FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCES & STADSACADEMIE GENT

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THE NEIGHBOURHOOD ENERGY COOPERATIVE IN THE JUST ENERGY TRANSITION – A STRATEGIC NICHE MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS OF THE LIVING-LAB MUIDE-MEULESTEDE

1. RESEARCH QUESTION:

Can local energy cooperatives accelerate a just and effective pathway toward climate neutrality in Belgium?

2. WHY THIS MATTERS:

- Belgium needs to achieve climate neutrality while ensuring social justice
- Energy cooperatives democratize energy governance
- Living Lab Muide-Meulestede tests innovative local solutions
- Critical insights for Belgian climate policy

3. CASE LIVING LAB MUIDE- MEULESTEDE

- A neighborhood in Ghent in transition
- Living Lab is an EU-subsidized experimental project aimed at a fossil-free neighborhood with collective energy measures.
- Neighborhood energy cooperative as a local citizen initiative, emphasizing energy citizenship, prosumerism and democratic governance.

4. ANALYTICAL APPROACH:

A) Strategic Niche Management (SNM):

- *Internal processes*: expectations, learning, networking
- *External processes*: shielding, nurturing, empowerment
- *Niche-regime interactions:*

B) Nancy Fraser's Justice Dimensions:

- *Distributive justice*: Fair distribution of benefits
- *Procedural justice*: Inclusive decision-making
- *Recognition justice*: Acknowledgment of all stakeholders

5. METHODOLOGY

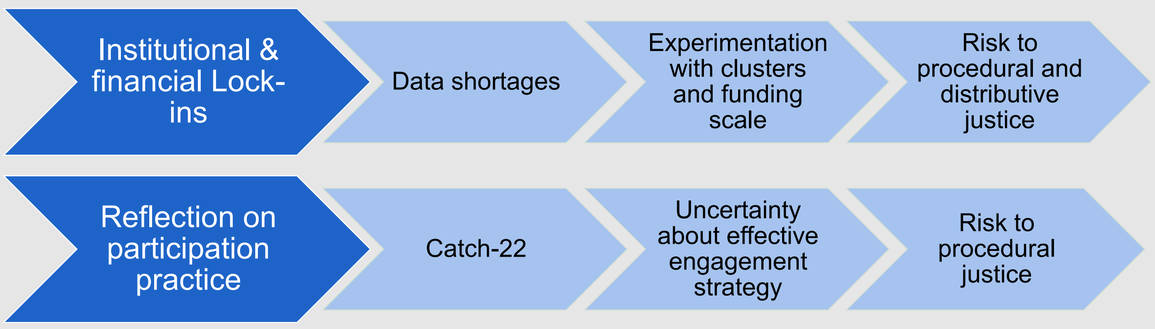
A) Research Design:

- Qualitative case study approach
- Living Lab Muide-Meulestede (Ghent)
- 6 semi-structured interviews with consortium actors
- Document analysis & policy triangulation
- Comparative analysis with BoTu (Netherlands)

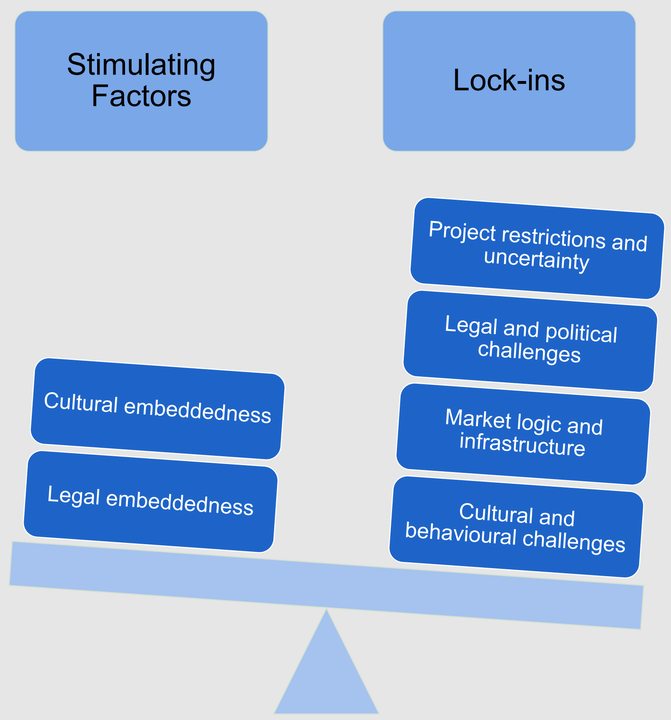
B) Interviewed Actors:

City of Ghent, Architecture Workroom Brussels, Energent cooperative, SAAMO, UGent, local-residents.

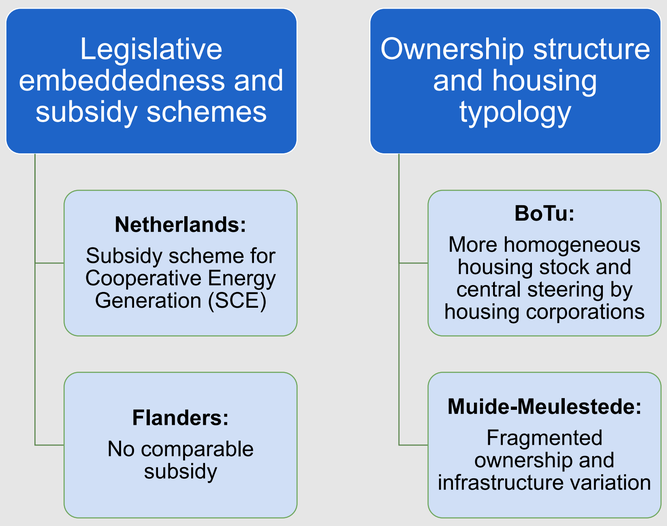
6. RESULTS: LEARNING CAPABILITIES WITHIN CONSORTIUM



7. RESULTS: POLITICAL AND GEOGRAFICAL EMBEDDEDNESS



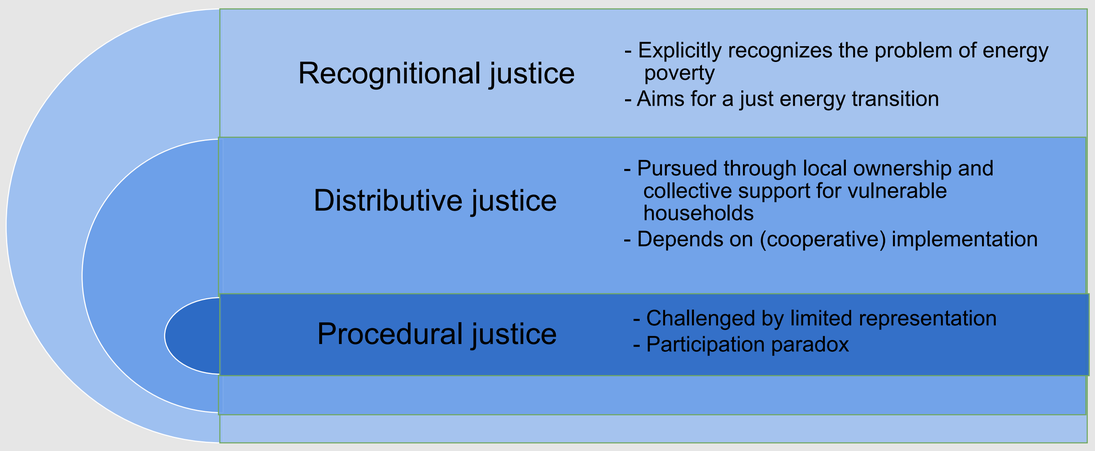
8. RESULTS: CROSS-CASE COMPARISSON



A) LIVING LAB CONSORTIUM

B) MAP OF MUIDE-MEULESTEDE

9: RESULTS: DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE AND ITS BARRIERS INSIDE CASE



10. POLICY TAKE AWAY'S

A) Importance of integrated support

- Lack of long-term financial predictability and support undermines the businesses of local renewable energy cooperatives.
- Even with better subsidies, local technological and social barriers remain substantial.

B) Importance of reflecting on participation practices and the concept of representation

- Without adapting strategy, there is a risk of exhausting citizen engagement and effectiveness and legitimacy remain limited
- Moreover, there is a risk that new pilots in Flanders will also stagnate

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