UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

THE OBSTACLE RACE TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

THE SLOW PATH TO POLICY CHANGE OF A COALITION
ADVOCATING FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN NORWAY
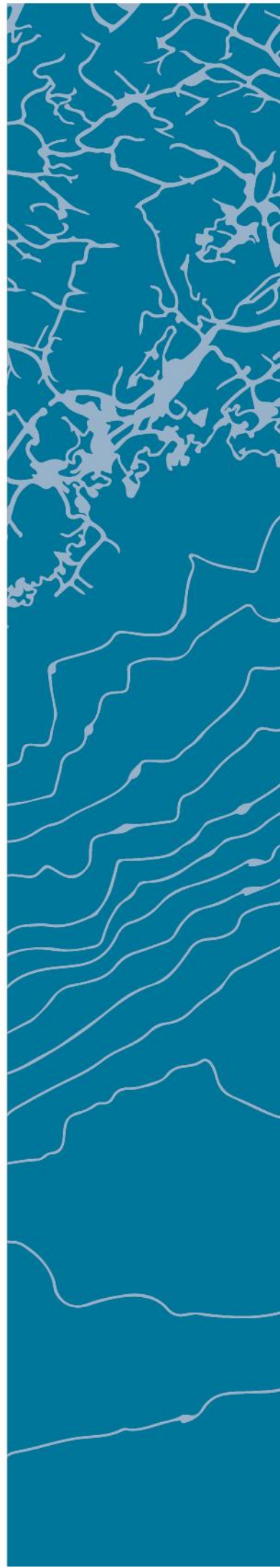
ELISA BORDIN

SUPERVISOR
Romulo Miguel Pinheiro

University of Agder, 2019
Faculty of Social Science
Department of Political Science and Management

Abstract

Developing school sexuality education policies is a complex matter due to the controversial and politicized nature of sexuality. This thesis aims at understanding the development of institutional change in the presence of complex policy systems that involve multiple actors in the policy process. To achieve this aim, it analyses the actions of an advocacy coalition that works to change sexuality education policies in Norway.

The study adopts the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) for understanding the interconnections among the macro-level of the political and historical context, the micro-level of the actor's motivations and the meso-level of coalition's goals and strategies. Moreover, it supports the ACF with the Historical Institutionalism (HI) approach to explain the struggle between the actors' efforts to achieve policy change and the persistence of cultural and political institutions.

Through the conduction of interviews and the analysis of relevant policy documents, this study identified a close interaction and co-dependence among different elements of the political system. In implementing its strategy, the coalition encountered facilitating and hindering factors that determined the achievement of a slow incremental change. The advocacy coalition started and continuously influenced the change process through a strategy of knowledge production and sharing that contributed in changing attitudes and perception of policy participants on sexuality education.

The active agency of the coalition's actors in creating arenas and channels of sharing and coordination facilitated the learning process. Nonetheless, fixed institutions and conflicts of interests hindered the achievement of a major policy change. Therefore, this thesis identifies the policy process as a complex interaction among different factors and elements that generate reciprocal influence and jointly determine the process' outcomes.

Hence, the study concluded that the institutional setting is essential in determining rules and constraints for the actors. However, the active agency of policy participants can strategically exploit the historical and institutional setting for achieving the actors' goals.

Keywords: Sexuality education, Norway, advocacy coalitions, institutional change, policy-learning, historical institutionalism

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1. Introduction

Few topics have attracted more conflicts and debates than sexuality education. For its supporters, sexuality education is a fundamental tool for achieving physical and mental wellbeing, as well as an inclusive and respectful society. Hence, all government should take action on adopting and promoting sexuality education programs. However, those who oppose sexuality education believe that it corrupts minds and bodies, and it contributes to the moral decay of society. Therefore, it should be strongly opposed, and sexuality should remain a strictly private issue. Nevertheless, both supporters and opposers must recognize that sexuality education is a relevant social and political topic, not just for its effects, but also for the intense debates that it provokes.

Debates on sexuality education hold a strong ideological nature and, thus, are impossible to reconcile. Even within the same faction, there are contrasting views over means and scopes. These tensions are strengthened by the high number of interests and actors involved in the delivery of sexuality education. Due to the complexity of interests involved, the policy-making process of sexuality education is a complicated matter. Each group engages in an intense advocacy work to transform their ideological standpoints into concrete political actions, therefore the development of policies involves a high degree of negotiation and compromise.

Researchers have played a relevant role in the policy process because they produced consistent literature both as support of the advocacy work, as well as evidence to contrast ideological debates. However, they have mostly focused on studying the effects of sexuality education programs, leaving a gap in the understanding of how to use this evidence. To close this research gap is important to understand how the policy process of sexuality education works and how advocacy work shapes it. This study aims at contributing to close this gap by analysing the processes and interactions involved in the formation and development of sexuality education policies in Norway through the theoretical lens of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. The application of this framework can provide an interesting contribution thanks to the combination of the processual perspective on the decision-making process with the conflicting aspect of actors' beliefs.

1.1 Background of the study

Sexuality education aims at creating knowledge and competences in individuals to contribute to a positive and informed relation with sexuality (UNESCO, 2018; Ponzetti, 2015). Sexuality is a wide concept that includes aspects from the physical, psychological and social sphere. There is a strong personal component on what is perceived as sexual. However, at the same time, sexuality has a strong impact on society through the definition of concepts such as relation and identity (Ponzetti, 2015). Therefore, sexuality education is highly relevant both from the perspective of the well-being of the individual, as well as in the development of a respectful and inclusive society.

A general understanding of sexuality education still identifies it with its public health component of prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as HIV or chlamydia. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that STDs spread at a rate of more than 1 million new cases each day in the world, more than half just among 15 to 24 years-old (WHO, 2019). Hence, the importance of intervening on young people to teach about prevention and sexual protection. However, this is not the only problem that sexuality education aims at resolving. In the US, one in five women is estimated to be raped during their life, while in Norway more than 60% of boys and girls have suffered from some form of sexual harassment (NSVRC, 2019; LDO, 2019). Sexuality education aims at tackling problems of physical and verbal violence by teaching respect for different forms of identity expression and gender, and by empowering the individuals to claim a respectful behaviour. The current global trend, especially from international organizations, is the support of a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). CSE aims at empowering the individual through the development of competences and knowledge that embrace all aspects of sexuality (UNESCO, 2018).

The most important arenas for teaching sexuality education are schools. They allow to reach a large population of young people between six to eighteen years old from distinct social background. In this way, they can be educated before their sexual debut though structured programs integrated in the school curriculum. However, sexuality education programs in schools are a particularly complex area of policy making. Here, the aforementioned conflicting interests and ideological standpoints add up to beliefs on education and the role of childhood. Moreover, the involvement of psychological, social and relational aspects implicates new interests that hold a high degree of complexity and a strong political nature. Therefore, the question becomes even more political due to the potential of education in shaping norms and values of future societies (Thomson, 1994).

Even in countries where sexuality education has been included in school curriculum for decades, debates are still strong and active. In Norway, sexuality education has been introduced as part of the national curriculum in 1971 and it has been held as an example worldwide. Nevertheless, ever since its introduction debates have never stopped due to the opposition of conservative actors and the constant emergence of new interests in the political landscape. In the past years, there has been an active discussion about changing the current strategy towards a more inclusive content and a strengthening of the programs' implementation in the schools. The interests and actors involved have steered and shaped the debate. However, an important role has also been played by the political institutions involved in the Norwegian policy making, as well as by the international context.

The stable political structure of Norway together with the recent appearance of new social interests make Norway an interesting case for understanding the influence of beliefs and actors on the formation of sexuality education policies. This case can contribute to a general comprehension of the development of sexuality education policies, as well as a wider understanding of the policy process in complicated policy areas.

1.2 Research aims

The aim of this research is to contribute to the understanding of the policy process and institutional change. It aims at understanding how the actors involved and their interactions influence policy making. To do so the study needs to take a step back and analyse the beliefs and goals that motivate actors to take part in the policy process. These motivations shape their strategy and, hence, their actions within the policy system. However, the outcomes of these actions are shaped by the social and institutional context. Therefore, for a thorough understanding of the policy process it is also fundamental to identify the elements and factors that define decisions and their outcomes.

To achieve this aim, I decided to use the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as my main theoretical framework. I chose the ACF because it is designed for dealing with wicked problems and complex policy fields (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The ACF perceives the policy process as the result of the aggregate actions of advocacy coalitions, which are groups of "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system -- i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions -- and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (Sabatier, 1988, p.139).

However, the actions of coalitions are also shaped by the context where they interplay, both internally and externally to the policy system. In support of this perspective, I use historical institutionalism as my secondary theoretical framework. This theoretical approach helps explaining the contrast between the struggle for change and the opposition of stable institutions.

Therefore, in light of the research aims and the theoretical frameworks, the main research problem that this study aims at answering is:

"How does an advocacy coalition achieve institutional change and influence the policy process?"

However, the research question above is hard to answer due to its very general nature and the difficulty in generalizing when talking about the policy process (Weible et al, 2012). Therefore, in order to solve this problem, the question must be narrowed down and put in a specific context. Hence, a more appropriate and specific research problem is:

"How and why did an advocacy coalition promoting institutional change influence the policy-making process of sexuality education policies in Norway between 2006 and 2018?".

To answer this question, I developed an in-depth case study on sexuality education policies in Norway between 2006 and 2018. The study focuses on the actions of an advocacy coalition supporting policy change in sexuality education policies, and the events and factors that hindered or facilitated this process.

However, to answer this research problem it is important to proceed step by step and define some minor research questions that need to be answered before the research problem. First of all, it is important to understand the policy context and the policy change in the period and the country of analysis. Hence, I need to answer the question: "What are the main characteristics of the policy system of sexuality education policies in Norway, and how has it developed between 2006 and 2018?". The answer to this question gives us an idea of the policy context where the advocacy coalitions acted.

Second, it is important to identify the advocacy coalitions and the motivations and strategies that guided their actions to achieve institutional change. Therefore, the research question to answer is "Who are the actors involved in the policy making of sexuality education in Norway, and what are their beliefs and their goals?". Finally, based on the analysis of the answers from the two previous questions, we can identify the outcomes of the actions of the coalitions and understand the effects that they have had on the policy making process of sexuality education policies in Norway.

Therefore, we can understand the factors that determined a specific outcome and, thus, influenced the achievement of institutional change.

1.3 Personal motivations for the choice of topic

Sexuality education is a topic that attracts very little attention on those who are not directly involved with it. However, those who work in related fields or hold a personal interest in the topic generally are enthusiastic supporters of its promotion at any stance. I am one of these persons. I am not personally involved with any sexuality education programs, but I daily experience the consequences that a lack of sexuality education causes. Gender violence, sexual harassment and hate crimes are an inevitable part of everyday news. I come from a country (Italy) in which sexism and gender inequality are strong components of the culture, and homophobic behaviours are frequent. Moreover, there appears to be a global withdrawal from reproductive rights and women's freedom. I believe that such things should not be tolerated in modern society.

However, I see that there is a clear and effective solution that, if it cannot solve these problems once and for all, it can certainly tackle their roots. I am a strong supporter of education as the best tool for achieving substantial changes in behaviours and attitudes. Hence, I believe that strengthening sexuality education worldwide could in the long run solve a consistent part of social problems. Learning about respect and empowerment are lessons that can be applied to all aspects of life.

Moreover, I decided to focus on the policy process, and on coalitions in particular, because I believe that strong policies and legislations are the best tools to transform hypothetical solutions into concrete changes. Besides, in an interconnected world, constructing strong networks of actors is essential for achieving any goal.

Hence, with this study I wanted to show that there is a problem, there is a solution and there is also an optimal way to implement this solution.

1.4 Outline of the study

As aforementioned, this research is an in-depth case study on the work of advocacy coalitions with sexuality education policies in Norway. Therefore, the study is structured to first provide the

political and the theoretical context of the study, and then proceed with the analysis of the empirical data.

Chapter 2 presents the background of the study, exploring relevant concepts from both sexuality education, and the Norwegian political context. Providing an historical and political analysis of sexuality education allows to understand the importance of the topic for research, as well as to highlight relevant issues to study. On the other hand, the analysis of the Norwegian political system sets the basis for understanding the empirical data.

In Chapter 3, I outline a literature review of the most relevant studies in the context of this research. The review aims at identifying the major actors and main topics of interests of the research field. The ultimate scope is to identify a research gap in the literature that justifies the importance of this study.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework. Here, I explain the main concepts and criticalities of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, as well as present a justification for its use. Moreover, the historical institutionalism approach is presented as support for the main theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 explains the methodology adopted for this study. The methodological approach, the research strategy and the means of data collection are presented and justified with the support of relevant studies. In addition, I present the chosen approach for the analysis of the data.

In Chapter 6 and 7, the empirical data collected are presented and analysed following the directions provided by the theoretical framework. Interesting insights are highlighted and an attempt to answer the research question is drawn.

Finally, I present the main conclusions inferred from this study. Moreover, I highlight their implications for researchers and practitioners, as well as the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research on the topic.

2. Background

2.1 Sexuality education: a politicized issue

2.1.1 Definition of sexuality and sexuality education

Sexuality education is a widely controversial and contested topic that causes strong debates worldwide, both in research and in practice (Roien, Graugaard and Simovska, 2018). An "explicit normative rationale" (Simmons, Fajans and Ghiron, 2007, pg. ix) guides these debates in which ideologies and moral values play a fundamental role. The sphere of sex and sexuality is still a taboo in many countries, and even in the most liberal ones there are discussions over values and practices that sexuality involves. Despite being considered a private matter, sexuality has a strong public standpoint which depends on aspects such as sexual health and personal identity. It needs to be understood as a "complex set of *social practices*, behaviours filtered through ideas and values, that change over time" (Weeks, 2017, p.2; emphasis in the original text). Sexuality is a multidimensional experience that involve thoughts, behaviours, practices and relationships, and each person holds a highly personal perception of what is considered sexual and what not (Ponzetti, 2015).

Therefore, school programs that aim at teaching children about sexuality carry strong ideological principles and require a careful planning to avoid contestation. Sexuality education is only a part of the process that leads to the formation and understanding of people as sexual beings, but it has a strong impact in influencing this development (Thomson, 1994). On one side, it impacts the physical and psychological well-being of individuals because it works to prevent the spread of sexual diseases and to respect people's boundaries. On the other side, like education in general, sexuality education determines the transmission of certain values and beliefs to the next generation which in turn will shape the future of society (Mckey,1997).

With the exact purpose of capturing these multiple aspects of the topic, I decided to use the term *sexuality education* to indicate the teaching of sexuality-related issues in curriculum-based programs in schools. These programs generally involve both children and young people, comprising primary and secondary schools. Sexuality education is described as a life-long learning process that leads the individual to understand matters of its own private life, sexual identity, and relationships (Stanovic and Lalic, 2010; Ponzetti, 2015). It aims at guaranteeing the sexual health of the individual by promoting positive sexual experiences free of coercion and violence, as well as developing self-confidence, respect for oneself and others, and planned reproduction. The ultimate

purpose of sexuality education is the well-being of the individual in its wholeness and as part of an equal and respectful society. (Ponzetti, 2015)

Being sexuality a multidimensional experience, arguments over sexuality education programs can emerge from many distinct aspects of their planning and implementation. Each of the elements involved, such as the influence of teaching on private life, the pedagogical methods and reverting mainstream roles, generate intense political debates. Sexuality education programs, thus, appear when one of the conflicting views prevails or the stakeholders involved reach an agreement on the definition of the policies.

2.1.2 History and development

Since its first appearance in school curricula in the late 1800s, teaching of sexuality education has expanded from focusing only on the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), to embrace an approach that includes the relational and psychological aspects of sexuality. The idea that the individuals need education on issues concerning their sexual life started shortly before the XX century. The first programs on sex education started with the intention of preserving the safety of the family unit from the spread of sexual diseases and lack of hygiene (Maddock, 1997). However, it was during the second half of the 1990s that sexuality education started to develop the shape that it has today. With the advent of new mass media like movies and television, sex became an increasingly public matter influencing a change in moral attitudes. This change culminated in the *sex revolution* of the 1960s, in which the old conservative morality was completely turned by a relaxed attitude towards sexuality (Maddock, 1997). Moreover, increased information on the functioning of sexuality and improved contraceptive technologies accompanied these changes in sexual attitudes (Maddock, 1997). The studies on human sexuality conducted by William Masters and Virginia Johnson demonstrated that it was possible to scientifically study sexuality and discuss openly about it[1]. The official international recognition of the importance of sexuality education came in 1975 when the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledged sexuality as an aspect of health to be nurtured and promoted (Maddock, 1997, p.13). In this changing context, feminists and sexual minorities movements started to stress the importance of receiving correct information about sexual practices and the use of contraception. This kind of

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[1] For a presentation of the results of the research see: Masters, W. H. & Johnson, V. E. (1966). Human sexual response. Boston: Little, Brown.

knowledge would not only serve as disease prevention, but also as a way to plan pregnancies and increase women's control over their reproductive life (Stubberud et al., 2017). Throughout the years these movements gained increased recognition and obtained the power of influencing the planning and content of sexuality education programs. However, during the 1980s the incredible pluralism of actors involved in sexuality education became a hindering factor due to the conflicts of interests and the complexity of forming alliances (Maddock, 1997). Moreover, the identification of the HIV virus switched once again the discourse on sexuality education towards a biological and health prevention perspective. Nevertheless, the advocacy work of different interests' groups continued throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, with major victories on the front of sexual rights and sexuality education. Sexual minorities gained increased recognition and protection, and their representation on sexuality education curricula improved. Many countries have bettered their provision of sexuality education and some even introduced national curricula (BZgA and IPPF EN, 2018). At the same time, the international community has recognized the importance of working towards a worldwide diffusion of sexuality education.

Sexuality education curricula still present very different characteristics in their delivery and focus around the world. Most programs tend to emphasise the public health perspective of sexuality, hence the prevention of STDs or unwanted pregnancies. However, there is an increased attention over the social and psychological aspects of sexuality, such as the relational component and the personal development of the individual (Roien et al., 2018). Minorities groups and international organizations continue their advocacy work for a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education. In the United States several national organizations, including the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), support campaigns for the inclusion of the LGBTQ perspective in sexuality education programs (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). This study presents the work of a coalition of organizations currently advocating for a more inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education in Norway.

2.1.3 Sexuality education as a human right

Sexuality education is based on the essential concept of sexual and reproductive rights (SRRs). Amnesty International USA (AI USA, n. d.) defines SRRs as the right of all people "to a healthy, safe, consensual and enjoyable sex life; to control their bodies and have sufficient accurate information to use in making decisions and seeking healthy behaviours; and to have affordable,

accessible services that keep them healthy [...]" (p.1). The SRRs have been defined during the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action and they are considered human rights. As such they are universal, indivisible, and undeniable. They are based on other fundamental human rights, such as the right to health, to be free from discrimination, to privacy, to determine the number and spacing of one's children, and to be free from sexual violence (AI USA, n.d.). Therefore, depriving a person of its SRRs means depriving them of their fundamental rights of health and well-being.

Since their definition as human rights, international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) run an intense advocacy work to stress the importance of respecting sexual rights worldwide. They identify sexuality education as a fundamental tool to achieve the fulfilment of these rights, because it allows to empower the individual through the development of relevant knowledge and competences in the area of sexuality. To emphasize the importance that sexuality education has for global objectives such as gender equality and ending gender violence, the United Nations have introduced the achievement of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) among the Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 agenda (UNFPA, 2017). The UNESCO defines CSE as a "a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality" (UNESCO, 2018) and works jointly with other international organizations for the recognition of sexuality education as an obligation for governments. In pursuing this objective, the governments should follow an evidence-based approach and avoid any censorship, bias, or ideological motivation in teaching (Ponzetti, 2015).

The importance of sexuality education is stressed also by the people that oppose a comprehensive approach. Even though they believe that the social and psychological aspects of CSE are not appropriate for the school context, they recognize that sexuality education can help reducing STDs and abortions rates. In addition, they perceive sexuality education as a crucial tool for transmitting important values to children and steer their behaviour. (Mckey, 1997)

However, sexuality education is not free from opposition. Different political and religious groups believe that sex is not an appropriate topic for the school environment and that sexuality is a private matter. Therefore, they think that sexuality education programs should be abolished and only the family should be able to educate about it. (Mckey, 1997)

Nevertheless, both supporters and opponents of sexuality education must recognize its importance, not only for the effect that sexuality education programs have on the pupils, but also for the strong debates that surround the topic. Sexuality education attracts intense opinions and strong ideological standpoints; hence, research cannot ignore it. Therefore, studies on this topic are necessary if we want to avoid ideological and radical debates without foundations on evidence.

2.1.4 Sexuality: a public-private issue

To understand sexuality education and its implications, first we need to understand the concept of sexuality. As seen in the chapter 2.1.1, sexuality is much more than just the biological aspect of sex. Sexuality is a central element of human lives and it has physical, ethical, and social aspects. All human beings are sexual beings because we relate with each other with love, affection, and intimacy, all part of the sphere of sexuality (Ponzetti, 2015).

Sexuality is a highly personal experience because it relates to how people comprehend it and how they decide to live it. It involves intimate thoughts and desires, and it determines personal decisions and behaviours. On the other hand, sexuality has a strong social and political aspect which relates to concepts like identity and normalization. Every society sets the standards for the sexual lives of its citizens and people must comply with them, otherwise they risk marginalization. This creates tight connections and strong cultural identification among the marginalized. Therefore, while sexuality embraces many aspects of the private and public life of an individual, each person perceives it differently. This perceptive dissonance generates strong debates that hold deep ideological and moral values. (Ponzetti, 2015)

A relevant example of the duality of sexuality is the debate concerning sexual minorities, such as gay and lesbian people. Sexual orientation can seem like a private issue that has little to do with how one lives in society. However, the debate evolved in a way that assumed a strong public aspect. This happened because the marginalisation and exclusion of these groups from the accepted practices has swift the debate from a matter of sexuality to an issue of identity and freedom of expression. People felt that their sexual orientation became a fundamental part of their identity and they wanted to identify with people like them. Therefore, they started movements that fought against discrimination and abuse and they developed their own culture and channels of expression. Thus, debates on personal expression and political discussions mixed in their fight for rights. (Ponzetti, 2015)

Debates on sexuality education follow a twofold perspective. On one hand, they claim to relate to a private aspect of a person's life, but on the other, they have a strong influence on the public sphere and a significant impact on society. Sexuality education in schools lays between and across two Aristotelian conflicting spheres, the "Oikos", relating to the private and family domain, and the "Polis", the public and political domain (Roien et al., 2018, p.1). The tension between the personal and public sphere makes sexuality education an inherently problematic area of public policy (Thomson, 1994). While the school, as a public setting, hold the obligation of educating children on matters of social relevancy, it is a problematic site for discussions about sexuality (Alldred, 2007). Thus, the debates on sexuality education policies often result in discussions about the boundaries of governmental authority and the limits of state intervention over people's life (Roien et al, 2018: Thomson, 1994).

Based on the perceived relationship between education, sexuality and society, debates' participants have developed a series of narratives on sexuality education that reflect their general perspective on the world. First, there is a conflict between a narrative of provision versus a narrative of protection of childhood. Second, Mckey (1997) identifies an opposition between a *permissive* and *restrictive* view of sexuality. Finally, from these two sets of narratives, originates the conflict on the best means of provision for sexuality education.

The first set of narratives sees a contraposition between a group of adults that aims at protecting children and one that aims at empowering them. The former group perceives childhood as a distinct phase of life that needs to be protected from the evil that comes from adulthood. Topics related to sexuality should be hidden from children because they corrupt their innocent minds and lead to an earlier sexual debut, as well as to the decadence of moral values in the society. The second group, instead, believes in preparing children for the challenges that they will face during life. They aim at empowering children through the acquisition of knowledge and competences to give them the necessary tools for protecting themselves. Hence, sexuality education is necessary for the children's right to be informed, understand the incoming challenges, and protect themselves from diseases and abuse. (Alldred, 2007)

The second set of narratives reflects an overall discussion about moral values and state control. Mckay (1997) summarizes the existing typologies of discussions' participants in two categories, the *Restrictive* and *Permissive* approaches. The *Restrictive* ideology has deep roots on religious traditions and holds a negative perception of sexuality. It believes that sexuality should be controlled and limited, and it understands "procreative intercourse within a mature monogamous

marital relationship as the most, if not only, morally valid sexual behaviour" (Mckey, 1997, p. 286). All the deviations from these norms are a danger for the institution of the family, which holds the duty of regulating and controlling people's sexual behaviour. The *Permissive* approach, on the other hand, perceives sexuality as a natural part of human lives and an essential element of the individual wellbeing. It contributes to personal development and psychological health, including aspects such as emotional intimacy, physical pleasure, and recreation (Mckey, 1997, p. 297). Hence, they perceive sexuality as neutral if not beneficial, and meant to be enjoyed without restrictions or control coming from outside.

These sets of narratives imply contrasting ideas on the goals and means of sexuality education programs. On one side, the *protective* narrative and the *Restrictive* approach believe that sexuality education should focus mainly, if not only, on promoting abstinence from sexual intercourses. Contraception and STDs prevention should be avoided topics, and sexuality should be presented in a heterosexual and heteronormative framework. The goal of sexuality education is to delay as much as possible the debut of sexual behaviour and transmit values of self-preservation and family principles. On the other hand, the *empowerment* narrative and the *Permissive* approach advocate for a comprehensive sexuality education that includes all aspects of human sexuality, such as pleasure, psychological safety and gender roles. In this case, sexuality education aims at providing correct knowledge and construct competences in young people. (Mckey, 1997)

These two opposite perspectives on sexuality education hold a deep ideological nature and, thus, are impossible to reconcile. Each actor perceives the other as evil and do not sees the possibility of an agreement. Therefore, they generate fervent debates over sexuality education policies and an intense advocacy work to support their personal view.

2.1.5 Importance of advocacy for sexuality education programs

Sexuality education is undoubtedly a complex area of social policy (Thomson, 1994). It involves a plurality of actors with strong ideological interests, but it also needs to respond to the social duty of guaranteeing the sexual health of the citizens. Sexuality education policies are the result of the government responses to societal changes in the field of sexuality and the political tensions that come with the change (Thomson, 1994). Either embracing or refusing change, developing and implementing sexuality education policies is a complex process that usually involve a high degree of conflict.

Sexuality education is a perfect example of pluralism of actors and interests in public administration[2]. On one hand, the development of sexuality education programs requires the involvement of a plurality of stakeholders from different sectors, such as health, education and the third sector. Sexuality education programs are delivered through the joint action of actors from the public and private sectors, as well as from the civil society. Although sexuality education programs for the most part happen within the school environment, teachers need the support of health professional and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for delivering correct and up-to-date information. Moreover, the difficulty of talking about sexuality-related topics require specific competences that most teachers lack. Hence, it is necessary for the public sector to coordinate with NGOs that possess the necessary skills to deliver an effective sexuality education.

On the other hand, there are many different interests at stake which need to be considered throughout the policy development to avoid the risk of interference from discontent parties. The most important but often overlooked group of interest is represented by the young people that receive the education (UNESCO, 2009). Programs should be developed with their best interests in mind so to be appealing and beneficial. The UNESCO (2009) suggests the involvement of young people in planning and developing the program, as the best way to ensure that their needs are fulfilled, and their doubts answered. This can be done through the involvement of youth associations or using peer-to-peer education. However, the best interest of young people is not always at the core of the decision-making process, as they lack the political power of influencing it (Thomson, 1994). Their decision-making and political power is delegated to their parents, who advocate for their interest on their behalf. Parents and parents' associations are essential stakeholders within the civil society (UNESCO, 2009), and they influence the development of sexuality education programs based on their beliefs on the role of schools in educating their children.

Another fundamental actor in the sexuality education landscape are teachers. They play a strong role in influencing the success of sexuality education programs because their competences and their commitment in teaching sexuality determines the actual outcomes of the programs (Kantar TNS, 2018). Moreover, teachers act as connections between the pupils and the external providers of sexuality education, such as health professionals and NGOs. Thus, considering the preparedness of these actors, the teachers' willingness to engage them in the teaching also influences the efficiency of the education. (UNESCO, 2016)

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[2] For an in-depth study on pluralism see: Olsen, M. E. (1982). *Participatory pluralism: Political participation and influence in the United States and Sweden*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

In addition to the actors directly involved in the provision of the programs, there are various external groups of interest that also aim at influencing the content of the programs (UNESCO, 2009). These are religious, political, and social groups that seek to transmit their values and beliefs through promoting, hindering, or changing the teaching of sexuality.

Due to the presence of multiple conflicting interests, when these programs are developed each advocacy group tries to impose its own values and objectives influencing the content and scope. This causes a gap between the agenda defined by *gatekeepers* and policy-makers and the actual needs of young people (Thomson, 1994). Ideally, the policy-makers would take all interests into account and develop policies accordingly. However, the possibility of reaching consensus and the process leading to it are determined by the institutional setting. The political and administrational settings, as well as the informal norms and cultures develop over time within a country and become embedded in a territory, determining the institutionalization of specific practices and values (March and Olsen, 2006). The political tradition and the power of health and education debates within the country are essential elements in shaping the policy process of sexuality education policies (Thomson, 1994). For example, when specifics interest groups, such as the religious ones, are very strong within the country reaching consensus can become a hard process and the values from the most powerful party would be the ones prevailing.

Nevertheless, consensus among all stakeholders involved is essential for avoiding obstruction from discontent parties. Sexuality education policies require constant negotiation to deal with the evolving context of society. Sexuality and its related values change over time, following the evolution of society (Weeks, 1981). New interests emerge in society, existing interest groups change their claims, and new evidence appears to transform people perspective on the topic. Hence, both society and political institutions undergo a process of de-institutionalization, where the embedded norms and beliefs become obsolete and, thus, are replaced by new practices and beliefs (Oliver, 1992). These, in turn, will become embedded in society, until new social transformations will cause a new process of de-institutionalization. Therefore, the map of the actors and the interests involved in the policy environment is in constant evolution.

In the case of sexuality education in Western countries, this developmental process is evident in the involvement of minorities in the production of the programs. Since the 1970s the involvement of sexual minorities in the development of sexuality education programs have evolved to reflect the changing role of sexual minorities in society, from being outsider to become more and more integrated in society (Maddock, 1997). In the same way, topics related to queer practices and

identities have gradually assumed a more central role in sexuality education programs. Nowadays, a strong impact on changes in sexuality education programs have been determined by the phenomenon of immigration (Bartz, 2007). The arrival of new cultures and new perceptions of sexuality have determined the need for Western societies to widen their perspectives to include the new interests present in the landscape.

Therefore, a constant negotiation of values and interest is fundamental for sexuality education policies. Considering the importance that values, negotiations and interests have in defining the role and shape of sexuality education worldwide it is of fundamental importance to understand what are the processes and actions that stand behind the policy making of sexuality education. As the Advocacy Coalition Framework suggests, the policy process is the result of the interaction between actors' beliefs and the surrounding environment. The latter shapes the resources and constraints that influence the advocacy work of policy participants, which aims at transforming their beliefs into concrete policies (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

The IPPF, during its 2017 conference held in Norway, presented a series of suggestions and guidelines for an effective advocacy work that aims at improving sexuality education worldwide. First of all, it is fundamental to understand the political and legal system for identifying the most effective pressure points and the best way to influence change. They suggest identifying the best option between a top-down or a bottom-up approach. Moreover, they strongly emphasize the importance of building coalitions across multiple sectors with strategic stakeholders who have relevant skills and interests concerning sexuality education. It is important to highlight the significance that each sector hold in a cross-sectional issue such as sexuality education and identifying the most appealing issues that allows to start a conversation for policy change.

In addition, it is critical to share information with strategic actors in order to incorporate sexuality education among their objectives. Showing the impact that issues such as STDs spreading and sexual harassment have on the society close to them, helps policy makers to personally relate to these problems. They can, thus, understand that sexually education is not just a third world problem, and the importance of including this issue in their agenda. Governments should acknowledge access to sexuality education as a fundamental human right and work to remove barriers to its access and enable all relevant actors to support and integrate the programs (IPPF, 2017).

2.2. The Norwegian context

2.2.1 Sexuality education in Norway

2.2.1.1. The origins

Sexuality education has a long and renown tradition in Norway. The country was one of the first nations to introduce a sexuality education program in the schools, and its comprehensive and inclusive national curriculum is used as an example in academic debates. Nevertheless, the debate on sexuality education policies is still active and it generates strong contrasts among its participants.

The origin of sexuality education in Norway take its inspiration from the health and political debate started in Europe at the end of the 1800s. The beginning of the 1900s saw a strengthening of the debate that resulted in 1935 with the introduction of a guide on reproductive theory in Norwegian schools. The guide was based on the idea that science and society have the responsibility to influence people's reproductive behaviour and promote the model of the European nuclear family (Stubberud et al., 2017). Soon after, the teaching of human reproduction became a mandatory part of biology classes. After War World II the Nordic countries founded organizations for sexual minorities which started as social meeting places but soon became political movements for gaining sexual rights and freedom. Meanwhile, the access to contraceptive technologies, such as the birth control pill, increased worldwide and the feminist movements started to claim their sexual and reproductive rights. Therefore, the debate on sexuality education assumed a strong political connotation thanks to the feminist movement and issues of women's and sexual minorities rights were integrated in the teaching of sexuality in school. (Stubberud et al., 2017)

The major step forward for sexuality education in Norway came in 1971 when the Department of Education and Church Affairs proposed a revision of the national curriculum. The Model Curriculum for Elementary Schools provided the guidelines for the education of children from 7 to 16. The new version, introduced in 1974, broadened the teaching content of "human reproduction" to include concepts related to sexual desire, family planning and sexually transmitted diseases. Moreover, it introduced the new compulsory subject "The Family". The aim of the new curriculum was to present sexuality education as a subject embracing the human being in its whole, as well as in its social aspect. A handbook with guidelines for teachers and parents and seminars for counties' representatives supported the implementation of this view. At first, the introduction of the new curriculum encountered the opposition of religious groups, but it was quickly accepted as a way to

reduce abortions. (Bartz, 2007) Nevertheless, the debate between "radicals" and "conservatives" continued throughout the 1990s culminating with the introduction of homosexuality in the sexuality education curriculum (Svendsen, 2014).

2.2.1.2 Recent developments

Sexuality education curriculum has changed repeatedly in the last two decades under the influence of political debates on sexual and minorities' rights. At the beginning of the new century, Norway revised the guideline book for teachers to include issues related to multiculturalism (Svendsen, 2012). In 2006, the *Knowledge Promotion Reform* introduced in the school curriculum the Competence Goals, that defined the objectives for each subject in term of knowledge and skills. This revision of the curriculum strengthened the teaching of culture, gender and sexuality within the social science subject with the aim of developing better competences among the students (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006). In the same year, the Norwegian Organization for Sexual and Gender Diversity (FRI) initiated a collaboration with the Directorate of Health to improve the health treatments of LGBTQ people. They started the program Pink Competency (Rosa Kompetanse) that provided education to health professionals on the specific needs of LGBTQ people and, hence, ensure an equal quality of treatment. In the following years, the program expanded to involve other sectors, including schools with the start of Pink Competency School in 2011. In 2008 Norway legalized same-sex marriages and this change affected also sexuality education in relation to sexual minorities. The following year the Directorate for Knowledge issued a new handbook for explicitly challenging heteronormative presumptions in the teaching of sexuality education, stressing the importance of a correct knowledge of sexual anatomy. (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006).

In 2011, Sex and Politics (Sex og Politikk) started Week 6 (Uke 6), a sexuality education program for schools. Currently, the program is widespread around Norway involving around 40% of primary schools' teachers. Week 6 provides teaching material in line with the competence goals established for sexuality education, as well as specific material on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and boundaries. (Sex and Politics, 2019). This last topic received the government approval after a wave of rape attacks draw the public attention to this problem in 2011 (Sex and Politics, 2011). In 2013, the Directorate of Education reviewed the competence goals to make specific reference to sexuality education and clarify the goals (Storting Report 34, 2012-2013). Moreover, in 2017 the Directorate of Health presented the new strategy *Talk about it!* that stressed the importance of

competence development and empowerment of the student. The strategy promotes an inclusive sexuality education and highlights the relevance of topics such as the respect of boundaries and the development of personal identity. In addition, it promotes the production of up-to-date material, as well as knowledge on the state of sexuality education in Norway (Helse- og omsorgsdepartementet, 2017).

In recent years, the debate on sexuality education has gained increased attention in both public opinion and political discussions. On one side, the creation of a National Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in 2016 and the promotion of conferences around Norway stimulated reflections and discussions among the actors working in the field. On the other hand, the increased engagement of Norway in the promotion of sexuality education worldwide brought attention also on the state of sexuality education within the country. Moreover, contrasts on the content and means of sexuality education delivery are still present in Norway. Interest groups, activists and researchers stress the importance of certain themes, such as queer practices and immigration, that require a different perspective in the educational curriculum (Svendsen, 2014).

Nevertheless, these debates influence the content of sexuality education in the curriculum, not its presence. Indeed, sexuality education is well integrated in the educational curriculum to avoid the interference of religious and political groups. Therefore, sexuality education in Norway remains mandatory and defined in its main features by the national curriculum. (Stubberud et al., 2017)

2.2.1.3 Sexuality education in schools

Sexuality education in Norway is mandatory for all students aged 6-16 and it follows an age-appropriateness logic. It aims at developing competences and knowledge in Norwegian students so that they can make informed choices and improve their sexual health. The sexuality education curriculum is regulated by the Education Act at the national level, but it is also influenced by sexual health strategies and the intervention of national and local organizations.

The scientific and technological debate of the first half of the century, together with the cultural and political debate of the second half of the century, explain the double aspect of the content of the curriculum of sexuality education in Norwegian schools (Stubberud et al., 2017). Teaching involves talking about health-related knowledge, such as reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases, as

well as moral and political aspects, such as gender and sexual rights. Sexuality education is organized interdisciplinary, and each piece of knowledge is related to a subject.

Sex education in schools is delivered through the joint work of schools, public health services and civil society. Teachers are the main responsible for the delivery of sexuality education and they should follow a compendium that provide guidelines on the topics to discuss and ideas for activities, as well relevant literature related to each subject (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2011). In their mission they are supported by school nurses who generally intervene when the topic is considered more difficult to discuss. Moreover, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are involved all around Norway and some developed specific programs, of which Week 6 of Sex and Politics is the most well-known.

Despite the existence of a standardized curriculum and national guidelines, the provision of sexuality education in Norway vary consistently between different school. The reason for these differences lies on a vague policy that leaves a lot of space to individual choices of teachers and actions of NGOs. As the people interviewed for this research stated, there is a lack of extensive research on the overall state of art of sexuality education in Norway. Still, the existing research shows that there is still a lot of work to do in Norwegian sexuality education, especially in comparison to its neighbouring countries Finland and Sweden (Svendsen, 2012). The major critics refers to the number of hours dedicated to sexuality education in school and the lack of teacher training which influence the quality of the delivery. Teachers lacks the competence to give useful information to the students. Moreover, different political and interests group criticize the resistance to reforms of the content of the sexuality education curriculum. Despite the effort in recent years to adapt the curriculum to the changing social environment in Norway and the pressure of interest groups, the curriculum tends to perpetrate the same kind of heteronormative and Norwegian-centric presumptions that undermine its inclusivity. (Svendsen, 2012)

Due to the pluralistic nature of sexuality education in Norway, both in term of actors and in terms of interests, changing the national curriculum is a complicated political process. Understanding this process is the aim of this research.

2.2.2 The Norwegian political system

Norway is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system. The Storting (parliament in Norwegian) is the most powerful political body, while the King holds a mainly symbolic function. The Norwegian political system is based on a separation of powers among the legislative, the executive and the judiciary branches, as in the case of the United States.

The legislative function is delegated to the Parliament which is elected every four years. Differently from most European countries, the Storting cannot be dissolved within the four-year period of a legislation and, thus, no snap election is allowed. The 169 members are elected from the 19 counties according to a system of proportional representation. Following the Westminster parliamentarism, the Parliament is the only national agent elected by the citizens and the article 49 of the constitution states that "The people exercise the Legislative Power through the Storting" (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). In addition, since 2007, the Parliament holds the constitutional power of legitimizing the Council of State (the cabinet). The parliamentary provision was already a constitutional custom and the Council was appointed by the King under the suggestion of the Parliament. The cabinet needs to have the majority in the Parliament, but there is no requirement of a confidence vote when a new cabinet is elected (Bergman and Strøm, 2011).

The Council of State represents the executive branch. It consists of a Prime Minister and its council of ministries. Norway has a political multi-party's system, therefore the party or the coalition with the ability of gaining the majority in the Storting, appoints the candidates for the Council. The fragmentation of the party system determined the creation of a series of minority and coalition's governments. This practice has had two major consequences on the Norwegian political system. On one side, it contributed to the reassertion of the power of the parliament (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). This change, however, has been contrasted by the increased power of control of the judiciary system. On the other hand, the need to seek legislative agreement with several actors from the opposition created a culture of compromise, and policy making became the result of bargaining (Engelstad et al., 2017). Cabinet conferences, informal gatherings of the Council of State, and parliamentary committees are considered the main arenas of conflict management (Bergman and Strøm, 2011; Engelstad et al., 2017).

The judiciary branch is independent from the legislative and executive branch. One of the functions of the judiciary is to exert control over the Parliament and the Council of State. Norway has a strong doctrine of judicial reviews (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). The role of these reviews is to control that

political decisions and actions are taken in compliance with the constitution. This culture determines a constraint for political decision-making. However, the political nature of the appointments has hampered the independence of the judiciary branch. Despite a reform in 2001 to increase the independence of judiciary appointments, the Ministry of Justice still holds a strong control over these processes.

2.2.2.1 A complex classification

Norway has often been identified as a neo-corporatist state "with a strong and active state closely interacting with a dense network of civil society organizations, a high degree of coordination in labour market policies and processes of wage formation, along with a generous welfare state." (Engelstad et al., 2017, p.2). However, some scholars disagree with this clear-cut definition and, investigating the policy-making process in recent years, they identify a transformation in the institutional settings within the Norwegian politics. Enjolras and Waldahl (2007), for example, investigating policy making in sports identify a double tendency towards clientelism and policy communities.

The disagreements concern the openness of the system, the number and kind of interests and actors involved and the means of integrating these interests in the policy-making process. A possible interpretation of these disagreements can be identified in the distinct elements and policy areas where the authors have focused their attention. In their study on higher education, Bleiklie and Michelsen (2013) found variety in sector governance traditions in Norway due to embedded structures and traditions within various sectors. Therefore, if focusing on the overall openness of the system, multiple policy venues such as boards and committees can be identified, as well as a practice of remiss for the consultation of affected interests in legislative and administrative issues (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). Based on these elements, Norway can be considered a neo-corporatist state with an open and accessible system where multiple interests are represented and taken into account. However, in specific policy contexts the venues for interests' representation are more selective, such as in the case of sports (Enjolras and Waldahl, 2007), and represent better a system of *clientela*. Nonetheless, authors like Olsen (1991) and Rokkan (in Engelstad et al., 2017), have focused on the conflictual nature of the interests and on the means for achieving compromise, hence identifying in Norway a corporate pluralistic state. Moreover, another focus of attention of researchers has been the legalistic nature of the Norwegian political system. Belonging to the

traditional Scandinavian state, Norway presents a combination of *Rechtsstaat* model and a universal welfare state (Bleiklie and Michelsen, 2013; Engelstad et al., 2017). Therefore, in Norwegian society rules and laws have a strong relevance, and both citizens and the state highly value law abiding. The central state has the responsibility of preparing and enforcing the law, while the bureaucracy emphasizes legal control and rule-following (Bleiklie and Michelsen, 2013). Besides, there is a high level of trust among all level of governance, and between citizens and the government (Osterud, 2013). The influence of New Public Management (NPM) at the beginning of the century marked a partial shift towards an Anglo-Saxon model of *public interest*. Still, characteristics of the legalistic state remain strong in Norway, and public trust and rule-following persist as embedded traits of Norwegian society (Osterud, 2013).

Nevertheless, all authors agree in perceiving the Norwegian political landscape as a system undergoing a transformation, where new interests are changing the environment and external pressures. Even though Norwegians refused to join the European Union (EU) in two referendums, the international context is increasing its influence on Norwegian politics. While Norway it is not an official member of the EU, it is part of international agreements such as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA). The membership of these organs determines constraints and influence the Norwegian political system. On one hand, it implied the indirect transfer of power to EU institutions. On the other, it shifted the internal power relations strengthening the role of the cabinet over the Parliament, as EEA and EU issues are handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). Although these relations are not directly involved in this research, they provide an understanding of the interconnected influence among different levels of governance, as well as national and international contexts.

2.2.2.2 Actors involved

There are three major actors involved in the Norwegian political system: the politicians, the bureaucrats and the civil society.

The political actors are organized through a party system which reflects the dominant social cleavages. The political parties are organized on a left-right ideological axis that mirrors the socioeconomic interests, with socialist parties on the left mainly concerned with welfare policies and equal opportunities, and nonsocialist parties on the right supporting a liberal market. The Centre Party, on the other hand, represents the regional interests (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). From left to

right the Norwegian parties are the Red Party, the Socialist Left, The Labor Party, the Center Party, the Christian People's Party, the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the Progress Party.

The formation of government coalitions is a common practice in Norway and the increased fragmentation of the party system have brought even the Labour party, who always governed independently, to seek for a governing coalition in 2005. During the time span of analysis of this research (2006-2018), there has been an alternation between a centre-left coalition and a centre-right coalition. The Red-Green coalition, formed by the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party, won the 2005 elections and was then reconfirmed in the 2009 elections. During both legislature, Jens Stoltenberg was appointed Prime Minister. In 2013, the coalition was defeated by the right-wing coalition guided by the Conservative party, while Erna Solberg became Prime Minister. Both the coalition and the Prime Minister were reconfirmed during 2017 elections (for the complete results see: valgresultat.no).

In addition to the socioeconomical interests, political parties represent the opposition between central-peripherical and rural-urban concerns (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). Therefore, within the same party, there are multiple interests at stake. The co-presence of conflicting interests has caused tensions in the policy-making, generating a politic of compromise where multiple interests need to be negotiated and no force is strong enough to prevail (Engelstad et al., 2017). Hence, Norwegian parties are important arenas for decision-making. Moreover, they are critical players in the policy process because they have a strong control on the selection of candidates for parliamentary office (Bergman and Strøm, 2011, p. 210). In turn, the independence of the elected representatives is strongly protected due to a lack of recall or expulsion mechanisms and term limits in the constitution (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). Therefore, political parties and politicians are strong actors within the Norwegian political system.

The administrative actors are nonpartisan professionals that represent the interest of the organization where they are employed (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). At the national level, the civil servants are organized in agencies with different mandates. The number of these institutions and their employees is variable, however it tended to increase in number over time (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). They have a high degree of autonomy and party control over civil servant is weak. Politicians have little ex post control, as once they delegate the power to bureaucrats these have complete autonomy over decision-making. However, civil servants are constrained in their actions by their employment contracts and all decisions need to have the approval of the head of department. Hence, the minister's control is quite strong over the decision making (Bergman and

Strøm, 2011). Moreover, there is a strong ex ante system of control through the required credentials for the employment of administrative actors.

In the past two decades, there has been a tendency towards an increased autonomy of the public agencies, through reforms that follow a New Public Management perspective. However, the effects of these reforms on the policy-making process are still under debate (Bergman and Strøm, 2011).

The civil society is composed by all the organizations and individuals working closely with the government to advocate for the citizens' interests. They represent the spontaneous aggregation of citizens that come together to pursue a common interest. Civil society mainly include non-governmental organizations, interest groups and activists (Engelstad et al., 2017). Their role is to assure that issues that concern the citizens are integrated in the agenda setting, and that politicians work towards the solution of social problems. Thanks to a better education and an increased access to information, the citizens' capacity to sustain their personal interests and propose informed opinions has improved (Engelstad et al., 2017). Consequently, it also increased the demand for transparency and accountability in politics and civil service.

There is a high degree of coordination among the political, administrative and civil actors. They cooperate for the definition of policies and their implementation. Most of the coordination happens through informal channels and meetings, but committees represent important formal venues for the coordination of these actors (Afdal, 2012; Bergman and Strøm, 2011). Within the committees the actors bring forward their expertise and their interests, and they negotiate on specific issues. Since they tend to be relatively small, parliamentary committees are important for achieving legislative compromise (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). Moreover, they are closely controlled by the parliamentary leaders, who determine the decision making through coordination and supervision.

2.2.2.3 Policy-making process

Politicians, bureaucrats and civil society are all involved in the policy making process in Norway. Generally, the policy making process starts with the agenda setting and the recognition of the problem to resolve through a policy. An issue can be brought forward by the civil society through official channels, public opinion or the media, or it can be brought to the attention of politicians by the agencies or the departments (Afdal, 2012; Engelstad et al., 2017). However, the ultimate decision on the agenda setting is taken by the politicians.

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When a problem is identified and included in the policy agenda, the competent Ministry present a White Paper to the interested parties. The scope of this document is to analyse the problematic issue and define the context of action (Afdal, 2012). It might be formed a specific committee of experts and politicians to deal with the problem and propose policy solutions. In the formation of these committees and, in general, during the policy planning, politicians try to be as inclusive as possible to gain support and legitimacy for the proposal (Rust, 1990). This practice is particularly relevant during minority government. Studies have found that the actors involved in policy planning tend to prefer informal channels of relation rather than formal setting (Afdal, 2012), and they maintain continuous contacts.

The first policy draft is generally redacted by the agency or the department concerned with the issue. The draft is redacted following recommendations presented by the civil society. The civil servants adopt a remiss (høring) system for including the perspective of different actors in the policy proposal. They send the draft to the civil society, who can then comment and give recommendations about the proposal. A final draft is redacted taking into consideration these perspectives and it is then presented to the competent Ministry. The politicians are allowed to change the document with no restrictions and then present it to the Parliament. Therefore, politicians have a lot of power in defining the final outcome of the policy making process. This way of proceeding has been defined as the state control model for steering (Afdal, 2012, p.178).

Hence, Norwegian politics tries to be as inclusive as possible by giving the possibility to civil society to be involved in the policy making process. Nevertheless, the policy making process tend to be a highly political process, in which politicians hold a high degree of control and power. However, there is an evident trend towards a more complex policy-making process and an increased number of factors influencing the policymakers (Bergman and Strøm, 2011). This is a common international trend due to increased interdependencies caused by globalization. The traditional Scandinavian model has been influenced by international trends such as the NPM and the constraints of international relations. Although the main characteristics of this model remain stable in all the Nordic countries, their political systems are undergoing rapid changes (Engelstad et al., 2017).

3. Literature review of sexuality education

3.1. Defining the field and the topics of interest

Due to its social relevancy and political controversiality, sexuality education has been subject to extensive research. It is a current topic with a strong presence in the media and the public discourse, thus it is a relevant issue to study for researchers. Moreover, the controversial nature of the topic encourages researchers to produce studies that function as scientific evidence for opposing ideological discourses. International organizations such as the UNESCO (2016) call for the importance of grounding all policy decisions, including the ones concerning schools, on high-quality evidence. Hence, research is produced as support for evidence-based practices that legitimize sexuality education programs that otherwise would be hindered by ideological debates (UNESCO, 2009). Finally, sexuality education has connections with many different fields of studies, such as health, education, and psychology. Therefore, it attracts the attention of practitioners and researchers that work within and across these fields and are interested in its implications for theory and practice.

Considering the extensive number of studies concerning this topic, the aim of this chapter is not to present a complete review of the literature on sexuality education, as it would not be relevant for this study. Instead, the scope of this review is to outline the field of research of sexuality education and to present the main trends in the literature, identifying the major actors involved, the differences between distinct fields of research and the major focuses of the researchers. This summary delineates the research context of this study and it highlights the research gap that this thesis aims at closing.

As aforementioned, the term sexuality education includes different elements and practices spread across different sectors and levels of society. Hence, it is necessary to restrict the field of research to topics and practices that are relevant to this study. Therefore, I focus on literature concerning studies on school sexuality education. This still leaves space for a multitude of different research focuses that range from the theories that stand behind sexuality education programs, to their planning and their final outcomes. Studies on sexuality education in schools are quite diverse and, while they present some common characteristics, they also show many differences in term of theoretical focus and methods (Roien et al., 2018). Most of the literature is perceived as a science-based support for the development and improvement of sexuality education programs. It offers

practical suggestions drawn from the scientific evidence. However, different researchers have decided to focus on different elements of the development process of these programs.

First, there are studies that focus on providing theoretical support for the means and contents of the programs. These studies include sociological, psychological, and pedagogical theories that recognize the validity of certain teaching methodologies, as well as identify the appropriate content for a specific age. This kind of studies are a small part of the literature on sexuality education (Roien et al., 2018) and they lay their basis on theories borrowed from other fields of research, such as feminist and gender studies or power and relation theories (Haberland, 2015; Bruess and Schroeder, 2013). Social learning theory is a widely applied theory used to explain the impact that education can have in a social matter such as sexuality education (Hogben and Byrne,1998). Moreover, the request for more inclusive and comprehensive programs determines an increase in the studies using queer theories and critical pedagogical approaches that help understanding and including minorities' perspectives (Gougeon, 2009; Sumara and Davis, 1999).

Second, there are studies that focus on the actual practices of sexuality education programs. This type of studies analyses the effect of existing programs with the double aim of evaluating them (Haberland, 2015) and defining best practices (UNESCO, 2016). Most of the studies belonging to this branch of the literature have a strictly public health perspective and they analyse the effect of the programs through changes in abortion rates, use of contraceptives and STDs rates. However, there is an increase in the use of qualitative methods to identify unpredictable outcomes (UNESCO, 2016; Roien et al., 2018). These studies vary consistently in their focus and scope.

Finally, there is a branch of research that focuses on the planning and development of sexuality education programs. This kind of studies focuses on the stakeholders involved in the process, or on decisions and actions that lead to the formation of these programs. These studies usually adopt a public policy or social change perspective and aim at understanding the processes behind these programs and identifying success and hindering factors (Thomson, 1994; Ogusky and Tenner, 2010).

The aim of most of this literature is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programs. In this way, they can validate the existing programs and outline best practices and guidelines for planning new programs. Scientific evidence is a compelling argument in ideological debates because it provides an unbiased perspective on the topic. Thanks to the impartiality and soundness of the scientific method, every faction should accept these studies (UNESCO, 2016). However, research

on sexuality education receives many criticisms because not all studies respect these criteria and evidence is often used in a politicized way (Haberland, 2015). The same researchers who conduct studies on sexuality education highlight the risk laying on the choice of a methodology. Choosing a certain methodology or focus can pre-determine the outcomes of the research, hence creating a bias in the study (Haberland, 2015).

Creating unbiased research is one of the main challenges of the literature on sexuality education. Even the authors who identify this risk, recognize that it is very hard to avoid it (Haberland, 2015). As for many studies in social sciences, the choice of a standpoint in the analysis automatically determines what outcomes will be included in the research. One solution for reducing the risk of biasness is combining different methodologies and using qualitative methods that will ease the inclusion of unpredicted variables in the study (UNESCO, 2016).

The actors involved in the production of literature on sexuality education can be divided in two major groups. On one side, there are studies conducted by individual academics or groups of academics. These studies mostly come from the United States (Roien et al., 2018). Undoubtedly, the language and the academic context influence the origin of the studies. However, the high number of studies in the United States depends also on the intensity of the sexuality education debate in the country. There, sexuality education programs are highly contested, thus there is a strong need of evidence to advocate in favour or against them. On the other side, there is a part of research that is produced by international and non-governmental organizations such as the UNESCO, the IPPF and the WHO. These organizations commission studies to support their advocacy work and to gain information on the state of art of policies and practices in the field. Organizations use these studies during conferences and political meetings as support for their proposals. This research has an international perspective on the topic of sexuality education and aims at identifying best practices to use as example and finding areas of improvement.

Therefore, literature on sexuality education receives many inputs from different channels and it has very practical implications. Research is used for the active development of new policies and as an advocate tool in contested decisions. I will now analyse more in depth the literature focusing on the effects of sexuality education, and on policies and politics. In this way I will contextualize the importance of my study in closing a research gap in the literature of sexuality education.

3.2 Effect of sexuality education programs

Studying the effects of sexuality education programs is highly relevant because the results provide evidence for their success or failure. Evidence of the outcomes of the programs function as leverage for the support of certain programs over others (UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, these studies aim at evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs with a double scope. On one hand, they have an accountability function for the proponents and implementers of the programs, who can provide scientific evidence of the outcomes of their work. On the other hand, understanding their strengths and weaknesses allows to improve the existing programs and to identify best practices and guidelines for the development of new ones. Hence, many researchers end their discussion part with practical suggestions on how to use the data emerged from the research in practice (UNESCO, 2016; Haberland, 2015; Pound et al., 2017).

These studies need to appeal to different political parties, as well as to the general public. Therefore, they need to develop scientifically sound methodologies and relevant measures to evaluate the programs. As aforementioned, there are disagreements on how to do this in practice, as there is not a consensus yet on what are the measures that determine the effectiveness of a program (Haberland, 2015). The studies conducted on the effects of the programs have mainly focused on measuring biological outcomes through the analysis of fluctuations in STDs transmission's or abortion's rates (Haberland and Rogow, 2015; UNESCO, 2016). These variables are objective and give a clear and unbiased definition of the effectiveness of a program from a purely public health perspective. The use of quantitative measures reflects the positivistic approach to research prevalent in the public health literature (Glanz et al., 2008). This approach perceives reality as objective, hence objectively measurable. The UNESCO, for example, calls for Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) as the best method for producing high-quality evidence with objective results.

Nevertheless, researchers note that RCTs and quantitative measures of biological outcomes are expensive and complex processes (Haberland and Rogow, 2015). Therefore, they often need to rely on measurements of behavioural outcomes, collected through self-assessment and self-report of the target population. However, behavioural data are considered limited measures of programs' effectiveness (Haberland and Rogow, 2015). In addition, the word 'effectiveness' itself is understood differently in different contexts depending on the objectives and efforts of the program (UNESCO, 2016). Moreover, researchers highlight the difficulty in identifying key factors that remain consistent across different studies, despite recognizing many variables that influence the outcome of a program (Haberland, 2015). These

variables include social aspects, such as age, gender and social extraction, the presence of other related programs, and the focus. Hence, even the studies that aim at maximum objectivity are at risk of missing unexpected outcomes and create biased research.

Recognizing the difficulty of creating fully objective studies, researchers are now trying to aim at a broader understanding of the outcomes of the programs (UNESCO, 2016; Pound et al., 2017). Therefore, they prefer qualitative methods because they allow to expose outcomes and variables that would otherwise remain concealed. The use of qualitative methods advances together with the broadening of the scope of sexuality education programs. CSE programs involve many social and psychological aspects that quantitative measures would fail to address. Although the biological component of sexuality is still at the core of the programs, elements such as self-esteem, psycho-social well-being, security, and self-expression are gaining increasing relevance for young people. However, they are very complex factors and each person hold a different understanding of their expression (UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, quantitative data might overlook highly relevant elements of their complexity, hence failing to understand when they are effective. Nevertheless, qualitative studies are subjected to the same time and resources constraint as the quantitative ones. Therefore, these studies can only analyse small populations or limited numbers of programs, with the risk of losing representativeness. Still, they allow to identify a higher number of variables and have a better understanding of the outcomes of the programs.

Despite the similarities in the overall scope and methodologies, the literature focusing on the effects of the programs is highly diversified (Roien et al., 2018). First, there are differences in the geographical location of the studies. There is a much higher concentration of studies focusing on the US context and on developing countries, while within the European context the United Kingdom is the most studied country (Roien et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2009). Moreover, the studies target different populations. Most of the research focus on the pupils subjected to the programs, but there is an increased attention towards other actors involved in the programs, such as teachers and parents (Roien et al., 2018). In addition, some studies focus on specific subgroups of the population, such as at-risk adolescent, specific age groups, and students with disabilities (Roien et al., 2018). The focus on limited segments of the population and specific practices depends on the geographical and cultural context of the study (UNESCO, 2016). For example, in Europe there is a wider acceptance of sexuality education programs, thus researchers focus mostly on the effectiveness of new policies and practices, such as peer-to-peer education or the use of internet and social media (Milburn, 1995; von Rosen et al., 2017). Whilst in the United States, where sexuality education is still a highly

contested topic, researchers focus on traditional practices, such as abstinence-only programs (Santelli et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Roien and colleagues (2018) highlight a higher percentage of studies focusing on non-conservative practices, defined as the practices that have a different scope rather than a strictly biological one. On one side, these practices require strong evidence for their support to overcome the opposition of conservative groups. On the other, being more complex and focusing on different topics they allow for a wider variety of studies. Moreover, the emergence of political and feminist movements, such as the MeToo movement, increased the attention towards specific outcomes of sexuality education programs, such as setting boundaries and empowerment. Hence, the literature on sexuality education will likely follow these trends and focus on these specific outcomes. Nevertheless, the methodological problem remains because these are variables that are hard to measure. Mixed-methods research is then essential for considering the multiple aspects of effectiveness in the educational setting and for the lives of the young people (UNESCO, 2016).

However, literature reviews that collect the results of these studies have a methodological problem as well. To create rigorous academic studies, literature reviews only include studies with sound methodologies. However, only a minority of the existing studies do have rigorous methodologies, hence causing the risk of misrepresentation of the existing literature and of the possible effects (UNESCO, 2009; Haberland, 2015). Therefore, despite the high quantity and relevancy of studies in this field of research, evaluations of sexuality education programs need strong methodological improvement for accurately reflecting practice (UNESCO, 2016).

3.3 Non-academic literature of international organizations

A consistent part of the literature on sexuality education comes from non-academic sources, such as national and international organizations that work with topics related to sexuality education. The most relevant part of this literature is produced by international non-governmental and governmental organizations. Each of these organizations focus on specific aspects of sexuality education depending on their mandate, such as public health in the case of the WHO and education for the UNESCO. In addition to these two organizations, other important actors in the field are the IPPF, UNWOMEN, UNAIDS and the UNFPA. However, these organizations work across sectors and they adopt a holistic view of sexuality education in which each aspect is connected and influence all the others (UNESCO, 2016). Hence, the physical, psychological, social, and

economical aspects are all relevant for each organization and they are all considered when developing studies or writing reports.

Producing information in the form of reports, books, pamphlets, and guidelines is a fundamental part of these organizations' work because it provides supports for their advocacy work. These studies function primarily as supporting evidence for the work of the organizations (UNESCO, 2016). On one side, they promote future work of the organizations by highlighting the need of improvement in certain areas or advocating for the use of specific practices. On the other side, they evaluate the accomplishments of the organizations providing accountability and leverage for their past work. Organizations use these studies both internally, with the scope of improving their work, as well as externally, presenting them as evidence to policy makers and legislators to advocate for financial and political support.

Most of the studies conducted by international organizations focus on developing countries, as they are the ones in most need of improvement concerning sexuality education (UNESCO, 2016). In addition, whilst it is easier to justify interventions in these areas thanks to easily identifiable life-threatening problems and the definition of clear objectives, these countries need strong advocacy work for overcoming cultural opposition to sexuality education programs and for prioritizing certain programs over others. An example is the document produced by UNESCO in collaboration with the UNFPA and the UNAIDS Secretariat "Emerging Evidence, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education – A Global Review 2015" in which they analyse the state of art of sexuality education worldwide with a specific focus on African and Asian countries. From the document, it emerges the importance that other reports and guidelines produced by international organization have in shaping and controlling sexuality education programs. Moreover, the document emphasizes the need for continue advocacy and support to achieve global delivery of CSE.

Despite the concentration of studies in developing countries, it is possible to find many studies that focus on the European context, the geographical area of interests for this study. The major producer of studies in this setting are the European affiliated offices, such as the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), or regional offices, such as the IPPF European Network, of international organizations. These offices have a strategic interest in focusing on the European context, as they deal with European countries as well as with the European Union. The studies produced by these organization are comparative analysis of case studies investigating multiple countries or programs with the scope of outlining the state of art and identifying the best practices.

The most recent and relevant example of a comparative study is the "Comprehensive report on Sexuality Education in Europe and Central Asia" published in 2018 and developed by the BzGA and the IPPF EN. This study aimed at closing the knowledge gap on the status of sexuality education within the European region. The report analyses the data collected through an extensive survey on the developments and current status of sexuality education in 25 selected countries of the WHO European Region. The data considered many different aspects of sexuality education, such as policies and strategies, stakeholders, organization and good practices. It emphasizes a rapid development in the field since the last analysis conducted in 2006. Unfortunately, Norway is not included in the study. However, it was included in the 2006 IPPF EN report, which highlighted the advanced status of sexuality education in Norway but reported the need of increased effort to fight the spread of chlamydia and STDs in general (IPPF EN, 2006). These studies have the double scope of mapping practices and stakeholders in the European territory, and to identify areas of improvement in which both the single countries and the international organizations must focus their work.

In addition, the European organizations produce guidelines and recommendations for the European states. These studies are based on in-depth case studies on specific countries or programs for identifying success and hindering factors. The data collected through these studies are then compared to define best practices and suggestions, that can guide the work of local organizations and national governments. An example of these studies are the policy briefs produced by the BzGA in collaboration with the UNFPA and the WHO Regional Office for Europe. These organizations published in 2017 a series of policy briefs that provide context for the delivery of sexuality education and suggest key steps for implementing and advocating for sexuality education programs (BZga, 2018).

The studies produced by international organizations have high influence power and visibility thanks to the prestige that their authors hold. Thus, they are very effective in influencing sexuality education trends. International organizations, in particular those belonging to the UN, are renown worldwide and they are considered experts in their field of mandate. Moreover, they have access to privileged channels of diffusions, as well as to the most important policy venues for advocating for sexuality education. Hence, their studies play a fundamental role in influencing the policy-making of sexuality education in schools. However, organizations rely also on academic studies for their advocacy work because they provide the prestige of scientific evidence and the depth of academic works.

3.4 Sexuality, politics and policies

As presented in the Background chapter, sexuality education holds a strong political component and advocacy campaigns and conflicts of interest are an inevitable part of the development of sexuality education programs. Therefore, some authors have decided to focus on the relations between sexuality education and politics. In this case, politics refers both to the ideological contrasts and power relations among the actors involved, as well as to the decision-making process that leads to the formation of sexuality education policies.

On one hand, researchers have focused on the relationship between sexuality education and society, trying to understand the moral and political implications that sexuality education programs have on society. Thomson (1994) and Mckay (1997) reflect on the social divisions and contrasts that sexuality and, in turn, sexuality education provoke on society. They highlight the strong moral component that sexuality education holds and that eventually leads to strong ideological debates in which different beliefs and world perspective clash with no possibility of an agreement. In the first part of Sear's book (1992) four authors reflect on the implications that these moral conflicts have on the formation of the curriculum of sexuality education programs. Each group advocates in support of its own personal interest and moral beliefs, hence transforming or censoring the curriculum based on their concerns, rather than on the best possible outcome. Therefore, this type of studies shows the importance that personal beliefs play in the formation of sexuality education policies, hence confirming the appropriateness of using the ACF as theoretical framework.

On the other hand, there are studies that analyse the policy process that have led to the definition of sexuality education policies. These researches focus on the decisions and interactions that construct the process of policy formation, highlighting the hindering and facilitating factors. International organizations produce information in this field identifying the social and political process that in different countries determined the introduction of a national curriculum (BZgA, 2018; IPPF EN, 2006). These studies mostly use an historical perspective of the process and aim at highlighting salient points in the development of policies. Researchers studying this process have focused mainly on the UK political context (Thomson, 1994; Monk, 2001; Meredith, 1989), although other political contexts are present as well (Ogusky and Tenner, 2010). The analysis conducted by these researchers aims at understanding the development of interactions and the role that ideological conflict has played in determining the decision-making process. Thomson (1994) and Ogusky and Tenner (2010) focused on the advocacy work pursued by the stakeholders involved in the policy-process and the interactions that this work has generated. Monk (2001), on the other hand, has

focused on the result of these interaction analysing the attempt of policy change and their results, while Meredith (1989) emphasized the management of the implementation of sexuality education policies. This literature is highly relevant for this study because it aims at understanding how different stakeholders act in presence of a conflict of interest and what consequences these conflicts have on the policy process.

However, researchers often overlook this aspect of sexuality education focusing on the production of evidence for the support of advocacy work. Nevertheless, the correct use of evidence for an effective advocacy work require a thorough understanding of advocacy work itself. Comprehension of this phenomenon can be gained through the analysis of the processes and interactions involved in the formation and development of sexuality education policies. This study aims at contributing to the improvement of this comprehension thanks to the application of the ACF to the field of sexuality education. The application of this framework can provide interesting insights on the topic because it combines the processual aspect of the decision-making process with the interaction perspective of conflicting beliefs.

4. Theoretical Framework. The Advocacy Coalition Framework

4.1 The rationale for the choice

As aforementioned, sexuality education is a controversial topic, that generates animated debates and contrasts among its participants. It thus requires an adequate theoretical framework that can deal with the dual aspect of the topic, which includes a strong ideological component and a more practical aspect of policy-making. For this reason, I have decided to use the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as the main theoretical framework for my research. However, I decided to supplement this framework with concepts derived from the historical institutionalism (HI) approach, as it allows to better explain the contrast between the actors' effort to achieve policy change and the persistence of cultural and political institutions (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002).

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith developed the ACF in the late 1980s "to deal with "wicked" problems - those involving substantial goal conflicts, important technical disputes, and multiple actors from several levels of government" (Hoppe and Peterse in Sabatier and Weible, 2007, p. 189). Hence, it is an apt framework for studying sexuality education because it deals with ideological conflicts, while also involving a multiplicity of actors from different sectors and different levels of government. Moreover, the ACF is considered a sound framework thanks to its multiple revisions and various applications in the over 20 years since its appearance. The latest literature review identified over 130 studies from 25 countries that applied the ACF in almost 100 journals (Pierce, Peterson, Jones, Garrard and Vu, 2017). In fact, researchers have repeatedly tested and revised the framework to respond to the critics addressed to it. It is now considered a classic among the theories dealing with public policies (Balla, Lodge and Page, 2015).

Its ability to explain the policy process in the presence of controversial issues, such as sexuality education, makes the ACF an appropriate framework for this research. Furthermore, I believe that the application of the ACF to the case of sexuality education can bring great insights on the development of sexuality education policies. In addition, the application of the ACF to a new issue of study can provide insights and clarifications for the framework itself, confirming or redefying its hypotheses.

This chapter aims at giving a general understanding of the main concepts and scopes of the ACF to lay the basis for its operationalization and application to the context of sexuality education. Thus, the scope is to give an overview of the structure and development of the framework, not to provide a comprehensive literature review of the applications of the ACF. For this purpose, I suggest

looking at the special issue published in the *Policy Studies Journal* in 2011 by Weible and colleagues which highlights the theoretical focus of the applications and the subsequent revisions of the framework. For a comprehensive review of the methodologies and theories used in the ACF applications, I suggest looking at the literature review proposed by Pierce et al. (2017). In addition, a section is dedicated to an overview of the HI approach. I present relevant concepts and assumptions of the HI that support the ACF in providing a clear and thorough analysis of the empirical data.

4.2. Origins and further developments

The ACF was originally published in 1988 by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith as a symposium issue of *Policy Sciences*. The authors developed the framework to deal with the controversial policies on energy and environment in the US, which was their field of expertise. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith felt the need to conceive a new framework because they realised that the current literature presented strong limitations in the analysis of the policy process, such as the interpretation of the process as a series of steps, the need for system-based theories of policymaking and a lack of theory and research on the role of scientific and technical information (Weible, Sabatier and McQueen, 2009). They responded to these limitations with "a system-based model that integrates most of the stages of the policy cycle, incorporates aspects of both the top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation studies, and places scientific and technical information in a central position in many of its hypotheses" (Weible et al., 2009, p.122). The aim of the authors was to overcome the rigidity of the traditional theories of bounded rationality (cf. Jones, 2003) and policy cycles. Instead they wanted to create a comprehensive framework that could explain the complexity of the process that leads to policy decisions and policy change. In the ACF the policy process is presented as a non-linear and non-circular process in which the beliefs of multiple actors play a fundamental role in determining the direction of the decision-making process, which is influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors.

In 1988, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith presented a well-rounded framework with strongly developed concepts and a sound theoretical base. However, the framework was not exempted from critics for the lack of empirical base of certain assumptions and the need of further clarification on specific concepts. For this reason, in the following years, the authors have proposed new revisions and applications of the ACF. In 1993, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith coedited a book that drew a set of hypotheses about beliefs and policy change, science in policy and learning, and ended with a critical

assessment and further revisions of the framework (Weible et al., 2009). During the 1990s the framework acquired increased attention and more researchers decided to apply it to their research, thus widening its scope to new topics and countries. Extensive literature reviews have been conducted on the numbers, scopes and focus of articles dealing with the ACF. The 2009 literature review conducted by Weible, Sabatier and Mc Queen summarized more than 80 applications of the framework across almost 20 years. The results show the wide application of the framework. Even though most of the articles still deals with the environmental and energy issue, the literature has expanded to include economic and social issues. Moreover, the ACF have been widely applied to the European context, and fewer studies involve applications from Asia, Africa, Australia, South America and Canada. In addition, four studies applied the ACF on a global scale or comparatively across multiple countries. (Sabatier and Weible, 2007)

The increased scope in the application of the ACF has led to significant revisions of the framework to adjust its premises to different sectors and contexts (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). In particular, the framework has been adapted to deal with the corporativist regimes in Canada and Europe, as well as the authoritarian regimes in many developing countries. In both cases, the policy process and the influence of interest groups differ from the original application in the American pluralistic system. Another aspect that emerges from literature reviews is that the ACF is applied with a wide variety of methods, although qualitative methods and, specifically, interviews are the most widely applied (Pierce et al., 2017). Moreover, studies have concentrated on different theoretical focuses and have tried to prove different assumptions proposed by the ACF (Weible et al., 2009). However, hypotheses concerning coalitions' structures and external perturbation seem to attract much attention in respect to aspects such as the *devil shift* and policy brokers. Therefore, the consideration that emerges from analysing the ACF applications is that the framework has been expanded and revised, and it is now possible to adapt it to a great variety of political and cultural contexts.

4.3 Core elements and structure of the framework

4.3.1 The core elements of the ACF

The ACF is a rather complex framework that involves multiple levels of analysis and different elements that need to be considered. Its complexity originates from the need of a thorough description including all the actors and processes involved in the policy process. The ACF is considered an *actual framework* in the sense that it "provides a foundation for descriptive and

prescriptive inquiry by establishing a set of assumptions, scope, and general classifications and relations among key concepts" (Weible et al., 2011, p.351) and it supports multiple theoretical areas of emphasis. Moreover, Cairney (2012) defines the ACF as based on a *Lakatosian* approach to science because abandoning one or more of the core elements of the framework means to abandon the theory itself. Sabatier (1988) established four core elements that are essential when adopting the ACF: a) the policy subsystem as the primary unit of analysis of the framework, b) the need for a long-term time perspective for understanding actions within a subsystem, c) the aggregation of actors involved in policy subsystems into advocacy coalitions, and d) the interpretation of policy designs as translations of coalition beliefs.

The policy subsystem identifies all the actors that are involved in a specific geographical area and policy issue. The definition of policy subsystem broadens the traditional *iron triangle* conception to "include actors at various levels of government active in policy formulation and implementation, as well as journalists, researchers, and policy analysts who play important roles in the generation, dissemination, and evaluation of policy ideas" (Sabatier, 1988, p.131). Being the arena in which the policy process occurs, the policy subsystem is considered the central element of the ACF.

The ACF focuses on long-term perspective of a decade or more because it believes that a short-term perspective would underestimate the importance of policy research in altering the perceptions of policy-makers over time. Timespans of over a decade allow to understand the cumulative effect of research and ordinary knowledge over policies (Sabatier, 1988).

The actors' beliefs play a fundamental role in the application of the ACF because they determine the configuration of coalitions, as well as the definition and direction of policy actions. These elements of the ACF will be examined more in depth later.

4.3.2 The ACF system

The diagram illustrated in Figure 1 is Sabatier and Weible's revision (2007) of the diagram presented in 1988 and it includes further revisions and clarifications. The diagram aims at explaining and visualizing the complexity of the policy process, as well as the system of relations among different elements of the ACF.

As aforementioned, the central element of the system is the policy subsystem where the policy process occurs through the work of the advocacy coalitions. Here the actors transform their beliefs

into strategies that aim at changing the distribution of resources and the policy decisions. Nonetheless, the boxes on the left identify factors that are external to the policy subsystem and that determine the

RELATIVELY STABLE PARAMETERS

1. Basic attributes of the problem area (good)
2. Basic distribution of natural resources
3. Fundamental socio-cultural values and social structure
4. Basic constitutional structure (rules)

LONG TERM COALITION OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

1. Degree of consensus needed for major policy change.
2. Openness of political system.

EXTERNAL (SYSTEM) EVENTS

1. Changes in socio-economic conditions
2. Changes in public opinion
3. Changes in systemic governing coalition
4. Policy decisions and impacts from other subsystems

SHORT TERM CONSTRAINTS AND RESOURCES OF SUBSYSTEM ACTORS

POLICY SUBSYSTEM

Coalition A   Policy Brokers   Coalition B

a. Policy beliefs   a. Policy beliefs
b. Resources   b. Resources

Strategy re. guidance instruments   Strategy re. guidance instruments

Decisions by Governmental Authorities

Institutional Rules, Resource Allocations, and Appointments

Policy Outputs

Policy Impacts

Figure 1. Diagram of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. Sabatier and Weible (2007)

general context where the actors operate. In different ways, these factors influence the policy process occurring within the policy subsystem. The joint action of the elements within and without the subsystem defines the process that leads to policy change. Depending on what part of the diagram is studied, the ACF presents three levels of analysis of the policy process. Sabatier and Weible (2007) identify three *foundation stones* that reflect the level of analysis depending if we look at the whole system, if we focus on the policy subsystem or if we observe the actors within the policy subsystem.

The first assumption considers the macro-level perspective and assumes that most policymaking occurs among specialists within a policy subsystem, but that their behaviour is affected by factors in the broader political and socioeconomic system. The second assumption observes the micro-level using a *model of the individual* that draws heavily from social psychology and looks at the motivations moving individual actions towards policy change. Breaking with the economic tradition of bounded rationality, the ACF assumes that individuals are moved by their beliefs and ideologies, and that their actions are the result of their work to transform goals into concrete actions. The third

assumption is a meso-level conviction that advocacy coalitions are the most useful means of aggregating "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system -- i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions -- and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time." (Sabatier, 1988, p.139). Aggregating actors in advocacy coalitions facilitates the understanding of policy change over a long period of time. These foundations are essential for understanding changes in beliefs and policies. I will now analyse more in depth each of the three levels of analysis.

4.3.2.1 The macro level: policy subsystems and perturbations

The macro level of analysis considers the whole policy process using the policy subsystem as its core element. Even though it is considered a closed system, a policy subsystem is embedded in a political, economic and societal system that influence the individuals as well as the collectives within the policy subsystem. The ACF introduces the concept of policy subsystem to overcome the rigidity and limitations determined by traditional theories that would only considered the formal actors involved in the policy process. Instead, the policy subsystem considers every actor, both in an individual as well as in an aggregated form, involved in influencing or acting within the subsystem scope. The aim of the framework is to include all those actors that are excluded from official policy channels, but that have a strong influence in determining policy change. In particular, it is interested in the role of scientists and researchers in influencing the policy process through the production of knowledge. In an era in which evidence-based policy-making is a strong governance model, this is ever more relevant (Cairney, 2016).

As previously mentioned, the policy subsystem is influenced by external elements that affect the behaviour of policy participants. The ACF identifies two sets of exogenous factors that impact the policy subsystem, one fairly stable and the other quite dynamic (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

The upper-left box of Sabatier's diagram (Figure 1) shows the first set of factors, the so-called relatively stables parameters, which influence the policy process in a fairly consistent way over a decade long period. The stables parameters include the basic attributes of the problem (i.e. the causes of STDs or unwanted pregnancies), the basic distribution of natural resources, fundamental sociocultural values and structures (i.e. the perception of Norway as a liberal country), and the basic constitutional structure. These stable exogenous factors rarely change over the course of a decade, but they are fundamental for understanding the resources and constraints within which policy

participants must operate (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). They represent the institutional setting that provide the context of action and the traditional norms and procedures. Guided by the imbedded values of society and their own personal beliefs, actors can decide to comply or disrupt these institutions, hence determining different courses of action (March and Olsen, 2006).

The second set of external variables (lower left box of Figure 1) are the dynamic exogenous factors which are likely to change repeatedly over the course of a decade. The dynamic factors include changes in socioeconomic conditions, changes in the governing coalition, and policy decisions from other subsystems. Due to their likelihood to change within a ten years period they are critical elements in affecting major policy change (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). However, further applications of the ACF have determined that changes in the exogenous factors are a necessary condition for major policy change, but they are not sufficient (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

Both sets of factors, stable and dynamic, affect the resources and constraints of subsystem actors, which in turn affect policymaking within the subsystem. If the first set of parameters determines the kind of actors that are involved and the nature of their interactions, the second set defines the arena in which policy conflict happens. The actors compete to exploit the opportunity windows that open when dynamic factors change.

The central boxes of the diagram (Figure 1) show the new definition of the mediating variables between the exogenous factors and the policy subsystem. Sabatier and Weible (2007) outlined this redefinition in response to the critiques made to the limited applicability of the ACF. They added a new category of variables, the coalition opportunity structures, that mediate between stable system parameters and the subsystem. In defining this concept, the authors borrowed heavily from the literature on political opportunity structures, which provides a strong European perspective and allows the ACF to expand its applicability (cf. Kriesi et al, 1995 and McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 1996)

The two sets of variables included in the political opportunity structures are the degree of consensus needed for major policy change and the openness of political systems. These variables analyse both the formal and informal institutions, as their combination provides a realistic representation of the nature of interactions within the policy subsystem (March and Olsen, 2006). Looking at only one of the two setting could hamper the observation of constraints and opportunities for the policy participants. The first set of variables implies that if a high degree of consensus is required for policy change, coalitions have more incentives to be inclusive in seeking

compromise and in sharing information with their opponents. Instead, the openness of the political system is a function of two variables on the decision-making venues for major policy proposals: (1) their number and (2) their accessibility. Corporatist systems, such as in European countries, tend to be much more closed than pluralistic systems, with fewer venues and fewer actors involved. However, contrarily to what Sabatier and Weible (2007) affirm, not all European countries are pure corporatist systems. As seen in chapter 2.2.2.1, Norway can be considered a corporate pluralistic state or neo-corporatist state, with a high number of actors involved and numerous regulated venues (Bergman and Strøm, 2011; Engelstad et al., 2017).

As we saw in Figure 1, both sets of exogenous factors impact the *mediating* set of variables which in turn influence the policy subsystem. The major impact on the overall framework is through the translation of relatively stable parameters into more specific constraints and resources affecting policymaking in the long run (Sabatier and Weible, 2007, p. 201). These parameters are embedded in the political and cultural context of action. Thus, on one side, they influence profoundly the actions of the policy participants. On the other, they are hard to change in a short-time span (March and Olsen, 2006). In addition, coalition opportunity structures impact short-term resources and constraints, which in turn are influenced by dynamic parameters that open up windows of opportunities that need to be exploited by different coalitions for achieving policy change. These parameters can determine optimal conjunctures that initiate process of de-institutionalization, in which institutionalized practices and beliefs are replaced by the emerging ones (Oliver, 1992).

Therefore, the policy subsystem deals with multiple external variables that complicate the analysis of policy change. Nonetheless, this complexity allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the policy process.

4.3.2.2 The micro-level: the model of the individual and the three levels of beliefs.

One of the core assumptions of the ACF considers the policy process as a translation of belief systems held by the policy participants. In the first definition of the framework, Sabatier (1988) explains that "public policies (or programs) can be conceptualized in the same manner as belief systems, i.e. as sets of value priorities and causal assumptions about how to realize them"(p.131) and they "involve value priorities, perceptions of important causal relationships, perceptions of world states (including the magnitude of the problem), perceptions of the efficacy of policy

instruments, etc."(p.132). Individuals and organizations enter the policy system to transform their values and beliefs into tangible goals, and they perform concrete actions to transform them into legislations or policy programs. In opposition to the bounded rationality theories, the ACF recognizes that policy participants' behaviours can follow two different logics, one based on the appropriateness of following rules, and one based on maximizing good consequences (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). On one hand, the *logic of appropriateness* is linked to a feeling of belonging and trust that bounds the actors to the external context and to other policy participants. The *logic of outcomes*, on the other hand, aims at changing rapidly the institutional setting for achieving the actors' objective and, hence, it is linked to a context of conflict or urgency (March and Olsen, 2006).

Policy actors possess a set of perceptual filters composed of pre-existing beliefs deeply embedded in the individuals and they use them to relate to the world (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). These beliefs become embedded in the individual and society through a process of acquisition, learning and legitimacy. Over time, the actors develop a strong link with certain values because they receive legitimization from the external context and, hence, become part of the individual identity (Zucker, 1991). The ACF organizes these beliefs in a hierarchical system depending on the depth and width of their application. The deeper and wider their application, the stronger they are embedded in an individual and the harder it is to change them.

The widest level of the belief system is the deep core beliefs level which refers to the general assumptions that people hold over humanity and society. This kind of beliefs goes extensively beyond the scope of a policy subsystem to include every aspect of human life. They are "very general normative and ontological assumptions about human nature" (Sabatier and Weible, 2007, p. 94). They also determine the priority of certain values over others. Deep core beliefs outline individuals' general view of politics because they define the priority of certain issues over others, as well as which social and non-social groups should have priority in decision-making. The positioning on the left or right spectrum of politics is determined by the deep core beliefs (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). They become embedded in the individual through childhood education and socialization, hence they are very hard to modify. Change requires a strong shock or dissonance and it is assimilated to a religious conversion. Therefore, changes in the deep core beliefs are rarely observed in time span of a decade, or either they require a conjunction of many elements for completing a de-institutionalization process (Oliver, 1992).

At a more narrow level of the belief system, Sabatier (1988) puts the policy core beliefs, that also translate into policy core policy preferences. They are more specific in scope than deep core beliefs as they refer to the policy subsystem, but they are still rather wide as they might embrace few connected areas of interests. Essentially, they are the transposition of the deep core beliefs into a more specific and tangible aspect of life. They are highly salient because they provide a concrete vision that steers the strategic behaviour of advocacy coalitions to realize their deep core beliefs. Policy core policy preferences are the strongest motivation for policy participants to stick together because they define specific instruments or proposals for transforming the policy subsystem in how it ought to be. Policy core policy preferences are the major cause of conflict within a subsystem. They hold a very strong ideological component and their tight connection with the deep core beliefs makes them hard to change. However, they are more tangible and narrow in scope, therefore change is more likely to happen at this level than at the deep core level. Nevertheless, change in policy core beliefs requires a strong dissonance between the individual's beliefs and reality.

At the narrowest level, there are the secondary beliefs. They have a very limited scope as they address very specific questions or issues. They can refer to specific aspects of a program, budgeting or the seriousness of a problem. They are strongly instrumental, and they are not connected to ideologies. On the contrary, they do not necessarily correspond to policy core beliefs. For this reason, they are much easier to change, and they are the subjects of most policy discussions. They are the major area of agreement between different coalitions.

The ACF model of the individual explains in a persuasive manner the escalation and continuation of policy conflict (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The presence of strong ideologies justifies the constant presence of conflict in some policy subsystems. Sabatier (1988) strengthens this idea by using the concept of *devil shift*. This concept explains why disagreements between coalitions with different beliefs are so hard to overcome and they tend to continue with no solution. The devil shift conceptualizes the tendency of individuals to perceive the opposite coalitions as less trustworthy, more evil, and more powerful than they are in reality (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). This applies also to the information presented by the opposite coalitions or even by neutral actors, if it is in contrast with their beliefs. Coalitions tend to filter this information through the lens determined by their beliefs and reject it if it forms a cognitive dissonance with their own beliefs.

Beliefs systems are at the base of all the actions within the policy subsystem. They function as the underlying motivation that guide policy participants. Moreover, they explain the interaction among different actors because policy participants tend to cooperate with those holding similar beliefs and

fight the ones with contrasting beliefs. In the next chapter, I explain how beliefs determine the formation of advocacy coalitions.

4.3.2.3 The meso level: Advocacy coalitions, resources and strategies

The meso level of analysis aims at aggregating actors through their beliefs (the micro-level) to simplify the analysis of their actions within the policy subsystem (the macro-level). Sabatier identified advocacy coalitions as the most useful way to aggregate actors. Advocacy coalitions are "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system -- i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions -- and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (Sabatier, 1988, p.139). The concept of advocacy coalitions aims at moving forward from the traditional notion of *iron triangle* to include all the actors that are involved or influence in some way the policy process.

The actors operating within the policy subsystem hold strong beliefs and policy preferences over the core issue of the subsystem. Policy participants aim at translating these beliefs into tangible policies. To do so, they seek allies that hold the same beliefs and have the same goal. In this way they will support each other to actualize their will. Even if the status quo reflects the actors' beliefs, they have to act in order to prevent their opponents to succeed in imposing their view (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). Therefore, the policy process is in constant motion and the actors involved in it must be constantly active. Thus, policy making is structured by informal networks of policy participants, the advocacy coalitions. To be considered as part of an advocacy coalition, actors must be engaged in a non-trivial degree of coordination. This means that they have to be actively working together to achieve policy objectives. Advocacy coalitions provide a significant and helpful simplification as they aggregate the behaviour of hundreds of organizations and individuals involved in a policy subsystem hence making the analysis of their behaviour much easier.

To achieve their goals, advocacy coalitions must strategically manage the resources available in the policy subsystem. Resources are a fundamental element of the ACF because they determine the actual possibility for advocacy coalitions to transform their beliefs into concrete policy programs. Sabatier (1988) explains that "while belief systems will determine the *direction* in which an advocacy coalition (or any other political actor) will seek to move governmental programs, *its ability to do so* will be critically dependent upon its resources" (p.143). The ACF identifies six relevant resources that policy participants use in their efforts to influence the policy process.

a) Formal legal authority to make policy decisions. This feature is considered as the most important resource that a coalition can possess. Dominant coalitions generally have more actors in positions of legal authority than minority coalitions. This gives them a favourable position because it allows to control important policy venues, as well as to have a strong influence on the decision-making process (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

b) Public opinion. The support of the public is a fundamental resource for coalitions because it allows them to succeed in their strategy for achieving formal legal authority. A favourable public opinion allows to win elections and to strengthen lobby campaigns. Therefore, coalitions need to spend a lot of time gaining the favour of the public.

c) *Information.* Coalitions use information to strengthen their membership, to support their argument against the opponents and to influence the opinion of the public and relevant officials. Information presents relevant aspects of the policy subsystem's issue, such as its severity, causes and costs, and benefits of policy alternatives. Information can be distorted to support coalitions' arguments.

d) Mobilizable troops. This feature refers to members of the attentive public who share coalitions' beliefs. These individuals can engage in various political activities in support of the coalitions' goals, such as public demonstrations and campaigns. They are a valuable resource because they are inexpensive.

e) *Financial resources.* Their relevance depends on the fact that they can be used to purchase and increase other resources.

d) Skilful leadership. Policy entrepreneurs are important because they create and communicate a shared vision for the coalitions and they can attract more resources. Skilful entrepreneurs are considered necessary for actual changes in policy to happen.

Most of the literature on ACF has focused on the beliefs system, whilst distribution and use of resources needs further empirical investigation. Nohrstedt (2011), and Ingold (2011) have explored how changes in the distribution of coalition's resources contribute to policy change. However, empirical applications raise more challenges and questions, especially on how to measure different resources. (Weible et al., 2011)

The combination of the beliefs system and the resources available in a policy subsystem determine the strategy adopted by each advocacy coalition to bring forward or maintain their interests.

Different strategies from conflicting coalitions will fight for application and the power structures and policy brokers will determine the result of the conflict. Advocacy coalitions may revise their strategy on the basis of perceived adequacy of governmental decisions, as well as new information resulting from research or external dynamics (Sabatier, 1988).

4.4 Theoretical focus within the ACF: Advocacy coalitions, policy-oriented learning and policy change

In the 2011 special issue in The *Policy Journal*, Weible, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith clarify that the ACF can be usefully used as an *actual framework* providing a general set of assumptions and concepts to support multiple theoretical areas of emphasis. A framework offers the "foundation for descriptive and prescriptive inquiry by establishing a set of assumptions, scope, and general classifications and relations among key concepts" (Weible et al, 2011, p. 351).

In the previous chapter, I mentioned the core assumptions of the ACF: the policy subsystem as the primary unit of analysis; a long-term perspective; actors aggregated into coalitions and policy designs interpreted as a translation of beliefs. This set of assumptions have been used by different researchers to focus on different areas of interest within the ACF. The ACF literature has identified three major theoretical focuses (or theories for Pierce et al., 2017): Advocacy Coalitions, Policy-Oriented Learning and Policy Change. Some researchers (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999) include policy-oriented learning as a subcategory of policy change, but most of the studies separates them as two different theoretical focuses. Weible et al. (2011) believe that "theories provide the best analytical approach for developing and testing hypotheses within the ACF" (p.355). I will now present more in depth each theoretical focus.

4.4.1 Advocacy Coalitions

The theory on Advocacy Coalitions[3] is the most widely used in the ACF literature (Pierce et al., 2017). Advocacy coalitions represent the meso-level of analysis of the ACF and examine the behaviour of policy participants through aggregate forms of coalitions. Researchers that focus on Advocacy Coalitions examine questions related to identification and formation of coalitions,

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[3] Advocacy Coalitions (capitalized) refer to the theoretical focus, while advocacy coalitions (lowercase) refer to the aggregation of actors

coalition stability over time, degree of shared beliefs, coordination, and expression of actors' viewpoint (Pierce et al., 2017). Sabatier (2007, p.195) suggests that operationalizing two or three policy core beliefs is sufficient to identify at least two advocacy coalitions. However, he also recommends operationalizing as many components of policy core beliefs as possible, because different coalitions can emerge from disagreements over components of policy core beliefs. Researchers focusing on identifying advocacy coalitions have found different numbers of advocacy coalitions present in a policy subsystem, ranging from 0 to 5. However, more than half of the studies identified 2 coalitions (Weible et al., 2009).

The most commonly tested hypothesis in the ACF literature concerns the stability of coalitions over time (Weible et al., 2009). Nevertheless, recent research has showed that advocacy coalition are not fixed entities. Instead, they change over time to adapt to the changing environment. Researchers have tried to explain the coalition instability and defection. They have identified multiple factors that can cause changes in the structure of a coalition. First, changes can be caused by internal factors. For instance, a dominant coalition could split as a result of a shift to different preferences for core policy alternatives, or extreme coalition members may abandon coalitions to prevent the adoption of "balanced" policies. Second, research shows that coalition instability and defection can depend on relatively stable parameters and political opportunity structures, such as actors strive for increasing their political influence. Finally, changes can depend on the diversity of beliefs among members of the coalition. Studies have shown that researchers should not assume homogeneity in beliefs within a coalition. (Weible et al., 2009)

4.4.2 Policy-Oriented learning

Policy-oriented learning is defined as "relatively enduring alternations of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999, 123). The ACF hypothesize that the capacity of policy-oriented learning to determine policy change depends on the level of the belief system. Deep core beliefs and policy core beliefs, due to their normative nature, are very resistant to change and they seldom respond to new information. Instead, secondary beliefs are hypothesized to be more open to new information and, consequently, to policy-oriented learning. Their narrow scope requires less evidence and fewer individuals need to change their beliefs for learning to happen. (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

Policy-oriented learning involves an internal feedback loop (see Figure 1) determined by the input of new information in the policy subsystem regarding the perceptions of external dynamics and increased knowledge about the policy problem. The new information improves the actors' knowledge on the parameters and factors influencing the issue at the centre of the policy subsystem. Policy-oriented learning is a slow process and the input of new information within a policy subsystem might take ten years or more to have an effect on policy participant. Moreover, it is more likely to have a minor impact on policy change and affect mostly secondary beliefs (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). As suggested by Oliver (1992), processes of de-institutionalization that lead to changes in mainstream values and behaviour might require a long time to have an effect and often require a conjuncture of events and settings for happening.

A minor policy-learning can happen within a coalition when information circulates among its participants. This is more likely to happen when there is a dissonance between the coalition's beliefs and the information presented. Policy participants need to deal with the new information and decide whether to accept it or reject it. This kind of learning can take a long time because the information is filtered through the lens of the participants' belief system. Moreover, this kind of learning only happens at a more superficial level, such as at the secondary level or certain aspects of the policy core policy preferences, because the deep core beliefs require a much stronger shock in order to be changed, and information that would contrast with the actors' core beliefs would be discarded as unreliable or simply ignored.

A more significant type of policy-oriented learning is the cross-coalition learning, which happens at the macro-level of the policy subsystem. In this case information flows through the whole policy subsystem, affecting every coalition. Policy participants organize institutional settings where the new information and its consequences can be discussed. *Professional forums* are considered to facilitate cross-coalition learning because they allow coalitions to safely negotiate, agree, and implement agreements (Weible et al., 2009, p.124). In addition, the ACF identifies the conditions when cross-coalition learning is more likely to occur: a) discussions should focus on secondary beliefs, b) the issues are technical or tractable, c) the conflict is at intermediate levels, and d) there is a professional forum (Weible et al.,2009).

The process leading to policy-oriented learning is complex and requires a strong investment of time and resources from the policy participants. Information concerning the seriousness of a problem and its features builds over time within a policy subsystem. First, findings are presented to the public by scientists and researchers. They are challenged by those actors that perceive them as contrasting

with their beliefs. Their opposition starts an analytical debate which slowly changes the beliefs of the actors involved and leads to changes in governmental actions. (Sabatier, 1988) The information challenges the cultural and political institutions that need to adapt and embrace the new institutional setting (Thomson, 1994; Oliver, 1992).

4.4.3 Policy Change

The theory of Policy Change includes elements from both the Advocacy Coalitions and Policy-Oriented Learning. The focus of this theory is on the elements and means that determine change in the policy subsystem. Change can refer to a modification in the legislation or to a variation in norms and dominant values, hence a change in the institutions. It can be a major radical change, such as the ex-novo introduction of a new law, or it can be a gradual change over a longer period, such as a change of attitudes or a gradual adaption of the existing legislation. The ACF assumes that only minor changes are possible within the policy subsystem, as only secondary beliefs can be changed from within the system. Thus, major change requires the intervention of external factors because they can provide the necessary shock to initiate the transformation of deep core and policy core beliefs. However, later applications of the ACF determined that significant external perturbation are necessary for major policy change to happen, but they are not sufficient as they require action from within the policy subsystem (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

Changes in the central elements of a policy are generally the results of perturbations in non-cognitive factors outside of the policy subsystem (Sabatier, 1988, p.134). Relevant perturbations include changes in socioeconomic conditions, the rise of a new governing coalition, outputs from other subsystems, or disasters (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier and Weible, 2007). These external shocks affect the policy subsystem because they can alter the agenda setting. They attract attention to the problem, from both the public, as well as key decision-maker. In addition, external shocks can change components of the policy core beliefs of the dominant advocacy coalition. However, the most important effect of external shocks is the redistribution of resources among the policy participants in the subsystem, and the opening or closing of new policy venues (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). This can lead to the replacement of the previously dominant coalition by a minority coalition.

Later applications of the ACF determined a revision of the framework to include a new factor that can determine policy change. The new revision recognises that major policy change can be caused

by major internal shocks (i.e. scandals or disasters) that occur from within a policy subsystem (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). As in the case of external shocks, internal shocks increase the attention on the problem and cause a redistribution of resources, thus shifting the power structures. The second assumption that the ACF makes on internal shocks is that they tend to confirm policy core beliefs in minority advocacy coalition, whilst increasing doubt within the dominant coalition (Sabatier and Weible, 2007, p. 205). Internal shocks generally highlight policy and values failures of a dominant advocacy coalition, therefore affecting the perception of the effectiveness of their policies in the eyes of the policy participants. Nonetheless, they confirm the policy core beliefs of minority advocacy coalition members, thus strengthening their membership.

Sabatier and Weible (2007) provide prescriptions for the design of "professional forums", which act as institutional settings for negotiating and implementing agreements. The most important elements are: a) The presence of a "policy stalemate", in which all the actors perceive the status quo as unacceptable; b) The involvement of representative from all groups of stakeholders and decision rules based on consensus. All actors need to feel involved because a dissatisfied party can ruin the agreement; c) A neutral and respected chair of the professional forum; d) A long-term and continuous commitment of the policy participants that allows to build trust, fundamental for the process; e) Empirical issues should be at the centre because they can be more easily solved collectively; f) Alternative venues should look as unappealing for the policy participants.

Finally, policy change can be determined by very different elements and it can choose different pathways to happen. The institutional settings and the logic chosen by the actors influence consistently the course of action of policy change. However, identifying all the elements that determined a major or minor policy change can be a challenging research.

4.5 General thoughts

As it emerges from its thorough analysis, the ACF provides a complex framework with multiple levels of analysis and many different elements to take into account. However, this complexity guarantees a comprehensive understanding of the policy process and changes that happen within.

Over the years the ACF has been subjected to several critiques, mostly related to the apparent lack of empirical validation of the theoretical assumptions and to the restricted applicability of the framework outside of its original context. Nevertheless, the high number of applications and the

differences in the contexts of study allowed to overcome both critiques. On one side, the core assumptions of the ACF have been confirmed by the empirical data. Secondary concepts and hypotheses have been revised when the empirical evidence showed a discrepancy with the theory. However, less studied concepts, such as the *devil shift* and *policy brokers*, require further empirical application. On the other side, the pluralistic American system has ceased to be the most widely studied policy environment and multiple studies from different political systems form a strong theoretical base for further applications of the ACF. The latest review complied by Pierce and colleagues (2017) suggests that the ACF balances common approaches for applying the framework with the specificity of particular contexts.

However, some authors criticized the loosely application of the ACF by researchers. Cairney (2012) complains that many researchers conduct "ACF inspired" studies without testing any of the hypothesis proposed by its authors, which could be a "problematic limitation for a framework designed to generate hypotheses to allow confirmation or revision" (p.491). Therefore, this is an important element to consider when planning a study using the ACF as the main theoretical framework. However, I believe that the application of a theory without a degree of flexibility constrain too much the applicability and the understanding of empirical data. Moreover, the application of different concepts can enrich the final analysis. Even the authors of the ACF (Weible et al., 2012) support the use of multiple theories for a thorough understanding of the policy process, as they recognize that no single theory can explain all the aspects involved in the policy-making process. Therefore, while maintaining fixed throughout the study the core elements of the ACF, I support them with concepts and ideas borrowed from the historical institutionalism (HI) approach. In the next section, I provide an overview of the main assumptions and theoretical foundation of HI.

4.6 An overview of historical institutionalism

Historical institutionalism (HI) is better understood as a general *approach* to study political and social sciences, then a specific theory or method of analysis (Steinmo, 2008). Pierson and Skocpol (2002) identify three essential features that characterize HI in contemporary political science. The HI literature should a) address real-world substantive questions that interest both the general public, as well as academics, b) give extreme importance to time and history, as processes are essential for understanding the development of social and political transformations, and c) examine macro-contexts and broad institutional settings to analyse their influence on the processes. Hence, processes are at the core of HI analysis, and researchers

define them as the combination of multiple elements and factors interacting over time. Processes of institutional change are the results of conjunctures, "interaction effects between distinct causal sequences that become joined at particular points in time" (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002, p. 8) and, thus, cause the initiation of such processes. However, these causal conjunctures can happen in multiple points in time and they might take a long time to provoke a change in the political context, hence determining a process of incremental change (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002). This assumption is in line with the incremental change proposed by the ACF (Sabatier and Weible, 2007), in which multiple elements from the macro, meso and micro context interact in determining a slow process of policy change.

As Mahoney and Thelen (2009) state, empirical studies show a prevalence of incremental processes over disruptive changes. Hence, these authors proposed a theory of incremental change strongly inspired by the HI perspective. They identify change as the result of intrinsic features of the institutional and political context. Therefore, institutional settings are essential for explaining the why and how of change processes, as they determine the distribution of resources within the political system. Hence, institutions define the power relations among different actors that depend on these resources (Pfeffer and Salancik. 1978; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009). Change is the result of the actors' struggle for redistributing resources through the transformation of institutions. Actors with similar interests coordinate to achieve these changes and compromise on the redefinition of institutions (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009). Thus, new institutions emerge, and old institutions adapt to accommodate the changing reality and the appearance of new social interests (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009).

Historical institutionalists give high relevance to the institutional setting as a whole and, thus, analyse multiple institutions at the same time (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002). When studying a policy process, it is essential to look both at formal and informal institutions as they present different constraints and opportunities for the policy participants. While formal institutions determine the official political context, informal institutions comprise unofficial norms and cultures that incentivize or constraint behaviour (North, 1990). Different type of institutions might react differently to the attempts of change and, hence, determine different processes in time. Moreover, when analysing data and processes through the HI lens, it is important to take in consideration the potential presence of self-reinforcing mechanisms (Pierson and Skocpol, 2002). These mechanisms are initiated by actions and decisions of policy participants that in time restrict the range of options available. Hence, they constrain their future actions, determining a path-dependency process.

HI combines the two assumptions at the core of sociological institutionalism and rational choice: human beings are both norm-abiding rule followers and self-interested rational actors (Steinmo, 2008). The first assumption relates to the context where the actors interact and behave. This context determines rules and norms that should be followed and, therefore, constraints and shapes people's actions. The second assumption, instead, refers to the individuals' ideas and beliefs that constitute the motivations for their active agency. Once embedded, values and beliefs frame the actors' perception of their interests and, in turn, their strategy to achieve institutional change. As North (1990) suggests, the embedded characteristic of institutional settings determine the opportunity for change, however it is the responsibility of the active agency of the actors to take advantage of these opportunities. Therefore, the lesson of HI is that institutions contain within themselves the possibility and the shape of change, determined by the unbalanced distribution of power and resources. However, the active agency of policy participants is essential to start and conduct the change process. Considering the double scope of this research to understand the overall policy process and the actors' influence, HI constitutes an interesting contribution to the theoretical lens of this study.

Moreover, the long-term perspective required by the ACF can be considered an element of support for the use of HI. As Steinmo (2008) explains, using a long-term time framework expands the number of observations, therefore allowing to identify a higher number of factors of influence, as well as to validate them through the confront with multiple data points. In addition, a long-time perspective allows the researcher to create a better analysis of the historical development, by placing events in a particular time without missing the overall patterns (Steinmo, 2008; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009).

4.7 The application of the ACF to the case of sexuality education

The aim of this research is to understand the complex process that leads to the formation and implementation of public policies. The policy process involves many factors and actors that influence the decision-making and the policies' development. This study aims at understanding how the socio-political context, the external environment and the values involved influence the actions and interactions of the actors through the formation of strategies and alliances. The ultimate objective is to understand the influence that this has on the policy-making process.

To achieve this understanding, this research uses the case of sexuality education policies. These policies represent an interesting context thanks to their politicized character and the pluralistic nature of the interests and sectors involved. The controversiality of the topic and the presence of a multitude of actors involved create conflicts of values and goals. Understanding the development of these tensions provides interesting insights on the actors' behaviour in the policy process.

The ACF aims at an overall understanding of the policy-process, whilst also focusing on the personal motivations of the individuals, hence being suitable for achieving this study's aim. To answer the research problem, this study needs to operationalize the theoretical framework. To simplify this operation, I decided to use the diagram presented in Figure 1 (see chapter 4.3). I operationalized each box by investigating its content in relation to the context of sexuality education policies in Norway. Moreover, I contextualized each box to its appropriate level of analysis.

The macro-level is important to set the institutional and policy context. It defines the parameters and rules that constrain the actions of the stakeholders. At the same time, it identifies relevant policy changes in the period of analysis, as well as resources and windows of opportunities that the actors can exploit to pursue their goals. Hence, the macro level sets the stage both for institutional constraints and for means of policy change.

The micro-level defines the beliefs and values that motivate the actions of the actors involved in the policy subsystem. It, thus, provide an understanding of the cultural and moral context which defines the interactions and conflicts influencing the policy process. Institutional theories can explain the embeddedness of these beliefs, as well as the struggle for changing contrasting social norms.

The meso-level is the most central for the scope of this research. Here is where the interactions and actions take place and develop. The aim of this level of analysis is to identify the presence of advocacy coalitions within the policy subsystem. Then, it looks for the binding values of the coalition and a shared strategy to transform these beliefs into action. Moreover, it aims at understanding the distribution of resources and the strategy for increasing them. Ultimately, the analysis of the meso level explains the attempts to achieve policy change, or to contrast it.

Finally, the combination of these three levels of analysis provides an understanding of the motivations, actions and hindering factors of attempts to policy change. Hence, it provides an understanding of the policy process of sexuality education policies in Norway.

In the analysis of the data, I use different concepts of both the ACF and the HI. Moreover, I test some of the ACF hypotheses against the empirical data, and look for new insights and contributions for both frameworks.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design. An in-depth case study

The research method chosen for this study is an in-depth case study of the development of sexuality education policies in Norway between 2006 and 2018. This method is suitable for the aim of this research because the normative nature of sexuality education and the absence of consistent literature on the topic creates a lack of predetermined variables that can be better unveiled through an in-depth case study (Yin, 2011). Case studies are an appropriate research strategy when there is the need to explain the why and how of certain processes (Yin, 1981). They allow to study in detail the case and understand thoroughly the variables involved. Therefore, in this research using a case study has a double scope. On one side, it allows to test the ACF and confirm its assumptions with the support of the empirical data. On the other, it has an exploratory function of discovering new variables or new aspects of the variables involved in the theory. Hence, it has both a theory building and a theory testing function (Tsang, 2013; Yin, 2011).

Moreover, as Yin (2011) suggests, the case study is appropriate when the boundaries between the studied phenomenon and the context are unclear. This is the case of the policy process, in which the institutional and political context play a strong role in determining the variables involved in the process (Weible et al, 2012). For this reason, developing a comparative case study in a developmental perspective would have required time and resources not available for this study.

I chose Norway as my case study for its long history in sexuality education and the relative stability of its political context. In Norway, sexuality education policies have been present for decades, hence complying with one of the requirements for the application of the ACF, the presence of a mature policy subsystem. Moreover, I believe that using a stable context of analysis decreases the number of variables involved, allowing to understand better the connections among them. At the same time, in recent years Norway has been facing societal changes, such as an increase in immigration, which are creating destabilizations in the cultural and institutional context (Svendsen, 2012). For all these reasons, Norway constitutes an interesting subject for this study. Moreover, the analogous institutional setting and the similar social challenges faced by the other Nordic countries, allow a generalization that could provide interesting insights on the policy process within these countries.

The ACF requirement of the long-time perspective on the policy subsystem influenced the definition of the time span of analysis. As suggested by the ACF, a time-span of a decade or more

allows to understand the cumulative effect of knowledge and research (Sabatier, 1988). I chose 2006 as the starting year for my analysis because it represented both a window of opportunity moment due to a revision of the national curriculum in education, and the introduction of a relevant actor in the system, Pink Competency.

5.2 Research strategy

In the context of this research, the motivations and beliefs that guide the actions of the actors are central, as they play a fundamental role in shaping the policy process. Therefore, the study requires an approach that allows to unveil these beliefs, while understanding their consequences for the development of the process. For this reason, an interpretivist approach seems appropriate, as the study assumes that values and world's interpretations shape the development of the process. The interpretivist approach is based on an ontological assumption that there is no objective reality and an epistemological assumption that we can only access to knowledge as a result of an interpretative process (Schwandt, 1994). However, in contrast with constructivism, interpretivism aspires at giving an objective explanation of the interpretation (Schwandt, 1994), which is exactly the scope of this research. In fact, on one hand, it uses the actors' beliefs to make sense of the process. On the other, though, it tries to explain the influence that these have on the overall process.

The interpretivist approach and the need to identify and analyse different variables during a period of time require a qualitative methodology. As Bryman (2006) states, qualitative research is inherently exploratory. It produces a deeper and clearer comprehension of the policy process because it is "more sensitive to the complexities of social phenomena than quantitative methods" (p.82). At the same time, it guarantees a better contextual understanding, hence allowing to understand behaviours in the context of meaning systems employed by the actors studied. Therefore, a qualitative methodology is the most appropriate for examining the three levels of analysis. In addition to explain the what within each level, it also allows to understand the developmental aspect of the process involved, as well as the relational and conflictual facet of interactions. Finally, it permits to understand the connections and influences among different levels, hence providing an overall comprehension.

5.3 Data collection

5.3.1 Means of collection

In order to collect the necessary information for the operationalization of the framework I decided to use a multiple-method approach that combines the analysis of relevant policy documents and the conduction of interviews with strategic actors in the field. The use of data triangulation (cf. the collection of data from multiple sources) is compatible with the constructivist approach, and it actually provides a mean for validation and reliability. The analysis of official documents allows to confirm or refute the affirmations of the interviewees, while the conduction of interviews permits to deepen and explain surface information present in the documents.

The documents collected for the analysis have been found through online searches or through reference from strategic actors. The documents include policy briefs, reports, surveys and the websites of governmental agencies and important organizations working with sexuality education. For the selection of the documents, the most important criterium was the reliability of the source. Only official documents produced by governmental actors and relevant organizations have been used as sources of information. The second criterium of inclusion was the relevancy for this study. Only documents that referred to the period between 2006 and 2018 have been included in the analysis. All documents referring to sexuality education teaching, sexuality education strategies and sexuality education policies have been analysed. However, only the documents specifically referring to sexuality education in the schools have been included as sources of information. The aim of the documents' analysis was to identify relevant changes in legislation, important events for sexuality education, such as conferences or meetings, categorize the position of the actors in respect of sexuality education and find relevant actors to interview. Conversely, I used different criteria for the selection of sources and references related to the theoretical framework. In this case, I chose to use only peer-reviewed studies as they hold a higher degree of reliability.

The interviews included semi-structured interviews conducted over the phone or videocall, and structured interviews with open end questions delivered via email. All interviews have been conducted between November 2018 and April 2019. The interviews targeted strategic actors working with sexuality education. The first contacts have been identified through the analysis of documents and the reference of academic experts in the field of sexuality education. Other interviewees have been identified through a snowball sampling, following the spontaneous or requested reference of collaborators or relevant actors by the people contacted.

The initial aim was to conduct phone interviews with at least one representative from each category of actors (political, administrative and civil society). However, the lack of availability of the respondents required a change of strategy towards email interviews. The actors interviewed include one governmental agency, one ombudsman, two local political actors, one union, one network and two associations from the civil society. Some of the interviewees only provided information about relevant documents, while others gave a comprehensive explanation of their work with sexuality education. The aim of the interviews was to understand the position of the actors in respect of sexuality education, to understand their goals and the strategy adopted, to identify the distribution of resources and the collaborations active in the field. Examples of the questions asked can be found in Appendix 1.

5.3.2 Problems and limitations

In the collection of data, I encountered several problems that hindered the acquisition of information and might constitute a limitation for the study.

First of all, I underestimated the language barrier. Although in the interviews the language has not been a problem at all, during the research of policy documents the language have constituted a relevant challenge as all the documents were in Norwegian, hence requiring a search in a language that I do not know. I overcame this problem by identifying all possible references to Norwegian documents in documents redacted in English, and I asked the interviewees to refer me to pertinent policy documents. I am confident that I have had access to most of the relevant information, but the risk remain that I might have missed important documents due to the language barrier. Moreover, I personally translated all the Norwegian documents with the aid of Google Translate, an online translating software. Hence, there is the risk of having misinterpreted the meaning of the document. However, I believe that this risk is very small as I was mostly interested in general concepts and information, rather than specific meanings.

Second, I have had troubles interviewing people. I have contacted over 20 people for scheduling a phone/videocall interview. However, only four people agreed to a phone interview, and just six opted for a structured email interview. Excluding the people that did not respond, the others either stated that they were not competent enough to answer or that they did not have enough time or personnel resources to help me in my research.

I believe I gained enough information through the conducted interviews. However, a higher number of interviewees would have provided more information and more representativeness of different views. In particular, I tried to contact politicians working at the national level, as well as youth organizations, but neither one responded to my emails. I believed that a national political perspective and a youth perspective on the issue would have been a great addition to the analysis. These two actors provide a particularly interesting viewpoint as they represent the two ends of the policies. The first ones are those actually designing and determining sexuality education policies. The second ones are those for whom these policies are designed. Nevertheless, I gained general secondary information about the politicians' strategic view and goals through documents and interviews.

Furthermore, the time limitations and the lack of responses allowed me to identify and investigate only one advocacy coalition within the Norwegian context. Although I gained information about opposers to policy change through the interviews, I was not able to identify a clear coalition of opposers as suggested by most of ACF studies (Weible et al., 2009). Nevertheless, I do not think that this is a limitation for this study. Weible et al. (2009) identified other studies where only one coalition was detected. Moreover, since the focus of the research are the relations within the coalition and between the coalition and the external context, an in-depth analysis of one coalition is sufficient to answer the research problem.

5.4 Data treating

Once collected all the relevant documents, I analysed their content and categorized the data following the three levels of analysis of the ACF. Hence, I grouped the information concerning beliefs and motivations, coordination and strategy, and national and international context in three different categories. After transcribing the interviews, I followed the same procedure for their content. I, then, integrated the data collected from the two sources and cross-referenced them to check for inconsistencies and contradictions, as well as for confirmations.

The data categorized have been analysed using the historical institutionalism (HI) approach. Initially, I intended to use the process-tracing methodology. However, due to the lack of a clear causality mechanism and the use of qualitative methods, using this methodology would have excessively complicated the analysis of the empirical data. Hence, considering the importance of

the long-term perspective in the ACF and the centrality of institutions in this study, made me decide to use the HI approach.

Hence, the data have been examined to identify the historical progression of events, as well as to define the historical context of the policy process. The data analysis, thus, focuses on identifying the presence of static and dynamic factors that can explain the temporal progression of events. On the other hand, the interviews are the main source of reference for understanding the actors' motivations and strategies to achieve institutional change.

Moreover, to comply with the agreement on confidentiality, I anonymized the interviewees providing the minimum information for contextualizing their view, while guaranteeing their anonymity. I decided to give information only about the sector and general mandate of their organization because many of the organizations and agencies involved in sexuality education in Norway are quite small. Hence, nominating the specific organization would make evident the identity of the interviewee. For referencing the citation of a specific interview in the text, I established a code that allows to understand the context of origin of the interviewee (civil society, administrative actors and politicians) and the mean of conduction of the interview (phone or email). In Table 1, I present the interviewees and illustrate the coding.

General information on the interviewee	Mean of interview conduction	Identification code of the Interviewee
Civil society, cross-sector	Email	CS E1
Civil society, organization working with minorities	Email	CS E2
Local political actor	Email	PA E3
Civil society, general organization	Email	CS E4
Civil society, union	Email	CS E5
Civil society, general organization	Email	CS E6
Administrative actor, directorate	Phone	AA P1
Administrative actor, ombudsman	Phone	AA P2
Civil society, working with minorities	Phone	CS P3
Local political actor	Phone	PA P4

Table 1. Interviewees and coding for identification

6. Empirical findings

The empirical findings of this research include the data collected through the interviews and the document analysis. The information provided by these means allow to operationalize the Advocacy Coalition Framework through the diagram proposed by Sabatier (Figure 2). The operationalization follows the ACF division in three levels of analysis: the macro, the micro and the meso. Instead of a dimensional progression, I decided to organize the levels in this order because the macro and the micro levels contain the premises for understanding the meso level of analysis.

The macro level outlines the historical and institutional context of the sexuality education policy process. The micro-level, on the other hand, delineates the beliefs and values guiding the actions of the policy participants. Both the micro and the macro level set the basis for an historical institutionalism approach in the data analysis, as they combine an historical setting with the active agency of actors' ideas. Finally, the meso-level of analysis presents the actors involved in the policy subsystem by grouping them in coalitions. It defines their resources and goals, that in turn
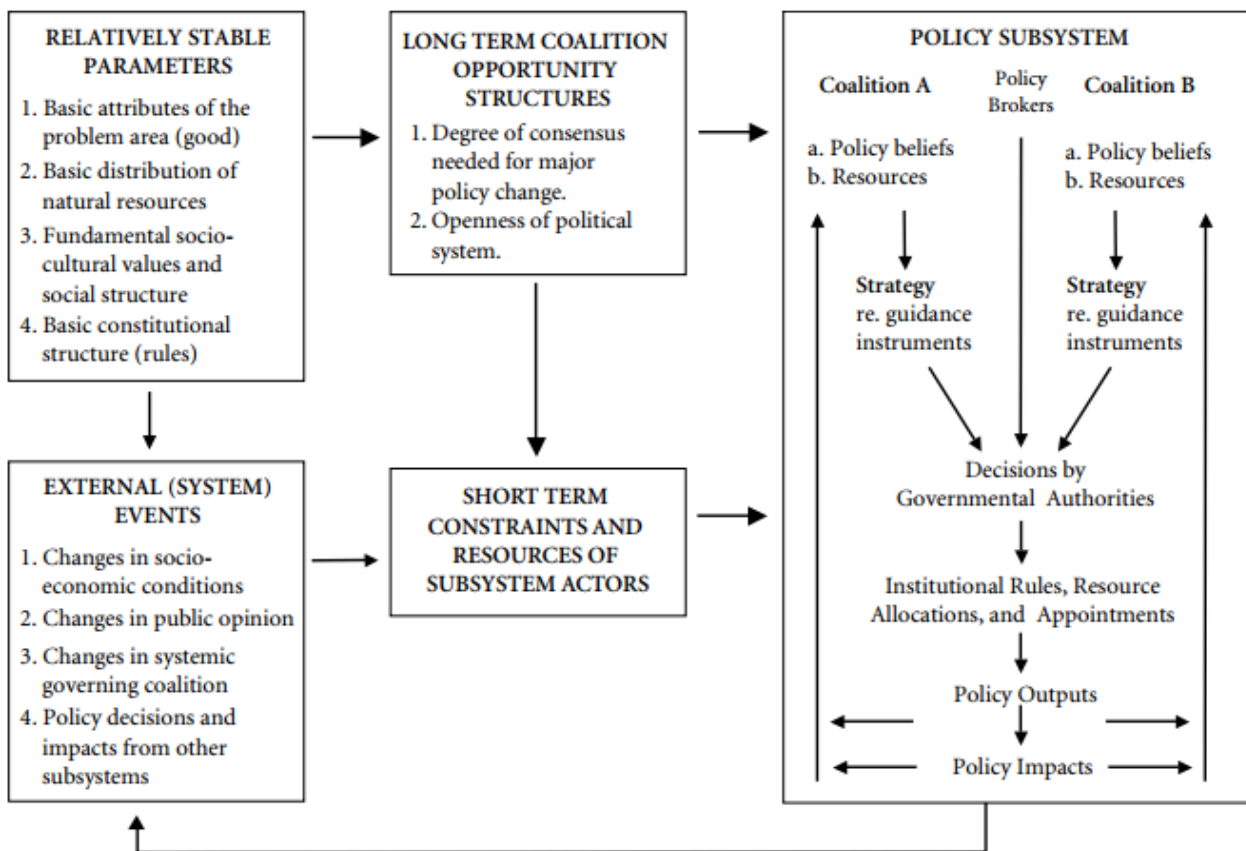

Figure 2. Diagram of the Advocacy Coalition Framework. Sabatier and Weible (2007)

determine their strategy. In conclusion, there is a brief presentation of the policy changes occurred within the policy subsystem between 2006 and 2018. The combination of the data from all levels of analysis provides the answer to the research problem. The findings are discussed in the Analysis Chapter.

6.1 The macro level of analysis

The macro level of analysis outlines the overall historical and institutional context where the policy participants act. In Sabatier and Weible's diagram (Figure 2), the macro level is represented by all the boxes outside the policy subsystem. As it is possible to observe from the direction of the arrows, the environment shapes the policy subsystem by determining the number and type of policy participants, the resources available and the institutional settings. In turn, the decisions and actions of the policy subsystem actors impact the overall context in a continuous process of reciprocal influence. In a historical institutionalist perspective, this process is the result of the combination of the rules set by the context and the ideas of the actors involved.

The overall context includes the cultural, social and political system of the country of analysis, as well as political decisions and international events that might have had an impact on the policy subsystem. In the case of sexuality education policies in Norway, it is important to understand the political institutions that regulate policy-making in issues related to health and education. Moreover, the study should outline the social and cultural values of Norwegian society, as well identify national and international events linked to sexuality education that occurred between 2006 and 2018. In the next chapters these elements will be presented following the framework presented in the diagram.

6.1.1 Relatively stable parameters

6.1.1.1. Basic attributes of the problem area

The basic attributes of the problem area refer to the nature of the problem that sexuality education aims at resolving. Defining the characteristics of the problem helps understanding the development of a solution through the policy process. The Ministry of Health and Care Services (Helse- og omsorgsdepartementet, 2017) explains that the main objective of sexuality education in Norway is to safeguard the sexual health of the citizens. Sexual health is a complex concept that involves

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elements of the physical, psychological and social sphere of an individual. Therefore, whilst tackling the high number of cases of sexually transmitted diseases and prevent unwanted pregnancies, sexuality education also aims at resolving problems related to sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

Hence, a complex problem requires a complex solution that involves a change in behaviours and attitudes. It is, thus, a solution that requires time to be effective. In addition, the sexual nature of the problem implies a high politicization of the debates on the policy development, for the reasons explained in the Background Chapter. Finally, the complexity of the problem and, in turn, of the solution require the involvement of a plurality of actors and interests for planning a policy strategy.

In Norway, sexuality education has been mainly handled by the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, who work in parallel to tackle different aspects of the problem. Their role is to develop the policies and manage their implementation. In the field, the major actors are the school personnel and NGOs working with sexuality education. In the first case, contact teachers and health nurses are the ones actively delivering the education, while the school management facilitates the process (Kantar TNS, 2018). In the second case, non-profit organizations, unions and youth organizations advocate for an improvement of sexuality education and, in some case, they are directly involved with its implementation. Finally, there are actors from the executive-administrative sector, such as Departments, Directorates and Ombudsmen working with health, education and family affairs. These actors function as mediators between the civil society and the politicians. They mainly regulate the resources, but they can also actively engage in advocacy work for sexuality education policies.

Therefore, sexuality education can be characterized as a complex problem, with a high degree of politicization and pluralism. Hence, it is likely to find a high degree of conflict over policy-making.

6.1.1.2. Basic distribution of natural resources

In the case of sexuality education, resources are mainly financial, political and human. Political resources are fundamental for controlling the policy-making process, while financial and human resources are more relevant during the implementation phase. These resources are spread among the political-administrative actors and the civil society. As interviewee P1 stated, the political-

administrative actors hold a high degree of control over the financial resources, as they are the ones allocating the grants to civil society. However, many interviewees stated that the financial resources tend to be rather stable within the sexuality education context.

Human resources are mainly composed by teachers and nurses working with sexuality education. Moreover, schools also have the possibility of increasing their human capital by purchasing external sexuality education programs delivered by NGOs, such as the Week 6 program. By purchasing external expertise, the schools not only increase their human resources, but they also improve their knowledge capital.

6.1.1.3. Fundamental socio-cultural values and social structure

Norway is considered a liberal country with an inclusive and equal society (Svendsen, 2014). Except for minor conservative groups, there is a liberal view concerning sexuality and sexuality education is widely accepted. In the last decade, Norwegian society have increased its acceptance of homosexuality, although negative attitudes towards transgender people and bisexual women are still strong (Svendsen, 2014; Interview P4). Moreover, an increase in migration in recent years have challenged the homogeneity of Norwegian society, causing social cleavages. Hence, the appearance of minority groups has tested Norway's reputation of a liberal and welcoming country.

6.1.1.4. Constitutional structure

The structure of the Norwegian political system has been presented in Chapter 2. However, it is important to highlight here that, from an ACF perspective, Norway is a pluralistic country. In fact, despite the controversies about its political definition, the policy process regarding sexuality education involve a high number of interests and policy participants can access multiple venues for expressing their opinion. Nevertheless, it should still be noted that the power resides in the politicians' hands. Moreover, Norway can count on a relatively stable policy context and no major changes or reforms have transformed the Norwegian political structure in the last decade.

6.1.2 External system events

6.1.2.1. Changes in socio economic conditions

Over the last two decades, Norway has assisted to an increase in the migration rate that have challenged the socio-cultural structure of Norwegian society (Bartz, 2007). Migrants form now a relevant part of the Norwegian society. They have brought new cultural and religious beliefs within a quite homogeneous society. Norway has been struggling to integrate these new beliefs in the society (Svendsen, 2014). From the prospective of sexuality education, they have challenged the "Norwegian-centric" teaching that looked at sexuality from a strictly Western-oriented perspective (Svendsen, 2014). In addition, the migrants' population suffers of high rates of HIV infection (Interview P1). Hence, it is essential for tackling STDs rates to include them in sexuality education programs and to adapt such programs to their needs.

6.1.2.2. Changes in the public opinion

In the last decade, there has been an increased awareness of the global public opinion towards issues such as gender equality, gender violence and sexual harassment (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2019). Feminists movements have contributed to bring these issues to the public attention. In 2017, the MeToo movement brought the problem of sexual harassment and violence on the media worldwide, advocating for solving the problem (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2019). As one of the interviewees explained, this movement contributed to put issues of equality and inclusion on the political agenda in Norway. Although gender equality was already an important value within Norwegian society, the international trends strengthened these beliefs and influence a call for action against sexual harassment.

6.1.2.3. Changes in systemic governing coalition

As mentioned in the Background chapter, in the period between 2006 and 2018 Norway has switched from a centre-left coalition to a centre-right coalition. The second coalition gained power in 2013 and it is currently governing. However, the change in coalition did not seem to affect consistently the sexuality education policy subsystem, as changes occurred both before and after 2013.

6.1.2.4. Policy decisions and impacts from other subsystems

Figure 3 shows a timeline of relevant policy changes and events happened in Norway and globally during the period of analysis. The events presented in the timeline occurred outside of the policy subsystem of sexuality education policies, but they are related to it in different ways. The reform of the school curriculum represented an opportunity to discuss about the role of sexuality education in the curriculum. The legalization of the same-sex marriage and the discussion over abortion are policy changes, or attempts to change, directly related to sexuality education. Both events sparkled a public discussion about questions of gender and reproductive rights (Svendsen, 2014; Sex og Sumfunn, n.d.). A similar discourse can be applied to the so-called "rape wave" of 2011. The incredible increase in rape attacks sparkled a discussion on the role of sexuality education to prevent violence (Sex and Politics, 2011). On the other hand, the foundation of the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) in 2014 represented the political concretization of the increased attention towards issues of discrimination and minorities' protection. The Directorate deals with problems related to sexual, ethnic and cultural minorities, and it has a research centre specialized on LGBT's issues.

While these changes occurred outside the policy subsystem but within the Norwegian context, the 2015 and 2017 events have an international dimension. In 2015 the United Nations defined the Sustainable Development Goals for the 2030 Agenda, and sexuality education was included as an essential tool for achieving gender equality, ending sexual violence and supporting human health.
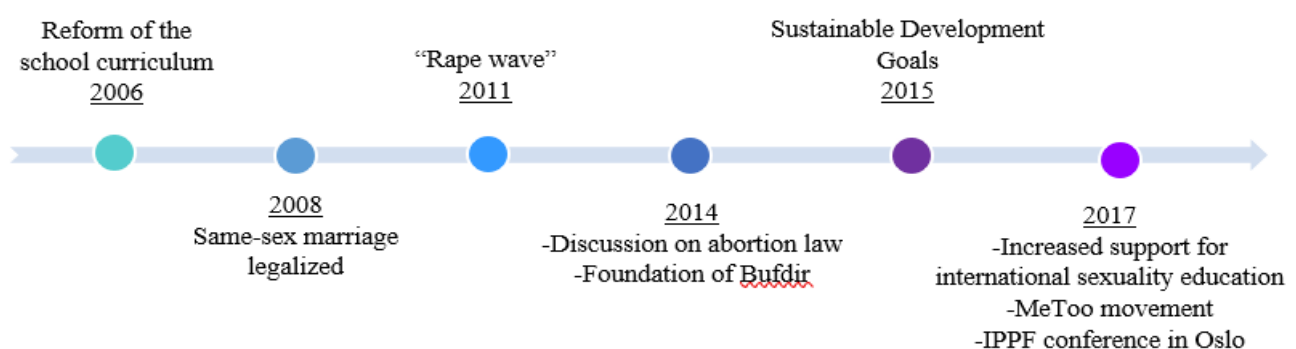

Figure 3.Timeline of exogenous policy changes between 2006 and 2018

Since their establishment, Norway was actively engaged in supporting the achievement of these goals worldwide. On one side, it increased the financial support for international programs on sexuality education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). On the other, Norway hosted a series of conferences that promoted comprehensive sexuality education through knowledge and competence sharing (IPPF, 2017). These international efforts, jointly with the media resonance of the MeToo movement, had a great impact in placing sexuality education at the forefront of the public and political agenda.

6.1.3 Long term coalition opportunity structures

6.1.3.1. Degree of consensus needed

As explained in the Background chapter, the Norwegian political system relies heavily on consensus. The tight link between civil society and the policy process requires a high degree of negotiation among different interests represented by a multiplicity of actors. Negotiations are particularly important during coalition and minority governments, a common situation in the Norwegian political system. Therefore, changes in policies are generally the result of negotiations among different actors, and agreements are based on compromise among contrasting views.

In a pluralistic issue such as sexuality education, the interests involved are countless. As interviewee AA P1 explained "including all the perspectives from the field […] was the best possible scenario. […] that is not possible in practice". Hence, consensus is not a viable option when the interests involved are so many. Thus, compromise is the only solution. Nevertheless, considering the importance of both consensus and compromise in the Norwegian political system, coalitions are incentivized to be more inclusive and share their knowledge with their opponents, as suggested by the ACF (Sabatier and Weible, 2007)

6.1.3.2. Openness of the system

The constitutional structure and the informal practices of the political system define Norway as an open system, where multiple venues exist for civil society to express its interests. Moreover, as interviewee AA P1 explained, the political and administrative actors are keen on inviting civil society to their meetings and to committees. At the same time, civil society actively seeks

opportunities for directly influencing the policy process. Formal meetings and committees are important venues for the negotiation of the policy process. However, informal coordination among actors has a strong impact on the policy process, as it is more continuous and based on personal relations of trust (Afdal, 2012; AA P1).

Therefore, Norway can be considered an open system. However, the openness of the system is partially reduced by the political control of the formal venues and the importance of personal contacts and trust in the informal coordination.

6.1.4 Short term constraints and resources of subsystem actors

The combination of the stable parameters and the opportunity structure on one hand, and the external events on the other, defines constraints and resources of the subsystem actors. While the stable parameters define the policy participants and the rules of the game, the external events can open up *windows of opportunities* that the actors need to exploit to achieve policy change.

In the case of sexuality education in Norway, the most important opportunities for policy change are the reforms of the school curriculum. In these moments, policy participants can exploit policy change from another subsystem to achieve their goals. However, when these windows of opportunity are not open, civil society actors can actively advocate to put sexuality education on the political agenda. Due to a political system in which politicians have a high degree of power, civil society actors must seek their support for achieving policy change. External events support the actors in their advocacy work by creating awareness and a favourable environment.

6.2 The micro-level. Beliefs and values of the subsystem actors

The micro-level of analysis focuses on the individuals' beliefs that motivate the actions of policy participants. Personal beliefs range from wide perspectives on society (deep core beliefs) to specific elements of political actions (policy core beliefs and secondary beliefs). As explained in the Background chapter, beliefs on sexuality education are deeply linked to the way an individual perceives sexuality. This perception reflects the interconnection among a series of opinions that concerns the role of the family and the state, the separation between the private and the public, the perception and expression of identity, and the role of childhood. Therefore, beliefs on sexuality

education are shaped by many different social and personal aspects. As a result, they are quite complex, and their schematization is far from straightforward.

However, for the purpose of this study I sketched sexuality education beliefs to help understanding the motivations of the subsystem actors. I analysed these beliefs through the ACF division in three levels of depth. This schematization sets the basis for understanding the formation of a coalition and its actions.

6.2.1 Deep core beliefs

Deep core beliefs refer to general assumptions about the human nature and society, as well as the priority of certain values over others. They are deeply embedded in the individuals and they are extremely hard to change. In relation to sexuality education, Mckay (1997) identifies two opposites perspectives, termed *Permissive* and *Restrictive*. The *Permissive* perspective holds a positive view of sexuality as a mean of personal development for the individual. Supporters of this perspective have a favourable view of sexuality education. The *Restrictive* ideology, on the other hand, has a conservative view of family values and a strictly heteronormative conception of sexuality. Supporters of this perception condemn sexuality education as an instrument of corruption of moral values. These two categories are a simplification of the numerous ideologies that concern sexuality education, and in reality, deep core beliefs can be placed in a continuum between a *Permissive* and *Restrictive* perspective.

Within the Norwegian society the *Permissive* perspective is prevalent (Svendsen, 2014; Bartz, 2007). Although conservative and religious beliefs are still strong in Norway, sexuality education is a widely accepted practice in Norway. Most of Norwegian hold a positive attitude towards homosexuality and different gender expressions (Bartz, 2007). Values of acceptance and inclusion are a strong part of the Norwegian identity. Moreover, state intervention in private matters is generally accepted as part of the welfare state (Engelstad et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, in Norway there are still conservative groups contrasting sexuality education (CS E2; CS E5). Moreover, even among sexuality education supporters, there are negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community and other kinds of minorities, as well as towards national state intervention in local settings (Svendsen, 2014; PA P4; AA P2).

6.2.2 Policy Core beliefs

The policy core beliefs represent the transposition of the deep core belief to a more concrete aspect of life. They translate into policy core policy preferences that are fundamental policy positions about the best strategy to adopt for actualizing the policy core beliefs. In the sexuality education context, policy core beliefs refer to being favourable or adverse to its teaching. Policy core policy preferences, instead, reflect the kind of sexuality education that the actors believe it should be provided.

As aforementioned, in Norway the acceptance of sexuality education is quite high. However, there are strong disagreements about its scope and the means to deliver it. While abstinence-only programs do not have many supporters in Norway, sexual health education is the most common approach to teaching in Norwegian schools (Kantar TNS, 2018). Supporters of this kind of education believe that teaching should focus on the biological aspects of sexuality and on preventing unwanted pregnancies. Nonetheless, there is an increasing number of actors that support a holistic approach to sexuality education, requesting the inclusion of physical, cultural and psychological aspects. The opposition between these two perspectives steers current debates on sexuality education in Norway. The sexual health perspective represents the present mainstreaming position in Norway, while supporters of the holistic approach actively advocate for a policy change introducing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). For the second group, the lack of compliance with their view contrast deeply with their deep core beliefs, as it is perceived as an obstacle for achieving fundamental rights of minorities (Svendsen, 2014).

6.2.3 Secondary beliefs

Secondary beliefs have a very narrow scope and they address specific aspects of an issue. They hold a strong instrumental nature and they are detached from any ideology. They generally refer to specific means to achieve policy core policy preferences or the priority of certain aspects of a problem over others. For these reasons secondary beliefs are fragmented and spread across different coalitions. In Norway, secondary beliefs on sexuality education refer to the prioritization of certain interests in teaching or specific aspects of the implementation of sexuality education programs, such as who is in charge of the teaching or how to ensure a homogeneity in the national territory. Actors belonging to opposite coalitions might have the same secondary beliefs, while actors within the same coalition might disagree on several of them (AA P2).

The major debate in Norway involving secondary beliefs concern the priority of sexuality education over other policy problems (CS E5). As long as the problem is not perceived as urgent, politicians would prioritize other policy issues over sexuality education.

6.3 The meso-level. Advocacy coalitions

The meso-level of analysis looks at what happens within the policy subsystem, focusing specifically on the actors involved and their influence on the policy process. It aims at investigating the actions of the policy participants by aggregating the actors in advocacy coalitions. Hence, the meso-level focuses on the analysis of what define a coalition, its beliefs and strategies, and what influence does it have on the overall policy process. The beliefs that bound together a coalition are defined by the micro-level of analysis, while the coalition's strategy is defined by the resources and the institutional setting identified by the macro-level of analysis.

6.3.1 The advocacy coalition

This study focuses on the analysis of one coalition within the Norwegian policy subsystem. This coalition supports policy change towards a more comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education. The analysis of the documents and the interviews did not show any clear or strong coalition opposing policy change or promoting a more restrictive sexuality education. On the contrary, one of the interviewees stated that those opposing CSE "don't have much political capital in the society we live in." (CS E5).

Therefore, the main focus of this research has been on the identified coalition acting to promote CSE. To identify the coalition, I based my analysis on Sabatier's definition of advocacy coalitions as "people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system -- i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions -- and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (Sabatier, 1988, p.139). Therefore, the coalition has been identified by investigating the deep core and policy beliefs, as well as the main collaborators of different organizations working with sexuality education in Norway. I combined all the information collected on beliefs and coordination to determine the actors bounded by the same beliefs and by a non-trivial degree of coordination. The result was a high number of actors collaborating to reach the same goal and moved by the same

principles. Therefore, in compliance with Sabatier's definition, I could identify them as an advocacy coalition.

6.3.2 The actors

The number of participants in the coalition is high, as more than 20 different actors between organizations and individuals have been identified holding a more or less strong connection with the advocacy coalition. The vast majority of actors comes from the civil society and belongs to non-governmental organizations working with sexuality education or minority rights. However, within the coalition there are also agents from the administrative system, as well as academics and local politicians. I was not able to identify national political figures belonging to the coalition. However, the lack of national political representation in the interviews might have hindered the identification of key figures. From the documents and the interviews, it appears that some politicians do support the coalition, but without actively engaging with it. The coordination with political figures is sought by the civil society and the administrative actors, who turn to them to gain support.

The advocacy coalition involves a high number of actors. However, only a number of them can be considered the core of the coalition, as they have been mentioned more often in interviews and policy documents. This core involves actors from both the civil society and the administrative sector. The two main actors from civil society are Sex and Politics (Sex og Politikk) and Sex and Society (Sex og Samfunn). Both organizations do advocacy work on sexuality education at a local and national level. Moreover, they are both responsible for delivering sexuality education through schools' programs. Sex and Politics started the program Week 6 (Uke 6) in 2011, which is now active in schools all around Norway. Sex and Society, on the other hand, has been delivering sexuality education programs in Oslo's schools since the 1990s. They have both been active for decades, thus they have strong connections and relations with many actors in the Norwegian civil society and political landscape.

Within the civil society there are several actors working with minorities. The most important is FRI, the Norwegian Organization for Sexual and Gender Diversity. This organization works for the protection and promotion of LGBTQ rights in different ways. They have a specific program, Pink Competency, that deals with sexuality education. The program was founded in 2006 in collaboration with the Directorate of Health.

A strong role within the coalition is given to youth organizations. The most relevant are Queer Youth (Skeiv Ungdom), the Student Union (Elevorganisasjonen), the Medical Students for Sexual Education (MSO) and the Red Cross Youth. These organization advocate for the respect of youth needs and perspectives when planning sexuality education.

Finally, the most important actors from the administrative sectors are the Directorate of Health, the Directorate for Education and Training, the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), the Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud and the Ombudsman for Children. These governmental agencies stand between the political actors and civil society. As they support the goals of the coalition they actively facilitate the advocacy work of civil society, and they themselves engage in advocating towards CSE.

All these actors engage in a non-trivial degree of coordination and actively collaborate to achieve a common goal. They use different channels to support their coordination, such as informal meetings, national and international conferences, formal political meetings, committees and consultations. In 2016, Sex and Society founded the National Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. This network function as a platform for sharing knowledge, information and strategies for all the actors involved.

6.3.3 Common beliefs within the organization

The coalition include actors with different responsibilities and different mandates. Nevertheless, they share common core values and policy preferences, and their willingness to transform them into concrete policies bound them together as a coalition. The actors chose diverse wording for expressing their core values and their beliefs on sexuality education. Interviewees CS E4 and CS E5 talked about a "norm critical" sexuality education, which is also in line with the perspective presented by Svendsen (2014). CS E4 also talks about the need of a "positive view on sexuality". All interviewees mentioned the need of an *inclusive* sexuality education, meaning both towards all minorities and identity's expressions, as well involving different issues related to sexuality education.   Therefore, the coalition's actors believe that sexuality education should be comprehensive and inclusive. They stress that topics that are treated as a side part of sexuality education, should be included within the core of the teaching (AA P2; CS E5). Moreover, they talk about teaching "respect" and "tolerance" towards different sexual and gender expression to contrast the prejudices and negative attitudes surrounding sexuality (AA P2; CS E5; CS P3). However, they

also stress the importance of the "traditional" sexuality education with a health and reproductive perspective (CS E5).

Hence, with a simplification it is possible to say that the coalition's actors hold the same core beliefs and policy core policy preferences. However, they present disagreements over the actual means for the realization of these beliefs. Distinct organizations hold different secondary beliefs over questions such as who is in charge of the teaching or how to control the implementation. According to one of the interviewees, even within the same organization there are opposite views on specific details of the policies (AA P2).

6.3.4 Resources

The resources are an essential element of the policy subsystem as they determine the transition from abstract goals to concrete policy achievements (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The ACF assumes that the policy participants would make a strategic effort to exploit the resources established by the policy context to achieve their goals. The analysis of the interviews and the documents identified a common hierarchy of importance of the resources within the identified coalition. Depending on the history and the position of each organization, the actors possess resources in different degrees and perceive their importance differently. Nevertheless, there is an agreement in considering political resources as the most essentials.

All interviewees agreed that political power and influencing politicians are central objectives for their organizations. Some actors can already count on strong political influence thanks to their long history in the field or the adoption of an effective strategy (AA P2: CS E5; CS E6). The administrative actors also have a privileged position that allow them to have close contact with politicians. Other civil society organizations gained their access to politicians and political venues thanks to a long work of "lobbying" (CS E5). Political resources include access to relevant political venues, the political support from elected politicians and strategic contacts with political actors.

Information and knowledge are other fundamental resources for the coalition. Almost all interviewees mentioned the importance of having evidence to support their claims both in front of the public opinion, as well as in front of the politicians. Therefore, reports and academic research function as support for the advocacy work of the coalition, because they prove the existence of a problem and, thus, the need to change the situation. Hence, it is in the best interest of the actors to

produce reliable and valuable research that shows the need of improvement in sexuality education. However, as interviewees AA P1 and AA P2 stated, some organizations lack the competences to produce such studies. Hence, they seek support from research centres and academics to conduct these studies. This practice requires advocating for the need of research, using the lack of evidence as evidence itself (AA P2). Moreover, this emphasizes the importance of creating arenas for sharing relevant information among the coalition's actors.

In addition, the production of knowledge is essential for steering the public opinion and convince the audience to support the view of the coalition. Interviewees CS E5 and AA P2 highlighted the importance of medias for reaching citizens and influencing public opinion. This strategy in turn influence the agenda setting of politicians. Moreover, knowledge has a specific relevance for this coalition, as the promotion of knowledge around issues of sexuality education is part of their core objectives. Thus, up-to-date evidence is essential for achieving the coalition's goals (CS E2; CS E4).

As aforementioned, the financial resources tend to be rather stable within the subsystem, as the contracts between civil society and the financial *gatekeepers* are renewed every year, without relevant changes (CS P3; AA P1). Therefore, civil society organizations can benefit from stable grants every year. In fact, none of the organizations stated that increasing the financial resources was their main priority. However, organizations more involved with the policies' implementation seems to be more concerned with financial resources than those mainly involved with agenda setting and advocacy work (CS E4; CS E2).

Although only one actor (CS E2) explicitly mentioned skilful leadership as a fundamental resource, other organizations referred to the importance of having strategic people within the organization. Having personnel, especially in senior positions, that has had extensive experience within the field is essential for ensuring strategic contacts and the ability to exploit them (AA P1).

Nevertheless, political resources remain central for the coalition strategy. Other resources are mainly used as additional tactics to increase political power.

6.3.5 The strategy

In view of the actors' values and the resources available to the coalition, the policy participants developed a strategy for achieving their goals. Due to the high number of actors and the complexity

of the policy system, the coalition developed two main strategies that aimed at changing sexuality education in Norway.

The first strategy follows a bottom-up approach and it aspires to achieve policy change by intervening on behaviours and local institutions. Hence, the organizations actively engage in the implementation of sexuality education programs and they seek new schools for activating their programs. In this way, they aim at changing the perception of sexuality education among local actors, while providing a comprehensive and inclusive program. The ultimate scope is to create a change in attitudes and behaviours that will eventually change the aspect of the policy subsystem of sexuality education in Norway. This strategy has a long-term perspective, as these changes require time to be effective. However, it appears to be a winning strategy because, as interviewee CS P3 points out, schools from all around Norway are actively seeking sexuality education programs such as those proposed by Sex and Politics, Sex and Society and Pick Competency.

The second strategy adopts a top-down approach. The main scope of this strategy is to change sexuality education policies through a consistent advocacy work towards national politicians. The actors exploit all the meetings, hearings and events organized by the politicians (AA P2; CS E5). They participate and actively promote their vision, presenting evidence on the problem and proposing solutions. Moreover, they organize conferences and meetings where they invite relevant actors from the field and present their perspective. Finally, they actively call the politicians to remember the urgency of the problem and they organize public and media campaigns, to keep sexuality education high on the political agenda. This strategy aims at increasing awareness around the nature and the urgency of the problem to influence the agenda setting, as well as to steer the decision-making process about sexuality education. In support of this strategy, the coalition conducts a parallel advocacy work to ask the government to fund research on sexuality education. Its aim is to exploit the public funding to produce evidence that can support the coalition's advocacy work (AA P2).

6.3.6 Influence of the coalition strategy on the policy subsystem

In the period of analysis, it was not possible to observe any major change within the policy subsystem. However, a series of incremental changes have led to an institutional change still in act at the moment of writing this research. A new revision of the curriculum is scheduled for 2019 and political consultations and hearing are already in act.

Figure 4 represent a timeline of the most salient policy decisions and events happened within the policy subsystem between 2006 and 2018. All these events contributed to the process of policy change.
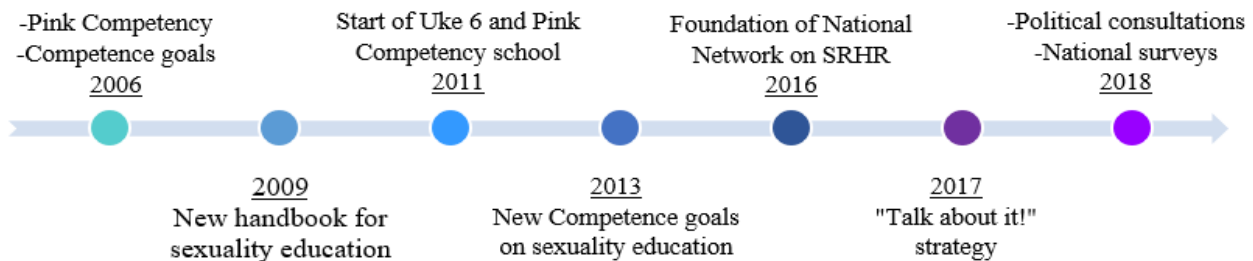

Figure 4. Policy changes within the policy subsystem.

In 2006, the revision of the national curriculum for Norwegian schools introduced the competence goals for Knowledge Promotion. Among the competence to develop, the reform introduced in the social science curriculum specific requirements on teaching about culture, gender and sexuality. It was required that students would learn to discuss "the relationship between love and sexuality in light of cultural norms" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2006). However, it was only in 2013 that the competence goals were revised to specifically deal with sexuality education. Actors are advocating for a further improvement in the next revision (AA P2). Curriculum reforms constitutes a fundamental window of opportunity for the actors to achieve policy change.

Pink Competency was instituted in 2006 as a program to increase knowledge and competences on LGBTQ sexuality. Its institution was the result of the advocacy work conducted by FRI which, supported by a survey on the living condition of the LGBT people in Norway, asked the government to do something about it. It thus received the support of the Directorate of Health and the Directorate of Education and Training. In 2011, Pink Competency started a school program to promote an inclusive sexuality education. In the same year, Sex and Politics introduced the program Week 6. After a failed attempt to introduce a revision on the support material, the organization exploited the discussion generated by the *rape wave* to introduce a new program. The program achieved a great success reaching over 35 000 students within the same year (Sex and Politics, 2011).

The introduction of these programs has been part of the bottom-up approach of the coalition. These programs aimed at bypassing the slow change in the policy process by directly pursuing a change in behaviours. The joint action of the growing number of schools adhering to these programs and the

increased awareness brought by the external events, contributed to a change in attitudes towards the LGBTQ people (CS E2: CS P3; PA P4).

In parallel to this strategy, different actors within the coalition have been actively advocating for policy change. In addition to being attentive to meetings and hearings, they have been actively producing and sharing research and information in support of their work. The foundation of the National Network on SRHR has been both a strategic move, as well as a relevant change in the policy subsystem. Sex and Society decided to create this network to provide an arena for sharing knowledge and promote the encounter of interested parties (CS E1). Therefore, on one side, it provides an additional venue for their advocacy work. On the other, the existence of such a network facilitates the diffusion of knowledge and, hence, policy learning.

The development of the strategy *Talk about it!* is the result of the accumulated work of the advocacy coalition. The Directorate of Health first proposed the strategy as part of a plan to unify the two parallel strategies on sexual health and reproductive health (AA P1). However, it became an opportunity for the advocacy coalition to promote its goals and integrate its values as part of the policy. The Directorate of Health actively supported the integration of multiple interests in the formulation of the strategy. However, the intervention of political actors for the final formulation of the draft reduced the inclusiveness of the policy. Nonetheless, the strategy explicitly supports a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education. In addition, it states the importance of producing knowledge on the state of sexuality education in Norway. In 2018, a report on the perceived conditions of sexuality education in Norwegian schools was published with the support of the Directorate of Health.

When asked about the most important changes within the sexuality education subsystem, the interviewees responded in different ways. Some actors (CS E4; CS E5) did not identify any clear change between 2006 and 2018. Interviewees AA P1 and AA P2 identified the introduction of Week 6 as an important contribution to the development of sexuality education. AA P1 also believed that the *Talk about it!* strategy proposed in 2017 was a relevant change in the system, and PA E3 supports this perspective. Interviewees CS E2 and PA P4, on the other hand, explained that a more open and positive attitude toward norm-critics and the LGBTQ community are a great achievement of the last decade. Therefore, there has been a different perception of the coalition's achievement during the period of analysis, and no radical change has been unanimously perceived within the system. However, these changes can be categorized as minor changes determined by the incremental effect of the coalition's advocacy work, supported by favourable exogenous events.

Therefore, even though they did not achieve a major policy change, both strategic approaches of the advocacy coalition have had an impact in determining an incremental policy change. Figure 6 represent the operationalization of Sabatier and Weible's (2007) diagram with a summary of the findings. In the next chapter, I analyse the elements and factors that hindered a major policy change and the ones that facilitated an incremental policy change.

POLICY SUBSYSTEM

Coalition B
?

Policy brokers
Directorate of Health

Coalition A
a. Policy beliefs
- Need of change
- Inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education
b. Resources
- Political power
- Knowledge
- Financial
- Leadership
- Public Opinion

Strategy
Bottom-up:
- Educate people
- Create programs
Top-down
- Advocacy work with politicians
- Production and circulation of knowledge
- Public opinion

Decision by Governmental authorities
Definition of a new strategy for sexual health

Policy outputs and impact
Effects of strategy still unclear. Increase in knowledge production. Ongoing process of change

LONG TERM COALITION OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES
1. High degree of consensus needed for policy change. Compromise more than consensus
2. Open venues for civil society for expressing their interests. But with selective entrance.

RELATIVELY STABLE PARAMETERS
1. Highly politicized issue with a pluralism of actors and interests involved.
2. Resources controlled by the administrative-political actors. Relatively stable
3. Liberal, inclusive, high involvement of civil society. Relatively stable policy environment
4. Neo-corporatism/corporate pluralism

SHORT TERM CONSTRAINTS AND RESOURCES OF SUBSYSTEM ACTORS
High degree of negotiation needed. Presence of venues where to do it. Importance of political power for transforming goals into policies.

EXTERNAL EVENTS
1. Increased immigration
2. Feminists movements
3. Centre-left coalition and centre-right coalition
4. Legalization of gay marriage/increased funding for international sexuality education/changes in the school curriculum
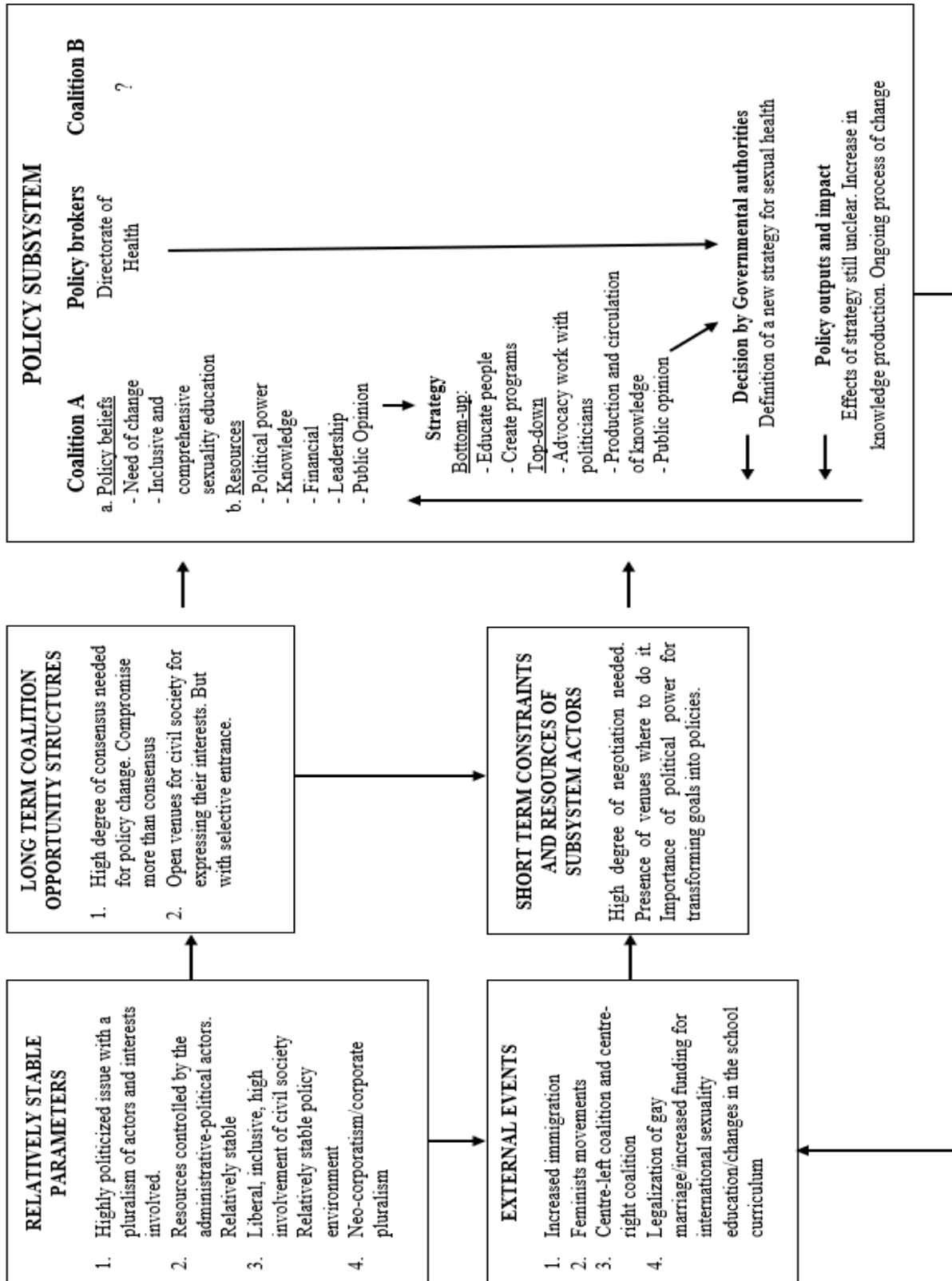
Figure 5. Operationalized diagram with summary of the findings.

7. Analysis

Between 2006 and 2018, the policy subsystem of sexuality education in Norway has undergone a process of incremental change that led to the formation of a new strategy and a change in the attitudes and behaviours of the citizens. In relation to the strategy adopted by the advocacy coalition, both approaches, bottom-up and top-down, have positively influenced the process and contributed to change. Most of the interviewees expressed happiness about the improvements in sexuality education in the schools, as well as about the development of an inclusive society. However, in relation to the goals of the coalition, all actors agree that they have not been completely achieved and the process of change has not been completed yet. Although the new strategy proposes a more inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education, the interviewees complain that there is still a lack of a solid legislation that supports an effective implementation of the policies.

7.1 Hindering and facilitating factors of policy change

In this section, I analyse a series of elements that in different ways influenced the policy process. These factors have been identified during the analysis of the interviews and the documents. In compliance with historical institutionalism, these elements are analysed to define their impact on the historical development of the policy process and to understand if they either hindered or facilitated policy change. The identified elements include the characteristics of the advocacy coalition, the role of knowledge, the professional forum, the policy brokers, and institutionalized practices.

7.1.1 The advocacy coalition

An advocacy coalition is a group of actors that share the same beliefs and values and cooperate to transform these beliefs in concrete policy change (Sabatier, 1988). The ACF definition of advocacy coalition aims at going beyond the *iron triangle* of policy-makers to encompass all the actors that participate and influence the policy process. In Norway, the identified advocacy coalition is composed by a multiplicity of actors that work together with a high degree of coordination to achieve the common goal of realizing an inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education.

The coalition's participants belong mainly to the civil society, but there are also relevant actors from the administrative sector and local politicians. Hence, the composition of the coalition is very

diverse, with actors working in multiple sectors and with different mandates. These actors are bounded by the same core belief, the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education, and by the same goal, to change sexuality education in Norway. This common objective determines a tight coordination among the actors and creates a network of trusted relationships. Seeking allies and cooperating is essential for building a support network that facilitates the goal's achievement. The common goal and the frequent coordination constitute the core of the advocacy coalition.

However, coalition's participants disagree on core policy preferences and secondary beliefs. They have contrasting perceptions on the best means for implementing policy change. Moreover, interviewees showed secondary beliefs and priorities in line with their specific mandate or working sector. Therefore, multiple different beliefs and secondary goals are present within the coalition, hence determining the formation of sub-coalitions. The actors hold a higher degree of coordination with those that have also a secondary interest in common, such as in the case of youth associations or organizations working with minorities. The fragmentation of interests within the coalition confirm the ACF hypothesis that "Actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues pertaining to the policy core, although less so on secondary aspects" (Weible et al., 2009, p. 129). Moreover, it complies with the understanding of advocacy coalitions proposed by Weible and colleagues (2009), who contest the assumption of homogeneity within coalitions. Instead, based on empirical research, they identify coalitions as changing, conflicting entities.

This fragmentation of interests and goals can be considered a hindering factor, as minor conflicts of interests and different opinions on the implementation have hampered a major policy change. As aforementioned, it is impossible to reach consensus when multiple interests are involved (AA P1). Therefore, the fragmentation of interests can slow down the process of a major policy change, as different interests conflict for priority and negotiations become necessary.

Nevertheless, the empirical data on the advocacy coalition confirm the ACF assumption that "Actors who share (policy core) beliefs are more likely to engage in short-term coordination if they: (i) interact repeatedly; (ii) experience relatively low information costs; and (iii) believe that there are policies that, while not affecting each actor in similar ways, at least treat each fairly" (Weible et al., 2009, p.129). The coalition's actors showed a high degree of interaction, a fluid circulation of information and agreement over a policy change that would benefit all of them. Therefore, they

created an informal network of relations and communication that functioned in parallel to the formal institutions, facilitating coordination and, thus, the achievement of policy change.

However, it was not possible to identify specific political figures at the national level that actively supported the coalition. The lack of national politicians among the coalition's participants can be considered a hindering factor for policy change due to the consistent power that politicians hold in the Norwegian system. The coalition needed to invest consistent time and resources in actively seeking and negotiating their political support. However, although stable, the financial and personnel resources of civil society organizations are limited (CS E2). Hence, these organizations have become experts in managing limited resources and multiple tasks and developing effective strategies (AA P2). Therefore, the coalition increased its resources by improving its skills and competences. Previous ACF studies (Sabatier and Weible, 2007; Weible, 2011) only focused on natural and financial resources. Thus, they considered appropriation of other coalitions' resources as the only way to increase them. However, in this study there is a consideration of *soft* resource, such as skills and knowledge. This type of resources can be built in time within the coalition and can help the strategic work of the actors. Therefore, even though the coalition lacked the essential resource of political power, they adopted strategical actions to change their resource dependence (Sabatier and Weible, 2009; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978).

7.1.2 The role of knowledge

In the Nordic countries, evidence-based policy making (EBPM) has been a common trend, and research has been used for seeking policy solutions by looking at best practices from past experiences (Pinheiro et al., 2017). As EBPM acquires increased attention among academics and practitioners, the impact of research in the policy process has become a current topic in academia (Cairney, 2016). Researchers are interested in understanding how advocacy groups use evidence to influence politicians and how policy-makers perceive and utilize these studies. Sabatier and colleagues developed the ACF with the purpose of including the role of science and research in the policy process, as they are believed to have an impact in policy change (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). All the interviewees mentioned knowledge production and circulation as both an essential resource and a central strategy for achieving policy change. In a strongly ideological context, reliable empirical research is fundamental for conducting advocacy work. Actors need to support their claims with strong scientific evidence in order to convince their opponents. In the case of sexuality education policies, evidence is necessary to show the problems caused by the lack of effective

programmes, as well as to demonstrate the positive results of a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education. The identified coalition used knowledge to change the perception of politicians about the seriousness of the problem and, thus, its priority in the political agenda (AA P2; CS P3). As one of the interviewees pointed out, if actors just say that sexuality education is bad, it does not have the same impact as if they present evidence that sexuality education in Norway is bad (AA P1). From the interviews, it emerged that it is common practice for certain actors in Norway to urge the government to support and fund research on specific topics that could support their claims and, in turn, promote policy change (AA P1; AA P2).

The empirical data confirm part of the ACF hypothesis "Problems for which accepted quantitative data and theory exist are more conducive to policy-oriented learning across belief systems than those in which data and theory are generally qualitative, quite subjective, or altogether lacking." (Weible et al., 2009, p. 129). There are little studies on topics related to sexuality education in Norway and the vast majority of the existing research is composed by surveys conducted on specific programmes or small geographic areas within Norway. Therefore, the lack of reliable and consistent research on sexuality education in Norway hindered the advocacy coalition's work and, hence, the possibility of cross-coalition learning[4]. However, the complexity of the problem and its measurement require a mixed-method approach to research (UNESCO, 2016). While quantitative methods outline the dimension of the problem, qualitative approaches provide an understanding of all its facets. Therefore, in the case of sexuality education policies in Norway, quantitative data do not necessarily have a bigger impact then qualitative methods.

Considering its importance, producing knowledge has been an essential part of the coalition's strategy over the last decade. Moreover, thanks to the coalition's advocacy work, knowledge production has been introduced as one of the objectives of the *Talk about it!* strategy in 2017. The combination of these two factors increased consistently the research on sexuality in Norway in the last ten years. The vast majority of the knowledge is still provided by small scale surveys and local studies. However, in 2016 and in 2018 two national reports on the state of sexuality education in Norway were published by Sex and Society and Kantar TNS (Sex and Society, 2016; Kantar TNS, 2018). The Directorate of Health commissioned the second report in response of the 2017 strategy. Both reports investigate the perception of teachers, health nurses and students on the quality and the effects of sexuality education programmes, highlighting the dissatisfaction of most people involved.

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[4] Even tough I identified only one coalition in the policy subsystem, I decided to use the term cross-coalition learning to refer to the process of learning that involved all the actors in the policy subsystem. I decided to use this term in opposition to the within-coalition learning process that only involves the members of the coalition.

In addition, in 2018 a survey was conducted to investigate the attitude of society towards LGBTQ people. The research identified an increase of positive attitudes among the citizens towards the LGBTQ community compared to the survey conducted in 2006. However, it also highlighted the existence of a high margin of improvement, due to the persistence of negative attitudes, especially against transsexuals and bisexual women (PA P4). Gender and digital violence, sexual harassment and gender equality in the marketplace have also been subject to research in recent years (AA P2). Moreover, different academics investigated the materials and the content of sexuality education to show their inappropriateness and normativity (Svendsen, 2014). All these studies have contributed to outline the problem and draw attention to it. Furthermore, they emphasized the lack of information and the need to improve knowledge on sexuality education. The *Talk about it!* strategy is a confirmation of the importance of the coalition's advocacy work, as knowledge production is now on the political agenda.

The continuous production of research on sexuality education is part of the strategic plan of the coalition for changing resources at their favour. By inserting knowledge production in a policy document, the coalition's actors gained an essential resource, as they now have an official document supporting their claims. Hence, they are less depended on their advocacy work, and they can redistribute strategically their resources to pursue their goal. Therefore, the advocacy coalition exerted what Mintrom and Norman (2009) call policy entrepreneurship. This concept refers to the ability of certain actors in the policy subsystem to strategically exploit events and resources to create changes in the policy system. Policy entrepreneurs engage in the fundamental activity of "shaping the terms of policy debates" (Mintrom and Vergari, 1996, p.423). Through the production of knowledge, the coalition presented sexuality education as an urgent matter and highlighted the failure of the current policies (Mintrom and Norman, 2009). Moreover, it exploited the window of opportunity created by the revision of the health strategy to strategically introduce an element of support for the coalition's strategy, hence favouring the achievement of policy change.

Therefore, knowledge is a facilitating factor for policy change as it highlights the existence and the dimension of the problem, contributing to its setting on the political agenda. Moreover, the development of studies over time show the success or failure of specific programmes, thus steering the direction of the policy process. Both these aspects contribute to changing beliefs and perspectives of policy participants, hence determining policy-oriented learning.

7.1.3 Professional forum

As explained in the previous section, knowledge is a relevant factor for influencing policy change through policy-oriented learning. However, knowledge production is a necessary but not sufficient condition for having a strong impact. To influence the policy subsystem, information needs to be shared and discussed by all policy participants. Professional forums provide arenas where all actors can participate in meetings and discussions regulated by professional and consensus-based norms (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The ACF assumes that "Policy-oriented learning across belief systems is most likely when there exists a forum which is: (i) prestigious enough to force professionals from different coalitions to participate; and (ii) dominated by professional norms" (Weible et al., 2009, p.129).

In Norway, the National Network for SRHR represent an important forum of discussion on sexuality education. The Network was founded in 2016 by Sex and Society with the objective of gathering actors working with sexuality education and creating a meeting point between relevant actors and authorities. Moreover, the Network aims at building cooperation among the participants and create a "forum that can contribute to a stronger voice and greater influence in the national work with SRHR" (Sex and Society, n.d, translation from Norwegian). Therefore, the Network function both as an arena for cross-coalition learning, as well as a strategy for strengthening the advocacy work of the coalition. The forum is open to all interested actors, "organisations, institutions, private persons etc." (CS E1) and policy makers are frequently invited to join the Network's meetings. Moreover, several parties' relevant interest groups participate in the network. The scope of the meetings is to share information and give everyone the space to present their opinion. In addition, the actors collaborate to deliver inputs to political processes through their expertise in different subjects (CS E1; Sex and Society, n.d.). Therefore, on one side, it has a strong impact on the policy process by involving political actors and raise their awareness on the topic. On the other, it facilitates the advocacy work of the coalition by creating more opportunities of coordination and easing the sharing of information.

The National Network holds all the characteristics that, according to the ACF, constitute a professional forum that facilitates policy learning. The long history in the field of Sex and Society guarantees the professionalism and prestige required to attract different actors to participate. Moreover, it can count on: a) the agreement of all actors that sexuality education in Norway is problematic; b) the involvement of representatives from different groups of stakeholders and open discussions where all actors are involved; c) the position of prestige of Sex and Society, which

coordinates the Network; d) periodic meetings and continuous contacts through mailing list; e) factual and knowledge based discussions. f) alternative venues, such as media and parliamentary meetings, that are more selective or less prestigious.

Hence, since its formation, the Network as functioned as a facilitating factor for achieving policy change through the exchange of knowledge and expertise, and the creation of additional venues for the advocacy work. Venues manipulation for creating a favourable space of discussion is representative of the entrepreneurial spirit of the coalition's actors (Meijerink and Huitema, 2010). Therefore, this study joins Brown and Stewart (1993) and Olson and colleagues (1999) in proving the role of professional forums in facilitating policy learning. However, as Weible and colleagues (2009) suggest, it confirms that professional forums are a necessary, but not sufficient condition for cross-coalition learning.

7.1.4 Policy brokers

Sabatier (1988) gives a broad definition of policy brokers as a group of actors whose principal concern is to mediate between conflicting strategies and find a reasonable compromise that will reduce conflict. They can belong to different positions, but generally they are elected officials or high civil servants (Sabatier, 1988). Thus, policy brokers are policy participants, external to the coalition, that contribute to the policy process by acting as mediators. However, they are not necessarily impartial judges, as many policy brokers have a political bend (Sabatier, 1988). Nevertheless, their prestige and their strategic position allow them to be considered as neutral. Moreover, they contribute to policy-learning by questioning taken-for-granted beliefs of policy participants (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017).

In the Norwegian context, the role of policy brokers has been assumed by *civil servants*. Even though there is no strong open conflict, the plurality of interests involved and their pressure to achieve policy change required a mediating figure. The role of the policy broker is to act as an intermediary between the coalition and the politicians. As one of the interviewees explained, the civil servants stand in between the civil society advocating for policy change and the politicians in charge of making policies. Therefore, they need to mediate between the plurality of input coming from the civil society and the responses of the political actors, in a continuous circle of input and mediation. Interviewee AA P1 explained this process as an infinite sign (∞) where the civil servants stand in the middle of the cycle of feedback between the civil society and the political actors.

Hence, for their central position, civil servants are likely to exert a mediation role and, thus, act as policy brokers.

During the formulation of the *Talk about it!* strategy, the Directorate of Health assumed the position of policy broker. The Directorate is a specific body in the area of health services, public health and living conditions. It has the responsibility of monitoring the field and offering advice on strategies and implementation to central and local authorities, voluntary organisations and the private sector. It compares knowledge and experience from the field to provide expertise to all the interested parties. Therefore, for its mandate, the Directorate was in a privileged position for capturing the knowledge developing within the policy subsystem and creating a mediation between the civil society and the government. The Directorate took the decision of merging the health and reproductive strategy based on the information and inputs collected from the field. It, then, asked and received the mandate from the Ministry to develop a policy draft for the strategy. The Directorate has both a position of power and a position of trust within the policy subsystem. On one side, it controls and allocate the financial resources destined to civil society organizations. On the other, it is part of the aforementioned network of trusted relations because many of its members have previously worked in the civil society and can, thus, count on good relationships with the organizations.

However, the definition of the strategy was a long process of mediation between the inputs collected by all the interested actors and the necessity of formulating a feasible strategy. The Directorate aimed at involving all possible interests related to sexuality education and represent them in the draft. Nevertheless, the Minister perceived the proposed draft as too expansive and expensive and, thus, decided to downsize the strategy. As custom in the Norwegian system, the final decision on the formulation of the strategy was taken by the political actors. The Minister respected the general will of the civil society actors, however he cut many of their propositions. While agreeing on the problems of sexuality education in Norway, the Conservative party (to which the Minister belong) do not perceive the matter as urgent and it is not willing to increase budgeting for it. In the 2017 elections, it was the only party that did not mention sexuality education in their programme (Walderhaug, 2017). However, the Directorate of Health's view on sexuality education was in line with the goals of the advocacy coalition. Hence, it tried to find stratagems to fit the achievement of a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education within the budget set by the Ministry.

In the Norwegian system, the relation between civil servants and politicians seems to stand between two of Peters' (1987) models, the formal-legal and the functional village life. Civil servants are held

in high consideration and they have power of bargaining, however the final say belongs to the politicians. These two public figures generally hold different views on policies due to the different length of their mandate and the different identification with their public position (Peters, 1987).

Even though the mediating action of the policy brokers was hindered by the power of the Minister, their intervention impacted the policy process because it facilitated the interaction between the coalition and the politicians. Moreover, it contributed to set the issue on the political agenda. Furthermore, the negotiation process confirms another assumption of the ACF, namely; that "Even when the accumulation of technical information does not change the views of the opposing coalition, it can have important impacts on policy—at least in the short run—by altering the views of policy brokers." (Weible et al., 2009, p.129). Hence, the presence of policy brokers within the political context is a facilitating factor for achieving policy change because they contribute to the exchange of knowledge and opinions among different coalitions, thus easing policy learning. This study, thus, confirms Bennett and Howlett (1992) and Meijerink and Huitema (2010) assumption on the facilitating role of policy brokers and civil servants in policy-learning processes.

Moreover, it aligns with Sabatier (1998) in defining policy brokers as partial actors, as they hold their own set of beliefs. This contrast Ingold and Varone (2012) hypotheses that are based on the assumption that they do not hold a strong beliefs system. In addition, it contributes to the literature that compares policy brokers and policy entrepreneurs. On one side, it supports their distinction as separate roles as proposed by Christopoulos and Andkariningold (2015). Policy brokers might act moved by their beliefs system. However, contrarily to policy entrepreneurs, they prioritize their civil duty over their personal interests. Nonetheless, this study demonstrates that the same actor can hold both roles, as in the case of the Directorate of Health. This acted as a policy entrepreneur when it exploited the window of opportunity of the strategies' merger for expanding the scope of the revision. However, in the negotiation process, the Directorate acted as a policy broker prioritizing its mediating role over its personal objective.

7.1.5 Institutionalized practices and norms

Institutionalization refers to the process that leads practices and beliefs to become embedded within individuals and, thus, taken for granted in society (March and Olsen, 2006). These practices acquire legitimacy over time and become part of the routines and rules of organizational systems. Their legitimacy and embeddedness within the individuals make them highly resistant to change (Oliver, 1992). Political systems are the result of a series of institutionalized practices and norms that

become unquestioned over time, until they become legally and politically legitimized (March and Olsen, 2006). Within the Norwegian context these practices determine the policy participants, their power relations and the rules and routines that they have to follow. In turn, they also determine the development of the policy process.

The institutionalized practices influenced in different ways the work of the advocacy coalition. The openness of the political system and the practice of inviting civil society to take part in the policy process favoured the coalition. The actors exploited these practices to make their voices heard and influence political actors. However, the high degree of regulation of the political venues, as well as the strong power of political actors within them, hindered the actions of the coalition. To comply with the legalistic nature of the Norwegian political system, the actors had to submit to the rules imposed by the institutional settings (Bleiklie and Michelsen, 2012). Hence, they had to leave to the politicians the last say on the policy formulation. The need to win the politicians' approval requires time and resources, hence slowing down the process of change.

The coalition's actors chose to follow a *logic of appropriateness*, complying with the rules set by the political context. The rule-following logic is based on a sense of rights and obligations derived from an identity and membership in a political community (March and Olsen, 2006). Actions and changes pursued trough this logic tend to have more legitimacy than those achieved by breaking the rules. However, changes pursued through the logic of appropriateness tend to have a slow pace and predictable outcomes (March and Olsen, 2006). The actors decided to use official channels and standardized practices to advocate for policy change, even though this might have hindered the opportunity of achieving major policy change. The lack of an open conflict gave no reason to the coalition to pursue a disruptive change of the institutions. Moreover, within the Norwegian system, informal channels and trust relationships play a strong role in the political context (Osterud, 2013). Therefore, the actors are more prone to follow the norms and practices established by their network, rather than pursuing a *logic of outcomes* that aims at maximizing actors' profit through disruptive behaviours. Hence, the coalition's actors preferred to respect the timing set by the institutional environment and maintain their network of relations.

Moreover, the coalition aimed at changing the attitudes and perception on sexuality education. These beliefs have a strong institutional value, as they are highly embedded in the individuals and they have a tight relation with social values. Therefore, in absence of a strong external shock, they are hard to alter, and their process of change requires time and resources. The advocacy coalition planned to change them by presenting new information on sexuality education, as well as by

actively engaging with sexuality education programmes. In the first case, the new knowledge aimed at creating a cognitive dissonance with the current beliefs in the attempt of changing them (Dunlop and Radaelli, 2017). In the second case, the actors used education to create new knowledge and, hence, different attitudes and beliefs. However, the embeddedness of these beliefs and attitudes requires a slow process of learning before leading to change.

Therefore, dealing with institutionalized practices and beliefs while following a logic of appropriateness hindered the achievement of a major change. However, it gave legitimacy to the process of incremental change triggered by the advocacy coalition.

7.2 The slow path to policy-learning

In the last decade, Norway assisted to a slow but incremental change of policies and attitudes on sexuality education. This change has been the result of policy-oriented learning, which is "relatively enduring alternations of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999, 123). Policy-oriented learning involves a feedback loop in the policy subsystem between the input of new information and its reception from policy participants (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The new information changes the perceptions of external dynamics and increases the knowledge on the policy problem. This process leads to a change in the beliefs of the policy participants which, in turn, can determine a change in policy. Policy learning is a slow process that might take a decade to have an effect, and generally influence only policy preferences and secondary beliefs (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). However, when happening at the subsystem level, cross-coalition learning can determine consistent change in policies and attitudes.

The policy subsystem of school sexuality education in Norway underwent a process of cross-coalition learning in the period between 2006 and 2018. The learning process involved the whole policy subsystem, changing the perception on sexuality education of all the actors and, thus, leading to policy change. This process was possible thanks to the lack of a strong open conflict and policy debates focusing on the perceived urgency, the values' priority, and the best means of implementation. Thus, since a change of core beliefs was not involved, policy-oriented learning was more likely to happen in the policy subsystem (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

The intense advocacy work of the coalition created a flow of information, facilitated by the presence of a professional forum (the National Network) and policy brokers (the civil servants). The presence of these elements facilitated cross-coalition learning because they allowed the circulation of knowledge, as well as discussions and mediated agreements. The production of new research, combined with an effective distribution, slowly changed the perception of the policy participants about the urgency and the characteristics of the policy problem. Moreover, it convinced relevant policy makers about the importance of a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education.

In addition, the national and international historical context facilitated the learning process by raising awareness on the topic and increasing the sense of urgency of the problem. National and international events, such as the *rape wave* in 2011 and the MeToo movement in 2017, contributed to outline the existence of a social problem in Norway that needed to be solved through effective policies. Furthermore, policy decisions and national discussions on issues related to sexual and ethnic minorities brought attention to the need for a more inclusive sexuality education. In both cases, exogenous factors contributed to facilitate policy-oriented learning and, in turn, policy change. These findings contribute to the ACF literature that focuses on policy learning (cf. Pierce et al., 2017 for an exhaustive review). This research is in line with studies that found a strong connection between learning and policy change (Lester & Hamilton, 1987; McBeth, Shanahan, Arnell, & Hathaway, 2007; Munro, 1993). However, it also integrates the influence of external events in contributing to policy change. Jenkins-Smith and colleagues (2014) also identified a relation between learning, external events and policy change, which in their study led to major policy change. As the process of change is still ongoing in Norway, it might be that the coalition will eventually achieve a major policy change.

Still, cross-coalition learning is a slow process because it requires the interiorization of the information and a change in embedded attitudes and beliefs. As Oliver (1992) suggests, the process de-institutionalization requires time because it implies the disruption of old embedded institutions and beliefs. Then, new norms and values must substitute the old ones, and they need to undergo a new process of embedment and legitimization. In the case of Norway, the process has been further slowed down by a series of institutional rules and practices that hindered policy change. These practices create a complicated and highly regulated system in which actors need to comply with fixed venues and procedures for expressing their interests, hence hindering the process of expression and assimilation of different interests. Moreover, the institutional power relations are structured in a way that disadvantages the coalition's actors in favour of the politicians. In addition,

the lack of consensus on policy preferences and secondary beliefs created a conflict among different interests, which required time to achieve a compromise and impeded an effective use of the formal venues for negotiation.

Finally, institutions and norms also have an impact on the cultural resistance of certain beliefs and mainstream conceptions (Zucker, 1991). Therefore, the process of changing normative and mainstream sexuality education towards a more inclusive and comprehensive one requires extensive time. Moreover, it is strongly linked to broader changes of values in the society. For example, the introduction of topics such as boundaries and sexual violence in the programmes would have not been possible (or it would have taken longer) without the public discussion on the *rape wave* in 2011. The debates shifted the general perception of public opinion towards these problems, and hence also their specific perception in relation to sexuality education. In similar ways, the MeToo movement in 2017 contributed to accelerate the process initiated by the setting of sexuality education among the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (UNFPA, 2017). The increased international engagement of Norway in promoting sexuality education, and the global attention toward gender equality and sexual harassment, put Norwegian sexuality education in the spotlight and raised public scrutiny regarding its quality. Being considered an example worldwide, Norway needs to live up to its reputation of a liberal and inclusive country (IPPF, 2017).

Hence, one can tentatively conclude that the incremental process that changed the policy subsystem of sexuality education in the last decade is the result of cross-coalition learning. The advocacy coalition started and continuously influenced the process through a common strategy of production and sharing of knowledge that contributed to changing attitudes and perception of policy participants on sexuality education. The active agency of the coalition's actors in creating arenas and channels of sharing and coordination facilitated the learning process. Nonetheless, fixed institutions and conflict of interests hindered the achievement of a major policy change.

7.3 The obstacle race to change

The policy process is a complex system in which multiple actors and factors interplay to determine the outcomes of the policy participants' actions. The analysis of the policy subsystem of sexuality education in Norway showed a strong linkage and co-dependence among the different elements. Beliefs, resources, and strategies influenced one another and, in turn, they all influenced the outcomes of policy participants' actions. The development of policy change within the policy

subsystem can be compared to an obstacle race. The actors' beliefs set the finish line, the ideal state of the policy subsystem that they want to achieve and, hence, their final goal. The path to the finish line is shaped by the presence and distribution of obstacles and shortcuts. Resources, power relations and knowledge determine the difficulty or the easiness for each participant to reach the final destination. Therefore, based on these elements, each actor determines the best strategy for conducting the race and achieving the final goal. However, the participants are aware that the race has specific rules that they have to follow for achieving a legitimate victory. The actors' participation to the race is based on trust that they will comply and respect the rules of the game. Hence, the actors deliberately choose to avoid certain shortcuts and follow the rules to ensure the legitimacy of their victory. Therefore, the outcomes of the race are determined by the combination of goals, resources, participants and rules.

The trust and rule-based system of the race reflects the dynamics of democracy. The democratic system distributes resources and power among the actors, and it sets rules and constraints that actors need to follow (Kane and Patapan, 2012). In a legalistic system such as Norway, rules' and norms' compliance is at the base of political life (Bleiklie and Michelsen, 2012). However, democracy is also based on shared trust that public actors will comply with their official roles, guaranteeing the correct functioning of the democratic system. In addition to official laws and rules, there are informal institutions (i.e. traditions and cultures) that regulate informal relations among actors and define the actual structure and outcomes of the system (Osterud, 2013). Thus, democracy actions are based on the collaboration of multiple actors that follow official and informal rules to achieve results for the public good. Therefore, trust, negotiation and compromise are essential for the democratic process, leading to the development of incremental changes (Zürn, 2000).

The coalition reflects the same dynamics, as multiple actors are involved in coordinated actions to achieve a common objective. Therefore, coalition's actors need to create trusted relationships, and compromise on issues when there is no consensus. Working within a specific system, the coalition reflects the mainstream culture and norms. Hence, when inserted in a pluralistic and legalistic country like Norway, it will reflect the same conformation. Thus, it will likely be an heterogenous entity that represent multiple actors and interests, guided by the same principle of rule-following.

In the Norwegian case, the policy process (the race) is shaped by the structure of the institutions (i.e. formal and informal rules), by the policy participants and their beliefs, and by the resources of the policy subsystem. These elements are defined by the geographical function of the system the Norwegian setting, as well as by the characteristics of the policy problem, sexuality education. The

Norwegian setting determines a plurality of actors involved in policy making, that give high relevance to trusted relations and rules, as well as to decisions based on consensus and inclusion. Both the corporate-pluralistic (Olsen, 1991) and the neo-corporatist (Engelstad et al., 2017) models highlight this feature of the Norwegian system. Nevertheless, sexuality education also determines the participation of multiple actors from different sectors, thus adding an ideological context.

Within the Norwegian policy subsystem of sexuality education, a variegated group of actors decided to coordinate their actions to achieve the common goal of changing sexuality education in schools. This goal was based on their common belief that sexuality education should be comprehensive and inclusive. This coalition of actors shared consensus on the core goal and the general strategy to adopt. However, the presence of actors with distinct interests determined a fragmentation on secondary beliefs and policy preferences, causing conflict on specific aspects of the strategy and, hence, hindering its implementation. The coalition chose its strategy based on the available resources, focusing on those considered the most central for achieving its goals.

The context of action is fundamental in shaping the adopted strategy, as it determines the resources available and the means to obtain them (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). In the Norwegian political system, politicians have the last say on policy-making, hence they are the most powerful actors. Therefore, the coalition aimed at winning their support for achieving policy change. Lacking relevant political power, the actors decided to exploit their most powerful resource, knowledge. Within a highly normative context, relevant evidence and information is essential for shifting beliefs and supporting the advocacy work. The coalition shaped both its top-down and bottom-up strategy on increasing and sharing knowledge and information on sexuality education. To facilitate their race towards policy change, the actors developed professional arenas and trusted channels of interaction both within the coalition, as well as with the outside world. This strategy aimed at redistributing the resources within the policy subsystem by changing the institutional settings of negotiations, as well as by shaping, through evidence, the discourses on sexuality education.

Nonetheless, the coalition was embedded in a system of institutional norms and settings that regulated the policy making process. The power relations and the structured procedures of these settings were disadvantageous for the achievement of the coalition's goal. However, the actors decided to comply with a logic of appropriateness even if it delayed the accomplishment of the goal. As March and Olsen (2006) suggest, the choice of this logic depended on their sense of belonging to the Norwegian system, which values the compliance with norms and the respect of

trusted relations (Bleiklie and Michelsen, 2012). Moreover, Norway takes in high consideration a policy process based on compromise and on institutional rules (Engelstad et al., 2017).

Hence, the lack of a clear open conflict led the actors to follow a logic of appropriateness, rather than a logic of outcomes (March and Olsen, 2006). The coalition preferred a slow incremental change based on institutional rules and correct procedures, to a rapid change based on disruptive actions. Following an *exploitation* strategy (based on a logic of appropriateness) allowed the coalition to achieve a slow learning process that affects attitudes and leads to a durable change in time. As Olsen suggests (1991), exploitation strategies based on gradual learning lead to predictable outcomes and do not risk to harm socialization. On the other hand, a pure *exploration* logic (based on a logic of outcomes) would have caused a high uncertainty in the results and the possibility of damaging the coalition's network of relations. In this way, the outcomes of the strategy received the necessary legitimacy from all the actors of the policy subsystem. The coalition's actions received a cognitive legitimacy derived from their conformity with the environment that allowed other policy participants to recognize and predict their outcomes (Suchman, 1995).

To overcome the rigidity of the institutional settings, the actors created an informal network of trusted relationships and informal channels of communication. When planning their strategy these informal channels were critical to achieve coordination and shared knowledge. In Norway, informal relationships are vital for the functioning of the social and political system (Osterud, 2013). Operating outside formal venues is a common practice due to their selectiveness and the power of politicians within formal institutions. Moreover, as interviewee AA P1 stated, "Norway is a very small country and, if you work in the same sector, you eventually end up working with the same people and creating a strong network of trusted contacts". Therefore, coalitions create an additional social capital by bringing together different sectors and levels of governance and building new channels of interaction (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). The National Network for SRHR is an example of such channels. On the one hand, it created the possibility for new interactions to emerge. On the other, it moved the discussion from the institutionalized channels to a new arena where the power relations and the dominant norms were yet to be established.

Moreover, the Network provided an important channel for sharing knowledge and information both within the coalition and across the policy subsystem. Within the coalition, sharing was essential for building trust and coordination among the actors, as it contributed to a common vision (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). Across the policy subsystem, distributing knowledge was a fundamental strategy for achieving policy learning and, in turn, change. The coalition skilfully achieved cross-coalition

learning thanks to the production of relevant knowledge and its effective dissemination. These aspects were part of both the coalition's bottom-up and top-down strategy. In the bottom-up approach, the actors have incentivized the diffusion of knowledge by advocating to schools and local government for use of up-to-date information. Moreover, they actively transmitted the knowledge to teachers and pupils through the implementation of sexuality education programmes. In the top-down approach, the coalition exploited knowledge to change the distribution of resources within the policy subsystem. The actors used relevant evidence to convince politicians to support their goal, hence increasing the coalition's political power, the most essential resource in Norway.

In doing so, the coalition exploited the historical context set by national and international events related to sexuality education. The emergence of feminist movements and political discussions on sexual rights helped framing the problem of sexuality education in Norway as urgent. Moreover, it frame the meaning of the information presented to the politicians. As historical institutionalists suggest, the macro socio-political context and the emergence of specific events in time shape the actions of the policy participants (Steinmo, 2008). They trigger specific courses of actions because they frame the actors' perception of certain problems or situations. However, policy change always implies the active agency of policy participants, whose beliefs and ideas are central in starting processes of change. As Mahoney and Thelen (2009) state, institutions are intrinsically inclined to change, as they contemporarily determine the distribution of resources and the struggle for changing this distribution. Nonetheless, it is the actor's responsibility to exploit this intrinsic feature of institutions and act to achieve change.

Therefore, while the macro context of interaction set the rules, the active agency of policy participants changed the game by moving it to different settings. The coalition demonstrated a high degree of policy entrepreneurship, by actively engaging in strategic actions to achieve their goal. As the Policy Entrepreneurship literature (see Mintrom and Vergari, 1996 and Mintrom and Norman, 2009) suggests, the essential tasks of policy entrepreneurs are the creation of networks of relations and the shaping of policy debates. The coalition managed to perform both tasks through the creation of the National Network. Moreover, single organizations within the coalition acted as policy entrepreneurs by exploiting the windows of opportunity that opened in the policy subsystem. Sex and Politics took advantage of the public discussion on the *rape wave* to introduce new topics and expand the coverage of its sexuality education program Week 6. Sex and Society exploited the national and global attention toward sexuality education to promote the National Network. Finally, the Directorate of Health expanded to scope of the health strategy's revision to include specific

references to inclusiveness and comprehensiveness. Agency, thus, it not simply the willingness to translate beliefs into actions, but it is the active entrepreneurial action of planning and implementing strategies and building networks. It has been the entrepreneurial spirit that allowed the coalition to reach its objective.

Historical institutionalists are often criticized for looking at change only as the result of critical junctures, generally caused by external or internal shocks (Steinmo, 2008). However, recent studies adopting the historical institutionalist approach contemplate the possibility of less disruptive processes, such as incremental change (Steinmo, 2008; Greener, 2002). This case study contributes to this line of research analysing an incremental process of change through the historical institutionalism lens. The incrementality of the change process was determined by the combination of exogenous events (not shocks), the lack of a strong conflict and the adoption of a logic of appropriateness. Moreover, the coalition entered in a path-dependent course of incremental change because the adoption of a logic of appropriateness activated a self-reinforcing mechanism over time. The early decision of following institutional rules lead to the strengthening of trust in the coalition's network of relations (March and Olsen, 2006). Hence, trust and the network of relation grew in time with the perpetration of the logic of appropriateness, making it increasingly difficult to break this path.

In conclusion, this research confirms the ACF core assumption that the policy process is the result of the interaction and interdependence among macro, meso and micro elements. The macro level of the system defines the institutional setting, both in term of norms and resources, as well as in term of mainstream values. It affects, and, in turn, it is affected by the strategy adopted by the policy participants that aim at changing the institutional settings. Finally, the strategy is shaped by the embedded beliefs and values of the actors, which again are influenced by the macro level. Therefore, the policy process is a constant cycle of reciprocal influence of all the elements and factors involved in its definition.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Answering the research problem

The aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the policy process in presence of complex issues involving multiple actors. Sexuality education is a significant example of a public issue involving pluralism of actors and interests, as well as a relevant degree of conflict. The multifaceted nature of sexuality, together with the social values involved in education, cause intense ideological and political debates. However, despite the recognised impact of sexuality education programs on both individuals and society, researchers have often overlooked the process leading to the formation of sexuality education policies. Therefore, the analysis of the development of sexuality education policies in Norway is a relevant case for contributing to filling this knowledge gap. Moreover, the complexity of the sexuality education issue, combined with the relative stability of the Norwegian political system, allow to identify the interconnection among different actors and elements of the policy process.

This study analyses the work of an advocacy coalition working with sexuality education, while investigating the elements and factors that influenced its actions and their outcomes. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) offers a suitable lens for this analysis, as it specifically designed to deal with complex policy issues. Moreover, it provides an understanding of the overall policy process, while focusing on the motivations and beliefs guiding the policy participants. However, I decided to support the ACF with the Historical Institutionalism (HI) approach, because it allows to better understand the interrelations between the constraints posed by the institutional setting and the role of the active agency of policy participants. Both theoretical frameworks demanded a developmental analysis of the policies and actions, hence putting the process at the core of the analysis.

This study investigated the beliefs, strategies and facilitating/hindering factors involved in the policy process. This analysis provided an understanding of the role of the coalition in shaping institutional change in Norway, hence allowing a tentative answer to the research question: "How and why did an advocacy coalition promoting institutional change influence the policy-making process of sexuality education policies in Norway between 2006 and 2018?". From the empirical data, it emerges that the advocacy coalition promoted institutional change to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education. This goal was based on their belief that this type of sexuality education can tackle problems of violence, health, and inclusion in Norway.

The advocacy coalition managed to start a process of incremental change during the last decade thanks to a coordinated strategy based on the consistent production and diffusion of knowledge. The coalition acted as a policy entrepreneur in creating new channels of interaction for the policy participants and new arenas for sharing and discussing information. Through these means, the coalition determined a process of cross-coalition learning that led to a change in perceptions and attitudes on sexuality education across the policy subsystem. Moreover, it led to the formation of a new health strategy that redefines the scope of sexuality education in Norway.

However, the actors decided to follow institutionalized rules and practices to avoid the disruption of institutions and to legitimize their achievements. Complying with a logic of appropriateness resulted in a slow incremental change. Nevertheless, the process of change is still ongoing, as currently Norway is undergoing processes of consultation and hearings. The coalition's actors aim at exploiting the reform of the school curriculum planned for 2019 for strengthening the implementation of sexuality education.

8.1 Summary of key findings

Interviews with key actors and the analysis of relevant documents allowed to identify the presence of an advocacy coalition working towards a comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education in Norway. An advocacy coalition is a group of actors "who share a particular belief system" and "show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time." (Sabatier, 1988, p.139) Hence, civil society, local politicians and civil servants formed a coalition to achieve policy change in sexuality education through a tight coordination of their actions. These actors were bounded by the common belief that sexuality education should be comprehensive and inclusive, as well as by the common goal of transforming this belief in concrete policy change. However, the coalition's actors were divided on secondary beliefs and specific interests related to their mandate. This fragmentation created sub-coalitions and hindered the achievement of the common goal.

To reach its goal and achieve policy change, the coalition defined a double strategy. On one side, it aimed at changing behaviours and attitudes through a bottom-up approach focusing on the provision of sexuality education programmes. On the other side, it adopted a top-down strategy that sought to influence politicians and policy makers through consistent advocacy work. Within the Norwegian system, political actors hold a high degree of power and control over the policy process. Hence, the top-down strategy aimed at gaining their support and, thus, increasing the coalition's political

resources. In addition to exploit the official venues for the advocacy work, the coalition was actively involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge and information concerning sexuality education. This strategic move was based on the assumption that in a strongly ideological context evidence is fundamental. Presenting evidence helped the coalition outlining the problem and its urgency. Moreover, combined with favourable national and international discussions, it increased public awareness on the importance of an inclusive and comprehensive sexuality education. This framing of the policy issue contributed to set sexuality education on the political agenda.

In implementing its strategy, the coalition demonstrated a relevant degree of policy entrepreneurship. To overcome the selectiveness and the politicians' power in the official venues, the actors decided to create a parallel network of informal institutions. Here, the coalition framed the discussion in its favour and altered the power structures. Hence, the creation of a professional forum and the strengthening of trusted relations have been essential for the achievement of policy change. Moreover, different actors within the coalition acted as policy entrepreneurs, exploiting the window of opportunity created by exogenous events. These actors took advantage of critical conjunctures to push forward the achievement of the coalition's goal, thus highlighting the importance of active agency in determining the course of events.

The Directorate of Health functioned both as a policy entrepreneur, as well as a policy broker. While it exploited the redefinition of the health strategy to perpetrate the coalition's goal, it prioritized the compliance with its institutional role and acted as a mediating figure between the coalition and the politicians. Therefore, it demonstrated the distinction between these two roles, and it highlighted the role of civil servant as central figures in negotiations.

The respect of a logic of appropriateness is a common denominator in the Norwegian system and in the coalition's actions. The legalistic nature of Norway and the strong role of public trust in the country determined the decision of all actors to privilege the achievement of a slow but legitimized change, over a rapid but disruptive victory. Trust and compromise are two essential elements of the democratic system. While their compliance might hinder major policy achievements, it guarantees inclusive and respectful policy processes. In an era of raising populist movements that propose simple and fast solutions, it is important to stress the centrality of a proper democratic process.

In conclusion, the coalition managed to achieve incremental changes that led to the revision of the national strategy and a change in attitudes towards sexuality education. Knowledge played a

fundamental role in shaping policy change, contributing to redefying the perception of the policy problem and its solution. The ACF define this slow process of change as policy-oriented learning.

8.2 Theoretical Contributions

The case study of sexuality education in Norway provided an interesting contribution to the Advocacy Coalition Framework as presented by Sabatier and Weible (2007). On one side, it investigated some overlooked concepts and hypothesis. On the other, it contributed with relevant insights on the policy process and on advocacy coalitions.

The empirical data provided an interesting understanding on the role of knowledge in determining policy change. It, thus, confirmed the ACF assumption that science and research play an essential part in shaping the policy process. They insert new information in the policy subsystem and, hence, cause changes in perspective and framing of the policy problem, thus determining policy change. However, while the ACF focuses mainly on academics and scientists as knowledge producers, this case study showed the importance of civil society organizations and bureaucrats in producing and promoting knowledge. In addition, it also emphasized the request of evidence production as an essential part of the coalition strategy.

Moreover, it confirmed the need of a long- term perspective to understand the impact of these information on the policy participants, as it took more than a decade of production, sharing and discussion of knowledge for changing the frame of sexuality education in Norway. The long-term perspective is also in line with the Historical Institutionalism approach, as history has been fundamental for understanding the development of the process of institutional change.

Furthermore, this research confirmed the ACF assumption of advocacy coalitions as aggregates of actors that hold a high degree of coordination and share common beliefs and goals. In addition, it endorsed Weible and colleagues' (2009) discovery that coalitions are not necessarily homogenous entities. On the contrary, they are likely to divide in sub coalitions based on their secondary beliefs. While they agree to coordinate to achieve a common goal set by a higher level of beliefs, they might be hindered in its achievement by disagreements over secondary beliefs and the pursue of minor objectives. However, this research highlighted an interesting insight on the factors that bound a coalition together. From the data analysis, the creation of networks of informal relations based on trust and coordination is a strong motivation in bounding actors together. These networks constitute relevant alternative channels of communication and sharing that empower the coalition's actors and,

hence, function as an aggregating force. This aggregating element is implicit in the definition of coalition, however no ACF study investigated its role and power in sticking coalitions together and in influencing the policy subsystem. Therefore, I believe that this insight provides a significant contribution to the ACF.

In addition, this case study confirmed the ACF assumptions regarding the role played by professional forums and policy brokers. The empirical data highlighted the importance of both elements as mediating factors that facilitate knowledge sharing and negotiations. The professional forum is confirmed as an essential element of the policy process that provides a neutral and professional arena promoting knowledge sharing and discussion. On the other hand, policy brokers provide access to negotiating venues and act as mediators between conflicting actors. However, contrarily to previous studies, in this research professional forums and policy brokers are central elements in shaping the policy process. Hence, while the ACF considered them as marginal factors, here they are central players in defining institutional change. Thus, considering their relevance for the process, this study emphasises the need of further investigation on their role in policy making. Moreover, it confirms Sabatier's (1988) assumption that civil servants are likely to act as policy brokers. Their central position in the political system and their strict compliance with their public role, are essential characteristics for a mediating figure such as policy brokers.

Finally, the contribution of the Historical Institutionalism (HI) perspective in an ACF study strengthened the role of stable parameters in shaping the definition of the coalition's strategy, as well as the outcomes of the policy participants' actions. Institutional settings, power relations and normative beliefs are highly resistant to change. Hence, when in contrast with the coalition's strategy, they lead to a slow, incremental change. While confirming the deep influence of the macro level on the policy subsystem, this study diverges from the ACF perception of internal and external events as game-changing shocks. Conversely, these events define the historical and institutional setting for the development of the policy process. Instead, the central role in defining the development of the policy process is assigned to the active agency of the policy participants. As Mahoney and Thelen (2009) and Steinmo (2008) propose, the actor's agency is fundamental in determining the course of events.

In addition, this study offers a contribution to HI by linking individual agency to the concept of policy entrepreneurship. Hence, it suggests the centrality of policy entrepreneurs in exploiting critical conjunctures and, thus, defining a specific course of events.

8.3 Contribution and practical implications for sexuality education literature

The case study analysed represent a particular setting of sexuality education, where the latter benefits from a wide acceptance and a low level of open conflict. However, the global condition of sexuality education is for most part characterized by a high level of conflict and tensions. Nevertheless, the specific setting provided by Norway allowed to analyse different variables in presence of a relatively stable political context. The isolation of such variables would have been hampered by the presence of a complex political setting.

This study confirmed the importance of evidence and knowledge production in the support of sexuality education policies. In a widely normative context, evidence is fundamental for defining the problem and highlighting the best possible solution. Therefore, this research highlighted the importance of producing studies on the impact of sexuality education programmes to use as evidence in support of the advocacy work. In addition, it stressed the relevance of producing evidence on the problems that sexuality education aims at resolving. Considering the complexity of the problems linked to sexuality education, this is not an easy task. Often, issues of gender violence, sexual infections and harassment are deeply interlinked, and it is hard to define their borders.

Nevertheless, it is fundamental for researchers to produce studies that present data on sexually transmitted diseases rates, sexual violence and attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, as well as student dissatisfaction with the existing education. These studies are essential for showing the impact of the programmes that aim at solving these problems. This type of research helps advocates to stress the urgency of the problem and the consequences of ineffective sexuality education policies. Current literature tends to focus mainly on the effects of sexuality education programmes, overlooking the motivations for starting such programs. However, as this research suggests, framing the urgency and gravity of a problem is a winning strategy for advocacy actors to push sexuality education in the agenda setting.

Moreover, this study also provides suggestions on essential ways to make evidence more efficient. In addition to producing relevant and reliable research, advocates should identify or create arenas for sharing and discussing knowledge and information with their opponents. In planning these arenas, the actors should concentrate in creating a neutral, professional and inclusive setting. On one side, all policy participants should be motivated to participate in these forums for their prestige and professionalism. On the other hand, they should feel involved and productive, through open discussions that have a policy impact. Hence, it is essential to define inclusive rules and ensure their compliance within the arenas.

In addition, policy participants should involve in these arenas prestigious and neutral figures, such as civil servants. These figures act as policy brokers, facilitating cross-sectorial learning and easing the achievement of compromise. Moreover, civil servants are essential for providing access to official venues and, hence, their support is strategic for achieving concrete policy change. Especially when lacking political power, the support of civil servants is fundamental for influencing the agenda setting and convincing politicians to support sexuality education policies.

However, actors working with sexuality education should be aware that policy-oriented learning is a slow process that requires time and resources. Hence, when planning a strategy for changing attitudes and behaviours, this is an important aspect to consider. In the section, I provide concrete recommendation for actors at multiple level of governance and society. These recommendations aim at providing strategical actions for improving the chances of achieving policy change. The scope is to achieve a durable and legitimate change that benefits all policy participants.

8.4 Recommendations

8.4.1 For policy makers

- **Create a solid legislation on sexuality education with specific directions on the funding and means for implementation.**
  The legislation should define clear Competence Goals about knowledge and skills that the pupils need to gain, set national standards and effective measurements, and include specific reference to the teachers' training. The legislation is meant to provide the final goal and the general directions for all Norwegian schools. However, it should respect schools' autonomy by leaving them freedom on the choice of specific means of implementation (i.e. external or internal expertise).

- **Favour mixed-methods studies or combine quantitative and qualitative studies when seeking for evidence for policy making.**
  While quantitative studies are useful to outline the general trend of problems and solutions, qualitative studies can guarantee the necessary depth for their thorough understanding. Moreover, qualitative studies explain the exceptions captured by quantitative studies, hence allowing the definition of a solution that includes specific needs.

- **Improve the coordination among different sectors through the creation of joint strategies.**

Following the trend started by the *Talk about it!* strategy, sexuality education strategies should contemplate an integration of objectives and means among different sectors. An integrated system can avoid overlapping in implementation and, thus, the waste of resources. Moreover, it can strengthen the solution to pressing needs providing a multifaceted approach.

- **Arrange venues and funding for initiatives that promote the cross-sectorial communication and coordination.**

  Linked to the previous recommendation, the creation and support of forums and conferences helps to align intentions and goals, as well as providing a general understanding of the problem and the solution that benefit from multiple standpoints.

8.4.2 To coalition's actors

- **Overcome divisions and tensions over secondary beliefs though negotiation and compromise.**

  To improve the coalition's influence within the policy subsystem, the actors should avoid conflict over secondary beliefs to focus on primary beliefs. It is essential to present a common front in the advocacy work to avoid confusion and strengthening the coalition message. Moreover, presenting clear propositions facilitates the acceptance and application of the demands.

- **Develop a better cross-sectorial understanding and define a shared vision.**

  Linked to the previous recommendation, develop an understanding of each other needs and values help the negotiation process and the development of a satisfying compromise for all parties. In doing so, coalitions can exploit official channels and platforms of sharing such as forums and meetings, as well as informal communication channels.

- **Take advantage of policy brokers in negotiations.**

  This recommendation refers to both within- and cross-coalitions negotiations. In both cases, policy brokers can mediate among conflicting parties, facilitating reciprocal understanding and the definition of a satisfying compromise. Policy brokers facilitate learning, hence they should be the point of reference for sharing knowledge and information.

- **Strengthen and develop *soft* skills, like leadership and network building.**

  Contrarily to financial and political resources, *soft* skills are not subject to scarcity within the policy subsystem. Hence, its acquisition does not necessarily involve conflict. Leadership and contacts can be developed in time within the coalition, thus strengthening its

position in the policy subsystem. In time, this can help increasing political power and financial resources.

- **Exert policy entrepreneurship in promoting change.**

  Developing a common vision and building networks is essential for being ready to exploit windows of opportunity when they open in the subsystem. Moreover, the coalition should be focused in capturing changes in the environment, such as the election of favourable governmental coalitions or public discussions. Hence, preparedness and attentiveness are central for achieving policy change.

- **Produce or promote reliable and significant knowledge using mixed-methods.**

  Evidence is essential for advocacy work. However, not all evidence has the same prestige. Quantitative research is generally held in higher consideration, but qualitative studies produce significant insights. Hence, mixed-methods approaches can combine both benefits.

8.4.3 To Policy Brokers

- **Facilitate the definition of a general understanding and a common vision.**

  The central position of brokers gives them an overall perspective on the actors and their beliefs and needs. Hence, they have the responsibility of mediating between contrasting positions and enabling a reciprocal understanding. Creating a common interpretation is essential for easing negotiations and avoid misunderstandings.

- **Favour the circulation of knowledge and information.**

  To facilitate policy learning, it is essential that knowledge and information circulate among all actors. Moreover, policy brokers should ensure the correctness and clarity of the information, as well as promote open discussions on relevant topics based on inclusive rules and the respect of such rules.

- **Enable learning at all level of governance and through all sectors.**

  All actors should be involved in discussions and learning. Policy brokers should ensure the respect of all perspectives and the equality among all actors.

8.4.4 To academics

There is a need of more studies on:

- **The role of policy brokers as determinant for policy change.**

  There is a general lack of studies on the figure of policy brokers. An interesting focus for further research is the role of policy brokers as sense-makers and sense-givers within the

policy subsystem. Moreover, the overlap between the role of policy brokers and policy entrepreneurs needs further empirical investigation.

- **The interplay between personal beliefs systems and institutional values.**
  Civil servants make an interesting case for investigating the hierarchy of beliefs systems, especially linked to their institutional role. Moreover, they can provide an understanding of the interrelation between self-interest and beliefs as motivating factors.

- **The role of policy entrepreneurs and individual agency in coalitions.**
  Research treats coalitions as homogeneous entities. However, it has been proved that often conflicts and tensions create divisions within the coalition. Hence, further studies should investigate the relation between individual agency or exceptional individuals (such as policy entrepreneurs) and coalitions. Interesting focuses could be the role of policy entrepreneurs in coalition formation and tensions between individual agency and coalition's strategies.

- **The role of leadership and *soft* skills in advocacy coalitions.**
  The presence of policy entrepreneurs and individual agents within coalitions raise the issue of formal and informal leadership. Interesting insights could emerge from the analysis of the role of leadership and soft skills in the presence of a conflict.

8.4 Limitations of the study and the generality of findings

The conduction of the study followed a rigorous research design based on the collection of data through semi- and structured interviews and documents' analysis. It aimed at confirming or confuting the hypothesis proposed by the ACF, as well as at contributing with new insights on the policy process. In the data collection, I encountered limitations caused by time and resources constraints, the language barrier and the lack of responses from possible interviewees. These limitations might have caused a lack of representativeness of the actors involved, as well as a misinterpretation of data. However, the soundness of the data and the validity of the results are guaranteed by the triangulation of data though a multiple-method of data collection. The interviews and the documents have reciprocally confirmed the information and allowed to fulfil the limitations determined by the other mean of collection. While the analysis of the documents covered the lack of responses, the conduction of interviews in English overcame the language barrier.

Moreover, despite the possibility of missing minor events and variables that influenced the policy process, it does not undermine the reliability of the results. The aim of this study was not an exhaustive compliance of all the factors that influenced the policy process. Instead, it aimed at

providing a general understanding of the role of the actors' agency and the overall political context in influencing the policy process. I am confident that this study achieved its goal of providing this understanding and contributing to the literature.

8.5 Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

For its complexity and involved factors the policy process of sexuality education constitutes an interesting topic of research that is often overlooked. This study contributed with interesting insights both on sexuality education policies, as well as on the general policy process. This research highlighted hindering and facilitating factors for policy participants in presence of a highly politicized and normative topic. Moreover, it contributed to the literature on ACF by confirming some of its hypothesis, as well as by gaining new insights on coalitions formation, policy learning and the role of external events. However, further research is needed to provide empirical support for the innovative findings of this research.

Moreover, this research provides a general understanding of the policy process in countries with a stable policy context and a pluralistic state. Hence, the finding can be generalized offering insights for countries that have this type of institutional setting, such as in the case of other Nordic countries. However, further research is necessary for developing comparisons with different institutional setting. Unstable political contexts and different involvements of civil society determine a different policy process and, thus, the presence of different variables. Therefore, the comparison among different institutional setting could provide further understanding on the role that these variable hold within a policy process.

Finally, further research could elaborate on the topics that this study overlooked for lack of time and resources. A relevant standpoint that needs further analysis is the role of politicians and youth organizations in the policy process. These two actors act as *gatekeeper* on opposite sides of the policy-making process. Hence, they have a privileged perspective on the creation and the implementation of policies. Therefore, studying politicians could provide relevant insights on the role of knowledge and networks in policy-design, thus, delineating the *other side of the story* in respect of this research. Moreover, an in-depth analysis on the role of youth organizations within the policy subsystem would be relevant for understanding the issue of youth representation. As young people do not have access to traditional institutional settings, this analysis could offer

important considerations on the use of alternative venues for representation, as well as on the mediation of interests within formal settings.

Finally, considering the latest developments on sexuality education policies in Norway, a follow-up study is essential for understanding the long-term impact of phenomena, such as immigration and feminist movements. Moreover, the 2019 review of the national curriculum will be a critical event in defining the direction of sexuality education policies in Norway. Hence, I suggest continuing the investigation of this topic as new critical junctures and elements are likely to emerge, thus redefining the network of interdependencies and connections that constitutes the policy process of sexuality education in Norway.

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Appendix 1.

Example of interviews' questions

1. Work with sexuality education

a) What beliefs does your organization hold in relation to sexuality education (how it ought to be, scope, etc.)?

b) What is your organization's strategy to translate these beliefs into practice?

c) What factors do you believe hindered or facilitated the implementation of the strategy?

d) What kind of resources (financial, political, information, leadership) are the most important for your strategy?

e) Since 2006, has your organization defined or implemented a strategy for increasing/changing its resources? If yes, can you briefly describe the strategy?

2. Collaborations

a) Can you state the name of the major actors (organizations, individuals, agencies) that your organization collaborates with?

b) On what base does your organization decide to collaborate with other actors?

c) Can you identify the major opponents of your organization's strategy?