

Chapter 4

Resources

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Biodiversity and the question of political power

An attempt to assess political power in the implementation of EU biodiversity targets at the lower end of the legal cascade using standard political science theories

Summary: The essay examines the concept of political power and is part of a larger research project. The essay develops a specific operationalization of political power intended for an empirical study on the EU's biodiversity goals within the framework of the Green Deal. The developed concept of power aims to clarify how and what kind of power is used at the municipal level, and whether powerful actors dilute or reinforce the EU's goals before their local implementation. Various concepts of power, including coercion, mediation, and collective mobilization, are analyzed in connection with EU directives, such as expanding protected areas and promoting biodiversity-friendly agriculture. Theories from Machiavelli, Weber, and contemporary thinkers like Han and Naím provide the theoretical foundation. The study introduces a power matrix to evaluate actors and means of power in local contexts. Lastly, initial findings from an exploratory interview are briefly cited, suggesting that local administrations may not be aware of the EU's biodiversity goals but act in their spirit, often relying on negotiation rather than coercion.

Keywords: Political power, biodiversity, EU Green Deal, municipal implementation, power concepts, legal cascade, empirical political research

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A. Preliminary considerations²

Each academic discipline has its characteristic terminology. In law, the focus lies on legality and legitimacy or the question of legal certainty. In economics, terms such as efficiency, revenue, or profit are central. In political science, key concepts include conflict, consensus, interests—and most importantly, power.³ Political science, more than any other discipline, places a central emphasis on the study of power.⁴

For the subject of biodiversity examined here, the concept of power is crucial for two reasons:

- (1) On one hand, the EU formulates goals and directives in its Green Deal packages aimed at fostering biodiversity within member states. Such goals cannot be achieved without power. Legal scholars might argue that the legal cascade ensures the EU's vision is implemented from the top down. However, from a political science perspective, one must critically ask: Is this truly the case? Or does the anticipated cascade get diluted or intensified through the influence of powerful actors?
- (2) On the other hand, power always necessitates certain instruments. Power is not a mythical force nor an electric current; it only manifests through specific means. Investigating these means is particularly valuable in the context of assessing whether the goals for increased biodiversity are diluted or intensified.

2 Disclosure: the AI “ChatGPT” was used to translate this chapter from German to English, due to efficient time-management. Quotations that were originally in German have been translated into English, using the same AI.

3 Hiltrud Naßmacher identifies these seven terms: interest, conflict, consensus, power, opposition, legitimacy, and legality, cf. Naßmacher (1997, pp. 5–12). Nitschke also includes “power” in his list of key terms, cf. Nitschke (2020, p. 12).

4 What is political? To answer this question, one would need to look for typically political categories. Such categories, which structure a specific field of inquiry, are often outlined based on a polarity. In morality, the polarity is between good and evil. In aesthetics, it is between beauty and ugliness. In economics, between profitable and unprofitable. Against this backdrop, Schmidt proposes the polarization between friend and enemy for defining the political. It is important to note that the enemy does not have to be morally evil. It is by no means about a psychological or individual difference in the sense of a personal enemy. Instead, it concerns the struggle between groups in the public sphere. Politics, therefore, inherently has a polemical character. For a conflict to unleash political power, it must be strong enough to shape people into a friend-enemy framework. At the same time, the unity of the state mitigates excessively extreme political hostility. Cf. Schmitt (2002, 26–31, 37).

The aim of this study is to extract key dimensions of political power from the literature. These will then be used in a planned, future research project to empirically investigate whether and how the EU's Green Deal objectives for biodiversity are altered—diluted or intensified—as they cascade down from the EU level to the municipal level. In this regard, this study serves as a preliminary investigation for an ongoing research project.⁵

B. Levels of Theory

It is first necessary to briefly clarify which theoretical level we are addressing. Broadly speaking, four levels of theoretical analysis can be distinguished (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Levels of social sciences theory*

Theoretical Approach/Level	Description
Epistemological Level and Meta-Theory	How is knowledge generated in the social sciences? What can we know at all?
Intellectual History Level	(Historical) theories of political ideas, terms, concepts, and configurations.
Social Theory	Fundamental statements and concepts about politics and society (e.g., Marxist social theory).
Empirical Political Research	Empirically grounded analysis of political phenomena.
<i>Practical Politics</i>	<i>The level of political reality.</i>

The highest, *epistemological level* fundamentally deals with the question of human cognitive abilities, delving deeply into philosophy and extending beyond the scope of this study's interest. Examples of such meta-theories include Karl Popper's epistemological philosophy ("critical rationalism").⁶

The *intellectual history level* examines political ideas or terms from their historical or philosophical foundations. Here, it would be worthwhile to ana-

- 5 Interdisciplinary research project "BioDivStrat" to examine municipal biodiversity strategies within the research cluster "Dynamics, Tensions, and eXtreme Events" (DTX) at Bremen University of Applied Sciences. The project aims to investigate, using the example of several lower nature conservation authorities (UNBs) located within districts and independent cities, how and whether the EU's objectives are being pursued and implemented.
- 6 Cf. Popper (1994) and Popper (1997). Critical rationalism was not chosen by chance; the author sees Karl R. Popper's approach as the most successful attempt to meet the primary quality criteria of research in the social sciences.

lyze the evolution or shifts in the ideas and concepts of power and identify which dimensions are relevant for this investigation. While Machiavelli,⁷ for instance, describes techniques and strategies of power—viewing power as coercion, fueled by a mix of violence potential (rulers need armed forces), resources (rulers require means to build and maintain this potential), and skills (rulers must be cunning, manipulative, and adept at deploying resources and force)—Thomas Hobbes focuses more on power resources: “The power of a man, generally speaking, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good (...).”⁸ In this understanding, Hobbes’s concept of power closely resembles Max Weber’s famous definition of power as the ability to impose one’s will despite resistance.⁹ This level, therefore, holds relevance for the present investigation and will be briefly addressed in the following section.

On the *social theory level*, the concept of power within grand social theories warrants examination. For Marx, power lies in the ability of the capitalist class to appropriate the surplus value created by workers, relying on the state as a means to sustain their economic dominance.¹⁰ For Bourdieu, power encompasses the idea of symbolic power, which can already be seen in his “Distinction”, where he discusses cultural capital as a tool for asserting cultural norms and symbols.¹¹ Since power analysis in grand social theories often represents only one of many elements, this level will not be explored further here.

Situated close to political practice and the general subject of political science is *empirical political research*. The term here is used more broadly, encompassing not only quantitative studies but also the observation and analysis of political processes with the goal of identifying theoretical patterns. Numerous fruitful approaches can be found at this level, such as Nye’s well-known distinction between “hard power” and “soft power”¹² or Naim’s typology of four different forms of power.¹³

7 Cf. Machiavelli (1978).

8 Hobbes (1984, p. 66) German Original: „Die Macht eines Menschen besteht, allgemein genommen, in seinen gegenwärtigen Mitteln zur Erlangung eines zukünftigen anscheinenden Guts (...).“

9 Cf. Weber (2000, p. 62)

10 Cf. Marx (2004).

11 For the “structuring of social space,” see especially Chapter 2. Bourdieu engages more extensively with the various forms of capital starting on page 195. Much later, he writes that classification systems are less instruments of knowledge and more instruments of power. Cf. Bourdieu (1987, 195ff., 744.).

12 Joseph Nye describes “soft power” as a mix of cultural attractiveness, political values, and foreign policy aligned with legitimate moral authority. Cf. Nye (2015, 59ff.).

13 Cf. Naim (2014, pp. 23–25).

C. Theories of Political Power

C.1. Power as Coercion and Effective Mediation

Empirical investigations require a clear theoretical framework that remains manageable. Thus, it is legitimate to limit the depth of intellectual history analyses in order to focus on the concrete examination of power effects in practice. This aligns with established methods in empirical political science. Despite this methodological focus on a clear and manageable framework, a brief review of intellectual history is valuable to trace the development of key power concepts. The following overview demonstrates how various understandings of power—from its foundation in coercion to subtler forms of mediation—have shaped the analysis of political processes.

Viewed from the intellectual history of the concept of power, it undoubtedly played a role in ancient political theory. However, there was no comprehensive political idea of power as conceptualized by the Greeks or Romans. Why would there be? The idea of pursuing power for its own sake would have been highly alien, if not outright reprehensible, to philosophers like Plato, whose political views were heavily intertwined with ethical questions.¹⁴ It was not until the early modern period that a genuine interest in power and its acquisition as a social technique emerged. The name Machiavelli is particularly prominent in this context, especially for his treatise *Il Principe*. However, Machiavelli is more concerned with the acquisition and security of power than with a nuanced understanding of what power is. For him, power is primarily coercion. Asked how the strength of a ruler can be assessed, Machiavelli's answer is straightforward: Is the ruler able to defend themselves and maintain authority? Here, he identifies the military, financial resources, fortified positions, and—interestingly—the acceptance of citizens as decisive aspects.¹⁵ This fundamental idea of power as coercion persisted for a long time. Approximately four centuries later, Carl Schmitt articulated a similar thought in relation to state power: state sovereignty endures as long as no one rises to challenge it in civil war. This echoes Hobbes: the sovereignty of law, for Schmitt, simply means the sovereignty of the entity that enacts the law.¹⁶ Across these varying perspectives, a common thread emerges—a conception of power characterized by its *force*-fulness, its coercion, as abstractly described by Max Weber in his famous formulation: the ability to impose one's will against the resistance of others.

14 Cf. for concise presentation to: Schwarz et al. (2017, 119f.).

15 Cf. Machiavelli (1978, pp. 45–48).

16 Cf. Schmitt (2002, 43, 66).

In modern times, however, this aspect of power that focuses solely on coercion has become too simplistic. One reason is straightforward: there is often a lack of self-determination in Western democracies. Power, according to the German-Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, always requires a commitment to oneself. Modern states, however, (rightfully) distribute and dilute power. In Han's words, they create "side spaces" of power, thereby preventing closure.¹⁷ Thus, solely relying on coercion may no longer be sufficient to address the question of power today.¹⁸ For Han, power is therefore a continuum that emanates from a self (whether a person or institution) and extends outward toward others, radiating influence. Han adds that if a power-wielding individual or institution successfully presents itself in a way that leads others to perceive their own goals and desires as aligned with those of the powerful, the greater the power exerted. In this scenario, the other party ultimately complies willingly. The less mediation succeeds, the more coercion must be employed—a suboptimal scenario, as coercion undermines the power of the institution or individual, provoking resistance.¹⁹

Thus, power operates most effectively when it engenders internalized behavior—when the subjects of power act as desired from the outset. Ideally, the subjects not only act but also think in the manner desired by the source of power. This could be summarized as follows: "The sphere of power expands the more the possibility of enforcement inherently shapes the behavior of the subjects."²⁰

In examining evidence of power exertion within the legal cascade of the EU's biodiversity plans, two aspects must be investigated: the possibilities and instruments of coercion on one hand, and the means and possibilities of mediation on the other. Empirical political research can help elaborate on this distinction further.

C.2. Concepts of Power in Empirical Political Science

What Han explores on a fundamental philosophical level is addressed in a significantly more concrete manner by Mosés Naím, a politically and practi-

17 Cf. Han (2015, 96ff.).

18 In eine ähnliche Richtung argumentiert Rosanvallon, der die Macht der repräsentativen Demokratie, Entscheidungen zu treffen und durchzusetzen, stark geschwächt sieht. Cf. Rosanvallon (2018).

19 Cf. for this idea in general: Han (2015, 11, 15, 30).

20 Cf. Weiß (1995, p. 307) German original: „Der Raum der Macht ist um so größer, je mehr die Möglichkeit der Durchsetzung von vorn herein das Handeln der Adressaten bestimmt.“

cally experienced thinker, former Venezuelan minister, former director of the World Bank, and former editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*. According to Naím, power can take four distinct forms. In essence, this reflects, in a somewhat more differentiated way, the dichotomy of *coercion* and *mediation* introduced in section C.1.²¹ He defines four specific manifestations that power can assume in order to assert itself:²²

1. *Muscles* – asserting power through the use of force, if necessary;
2. *Codes* – relying on symbols, codes, or rules to establish accepted authority;
3. *Persuasion* – successfully convincing others to see things the way power wants them to;
4. *Rewards* – using financial incentives to prompt desired behavior.

This set of four elements can be aptly understood as instruments of power, as metaphors like *muscles* or *rewards* clearly suggest. However, instruments do not deploy themselves; they require human agency to wield them. For this reason, turning our attention to the United States proves insightful. Rieger and Schultze highlight that, particularly in the U.S., empirical power analyses are predominantly shaped by a more behaviorist approach. In line with a “decision-making approach”,²³ the focus lies on actors and their behavior rather than on normative or structural questions.

One of the most foundational contributions to the empirical concept of power comes from Robert A. Dahl. Unlike the aforementioned, more philosophical works, Dahl measures the concept of power—not only through the instruments or *means* of power, but additionally also identifies—by addressing the following issues:²⁴ *base*, the *amount* and the *scope* of power.

(a) *Base of power*

Weber famously distinguishes the “crystalline” concept of authority (*Herrschaft*) from the “amorphous” (Weber) concept of power (*Macht*).²⁵ From a social perspective, power can indeed take on almost any form, which is why

21 Naim speaks of coercion and authority, as well as influence and persuasion. Cf. Naim (2014, p. 16).

22 Cf. Naim (2014, pp. 23–25).

23 Vgl. Rieger and Schultze (1994, p. 245). This led, among other things, to mathematical ideas for formally representing power. While this can be intellectually interesting, it doesn’t really move us forward in applied research, especially if we assume that power has become “fuzzy” today.

24 Cf. Dahl (1957, p. 203).

25 Cf. Weber (2000, p. 62).

Weber refers to it as amorphous. In the political context, however, the basis of power might be defined somewhat more narrowly, even though Weiß considers Thomas Hobbes' notion of political power similarly unspecific. Political power can, in fact, be purely fictitious: those who are preceded by a reputation for power already possess power by virtue of that reputation.²⁶

If one defines it more narrowly, power can be derived from political sources, such as the regulatory power of (democratic) institutions or the mobilizing power of large followings. Power can also have an economic basis, such as the financial power of corporations or the lobbying power of interest groups. There are communicative sources of power, including the reach and influence of media and media creators. Additionally, power can be of a political-theological nature, recognizing the potency of ideologies, convictions, and belief systems.

(b) Amount of power

Intensive power possesses a high degree of penetrative and enforcement capability, a characteristic not shared by extensive power. Symmetrical power relations are marked by approximately equal influence among actors, whereas asymmetrical power relations reveal a clear hierarchy. Centralized power is monopolistic or concentrated in the hands of a few actors or institutions, while decentralized power is often distributed within networks or collaborative decision-making mechanisms. Latent power is invisible, revealing itself only in specific situations, whereas manifest power is directly observable, such as in decisions or conflicts. Empirically, latent power can be examined through the analysis of agenda-setting or tacit consent, while manifest power is captured through concrete decision-making processes and their enforcement.

(c) Scope of power

Broad power relations encompass a wide range of actors, whereas narrow power is limited to specific thematic areas. The spatial scope of power addresses the geographical reach it can encompass. The temporal reach of power varies significantly between state power and societal power relations: state power, in the form of laws, is designed for long-term stability and generally lacks an "expiration date." In contrast, societal power relations are more dy-

26 Cf. Weiß (1995, p. 307).

namic and subject to constant change. Power structures that dominate today may be challenged and shifted tomorrow by new actors, values, or technologies.

The preceding discussion will be summarized in a matrix. However, it is worthwhile to first introduce another dimension that has not yet been sufficiently addressed.

C.3. Collective Mobilization Power in Transformation Processes

The preceding discussion of power primarily focuses on “classical” power constellations within parliamentary democracies. However, new social movements, activism, and social media—along with the attempts they fuel to achieve societal transformation without direct parliamentary representation—may necessitate a third expansion of the concept of power.

In this context, some ideas proposed by Flor Avelino in the *Journal of Power* could prove particularly fruitful. Avelino presents a meta-theoretical framework for examining power in processes of social change and innovation.²⁷ An important complementary aspect that can be drawn from Avelino’s essay is the concept of collective mobilization. Collective mobilization can take the form of a muscle (mobilized followers) without being a muscle itself; it can enforce codes (in the sense of altered norms) without being a code itself; it can operate through persuasion and reward (e.g., social recognition, “likes”) without being confined to these mechanisms.

By integrating the contents of sections C.1 to C.3, the following construct of power emerges:

Table 2: Matrix of the Developed Concept of Power

	Instrumentes of power (means)				
	Coercion		Mediation		Collective Mobilization
	Muscles	Codes	Persuasion	Rewards	
Base of power	Physical Strength, Use of Force	Accepted Rules, Symbols, Institutional Authority	Discourse Control, Communicative Skills, Media Power	Financial Resources, Economic Power	Networks, Shared Values, Identity, Disruptive Ideas, Ability to Challenge Existing Structures

27 Cf. Avelino (2021).

	Instrumentes of power (means)				
	Coercion		Mediation		Collective Mobilization
	Muscles	Codes	Persuasion	Rewards	
Amount of power	Spatially Limited, Potentially Intensive, Directly Related to Conflicts	Moderate Intensity, Broad and Temporally Stable Rules (e.g., Laws)	Variable, Theme-Specific, Flexible	Extent Highly Dependent on Resources (Power Base)	Variable, Dependent on the Degree of Mobilization and the Compatibility of Value Systems
Scope of power	Spatially Limited, Directly Related to Conflicts, Typically Short-Term	Broad, Temporally Stable Rules (e.g., Laws and Norms)	Theme-Specific, Flexibly Applicable	Usually Limited to Specific Groups or Contexts	Potentially Global, with Possibly Far-Reaching Impact on Social, Political, and Economic Systems

Having now elaborated on the concept of power in greater theoretical detail, enabling its operationalization, the next step will address how this concept of power applies to the planned case study.

D. The Political Overarching Goals of the EU Green Deal in the Field of Biodiversity

D.1. The Key Objectives of the EU

Biodiversity is a central component of the EU Green Deal. Healthy ecosystems are essential for providing vital resources such as water, soil, and air. They contribute to combating climate change, for instance, by enabling forests and peatlands to store carbon. The EU Green Deal aims, among other goals, to halt the decline of biodiversity and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

Particularly relevant in this context are the following three key documents from the European Commission:

Year	Document	Comment
2020	EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (COM(2020) 380final)	Strategic Paper on Biodiversity Conservation: Direct Link to the EU Green Deal
2020	EU Strategy „From Farm to Fork“	Strategic Paper on the Ecological Transformation of Agriculture, One of the Main Influencing Factors on Biodiversity.

Year	Document	Comment
2023	Regulation on Nature Restoration (2022/0195 (COD))	Draft of a Binding Regulation. Status: Now in Force (August 2024).

The first key document is the *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030* from 2020. This strategy integrates and reinforces central aspects of the *Farm to Fork* paper from the same year. It provides the substantive foundation for the *Regulation on Nature Restoration*, which, at the time of the presentation, had not yet been adopted. The general direction of the Commission’s biodiversity protection initiatives becomes clear from the headings of document COM(2020)380. These initiatives primarily aim to:

1. Expand areas of land, defined by the Member States, for less intensive use, stricter protection, and better connectivity;
2. Halt the encroachment of natural areas by development, restore greenery where possible, or even reverse land use;
3. Reduce emissions into the environment overall.

In detail, the Commission outlines numerous measures, such as improving protected areas (expansion, coherence, corridors), increasing forest and green cover (tree planting, urban greening, forest information systems), and managing invasive species (preventing introduction, population management).²⁸ Empirical evaluation of these partly general objectives becomes particularly feasible when they are quantified. Let us focus on the question of protected areas. The Commission states that at least 30% of the EU’s land area should be designated as protected, which represents an increase of at least 4 percentage points compared to 2020, when approximately 26% was protected. Particular emphasis is placed on improving strict protection, with the EU aiming to achieve a target of 10% by 2030, compared to the current 3% under strict protection. Member States are expected to demonstrate “significant progress in the legal designation of new protected areas and the integration of ecological corridors” (European Commission) by the end of 2023. The responsibility for implementation lies with the Member States, either through Natura 2000 or national protection programs.²⁹

Turning to the agricultural sector, the Commission identifies farmers as the “custodians of our soil” (European Commission) and emphasizes the im-

28 Cf. (EU Biodiversitätsstrategie für 2030. Mehr Raum für die Natur in unserem Leben, 2020).

29 Compare for this paragraph: (EU Biodiversitätsstrategie für 2030. Mehr Raum für die Natur in unserem Leben, 2020, pp. 4–6). The Commission announced guidelines for implementation.

portance of safe, sustainable, and affordable food. It expresses the goal of supporting the “transition to fully sustainable practices” (European Commission). The Commission references both the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the EU Farm to Fork strategy, adopting two key objectives from the latter:

- (a) reducing the use of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030,³⁰ and
- (b) ensuring that at least 10% of agricultural land features diverse landscape elements to enhance biodiversity, such as buffer strips, fallow land, hedgerows, dry stone walls, or ponds.

Member States are explicitly called upon to translate the mentioned 10% target into their respective national territories. Furthermore, 25% of agricultural land is to be managed organically or biologically by 2030.³¹

In addition to numerous specific objectives (and many exemptions), the *Regulation on Nature Restoration* establishes three distinct, quantitatively measurable targets: Member States are required to take measures to restore certain habitat types to improve their condition, provided they are currently not in a favorable state. By 2030, at least 30% of these habitat types must be restored; by 2040, the target increases to at least 60%; and by 2050, at least 90%.

D.2. Integration of the Power Matrix and Objectives

This paper aims to prepare for an empirical investigation. To analyze the implementation of EU biodiversity goals at the local level, the developed power matrix will be used, applied to municipal actors and processes. The reason for this is that while the German federal government can create a national plan to achieve the EU’s stated land area goals, it ultimately requires the approval and action of the municipal level. This is because municipalities have territorial authority and cannot be compelled to provide land. Local authorities, farmers, NGOs, and citizens’ initiatives are thus considered key stakeholders, and their approach to the EU target objectives will be examined. The focus is on whether and how the quantitative targets set out in the three EU papers, such as the expansion of protected areas or the reduction of chemical pesticides, are being implemented locally.

30 This goal is not included in the selection of objectives to be investigated, as it is more of a state-level rather than a municipal task.

31 For all this cf. (EU Biodiversitätsstrategie für 2030. Mehr Raum für die Natur in unserem Leben, 2020, 8f.).

The subsequent study will rely methodologically on document analysis, interviews, field studies, and quantitative surveys. Local development plans, environmental reports, and land data will be analyzed to capture changes in protected areas and biodiversity-promoting measures. Interviews with local actors will provide qualitative insights into their perceptions and influence on the implementation of the goals. Field studies and on-site visits will assess whether the intended measures have actually been implemented.

When combining the power matrix with the EU goals, the following sets of questions emerge for the intended further investigation:

- 1) Do the local administrations under investigation possess sufficient **amount of power** – measured by the (centralized? asymmetric?) **power base** of expertise, human resources, political majorities, and financial means – to implement the EU-quantified goals using coercive **power means** such as regulations, statutes, and land acquisitions? Furthermore, are the municipalities well-connected with higher levels (e.g., state government) in such a way that they can receive additional support for implementation? Is the **scope of their power** substantively comprehensive, or is it so limited by numerous exceptions that it must be considered constrained?
- 2) What **power means** of collective mobilization – such as promoting relevant values (e.g., protection and improvement of biodiversity), criticizing existing structures, and building transformation alliances – do the declared changemakers of the status quo (e.g., environmental protection organizations) possess locally to enforce the EU's quantified goals? Is their **power base**, in the form of societal support, and their **power amount**, in the form of societal pressure groups and communicative power, sufficient, or do they prove inadequate due to asymmetry with other actors and decentralization? Does their power base and **scope** increase through cooperation and alliances? Can their reach be amplified through the targeted use of social media? Are they successful in establishing a new value framework locally and using societal codes as a power tool to promote the desired transformation? Can noticeable shifts in public opinion be identified in the process?
- 3) What **power means** of collective mobilization – such as spreading relevant values (e.g., food security, job losses, loss of property), criticizing the planned change, and building prevention alliances – do the supporters of the status quo (e.g., agriculture) possess locally to prevent or soften the EU's quantified goals? Is their **power base**, in the form of political networking and societal support, and their **power amount**, in the form of mobilizable societal pressure, sufficient for purpose, or do they prove in-

adequate? Are they able to protect the existing value framework locally and ultimately use societal codes as a **power means** to avoid the desired transformation and prevent or mitigate the quantified goals?

The following three quantified EU goals are established for the upcoming investigation:

- Expansion of Protected Areas: At least 30% of land areas should be placed under protection by 2030, with 10% under strict protection. Any percentage not achieved in Municipality A will require compensatory action in Municipality B.
- Biodiversity-sensitive Agriculture: At least 10% of agricultural land should be enhanced with biodiversity-rich landscape elements such as fallow land, hedges, or buffer strips by 2030.
- Restoration of Damaged Habitats: By 2030, at least 30% of damaged habitat types should be restored to a good condition. This goal increases to 60% by 2040 and 90% by 2050.

E. Outlook

As part of the preliminary investigation, which includes this paper, an initial exploratory interview was conducted. It took place on January 4, 2024, lasted two hours, and was held with an employee from the Lower Nature Conservation Authority of an independent city in Lower Saxony. The employee holds a university degree, has worked in the authority for decades, and is primarily responsible for biodiversity-related issues in the field of practical environmental protection. After the interview, the employee provided non-public documents related to the planned tightening of regulations in a protected area. Specifically, these documents were a draft regulation for the stricter protection rules for wet meadows in a 347-hectare IUCN Category IV area located on the outskirts of the city.

In light of the research objective outlined here, the employee seemed unimpressed by the EU's goals. On the one hand, he pointed out that these goals were, in his opinion, rather unknown at the municipal level. On the other hand, he expressed the view that the EU's goals were generally too complicated to be implemented in the local political reality. While it might not matter from the EU's perspective whether these goals are associated with the EU or not, it is important to note that the objectives of the local authority do align with the direction desired by the Commission.

What was even more interesting, however, were the comments on the strategy of the administration and how they intended to achieve their goals.

Although the measure took the form of a forceful means – a regulation, a legal obligation – the approach was, in effect, a negotiation. What the authority was preparing was an unofficial pre-negotiation with landowners *before* the actual negotiation. The latter refers to the legally required involvement of public interest groups, such as agricultural associations. Since the authority viewed these groups as opponents in this case but considered the actual landowners to be open to compromise, they did not attempt to use coercion or force. Instead, they preferred collaboration and hoped to better achieve their codes (a compromise between agriculture and environmental protection) through this approach. This behavior suggests that the administration ultimately assessed its own power base, its capacity, and its reach as insufficient to enforce its goals if necessary. However, further research is needed, and the developed power matrix along with the formulated sets of questions could play a useful role in this.

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