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### Inter-Ministerial Working Groups as a Panacea for Coordination Problems?

The Cases of Climate Adaptation, Immigration and Raw Materials in the German Federal Government

#### Abstract

Based on a comparative design, the article shows that inter-ministerial working groups do not generally represent panaceas for coordination problems as is usually assumed by the literature. The analysis compares three inter-ministerial working groups in the German federal government. The article asks which factors influence the mode of coordination in inter-ministerial working groups. The analysis reveals that it is affected by the organisational structure of these bodies and the negotiation mode for solving conflict among its members, which leads to variance in its capacity to establish positive coordination.

*Key words:* positive and negative coordination, inter-ministerial working groups, German federal government

#### Zusammenfassung

*Interministerielle Arbeitsgruppen als Allheilmittel für Koordinationsprobleme? Klimaanpassung, Zuwanderung und Rohstoffe in der deutschen Ministerialverwaltung*

Anhand einer Untersuchung von drei interministeriellen Arbeitsgruppen in der deutschen Ministerialverwaltung zeigt dieser Artikel, dass interministerielle Arbeitsgruppen, anders als in der Literatur angenommen, kein Allheilmittel für Koordinationsprobleme darstellen. Der Artikel fragt nach den Faktoren, welche den Koordinationsmodus in den interministeriellen Arbeitsgruppen prägen. Die Analyse zeigt, dass dieser von der organisationalen Struktur der Arbeitsgruppen und dem Verhandlungsmodus zwischen den vertretenen Ministerien beeinflusst wird. Dies führt zu Varianz zwischen den interministeriellen Arbeitsgruppen und damit zu Unterschieden in der Fähigkeit, positive Koordination herzustellen.

*Schlagworte:* Positive und negative Koordination, interministerielle Arbeitsgruppen, deutsche Ministerialverwaltung

### Introduction

The demand to coordinate is as old as functional differentiation within administration (Gulick 1937, Ellwein 1991, p. 99; Mayntz/Scharpf 1975, p. 145) and a particularly difficult task with regard to policy issues that cross established sector divisions. Though it is considered a perennial issue of both public administration practice and research, coordination is neither a fixed term in public administration research nor do we have a ‘grand theory’ of coordination (Hustedt/Veit 2014, Wildavsky 1973, Andeweg 2003). While coordi-

nation is thus widely called for, systematic findings on the variety of coordination structures, processes and practices in government are rare (but see: *Laegreid et al.* 2014). In policy coordination in general, ‘negative coordination’ is considered to represent the standard coordination procedure in government among policy officials (*Scharpf* 1973, 1996). Here, cross-sector policy making is based on the initial draft prepared by one organisational unit that has primary responsibility for the issue. Subsequently, other units get involved to check if the draft would interfere with their policy preferences and turfs. In addition, however, a variety of inter-ministerial coordination bodies have been established in a number of policy fields by many governments and at various levels of hierarchy. Yet inter-ministerial working groups have so far represented a ‘black box’ of research on coordination in German federal government. It is not just that one of the few comprehensive studies dates back to 1968 (*Prior* 1968, but see: *Hustedt* 2014), but also that it is almost impossible to identify their exact number as the government does not register them, nor does it file or monitor them.

In general, inter-ministerial working groups are considered to be additional coordination structures addressing sector differentiation within public administration to overcome ‘siloization’ (*Alexander* 1993, p. 333; *Peters* 2006, pp. 131-132). These bodies are thus linked to pressure for greater “horizontality” (*Peters* 2006) in government. In both academia and government practice it is often implicitly assumed that such pressure is best coped with by means of ‘positive coordination’ i.e., collaborative drafting and the negotiation of compromise, instead of unilateral ‘negative coordination’. Drafts prepared by means of positive coordination are assumed to be more innovative and greater in scope (*Scharpf* 1993, p. 144). It is true that positive coordination is not necessarily ‘better coordination’ as it is much more difficult and involves much conflict (*Scharpf* 1993, p. 140). Furthermore, transaction costs are higher, which drains resources such as time and staff.

Against this backdrop it is remarkable that we have only very limited knowledge of how coordination actually takes place within inter-ministerial working groups. This question is of particular relevance considering that inter-ministerial working groups differ in various regards. They are typically established to work on a concrete policy issue in either a short-term framework or in more formalised permanent bodies. They are established at various hierarchical levels and can include representatives from interest organisations, or be composed exclusively of representatives of ministries. Given the variety in mandates and composition, it seems implausible that they all show a uniform mode of coordination. This article addresses this research gap by investigating three inter-ministerial working groups in the German federal government by asking: What factors influence the coordination mode within inter-ministerial working groups?

The aim of the article is thus a ‘reality check’ of the assumption that inter-ministerial working groups follow the ideal-type of positive coordination. It argues on the one hand that the organisational structure of inter-ministerial working groups, and the negotiation mode among its members on the other, are crucial to understanding how inter-ministerial working groups coordinate. The analysis reveals that organisational structures and negotiation modes vary between inter-ministerial working groups and affect the overall mode of coordination. Inter-ministerial working groups therefore differ from the assumed positive coordination in an empirical sense, which reduces their actual capacity to serve as panaceas for coordination problems.

The article analyses three inter-ministerial working groups that have been established in the German federal government in recent years: the inter-ministerial working groups on

climate adaptation, raw materials and immigration. In all three cases, external pressure fostered the demand for greater horizontality within policy-making. However, the cases differ with regard to the policy sector and the realm of the establishment of the inter-ministerial working group being either the operational level, the level of state secretaries, or the interface between the public and private sphere.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. In the next section, the core argument is developed in more detail followed by an elaboration of the research design. The empirical analysis then applies the working assumptions developed to each case. Subsequently, the research question is answered by comparing the influence of the analysed factors on coordination within inter-ministerial working groups. The paper concludes by discussing avenues for further research.

## Understanding Coordination in Inter-Ministerial Working Groups

This article argues that the coordination in inter-ministerial working groups can be understood by its organisational structure on the one hand, and by the mode of negotiation among its members on the other. It is based on the assumption that information processing and coping with conflict are highly interdependent in the empirical world e.g., power structures and anticipation of conflict influence these processes (*Scharpf* 1993, p. 22).

Inter-ministerial working groups are supposed to “concert the decisions and actions of their subunits or constituent organizations” (*Alexander* 1993, p. 331) typically in the form of coordinated policy outputs, such as a strategy document. Thus, they are supposed to increase the capacity of information processing and building consensus – the two prerequisites of effective problem solving (*Scharpf* 1993, p. 32). Coordination within inter-ministerial working groups constitutes processes based on interactions in which conflict is regularly observable and consensus hard to achieve (*Scharpf* 1993, p. 21, for an in-depth discussion on various meanings of coordination see *Peters* 2015, pp. 3-8) and can be conceptualized by negative and positive coordination. Negative coordination denotes a process in which the key responsible organisational unit prepares a draft that is checked for objections by the other parties involved. In contrast, positive coordination refers to a process in which a collaborative draft is prepared by including all parties involved proactively from the initial drafting stage by asking for contributions that are harmonized, with the goal of ending up with one collaborative output. However, positive and negative coordination represent “ideal types” (*Mayntz/Scharpf* 1975, p. 147) and “a continuum rather than dichotomous alternatives” (*Mayntz/Scharpf* 1975, p. 147). Thus, also Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf as the ‘founders’ of this distinction point to empirical variety in everyday government coordination.

To analyse the coordination mode between the two ideal-types of positive and negative coordination in inter-ministerial working groups, two particular factors are considered of crucial relevance: firstly, the organisational structure of a working group, and secondly, the dominant negotiation mode. Both factors indicate whether an inter-ministerial working group shows positive coordination because they focus on the key factors that structure coordination processes.

Firstly: Organisational structure is an important factor to understand coordination within inter-ministerial working groups, because it signifies the overall rules that “give

rise to distinctive actors and action routines" (Scott 1994, p. 70). Thus, the organisational structure preselects perceptions of problems and solutions (Scharpf 1993, p. 26; Dearborn/Simon 1958). To operationalise, the organisational structure of an inter-ministerial working group refers to the division of competencies in the group between the parties involved. By assigning lead responsibilities to some and 'ordinary' membership to others, resources to influence coordination are distributed unequally between the members. If the lead responsibility to coordinate is dispersed between various actors, the trend is towards positive coordination because such decentralisation requires participants to contribute their individual preferences and views that must subsequently be conflated to achieve agreement. If the lead responsibility is centralised, coordination in an inter-ministerial working group is directed towards negative coordination because centralisation enables the lead unit to lay down its preferences and views on the policy problem. In so doing, it has the opportunity to impose views on others if not actively opposed.

Secondly: The negotiation mode is of crucial importance to understanding coordination in inter-ministerial working groups (Scharpf 1993, pp. 143-144), because it is a particular feature of cross-cutting issues i.e., those that become topics for horizontal coordination. Knowledge of the policy problem, potential solutions and means-ends chains are contested between involved actors (McGrath/Arrow/Berdahl 1999, p. 2010). Thus, diverging interests can be observed which reflect variance in problem perceptions and resulting interests (Sabatier 1999, p. 5), which can constitute a "negotiators' dilemma" (Scharpf 1993, p. 138) as participants will show cooperative and competitive orientations at the same time. Thus, analysing how conflicting interests are coped with within negotiation is important as means to understanding coordination in inter-ministerial working groups.

In settings of positive coordination, conflicts are managed by "multilateral and simultaneous negotiations among all units concerned" (Scharpf 1993, p. 144). Thus it is aimed at a truly coordinated collaborative draft representing a shared view on the issue at hand, and on how to address it through government policy. Measures to develop a common language and partisan mutual adjustment are therefore visible during negotiation and coping with conflict within this setting.

In settings of negative coordination, coping with conflicts typically shows "sequential negotiations, or even [...] unilateral avoidance" (Scharpf 1993, p. 144). Thus, the behaviour of participants involved clearly demonstrates turf protection by mutual protection of the individual area of competence from the interference of other parties. Turf protection is typically accompanied by potential vetoes from single actors with regard to the proposal. It thus directs attention towards objection and the accomplishment of a single actor's interests. A lowest common-denominator position instead of a multi-faceted approach towards the policy issue is aimed at during coordination.

Empirically, the effects of organisational structures and modes of coordination are not mutually independent. For example, the division of core competencies for arranging coordination is likely to impact on how conflicts are addressed. Here, the distinction serves the analytical goal of shedding light on the inner dynamics of coordination in inter-ministerial working groups, which are influenced by both structure and process characteristics. Table 1 sums up the factors to analyse coordination.

*Table 1: Negative and positive coordination*

	<i>Negative coordination</i>	<i>Positive coordination</i>
<i>Organisational structure</i>	Centralised lead to coordinate in one actor	Dispersed competence to coordinate among various actors
<i>Negotiation mode</i>	Unilateral avoidance	Multilateral negotiations among all units concerned

Source: Own compilation.

To sum up, inter-ministerial working groups are often considered to establish positive coordination. It is seen as leading to a multi-faceted and innovative approach towards a policy problem (Scharpf 1993, p. 144). Thus, our analysis is guided by two working assumptions to empirically study if we find positive coordination:

- A1: Organisational structure: the lead responsibility to coordinate is dispersed between at least two actors.  
 A2: Negotiation mode: Negotiations are characterised by multilateral and simultaneous negotiations among all units concerned.

Or to put it differently, if the results of the analysis show centralisation of competence to coordinate and sequential negotiations or unilateral avoidance, we conclude the coordination mode in an inter-ministerial working group is characterised by negative coordination.

To reflect the negotiation modes of positive and negative coordination as ideal-types, a continuum of modes of coordination in inter-ministerial working groups can be created for the empirical observation based on the assumptions. Hence, it can be assumed that alongside either full positive coordination or full negative coordination, hybrids with only one of the assumptions remaining valid are observable.

## Research Design and Data Collection

This study represents a comparative case design. Overall, the selected cases represent typical examples of inter-ministerial working groups in the German landscape of inter-ministerial coordination bodies, and share three similarities. First, the policy problems addressed (climate adaptation, raw materials supply, migration) constitute typical cross-sector policy issues that do not fall into the area of responsibility of a single ministerial portfolio. Second, all inter-ministerial working groups under investigation are established in the context of a need to formulate a particularly comprehensive multi-faceted governmental strategy. They are thus pressured to coordinate horizontality (Peters 2006). Thirdly, they are all established within one decade and thus about the same time (2005 to 2015). The “typical case selection strategy” fits the research objective of this study, which is a “pattern-matching investigation” (Seawright/Gerring 2008, p. 299) aiming at an analysis *within* representative cases.

By comparing the cases, the research design of this study seeks to achieve a comprehensive perspective of the landscape of inter-ministerial working groups in the German federal government. The case selection strategy of ‘typical cases’ is therefore supplemented by the cases being selected based on differences in their respective setting. Whereas the inter-ministerial working group for climate adaptation was set up at the

working level of the ministries involved, the inter-ministerial working group for immigration was established at the level of state secretaries. In contrast, the inter-ministerial working group for raw materials was set up at the interface between the public and the private sphere.

Data collection includes a qualitative analysis of key documents and approximately 60-minute semi-structured expert interviews with members of the three inter-ministerial working groups conducted in 2014 and 2015. The data was analysed in two steps. First, key documents for each policy field were studied to identify the organisational structure of inter-ministerial working groups, differing perspectives, and potential tensions. Second, the interviews were conducted and analysed to attain data on how the members perceived the distribution of responsibilities within the inter-ministerial working groups, diverging perspectives and interests, and coping with conflict through negotiation within the bodies. To investigate the organisational structure, we analysed documents for formal lead responsibility as well as the working structure within the inter-ministerial working group, and asked in the interviews for the role of participants within the bodies (e.g., Who formulates the agenda of meetings of the working group? Who is responsible for a draft version of the group's output? Is there a division of tasks among the members throughout the process?) For the factor 'negotiation mode' we analysed documents for variance with regard to participants' perspectives on policy problems and solutions. We then asked in interviews how these perspectives materialised with regard to inter-ministerial working groups' output. We also asked for the way in which negotiations to cope with conflict among members take place (e.g., To what extent is there a mutual understanding with regard to the policy problem among the members? What happens in case of disagreement between members?).

In considering climate adaptation, ten interviews were conducted and the document analysis relies on policy documents such as the National Adaptation Strategy and its subsequent implementation report. For immigration, we conducted seven interviews. Immigration laws and ordinances, the government's strategy papers, action plans and reports from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*, BAMF) were identified and analysed as key documents. The investigation of raw materials is based on seven interviews and on policy documents, such as the Federal Government's raw materials strategy and the German Resource Efficiency Programme (ProgRess). All interviews were conducted with the representatives of the federal ministries involved, either at the level of section head (*Referatsleiter/in*) or at the level of policy officials (*Referenten*). Moreover, the interviews on climate adaptation included the Federal Environmental Agency (*Umweltbundesamt*, UBA), while those on raw materials included representatives of societal organisations. Two ministries answered the questions in writing, these answers are just like the oral interviews cited or referenced. One interviewee requested that no recording be made. In this case, notes were taken carefully throughout the interview. As full anonymity was assured to all interview participants (except for those allied to the chair organisation of the inter-ministerial working groups in the policy fields of climate adaptation and raw materials), interviews are referred to by anonymous codes (IMA Adaptation = Interview Adaptation 1-10, IMA Raw Material = Interview RM 1-7; IMA Immigration = Interview Immigration 1-7).

## The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Adaptation Policy

In general, the field of climate policy is split between mitigation and adaptation policy. Mitigation policy targets the causes of climate change mainly through emission reduction, while adaptation policy comprises measures and instruments to cope with adverse effects of climate change that appear inevitable (*IPCC 2007: Annex II*). Adaptation policy assumes a latecomer position on the international and domestic climate policy agenda (*Stecker/Mohns/Eisenack 2012*). It was not until 2008 that the German federal government approved a National Adaptation Strategy (NAS) (*BReg 2008a*). Whereas the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA) had already started working on the issue in 2002, as stipulated by international and EU processes and research findings on adaptation, the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (*Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit*, BMUB) became interested in late 2006 when formal responsibility for domestic adaptation policy were shifted from the division for international climate policy to the division responsible for water policy, as the latter had already been involved in EU adaptation policy (*Stecker/Mohns/Eisenack 2012*, pp. 186-187, *Hustedt 2013*). The new unit in charge initiated an informal working group including those ministries that had begun to work on the issue, because adaptation policy had hitherto been an issue ministries were addressing on an individual basis. The aim of the informal working group was to raise awareness of, and draw attention to, the issue in other federal ministries by starting to work on the issue in an institutionalised, albeit informal manner (Interviews Adaptation 4, 6, 8, *Stecker/Mohns/Eisenack 2012*, pp. 193-194). However, all parties involved were very aware of the cross-sector nature of adaptation policy, and it was the UBA that included the formal establishment of IMA Adaptation in the NAS (*BReg 2008a*) (Interviews Adaptation 4, 6, 8). IMA Adaptation was established to develop an implementation plan for the National Adaptation Strategy, which was approved by cabinet in 2011 (*BReg 2011*).

## Organisational Structure: Centralised Competence

With the formal assignment of lead competence for IMA Adaptation, the BMUB has been placed in the ‘driving seat’ regarding adaptation policy. All federal ministries are also formal members of the working group, but some do not participate in the meetings (Interview Adaptation 4). Formally, IMA Adaptation is established at the level of the heads of division (*Abteilungsleiter*). They delegated this responsibility to the level of the heads of section and policy officials after the initial meeting (Interview Adaptation 4). However, sitting in the driving seat does not imply that the BMUB can hierarchically impose its preferences on all other ministries, as the implementation plan ultimately represents a federal government policy document. Hence, all ministries involved had to agree on the document: “Because otherwise the document will be stopped at the political level anyway if not even the working level agrees on what is included” (Interview Adaptation 1). Yet, as the lead organisation, BMUB serves as a driving force in the coordination process and has a remarkable influence on the coordination structure by means of preparing suggestions for the agenda and by providing drafts of the working documents, which – of course – represent the view of the BMUB. It constitutes a “quasi-secretariat” (Interview Adapta-

tion 3) for IMA Adaptation and chairs working group meetings, prepares the daily agenda, and arranges for the distribution of working documents (for more details: *Hustedt* 2014). Quite in contrast to IMA International Migration, IMA Adaptation has no further internal substructure, but all meetings take place with all represented ministries. However, the lead organisation's scope for influence is limited by the fact that the final decision-making authority regarding all issues in their respective remit remains with the single ministries. Thus, with regard to the organisational structure, IMA Adaptation does not fulfil the prerequisite for positive coordination, as the ability to coordinate is centralised in one lead ministry.

## Mode of Negotiation: Unilateral Avoidance

This 'first-among-equals' structure is also reflected in the mode of negotiation of IMA Adaptation. Though the establishment of IMA Adaptation did not reveal particular policy-related conflicts, it did initiate typical ministerial behavioural patterns of turf protection, and single ministries' interests dominate the process. The departmental representatives considered advocating their ministries' interests and perceptions in the working group as their main task at the core of their individual mandate (Interviews Adaptation 1-7, 10). From the perspective of departmental representatives, it is crucial that all contributions to the working group are in accordance with the "technical and political appraisal" (Interview Adaptation 5) of the home ministry (similar: Interviews Adaptation 1-3, 6). In the words of one interviewee: "Everyone has to represent the perspective of one's home ministry" (Interview Adaptation 3). Thus, they aimed at "developing a sense of where things could go wrong" (Interview Adaptation 2, similarly: Interviews Adaptation 3-6). While no obvious policy conflicts emerged, the mere establishment of IMA Adaptation made the ministries involved aware of mutual positions that would be inclined to 'fight back', fostering persistent conflicts along departmental boundaries e.g., between the ministries for environment and transport. This 'single-ministry' focus is also underlined by an analysis of the implementation<sup>1</sup> plan showing that all activities and projects therein remain under the lead of the single responsible ministries and no joined activities are projected (*Hustedt* 2014). Thus, unilateral avoidance i.e., respecting mutual interests and single turfs, characterises the negotiation mode in IMA Adaptation. All in all, IMA Adaptation represents a case of negative coordination as evident from centralised coordination competence – both formally and empirically – and negotiations relevant to the single departmental interests.

## The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Immigration

The policy field of immigration has seen several reforms in Germany in the last two decades linked to an increased political will to steer the issue according to national and labour-market needs. This has replaced the focus on preventing immigration. Demographic change results in increased competition among ageing and shrinking industrial countries for qualified labour forces (*Angenendt* 2013, p. 5; *Tietze* 2008). The increased numbers of asylum seekers in recent years further necessitate a rethink about links between migration, development and foreign policies and a return to the governmental agenda (*Angenendt*



2015; *Nuscheler* 1995, p. 42) which has become even more pressing considering the refugee crisis starting in 2015. Furthermore, a multi-faceted perspective on migration policy was formulated at the EU level in the form of a “Global Approach to Migration” (*Bendel* 2009, p. 123). Based on increased pressure to formulate a national strategy which conceives of immigration not only as a security issue (Interviews Immigration 1, 2, 7) and in the context of an increased demand to advocate German interests at the EU and international level (Interview Immigration 3), the inter-ministerial working group ‘International Migration’ (St AG) was constituted on 15 October 2014 (*BT-Drs.* 2014). Within policy formulation in the German policy field of immigration, the importance of cross-sector interaction was confirmed by the interviewees. Each pointed to several ministries that are important in their everyday work (Interviews Immigration 1-7). The St AG was established at the level of administrative state secretaries. In the German federal government, administrative state secretaries are the top civil servants that are appointed as ‘political civil servants’ i.e., they can be sent to temporary retirement according to the Civil Service Law (§54 BBG). The establishment of the St AG at this level is supposed to be a symbol of the ability to form a unified capacity to act (Interview Immigration 6).

## Organisational Structure: Dispersed Competence to Coordinate

The organisational structure of the inter-ministerial working group reflects the ideal type of positive coordination as it establishes a dispersed competence to coordinate through shared leadership of the working group and further differentiation of the body. During the drafting of ministerial bills, the central role usually played by the Ministry of Interior (*Bundesministerium des Innern*, BMI) was highlighted by all interviewees (Interviews Immigration 1-7). This dominant role of the BMI is considered as inhibiting a formulation of a multi-faceted strategy for immigration as it is linked to a prevailing one-sided, security-oriented perspective on the policy problem (Interviews Immigration 3, 7). At the same time, the expertise of other ministries to formulate a holistic strategy for immigration policy and to turn it into concrete measures is considered vital but missing (Interviews Immigration 3, 6). The establishment of the St AG is seen as a way to overcome such problems during standard coordination in the policy field (Interviews Immigration 1-4). Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated the working group (*Auswärtiges Amt*, AA) who approached the Ministry of Interior, which resulted in a shared lead of the BMI and the AA. It is further differentiated into five sub-working groups, which are led by single ministries.

Additionally, a steering group of BMI, AA and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (*Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung*, BMZ) decides on this structure and the time-line of the process and is responsible for merging the results of each sub-group into one report. It thus is the formalisation of the shared lead. The steering group is responsible to draft the results of the working groups based on the output of the individual sub-working groups (Interviews Immigration 3, 6). In the sub-working groups ordinary members of the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie*, BMWi), Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*, BMAS), Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*, BMBF) and the Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (*Bundesministerium der*

*Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz*, BMJV) come together led by a representative of one of the ministries belonging to the steering group:

- Relations to third countries and international fora (led by AA)
- Fighting of illegal/irregular migration (led by BMI)
- Migration and development (led by BMZ)
- Protection of refugees (led by AA)
- Steering of legal migration (led by BMI)

Thus, the case shows the shared lead of BMI and AA with an additional strong role for the BMZ. Overall, the working group reflects dispersed ability to coordinate, meaning that our first working assumption holds true in this case.

## Negotiation Mode – Multilateral

To interpret the negotiation mode in the inter-ministerial working group appropriately, it is important to state that the sub-working groups of the St AG only started meeting in spring 2015 (Interviews Immigration 1, 2) indicating an early stage of the working process. All interviewees in the ministries point to the importance of the inter-ministerial working group itself as an instrument of evaluating the status quo of immigration policies, and to facilitate common understanding and objectives (Interviews Immigration 1-7). However, finding a common language is at the moment the core concern e.g., understanding and incorporating core terms of development policies, as the BMZ was not involved much in previous coordination processes in national immigration policies (Interviews Immigration 2, 3, 5). Next to the difficulty of finding a common language, exchange of information has been the main purpose of the meetings so far (Interview Immigration 2) and there is a great willingness to invite external experts e.g., Commissioners of Migration of other EU member states or experts from foundations (Interview Immigration 3). Thus, arriving at a common understanding including the variety of policy aspects involved already appears rather difficult.

However, all interviewees emphasise the goal of the St AG to formulate a strategy (Interviews Immigration 1-7), which requires movement beyond the exchange of information towards decisions on objectives and measures (Interview Immigration 5). However, differing perceptions prevalent in the ministries involved have been seen thus safe as potentially inhibiting to such an achievement (Interviews Immigration 2, 3, 7). Remarkably however, all interviewees but one are confident that these can be overcome. The vague two-page concept paper drafted by the BMI and AA as a basis for the establishment of the working group is hereby seen as positive (Interview Immigration 3). The vague mandate allows a lot of room for manoeuvre and is considered to pave the way for a truly joint strategy instead of previously defining departmental interests. It already was stated in the interviews that some members of the working group were more willing to move away from the traditional perspective prevailing in their home ministries (*‘Hauslinie’*) than others for the sake of a common and multi-faceted perspective on the policy problem (Interviews Immigration 2, 3). Those statements can however also be seen as a pre-emptive blame shift if the working group fails to produce the wished output of a common strategy. Yet, the sub-working groups of the St AG consult simultaneously on the different aspects of the policy problem. Negotiations are multilateral as interviewees

emphasise that every representative is equally entitled to contribute ideas in the sub-working groups (Interviews Immigration 1, 3, 5, 6). The shared leadership of the body as a whole is further seen as a way to uphold diverse perspectives in the upcoming stage of drafting a concrete output leading to multi-faceted problem solving.

All in all, in the case of the inter-ministerial working group on immigration policy, we find grounds for possible tensions, but a joint effort to discuss varying perspectives on the policy problem multilaterally in the light of potential shared or coordinated solutions. So far, because of the dispersed ability to lead the coordination process and because of the multilateral mode of negotiation, the inter-ministerial working group on immigration policy represents full positive coordination.

## The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Raw Materials

Germany is a resource-poor country that depends on imports. Securing the supply of raw materials is therefore a prerequisite for the economic power of the ‘export world champion’. For decades, the supply of raw materials had been considered an issue for companies. The public sector was not involved, because it was not perceived necessary. Instead, private players – especially companies – dominated the sector with their almost entirely economic perspective.

In the early 2000s however, world markets prices for mineral resources and metals rose dramatically, and price increases of between 100 and 500% were recorded (Tiess 2009, p. 67). German companies from the production sector were among the first to call for an involvement of the state in order to secure the supply (Klennert 2015). Several interview partners confirmed this “cry for help” from the companies to be the reason for the establishment of the inter-ministerial working group Raw Materials in 2007 (*Interministerieller Ausschuss Rohstoffe*, IMA Raw Materials) in order to “coordinate the activities of the Federal Government within raw materials policy” (Interviews RM 1, 3-7). Beside this major concern for high prices, the issue of raw materials supply touches both domestic and foreign policy aspects e.g., the domestic extraction of raw materials and the efforts to increase resource efficiency in Germany on the one hand, and efforts to reduce distortion of competition in the international commodity markets within the WTO framework and bilateral raw materials partnerships on the other. These multiple objectives call for the involvement of several ministries in order to secure comprehensive governmental action under the roof of one shared strategy.

## Organisational Structure: Centralised Competence

The inter-ministerial working group was established at the level of head of divisions to coordinate the various (new) activities of the German government on raw materials, to develop a common government raw materials strategy (2010) and afterwards to exchange information on the implementation process as well as on related activities in the single ministries (Interviews RM 1-7). The BMWi is the logical counterpart of the companies and thus became the lead ministry in the IMA Raw Materials (Interviews RM 1, 3- 5, 7).

Next to BMWi, representatives of the German Chancellery, AA, BMUB, BMBF, BMZ, BMI, the Federal Ministry of Finance (*Bundesfinanzministerium*, BMF), of Food

and Agriculture (*Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft*, BMEL) as well as Transport and Digital Infrastructure (*Bundesministerium für Verkehr und digitale Infrastruktur*, BMVI) are members of the IMA (BReg 2008b). Subordinated bodies of the BMWi, the German Mineral Resources Agency (*Deutsche Rohstoffagentur*, DERA) and the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (*Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe*, BGR) are permanent members of the IMA, too. The BGR is the central geo-scientific advisory organisation of the federal government, part of the portfolio of BMWi and represents a typical German governmental research agency (see *Bach/Döhler* 2012). In contrast to inter-ministerial coordination bodies in climate adaptation and immigration policy, private players contribute to IMA Raw Materials. These are the Federation of German Industry (*Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie*, BDI) and the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag*, DIHK). Both represent the interests of companies and industries dependent on raw materials.

The inclusion of industry representatives ensures that the latest developments in the respective private sectors concerning raw materials are brought to the knowledge of relevant ministries (Interviews RM 1-7). They further provide information in order to prevent belated reactions. It was a lesson from the early 2000s, when the German government was perceived as failing to notice that the situation on the world markets for raw materials had changed considerably and the production potential of German companies was endangered (Interviews RM 1, 4-7).

As the lead ministry, BMWi chairs and prepares the meetings, suggests the daily agenda and provides drafts of the working documents (Interview RM 1). After BMWi provided drafts to the involved ministries, they did not intervene concerning the content because “we wouldn’t make progress working like that” (Interview RM1). The ministries and their departments exchange information comprehensively, but “you don’t discuss the reasonableness” (*ibid.*). This is in the responsibility of the lead organisation.

IMA Raw Materials shows the centralised ability of the Economics Ministry to coordinate. Hence, the first working assumption – dispersed responsibility as a prerequisite for positive coordination – is not fulfilled in this case.

## Mode of Negotiation: Unilateral Avoidance

Problem-solving processes in the policy field rely on a multiplicity of sources that are arranged alongside organisational boundaries including the ministries involved as well as industry representatives. Negotiation processes in the working group show clear indications of turf-protecting behaviour alongside organisational boundaries that circle around a key line of conflict (Interviews RM 2, 4, 5, 7). One interviewee would thus divide the involved ministries into two groups, the first in favour of regulation (e.g., BMUB, BMZ) and the second in opposition to regulatory interventions restricting companies (e.g., BMWi, BMJV) (Interview RM 4).

This line of conflict refers to the economic and industry realm focusing on how to secure the continuation of supply in order to secure national production which clashes with social, developmental and environmental concerns, like an increase in recycling rates and substitution of raw materials or adequate payment, protected labour standards and conditions for mining workers (Interviews RM 2, 4, 5, 6). These conflicting objectives are

based on distinct perceptions on how to cope with the issue policy-wise. The most obvious and often mentioned line of conflict in this regard is the one between the BMWi and BMUB (Interviews RM 1-7). The BMUB is concerned with environment protection and recycling while the BMWi reminds the IMA of the necessity to preserve and create jobs in the industrial sector (Interviews RM 1, 2, 5). Another example would be the engagement of the BMZ to prevent resource conflicts or the misuse of export revenues by political leaders in developing countries while the BMWi is interested in a diversification of sources of supply. IMA Raw Materials parallels those diverging objectives reflected in the prevalence of ministry-specific interests. Thus, the process of consensus building and decision-making is characterized by turf protection. Those diverging interests are worked out bilaterally if considered necessary (Interviews RM 1, 2, 4).

In times of low prices the pressure for common governmental decision-making decreases as well as coordination and joint activities of all involved actors – public and private. Every department instead insists on its own objectives and the conflict between economic and environmental objectives becomes more and more evident.

The negotiation mode within IMA Raw Materials is characterised by unilateral avoidance, similar to the processes described for IMA Adaptation, and thereby clearly indicates the coordination mode categorised as ‘negative coordination’. Thus, both the first and second working assumption as prerequisites for positive coordination are not fulfilled in the case of raw materials.

Comparison: On the Road to Positive Coordination?

The analysis of the coordination mode of the three inter-ministerial working groups on climate adaptation, immigration and raw materials shows that analysing the organisational structure and negotiation mode gives valuable insights in the coordination dynamics of inter-ministerial working groups. In all three cases the issue areas cut across established sector lines. Furthermore, they were set up at about the same time in response to pressure for horizontality. The analysis demonstrates that they differ in regard to their mode of coordination (see table 2).

Table 2: Findings of analysis

	Adaptation	Immigration	Raw materials
Organisational structure	Centralised competence (environmental ministry)	Dispersed competence	Centralised competence (economics ministry)
Negotiation mode	Unilateral avoidance	Simultaneous, multilateral negotiations	Unilateral avoidance
Coordination mode	Negative	Positive	Negative

Source: Own compilation.

Though often linked to the ‘promise’ of positive coordination, the coordination modes of the three working groups do not consistently accomplish that ‘promise’. Quite in contrast, our analysis shows with regard to the organisational structure that only the inter-ministerial working group on immigration matches the pre-requisites for positive coordi-

nation by the dispersed competence to lead coordination between two ministries, whereas the other two are chaired each by a single lead ministry. Regarding the negotiation mode, indication of positive coordination again only holds true for the case of the inter-ministerial working group on immigration showing multilateral and simultaneous negotiations within the sub-working groups. In both climate adaptation and raw materials negotiation is characterised by unilateral avoidance.

The analysis provides indication for the relationship of characteristics to understand the cross-case variation in two respects. First, it does not make a difference for the overall coordination mode if an inter-ministerial working group is exclusively composed of representatives of the ministries or if industry representatives are present. This can be seen in the similarities of the cases of the inter-ministerial working groups on climate adaptation and raw materials. Furthermore, the findings show that the mode of coordination varies according to the level of hierarchy at which the inter-ministerial working groups are set up. Positive coordination at the level of state secretaries in the policy field of immigration is present and negative coordination in the two inter-ministerial working groups set up at the operational level in the policy fields of climate adaptation and raw materials. In the case of immigration, however, the bulk of work in the inter-ministerial working group is also done by representatives at the operational level.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this analysis reveals that negative coordination also prevails in inter-ministerial working groups that are often considered as incidents of positive coordination. Moreover, the analysis demonstrates that the structural properties and those for negotiation create incentives for negative coordination by fostering usual and deeply embedded patterns of bureaucratic behaviour. Whereas inter-ministerial working groups do indeed contribute to an increased mutual understanding of departmental views on policy problems, they do not ‘quasi-automatically’ result in positive coordination by their mere existence.

Though this study investigates three inter-ministerial working groups in the German federal government that exemplify the variety of those bodies, the findings here contribute to the literature on government coordination in general.

Firstly, this study shows that inter-ministerial working groups constitute focused additional coordination arenas by serving as organisational anchor points of problems. Despite their differences in the coordination mode, they can serve as organisational symbols for the government to indicate and signal to their environment that they are aware of certain coordination demands in the face of cross-sector policy problems.

Secondly, however, they also show that inter-ministerial working groups contribute to making power differentials among ministries more transparent by pushing single ministries to find a position on a given issue.

The findings of this study point to demands for further research e.g., regarding the purpose of an inter-ministerial working group as an explanatory variable. It might matter whether they are set up with a concrete aim to draft a strategy or whether the output is open. Moreover, more research is needed to actually study the formation of the coordination output, which was beyond the scope of this article. Furthermore, we suggest analysing the long-term effects of inter-ministerial working groups in more detail. Two scenari-

os are conceivable: On the one hand, one could expect to find consolidation of turf-protection behaviour that results in ‘formal compliance’ of being represented in an IMA. On the other hand, we could also expect a ‘socialization effect’ of IMA membership i.e., an amplification of mutual understandings.

Finally, the findings are based on the German federal government that is said to be particularly alien to horizontal coordination due to its institutional context prescribing a strong role to single ministries. The inner dynamics of inter-ministerial working groups studied here reflect typical behavioural patterns institutionalised in the ministerial bureaucracy that are tamed by the centrifugal forces of a political mandate to arrive at a consensual policy – if at all. Consequentially, the findings still deserve closer investigation in other cases. In particular, the findings suggest a comparison with other executive systems relying more on collective behavioural incentives.

## Note

- 1 The implementation plan is structured in four pillars, referring to the rather broad areas of knowledge, regulatory frameworks, adaptation in federal government and international cooperation. The annex of the implementation plan lists all initiated and planned activities according to all these pillars and according to the lead ministry for each and every project (BReg 2011, see for further analysis: *Hustedt* 2014).

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