

Assessing Partners' SDG Performance In Hybrid Municipal Organizations

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ABSTRACT,

This paper offers insight on how to assess partners' SDG performance in hybrid municipal organizations. This was done as through a case study of the municipality of Rheden, the Netherlands. Assessment options were selected and compared on their influence on SDG contributions of partners with literature review. The urgency and applicability for the municipality of Rheden was assessed with interviews and a survey. The purpose of this research was to gain more insight on how to best assess SDG performance of partners of an hybrid municipal organization.

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Keywords

Purchase assessment tool, SDG performance, partner assessment, supply chain management

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2015 the United Nations provided 17 goals to help achieve a more sustainable planet. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were set for the member countries to meet in global context. These 17 goals (Figure 1) are build up out of multiple targets each. The SDGs were the result of years of work and are often used in sustainable reporting by governments and other organizations (UN, 2015). The SDGs include 107 targets to reach the 17 goals. The UN provided the countries with 232 indicators that the UN member countries agreed upon.

The municipality of Rheden is a leading municipality when it comes to driving change through the SDGs within the Netherlands. They were awarded with the following prizes: 'Most promising Global Goal municipality of the Netherlands' in 2018 and 'Most inspiring Global Goals municipality of the Netherlands' in 2019. Furthermore, they tried to implement an 18th goal, which the municipality has developed in collaboration with local students. This goal, "Share and pass on" focusses on sharing practices and learning from each other.

Increasingly, municipalities are starting to organize themselves as a network or hybrid organization (Gemeente.nu, 2014; TNO, 2014). In this new constellation focus is put on cooperation between the different stakeholders and their added value (Munsayac, 2021). There are a couple variations of the delimitation of hybrid organizations, however three elements tend to come back in each one of them: 1) the involvement of a variety of stakeholders; 2) the pursuing of multiple and possibly conflicting goals; and 3) the engagement in divergent activities (Anheier & Krlev, 2014; Besharov & Smith, 2014). As the municipality of Rheden has many different partners adding value to very different local goals through many different types of activities, the municipality can be seen as an hybrid organization as the three aspects mentioned above are applicable for the municipality of Rheden. With this development it becomes more important what and how stakeholders and partners contribute towards the SDGs as it is an important value for municipalities.

Keeping the relationship with stakeholders and/or partners becomes more important as well as the performance of the municipality is stronger linked to its partners now than before (Kapucu *et al.*, 2014). Using an assessment tool is one of the tools that can lead to successful multistakeholder partnership (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016) and will also give the municipality a better view on its contribution to the SDGs.

However, currently there is no comprehensive tool in use within the municipality of Rheden to practice this. There are many assessment tools available but they all have their own advantages and disadvantages for use. The municipality of Rheden currently does not apply one of these assessment tools. If through this research options are found that could work for the municipality of Rheden, it could possibly also be useful for other municipalities. The Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten International (VNGi) could recommend similar assessment tools to other municipalities. They have already shown interest in an

assessment tool for SDG performance monitoring of local partners of the municipalities.

The objective of this research is to come up with a plan and necessities an assessment tool must cover to measure an organization's SDG-contribution effectively. Finding or creating an functioning assessment tool or relevant criteria would also complete the research objective. This is why the central research question is:

How can the Municipality of Rheden assess stakeholders' contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals?

This is the main research question. To find an complete and accurate answer the following sub-questions need to be answered:

1. *What are the possibilities and available assessment tools for measuring the different aspects of SDG-contributions of organizations?*
2. *What are the strengths and weaknesses of the inventarized assessment tools?*
3. *What are relevant characteristics for measuring SDG contributions of partners in the view of municipal account managers?*
4. *What assessment tool design does fit best with the relevant characteristics?*

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH

2.1 Theoretical Framework

There has been evidence that data collected by organizations to shape their sustainability report has been used and thus that the reporting itself could have an positive impact on the municipality of Rheden (Adams & McNicholas, 2007). Adams and McNicholas (2007) worked together with an organization to help integrate an sustainability report into the annual report of the organization. Adams and McNicholas used an action research approach and observed corporate meetings for eight months. By doing so the sustainability issues of the organization got integrated into the organizational planning and decision making. This indicates that sustainability reporting in itself has use and could possibly impact the SDGs and Rheden positively.

A particular relevant part of sustainability reporting for the municipality of Rheden is urban sustainability reporting. "Urban sustainability reporting is a tool for informing local government, as well as individuals, businesses, and other organizations, about the progress that they are making towards achieving urban sustainability... ..urban sustainability reporting has the potential to be an important new tool in planning for sustainability." (Maclaren, 2005, p. 11).

If we look at another case study within urban sustainability reporting the conclusion has been drawn that assessment tools have shown also positively affect the trend towards the objectives

set out, which supports a wider application of sustainability assessment tooling (Gilmour *et al.*, 2015). The use of sustainability indicators provides a benchmark to measure progress.

There has been a lot of previous research in many different assessment options for the SDGs. There have been so many and diverse options that there are some summarizing publications available (Wulf *et al.*, 2019; PWC, 2020), through their research was found that harmonization is very important within assessment of SDGs. There are three different aspects that should become harmonized: 1) basic principles that deal with SDG-reporting; 2) the assessment tools and 3) the indicators used.

One important set of standards that is often used within sustainability reporting is the Global Reporting Initiative consolidated standards (GRI, 2020). These standards were developed to formulate the SDGs more applicable for organizations, as the SDG targets were originally meant for benchmarking countries (GRI, 2020). These consolidated standards are often used within different assessment tools and have useful practical application to reach the SDGs through organizations as the goals are more in reach of what they could do (GRI, 2020). Until 2020 there have been 63,000 reports created that use the GRI consolidated standards (GRI database, 2021). With an potential assessment tool it is important to ensure the partnerships with all the stakeholders remains successful. Research has also shown that hybrid organizations have considerably more reach than direct regulations and control (Newall *et al.*, 2012). As will be described next, previous research defines nine conditions for successful multistakeholder partnerships (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016) and six leading principles (Ollerenshaw *et al.*, 2017). The nine conditions are divided in conditions for actors, process and context. Also the key literature on sustainability assessments can be divided in these three categories (see table 1).

Table 1. Literature review ranked by actors, process and context

Conditions for success	Key literature
Actors	
1. Optimal partner mix	Beisheim (2012), Newell <i>et al.</i> (2012) and Gray (2007)
2. Effective leadership	Glasbergen (2010), Abbott and Snidal (2010) and Gray (2007)
Process	
3. Stringent goal-setting	Liese and Beisheim (2011), Abbott <i>et al.</i> (2009) and Keohane and Victor (2011)
4. Sustained funding	Martens (2007), and Reinicke <i>et al.</i> (2009)
5. Professional process management	Liese and Beisheim (2011), Szulecki <i>et al.</i> (2011), Aylward <i>et al.</i> (2003)
6. Regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation to support organizational learning	Wigell (2008) and Bäckstrand (2012)
Context	
7. Active meta-governance	Biermann <i>et al.</i> (2009), Derkx and Glasbergen (2014) and Glasbergen <i>et al.</i> (2007)
8. Favorable political and social context	Stringer <i>et al.</i> (2014) and Beisheim and Liese (2014)
9. Fit to problem-structure	Miles <i>et al.</i> (2001), Abbott (2012) and Keohane and Victor (2011)

The first two conditions found by Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) are based on actors: optimal partner mix and effective leadership. Optimal partner mix refers to having a balanced set of partners, without strong power asymmetries. This can be achieved by assessing current partners and needs. The effective leadership condition is mainly concerned with connecting different opinions and helping partnership through difficult times. These conditions are hard to operationalize (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016).

The next four conditions of Pattberg and Widerberg are connected with the process: stringent goal-setting, sustained funding, professional process management and finally regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation to support organizational learning. The stringent goal-setting helps prevent conflicting fragmentation and thus improves effectiveness (Biermann *et al.*, 2009). When the goals are unclear or ill-defined, this can lead to different expectations. This fragmentation of the goals is what is

referred to in conflicting fragmentation. Sustainability funding is important for partnerships as more and more funding from private financiers is based on goodwill, which is “ultimately unpredictable” (Martens, 2007, p. 6). Professional process management has a positive relation with effectiveness (Szulecki *et al.*, 2011; Beisheim 2012). Effectiveness within the literature used is seen as the problem-solving capability to address the issue they set out to solve (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016, p. 2). Clear roles and responsibilities have been found as indicative for effective management including clear plans (Aylward *et al.*, 2003). Fourthly, regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation to support organizational learning is key. This seems extra relevant as an assessment tool can be used directly as input for such activities. This enables organizational learning, which in turn has proven to increase effectiveness in organizations but also potentially both parties individually (Folke *et al.*, 2005).

The last three conditions proposed by Pattberg and Widerberg relate to the context of the partnership: active meta-governance, favorable political-social context and fit to problem-structure. Active meta-governance has been defined as “an indirect form of governing that is exercised by influencing various processes of self-governance” (Derkx and Glasbergen 2014). To have good meta-governance, goals should be checked against a multitude of criteria such as the SDGs within sustainability (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016). Mapping the political-social context of the partnerships is central to find opportunities or challenges (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016). The last condition within this framework is fit to problem-structure. To create an effective partnership it is important that the collaboration actually helps solve a problem and that there are no other more promising partnerships possible instead (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016). By applying these nine conditions shown in table 1, within the assessment tools and options found we can see if they increase the successfulness of partnerships. Using the nine conditions for success it is possible to see how the assessment tools and options should increase effective partnership and give new insights by combining the research.

Furthermore, another possibly relevant framework is used by Australian local government to measure its success in partnership (Ollerenshaw *et al.*, 2017). This framework can also be used here to cross reference the assessment tools found on how they could improve partnerships of the municipality of Rheden. This framework is based around six principles (see figure 2). For successful partnerships, good performance in each of the six principles is necessary. Between both these frameworks there is a clear overlap of the principles and conditions of success. This overlap is shown below (table 2).

Table 2. Overlap between conditions and principles

	Condition	Principles
Actors	Optimal partner mix	Recognizing and accepting the need for partnership
	Effective leadership	Developing and maintain trust
Process	Stringent goal setting	Developing clarity and realism of purpose
	Sustainable funding	
	Professional process management	Ensuring commitment and ownership
	Regular monitoring, reporting, evaluation and organizational learning	Monitoring, measuring and learning
Context	Active meta-governance	
	Favorable political-social context	
	Fit to problem-structure	Developing clear and robust partnership arrangements

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

For this research three different methods were applied: a literature review, an indicative survey and interviews. The reason for using mixed methods is the mix produces a more complete picture by combining information from complementary kinds of data and sources (Denscombe, 2008). This will help answering the research questions and the sub-questions. The literature review will mainly answer the first two questions while the indicative survey and interviews will mainly help answer the last two sub questions. The aim of using a mixed methods approach in this research is to combine the knowledge gained from the literature review, with the case information obtained in the interviews and survey.

3.2 Study Context & Sample Description

For the survey the municipality of Rheden is compared to VVSG member municipalities. This Flemish organization is an overarching organization that works with the Flemish municipalities. It plays an important role in policy writing and other important tasks for the Flemish municipalities. The comparison between the Flemish municipalities and the municipality of Rheden was made to see how the current assessment and sustainability initiatives are compared to similar municipalities.

The sample selection was thus based on these two organizations and have been send to member that work with the partners, or on sustainability initiatives of both organizations. The response rate was 4 of each group (Municipality of Rheden and VVSG).

3.3 Literature Review

First, literature review is necessary to get an better understanding of the assessment tools available. With the amount of information available on SDG metrics / assessment tools it is important to use a method to search for useful assessment tools for the municipality of Rheden. Furthermore, because the literature review is fundamental for this research, it is important to have the right approach to this research method. Thus, the five-stage grounded-theory approach is used (following Wolfswinkel *et al.*, 2013); applying this method improves the quality of the research. The first stage of this method refers to defining. A few specific things need to be defined, including the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, the fields of research, appropriate sources and the terms that will be used in the search. For inclusion we looked at whether the assessment option is applicable for municipal organizations like Rheden. Another important factor for inclusion is language, this limited us to languages in English and Dutch as those are the ones we understand. On top of that the availability also limited my inclusion. Only articles that were open access or accessible through the University of Twente library network were used. To find the articles entered the search terms both into Google Scholar and Scopus, to increase the chance of finding relevant results. These two academic databases were chosen as they are relatively large and by using both we had a good opportunity to find the most relevant assessment tools. After finding useful tools, through citations we will also look for more useful articles and assessment options. The search terms included: partnership, sustainability, SDG, stakeholder control, stakeholders, assessment, assessment tools. These terms were used in different combinations to find the best results (see Appendix C for the search strings). Then the second stage is the search itself, followed by the selection for stage three. The selecting of the right articles is mainly based on reading through the abstracts, as it can great insight into the articles. Furthermore, there has been a check if it relates to the theoretical framework and if it could provide new insights for an assessment tool / method. The papers and articles selected are later shown in the literature review with their strength within the effectiveness framework used. These strengths were the reason for selection. The fourth stage is analyzing the now carefully created stack of articles. This will mainly be done with coding techniques as proposed by Gioia (2013), which refers to reading through the text highlighting important excerpts. It is important to create sub-headings for analyzing if there are different aspects involved, which likely be the case within this case study. The final stage is to present. This concerns presenting the information acquired in a structured manner.

3.4 Interview

To assess the current situation of the municipality of Rheden some interviews will be useful to further assess the current weaknesses or strengths within their partnership assessments. To ensure that the right information is obtained these interviews will be held with employees of the municipality of Rheden that have direct contact with the partners and are part of the management of these relations, account managers and such roles. To make sure we received a comprehensive overview, four account managers (this is not the term they use within the municipality but there is a strong overlap in functionality), from different size and style partners were included. The question-set is based around the framework mentioned above to see the how the effectiveness the municipality of Rheden is with their current partnerships. Furthermore, to get better insight it partner relations questions from the study “Exploring challenges of boundary-crossing performance dialogues in hybrids” have been used (Rajala, 2019). This has been done as Rajala’s research focused

on the quality of dialogues between partners, which fits well within this research. Before the interviews we asked for permission to record the interview and if we could use the records for this research. To review the interview data, the Gioia method is used for data-analysis (see 3.5).

3.5 Survey

Another way to access the current situation an comparison to different municipalities will give a better picture in which area the municipality could improve in. Using Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) theory and Ollerenshaw *et al.*'s (2017) theory mentioned in the theoretical framework, we created a survey in which their current progress in terms of partnership management is assessed. This was done using the conditions mentioned in the framework (see Appendix B for all survey-items). We compared the municipality of Rheden results to Flemish municipalities facilitated by the VVSG. This was done to understand the differences between the results and could illustrate the room for improvement and/or strengths of the municipality of Rheden approach. Doing so will help answer the second sub-question of this research. To ensure scientific quality the 7 points Likert scale will be used (Norman, 2010). This scaled from “disagree” and “agree” respectively. There will also be open space after every statement so participants can elaborate their choices.

3.6 Data Analysis

To analyze the data the qualitative data approach that enhances grounded theory based analysis by Gioia (2013) was used. This means that we have found the critical sentences in the interview scripts and then use these sentences to define a first order code. Conducting this approach it creates a clear overview of the situation. It is important that we are objective in finding the critical sentences and then turning them in first order code requires a lot of interpretation. To analyze the literature review, the items were read and values were assigned to them based on every condition mentioned in the framework.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Literature Review Results

Table 5 of the appendix C, shows an overview the most relevant assessment tools that were found in the literature review. Further explanation per assessment options are described below.

An example of an comprehensive assessment tool is the Mandala tool (UCLG, 2018). This tool is used in Brazil to evaluate the progress of different municipalities towards the 2030 goals. This is done by looking at 28 different indicators and using the information out of that in a radar chart per different municipality, different levels of progress are indicated compared to the mean. A tool like this is comprehensive because it harmonizes the assessment tooling and indicators for all municipalities in Brazil. It allows the option to compare the different municipalities which could lead to important action.

A second assessment tool that potentially could be used for different stakeholders of the municipality of Rheden is the “Toward Common Metrics and Consistent Reporting of Sustainable Value Creation” tool (WEF, 2020), this tool of the World Economic Forum was developed in collaboration with the Big Four accountancy firms. There are four pillars created – Principles of Governance, Planet, People and Prosperity- by combining SDGs and using the essential elements. Then the GRI standards (and other commonly used standards) are used to create two sets of metrics to measure performance within each pillar. These metrics might not all be as useable for the municipality of Rheden as it is mainly metrics to measure private organizations. An example of a metric used that would not fit very well to all

public (monopolist) organizations would be Net Promoter Score (NPS). This metric refers how likely it is that you will recommend the product/service to a friend or family member. For some stakeholders this is not relevant, such as local public health and security area associations (like the Rheden partner ‘Veiligheids- en Gezondheidsregio Gelderland-Midden’).

To create an assessment tool it is important to learn from organizations or municipalities in a similar position. The Association of Flemish Cities and Villages (VVSG) has created its own indicators / roadmap for implementation (VVSG, 2013). Learning from the Flemish actions could help with developing and choosing the right indicators for the municipality of Rheden. From their roadmap we can also find some interesting keys to success that align within the theoretical framework used for this research. The VVSG wants its employees to commit to the SDG indicators. They want to do this by creating clarity in responsibility, both politically and administratively. Furthermore delegating and rewarding the success are also important to commit the employees to the goals. This could potentially also be done by the municipality of Rheden to improve the management of both the tool and managing partners if the responsibilities are clear.

The UN has also created and roadmap for localizing the SDGs. Within this roadmap the UN claims that a national consensus with local ownership of SDGs will increase implementation and involvement locally (UN Habitat, 2016). This aligns with the meta-governance from the theoretical framework. This improved coordination can improve the meta-governance can help the municipality of Rheden and potentially other municipalities in the Netherlands if a national consensus is created. Within the UN Road map there is another important step that is necessary on national level first. This comes to financial reforms. This can according to them, better be done on national level as “expenditures and investments in sustainable development are being devolved to the subnational level, which often lacks of adequate technical and technological capacity, financing and support.”

For an assessment tool which fits with the context in Rheden it is important to inventory per partner what indicators are relevant and how the indicator sets are created. A good example on a model for customizing the indicators is the SILENT model (Yigitcanlar, 2010). The SILENT model is an advanced geographic information system and indicator-based comparative urban sustainability indexing model. First there is an indicator set created, based on theory. For the municipality of Rheden this would be SDG indicators, in line with private the GRI standards mentioned in the framework. Then the SILENT model selects which indicators are used based on four criteria. These four criteria are relevance, representativeness, predictability and how policy-laden it is. Selection of indicators will also be important for the municipality of Rheden as not all partners will be able to use all indicators. This is because the partners of the municipality Rheden have different sectors and sizes. Having a proper selection of indicators per partner will be key to have a good problem structure. A good problem-structure fit is a key condition for successful partnership (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016).

To conclude, all the assessment tools have their own respective strength and provide different insights. In table 5 (Appendix C) an overview is provided.

4.2 Interview Results

The interview results are put in the appendix B, table 4. In several interviews the room for improvement of the process management was mentioned. Furthermore, making agreements has also been

noted as an potential area for improvement at the municipality of Rheden. Stringent and consensus about the goal setting is very important when making new agreements, however, the process management is very important for this too, as creating these goals relies on an good process for creating commitments. Another condition for improvement is sustainable funding. For not all partnerships this appears to be an issue, but for some partnerships the dependency of the regional of national government bodies seems to negatively affect the partnership as own decisions cannot be made properly. Through the interviews it also became clear that the partnerships of the municipality of Rheden differ a lot. This makes a proper fit-to-problem an area to pay extra attention to.

4.3 Survey Results

When looking at the survey results (see Figure 1 and table 3 below) a couple things stand out. Firstly, there is a notable difference between the municipality of Rheden and the VVSG for 5 out of the 7 questions. This gives us an indication that the municipalities within the VVSG are possibly front running with implementing SDGs in their partnerships. This is possibly an added argument in the literature review of this as the VVSG already developed an assessment method for SDG performance. The questions that indicate the most room for improvement are for goal setting, fit to problem structure and professional process management (respectively question 2, 4 and 6). This is due to relatively low values and bigger discrepancies with VVSG than with the other topics. These topics respectively represent a more stringent goal setting, fit-to problem structure and professional process management from the framework. For the goals setting condition two questions were used, to find out which part of the goal setting could see improvement, the setting of goals itself or ensuring these goals are stringent.

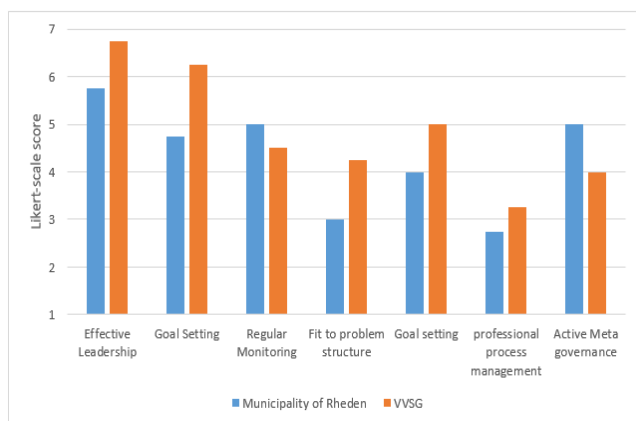


Figure 1. Survey results per question on Likert-scale

5. DISCUSSION & LIMITATIONS

In the literature review many articles were found and the focus what put on alignment with the framework of Pattberg and Widerberg used in this research. However, if another framework should be used different assessment options could have been seen as more beneficial. This refers to the conditions and principles used as fundaments used could have also been substituted by different perspectives on partnership effectiveness. It is important to realize that the results of the research are limited by the chosen framework, and thus provides the assessment options that are only best for effective partnerships from the perspective of the framework used.

The conclusion drawn out of the literature review, on which the overall conclusion is based, also has a point for discussion. The

values assigned to the specific assessment tools was done solely by one researcher, and could thus contain personal errors or deviations. Furthermore, due to having one reviewer for the literature review, a bias or error could be there as no other reviewer challenges the inclusion/exclusion of publications. To ensure the conclusion is correct further research could review the strengths and weaknesses assigned by a larger group of researchers, and potentially include users of the assessment tools as well. This way, different views on the effectiveness of certain tools will be better represented. It is also important to realize the limitations of the survey. Due to the limited amount of people that could potentially fill it in and the short amount of time, the response rate was really low. This is why the survey has not an prominent role in answering the research questions.

Another point for discussion is that the municipality of Rheden and the VVSG members differ in size and context. Thus you could argue that the VVSG member municipalities and municipality of Rheden are not comparable. For both the interviews and the survey there is another point of discussion. For the interviewees it is important that their partnership is managed well as most of them are account managers or have an equivalent role. This means they could have an bias and want to make the relation between the municipality of Rheden and the partner seem better than it actually is. This could be solved with further auditing research and experiences of the municipality itself. Something else to keep in mind with this research is that assessment tools, and sustainability reporting in general is a means to an end, which indicates that with reporting some action has to be taken to create an different future (Pucker, 2021). With the results obtained from assessment tools some action has to be taken to positively influence SDG contribution in this case. For further research more data should be collected by the municipality to see what could help to get a better understanding of their current network and contexts of their network partners. This is essential for creating or selecting the right assessment based on specific requirements. More research could also be executed about how to combine or integrating multiple assessment tools.

6. THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

This paper has theoretical relevance through the analysis of assessment options regarding to conditions and principles. Combining the knowledge of the available tools and using the conditions for successful multistakeholder partnerships. (Pattberg and Widerberg, 2016), by applying both the knowledge gained from the literature review with the interview and survey results gives an new understanding of the assessment options for the municipality of Rheden. Also the theoretical conditions and principles are evaluated from a practice point of view.

We can see that the conditions and principles mentioned in the framework come back in the assessment options found in the literature review. However, some conditions do not seem to play a role in the assessment options, such as optimal partner mix. When looking at the practicality of this condition within assessment options it also makes sense it is not included. The assessment options helps the Municipality of Rheden judging the effectiveness of the current specific partnerships. This leaves out the potential other partners that could be included, which in turn makes it hard to realize whether the partner mix is optimized. The other conditions used in the framework all had some relevance in the assessment options.

A lot of information is already available and many different assessment tools exist (PWC, 2020). Combining that knowledge with this research could give this research more relevance as

researchers could apply the sample principles and conditions mentioned in this framework over a broader set of assessment options, or more in depth to get an even more comprehensive overview.

7. PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

The practical relevance of this case study is also important. The Municipality of Rheden could potentially use the outcomes to assess their partners. This is practical because, as mentioned in the description of the situation and current complication, regarding the need to assess these partners. The proposed actions for further implementation of the research results in Rheden are discussed in the conclusion.

Furthermore, to help solving challenges such as the local SDG implementation it is important to call for action, potentially through research such as this (George, 2016). This gives relevance to apply the information given in the conclusion, and for the Municipality of Rheden to develop a new or select an existing assessment tool.

8. CONCLUSION

First it is useful to deeply understand the descriptions of the five selected existing assessment options found in the literature review. The review shows that there are many different assessment options that all have their own strengths and weaknesses. To reflect on these strengths, they have valued them according to the framework (see table 6, Appendix C). It also shows that there are ready made assessment options but creating your own assessment tool is also an option, as VVSG showed.

To find out what option fits the municipality of Rheden best, the interviews and survey gave some insights. In table 3, the framework is linked to the interviews and the survey to find out in which area the municipality of Rheden finds the best option for assessing partners. As visible in the table both the optimal partner mix and favorable political and social context have not been included for the results. This was because very little information of implementing these within an assessment option was available. Changing the social and political context for a municipality is very difficult, and hard to assess within assessment options. This why we considered it better to leave it out of the conclusion drawn from both the interview and survey.

With the results from the interviews and survey we see overlap on which areas improvements could be made, this indicates that the results of the literature research is confirmed in the interviews and survey. In all interviews ‘process management’ has been mentioned as an explicit point of possible improvement. Furthermore, adequate ‘process management’ will also create strategic direction (Arnstead *et al.*, 1999), which was mentioned to hinder effective partnerships during the interviews.

Due to all partners of Rheden vary much in characteristics such as size and bureaucracy and culture, creating an own assessment options seem to work better than using an pre-existing one as the pre-existing assessment options tend to be focused on one particular set of organizations, SILENT model being focused on sustainable development, WEF’s model on organizations, etc.

Table 3. Relevance of framework from interview and survey perspective

Key conditions of success	Room for improvement, based on interviews	Room for improvement, based on survey
Effective leadership	-	-
Stringent goal setting	++	+
Sustainable funding	+	-
Professional process management	+++	++
Regular monitoring, reporting, evaluation and learning	+	-
Active meta-governance	-	-
Fit to problem-structure	+	+

The assessment tool that fits best would be the assessment tool by the VVSG, which accelerates in ‘process management’ and also is applicable in similar contexts as the municipality of Rheden. From the survey we also get the indication that the VVSG is also slightly further in making sustainability an integral part of their organization and partnerships. To assess stakeholders performance towards the SDGs, the municipality of Rheden could best implement an tool using strengths of each of the tools mentioned, based on the VVSG model with the key characteristic ‘process management’.

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10. APPENDIX A



Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals overview

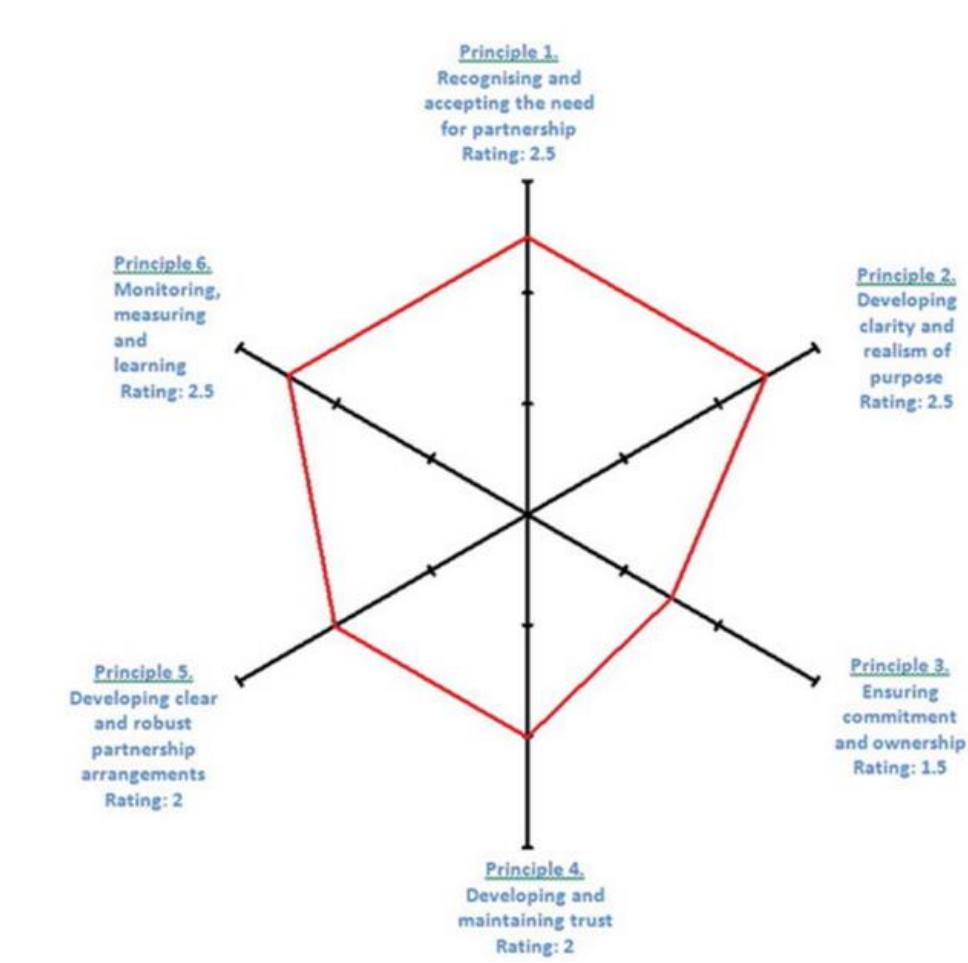


Figure 2 From: Leading the way: The integral role of local government within a multisector partnership delivering a large infrastructure project in an Australian growth region (Ollerenshaw *et al.* 2017, p. 17)

11. APPENDIX B

Interview Questions:

1. Wat is jouw rol in relatie tot het relatiebeheer van leveranciers of partnerships bij de Gemeente Rheden?
2. Met welke leveranciers / partners werk je samen met de partners van Rheden?
3. Op welke wijze beoordeel je de toegevoegde waarde van dit of deze leveranciers/partnerships ?
- 3.b. Waarop wordt gelet?
- 3.c. Welke criteria worden gebruikt?
- 3.d. Zijn er op het moment ook criteria in het gebied van duurzaamheid (zoals bijvoorbeeld de Global Goals)?
4. Op welke manier zijn de partners belangrijk voor een bijdrage op het gebied van duurzaamheid?
5. Welke mogelijkheden ziet u om de partners ook te beoordelen op hun bijdrage aan duurzaamheid (Global Goals – breed)?
6. Welke kansen en belemmeringen zie je?
7. Wat zou een eerste stap kunnen zijn om beter grip te krijgen op de bijdrage van de partner aan de duurzaamheidsprestaties van de gemeente?

Performance dialogues interview questions (Rajala, 2019)

1. Hoe zou je de prestatie met de partner/leverancier beschrijven gesprekken beschrijven
2. Zijn er problemen die gerelateerd zijn aan prestatie informatie of de manier waarop deze informatie gedeeld word?
3. Hoe worden verschillende meningen of conflicten opgelost met de partner/ leverancier?

Survey items (on a 7-point Likert-scale):

1. Binnen de gemeente(s) is er een behoefte om duurzamer te worden
2. Binnen de gemeente(s) is de duurzaamheid verwerkt in een programma begroting.
3. Er wordt bij de gemeente gekeken naar toegevoegde waarde van partner-organisaties.
4. Partners worden expliciet geselecteerd op hun bijdrage aan het beleid op het gebied van duurzaamheid
5. Er zijn duidelijke doelen geformuleerd voor duurzaamheid binnen de gemeente
6. Binnen de gemeente(s) zijn medewerkers verantwoordelijk voor de monitoring van de toegevoegde waarde van de partnerships.
7. Er wordt rekening gehouden met wijk- en buurtverschillen binnen de gemeente

Table 4. Interview results

Critical sentence	1st order code	2nd order theme
“Eerst vooral de focus op uitvoering, ..er komt nu ruimte voor een grotere verantwoording”	Performance focus	Regular monitoring, reporting, evaluating and learning
“We hebben daar kpi’s voor ontwikkeld”	Performance indicators	Stringent goal setting
[Dieren fiets op één] ...hebben global goals als vehicle genomen”	SDG Criteria	Regular monitoring, reporting, evaluating and learning
“Er is nu een programma energie, dat gaat echt richting duurzaamheid”	Part of the partnership green focus	Fit-to-problem structure Sustainable funding
“op welke global goals halen we de meeste subsidies binnen”	Opportunities for funding	
“Als we het meer willen professionaliseren, met name in het daadwerkelijk verbinden”	Making more collaboration agreements	Imperfect professional process management
“structureel accountmanagement, dat is dat je periodiek overleg hebt en dat er een vorm van een samenwerkings plan aan ten grondslag ligt.”	Structural meetings with agreement with agenda	Sustainable funding
“Het meest intensief op uitvoerings niveau... ..er is niet een management overleg”	Intensive on performance level. Lack of management consultation	Imperfect professional process management Imperfect effective leadership
Ja, het lastige is dat er soms afspraken ontbreken.. ..Als we iet oppassen groeit de connectie sneller dan de gemeente.. Je wilt als partner wel in dezelfde soort groei blijven zitten”	Lack of agreements, growth alignment	
“in theorie kan er gestemd worden... ..als ze er niet uitkomen word het uitgesteld... er mist urgentie”	In reality, delay. Lack of urgency	

12. APPENDIX C

Search strings literature review:

1. Partnership AND sustainability
2. Partnership AND sustainability AND SDG
3. Partnership AND sustainability AND stakeholders
4. Partnership AND sustainability AND assessment
5. Partnership AND sustainability AND assessment tools
6. Partnership AND SDG AND assessment
7. Partnership AND SDG AND assessment tools
8. Stakeholder control AND sustainability
9. Stakeholder control AND sustainability AND SDG
10. Stakeholder control AND sustainability AND assessment
11. Stakeholder control AND sustainability AND assessment tools
12. Stakeholder control AND SDG AND assessment
13. Stakeholder control AND SDG AND assessment tools
14. Stakeholders AND sustainability
15. Stakeholders AND sustainability AND SDG
16. Stakeholders AND sustainability AND assessment
17. Stakeholders AND sustainability AND assessment tools
18. Stakeholders AND SDG AND assessment
19. Stakeholders AND SDG AND assessment tools

Table 5. Overview literature review

Assessment option	Made by	Critical information gained	Strengths within the Framework	Retrieved
Mandala tool	UCLG	Goal setting can be done by benchmarking the mean	Goal setting	https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/the_mandala_tool.pdf
Towards common metrics and consistent reporting of sustainable value creation	WEF	Do not reinvent the wheel, use existing metrics, and group useful categories for easier monitoring	Monitoring, reporting and organizational learning	http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_IBC_ESG_Metrics_Discussion_Paper.pdf
Local Indicators for the 2030 Agenda	VVSG	Learn from organizations in similar positions, Delegate responsibility and reward	Process management, effective leadership	https://www.local2030.org/library/620/Local-Indicators-for-the-2030-Agenda-Sustainable-Development-Goals.pdf
Roadmap for localizing the SDGs: Implementation and monitoring at a subnational level	UN HABITAT	A national consensus with local ownership will increase implementation and involvement, Fiscal reforms are necessary on national scale	Meta-governance, Budgeting	https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/roadmap_for_localizing_the_sdgs_0.pdf
SILENT Model	T Yigitcanlar	Indicator selection criteria	Fit to Problem-structure	https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/2/1/321

Table 6. Literature review conclusion

Conditions	Mandala tool	Towards common metrics and consistent reporting of sustainable value creation.	Local indicators for the 2030 agenda	Roadmap for localizing the SDGs: Implementation and monitoring at a subnational level	SILENT model
Optimal partner mix	-	-	-	-	-
Effective leadership	-	-	+++	-	-
Stringent goal setting	+++	+	+	+	++
Sustainable funding	-	-	-	++	-
Professional process management	-	+	+++	-	-
Regular monitoring, reporting, evaluation and organizational learning	++	+++	-	+	-
Active meta-governance	-	-	-	+++	-
Favorable political and social context	-	-	++	-	-
Fit to problem-structure	+	-	+	-	+++
Overall score	6	5	9	7	5