

Explaining Differentiated Policy Implementation of EU Animal Welfare Regulations

ILANA SCHRÖDER,¹  JOHANNA KUENZLER²  and COLETTE VOGELER³ 

¹University of Bern, Bern ²University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, Basel ³German University of Administrative Sciences, Speyer

Abstract

Farm animal welfare has emerged as a growing policy subsystem within the European Union's (EU) Common Agricultural Policy. However, despite a harmonized EU framework, member states differ substantially in how they implement EU directives on farm animal welfare. Building on the concept of differentiated policy implementation (DPI), we examine how institutional fit, domestic politics and problem pressure shape national implementation patterns in three EU member states with large animal production: Denmark, France and Spain. Our findings reveal that whilst economic imperatives create tensions across all cases, national policy-making styles and actor constellations drive divergent outcomes. We argue that the relevance of DPI factors is shaped in part by the characteristics of the policy subsystem, particularly its political salience and economic salience. Moreover, our article advances the understanding of how national contexts influence EU implementation in an understudied policy domain and provides practical insights for current challenges and potentials in animal welfare policy-making.

Keywords: Common Agricultural Policy; institutions; multilevel governance; policy implementation; policy subsystem; policy-making

Introduction

The Common Agricultural Policy is one of the oldest and most extensively funded policy areas in the European Union (EU). While it 'appears to be a standalone sector' (Domorenok and Gatti 2026, p. 6), amongst its responsibilities lies the domain of farm animal welfare, a still nascent but increasingly significant policy subsystem. Farm animal welfare constitutes a key element in the broader transition towards sustainable food systems (Fesenfeld et al. 2023; Lecuyer and Verrier 2025; Nadeau and Berardo 2025). The recent success of the European Citizens' Initiative 'End the Cage Age', which gathered 1.4 million verified signatures (European Commission 2021), underscores that animal welfare has become an issue of considerable public concern within the EU. Beyond the protection of the animals themselves, policies designed to improve welfare and animal health in livestock production system are increasingly relevant for human and environmental health: the growing interconnection between animal and human health becomes particularly evident in the case of antimicrobial resistance but also in the rapid spread of zoonoses (Parth et al. 2026; Vogeler and Parth 2024; Wyser et al. 2024).

Despite this growing relevance, policy-making processes on farm animal welfare remain insufficiently understood. To date, only a limited number of empirical studies have sought to examine and explain how farm animal welfare policies are developed and implemented across governance levels (Hårstad 2024; Hårstad and Vik 2022; Hus and

McCulloch 2023; Vogeler 2019b; Vogeler et al. 2020). We contribute to this emerging body of research by addressing the implementation side of animal welfare regulations in the EU and ask what influences diverging national implementation. The EU has already set minimum standards for animal welfare during transport and slaughtering in the 1970s. In 1997, the Amsterdam Treaty marked a turning point by recognizing animals as sentient beings. This laid the basis for the adoption of species-specific directives and the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for scientific guidance in the early 2000s. Despite the rising awareness and uniform regulatory framework established by the EU, there is significant variation in how member states implement animal welfare directives at the national level. For instance, a recent evaluation of the EU pig directive highlighted that whilst some countries adopt and even exceed EU guidelines through proactive national measures, others struggle to barely meet minimum standards (Kuenzler and Vogeler 2025). Although national-level variation in policy implementation has been acknowledged as a recurring phenomenon in multilevel governance, particularly across environmental domains such as water (Liefverink et al. 2011), pesticides (Bazzan et al. 2025), air quality (Bondarouk et al. 2020) and biofuels (Di Lucia and Kronsell 2010), the underlying explanations for implementation differences in EU agricultural policy and particularly in farm animal welfare policy are still understudied. Accordingly, we aim to answer why EU member states differ in implementing EU farm animal welfare regulation. In doing so, we will test the DPI framework in an under-researched policy subsystem and thus contribute to DPI theory building and animal welfare policy studies specifically.

Building on recent developments in the EU implementation literature, in particular on differentiated policy implementation (DPI, Zhelyazkova et al. 2024), we address the above question through a comparative study of three EU countries with large and internationally competitive pig sectors: Denmark, France and Spain. Pig production represents one of the most economically significant livestock sectors in the EU and has been subject to EU regulation since 1991. To explain how and why implementation differs across the three countries, we analyse empirical evidence from qualitative interviews with 35 experts across the studied countries. More concretely, we examine how societal attitudes, political advocacy and institutional arrangements influence national policy implementation. We relate this to DPI factors with a focus on the institutional (mis)fit between EU policies and member states' policy-making approaches, national responses to domestic politics and functional drivers such as problem pressure and ambiguity. By exploring farm animal welfare policy as a case of low political salience and high economic salience, we offer theoretical insights relevant to the broader literature on DPI and comparative public policy.

Our article is structured as follows. First, we discuss findings from the literature in DPI with regard to our policy domain. Based on this, we derive theoretical assumptions about implementation differences in animal welfare policy. In Section III, we illustrate our methodological approach and case selection. Section IV presents the research results of our qualitative case studies, followed by a final discussion and conclusion of our study.

I. Differentiated Implementation in EU Farm Animal Welfare Policy

Multilevel policy-making in the EU is inherently complex, particularly when translating supranational directives into policies at the national level. Animal welfare legislation in

the EU has seen significant advancements over the past decades, particularly through species-specific directives. One landmark regulation was the ban on battery cages for laying hens under the Directive 1999/74/EC, which came into force in 2012. The directive marked a milestone in improving the welfare of poultry and set a precedent for similar reforms in other livestock sectors. Similarly, Directive 2008/120/EC established minimum standards for the protection of pigs, representing a significant step in addressing the welfare of one of Europe's most economically important livestock species. The directive required, for instance, the gradual phase-out of continuous sow confinement in individual stalls and requirements for environmental enrichment to reduce animals' stress and promote natural behaviours (for an overview of animal welfare policies in the EU, see Vogeler 2019b).

Existing research on farm animal welfare policy-making remains limited and focuses mostly on agenda-setting and decision-making (Hårstad 2024; Hus and McCulloch 2023; Vogeler et al. 2020). Thus, to explore the implementation of animal welfare policy in member states, we rely on theoretical contributions generated via other policy domains. In theory, compliance with such EU regulations is mandatory and countries risk infringement procedures if they do not adequately translate directives into national law. In practice, however, national policy-making is subject not only to EU legislation but also to national priorities, lobby pressure, administrative capacities, economic considerations and many more factors that influence how policy actors use their discretion in implementing EU law.

Comparative public policy research has several theoretical streams that study variations and challenges of national EU policy implementation. One main body of literature focuses on the legal (non-)compliance of member states with EU regulations. This rather 'classic' approach to EU implementation research adopts a top-down perspective, investigating whether countries successfully implement EU directives as given. For instance, Börzel and Buzogány (2019) illustrate that environmental policy is an area with one of the highest numbers of EU law violations, although with a declining trend. Calling for a more nuanced, bottom-up understanding of EU policy implementation in consideration of multilevel dynamics and local conditions, another strand of research focuses on countries' varying implementation of EU regulations *within* the area of compliance. The potential of member states to adapt EU regulations to their preferences is called customization (Thomann 2015; Thomann and Sager 2017). Customization literature highlights two main factors of how countries adopt EU law: regulatory density, the number of additional rules in the national adoption and the level of the domestic policy's additional restrictiveness in contrast to the original directive. For example, Thomann (2019) shows that in the area of veterinary drug regulation, western EU member states such as Austria, France and Germany all extensively customized an EU directive by increasing standards and adding rules, thus 'secur[ing] animal health and food safety in the European single market' (p. 76). One specific form of customization is over-compliance, sometimes also referred to as over-implementation or gold-plating (Thomann 2019). In the European case, this describes national policy implementation that exceeds standards set by the EU, for instance, through additional regulations or (overly) early implementation (Jans et al. 2009).

Moving from the 'whether' (compliance) and the 'how' (customization) to the 'why' of EU policy implementation, the literature on DPI (Zhelyazkova et al. 2024) focuses on conditions that explain national diversity in (not) applying EU law. The authors propose five factors underlying DPI that may explain divergent implementation (Figure 1):

- the level of national discretion granted by the formulation of EU policies;
- the institutional (mis)fit between the EU policy and national regulatory systems and policy-making approaches;
- countries' responsiveness to domestic politics, for example, through organized interest groups or political parties;
- the influence of functional drivers such as problem pressure and policy conflicts; and
- a country's administrative capacity to implement or customize the respective EU law.

Following our aim to understand factors (i.e., independent variables) that drive countries to comply with or exceed EU minimum standards on farm animal welfare (i.e., dependent variable) rather than their capability to do so, we decided in a pre-analysis to not zoom in on the EU directives' level of discretion or the national administrative capacity to implement it. Whilst these are important factors to understand the extent to which countries have the necessary discretionary power and resources to transpose EU law,

Figure 1: Summary of DPI factors with examples. Studied factors highlighted in dark grey.



Source: Author's compilation.

we focus on DPI factors that emphasize the member states' implementation willingness over their ability. This coincides with the fact that for the analysis at hand, the two remaining factors play no or only a subordinate role. Administrative capacity is less important when investigating the three cases of Denmark, France and Spain because in comparison to all EU member states, the three countries exhibit high government effectiveness (World Bank 2023), low corruption perceptions (Transparency International 2024) and high rates of CAP fund absorption (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2024). Moreover, the economically strongest and thus often emphasized livestock sector in our countries of study is regulated by the EU pig directive (Council Directive 2008/120/EC). As such, national discretion granted by this EU policy is constant for all cases. Despite the same level of discretion, a recent study by Kuenzler and Vogeler (2025) showed that Denmark, France and Spain reveal strong customization differences (e.g., 18 added rules to EU directive in France vs. 85 in Denmark) in their national regulations since 2020. We depart from these findings with the aim of investigating possible explanations for this variation.

In the following, we introduce the three theoretical DPI factors 'institutional (mis)fit', 'domestic politics' and 'functional drivers' and formulate theoretical assumptions. These assumptions should be understood as heuristic propositions that guide our qualitative inquiry rather than formal hypotheses. They serve to support the structure, coding and analysis of the expert interviews whilst remaining open to contradiction, refinement and surprising results.

Institutional (Mis)fit

The concept of institutional (mis)fit highlights the alignment or divergence between supranational EU policies and the existing institutional frameworks and policy-making styles of member states. The policy-making style refers to a country's or sector's specific way of which actors are involved in policy-making, how they interact, which institutions and norms guide their action and how this influences their decision-making (Howlett and Tosun 2021). DPI research showed that conformity of EU regulations with national and sectoral policy styles facilitates (over-)compliance (Brendler and Thomann 2024). Thus, a good fit between national legal systems and problem-solving approaches decreases implementation hurdles and facilitates compliance (Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002). Looking at institutional (mis)fit with a focus on countries' willingness to adopt or even exceed EU regulation, one can assume that the less contradictory an EU policies' logic is to the usual regulatory styles of a respective country, the lower the national policy-makers' dissonance and the higher their interest in complying.

In the context of animal welfare policy, institutional (mis)fit can manifest in several ways. Countries with strong traditions of animal protection, such as Denmark, may exhibit high institutional alignment with EU animal welfare directives, as they are complementary to existing policy objectives and structures. On the other hand, institutional misfit can occur in countries like Spain and France, where the existing regulatory frameworks and priorities have traditionally been oriented more towards economic productivity than animal welfare (Kuenzler et al. 2024). Here, EU directives may be perceived as imposing external values that conflict with domestic policy priorities, creating friction in the implementation process.

Assumption 1: (institutions): The better the EU animal welfare directives align with national institutional frameworks and policy-making styles, the more likely it is that member states engage in (over-)compliance.

Responsiveness to Domestic Politics

The role of domestic politics in policy implementation emphasizes the influence of policy actors, interest groups and societal stakeholders in shaping how EU directives are adopted at the national level. In some contexts, strong domestic opposition from influential actors like agricultural lobbies, farmer associations or parties can generate resistance to compliance with supranational policies. Conversely, supportive coalitions may facilitate reforms or enable governments to move beyond EU minimum standards (Akbik et al. 2024; Mizarhi-Borohovich et al. 2024; Zhelyazkova et al. 2024). In member states with a tradition of political pluralism, such as Denmark, animal welfare could become a priority on the national agenda more easily, particularly when aligned with the preferences of influential political parties or interest groups. Moreover, an increased number of committees and forums which put policy issues on the agenda can additionally intensify issue salience and as such increase potential for policy change (Bandelow and Hornung 2021). Alternatively, ignorance or domestic resistance to issues addressed by a European directive may be expressed in less willingness to exceed minimal standards (Thomann 2019).

Assumption 2: (domestic politics, actor-centred resistance/support): The stronger the opposition from influential political actors, interest groups or civil society organizations towards animal welfare regulation, the less likely it is that member states engage in (over-) compliance.

Functional Drivers

Functional drivers refer to the situational pressures that create a sense of urgency for policy action, such as problem pressure (Lieberink et al. 2021; Thomann 2019) or focusing events (Obinger 2023). Problem pressure arises when, for instance, scientific evidence or market developments indicate that existing policies are insufficient. Focusing events such as major scandals over welfare violations or EU infringement proceedings can abruptly expose shortcomings and act as catalysts for political attention (Birkland et al. 2025). This ad hoc heightened salience can increase societal and thus electoral political interest, encouraging policy-makers to go beyond the legal requirements. Unlike domestic political support or resistance, functional drivers generate temporary spikes in attention or issue salience, which may create windows of opportunity for policy change. These effects are largely exogenous and event driven, and their impact can fade quickly if not institutionalized.

Assumption 3: (functional drivers, situational triggers): The higher the perceived problem pressure, whether gradually emerging or triggered by focusing events, the more likely it is that member states engage in (over-)compliance.

II. Case Selection and Methods

Case Selection

We chose Denmark, France and Spain to capture both similarity and variation relevant to EU farm animal welfare implementation. Accounting for 43% of the total EU livestock (Eurostat 2024), these countries represent typical cases (Gerring 2009) in the European animal welfare domain. Moreover, they form a most similar set with respect to overarching structures including EU membership, common regulatory obligations and high economic relevance of the livestock sector. However, they also offer a diverse range of institutional, political and administrative contexts that will help us explain how and why implementation differs across member states.

Denmark and Spain are amongst the most export-oriented pork producers in the EU, with a significant share of their production dedicated to international markets. This export-driven focus creates unique pressures and priorities, often balancing the need to meet EU welfare standards with maintaining competitive advantages in global markets. Denmark has a long-standing tradition of animal welfare, beginning with its 1916 animal welfare act and extending to the recognition of animals as sentient beings in 2020. Moreover, the Danish government initiated the 2014 Pig Welfare Action Plan (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri 2014) and the subsequent 2024–2027 Animal Welfare Action Plan, which address key welfare issues such as tail-docking and sow confinement (Socialdemokratiet, Venstre, Moderaterne, Socialistisk Folkeparti, Liberal Alliance, Det Konservative Folkeparti, Radikale Venstre, Dansk Folkeparti and Alternativet 2024). Characterized by a tradition of consensus-oriented agricultural governance, Denmark represents a most likely case for ambitious implementation.

Spain contrasts sharply with Denmark in its approach to animal welfare. The Spanish agricultural structure is dominated by large companies, so-called ‘integradoras’ that act as a contractual link between farmers and the market. They provide feed, supply medicines and monitor the implementation of regulations, particularly in pig and poultry farming. Spanish policies are largely compliance driven, with limited national initiatives exceeding EU requirements (Vogeler 2019b). The country’s fragmented multilevel governance has led to repeated EU infringement proceedings related to farming practices in recent years (European Commission 2021). Spain is thus the least likely case in our selection to reflect (over-)compliance. In the last 2 years, however, Spain has witnessed more far-reaching regulation, including a ban on bullfighting in Catalonia and two Royal Decrees exceeding EU standards: Royal Decree 695/2022, which established the mandatory installation of video recording systems in slaughterhouses to enhance oversight and transparency during slaughter processes (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática 2022), and Royal Decree 159/2023, which reduces the allowable stocking densities for pigs to mitigate crowding and counteract the need for tail docking (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática 2024).

France is more oriented towards domestic consumption, reflecting different economic incentives and societal expectations. The country’s journey towards formalizing animal welfare began in 1976 with the recognition of animals as sentient beings in the country’s rural code and the institutionalization through an Office for Animal Protection in the French Ministry of Agriculture in 1980 (Carrié et al. 2023). Despite these early efforts, animal welfare policies developed sporadically over the following decades, with most

domestic legislation stemming from transpositions of EU directives rather than proactive national initiatives (Vogeler 2019a). France's slow progress in aligning with EU standards led to several infringement proceedings by the European Commission, highlighting repeated delays or failures in transposing binding EU laws into national regulation (Buller and Cesar 2007). The establishment of the first National Plan for Animal Welfare in 2016 marked a turning point, emphasizing research and institutional support through the creation of the National Reference Center for Animal Welfare. However, there was no further recent activity extending EU requirements. Thus, France presents an intermediate case of animal welfare policy implementation vis-à-vis Denmark and Spain.

Qualitative Expert Interviews

Our study aims to explore factors that drive EU member states to fulfil or exceed EU requirements by using farm animal welfare as an exemplary case for a subsystem with rather low political salience but high economic salience. To do so, we adopt a theory-informed but exploratory approach. We employ a qualitative research design to capture the perspectives of central actors in animal welfare policy-making across three EU member states on the key factors that influence policy implementation in their country. So far, secondary data such as policy documents or press releases formed the empirical basis for DPI analyses (for a notable exception, see Pircher et al. 2024). Our analysis complements this body of research with an in-depth perspective through the use of semi-structured expert interviews.

In line with the exploratory approach, we developed an interview guide aimed at capturing a broad variety of theoretically relevant explanatory factors which was translated in the respective national languages of the studied countries (see Appendix 1). This included but was not limited to the DPI factors (institutional fit, domestic politics, functional drivers) under study. The interview guide served as an orientation and not as a closed query (Patton 2015, p. 644). The flexibility in changing the order and intensity of discussed thematic blocks ensured a natural flow of the conversation whilst keeping a focus on the research aim (Kaiser 2014, p. 80). The interviews had an open nature, which allowed the interviewees to mention anything they considered relevant to farm animal welfare policy in their country. The guide was adapted for each country based on desk research on relevant national actors or policies. This included, for instance, inquiring about the role of the animal welfare party PACMA (Partido Animalista con el Medio Ambiente) and the recently adopted proactive animal welfare guidelines in Spain.

We chose to conduct semi-structured expert interviews as they are particularly well suited to gather in-depth insights from actors with special knowledge on the interplay of different factors in a social situation they are part of (Gläser and Laudel 2009). The relative openness of semi-structured interviews provides the flexibility to uncover inductively derived explanatory factors that might not emerge from fully structured interviews. At the same time, this approach allows us to adapt questions during the interview to focus on the specific expertise of the respondent (Kaiser 2014, p. 53). Moreover, compared to unstructured interviews, the use of a guiding framework ensures comparability across interviews, which is essential for systematically analysing and relating empirical findings across the three selected countries. Throughout the interviews, we adhered to good practice interview principles such as asking open-ended, clear questions, listening and

observing attentively and offering encouraging but non-judgmental guidance throughout the interview (Patton 2015, p. 631).

For the identification of relevant experts, the authors relied on their networks in agricultural policy, media analyses and online research. Another key recruitment strategy was the snowball sampling method: interviewees were asked to suggest additional contacts at the conclusion of each interview (Parker et al. 2019). In total, we conducted interviews with 35 individuals actively engaged in animal welfare policy-making in science, local and national politics, public administration and representatives of environmental, animal welfare and (pig) farming organizations (see Appendix 2). The authors conducted the interviews in French, English or Spanish during field trips in the respective study countries, with occasional support from local collaboration partners.

The interviews constitute the primary empirical basis of this study. Field trips and desk research (policy documents, media debates, plenary discussions) were used complementarily to triangulate interview findings and get a more elaborate picture of the policy-making context and the societal and political relevance of farm animal welfare in each country. The study did not seek formal ethics committee approval prior to conducting interviews, as it involved non-sensitive interviews with experts speaking in their institutional or public capacities. Participants gave informed consent for audio recording. The article does not disclose any personally identifiable information, nor does it reference direct quotations; instead, it presents synthesized findings. The methodological approach was approved by the funding organization.

All expert interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts and audios were shared within the research team and qualitatively analysed by the leading researcher who conducted the interview. We used open coding supplemented by predefined initial codes to capture responses relevant to DPI-related questions and to identify additional themes that emerged from the interviews. The initial codes were developed based on the three selected DPI factors, institutional (mis)fit, domestic politics and functional drivers, and were refined throughout the coding process. In doing so, we followed an abductive approach characterized by an iterative, flexible back and forth in which data collection, data analysis and theory building are influencing each other (Van Hulst and Visser 2025). All interviews were coded using the same codebook to ensure consistency and comparability across the three country cases. The insights from the interviews were iteratively discussed and compared within the research team throughout the interviewing process to ensure validity and intersubjective interpretation. Appendix 3 presents how our theoretical assumptions on DPI relate to the empirical analysis. It outlines the corresponding interview questions from the guideline and examples of themes that were captured in the data. The interview transcripts are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

III. Results

Denmark

In Denmark, the protection of animals and specific animal welfare laws have a long tradition. The Danish policy-making style, characterized by collaborative and consensus-driven decision-making, was highlighted by many interviewees as a key

feature of the country's approach to animal welfare. The Danish animal welfare label, which was launched in 2017 by the government in collaboration with market and agricultural stakeholders, is an expression of this deep-rooted cooperation. The label was developed by the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration in close cooperation with key stakeholders in the food sector and is based on market-driven principles. It sets stricter animal welfare requirements than Danish and EU legislation and is voluntary for producers. The label encourages livestock farmers to invest in higher welfare standards and helps retailers meet growing consumer demand for improved animal welfare and has gained significant market shares since its introduction.

In Denmark, policy-making implies a constant attempt to engage in dialogue and joint problem-solving with industry and society to find consensual solutions together, reflecting a good institutional fit as conceptualized in the DPI literature. This Danish approach is also exemplified by the Pig Welfare Action Plan (2014), which brought together the farming sector, animal welfare organizations, consumer organizations, veterinarians and retailers to solve existing welfare problems in pig farming. Additionally, the more recent 2024–2027 Animal Welfare Action Plan is the result of a consensus across six Danish political parties spanning the ideological spectrum. These efforts not only emphasize the cooperative nature of Danish policy-making but also underscore the importance of balancing economic interests with societal acceptance. Denmark's alignment with EU animal welfare policies reflects a high degree of institutional fit, where existing regulatory approaches and animal welfare policy-making traditions facilitate customization and over-compliance. This institutional synergy fosters policy innovation, even as challenges like enforcement of existing laws remain. This does not mean that there is no conflict, but as one interviewee stated, the cooperative character of decision-making is part of the success story of Danish farming.

Similar findings can be made with regard to the variable responsiveness to domestic politics. In short, most interviewees stated that animal welfare is generally not a conflictive policy area in Denmark. Party-wise, only one party stands out for its historically closer ties to the farming sector, the Danish liberal party 'Venstre'. However, the broad political spectrum's involvement in recent action plans highlights a unified approach, largely free from polarized resistance. One interviewee mentioned that generally, animal welfare was more an issue in the cities and not so much of countrywide party-political competition. Regarding the role of agricultural lobbies, one interviewee said that it is the typical Danish way of first trying to get the industry to approach animal welfare by themselves instead of passing a law. As such, the government and industry together launched an animal welfare label in 2017 for the locally sold production. Whereas some of the interviewees, especially those from the pig sector, praised the repeatedly present approach of cooperative problem-solving in Denmark, it is facing criticism from animal welfare organizations who consider the strong role of the industry as a main cause for slow progress in further advancements in animal welfare. However, all interviewees presented a picture of a cooperative domestic approach towards animal welfare that is not dominated by strongly opposing positions or demands from different groups of actors.

Lastly, we look at the functional drivers for DPI in the Danish case. The societal awareness of animal welfare issues is present but not particularly heightened compared to other European countries. According to recent data, only 58% of Danes consider it 'very important' that farmed animals have decent living conditions, and 41% believe animal welfare

requires better protection – both figures below the EU (2023) average. This might be explained by the already high regulatory level as compared to other member states. Contrastingly, Denmark exhibits a strong willingness to pay for welfare-friendly products, with three-quarters of the population supporting higher prices for such items, significantly more than in Spain and France. An interesting point that was raised with regard to the future of the Danish pig sector was that environmental and climate-related questions increasingly challenge pig farming in Denmark. Several interviewees mentioned that the environmental consequences of intensive animal production in a comparatively small country are moving into the centre of attention, which, as a consequence, decreases public support for animal production. However, there were no focusing events in this regard which continues to limit the urgency for transformative reforms towards current policy-making.

France

The French case reveals quite different findings. In France, for a long time, animal welfare was mostly absent from the political agenda. Thus, in terms of pre-existing policies, the institutional fit is weak. Furthermore, the sectoral policy-making style is marked by strong polarization and exclusion of both moderate and radical actors that promote animal welfare measures. This is due to the marked dominance of the farmers' lobby FNSEA (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles); see also below. Hence, EU directives concerning animal welfare enter a policy-making domain that prioritizes agricultural production over animal well-being. Interviewees noted that the institutional focus remains predominantly on compliance with EU standards, with enforcement responsibilities falling to departmental agencies often hampered by resource constraints. The creation of the National Reference Center for Animal Welfare in 2016 reflects an attempt to strengthen the institutionalization of animal welfare. However, the limited visibility of institutions in the interviews indicates that the effectiveness of this reference centre remains limited.

When it comes to domestic politics, as our second variable under analysis, we find similarly challenging patterns: in France, domestic politics surrounding animal welfare are marked by complex and often conflicting dynamics. Broadly, political parties in France have varied stances on animal welfare, with left-leaning parties generally more supportive and right-leaning parties more resistant. However, also far-right parties like Rassemblement National have adopted welfare issues, albeit with a focus on companion animals rather than farm animals. Interviewees noted that given the rather low salience of the topic, most political actors approach animal welfare as a secondary issue, often aiming to secure additional votes without risking backlash from agricultural stakeholders.

Among individual actors, Loïc Dombreval, a former parliamentarian from President Macron's party, was frequently mentioned by interviewees for his contributions to advancing farm animal welfare. A veterinarian by training, Dombreval focused his parliamentary work exclusively on animal welfare, including chairing a parliamentary study group on the topic. However, his single-issue advocacy ultimately contributed to his defeat in the 2022 elections. His successor, Corinne Vignon, continues to lead the *groupe d'étude* on animal welfare in Parliament, though its influence remains limited according to several interviewees. Besides this, animal welfare gained greater prominence during

the tenure of Agriculture Minister Stéphane Le Foll under President Hollande's administration from 2012 until 2017. Le Foll integrated welfare considerations into his agroecology framework, though his efforts were reportedly spurred by public outrage following the release of undercover videos by the animal rights organization L214 (see also below, section on functional drivers). Current consultation processes between agricultural lobbies, particularly the FNSEA, and moderate animal welfare organizations aim to find a middle ground. However, more radical welfare groups like L214 are excluded from these discussions, which has perpetuated a climate of mutual distrust and hardened positions. The FNSEA's influence was consistently described by interviewees as a major barrier to advancing animal welfare policies as they frequently express strong opposition to the concept as framed by welfare organizations, perceiving it as stigmatizing and accusing critics of engaging in 'agrobashing'. This term reflects their view that the agricultural sector is unfairly vilified for its practices, a narrative dismissed by several interviewees who attributed the resistance instead to the FNSEA's focus on maintaining the competitiveness of France's intensive farming systems.

Regarding the last variable, functional drivers, France presents a contrasting case compared to the Danish case. Here, focusing events apparently have had a transformative effect on animal welfare discourse. The release of covert videos by the radical animal rights organization L214 in 2015, exposing severe mistreatment in farms and slaughterhouses, was identified by most interviewees as a critical turning point. These scandals captured widespread media attention, elevating public and political interest in animal welfare. They directly influenced the adoption of the National Plan for Animal Welfare 2016–2020 and strengthened calls for enforcement improvements. Despite this momentum, the continued dominance of the FNSEA and limited sustained societal demand for welfare advancements have constrained initiatives promoting animal welfare. Interviewees noted that whilst such focusing events can prompt immediate action, their effects often dissipate without sustained advocacy or structural change. This was mirrored in the creation of the National Reference Center for Animal Welfare in 2016 and the lack of continued reforms or institutionalizations since then.

Spain

Spain presents an example of moderate institutional fit. Interviewees emphasized that Spanish animal welfare policies are largely compliance-driven and have been framed more as mandatory regulations imposed by the EU than something nationally desirable. Although Spain's governance system is semi-federal, with autonomous communities holding jurisdiction over agriculture, implementation of animal welfare policies often reflects a centralized approach. While EU legislation sets an overarching, common framework for action, Spain's decentralization often sparks the simultaneous existence of several local policy-making approaches leading to multilevel tensions. Nevertheless, Spain has begun addressing this misalignment since 2022 through proactive national legislation that exceeds current EU standards on farm animal welfare. Several interviewees explained this through increasing social and scientific pressure which motivated policy-makers, societal and market actors to collaboratively intensify national animal welfare measures despite the path-dependent low institutional fit between Spain's agricultural policy style and the EU regulations.

Spain's party-political landscape reflects limited proactive engagement with animal welfare. Although there is a national political party focused on animal rights called PACMA which all 13 interviewed experts knew by name, no interviewee could refer to one active politician or recall the party's influence on the animal production sector or animal welfare policy-making. At the national level, there were conflicts in 2021 following Consumption Minister Alberto Garzón's #MenosCarneMásVida (less meat, more life) campaign, from which Agriculture Minister Luis Planas publicly distanced himself. However, this political conflict was more relevant in the media than in the sector and quickly faded away. Besides this, farm animal welfare is regarded as an economically relevant and thus cross-party issue as it constitutes animal products' position in the (inter)national market.

As a consequence, Spain's animal welfare discussion is less shaped by party politics and more by non-governmental interest groups. Several interviewees highlighted the important differentiation between associations that are against animal production in general and those advocating for sustainable, non-industrial production. While the first are rather outside the policy process, the latter partly get together with farmers' associations and political institutions to discuss animal welfare policy-making. The national farmers' association ANPROGAPOR and its branches in the autonomous communities play a significant role in representing farmers' interests. In recent years, their role was not to block animal welfare related policy change as shown in France, but to negotiate with scientific and political institutions on how to find a balance between increased animal welfare, farmers' concerns and a favourable position in the international market.

One surprising insight of the Spanish case is the increasingly significant advisory role scientific organizations play in animal welfare policy-making. While scientific institutions and individual researchers are rarely considered politically influential actors – beyond heavy crisis situations like COVID-19 – multiple interviewees argued that policy recommendations by veterinarians were central to Spain's animal welfare policy-making. Scholars from veterinary departments at public universities and specialized research organizations like the Institute of Agrifood Research and Technology (IRTA), which is ascribed to the Catalanian Department of Agriculture, are increasingly co-defining pressing issues in the animal production sector and putting them on the policy agenda. For instance, the issue of tail-biting reached the agenda through studies conducted by veterinarians who consequently jointly formulated the Royal Decree on lower pig densities together with ANPROGAPOR and the National Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The public also seems to play an increasing role in advancing animal welfare in Spain. Next to scientific evidence, interviewees consistently attributed the passing of the two proactive Royal Decrees to increasing European consumer demand and heightened EU expectations for welfare standards. As such, interviewees emphasized that Spain's motivation lies more in external accountability than domestic problem recognition.

This is further highlighted by the increasing role of market labels such as Welfair. This EU-supported initiative has gained prominence in Spain due to its alignment with the growing social and export market demands for transparency and welfare guarantees in animal production. While these labels remain voluntary, they are perceived as essential for maintaining competitiveness in both domestic and international markets. However, interviewees noted that the costs associated with obtaining and maintaining such certifications

are prohibitively high for smaller farmers. This cost barrier often marginalizes more sustainable and small-scale producers, reinforcing a system where EU subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy disproportionately benefit larger industrial operations, further entrenching their dominance in the sector. Another critical issue affecting the Spanish livestock sector is its negative public image spread by illegally recorded animal welfare violations on farms, a challenge also mirrored in France. This stigma is amplified by labour shortages and a tendency to portray the sector as inherently harmful or exploitative. Interviewees highlighted ongoing discussions around new technologies such as video cameras, sensors and automated feeding systems to improve animal welfare monitoring and make the agricultural workforce more appealing.

IV. Discussion

Although the pork sector's financial importance creates tension between welfare goals and economic priorities across all countries, our analysis of 35 expert interviews reveals that Denmark's leadership and over-compliance in this domain exemplifies the benefits of institutional alignment, cooperative policy-making and a tradition of consensus-driven reforms. France's centralized system presents a case where institutional fit favours compliance but does not translate into proactive policy advancements. Instead, focusing events like the L214 scandals temporarily heightened political engagement and led to the institutionalization of animal welfare interests through policy programs. However, the lack of sustained societal advocacy and the resistance from agricultural lobbies hindered long-term reforms. Spain's experience offers an intriguing contrast. Despite moderate institutional misfit and a historically compliance-driven approach, recent legislative advancements reflect the growing influence of external pressures like scientific evidence and market demands on proactive welfare policies even in the absence of strong domestic advocacy or focusing events.

Across the three cases, varying degrees of **institutional fit** (Assumption 1) shape the implementation of animal welfare policies. Denmark exhibits a high institutional fit rooted in collaborative policy-making and a strong culture of consensus, which at times leads to over-compliance with regulatory standards. In France, a centralized governance structure ensures uniform compliance but restricts innovation, resulting in institutional alignment that maintains stability without fostering significant advancement. Spain, by contrast, demonstrates a moderate degree of misfit due to its semi-federal and fragmented governance system; although reforms introduced since 2022 have mitigated some inconsistencies, these improvements remain externally induced rather than system-inherent.

A second important finding from the analysis is the high relevance of differences in **domestic responsiveness** (Assumption 2) grounded in different traditions of decision-making and political culture. Denmark benefits from a broad cross-party consensus on animal welfare, with only Venstre maintaining historical agricultural affiliations. In France, the issue is highly politicized: Left-wing parties tend to support reform efforts, whereas FNSEA-aligned actors resist them, keeping animal welfare a secondary policy concern. In Spain, the topic receives limited political engagement, with animal welfare largely absent from party platforms and PACMA maintaining low policy influence. This goes in line with different lobby dynamics that shape responsiveness. Denmark's consensus-oriented model minimizes conflict through close cooperation between

government and industry. France's agricultural lobby, particularly the FNSEA, actively resists welfare-oriented reforms, prioritizing competitiveness and production intensity. In Spain, large integrators dominate the sector, yet associations like ANPROGAPOR engage with policy institutions and societal actors to balance economic and welfare concerns.

Scientific involvement also varies markedly. Denmark's long-standing cooperation between government, industry and veterinary institutions supports incremental yet continuous reforms. France's scientific sector plays a less prominent role, as initiatives such as the National Reference Center remain peripheral. In Spain, by contrast, strong collaborations with veterinary and research institutions, such as IRTA, have contributed to substantive regulatory advances, including improvements in stocking density standards.

Functional drivers (Assumption 3) reveal parallel distinctions. In Denmark, moderate but consistent public concern is paired with a relatively high willingness to pay for welfare-friendly products. In France, societal awareness has been sporadically amplified by the L214 scandals but remains limited in persistence and consumer behavior. In Spain, awareness is increasing, though it is primarily driven by external pressures such as EU regulations and shifting consumer demand. Finally, focusing events differ significantly: Denmark has experienced no transformative episodes, with animal welfare discourse increasingly subsumed under broader environmental and climate concerns. France's L214 scandals, by contrast, triggered temporary policy innovations such as the National Plan for Animal Welfare. Spain, meanwhile, has seen few comparable events; recent legislative initiatives stem largely from EU and market dynamics rather than domestic catalysts. Table 1 offers a comparative overview of the analysed factors across the three countries.

Overall, this shows how the three chosen DPI factors interact with each other and how different combinations of factors can lead to the same outcome, that is, (over-)compliance in animal welfare policy-making. At the same time, our findings suggest that important factors in some areas (e.g., party politics) are less relevant in animal welfare policy. Thus, DPI factors should not be treated as uniform but rather as sensitive to the specific characteristics of policy subsystems, especially regarding political and economic salience (Table 2). According to our results, we characterize EU farm animal welfare as a policy subsystem with low political salience and high economic salience.

A policy subsystem with high political salience is characterized by issues that attract strong public attention, influence electoral behaviour and generate visible partisan conflict (e.g., climate policy and migration policy). In such contexts, DPI is likely to reflect overt political conflict, party competition and public pressure. By contrast, low-salience subsystems like farm animal welfare are rarely central in national electoral debates, party platforms or mainstream media discourse. Although societal salience of animal welfare is rising, reflected in growing public concern and citizen initiatives about sustainable food systems, it does not necessarily imply high political salience. Political salience requires that an issue become electorally decisive and central to partisan competition. In the case of farm animal welfare, public concern is increasing, but it remains weakly organized, episodic and rarely linked to voting behavior or party conflict.

A policy subsystem with high economic salience is one in which policies affect major economic interests, altering production, trade, investment and cost structures, and where economic actors have a strong incentive to influence outcomes. In economically

Table 1: Factors for Differentiated Policy Implementation Across the Case Studies.

	<i>DK</i>	<i>FR</i>	<i>ES</i>
Institutional (Mis)fit	High alignment due to collaborative policy-making and consensus culture. Synergy facilitates over-compliance.	Centralized governance ensures uniform compliance but limits innovation. Institutional fit exists but does not drive advancements.	Moderate misfit due to semi-federalism and fragmented governance. Improvements since 2022 address misalignment but are not intrinsic to the system.
Responsiveness: party politics	Low conflict; broad political consensus on animal welfare across parties. Only <i>Venstre</i> exhibits historical ties to farming.	High conflict; left-leaning parties generally supportive, FNSEA-backed parties resistant. Issue often secondary in political campaigns.	Low engagement; animal welfare largely absent from party agendas. Limited visibility of PACMA in policy-making.
Responsiveness: science	Collaborative partnerships between industry, government and veterinarians drive incremental reforms.	Limited engagement from scientific institutions. Initiatives like the National Reference Center have low visibility.	Strong collaboration with veterinary institutions and research centres (e.g., IRTA) driving regulatory advancements like stocking density reforms.
Responsiveness: lobby pressure	Industry collaborates with government; consensus-driven model minimizes conflict.	FNSEA exerts strong resistance to welfare reforms, prioritizing competitiveness and intensive farming.	Sector dominated by integrators; Farmers' associations (e.g., ANPROGAPOR) engage collaboratively with institutions to balance welfare and market competitiveness.
Functional drivers: societal awareness	Moderate societal concern due to relatively high standards; high willingness to pay for welfare-friendly products.	Moderate societal concern heightened by L214 scandals but not sustained. Limited willingness to pay for welfare-friendly products.	Increased societal awareness of welfare issues; external pressures (e.g., EU standards, consumer demand) more influential than political advocacy.
Functional drivers: focusing events	Lacking transformative events; environmental and climate concerns increasingly drive broader critiques of intensive farming.	Transformative-focusing events like L214 scandals led to temporary policy innovations (e.g., National Plan for Animal Welfare).	Limited focusing events; recent proactive legislation attributed to EU and market pressures rather than intrinsic domestic events.

Source: Authors' illustration.

high-salient policy subsystems like livestock farming, DPI is strongly conditioned by entrenched interests, institutionalized sectoral practices and concerns over competitiveness. Our case illustrates that even in the absence of public pressure, countries may go beyond EU minimum standards if institutional configurations (as in Denmark) or scientific expertise (as in Spain) create openings for incremental advancement. Conversely, strong

Table 2: Subsystem-Specific Factors of Differentiated Policy Implementation (DPI).

		<i>Economic salience</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Political salience	Low	e.g., technical standardization (food labelling, statistical reporting) DPI factors: bureaucratic routines, administrative discretion, legal clarity	e.g., <i>farm animal welfare</i> and rail infrastructure DPI factors: sectoral governance logics, lobbies, expert institutions
	High	e.g., data privacy and digital rights DPI factors: normative pressure, civil society mobilization, legal contestation	e.g., climate policy, energy transition and public health DPI factors: electoral competition, party conflict, media framing, lobbying pressure

Source: Authors' illustration.

economic lobbies (as in France) can constrain implementation despite moments of heightened attention.

Conclusion

This article has examined why the implementation of EU farm animal welfare regulations varies across member states, despite a shared supranational framework. By comparatively analysing Denmark, France and Spain, we identified how institutional fit, responsiveness to domestic politics and functional drivers shape DPI. Our main empirical finding is that none of these factors alone can explain policy (over-)compliance or the lack of it. Instead, the interplay of these factors and the manner in which they play out in different national settings highlight the contingent nature of (over-)compliance. Future studies could analyse this by highlighting the interrelation of explanatory factors and involving additional member states or policy subsystems, for instance, with a qualitative comparative analysis (Oana et al. 2021).

Moreover, our comparative study contributes to DPI literature with a theoretical refinement. We propose that the analysis of DPI factors should be sensitive to policy subsystems based on their political and economic salience. By categorizing farm animal welfare as a low-salience but economically significant subsystem, our study introduces a typology for understanding how characteristics of policy subsystems shape implementation dynamics. While the idea that policy subsystems matter for policy-making is not new (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Howlett et al. 2020; Jenkins-Smith et al. 1991), this has yet to be systematically reflected in DPI literature. Analyses across policy subsystems and theoretical contributions would be necessary to enhance our understanding of this. Our proposed four-field matrix should be understood as a first theoretical building block in this direction and as a contribution to related discussions in EU implementation and comparative politics scholarship.

For policy-makers, our study implies that achieving meaningful advancements in animal welfare policy implementation requires not only aligning institutional frameworks with EU directives but also actively cultivating societal awareness, leveraging scientific expertise and engaging diverse stakeholders in cooperative governance models. Moreover, addressing barriers posed by influential lobbies, as seen in France, or the dominance

of market integrators, as observed in Spain, is critical for ensuring equitable and effective policy outcomes. Tailoring implementation strategies to the specific governance culture, political dynamics and actor configurations of each member state can enhance the responsiveness and legitimacy of EU-level initiatives, especially in policy subsystems where formal compliance does not guarantee substantive change. Finally, raised awareness towards the political and economic salience of a subsystem can help identify suitable strategies to understand and improve policy implementation in different cases.

Although our empirical analysis had an explicit focus on the implementation of the EU's pig directive, the findings can be generalized to other areas of farm animal welfare. Our findings confirm the partly obstructive role of powerful interest groups in farm animal welfare that has been found in these studies (Kuenzler and Vogeler 2025). In particular, farmer associations often bring their economic objections with regard to animal welfare in livestock farming into the decision-making process. Like in France, these interest groups are normally well connected to specific political parties – either conservative or specific agrarian parties (Vogeler 2019b). These party-political conflicts were also confirmed by previous studies on the European Parliament when it comes to tightening EU animal welfare regulations (Vogeler et al. 2020). At the same time, our results contrast with previous findings that show how public concerns about farm animal policies are usually put on the political agenda by green political parties (Bazzan and Vogeler 2026). In our study, animal welfare concerns either were not addressed by political parties or were an issue discussed across parties and, even more so, put on the political agenda by sector-specific actors like lobby groups or veterinarians.

Whilst our findings highlight plausible patterns of policy implementation, the study did not establish strong causal claims. Thus, a process-tracing or hypothesis-testing design could be used in future work to assess competing explanations more rigorously. Moreover, subsequent research could explore the role of administrative capacity and discretionary power in shaping policy implementation, building on the DPI framework's focus on member states' ability to implement policies. The analysis of other data sources like media reports or public hearings could also help to triangulate the above findings and get a more elaborate picture of the role of framing, narratives and discourse networks on policy implementation. What has not yet been studied in detail in the area of animal welfare is the role of institutional factors for the national implementation of EU directives. Whilst our findings present first ideas on how they favour or hinder successful implementation, this should be further tested in future cross-country comparisons of animal welfare policy-making.

Acknowledgements

Open access publishing facilitated by Universitat Bern, as part of the Wiley - Universitat Bern agreement via the Consortium Of Swiss Academic Libraries.

Funding information

This work was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft under Grant Number 449682494.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Correspondence

Ilana Schröder, KPM Center for Public Management, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland.
email: ilana.schroeder@unibe.ch

References

- Akbik, A., Freudlsperger, C. and Migliorati, M. (2024) 'Differentiated Participation, Uniform Procedures: EU Agencies in Direct Policy Implementation'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 645–670. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2161727>
- Bandelow, N.C. and Hornung, J. (2021) 'Policy Programme Cycles Through Old and New Programmatic Groups'. *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 633–652. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X20000185>
- Baumgartner, F.R. and Jones, B.D. (1991) 'Agenda Dynamics and Policy Subsystems'. *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 4, pp. 1044–1074. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2131866>
- Bazzan, G., Kuenzler, J. and Vogeler, C.S. (2025) 'Conditions Favoring the Reduction of Pesticides: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of EU Member States'. *Review of Policy Research*, Vol. 42, No. 6, pp. 1480–1495. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.70021>
- Bazzan, G. and Vogeler, C.S. (2026) 'Differentiated Policy Implementation in Food Safety and Animal Welfare Policymaking'. *European Policy Analysis*, Vol. 12, No. 1, e1239. <https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1239>
- Birkland, T.A., DeLeo, R.A. and Taylor, K. (2025) 'Focusing Events and Attention'. In Zahariadis, N. and Taylor, K. (eds) *Handbook of Public Policy Agenda Setting* (Edward Elgar Publishing), pp. 406–432. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035318513.00040>
- Bondarouk, E., Liefferink, D. and Mastenbroek, E. (2020) 'Politics or Management? Analysing Differences in Local Implementation Performance of the EU Ambient Air Quality Directive'. *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 449–472. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X19000035>
- Börzel, T.A. and Buzogány, A. (2019) 'Compliance With EU Environmental Law. The Iceberg Is Melting'. *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 315–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1549772>
- Brendler, V. and Thomann, E. (2024) 'Does Institutional Misfit Trigger Customisation Instead of Non-Compliance?' *West European Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 515–542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2166734>
- Buller, H. and Cesar, C. (2007) 'Eating Well, Eating Fare: Farm Animal Welfare in France'. *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, Vol. 15, pp. 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.48416/IJSAF.V15I3.278>
- Carrié, F., Doré, A. and Michalon, J. (2023) *Sociologie de la cause animale* (La Découverte). <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.carre.2023.01>
- Di Lucia, L. and Kronsell, A. (2010) 'The Willing, the Unwilling and the Unable – Explaining Implementation of the EU Biofuels Directive'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 545–563. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501761003673559>
- Domorenok, E. and Gatti, F. (2026) 'The EU's Strategy for Sustainability: A Landmark Turn With the European Green Deal?' *European Policy Analysis*, epa2.70035. <https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.70035>

- European Commission. (2021) 'Water: Commission Decides to Refer SPAIN to the Court of Justice of the European Union for Poor Implementation of the Nitrates Directive.' Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6265
- European Union. (2023) 'Special Eurobarometer 533—Attitudes of Europeans towards Animal Welfare.' Directorate-General for Communication. Available from: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2875/93051>
- Eurostat. (2024) 'Pig population—Annual data[apro_mt_lspig—custom_3280432] [Data set].' https://doi.org/10.2908/APRO_MT_LSPIG
- Fesenfeld, L.P., Maier, M., Brazzola, N., Stolz, N., Sun, Y. and Kachi, A. (2023) 'How Information, Social Norms, and Experience With Novel Meat Substitutes Can Create Positive Political Feedback and Demand-Side Policy Change'. *Food Policy*, Vol. 117, 102445. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2023.102445>
- Gerring, J. (2009) 'Case Selection for Case-Study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques'. In Box-Steffensmeier, J.M., Brady, H.E. and Collier, D. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (1st edition) (Oxford University Press), pp. 645–684. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199286546.003.0028>
- Gläser, J. and Laudel, G. (2009) 'On Interviewing 'Good' and 'Bad' Experts'. In Bogner, A., Littig, B. and Menz, W. (eds) *Interviewing Experts* (Palgrave Macmillan UK), pp. 117–137. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230244276_6
- Hårstad, R.M.B. (2024) 'The Politics of Animal Welfare: A Scoping Review of Farm Animal Welfare Governance'. *Review of Policy Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12554>
- Hårstad, R.M.B. and Vik, J. (2022) 'Political Parties' Framing of Farm Animal Welfare: A Fragmented Picture'. *European Policy Analysis*, Vol. 9, No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1002/epa2.1154>
- Howlett, M., Ramesh, M. and Perl, A. (2020) *Studying Public Policy: Principles and Processes* (Fourth edition) (Oxford University Press).
- Howlett, M. and Tosun, J. (2021) 'National Policy Styles in Theory and Practice'. In Howlett, M. and Tosun, J. (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Policy Styles* (Routledge), pp. 11–20.
- Hus, A. and McCulloch, S.P. (2023) 'The Political Salience of Animal Protection in the Netherlands (2012–2021) and Belgium (2010–2019): What Do Dutch and Belgian Political Parties Pledge on Animal Welfare and Wildlife Conservation?' *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-023-09899-6>
- Jans, J.H., Squintani, L., Aragão, A., Macrory, R. & Wegener, B.W. (2009) 'Gold Plating' of European Environmental Measures? *SSRN Electronic Journal* <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1485386>
- Jenkins-Smith, H.C., Clair, G.K.S. and Woods, B. (1991) 'Explaining Change in Policy Subsystems: Analysis of Coalition Stability and Defection Over Time'. *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 851. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111497>
- Kaiser, R. (2014) *Qualitative Experteninterviews: Konzeptionelle Grundlagen und praktische Durchführung* (Wiesbaden, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden).
- Knill, C. and Lehmkuhl, D. (2002) 'The National Impact of European Union Regulatory Policy: Three Europeanization Mechanisms'. *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 255–280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00012>
- Kuenzler, J., Vogeler, C., Parth, A.-M. and Gohl, T. (2024) 'Exploring the Eternal Struggle: The Narrative Policy Framework and Status Quo Versus Policy Change'. *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 57, No. 3, pp. 485–517. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s1077-024-09537-6>
- Kuenzler, J. and Vogeler, C.S. (2025) 'Implementation of the European Directive on Pig Welfare: A Comparative Study of Four Member States'. *Animal*, Vol. 19, No. 8, 101586. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.animal.2025.101586>

- Lecuyer, L. and Verrier, M. (2025) 'Implementing Innovative Climate Change Procedural Instruments to Mitigate Livestock Farming Foodprint in Colorado State, United States of America'. *Review of Policy Research*, Vol. 42, No. 6, pp. 1428–1449. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.70041>
- Liefferink, D., Graversgaard, M., Nielsen, H.Ø., Boezeman, D., Crabbé, A., Wiering, M. and Kaufmann, M. (2021) 'How Hercules Cleans Up the Augean Stables: Differentiated Implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive'. *Water Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 1000–1016. <https://doi.org/10.2166/wp.2021.024>
- Liefferink, D., Wiering, M. and Uitenboogaart, Y. (2011) 'The EU Water Framework Directive: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Implementation and Domestic Impact'. *Land Use Policy*, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 712–722. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2010.12.006>
- Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri. (2014) 'Pig Welfare Action Plan 2014.' Available from: <https://en.fvm.dk/focus-on/animal-welfare/pig-welfare-action-plan-2014>
- Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática. (2022) 'Real Decreto 695/2022.' Available from: https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-14057
- Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática. (2024) 'Real Decreto 159/2023.' Available from: <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2023/03/08/pdfs/BOE-A-2023-6083.pdf>
- Mizarhi-Borohovich, I., Newman, A. and Sivan-Sevilla, I. (2024) 'The Civic Transformation of Data Privacy Implementation in Europe'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 671–700. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2184108>
- Nadeau, N. and Berardo, R. (2025) 'A New Beef: An Analysis of Discourse Coalitions in the Nascent Cellular Agriculture Policy Subsystem'. *Review of Policy Research*, Vol. 42, No. 6, pp. 1404–1427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.70018>
- Oana, I.-E., Schneider, C.Q. and Thomann, E. (2021) *Qualitative Comparative Analysis Using R: A Beginner's Guide* (1st edition) (Cambridge University Press). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009006781>
- Obinger, H. (2023) 'Funktionalismus'. In Wenzelburger, G. and Zohlnhöfer, R. (eds) *Handbuch Policy-Forschung* (Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden), pp. 23–43. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-34560-0_1
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024) *Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2024: Innovation for Sustainable Productivity Growth* (OECD). <https://doi.org/10.1787/74da57ed-en10.1787/74da57ed-en>
- Parker, C., Scott, S. and Geddes, A. (2019) 'Snowball Sampling'. In Atkinson, P., Delamont, S., Cernat, A., Sakshaug, J.W. and Williams, R.A. (eds) *SAGE Research Methods Foundations* (SAGE Publications Ltd). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036831710>
- Parth, A., Möck, M., Vogeler, C. and Kuenzler, J. (2026) 'No More Fashion Victim? Spillovers Across Multiple Streams: The Case of Fur Farming Bans During the COVID-19 Pandemic'. *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 1, e70039. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.70039>
- Patton, M.Q. (2015) *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (Fourth edition) (SAGE).
- Pircher, B., De La Porte, C. and Szelewa, D. (2024) 'Actors, Costs and Values: The Implementation of the Work–Life Balance Directive'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 543–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2181504>
- Socialdemokratiet, Venstre, Moderaterne, Socialistisk Folkeparti, Liberal Alliance, Det Konservative Folkeparti, Radikale Venstre, Dansk Folkeparti and Alternativet. (2024) 'Sammen om Dyrene. Aftale om Dyrevelfærd 2024–2027.' Available from: https://fvm.dk/media/638477/332860181656/sammen_om_dyrene_-_aftale_om_dyrevelfaerd_2024-2027.pdf

- Thomann, E. (2015) 'Customizing Europe: Transposition as Bottom-Up Implementation'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 10, pp. 1368–1387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1008554>
- Thomann, E. (2019) *Customized Implementation of European Union Food Safety Policy: United in Diversity?* (Springer International Publishing). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92684-1>
- Thomann, E. and Sager, F. (2017) 'Moving Beyond Legal Compliance: Innovative Approaches to EU Multilevel Implementation'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 24, No. 9, pp. 1253–1268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1314541>
- Transparency International. (2024) 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2023.' Available from: <https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI-2023-Report.pdf>
- Van Hulst, M. and Visser, E.L. (2025) 'Abductive Analysis in Qualitative Research'. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2, pp. 567–580. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13856>
- Vogeler, C.S. (2019a) 'Market-Based Governance in Farm Animal Welfare—A Comparative Analysis of Public and Private Policies in Germany and France'. *Animals*, Vol. 9, No. 5, 267. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani9050267>
- Vogeler, C.S. (2019b) 'Why Do Farm Animal Welfare Regulations Vary Between EU Member States? A Comparative Analysis of Societal and Party Political Determinants in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK'. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 317–335. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12794>
- Vogeler, C.S., Hornung, J. and Bandelow, N.C. (2020) 'Farm Animal Welfare Policymaking in the European Parliament – A Social Identity Perspective on Voting Behaviour'. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 518–530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2020.1778458>
- Vogeler, C.S. and Parth, A.-M. (2024) 'An Elephant in the Room? Explaining Agenda-Setting in Antimicrobial Resistance Policies in 30 European Countries'. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 356, 117164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117164>
- World Bank. (2023) 'Worldwide Governance Indicators | Interactive Data Access.' Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/worldwide-governance-indicators/interactive-data-access>
- Wyser, J., Puran, T., Hornung, J. and Fischer, M. (2024) 'Media Coverage of Antimicrobial Resistance in Germany and Switzerland: An Interpretation Through the Multiple Streams Framework'. *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 363, 117470. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117470>
- Zhelyazkova, A., Thomann, E., Ruffing, E. and Princen, S. (2024) 'Differentiated Policy Implementation in the European Union'. *West European Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 439–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2257963>

Appendix 1: Interview Guideline

Opening

- Please describe the [national] livestock sector from your perspective. In what context do you see your role?
- What role has animal welfare played in this sector so far? What milestones have marked the formulation of animal welfare policies in [country]?
- In your opinion, what is distinctive about the [national] approach to animal welfare compared to other countries?

Block 1: Actors

- How, if at all, do you participate in the policy-making process? Are your interests considered at any stage?
- What roles do farmers, NGOs, political parties, the public, the media, and science play in shaping animal welfare policies?
- What coalitions have emerged in the discourse on animal welfare? Which actors collaborate, and which are in opposition? Where do you see conflicts?

Block 2: Drivers and barriers

- What role do EU requirements play in shaping national policy?
- What are the main obstacles to establishing animal welfare policies?
- Have there been any events or scandals that influenced animal welfare policies?

Block 3: Policy instruments

- Are there animal welfare labels on food products in [country]? If so, how did they come about? If not, has such an idea been debated?
- What advantages or disadvantages do you see in practice between regulatory instruments (laws, regulations) and cooperative or voluntary instruments (labels, informal agreements)?
- What combination of policies would you prefer?

Block 4: Implementation

- What is your opinion on the implementation and enforcement of animal welfare policies in [country]?
- How successful is implementation at the different levels (national, regional) in [country]?
- Where do you see the biggest problems, and why?

Block 5: Current challenges

- In which areas do you see the greatest need for action?
- What are the main challenges to advancing animal welfare?

Conclusion

- Are there any aspects we have not covered that you would like to comment on?
- Can you recommend other people I should interview?

Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

#	Country	Sector	Position
1	DK	Science	Veterinarian active as a political advisor
2	DK	Society: agricultural sector	Member of pig farmer's association 1
3	DK	Society: agricultural sector	Member of pig farmer's association 2
4	DK	Society: agricultural sector	Member of pig farmer's association 2
5	DK	Politics	Civil servant at the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
6	DK	Politics	Civil servant at the Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
7	DK	Society: environmental association	Animal welfare organization 1
8	DK	Society: environmental association	Animal welfare organization 1
9	DK	Society: environmental association	Animal welfare organization 2
10	DK	Industry	Director of Slaughterhouse/Cooperative*****
11	ES	Politics	Head of the livestock management in the administration of an autonomous community
12	ES	Politics	Civil servant for agriculture in the administration of an autonomous community
13	ES	Politics	Former national animal welfare officer
14	ES	Society: agricultural sector	Director of national farmers' association
15	ES	Society: agricultural sector	Director of local farmers' association
16	ES	Society: environmental association	Journalist and activist of an animal rights association
17	ES	Society: environmental association	Environmental attorney of an association against industrial livestock
18	ES	Science	Veterinarian at the Institute of Agrifood Research and Technology (IRTA)
19	ES	Science	Veterinarian at a public university
20	ES	Industry	Business quality manager at Integradora 1
21	ES	Industry	Director of communications at Integradora 1
22	ES	Industry	Director of public affairs at Integradora 1
23	ES	Industry	Deputy for Public Affairs at Integradora 1
24	FR	Politics	Civil servant for animal welfare on the national level
25	FR	Politics	Politician committed to the topic of animal welfare (liberal)
26	FR	Politics	Politician committed to the topic of animal welfare (leftist)
27	FR	Politics	Politician committed to the topic of animal welfare (liberal)
28	FR	Society: agricultural sector	Representative of a farmers' union
29	FR	Society: environmental association	Animal welfare organization 1
30	FR		Animal welfare organization 2

#	Country	Sector	Position
		Society: environmental association	
31	FR	Science	Two veterinarians at the Reference Center Animal Welfare
32	FR	Science	Sociologist at a public university
33	FR	Science	Veterinarian at a public university
34	FR	Science	Veterinarian at a public university
35	FR	Industry	General secretary at a sectoral interest organization

Appendix 3: Operationalization of DPI Factors in the Interview Guideline and Analysis

<i>DPI factors</i>	<i>Indicators in interview guide</i>	<i>Example themes from data</i>
Institutional (mis) fit	- Opening questions: what role has animal welfare played in this sector so far? What is distinctive about the [national] approach to animal welfare ... ? - Block 2: What role do EU requirements play? - Block 4: How successful is implementation at the different levels (national, regional) in [country]?	- Collaborative policy-making tradition - Fragmented multilevel governance - Animal welfare = agriculture = economy
Domestic politics, resistance/support	- Block 1: What roles do farmers, NGOs, political parties, the public, the media, and science play in shaping animal welfare policies? What coalitions have emerged in the discourse on animal welfare? Which actors collaborate, and which are in opposition? - Block 5: In which areas do you see the greatest need for action?	- Strong farmer lobby - Association for animal rights - Cooperation between science and farming sector - Information exchange
Functional drivers	- Block 1: Where do you see conflicts? - Block 2: Have there been any events or scandals...?	- L214 scandal - Growing environmental concern - Media coverage after scandals - EU pressure - Limited public debate - Societal pressure
Other/open questions	- Block 2: what are the main obstacles to establishing animal welfare policies? - Block 3: policy instruments - Block 4: What is your opinion on the implementation and enforcement of animal welfare policies ... ? Where do you see the biggest problems, and why? - Block 5: Current challenges - Conclusion questions	- Science–industry collaboration - Use of evidence - Food labels - Market as a driver for voluntary instruments - Slow local administration - Technological progress as solution - Image of the farming sector