How would you describe the role of Higher Education Institutions in Regional Sustainability Transitions?

Unveiling the role of Higher Education Institutions in Regional Sustainability Transitions – a systematic literature review.

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Problem Framing

Sustainability

The **role** of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Regional Sustainability Transitions (RST)

Higher Education Institutions

Region
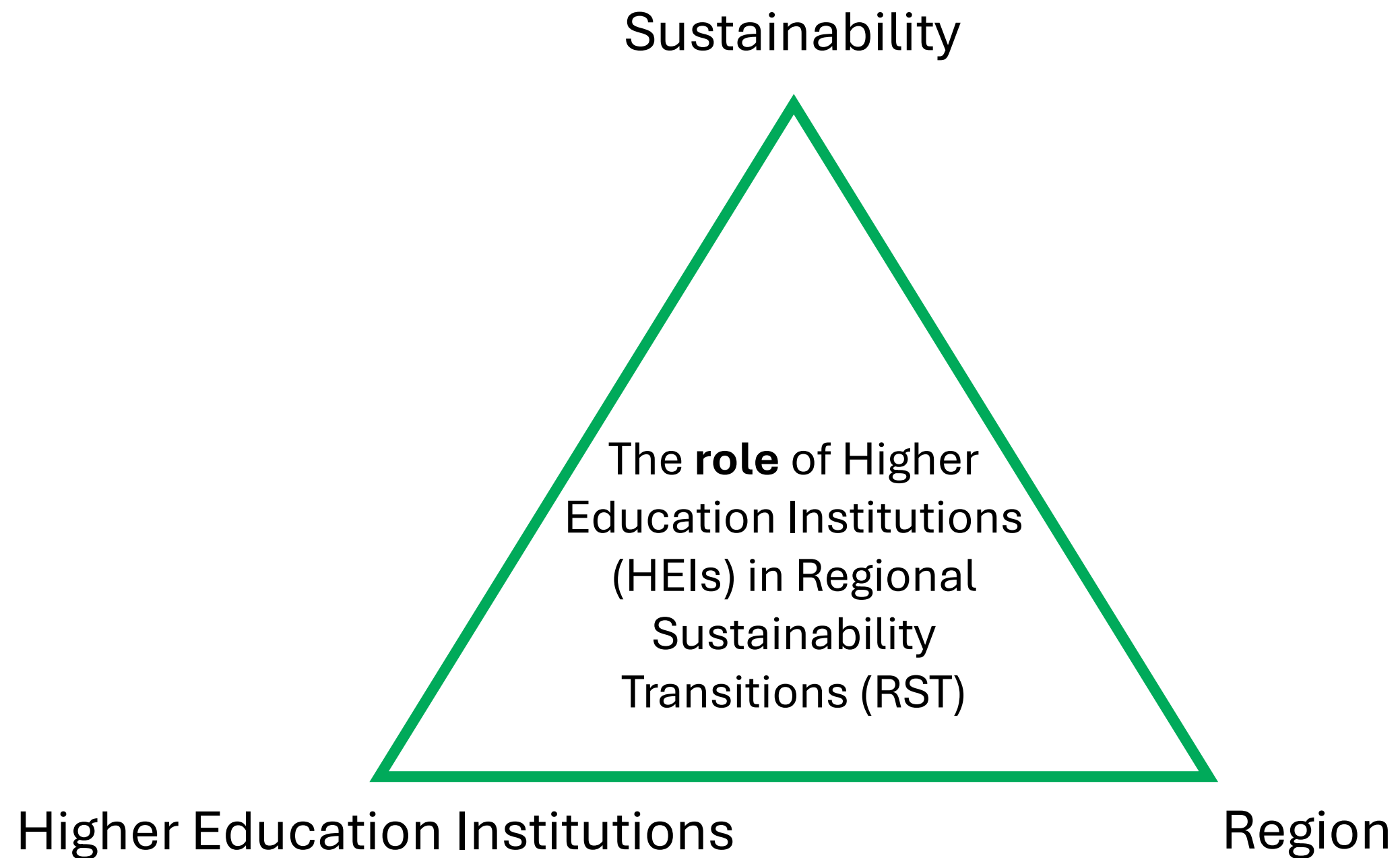
Research Questions

- Which **role** of HEIs in RST has been **theoretically** and **empirically** described in the recent literature?

    - How is this role **conceptualized** and which **theoretical approaches** are employed?

    - How is this role empirically described in terms of **actors** and **activities**?

    - Which **drivers** and **challenges** have been found regarding this role?

    - Which **impacts** of this role on RST are depicted in the literature?

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Analytical Framework (I): role theory

- **Characteristics** of role theory:
  - Roles are understood as **certain regular patterns of behavior and attitudes** for dealing with recurring sets of situations (Turner, 1990).
  - Roles are defined in relation to other roles (Lynch, 2007), meaning that **roles can change when the environment around them changes**.
  - Roles are "are recognized, accepted, and used to **accomplish pragmatic interactive goals** in a community" (Callero, 1994, p. 232).
  - Roles are used to gain access to **cultural, social or material resources** (Callero, 1994; Hilbert, 1981).
  - Roles contribute to the **creation of social structures** while social structures influence the construction of social roles (Callero, 1994).
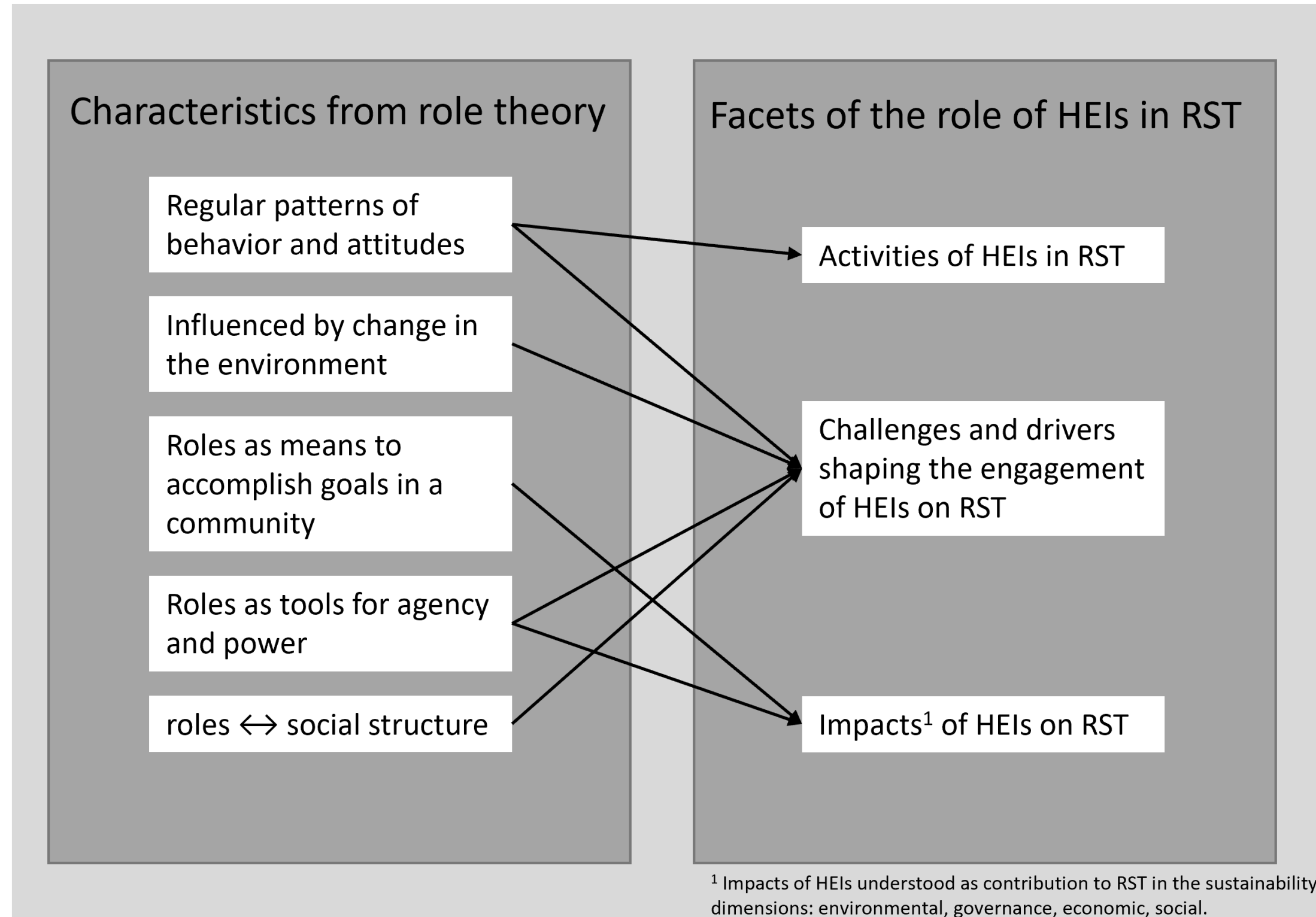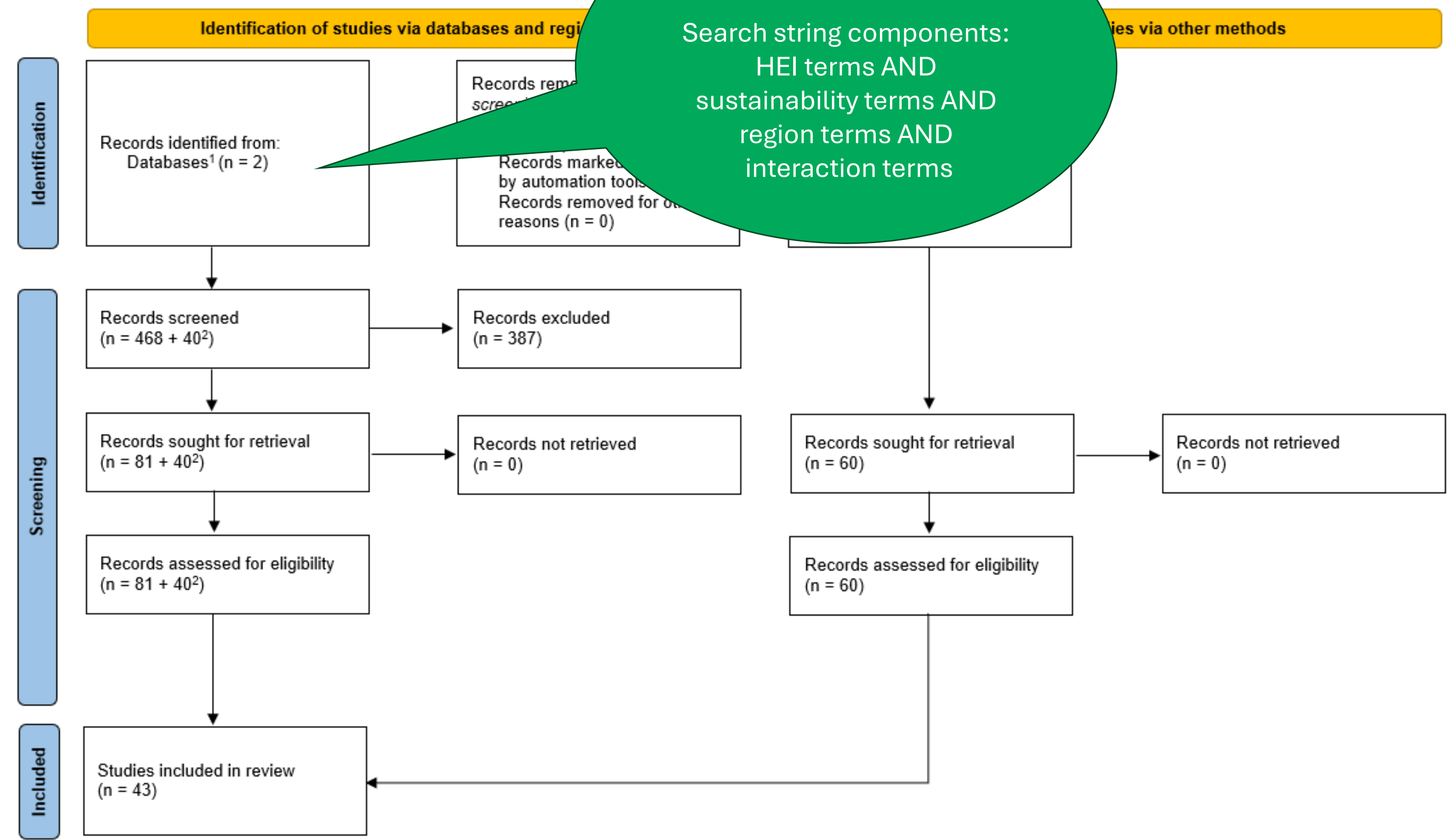
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Analytical Framework (II)

Figure 1: role characteristics and their application for this literature review (own illustration)

Characteristics from role theory

- Regular patterns of behavior and attitudes
- Influenced by change in the environment
- Roles as means to accomplish goals in a community
- Roles as tools for agency and power
- roles ↔ social structure

Facets of the role of HEIs in RST

- Activities of HEIs in RST
- Challenges and drivers shaping the engagement of HEIs on RST
- Impacts[1] of HEIs on RST

[1] Impacts of HEIs understood as contribution to RST in the sustainability dimensions: environmental, governance, economic, social.

Material and Methods (I): litera...

Figure 2: Prisma Flow Diagram depicting the process of literature search (own illustration)

Material and Method (I): literature search
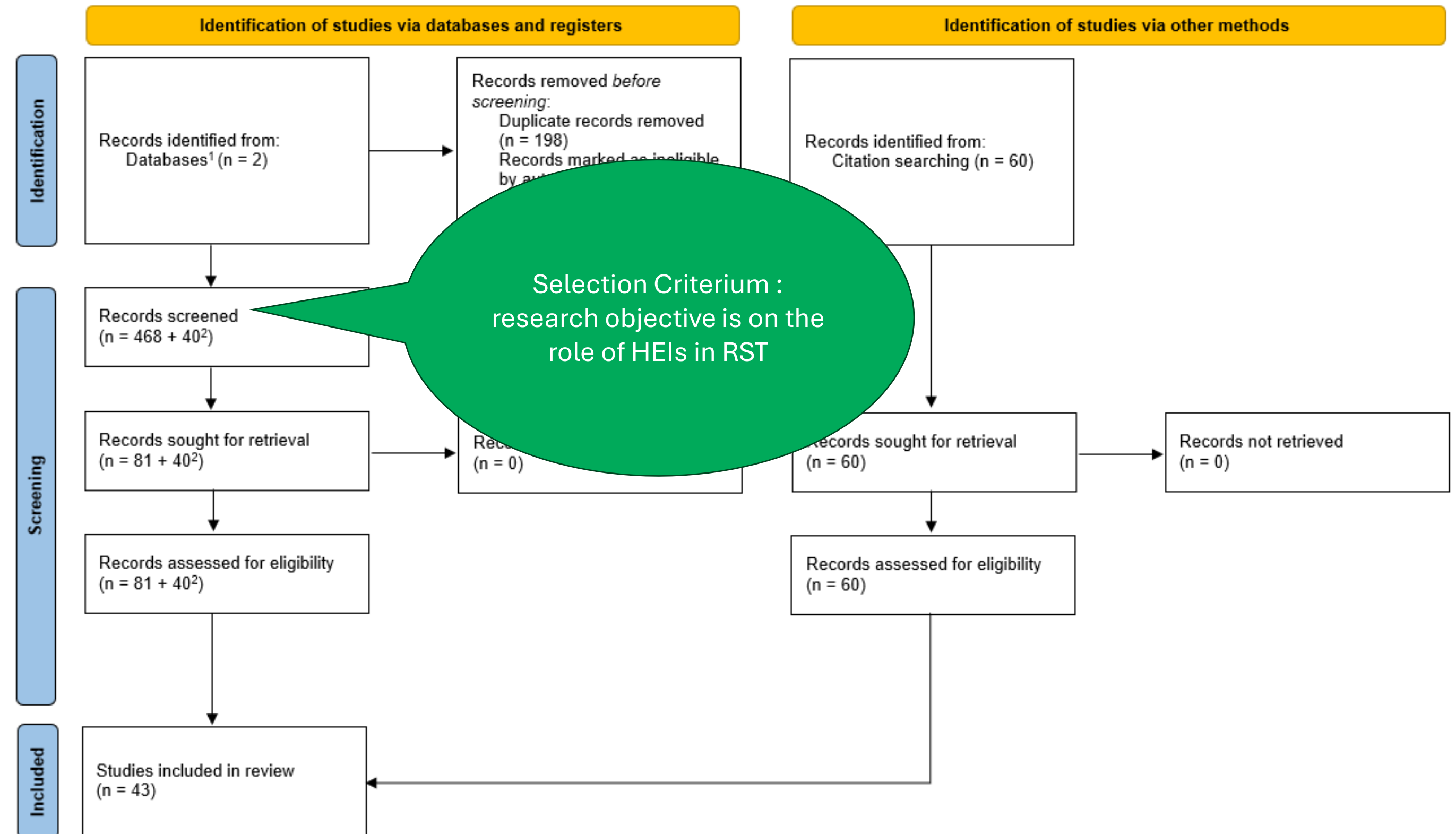
Figure 2: Prisma Flow Diagram depicting the process of literature search (own illustration)

Method (II): analysis of the literature

Coding

- Based on the operationalization of role theory of Wittmayer et al. (2017)
- Pre-defined coding categories

Table 1: Overview on the main and sub-coding categories (own illustration)

| Conceptualization of role	Expression of role	Drivers and framework conditions
Theoretical approaches	Activities	Drivers
Conceptualization of role	Involved actors	Challenges
Definition of role	Impacts	

Results (I) – Invovled actors

HEI

- Students

- Researchers, teachers

- HEI leadership and management

- HEI administration and service centers

Region

- Public actors, e.g., administration, politics, schools, church, library, hospitals

- Private actors, e.g., businesses, industry

- Civil society, e.g., citizens, NGOs, associations

Results (II) – activities
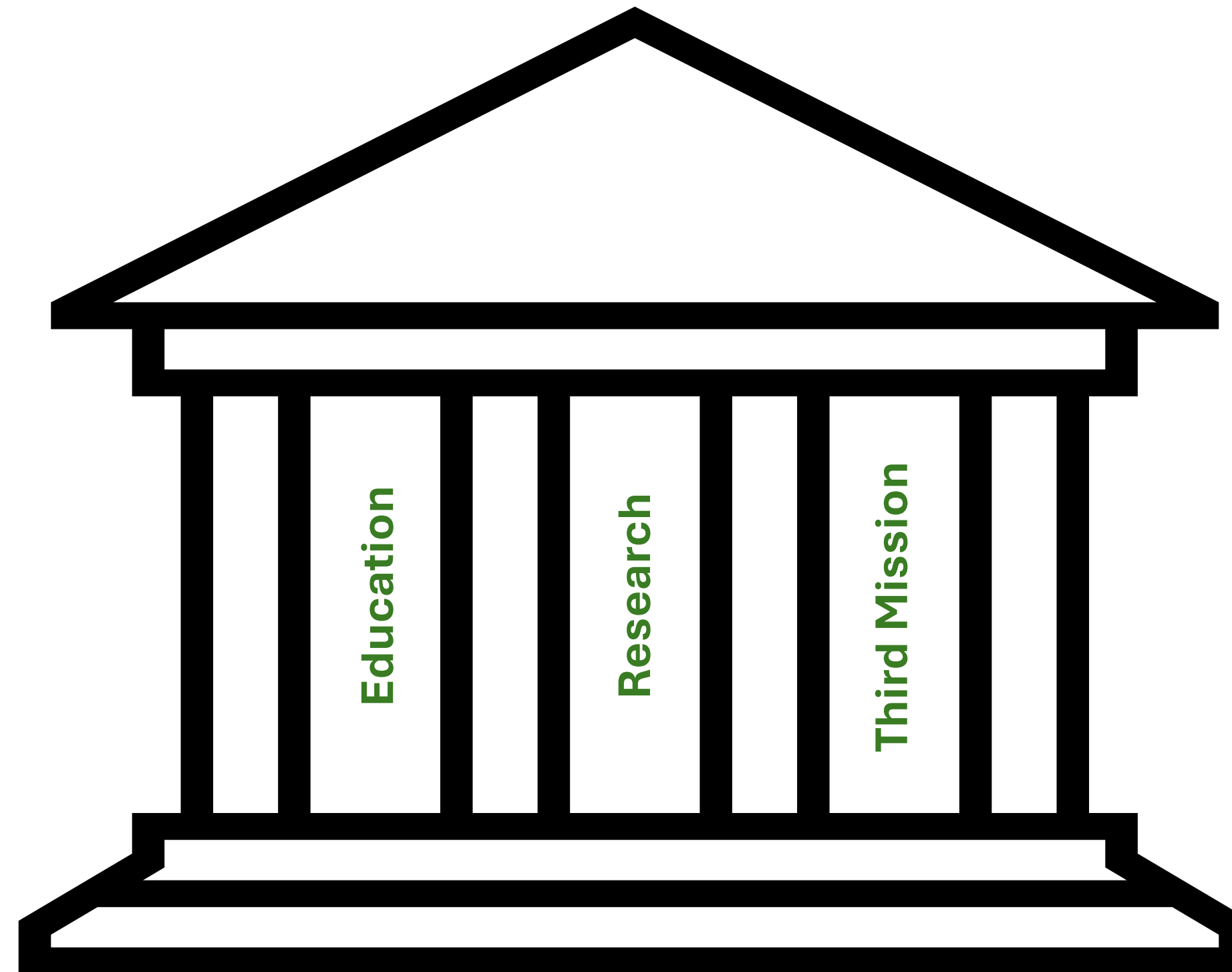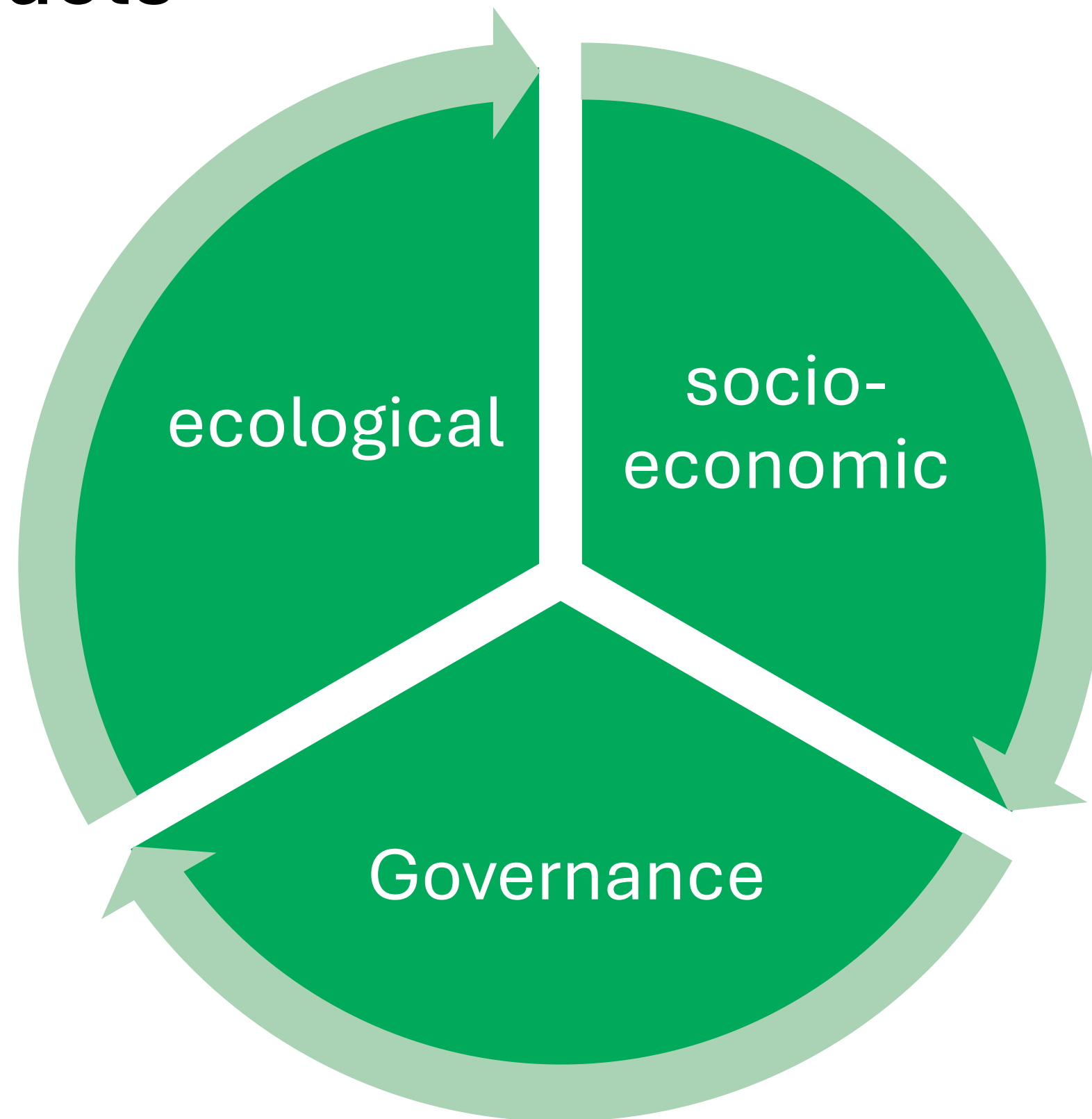
Results (III) – drivers and challenges

Drivers
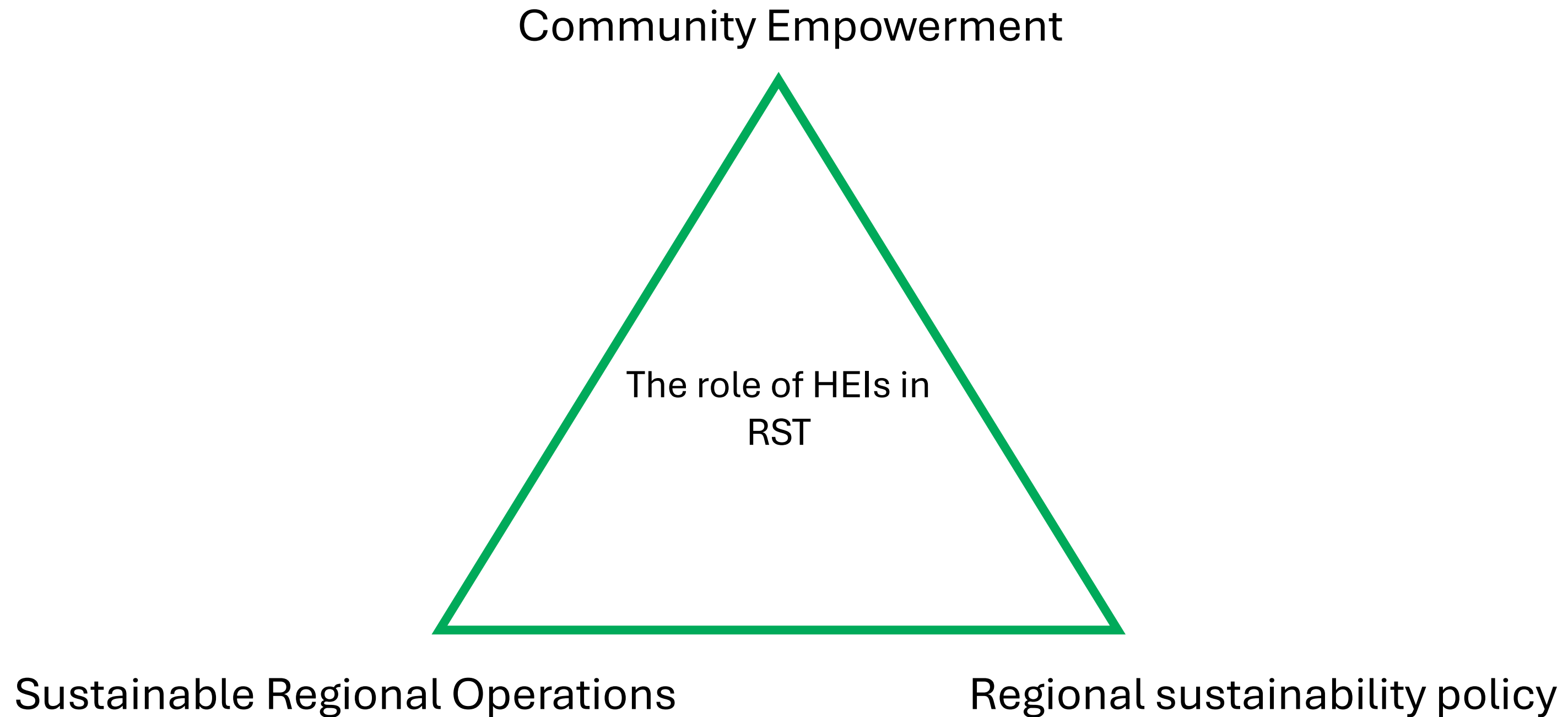
- „Change Agents"
- HEI leadership

Challenges

- Lack of institutionalization of HEI-region cooperation
- Lack of resources (time, human, monetary)

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Results (IV) – Impacts

Discussion: The role of HEIs in RST?

Community Empowerment

The role of HEIs in RST

Sustainable Regional Operations

Regional sustainability policy

Further research avenues

Further **avenues of research**:

- Who (from both the regional and HEI side) decides whether a HEI takes on the role of contributing to RST and which dimension(s) is/are enacted?

- Why do seemingly similar HEI-region setting diverge from each other?

  - Which role do path dependencies play here?

- How does the roles of HEIs in RST change over time?

- Who are the drivers of the engagement of HEIs with RST?
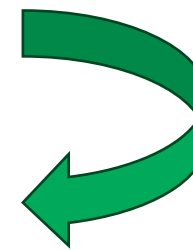
Thank you for your attention! Questions?

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