

A governance perspective on agri-environmental schemes: Actors, roles, and barriers

True Cost scientific talk series

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SYTRA transition of
food systems

The EU agricultural system are under pressure



FIAN international:
The corporate capture
of food systems (2021)

The externalities of the food systems

Food systems **generate** significant **externalities** while simultaneously being **highly exposed** to them

They span **environmental**, **social**, and **economic** dimensions



The EU policy framework to tackle externalities



Slow Food (2021)

The Common Agricultural Policy as main framework

- The CAP accounts for approximately one-third of the EU budget, with an allocation of around **€387 billions for 2021–2027**
- Established in **1962 to secure food supply** and **stabilize agricultural markets** after World War II, the CAP has evolved over time
- From **1990s onwards**, includes additional objectives such as **rural development** and **environmental protection**
- Future **CAP is under negotiation**, discussing its objectives and is **not yet clear** what it will be its **role in addressing systemic externalities** within agri-food systems

The debates around the CAP

- The CAP is at the centre of **intense political and societal debates**, involving both agricultural and non-agricultural stakeholders.
- Described as a “**exceptionalist policy**” (budget size, political protection it enjoys compared to other policy areas)
- Main criticism:
 - conflicting objectives
 - insufficient environmental ambition
 - unequal distribution of subsidies
- The CAP’s **governance** and decision-making are deeply shaped by **power dynamics**, limiting their **capacity to address externalities**

Why a governance perspective on the CAP?

1. Understanding the role of actors and decision-making helps **identify barriers** that prevent public policy from addressing externalities
2. Analysing governance dynamics as a **starting point for levers** to mitigate the underlying impacts of the EU agricultural system
3. A governance perspective **bridges scales** (a meso-level approach) avoiding siloed, disconnected policy and farm interventions

Governance: a buzzword

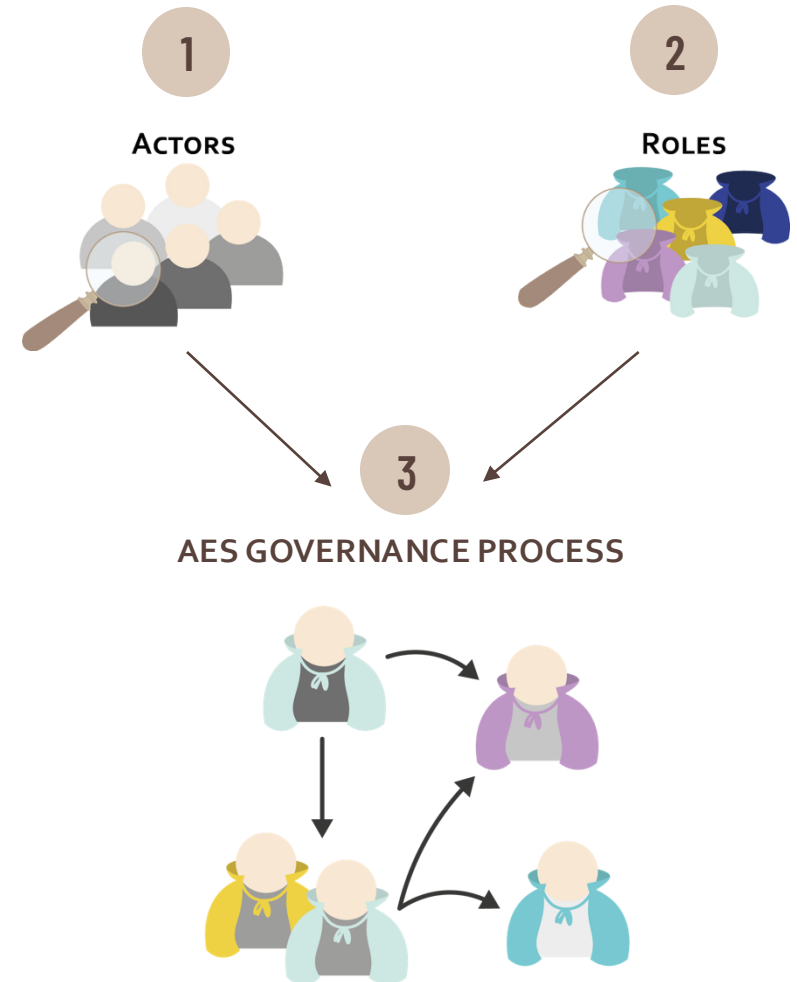
- In agri-environmental governance literature, four constitutive elements of the governance:
 - a clear **goal or priority** to be collectively achieved
 - a **plurality of actors** from both public and private entities
 - dynamic **interactions** among these actors
 - presence of **institutions, rules, and institutional arrangements** that shape these interactions
- To operationalize the concept of governance we identify both **actors** and **their roles**

Define the governance framework

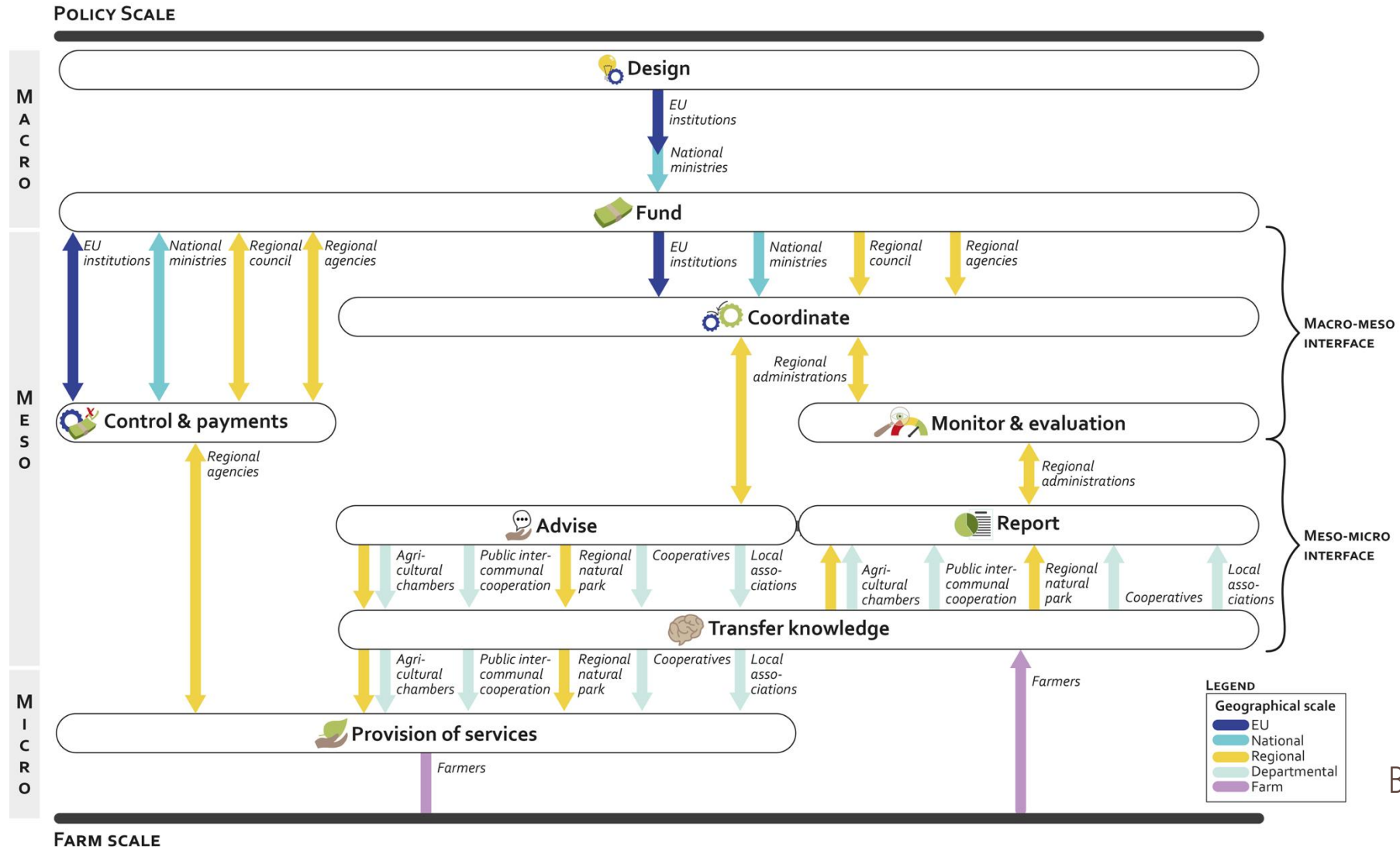
Three steps:

1. Identify **actors**
2. Define their **roles**
3. Understand the **governance process** linking the two

We conducted **interviews** with regional actors under a case study approach



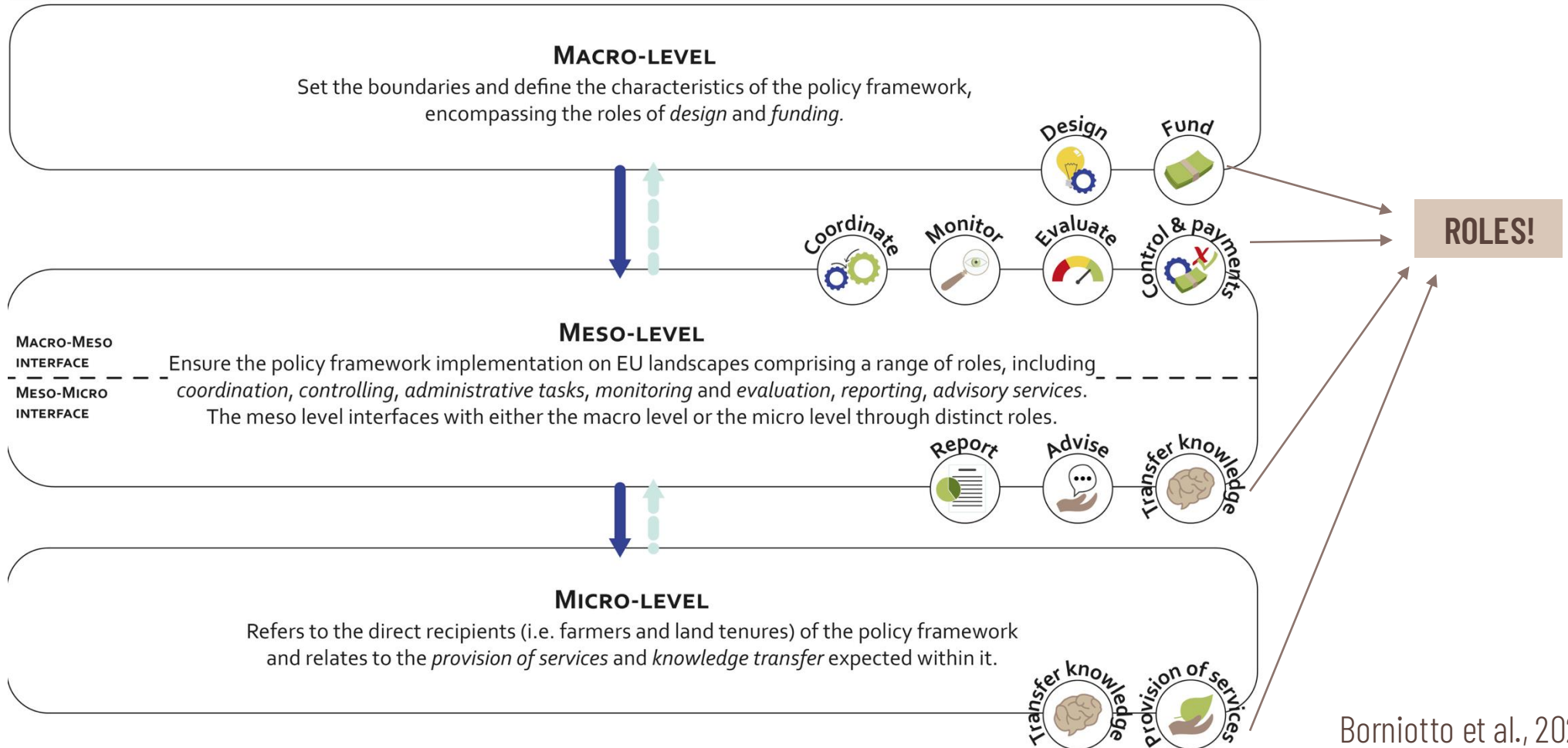
Governance framework: roles and actors



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Governance framework: roles and levels

POLICY SCALE

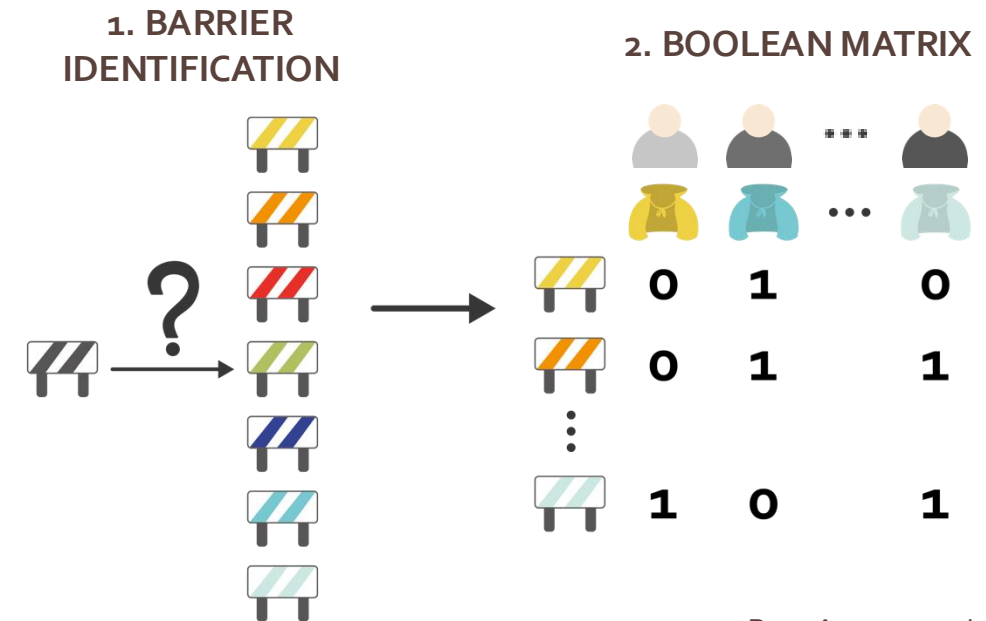


FARM SCALE

Borniotto et al., 2025

Linking barriers & governance framework

- The analytical framework based on two steps:
 1. Barrier identification
 2. Boolean matrix linking the barriers to both actors and roles
- The main results of the research derive from a qualitative content analysis of the related two outputs



Borniotto et al., 2025

Roles and actors

- According to the governance framework defined in the governance framework, a **list of roles and related actors** for our case study
- The roles and associated actors span across **governance levels** and **geographical scales**

	 TECHNICAL			 POWER DYNAMICS/ RELATIONAL		 ORGANIZATIONAL					 KNOWLEDGE					 INSTITUTIONAL					 FINANCIAL			 CULTURAL																				
ROLE NAME	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40				
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 Coordinate	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○		
 Control & payments	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
 Monitor & evaluation	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
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Lobbying	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Investment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
EU institutions	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
National ministries	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Regional administrations	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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Control & payment agencies	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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Intermunicipal cooperation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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Farmers' unions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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LEGEND
○ Barrier absent
● Barrier present

- A list of **40 barriers** has been identified during a series of **semi-directed interviews** with **regional experts**, spanning across roles and governance levels
- Barriers cover from **technical**, to **institutional**, **financial** and **cultural** aspects

LEGEND

○ Barrier absent

● Barrier present

The matrix

- Barriers cut across actors & roles
- Some are shared, reflecting the **interdependent governance framework**
- Others are more **actor-specific** (e.g., institutional barriers for policymakers; power dynamics between governmental and advocacy actors)

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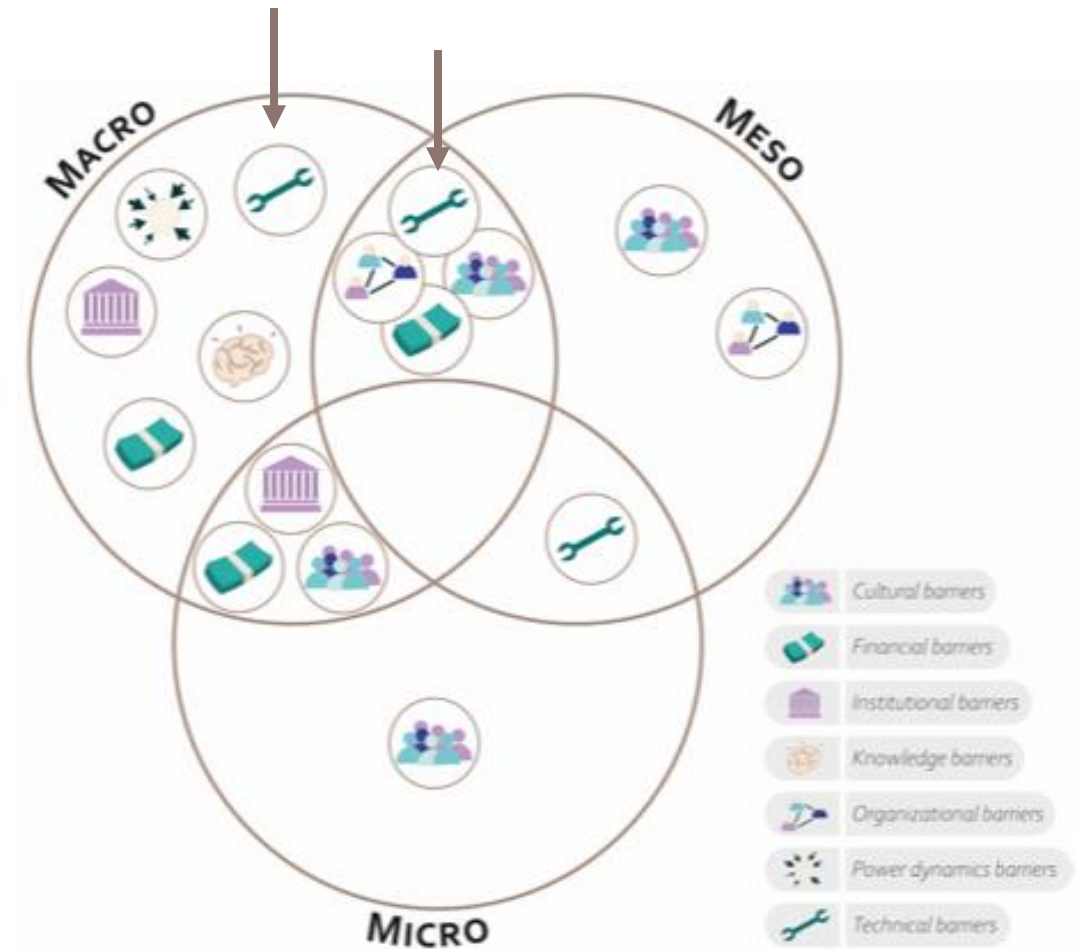
LEGEND

○ Barrier absent

● Barrier present

Barriers and governance framework

- Some barriers are specific to a single level, while others cut across multiple levels, underlying **interdependency across levels**
- The **macro-level** faces a broad spectrum of barriers
- Barriers between macro and meso: **coordination**
- Barriers between macro and micro: **institutional & cultural**



Main conclusions

- Barriers are different in nature and cover a broad set of categories (e.g. financial, cultural, power dynamics)
- Barriers to AES environmental performance emerge across three governance levels (macro, meso, micro) and levers should be planned accordingly
- Several barriers are interlinked, crossing institutional boundaries and actor roles
- Some actors face the consequences of barriers without having the agency to address them

Why a governance perspective for a trajectory of levers?

- It provides a concrete **framing of barriers**: clarify who is responsible and who faces the consequences
- Establishes the basis for **identifying levers**, within their governance context (who should be involved, and in what role, to do what)
- Captures **connections across governance levels** without overlooking linkages
- Spans across **multiple topics and disciplines**, avoiding narrow and siloed perspectives
- Serves as a practical starting point for **action plans**



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Thanks for your attention!



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food systems

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