

Increasing the Size of the Pie



Factors Accelerating the Development and Implementation
of Multi-Party Mediated Processes for Environmental
Challenges in the Netherlands.

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**Concise Research Plan:
Factors Accelerating the Development and Implementation of
Multi-Party Mediated Processes for Environmental Challenges
in the Netherlands**

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Abstract

This qualitative exploratory case study takes a deep dive into the complex landscape of multi-party mediated processes (MPMPs) in their application to environmental challenges in the context of the green transition in the Netherlands. The main research question revolves around the acceleration of MPMPs from niche-based cases to larger-scale institutionalization. It is analyzed and conceptualized through Loorbach's (2010) Transition Theory (TT). The research suggests that MPMPs are nuanced problem-solving approaches fit for the complex challenges the green transition poses, as they mirror the latter's complexity with a thorough process design.

The objective of the research is to investigate the elements contributing to the successful execution of MPMPs and their development in the Netherlands through the lens of the TT. It looks at the constituent parts of transitions, the culture, structures, and practices, influencing MPMPs. With desk research and 11 semi-structured 30-45-minute interviews with experts, practitioners, a public servant, and researchers of MPMPs, key findings emerged.

Cultural factors, including norms and values, and the place value of sustainability and collaboration in Dutch society, have and continue to greatly influence the development and acceptance of MPMPs in the Netherlands. The research shows, however, that there are structural deficiencies such as an absence of clear rules and guidelines regulating MPMPs. Supportive infrastructure is furthermore also often only found in communities and networks of MPMP practitioners and researchers. This poses a challenge for the scaling and the potential impact of MPMPs and shows both a knowledge and practical gap in the field. It is, however, also doubtful to what extent the scaling of MPMPs is desirable. Furthermore, the findings indicate that individual actors and key players are the drivers of the development of MPMPs. The advice is to focus on learning from their practical insights and knowledge. Realizing a scaling of MPMPs to the acceleration phase of the TT to establish the approach firmly in the Netherlands, thus also relies heavily on the collective knowledge of actors and networks of MPMPs.

The research contributes to the body of knowledge by applying the TT in a non-technical context and distilling cultural insights and governance perspectives within the context of MPMPs. By examining different societal puzzle pieces such as culture and governance, the study aims to educate about this collaborative effort. Overall, the study advances the body of research on MPMPs by offering insights into the success factors and challenges for the development and scaling of MPMPs in the Netherlands in the context of the green transition.

List of Abbreviations Used

MPMPs – Multi-Party Mediated Processes
CRR – Concise Research Report
ADR – Alternative Dispute Resolution
MGA – Mutual Gains Approach
TT – Transition Theory
SNM – Strategic Niche Management
AG – Alternative Governance
CFW – Conceptual Framework

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The research on MPMPs was carried out during a 17-week-long internship at the social enterprise Akordi Oy in Helsinki, Finland. Akordi works as a neutral-party facilitator of negotiated multi-party processes in cases of conflicts in environmental challenges such as the energy transition in Finland. This is a particularly timely endeavor as Finland is committing to climate neutrality by 2035 (State Treasury Republic of Finland, 2023), attempting to tackle the environmental challenges the country is facing sooner rather than later.

This commitment to and moment of “wider societal transformation with its many consequences and contradictions” does often come with its own set of challenges (Peltonen, 2023). Especially when discussing the path forward for urgent sustainability transitions, complexity is high. Peltonen (2023) argues, that e.g., “the promotion of green energy solutions and their effects can be in conflict”. Conflicts may be unforeseen consequences of green transitions, or conflicts arising when relevant parties are not at the decision-making table. It presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Finland, to tackle the upcoming green transition collectively. The demand for effective problem-solving strategies and practices is thus high, which is why Finland may look toward possible practices such as MPMPs.¹

For that reason, Akordi has been learning from international partners, looking at international best practices to help grow the approach of MPMPs for the past decade. This research is taking Akordi’s approach to heart, looking at the case of the Netherlands, to learn from experts, researchers, and practitioners in a country that faces similar environmental challenges as Finland. For one, both countries focused on switching to green energy resources back in 2014 (Bosman & Rotmans, 2014). Secondly, the EU Soil Observatory assessed that Finland, among other countries, could look at issues with e.g. soil health, which the Netherlands has faced and is dealing with today (European Commission, n.d.). It is thus worth exploring, how approaches such as MPMPs function in the Netherlands and what their development has and continues to constitute.

To thoroughly assess their development, and factors of success and failure alike, the research takes the theoretical lens of Loorbach’s (2010) TT. This will allow for a proper assessment of the context in which MPMPs operate – environmental challenges and the green transition in this case – and what constitutes the success of these multidimensional processes in the Netherlands.

1.2. Problem Definition

As previously touched upon, creating, and implementing effective solutions for the countless environmental challenges the world is facing today can often be obstructed by complex conflicts that naturally arise during the solution-finding process. Especially prone to such complex challenges is the green energy transition, because it is subject to a variety of different opinions, goals, political and societal influences, practical considerations, etc. At the same time, the stakes of finding a valuable, sustainable path forward in the green transition are just as high, as the (near) future depends on today’s solutions and processes. Peltonen (2023) argues that the transition must thus be approached “with expertise and quality processes” and that one must be aware that, given the scrutiny the transition is facing, “every project improves or diminishes the reputation of the green transition” (Peltonen, 2023).

Evidence shows, as will be discussed throughout this research, that collaborative

efforts such as MPMPs attempt and have been able to not merely find working, long-lasting solutions. They have also been able to alleviate some of the conflicting opinions and combat a lack of support, and public backlash in cases of green transition projects, by working with an inclusive, holistic trust- and commitment-based process. This tale is told by MPMPs' many examples of trial and error. Successful executions that highlight the potential of MPMPs are e.g., the creation of a collaborative process in the Port of Rotterdam (WesselinkVanZijst, n.d.) and the building of a collaborative platform for Lapland's wind energy companies and reindeer herders (Akordi, 2023). The success of these projects lies in the MPMP process, which navigates interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral factors of conflicting climate goals, something Peltonen (2023) has highlighted to be at the core of MPMPs. The research argues that at its core, MPMPs are a functional process towards effective and longer-lasting decision-making for today's and the future's challenges because they facilitate sustainable objectives by considering environmental, social, political, conflicting, etc. factors.

The study aims to analyze factors such as governance structures, the political climate, relevant businesses, the public, cultural background, and concrete practices of MPMPs in the Netherlands to formulate lessons learned for other cases and countries. As such, the research provides a comprehensive deep dive into the factors conducive to MPMP's success and failure. It recognizes the need for a clearer definition and demarcation of MPMPs. At the rapid rate at which the green transition is developing, the knowledge gap of a greater understanding for further development and acceleration of MPMPs must be filled quickly. The Dutch case can serve as a baseline to articulate generalizable and transferable best practices to fill that quickly growing need. At the same time, it allows for a clear definition of MPMPs' defining components and why transitions to collaborative decision-making are pertinent. The overarching objective of the study is hence to provide insights into the potential of MPMPs and contribute to the strengthening and acceleration of methods for collaborative, sustainable problem-solving.

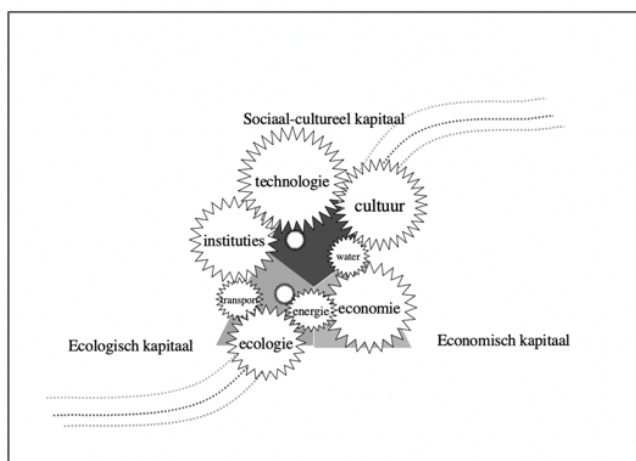
2. Literature Review

Collaboration has played a key role in history and remains essential for complex problem-solving (Curry et al., 2019). Such problem-solving is especially needed in today's complex world but is often overshadowed by competition, time constraints, and other priorities (Grootjans et al. 2022). The importance of collective learning and collaborative dynamics is discussed broadly, even on a molecular level with the so-called Bénard cell model. Alatalo et al. (2023) argue that the impact collaboration is having on the human body is a mirror for how collaboration can impact societies and our collective problems. Their research highlights in particular the similarities between cell movement and society by showing the positive effects cells experience when they cross paths and join in action. Peltonen (as cited in Alatalo et al., 2023) explains that this modulation "helps to understand relational and emergent properties" (p. 5) of collaboration. As modulated in the cells' movement, synergies occur when multiple parties/cells/actors collaborate. There are similarities between Grootjans et al. (2022) and Alatalo et al.'s (2023) research findings, which both speak of the power of cross-sectoral knowledge sharing and the potential of effectively solving complex and wicked challenges by joining forces and collaborating.

Adding to their argument, Rotmans and Kemps (2003) discussed already in 2003, that approaches to addressing societies' complexity, socio-economical and socio-ecological interconnectedness, should mirror the complexity of the task through collaboration. Illustrated in Figure 1, they argued the interconnectedness of societies' functions and factors and termed it *societal cogwheels*. In any case, societal silos, according to Rotmans and Kemps (2003) cannot withstand the test of time. Furthermore, it illustrates that collaborations are indispensable when addressing any issue affecting society to some extent. For this research project, it means looking closer at existing collaborative efforts in the Netherlands and a lens, e.g. a framework, that suits this complexity of societal cogwheels.

Figure 1.

Figure 1. Transition as a complex set of societal cogwheels that engage each other.



Transitions diagram (Rotmans & Kemp, 2003).

2.1. Introduction MPMPs

Loorbach (2022) adds to the discourse on the across-the-board rise in complexity by stating that society's sustainability challenges are only reiterating the urgency to work on "(...) transformative change and strategies to accelerate this [responses to said challenges]" (p. 1). And indeed, Douglas et al. (2020) argue that the market for such responses to today's wicked problems is thriving, seeing numerous examples of "holistic, inclusive, cross-sectoral initiatives" (p. 496). A few of such innovative approaches can be summed up under the umbrella term of MPMPs. The goal of these MPMPs is, following suit with the Bénard cell model, to work together on the premise of collaboration, to formulate long-term, consensus-based solutions for complex issues rather than short-term compromise win-lose/lose-win, or even lose-lose solutions. Greenwood et al. (2021) add that using MPMPs can also change and strengthen the public policy sector because the approach focuses on a more holistic approach fitting the complexity of the societal cogwheels as detailed in Table 1 (Greenwood et al., 2021). This is done by strategically involving all relevant parties in a process of cocreation without prior decided-upon outcomes, meaning that the outcomes of such MPMPs are based on the buy-in of all stakeholders and a creative solution fitting to what is possible and feasible for all.

2.2. Definitions and frameworks of MPMP

Researchers like Greenwood et al., Alatalo et al., and Grootjans et al., have reiterated why collaboration is important and timely. While the literature on collaborative problem-solving for (conflicts in) environmental challenges is fittingly abundant and diverse, it is oftentimes polarized into many case-specific small-N studies on the one hand and a couple of theoretical large-N studies on the other hand (Waardenburg et al., 2019). Waardenburg et al. (2019) also observe a general lack of coherence in the literature on MPMPs. They critique that this polarization in research is a result of the highly context-specific application of MPMPs, lacking generalizability. Before Waardenburg, Rotmans and Kemp (2003) questioned the generalizability and thus scalability of MPMPs due to a lack of research on meso-level applications of MPMPs. These critics argue for such a mid-level analysis of the approach because MPMPs operate on this very mid-level, as they operate within the "social norms, interests, rules, and belief systems" (p. 12) of the public and private sectors. Kovanen et al. (2023) expand on this critiquing that "transformative grassroots movements enhancing social innovation is largely ignored by public-driven multi-party mediated processes" (p. 1).

This research gap begets a closer look at MPMPs and a better understanding of the choice of words for MPMPs. There are multiple examples of definitions, frameworks, and applications of different MPMPs. To name a few prominent ones, Batory and Svensson, Ansell and Gash, Agranoff and McGuire, Bingham et al., and Emerson et al. (as cited in Batory and Svensson, 2019), discuss in their work *collaborative governance* for complex problem-solving. With its specific focus on governance, it is not a fit for this study. What is more, *Alternative Dispute Resolution* (ADR) on the other hand, can be seen as an umbrella term for efforts of mediation, capacity building, collaboration, joint fact-finding, and more (Akordi, n.d.a.). The concept dates to 1998 and is "by no means a novelty" (Weidner, 1998, p. 11). ADR is defined by Weidner (1998) with the following words:

"Alternative Dispute Resolution" (ADR) is a label applied to a larger variety of processes with varying degrees of institutionalization which are meant to settle environmental and natural resource conflicts more effectively than conventional (formal) governmental decision-making processes and legal procedures" (p. 11).

The approach is also often taken in the practice of law. The approach does thus not exclusively operate in the context of environmental conflicts and does not require a neutral party. Weidner (1998) however argues that the facilitation of the processes by a neutral party accepted by all involved is the best practice in ADR. This stance is also supported by Akordi (n.d.a.).

The Mutual Gains Approach (MGA) is another collaborative effort and descendent of ADR and adopted by many because the approach focuses on value creation and win-win outcomes (Harvard Law School, n.d.). The Dutch company Wesselink Van Zijst adopted the MGA and developed the *Strategic Stakeholder Engagement* approach. Furthermore, the Governance Network approach as researched and applied in a Chinese project by Liu et al. (2016), is a collaborative method accounting for conflictual "interactions among multiple actors aimed at influencing processes of public problem solving and public service delivery involving various competing interests, perceptions and values" (p. 316). Apart from not specifying the context of conflicts arising in tackling environmental challenges, it is another example that is in this study summarized under the umbrella term of MPMP.

Lastly, worth mentioning particularly in the context of the Netherlands is the longstanding tradition and experience with public participation operating most often on a local governmental level. To varying degrees and at varying points in time citizens are involved in processes of public problem-solving e.g., in the energy transition. In the context of MPMPs, one could say that participation *could* qualify as MPMP; however, the explicitness of deliberate design processes is missing. The quality of said participation process and the relevance of all involved may thus be questioned and would require further analysis (Uittenbroek et al., 2019).

To conclude, as seen with ADR, the principles of collaboration discussed are not in the slightest a new concept. Many scholars have discussed the various kinds of

collaborative efforts and frameworks for collaboration, their shortcomings, and success factors. Regardless, or rather because of common terminologies such as ADR, collaborative governance, MGA, Governance Network, and more, this research purposefully chooses the phrasing of *multi-party mediated processes*. It allows for some distance and flexibility in the analysis of effective collaborative efforts in the Netherlands in the specific context of environmental challenges and distance from language-based connotations that different countries and scholars assign to common terminologies (Batory & Svensson, 2019). It is a neutral formulation fitting the intent of the research because the neologism is a description of the criteria for the collaborative efforts:

- Multi-party: Having the relevant parties affected by and/or involved in a project/process at the table, in the discussion, contacted from the beginning on, etc.
- Mediated: Ideally neutral parties, third parties mediating the collaboration process to safeguard the quality of processes.
- Processes: Ideally existing freedom in resources such as time, commitment, money, and authority in decision-making.

2.3. Success and Future of MPMPs

Although there are many different applications, and approaches to efforts like MPMPs, there are some factors for collaborative problem-solving that scholars share consensus over. In Table 1 below, scholars identify factors pertinent to the success of collaborative efforts of any kind.

Table 1.

Success factors of collaborative efforts.

Ground rules + values	Mindsets + approaches	Success factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle-based engagement (Grootjans et al., 2022) • Shared motivation (Grootjans et al., 2022) • Power distribution – (French & Raven, 2022, as cited in Grootjans et al., 2022) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity for joint action (Grootjans et al., 2022) • Consensus focused (Langevoort, 2023) • Problem-solving oriented (Langevoort, 2023) • Solution and opportunity finding (Langevoort, 2023) • Dealing with disagreements (Langevoort, 2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grootjans et al. (2022): Shared goal setting, transparency, physical presence in meetings, informal meetings, trust, leadership • Value creation for all (Langevoort, 2023) • The notion of moving northeast in collaborations and negotiation (Greenwood et al., 2021)

To understand the development and scaling of MPMPs, as well as their impact on the public sector better, relies on even clearer definitions and operationalization of such success factors. However, as Douglas et al. (2020) argue, an attempt at streamlining the inherently endogenous MPMPs bears its challenges. Because MPMPs are highly context-dependent, e.g., operating in the green transition with its many challenges, their societal cogwheels make streamlining difficult. Not only for that reason is it questionable if and how MPMPs can and should be streamlined more to harvest the potential of MPMPs on a larger scale. Greenwood et al. (2021) e.g., argue that at any rate, the flexibility and creativity inherent to MPMPs should not be restricted or impacted negatively by stricter standardization and e.g., rule setting for MPMPs. Loorbach (2022) expands this point by expressing hesitancy towards standardizing innovative approaches such as MPMPs raising concerns about the following: “It is not the lack of technological or social innovation that is leading to this persistent pattern of unsustainable development” (p. 2). He illustrates this by highlighting how the focus in decision-making systems is persistently wrongly placed and too fixed on “risk and control” and “a continuing drive for (cost-) efficiency and optimization” (Loorbach, 2022, p. 2).

Institutionalization would require a focus on institutional design and consensus building (Susskind et al., 1999), with specific factors and measurables that need to be present. Susskind et al. (1999) argue that a legal framework for MPMPs must be established to safeguard the success factors of MPMPs such as authority and legitimacy. Such focus on legitimacy is required to gain the necessary approval from the public and private sectors. Other measurable variables to assess the extent to which MPMPs are or should be institutionalized are the setting and existence of ground rules as well as an attitude of working with not against existing governance structures and systems, according to Susskind et al. (1999). The latter resonates with more recent work by Aaltonen and Turkulainen (2022), who argued that institutional change requires “changes in regulative, normative and

cognitive systems” (p.1299). A preliminary strategy formulation based on their research in the field of mediation and MPMPs follows the three stages “problematization, theorization” and “legitimation” (Aaltonen & Turkulainen, 2022, p. 1299).

The discussion on streamlining, scaling, or institutionalizing is thus not to be dismissed so quickly, because all voices, whether critical or encouraging, do see value in streamlining the processes of MPMPs to some extent. The bottom line is, that MPMPs could benefit from better regulation that allows for enough space for a creative and flexible approach. Finding such a balance, if possible while gaining enough traction for more legitimacy in MPMPs, would require more research.

2.4. Theory-backed approach

Especially because topics of sustainability are often widely contested, Termeer and Dewuld (2012) argue for collective action and a multi-party approach to tackle environmental conflicts sufficiently and occasionally even well. Researchers have also pointed toward MPMPs paired with the guidelines of a theoretical lens such as a multi-theory lens (Wittmayer et al., 2014). This is supposed to contribute greatly to a cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach to cases in the green transition.

The theoretical framework of Loorbach’s TT was for example applied in the Dutch energy sector in 2003 (Rotmans & Kemp, 2023), to address dilemmas and uncertainties in the emerging sector. The TT is focused on “anticipating transitions as a process away from” existing unsustainable systems and is about “exploring in a more experimental way potential and desirable possible future transitions” (Loorbach, 2022, p. 3). Wittmayer et al. (2014) explain that TT and its toolbox, the transition management, help find common narratives and navigate through complex projects toward a feasible transition in urban areas and communities. *Adaptive governance (AG)* on the other hand focuses on collective action, hence less on the individual’s drive for social and political change (Communities For Future, 2021). This theory does, however, not entail what had been explored as MPMP’s success factors: the importance of leadership, authority, and legitimacy of a neutral party to create sustainable change and increase acceptance (Grootjans et al., 2022; French and Raven in Grootjans et al., 2022, Susskind et al., 1999). Finally, *strategic niche management (SNM)* is a useful lens in niche change creation such as grassroots initiatives (Communities For Future, 2021). Similar to the TT, SNM stresses the importance of legitimacy in projects.

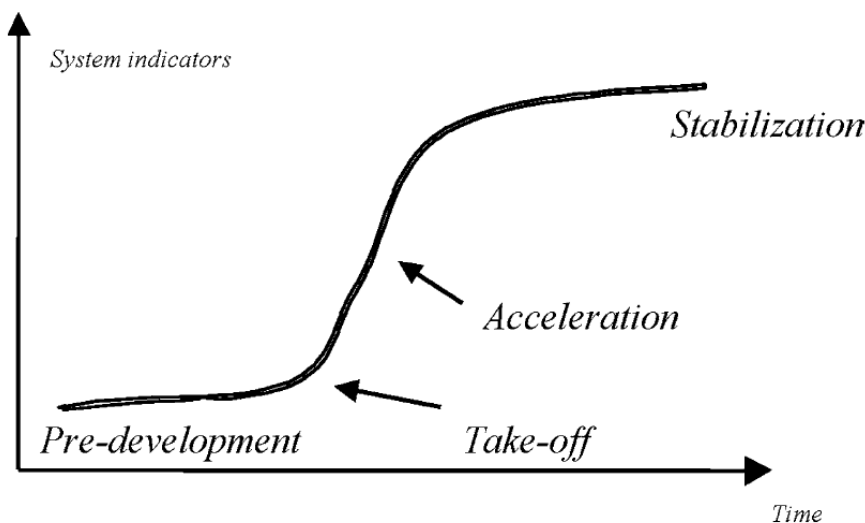
While a multi-theory lens can be useful, for the scope of this research one theoretical lens is applicable. TT is deemed most fitting to analyze the development of MPMPs because AG is not similar to MPMPs enough and SNM focuses too much on change on a niche level. What is more, TT lives up to the complexity of environmental disputes (Wittmayer et al., 2014).

2.5. Transitions Theory

Rotman and Kemp’s (2003) illustration of socio-economic and socio-ecologic interconnectedness in societies (see Figure 1), effectively showcases how change in societies is only possible if all societal cogwheels are addressed and considered. Even though TT is usually used in the scaling of technological innovations (Kivimaa, 2018), its four-stage transition- and management tool addresses all societal cogwheels discussed in Figure 1. Said transition phases, namely *pre-development*, *takeoff*, *acceleration*, and *stabilization* (see Figure 2) (Van Der Brugge et al., 2005), can be applied to assess the progress of the MPMPs and their potential to influence the green transition.

Figure 2.

Transitions Theory (Van der Brugge et al., 2005).



Based on the literature, a tentative hypothesis for MPMPs in the Netherlands would be that it has managed to reach the third, acceleration phase. This phase is characterized by visible structural changes resulting from interrelated socio-cultural, economic, environmental, and institutional changes. However, it remains to be seen to what extent this hypothesis

holds and whether changes occur at different socio-economic and socio-ecological levels.

2.6. Critique

The literature on MPMPs and their institutionalization voices multiple words of caution. For one, Greenwood et al. (2021) stress that in any case, systemization, or institutionalization is not to be mistaken for the all-powerful solution to issues facing society and decision-makers. They add, that MPMPs should rather be used and more widely recognized as well-working approaches to complex challenges. Secondly, the phrasing of MPMPs is only one of many terminologies in environmental conflict resolution. Terminologies differ per country and scholar, partly due to different language-based connotations that must be considered (Batory & Svensson, 2019). Thirdly, MPMPs are abundantly represented in academic literature but are not generalizable due to a lack in equal application in research and practice. The discussion is, according to Batory and Svensson (2019) often too focused on navigating the fuzzy and incohesive language and terminology of MPMPs. In practice, this occasionally results in MPMPs being used as a polarizing buzzword or box to check off (Batory and Svensson, 2019).

Fourth, Greenwood et al. (2021) reiterate that MPMPs solely function under the premise of the stakeholders' voluntary participation. Any hope for a successful execution is thus based on the willingness of all parties to participate, contribute, and carry responsibilities. This stands in stark contrast to Batory and Svensson's (2019) following finding: "Both policy writing and the academic literature tend to presume that a transformation towards multi-party mediated processes is genuinely desired by policy-makers" (p. 3). Grootjans et al. (2022) expand by expressing their worries about the misappropriation of the (buzz)word (Batory and Svensson, 2019) of collaborative platforms by *the powerful*, and/or their use as a stage for personal/other agendas. They stress that it depends on whether actors and stakeholders in MPMPs are elected or selected to participate, and whether neutral facilitators are overseeing the process. Hence, they highlight the importance of legal oversight and multi-axial representativeness achieved in properly executed, legitimate MPMPs. At the same time, researchers are concerned with the circumscription of the flexibility, creativity, and effectiveness of MPMPs if they are further institutionalized. This is only one articulation of the clear conflict of interest between stricter scaling of MPMPs and the value of a free, creative process.

Fifth, Durant et al. (2017) argues against the use of MPMPs in environmental conflicts and transitions as they are concerned that solutions formulated by such MPMPs are too simplistic and too detached from the reality of governance, which could lead to execution issues. In situations in which "public rulemaking processes" are substituted for ad hoc MPMPs, issues with fairness and accountability could arise (Durant et al., 2017, p. 276).

2.7. Knowledge gap

There are various knowledge gaps in the literature and uncertainties surrounding MPMPs. How MPMPs can be implemented more in society is unclear, as it is uncertain yet at what stage in the TT it is in the Netherlands. There are various factors to consider in assessing its status, but also different arguments for and against scaling MPMPs.

What has been discussed in the literature is a lack of meso-level studies of MPMPs and numerous issues with the fuzziness of the terminology of MPMPs. There is a clear knowledge gap in how to scale MPMPs and to what degree scaling is desirable. This brushes upon the question of whether institutionalizing MPMPs is the way forward, with some stating rules and regulations could support MPMPs while others worry this could affect the effectiveness of MPMPs. The former argument would require a blueprint for a nationwide system, synthesis, and analysis of best practices, which is currently still missing. The latter would require a rethinking of how MPMPs could be scaled, as both sides agree that MPMPs could benefit from more guidelines and clarity.

Another knowledge gap lies in the abundance of literature, policy improvement suggestions, and best practice examples, as well as a lack of implementation and general agreement on what MPMPs are or should be (Langevoort, 2023). This gap also suggests an explanation for "the slow and/or stagnant development process" (Langevoort, 2023, p.101). While there is an abundance of examples of how and why MPMPs work, the translation to higher public-sector levels is missing. A study into how TT can be used to establish MPMPs at the acceleration phase, influencing collective action to tackle environmental conflicts and challenges (Alatalo et al., 2023), could thus be of value.

For these reasons, the gaps will be addressed by conceptualizing the lens of the TT in the following conceptual framework to analyze MPMPs and their future potential in the Netherlands.

3. Conceptual Framework

MPMPs have the potential to significantly affect the green transition and other environmental challenges, as they produce durable solutions, the literature suggests. Adding the theoretical lens of the TT, as previously argued, and shown in Figure 2, can help assess the status, and factors of success and failure of MPMPs and thus show potential pathways of development in the future. The research adopts the transition management types of TT, as developed by Loorbach, CEO of the Dutch Research Institute for Transition (DRIFT)

(DRIFT, n.d.), and can be seen in Figure 3. Their conceptualization is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 3.

“The Transition Management Types and Their Focus” (Loorbach, 2010, p. 171).

TABLE 1
Transition Management Types and Their Focus (Loorbach 2007)

Transition Management Types	Focus	Problem Scope	Time Scale	Level of Activities
Strategic	Culture	Abstract/societal system	Long term (30 years)	System
Tactical	Structures	Institutions/regime	Mid term (5–15 years)	Subsystem
Operational	Practices	Concrete/project	Short term (0–5 years)	Concrete

The study on the Dutch case of MPMPs utilizes all three problem scopes, the abstract/societal system, institutions/regime, and the concrete/project level. The interrelations of the three levels are also subject to this study. In some explanations of this management toolset, a fourth level, namely *reflexive* activities, is included. Since this is defined as the scale of “monitoring, assessments and evaluation of ongoing policies, and ongoing societal change” (Loorbach, 2010, p. 170), the scale is crucial for the task of assessing MPMPs in the Netherlands. However, Loorbach (2010) has pointed out, that this level is inherently intertwined with all three previously mentioned levels and will thus for the sake of the scope of the study be used iteratively within the main three levels. In the research results and discussion, the fourth layer is indirectly used to reflect on the development and state of the culture, structure, and practices of MPMPs in the Netherlands. The CFW, as presented in Figure 4 below, is the backbone of the inductive research ensuing.

Figure 4.

CFW as modified from “Transition Management Types and Their Focus” (Loorbach, 2010, p. 171).

Acceleration
phase

Take-off
phase

Loorbach (2010) has discussed in his work, each level and system. The societal system, the culture of a transition, resonates closely with the success factors of MPMPs that have been discussed in Table 1 by Grootjans et al. (2022), French and Raven (2022 as cited in Grootjans et al., 2022), Langevoort (2023) and Greenwood et al. (2021). This level is defined by Loorbach (2010) as “processes of vision development, strategic discussions, long-term goal formulation, collective goal and norm setting, and long-term anticipation” (p.168-169).

The structural level of the regime addresses “patterns and structures, such as rules and regulations, institutions, organizations and networks, infrastructure, and routines” (Loorbach, 2010, p. 169). This level is essential when discussing a possible institutionalization of MPMPs as e.g., institutional and/or organizational fragmentation on that level can be a barrier for MPMPs to create long-term solutions and the transition to move forward (Loorbach, 2010). Looking at e.g., the Environment and Planning Act (Business.gov.nl, 2023), one can suspect that the Netherlands has already made advances in the field that suggest MPMPs to be at an *accelerated* transition level. This hypothesis is

tested during the interview phase, seeing what collective and societal change individuals and/or companies in the Netherlands have managed to achieve.

On an operational level, the transition management looks at innovative projects and practices, driven by (individual) actors of change (Loorbach, 2010). What is more, the use of the CFW in this research may clarify the relevance and interconnections of each of these three factors. It furthermore informs the formulation of the ensuing research objective and questions.

4. Research Objective

The purpose of the research is to investigate the factors needed to transition from niche-based MPMPs to more upscaled practices that support larger-scale MPMPs that can be applied in the green transition. TT and its Transitions Management Toolset are used to analyze what constitutes successfully executed MPMPs and the status of MPMPs in the Netherlands. Focusing on culture, structures, and practices in the Netherlands through which and within which (individual) change agents, organizations, and institutions operate, the research aims to address knowledge gaps identified in the literature. The objective is thus to create a comprehensive analysis of the current development and potential of their place in society and effect on the green energy transition. The analysis aims to assess the extent to which MPMPs in the Netherlands were developed under the influence of TT's factors (culture, structures, practices), and to what extent the factors enabled and hindered their development and continue to do so.

The findings of the research are generalized in the professional product and formulated in a more approachable manner. It may e.g., be used in the Finnish context based on similarities in e.g., governmental structures between the Netherlands and Finland while highlighting essential societal and cultural characteristics that are unique to the Dutch case.

By synthesizing constituents of success and failure in the Dutch case, this research adds value to the body of research and the development of MPMPs in different countries. Lessons learned will be synthesized to the extent to which the Dutch insights are applicable and replicable in other cases. While some aspects may thus be country-specific to the Netherlands, the research objective is to be useful and valuable to the professional field of MPMPs and all interested in sustainability transitions. Especially in light of its cross-organizational and interdisciplinary approach, it is for all interested in how individual actions move towards collective action within the context of sustainability transitions.

5. Research Question and Sub-question

Ensuing is the main research question and sub-questions, which emerged from knowledge gaps in the literature and the factors addressed in the CFW. The questions were operationalized in an interview questionnaire (see [Appendix A](#)) used to explore and analyze MPMPs in the Netherlands. A more in-depth operationalization of the CFW can be found in Chapter [6.5 Operationalization](#), below. The sub-questions each zoom in on the cultural, structural, and practices of the CFW. In the interview questions, one can also see the fourth factor, the reflexive activities, that will not specifically be looked at in the sub-questions to avoid redundancies. Insights gained through the sub-questions in the Netherlands will be validated by desk research in the research section.

Research Question

What is needed for multi-party mediated processes in the green energy transition to develop from niche-based toward larger-scale institutionalization, reaching the acceleration phase of change (Transition Theory) in the Netherlands?

Sub questions

1. What are the cultural factors enabling and driving the implementation and acceleration of multi-party mediated processes across the Netherlands?
2. What are structures enabling and driving the implementation and acceleration of multi-party mediated processes across the Netherlands?
3. What are practices enabling and driving the implementation and acceleration of multi-party mediated processes across the Netherlands?

6. Research Design

The section discusses the research's design, including its sampling methods, data collection, and analysis methods, the operationalization and population of the research, a quality assurance plan, and research ethics. The research is best described as an exploratory case study of MPMPs in the context of the Netherlands. The research design thus follows the guidelines for case study methodologies, as put forth by Priya (2021).

6.1. Sampling Method

Purposive and snowball sampling methods were chosen based on the researcher's

own experience and with the help of Akordi. In practice this meant that Akordi suggested Dutch experts of MPMPs in their network, the purposive sampling, who formed the first six interviews. These interviewees were asked to recommend other experts on MPMPs to interview. The snowball sampling thus came forth from the interviews and the desk research on MPMPs in the Netherlands and resulted in 5 more, 11 interviews in total.

These sampling methods fit the needs of the CFW and the research questions best as the goal was to find the constituents of the success and failure of the implementation and development of MPMPs in the Netherlands. To fit this purpose both sampling methods, followed key criteria for the selection of interviewees. The interviewees had to be focused on the Netherlands and fulfill at least two out of the four criteria listed below:

- **E:** Expert in MPMPs (years of experience, contribution, involvement, interest).
- **P:** Experienced practitioner of MPMPs [(private) consultant, project and/or change manager, strategic stakeholder manager, public or civil servant, representative of an MPMP network or company].
- **R:** Researcher of MPMPs.
- **S:** Public Servant working with MPMPs.

In essence, the goal was to interview those who were most experienced in MPMPs in the Netherlands and were able to express thoroughly their experience over the years. The snowball method was added to choosing the pioneers and most prominent people first, as it enriched the findings and provided a generalizable population within the scope of a bachelor thesis (Priya, 2021). These were individuals that were mentioned by at least two of the first six interviewees which further ensured the relevance of these individuals. Due to the scope of the research and the prerequisite of being knowledgeable and relevant in MPMPs, the public was excluded. Below in Table 2 is an overview of the anonymized interviewees, including their respective category of profession, as used in referencing later.

Table 2.

Overview of Interviewees in Research.

Numbering	Category of profession
Interviewee 1pr	Practitioner (p), Researcher (r)
Interviewee 2pe	p, MPMP Expert (e)
Interviewee 3pr	p, r
Interviewee 4pe	p, e
Interviewee 5re	r, e
Interviewee 6pr	p, r
Interviewee 7per	p, r, e
Interviewee 8pe	p, e
Interviewee 9pe	p, e
Interviewee 10ps	p, s
Interviewee 11pe	p, e

6.2. Data Collection Method

The data was collected in an iterative process of analyzing primary and secondary sources, complemented by 11 semi-structured interviews. The latter was crucial for the research since the insights of experts, researchers, practitioners, and public servants in the Netherlands were indispensable for formulating best practices in MPMPs. The iteration between primary and secondary sources, interviews, and then again desk research enriched the research's quality.

Sources for this research were selected from various databases and had to be both peer-reviewed and from the last decade. The research made use of older sources when they were especially relevant, highly referenced, or not prone to being outdated. The databases of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam gave access to literature from e.g., Science Direct, JSTOR, Oxford University Press, Elsevier, Springer, Grey Literature, and Sage Publications. Additionally, relevant resources and references were provided by Akordi, interviewees, and their network.

The interviews with the described population were semi-structured and ranged from 30 to 45 minutes which befitted the scope and complexity of the social science research. The duration varied depending on the availability of the interviewees and the detail in knowledge provided per sub-question. The method of semi-structured interviews was chosen to allow for exploration and discussion while maintaining structural elements important for the research's quality (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). Before participating, interviewees were provided with an interview protocol and a rough guideline of interview questions to safeguard transparency and proper research ethics (see

[Appendix B](#)). Upon receiving their consent, interviews were transcribed and coded.

6.3. Data Analysis Method

The data of the literature analysis was systematically stored and organized by memo-writing and logbooks which allowed for easy (cross-) referencing when comparing the findings of the desk research with the coded transcripts of the interviews. Said codes emerged through an inductive analysis system during the analysis of the transcripts, which befitted the research's aim to explore this multi-disciplinary social science topic holistically and unbiasedly. Furthermore, it allowed for hypothesis testing during the iteration phases of desk research and interviews and consequently the analysis section. It meant that the research was not shaped by predetermined judgments on e.g., codes (APA, 2019), which would have been the case with deductive coding.

The results of said analysis are presented and discussed below. The process of arriving at these results was guided and informed by the ensuing operationalization of the CFW and the research questions that allowed for emerging codes and note-worthy findings to be sorted systematically.

6.4. Operationalization

The CFW is an adoption of Loorbach's Transition Management Types and its TT. The following operationalization, as shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5, helped inform and guide the interviews, the desk research, and the analysis of their findings. Within the operationalization, a specific focus was put on sustainability and the green transition in the Netherlands because that is the context of the MPMPs discussed throughout the interviews and the desk research.

Table 3 zooms in on the operationalization of the strategic activities, and the culture, as researched in sub-question one. In this societal (sub-)system, the long-term aspects of transitions take place. Concretely it hence discussed the influence, place value, relevance of, and relationship between Dutch culture and sustainability transitions. In essence, it focused on the why behind a push toward developing MPMPs for environmental challenge and as such formed a cornerstone of this research.

Table 3.

Part 1 of Operationalization of CFW (modified from Loorbach, 2010).

Societal (sub-)system [30 years of transition]

Culture: strategic activities

Questions to be asked:

- Which norms and values are cornerstones of Dutch society?
- How are these norms and values informing actions, decision-making, and e.g. the green transition?
- Which dialogues about the future are urgent now and are these debates taking place?
- What is the Netherlands' stance on sustainability?
- To what extent are topics of sustainability, the green transition, etc. important for society?
- What place value holds the green transition/MPMPs in Dutch society [Functional importance]?
- What place value holds the green transition/MPMPs to other topics relevant to society [relative importance]?

Examples of this system:

- Discussion on energy transition: "Energy security, climate impact, energy prices, and diversity of resources" (Loorbach, 2010, p. 169)
- Urgency in dialogue about the future, high uncertainty, tense political climate, etc.

Within Table 4 one can see the mid-level structure of societal (sub-)systems of transitions. What is at stake here are tactical activities supporting or hindering the development of MPMPs in the Netherlands. For that reason, patterns, interest-driven steering activities, infrastructures, routines, and more were the subject of analysis. Of interest furthermore was the extent to which these tactical activities are changing over the next years and what the future trends for MPMPs are.

Table 4.

Part 2 of Operationalization of CFW (modified from Loorbach, 2010).

Structure of societal (sub-)system [5-15 years of transition]

Structures: tactical activities

Questions to be asked:

- What kind of interest-driven steering activities are taking place for MPMPs?
- What kind of patterns such as rules, regulations, institutions, organizations, networks, infrastructures, and routines are established and are being developed for MPMPs?
- What is the reality of activities supporting or hindering the development and uptake of MPMPs?
- What are the goals for the next 5-15 years for MPMPs?

Examples of this system:

- Common hindering trends: institutional fragmentation versus long-term strategies.

- Debates on energy sources, “technology, policy, market, and consumption” (Loorbach, 2010, p. 169)

Table 5 relates to the operational activities of and for MPMPs that shape the state of MPMPs in the Netherlands. It asked the question of how the future of MPMPs might look like regarding key players and important innovative practices with future potential. These factors of change operate on the level of individuals, entrepreneurs, and practical examples in transitions.

Table 5.

Part 3 of Operationalization of CFW (modified from Loorbach, 2010).

Level of individuals, entrepreneurs, change agents [0-5 years of transition]

Practices: operational activities

Questions to be asked:

- What innovative practices, experiments and tangible actions are taking place for and/or through and/or within MPMPs?
- How and to what extent are MPMPs operationalizing societal, technological, institutional, and behavioral practices?
- Which agents of change, think business, industry, politics, civil society, etc., are relevant and/ or important to MPMPs and their development?
- Who are the key players here?

As mentioned before, the reflexive factors mentioned in the management of transitions by Loorbach (2010) are integrated throughout the three levels themselves. Related activities such as the “monitoring, assessments and evaluation of ongoing policies and ongoing societal change” (p. 170) were furthermore the angle this research is taking itself. It would have been redundant to focus on these activities as well.

6.5. Quality Assurance

The research’s quality was established through careful drafting of the research question, sub-questions, and their operationalization. A comprehensive research design was developed by meticulously selecting the sampling method, data collection and analysis, and deciding on a clear demarcation for the research population. The research design and quality were strengthened through the inclusion of triangulation and iteration, which were key to the research’s validity and reliability.

Equally vital was data triangulation, as discussed by Tomaszewski et al. (2020). Accordingly, multiple types and sources of data were used throughout the study. Iteration played a vital role here because it safeguarded the relevance of sources and the research’s quality. Triangulation and iteration secured internal and external validity in the sampling method, population, data collection, and analysis. Both validities in the interviews were ensured through the careful demarcation of the population and backing up against systematic errors through desk research.

Reducing preventable biases in this research also spoke to the quality of the research. The CFW, for example, was chosen upon a thorough scholarly work analysis, as the research required diligence in selecting information to fit the research’s framing. Such consideration allowed for a proper alignment of the research question and objective with the CFW and thus an operationalization that prevented construct validity biases. Similarly, inducting coding was chosen, as it made a comprehensive consideration of the results and therefore addressing content validity biases possible. Qualitative considerations guided the characteristics for the selection of sources for the desk research, as discussed above. The reliability and validity of sources were accounted for by fact-checking and cross-referencing these and their respective authors. Commonly accepted claims were critically viewed by actively searching for contrasting opinions.

Following APA 7 reporting standards meant collecting data in memos and logbooks to guarantee the research’s reliability. The latter was also kept in mind by inviting peers and supervisors to provide feedback and constructive criticism. This was either conveyed through oral or written feedback in weekly meetings or monthly presentations. This set-up not only improved the research’s reliability but also honed the researcher’s skills. Random errors in the research and its results were prevented by carefully drafting and testing the interview questions. Overall, APA 7 reporting standards served as a quality check, such as avoiding biases such as selection and reflexivity biases.

6.6. Research Ethics

To ensure the truthfulness of the results and proper ethical conduct in this study (APA, 2019), all APA 7 reporting standards were meticulously adhered to. Quotations sourced from both literature and interviews were presented and referenced correctly according to APA 7 and Intellectual Property Rights. The interviewees were presented with a consent and confidentiality form detailing the implications of recording the interview, storage of data, and using quotes in the result section and discussion (see [Appendix B](#)). Before quoting individuals, clear consent was sought. Additionally, all interviewees were anonymized and made aware of the use of their information in this study, storage, and publication of the study.

The limitations of the researcher based on their background and education were kept in mind when writing the limitation section of this research in the attempt to limit its influence on this work (APA, 2019). Limitations were combatted by remaining critical in the analysis of

the results and discussion, including sections on the limitations of the research itself at the end of this research. The results should thus be fully replicable by external auditors and researchers with different backgrounds, education, and perspectives. Research incentives were not used given the limitations of the research's budget.

7. Research Results

In this section, the research findings of the key informant interviews and desk research are presented. The section is supported with (direct) quotes and illustrating examples from the literature and the interviews. The results are articulated with the help of the operationalization of the CFW, and research questions, and structured per the relevance of the findings, and inductive coding. Afterward, the results will be discussed per sub-question and recommendations for further research are formulated.

7.1. Need-based collaboration?

Researching influencing factors for MPMPs necessitates researching the interplay of different societal cogwheels on the development of MPMPs in the Netherlands. Interviewees stressed that in the Netherlands people now and in the past, as seen with the examples of the Poldermodel and Waterboards, worked together because the issues they faced were too complex to solve without collaboration (Interviewee 4pe, 2023). Interviewees discussed some of these complex issues, namely conflicts in land use for agriculture, housing, wind turbines, or solar panels (Interviewees 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 2023). Consequently, they argued that within the Netherlands, MPMPs emerged on a need-based basis, created, and grew within an environment of collaboration and cooperation.

In the past, the Poldermodel played an important part as a consensus-based decision-making system in the creation of an environment in which collaborative efforts are the common mode of problem-solving e.g., in the public sector (Dekker, 2017). Willem Jan Goossen of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management illustrated the importance of the Poldermodel in connection to water security in the Netherlands as follows: "Water is in our genes and it even has an impact on our way of governance with the 'Poldermodel', which is at the heart of our culture and approach" (European Environment Agency, 2023). It is of relevance here because it exemplifies nicely how collaborative efforts have been in some way or another connected to Dutch culture and the water issues the Netherlands faces. Interviewee 4pe (2023) reinstates its relevance when stating: "We've built the Poldermodel based on cooperation, you need to cooperate because nobody could do it alone". Most respondents agreed with these statements as they experienced that MPMPs were much needed for people facing issues too difficult to solve in silos, without cooperative systems and tools in place.

The development of MPMPs did stop there. Interviewee 10ps (2023) reiterates the importance of developing MPMPs stating that the discussions about the future of the Netherlands necessitate negotiation because negotiation is direly needed in a space as small as the Netherlands. For that purpose, interviewee 2pe (2023) advised focusing on fostering a thriving environment for MPMPs by strengthening a culture of cooperation, which they argued to be "probably one of the most important drivers why this type of work [speaking of MPMPs] has an existence in the first place".

Whether MPMPs arose from a need for better responses to increasingly complex challenges or as an offering of tools and knowledge for conflict responses is arguably a chicken-or-egg dilemma. In any case, the Netherlands was seen as culturally receptive to conflict management tools such as MPMPs. As Interviewee 2pe (2023) put it: "There's a huge demand and the reason is maybe because we have so many conflicts especially also in the energy transition". One can thus tentatively start to see that cultural factors, as discussed in sub-question one, have had an influence on the development of MPMPs.

7.2. Dutch Culture of Collaboration and Communication

The findings of the interviews often stressed the importance of the (uniquely) and highly important Dutch qualities and knack for communication, conflict management, dialogue, etc. They argued that these have had and continue to have a great impact on MPMPs. These opinions were based on their longstanding experience as MPMP experts, researchers, and practitioners, that showed them how open communication and opinion sharing positively influenced MPMPs.

For instance, interviewee 1pr (2023) stressed that MPMPs are influenced by an attitude of expecting differences in opinions between colleagues, stakeholders, and oneself. They stated that this both opened pathways for MPMPs to grow and for the approach to be supported by conversations and negotiations on why MPMPs are important, what they entail, and what role sustainability plays. Similarly, Interviewee 6pr highlighted that regularly expressing opinions fosters a culture of attentiveness to all if open dialogue is facilitated. These arguments are supported by Hofstede's (2015) research on differences in communication styles between different countries. They argued that the Dutch *low power distance* is expressed in a culture of equality in the Netherlands, which can explain this knack for communication and opinion sharing because all tend to be seen to have an equal saying (Hofstede, 2015). What is more, this knack "to talk and talk and talk" was fostered to create collaborative solutions for common issues and coincided with the previously discussed "longstanding (...) culture of trying to solve your problems together" (Interviewee 2pe, 2023).

What is more, tangible examples and success stories of co-creation and

collaboration can be seen throughout the history of the Netherlands with the Poldermodel and Waterboards as prominent examples. These examples point towards the existence of a specific culture, also on an institutional level, argued Jansen et al. (2008) back in 2008 because a prerequisite for successful cooperation as practiced within waterboards is said to be based on shared culture. They stated in their research on collaboration in the public health sector, that the Netherlands has fostered a culture of co-creation and capacity building, which together with shared beliefs and norms build the foundation of such collaboration (Jansen et al., 2008). Interviewees 1pr, 2pe, 3pr, and 11pe share this understanding.

While these communication and opinion-sharing skills are not enough to confidently state that cultural factors have been a propelling influence in the Dutch case, it is yet another puzzle piece pointing toward such a relationship. It is another argument for the enabling nature of strategic activities as discussed in sub-question one.

7.3. Conflict averseness?

Analyzing the Netherlands' culture as an influencing factor of MPMPs means analyzing how actors tend to approach and see conflict situations and problem-solving mindsets. The interviewees argued that in their experience, they see that the necessary and urgent conversations about sustainability and collaborative solutions are taking place. There are debates about concession models, negotiation forms, conflict resolution, and management, indicating that strategic activities related to the culture of the Netherlands are having an impact on MPMPs (Jansen et al., 2008). Interviewee 3pr (2023) stated for instance that the knack for communication also expresses itself in a "culture of haggling", meaning that in their work, they experienced a tendency to discuss, debate, and differ in opinion. They argued that this may be at times a key factor in the success of their MPMPs but also critiqued that it can also at times be a limiting factor when it turns toward avoiding conflicts (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).

The MPMP practitioners and experts among the interviewees explained that they experienced the people in the Netherlands as open and direct during their MPMPs. At the same time, they noted that they also experienced that people at any (institutional) level do not tend to not like to openly admit to being stuck in a conflict in an energy transition MPMP, a land use project, or else. In such situations, this conflict averseness may be expressed in hesitancy toward engaging with mediators and third-party facilitators in MPMPs. To illustrate, interviewee 7per e.g., experienced great differences in how conflicting parties view a third-party facilitator of MPMPs which is hired to help mediate and find win-win outcomes. They explained they tend to present themselves as an independent chair rather than a mediator because in their experience people tending towards conflict-averseness were more welcoming then. They went on to point out that particularly in the public sector, this simple phrasing became relevant based on the importance of portraying a favorable public image when working on sustainability transitions.

The findings of the interviews and literature on specific collaborative projects in the Netherlands and culture as an influencing factor of success point towards a relationship between the two. While the interviewees could not state bulletproof facts as to which cultural factor influenced MPMPs specifically, all interviewees being MPMP experts, practitioners, researchers, and public servants elaborated on the significance of cultural elements in the Netherlands and MPMPs. This was also mirrored in the literature. The intricacy of MPMPs aligns with the complexity of factors that may have played a role in the development of MPMPs in the Netherlands, meaning for this research that more factors will be considered in the following before arriving at conclusions.

7.4. Shift in the political climate

The illustration of interconnections of societal cogwheels (see Figure 1) showed the interplay of society. Similarly, within Loorbach's TT and the CFW, strategic and tactical activities interplay and influence the development of MPMPs to varying degrees. The analysis of structures, cultural activities, guidelines, institutions, etc. provides insights into how sustainability and MPMPs are valued in the Netherlands, and what enabling and hindering factors exist. Most interviewees found that the Netherlands is in a time of change, experiencing uncertainty on many ends, particularly on how to solve conflicts.

Interviewees and the literature found that the (political) climate in the Netherlands is shifting due to various circumstances, which is significantly affecting MPMPs. The development of regulations, guidelines, and structures for MPMPs was seen to be subject to paternalistic, concession- and compromised-based decision-making, and polarization alike. They also suggested a shift from a collaborative Poldermodel mindset to a more conflict-rich and strenuous process, particularly visible in a wide-ranging array of sentiments, opinions, and constructive and destructive attitudes about systems and institutions. Table 6 highlights examples of the above-mentioned observations.

Table 6.

Perceived Political Climate.

Theme	Quote/Example
Paternalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "[Politicians'] general feeling of we know what's good for the country" (Interviewee 2pe, 2023). • Knowing best or better attitude (Interviewee 1pr, 2023).

- “In times of chaos, we think a tough leader can solve everything and if there’s one country in the world where a tough leader cannot do it, it’s our country (...)” (Interviewee 4pe, 2023).
 - “A tough leader in the Netherlands is without any doubt not going to be successful” (Interviewee 4pe, 2023).
- Compromise and concessions politics
- “[municipalities and other governmental structures] cause a lot of problems as well” (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).
 - Dutch politics necessitates concessions for needed coalitions (Interviewee 1pr, 2023).
 - Compromise as a loose-loose scenario (Interviewee 7per, 2023).
 - Process of compromise, not of what is possible (Interviewee 7per, 2023).
- Polarization
- “Polarization may have both positive and negative outcomes on societies; it can encourage social change by stimulating discussion, political engagement, and protest, but it can also undermine social cohesion by increasing the avoidance of conflicting opinions and information, the stigmatization of (minority) groups, and segregation in society, which may further increase attitudinal polarization” (Albada et al., 2021, p. 627).
 - Societal unrest, demonstrations as popular resistance (Interviewees 1pr, 2pe, 4pe, 2023)

Secondly, the attitude towards institutions and structures in the Netherlands was found to affect the acceptance of decision-making and thus the viability of the latter. Consequences e.g., the prioritizing of approval by constituents above the *best* outcome for all. MPMPs were seen to suffer under this as well, while interviewees argued that MPMPs could also be a counterweight to the negative consequences of this trend. For another, MPMP experts discussed public dissatisfaction with common decision-making processes, low trust in the government and its decision-making, and almost categorical opposition to hierarchies and institutions as factors of change. They argued that this mistrust for instance also presented opportunities and e.g., also sparked a more active involvement of the public, companies, and individuals (Interviewees 1pr, 3pr, 8pe, 9pe, 11pe, 2023).

Interviewee 3pr (2023) argued that MPMPs’ potential and promise lie in “taking out the pain a bit and [to] then come to a better conversation” especially when “there are large conflicts among interest groups” (Interviewee 3pr, 2023). This is why this change in the Dutch political landscape was seen to at times benefit from the more flexible, long-lasting, sustainable, and green transition-fitting results MPMPs promised to produce. Interviewee 10ps (2023) showed that particularly on a provincial level, which is getting fewer media coverage than the municipal and national institutions, and thus less *heat* stemming from this change, MPMPs can often be executed successfully. Provinces, they argued, have the resources, the necessary authority, and legitimacy (Grootjans et al., 2022; French and Raven in Grootjans et al., 2022, Susskind et al., 1999), to carefully design and execute MPMPs. Interviewee 5re (2023) explained that such larger-scale MPMPs can surpass the usual concession- and compromise-based and therefore loose-loose decision-making by raising the value and result for all through win-win approaches.

Third, changing times in the Netherlands manifested visibly in the highly debated national elections in November 2023. The functionality of political decision-making and the public’s acceptance thereof are still being discussed (Henley et al., 2023). It is a turning point for MPMPs on a larger scale as well because MPMPs require time, attention, willingness, knowledge, resources, etc. As Greenwood et al. (2021) argued, the most important prerequisite for MPMPs is that they are based on voluntary participation no matter the scale. With a change in the national government, it will remain to be seen whether parties will “go back to the table together” (Interviewee 4pe) because not even the usual concession-based coalitions were possible to be formed thus far (Reuters, 2023). Befitting here was Batory and Svensson’s (2019) critique of the widespread assumption that policymakers “genuinely” desiring “a transformation towards multi-party mediated processes” (p.3). It thus remains to be seen, whether MPMPs will be a desired working method of institutions and governments, which are thus far so troubled by polarization (Albada et al., 2021) and expressed hesitance to collaborate even amongst parties (Reuters, 2023).

In any case, the interviewees indicated that some societal and structural trends have the potential to enable, others to hinder MPMPs. Similarly, the Dutch political climate poses both a challenge and an opportunity for MPMPs. Not only the MPMPs themselves but also their playing field grew in complexity and became more conflict-rich and strenuous to work with. The interviewees showed what great place value, and thus functional importance, collaboration, and MPMPs have and continue to hold in Dutch society. At the same time, they and the literature raise concerns about the hampering effects of compromise- and competition-based thinking, which together with other priorities often overshadows the development and adoption of MPMPs in the future.

The reality of hindering versus enabling influences in the Netherlands looks rather challenging for the upcoming years. At the same time, cultural influences as opposed to challenges in the structures for MPMPs, are seen as interrelating and positively affecting the development of MPMPs. This is also a testament to the interrelation of Loorbach’s cultural,

structural, and operational (as seen later) factors.

7.5. Institutional fragmentation

Interviewees have identified issues due to institutional fragmentation, which is impacting the development, use, and overall appeal of MPMPs. This fragmentation in the Netherlands means a shift towards more local policymaking or at least the design and carrying out of policies on a local level. The approach is supposed to be more responsive to the locals' requirements in e.g., water safety measures, capacities for windmills and solar panels, and spatial questions. The interviewees critiqued, it often results in a mismatch in what municipal and local governments need and what they can realistically achieve and execute.

MPMPs require resources, accountability, and ownership (Grootjans et al., 2022). Interviewees 4pe and 1pr (2023) highlighted that that is often not the case and that a shift toward a local and more active civil society can only function well when national policy development and clear boundaries thereof are in place to uphold the responsibilities and commitments of formal democracy. On a provincial level, MPMPs function well, because the basic requirements for MPMPs are in place: "We can do like a lot of things in the mid-level governments, and I think that's why we get enough time to do like a lot of these processes [MPMPs]" (Interviewee 10ps, 2023). They also point out that MPMPs often take longer and require more resources, because they are more thorough than other conventional decision-making. This is why a stronger shift towards the local would also require the equipment of the local communities, organizations, and governance to execute the outcomes of MPMPs. Interviewee 2pe (2023) explained this political shift in the Netherlands as there evolving "fluid movement between different levels".

This move towards a more local approach is theoretically possible but becomes with a closer look at e.g., wind turbines impossible. Interviewees have often taken this example because wind turbines have been a cornerstone of the Dutch energy transition, and are lacking, however, the necessary "social acceptance on the local scale" (Klok et al., 2023). One can think of local concerns e.g., "landscape impacts, environmental concerns, socio-economic factors, and the procedural processes" that are often not included in the processes (Klok et al., 2023). The research of Klok et al. (2023) proposes a framework for achieving the necessary community acceptance by the locals, which is a framework that could be implemented when taking to heart MPMPs that include such voices and concerns. A linear adoption of national policies risks falling short of the benefits of MPMPs e.g., for local conflicts in the energy transition. Interviewees 5re and 6pr (2023) highlight this by stating that often they experienced this thinking on and "targeting [of] two scales at the same time". When planning on the national and executing on the local scale, the mismatch is apparent.

The case of the RES Foodvalley cross-regional MPMP highlights difficulties with institutional fragmentation and conflicting goal setting. Interviewee 6pr (2023) worked on this project and shared their experience in dealing with conflicting objectives and inflexible policies. When breaking down national policies on e.g., the energy transition, objectives, timelines, and resources may clash in a single project. Especially when this project is supposed to be adopting MPMPs. Interviewee 6pr (2023) mentioned that several goals had to be achieved collaboratively at the same time, which proved to be impossible because the prioritization of these goals was unclear. The "(...) very mutually exclusive legislations and jurisdictions" (Interviewee 6pr, 2023) of different policies e.g., for wind turbines or spatial planning conflicted and overlapped without clear directions in restrictive and inflexible timelines. For that matter, interviewee 6pr (2023) suggested:

"I think the government should be very clear on what the most important thing is. Giving one assignment and maybe a second but give clear instructions on how these relate to each other and what will happen if something is not achieved".

To conclude, institutional fragmentation presents a challenge to the structuring of transitions, as identified by Loorbach (2010). This issue is apparent in three ways, including the trend to localize national policies, the intricacy of working across levels resulting in competing objectives, and the absence of boundaries and accountability. One can conclude that there are a lot of interest-driven activities that lack coordination and prioritization. This presents a challenge and an opportunity for the next 5-15 years to account for these structural deficiencies with a clearer design of processes. With various actors, institutional levels, rules, and regulations are interplaying, what is still missing is coherence in when, how, and where there is space for MPMPs and the regulations for the space within MPMPs are applied.

In the politically tumultuous present state of the Netherlands, the interviewees underscored the advantages of MPMPs, while acknowledging that the organization of decision-making at every level creates obstacles for these processes to function optimally. This was previously discussed by Loorbach (2010), who argued that this phenomenon of organizational and institutional fragmentation is a common attribute of the regime, the structural level, and a pitfall for MPMPs. It implies that sub-question 2 might be concluded stating there are more hindering elements to Dutch MPMPs than enabling structures.

7.6. Environment and Planning Act

While structural deficiencies are often pointed out, most interviewees discussed the potentially positive effect of the planned 'Omgevingswet' or 'Environment and Planning Act'. This legislation aims to consolidate 26 different laws of spatial projects to

streamline their approval and initiation and enhance stakeholder participation, particularly in energy transition projects such as wind farms (Business.gov.nl., 2023). The interviewees' perspectives and expectations of the upcoming legislation, set to take effect in January 2024, were varied.

Interviewees 1pr, 3pr, 4pe, and 10ps explored the possibilities of the new and simplified concept of (spatial) planning. They concurred that it could streamline and guarantee the inclusion of all relevant parties. Nevertheless, its impact on the advancement of MPMPs remains a topic of future discussion. While Interviewee 4pe (2023) indicates that "participation is included at the front end," it is ambiguous to what extent relevant stakeholders are effectively involved in process design and decision-making. Interviewee 10ps' (2023) voiced similar doubts toward the change this legislation would be able to create, arguing there to be no jurisprudents for one. Secondly, at a provincial level at least, the legislation would merely be "playing catchup" (Interviewee 10ps, 2023) with what is already practiced with MPMPs and serious game design today.

Regardless, the law mandates e.g., the consultation with all stakeholders if wind turbines are to be installed. To some degree, it is thus institutionalizing parts of the thought process behind MPMPs. However, it is not communicated to what extent consultation is required and when this stakeholder involvement is done *well*.

The Environment and Planning Act is pertinent to the development and acceleration of the acceptance and development of MPMPs, as stakeholder consultation is legally required. The efficacy and value of the it for MPMPs and their acceleration are yet to be determined. It is in any case a step forward. Concerning the CFW and research questions, this does indicate a shift in the conversations that are happening in the Netherlands, a shift in structures, and a potential impact on MPMPs in practice. It indicates that tactical activities are taking place to create more rules, regulations, and systems for the adoption of MPMPs. It indicates a transition close to the acceleration phase.

7.7. Pitfalls of MPMPs

Especially on a local and provincial level, there is "huge freedom to work on issues together" and to adopt MPMPs as one's working method. There is, however, "also a huge responsibility that when we do come to an answer [with MPMPs], that we take the responsibility to execute it" (Interviewee 4pe, 2023). This is only one of many potential pitfalls for MPMPs mentioned by all interviewees, which is linked to an exploration of the operational activities of the transition to MPMPs. Examples of MPMPs the interviewees worked on provided insights into the potential pitfalls of MPMPs and their development. They highlighted for instance, that working with MPMPs has become increasingly complex due to the previously mentioned shift in the Dutch political climate. More examples of such pitfalls are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Results on MPMPs.

Theme	Quote/Example
Increasing complexity	- "People don't like change" (Interviewee 2pe, 2023).
	- "Every next project is getting more trouble" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).
	- "Every new assignment has a different accent, but it's all the same type of problems" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).
Fear-driven decision-making	- Municipalities asking MPMP facilitators to design outcomes that are supported (Interviewee 1pr, 2023).
	- Elections affect political climate drastically (Interviewee 1pr, 2023).
	- "They are also afraid of the protests" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).
	- Lack of incentives and motivation to participate in MPMPs (Interviewee 1pr, 2023).
	- "Fear of citizens" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).
	- "Political fear of taking decisions that are unpopular" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).
	- "Have a backup for difficult political decisions" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023).

Batory and Svensson (2019) have stressed the importance of not engaging in collaborative practices based on "pre-determined public policy objectives" (p. 3). However, this is exactly what the interviewees saw trending in the current political climate in the Netherlands. During the interviews, concerns were expressed about whether MPMPs engaging the public were used to mitigate this "fear of citizens" (Interviewee 3pr, 2023) rather than primarily focusing on collaborative approaches. What is more, they highlighted that MPMPs are more than public participation, extending to all relevant actors of a challenge, ever so often forgotten. Think of the governmental level, institutions, and citizens, but also of academic institutions, companies, social enterprises, NGOs, community initiatives, and individuals.

For that reason and more, individuals worried that MPMPs, if not executed correctly, could potentially extend the transition processes in energy and other sectors rather than provide pathways for sustainable solutions for all. Without addressing the non-linear nature of environmental challenges that MPMPs deal with, all interviewees argued, that one misses

the goal of MPMPs. Interviewees 7per, 8pe, and 9pe (2023) argued that over the past years, not only an awareness for the urgency of climate change and action grew, but also the importance of education and knowledge e.g., on energy transitions. Actors of any kind should thus not be dismissed as unknowledgeable or irrelevant but invited to contribute and co-create, according to the interviewees.

What is more, Susskind et al. (1999) discussed what an institutional design of MPMPs would require. Following their research, the findings of the interviewees indicated that MPMPs do not have enough legitimacy and authority to be called *institutionalized*. While the public sector is increasingly engaging with civil society, it is important to acknowledge that this operates on the assumption of the citizens' and stakeholders' willingness to be involved. On the assumption that these actors want to contribute to the energy transition, which often disregards alternative motives and priorities. When working on strategies for accelerating MPMPs, it is thus essential to consider numerous practices and cultural factors that hinder or slow down their development. In the Dutch case, both aspects have both hindered and enabled the growth of MPMPs. To distill the specific practices of MPMPs, the development thereof, and their potential, the success factors of such processes are discussed in the following.

7.8. Potential and Guidelines for MPMPs

Repeatedly, the results pointed to a lack of coherence or specific regulation but also stated that MPMPs require a delicate balance of flexible and creative processes, the *right* people, and power for legitimate decision-making. The interviewees presented many examples of specific practices and innovations of and for MPMPs that are taking place. It is evident, that MPMPs are operationalizing and impacting different levels of society, incorporating technology (e.g., wind turbines), institutions, and human behavior in the process of creating sustainable outcomes. However, the interviewees argued that these tangible actions heavily rely on the structures supporting MPMPs, as they are the door openers for tangible change. Many also repeatedly mentioned a lack of such structures while debating the desirability of stricter policies. The interviews proposed a three-pronged argument.

Firstly, it was suggested that implementing rules and regulations may lead to numerous issues (Interviewee 3pr, 2023). Secondly, while there are certain guiding structures, e.g., citizen councils and case-based temporary structures (Interviewee 6pr, 4pe, 5re, 3pr, 8pe, 9pe, 10ps, 11pe, 2023) permanent structures were said to be nonexistent. Thirdly, when asked if it would be beneficial to establish more formal structures and legislations for MPMPs, the interviewees expressed serious doubts and highlighted the actual practice of MPMPs above structuring it.

Interviewee 7per (2023) and Greenwood et al. (2021) argue that legalizing MPMPs in detail could harm their flexibility and creativity. Interviewee 1pr provided an account of several procedures where rules and regulations were not fully adhered to, lacked precision, or hindered the achievement of lasting outcomes with MPMPs. They questioned the extent to which decisions are made at the decision table and which relevant stakeholders have a seat at that table (Interviewee 1pr, 2023). What is more, the effectiveness and desirability of including anyone at the table regardless of their knowledge or willingness to contribute was questioned (Interviewee 8pe, 9pe, 2023). This touched upon the importance of involving the relevant actors and institutions at the right time while increasing the “knowledge exchange” between all actors of MPMPs (de Olde et al., 2017).

Historically, formal networks with structures that could accelerate the use of MPMPs in daily decision-making exist in the form of e.g., the Social-Economic Council, the Poldermodel, and Waterboards (Interviewees 1pr, 3pr, 4pe, 5re, 2023). When temporary structures exist, the infrastructures of the case in question allow for “room also for negotiation and mediation” and thus for MPMPs (Interviewee 3pr, 2023). Citizen councils serve as concrete examples of these, which often have “(...) their own jurisdiction but these regional energy strategies kind of create a temporal new jurisdiction” (Interviewee 3pr, 2023). Additionally, Interviewee 4pe (2023) highlighted a shift in awareness as “(...) more and more civil servants and governors [exist] who understand that if we want to be successful, we better involve the stakeholders especially if we need them to execute the agreement that we reach”. MPMPs such as MGA or mediation for dispute resolution as are known today, are only occasionally supported by such structures and/or legislations, but rather operate on a network base. On such a network basis, the innovative practices of MPMPs are taking place.

Interviewees 2pe, 4pe, and 6pr indicated that the usage and development of MPMPs is more sporadic than it is informed by legislation. Its development and existence do rely on individuals, initiatives, and companies that organize themselves in networks. As such, MGA networks, knowledge-sharing platforms, and training for MPMPs exist that can be relied on when working with MPMPs. What is more, interviewees indicated that through these networks people also get in touch with MPMPs for the first time and can acquire projects or hire experts. In general, “you see a lot of new initiatives throughout the whole society” (Interviewee 4pe, 2023).

Additionally, upon being asked if structures or specific legislations were missing, interviewees mentioned wanting more coherence or nothing while voicing their concerns about institutionalizing MPMPs more. Relating to what has previously been discussed by Greenwood et al. (2021), the formal structuring of MPMPs carries the potential to impede its

development and negatively impact the process as well as the outcomes. Furthermore, does it make sense to aim for institutionalization as a means of enhancing the transition to MPMPs, even though rules and regulations are often rejected on the premise that the government knows "what is good for the country" (Interviewee 2pe, 2023)?

The three-pronged argument necessitates an alternative approach to institutionalizing (if even) and legislating MPMPs in the Netherlands. Cultural factors, per Loorbach (2010), impact the political climate such that loose structures appear practical, while stringent regulations seem unappealing. Rather, innovative practices, citizen initiatives, businesses, and MPMP projects were preferred. What is needed at a governance level is the provision of freedom and encouragement for such practices, along with space for education on MPMPs, according to the interviews. This conclusion overlaps with the literature on institutionalization and concerns voiced by scholars such as Greenwood et al. (2021), Grootjans et al. (2021) and Batory and Svensson (2019). Greenwood et al. (2021) stressed time and time again that institutionalization is not to be mistaken for the all-powerful solution to issues facing society and decision-makers. At the level of practices, of operational activities, not many results were found. This is also because in this case, the MPMPs, so the subject of transition itself, and thus reiterates that exactly such innovative practices and actions are needed. Many of the interviews concluded that "the development of shared goals and trust between stakeholders with competing interests" (Lette et al., 2019) is what is needed next. This also coincides with the literature on MPMPs as discussed throughout this document. One may conclude that MPMPs themselves bear the success stories for the way forward.

8. Discussion

In this section, the above-presented results of the interviews are discussed per sub-question to provide a detailed answer to the main research question. The main question posed the following: **"What is needed for MPMPs in the green energy transition to develop from niche-based toward larger-scale institutionalization, reaching the acceleration phase of change in the Netherlands?"**. It emerged from the literature and the CFW, which adopted Loorbach's (2010) Transition Theory. The operationalization of the research questions and the CFW helped in the analysis of the results. Furthermore, the research was conducted based on the tentative hypothesis that the Netherlands is on its way to the acceleration phase of change in the TT. The aim of the study was hence also, to assess to what degree that hypothesis can be sustained or reformulated in case of rejection.

8.1. Discussion of sub-question 1

The first sub-question focused on the societal (sub-) system of culture and thus strategic activities that may be linked to the development, growth, or decline of MPMPs in the Netherlands. The results of the literature and the interviews with experts, researchers, a public servant, and practitioners showed a three-pronged argument when discussing cultural influences for and of MPMPs. According to the results, MPMPs developed based on a need for problem-solving processes, the Netherlands has fostered a culture of collaboration and communication positively influencing MPMPs, do however also shows to some extent conflict averseness.

The need-based development of MPMPs speaks of both the functional and relative importance the Netherlands puts on sustainability issues. The interviewees spoke of conflicts in spatial planning, water management and safety, and the energy transition, which showed how common issues resulted in a common purpose and the need and willingness to collectively solve the most pressing issues. Secondly, specific tendencies to communication, collaboration, open opinion sharing, and equality in the Netherlands influenced MPMPs from the earliest stages of e.g., the Poldermodel and Waterboards forward. The literature reiterates the influence of low power distances in the Netherlands, which shows the culture of equality the interviewees talk of when discussing why people are prone to collaborate. At the same time, MPMPs are influenced by varying degrees of conflict-averseness that some of the interviewees noted. Lastly, the results show how such cultural factors have created a portfolio of co-creation and capacity-building based on shared beliefs, norms, and values on collaboration. Considering the abundance of literature and interviewees mentioning culture as contributing to the development of MPMPs, the mentions of conflict awareness may be regarded as less important.

The results do not specifically show the Netherlands' stance on sustainability, but rather highlight, how and why sustainability and now the green energy transition is highly important to the Netherlands. The interviewees argue that sustainability has gained so much traction that it holds a great place value in society. Regardless, MPMPs still often fade in light of more conventional problem-solving and decision-making processes. Speaking of the place value of MPMPs one thus can conclude that the relative importance of MPMPs is still lacking.

To conclude, sub-question one incorporates a need-based development, a knack for communication and collaboration, and in some instances conflict-averseness that enable and drive the implementation and acceleration of MPMPs in the Netherlands. Also looking at the CFW, one can state that MPMPs have greatly been influenced and enabled by (Dutch) culture.

8.2. Discussion of sub-question 2

The focus of sub-question two was the structures supporting or hindering the

development and acceleration of MPMPs, which initiated an analysis of the tactical activities, institutions, rules, and regulations influencing MPMPs. Similar to the cultural factors, a three-pronged discussion is presented by the literature and the interviewees. MPMPs are to varying degrees influenced by a shift in the Dutch political climate, institutional fragmentation, and the potential of the Environment and Planning Act.

For one, this shift in the political climate and leadership in the Netherlands was not necessarily seen as beneficial to MPMPs. Paternalistic, concession- and compromise-based decision-making paired with polarization were (potentially) negatively affecting MPMPs' development. What is more, the interviewees noted the great influence of the public both as a challenge and an opportunity for MPMPs. With a more active civil society, collaborative processes were gaining in popularity, which is moving MPMPs more into the spotlight and closer to becoming the norm.

While there are great examples of opportunities for MPMPs at a province level, the meso-level, that allow for resources to be allocated flexibly to MPMPs, the interviews noted a shift in responsibility of carrying out national policies on a local level. They critiqued this pattern of governance as the infrastructure and relevant parties are often lacking on a local level that would allow for a proper execution e.g., of national wind energy policies with local resources. The reality of how well MPMPs are executed was showing a lack of clear priorities, time, and resources, while the necessary actors such as organizations, the public, networks, and governmental bodies were ready and often willing to collaborate in common conflicts.

The consensus of the interviewees on more regulations and guidelines for MPMPs, that would result in a better structure for MPMPs, is clear. A streamlining of processes is desired, while a too-strict regulation of MPMPs is critiqued. A potentially more explicit legislation could be the Environment and Planning Act, which does, however, not speak of the type, the quality of stakeholder engagement, and is said to play catchup with what is already practiced. One can conclude that regulations specifically addressing *multi-party mediated processes* do not exist. The Act, once in action, provides opportunities to engage more people and institutions in collaborative processes.

The interviewees also stressed that this current lack of structures results in a well-working network-based sharing of practices, collaboration, and knowledge. And added that it would be desirable not to further complicate and institutionalize these. Especially in times of institutional fragmentation that appears to be resulting in a mobilization of the civil society. On the other hand, paternalistic and compromise-driven activities, and institutional fragmentation do hinder the implementation and especially acceptance of MPMPs. Interviewees suggested that we need radical solutions and that a middle way, also in terms of loosely institutionalizing MPMPs could be in the upcoming development.

To conclude, structures in the Netherlands are lacking in comparison to cultural influences for MPMPs. It is somewhat unclear what the right extent of structuring and regulating MPMPs is. The development of structures for MPMPs is hence at the earliest stages.

8.3. Discussion of sub-question 3

Sub-question three addressed specific practices enabling and driving the implementation and acceleration of MPMPs in the Netherlands. Firstly, it must be noted, that MPMPs themselves can be seen as an operationalization of societal, technological, institutional, and behavioral practices. Furthermore, the important agents of change, thinking of businesses, industries, politics, and civil society are the key players for MPMPs but also their development as this is greatly influenced by every successful MPMP.

The results show that practices hindering and/or enabling the development of MPMPs in the Netherlands can be sorted into pitfalls and guidelines/success factors of MPMPs. The interviewees unanimously agree that MPMPs themselves are the best learning opportunity for future MPMPs. They discuss countless examples of MPMPs on the local, regional, and sometimes even national scale, that show how an increasing complexity in the conflicts MPMPs operate on and fear-driven political decision-making are pitfalls for MPMPs. An example would be working with pre-agreed-upon outcomes to gain the public's support or stakeholder buy-in rather than co-creating a solution-finding process with a win-win outcome.

Some individuals worried that such incorrectly executed MPMPs could potentially extend the transition processes in environmental challenges rather than provide pathways for sustainable solutions for all and hinder the development of MPMPs at the same time.

What is more, the pitfalls show that the assumption of actors' willingness to engage in MPMPs, as previously discussed by Greenwood et al. (2021), holds true. This is important to keep in mind when thinking of institutionalizing MPMPs, something the interviewees agree would not be desirable. MPMPs are seen as most effective and successful when structures exist on a case-by-case basis. The results formulate the advice to focus on the actors driving change within the sustainability sector and the MPMP practitioners to strengthen networks, mutual learning, and knowledge sharing to raise awareness and inspire people to collaborate.

To conclude, MPMPs are themselves both hold the potential to be the hindering and enabling drivers of the development and acceleration of MPMPs in the Netherlands. Focusing on more cases of MPMPs, more networks, more sharing of the processes, more

transparency, and more learning from mistakes is hence the advice emerging from this research.

9. Conclusion

Based on the previously discussed results, this chapter concludes the research and answers the main research question: **What is needed for multi-party mediated processes in the green energy transition to develop from niche-based toward larger-scale institutionalization, reaching the acceleration phase of change (Transition Theory) in the Netherlands?**

An answer to this question can only be a nuanced one. In a way, the research concludes that the subtle implication of the question had always been that to reach the acceleration phase in the transition theory would be to institutionalize MPMPs. The results of this research indicate clearly that institutionalization in the sense of rules, regulations, and legislations describing and prescribing MPMPs is not desirable. This is due to the thriving state of MPMPs due to cultural influences, actors, and specific practices of MPMPs with often merely case-based guidelines in place. Other significant factors making the institutionalization of MPMPs particularly undesirable include the challenging political climate in the Netherlands, institutional fragmentation, and low trust in the government and governance.

What is needed to reach the acceleration phase of Loorbach's Transition Theory is the construction and development of (existing) networks, infrastructures, education on MPMPs, and projects in which MPMPs have played a significant role. Education about MPMPs and an effort to make the subject and field a less fuzzy one (Batory and Svensson, 2019) could help articulate the objectives, regulations, and needs of MPMPs in order to both withstand and thrive in the current challenging (political) climate of the Netherlands. Increasing awareness of the existence of a more sustainable and value-creating path has great potential to spark solutions for the environmental challenges and green transition goals of the Netherlands.

Focusing on the constituent parts of transitions, cultural factors have a huge impact on MPMPs in the Netherlands. Structurally, the Netherlands must dedicate specific room and resources for MPMPs in their policy- and decision-making and articulate the accountabilities and responsibilities of each party involved in order to create an environment in which MPMPs can be properly executed. Lastly, best practices and lessons learned from MPMPs can most effectively inform the practices driving MPMPs, which is why a focus on learning from MPMP examples is crucial.

What is more, the results show clearly that socio-cultural and, to some extent, economic, environmental, and institutional changes have taken place regarding MPMPs. Still, I would be careful to confidently conclude that the Netherlands has thus reached the acceleration phase described in the transition theory. This caution is based on the deeply ingrained and highly praised politics of compromise, which starkly contrasts MPMPs and their strive for consensus and win-win outcomes.

10. Limitations

As any research, this research has limitations in various aspects, that should be considered by the reader and those wanting to apply its findings to different contexts (APA, 2019). Firstly, due to the scope of a bachelor thesis, the study had a rather small sample size of 30–45-minute semi-structured interviews with 11 MPMP experts. Constraints can be found in the snowballing and purposive sampling methods because this sampling is quite subjective. Another limitation of the study would be the population of the research and the interviews, as their professions collectively represented seven experts, five researchers, ten practitioners of MPMPs, and only one public servant. For future research, it would thus be advised to include more public servants and consider contacting citizens. The role of the public servants would need to be stressed more, as the study discusses a lot of political influences.

Secondly, the interviews as the chosen method of data collection did allow for great qualitative data. However, time constraints of around 30–45 minutes per interview limited the depth of the conversation and thus results. Thirdly, it being a bachelor thesis with clear time and word limits due to the requirements of the supervision of the Windesheim Honours College, limited the scope of the research. The focus on MPMPs was taken loosely during the interviews, to gain a broader picture of the state of the field in the Netherlands. Since only cultural, structural, and practical factors were considered, the findings were narrowed down to that focus. When using this research, one must thus keep in mind the specific reference to MPMPs in the context of environmental challenges in the energy transition as well as the case-specific application to the Netherlands. Advice for using the research's findings or further research on its topic would be to narrow down the focus of MPMPs also regarding the selection of interviewees and literature to only specifically *mediated* processes. What is more, a stronger focus on the structural factors and especially the influences of practices on MPMPs should be at the center of future research as there are still knowledge gaps to explore.

Concerning the findings of the research, errors in analysis and/or interpretation of the results may have occurred. Though they were conducted with care and diligence, errors are

possible and could thus impact the generalizability of the research. Similarly, random, and systemic errors may have occurred, even though the research was designed with care.

In conclusion, the research does contribute valuable insights into the state of the art of MPMPs in the Netherlands, insights into the Dutch culture of collaboration, structures, and practices, and its potential for the future of MPMPs.

11. Relevance to the Work Field

As discussed in the conclusion and limitations sections, this research has had a very specific scope and focus. With MPMPs as the subject and the Netherlands as the case, the desk research focused on MPMPs, whose origins are in Alternative Dispute Resolution and different variants such as the Mutual Gains Approach. It has also been previously clarified that MPMP was chosen as an umbrella terminology for processes such as MGA or mediated stakeholder engagement. During the interview phases, this terminology has been specifically referred to. The researcher deemed it valuable to also include opinions on the state of MPMPs given by participants that primarily worked with other forms of collaboration such as participation in the Netherlands, that do not focus on mediation by a third party. Depending on the reader, this widens or narrows down the applicability and relevance of this work. I would like to argue, that the value of this research lies primarily in the assessment of the Netherlands and its unique culture of collaboration, changing political climate, arguably contrasting characteristics of the Dutch, and innovative, entrepreneurial spirit in the face of failures in the government and a climate urgency.

The *work field* itself is thus difficult to pinpoint. This research is relevant cross-organizational to people working with MPMPs of any shape or form, and those interested in what makes the Netherlands so unique in the context of MPMPs. It is an account of the application of Transitions Theory by Loorbach (2010) in the case of MPMPs in the Netherlands meaning that actors interested in societal transitions and a non-technical application of TT are also addressed. It is also relevant to anyone interested in learning about all the above. What is more, it is relevant to both internal and external stakeholders of the internship organization Akordi, hence also to Finland, especially when considering the ensuing professional product that will be based on this research.

Given the fact that economic, political, environmental, legislative, societal, managerial, and cultural aspects were considered, and given the international and interdisciplinary background of the researcher's education and upbringing, the research is inherently interdisciplinary.

12. Contribution to the Professional Product

The research has focused on the Netherlands and its analysis of the state of the art of MPMPs considering the TT. The purpose of this study is to be able to apply conclusions from the Netherlands to other cases such as Finland. This would benefit Finland's commitment to their Climate Change Act in 2022 (State Treasury Republic of Finland, 2023), focusing on the cut of emissions in the land use sector. For Finland's upcoming environmental challenges, which are - similarly to the Netherlands currently - mainly focused on land use challenges and conflicts, Dutch cases of MPMPs provide an interesting comparative context. The reason for that is e.g., the soil health of both countries, as indicated by the EU Soil Observatory, which is to shift so dramatically, that Finland among other countries could look at issues faced and dealt with by the Netherlands today (European Commission, n.d.). Furthermore, the study runs on the hypothesis that the Dutch case of implementing MPMPs is more advanced than the Finnish case, resulting in a learning opportunity for Finland and the researcher's internship organization, Akordi. The research aimed to fill the knowledge gap in how the uptake of MPMPs may be accelerated in Finland (as well).

The goal for the professional product, is to apply the conclusions of the Dutch case including specific recommendations and results that can be formulated as advice for others. This is part of a two-fold product consisting of a written document for general use and an educative presentation for Akordi. They can use the information and recommendations gathered in these two products to inform their (Finnish) stakeholders and in general to improve the field of MPMPs in Finland. It may also be used by external stakeholders and other parties interested in MPMPs in the Finnish context.

The demand for such a product cross-organizationally and cross-disciplinary is clear. In the Yhys Research Colloquium 2023 on polycrisis and conflicts in working on environmental challenges with MPMPs (Lähde, 2023), this need was articulated multiple times. Specifically, a need to bridge the gap between e.g., academic research and the reality of policymaking and the industries in question, that being e.g., the forestry industry in Finland, the energy transition, and the mining industry. The products intend to impact the field of public policy and serve as a steppingstone for accelerating the field of MPMPs in Finland.

In summary, it must be mentioned that this product will be tailored to Akordi's needs. Even though Akordi has made progress in establishing MPMPs in Finland, there is a distinct need to clearly articulate why MPMPs work, and under which circumstances this work can be grown.

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14. Appendices

14.1. Appendix A – Interview Questionnaire

Interview questions:

Strategic/culture

1. How would you describe the impact of cultural norms and values on the use/implementation of multi-party mediated processes in the Netherlands?
2. Are there specific cultural factors promoting or hindering the use and implementation of multi-party mediated processes?
3. Specific examples during which cultural aspects impacted the success or failure of the project?

Tactical/Structures

1. What key **rules and regulations and/or institutions** shape multi-party mediated processes significantly (hampering and enabling aspects)?
2. In what ways **have structures changed through time** and or related to cultural shifts?
3. Where are the **gaps in structures** supporting your work in this field?

Operational/practices

1. Are there **concrete experiments, actions, or innovations** driving the implementation and **acceptance** of multi-party mediated processes for complex problem-solving?
2. Any **highly impactful, larger-scale projects or** experiments that come to mind, failures as well as successes?
3. How do structural and/or cultural aspects support or hinder such practices?

Other:

1. How do the structures, practices, and culture inform each other, affect, and relate to each other?

2. Further remarks?

14.2. Appendix B – Interview Informed Consent Form

Interview Informed Consent Form

Frame: Bachelor Thesis for Windesheim Honours College's 'Global Project and Change Management' BBA

Research topic: Upscaling Multi-Party Mediated Processes for Environmental Conflicts in Finland

Investigator: **Eva Härter**

Institution: **Windesheim Honours College, Zwolle, The Netherlands**

Internship Company: **Akordi, Finland**

Introduction:

As part of the bachelor thesis research project for the interviewer's degree in *Global Project and Change Management*, you are invited to participate in an interview. For research ethics, data protection, informed consent, and transparency for your participation, please read the information below.

Duration:

About 30 min, semi-structured interview, interview questionnaire was provided upfront, guiding the interview. The interview will be recorded [if agreed upon] for transcription and analysis purposes.

Voluntary participation:

You may withdraw from the interview at any given moment, as your participation in the interview is fully voluntary. If you cannot or are not comfortable with answering specific questions, feel free to withhold responses at any given time.

Data Protection and Confidentiality:

If agreed upon, the interview will be recorded for further transcription, coding, and analysis. The data provided will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your name, position, or any identifying information will be kept confidential if you request as much. Any quotations or mentions will be anonymized or else, used upon agreement.

Contact details:

If after the interview, you have any questions, you may reach out at any time. Especially if there are concerns or questions surrounding the interview and information shared.

Agreements: please highlight/select applicable

Quotations and/or mentions may be used.

Quotations and/or mentions may be used upon request.

Name may be used.

Name is to be anonymized.

Position/Company may be named.

Position/company is to be anonymized.

Participants name:

Participants signature:

Date signed: