

# **The role of a civic initiative in transforming how conflict is handled in energy planning participation**

## **The case of JongRES**

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## Abstract

The planning field is full of conflicts and it is a planners job to deal with these conflicts. In specific, conflict is omnipresent in the energy landscape. These conflicts pose a significant challenge for the energy transition. Hence planners and policymakers have started to put a greater emphasis on participation. However, in practice, the reason for participation is often to avoid conflict in the implementation stages of policies as well as to increase support and acceptance of a policy. Next to all the conflict, new civic initiatives are emerging in the energy landscape. These emerge because they feel their interest are not represented in the current planning processes. This research focuses on the emerging civic initiative of JongRES. An initiative that aims to represent youth in the Dutch Regional Energy Strategies. Civic initiatives operate in the informal world, but for JongRES to reach their goal they need to integrate with the formal world. Both world have their own characteristics that affect the relationship between governmental institutions and civic initiatives. Since conflict is omnipresent in energy planning the aim of this research is to deepen the understanding of how a civic initiative can transform how conflict is being handled within the participation institutions of energy planning. This study found that the combination of structural (formal) and interpersonal (formal) aspects affects the transition of conflict handling in energy planning.

**Keywords:** social conflict, participatory planning, energy planning, civic initiative, government, informal, formal, regional energy strategy

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## 1. Introduction

Many European countries, including the Netherlands, are experiencing increasing social heterogeneity and inequality. Resulting in political divisions and democratic gaps. There is a shift towards pluralist democracies. A pluralist democracy is a political system with more than one center of power; the power is dispersed. Moreover, in this political system, various ideals can flourish. For example, the current rise of right-wing populism can be interpreted as an expression of increasing pluralism. Despite populism being anti-pluralistic itself. Pressure groups, from all over the political spectrum, are inherent to pluralist democracies. Moreover, the active civic engagement of citizens in public protest, citizen initiatives, and referendums is also increasing (Kuhn, 2021). These transitions in society also affect planning. The increasing pluralism has resulted in a rise in conflict within and from planning. For example, the conflict that arises in the implementation of the post-fossil era energy transition such as the multiple citizens' initiatives against wind turbines.

In the energy landscape social conflict is omnipresent. There are multiple reasons for the presence of conflict in energy planning. There are multiple technological options in the energy transition, both fossil and renewable; wind energy, biogas installations, transmission lines, carbon capture and storage, shale gas, natural gas, gas storage, solar field, and so on. There are various opinions on what technological option is best, as well as what steps should be taken now and which later. However, there just are no unequivocal solutions in energy planning (Cuppen, 2018). Furthermore, energy systems are becoming more and more decentralized, relying on technology with a significant spatial impact (e.g. wind parks). This will raise conflicts related to what can be considered fair distribution of burdens and benefits, fair decision-making procedures, and fair representation of individuals and their viewpoints. Moreover, following a supposed phase of 'post-democracy' publics are increasingly attentive to energy and therefore energy decision-making (Miller, Richter & O'Leary, 2015) and there are growing calls for greater democratic voice and involvement (Barry & Healey, 2017).

Social conflict poses a significant challenge for the energy transition. Hence planners and policymakers have started to put a greater emphasis on participation. However, in practice, the reason for participation is often to avoid conflict in the implementation stages of policies as well as to increase support and acceptance of a policy. Additionally, planners, acting on behalf of the government, define the 'the invited spaces' for the collaboration of selected stakeholders as well as the rules for the dialogue in these spaces (Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002).

When citizens feel that their interest are not represented in the formal participation processes, new civic initiatives may emerge in the informal world. However, these new initiatives and their values and concerns do not always reach the government (Verloo, 2017). A possible reason for this is the gap between what planners consider legitimate claims and the ways in which citizens express their concerns and values in social conflict (Pesch et al., 2016).

In practice the reason for participation is often to avoid conflict in implementation stages of policies as well as increasing support and acceptance of a policy. However contemporary participatory practices in energy planning are not sufficient in including different opinions and values in decision-making on energy policy (Cuppen, 2021). With that the value of conflict for energy policy and planning is overlooked. The inclusion of JongRES in the stakeholder participation processes of the RES has introduced conflicting interests and values, namely JongRES's stance, in the processes. As said, participation in practice often aims to avoid conflict or deflect it by focusing on reaching consensus. However, considering and addressing conflict might avoid backfiring or unproductive outcomes (Cuppen, 2021). Moreover, according to management science conflict can increase performance, innovation and creativity in organizations (Gualini & Bianchi, 2015). Hence the integration of conflict in participation processes may be valuable. Therefore this thesis explores. How can a civic initiative

take part in transforming how conflict is being handled within the participation institutions of energy planning?

In order to answer the main research question three secondary questions will be answered first:

1. What conditions led to the formation of the civic initiative of JongRES as an included actor in energy planning participation?
2. How is the civic initiative of JongRES working towards becoming an integrating actor in a conflict-based decision-making process?
3. How is the conflict-based decision-making process playing an enabling role in the future potential of civic initiatives transforming the energy landscape?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter starts with a brief history of the Dutch energy landscape to provide background information and context. Following that, a description of how conflict is present in energy governance will be given. Additionally, how conflict in different planning paradigm is handled is and what role citizens have is explained. Lastly, the emergence of civic initiatives and their relationship with formal governmental institutions is described.

### 2.1 Background: Dutch Energy Landscape

The first steps in the energy transition toward renewable energy sources were made after the oil crisis of 1973. This crisis gave reason to diversify energy resources and increase government regulation to ensure energy reliability. After the implementation of the National Environment plan of 2001, a new route was taken in regards to the energy transition. A small core group of civil servants in the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs decided to develop and innovate the energy transition. This new development was based on transition management: searching, learning, and experimenting through frontrunners combined with top-down and bottom-up governance. This policy experiment gained a lot of publicity in and outside the Netherlands. In hindsight the policy results were mixed. The policy consisted of a long-term vision, multiple transition paths, and experiments. A point of critique is that the bigger picture and the coordination between the vision, paths, and experiments were lacking. Moreover, there was too much emphasis on technological innovation and little to no social and institutional innovation. Technology was the main focus and civilians, the end-users were barely involved (Fischhendler & Nathan, 2014; Szulecki & Kuszniir, 2017). The policy did create a new discourse with more ambition and a long-term vision. In addition, new networks and coalitions emerged that resulted in a movement of a few thousand people. However, this movement was not rooted in local and regional activities. Consequently, the movement did not reach pioneers on location.

The transition was not very recognizable in the policy process. Independently operating platforms (transition arenas) had been established but within these arenas, it wasn't the frontrunners (niches) but the status quo (regimes) who dominated. Additionally, there was limited space for innovation due to the vertical transition that surrounded the platforms (e.g. various task forces, commissions, etc. as a result of the national government's need for control). Initially, the process was meant to be horizontal (network governance) but slowly it became vertical with top-down directive governance. What started as a policy experiment turned into an implementation project. It can be concluded that the project energy transition slowly got encapsulated by the fossil fuel regime. The fossil fuel regime had taken over the transition agenda and become the dominant discourse. Furthermore, the energy transition became institutionalized. Structures were created that encapsulated the energy transition into the established bureaucratic regime of The Hague. As a result, civil society took the lead in developing new sustainable innovations.

The rapid emergence of decentralized energy generation and smart grids gave the technical possibility to generate energy on a large scale sustainably. There has been an increase in local and regional energy cooperatives. Furthermore, renewable energy sources (e.g. wind and solar) have a significant impact on space. Therefore it had become imperative to create spatial planning policies for these renewable energy technologies. On a regional level, there were collaborations between regional governments and private companies, sustainable innovation, regional energy cooperatives, climate-neutral neighborhoods and dwellings, city energy programs, and/or ambitious provincial energy projects. Basically, every municipality was concerned about sustainability, be it different levels of concern. The regional and local ambition level was often higher than on the national level. At the political regime level energy projects often got stuck in formalities.

There was a significant public support for sustainability, however citizens were not able to turn it into action. The chaos on the multiple levels of scale indicated a turbulence and unrest that are typical for a transition stage. At that point in time the energy transition was at a tipping point. As a result the energy system was vulnerable for disruptions, as well as open for new radical changes (windows of opportunity).

This new transition stage asked for more decentral, more facilitating and stimulating of pioneers, and the upscaling of successful experiments. Rotmans (2011) advises in conclusion to his analysis of the state of the Dutch energy transition, to choose for transition options that are integral sustainable, that have the potential to swiftly break through, and that fit the market dynamics as well as are publicly accepted. Actors from the market and society with certain knowledge and distance to the transition process are able to make those decisions. This involves a new transition agenda with a broadly supported transition plan (no blueprint), a transformation plan that focuses on retrofitting the built environment, 'clean tech' as the fastest growing industry in the world, electric vehicles and the facilitation of frontrunners across the country. There is a crucial role for lower governments, private companies and intermediaries. There also needs to be a cultural transition, a change in perception. New people are needed, that are recalcitrant and are skilled in playing the transition game. Space for innovation is needed so that the frontrunners can learn this game and step by step 'infiltrate' the organization.

### 2.1.1 Regional Energy Strategies

Following the Dutch Climate Act of 2019, regional energy strategies (RES) were instated. The Netherlands was divided into 30 regions, each tasked with creating an energy policy to enforce the national agreements of the Climate Act. The RES have multiple tasks. Firstly, the policy needs to describe which energy goals have to be met and on which terms. Secondly, the RES serve as an instrument to organize spatial harmonization with societal participation. Lastly, the RES provide an opportunity to establish long-term cooperation between all regional parties. Each region has its own unique challenges and potential, therefore each region is allowed to create their own interpretation of a strategy within the frameworks and agreements of the Climate Act. The regions are supported by the National Program RES (NPRES), which serves as a joint between the Climate Act and the regions. NPRES facilitates, monitors, develops knowledge and provides clarity to regions but is not responsible for the content and creation of the RES. October 2020 the concept RES was presented to the NP RES. Here, regions described broadly what would be possible in term of renewable energy technologies and how they anticipated to engage citizens and other stakeholders. July 2021 the RES 1.0 were presented to the NP RES. This document is a more elaborate version of the concept RES and the intentions for citizen engagement were implemented. At the time of writing the regions have just started working on RES 2.0. In the phase of RES 2.0 the focus is on the implementation of renewable energy projects.

One of the aims of this decentralized approach to the energy transition is to establish collaboration between governments, citizens, businesses, utility companies, energy cooperatives and other societal organizations. As mentioned before, energy policies used to be rather technocratic and the role for citizens and other societal groups was limited. The establishment of the RES has provided a window of opportunity for new emerging citizen groups to join the energy planning and policy making.

### 2.1.2 JongRES

A specific civic initiative that has emerged since the establishment of the RES is JongRES. This initiative represents the voice of the youth and wants a faster energy transition. JongRES was initiated by the Youth Climate Movement (Jonge Klimaatbeweging) and the Climate and Energy organization (Klimaat en Energie Koepel) in response to the lack of youth representation experienced during the deliberations of the Climate Act. JongRES is structured similar to the the formal RES. There is a NP



JongRES (national board) just like there is a NP RES. Then there are 5 coordinators, each responsible for 2-3 provinces, each provinces consisting out of 1-6 RES Regions (see appendix 1). Almost every RES-Region has a JongRES representative.

## 2.2 Social conflict in the energy governance

The RES are policies aimed to tackle the issue of the energy transition and part of energy governance. Social conflict is omnipresent in energy governance. There are multiple reasons for this. First, there are multiple technological options in the energy transition, both fossil and renewable; wind energy, biogas installations, transmission lines, carbon capture and storage, shale gas, natural gas, gas storage, solar field, and so on. There are various opinions on what technological option is best, as well as what steps should be taken now and which later. However, there just are no unequivocal solutions in energy planning (Cuppen, 2021). Secondly, energy systems are becoming more and more decentralized, relying on technology with a significant spatial impact (e.g. wind parks). This will raise conflicts related to what can be considered fair distribution of burdens and benefits, fair decision-making procedures, and fair representation of individuals and their viewpoints. Moreover, following a supposed phase of 'post-democracy' publics are increasingly attentive to energy and therefore energy decision-making (Miller et al., 2015) and there are growing calls for greater democratic voice and involvement (Barry & Healey, 2017).

Social conflict poses a significant challenge for the energy transition. Hence planners and policymakers have started to put a greater emphasis on participation (Cuppen, 2021). However, in practice, the reason for participation is often to avoid conflict in the implementation stages of policies and/or to increase support and acceptance of a policy. Additionally, planners, acting on behalf of the government, define the 'the invited spaces' for the collaboration of selected stakeholders as well as the rules for the dialogue in these spaces (Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002). Invited participation – even when done with the best purposes and according to topnotch insights in participatory approaches – is not sufficient in ensuring the inclusion of different norms and values (Cuppen, 2021). Invited participation are all the processes and procedures set up by e.g. governments, companies or knowledge institutions to engage in some form of dialogue with stakeholders. The aim of this kind of participation is to make a policy more legitimate, innovative or supported through the involvement of stakeholders. Moreover, the participation procedures are more or less fixed.

In Dutch policy procedures public participation is institutionalized and made compulsory. However, governmental institutions cannot anticipate all the new values that emerge in society, even when they intend to include a diverse public as possible. These new values and concerns emerge in the informal world, in response to the perception that institutions are not taking into account alternative concerns and values (Cuppen, 2021). These new values and concerns can bring about conflicts that play out in informal arenas, on social media, and in street-level interactions between e.g. local civil servants and citizens (Verloo, 2017). According to Verloo (2017) these street-level interactions in social conflict provide opportunity for democracy. At this level, citizens put forward their concerns and values. However, their concerns and values do not always reach the (local) government. A possible reason for this is the gap between what planners consider legitimate claims and the ways in which citizens express their concerns and values in social conflict (Pesch et al., 2016). Thus, to grasp the value of social conflict, the values, preferences, and knowledge from the public debate need to be fed back to formal decision-making procedures.

## 2.4 Planning and conflict

Before looking into how conflicting concerns and values can be fed back to formal decision-making procedures, it is imperative to take note of how different planning approaches handle conflict. In spatial planning there are multiple paradigm; from instrumental-rational to communicative to

agonistic. Each paradigm handles conflict differently. Moreover, when explaining each planning paradigm it might seem as if each of them exist separate from one another. However, even though a new planning paradigm may emerge from critique on the dominant paradigm, the new paradigm does not straightforwardly replace the former one, but rather provide a new addition to the palette of planning approaches.

#### **2.4.1 Instrumental-rational approach**

The first approach is based on instrumental-rational planning theory. Within this approach the planner takes the role of a higher-level master and independent expert, who collects the most comprehensive information available, develops forecasts, defines long-term goals, coordinates resort departments, and creates “large-scale plans” or “master plans” (Altshuler, 1965). The instrumental rational models views planning as a technocratic engineering science (Friedmann, 1996). This planning approach can be seen in earlier energy governance which was characterized by a more technocratic form of decision-making (Fischer, 2000). The energy domain was traditionally dominated by experts such as engineers and scientists. Furthermore, energy policy used to have a strong technocratic perspective in which the input of society and social scientist was limited. Although the aim of the energy sector is to provide electricity to the customers, it excludes them from the possibility of deciding about the structure of the sector and its future development (Fischer, 2000). This is similar to the instrumental rational approach where since the planner is an independent expert, who claims to be able to represent the public interest, there is limited democratic participation. Consequently conflict is not a feature in this model. In this approach conflict is understood a form of unexpected disruptions to planning processes that have to be avoided or suppressed as far as possible (Kuhn, 2021).

The instrumental-rational model is criticized for its notion that planners are rational and all-knowing. This thinking is considered idealistic and unrealistic (Healey, 2006; Allmendinger, 2002). The instrumental approach is deemed not well suited to deal with unpredictable change (Hillier & Healey, 2010). In reaction to the instrumental-rational model, new planning approaches emerged, that focused on bounded rationality, incrementalism, and contingency (Andersen, 2003). Advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) emphasized the interactive an bottom-up nature of planning work (Healey, 2007). From here participatory and communicative approaches were developed to deal more effectively with the challenges of an increasingly complex, fragmented, and pluralistic society (Forester, 1999; Innes, 1995).

#### **2.4.2 Communicative approach**

The communicative turn in planning theory calls for more inclusive and deliberative approach to planning in order to manage change more effectively. This approach considers it unrealistic to objectively know a reality that is out there and to design interventions that fit to that reality. Instead reality is considered to be socially constructed. This means that the reality we know is interpreted through discourse (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore, in this model the planner takes the role of a moderator of discussions, who organizes public debate, participation processes, and forms of collective cooperation (Kuhn, 2021). There is a wide range of different participatory approaches in the communicative model; the aforementioned invited participation that occurs in energy planning is also a communicative participatory approach.

The communicative approach is strongly based on Jürgen Habermas’ social science theory of communicative action. The ideal of this model is that collaboration and deliberation will lead to a better fit with perspectives of relevant stakeholders on social reality. In collaborative decision-making processes stakeholders exchange and combine different forms of local and expert knowledge (Forester, 1999). Furthermore, establishing an inclusive as possible representation of stakeholders is supposed to enable consensus building and social acceptance, thus improving the effectiveness and

democratic legitimacy of decisions (Innes, 1995; Innes & Booher, 2004). It is considered that collaborative approaches stimulate both active citizen involvement and self-organizing capacity (Innes & Booher, 1999, 2002). Consequently, the communicative turn is accompanied by a call for a shift from hierarchical forms of steering to more participative modes of governance, also known as the shift from government to governance (Rhodes, 1997).

The relationship between communicative planning and conflict is reactive (Kuhn, 2021). The insurrection of protest and manifestations of conflict are seen as an opportunity to organize discussions and participation processes. The main goals are to resolve the conflict by finding a consensus between actors. In many cases a consensus has the implicit goal of increasing acceptance of a plan or decision (Kuhn, 2021).

A central critique is that participatory approaches run the danger of falling into an instrumental-rationalistic trap, because there is a continuous belief in the malleability of the planning process (Swyngedouw, 2005). Due to focus on achieving consensus and support, planners, acting on behalf of the government, define the 'invited spaces' for the collaboration of selected stakeholders as well as the rules for the dialogue in these invited spaces. (Flyvbjerg & Richardson, 2002).

A critique on communicative planning theory is that it is unable to acknowledge conflicting conceptions of reality as being equally valid. This is problematic because participants in practice already have different understandings as to whether there may be a planning problem in the first place (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). From the perspective of democratic conduct it makes a difference whether one is allowed to take part in formulating the criteria to resolve a given problem, or whether one is included in the debate on what kind of societal problems we actually do have that need to be resolved. Democratic decision-making should mean dialogue on what we on different occasions find essential in our society, not making distinctions between valid and invalid arguments (Hajer, 2003).

Another critique on this approach is that it is not realistic. Habermas' ideal speech situation that enables communicative rationality is unattainable. This critique is based on Foucauldian thought, that power cannot be detached from our psychological, social and cultural existence into an aspect of bureaucratic and business dealings (Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). The consensus-oriented styles of process management leave little room for agonistic discourse, which is the source of creativity and unexpected viewpoints (Hillier, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2005). Thus the innovative potential of the collective effort is left untapped. Too much control of planners constrains the creativity and transformative potential, thereby leading to compromises that do not bring sustainable solutions (Torfing & Sorensen, 2008).

It is argued that the instrumentality of participatory processes can partly be blamed on a top-down managerial strategy of government agencies to 'tame citizens' protest' (Healey, 2008) as a necessary step in achieving social and political support (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Van Assche et al., 2011; Innes & Booher, 2004). Administrators tend to use citizen participation, not to empower citizens and to change things, but to empower themselves, by regularizing conflict and legitimizing decisions (Healey, 2008). Citizen participation in that view is merely a way to get support for already developed solutions, a 'public support machine' (e.g. Van Assche et al., 2011).

### 2.4.3 Agonistic approach

Agonistic approaches in planning theory have gained popularity in recent years because they respond to the increasing conflict within society (Kuhn, 2021). Other approaches such as communicative planning theory have not adequately addressed such conflict, instead focusing on consensus and cooperation. Most agonistic planning approaches are based on Chantal Mouffe's political theory of agonistic pluralism. According to this theory, conflict is inherent in pluralist societies and the

acceptance and legitimacy of conflict characterizes pluralist democracies (Mouffe, in Kuhn, 2021). Mouffe’s agonistic model of democracy is about handling the tensions between the aggregative (political theory that aligns with instrumental-rational planning theory) and deliberative (political theory that aligns with communicative planning theory) modes of political activity, acknowledging both of these modes as legitimate interpretations of democratic conduct.

In this model mutual respect of stakeholders even when their interests are contradictory is important (Hillier, 2002). With mutual respect, adversary stances between different meaning systems may become transformed into agonism, when the counterparts openly acknowledge the limits of achieving consensus (Mouffe, in Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). In consensus-based processes based on communicative rationality this is not possible, and thus risks that political conflicts are pushed out of the formal arena. This makes our society vulnerable to different extreme movements and radicalized groups that start to operate outside the democratic system (Mouffe, in Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). Something similar can be seen in energy planning if we take a look at protest groups against wind energy. However most people who are against wind energy, are not necessarily against the energy transition. These people may even be able to contribute to energy transition debate by being open to experiment with other options of renewable energy. Thus, negating conflict, as mentioned before, can decrease the innovative potential of policy and planning.

According to Mouffe (in Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010) passionate political action should not be dismissed in order to enable a consensus, but rather should be mobilized to serve democracy. In agonistic democracy opposing actors are seen as legitimate adversaries, who may disagree with each others opinions, but whose right to present and defend those views it does not question either (Mouffe, in Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010). In agonistic planning the stakeholders may agree on certain issues and respectfully agree to disagree on others (Hillier, 2002). Even if the conflicts were to be found irresolvable, the actors may still come to a mutual agreement on the procedure – how the differences in opinion are to be dealt with (Barber, 1984). According to Bond (2011), who tries to find commonalities between communicative and agonistic planning, planning is to work with dissensus but nevertheless reach some form of decision within a sphere criss-crossed by dissensus and contingency. “Creating agonistic spaces requires being open to dissensus and embracing it in such a way that conflicts are seen as opportunities for communication and knowledge exchange in order to think differently and to understand the hegemonic relationships that structure decision-making in planning practices” (Bond, 2011, 176–179). Moreover, conflict can be productive when it leans into its transformative function as a catalyst of social and institutional change (Ploger, 2004).

The table below provides an overview of the three planning paradigms and what the role of conflict and citizens is in each paradigm. It is important to note that agonistic planning theory is still just a theory and not common practice.

Table 1. Planning models on dealing with conflict

<b>Planning models</b>	<b>Comprehensive-rational</b>	<b>Communicative</b>	<b>Agonistic</b>
<b>Relationship between planning and conflict</b>	Passive	Reactive	Proactive
<b>Understanding of conflict</b>	Disruptive: Conflict as a disturbance	Deliberative: Conflict as an occasion for participation	Productive: Conflict as catalyst for change
<b>Goals in dealing with conflict</b>	Avoidance	Consensual solution, arbitration, acceptance of projects	Acceptance of dissent, “strife”

<b>Role attributed to planners</b>	Expert, master	Negotiation, moderation, mediation	Create arenas for conflict
<b>Form of democracy</b>	Representative	Deliberative, pluralistic	Radical, pluralistic
<b>Forms of power relations</b>	Planning sovereignty (government)	Negotiation in actor networks (governance)	Discursive hegemony
<b>Role of citizen</b>	Citizen as a subject of expert-oriented public administration	Citizen as a communicatively rational actor in search for consensus	Citizen as a provider of complementary views and legitimate adversary

(Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Kuhn, 2021)

## 2.5 Civic Initiatives

The role of the state has changed, there has been a shift from government to governance (Kooiman & van Vliet, in Hassink et al., 2016). Moreover, energy governance has decentralized. At the same time there has been an empowerment of new actors (Parag et al., 2013). Among these new actors are citizen initiatives.

Citizens contributing to the provision of public services and or good have become a trend in Western states (Bailey, 2012; Healey, 2015). These citizens take matter into their own hand by trying to tackle wicked issues such as sustainability and the energy transition. In the literature there are different names for these kind of initiatives; social enterprises (Cheng, 2015; Teasdale, 2012), self-organization (Anttilla and Stern, 2005), and grassroots initiatives (Ornetzeder and Rohrer, 2013). An often used umbrella term for those is ‘citizen initiatives’ (Igalla, Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2019). Citizen initiatives are a form of self-organization in which citizens mobilize energy resources to collectively define and carry out projects aimed at providing public goods or services for their community.

Civic initiatives almost always emerge as a reaction to social exclusion (Gonzales, Moulaert & Martinelli, 2010). Social exclusion may refer to material needs (poverty, lack of housing), social (limited access to health and education), political (no access to decision-making), and existential (no access to self-expression and creative activities) deprivation. In order to overcome this exclusion, an initiative has to overcome the previously alienated human needs, establish a relative empowerment of the previously excluded social group through the creation of new ‘capabilities’, and bring about changes in the existing social and power relations towards a more inclusive and democratic governance system (Gonzales, Moulaert & Martinelli, 2010).

Even though citizen initiatives originate and operate in an informal world (e.g. with fellow residents), they interact with the formal world, like the political and institutional context of local governments (van Dam et al., 2014). In the informal world there are “loose”, spontaneous, more casual interactions and behavior. Moreover, this world is characterized by personal relations, informality, values and voluntariness (Habermas, 1987; Van den Brink, van Hulst, de Graaf, & van der Pennen, 2012). Whereas the formal world entails “tighter”, more deliberate, impersonal modes of conduct and setting that occasion such conduct (Morand, 1995; Salverda, van der Jagt & Duing, 2012). Characteristics of the formal world are functional hierarchy, formal rules and procedures, rationality, and paid employees (Van den Brink et al., 2012; Weber, 1922). In recent decades the tensions between both worlds have increased, due to higher education of citizens and an increasing demand from citizens with regard to public services (Van den Brink et al., 2012). Moreover, citizen initiatives often arise as self-reliance responses to the failure of the state and market to provide public goods (Teasdale, 2012) and fill the

gap caused by the trend of 'less' government (Igalla, Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2019). Bridging the gap between the informal and formal world and developing good relationships between people operating in both worlds is an important challenge (van Dam et al., 2014; WRR, 2012).

The collaboration between citizen initiatives and local governments is affected by two main types of key factors. First, there are process-related aspects, like the development of interpersonal contacts, the creation of trust and shared understanding, and a sense of commitment (Bakker et al., 2012). These interpersonal contacts are associated with the informal world of citizen initiatives. The second factor is related to structuration aspects, such as rules, regulations, procedures and arrangements (Marschall, 2004; Ostrom, 1996). These are generally related to the formal world of local governments. Both local governments and citizen initiatives can incorporate and connect characteristics of both the formal and informal world. More personal approaches by the local governments can influence the relationship with citizen initiatives (Oude Vrielink & van Wijdeven, 2011). Furthermore, attention and recognition from local governments can boost the morale of citizen initiatives (Hurenkamp et al., 2006). Citizen initiatives can incorporate elements of the formal world, for instance by establishing a reliable formal organization (van Dam, Duineveld, & During, 2015). Initiatives institutionalize themselves (e.g. by establishing a foundation) in order to be taken more seriously by surrounding actors (van Dam et al., 2014). In general, governmental organizations prefer citizen initiatives, which have objectives that are politically justified, have a formalized organizational form and organized according to the logic of governmental discourse (van Dam et al., 2015). Based on the formality-informality dichotomy, different coordination mechanisms can be identified, focusing on common values and norms, trust and reciprocity or on rules, agreements and contracts (Salverda, Slangen, Kruit, Weijschedé, & Mulder, 2009; van Dam et al., 2014).

The relationship between initiatives and local governments is not static. According to Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) there are different phases in the partnerships. First, in the pre-partnership collaboration phase, it is imperative to establish an informal relationship based on trust and willingness to work together. In later phases, informality is often replaced by more formalized procedures and structures. The main challenge that partnerships face is managing the more informal and more formal modes of governance (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). The initial quality of the partnership is connected to level of trust and the extent to which interaction is seen as providing mutual benefit (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998).

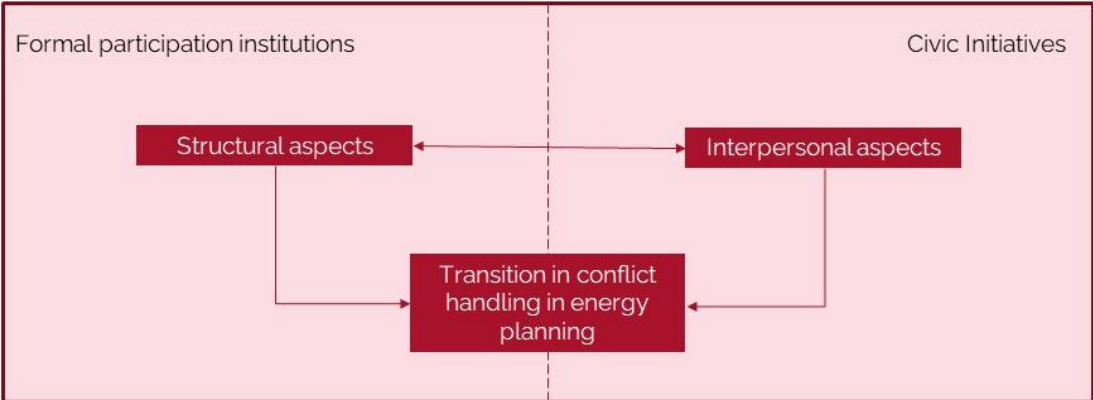


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

The transition of handling of conflict occurs within the formal and informal world. Structural and interpersonal aspects affects one another and affect the transition in conflict handling in energy planning.



## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research approach

The aim of this research is to understand how civic initiatives can take part in how conflict is handled in the participation institutions of energy planning. This research makes use of qualitative data collection. Because qualitative research allows researchers to study phenomena and strive to make sense of, or interpret, them with respect to the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Moreover, qualitative research is more proficient in providing data on the challenges encountered in implementing interventions designed to change or reform existing practices than quantitative research (Natasi & Schensul, 2005). The chosen method allows for highlighting valuable elements, which can be connected to each other via multiple interviews, within context. Quantitative methods or secondary data alone do not provide enough in-depth information to provide answers to the research questions. The use of quantitative methods was taken into consideration but not preferred as it would not provide the insight into the reasoning behind decisions made by the citizen initiative and government officials. The theoretical framework and conceptual model will provide the frame of reference for discussing the results.

This study uses a qualitative, single case-study approach. Case studies can be useful in exploratory studies, when the aim is to gain a holistic understanding of how dynamics unfold in real life settings (Yin, 2009). Moreover, case studies can offer deep and detailed insight into contemporary events (Rowley, 2002). By interviewing people involved in different RES regions, linking the case study to a theoretical framework and using different data sources it was tried to optimize validity, reliability and generalization of the case study findings (Yin, 2009). This study examines how civic initiatives can take part in transforming how conflict is handled in participation institutions in energy planning. JongRES was chosen as a case study, because they are new in the energy landscape and represent values and interests that are different, i.e. conflicting, from the values and interests that are already present in energy policy decision-making.

### 3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The goal of the interviews is not to generalize and standardize but to understand how a citizen initiative can transform the handling of conflict in the participatory institutions of energy planning. Semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity to gain insight in for example the reasoning why JongRES chose for a certain approach in their journey towards being an included actor in the decision-making process.

The questions for the semi-structured interviews are based on the literature review. The RES policies and information related to participation available on the RES regions websites were used to support the preparation for the interviews. Moreover, during the data collection interview questions were added based on the already conducted interviews.

In comparison to structured interviews, semi-structured interview give the opportunity to ask questions additional to those listed beforehand. This extra flexibility is valuable when responding to unexpected turns in the interview (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). Furthermore, it offers participants the opportunity to elaborate on matters they consider important to mention (Longhurst, 2010).

It is important that the interviews are held in a neutral space where the participant feels comfortable to speak freely (Longhurst, 2010), in case the selected participant is critically questioned. Therefore the participant was free to choose the space, preferably in person. However, due to the recent pandemic participants might still work from home most days and therefore it sometimes was preferred to be interviewed over videocall.



After each interview the researcher wrote down a quick summary about what stood out from the interview, what new hypotheses, speculations or hunches about the field situations were suggested by the contact and what kind of potential additional questions might be asked during a next interview.

### 3.3 Participant selection & criteria

The unit of analyses, or the case, is determined by defining spatial boundary, theoretical scope, and timeframe (Yin, 2009). The theoretical scope is defined based on the literature study. The units of analysis are JongRES representatives and government officials responsible for the stakeholder management and/or participation process of the regional energy strategies. The spatial boundaries are the RES-regions. There are 30 RES-regions in the Netherlands. Due to limited time not all 30 regions will be interviewed for this research. Moreover, RES-regions all across the Netherlands will be approached, varying from urban to relatively rural, varying in size (as in how many municipalities are part of the RES-region), and whether the RES-region equals a province or is one of multiple RES-regions in a province. The JongRES representatives will provide the perspective of the citizen initiative. In the literature study is argued that the inclusion of actors as well as the form of participation- and decision-making processes are ultimately determined by government institutions. Therefore RES government officials will be interviewed for their perspective on new emerging citizen initiatives participating in decision making processes in energy planning and policy-making.

The aim was to interview a JongRES representative and governmental representatives from multiple regions. However, the researcher was only able to do this for two regions; Achterhoek and Groningen. From the other regions either a JongRES representative or a governmental representative was interviewed. Reasons for this were that JongRES representative is a voluntary function, that people tend to do for about a year or so. At the time of the research RES 1.0 had been established for almost a year and often the JongRES representative left after that stage, therefore it was difficult to get in touch with those former representatives. There was also similar change of process director (procesregisseur) after the establishment of RES 1.0. Furthermore, there had just been municipal elections which resulted in a change in chairmen in the formal RES.

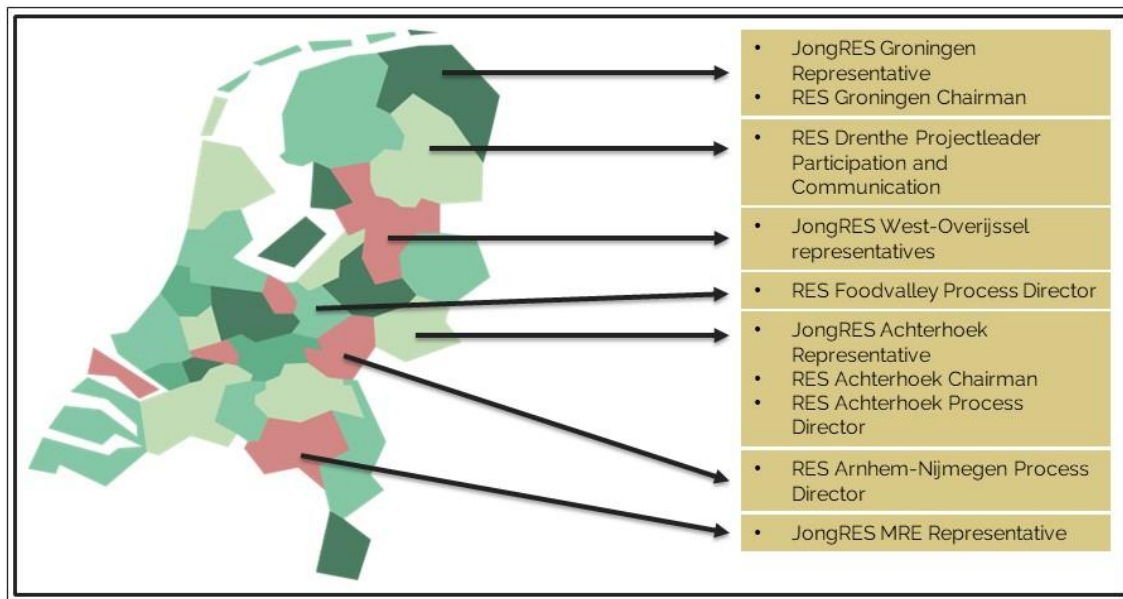
The semi-structured interviews took place in May and June 2022 and were guided by the theoretical framework, preliminary conversations with JongRES, and relevant policy documents. In the interviews with JongRES, the focus was on the interaction between JongRES and the formal RES in the formal processes, the occurrence of conflict, and the role of JongRES within the formal processes. In the interviews with governmental representatives of the formal RES, the focus was on their experience with JongRES, the handling of conflict in the participation and decision-making process, and their ideas and expectations of JongRES. Table 2 provides an overview of the interviewees and in figure 2 there is a map of the regions interviewed.

Table 2. List of interviewees

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Active during:</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Method</b>
JongRES representative Metropole Region Eindhoven	Partly RES 1.0 and RES 2.0	18-5-2022	In person
JongRES representative Achterhoek	RES 1.0	25-5-2022	Google Meet
Process director Achterhoek	Concept RES and RES 1.0	2-6-2022	Google Meet
Chairman RES Achterhoek	Concept RES and RES 1.0	3-6-2022	Google Meet
JongRES representative Groningen	RES 1.0 and RES 2.0	25-5-2022	In person
Chairman RES Groningen	Concept RES and RES 1.0	8-6-2022	In person
Projectleader Participation and Communication RES Drenthe	Concept RES, RES 1.0 and RES 2.0	2-6-2022	In person

JongRES representatives West-Overijssel	RES 2.0	25-5-2022	In person
Process director Foodvalley	RES 2.0	13-6-2022	Telephone
Process director Region Arnhem-Nijmegen	Concept RES and RES 1.0	20-6-2022	Google Meet

Figure 2. Map of RES Regions interviewed



(Resinbeeld.nl)

### 3.4 Data analysis

This research enhances the understanding of how new emerging citizen initiatives are able to get included in decision-making processes of participatory governmental institutions and how citizen initiatives can work as an integrating actor in a conflict-based decision-making process. Thus, the interviews can contribute to further theory development on this topic.

To be able to analyze the interviews, they were audio recorded, transcribed and coded. A thematic analysis was done to make sense out of the large amount of qualitative data. A thematic analysis is the process of sorting and categorizing data to make meaning by identifying patterns or themes in the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This analysis is a complex process in which there will be a back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). There was a combination of a deductive and inductive approach to qualitative analysis used. The deductive codes originate from the literature study. It was decided to also use inductive codes since literature that provided information to answer the third sub research question; how is the conflict-based decision-making process playing an enabling role in the future potential of civic initiatives in transforming the energy landscape.

The data exists out of the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, which have been transcribed. Before coding, the transcribed data was read and notes were taken on what was believed to be happening and what themes seemed to be present.

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

Prior to the interview, the interviewees were informed about the length and purpose of the research and that their input is part of this research. It is imperative when interviewing to be aware of how the personal interaction can be influenced by norms and values, expectation and power structures (Dunn, 2010). In this case the researcher can be considered an outsider with interests in energy planning and governance. The aim of the researcher is to gather the required information. All interviewees will sign a declaration of informed consent. Moreover, once the research is completed the data will be kept behind a password on a computer for one year and will only be accessible by the researcher.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Structural aspects

#### 4.1.1 Citizen initiative is a reliable formal organization

JongRES's structure resembles the organizational structure of the formal RES. According to the JongRES representative MRE *"it's very convenient to be organized similarly to the RES regions ... because we try to actively partake in the RES processes"*. Additionally, JongRES has become an official foundation (stichting). JongRES representative Overijssel said *"now we are a more formal organization ... we often get the question who are you, what do you want, who is sponsoring you, those kind of questions, because we sit around the table with many lobby parties"*. Moreover, JongRES is still developing as an organization. Nevertheless they are slowly increasing their numbers. JongRES Groningen said *"now we have a whatsappgroup with around a 100 youth, and on LinkedIN around 300 persons follow us ... now it's really a group and in a way we are slowly starting a movement"*.

In general the JongRES representatives are positive about their development towards becoming a reliable formal organization. However, not all of the formal RES are as positive. For example, the role of JongRES representative is temporary and in some regions they have not been able to find a new representative. This is the case in Drenthe and RES Drenthe said *"they [JongRES] are very keen and involved. But what I feared would happen happened; they [JongRES] are very dependent on a small active group, which limits their striking power."* Another point of concern in relation to the reliability and legitimacy of JongRES is the size and diversity of their constituency. RES Achterhoek process director mentioned *"we have not really worked with JongRES. We have only spoken to the JongRES representative, never with a larger group of youth."* RES Drenthe adds to this *"the aim was to have someone represent youth at the table. This leads to the question what youth, who are their [JongRES] constituency? This constituency consultation still has not been developed in Drenthe ... which is a point of concern."* Lastly, the need for JongRES to be present during the participation processes was questioned. In the formal RES Groningen actors wondered whether JongRES's interest might already be represented by other organizations (i.e. environmental and climate organizations). The Chairman of RES Groningen said *"it is difficult to tell what the specific interest of JongRES is. I mean I understand what they strive for, but their interest is not specific in the sense of now because their interests are those of future generations"*.

#### 4.1.2 Procedures

In the participation and decision-making processes certain formal procedures are adhered. There are specific moments when stakeholders can react to specific topics of the concept policy. Moreover, civil servants and politicians use certain language. JongRES Groningen described the processes as *"similar to meeting in corporate life, where people kind of move around one another"*.

Another specific about formal procedures is that actors take on a certain role. Especially in the beginning of the RES procedures, formal RES representatives wondered what role JongRES could take on during the participation and decision-making processes. RES Achterhoek process director said *"youth excel in taking to the streets to demonstrate, but joining the conversation in more formal setting remains difficult ... getting youth to join formal procedures is difficult. I dare say I have never seen a young person at an consultation evening."* This indicates that having youth join the formal conversation has been difficult and a rare occurrence.

All three process directors emphasize the importance of youth speaking up in stakeholder meetings and/or municipal council meetings. In general the formal actors see JongRES as an organization that represents the younger generations and that is able to express the urgency of the energy transition. The process director of RES Region Arnhem and Nijmegen stimulated JongRES to speak up during

certain formal events. *"I think it is commendable that JongRES was present during all those council meetings. Those are crucial to let your voice be heard. It is THE formal moment to be present and use your 5 minutes of speech time. ... I think it is imperative for JongRES to speak because they can embody the voice of the youth in a way that I cannot do for them."* Despite being happy with the presence of JongRES, the chairman of RES Groningen does add some nuance *"you notice that they [JongRES] are searching how to best represent themselves, which makes me wonder if they can reach their goals through participating in a abstract decision-making process or whether another approach might be a better fit to reach their goals"*.

## 4.2 Interpersonal aspects

### 4.2.1 Voluntary nature

All JongRES representatives are volunteers. Because they are volunteers they can be apolitical in the formal processes and represent the voice of the youth authentically. JongRES Groningen on how JongRES is apolitical: *"Unlike a civil servants we do not have to take the position of the respective alderman into consideration. We can represent the voice of the youth without consequences. ... We can be more activistic, push back against the establishment. We can say 'dammit man hurry up, we are concerned about our future.' And sometimes that resonates. It's nice to take on that role of kicking against the establishment, instead of always remaining within the formal frameworks; Mr Chairman and stuff like that."* The RES Achterhoek Chairman valued the apolitical nature of JongRES *"he [JongRES Achterhoek representative] aims to be confrontational by saying 'all good what we are talking about, but do not forget why we have to do this'. And he [JongRES Achterhoek] can say this authentically, whereas if I said that it would almost be a political statement."*

At the same time due to them being volunteers they have limited accountability which gives them the opportunity to say whatever they want, which, according to RES Region Arnhem Nijmegen process director, can create an unequal playing field (in the scenario of JongRES joining the decision-making table, not in the scenario of JongRES speaking up during stakeholder meetings) since municipalities cannot do this.

Lastly, not only does the voluntary nature and newness of JongRES make it difficult for formal actors to assign JongRES a role in the formal procedures, it also meant that they are not familiar with influencing strategies. JongRES Drenthe mentioned this concern to JongRES *"you need a certain influencing strategy ... I have had conversations with JongRES offering to help them come up with certain strategies. However they said they wanted to remain 'fresh', which I do understand on the one hand, but on the other made it difficult for them to really influence the progress"*.

### 4.2.2 Recognition

JongRES got to participate on different levels of the participation and decision-making processes depending on the region. Moreover, in the Achterhoek JongRES got to write the preface of the RES 1.0. To acknowledge JongRES and let them write the preface was a conscious choice for the RES Achterhoek Chairman *"It has been a conscious choice to have the preface written by JongRES and not by one of administrators ... of who some might not be sitting in their backyard anymore in 10 years. ... So we purposely chose to give the mic to the youth. Because that is what it is all about, not the people who live there now. To counterbalance all the protest groups, often consisting of highly educated 60 plus years olds, that are willing to take all judicial measures possible to not have to experience any changes in their living environment, thinking they are gone live forever."* In Groningen an paragraph on youth participation was included, which boosted the moral of JongRES. JongRES Groningen said about the paragraph *"to me the paragraph in RES 1.0 meant that we are in the policy, and we are really part of the process. The document is signed. All municipalities have signed it. Now we have*

*some leverage to put pressure on them.*” Furthermore, a little bit of information on JongRES can also be found on the formal RES websites.

#### 4.2.3 Interpersonal relations

All the JongRES representatives that were interviewed were able to establish personal relations with the RES chairmen, process directors, aldermen and civil servants. However, due to recent municipal elections they likely need to establish new relations. In general the building of the relationships were mutual. RES Drenthe explained that *“A great emphasis was put on building a trusting relationship. Thus there was not really a feeling anymore of us vs. them. ... It takes effort, you really need to build these relationships.”* Moreover, the current relationship between JongRES and the formal RES has mutual benefits. JongRES can bring a ‘PIMBY’ (Please In My BackYard) stance to municipal meetings on wind and solar farms to oppose the NIMBY (Not In My BackYard) groups that are often present at such meetings.

### 4.3 Planning approach

#### 4.3.1 Instrumental rational approach

In all researched regions the RES policy decision-making processes generally followed an instrumental rational approach. This was due to the complexity and scale of the policies. The Foodvalley initially followed a mutual gain approach. This approach is based on the premise that both parties in a negotiation have something to gain from the negotiation. The difference between alternative negotiation methods is that in mutual gains parties do not participate from a specific position but out of particular interests.

Process director RES Region Arnhem Nijmegen said *“we deliberately choose to have the real decision-making be done by representatives of the people [i.e. aldermen etc] because that’s why we have elections”*. Other regions have a similar structure for the decision-making, where a representative democracy is the choice of democracy. Another reason to have the decision-making process be done by aldermen etc. is that there are many interests (i.e. nature, agriculture, personal etc.) and it is important to keep all these interests in mind, however, some of these are opposing interests and you do not want the ‘loudest’ voice to win (Process director RES Region Arnhem Nijmegen). Therefore it can be convenient to not include stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The final policy document is also in line with an instrumental rational approach. JongRES Groningen calls the final policy *“a document where all the different municipal plans have been stapled together to create one policy document with only limited consideration of the various stakeholders”*. RES Drenthe argues that *“the policy document may seem relatively conservative because the aim was to reach consensus”*. Additionally RES Drenthe nuances it by saying that *“the initial advice given by the various workgroups were more progressive”*. More about these workgroups down below.

#### 4.3.2 Communicative approach

Even though the decision-making is characterized by an instrumental rational approach, it is informed by the participation processes that can mostly be described as part of the communicative approach. In all researched regions JongRES was part of stakeholder groups that had the opportunity to react to proposed policy concepts. JongRES MRE described the participation process as *“reactive”*, nevertheless *“it feels like there is room to elaborate on certain topics together, there is an intention to involve stakeholders more. For example we now get sent the itinerary of the various work groups which gives us the opportunity to join specific work group meeting if they are relevant to us”*.

The communicative participation approach is not always seen favorably by JongRES. JongRES Groningen mentioned *“I don’t remember for what specific work group I was invited, but something*

*about energy generation. And I said we have more space here than in other parts of the Netherland so we should generate a lot of energy here. But they never took our advice and even put in the report that we supported their proposition whilst we did not."*

#### 4.3.3 Agonistic approach

Even though the participation process was mostly communicative, there are certain examples where a move to a more agonistic approach can be seen. JongRES Groningen gave the example *"a civil servant from the province of Groningen said that 'an open landscape is the main priority of groningers'. To which I responded 'open landscape? If we don't act now there won't be an open landscape in the future, so an open landscape should not be the priority. You should start implementing renewable energy generation projects as soon as possible and try to combine that with nature and the visual landscape'. And I noticed that she was surprised to hear that an open landscape isn't necessarily a priority. Additionally, one of the aldermen said 'we should listen to him, he is 2030, 2050, the future'."* This shows a change in the role of the civic initiative as well as change in how conflict is handled by planners.

RES Groningen Chairman talked about *"a meeting at the energy bar at Zernike, where JongRES was deeply engaged in a discussion about the future and was understanding about the impact more solar and wind energy have on the living environment etc. But at the same saying 'yes, we understand, and we should do something about that and limit the consequences, but in the end the goal is to become energy neutral in the future'."* The change of arena as well as the change in role of civic initiatives shows a move to a more agonistic approach.

The process director of RES Foodvalley gave an example on how power relations can change *"during a meeting the municipality of Veenendaal got a lot of pats on the back figuratively speaking because they were doing so well. Then the representative of JongRES said 'I am not gonna pat Veenendaal on its back because' and then a whole story about other aspect followed. I thought that was great, because as JongRES you can do that sort of thing. All other parties have their own interest and JongRES in a way represents the integral interest of the RES"*.

Lastly, RES Groningen Chairman said he appreciates JongRES because they push back against the establishment from time to time, which is needed because the formal world often prefers 'polderen' while this might not lead to the most desirable solutions. JongRES Groningen agrees that their more 'critical' approach is appreciated. However, he also notes that in order to move forward, JongRES needs the municipalities and their civil servants. Therefore it is import to not create resistance.

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter the results will be evaluated, reflected upon and connected to the literature in relation to the research question. The results will be connected to the conceptual model, that has provided a general overview of the relationship between structural and interpersonal aspects and the handling of conflict. Moreover, the results will also be connected to the table on planning approaches. The results show that the participation and decision-making processes cannot be labeled under one single planning approach. This demonstrates the challenge of translating theory to practice.

### 5.1 Reflections on the relationship between structural aspects and the handling of conflict

Structural (formal) aspects are generally related to the formal world, however can be incorporated by both local governments and citizen initiatives. Governmental organizations prefer citizen initiatives that have objectives that are politically justified, have a formalized organizational form and are organized according to logic of governmental discourse (van Dam et al., 2015). In this research case study it can be seen that JongRES uses a similar structure to the formal RES with local representatives, regional coordinators and a national board. The results show that the citizen initiative, JongRES, mostly benefits from having a similar structure. It helps them to be present at the RES processes that happen on different level of government. Moreover, just recently JongRES has been registered as a foundation, which has helped them explain who they are to other actors in the energy landscape. According to the interviewed formal RES actors JongRES's objectives are politically justified. JongRES makes the palette of stakeholders more inclusive by representing the younger generations, a group that is often missing in formal participation procedures. Additionally, JongRES is able to convey the urgency of the energy transition. Nevertheless, JongRES currently does not have the desired size and diversity constituency. This slightly affects the formal RES ability to justify why JongRES compared to other citizen initiatives deserves to be part of the participation processes.

The incorporation of structural aspects by JongRES affects the civic initiatives ability to be an included actor in the energy planning participation processes. From the interviews it is evident that the governmental and political actors want these structural aspects in a civic initiative so they know how to incorporate them into the participation processes. Moreover, the structural aspects incorporated by JongRES are beneficial to them in the transition of conflict handling in the planning processes. Due to adhering to a certain level of structural aspects JongRES is able to sometimes take on the role of the critic during participation processes. It also helps change the citizen initiatives role during those processes from a communicatively rational actor to a legitimate adversary with complementary views. The exchange between JongRES Groningen and the civil servant is an example of how conflict can be seen as an opportunity for communication and knowledge exchange in order to think differently (Bond, 2011).

### 5.2 Reflections on the relationship between interpersonal aspects and the handling of conflict

Interpersonal (informal) aspects are associated with the informal world of citizen initiatives (Bakker et al., 2012). More personal approaches by the local governments can influence the relationship with citizen initiatives (Oude Vrielink & van Wijdeven, 2011). Furthermore, attention and recognition from local governments can boost the morale of citizen initiatives (Hurenkamp et al., 2006). In the case study this was exemplified by JongRES feeling recognized by getting the opportunity to add a paragraph on youth participation in the final policy as well as writing the preface of the document. This boosted the morale of JongRES to continue to participate in the next phases of the RES.



The interpersonal aspects are not as important as the structural aspects in relation to transitioning how conflict is handled in energy planning. The fact that JongRES are volunteers is beneficial to the 'critical' role they take on during the participation processes. It allows JongRES to be apolitical. Moreover, in the beginning of the relationship the interpersonal aspects were needed to build a trusting relationship. The interpersonal aspects are needed to move the relationship between the formal and informal RES to later phases in which there is the possibility to move to more agonistic planning approaches. Interpersonal aspects by itself are not enough to affect the transition in conflict handling. Parallel to interpersonal aspects, structural aspects need to be developed in order for civic initiatives to be able to affect the handling of conflict.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter will provide an answer to the research questions. Furthermore, recommendations will be given that are useful for theorists and professionals. Followed by a critical reflection on the thesis. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be provided.

### 6.1 Conclusion

#### 6.1.1 Research questions

The main aim of this research was to find a deeper understanding of *how a civic initiative take part in transforming how conflict is being handled within the participation institutions of energy planning*. Before elaborating on this the secondary question will be answered.

The first sub-question aimed to understand *what conditions led to the formation of the civic initiative of JongRES as an included actor in energy planning participation*. The establishment of the RES policies created a window of opportunity for new emerging initiatives to join the energy policy making process. There was a lack within the participation processes in terms of youth participation. This lack led to the formation of JongRES. After the formation, JongRES got in touch with leading actors in the formal RES and started to build a relationship. For this relationship to grow, the formal RES needed to incorporate interpersonal aspects and most importantly JongRES needed to apply structural aspects such as a reliable formalized organizational structure.

The second subquestion aimed to understand *how the civic initiative of JongRES is working towards becoming an integrating actor in conflict-based decision-making processes*. The combination of interpersonal and structural aspects helped grow the relationship between the formal RES and JongRES to a stage where JongRES was actively included in the participation processes. JongRES was not able to actively partake in the decision-making processes, since these processes were exclusive to governmental and political actors. However, JongRES can indirectly affect the decision-making process by joining the workgroups. JongRES is invited to these groups due to the development of the interpersonal and structural aspects. These workgroups provide a smaller formal arena where JongRES can take on the role of legitimate adversary with complementary views. This way JongRES is able to slowly integrate productive conflict in the participation and decision-making processes.

The third subquestion aimed to understand *how the conflict-based decision-making process is playing an enabling role in the future potential of civic initiatives transforming the energy landscape*. In this case conflict-based decision-making should be regarded as a decision-making process in which the range of stakeholders is as inclusive as possible. When formal governmental institutions aim to have an inclusive decision-making process this provides an opportunity for civic initiatives, that represent an interest that is not represented yet, to participate in the process. In summary a conflict-based decision-making process would allow civic initiatives to take on a larger role in participation processes and even guide formal actors in policy-making.

The main aim of this research was to find a deeper understanding of *how a civic initiative take part in transforming how conflict is being handled within the participation institutions of energy planning*. In this case study, the civic initiative is dependent on what role, opportunities, and power the formal participation institutions allow them to have. JongRES had the role of providing opposing voice towards the NIMBY-like parties. In a way JongRES represented the integral interest of the RES policies and therefore was able and allowed to push back against the establishment whenever this integral interest got lost in discussions. Furthermore, having the opportunity to formally speak at municipal and provincial council meetings has put the importance of including youth in energy planning on the agenda. Currently the deciding power is still with the administrators. JongRES does take on the role of legitimate adversary with complementary views. However, the inclusion of stakeholders in the decision-making process continues to have the aim of gathering social and political support for the policy.

## 6.2 Recommendations

### 6.2.1 Agonistic approaches in practice

The results suggest that the regional and abstract scale of the RES 1.0 are not the most suitable for agonistic planning approaches. At this stage the main aim was to establish the policy framework. In the next stage, RES 2.0, implementation of renewable energy generation is the main aim. The implementation happens on a local level and the plans will be more concrete. This provides a better environment for challenging how conflict is handled in energy planning. Planners should experiment with agonistic approaches on this level. This can be done by giving citizens the opportunity to take on the role of legitimate adversary. The biggest challenge will be convincing the political actors to try an agonistic approach since this will limit their powers in a way.

### 6.2.1 Further research

Further research on how agonistic planning approaches can be understood in practice is needed. This research only gave a limited understanding.

## 6.3 Critical reflection

This research was limited in terms of geographical scale. The RES regions included in this research were based eastern, more rural, parts of the Netherland and therefore the findings are not as powerful and generalizable as when more regions were researched. Moreover, this research only interview one to maximum three persons from one region. This resulted in few perspectives on the participation and decision-making processes. In retrospective focusing on a limited amount of regions and interviewing more than two persons per region would provide a richer data set. Furthermore, JongRES is just one particular civic initiative and is not representative for other civic initiatives. Civic initiatives who have opposing values to JongRES might have a different experience participating in the energy landscape. It would have been valuable to include various kinds of civic initiatives or do a separate study on another type of civic initiative.

Altogether, this research led to new insight on how civic initiatives can transform how conflict is handled in energy planning participation. The knowledge on how more agonistic planning approaches can appear in practice is limited. This research provided some insight into this. However, the gap between agonistic planning in theory and practice remains.

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## Appendix 1 – Organizational structure JongRES

NP JongRES	Coordinators	Provinces	RES Regions	
	North	Groningen	Groningen	
		Drenthe	Drenthe	
		Friesland	Friesland	
	East	Overijssel		West-Overijssel
				Twente
		Gelderland		Noord-Veluwe
				Achterhoek
				Cleantech
				Foodvalley
				Arnhem-Nijmegen
		Rivierenland		
	Middle	Noord-Holland		Noord-Holland Noord
				Noord-Holland Zuid
		Utrecht		U16
				Amersfoort
				Part of Foodvalley
	Flevoland		Flevoland	
	South	Brabant		MRE
				Noord-Oost Brabant
				Hart van Brabant
				West-Brabant
		Limburg		Noord-Midden Limburg
				Zuid-Limburg
	West	Zeeland		Zeeland
		Zuid-Holland		Rotterdam-Den Haag
				Hoeksewaard
				Drechtsteden
			Alblasserwaard	
			Midden-Holland	
			Holland Rijnland	

## Appendix 2 Codes

Element	Code		
Structural	Reliable formal organization	Deductive	
	Procedure	Deductive	
Procedural	Voluntary nature	Deductive	
	Recognition	Deductive	
	Interpersonal Relations	Deductive	



Planning Approach	Instrumental rational	Deductive	
	Communicative	Deductive	
	Agonistic	Deductive	