tributes to a reiteration of a pre-existing discourse, instead of a change of direction. The BMBF's powerful position to actively neglect or enable entrance to its *circle of kings* of a discourse coalition of different actors stretches the boundaries of the concept of discourse coalitions. While it thus might not be an idealtype discourse *coalition*, the instance of BMBF policy making can be interpreted as an illustration of the relation of power, discourse and knowledge. Arguing with Keller (2011) that discourse structures are power structures, the discourse coalition here is not only an instrument of maintaining power over the discursive direction, but of safeguarding the own institutional status quo. The BMBF manages to maintain its power in relation to the other actors involved not only in view of the discourse's contents – by re-enacting its own discursive assumptions ("Deutungsmacht") – but also in view of its institutional power.

This view does not necessarily contradict the position held in critical science policy literature, that external experts such as industry representatives are a powerful influence on agenda setting (such as Ober 2014) or that current directions of policy are the result of actor networks, as expressed by Sarewitz and Pielke who argue that the alignment of industry needs and policy "is not a result of serendipity, but of the development of networks that allow close and ongoing communication among the multiple sectors involved in technological innovation" (Sarewitz and Pielke Jr. 2007: 7). My argument rather shifts the focus to a different notion. Industry representatives as well as other experts involved in policy processes certainly try to influence the specific direction of science policy – as for example has been noted about the GWP, which interviewees have titled a lobby (interview with PP22).

However, in the specific instance of German science policy making, the ministry's power to include or exclude speakers in the coalition of agenda setting is decisive for maintaining or changing the direction of policy. As a further safeguard, external actors are only granted advisory roles, but no official decision-making power. As Hornidge (2007) argues in view of enquete commissions as advisors to the German federal government, the ministry maintains the final say about any policy programmes and initiatives.

7.5 A self-reinforcing equilibrium in science policy

While the apparent imbalance in the distribution of power between the ministry, project management agencies and the research community is notable, it is equally remarkable that only few researchers of those excluded from the discourse coalition openly contest the direction of policy or the underlying policy processes. For the BMBF itself as well as those members of the science community directly involved in the discourse community, the advantage of maintaining the current state of the

art in decision-making and institutional set up is obvious. The acceptance of the status quo by the rest of the research community, or at least their lacking resistance, might be attributed to two reasons.

On the one hand, despite of the unequal power distribution, meeting the interests of the research community indirectly plays a large role for the policy makers. While the ministry is in a powerful position to shape science policy, it is not independent of other social actors. The research community is not a servant to the BMBF as its master. Their relation is rather an interplay of checks and balances: There needs to be a congruence of discursive ideas of policy makers and scientists in order to create an equilibrium (ch. 10.3). The ministry needs to ensure that the policies meet the demands of the potential applicants from the scientific community. Not doing so might lead to unsuccessful funding initiatives in terms of application numbers or quality of research proposals. Unsuccessful policies (measured in not spending the foreseen budget) in turn may lead to budget cuts in the next financial period or to a political reorientation (Ober 2014).

The relation between the BMBF and the researchers is not as hierarchical as it may seem at first sight. It may rather be described as an *interdependency* than as a top down hierarchy. If the BMBF deviates too far from the interests of the research community or narrows down the scope of agency within funding initiatives too much, the equilibrium of supply and demand of research funds would collapse. It is therefore not surprising that the BMBF consults selected external actors in the process of designing new funding initiatives or strategic programmes. The needs of the target group for a future funding initiative are embedded within the policies by consulting relevant experts (interviews with PA02, PA11).

Beyond individual funding initiatives, the BMBF's general direction of policy discourse is shaped long before discussions about new policies begin: The BMBF's science policy discourse does not emerge out of the blue but reflects accepted norms and ideas. A broader social consensus in society, including the research community, precedes the policy discourse and its institutions, practices as well as the ideas (ch. 8). It is therefore safe to assume that a large part of the science community subscribes to the current direction of science policy. The BMBF's status and decision-making power depend on the acceptance of the current status quo of large parts of the research community.

On the other hand, and whether employed as a conscious strategy or not, the present institutional arrangement, including the unequal distribution of power, stabilizes the current policy discourse, excludes alternative discourse and thus leads to a repetition of discursive contents and the conservation of the status quo. Open contestation and criticism are curbed by the fact that employees of the project management agencies as well as those members of the research community interested in BMBF funding depend on the BMBF financially, either in form of current and future third-party funding or through job contracts.

Observations of the FONA-Forum in 2013 illustrate the research community's reluctance to contest policies openly. Participants felt insecure how the BMBF staff would react if they openly criticized directions of policy. In informal conversations, during breaks, they dared to share criticism about the main discourse on sustainability science policy. In the public events, however, participants did not challenge the overall direction of FONA, thereby giving even more room to actors and opinions in line with the proposed direction. The perceived dependencies on the ministry led to self-censorship (fieldnotes on FONA Forum, 09.-11.09.13).

In a longer term, this has narrowing effects for the direction of policy. With the ministry being in power over the policy direction and the allocation of funding and on the background of the institutional dependence of actors such as the project management agencies and the scientific experts consulted, discourse coalitions turn into a self-re-enacting system. In the policy setting as such, actors included within the discourse coalition are unlikely to act as change agents, as all of them benefit from the current status quo. Being involved in the coalition grants insights into knowledge on future funding (in case of scientific experts and other stakeholders) and is key to further employment (in case of the project management agencies).

Under the constellations as such, even in so-called open agenda processes such as the FONA Fora, the general direction of the policy discourse is stabilized, while at the same time stabilizing the institutional status quo of all actors involved in speaker positions. The order of knowledge and the order of the external actors involved in knowledge generation is repeated rather than challenged.

Nevertheless, the BMBF's policy discourse is *not* a rigid frame. Niches exist for internal change agents to use spaces of agency within the ministry (ch. 6). Discursive change of the official policy discourse then is not inspired by direct confrontation with bearers of alternative discursive stances but is rather mediated through individual change agents within the ministry – who act as *early adopters* of an innovative policy idea, introduce new discourses and dare to institutionalize these in new strategies, programmes or funding initiatives, often in niches at first. Examples include the sustainability concept (ch. 8) or newer policy initiatives for international cooperation in the Sustainability Subdepartment, like the Megacities Initiatives or the African RSSCs, which deviated from the general orientation of science policy and produced shifts in the underlying rationale (ch. 6). At the same time, the process of transmitting policy objectives to the real world via funded research projects bears further opportunities of adapting and reinterpreting the policy discourse according to alternative discourse ideas under the radar of official instances of policy discourse actualisation. Projects funded in both the Megacities as well as the IWRM funding initiatives used the rooms for agency in adapting policy expectations. While one the one hand, these instances of actualizing the main policy discourse may be portrayed as a subversion, on the other hand, the room for

deviation from the main discourse on a smaller scale also contributes to its stability (ch. 10.3).