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Developments in Norway's sustainability governance in the pre- and post-2030 Agenda era

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Abstract: Since their introduction, in 2015, United Nations (UNs) 2030 Agenda, and associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has now become an integral part of nations' longer term policies. From the very beginning, Norway has shown exceptional sensitivity and zeal in establishing the values of sustainable development in its governmental strategic planning. However, the cataclysmic developments in this area call to explore further the long-standing Norwegian positions and future strategies in meeting global sustainability undertakings. The aim of the article is to explore and discuss Norway's sustainability governance regime, as has been formulated from 1987 until today. In this context, this paper draws on a systematic review and analysis of concepts, policies and laws stemming from Norway's governmental documents framed by the principles of a socio-legal research approach. The findings suggest that Norway maintains a clear regulatory and visionary base sustaining, thus, a sharp focus in enhancing its sustainable development policies.

Keywords: 2030 Agenda; sustainable development; Norway; policy; regulatory framework.

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1 Introduction

In September 2015, our world embarked to critical challenge journey where decisions had to be made about the future of humanity (Ab Rahman and Abd Aziz, 2020). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, adopted by UN General Assembly, sought to be the successor of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

and a pioneer initiative in trying to pass on to future generations a better world (Weststrate et al., 2019). Such a global vision of the United Nations was set out in the 2030 Agenda Declaration and envisioned a world free of poverty and hunger, which would move to an upgraded environment that would further combat climate change and environmental degradation and provide equal opportunities (Bali Swain and Yang-Wallentin, 2020). Since then, many acts, legislative frameworks, strategies, policies and other social or industrial initiatives have been undertaken with the aim of implementing the SDGs as effectively as possible (Leal Filho et al., 2019). Such actions have mostly been the result of a global declaration or visionary plan by the United Nations or other worldwide scope organisation. For instance, on the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg 2002, several participants, including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and businesses came together and took significant decisions on global health, water, energy, agriculture and biodiversity matters (Pring, 2020). Nevertheless, it is admissible that UN SDGs posed tremendous challenges and an extensive list of commitments over a wide range of social, political and economic issues worldwide which surpassed all previous ones (Nerini et al., 2019).

Eventually, a number of governmental and non-governmental actors, policy makers, societal and business players were called upon to implement the requirements of UN 2030 Agenda through specified targets and other measurable indicators and report their progress against achievements (Reddy, 2016). Actually, SDGs are a collective venture that seeks cooperation and contribution amongst communities, organisations, and governments (Lu et al., 2015). Hence, Norway became an early mover in establishing sustainability strategies and policies aiming to provide a long-term viability and success amid economic growth, social welfare and environmental health (Ruud, 2009). In reality, it was well before 2015, and the introduction of UN 2030 Agenda, when Norway began to play an active part in bringing sustainable development concept in the forefront of its national policy and strategic action plan. An example refers to Norway's National Agenda 21, in 2004, in which the country presented its national strategies for sustainable development (Moe, 2007). Norway's sensitivity and conscientiousness towards sustainable development have made the country the third most sustainable country in the world according to the SDSN SDG Index (Halonen et al., 2017). Moreover, in 2020, the SDG Europe index indicated Norway as the only country in the middle of a pandemic COVID-19 that has realised SDG3 (good health and well-being), while many countries being off-road for achieving it by 2030 (SDSN and IEEP, 2020). However, despite Norway's excellent performance in sustainable development and amid cataclysmic developments in global law, we find that there is not enough recent research to highlight Norway's sustainable development policy and regulations and how they were shaped before and after UN 2030 Agenda.

In this context, this article aims to critically analyse and discuss Norwegian legislation and policy framework for sustainability, from 1987 to the present. In this way an effort will be made to enlighten the public about the completeness of the Norwegian system and the points that need to be improved. In such an endeavour, the SDGs are a key fact in our study, as they contrast the changes between the eras before and after the introduction of the UN Agenda 2030. To achieve this, the following research question sought to be answered:

“What is Norway's legal and policy framework and organizational structure underlying sustainable development in the pre- and post-2030 Agenda era?”

To do so, socio-legal research methods are adopted that include an in-depth documentary inquiry. Further to that, this contribution builds on the analysis of Norwegian Government official reports, guidelines, resolutions, policy statements etc. related to the dissemination of sustainable development that has shaped country's national strategy and policy framework. Based on the findings and implementation status of Agenda 2030, Norway is showing an excellent and well-advanced approach to contributing to the SDGs with significant reforms that have taken place between the pre- and post-SDGs era.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides some terminological and background information and clarification of sustainable development concept. Thereafter, it continues with a discussion on global sustainability headways before it concentrates in Norway's past and present status quo for sustainability. Section 3 explains the methodological framework of this paper. Section 4 presents the study findings concerning Norway's sustainability law and policy framework in the pre- and post-SDGs period. Section 5 argues on country's major contributions and achievements towards UN 2030 Agenda. Section 6 provides the main discussion and concluding remarks of this study.

2 Background and study setting

2.1 Terminological and contextual considerations of sustainable development

The word 'governance' has its origins thousands years ago and had been found to get used extensively in ancient Greece, though; etymologically its roots are traced in the Latin verb for 'to steer' (Vymětal, 2008). Sometimes, throughout world's history, it was substituted and used interchangeably with the word 'power'; however, diachronically, and irrespective its form, it encompassed the attempt of the state to control the society (Van Zanten and Van Tulder, 2020; Bragaglia, 2020). In the modern world the use of word governance is widespread and has been found in almost all aspects of political, social and business life. Thus, compared to past, its use is not limited solely to the state administration and control level but also includes further aspects. To approximate its precise meaning though depends greatly on our area of interest (Vymětal, 2008). For instance, governance can be found in various constructs such as, public governance, business governance, environmental governance, financial governance, etc. with each term to include government, business and civil society acts to regulate and control the subject of interest. All depends on what to be governed (Keating and Katina, 2019; Vymětal, 2008; Zürn, 2018).

Further to this approximation, sustainability governance or governance for sustainable development refers to a paradigm of governance reflecting the attempt of the social, political and business setting to control and regulate sustainability values and the resulting political or legislative regimes, i.e., sustainable developments goals (Nguyen et al., 2021). Regulation in this field comes through conventions, state law, treaties, policy documents, industry standards, codes, resolutions, etc. (Mamai et al., 2018). Out of this wide range of stakeholders and regulatory frameworks, the focus and subject of analysis of this study will be Norwegian Government emanating acts and policies in its effort to diffuse and normalise UN 2030 Agenda and sustainable development principles, as a whole, throughout Norway's political, social and business life. To sum up, it should be mentioned that the year 1987 was deliberately chosen as the chronological starting point of our research, since in that year we had the important event for the evolution of

the concept of sustainable development, namely, the release from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) of the *Brundtland* or *Our Common Future* report, which altered world thinking on sustainable development (WCED, 1987). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the year 2015, when we introduced the global SDGs, forms another milestone in the examination of Norway's pre- and post-sustainability strategy (Omri and Mabrouk, 2020).

2.2 *An overview of sustainable development and its worldwide evolution*

The development of nations and societies regardless of time has always been a timeless pursuit. The rise of living standards and the improvement of people's daily lives through scientific and technological discoveries has become a primary concern in a world that over time went through many social, political and economic upheavals (World Bank, 1992). However, the end of the Second World War can be said to have marked a milestone and a starting point for humanity, which was followed by the Industrial Revolution and the mass production of goods (Krueger, 1995). At a cost that of course was nothing more than the degradation of the environment. The uncontrolled use of land resources accompanied by technological progress has led to the destruction of the natural environment with its consequences being visible through air pollution, pollution of the seas and aquifers, destruction of forests, etc. (Balsalobre-Lorente et al., 2020). Thus something had to be done to put a brake on the uncontrolled use of the term development while ensuring a healthy world for its present and future generations (Suhrke, 1994).

As a reaction to this situation, in 1987, the first official use of the term sustainable development was introduced at the *Brundtland* or *Our Common Future* report and defined sustainable development as "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [WCED, (1987), p.43]. It was preceded by the establishment of the United Nations WCED in 1984, which aimed to adopt global development plans for the preservation of the environment (Klarin, 2018). Since WCED *Brundtland* report, in 1987, the concept of sustainable development has been forged and evolved, always adapting to the challenges of each era (Borowy, 2013). So after the starting point and the proclamation of its fundamental principles in 1987, where sustainable development focused more on the needs and interests of the people, we went to the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (Earth Summit or Rio Conference), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992, where was stressed out the need to address economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development through governmental strategies (Klarin, 2018; Du Pisani, 2006; Mensah and Casadevall, 2019).

In the 2000s, world leaders sought to set a new vision to fight poverty which would spread over a 15 year period, from 2000 to 2015. This visualisation resulted to the genesis of the eight MDGs through which United Nations members stated took specific action on issues such as, poverty and hunger eradication, promotion of child education, securement of women empowerment and gender equality, combat HIV, ensure environmental sustainability, etc. (World Bank, 2015) Thereafter, the WSSD, Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, focused on the review of the outcomes from Rio Summit and drew the attention of world leaders on the further commitments and challenges needed to implement under Agenda 21 (Opschoor, 2003). Afterwards, in 2012, global leaders met at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, at another Conference on Sustainable Development known as 'the future we want' in which member states renewed their

commitment to sustainable development and agreed to further mainstream sustainable development at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental life (Rugg, 2016; Mensah and Casadevall, 2019; Du Pisani, 2006). However, the most recent, and perhaps most remarkable event in the history of sustainable development occurred in 2015 at the United Nations meeting in New York, which resulted in the agreement on 17 goals of global sustainable development to be achieved by 2030 (Boluk et al., 2019). Figure 1 shows the 17 SDGs adopted by United Nations in 2015.

Table 1 Global strategies related to worldwide sustainable development evolution

<i>Year</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
1987	WCED report Our Common Future or Brundtland report was published	UN founded the notion of sustainable development introducing people's needs and technological limitations to achieve them.
1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit or Rio Conference), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	The conference produced Agenda 21 which stimulated international cooperation and action in order to meet sustainable development targets.
1997	Kyoto Climate Change Conference, Kyoto, Japan	It extended the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and committed parties to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
2000	UN published Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declaration	UN Assembly agreed that by 2015 specific actions to have been undertaken to achieve MDG such as, poverty eradication, access to education, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, etc.
2002	The World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa	Progress of Rio 1992 Conference was evaluated and member agreed on a political declaration and implementation plan related to water, energy, health, agriculture, biological diversity and other areas of concern
2012	UN Conference Rio +20, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	A set of new goals related to sustainable development was launched, based on Millennium Development Goals, along with progress measurement against 'the future we want' report at Rio 1992
2015	UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, 2015, New York	17 global and interlinked goals agreed and included in a UN Resolution called the 2030 Agenda

Source: Klarin (2018) and Holden et al. (2014)

Analysing these goals and commitments of world leaders, we can clearly see that the 2030 agenda clearly emphasised the importance of achieving sustainable development in its entirety, in other words through a balance of our economic, social and economic aspirations, and not in fragments (Opoku, 2016). Furthermore, the 17 SDGs succeeded and terminated the MDGs by further mitigating the range of concepts and goals that fall within the concept of sustainable development (Boluk et al., 2019). In all this reference to the course of sustainable development it is worth mentioning that Elkington (1997, 2004), in 1992, functioned as a precursor and conceptualised such integrated form of sustainable

development in a model known ‘triple bottom line’ (highlighting its social, economic and environmental dimensions).

Figure 1 The 17 SDGs (see online version for colours)



Source: UN SDGs (2021)

In sum, Table 1 summarises the described changes and milestones in the history of sustainable development. It should be noted though that such list is not exhaustive. However, it incorporates the most critical advances that transformed and evolved sustainable development concept over time.

3 Materials and methods

Choosing the overall methodological framework in each research depends on the type of research, the set aims and objectives and the research questions sought to be answered (Dane, 1990). What can be inferred though from the analysis and approach of the problem so far, is that this study has been characterised by a multifaceted nature. Such assertion derives from the fact that our research process utilises both law and social sciences sources and disciplines to improve our understanding in the chosen topic. According to McConville and Chui (2007) this stance has been characterised by the law-in-context approach, emerged in the late 1960s, and which gives another dimension to the study of legal and regulatory material. Furthermore, using law and other legal and regulatory information and methods to collect data and understand, thereby, social phenomena lends this study interdisciplinary shading, which is essential so as to better address our research aim and question (McConville and Chui, 2007; Berring and Heuvel, 1989). This feature of studies is basically found in social sciences (Banakar and Travers, 2005; Creutzfeldt et al., 2019). Against this background, although review and analysis of our documentation included also legal sources, however, such research was driven with

by our pursuit to understand how legal and regulatory documentation has influenced the configuration of Norway's strategic and policy plans. In other words, conducted legal research was done with the purpose to better inform the study problem and understand generated social, economic and political implications, and not per se for analysing and resolving legal issues (McNeill and Chapman, 2005). To that end, adoption of a socio-legal methodological framework was judged as the most compatible casing to this study.

Table 2 Material selection

<i>Type of document material</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>Relevant</i>	<i>Assessed</i>
Consultations	8	1	1
Draft resolutions and bills	14	3	3
White papers	156	86	10
Official Norwegian Reports (NOUs)	32	11	5
Guidelines and brochures	150	45	15
Reports, plans and strategies	462	135	25
Letters	68	28	4
Acts and regulations and circulars	165	60	17

Recalling our study aim and formulated research question it has been obvious this paper seeks to investigate Norway's governance system, with regard to established sustainable development strategy and policy from an exploratory perspective. However, given the fact that the term governance, as explained above, is quite broad, our research is concerned with material available in Norwegian Government official website and is related to sustainable development law, strategy and policy considerations. Accordingly, we excluded from this study the social and business dimensions of the term 'governance', and associated sources and material that may have been produced in the field by societal and business actors, focusing, thus, only on government's discourses in the area of sustainable development. Using documents as source material is a method quite often used in socio-legal studies maintaining a qualitative approach (Webley, 2010). As such, the general inclusion criteria were threefold: relevance (to sustainable development topic), authority (issued by Norwegian Government) and issue date (after 1987 and up to today). In addition, another imposed restriction for document selection referred to the age of material. Specifically, we opted to investigate material produced after 1987, a year which, as mentioned above, was a milestone in the world history of sustainable development with the introduction of the *Brundtland* report by United Nations WCED (1987). Identified documentary sources were localised through a combination of searches, using keywords and terms associated related to sustainable development. These included sustainability, development, sustainable development, sustainability, environmental sustainability, 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Examined data referred to consultations, draft resolutions and bills, white papers, Official Norwegian Reports (NOUs), guidelines and brochures, reports, plans and strategies, letters, acts and regulations and circulars all framing and expressing Norway's sustainability strategy regulatory and legal framework. The content of these documents was content analysed and summarised under the chronological themes development in Table 1 (from 1987 up

to today) without coding, but with notes and guided by the keywords and phrases already mentioned. A summary of the relevant literature investigated is presented in Table 2.

4 Findings

This section presents the findings of this study and is divided into two parts: Norway's pre- and post-2030 Agenda regime for sustainable development.

4.1 Norway's sustainable development law and policy in the pre-2030 Agenda era

In response to the Secretary-General's call, in 1983, Norway's first female Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland presented during the WCED Commission, in London, in April 1987, a report known also as Brundtland report (Ribberink, 2006). Norway proudly calls and recognises in her face this important contribution and often calls her the mother of sustainable development (Norwegian Government, 2017). This report was original for that time since it established one of the most diffused international definitions of sustainable development, raised its economic, social and environmental dimensions as an integral component of sustainable development, and laid the groundwork for the planning and implementation of member states' sustainability strategies until 2000 (WCED, 1987; Norwegian Government, 1997). In general, however, this pioneering development of 1987 did not have a similar continuity in the 1990s (Ruud, 2009) where activity and strategic planning in Norway for sustainable development appeared to be somewhat limited (Lafferty et al., 2007). The deregulation of the Norwegian electricity market with the entry into force of the Energy Act in 1991 and the appointment of the Green Tax Commission in 1992 though refer to some important policy initiatives in an attempt to achieve a more efficient economy, while ensuring a healthy ecosystem and higher employment rates (Gerasimova, 2017; Banet, 2017; Norwegian Government, 1997).

As we progress through the 1990s, and in parallel with global developments, we cannot ignore some steps taken by the Norwegian Government to bring it into line with important global events such as, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit or Rio Conference), 1992, and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted in May 1992 (Merkouris and Perreaut, 2017). Thus, in a response to the negotiations on Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on biodiversity and climate change, Norway established the Centre for International Climate and Energy Research (CICERO), with purpose to contribute to education and knowledge required in designing national and international policies on climate (Norwegian Government, 1997). On 2 June 1995, the Government of Norway submitted a Report No. 41 (1994–1995) to the Storting (Parliament) on Norwegian policy to mitigate climate change and reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) (Norwegian Government, 1994–1995). A second report on Norway's national communication on climate change was submitted in 1997 outlining Norwegian climate policy according to the commitments under the Framework Convention on Climate Change (Norwegian Government, 1997). Then, in June 1998, the Ministry of Fisheries presented a Report No. 51 to the Storting in an attempt to formulate a background for the development of policies with regard to the sustainable management of its ocean resources (Norwegian Government, 1997–1998). Nevertheless, the 1990s

will end without formulating a meaningful strategy other than formulating policies that have raised environmental concerns and educational initiatives (Lafferty et al., 2008; Ruud, 2009).

After a decade with a relatively lukewarm commitment and actions related to sustainable development, it could be claimed that, in the 2000s, we saw for the first time the undertaking, by the Norwegian Government, of a clear strategy for sustainable development (Lafferty et al., 2008; Ruud, 2009). Important role in this re-emergence of Norway's commitment to sustainability had played three historic events, namely, the Kyoto Protocol, adopted in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997, the WSSD, in Johannesburg, 2002, and the declaration of the MDGs by United Nations in 2000 (Spalatro and Cappelletti, 2019). A point of departure could be said to be the Norwegian Government's Action Plan, in 2002, through which Norway formulated its strategy to achieve the MDGs (Norwegian Government, 2002a). Moreover, in March 2002, through an amendment to Report No. 54 to the Storting (2000–2001) Norwegian climate policy, the Norwegian Government amended its climate policy and incorporated Kyoto Protocol requirements by setting targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Norwegian Government, 2001–2002). In addition, throughout spring and summer 2002, Norway had been preparing the ground for incorporating in its national strategy the expected WSSD requirement to be done in autumn 2002. The publication of the Norwegian perspectives and inputs to the WSSD process, in May 2002, and the Globalization Project report, in June 2002, are two typical initiatives of the forthcoming orgasm of sustainable development strategic initiatives that would follow in the coming years (Norwegian Government, 2002b).

In the wake of all these progresses and in an attempt to follow up with forthcoming global policies, the Norwegian Government presented a National Action Plan for Sustainable Development, called Norway's National Agenda 21, which moreover formed part of the country's 2004 National Budget (Norwegian Government, 2021a). Through this action plan, which included consultation with a variety of stakeholders from business, government, voluntary organisations and other social groups, Norway pursued the permanent inclusion of sustainable development in its political agenda (Norwegian Government, 2005). Thus, a Norwegian strategy on sustainable development was formed with principal aim to integrate sustainability into all sectors of society. One important outcome and requirement of the National Action Plan was the need to draw up indicators to measure sustainable development targets. Therefore, in March 2005, a commission composed by a multidisciplinary group agreed on a core set of 16 sustainable development indicators. Accordingly, Statistics Norway was designated with the responsibility to monitor, update and publish the indicators (Norwegian Government, 2021b). Thereafter, the Norwegian strategy and policy plans on sustainable development was enriched as evidenced by the numerous declarations and measures taken to achieve a viable Norwegian state. The Norwegian Action Plan 2007–2010 on Environmental and Social Responsibility in Public Procurement was a governmental program, under the heading of sustainable production and consumption, and aspired to cultivate a culture and propose measures to promote green public procurement (Norwegian Government, 2007a). However, along with all these endeavours, Norway revised again its strategy for sustainable development, in 2007, which was published as part of the 2008 National Budget. The revised strategy showed shifting the weight of Norwegian policy to the

social element which should be taken into account and further contribute to overall sustainable development.

Having ratified a number of conventions and international treaties so far such as, the Climate Change Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada Convention), the revised European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Malta Convention), etc. the government committed to further strengthen its efforts for contributing UN MDGs (Norwegian Government, 2008). Thereby, the Norwegian Government, in 2007, developed Norway's Aid for Trade plan through which sought to promote good governance systems for international trade facilitating, thus, investment and sustainable economic growth for poorer countries (Norwegian Government, 2007b). Norway's multifaceted approach and contribution to sustainable development is also found in the Government's Strategy for a Competitive Norwegian Aquaculture Industry, presented in August 2007, where the government formulated its targets for an eco-friendly and sustainable seafood production (Norwegian Government, 2009a). Moreover, in its effort to sustain and protect its seas and coast, Norway released a Report No. 37 (2008–2009) to the Storting Integrated Management of the Marine Environment of the Norwegian Sea. In this report the government set out the overall political and strategic framework and guidelines of an ecosystem-based management approach for protecting Barents Sea-Lofoten area (Norwegian Government, 2008–2009b).

In the area of climate change, Norway continued its efforts to the earlier commitments by revising its national targets and instruments with regard to emissions. Thereby, government established long-term targets [by adopting Report No. 34 (2006–2007) to the Storting on climate change policy] to reduce greenhouse emissions by the equivalent of 30% of its own 1990 emissions by 2020 seeking become a carbon neutral country by 2050 (Norwegian Government, 2006–2007). In the late 2000s, and in an effort to further promote sustainable development principles across Norwegian public and private sector, the government published Report No. 10 to the Storting 2008–2009 entitled 'Corporate social responsibility in a global economy'. In this report, which carries the strategic directions in the sustainable development of 2008 with emphasis on its social dimension, is stressed out the contribution and subsequent necessity of integrating corporate social responsibility values into organisations' operations and their decision making processes, as a backbone towards sustainable development (Norwegian Government, 2008–2009a).

Norway's interest and planning for sustainable development continued to focus on the social element after 2010. The beginning of this decade, combined with the deep economic crisis that has been felt since 2009, has made Norway more even more in tune with the European Union's efforts for growth and jobs (Norwegian Government, 2009b). The concern at that time was clearly in reversing the negative economic climate and creating jobs so as to achieve social equilibrium and then sustainable development. The importance of sound financial management and the responsibility with which public money should be invested as a factor for sustainable development was also reflected in Report No. 10 (2009–2010) to the Storting, where the lines of Norwegian investment policy were formulated (Norwegian Government, 2010–2011). However, something seemed to be changing globally, especially from 2012 onwards.

The new global challenges and the lack of political and financial stability made the whole scene more complicated. It was clear that problems such as hunger, lack of

training, social inequalities, environmental pollution, etc. could not be tackled with the existing means of policy and strategy of the member states (Norwegian Government, 2011–2012). Global consultations between leaders had already begun and tended to create a new framework for sustainable development. In this mobility, Norway has shown a willingness but also a practical involvement in laying the foundations for a new global policy and approach to sustainable development. Thus, in 2014, Norway issued a report highlighting its needs, challenges and contribution to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (Norwegian Government, 2015a). The preparation and previous work done in this direction found Norway prepared for the new roadmap for sustainable development, namely, the 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs introduced in 2015. Therefore, a coordinated work by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an inter-ministerial contact group was then undertaken to address potential consequences and challenges for Norwegian foreign and domestic policies (Norwegian Government, 2016).

Table 3 summarises the most important activities that took place in Norway after the Brundtland report and until the introduction of SDGs in 2015.

Table 3 Norway's sustainable development strategies in the pre-2030 Agenda era

<i>Year</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
1987–1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deregulation of the Norwegian electricity market (1990) • Appointment of the Green Tax Commission (1992) • Centre for International Climate and Energy Research (CICERO) (1994) • Norwegian policy to mitigate climate change sustainable management of its ocean resources (1998) 	Despite the dynamic start in the late 1980s, the 1990s, apart from some fragmented movements, was not characterised by similar dynamics in the field of sustainable development.
2000–2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norwegian Government's Action Plan (2002) • Norwegian Climate Policy (2002) • Norway's National Agenda 21 (2004) • Sustainable development indicators (2005) • Strategy for sustainable development revised again in 2007 • A series of plans adopted to strengthen MDGs 	In the 2000s, Norway significantly revised its policy and formulated a clear strategy for sustainable development. World events played an important role in this were the MDGs, Kyoto Protocol and 2002 Summit.
2010–2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis placed on the social dimension of sustainable development (2009) • Aligned with European Union's efforts for growth and jobs (2010) • Contribution to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda preparations (2014) 	The deep economic crisis but also the end of the era for MDGs put Norway on a trajectory in search of a new framework for sustainable development. However, the UN had already begun consultations on the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals, which would mark a new era for the Norwegian model.

4.2 Norway's sustainability governance in the post-2030 Agenda era

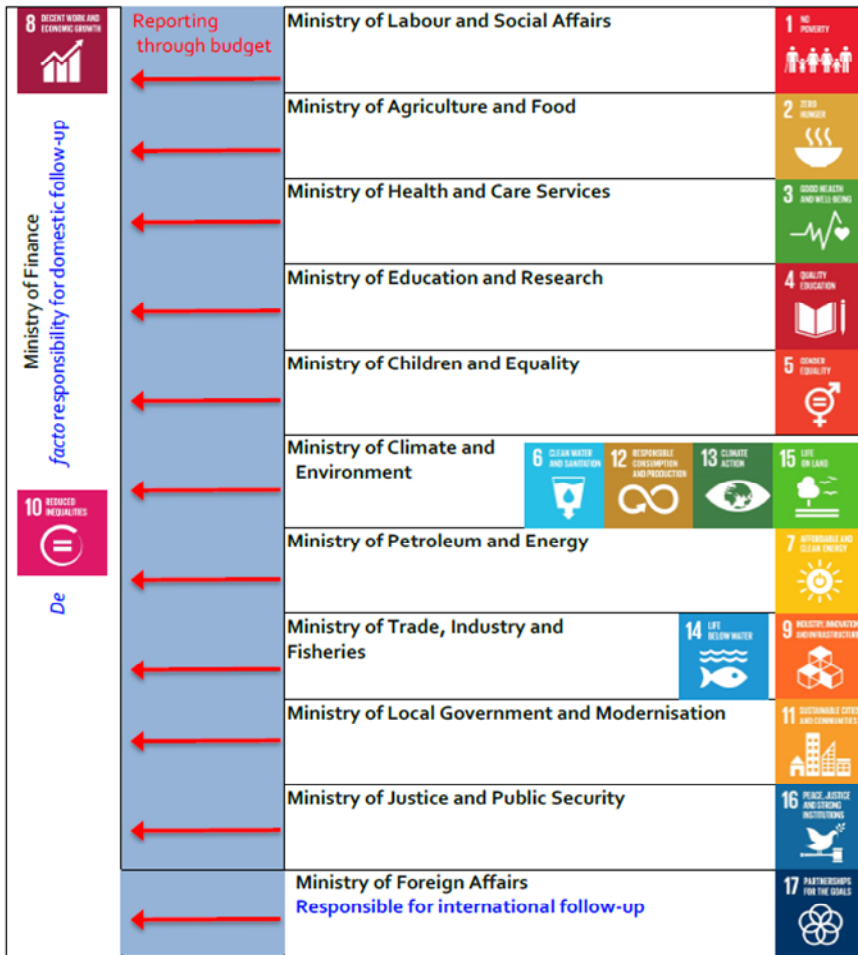
From the moment the international community accepted and co-signed UN 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs, Norway reiterated its commitment for success. An initial Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) of United Nations was presented, in July 2016, and provided an overview of SDGs state in Norway (United Nations, 2016). In addition, one of the first reviews of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN), October 2016, ranked Norway second out of 34 countries across all dimensions of the SDG Index (Peterson et al., 2016). Although the first indications were encouraging that Norway would make significant progress towards its SDGs, however, the Norwegian Government recognised that there had been difficulties and challenges that need to be overcome. Thus, challenges that had been identified at the national level included, amongst others, promoting mental health, increasing high-school completion rates, eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, reducing unemployment of young people, ensuring sustainable infrastructure, improving air quality, reducing waste generation and combating all forms of violence (United Nations, 2016). In another action, and in parallel with UN consultations, in 2016, Norway took the initiative, in conjunction with other Nordic countries, to establish a new Nordic program in response to Agenda 2030. This program included discussions with several stakeholders from government, the private sector and civil society. As a response to the meeting held in Helsinki, in November 2016, a joint Nordic cooperation program on the SDGs was agreed including synergies and partnerships in facilitating SDGs implementation (Halonen et al., 2017).

However, despite the consultations and declarations of plans to achieve the goals of sustainable development, their integration and alignment, as well as their coherence with the government strategy and policy were seen as determinant for their achievement (United Nations, 2016). The necessity for the development of a coherent policy framework for the success of SDGs was recognised by the Norwegian Government, along with the need to identify positive and negative synergies between Norwegian development policies (Norwegian Government, 2015b). And although, admittedly, Norway had an institutional framework in place, though, as Peterson et al. (2016) highlighted it had not linked the implementation of 2030 Agenda and SDGs to existing SD policy strategy documents in a clear direct way. Hence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, through the Meld. St. 24 (2016–2017) Report to the Storting (white paper), established a project for the post-2015 development agenda, with primary aim to maintain a dialogue with other ministries and establish a policy and strategy framework for coherence towards their implementation and follow up status (Norwegian Government, 2016–2017). As result, Figure 2 shows the ownership of SDGs among the Norwegian ministries.

Further to that, mainstreaming SDGs across country's national policies, plans and strategies has become a priority for Norwegian Government. Efforts have focused on highlighting issues and undertaking policies and strategies that fall within the scope of human rights, women's rights and gender equality, climate change and environment and anti-corruption (Norwegian Government, 2016). Several stakeholders from civil society organisations, representatives the business community and the scientific and academic communities were asked to contribute on those cross-cutting issues for the development of Norwegian policy (United Nations, 2016). Since then, significant initiatives and reforms of the Norwegian regulatory framework and strategy have followed. The sponsor

of research as well as education on sustainable development is an area in which Norway has taken important steps. The government launched an ambitious long-term plan for research and higher education 2019–2028 with approximately NOK 1,500 million to be devoted on activities such as, greener technological research, R&D in restructuring the business sector and promotion of programs to improve quality in higher education (Norwegian Government, 2018–2019).

Figure 2 Organisation structure for SDGs implementation in Norway (see online version for colours)



Source: Halonen et al. (2017)

In the field of healthcare, gender equality and human rights, Norway has also shown significant commitment. Recognising this area as an integral part of the SDGs, in 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set the principles for Norway's strategy to eliminate harmful practices for women, children and, generally, every human for the 2019–2023 period (Norwegian Government, 2019a). Furthermore, in attempt to combat climate change and achieve an affordable and clean energy for all the government launched, in

2020, a project called ‘longship’ seeking to achieve full the carbon capture storage (CCS) seeking to reduce CO₂ and greenhouse emissions (Norwegian Government, 2019–2020). The indisputable sensitivity, holistic and multifaceted approach that Norway has adopted towards achieving the goals of sustainable development is reflected in many strategic declarations and instructions. It is worth recognising in them the country’s strategy and measures to reduce emission from domestic shipping and fisheries by half by 2030 (Norwegian Government, 2019b). In addition, Norway’s ‘Strategies towards attractive nordic towns’ local strategies and actions to the SDGs reflects the vision and principles of Norway, along with the whole Nordic region, in building resilient, attractive and sustainable cities in future (Norwegian Government, 2019c). And last but not least, we could not fail to mention the white paper published in January 2021 and concerns Norway’s Arctic policy. Building on the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and inextricably linked to the SDGs, Norway’s Arctic policy targets to safeguard Norwegian interests in the Arctic by ensuring peace, stability, ecosystem protection, job creation and stakeholder cooperation (Norwegian Government, 2021b).

In Table 4 are summarised Norway’s most important sustainable development strategies and policy development from 2015 nowadays.

Table 4 Norway’s sustainable development strategies in the post-2030 Agenda era

<i>Year</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
2015 to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway proposes measures to UN Assembly (2016) • National Review (VNR) to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) of United Nations was presented (2016) • European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) established (2016) • Nordic program in response to Agenda 2030 (2016) • Report to the Storting (white paper) for policy coherence need (2017) • Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocates ownership for SDGs (2017) • Long-term plan for research and higher education launched (2019) • Strategy to eliminate harmful practices for women and children (2019) • ‘Longship’ program for carbon capture storage (CCS) (2019) • Strategy for green shipping (2019) • Strategies towards attractive Nordic towns (2019) • The Norwegian Government’s arctic policy (2021) 	<p>A wide range of measures and transformations have been taking place from 2015 until today. The country’s governing system is becoming even more active nationally and internationally. Sustainable development goals are disseminated through Norway’s educational, environmental, economic, political and humanitarian strategies and policies to a variety of institutions and organisations.</p>













5 Norway’s achievements towards SDGs

The introduction of SDGs and targets, in 2015, was an ambitious venture of the global community that aspired to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions

(social, environmental and economic). Participation and active engagement of other social and business actors was also indispensable for their achievement. However, it was important that such a complex and multidimensional plan can be quantified to check whether the original objectives are met (United Nations, 2017; Kavvada et al., 2020). Hence, through a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, on July 2017, it was decided that SDGs should be measured by a set of global indicators developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. Subsequently, a progress review report of the status of implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be presented at the annual high-level political forum. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of United Nations was tasked to assist countries in strengthening national statistical capacity and incorporate transparent and reliable set of indicators, based on the guiding principles of the global indicator framework for the SDGs and targets of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2017; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020).

It is worth mentioning that developing and measuring progress on sustainable development in Norway was not something new. Actually, in 2005, the Norwegian Government proposed a plan for National Agenda 21 that included a core set of indicators for sustainable development. This plan was presented to the Parliament in the National Budget 2004 and at that time was characterised as an important aid to policies to enhance sustainable development in Norway well before the 2030 Agenda appears (Norwegian Government, 2005). Currently, 231 unique indicators have been incorporated in the United Nations global indicator framework. The SDGs indicator framework is not a static one as it is continuously refined and reviewed by the Statistical Commission with the next review being scheduled in March 2020. In the latest annual SDGs Report 2020, based on the latest available data as of June 2020, and amid COVID-19 crisis, Norway maintains a prominent place. We refer to it as, according to the United Nations, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted on specific goals and targets. As can be seen in Figure 3 Norway is ranked 6th out of 166 countries in total in terms of the progress made towards achieving the 17 SDGs. The scale of measurement ranges from 0 to 100, where a score of 100 indicates that all SDGs have been achieved (Sustainable Development Report, 2020).

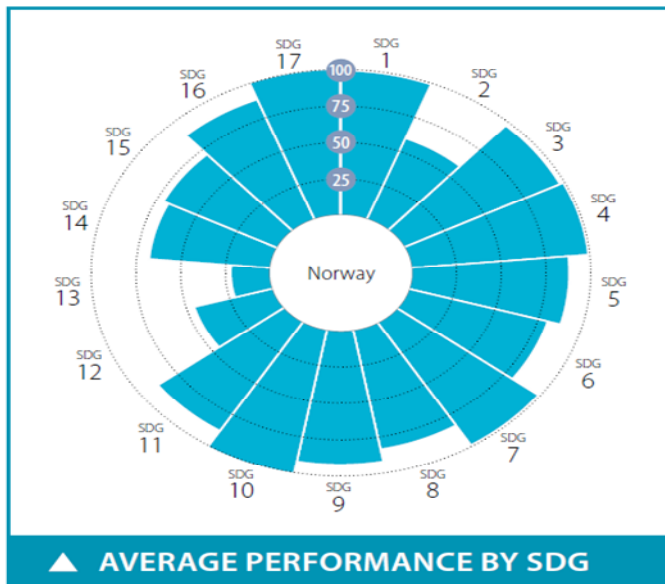
Figure 3 Norway's global ranking in terms of SDGs achievement (see online version for colours)

Rank	Country	Score	Performance by SDG
1	 Sweden	84.72	
2	 Denmark	84.56	
3	 Finland	83.77	
4	 France	81.13	
5	 Germany	80.77	
6	 Norway	80.76	

Source: Sustainable Development Report (2020)

However, and earlier than the pandemic, as per Norway’s annual report for the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, published in 2019, it was affirmed that Norway is also on the right track (Norwegian Government, 2019d). Closely to that, according to an OECD study, Norway has achieved 25 of the 102 relevant indicators. Eliminating poverty and climate change combat have been seen as two distinctive features of such Norway’s effort. The same study also notes Norway’s significant political will to achieve its development goals, which has led to an increase in the budget and funds spent in this direction in recent years (OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Norway, 2019). Individual performance of Norway per SGD can be viewed in Figure 4. In addition, among Norway’s achievements, it is worth noting that it is the only European country that has reached SDG5 (gender equality). This is confirmed by the various humanitarian initiatives taken by the Norwegian Government so far in this area and concerns the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the general protection of human rights for all people (Norwegian Government, 2021c).

Figure 4 Norway’s performance per SDG (see online version for colours)



Source: Sustainable Development Report (2021)

Norway’s significantly higher ranking and exceptional progress in achieving the SDGs has been also confirmed by the 2020 Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). In the 2020 SDSN report, Norway was listed fifth among 31 European countries (ESDR, 2020). In addition, as can be seen in Figure 5, Norway has been on track for maintaining SDGs achievement for nine goals, with five showing a moderate improvement, an element confirms the Norwegian Government’s optimism that by 2030 the targets will have been met (Norwegian Government, 2019d). It is worth noting that the progress achieved by country in SDG9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) reflects the significant investment in new technologies, research and training that Norway has made in recent years. Particularly through the introduction of the government’s long-term plan for research and higher education, 2019–2028, approximately NOK 1,500

million are to be devoted on activities such as, greener technological research, R&D in restructuring the business sector and promotion of programs to improve quality in higher education (Norwegian Government, 2018–2019).

Figure 5 Norway's SDGs performance among European countries (see online version for colours)



Source: ESDR (2020)

6 Discussion

It has long been known that Norway is characterised by a conscious effort to create a governance framework consistent with sustainable development requirements. Adding to this knowledge, we highlight how the Norwegian sustainability policy and legal regime has evolved to reflect the trends and actions of the global sustainability framework. As a first overview of this research, the ongoing examination of laws, policies, strategies and reports published by the Norwegian Government showed that, despite positive trends in social and environmental initiatives, sustainable development in Norway, as in the rest of the world, remains with visionary idea (Rugg, 2016; Kemp et al., 2005). This finding resonates with earlier literature, which suggests that Norwegian policies and laws, as well as international ones, have been developed to regulate the individual features of sustainable development (i.e., social, environmental and economic issues), without however taking the form legislative law (Case, 2021; Norwegian Government, 2021b; Birkeland, 2015).

Delving in our analysis, results showed that the establishment of sustainable development in Norway has its roots much earlier. Starting in 1987, when the term was first introduced globally by WCED Brundtland, sustainable development in Norway marked a promising beginning as the Prime Minister declared the need to integrate it into government policy and strategy (Aall, 2014; Lafferty et al., 2007). For example, the deregulation of the Norwegian electricity market, in 1991, and the appointment of the Green Tax Commission, in 1992, refer to major Norwegian policy initiatives to materialise Brundtland's objectives. These examples are linked to the literature showing that the efforts of the United Nations in the 1990s to combat climate change focused on energy conservation and the development of environmentally friendly production processes (Bodansky, 2001; Tompkins and Amundsen, 2008). Since then, sustainable development in Norway has been through many events and has been adapted many times to meet the challenges of each era (Lafferty et al., 2007; Sageidet, 2014). To this, it is worth adding that such country's initial enthusiastic start, as expressed by the Brundtland report, 1987, had not been followed by a similar dynamic continuation. Thus, Norway's

focus and action on sustainable development during the 1990s remained somewhat lukewarm (Langhelle and Ruud, 2012; Ruud, 2009). Indeed, as findings affirmed, social and environmental measures taken by the Norwegian Government at that time were mainly driven by ecological concerns without forming part of a constitutional national strategy for sustainable development (Ruud, 2009; Sjøfjell, 2013). This is consistent with the overall literary bent of that period which was characterised by ecological sensitivity and the effort to educate around the adverse environmental situation (Nomura, 2009).

The situation described above was particularly true until 2004, when sustainable development, in the form of sound strategy and political action, first appeared with the Norwegian Government's first declaration of a sustainable development strategy (Breiby et al., 2022). Indeed, as indicated by our research, from 2004 to 2015, Norway's sustainable development strategy and policy began to change to reflect the need for changes in traditional social and environmental protection processes. Linking the 2030 Agenda and SDGs to its existing sustainable development policy and strategy is just an indicant example (Dankel et al., 2022; Hebnes and Kvæstad, 2021). In addition, changes reflected the need to enrich existing policies and strategies with the social dimension of sustainable development, guided by the values of corporate social responsibility (Norwegian Government, 2010–2011). Such transformations resonate with previous research that wanted the dynamic introduction and interconnection of the term corporate social responsibility with sustainable development, either as a management model or as a means of achieving the social dimension of sustainability (Baumgartner, 2014; Ebner and Baumgartner, 2006). After that, and following the introduction of UN 2030 Agenda, the Norwegian Government has shown a solid commitment in achieving SDGs. This is also affirmed by its commitment to provide 1% of gross national income (GNI) as official development assistance (ODA) in OECD (OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Norway, 2019). In addition, the importance of the SDGs, and Norway's explicit commitment to them, is reflected in the first national action plan for the implementation of the SDGs to Parliament in 2021 through which Norway continued to monitor progress, increase awareness, engage stakeholders and integrate the SDGs into regional and local strategies and plans [Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment (ForUM), 2021].

The time being, findings suggest that Norway has made an overall positive contribution to meet the SDGs. This is affirmed by cross checking several sources on SDGs measurement indicators at global or regional level. In this positive progress of Norway towards SDGs we must mention the catalytic role played by the engagement of various stakeholders from civil society and the business sector. In particular, the Norwegian Forum for Development and the Environment (ForUM), the UN Global Compact Norway and the SDG Norway are some of the government's closest partners in policy making and knowledge transfer for sustainable development. Remarkable are also the achievements in the field of poverty reduction, health and well-being, gender equality, quality education and affordable energy reflecting country's long standing policy and tradition in such issues. However, findings revealed country's underperformance in SDG12 (production and consumption), SDG13 (climate action) and SDG14 (life below the water). Further to that, results could suggest that Norwegian Government takes further measures to reduce food waste and over-consumption, increase natural carbon capture in the climate law, stop oil and gas exploration and restore degraded and destroyed marine and coastal areas [Abualtaher et al., 2021; Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment (ForUM), 2021].

7 Conclusions

This paper departed from the concern that little research has been conducted to explore and provide insights into Norway's sustainability status, and how it has evolved over time, in the pre- and post-2030 Agenda era. Accordingly, the aim of this study was to explore and provide a systematic overview of the Norwegian sustainable development regime, thus narrowing part of the current knowledge gap and highlighting aspects of Norway's legislation and sustainability policy that need to be improved. Based on the results, many interesting developments have taken place in the governance of Norwegian sustainability. Relying on data collected through a socio-legal study and analysis of Norwegian law and policy documents, the study revealed that the emerging concept of sustainable development has been intensified with the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, in 2015. Therefore, despite the earlier integration of environmental and socio-economic legislation, this historic event laid the foundations for a more comprehensive and unified Norwegian approach to sustainable development.

An implication arising from this research is the need to take further steps and initiate changes in support of SDG12 (production and consumption), SDG13 (climate action) and SDG14 (life below the water), in which Norway underperforms. Such negative trend in SDG12 is possibly attributed to the high consumption rates of Norwegians, forming world's highest consumptions per capita and consuming 44 tonnes of natural resources each year. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Norway's high domestic and exported emissions, owing to high oil and gas production, need to be considered, as it is believed to be the main reason behind the low performance in terms of SDG13. Another implication arising from this research is the need to work more and reverse the negative achievements in SDG14. This reflects the great challenges that Norway still has to overcome in terms of by-catches in fisheries, the lack of protection plans for seabirds, harmful subsidies to the oil and forestry industry and the limited control of the aquaculture industry.

There are some limitations to the present study. The most important lie in the fact that the present study does not delve into the investigation of the causes of Norway's underperformance, particularly, in the SDG12, SDG13 and SDG14. Also, the contribution and role of individual stakeholders has not been assessed by this paper. In the context of lifting these limitations, but also improving Norway's overall contribution to SDGs, some areas of further research are recommended. Therefore, future study is suggested to assess the contribution of stakeholders from the wider social and business spectrum and how they could further commit themselves to supporting the Norwegian Government's efforts to implement Agenda 2030. In addition, due to the underperformance in sea, energy and consumption issues, the effectiveness of Norway's integrated ocean management plans, energy policies, gas and oil tax system and food production and consumption practices need to be further evaluated. Closely, an alternative research design should also be used to improve real-time data collection and analysis, thus, combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

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