

Exploring State Effectiveness in Sustainable Development: Development and Use of a Measurement Tool for the Fez-Meknes Region

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The implementation of sustainable development has become a key guiding principle that has been integrated into many policies and governance models. Governments and administrations have put in place governance arrangements to guide their actions towards sustainability. How can the success of this integration of sustainability into government and administrative activity be assessed? This paper presents a tool for measuring and comparing internal governance capacity for sustainability in the region of Mediterranean area, such as the provinces and prefectures of the Fez-Meknes region, which aims to be a reference for the sub-region, as a smart, resilient and sustainable city. The application of this tool reveals the diversity of governance arrangements and their different capacities and indicates where and how the governance of the sustainability of governments and administrations can be further improved with regard to our modes of cultural management, which can be further reinvented and better organised.

Key Words: territorial collectivity, governance, sustainability, Euro-Mediterranean area

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INTRODUCTION

Since the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, all societal actors have adopted the 2030 Agenda to promote sustainable devel-

opment. The essence of this strategy is subdivided into seventeen Sustainable Development Goals with one hundred and sixty-nine specific targets, most of which should be achieved by 2030.

[176] Through their adoption as a point of reference in international political declarations and in a modified discourse within global institutions, the governance principles underlying the Sustainable Development Goals, including universality, coherence, and integration, have become part of the dominant discourse in institutions. As a result, many countries have begun to integrate these goals into their administrative systems, and some governments such as the Kingdom of Morocco have designated bodies and formed new units for the implementation of the sustainability goals. This executive complex of the state is decisively involved in the preparation and implementation of policy decisions and thus plays a decisive role in the governance of social transformation (Hasan 2018). They initiate models and plans, and establish governmental and administrative coordination bodies focused on sustainability. In other words, they assess the compatibility of projects with sustainability and develop relevant expertise (Dounya and Mbarek 2021; Houdret and Harnisch 2019). Today, sustainability has become a major concern for governments and administrations (Amrani et al. 2021; Raynal 2009). After seven years of implementation, less attention has been paid to understanding whether these goals have had a policy impact within sub-national governance to address such pressing challenges as zero poverty, peace and effective institutions, and the question of how sustainability can be integrated into the actions of government and administration. Given the heterogeneity of the trade-offs, the question arises as to how the sustainability-oriented internal governance capacity of governments and administrations can be systematically recorded and compared: How can the extent to which sustainability is integrated into government and administrative activities be empirically determined?

The present contribution is to design, contextually operationalize, and successfully implement a tool for measuring the governance capacity of the internal state oriented toward tangible development.

As the Sharifian Kingdom (Morocco) has adopted advanced re-



gionalization (Royaume du Maroc 2021a; 2021b; Conseil regional Fès-Meknès 2018), one can expect very little variety of governance arrangements and a sketch of the state of play that allows for systematic comparison. The list of existing measurement tools (Ibourk and Raoui 2021; <https://siredd.environment.gov.ma/fes-meknes/indicateur>; <https://www.hcp.ma>; <https://bti-project.org/en/index/political-transformation>) should therefore be complemented by an approach that focuses on the domestic domain of government and administrative action on the one hand, and that can take into account the varied, but little-studied national level, on the other.

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Based on a review of existing measurement tools, we develop a concept of sustainability-oriented internal governance capacity based on a three-dimensional understanding of governance. We then operationalize it for the context of the Fez-Meknes region in Morocco and present the results of its application. We reflect on the added value and limitations of the measurement tool and conclude with implications for governance practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIC APPROACH

Contextual Framework

The Fez-Meknes region is situated in the northern part of Morocco, encompassing a substantial portion of the central-northern territory. This region boasts diverse topography, ranging from the rugged landscapes of the Middle Atlas Mountains to the fertile plains of the Saïss Valley. The region is crossed by several rivers, with the Oued Sebou playing a vital role in irrigating agricultural lands. It is known for its natural resource wealth and significant contribution to Moroccan agriculture. The region's strategic location makes it an important trade and economic hub. Fez-Meknes comprises nine prefectures and provinces, each presenting unique geographical features; Fez: located in the northern part of the region, is known for its rich history, medieval medina, and cultural significance; Meknes: situated to the west, is another historically significant city, offering insights into Morocco's imperial past; Taounate: positioned in the north, is known for picturesque landscapes and agricultural activi-

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ties; El Hajeb: nestled in the Middle Atlas Mountains, is characterized by mountainous terrain and agricultural practices; Boulemane: located to the east of the region, is marked by diverse landscapes and natural beauty; Taza: is found in the north-eastern part of the region, known for its proximity to the Rif Mountains; Sefrou: situated south of Fez, is renowned for its agricultural heritage and traditional practices; Ifrane: often referred to as 'Little Switzerland,' is known for its alpine architecture and lush green surroundings; Moulay Yacoub: recognized for its thermal springs and spa resorts.

The Fez-Meknes region in Morocco has a complex institutional architecture that comprises several levels of governance, namely the regional and prefectural/provincial levels. The Regional Council, governed by the Organic Law on Moroccan Regions, serves as the legislative body, empowered to deliberate, adopt policies, and make decisions on regional development, economic planning, education, healthcare, and more. It formulates development plans, regional budgets, and oversees policy implementation. The Wali, appointed by the King, represents the central government in the region, implementing national policies as per the law. They coordinate regional authorities and enforce national laws and regulations. Prefectures and provinces have local responsibilities, including urban planning, education, healthcare, and public services, with governors exercising decision-making authority. Municipalities are autonomous entities with powers defined by the General Code of Local Authorities. Elected municipal councils address local needs, especially in urban planning and resource management. Decentralized agencies handle specific areas like agriculture and culture, operating under legislative and regulatory texts, making decisions in their domains. Social partners, such as professional organisations and unions, engage in regional development decisions, adhering to labour and association laws.

Approaches to Measuring Sustainable Development Governance

Measuring sustainability is not a new topic. Many approaches focus on specific concepts and rely on different measurement methods. Some aim to measure the effectiveness of the management of



sustainable development policies using outcome indicators while others focus on assessing ecological footprints by measuring energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, waste management and other key environmental factors. Thus, this tool is used to monitor environmental conditions and to diagnose environmental conditions and their variability in cooperation with regional actors participating in regional networks to collect and exchange data and information (see <https://siredd.environnement.gov.ma/fesmeknes/indicateur>).

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However, there are no indicators that actually assess the capacity for action of governments and administrations. For example, the Rokhas index used by Morocco is a tool for assessing the operational performance of local authorities in obtaining urban planning permits (see <https://www.collectivites-territoriales.gov.ma/fr/rokhas>). Other approaches focus explicitly or implicitly on the capacity to act. ‘Capacity’ is conceptualised in a narrow sense, either by focusing on sustainable development (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2008) or on design options for specific practices such as sustainability strategies (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017). The Bertelsmann Foundation’s Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) approach is probably the most important instrument for measuring sustainability governance and is conceptually more comprehensive compared to the African Development Bank’s governance rating, which assesses the quality of the institutional framework.

Governance capacity, together with democratic quality and political effectiveness, is one of the three pillars of the SGI approach and is defined as the political leadership to lead processes successfully (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017). Governance is examined on the basis of two categories: that of governmental performance, and competence of participation of external actors. This perspective is not merely a simple analysis of the instrument, but also goes beyond the internal governance of governments and administrations, which is of particular interest here.

Methodologically, the Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) examine governance and decision-making processes in all OECD member countries and the EU, with the aim of assessing the need for

reforms in each country and the capacity to achieve them (Schraad-Tischler and Seelkopf 2015). The indicators are constructed from quantitative data collected by international organisations, complemented by qualitative analysis by recognized national experts. [180] This combination provides a detailed picture of policy outcomes, the quality of democracy and steering capacities. However, whether experts have sufficient visibility into internal administrations to reliably assess capacity remains doubtful. These doubts are likely to affect in particular, the sub-national level, which is much less subject to expert observation than the national level, given the difficulty of determining the measure of internal governance capacity of governments and administrations focused on sustainability, which is also under the spotlight here. To arrive at a more authentic alternative, we propose an approach that is conceptually based on a differentiated understanding of internal governance capacity and methodologically based on objective data. We emphasise, in this regard, the need to integrate sustainability as a fundamental reference point to guide actions and engage various stakeholders in policy development. Furthermore, the interactions among different factors provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of how governance capacity functions in a sustainability-focused context. In summary, our approach distinguishes itself through the redefinition of governance capacity, the introduction of governmental and administrative capabilities, the provision of a comprehensive model of governance capacity, and the emphasis on the institutional anchoring of sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

Conceptualisation: Internal Governance Capacity for Sustainability

Our approach is based on an understanding of governance capacity as the ability of a governance arrangement to steer social problem-solving action towards a collectively shared goal. To this end, sustainability must first be integrated into the mechanism in question, i.e., it must become an obligatory and significant reference point for its action. Governmental and administrative capacity thus



describes the ability of a state government to include various actors to make sustainability a guideline for executive management of issues and policy making. Building on the existing understanding of governance, we conceptualise internal governance capacity in a sustainability-oriented way as the interaction of institutional factors, content or idea factors and the power factor. The governance of an entity is based on a multidimensional framework that requires in-depth exploration for a comprehensive understanding. Firstly, the structural dimension of governance focuses on internal organisation, hierarchy, and the distribution of responsibilities. It encompasses the rules, policies, procedures, and formal mechanisms that shape the entity's operation. This dimension reveals how decisions are made and how responsibilities are allocated, playing a central role in governance (Mériade 2019). The content dimension of governance emphasises the substance of decisions and policies within the entity. It involves evaluating the content of policies, laws, regulations, and organisational practices, examining what is actually decided and how these decisions align with the entity's objectives, values, and standards. Lastly, the political power dimension of governance concerns the influence and control exerted by political actors within the entity. This includes the analysis of power relations, political coalitions, decisions driven by specific interests, and how power is exercised and distributed among stakeholders. This dimension highlights the political and social aspects that influence decisions and policies within the entity, completing the governance landscape (Treib, Bähr, and Falkner 2007). By combining these dimensions, a comprehensive and nuanced view of the governance of an entity emerges, showing how its structure, content, and political power interact to shape its operation. For sustainability to be realised in the actions of a government, it must first be embedded in the institutional architecture. Organisational structures, rules and norms stabilise the expectations of actors. They ensure that sustainability issues receive the attention of the government and administration and become decisive for their thinking and actions (Wang, Van Wart, and Lebrede 2014).

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For example, the specialised sustainable development units in-

TABLE 1 List of Factors

F1	Administrative unit specialised in humanitarian aid
F2	Institutions anchored in sustainability
F3	Interdepartmental coordination institution
F4	Legitimacy
F5	Comprehensive and binding sustainability models
F6	Sustainability strategies
F7	Treatment of cross-cutting issues climate, biodiversity, sustainable nutrition
F8	Ex-post evaluation tools
F9	Pre-event evaluation tools
F10	Sustainable development expertise
F11	External legitimacy
F12	External networking
F13	Commitment of government leadership

NOTES See Annex 1 for additional information.

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dicate who is responsible (factor 1). Other policy-related factors are the reference to sustainable development in other areas of the organisation (factor 2) and interdepartmental coordination (factor 3).

Constitutional and legal bases oblige governments and authorities to address sustainability issues or take into account sustainability standards and provide the basis for legitimising the respective actions (factor 4).

The ability to integrate sustainability into governmental and regulatory action relies secondly on its anchoring in the conceptual foundations of executive action (Hartley and Zhang 2018). The visions, goals, problem analysis, structural metrics and indicators, and action orientation of subjects from a cognitive perspective are also important sources of motivation and debate. Sustainability engagement in content and ideas leads to comprehensive and binding sustainability guidelines (factor 5), sustainability strategies that include several policy areas as a programmatic commitment to sustainability (factor 6), as well as addressing cross-sectoral and cross-cutting topics such as climate change protection and adaptation, biodiversity, sustainable food, digitalisation or a circular or green economy (factor 7). Evaluation tools (e.g., post-monitoring and pre-evaluation based on sustainability indicators; factors 8 and 9) as



well as sustainability expertise enable administrative agencies to orient their actions according to this guiding idea (factor 10). Finally, the internal governance capacity of the government and the sustainability-oriented administration is based on elements of political power (political dimension) that politically legitimise the actions of sustainability-oriented change agents within the government and regulators, while reinforcing this action against other political concerns. Administrative actors can strengthen their internal performance capacity by providing external support for their concerns (Bouzoubaa 2009). This is done, for example, by receiving subsidies (factor 11) or by mobilising professional and political networks (factor 12). In addition, the mass media towards sustainability and the voluntary commitment of political leaders to government signal a corresponding political preference and willingness to politically support internal sustainability issues (factor 13). From this three-dimensional concept, this tool has to be designed progressively. Thus, the institutional position of an administrative department responsible for sustainable development (factor 1) determines its capacity to act. If it is positioned in direct proximity to the government, this promises a greater capacity to influence and steer decisions towards sustainability than at a lower hierarchical level (e.g., in a department).

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Operationalisation: Indicators and Measurement in the Example of Provinces and Prefectures of Fez

In order to be able to measure the capacity for internal sustainability-oriented governance in the context of specific political institutions, we operationalised the factors described at the Fez region in Morocco. To optimise comparisons between provinces, we selected indicators that could be recorded on the basis of objective data for all nine provinces and prefectures of the Fez-Meknes region. This was not possible for factors 2 and 3, so they were excluded from the analysis. Table 2 presents the 11 metrics and their associated measurement operations.

Based on this system of indicators, we carried out in December 2022 a measurement focusing on the sustainability of the internal

TABLE 2 The Multidimensional Measurement Tool: Conceptualisation (Factors) and Context-Specific Operationalisation (Indicators) of Sustainability-Oriented Internal Governance Capacity

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Structural dimension				
F1	F2	F3	F4	
1	Department of Sustainability	Administrative body for social assistance social assistance	No operationalisation and measurement	Sustainability in constitutional and legislative texts
0	No sustainability department			No legal base
1	Sustainable Development Department at Office level			Grounded in the substantive law
2	Sustainable development department in the regional council			Anchored in the constitution/the law of administrative organisation
3	Department of Sustainability close to the Head of Government			Rooted in the constitution and the law on administrative organisation

Continued on the next page

governance capacity of the Fez-Meknes region. To do so, we first compiled publicly available policy documents, such as regional land use strategies, legal compendiums, monitoring reports of the High Commission for Planning, and administrative descriptions (organigrams) on regional websites. We also identified events in which the prefectures would participate, as well as funding instruments proposed by the Ministry of National Planning, Urban Development, Housing and Urban Policy and the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development.

We have searched the administrative documents on the databases of the High Commission for Planning as well as the regional reports of the Fez-Meknes region for relevant information, which we have recorded. We then quantified the results for each indicator, generally using a four-point scale to assess the strength of each factor. This measure is based on the assumption that the more globally differentiated and explicit sustainable development is in the internal



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TABLE 2 *Continued from the previous page*

Content dimension		F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10
1	Understanding of sustainability	Policy strategy for sustainable development	Handling of cross-cutting issues	Sustainability monitoring and reporting	Sustainability assessment	Participation in external knowledge events	
0	No understanding of sustainability	No policy strategy related to sustainability	Activities on 0–1 cross-cutting issue	No sustainability monitoring	No sustainability assessment	0–4 participation in the Sustainable Development Forum	
1	Sectoral understanding of sustainability	A point for: The general requirement of social assistance in policy strategy;	Activities on 2–3 cross-cutting questions	One point each for: Participation in SIREDD; Monitoring that goes beyond SIREDD indicators; Sustainable development report integrated into the political control process	Occasional assessment of sustainability without its own instrument	5–9 participation in the Sustainable Development Forum	
2	Comprehensive and simple understanding of sustainability	long-term horizon (>4 years); integration of development assistance in policy planning	Activities on 4–5 cross-cutting issues		Regional sustainability assessment instrument without commitment	10–14 participation in the Sustainable Development Forum	
3	Comprehensive and differentiated understanding of sustainability		Activities on 6 transversal themes		Structured and mandatory sustainability assessment process	≥14 participation in the Sustainable Development Forum	

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governance of prefectural executives, the greater their capacity to act for sustainable development. We created the index by combining eleven metrics. We first calculated the average of the unweighted measures for each governance dimension and divided the sum of the averages by the number of dimensions.

$$\text{Weighted Average} = \frac{\text{Sum of (Measures} \times \text{Dimension)}}{\text{Sum of Dimensions}}$$

In contrast to the simple average, this method takes into account the conceptual equality of the governance aspects. The weighted average is a statistical measure where different values are assigned spe-

TABLE 2 *Continued from the previous page*

Dimension of political power		
F11	F12	F13
I Applications to the funding programme	Engagement in the national sustainability network.	Government commitment to sustainability
o No application to the Sustainable Development Funding Programme.	o participation in the network	No commitment to sustainability
1 1–2 applications to the Sustainable Development Funding Programme	Occasional participation	
2 3–4 applications to the Sustainable Development Funding Programme	Regular participation	Commitment to sustainability
3 ≥4 applications to the Sustainable Development Funding Programme	Management function in the network of regional sustainability offices	

NOTES F1–F13 – factors, I – indicators of context-specific internal sustainability governance capacity, o–3 capacity measurement.

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cific weights based on their relative significance in the dataset, and is used to obtain an overall picture while emphasising diversity within the sample (López-Penabad, Iglesias-Casal, and Silva Neto 2022).

RESULTS

Table 3 presents the indices for each province in the Fez-Meknes region. Using the index of internal governance capacity for sustainability that is placed in the very last row of our table, we distinguish two levels of capacity: three provinces with an index of at least 2 have high capacity. Six other provinces with an index between 1 and 1.9 indicate medium capacity. The inventory confirms that a variant of the sustainability governance prototype can be found in the region and at all capacity levels (Bartle and Leuenberger 2006; Fukuyama 2013; Keskitalo and Preston 2019). Even for the high index locations, no uniform pattern emerges (Bajpai, Stratton-Short, and Adelekan 2022).

Sefrou is the only province that scores in all three dimensions of governance with an average value above 2 points. The other high-capacity localities achieve at least average values. On the one hand,



this underlines the fact that high capacities cannot be achieved only by high values in the individual dimensions. On the other hand, it also shows that there is no successful model of internal sustainability governance (Peters et al. 2022; Tils 2007).

Despite this diversity, certain patterns can be discerned. For example, achieving a high index (over 2 points) requires a sustainability department. To achieve a high index, a province must therefore assign responsibility for sustainability to a single department. However, it does not matter where and at what level in the administrative organisation this position is located. Sustainability expertise is therefore, an important precondition for acting sustainably.

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If we compare the expressions of the factors, we notice that the indicators F5 'Understanding of sustainability' (3 points), F6 'Sustainability strategy' (3 points), F11 'Application to the funding programme' (3 points) and F13 'Government commitment to sustainability' (3 points) achieve the highest average values. Indicators F1 'Dedicated service to sustainability' (1.1 points), F4 'Sustainability in constitutional and legal texts' (1 pt) and F9 'Sustainability assessment' (1.3 points) have the lowest average values.

This suggests that provinces tend to build internal governance capacity for sustainability through factors that determine their legitimacy through institutional and legal texts on sustainable development (factor 4) or sustainability models (factor 5). Factors that directly affect the individual capacity of governmental and administrative actors are only developed in a subordinate way, namely the acquisition of sustainability expertise (factor 10), external legitimacy and networking (factors 11 and 12) or political commitment (factor 13). In order to align their own actions with sustainability, governments and administrations tend to create structural conditions for action. On average, these provinces have higher values for the factors relating to the specific capacity of government actors and administrative agencies to act sustainably than for the factors relating to the condition for action. Therefore, the ability to steer government action towards sustainable development is not only reflected in the operating conditions of the provinces with high indices, but also in the individual competences of the administrative and gov-

TABLE 3 Internal governance capacities of the provinces and prefectures of the Fez-Meknes region focused on sustainability

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Internal governance capacities	Fez-Meknes	Ifrane	Meknès	Boulemane	Fes	Moulay Yacoub	Sefrou	Taounate	Taza	El Hajeb
Sustainability Department	3	0	0	1	2	0	3	0	2	2
Sustainable administrative and legal texts	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	0	0
Understanding of sustainability	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Sustainability policy strategy	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Activities on transversal issues	3	1	2	3	3	1	1	2	1	1
Monitoring and reporting on sustainability	2	0	3	3	3	0	3	0	2	0
Sustainability evaluation	3	3	0	0	1	1	1	0	3	3
Participation in external knowledge events	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	2
Applications to the funding programme	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Involv. in the national sustain. network	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	2
Province's commitment to sustainability	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Average	2.5	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.4	1.8	2.3	1.6	1.9	1.8

ernmental actors focused on. This result may be partly influenced by the objective approach, which focuses more on factors that reflect externally visible conditions for action than on those that reflect the individual capacities of actors. Yet it can also be understood as the logical expression of government and administrative action in general. These clearly tend to shape the conditions of action such as establishing an administrative organisation, enacting laws, and forming models, rather than directly building the capacities of their actors.

The Fez-Meknes region is characterised by substantial variations in internal capacity within its prefectures and provinces concerning the promotion of sustainability. Each of the prefectures and provinces has its own characteristics, resources, and priorities in terms of sustainable development. Consequently, administrative capacities vary based on these local factors. Similarly, the specific skills of administrative personnel and existing collaborations with local or international partners influence the ability of prefectures and provinces to achieve sustainability goals. Understanding these



FIGURE 1

Map of the Fez-Meknes Region According to Internal Governance Capacities Focused on Sustainability of the Provinces and Prefectures



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regional variations and neighbouring effects is crucial for designing effective policies aimed at promoting sustainability across the entire Fez-Meknes region. This can be observed through Figure 1, which presents the performance mapping of the capacity index, and can be attributed to the new administrative configuration in the Fez-Meknes region in 2015. This restructuring facilitated geographic proximity between these administrative entities, resulting in significant regional variations in terms of the internal capacity of administrations to promote sustainability. However, it is essential to note that regional variations can also lead to inequalities in sustainable development. Some prefectures or provinces may lag in terms of internal capacity, necessitating additional support to strengthen their efforts in this domain.

REFLECTION

Potential and Limitations of the Measuring Instrument

The exemplary application of the measurement tool to the provinces of the Fez-Meknes region shows that it can be used to build a comprehensive and nuanced picture of how governments and administrations behave towards the population. Public administrations promote sustainability in their actions (Benkada et al. 2018). 11 indicators are used to show differentiated patterns of differently developed structural (political), substantive or content (political) and

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power (political) governance capacities. In addition, the aggregate capacity index makes it possible to assess the extent to which sustainability is embedded in government and administrative activities in general. On the one hand, the instrument is therefore, suitable for recording the diversity of sustainability-oriented governance arrangements that exist at sub-national level to determine their capacity and to compare them. On the other hand, the innovation of the measurement instrument lies less in the presentation of new factors. It is indisputable that the presence of sustainability strategies or sustainability assessment tools enhances the administration's capacity to direct its efforts towards sustainability (Meadowcroft and Steurer 2018; Ousaa and Fasly 2023; Santoro 2019) but rather, the conceptual contribution of the measurement instrument lies in the combination of known factors (and the plausibility of some new ones) based on a well-founded, comprehensive and at the same time, differentiated understanding of the internal governance capacity for sustainability. Most existing approaches focus on outcome and impact measures (Maldonado and Corbey 2016; Sueyoshi and Ryu 2021), whereas this methodology distinguishes itself in the way governments and administrations are structured and organised to promote sustainability. The article highlights the diversity of governance arrangements for sustainability, allowing for a better understanding of the various approaches adopted by governmental administrations. This in turn, facilitates a more precise delineation of the different strategies in place to promote sustainability at an administrative level, and the determination of which practices yield the best results. The identification of areas where sustainable governance can be strengthened constitutes a significant contribution, as it goes beyond merely identifying shortcomings to provide practical recommendations for enhancing government sustainability. Finally, instead of offering a generic approach, the article customises the measurement instrument to a specific geographical and political context, thus enabling an in-depth analysis of sustainable governance at regional level. The combination of institutional, content-related and process-related factors goes beyond the existing analytical perspectives on the region. From an empirical point of view, the



measurement instrument provides the possibility of distinguishing the characteristics of the capacity factors. Instead of considering departments or sustainability strategies as capacity building, it is possible to measure the capacities of different forms of departments and strategies. This allows for a detailed and reliable comparative analysis of the capacities of different governance arrangements under similar contextual conditions (e.g., the capacities of sub-national entities within a state). While the models identified and their implications initially apply to the local level in Morocco, the geographical basis of the measurement tool – the three-dimensional understanding of governance – allows the approach to be transferred to other political and institutional contexts. This has necessitated a context-specific adaptation of the indicators. Thus, in other contexts that are distinguished by their own competencies and resources, other models of governance for sustainable development are to be expected and should be represented by modified indicators.

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To further strengthen sustainable development governance and promote state capacity in this area, it is insufficient to simply reorganise the public administration; it is also necessary to reorient the minds and hands that work in it. At the same time, the limits of the approach become visible. On the basis of the measurement instrument, no statement can be made as to whether the capacities are actually reflected in the results. For example, if external networking in other governmental and administrative systems (e.g., at local level or in other federal states) tends to be organised in informal sustainability networks, this must also be reflected in the indicators and measurement operations. Quantitative and qualitative analyses can also show how specific contextual conditions affect the functioning and capacities of the corresponding governance arrangements.

The fact that it was not possible to measure two main factors, such as interdepartmental coordination facilities and administrative bodies related to sustainability, reveals the methodological limitations of the measurement instrument or even the fact that this region is not fully open to the disclosure of information. These are located where the public visibility of governmental and administrative organisations ends. It is precisely at sub-national level that

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the approach increases traceability compared to expert assessments such as the 'SGI'; this shows us the missing link between local and global scales and the lack of coordination between departments. This opens up new possibilities, so time series analyses can be used to capture the evolution of the capacity to identify explanatory factors for high or low capacity. The data for the Fez-Meknes region allows us to assume that external socio-economic conditions, such as the degree of urbanisation, the relative level of prosperity, the Ramsar convention, and the administrative size or political opportunities could act as explanatory factors for the level of internal governance capacity for sustainability. In addition, the National Human Development Initiative programme could be used as the means by which each department should work towards the smooth running and implementation of sustainability in each locality.

Implications for Governance Practice

In this article, we present and discuss an instrument for measuring the internal governance capacity of governments and administrations for sustainability and apply it as an example to the region of Fez-Meknes. Using this approach, a differentiated picture can be drawn, which is based on a thorough and comprehensive understanding of governance on the one hand, and objective data on the other. It appears that the governance arrangements of the provinces and prefectures differ considerably in their ability to steer government and administrative action towards sustainability. A high index can be achieved with different arrangements. Even if certain models are recognisable, it is not possible to identify a successful model for internal sustainability governance.

Observations on the relationship between factors that target the conditions for action and factors that concern the empowerment and capacity of government and administrative actors themselves are revealing for the practice of governance. While the former tends to be more pronounced, the latter generally receives medium values. However, a small number of provinces and prefectures with a high index give relatively more importance to factors related to the mode of operation. Governments and administrations, therefore, seem to



focus on factors that refer to the conditions for action – for example, the establishment of a sustainability department and the creation of a legitimacy base, as the national policy of the kingdom aims to develop a good understanding of sustainability to achieve a high-capacity index. However, the administrative and governmental actors themselves also need to be empowered. In this respect, the development of expertise in the field of sustainability seems particularly effective. It would be a major asset to strengthen this whole system with the participation of certain stakeholders such as civil society.

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These results should also be interesting for the debate on the governance of sustainable development in general. They show once again, that it is not just a question of rigid, but rather flexible conditions for action.

ANNEX 1

Additional information for operationalisation: Indicators and measurement of internal governance capacity for sustainability in the context of the Fez-Meknes region.

Political Dimension: Structural Factors

Factor 1: Specialised administrative unit for sustainable development → Sustainable development department.

Key Question: Has a regional sustainable development department been institutionalised and where is it located organisationally?

The administrative bodies responsible for sustainability raise awareness of sustainability within government and administration and ensure that sustainability concerns are considered by government and administrative actors. The governance capacity for sustainable development is higher (1) the closer an administration is designated as the lead for sustainable development and (2) the closer it is to the decision-making centre, i.e., the higher it is in the administrative hierarchy.

Factor 2: The institutional embedding of sustainability → Administrative offices linked to sustainability.

Factor 3: Cross-cutting coordination structures → no operationalisation and measurement.

Factor 4: Legal anchoring of sustainability → Sustainability in constitutional and legal texts.

Key Question: How is sustainability anchored in regional law?

A legal anchoring of sustainability creates legitimacy and commitment for government and administrative action. The more generally binding the legal anchoring of sustainability, the greater the capacity for governance of sustainability. It is assumed that the general binding nature of simple substantive laws, ranging from administrative organisation laws to constitutional articles, will increase.

Policy Dimension: Content Factors

Factor 5: Sustainability mission statement → understanding of sustainability.

Key Question: Does the locality have a transversal and differentiated understanding of sustainability?

Global sustainability models are an expression of the fact that sustainability is embedded in terms of content and ideas in government and administrative action. The governance capacity for sustainability is greater the more (1) an understanding of sustainability is formulated across government and (2) the more differentiated it is. A less differentiated, but globally formulated understanding of sustainability indicates a greater capacity than a more differentiated understanding of sustainability formulated at the department or office level.

Factor 6: Sustainability strategy → Policy strategy related to sustainability.

Key Question: Does the region have a comprehensive, long-term, strategic action plan for sustainability?

The existence of cross-sectoral strategic policy planning for sustainability increases the binding nature and effectiveness of sustainability for government and administrative action. The sustainability governance capacity associated with a sustainability-oriented policy strategy is all the greater if (1) an overall sustainability claim is made in the policy strategy, (2) a long-term perspective is adopted and (3) the sustainability-oriented strategy is integrated into (real) policy planning.

Factor 7: Higher level treatment: Sustainability issues → Activities on cross-cutting issues.



Key Question: How many cross-cutting sustainability issues (climate protection, climate adaptation, biodiversity, sustainable food, digitalisation, circular economy or green economy) are addressed?

The preoccupation of government and administration with cross-cutting sustainability issues indicates whether the issues are potentially addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Sustainability governance capacity is higher the more strategies and programmes are developed and communicated on specific and cross-cutting sustainability issues. Activities on the following cross-cutting issues were recorded: climate protection and adaptation, biodiversity, sustainable nutrition, digitalisation and circular or green economy.

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Factor 8: Post facto (ex-post) evaluation of sustainability → Sustainability monitoring and reporting.

Key Question: Does the region have a sustainability monitoring system?

Ex-post sustainability assessments are instruments for aligning government action with sustainability. The capacity for sustainability governance is enhanced if (1) sustainability-oriented development monitoring, e.g., on the basis of the Indicator Circle (IC), (2) this is carried out regularly, (3) monitoring is based on a differentiated basis and (4) reporting is integrated into the canton's control process (e.g., basis of the policy strategy).

Factor 9: Prior (ex-ante) sustainability assessment → sustainability assessment.

Key Question: Does the region have binding instruments and processes for ex-ante sustainability assessment of projects?

The instruments and basis for carrying out ex-ante sustainability assessments of plans and projects strengthen the integrative consideration of sustainability concerns in government and administrative action. The capacity for sustainability governance is all the higher if (1) there is a specific sustainability assessment instrument, (2) it is based on a conceptually differentiated basis and (3) there are binding regulations for the application of sustainability assessment.

Factor 10: Sustainability expertise → Participation in external knowledge events.

Key Question: Is the region developing sustainability expertise by participating in knowledge events (participation in the region's Sustainable Development Forum)?

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The sustainability knowledge of the administrative staff is a prerequisite for competent handling of sustainability issues. The capacity for sustainability governance is higher the more frequently prefectural staff participate in external events with an explicit reference to sustainability, e.g., the nationally oriented Sustainability Forum.

Political Dimension: Political Power Factors

Factor 11: External legitimacy → Application to the federal funding programme.

Key Question: Does the region participate in forward-thinking projects to initiate innovative activities for sustainability (funding programme)?

If administrative actors acquire external resources for projects and activities, they strengthen their legitimacy and internal assertiveness. The more provinces and prefectures participate in innovation-oriented funding programmes, the higher the capacity for sustainability governance. The number of entries of provincial and prefectural authorities in the development assistance programme serves as an indicator.

Factor 12: External networking → Participation in national sustainability network.

Key Question: Does the region participate in the interregional network of sustainability specialists?

Participation and exchange in external sustainability networks strengthen the internal assertiveness of administrative actors. The capacity for sustainability governance increases as sustainability officers become involved in the national network for sustainable development.

Factor 13: Commitment of senior government → Regional government commitment to sustainability.

Key Question: Does the government make a public commitment to sustainability in strategic policy documents?

Public communication and political leadership commitment to sustainability signals political importance and willingness to support and promote sustainability concerns internally.



Sustainability governance capacity is higher the clearer it is. The regional organisation has committed itself to sustainability in strategic policy documents. The government's visible and official statements on sustainability, for example in the legislative programme, serve as indicators.

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