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How to achieve procedurally just multistakeholder collaboration in food system transformation governance: The case of the Agroecology Coalition

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Author's declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS submitted by:

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Current food systems are unsustainable in many ways, they have huge ecological impacts and are characterized by far-reaching social inequalities. The process of adapting and transforming these systems thus needs to pay attention to justice considerations, particularly in the form of procedural justice which describes equal participation opportunities for affected actors in fair and inclusive decision-making processes. The UN Food System Summit is an important multistakeholder initiative that drives food system transformation on the global level. However, previous research has pointed out controversies around its governance, structures and approaches. In this context, the Coalitions of Actions, part of the follow-up of the Summit, have been neglected in research so far. This thesis applies a case study approach to the Agroecology Coalition to uncover to what extent procedural justice aspects are considered and which elements and processes are conducive to it. Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, the perceptions of different members are captured. The findings highlight the importance of guiding principles to identify relevant actors, and of targeted efforts to ensure equal representation of these actors. Furthermore, the findings reveal that creating synergies, fostering visibility for less resource-rich organizations and having inclusive composition formula for leadership bodies help to balance disparities in power and influence. The research also discusses how limited capacities can hinder information sharing and the crucial role an administrative entity plays in this. The study emphasizes the crucial role of adequate and specific measures that ensure procedural justice in order to enable just transformation processes.

Keywords: Food system transformation, multistakeholder initiative, global governance, UNFSS, Agroecology coalition, procedural justice

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFS	World Committee on Food Security
CSIPM	Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition
IPBES-Food	International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems
MSI	Multistakeholder Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNFSS	United Nations Food System Summit, also referred to as The Summit
WG	Working Group

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Sustainable food systems have been identified to be key to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to play a central role in their implementation, the 2030 Agenda (FAO 2016). There has been a rising consensus in academia and policy-making that a holistic food system approach is needed to address the many shortcomings our current food systems are characterized by (HLPE 2017). Food systems are not only responsible for 21-37% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Mbow et al. 2019, 439) and one of the main contributors to terrestrial biodiversity loss (UNCCD 2022), but are also characterized by social inequalities, from access to healthy and nutritious food to production capacities and finances, to access and participation in globalized markets and trade (HLPE 2023). These inequalities are accentuated by large power asymmetries between a few powerful companies monopolizing different points along the supply chain (IPBES-Food 2017) and the huge share of small-scale food producers and consumers on both sides, a situation which can be described vividly as an hourglass (Vorley 2003 in Clapp, Noyes and Grant 2021).

One of the prominent narratives in the literature is that for food systems to become more sustainable, current social inequalities need to be addressed (Béné et al. 2019). To achieve this, the process of transforming the systems needs to consider justice-related aspects, otherwise there is a risk that existing injustices are reproduced or exacerbated (Zurek, Hebinck and Selomane 2021). Furthermore, many distributional issues and inequities in food systems are rooted in participatory inequalities of marginalized groups in food governance (Loo 2014). This thesis is thus interested in the consideration of participatory and procedural justice in the context of food system transformation governance. Procedural justice can be defined as the equal

opportunity for all people affected by an issue to participate in fair and inclusive decision-making processes concerning this issue (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki 2022).

An important space where decisions on the future of our food systems were made was the UN Food System Summit (UNFSS)[1], the newest of the high-level food summits convened by the UN Secretary-General in 2021 to address the issue of food system transformation (United Nations n.d.a). The Summit, held completely virtually, was preceded by a two-year preparatory process consisting of a pre-summit and stakeholder dialogues and was followed by a stocktaking moment, UNFSS+2, in autumn 2023 (von Braun 2023; UN Food System Coordination Hub n.d.). The follow-up structure of the Summit further consists of the implementation of the developed national pathways for countries and the establishment of Coalitions of Actions which should further drive the work on thematic areas of food systems (von Braun 2023; UNFSS Coordination Hub 2022).

1.2 Research problem

The goal of the UNFSS was to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders and solutions to "launch bold actions to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs" and "transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food" (United Nations n.d.a). The Summit was intended to be a "People's Summit", a summit for everyone that brought together key players from every sector and promoted inclusivity by following a multistakeholder approach (United Nations n.d.b). However, the newest report of the IPBES-Food (2023) has shown that these multistakeholder initiatives also hold inherent risks of providing an arena for the most powerful actors, as for instance agri-food businesses, while neglecting other voices. While the potential of multistakeholder initiatives to enable knowledge exchange and promote a more flexible and

[1] Later also referred as "the Summit".

adaptable way of governance exists, research has also shown that they can fail in terms of inclusivity or equal participation of actors (refer to section 2.2).

In the case of the UNFSS, parts of civil society and indigenous peoples criticized the Summit for its corporate domination along with its lack of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability safeguards (CSIPM 2021). Previous research on the UNFSS has shown the controversies that existed around the legitimacy and recruitment of participants to the Summit, the role and level of inclusivity of science, power asymmetries and lacking accountability measures (refer to literature review section 2.3). Meanwhile, there is a lack of research on the follow-up initiatives of the Summit and in particular on the Coalitions of Actions that are considered to be impactful in further driving and governing food system transformation (Liaison Group CSIPM 2022; Diaz-Bonilla et al. 2022). Especially in the light of the discrepancies found around how the Summit aspired to be and how it was implemented, the question arises to what extent procedural justice is considered in the Coalitions of Actions and what processes and elements contribute to ensuring it. This thesis contributes to answering this question by applying a case study approach to the Agroecology Coalition[2] and uncovering its processes and structures. The combination of an analysis of publicly available documents of the Coalition and semi-structured interviews with different categories of members help to paint a holistic picture.

The Coalitions of Action, and the Agroecology Coalition as one of them, are rooted in the UNFSS, but are organized independently and are meant to set up their own governance structures and processes (UNFSS Coordination Hub 2022). The Agroecology Coalition is a multistakeholder coalition, composed of a variety of actors that jointly work on driving food system transformation through the concept of agroecology (further detailed in the case study section 5.1.4). Given the rise of multistakeholder initiatives in global food governance (Aubert,

[2] Later also referred to as "the Coalition".

Brun, and Treyer 2016), the question of how procedurally just multistakeholder collaboration in the context of food system transition can be realized is of high pertinence and actuality, and the findings from the Coalition can provide valuable insights beyond its scope.

1.3 Research aims and questions

This research is guided by the following two questions:

RQ1: To what extent are procedural justice aspects considered in the Agroecology Coalition according to its members?

RQ2: Which elements and processes are conducive to procedural justice in the Agroecology Coalition?

In answering these questions, the research pursues two aims: First, produce descriptive findings of the current situation regarding procedural justice in the Agroecology Coalition. This is done by relying on a qualitative research approach that captures the perceptions of the people involved, uncovering how the aspects of procedural justice are considered in practice. The second aim is to contribute to transformative knowledge by revealing what can contribute to procedural justice and thereby enable a *just* food system transformation. The second aim builds analytically on the first. It is essential to first understand how procedural justice aspects are considered in practice to be able to understand the elements and processes which are conducive to it.

1.4 Thesis outline

The structure of this thesis is the following: After the introduction, providing the background leading to the research questions and aims, chapter 2 consists of a review of the existing literature on the three topics of (1) the global food governance, (2) multistakeholder initiatives

and (3) the UN Food System Summit. This is followed by chapter 3 which outlines the theoretical framework guiding this thesis and chapter 4 that informs about the methods used. Chapter 5 is divided into two main parts, the first one presents the case study and situates it in the broader umbrella of the UNFSS. The second part contains the results of the thematic analysis, sorted by themes. In chapter 6, these results are discussed in the light of the analytical framework and the existing literature. The thesis ends with chapter 7 which summarizes the findings and their relevance, provides an outlook on further research and presents the lessons learned from the case study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is structured in three parts. In the first part, the aspects and developments of the global food governance that are relevant to this research are explored. In the second part, the focus is on one particular development, namely the proliferation of multistakeholder initiatives and their definition and performance. The biggest section of the literature review is devoted to the UNFSS and the existing research on it, which leads to the specific research problem this thesis addresses.

2.1 Global food governance

This section provides contextualization of the UNFSS in the history of food summits organized by the UN, many of them not only impactful with responses to crises but also in restructuring the food governance scene. The UNFSS was the first of the food summits with a multistakeholder instead of a multilateral design (von Braun 2023), further pushing the trend towards multistakeholder food governance which coincides with the increase of private sector involvement and power in food governance (Valente 2018). The Summit also presented a paradigm shift by putting the focus away from narrowly defined sectoral issues to a holistic approach to food *systems,* including environmental sustainability (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021; von Braun 2023).

2.1.1 The food system approach

Global food governance has over the past 80 years been characterized by a total of seven food summits, the last one being the UN Food System Summit in 2021. Their distinct emergence contexts have led the summits to prioritize different areas of focus: The newest summit, the UNFSS, introduced a significant shift with a new focus on food *systems,* paying stronger

attention to environmental considerations and taking a broader approach, anchored in the SDGs, than previous summits (von Braun 2023). The summit was anchored specifically in SDG2 with the aim to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" (UNDP 2024, n.p.). The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) report 8 defines a food system as encompassing "all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes" (HLPE 2014, 29). In academia and the policy sphere likewise, the benefits of a food system approach, as an integrated approach across sectors that takes into account the various interlinkages, challenges, and feedback from different sub-systems, have been stressed over the past decades (FAO 2018; Janin, Fofiri Nzossié, and Racaud 2023). Common to the food system approach is its problem-focused nature, the overarching message being that current food systems are failing us, and that change is needed (Béné et al. 2019). The food system approach aims to address the complex and interrelated challenges in food systems from a systemic, multilevel and multistakeholder angle (UNEP, FAO and UNDP 2023). However, while there is agreement that a transformation of the current food systems is needed, positions on the problems to be solved, the solutions and the ways forward differ widely (Béné et al. 2019). Anderson and Rivera-Ferre (2021) separate these into two main narratives, regenerative food systems and extractive food systems. Put simply, extractive systems value modernization, technology and industrial agriculture to increase agricultural productivity. In addition to food production, regenerative systems emphasize ecological components such as biodiversity, and social components such as community well-being and human dignity (Anderson and Rivera-Ferre 2021).

2.1.2 Reconstruction of global food governance

The UNFSS did not only introduce the concept of food systems to the global scene, it also further implemented an organizational change through the multistakeholder approach it adopted. Many of the food summits played an important role not only in mobilizing action against various food crises but also in inducing organization and institutional change in the global governance structure, for instance, the World Food Conference in 1974 that led to the establishment of the World Committee on Food Security (CFS) (von Braun 2023). Originally, the CFS was established as a standing committee of FAO with the mandate to monitor the outcomes of the 1974 conference, but its mandate shifted over the years, most significantly in 2009. At this time, the reform of the CFS, pushed for by social movements, was approved by member states (Margulis 2012; Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). This reform transformed the committee into the "foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all", based on the concept that states keep the ultimate decision-making power, but civil society and the private sector can actively participate and shape decisions (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021, 183). Since this reform, which for instance provided a self-organized space for civil society organizations, the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM), the voices of the most affected by food insecurity were heard in policy-making processes and concepts such as agroecology, and a rights-based approach found their way into the global agenda. The movements regrouped under the CSIPM are from 11 constituencies, including among others peasants, small-scale food producers, food-chain workers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and indigenous peoples (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021).

However, simultaneously to the increased participation of civil society and social movements, private sector actors also became more prominently involved in global food governance. While the private sector to some extent was involved from the early 70s on, their influence grew over

the years, coinciding with the severe budget cuts the UN system was confronted with. As a result of the withdrawal or diminishment of the contributions of their traditionally important donors such as the United Kingdom or the United States, many UN organizations ended up in the position to start accepting private funding (Valente 2018). When the dynamic of market liberalization and deregulation further strengthened the role of transnational corporations in food systems, the power of these actors in global food governance also increased significantly (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021; Clapp and Fuchs 2009). In 2000, the Global Compact between the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF) set the stage for public-private partnerships (PPPs), a tool to promote voluntary business sector engagement to pursue UN principles in various sectors, including the environment (Sethi and Schepers 2011). PPPs are multistakeholder initiatives that focus on the cooperation between governmental (public) and private actors.

Since the early 2000s, transnational corporations have succeeded in occupying a central seat in decision-making and policy development about food systems, as displayed in the many well-known PPPs in the agri-food sector (e.g. the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) or the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Movement) (IPBES-Food 2023). In 2019, the UN signed a strategic partnership agreement with the WEF, aiming at accelerating the implementation of the SDGs by a deepened institutional collaboration (Manahan and Kumar 2021). This agreement was also the foundation for the emergence of the UNFSS, the first of the food summits that adopted a multistakeholder approach (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). Multilateralism refers to the "governance of the many in which states are the main decision-makers and implementors" (Manahan and Kumar 2021, 3), but where other actors can participate and make contributions. An example of such fora would be the CFS (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys

2021)[3]. Multistakeholder governance on the other hand encompasses a variety of actors beyond governmental entities, such as the private sector, academia and civil society as decision-makers. As a result, the identification of key actors in these processes is more ambiguous (Gleckman 2016).

It can be noted that global food governance in recent years has been characterized on the one hand by the development of multi-stakeholder initiatives with the particularly active participation of the private sector, and on the other hand by inclusive multilateral spaces such as the CFS in which civil society and social movements have been able to actively participate.

2.2 Multistakeholder initiatives

The development of global food governance shows how private sector involvement and the proliferation of multistakeholder initiatives in the food sector have increased over the past 20 to 30 years (Aubert, Brun, and Treyer 2016). Along with this came an increasing interest of researchers and practitioners in the actual performance of these multistakeholder processes and how they can or need to be optimized, a topic that is addressed in section 2.2.2.

2.2.1 Definition

The idea of multi-stakeholder *partnerships* originated in the corporate world and has become an important concept within the global governance of the SDGs first at the Rio Conference 1992 that called for a "Global Partnership for Sustainable Development", a call strengthened at the Rio +10 conference in Johannesburg in 2002 (Aubert, Brun, and Treyer 2016; Pattberg and Widerberg 2016). A wide variety of designations exist, ranging from multistakeholder platforms to initiatives, processes or collaborations – a phenomenon that is also referred to by

[3] These definitions can be interpreted in slightly diverging ways, for some researcher the CFS might be considered as a multistakeholder process.

more critical voices as "multistakeholderism" (Manahan and Kumar 2021). The mentioned terms often describe similar structures, and most of them can be classified as form of multistakeholder governance. These structures operate according to a set of formal and informal rules, norms and enforcement that underpin their functioning, actions and objectives (Manahan and Kumar 2021). While I acknowledge the existence of the variety of designations listed above, for this thesis I only use the term multistakeholder initiative (MSI) to prevent confusion.

Since it is hard to offer a clear categorization or definition of MSIs, building upon previous research, Thorpe et al. (2022, 169) defined them as “governance arrangements that work with actor interests across public, private and community boundaries to solve complex and systemic problems which participants believe cannot be solved by acting alone”. These arrangements can be more or less institutionalized, but they are considered to have a common set of features or principles: They are voluntary instruments, based on the principle of willingness to participate as actors or organizations from a variety of spheres such as government, private sector, civil society, international organization and academia (Aubert, Brun, and Treyer 2016). Multistakeholder initiatives “design and follow agreed processes to effectively reach a shared purpose” (Biekart and Fowler 2018, 1695) but in many cases rules and targets are only vaguely formulated and lack clarity (Aubert, Brun, and Treyer 2016). In food and nutrition, most of the MSIs have the aim to collectively work towards a more sustainable agri-food sector (Thorpe et al. 2022).

2.2.2 Evaluation

In light of the proliferation of MSIs, evaluating the effectiveness of such initiatives to allow for improvement in their design becomes important. However, as Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) stated, there is only limited evidence for the positive performance potential of multistakeholder initiatives. Supporting this, different authors concluded that empirical findings are lacking on

the extent to which these initiatives really act as efficient changemakers for sustainability and can contribute towards transformational change (Thorpe et al. 2022). Trying to fill this gap, Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) established nine conditions deemed to improve the performance of MSIs in the three areas of actors, processes and contexts. In the specific context of food systems, international organizations such as UNEP, FAO and UNDP have focused their attention on multistakeholder initiatives and developed a guide on how to enhance them (UNEP, FAO and UNDP 2023). The guide provides resources and tools to achieve the goal of broad, inclusive and effective collaboration based on a good understanding of the food system, guided by a roadmap and ensuring the sustainability of the collaboration. It has also been shown that MSIs are likely to fail when not having an agreed framework (Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021).

As Pinkse and Kolk (2012) argued, multistakeholder initiatives can fill a participation gap by mobilizing all parties affected and giving them a say, a resource gap by mobilizing resources (e.g. finances, network, knowledge) that different actors are missing, and a regulatory gap by replacing previous governance structures in achieving public objectives. There is the claim that conventional governance arrangements have failed to achieve the aspired ambitions in food systems and that MSIs have the potential to address these shortcomings by mobilizing various actors and working more effectively between sectors and scales (Herens, Pittore, and Oosterveer 2022). Other benefits identified are that MSIs can nurture the exchange of knowledge on various dimensions of complex agricultural issues by fostering a collaborative learning process to test the feasibility of solutions from different perspectives. In addition, the actors involved become aware not only of their different needs and objectives, but also of their interdependencies, which require joint action (Hermans et al. 2017). From a political science perspective, multistakeholder initiatives, with the UN agencies as orchestrators, can be seen as

helping to solve complex problems by providing greater flexibility and adaptability while allowing for the inclusion and participation of a wider variety of actors (Bloodgood 2022).

While proponents argued that MSI can enhance deliberative democratic decision-making, others have drawn attention to the flaws exposed with multistakeholder initiatives in relation to deliberative democracy: failure to include all groups and perspectives on the issue at stake, lacking accountability and reflexivity in decision-making structures, and missing out on accounting for power asymmetries in participation (Alves Zanella et al. 2018). Gleckman (2016) puts forward that actors in MSIs are not equal, they have asymmetric capacities and resources for their participation which means that ways must be found to balance power and resource asymmetries. For instance, due to the divergence in resource endowment of the participating actors and the lack of clear rules that structure the functioning of the initiatives, civil society organizations have reported difficulties in voicing their positions in these arrangements (Aubert, Brun and Treyer 2016). Meanwhile, a review of 27 MSIs active in global food governance revealed that the corporate sector occupies many leadership positions (Manahan and Kumar 2021). Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) concluded that multistakeholder initiatives fail to increase the inclusion and participation of previously marginalized groups in global governance. Activist researchers found that in several cases the actors invited and classified as representatives of affected communities were in fact far removed from their concerns, as they were large international NGOs or other organizations funded by major philanthropies (Manahan and Kumar 2021). Other research argued that the legitimacy of an MSI is not determined by the sheer number of actors it includes but whether it includes the "relevant ones" (Mena and Palazzo 2012, 539).

In summary, MSIs have the potential to attract funding, enable knowledge exchange, and promote a more flexible and adaptable way of governance and the inclusion of stakeholders. However, research also shows that some of these initiatives are not producing positive results

in terms of inclusivity and equal participation. This raises questions, in particular since the involvement and participation of a large number of actors is an issue that is often claimed to be better in MSIs compared to multilateral systems. Thus, further research on the functioning of multistakeholder initiatives is needed in order to find out how they can assure the aspired values of equal and inclusive governance.

2.3 The UN Food System Summit

This section reviews findings regarding the legitimacy and recruitment of participants to the UNFSS (2.3.1), the role and level of inclusivity of science (2.3.2), the issue of power dynamics (2.3.4) and the outcomes and effectiveness (2.3.4) of the Summit. Most of the research on the UNFSS produced results that outline different shortcomings with regard to the Summit's governance structure and decision-making processes, some of it found by researchers engaged and in dialogue with the CSIPM (e.g. Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021). Many of the findings that transmit the positive performance and successes of the Summit are related to data produced by the Summit's Secretariat and research done by people affiliated with the UNFSS, such as Joachim von Braun who was the head of the scientific group, or Agnes Kalibata, the UN Secretary's General Special Envoy to the Summit. While I do not intend to question the scientific validity of the findings produced by each of the groups, I believe that this contextualization helps to better understand the controversies around the Summit presented in this section.

2.3.1 Participation

One of the controversies around the Summit was the question of how inclusive it was, and which actors were represented. The UNFSS Secretariat stated on its website that the Summit gathered key players from science, business, policy, healthcare and academia but also farmers, indigenous peoples, youth organizations, consumer groups and environmental activists (United

Nations, n.d.a). Furthermore, Kalibata (2022) reviewed that the Summit successfully mobilized thousands of people who engaged in the UNFSS platforms for instance through the over 1000 multistakeholder dialogues, and that also often forgotten actors were included. However, it has to be noted that the CSIPM, a compendium of 500 organizations with over 380 million members from eleven constituencies, many of them marginalized and highly affected by food security, decided to boycott the Summit (CSIPM 2021). Previously, the CSIPM had raised its concerns about the disproportional influence of corporate actors and the UN-WEF partnership in an open letter to the Secretary-General (CSIPM 2020). Furthermore, well-known scientific bodies such as the IPES-Food withdrew their participation (Anderl and Hissen 2021). Meanwhile, according to Kalibata (2022), only a small section of civil society did not participate at all or not sufficiently in the Summit – and this despite many attempts from the organizers to include them. Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann (2022) draw a nuanced picture of the participation process, highlighting that the Summit succeeded in mobilizing local knowledge and attracting a variety of participants from different parts of the world and with various backgrounds, but missed out on allowing the inputs of participants to actually influence the decisions and outcomes.

Other research suggested a that there was a lack of transparency in participant recruitment, particularly also for leading positions, and a perceived bypassing of established bodies such as the HLPE or the CFS (Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021). As Anderl and Hissen (2021) identified, the Summits' bypassing of existing institutional bodies and the inducement of a feeling of betrayal at the side of the activists of the food sovereignty movement led to the loss of institutional trust that had been built up in previous decades for FAO and the UN food governance as a whole. By examining the UNFSS from a procedural justice perspective, it was shown that information disclosure and institutional representation were rated negatively, especially by participants in favor of a regenerative transition pathway narrative, calling out

opaque decision-making and the ignorance of existing UN mechanisms (Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann 2022).

Another discussion within the UNFSS, common to multistakeholder initiatives, was the question about who the relevant actors are. The philosophy behind the Summit was to be a summit for everyone, everywhere, with the reasoning that we are all part of the food system, and it is thus needed that all of us take action to help the transformation (United Nations n.d.a). While the Summit clearly tried to establish legitimacy through the participation of a wide variety of stakeholders, questions remained about the relevance of these stakeholders (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). Two principles that can guide the identification of legitimate stakeholders are the "all-affected principle" which guided the recruitment for the UNFSS, and the "most-affected principle" advocated for by the CSIPM and since 2009 guiding principle for participation in the CFS (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). The rationale behind the UNFSS was to allow any organization or individual to participate if they wished to do so, following the idea that "all who are affected by a decision should have a right to participate in making it" (Dahl 1970 in Lagerspetz 2015, 6). However, some argued that this principle fails to address power imbalances between participating actors (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021), and it should be applied in a way to distinguish between the different levels of interest actors have instead of assuming equal affection (Lagerspetz 2015).

The UNFSS had established principles of engagement for the participating stakeholders to create an inclusive event, valuing various perspectives and building trust between different actors . On top of that, it regulated the participation of individual corporations by only allowing them to be represented through business associations (UNFSS 2021). To what extent these guidelines were respected has however been questioned by Clapp, Noyes and Grant (2021) who found that representatives of individual corporations were still present in many events leadings up to the Summit which were considered key in setting the agenda and direction of the Summit.

2.3.2 Science at the Summit

The UNFSS was the first food summit hosted by the UN which was guided by advice from an independent scientific body, established for this reason (von Braun 2023). The scientific group had a significant mandate, it was meant to set up a common definition of food systems, frame the aspired transformation through recommended outcomes, and inform the five Action Tracks (von Braun 2023). Furthermore, the Summit aimed to "bring in diverse perspectives, including indigenous knowledge, cultural insights and science-based evidence" (United Nations n.d.b). However, the composition of the scientific group represented a limited variety of backgrounds and scientific expertise: It was composed of 20 natural scientists and 9 economists, without neither other disciplines being represented (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021) nor representatives of indigenous knowledge included (Nisbett et al. 2021). Furthermore, as a document analysis revealed, many of its members were linked to philanthropies and the private sector (Montenegro de Wit and Iles 2021).

The scientific group was in many ways impactful: First, as this was the first food *system* summit, the setting opened doors for new contestation about who can claim epistemic authority over the particular global governance field of food *systems* (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). Second, the scientific group aimed to institutionalize its authority by establishing a science-policy interface (Fears and Canales 2021). Controversial was not only the question of whether such an additional advisory body was needed but also to what extent it tried to delegitimize the HLPE, the established science-policy interface attached to the CFS and considered to be more inclusive of other knowledge (systems) (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). Science was also used at the UNFSS to construct the legitimacy of the Summit and the multistakeholderism it is based on (Montenegro de Wit and Iles 2021). Montenegro de Wit and Illes (2021) argued that the scientific group claimed its legitimacy around its presumable inclusivity of marginalized communities disguising the 4th industrial revolution agenda it was pushing for, with

biotechnology, digital technology and innovation at its core. Supporting this, Spires et al. (2023) stated that the UNFSS failed to include the lived experiences of people for whom he tried to deliver as a "People's Summit" into the evidence-gathering which was the source for the actions and recommendations it promoted.

2.3.3 Power dynamics

The different forms of power in food system governance and multistakeholder settings have also been studied for the case of the UNSS. Building on the concept of discursive power as one form of corporate power (Clapp and Fuchs 2009), Horton (2024) found that in Australia's National Food System Summit Dialogues discursive power was used to put forward two principles for food utopias: Technologically-mediated sustainability and multistakeholder participation respectively, which both emphasize the role of the corporate sector in the transformation and advocate for keeping the status quo rather than structurally transforming food systems. Others found that the Summit was strategically silent with regard to the problem of corporate power and thus ignored the large power asymmetries between small-scale food producers and agri-businesses, inherent in the current food systems and being responsible for many shortcomings of the system (Clapp, Noyes, and Grant 2021). As a result, for the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, the Summit promoted the paradigm of the need for new technologies to enhance productivity, while missing to touch upon more structural issues, taking a human-rights-based approach or putting agroecology at the center (Fakhri 2021).

2.3.4 Outcomes and effectiveness

Research was also conducted on the operation and effectiveness of the different initiatives of the Summit. While for now only a preliminary assessment of the Summit was possible, some of the positive outcomes stated by von Braun (2023) are the strong political, social and scientific engagement it fueled, the action agenda it set up and the global initiatives and coalitions on

different topics that emerged out of it. By evaluating two of the levers of change, Diaz-Bonilla et al. (2022) concluded that they were effective tools in framing key principles and concrete directions for actions, while the operationalization of these directions remains more uncertain. The 31 Coalitions of Actions that emerged from the Summit must therefore have solid institutional backing, establish inclusive and effective governance structures, build financing structures and work towards consolidation with coalitions working on similar issues (Diaz-Bonilla et al. 2022). With regard to the coalitions, the CISPM criticized their opaque setup structure and the lack of meaningful participation by small-scale food producers, social movements and member states (Liaison Group CSIPM 2022, 6). They called out the fact that the ones that have the money and the organizational capacity can establish sizeable coalitions to roll out their solutions for food system transformation, while other solutions that rely on asking for resources from the UN or member states are disadvantaged (IPBES-Food 2021).

Another discussed issue in the context of the Summit was accountability and how it can be ensured. While governments are present as stakeholders in the Coalitions of Actions, these coalitions have not been collectively agreed upon or mandated by states and thus are also not accountable to the public (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). According to Diaz-Bonilla et al. (2022), one of the main shortcomings of the follow-up of the Summit is the lack of accountability mechanisms, for national pathways and coalitions likewise. Covic et al. (2021) also articulated the importance of putting in place strong accountability mechanisms following the Summit to clearly define the responsibilities for the variety of stakeholders involved and track the fulfillment of their commitment with the help of set targets and defined indicators for monitoring. While this vision of accountability follows an output-based approach, a transparent process of decision-making and the duty to share information can also be seen as a way of how accountability could be conceptualized in a setting beyond the nation-state under international law accountability to its citizens (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021).

2.3.5 Research gap

The literature review has shown that a decent amount of research has studied the processes, structures and outcomes of the UNFSS. The different studies focused on some of the key dimensions of governance, such as participation, transparency, power relations or accountability. The findings of the existing research point towards the fact that there are discrepancies between how the Summit was outlined and aspired to be, i.e. a "People's Summit", and how its actual implementation was. The governance structure of the Summit was meant to be evidence-based, transparent, accessible and built on accountability (United Nations n.d.b). While some positive outcomes of the Summit were identified (e.g von Braun 2023 and Kalibata 2022), a variety of research has shown that the Summit raised questions about the legitimacy and recruitment of its participants, inclusivity, the issue of power dynamics, and its outcomes and effectiveness (refer to literature review section 2.3). These issues largely coincided with the shortcomings of multistakeholder governance arrangements found by Alves Zanella et al. (2018) or Pattberg and Widerberg (2016) which included a lack of inclusivity, accountability, reflexivity and addressing power asymmetries. The Summit has also been studied from a procedural justice perspective which resulted in critical findings and exposed how important procedural justice aspects such as institutional representation and information disclosure were neglected (Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann 2022).

While these controversial findings on the UNFSS exist, the discussions on the follow-up of the Summit have so far been limited to recommendations on what would be needed, for instance strong accountability mechanisms (e.g. Covic et al. 2021). There is a lack of scientific research about the follow-up initiatives' actual performance and functioning. In particular the Coalitions of Actions, that are considered to have the potential to be influential in further shaping food system transformation (Liaison Group CSIPM 2022; Diaz-Bonilla et al. 2022), have not been studied with regard to their governance structure and processes. Thus, the question of to what

extent procedural justice aspects are considered in the Coalitions of Action, also compared to the Summit and the findings by Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann (2022), arises.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis draws on the theories of justice in sustainability transitions and food justice, with a focus on procedural justice. In the first section, insights are provided into justice and its dimensions in sustainability transitions. Afterwards, the relevance of justice and specifically procedural justice in the context of food system transformation is lined out. This is followed by a chapter defining procedural justice and the elements it entails and ends with the presentation of the analytical framework that is used to operationalize procedural justice in the context of the Coalition.

3.1 Justice in sustainability transitions

When it comes to food systems and how they can be transformed to become more sustainable, resilient to climate change, and socially just, the use of environmental and social justice concepts in a context of transition is of interest. As Williams and Doyon (2019) argue, no sustainable future is possible without considering justice as an integral part of the process of getting there. This is what *just* transition is about, it broadly refers to "achieving a socially just sustainability transition leaving no one behind as societies move towards lower-carbon production and consumption practices" (Huttunen, Turunen, and Kaljonen 2022, 1). Further important elements are the global nature of the transition and its connectedness to diverging realities of communities and individuals on multiple scales (McCauley and Heffron 2018). In the context of the 2030 agenda, the concept of *transformation* is often used, "referring to the need for the change to be intentional and profound, based on factual understandings and societal agreements and aimed at achieving outcomes at scale" (UNEP, FAO and UNDP 2023, VI). Because transformation is also the term used by the UNFSS sphere and my interviewees, I

mostly use the term food system transformation in this thesis. An exception is this chapter where I refer to just transition theory, but the same process of change is meant.

Justice considerations in the context of transition to fossil-free energy systems have so far attracted the greatest amount of interest (Kaljonen et al. 2021). It is argued that if justice and equity considerations are left aside, the transition process can result in aggravated poverty, gender bias, non-participation, and failure to acknowledge the needs of marginalized groups (Jenkins, Sovacool, and McCauley 2018). Justice in sustainability transition is often conceptualized through the three dimensions of distributive, procedural and recognitive justice (e.g. Williams and Doyon 2019; Jenkins, Sovacool, and McCauley 2018, Kaljonen et al. 2021). This follows the tripartite definition of justice proposed by Schlosberg (2004) which includes the three interlinked and overlapping concepts of equity in distribution, recognition of diversity of particular groups of people and their experiences, and participation in political processes. An example of how this tripartite conceptualization in the context of food system initiatives might look is illustrated in Figure 1. All three dimensions are interconnected and influence each other; for instance, it is often the same groups of people who experience distributive injustices or are most affected by decisions that have the least power in decision-making (de Bruin et al. 2023).

Distributive justice is touching on the question of the "just" attribution of goods, burdens, services, and non-material aspects of life (Miller 2013 in de Bruin et al. 2023, 347). Recognition justice is concerned with who is considered an object of justice, as many redistribution issues are founded in matters of misrecognition where there is a failure to attribute equal respect and rights to certain groups (Fraser 1997). Procedural justice focuses on the way of how decisions are made, for instance how societal structures, institutional rules and contexts determine the distribution of resources. It is concerned with the fairness of decision-making power and processes and sheds light on the process and contexts in which the patterns of distribution are made or sustained (Young 1990).

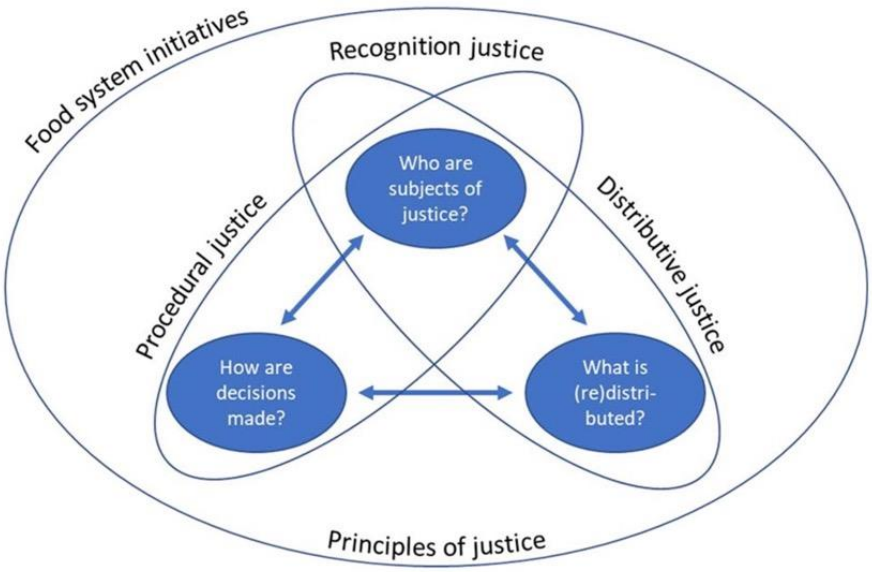

Figure 1: Justice framework for food system initiatives. Source : de Bruin et al. 2023, 349. *https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/*

3.2 Food justice

While food system transition is increasingly prevalent in sustainability transition research, accounting for justice considerations happens only to a limited extent (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki 2022). For example, a review of eleven reports identifying pathways of change for food systems found that many of these pathways leave justice and equity considerations aside (Zurek, Hebinck, and Selomane 2021). However, there are several reasons to explore the transition of food systems as a *just* transition issue. First, agriculture is responsible for 21-37% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Mbow et al. 2019, 439), is the main contributor to terrestrial biodiversity loss, and drives land degradation and deforestation (UNCCD 2022) – it is thus essential to find ways how to nourish the world in a more sustainable and less carbon-intensive way. Second, food systems are characterized by persistent inequalities and dynamics of exclusion (Hebinck et al. 2021) and thus contain a high risk that the processes inducing transition and change will reproduce or exacerbate existing social injustices (Zurek, Hebinck and Selomane 2021). Inequalities are prevalent across the whole food system, from access to

healthy and nutritious food to production capacities and finances, to access and participation in globalized markets and trade. Major inequality dimensions identified are gender, education, economic and social status, location or ethnicity – in many cases occurring in an intersectional form (HLPE 2023). These inherent inequalities in current food systems can also be referred to under the term *food injustice* which is "the maldistribution of food, poor access to a good diet, inequities in the labor process and unfair returns for key suppliers along the food chain" (Heasman and Lang 2004, 8). While many distributional injustices are reflected in this definition, it fails to include participatory concerns (Loo 2014). The failure to address participatory issues is also reflected in the fact that few papers discuss procedural justice aspects in food system initiatives (de Bruin et al. 2023). However, as Loo (2014) demonstrates in her work, many distributional issues and inequalities in food systems are rooted in participatory inequalities of marginalized groups in food governance. More generally, corporate concentration in the agri-food sector can enable a few dominant and extremely powerful firms to shape policies and governance in a manner that serves their interests (Clapp, Noyes, and Grant 2021), leaving aside the voices of less powerful actors. As IPBES-Food (2023) concludes in their report, especially in food systems, with their deeply rooted inequalities and power asymmetries, democratic governance and inclusive participation structures focusing on the inclusion of the most affected actors are crucial for building just and sustainable food systems. Thus, for the promotion and assurance of food justice, procedural and participatory justice aspects need to be considered (Loo 2014). Building upon this stream of thought, the focus of this thesis is on participatory issues reflected as procedural justice in food system transformation.

3.3 Procedural justice

Procedural justice can be defined as the equal opportunity for all people affected by an issue to participate in fair and inclusive decision-making processes concerning this issue. In the *just*

transition and food justice literature, attention is also given to the obstacles to *de facto* participatory equality (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki 2022). *De jure* participatory equality is ensured when according to the law or rules, all actors have the same right to participate. Nonetheless, because of various obstacles such as power asymmetries or capabilities disparities, this might not result in a *de facto* equality, participatory equality in practice (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki 2022).

The question of how to address these power imbalances remains to a large extent unstudied (Williams and Doyon 2019). Additionally, decision-making is not only about who should be in the position to make decisions but also about which rules and procedures determine the decision-making process. Research on procedural justice has also linked it to democratic, deliberative and participatory decision-making processes (Young 1990). The guiding European convention for procedural justice in the environmental field is the Aarhus Convention which is based on three pillars of access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice (Stec, Casey-Lefkowitz, and Jendrośka 2000, 6).

3.3.1 Procedural justice dimensions

Procedural justice can be operationalized by multiple dimensions which serve as criteria to judge whether a decision-making process is fair (Shrader-Frechette 2002). Important to note here is that different actors' evaluation of these criteria and whether a process is considered "just" can diverge. On the one hand, their experiences in the process are individual and on the other hand, their normative expectations about what "fairness" means might differ (Simcock 2016).

The definition of the dimensions and indicators of procedural justice is an integral part of the construction of an analytical framework that can be used to examine the case study. The analytical framework for this thesis is rooted in Simcock's (2016) framework for *just* transition

in the energy sector which proposes three dimensions of procedural justice: inclusion, influence and information. The following sub-sections will discuss these three dimensions.

3.3.1.1 Inclusion

The dimension of inclusion is about who can participate or has their voice represented in a decision-making process. This right of participation is often framed under the all-affected principle (Simcock 2016). However, there are reasons to focus on ensuring the inclusion of the most affected and vulnerable groups who are often excluded from decision-making (Kortetmäki 2016). In the context of food systems, de Bruin et al. (2023, 1) identified the following groups as important subjects of justice: "those with a particular role in the food system including producers and consumers, people who are marginalized, indigenous communities, those with experiences of negative consequences of the food system, future generations, and nonhumans". For social movements, the ones most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition are peasants, small-scale food producers, food-chain workers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and the urban poor, as well as women and youth (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021, 188). Furthermore, inclusivity is not only about the inclusion of different groups but also of different forms of knowledge, beyond technical science, that are relevant to make informed decisions (Davies 2006).

3.3.1.2 Influence

For procedural justice, there is a need not only to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders but also to enable them to influence the distribution of benefits and costs among those involved (Loo 2016). Thus, the influence dimension measures to what extent the participation of actors can result in shaping the outcomes of the decision-making process, according to the perception of the participants (Knudsen et al. 2015). To categorize the level of influence of a participant or a participating organization, I rely on the tripartite categorization by Simcock (2016, 469) into "listen as spectator", "consultative influence" and "direct authority":

- Listen as spectator: The participant or organization receives information but cannot influence the decision.
- Consultative influence: The participant or organization can give their opinion, but the decision is made by others.
- Direct authority: The participant or organization can formally take the decision individually or democratically together with others (e.g. with voting).

Related to this categorization is also whether certain perspectives (e.g. the ones of small-scale farmers) are represented in leading positions and functions.

The earlier mentioned *de facto* participatory equality can only be assured by a special focus on barriers to participation such as power asymmetries and capabilities differences (Williams and Doyon 2019). The question of to what extent power asymmetries are present, and how they are mitigated, are thus important factors of procedural justice (Williams and Doyon 2019). Power can be defined as "the ability of actors to mobilize resources to achieve a certain goal" (Avelino and Rotmans 2009, 550). Thus, to examine the presence of power asymmetries one needs to look at the resources and mobilization potentials of actors. As proposed by Avelino and Rotmans (2009, 551) resources can be categorized into human (human leverage as in members, personnel etc.), mental (e.g. information, ideas), monetary (e.g. funds, cash), artefactual (e.g. products, infrastructure), and natural resources (e.g. raw material, physical space). Each categorization of resources can become the object of power to varying degrees, depending on the context (Avelino and Rotmans 2009).

Based on the existing literature, another relevant question for procedural justice is whether participants have adequate capabilities to participate and if not, what tools or techniques are used to ensure the engagement of these participants with low capabilities (Williams and Doyon 2019). Capacity-building of the actors involved in the decision-making process and the

empowerment of marginalized actors to enable them to influence decisions and for instance hold other actors accountable, is an important factor in creating a level playing field (Barnaud and Van Paassen 2013). Silveira and Pritchard (2016) refer to the importance of having measures in place to enhance capabilities of involved actors through the provision of skills and training.

3.3.1.3 Information

The information dimension examines what kind of information is given to whom, at what stage and in what form (Knudsen et al. 2015). To allow for a *just* process, information should be shared in a timely manner in the process, contain sufficient information, and be objective (Knudsen et al. 2015). For active and meaningful participation in food system decision-making, actors need to have information about the impacts of food systems on humans and nature, the consequences of possible solutions that are decided on, and about the people who are involved (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki 2022). Food system actors have the right to be informed about the benefits and risks of decisions that will affect their food systems (Loo 2014). Given the context of food systems and the wide divergences regarding the problems to be solved and the solutions needed (Béné et al. 2019) diverse perspectives on food system transformation should be shared. Furthermore, transparency refers to accessible information on finances and the included experts and knowledge. This means knowing what the funding structure of an initiative is and how the selection of experts to join the decision-making process was (de Bruin et al. 2023). Another important kind of information, for instance lacking in the context of the UNFSS, consists of details about the decision-making processes, how and when decisions are made (Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann 2022).

3.3.2 Procedural justice framework

Building upon the framework by Simcock (2016), my analytical framework is hence structured around the three dimensions of inclusion, influence and information. By integrating the considerations of the existing literature discussed in the previous sections, my indicators for procedural justice in the transformation of food systems were developed. The resulting framework with its dimensions and indicators is summarized in Figure 2. Compared to Simcock's framework, three main amendments and additions were made: (1) Inclusion of criteria regarding power and capabilities disparities, (2) conceptualization of inclusivity not only in relation to participants, but also to different forms of knowledge, and (3) detailing of the types of information needed to ensure transparency (information on food systems, on the process and functioning, on financing and included experts etc.).

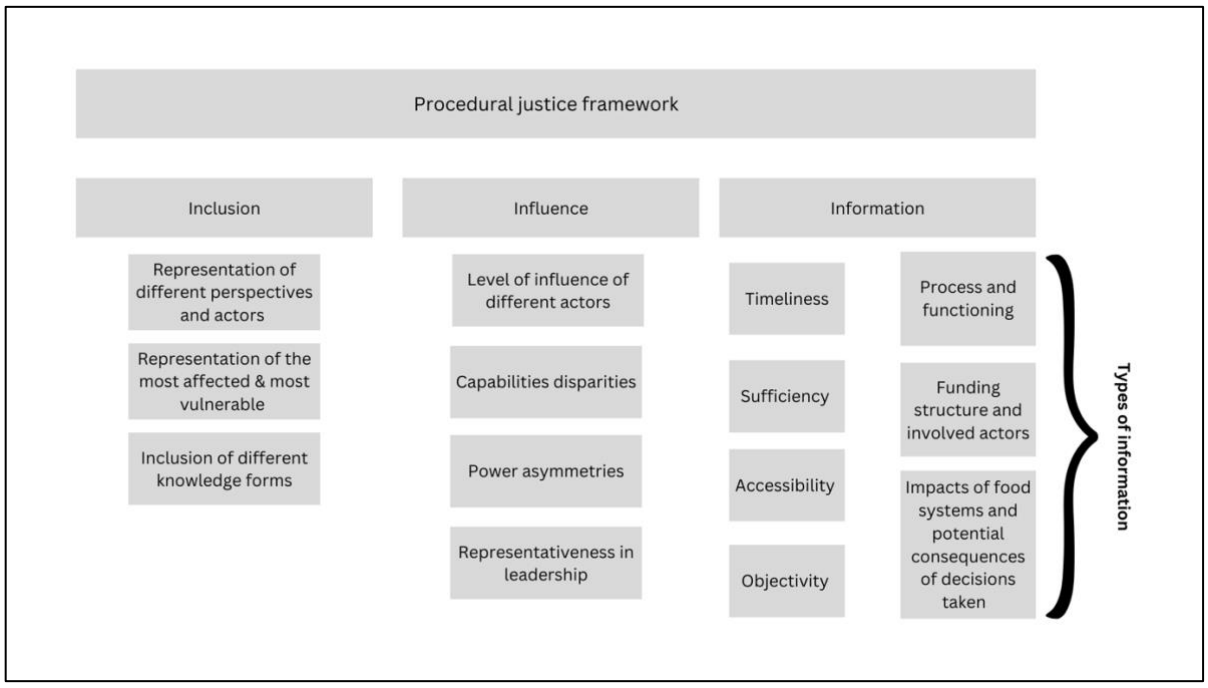

Figure 2: Framework for procedural justice in food system transformation. Source: Developed by the author, rooted in Simcock's framework (2016).

4. METHODS

4. 1 Research approach and design

As the focus of my research is on the meanings different participants attribute to a social issue, in this specific case their experiences of the governance and processes of the Coalition, a qualitative research approach is the best fit (Creswell and Creswell 2018). A case study design was employed, enabling a thorough analysis of the selected Coalition working on the theme of agroecology. The research is embedded in the constructivist worldview, which puts forward the relevance of individual meanings (Creswell and Creswell 2018). This was reflected in my research by relying on interviews to capture the subjective experiences and perspectives of a variety of actors. This subjectivity allows for interesting comparisons and provides a holistic picture of the processes and dynamics in the Coalition. The research approach also includes elements from the transformative worldview as the focus of procedural justice is on ensuring equal participation for all, specifically for marginalized groups (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

4.2 Data collection

Data collection can be separated into two main phases, illustrated in Table 1: The first phase included data collection through a literature review as well as preliminary desktop research on the structure and functioning of the UNFSS. Out of this emerged the selection of the case study and the analytical framework used for its evaluation. In the second phase, two types of data were collected, the first one refers to the lived experiences and perceptions of different members, and the second type traces the processes and structures of the Coalition. To gather the data, semi-structured interviews with members were conducted and complemented with a document analysis. In the following sections, the four different processes of data collection are further explained.

Table 1: Overview over research processes and outputs. Source: Developed by the author.

	Phase 1 of data collection	**Phase 2 of data collection**
Processes	Literature & theories review	Document analysis
	Preliminary research	Semi-structured interviews
Outputs	Analytical framework to evaluate the case study	Findings about procedural justice in the case study, answers to the research questions
	Understanding of the UNFSS structures and processes; case study selection	

4.2.1 Literature review

For each subtheme of the literature review, desktop research with the databases of GoogleScholar, LUBsearch and Swisscovery was conducted to identify relevant scientific work, and to a limited degree grey literature. Many articles were also identified by using the snowballing method. Besides the significance of the content, I considered other criteria for including articles such as timeliness, with a preference for articles published from 2012 onwards, except in cases of theoretical considerations or historical focus. In the second step, the identified literature was sorted and categorized using different synthesis matrixes to enable a structured analysis.

4.2.2 Preliminary research on the UNFSS structure and functioning

To enable data collection through meaningful document analysis and the conduct of semi-structured interviews, a preliminary research phase was necessary. The focus of this phase was to develop an in-depth understanding of the functioning and structure of the UNFSS with its

numerous sub-structures, initiatives and follow-up activities. This phase was particularly crucial given the complex and confusing setup of the Summit, combined with limited transparency and fragmented information available (e.g. Anderson et al. 2022). By consulting the various websites, documents and diagrams of the UNFSS (e.g. UNFSS n.d.), a structure diagram of the UNFSS leadership, summit and follow-up was constructed (displayed in section 5.1). Based on this research combined with the knowledge gap identified in the literature review, the focus, first on the Coalitions of Action rooted in Action Track 3 (Boost Nature-Positive Production) and then on the Agroecology Coalition, emerged. Besides the considerations and reasons that are further outlined in the case study chapter, practical reasons regarding data accessibility influenced the selection of a Coalition that was operational, had an established website, and provided information about its members.

4.2.3 Document analysis

The document analysis focused on publicly available documents and content from the website and social media channels of the Coalition. In combination with the interviews, it allowed me to draw a comprehensive picture of the governance structures and decision-making processes of the Agroecology Coalition from a procedural justice perspective. Employing two types of data sources and two types of data collection facilitated scientific triangulation (Long and Johnson 2000). The document analysis was useful for building background knowledge for the interviews and verifying and deepening the information provided by the interviewees. Furthermore, it enabled tracing the development of the Coalition, its members, and its structures. The content selected for the analysis was chosen by two criteria, either because it visibly seemed to be related either to the governance or member structure or the decision-making processes, or because it thematized events or facts mentioned by the interviewees.

4.2.4 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are suitable for studies about people's opinions and perceptions. Additionally, they are adapted to the need for flexibility that allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions (Kallio et al. 2016). At the beginning of my research, a general interview guide had been developed to structure the interviews and was, based on the experiences in the interviews, adapted and improved throughout the process (can be consulted in Annex 1). Furthermore, both in the preparation phase and during the interviews, the guide was adapted to the interviewee and their role, their knowledge or level of involvement, etc., which led to certain questions being emphasized or omitted. The approach was to ask open questions to let the interviewees bring in their perspective and then ask unplanned, or planned, more specific follow-up questions (DeJonckheere and Vaughn 2019). This helped to mitigate the potential bias introduced by directly asking about specific concepts such as fairness and letting instead the interviewees raise issues that they considered important. The semi-structured interviews were held online over Zoom, due to various locations of the interviewees. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and was conducted in English or, in one case, in German. After each interview, with the exception of two (refer to the limitations section), an automatic transcription was performed, followed by a manual review and re-listening to prepare the interview for analysis.

4.2.4.1 Participant selection and sampling

Purposeful sampling is a frequently applied method, also in research focusing on procedural justice in the case of different initiatives or projects (e.g. Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann 2022; Simcock 2016). My method employed for the selection of interview partners was purposeful sampling aiming at the maximum variation, the representation of the widest range of perspectives possible (Alsaawi 2014). In the case of the Agroecology Coalition, that meant

covering a wide variety of roles and functions within the Coalition, actor groups and geographical backgrounds (detailed in Table 2).

Table 2: List of attributes of interviewees. Source: Developed by the author.

Attributes criteria	**Included subgroups**
Function/role within the Coalition	Level of involvement, take-over of leadership positions, length of membership, size of organization
Geographical background	Africa, Americas, Europe, Asia-Pacific (same categories as used by the Coalition)
Actor groups	Farmer's organizations, CSOs/NGOs, Indigenous peoples' associations, philanthropic organizations, UN and international organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises, governments and regional authorities, research institutes (same categories used as by the Coalition)

To select interview partners according to the identified attributes, preliminary research on the members of the Coalition was conducted. In instances where it was unclear which person within an organization was involved with the Coalition, I reached out to the organization directly with a request to propose the most suitable and knowledgeable person. Because of the limited time available and the difficulty of reaching certain actors, the snowball sampling method was used to increase efficiency in some cases. A list of all the interviews conducted can be found in

Annex 2. The interviews were conducted between February 27 and April 12, 2024. It is important to note that one interview was held with a person from a different coalition and was therefore used for the scoping of the thesis and for informative reasons but not directly in the analysis.

4.3 Data analysis

The data of the interviews and the documents was analyzed by using a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is described as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). Themes consist of patterns in the data that give important information and are relevant for answering the research question(s) (Maguire and Delahunt 2017).

The analysis was conducted with the help of the N-Vivo computerized data management program which helps to facilitate manual coding. Following the systematic steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2006), after familiarization with the data (1), initial codes were generated (2) by using inductive and deductive codes. The combined approach of inductive and deductive coding allows for a theory-led analysis (the procedural justice perspective) and at the same time gives space to the experiences and perspectives of the interview partners (Proudfoot 2023). The next step was to search for themes (3) which were organized with the help of the dimensions of the framework and the use of thematic maps. Themes were then reviewed (4) at the level of the coded extracts and in relation to the entire data set. After further defining and refining the themes (5), the thematic analysis was written up (6). Despite the step-by-step approach, the analysis was not a linear but an iterative and reflexive process.

4.4 Limitations

As a result of time and capacity constraints, I chose to concentrate on one coalition. While the Agroecology Coalition cannot be considered representative of all the Coalitions of Actions or even multistakeholder initiatives in food systems, the aim was not to achieve generalizable results. With thematic analysis, the aim is to produce an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon in a specific context, with the potential for transferability of these findings (Polit and Beck 2010).

As pointed out for example by Schlosberg (2004), procedural justice heavily relates to and is connected with recognition and distribution justice. However, reviewing all three dimensions of justice for the chosen coalition would have gone beyond the scope of this work.

Regarding the semi-structured interviews, several obstacles were encountered. First, some interviews were characterized by difficulties in understanding, due to previously unknown English language barriers from the side of the interviewees. Furthermore, two interviews could not be recorded as there was no permission for it from the side of the organization. To ensure data accuracy in these cases, the transcripts were given to the interviewees for a review. Second, due to their limited number, recent participation and difficulty to identify them, no member of the actor group small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was interviewed. Additionally, despite continued efforts to reach representatives of the CSIPM and other social movements that have not joined the Coalition, no interview with such an outside view on the Coalition could be realized.

4.5 Ethical considerations and positionality

My first ethical consideration was to ensure transparency regarding my personal, past experiences in global food governance with the CSIPM as part of my internship with Schola

Campesina. This reflexivity on my "pre-understanding" of the topic was important to minimize any potentially introduced biases (Long and Johnson 2000). The insights I gained through my work in the CSIPM and the interactions I had with its members heavily influenced my interest in the topic of food system governance and drew my attention to the UNFSS. With my thesis, I intended to contribute not only to scientific knowledge but to also produce findings that are relevant for practitioners and can help towards the achievement of a *just* and sustainable transformation of food systems.

Several considerations were made to ensure the integrity and honesty of my research results. First, I engaged throughout the process in the above-mentioned reflexivity and sought outside feedback from peers and my supervisor – two strategies identified to control for potential biases and establish validity (Long and Johnson 2000). Second, I collected data from all the different actor groups represented in the Agroecology Coalition (except SMEs – see limitations section) as well as from the Coalition's official communication channels.

In accordance with the CEU Ethics in Research Policy, prior informed consent was ensured for my interview partners by providing them with a consent form and information sheet, to be signed before the interview (can be consulted in Annex 3). Participation in the research was completely voluntary and withdrawal was possible at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed for all interviewees through the use of pseudonyms and thoughtful data storage and processing.

5. RESULTS

The following chapter presents the results of my research. The chapter is separated in two main parts, the first part outlines the results of the preliminary research on the UNFSS which identified the Agroecology Coalition as the case study for this thesis. In the second part, the results of the interviews and the document analysis are presented.

5.1 Case study

This section presents the case study, situates it within the broader UNFSS framework, and explains its relevance. As can be seen in Figure 3, the Agroecology Coalition, as part of the follow-up structure, is one of the Coalitions of Actions formed under Action Track 3, Boost Nature-Positive Production. The research discussed in the literature review focused on the different structures of the Summit and its leadership. As can be seen in Figure 3, these structures and the work that they have been doing is now taken on by the follow-up structures. The two main follow-up structures are the Coalitions of Action and the national pathways of countries, and they are both supported by new leadership structures.

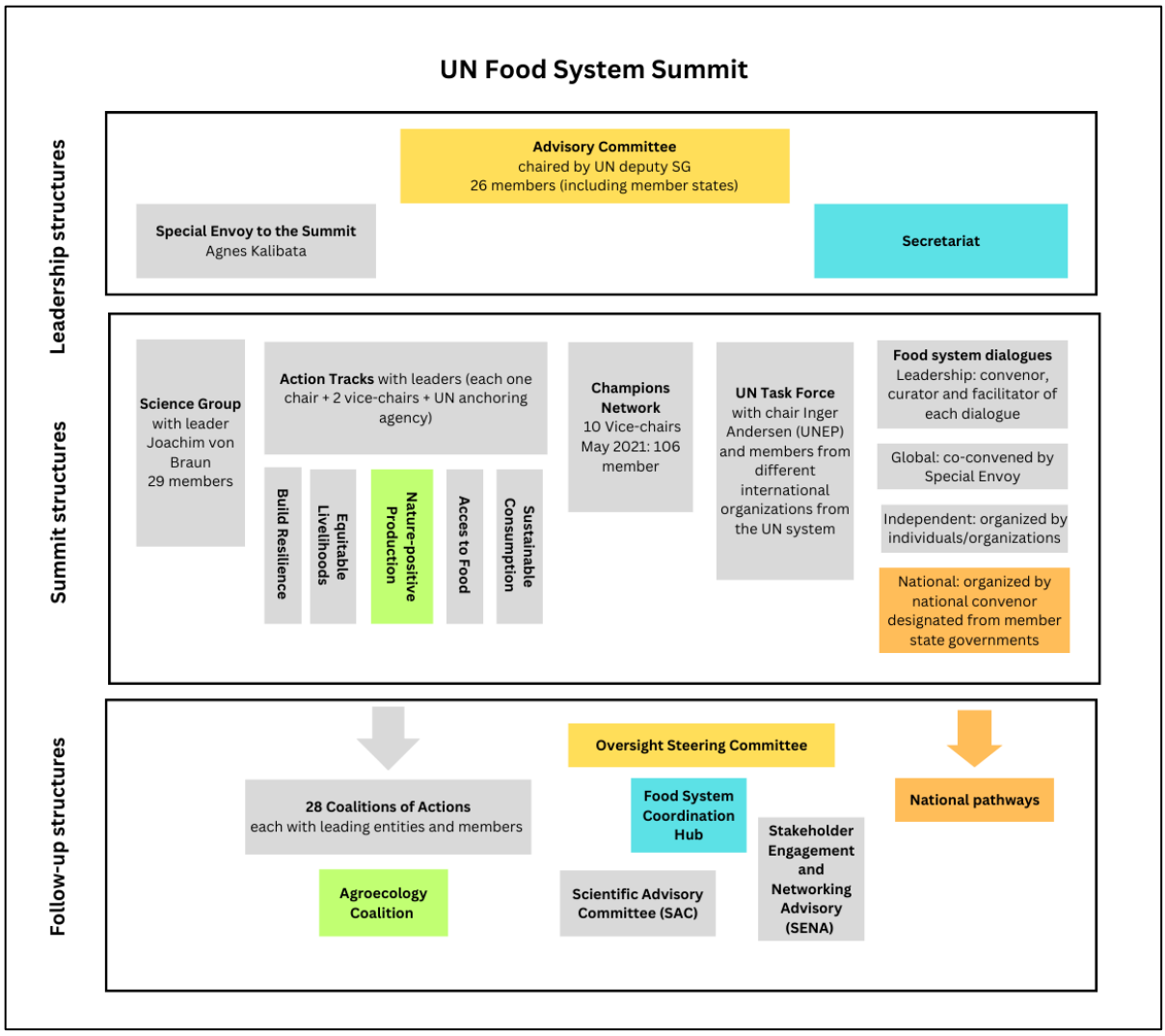

Figure 3: Structure diagram of the UNFSS. Source: Developed by the author, inspired by UNFSS (n.d.).

5.1.1 The Coalitions of Action

As defined by the UNFSS Coordination Hub, "Coalitions are groups of people and/or institutions (state and/or non-state actors) developed in the context of the UN Food Systems Summit and assembled to challenge business as usual and champion an integrated, systemic approach at scale to address (a) specific issue(s) related to food systems" (UNFSS Coordination Hub 2022, 2). As the priority of the coalitions is to support countries' national pathways for food system transformation under the umbrella of the SDGs, their actions need to align with the principles and targets of the 2030 agenda (UNFSS Coordination Hub 2022). While

governments are present as stakeholders in the coalitions, the coalitions have not been collectively agreed upon or mandated by states (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). They function self-organized and independently, but are encouraged to follow the five principles listed below (based on Coordination Hub 2022, 2):

1. Country-driven as in supporting and in alignment with national development agendas.
2. Systemic and transformative by applying a holistic, multistakeholder and multisectoral approach.
3. Inclusive and based on coordination by prioritizing collaboration, information sharing, collective decision-making and alignment of their actions.
4. Accountable through mutual accountability between members and transparent and regular reporting on progress.
5. Action-oriented by establishing tangible and measurable plans and targets.

The role of the UNFSS Coordination Hub is to support the actions of the coalitions by serving as a connector and knowledge management point. Currently, there are 28 coalitions attributed to one of the five areas of action of the Summit, the Action Tracks, summarized in Figure 3 (UNFSS Coordination Hub 2022).

5.1.2 Action Track 3: Boost Nature-Positive Production

Action Track 3 concentrates on food production, with the aim "to boost nature-positive production systems at scale to globally meet the fundamental human right to healthy and nutritious food, while operating within planetary boundaries" (Action Track 3 2021, 4). Many of the issues with current food systems are related to production systems, they are the biggest cause of decline in nature, driving deforestation, water overuse, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. At the same time, biodiversity along with well-functioning and healthy ecosystems are essential to ensure sustainable food production in the future and deliver on the SDGs (Action

Track 3 2021). Thus, the topic of food production covered by Action Track 3 can be expected to play a relevant role in driving food system transformation, which is also illustrated by the high number of coalitions (10) that emerged from it (UNFSS Coordination Hub 2022). Furthermore, from a participatory perspective, the actors involved in food production and thus strongly affected by decisions regarding changing production systems are many, and an important amount of them are highly vulnerable to food insecurity, such as small-scale food producers, food-chain workers, women or youth (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). Ensuring the inclusion of the voices of this variety of groups in decision-making on food production systems can thus be seen as essential.

Under the Action Track, nature-positive production is defined as food production based on regenerative, non-depleting and non-destructive methods of natural resource use. Promoted actions and measures focus on the three areas of protection, sustainable management and restoration of productive systems (Action Track 3 2021, 4). During the process of the summit, the leaders of the Action Track collected solutions which were then grouped under *solution clusters* to serve as strategic, thematic focal points around which coalitions should be created (Action Track 3 2021).

5.1.3 Agroecology within the UNFSS[4]

One of the *solution clusters* under the action area *management* was "Transformation through Agroecology and Regenerative Agriculture" co-led by three people. Out of this emerged a dynamic where it was proposed to found the Agroecology Coalition in September 2021 (FAO 2021). Agroecology represents an interesting case as it is a paradigm for food system transformation which is widely endorsed in conjunction with food sovereignty by social

[4] Sections 5.1.3 and 5.1.4 are not only based on the preliminary desktop research but also include information gathered during the interviews, essential to understand the background, structures and processes of the Coalition.

movements and organizations representing small-scale food providers such as La Via Campesina (Nyéléni 2015). These advocates, however, were to an important extent absent from the Summit due to their boycott decision (CSIPM 2021). The CSIPM has therefore expressed concerns that concepts such as agroecology have been coopted and reinterpreted within the UNFSS in a corporate-friendly way that obscures their radical transformation potential (Liaison Group, CSIPM 2022). It was confirmed that agroecology was one of the particularly conflicting issues within the Summit (von Braun 2023) and as a result, it was only presented in final documents as one out of many tools instead of a foundation for change – to the dissatisfaction of its supporters (Gliessman 2023). Putting agroecology on the agenda of the UNFSS has been described as a struggle by some interviewees. It needed a co-lead intervention of several countries and individuals to demand a session on agroecology for the Pre-Summit (interviewee 1,7). However, the potential of the Agroecology Coalition to scale up agroecology to influence food system transformation and reach policymakers when it joins forces with grassroots efforts is seen as a given (Gliessman 2023). To achieve this connectedness with grassroots organizations and social movements, and their conceptualization of agroecology, there is an argument for the relevance of participatory decision-making for the Coalition.

5.1.4 The Agroecology Coalition

The Agroecology Coalition aims to support food system transformation and implementation of national pathways through agroecology, mainly in the following three areas (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 5):

1. Facilitating co-creation and exchange of knowledge
2. Promoting increased investments in agroecology
3. Seeking political engagement and increased commitment to the agroecological transformation

Its work is guided by 13 principles of agroecology of the HLPE[5] in alignment with 10 elements of agroecology adopted by FAO members in 2019. In figure 4, the 13 principles of agroecology are illustrated in the outer circle, sorted by the three themes of resilience, resource efficiency and social equity. According to the Coalition, these principles protect the environment while promoting resilience, economic viability, social acceptance, cultural diversity, and efficiency, and can be applied to all forms of sustainable agriculture or food production (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 2). It is important to note that agroecology also aims to improve social deficiencies such as gender inequality or precarious livelihoods of food producers, and that the agroecological principles include principles for fairness, co-creation of knowledge and participation (Agroecology Coalition n.d.), which align with procedural justice. In this sense, agroecology goes further than just changing production systems, "it represents a transdisciplinary field that includes all the ecological, sociocultural, technological, economic and political dimensions of food systems, from production to consumption" (Agroecology Europe n.d., n.p.)

[5] Later referred to as "the 13 principles".

Figure 4: The 13 principles of Agroecology. Source: Agroecology Info Pool, Bivision Foundation Switzerland. https://www.agroecology-pool.org/13aeprinciples/

According to the Coalition's website, as of May 2024, the Coalition has 265 members, out of which 53 governments, 3 regional commissions and 212 organizations (Agroecology Coalition 2024b). Figure 5 shows the different structures and bodies of the Coalition: The guiding entity is a Steering Committee composed of 10 members, rotating two co-chairs which will be elected yearly by the committee (Agroecology Coalition n.d.). Since March 2023 the work of the Steering Committee is supported by a permanent Secretariat consisting of four staff members, following up on the interim coordinator(s) (Agroecology Coalition 2023, interviewee 1). The highest decision-making body in the Coalition is the General Assembly of all members, which meets twice a year (interviewee 1). Furthermore, five working groups (WGs) on the topics of research, financing, policies, communication and implementation should help to advance the

work of the Coalition (Agroecology Coalition n.d.). When members join the Coalition, they are asked to assign a focal point and invited to join as many WGs as they want. The different working groups meet every few months and are led by 2 to 6 co-facilitators each (interviewee 1, 10). In addition, the Coalition has different sub-groups for world regions, for instance, the European group that holds periodical meetings (interviewee 10). Other than that, it was highlighted during the interviews that the Coalition has been involved since June 2023 in the process of the development of a five-year strategy which is supposed to be finalized in 2024 (interviewee 1, 12).

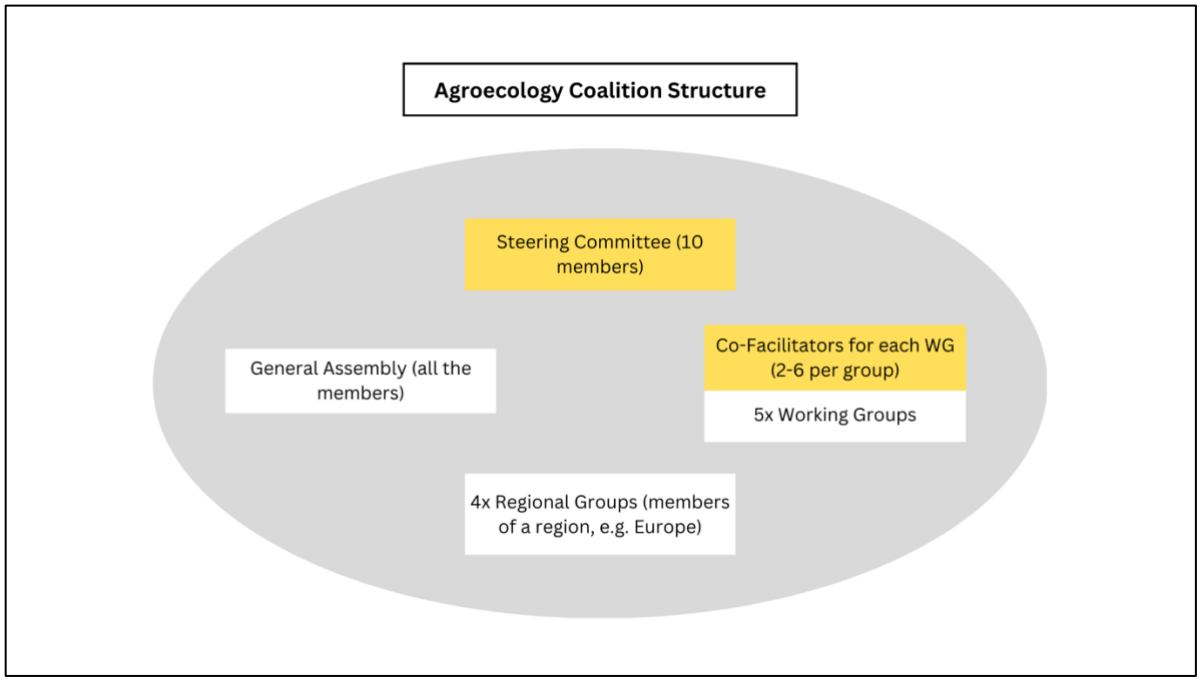

Figure 5: The structure of the Agroecology Coalition. Source: Developed by the author.

5.2 Results of the thematic analysis

In this section, the result of the thematic analysis of the documents (in a broader sense) and the semi-structured interviews with members are presented. A total of 10 themes emerged from the analysis, structured by the three dimensions of the procedural justice framework, which are summarized in Figure 6.

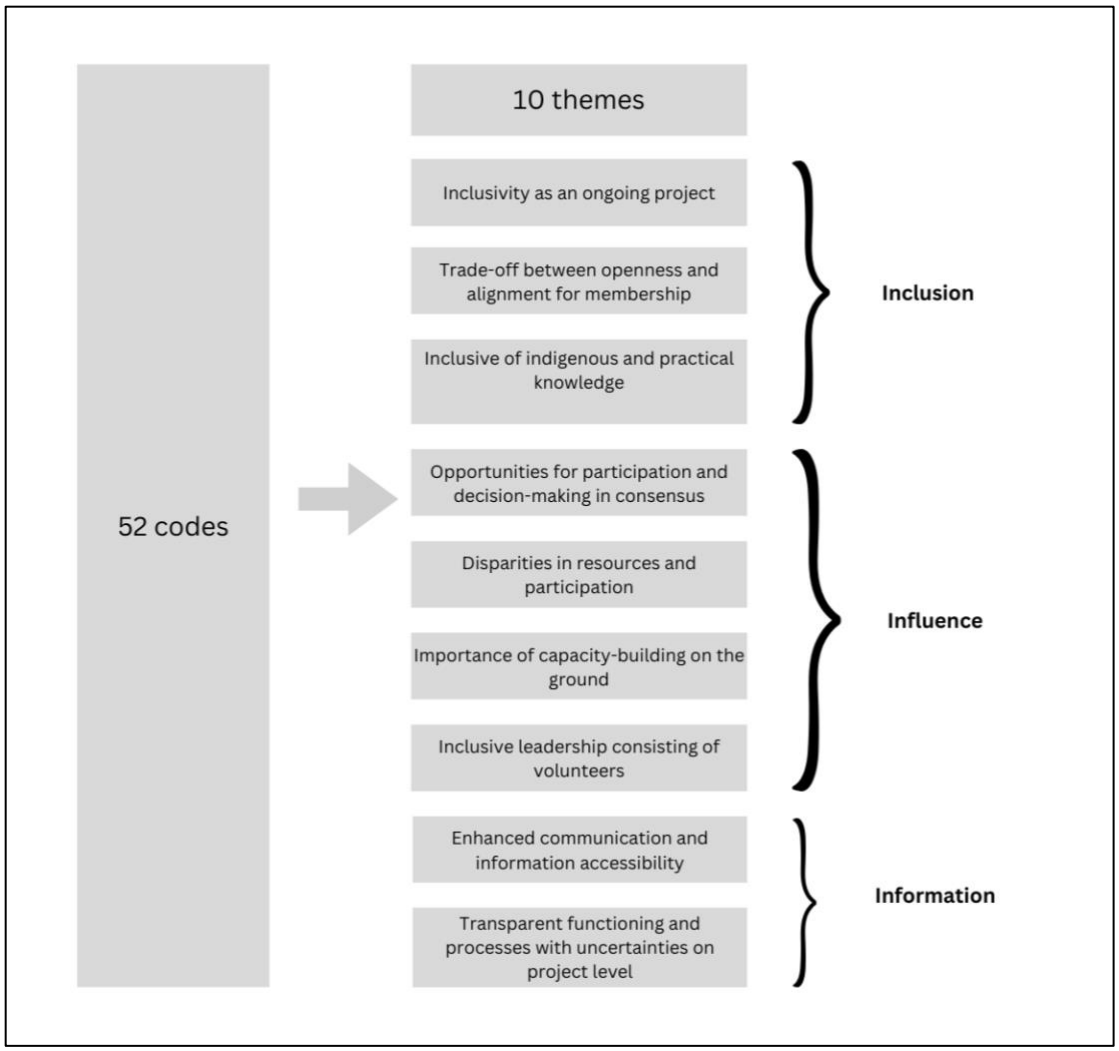

Figure 6: Overview over the analysis process. Source: Developed by the author.

5.2.1 Inclusion

The first dimension addresses the inclusion and representation of actor groups and knowledge forms. The three themes that developed from our data analysis are: (1) Inclusivity as an ongoing project, (2) trade-off between openness and alignment for membership, and (3) inclusion of knowledge forms and practical experiences.

5.2.1.1 Inclusivity as an ongoing project

The first topic concerning inclusion addresses the question of who is represented in the Coalition and to what extent. When looking at the communication material of the Coalition, the importance of inclusivity is stressed several times, for instance in the brochure of the Coalition[6] it is explained that the governance of the Coalition "should be inclusive, participatory and involve all types of actors" (Agroecology Coalition n.d.). This is also confirmed by several interviewees who mentioned for instance that a wide variety of actors are represented which contributes to a heterogeneity of points of view (interviewee 10) and that "*it is a very inclusive type of system where everyone has a voice*" (interviewee 12). Some specifically pointed out that there is a good government representation and that also many small organizations are included (interviewee 10, 8). A diagram describing the eight types of members and their share in the Coalition is published on the Coalition's website. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are represented with 127 organizations, followed by 53 state or regional institutions and 42 research institutes. All the other member categories have a share between 2 and 13 organizations (Agroecology Coalition 2024c, n.p.).

[6] Later referred to as "the brochure".

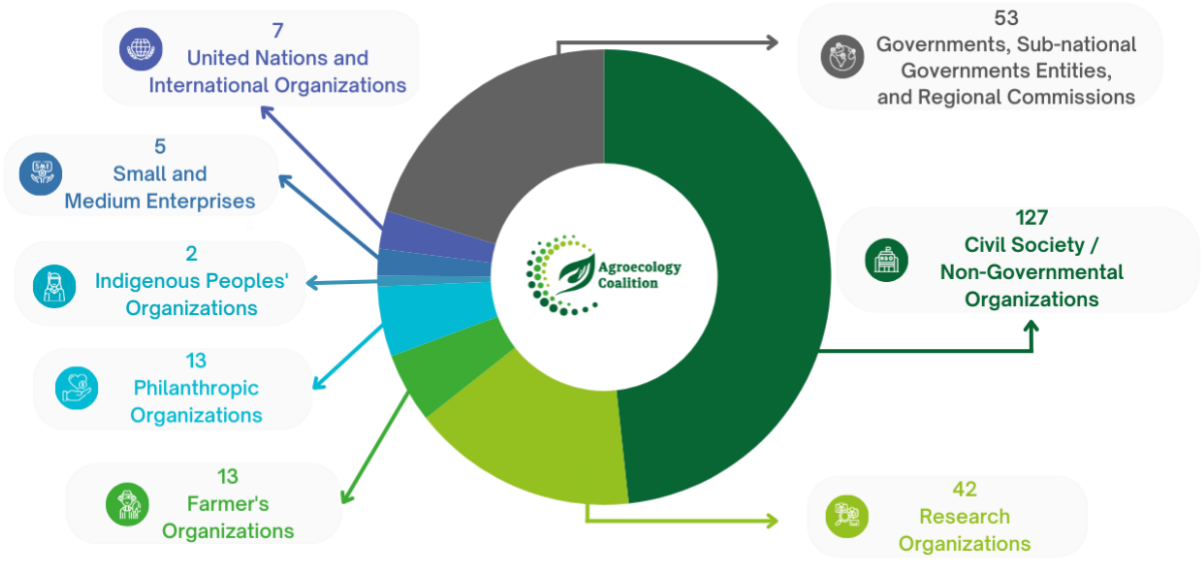

Figure 7: Share of membership types, as of 24.05.2024. Source: Agroecology Coalition. https://agroecology-coalition.org/members/

An interviewee who opened the website during the interview referred to this imbalance in representation and mentioned that it reflects the general trend that agroecology is still driven by CSOs and NGOs, which also has its origins in the CFS and the strong voice of civil society on agroecology there (interviewee 8). Another member however had the perception that in the Coalition, "*it's mainly Member States and the EU, but there are few civil society organizations that are members now*" (interviewee 7).

That the member composition is however an ongoing process which is still developing was illustrated by many interviewees mentioning that membership is constantly increasing (interviewee 1, 3, 10, 12). The Coalition's recently published annual report shows that membership increased by 61% in 2023, with 5 governments, one regional administration and 72 organizations joining (Agroecology Coalition 2024a, 16). Furthermore, the brochure puts forward that "efforts will be made to reach out to more members from all regions" (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 6). During the interviews, several groups that were missing or should be better represented, and the ongoing efforts to reach out to them were described. It was emphasized that they would want to have more frontline people and farmer's organizations (interviewee 2,

3) and that "*there was a real effort to reach out to those organizations and they're still, contacts are continuing with farmer's organizations, to have more farmer's organizations for example, joining the Coalition. That's an ongoing, an ongoing process"* (interviewee 1). The inclusion of companies was also mentioned several times, for instance, it was reported that the Steering Committee had discussed that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) working on agroecology have an important role in the transformation and there was an attempt to proactively encourage them to get involved (interviewee 1). As can be seen from the membership type diagram, the Coalition does not appear to include any large private sector actors and SMEs make up around 2% of the total membership. Interviewee 3 suggested that it would be good to have "big companies" represented to partner with farmers and interviewee 12 explained: "*Big private actors may be missing because they are sometimes seen as the opposition. The group is not represented in Steering Committee, but they still have an important perspective. From the [anonymized organization] standpoint, we work closely with them, embrace them as being part of the transformation. […] If we had this group better represented, it would give a slightly more balanced discussion in the Coalition, I believe."*

Another topic that came up during the interviews is that it can be hard to judge the level of representativeness: *"So far, every important group is represented, but not all at the same level. For example, the associations of producers. For the leader of the group of associations of producers, I can't say how much he is representative of all producers' associations from the world. I don't have a sense of the weight of each representative"* (interviewee 10). Another interviewee pointed in the same direction, saying that a regional farmer organization may represent a hundred thousand of farmers, "*so therefore, it's always, maybe it doesn't really reflect the people who are behind this*" (interviewee 8). Furthermore, it can be hard to categorize organizations under certain regions or groups that they are representing because they might be

representing several groups or do not have similarities with the region they are assimilated with (interviewee 8, 9).

5.2.1.2 Trade-off between openness and alignment for membership

With regard to the inclusion of actors, the criteria for membership, such as who can become a member and how they qualify, are relevant. The brochure states that "as a 'Coalition of the willing', the Coalition is open to members that commit to implementing food system transformation through agroecology in harmony with the 13 principles of agroecology by signing the Declaration of Engagement" (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 6). It is furthermore explained that this also encompasses organizations that do not yet implement the 13 principles but commit to moving towards this goal. Interviewees also addressed the question of who should be in the Coalition or how agroecological the different members are. For instance, interviewee 7 pointed out that some groups might not adhere to the 13 principles across their whole programmatic scope but only in some projects, and that this raised the question of to what extent an organization would need to adhere to the principles. However, interviewee 1 reminded that openness is needed because if 100% agroecological was requested, there would be no members, so the main criterion is that "*there is a real intention to move in that direction*".

Several interviewees stressed that if organizations do not support the agroecology principles, they should not join the Coalition (interviewee 2, 6). As interviewee 5 explained: "*Yeah, because I think that, I mean to my mind, one of the good things about the Coalition is, it's been very, I don't want to say rigid, but certain that we're talking about agroecology in an integrated way. […] So, I don't think we'd want to trade that off just in order to bring more people in."* Interview 2 described that they want to review what an organization works on before it can join (interviewee 2) and interviewee 7 told me that they advocated for a monitoring process for

members to check *"whether they in fact were adhering to the 13 principles. Or whether they had changed their practices in any way after signing on to the Agroecology Coalition".*

Related to this, during the interviews it emerged that within the Coalition there had been a discussion about accepting big private sector actors into the Coalition. Interviewee 7 defended the standpoint "*that it would really hurt the Agroecology Coalition if we started accepting food businesses [multinationals] as members, that we would just become another MSI".* Interviewee 12 explained that the decision was made to allow these businesses, "*which is quite reasonable I think, to include all stakeholders in the discussion*", without requesting an additional set of criteria because "i*t was decided that this maybe is not fair as we are all equal members*". Interviewee 1 on the other hand told me that private sector organizations, other than SMEs, have to additionally submit an explanation of the reasons why they want to join. As the person described it: "*And that's an opportunity to have an evaluation, by, first by the Secretariat, but then by the Steering Committee, that there is a genuine intention to embark on an agroecological transformation and not greenwashing. So, we are very careful".*

Besides the danger of greenwashing, which was mentioned by others as well, the different views on the transformative aspect of agroecology and its implications for membership came up. It was highlighted that the Coalition has shown openness to "*both sides, the more conservative side and the more radical side"* (interviewee 5) which creates a space to discuss and that the 13 principles help as a common foundation. However, there is a worry that through the broad membership of the Coalition, an apolitical or neutral vision of agroecology could be promoted, the lowest common denominator, which would be seen as counterproductive (interviewee 6).

Some of the interviewees also assumed the risk of co-optation or a rather reformist instead of a transformative vision of agroecology as the reasons for the reluctance of social movements affiliated with the CSIPM to join (interviewee 5, 7). It was reported that in ongoing discussions

of the Coalition with these groups, doubts were expressed about the formation and the membership (interviewee 2) or the Coalition's association with the UNFSS (interviewee 7). As interviewee 7 described it: *"They are, it's not that they oppose the Coalition, they're in more of a wait and see position. They want to see what comes out of the Coalition"*.

5.2.1.3 Inclusive of knowledge forms and practical experiences

Besides the inclusion of actors, one of the indicators of the framework addresses the extent to which different forms of knowledge are considered in the Coalition. One of the three prioritized areas of work of the Coalition is "facilitating the co-creation and exchange of knowledge and experiences", as pointed out in several documents (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 5). The research WG has the objective to do research differently and in a transdisciplinary way which includes "grounding agroecological science in agroecological practice and social movements, embracing all stakeholders, including farmers and civil society organizations, and their knowledge" (Agroecology Coalition 2024d, n.p.).

For interviewee 2, agroecology encompasses traditional and indigenous farming which means that indigenous knowledge is considered. Interviewee 7 also confirmed that "*there's openness to traditional ecological knowledge*" and that the Coalition shares resources from their members on, for example, farmer-led seed and knowledge systems in the newsletter. Moreover, interviewee 10 described how in the implementation working group everyone would share experiences from the ground, including grassroot and small organizations, and that the creation of a community of practice was happening within the Coalition. A look at the website shows that there is a dedicated section for the presentation of agroecology case studies, including lessons learned and experiences from them. Another interviewee highlighted that they felt that the Secretariat was actively trying to ensure that knowledge from indigenous or local communities was available in important meetings. The person said: "*My perception is that the*

Secretariat is really taking care that there is a good representation, also knowledge based. My knowledge is on policy, but we have others who have more practical approaches, then we have governments. So, it's really something they try to balance this" (interviewee 8).

5.2.2 Influence

The dimension of influence refers to whether actors are not only represented but can also be influential in shaping outcomes. The four themes that emerged out of our data are: (1) Opportunities for participation and decision-making in consensus, (2) disparities in participation and resources, (3) importance of capacity-building on the ground and (4) inclusive leadership consisting of volunteers.

5.2.2.1 Opportunities for participation and decision-making in consensus

Asked about their participation in the Coalition, interviewees described many ways in how they made contributions and actively participated in different settings. Several communicated that they got the space to present their activities/projects in the implementation WG (interviewee 9, 10) or at international conferences, where their story or proposals were shared (interviewee 2, 3). Interviewee 8 highlighted that they drafted inputs or co-organized joint events with the Coalition and interviewee 5 talked about a project that their organization had the idea for, and which was then taken up and endorsed by the Coalition. The person added that "*that's the way it should happen. That the people from the ground, you know, make proposals*". Regarding participation in the working group, interviewee 7 explained that "*people are free to raise objections or to raise comments and to contribute to any of the projects that are initiated".*

Another topic that was addressed during the interviews was the development of the five-year strategy for the Coalition, a process that has been going on for several months. Interviewee 1 emphasized that it was a consultative process from the beginning on and that the aim was to

"*get all this, the input from all the members and going out after each of the categories of members to make sure that we have taken, we are taking into account all the different perspectives*". Members described that consultation happened with the WGs, the regional groups and the different actor groups of the Coalition at different stages (interviewee 1, 10, 12). After a first round of gathering inputs from members, a draft was established and in a joint meeting of the Steering Committee and the co-facilitators of the WGs the draft was further discussed and changes made (interviewee 1, 12). This meeting was described as a several-day workshop that had a very participatory dynamic (interviewee 8). The representatives of the actor groups on the Steering Committee then got back in touch with their constituency to review the draft and this feedback is currently being incorporated (interviewee 10, 12). The process was described as an open process (interviewee 7, 8) and the members who did not participate actively said that this was their personal choice and that they could have been more involved if they wanted (interviewee 6, 9). Some interviewees pointed out that the process has been slow and included postponements but as interviewee 12 put it "*you can't have it done inclusive and fast at the same time*".

Talking about participation opportunities in general, a less involved member highlighted: "*I definitely feel invited, and I have the feeling that if I wanted to get involved, it would definitely work*" (interviewee 6).[7] Supporting this, interviewee 12 stated that "*everyone has an equal opportunity to speak up*". While one interviewee mentioned that involvement in the governance could be improved, they saw the reasons for this in the infant stage of the Coalition, in a learning process and with limited resources (11). The person elaborated that "*activities and issues that are being implemented, sometimes for us, or for my perspective looks like they come from the air. But it's because we haven't been involved maybe in planning and setting all the actions and*

[7] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*Ich fühl mich auf jeden Fall eingeladen und ich hab das Gefühl, wenn ich mich jetzt engagieren wollen würde, würde das auf jeden Fall funktionieren".*

knowing where we are going altogether so that we are all, we all own the process". The person clarified that because of time constraints, the Secretariat may sometimes bring something up where the genesis is unknown.

The decision-making process, at least for the definition of the mission and objectives of the different WG, was described as a bottom-up process, carried out by the WGs themselves and later approved by the whole group, the General Assembly (interviewee 1, 7). Interviewees reported that decisions in the Coalition are made by discussing and then subsequently achieving a consensus, a compromise that everyone can live with (interviewee 1, 12). Interviewee 12 added that "*the decisions are well enough debated among the different stakeholders*" and interviewee 10 confirmed that "*anything was discussed that represented a problem*". Formal votes have not taken place yet in the Coalition, interviewee 7 answered to a question about this that "*if someone were to raise an objection, there would be an attempt to change that part of the scope of the working group and to come back and say is this acceptable. And never a vote, never a vote*". In other instances, members reported that in some WGs, there was just no need to make decisions because the meetings were mostly about sharing resources, and learning from each other (interviewee 11, 9). Others told me that in the Coalition, the people have the same vision (interviewee 2) and are "*already very much aligned"* (interviewee 8). For interviewee 9 there is no strong opposition within the Coalition, for instance, there is a general agreement on the definition of agroecology. Interviewee 12 explained that "*usually, everyone is on the same page because the 13 principles are a guiding document*" and in the words of interviewee 7, adherence to the 13 principles is the glue that holds the Agroecology Coalition together.

5.2.2.2 Disparities in resources and participation

While opportunities for participation are there for everyone, not all members use or can use them to the same extent. Some members of smaller organizations mentioned that they prefer to

be observers and hear and learn from others, in part because they are not as knowledgeable on some topics (interviewee 9, 3). For others, it is a priority to make inputs to the Coalition (interviewee 8) and some are working on being better involved and contributing matters (interviewee 11). Several interviews thus also reported differences in the strength of participation of actors. For instance, not everyone participates in the calls, and it is the same actors that regularly show up (interviewee 7). Interviewee 6 particularly refers to individual NGOs that are very active and very involved in the WGs. Similarly, interviewee 12 has the perception that some members are more active than others, such as for instance European countries, and identifies the level of interest as a reason for this. With a slightly diverging perception, for interviewee 5, one of the challenges of the multistakeholder approach in the Coalition is that especially the constituencies of governments and civil society organizations (not NGOs) have weaker participation. The person elaborated that from the representation it looks inclusive but "*on the level of actual operations and discussions and deliberations, it needs to be improved".* The person suggested that to make it more accessible, there is a need for proactive recruitment of participation from these groups, an issue that they hope the Secretariat can take on more in the future. It seems that the Secretariat has come to similar conclusions, as in the annual report it is stated that "*the Secretariat is establishing closer links with the members to ensure their active participation and to promote greater ownership*" (Agroecology Coalition 2024a, 16).

Several interviewees also told me about the barriers they encounter in their involvement, most of them regarding resource constraints and some with regard to the functioning of the Coalition. Related to the functioning of the Coalition, interviewee 11 raised the issue that the majority of meetings happen online which makes it harder to discuss and come up with something together than in an in-person gathering. Furthermore, it was mentioned that it would be easier if the

yearly planning was known more in advance to organize things and be able to participate in meetings (interviewee 11).

Financial constraints are mainly raised by two members from the "Global South". Interviewee 3 recounted that they cannot focus as much as their colleagues from developed countries on policy work because they also have to ensure their food security. As they put it: "*We try our best to participate, but we also need to ensure our food security as well"* (interviewee 3). Interviewee 11 remarked that it can be useful to attend conventions in which the Coalition participates to meet other members, but that is only possible if you have the funds available. Members need to self-fund which often also implies to gather funds from elsewhere or sometimes prevents them from coming (interviewee 3, 11). Members from smaller organizations addressed the issue of time constraints, they explained that they are very busy and that they have other commitments with their organizations (interviewee 3, 9). In the words of interviewee 2: "*I have activities to implement. I have farmers to attend to. I have an office to run".* It is also mentioned that since Covid the workload for many has increased again and thus participation in the meetings decreased (interviewee 2, 8). Besides the other commitments, the engagement in the Coalition is described as rather time-intensive (interviewee 5, 12) and interviewee 5 assumed that this can pose a challenge to grassroots organizations with limited staffing. Interviewee 6 for instance would want to participate more but said that they can't, "s*imply because I actually have no capacity*".[8] Interviewees also mentioned that they are working on including more people from their organizations in the Coalition to better divide the workload (interviewee 9, 12).

Besides including more people from their own organizations, the creation of synergies was a topic that was brought up several times during the interviews. Interviewee 11 had the perception

[8] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*einfach weil ich keine Kapazität hab tatsächlich*".

that for now, it is still mostly "individual representation" of each organization or member state instead of having for instance a representation for a region which would make it easier to make interventions and bring in perspectives. Furthermore, several interviewees talked about national agroecology coalitions or regional networks and how it would be important to clarify and improve the cooperation of the global Agroecology Coalition with them (interviewee 3, 6, 9). To avoid duplication and having to spend too much time in different Coalitions, interviewee 9 believed it would make sense to assign a representative of the national coalition to the global Coalition. Besides creating synergies with regional levels, doing joint actions with other global coalitions working on related topics was mentioned (interviewee 12).

The diverging resources available to members for their participation seem to play a role to the extent that there is a need for active engagement, as in putting time and effort into having an impact or achieving something within the Coalition (interviewee 12, 5, 6). Especially because of the structure of the Coalition with only a few full-time positions (the Secretariat), the operational work depends on the efforts made by members (interviewee 5). Interviewee 6 explained it like this: "*And I think it's basically the same as it is everywhere: those who invest resources and time naturally also shape what happens*".[9] Interviewee 7 hinted in the same direction: "*Well, there are few people in the group, in the groups, who have strong voices and they are consistently listened to*". Asked about why the voices of these people were stronger than those of others, the answer was: "*Because of their presence, because of the fact that they've involved from the very beginning*" (interviewee 7). It was also brought forward that the Coalition has become a professionalized space, and that NGOs and professionalized, staffed organizations are playing a leading role in the Coalition (interviewee 5). Interviewee 12 added another reason than active participation to why people are listened to, they explain that

[9] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*Und ich glaube, da ist es aber im Grunde so, wie es eigentlich überall ist: Die, die Ressourcen und Zeit reinstecken, die prägen natürlich auch das was passiert".*

preference is given to countries to give their opinion because it is them who "*have to drive the transformation*".

Some interviewees also referred to power imbalances, particularly with regard to small civil society organizations or social movements (interviewee 7, 5, 6). Interviewee 6: "*So, I mean, there's a country and then there's a small civil society organization, and they're both members. Of course, that looks great, the question is simply how to make it workable, so to speak*".[10] Interviewee 5 talked about how in general, very few investments in agroecology go into social movements and how this leads to a power imbalance that is also perceivable in the Coalition. At the same time, several members highlighted the importance of the Coalition for them to establish partnerships or funding opportunities for their projects (interviewee 9, 2, 3, 11). Interviewee 6 suggested: "*And I think that Oliveros [the coordinator of the Coalition] has really set itself the goal of bringing a lot of visibility to smaller organizations from the Global South. For example, through their social media posts and so on, they always portray someone who would otherwise certainly not have this reach*".[11]

5.2.2.3 Importance of capacity-building on the ground

While none of the interviewees mentioned inadequate capabilities to participate in the Coalition process, one of the topics that came up during the interviews was the importance of having capacity-building on the ground for farmers or other groups practicing agroecology. For interviewee 3, one of the main reasons why they are in the Coalition is to provide knowledge transfer to their members who expect support and help with capacity-building. Learning from

[10] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*Also ich meine, da ist ein Land und dann ist eine kleine Civil Society Organisation, und die sind beide Member. Das sieht natürlich super aus, die Frage ist einfach, wie man das dann workable macht, sozusagen".*

[11] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*Ich glaube Oliveros hat sich auch wirklich so als Ziel gesetzt, dass sie viel Visibilität bringen, auch für kleinere Organisationen aus dem globalen Süden. Also beispielsweise über ihre Social Media Posts und so weiter, dass sie immer wieder auch jemanden porträtieren, der sonst sicherlich nicht diese Reichweite hätte".*

others and using the Coalition's expertise and skills to support the transformation in their context is also important for interviewee 11.

Capacity-building is mentioned in the documentation of the Coalition, where it is stated that the Coalition aims at "facilitating capacity building, including peer-to-peer learning between countries (e.g., on agroecological policies) and between organizations" (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 5). Furthermore, one of the objectives of the research working group is "*to develop and endorse co-learning training and educational resources that can be used in schools, colleges, training institutions and universities to develop capacity to transform food systems through agroecology*" (Agroecology Coalition 2024, n.p.). For instance, the publication of the Agroecology Assessment Framework, referred to by several interviewees as the Agroecology Assessment or Measurement Tool, demonstrates ongoing efforts in this field. Some interviewees mentioned that they already use or plan to use this tool to assess the "agroecologicalness" of their projects (interviewee 10, 9, 6).

Meanwhile, interviewee 3 explained that most of the tools about agroecology are difficult to understand, especially for small farmers, because they are often not translated into the local language. Therefore, it would be helpful if the Coalition could work on "*a manual to translate the meaning of agroecology clearly for further capacity building to the farmer*". Interviewee 9 also brought up the importance of making agroecological knowledge and practices accessible, for instance for refugees, and to translate those tools in as many languages as possible. Regarding agroecology projects that are implemented by different members of the Coalition, interviewee 9 sometimes wondered whether the local communities have ownership of the projects, as in whether the projects are rooted in local communities or led by people with a lot of technical knowledge from outside.

5.2.2.4 Inclusive leadership consisting of volunteers

This theme addresses the leadership bodies, the actors who are represented in them and how these people were designated. The main leadership body of the Coalition is the Steering Committee, composed of 10 members, one for each of the 4 member countries regions and for each actor group (for the groups refer to table 2). Furthermore, the co-facilitators take a somewhat leading function in the WGs by organizing the agenda and coordinating the calls, as well as participating in the first half of the Steering Committee meetings (interviewee 1). The designation process for the members of these two entities and also their composition are slightly different.

For the Steering Committee, an inclusive representation was expressly sought for as can be seen from the above-mentioned formula for its composition. Furthermore, interviewee 1 told me that the three categories of farmers, indigenous peoples and civil-society organizations, often lumped together, were on purpose kept separate to make sure "*that they would have a stronger voice in governance because after all, they are the main actors in our food systems*". Interviewee 5 said that they were careful about their leadership because the more important participants in the Coalition are the governments and civil society organizations.

Members also brought up that all the different constituencies (interviewee 7) and regions (interviewee 10) are represented in the Steering Committee. About the selection process of these representatives, it is communicated in the brochure that "the different regions and stakeholder categories select who will represent them in the Steering Group" (Agroecology Coalition n.d., 7), which was confirmed by interviewee 11. Interviewee 1 specified that it was more of a request for volunteers who were then confirmed through a formal election process. For some constituencies or regions, this formal election process is still pending as they first wanted to have a higher number of members from these constituencies in the Coalition (interviewee 1).

Some actor groups also agreed among themselves as they had so few members at the time. In this case, the process consisted of certain people being approached and agreeing to volunteer for the position rather than being elected (interviewee 2, 12). For the reasons why certain people were asked interviewee 2 told me it was for representation reasons and interviewee 12 that it was because of previous active engagement with agroecology compared to others in the constituency.

In contrast to the Steering Committee, there is no official formula for the composition of the co-facilitators of the WGs. The selection process was also described as informal here, as certain members were asked whether they wanted to take on the role (interviewee 8, 1, 5) or came forward directly (interviewee 7). Interviewee 6 said about it: "*So I don't know exactly how it went, who is doing it now and why, but if you really put time and energy into it, then you could certainly join*".[12] Going in the same direction, assumptions of why people were reached out to were because of their background and/or that they have been working on the topic for years (interviewee 5, 8) or because they provided funding to the Coalition and had been involved for a long time (interviewee 8).

For leadership positions in general, two interviewees mentioned that there was not much competition for taking on the role, so in some ways it was more of a favor to take it on (interviewee 5, 12). In the words of interviewee 5: "*I just volunteered, basically. It wasn't like there was a lot of competition to take on the role, as you can, as you know, people aren't always looking for new leadership positions*". Interesting to note is that in relation to leadership, some interviewees referred to the Secretariat as being part of it. Interviewee 5 told me that the organization has gotten better with the Secretariat assisting with the tasks of the co-facilitators,

[12] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*Also ich weiß nicht genau wie das lief, wäre das jetzt wie warum macht, aber wenn man jetzt wirklich Zeit und Energie reinstecken würde, dann könnte man da sicherlich dabei sein".*

who are volunteers with limited time. Several members mentioned that through the establishment of the permanent Secretariat, the Coalition has become more structured and institutionalized (interviewee 7) and is now running well (interviewee 8). Interviewee 5 suggested that there is the need to find a balance between having staff to get work done, as it is the case now with the Coalition, but also said that "*you don't want coalitions to get too heavy with too many staff people because then it turns into an organization that in fact, in the worst situation, they can become, they can have their own agenda as a Secretariat".*

5.2.3 Information

The dimension of information addresses information sharing and transparency in the process. The themes that emerged out of our analysis are (1) enhanced communication and information accessibility and (2) transparent functioning and processes with uncertainties on project level.

5.2.3.1 Enhanced communication and information accessibility

The interviewees generally highlighted the accessibility of information and the important role that the Secretariat plays in it. Reaching the current level of information sharing was however a development over time. It was mentioned that with the interim coordinator(s) the capacity was very limited and that with the establishment of the permanent Secretariat, several communication processes were launched (interviewee 8, 1). The timeline in the annual report visualizes how in April 2023 the social media accounts were set up and the website was updated in October 2023 (Agroecology Coalition 2024a). Members also suggested that "*the communication, especially since we have the Secretariat, works very well*" (interviewee 8).

Several members said that the communication was active, they would get regular updates (interviewee 6) and information was well-shared (interviewee 2). Interviewee 7 furthermore said: "*I think they're genuinely trying to give a comprehensive picture of what they've been*

doing", despite the Coalition being "*a complex organization with so many different members and so many different things happening*". Asked about the amount of information received, many interviewees agreed that it was enough (interviewee 10, 11, 12). Interviewee 9 considered it as a good balance where they were not overwhelmed with information, but several interviewees however drew attention to the fact that it required time to go through all the information received (interviewee 5) and that it can be difficult to digest the amount of material shared (interviewee 10). As a concrete example, interviewee 6 mentioned that an email sent via the distribution list and to which many people also reply via the list can become an "email flood" that they cannot read through. Related to the creation of synergies with national coalitions, interviewee 9 suggested that this would also help to organize the information influx and make sure that everyone is well informed.

Additionally, two interviewees highlighted the accessibility of the Secretariat. The Secretariat is described as being very responsive (8) and as interviewee 6 said: "*So you just know who to turn to and then you have the feeling that someone is taking care of your request*".[13] Some members also said that for them it is easy to access information because they are engaged in the inner planning (5) or because they are there when decisions are made (12).

The only issue with regard to accessibility where members mentioned potential for improvement was translation. The annual report puts forward that "the Coalition needs to be, as much as possible, a multilingual space to allow members from different regions to engage" (Agroecology Coalition 2024a, 18). Written material as for instance the brochure, the annual report or the website are available in English, Spanish, French and sometimes Portuguese. For the meetings, however, members reported that they were mainly conducted in English

[13] Translated by the author from German. Original quote: "*Also man weiß es einfach, an wen man sich wendet, und hat dann das Gefühl jemand kümmert sich um das Anliegen".*

(interviewee 5, 6, 7) while sometimes informal translation or assistance was provided (interviewee 1). For the General Assembly meetings, the Coalition had so far capacity to provide simultaneous translation into English, French and Spanish (interviewee 1). Missing translation has been described as an issue which limits the participation of some members (interviewee 1) and even if it is a big cost consideration, it would be a mistake not to provide it (interviewee 5).

5.2.3.2 Transparent functioning and processes with uncertainties on project level

Members also specifically talked about certain types of information and how they were convened. It was highlighted how for the WGs minutes and notes are provided for those who missed a meeting (interviewee 2, 10). As interviewee 8 described it: "*Those who are in the working group, they get all the information they want. I think it's a very transparent process*". Furthermore, in the General Assembly meetings, the WGs present to all the members what they are doing (interviewee 12, 7). The newsletter then provides more general information on what the Secretariat, the Coalition and its members are doing and producing (interviewee 7). Interviewee 12 outlined how emails from the Secretariat inform the members about decisions made in the Steering Committee. Interviewee 7, however, explained that in some cases for them, it was unclear whether a real decision had been reached or what it entailed, but that they had not questioned it much and just went along. This uncertainty about certain decisions is also perceivable in the slightly deviating reports on what was decided on the participation of big private sector actors (refer to section 5.2.1.2).

As far as the terms of reference are concerned, the Coalition provides these for the Steering Committee and the different WGs on the according website sections, which is also pointed out by interviewee 7 and 8. However, interviewee 7 told me that in some cases they felt that they

had not been informed about the terms of reference of a particular project and why certain people in a WG were chosen to carry out the project. The member explained: "*I'm not sure if other people in the group feel the same way. They may feel, oh, it's wonderful that somebody's doing this work and I just want somebody to do it. I don't care very much exactly what they've agreed to do, I'm just really glad that somebody's working on it. But from my perspective, it's important that we get that information*".

Regarding finance, the Coalition transparently publishes on its website in a dedicated section their donor partners. The only issues in relation to financing raised by interviewees were with regard to an international organization: For some, it seems unclear to what extent this organization might have provided funding to the Coalition for some specific project or to what extent they are sponsoring the Coalition in other ways (interviewee 7, 9). Not only finances but also participating entities and actors are transparently communicated in the documents of the Coalition. Interviewee 11 for instance mentioned that members had been informed about the recruitment process of the Secretariat and the co-chair election of the Steering Committee was communicated through different channels. Besides the general list of all the members on the Coalition's website, all the members of the Steering Committee, the co-facilitators of the WGs as well as the staff of the Secretariat are listed and the newsletter regularly updates about new members who have joined (Agroecology Coalition 2023).

6. DISCUSSION

After the presentation of the results of my analysis, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the findings in the light of the two research questions that guide this thesis: **RQ1: To what extent are procedural justice aspects considered in the Agroecology Coalition according to its members? RQ2: Which elements and processes are conducive to procedural justice in the Agroecology Coalition?**

First, the findings for each dimension[14] are discussed in relation to the procedural justice framework (presented in detail in section 3.3.2) and compared to the existing literature on multistakeholder initiatives (MSIs) and the UNFSS.

6.1 Inclusion

The dimension of inclusion is concerned with the representation of actors and knowledge forms, with a special focus on the inclusion of the most affected and most vulnerable actors.

6.1.1 Who are the relevant actors?

The results indicate that members perceive inclusivity as an ongoing process in the Coalition in which representation of many actor groups is assured, but differences in the strength of representation prevail.

Interesting to note is that the only group not being represented are big private sector actors. The non-presence of these actors and the low proportion of SMEs make the Agroecology Coalition a rather atypical MSI, as many of them are dominated by the corporate sector (Manahan and Kumar 2021). In the case of the UNFSS, while individual companies were technically not

[14] Meaning dimension of the framework, namely inclusion, influence and information.

allowed to participate, it has been found that company representatives were nevertheless present at important agenda-setting meetings of the summit, and corporate interests were given a prominent space (Clapp, Noyes, and Grant 2021). In the Agroecology Coalition, different opinions exist on whether big private sector actors are important actors that should be involved in the Coalition's work on food system transformation through agroecology. This result ties in with the discussion in the literature about who the actors are that should have a say in a particular issue. For instance, the philosophy behind the UNFSS was that all actors who wished to participate could participate, following the all-affected principle (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). Meanwhile, Mena and Palazzo (2012, 539) argue that what creates the legitimacy of an MSI is not including as many actors as possible but including the "relevant ones". The Coalition's approach can be considered similarly: It decided to limit its membership to organizations that agreed to adhere to the 13 principles of agroecology because this is the foundation of what the Coalition is working on and strives for. Large private sector actors (for instance multinational agri-businesses) are allowed to join but have to adhere to the 13 principles and might[15] have to offer additional proof of their motivation to work on agroecology to be accepted. The reasons why none of these actors are present is thus most likely due to their lack of interest in joining under these circumstances. The evaluation of whether the Agroecology Coalition fails to include all perspectives on the issue at stake, as is the case for some multistakeholder settings (Alves Zanella et al. 2018), depends thus also on the perspective of who the included actors should be.

Furthermore, our results show that it is also important to define what the issue at stake is to define who the relevant actors are. This is especially important in the presence of power asymmetries which can give influential actors the possibility to implement their interpretation of an issue on others. In the Coalition, there is agreement that only actors willing to work on

[15] Reports from interviewees on this issue have been slightly diverging, so the word "might" is used.

the issue of agroecology as defined by the 13 principles should join, but opinions diverge on how strictly these principles should be applied. The risk of co-optation and a watering down of the transformational view on agroecology, mentioned by some of the interviewees (interviewee 5, 7, 2), is also an issue that was raised by the CSIPM in relation to the UNFSS (Liaison Group, CSIPM 2022).

6.1.2 Inclusion of the most affected and vulnerable actors

Another aspect of procedural justice is the inclusion of particularly affected and vulnerable groups in the transformation of food systems. According to Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys (2021) these groups include the various forms of small-scale producers, indigenous peoples, the young, and women. Previous research on MSIs has shown that they fail to bring previously marginalized communities, that align with the above groups, more fully into global governance (Pattberg and Widerberg 2016). In the case of the Coalition, farmers and frontline people are represented but were mentioned as part of the groups where representation should be increased. Give that they currently hold a small share of the overall membership, and it is hard to judge whether the organizations present can be representative of the whole actor group, it seems to be reasonable to aspire a more balanced representation by having further organizations joining. It can thus be seen that not only whether there is representation but also the quality of this representation is relevant. However, as will be discussed more in detail with regard to influence, increasing representation or membership does not automatically mean that voices are better heard.

Interesting is also that the reservation of some of the social movements to join seems to be due in part to the fact that they do not find the 13 principles as a criterion and/or the way they are currently applied convincing to prevent co-optation or a less transformative view. Again, a

connection between inclusivity, clearly defining the issue worked on and how to handle power asymmetries is perceivable.

6.1.3 Inclusive of knowledge forms and practical experiences

The inclusion of traditional and practical knowledge is positively assessed by the interviewees. It is perceived that practical knowledge from projects on the ground is considered as relevant within the Coalition, and its distribution is promoted by the Secretariat. This stays in contrast to the findings in the context of the Summit according to which the lived food system realities of people were not considered as a source for the Summit's recommendations (Spires et al. 2023) and its scientific group lacked representatives of these forms of knowledge (Nisbett et al. 2021). Furthermore, while in the context of the UNFSS bypassing and attempts of delegitimization of existing UN-level bodies such as the HLPE were reported (Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021; Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann 2022), the Coalition incorporates their work, such as the 13 principles, prominently in the Coalition. Furthermore, the extent to which a community of practice is established and the exchange of knowledge from different projects, region and perspectives happens, the Coalition confirms the role MSIs can have in nurturing knowledge exchange on various dimensions of complex agricultural issues (Hermans et al. 2017) and filling knowledge resource gaps (Pinkse and Kolk 2012).

6.2 Influence

The dimension of influence addresses the level of influence of actors, representativeness of actor groups in leadership positions, capabilities disparities and power asymmetries.

6.2.1 Level of influence

Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann (2022) found in their research on the UNFSS that the Summit successfully included a variety of actors and knowledge but failed to include their inputs into

decisions and outcomes. These results emphasize that looking at the representation of actor groups does not reflect the whole picture, it is also important to see whether they can actively participate and influence outcomes. For judging the level of influence of the different actors, the tripartite categorization by Simcock (2016), ranging from listening as a spectator (receiving information) to consultative influence (giving an opinion but decisions are made by others) to direct authority (taking the decision together with others) can be applied. Given the existing opportunities and openness for participation, it can be interpreted that members had consultative influence for instance in the development of the strategy or by providing their inputs in conferences or meetings of the Coalition. For the strategy development, to the extent that feedback has been included, they also had direct authority. Furthermore, the consensus and discussion-based decision-making process points towards the fact that everyone can exercise direct authority by actively participating in the decisions made, for instance by approving the missions of the WGs or raising objections.

Generally, it can be stated that members can exert influence on the second and third levels of the categorization and that no differences were found between the members' available options for exerting influence. Interesting in terms of decision-making is also that many interviewees felt that not many hard decisions had to be taken and that people were aligned with their opinions. This seems to be related to the 13 principles that are seen as helpful in defining how and what the Coalitions intends to work on. This is an important finding as a common problem of MSIs is the lack of clear rules and objectives (Aubert, Brun, and Treyer 2016). It has also been shown that MSIs are likely to fail when not having an agreed framework (Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021). However, as the discussions on the different views on agroecology in relation to the wait-and-see approach of certain civil society actors to join shows, the strategy process was an important next step to define even more clearly what is aimed at and what is focused on.

6.2.2 Resources and power disparities

My results (section 5.2.2.2) show that not all actors participate to the same extent in the Coalition, partially because for some actors it is not a priority to be actively engaged but mostly because they cannot use the opportunities to the same degree. The barriers to participation relate mostly to resources, be it financial, human capital or time constraints. While *de jure* participatory equality is ensured, *de facto* participatory equality seems not to be realized. Barriers to *de facto* equality are also discussed in the literature and are related to power asymmetries and capabilities disparities (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki 2022). Unequal capacity to mobilize resources creates power asymmetries (Avelino and Rotmans 2009). The differences in resource endowment of members can be interpreted in a way that certain power asymmetries are present in the Coalition that affect a wide range of members. This finding resonates with the existing literature that puts forward the presence and insufficient accounting of power asymmetries in MSIs (e.g. Gleckman 2016; Alves Zanella et al. 2018).

Generally, the impression is transmitted that ones who have the means and resources to actively participation lead and shape the Coalition. This means that the power asymmetries are related to an inequality in participation and influence consequently. As there are no big private sector actors present in the Coalition, it is the more institutionalized, larger, and resource-rich organizations that are most influential.

6.2.3 Measures to work towards *de facto* participatory equality

As concluded by Williams and Doyon (2019), the question of how to address power disparities remains to a large extent unstudied in procedural justice literature. My results show, however, that measures are already implemented or could be implemented to facilitate participation in the case of the Agroecology Coalition. First, interviewees mentioned the importance of creating synergies, with existing coalitions or networks on a more regional/national level, or also with

other global coalitions. In their study on the UNFSS, Diaz-Bonilla et al. (2022) also suggested increasing consolidation between coalitions working on similar issues. This creation of synergies and joint representation in the global coalition would reduce the workload and need for resources for members. It could make their involvement more efficient and targeted, and thus also strengthen their participation and influence. Second, the Coalition is described as a space for small organizations and the Global South to get visibility and a platform for partnerships for their mission and projects. Providing these organizations with access to more resources or a platform for visibility, which may otherwise be unattainable given their own resources, can be seen as a way of balancing resource asymmetries.

Capabilities disparities are the other barrier identified in the literature to equal participation of actors in just transition processes (Williams and Doyon 2019). My results illustrate the space and importance given to learning processes and knowledge exchange within the Coalition, possibly also a reason why no members raised lacking capabilities for their participation. While the literature addresses the issue of building capacity to influence decisions (e.g. Barnaud and Van Paassen 2013), in the context of the Coalition, capacity-building was mentioned with regard to making tools for the implementation of agroecology accessible to people on the ground. According to my results, it would be important for the Coalition to put greater focus on the topics of empowerment and capacity-building for local communities and farmers. The potential of the Coalition to work on this capacity-building for marginalized communities could also help to establish greater connectedness to grassroot organizations.

6.2.4 Inclusive and volunteer-based leadership

The Steering Committee of the Coalition is perceived by the members as an inclusive body where all the constituencies are equally represented. Overall, the mode of recruitment of leadership positions reinforces the impression that the influential actors in the Coalition are the

ones who have the capacity to put time and other resources and for instance take on a leadership position as a volunteer. However, actor groups could decide on their representatives and often were happy that someone with expertise took on the responsibility. It thus seems that no one was bypassed to take on a leadership position, as it has been shown in the case of the UNFSS (Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021). Furthermore, in the case of the Steering Committee, the composition formula explicitly reserves seats for all the constituencies in the committee. For instance, a separate representation of the three constituencies of CSOs/NGOs, farmers and indigenous peoples is ensured on purpose. Given the rather low share of farmers and indigenous peoples organizations in the overall membership, this measure can help to a certain extent to balance out their underrepresentation which becomes important for procedural justice especially because these groups are considered to be part of the most affected and vulnerable actors in the food system (Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys 2021). The case of the Agroecology Coalition thus shows that a volunteer-based structure for leadership positions that favors resource-rich organizations can be balanced out by explicit rules on inclusive compositions. Furthermore, given that all the leadership positions are held by volunteers and thus have limited time capacity, the Secretariat is perceived as having an important role in supporting the leadership and keeping the organization running.

6.3 Information

The indicators of the information dimension relate to the accessibility, timeliness, objectivity and sufficiency of information, as well as the type of information shared, for instance on the process and functioning, the funding structure and involved actors, and on food systems.

6.3.1 Information accessibility and sufficiency

The objectivity and timeliness of information provision did not come up as a topic. For the two other criteria of how information should be shared, accessibility and sufficiency, the perception

of the interviewees was overall very positive, except for translation where potential for improvement was identified. The difficulty in digesting the amount of information received, can also be interpreted as a limited capacity to receive and process information from the side of the members, which would link to the time barriers they face in participation (discussed in section 6.2.2). To make information receiving more efficient, the creation of synergies and common representation could help (as discussed in section 6.2.3).

One of the main findings in the information dimension is the important role of the permanent Secretariat in information provision and distribution. The Secretariat, with increasing capacity, was not only able to launch several communication channels and improve the structure and organization of the Coalition, but it also provides an accessible point to go to in case of questions. The results furthermore show that the next important development to enhance information provision would be the expansion of translation, which in turn is resource- and capacity-intensive.

6.3.2 Importance of transparency in multistakeholder initiatives

My results provide an insight into the perceived differences in the type of information received. The sharing of information about food systems transformation and the consequences of decisions and actions was not that much raised or discussed, which might be related to the fact that the Coalition so far has not established any new guidelines and the 13 principles as a guiding tool are known to and accepted by everyone.

In the context of the UNFSS, findings showed that the recruitment of participants and important positions happened in an untransparent manner, and the overall structure was hard to understand because of its convoluted nature (Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael 2021). Nothing of this kind was reflected in the results on the Coalition, which is probably due not only to the simpler structure and smaller setting but also the clear and transparent communication on it. However,

it was also convened that some decisions and terms of reference, on a project level, were unclearly communicated. While this was only brought up by one interviewee it might have further relevance as the interviewee also said they had not questioned it too much at the time and that other people might have reacted in the same way. Furthermore, Simcock (2016) highlights that people can have different perceptions of whether a process or situation was procedurally just due to different normative expectations or differing experiences of the situation.

Compared to UNFSS where a disconnection between different steps of the process and uncertainty of participants on how their inputs will be further processed was noted (Tanzer, Gläsel, and Egermann 2022), information on the process and functioning of the Coalition is transparent. Related to transparency is also the discussion on new forms of accountability needed in multistakeholder settings. For example, Canfield, Duncan, and Claeys (2021) identified a transparent decision-making process as a mean to conceptualize accountability in these contexts. In this light, the importance of sharing information to make sure that the involved people feel informed becomes even more relevant.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to uncover to what extent procedural justice aspects have been considered and which processes and elements have been conducive to procedural justice in the context of the Agroecology Coalition. The findings provided insight into how the theoretical concept of procedural justice is operationalized in practice and contributed to the knowledge on how procedurally justice multistakeholder collaboration in food system transformation governance can be achieved. Furthermore, the qualitative research approach allowed to open a discussion and provided the opportunity for members to reflect on their experiences within the Coalition and share their perceptions with regard to fair and inclusive governance and processes.

The thesis contributed to filling the research gap on the UNFSS follow-up process, specifically on the Coalitions of Actions and their relationship to procedural justice. The focus on the follow-up process of the UNFSS was chosen in light of existing research on the Summit that revealed several discrepancies concerning the legitimacy and recruitment of participants, the role and level of inclusivity of science, power asymmetries and lacking accountability (refer to literature review section 2.3). The case of the UNFSS and the specific case study of the Agroecology Coalition is significant in that it is an example of a multistakeholder approach to food system governance. These forms of collaboration are gaining ground even if it has been shown that they do not always succeed in higher inclusivity of actors and ensuring participatory equality (refer to literature review section 2.1 and 2.2). However, procedurally just decision-making processes are a crucial component of the transformation to sustainable food systems (refer to theory section 3.2).

The findings revealed that for all three dimensions of procedural justice, aspects were found that are well considered but also some areas where improvement can be made. For the

dimension of inclusion, the research uncovered that inclusive representation is ensured but that the strength of representation is for now not the same for all actors. The findings also raised the question of how to define membership and the relevant actors to strike a balance between ensuring openness to different actor groups and ensuring a certain alignment of these groups with the principles of the Coalition. Concerning the dimension of influence, the research shed light on how power asymmetries impact participation and influence patterns. Furthermore, it discussed measures to balance inequalities in participation and showed the importance of capacity-building not only within the Coalition but also on the grassroot level. In the case of information sharing, the research revealed how barriers to smooth information sharing can be overcome and discussed for which types of information transparency can be enhanced.

Additionally, the research provided theoretical implications for the operationalization of procedural justice, in particular highlighting the interconnectedness of the different dimensions of procedural justice and how many issues have an impact or appear across dimensions. This reaffirms the importance of considering the three dimensions of procedural justice in conjunction in order to paint a holistic picture of a process.

Given the importance of considering the development of a multistakeholder initiative and the associated development of procedural justice aspects over time, my findings have to be understood as a snapshot of the situation in the Coalition. One implication of this is that examining the same case study in a few years' time could provide new relevant insights into for instance the consequences of the finalized strategy process, the further recruitment of members or the development of communication.

Furthermore, the thesis has reaffirmed the importance of conducting research on MSIs to see to what extent they consider procedural justice aspects. This concerns specifically the other Coalitions of Actions that emerged from the UNFSS and work on further driving food system

transformation on a global scale. While the coalitions are encouraged to follow certain principles, they are free to organize themselves , so other coalitions might be very different in their functioning from the Agroecology one. It would thus be insightful to see what processes and structures they have set in place and whether their members had similar or different experiences. Comparing and bringing these results and experiences from different coalitions together could foster mutual learning on how to ensure fairness and inclusiveness.

The research raised important questions on how procedurally just multistakeholder collaboration can be achieved. The findings on what elements and processes are conducive to different aspects of procedural justice also have relevance beyond the scope of the case study. The in-depth findings that generated the lessons learned of the Agroecology Coalition (presented below) can inform and guide practitioners involved in setting up or managing other multistakeholder initiatives in food system transformation governance. Given that a considerable number of findings on the Coalition have parallels with the existing literature on MSIs (refer to discussion sections 6.1 to 6.3), these lessons cannot be directly generalizable but of relevance to other cases. Based on my research, the following lessons learned on how to achieve procedurally just multistakeholder collaboration in food system transformation governance are proposed:

(1) Proactive recruitment and targeted efforts to motivate specific actors to join are needed to ensure a balanced representation of actor groups and knowledge forms.

(2) A staffed secretariat as an administrative entity plays an important role in enabling sufficient information sharing and supporting leadership positions, especially when they are held by volunteers with limited time capacity.

(3) Guiding principles such as the 13 principles help to define the issue at stake and the relevant actors to collaborate on it. They can limit the room for contestation or co-optation

and facilitate decision-making, which can enhance the inclusivity of marginalized and less powerful groups.

(4) Disparities in power and participation can be mitigated by facilitating the creation of synergies and joint representation of different regions or subgroups, fostering visibility and partnerships for less resource-rich organizations and having inclusive composition formula for leadership bodies.

(5) Limited capacities of an administrative body on the transferring side or/and of members on the receiving side can hinder a sufficient exchange of information and thus transparency in the process.

(6) With the development of an MSI, procedural justice aspects can be increasingly considered, if made a priority, due to increased capacity and learning processes.

In the broader context, my findings showed the potential for the consideration of procedural justice aspects in multistakeholder initiatives. However, my research highlighted that for transformation processes to be inclusive and fair, adequate and specific measures conducive to procedural justice need to be implemented in practice. It is thus crucial to exchange practices and lessons learned from cases such as the Agroecology Coalitions in the broader umbrella of the UNFSS and with the other Coalitions of Actions to enable them to unfold their role in driving a *just* transformation of food systems on a global level.

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ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TEMPLATE

Part 1

- How did you hear about the Agroecology coalition and when did you join it?
- What is your role in the coalition and which functions do you have?

Part 2

- From your perspective, how was this coalition established?
- How would you describe the governance of the coalition?
- How do you perceive the actors that are represented in the coalition?
- What are criteria for membership?
- How are leadership positions attributed?

Part 3

- How do you make inputs and contribution to the coalition?
- How do the working groups operate?
- From your experience, how is the decision-making process within the coalition?
- How did you experience the consultation process for the five-year strategy? What contributions did you make to the five-year strategy?
- Could you tell me about a situation in which you were able to make a difference or in which your input was taken into account in the coalition?
- Was there maybe also a time when you did not agree with a decision that was made or a project that was implemented?
- What are barriers to your participation in the coalition? What facilitates your participation?
- How do you receive information about decisions that are made and about what is happening in the coalition?
- What kind of knowledge is consulted to inform the work of the coalition?

- How are translations provided for meetings and documents?

- Final questions: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the coalition and its mode of work? Do you have any questions for me about my research?

ANNEX 2: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Table 1: List of interviewees. Source: Developed by the author.

Pseudonyms	Coalition	Date of the interview
Interviewee 1	Agroecology Coalition	27.02.2024
Interviewee 2	Agroecology Coalition	29.02.2024
Interviewee 3	Agroecology Coalition	29.02.2024
Interviewee 4	Other coalition	04.03.2024
Interviewee 5	Agroecology Coalition	08.03.2024
Interviewee 6	Agroecology Coalition	11.03.2024
Interviewee 7	Agroecology Coalition	21.03.2024
Interviewee 8	Agroecology Coalition	25.03.2024
Interviewee 9	Agroecology Coalition	28.03.2024
Interviewee 10	Agroecology Coalition	04.04.2024
Interviewee 11	Agroecology Coalition	04.04.2024
Interviewee 12	Agroecology Coalition	12.04.2024

ANNEX 3: CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Hanna Della Casa and I am currently a Master student in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management at the Central European University (CEU). Under the supervision of Anke Schaffarztik, I am conducting research for my Master thesis about the Coalitions of Actions that emerged out of the UN Food System Summit (UNFSS).

More specifically, I am interested in the governance structure and decision-making processes of the Coalitions of Actions rooted in Action Track 3 "boosting nature-positive production".

The purpose of this research is to uncover the functioning and decision-making processes of the coalitions with regard to the three concepts of inclusion, transparency and influence. The focus is on gathering the experiences of the participating actors. By studying the procedures and dynamics of decision-making in the coalitions, I hope to conclude "lessons learned" about how fair and inclusive multistakeholder collaboration for food system transformation can be achieved.

As part of this research, I would like to conduct an interview with you of approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour to talk about your experiences. It would assist me if I could audio or video record the interview with your permission. This would allow me to revisit the conversation, transcribe it accurately, and ensure that I capture all relevant details. The data will be stored on my computer and on my iPad, both locked with a password and only I will have access to it. One year after the completion of my thesis project, the recording will be deleted.

The conversation will be confidential and anonymous. Nor your name neither any other identification will be used, your ideas and quotations will be referred to by a pseudonym. The data gathered will only be used for my Master thesis.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time by contacting me via email. No renumeration for the participation in this research will be made and no payment from your side is needed. If you wish so, you can get access to the final findings and the thesis project which may provide you with valuable insights.

The risks for your participation are no more than what happens in everyday life. If you do not want to answer a question or it makes you feel uncomfortable, please let me know and we will move on to another question.

If you have at any time questions about this research, do not hesitate to contact me. If needed, you can also reach out to my supervisor at any time.

Thank you in advance and with best regards,

Hanna Della Casa

[redacted]

Supervisor: Anke Schaffartzik [redacted]

Consent Form for Interview as part of the thesis project on the Coalitions of Actions of the UNFSS

Name and position of the interviewee: ____

The participant confirms to have been informed about the purpose and nature of the research project and to have had the opportunity to ask questions about it. The participant confirms that they know what this study is about.

YES NO

The participant understands that their participation in this research is completely voluntary and that their participation can be withdrawn at any time, and they can refuse to answer a question/questions.

YES NO

The participant understands that their data will be treated confidentially.

YES NO

The participant agrees to participate in the research by giving an interview.

YES NO

The participant gives their consent for the audio or video recording of the interview.

YES (audio) YES (video) NO

The participant agrees that quotations and ideas from the conducted interview may be used in the thesis paper, without mentioning names.

YES NO

Date ____ Name _____

Signature _____