



DOES TRANSPOSITION LEAD TO EFFECTIVE REALISATION OF POLICY GOALS?

The case of Renewable Energy Communities in
Sardinia and Valencia

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1 Introduction

This Master Thesis aims at providing an important contribution on the matter of transposition of an EU Directive. The case of Renewable Energy Communities development will be used to assess the extent to which the transposition process of an EU Directive determines the effective realisation of a policy goal embedded in the EU law provision. Moreover, this research thesis will analyse the role different factors have in this process and to what extent they can offset the importance of transposition.

1.1. Renewable Energy Communities: what are them and where they stand in the academic literature.

In November 2016, the European Commission published its ‘Clean Energy for all Europeans’¹, a package of 8 different legislative provisions in the form of Directives that aim to contribute to the decarbonisation of the EU’s energy system. One of them is the recast of the Renewable Energy Directive (2016/0382(COD))², the compromise considering the co-decision procedure was agreed in June 2018 and the revised directive 2018/2001/EU³ entered into force in December 2018. In REDII, the overall EU target for Renewable Energy Sources consumption by 2030 has been raised to 32%.

Article 2(16) of the REDII presents Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) as *“initiatives where natural persons, local authorities (including municipalities), or SMEs participate directly in producing, selling, or distributing renewable energy, either on their own or acting in partnership with others”* (Renewable Energy Directive II (REDII) (Recast), Article 2 (16), Internal Electricity Market Directive (IEMD)⁴, Article 2). RECs are distinguished primarily through open, voluntary participation of natural persons, local authorities or SMEs, local ownership and control, their non-commercial purpose and orientation towards community benefits. It is important to underline that the Directive does not directly require Member States to increase the number of Renewable Energy Communities

¹ Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b4e46873-7528-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

² Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources (Recast), (2016)

³ Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources (Text with EEA Relevance.), 2018

⁴ (Directive (EU) 2019/944 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on Common Rules for the Internal Market for Electricity and Amending Directive 2012/27/EU (Text with EEA Relevance.), 2019)

developed in their territories, but it asks for the establishment of an *enabling framework*⁵ in the national legislation which facilitates the process of RECs establishment, in fact, before the REDII Directive RECs were not yet envisioned as a concrete legislative entity in any national legislation (Dóci et al., 2015). Since the initiative represents a game-changer in the energy market system of the Member States by allowing RECs to substitute traditional energy providers, their development was relatively slow.

Such initiatives also represent one of the most operative solutions to put in to practice two of the goals delineated in the EU Green Deal, respectively: *Supplying clean, affordable and secure energy*



Figure 1 Community energy, citizen energy communities and renewable energy communities.
Source: COME RES Deliverable 2.1

and *Building and renovating in an energy and resource efficient way* (Steinkohl & Energy, s.d.).

RECs allow small communities to achieve energy self-sufficiency from renewable sources.

In Figure 1 there is a visualization of how Community Energy (ECs), Citizen's Energy Communities (CECs) which do not have an explicit generation and consumption aspect, and Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) are related.

The idea of energy communities is based on the principle of energy democratization and justice as

it is addressed from several scholars (Hanke et al., 2021; Jenkins et al., 2016; McGee & Greiner, 2019) that called upon governments to rethink the roots of energy distribution. As mentioned before, RECs increment the adoption of renewable energy sources across Member States and at the same time contribute to delivering equal access to power for communities either located in urban or rural areas of Europe.

⁵ Art. 4 para 22 of REDII "4. Member States shall provide an enabling framework to promote and facilitate the development of renewable energy communities. That framework shall ensure, inter alia, that: (a) unjustified regulatory and administrative barriers to renewable energy communities are removed; ... (f) the participation in the renewable energy communities is accessible to all consumers, including those in low-income or vulnerable households; (g) tools to facilitate access to finance and information are available; (h) regulatory and capacity-building support is provided to public authorities in enabling and setting up renewable energy communities, and in helping authorities to participate directly; (i) rules to secure the equal and non-discriminatory treatment of consumers that participate in the renewable energy community are in place." Adapted by Hanke & Lowitzsch (2020: 2)

From a review of all the relevant literature and studies that were produced on this topic, a better understanding on what RECs are and how they are being analysed by scholars was achieved.

The literature regarding RECs can be divided into two big strands: a first part addressing the opportunity and possible benefits derived from initiatives aiming at tackling energy injustice and democratization and a second part focussing on how RECs are implemented, the barriers and overall development in different EU Member States.

Another important aspect of RECs regards the new role given to citizens in the climate challenge, as described in this Youtube video from Patagonia⁶, people and communities become relevant actors in the decarbonization and securitization of the Energy system by joining a REC.

Moreover, this empowerment mechanism represents a clear response to the problem of energy poverty since Renewable Communities are seen as the opportunity to overcome the increasing costs of energy, especially renewable, by allowing citizens to share a source and jointly benefitting from it (Hanke et al., 2021). Furthermore, consuming energy of a renewable source is proved to reduce the bills of the user in the longer-term (Brummer, 2018).

Renewable Energy Communities are a way to demonstrate the strength of the cooperative culture and communitarian tradition that characterizes several populations in the EU (Linnerud et al., 2018). The realisation of a REC in a town/village/urban/rural area not only represents an opportunity of achieving energy self-sufficiency, but also permits these communities to generate profits from the surplus of power produced, that can be re-invested into services and infrastructures needed in the communities.

1.2 The transposition of RECs in Member States legislative frameworks
Since the Commission published the REDII Directive, various initiatives have taken place to create *enabling frameworks* for Renewable Energy Communities among Member States.

The first step Member States are called upon is to transpose the EU Directive into their national legislation, but since the transposition mechanisms are not the same in all countries, Member States proceed at different speeds when transposing a directive (Haverland et al., 2011). It is not possible to have a perfect translated Directive in all Member States at the same moment and thus there is no homogeneity of transposition of the REDII in the EU Member States.

⁶ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75A9WGxoUn8>

The situation is summarized in a snapshot of the REScoop (European federation of citizen energy cooperatives) transposition index (Figure 2), a tool which analyses the progress made by different Member States in the national transposition of the REDII directive⁷. Evidence from both RESCOOP

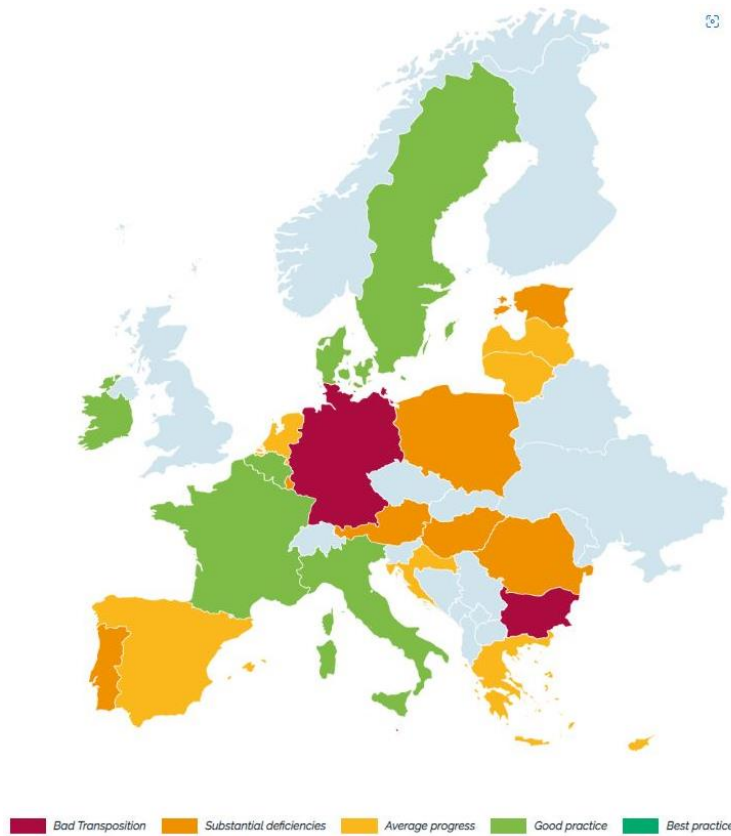


Figure 2 Snapshot of REScoop transposition tracker.

Source: <https://www.rescoop.eu/policy#transposition-tracker>

Directives into their national legislation underlined by previous research.

It seems correct to expect the *enabling framework* to be a decisive factor in the diffusion of RECs in Member States, since its establishment is intended to facilitate RECs realisation, but the evidence shows a different pathway. As pointed out by Dr. Dörte Fouquet⁸ (2021) on one hand there are States where Renewable Energy Communities are in an advanced stage of their development (and sometimes presented as best practices examples for replication in other countries) even though their *enabling framework* is not completed or even present (as the transposition process is not finished yet) and on the other hand other States which have transposed well the Directive and established an *enabling framework* still see RECs to struggle in their development (Di Silvestre et al., 2021).

⁷ The Transposition index is available at: <https://www.rescoop.eu/policy#transposition-tracker>

⁸ President of the Becker Buettner Held Law firm – Energy and Law advise

1.3 The research puzzle, analysing the research gap

The idea of this thesis is to assess the extent to which the transposition process is relevant for the effective realisation of a policy goal embedded in an EU Directive by using the case of RECs. An initial literature review on the transposition literature was done to develop a concrete understanding of the process and determine whether authors have analysed the matter yet from this point of view. This exercise was complemented by the analysis of the relevant literature regarding Renewable Energy Communities and extracts from Horizon2020 projects' deliverables.

Scholars have underlined the tendency of Member States to delay the transposition process even though this pattern is not always diffused among all Member States and depends on the policy sector the Directive addresses (Falkner et al., 2004; Lampinen & Uusikylä, 1998; Thomson et al., 2007). Moreover, it seems that specific topics are often transposed regularly or quicker than others (Haverland et al., 2011; Haverland & Romeijn, 2007; Thomson, 2007). Earlier on, Knill and Lenschow (1997) affirmed that British and German administration drove their transposition mechanisms at different speeds when treating environmental and green issues, just as an example of how different sectors are proceed on speeds when talking about transposition.

This research gap will be addressed by this thesis, the opportunity to investigate over the RECs directives transposition and implementation in EU Member States; Will allow to provide a understanding of the attitude of EU MS towards green directives, contributing to the very limited academic literature on this specific subject.

To fulfil the gap in the research literature on the matter of transposition mechanisms, specifically regarding the REDII Directive, the research is complemented by insights and findings that *Ecorys* can provide when it comes to this specific topic. The REScoop transposition index is an important tool to build on the argument, and, in addition to that, findings of different Deliverables of the COME RES⁹ project will be presented.

A comparative analysis between two EU countries (Spain and Italy) that stands in a very different position will be carried out: Spain has not yet developed an *enabling framework* for RECs but has seen in the last 2 years a proliferation of the initiatives. On the other hand, Italy has developed one

⁹ A comprehensive study of renewable energy communities in nine EU countries (available at: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/953040/it>)

of the most advanced enabling frameworks for RECs in the EU, but still sees very few Renewable Energy Communities compared to other countries (Maleki-Dizaji et al., 2022).

As mentioned before, to develop a strong and coherent theoretical assessment there will be presented a robust literature review on the matter of the link between legal transposition and effective realisation of policy goals embedded in EU directives in Member States (Steunenberg & Rhinard, 2010; Steunenberg & Toshkov, 2009; Toshkov, s.d.) as a starting point. Then an analysis of the factors that intervene between the transposition and the realisation process (Zhelyazkova et al., 2016) will be exposed, which will be adopted also as a theoretical basis to build some of the hypotheses.

1.4 Why is it important to investigate RECs?

Focusing on RECs initiatives gives the opportunity to enhance and strengthen the understanding of a relatively new topic related to the Green Deal Call framework, by exploiting projects and expertise to provide additional knowledge to the relevant research. As a matter of time, developing a research analysis in this topic allows to focus on tool that the European Union wants to implement and diffuse at the Member State level.

The matter of Renewable Energy Communities is one of the cardinal initiatives that the EU wants to strongly implement in the Member States. This intention is also emphasized by the strong references that the single countries have made in their NECPs¹⁰ (National Energy and Climate Plans). The intention and view of RECs as a concrete solution to the Energy Transition problem underlines once again the relevance of this topic in the EU and Member States agenda.

The centrality of Renewable Energy Communities puts this work in line with literature related to the transposition of the REDII directive at the Member State level, which, as stated before is a relatively little research field, thus providing new insight in this direction creates a significant contribution to the existing literature, especially if concentrating on the relevant factors behind the realisation of RECs at the regional level.

The academic research focussed on RECs initiatives across Europe has emphasized their importance and innovative aspects. These studies have been endorsed widely by the academic world (Boulanger

¹⁰ National 10 years plans established by the Member States where they foresee the realisation of the EU's new Energy and Climate goals for 2030.

et al., 2021; Di Silvestre et al., 2021; Dóci et al., 2015), the potential of such initiatives to challenge the problems of energy poverty and energy democratization have been analysed and described by previous scholars (McGee & Greiner, 2019; Szulecki & Overland, 2020).

The added value this Master Thesis aims to bring to the existing literature regards the importance and magnitude of transposition in the process of establishing and implementing Renewable Energy Communities in Member States. The literature, in fact, seems to not consider the extent to which an *enabling framework* influences the correct development of RECs in a certain territory. The major contributions from this work will target to some extent two different strands of academic literature: clearly, the research on RECs will benefit from the analysis of the implementation of the initiatives in two different Member States taking into account the different legal condition, but most importantly the findings of this master thesis will contribute to broader to the literature on legal transposition in EU Member States of Directives, assessing how this process work for those related to green topic, and providing a new insight of which variables and factors intervene between the so-called “*law on paper*” and “*law on action*”. This work will provide an interesting contribution to the future research on the Green Deal initiatives designs and implementation in EU countries.

Considering the new international circumstances such as the war in Ukraine and the consequent growing demand for alternative energy supplies in Europe, the EU intends to heavily support the development of Renewable Energy sources and initiatives across the continent. RECs are foreseen to be an important bridge between citizens and a renewable energy-based future. The content of this analysis is timely and aims to address an important gap in the research which could be of crucial importance for the future of the energy market and community initiatives in the EU.

1.5 The Research Question and the Structure

As explained earlier, this thesis will focus on the national transposition of the REDII directive into national legislation. The literature up to now has agreed on the existence of late transposition pathways between Member States, with different tendencies depending on the different countries and policy sectors. Scholars have as well started to focus on the different factors that shaped EU law incorporation processes in the Member States. The extent to which a correct legal transposition of

an EU directive influences the realisation of the policy goal embedded in the single provisions is still unstudied and thus needs to be analysed.

The focus will not be on the transposition as a mechanism *per se*, in fact, a step back will be taken, and a picture of the whole process will be presented. The example of the REDII Directive transposition in Member States will be used as a tool to address the research gap.

Findings by Dörte Fouquet (2021) contribute to design the path of research which is intended to be followed, it seems that in countries where the transposition process is not achieved concretely, the development of RECs initiative is in a further stage than countries where the transposition process was ahead. This interesting unfolding brings the idea of uncovering the real influence that legal transposition exerts over specific EU initiatives such as RECs, contributing to the following research question:

To what extent is the national transposition of the REDII directive relevant for an effective realisation of Renewable Energy Communities on the Regional level in the Western Mediterranean?

This research question is tailored for this specific study and will be the guide behind this analysis. A regional comparison between two different parts of Spain and Italy will be provided and a concrete justification for this choice is presented in the methodological chapter of the thesis.

To help the reader familiarize with this work, a guidance of this research is exposed below. The following chapter will expose the analysis of the relevant literature regarding legal transposition, both qualitative and quantitative studies. Then, an overview of the studies regarding Renewable Energy Communities and their general situation will be presented. In the last part of the chapter a general understanding of the deliverables and project materials relevant for this thesis will be exposed.

In chapter three the theoretical contributions will be addressed, providing an assessment of the present findings and theories that will be used to build the hypotheses, then in chapter four there will be a methodological assessment with the justification for the methods chosen, cases, data collection and analysis.

Chapter five will present the results of the analysis considering the hypotheses and the research question previously formulated. Then in chapter six, the results obtained will be discussed ending

the thesis with a conclusion embodying implication for academia, society, and policymakers. The main goal of this work will also be to provide an abstract policy recommendation and a part regarding future improvements of this research will also be outlined.

2 Literature Review

The first part of this chapter focuses on the existing literature regarding EU law transposition of Directives in Member States national legislation, analysing which have been the most frequent methods adopted, the scopes and the most relevant findings. Moreover, this literature review will highlight the relevance of previous research for the topic of this work, underlining the importance of the research gap for this thesis. In the second part of the Chapter, the main highlights of the academic literature regarding Renewable Energy Communities are presented, emphasizing how scholars have concentrated on how RECs contribute to the fight against energy democratization, and which were the main drivers and barriers allowing for the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities. Furthermore, this chapter will flag out the main research gaps in both literature reviews and conclude with an assessment of their relevance for this research topic.

2.1 What is legal transposition in the EU?

Legal transposition can be understood as the process that embodies the transformation of EU directives into provisions of national law of the different Member State (Prechal, 1995). Other authors have described transposition as the *translation* of EU directives into national legislation differing them from regulations which do not allow for transposition into national legislation (Jans et al., 2007). According to scholars, transposition is the first phase of the implementation of EU law into the legislative framework of Member States, followed by operationalisation which comprehends the designation of the national authorities responsible for the further stages of the implementation process, namely application and enforcement (Duina, 1997; Jans et al., 2007).

According to EUR-LEX, with the term transposition it is identified “*the process of incorporating EU directives into the national laws of EU Member States. Unlike other types of EU legal acts, directives are not automatically applicable throughout Member States but require national laws to incorporate their rules into national legislation. The directives have to become law in the Member States by a deadline, which is specified in each directive. Member States must send the text of their national implementing measures to the European Commission.*” (EUR-LEX, Glossary of summaries, Transposition)¹¹.

Transposition represents the process Member States adopt to align their national legislation with

¹¹ Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/transposition.html>

EU directives. The EU institution may launch infringement procedures before the Court of Justice of the EU against those Member States (defined by scholars as “*non-compliers*” (Falkner et al., 2007; Falkner & Treib, 2008; Thomson, 2007)) which fail to align their national legislation with EU directives in due time.

Moreover, Duina (1997) defined the process of legal implementation of EU law provision into Member States legislation as a process that requires “(1) *transposition into national law and (2) application [...] Speed of transposition refers to the time required by each member state to translate EU law into national law within the time limit specified by the EU.*” (1997: 156).

Following these different approaches and definitions of transposition, it is possible to get an initial flavour of how scholars have studied the topic. The focus has been mainly the speed of the process, how relevant factors influence it and how Member State tend to behave when transposing an EU Directive in their national legislation. Starting from the most important insights of the literature, this chapter aims at narrowing down the absence of academic work on the link between transposition and effective realisation of policy goals embedded in the directives, which is the relevant research gap this thesis is based on.

2.2 Relevant contribution on the matter of EU law transposition mechanisms

Being the academic work on the topics very extensive and more than thirty years old, this literature review will flag out the main achievements, findings, and methods that scholars have presented, how these previous findings are related to this research and what this thesis aims to add to what is already existing.

The academic literature has examined transposition extensively by using a considerable variety of methods and approaches. Qualitative methods tended to be used when analysing transposition deficits due to the absence of reliable data that could show the EU suffering from a serious compliance deficit (Börzel et al., 2005) this research design was adopted to provide explanatory factors for the transposition deficit in Member States highlighting different how different speeds in the process depended on different between policy sectors (Falkner et al., 2007; Falkner & Treib, 2008; Knill & Lenschow, 1997). Regarding quantitative studies, it is crucial to mention the work by Toshkov (2010) who provided the academic corpus with a consistent literature review of all the studies adopting this design on the matter of transposition. The author based his contribution on

an online database¹², and his research goal was to address and fight the scepticisms accompanying quantitative studies on the matter of transposition (for example the previously cited argument raised by Börzel in 2005).

2.2.1 Studying the causes of transposition delays

Haverland & Romeijn (2007) provided an extensive quantitative analyses of the transposition deficit among EU countries. They studied different Member States' behaviour when transposing a set of EU Directives and with the intent of analysing the extent to which transposition deficits differ across countries, they proved Member States have different attitude towards transposition (UK for example was the fastest transposer, followed by the Netherlands, Germany and Spain with Greece attributed the feature of the slowest for the directives they analysed).

Moreover, they provided a series of plausible explanations for these tendencies by initially focusing on the directive-level (new vs. amendments, member state preferences and complexity) but eventually they found out that these factors were not statistically significant. Then, a more statistical relevance was attributed to state-level characteristics such as administrative inefficiency and the pressure resulting from inter-ministerial coordination. It is important to bear in mind these characteristics since the role state actors play in the transposition process influences further implementation of the Directives and in fact, it is arguable that for the effective realisation of a policy goal these state actors play an important role. Furthermore, In 2011 Haverland et al., provided another important finding on the influence posed by the directive itself to the transposition speed. It was demonstrated that Member States are characterized by different transposition speeds depending on the policy sector of the Directive.

2.2.2 Falkner's worlds of compliance

Based on the target of this research, the most important pieces of literature on transposition comes from Falkner et al. (2007) where the authors tested the main theoretical findings provided by previous studies. They started by validating the explanatory power of the *misfit* hypothesis¹³ (T.

¹² "The database has been developed and is managed by the author with the support of the Institute for European Integration Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences"(Toshkov, 2010, pag. 2). (Available at: <http://www.eif.oeaw.ac.at/implementation/>)

¹³ Explanation proposed by several scholars for implementation and transposition delays; based on the assumption that the transposition process is delayed when the policy goal embedded in the directive provision contrasts the national tradition (Knill & Lenschow, 1997)

Börzel, 2000; Duina, 1997; Duina & Blithe, 1999; Knill & Lenschow, 1997, 2002) and its relationship with the veto-players argument previously argued by Haverland and Romejin. Several studies and important theories claimed that the sole presence of veto-players, in case of a misfit in terms of policy goal between EU law provision and national policy tradition, could slow-down the transposition process because of the tendency these actors have to oppose a change of the existent status-quo of their country.

By analysing the transposition of 6 different EU directives in 15 EU Member States, Falkner et al. managed to improve the above-mentioned assumption demonstrating that to some extent, veto-players could also positively impact legal transposition. Moreover, they clarified that if veto-players are aligned with the provisions contained in the directives, the national transposition could accelerate. The authors demonstrated that veto-players could have a two-fold role in the transposition process, whereas before their study, this institutional actor was mainly seen as a negative influence on the process.

The reason why this work is particularly significant for the transposition literature, is the impact of the contribution for future studies. The authors re-structured the theoretical framework and proposed a new clustering of countries, based on their attitude towards transposition, measured in terms of compliance with the EU directives. The three “*worlds of compliance*” are respectively: “*Law observance, Domestic politics and Transposition Neglect*”. The clustering depends on the average degree of compliance by Member States towards EU laws, with the first cluster of countries transposing EU directives efficiently and timely regardless of their national attitudes and tradition; the countries belonging to the “*domestic policy*” group having a more middle stance seeing an efficient transposition whenever the conflict that an EU provision might have with national legislation is low. The Member States belonging to the last cluster are effectively *non-compliers* with EU legislation, defined as “*the national arrogance group*” (Falkner et al., 2007, pag. 405).

Building on these findings Falkner and Treibb (2008) studied again the implementation of three working time and equal treatment directives in the recent joiners of the EU (mostly Central Eastern European Countries). This additional study allowed them to provide a relevant insight which I believe to be fundamental for my thesis.

The authors have extended the “*three worlds of compliance*” framework to these new countries and discovered that their “behaviour” could have not been classified in none of the categories they

previously elaborated. The CEEC countries showed a relatively rapid response in terms of transposition and managed to quickly align their legislation to the examined provisions, but the action and enforcement phases were delayed or even absent. They argued that the directives were literally transposed on paper but in most cases not effectively put-in-to-practice. Interestingly, they were able to cluster again other countries from their previous analysis into this new category (Italy above all), called “*the world of dead letters*”.

The relevance of this cluster is fundamental for this master thesis because it shows that the lack of correspondence between EU law and national legislation in terms of practice is real even though the transposition process happened swiftly. It is important to mention that the compliance of a state with EU law is not measurable in terms of effective realisation of policy goals embedded in directives, but only when speaking of transposition and application. Defining Member States that do not realise policy goals as non-compliers even though they transposed efficiently a directive is not correct and thus it will be avoided for the rest of the thesis. Moreover, the reasoning behind Falkner’s work is one of the key theoretical bricks of this research, since it was demonstrated that Member States can transpose a directive but not put in to practice the provision and to some extent the effective realisation of a policy goal was missing despite the transposition process.

The intent of this research is to understand the reasons behind this behaviour of Member States by using the Renewable Energy Communities Directives (REDII). Moreover, this research will investigate on the role different state actors have in the effective realisation of the policy goal embedded in the Directive, by understanding how local communities can directly contribute in the process of energy democratization influencing the way Member States put in to practice the policy goal of increasing the number of RECs through establishing an *enabling framework*.

2.2.3 *Contrasting the worlds of compliance*

On the different factors influencing transposition delay and contrasting Falkner’s work, Thomson (2007, 2009, 2010) provided an important contribution to this literature for various reasons. The author presents the role of the Commission as a crucial factor in monitoring the transposition processes in different Member States, emphasizing the fact that when the European institution patrols stringently the national legislative adoption mechanisms, the timeline of this processes is shortened in the countries analysed and in fact, the European Commission seems to reduce drastically the incentives from the Member States to deviate. Still Thomson, in 2009, provided an important contribution directly addressing Falkner’s worlds of compliance and the understanding

of the *misfit* hypothesis. Using the same data as Falkner (but this time analysing the single provisions contained in the different directives, extending the number of observations per country), Thomson showed that *misfit* is associated with transposition delay in all three worlds and that its effects were relatively lower in the world of domestic politics (2009). It was further demonstrated that countries with higher corporatism characteristics tend to comply even more than non-corporatism states and across all the worlds of compliances categories (whereas Falkner (2007) stated the opposite, emphasizing how such feature would delay the transposition process, especially in the states clustered in the world of law observance).

This contribution re-establishes the importance of the *misfit* hypothesis and its relevance in the transposition literature. Later it will be exposed how this concept is extremely important for this work, in fact the argument of the *misfit* hypothesis will be applied to the matter analysed, investigating the extent to which the policy tradition of a Member State can influence the effective realisation of a policy goal embedded in a Directive, regardless the outcome of the transposition process. In essence, it applies an already existing theoretical assumption in the transposition literature to test its relevance in the effective realisation phase, doing so allows to understand the real importance that transposition has in the policymaking process.

2.2.4 *The misfit hypothesis once again*

Duina (1997) was one of the first ones to elaborate a deep argument for the *misfit* hypothesis. When he presented his study on the implementation of the Equal Pay Directive in three different Member States, he structured his hypotheses on the argument that the time a directive is transposed into national legislation is dependent on both national actors preferences (*veto-players*) and the policy tradition of the state.

He explained how the legislation regarding equal pay in France, the UK and Italy evolved through history and how this tradition was reflected in the implementation process. He argued that if a directive does not represent an important shift in the policy tradition of the State, is in line with its political history and does not clash with the interest of the most relevant national actors, it is not only transposed rapidly, but the application process benefits as well from this condition.

This work is relevant for this master thesis because it showed that Italy is a particular case, in fact, the Mediterranean country was the faster among the three analysed to transpose the directive into the national legal framework, but the application process was delayed or even absent. The author argued that the country tends to transpose quite quickly EU directives, but he provided the

additional argument that the *misfit* feature came up strongly in the application process, and the new provision remained effective only in paper, rather than in effective action.

This argument is in line with what presented by Falkner & Treib (2008) about states transposing efficiently but lacking effective application and enforcement. The presence of Italy in both their additional category and in what emerges by the findings of Duina, supports the initial impression that the country transposes relatively quick EU law but tends to defy in the application and enforcement part. From the arguments presented before, it is arguable that Italy tends to not effectively realise a policy goal embedded in a Directive even though the transposition process happens relatively swiftly. Nonetheless, the literature studying the relevance that transposition plays in effective realisation is still missing and as it will be explained later, authors have flagged out the necessity to analyse the phases that follow the transposition process. This thesis addresses this research gap by investigating the extent to which different national actors influence the realisation of policy goals with the core objective of understanding the importance of a correct transposition process.

2.2.5 “Law on paper” vs “Law in action”

The difference between the “law on paper” and the “law in action” is a relatively new topic in this strand of literature and this research aims to provide a new contribution in this direction. Concretely, few authors have focused on the extent to which legal transposition differs to practical application. Versluis (2007) was one of the very few ones along with Falkner & Treib (2008) who pointed out the discrepancy between complete legal transposition and effective application and enforcement; the author reflected as well on the use of the term implementation when studying EU law, stating that the literature must rethink its approach and start to looking at the whole picture rather than only at the legal transposition, which has been the main focus of scholars.

Zhelyazkova et al. (2016) provided the academic corpus with an important contribution regarding the tendency of Member States to decouple between the practical application of EU directives and their legal transposition. The authors have analysed a sample of 24 directives in 27 Member States, pointing out that practical application is decoupled from legal transposition when the management actors of the Member States show reservations regarding the content of the single directive. In addition to that, they also claimed how societal actors perceived an EU policy as “*legitimate*” could serve as a possible decoupling “*trigger*”.

It was demonstrated that the policy preferences of political actors have little impact on the practical

application and that public support for EU policy shapes the incentives of administrations to align with both domestic policy obligations and EU policy requirements (Lampinen & Uusikylä, 1998; Zhelyazkova et al., 2016).

All in all, the available academic production on the matter of transposition developed a considerable amount of work analysing the legal delay that Member States, initially providing evidence for the existence of the so-called transposition deficit, then addressing the different causes behind it and emphasizing how there are cross-country differences in speed and that policy sectors are relevant in these delays. The first strand of literature serves as a background understanding for the topic of this master thesis, and it's then complemented by the acknowledgement of a research gap on the decoupling mechanism between transposition and application of EU law directives into national legislation. It is important to clarify that this thesis will not analyse the application process of an EU Directive in Member States, but it will investigate on the effective realisation of policy goals embedded in the EU law provision, the main theoretical assumption of this thesis is that the argument of decoupling application and transposition is applied also in the case of effective realisation of policy goals.

Scholars are expected to be more involved in this topic in the future years, but for now it appears that the analyses on the reasons and attitudes of Member States' practical application of EU directives is very limited. This gap is addressed by this research through using the theoretical contributions highlighted previously and by exploiting the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities as a benchmark for understanding the factors influencing effective realisation of policy goals.

2.3 Studying Renewable Energy Communities

In this section the results from an analysis of the existing literature on the matter of RECs will be presented. In the end there will be an overview of the existing EU funded projects' materials published recently, which are believed to be an important insight for the general understandings of this Master Thesis.

2.3.1 Energy justice, Energy poverty and democratization

Scholars have started to question the energy market framework in Europe long time before the development of the REDII Directive. They questioned the sustainability of the energy market model of the Member States (Arentsen & Bellekom, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2016; McGee & Greiner, 2019;

Szulecki & Overland, 2020) and pointed out important problems strictly related to energy consumption such as energy poverty and energy democratization.

With the relatively strong push from the society, energy market actors and politicians towards the increase of renewable energy consumption, governing institutions have started to adopt and propose incentives for initiatives aiming at shifting the main sources of power in Europe from fossil fuels and methane towards renewables (Clean Energy for All European, 2019)¹⁴.

Renewable Energy Communities represent one of the major initiatives at the EU level which aims towards a low-carbon transition for the energy sector on one side and towards a democratization of energy availability on the other.

Scholars have started to analyse this topic from different perspectives. Insights on the extent to which RECs address the issue of energy poverty were provided by Barroco Fontes Cunha et al. (2021) demonstrating through a qualitative analysis of RECs establishments in Brazil and Italy demonstrating that RECs could alleviate energy poverty by lowering the energy bills for low-income users, but they also foresaw this solution as a short-term one that risked to result more expensive in the longer period.

Moreover, Hanke et al. (2021) pointed out that RECs engaging with vulnerable and underrepresented groups are the only examples of how this initiative tackles energy poverty, but overall they demonstrated that in Renewable Energy Communities there is a limited understanding on how to challenge the problem and the authors also emphasized how various communities do not see this as a primary focus concluding that when referring to the initiative as a direct measure to counter energy injustice, it is preferable to be more careful. In sum, even though Brummer (2018) defined RECs as *“An energy system that allows more participation and democratic control”* (2018: 194) the extent to which this initiatives contributes to the goal of reducing or shrinking the problem of energy justice is still empirically demonstrated to be limited. Despite the concrete effect that RECs can have in fighting energy poverty and democratization has not been empirically supported yet, the idea behind the initiative is that RECs can contribute but alone cannot solve the problem yet. In light of this master thesis, it is important to clarify that the initiative is not seen by the European Commission as the only way to solve energy democratization and poverty, but along with

¹⁴ Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b4e46873-7528-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

a set of other instruments listed in the REDII Directive and other policy instruments (Just Transition and Green Deal above all) are the best way to fight these phenomena.

2.3.2 Drivers, barriers, and motivations behind RECs

The literature regarding Renewable Energy Communities explored another important feature of the matter: the drivers, barriers, and motivations behind a correct realisation of the initiative.

Willingness of individuals, community action traditions, interest in innovative solutions seem to be very important drivers behind a REC realisation according to Boulanger et al.(2021), and his work provided the literature with an insight on what seems to represent an important factor in realising a REC: *“the personal relationships among people or the effectiveness of the cooperative/community created than on energy-related aspects is real.”* (2021: 12).

The emergence of other drivers such as environmental risks, economic growth, social cohesion and disappointed caused by inefficient central government coordination strengthen the perspective that RECs are a potential social approach to energy distribution giving them also an innovative feature as they renewed the supply and production chain of electricity, business models and financing schemes (Arentsen & Bellekom, 2014). The role of public institutions and policy design is demonstrated to matter enormously in the final success of a community, especially in terms of actions designed to delineate the path for the energy transition (Barroco Fontes Cunha et al., 2021). Bauwens (2016) underlined an important aspect of the mentality enshrined in the Community initiatives, in fact he developed one of the very few pieces of literature analysing the behavioural paths of REC’s members. He pointed out that the behaviour of its members is more leaning towards social and moral norms when the community logic is prevalent, whereas when the members are part of the REC only as clients, then the most common behaviour is based on material incentives.

From what emerges in this study, it is plausible to affirm that these contributions on the matter of the drivers behind a REC are of vital importance for this master thesis, in fact it is possible to point out that at this point scholars have focused on the factors influencing correct realisation of the initiatives but have never related them to the transposition phenomena. As the next Chapter will show, such relevant findings will be crucial for the elaboration of the hypotheses, linking the already established and studied relevant drivers for the realisation of a Renewable Energy Community with the transposition and effective realisation problem highlighted in the previous.

2.3.3 RECs transposition in the Member States legislative frameworks

The literature regarding RECs transposition has, though, provided useful insights that are relevant for understanding the general context of how RECs are placed in the legal *corpus*.

Hanke & Lowitzsch (2020) came back to the “*enabling framework*” concept, expressing its crucial relevance for the total implementation process. If well established, the *enabling framework* can provide various benefits to the members, whereas if not well tailored in the national legislation it can produce an exclusionary effect between RECs and citizens. Lowitzsch et al. (2020) pointed out the importance of the legislation in encouraging complementarity and cooperation between community, and Heldeweg & Séverine Saintier (2020) highlighted the fundamental role of governance structures in building the adequate regulatory framework for the safety and resilience of energy communities and their users.

These contributions are an important input to assess the relevance of legislation when talking about RECs and they provide a more concrete understanding on the expectations the Commission has regarding the establishment for *enabling frameworks* in Member States for RECs development.

EU countries are given a crucial role when establishing the participation and governance criteria of RECs, they could create “*risks that these concepts are appropriated and abused by well-resourced energy companies, and larger industrial and commercial energy consumers*”(Roberts, 2020: 243). Not only legislation, but also policymaking is given a vital role, as mentioned before, Renewable Energy Communities represent an important shift in energy market management and approach, leaving to citizen-led entities the control over electricity distribution in certain areas means to damage the monopoly of big energy industries and organization (Roberts, 2020).

This clash might also account as a possible reason to oppose swiftly implementation of the RECs directives in Member States following the *misfit* hypothesis previously mentioned, in fact, changing the traditional way the energy market is structured represent an important deviation from national policy tradition on the matter, and this difference can account for the delayed or not efficient effective realisation process.

To conclude, it is worth to mention some findings from the COME RES project which integrate perfectly with the rest of the literature review. These findings are relevant for this work in the sense that they present a detailed picture of the situation of RECs realisation and development in the EU.

The findings describe Italy and Belgium as the countries that can account for the most advanced

enabling frameworks in their national legislation, whereas countries like Spain and Germany still see the transposition of REDII in an earlier phase (at least for what specifically regards the *framework*). These insights seem to be relevant for this analysis, in fact, despite having the one of the most advanced legislations on the matter, Italy still sees RECs development at an inception phase (Dr. Dörte Fouquet, 2021), whereas Spain in the last few years has seen a proliferation of Community Energy initiatives even though its *enabling framework* is far from completed.

2.4 Summary of the literature review

In sum, the literature regarding transposition is vast, with several studies investigating on the existence of legal alignment delays and the reasons behind it. Nevertheless, studies and contributions on the discrepancy between law on paper and law on action in Europe are still limited, in fact the state of the art stresses the importance of extending the theoretical framework related to the transposition literature towards the research regarding the other phases of the implementation process, in relation to this gap, the aim of this master thesis is to evaluate the importance of transposition in the effective realisation of policy goals.

Investigating about the relevance that the translation of an EU directive on the realisation phase is useful to provide the literature in a comprehensive understanding about the complementarity and interrelation of the phases of implementation. Using the case of Renewable Energy Communities to study this research gap is an added value as the insights of this thesis will contribute to the existing literature on the matter of RECs. Furthermore, as it will be showed in the next chapter, the reasoning will try go beyond the mere legal or technical sphere of the single directives. It would rather provide the reader with an understanding of how interdimensional the subject is by considering different variables in the theoretical framework, such as social cohesion, policymaking, governance structure and environmental context.

All in all, this research aims at providing a concrete insight on the role that local Communities can have in the effective realisation process, since using the case of RECs allow for the assessment of the relevance that these actors play in realising a policy goal. As it will be explained later when establishing a REC, a crucial role not only belongs to the state governing institution, but other relevant actors are important.

3 Theory and Hypotheses

The main purpose of this chapter is to clarify the theoretical assumptions that served as a basis for the formulation of the hypotheses of this master thesis.

In the previous chapter, it was established that scholars have not yet fully explored the discrepancy between “law on paper” and “law in action” when analysing the process behind the implementation of an EU directive in the Member States. The few contributions that the literature provided on the matter are relevant in this research since it was demonstrated that relevant actors in the Member State are not only able to influence the mere transposition process but are also relevant when policies are realised.

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate plausible theoretical reasons behind the discrepancy of legal transposition and effective realisation of the policy goal embedded REDII Directive in the Member States chosen for this analysis, focussing on the role different actors can play in the core process. Concretely, the effective realisation of a Renewable Energy Community is the policy goal, whereas the presence of an advanced *enabling framework* is intended as the “law on paper”.

3.1 Good Transposition vs No realisation or Good Realisation vs No Transposition?

This thesis aims to investigate on the role different actors play in the effective realisation of Renewable Energy Community and relate it to the transposition process of the REDII Directive, which calls Member States to create an *enabling framework* which aims at facilitating the development of RECs in EU countries.

As highlighted previously the role veto-players is fundamental in the transposition process; their relevance also in the realisation and application of the policies embedded in Directives is believed to be an important starting point for the literature on the topic, even though it’s still young.

To complement the theoretical findings highlighted in the previous chapter, this Master thesis adopts the argument provided by Lampinen and Uusikylä (1998), that provided the literature with an analytical framework of different factors influencing practical implementation of EU law in Member States, presented in Figure 3, where they established that several factors influenced a correct implementation.

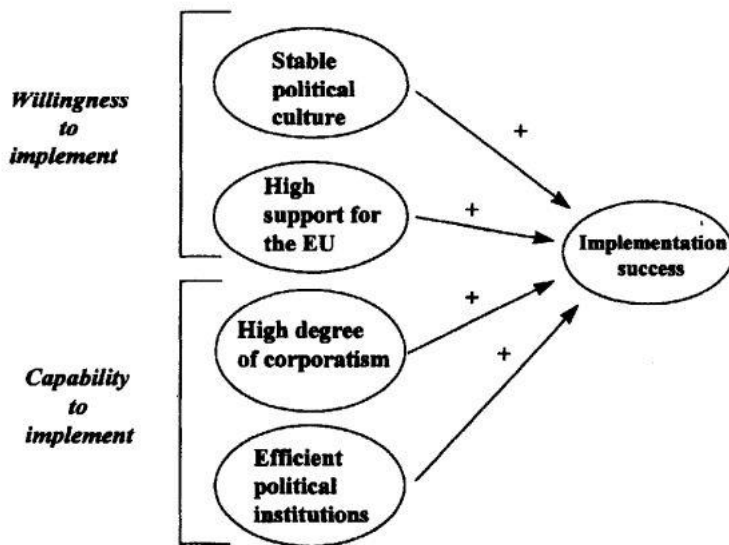


Figure 3 Analytical Framework behind correct EU law implementation
Source: Lampinen and Uusikylä (1998)

of the implementation process. Moreover, the authors have argued that a positive attitude towards the EU does not only matter for what regards policymakers, but it is important when coming from most of the society of the Member States. This reasoning is used in the formulation of the hypotheses of this master thesis as relevant characteristics in society and communities of the Member States are expected to influence the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities. Furthermore, by looking at Figure 3 political institutions have a role in influencing the capability to implement, thus, policymakers are relevant actors also in the realisation of policies embedded in Directives and not only in the transposition phase. Further in this chapter an assessment of how policymakers' actions and characteristics are expected to shape the realisation phase of the REDII Directive in the Member States selected for the analysis

3.2 Social acceptance and co-ownership

The concept of social acceptance is related to the effect that a certain event, initiative or phenomenon have on the people of a certain community. Something is socially accepted by the people if their attitude towards it is positive, and they do not manifest intentions to reject it. The co-ownership concept relates to all those initiatives where the item invested upon is not owned by a single person and thus the property of it is shared among different owners.

Von Wirth et al. (2018) produced an important literature review regarding the different attitudes that scholars had towards distributed energy solutions implementations. The authors have analysed different works from other scholars and theorised an initial common line of reasoning claiming that the role of people in communities is of vital importance when implementing “innovative” technologies including renewable energy solutions. The authors have emphasised how there is an overall heterogeneity of studies and research works on the matter of renewable energy solutions’ impacts on communities, but their findings pointed out that it is still infeasible to determine a clear assessment of public acceptance for what regards distributed energy solutions as it appears to be sparse and not well defined. Other authors have though, provided the literature with relevant findings on the study of public attitudes towards relevant renewable energy and communitarian solutions, affirming that in the majority of the cases community energy enables public acceptance due to its ability to promote citizens’ participation and control over decision-making in renewable energy solutions (Linnerud et al., 2018; Nucci & Krug, 2018).

The previous contributions have emphasised how the public reacts to community energy and renewable sources solutions. Based on these important aspects of the literature, the reader might easily assume that the public is generally enthusiastic of the initiative of Renewable Energy Communities, a thought which have been emphasized by findings of Deliverable 5.2 of the COME RES¹⁵ which established that when it comes to RECs, the factor of local acceptance plays a role as a potentially inhibiting factor in the implementation of energy transition if the people of the community are not in favour of its establishment. Particularly in those countries where the legal framework is in an advanced stage, areas characterised by a low extent of cooperative culture and community initiative are seen as possible delayers of REC implementation.

The literature pointed out the tendency of communities to support and agree with the initiative of community “green” energy; building on this and what has been previously mentioned, the extent to which a community is supportive of RECs is also determined by how strong its cooperative culture and community initiative tradition is.

The local acceptance of community energy initiatives’ implementation is believed to be a fundamental driver of their realisation and based on the previous theories it is plausible to argue that this factor is a possible crucial decider on the correct implementation of Renewable Energy

¹⁵Available at: [COME-RES | Resource](#)

Communities, despite their correct legal transposition. This is the reasoning behind the formulation of the first hypothesis:

H1 → *The impact of national legal transposition on REC development is strongly detrimental when local acceptance and community cooperative culture are low*

3.3 Environmental Risk

According to Hecló (1974) the process of policy learning undertaken by governments and officials when formulating new political initiatives is not only established in a conflict environment, but it also appears as a response to changes in external policy 'environments'. Society itself acts as the major external environment as Hecló intended, and thus the new inputs and ideas coming from society can influence policymaking itself.

Tews affirmed *“the international awareness of certain problems potentially stimulates the rise in frequency of national environmental policy adoptions across the world and that the promotion of approaches to cope with these problems by international organisations and trans-national advocacy networks—as so-called agents of diffusion—do affect diffusion processes.”* [2003:2]

Considering Tews, the societal awareness regarding contemporary topics and issues directly influences the national policies and push decisionmakers to design actions to concretely act in these regards and thus, it is possible to affirm that external and societal factors can influence the policymaking process. Relying on the growing feeling of society to take part in the fight for climate change of the last few years, with especially younger generations being involved in climate related demonstration it is possible to argue that the societal awareness and preoccupation regarding the environmental risk our planet is facing is pushing policymakers to adopt more climate-friendly policies.

As it was established in chapter two, the veto-player argument is one of the most diffused and examined by the literature on transposition. The relevance of the policy preference at the national level when transposing an EU directive is an established characteristic that more or less find the majority of scholars in agreement (Haverland & Romeijn, 2007; Tews et al., 2003; Thomson, 2007).

Regarding the studies on the effective realisation of policy goals embedded in EU directives in Member States there is not yet a clear agreement in favour of the veto-players explanation for what regards this stage of the implementation process, probably due to the little research done on the

topic. Despite this, the analytical framework elaborated by Lampinen and Uusikylä (1998) presents an important starting point for the formulation of the second hypothesis, in fact, as shown previously in this chapter, an efficient political institution is one of the factors influencing the correct implementation of an EU directive.

Following this line of reasoning it is possible to predict that policymakers can have the opportunity to influence the implementation process as they are intended as members of a political institution. This overall picture, if joined by the findings and theoretical contributions from Hecló (1974) and Tews (2003) can allow for assuming that if the external environmental pressure towards policymakers can be translated into policy preferences, then the recent developments and international events of the last 10 years in terms of sustainable and environmental demands are important factors that can influence the development of RECs initiatives in Member States.

This line of reasoning can be summed up by the following Hypothesis:

H2 → *A regional and/or national vulnerability to the risks and impacts of climate change felt by society is translated into a preference by policymakers to speed up the effective realisation of RECs initiatives*

3.4 Regional Administration

Following the analytical framework elaborated by Lampinen and Uusikylä (1998), the role of institutions is fundamental for the correct realisation of a policy goal on the basis of a correctly transposed Directive.

Scholars have pointed out as well, that the state organization is a variable worth of analysis in the core transposition process, where federalist and regionalist states demonstrated to have different tendencies when aligning national legislation to the EU provision (Haverland, 2000; Thomson, 2010). Based on this previous works, it plausible to argue that sub-national administration levels are to play an important part in the core implementation process. Building on the argument exploited for the establishment of the second hypothesis and on the findings exposed in the literature review, it is clear that the role of institutions and their preferences is expected to obstruct implementation by increasing the adjustment costs to a level that political and administrative actors are unable to bear if the policy alignment required strides with their political tradition and mandate. (Falkner et al., 2005; Héritier, 1996).

Studies focusing on the enforcement approach generally assume that political actors can steer the implementation process in accordance with their policy preferences (Downs et al., 1996; Fearon, 1998). Consequently, the outcome of the implementation process is expected to reflect the accordance that a specific directive has with a specific political preference of a Member States government, or a regional administration.

By using the example of the Italian transposition of the REDII Directive (*Decreto Milleproroghe*, 2021) the role of regional administration is deemed fundamental for the correct realisation of Renewable Energy Communities in the territory. According to the national legislation of the country, regional administrations are responsible for the facilitation process and diffusion of RECs, by allowing knowledge sharing and support events to happen in their territory.

This reasoning, with the help of the previous argument regarding policy preferences can be summarized in the following hypothesis:

H3 → *Political leanings of regional administration influences implementation of Renewable Energy Communities by speeding up the process or slowing it down.*

In line with the to the argumentation that institutions are expected to have an important role in the realisation process and following the reasoning that regional administrations are relevant actors in the realisation of RECs based on the REDII Directive. It is plausible to argue that regional administrations that account the relevant resources and willingness can still implement efficiently particular initiatives without waiting for the national legislative input. This argument stems from the observations of the results of the COME RES project, where regions in Europe have realised RECs in countries of the EU that still did not complete (or even started) a transposition process of the relevant directives. This relevant evidence, jointly with the argumentation of administrative actors importance in the whole process has led to the following hypothesis:

H4 → *administrative effort (concerning energy communities) on the regional level can to a good extent compensate for the lack of a complete legal national transposition on the one hand or the lack of an effective realisation the directive goals*

3.5 Approach to the literature for the Theoretical Contributions

This Chapter aimed to provide the reader with the hypotheses formulated to answer the Research Question, to investigate the relevance that legal transposition of EU directives in Member States

has on the realisation of the initiatives contained in the provision the example of RECs is used. Moreover, by testing these hypotheses, it will be possible to assess whether other actors such as local communities and regional administrations influence the realisation of policy goals embedded in EU directives, since these actors are an important part of the theoretical background of this master thesis. The adoption of these hypotheses follows the reasonable doubt that when talking about policy goals, it might not be sufficient to only transpose EU Directives to achieve determined objectives and that other potential factors play a role in process.

A deductive approach was initially privileged for the formulation of the hypotheses and the use of the relevant literature. In fact, existing theories (such as the analytical framework provided by Lampinen and Uusikylä (1998)) and previous studies on the matter of transposition and implementation (especially the misfit hypothesis argument) were all summed and analysed to develop the theoretical background. The deductive approach was respected to the extent that the existing works and studies of implementation were used to develop hypotheses that are tested in the next Chapter.

An important observation worth mentioning as explained already in Chapter 2, is that the literature regarding transposition and implementation does not yet cover extensively the realisation of policy goals. As the research gap is the basis of this master thesis, a total deductive approach is not possibly justified when formulating the hypotheses. In fact, the non-extensive literature addressing this topic does not allow for the presence of complete and exhaustive theories on the matter. It can be said that an additional inductive element is introduced when the hypotheses development embodied extracts from data tendencies (Thomas, 2006), and for what regards the empirical observations regarding RECs establishment in countries with poor legal transposition of the REDII Directive some evidence coming from national provisions (*Decreto Milleproroghe*, 2021).

In the end, this Master Thesis aims at testing the elaborated hypotheses (core characteristic of the deductive approach (Gallaire et al., 1989)). The final goal of this work is to provide a contribution which can be understood as closer to a descriptive theory on the realisation of policy goals embedded in EU directives in different Member States and additionally a final abstract policy recommendation for the correct realisation of RECs initiatives in the EU countries which are still behind in this process.

4 Methodology

This chapter will outline initially the way the research question is operationalised, then the assessment of the research design will be provided which consists of a two-cases, relying on semi-structured interviews as the central means of data collection.

4.1 Develop/operationalise the key concepts for empirical investigation

This section elaborates on the variables of this research to help structure the empirical understanding of what is being investigated.

Indeed, the independent variable in this research is the level of realisation of Renewable Energy Communities in a European region¹⁶, whereas the main dependant variable is the extent to which the *enabling framework* (i.e. transposition of RED II) in that determined area is developed at the national level. The former is operationalised by the extent to which such Communities are complying with the REDII definition and criteria. To be clear, it is widely affirmed that the amount of RECs in Europe that perfectly comply with the provision, is a data hardly available at the moment (evidence from coming projects regarding extensive mapping of RECs in Europe are soon to be published, but not yet exploitable for this master thesis), thus the most available information is detected through the data collection phase, where the interviews carried out will provide the necessary assessment by RECs leader and heads about the extent to which their projects comply with the provision. This process is complemented with a previous desk research on the selected communities to develop a general understanding of these cases' situations.

The dependent variable is the establishment of the so-called *enabling framework*. This characteristic is rather easy to detect compared to the previous one, since it is available in the REScoop transposition tracker dataset which allows for a specific assessment of the national legal adoption situation of the REDII Directive in the different Member States.

In the sections below an overview of how the concepts are operationalised will be presented adopting Goertz (2006/2020) three level framework and then an overview and justification of the research methods and data collection strategies selected will be provided, concluding the chapter

¹⁶ The term refers to entities classified as basic territorial units for the application of regional policies (NUTS2) according to the NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) classification (available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background>)

with a general understanding of the shortcomings of these choices and the eventual obstacles the researcher encountered.

4.1.1 Community attitude towards RECs

The first plausible intervening variable is community spirit and cooperative culture of determined areas in the EU which led to the realisation (or non-) of RECs.

To assess this variable in the qualitative interviews, relevant questions are asked to the different subjects. Questions that aimed at investigating exactly the extent to which a determined community is characterized by a cooperative culture, mentioning initiatives which strengthened the community spirit or represented a particular cooperative culture of the community. In addition to this characteristic, an investigation of the social acceptance (Linnerud et al., 2019; von Wirth et al., 2018) that members of the community transmit towards Renewables and RECs is also foreseen in the data collection part. An important visualization of the process behind the conceptualization of this variable is exposed in figure 4, following Goertz's three level framework (Goertz 2006/2020: 28).

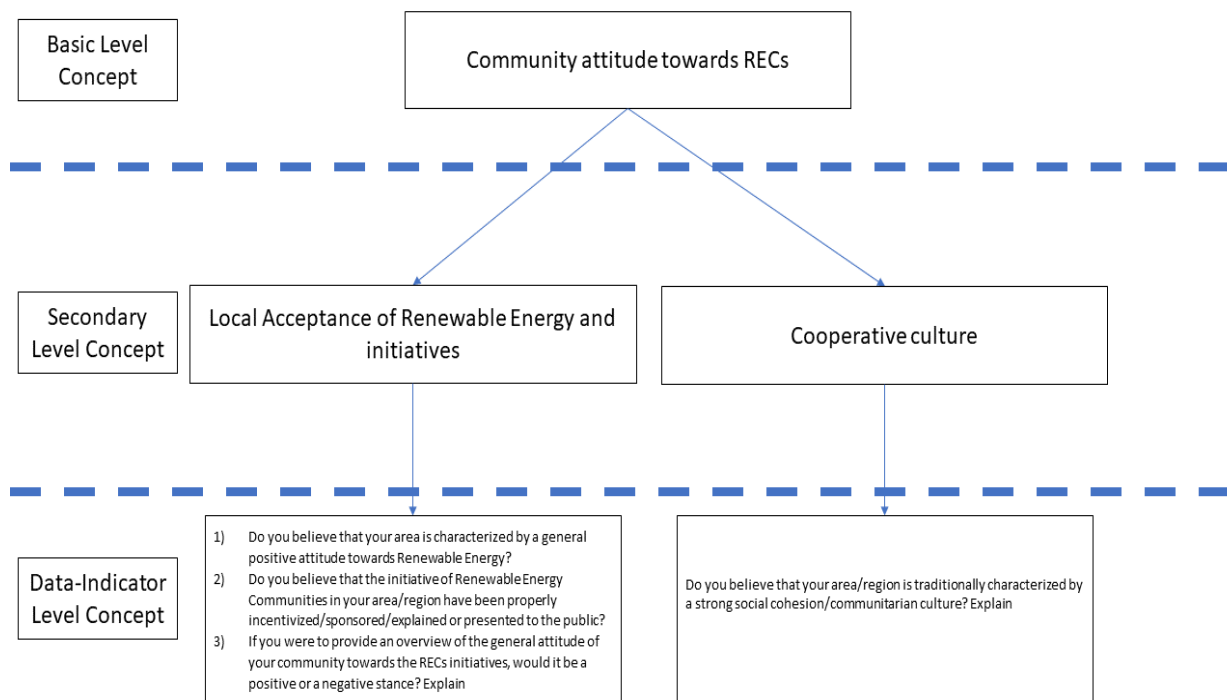


Figure 4 Community and societal attitude towards RECs conceptualization

The basic level of the concept is the result of the abstraction of the hypothesis (“*Community attitude*”) whereas the secondary level embodies more concretely definitions related to the concept (“*Local acceptance*” and “*Cooperative culture*”). The third or data-indicator level in the figure is presented by extracting some of the relevant questions asked during the interviews. The usual aggregation of the secondary level concepts by the logical “OR” framed by Goertz is applicable at this stage, as each single secondary level concept might be sufficient to measure “*community attitude*”, but some may be more relevant than others.

The chosen research design is the qualitative semi-structured interviews and thus the cues and results will be related to the perception that the different interviewees transmit to the interviewer. In the next sections the reasoning behind the choice of the different subjects for the interviews will be provided.

4.1.2 Environmental Risk and International awareness

The second plausible intervening variable is related to the second hypothesis of this analysis. It is the perceived attitude from members of the communities regarding environmental challenges and international developments and how this awareness influenced RECs development.

This variable is measured in the interviews by the assessment provided by the interviewee on the existing strong community awareness of the environmental risks and benefits provided by the establishment of a REC. This variable is strongly related to the recent international developments (e.g. War on Ukraine) and the consequential energy provision problem as external factors influencing societal awareness (Tews et al., 2003). In figure 5, a visualization of this conceptualization based on Goertz’s three level framework is presented.

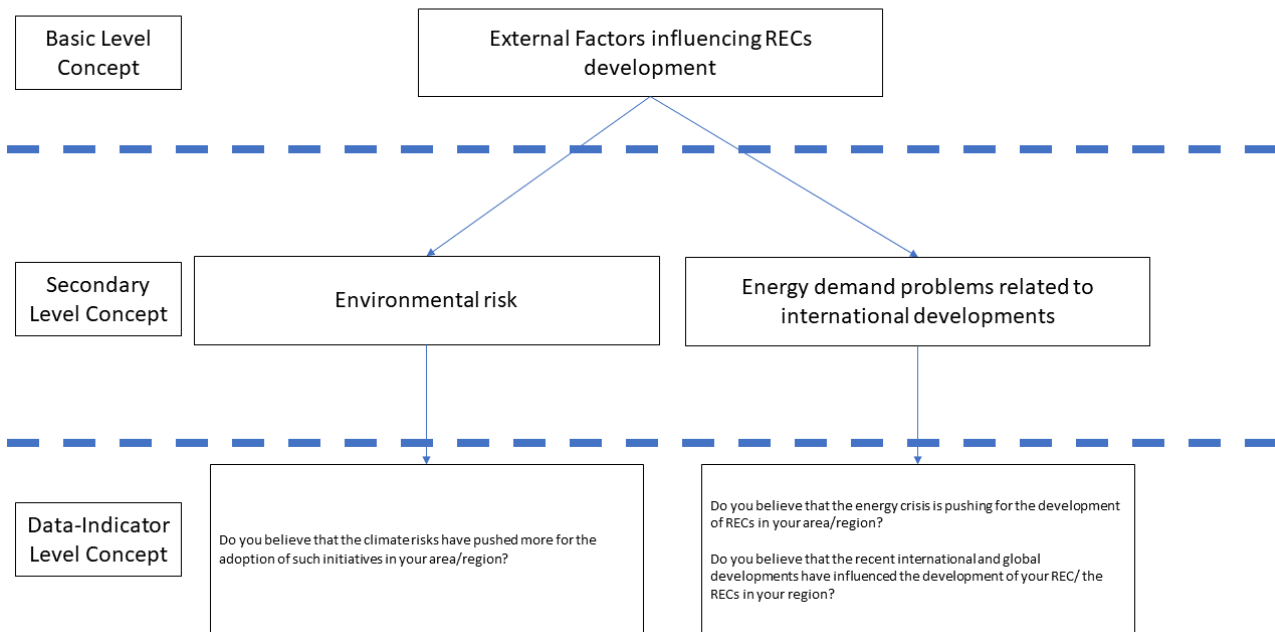


Figure 5 Conceptualization of External factors influencing RECs development

An interesting insight which will be measured in the interviews regards the perceived general attitude of the public towards the *Green Transition* and the various goals of the *Green Deal*. It is important to note that this aspect could be a starting point for future research on the matter of Renewable Energy Communities and the public's response to global challenges.

4.1.3 Regional Administration

The last plausible intervening variable to be measured embodies overall the general role and actions that regional administrations have or had in the RECs realisation. The last part of every interview will focus on the strengths and weaknesses that the interviewee believes to belong to the regional administration.

According to the theoretical background, it is possible to argue that political institutions have a role in the realisation of policy goals embedded in EU directives. In the Figure 6, a visualization of this conceptualization based on Goertz's three level framework is presented. From this perspective it is possible to investigate on both the perception that interviewees had regarding the administrative effort done to implement RECs in their regions and to assess whether there is a perceived tendency from a determined political part to approve or support more this type of initiatives rather than from another part of the political spectrum

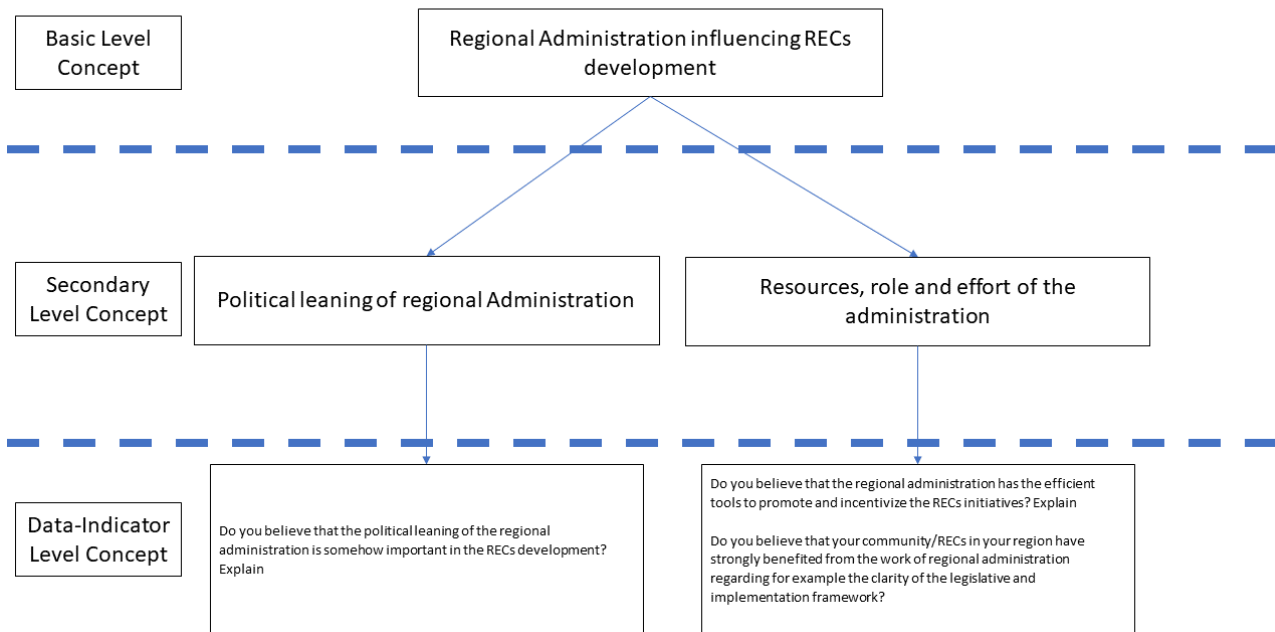


Figure 6 Regional Administration role conceptualization

4.2 Research Design

When looking at the research design of this thesis, it is important to consider a key point made by Aberbach & Rockman, that “*studies must be designed with the purpose [of the research] as a key criterion*” (2002: 675). The key purpose of this research is to investigate whether transposition of the REDII directive in two Member States is crucial to the correct realisation of Renewable Energy Communities initiatives. Moreover, are different factors having a decisive relevance in the process? In order to effectively address this research purpose, the following research design has been selected.

Fundamentally the Thesis adopts a case study research strategy and uses semi-structured interviews as the central mean of data collection. This process serves to identify the casual mechanisms in operation to provide a closer to be descriptive theory. Below, each of these are explained and the limitations will be outlined at the end.

4.2.1 Case Study Research

To begin with, this thesis defined case study research as an empirical inquiry uncovering contemporary phenomenon in depth and contextualising them in the real world (Yin, K. Robert, 2009). Similarly, Blatter & Haverland (2012) have described this type of research as “*an intensive*

reflection on the relationship between concrete empirical observations and abstract theoretical concepts" (ibid: p19). This research strategy was selected with respect to the nature of the research question, in fact it is arguable that the issue at stake calls for a real life and in-depth engagement, that being the development of Renewable Energy Communities in two different Member States. The use of case study research is quite unusual in the academic literature regarding this initiatives, scholars have addressed RECs on the quantitative perspective (Brummer, 2018; Cielo et al., 2021) intensively, while the research focus on case study and their comparison represents a novelty with some exceptions coming from both academia (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2018) and EU funded projects deliverables (as explained in chapter two). This choice is justified by both the nature of this master thesis (addresses a research gap by using a real life example studied in-depth), and the small-N nature of the sample (Blatter & Haverland, 2012).

As case study research is proven to be valuable for theory building stages where *"candidate theories are tested"* (Gomm et al., 2000: 111), this choice represents the most suitable design to validate the theoretical hypotheses presented in the previous chapter. In addition to this, case study research was the selected method of analysis carried out by researchers working in the COME RES project, where the aim was to provide an understanding of structures and features of different RECs in Europe. Since an in-depth understanding different Renewable Energy Communities in the EU is the core part of this research, the suitability of the method for this analysis is at least justifiable. This validation process has also been presented as a *"congruence method"* (George & Bennett, 2005: 180), whereby observable empirical expectations are formed, validated and their compliance level is tested.

Finally, according to Yin (2009) case study research is suitable to provide answers to *"how"* and *"why"* questions, when the researcher is not in control of the real events happening and when the target of the research is a contemporary and real life phenomenon.

4.2.2 Case Selection

As an incorrect case selection strategy might have a negative influence for *"making valid causal inferences"* (King et al., 1994: 115), an appropriate selection of cases is fundamental for an optimal analysis. To proceed with the case selection, an initial step is to define the universe of cases in this analysis which are regions in Europe that see development of Renewable Energy Community initiatives.

The specific case selection strategy of “*diverse cases*” proposed by Gerring (2007) is adopted. Specifically, this process lies “*where the individual variable of interest is categorical, the identification of diversity is readily apparent. The investigator simply chooses one case from each category*” (Gerring, 2007:98). Considering the dependant variable, the two cases must be chosen from highly different and opposing categories and thus, when applying this to the subject of analysis, two different regions with opposing outcomes with regards to the transposition of REDII directives are to be chosen.

The selection of the Member States is clearly depending on the outcome of the REScoop transposition index presented in chapter one. In fact, the Italian state is one of the most advanced



Figure 7 Snapshot of EU27 NUTS2 Region highlights on Sardinia and Comunitat Valenciana
Source: Wikipedia Commons (adapted), 2007

in transposing the REDII¹⁷, whereas the Spanish country has not yet proposed an enhanced legislative framework embodying the directive¹⁸. Moreover, the choice to analyse deeply the phenomenon in a region rather than in a whole country not only resulted in being efficient in time management, but it brings the reader to a down-to-earth approach,

understanding deeply the whole concept of Renewable Energy Communities (as in Communities), in fact a qualitative comparative analysis between both Member States would have ruled out the peculiar differences between regions that scholars (Bauwens, 2016; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2018; Zulianello et al., 2020) and EU funded projects have underlined (Maleki-Dizaji et al., 2022). The regions of Sardinia in Italy and Comunitat Valenciana in Spain were selected. To assure the comparative feature between the two regions, various factors are considered and exposed in Table 1 below, such as geographical feature of the territory, population, most diffused renewable sources, and climate characteristics.

¹⁷ The directive was transposed in 2021 through the “*Decreto Milleproroghe*” and according to REScoop represents one of the most aligned legislative outcome to the EU provision, to be fair the transposition did not reflect an exact “*translation*” (adopting the terminology from Prechal (1995)) of REDII point by point, but compared to other European transposition outcomes is one of the most valuable.

¹⁸ Still, according to REScoop, the national Spanish law reflecting REDII is expected to be established this summer.

Table 1 Factors relevant for the case selection

Factors	Comunitat Valenciana	Sardinia
Geographical Morphology	The region is on the south-east coast of Spain, presents a relatively extended mountain chain, few are the flat areas of the region (Wikipedia, 2020) ¹⁹	Island located in the middle of the Mediterranean, mainly characterized by mountains and hills, few are the flat areas of the region (Wikipedia, 2020) ²⁰
Population	5,051,250 (Eurostat, 2020)	1,599,511 (Eurostat, 2020)
Extension (in Km2)	23,255 ²¹ (CountryEconomy)	23,813 ²² (Britannica)
Most diffused RE sources	Photovoltaic, Wind (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2018)	Photovoltaic, Wind (Vicinanza et al., 2013)
Climate characteristics	Temperature from 12-18°C in winter to 30-35°C in summer (Climatestotravel). Heavy rains in November and March ²³	Temperature from 13-20°C in winter to 33-38°C in summer (Climatestotravel). Heavy rains in November with risks for floods. ²⁴

It was decided to not select the GDP as trait for justifying the comparison as its value is widely different in the two territories, this choice is justified by the fact that for the purpose of the analysis the economic factor does not represent a fundamental characteristic, in fact it is important to underline the socio-economic background of a region to describe the establishment of a REC, but considering the different concepts to be measured (social acceptance, environmental risk and regional administration), the relation between them and such an economic characteristic would call for an additional analysis focussing on the relevance economic characteristics have in establishing such factors. It is important to emphasize that for future research including a socio-economic characteristic might be beneficial and would broaden the validity of the findings.

On the other hand, the two regions share various common traits: the morphology of the territory seems to be quite the same, despite the Italian region being an island. This characteristic allows for a similar environment for the realisation of RECs initiatives, which can be based on the exact same

¹⁹ Data from Wikipedia (available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valencian_Community)

²⁰ Data from Wikipedia (available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardinia>)

²¹ Data from CountryEconomy (available at: <https://countryeconomy.com/countries/spain-autonomous-communities/valencia>)

²² Data from Britannica dataset (available at: <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Sardinia-island-Italy>)

²³ Data from Climates to travel (available at: <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/spain/valencia>)

²⁴ Data from Climates to travel (available at: <https://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/italy/sardinia>)

Renewable Energy sources (PV and wind). Temperatures are on average the same as well as the width of territory. The important difference is the higher population density of the Spanish region, which can lead to the argument that a higher population lead to more RECs initiatives. To avoid this bias, the analysis is going to focus on the quality of the Renewable Energy Communities in light of REDII than merely the number of initiatives. However, this important feature can be useful for further improvements and contributions on the matter.

4.2.3 Interviews

This section will present the reasoning behind the choice to carry out interviews and an explanation behind the subjects selected. Then a reflection on the possible implication of this choice and the basis for further improvements are presented.

Interviews are used as a central source of data as they allow for an in-depth understanding on a certain issue to reveal the causal mechanisms in operation, moreover, this method is widely agreed by the academic literature as an efficient mean to carry out the abovementioned task in small-N studies (such as this master thesis).

Due to the nature of the hypotheses and the consequent operationalisation of the concepts to be measured, it is arguable that using interviews is a reliable method to collect information regarding perceptions, attitudes, and preferences of subjects. Interviews are an efficient way to enrich the real world with contextual meaningful information (Denzin, 2001), allowing interviewers to reveal the “*the complexity of other people’s worlds*” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 134) and finally, interviews are crucial methods to detect information regarding social issues by examining the individuals’ experience on these matters (Seidman, 2012). Ultimately, interviews are regarded as a co-construction method, in the sense that both the interviewee and the interviewer are involved in the data collection by being both contributing participants (Alsaawi, 2014), this nature of cooperation was detected in the data-collection phase, where various interviewees have manifested their interest in being involved in such analysis and reminded the interviewer to share the final results when finished.

4.2.4 Which type of interview?

According to Aberbach & Rockman (2002), there are three types of considerations to bear in mind when selecting a certain type of interview, in fact, the choice on the type of interview to use is strongly dependent on the prior research that was done on the topic of interest. If there is the presence of a strong assumption due to exhaustive and comprehensive relevant studies on the

matter, then the researcher shall adopt a close ended questions when interviewing. If the intention of the scholar is to maximise response validity, then he or she shall opt for open ended questions. Then the nature of the respondent must be considered, as in, the subject being highly educated or even an expert; leading the researcher to formulate his question in a manner that the interviewee has the sufficient time to elaborate an exhaustive and comprehensive answer. All three of these considerations are relevant in this analysis, but they are not weighted in the same manner, in fact, the absence of a strong and exhaustive assumption from the literature on the topic and relating to the research question, have led towards the selection of an open-ended approach.

It is necessary to determine whether semi-structured or unstructured interviews are optimal for this analysis. As it was already anticipated at the start of this chapter, the choice was the semi-structured approach, because there are a few different and novel hypotheses to be tested, thus for the researcher it was better to follow an informal guideline (available in the Annex) of the questions to ask. This was used as a starting point and was however not completely followed through the interview, but it revealed its usefulness to keep track of which were the relevant information to be collected and to always come back on the guideline whenever the interviewer felt the argument of the interview was shifting too much.

It is important to clarify that the means used to conduct the interviews were online communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Google Meet (in one case). The adoption of these means is justified by the current pandemic situation and the requests by the subjects interviewed, as their availability was in some case communicated on short notice, avoiding the opportunity to meet in person.

The instrument adopted to analyse the interviews will be open coding, a method adopted because when using open ended questions and interviewing educated subjects, answers are often long and well-structured, thus a coding system rich in categories and subcategories is of fundamental importance. Practically speaking most responses were coded considering the matter/question concern, which position covered the interviewee and how this was related to RECs initiatives realisation, hypotheses, and research question.

4.2.5 Who to interview?

According to Aberbach & Rockman (2002), when interviewing and selecting who to interview, it is important to choose the subjects on their knowledge and expertise on certain topics. Thus, the need to select experts and navigated subjects that have accumulated experience and knowledge on the topic of Renewable Energy Communities is clear, justified and was set as the main target to carry out the analysis to provide the most valuable findings.

Previously in this master thesis, it was specified the need to provide an interdimensional view on the matter of research and this was another important condition to bear in mind when designing the methodology and select the interviewees. It was chosen to explore three specific dimensions of the RECs realisation in the researched areas. The first one regards the academic approach to Renewable Energy Communities, in fact, one academic expert per region was selected to be interviewed. Through the analysis of the findings from this specific interview it will be possible to build an academic answer to the research question. Answer that will be complemented by the insights from the interviews with leaders and heads of Renewable Energy Communities in both the regions (namely two for each one), enriching the findings with a more technical and in-depth perspective on RECs development in the different territories. The last subjects to be interviewed will be administrative officials from the regional offices competent on the matter of Renewable Energy and Environment, in order to provide a public servant perspective on the matter.

All in all, the interviews are going to be a total of eight (four per region). In Table 2 below a summary of the different subjects selected is exposed.

Table 2 Summary of the interviewed subjects

Position	Sardinia	Valencia
Academic Expert	Academic Professor	Academic Professor
RECs Leader	Mayor	Energy Cooperative Leader
RECs Leader	Mayor	Energy Cooperative Leader
Administrative Official	Servant at the Regional Industry Agency	Servant at the Regional Energy Agency

4.3 Issues Encountered along the way

When conducting interviews, the most important issue to face is the organization. In fact, depending on the position that interviewees cover, their availability can result as a problem. Thus, the

researcher has decided to forward the invitations for interviews with a twenty days' notice to the subjects, this action has allowed to overcome eventual issues related with the availability of the interviewees, but it is fair to admit that despite this planning, a couple of subjects still resulted complicated to reach out. Replacements for the interviews were identified in order to have a strong back-up in case the first subjects resulted to be completely unreliable or unavailable.

The other important issue faced was the willingness of the subjects to speak about some matters, precisely some interviewees were a bit reluctant to answer the questions about the political leaning and its relevance in environmental policy action, the researcher tried to come across the question by framing in different ways; but still in some cases a bit of avoidance was detected.

Finally, another important obstacle to overcome was the establishment of a relationship between the researcher and the respondent, in fact as illustrated in the Annex with the template of question guidelines, the first aim was to make the subject comfortable incentivizing him to initially speak about himself and his job rather than directly jump to the questions related to the analysis. This strategy has allowed in many of the cases to make the interviewee comfortable and proactive, and as mentioned already, in some interviews the respondents openly finished the interviews with asking the researcher to receive copies of the Master Thesis once finished.

5 Analysis of findings

In this chapter the findings obtained upon the data collection activity will be analysed. The order in which they will be presented reflects what was outlined in chapter three and is thereby based on several central themes and sub-questions. To begin with, the hypotheses behind the role that social acceptance and cooperative tradition play in the realisation of REC initiatives will be assessed. Secondly the role played by environmental risk will be investigated and then the importance of regional administration in the whole process will be addressed. The findings will be presented, analysing the three different perspectives mentioned previously, namely academic, practical level and administrative, and exposing the differences between the two cases. The chapter will end with a comparative assessment of the findings regarding the two regions, drawing the basis for the concluding chapter which will follow.

5.1 Social Acceptance, Co-ownership, and cooperative tradition

This thesis considered the relevant literature regarding EU law implementation and Renewable Energy Communities and proposed the assumption that cooperative culture and social acceptance

influence the speed of the realisation of a Renewable Energy Community in a territory despite the progress of the national transposition of the REDII directive in the Member State.

The empirical data supported the hypothesis that cooperative culture and social acceptance determine concretely the development of RECs in a region. However, as data will show, the extent to which the empirical evidence aligns with the assumption is different from one case to the other. As a reminder, the first hypothesis elaborated in chapter three was the following:

H1 → *The impact of national legal transposition on REC development is strongly detrimental when local acceptance and community cooperative culture are low*

Sardinia

From a general understanding of the data, the role of cooperative culture and social acceptance in the Italian region was found to be fundamental in the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities in the territory. The findings supported the hypothesis that this factor can limit the correct realisation of a REC despite the transposition process happened and an *enabling framework* was established. The rest of this sub-section will outline the main findings supporting this argument with a conclusion underlining the extent to which the hypotheses are verified in the case.

The academic expert pointed out that community initiative and cooperative spirit are at the basis of the development and realisation of a REC in general, and communities characterized by a tradition of co-ownership initiatives have an advantage in developing such initiatives since they are more used to this type of action. Moreover, realising a REC represents an opportunity to consolidate cooperative traditions. However, the expert underlined that despite an overall common trait of cooperation and communitarian spirit, concretely Sardinian people do not tend to emphasize this feature of their cultural heritage when it comes to Renewable Energy Communities and the Sardinian co-ownership and cooperative spirit is not yet strong enough to deliberately push for the diffusion and realisation of RECs on a large scale, from the academic point of view the tradition of cooperation in Sardinia was not strong enough to support the development of RECs and despite a correct transposition process and it played a detrimental role by not accelerating the realisation of the initiative.

Moreover, that the matter of social acceptance represented a barrier for his work as an environmental engineer. In essence, he faced strong opposition when proposing to communities

the installation of wind turbines (which he demonstrated having the opportunity to produce more electricity than normal solar panels), because they represented to the public as damaging the landscape (ironically, he pointed out different infrastructures diffused in the region that damaged the landscape more in his opinion but were never strongly opposed). The data showed that social acceptance plays a concrete role in the public attitude towards Renewable Energy solutions and the possibility to develop a REC in a certain territory passes from the citizens approving the use of a determined energy source; in the Italian region this societal approval regarding wind turbines is not diffused and according to the academic expert it is one of the main barriers that Renewable Energy Communities face in the territory.

These findings were reinforced in the interviews with the two leaders of the few RECs in the process of establishment in Sardinia. In fact, they believed their communities to be characterized by some form of cooperative culture and co-ownership initiatives' tradition, but they underlined this not being a driver factor of the REC establishment. Instead, they pointed out that it was fundamental for the acceptance of the idea to present to the citizens the economic benefit they would get in case of joining the initiative, in fact for the Italian law (*Decreto Milleproroghe, 2021*), members of a REC can benefit from an economic prize if they produce renewable energy, a prize that is deducted from their energy bills. According to the two leaders of RECs, a low cooperative culture and social acceptance of renewables resulted as a barrier for the realisation of the initiative, and the only way to incentivize the creation of the REC was to present the economic benefit right away.

The presentation of the economic incentive was pointed out as a crucial milestone in the realisation of a REC also according to the administrative official interviewed. The official emphasized the absence of a social cohesion tradition in the region and thus he underlined how this factor cannot be considered as a push for the initiative in Sardinia. The official has emphasized the need for a campaign to concretely present RECs in the region, aiming at enhancing the participation of the citizens in the process, highlighting how this important task cannot be left to a few virtuous personalities but needs be carried out on a larger scale and from an institution such as the regional administrative office for energy and environment.

All in all, the idea of the social acceptance and co-ownership tradition as a potential driver of the realisation of RECs in Sardinia despite the transposition process occurred in Italy found support in the empirical evidence to the extent that the absence of a strong cooperative culture and well

diffused acceptance of renewable sources offset the correct development of RECs in the region. Moreover, it was determined that the economic benefit was a strong incentive for citizens to join the initiative and according to the data collected, this was rather the main driver behind RECs development.

Comunitat Valenciana

From the outset of the data collection exercise in the Spanish region, it emerged social acceptance and cooperative initiative tradition played an important role in the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities. It is important to underline that the H1 in this case was not directly supported, but the empirical evidence showed that a strong cooperative culture and social acceptance facilitated the realisation despite the fact that the transposition of the REDII Directive still has not happened in the country.

The opinion of the academic expert was fundamental for several reasons, in fact, he stated that the region is characterized by the presence of energy cooperatives that are nearly a hundred years old. The existence of a long-affirmed tradition of co-ownership energy initiatives in the region have influenced the process of RECs establishment, in fact people who were already used to take part in projects of joined energy consumption saw immediately the opportunity of joining a Renewable Energy Community and exploited their background knowledge to move towards shared production.

In Valencia the economic incentive had a role in strengthening the conscience of people taking part in RECs project, but the presence of long-established cooperative culture made the realisation process easier despite the absence of an advanced *enabling framework*. The research question here is partly answered, as the transposition of the REDII directive in Spain is not completed yet, but still in Valencia citizens have started to establish their RECs starting from the energy cooperatives already present, putting themselves one step ahead the legislation. Overall, from the academic perspective, a long-standing tradition of cooperative initiative, specially for what regards energy consumption has positively influenced the development of RECs.

The leaders of the two cooperatives interviewed pointed out the fact that due to the absence of a defined legislation it was relatively hard to initiate the process of RECs establishment in the territory and they always tried to predict the outcome of the transposition process when forming their communities but still their resourcefulness was a key factor influencing the process.

In these two interviews the strong element of cooperative culture came up frequently, reinforcing the findings of the interview with the academic expert. The leaders of the cooperatives explained that their major members are driven by a common awareness and positive attitude towards both Renewable Energy and cooperative initiatives. Through some anecdotes they described how people joining the Communities were not interested initially in the economic benefit but rather pushing for the shared consumption-production feature of the initiative. Of course, when realising the existence of an economic incentive they pushed even more for the realisation and engaged more themselves in the project. Again, the importance of cooperative culture tradition in the region is presented as a fundamental driver by the data collected, and it offset the absence of an *enabling framework* to some extent.

According to the two leaders, the acceptance of Renewable Energy Sources in the region is quite a controversial argument, in fact they have tried to differentiate the power-basis of the Communities in Valencia by proposing to adopt several sources rather than the few most diffused; but this process encountered resistance from the public. They perceived the citizens as more willing to install wind turbines and even solar panels rather than using biogas as source, and this for them still represents an important barrier as of today. Even though they constantly try to promote alternative sources, the citizens seem to willingly accept the two traditional ones, but overall, a quite diffused social acceptance was diffused in the region and this openness was deemed as a crucial driving factor.

The public servant for energy and environment in the region provided useful inputs on the matter, the evidence collected in the interview supported the idea that Valencia is characterized by a cooperative and co-ownership culture and they as administration registered an important push from citizens to form the Renewable Energy Communities. From the administrative point of view, this represented quite a problem because the absence of a concrete normative framework to place the realised initiatives rendered their action and efforts a novelty and thus, they had to make-up for a non-existent legislative territory.

The impact of the administration was important according to the leaders of the cooperatives, in the sense that despite the fact of not having affirmed expertise in the practical establishment of Renewable Energy Communities the administrative action was crucial because it demonstrated to them that the cooperative culture of the region was not a feature characterizing only members of cooperatives but was more of a horizontal feeling of the people in region.

H1 is proven by this empirical evidence to different extents: first of all, the data collected pointed that in cooperative culture has been a crucial driver of the realisation of RECs in the region, and thus if a positive and strong presence of this factor determines the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities despite the absence of an *enabling framework*, the argument embedded in H1 is still supported since these findings have proved the counterfactual. All in all, in the Spanish region social acceptance did not seem to play a crucial role in the process and finally H1 is supported only for the aspect of the role of social acceptance.

5.2 Environmental Risk

The environmental risk and the energy crisis were considered to be important external factors influencing the realisation of a RECs despite the national transposition according to chapter three. The assumption was based on academic contributions that pictured the external factors influencing society as inputs for relevant actors to affect policymaking and thus accelerating the policy goal realisation process. As a remainder, the hypothesis elaborated in chapter three was the following:

H2 → *A regional and/or national vulnerability to the risks and impacts of climate change felt by society is translated into a preference by policymakers to speed up the effective realisation of RECs initiatives*

According to the data collected, this hypothesis was not supported by the empirical evidence. The analysis showed that the awareness regarding the environmental risk and the energy crisis matter in the whole conceptualization of the initiative, but overall, it was not proven whether this attitude had a concrete effect in RECs realisation in both regions.

Sardinia

In the Sardinian context awareness raising regarding the environmental risks was shown not directly influence RECs realisation and thus no support was found for H2 in the Italian case despite the presence of a growing sentiment in the citizens towards the environment. In fact, according to all the interviewees, citizens awareness regarding the climate situation raised incredibly in the last few years, and due to the energy crisis of the last few months it appears that the people have decided to favour renewable initiatives more. Nonetheless, this awareness was not traduced in an immediate action to realise RECs in Sardinia, in fact according to the experts people are aware of the climate catastrophic situation and even more acknowledging about the energy crisis, but still when presented the opportunity to realise a Renewable Energy Community they fell from the clouds seeming to not be able to link the initiative with its potential contribution to both problems.

The concrete example about this awareness regards the participation that the campaign on waste management received. Cagliari, the capital of the region was recently awarded as the most virtuous metropolitan area in Italy regarding waste management (ISPRA, 2021²⁵) and the positive attitude towards the environment in this regard was registered in the whole region according to the interviewees.

The evidence showed that the absence of a direct link between the awareness raising and the development of RECs was due to a weak communication strategy from authorities when sponsoring the initiative to the citizens, in fact, the prospect of fighting climate change and energy crisis through Renewable Energy Communities was never presented to the them.

According to the leaders of the Communities the people were not incentivised to create a REC by the environmental risk of their region or the energy crisis, but still, the foreseen economic return was the most important value they could see in the initiative. In the Sardinian case, interviewees stated that citizens were deliberately not in favour of the initiative and did not see the point of investing time in realising a Renewable Energy Community, they decided to support the initiative when they acknowledged the possibility of a discount in their electricity bills.

Among those citizens who adhered to the initiatives, the leaders of the Communities have pointed out that some have demonstrated virtuosity and attention to the climate situation, but they also explained that this sentiment came out once the REC was joined.

According to the academic expert the citizens awareness of the climate issue and the energy crisis raised in the last two years (a claim backed up by several surveys that were conducted by Legambiente Sardinia²⁶), but it was emphasized how this shift in conscience was never directed towards determined concrete action, especially for what regards Renewable Energy Communities.

The administrative official interviewed listed a series of concrete actions that the regional office is carrying out on the territory due to the magnitude of the citizens' demand for climate action, in the list Renewable Energy Communities was not present, and according to the official the citizens still

²⁵ "ISPRA – Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale", publishes a yearly report which monitors the efficiency of the waste management campaigns in the Italian State

²⁶ It is an environmental organisation present in Italy that is involved in several processes and actions tied to the climate and environmental challenge. The academic professor is a member of the Sardinian office of the organisation

are not aware of the potential of the initiative from the perspective of the green transition and energy crisis.

In the interviews, all subjects explicitly requested a more direct approach when the initiative is sponsored to the public, since they believe firmly that the Sardinian community has the potential to react positively when it is presented to them a concrete possibility to make a change and contribute to ameliorating the environmental and energetic situation of the Island (and the rest of the world consequently).

All in all, H2 is not proven from the empirical evidence collected in Sardinia and despite an important conscience and attention developing in the region towards the environment and the energy crisis it was registered this factor is not enough yet to influence positively the realisation of Renewable Energy Communities. However, it is important to mention that a well-tailored communication campaign demonstrating the real contribution the initiative provides to both the environment and the energy crisis was believed to be a useful strategy to reach the minds and hearts of the Sardinian citizens stimulate them to join RECs.

Comunitat Valenciana

The overall raise in citizens' awareness regarding the issue of climate change and energy poverty was perceived in Sardinia as well as Valencia. Still, the empirical data collected in the region did not support the second hypothesis of this master thesis. In fact, the interviews carried out in this region showed that the Spanish citizens have understood the climate emergency, but it is still uncertain whether their acknowledgement of the situation have pushed for their involvement in the RECs establishment.

The academic professor interviewed have stated that in Valencia, citizens are becoming more engaged in several activities related to the environmental challenge, especially for what regards general waste and sensibilization campaigns.

According to the energy cooperative leaders interviewed, the citizens involved in the initiatives in the region shared a common feeling towards the environmental challenges and the idea of stepping up and take part in the climate emergency is well established. Nonetheless, according to the data, citizens did not feel the urge to take part in a Renewable Energy Community in the region because of what it represents in the green transition, nor did they see it as a possible remedy for the energy crisis. Experts pointed out two fundamental ingredients for people to take part in a REC: a

cooperative tradition and the economic incentive the former reinforces H1, and the latter will be counted as an important factor for future research. Both the academic and the energy cooperative leaders agreed that environmental awareness appeared to be a secondary factor of attraction for the initiative, not deemed to be a decisive trigger for the citizens to establish the Community. This evidence demonstrated that societal awareness is not yet a factor able to influence the extent to which Directives transposed in a Member State matter in the effective realisation process.

According to the administrative official, the citizens in the region failed to clearly associate the initiative with its potential contribution to face both climate change and energy crisis and thus it was not possible to deem the environmental risk to be a crucial factor in the implementation of the RECs in the Spanish region. Regarding the energy crisis, according to the official and the other experts interviewed, there is a weak link between the benefits of the initiative in fighting the crisis, but still, since most of the Renewable Energy Communities in Valencia were starting their realisation phase before the outbreak of the energetic slump, establishing a concrete causal relationship between the two is not possible.

In the interviews, all subjects explicitly requested a more direct approach when the initiative is sponsored to the public, since they believe firmly that the Valencian community reacts positively towards initiatives related to the green transition and the energy poverty. A data that came up as well in the interviews carried out in Sardinia and which can be used as a basis for an initial policy recommendation which will be present in the following chapter.

In the end, the environmental risk and energy crisis are not deemed as important impulses in the RECs development in the region. Thus, the data showed no support for H2 which is then rejected. However, it emerged that a better framing of how the initiative contributes to both the problems is needed from all the perspectives embodied in this analysis.

5.3 Regional Administration

The following section outlines the empirical findings regarding the third and fourth hypotheses formulated in the previous chapter. Concretely the two hypotheses are the following:

H3 → *Political leanings of regional administration influences implementation of Renewable Energy Communities by speeding up the process or slowing it down.*

H4 → *administrative effort (concerning energy communities) on the regional level can to a good extent compensate for the lack of a complete legal national transposition on the one hand or the lack of an effective realisation of the directive goals on the other*

From the outset of the data collection exercise carried out in both regions, it has emerged that H3 was not supported by the evidence and in essence political colour does not matter in RECs establishment at this precise moment (as it will be pointed out later, this aspect can be important for future research). On the other hand, H4 was supported by the data collected and the results have demonstrated the crucial importance of the administrative effort and resources for the establishment of RECs in territories despite transposition processes

Before describing the findings of this analysis, it is important to mention that the questions were formulated in a manner that the respondent did not feel uncomfortable in answering (especially for the two public servants). In addition to that, the subjects were selected among those in positions not tied to a political appointment and thus it was easier for them to answer those questions regarding sensitive arguments (such as the political leaning).

Sardinia

The results of the analysis carried out in Sardinia supported H4 by proving that a poor administrative effort and capacity limits the correct development of RECs despite the presence of an *enabling framework*. On the other hand, H3 was not supported since it was not possible to measure the influence of political leaning in the RECs establishment process as the political party governing the region has always been the same since the adoption of the REDII.

The general perception of the administrative machine in the Italian region (and in Italy in general) is not very positive, it is believed that the bureaucratic machine is slow and inefficient and sometimes a non-cooperative entity. Public servants in this body are deemed to be incompetent and not used to implementing tasks.

By using a metaphor, the academic explained how slow the Italian bureaucracy is at implementing its tasks and how it is difficult to get them to effectively respect deadlines and deliver concrete inputs. The expert underlined the importance that the regional administration has in incentivizing the citizens to participate in the Renewable Energy Communities, it has the means to contribute to the development of RECs in the region by promoting roundtables and events, but the reality is that

the administration did not take part in the dissemination and communication activities related to the initiatives.

According to the professor, the administrative action was not sufficiently in support of the initiative in the region, in fact the RECs present in Sardinia are the result of an excellent communication and implementation campaign done by the single leaders of the Communities, an insight later reinforced by the interviews from the two RECs leaders.

The mayors cleared out that the regional administration was not present at all in the implementation phase, and they deemed that a more engaged public office could have led towards a broader diffusion of the project in the region. The leaders of the communities have emphasized that the regional administration has the means to strengthen several aspects of the implementation of RECs in the territory, they have listed a few potential actions that the administration could undertake to both help the development of the existing Communities and enhance the realisation of new ones.

Both the professor and the Community leaders agreed that the regional administration could carry out roundtables to share good practice models looking at ameliorating the overall development of RECs in the region. Furthermore, in their opinion administrators should implement concrete action to overcome the barriers these Communities face, such as engaging with energy providers to facilitate the grid connection to effectively make the REC initiative operational or provide additional support to the subjects interested.

From the subjects interviewed it emerged that the regional administration office attitude towards environmental policies and initiatives is not dependent on a determined political leaning, meaning that in the eyes of the interviewees the political will to carry out concrete actions to impact the climate challenge and the energy poverty problem is still lacking from different political parties. It is important to mention that this assessment for the specific case of Renewable Energy Communities presents a contradiction since the initiative is still quite young and the political colour of the regional administration in Sardinia has not changed yet (thus, measuring the attitude of different political parties towards the initiative at the administration level is a task relevant for future research).

Considering what was mentioned before, the Community leaders argued that the coalition which is not in government (opposition in the regional parliament) seem to be more concerned about RECs,

but the perception regarding these attitudes was very cautious in the subjects interviewed as they pointed out this strategy to be only a political calculus.

According to the administrative official interviewed, the regional offices are responsible to a certain extent for the implementation of Renewable Energy Communities. The office is the body that should clarify the processes and facilitate the transition from consumption towards self-consumption in these Communities. The reality is that, the implementation of RECs was not ranked as a top priority in the agenda of the administration and thus the availability of the office to work on it was reduced and limited.

Administrative efficiency in the opinion of the public servant was constrained by the resources that were available to pursue the goal of realising the initiative. Furthermore, it appears that the regional administration did not foresee any defined intervention on the process of establishing the Communities and that the major task in this moment is still about providing a definite conceptualisation of the initiative, to use as a “*dress*” which can fit all the applicants. Still, on the opinion of the public servant, the RECs already in place in the region have taken a step forward and tried to predict the outcome of this definition process.

In the end in the Italian region the regional administration has a fundamental role in the development of Renewable Energy Communities, according to the data collected the administrative help would have influenced positively the shaping out of the initiative in the region, but the interviewees have claimed that due to the low support received, the RECs development in Sardinia is still in an embryonal phase. These findings clearly support H4, clarifying the centrality of role attributed to the regional office in the whole realisation process.

The data showed that the idea of a low administrative support on the cause of RECs is not due to a particular political leaning since it is not yet effectively measurable whether other political parties when in government would strongly support the development of Renewable Energy Communities in the region. H3 is therefore rejected, and the interviews suggested that this aspect can be measured in future research projects, in the years to come, when relevant number of political parties governed the territory and thus their attitude towards RECs can be compared properly.

Comunitat Valenciana

From a general perspective, the data collection exercise carried out in the Spanish region has produced supporting evidence for the influence that the administrative effort plays in the RECs development, attributing to the administrative body a decisive role supporting in the matter, supporting H4. On the other hand, the empirical results did not support the relevance that political leaning has in this process, rejecting H3.

The subjects interviewed confirmed the idea that the regional administration has a central role in incentivizing the development of Renewable Energy Communities in Valencia. It has emerged that due to the resourcefulness of some public servants in the regional offices, the establishment of RECs was possible despite the national transposition of the REDII being still in place.

The fact that the regional administration was crucial in this process in the region was reinforced by both the academic expert and the leaders of energy cooperatives, in fact they explained that the willingness of the public servants to explore a yet unknown possibility made concrete the opportunity to realise the RECs in the region.

The regional administration has provided support at all levels for the Communities in their establishment, setting up structures and providing organizational support despite the absence of a clear legislative provision at the national level. Furthermore, the regional authorities have set up an online support service for the establishment of RECs in the region and this have increased the enthusiasms towards both the initiative and the administration offices.

It is important to underline that the input from this governmental body is still far from final and the data collected supported the claim that the administration is a facilitator in the process of establishing a Renewable Energy Community but does not resolve all the problems that impede a successful realisation. From the interviews it emerged an important feature of the Valencian case which is worth mentioning, the fact that there is a tendency in the region to already start the process without consulting with the regional administration (a sort of arbitrary decision to disobey in the first place), leaving the public servants to just deal with the reality of the facts and crucially the administrative actors take stock of the process and move forward most of the times, instead of asking to re-do the whole on the basis of their inputs.

As emerged previously in the Sardinian case, investigating the importance of a political colour when developing RECs remains an unknown territory and to measure this aspect it is necessary to

implement further research in future years by comparing different political administrations. Therefore, H3 is not supported by the empirical evidence but political leanings are a factor worth the attention of future analysis.

All in all, Valencian Renewable Energy Communities are still far from complete and well established, but from the data collected, the proactiveness of the regional administration was a crucial factor in the realisation of RECs. It was mentioned several times that officers were more inclined to help the initiative rather than impede it and their resourcefulness in terms of ideas and proposals was a crucial determinant of the establishment of Communities. In essence, H4 is supported by the empirical evidence collected in the Spanish region to the extent that administrative efforts demonstrated to take a decisive role in the realisation process.

5.4 Summary and Case Comparison

Analysing these two different regions has allowed for a case comparison based on the dependent variable, as in the level of RECs development in both territories. Both cases are part of two Member States that were called to transpose the REDII Directive into their national legislation to create an *enabling framework* for Renewable Energy Communities to diffuse easily and rapidly, this being the policy goal embedded in the Directive. Italy was the only one out of the two to complete the transposition process and created a framework, whereas Spain still has not created one.

The analysis showed that despite the advancement of the transposition process, RECs have developed following different trends in the two regions. According to the data collected a stronger cooperative culture, diffused social acceptance towards renewables were the key ingredients for RECs to develop better in the Spanish region despite the absence of the *enabling framework*, meanwhile in Sardinia Renewable Energy Communities still struggle to develop and diffuse even though Italy transposed the REDII Directive in 2021.

The societal awareness raising due to the recent international developments and environmental challenges did not seem to play an important role yet in the establishment of RECs in both regions. Nonetheless, it was demonstrated that people in both cases are aware of the situation but still have not linked the potential this initiative has in fighting climate change and contribute to ameliorate the energy prices situation.

Regional administration was shown to be a vital factor in the establishment of RECs in both regions, and according to the findings a proactive administrative component can offset the absence of an

enabling framework as it happened in the Valencian case. The poor administrative effort in Sardinia on the other hand, impeded a strong development of the initiative in the region.

Regarding the political leaning of the administrative body, the data collected was not enough to determine a concrete role of political belongings in the process of developing and establishing Renewable Energy Communities.

As it will be described in the next chapter, local communities, societal actors, and sub-national administration office are able to influence the effective realisation of policy goals embedded in EU Directives. However, it was demonstrated that still a lot needs to be done in terms of policy effort to allow RECs to spread better in Member States and most of all, the process of transposition appears not to be a fundamental step with regards to effective realisation of policy goals.

In the end this case comparison demonstrated that the first and last hypotheses were strongly supported by the evidence collected through the interviews in both regions, meaning that cooperative culture (and social acceptance) and administrative effort are relevant in the realisation process of Renewable Energy Communities despite the transposition outcome. Moreover, the second hypotheses was not supported by any evidence in both regions, but some insights obtained in the interviews have contributed to the idea of building future research using it as a starting point, because societal awareness regarding environmental issues is growing and its influence towards green related policies implementation has already started to be studied (Rustam et al., 2020). The fourth hypothesis was not supported by empirical evidence, but as mentioned already it can be good starting point for future research.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Transposition relevance and key lessons learned

Since the start of this research, the focus has been addressing the relevance that the transposition of an EU Directive plays with regards to the effective realisation of a policy goal embedded in the Directive.

To answer this main question, the case of the REDII transposition process and Renewable Energy Communities diffusion and development were used as a specific case of analysis. According to the results exposed in the previous chapter, the translation of an EU Directive in the Member State national legislation is an important aspect contributing to the realisation of a policy goal. Nonetheless, it was demonstrated that for the case of RECs the presence of an *enabling framework* in a Member State does not automatically allow for a broader diffusion of the initiative and on the other hand in the country that transposed efficiently the REDII this absence did not negatively influence the diffusion of RECs.

According to the interviews carried out, several factors have demonstrated to have an important role in the development of Renewable Energy Communities. The cooperative culture and social acceptance towards Renewable Energy sources is a key ingredient in developing RECs, it was proved to be the major driver of initiatives in the Valencian region, where a long-standing tradition of energy cooperatives among the citizenship influenced positively the attitude and approach towards RECs in the region.

The importance of this factor was reinforced also from the interviews from Sardinia, where despite a well transposed REDII and established *enabling framework*, Renewable Energy Communities are still not diffused in the territory. A phenomenon caused by a bad communication campaign regarding the initiative, a selective social acceptance of renewable sources in the region (where wind turbines are not well accepted by the community due to the potential landscaping damage) and a poorly diffused cooperative culture among the citizens.

The main lesson learned from this part of the analysis is that with this specific policy goal, transposition did not result as the single driving factor. Moreover, transposition was complemented by the community tradition of cooperative actions and social acceptance, which were expected to be driving factors for the initiatives (Linnerud et al., 2018), and the findings not only reinforced this

expectation but determined a two-folded role of this characteristic, which can either offset the absence of an efficient transposition (Spain) leading to a policy goal realisation or obstacle concrete realisation despite a the presence of an *enabling framework* (Italy).

In addition to the previous factor, the analysis pointed out the crucial role of regional administration offices and resources. In Valencia the actions of public officials from these offices rendered the development of RECs a reality regardless of the absence of an *enabling framework* and despite the difficulties faced, the case of Valencia is important because it shows that even though at the national level a Directive is not transposed, the resourcefulness of administrative offices and local communities can help the realisation of such policy goal.

In the Italian case it seemed that the presence of an *enabling framework* in the national legislation did not allow for a concrete contribution in the realisation of the policy goal from the regional administration offices despite they were attributed a relevant role in the process by the national legislation (*Decreto Milleproroghe, 2021*). The regional administration was deemed to be responsible for a badly planned communication campaign and a total disinterest in the development of the initiative in the territory.

All in all, transposition is relevant for policy goals' realisation to the extent that other factors can have a major realisation power. This feature depends on both the type of policy goal and the Directive, for the specific case of RECs it was demonstrated that other factors can matter even more than transposition. An additional lesson learned regards the relevance that Communities can play in the process of energy democratization, in fact this master thesis showed how several features enshrined in communities can heavily contribute to the RECs establishment.

6.2 Inspiration for policy recommendation

An important understanding of the results obtained through this analysis can be the basis of a policy recommendation for policymakers wanting to increase the number of Renewable Energy Communities in their territories.

It was shown in the data collection that administrative offices have a crucial role in the process, and several suggestions from the experts interviewed can be used as the basis for a policy guideline.

The starting point is the communication campaign, being the understanding of the initiative from citizens a crucial determinant of success, it is asked to policymakers to invest in this action by using communication experts and proper strategies. Strengthening the potential of Renewable Energy

Communities in contributing to fight the environmental challenge since the initiative is deemed as one of the tools the European Commission sponsors to decarbonise the energy sector in the continent.

Emphasis should be given as to how community self-consumption contributes to energy democratization by lowering the energy bills in the long-term. Moreover, citizens empowerment is another important aspect that needs to be underlined when presented to the public, since participation in a REC is a concrete action that alongside with other green behavioural steps represents a meaningful impact citizens and communities can have on the environmental challenge.

A good and tailored communication campaign is not the sole action policymakers can carry out to positively influence RECs diffusion and development. As it was demonstrated in this analysis, the administration resources and efforts are a crucial aspect of the initiative, and it was stressed that these actors should take important actions regarding the concrete implementation and diffusion of RECs in the region.

Several tools were suggested in the interviews, and the relevance of them in the whole Renewable Energy Communities discourse was reinforced by several authors (Cielo et al., 2021; Maleki-Dizaji et al., 2022). Regional administration should contribute to the knowledge exchange between long-standing RECs and new-born ones to facilitate the learning process from one the other. Moreover, the priority in this agenda should be to identify those so called “*best practices*”²⁷ in the territory or in other Member States with similar characteristics to be used in the knowledge sharing process.

Additionally, administrations should provide technical assistance towards potential communities through roundtables, workshops, and experts webinars in order to support the development of RECs in all the phases of the implementation.

All in all, the lesson learned from the Spanish region consists in an efficient assistance by the regional administration towards those Communities and entities aspiring to become RECs in the territory. A proactive approach is considered to be crucial in this case and the example of Valencia should be transferred not only to Sardinia but also to other regions in Italy and Europe with similar

²⁷ Best practices are considered as superior to good practices in that they are innovative, testable, sustainable and transferable approaches which contribute to the improved performance of a project or policy. (Rumohr-Voskuil, 2010)

characteristics since the regional administration input was demonstrated to be an important factor in the effective realisation of this policy goal.

6.3 What does this research mean?

This research represents an important insight and lesson for several targets. The first one to mention is academia, and in fact due to the nature of the research question this thesis provides a contribution of the extent to which transposition is relevant in the realisation process, by having an assessment of how other relevant factors intervene. The added value of contributing to the literature on Renewable Energy Communities by providing an understanding of how much a correct *enabling framework* matters in the diffusion and development of RECs in Member States is worth mentioning as an additional impact on the academic world.

However, as it will be explained in the next sub-chapter, the external validity of this research remains an issue for two separate reasons: first, it is a small-N study, and the transferability of its findings are always going to be questionable. Secondly, the case of the REDII transposition, and its policy goal represents a specific case whose application in other cases studying different directives may result very difficult.

Furthermore, the results of this research can have an important impact on society since the role of local communities in the effective realisation of Renewable Energy Communities process was demonstrated to be fundamental. Moreover, this thesis has reinforced the idea that citizens and regional administration offices play a relevant role in the process of energy democratization. This research has opened the discussion on the concrete tools and importance that society has in order to fight climate change.

This research has provided an important insight for policymakers and administrations. The data collected in the interviews have not only contributed to the main research goal, but also provided relevant information to create a policy guideline to enable the development and diffusion of Renewable Energy Communities. Moreover, this policy aspect is mostly relevant to the Sardinian since the suggestions exposed consists of insights from the Valencian case that are deemed helpful not only for Sardinia but for other regions in Italy.

All in all, this research portrays different impacts for society, academia, and policymakers with some more relevant than others, but it is possible to argue how the timing of this analysis is in line with the current needs and challenges that the world is facing these days.

6.4 Limitations and future improvements

As anticipated in the previous section, the external validity of the findings and the results is an important limit to this research. Using a case study comparison between two regions does not allow for a direct application of the insights to other regions of Europe unless there are similar characteristics between the regions and the diverse strategy on the dependant variable is respected. This peculiarity demonstrates how much this thesis research design embedded a clear limitation from the start.

Nonetheless, as argued before it is plausible to use the findings as an important starting point for future research on the matter of RECs, and additionally new sets of data regarding Renewable Energy Communities are expected to be published in the coming months through European funded projects and initiatives. Based on this, it will be possible to carry out research on the relationship between RECs development and transposition with other methods, allowing for larger N and consequentially a broader external validity. Also, by exploiting these coming new datasets, it will be possible to analyse the matter on a national perspective rather than a regional one (even though scholars emphasized the regional feature as peculiarity worth to investigate).

A crucial input for future research consists in investigating on the relevance that the economic incentive plays in RECs realisation, since it was one of the most relevant influencing factors according to the data. However, as mentioned in the methodological chapter of this master thesis it will be necessary to select different cases for the analysis.

In the future years it will be possible to assess the importance that political leanings of regional administrations have in the RECs development because at this moment in time there was not enough data to properly address this aspect. In fact, given that the initiative is very young (the REDII was published in 2018) the number of regional governments that took power since its inception are still too low to assess this factor. This reasoning is reinforced by the fact that in the interviews it was shown that those political parties that play an opposition role in the regional administrative panorama seemed to be more in favour of RECs, but the extent to which this impression belongs to a mere political calculus is still unknown.

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Annex

Interview Guide

I am glad to have you participating in my thesis research project which will analyse the relevance of transposition on the realisation of a policy goal embedded in a Directive by using the case of Renewable Energy Communities.

I would like to record our interview and I won't cite you directly in my thesis.

We can start with a general understanding of who are you, what's your story and what brought you in the world of RECs.

Part 2

What are the main characteristics of your REC / What are the main characteristics of the RECs that have been developed in your region?

Do you think that there has been a clear and sufficient presentation of the concept of RECs at the national level?

Do you think that an adequate enabling framework for the development of RECs at the national level has been successfully developed?

What are the main drivers and barriers facing your REC(s) in your region?

Part 3

Do you think that your territory is characterised by a generally positive attitude towards Renewable Energies?

Do you think that the Renewable Energy Communities initiative in your area has been properly incentivised/sponsored/explained or presented to the public?

Do you think your region is characterised by a strong tradition of social cohesion/community culture?

Do you think that the above factor can have a major influence on the proper development of RECs in your area?

Part 4

Do you think the energy crisis is driving the development of RECs in your region?

Do you think that climate change risks have been more of a driver for the adoption of such initiatives in your region?

Would you say that the members of your REC/RECs in your region are more attracted by the benefits of the REC or by the potential of this initiative with regard to the ecological transition?

Part 5

Do you believe that the regional administration has a concrete role in the successful development of RECs?

Do you think that the political inclination of the regional administration is in any way important in the development of RECs?

Do you think that the regional administration has sufficient tools to promote and encourage REC initiatives?

Do you think that your REC(s) or RECs in your region have benefited a lot from the work of the regional administration with regard to, for example, clarity of the legislative and implementation framework?

Do you think that your REC(s) in your region have been hindered in any way by the regional administration?

In your opinion, is the regional administration doing enough to promote the development of RECs in your area/your REC?

In your opinion, are the administrative tasks necessary to set up a REC clear and do they not slow down the process?