At the Halfway-Point of the 2030 Agenda: When Global Norms Meet Local Realities

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Abstract

This research explores the process of the localization of global norms at national and subnational levels of government. With a point of departure in the United Nations' vision of Transforming Our World through its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we investigate the efforts of the different governmental levels in two structurally similar and well-performing countries, Denmark and New Zealand, to modify the universal scope of the global norm to resonate in their respective areas of influence; be that nationally, regionally, or locally. The findings reveal the influence the given local context and engagement of the governing body have on how a global norm is modified and its impact on local beliefs and practices. Moreover, the importance of the visibility of United Nations-specific symbols, themes, and formulations is discussed as the assessment of the local level cases reveals that Best Cases do, in fact, directly engage with the global representation of the norm while Worst Cases present a more diluted relationship with said aspects. Finally, the study concludes that the two countries and their respective subnational levels of government, which may be considered similar based on structural considerations, have significantly different approaches to localizing the global norm that the United Nations seeks to diffuse through its 2030 Agenda. Hence, efforts by all countries and at multiple levels of government are crucial to achieving universal success of the 2030 Agenda.

List of Abbreviations

CCC - Christchurch City Council

EU - European Union

ICC - Invercargill City Council

IO - International Organization

LGA - Local Government Act

LTP - Long Term Plan

MDG - Millennium Development Goal

MLG - Multi-level Governance

NI - New Institutionalism

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SD - Sustainable Development

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

SI - Sociological Institutionalism

TCDC - Thames-Coromandel District Council

UHCC - Upper Hutt City Council

UN - United Nations

UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

VNR - Voluntary National Review

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1. Introduction

The year of 2022 marks the halfway point of *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (henceforth, 2030 Agenda) and its 17 defined Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 concomitant Targets. These Goals, a refinement of the preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDG), were designed to "[...] stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet" (United Nations, 2015, Preamble section). While progress reports continue to surface and detail the progress of the participating nation-states, this study goes a step further to examine the localization of the SDGs at the local governmental levels; particularly, in a select number of regions and municipal governments in the Kingdom of Denmark (henceforth, Denmark) and Aotearoa New Zealand (henceforth, New Zealand).

Our research is grounded in the argument that sustainable development (SD) and the SDGs are global initiatives that must be localized to succeed (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Therefore, based on a structure of multi-level governance (MLG), the study explores how the norms established by the United Nations (UN) are diffused and subsequently modified at the local levels. We understand that the UN cannot push an agenda without establishing norms and facilitating their localization in the member states. Therefore, we develop a theoretical framework drawing on the constructivist paradigm, new institutionalism (NI) and its sub-branch of sociological institutionalism (SI), and norm localization theory to analyze 19 local governments that can function as proxies for other cases at their respective levels of government.

The local levels of government and their respective local, regional, and national contexts are the focal points of our analysis. Accordingly, we set out to investigate whether two 'best case' and 'most similar case' nations (New Zealand and Denmark) have adopted policies, plans, or strategies in favor of the UN's 2030 Agenda. Derived from the material, we seek to identify the processes the global norm went through in its localization and how these affect the local implementation. These findings will aid us in our quest to answer our research question: *How are the SDGs and themes of the 2030 Agenda localized at the local governmental levels in Denmark and New Zealand?*

To clarify, our understanding of 'local levels' rests on our reliance on the methodological use of MLG to structure our research, i.e., national, regional, and municipal levels of government. Moreover, when we articulate the "localization of the 2030 Agenda," we mean the 2030 Agenda that holds SDGs as its vital tool to achieve the overall aim and themes of the

Agenda. Finally, when speaking of the global norm throughout our research, we refer to the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs, the three pillars of SD, and other aspects that make up the Agenda, as will be elaborated on throughout our research. Hence, we hold that, collectively, these aspects make up the collective norm that the UN seeks to diffuse and that, individually, these elements help reinforce the presence of the norm.

2. Literature Review

In searching for literature to enlighten us on existing literature within the field of research we engage with, the following keywords guided us: *Constructivism, sociological institutionalism, norm localization, sustainable development,* and *multi-level governance*. Our preliminary research is rooted in the scholarly databases made available by Aalborg University, including the online platform of Aalborg University's library (AUB) and Google Scholar.

At the beginning of our research, we found our point of departure in the study on global governance through goal-setting by Biermann, Kanie, and Kim (2017). They argue that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are a new and intriguing global initiative within SD and environmental policy. However, given the Agenda's non-binding legal nature, it has a weak institutional arrangement at the intergovernmental level. Also, it grants leeway for national governments to determine their own ambition, that is, selecting and modifying the SDGs (Goals, Targets, and Indicators). Their findings embarked our journey towards studying how the SDGs are implemented (localized) among nations we believe should have coherent and level-deep localization of the SDGs. Hence, states that perform relatively well on the SDG Index are committed to the UN as an international organization (IO) for setting international law and agendas and view themselves as pioneers for SD.

In the late 1980s, Nicholas Onuf was one of the first international relations scholars to argue that everything is socially constructed, even power politics (Onuf, 1989). Hence, he challenged the general considerations of realism and liberalism in international relations. Following this, Alexander Wendt (1992) established an argument that would substantiate liberalism's assertion that IOs can transform state identity and interests by critically examining realist perspectives on anarchy (pp. 394-195). Hence, Wendt (1992) presented his constructivist argument that stressed the influence of institutions in international relations and that the core realist elements of anarchy, self-help, and power politics are socially constructed (p 395). More recent authors, such as Theys (2017) and Barnett (2017), follow constructivism's

epistemological and ontological understandings and present various concepts that stem from constructivism's social approach to international relations.

One of the vital concepts in constructivism is norms; how these affect, diffuse, and develop in international relations. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) provide one of the well-known theories of norm diffusion in international relations, i.e., the norm life cycle theory. Similarly, Zwingel (2012) argues that global norms travel through various constellations in their diffusion from the international to the national level. Given that our research focuses on the local level, we draw upon Archarya's (2004) norm localization theory as we seek to uncover the processes a global norm goes through in its journey down to the local governmental levels. Engberg-Pedersen and Fejerskov's (2021) elaboration on the engagement with global norms for states and actors (in policymaking) provided key notions for our research. They focused on the difficulties of diffusing the SDGs. They question the challenges of spreading global norms worldwide and find their answer using norm engagement considerations. First, they characterize the SDGs as prescriptive norms; hence, they are "[...] understood as *acknowledged, but not necessarily accepted, understandings of collective ambitions*" (Fejerskov, 2019, as cited in Engberg-Pedersen and Fejerskov, 2021, p. 168; emphasis in original). Their situated approach to norm engagement stresses that norms face a discontinuous transformation in their diffusion. The norms are shaped by actors and contexts and are not fixed structures (ibid., p. 169). Thus, the global norms are either rejected or modified to local contexts, which aligns with Acharya's (2004) localization process arguments. Consequently, we follow Acharya (2004) and Engberg-Pedersen and Fejerskov's (2021) assertions that global norms are objects of interpretation rather than continued homogenization, as they do not spread unaffected by social conditions. Instead, they face various interpretations depending on the actors and the contexts they face.

Hall and Taylor (1996) set out to make sense of the different analytical approaches to new institutionalism by focusing on the two aspects they deem fundamental to institutional analysis: "[...] how to construe the relationship between institutions and behavior and how to explain the process whereby institutions originate or change" (p. 937). Thus, this article helps shape our theoretical approach to our research subject by providing key notions for institutional change, expansion, or consistency. Additionally, Finnemore (1996) engages in a presentation and assessment of sociological institutionalism to emphasize the importance of culture and norms in world politics and social structures. Her work illustrates how sociological institutionalism complements constructivism and, thus, provides valuable insight to form the theoretical framework of this thesis. In fact, she argues that "[…] sociology's institutionalism

provides a much richer and more detailed theoretical framework than has constructivism. Sociologists specify the substantive content of social structure. They do more than argue that social structure matters; they tell us what the social structure is [...]" (Finnemore, 1996, p. 327); namely, seeing norms and culture as a social structure that is global and all-encompassing. Nevertheless, Finnemore's take on sociological institutionalism also enlightens us on the main critique of the theory, that is, its neglect of agency. Therefore, combining this theoretical perspective with norm localization theory is essential to address agency in the diffusion of global norms.

Lanshina et al. (2019) contributed to the research on the localization of SDGs among what is considered 'the pioneers for SD'. They conclude that even the top 10 leading countries on the SDG Index face differences in their implementation and localization of the SDGs at the national level, stressing the significance of examining 'most similar' and 'best cases' for the localization of the SDGs. Similarly, Okitasari and Katramiz (2022) examine the impact of SDGs, as a normative tool, on National Development Plans. Drawing on norm localization theory, they argue that while the SDGs have not fundamentally changed the dominant development paradigms of states, they have come to offer alternatives and flexibility for norm translation into domestic traditional normative frameworks to create space for SD. Hence, they provide insight into the relationships between, and impact of, global goals in shaping domestic policy, in this case with a focus on national development plans, highlighting the broad language as an advantage for selective framing and adaptation to cater to different domestic audiences. Their findings further substantiate the relevance of investigating the localization process of global norms.

Furthermore, as we investigate the localization of the SDGs, we retain our focus on the local level of government, that is, municipalities. Following the research of Oosterhof (2018), Hartley (2019), Orozco et al. (2021), Croese et al. (2021), and Betsill and Bulkeley (2006), we stress that the local level and an MLG approach hold crucial roles in the success of the 2030 Agenda. Oosterhof (2018) concludes that the role of regional and local governments, communities, and stakeholders is vital for the success of the 2030 Agenda, in particular, to match the Leave No One Behind-pledge of the Agenda. Also, for the MLG framework, strong vertical dialogue and collaboration are necessary to localize and align the SDGs nationally. Similarly, Croese et al. (2021) argue for the importance of a multi-level approach to implement the SDGs in states effectively. This follows their critique of a lack of national guidance, which then necessitates action at subnational levels. We found similar arguments made by Hartley

(2019) and Orozco et al. (2021), thus, signifying a trend within the field that reinforces the importance of local action, participation, and ownership, and recognizes the MLG structure.

Another interesting point from Betsill and Bulkeley's (2006) research is their correlation between MLG and global governance. They assert that some international relations theories fail to grasp how global governance can occur through processes and institutions operating at various levels, involving different actors, and holding distinct authority. Thus, they conclude that the MLG framework provides significant concepts to address the connections between global, national, and local levels and state and non-state actors. Furthermore, the framework creates the conceptual space to consider the role of subnational governments in global governance. Hence, as our point of interest stems from how the UN governs the SDGs when it holds no legal power over nations in global politics, we found it interesting to consider the connection between global governance and the local governmental levels through the MLG approach.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter presents our theoretical framework, consisting of the constructivist paradigm, NI and SI, and norm localization theory. The constructivist paradigm functions as the frame and scope of our research, as it provides the fundamental world understanding for our thesis. NI and SI operate as theoretical perspectives that enable us to conceptualize how institutions are transferred to actors through cultural norms that come to influence their frames of meaning. Lastly, norm localization theory functions as the leading theory to guide the analysis of our research, as we aim to uncover how the SDGs and the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda localize at the local governmental levels in Denmark and New Zealand; hence, move from the global to the local.

3.1 Constructivist Paradigm

With its function as the frame of our research, the theoretical considerations of constructivism conceptualize our world understanding and provide the paradigm for our theoretical framework. Moreover, constructivism enables us to understand how states act in global politics and interact with IO in a socially constructed world. Thus, when we refer to the term 'actor', we refer to states and national governments, and local governmental institutions at the subnational levels, as these are the core of our research.

As a relatively new theory in international relations, constructivism is a paradigm that enables one to capture crucial features of global politics, which previous dominant international relations theories could not grasp (Barnett, 2017, p. 145). The constructivist paradigm views the world and everything it comprises as socially constructed; here, elements such as norms, identity, actors, and agency play crucial roles in the structure and change in global politics (Theys, 2017, p. 36; Barnett, 2017, p. 145).

Norms and rules are essential elements of the constructivist paradigm. Here, norms have two primary varieties: *Regulative rules*, which "[…] regulate already existing activities […]" and, thereby, form the rules of the game (Barnett, 2017, p. 148; Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2017, p. 531). *Constitutive rules* "[…] define the game and its activities […]" (Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2017, p. 531). Thus, *constitutive rules* form the identities and interests of the actors and establish what is considered legitimate action, which helps the actors operate legitimately (ibid.). Note that these rules are considered normative, not static; thus, they can be revised to fit new situations (Barnett, 2017, p. 149). Moreover, norms hold a particular form of power in constructivism as they "[…] guide and constitute state identities and interests" (ibid.). In line with these two distinctions, constructivism grants the concept of legitimacy a significant effect on how actors act. Following constructivism, "[…] all actors crave legitimacy, the belief that they are acting according to and pursuing the values of the broader international community […]" (ibid.). Still, they act and have such considerations because of their identity and interests (ibid.). Constructivists identify a direct relationship between an actor's legitimacy and the costs of an action. More legitimacy equals more ease in establishing cooperation, whereas less legitimacy equals more costly actions (ibid.). Furthermore, two concepts parallel the previous two distinctions of norms and rules. First, the *logic of consequence* holds action up against its anticipated costs and benefits. In contrast, the *logic of appropriateness*, which dominates constructivist thinking, holds action up against whether it is considered legitimate and morally correct (ibid., p. 150). These theoretical considerations enable us to provide explanations for how the local governments in New Zealand and Denmark localize the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Given that constructivism builds the frame and world understanding of our thesis, we find it crucial to consider its conceptualization of the state as an actor in the international realm. Here, we found that a state acts based on obtaining legitimacy and following internationally

established norms and rules. While we recognize this assumption of state action, we expand the constructivist conceptualizations with considerations from neoliberalism. We mix the two conceptualizations as we follow Zwingel's (2012) assertion that all states do not have the same motivation to act a certain way (p. 117). In short, neoliberalism builds on a centrality perspective of the state in the international system, which indicates that the state is the primary actor in the system (Dunne, 2017, p. 123; Park, 2017, p. 323). Moreover, the international system is structured by anarchy, meaning a supranational government is absent (ibid.). When conceptualizing the state, neoliberals assert that a state can participate in international cooperation if the gains are evenly shared (Dunne, 2017, p. 123). Hence, neoliberalism assumes a state officially accepts or ratifies international norms and agreements without implementing them because the state solely seeks to increase its international legitimacy to gain from it (Zwingel, 2012, p. 117). By combining the constructivist and neoliberal theoretical conceptualizations of the state, we argue that some states partake in international cooperation because they seek to become legitimate and respectable members of the international community; also, they believe in international cooperation above all (ibid.). Whereas other states might agree that international cooperation is a good thing, there still needs to be equal gains for everyone; also, the state's individual interests can be more important than those of the international community.

Having visited some of the core concepts that make up the constructivist paradigm and expanding our conceptualization of the state, we turn to the main focus of constructivism, investigating how the world coheres. That is, "[…] how normative structures construct the identities and interests of actors, and how actors are rule-following […]" (ibid., p. 153).

Throughout history, various norms and rules have been established internationally, and certain courses of action that are now considered illegitimate were in their time deemed legitimate. For example, the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 established state sovereignty and the norm of non-interference; however, in recent decades, processes challenged the norm of non-interference and suggested how state sovereignty is conditional (ibid.). Here, the 'responsibility to protect'-framework, developed by the UN, was one of the main forces behind these new considerations for international norms and rules (Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2017, p. 545). Furthermore, the coherence of the world today is described as homogenous regarding global politics (Barnett, 2017, p. 153). Here, international institutions hold a central role in

establishing norms, rules, and values of the international realm and the relations between states (ibid.). The homogenization lies in "[…] the tendency of states to organize their domestic and international lives […]" (ibid.) similarly and the increasing acceptance of the international norms and rules established by IOs (ibid.).

There are three concepts to study global change and transformation in constructivism: *norm diffusion, socialization,* and *the internationalization and institutionalization of norms*. *Norm diffusion* implies that certain practices, models, beliefs, norms, or strategies spread within a population (Barnett, 2017, p. 153). In an international context, *norm diffusion* can be understood as norms or values held by IOs spread to the states and then further down the subnational levels (ibid.).

Constructivism considers the concept of *socialization* when seeking to explain how actors change their identity and interests to conform with those of a group of like-minded actors (ibid., p. 154). According to Johnston (2008), one place to uncover this socialization is the relations between states and national and local governmental institutions and IOs, where various mechanisms produce *socialization* (as cited in ibid.).

Last, we turn to the concept of *internationalization* and *institutionalization of norms*. Constructivism views norms as "[…] standards of appropriate [behavior] for actors […]" (ibid.). In our current international order, norms of trade, human rights, military intervention, humanitarianism, citizenship, and environment have been established by IOs and international institutions formed by states (ibid.). These norms serve not solely as regulation of how the states act; they also illustrate states' identities (how they define themselves) and their interests (ibid.). Moreover, in the constructivist paradigm, norms function as constraints for actors' action and behavior; for example, 'civilized' states are expected to settle differences through diplomacy and not violence because violence infringes how 'civilized' states are expected to act according to international norms (ibid.).

As a concluding point, constructivism grants the international realm great power in establishing conventions and norms, which the actors follow. Moreover, with constructivism as our theoretical paradigm, we perceive Denmark and New Zealand as states that should adhere to the norms established by the UN and, in our case, adopt plans or strategies for the SDGs at all governmental levels to fulfill the 2030 Agenda.

3.2 New Institutionalism

The theory of new institutionalism (NI) emerged and gained legitimacy in the mid-1980s to counter what these scholars considered an overemphasis on agency without structure by bringing institutions to the forefront of analysis (Schmidt, 2008). Thus, NI is concerned with identifying "[...] the role that institutions play in the determination of social and political outcomes" (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 936). Scholars of NI theory concern themselves with the nature of institutions, processes of institutional change, and the dynamic of structure-agency relationships (Lecours, 2005). The theory, then, incorporates the tension of this agency-structure relation and sees "[...] the social environment as affecting the behaviors and practices and ideas of people and groups now conceived as bounded, purposive and sovereign actors" (Meyer, 2008, p. 790).

A concept from new institutionalism to consider is that of *formal* and *informal institutions*, as presented by Ingram and Silverman (2002). A *formal institution* is contracts or laws, while an *informal institution* refers to norms (pp. 24-25). Drawing on Nickerson and Zenger (2002), Ingram and Silverman (2002) note that *formal institutions* can help foster normative changes (i.e., the introduction of *informal institutions*) throughout organizational structures. At the same time, the spread of *informal institutions* may foster an environment that necessitates changes to the *formal institutions*.

In their 1996 article, Hall and Taylor account for three different analytical approaches to NI based on the rationale that said theory "[...] does not constitute a unified body of thought" (p. 936). The different approaches identified have been named historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism (ibid.). Subsequently, a fourth analytical approach to NI has emerged and been recognized within the field, namely discursive institutionalism.

In line with the scope of our research, the focus will be on the sociological approach to new institutionalism. This will aid us in the research to identify how governmental institutions, specifically on the local level, engage with the UN's presentation of the SDGs and generate a sense of purpose for said Goals.

3.2.1 Sociological Institutionalism

The sociological school of new institutionalism emerged from the subfield of organizational studies in the late 1970s to argue that institutional forms, procedures, and symbols should be seen as culturally-specific practices (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Following Martha Finnemore, "[t]hese world cultural rules constitute actors - including states, organizations, and individuals - and define legitimate or desirable goals for them to pursue. World cultural norms also produce organizational and behavioral similarities across the globe" (1996, p. 326). Hence, SI provides an insight into why actors engage with institutions and how said practices are diffused and reflected in similarities in behavior caused by a common global culture (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Finnemore, 1996).

Based on this point of departure, sociological institutionalists have a broader perception of institutions than political scientists, as the former's definition overlaps the otherwise divided concepts of 'institutions' and 'culture'. Hence, institutions are not just made up of "[...] formal rules, procedures and norms," as per the political scientific understanding, but also of "[...] symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that provide the 'frames of meaning' guiding human action" (ibid.).

The sociological institutionalist perception of institutions as influencers of an actor's behavior and actions demonstrates constructivism's influence on this theoretical perspective. Hall and Taylor (1996) comment on this, arguing that "[...] institutions are said to provide the very terms through which meaning is assigned in social life" (p. 948). In this way, institutions are deemed crucial in unfolding the social world by affecting the basic preferences of social actors and their identities. When acting in accordance with the social convention, actors simultaneously help reinforce the convention to which they are adhering. Thus, sociological institutionalists characterize the relationship between institutions and social actors as 'highly-interactive' and 'mutually-constitutive' (ibid.). Although, for this to happen, any given norm must be embraced and perceived as legitimate. SI views the origin and change of institutional practices through the lens of *social legitimacy*. That is, institutions will embrace a particular form or practice if and when it is deemed appropriate or positively regarded in a broader cultural environment; hence, institutions form cultural norms following the *logic of appropriateness* (Hall & Taylor, 1996).

3.3 Norm Localization

Following Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), we define 'norms' as "[…] a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (p. 891). We rely on the generally agreed definition; however, we also turn to the language of 'institutions' to accommodate our research. The language of 'institutions' stresses that behavioral rules are structured together and interrelated, for example, as a "[…] collection of practices and rules" (ibid.). Hence, we identify norms as an agreed-upon standards of behavior by a collection of actors in an IO. These norms can cascade down to the national and local levels of these actors.

Furthermore, norms are both regulative and evaluative (or prescriptive), which means that they "[…] order and constrain behavior" and have a "[…] quality of 'oughtness' that sets norms apart from other kinds of rules" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). As norms hold both qualities, the intersubjective and the evaluative dimensions are crucial to consider (ibid.). These dimensions make norms capable of operating as rules in the global political setting and the national or local political settings. We must be able to establish what appropriate behavior is by referencing it to the evaluation by society; for example, norm-breaking behavior is recognized because it "[…] generates disapproval or stigma […]" (ibid., p. 892). Moreover, we identify norms as holding a shared moral assessment, as they are defined by a collection of actors, and they justify certain actions (ibid.).

Turning to our leading theory, Amitav Acharya (2004) builds a dynamic theory on norm localization, i.e., how a norm travels from the global to the local and whether it is accepted or rejected. Acharya's norm localization theory enables us to reveal how global norms travel from the UN down to the local governmental levels in New Zealand and Denmark and how the governmental institutions hold the agency in the congruence-building process (Acharya, 2004, p. 240).

First, Acharya (2004) defines 'localization' as "[...] the active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors" (p. 245). The localization results in the norm developing compatibility with local practices and beliefs (ibid.). The theory is progressive, as it reshapes existing local practices and beliefs and foreign ideas (norms) in the given local context (ibid., p. 252). Thereby, the foreign ideas and the local practices and beliefs gradually blend to build congruence (ibid.).

Following norm localization theory, we ascribe local actors, such as governments at the subnational levels, agency in the localization of a norm (Acharya, 2004, p. 249). In contrast with other norm theories, the localization perspective understands norm entrepreneurship as coming from 'insider proponents' (ibid.). Hence, the actors working for the localization of a norm are local; their primary commitment is to "[...] localize a normative order [...] and to legitimize and enhance that order by building congruence with outside ideas" (ibid.). Furthermore, the localization perspective acknowledges that both local and foreign actors can undertake the spreading of a global norm. However, it is stressed that foreign actors will achieve more success in their localization if they act through local agents and not solely independently (ibid.).

Another contrast norm localization theory poses to other norm diffusion theories is that it distances itself from 'adaptation'. Adaptation is usually used when explaining the process of an actor accepting (or adapting) to a norm (ibid., p. 250). However, Acharya (2004) emphasizes that adaptation is too generic and that her term 'localization' has more specific features (ibid.). From the localization perspective, local actors hold the agency in seeking change and localizing norms. Also, the forms the new norms take in the local sphere depend on the existing local beliefs (ibid.). In addition, Acharya (2004) argues that the localization is voluntary; thus, the norm localization and change are likely to be more enduring than an adaptation that holds an element of force on the target audience (p. 251). Consequently, we follow Acharya's (2004) understanding of the norm change and acceptance process and recognize that actors hold power in accepting norms; i.e., adapting to global norms established by IOs is not just a presumed state of affairs that actors blindly do.

The localization of a norm occurs when an actor "[...] responds to a foreign idea by functional or membership expansion and creates new policy instruments to pursue its new tasks or goals without supplanting its original goals and *institutional* arrangements" (ibid., p. 253; emphasis in original). That is, by "[...] perform[ing] acts of selection, borrowing, and modification in accordance with a preexisting normative framework to build congruence between that and emerging global norms" (p. 269). Thus, in the process of acceptance (localization), a foreign norm is locally modified before it is localized (ibid.). Still, the existing local practices and beliefs can also be modified while the institutional model and norm hierarchy remain (ibid.). Consequently, when localized, a locally modified foreign norm enters

the norm hierarchy and institutional model without preceding the existing norms (ibid.). However, neither the modification of a foreign norm nor the local practices and beliefs must end up in one supplanting the other in the localization process, as they need to build congruence.

To summarize, Acharya's (2004) norm localization theory elaborates on existing theories of international norm diffusion with a perspective that addresses local actors' agency in modifying a global norm to build congruence with the local practices and beliefs. Thus, we assert that the most crucial part of the localization process is that the global norm faces modification, though not to the extent that the local beliefs and practices supplant it. Moreover, the theoretical perspective allows us to allocate the agency to the governmental institutions and capture how they localize the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda in their policies, plans, or strategies.

4. Methodology

The following chapter presents the methodology for our thesis. We begin by briefly introducing constructivism as a philosophy of science. Then we introduce the method of our case study and reveal our case selection process. The following section elaborates on our data retrieval, types, and uses. The last part of this chapter presents the analytical tools derived from our theory and introduces the MLG method for structuring our analysis. Please note that we did not give limitations a separate section; instead, we reflected on our limitations throughout the chapter.

4.1 Constructivist Philosophy of Science

The fundamental idea of constructivism, as a scientific method, is that everything we know as 'real' or 'true' can be different (Schmidt, 2022, p. 3). Constructivism has a critical perspective on what we know as societal truths, as it strives to deconstruct and criticize these to establish other ways to think about reality and act in the world (ibid.). Hence, research conducted in the constructivist paradigm seeks to uncover the social influences our construction of reality and the world are subject to. More so, to contest these influences or shed light on how such influences affect our perception.

The two significant perspectives of constructivism in science are epistemological and ontological (ibid., p. 1). The epistemological perspective stresses that one's perception and knowledge are socially constructed, indicating that they are a product of one's culture, history,

and society (ibid.). Here, knowledge and perception of the world are produced and reproduced continuously through interactions, where certain actions and language are attributed as 'natural' and others as 'unnatural' (not socially acceptable) (ibid.). The ontological perspective concerns the nature of reality (Theys, 2017, p. 36). There are two versions of the ontological perspective, a radical, where the physical reality is socially constructed, and a limited, where the social world is socially constructed, while the physical world (nature) is not (Schmidt, 2022, p. 2). Our research operates in a combination of the epistemological and limited ontological constructivist perspectives. We find that both perspectives provide a clear understanding of the world[1].

Furthermore, we consider the context of our cases when analyzing the localization of the norms, as the contexts hold a significant role in how norms are received and perceived (Schmidt, 2022, p. 3). Wendt (1995) also emphasizes how meaningful the context is for how we understand reality (as cited in Theys, 2017, pp. 36-37). As a scientific method, constructivism stresses that using official political documents is vital for grasping the societal culture and context in which one's study resides (Schmidt, 2022, p. 3). Therefore, part of the primary data we use for our analysis is policy papers and political strategies and plans, which can provide us with an inside perspective of the societal culture that affects the context and outcomes.

4.2 Comparative Case Study

Our case design involves mapping and comparing the localization processes of the SDGs at 20 national and subnational governmental levels in New Zealand and Denmark. We compare of the 20 cases (national, regional, and local levels) to map the similarities and differences to potentially provide general patterns of Denmark and New Zealand's localization processes of the SDGs and the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda.

We chose Denmark and New Zealand based on the 'most similar' and 'best case' case designs. The 10 municipalities were selected solely on a 'most similar' case design basis regarding the number of citizens. Our case selection process is elaborated further in section 4.2.1. A 'most similar' case design entails comparing similar cases where the absence or

[1] Wendt (1995) offers a significant example of how reality is socially constructed in his statement "[...] that 500 British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the United States than five North Korean nuclear weapons" (as cited in Theys, 2017, p. 36). Wendt's example clearly illustrates that it is not the material structure, but rather the ideational structure that causes such an understanding of states holding nuclear weapons (ibid.). Here, the ideational structure is explained as "[...] the meaning given to the material structure [...]", which is the nuclear weapons (ibid.).

presence of a dependent variable is explained by the independent variables uncovered in the case comparison (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, n.d., para. 2). In the 'best case' case design, cases selected for comparison are assumed to be the most optimal cases for the given research theme (Bryman, 2004). In short, Denmark and New Zealand are 'most similar' and 'best cases' because both states are Western liberal democracies, officially committed to the UN's 2030 Agenda, and assumed to have optimal dispositions for adopting plans or strategies for the SDGs.

First, with the comparative case design, we aim to uncover the differences and similarities in the localization processes of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda between the municipalities, regions, and national governments in each nation. The findings are then compared to uncover intriguing instances at the different levels, which are subsequently subject to further analysis. Second, our findings are used to compare all levels of government in Denmark and New Zealand, drawing on our theoretical framework and context aspects for each nation to substantiate our analytical findings.

Furthermore, we do not necessarily use the comparative design of our research to identify contrasts, as we selected the two states based on their similarities. We acknowledge that the usual way to select cases for a comparative study is based on the criterion of contrast (Bryman, 2004, p. 53). Instead, we aim to uncover the similarities and differences in how the local governmental levels in New Zealand and Denmark adopt plans or strategies that foster SD in accordance with the global norm. By comparing the selected cases in Denmark to the cases from New Zealand, we expect to detect similar or different patterns in the MLG structure and the localization of the global norm (refer to sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). More specifically, our comparative case study can be categorized as an exemplifying case, which is a case that provides a suitable context for specific research questions to be answered (Bryman, 2004, p, 51). Thus, our research seeks to exemplify how the global norm is localized at the local governmental levels in Denmark and New Zealand by examining the governance and institutional structures and the norm localization of the local cases.

One could argue that another way to conduct the comparative study would be to select a developed state like New Zealand or Denmark and then compare it to a developing state. This would be expected to illustrate contrasts in the MLG framework, institutional structures, and norm localization; also, the contexts would vary greatly, which would indicate analytical and theoretical findings that contrast each other. Hence, in such a comparative study, the findings would emphasize the contrasts between a developed nation and a developing nation in localizing the global norm by adopting plans or strategies for the 2030 Agenda. In contrast, by

having a ‘most similar’ case design, we can elaborate more thoroughly on variables that indicate differences in our comparison of the cases since we can take certain similar factors for granted in our analysis (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 304).

We hold the assumption that states like New Zealand and Denmark, given their official commitment to the 2030 Agenda and status as developed Western democratic nations with optimal dispositions (refer to section 4.2.1), should, at this point, have localized the global norm to fulfill the Agenda. Hence, we consider Denmark and New Zealand as ‘best cases’ for localizing the SDGs. The implications that follow our ‘best case’ design is that we might be wrong in our assumption; our research might indicate that Denmark and New Zealand have not localized the global norm to the extent we expect. This implication made us choose to investigate ‘best cases’, because we are interested in whether states that have the optimal dispositions and are committed to the Agenda actually localize the SDGs by the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, another implication is that if developed states have not localized the global norm, how can one expect developing nations to do so. Thus, we think that the focus on developing countries in research related to this field (refer to Chapter 2) is significant. However, it is equally vital to investigate how developed nations are doing in localizing the 2030 Agenda. Still, our assumption that resources and political systems/agendas are tied together in progress on SD can be faulty (as discussed in section 4.2.1). Some developing countries might be more committed than developed nations to localizing the global norm since they would be able to develop sustainably. Moreover, developing nations are typically subject to aid programs from developed nations, and such programs could potentially put developing nations ahead of developed ones.

Following Bryman (2004), we stress that our findings and conclusions cannot be generalized since we work with a case study (p. 52). However, we do not seek to provide a generalization of all Western nations with optimal dispositions and official commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Instead, we seek to provide detailed research of how the SDGs and the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda localize at the local governmental levels in Denmark and New Zealand to map the similarities and differences in the process.

4.2.1 Case Selection

As we follow the ‘most similar’ case design, we selected Denmark and New Zealand based on their demographic similarities and the assumption that whether they localized the global norm depends on independent variables, which we will reveal in our analysis. Still, for the selection

of the nations, we diverted from choosing the most similar in some aspects; instead, we chose two nations that are similar on some variables but still have certain differences. One of these differences is geographical placement, which causes differences in relations and collaborations above the national level.

Our point of departure was to analyze Denmark since the current Government presents Denmark as a forerunner country on green energy and climate and attributes Denmark as holding a leading role in the world regarding SD (Regeringen, 2018, p. 4; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d., para. 1). Hence, we identify Denmark as a 'best case' because it is highly committed to SD and optimal for fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, such as a strong economy and resources (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2021, para. 2). Therefore, we were interested in investigating whether Denmark actively engages in localizing the global norm at the subnational levels of government. In addition, we find Denmark's political system and structure of the subnational governmental levels fitting and intriguing for the research we want to conduct.

We considered various countries in selecting the nation to compare Denmark with. The United Kingdom, the United States of America, and other Scandinavian nations were among these. However, we ruled out the US based on the notable difference in the political system; a federation compared to a unitary state. As MLG operates as the structure of our analysis, we would have to account for two contrasting political systems, which is not the focal point of our research. We want a similar political system, where we can take certain aspects for granted and focus on those that indicate differences. We decided against the United Kingdom based on population size since it is much larger than Denmark; thus, we found it challenging to select and compare municipalities based on the number of citizens. Moreover, the other Scandinavian states were ruled out because we wanted a similar case but still one where we expected there to be significant differences in the cultural context.

We found that New Zealand's Government promotes New Zealand as a country vastly invested in human rights and SD (Victoria University Wellington, 2019, p. 10). In addition, according to the OECD (2022), New Zealand has a strong economy and resources; hence, an optimal disposition for fulfilling the 2030 Agenda (para. 1-2). Consequently, we identify New Zealand as a 'best case'. The nation's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and other norms set by the UN, such as human rights, piqued our interest in whether the country actually engages in localizing the SDGs at the subnational levels. Also, New Zealand's political system is similar to Denmark's, which will fit with the focus we want to put on the localization processes in our research. Consequently, on the variables of government framing, commitment to the 2030

Agenda, optimal disposition, and political system, New Zealand can stand as a 'most similar' case to Denmark. In addition, the demographic similarities between Denmark and New Zealand further substantiate our choice rooted in the 'most similar' design (population size[2]).

Furthermore, according to the Sustainable Development Report by Sachs et al. (2021), Denmark is ranked 3rd and New Zealand 23rd on the 2021 SDG Index scores (p. 10). Based on this ranking, we decided that Denmark and New Zealand would be interesting nations to examine and compare, as they rank at the higher end of the scores. Still, there is a significant difference in their ranking, which we presume can make itself noticeable in our analysis.

We decided to focus our research on the local level; however, as we follow the MLG structure, the national and regional levels cannot be disregarded in our analysis since findings at these levels may impact beliefs and practices at the municipal level. Thus, we will examine the national Governments, regional authorities, and municipalities. New Zealand's equivalent to a municipality is a city or district council; hence, when we use the term 'municipality', we also account for said councils. Based on various research, as presented in our Literature Review (Chapter 2), local adoption of SD is as vital as national adoption for the success of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, the UN states that the adoption of the SDGs at the local level is essential for reaching the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015, para. 45). Therefore, we decided to place our main analytical focus at the local governmental levels.

For selecting the 10 municipalities in New Zealand and Denmark, we based our selection on numeric values in the form of the number of citizens in the municipalities. We ranked all municipalities in Denmark and all unitary (Auckland), district, and city councils in New Zealand according to the number of citizens as of 2022 for Denmark and 2021 for New Zealand (Appendix 1). Do note that the numbers from New Zealand were subject to rounding by New Zealand's official data agency, Stats NZ (2021). After the rankings, we decided to select municipalities based on four different tiers. The first tier is Major Urban Area, which equals 100,000 and above citizens. The second tier is Large Urban Area, which equals 50,000 to 100,000 citizens. The third tier is Medium Urban Area, which equals 35,000 to 50,000 citizens. The fourth tier is Small Urban Area, which equals 35,000 and down. Our tier ranking is inspired by Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand and Massey University's (n.d.) categorization of areas in New Zealand. We decided to make the criterion our own by basing it on the number of citizens and making it suitable for both Denmark and New Zealand. Within

[2] With an estimated population at 5,127,200, New Zealand is close to Denmark's at 5,873,420 (Estimated Population of NZ, 2022, para. 1; Befolkningstal, 2022, para. 1)

the five tiers, we selected the municipalities calculated to be the median (Appendix 1). Outside of the tier ranking, we decided to include the capitals by default since we view these as crucial local levels to consider, but we still wanted to include the major urban areas; i.e., the second-largest municipalities, to gain a broader local perspective.

Consequently, we analyze 10 municipalities in total. From Denmark: Copenhagen (Capital), Aarhus (Major Urban Area), Sønderborg (Large Urban Area), Ballerup (Medium Urban Area), and Rebild (Small Urban Area). From New Zealand: Auckland (Capital), Christchurch (Major Urban Area), Invercargill (Large Urban Area), Upper Hutt (Medium Urban Area), and Thames-Coromandel (Small Urban Area) (Appendix 1).

Based on our selection of these ten municipalities, we will include Region Hovedstaden, Region Midtjylland, Region Syddanmark, and Region Nordjylland in Denmark, and the Auckland Region, the Canterbury Region, the Southland Region, the Waikato Region, and the Wellington Region in New Zealand to substantiate our analysis.

We decided that the number of citizens would be the deciding factor in selecting the municipalities to commit to the 'most similar' case design. Also, in both states, a large part of a municipality's economy relies on taxes per citizen or property. In Denmark, 75% of a municipality's economy is tax; these taxes are municipal income taxes, and each taxable citizen must pay a municipal income tax to the municipality they reside in (Systime, n.d., para. 3; Kommuneskatteloven, 2019, §2). In New Zealand, a municipality earns around 60% of its income from property tax (Local Government Finance, n.d.c., para. 3). Hence, a municipality with a higher number of citizens earns more income on the property tax as more people own a property.

Consequently, we assert that the number of citizens in a municipality equals the amount of resources the municipality has; hence, a municipality with a higher number of citizens has more resources than a municipality with a low number of citizens. Especially as the income municipalities in Denmark and New Zealand earn depends on the number of citizens. Therefore, our deciding factor for selecting municipalities was the number of citizens. Moreover, we avoided searching for the municipalities' involvement in the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for the selection since we want to conduct as objective and unbiased an analysis as possible. Hence, we disregarded the 'best case' case design for selecting the municipalities to uphold objectivity and avoid bias.

Last, with our selection of ten municipalities in total ranked in four different tiers, we aim to offer proxies for other municipalities in the tiers that were not selected for our study.

Thereby, we do not seek to generalize for all Western countries; still, we want to offer these cases as possible proxies for municipalities in the same tiers in Denmark and New Zealand.

4.3 Data

We derived our data from the official websites of selected Municipalities and Regions and the national Governments in Denmark and New Zealand for our analysis. We explored the following websites: https://www.kk.dk (København), https://www.aarhus.dk (Aarhus), https://sonderborgkommune.dk (Sønderborg); https://ballerup.dk (Ballerup); https://rebild.dk (Rebild), https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Pages/default.aspx (Auckland), https://ccc.govt.nz (Christchurch), https://icc.govt.nz (Invercargill), https://www.upperhuttcity.com/Home (Upper Hutt), https://www.tcdc.govt.nz (Thames-Coromandel), https://www.regionh.dk (Region Hovedstaden), https://www.rm.dk (Region Midtjylland), https://regionsyddanmark.dk (Region Syddanmark), https://rn.dk (Region Nordjylland), https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/Pages/default.aspx (Auckland Region), https://www.ecan.govt.nz (Canterbury Region), https://southlandnz.com (Southland Region), https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz (Waikato Region), https://www.gw.govt.nz (Wellington Region), https://www.regeringen.dk (Danish Government) and https://www.govt.nz (New Zealand Government). The data we searched for on the websites was plans, policies, or strategies that steer towards the 2030 Agenda. Given the holistic nature of the SDGs, our focus has remained on texts that explicitly reference the SDGs or SD and central documents that outline the direction in which each municipality is headed (e.g., plans or strategies). Our main priority was to find local Development Plans and Sustainability Strategies published by the respective governments of our cases. When this was not possible, we relied on Municipal Plans or Long Term Plans (LTP), the latter of which primarily covers the content presented in other Development Plans. Hence, all Danish cases have Development or Sustainability Strategies except for Ballerup, in which case we used a Municipality Plan. However, for New Zealand, we relied on LTPs for all Municipalities for comparability. For Upper Hutt City Council (UHCC), we also found a Sustainability Strategy, which we substantiated the LTP with. It is important to note that while we strove to use the most recent LTPs (2021-2031) for all cases in New Zealand, Thames-Coromandel District Council's (TCDC) most recent LTP was unavailable. Hence, we used the 2018-2028 LTP for this case as we still deem it relevant due to its contemporary scope and publication after the introduction of the 2030 Agenda in 2015.

For the national level, we used both nations' Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports to analyze their localization of the global norm at the national level and consider the most updated status on their SDGs assessment. For Denmark, the VNR is from 2021, whereas for New Zealand, the most recent VNR is from 2019. To substantiate our analysis, we also explored the websites related to the SDGs for each country. These include https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/temaer/SDG (Danmarks Statistik, Denmark) and https://www.sdg.org.nz (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand). The website from New Zealand is a public good provided by the University and the only website available that provides information on the SDGs in New Zealand. Similarly, the website for Denmark is not the official one for the SDGs, but the official website for Danmarks Statistik, which provides information on the SDGs in the Danish context.

Furthermore, we will draw upon externally conducted analyses of the governments' engagement with the SDGs to substantiate our analysis. This includes a report by the politically independent 2030-panel presented to the Danish Parliament, Folketinget, and the review of New Zealand's SDG progress by the Victoria University of Wellington. The dataset offers a combination of internal and external perspectives and interpretations that allow us to analyze and interpret the cases critically and limit the chances of bias. Hence, throughout our data-selection process, we have relied on a method of triangulation to ensure that different dimensions of our research are captured to increase the level of knowledge and understanding of the cases selected.

Consequently, the data we use for our research are official documents and mainly qualitative allowing us to conduct an in-depth analysis of the written data. In addition, the inclusion of external work on the governments' engagement with the 2030 Agenda aids in broadening our perspective on the localization of the global norm in the selected cases. Moreover, other academic research will be drawn upon when fitting to support, substantiate, and provide context for our findings.

For our case selection, we used quantitative data, which enabled us to select municipalities based on numeric values and, thereby, keep objectivity and avoid bias. For our context chapter, we used both official and external sources to provide context on the UN, the 2030 Agenda, and the SDGs, Denmark, and New Zealand (e.g., https://sdgs.un.org; https://www.un.org/en/).

To enable objective conclusions, we aimed to obtain a broad dataset for our research that accounts for both internal and external perspectives on the cases. However, given our choice of analysis, we solely rely on written data; hence, fieldwork in the form of observation and

interviews is not included. Fieldwork could have provided us with first-hand data from official sources, as we could have interviewed governmental personnel, politicians, etc., who could give us answers to questions we might have, which are not answered in the documents derived from the official websites. Moreover, given that we rely on written data published by the official channels, it is limited how up to date the sources are; some plans or strategies might be a few years old, as these might depend on the election cycle or other external factors. In addition, there might be plans or strategies in the making, but we cannot know this using our method of extracting data. Here, fieldwork could enable us to get an insight into plans and strategies that are underway.

4.4 Analytical Tools

The following subsections present the analytical tools derived from our theoretical framework. Inspired by Acharya's (2004) norm localization theory, we established a localization process in three steps, which we will use to systematize our background analysis of all 20 cases (pp. 251; 254). The background analysis is placed in Appendix 2 (Denmark) and Appendix 3 (New Zealand). Based on our findings from the background analysis, we establish relevant themes for our main analysis. The main analysis substantiates the results and analyzes the selected themes using analytical tools derived from constructivism, NI, and SI. The concepts of norm localization will still be applied in the main analysis. In the last subsection, we present MLG as the structure of our analysis.

4.4.1 Background Analysis

Step 1 is the Localization Process, which we divided into two parts: a. Modification of the global norm to fit in the local context; b. Modification of the local beliefs and practices to fit with the global norm. The first part investigates how national and local actors frame and construct the external norm to fit in the local contexts. Here, we examine the extent of the modification of the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda detected in the documents. The themes include, but are not limited to, the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda; i.e., the three-fold approach to SD (social, economic, and environmental pillars), the Leave No One Behind-pledge, the five Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership), and the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement aspect of the SDGs. In the second part, we examine the modification of local beliefs and practices, as these can also face modification to build congruence between the global and local. Here, we investigate the same documents but

focus on indications of change in local practices or beliefs in the form of policies, initiatives, or understanding of the themes related to the Agenda.

Step 2 is Policy Adoption of Goals 12 and 13. Here, we decided to focus on SDGs 12 and 13 as these are the Goals Denmark and New Zealand have the most challenges with (Finansministeriet, 2021, p. 10; Victoria University of Wellington, n.d., "Responsible consumption and production" & "Climate action" sections). Hence, we find it intriguing how the two Goals are worked with at all levels of government. Therefore, when examining the selected plans and strategies, we will investigate whether there are references to specific initiatives and policies within the realms of SDGs 12 and 13. If there is, we will turn back to the official websites and look for these.

Step 3 is Localization Occurrence, where we provide our general observations of the cases' localization processes. We briefly touch upon whether the global norm faced modification to fit the local context and if the local beliefs and practices were also modified to fit with the locally modified global norm.

4.4.2 Main Analysis

In our analysis of the themes extracted from our localization analysis of all 21 cases, we will rely on concepts from constructivism, NI, SI, and contextual significances (Chapter 5) to reveal the possible explanations for the thematic structures found in our background analysis (Appendix 2 and 3). From constructivism, the *logic of appropriateness* enables us to examine the reasons behind the governments' localization of the global norm, which we seek to address to signify the agency and actor-level in our analysis. Furthermore, the concept of *socialization* can help us uncover how a coherent or incoherent approach to localization occurs between and across the national, regional, and local levels in both countries. The concepts of *constitutive rules* and *regulative rules* allow us to identify how the national Governments might seek to diffuse their modification of the global norm to the subnational levels, which can facilitate the localization process across the nations. *Institutionalization of norms* is a concept that can substantiate our findings of the localization of the global norm, as it grasps that a global norm can embed itself in a state's identity or regulate its behavior. In addition, with the NI concepts of *formal* and *informal institutions*, we can reveal how a *formal institution* can facilitate the localization of an *informal* one or hinder the process. Thereby, we can account for the various actions taken to localize the global norm, consider whether these assisted the process, and demonstrate possible similarities or differences between Denmark and New Zealand.

Moreover, SI enables us to capture whether the localization process unlocks social templates that lead to establishing *frames of meaning* that can guide political action across the different levels of government. Here, we can detect whether the social templates and *frames of meaning* originate from the UN or whether the national or regional governmental levels seek to establish these to guide the localization process of the municipal levels. Like constructivism, SI also grants the concept of *logic of appropriateness* significance in accepting a foreign norm. The institutionalist perspective allows us to conceptualize institutional change or expansion based on the global norm being perceived as legitimate. Hence, we can grasp why institutional change or expansion occurs on the basis that the norm is deemed appropriate or positively regarded in the broader environment.

Given that some of the theoretical concepts enable us to capture the agency and actor-level in our analysis, we are still restricted in accounting entirely for this perspective given our point of departure in written material (e.g., strategies, plans, and policies). Nevertheless, the actor-level can be indicated in some of the material we use for our analysis; therefore, we will account for it within the scope of our research material.

4.4.3 Multi-level Governance

Our methodological approach to and structure of our analysis is based on MLG, as we operate from a top-down vertical approach. Following academic debates and contestation of the nature of the concept of MLG (Phytian, 2005; Faludi, 2012), we do not consider MLG to be a theory but rather an organizing concept that helps guide our analysis.

The concept of MLG emerged following the general acknowledgment that the world is rapidly and continuously globalizing, resulting in a growing number of political topics that must be dealt with beyond the level of the nation-state, e.g., environmental issues, security issues, trade agreements, etc. Therefore, MLG suggests that actors at different levels - local (subnational), national, and global (supranational) - must be aligned to tackle such transnational policy issues by defining collective goals (Saito-Jensen, 2015). This entails decentralizing the power monopolized by the state to distribute it between actors operating at multiple levels. According to Saito-Jensen (2015), this development entails "[...] reconfigurations of the relationships and modes of interactions between states and other levels of government" (p. 2). Thus, questions concerning authority and responsibility of implementation, among other things, arise in the wake of such restructuring of power and decision-making in the international system.

Saito-Jensen (2015) has identified two different types of MLG, albeit not mutually exclusive. The first type, 'nested' MLG, regards governance on multiple levels as being clearly structured and having a vertically tiered hierarchy of only a limited number of authorities. On the contrary, the second MLG type is characterized as 'polycentric'. In this case, the clear structure and hierarchy of 'nested' MLG are regarded as blurred or even nonexistent due to the many interactions between all the different levels of governance (pp. 2-3). Based on our point of departure in the UN and the localization of the SDGs at the local governmental levels, our methodological approach to the analytical framework is guided by the first type of MLG. That is, governance between multiple levels is seen as having a clear and vertically tiered hierarchy. Therefore, our analysis follows this structure, focusing only on a limited number of authorities involved in policy- and decision-making at different levels.

Nevertheless, in line with the statement that both types of MLG are not mutually exclusive, we acknowledge the polycentric aspect of MLG and the manifold interactions between governing bodies, and the consequent transfer of power in multiple directions. This process contributes to the diminishing role of the state, which is prevalent in both types of MLG, as "[...] the fact that arenas of governance are multiplying also means that states have better possibilities for delegating responsibilities to other levels of governance [...]" (Saito-Jensen, 2015, p. 4). However, for the sake of the analysis of the UN and its norm diffusion to local levels of government, the first type of MLG remains dominant in our approach.

5. Case Contexts

In line with our structural framework guided by MLG, we focus our analysis on actors at different levels of government. This chapter introduces these actors; specifically, we focus on the UN at the international level and Denmark and New Zealand at the national level to provide relevant context for our study on the localization processes of the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda.

5.1 The United Nations and Sustainable Development

The UN is one of the prominent champions of SD at the global level, pioneering and promoting this agenda by pushing cultural norms for states to follow. The following sections (5.1.1 and 5.1.2) introduce the UN as an organization, its background, and nature of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

5.1.1 The United Nations

The UN was established by the end of the Second World War, on October 24, 1945, by 51 founding member states led by the victorious party of the war. Denmark and New Zealand were among the founding member states. Today, the UN counts 193 member states (Curtis & Taylor, 2017, p. 332; United Nations, n.d.a.). Six different bodies make up the UN Principal Organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, the International Court of Justice, and the Trusteeship Council[3].

The UN project encapsulates former and current world leaders' hope for peace and international cooperation. The United Nations Charter outlines the purposes of the UN, namely "[...] to maintain international peace and security," "[...] to develop friendly relations among nations," "[...] to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems […] and in promoting […] respect for human rights," and "[...] to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations" (United Nations, 1945, Chapter 1, Article 1). Initially, the primary focus of the UN was on state relations and international order rather than the rights of individuals. However, by the late 20th century, the latter gained a more prominent status, and today, human security and justice for individuals are considered an integral aspect of national interest.

Curtis and Taylor (2017) briefly summarize the character and function of the UN: "[i]t is the only global institution with the legitimacy that derives from universal membership, and a mandate that encompasses security, economic and social development, the protection of human rights, and the protection of the environment" (p. 332).

Nevertheless, contestation has surrounded the UN's legitimacy regarding the organization's ability to act when needed and hold violators of international conventions accountable (Gray, 2008). The UN does not have a direct hard power[4] mandate, and the use of methods of aggression is not an option in the quest to obtain its principles (Nye, 2007). Instead, the UN has troops available contributed by its member states; however, these are mandated for peacekeeping missions and work on the principle of "[...] non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate" (United Nations, n.d.b.). Moreover, the UN has long held the respect for sovereignty and non-intervention to be prevailing principles. Not until 1991 was a relaxation of this principle considered. In line with the turn to increased consideration of the

[3] For an overview of the structure of the United Nations system detailing the UN Principal Organs and their subsidiary bodies and Specialized Agencies, etc., please see Figure 21.1 by Curtis & Taylor, 2017, p. 334.

[4] Cambridge Dictionary defines hard power as follows: "the use of a country's military power to persuade other countries to do something, rather than the use of cultural or economic influence" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a.). Similarly, Nye (2007) offers: "Hard power works through payments and coercion (carrots and sticks)" (para. 2).

justice of the individual, humanitarian interventions have since then been ordered on rare occasions when peaceful means have been considered inadequate (Curtis & Taylor, 2017, p. 339). Therefore, the UN has had to seek influence in other ways, mainly through soft power[5] means, e.g., global norms. Nye (2007) argues that "[...] the UN has considerable soft power that arises from its ability to legitimize the actions of states" (para. 4). This ability is the focal point of our analysis as we seek to understand how norms created at the UN level are translated and implemented by local levels of government in Denmark and New Zealand.

5.1.2 The Sustainable Development Goals

On September 25, 2015, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted 17 SDGs and 169 appertaining Targets as an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for SD (UNGA, 2015). The SDGs replaced the MDGs, which constituted the blueprint for development between 2000 and 2015. The vision for the SDGs is, thus, to build on the momentum generated by the MDGs and to complete what the MDGs did not achieve in a common quest to eradicate global poverty and inequality and secure peace. The themes guiding the UN document *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* can be summarized through the five P's: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership (UNGA, 2015). In the introduction to the 2030 Agenda, the UNGA (2015) introduces the 17 Goals as follows: "[t]hey are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental" (p. 1). We point to the 2030 Agenda and its concomitant inclusion of SDGs, the three dimensions of SD, and pledge to Leave No One Behind as the core of what we consider the global norm throughout our research.

The notion of economy, social issues, and environment being integrated and indivisible is crucial to understand SD, albeit these have only become impactful during the past three decades. In a review article on SD, scholar Justice Mensah (2019) accounts for the history, principles, pillars, and implications of SD. Although he traces the origin of the concept back to a discussion concerning the limited capacity of the Earth's natural resources within the discipline of economics that took place in the early 1800s, it was not until 1972 at the UN Conference on the Human Environment that the concept of SD was more broadly internationally recognized (2019, section 4). Later, in 1987, the World Commission on

[5] Cambridge Dictionary defines soft power as follows: "the use of a country's cultural and economic influence to persuade other countries to do something, rather than the use of military power" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b.). Similarly, Nye (2007) offers: "soft power works through attraction and co-option" (para. 2).

Environment and Development released a report titled *Our Common Future* which became monumental in transforming the understanding of development from being related solely to economic growth to a more holistic understanding of development as being sustainable (Pohoaţă, Diaconaşu, & Crupenschi, 2020, section 1.2). As such, the sustainable approach to development aims to simultaneously achieve social progress, environmental equilibrium, and economic growth (Mensah, 2019, section 3.3). The *Our Common Future* report's presentation of SD has since been institutionalized, and scholars of the field commonly cite the following definition of the concept: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, Chapter 2). In other words, SD appeals to the use of resources in a way that allows them to continue to exist for others.

The interconnectedness of the social, economic, and environmental spheres is crucial for the understanding of SD. A typical presentation of this 'tripartite description' is depicted as a figure in the form of "[...] three intersecting circles of society, environment, and economy, with sustainability being placed at the intersection" (Purvis, Mao & Robinson, 2018, "Introduction" section). In line with this depiction, development scholars declare that SD fundamentally rests on three conceptual pillars: 'economic sustainability', 'social sustainability', and 'environmental sustainability' (Mensah, 2019, section 6).

Based on the knowledge that natural resources are not finite, academics have been rethinking traditional economic postulations to slow down and eventually stop uncontrolled growth and consumption (Mensah 2019, section 6.1). Therefore, "[e]conomic sustainability implies a system of production that satisfies present consumption levels without compromising future needs" (ibid.). Hence, a balance is to be reached concerning sustainable decisions that are made "[...] in the most equitable and fiscally sound way possible, while considering the other aspects of sustainability" (ibid.).

Social sustainability focuses on "[...] the nexus between social conditions such as poverty and environmental destruction" (Mensah, 2019, section 6.2). In other words, the pillar is concerned with alleviating poverty and fostering the development of a meaningful life for all people and their communities and cultures without damaging the environment and economic stability. Mensah (2019) references Kolk (2016) as he argues that social sustainability "[...] aims at providing enabling conditions for everyone to have the capacity to realize their needs, if they so desire" (section 6.2). Obstacles to this development are to be addressed to foster social sustainability. In contrast to the easily observable nature of environmental and economic systems, it is more complex to model the intangible social systems. Rather, a less rigid way of

determining the success of social sustainability is that "[...] people are not subjected to conditions that undermine their capacity to meet their needs" (Everest-Phillips, 2014, as cited in Mensah, 2019, section 6.2).

Environmental sustainability focuses on "[...] the natural environment and how it remains productive and resilient to support human life" (Mensah, 2019, section 6.3). It deals with 'ecosystem integrity' and the 'carrying capacity of natural environment' to ensure that resources are not extracted before being regenerated. This is necessary to avoid exceeding the limits within which environmental equilibrium is maintained to remain stable and resilient to support human life and SD (ibid.).

This conceptualization of SD culminated with the introduction of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Biermann, Kanie, and Kim (2017) articulate the significance of the SDGs and their contribution to SD: "[t]he SDGs mark a historic shift for the UN towards *one sustainable development agenda* after a long history of trying to integrate economic and social development with environmental sustainability" ("Introduction" section).

5.2 The Kingdom of Denmark

The Kingdom of Denmark is a unitary state, organized on a decentralized basis with three levels of government: a multi-party Parliament (Folketinget), five regional authorities, and 98 municipalities. Only municipalities are considered local authorities in Denmark (European Committee of the Regions (ECR), n.d.). To elaborate further, "[l]ocal and regional authorities are responsible for matters of their interest which are not expressly conferred to the State. The regions and the municipalities do not hold legislative powers and must act within the confines of the applicable law. There is no hierarchy between the regions and the municipalities" (European Committee of the Regions, n.d., section 1). Among other things, regions are responsible for healthcare, environment and nature, employment, transport, and culture. Municipalities are responsible for care for children and the elderly, primary education, integration of refugees and immigrants, regulatory, supply, and financing responsibility of social services, environmental protection, waste management, etc. (ibid., section 1.2; section 1.3).

Financially, Danish municipalities rely on income taxes from taxable citizens residing in the given municipality (as presented in section 4.2.1). To address the imbalance between municipalities with few and many citizens, the Government introduced a system of

equalization, which redistributes money to small municipalities and ensures extra government finances for them (Finansministeriet, 2020).

Denmark is among the 51 founding members of the UN (section 5.1.1) and remains committed to being active in international relations and cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (n.d.) writes: "[f]or a country with fewer than 6 million citizens, Denmark plays an outsize role on the world stage when it comes to sustainable development and the fight for human rights" (para. 1). Naturally, it follows that Denmark has committed itself to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (ibid., para. 15).

Significant to the Danish context is that the country is a member of the European Union (EU) and is, in some cases, such as monetary policy, social policy, and environment, subject to EU law or a framework defined by the organization (European Union, 2016, Article 2). This also reveals Denmark's immediate geopolitical environment as having already achieved stability and prosperity. Given our focus on local levels of government, we take for granted the impact that Denmark's membership in the EU might have on the localization of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the local levels of government in Denmark.

As we seek to compare Denmark with New Zealand, we cannot disregard the role of indigenous people in the context matters. Hence, we will shortly introduce what we consider the closest to Denmark's equivalent to indigenous people in its Realm, namely the Inuit from Greenland. The Kingdom of Denmark consists of Denmark, Faroe Islands, and Greenland (Udenrigsministeriet, n.d., "Rigsfællesskabet" section). In 1721 Greenland became a Danish colony and remained in that status until 1953 when it officially became a constituency of the Danish Realm (Naalakkersuisut, 2018, para. 1). Thus, the relations between Denmark and Greenland have been colored by the colonization and Greenland's current process to obtain status as a sovereign independent state. For the Inuit, colonization meant that they had no actual influence, rights, or responsibilities over Greenland and themselves (Rud, 2017, p. 121). The current relations eased the tensions that divided the Inuit and Denmark on social, economic, and political subjects (ibid.). Now, Greenland is considered a state in the Danish Realm on equal footing with the other states (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 2). Moreover, Greenland obtained autonomy over vital areas through the Home Rule Act (1979) and the Self-Government Act (2009); still, Denmark holds power in policy areas of foreign relations, defense, and security (Breum, 2018, p. 31). Considering the current relations and Greenland's status, we do not consider the Inuit to hold the same significance for Danish national politics as the Māori and Pacific peoples do for New Zealand. Nevertheless, it is still relevant to consider the role of minorities in the Danish plans and strategies.

5.3 Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa is the current Māori-language name for New Zealand) is a unitary state with a two-tier local government system. The local government sector consists of 11 regional councils, 61 territorial authorities (11 of which are city councils and 50 of which are district councils), and six unitary councils, which are territorial authorities with regional council responsibilities (Local Government in New Zealand, n.d.a.). Like the Parliament, which is elected by the people to deal with issues relevant to the country and its people, a local government also "[...] operates on the basis of an electoral mandate provided by its citizens" (ibid.). The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) declares the dual purpose of local governments: "(a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future" (New Zealand Government, 2002, section 10). Furthermore, the LGA clarifies the responsibilities of the regional councils and the territorial authorities. As such, regional councils are responsible for resource management, flood control, air and water quality, pest control, public transport, regional parks, water supply, etc. The territorial authorities take on municipal responsibilities, including local roads, water supply and sewage, waste, culture, parks, recreation services and sport, local regulations, community and economic development, tourism, town planning, social housing, etc. (New Zealand Government, 2002). Additionally, it is important to note:

> "[c]ouncils [...] can differ widely in relation to activities they undertake, as long as they have consulted their communities in making the decisions. As a result, there is considerable diversity in the range of activities that councils provide, reflecting the different circumstances that cities, towns and communities find themselves in." (Local Government in New Zealand, n.d.b.).

To support this range of activities financially, 60% of a municipality's income stems from property tax, whereby resources vary internally between the territorial authorities. Supplementing this, the LGA gives councils the "[...] full capacity to carry on or undertake any activity or business, do any act, or enter into any transaction [...]" to perform their role (New

Zealand Government, 2002, section 12). This is important because of the fact that national and local governments in New Zealand are independent of one another politically, financially, and administratively (Commonwealth Local Government Forum, n.d.). Nevertheless, a country profile report published by the OECD and United Cities and Local Government (2016) announces that "[...] New Zealand is among the most centralised countries in the OECD with regard to spending responsibilities" ("Subnational Government Finance" section).

New Zealand is among the 51 founding members of the UN (section 5.1.1), demonstrating the country's willingness to engage in international cooperation. In September 2015, New Zealand committed itself to the UN's 2030 Agenda, including its 17 SDGs and 169 Targets, declaring its willingness to contribute to the achievement of said Goals through domestic action, international engagement and leadership, and supporting other countries through the New Zealand Aid Programme (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, n.d.b.). A report published by Victoria University (2019) points out that "[...] Aotearoa New Zealand has a reputation as a leader in human rights, a country with a clean, green image, committed to a better world and to addressing many of the issues included in the SDGs" (p. 10).

Additionally, much of New Zealand's international engagement is centered around its Pacific neighbors, with the country stating that its "[...] long-term strategy is to achieve a stable and prosperous Pacific, in close partnership with Pacific countries, regional organisations and other development partners" (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, n.d.b.). In fact, 60% of the country's development assistance is reserved for its Pacific neighbors, which encompass several small island states in the Pacific. Hence, New Zealand takes on an active role in helping its neighbors that are restricted by lesser resources and global influence.

One of the critical aspects to consider in the case of New Zealand is the importance of the Māori people. New Zealand was founded on February 6, 1840, as the Treaty of Waitangi, an agreement between the British Crown and Māori rangatira (chiefs), was signed (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2017, para. 1). However, much contestation has surrounded the Treaty due to faulty translations that led to different interpretations of the agreement amongst the British and Māori signees:

> "In the English version, Māori cede the sovereignty of New Zealand to Britain; Māori give the Crown exclusive right to buy lands they wish to sell, and, in return, are guaranteed full rights of ownership of their lands, forests,

> fisheries, and other possessions; and Māori are given the rights and privileges of British subjects" (ibid., para. 5).

However, conflict arose as the word 'sovereignty' was translated as 'kawanatanga' (governance) and the English guarantee of 'undisturbed possession' of all their 'properties' translated to 'tino rangatiratanga' (full authority) over 'taonga' (treasures, which may be intangible) (ibid. para, 6). As a result, systemic mistreatment of the Māori people taints the history of New Zealand. However, since 1990, efforts have been made to develop Māori policy that reflects and meets the needs of the country's indigenous peoples. Moreover, the Government has three prime responsibilities to Māori:

> "To endeavour to work through past Treaty of Waitangi grievances by negotiation and to try and deal with them through settlements [...];" [...] to retain and promote our unique indigenous Maori language and culture; and [...] to involve, to empower and to raise average Maori achievement levels well above what they are, so that they equal the rest of our society" (Luxton, 1996, "GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES" section).

Therefore, the Māori population holds a special place in the political and cultural agendas in New Zealand and is essential to consider in the localization of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

6. Analysis

As we go into the analysis, we reaffirm our understanding of, and reference to, the global norm as encompassing the central themes of the 2030 Agenda, i.e., the SDGs, the three pillars of SD, the importance of partnerships, and focus on holism. We approach our main analysis by identifying the three themes that structure our findings from the multiple levels of government in Denmark and New Zealand to allow for a comparative approach to answering our research question. This analysis takes its point of departure in our background analyses of the norm localization at the national, regional, and local governmental levels of our selected cases. The most significant findings are summarized in the section below, while the complete background analyses are in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3. The themes that guide our main analysis are *how*

the National Levels Set the Tone or the Local Governmental Levels (section 6.2), *Local Realities and the Localization Processes* (section 6.3), and *The UN Impact on the Localization Outcomes* (section 6.4).

6.1 Overview of Analytical Findings

This section presents the main findings from our background analyses conducted in Appendix 2 (Denmark) and Appendix 3 (New Zealand). The most significant findings are listed in the two tables below and present actions taken to modify the global norm to fit local contexts, modifications of local practices and beliefs to accommodate the global norm, and, finally, our overall observation of the individual cases. Please note that Auckland's regional and municipal levels are combined under the regional level.

6.1.1 Table 1 - Summary of Findings, Denmark

DENMARK			
CATEGORIES	**Modification of Global Norm**	**Modification of Local Practices and Beliefs**	**Case Observation**
NATIONAL LEVEL			
Danish Government	No modification of the SDGs, Targets, or Indicators to national context. Assessment of Denmark's fulfillment based on the UN's universal formulations. Striking focus on the Leave No One Behind-pledge (what Denmark does for this nationally through political initiatives and efforts). Construction of 50 Political Goals for Denmark categorized under the five Ps of SD (use of the Danish Indicators developed by the 2030-panel).	Placed existing political efforts, reforms, and initiatives under its pledge to Leave No One Behind; hence, the Government modified these to correspond with the Pledge. Placed its own Political Goals under the five Ps to parallel the SDGs' interconnectedness. Explicitly addressed its willingness to assimilate its national agendas with the SDGs through a new impact assessment of its law proposals.	The Danish Government localized vital themes of the 2030 Agenda; however, it still lacks in its assessment of its fulfillment of the SDGs, since it explicitly applies the SDGs and their concomitant Targets and Indicators instead of providing a framework for these in the Danish national context.
REGIONAL LEVELS			
Region Hovedstaden	The Region identified three SDGs that are relevant for its context; here, it considered which and how the SDGs fit into its local context. Constructed its own Goals for each of the three SDGs; thus, effectively modifying the global norm to fit with its context.	Introduced its new approach to thinking of and working with complex challenges; heavily inspired by the nature of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Recognized that it must abandon traditional silo-mentality in favor of holism to solve the complex challenges addressed in the 2030 Agenda.	Region Hovedstaden actively engaged in constructing its own contextualized Goals and Targets (to fit under the selected SDGs). The Region modified its previous approach to policymaking, acknowledging the interconnectedness and holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda and mirroring this in its own approach.
Region Midtjylland	Constructed its own four Strategic Tracks, where each Track corresponds explicitly and implicitly with selected SDGs.	The SDGs operate as the framework for the Strategy, which indicates that the local practices	Region Midtjylland carried the global norm (SDGs and partnerships) down and modified it to fit with its regional context, while

	SDG 17 was present in all four Strategic Tracks, which illustrates the Region's emphasis on the vital role of partnerships to accomplish its Tracks. For the Region, the most crucial partnerships are with educational institutions, municipalities, and businesses.	and beliefs faced a modification, bordering a reconstruction. Addressed how each Strategy Track and their Goals/Intentions contribute to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, which further indicates the modification of local practices and beliefs, as the Region's development work is assessed in relation to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.	simultaneously modifying its local beliefs and practices to fit with the ideas and intentions of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.
Region Syddanmark	Clustered selected SDGs within the framework of six Strategic Paths, each of which have Regional Goals that reflect the strategic direction and the SDGs identified. Reconstructed the SDGs to fit them into its regional context as demonstrated by the formulation of Regional Goals.	Stated that the SDGs direct the development in the Region and provide the foundation on which the six Strategic Paths rest; thus, demonstrating how the global norm modified local practices. Credited the SDGs for having aided in increasing the Region's realization of the necessity of engaging in partnerships to address challenges and create solutions.	Region Syddanmark engaged in a compromise which sees both the construction of Regional Goals as a modification of the global norm and a modification of local practices to encompass the global norm, which has seen the introduction of a goal-setting approach to regional development.
Region Nordjylland	No construction of its own Goals to localize the SDGs, but the Region constructed its own Fields of Action, Core Initiatives, and Principles that were all developed within the holistic framework of the 2030 Agenda. Emphasized the notion of SD as being socially, economically, and environmentally constituted by presenting how the Region can ensure such sustainability through initiatives that directly relate to its context.	Directly addressed the change the Region had in its development of strategies to include areas that can be allocated under the pillars of SD and the SDGs. Focused on establishing partnerships and collaborations in the process of creating its strategy. Modified the way in which the Region envisions policymaking to now focus on how an initiative in one area affects another; crediting this to the interconnectedness of the SDGs.	Region Nordjylland constructed its own Fields of Action, Core Initiatives, and Principles, while, simultaneously, modifying its local beliefs and practices to correspond with the holistic framework of the 2030 Agenda. It established a new way of thinking about its policymaking, which is credited to the interconnectedness of the SDGs.
LOCAL LEVELS			

Copenhagen Municipality	Embraced the SDGs as established by the UN and, simultaneously, modified them to reflect the local context. Highlighted selected SDG Targets under each Goal, while also constructing its own Targets that fit into the local context. As such, the Municipality considers the content of each SDG and its concomitant Targets and Indicators individually.	Modified its comprehension of the term 'sustainability' from previously being centered solely around the green agenda to now also cover social and economic sustainability. The local practice of communication between the Municipality and its citizens was affected by the SDGs. The municipality references a Citizen Representation, demonstrating its commitment to include citizens in the Municipality's development through communication and citizen-dialog.	In general, Copenhagen took the SDGs and integrated them into the existing local practices instead of one replacing the other. Also, it emphasized the importance of grasping the term 'sustainable development' in its full capacity, which includes social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Copenhagen constructed its own Goals/Targets for each SDG to fit within its local context while still catering to the overall agenda of each SDG.
Aarhus Municipality	No explicit reference to the SDGs or presentation of what they comprise. Construction of five Indicators (Århus Målene) and Objectives with a point of departure in the local context. Only Goal 17 was explicitly addressed; hence, the Municipality constructed more than reconstructed the global norm to fit with its local context.	Instances where an Initiative or Objective catering towards one of the SDGs automatically would cater towards another; hence, building on the mutually reinforcing principle of the SDGs. Modified its local practices of addressing social, economic, and environmental aspects in its Plans for the municipality to assimilate with the global norm of the 2030 Agenda and its view on SD.	Aarhus introduced its Indicators (Aarhus Målene) that were inspired by the 2030 Agenda. Existing local practices and the previous understanding and use of the term 'sustainability' were modified to fit with the global norm.
Sønderborg Municipality	Added a fourth dimension to SD; namely, culture. Presented four dimensions of sustainability, where each pillar corresponded with specific SDGs. Presented its own Goals that correspond with the selected SDGs and its local context. Reconstructed the selected SDG Targets to fit with its local context. The Indicators it used for its Goals were also reconstructed to fit its local context.	Formulated five Principles for Sustainability that aid in incorporating the sustainability mindset into the daily work across the organization. These Principles demonstrate the impact that the global norm had on the modification of local beliefs and practices. Made Plans and Strategies for the Municipality dedicated to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, which indicate the influence of the global norm on the local beliefs and practices.	Sønderborg is highly committed to localizing the SDGs and Agenda 2030. On one hand, it modified the global norm to fit into its local context by reconstructing the SDGs and by constructing new local Targets and Indicators corresponding with the local context. On the other hand, it modified its local beliefs and practices to fit into the norm pushed by the 2030 Agenda, which has seen the introduction of new guiding principles and approaches that speak into the UN's ideas and normative constructions.

Ballerup Municipality	Stated that six of the seventeen SDGs should be integrated into the plans, strategies, and tasks of the different Committees in the Municipality. Acknowledged the SDGs. Solely mentioned how the SDGs already relate to existing practices (in their universal form). There was no effort to modify the SDGs to fit the local context. No mention of targets or indicators - universal, national, and local alike.	Did not provide any concrete goals, initiatives, or policies that it wanted to adopt to further its progress with sustainability in the Municipality. Modified local beliefs and practices to correspond with the norm of SD encompassing all three pillars.	Ballerup did not modify the SDGs to fit its local context. Instead, the Goals were explicitly applied in their universal form. Still, implicitly, it modified its local practices to fit with the norm of sustainability encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions. It also presented six SDGs that it commits to prioritize in its work, which showed that the municipality wants to incorporate the SDGs in its future work. However, instances of localization are yet to occur.
Rebild Municipality	Did not modify the SDGs or their concomitant Targets to fit with its local context. Conducted a selection of the SDGs and Targets (in their universal form) based on relevance for its core tasks. No modification of the actual SDGs and Targets but articulated that its existing efforts and actions already align with the 2030 Agenda. Modified the global norm to ascribe extra importance to the environmental dimension of SD compared to the dominating global consensus.	Adopted central visions of the 2030 Agenda, particularly the interconnectedness of the SDGs, which is reflected in the multidimensional intent and impact of the initiatives expressed in its Plan. Stated that a holistic approach to sustainability should be present in plans, policies, strategies, etc., and should continue to be so as it engages in long-term, interdisciplinary, holistic, and inclusive initiatives. Credited the 2030 Agenda for its initiative to simplify, rethink, and reduce the number of policies in the Municipality to ensure the connection between, and interdisciplinary approach to, problem-solving.	Rebild declared its dedication to policymaking that values interconnectedness and interdisciplinarity (as inspired by the 2030 Agenda and the nature of the SDGs). A consequent effort to simplify, rethink, and reduce the number of policies in the Municipality is taking place, exemplifying the modification of local practices and beliefs. The norm of SD encompassing social, economic, and environmental elements was carried down in the policymaking. Also, the Municipality continued to reference the SDGs as posed by the UN. However, the SDGs and their concomitant Targets were not modified to fit with the local context, nor were new local goals for Rebild constructed.

6.1.2 Table 2 - Summary of Findings, New Zealand

NEW ZEALAND			
CATEGORIES	**Modification of Global Norm**	**Modification of Local Practices and Beliefs**	**Case Observation**
NATIONAL LEVEL			
New Zealand Government	Provided a status on its fulfillment of the SDGs by relating the SDGs to its national context. Created the theme of Wellbeing that parallels the main aspect of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGS – the three-fold approach to SD with the addition of a cultural pillar. Introduced Indicators to monitor, analyze, and report on the Wellbeing of the people of New Zealand.	Modified its beliefs in how actions in certain areas can affect actions in others; thus, acknowledging the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement of the SDGs. Indicated a modification of its practices, as it is now committed to measuring its progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda not solely in economic terms, but also social, cultural, and environmental. Used the phrase Wellbeing under almost all SDGs, which illustrated its modification of how it thinks of Wellbeing as not solely physical, but also as concerning energy, climate, and equality – aligned Wellbeing with the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda.	The New Zealand Government modified the global norm to fit with its context, as it related each SDG to New Zealand's context. It constructed its own national Indicators for the SDGs. The Government modified its own practices to correspond with the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda; that is, focus on SD in all three dimensions with the addition of a fourth (cultural). Also, posed the Wellbeing Agenda as equivalent to the three-fold approach to SD.
REGIONAL LEVELS			
Auckland Region/Municipality	Constructed six Outcomes that address the themes the SDGs touch upon. Reviewed its Plan against the SDGs and their concomitant Targets, which illustrates a link between the two.	Increased focus on sustainability in its recently updated 2050 Plan, which demonstrates the normative impact of the 2030 Agenda on the local government and the public for said norm to now be embedded in the Plan. Previous focus on economic progress was addressed, adding that this can only be truly	Auckland constructed its own modified Outcomes that align with the themes of the SDGs and modified its local beliefs and practices as demonstrated by the enhanced focus on sustainability introduced to the revised Auckland Plan 2050 in 2018 and the broadened understanding of SD as encompassing not only an economic agenda

	Reconstructed the norm of SD to encompass a fourth pillar, culture to align with the national Government.	successful if sustainable prosperity and an environmental focus is incorporated.	but including social, environmental, and cultural concerns.
Canterbury Region	Stated that its core purpose is to promote social, economic, environmental, and cultural Wellbeing. This follows the national agenda with Wellbeing. However, heavy focus on the environmental aspect revealed modification. Constructed its own four Capitals and established its own Community Outcomes. Displayed which SDGs fit under each Outcome and Capital. However, the SDGs held no significant role for the Plan overall; thus, the display was not vital for the global norm to fit with the context. Followed a similar framework as the 2030 Agenda, where SD accounts for social, economic, and environmental pillars. Added its own human capital (pillar).	Broadened its understanding of SD; that is, the reference to, and reliance on, economic development was broadened in its scope to sustainable regional development across all four dimensions (social, economic, environmental, and cultural). Spoke into one of the fundamental principles of the 2030 Agenda; namely, the Leave No One Behind-pledge. Constructed its framework of the four Community Outcomes and the four Capitals with the SDGs in mind.	The Canterbury Region both constructed and reconstructed vital themes of the 2030 Agenda to fit with its regional context. The extent so far, that SD and SDGs were not present in the core features of the Plan's framework. For the modification of local practices and beliefs to fit the global norm, the Region broadened its understanding of SD, spoke into the Pledge of the 2030 Agenda, and were inspired by the SDGs in its construction of its Capitals and Outcomes.
Southland Region	Constructed four Outcomes that align with the 2030 Agenda's notion of holism. Modified the holistic approach bound to the 2030 Agenda to fit with its context. Recognized the importance of building partnerships to achieve its Outcomes.	Addressed SD in terms of social, economic, environmental, and cultural Wellbeing; hence, followed the Wellbeing Agenda set by the Government. Modified how it thinks and approaches challenges in the Region, so that it corresponds with the holistic nature the 2030 Agenda promotes.	The Southland Region modified the global norm to fit its context by focusing on the holistic approach of the 2030 Agenda and the importance of partnerships to achieve one's goals. For the modification of local beliefs and practices, the connections to the global norm were diluted and could be credited to simply following the national agenda set by the Government.

Greater Wellington Region	Incorporated one of the vital points in the 2030 Agenda, which is partnerships for achieving SD. Incorporated the social, environmental, and economic pillars of SD into its work to achieve a sustainable region. Constructed a framework wherein it has what can function as goals and targets to achieve its Outcomes; hence, it reconstructed the framework of SDGs to fit with its context.	Linked its environmental focus with economic sustainability and a focus on cooperating with Māori partners. Hence, it modified the local understanding of SD to also encompass economic and social SD. Modified local practices to accommodate its establishment of what can function as goals and targets to take action and measure progress (its reconstruction of the SDGs framework).	The Greater Wellington Region constructed a framework that contains the likeness of goals and targets that have been modified by the global norm and, thus, reflect a reconstruction of the SDGs framework to fit with the regional context. The Region's modification of its local beliefs and practices was detected in the three-dimensional understanding of development which was further reflected in its responses to uncertain or emergency situations.
Waikato Region	Constructed Outcomes to achieve social, economic, environmental, and cultural Wellbeing; hence, aligning with the national Wellbeing Agenda. Addressed all SDGs through its three Outcomes. Modified the global norm of the SDGs through its partnership in a community-led project, where the Waikato Targets were created based on the SDGs. The Waikato Targets correspond with the SDGs as they operate within the theme of the given SDG, while being constructed to fit in Waikato's context.	Engaged with the notion of sustainable decision-making, central to the 2030 Agenda; e.g, through regionally focused frameworks to mitigate the impact of climate change; hereby, modifying its local approach to fit with the global norm. Reflected the UN-led focus on ensuring a balance between the three pillars of SD in its vision of striving towards a healthy environment, strong economy, and vibrant communities. Modified its beliefs and practices to correspond with the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement in SD. Emphasized the importance of partnerships for success.	The Waikato Region constructed its own Waikato Targets to fit the SDGs into its context and its own Outcomes that correspond with the SDGs and SD. Simultaneously, it modified its own beliefs and practices for SD, which the UN attributes interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement.
LOCAL LEVELS			
Christchurch Municipality	Constructed its own framework and four Outcomes that embrace the threefold understanding of SD, as they address issues of	Stated that it builds strong partnerships across local and regional borders, with government agencies, indigenous communities, and businesses.	Christchurch's norm localization process is demonstrated by its whole-of-community view and the way that its four Outcomes

	social, environmental, and economic character as they unfold in the local context. Emphasized a whole-of-community view, which is a smaller-scale mirroring of the global Leave No One Behind-pledge that underlies the entire 2030 Agenda. Spoke into the notion of SD as covering four dimensions; namely, social, environmental, economic, and cultural. Modified the global norm of the threefold understanding of SD to focus mainly on the environmental pillar to fit its local context, where the environment has a larger focus.	Modified its local beliefs and practices to focus on establishing partnerships across all sectors to achieve its goal of a thriving, prosperous, and resilient city.	embrace and modify the three dimensions of SD as pushed in the 2030 Agenda. Simultaneously, its increased focus on partnerships demonstrates modification of local practices as well.
Invercargill Municipality	Constructed five Strategic Challenges that modified the pillars of SD in the sense that they address local challenges of Wellbeing. Constructed three Community Outcomes that do not demonstrate a modification of the global norm, as they are vague. Constructed Indicators under each Outcome that fit with various themes of the SDGs. Hence, it modified the SDGs, their concomitant Targets and Indicators, through this construction.	Indicated the inclusion of the three dimensions of SD in its strategic framework to support decision-making. Increased focus on engaging in partnerships following an acknowledgement of the complexity of political issues and decisions which calls for collaboration to ensure a holistic approach to said problems; a predominant feature of the 2030 Agenda.	Invercargill modified the global norm of the SDGs by constructing its own Strategies, Outcomes, and Indicators that incorporate the themes of the SDGs, but in a local context; however, the references are broad and vague. It incorporated the three pillars of SD into its decision-making process; thereby, indicating a modification of its practices. Also, it now recognizes the importance of partnerships to achieve its own agenda.
Upper Hutt Municipality	Constructed four Outcomes that guide local activities, projects, and service levels to facilitate Wellbeing.	Engaged in a process that balances the different pillars of SD to mitigate environmental, social, and economic consequences locally.	Upper Hutt constructed four Outcomes of which three reference the pillars of SD in its local context. Focused on the inclusion of Māori in its work toward achieving a sustainable municipality; hence, the

	Referenced the three dimensions of SD in the first three Outcomes, as now modified to fit its local context. Published a Sustainability Strategy, detailing its plans for working towards a more sustainable future. It touched upon all dimensions of SD and aligned itself closely with the UN's 2030 Agenda. Accommodated the Māori view of sustainability into its current framework: the environment is imperative to Māori culture and securing this is therefore of significant importance to both Māori and Upper Hutt in their work to accommodate and include this part of their community. Took the SDGs and the nationally modified understanding of the SDGs into account in its own process of defining its own Sustainability Goals and Principles.	Modified the previous focus on ensuring a stable natural environment to also focus on meeting the social needs and building the resilience of the community in a financially sustainable manner. Created a Sustainability Strategy, detailing its plans for working towards a more sustainable future.	reconstruction of the threefold understanding of SD to include a fourth cultural pillar. Took the SDGs and the national modification of them into account in its own process of constructing its own Sustainability Goals and Principles. Upper Hutt also modified its own practices and beliefs to engage in a process where the pillars of SD are balanced. Hence, the focus on the natural environment must also include social and economic considerations. The Municipality decided to create a Strategy for sustainability, which further demonstrates its modification of its practices to fit with the global norm.
Thames-Coromandel Municipality	Constructed a Vision and Outcomes that reference themes of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs, and Wellbeing in a local context. Referred to the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability in its Plan. The social dimension was added, but not in explicit reference to sustainability. Emphasized financial sustainability more than the other dimensions.	Addressed SD and aspects of the 2030 Agenda in relation to its management of infrastructure assets, financial sustainability in terms of affordability of core services, and in relation to the sustainability and resilience of the Municipality. In an ongoing process of modifying its local beliefs and practices to fit with the global norm; i.e., has identified challenges but not yet made moves to address them.	Thames-Coromandel identified the areas in which it falls short on delivering on aspects central to the 2030 Agenda. From this, we deem that local beliefs and practices are yet to be modified to build congruence with the global norm.

6.2 How the National Levels Set the Tone for the Local Governmental Levels

Our analysis of New Zealand's national level of government reveals a significant degree of modification of the global norm to fit the national context. This includes efforts by the Government to place the SDGs in a New Zealand context and their construction of the Wellbeing Agenda, which encompasses a modification of the understanding of SD by including a cultural dimension. Finally, the introduction of the more than 100 Indicators that measure New Zealand's Wellbeing demonstrates the modification of local beliefs and practices and the impact of the Wellbeing Agenda. Similarly, we detected efforts on behalf of the national Government of New Zealand to modify its local beliefs and practices to fit the global norm, as illustrated by its revised understanding of and approach to sustainability and Wellbeing to be more holistic. Hence, we consider the norm localization at the national governmental level in New Zealand to reflect a balance in which both the modification of the local beliefs and practices and the global norm are accommodated in the national political approach to Wellbeing (i.e., SD).

In contrast, our examination of Denmark's national level of government indicates a notable modification and reconstruction of the themes of the global norm to correspond with the national context. Here, we identified that the Danish Government modifies vital notions of the 2030 Agenda, such as the Leave No One Behind-pledge, the five Ps, and SD as encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions, to fit with Denmark's national context. In addition, we uncovered that the 2030-panel, instated by the Danish Government, constructed the Danish Indicators intended to replace the SDG Indicators; however, we found that the Government did not use the Danish Indicators in its assessment of its progress with the SDGs. Still, in its presentation of its fifty Political Goals for Denmark, the Government included the Danish Indicators and the SDG Targets.

In comparing the two countries' localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the most notable difference we identified lies in the use of the SDGs in their assessments. We detected that the Danish Government assesses itself based on the universal portrayal of the SDGs and their concomitant Targets and Indicators. In contrast, the New Zealand Government assesses itself by modifying the SDGs to fit its national context. Still, we found that both countries operate on the basis of *logic of appropriateness* in their localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. To clarify, our understanding and use of the constructivist and sociological institutionalist concept of *logic of appropriateness* is as follows: when the UN diffuses a norm, here the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, this does not automatically result in all countries

following said norm. Rather, they engage with (modify) it and, following considerations of its *appropriateness*, choose to align with said norm or not. Hence, we assume that following a *logic of appropriateness* entails agency on behalf of the 'follower', namely, different levels of government. Hence, it is not just a presumed state of affairs that actors blindly relate to, but a global norm gaining impact that said actors actively consider before accepting and modifying their beliefs and practices to fit with it. For example, the Danish Government expanded the impact assessment for law proposals so that all proposals will be screened for impact on the SDGs (Finansministeriet, 2021, p. 11). For the proposals that have a significant and relevant impact on the SDGs, a separate section that describes what said impacts are for the SDGs and their concomitant Targets and Indicators must be included (ibid.). Hence, the Danish Government took action to follow the global norm further and implemented a law that will keep the SDGs present in the Government's policymaking, which we deemed was done to follow the moral template of said norm. In addition, both documents we used for our analysis of the national levels are the VNRs. Given that both Denmark and New Zealand decided to conduct the Volunatury Review on their progress with the SDGs, the Governments followed a *logic of appropriateness*. That is, they engage with the UN norm voluntarily because they deem it 'the right thing to do' (Finansministeriet, 2021, p. 70; New Zealand Government, 2019, p. 4). Moreover, the states would not be met with monetary sanctions or lawsuits if they fail to deliver. At most, they would face condemnation from like-minded actors or the UN, thus, indicating the normative nature of the 2030 Agenda and the moral template that it has come to constitute (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.). Hence, we stress the importance of agency when states engage with and deem a global norm legitimate and appropriate to follow, which aligns with our inclusion of neoliberal considerations to complement our constructivist framework.

Furthermore, when comparing all the cases, we found that the regional and local levels in New Zealand demonstrated a more cohesive approach to the localization compared to the cases from Denmark. Here, the consistent reference to Wellbeing, which for New Zealand is equivalent to SD and its three dimensions, with the addition of a fourth cultural dimension, played a significant role.

In New Zealand, we uncovered that the LGA requires all local governments to have an LTP that lasts 10 years and is revised every third year (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002, pp. 102-103). Following new institutionalism, we identify the LGA as a *formal institution*, as it generates legislation for the municipalities and regional governments to follow in their policymaking. Nevertheless, the requirement of LTPs does not constitute the localization of

the global norm. In addition, based on our findings from the national level in New Zealand, we decided to investigate the Wellbeing Agenda further. We found that the New Zealand Government made its first Wellbeing Budget in 2019, the same year as the VNR. Like the Wellbeing Agenda, the Budget is designed to use economic, social (including culture), and environmental indicators to guide the Government's economic policymaking (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, n.d.). In all Regions, we identified the Wellbeing Agenda as directly corresponding with the SD aspect of the 2030 Agenda. Also, we found direct use of or implicit reference to the Wellbeing Agenda for some of the local levels, namely, Christchurch, Invercargill, and Upper Hutt.

Consequently, we argue that the *formal institution* of the LGA has facilitated the diffusion of the Wellbeing agenda through the different levels of government in New Zealand. Moreover, we assert that, in the case of New Zealand, the *formal institution* has reinforced the *informal institution*; that is, the norm localization. Thus, we argue that the reinstatement of the *formal institution* has facilitated the cohesiveness in New Zealand's localization of the global norm at all governmental levels. Aligning this with the constructivist paradigm, the success of New Zealand's Government in localizing its modified Wellbeing Agenda lies in its ability to combine the *constitutive rule* that is for subnational governments to present LTPs with a new-coming *regulative rule* that incorporates Wellbeing into all policymaking; thereby, forming the *rules of the game*.

In its Action Plan, the Danish Government presents the Leave No One Behind-pledge as a vital agenda for the Government to achieve SD (Finansministeriet, 2021, p. 19). However, our analysis of both the Regional and Municipal Governments showed that the Leave No One Behind-pledge only serves as an agenda for the Danish Government and not Denmark as a nation. The subnational levels did not indicate use of the Leave No One Behind-pledge; hence, the *norm diffusion* from the national level to the subnational levels did not occur. Compared to New Zealand, we decided to investigate whether Denmark has similar legislation as the LGA for their regional and local governments. Here, we found that regions in Denmark are required to uphold a Regional Development Strategy (Regionsloven, 2022, §5.2). Similarly, municipalities must maintain and uphold a Municipal Plan that runs for 12 years at a time and is up for revision following municipal elections every fourth year (Bolig og Planstyrelsen, 2022, "Kommuneplanens rolle" section). Given our data of mostly sustainability plans and strategies for the Municipalities, we cannot account for whether the *formal institution* facilitated the *informal institution* of the Leave No One Behind-pledge. However, for the Regions, we used their Development Strategies, and we detected that the *formal institution* did

not facilitate the *informal* one for the Regions, as none of them addressed the Leave No One Behind-pledge. Consequently, we derive that the *formal institution* might facilitate the diffusion of norms within states; however, this is not guaranteed. Therefore, we seek to expand the explanation for why New Zealand has an apparent diffusion of a specific norm from the national level to the subnational levels that facilitate the localization process of the global norm, whereas Denmark does not, by drawing on the impact of MLG structure and the respective political systems on the localization process.

We argue that the difference in the diffusion of the nationally modified global norm from the respective governments to the subnational governmental levels can be explained by the political structures of the countries and the impact that this has on the diffusion of the norm across multiple levels of government. As our contextual presentations (5.2 and 5.3) reveal, the Danish political system is decentralized while the New Zealand system is very centralized. Consequently, we found that the local authorities in Denmark, who enjoy more autonomous decision-making compared to their New Zealand counterparts, generally derive meaning from many different sources, be that the UN, the Danish Government, citizens, and, in the case of municipalities, from their respective regional authorities. Their notion of what is considered legitimate and morally correct is, thus, influenced by a wider array of actors and institutions with whom they *socialize*. This aids us in explaining the significant variety in approaches to the modification that we uncovered in our analysis of the Danish cases. In contrast, New Zealand's subnational governments are less autonomous and, thus, more restricted in their ability to derive meaning and form their own modifications. We noticed how they rely primarily on the Government's norm modification and input from its citizens in its approach to modifying the global norm. In this sense, their understanding of what to consider legitimate and morally correct is influenced by a more limited selection of actors and institutions, and their identity and interests reflect those of such like-minded actors.

We acknowledge that an opposite outcome might have also been the case; that is, a centralized system with a government highly committed to the 2030 Agenda could facilitate a successful localization at the subnational levels of government by pushing its successful localization at the national level to be reflected at subnational levels. Nevertheless, in the case of New Zealand, a centralized political structure did not facilitate further localization at the local governmental level due to the detected omission of the SDGs compared to Denmark, where we identified an explicit mention of the SDGs in all cases. In that sense, we align with the argument made by Orizco et al. (2021) as they infer that "[t]he more concentrated the power in the central government, the less voice subnational actors have in SDG localization" (p. 17).

Therefore, if local governments are not explicitly required to reference and modify the SDGs, we cannot expect to find them at this level of government, as demonstrated in New Zealand. In contrast, the Danish local level governments present the SDGs despite there being no clear instructions from the national Government. Thus, we argue that their increased autonomy underlies this finding.

6.2.1 Cultural and Geopolitical Context in the National Localization Processes

Derived from Denmark and New Zealand's VNRs, we argue that New Zealand elaborates on its responsibility and commitment to further the 2030 Agenda in the Pacific through partnerships and aid for SD as an integral part of its international and national approach to SD (New Zealand Government, 2019, pp. 9; 15). In contrast, Denmark focuses mainly on its national initiatives for SD, where it presents substantial efforts and policies to further SD in the country. In the Action Plan, the last chapter is dedicated to Denmark's role in international collaboration for SD; however, the chapter has a broad international perspective instead of focusing on Denmark's geographical region (Finansministeriet, 2021, pp. 70-72).

Accordingly, a crucial factor for explaining the difference in the inclusion of geographical regions at the national level is the geopolitical differences between Denmark and New Zealand. Denmark is located in Northern Europe, surrounded by other well-standing states, and is a member of the EU (section 5.2). Thus, there are no nations in the immediate regional area needing aid from Denmark to further their SD. Whereas, for New Zealand, the country is located in the South Pacific, where neighbors are far between and mostly islands (section 5.3). Hence, with a vision to boost the resilience and prosperity in the Pacific, New Zealand allocates a large part of its work with SD in the Pacific to ensure a more sustainable and resilient region for all its residents, including itself (New Zealand Government, 2019, p. 5).

Still, we argue that New Zealand's actions are also explained by the *logic of appropriateness* and constructivist state characteristics. That is, New Zealand's focus on helping the development of the Pacific because it corresponds with the global norm that sees developed countries helping to ensure that developing countries also achieve SD; i.e., Leaving No One Behind (UNGA, 2015, "partnership" section; Article 22). In this argument lies the assumption of agency on the New Zealand Government's behalf; that is, the Government's national self-understanding aligns with the global norm, which reinforces efforts taken that favor this policy area. The national recognizability prompts New Zealand to deem the global

norm appropriate. As such, since New Zealand outwardly prides itself on being a frontrunner in this regard, said actions are essential in pushing this image (section 4.2.1).

Furthermore, derived from these findings, we also identified the instance of *norm institutionalization*, as we found that the UN's 2030 Agenda norm of international cooperation to facilitate SD localized at the national levels in New Zealand and Denmark. This was evident in their focus on and commitment to international cooperation for SD, whether in their immediate geographical area or broader scope. Our findings demonstrate that both nations identify themselves as significant supporters and contributors to international cooperation for SD.

Turning our focus from geopolitical considerations to cultural ones, one of the significant differences between Denmark and New Zealand at the national level is their political-cultural systems which are also reflected in their localization processes of the global norm. This becomes apparent in New Zealand's consistent consideration of their Māori population and the Pacific Peoples in the country. Māori are explicitly mentioned in all the Plans we analyzed for New Zealand, and Pacific Peoples are also mentioned in a few of them, albeit mainly at the national level. In contrast, the Danish Plans and Strategies do not mention minority groups to the same extent the Māori and Pacific Peoples are included in the New Zealand Plans. Denmark's closest relation to indigenous people are the Inuit, who originate from Greenland. However, given the historical context, we do not presuppose that Denmark would include them in their policymaking (section 5.2). We point to these historical and contextual differences and the theoretical perspectives of constructivism and SI, which will be introduced in the next paragraph to explain the difference in the inclusion and focus on national minority groups.

Given New Zealand's cultural-political context with the Māori and Pacific Peoples, we identify its significant focus on the inclusion and recognition of the indigenous people as illustrating its sense of moral responsibility to help these people and the areas they reside in (the Pacific). Hence, the New Zealand Government and all the regional and local Governments diffuse the norm of collaborating with and assisting the indigenous people and the Pacific in developing sustainably on the *logic of appropriateness*. That is, they deem the global norm of not leaving anyone behind to be legitimate and, consequently, set out to act accordingly. This aligns with the national sense of self in which New Zealand portrays itself as a global frontrunner in facilitating SD. Hence, to live up to this standard, the national Government takes action to fit into the global consensus in which partnerships and development assistance have become the legitimate ways for developed states to act.

One of the major pitfalls for New Zealand is their historical mistreatment of the Māori people (New Zealand Government, 2019, p. 7), which they are now trying to mend. As a result, the indigenous New Zealanders now have a special place and priority in society; "[...] we acknowledge that the special status of Māori, as the tangata whenua or indigegnous people of New Zealand, is fundamental to who we are as a nation" (ibid., p. 4). This may help explain why the otherwise well-performing country places lower on the SDG performance list (in comparison to Denmark) (section 4.2.1). Moreover, we notice how this narrative developed to form a moral template across the nation and, thus, came to provide the *frames of meaning* that guide action across political levels in New Zealand, as outlined by SI. Specifically, we infer this based on the insistent consideration of the Māori people that characterize the LTPs of all our cases across the different governmental levels in New Zealand.

This is not the case in Denmark, where the Danish Government's focus on Leave No One Behind takes a broader narrative regarding the country's welfare system, which contrasts with the cultural element found in New Zealand. The fact that Denmark conforms to the Leave No One Behind-pledge suggests that the UN succeeded in diffusing a *constitutive rule* that Denmark now operates legitimately under, as demonstrated by making it a central aspect of the Government's political vision. Hence, the norm has come to form Denmark's national identity (as a reflection of the current Government) on the basis of furthering welfare. Therefore, it is another *frame of meaning* that guides action in Denmark, i.e., structurally mitigating inequality, and results in a different modification of the global norm compared to what was the case in New Zealand.

Following these discoveries, we infer that those national contexts and cultural specificities significantly impact how countries engage with global norms. Thus, while we hold that the structural focus of SI is an important aspect of diffusing a culture that easily accommodates the global norm that the UN works to spread, the national (and regional and local) agency simultaneously takes a vital role as accounted for by norm localization theory. Hence, local realities and the national sense of self play a significant role in determining which aspects of a global norm take root in the different countries. Hence, while SI explains how social actors (here, governments at national and subnational levels) adhere to the norms/institutions that are diffused to them through means of culture, symbols, etc., we simultaneously find that we cannot ignore the agency of local actors (governments) to pick and choose among said cultural codes to align with their individual realities, as such modifying a global norm.

6.3 Local Realities and the Localization Processes

This section takes its point of departure in identifying the municipal cases of our research as Best Case, Worst Case, or as placing somewhere in between depending on certain shortcomings or inclusions. To make said qualification, we identified six parameters based on our findings and considerations from literature in the field.

Following Acharya's theory (section 3.3) and the findings from Lanshina et al.'s research (chapter 2), we identify the localization of the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda when the municipal government has selected relevant Goals and modified these to fit with its local context (selecting Goals, Targets, and Indicators). At the same time, it explicitly referenced or modified the three essential themes of the 2030 Agenda, namely, the three-fold approach to SD, the Leave No One Behind-pledge, and partnerships to achieve the strategies, goals, or outcomes set for the municipality. Simultaneously, the municipality must modify its beliefs and practices to correspond with the global norm to build congruence.

We established six parameters to guide our evaluation of the best and worst cases at the local level. We decided to simplify our evaluation parameters to easily answer either 'yes' or 'no' to them for each case. Still, our evaluation is based on all our analytical findings as laid out in Appendix 2 and 3. These parameters reflect our theoretical framework (Chapter 3) and are influenced by the findings of scholars in our field (Chapter 2). Nevertheless, we recognize that this has multiple nuances, which we will address in a discussion based on our concluding remarks in Chapter 7.

The first parameter is SDGs selection; here, we identify whether all or selected SDGs (Goals, Targets, and Indicators) are presented in the documents. The second parameter is SDGs modification, where we examine whether the selected SDGs (Goals, Targets, and Indicators) faced modification to fit the local context. The third (three-fold approach to SD), fourth (Leave No One Behind-pledge), and fifth (partnerships to achieve the strategies, goals, or outcomes) parameters reflect the themes of the 2030 Agenda (global norm) and incorporate the indicators 'explicit' and 'implicit' to guide our evaluation of the cases. Here, we determine whether the parameters are explicitly or implicitly addressed or referenced in the material. Given that our norm localization theory ascribes the actors (the municipalities) power in the localization process, we assert that an explicit articulation of the third, fourth, and fifth parameters is better, as it demonstrates the actor's active use of the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda. Finally, the sixth parameter is the modification of local beliefs and practices; here, we found that all cases modify their local beliefs and practices. Still, the extent to which this was done, and the actual

influence of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda differs between the cases. Therefore, to keep our parameters simple, we will elaborate on this in our characterization of the Best and Worst Cases. Table 3 below summarizes our characterization of our 10 cases at the municipal level as they relate to each of the six established parameters.

Table 3 Summary of Parameters, Municipalities

	SDGs Selection	SDGs Modification	Three-fold Sustainable Development	Leave No One Behind-pledge	Partnerships to Achieve Goals	Modification of Local Beliefs and Practices
Copenhagen	Selected relevant Targets	Local goal-setting the themes of the SDGs	Yes Explicit	No	Yes Explicit	Modified its comprehension of the term 'sustainability' from previously being centered solely around a green agenda to now mirroring the three-fold approach to SD. Focus on cooperation between the Municipality and other sectors.
Aarhus	Highlights one Goal (SDG 17)	No	Yes Implicit	No	Yes Explicit	Initiatives or Objectives mirrored the mutually reinforcing principle of the SDGs. Addressed social, economic, and environmental aspects in its Plans.
Sønderborg	Selected all SDGs as relevant	Selected relevant Targets and modified the Indicators	Yes Explicit	Yes Explicit	Yes Explicit	Formulated five Principles for Sustainability that aid in incorporating the sustainability mindset into its daily work. Made Plans and Strategies dedicated to the SDGs.
Ballerup	Selected SDGs 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 13	No	Yes Implicit	No	No	Touched upon the three dimensions of SD in its strategy.
Rebild	No	No	Yes Explicit	No	Yes Implicit	Adopted the interconnectedness of the SDGs. Wants to have a holistic approach to sustainability in its future policymaking.
Auckland	No	No	Yes Explicit	No	Yes Explicit	Increased focus on sustainability. Previous focus on economic progress was addressed, adding that now it must include sustainable prosperity and an environmental focus.

Christchurch	No	No	Yes Explicit	Yes Implicit	Yes Explicit	Focused on establishing partnerships across all sectors to achieve its goal of a thriving, prosperous, and resilient city.
Invercargill	No	No	Yes Implicit	No	Yes Explicit	Inclusion of the three-fold approach to SD in its strategic framework to support decision-making. Increased focus on engaging in partnerships.
Upper Hutt	Selected relevant themes the SDGs address	Modified selected themes into its own Sustainability Goals	Yes Implicit	No	Yes Explicit	Modified its previous focus on ensuring a stable natural environment to also focus on social and economic stability. Created a Sustainability Strategy.
Thames-Coromandel	No	No	Yes Implicit	No	Yes Implicit	Addressed sustainability in relation to its management of infrastructure assets, the affordability of core services, and the sustainability and resilience of the area.

Following our analysis of the 10 Danish (Appendix 2) and New Zealand (Appendix 3) Municipalities, we identified the following Best and Worst Cases from the two countries based on our evaluation of their localization processes: For Denmark, the Best Case is Sønderborg and the Worst Case is Ballerup. For New Zealand, the Best Case is Upper Hutt and the Worst Case is Thames-Coromandel.

Among all Municipalities, Sønderborg was the only one that scored 'yes' and 'explicit' in all parameters. What characterizes the Best Case in Denmark, is its active selection and modification of the SDGs to fit its local context. Sønderborg presents all 17 SDGs in its local context, with a status of, and challenges relating to, the given SDG and its own established Goals (under the theme of the given SDG). In our examination, we found that in the status section for each SDG, Sønderborg introduced how the overall theme of the given SDG fits into its context to facilitate the elaboration of its own Goals, Targets, and Indicators. For example, for Goal 1 (No Poverty), the Municipality selected three out of the seven original Targets and reconstructed these to correspond with its context. Here, Target 1.1 initially states, "[b]y 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day" (UNGA, 2015, p. 15). In Sønderborg's context, the Target is reconstructed to state that it "[i]nvolves homeless people and citizens that have received §85 support in their own home" (Sønderborg Kommune, 2021b, p. 7).

Similarly, Upper Hutt selected relevant SDGs and modified these to fit with its local context in its Sustainability Strategy. Upper Hutt took the SDGs and the nationally modified understanding of them into account in its process of defining its own Sustainability Goals and Principles (Upper Hutt City Council [UHCC], 2020, p. 7). The Upper Hutt Sustainability Goals were presented in its 2020 Sustainability Strategy and illustrate the modification of the SDGs to fit its local context. For example, its first Goal is to make the Council a carbon-neutral organization by 2035, which is a local take on how the Council can achieve the aim of the SDGs and fulfill the 2030 Agenda (ibid., p. 20).

In addition, Sønderborg modified its local beliefs and practices to correspond with the external norm by formulating 5 Principles for Sustainability that aid in incorporating the sustainability mindset into the daily work across the municipal organization (Sønderborg Kommune, 2021a, p. 14). These principles demonstrate the impact that the global norm has had on the modification of local beliefs and practices in Sønderborg, as the Principles incorporate the three-fold approach to SD by addressing social, environmental, and economic aspects, and they address the importance of partnerships to achieve the Municipality's Goals (ibid.). Moreover, we identified that the active creation of plans and strategies for the SDGs

and the 2030 Agenda further emphasizes the modification of local beliefs and practices to fit with the global norm. In its LTP, Upper Hutt sets out to transition to "[...] a sustainable, low-waste, low-emissions, carbon-neutral environment [...]" by engaging in a process that, implicitly, balances the different pillars of sustainability to mitigate environmental, social, and economic consequences (UHCC, 2021, pp. 12-13). Hence, like Sønderborg, it incorporated the three-fold approach to SD, and we detected that it also details how it, in close collaboration with its citizens, will work towards a more sustainable Upper Hutt (UHCC, 2020, p. 8). Moreover, the Municipality created plans and strategies for sustainability, which further emphasizes its commitment to modifying its local practices and beliefs to fit the global norm.

Concerning the third, fourth, and fifth parameters, Upper Hutt implicitly referenced the three-fold approach to SD, left out the Leave No One Behind-pledge, and explicitly addressed the partnerships to achieve its Goals and Outcomes. In contrast, Sønderborg explicitly references all three parameters. Thus, we identify the main differences between the two Best Cases lie in the inclusion of the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda. For example, Upper Hutt implicitly references the three-fold approach to SD in its first three Community Outcomes, as the themes of the Outcomes correspond with the three pillars of SD (UHCC, 2021, p. 11). Whereas Sønderborg modified the UN's understanding of SD as comprising three pillars (social, economic, and environmental) by adding a fourth dimension, namely, culture (Sønderborg Kommune, 2021a, p. 3). The difference between the implicit and explicit approaches indicates that Sønderborg is actively engaged in understanding and reconstructing the three-fold approach to SD. On the contrary, Upper Hutt's Outcomes are by law meant to include social, economic, and environmental considerations (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002, p. 23). Thus, paired with our analytical findings, we argue that the Municipality did not take on an active role in incorporating the pillars because they wanted to localize the UN's norm of SD.

We identified a significant aspect of the localization process, which includes local governments *responding to a foreign idea* (as presented in section 3.3). The explicit articulation of the SDGs shows that this foreign idea (global norm) was considered in the subsequent modification of said norm to fit the local context. Following this, we place Sønderborg as the Best Case overall. The explicit reference and articulation of the vital themes of the UN's 2030 Agenda demonstrate the actor's awareness of the explicit link the themes have to the UN's norm, further indicating an active localization process by the actor. Furthermore, our evaluation of the Municipality scoring 'yes' on all parameters illustrates the Municipality's commitment to localizing all normative aspects of the 2030 Agenda. Also, the case of Sønderborg fits with

our definition of localization, as it has selected relevant SDGs and modified them to fit its local context (constructed its own Goals, selected and reconstructed Targets, and constructed new indicators). Simultaneously, it modified its local beliefs and practices to fit with the global norm by formulating 5 Principles for Sustainability that incorporate the three-fold approach to SD into the daily work across the organization and address the importance of partnerships to achieve the Municipality's Goals. Thus, we assert that Sønderborg performs an active localization process of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda and is on the road to achieving localization of the global norm.

Turning to the *institutionalization* of the global norm, Upper Hutt constructed local Community Outcomes under the pillars of SD, which demonstrates that it maintains the institutional model as instituted by the LGA. Moreover, the content of the Outcomes is then modified to fit with the global norm (pillars of SD) but in the local context. Thus, following norm localization theory, the original institutional arrangements were not supplanted by the global norm; instead, the global norm was modified to fit with the local context in the institutional model. Still, given that the Municipality also constructed its own Goals by selecting and modifying the SDGs, we assert that the case also demonstrates that expanding institutional arrangements might be necessary to localize a global norm.

For Sønderborg, we identified that it explicitly uses the SDGs and presents each Goal with its own constructed targets and indicators. Given that we found these instances in plans explicitly related to the SDGs, we argue that Sønderborg establishes new institutional arrangements in the form of plans dedicated to the SDGs to diffuse the core of the global norm to the local level. Thus, we identify an instance of institutional expansion for the municipal organizations to incorporate the global norm, as the institutional arrangements are supplemented with new ones. Thereby, we argue that Sønderborg illustrates that expanding institutional arrangements is necessary to localize a global norm. We recognize that introducing new institutional arrangements to supplement the existing ones can develop into institutional supplanting, which halts the localization; however, our findings reveal that this is not the case for Sønderborg.

Based on our comparison, we identified that the Best Cases demonstrate that it is vital to present and select SDGs, while modifying the Goals, Targets, or Indicators in the localization process. Here, the case of Sønderborg illustrates that a modification of all SDGs furthers the chances of a localization. Moreover, both cases demonstrated the common practices of explicitly incorporating the three-fold approach to SD and recognizing the importance of partnerships to reach their Goals and Outcomes in modifying local beliefs and practices. Still,

we argue that another vital point for the characterization of both Best Cases is that they made Plans and Strategies that explicitly catered to SD, the SDGs, and the 2030 Agenda, which demonstrates a commitment to localizing the global norm.

We now focus on the identification and characterization of the Worst Cases. Among all Municipalities, Thames-Coromandel scored the worst, collectively; in the parameters where it scored 'yes', the 'implicit' indicator made the difference from the second-worst case, Invercargill. In contrast to the Best Cases, Thames-Coromandel did not select or modify the SDGs to fit its local context, which makes it score low in the evaluation. However, we identified a common theme in the New Zealand Municipalities, which is that none of them select and modify the SDGs except the Best Case. In contrast, the Worst Case from Denmark, Ballerup, conducted a selection of SDGs relevant to its context, as it identified six SDGs, which the Committees in the Municipality should integrate into plans, strategies, and tasks as they occur (Ballerup Kommune, 2020, "FN's verdensmål" section). Consequently, even though Ballerup conducted a selection of the SDGs, there was no attempt to modify these to fit its local context, which, following Acharya (section 3.3), we argue will disrupt the localization process, as the local modification of the global norm is essential for a localization to occur.

Furthermore, for the two Worst Cases, the 'implicit' indicator is used for two of the three parameters they score 'yes' on (third and fifth). Thus, in the instances where we detected references to the three-fold approach to SD and the role of partnerships in achieving Goals and Outcomes, we found that these were not explicitly stated, which can indicate a passive approach and lack of awareness from the actor in the localization of the global norm. For example, we identified the implicit presence of the (nationally modified) four pillars of SD in Thames-Coromandel's LTP, where it addresses its work with the economy, natural environment, and social sustainability (Thames-Coromandel District Council [TCDC], 2018, pp. 35; 45; 52; 129). Similarly, we found the implicit presence in Ballerup Municipality's Vision 2029, as the Vision's four themes can all be related to the three pillars of SD (Ballerup Kommune, 2017, pp. 4-7). The implicitness lies in the fact that, through a cross-reference, we were able to identify similar themes and structures, such as the UN's vision of SD being three-fold and mutually reinforcing, in the Plans. However, solely by looking at the Plans, the reference is not correlated strongly enough to the global norm to indicate a modification.

Consequently, the two Worst Cases present similar and different approaches to localizing the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Thames-Coromandel did not meet our criterion of selecting and modifying the SDGs, and Ballerup only selected SDGs but made no efforts to modify them. Upon closer reflection, we argue that the lack of selection and modification of the SDGs

significantly impacts the localization process, as neither the global norm nor the local beliefs and practices should supplant the other. Thus, by omitting the selection and modification of the SDGs, the global norm is supplanted by the local beliefs and practices to an extent where the inclusion of the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda cannot prevail.

The rest of the cases all place somewhere in-between the Best and Worst Cases. Still, we have made a distinction between cases that lean towards the better-performing end of the spectrum (i.e., share more similarities with the Best Cases) and cases that resemble the Worst Cases, albeit performing better in certain aspects than the Worst Cases. Similar for all of these cases is that most of them have not made an effort to modify the SDGs to fit the global norm into their local context. Nevertheless, Aarhus includes the SDGs in their universal form in their Plans, resulting in it performing better than Auckland, Christchurch, and Invercargill. The main exception here is Cophenhagen. Significant to Copenhagen is that while it performs at the same level as Upper Hutt, based on our indicators, Sønderborg performs better, and we, therefore, do not characterize it as a Best Case.

Following this, we argue that our assumption of performance in localizing the global norm mirrors the population size (available funding and resources (section 4.2.1)) has mostly been proved correct. Roughly speaking, the Worst Cases are located in small (Thames-Coromandel) or medium (Ballerup) urban areas, in this sense aligning with our expectations, while the better-performing Cases are to be found in the larger (Invercargill) and major (Aarhus, Copenhagen, Christchurch, and Auckland) urban areas. However, the notable exception is that the Best Cases are large and medium urban areas. Similarly, Rebild, a small urban area, falls out of this pattern. To help explain this outcome, we point to the Danish context in which finances are redistributed between municipalities to facilitate equal access to welfare (section 5.2). Generally, however, we hold that a pattern in which performance reflects resources and finance is detectable despite the identified exceptions in relation to the Best Cases. Following this argument, we can infer that one of the challenges faced by some of the municipalities in their process of localizing the global norm is limited access to funding and resources, which constrain their ability to modify either the global norm or local practices and to adopt and successfully implement policies to address this.

We identify the urban- and population size as an explanatory factor of our Best Cases being medium and large urban areas. That is, compared to smaller urban areas, our research design assumes Sønderborg and Upper Hutt to have more resources available to invest in localizing the global norm. Moreover, the municipalities point to an ongoing population growth in the larger cities of the areas which they must invest in to accommodate (Sønderborg

Kommune, 2021; UHCC, 2021). Hence, unlike the major urban areas that have already undergone such transformation, Sønderborg and Upper Hutt have the advantage of being able to place the 2030 Agenda at the core of such plans (e.g., development of infrastructure). Whereas municipalities that have already undergone said development are required to accommodate the global norm to fit local realities. Consequently, localization of the global norm is more balanced with the modification of local beliefs and practices in the Best Cases. Nevertheless, we contend that the performance of the individual municipalities also comes down to a local willingness to engage globally / with the global norm. While our theoretical framework mainly focuses on structure over actors, we also argue for the importance of the latter as demonstrated by the different localization processes. We draw on the contribution from norm localization theory and neoliberal characterization that adds to our constructivist framework to infer that actors and context remain essential throughout the process, which helps explain why Sønderborg and Upper Hutt differ from Ballerup and Invercargill despite their comparable sizes. That is, our methodological framework assumes that resources and population and urban sizes are similar between Sønderborg and Invercargill and between Ballerup and Upper Hutt. Therefore, their differences cannot be explained by structural differences in this comparative case. The same goes for the mediocre performance in Rebild. Thus, contextual matters and the willingness of local actors to embrace and modify the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are also important explanatory factors.

Based on our analysis of all 10 municipal cases, we found that, in the Best Case of Sønderborg, the localization runs deeper. We credit this to, among others, its institutional expansion by creating new plans and strategies for the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, which indicates its commitment to incorporating the global norm in its work. Sønderborg created a whole new universe for the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda; they set up a digital platform dedicated to their Sustainability Policy, rooted in the SDGs and the Agenda, for easy access and exploration (Sønderborg Kommune, 2021a). Also, they established a Baseline Strategy with the SDGs that serves as the foundation for the Municipality's Sustainability Policy (Sønderborg Kommune, 2021b). Another factor is that Sønderborg explicitly references and applies the three vital themes of the 2030 Agenda in its Policy. For example, it is the only local government that explicitly uses the phrasing “Leave No One Behind” (Sønderborg Kommune, 2021b, pp. 6; 9; 14). Hence, for Sønderborg, the localization of the global norm is deeper, as the Municipality actively expanded its institutional arrangements and incorporates, through modification, the SDGs (Goals, Targets, and Indicators) and the vital themes of the Agenda in its Policies and Plans for the Municipality. When examining all our material from the

Municipality, Sønderborg clearly sets a vision to become the forerunner of SD at the local level, which further implies the actor's (the Municipality) agency in the localization process.

6.3.1 Challenges in the Localization Processes

In addition to the previously mentioned challenge of limited resources and funding in some smaller local governments, we identified several challenges in the norm localization process for our municipal cases, which we will elaborate on in this section.

For the two Worst Cases, Ballerup and Thames-Coromandel, we uncovered similarities in the challenges that both Municipalities encountered in their localization process. That is, localization practices municipalities should not do. First, we found that Ballerup lacks modification of the global norm as it mainly allocates the SDGs in their universal form to its different subcommittees. Thus, Ballerup takes on the *constitutive rule* as established by the UN, which does not facilitate localization. In contrast, Thames-Coromandel modifies and reconstructs the global norm so severely that one cannot pinpoint the implicit references to the SDGs or themes of the 2030 Agenda. Here, the *constitutive rule* by the UN is diluted to the extent that it is unclear whether the norm formed the interests and established what Thames-Coromandel considers legitimate action. Second, we identified that both cases lack modification of the local beliefs and practices to balance the global norm. We argue that Ballerup is further ahead in the process because it has more explicit references to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in its local beliefs and practices than Thames-Coromandel. Our analysis of Thames-Coromandel merely demonstrated implicit references to aspects of the 2030 Agenda in its local practices and beliefs; hence, a significant challenge for Thames-Coromandel is its implicit and diluted use of the global norm in its localization process. The main challenge for Ballerup is the lack of modification, which hinders localization, as a global norm cannot be locally accepted if it is used in its original form; here, as a *constitutive rule* in global politics.

Furthermore, we detected a challenge in the localization processes for the Best Cases regarding providing best practices for localizing a global norm. We detected that the challenge lies in finding the balance between local and global modification. An argument for the challenge could be that pinpointing the balance is up to the local governmental levels so that it fits within their context. However, we still assert that a certain degree of modification and reconstruction is too much for all contexts; that is when the global norm vanishes in the process. For instance, this is demonstrated in the cases of Christchurch and Invercargill, given their lack

of the presentation of SDGs and mere indirect references to any aspects of the global norm (Table 2; Table 3).

Thus, following norm localization theory, we maintain that context matters to a degree, but for a localization to be successful, the global norm must not undergo reconstruction and modification to the extent that it is severely implicit so that one cannot pinpoint where it came from. Moreover, the local beliefs and practices cannot undergo severe changes in the institutional arrangements to accommodate the global norm. Thus, local governments must ensure that they do not install new institutional arrangements to include the global norm in their practices to the extent that they completely replace and undermine old ones. Here, the balance lies in incorporating the modified global norm into existing practices and beliefs. Based on our Best Cases, we argue that institutional expansion by supplementing existing arrangements with new ones can facilitate global and local congruence. Consequently, derived from our Best Cases, we argue that a best practice for localizing the SDGs (a *constitutive rule*) is to ensure that they are visible, preferably with their original symbols, and that the Targets and Indicators are modified to fit with the local context. Simultaneously, the local practices and beliefs should be modified to incorporate themes of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, either by expanding or sustaining the institutional arrangements.

A more general observation we made in our analyses of the cases in New Zealand relates to the challenges that follow a centralized political structure with Acts that dictate specific actions at the subnational levels of government. Here, we focus on the LGA, which ensures a streamlined approach across multiple levels of government in New Zealand. Thus, it partially restricts local authorities from engaging in their own even more localized interpretation and modification of the Goals, meaning that cases where SDGs permeate all areas of a local government were not detected (such as is the case for Sønderborg in Denmark). We note that this could be one of the reasons why New Zealand placed lower on the global SDG Index and receives critique on its SDG localization and implementation, e.g., from Controller and Auditor-General John Ryan (2021).

6.4 The UN Impact on the Localization Outcomes

To aid us in examining the role of the UN in the diffusion of its norms to the local levels in different states (Denmark and New Zealand), we draw on the theoretical perspective of SI in particular. Specifically, we draw on the tools utilized by the organization to help institutionalize its norms and establish specific *frames of meaning* to guide the actions of its member states

and human action more generally. The *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* provides a set of symbols and moral templates that we further identified throughout the diffusion of the global norm to the local levels of government in Denmark and New Zealand. These representations of cultural norms include, but are not limited to, the 17 symbols connected to each of the SDGs and the moral template of the Leave No One Behind-pledge. We identified examples of using such cultural norms in the following governments and local authorities.

Both the Danish and the New Zealand Governments present and engage with the SDG symbols at the national level. The impact of the UN institution and norms are, thus, detectable at the national level as they aid in guiding policy adoption and action related to said political institutions. Hence, they help provide the *frames of meaning* in the countries' political approach to SD now and in the future, as outlined in the VNRs. The symbols' cultural presence illustrates how they have been deemed appropriate by the Governments following a *logic of appropriateness*; i.e., the global legitimacy that follows the alignment with this social norm is what drives the decision to include said symbols. This is particularly important for the Danish and New Zealand Governments, who brand the countries as global frontrunners with a mind to SDG implementation. Concerning the Leave No One Behind-pledge, we note how the Danish Government relies heavily on this approach, having dedicated an entire section of the Action Plan to it and articulating the importance of the Pledge in the Danish context. Similarly, New Zealand engages with the pledge in its VNR, albeit taking a more understated approach nationally and, in turn, relating this cultural norm to its developmental partnerships with small island states in the Pacific region. Nevertheless, both Governments embrace the cultural norms and practices generated by the UN, thereby demonstrating the impact of the UN as an institution that determines social and political outcomes in global politics by creating *frames of meaning* with a point of departure in the normative aspects of the 2030 Agenda.

Looking at the regional level in both states, we also identified instances where the impact of the UN is visible. In Denmark, we detected the use of the SDG symbols in all the regional governments represented in our case study. However, in New Zealand, this was only the case for two out of five regional authorities, namely Canterbury and Waikato. From this, we infer that the UN has a larger cultural impact on the regional level in Denmark compared to New Zealand. We argue that this ties into the aforementioned heavier influence of the national level in New Zealand due to the centralized nature of the political system. In contrast, the more decentralized political system in Denmark has resulted in the national government not holding the same level of authority at the regional level. As a result, these authorities also look

elsewhere, as demonstrated by a heavier UN influence shown by the presence of UN's SDG symbols. As mentioned previously (section 6.2), we recognize the two sides to this argument on the impact of (de)centralization. The opposite side of this perception would be that a centralized government should be able to facilitate its desired action at lower levels of government. However, based on the findings within our framework of a broad range of cases at different governmental levels across two nations, we argue that an explicit and active engagement with the Agenda ensures more successful implementation, which is also reflected in the autonomy of the individual governments. Said engagement is identified in all cases at all levels in Denmark, while in New Zealand, it is the case for the national Government, two out of the five Regional Councils, and one of the Municipalities. Below, we will go more into depth with the regional levels and the impact of socialization on this outcome.

Derived from our analyses of the regional levels, we identified that the Danish Regions all incorporate the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in their Plans and Strategies. Here, we draw on the concept of *socialization* to reflect on why the Regions all localize the SDGs. The Danish Regions *socialize* in the sense that they all incorporate SDGs and the 2030 Agenda into their Regional Strategies. Hence, the Regions might have modified their identities (to focus on their role in achieving the SDGs in their plans and strategies) to conform with each other (the group of like-minded actors). We found that this is facilitated at different conferences and meetings between the Board and Chairmen of the Regional Councils where, for instance, guidelines for Regional Strategies are outlined (Danske Regioner, n.d.). *Socialization* indicates that the regions seek to remain similar with each other in their framework of incorporating the SDGs into their plans and strategies to avoid standing out amongst the crowd in a negative way. For example, with a lack of focus on sustainability, which is a vital topic in Denmark both politically and in civil society. On the contrary, the majority of the New Zealand Regions exclude the SDGs in their Plans and Outcomes. Hence, the *socialization* led to the SDGs not being used in the majority of the regional cases. Solely, two Regions use the SDGs wherein they allocate the Goals under their Outcomes (Canterbury and Waikato). Thus, for New Zealand, the *socialization* indicates that the Regions do not feel pressure to modify their identity (to focus on their role in achieving the SDGs in their plans and strategies) to conform with the other Regions, as the majority does not incorporate such considerations in their plans and Outcomes. This aligns with the lack of meetings between regional councilors, which results in the global norm not being reinforced and strengthened amongst the Regions through the mutual impact that pushes them towards further localization of the 2030 Agenda.

At the local municipal level, we found that all Danish Municipalities, excluding Ballerup, incorporated the symbols of the SDGs into their plans and strategies, thus demonstrating the impact of this UN-diffused cultural norm down to the lowest governmental level in Denmark. We deem that Ballerup's lack of *socialization* of this cultural norm can simply be due to the fact that the Municipality is not focused on localizing the SDGs in the sense of presenting them with symbols. Also, rather than only implying that all the other Municipalities follow the cultural norm through *socialization*, as they all showed varying degrees of using the symbols, we ascribe each Municipality agency in its localization process. Hence, Ballerup's lack of symbolic visualization of the SDGs can simply be because it is not vital for the Municipality's vision and work. Furthermore, the incorporation of the SDGs (selection and modification) in the plans and strategies varied considerably across the Danish municipal cases, demonstrating that the Municipalities do not socialize similarly to the Regions for their localization of the global norm. The difference can be that the Municipalities do not adopt a similar framework for incorporating the SDGs, as they would rather develop their own framework to fit their contexts. Furthermore, this can be credited to the vast realities of the Municipalities concerning, for example, finance and resources. Also, we argue that it is easier for five regions to meet and develop similar strategies than for ninety-eight municipalities.

In New Zealand, we found that only one of the municipalities uses the symbols for the SDGs, namely, the Best Case, Upper Hutt; though, the symbols are only found in its Sustainability Strategy. Therefore, the general lack of UN's SDG symbols signifies that the cultural norm has not reached this level of government in the country. A reason can be that the *socialization* at the regional level that excludes the cultural norm reinforces similar *socialization* at the local level. That is, the Municipalities see no significance in including the symbols because the majority in their group of like-minded actors do not incorporate them in their Plans. Another point can be that the LGA determines the development of Community Outcomes that address social, environmental, economic, and cultural aspects, which already refers to the vital theme of the 2030 Agenda, namely, the three-fold approach to SD. Hence, the Municipalities might feel that they already incorporate the essential parts of the global norm through their Outcomes, which indicates that they see no need to incorporate more themes of the global norm in their Plans.

Based on our assessment of the impact and role of the UN in determining social and political outcomes at the local level in Denmark and New Zealand, our findings suggest that in Denmark, the UN is successful in diffusing a cultural norm, particularly the symbolic illustration of the SDGs. Hence, this practice has been deemed appropriate in a broader cultural

environment across different levels of government in Denmark. The UN's cultural norm is being used and maintained as an effective way of communicating the norm throughout the MLG system. We deem this positive for the UN and the diffusion of the global norm. However, in New Zealand, we found the contrary to be the case. While we detected the use of UN symbols at the national level, only a few of the Regions deemed this cultural norm appropriate. This is further diluted at the municipal level, where only one Municipality uses the UN symbols. Hence, as governance becomes more and more local in New Zealand, following the MLG structure, we found that the global norm is increasingly disregarded as demonstrated by the vanishing of the cultural norm.

6.5 Part-Conclusion

To wrap up our analysis, we compare our findings with our initial expectations during our case selection as articulated in sections 4.2 and 4.2.1. Our analysis takes its point of departure based on a methodological framework that compares Denmark and New Zealand, derived from the assumption that these countries have significant similarities and good performances concerning SDG localization. Albeit we expected to find cultural differences following the considerable distance between both countries, among other things. In other words, we expected similar points of origin for the countries to localize the 2030 Agenda, but outcomes differed depending on cultural contexts.

Based on this point of departure, we found that both countries engage with the UN's 2030 Agenda at the national level as the cultural institutions of the global norm impact the respective Government's approach to SD in the countries. We identified Plans that embrace and modify the SDGs, the pledge to Leave No One Behind, and all three pillars of SD (in New Zealand's case, also adding a fourth pillar to comply with the local context). Despite this, as we engage with the MLG structure to look at the regional and municipal levels, we note that, in New Zealand, these similarities are diluted in favor of local practices at lower levels. Hence, we note that local and national contexts matter in the localization of global norms. In this sense, we find that our analytical findings align with our previous expectations. Nevertheless, we stress that while contextual differences between different countries are expected, our analytical findings reveal that this aspect is more complicated than first assumed. The differences between Denmark and New Zealand are normative in the sense that because there are different *formal institutions* in place in our cases, the *informal* ones also come to differ.

Moreover, our cases at the subnational levels were identified based on numeral considerations, based on categories of the size of urban areas as determined by the population size. In this regard, we find that the population and urban size correlate to our identification of Best and Worst Cases, roughly speaking, and align with our expectations. Generally, we found that smaller urban areas perform worse than larger ones, as we expected. Nevertheless, we identified an expectation that our Best Cases were to be found among medium and large urban areas. Hence, we sought to explain this from a structural perspective in terms of the scale of growth and a perspective of agency and willingness to engage with the global norm.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

We set out to research *how the SDGs and themes of the 2030 Agenda are localized at the local governmental levels in Denmark and New Zealand?* In the following, we answer our research question by following the methodological use of the MLG structure of our analysis and drawing upon our most significant findings at each level, i.e., national, regional, and municipal levels of government. Subsequently, in section 7.1, we return to our literature review (Chapter 2) and relate our findings to those of the field, and in section 7.2, we open a discussion of the challenges we experienced when deciding on the parameters for evaluation and the many different nuances considered when characterizing what equals a localization of the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda.

Our research of 20 cases of governments at the national, regional, and local levels in Denmark and New Zealand leads us to conclude that there is a wide array of approaches to localizing the UN's SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Still, we emphasize that certain actions lead to the most successful outcomes.

At the national level, the localization processes were characterized by noticeable alignments with the themes and visions of the 2030 Agenda with a mind to how they fit into the respective contexts of the two countries. Derived from our analysis, we contend that the best practices for national Governments to localize the global norm involve perceiving the norm as a legitimate template for moral action. Hence, actions towards localization were taken at the national level because of their social legitimacy, i.e., as they are considered the right thing to do. Furthermore, a significant finding at the national level is the impact of cultural differences on the localization processes, which we conclude generated visibly different approaches and outcomes in the two countries. Hence, while a focus on Wellbeing and the cultural significance of the Māori people is at the forefront of New Zealand's actions, welfare

is the prominent priority in Denmark. This finding demonstrates the success that both countries have had in modifying the global norm at the national levels, as their interpretation of and work to further diffuse the global norm has come to reflect the national identities of the respective countries.

At the regional levels of government, we identified that the localization processes were impacted by *socialization*; however, the impact differs for the two nations. For Denmark, we uncovered that the Regions *socialize* horizontally amongst each, which is mirrored in the fact that all regional cases incorporated the symbols and selection and modification of the SDGs to resemble the group of like-minded actors. Consequently, in the case of the Danish Regions, *socialization* facilitated a coherent approach to the localization of the global norm across the level of government. On the other hand, for New Zealand, we detected that most of the Regions excluded the SDGs in their Plans, which means that through *socialization,* the Regions have downplayed the importance of visualizing symbols and engaging in the selection and modification of the SDGs in their Plans. Thus, resulting in an incoherent approach to the localization of the global norm across the regional level in New Zealand. In our further reflection on this finding, we propose that a possible explanation can be that the Regional Councils are more focused on facilitating cooperation between the municipalities in the respective region. Hence, we conclude that New Zealand's Regions are not particularly concerned with collaboration but chose to focus on vertical cooperation.

For the 10 municipal cases, our findings conclude that there is a wide array of approaches to localizing the global norm, but these all fall back on certain fundamental actions. In this sense, our research of the municipalities (that function as proxies for the rest of society) reveals that all cases in question set out to modify the universal nature of the global norm to fit into the specific contextual benefits and challenges of the individual governments, albeit with varying degrees of success based on their efforts. Our Best Cases, Sønderborg and Upper Hutt, reveal the importance of balancing the efforts of retaining links to the global Agenda while also fitting the norm to align with local realities; a balance that many of our other cases at the municipal level struggled with as many lacked in the modification of the global norm. Thus, we declare that localizing the norm that is the 2030 Agenda requires active engagement on behalf of local governments to modify norms and local beliefs and practices, emphasizing the former practice.

To conclude, we uncovered that even two 'most similar' countries and 18 'most similar' regional and municipal cases demonstrated varied approaches to localizing the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda. Wherein, we identified no complete national approach to the localization of the global norm, except for in New Zealand, where the national Wellbeing

Agenda was pushed down through the vertical structure. Nevertheless, this did not facilitate the localization of the global norm. For Denmark, only the four Regions demonstrated a coherent approach to their localization of the global norm; hence, the Danish Government did not succeed in establishing a national agenda to facilitate the localization of the global norm across the nation. Consequently, we infer the localization processes of our 20 cases, while having a similar point of departure, are influenced several modifying contextualities which ultimately result in significantly different outcomes of their modification of the same universal norm when comparing the two countries as well as the three different levels of government included in our research.

7.1 Ties to the Academic Field

In the field of research that deals with global norms as they are diffused to the national and local levels, Engberg-Pedersen and Fejerskov's (2021) situated approach to norm engagement stresses that norms face a discontinuous transformation in their diffusion. That is, the norms are shaped by actors and contexts and are not fixed structures. Similarly, Acharya (2004) asserts that a global norm must face modification to fit in the context it is desired to localize in. Thus, there is a consensus that global norms are objects of interpretation rather than continued homogenization in their diffusion. Our findings resonate with this consensus, as we identified various approaches to localizing the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda. For example, Denmark and New Zealand demonstrated varied approaches to interpreting the Leave No One Behind-pledge at the national level. That is, catering to a national self-understanding as a welfare state or a state that aids minorities and less fortunate island states in the Pacific, respectively.

In research on the interconnectedness between norm diffusion and the MLG framework, Oosterhof (2018) concludes that a strong vertical dialogue and collaboration are necessary to localize and align the SDGs. Our findings demonstrated that a strong vertical dialogue might not be necessary as the Best Case overall, Sønderborg, is situated in Denmark, where we did not identify a strong vertical relation between the national, regional, and local levels. Still, we recognize that to build a cohesive localization for the whole country; a strong vertical relation might facilitate this. Also, we found that the nature of the vertical dialogue impacts the localization. In New Zealand, the vertical dialogue from the national level establishes the norm of the Wellbeing Agenda for New Zealand, and we argue that this norm, though corresponding with the 2030 Agenda, might have induced the dilution of the global norm in the localization

processes. That is, we found more references to Wellbeing than to sustainability in the Municipal cases. In addition, Croese et al. (2021) argue for the importance of a multi-level approach to effectively implementing the SDGs in states. This follows their critique of a lack of national guidance, which then necessitates action at subnational levels. In contrast, our findings illustrate that national guidance might not be the turning point for the successful localization of the SDGs and the Agenda. In Denmark, the subnational levels do not follow the agenda set by the Government. However, overall, the Danish regional and municipal cases score better on our parameters in their localization processes. Whereas for New Zealand, the cases follow the Wellbeing Agenda, but we argue that it might be one of the causes for the vanishing of the global norm in most regional and municipal cases, which led to them scoring overall worse on our parameters.

Finnemore's (1996) take on SI enlightened us on the main critique of the theory, that is, its neglect of agency, which further signified the importance of the norm localization theory in our framework. Our theoretical framework enabled us to address the agency in the localization process; however, our data consists of textual policies and plans, so we were still limited in accounting for the agency. Therefore, we acknowledge that further research can include the agency aspect through fieldwork to grasp the practices used by the actors to engage with, for example, civil society in the localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Still, we assert that our research, which set out to extensively map the localization processes from the global to the local levels in two most similar nations, provides a consistent framework for what tailors the process and how different approaches unlock different outcomes.

Finally, while our methodological and theoretical frameworks led us to conclude that the political systems influence the norm localization process, we recognize that other explanations may also be viable. Some theoretical perspectives place an increased focus on the agents and their role in pushing the 2030 Agenda towards its realization before the deadline, as indicated in our literature review. In line with this, we find that examining the role of civil society in realizing the 2030 Agenda is also a perspective that would be relevant to consider contributing with to this field. Nevertheless, our focus on a structural perspective that still accounts for the agency is a crucial contribution to this field of research, given the broad and complex nature of the UN's ambitions to realize the 2030 Agenda.

7.2 Further Discussions

One of the main nuances we discovered in our research is the definition of when a global norm is localized. The cases in Denmark and New Zealand demonstrated two different approaches to localizing the SDGs and the themes of the 2030 Agenda; that is, the balance between keeping the global visible in the modification or modifying it to an extent where the source is not visible. Given this observation, we reflect on whether the SDGs should be explicitly referenced by using symbols, original headlines, targets, etc., for the global norm to localize, or if the construction of own goals or outcomes and the omission of the SDGs better serve as a condition for the localization of the global norm. In establishing what we identify as the localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, we were first split between the two varied approaches Denmark and New Zealand demonstrated. However, relying on our theory and previous research in the field to determine our stance, we produced six parameters to assist in providing an evaluation of our cases to identify the Best and Worst Cases.

Nevertheless, before we decided on our criteria, our analytical findings underpinned the discussion of whether the actual SDGs should be present or if inclusion of the themes of the Agenda is just as legitimate for the localization of the global norm. One can raise the question of whether the SDGs need to be explicitly included if the government is working with an SD-mindset; hence, working towards the Agenda but only relating to it implicitly. Here, we could not solely rely on our norm localization theory, as it focuses on the process and not necessarily the localization outcome. In addition, our research in the field and of the UN's documents on the Agenda indicated that the SDGs are the symbolic representation of the Agenda and are pivotal in communicating the vision and mission of the Agenda, and signify a government's commitment to achieving these. Consequently, even though one can argue that simply working sustainably in economic, social, and environmental areas should be enough to signify one's work towards the Agenda, we assert that for the localization of the SDGs and the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda (the global norm), the SDGs must go through selection and modification to fit the local context. Though we still acknowledge that general work within SD that facilitates the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda (i.e., the SDGs) is noteworthy, our research is not about analyzing Denmark and New Zealand's work for the Agenda. Instead, we sought to compare the two nations and their national, regional, and local levels of government to map the differences and similarities and provide general patterns in the localization processes of the SDGs and the vital themes of the 2030 Agenda.

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