

# Same but different: On continuity and change in agricultural policy reforms

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## Abstract

This article contributes to the Historical Institutionalism literature on stability and change by unpacking how an institution has persisted for more than 70 years despite substantial contextual changes. The overall stability of the institution comes both through changes in policy instruments and their settings, and through the incorporation of differing, but aligned rationales. Ideational multidimensionality yields stability by providing leeway to recondition the institution in response to changing circumstances. This allows for different interests in the coalition to stimulate overall institutional stability by supporting incremental changes in policy instruments whilst avoiding institutional exhaustion and third order changes. This shows that policies initiated under a certain set of circumstances may be better equipped to persist when circumstances change if they are able to incorporate differing, but aligned, rationales and to respond to upcoming issues through policy instrument changes. The theoretical arguments are exemplified through a case study analysis of Norwegian agricultural policy.

## KEYWORDS

agricultural policy, historical institutionalism, ideas, multidimensional policy, policy change/stability

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## INTRODUCTION

Historical institutionalism (HI) has evolved into an extensive framework for understanding the evolution of public policies. It emphasises the relative stability of political orders (Fioretos et al., 2016; Steinmo et al., 1992), but it also comprises a large amount of literature focusing on the mechanisms of change (Pierson, 2000; Streeck & Thelen, 2005). One prominent strand of literature accentuates critical junctures and the possibility for radical change (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Gerschewski, 2021), while another emphasises ‘that important changes often take place incrementally and through seemingly small adjustments that can (...) cumulate into significant institutional transformation’ (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, xi).

Recent HI contributions have criticised both strands for giving too much prominence to structural factors (e.g., McAdam, 2022) and their role in reproducing order (Carstensen & Röper, 2022; Jabko & Sheingate, 2018). The ‘coalitional turn’ (Emmenegger, 2021; Hall, 2016) in HI seeks to incorporate social coalitions as the basis of institutional genesis and change, as well as of continuity. Alongside these developments, an ideational interest has also inspired institutional studies (Béland, 2016). While McAdam (2022) underscores the need to look at how ideas are central to strategic action in institutional change, Skogstad and Wilder (2019), among others, argue that policy ideas that are multidimensional—able to incorporate various interests’ wants and needs—may promote stability in the long run.

This article is a case study of a specific and core part of agricultural policy in Norway which goes by the label canalisation policy. It follows the policy over a 100-year period starting in the period prior to institutionalisation (1920–1950) and continues throughout the subsequent development (1951–present). The canalisation policy refers to a range of policy instruments implemented to generate a structure of ‘geographical distribution of agricultural production’ which in this case means concentrating grain farming in the most productive agricultural areas and allocating livestock farming to the less advantageous areas. A policy with the goal of geographical distribution of production must incentivise feed production in the most productive areas in order to produce feed and not livestock (which otherwise would have been more profitable) while simultaneously keeping the cost of feed at tolerable levels for livestock farmers. A necessary bit of context is the topographic and climatic conditions of Norwegian agriculture. The production conditions are generally harsh but vary widely: whereas the best agricultural areas are suitable both for grain and livestock production, the less advantageous areas are only suitable for livestock production (Arnoldussen et al., 2014). Thus, the canalisation policy essentially regulates a fundamental conflict of interest in the relationship between feed producers (grain farmers) and feed consumers (mainly dairy farmers). Thus, despite conflicting interests, the policy has been described as ‘an expression of solidarity among farmers in different parts of the country’ (Farsund, 2004, pp. 33–34).

The puzzle we seek to answer is: *How can an institution that encompasses fundamentally opposing economic interests persist for more than 70 years, despite modernisation, structural change and changing ideational and agricultural regimes?*

While we could have expected a gradual withering away and exhaustion of the policy (Streeck & Thelen, 2005), or an overall dismantling of the goal structure guiding the policy (Hall, 1993), the opposite is the case. The institution has taken various forms in terms of policy instrument composition and has proven persistent under substantial ideational, structural and political changes since its implementation in 1951, despite its reliance on a coalition of different interests between the government (represented by the Ministry of Agriculture) and the Norwegian Farmers' Association (NFA) and the Norwegian Farmers' and Smallholders' Association (NFSA). Furthermore, faced with shifting political considerations regarding food and farming along with comprehensive changes in agricultural production and markets, the institution has continuously been adapted to respond to these developments.

It is this unexpected institutional stability—despite instrumental and contextual changes—that is the focus of our analysis. We assert that long-term stability in some instances require incremental adjustments and change. Furthermore, we argue that geographical distribution of production is a multidimensional policy idea (Skogstad & Wilder, 2019) able to incorporate several considerations which provide flexibility as the context and conditions challenge the existing structure.

The article seeks to make two contributions to the literature. First, it addresses a recent development in the HI literature pointing towards unexpected stability (Carstensen & Röper, 2022; van der Heijden & Kuhlmann, 2017; Jabko & Sheingate, 2018), and documents how a coalition actively works to sustain and stabilise the overall institution through first- and second-order changes (Hall, 1993). Second, the article connects the unexpected stability to the concept of ideational multidimensionality (Skogstad & Wilder, 2019), and shows how this contributes to enabling broad support for the institution from diverse interests within the coalition. Ideational multidimensionality provides tools and arguments for the coalition with which to actively reproduce the institution when faced with shifting political conditions and contextual changes.

We first outline the theoretical approach, and then we discuss the methods and data material used. Thereafter, we present the empirical material, and finally, discuss the findings and present our conclusions.

## STABILITY AND CHANGE

While our case is an example of a public policy, it is also an institution or arrangement established to solve collective action dilemmas (Hall & Thelen, 2009), structure interaction between actors (Pierson, 2004), as well as a 'distributional instrument(s) laden with power implications' (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, p. 8). We argue, in line with Capoccia (2016), Pierson (2004), Hacker et al. (2015) and

Jacobs (2016), that major public policies, such as the canalisation policy, can be treated as institutions and we use the terms interchangeably. Stability and change is a central dichotomy in the study of institutions, and differentiating between stability and change is often treated as a matter of judgement (Peters et al., 2005). Here, we interpret overall institutional stability as ‘maintaining the status quo of a policy and strengthening it over time as opposed to weakening and/or dismantling’ (Rietig & Laing, 2017, p. 577). Nevertheless, this interpretation requires further elaboration.

While several approaches to policy change and stability can be found in the literature, two influential conceptualisations will be applied in this case study. The first is the framework of Hall (1993), which argues that there are three levels, or orders, of changes in policy. First-order change is defined as a change in the settings of policy instruments, that is, incremental adjustments and modifications of the instruments in use ‘...in light of experience and new knowledge’ (Hall, 1993, p. 278). Second-order changes are changes in instruments as well as instrument settings; policy goals denoting direction remain the same, but past experiences with previous instruments set to attain those goals, are not satisfactory. Third-order change is characterised by wholesale changes, involving alterations in instrument settings, instruments and the very goal structure guiding the policy (Hall, 1993). Based on this, we operationalise institutional stability as the absence of third-order change.

Building on this framework, Jordan and Moore (2023) operationalise goals (third order) as the aims of the policy—stating what the policy is meant to bring about. Instruments (first- and second order) are understood as the tools used to reach these goals. These internal dimensions of the policy generate external outcomes, either preferred or actual. Our focus is not on the outcomes of the canalisation policy, as this has been documented by others (e.g., Melås, 2019; Vatn, 1989), but rather on policy output (as the substance of policymaking in terms of instruments and their settings) and the goals attached to the policy.

The second line of conceptualisations used in this article comes from Streeck and Thelen (2005, p. 31), who distinguish between different modes of institutional change. *Displacement* denotes a ‘slowly rising salience of subordinate relative to dominant institutions’. *Drift* is ‘neglect of institutional maintenance in spite of external change resulting in slippage in institutional practice on the ground’. *Layering* is when ‘new elements attached to existing institutions gradually change their status and structure’. *Conversion* is the ‘redeployment of old institutions to new purposes; new purposes attached to old structures’ (Streeck & Thelen, 2005, p. 31), or the redirection of ‘institutions or policies towards purposes beyond their original intent’ (Hacker et al., 2015, p. 180). *Exhaustion* is a process leading to institutional breakdown rather than change (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Our arguments differ slightly from those of Streeck and Thelen, but mainly because the focus of their contribution is on the incremental changes leading to institutional discontinuity, while our focus is on the incremental changes leading to continuity.

## COALITIONS AS FRAGILE COMPROMISES OR STABLE INTERDEPENDENCIES

As mentioned, the canalisation policy coordinates and allocates resources between actors with conflicting wants and needs; therefore, it reflects the tensions of the relational configurations it serves (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). A general theoretical assumption prevalent in the literature is that the distributional element of institutions almost automatically creates winners and losers, and so the struggle between different interests is what drives institutional development (Peters et al., 2005; Pierson, 2004). While this is often connected with change, incumbent coalitions may also contribute to stabilise institutions, because their position makes them effective in defending the status quo (Emmenegger, 2021).

Consequently, what emerges as a pressing theoretical question is how incumbent coalitions, in changing contexts, contribute to fostering change (Seitzl & Emmenegger, 2019) but also to preserving stability. It is the latter type of activity in which we are interested in this study. Maintaining institutional stability may involve the active rearrangement of ideational and institutional elements on the part of the coalition (Carstensen & Röper, 2022). This activity has been referred to as a ‘change-but-no-change’ strategy (Fitch-Roy et al., 2020, p. 96) and as ‘practices of dynamic order’, as a means of changing things in order for them ‘to stay as they are’ (Jabko & Sheingate, 2018, pp. 312–313).

Institutions are central in balancing the relations of power within a coalition (Hall & Thelen, 2009). In this case study, the balancing of interests is formalised through corporatist negotiations within the coalition between the state—represented by the Ministry of Agriculture—and the two organisations representing farmers, who often hold differing interests (Rommetvedt & Veggeland, 2019). Policymaking is thus characterised by efforts to induce an alignment of different and even contradictory interests in order to make coalitional agreement possible (Béland & Cox, 2016; Palier, 2005). While differing interests might suggest a process of conflict (Sharma & Daugbjerg, 2021), it does not automatically mean continuous battling over the distribution of resources within the institution. Indeed, it may also lead to institutional compromises between actors with different (and changing) views as to desired outcomes (Fitch-Roy et al., 2020).

### THE EFFECT OF MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

This leads us to the next key item of our framework: multidimensional policy ideas. Following Béland and Cox (2016, p. 430), we understand ideas as ‘causal beliefs about economic, social and political phenomena’. Multidimensional policy ideas are distinct in that they have the potential of being interpreted differently by various interests with contrasting wants and needs (Parsons, 2016)

and ‘...appeal to actors with varied interests’ (Palier, 2005). Such ideas foster what Davenport and Leitch (2005, p. 1606) call ‘unified diversity’. In terms of coalitions and institutions, multidimensionality (Mondou et al., 2014) is a central characteristic of coalition magnets—ideas capable of the initial construction of a political coalition (Béland & Cox, 2016). While several authors address how ideas function in the initial phases of coalition-building (see e.g., Parsons, 2016; Sharma & Daugbjerg, 2021), studies of their effect in the longer term are needed (Béland & Cox, 2016).

As Pierson (2004) underscore: *time matters*, implying that both external circumstances and internal positions may shift, rendering institutions founded under other conditions and for other purposes open to reinterpretation and redeployment (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). In the words of Hall and Thelen (2009, p. 10): ‘...the current effects of an institution help explain contemporary support for it, but only rarely can those effects explain the origins of an institution’. The implication hereof is that to explain institutional development, we need to document how and what is presented as the purpose of the institution, and how this is redeployed over time. Specific to this case study, if geographical distribution of production continues to be the solution for the incumbent coalition, what are the (changing?) perceived problems, and how is the canalisation policy adapted to respond to these problems?

Sharma and Daugbjerg (2021) contend that if a policy coalition is characterised by somewhat unaligned interests emphasising different dimensions of the policy, this may lead to political failure in the longer run. However, policy idea multidimensionality may also support lasting coalitions, as it encompasses several rationales (Skogstad & Wilder, 2019), offers a wider basis of support wherein different interests are comprised in one arrangement (Skogstad, 2020), and provides resilience by offering the incumbent coalition the opportunity to draw ‘...on several potential lines of argumentation’ (Mondou et al., 2014, p. 160). This indicates that multidimensionality can provide institutional stability when overarching political circumstances and considerations change. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how multidimensionality affects coalitional support (Skogstad & Wilder, 2019) and how changes may contribute to institutional stability in the long term (Carstensen & Röper, 2022).

In summary, our theoretical framework posits that sustaining an institution founded on a compromise necessitates careful balancing of the interests in the coalition. As posited theoretically, we also need to look for ideational reinterpretation and (re)deployment of policy instruments that may or may not serve to safeguard the survival of the institution in the face of changing circumstances and political agendas. Our focus is directed towards how the multidimensional idea of geographical distribution of production may carry differing but shared understandings among different actors over time; we are particularly interested in whether this contributes to preserve the institution by

reconditioning it in response to changing situations—resulting in maintaining the status quo and strengthening it over time—or whether multiple considerations lead to its dismantling. While this might materialise in the argumentation used by the members of the coalition, it is also visible in the changes in policy instruments, and how these changes affect the development of the policy.

## DATA AND METHODS

An analysis of the development of the canalisation policy in Norway is well suited as a case study of complex, long-term processes of institutional development (George & Bennett, 2005), and thereby contributing to the theoretical field of institutional change and stability. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, our focus is not on the policy effects or outcomes but rather at the dimensions of policy output and the goals of the institution.

We outline the institutional development by presenting a narrative based on content analysis of primary and secondary sources. We document how the institution is described and discussed in all agricultural parliamentary reports (white papers/St. Meld.), all relevant Norwegian Official Reports (NOUs), and other official reports published in the period. NOUs and official reports are knowledge statuses drafted by government-appointed expert consortia on the state of a defined field of interest, while white papers document the desired political direction and intent.

We also build on Vatn (1984, 1989), Farsund (2004), Grue (2014a, 2014b) and Almås (2002)—six empirically rich historical inquiries which in combination cover the period in question. These secondary sources contribute to the construction of the narrative, as well as to guiding and enlightening our reading of the empirical material. This strengthens our certainty that while not all reports on the subject are included, the development presented in this case study is in line with the actual events. Together, the primary and secondary sources point to crucial elements of the agricultural policy history, mark emphasised topics in the policy discourse and contain descriptions of the various actors' interests and positions in relation to the institution (where this is available). We trace the general and technical political changes related to the canalisation policy and identify central episodes to highlight how and why the policy was introduced and has evolved.

As illustrated in the time base in Appendix 1, we organise the narrative into four phases. First, 1920s–1945, is characterised by the emergence of regulative ideas. The period 1946–1989 started with institutionalisation of the canalisation policy and ensuing stability. 1989–2000 marks the first period where agriculture experienced growing external pressure, increasing influence of market economy principles and the rise of international agreements influencing agricultural policy. The 2000–the present is a continuation of this, however characterised by the introduction of multi-functionality and new productivism, following international developments.

## FOUR PHASES IN CANALISATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT

### 1920s–1945: The emergence of regulative ideas

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, periodic overproduction of dairy products and high imports of grain drove prices down. This, combined with low profitability and a weak agricultural economy, initiated a growing acknowledgement that market regulation was necessary (Vatn, 1984). These conditions gave rise to regulative institutions, such as the trade law and the law on import, along with various measures (like rations and caps on concentrate) that attempted to ameliorate the dairy situation (Farsund, 2004). The government also established a public grain monopoly in 1928 (the State Grain Business) which was granted both the right to import grain and the obligation to buy all domestically produced grain at a price above the world market price (Agricultural Committee of 1956, 1960).

In the interwar years, the agricultural associations favoured regulating the market over regulating production; however, production regulation—in the form of transferring production capacity from dairy to grain production—eventually became necessary. The latter strategy linked the dual problem of overproduction of dairy products and high imports of concentrate feed inputs, and thus also addressed the central relation between feed producers and feed consumers. This idea involved the canalisation of production capacity by incentivising grain (feed) production in the best areas, which would both expand the possibilities for provision in the livestock and dairy sector through lowering the market pressure as well as increase the share of domestic feed production (Vatn, 1984). However, while grain prices were raised, the idea was not translated into a specific policy, and the war temporarily halted discussions on these issues.

### 1946–1989: Institutionalisation and ensuing stability

Following World War II's damages to agricultural production, the idea of strengthening grain production through geographical distribution resurfaced in the late 1940s [St. Meld. Nr. 60 (1955–1956)]. The idea fit well into the planning regime of the social democratic post-war government (Vatn, 1984). The then-liberal-leaning NFSA had been resistant to regulating production in the interwar years (Espeli, 2014), but after the war they saw the need to free up production capacity for smaller livestock farms to grow: they feared that the next occurrence of overproduction would harm smaller farms, and they wanted a distribution of production that benefitted these farmers. The NFA had been fairly positive towards regulating production through canalisation, justified by the need to both improve grain producers' terms and increase domestic grain



production. However, in the food deficiency period in the immediate post-war years, regulation was given low priority by both the associations and the Ministry of Agriculture (Vatn, 1984).

It was only when overproduction once again arose in 1950—that the topic was reintroduced. Unlike earlier, and unlike many other proposals for regulating markets or production, the idea of a canalisation policy resonated well within both farmer associations and the Ministry (Vatn, 1984). This occurred in a new context, as a corporatist institution was implemented in 1950 through what is called the Agricultural Settlement. In this arrangement the Ministry of Agriculture, the NFA and the NFSA negotiate levels and the distribution of prices and subsidies. These negotiations issued the agricultural organisations not only co-determination, but also co-responsibility for the policy (Almås, 2002). As different agricultural interests in terms of both geography, production and size have been spread to some degree across the agricultural associations, the negotiations oblige compromises (Farsund, 2004).

It was within this institution that what is considered the official creation of the canalisation policy was negotiated. The parties agreed on a scheme to regulate the price difference between milk and grain (Almås, 2002), and prices were to be set in annual negotiations (Vatn, 1984). An additional input to the price agreement in 1951 stated that: ‘For the grain crops in 1952/54, the Government will propose that the State Grain Business’s purchase prices for Norwegian wheat are no longer set lower in kroner per kg than 1.5 x the average payout price per liters of milk at the dairies’ (St. Meld. Nr. 77, 1951, p. 8, *authors’ translation*). This marks the institutionalisation of the idea of geographical distribution of production.

The idea gathered support from different actors who formerly held unaligned views as they connected their motivations: collectively, the agricultural associations needed a stable market, and the Government needed higher total production along with the tools to steer it. The coordination of support for the idea of canalisation of the three-party coalition was an agreement based not on united similar interests but rather on contrasting interests that nevertheless were aligned. The conflict of interest between different productions was also settled: grain producers needed an avenue for feed products, while dairy farmers needed increased outlet capacity.

Once the idea of canalisation was implemented as a policy, it proved to be persistent, and it was supported and assured by the official reports and white papers that followed. White paper 64 [St. Meld. Nr. 64 (1963–64)] noted that the oversupply of dairy products since 1950 had remained within acceptable quantities, thanks in part to livestock farmers in the best areas changing to grain production. The report from 1974 (NOU 1974: 26) argued that the grain sector was key to regulating agricultural production but was not as decisive as it had been, due to limitations regarding increasing grain production. By the end of the 1970s, the potential to expand grain production in the productive southeastern parts of Norway was

somewhat exhausted, so the authorities turned to mid-Norway for further expansion (Vatn, 1989). The white paper from 1976 [St. Meld. Nr. 14 (1976)] argued that grain production would continue to be important to regulate production. Both agricultural organisations supported the continued canalisation of production in their consultation on NOU (1974), and the NFA argued for solidarity across different regions (Farsund, 2004). Thus, the adjustment of relative prices had not lost its blessing from the actors involved.

But even though a specific target was set in 1951, the actual relative price difference varied in the subsequent decades until 1990. Grain and dairy prices were negotiated and calibrated (first-order changes) to affect the profitability of the two productions (Vatn, 1989), which was a complex undertaking. First, it was meant to incentivise farmers in the best agricultural areas to continue or start producing grain, which had been successful: in the favourable grain areas in southeastern Norway, the policy had led to a decrease in animal production and a considerable increase in grain production, clearing the way for dairy production in less favourable areas (Vatn, 1989). Second, setting high prices to support grain production had to be used with caution, because high prices on concentrates would harm the dairy producers economically—who were already worse off compared to grain producers (Almås, 2002). Third, although the policy was supposed to stabilise the dairy sector, overproduction continued to be a recurring issue (Vatn, 1984).

The continued market imbalance in the dairy sector led to the emerging realisation that adjusting grain prices was insufficient as a regulative instrument. During the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of introducing milk quota regulation to counter this was raised in debates and in political documents (NOU, 1974: 26; St. Meld. Nr 64, 1964; St. Meld. Nr. 14, 1976). However, at that time, this move was seen as an intrusive and administratively difficult measure and was therefore not implemented (Vatn, 1984).

In 1975, after substantial unrest in the agricultural community, the Parliament initiated a plan to bring farmers' incomes up to the level of industrial workers using price subsidies. A known potential consequence of this was overproduction, especially in the dairy sector (Almås, 2002). The farmer associations argued for raising the grain price substantially, but the Ministry of Agriculture was reluctant to raise it too much, as this would affect profitability in large parts of the livestock sector (Vatn, 1984). Moreover, a substantial share of the potential for canalisation of production had been exploited by this time, so further adjustment of the price difference between grain and milk was no longer seen as suitable for stopping overproduction (Grue, 2014a). When overproduction became a reality in the late 1970s due to implementation of measures to raise income, but also structural developments (Vatn, 1984), it necessitated an additional instrument in the institutional mix: milk production quotas, which was implemented in 1983. Unlike in many other countries, this move was agreed upon by the coalition of agricultural interests and the government (Grue, 2014a). As mentioned, this instrument had been

discussed earlier, but the agricultural associations had opposed it and the government had regarded it as avoidable up to that point (Grue, 2014a; Vatn, 1984). The responsibility for regulating production was delegated to the dairy cooperative. In addition to being set for individual farms, milk quotas were also set on a regional basis (first nine regions, later 18), with each region getting a fixed share of the total production. This effectively froze the distribution of dairy production to what was already in place by the time of implementation (Melås, 2019).

This is a case of layering—adding new instruments alongside those already in place—made necessary by a changing context which affected the functioning of the original policy (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). It is also a case of second-order changes (Hall, 1993), prompted by the failure of previous instruments to attain policy goals. This instrument manifested as a solid stabiliser of the geographically distributed structure of Norwegian agriculture, and thus as an effective tool to regulate production (Melås, 2019).

Quota regulation affected a part of the domain that the relative price difference between milk and grain had addressed until then. When quota regulation largely blocked dairy overproduction, this consideration no longer applied to the price-difference instrument. Thus, price-setting of grain from that point was more about adjusting the level of incentives for grain production and less about regulating production of dairy products. The introduction of milk quotas marks the first of several second-order changes that converted the canalisation policy from an institution established to effect changes in production into an institution designed to preserve the status quo.

### **1989–2000: External pressure and preservation of the existing structure**

By the 1990s, the potential to canalise production capacity was perceived as limited, due to nearly full coverage of grain products that could be traded within the country (NOU 1991: 2B). Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture was also concerned with the declining price trend in Europe. Negotiations in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) aimed to downscale agricultural support and increase international trade by reducing income-, price- and export subsidies [St. Prp. Nr. 8, (1992–1993)]. In addition to the international context, there was also growing attention towards environmental issues relating to agriculture, including monocultural grain production (Sødal & Aanestad, 1990). Thus, second-order policy changes in this period can partly be interpreted as adaptations to a changing context and as facilitating increased international influence in the agricultural market (Almås, 2002).

This led to pressure for a shift in type of policy instruments, from price support to acreage support. The acreage grant was introduced in 1989 and partially replaced the former model of production subsidies (NOU 1991: 2B), an example of displacement (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). Thus, a new model for adjusting the relative profitability between grain farmers and livestock farmers was in effect. This new

scheme was differentiated geographically according to the distribution of production already in place [St. Prp. Nr. 8 (1992–1993)], and the size of this grant grew significantly throughout the decade (Tenge et al., 2016). Even though the new instrument was quite different from the old one, the underlying idea of geographical distribution remained. This adaptation was supported by the NFSA in particular, since it did not incentivise increased production output (Farsund, 2004).

Alongside the instrumental shift was also an ideational shift in what was described as the purpose of a geographical distribution of production. This indicates a broadening of the ideational elements affecting the agricultural sector through the incorporation of both international perspectives and environmental issues as applicable considerations. In the white papers from that time, geographically distributed production had shifted from being described as a means to regulate production to representing a feature of the agricultural structure that was necessary in order to uphold total agricultural area, emergency supply preparedness and sustained rural settlement [St. Prp. Nr. 8 (1992–1993); St. Meld. Nr. 19 (1999–2000)]. At that time, centrally located grain producers had about twice the income in man-years of rural livestock farmers (NOU 1991: 2C), and it was also acknowledged that the costs in animal husbandry, especially costs of concentrates, were too high. Thus, a significant reduction in grain prices was seen during the first years of the 1990s (Almås, 2002). This reorientation of ambitions, combined with the outside pressure to reduce costs, in effect triggered a downsizing of the grain sector. The changes in these instrument settings regarding grain and concentrates were not welcomed by the agricultural organisations (Grue, 2014b).

However, in 1995, the grain price write-down subsidy was introduced (Ministry of Agriculture, 2000). This instrument concealed the inherent conflict in the coalition between feed producers and feed consumers, where adjustments of grain price effectively had benefitted one or the other producer group. The new instrument levelled the price of Norwegian-produced grain to world market prices through subsidising feed mills for the higher cost of using Norwegian grain. In this way, it incentivised the use of Norwegian grain without inflicting high feed costs for livestock farmers [St. Meld. Nr. 19 (1999–2000)].

Thus, the new reformed version of the canalisation policy gradually developed through the layering of the complementary instruments of acreage support and the grain-price write-down subsidy. These measures eliminated the need for high grain prices as an instrument to lower the pressure in the livestock sector and effectively froze the overall agricultural structure. These instruments were not intended to alter the distribution of agricultural production, but rather to uphold the existing structure.

## 2000–Present: multifunctionality and new productivism

The international framework conditions for Norwegian agriculture changed significantly around the turn of the century (Farsund, 2014). Initially, the

implementation of the WTO agreement in Norwegian agricultural policies created conflicts between the Ministry of Agriculture and the two agricultural associations (Farsund, 2004). However, the coalition soon began a pursuit of strategies that could secure a viable agricultural sector within the framework of the agreement. In that regard, the built-in agenda of the WTO agreement represented both a challenge and an opportunity.

Norwegian preparations for what became known as the Doha round in the WTO started as early as 1997, when the government decided to follow a two-track strategy (Grue, 2014b). Domestically, the Ministry of Agriculture prepared a white paper in close cooperation with, among others, the two agricultural associations. This white paper [St. Meld. Nr. 19 (1999–2000)] outlined a ‘new’ policy for the agricultural industry, promoting the idea that agriculture fulfilled a series of functions besides food production and policies for the farmers. This ‘multi-functionality’ included public goods such as rural settlement, food security and a living cultural landscape. The canalisation policy and geographical distribution of production was promoted as important for achieving these purposes, and the government wanted ‘to continue the division of labour in agriculture as we have it today’ (Farsund, 2004, p. 182). Internationally, the Norwegian Government advocated these ideas in international negotiations and joined an international alliance for ‘non-trade concerns’ (Farsund & Daugbjerg, 2017, p. 360).

The negotiations in the Doha round also affected the next white paper on agricultural policy (Farsund, 2021). This white paper proposed four goals aimed at strengthening the basis of agricultural production in Norway [Meld. St. Nr. 9 (2011–2012)]. The principal ambition was enhancing national and global food security through increased domestic food production (Vik, 2020). This was the first time the ministry introduced this idea as its main argument for supporting agriculture. Consequently, a multifunctional and sustainable (at least on the surface) form of neo-productivism, called ‘repositioned productivism’ (Bjørkhaug et al., 2012), appeared in Norwegian agriculture. The political ambition of the white paper was clear: ‘The government will use all policy instruments allowed to secure Norwegian food production’ [Meld. St. Nr. 9 (2011–2012), p. 77]. The policy ideas were vague, but the white paper stated that subsidies are to be differentiated in terms of geographical location, size or both. Alongside productivism, increasing attention was paid to the effect of agricultural policies on rural livelihoods.

The potential for major changes rose when a new, more market-liberal minority government took office in 2013. They presented their white paper in 2016, which already in the very first paragraph stressed the need for ‘competitiveness, efficiency and more market solutions and less political involvement in the whole industry’ [Meld. St. Nr. 11 (2016–2017), p. 7]. However, several of the primary policy goals, including the emphasis on food security and the maintenance of agriculture in the whole country, were a continuation of the main objectives in the previous white paper. Furthermore,

the liberalisation initiatives were met with extensive criticism from, among others, the agricultural associations. In the end, the majority in parliament rejected the most ambitious liberalisation proposals (Farsund, 2021); thereafter, the geographical distribution of production also persisted.

International agreements and negotiations have placed limitations on Norwegian agricultural policies in recent decades. Nevertheless, many of the important political decisions regarding the development of goals and instruments for the agricultural industry have been agreed through negotiations between the Ministry of Agriculture and the two associations representing farmers (Farsund & Veggeland, 2016). In this context, geographical distribution of production has remained a unifying goal able to sustain the compromise despite the changes in circumstances.

## DISCUSSION

We have documented changes in instruments and instrument settings, but not in the goal of the institution: geographical distribution of production has been the goal of the policy throughout the entire period, even as the instruments used to reach this goal have been modified and replaced. This, we argue, characterises as first- and second-order changes but absence of third-order change. Following the definition of Rietig and Laing (2017), we interpret the institutional development in this case as stable in the sense that it has maintained status quo and actually been strengthened over time. The first- and second-order changes in policy instruments (Hall, 1993) are not accompanied by any signs of changes in, or reduced weight given to, the goal of geographical distribution of production. Rather, we observe that the institution has expanded to include additional purposes, which have been used as arguments supporting the need for the institution and thereby have strengthened it. This generated the unexpected stability. What this case study shows is a change in form—that is, the composition of instruments and the instruments used—but stability in content—that is, the meaning or idea underlying the policy.

Regulating the conditions for grain farmers (as feed input producers) and livestock farmers (as feed consumers) was done by establishing a structure of geographical distribution, which served as an idea around which the coalition was able to coalesce. This compromise between feed producers and feed consumers remained stable. Continuous efforts from the coalition were necessary to uphold this agreement and provide institutional stability; these were seen in consensus-oriented processes within the corporatist negotiations. The stability has been contingent on first- and second-order changes that did not create excessive discontent among the agricultural associations. The coalition supported policy changes in order to sustain the overall institutional stability.

## Policy instrument changes

Through layering, conversion and displacement, the canalisation policy was redirected from a policy originally designed to induce change on the ground into a policy fashioned to preserve stability. This involved first- and second-order changes of policy occurring over approximately 12 years (1983–1995). Due to the layering of additional instruments such as quota regions, the grain price write-down subsidy, and acreage grants, the shift did not inflict on the coalitional compromise behind the institution nor on the interdependency between feed producers and feed consumers.

Initially, the canalisation policy was purely economically managed, by controlling the relative price difference between grain and milk. This instrument (phases 1 and 2) was constructed to increase profitability in the grain sector, whereby farmers in grain areas would retreat from dairy production, which in turn would increase the market for animal products from outside of these areas. This instrument was eventually combined with the layering of geographically differentiated subsidy schemes (phases 2, 3 and 4) that, among other criteria, differentiated between typical grain areas and livestock production areas. Over time, this created a geographical distribution of production. This structure was effectively fixed with the layering of a new policy instrument: regional milk quotas (phases 2, 3 and 4), by nature a preservative instrument. The introduction of the acreage grants and, eventually, the write-down subsidy displaced the initial instrument of the canalisation policy (phases 3 and 4). Whereas the relative price difference directly affected the profitability of each type of production at the expense of the other, the new measures concealed this inherent potential conflict while still balancing the interests.

The policy instrument changes are summarised in Figure 1, which shows the gradual layering and displacement of policy instruments which eventually lead to an institution designed to stabilise the geographical distribution while also balancing the interests of livestock and crop farmers. We consider this as adaptations to the contextual development.

Based on these findings, we argue that the evolution of the canalisation policy can ultimately be characterised as a conversion, as the institution was redirected with ‘new purposes attached to old structures’ (Streeck & Thelen, 2005, p. 31). We acknowledge that a strict understanding of conversion involves that formal rules are constant, but we advance the claim that a transformation of the composition of the instruments—despite continuity in the underlying goal and coalitions—can also be defined as conversion.

## MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

Our empirical material points at two central aspects of how the multidimensionality of the idea of geographical distribution contributed to the institutional stability. First, it provided a context for compromises and

| Instruments \ Phases | Relative price difference milk/grain | Geographically differentiated subsidies | Regional milk quotas | Acreage grant | Grain price write-down subsidy |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Phase 1: 1920-1945   | X                                    |   |                      |               |                                |
| Phase 2: 1946-1989   | X                                    | X                                       | X                    |               |                                |
| Phase 3: 1989-2000   |                                      | X                                       | X                    | X             | X                              |
| Phase 4: 2000-today  |                                      | X                                       | X                    | X             | X                              |

The table is annotated with a 'Change' box pointing to the transition between Phase 1 and Phase 2, and a 'Preservation' box pointing to the continuation of instruments in Phase 3 and Phase 4. A line connects these two boxes, indicating a shift from changing to preserving the structure.

**FIGURE 1** Policy instrument changes. Cells are marked with an X if the instrument was implemented or in place during the given period. Shades of grey in the table are used to indicate a discretionary assessment of the strength/intensity of the instrument relative to other periods: darker shades indicate stronger application. Cells with slanted lines indicate partial implementation. The line indicates how policy converted from *changing* the agricultural distribution into *preserving* this structure.

alignment of interests. With the introduction of the idea, we saw that conflicts of interest were eventually levelled, enabling different interests to gather and work together (Palier, 2005). The corporatist negotiations facilitated compromises within the coalition, which repeatedly confirmed a unanimous endorsement of the need for a geographical distribution of production. This compromise between domestic feed producers and feed consumers became a cornerstone of Norwegian agricultural regulation. Canalisation was not multidimensional in terms of the goal of the policy—a geographical distribution of production—but in what the various interests saw as the purposes of a successful geographical distribution of production. The institution initially provided rural livestock farmers with an increased market ‘space’, central grain farmers with a livable provision for their produce and agricultural authorities with a tool to regulate the utilisation of resources.

Second, this multidimensionality provided the coalition leeway to reinterpret what purposes geographical distribution of production could serve. The gradual policy changes described above were followed by expansions of the explicit purposes of the policy, while the geographical distribution of production was still the overarching goal. Just like the initial purposes of avoiding overproduction and reducing feed import, upholding agricultural production nationwide was a consideration that fit well into the agricultural actors' interests and arguments for maintaining the policy. When changing contexts altered political sentiments (e.g., in the face of international negotiations), multifunctional considerations were linked to geographical distribution. When potential food deficits became part of the political agenda,



the geographical distribution was once again reinterpreted as crucial for productivist concerns. This points to the multidimensionality of geographical distribution of production and the ideational flexibility of the coalition needed to sustain the institution.

This shows that the multidimensional idea of geographical distribution of production fit well into different regimes (e.g., planned economy, productivism, multifunctionality), as it encompassed several political considerations: rural viability, national self-sufficiency, balanced markets and higher total production, among others. Multidimensionality enabled both flexibility and consistency even under changing agricultural regimes and paved the way for linking these additional arguments to the policy. In this way, the canalisation policy constituted a flexible multifunctional solution around which different actors could converge through compromises grounded in a ‘unified diversity’ of interests (Davenport & Leitch, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have analysed the establishment and evolution of a puzzlingly stable institution concerning geographical distribution of agricultural production. The institution—labelled the canalisation policy—is built on an interdependence between partially conflicting interests within the agricultural sector. Our case study suggests that plausible explanations for this unexpected institutional stability include the coalition's ability and willingness to adapt policy settings and instruments to reproduce order, as well as the possibility of connecting and incorporating new considerations to the institution's principal goal.

The analysis shows that long-term stability requires incremental adjustments and change. When circumstances change—as, in this case, through international and environmental influences, market imbalances and changes in the agricultural structure—introducing first- and second-order policy instrument changes contributes to sustaining the institution. Second-order changes were layered on top of existing instruments with the consent of the different members of the coalition, thereby avoiding conflict and struggles between ‘winners and losers’. We argue that the cumulative effects of layering eventually amounted to conversion into an institution designed to preserve the agricultural structure rather than change it. Even though we document changes in policy instruments and which problems the institution was argued to solve, we also observe absence of third order change. Faced with a multitude of problems, geographical distribution of agricultural production persisted as a unified and recurrent objective and solution for the coalition.

Consequently, the article addresses a recent development in the HI literature. As Jabko and Sheingate (2018, p. 313) quoted: ‘[for] things to stay as they are, things will have to change’ [Lampedusa, 2008 (1960)]. This articulates the need for the supporting coalition to respond to challenges by adjusting policy instruments and

ideational elements while still maintaining the existing institutional setup (Carstensen & Röper, 2022). Our research supports this claim, showing how the coalition contributed to preserving overall institutional stability by supporting first- and second-order policy changes. The balancing of the different interests within the coalition, the political art of weighting these in the calibration of instrument settings, and the layering of complementary instruments (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), were what provided stability.

These actions were rendered possible by the multidimensionality (Skogstad & Wilder, 2019) of geographical distribution of production. Initially, this feature functioned as a ‘magnet’ (Béland & Cox, 2016) that pulled the coalition together, but the article also shows how multidimensionality led to maintaining the status quo, adding to the insights from the literature into how coalitions and institutions are formed. This points to the potential flexibility inherent in multidimensional policies that contributes to creating and preserving a resilient institution. This flexibility means that policies initiated under a certain set of circumstances may be better equipped to persist when circumstances change if they are able to incorporate differing, but aligned, rationales and to respond to upcoming issues through policy instrument changes. The coexistence of several diverse arguments supporting the policy enables the coalition to respond to shifting concerns in altering external circumstances. This way, multidimensionality may increase institutional stability. Several episodes in the case study reveal how the multidimensionality of geographical distribution of production not only brought about the initial compromise of agricultural productions that were believed to be at odds, but also provided leeway to recondition the institution and provide stability.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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## APPENDIX 1: THE CANALISATION POLICY TIMELINE

