

AGENDA-SETTING, PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY TRANSFER IN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL

FORMAÇÃO DA AGENDA, PROGRESSOS E DESAFIOS PARA A TRANSFERÊNCIA DE POLÍTICAS AMBIENTAIS NO CONSELHO DE COOPERAÇÃO DO GOLFO

AGENDA DE FORMACIÓN, PROGRESOS Y DESAFÍOS PARA LA TRANSFERENCIA DE POLÍTICAS AMBIENTALES EN EL EN EL CONSEJO DE COOPERACIÓN DEL GOLFO

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Resumo: Este estudo analisa a convergência política e a coordenação na formulação de políticas para a sustentabilidade, no contexto do Conselho de Cooperação do Golfo (GCC). O artigo explora as escolhas políticas dos países do CCG em relação à definição de agenda, aprendizagem política, convergência política e coordenação como um caso de transferência Sul-Sul na região do Oriente Médio, que é um aspecto relativamente pouco estudado dos esforços intensivos de diversificação dos Estados do Golfo. O estudo conclui que a integração regional limitada entre os países do CCG dificulta suas relações. Os interesses nacionais individuais são priorizados em detrimento da transferência e

convergência da política regional. Além disso, alguns membros optam por se posicionar mais próximos da perspectiva Ocidental e Global na agenda de desenvolvimento. Consequentemente, eles estão mais dispostos a adotar políticas ambientais.

Palavras-chave : Conselho de Cooperação do Golfo; mudanças climáticas; diversificação econômica; sustentabilidade; desenvolvimento sustentável; transferência de políticas; aprendizagem política; meio ambiente

Abstract: This study analyzes policy convergence and coordination in policymaking for sustainability, taking place in the context of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It explores the policy choices of GCC countries in relation to agenda-setting, policy learning, policy convergence and coordination as a case of South-South transfer in the Middle East region, which is a relatively understudied aspect of the intensive diversification efforts of Gulf States. The study concludes that limited regional integration among GCC countries makes their relations more difficult. Individual national interests are prioritized over regional policy transfer and convergence. Moreover, some members choose to position closer to Western and Global perspective on development agenda. Consequently, they are keener to adopt environmental policies.

Keywords: Gulf Cooperation Council; climate change; economic diversification; sustainability; sustainable development; policy transfer; policy learning; environment

Resumen: Este estudio examina la convergencia política y la coordinación en la formulación de políticas de sostenibilidad en el contexto del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo (CCG). El documento explora las opciones políticas de los países del CCG con respecto al establecimiento de la agenda, el aprendizaje político, la convergencia política y la coordinación como un caso de transferencia Sur-Sur en la región del Medio Oriente, que es un aspecto relativamente poco estudiado de los esfuerzos intensivos de diversificación de los estados del Golfo. El artículo concluye que la integración regional limitada entre los países del CCG dificulta sus relaciones. Los intereses nacionales individuales tienen prioridad sobre la transferencia y la convergencia de la política regional. Además, algunos miembros optan por acercar la perspectiva occidental y global a la agenda de desarrollo. En consecuencia, están más dispuestos a adoptar políticas ambientales.

Palabras clave: Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo; cambios climáticos; diversificación económica; sostenibilidad; desarrollo sostenible; transferencia de políticas; aprendizaje político; medio ambiente

INTRODUCTION

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries face a serious challenge caused by the gridlock in the nexus between development, energy security and sustainability. The pressing need for global policies and measures to effectively counter Climate Change's impact, leave these countries with an important struggle: on the one hand, negative impacts of climate change hinder the region's water, food and human security, while on the other hand, the remedies to this significant challenge demand a fundamental change in the global fossil fuel consumption which further threatens their

economies unless the revenues and their economies are diversified away from oil and gas exports. Being key players in the global energy market, with their resources making up 30.6% and 19.8% of the world's total oil and gas reserves, respectively (BP, 2019), how the GCC countries are shaping their policies and agenda for sustainable development emerges as an interesting puzzle.

This paper focuses on the GCC, as a regional economic community between six countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates) to underline how regional specificities, both strengths and limitations, influence the Council's agenda setting and progress in policy processes as response to sustainable development. Consequently, it reveals the way sustainability is taking its place in policy-making in the region.

Under the threat of climate change and in line with developing international efforts to address it through binding regulations, this study highlights the tension in GCC countries between their economic growth and their desire to address climate change. A unified regional approach is still lacking, emphasizing the limited regional integration between Gulf countries. In this context, the analysis targets to explore how the strategies of GCC countries can relate to policy processes as policy learning, policy convergence and coordination, as a case of South-South transfer in the Middle East region, across the Muslim states of the Arabian Gulf and as a relatively understudied aspect of the intensive diversification efforts of Gulf States. Given their geographical proximity, their economic interdependency and similar features, especially with regards to the role of fossil fuels in their economies or with regards to their historical cultural Arabian ties, one can expect to trace evidence for policy harmonization and coordination among these countries and convergence when it comes to policy behaviors pertaining to the economic diversification. The situation is more complex and it entails divergent and individual interests as well as strategies.

At this point a crucial question stands out: what do endanger or challenge policy convergence and coordination at the regional level among GCC states? Is weak and ineffective regional integration the major cause? Are there other important reasons? In light of 2017 political developments and crises inside the GCC, including the blockade against Qatar, we question to what extent policy convergence and coordination in the sphere of sustainability policymaking can take place. On one hand, the distinction between high politics and low politics, often attributed to national security/ military

reasons and the environment/ climate change respectively, can partially explain the lack of coordination: a crisis or blockade at the high politics can affect the policymaking in low politics as well. On the other hand, in the age of global multi-connections and complex networks of actors and pressure groups, states are no longer the only source of policymaking. Several agents are now instrumental, as “policy entrepreneurs” being companies, foundations, research centers, epistemic communities, individuals as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), initiating policy innovations, which can diffuse across the boundaries without a priority role of the state.

Public policy is critical to this extent as it provides inputs and it sets the institutional and regulatory framework that influences all stakeholders, who play a role in environmental protection and climate change, including private investors and businesses. In the case of Qatar, for instance, the National Environment Strategy and the Qatari Environmental Protection Law set a framework and a trend to which economic stakeholders must comply. Governments have henceforth always a crucial role, although in a different way compared to the past. They have also to improve the enabling environment, mobilizing public and private investment, and encouraging private participation through appropriate frameworks and investment planning. This is perhaps what public policy strategies has to do by improving the entrepreneurial ecosystem and encouraging green entrepreneurship, creating investments and jobs, while complying to sustainability standards.

1. The Specific GCC Context

1.1. Between Conflict and Economic Diversification

The GCC is a regional economic and political union created in 1981 between the states of the Arabian Gulf. Despite their commonalities, from the political point of view (all countries are monarchies), economically (to reduce their dependence on extractive resources and to diversify their economies, GCC states are pursuing structural reforms), and culturally speaking (their common Arabic and Islamic culture), regional integration has been experiencing limitations, challenges and setbacks, because of divergent and contradictory interests among member countries. The regional context is complex and promptly changing, also in relation to alliances and non-regional countries, like the United States.

Despite differences, GCC states have not been actively engaged in regional conflicts to the extent that they are now. Militarization is an important factor for economic development and collective security in the region. Unified military, through the Peninsula Shield Force, is among the key regional goals for integration. Today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the UAE are expressing military power in the region and there is a broader battle for regional Gulf hegemony between KSA and Iran, which affects all GCC states and others in the broader Gulf region, like Yemen and Lebanon. Since 2011, the KSA advanced a proposal to enhance political, economic, and military coordination between GCC member states to counter the Iranian influence in the region.

The tensions between Qatar and KSA, including the UAE and Bahrain, starting in 2014 and escalating in 2017 with the blockade against Qatar, is not only a manifestation of an idealistic contrast, but also a tangible political sign of economic rivalry between oil and natural gas producers in the larger Middle-East and North African (MENA) region, as Egypt joined the group.

In the economic realm, the similarities in the structural features of GCC countries has already led to some policy diffusion and pursuit of similar strategies in the region in certain cases, such as addressing the lack of arable land. However, to address a broader transformation, still, more needs to be done in the region to enhance private sector capacities and to develop a strong and competitive private sector as a regional comparative advantage equal to that of the hydrocarbon expertise. Otherwise, there will be many ramifications and political security could not be guaranteed. As a recent example, countries like Qatar have realized how crucial it is also at the national level to counter economic turbulences and political clashes. Furthermore, individual GCC national markets are limited in size, but GCC integration could help them grow and subsequently become more collectively competitive and henceforth secure. Accordingly, the notion of “security” for the region does not only include hard security in terms of regime stability and military status quo, but also human security with components often attributed to soft security issues, such as well-functioning economy, food, water and environment.

Sustainability-oriented policies and regional cooperation are consequently critical to effectively enhance regional development and economic diversification. Nevertheless, the traditional fierce competition among the GCC countries mainly

related to hydrocarbons seems to transform into micro-competitions as these countries are diversifying into similar sectors, such as aviation, deep water ports and logistics, renewable energy, financial services, real estate, and tourism. To illustrate, ports and logistics are part of more than one diversification plan since the geographical position of the GCC states offer a good location for an interregional trading hub. As a result, these emerging micro-competitions are highly connected with the slow pace of development in terms of intra-GCC economic interdependencies (Sever, Tok, D'Alessandro 2019).

In such a context, as an alternative way to foster progress and cooperation in sustainability, according to some scholars such as Hertog and Luciani (2009), sustainability policies should be pursued on a “project basis” to implement with ad hoc selected stakeholders, building local technology clusters, these networks being under the direct control of leaders. This strategy is more successful than broader regulatory strategies in the Gulf context, because the involved stakeholders have their own interest to make the policy effective and to participate to set in place the required business environment for it to work. In line with this perspective, some areas for policy learning and transfer emerged for the GCC countries:

Increasing Smart Cities

A particular vehicle for Gulf States to cut down emissions and attain more sustainable economies has been the increasing will to develop and improve smart cities for becoming global leaders in building smart cities. The concept of smart cities in the GCC region, particularly in Qatar and the UAE, is gaining importance as a means of making available all the services, data, and applications enabled by information and communication technologies (ICTs) to citizens, companies, and authorities that are part of an urban system, and beyond a larger economic and social national territory. It aims at increasing the quality of life of citizens and communities and improving the efficiency as well as the quality of the services provided by governing entities and businesses, while respecting the environment. Governments of many countries are taking the lead in developing the next generation of cities driven by technological and sustainability friendly solutions. Masdar City is, for example, the first carbon-neutral, zero-waste city in the world. Dubai is also a leading urban environment to this extent, especially when it comes to policies governing technological change and data management in a sustainable way.

Development Aid

Gulf States have demonstrated a greater willingness in the 21st century to take proactive steps in reshaping their position in the international system. They have made concerted efforts to, enhance their visibility and voice in the international stage, and started processes of normative divorce away from their hard and soft power as being discursively tied to hydrocarbon stockpiles (Sever, Tok, D'Alessandro 2019). This strategy has increased the importance of development aid.

Over the past decade, the regional preferences of targeted recipient countries of Gulf donors have shifted. As globalization has deepened links between Gulf States and the international system, with high oil prices and increased demand for energy resources from emerging economies, Gulf donors have begun to broaden the scope of their development cooperation to include deepening ties with new Southern allies. Together with their economies, Gulf assistance has also been diversifying: in 2012, the UAE disbursed AED 5.83 bn (USD 1.43 bn) through 43 donor entities, the private sector and individuals in support of development, humanitarian and charitable projects in 137 countries and territories. Sub-Saharan African countries have become strategic recipients and partners for Gulf donors. As the financial and economic crisis unfolded during the course of the years 2008-2010, Gulf financial institutions increased their focus and activities of development cooperation on infrastructures such as transportation, energy, and water (Ulrichsen, 2015). More recently, there have been efforts to devote more resources to agriculture and social sectors. These sectors are a way to “export” in recipient countries the commitment and choice to focus on sustainability.

Encouraging Green Entrepreneurship

Small and medium enterprises are a recent trend and are still limited in number in Gulf countries, where large national state-led enterprises have been more common in the past. Henceforth, through policies building the required entrepreneurial ecosystem, Gulf countries are encouraging small and medium green enterprises that support job creation (especially but not only for the youth), but also sustainable choices and measures. This strategy is reinforced with incubators, financing and investment mechanisms, entrepreneurship education, and urban policies among others emphasizing green and sustainable measures, especially in countries and spaces

more vulnerable to climate change, as it is the case in the Gulf, where water and food security is among the most crucial concerns for the populations in the forthcoming years.

1.2. The Climate and Energy Dilemma

Climate change and global warming have various effects, such as the loss of habitat and biological diversity, declining productivity, the irreversible degradation of ecosystems, groundwater depletion in both quantity and quality, soil and water salinization, the loss of snow and ice in the Arctic region, rising sea levels, and saltwater intrusion, severe water shortages, decrease in freshwater environments and desertification. All together, these challenges highly endanger water, food, and human security. Unusual climate events, as well as rising temperatures have the potential to increase the risk of violence and conflict in more affected regions, such as tropical ones, but also in the Gulf where water and food production are very limited, because of physical conditions. Climate change is considered to seriously increase competition for scarce water (Lambert, 2016) and thus to complicate peace agreements, while perceptions of shrinking resources can participate to cause the militarization of strategic natural resources, which is problematic especially for already turbulent regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

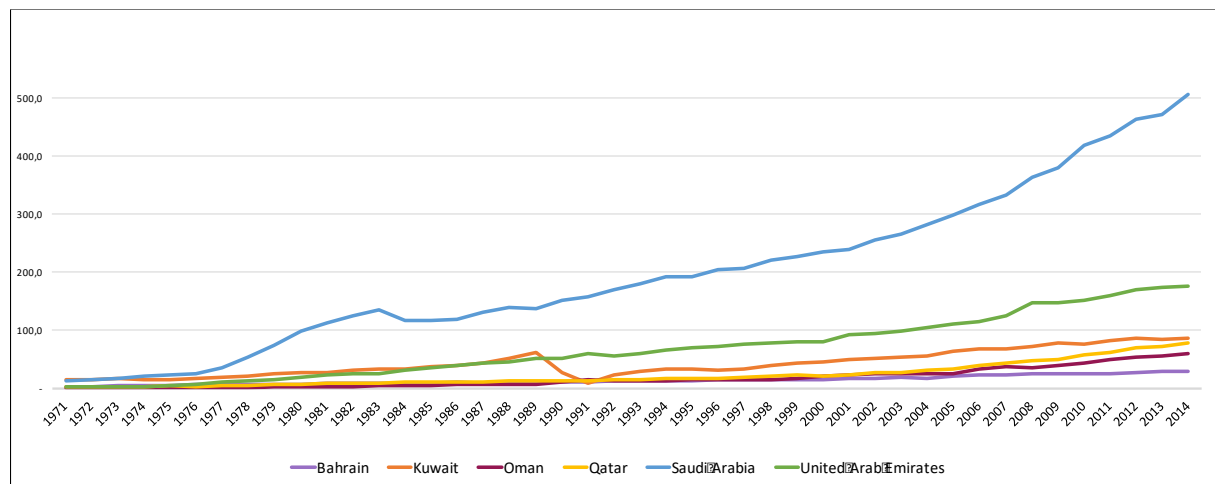
In addressing these challenges, the Paris Agreement, entered into force in 2016 and signed by all the GCC members, offers a structure to evaluate national laws, policies, and actions in the global context with reference to emission reduction policies for the fight against global warming. According to the Paris Agreement, governments must hold themselves to account through their internal systems of monitoring, evaluation of policy effectiveness and efficiency in the climate change domain. As such, they need to have or develop accurate and comprehensive national data on greenhouse gas emissions as a basis for evaluating climate policies. Furthermore, national climate governance frameworks and their policy cycles must be aligned with their long-term decarbonization strategies. Aligning ambitions has consequences on the policy cycle (from elaboration to revision, through implementation and evaluation) and on the legislation.

Based on the principles of “common but differentiated responsibilities” and “special national circumstances”, the GCC members as well offer ambitious national policies evolving around common themes of: economic diversification away from

hydrocarbons, energy efficiency, carbon capture, clean and renewable energy resources, water and waste management, risks emanating from sea level rise, research and development and increasing public awareness (UNFCCC, 2017). However, what is critical is that this global action for transferring climate and environmental concerns into actual state policies definitely affects overall energy supply portfolios and global energy markets. To illustrate, improvements in energy efficiency, renewable resources and switch to electric and natural gas vehicles are expected to decrease the global oil demand, especially in the European Union and United States. While a 30 per cent increase in global energy demand is calculated for 2040 scenarios, the biggest share in world production is expected to come from renewables, reaching almost 60 per cent of all new power generation capacity by 2040 (IEA, 2016). This transformation, affecting water use, food production, as well as construction, heating/cooling, cars, infrastructure among others, presents several critical issues for the GCC.

First, GCC's own energy profiles are heavily dependent on oil and natural gas, requiring resource diversification to curb their emissions, which have been increasing since 1970s.

Figure 1: The GCC's CO₂ Emissions from Fuel Combustion (million tonnes)

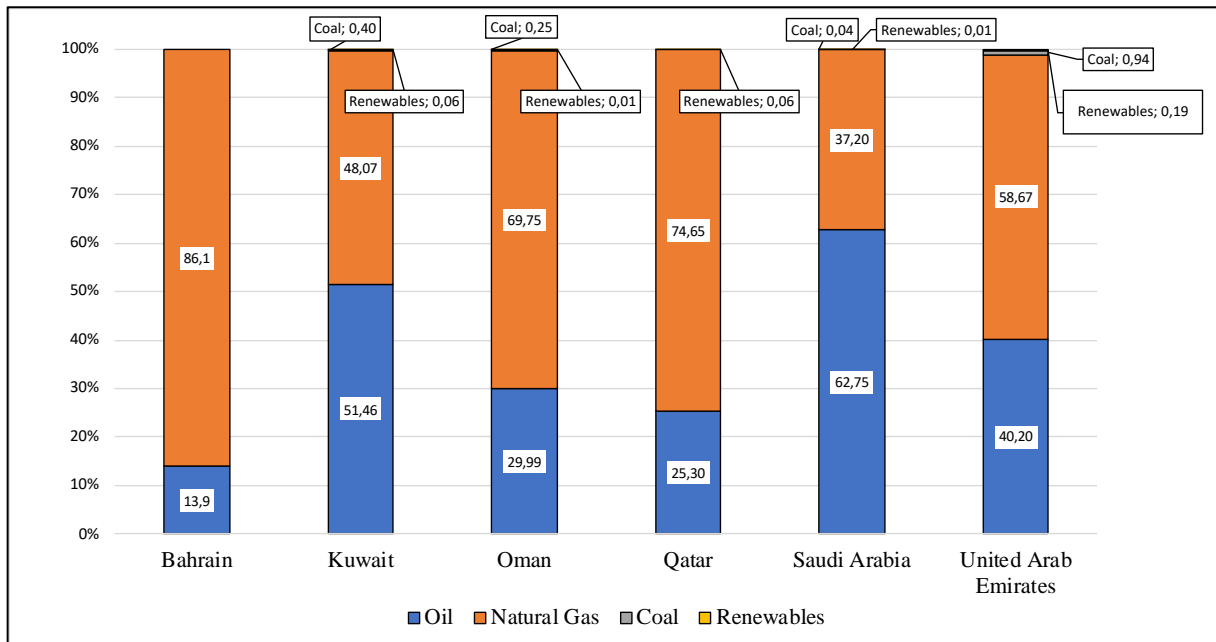


Source: Prepared by the authors using International Energy Agency, 2016

Among the members, the share of alternative resources, such as biofuels, geothermal, solar and wind are not significant enough, with really small percentages. National sustainability policies in the energy sector are required as effective tools to

deeply transform the relation that these countries have with extractive energy production and consumption.

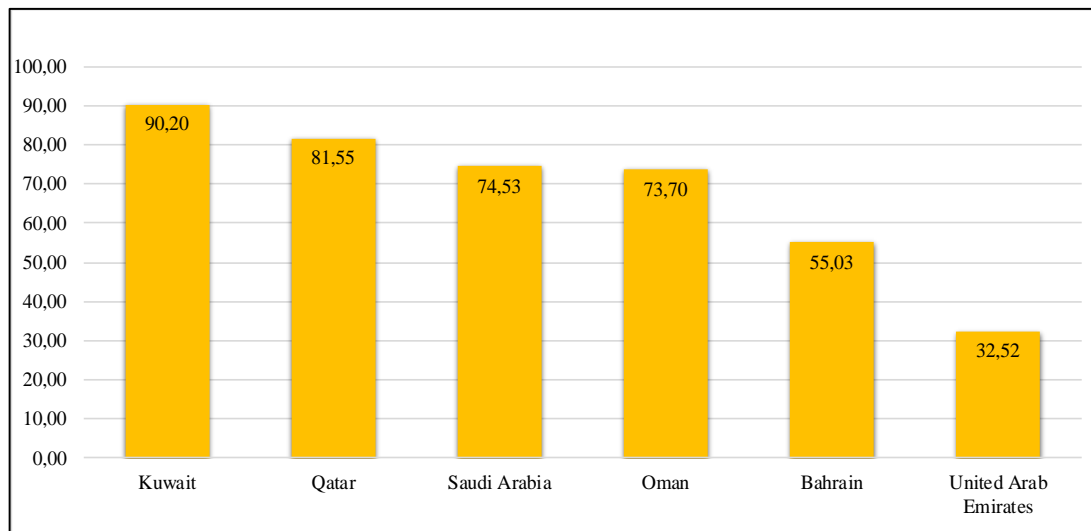
Figure 2: Shares of total primary energy supply in the GCC, 2018 (%)



Data Source: BP 2019 & IEA 2016 (For Bahrain)

Second, international climate mitigation measures and initiatives are directly affecting the GCC, since the geopolitical power of these oil exporters and survival of existing elites are still based on oil revenues and thus on the continuous global demand for oil (Luomi, 2010; Russell 2015). Scientists proved that around 78 per cent of the total greenhouse gas emissions increase from 1970 to 2010 comes from emissions of CO₂ from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes (IPCC, 2014: p. 2,5) and that “75 per cent of known fossil reserves must be kept in the ground if we are to have any chance of stopping dangerous levels of climate change” (Vaughan, 2015). Accordingly, the GCC is “caught between a rock and a hard place, between economic catastrophe and climate catastrophe” (Murthy, 2016). GCC economies are dependent on their fossil fuels production and export, and thus are highly vulnerable to the global efforts to diversify away from the oil and gas towards low-carbon resources.

**Figure 3: Share of Fuel Exports in the GCC Members
(% of merchandise exports), 2016-2017**



Source: Prepared by the authors using WDI, 2019

Economic diversification is an urgent necessity for GCC states as, despite their recent efforts in these directions, their economies are still dependent on extractives. Nonetheless, we suggest that the GCC region is under an environmental awakening meaning that these countries have become aware of climate change issues and of the urgent need for sustainable policies. Moreover, we highlight that the climate change is not only about challenges: it also presents new business opportunities especially in the realm of sustainability as the demand for alternative, environment-friendly solutions is increasing. Therefore, common threats, common weaknesses, as well as individual strengths of Gulf countries and their position in the sustainability policies are instrumental for any collective action, coordinated solutions or transferred policies which can further reveal patterns and actors of environmental policy transfer.

3. Policy Learning and Transfer for Sustainability Policy in the Gulf

Policy transfer could be defined as “a process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system” (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000: p. 5). The rise of policy transfer as an important component in policy development is typically attributed to processes of globalization (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000), as well as to neoliberal dynamics that have been pushing for similar policies across different geographical contexts. Those adopting the approach seek to understand the micro-level processes and dynamics by which policies move from one jurisdiction to another by virtue of imitation or lesson drawing. This applies to regional contexts as well as other forms of policy influence, such as the one linking former colonizers and colonized countries or influence coming from common culture and traditions influencing policymaking. Policy transfer is a strong indicator of policy convergence and coordination and it would indicate that GCC countries have a common concern for sustainability policy, while trying to adopt and adapt similar policy solutions.

Interestingly, given the relatively lower levels of institutional legacy and public policy memories compared to Western countries and taking into account the specific character of resource-rich countries governed by ruling elites, such as the GCC countries, as well as culture-specific variables in these Muslim societies, the nature of policy learning among GCC members has been rather complex.

Khodr and Reiche (2012) argued that in the case of GCC states, policy innovation is the result of geographical proximity. It is positively related to the number of bordering countries that had already adopted that policy, as these proximate states tend to usually have similar economic aspects (such as the finiteness of fossil fuels in the GCC countries) and common social problems (the dependence on foreign workforce, health and education related issues), which lead to similar policy action effects. To illustrate, the smart cities built by the GCC were designed to be models for diffusion and some of them have the potential to solve difficult problems (e.g., role of women, educational challenges, and renewable energy), and thus might be models for others in an informational and problem-solving account of the diffusion.

Tok *et al.* (2017) suggested that low oil prices, regional dependence on hydrocarbons, and weak economic diversification efforts signal GCC states' preferences to reinforce the rentier system with alternative state revenue streams. At a first glance, one could then expect a significant deal of convergence among GCC member states given that, despite the recent political turmoil and the blockade against Qatar, policy innovation and its diffusion are mainly the results of commonality of concerns (overreliance on extractive resources, monarchic regimes based on Muslim traditions and faith, and the need to diversify their economies) and similar policy traditions (inspired by Western policies and global frameworks). Societies face similar issues, from food and water insecurity to high carbon footprints and increased demands for energy. Economic diversification and productive employment are needed through an expanded private sector, as major enterprises in the GCC, especially in crucial sectors (like airlines and health for example), remain state owned or controlled and unemployment is a critical social concern. Global competition remains fierce and existing policies across the GCC, despite the push for changes (like in Qatar), maintain the status quo which appears to be unsustainable, as change towards green small and medium enterprises is timid and slow.

In such a context, is there a room for policy learning and transfer across GCC, if not, why is this the case?

4. Potential Spheres of Policy Convergence and Coordination for Sustainability Policies in the GCC

Building on an International Political Economy background and on sectors which are already open for policy transfer and learning in the GCC region, and given the common challenges and problems to face in line with climate change and energy-food-water security, it is possible to expect evidences from GCC policy reforms and developments that suggest policy convergence and potential policy diffusion in specific issue areas. Thus, the sphere of sustainability, also corresponding to climate and energy, has a great potential for policy learning and transfer within the GCC.

In this regard, examining the environmental performance of the GCC is instrumental to detect both the current status and the spheres open for progress through new sustainability policies addressing specific issue areas. *Environmental*

*Performance Index (EPI)*¹ detects that the six Gulf countries perform in the range between 51 to 67, representing average/low performance in the overall global rankings (Table 1).

Table 1: Environmental Performance Scores of the GCC, 2018

COUNTRY NAME	OVERALL RANK (OUT OF 180)	OVERALL SCORE (OUT OF 100)
BAHRAIN	96	55,15
QATAR	32	67,8
UAE	77	58,9
KSA	86	57,47
KUWAIT	61	62,28
OMAN	116	51,32

Source: Environmental Performance Index, 2018

EPI trends for the last ten years reveal that Kuwait and Oman distinguish themselves with relatively lower scores compared to the remaining four Gulf countries (Environmental Performance Index, 2016). The initial question provoked by this

¹ The Environmental Performance Index is prepared by the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy (YCELP) and Yale Data-Driven Environmental Solutions Group at Yale University (Data-Driven Yale), the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University. EPI consists of the country rankings based on the national performances regarding nine issue areas (Health Impacts, Air Quality, Water and Sanitation, Water Resources, Agriculture, Forests, Fisheries, Biodiversity and Habitat, Climate and Energy) which consist of 19 indicators, addressing different aspects of the protection of ecosystems and human health. The evaluation of the country scores are made in reference to meeting internationally agreed targets or cross-country comparisons. With regards to the "Climate and Energy", EPI report acknowledges the fact that the assessment of the policy implementation targeting measurable climate mitigation is an urgent, yet difficult challenge. Accordingly, the indicators represent how the states are decarbonizing their economic growth by looking at the trends in carbon intensity, rather than the tangible effects of their climate policies. Higher scores in EPI indicators represent better performance, 100 being the highest possible performance score. According to the latest EPI report, the best performer among 180 countries for the year 2018 is Switzerland with a score of 87.42 and the last country on the ranking is Burundi with 27.43. These two scores are instrumental in revealing the standards for the sake of comparison.

distinction is whether Kuwait and Oman are the “late comers” among the GCC with regards to sustainable development, and especially sustainable energy policies and climate change mitigation measures. If that is the case, Kuwait and Oman can be expected to be policy “learners” within the GCC. On the other hand, another striking trend in the 10-year scores of the GCC is the fact that, despite their lower performance, Kuwait and Oman have an upward trend in their performances with a change of 9.35 per cent and 2.43 per cent, respectively. Compared to the performance of Qatar, UAE, and KSA, which have better scores, but a negative trend in their performance throughout the years², the case of Kuwait more particularly signals a puzzle: can we classify some members of the GCC as “good learners” of sustainability policy?

Splitting the aggregate components of the EPI scores (Table 2) also underline important clues for potential policy convergence and coordination, as they reveal that each GCC member has strong and weak policy areas in their environmental performances. While in some issue areas they all together possess low scores, some countries stand out with better scores in other issues, as in the case of Kuwait and UAE in terms of biodiversity and habitat. In the issue of Climate and Energy in EPI, Qatar performs significantly better among the GCC. Given this relatively high performance, whether Qatar has exclusive climate policies resulting in better practices remains to be further studied in the context of its national energy and climate policy. If it is the case, does Qatar have a leadership role in the sustainability policy transfer within the GCC in the sphere of climate change?

Table 2: EPI Scores of the GCC for 2018, by Issue Areas

COUNTRY	Air Quality	Water and Sanitation	Biodiversity and Habitat	Fisheries	Climate and Energy	Air Pollution	Wastewater Treatment	Agriculture
BAHRAIN	67,81	63,06	33,26	45,54	44,31	59,38	96,54	36,22
QATAR	76,29	72,9	43,71	63,62	68,68	86,88	96,13	19,76

²The 10 year trend scores for these countries are as the following: Qatar -1,04%, UAE -3,07%, KSA - 2,96% (Environmental Performance Index, 2016)

UAE	72,93	63,27	74,67	56,76	27,12	54,55	96,87	0
KSA	79,91	62,38	48,33	55,1	40,47	25,4	87,79	29,41
KUWAIT	75,17	65,79	86,33	64,88	31,78	22,66	96,88	30,75
OMAN	86,19	62,84	34,81	50,41	32,71	0,65	68,37	18,7

Source: Table compiled by the authors, figures from EPI, 2018

To take another example, overall, the GCC is putting forward a successful performance especially for the wastewater treatment. Is this a result of a successful policy diffusion among themselves? Is there any sound policy convergence and cooperation between GCC countries as leading and copying countries?

In the regional context of GCC, prone to suffer from the immediate lack of sustainability measures, the interaction between the Gulf countries so as to transfer or learn policies from each other with regards to their strong vs. weak environmental policy areas has great potential for the sustainable development and environmental survival of these countries. Agriculture, climate, and energy appear as the least successful spheres for all GCC members, which leads us to question if it is due to a resistance for policy diffusion and cooperation in those areas. Do the GCC states' divergent profiles and proficiencies transform into transferred policies in their weaknesses so as to sustainability policies? The following section is addressing the answers.

5. Policy Convergence, Coordination, and Resistance

The effort towards economic diversification in the GCC is intrinsically connected to environmental concerns and consequently to climate change, leading to a sustainable development vision and strategy, as it appears in the national development visions of Gulf states for a post-hydrocarbon future. The Qatar National Vision 2030, the New Kuwait vision by 2035, and the UAE Vision 2021 are enlightening examples to this extent: sustainability is at the core of these visions, with some flagship measures and programs being commonly used to achieve this goal. Smart cities, development aid, and green entrepreneurship are also examples of measures and domains used to “localize” and ground visions of sustainability to local and national spaces.

Table 3: National development visions of GCC states

Country Visions(by launch year)	Key aims	Explicit role given to climate change
Qatar National Vision (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound economic management; • economic diversification; • knowledge-based society 	Proactive and significant relevant regional role in assessing the impact of climate change and mitigating its negative impact in the Gulf
Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double real household income • establish itself as a regional financial services center 	Reference only to environmental protection and energy-efficiency regulations
UAE Vision 2021 (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming one of the best places in the world for business; • diversifying the economy by expanding into new strategic sectors (such as financial services, trade and commerce) 	Balanced growth fuelled by a sustainable range of energy resources, with an important role for alternative and renewable energy sources, new energy-efficient technologies reduction of carbon and ecological footprints, mitigation of the effects of climate change
Oman's Tanfeedh (2016) (National Vision 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing economic diversification through key sectors (such as manufacturing, tourism, logistics and finance) 	No reference
Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create productive employment, • improve the quality of life, • Double per capita income • Diversify the economy 	No reference

<p>New Kuwait (2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To transform the country into a financial and trade center, attractive to investors, where the private sector leads the economy, • to achieve human resource development as well as balanced development, • providing adequate infrastructure, • advanced legislation • an inspiring business environment 	<p>Only reference to environmentally sound resources and tactics for living environments</p>
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Sources: Sever, Tok, and D’Alessandro, 2019; compiled by the authors using Luomi (2014) and official websites of the national visions of GCC countries.

The emphasis given to environment and climate change in these national development visions (Table 3) is critical as these strategy documents are the main frameworks inspiring implementation of projects and policies. The countries’ strategic sectors and economic priorities determined in the vision for the upcoming decades reveal the extent to which environment is incorporated in their development mindset.

Another important and complementary indicator of the importance and role of climate change and environment for the GCC countries is the establishment of environmental laws, together with the entities in charge of climate change related issues. This information is briefly summarized in Table 4 for GCC countries.

Table 4: Entities in charge of environmental governance and the year of establishment of the environmental law in GCC countries

Countries	Entities in charge of the environment	Year
Bahrain	Ministry of housing, municipalities and environment	1996

	Public Commission for the Protection of Marine Resources, Environment & Wildlife National Committee on Environment and wildlife	
Kuwait	Environment Public Authority	2001
Oman	Ministry of environment and climate affairs	2001
Qatar	Ministry of environment Permanent Commission for Environmental Protection at the Council of Ministers Supreme Council for the Environment and Natural Resources	2002
KSA	Presidency of meteorology and environment Ministerial Committee on Environment National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development	1992
UAE	Ministry of environment and water Federal National Council	1999

Sources: compiled by authors, using Djoundourian (2010), Al-Saqri and Sulaiman (2014), and Kannan (2012).

Djoundourian (2010) considers the year of establishment of the environmental law as an indicator of environmental engagement: older is the law and longer has been the commitment and regulation of this domain, henceforth to sustainable development. These are sustainability policy *ante litteram*: they participate to prepare the ground for them when the time comes. To this extent, KSA has been the first GCC and Arab country to establish an environmental law in 1992. The UAE has developed a comprehensive set of environmental regulations, including monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, remediation options, and penalties. Very differently, the enforcement of environmental laws and regulations is weak in Kuwait: capacity gaps of implementing authorities and in the judiciary system handicap are the main implementation gaps. This is certainly also related to the fact that Kuwait is the only GCC country in which the same institution, the Environment Public Authority, handles environmental policymaking and the implementation of environmental policy and programs (Kannan, 2012).

Stand-alone ministries or joint ministries responsible for the environment, environmental agencies or authorities have been in fact established or restructured in every GCC country in the 1990s, but this new setting for environmental governance

was still inadequate to address larger and more complex multi-sectoral sustainability issues, including climate change. Furthermore, with the only exception of Bahrain and Kuwait, most GCC countries have established institutional sections on climate change related issues, also in charge of renewable energy sources. Lack of human and technical resources, fragmentation and duplication of responsibilities, and obstacles of coordination are the most common gaps, explaining the weak implementation of the legislation and enforcement of standards. Although environmental institutions are still mostly centrally governed, some GCC countries are starting to decentralize them. It is the case for the UAE, Oman, Qatar, and KSA (Al-Saqri and Sulaiman, 2014). In this context, environmental institutions and laws serve as indicators of an original and genuine will to commit in sustainability policy.

We can argue that the need for a comprehensive approach across GCC countries progressively increased through steps such as The General Regulations of Environment in the GCC States (GREGCC) adopted in 1997 and Gulf Green Initiative (GGI) launched in December 2007. These steps highlighted the need to balance economic development, the protection of natural and environmental sources, the harmonization of national environmental laws in the GCC and the need for the establishment of a common regional environmental agency (Kannan, 2012:134-135). On the other hand, although climate change has been largely and openly recognized as a game changer in the GCC region, and despite the growing regional awareness in relation to climate change in the region (Al-Maamary et al., 2017), the action of GCC countries against climate change appears to be recent, diversified, and with an evident lack of a sound policy convergence and regional cooperation (Sever, Tok, and D'Alessandro, 2019). This controversial position of the GCC in the fight with climate change is due to the clash of interest between the need for long term sustainability and their economic interest on the short term. Low carbon and green energy systems are vital for their ecological survival, yet this remedy signal the end of an era of fossil fuels exploitation, still vital for their economic growth.

Furthermore, limited regional integration among GCC countries makes their relations more difficult and individual interests of countries come before regional convergence. Henceforth, some countries like Qatar are closer to Western and global positions on the post-2015 development agenda and consequently keener to adopt sustainability policy. Others like KSA and the UAE may adopt divergent policy

measures and decisions at the national level, while showing a strong will and commitment for sustainability policy at the international level.

6. Conclusions

This study has been motivated by the need to emphasize the critical role of policies encouraging sustainable development, as means to contribute to environmental protection and to fight climate change effects on energy-food-water security for GCC societies. The analysis of GCC states indicated that the national scale is critical to this extent, but the regional level is strategic to achieve the sustainable development goals. Sustainability policies are the means to achieve them.

The role, strategies, and the capacity to implement environmental policies, laws, and regulations greatly vary among the GCC countries, as well as the institutional settings in charge of these processes. As a matter of fact, each Gulf country has recently set in place institutional mechanisms to deal with sustainability and environment. However, the real impact and performance of these institutions are yet to be investigated.

Furthermore, regional integration is still lacking in the GCC. Plus, divergent interests and views among member countries on sustainable development decrease and slow down policy coordination among GCC countries in the sustainability domain. Henceforth, policy transfer has not been consistently documented among GCC countries, despite commonalities facilitating it. "Most of the environmental strategic plans are adopted from developed countries, the fact is that the environmental conditions of these countries are different and has to take in to account GCC's requirements and also this has to be considered into account during enhancement and implementation of environmental management in GCC countries" (Al-Saqri and Sulaiman, 2014).

We find that some GCC states, such as Qatar, has already been leading towards the path of sustainability policy and advocating for sustainable development. Overall, there is an increased understanding among GCC's national authorities for the need to develop partnerships addressing environmental challenges, as they are shared by all the members. Nevertheless, this understanding has not yet transferred into concrete actions and policy convergence. Although current tensions among Gulf

countries highly impede the ecosystem for policy learning and transfer through interaction among GCC members, in the long term, the urgent need to tackle climate change effects in the region might create some sort of convergence and coordination in favor of sustainability policies. We suggest that the mismatch between the actual environmental performances and the targets aimed in the national strategy documents, offer room for progress through the transfer of better practices. Enhancing regional integration would be a strong asset for sustainable economic growth and transformation in the Gulf region.

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