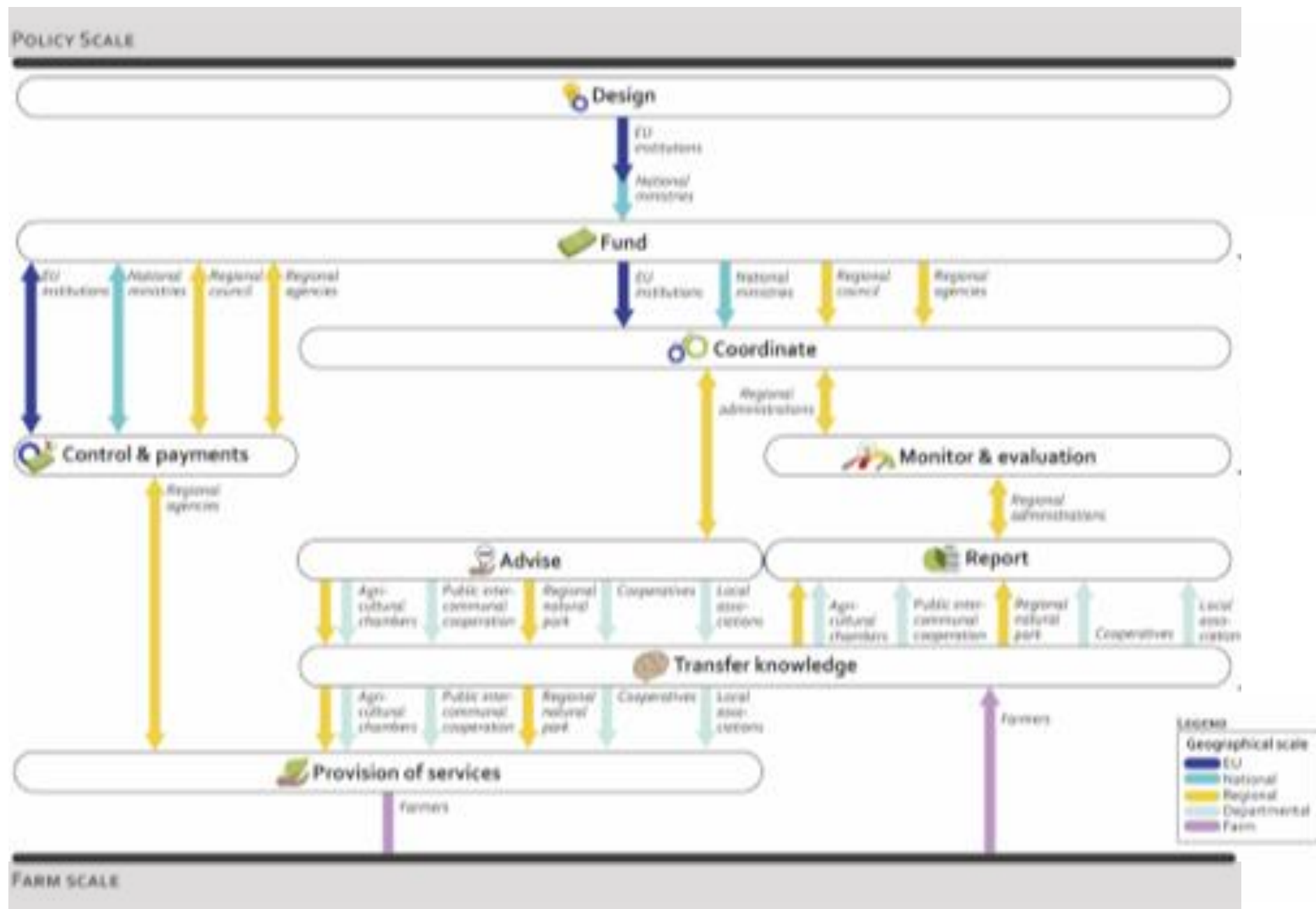
Legend

Geographical scale

- EU
- National
- Regional
- Departmental
- Farm

IMPLEMENTATION





Key messages

1. Policy level and farm level are linked, and this can be seen through the governance model linking its actors

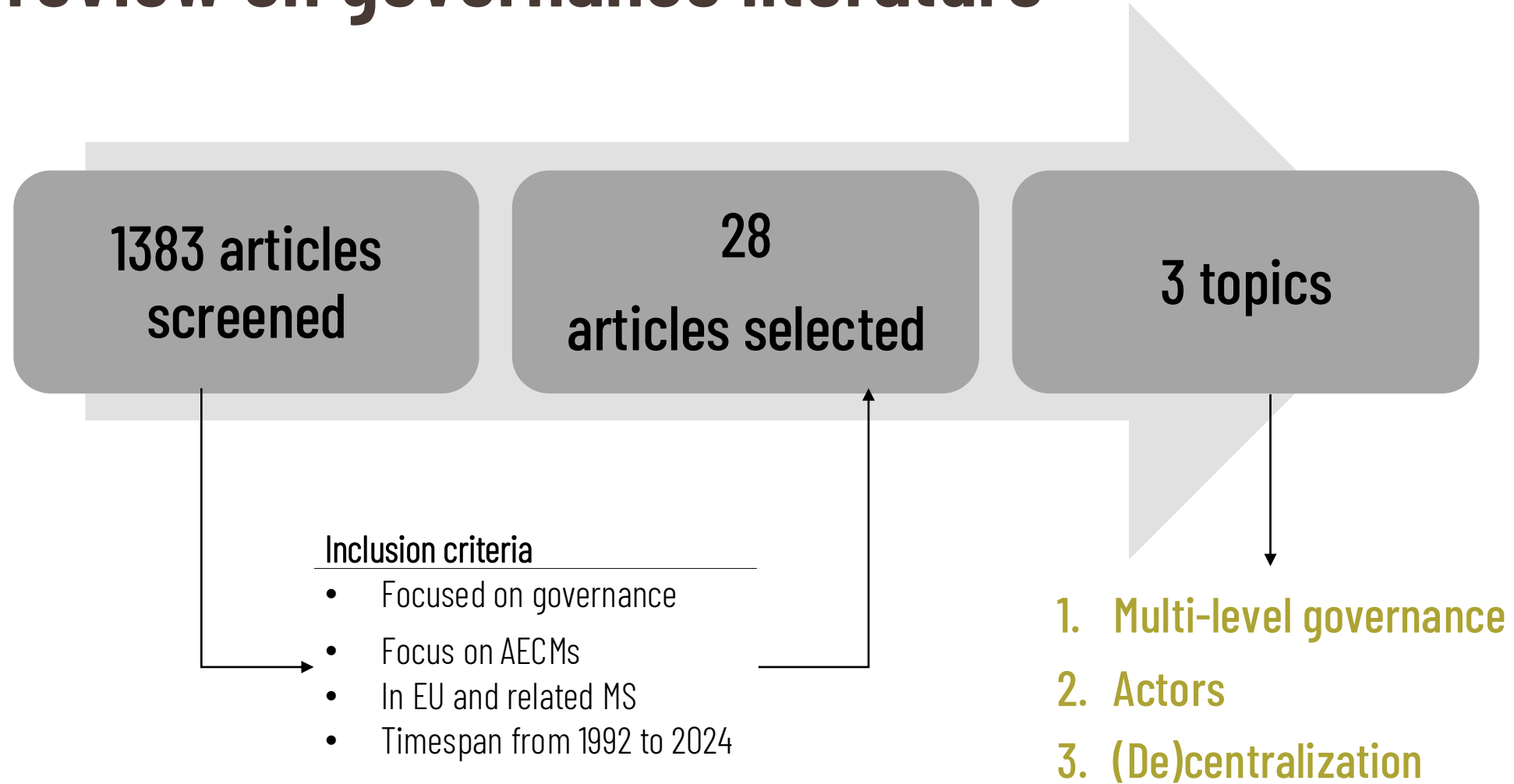
If governance links policy and farm, is this link the same everywhere in Europe?

Does governance change across EU Member States ?

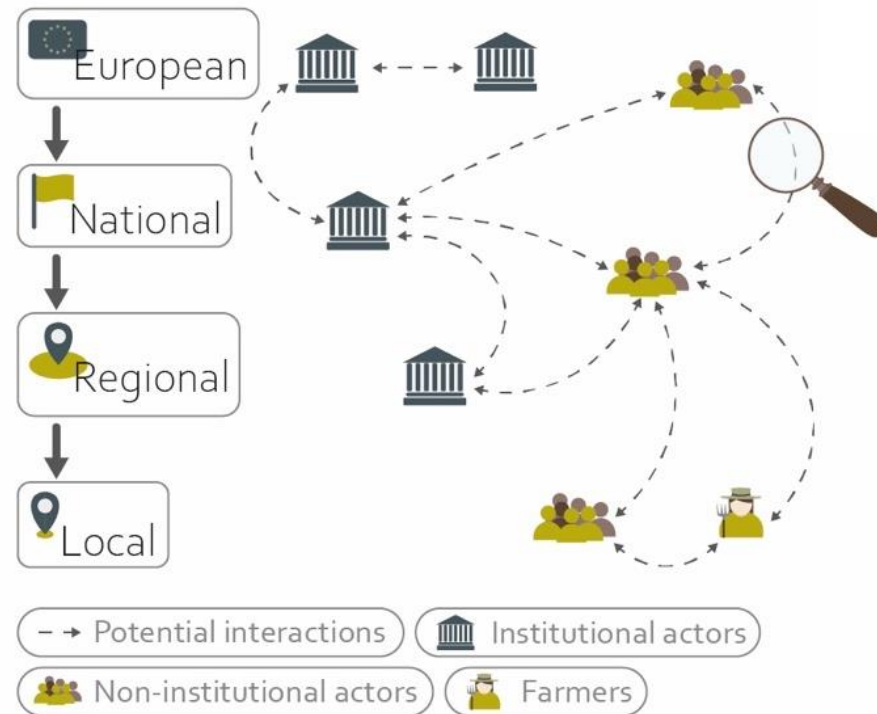
- A common set of EU regulations shaping AECMs
- Implementation through 27+1 **CAP Strategic Plans** are national (and regional for Belgium)



A review on governance literature



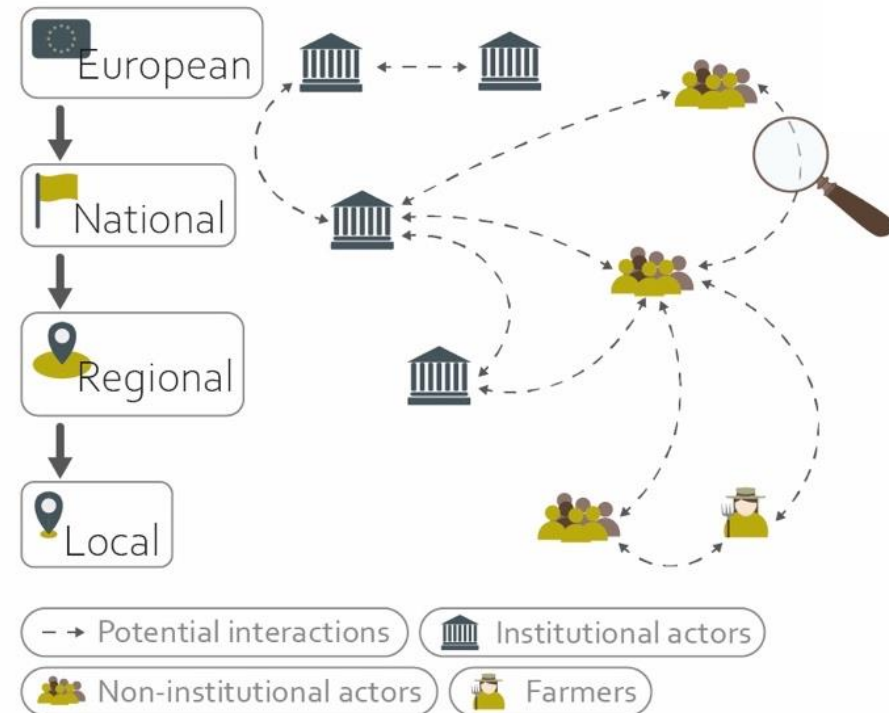
MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



Actors

ID	Actors
1	Agricultural administrations
2	Agricultural ministry
3	Farmer advisors
4	Farmers
5	Farmers associations
6	Farmers collectives
7	Environmental administrations
8	Environmental ministry
9	NGOs & environmental associations
10	European institutions
11	National government
12	Departmental and regional councils
13	Governmental agencies
14	Municipalities
15	Financial institutions

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

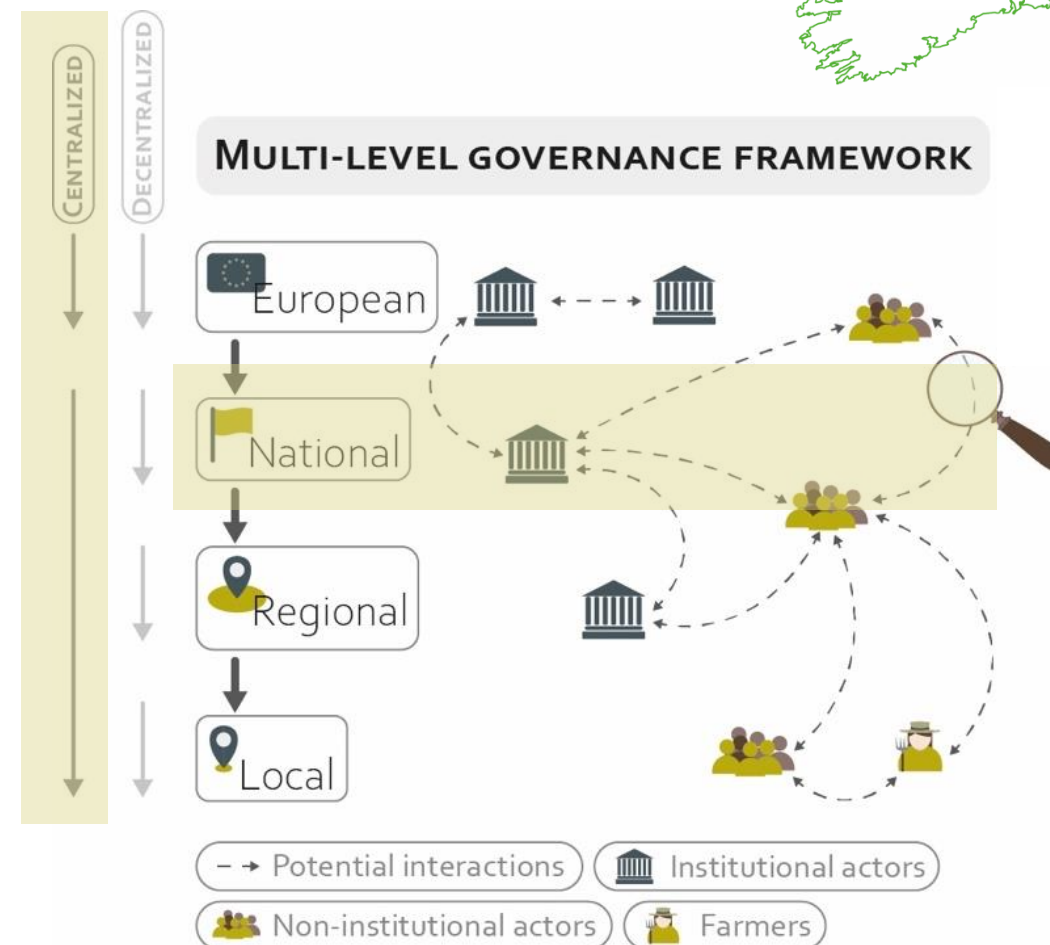


Ireland



Centralized

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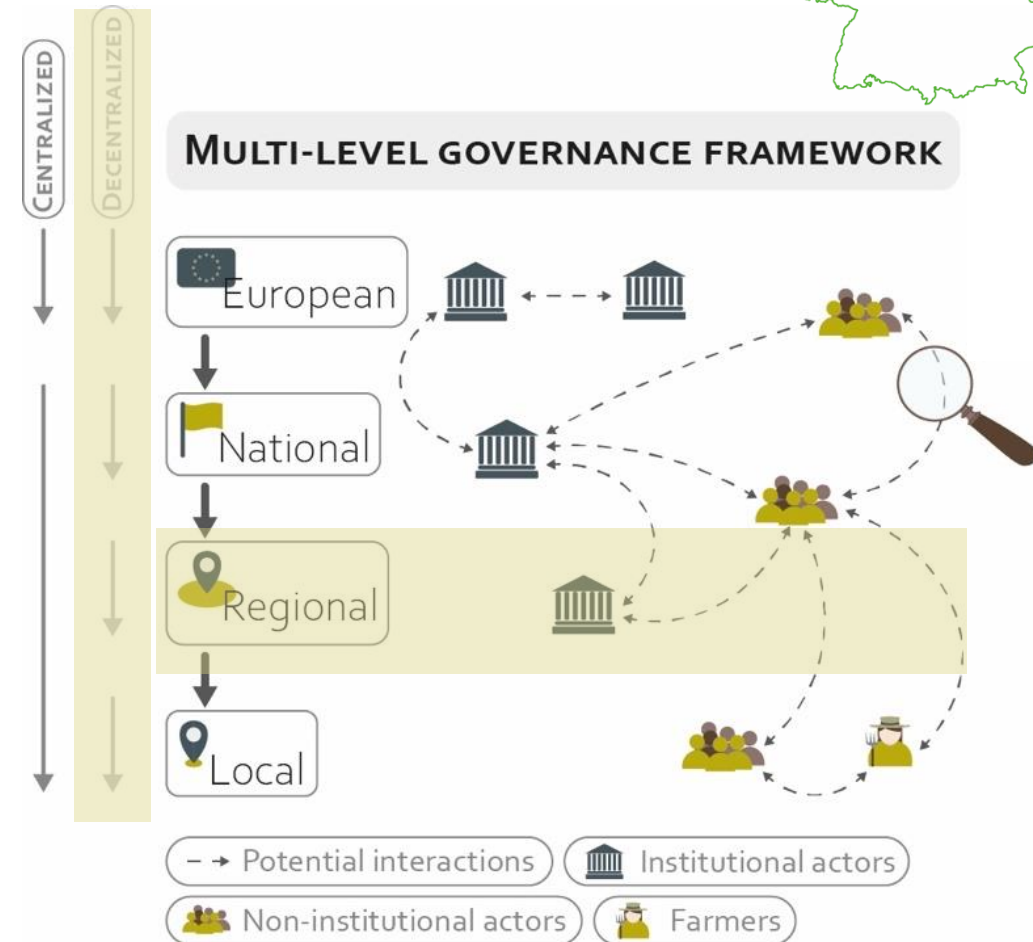


Germany

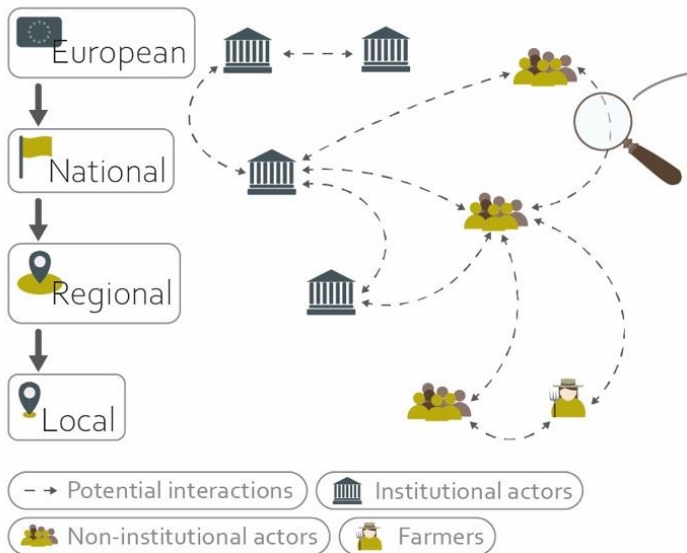


Decentralized

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MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



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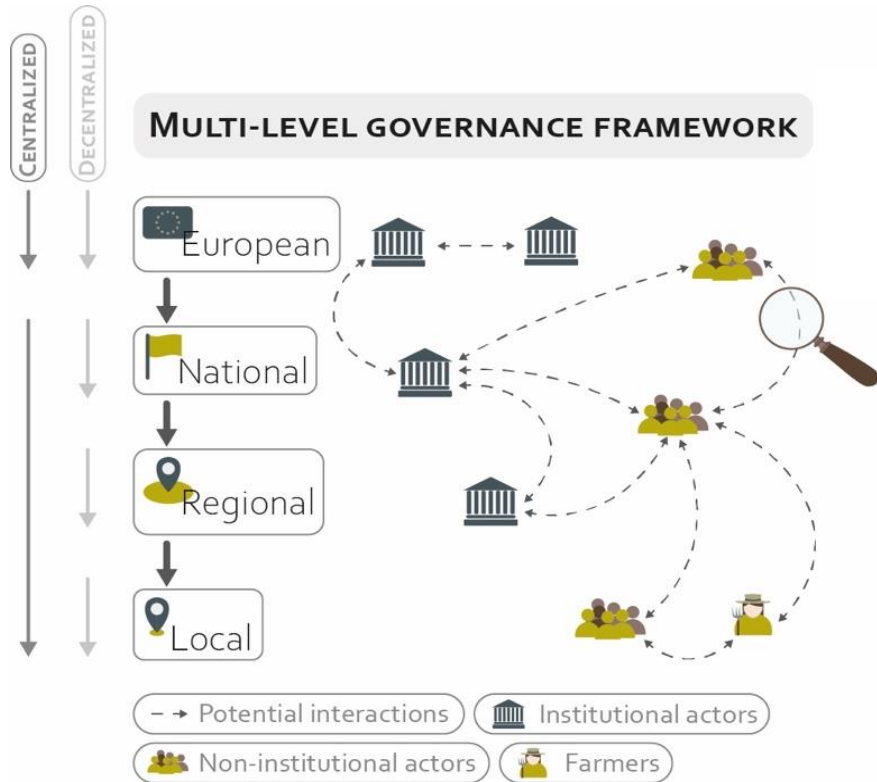
AES governance model

- Centralized
- Decentralized
- Mixed
- Regionally split (Belgium)
- Studied, model not specified
- Not covered by reviewed studies

Key messages

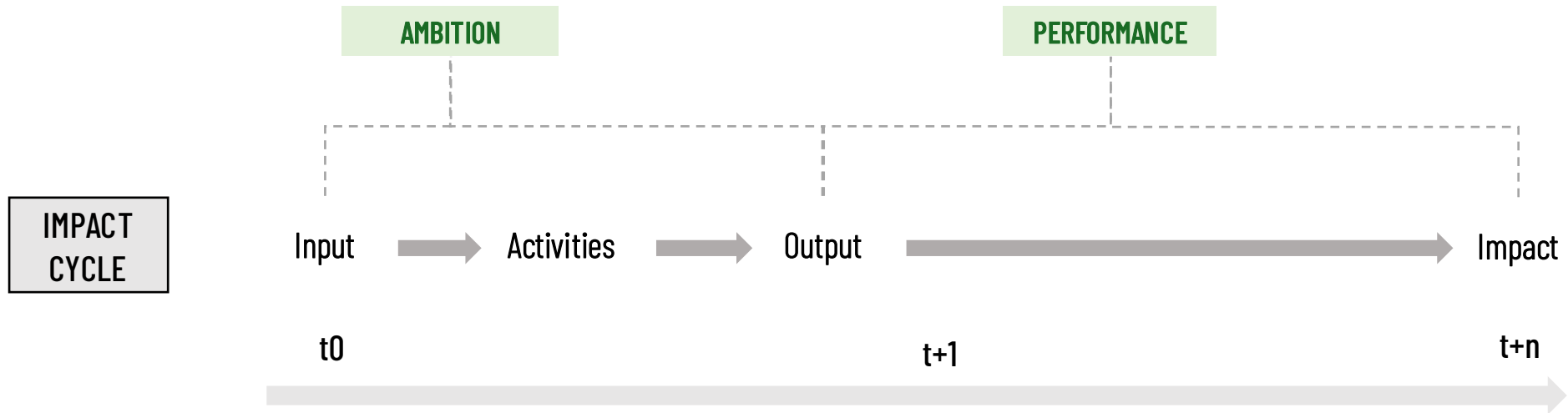
1. Policy level and farm level are linked, and this can be seen through the governance model linking its actors
2. **In the EU coexists a diversity of governance models, under a multi-level framework**

If governance models differ, does this matter for the environment? Does it change how *ambitious* policies are, and how well they *perform*?

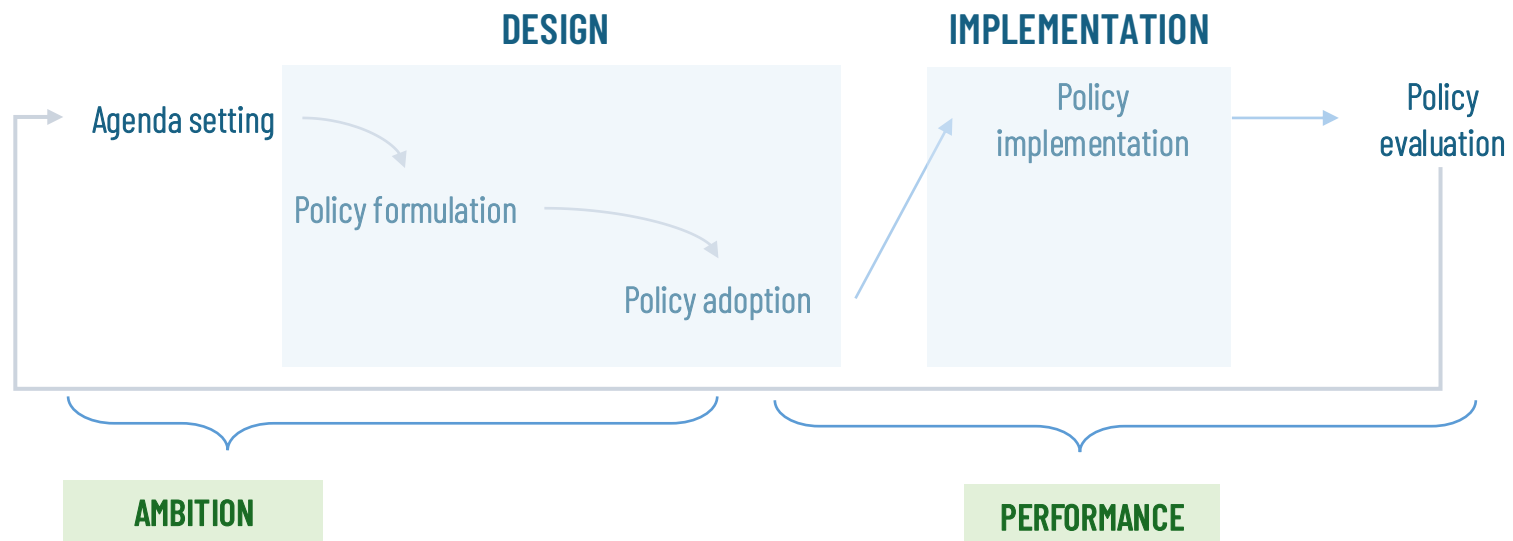


?

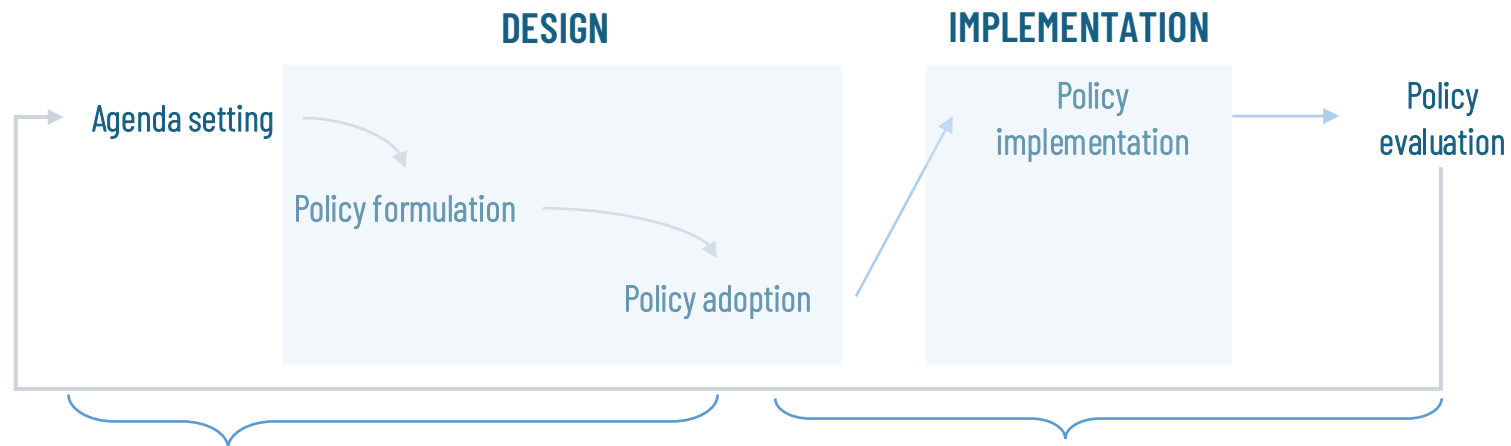




**POLICY
CYCLE**



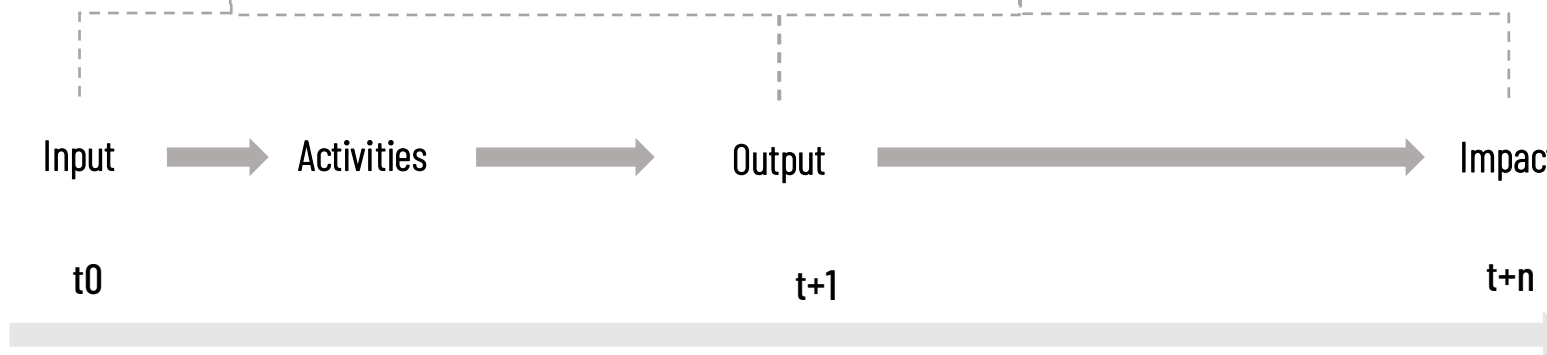
**POLICY
CYCLE**



AMBITION

PERFORMANCE

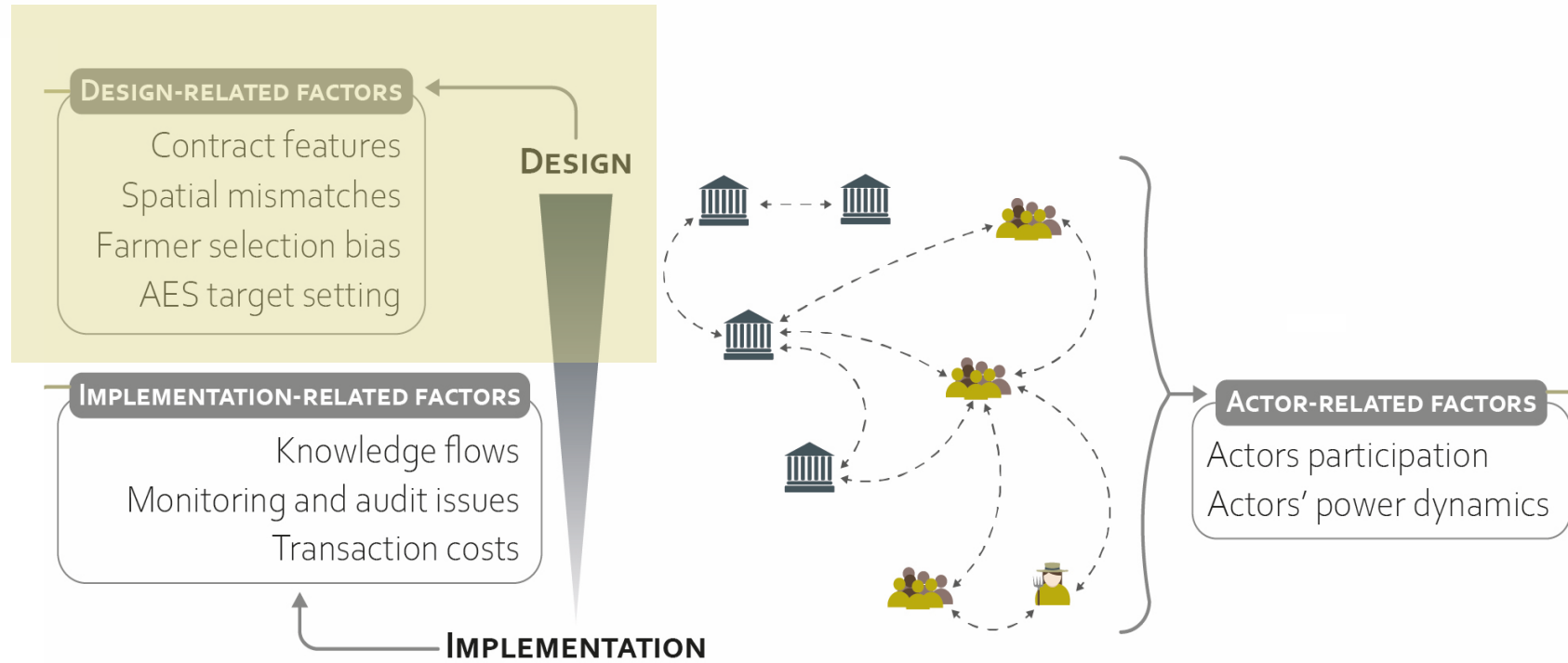
**IMPACT
CYCLE**



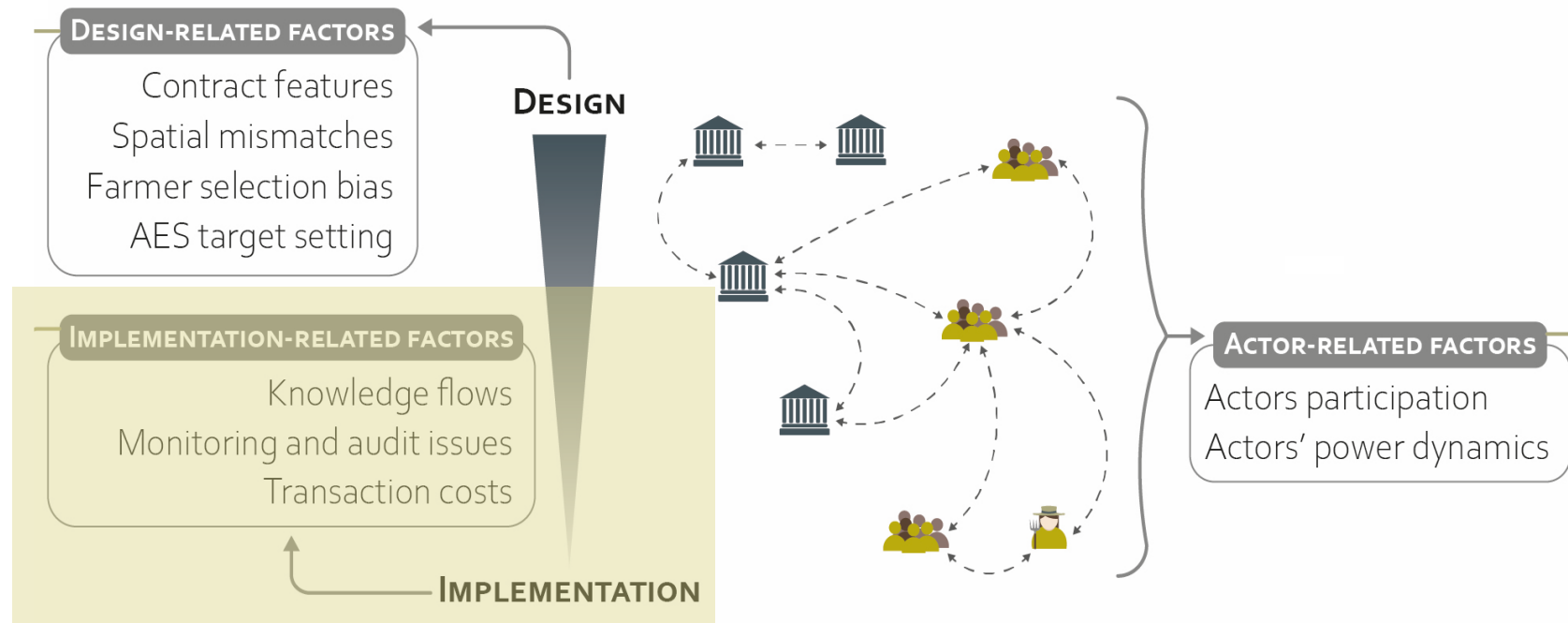
Three factors linking governance and environmental performance

- Design
- Implementation
- Actors

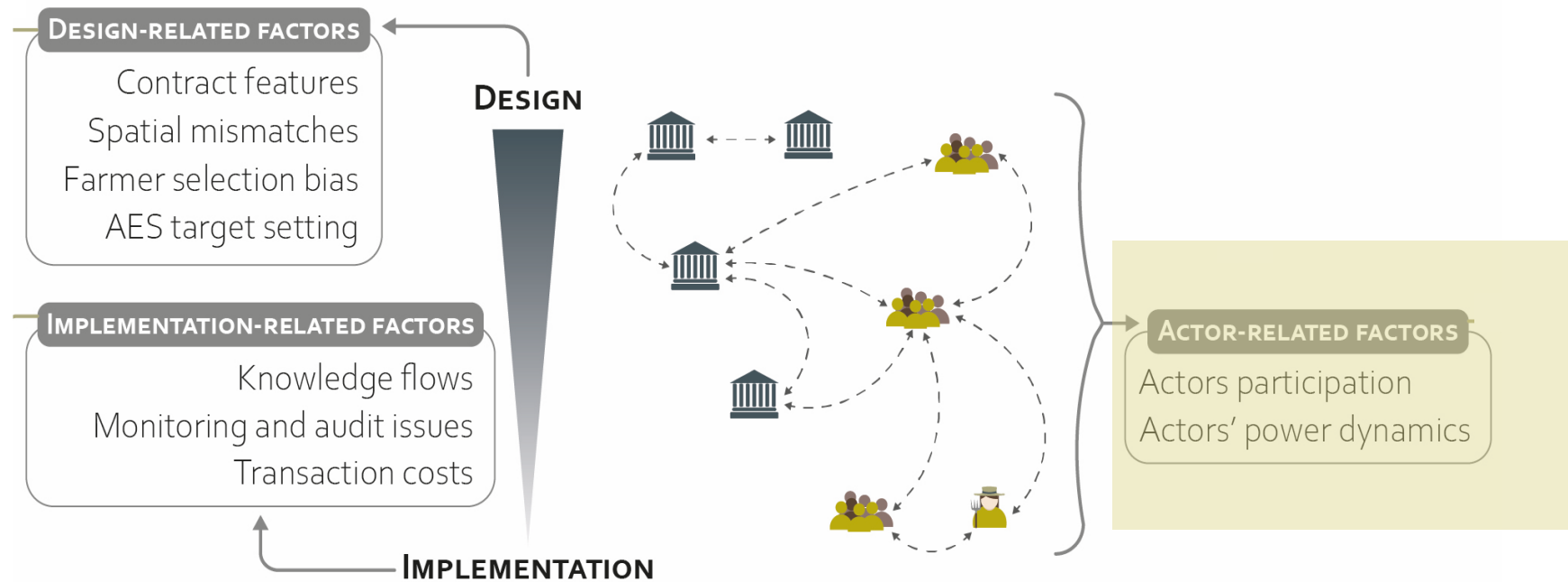
Design



Implementation



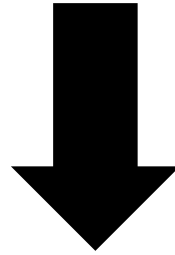
Actor participation and power dynamics are driver



Key messages

1. Policy level and farm level are linked, and this can be seen through the governance model linking its actors
2. In the EU coexists a diversity of governance models, under a multi-level framework
3. **Difference governance factors affects environmental performance**

So if there is no single best model, is there instead a diversity of paths to environmental ambition across the EU?



Comparative analysis

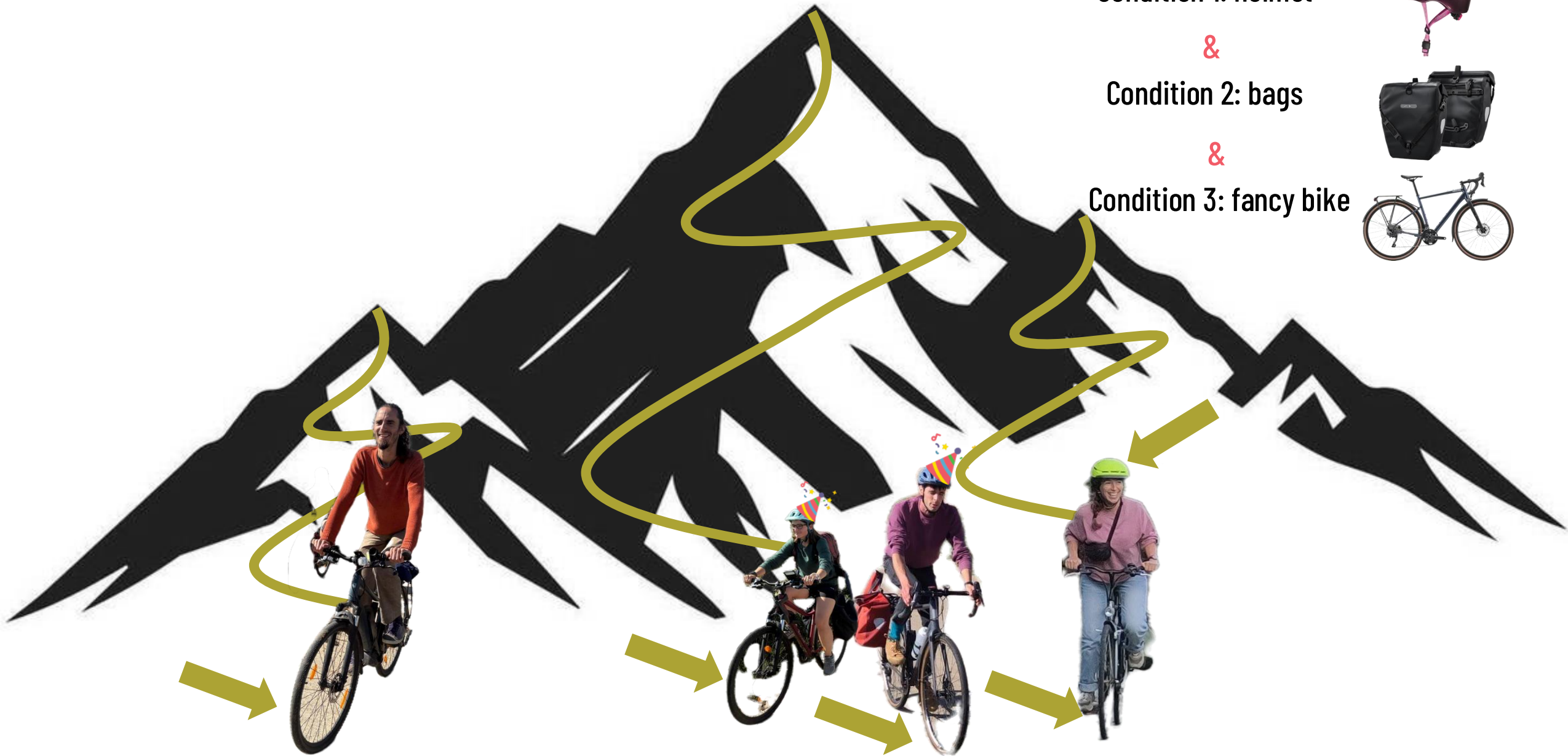
Condition 1: helmet

&

Condition 2: bags

&

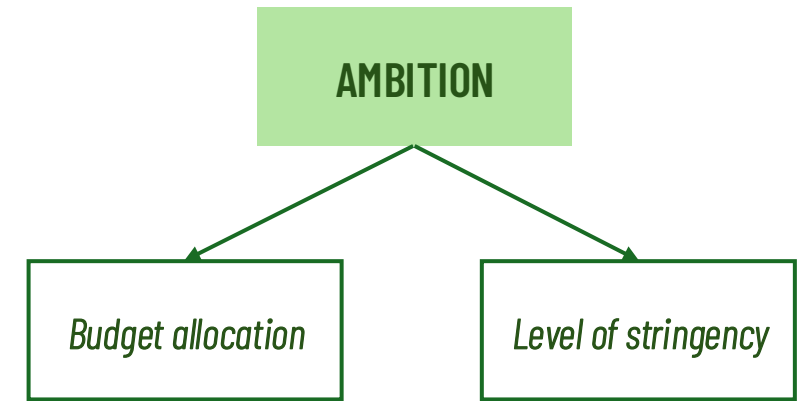
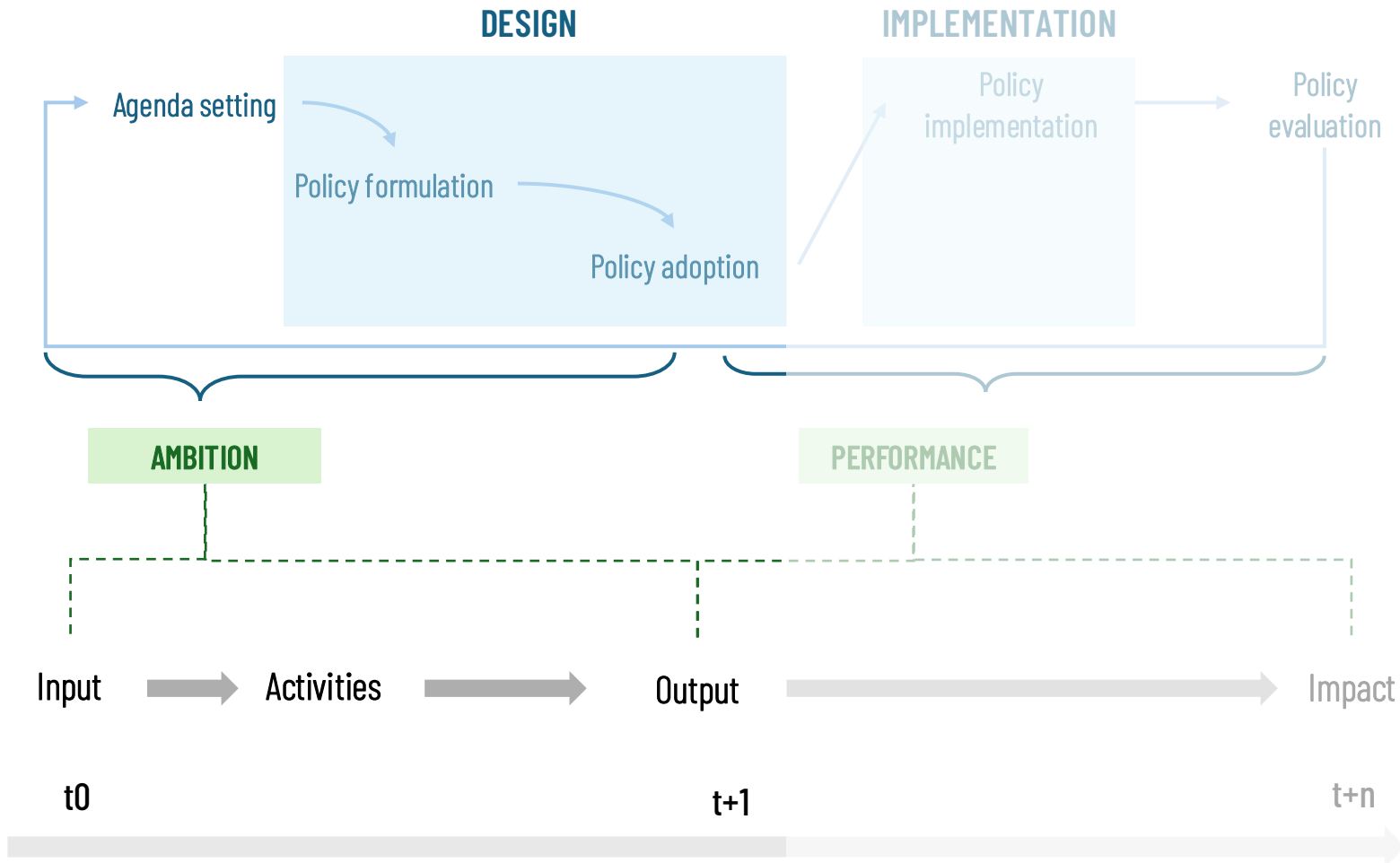
Condition 3: fancy bike



The conditions

Condition	Outcome
1. Political parties	Policy ambition of EU agri-environmental schemes
2. Interest groups	
3. Administrative capacities	
4. Farming systems	
5. Agricultural policy paradigms	

Policy ambition – which indicator?



27+1 CAP Strategic Plans



Condition

Outcome

1. Political parties
2. Interest groups
3. Administrative capacities
4. Farming systems
5. Agricultural policy paradigms

Policy ambition of EU agri-environmental schemes

Eco-schemes

&

AECMs

RESULTS

- **No single condition** is sufficient nor necessary, only combination of conditions (pathways)
- **5 specific pathways for AECMs** and **3 for Eco-schemes** leading policy ambition
- **Member States** tend to **concentrate policy ambition** in one instrument

Key messages

1. Policy level and farm level are linked, and this can be seen through the governance model linking its actors
2. In the EU coexists a diversity of governance models, under a multi-level framework
3. Difference governance factors affects environmental performance
4. **Diversity of path in pursuing and achieving environmental objectives**

Power as reoccurring issue



What is the role of power in shaping governance?

Power dynamics as reoccurring issue

- Power dynamics across **agriculture** and **environmental actors**
- Power dynamics → unbalanced **mandate** and **decision-making** power
- Power-related barriers → **external pressures** from agricultural **lobbying**
- Power dynamics different **at design** and **implementation**

Ambio 2025, 54:1867–1884
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-025-02182-0>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A governance perspective on agri-environmental schemes: Actors, roles, and barriers

Diana Borniotto , Clémentine Antier , Philippe V. Baret

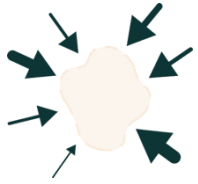


Diversity of agri-environmental governance and potential impacts on environmental performance – a systematic review

Diana Borniotto , Philippe V. Baret

SYTRA, Earth and Life Institute, UCLouvain, Croix du Sud 2/ 17.05.14, Louvain-La-Neuve, 1348, Belgium

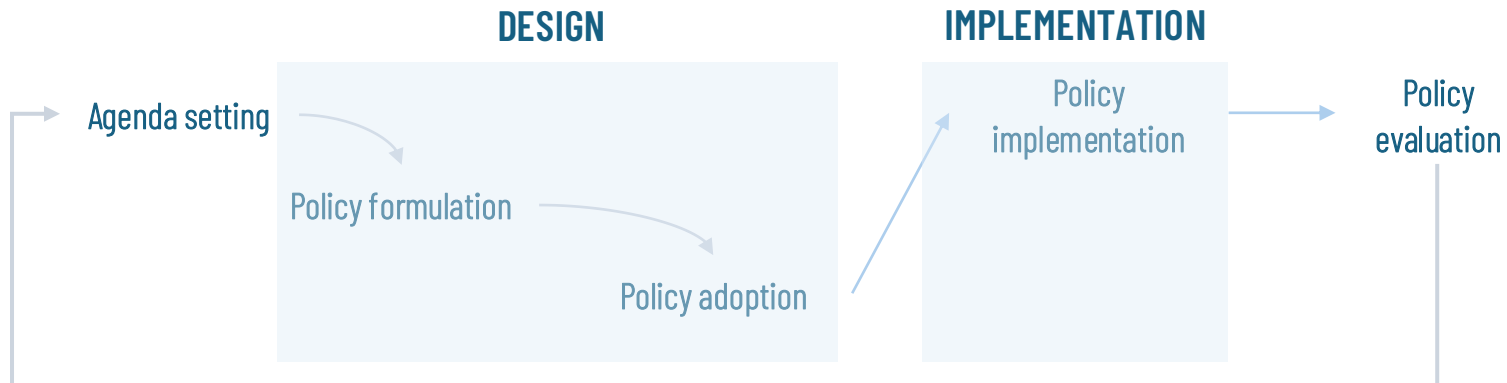
Power at design and implementation

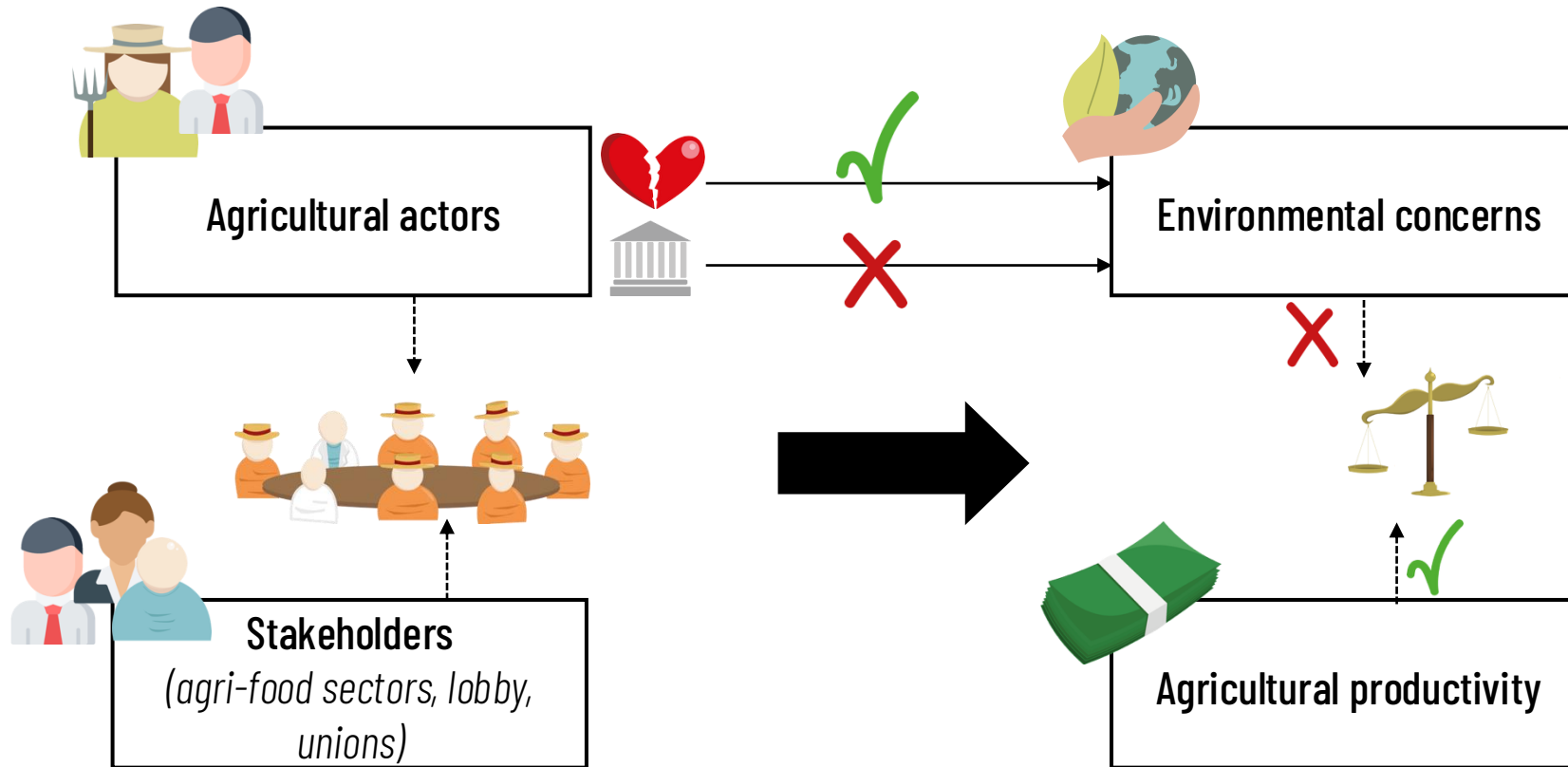


Design is highly sensitive and frequent target of lobbying and advocacy



Implementation power is driven by the institutional setting itself





Key messages

1. Policy level and farm level are linked, and this can be seen through the governance model linking its actors
2. In the EU coexists a diversity of governance models, under a multi-level framework
3. Difference governance factors affects environmental performance
4. Diversity of path in pursuing and achieving environmental objectives
5. **There exists power dynamics actors composing governance and influential external actors which affects how environmental objectives are translated in actions**

To bring it all together

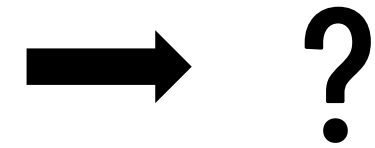
**Multi-level
governance**

Diversity
*(actors, models,
pathways)*

**Environmental
ambition and
performance**

Power

And tomorrow ?



The future of EU agri-environmental policy

- EU currently discussing new EU budget and the new CAP reform (post-2027)
- Main changes for agri-environment:
 1. **New EU governance frame:** agricultural policy within a bundled policy approach under common budget (NRP plans)
 2. **Greater flexibility:** stronger decision-making at MS level
 3. **Fiscal constraints:** prioritization across EU objectives (i.e. security, energy, industry)
 4. **Budget shift:** no ring-fence for the agri-environment; more MS budget contribution
 5. **Changing EU rules:** incentive approach to agri-environment

Agri-environmental debate

- Focus on content – which measure, how much budget, targets
- Focus on governance – who designs, who implements how power is shared
- If environmental actors only consulted
- Coordination amongst level is weak
- Decisions only in the hand of few

→ even the best-design measure will struggle to deliver ←

Main message of the PhD

Better environmental outcomes start with better governance: *reflecting* and *acting* on **who decides, how, and with whom**

This PhD has been funded by:



Thank you for your attention!

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transition of
food systems

WWW.SYTRA.BE

*Thanks to **Céline Chevalier** for the
figures in this presentation and
Charlotte Bens for the flyer*



UCLouvain

Governance levers and potential actions

<i>Thematic</i>	<i>PhD insights</i>	<i>Governance levers</i>	<i>Concrete actions</i>
Level	• Policy level and farm level are linked through governance • Agri-environment policy has multi-level framework	• Increase coordination across levels • Foster coherency across levels	1. Ring-fence fund fund for administrative coordination in NRPP budget envelop 2. Managing authority mandate to inter-institutional committee
Diversity	• Diversity of governance models • Diversity of pathways to environmental objectives	• Allow for flexibility within the compass of EU value added	3. Rebalance EU and MS co-fund to ensure EU value added on environment 4. EU ring-fence on agri-environment
Actors	• Diversity of actors • Different roles • Unbalances roles and actor types	• Increase diversity of actors • Redistribute mandate across agriculture and environmental actors	5. Ensure co-funding with regional actors with environmental statutory obligations (e.g. water agencies) 6. Formal design mandate to environmental institutions (at EU, national and regional levels)
Power	• Power shapes agri and env • Power from within and power from outside	• Monitoring governance • Increase transparency	7. Governance indicators 8. Monitoring committee for CAP design phase