A Just Transition:
Energy Regions in the Spotlight?

An analysis of the Dutch RES process in the Foodvalley Region

Abstract

In the Netherlands, regions are considered the crucial geographical scale to address the goals and challenges related to the transformation of our energy systems. This qualitative study applies a Just Transition frame to evaluate how polycentric Regional Energy Transition (RET) strategies, in this case the Dutch RES process, could accelerate a Just Transition and implement the three dimensions of Just Transition practice. A two-part analysis on the content of the RES framework and the perceptions of stakeholders in the 'Regio Foodvalley' is conducted. For the latter, information from 12 participating stakeholders was collected to qualify Just Transition barriers and opportunities within RET. The results show that, while stakeholders are engaging with Just Transition practice, shared values are lacking. Justice forms should be considered in relation to each other to create a shared story in striving for a Just Transition in service of a sustainable and just future.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

A global energy transition, understood as the long-term structural transformation from fossil-based to zero-carbon energy systems, is a key factor in the ongoing fight against climate change (Sanz-Hernandez et al., 2020). Following the 2015 Paris Agreement, signatories pledged their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), setting nationwide transition objectives (Jenkins et al., 2020). In the Netherlands, the NDC was articulated in the National Climate Agreement of June 2019. Its central goal is to establish a 49% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels (The Government of the Netherlands, 2019). A sub-goal is to develop 35 TWh of renewable weather dependent electricity on land. To reach this, 30 energy regions were organized to develop tailor-made Regional Energy Strategies (RES) with broad regional support (NP RES, 2019). Despite challenges of civil unrest and declining support for action against climate change due to the COVID-19 crisis (Jorna, 2020; Kraak, 2020), draft versions of the RES have been published mid 2020 for assessment by the Dutch Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) (Reijn, 2020).

1.1.1. Societal relevance

The energy transition will critically impact existing landscapes, e.g. through the installation of wind turbines and solar panels, and the development of new energy infrastructures and storage facilities (Kempenaar et al., 2020). Unequal spatial outcomes can introduce an uneven distribution of both benefits and burdens among citizens (Fisher, 2015; Marschütz et al., 2020). Moreover, within a dense spatial layout like the Netherlands, it will have implications for other land-uses and spatial issues (Kempenaar et al., 2020). As a consequence, two trends can be distinguished.

One is increasing societal and political attention to concerns of justice in relation to energy transition policy, stressing the importance of fair and inclusive governance and decision making (Bulkeley et al., 2014; Hughes & Hoffmann, 2020). Based on the already extensive debate on what 'justice' means, the complexity of (action against) climate change, and pre-existing social justice concerns, it comes as no surprise that a wide range of climate change-related justice movements exist worldwide, with different perspectives and approaches (Fisher, 2015; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The United Nations (UNFCCC) as well as the European Union (EU) addressed the concerns by adopting a focus on 'just' energy transitions, visible in the European Green Deal (Jenkins et al., 2020; Sanz-Hernandez et al., 2020).

The second trend is a decentralized approach towards NDCs, which is regarded as a strong potential for delivering a fair and inclusive (just) energy transition (Heldeweg & Saintier, 2020). The EU stimulates the formation of 'renewable energy communities' in member states to support citizens in taking ownership (Heldeweg & Saintier, 2020). Embedding such entities into the governance and regulations of national energy systems is no simple feat, as decentral initiatives can come in different shapes and sizes and their functioning seems to be highly context dependent (Heldeweg & Saintier, 2020). In this light, Regional Energy Transition (RET) strategies are receiving increasing attention from policy makers across Europe as a form of polycentric governance, to bridge the gap between national climate goals and local initiatives (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020).

The policy formulation processes of the Dutch RES (the RES process) are an obvious example. The national government encourages decentralized counterparts and non-public actors to take responsibility in reaching the NDC. A broad national framework gives governance conditions and supportive policy instrumentation that regional stakeholders can use. This way, the energy transition can be tailored to the regional scale with context-dependent actions (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). In theory and practice, more knowledge needs to be developed on the realities and perceptions of the RES process in service of sustainability and justice for Dutch society. To capture the complexity of polycentric governance and account for the subjective character of justice, a fine grained, place-based research approach is needed to analyze the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020; Marschütz et al., 2020).

1.1.2. Scientific relevance

A range of academic conceptions have been formulated on the fusion of climate change and justice (Fisher, 2015; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Most work is an attempt at applied (political) philosophy, discussing the substance and clarity of normative ideals of justice in relation to climate change (action), often from a global perspective. Recently, the three largest climate change-related justice scholarships, being climate, energy, and environmental (CEE) justice have been brought together under the umbrella of Just Transition. It provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing and promoting fairness and equity throughout the transition away from fossil fuels

(Heffron & McCauley, 2018b). Several Just Transition scholars (e.g. McCauley & Heffron, 2018a; Jenkins et al., 2020; Hughes & Hoffmann, 2020) have built research agendas toward understanding the realities of Just Transition practice, but real-world application is lacking. At the same time, a knowledge gap exists around the challenges of governing the energy transition on a regional level (RET), while policy makers are wondering how to shape and implement this (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). The research at hand will help to push both agendas forward by developing an understanding of Just Transition practice in RET, moving beyond the conceptual and normative studies.

1.2. Objectives and questions

This research aspires to develop a socially, politically, and spatially grounded perspective on the barriers and opportunities that exist in a real-world RET strategy for implementing Just Transition practice. From the theoretical framework follows that the trivalent justice theory should give the broad parameters to recognize and measure Just Transition practice. It is applied to a case study in the Dutch RES process which, theoretically, looks to be a comprehensive RET strategy in achieving the countries' NDC. This study consists of a two part-analysis: a textual assessment of RES policy documents and interviews with RES stakeholders in the Foodvalley region, being key agents in shaping the polycentric RET.

Consequently, the following question is adopted:

How does the RES process encourage or discourage Just Transition practice in the Dutch energy transition?

To structure the research, the questions that follow from the main research question are:

Table 1: Sub-questions (by Author)

1	*How can the concept of Just Transition practice be operationalized and applied in a RET strategy?*
2	*What are the relevant components of the RES process for implementing Just Transition practice?*
3	*How is a Just Transition framed by RES stakeholders?*
4	*How is the regional scale for energy transition governance perceived by RES stakeholders?*
5	*What are the perceived barriers of the RES process for implementing Just Transition practice?*
6	*What are the perceived opportunities of the RES process for implementing Just Transition practice?*

1.3. Introduction to the case

In 2018, the Dutch municipalities, provinces, waterboards, and national government agreed on developing a long-term systematic approach of regional energy strategies to reinforce the National Climate Agreement (IBP, 2018). 30 energy regions got the task to create their own RES for locating wind and solar energy generation, storage, and infrastructure. Plans to develop sustainable heat sources are made in a separate track, which is outside the scope of this research. Some energy regions follow provincial borders, while others created new intermunicipal structures. The RES process is currently well underway, as can be seen in Figure 1.
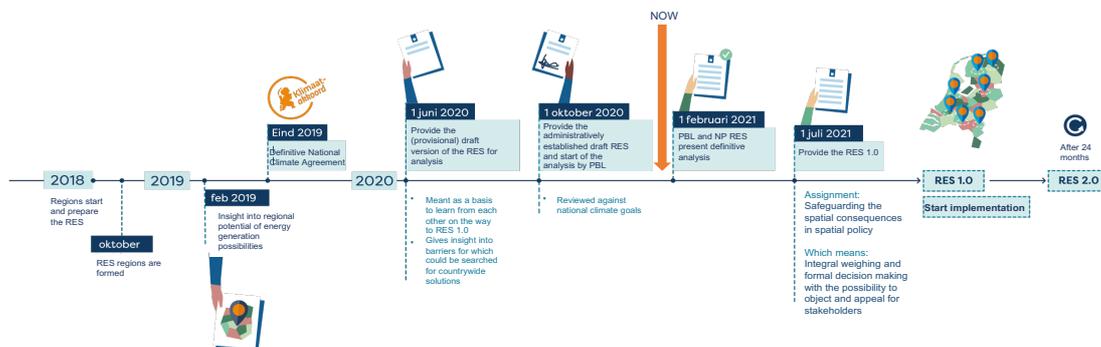

Figure 1: Timeline of the RES process (NP RES, 2020a; translated by Author)

National Program Regional Energy Strategy
The NP RES was established to support the regions in the creation of their RES. The program also clarifies the national framework (created together with regional representatives) for developing a RES and ensures coordination between the participating regions (NP RES, 2019). There is no specific assignment per region: the idea is that they create and execute their own policy formulation process. The regions are expected to do so in way that maximizes their technical, spatial, and social potential, of which they are their own assessors. In the case that the joint 'bid' of the regions does not add up to the national goals, a countrywide allocation system will decide on the leftover assignment (Regio Foodvalley, 2020).

The regional process
The National Climate Agreement (2019) states that "*within the RES, public authorities work alongside social partners, network managers (for gas, electricity and heating), the business community and, where possible, residents to develop regionally supported choices.*" (p.232). RES regions have their own administrative steering group, consisting (at least) of representatives of the (largest) governmental bodies within the region (provinces, municipalities, waterboards). This steering group coordinates the policy formulation process and establishes structures for cooperation and participation (Government of the Netherlands, 2019). The exact set up is for every steering group to decide, and the amount and types of stakeholders that is involved may differ per region (NP RES, 2019).

The embedded case study will focus on 'Regio Foodvalley', within the provinces of Gelderland and Utrecht (Figure 2). The region has a history of being a 'framework' for inter-municipal cooperation between the 8 municipalities (Foodvalley NL, 2020). In Foodvalley, the RES steering group initiated a stakeholders table as part of the administrative process that involves civic and market actors. The stakeholders table negotiates the content of the RES with independent process counselling (Regio Foodvalley, 2020).
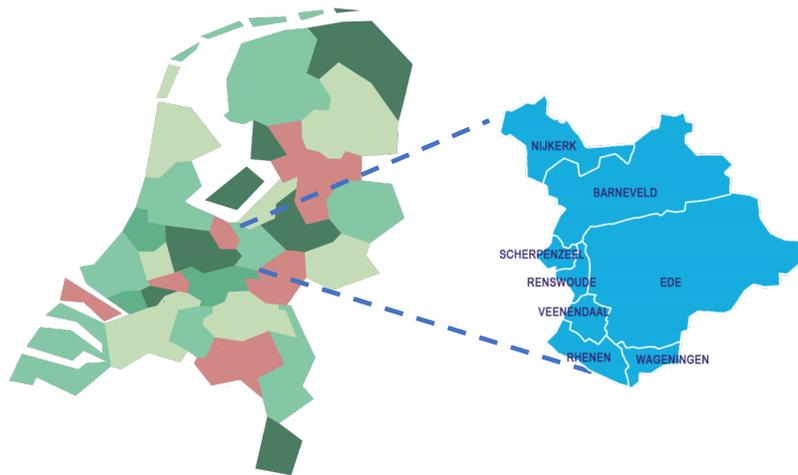
Figure 2: The RES regions and 'Regio Foodvalley' (NP RES, 2020b; De Zakenmarkt, 2020; edited by Author)

1.4. Reading Guide
This study comprises six chapters. The theoretical underpinning is explored in chapter two. Chapter three elaborates on the research strategy and the selection of the case study. The fourth chapter presents the results of the two-part analysis. Chapter five discusses the findings in the light of the theory. Chapter six reflects on the research outcome and process.

2. Theoretical Framework

The goal of this theoretical framework is to provide a synthesis of relevant literature with an eye toward composing a frame for Just Transition practice. I start with a discussion of justice scholarship. Thereafter, I turn to the trivalent Just Transition frame and how to operationalize it, followed by an examination of the polycentric RET approach. The theoretical framework is concluded with the conceptual model.

2.1. Justice

2.1.1. Theories of Social and Spatial Justice

There is no universally accepted theory of justice, as different articulations of justice are inherently biased (Sen, 2009). It is not the purpose of this research to add to this debate. Rather, it aims to explore the diverse conceptions that have informed the contemporary understanding of what justice means. I by no means have the illusion to be complete in this exploration, rather to point to important events that have nourished contemporary Just Transition scholarship.

While philosophies of justice go back as far as the ancient Greek times, I will start in 1971. Then, *A Theory of Justice* by the American philosopher John Rawls (1971) is published. In his magnum opus, Rawls (1971) addresses concerns of distributive justice and formulates a liberal theory of justice with three absolute principles. The work sparked an extensive debate on how to conceptualize (social) justice, including influential dissenting approaches (e.g. Nozick, 1974; Hayek; 1976). In 1983, Pirie looks back on the first years of this post-Rawlsian debate. He notices the critical reception of the objective justice principles by Rawls and others, and echoes an alternative way of interpreting justice: as being essentially subjective. Pirie (1983) argues that research should focus on a 'sense of (in)justice' by the person whom it directly affects in a certain social and spatial context. In addition, he points to reservations about the scope of justice being much broader than only 'the justness of distributions'. Titled *On Spatial Justice*, the essence of Pirie's essay (1983) is that geographers and spatial theorists should express more interest in the busyness of political philosophers to explore social justice. Considering justice as complex and multi-dimensional, he argues that the spatiality of justice is essential to its character, while many justice theories, like the one of Rawls (1971), are fundamentally aspatial (Pirie, 1983).

Fast forward to the beginning of the 21st century, Mustafa Dikeç (2001) starts his paper with the conclusion by Pirie (1983) and reflects on the notion of justice in relation to spatiality. He points to the ways in which the process of spatialization, being the social reproduction of space, is one of the major systematic producers of domination and oppression, so it is of injustice:

"The argument is built around the social production of space, with the idea that the very production of space, which is inherently a conflictual process, not only manifests various forms of injustice, but actually produces and reproduces them (thereby maintaining established social relations of domination and oppression)." (p. 1788).

Policy practices should therefore be conscious of spatiality, as approaches to, and principles of, justice are inherently space and time specific (Dikeç, 2001; Soja, 2010).

While Rawls (1971) has been critiqued in many ways, his ideal of distributional justice has been built on and extended into broader framings of justice that are more sensitive to its complexity (Bulkeley et al., 2014). Nancy Fraser (e.g. 2000; 2010) developed a so-called 'post-distributive' notion of justice: justice as 'recognition'. In short, it views socio-economic injustices, like distributional issues, as fundamentally linked to inadequate recognition of certain groups in society (Bulkeley et al., 2014). Amartya Sen (e.g. 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (e.g. 2003) developed the capabilities approach, which evaluates justice in terms of the freedoms and opportunities that a person has to be and to do whatever they have reasons to value (Ballet et al., 2013; Bulkeley et al., 2013).

2.1.2. Justice and climate change

The normative shift away from a solely distributive notion of justice became intertwined with the rise of different streams of climate change-related scholarship on justice (Bulkeley et al., 2014). First in line was the environmental justice discourse, emerging in the mid-80's from academic attention to political and activist movements against environmental bads and vulnerabilities (Chapman et al., 2019). The scholarship concerns a combined interest in social and economic justice, equity in resource allocation, and living within ecological limits (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). Most notably is the widely accepted framework by Schlosberg (2004). It describes distribution, procedure and recognition as the three facets of a rounded trivalent justice theory (Figure 3), building on the (post-) distributive notion of justice as well as the capabilities approach (Bulkeley et al., 2014).
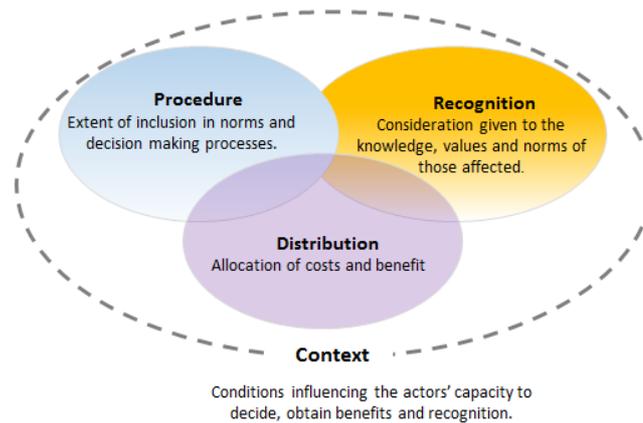
Figure 3: The dimensions of environmental justice (Garmendia et al., 2015)

Following on from environmental justice, the notion of 'climate justice' emerged in the early 2000s (Chapman et al., 2019). It concerns the current dilemmas of climate change and climate policy and their implications for justice and equity (Fisher, 2015), applying the framework and approaches of the broader environmental justice discourse (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The concept of energy justice emerged in the early 2010s with respect to energy policy, aiming to improve upon the former concepts through greater manageability, and a focus on energy issues (Jenkins, 2018).

2.1.3. Just Transition

The aforementioned scholarships treat their concepts as separate constructs, despite significant overlap (Chapman et al., 2019; Heffron & McCauley, 2018b). With the Just Transition frame, scholars attempt to encapsulate the perspectives of CEE justice into a single stream. The term Just Transition was originally proposed by global trade unions in the 1980s, as a mobilizing term for promoting green jobs as a necessary component of the transition away from fossil fuels (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b). The term transcended its original strategic purpose when it was coined in literature (Hughes & Hoffmann, 2020). A foundational paper was that of Newell and Mulvaney (2013), who argue the need to understand "*who defines what is just and for whom*" (p. 138) and how such questions are related to existing power structures in different contexts (Hughes & Hoffmann, 2020; Jenkins et al., 2020).

In recent years, different authors have developed Just Transition research agendas (Williams & Doyon, 2020). Hughes & Hoffmann (2020) focus on Just Urban Transitions, while Jenkins et al. (2020) propose to politicize the Just Transition concept by linking it to global politics. Two duos of scholars whose work is of particular interest for this study are Heffron and McCauley (2018a; 2018b) and Williams and Doyon (2019; 2020).

The first have created an inclusive Just Transition framework to promote justice in the transition to a post-carbon world (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b). Heffron and McCauley (2018a) ground their theory in time and place, stating the importance of considering the scales on which the transition is happening. They argue that, depending on time and place, different forms of CEE justice can become more relevant. The Just Transition framework encapsulates this process (Heffron & McCauley, 2018a). While this sounds promising, Heffron and McCauley (2018a; 2018b) did not go further than this conceptual claim (Jenkins et al., 2020).

The latter draw on Heffron and McCauley (2018a; 2018b) and other (CEE) justice literature, creating an analytical framework around the three most commonly used dimensions of justice: distribution, procedure, and recognition (Williams & Doyon, 2019). They address a series of key questions that would enable practitioners and researchers to design, implement, and evaluate processes that facilitate justice in transitions (Williams & Doyon, 2019). Williams and Doyon (2020) go one step further than Heffron and McCauley, applying their framework to a real-world transition project. Their method successfully demonstrates how the project made strides towards justice and the gaps it has to fill (Williams & Doyon, 2020).

2.1.4. Operationalization

This research follows the abovementioned scholarship in integrating CEE justice into one inclusive frame. As argued and demonstrated by Williams and Doyon (2019) and others (e.g. O'Beirne et al., 2020), the three-dimensional theory of justice (e.g. Schlosberg, 2004), offers a simple, yet comprehensive approach to incorporate the insights of the wide variety of justice scholarships (Walker, 2012). Therefore, this study adopts the three dimensions within its Just Transition frame (Table 2).

Table 2: The justice dimensions as described for the purposes of this study (elaborated by Author)

Dimensions	Description
Justice as recognition	Justice is conceived in terms of who and what is and is not valued, respected, acknowledged, and included (Jenkins et al., 2016; Walker, 2012).
Procedural justice	Justice is conceived in terms of the way processes, decisions, and impacts are made, who is involved and has influence, and access to the (formal) governance system (O'Beirne et al., 2020; Walker, 2012).
Distributive justice	Justice is conceived in terms of the distribution or sharing of good (resources, control) and bads (harms and risks) (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Walker, 2012).

To operationalize the frame and apply it to a real-world RET case, this research will draw heavily on the insights of both Heffron and McCauley (2018a; 2018b) and Williams and Doyon (2019; 2020). A qualitative *just transition tree* is created that divides the three dimensions into different *justice forms* (Figure 4). The *justice forms* should inform a comprehensive analysis of the conceptions and applications of justice that exist in the politics and practices of RET (Table 3).

Note that the different *justice forms* span boundaries and may overlap, thus being considered in relation to each other (Bulkeley et al., 2014; Williams & Doyon, 2020). This interdependency is not visible in Figure 4. Moreover, when applying the *just transition tree*, it is crucial to be aware of its space and time component, as substantiated in different bodies of literature (Burnham et al., 2013; Heffron & McCauley, 2018a; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The *just transition tree* has a human focus, that is, not directly including justice for non-human species and ecosystems (Schlosberg, 2013).
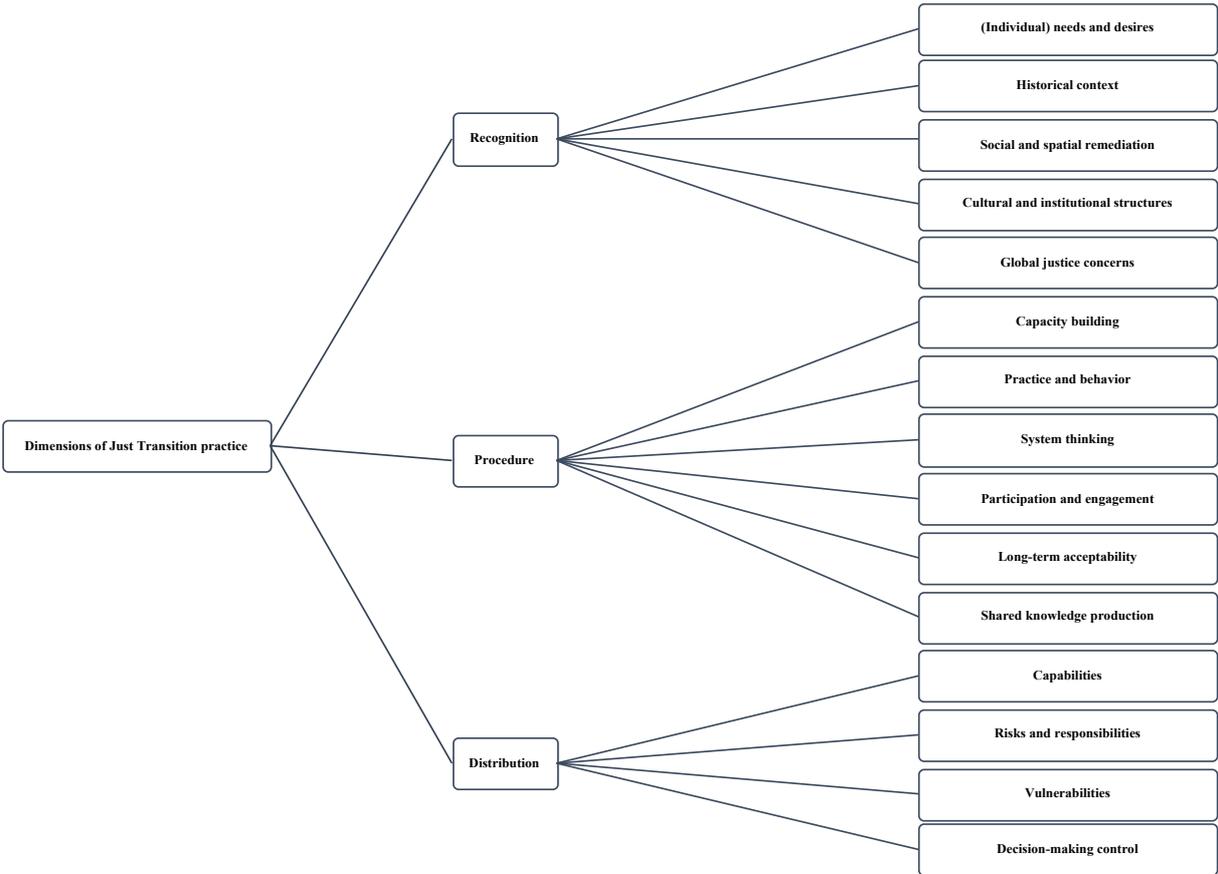

Figure 4: Just transition tree as applied in this study (elaborated by Author)

Table 3: Justice forms as described (normative) for the purposes of this study (elaborated by Author)

	Justice form	Description
Recognition	(Individual) needs and desires	The acknowledgement that there are a diversity of needs, values, and interests; it goes beyond respect to a more fundamental question of how we identify and understand pluralist and complex needs (Williams & Doyon, 2019).
	Historical context	The historical exclusion of peoples and worldviews, as well as the embedded patterns, actions, and structures, and how changes within these domains are influenced by exogenous trends (Grin et al. 2010, cited by Williams & Doyon 2019, p. 145).
	Social and spatial remediation	What processes exist for remediation to reveal and reduce injustices, and to rectify situations that harmed particular communities in the past (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Jenkins et al., 2016).
	Cultural and institutional structures	Cultural and institutional processes and legacies that explicitly or implicitly give individuals, communities, or social groups unequal recognition (Walker, 2012).
	Global justice concerns	Exclusion, diversity, inequality, autonomy and so on (Bulkeley et al., 2014; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014).
Procedure	Capacity building	Preparing for major transition processes and allowing communities to respond positively (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b).
	Practice and behavior	Align with the practice & behavior of participants and communities (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Williams & Doyon, 2020).
	System thinking	Considering the comprehensive and multi-level nature of energy systems (Jenkins et al., 2016; Heffron & McCauley, 2018b).
	Participation and engagement	Effectively engaging communities to participate in the transition process (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Williams & Doyon, 2020).
	Long-term acceptability	Ensuring the long-term acceptability of transition plans within communities (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b).
	Shared knowledge production	Developing shared knowledge and understanding of the technical aspects of climate change and (mitigating) responses to it (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Williams & Doyon, 2020).
Distribution	Capabilities	A person's freedom to be and to do, which constitutes a person's (well-) being (Ballet et al., 2013; Schlosberg et al., 2017).
	Risks and responsibilities	The responsibilities for consequences of climate change vs. the risks that come with it (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014).
	Vulnerabilities	In terms of access and affordability, e.g. leading to financial consequences like energy poverty (Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Schlosberg et al., 2017).
	Decision-making control	Having the power of, or a vote in, making binding decisions on the transition process (Bulkeley et al., 2014; Williams & Doyon, 2020).

2.2. Regional Energy Transition

Polycentric process

Polycentricity, as defined by Elinor Ostrom (2010), is characterized by multiple governing authorities existing beyond the nation state (Jordan et al., 2015). The landscape of energy transition governance is increasingly polycentric, shaped by actors from different backgrounds, such as NGOs, private actors, and local governments, who initiate actions, networks, and mechanisms at multiple scales from diverse multi-level collaborations (Jordan et al., 2015; Hölscher, 2019). While existing national governance regimes are often dominated by short-term policy cycles, power relations, and gradual decision-making (Loorbach, 2014), scholars stress that effective energy transition governance should encourage synergies, learning, innovation and multi-level cooperation through polycentricity (Hölscher, 2019). Shawoo and McDermott (2020) conclude that polycentric governance also widens the space for diverse framings of justice to be voiced and enter the policymaking sphere. This way, it can lead to different social constructions of justice and therefore the embracement and prioritization of certain forms of Just Transition practice (Shawoo & McDermott, 2020).

RET in theory and practice

RET is a regional approach towards polycentric governance in light of achieving zero-carbon energy systems (van Engelenburg & Maas, 2018; Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). It is a fairly recent concept that thus far has received little scholarly attention (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). In 2018, van Engelenburg and Maas of the Dutch organization for applied scientific research (TNO) identified practical RET challenges: stakeholder involvement, organizing a RET, and transforming the energy system. They drew the conclusion that theoretical knowledge on the topic had not yet developed sufficiently to address these challenges and serve the needs of practitioners. Going forward, scientific research on RET should be intensified to test integrated tools and decision-making approaches (Van Engelenburg & Maas, 2018). Their essay also points to the similarities between contemporary urban planning approaches and RET, as both are associated with multiple stakeholder interests, institutional complexity, and scientific uncertainty (Van Engelenburg & Maas, 2018).

(Spatial) justice through RET

Local renewable energy projects and infrastructure have implications beyond single municipal jurisdictions, requiring inter-municipal decision-making. Hoppe & Miedema (2020) state the importance of the regional scale for justice concerns in the transition process. With RET governance, zero-sum games can be avoided in which one local administration will reap the benefits while others suffer from unfair costs (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). This touches upon the issue of large-sized cities and municipalities having larger capacities, investment room and interests than their smaller counterparts. Further, it concerns the distinctive spatial characteristics that can exist on local scales. Already in 2013, Bridge et al. dove deeper into questions of scale in relation to organizing the deployment of renewable energy technologies. They echo the standpoint that energy transition governance as a national issue seems to be ineffective vis-à-vis its highly distributed, decentralized activities. This creates 'capability gaps': having too much responsibility at the national scale, and too little capacity to act within affected communities and sectors. Questions of scale illuminate questions about who is affected, who has the capacity to partake, and where the boundaries of responsibility lie (Bridge et al., 2013).

2.3. Conceptual model
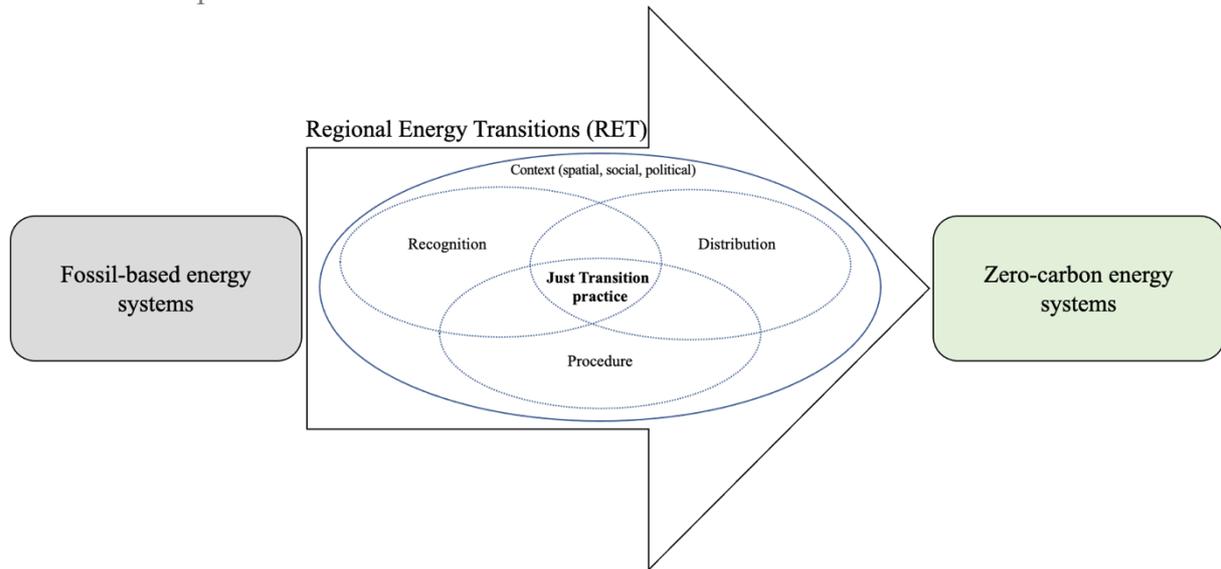
Figure 5: Conceptual Model (by Author)

Figure 5 shows how the main concepts within this study interrelate. The goal of the energy transition is a structural move from fossil-based to zero-carbon energy systems. RET is a polycentric strategy to govern this process on regional scales. This research focuses on the way such a RET strategy can discourage or encourage (dimensions) of Just Transition practice. This is highly dependent on the context in which the process proceeds. The model shows how the different dimensions of justice overlap and interrelate. Conceptually speaking, recognition is most concerned with pre-existing phenomena, procedure with considerations within the process, and distribution with process outcomes. Therefore, this is the order in which the dimensions are treated in this study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research strategy

3.1.1. Literature review

In order to find relevant theories and concepts, and to be able to place this research in its academic context, a literature review was conducted (Clifford et al., 2016). With the literature review, the theoretical framework has been defined. Relevant academic literature, as published in leading peer-reviewed journals, was found by making use of the renowned and comprehensive database of SCOPUS and the search engine SmartCat of the University of Groningen.

3.1.2. Case study

Clifford et al. (2016) state that a case study offers the possibility to gain profound and integral knowledge on a specific process in practice. This research aspires to develop an empirical understanding of the barriers and opportunities that RET provides for implementing Just Transition practice. To match this aim, a case study has been conducted. As this study is concerned with subjective framings, narratives, and perceptions of justice, a qualitative frame is applied (Punch, 2014).

Case selection

First and foremost, the selection of the case is based on its relevance to the research aim. The RES process is situated on the regional scale and has a clear polycentric character. Furthermore, it is deployed as both a policy instrument and a collaborative process. This makes it an interesting case to evaluate and understand the experiences of collaborating actors in shaping the RES. As stated in the introduction, the energy regions have a lot of freedom in creating and executing the process. To be able to develop an in-depth understanding of the research questions, one energy region has been selected as embedded case study: the Foodvalley Region. This way, the subjectivity and spatiality of real-world (justice) experiences (e.g. O'Beirne et al., 2020), and the complexity of a RET (e.g. Van Engelenburg & Maas, 2018) is accounted for.

The Foodvalley Region profiles itself as being a leading international agri-food area, with Wageningen University & Research (WUR) as its expertise heart, several food-related R&D centers, and a strong agricultural sector (Regio Foodvalley, 2021). This is an interesting agenda in relation to the energy transition, as in recent years, several environmental policy-related protests by farmer organizations have reached national headlines and influenced political decision-making (Hotse Smit, 2020). However, as opposed to other RES drafts (LTO Noord, 2020; Schel, 2020), the 'farmer friendly' Foodvalley RES process seems to receive fairly positive reactions in media outlets, by agricultural actors (Hallema, 2020) as well as other stakeholders (RES Foodvalley, 2020). This suggests that Foodvalley might be a positive case for Just Transition practice in RET.

3.1.3. Methods

Following from the theoretical framework, the Just Transition frame can be approached from a more normative, theoretical point of view, but also from a subjective, place-based standpoint. To reflect this, two methodological approaches are included in this study:

1. A content analysis of the RES framework *(Normative, theoretical)*
2. Semi-structured interviews with participating Foodvalley stakeholders *(Subjective, place-based)*

The choice for a multi-method approach does not only fit the research aim, but it also strengthens the findings. Using multiple methods and sources is known as *triangulation*: gaining in-depth knowledge from different (unique) perspectives (Clifford et al., 2016; Punch, 2014). An overview of the used methods in relation to the research questions is presented in Figure 6.
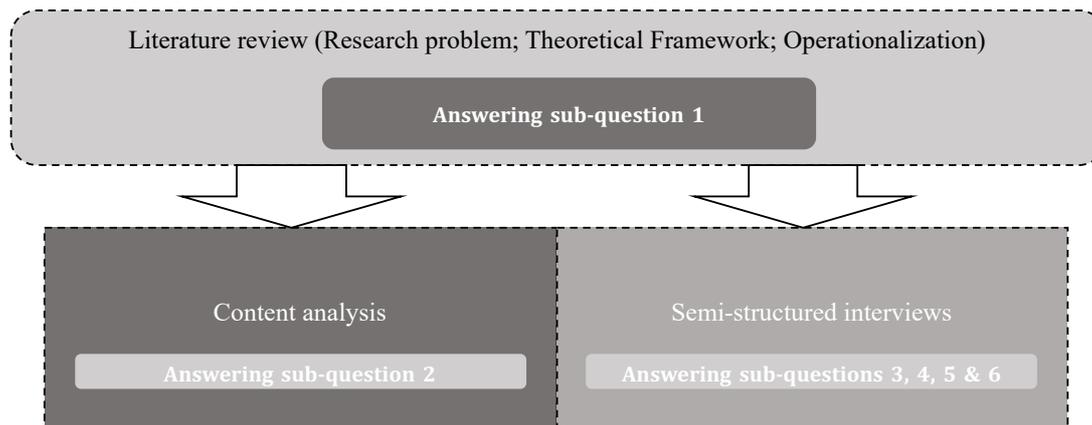
Figure 6: Overview of the research strategy in relation to the sub-questions (by Author)

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1. Content analysis

With this approach, secondary data is used to broadly examine the design and structure of the RES process as a RET policy instrument, and its attention to dimensions of justice. It aims to find evidence on how the (NP) RES addresses *justice forms* in its official policy (planning, design, evaluation) documents. The documents are interpreted by the researcher to give context and meaning to the case (Bowen, 2009). An online search was conducted to find the policy documents as secondary data. Table 4 provides an overview.

Table 4: Selected documents (by Author)

Title	Published by	Date of publication
Klimaatakkoord: D7 RES	Rijksoverheid	28-06-2019
Handreiking 1.1	NP RES	10-2019
Jaarplan 2020	NP RES	Unknown

3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

This approach is used to find the ways in which stakeholders perceive, as well as shape, the role of justice in the context of the RES as a polycentric process. Primary data has been collected with semi-structured interviews. Interviews can be distinguished into three types: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Semi-structured interviews provide the possibility to prepare questions beforehand in order to support a targeted data collection based on the Just Transition frame, but also leave room for flexibility if respondents add something new or go in-depth on their perspectives (Clifford et al., 2016). As both are crucial to the research strategy, semi-structured interviews are the right fit. To collect data on the widest possible range of perspectives and interests from participating stakeholders within the limited scope of this study, a multi-actor perspective was used to categorize them (Williams & Doyon, 2020). This way, a diversity of respondents could be ensured that fits the composition of the stakeholders table. The composition of the stakeholders table at the time of this research is shown in Table 5. As Foodvalley is starting to work towards the final version of the RES (RES 1.0), two citizen representatives join the stakeholders table from December 2020 onwards, thus filling the 'empty chairs' for the community.

Table 5: Stakeholders table from a multi-actor perspective (RES Foodvalley 2019; classified by Author)

Community (0)	Market (2)	Public (11)	Civic (8)
- 'Empty chairs' at the time of this study, reserved for citizens	- Utility company - Grid operator	- 8 Municipalities - 1 Waterboard - 2 Provinces	- Agricultural sector - Housing corporations - Energy cooperatives - Recreational sector - Entrepreneurs - Youth - Energy companies - Nature and environment

The recruitment of stakeholders was done via email. The interviews were conducted in October and November 2020 and lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. The interviews took place in Dutch via different video calling services like Microsoft Teams and FaceTime. All interviews have been be recorded and stored on a secured computer. Transcripts have been made using 'oTranscribe'. Table 6 provides an overview of all respondents (n=12). The term 'representative' has been used to provide anonymity (O'Beirne et al., 2020). Respondent 5 and Respondent 11 are not part of the stakeholders table. They play a substantive role in the process for their respective organizations. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1. The guide addresses the experiences of the respondents with different characteristics of the policy process, like its regional scale and polycentricity. It also touches on the dimensions of Just Transition practice in relation to respondents' experiences.

Table 6: Overview of respondents (by Author)

Name in thesis	Actor (sector)	Detail	Occupation	Date
Respondent 1 (R-1)	Municipality (public)	Rhenen	Alderman	09-11-2020
Respondent 2 (R-2)	Energy companies (civic)	Energie Nederland	Program Manager	13-11-2020
Respondent 3 (R-3)	Representative			17-11-2020
Respondent 4 (R-4)	Municipality (public)	Representative		18-11-2020
Respondent 5 (R-5)	Nature and environment (civic)	Natuur en Milieu Gelderland	Employee	18-11-2020
Respondent 6 (R-6)	Agricultural sector (civic)	LTO Noord	Board member	19-11-2020
Respondent 7 (R-7)	Municipality (public)	Nijkerk	Alderman	20-11-2020
Respondent 8 (R-8)	Municipality (public)	Wageningen	Alderman	23-11-2020
Respondent 9 (R-9)	Energy cooperatives (civic)	Vallei Energie	Chairman	25-11-2020
Respondent 10 (R-10)	Youth (civic)	Representative		26-11-2020
Respondent 11 (R-11)	Representative			27-11-2020
Respondent 12 (R-12)	Housing corporations (civic)	Woningstichting Wageningen	Director	01-12-2020

3.3. Data analysis

The selected documents and interview transcripts have been coded and categorized based on the theory-driven, deductive *just transition tree* (Figure 4). The coding process serves as the bridge between the collected data and the relevant theory. The coding was done manually by using the coding software 'ATLAS.ti'.

3.4. Ethical considerations

An important ethical consideration was to inform respondents in advance of the exact intentions and objectives of this research, as well as the ways in which primary data would be used. Therefore, interviewees were sent a consent form via email and they were formally asked whether they agreed with its content. The document is attached in Appendix 2 and was drawn up in compliance with the ethical policy of the University of Groningen, which can be found via https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/policy-and-strategy/research-ethics/.

3.4.1. Positionality

Positionality refers to the position that the researcher adopts within a study. This influences how research is conducted, its outcomes, and results. It is typically identified by locating the researcher about three areas (Holmes, 2020).

Research subject

I was not familiar with the scholarships on climate change-related justice as well as RET governance before conducting this study. Therefore, I did not have prior scientific knowledge about the topic of this study. My ideas on how to operationalize the framework as well as analyze the data were formed in consequence of the peer-reviewed literature review. However, I believe that everyone has its own (implicit or explicit) conception of justice and is therefore inherently biased (e.g. Sen, 2009). It may be presumptuous for researchers to declare the validity

of their own conception of justice in their study (Williams & Doyon, 2020). Being aware of this, the Just Transition frame is closely followed in every step of the data analysis. Moreover, I both assess the case study through a normative content analysis and a display of the perceptions of real-world participants.

To the case study itself, I am an outsider. Before conducting this study, I was not familiar with the RES process behind a basic knowledge of its existence. The Foodvalley region is a geographical area that I am not familiar with, as I do not live in or visit this area (or have done in the past).

Research participants
I was not familiar with any of the respondents before conducting this study. Moreover, I was not familiar with any of their experiences or ideas regarding the topic of this study before interviewing them. All respondents have participated in this study in a voluntary basis, and I have not felt any pressure to produce any type of results or conclusions on the basis of their contributions.

Research process
This research has been a learning process, as it was conducted as a Bachelor Project. At the time of conducting this study, I did an internship at a Dutch advisory company, where I have been part of different projects in the spatial environment. This helped me to get in touch with respondents, as it was possible to get contact information via colleagues or relations. It also increased my understanding during interviews, in the way that I was already familiar with many of the (Dutch) contextual substance that interviewees mentioned in their answers. This study has been conducted irrespective of my work as an intern and colleagues have not been involved in conducting this study. In addition, myself or the company of my internship do not have any interests in certain results or conclusions within this research.

4. Results

4.1. National RES framework

This section presents the results of the content analysis. Table 7 provides insights into any overlap or gaps between the RES framework and the normative Just Transition frame of this study. The narratives are a generalization of the content of the selected documents, interpreted in (positive) relation to the *justice forms*.

Table 7: Embracement of Just Transition practice in the RES framework (elaborated by Author)

Strong embracement (+): Direct expression within documentation Moderate embracement (+/-): Indirect or partial expression within documentation Weak embracement (-): No expression within documentation			
	Justice forms	*Narrative*	*Embracement*
Recognition	(Individual) needs & desires	[No codes]	-
	Historical context	Challenges and potential are unique in regions. There should be alignment with area-specific characteristics (social, cultural, spatial, political).	+/-
	Social and spatial remediation	Spatial integration of the RES should create new (local) spatial qualities.	+/-
	Cultural & institutional structures	All elected representatives can make their own considerations on how to be involved in different parts of the RES process.	+/-
	Global justice concerns	[No codes]	-
Procedure	Capacity building	The RES is linked with other issues, transitions, and functions, and should create broad support. Both to accelerate implementation and ensure careful spatial integration.	+
	Practice & behavior	The national government is only supportive towards the policy processes that are shaped within the region by local authorities and stakeholders.	+
	System thinking	A RES is part of the total energy system and should contribute to energy efficiency and fit supply and demand in all sectors.	+
	Participation & engagement	Direct involvement of citizens, market and civic parties is desirable.	+/-
	Long-term acceptability	The RES process should create broad support for long-term plans and will be reassessed every two years.	+/-
	Shared Knowledge production	Meant as being a cooperative learning process containing periodic evaluations. Knowledge of local characteristics and technical substance is incorporated to enlarge the RES quality.	+
Distribution	Capabilities and well-being	Energy transition will have a large influence on the life of citizens, so they should feel represented in decisions.	+/-
	Risks & Responsibilities	[No codes]	-
	Vulnerabilities	Financial engagement for locals through local ownership.	+/-
	Decision-making control	Elected representatives within RES region have control; there is a commitment to get support from non-public actors.	+/-

4.2. Foodvalley Region

This section presents the results of the embedded case study in four parts. In 4.2.1., the framings of a just energy transition are shown. Sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3., and 4.2.4. discuss the three dimensions of Just Transition practice. The respondents mentioned barriers and opportunities within the RES process which they perceive as being related to justice. Additionally, stakeholders explained how they perceive the RES process. In doing so, they potentially also mentioned *justice forms*. This can be a barrier or opportunity in itself, as they are stakeholders that 'shape' the RES. Both types of insights are integrated in main topics per dimension.

4.2.1. Framings and narratives of a just energy transition

To answer the question: "*What comes to your mind when imagining a just energy transition, and what would be important to reach it?*", respondents mentioned *justice forms* that exist in, or are relatable to the *just transition tree*. All respondents focused on only two of the three *justice dimensions*. Distributional justice was dominant and mentioned by every respondent. Besides, many respondents approached the question in accordance with the interests they said to promote at the stakeholders table: aldermen mentioning the impact on local communities, a farmer mentioning the injustice of energy plants on agricultural land (R-6), and a representative of housing corporations mentioning the interests of tenants (R-12). To show the differences and similarities, the perspectives are merged into four distinct frames (Schlosberg et al., 2017; Shawoo and McDermott, 2020). Table 8 presents the frames and shows the number of respondents that mentioned it in their direct answer (one can mention multiple).

Table 8: Frames and narratives of just energy transition (elaborated and classified by Author)

Frame	Narrative example	Times mentioned
Fair distribution of burdens and benefits	"(...) Those who feel the burdens of the energy transition, for example by living close to a windmill, to name something, should also share in the benefits of the renewable energy generation (...)" (R-1)	6
Recognizing and including (all) interests equally	"Justice, as far as I am concerned, is treating everyone equal and giving everyone the same perspective (...)" (R-7)	6
Fair conditions for investment and ownership within the transition	"Then I do think of money first. In living labs, you see people asking what is will cost and if it is fair that they need to contribute financially themselves. (...)" (R-2)	5
A spatial integration that considers other pressing issues	"Energy production should not compete with other pressing issues (...)" (R-6)	3

4.2.2. Justice as recognition

Urgency

The RES process has a short term on which spatial implementation needs to start: *"There are hard deadlines that were agreed nationally. That gives an enormous urgency, to the climate problem in general but also to reach goals on a short term. It just has to be delivered at a certain moment with an administrative stamp."* (R-11). The main reason for this is that mitigating action against climate change has started too late, as illustrated by R-2: *"(...) we have wasted an incredible lot of time between the accords of Kyoto and Paris. (...) This means that I am incredibly happy that the RES drafts are now there, and now we just have to get on with it, and search for a sensible way to do so (...)."* This can discourage policy makers to give space for dissenting voices in the formulation process, and therefore, acknowledge individual needs and desires, as this could hinder their ability to act. This leads to the (possible) exclusion of peoples and worldviews. In the Foodvalley region, this manifests itself in the fact that, although having different interests, the stakeholders are like-minded people that have a similar sense of urgency. R-9 illustrates this: *"I think that the stakeholders table is in the realization state like: we just have to. And that this [involving local communities] is not considered a lot. They think like, whether we do it one way or the other, we just have to reach the TWh."*

Representation
Every interest can be present at the broad stakeholders table (e.g. R-4; R-8; R-9). This way, the process recognizes pluralism and diversity in the region. R-8 states: *"It is a process with not only the public administrators at the table, but actually a very broad group of stakeholders. This gives a lot of insights into the problems that are faced. Where do the diverse interests clash? Nature, agriculture, housing, entrepreneurs. This gives a pretty complete picture at the table."* In addition, the stakeholders table exists predominantly of local and regional administrators that are familiar with the historical and cultural contexts in the region, which helps to consider this: *"(...) that is very important, because that is how such a region works and how the people in the region work. If you let a person from Rotterdam decide it for a person from Groningen, it goes wrong. That is not a reflection of how those people are."* (R-10). The strategy of representation also holds threats to Just Transition practice. First of all, public representation is done by the different aldermen, who have to generalize the various interests and views of citizens as input for the regional process. While municipalities feel responsible for this and put effort into 'collecting' local needs and desires (R-1; R-4; R-7), the gap between the regional and municipal scale makes it difficult to recognize this in the negotiations. Moreover, the aldermen, being elected on behalf of a political party, represent particular standpoints on topics like energy transition governance themselves (R-10). Civic stakeholders represent a constituency as well, although not always as clearly as the public administrators: they do not have the same institutional structures of representation (R-1; R-2; R-8). Respondents expressed their doubts whether this leads to misrecognition of needs and desires at the regional scale level, as having a farmer or entrepreneur (organization) at the stakeholders table is by no means representative for the whole population of farmers and entrepreneurs (R-1; R-6; R-12).

Spatial complexity
Several respondents wish for coherence between energy transition governance and (spatial) issues like heat transition, energy saving and housing construction (R-3; R-9; R-10; R-12). Subsequently they also mentioned the complexity of this: *"(...) Take another big issue like housing shortage. We need space. A search for connections between the different issues would be just, but you can do that for hundreds of issues. The farmers can think of something, the environmental organizations can think of something. You cannot fit all pieces of the puzzle together, because then it would be so complex that it gets stuck. But then the question comes up whether it is still just."* (R-12). In consequence, there is little room to talk about social and spatial remediation. It also constrains other dimensions of justice, for example through limited system thinking and capacity building, and distributional limitations. Still, all respondents argue that the regional scale is the right place to formulate energy transition policy. It is *"Large enough to make solid choices. In the Foodvalley region, the municipality of Wageningen is for example fairly small, with little rural area. Veenendaal has even less. They could never fulfill their own energy demand, if you talk about renewables. As a region, you can explore the least problematic locations to develop. (...) Gelderland as a province would be too big and diverse to speak with one voice."* (R-5). Moreover, *"You have to start somewhere. Because we are moving to decentral energy generation, I do not think you can enforce it countrywide. Then you would have the chance that the Achterhoek area would generate the energy for the Randstad, to exaggerate a bit. Because there is more space to do it."* (R-10).

Regional coherence
The municipalities and civic actors at the stakeholders table are used to cooperate within the Foodvalley Region for years on other policy domains. To summarize, respondents say that this enhances good cooperation, a community-like feeling, and recognition of the cultural and institutional contexts of the region. R-2 symbolizes this as follows: *"The 8 municipalities have had some type of alliance for a long time which can work well, but there are also RES regions that are swept together like: this is the leftover. If they do not have a lot in common, this might make it more difficult to find justice. (...) the fact that these municipalities are used to cooperate with each other means that they have more shared interests, and if such a collaboration exists for a longer period of time, this apparently gives sufficient common ground to decide things together. So, there is a culture, or history, of handling things together (...)."*

4.2.3. Procedural Justice

Substantive knowledge
Developing substantive knowledge on energy transition governance is a central issue in the RES process, as the stakeholders table does not include a lot of technical know-how (R-4; R-8; R-10). While the stakeholder composition might serve Just Transition practice through a focus on representation and legitimacy, it is a barrier to more technical procedural forms like capacity building and system thinking. To overcome this, stakeholders appreciated the independent process assistance, the room for shared knowledge production at the start of the process, and the ateliers in which different (technical) topics can be discussed in detail by their representatives and employees (R-4; R-7; R-8; R-12). A much-discussed topic was the role of civic and market actors in this regard.

Something that all respondents agree on, is that the non-public stakeholders bring in a lot of valuable knowledge about the costs and possibilities of renewable energy technologies, which serves Just Transition practice. First, this contributes to shared knowledge production among the different stakeholders. Second, it builds the region's capacity to prepare for transition processes through a better understanding of the implications it will have. Third, it creates opportunities to ensure long-term acceptability for the energy transition, as better decisions can be made, and simultaneously, more interests are involved in the RES process: *"The multi-stakeholder approach makes it more complex, but also enables an integration of all perspectives, which is very valuable. Commercial parties have a seat at the table as well. (...) They bring in a lot of meaningful knowledge."* (R-4). Nonetheless, many non-public respondents argue that their role in the process should be larger, to ensure more balance in multi-actor perspectives and the presence of substantive knowledge (R-2; R-3; R-6; R-10).

Stakeholder negotiations
Different respondents mentioned that energy transition governance is at the end of the day a 'people business': the practice and behavior of those involved have a big influence on the way the RES process plays out (R-2; R-4; R-11; R-12). An important aspect are the horizontal negotiations, in which *"You are just regional partners that are working together. There is no formal structure in which you have to operate. You have to cooperate on the basis of trust, which also means making sure that everyone is truly involved."* (R-6), and *"the discussions are really on the basis of equality."* (R-1). Among others, R-7 emphasizes the important role of the independent process counsellor, *"Who has the task to make sure all interests are known and that everyone is treated equally, without a certain interest being dominant or inferior, and who also remains focused on the rules of the game."* At the start of the process, the stakeholders agreed on 'ground rules' inspired by the 'mutual gains approach' (Susskind & Field, 1996), with the search for 'consensus' as the central aim. To find supported solutions, stakeholders agreed to go beyond static 'standpoints' towards negotiating from different 'interests'. Several respondents mentioned their positive experiences with this approach. R-12 stated: *"If you look at the process, there are a lot of different interests at the table. Because you work towards consensus, you try to work on justice as well."* However, R-12 also mentioned the thin line between a smooth stakeholder collaboration that works towards procedural justice, and constraining the openness of the discussion: *"You know, there is always some kind of steering going on. What you don't discuss, you don't discuss, to say it like that."* In addition, different respondents mentioned the difficulty of creating a shared understanding of justice issues. R-11 described this as follows: *"Everyone has their own perception and there is a lot of 'talking past one another' going on. (...) Participation for example is a very broad term, just like sustainability. Everyone frames it differently, and then you notice that you talk about something else than you was thinking of yourself."*

Direct citizen involvement
A procedural matter of concern for many respondents is the direct engagement and participation of local residents. Stakeholders feel like the current plans remain abstract, which makes it difficult to discuss them locally, as citizens might find it too difficult or misunderstand the intentions (R-10; R-12). To overcome this, stakeholders find it important to be transparent about the negotiation process. Therefore, all documentation is available online (R-1; R-4). Every respondent does argue that this is not sufficient. Different aldermen referred to municipal initiatives to discuss the RES with inhabitants, and they actually think it works well to have this responsibility locally, as they are the ones that can bridge the local and regional scale (R-1; R-4; R-7; R-8). In addition, the period between the draft version and RES 1.0 will be used to conduct a regional survey and to set up a regional citizen forum. Nevertheless, especially non-public respondents expressed their doubts about sufficient involvement of local residents. They think that it might happen too late in the process, leading to situations in which *"Plans are made to develop windmills somewhere, and people say: I have not been involved at all. Those guys have made some plans in a meeting without consulting us, but we are against it. I say it black and white, but I do think this risk will be there."* (R-2). Another threat that is feared, is the divergence of the regional and local processes: *"I see two movements at the same time. On the one hand you have the regional ateliers, in which locations are explored. Meanwhile, municipalities themselves are also looking, what are our suitable locations? This has to come together eventually, which is not the case right now I think."* (R-9).

National framework
R-9 argued that, as Foodvalley is surrounded by nature areas, it does not need much alignment with other energy regions. If this geographical situation is different (as in other parts of the country), R-2 and R-9 think it is valuable to have the opportunity to 'deal' with the spatial integration of energy plants between regions, which is not the case right now. Otherwise, the national framework will be a barrier to finding adequate, as well as just, spatial solutions that ensure long-term acceptability, system thinking, and transition capacity. Apart from that, the respondents have experienced the national framework primarily in the planning and goals of the RES. The freedom to have a regionally tailored process was emphasized.

4.2.4. Distributive Justice

Political decision-making

Energy regions do not have a formal decision-making mandate. In the RES process, this means that the aldermen are constantly switching between the stakeholders table, on which they negotiate the RES, and their municipal council. The RES process is dependent on the institutional structures on local scales, while the stakeholders table also committed to approval of all stakeholders before the final version will be send to the councils (R-8). This way, there is a profound distribution of decision-making control. Ultimately, the final decision about the RES 1.0 will be made by the councils and provincial executives. As the elected political representatives, they are the legitimate bodies to do so, and the respondents acknowledge this. However, R-12 points to the awkward situation this could provide: *"You see at five to twelve that the political arena makes an impact with motions and amendments. As a stakeholder, that is complicated, as we are not part of that process. There comes politics all of a sudden, although that is of course also just, but then democracy, a different form."*

Financial consequences

Despite the attention to distributional justice, how to cope with it remains difficult. Respondents fear that distributional issues with local ownership and financial vulnerabilities will arise, as discussions about this have been 'delayed' up until now (R-2; R-5; R-9). The fact that many stakeholders engage with the distribution of benefits and burdens might be a positive sign. Moreover, local ownership is an explicit target of the RES: *"We have made the agreement that we should ensure a minimum of 50% local ownership (…) it is important that you involve the surroundings and let them profit from the revenues, and not only confront them with burdens."* (R-8). In the coming months, this will be further discussed (R-11). Some respondents have doubts whether this local ownership will always lead to just solutions, as this might make it more difficult for investors to turn their financial risk into revenues (R-3), and to create affordable energy supply for consumers (R-12).

5. Discussion

5.1. Dilemmas

While the RES process makes strides towards justice, there are gaps to fill. Overall, the results demonstrate key dilemmas of Just Transition practice in RET that can be considered beyond the case study. The dilemmas are a limited representation of complex realities, which are less black and white.

Dilemma 1: Urgency to act vs. support and participation
The Foodvalley stakeholders are very aware that mitigating climate change is a task of the highest priority. On the one hand, this sentiment and attitude is a foundation for Just Transition practice. A central matter of concern for CEE and Just Transition literature is that doing too little or doing nothing cannot be just (e.g. Jenkins et al., 2020; Sanz-Hernandez et al., 2020). On the other hand, this study shows that social and political urgency can be a barrier for a just process. In line with Williams and Doyon (2020), stakeholders explain that providing enough space for dissenting views and striving for community engagement and support are discouraged by the high urgency to act. In addition, the still rather abstract regional scale makes it easy to (purposely) overlook this.

Dilemma 2: Regional collaboration vs. local decision-making
In many ways, the region is regarded as a successful policy scale within Foodvalley. One could say that the RES process creates an 'informal institution' with a variety of actors. They can cooperate on an equal basis to find supported solutions. This mirrors the potential of effective RET governance (Hölscher, 2019; Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). However, stakeholders also mentioned the practical difficulties with this structure. One is the distance and complicated relationship between the local decision-making mandate and the regional negotiation process. This limits the degree of influence that Just Transition practice by stakeholders and practitioners can have on the outcomes of the process, with which many of the distributive *justice forms* are concerned. As the municipal councils are chosen representatives of the people, the fact that they have the final word is as a form of justice as well. Especially since they fit the decentral scale of many energy transition activities (Bridge et al., 2013).

Dilemma 3: Technical substance vs. legitimacy
Substantive knowledge and sufficient capacity are regarded as vital to solid, long term decisions on transforming energy systems, by stakeholders and in literature (Bridge et al., 2013; Heffron & McCauley, 2018b; Jenkins et al., 2016) As this supports communities in coping with the transition, reaping benefits from it, and sustaining their capabilities, it also contributes to Just Transition practice. In the RES framework, legitimacy and representation are the guiding principles. Public administrators play a central role regardless of their expertise, and the engagement of non-public parties is predominantly done on the basis of recognizing different interests and creating broad support. Williams and Doyon (2019) argue that a risk to incorporating justice is making sub-optimal decisions due to the exclusion of non-experts. Stakeholders feel like the opposite is also true.

5.2. Shared story

This study shows that justice dimensions are interrelated (Bulkeley et al., 2014), and that some aspects of RET might be an opportunity for one *justice form,* but a barrier to another. The purposely polycentric character widens the space for diverse framings of justice (Shawoo and McDermott, 2020). In the RES process, stakeholders explicitly represent particular interests. This steers them in having different frames and values of justice that correspond with their interests at the stakeholders table. On the one hand, this shows the potential of polycentric RET to allow social, cultural, and political pluriformity. On the other hand, as Newell and Mulvaney (2013) argued before, this raises the questions how and by whom justice in the energy transition is defined, and who qualifies for it. After all, justice and Just Transition practice are a matter of equity, fairness, and public interest.

No one is 'against' a Just Transition, but somewhere, conceptions are diverging. To understand this, stakeholders and practitioners would benefit from embracing ground rules of justice (similar to the ground rules of the RES Foodvalley to negotiate from 'interests' rather than 'standpoints'). The application of the Just Transition frame shows its potential to guide such a process, in line with previous attempts (Williams & Doyon, 2020). However, as justice is inherently subjective and highly dependent on its (spatial) context, there will be no single recipe to adopt. Therefore, the Just Transition frame should not be approached as a given reality, but as a tool to distinguish the different *justice forms* that are of particular importance in a policy process, according to its stakeholders. Can a particular *justice form* be a goal on its own, or only as part of a broader justice frame? And when can one *justice form* be less important than another, if this contributes to reaching the set end goal? By considering such questions, Just Transition practice can be incorporated more effectively in RET, but it will also prevent justice from becoming a toy for promoting stakeholder interests. The RES case shows the potential for embracing a shared story of justice, in service of fostering a sustainable and just future.

6. Conclusion

The foremost contributions of this study are (I) providing empirical evidence for the barriers and opportunities that exist in the RES process for implementing Just Transition practice; (II) evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the regional scale for energy transition governance; (III) highlighting key dilemmas for encouraging or discouraging Just Transition practice in RET, and (IV) calling attention to the diverse Just Transition perceptions within polycentric governance and the need to explicitly embrace them in the policy process.

The research strategy and case study proved their value in answering the research questions while appreciating the complexity and context-dependence of the topic. The *just transition tree* offered a comprehensive tool for assessing conceptions and applications of justice. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations on the generalization of findings. First, because the findings are based on one specific case, which is by no means (directly) representative for other energy regions or RET strategies. Second, because the Netherlands is known for its corporatist negotiation culture (which favors non-hierarchical, networked forms of governance), making it suitable for implementing RET (Hoppe & Miedema, 2020). Third, because this research includes a selected group of respondents that are official stakeholders of the RES process. The possibility of marginalized or minority groups being excluded from the process, can also lead to possible issues of exclusion within this study.

Further research directions
For future research, I suggest that studies apply and elaborate the Just Transition frame to:
- Evaluate real-world policy processes on other scale levels
- Compare two real-world RET case studies
- Focus on the role of indirectly represented communities in Just Transition practice and RET strategies
- Apply it to seemingly unsuccessful RET strategies

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Inleiding

Vraag 1. Zou u iets over uzelf, uw achtergrond bij [ORGANISATIE], en uw rol in het RES-proces kunnen vertellen?

Blok 1: Het (NP) RES-proces

Vraag 2. Wat zijn volgens u de 3 belangrijkste aspecten van de structuur en governance in het RES Proces?

Vraag 3. Wat is uw kijk op het Nationaal programma en de inbreng van de Regio Foodvalley daarin?

Vraag 4. Wat is uw kijk op de regio als schaalniveau voor het vormgeven van de energietransitie?

Blok 2: Een rechtvaardige energietransitie

Vraag 5. Wat is het eerste waar u aan denkt bij een rechtvaardige energietransitie?
> **Vraag 5.1** Hoe heeft de regio hier invloed op?

Vraag 6. Draagt het RES Proces daaraan wel/niet aan bij, en hoe?

Blok 3: De dimensies van rechtvaardigheid in het RES Proces

In de Academische literatuur worden 3 dimensies van rechtvaardigheid onderscheiden die als het ware als "indicatoren" voor een rechtvaardige transitie kunnen worden ingezet. Ik ben benieuwd wat uw perspectief op deze dimensies is en of u dit herkent in het RES Proces.

De eerste rechtvaardigheidsdimensie is de "erkenningsdimensie". Het erkennen van pluriformiteit en betrekken van de juiste sociaal-culturele aspecten bij het vormen van een beleidsproces. In de tijd geplaatst zou dit de eerste dimensie zijn die gaat over de context waarin het beleid zich bevindt, en daarna door blijft werken in het proces. normen & waarden, historie, ongelijkheden, cultuur, bestaande instituties, bestaande rechtvaardigheidsvraagstukken (inclusie, diversiteit, racisme, verschil tussen arm en rijk).

Vraag 7. Wat is het eerste waar u aan denkt bij deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie in relatie tot de energietransitie?
> **Vraag 7.1** Wat zijn volgens u de kansen voor deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?
> **Vraag 7.2** Wat zijn volgens u de barrières voor deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?

De tweede rechtvaardigheidsdimensie is de "procedurele dimensie". Dit slaat op de eerlijke inrichting van het beleidsproces zelf en is misschien de meeste politieke dimensie. Het gaat om de kwalitatieve kenmerken van het proces en de beleving daarvan. Dat deze eerlijk verloopt, lange termijn oplossingen, participatie en betrokkenheid, voorbereiden op de transitie.

Vraag 8. Wat is het eerste waar u aan denkt bij deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie in relatie tot de energietransitie?
> **Vraag 8.1** Wat zijn volgens u de kansen voor deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?
> **Vraag 8.2** Wat zijn volgens u de barrières voor deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?

De laatste rechtvaardigheidsdimensie is "de distributieve dimensie". Het gaat hierbij om een eerlijke verdeling van de kwalitatieve uitkomsten als gevolg van het beleidsproces, dus eigenlijk de verandering die als gevolg van het proces tot stand komen en een positieve of negatieve invloed op belanghebbenden hebben.

Vraag 9. Wat is het eerste waar u aan denkt bij deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie in relatie tot de energietransitie?
> **Vraag 9.1** Wat zijn volgens u de kansen voor deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?
> **Vraag 9.2** Wat zijn volgens u de barrières voor deze rechtvaardigheidsdimensie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?

Afsluiting

Vraag 10. Terugkijkend op de inhoudelijke blokken, wat zijn volgens u de 3 belangrijkste lessen voor een rechtvaardige energietransitie die voortkomen uit het RES Proces?

Vraag 11. Wat verwacht u van de uitkomsten van het RES-proces op het gebied van rechtvaardigheid zoals tot nu toe besproken?

Vraag 12. Hoe kijkt u terug op het RES-proces. Zijn er kansen gemist?

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Overeenkomst van deelname

Onderzoeksproject: Bachelor scriptie Technische Planologie
Universiteit: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
Naam student: Lennart van Drunen

Deze bachelor scriptie doet onderzoek naar percepties van een rechtvaardige energietransitie en de rol van regionaal energiebeleid daarin.

U bent uitgenodigd om aan dit onderzoek deel te nemen als geïnterviewde. Met het ondertekenen van deze overeenkomst verklaart u dat:
- Het u duidelijk is waar dit onderzoek over gaat.
- U in volledige vrijheid hebt geaccepteerd om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek.
- U begrijpt dat deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is en u het recht hebt om individuele vragen niet te beantwoorden.
- U begrijpt dat deelname aan het onderzoek vertrouwelijk is en dat, zonder uw schriftelijk bezwaar hiertegen, materiaal (algemeen of in de vorm van quotes) in de rapportage kan worden gebruikt.
- U begrijpt dat alle informatie die wordt verkregen vertrouwelijk zal worden bewaard, zij het op een met wachtwoord beveiligde computer of bestand.
- U begrijpt dat de data die voortkomt uit het interview gebruikt kan worden in artikelen, hoofdstukken van boeken, gepubliceerd en ongepubliceerd werk en in presentaties.
- U begrijpt dat u na afloop van het interview uw antwoorden slechts kan aanpassen op feitelijke onjuistheden.

Daarnaast bent u zich ervan bewust dat:
- U op ieder moment kunt aangeven het interview te willen stoppen zonder consequenties.
- U in de mogelijkheid bent om extra toelichting te vragen over de datacollectie procedure en elk ander aspect van deze bachelor scriptie.
- Uw naam en andere persoonlijke gegevens niet zullen worden verwerkt en gebruikt wanneer u hier geen toestemming voor heeft gegeven.
- Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd volgens het ethisch beleid van de RUG (https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/policy-and-strategy/research-ethics/)

Wanneer u akkoord gaat met het bovenstaande, graag invullen:

Ik geef toestemming tot het opnemen van het interview   JA / NEE
voor verwerkings- en coderingsdoeleinden

Ik wens anoniem te blijven binnen dit onderzoek   JA / NEE

     Wanneer JA:
     Er kan een pseudoniem naar mijn keuze worden gebruikt   JA / NEE
     (Bijvoorbeeld: 'respondent *nummer*')

Naam _____

Handtekening_____

Datum_____

Voor verdere informatie kunt u contact opnemen met de scriptiebegeleider, Dr. Ethemcan Turhan (e.turhan@rug.nl)