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Local community ownership ‘just’ right?

Abstract:

This research focuses on the practical implementation of a 'just' transition in the municipality of Steenwijkerland, specifically exploring how community ownership relates to the energy transition. Currently, there is a pressing need to reduce emissions on a large scale and accelerate the energy transition. The 'just' transition aims to reduce community dependence on the oil and gas industry and promote self-sustainability. The study utilizes a qualitative research approach which involves the analysis of several policy documents, council meetings and six stakeholder interviews to gain insights into the role of community ownership in the process and outcome of renewable energy projects. Additionally, the study identifies challenges and success factors in the transition. Based on the findings, recommendations are given to promote a more equitable and justifiable 'just' transition in Steenwijkerland.

Keywords:

just transition, community ownership, regional energy transition, onshore energy

Colophon

Title: Local ownership 'just' right?

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Version: Final

Date: 12th of June 2023

BSc Spatial Planning and Design

University of Groningen

Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Word count: 6596

Table of contents

Colophon	2
Introduction	5
Background	5
Research Problem.....	5
Introduction to the municipality of Steenwijkerland.....	6
Research question.....	7
Structure	7
Theoretical framework:	8
Justice.....	8
Community ownership.....	8
Conceptual Model	9
Expectations	9
Research strategy.....	10
Data collection.....	11
Data analysis.....	12
Ethical considerations.....	13
Results	14
Implementation of community ownership.....	14
Distributive justice	14
Benefits.....	14
Responsibilities	15
Impact.....	15
Procedural justice	15
Professionalism and resources distribution	15
Trust issues.....	16
The role of the initiator.....	16
The role of the municipality	16
Community ownership in relation to the ‘just’ transition.....	16
Challenges	17
Success factors	17
Reflection	18
Conclusion.....	19
Recommendations	19
References	20
Appendices	22
Local ownership ‘just’ right?	
Victor Veldhuis	3

Appendix 1: Interview Guide	22
Appendix 2: Interview Guide English.....	24
Appendix 3: Consent Form	26

Introduction

Background

The urgency to reduce our emissions and thus the need for the energy transition has been established in climate agreements like the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015) and the EU climate package ‘Fit for 55’ (Consilium, 2023). These goals and ambitions are translated into the Dutch climate agreement ‘klimaatakkoord’ (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, 2019). This agreement stresses the importance of a bottom-up planning approach for planning, realising and exploiting renewable energy projects. According to the Dutch climate agreement each renewable energy project should result in a community-owned share of 50%. This implies that local inhabitants and companies together should own 50% of the project. Since the climate agreement (2019) is relatively recent it is interesting to study how this ambition is realized in practice. The importance of the bottom-up planning approach and the community share both fit in the wider concept of the (just) transition which is the shift from fossil fuel to a sustainable and low-carbon economy. This transition’s ‘just’ aspect is that citizens and communities should be less dependent on the oil and gas industry and promote self-sustainability (McCauley and Heffron, 2018). In the Netherlands this is commonly achieved by involving communities in the planning process which should result in community ownership and control over renewable energy projects.

The Renewable Energy Agency (2020) suggests that a participatory approach has numerous benefits. This approach requires a comprehensive and collaborative planning process initiated from the bottom-up, which may extend the planning phase but ultimately reduces time and creates greater support in the long run (De Roo and Voogd, 2021). Therefore, all stakeholders stand to benefit by working together in an integrated manner to achieve the defined ambitions. To initiate the bottom-up energy transition in the Netherlands, 30 Regional Energy Strategies (RES) were founded to contribute to a reduction in emissions of 49% in 2030 compared to 1990 and become climate neutral in 2050. In each RES area, the provinces, municipalities, grid operators, energy cooperatives, and citizens need to work together to reach their renewable energy ambition which they have established in the RES 1.0 document and will be elaborated on in the RES 2.0 document which will be published in June 2023. Interestingly, several RES areas still must realize a substantial part of their ambition before 2030 (Dutch National Programme Regional Energy Strategies, 2022a).

Research Problem

This research is focused on the practical implementation of a ‘just’ transition which could be defined as “a fair and equitable process of moving towards a post-carbon society (McCauley and Heffron, 2018, p. 2).” To ensure the fair and equitable participation of communities, the most dominant forms of justice in the energy transition are distribution and procedural justice (McCauley and Heffron, 2018).

Municipalities are heavily involved in the planning of renewable energy projects, together with several stakeholders. The municipality designs the institutional framework for the planning and the realization of renewable energy projects, including the type of renewable energy, the area where renewable energy can be located, and how initiators should involve the community. Thus, municipalities play a crucial role in planning renewable energy projects. Especially for community ownership, the role of the municipality is important, as they are responsible for the implementation of the 50% community ownership goal into their local policies. Since nationally, it is only an ambition, the municipalities within the RES area need to decide how they are going to transition the national ambition into their policies (Dutch National Programme Regional Energy Strategies, 2022c).

For this research, a municipality will be selected in a Rural RES area since the rural landscape has more space for solar and wind infrastructure. RES Area West-Overijssel is selected to study because in July 2022 the renewable energy target is translated into 23% realisation, 22 % planned and 55% which

is still an ambition to realize before 2030 (Dutch National Programme Regional Energy Strategies, 2022b). Compared to the national average of 44% realisation 23% planned and 22% which is still an ambition. The municipality of Steenwijkerland does not have much renewable energy infrastructure in their municipality yet. This presents both opportunities and problems for a 'just' transition in the municipality. While the recent establishment of community ownership objectives in 2019 allows for increased local ownership in energy facilities, doubts persist about achieving the municipality's renewable energy goals by the 2030 deadline due to the remaining substantial percentage of ambition. Moreover, Steenwijkerland has high expectations for community-owned projects to contribute to the (just) transition, yet limited research has been conducted to assess the form of ownership and its actual impact.

Introduction to the municipality of Steenwijkerland

The selected municipality is located in the northwestern part of the province of Overijssel in the Netherlands. It covers an area of approximately 322 square kilometres. Its location relative to the rest of the Netherlands is shown in figure 1. Steenwijkerland has a population density of 155 inhabitants per km², which is relatively low compared to other parts of the Netherlands. Therefore, it is identified as a rural landscape (CBS, 2022). The rural landscape is dominated by agricultural and cultural functions. In the middle of the municipality, there is a national park and Natura-2000 area 'Weerribben-Wieden'. This is the largest lowland marsh area in northwestern Europe. This covers an area of approximately 100 square kilometres (Weerribben-Wieden, no date).



Figure 1: RES Area West-Overijssel; municipality of Steenwijkerland adopted from RES Regio West-Overijssel

Currently, the renewable energy projects that have been realized are either solar panels on a larger scale on rooftops or one of the two solar parks that have been realized in the municipality. One of them is a park in Oldemarkt, which is called solar park the 'Boterberg'. This park is relatively small because it consists of 3200 panels and covers a land area of 1.5 acres (Steenwijkerland, 2023). Next to that, there is a solar park near Wanneperveen and Meppel which covers a land area of 47 acres and could provide electricity for 8000 households (PowerField, 2022). Furthermore, there have also been several initiatives that have stalled, such as in the 'Bentpolder' in Vollenhove and near Eeserwold. Next to that, are there some small wind turbines present. Given that solar energy infrastructure dominates the renewable energy landscape in this municipality, the primary focus of this research will be on exploring community ownership in solar parks.

Name of the park:	Location:	Institutional framework:	Initiators:	Realization:
Solar park the 'Boterberg'	Oldemarkt	Old policy without community ownership	Energy cooperative Oldemarkt and the Municipality of Steenwijkerland	EC Oldemarkt 10% / Municipality of Steenwijkerland 90%
Solar park Meppel	Wannerperveen	Older policy without community ownership	PowerField	100 % owned by PowerField
Solarpark the Bentpolder	Vollenhove	The new policy which should include community ownership	Solarfields (new name Novar) and Energy cooperative Steenergie	Has not been realized
Solar park Eeserwold	Eeserwold	The new policy which should include community ownership	Groenleven	Has not been realized (yet)

Figure 2: Overview of solar parks in the municipality that have been initiated

Research question

To conduct this research the following main research question is formulated as follows:

‘How is community ownership in solar and wind parks implemented in the municipality of Steenwijkerland and how do these forms of ownership relate to a ‘just’ transition’

Sub questions:

- 1. How can the concepts of community ownership and ‘just’ transition be defined and applied to the energy transition context?*
- 2. How do forms of community ownership found in Steenwijkerland relate to distributive and procedural justice?*
- 3. What are the challenges and success factors for community-owned solar and wind parks in Steenwijkerland to achieve distributive and procedural justice in the energy transition in Steenwijkerland, according to stakeholders?*

Structure

The study begins with the introduction of the theoretical perspective of the 'just' transition and the exploration of various forms of community ownership. Following this, the conceptual model and expectations are presented. Followed by a review of the triangulation research design and the selected data. The methodology section also encompasses the data analysis and coding processes. The fourth part presents the results. The final section starts with a reflection on the research process. After this, the research question will be answered, and the most important aspects relating to the 'just' transition and community ownership in solar and wind parks will be summarized.

Theoretical framework:

In this theoretical framework, the concept of a 'just' transition will be operationalized in the form of distributive and procedural justice. Thereafter, community ownership will be introduced, and the forms of community ownership are discussed. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of the 'just' transition and community ownership. The conceptual model will show the relationship between the different introduced terms.

Justice

The 'just' transition should create a new economy in which citizens and communities are less dependent on the oil and gas industry and more self-sustaining. (Heffron and McCauley, 2018). While achieving this 'just' transition no one should be left behind or unfairly impacted. Theoretical debates about 'justice' and its implications date back in the Western World to the Greek philosophers. The term 'just' transition has been introduced since the 1980s. Since then, it has been in development and the term and its implications have been used in papers that are focused on the energy transition (McCauley and Heffron, 2018). In the scope of this research, only two terms of justice will be included namely distribution justice and procedural justice. This pragmatic choice is based on literature since McCauley and Heffron (2018) argue that distribution and procedural are the most common dimensions of justice in the wider concept of a 'just' transition.

- 1) Distribution justice as introduced by Walker (2009) refers to 'the (un)equal spatial distribution of benefits, responsibilities and impacts.' Justice is achieved whenever the three aspects are distributed equally among the stakeholders involved.
- 2) Procedural justice as summarized by Mccauley, Heffron and Jenkins (2009) highlight the importance of fair and equitable processes in decision-making, particularly in areas that impact various stakeholders. This form of justice calls for the involvement of all affected parties in a non-discriminatory manner, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their decisions are considered throughout the process.

Community ownership

Community ownership can be defined as a process by which community members collectively control the asset, the decision-making processes and the resources. In the context of this research, this implies the management of the renewable energy project and the responsibilities for that project. The financial investments, risks and rewards. Community ownership involves a shift in centralized control towards community-driven co-governance (Hogan *et al.*, 2022).

In the worksheet provided by the Dutch National Programme Regional Energy Strategies (2022c) several forms of ownership were introduced that have some form of ownership that could be seen as a form of community ownership. Based on this information an ownership spectrum can be drafted. Where fully locally owned is the most extreme form of community ownership, whereas privately owned by one local individual or company is the most extreme form on the right side of the spectrum. Other forms are cooperatives and shared ownership which both have some form of community ownership. (Hogan *et al.*, 2022). To further classify the form of community ownership a model (figure 3) introduced by Walker and Devine-Wright (2008) will be used. This model includes the process and outcomes of community ownership, which are both important and related to procedural justice (process) and distribution justice (outcome). Since the ideal form of community ownership depends on both aspects. The process is defined as the involvement of locals in the planning, realisation and exploitation of the project. Whereas the outcome has the following definition of how and where the benefits and impacts are distributed. Next to that are the benefits defined as the compensation for the community, mainly in the form of financial payments. Impacts are seen as the local costs associated with the development (Hogan *et al.*, 2022).

The community ownership worksheet for civil servants states that the percentage of community ownership is a decision made on a political level. This indicates that this choice is an important factor in determining the place on the process outcome model (figure 3). This political choice of the share of community ownership will determine how open the process is and how local the outcome will be. The document determines the following percentages of community ownership with (co)determination of 100%, 51%, 50%, and less than 50%. Additionally, there is a form of community ownership called "community ownership in the exploitation phase," Where the community can still become owners and share the revenues but does not have co-governance in the project automatically because this depends on the agreements made between the developer and the local community.

Furthermore, financial participation in the project is not seen as (community) ownership because participation does not make a financial participant an owner of the project. However, it provides an accessible opportunity for the local community to invest in the project and benefit from the revenues gained from the sustainable energy infrastructure in their local area (Dutch National Programme Regional Energy Strategies, 2022c).

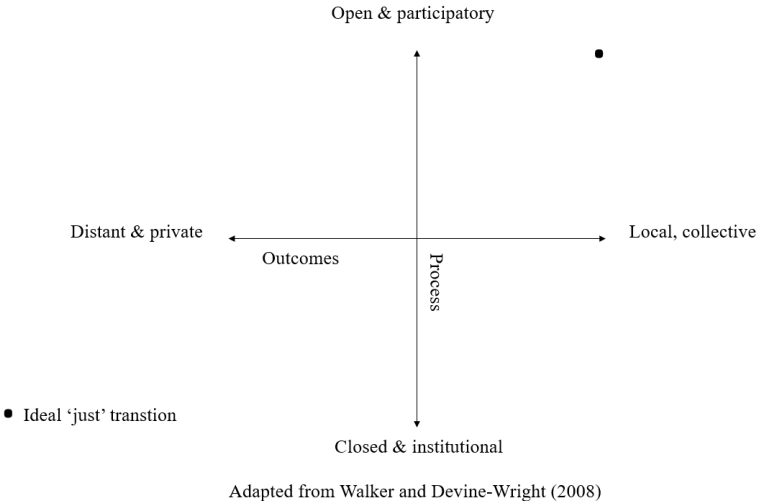


Figure 3: Process outcome model

Conceptual Model

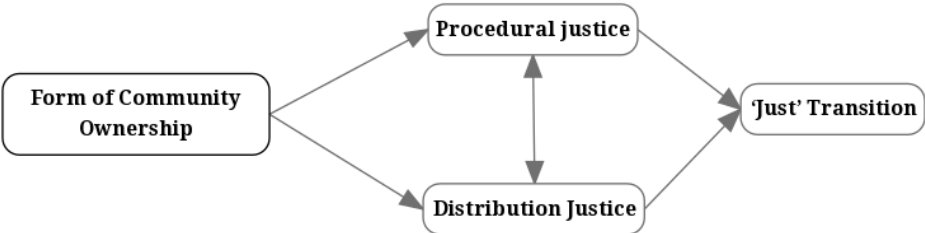


Figure 4: Conceptual model

Expectations

The form of community ownership is expected to impact the outcomes of procedural justice and the distribution of justice (figure 4). The perceived fairness of the procedural process and the distribution outcome of benefits and impacts both play crucial roles in determining the extent to which a 'just' transition can be achieved. Moreover, there is a suggested interdependence between the procedural and distribution aspects, as the process itself can influence the distribution outcomes, and vice versa, the distribution outcomes can impact the perceived fairness of the process.

Methodology

Research strategy

This research consists of a secondary data analysis conducted on selected policy documents and council meetings related to RES policy documents or solar energy on land. In addition, a primary data collection was gathered through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. This qualitative multi-method approach has both a normative and theoretical perspective, as well as a subjective contextual perspective. Aiming to provide an understanding of the current and expected situation by analysing policy documents, and then focusing on key aspects of community ownership during stakeholder interviews. This research design provides background knowledge on the regional energy transition and the specific aspects of community ownership within the municipality of Steenwijkerland and may also provide insights into possible mismatches between the policies in place and stakeholder experiences. To account for this, the study incorporates three methods of data collection:

Policy document analysis (normative, theoretical)

Council meeting analysis (subjective, political)

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (subjective, contextual)

These multiple methods and sources are known as triangulation: gaining in-depth knowledge from different unique perspectives and stakes (Clifford *et al.*, 2010).

The choice of a multi-method approach not only fits the research aim but also strengthens the findings. As explained by Clifford *et al.* (2010, p. 8): ‘‘Researchers can use multiple methods or different sources of information to try and maximize an understanding of a research question.’’ Since different governmental layers and stakeholders in the energy transition need to work together. The policy documents guide the stakeholders on future developments in institutional design and the role of the government in the planning and realization of renewable energy projects. Whereas the council meetings provide (political) context. The secondary data findings will be used as input for the stakeholder interviews. Here are the interviewees asked about their perspective on community ownership in solar parks and their view on the planning of renewable energy projects with community ownership in the future. This approach facilitates the integration of various unique perspectives and enables a comprehensive understanding of the current context regarding community ownership within Steenwijkerland, with a specific focus on procedural and distribution justice. In the figures 5, 6 and 7, an overview is given of the selected policy documents, council meetings and stakeholders.

Data collection

Title:	Published by:	Date of Publication:	Selection of chapters:
Climate Agreement (P-1)	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate	28th of June 2019	C5.5, e5.9, D5, D7
Hoofddocument RES 1 (P-2)	West-Overijssel RES	1st of June 2021	
Tussenstand Regionale Energiestrategie (RES) (P-3)	West-Overijssel RES	12th of July 2022	
Bijlage 1b. Participatiekaarten per gemeente RES 1.0 (P-4)	West-Overijssel RES	After April 2020	Participatie gemeente Steenwijkerland – zoekgebieden
Bouwsteen Aan de slag met lokaal eigendom (P-5)	West-Overijssel RES		
Beleidskader voor kleine windmolens in de gemeente Steenwijkerland p.11 & 12 (P-6)	Municipality of Steenwijkerland	25th of januari 2022	
Beleidskader Ruimte voor zonnepanelen op (Steenwijker)land (P-7)	Municipality of Steenwijkerland	21st of May 2019	

Figure 5: Overview of the selected policy documents

Title:	Topic on the agenda:
Council meeting - 21st of May 2019 (C-1)	5.1 Solar energy on land
Council meeting - 20th of April 2021 (C-2)	5.2 Application for temporary environmental permit - Realising a solar park near Eeserwold
Council meeting - 21st of April 2021 (C-3)	5.3 Application for temporary environmental permit - Realising a solar park near Wanneperveen & 5.4 Establish final offer and Main Line Agreement Regional Energy Strategy West Overijssel
Council meeting - 22nd of June 2021 (C-3)	5.1 RES 1.0 West-Overijssel

Figure 6: Overview of the selected council meetings

For this research, I have requested policy documents from the registrar that were related to the energy transition. A selection has been made from the received documents based on topics like: ‘renewable electricity’, ‘spatial integration’, ‘support base’, ‘participation’, ‘RES West-Overijssel’, and ‘municipal policies on renewable energy’.

Name:	Function:	Date:
Gerrit Klaassen (I-1)	Former secretary of energy cooperative Voorst tot Wieden	07-04-2023
Solar Park developer X (I-2)	Project manager	13-04-2023
Energy cooperative Steenergie (I-3)	Board member	17-04-2023
Energy cooperative Wieden Weerribben (I-4)	Chairman	19-04-2023
Enexis (I-5)	Senior partner energy transition	25-04-2023
Municipality of Steenwijkerland (I-6)	Senior advisor sustainability and support base	02-05-2023

Figure 7: Overview of the selected stakeholders

The interviewees were selected because the municipality, market developers, and energy cooperatives were most frequently mentioned as relevant stakeholders in RES documents. In this interviewee selection design, three out of seven cooperatives in the municipality were selected. These cooperatives have realized or will realize solar projects either on land or on rooftops. Within the municipality, five

cooperatives fit the description of 'will or have realized the solar project(s)'. The other two cooperatives have a broader focus on sustainability and promoting sustainable behaviour among locals. Out of the four cooperatives involved in solar energy, I have selected three cooperatives: Gerrit Klassen (who speaks on his own behalf), cooperative Steenergie, and cooperative Wieden-Weerribben, all active in the southern part of the municipality. cooperative Steenwijk focuses on Steenwijk and surrounding areas, while cooperative Oldemarkt has a park in Oldemarkt, both in the northern municipality.

Data analysis

The policy documents and interviews were coded based on the coding tree created prior to the analysis. This tree was developed based on the conceptual model and guided the data analysis performed using "ATLAS.ti." The documents were uploaded to this program and analysed carefully. If a piece of text corresponds to one or more codes, these codes were assigned to the text.

The coding tree, derived from Walker's (2009) article on the distributional aspects of benefits, responsibilities, and impact, was operationalized by introducing relevant variables. These variables, adapted to fit the research scope, were incorporated into the coding tree. Some codes were introduced by the author before coding the policy documents and interview guides, indicated by an asterisk (*), while the code "positive perception" was added during the coding of the policy documents, denoted by double asterisks (**) in figure 8.

During data processing and interpretation, ATLAS.ti served as the main tool. It functioned as a database containing the selected policy documents and interview transcripts, providing comprehensive context. ATLAS.ti was also utilized as a code manager, facilitating the identification of relationships and patterns within coding groups and individual codes. The observations were thoroughly analysed and interpreted, leading to the final presentation of the results.

However, challenges arose when applying codes from the procedural code group, particularly due to the overlap between "When are they included" and "Who is included." Similar challenges were encountered with the codes "Is there an equal playing field" and "Who decides on the issues." Attributing a single code became difficult, as data often related to multiple codes simultaneously. Consequently, many codes were used simultaneously.

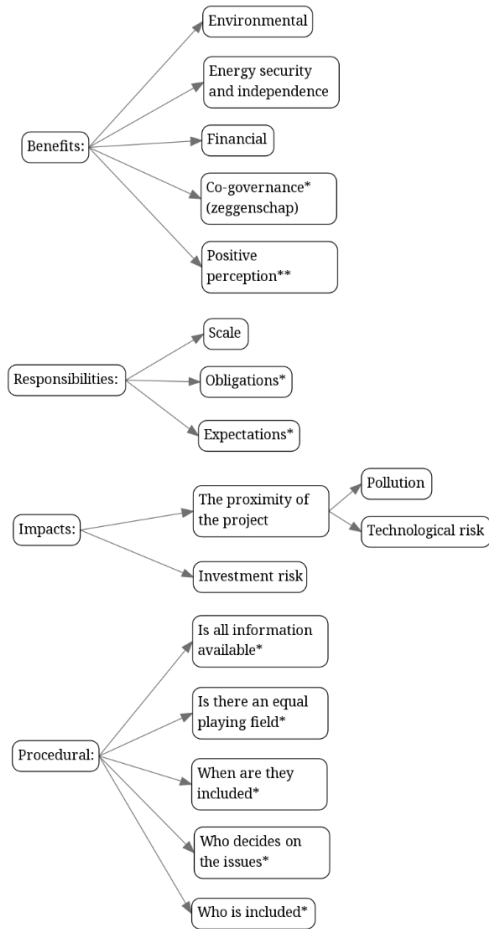


Figure 8: Coding tree

Ethical considerations

Regarding the power relations between the interviewee and me as the researcher, I see no problem. I do not know any selected person from my direct network; therefore, we could interact professionally. Next to that, I realize that I have prior knowledge about the municipality which is why I know that some parties are sometimes negative about the role of the civil service and the politics in their ability to execute their policies and facilitate the market in their needs. Since I am conducting semi-structured interviews with open questions that are directly linked to my theory. I do not take any position. By doing this, I have done the best I could to strive for academic objectivity.

However, ethical challenges might arise from the fact that most of the RES ambition still needs to be translated into solar or wind projects. Here I see a dilemma of consent and confidentiality which is a common ethical dilemma according to Clifford et al., (2010). Although everyone except for market developer X did agree on participation under their own name. There is still a dilemma regarding the private data gained from the interviewees, they will share their perspectives on the current situation of the energy transition in Steenwijkerland, and specifically their position regarding community ownership. The dilemma that arises here is the trade-off between sharing the research results to provide insights on justice and potentially causing harm. That is why I will adhere to the 'cause-no-harm principle' (Meho and Langin, 2022). This article provides an example that shows that the potential harm to the respondent is not worth the potential benefits of the knowledge gained. So, to ensure that each viewing point on potentially sensitive subjects remains confidential, does the results section not refer to single interviews. Only when a standpoint is confirmed by multiple interviews, a reference is made to the underlying interviews.

Results

At present, solar energy can be generated through rooftop installations, and by solar parks on land. Next to that small wind turbines are permitted in Steenwijkerland. Both solar parks and small wind turbines are subject to a specific policy (P-6, P-7). During the data collection, which took place in April and the beginning of May, large wind turbines were restricted. However, the possibility of large wind turbines on land is gaining political support. It could be expected that large wind turbines will be allowed for some areas within the municipality in the upcoming period (I-3, I-4).

Implementation of community ownership

Currently, the large rooftop installations and the solar park in Oldemarkt do have community ownership. In Wanneperveen the park does not have any form of community ownership.

Three energy cooperatives have implemented solar installations on rooftops. They raised 100% local funding through the 'Postcoderoosregeling', allowing collective investment and shared returns. Cooperative members are exempt from energy tax on their produced electricity for 15 years. Participation requires residency in or near the project's postal code area. The 'Postcoderoosregeling' has been replaced by the 'Subsidieregeling Coöperatieve Energieopwekking' (SCE) since April 1, 2021. The SCE guarantees electricity prices, encouraging investments in the energy transition. These regulations enable 100% community ownership and contribute to the energy transition and RES ambition despite small-scale projects (I-1, I-4).

The solar park in Oldemarkt has been realized with a partnership between the local energy cooperative Oldemarkt and the municipality of Steenwijkerland. The cooperative initiated the process, which started in 2018, and was in the lead for the planning of this park. They informed the local inhabitants and created the opportunity for the community to participate. Because the municipality also wanted to invest, the park could be larger, resulting in scale advantages for the two parties involved. During the planning, there was no clear policy in place regarding local ownership, which resulted in 40 households owning 10% of the park, while the municipality owned the remaining 90%. The energy generated is used for the 1,200 sewage pumping stations within the municipality (Steenwijkerland, 2023).

The solar park in Wanneperveen was also planned and realized under the older policy without local ownership targets. The developing party PowerField has realized this park with the absence of an energy cooperative involved in the realization of this park. In the old policy, there was a payment per megawatt peak that the developing party needs to pay annually for a period of 15 years. In consultation with the village interest group, an agreement was made to deposit the annual payments into a community fund at once. This involves a sum of several hundred thousand euros. In addition to this payment, agreements were made to make five public buildings more energy-efficient or to install solar panels on the roofs of these buildings. Although there is no direct local ownership within this park, PowerField has done more than what was required by the municipality as compensation for the local community according to the municipality's policy at that time (PowerField, 2022).

Distributive justice

Benefits

The most frequently mentioned benefit created by community ownership are the financial aspects that arise from the exploitation of the renewable energy infrastructure (I-1, I-3, I-4). With statements like: *‘One very important reason is the fact that it is financially attractive.’* The idea here was that the impact experienced should also be compensated by the benefit derived from the revenue generated by the infrastructure. Another important aspect seen as an advantage is the fact that local ownership also yields co-governance control (I-1, I-3, I-4). *‘Since everyone has equal rights.’* An additional benefit is that people become involved in the energy transition as a result. *‘So, it is a matter of involvement.’* The other aspects were all mentioned much less frequently in policies and during the interviews. It can

be concluded from this that the financial aspect and control aspects are important for those who provide community ownership in Steenwijkerland. The other aspects, such as the benefit of energy security and independence, the environment, opportunities for the local economy, and the positive perception were mentioned less frequently (P-5, P-6, P-7, I-1 – I-6).

Responsibilities

Upon examination of the responsibilities, it became evident that the initiator holds a significant responsibility. The initiator is accountable for initiating a well-planned process that adheres to the institutional design. (P-7, I-1 – I-6) *‘Yes, there is definitely a disproportionately large responsibility on the initiators. As a result, too few projects are being realized.’* It is still feasible for the energy cooperatives for small projects, as there are relatively few expectations and obligations set by the municipality for the realization of solar roof installations for instance. Scale plays an important role, as there are many expectations and obligations for the planning and realization of a large solar park such as in Wanneperveen. Both the local community and the municipality expect a good planning process that adheres to obligations, such as a good participation process. This responsibility solely rests with the party initiating the project. Given the limited number of parties that can initiate solar (and wind) energy projects, I would argue that there is a significant responsibility on the existing cooperatives to meet Steenwijkerland's sustainability ambitions. This means that the cooperatives are not only responsible for developing and implementing their projects but are also expected to collaborate with market parties. The question can be raised whether this is an unrealistic expectation, as the cooperatives and their boards are not professional enough (yet) to take on this responsibility or they do not have the ambition to do so (I-1, I-2, I-4, I-5).

Impact

Two types of impact can be distinguished when considering the impact of solar projects. The first is the impact on the community, due to the project's location in the immediate vicinity. The second is the impact on project participants. These two types of impact were observed in solar farms on land, but not in solar installations on a roof.

Firstly, the impacts on the community. The proximity of the project and the possible (unknown) risks of solar parks were mentioned as aspects that cause the experienced impact (I-3). Especially for non-landowning residents in the immediate vicinity, the proximity of the solar park is such a significant impact that these stakeholders do not want to talk about the arrival of a solar park beforehand. The compensation options are not sufficient to compensate for the impact. *‘People living there just don't seem to have a strong desire for a solar park. Landowners are more interested as I have noticed.’*

Moreover, initiating a renewable energy project involves significant risk, especially in the initial phase when many uncertainties remain. This pre-investment phase incurs both time and monetary costs, which can have a significant impact on the initiator, given the scarcity of these resources (I-2, I-3, I-5). The risk/reward trade-off is bigger for solar energy on land compared to rooftops, and this will be even more pronounced for the planning of large wind turbines. Hence, the scale of the project influences the potential impact for the initiator(s).

Procedural justice

The codes 'Who is included' and 'Who decides on the issue' were the most common, followed by 'Is there an equal playing field' and 'Is all the information available'. 'When are they included' did not appear that frequently. While some aspects may be more prominent or frequently mentioned, taking into consideration the interplay of factors is crucial in assessing the fairness and transparency of the decision-making process (P-1 – P-7, I-1 – I-6).

Professionalism and resources distribution

The energy transition demands significant investments in large-scale energy parks such as the one in Wanneperveen. This implies that millions of euros need to be invested in these holding structures.

However, several energy cooperatives in the municipality are not sufficiently professional to manage such an extensive project (I-2, I-3). So, they will either undertake a project at the same small scale or the energy cooperative needs to work together with a market developer. The relationship between market parties and energy cooperatives can be complicated, as market parties have more resources, knowledge and expertise (I-1, I-3, I-4). This gives the market developer an advantage in negotiations, which results in an unequal playing field, which negatively impacts the procedural (process) and distribution (outcome) justice aspects and thus negatively impacts the ‘just’ transition.

Trust issues

In addition to that, trust issues among cooperatives further complicate collaborations. The general sentiment from different cooperatives is that cooperative Steenergie is seen as ‘money driven’, a business club with a commercial interest’. The reluctance to collaborate with Steenergie arises from these perceptions, which contribute to a lack of willingness to work together. Steenergie is the most professionally established cooperative within the municipality, aiming to generate sustainable energy on a large scale. Whereas the other cooperatives have realized projects on a small scale. Both the realization of large and small projects are crucial to achieve the intended RES ambition. Collaborating between the cooperatives is desirable to achieve larger-scale projects. Such collaboration can ensure that even large projects have at least 50% local ownership, benefiting the (just) transition.

The role of the initiator

In the municipality of Steenwijkerland, the initiators are responsible for the planning, realization, and exploitation of solar projects. The initiator can be an energy cooperative or a market party, as well as a collaboration between local parties and/or national market parties. There is a mismatch between the desires of the municipal policy and reality. Not all cooperatives aspire to generate sustainable energy on a large scale in the short term, either independently or in collaboration with a market party (I-1, I-2, I-4, 1-6). Due to the requirement of at least 50% local ownership, market parties can no longer independently realize projects like the park in Wanneperveen. This requirement promotes fairness in the process by reducing the advantage held by market developers. It emphasizes the need for energy cooperatives and market parties to collaborate within a fair and equitable framework.

The role of the municipality

Although the municipality is a key player, its role in achieving a ‘just’ transition has not been sufficient. The municipality claims to have a facilitative role; however, several stakeholders do not perceive it as such (I-3, I-4). *‘Yes the facilitating role of the municipality is absent, because the municipality just says 50% ownership but will in fact just leave it to the cooperatives to sort that out with the market developers.’* This may be a temporary problem caused by high staff turnover, but it is desirable for the municipality to resume its facilitative role as soon as possible. In which the municipality creates the right conditions, provides resources, and removes obstacles so initiators could work efficiently and effectively (together).

Community ownership in relation to the ‘just’ transition

The relationship between forms of community ownership and the ‘just’ transition could be explained by the process outcome model for the different solar energy installation types within the municipality (figure 9). This model has been established after the examination and interpretation of the data gained in this study.

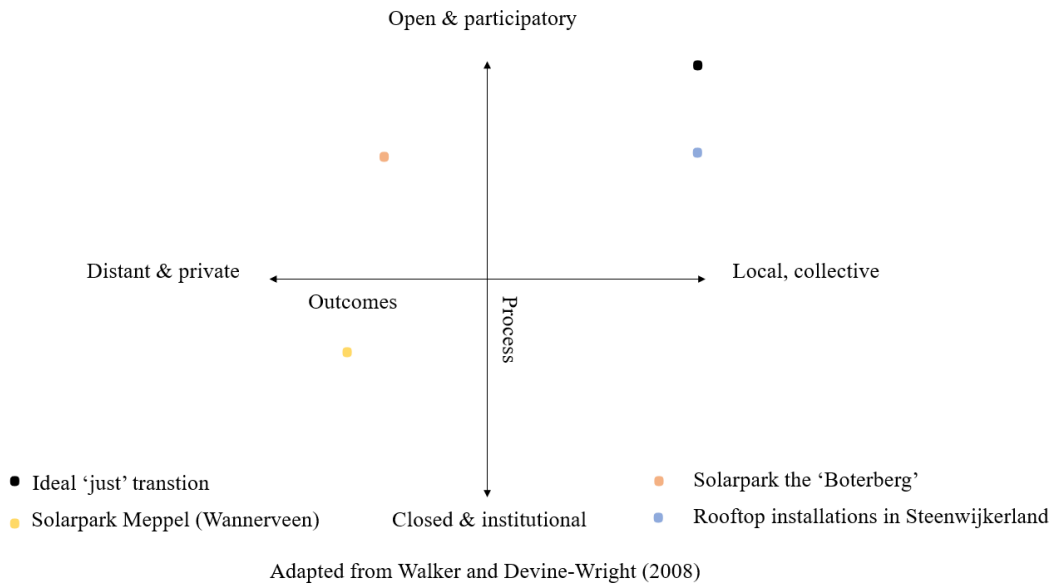


Figure 9: Process outcome model applied in the municipality of Steenwijkerland

When looking at the process, the municipality claims that it is open and participatory and that they facilitate local bottom-up initiatives. However, the local initiator disagrees with this for solar parks since the process is complex and therefore not inviting. Cooperatives need to establish a sufficient planning and participation process, although not everyone involved has the experience to do so. As for the outcome, some rooftop installations have been realized, but only dozens of households invest in these installations. In the municipality, there is one large-scale solar park, hence the process was not open, and the outcome was not local. For the 'Botenberg' the process was as open as the rooftop installations here households did invest which resulted in 10% being owned by the inhabitants of Oldemarkt. Although policies have been drafted to promote several bottom-up initiatives, the reality is that energy cooperatives have not yet succeeded in realizing larger-scale projects, either on their own or in collaboration with market parties. Until now, the challenge of achieving a minimum of 50% community ownership in large-scale projects continues to be evident.

Next to that, community ownership is one of the means to achieve the 'just' transition. It can only be a 'just' transition if the energy transition also takes place. In that respect, Steenwijkerland is still facing a major challenge. The last RES publication of 2022 shows that only 23 % of the goal for 2030 is realized. This indicates that the community is still heavily reliant on the oil and gas industry, which shows that the (just) transition has not yet gained sufficient traction.

Challenges

- Under the municipal bottom-up policy a limited number of projects have been initiated and realized.
- The projects with local ownership are relatively small in peak capacity.
- Energy cooperatives have limited resources in comparison to market parties.
- The energy cooperatives bear significant responsibilities due to the current institutional design.

Success factors

- Energy cooperatives are an effective way to participate in the energy and 'just' transition.
- Projects initiated locally can count on more support from the community.
- Community ownership has the potential to compensate for the impact of renewable energy installations for the wider community.

Reflection

While conducting this research, I noticed the high responsibilities of the initiator. As stated in the expectations I assumed that the benefits should compensate for the impacts, so I have not thought about the relationship between the distributive aspect and the responsibilities. The responsibilities issue came to light through reflection and the comparison of different interviews. In future research, it would be beneficial to delve deeper into the distribution of responsibilities and the implications for the 'just' transition.

Furthermore, I realized the energy transition in practice contradicts the ideological foundation of an equitable and inclusive transition. Currently, the transition is in several aspects not as inclusive and equitable as it could be. To facilitate a 'just' transition the community need to be active in the planning, realization and exploitation of projects throughout the future energy provision. However, many inhabitants do not have the resources to do so. Even if the community gets self-sufficient some inhabitants are still dependent since they have not participated in the transition. This is also understandable, given that these types of projects are large-scale ventures that involve millions in investments. So, due to the high investment costs, the transition in practice is less inclusive than what the theory prescribes.

For the stakeholder selection, one pragmatic choice was made. Even though Henk Schimmel is not directly involved in the energy transition of Steenwijkerland. Schimmel was chosen for the interview due to his extensive experience as a senior 'partner energy transition'. I believe that his insights contribute to the understanding of the role of Enexis within the energy transition. Since the role of Enexis is similar for different geographical areas. The fact that Henk Schimmel is responsible for different municipalities should not be a problem for the interpretation of the role of Enexis. Moreover, the process of data collection was conducted seamlessly, as the policy documents were obtained with the assistance of the registrar. Additionally, I was able to arrange interviews with all the intended selected stakeholders.

In this research, only a few solar parks have been examined, namely rooftop installations, the 'Boterberg,' and the park in Wanneperveen. These projects have distinct ownership models, which required cautious handling of the data, and generalization was conducted separately for each park type. Nonetheless, it was possible to identify certain patterns, success factors, and challenges, which are presented in the results section.

The research question addresses solar and wind parks, including large-scale rooftops as a park type. However, the implementation of wind parks has been underexplored due to current prohibition. Nonetheless, this study highlights the imperative nature of wind park implementation for meeting RES targets.

Lastly, the 'just' transition may present challenges in certain aspects, but it provides researchers, political administrators, and policymakers with guidance for creating the most desirable future situation for the local community. Hence, political administrators should continue to strive for a 'just' transition.

Conclusion

This study aims to answer the main question: How is community ownership in solar and wind parks implemented in the municipality of Steenwijkerland, and how do these forms of ownership relate to a 'just' transition? The findings of this research provide several key insights.

Firstly, it is observed that local initiators bear too many responsibilities since the municipality falls short in facilitating the initiator. Despite this, a limited number of inhabitants have actively volunteered and organized themselves into seven different energy cooperatives. These cooperatives currently hold the responsibility for executing the energy transition at the municipal level, either through self-implementation or by collaborating with market actors. Since the municipality does not want to realise new projects currently themselves

Moreover, the findings of this research indicate that, for smaller projects, the community expresses a preference for 100% ownership. As the scale of the projects increases, cooperatives are generally content with a community share of at least 50%. Thus, for larger projects, shared ownership seems like a viable alternative to 100% community ownership. However, this could only be achieved if there is an equal playing field for the cooperatives and market developers.

Next to that, it could be argued that the current policy, in which they give citizens the opportunity to realize projects from the bottom-up, falls short of the realization of the drafted RES targets. The institutional design appears to lack sufficient attractiveness for the self-realization of renewable energy projects. Furthermore, while the benefits of the energy transition largely outweigh its impacts, it is worth noting that immediate neighbours sometimes experience significant negative consequences, leading them to reject discussions regarding potential financial compensation. Overall, there are still significant gains to be made in achieving a 'just' transition within the municipality of Steenwijkerland. Both in terms of planning and implementation, there are distribution and procedural aspects that contribute to a reduced legitimate process and outcome.

To successfully meet the set goals for 2030 while achieving a 'just' transition, a substantial scaling up of sustainable energy installations is necessary. This expansion requires a collaborative effort facilitated by the municipality between local cooperatives and market developers. Together, stakeholders should collaborate to ensure that projects are implemented with a minimum of 50% community ownership because this is a policy obligation. The minimum of 50% highlights the importance of fostering constructive partnerships between equivalent partners. Furthermore, it is crucial to act immediately on the development of onshore wind policies, which involve the identification of appropriate areas for onshore wind turbines.

Finally, this study supports the claims done in McCauley and Heffron (2018). Both the distributional and procedural justice aspects are important to get to a 'just' transition. Next to that, shows this research similar social benefits that come out of community ownership as found in Philpott and Windemer (2022).

Recommendations

-The municipality should ensure that either more residents participate in the energy transition or take a more active role themselves. This can be achieved by actively facilitating or engaging in energy production, storage and consumption management.

-The municipality should consider providing more support and facilitation to the cooperatives. The municipality can act as a knowledge institute, ensuring an equal playing field and enabling the cooperatives to (further) professionalize. This would indirectly place them on an equal footing with market players. A constructive collaboration between local cooperatives and the market is necessary to realize sustainable energy projects on a large scale, with at least 50% community ownership.

-It is crucial to establish wind-on-land policies as quickly as possible, including the designation of wind-on-land search areas.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Binnen dit onderzoek doe ik onderzoek naar de lusten en lasten voor de lokale gemeenschap door de energie transitie. Hierbij kijk ik of lokaal eigendom kan zorgen voor een betere verdeling van lusten en lasten ten aanzien van de gehele lokale gemeenschap.

1. Introductie

- a. Zou u uzelf kunnen introduceren, uw achtergrond en uw rol bij de organisatie
- b. Op welke manier is uw organisatie betrokken bij het realiseren van Duurzame energie projecten?

2. Algemeen lokaal eigendom

Beleidsmaker / gemeente:

- 1) Hoe wordt er met het lokaal eigendom om gegaan in het beleid.
- 2) Met welke vormen van lokaal eigendom werkt de gemeente.
- 3) Wat zijn de voor- en nadelen van lokaal eigendom?

Lokale energie coöperatie:

- 1) Op welke manier wordt het lokale eigendom vormgegeven in de gemeente Steenwijkerland.
- 2) Met welke andere vormen van lokaal eigendom bent u bekend mee?
- 3) Wat zijn de voor- en nadelen van lokaal eigendom?

Netbeheerder:

- 1) In hoeverre is Enexis betrokken bij projecten met lokaal eigendom.
- 2) Zijn er voor de netbeheerder verschillen tussen projecten met een aandeel lokaal eigendom ten opzichte van projecten waarbij alleen de markt een project plant en realiseert?
- 3) Welke voor- en nadelen kennen de verschillende vormen?

b. Welke rol speelt lokaal eigendom binnen de realisatie van zon of wind energie projecten.

c. In hoeverre bent u bekend met de doelstelling van 50 % lokaal eigendom uit het klimaatakkoord 2019.

- 1) Wat vindt u van deze doelstelling?
- 2) Heeft u liever een hoger of lager aandeel lokaal eigendom (<50, 50, 51, 50>, 100)

d. Hoe beïnvloed lokaal eigendom de business case van het duurzame energieproject?

e. Waar ligt volgens u de grens van 'lokaal', binnen lokaal eigendom?

f. Wat voor aandeel lokaal eigendom is volgens u wenselijk voor de energie transitie (<50, 50, 51, 50>, 100)

Procedurele aspect

3. Organisatie en implementatie van lokaal eigendom

a. Welke belanghebbende zijn er allemaal betrokken bij projecten met lokaal eigendom?

Proberen ontwikkelaars/burgerinitiatieven actief om lokale burgers/bedrijven te betrekken of kijken ze wie zich meldt? Kijken ze alleen binnen hun 'leden' of proberen ze een bredere groep te betrekken? Staan ze open voor geïnteresseerden die zich melden? Hoe gaat dit proces in zijn werk?

b. Hoe kan lokaal eigendom volgens u het best georganiseerd worden?

1) Zijn er ook partijen die momenteel niet bereikt worden?

c. Welke rol speelt wet- en regelgeving binnen de realisatie van lokaal eigendom

d. Hoe gaat de samenwerking van energie coöperatie met de gemeente, netbeheerders en marktpartijen?

e. Op basis waarvan worden er besluiten genomen over de planning en realisatie van projecten met lokaal eigendom

1) Welke partijen zijn er betrokken in het besluit proces?

Distributive aspect

4. Herverdeling van voor- en nadelen door lokaal eigendom

a. Welke voordelen brengt de realisatie van een hernieuwbare energie project met lokaal eigendom

1) Kunt u uitsplitsen per betrokken partij, wie van de genoemde voordelen profiteert?

b. Welke verantwoordelijkheden komen er kijken bij de planning en realisatie van projecten met lokaal eigendom en hoe worden deze onderling verdeeld.

c. In welke mate compenseren de voordelen van lokaal eigendom de impacts die het project op de lokale gemeenschap heeft

1) Kunt u aangeven welke aspecten wel voldoende compenseren?

2) Kunt u aangeven welke aspecten niet voldoende compenseren?

5. Follow-up vragen / afsluiting

a. Zijn er nog andere belangrijke kwesties in relatie tot lokaal eigendom die we niet hebben besproken en die u graag zou willen delen?

b. Zijn er nog aspecten die belangrijk zijn voor dit interview die we niet hebben besproken, maar u toch wilt behandelen?

Appendix 2: Interview Guide English

Within this research, I will investigate the benefits and impacts for the local community from the energy transition. I am examining whether community ownership can lead to a better distribution of benefits and impacts for the entire local community.

1. Introduction

- a. Can you introduce yourself, your background, and your role within the organization?
- b. In what ways is your organization involved in realizing sustainable energy projects?

2. General aspects of community ownership

Policymaker/municipality:

- 1) How is community ownership addressed in policy?
- 2) What forms of community ownership does the municipality work with?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of community ownership?

Community energy cooperative:

- 1) How is community ownership shaped in the municipality of Steenwijkerland?
- 2) What other forms of community ownership are you familiar with?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of community ownership?

Grid operator:

- 1) To what extent is Enexis involved in projects with community ownership?
- 2) Are there any differences for the grid operator between projects with community ownership and projects where only the market plans and implements a project?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms?

b. What role does community ownership play in realizing solar or wind energy projects?

c. To what extent are you familiar with the ambition of 50% community ownership from the Climate Agreement of 2019?

- 1) What is your opinion of this ambition?
- 2) Would you prefer a higher or lower percentage of community ownership (<50, 50, 51, 50>, 100)?

d. How does community ownership affect the business case of a sustainable energy project?

e. According to you, what is the limit of 'community' within community ownership?

f. What percentage of community ownership do you think is desirable for the energy transition (<50, 50, 51, 50>, 100)?

Procedural aspect

3. Organization and implementation of community ownership

a. Which stakeholders are involved in projects with community ownership?

Do developers/citizen initiatives actively involve community residents/businesses, or do they only reach out to their 'members'? Do they try to involve a broader group? Are they open to interested parties who approach them? How does this process work?

b. According to you, what is the best way to organize community ownership?

- 1) Are there currently any stakeholders that are not involved?
- c. What role do law and regulations play in realizing community ownership?
- d. How does the energy cooperative collaborate with the municipality, grid operators, and market parties?
- e. Based on what criteria are decisions made regarding the planning and implementation of projects with community ownership?
 - 1) What stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process?

Distributive aspect

4. Redistribution of benefits and burdens through community ownership
 - a. What benefits does the realization of a renewable energy project with community ownership bring?
 - 2) Could you break down, per stakeholder, who benefits from the mentioned advantages?
 - b. What responsibilities are involved in the planning and realization of projects with community ownership, and how are they divided among stakeholders?
 - c. To what extent do the benefits of community ownership compensate for the impacts the project has on the local community?
 - 1) Could you indicate which aspects sufficiently compensate?
 - 2) Could you indicate which aspects do not sufficiently compensate?
5. Follow-up questions / Conclusion
 - a. Are there any other important issues related to community ownership that we have not discussed, but that you would like to share?
 - b. Are there any aspects that are important for this interview that we have not discussed, but that you would still like to address?

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Overeenkomst van deelname interview

Bachelor scriptie: Spatial planning and design

Universiteit: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Naam student: Victor Veldhuis

Binnen deze Bachelor scriptie onderzoek ik de vorm van lokaal eigendom binnen zon en wind parken en hoe dit zich verhoudt tot de rechtvaardigheid van de energie transitie.

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/>)

Indien u akkoord gaat met het bovenstaande, graag invullen:

Ik geef toestemming to het opnemen van het interview voor verwerkings- en coderingsdoeleinden. ja/nee

Ik wens anoniem te blijven binnen dit onderzoek ja/nee

Indien ja:

Er kan een pseudoniemen naar mijn keuze worden gebruikt ja/nee
(Denk aan: 'respondent' *cijfer*)

Naam _____

Handtekening _____

Datum _____