

Exploring Recognition Dynamics in Housing Renovations: An Interpretive Approach

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Abstract

This article explores the role of recognition justice in urban energy transitions, focusing on housing retrofitting in underprivileged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. Integrating recognition theory, transition studies, intersectional perspectives and interpretive epistemologies, we propose an empirical and interpretive approach that analyses actors' interactions, (discursive) practices, and institutional contexts to identify, analyse and interpret instances of (mis/non-)recognition and its dynamics.

We review existing literature on recognition justice, noting a gap in empirical and decision-making dimensions. Drawing from empirical vignettes, we highlight struggles over recognition in renovation processes, emphasizing tensions between engaging residents and institutional constraints.

Our interpretive epistemology focuses on interpretation, practice and deliberation as lenses on lived experiences of (mis/non-)recognition, in combination with methods such as institutional ethnography and framing analysis. By integrating an intersectional and critical perspective, we challenge dominant narratives and prioritize marginalized voices.

Finally, we propose recognition justice as a transformative instrument, arguing for co-designed renovation policies grounded in community values and integrating interpretive and intersectional methodologies to challenge existing energy policies and practices.

Introduction

The imperative for sustainable energy transitions has brought the concept of energy justice to the forefront of academic and policy discussions. Central to this framework is recognition justice, an often neglected but critical dimension that involves acknowledging and valuing the diverse identities, experiences and needs of all, but particularly historically marginalized groups. This article seeks to fill this gap by exploring the dynamics of recognition justice within the context of urban energy transitions, particularly focusing on housing renovation projects.

The urgency of achieving sustainable energy transitions is exemplified in the Netherlands, where an ambitious objective has been set to remove over 8 million homes from the gas grid, aiming to create sustainable, livable, and future-proof neighborhoods. This endeavor signifies a paradigmatic shift in how we understand and manage energy systems. As Berry (1988, p. 123 in Escobar, 2018) suggests, we are witnessing a transformation where the old narratives that once explained our relation to energy systems are becoming slowly obsolete. Embracing alternative narratives requires not only innovative socio-technical practices but also the establishment of a structural context that supports this transition, akin to the emergence of a new regime (Grin, 2020, p.3).

Within this national framework, the situation in underprivileged neighborhoods is particularly critical. These areas often face a multitude of challenges, including economic deprivation, social exclusion, and inadequate housing conditions. The multifaceted problems in these communities necessitate a comprehensive approach to energy justice that addresses not only the technical aspects of energy transitions but also the social dimensions.

Despite significant advancements in sustainable energy technologies, the exploration of recognition justice within housing renovation projects remains limited, particularly in underprivileged neighborhoods. This study argues that recognition justice is essential for a holistic understanding of justice in energy transitions. By investigating recognition justice as both an analytical and transformative instrument, we aim to shed light on the dynamics of (mis/non-)recognition in renovation strategies, contributing to a nuanced perspective on energy justice.

This article contextualizes the Dutch initiative to transition homes off the gas grid, examining how socio-technical innovations can intersect with multifaceted challenges. Thus, identifying where and how (mis/non-)recognition occurs, and how it can be effectively addressed – what we will call in the remainder of this article the *dynamics* of recognition – remains crucial. The purpose of this article is to provide an interpretive framework for identifying these dynamics of recognition in the context of energy transitions, ensuring that all aspects of justice are addressed. In our approach, we emphasize the importance of both emic and etic perspectives in the study of recognition justice. Current studies on energy justice predominately tend to adopt an etic standpoint, which involves an external analysis of justice principles. However, there is a growing body of studies attempting to incorporate emic

perspectives, which involve understanding justice from the viewpoint of the affected communities themselves. (Agusdinata et al., 2023; Astbury & Bell, 2018; Boamah & Rothfuß, 2020; Chu & Michael, 2019; Eikeland et al., 2023; Frankowski et al., 2021; Gürtler & Herberg, 2023; Hurlbert & Rayner, 2018; Pandey & Sharma, 2021; Robinson et al., 2023; Verloo, 2023; Willand et al., 2023)

This article presents an approach to studying recognition justice emically, thereby contributing to the empirical observations of energy justice from within the communities impacted by energy transitions.

The forthcoming sections of this article will unfold methodically. We begin with a literature review, delving into the existing scholarship on recognition justice and identifying key themes and debates. Subsequently, we present vignettes from ongoing fieldwork that provide empirical insights into the complexities of recognition dynamics within the renovation processes. We then delve into the epistemological and methodological foundations of interpretivism and introduce methods to apply an interpretive lens to analyze the interplay of recognition dynamics in empirical settings.

By doing so, our goal is to contribute to the broader research agenda on sustainable urban renovation and energy justice, offering a detailed account of both the material and intangible aspects of justice in energy transitions. Underscoring the importance of recognition justice, this article provides a foundation for future research and policy development emphasizing the need for emic and interpretative approaches to energy transitions (Bal et al., 2021; Breukers et al., 2017; W. Broers et al., 2022; W. M. H. Broers et al., 2019; Hoppe, 2012; Hoppe et al., 2011; Preece, n.d.).

The Energy Justice Framework

Energy justice is increasingly recognized as a crucial framework for connecting justice to energy policy and technology. Sovacool and Dworkin (2015) offer a comprehensive conceptualization of energy justice as a multifaceted concept that operates on three levels: conceptual, analytical, and decision-making. To fully understand this framework, it is essential to delineate these distinctions before delving into the specific tenets of energy justice.

At the conceptual level, energy justice involves the foundational principles and theories that inform our understanding of justice in the context of energy systems. This includes the philosophical underpinnings that address what justice means and why it matters in energy contexts. Sovacool and Dworkin (2015) emphasize that justice is not monolithic but pluralistic, drawing on various philosophical traditions to articulate a comprehensive framework that addresses the diverse dimensions of justice as they concern to energy production, distribution and consumption.

The analytical level of energy justice refers to the methods and tools used to assess and evaluate justice within energy systems. This involves the development of metrics and criteria to measure justice outcomes, such as the distribution of energy resources, the fairness of decision-

making processes, and the recognition of diverse stakeholder perspectives. At this level, scholars like Heffron and McCauley (2014) have applied the energy justice framework to a specific case study on wind energy in Denmark to analyze the distributional and procedural dynamics of renewable energy policies.

As a decision-making framework, energy justice provides guidelines for policymakers, professionals and also citizens to implement energy policies and projects. Sovacool and Dworkin (2015) argue that energy justice can guide decisions by ensuring that policies not only distribute resources equitably but also engage stakeholders in fair and inclusive decision-making processes, recognizing the variety in needs, perspectives and identities. For example, Dolter and Boucher (2018) applied this perspective in designing a solar energy program in Saskatchewan, Canada, showing how participants identified guiding principles that should shape the development of the program. These principles aligned with various dimensions of energy justice, such as affordability, sustainability, community participation and responsibility. However, the authors also highlighted the challenge of understanding the trade-offs between different dimensions of energy justice, such as affordability and intergenerational equity, thereby revealing the complexity of integrating energy justice principles into policy design.

The Three Tenets of Energy Justice

Energy justice encompasses three primary tenets: distributional justice, procedural justice, and recognition justice. Distributional justice focuses on the equitable allocation of resources, costs, responsibilities, assets, and liabilities with energy infrastructures and services (McCauley et al., 2013). This tenet addresses who gets what in terms of energy benefits and burdens, ensuring that no group disproportionately bears the negative impacts of energy production or consumption. Procedural justice concerns the fairness of decision-making processes related to energy policies and projects. This includes transparency, inclusiveness, and the opportunity for all stakeholders to participate meaningfully in decision-making. Jenkins et al. (2016) highlight that procedural justice ensures decisions are made through democratic processes, enhancing the legitimacy and acceptance of energy policies. Recognition justice involves acknowledging and respecting the diverse perspectives, needs, and rights of different social, cultural, and economic groups, especially those historically marginalized (Heffron, 2022). This tenet calls for the recognition of the rights and identities of various communities, ensuring their voices are heard and valued in energy decision-making.

While the energy justice framework provides a comprehensive approach to integrating justice into energy systems, several challenges remain. One significant challenge is the difficulty of defining and measuring justice across different contexts, given the diverse perspectives on what constitutes fairness and equity (Bell et al., 2020). Additionally, much of the current literature has focused

primarily on distributional and procedural justice, often neglecting recognition justice. This neglect is understandable due to the complexity and intangibility of recognition justice ((van Uffelen, 2022). Indeed, recognition theorists, such as Ikäheimo & Laitinen (2011) and Schick (2022) represent a starting point for researchers to explore the origins of recognition, its normative capacities, and its ambiguities. Insightful as these conceptual frameworks may be, they appear somewhat disconnected from the practicalities of the energy transition since concepts such as “love”, “the law” and “status order” are harder to quantify, or even qualitatively be addressed through policy measures. Moreover, historical emphasis has been on the more tangible aspects of justice, such as resource allocation and decision-making processes, which offer clearer pathways for policy action.

However, studying recognition justice is crucial for several reasons. First, a lack of recognition can exacerbate inequalities in resource distribution and participation. For instance, marginalized groups that are not adequately recognized may also be excluded from decision-making processes and fair resource allocation. Second, many marginalized communities, including Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and others, have faced historical exclusion and misrecognition. Recognition justice is crucial for addressing such historical and systemic injustice that may have long been overlooked. Third, and finally, identifying where and how (mis/non-)recognition may occur, and in which ways it may be effectively addressed – what we will call in the remainder of this article the *dynamics* of recognition, remain crucial as a comprehensive approach to energy justice, one that includes recognition justice ensuring that all aspects of justice are addressed. This may lead to more robust and equitable energy policies that can better navigate the complexities of modern energy systems, helping to create more balanced and inclusive energy policies.

The Analytical Dimension of Recognition Justice

Advancing our understanding of the analytical dimension of recognition justice is essential. From a theoretical perspective, defining recognition justice within a single disciplinary framework is challenging. Recognition scholars have demonstrated that recognition affairs address contextual challenges that cut across various dimensions: historical, cultural, social, economic, environmental, procedural, distributional, material, technical and scientific (Agusdinata et al., 2023; Boamah & Rothfuß, 2020; Chu & Michael, 2019; Frankowski et al., 2021; Fraser, 2018; Giles, 2018; Ikäheimo, 2022; Pandey & Sharma, 2021; Sebrechts et al., 2018; Tully, 2000; Verloo, 2023; Whyte, 2011).

As contexts change, so do the stakes involved in recognition affairs. Therefore, it is insufficient to rely solely on the normative and philosophical underpinnings of recognition (in)justice. An empirical approach is also needed to understand how (mis/non-)recognition emerges in practice during the energy transition and how to address mis/non-recognition issues effectively to provide energy justice.

Verloo (2023) uses the politics of recognition as an analytical framework to understand how mis/non-recognition is shaped through informal, micro-interactions among citizens and state actors at the street level. She identifies five socio-spatial tactics by which citizens were ignored during the participatory process: disregarding elements of citizens' stories, omitting their counter-narratives, neglecting citizens' memories, showing disdain for their emotional expressions, and being spatially absent from their protests. Similarly, Pandey & Sharma (2021) argue that non-participation can be a mode of resistance against subversive knowledge politics. Despite projected benefits and "apparent needs", people often reject the predefined roles and identities prescribed for them in Renewable Energy Transitions projects. Instead, vulnerable and marginal social groups mobilize their agency by framing needs and priorities in relation to emergent social, political and ecological identities, demanding recognition-based energy justice.

Willand et al. (2023) explore hermeneutical injustice as a form of misrecognition by analyzing the role of trusted intermediaries in recognizing and identifying hidden mis/non-recognition issues. They highlight how the links between power, knowledge production and communication can reinforce each other and reproduce structural injustices. Massarella et al. (2020) demonstrate epistemic injustice, asking whose ways of knowing, values, and perspectives on governance and justice are recognized and who are excluded, using a case study in Tanzania. Simcock et al. (2021) demonstrate how different forms of misrecognition can unintentionally slip into policy design and operation at both national and local scales, ultimately contributing to the reproduction of energy injustice.

These studies underscore the importance of the analytical utility of recognition to identify barriers and facilitators of the concerns and problems that marginalized communities may face in different energy transition contexts. They highlight the pressing need to include citizens through engagement, communication, and co-creation in decision-making processes. Remarkably, the decision-making function of recognition justice remains understudied. In commonality with its overarching framework of energy justice, recognition justice is synthetic too. Understanding the effects of recognition on just decision-making and its outcomes is crucial, as "who people see as responsible for energy problems and what they perceive as just or unjust can shape investment decisions, personal behavior (adoption of energy technologies), and even trust or lack in both information about energy and the institutions regulating or supplying it" (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015, p. 436)

As is perhaps obvious by now, recognition concepts and their analytical applications are garnering more attention, both within and outside the energy justice field. The above studies clearly show that mis/non-recognition dynamics are observed in procedural dimensions. These findings underscore the importance of the analytical utility of recognition to identify barriers and facilitators of

the concerns and problems that marginalised communities may face in different energy transition contexts. These studies highlight the pressing need to include residents through engagement, communication and co-creation in decision-making processes. Remarkably, it is exactly that the decision-making function of recognition remains understudied. In commonality with its overarching framework of energy justice, recognition is synthetic too. In other words, understanding the effects of recognition on just decision-making and its outcomes is crucial as “who people see as responsible for energy problems, and what they perceive as just or unjust, can shape investment decisions, personal behaviour (adoption of energy technologies) and even trust or lack of trust in both information about energy and the institutions regulating or supplying it” (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015, p. 436).

Including marginalized communities in the right way entails empirically studying the dynamics of recognition and its effect on planning and decision-making processes. It involves actions that lead to meaningful changes and improvements in acknowledging different identities, needs and perspectives. Energy justice, therefore, encompasses how transformative dynamics of recognition can influence better planning and decision-making processes, contributing to more just energy outcomes. Eikeland et al. (2023) illustrate how dynamics of (mis-)recognition serve as a policy feedback mechanism influencing further energy policy processes and development. While their study explains why municipal stances on wind energy have shifted from acceptance to resistance, the application of energy justice perspectives with policy feedback is an interesting take on combining a more descriptive and normative theoretical perspective with an explanation-oriented approach.

It becomes increasingly apparent that the theoretical underpinnings of recognition justice reverberate throughout the practical landscape of energy policy and implementation. Grounded in this understanding of recognition justice and its dynamics, we now move towards the empirics of energy renovation projects. Herein lies an opportunity to scrutinize the complex interplay between interactions, (discursive) practices, and institutional frameworks.

Unpacking the Analytical Dimension of Recognition Justice: Vignettes from an Energy Renovation Project in the Netherlands

We now turn to everyday interactions in energy renovation projects and reveal who is (mis)recognised and by whom, what form(s) of (mis)recognition emerge, why it emerges in such forms, and how the (mis)recognition is addressed. This section presents vignettes with limited empirical observations to illustrate the importance of an empirical analysis of recognition justice, highlighting the need for an interpretative approach.

Vignette I: Community Engagement through “The Connecting Room”

It is the year 2023.

In a renovated house in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the Netherlands, a woman whose enthusiasm infuses the air begins talking about her community-based organization called ‘The Connecting Room’.

“We try to understand what is happening beyond the front door. By visiting every household, we try to reach every resident to identify and learn what issues or themes are present in their life. We collected these so-called ‘signals’ with social workers, apartment block teams, individual residents or the ‘community building’ team. These ‘signals’ were then allocated to a Social team member, a buddy, a household member, and a neighborhood partner. At the same time, once we reached the residents, we tried to connect them to strengthen the informal network. To support this, we used apartment block teams. In practice, this meant that two people were assigned to each block, organizing a weekly coffee-chat in the entrance hall. Because the same duo hosted these events on a fixed day and time and kept them quite informal, we managed to create a sense of familiarity among the residents, strengthening trust.

She pauses a moment. “And now, we have more than 30 active residents in this neighbourhood!” she says proudly. “You see, these active residents are the eyes and ears in the apartment blocks. They are the ones who know what is happening during the day and night. They are the ones that signal what goes well and what goes wrong.

On top of that, most residents are likely to trust their neighbours sooner than a professional. The woman re-positions her body, so she is now sitting on the front part of her chair. “You know what the most beautiful thing is about this project?” Her voice contains traces of passion. She proudly finishes her sentence: “Well, you see, the impact of our project became noticeable when a resident told us these words: We were first invisible, but now we have a voice.”

In this vignette, a diverse coalition of actors (municipality, housing corporation, community organizations, and residents) adopts a collaborative approach to address the problem of misrecognition and exclusion. Through a shared understanding of the problem at hand (who is being misrecognised and by whom) or the struggle over recognition (i.e. residents are invisible and excluded). There seems to be an implicit understanding of why this struggle over recognition must be

addressed (i.e. the energy transition is also a social transition) and how it can be addressed (i.e. we need to know what is happening beyond the front door). However, it is this interpretation of the energy transition that is communicated symbolically in this strategy through a ‘shared language’ of recognition, actions and practices (i.e. weekly coffee-chats, door-to-door visits, assistance with rent arrears and social isolation). Thus, an analytical ‘reading’ of recognition not only aids in identifying normative dynamics of energy injustices but also illustrates how recognition dynamics unfold in interactional practices, influencing both the articulation of residents’ experiences and the decision-making processes of institutional actors. The transformative dynamic of recognising residents as equal partners has been made explicit by the perceived change by residents and their status from being invisible to empowered: *“Well, you see, the impact of our project became noticeable when a resident told us these words: We were first invisible, but now we have a voice.”* This knowledge is often implicit, as it is difficult to articulate or codify what it means to “be invisible” or “have a voice”, as these understandings are often deeply ingrained in an individual’s experiences, beliefs and values. However, a further and deeper ‘reading’ can uncover implicit biases and assumptions that may perpetuate the invisibility of residents in energy renovation projects. Such a ‘reading’ of recognition justice may also reveal how different stakeholders interpret and engage with energy renovation policies, and how disparities in influence, access and decision-making marginalizes or excludes certain groups.

Vignette II: Tensions between Regulatory Frameworks and Residents’ Perspectives

In that same renovated house, the conversation now turns to a man sitting in a chair in the left corner of the living room. *“We want to change. However, we do not know how”,* he says. He pauses for a moment and seems puzzled. He continues *“As a housing corporation, we know that we tend to neglect residents’ perspectives and that we do not include them enough in decision-making processes. It is not the case that we do not want to include them, but we do not know how to give residents a voice, when we should give them a voice and why.”*

He explains further, *“On top of that, we also must adhere to specific rules. For example, sometimes residents tell us that their houses need renovation, which might be the case, but on paper, they are relatively better graded than other houses in the city. So, based on this data, we decide first to renovate our other properties, the ones that are worse off than theirs.”*

This housing corporation’s employee highlights the complexities of balancing residents’ needs with institutional mandates. His acknowledgement of the corporation’s struggle to include residents’ voices underscores the tension between institutional priorities and the recognition of residents’ needs and experiences: *“It is not that we do not want to include them, but we just do not know how we can give residents a voice, and when we should give them a voice, and why so.”* This example illustrates the

tension between textual practices, material conditions and the local, interactional context. The housing corporation realizes it is misrecognizing residents through interaction, or rather, the unclarity of interaction between them. It may want to address misrecognition, yet paradoxically, it may be inhibited in actually doing so because of its established beliefs (e.g., strongly favouring input from experts, technical understanding of sustainability and justice) and selecting specific values above others (e.g., effectiveness & efficiency) or simply because some technical needs are simply not feasible (i.e. Simoens et al., 2022, p. 6).

"On top of that, we must also adhere to certain rules. For example, sometimes residents tell us that their houses need renovation, which might be the case, but on paper, they are relatively better graded than other houses in the city. So, based on this data, we decide first to renovate our other properties, the ones that are worse off than theirs." This shows how a housing corporation must operate within the boundaries of its institutional practices *and* that such practices co-shape how professionals follow specific 'ways of working'. The corporation's representative provides an example of how he practices a specific way of working that inadvertently leads to misrecognition "[...] *So, based on this data, we decide first to renovate our other properties, the ones that are worse off than theirs.*". It becomes clear that the housing corporation has a different viewpoint and interpretation of an effective energy transition (i.e. retrofitting building stock that has higher energy inefficient levels is more effective in reducing gas emissions than building stock that is relatively more energy efficient). It is exactly these differences in interpretation leading us to question how various meanings of policies produce different forms of mis/non-recognition in practice, and how they may exacerbate existing inequalities within communities.

Discussion

These vignettes reveal the nuanced and complex dynamics of recognition justice in energy renovation projects. Recognition justice extends beyond a normative ideal and serves as an analytical framework to understand who is being (mis/non-)recognized, by whom, in what forms, and why. It also examines how mis/non-recognition can be addressed. For instance, the first vignette, "the Connecting Room" demonstrates how a community-based approach can facilitate the recognition of marginalized residents by involving them in regular, informal interactions. The practices of collecting "signals" from residents and organizing weekly coffee-chats illustrate an effort to acknowledge and address residents' concerns and experiences directly. This approach highlights the importance of creating familiar, trusting and safe environments where residents feel seen and heard. The transformation from invisibility to having a voice, as expressed by the resident, underscores the positive impact of recognition on community empowerment.

The second vignette, involving the housing corporation employee, highlights the challenges institutions face in balancing residents' needs with regulatory and operational constraints. The employee's admission of the corporation's struggle to include residents' voices reveals a critical tension between institutional priorities and the recognition of residents' perspectives. This tension seems to be exacerbated by the reliance on technical data and predetermined criteria for decision-making, which can lead to the inadvertent exclusion of residents' lived experiences and needs. The vignette shows how institutional practices and logic, such as favoring expert input and efficiency, can perpetuate misrecognition and hinder meaningful engagement.

The empirical observations from both vignettes demonstrate how recognition justice can manifest in practical settings. In the case of "the Connecting Room", recognition seems to be achieved through direct, personal interactions and community-building activities. These efforts seem to create a certain sense of belonging and agency among residents, where their voices are valued. On the other hand, the housing corporation's approach reveals the limitations of institutional frameworks that prioritize technical assessments over procedural matters, highlighting the need for more flexible, engaging and inclusive practices.

The transformative potential of recognition justice is evident in the perceived changes in residents' status and empowerment. In the first vignette, the shift from being "invisible" to having a "voice" demonstrates how recognition can lead to increased participation and influence in community affairs. This transformation is crucial for ensuring that residents' needs and perspectives are incorporated into decision-making processes. The second vignette, however, shows that without addressing the underlying institutional constraints and (potential) biases, efforts to achieve recognition can be hindered or even prevented, risking maintaining power imbalances and perpetuating injustices.

Both vignettes also highlight the discursive aspects of recognition justice, where language and communication play a role in shaping recognition dynamics. The shared language of recognition actions and practices seem to facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation among residents and institutional actors. In contrast, the housing corporation's reliance on formal criteria and technical language points toward the disconnect between institutional practices and residents' lived realities. This discursive negotiation is critical for bridging the gap between policy interventions and practical outcomes, ensuring that recognition is both meaningful and effective.

Taken together, four broad themes emerge from the above analysis: (1) the meaning of recognition claims in interactions; (2) the empirical manifestations of such claims in an institutional and material context; (3) the transformative dynamic of recognition, and (4) the discursive negotiation of recognition and its various meanings in interactions embedded in a specific institutional and material context. These dimensions highlight the complex dynamics of recognition justice. To further make sense of these dynamics, the further advancement of recognition justice asks for an

epistemology that allows for a deeper exploration of these themes. The following section proposes a way forward.

An interpretivist approach to understanding recognition dynamics

Core features of interpretivism

To gain a deeper understanding of recognition dynamics, an interpretivist approach, as developed in the field of public policy analysis, seems most suitable. For our purposes, it is useful to focus on three elements central to interpretivism (cf. Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003): interpretation, practice-orientation and deliberation.

Interpretation focuses on meanings attributed by actors to social phenomena, objects, policy objectives, rules, acts, et cetera; and the processes of interpretation through which meanings arise in (crucially) an action context. The context thus influences the meanings actors produce through the interpretations they make of important contextual elements, such as the setting or venue in which action occurs, formal and informal rules, deeper engrained discourses, and events that occur.

Meanings and interpretation are seen as the drivers of action and arise and evolve in a specific action context; they evolve, as the situation ‘talks back’, both through features of the context and through interactions (Schön, 1983) also Yanow, 1996; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Fischer, 2004).

Interpretation is always political. The objects, goals, language, actions, or events in which meaning is imbued, conveyed and read, allow for multiple interpretations, that reflect different positions of actors (Majone, 1989; Fischer and Forester, 1993; Grin and Van de Graaf, 1996; Stone, 2012). These multiple interpretations are the result of ‘framing work’ consisting of how actors make sense of a situation, how they select, name and categorize, and how actors tell stories about problems and possible solutions (Schon & Rein, 1994; Van Hulst & Yanow, 2014). Through their framing work actors put specific interpretations on substance, objects, procedures or relations. Framing work is essentially a creative process. Meanings are not determined by beliefs or context but arise from a dialectic process, in which actors iterate between generic beliefs or values and the particularities of the situation, including material and institutional context and actions by and interactions with other actors (Schön, 1983).

An often used and relatively open-textured definition holds that a practice is ‘(...) a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood’ (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). A practice-orientation thus focuses on action situations in which actors engage in daily routines and are socialized to act upon situations at hand, based on practical judgement, knowledge and experience. A focus on practice makes interpretivists susceptible of how actors deal with conflict, power, uncertainty and other challenges they encounter in their daily

lives or at work (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). Actors negotiate concrete situations by acting upon them, thus creating a new understanding of the situation and changing it, a process Schön (1983) called reflection-in-action. Their understanding of the situation grows as they try to change it, sometimes leading to unintended changes that create new meaning: the situation talks back, thus inciting new reflection and new action (Schön, 1983). Part of such situations is also that actors test what they have learned during interactions with others to further confirm or disconfirm what they think to know about a situation (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). However, most of this reflection can be seen as actors ‘thinking on their feet’ (Schön 1983) or as processes of single-loop learning in which actors focus on solving concrete issues when they occur (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

That takes us to deliberation, our element of interpretivism which draws attention to the importance of making practical judgements based on collective interactive discourses. Telling stories and reacting to each other’s stories forms the driver of practical judgement. Deliberation can thus be seen as a process of mutual inquiry and mutual discourse in which practical judgment gradually evolves over time (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Loeber, 2007). As a collective process deliberation has a powerful transformative potential, as it may enable processes of reflection-*on*-action in which actors take more time to assess situations after they happen, how they acted and what other ways of acting were possible (Schön, 1983). Such reflection-*on*-action relates to processes of double-loop learning in which actors start questioning the conditions under which they act (Argyris & Schon, 1974). This form of learning typically involves a dialectic process, in which actors iterate between generic beliefs or values and the particularities of the situation, including material and institutional context and actions by and interactions with other actors (Schön, 1983) This crucially implies a recognition of the possibility of agency, i.e. “the capacity to act otherwise” (Giddens, 1984, p. 14) as well as the possibility of adapting or finetuning generic beliefs or values. Hence, deliberation recognizes and helps to identify and understand the potential of transformative action in a specific context (Grin, 2010).

Our separation of interpretation, practice orientation and deliberation as distinct elements of interpretivism should not be taken to imply that these can be separated in housing-renovation processes. These elements are all part of the same processes, but we separated them here for analytical purposes. In fact, distinguishing these elements has different analytical implications when studying recognition dynamics in renovation processes.

An interpretivist lens on recognition dynamics

We can now see how an interpretive approach enables the analysis of (mis)recognition dynamics. Through adopting an interpretive approach, we can identify when an actor is (mis)recognized: when meaning and interpretations, or the ways in which actors act upon situations do, or do not, properly

recognize that actor's needs, perception of the situation, values, worldview or identity and lifestyle. More specifically, interpretivism may help us understand when (mis)recognition manifests itself, how it shapes interpretations and actions; as well as how others interpret such meaning and act on it – in other words, it may help us understand the dynamics of (mis)recognition as it unfolds through interaction. Finally, the deliberative element draws attention to the potentiality of and may inform, transformative action to deal with (mis)recognition and its causes.

As a generic methodical guideline, fine-grained analysis and thick description (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) are needed. For instance, the meaning of being invisible or excluded can only be fully grasped through a detailed account of such social phenomena. For that purpose, referring to the previous section, we distinguish three analytical tasks: 1) identifying instances of (mis)recognition; 2) identifying and understanding the interpretations and actions at the core of experienced (mis)recognition; and 3) analyzing (mis)recognition dynamics as they manifest themselves during interactions as well as in texts. While, given the very core features of an interpretivist ontology, these tasks are not disjoint but interrelated, we will discuss them separately, indicating relations were helpful in performing the analysis.

First, to identify a case of (mis)recognition as such may be straightforward when a sense of (mis)recognition is clearly articulated and/or leading to action. More complicated, but at least as important, are more covert instances. Here, a useful point of departure is to understand (mis)recognition as an action and practice, informed by interpretations that root in beliefs and values situated in a particular institutional and material context in which traditions or socialization patterns have evolved. These traditions may, in a concrete situation, lead to dilemmas, discomfort or other surprises that must be confronted and resolved.

Hence, to uncover covert instances of (mis)recognition, it is important to be equipped with a preliminary understanding of how – given their identities, experiences, beliefs and values - different actors in a context may be prone to (mis)recognition. In the case of misrecognition think of e.g. earlier experienced negligence of specific lifestyles/life circumstances, an experience marginalization, a lived history of enslavement, discrimination, or objectivation. This preliminary understanding can be based on a combination of literatures on similar settings and groups, and relevant bodies of critical theory (cf. next section); on documented history or narratives of the community or neighborhood involved; and on exploratory study through semi-structured interviews. Thus equipped, the researcher then should scrutinize apparently surprising actions (like the rejection of a procedure or a plan which its designers expected to receive a warm welcome) in terms of whether they 'betray' covert experiences of misrecognition.

Second, to confirm whether an apparently covert case indeed involves misrecognition, and to analyze an established case of misrecognition, understanding interpretations is key. To grasp why, for

example, some residents are misrecognized, and others are not, one must first reconstruct the interpretations and practices in which misrecognition appears. Here methods that allow researchers to ‘read’ misrecognition literally in texts but also in actions are important. The dynamics of misrecognition may be uncovered through textual analysis and observations of practices and their contextual elements and may become understandable once interpretations and related beliefs and values are analyzed. Hence, an understanding of the dynamics of misrecognition then becomes key to explaining the experienced injustice. Yet an explanation of recognition injustice as an outcome is not to be understood as an attempt to identify a general law or norm as a final verdict. Instead, explaining recognition injustice is a contextual and case-specific analytical and empirical application of a justice lens on social phenomena. In other words, to locate injustice in struggles over recognition, and to locate struggles over recognition against the backdrop of interpretations and practices, is to explain the interpretations of struggles over recognition and the practices they inspire.

Third, understanding the interpretations and actions at the core of (mis)recognition will help to understand how the dynamics of (mis)recognition unfolded as they did, and how they relate (bi-directionally) to distributive and procedural aspects of justice, thus shedding light on the interaction between recognition and the other two tenets of energy justice. In the next section, this will be taken as an additional starting point for understanding transformative potential. In the remainder of the present section, we will elaborate on how to analyze the dynamics of recognition, focusing on the interpretations and practices of individuals and organisations as they shape and emerge from their interactions.

As portrayed in the earlier vignettes, each actor, based on their interpretations, has their own account of what has been going on, what is going on, and what needs to be done (Van Hulst & Yanow, 2014, p. 9) In these accounts, certain aspects of meaning are selected, named and categorized. In this case, the housing corporation professional narrates its history of what went wrong (excluding residents), what matters to them (renovating lower-graded houses as a priority), and what they ought to do in the near future (including residents). These aspects of meaning are used by the housing corporation professional to construct a problem representation focused on resident inclusion to work on the renovation.

Other issues are evident in the framing work by the Connecting Room in the phrase “*We try to understand what is happening beyond the front door. By visiting every household, we try to reach every resident to identify and learn what issues or themes are present in the lives of residents*”. Its initiator described how she, over time, has increasingly realized her ambition to give residents’ informal knowledge a more prominent role in planning the energy transition. As for the residents themselves, a closer, more analytical reading of the phrase “*We were first invisible, but now we have a*

voice" entails a shift in their interpretations of visibility within their community. Being invisible symbolizes a state of marginalization and neglect, where residents' voice and concerns are disregarded or overlooked. Conversely, having a voice signifies empowerment, representation, inclusivity, and access to information where residents' perspectives and experiences are acknowledged, valued, and accounted for in decision-making outcomes. In this context, being invisible and having a voice represents contrasting power dynamics, representation, and accountability within the decision-making process.

What we take from these vignettes is that struggles over recognition transcend the material transition itself. Conversely, the broader discourse surrounding the energy transition often remains narrowly focused on the technicalities of the transition, overlooking the interconnected social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors that ultimately shape struggles over recognition pertinent to the transition. Overlooking the intersectionality of these issues, can potentially aggravate systemic barriers that marginalized communities may face. In return, a misrecognition of barriers can lead to tokenization of marginalized voices and the neglect of critical priorities, such as health impacts, comfort, stigmatization, and safety concerns. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the dynamics of recognition calls for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach that extends beyond mere description. For instance, the vignettes offer insight into a problem representation within the housing corporation where adherence to formal rules and regulations risks overlooking residents' needs. This struggle over recognition is implicitly conveyed through various symbolic representations, including language, which shapes framing work and practices-in-interaction (Yanow, 2000, 2003). Further understanding how individuals and groups attribute meanings to their actions and experiences within this joint practice requires analysis of how they interpret key objects and issues from their day-to-day experiences in their 'home practices' (Duiveman, 2022).

An ethnographic approach as a key method in understanding everyday experiences informing the interpretations of the various actors in an energy transition-making process opens the 'black boxes of recognition'. Ethnographically informed research on energy transition processes can capture the mundane, the routine, the taken-for-granted, and the non-verbal elements of how individuals, communities and organisations recognize, interpret, and respond to changes in energy systems, policies and technologies.

As a setting or context in which (mis/non-)recognition occurs, the work of the Connection Room can also be understood as an emergent intermediary practice between actors each rooted in their own contextual practice. Ideally, it is shaped as a space for deliberation with its weekly coffee chats, apartment block teams, and home visits as practices being instrumental in the creation of 'understanding what is happening beyond the front door' as part of a 'social' energy transition (compare Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). The researcher may support this by identifying and

understanding meanings (i.e. subjective interpretations and significance people assign to various elements of renovation processes) attributed by actors to social phenomena, objects, rules (i.e. renovation grading system), and acts (i.e. weekly coffee chats). For instance, by focusing on the interpretations attached to concepts such as “invisibility” and “having a voice”, we can identify the local and centralized frameworks in which actions and interactions occur within specific social spaces, including families, homes, community centres, housing corporations, municipalities and more (Smith, 2006).

At least as important, the Connection Room also offers an appropriate way to enable residents, corporation officials and other actors, to scrutinize such researcher’s understanding – and to, in the process, refine, adapt or reject these understandings. Finally, in and through such deliberation (which of course also may occur without researchers’ inputs), second-loop learning may occur, potentially leading to transformative action. Even more, this kind of intermediary practice may offer a proper space for collaboratively designing interventions, iterating between a joint understanding of the issues and broadly acceptable solutions. (Loeber, 2007; Grin, 2010).

Methods for an interpretivist analysis of (mis)recognition

To come to a fine-grained analysis and thick description of (mis)recognition in line with the three analytical tasks outlined above, several methods related to interpretation, practices and deliberation are suitable. Interpretation can best be analyzed by focusing on actors’ framing work in texts, such as policy documents, reports, guidelines, and (social) media materials. Such textual analysis lends itself to uncovering how institutional actors such as governments or housing corporations, and intermediary organizations such as the Connection Room, frame (mis)recognition. In addition, semi-structured interviews may help to deepen institutional actors’ interpretations and may serve as a first point of entry into residents’ interpretations of (mis)recognition. Interviews lend themselves to delving into various themes within individuals’ working- and living environments, including their views on energy renovation projects, community participation, decision-making processes, interpersonal relations, and more. Central to this method is allowing narratives to semi-naturally unfold during interviews guided by a topic list (Saldana, 2009). This approach creates a reflective space for participants to share their experiences with (mis)recognition, whether through overlooked or acknowledged needs; silenced or heard voices; and denied or granted access to decision-making processes. These stories not only structure the interviews but also capture interviewees’ encounters with recognition dynamics within their specific contexts. Once transcribed, interviews become texts that can be analyzed in similar ways as other textual data.

To study practices, ethnographic methods are most suitable. What ethnographic methods are appropriate, and how they should be complemented by other interpretive methods depends on what is

to be investigated. Consider, for instance, the excerpt from the second story, “*We were first invisible, but now we have a voice*”. This statement highlights the diverse ways invisibility is experienced, particularly by those whom institutions (mis/non-)recognize. To investigate this in more depth, participant observation is an essential method, as it enables insight into the actions, practices and social dynamics in struggles over recognition. Immersion in residents’ day-to-day practices allows researchers to capture unspoken social dynamics and environmental factors shaping residents’ lived experiences (Bryman, 2012, pp. 470–471).

Complementing participant observation, the method of shadowing reveals patterns and day-to-day practices often overlooked by traditional research methodologies, providing insights into the practical realities of transition practices within specific institutional contexts (McDonald, 2005, pp. 11-13). Institutional ethnography (IE) is more appropriate to investigate more deeply how the official of the corporation interprets residents’ claim that they were ‘invisible’ to his organization and their desire to gain a ‘voice’, as his experiences are co-shaped by his more formal day-to-day practice and its institutional context. As articulated by the housing corporation professional: ‘On top of that, we must also adhere to certain rules. For example, sometimes residents tell us that their houses need renovation, which might be the case, but on paper, they are relatively better graded than other houses in the city. So, based on this data, we decide first to renovate our other properties, the ones that are worse off than theirs.’ IE offers a lens into the interplay between institutional procedures, social relationships, and individual experiences. By delving into the everyday practices of individuals within institutional settings IE reveals the underlying processes that shape decision-making and (inter)action (Smith, 2006). It does so through participant observation, complemented by other methods, especially semi-structured interviews and shadowing (McDonald, 2005, pp. 11–13). In addition to focusing on individual experiences, IE also examines “higher order texts”, such as policy documents. These texts, including reports, guidelines, and strategies from governmental bodies and local authorities, shape the actions of institutional actors (Smith & Turner, 2014, pp. 64–89).

The episode just discussed also has transformative potential. It illustrates how professionals must navigate complex regulations, like the grading systems, in their daily work. More specifically, this example highlights that they may feel uncomfortable about being institutionally constrained by existing structures and processes. As evidenced by their statement, “We want to change. However, we do not know how”, this lock-in perpetuates marginalization within the community and acts as a barrier to sustainable transitions. Under circumstances, they may critically scrutinize how they deal with their institutional context or even that context as such. This involves what Schön calls double-loop learning. Three conditions may promote such learning: surprises (i.e. actions have other effects than anticipated), crises (events or developments from other contexts may interfere) and deliberation between different actors, critically scrutinizing each other’s claims. In our episode the first condition

is in place: the professional feels uncomfortable. Yet, this condition is not sufficient to overcome this problem.

In such cases, action research may help to deal with the problem, as an action researcher may act two things to the professional's situation. First, an action researcher may explore the precise nature of the tension between residents' desires and professionals' perceived possibilities through examining interactions, language, and institutional contexts as discussed above. Second, an action researcher may take her preliminary findings to a deliberative session with residents, the professional and other actors involved, so that (i) the latter may scrutinize her interpretation of the issue and (ii) they may engage in deliberative discussion to explore ways of making residents' desires and professional's possibilities match.

Such deliberation must be essentially creative in nature, that is: it must be capable of redefining actors' framings as well as interventions in practices and contexts. It must thus essentially be set up as of joint, deliberative *design* (Grin et al., 2010) in which residents, professionals, other actors involved and action researchers participate. Each brings to the proves own needs, capacities and (formal and informal) knowledge; and each may scrutinize all others' ideas. By embedding action research in such a deliberative process, (i) actors may find ways to reach joint solutions that make sense to all, and (ii) an important extra condition for double-loop learning is created, promoting the possibility of *transformative* interventions.

Intersectionality and the Multifaceted Nature of Recognition Justice

As demonstrated earlier, the energy transition involves more than just moving from fossil fuels to renewable energy. A deeper analytical insight from the vignettes reveals how power dynamics, systemic barriers, technology, and social identities intersect during an energy renovation project. The interconnectedness of social realms is a well-established concept (Anthias, 2013). Intersectionality, pioneered by Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (1993), offers a lens to observe how power interacts and intersects, making it essential for understanding energy transitions. For example, it can be applied to understand how the transition affects different age groups, or how it intersects with geographical location. Although classical intersectionality focuses on gender, race, and class, its flexible nature allows the inclusion of various categories relevant to energy transitions, such as technology, lifestyle, age, disability, geographical location, housing tenure, family composition, and immigration status (Cho et al., 2013).

For instance, the excerpt "*On top of that, most residents are likely to trust their neighbors sooner than a professional*" highlights power dynamics (institutional authority vs community-based initiatives; professionals vs. residents), informal networks, and multiple social identities (residents, professionals, neighbors). This analytical lens may help interpret longstanding mistrust in institutions

among certain groups—stemming from legacies of colonialism, slavery, past neglect, exclusion, and discrimination—as a barrier to recognition. In this context, understanding mistrust as a form of misrecognition (and thus a barrier to justice) is crucial for co-designing interventions that restore trust.

Another example from the vignette illustrates the transformative power of intersectionality, as it shows residents transitioning from being invisible to having a voice. Intersectional analysis ensures that the experiences of marginalized individuals and communities are not overlooked, emphasizing the importance of their visibility for achieving recognition justice. It demands that all individuals, especially those marginalized, are acknowledged and valued.

Against this backdrop, we argue that individuals and communities experience recognition, misrecognition, and non-recognition in multifaceted ways that cannot be understood through a singular lens (such as housing tenure or gender alone). Combined with an interpretivist epistemology, an intersectional analysis reveals that recognition dynamics particularly struggles over recognition, are constructed through action, interaction, and practices within specific (institutional) contexts. Intersectionality may, first, sensitize the researcher and guide and deepen interpretations by providing insight into the socio-historical context of people’s felt (mis)recognition. Second, understood as a form of critical theory, it may also inform a critical interpretation of existing institutional discursive, and material contexts that contribute to misrecognition, and denaturalize by showing that they reflect earlier (power and value-laden) interactions - yielding valuable insights for transformative interventions.

By combining intersectionality with interpretivism, researchers studying recognition justice in sustainability transitions can shift their focus from theoretical definitions to practical effects. This approach broadens and deepens our understanding and critically examines the impacts and consequences of recognition and mis/non-recognition and the collaborative design processes involving researchers, practitioners, and respective communities, contributing to tailored and context-sensitive solutions and interventions.

Towards a New Research Agenda on Recognition Justice

With this article, we sought to bring forth the analytical dimension of recognition justice to study recognition dynamics through an interpretive approach and its varying methods. It is important to reiterate that our contribution does not lie in a comprehensive literature review, but rather lies in showcasing potential interpretative approaches to recognition justice as an analytical framework, drawing out its transformative potential. This transformation involves a two-fold process: first, making visible the challenges arising from various forms of injustice in the energy transition; and second, addressing these challenges through deliberation and learning practices, co-designing policy interventions with affected communities.

Demonstrating that recognition justice is not solely about acknowledging injustice but using this acknowledgement as a means to take meaningful action to transform the mechanisms or conditions that may lead to such forms of recognition injustice. This dual perspective enables the identification of problems and contributes to their resolution.

As flagged before, by identifying three (common) key dimensions – interaction, discourse and practices – to observe, analyze and interpret recognition dynamics, our research extends the literature on energy justice, in particular recognition justice, by moving away from recognition as a normative standard to an analytical perspective and a practical tool for transformation. Hence, our article contributes to the growing literature on recognition justice and its interaction with other justice dimensions. Such empirical understandings thus contribute to addressing the vicious cycle in underprivileged neighbourhoods, where ineffective technologies, lack of trust in actors, and impacts that reinforce existing inequalities perpetuate each other, exacerbating distress. By intervening in the mismatch between residents and actors planning and implementing solutions, this article aims to set an agenda that breaks this cycle.

Finally, our article demonstrates that evaluating housing renovation processes through an interpretative lens of recognition justice should be approached both etically (from the analyst's perspective) and emically (from the perspective of those involved), effectively addressing the above mismatch. Hence, introducing recognition justice as an analytical framework in energy justice scholarship is another promising step forward for not only understanding but also transforming injustices in energy transitions and beyond.

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