Politics out of place

Understanding the geography of discontent in the Netherlands from a spatial justice perspective

Bram van Vulpen

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Prof. dr. C.F. van den Berg
Prof. dr. ir. B.B. Bock

Beoordelingscommissie

Prof. dr. A.M. Molema
Prof. dr. ir. E.S. van Leeuwen
Prof. dr. K.J. Cramer

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Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.
- Marcel Proust (1957)

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Preface

The preconstructed is everywhere.
- Pierre Bourdieu (1992)

Before I start, I would like to invite you to a practice of reflexive sociology. In this particular practice, I follow the conception of sociological reflexivity as set out by the renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1992). Accordingly, social scientists must at all times be conscious of the effects of their own position, their own set of internalised structures, and how these are likely to distort or prejudice their objectivity.

We humans are shaped – to a great extent - by our social environment. I am referring to family, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbours, and other people that were and still are surrounding us. Our social environment is entangled in spatial contexts with specific cultural, economic, and political features. One's country, one's region, one's neighbourhood or village, it co-shapes who we are. With that, it is important to realise how people and their behaviour are formed and that there may be differences depending on where you were born or where you live. Inequalities in wealth, freedom, security, affection, opportunities in life, to name a few examples. At the same time, we must be wary of judging another by where one's from.

According to Bourdieu 'the sociologist is thus saddled with the task of knowing an object – the social world – of which he is the product, in a way such that the problems he raises about it and the concepts he uses have every chance of being the product of this object itself' (Bourdieu, 1992, 235). I am conscious of my own positionality as researcher, and therefore I would like to briefly explicate my own geographical pathways here.

Only a few steps away from the serene forests, in a terraced house in an affluent urban neighbourhood, there stood my cradle. I grew up in the Dutch 'hills' of Arnhem, a middle sized city in the east of the Netherlands, near the border with Germany. My parents settled there as my father started working at KEMA (a Dutch company for technical consultancy, operational support, inspection, and testing and certification services headquartered in Arnhem). Raised in a loving, middle-class family, I was privileged to have a stable and caring environment growing up in the 1990s and 2000s.

After graduating high school, I moved to Amsterdam to study sociology. In the nation's capital I learned to critically study the welfare state, capitalism, governmentality, and different forms of capital, to name a few. In these college years, I became intertwined with the cultural and intellectual 'hotspots' of Amsterdam. My first fulltime position was as a junior researcher at the Netherlands School of Public Administration in The Hague, where I became acquainted

with the ways of policymaking in the government skyline. In the political heart of the country, I also saw the complexity of policymaking, the necessity of bureaucratic sluggishness, and the engagement of civil servants to improve policy.

My aspiration to write a dissertation then pulled me towards the north of the Netherlands. In late 2018 I started as a PhD candidate at the University of Groningen, Campus Fryslân. Living in Leeuwarden I soon learned much about regional attachment and the Frisian history. I even discovered that I had Frisian roots myself, albeit multiple generations ago. Frisian ancestors from my mother's side lived for centuries in Bolsward and later one of them settled in Leeuwarden to become a cabinet-maker. The historical bricks of my ancestors are just a stone's throw away from the faculty building of Campus Fryslân. With red neon-light shining on my cheeks, I found out that the former home of my great-great-great-grandfather is nowadays a ramshackle, seedy erotic centre. Although a little awkward, it perfectly exemplifies how place changes over time.

In the chair group of Global and Local Governance led by Caspar van den Berg, I was soon intrigued by the role of regional disparities across countries. It was here where my engagement in social and economic inequalities, which developed strongly during my college years, was first introduced to its geographical aspects. I noticed that people felt detached from the government skyline in the Hague, that national politics was perceived to be out of place, and as a consequence overlooked what was happening in the outskirts of the country. That is why I decided to follow the path of spatial justice in the Netherlands for my dissertation.

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1. Introduction

Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics. It has always been political and strategic. There is an ideology of space.
- Henri Lefebvre (1976)

1.1 The geography of discontent

1.1.1 Political tumult in the Netherlands

In October 2019, a parade of tractors drove into the political capital of the Netherlands. From all over the country heavy rubber wheels slowly chugged towards the city of The Hague, causing the biggest traffic jam in the history of the Netherlands. Right in the political heart of the country assembled an estimated 2200 tractors, standing in front of the departmental skyline as a strong symbol of the countryside. Thousands of people came to protest against a 'distrustful government' (Verlaan and Smouter, 2019), which according to the organisers was creating a false image of the agricultural sector. It marked the beginning of years of fierce farmers' protests in which protesters revolted against stricter regulations for nitrogen deposition by the agricultural sector (see Van der Ploeg, 2020; Meijer, 2022; Bosma and Peeren, 2021).

In various recent outbursts of social unrest, such as the farmer protests, outraged Dutch citizens blamed a political establishment for ignoring and mistreating their place. For example with the protests against the extraction of natural gas in the northern periphery that caused local earthquakes in the region of Groningen (see Van der Voort and Vanclay, 2015; Perlaviciute et al., 2018; Otjes et al., 2020). Or, with violent encounters between people who are pro- and anti-blackface, a caricature in a national tradition of St. Nicholas that is accused of being a racist stereotype. In several news reports on these cases, protesters directed their resentment towards politicians 'from The Hague' (where parliament is seated), and people 'from the Randstad' (an economic conurbation of the four largest cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague), who according to them had no interest in the wellbeing of the people from the countryside or distant regions (see for example Sommer, 2014; Kruyswijk, 2019; FDF, 2020).

Besides these protests, in the past years there has been growing support for right-wing populism in the peripheral parts of the country (De Voogd, 2017), including the entrance of a new farmer party (*BoerBurgerBeweging)* onto the political scene. Populist parties are characterised by their anti-establishment rhetoric of acting for 'the common people' and blaming a political elite (Mudde, 2019). While in the very beginning of the 21st century new right-wing populism arose in the large cities in the Randstad area (Lucardie, 2008), in recent

years the support for anti-establishment parties is strongly coming from poor urban areas and peripheral regions (Evans et al., 2019; De Voogd and Cuperus, 2021).

1.1.2 International geography of discontent

The geographic character of recent political tumult in the Netherlands can be viewed in light of an international phenomenon called *the geography of discontent*. In the last decade, the political landscape was shaken up by a new wave of populist leaders seizing power in long-standing liberal democracies (Mudde, 2019; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). First there was the election of Trump in the United States in 2016, proceeded by the 2017 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, followed by many other electoral wins of populist leaders across Europe. Considering the populist vote as an expression of protest by citizens who are displeased and fed up with the way the country is governed, the populist revolt triggered a burst of studies that tried to explain where the dismissal of the political establishment was coming from. A renewed light was shed upon discontented groups that were possibly overlooked, disadvantaged, and left behind in the corners of society.

With the international surge of populism, rural and old-industrial communities were swiftly flagged as prominent places of discontent (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2017; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2020). Pioneering studies found that new social cleavages developed strongly across spatial divides. From a geographic point of view the populist surge became widely known as 'the revenge of the places don't matter', coined by Rodríguez-Pose (2018). Correspondingly, economic geographers pointed out a divergence between prospering regions and regions that were 'victims of globalisation' and 'left behind' in economic prosperity (Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Gordon, 2018; Martin et al., 2018; Odendahl et al., 2019; De Ruyter et al., 2021). So-called left-behind places, or inner peripheries, were afflicted by economic decay, population decline, and lower levels of education (see also Raugze and van Herwijnen, 2018; Wuthnow, 2018). Other studies indicated that sentiments of discontent also come from cultural resentment, between a relatively conservative countryside and cosmopolitan cities (Cramer, 2016; Florida, 2021), and between peripheries with strong regional identities and dominant national cores (Ziblatt et al., 2020).

When I began this doctoral research in late 2018, I was becoming alarmed at the increasingly hostile geographic split within nations, including my own. At the same time a new field emerged on the topic of geography of discontent, induced by scholars who – like me – were trying to grasp this social phenomenon and looking for scientific evidence to explain it.

What exactly are sentiments of discontent, how is it spread across regional divides, and what are sources of regional discontent? Are there regions that are disadvantaged or left out?

This introductory chapter is structured as follows. First I will provide a broad overview of the topic of this research. Subsequently I lay out the research problem that I address in this dissertation, narrow the research focus, and go into the research questions. Next, the theoretical and methodological approach of this dissertation is explained followed by an outline of the thesis.

1.2 Unjust geographies

1.2.1 A spatial turn

In the late twentieth century a spatial turn occurred in academia, in which geographers noted that science had a blind spot for territorial features and spatial conditions in social divides (Smith, 2000; Soja, 2010; Shucksmith et al., 2021). Simply put, some people in some places are better off than others elsewhere. The French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, one of the founders of critical geography, emphasised in his cutting-edge work *The Production of Space* (1992) that space is a social product rather than an uncontrollable autonomy (see also Elden, 2007). It is true that for centuries landscapes and their natural resources have determined the location to build communities, and still are today. Rivers, oceans, mountains, forests, deserts, islands, soils, and so forth, shaped divides between communities across the world. However, spatial divides are also the outcome of several social, economic, demographic, and political changes. These changes are not 'natural' critical spatial theorists point out, but constituted by human acts. This interdependency is termed as the *socio-spatial dialectic* (Soja, 1980): space shapes the social world and the social world shapes space. According to this conception, injustices between areas are the product of human action and political decision-making (Lefebvre, 1976, 1992; Pirie, 1983; Elden, 2007).

Critical geographers created a new spatial consciousness in seeking justice (Soja, 2010). In doing so, they challenged the widely-held assumption that the bounds of injustices are fundamentally interpersonal, such as race, sexuality, age, and gender, arguing instead that space also contributes to matters of injustice and social divides. Spatial justice is a subcategory within social justice, similar to racial justice or climate justice theory (e.g. Bell, 1987; Jenkins et al., 2016). Even though these subcategories are often intersected (see for example Pellow, 2017). The scope of spatial justice can be understood as geographical engagement with social justice, in which researchers aim to uncover 'the production of unjust geographies' (Soja, 2010). With

this spatial approach, injustices can be studied at multiple scales and in many different social contexts, from urban segregation to postcolonial geographies.

1.2.2 From global to urban divides

(Un)just geographies were – and still are – predominantly addressed in relation to global inequality and later to urban inequality. In the 1960s and 1970s, economic dependency theorists addressed the uneven development of countries within the context of global capitalism (Wallerstein, 1974; Friedmann and Wayne, 1977; McKenzie, 1977). According to them, persistent poverty in many parts of the world was the result of shifting production processes and division of labour in global capitalism that transformed spatial interdependence across the globe into domination-subordination relationships. The World System's Theory of Wallerstein (1974) explained that dominant core countries – politically stable, highly developed, technologically advanced – exploited the peripheries with a weak state and underdeveloped labour-intensive societies.

Already in 1968 Lefebvre was the first to popularise the phrase 'the right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996), which referred to the right to belong to and the right to co-produce the urban spaces. Nowadays this idea still provokes many discussions about its meaning (see for example Marcuse, 2009a). With urban decay prevalent in large cities across western countries in the 1980s and 1990s, many scholars started to focus on inequality within cities. Urban sociologist Wacquant (2008), and social geographers such as Harvey (1990), illuminated that in post-industrial cities the outskirts developed into black American ghettos and European working-class peripheries, and residents were relegated to urban outcasts. This approach, still applied today, grasps the institutional mechanisms that produce and reproduce social injustices within cities (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2009; Fainstein, 2015; Wacquant, 2016).

In affluent countries the post-industrial void was filled by an international rise of metropolitan areas in a knowledge-driven economy. Economically successful cities were first hailed as the engines of the global economy, as competitive clusters of innovative and transformative power in a global network (Florida, 1996, 2004; Glaeser, 2011). A new regionalism in a networked society set the ground for a new economic order of local buzz and global pipelines (Castells, 1997; Keating, 1998; Amin, 2004). Space and production processes became less interdependent and initiated a geographical dispersion of production, yet advantages of agglomeration led new industries to settle close to each other in mostly urban areas (Rosenthal and Strange, 2004; Meijers and van der Wouw, 2019). Regimes with a pro-growth agenda typically bet on their 'strong horses' or 'national champions' to compete

internationally with other cities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Crouch and Le Galès, 2012; Jessop, 2018).

1.2.3 New regional divides

From 2016 onwards, political shocks of the international uprising of populist leaders caught the attention of many scholars. Besides social characteristics such as economic precarity, cultural backlashes, or rising anti-migration attitudes (Rodrik, 2018; Mudde, 2019; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Damhuis, 2020), researchers became increasingly interested in the geographic patterns. With that, academic literature in regards to territorial inequalities and geographic divides, broadly speaking, shifted from global inequality, to urban inequality, to regional inequality. A new field emerged around the salient topic of the geography of discontent, which aims to better understand in what ways place contributes to the socio-political consternation in societies.

Economic geographers swiftly pointed out that globalisation reached a critical conjuncture of increasing interregional inequalities (Martin et al., 2018). In the last decades, several regions bloomed in prosperity while other parts of the same country were 'left behind' in the fierce economic competition of globalisation (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Wuthnow, 2018; McCann, 2020; MacKinnon et al., 2021; Pike, 2023). Even though the European Union implemented policies to improve territorial cohesion and economic underdevelopment of areas, multiple studies showed that regional inequalities within EU member states steadily increased since the mid-90s (Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2018; Odendahl et al., 2019). According to this approach, inhabitants of economically sidelined regions turned away from the political establishment and walked in into the arms of populist leaders (Guilluy, 2019; Dijkstra et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020).

Rural sociologist and social geographers, in addition, flagged the negative impacts of demographic changes on sparsely populated communities. The body of peripheralisation literature signals that population decline and ageing are contributing factors to the erosion of public services in communities, such as (digital) infrastructure, public transport, health facilities, and schools, supermarkets (Kühn, 2015; Wirth et al., 2016; Raugze and van Herwijnen, 2018). Research on the urban-rural divide in digital exclusion (Salemink, 2016; Ashmore et al., 2017; Philip et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2017), as well on the social innovations to revitalise rural communities (Bock, 2016; Gieling et al., 2019; Richter, 2019; Ubels et al., 2020), show that peripheral areas across different countries strongly rely on self-organisation and civic action to overcome certain spatial inequalities. In consideration of that, social

deprivation of rural communities is also linked to the geography of discontent (Wuthnow, 2018; Van den Berg and Kok, 2021).

Other studies also pinpointed the role of strong place-based social identities. This is often captured as the cultural resentment between conservative countryside and cosmopolitan cities (see for example Florida, 2021). Studies in the US showed a salient social clash in which ruralites feel dismissed and maltreated by an urban elite, on account of personal experiences of being talked down to as 'fly-over country' or as 'backward' and of being disrespected due to their rural lifestyle (Cramer, 2016; Carolan, 2019). Yet scholars should not overlook the deeper, historical roots, and cultures, particularly in Europe. In his research to radical right support in Germany, Ziblatt (2020) demonstrated that historical peripheries are more likely characterised by strong regional identities in opposition to a dominant national core.

1.3 Problem statement, research aim and questions

1.3.1 Research problem: three knowledge gaps

Despite the increasing knowledge about the geography of discontent, only little is known about the different sentiments of discontent as well as the multiple sources that fuel contemporary discontent. I note three knowledge gaps in literature.

First, there is a *content gap* related to the geographic context of studies. The geography of discontent is signalled in countries across the whole world (Rodríguez-Pose, 2020), yet an overwhelming amount of studies was conducted within the specific context of the US and the UK. What applies in these most likely cases – countries with large geographic distances and strong economic inequalities – does not necessarily have to apply for other places. Especially in European countries there is a long history of territorial conflicts and regional identities that should be taken into account (Gottlieb, 1994; Paasi, 2003; Ziblatt et al., 2020). For instance, ethno-nationalist sentiments in northern Italy and Flanders (Bonikowski, 2017; Dalle Mulle, 2017), or communism and fascism in eastern Germany (Ziblatt et al., 2020; Greve et al., 2022). Although not always visible in the landscape, space is moulded by historical elements (Lefebvre, 1992). It ignores that most national contexts of political systems, geographies and cultural history are fundamentally different. The presumed generality of US or UK cases in the geography of discontent is not just ignorant, it could potentially enforce further discontent.

Second, there is an *empirical knowledge gap*. Numerous studies of importance have signalled geographic patterns in discontent through populist voting behaviour. Even though election data is - in most countries - highly reliable and very rich in detail, by itself it does not

provide an explanation for the exact reasons for casting a vote. It lacks a full understanding of different sentiments of discontent in society, and where these sentiments come from. Discontent can comprise different sets of feelings, which are not rooted in a single issue. In addition, it is contested which political parties can be labelled as populist (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Norris, 2020), and whether their voters share the same resentment towards the same establishment (Rooduijn, 2018). Moreover, people can be discontented for the same reasons as populist supporters, yet not turn to populist alternatives. As a result of this, the geography of discontent is often flattened into a populist threat, while there is much more to unravel about the different sentiments of discontent inhabitants might share regardless of their voting behaviour.

Third, there is a *conceptual knowledge gap*. Spatial justice literature has long ignored the countryside. It is developed and applied in urban studies to highlight fundamental unjust procedures and outcomes in the city (see for example Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2009; Soja, 2010; Fainstein, 2015; Moroni, 2020), leading to a rather urban-centric focus (De Souza, 2017). Only recently several scholars started to include rural and regional inequalities in investigating spatial justice, with an eye for institutional mechanisms and government policies (e.g. Carolan, 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Woods, 2019; Shucksmith et al., 2021; Weck et al., 2021). Many studies of spatial justice though lack a discussion about the principles of justice. There is a lack of interest in unpacking the political philosophy of the meaning of injustice (e.g. Dikeç, 2001; Marcuse, 2009; Bret et al., 2010; Soja, 2010; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013), which fails to explain what moral principles of justices are being violated.

1.3.2 Research aim: a new conceptual and spatial perspective on the geography of discontent

The aim of this dissertation is to deeply understand the geography of discontent, investigating how sentiments of discontent are spread across regional divides and which regional disparities are considered as likely explanations for contemporary discontent. In pursuing that research aim, this dissertation provides a new conceptual perspective, which is unfolded with an empirical case study of the Netherlands.

In order to peal of the many layers of the geography of discontent and come to an deeper understanding, this dissertation turns to *spatial justice theory*. I argue that first one needs to view the geography of discontent not merely as a (populist) threat to democracy, but to empathise with the other and explore discontent as a sign of possible injustice in society. Both in academic circles and in political arenas there are concerns over the fact that discontent

triggers political instability, and for good reasons. With authoritarian populist leaders in political power there is a risk of democratic backsliding, an erosion of democratic checks and balances (Mudde, 2004; Bermeo, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Also, place-based discontent can be fertile ground for radicalised and extreme resistance (see for example Von Essen et al., 2015). Indeed, it is important to uncover to what extent a (potential) destabilisation of liberal democracy is geographically determined. With a conceptual view of social justice, discontented citizens are also seen as potentially vulnerable groups who are possibly afflicted by economic hardship, social exclusion, and maltreatment by the state.

In this dissertation I specifically engage with the social justice framework of philosopher Nancy Fraser (2009), by proposing a spatial (re)interpretation of her conceptual work, which I will later expound on in the theoretical approach. While Fraser's framework is typically used to address matters of justice related to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other forms of discrimination, this same approach may be very helpful in a spatial context testing for injustices across regional divides. According to Carolan (2019: 6) social justice is 'not just a concept but a project that is continually negotiated and renegotiated, as are questions about whose voice ought to count in these debates'. Therefore it is necessary to continuously (re)identify who are subjects of injustice, including place-based groups. According to Fraser matters of social justice revolve around three axes: (re)distribution, recognition, and representation (Fraser, 2009; Cesario Alvim Gomes, 2018; van den Brink et al., 2019). A spatial reinterpretation of Fraser's prism allows me to capture different sentiments, to search for regional disparities within specific domains that can explain discontent, and also to substantiate different principles why something is perceived as unfair.

1.3.3 Case description: the Netherlands

To contribute to filling the geographic content gap in literature, this dissertation takes the Netherlands as a case study. The Netherlands is considered a *least likely case* for a geography of discontent, which means that the findings about regional divides may be likely to apply for other countries. The inferential logic of a least likely case design is based on what Levy (2008) calls a 'Sinatra inference': if I can make it there I can make it anywhere. This logic contrasts most likely cases such as the US and the UK. The Netherlands is a least likely case for regional discontent, for three reasons.

First, a geographic reason. The Netherlands is one the smallest and densely populated countries in Europe (Eurostat, 2019). This small and mostly flat delta area in north-western Europe is inhabited by more than 17 million people. Distances from one place to another are

relatively small, and in comparison to large countries all areas are easy to travel by car and public transport (max. 4-5 hours). In absolute terms, one can hardly speak of remote or isolated areas. Second, a political reason. The Netherlands is a traditional consensus seeking democracy that consists of a proportional system with one national constituency (Toonen, 1990; Van der Meer et al., 2019), which suggests that territorial representation is not considered important. In contrast to surrounding countries such as Belgium, Denmark, and Germany, the Netherlands is a democracy without a district system. Parliamentary seats are not bound to a specific region, but to the general population. In addition, Dutch regions are limited in authority (Hooghe et al., 2010; Groenleer and Hendriks, 2018). Third, a socio-economic reason. The Netherlands is among the most affluent countries in Europe (Eurostat, 2019). Standards of economic wealth and general wellbeing of Dutch citizens are consistently high. In comparison to other European countries, the Netherlands has high household incomes, low income inequality, low unemployment rates, a good health care system, and high levels of subjective wellbeing (Eurostat, 2019; Peiró-Palomino, 2019; Chancel et al., 2022).

Yet similar to other European countries, there are signs of uneven spread of discontent across the Netherlands. Quantitative evidence shows stark regional disparities in economic performance (Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2018), a decline of accessibility of rural areas due to cutbacks in public transport (Tillema, 2019), as well as a divergence of cosmopolitan-nationalist attitudes along the urban-rural divide (Huijsmans et al., 2021), and more support for right-wing populism in the peripheral areas (De Lange et al., 2022; Van den Berg and Kok, 2021; Van Leeuwen et al., 2021). In addition, the Netherlands has a long history of strong territorial divides and regional identities that continues in regional attachment and a sense of belonging today (Simon et al., 2010; Terlouw, 2018; Vermeij and Schyns, 2019). For those reasons, the Netherlands is not likely to be a deviant case – an exception to the rule (see Levy, 2008), but should be considered as a least likely case.

With a new conceptual lens, I capture empirical evidence about perceptions and contextual factors across regions in the Netherlands. On the one hand, revealing perceptions and attitudes clarify different sorts of sentiments of regional discontent. On the other hand, exposing regional development and contextual factors helps to problematise spatial disparities within the Netherlands and to uncover whether perceptions are aligned with them or not. Moreover, it even helps to confirm or debunk myths.

In correspondence with scholars who problematise economic decline of old-industrial areas in the last decades (Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2018; Blažek et al., 2019; Evenhuis et al., 2021; Diemer et al., 2022), and population loss and public services accessibility

in rural areas (Kühn, 2015; Wirth et al., 2016), I am keen to reveal trajectories of socio-economic development across regions and over time within the Netherlands, and find out how these relates to recent regional discontent. Recent studies also showed that many Dutch people feel that one's region is overlooked by government (De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022), more specifically that one's region is not receiving their fair share in redistribution. Yet, little is known what government perceives as a fair or 'just' redistribution in a new regional development funds. Moreover, while several political scientists showed a representational gap of women, migrants and working-class electives in Dutch parliament (Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Bovens and Wille, 2017; Mügge et al., 2019), this study endeavours to examine the understudied structural underrepresentation of regions in a parliament without district seats.

1.3.3 Research questions
This dissertation addresses the following main research question:

How is contemporary discontent spread across regional divides in the Netherlands, and what regional disparities are likely to explain this?

Subquestions:

- Which insights into regional divides can be generated when departing from a spatial interpretation of Fraser's concept of social justice? (Chapter 2)
- To what extent may uneven distribution of socio-economic prosperity between regions explain feelings of regional discontent? (Chapter 3)
- From which principle of justice do novel regional development policies depart, and how does that affect the redistribution of regional investments? (Chapter 4)
- How (mis)balanced is regional representation in Dutch parliament, and is this likely to explain regional discontent? (Chapter 5)

1.4 Theoretical approach

1.4.1 Philosophical understanding of social justice
To elaborate on how I approach spatial justice in this research, I will first explain my philosophical understanding of social justice. The philosophy of social justice has a long history and can even be traced back to philosophical thinkers such as Confucius, Plato and Aristoteles

who discussed the notion of justice in relation to fairness, goodness, and virtue among others. Social justice is about the moral beliefs each person has about what is right and what is wrong. With that, and this is very important to emphasise, there is no true or false view on what is just and what not. Justice is not per definition equality – a common misunderstanding. Over centuries, several schools of thought have sprung up in political philosophy of social justice (see Sandel, 2010), which have alternately prevailed in political governance and thus in the organisation of a just society. We can speak of, in Rawlsian terms, reasonable pluralism comprising a 'family' of normative principles of justice (Peter, 2007). Consider, for example, (neo)liberalism (see Peck, 2010), egalitarianism (see Nielsen, 1979), or utilitarianism (Warnock, 2003). Unfortunately I cannot go into detail about all families of political philosophy here, what matters to me is that there are many different arguments about what a just society should look like.

Fraser is seen as an egalitarian philosopher. Fraser (1995, 2009; Fraser and Honneth, 2003) considers justice from a radical-democratic standpoint of participatory parity: everyone should be able to participate in social life as peers, and we should dismantle the institutionalised obstacles that induce imparity. In this egalitarian philosophy, Fraser strives for a community of equals: a society in which everyone has an equal position to participate. In this dissertation, however, I will not pursue a particular egalitarian conception of social justice, nor an another normative conviction. Converting moral conviction into political practice is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Social justice theory is sometimes criticised as being arbitrary, for being too normative and for being associated with activism (see also Smith, 2000). Prominent geographer Harvey (2009: 14) noted that there is an inevitable distinction between observation and values in the judgement of justice. Indeed, a scholar must be wary of becoming too politically engaged. Yet, the critique on social justice ignores its explanatory power, it ignores the fathomable ways it can distil people their arguments for perceived injustices. I therefore argue in line with the Frankfurter School to make normative criteria more explicit and up for discussion. In correspondence with Pirie (1983: 166), I acknowledge that 'different basic assumptions do, however, generate different principles of justice and are open to debate anyway'. A more detailed examination of these various principles of justice would be required to capture different views of a fair society and to expose issues that could be interpreted as unfair and lead to friction. Inspired by the work of Buitelaar and colleagues (Buitelaar et al., 2017; Needham et al., 2018; Buitelaar, 2020; Evenhuis et al., 2020), this dissertation aims to distill normative

perspectives of justice in designing policies and institutional structures and relate this to the empirical observations.

1.4.2 Towards a spatial interpretation of Fraser's social justice framework

In this dissertation, I engage with Nancy Fraser's tridimensional framework of social justice with a spatial reinterpretation. In response to a surge of distributive justice scholarship in the 70s (e.g. Rawls, 2009), Fraser (1995) argued for incorporating the multiculturalist critique of 'recognition of difference' brought forward in the 90s by Charles Taylor and Iris Marion Young among others. According to Fraser (1995; 2004), on the one hand theorists of distributive justice ignored identity politics while theorists of recognition on the other hand ignored distribution. Integrating the two, Fraser (1995) argued, would help to better understand the social challenges at stake. Later Fraser (2005, 2009) added a third political dimension alongside the economic and cultural dimension she presented in her earlier work (see also Cesario Alvim Gomes, 2018; van den Brink et al., 2019). This makes the following three dimensions that capture matters of social justice: (*re)distribution*, *recognition* and *representation*. Even though these dimensions are conceptually distinguished, they are also inextricably intertwined.

In her work – predominantly covering class struggles and violation of women's rights, Fraser neglects the spatial. Fraser (2005, 2009) claims that globalisation forces us to rethink justice and pleads to go beyond national borders, arguing that people no longer coincide with territorial citizenries and economies are no longer national. Following the spatial critique on social justice scholarship by Harvey (2009), Soja (2010), and more recently Carolan (2019), which emphasised the significance of the socio-spatial dialectic, I argue that it is important to also critically study empirics within borders to comprehend how social injustice relates to spatial disparities. Chapter 2 works out an extensive spatial interpretation of Fraser's theoretical justice framework, by arranging empirical evidence for regional inequality and the geography of discontent into the three dimensions of justice. Yet, I will briefly introduce the triparte understanding of justice here.

First, the conceptual approach of *distribution* examines the distribution of benefits and burdens across society. Redistribution then specifically focusses on the ways how government redistributes, or allocates, resources between groups. Traditionally, this approach addresses socio-economic issues revolving around the rich versus the poor (see for example Rawls, 2009; Chancel et al., 2022). For instance, how is wealth distributed within societies? And how are institutional mechanisms and state regulations (re)producing wealth inequality? From a spatial point of view, the scope of this issue immediately falls on the (re)production of geographic

divides in wealth inequality within cities (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2009), or uneven regional development (e.g. Horner et al., 2018). Uneven spatial (re)distribution stretches beyond the distribution of economic resources, to access to public services, to the built environment, to exposure to environmental hazards, et cetera. The conceptual lens of (re)distribution then covers a wide variety of resources that create spatial divides.

Second, Fraser's dimension of *recognition* addresses issues of inferiority, dignity, contempt, and discrimination that are entangled with social status. According to Fraser, injustices in society come from social inequality. Marginalised groups at the bottom of social hierarchy generally face more challenges in life than those at the top. Typically, studies of recognition critically assess whether groups have the same legal rights, entitlements, opportunities, and outcomes. For instance marginalised groups based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or nationality. From a spatial point of view, social status is also attributed to places. Wacquant (2008) discerningly showed the marginalisation processes of territorial stigma, in which people – especially migrants – from urban outskirts were relegated as urban outcasts. Rather than capturing merely different cultural lifestyle between groups, the perspective of recognition unlocks the role of social hierarchies.

Third, *representation* is concerned with the exclusion of groups in political decision-making and whether voices of minorities are heard by government. Many studies have examined non-spatial gaps in representation, showing important divides coming from a lack of working-class politicians (Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020; Noordzij et al., 2021; Elsässer and Schäfer, 2022), women and migrants in political offices (Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2006; Mügge et al., 2019). In political geography, studies of representation generally looked at issues that come with gerrymandering (Issacharoff, 2002), and dyadic representation (Hanretty et al., 2017; André and Depauw, 2018). In addition, scholarship around territorial politics also grasped domestic conflicts over borders, culture, and ethnicities. These studies typically address the political oppression of regional minorities by central state with notions such as 'internal colonialism' and 'subordination', or Castells' (1997) understandings of 'nations without a state' (see also MacInnes, 2006). With that, scholars explore issues that are setting the stage for regional disengagement and secessionist movements (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan and Urwin, 1983; De Winter and Tursan, 2003). This conceptual approach to representation allows to explore uneven geographies in the political arena.

	Disputes	Realms	Injustices
(Re)distribution	Access to resources: Who gets what?	Economic realm	Maldistribution
Recognition	Respect from others: Who matters?	Public realm	Misrecognition
Representation	Voice in decision-making: Who is heard?	Political realm	Misrepresentation

Table 1. Fraser's dimensions of social justice

1.5 Methodological approach

This dissertation applies a mixed-method research design to collect and analyse empirical data, with the theoretical prism of Fraser composing the foundation. With a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and a multidimensional theoretical framework this study focusses on regional matters of (in)justice in socio-economic (re)distribution, recognition, and political representation in the Netherlands.

With that, I believe that it is crucial to guard against what C. Wright Mills (2000) has called a methodological inhibition of the sociological imagination: the widespread tendency to examine primarily, or even exclusively, what can be studied with the methods one feels comfortable with. So I challenge myself in developing new methodological skills to be able to answer the research questions. This is an interdisciplinary research that that builds on empirical evidence and applied methods from economic geography, spatial planning, rural sociology, social policy, political geography, and political science.

First, I compose a theoretical framework of this dissertation in detail (in chapter 2), which combines conceptual thinking with empirics. I propose a philosophically grounded and empirically informed review of how regional disparities relate to spatial justice. This is done inventorying spatial injustices through a systematic literature review (see Peters et al., 2015), unravelling the kind of injustices based on a philosophical principles and categorisations of (in)justice. The study starts with a discussion of how spatial justice has been conceptualised, looking more particularly into Nancy Fraser's tripartite understanding of social justice as (re)distribution, recognition, and representation. Subsequently, I re-examine 134 empirical papers carefully selected with a scoping method, and sort them into the three dimensions of spatial justice.

To examine the uneven distribution of socio-economic resources across regions, I apply a quantitative analyses of longitudinal data on NUTS-level 3 regions (in chapter 3). With that, I uncover regional divides in the Netherlands, and show what long-term trajectories can be detected in regional development and how these relate to recent regional discontent. This chapter examines pathways of decline and divergence in social and economic inequalities over the last decade(s). More specifically, looking at regional pathways of income, wealth, and unemployment, as well as population change, distance to public services, and ageing. With a correlation analysis of attitude data, this chapter explores how different feelings of discontent relate to regional disparities in development.

Then, I delve into the principles of justice that can be found in government rationale in regards to regional redistribution (in chapter 4). In a critical policy analysis I take the WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) approach into a spatial context (Bacchi, 2009). This study aims to uncover in what ways issues are problematised in regional development policies, in which normative principle of redistributive justice the policy problem is primarily grounded, which regions are recognised, and how this affects the allocation of investments. Chapter 4 critically examines an empirical case of novel policy for regional development in the Netherlands: the Region Deals (*Regio Deals*). In doing so, I attempt to showcase to what extent government rationalities about 'right' and 'wrong' regional development are a crucial factor to which regions benefit most from redistribution.

In terms of political representation from a regional point of view, in many democracies people feel that one's place is being overlooked by politics. To assess political representation I build on the renowned conceptual work of political scientist Pitkin (1967), see chapter 5. This helps me to examine various forms of regional representation in Dutch proportional democracy, a parliamentary system without district seats (Latner and McGann, 2005; Andeweg, 2008). Inspired by the methods of other scholars who have studied non-spatial representational gaps (see for example Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020), I build a unique dataset that consists of the place of birth and of residence of 1 188 MPs and of 67 686 written parliamentary questions (1994-2021). To analyse this large dataset, I apply – among others – a highly digitally skilled and innovative method of named entity recognition (Goyal et al., 2018). First, an overview is provided of descriptive representation of regions based on MPs' regional background. Second, an overview is presented of substantive representation of regions, based on the geographic spread of issues that MPs put on the political agenda. Third, this chapter shows to what extent MPs voice issues concerning their 'own' region. Fourth, this chapter explores to what extent proportional regional representation can temper regional discontent.

Chapter	2	3	4	5
Title	Rethinking the regional bounds of justice	Does regional decline trigger discontent?	The 'right' policy for regional development	Representation out of place
Conceptual focus	Distribution, recognition, and representation	Distribution (and recognition)	Redistribution (and recognition)	Representation (and recognition)
Aim	Providing an empirically informed conceptual framework of spatial justice	Showing how long-term uneven distribution across regions relates to discontent	Demonstrating how principles of justice in government rationale impact regional redistribution	Unravelling how long-term uneven regional representation relates to discontent
Method	Mixed: Systematic literature review	Quantitative: Descriptive data analysis and correlation analysis	Qualitative: Policy analysis	Quantitative: Descriptive data analysis and named-entity recognition analysis
Data	Peer-reviewed articles	Survey data and longitudinal of socio-economic data at NUTS-level 3 regions	Policy documents and newspaper articles	MPs' place of birth and residence, parliamentary questions, and survey data

Table 1: Overview of chapters

1.6 Background information: a brief political history of geographic divides in the Netherlands

1.6.1 From autonomous regions in a republic to a district system in a unitary kingdom

The history – and the geography - of the Netherlands is strongly determined by soil and battle. One can trace back steps as far as when tribes first permanently settled in this swampy delta area nowadays known as the Netherlands. I will start here at the creation of the first independent Dutch nation-state in the 16th century, when regional borders were established that roughly resemble current borders. The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (1588 - 1795) was established in the Low Countries to form a united front against the Catholic Spanish Empire of King Philip II (see Israel, 1995). Northern duchies, counties, lordships and alike integrated into a confederation of sovereign provinces, see Appendix A1 for a map. In the Dutch Republic representatives of the provinces formed the highest political body that assembled in The Hague.

Regions mostly cooperated military to defend their territory, but remained autonomous and economic competitors (Price, 1994).

Economic prosperity predominantly clustered in the west, in the urbanised province of Holland and in maritime regions. Under the protection of the colonial Dutch Republic state, Dutch merchant ships crossed the oceans to loot spices and other commodities, so-called merchant capitalism (Van Zanden, 1993). This brutal colonial regime led to very wealthy Dutch merchants (Gelderblom et al., 2016), who could afford to build luxurious estates along the canals in the inner cities and grand country houses in the countryside (Kuiper, 2016). In this age, Amsterdam developed into one of the most important financial centres of the world (Huizinga, 1969).

In the 18th century the Netherlands was turned into a constitutional monarchy. After the demise of the Republic by Napoleon Bonaparte and a period under French rule, a new political institution of the Netherlands was established by the great European empires (ratified at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815). Due to the country's geopolitical vulnerability after the Napoleonic wars, a strong unitary system was preferred over the old federal structure. The Kingdom of the Netherlands became a decentralised unitary state: one central government providing uniformity through legislation and supervision (Toonen, 1990). National unity quickly cracked. In 1830 Catholics and liberals from the southern Low Countries revolted against the Protestant king and successfully declared Belgian independency, later followed by Luxembourg.

Amidst a revolutionary wave for more democracy across Europe and growing discussions on clientelism in the Netherlands (Kaal, 2016), the Dutch state introduced a constitutional revision in 1848 that limited political power of the king and expanded power to eligible voters in constituencies (Toonen, 1990). In this new electoral district system candidates needed an absolute majority. However, strong personal ties appeared to be of significant importance in winning the elections. Similar to current critique on the political establishment, several conservative candidates criticised liberal candidates by portraying them as ''men from the Hague' – the seat of the Dutch Parliament – who were only in it for the money, rarely visited meetings of parliament and were more concerned with securing well-paid jobs than serving the needs of their districts' (Kaal, 2016: 491).

1.6.2 Centre-periphery tensions in a proportional democracy

In the beginning of the 20th century the Dutch district system was abolished. Social upheaval and fear of revolution led to important constitutional amendments in a package deal called the

Great Pacification (see Toonen, 1990). This included universal suffrage for men in 1917, and in 1919 for women. The Liberals, with a strong affluent constituency, feared a mass electorate and bargained that the absolute majority system was replaced by a system of nationwide proportional representation to secure a share of seats in parliament (see Andeweg, 2008).

From this point political representation was mostly informally place-bound. Dutch society was divided in well-organised social segments based on religious beliefs and/or ideology, so-called pillars. In a consociational democracy proportional representatives of the pillars were seeking for consensus (Lijphart, 1975; Andeweg, 2019). Generally the electoral geography of was as following: the Catholics dominated in the South, orthodox Protestants were popular in the 'Bible belt' stretching from south-west to north-east, the constituency of the Liberals were mostly situated in the trade cities, and the Socialists in the industrial areas (De Voogd, 2017). From the 1960s onwards individualisation and detraditionalisation processes of reflexive modernity (Giddens, 1991), led to a 'depillarisation' in the Netherlands: With the disintegration of the networks of the traditional social segments, established geographical patterns in political ideology for long continued and only slowly readjusted.

At the same time, Dutch government slowly built a polycentric metropolitan area: the Randstad (see Zonneveld and Nadin, 2021). Randstad is the name for an economic conurbation of the nation's four largest cities in western Netherlands (Dieleman et al., 1999; Fainstein, 2001), which includes the political in The Hague, the nation's capital of Amsterdam, Europe's largest seaport in Rotterdam, railway hub Utrecht, and all (agricultural) land in between. These cities were also historically dominant and wealthy trade cities in the west (Brand, 2021). In the post-war period the Randstad was first designed as a site for decentralisation of industrial activity and for suburbanisation of housing (Zonneveld and Nadin, 2021). The regional scale was increasingly appointed as the right scale for governance (Hooghe et al., 2010; Groenleer and Hendriks, 2018), and in neoliberal regimes as the right scale for economic competition (Keating, 1998; Jessop, 2018), leading to central investments in favour of superstar cities (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Crouch and Le Galès, 2012). Since the 1990s, the Randstad was planned as the economic powerhouse for the Dutch economy to compete at an international scale (Zonneveld and Nadin, 2021).

The Randstad in the west of the Netherlands can be considered as the national core, situating the largest cities, the political heart, and strong economic clusters. See Appendix 2 for a population density map. The periphery on the other hand is considered as hinterland, which in the Dutch case is close to the borders of Germany and Belgium. Peripherality is characterised by a sparse population, agricultural activities, strong regional identities, strong social cohesion,

and relatively less (infrastructural) connections (De Souza, 2017; Kühn, 2015). In the Netherlands there is a certain centre-periphery tension, between a dominant Randstad and 'the rest' (see also Molema, 2012; Evans et al., 2019). It should be noted here that peripheries are first and foremost produced by applying this spatially oriented metaphor itself. The conceptions of centre and periphery are, however, useful as an analytical approach that highlights the power-hierarchical structures between spaces.

In the beginning of the 21st century new right-wing populism emerged in and around the large cities in the west. By addressing 'the common people' with issues of urban decay and failed integration of – particularly Muslim – immigrants, and by blaming the political elite, populist leader Fortuyn gained much support in the Randstad area (Lucardie, 2008) – who shortly before election was shot to death. After the financial crisis, large cities slowly became more left-wing oriented and the support for right-wing populism expanded to peripheral parts of the country (De Voogd, 2017). Van den Berg (2019) speaks of a replacement of traditional Dutch pillars by a new social system of 'bubbles' characterised by cosmopolitans and conservative nationalists. In this new political landscape, the support for anti-establishment parties is mainly coming from poor urban areas and more recently peripheral regions (De Voogd and Cuperus, 2021).

The current constitutional design of Dutch parliament is strongly based on the principle of proportionality, and made regional representation a party affair. Over the centuries only in the Dutch Senate (*Eerste Kamer*) a regional component remained through the indirect election of 75 seats, appointed by the members of the twelve States-Provincial. However, the electoral weight of the vote from a member of the provincial council is weighed for population size of the province (see Ramkema et al., 2008). With that, even the Senate is composed on the basis of proportionality. In contrast to many other countries, regionalist parties in the Netherlands do not participate in national elections (Massetti and Schakel, 2015, 2016), only in local and provincial elections. In 2018 a parliamentary committee addressed the dominance of MPs coming from the Randstad area in the House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*), and recommended to strengthen the regional component in order to improve collective feelings of representation (Remkes, 2018). For a while now, centre-periphery tensions are noticeably present in the Netherlands, yet discussions are still ill-informed and lacking empirical evidence.

1.7 Outline

This introduction (chapter 1) set out the general topic, existing bodies of knowledge, the research aim, theoretical approach, methodology, and a case description of this dissertation. In the following chapter (chapter 2) I further work out a reinterpretation of Fraser's conceptual framework of social justice, grounded in recent empirical evidence of regional inequalities in Europe. Chapter 3, then, discusses the socio-economic divides across regions in the Netherlands, and shows inequality trajectories in regional development and how these relate to recent sentiments of regional discontent. Chapter 4 uncovers in which normative principles of justice a novel Dutch regional development policy (the Region Deals) is primarily grounded, and how this normative standpoint affects the allocation of regional development investments. Chapter 5 shows the uneven political representation of regions in Dutch proportional democracy, based on feelings of misrepresentation, MPs' regional background, and the issues MPs voice. In the concluding chapter, I give an answer to the research questions based on the findings from all chapters. Moreover, I discuss the results in relation to social justice theory and suggest directions for possible future research.

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Appendices

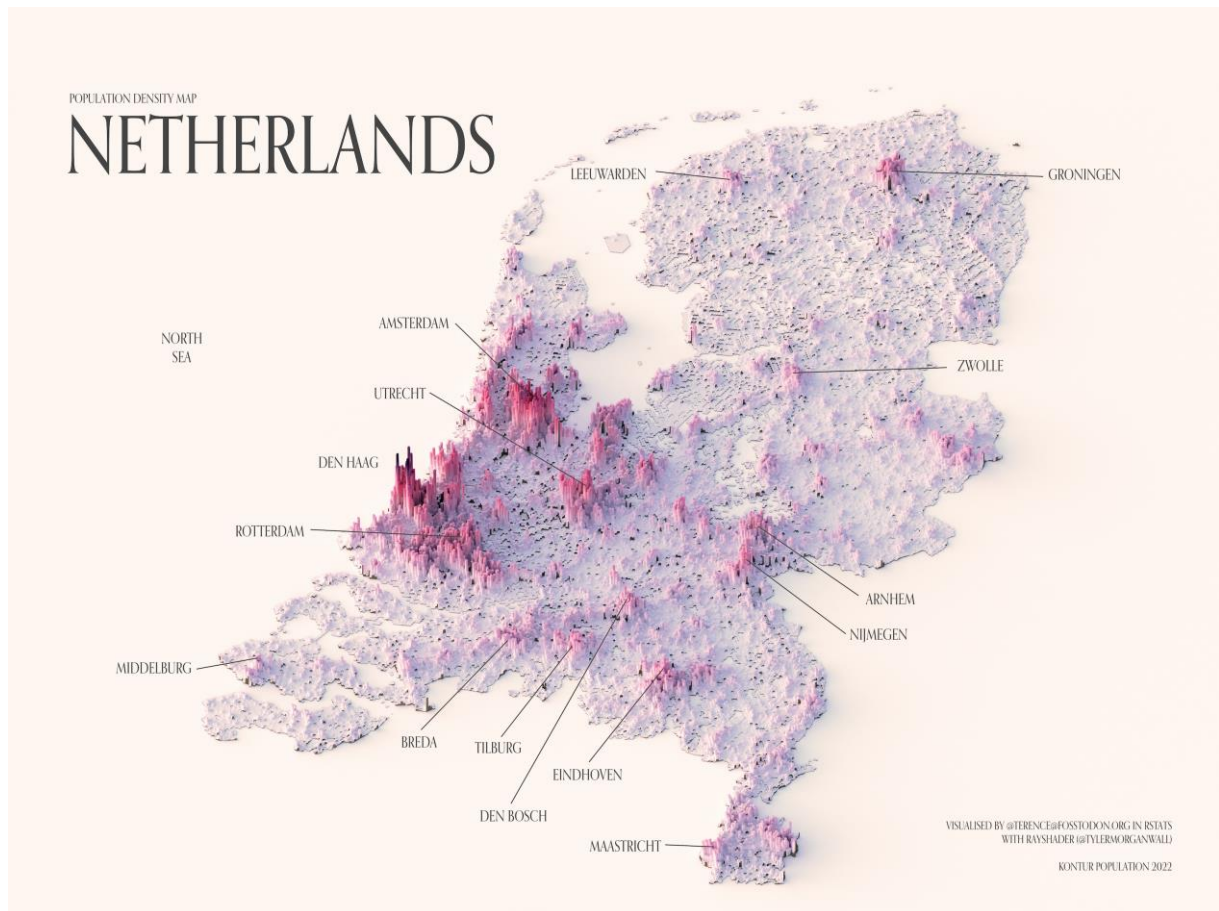**Appendix A1**: Map of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands
Source: Collectie Rijksmuseum

*Kaart van de Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden, Caspar Specht (mogelijk), 1726 –
1750*

Appendix A2: Map of population density in the Netherlands in 2022
Source: Terence (@researchramora on Twitter)

2. Rethinking the regional bounds of justice
A systematic literature review of spatial justice in EU regions

Abstract

This paper contributes to the debate on spatial justice in a geography of regional uneven development in the EU. The purpose of this study is to provide a philosophically grounded and empirically informed review of how regional inequality relates to spatial justice. This is done inventorying spatial injustices through a systematic literature review, unravelling the kind of injustices based on a philosophical principle and categorisation of (in)justice. The paper starts with a discussion of how spatial justice has been conceptualised, looking more particularly into Nancy Fraser's egalitarian understanding of social justice. Her tripartite distinction of justice as (re)distribution, recognition, and representation allows us to re-examine regional inequality and to sharply formulate what is understood as just or unjust. Through a spatial reinterpretation of Fraser's prism, we then re-examine 134 empirical papers carefully selected with a scoping review method. Our results reveal six manifestations of regional injustice in the EU, which not only encompass an unequally distributed regional development of economic wealth and access to services, but also signal a cultural hierarchy imprinting territorial stigmas and neglecting environmental issues, as well as a political geographical divide of deeply felt rural and regional misrepresentation.

2.1 Introduction

Globalisation has reached a critical conjuncture of increasing interregional inequalities (Martin et al., 2018). In the last decades, several regions bloom in prosperity while other parts of the same country are 'left behind' in the fierce economic competition of globalisation (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Wuthnow, 2018; McCann, 2020). Even though the European Union (EU) implemented policies to improve territorial cohesion and economic underdevelopment of areas, regional inequalities within member states steadily increased since the mid-90s (Butkus et al., 2018; Raugze and van Herwijnen, 2018; Odendahl et al., 2019). This geography of uneven development has recently been flagged as a prominent source of exclusion and political shocks, generally expressing understanding for residents in left-behind regions protesting against policies from urban elites (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2017; Wuthnow, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2019; Guilluy, 2019). Indeed territorial inequality can provoke experiences of unfairness and injustice, as reflected also in the rise of right-wing populism that thrives on addressing this discontent (Evans et al., 2019; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020).

Although the residents' moral outrage is often understandable, it is, however, important to better understand what precisely constitutes (spatial) injustice. Despite the acknowledged uneven regional development and its potential to destabilise liberal democracies, little is known about what spatial justice entails, which regional inequalities are unjust and why.

This paper attempts to unravel how regional developments relate to injustice, by using a philosophical substantiated multidimensional framework of social injustice to re-examine the empirical evidence of regional inequality in EU regions. To identify and better understand the injustices that arise in uneven regional developments, we introduce the concept of spatial justice next to the concept of social justice. While social justice scholarship fails to incorporate spatiality (e.g. Rawls, 2009; Young, 2011; Fraser, 2019; Sandel, 2020), many spatial justice scholars undertheorise the moral principles of justice (e.g. Bret et al., 2010; Dikeç, 2001; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013; Marcuse, 2009; Soja, 2010). In addition, spatial justice theorists tend to focus on urban spaces and neglect areas beyond city-borders (e.g. Fainstein, 2015; Harvey, 2009; Soja, 2010). A lack of expounding the political philosophy of spatial justice leaves us in the dark about what moral laws of justices are being violated and how. We argue that establishing these principles of justice helps to better understand, evaluate and debate justice in a spatial context.

Galvanised by Carolan's (2019) approach to justice in the countryside, this study builds on Nancy Fraser's philosophy of social justice theory and takes her egalitarian principles of equality into a spatial context. Fraser's (2009) tripartite understanding of social justice goes beyond economics, and acutely assembles the major disputes in justice theory: the distribution of wealth and resources, the apportion of respect through recognition, and the representation of political voices. Through a new spatial interpretation of Fraser's normative prism of democratic egalitarianism, we are able to establish a heuristic schema of forms of spatial injustices to revisit the empirical evidence on regional inequalities in state-of-the-art literature. This study conducts a *scoping review* (Peters et al., 2015), in which we systematically collect relevant empirical papers revolving regional inequality and categorise them according to forms of spatial injustices. The results are what we term 'manifest regional injustices'.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we revise the conceptual spatialisation of social justice and argue for a Fraserian theoretical grid to analyse the empirical literature, sharply formulating the philosophical standpoints of what is understood as just or unjust. Second, we show the methodological steps in our scoping review, to provide a detailed overview of how we systematically collected and categorised the empirical literature. Third, we present which occurrences of spatial injustice we have identified in the literature, revealing six manifestations

of regional injustice in the EU. Last we conclude with a discussion of spatiality in the production of injustices in globalisation, and the implications of Fraser's principles of justice for our findings.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Revising the spatialisation of social justice

The philosophy of social justice has a long history and can even be traced back to philosophical thinkers such as Confucius, Plato and Aristoteles who discussed the notion of justice in relation to fairness, goodness, and virtue among others. It was only in the late twentieth century that the spatiality of injustice was assessed when critical geography scholars introduced concepts such as 'the right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996), 'territorial social justice' (Harvey, 2009) and later 'spatial justice' (Pirie, 1983). Social justice scholarship was criticised by them for having a blind spot for territorial characteristics and spatial circumstances that should be weighted, and still is criticised for the same reason by scholars up till today (e.g. Dikeç, 2001; Marcuse, 2009; Soja, 2010; Bret et al., 2010; Carolan, 2019). Yet it was not until the economic crisis of 2008 that the concept of spatial justice became big within academia, as demonstrated by the literature review of Jones and colleagues (2019, pp. 107).

If one thing, critical geography taught us that socio-spatial dialectic affects a just society: social justices can differ spatially and spaces can produce social injustice (Marcuse, 2009; Soja, 2010; Fainstein, 2015; Carolan, 2019). Spatial justice theory distinguishes itself from other geographical approaches to inequality, with a different set of questions, both investigative and moral, which not only captures distinctive vulnerabilities of communities but also how space influences injustices. Moreover, it considers the rights of citizens and fair treatment concerning the spaces they live in. Spatial justice can be studied at multiple scales and in many different social contexts, from urban segregation to postcolonial geographies.

Nevertheless spatial justice literature, we argue here, can be criticised for two reasons. First, it ignores the countryside. It is developed and applied in urban studies to highlight fundamental unjust procedures and outcomes in the city (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2009; Soja, 2010; Fainstein, 2015), leading to a rather urban-centric focus. To our knowledge, Carolan (2019) and Woods and colleagues (Jones et al., 2019; Woods, 2019) are currently the few scholars who apply justice theory in a rural context, arguing that the bounds of injustices are not only fundamentally interpersonal, such as race, sexuality, and gender, but place also matters in the production of injustices.

Second, many studies of spatial justice lack a clear formulation of ethical principles of justice. Often there is no interest in unpacking the political philosophy of the term (e.g. Bret et al., 2010; Dikeç, 2001; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013; Marcuse, 2009; Soja, 2010), which leaves us in the dark what and how moral laws of justices are being violated. This theoretical deficit can be explained by the choice for a rather inductive approach to territorial inequalities, which lets empirical evidence point out the spatial injustices. Harvey (2009, pp. 14) noted that there is an inevitable distinction between observation and values in the judgement of justice, however, in contrast to Harvey, we argue in line with the Frankfurter School to make normative criteria explicit and up for discussion. We argue that it is necessary to clarify moral standpoints and assumptions about justice upfront, rather than keeping them implicit. Once these principles are established and transparent we can evaluate and debate them in a spatial context. In correspondence with Pirie (1983, pp. 166) we acknowledge that '*different basic assumptions do, however, generate different principles of justice and are open to debate anyway*'. We are aware that with another philosophical framework, grounded in liberalism or utilitarianism for instance, it is possible that one might find other spatial injustices.

2.2.2 Revising social justice from a spatial perspective

In this study, we take Nancy Fraser's philosophy of social justice theory into a spatial context to revise the current literature of regional inequality. Fraser (1995; 2009; Fraser and Honneth, 2003) considers inequality from a radical-democratic standpoint of participatory parity: everyone should be able to participate in social life as peers, and we should dismantle the institutionalised obstacles that induce imparity. In this egalitarian philosophy, Fraser strives for a community of equals: a society in which everyone has an equal position to participate. Accordingly, it is necessary to continuously (re)identify who are subjects of injustice, who are the marginalised groups, and critically assess whether all groups have the same legal rights, entitlements, opportunities, and outcomes as others.

In response to a surge of distributive justice scholarship in the 70s (e.g. Rawls, 2009), Fraser (1995) argued for incorporating the multiculturalist critique of 'recognition of difference' brought forward in the 90s by Charles Taylor and Iris Marion Young among others. According to Fraser (1995; 2004), on the one hand theorists of distributive justice ignored identity politics while theorists of recognition on the other hand ignored distribution. Integrating the two, Fraser (1995) argues, would help to better understand the social challenges at stake. Later Fraser (2005; 2009) is revising her previous account of what justice encompasses and adds a third political dimension alongside the economic and cultural dimension she presented

in her earlier work. This makes the following three dimensions that capture the process of justice: (*re)distribution*, *recognition* and *representation*.

Fraser's first dimension concerns political and economic structures of (re)distribution: who gets what? An equal distribution of material resources ensures a participants' independency and voice, and can be ensured through government policies of redistribution. The second dimension considers a philosophy of recognition: equal respect ensures the equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. This concerns the position on the institutionalised hierarchies of cultural value and social status inequality, and the stigmatisation of people. To put it bluntly, disputes revolve around the question: who matters? The third dimension looks at the democratic representation in governance structures and voice in decision-making procedures. Equal political constitution accords roughly equal political voice to all social actors. If groups are structurally deprived from their fair chance to influence decisions that affect them, this is called political misrepresentation (Fraser, 2005; 2009). Last, we note here, that Fraser does not make any hierarchy in the three dimensions and they are interwoven, one cannot see the one without the other.

	Disputes	Realms	Injustices
(Re)distribution	Access to resources: Who gets what?	Economic realm	Maldistribution
Recognition	Respect from others: Who matters?	Public realm	Misrecognition
Representation	Voice in decision-making: Who is heard?	Political realm	Misrepresentation

Table 1: Fraser's dimensions of social justice

Although Fraser (2005; 2009) claims that globalisation forces us to rethink justice, her approach aims to go beyond national borders, arguing that people no longer coincide with territorial citizenries and economies are no longer national. Following the spatial critique on social justice scholarship by Carolan (2019) and Soja (2010), we emphasise uneven geographies (e.g. Martin et al., 2018; Wuthnow, 2018), and argue here to critically engage with borders from a multiscalar perspective that comprehends how social injustice relates to spatial inequality, from local to transnational. Contrary to looking beyond borders (Fraser, 2009), this study aims to examine existing evidence of regional inequalities within states and rethinks them in the light of social justice.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Scoping method

To not randomly select empirical evidence on regional inequality, and to give substantial support to our new conceptual spatialisation of the Fraserian framework of social justice, this study conducts a scoping review. A scoping review is considered as a type of systematic literature review focussing specifically on key themes drawn from one or more bodies of literature. The systematic review is known and acknowledged in academia, for its transparency and replicability, thoroughly explicating *a priori* limits and steps that are taken in the process of selecting the literature for review (Peters et al., 2015). Unlike systematic reviews, which typically analyses the empirical evidence for the effect of an intervention, the scoping review comprises '*a technique to 'map' relevant literature in the field of interest*' (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005, pp. 20). This study is conducting the scoping review according the PRISMA statement (Moher et al., 2009), which describes four steps to select literature: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

2.3.2 Data selection

Next we describe the search strategy and the selection criteria for papers we used for analysis. Unquestionably the inclusion criteria will not capture all relevant literature, as it is impossible to get a perfect extraction from the great ocean of academic literature. To search for documents we used the software program *Publish & Parish*, searching for peer-reviewed articles *between January 2015 and May 2020*. This time frame covers articles with fresh insights in regional inequality, including compelling events in the EU such as the aftermath of the economic crisis and political shocks brought about by rising populism. See table 2 for the inclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria
▪ Full-text articles only. This means no books, book chapters or book reviews.
▪ Article is written in English. There is high financial cost and time related to translating foreign languages, resources not available for this study.
▪ Article is published between January 2015 and May 2020. This time frame covers state-of the-art literature, including studies on recent economic and political shocks in the EU member states.
▪ Article is peer reviewed. This provides assurance of quality standards of work and identifies gaps specifically to this dissemination mode.
▪ Study demonstrates findings based on research involving socio-spatial analysis of regional spaces.
▪ Findings express marginalisation of people tied to regions – specifically in rural areas and peripheries.
▪ Research setting is beyond the urban context, preferably with a comparative view.

Table 2: Inclusion criteria

To find relevant literature we used search phrases within three key themes: region, inequality, and fields. These consider inequalities of regions in sociology, geography, and fields affiliated to them. This includes studies in fields such as rural sociology, regional sciences, economic geography, and political geography. With that, we draw upon keywords from theoretical concepts related to regional inequality. See table 3 for the search phrases that were used to search.

Key themes	Search phrases – combined using AND
Region	region OR rural OR periphery OR 'left behind'
Inequality	exclusion OR inequality OR resentment OR marginalization OR marginalisation
	'uneven development'
	peripheralization OR peripheralisation
	'spatial justice'
	regionalism OR regionalist
Field	sociology OR geography

Table 3: Search phrases

In total a number of 4750 documents were retrieved, which have been narrowed down through filtering type of documents and screening of journals, titles and abstracts on basis of the inclusion criteria. This led to the selection of total 138 papers for a full-text review, of which 134 are categorised. After identifying relevant papers, these have been coded according to a categorisation of six bodies of literature: uneven regional development, peripheralisation, territorial stigmatisation, environmental justice, politics of resentment, and territorial politics.,

First we compiled and labeled six bodies of literature, which we subsequently examined for spatial injustices. In the results section below we describe a distinctive spatial injustice from each body of literature. The types of injustices in the findings are based on six definitions in the work of Fraser, which to our opinion are underexposed terms that can actually be of much help in better understanding injustice. With a spatial and empirical specification of these social injustices, this paper endeavors to further develop Fraserian understandings of justice.

PRISMA steps	Exclusion criteria
Identification (n = 4750) *Filtering document type*	**Excluded** (n = 1234): ▪ Books ▪ Book chapters ▪ Book reviews ▪ Citations ▪ Journal absent or unknown
Screening (n = 3516) *Screening journals and titles*	**Excluded** (n = 3220): ▪ Book chapter ▪ Book review ▪ Irrelevant field ▪ Outside of EU ▪ Not in English ▪ Not peer reviewed ▪ Duplicates
Eligibility (n = 296) *Examining abstracts*	**Excluded** (n = 158): ▪ Irrelevant topic (n = 90) ▪ Outside of EU (n = 25) ▪ No access (n = 12) ▪ Urban focus only (n = 11) ▪ Not peer reviewed (n = 7) ▪ Book chapters (n = 6) ▪ False hyperlink (n = 5) ▪ Not in English (n = 2)
Included (n = 138) *Full-text review*	**Excluded** (n = 4): ▪ Irrelevant topic (n = 4)
Categorised (n = 134)	

Table 4: PRISMA steps

2.4 Results and discussion

2.4.1 Economic marginalisation in 'uneven regional development' (n = 46)

The purpose of uneven regional development literature is to better understand the development paths to overcome economic underdevelopment. Uneven development generally demonstrates the evolution of economic divergence, and seeks for drivers and patterns of inequality in the economic landscape (Martin and Sunley 2015b; Horner et al., 2018). Scholars typically build on the work of urban and economic geographers who stipulate a rise of prospering city-regions caused by globalisation's new spatial division of labour (e.g. Storper and Walker, 1984; Florida, 2004; Glaeser, 2011; Moretti, 2012).

Substantial quantitative and longitudinal economic data, mostly GDP on NUTS-level 2 or 3, shows that for decades subnational regions within almost all EU member states are drifting apart (e.g. Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2019). Since the mid 90s the economic inequality between EU member states has decreased, while regional inequality within the majority of the member states has increased (Butkus et al., 2018). The uneven regional development maps out clear within-country divisions between so-called 'underperformers' and 'overperformers' (Iammarino et al., 2019). Underperforming regions cope with high unemployment rates while overperformers profit from the transformation to high-skilled manufacturing and services with a high productive growth.

Explanations for regional unevenness are generally sought in 'resilience', the ability to bounce back from economic downturn in an era of transforming industries (Fainstein 2015; Martin and Sunley, 2015a). The responses to the economic crisis of 2007/2008 in Europe and the varied aftermath shows that regions with cities had greater economic resilience (Hansen, 2016; Omstedt, 2016; Pósfai and Nagy, 2017; Tyler et al., 2017), especially according to the type of functions hosted in them (Capello et al., 2015; Martin et al., 2016b; Eriksson and Hane-Weijman, 2017). To venture beyond a brief observation of underperformance, scholars explicate typical negative pathways or strategies that incorporate the diversified contexts of stagnation and decline (Blažek et al., 2019; Iammarino et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019). While many old industrial areas are hit by a decline in employment and relative income, rural areas are characterised by income stagnation (Martin et al., 2018). Meanwhile the countryside is becoming the central site for the postcarbon transition, asking for a rural development towards sustainable rural communities (Marsden, 2016; Navarro et al., 2016; Cañete et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019; Lowe et al., 2019).

The literature on uneven regional development highlights the unequal spatial distribution of economic resources such as wealth, employment, and income. This corresponds to Fraser's (2005) notion of *economic marginalisation,* which she defines as being confined to poorly paid work or being denied access to labour. The so-called 'productivity puzzle' that is put forward in the literature (McCann, 2020), urges policymakers to rebalance inequalities and mitigate economic shocks. Typically scholars suggest unfolding place-sensitive development policies that stimulate the economic resilience of regions by adjusting internal capacities to external changes. In contrast to the performance-based redistributive policies striving for innovation and utilisation of economic potential, some papers claim to reconsider the distribution system, since uneven development, in other words economic marginalisation, is inherent to the neoliberal model of competitiveness, argued for instance in studies on spatial planning in Ireland and the UK (O'Callaghan et al., 2015; Daly, 2016; Jessop, 2018).

2.4.2 Deprivation in 'peripheralisation' (n = 30)

In response to the economic perspective on uneven regional development, an increasing number of scholars appeal to look beyond economic growth and to consider spatial differentiation. In the beginning of the twenty-first century several German critical geographers pled for a multiscalar and multidimensional approach to analyse the deterioration of regions, this approach is known as peripheralisation (Kühn, 2015). Leick & Lang (2018) suggest there are limits to growth and therefore we should look beyond growth-oriented paradigms in regional development. Drawing on the work of Castells (1997), Amin (2004), and Massey et al. (2003) on relational connections in globalisation, peripheralisation looks at the multilayered (dis)connections of regions producing subnational cores and peripheries, and is concerned with the accessibility of resources and services that affect the quality of life in areas (Lang, 2015).

One of the problems standing out in peripheralisation literature is population decline. Comparative and case studies in the EU highlight the negative impacts of population decline, or 'shrinkage'. For instance, Wirth et al. (2016), Kühn et al. (2017), and Pociūtė-Sereikienė (2019) show the negative effect of population decline on the access to public services in places. Due to a shortage of people who could generate the necessary taxes and revenue, crucial services might be forced to merge, close departments, or even completely close down. Depopulation affects public services such as infrastructure, public transport, health facilities, and education. Studies on digital infrastructures expose an important paradox for peripheral areas: they are in most need of digital connectivity to compensate for remoteness but they are the least connected (Philip et al., 2017; Salemink et al., 2017; Townsend et al., 2017). Sparsely

populated rural areas suffer from digital exclusion simply because of a lack of return on investment for market parties, also known as a *rural penalty* (Salemink, 2016). Research on the initiatives of community resilience in the context of the digital divide (Ashmore et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2017), as well on the social engagement and innovations to revitalise rural communities (Bock, 2016; Gieling et al., 2019; Richter, 2019; Ubels et al., 2020), show that peripheral areas rely on social networks, in the form of self-organisation and civic action, more than others, when it comes to overcoming certain spatial inequalities.

Peripheralisation literature, thus, emphasises the unequal access to crucial public services in countries. This resonates with Fraser's (2005) definition of *deprivation* signalling inadequate material standard of living. The findings in the selected papers stress a lack of multi-scalar strategies in addressing and regulating deprived regions. Especially policymakers above the local level are compelled to reach out to peripheries and design new strategies to overcome problems of peripheralisation (e.g. Humer, 2018). Therefore Bock (2016) calls for a 'nexogeneous' approach to reconnect and bind together forces across urban and rural spaces. Moreover, there is a surge for multidimensional policy strategies that go beyond economic performance of regions and include demographic development, quality of life, and subjective well-being (e.g. Dax and Fischer 2018). Peripheralisation scholarship, we conclude, calls for a redistribution that ensures the basic rights and the standards of living, to fix the deprivation in peripheries provoked by economic and population decline.

2.4.3 Disrespect in 'territorial stigmatisation' (n = 15)

The literature on territorial stigmatisation uncovers the negative consequences of social constructions of spaces and place-based identities, mostly with qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. Perceptions, prejudices, and labels that are ascribed to places matter when it comes to equality of respect between groups in society and the (re)production of socio-economic precarity (Shucksmith and Schafft, 2012; Wacquant et al., 2014; Meij et al., 2020; Sisson, 2020). In a regional context the negative discursive power is mostly reflected in the portrayal of rurality and the countryside (de Souza, 2017).

Most studies of the selected papers are engaged with the negative downward-spiral effects of stereotyped areas through narratives around 'deplorable areas' or the countryside as being 'backwards', 'hollowed out' or 'wasteland'. Drawing on the peripheralisation approach a few scholars integrate stigmatisation of inner peripheries with economic and demographic aspects, also known as discursive peripheralisation (Meyer et al., 2016; Willett and Lang, 2018; Willett, 2019; Willett, 2020), problematising desires of out-migration and perceptions of a lack

of economic viability. Marginalised rural areas are challenged to shake off the negative representations of themselves by outsiders, and change the downward-spiral effect and attract potential inhabitants, companies, and government investments, addressed for instance in studies of Poland and Greece (Gkartzios and Scott, 2015; Dymitrow, 2017). In a case study of perceptions on shrinking regions in Eastern Germany, Meyer and colleagues (2016) show that adolescents also dissociate themselves from derogative stigmas, by 'othering' the stigmatised groups in their own region and extending the geographical borders of the stigma. Research on gendered dynamics in rural context stresses the domination of rural masculinity constructions (e.g. Dirksmeier, 2015; Sircar, 2019), which are defined opposed to the perceptions of urban ideologies of heterogeneity of race, sexuality, and class (Leap, 2017). Wiest (2016) signals a high rate of out-migration among women in shrinking villages in Eastern Germany, triggered to escape a dominant and distorted perception of being left behind in a backward male life world. The rhetoric of excelling here implies moving to 'progressive' or 'successful' places.

The specified stigmas imprinted on marginalised (rural) areas not only affects inhabitants' dignity but also reinforces patterns of uneven development. Place-based stigma fends off people and business from settling. According to Fraser (1995) misrecognition can manifest in what she terms *disrespect*, referring to a situation in which people are degraded in public discourse and cultural representation. Economic success and progressive culture proved to be important values in the apportion of social status to places, and led to disrespect places down the ladder. Yet, findings also recognise and point out that the rural idyll remains a strong and attractive imaginary that can mobilise people (Wiest, 2016; Shucksmith, 2018), for instance after the economic crisis in Greece (Anthopoulou et al., 2017; Gkartzios and Remoundou, 2018) - the COVID-19 pandemic could have a similar effect. Looking at how stigmas can be challenged and changed in UK's region of Cornwall, Willett (2019; 2020) pleads for radical democratic approaches that give agency to residents in the process of placemaking their own resilient community, which will provide counter-narratives to stigmatising perceptions from outsiders. The idea is that local citizens can better envision alternative qualities, attractive landscapes or local culture.

2.4.4 Non-recognition in 'environmental justice' (n = 17)

Another form of misrecognition of communities is prompted in a fresh perspective of justice theory concerned with the regional differentiated impacts of exploitation of natural resources and of environmental hazards and risks, called 'environmental justice' or 'energy justice'. Building on the work of Fraser (e.g. 2009), Young (2011), Soja (e.g. 2010), and Jenkins et al.

(2016), among others, these papers aim to integrate multiple aspects of justice in their spatial approach to environmental impacts. Apart from addressing an inequitable spatial distribution of environmental risks and benefits, and unheard voices in environmental decision-making, this approach addresses the ignoring of regional spaces (Pellow, 2017). In contrast to territorial stigmatisation, it is not so much about disrespect but about neglecting place-based issues from communities by the state.

Findings of the selected papers suggest neglecting of spatial injustices concerning energy and environment in EU regions. For instance, Bouzarovski & Simcock (2017) signal a disregard of regional differentiations in vulnerability to energy poverty. Golubchikov & O'Sullivan (2020) identify so-called 'energy peripheries' in South Wales, in which, despite the presence of natural resources and space to harness low carbon energy, households are trapped and remain locked-in to out-dated, inefficient, and carbon-heavy technologies (O'Sullivan et al., 2020). Other studies highlight a blind spot in politics for the regional damage to the environment and the social upheaval caused by the extraction of natural resources. Some regional spaces are at risk of becoming wasteland through land degradation. For instance through fracking, a technique for natural gas and oil mining from unconventional petroleum reservoirs that leads to chemical pollution of water, air and soil, seismic risks, and disruption of natural landscapes (Meng, 2018). Cotton (2017) concludes that UK fracking policies are insufficient in protecting communities from harm by a pro-industry central government that neglects the fact it is making profits at the expense of fracking-intensive regions. Also, in their study on biodiversity conservation controversies, Martin and colleagues (2016) illuminate misrecognition, exemplified in a case study of an association for small-scale peasant farmers in France's Dordogne that seeks both cultural and legal recognition in a predominantly industrial and polluting agriculture in Western Europe.

Environmental impacts on communities can be quite harmful, definitely if the state ignores regional interest. Environmental justice points out that basic rights and standards of living can be neglected, especially when regions become wasteland through land degradation. In light of Fraser (1995) this form of misrecognition we consider as *non-recognition*: a situation where the needs or circumstances of groups are not identified or ignored. To tackle non-recognition of regional spaces the conceptual framework of spatial justice is put forward as a critical tool to inform decision-making (e.g. Sovacool et al., 2017). Martin et al. (2016) and Cotton (2017) stress to include careful attention to ways to pursue equality of status for local stakeholders and empower communities. In environmental justice scholarship, we distil, the

inclusion of local communities in democratic deliberation and governance is viewed as an important step towards environmental justice.

2.4.5 Misrepresentation in 'politics of resentment' (n = 9)

The politics of resentment is typically understood as the analysis of spatially differentiated grievances driving political behaviour, examining geographic patterns in the mobilisation of collective resentment, generally concerning the rise of right-wing populism. This is also called the *geography of discontent* (Hendrickson et al., 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2019; McCann, 2020). The crux for the politics of resentment is to find out how inequalities are politicised and incorporated into spatial identity constructions (e.g. Carolan, 2019; Cramer, 2016; Guilluy, 2019; Wuthnow, 2018).

Interestingly, studies of the politics of resentment demonstrate a hinge towards populist nationalism in response to territorial inequality (Bonikowski, 2017). Considerable research demonstrates that regional uneven development within countries serves as a breeding ground for populist movements in the EU (Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Gordon, 2018). Especially the 2016 UK referendum on its EU membership received close attention from economic geographers, concluding that left-behind places have taken their 'revenge' through the ballot box (Gordon, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). The right-wing populist revolt mostly came from old-industrial Britain which is still suffering from deindustrialisation: closing down factories, shipyards, and coal mines (MacLeod and Jones, 2018). Essletzbichler et al. (2018) add to that a significant effect of rising immigrant shares and poor recovery from the 2008 economic crisis regions, on populist support in Austria and the UK. The prevalent framing of 'Left Behind Britain' then effectively captured a sense of dissatisfaction with regional uneven development, Sykes (2018) concludes from unpacking some spatial imaginaries of the UK's Brexit debate. In addition, Willett and colleagues (2019) illuminate significant perceptions pulling voters towards the Leave camp with a case study of Cornwall in the South West of the UK, such as the idea that a stronger nation-state would take away their uncertainty, insecurity and frustration about governance decisions. Several rural studies also address that people feel their rural way of life is under pressure. For instance, in Nordic countries, populist hunting movements pressured in their cultural tradition due to regulations protecting species, defied their exclusion from public debate through radicalisation: militant acts of resistance and rhetorically uniting heterogeneous ruralities (Von Essen et al., 2015). Also in legitimising policies to revitalise rural communities Nilsson & Lundgren (2018) find that the phrase 'a living countryside' in Swedish

rural politics is charged with both beliefs about civil rights for quality of life and a Swedish rural idyll.

Voicing feelings of being forgotten and excluded from decision-making processes by an urban establishment, provoked a swing to the right in deprived and rural areas. The dispute of injustice here concerns what Fraser (2009, pp. 18-21) terms *misrepresentation*: if political decision rules include people but are wrongly denied to participate as peers. To prevent groups from exclusion in politics and push them towards populist nationalism, the selected papers suggest to enhance the acknowledgement of spatial differences in development policies and to include regional voices in mainstream politics. Despite the evidence for economic and cultural victimisation, the empirical evidence for actual misrepresentation in political science is not overwhelming. The assumption, here, is that populist parties do not actually defend the interests of residents' place-based grievances that have long been disregarded and now voiced through populist rhetoric. To substantiate the claim of misrepresentation, we need different research that goes beyond voting behaviour and engages in a geography of parliamentary political representation (cf. Pitkin, 1967).

2.4.6 Misframing in 'territorial politics' (n = 16)

The scholarship around territorial politics traditionally grasps marginalisation conflicts over borders, culture, and ethnicities. It points out that a sense of regional belonging is a central feature in political mobilisation. Studies examine what issues are setting the stage for regional disengagement and secessionist movements (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan and Urwin, 1983; De Winter and Tursan, 2003). Traditional forms of regionalism, also referred to as 'nationalism' or 'ethno-regionalism', revolve around old cultural identities and linguistic minorities. Seeking the roots for electoral threats to territorial cohesion and state authority, studies looking into party rhetoric, as well as economic conditions and cultural recognition of regions. Territorial politics interprets injustice in terms of political oppression, such as 'internal colonialism' and 'subordination', and draws on Anderson's (2006) work on 'imagined communities', Castells' (1997) understandings of 'nations without a state' (MacInnes, 2006), and Paasi's (2003) interpretation of 'regional identities'.

In many EU member states, regionalist movements shaped around a regional identity that values cultural history, language, traditions, and landscape (e.g. Warf and Ferras, 2015). Party origins are typically a struggle for self-determination and recognition, which initiated parties to represent the interests of peripheries against a dominant centre with a nation-building attitude (Fagerholm, 2016). Yet several international comparative and longitudinal studies

demonstrate that regionalist parties in Europe have differentiated ideologies, from left to right on the political spectrum and from protectionist to separatist standpoints (e.g. Fagerholm, 2016; Massetti and Schakel, 2016). In search of attention from the centre regionalist parties can radicalise and mainstreaming their demands by pulling other parties along (Basile, 2015; Mueller and Mazzoleni, 2016). Some regionalist parties protect regional interests, while separatist and secessionist parties act to reframe the sovereignty of a territorial state. Regionalist parties in relatively rich regions lean towards a rightist orientation, while regionalist parties acting in relatively poor regions tend to develop a leftist orientation (Massetti and Schakel, 2015). Both sides claim economic victimisation and political marginalisation. The 'internal colonialism' rhetoric of left-wing parties, however, calls for more national solidarity in regional development, while in the 'bourgeois regionalism' discourse of right-wing parties the loss of regional resources to poorer regions is denounced (Massetti and Schakel, 2015). In the latter case political parties, for instance in Italy, voice a 'backward core' that exploits a more advanced periphery of 'hard-working people' in the north (Basile, 2015; Newth, 2019). Yet *Lega Nord* toned down the hostile rhetoric towards the 'wasteful South' and a corrupt elite of 'robber Rome' for a more nativist sound, which attracted voters beyond northern borders and won them the highest number of votes in the history of the party (Newth, 2019).

In territorial politics matters of inequality are centred around the misrepresentation of regions by regionalist parties, claiming minority communities are oppressed by a central state that leads them to economic disadvantages and cultural restraints. As a result of economic and cultural victimisation both poor and rich regions can seek for more self-determination, or even drawing new territorial state borders to create a new nation-state for their own. Separatist parties seek to redraw the boundaries of the existing territorial states. Accordingly, the political injustice at stake here is a deeper form of Fraserian misrepresentation: *misframing*. Misframing concerns the electoral boundaries of politics: the frame-setting, the constitution of both members and non-members, in a political community can exclude groups from participation. Separatist parties claim that their region is being denied the proper political autonomy and aims for state sovereignty. Yet on basis of the selected empirical literature it is difficult to conclude whether the perceived injustice is in fact just or unjust, more research is needed substantiating that specific regional residents are excluded from political decision-making.

Understandings of injustice	Claims of regional injustice	Typical remedies
Distribution literature		
Economic marginalisation	**Uneven development** (n=46) Underdeveloped regions can suffer from a decline in economic resources such as wealth, employment, and income.	**Resilience-based redistribution** Stimulate regional resilience and utilise economic potential of underperforming regions through implementing place-based investments.
Deprivation	**Peripheralisation** (n=30) Disconnected, sparsely populated regions can have poor access to essential public services such as health care, education, and infrastructure.	**Standard-based redistribution** Protect basic rights and standards of living through (re)connecting regions to network linkages and regain livelihood.
Recognition literature		
Disrespect	**Territorial stigmatisation** (n=15) Stigmatised regions can suffer from disrespect and stigma can (re)produce uneven development.	**Community reimagination** Involve communities in building counter-narratives to change their cultural status.
Non-recognition	**Environmental justice** (n=17) Neglected, unseen regions can be disadvantaged by a lack of protection from environmental exploitation and hazards such as land degradation and pollution.	**Community protection** Include local stakeholders in deliberation and governance to protect regional interests and environment.
Representation literature		
Misrepresentation	**Politics of resentment** (n=9) Regions can be misrepresented in their place-based economic grievances and cultural discrepancies.	**Regional representation** Voice place-based grievances of redistribution/recognition in mainstream politics.
Misframing	**Territorial politics** (n=16) Regional minorities can suffer from state or majority oppression.	**Regional self-determination** Rebalance regional autonomy.

Table 5: A summarised overview of manifest regional injustices

2.6 Conclusion

This paper makes the case for a philosophical grounded and empirically informed perspective on how regional inequality relates to injustice. We first expounded the Fraserian principles of justice on equality, arguing that justice is obtained when groups are participating as peers in society. Accordingly, this is a matter of equality on three dimensions: (re)distribution, recognition, and representation. From this egalitarian reinterpretation of spatial justice, we re-examined 134 empirical papers that we carefully selected through a scoping review method. Reviewing the literature in relation to the three dimensions of justice we identified six manifest regional injustices that withhold people from participating as peers in social life based on their place of origin/residence. In table 5 we made an overview of the manifested regional injustices, which we briefly present below.

First, in the selected papers on unequal regional distribution, we found evidence for two forms of spatial maldistribution: economic marginalisation and deprivation. Studies in uneven regional development showcase that globalisation's new spatial divisions of labour, moving low-cost manufacturing industries to countries outside the EU, led to the underdevelopment of various old industrial and rural areas. In Fraserian terms, these regions cope with *economic marginalisation*: a decline in economic resources such as wealth, employment, and income. In addition, peripheralisation literature highlights the *deprivation* of regions: a lack of access to public services, such as (digital) infrastructure, health facilities, and public transport, due to population decline. We can speak of a spatial political economy, which institutionalised an uneven allocation of economic and public provisions to depriving and sparsely populated regions.

Second, other than unjust distribution, we found two forms of spatial misrecognition in the selected literature engaged in status inequality: disrespect and non-recognition. Empirical research of territorial stigmatisation typically supports the conclusions of Wacquant (2008) and Shucksmith (2012), claiming that stigmas ascribed to disrepute places provoke *disrespect*: an unequal level of respect and a cultural hierarchy of territorial status. Moreover, it (re)produces economic marginality. The stigmatisation of marginalised rural areas as lagging behind, in economic and/or cultural sense, perpetuates uneven development as it drives away youngsters, mostly female, and holds off citizens and entrepreneurs from settling in a 'backward male lifeworld'. Moreover, studies of environmental justice reveal to us the injustices that some regions are subjected to, specifically of the *non-recognition* of environmental impacts on regions in public debate. In many cases, land degradation as a result of extracting natural

resources and industrial pollution affects local inhabitants, but their concerns remain unacknowledged. We conclude that there is a spatial status order that generates spatial injustices of misrecognition. Rephrasing Fraser's own words about gender for a spatial context (Fraser and Hrubec, 2004, pp. 883), we claim that a spatial order institutionalises a hierarchy of cultural values that privileges traits associated with growth, progress, and innovation of places, while devaluing traits categorised as obsolete and decline and ignoring environmental issues.

Third, in the tabbed papers addressing the inequalities of political representation in a regional context, we established two forms of injustices: misrepresentation and misframing. With the analysis of geographical patterns of voting behaviour, new social movements, and political discourse, the politics of resentment reveals that people living in regions who have long been disregarded by the political establishment, are now given voice through populist rhetoric. People can be *misrepresented* when their place-based economic grievances of unequal distribution and cultural discrepancies are not voiced in decision-making processes. Territorial politics then illuminates that regional minorities can suffer from state or majority oppression. In some regional communities, people experience no membership of the nation-state, they feel excluded from participating in democratic decision-making that concerns them and they strive for more self-determination, or even separation. This is an issue of *misframing*. We note here that our selection of empirical papers is not grounded in legal or constitutional analysis to substantiate the voiced imparity of participation in politics.

We conclude this paper with an endorsement for scholars in rural sociology, regional studies and other related fields to consider regional inequality in relation to justice in future research. The tripartite understanding of Fraser provides a helpful set of pillars addressing important dimensions of justice, and proved to be very useful in a spatial context of territorial inequality. Looking at regional inequalities from an egalitarian principle, spatial planning could focus less on arming regions for an economic race between regions and more on policies that protect basic standards of living, respect people and environment, and make the quality of life better for all regions.

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3. Does regional decline trigger discontent?
Unravelling regional development in the Netherlands

Abstract

A new geography of regional decline is signalled as a prominent source of discontent. This study considers regional divides in the Netherlands, and examines what trajectories can be detected in regional development and how these relate to recent regional discontent. Based on quantitative analyses of longitudinal data at the NUTS-3 level, we found a persistence of social and economic inequalities over the last decade(s). Our main result is that evidence for economic decline at the regional scale is limited, and unlikely to account for regional discontent in the Netherlands. Pathways of regional divergence and decline were mostly found in demographic change. Anti-establishment attitudes across Dutch regions were strongly associated with low income, low population change, and ageing.

3.1 Introduction

From the 1990s onward, a new phase of industrial transformation, state restructuring, and shifting policy preferences rearranged the economic landscapes of subnational regions in the Global North (Horner et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2018b; Odendahl et al., 2019). Some regions bloom in prosperity while others dwindle and are earmarked as places that are 'left behind' or 'don't matter' (Gordon, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Wuthnow, 2018; MacKinnon et al., 2021). The populist surge brought attention to these regional divides, which are signalled as prominent sources of discontent directed at a political establishment accused of ignoring the interests of rural and old-industrial communities (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2017; Gordon, 2018; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020).

The rise of the geography of discontent is predominantly explained by socio-economic decline (Dijkstra et al. 2020; Essletzbichler et al. 2018; Guilluy 2019; Rodríguez-Pose 2018). Accordingly, regions are left behind in industrial transformation and innovation (Dawley et al. 2010; De Ruyter et al. 2021; Rodríguez-Pose 2018). Recent studies contested to what extent the fertile grounds for regional discontent are economically or actually culturally determined (Carolan, 2019; Iocco et al., 2020; Florida, 2021), if geographic cleavages are determined by a changing composition of people or changing context of places (Maxwell, 2019; Koeppen et al., 2021), and whether resentment is coming from rurality or peripherality (Harteveld et al. 2019; Ziblatt et al. 2020). To date we do not have a complete understanding of the sources of regional discontent and their recent socio-economic history. We argue that it is important to consider

paths of regional inequalities over time (see also Odendahl et al., 2019; Carrascal-Incera et al., 2020; Evenhuis et al., 2021; Diemer et al., 2022), and to critically examine them for trends of decline and divergence with an in-depth understanding of geographic divides within a national context.

This paper takes the Netherlands as a case study. The motivation for investigating the Netherlands comes from the fact that it is a least likely case, being a proportional democracy without territorial seats in parliament (Van der Meer et al., 2019), and being one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in Europe with a much smaller retraction of rural population (Eurostat, 2019a). Yet, similar regional trends to other European countries are observed. There are economic frontiers while others are lagging behind (Iammarino et al. 2018; Raspe and Van der Berge 2017), divergent cosmopolitan-nationalist attitudes across urban and rural areas (Huijsmans et al., 2021), and disproportionally more supporters for right-wing populism in the periphery (Van Leeuwen et al., 2021; De Lange et al., 2022). Yet how these regional cleavages differ or complement each other, whether regional inequalities are widening over time, and if and how regional development fuels discontent requires further investigation.

This study exposes trajectories of socio-economic development *across regions* and *over time* in the Netherlands, and how these relates to recent regional discontent. In doing so, we explicitly examines inequality trajectories along the centre-periphery and urban-rural divides over the last decade(s). We formulate the following research questions:

1) What trajectories (of decline and divergence) can be detected in regional development over the last decade(s) across regional divides?

2) How are attitudes of regional discontent distributed across regional divides?

3) How do regional inequalities relate to attitudes of regional discontent?

To address this we undertake two analyses. First, a descriptive analysis endeavours to provide a detailed and multifaceted description of *regional development trajectories* (also referred to as paths, patterns, or trends) in the Netherlands, based on longitudinal data on NUTS-3 regions. We engage in two types of disadvantages of regional inequalities that might trigger discontent: economic disparities and social disparities. The former grasps the distribution of income, wealth, and unemployment. The latter the access to public services and demographic change. Specifically we look for patterns of convergence and divergence, growth and decline. Subsequently we capture feelings of discontent through three different attitudes in survey data at NUTS-3, and describe how these are distributed across regions. Second, with a correlation analysis we explore how variables of economic disparities and social disparities relate to

discontent. Before that, we will first ground our theoretical understanding of regional inequality and discontent, and specify our chosen methods and selected statistical datasets.

3.2 Theory

3.2.1 Understanding regional inequality

Evidence in the literature of regional development highlights trajectories of long-term economic divergence across regions within countries in the post-industrial era (Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2018; Blažek et al., 2019; Evenhuis et al., 2021; Diemer et al., 2022), including the Netherlands. Rural and old industrial heartlands in Europe suffered from relative – and in some cases, absolute – productivity downturn (Odendahl et al., 2019). We aim to understand economic disparities beyond productivity and sort out place-bound economic hardship for households and less for industries – even though the two are interdependent. In a study on right-wing populist support across the Netherlands, Harteveld and colleagues (2021) found that unemployment is particularly relevant in rural areas, while low incomes matter especially in urban areas. Further, there has been a rapid growth of house prices in large cities (Odendahl et al., 2019), and we also know that the people-based wealth gap is larger than the income gap in the Netherlands (Chancel et al., 2022). For those reasons, we also examine the development of regional wealth of households (financial assets minus liabilities), in addition to income and unemployment.

We go beyond economic context when considering regional cleavages, and include disparities in demography and quality of life in communities, typically brought forward in peripheralisation literature (Kühn, 2015). Scholars exposed an uneven distribution of essential public services across regions, in which rural areas suffer the burden (Lang, 2015; Bock, 2016; Dax and Fischer, 2018; Humer, 2018). Many sparsely populated regions are afflicted by population decline and ageing (Eurostat, 2019a), including the Dutch countryside. As a result public services retract such as public transport, health facilities, and educational services (Wirth et al., 2016; Kühn et al., 2017). Ageing, however, particularly requires adequate access to public services (Scharf et al., 2016). Moreover, the loss of a village supermarket, for example, can be a source for grievances and for a decrease in social attachment in rural Netherlands (Gieling et al., 2019; Haartsen and Gieling, 2021). The pressures on communities' standards of living are indicated in this study by population change, access to public services and ageing.

3.2.2 Understanding regional discontent

In most studies discontent is measured by populist voting (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; De Ruyter et al., 2021; Van Leeuwen et al., 2021). Yet we argue here it is important also to use survey data. Of course data from elections results are, in most liberal democracies, very accessible, reliable, and detailed. Plus every election serves a new batch of data. Yet election data are also limited. they lack a full understanding of what people are discontented about. Also, it is contested which political parties can be labelled as populist (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Norris, 2020), and whether their voters share the same resentment towards the same establishment (Rooduijn, 2018). Discontent can comprise different sets of feelings, which are not rooted in a single issue. Moreover, discontent may not always be expressed in a populist vote, or even through the ballot box, which therefore may overlook resentment in less populist regions. To better understand regional discontent, we should not only unravel multiple causes, but also we should consider multiple forms of discontent. Therefore, this paper chooses to unfold discontent as feelings inhabitants might share regardless of their voting behaviour.

We pose three attitudes here to explore different forms of regional discontent in the Netherlands. First, regional discontent can exist of the perception of unfair redistribution of regional investments, and feeling neglected by the established government. In rural or peripheral areas people often claim that their community does not receive a fair share of public investments (Cramer, 2016; Huijsmans, 2022; Van Vulpen, 2022). Second, regional discontent can stem from dissatisfaction with the local environment in which people live. Wuthnow's (2018) study of people in places that are left behind shows, amongst others, that a lack of jobs, population decline, and brain drain affected a local community as a whole. Third, regional discontent can be rooted in anti-establishment attitudes and distrust towards a distant political power. Several studies conducted in different countries found significant lower levels of institutional and political trust in regions that are characterised by poor economic development (Ashwood 2018; Hobolt 2016; Lipps and Schraff 2020; McKay et al. 2021; Mitsch et al. 2021). With that, we extend the set of attitudes for regional discontent in comparison with the recent research of De Lange et al. (2022).

What shapes the geography of discontent, as well as other political attitudes, can be distinguished into contextual and compositional effects (Maxwell, 2019; Koeppen et al., 2021). Contextual effects are place-based circumstances that might cause people to be discontented. For instance a higher unemployment rate, population decline or low access to public services. This is typically assumed in the literature of geography of discontent (e.g. De Ruyter et al. 2021; Essletzbichler et al. 2018; Rodríguez-Pose 2018). In contrast, compositional effects examine

the geographic clustering of people sharing the same individual characteristics or lifestyle, also known as geographic sorting. In this view sources of discontent are explained by the sociodemographic composition of an area. Both views are used to discuss our results.

3.2.3 The Netherlands: centre-periphery and urban-rural divide?

There are two unremitting geographic divides that mark a place-bound 'us' versus 'them': centre-periphery and urban-rural (De Souza 2017). Both are powerful socio-spatial imaginations that are invoked in public and political debate. See, for instance, the farmers' upheaval coming from the Dutch countryside (Van der Ploeg 2020), and the protests against the extraction of natural gas in northern Netherlands (Van der Voort and Vanclay 2015). As these two divides overlap, their borders can become blurry and are commonly mixed up. It should be explicitly noted here that centres and peripheries are first and foremost produced by applying this spatially oriented metaphor itself. The centre-periphery cleavage is still useful as an analytical approach to highlight the power-hierarchical relations or structures between spaces.

In this study we refer to the centre as the Randstad area, a polycentric metropolitan area (Zonneveld and Nadin, 2021). The Randstad comprises a cluster of the four largest cities in western Netherlands, and all (agricultural) land in between. These cities were also historically wealthy trade cities in the (pre-)modern era (Brand, 2021). In the post-war period the Randstad was first designed for decentralisation of industrial activity and for clustering suburbanisation; since the 1990s it has been planned as an economic powerhouse to compete at an international scale (Zonneveld and Nadin, 2021). The periphery, on the other hand, is generally considered as hinterland, close to the borders of Germany and Belgium. Dutch peripherality is characterised by a sparse population, stronger regional identities, and more social cohesion.

Due to the relatively small size and dense population of the Netherlands, the urban-rural divide is different than in most other countries. According to European standards the Netherlands does not have any rural areas at a regional scale, only at a local scale (Eurostat, 2019a). Yet about 54% of land is used for agriculture, 34% of land consists of natural terrain and of inland and open water, and only 13% of land is used for buildings and traffic (CBS, 2020b). Rooted in a long agrarian history, citizens also hold strong beliefs about the Dutch countryside. On the one hand it is imagined as a rural idyll, a romanticised view of the countryside (Van Dam et al. 2002; Haartsen et al. 2000). On the other hand, rural areas can be challenged to shake off the territorial stigmas imprinted on them by outsiders, such as the former agrarian pauper colonies in north-eastern Netherlands (Meij et al. 2020).

3.3 Method and data

3.3.1 Dutch regional typology

In this section we formulate a new regional typology to capture the centre-periphery and urban-rural divide for NUTS-level 3 regions in the Netherlands. First, to define the centre-periphery we work with a classification of Randstad regions and non-Randstad regions. This makes the following definitions:

- Centre: regions comprising the four largest cities plus all the regions within this 'ring'.
- Periphery: all other regions, which are generally considered as national hinterland.

Second, we classify regions according to a new urban-rural typology. Eurostat (2019) defined an urban-rural typology for at NUTS-level 3 regions in Europe based on population density, which is extremely helpful for making international comparisons. Yet it is not particularly sensitive to applying it to the Dutch context only due to a high population density across the country. To make a more detailed and context-specific distinction between urbanity and rurality at a regional scale in the Netherlands, we choose to work with the absolute number of people living in urban areas. Taking the population size per degree of urbanity (very strong, strong, slightly, little, not), the following urban-rural typology is used:

- Large urban (LU) regions: more than 100 000 inhabitants living in very strong urban areas.
- Mid-urban (MU) regions: between 10 000 and 100 000 inhabitants living in very strong urban areas, or more than 100 000 inhabitants living in very urban areas.
- Rural (RU) regions: between 0 and 10 000 inhabitants living in very strong urban regions.

In our analysis we sorted LU, MU, and RU regions in centre and periphery, making five regions (accordingly there were no rural regions in the centre). In Appendix 1, you can find an extra descriptive overview of the size of the population and urbanity level across the regions we composed, but also the population density and the share of population. Figure 1 maps our regional typology.
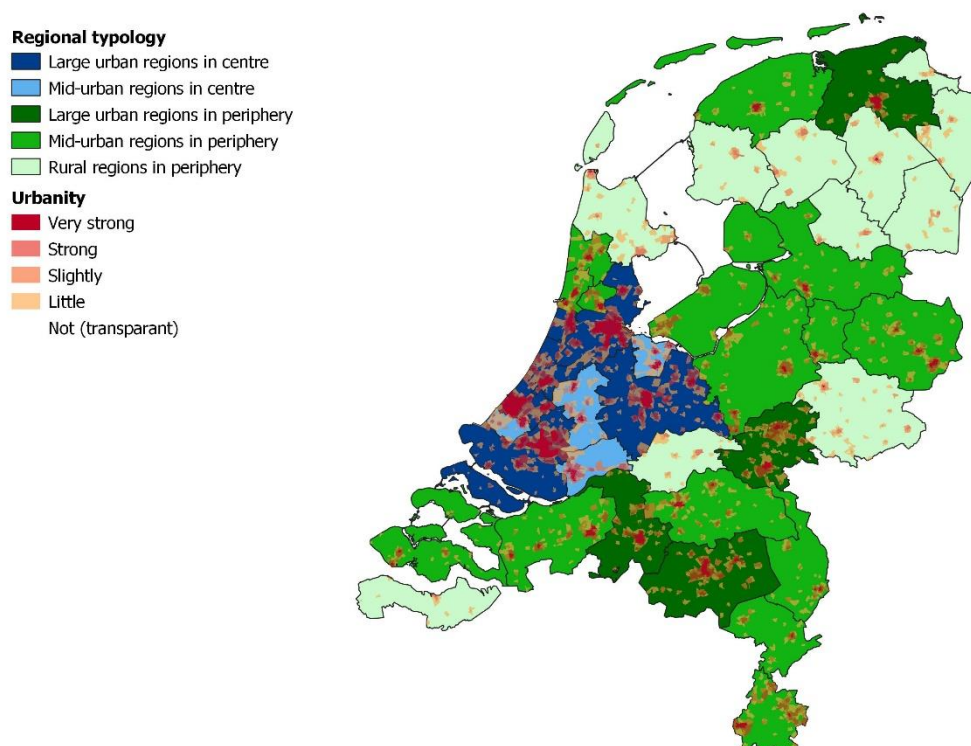
Figure 1: map of regional typology. Note: Urbanity levels on the map are from 2017. Sources: own work and CBS.

3.3.2 Measuring regional development trajectories

All data used in this study were obtained at the NUTS-3 level. Indeed, the level of scale at which the analysis is conducted both reveals and conceals things. The data at the NUTS-3 level is most detailed and complete for analysing regional development trajectories in relation to discontent. Most importantly, the regional scale makes it possible to explore correlations with attitude data since only few nationwide survey studies are representative at the regional scale, let alone at the local scale. In terms of development, the regional scale also allows us to go back further in time and rule out missing data for local areas. Moreover, the data are more valid as data variations due to municipal mergers, of which there have been many throughout the years in the Netherlands, have far less impact than on the local scale. Certainly, the NUTS-3 level does not show the within-region differences at the local scale. As a result, this study is limited in tracing disparities in local development. To compensate this, we included an overview of all social and economic variables at municipality for 2019, see Appendix 4. These descriptive statistics at municipal level show no large discrepancies with our main analysis at the regional scale. Also, we present an overview of income and wealth change at the municipality level in Appendix 3. For employment and public services the data was missing or incomplete.

The trajectories of regional development are examined with a descriptive analysis of region fixed variables. Economic disparities are examined by taking three indicators: mean standardised household income, median household wealth, and unemployment rate. Social disparities are measured with three indicators: population change, distance to public services, and the share of elderly population (65+ years). These six indicators are also used as independent variables in a correlation analysis examining for both longitudinal and cross-sectional effects (see also Martin et al., 2018a). The data used in this study consist mainly of *CBS Statline*, a large dataset of *Statistics Netherlands.*

The timeframes of our data are restricted. When possible, the data measures the regional trajectories from 1995 to 2019. However, NUTS-level 3 data of some variables were not available over the full period. Therefore, we took the longest period possible within that timeframe. With regards to multicollinearity, we consider the correlation between the independent variables robust. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values for regional inequality in 2019 are <6.0 and for long-term regional development are <2.0. Table 1 provides an overview with the details of all the indicators used in the analysis of long-term regional development, including the units of measurement, the exact periods, and the data sources.

	Indicators	**Unit of measurement**	**Period**
Economic disparities	Income	Mean standardised income private households (excl. students)	2011-2019
	Wealth	Median wealth private households (excl. students)	2011-2019
	Unemployment	Unemployment rate of workforce	2003-2018
Social disparities	Population change	Number of in- or out-migration per 1000 inhabitants	1995-2019
	Accessibility public services	Average distance to facilities related to:	2008-2019
		Health and wellbeing (general practitioner; hospital)	
		Daily groceries (large supermarket)	
		Catering industry (restaurant)	
		Education (primary school; secondary school)	
		Traffic and transport (main road; railway station)	
	Ageing	Average share of inhabitants aged 65 and over	1995-2019

Table 1: indicators for regional development trajectories

3.3.3 Examining regional discontent

This study conducts a correlation analysis to explore whether regional inequality and/or regional change affected feelings of regional discontent. Since our data samples are limited to regional averages at the NUTS-3 level, we choose a correlation analysis and test for the strength of linear associations between two variables, and not a regression analysis. This may limit statements about the multivariate relationships between variables, but it increases the reliability

of our linear associations. Regional discontent is captured by dissatisfaction with regional investments, satisfaction with the living environment, and institutional trust. See table 2. These dependent variables are based on existing statistics and secondary data analysis at NUTS-3 level. The survey data about dissatisfaction with regional investments are from the *SCoRE project*, an international collaboration of universities that studies the subnational context and radical right support in Western Europe. This latter indicator, focused on the perceived insufficiency of regional investments by central government, is one of three items that together are constituted as regional resentment in the recent study of De Lange (2022). In addition, we used survey statistics from two other indicators retrieved from *CBS Statline*: institutional trust and satisfaction with the living environment.

Indicators	Unit of measurement	Period	Source
Perception of insufficient regional redistribution	The percentage of private households that believe that the government has done too little to improve one's regional economy.	2017	*SCoRE*
Satisfaction with living environment	The percentage of private households that are very satisfied or satisfied with the current living environment.	2018	*CBS Statline*
Institutional trust	The percentage of private households that trust the House of Representatives, the police, and judges.	2019	*CBS Statline*

Table 2: indicators for regional discontent

3.4 Findings

3.4.1 Descriptive results

3.4.1.1 Economic disparities

In this section we highlight several economic development trajectories across regional divides in the Netherlands. Figure 2 demonstrates the development of standardised household income, median wealth per household, and unemployment rate. The graphs on the left side show the averages per year of the regions classified according to the five regional typologies. On the right

side we plotted the z-scores across most recent year (y-axes) and oldest year (x-axes), to show the spread of all 40 regions.

Between 2011 and 2019, there was an overall increase of standardised household income across regions in the Netherlands. There was no decline, merely growth at the regional scale. There was however a stable centre-periphery cleavage, see Figure 1. In the centre regions the average income was significantly higher than the peripheral regions. Even though disproportionally large shares of both poor and rich people are located in the large cities (Buitelaar et al., 2016; Hoff et al., 2019), the average income was highest in both large urban and mid-urban regions in the centre. Mean income was lowest in rural regions in the periphery. Figure 2 shows that these income inequalities across centre-periphery divide stayed more or less the same. The z-scores along the diagonal also indicate no con- or divergence of regional incomes. At the municipality level the income change presents a similar pattern, one of a persistence of inequalities and on average a slightly smaller growth in the rural periphery, see Appendix 3.

Looking at the regional development of the median wealth per household, one can clearly see the economic shock that came from 2008's financial crisis. From 2011 to 2013 there was an overall downfall in regional wealth, while in 2011 the median wealth of households was highest in rural regions in the periphery, it was also here where recovery from the economic shock was slower. The Randstad regions caught up with a more rapid recovery. In doing so, on average regions surpassed their urban/rural counterparts in the periphery. The rural regions lost their leading position to the mid-urban regions in the centre and only saw a small increase compared with 2011. Other regions, especially in the Randstad, significantly improved their wealth. When looking at the z-scores, one can see that the large urban regions are very much spread with three regions which remained at the bottom and three regions which had a relatively large increase in median wealth. At the municipality level the wealth change looks a bit different, see Appendix 3. A substantial part of the municipalities in the periphery had a decline in wealth, though on average wealth increased.

Between 2003 and 2018 there was an almost unchanged path of the highest regional averages of unemployment rates in LU regions, see figure 2. The LU regions in both centre and periphery show compatible rates over time, making them the least well-off in terms of unemployment. The development of unemployment rate in rural regions somewhat changed over time. Before the 2008 financial crisis, RU regions had a relatively high unemployment rate, comparable with the LU regions. From 2010 on, however the unemployment rate became lower than of the LU regions. The MU regions were at all time better off than other types of

regions, especially the MU regions in the centre. Overall, there was no clear divergence or convergence. Rather, we see an accordion pattern: in times of economic regression, at the peaks of national unemployment, regional divides were stretched. When unemployment rates were lower regional differences converged.
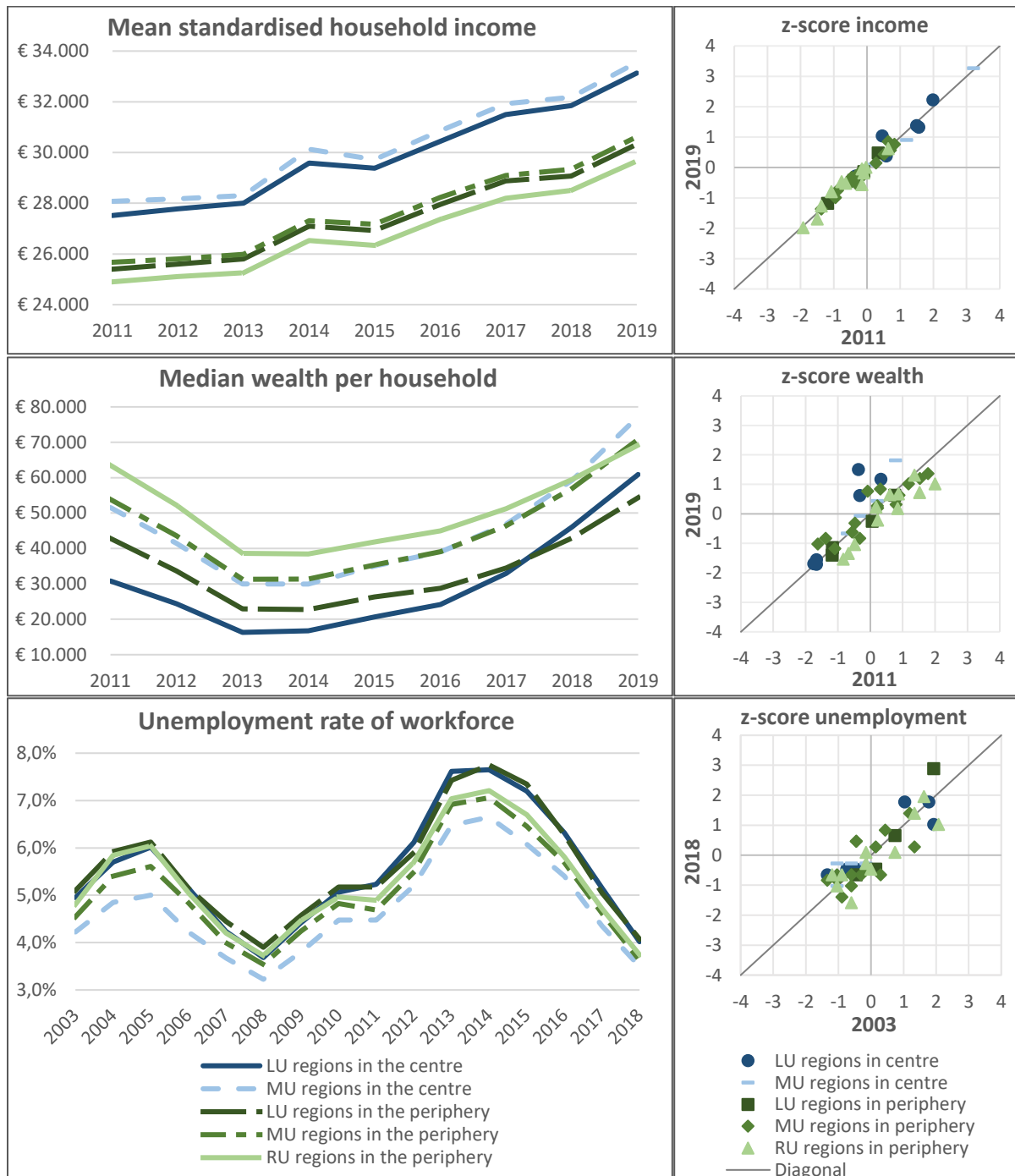
Figure 2: economic development trajectories

3.4.1.2 Social disparities

In this section we focus on the development trajectories of several social disparities between regions. Figure 3 presents the population change per 1000 inhabitants between 1995 and 2019, the distance to public services (km) between 2008 and 2019, and the shares of elderly population between 1995 and 2019. Looking at the relative population change across regional divides, one can see a divergence from 2005 on. Between 1995 and 2005, trends across regional divides were quite similar. Yet, from 2005 on there were periods of population decline in the RU regions while other regions continuously experienced population growth. Since 2016 there was a resurgence in population growth in rural regions. The z-scores present that especially the LU regions in the centre are above the diagonal.

The accessibility of public services is characterised by a sharp divide between centre and periphery. Public services are much closer to people living in the centre regions, compared with those in the periphery. Especially inhabitants of the rural regions have to travel further to reach public services. Over the years there was an overall growth in distance, be it very small at the regional scale. Disparities at the local scale are likely to be larger. In MU and RU regions the distance increased a bit more than in the LU regions. A very small though undeniably present divergence between regions can be seen across the urban-rural cleavage.

There was consistent divergence across the regional divides in ageing. Since 1995 the distribution of the share of elderly population across regions became more uneven. There was a general growth in elderly population, which over time developed into an urban-rural divide. In 1995 the regional inequality with regards to the elderly population was much smaller compared with the situation in 2019. From 2003 on, the smallest share of people aged 65 or over can be found in the LU regions. Especially the rural regions increasingly lodged more elderly who enjoy their pension in a quiet environment.
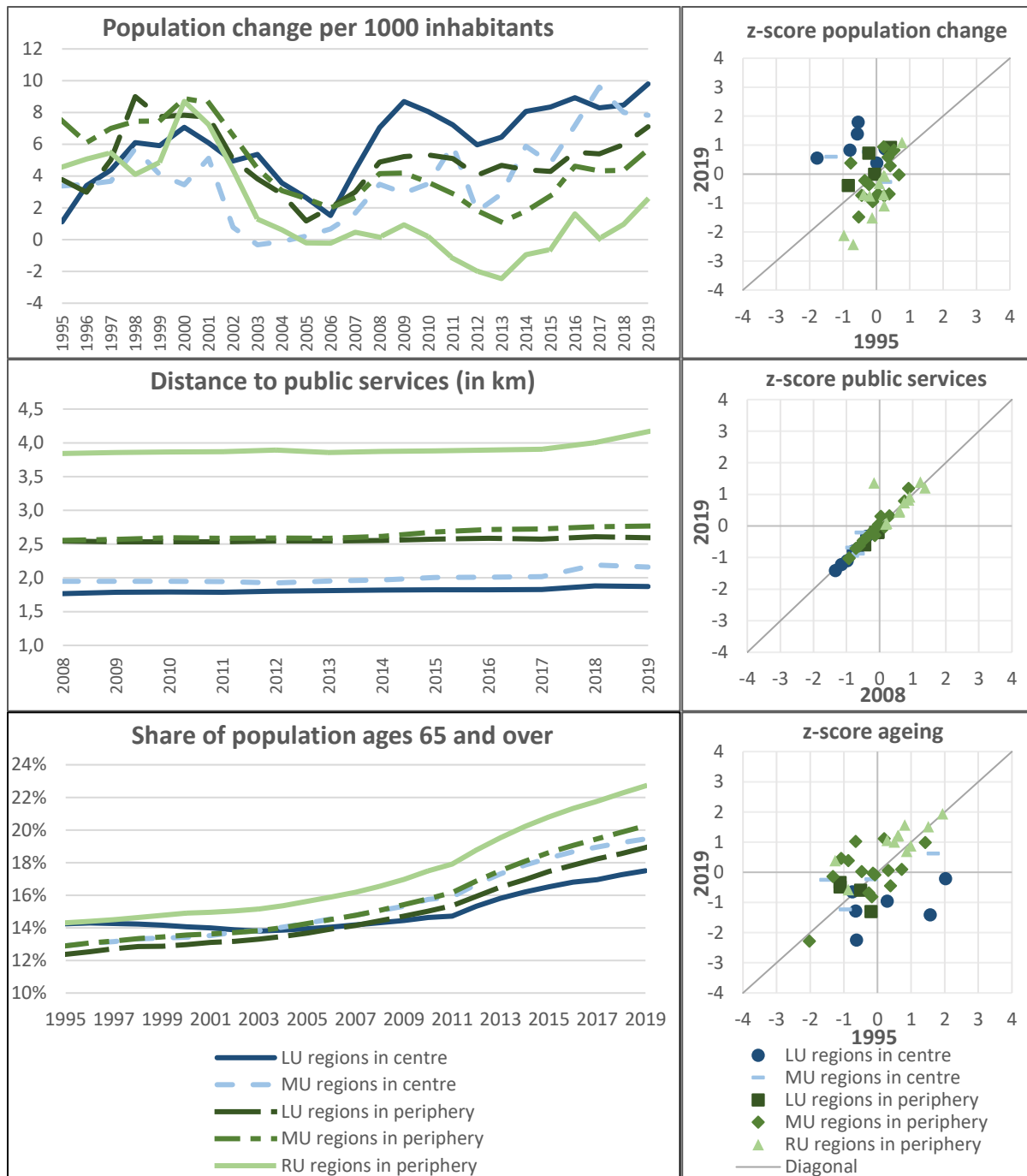
Figure 3: social development trajectories

3.4.1.3 Regional ranking

Figure 4 shows scatter plots of the relative regional change of economic and social disparities. It represents the change in mean ranking position of the three variables, and compares the oldest year with the most recent year. Regions were ranked from most positive score (1) to most negative score (40). The dots below the diagonal indicate regions that improved their ranking, and above the diagonal line which regions' ranking depreciated.

Figure 4 shows that regions are scattered around the diagonal, especially in the lower rankings. This indicates that there have not been any substantial changes in the economic mobility across regions. See Appendix 2 for a more detailed overview of rankings per region. Regions that rank lowest in 2019 were already in a more or less low ranking previously. No distinct patterns of regional divides in terms of econo0mic disparities were observed in our rankings. The scatter plot reveals a greater dispersion in the ranking of social disparities, suggesting that there were larger relative changes in this aspect. Particularly, the LU regions in the Randstad demonstrated significant improvement in their position, while rankings of RU and MU regions in the periphery mostly depreciated.
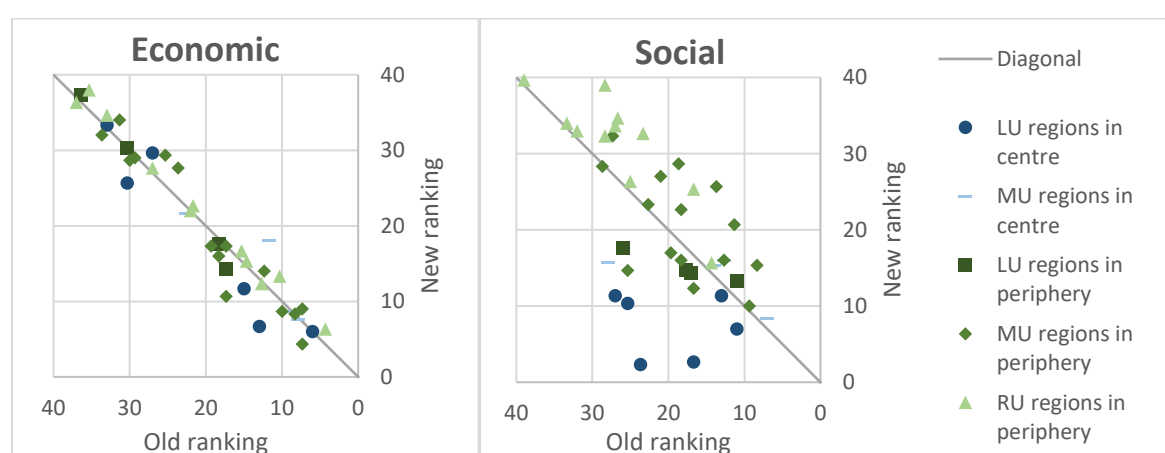
Figure 4: old and new ranking of economic and social disparities. Note: ranking is calculated as average ranking of the three variables.

3.4.1.4 Regional discontent

Our descriptive findings on regional discontent reveal consistent disparities between centre and peripheral regions in the Netherlands. Regional discontent is measured here by respondents' agreement with propositions about perceived insufficiency of regional investments, satisfaction with living environment, and institutional trust. See figure 5. Among the three indicators dissatisfaction with regional investments exhibits the widest regional variation. People living in regions in the periphery generally feel more dissatisfied with the central government's investments in their region than those in the centre. This accounts especially for rural regions, although there is quite some variation between them. In addition, figure 5 shows that inhabitants of peripheral regions also have less institutional trust than those in centre regions. The regional divide in trust corresponds with international studies that found a similar pattern of higher levels

of institutional distrust in economically disadvantaged regions (see Lipps and Schraff, 2020; McKay et al., 2021).

Compared with other regions, inhabitants of peripheral regions are however generally more satisfied with their living environment. Even though the differences between the four regional categories are small, it is an interesting result. The fact that residents of large urban regions in the centre are less likely to be satisfied with their living environment compared with regions in the periphery could come from the disadvantages of urban overdevelopment, such as a lack of affordable housing, high levels of criminal offenses, high levels of feeling unsafe, less green spaces, and high levels of air pollution (CBS, 2020a). This resonates with many other EU member states in which the subjective wellbeing is relatively high in rural areas than it is in urban areas (De Dominicis et al. 2020). Even though regional differences for most accounts are not large, these descriptive results suggest that regional discontent is essentially political discontent strongly present in the periphery.
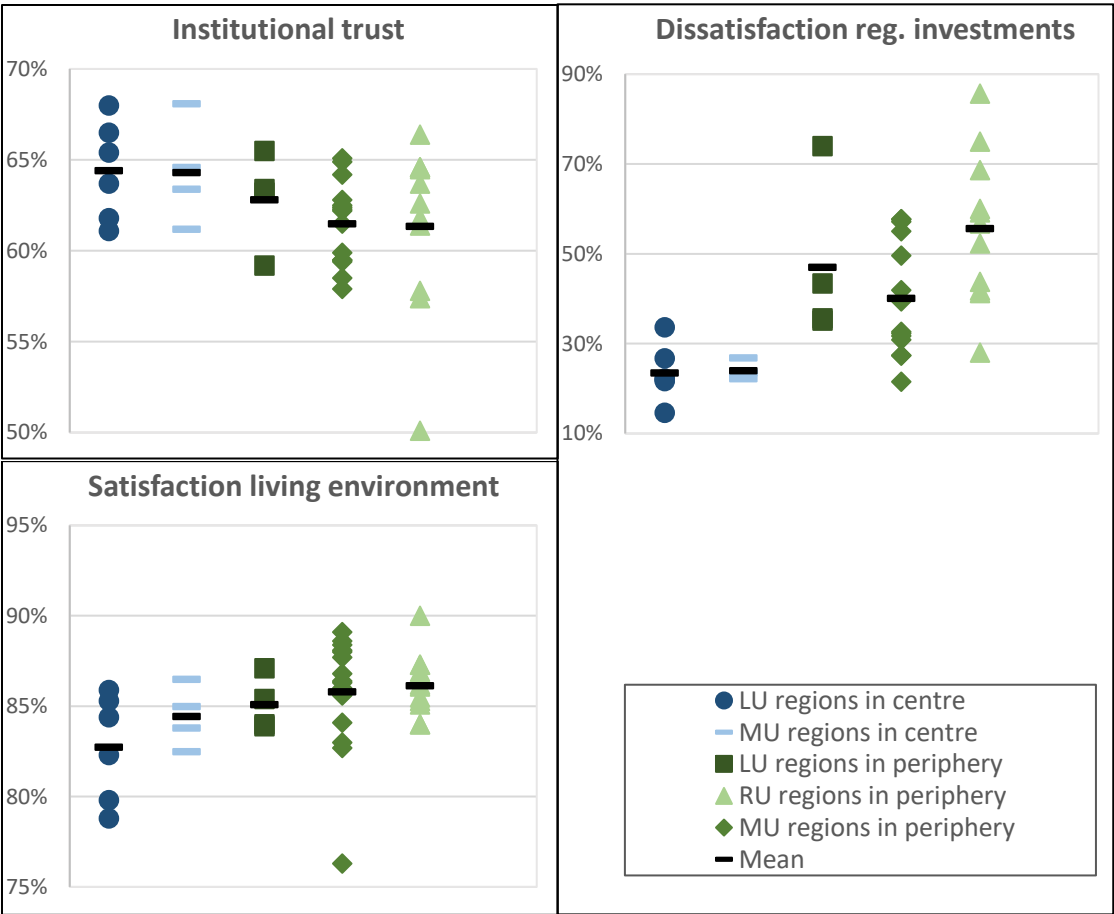
Figure 5: Attitudes of discontent

3.4.2 Correlation results

In order to investigate the causes of regional discontent in the Netherlands, we conducted an exploratory analysis of correlations for both recent regional inequality (most recent year) and regional change (the value of most recent year minus oldest year). In this type of analysis, coefficients are not controlled for other variables. Indeed a more extensive analysis with a larger number of observations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of effects on discontent, our data only permit us to explore potential associations with discontent. Knowing that some regional inequalities remained relatively stable over time, such as income, we still included them in the analysis. See the z-scores in Figure 3 and 4: if values were clustered along the diagonal then are not much changes between regions. For an interpretation of the strength of the correlation coefficients, we follow Hinkle et al. (2003): negligible (0.0 to 0.3); low or weak (0.3 to 0.5); moderate or strong (0.5 to 0.7); high or very strong (0.7 to 0.9); very high or extremely strong (0.9 to 1.0), likewise for negative correlations. Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients and probabilities for each of the indicators with each of the three indicators for regional discontent.

The correlations between income and dissatisfaction with regional investments demonstrate significant strong positive associations, and income shows negative associations with institutional trust. These results reveal that people living in regions with relatively low average household incomes are more likely to be discontented with regional redistribution policies by government and to be distrusting towards institutions. The findings for wealth show significant correlations between regional change and dissatisfaction with regional investments and institutional trust, but the associations were weak. Moreover, we found a significant and strong positive association between wealth inequality and satisfaction with living environment. This suggests that inhabitants in more wealthy regions are generally more satisfied with their residential area. For unemployment rates we only found one significant yet weak correlation, which indicates that higher unemployment levels have a negative relationship with residents' satisfaction with their living environment.

The strongest coefficient in our correlation analysis was found between population change in 2019 and the perceived insufficiency of regional investments. This suggests that at the regional scale, the best predictor for belief in government failing to sufficiently invest in one's regional economy is population change per 1000 inhabitants, followed by mean household income. Accessibility of public services has no strong correlations with attitudes, it correlates mostly with dissatisfaction with regional investments, indicating that in places with a longer distance to public services people are a bit more likely to be discontented with regional

redistribution policies. Lastly, Table 3 shows that ageing in 2019 strongly correlates with ideas about insufficient government efforts for regional development. The larger the share of elderly population, the higher the discontent. Also, highly ageing regions have a weak association with being happier about living environment and a weak association with being more distrusting towards institutions.

Correlation **Probability**	*Dissatisfaction with regional investments*		*Satisfaction with living environment*		*Institutional trust*	
	Reg. inequality	**Reg. change**	**Reg. inequality**	**Reg. change**	**Reg. inequality**	**Reg. change**
Income	2019	2011-2019	2019	2011-2019	2019	2011-2019
	-0.619**	**-0.587****	0.047	0.118	**0.620****	**0.567****
	0.000	*0.000*	*0.772*	*0.468*	*0.000*	*0.000*
Wealth	2019	2011-2019	2019	2011-2019	2019	2011-2019
	-0.295	-0.455*	**0.580****	-0.072	0.405	0.457*
	0.064	*0.003*	*0.000*	*0.660*	*0.010*	*0.003*
Unemployment	2018	2003-2018	2018	2003-2018	2018	2003-2018
	0.381	-0.351	-0.445*	-0.067	-0.303	0.379
	0.015	*0.027*	*0.004*	*0.682*	*0.057*	*0.016*
Population change	2019	1995-2019	2019	1995-2019	2019	1995-2019
	-0.699**	-0.209	-0.226	-0.207	0.333	0.407*
	0.000	*0.195*	*0.161*	*0.199*	*0.036*	*0.009*
Accessibility public services	2019	2008-2019	2019	2008-2019	2019	2008-2019
	0.467*	0.490*	0.286	-0.053	-0.196	-0.256
	0.002	*0.001*	*0.074*	*0.745*	*0.226*	*0.110*
Ageing	2019	1995-2019	2019	1995-2019	2019	1995-2019
	0.529**	0.324	0.476*	0.471*	-0.339	-0.359
	0.000	*0.041*	*0.002*	*0.002*	*0.032*	*0.023*
Note: **N=40. **p <0.001; *p <0.01.**						

Table 3: Correlations by regional inequality and regional change

3.5 Discussion

In this section, we delve deeper into how the findings of our study on economic disparities and social disparities align with the existing literature on the geography of discontent. First, in correspondence with several studies on discontent (Van Gent et al., 2014; Dijkstra et al., 2020; De Lange et al., 2022), our results reveal that regional income inequalities in the Netherlands are strongly associated with both feelings of insufficient government support and institutional

distrust. In contrast to earlier studies conducted at a local level (Harteveld et al., 2021; Huijsmans, 2023), our study at a regional scale detected no strong link between unemployment and discontent. The findings from our descriptive analysis provide insights into the economic development of regions, which among others indicate that there were no relative changes in income mobility of regions characterised by lower average income. From a contextual perspective, lower income regions, mostly situated in the Dutch periphery, correspond to the notion of being 'trapped' in the lower tiers of economic development within the country (Diemer et al., 2022), and less so to the notion of 'economic decline'. However, it is essential to also consider the effects of composition (see for example Maxwell, 2019). Several researches of the Netherlands showed that a higher concentration of lower incomes also signifies the geographic clustering of a lower socioeconomic class that tends to harbor greater grievances against a political establishment (Van Gent et al., 2014; Harteveld et al., 2021; Noordzij et al., 2021). Similarly, the strong link between high concentrations of elderly population and regional discontent in our study aligns with research suggesting that elderly tend to harbor more negative sentiments towards the established political order (Dijkstra et al., 2020; Harteveld et al., 2021). An economic development trajectory characterised by lower income job opportunities and a lack of relative upward mobility, perpetuates the concentration of low-income groups in these regions. The presence of these compositional effects prompt further research into spatial sorting and its relationship to place-based discontent in the Netherlands.

Rural communities in the Netherlands, particularly in the periphery, face challenges from a vicious cycle of depopulation and decreasing public services (see also Gieling et al. 2019; Ubels et al. 2019). In line with recent studies of the Netherlands (Harteveld et al., 2021; Van Leeuwen et al., 2021), we found that the distance to public services is a weak predictor for feelings of discontent. Possibly rural residents in the Netherlands perceive the centralisation of public facilities as a minor inconvenience and shrug their shoulders for a slightly longer travel, after all the Dutch situation is much less pronounced compared with countries such as Spain or Italy (see Eurostat 2019a). Yet, qualitative studies illustrated a sense of loss and decreased social attachment in peripheral areas in the Netherlands coping with retraction of public services such as a supermarket (see Gieling et al. 2019; Haartsen and Gieling 2021). Possibly there is, what we term here, a rural service paradox. Our study indicates that population change is strongly associated with people's dissatisfaction with regional investments. Considering that population change emerges as the primary catalyst for the decline in local public services, it is plausible that the strong correlation between population change and dissatisfaction with government investments comes from a worsening regional context. Many rural residents

engage in social innovation to sustain public services (see Bock, 2016; Ubels et al., 2019), for instance through initiating a cooperative that gives the local supermarket a new lease life. Local initiatives help alleviate the drawbacks of public services, but the lack of government support simultaneously evoke feelings of being left behind (see also Bolet, 2021). It presents a paradox because, on one hand, the local initiatives have a positive impact on the local quality of life in terms of service provision and social attachment, but, on the other, the absence of government support undermines the overall relationship between rural citizens and the government, potentially evoking negative sentiments of being left behind or neglected. Further exploration of this dynamic is necessary to comprehensively understand the relationship between population change, public service accessibility, and discontent.

3.6 Conclusion

The geography discontent causes much concern, and numerous scholars are puzzling with pinpointing the underlying causes. Frequently, discontent is associated with long-term economic decline in regions that are left behind in industrial transformation. For instance, in parts of peripheral France, peripheral England, southern Italy, and eastern Germany the populist surge is (partly) explained by deindustrialisation and employment decline (Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Diemer et al., 2022; Greve et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020). These are, however, more likely cases for finding regional discontent, since these large countries are heavily industrialised and have more severe economic inequality between regions. From this least-likely case study we conclude that in the Netherlands there has not really been any economic divergence or decline across households at the regional level. Our findings show that socio-economic distribution in the Netherlands is regionally unbalanced and mostly to the detriment of the rural periphery. However, we did not detect strong decline or divergence in recent economic development for households across regions. There were, however, pathways of decline and divergence in demographic change. The Netherlands exemplifies that recent changes in economic development are not likely to explain feelings of political discontent in all cases.

Building on studies about uneven regional development in a post-industrial era (e.g. Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2018; Blažek et al., 2019; Evenhuis et al., 2021; Diemer et al., 2022), we unravelled several other regional development trajectories within the Dutch context. Even though average household income in the rural periphery remained lowest, there was also structural income growth for all regions in the Netherlands. Moreover, large urban regions were afflicted by lower median wealth and higher employment peaks. Starting from

1995 a nationwide trend of ageing emerged, leading to a large increase of elderly population in the rural regions in the periphery. Additionally, these same regions experienced a period of population decline between 2010 and 2014.

This study showed that discontent in the periphery was more strongly expressed in anti-establishment attitudes, such as the perception of one's region not receiving their fair share of government investments and institutional distrust. These differences correspond with international findings on higher shares of political distrust in economic disadvantaged and rural areas (Hobolt 2016; Lipps and Schraff 2020; McKay et al. 2021; Ashwood 2018). The correlation analysis showed that regional discontent, in terms of anti-establishment attitudes, is best predicted by household income inequality, population change, and ageing. This study indicated that regional discontent is likely to be explained at a regional scale by consistent lower average income, social challenges from population decline, and larger shares of elderly population. Our results also show that people in the less urban peripheral regions are generally happier with the place they live in than people in other parts of the country, which resonates with findings of higher subjective wellbeing in the countryside of Western Europe (De Dominicis et al. 2020). Dissatisfaction with residential area, strongly present in large urban regions in the Dutch Randstad, can be considered as a specific form of discontent from urban overdevelopment (see also Florida 2021).

This study yields several new findings, in addition to the literature on the geography of discontent in the Netherlands, and more specifically to the work of De Lange and colleagues (2022) on regional resentment in the Netherlands. First, by providing a detailed overview of inequality trajectories of the explanatory variables, this study helped to create a more complete understanding of recent regional developments that are associated with regional discontent. Second, our findings showed that political distrust is stronger in the periphery – especially in the rural periphery – but that the differences are substantially smaller than for dissatisfaction with regional investments. This suggests that place-based sentiments towards politics (such as perceived insufficiency of government investments in one's region) tend to be more geographically divided than non-place-based discontent towards politics (such as political distrust). Third, this study contributed by revealing that people in the peripheral regions tend to be more satisfied with their living environment, and so it is likely that many of these residents are very much attached to their place of residence. Fourth, we confirmed that also at a regional scale, and not only the local scale as analysed in De Lange et al. (2022), political discontent cuts somewhat more strongly along the centre-periphery than the urban-rural divide in the Netherlands.

This least likely study, thus, confirms the persistence of interregional inequalities and the presence of regional discontent in peripheral Netherlands. Yet we also need to state the limits. First, since we did not conduct a multivariate regression analysis, there was no control for any indicators that might better explain the strong associations we found, for instance education levels. Second, since we work with only 40 NUTS-3 level regions, our approach unfortunately does not allow us to work out a more detailed correlation analyses and compare different predictors across the regional cleavages. It would be very relevant also to study development *within* regions rather than *between* regions. Yet, our explorative analysis of municipalities (see Appendix 3), showed that for household income it is unlikely that it would distil different patterns of divergence and decline across geographic divides, but for wealth it might. Third, it requires longitudinal panel survey data to find out how specific conditions and compositions develop parallel to attitudes over time.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: descriptive info of regional typology

1 January 2020	LU regions in centre	MU regions in centre	RU regions in centre	LU regions in periphery	MU regions in periphery	RU regions in periphery	Netherlands
Number of NUTS-level 3 regions	6	4	-	4	15	11	40
Population size (x 1 000 000)	5.7	1.2	-	2.4	5.9	2.1	17.4
Share of national population	33%	7%	-	14%	34%	12%	100%
Population living in very strong to strong urban areas (x 1 000 000)	4.2	0.7	-	1.0	2.2	0.3	8.5
Share of population living in very strong to strong urban areas (regional mean)	76%	59%	-	44%	39%	13%	49%
Population density (regional mean of number of addresses per km2)	1875	1149	-	555	567	216	517

Type	Region	Income		Wealth		Unemployment		Population change		Public services		Ageing	
		2011	2019	2011	2019	2003	2018	1995	2019	2008	2019	1995	2019
LU regions in cen.	Groot-Amsterdam	13	5	40	39	38	33	33	3	3	3	14	2
	Groot-Rijnmond	24	23	38	40	37	37	36	9	16	15	24	7
	Agglomeratie 's-Gravenhage	11	14	38	38	32	37	32	2	2	2	37	3
	Utrecht	4	3	25	16	16	16	11	7	10	9	12	5
	Agglomeratie Haarlem	2	2	26	2	11	16	40	15	1	1	40	18
	Agglomeratie Leiden en Bollenstreek	3	4	14	6	1	8	20	16	8	8	11	10
MU regions in cen.	Delft en Westland	8	10	23	23	4	21	7	8	6	11	8	6
	Het Gooi en Vechtstreek	1	1	11	1	12	21	39	13	7	6	38	28
	Zuidoost-Zuid-Holland	16	16	31	28	21	21	10	24	10	7	18	17
	Oost-Zuid-Holland	5	6	18	17	4	3	27	11	13	19	2	16
LU regions in peri.	Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant	14	12	12	15	26	16	5	6	23	19	5	15
	Overig Groningen	36	36	35	36	38	40	37	27	23	22	18	4
	Arnhem/Nijmegen	27	27	34	33	30	31	21	19	15	13	15	11
	Midden-Noord-Brabant	18	20	21	25	16	8	26	12	22	19	5	13
MU regions in peri.	West-Noord-Brabant	15	15	16	21	21	16	19	28	20	18	16	22
	Twente	33	33	29	27	26	27	30	32	17	17	21	21
	Zuid-Limburg	34	35	33	34	34	27	31	37	9	9	23	35
	IJmond	7	10	22	10	1	6	3	20	4	4	31	24
	Veluwe	12	13	6	8	4	6	15	5	18	23	22	20
	Noordoost-Noord-Brabant	8	7	2	3	12	3	6	18	25	25	3	19
	Noord-Friesland	37	38	24	29	33	35	25	26	35	36	26	23
	Alkmaar en omgeving	6	8	15	9	4	8	4	9	12	12	9	25
	Zaanstreek	24	30	36	29	16	29	28	23	5	5	17	9
	Noord-Overijssel	28	25	18	19	12	8	9	14	30	29	20	8
	Zuidwest-Overijssel	28	28	27	26	16	29	35	16	14	14	27	14
	Overig Zeeland	18	22	10	18	9	2	13	33	34	33	35	31
	Noord-Limburg	28	26	7	14	20	8	22	35	27	24	7	27
	Midden-Limburg	21	19	3	5	28	8	8	28	21	16	12	33
	Flevoland	24	23	37	31	29	32	1	1	26	28	1	1
RU regions in peri.	Kop van Noord-Holland	21	18	20	20	3	8	15	21	31	30	4	25
	Noord-Drenthe	17	17	8	12	21	21	18	25	37	35	30	37
	Achterhoek	18	21	4	11	9	8	13	36	28	26	29	36
	Zuidoost-Friesland	35	34	16	24	30	25	24	33	39	37	33	29
	Zuidwest-Drenthe	31	30	9	22	25	16	12	22	29	27	34	30
	Zuidwest-Friesland	32	28	13	13	21	25	15	30	38	39	28	32
	Delfzijl en omgeving	39	39	32	37	40	33	34	40	19	38	32	39
	Oost-Groningen	40	40	30	35	36	39	29	30	35	34	36	38
	Zuidoost-Drenthe	37	37	28	32	34	35	23	38	33	32	24	34
	Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen	21	32	5	4	12	1	38	39	40	40	39	40
	Zuidwest-Gelderland	8	9	1	7	4	3	2	4	32	31	9	12

Note: ranking as calculated from positive to negative position (1 in blue to 40 in red)

Appendix 3: Income and wealth change at municipality level 2011-2019
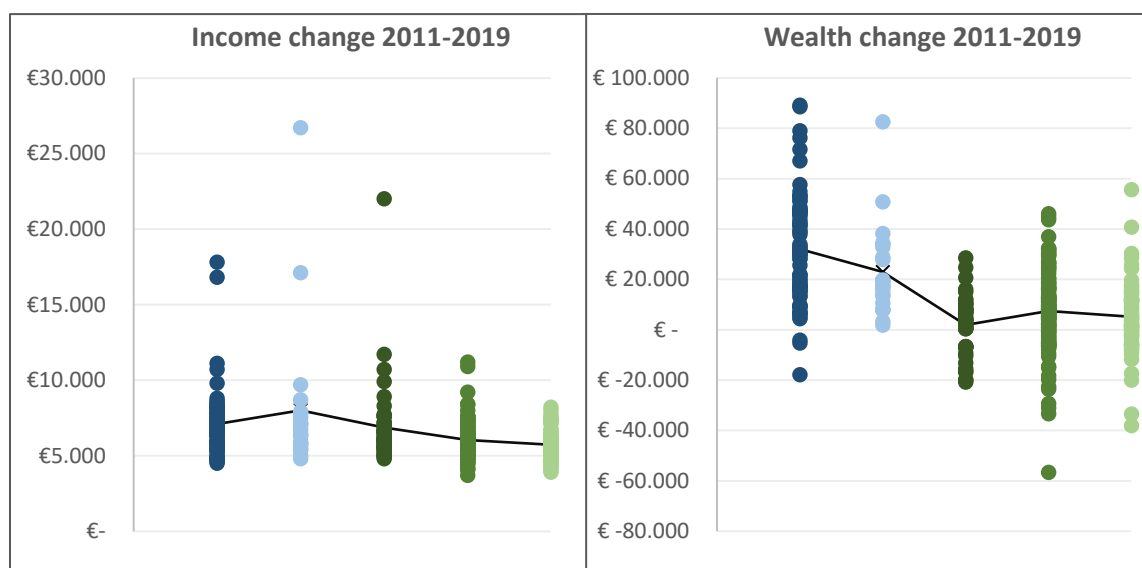
Note: From left to right: municipalities in LU regions in centre, in MU regions in centre, in LU regions in periphery, in MU regions in periphery, in RU regions in periphery. The chart includes 334 out of 355 municipalities. The line connects the averages.

Appendix 4: box-and-whisker plot of economic and social disparities at municipality level in 2019
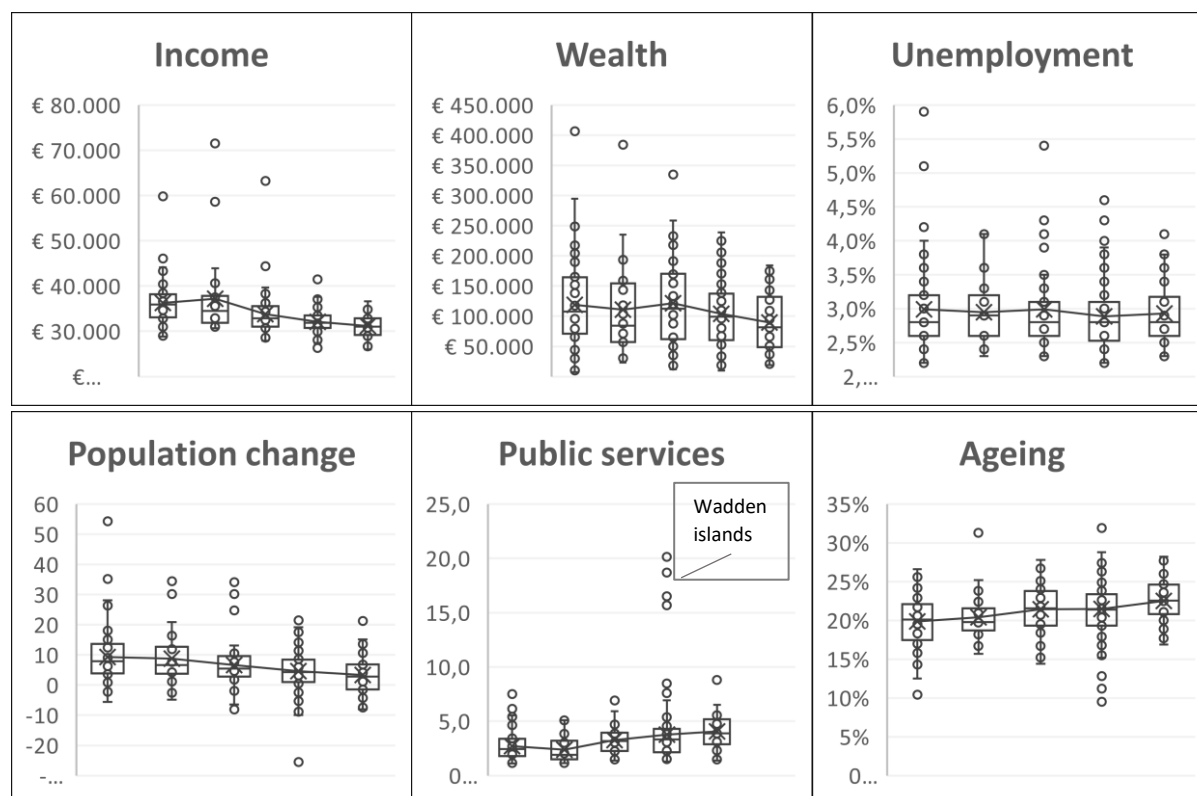
Note: From left to right: municipalities in LU regions in centre, in MU regions in centre, in LU regions in periphery, in MU regions in periphery, in RU regions in periphery. All 355 municipalities of 2019 are plotted in this chart. The line connects the averages.

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4. The 'right' policy for regional development
Seeking spatial justice in the Dutch case of the region deals

Abstract

Central governments are increasingly preoccupied with problems of regional development, ranging from political discontent to sustainability transitions. New development funds are unfolded with different rationalities about what spatially just redistribution is. This paper aims to uncover in what ways issues are problematised in regional development policies, in which normative principle of redistributive justice the policy problem is primarily grounded, and how this affects regional development investments. This study critically examines an empirical case of policy for regional development in the Netherlands: the Region Deals (Regio Deals). The findings show that even though Dutch central government discursively problematised people who are left behind in the progress of the country, this priority was not maintained for places that are left behind. The Dutch case exemplifies that government rationalities about 'right' and 'wrong' regional development are a crucial factor to which regions benefit most from redistribution. Yet these rationalities are underexposed and inconsistently articulated in policy documents and political discourse.

4.1 Introduction

Problems of regional development are high on the agenda in Europe. Both in academic circles and in political arenas there are concerns over the rise of discontent in disadvantaged regions, which poses a threat to political stability in liberal democracies throughout Europe (Gordon, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Florida, 2021; McKay et al., 2021). At the same time regions are forced to take action on climate adaptation and sustainability transitions (EU, 2020; OECD CFE, 2020), not in the least in rural and old-industrial areas. Many national governments are revising regional redistribution and are puzzling with designing the 'right' policy for regional development. New development funds are unfolded with different redevelopment strategies, such as the 'levelling up' approach in the UK (Tomaney and Pike, 2020; Martin et al., 2021) or the 'Region Deals' in the Netherlands (Den Hoed, 2021; ROB, 2022). This paper takes a critical look at what government perceives as just and unjust regional development, and how this affects the allocation of regional investments.

The literature on the geography of discontent points out that current regional divides exist from a combination of unequal distribution of economic disadvantages such as low incomes and high unemployment levels, sociodemographic differences such as ageing and accessibility of public services, and cultural resentments such as clashing lifestyle preferences

(see Cramer, 2016; Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Wuthnow, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2020; Maxwell, 2020; Florida, 2021; Harteveld et al., 2021; Mitsch et al., 2021; Van Leeuwen et al., 2021). But what about the role of central government? Not only can political neglect of places (re)produce regional inequality, it can also prompt people to feel their region is overlooked and ignored by government (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Studies about the US and the Netherlands show that feelings that one's region is not receiving a fair share of government investments is a substantial source of regional resentment, and that these feelings are most prominent in rural and peripheral areas (Cramer, 2016; de Lange et al., 2022).

This paper is seeking what issues are problematised in regional development policies, in which normative principle of redistributive justice the policy is grounded, and how this affects regional development investments. In doing so, I draw upon a normative theory of spatial justice, which makes explicit the relation between territorial inequality and policy decisions (e.g. Jones et al., 2019; Papadopoulos, 2019; Woods, 2019; Madanipour et al., 2021; Petrakos et al., 2021; Shucksmith et al., 2021; Weck et al., 2021). That what central government proposes as 'wrong' in regional development and envisions as the 'right' plan to fix it has important implications for which regions benefit from the investments, and for people's perception of whether their region receives a fair share.

This study selected an empirical case of a relatively novel policy approach to sustainable redevelopment at the regional scale in the Netherlands. In 2018 the national government of the Netherlands introduced a new regional policy programme titled the 'Region Deals' (*Regio Deals)*. A critical policy analysis is conducted following the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach (Bacchi 2009). The WPR approach is a Foucauldian method that specifically interrogates the ways in which policies constitute 'problems' to be 'solved', which enables to uncover government rationale about what is just and what is not. In regards to the Region Deal (RD) policy this paper questions: (1) what is proposed as the problem (2) what are the underlying normative premises, and (3) which regions (do not) benefit from the investments?

The paper begins by discussing the theory of spatial justice and explicating four principles of (re)distributive justice. The next section elaborates on the details of the policy analysis and the data collection of this research. Subsequently, the paper explains the Dutch history of regional development policies. This is followed by the findings section and a conclusion.

4.2 Theory

4.2.1 Spatial justice

Spatial justice originated from geographical engagement with social justice. Social justice is about fairness and morality, our beliefs about what is right. In the late twentieth century, geographers first started to criticise the notion of social justice for having a blind spot for territorial features and spatial conditions (Smith, 2000; Shucksmith et al., 2021). Geography created a new spatial consciousness in seeking justice (Soja, 2010). Critical geographers illuminated that injustices between areas are the product of human action and political decision-making (see Pirie, 1983; Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2009). Geographies are produced by political actors who make imaginative and administrative borders, scales, and territories (Foucault, 2007).

(Un)just geographies were – and still are – predominantly addressed in relation to global inequality (e.g. Wallerstein, 1974; Friedmann and Wayne, 1977) and later to urban inequality (e.g. Lefebvre, 1996; Wacquant, 2008; Harvey, 2009; Fainstein, 2015; Moroni, 2020). In the last years, several scholars started to include rural and regional inequalities in investigating spatial justice (e.g. Carolan, 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Woods, 2019; Van Vulpen and Bock, 2020; Shucksmith et al., 2021; Weck et al., 2021). Even though policies for place-based development were examined, there is little attention to the effects of different orientations towards a just distribution of central government investments across regions.

4.2.2 Principles of (re)distributive justice

Following the triparte understanding of philosopher Nancy Fraser (2009), justice revolves around three interrelated axes of (re)distribution, recognition and representation (see Van Vulpen and Bock, 2020). In this paper, we focus specifically on redistribution, more specifically (re)distributive principles in regional development arrangements. Distribution traditionally covers how benefits are distributed across people/places and the redistribution by means of public resources: who gets what and where?

This section elaborates on normative, or political, perspectives on justice grounded in classic philosophical theories on (re)distribution. We can speak of, in Rawlsian terms, reasonable pluralism comprising a 'family' of normative principles of justice (Peter, 2007). Inspired by the work of Buitelaar and colleagues (Buitelaar et al., 2017; Needham et al., 2018; Buitelaar, 2020; Evenhuis et al., 2020), which brings forward a comprehensible set of normative

perspectives of justice, I highlight four principles of (re)distributive justice here. See table 1 for an overview.

The school of *utilitarianism* argues that a just society is governed through establishing maximum wellbeing to the greatest number of people. The principle of utility comes from well-known philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (Warnock, 2003). Utilitarianism intends to grow the pie as a whole, and in that case justifies a skewed distribution of the pieces of pie. Disadvantages for a minority are accepted if it is in the best interest of the majority. From an utilitarian perspective state interventions should contribute to maximising wellbeing. Taking this orientation in a regional context, regimes with a pro-growth agenda typically bet on their 'strong horses' or 'national champions' to compete internationally (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Crouch and Le Galès, 2012).

In the case of *egalitarianism*, equality is seen as the highest form of social justice. Egalitarian justice advocates a society with an even distribution of material goods and wellbeing (Nielsen, 1979). Marxism is built on the principle the more equal, the more just. Spatial evenness is considered to be just, whether it is within a city, region, nation, or on a global scale. In this school of thought, communities, or geographies, are mostly criticised for uneven distribution of income and capital (Harvey, 2009). From an egalitarian viewpoint, government should always aim to reduce relative deprivation. Regional policy, thus, typically problematises regional inequality (e.g. Molema, 2012).

Sufficientarianism on the other hand focuses on absolute deprivation rather than relative deprivation. Accordingly a just society is designed to guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living (Frankfurt, 1987). Inequality is not problematised, only if an absolute norm of sufficiency is violated. Not everyone should have the same but each should have enough (Ibid.). From that perspective, it is deemed important that sufficient resources, facilities, and services are provided to people, no matter where they live. This can be done by introducing minimum standards for employability, affordable housing, internet speed or accessibility to public services. German spatial planning law, for instance, stipulates comparable living conditions across all areas. The sufficientarian principle revolves around bringing regions up to standard.

Prioritarianism considers that redistribution should benefit the least well-off in society. Accordingly, a just society is arranged to improve the situation of those in most need. Prioritarianism builds on John Rawls' 'difference principle', which claims that an unequal distribution of goods, services and resources is just if the situation of the worst off is improved (Rawls, 2009). In contrast to sufficientarianism and egalitarianism, it is not weighed whether people are living below or above a certain minimum standard, and there is no intention to close

a gap of inequality. Accordingly government should support the 'left behind', typically with investments in regional minorities or rural poverty.

(Re)distributive justice	Principle	Aim
Utilitarianism	Maximise wellbeing for the largest public	Create general growth
Egalitarianism	Reduce relative inequality	Close the gap
Sufficientarianism	Guarantee minimum standards of living for everyone	Bring up to standard
Prioritarianism	Advance the least well-off	Support the left behind

Table 1: Conceptions of (re)distributive justice

4.3 Method & Data

4.3.1 Methods

In recent years, studies in territorial development and spatial planning predominantly focused on improving regional governance procedures, performance, and effectiveness. In terms of governance theory (see Schmidt, 2013), I argue that the scope in contemporary regional studies is mainly limited to the throughput (procedures) and output (performance) of policies, without critically examining the input (politics). Therefore it is necessary to take a step back and review regional development plans from a governmentality perspective that accentuates rationalities of government in creating (un)just geographies (Huxley, 2007; Soja, 2010).

In 2009 Bacchi (2009) introduced the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach in social sciences. Bacchi (2012) argued that we are governed not through policy but through its problematisations. WPR is an analytical tool that is used to uncover the role of government rationale by studying problematisations in social policy and the implications for those governed (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016), with paying close attention to the discursive practices. It is about making politics visible (Bacchi, 2012).

The WPR approach rejects the conventional idea that government reacts to predetermined or 'existing' problems, and proposes that government actively creates policy 'problems' (Bacchi, 2009). Government here is understood through a Foucauldian lens: a critical mode of thinking that focuses on government rationalities, referred to as governmentality (Foucault, 1991). Despite Foucault's own critical stance towards geography,

emphasising that space is constituted as an object of government (Foucault, 2007), several geographers viewed him as a groundbreaking spatial thinker and have reassessed Foucault's work and further developed his insights (Philo, 1992; Crampton and Elden, 2007; Frank, 2009; Soja, 2010). The emphasis on government rationale, as well as the aim to put in question the underlying normative premises in social justice, makes the WPR approach fit very well to the purpose of this research. To put it simply, if one uncovers the 'problem' in policymaking one can uncover government's rationale on justice in uneven development and territorial inequality. See Appendix 1 for the seven steps in the WPR framework aimed at identifying and critically scrutinising problematisations. These steps have been followed to find the problem representation and underlying principle(s) of distributive justice.

The collected textual data consist of a total of 453 policy documents and newspaper articles, see Appendix 2. The 206 policy documents were retrieved from official government websites. The newspaper articles consists of Dutch local, regional and national newspapers. A total of 247 articles are retrieved from LexisNexis, using three search phrases due to different types of spelling: 'regio deals', 'regiodeals' and 'regio-deals'. All the data were collected over the period June 2017 till September 2021. Using the software of Atlas.ti, the data were coded. The data were approached by the standards of a directive content analysis (see Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), which uses a deductive category application. Codes were assigned to three initial coding categories: WPR (what's the problem represented to be?), the four principles distributive justice, and the issues named in the RDs. A total of 56 codes were applied to 1337 quotations, see Appendix 3. In doing so, I also considered who claimed what (opposition parties, ministries, coalition partners, and cabinet), see Appendix 4. Since there is a lot of emphasis on rhetoric in this study, the quotations were difficult to quantify. It was not possible to simply count the number of arguments for the four orientations towards redistribution and weigh them against each other. The quotations have therefore been thoroughly qualitatively studied in order to be interpreted in the context of the research questions.

The RD fund for regional development is calculated across municipalities by taking each allocated budget and divide it with the amount of participating municipalities. Subsequently, the distribution is accounted for population size and the contribution by central government weighed per inhabitant of a municipality. Both the municipal division and population size are taken from 2020. The RD with three Caribbean Islands Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba (former colonies and nowadays considerably autonomous areas within the Kingdom of the Netherlands) is excluded from the geographic analysis since this paper focuses on within-country dynamics.

4.3.2 Regional development policies in the Netherlands

The Dutch consensual governance system (Van der Meer et al. 2019) is characterised by central supervision and local operationalisation (Groenleer and Hendriks, 2018). Likewise, the Dutch spatial planning system is consensus-oriented and structured on the guidelines of decentralisation and deliberation (Hajer and Zonneveld, 2000). The first regional development policies designed by Dutch national government were introduced after World War II. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, an egalitarian oriented Dutch welfare state introduced strong top-down planning policies to tackle uneven regional development. Problematising the overdeveloped 'urban west' of the Netherlands and the underdeveloped 'rural rest', economic policies aimed to rebalance regional inequality through industrial development (Molema, 2012). A so-called spread policy (*spreidingsbeleid*) was introduced to disperse employment and population across the Netherlands, with investment grants for manufacturing industries and with relocation of state institutions.

In the 1980s, after the economic recession induced by the oil crisis, a neoliberal wave entered European politics that stimulated measures of austerity, deregulation, privatisation, and market competition (see Peck, 2010). In spatial planning this led to 'urban neoliberalisation' (Van Loon et al., 2019), in which neoliberal regimes with a pro-growth agenda pursued national economic success through reinforcing a few successful cities (Florida, 1996; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Glaeser, 2011; Crouch and Le Galès, 2012). Likewise, urban neoliberalisation in the Netherlands led national government to move away from investing in underdeveloped regions, towards facilitating clusters in urban cores combined with stimulating top sectors (Van der Wouden, 2016, 2021). Provincial levels were held responsible for their 'own' regional economies. Central government principally invested in place-based projects to maximise national economy (see Davoudi, Galland, and Stead 2020; Ros 2009), and supplied new infrastructure for the national champions in reaching a global-city status (Fainstein, 2001; Van Loon et al., 2019).

In the last decade, public sector reforms triggered a rise in regional governance arrangements in the Netherlands (Groenleer and Hendriks, 2018; Klok et al., 2018). Since 2010 the Netherlands was governed by coalitions with the liberals as largest party, all headed by prime minister Mark Rutte. These cabinets are generally considered a continuation of a neoliberal government path from the 80s (see Aalbers, 2013; Van Loon et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2019; Oudenampsen, 2021), pursuing more civic self-reliance. A combination of increased decentralisation (see Klok et al. 2018), multi-level partnerships (see Van den Berg 2011), and public-private partnerships in networked governance (see Klijn and Koppenjan 2014), tied the

laces of Dutch governance even more closely to the regional scale. Yet, simultaneous austerity measures such as structural cutbacks in municipal budgets caused an imbalance between tasks, organisation, authorities and funding, pressuring many municipalities into financial hardship (see Van der Meulen 2021; ROB 2021b).

Until the third government of Rutte (2017-2021), spatial development policies proceeded with an entrenched focus on the city as engines of economic growth – with the exception of a new policy for areas with population decline implemented in 2011. In 2015 a network comprising the 40 largest cities, together with national government and local stakeholders formulated targets on urban issues such as climate adaptation, inner-city construction and urban accessibility. These were the so-called City Deals. Cabinet Rutte-III announced an increased focus on issues and governance at the regional scale (Schaap et al., 2017).

4.4 Findings

The findings of the paper are brought back to four themes that help to answer the research questions. First the problem representation in the RD policy is laid out. Then, the paper shows how the policy is discursively justified and designed. The last section of the findings presents which regions did (not) benefit from the actual distribution of the budget for regional development.

4.4.1 'Fixing' inadequate regional governance for more prosperity

At the installation of the third cabinet of Rutte in 2017, a new fund for regional development was announced. As part of the coalition's ambition to 'invest for all', Cabinet Rutte-III announced that €900 million (later topped up to €950 million) was budgeted for regional 'bottlenecks' (*knelpunten*). This budget for 2018-2022 came to be known as the Region Envelope (*Regio Envelop*). The way of distributing the budget across regions was put in the hands of The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (ANFQ). Even though it is difficult to pinpoint one specific problem definition in the RD policy (see also Bacchi and Goodwin 2016: 20), I found that central government mostly problematised a lack of prosperity in the country caused by inadequate regional governance. See Appendix 5 for a network overview of the codes with the number of quotations.

In February 2018 the policy design for regional development was first introduced as 'the Region Deals', and was laid out as a new bottom-up approach to boost and accelerate prosperity. The choice for making the Ministry of ANFQ responsible for the RD policy, suggested that the Region Envelope was engaging with rural development. Yet, the Ministry of

ANFQ announced to target all sorts of regional 'challenges' (*opgaven*), from urban to rural. In the official letters to parliament and general meetings with members of parliament between 2018 and 2021, the country was repeatedly presented by the Ministry of ANFQ as a set of distinct regions with each region having its own unique opportunities and challenges. It was argued that regional disparities in the Netherlands needed to be fully utilised to bring more progress to the whole country, and that these growth potentials were best recognised by the decentral governments at the ground: strength comes from the region.

To fully utilise regional disparities government claimed that there was a need for new and efficient governance at the regional level, implying that the regional governance was inadequate. Much emphasis was laid on the aim to stimulate national growth through regional resilience. Examples of this problem representation is shown below in the quotations from the first paragraphs in the first official letters to parliament laying out the RD policy.

"*If central government, regional governments and companies, knowledge institutions and social organisations in the regions work together, we can do more for society and government policy becomes more effective. Because in regions, societal challenges come together more often and opportunities arise. If we strengthen regions, we can strengthen society. And a country with a strong society can mean more in the world.*" (The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 2018a: 1)

 "*Throughout the Netherlands we are committed to a strong society and we are working on our economy and future, for all our regions. The government would like to tackle challenges jointly in partnership with the regions. Together with regional governments, the business community, knowledge institutions and social organisations, we strengthen the regions and thus society.*" (The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 2018b: 1).

Central government's desire to 'strengthen' the country as a whole through enforcing the region, is in line with the utilitarian principle of maximising collective wellbeing for the largest public (see Warnock 2003). From this perspective locked, untapped potentials at a regional scale were proposed to hinder the country from progress and more wellbeing. Knowledge and engagement of regional stakeholders at the ground willing to improve their region were seen as potential sources for collective growth.

The policy problem of the country not being strong enough was proposed here as coming from inadequate regional resilience to changes in society, which is to be 'fixed' with a new way of regional governance. This corresponds with the idea that good governance is a prerequisite for (economic) growth and development (Nanda, 2006). 'Good' regional governance was perceived as networked entities that stretch beyond single political-

administrative borders. Challenge-led partnerships in the form of regional 'coalitions of the willing' were considered more effective to adapt to the current changes and challenges in society. Partnerships between decentral governments, private organisations and knowledge institutes in the region were idealised, so-called 'triple-helix collaborations'. The RDs were practiced in what can be called an institutional void, a political setting in which 'there are no generally accepted rules and norms according to which policy making and politics is to be conducted' (Hajer 2003: 175). 'Region' was purposefully left borderless and unspecified to prompt new and unfixed regional coalitions at an intermunicipal level. This is no official political-administrative level in the Netherlands (Klok et al., 2018), and it has been criticised for stepping out of boundaries of local democracy (see ROB, 2021a).

A financial booster for new regional coalitions was meant to stimulate regional resilience. Under the name 'broad prosperity' (*brede welvaart*), central government implemented a specific concept of sustainable wellbeing for designing and assessing the RDs. Broad prosperity is understood well beyond economic performance. It covers a broad range of topics in regards to quality of life, such as subjective wellbeing, material wealth, health, work and leisure, housing, solidarity, safety, and consequences of climate change (Horlings and Smits, 2019). Similar to the Sustainable Development Goals (OECD CFE, 2020), the concept of broad prosperity is grounded in the idea by Stiglitz and colleagues and the CES recommendations to use alternative measurements to GDP to indicate economic performance, social progress and sustainable development (Stiglitz et al., 2009; UNECE et al., 2014). With that, wellbeing within the Netherlands was considered principally place-based, more precisely regionalised. Corresponding with ideas of endogenous growth, civic self-reliance, and subsidiarity, national government aimed to utilise quality of life by branching it into regions. Central government made decentralised authorities responsible for regional prosperity by discursive appeals (see also Davoudi, Galland, and Stead 2020). For instance, a slogan 'strength from the region' (*kracht van de regio*) used for an official RD website and Twitter account emphasised the unique and distinctive regional characteristics and the initiatives coming from a region.

4.4.2 Claiming to enforce prosperity for all, including for those who are left behind

This section describes how the policy for regional development was discursively justified. Claims about a just distribution of the RDs were mostly found in the communication between the ministry and parliament, such as the official letters of the ministry to parliament and the official general meetings with members of parliament. General meetings were held with a

commission consisting of fixed members of parliament from both coalition and opposition parties who had the task to monitor the government activities of the Ministry of ANFQ, including the RDs.

The redistributive policy intervention of the RDs were implemented to improve broad prosperity for all, with a dual focus. On the one hand it aimed to strengthen by seizing opportunities for growth, on the other hand it aimed to strengthen weaknesses by helping a hand where needed. For instance, in official letter to parliament, the Ministry of ANFQ wrote (2018a: 2-3):

"The government is particularly interested in initiatives that exceed the effect or capacity of the region. For example, by giving impulses to regions where there are opportunities or by offering a helping hand to regions that cannot cope with their problems without help. The core of the approach is its bottom-up character: the cabinet seeks to connect with the challenges and opportunities associated with the DNA of the region."

When asked by the social-democratic opposition party to clarify why the government does not only prioritise specific regions that are left behind in order to decrease regional inequality, for instance with the retraction of public services, the Minister of ANFQ (2020: 16) emphasised a dual focus:

"Of course we look at where you can give an extra impulse. [...] but you also look very specifically at the need in such an area. That is also the philosophy behind the deals. So yes, we pay attention to places where things are less easy, but it is not an exclusive consideration to drop it [a government investment] there."

Besides an utilitarian orientation pursuing to boost national growth, one can also see a prioritarian tendency in central government's discourse around the RDs. Typically, one sentence from the 2017 coalition agreement was quoted in several official letters to parliament to justify the selected RDs in the tender procedure.

"Our goal is to make a strong country even better for all, especially for those who now have the feeling that the government is no longer here for them."

The last part of the sentence is crucial here, which problematised people who feel unheard in society. It was actually at the start of the third government Rutte, the cabinet coalition articulated to also improve the situation of groups at the bottom. The reason for that was Rutte-III considered their potential discontent, rooted among others in their unwelcoming stance towards newcomers, a threat to the stability of the country (VVD et al. 2017: 1). At a later stage

of the RD policy, from September 2019 onwards, this quote was frequently referred to in the letters of the ministry.

In the RD policy there is an important distinction between injustice *between* regions and injustice *within* regions. The former is a matter for national government, while the latter is considered a matter for decentral government. What is (un)just intraregional wellbeing is thus left open to regional coalitions and their problem representation, making a wide range of problematisations of regional injustices in the RDs (see also Evenhuis et al., 2020). Regional issues varied from population decline to sustainable agriculture, and from employment to undermining criminality, see Appendix 3. With that, citizens have become more dependent of subnational governmentality, and how it perceives justice in relation to regional development. Unfortunately, the collected proposals were not extensive and detailed enough to rigorously grasp the underlying principles of justice per region in this paper. These documents were rather short and brought forward a variety of issues in the respective region since the policy demands to target multiple issues in broad prosperity.

The evidence presented above shows that in the discursive justification of the RD policy there was a mixture of two principles of redistributive justice: utilitarian and prioritarian. The RDs were initiated to boost regional wellbeing across the country, and the Netherlands as a whole was to benefit from it. Yet, central government also claimed that the groups that feel unheard should also benefit from the regional investments.

4.4.3 Selecting through coalitions negotiations and tendering

In this section, I highlight the design, the policy tools for the distribution of the Region Envelope fund of €950,- million. Simply put, it comprised three rounds. Six projects preselected in the coalition agreement (round 1) were followed by two rounds of tendering in 2018 and 2020.
The preselection of six place-bound projects was the result of coalition negotiations, which in the consensus-seeking Netherlands has a tradition of consulting representatives of civil society and decentral governments among others, who may lobby for their 'problems'. There was not much explanation provided for why these six projects were prioritised. When asked for clarification by MPs, the Minister of ANFQ (2020) argued that she simply followed the coalition agreement, and that in some cases old promises by political parties were fulfilled. The preselected projects varied greatly, supporting: the economically thriving region Brainport Eindhoven, nuclear waste management in Petten, a space technology campus in Noordwijk, urban inequality in Rotterdam, financial compensation for the province of Zeeland, and the quality of life in Caribbean Netherlands.

The tendering design was open to all regions, any local or regional coalition could apply. Decentral governments were called to establish new partnerships with regional stakeholders and propose new plans to stimulate development trajectories in their region. Since regional coalitions were left unbound to borders, significant deals for tackling urban issues in large cities were also allowed – not exactly what one expects from a *region* deal. The proposals deemed most viable and effective were selected. The budget was monitored geographically by classifying the Netherlands into four districts (North, East, South, West). From a somewhat egalitarian idea, the aim was to balance the investments between these four areas, but no formal rules were accounted for geographic distribution. Based on the collected data, this study cannot say to which extent proposals from lagging regions were (dis)favoured behind the closed curtains of the ministry.

In the tendering procedures, proposals were required to meet several preconditions for an assessment framework (The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, 2018b). In general, coalitions were asked to:

- formulate a new challenge that covers more than one issue and that matches regional goals of central government
- co-fund 50% of the deal
- form a new coalition of the willing with explicit goals (efficiency)
- form public-private partnerships (triple-helix)
- aim for long-term effects
- not compensate budget shortages

In cooperation with 'deal makers', public servants of the Ministry of ANFQ, selected applicants were 'matched' to policymakers of ministries, so-called thematic experts, and work out a covenant.

To guide 'good' regional governance from the bottom-up and to fixate opportunities and challenges of broad prosperity at a regional scale, a new regional monitor for broad prosperity was provided by central government (CBS, 2020). Rather than using this monitor to determine which regions are in most need, or which regional inequalities in broad prosperity are most urgent, central government shared the monitor with subnational governments in order for them to determine what challenges and opportunities are important in their region.

The choice for a tender procedure shows that central government advocated competiveness between regions as the right instrument to trigger new regional coalitions. A neoliberal pro-market ideology here viewed competition as a fair tool that serves to empower

regional resilience through endogenous development processes (Jessop, 2018). More importantly, it was a technique by central government to reshape regional governance through examination, which can be considered a form of hierarchic control that is qualifying and classifying desired norms (Foucault 2010: 256-269). After all, it was central government who selected which regions received investments and who imposed deal makers to help formulate the region deals. The design of the RD policy (preselection, tender, assessment framework, deal makers) did not indicate a preference for specific disadvantaged regions, for tackling regional inequality, or for guaranteeing specific minimum standards. Moreover, the preconditioned 50% co-funding, by reason of substantiating commitment, made it more difficult to apply for regions with smaller budgets or in financial hardship.

4.4.4 Big winners and small winners

Which regions actually financially benefited from the regional development fund? In total 32 regional coalitions were funded. Six were preselected in the coalition agreement, and 26 RDs were selected through tendering. See Figure 2 for an overview of investments per RD and see Appendix 6A for an overview of the funding per round. The bar chart in Figure 2 shows that some places received much higher investments than others. The Brainport region around Eindhoven and the city of Rotterdam were both attributed €130 million, Petten received €117 million. These lucky few can be considered the big winners of the redistribution. In the competitive calls, each region could apply for funding between €5 to €40 million, with a total budget of about €200 million per round. This was far less than what the big winners received. More than half of the total budget of the Region Envelope was spent to the six preselected projects.
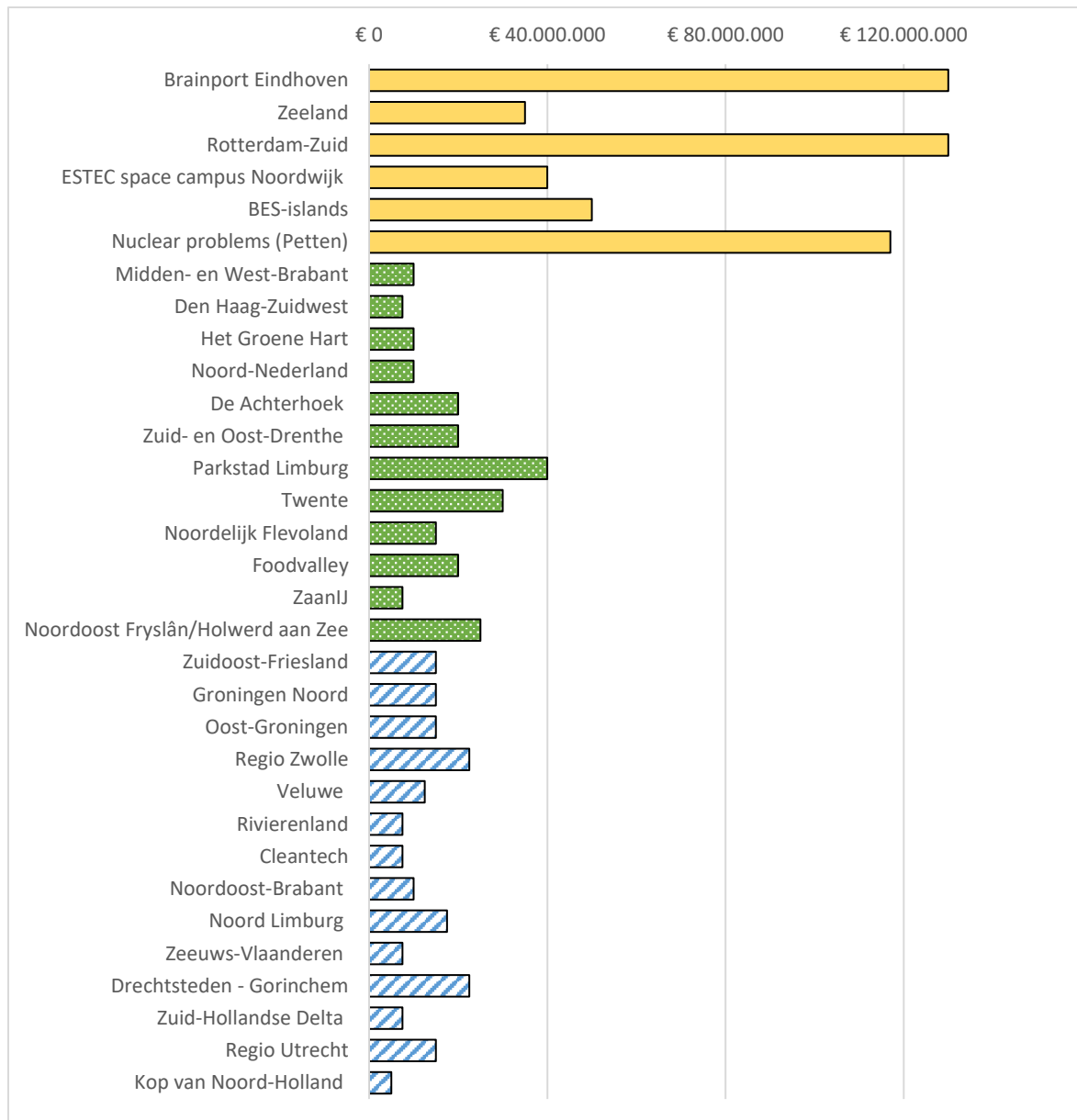
Figure 2: Distribution of Region Envelope per Region Deal. Note: round 1 (in yellow), round 2 (in green with white dots), round 3 (in striped blue). Source: own work.

Figure 1 shows the Region Envelope (2018-2022) distributed across municipalities per inhabitant, using the Jenks natural breaks classification method. The distribution of the RD fund is calculated by taking each region deal divided by participating municipalities weighed for population size. The map in figure 1 demonstrates that the municipalities of Schagen (Petten) and Noordwijk received relatively large shares of funding per capita. Unlike the other RDs, the preselected funding for nuclear waste management in Petten (€117 million) and a space technology campus in Noordwijk (€40 million) was not required to come up with 50% co-funding.
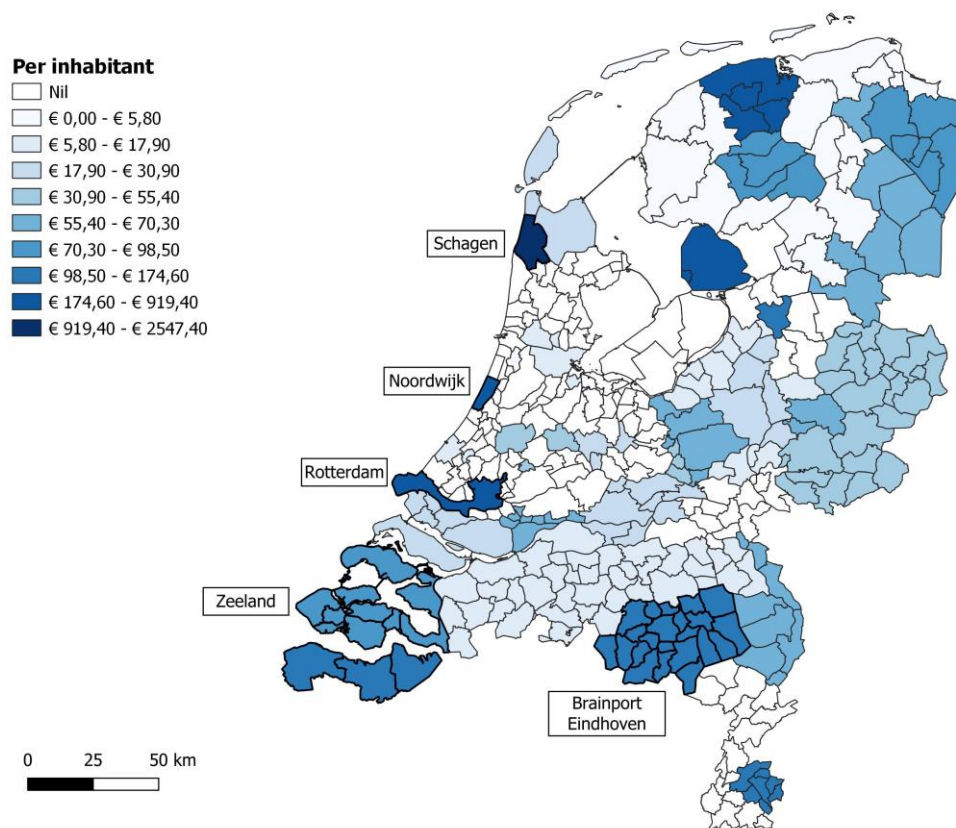
Figure 1: Region Envelope (2018-2022) distributed across municipalities. Source: own work.

To see how the regional development fund was distributed across the urban-rural continuum combined with the centre-periphery continuum, I made a bar chart in appendix 6B. Even though the big winners were not located in the periphery, the sum of smaller investments in more peripheral areas also led to a relatively high share of investments there. For instance in North-Eastern Fryslân, the Noordoostpolder, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and Parkstad Limburg.

Finally, to examine whether the RDs reached the regions in which people feel neglected, left behind, or unseen by their government, I looked at the distribution of the budget geographically. More specifically, I visually considered how the Region Envelope is distributed across municipalities in relation to feelings of regional discontent. Therefore I make use of unique geocoded survey data from the *SCoRE* project, conducted online in May 2017 and completed by 8133 respondents. Appendix 7 shows the average score of regional discontent per municipality based on three survey-items on a Likert scale. A higher score represents more regional discontent. Subsequently the map used Jenks natural breaks classification method to highlight the relative disparities between areas. Regions with a greater extent of regional resentment are generally located in the rural periphery of the Netherlands (De Lange et al.,

2022). The plot in Appendix 8 excluding two outliers (Schagen and Noordwijk), shows that on average municipalities with a higher share of regional discontent received more funding per inhabitant.

4.5 Conclusion and discussion

This article critically examined new policy for regional development from a spatial justice perspective. 453 policy documents and newspaper articles were collected for a qualitative case study of a novel policy approach in the Netherlands, the so-called Region Deals. With that, this study aimed to uncover what the policy problem was represented to be, which normative principle of justice was underlying the distribution of the regional development fund, and which regions benefitted from the fund. In the official policy practice the rationalities of distributive justice were inconsistently articulated by national government in the RD policy. Based on evidence from policy aims, tools, and allocation, this article concludes that the RD policy was grounded in a mixture of utilitarian and prioritarian principles of justice.

The RDs were implemented by problematising a lack of progress in the country that was proposed to be fixed with adequate regional governance. The Dutch RD policy broke with decades of conventional policymaking for urban economic development (see also Spaans, 2006; Van Loon et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2019), by looking at sustainable development challenges at the regional scale. Urban and rural disparities, actors at the ground, and local knowledge, were viewed as untapped endogenous sources to be utilised in order to create more wellbeing across the country. New and unfixed regional coalitions with public-private partnerships between decentral governments and local organisations were stimulated by means of a preconditioned one-off financial booster.

Based on the discursive evidence presented in this paper, I conclude that the RD policy problem was represented from a mixture of theoretical orientations to distributive justice: both utilitarian and prioritarian. An efficiency-driven central government claimed on the one hand to strive for maximum regional wellbeing across the whole country, and on the other to also specifically invest in people who are left behind in the progress of the country and feel unheard. Any improvement within a region was considered as 'right'.

Even though the third government of Rutte discursively problematised people who are left behind, this paper also concludes that the RD policy tools were not designed to specifically invest in places that are left behind. Using pro-market and deregulation techniques to stimulate regional competiveness in an institutional void (see Hajer, 2003), at an intermunicipal level all

regions could apply for investments in tender procedures. Rather than rebalancing unevenness between the regions, ensuring a sufficient standard of wellbeing, or prioritising left-behind regions, central government's assessment framework for selecting the RDs focused to boost prosperity within all regions. Given the structural imbalance between tasks, authority, and funding that pushes municipalities into financial hardship (see Van der Meulen 2021; ROB 2021b), one can question whether there was a level playing field with the co-funding regulations. The opening up to the region with the Region Deals can be considered as a shift from 'urban neoliberalism' that stimulated successful cities to a new form of regional neoliberalism that enforces sustainable growth within regions (c.f. Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Aalbers, 2013; Ward et al., 2019).

While feelings that one's area is being overlooked by government are a substantial source of discontent in peripheral Netherlands (De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022), the RD policy investments included these so-called places that don't matter (see Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) but not specifically prioritised them. Whether the RDs actually had an effect on regional discontent requires further research. On the one hand, one can expect that the regional development fund might have tempered regional discontent in the funded peripheral areas. With many investments, although smaller, given to rural and peripheral areas, the RDs also recognised regions with more regional discontent. On the other hand, one can expect an opposite effect for possibly sending a misgiving message to people in peripheral places by giving the largest investments closer to the centre and by including deals for urban development only. Moreover, big winners of the region deals were also preselected in the coalition agreement without participating in a form of competition like other regions had to, which could seem unfair to the small winners and those who received no funding. Future research would have to indicate what a 'right' distribution of government investments across regions actually would be according to those who feel their region is ignored by national government.

This study also has its limits. For instance, knowing that policymakers have an important role in government shifts (Oudenampsen and Mellink, 2021), this study does not uncover to what extent the administrative elites in charge of selecting the RDs determined what a spatially just redistribution was, and whether they had an underlying preference for supporting left-behind regions or not. Nor did I look into the practice of political lobbying by local politicians and local stakeholders who urged for investments in 'their' region. Finally, from a comparative view, it would be valuable to examine other new regional development plans that are set out by national governments, such as UK's Shared Prosperity Fund of £2.6 billion, and compare whether they can be sorted into different principles of justice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: WPR questions

Seven questions of WPR approach to policy analysis:

1. What's the problem represented to be?
2. What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this representation? Where are the silences?
5. What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation?
6. How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended?
7. Apply this list of questions to one's own problem representations.

Appendix 2: Overview data collection

Collected data

Textual data	Number of documents
Proposals	134
Letters to parliament	39
Parliamentary questions and answers	8
Parliamentary meetings	3
Budget documents	1
Coalition agreement	1
Evaluation and recommendation reports	9
Newsletters website	11
Total policy documents	**206**
Newspaper articles	247
Total media items	**247**
Total documents	**453**

Applied codes

Code number	Code name	Number of quotations	Code Groups
1	○ egalitarian (D66)	1	Principles of distributive justice
2	○ egalitarian (LNV)	9	Principles of distributive justice
3	○ egalitarian (PVDA)	5	Principles of distributive justice
4	○ prioritarian (BZK)	3	Principles of distributive justice
5	○ prioritarian (cabinet Rutte III)	4	Principles of distributive justice
6	○ prioritarian (CU)	5	Principles of distributive justice
7	○ prioritarian (GL)	1	Principles of distributive justice
8	○ prioritarian (LNV)	11	Principles of distributive justice
9	○ prioritarian (PVDA)	4	Principles of distributive justice
10	○ prioritarian (RD)	1	Principles of distributive justice
11	○ prioritarian (SP)	2	Principles of distributive justice
12	○ utilitarian (BZK)	3	Principles of distributive justice
13	○ utilitarian (CDA)	2	Principles of distributive justice
14	○ utilitarian (D66)	5	Principles of distributive justice
15	○ utilitarian (LNV)	35	Principles of distributive justice
16	○ utilitarian (VVD)	2	Principles of distributive justice
17	○ ageing	26	RD issues
18	○ biodiversity	47	RD issues
19	○ day care	1	RD issues
20	○ debts	19	RD issues
21	○ education	88	RD issues
22	○ fishing	4	RD issues
23	○ health	42	RD issues
24	○ health care	60	RD issues
25	○ high skilled workers	30	RD issues
26	○ high tech production	11	RD issues
27	○ housing	105	RD issues

28	○ infrastructure	2	RD issues
29	○ innovation	56	RD issues
30	○ knowledge economy	2	RD issues
31	○ labour market	97	RD issues
32	○ logistics	7	RD issues
33	○ manufacturing industry	19	RD issues
34	○ mobility	15	RD issues
35	○ nature	103	RD issues
36	○ nuclear waste	1	RD issues
37	○ participation	7	RD issues
38	○ population decline	45	RD issues
39	○ poverty	26	RD issues
40	○ public services	41	RD issues
41	○ quality of life	113	RD issues
42	○ regional economy	122	RD issues
43	○ safety	32	RD issues
44	○ soil degradation	60	RD issues
45	○ sustainability	24	RD issues
46	○ tourism	45	RD issues
47	○ undermining criminality	20	RD issues
48	○ unemployment	2	RD issues
49	○ vulnerable neighbourhoods	13	RD issues
50	○ broad prosperity	18	WPR
51	○ criteria	7	WPR
52	○ decentral responsibility	14	WPR
53	○ inadequate regional governance	49	WPR
54	○ regional disparities	15	WPR
55	○ regional resilience	3	WPR
56	○ strength from the region	14	WPR

Network showing codes of principles of distributive justice and their ties to actors (in red), ties to document groups (in blue), and the number of quotations (G).
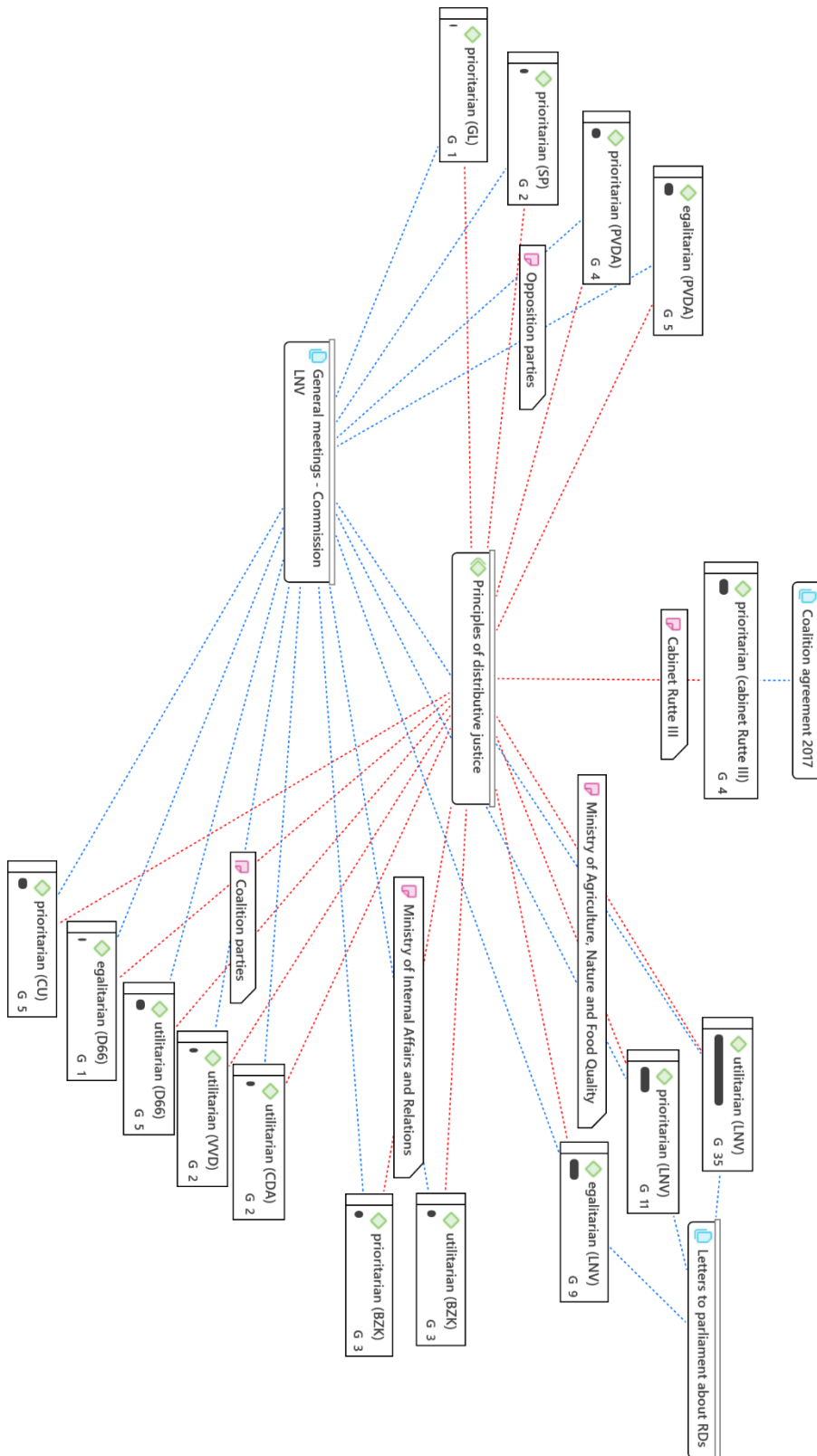
Network showing codes of What's the problem represented to be (WPR) (ties in red), ties to document groups (in blue), and the number of quotations (G).
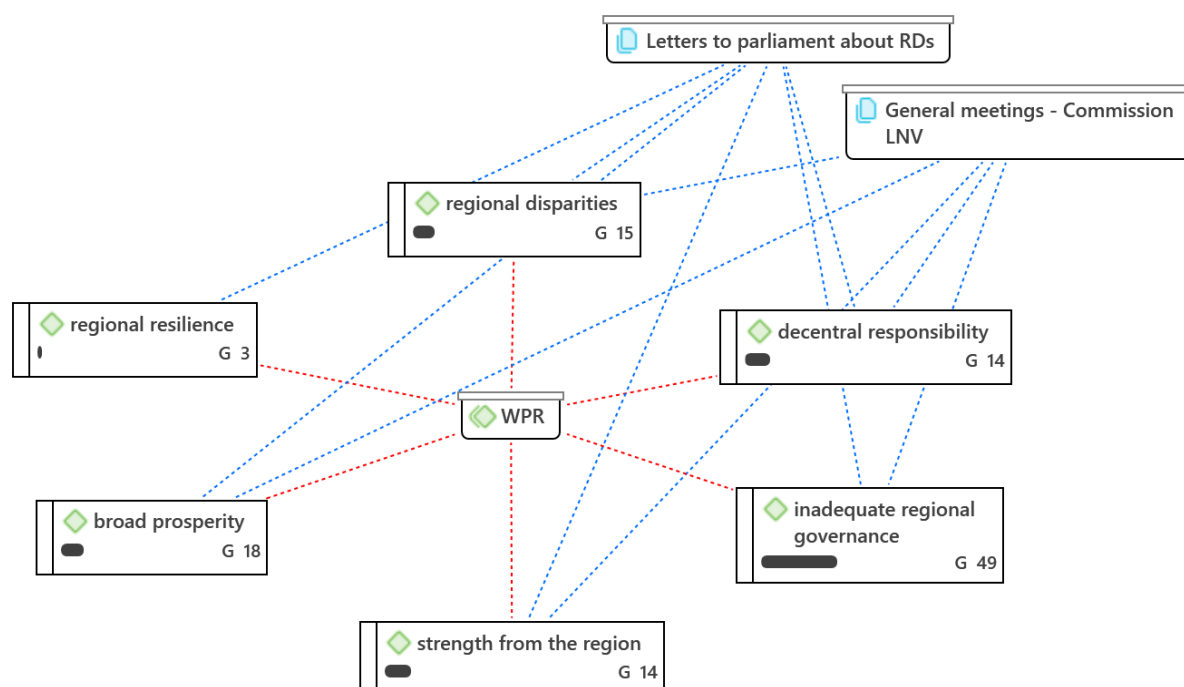
Appendix 6: Distribution of Region Envelope per round (2018-2022)

6A: *Distribution of Region Envelope per round:*

Phases	Selection procedure	Date of selection	Region Deals (RDs)	Contribution national government
Round 1	Coalition negotiations	October 2017	4/6*	€502 mln (incl. an additional €20 mln)
Round 2	Tendering	November 2018	12/88	€215 mln
Round 3	Tendering	February 2020	14/26	€180 mln
Other	Service costs	-	-	€53 mln
Total			**30**	**€950 mln**
6 projects were funded, 4 out of 6 were turned into an official RD*				

6B: Distribution of Region Envelope across municipalities, in total:
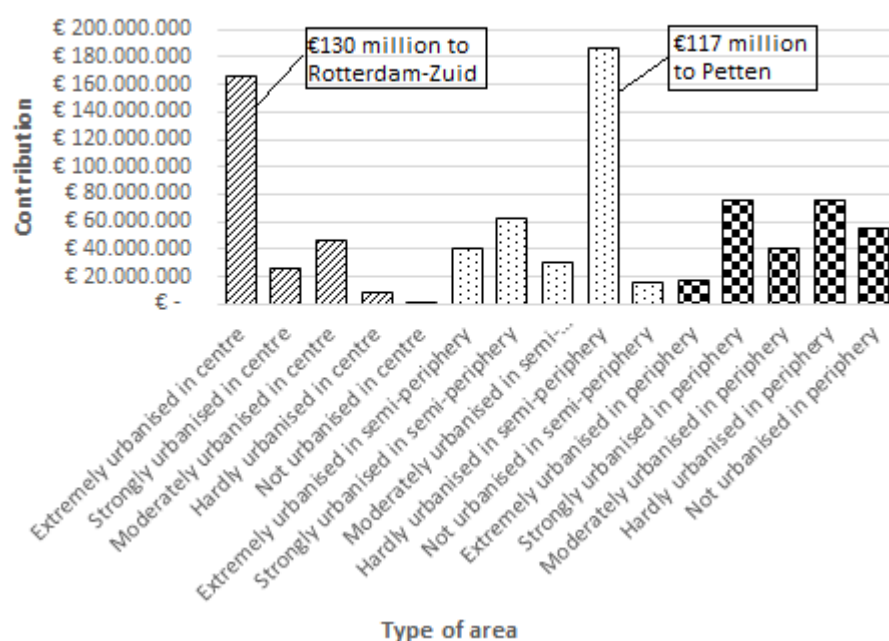
Note: centre, semi-periphery, and periphery are sorted in three quantiles according to their average distance to the four Randstad cities (The Hague, Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Rotterdam), the degree of urbanisation is classified according to address density based on five categories (see CBS).

- centre: 32 to 64 kilometre average distance to the Randstad cities

- semi-periphery: 64 to 70 kilometre average distance to the Randstad cities

- periphery: 70 to 210 kilometre average distance to the Randstad cities

- extremely urbanised: 2500 addresses or more per square kilometre

- strongly urbanised: 1500 to 2000 addresses per square kilometre

- moderately urbanised: 1000 to 1500 addresses per square kilometre

- hardly urbanised: 500 to 1000 addresses per square kilometre

- not urbanised: fewer than 500 addresses per square kilometre

Appendix 7: Regional discontent

Average score of regional discontent per municipality based on three items (7-point Likert scale). Source: SCoRE.
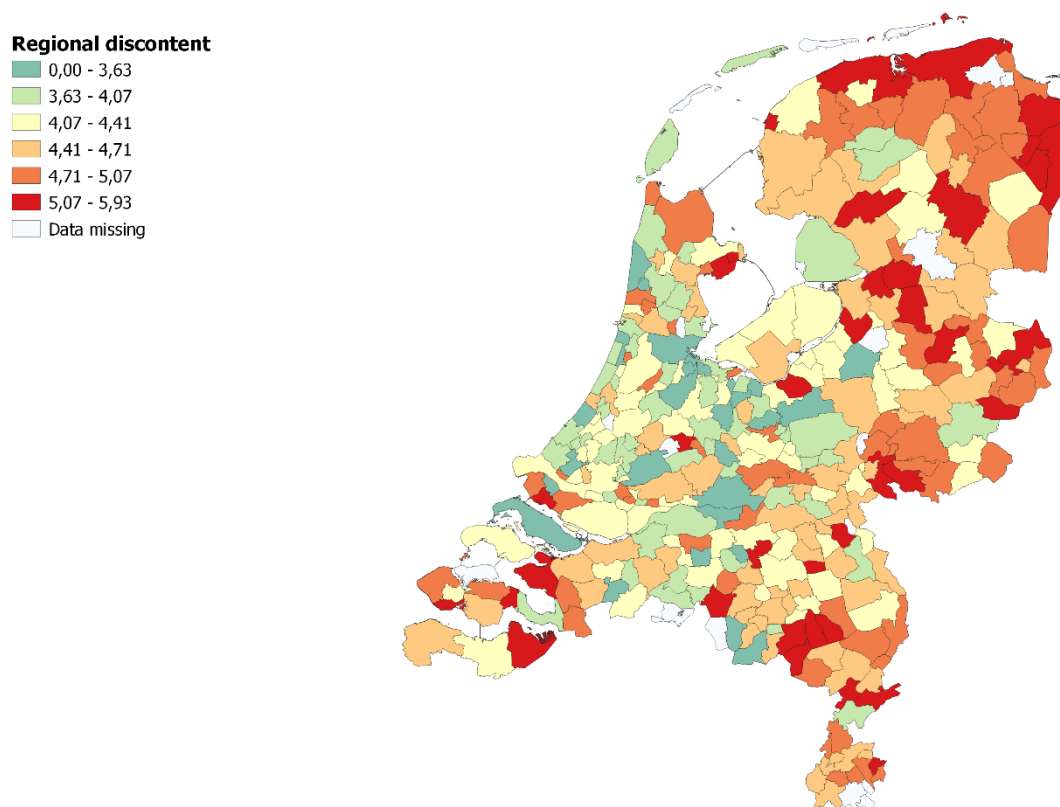
Appendix 8: Distribution of Region Envelop across municipalities (2018-2022)

8A: Distribution of Region Envelope across municipalities (weighed for population size)
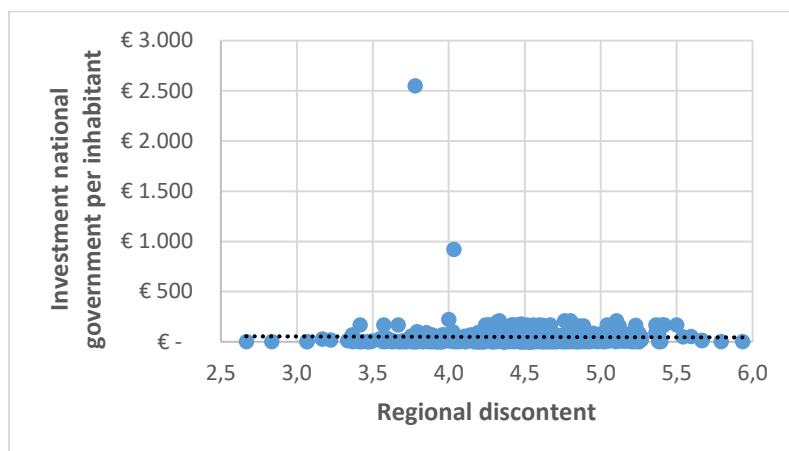
Note: regional discontent is average score per municipality based on three items (7-point Likert scale). Source: SCoRE and own work. The two outliers are Schagen (€2547,-) and Noordwijk (€919,-).

8B: Distribution of Region Envelope across municipalities without outliers (weighed for population size)
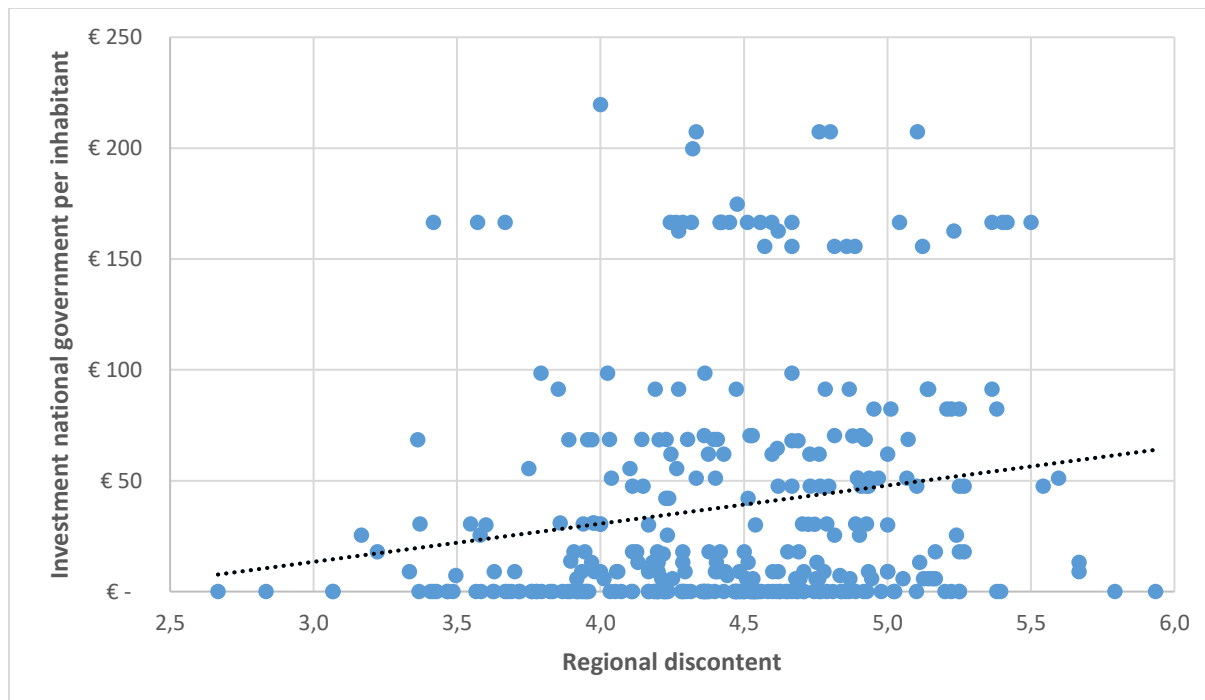
Note: regional discontent is average score per municipality based on three items (7-point Likert scale). Source: SCoRE and own work.

5. Representation out of place
The regional representation gap in Dutch proportional democracy

Abstract
In many democracies people feel that one's region is being overlooked in national politics. Yet, there is still little known about how the geography of discontent is related to the geography of political representation. This study assesses the political representation of regions in Dutch proportional democracy, a parliamentary system without district seats, between 1994 and 2021. To capture regional representation we built a unique dataset that consists of the place of birth and of residence of 1 188 MPs and 67 686 written parliamentary questions. With descriptive and named entity recognition analyses, this study uncovers a regional gap in Dutch political representation. The findings show a structural and disproportionate overrepresentation of a dominant centre. However, this study also found a vocal periphery that is disproportionately overrepresented yet deeply discontented. We conclude that a disproportionately low representation of regions in parliament is not likely to explain high levels of regional discontent in the periphery of the Netherlands.

5.1 Introduction

Political representation is one of the cornerstones of liberal democracy, for it is in the political realm where claims of (in)justice are disputed and settled by representatives (Fraser, 2009). In the last decades a global rise of populism revolted against a political elite who in the eyes of populist leaders failed to recognise and represent the people's interests (Mudde, 2004; Fraser, 2019; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). From a geographic point of view, 'victims of globalization', 'places that don't matter', or 'left-behind regions' were appealed by populist rhetoric and took their political revenge (Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, 2020; Wuthnow, 2018; Guilluy, 2019). In this so-called geography of discontent sharp political divides within countries emerged between large urban areas on the one side and rural and old-industrial regions on the other. This puts into question whether there are critical geographic gaps in democratic representation. Therefore we focus here on whether political representatives are predominantly coming from one specific type of area, whether political representatives are preoccupied with the issues in their 'own' area, and if uneven geographic representation can help to explain regional discontent. In other words, is political representation out of place?

In political geography, studies of representation mostly look at the discrepancies between constituencies and electives in district systems, issues that come with gerrymandering

(Issacharoff, 2020), and dyadic representation (Hanretty et al., 2017; André and Depauw, 2018; Willumsen, 2019). Yet the current geography of discontent is perhaps a more pressing issue for proportional democracies with little or no geographic regulations for representation. In proportional representation, such as in the Netherlands and Israel, misrepresentation from a geographic perspective is however an understudied phenomenon, with exemption of a few studies looking at the geographical distribution of members of parliament (see Latner & McGann, 2005) and their role orientations (see Thomassen & Andeweg, 2004). Most studies have examined non-spatial gaps in representation, showing crucial divides coming from a lack of working-class politicians (Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020; Noordzij et al., 2021; Elsässer and Schäfer, 2022), women and migrants in political offices (Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2006; Mügge et al., 2019).

This study takes the Netherlands as a case study. The Netherlands is an extreme case in the sense of legislation for regional representation. Over centuries the Dutch political system has developed from a territorial system of almost complete regional identification to a system of proportional representation of a single national constituency (Van den Berg & Van Vulpen, 2019). In contrast to the district systems of surrounding parliaments in Germany, Denmark and Belgium, the seats in the House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*) are completely detached from electoral districts (see Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2023). The members of the Dutch Senate (*Eerste Kamer)* are elected indirectly by the members of the provincial councils, whose votes are weighed for population size. The articulation of regional interests and claims of regional injustices are foremost dependent on the agenda of political parties and individual members of parliament (André and Depauw, 2018). On the other hand, the Netherlands seems a least likely case for political tensions between regions. It is a very small, densely populated, and affluent country in north-western Europe. Yet the Dutch political landscape exposes regional divides similar to the international geography of discontent (see Koeppen et al., 2021; Van Leeuwen et al., 2021). More specifically, in peripheral areas high shares of resentment were found, such as the feeling of one's region being overlooked by government (De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022).

To come to a deeper understanding of the geography political representation, this study aims to map out structural under- and overrepresented regions in the Dutch parliament. Therefore we ask four questions:

- Where are MPs coming from?
- Which regions do MPs put on the political agenda?

- Are MPs acting more strongly for their 'own' region?
- How is regional discontent related to regional representation?

With a quantitative descriptive analysis we specifically examine the main arena for political representation of the Dutch people: the House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*). First, we provide an overview of the regional backgrounds of members of parliament (descriptive representation), based on the place of birth and residence of 1 188 members of parliament (MPs) of eight periods between 1994 and 2021. Second, we show the MPs' representational activities (substantive representation), based on the locations mentioned in 67 686 written parliamentary questions (PQs) asked between 1994 and 2021. Third, we study the (descriptive-substantive) linkage between MPs' regional background and the extent to which they put 'their' regions on the political agenda. Lastly, we consider how the geography of discontent relates to disproportionate representation of regions.

Before presenting our findings, we first turn to our theoretical framework in which we explain our understanding of political representation. This is followed by a historical overview of regional representation in political system of the Netherlands. After that we explicate our methods of data collection and analysis. We conclude this paper by developing new regional classifications, which shows that politics in the Netherlands is divided into a dominant and satisfied centre, a comfortable middle, a vocal yet discontented periphery, and an unseen and discontented periphery.

5.2 Theory

5.2.1 A geography of political representation

Representation has many definitions, and exists in all forms of everyday life, for instance in art, advertisement, and architecture. To measure geographic representation we draw upon three forms of political representation formulated by Pitkin (1967):

1) *Descriptive representation*: the way representatives are 'standing for' a constituency and resemble a social group based on identity characteristics.
2) *Substantive representation*: the way representatives are 'acting for' a social group or constituency based on the actions taken and the issues they articulate in politics on behalf of or in the interest of that group.
3) *Symbolic representation*: the public perception of representatives standing for their social group or constituency with an emphasis on symbolisation.

First, *descriptive representation* refers to the numerical presence of representatives in parliament resembling particular groups (Pitkin, 1967). Several political scientists investigated descriptive representation in Dutch parliament, showing disproportionate little women, migrants and working-class electives in parliament (Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Bovens and Wille, 2017; Mügge et al., 2019). Only very few studies highlight the places representatives are 'coming from' in the Netherlands. They indicate that right at the beginning of the 21st century there was a relative overrepresentation of 'Randstad MPs' in the Netherlands (Latner and McGann, 2005). Randstad is the name for an economic conurbation of the nation's four largest cities in western Netherlands (Dieleman et al., 1999), which includes the seat of parliament in The Hague. The Randstad is generally considered as the national core. Another study that looked at the regional background of the candidate MPs for the elections in 2017, demonstrated a disproportionate overrepresentation of candidates living in the Randstad region (Hakhverdian, 2017). Interestingly, both studies also showed that the most peripheral provinces were proportionately overrepresented (Latner and McGann, 2005; Hakhverdian, 2017), especially when looking at the place of birth. In this study we expect a longterm overrepresentation of 'Randstad MPs'.

Hypothesis 1: *The House of Representatives is disproportionately overrepresented by MPs coming from large urban regions in the centre (Randstad area).*

Second, substantive representation refers to the actual political behaviour of representatives, 'acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them' (Pitkin, 1967: 209). Many scholars examine whether it pays off to elect 'one of us'? Studies of substantive representation of gender (e.g. Koning, 2009), of ethnic minorities (e.g. Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016), of their intersection (e.g. Mügge et al., 2019), of educational levels (Aaldering, 2017; Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020), and of wealth (Schakel and Burgoon, 2022), all show that the social backgrounds affect the type of issues MPs raise. However, we know very little about the MPs' substantiation of regional interests in proportional systems, for instance through passing bills or putting issues on the political agenda. Studies about the role orientations of Dutch MPs showed that representatives from peripheral provinces considered it far more important to represent the interests of 'their' region than representatives from other parts of the country, especially from the west (Andeweg & Van Vonno: 13, 2017; Thomassen & Andeweg, 2004: 58-60). Yet there is no rigorous evidence of the descriptive-substantive link

in MPs' regional background. We expect that representatives act more strongly in the interests of their regional background, especially peripheral representatives.

Hypothesis 2a: Issues of peripheral regions are placed disproportionately less often on the political agenda of the House of Representatives.
Hypothesis 2b: MPs in the House of Representatives strongly act for the interests of their 'own' region, especially MPs coming from peripheral regions.

Third, *symbolic representation* refers to the symbolic value of a representative standing for a social group. A political leader can embody or resemble characteristics of certain group and therefore viewed as being 'one of us'. The political establishment 'in The Hague' – the seat of the Dutch Parliament – are frequently denounced for allegedly only representing an urban constituency in the Randstad area while neglecting 'their' interests. Already in nineteenth century, affluent men of the political establishment were criticised for neglecting the interests of peripheral regions (Kaal, 2016: 491). There is a strong sense of anti-centrism, an aversion of a spatially-bound class of a wealthy, progressive, self-centred elite in the Randstad area, who is blamed for dominating the way the country is governed and for overshadowing the interests of people in the periphery (see also Noordzij et al., 2021). This spirit is comparable to the rural consciousness in the United States, as described by Cramer (2016), in which ruralites feel ruled by a self-centred cosmopolitan elite in the large cities. See for instance the recent Dutch farmers upheaval coming from the countryside (Van der Ploeg, 2020), and the protests against the extraction of natural gas in the northern periphery (Van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015). Still, nationwide survey research into perceptive representation in the Netherlands typically considers interpersonal variables and not so much interregional variables (e.g. Dekker & Den Ridder, 2018). De Lange and colleagues (2022) showed that large shares of people living in peripheral parts of the Netherlands feel that one's region is ignored and overlooked by their government (see Huijsmans, 2022). In 2018 the dominance of MPs coming from the Randstad area was problematised by a parliamentary committee (Remkes, 2018). Research also shows that people who voted for right-centered parties with a significant part of their voters base in peripheral and rural areas, are relatively more in favor of a district system in parliament (Jacobs, 2017).

Hypothesis 3: Peripheral regions with high levels of regional discontent show low levels of descriptive and substantive representation.

5.3 Method & Data

5.3.1 Descriptive representation

In this study we focus specifically on MPs seated in the House of Representatives, for the reason that this is the primary arena where the government is held accountable, legislative proposals are submitted, and political issues are debated. The task of these MPs is first and foremost to represent the people in national politics. In consequence we do not include members of the senate nor of the government. We also considered that candidate lists were no valid source for representation, as there are many candidates who are not elected as representative. Moreover candidates at the bottom of these lists, so-called *lijstduwers*, do not intend to stand for election but merely show symbolic support to the party, a role often taken by celebrities.

To determine where MPs are 'coming from', we identified their place of birth and place of residence at the time they were elected. Drawing on data of eight parliamentary sessions in the period from 1994 until 2021, we were able to analyse the regional backgrounds of MPs on basis of their place of birth and place of residence around the time they were elected. We unsuccessfully attempted to compose a more complete geographic biography of the MPs, by also including their place of tertiary education and their residency prior to the election, however this data was unfortunately far from complete. For each period we selected a reference date, which is shortly after the inauguration of the respective cabinet so that we see the actual composition of the House of Representatives, clear from candidates who were high on party lists and became a minister. The reference dates between 1994 and 2021 are as follows: 7 September 1994; 7 September 1998; 7 September 2002; 7 June 2003; 7 March 2007; 21 October 2010; 20 November 2012; 7 November 2017.

In order to appoint the MPs to an area, we converted the places of birth and residence, which sometimes even dated back to World War II, to the municipal composition of the Netherlands in 2021. For each period the regional background for all seats were counted, even if a seat had been taken by an MP in the prior period. To generate a geography of descriptive regional representation we weighed the number of MPs in proportion to the population size of the region. In doing so, we used the population size at the start of the following year of the reference date.

5.3.2 Substantive representation

The act of representing, in other words representation activities, happens in- and outside parliament. Substantive representation can be measured, for instance, by the introduction of

new legislation or policies, the congruence of policy preferences in opinion polls (e.g. Schakel & Van der Pas, 2020), or membership in committees (Kroeber, 2018). We choose here to focus on the act of addressing issues to the political agenda. Inspired by the work of Aydemir & Vliegenthart (2016), we collect MPs' written parliamentary questions addressed to the government to measure substantive representation. By means of a quantitative content analysis of parliamentary questions (PQs), we examine to what extent representatives voice issues concerning the region they were born or reside. Therefore we collected written parliamentary questions between 1994 and 2021, making a total of 67 686 unique PQs.

Simply put, we counted the number of places that were mentioned in the PQs and sorted them per region. With that, we assume that mentioning a place could broadly be interpreted as an act of addressing an issue within that region. To count which places are mentioned and how many times within 67 686 PQs, we used a named entity recognition (NER) method that seeks named entities mentioned in unstructured text into pre-defined categories such as person names, organisations, and locations. This method is very efficient in automatically analysing big data of textual information. NER has been used in all sorts of fields and for a wide range of purposes (see Goyal et al., 2018; Marrero et al., 2013). For the analysis in this study we used the large NER model of Schweter and Akbik (2021). In a first attempt these named locations, or geo-entities, were automatically linked to coordinates via *openstreetmap*. Yet these results were far from perfect. In addition we matched the mentioned geo-entities with a list of place names, consisting of all municipalities and all NUTS-levels, until the most granular level reasonably applicable. Next we excluded 2 737 named geo-entities that were false positives, for instance referring to foreign countries and places or mistakes from the NER. These were mostly foreign countries that were falsely identified as a neighbourhood. Next we manually annotated a total of 1 039 geo-entities that were mentioned at least 7 times in the PQs, and assigned them to our list of place names. This left a number of 3 779 geo-entities unannotated, which was the lower 30 percentile of all geo-entities and made up a very small part of the total sum of mentions (4%), see figure 1 and table 1. We decided to exclude nature areas that were crossing NUTS-level 1 borders from the analysis. Finally, a unique geo-entity was capped at max 1 per unique question. For instance, if in one unique PQ 'Appingedam' was mentioned 3 times and 'Pekela' 7 times, this made a score of 1 each.

		Unique geo-entities		All mentions		Unique PQs	
		Number	Share	Number	Share	Number	Share
Included	Manually annotated	1 039	12%	37 361	16%	13 618	20%
	Exact match	1 022	12%	33 311	14%	13 786	20%
Excluded	Unannotated	3 779	44%	9 166	4%	4 079	6%
	Ignored	2 737	32%	159 949	67%	26 625	39%
	Total	8 577	100%	239 787	100%	67 686	100%

Table 1: Annotation of all locations in parliamentary questions

This way of annotation led to a coverage rate of 46% at a municipal level and up to 57% on NUTS-level 1, see table 2. This means that in 57% of the collected written parliamentary questions, we have managed to identify the mentioning of a location within the municipalities of the Netherlands. Subsequently we combined both datasets, linking the regional background of MPs to the mentioned locations in the PQs. If in one unique question 'Appingedam' is mentioned 5 times and 'Pekela' 7 times, and this question is submitted by 3 MPs, this would make a score of 6 (3x2) for the province of Groningen.

	Unique geo-entities	Total mentions	Identifies in PQs	
	Total	Total	Total	Share of PQs
Municipality	1 765	56 040	30 937	46%
NUTS-level 3	1 807	58 007	32 106	47%
NUTS-level 2	1 903	66 984	37 179	55%
NUTS-level 1	1 961	69 808	38 780	57%
Note: Identifies in PQs is calculated as max. 1 per geo-entity in PQ				

Table 2: Locations mentioned in PQs annotated across municipal level and NUTS-levels

5.3.3 Symbolic representation

To grasp regional discontent we make use of survey data collected for the purpose of studying geographic variation in political attitudes. We follow De Lange and colleagues (2022) to grasp regional discontent, also referred to as regional or place-based resentment. Regional discontent comprises three attitudes measured in 2017 by a Likert scale ranged from 1 (fully disagree) to 7 (fully agree): 'Politicians in The Hague are not interested in my region'; 'The government has done too little to improve the economic situation of my region'; 'People in the rest of the Netherlands do not have enough appreciation for the people in my region'. In addition, we

added institutional trust from another survey of Statistics Netherlands to check whether there are no strong discrepancies with regional discontent. Institutional trust is calculated as the share of population that in 2019 somewhat to strongly trusted state institutions – taking the average of the House of Representatives, the police, and judges.

5.3.4 Regional typology

In this study we use a regional typology combining the centre-periphery and urban-rural divide, see figure 1. The centre is understood as the Randstad area, a cluster of the four largest cities in western Netherlands that since the 1990s is planned as an economic powerhouse to compete at an international scale (Zonneveld and Nadin, 2021). The periphery is generally considered as hinterland, located far from The Hague and close to the borders of Germany and Belgium. Dutch peripherality is characterised by a sparse population, stronger regional identities, and more social cohesion. To capture the centre-periphery and urban-rural divide for NUTS-level 3 regions in the Netherlands, we formulate the following regional typology.

- Centre: regions comprising the four largest cities plus all the regions within this 'ring'.
- Periphery: all other regions, which are generally considered as national hinterland.

Second, we classify regions according to a new urban-rural typology. Eurostat (2019) defined an urban-rural typology for at NUTS-level 3 regions in Europe, which has proven to be very helpful for making international comparisons. Yet it is not particularly sensitive to applying it to the Dutch context only. To make a more detailed and context-specific distinction between urbanity and rurality at a regional scale in the Netherlands, we chose to work with the absolute number of people living in urban areas. Taking the population size per degree of urbanity (very strong, strong, slightly, little, not) as measured by Statistics Netherlands, the following urban-rural typology is used:

- Large urban (LU) regions: more than 100 000 inhabitants living in very strong urban areas.
- Mid-urban (MU) regions: between 10 000 to 100 000 inhabitants living in very strong urban areas, or more than 100 000 inhabitants living in very urban areas.
- Rural (RU) regions: between 0 to 10 000 inhabitants living in very strong urban regions.
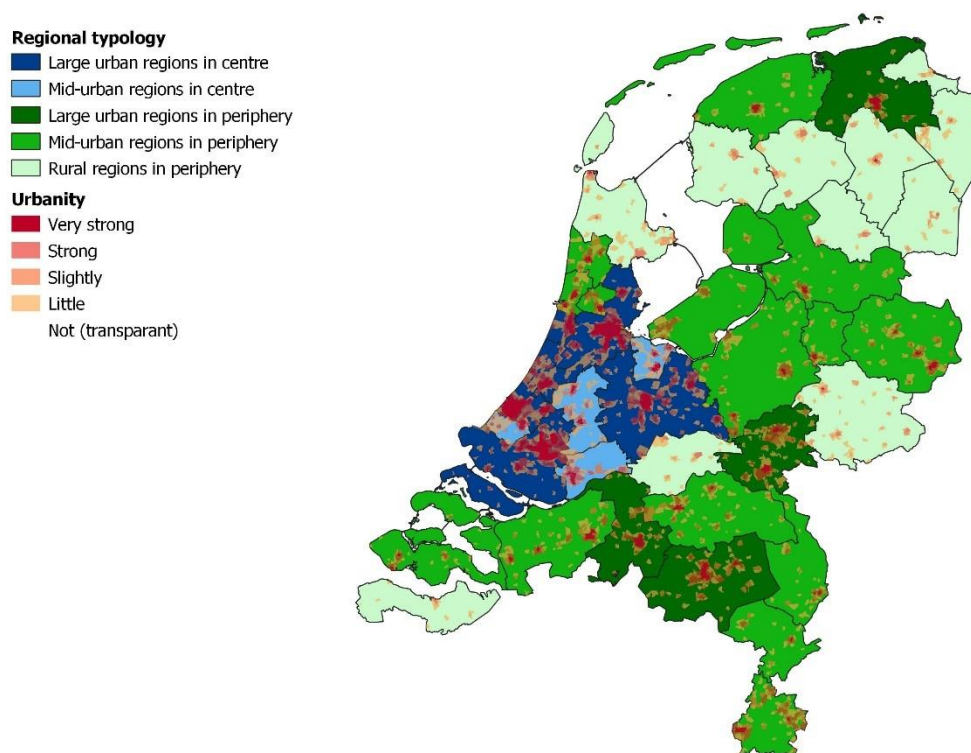
Figure 1: Regional typology based on centre-periphery and urban-rural divide. Note: Urbanity levels are from 2017. Source: CBS Statline.

5.3.5 Data

First, the data consisted of the places of birth and residence of 1188 MPs, missing 12 MPs. Moreover, new MPs replacing the MPs who resigned or temporary left (due to illness or parental leave) were not counted. We note here that 5% of the MPs in our dataset was either born outside the Netherlands or resided in another country at time of the election, which in that case means they have no score for a Dutch region. This data was made available to us by the Parliamentary Documentation Centre of Leiden University (PDC). Second, the parliamentary questions were retrieved through web scraping the official government website for documentation (overheidsdocumenten.nl). We retrieved almost all written PQs between 1994 and 2021, which made a total of 67 686 unique questions. These questions were regularly submitted by multiple MPs, so that the questions were signed 99 344 times by MPs. We did not manage to scrape PQs that were available in PDF only, yet we estimated this proportion as rather small. Third, a unique geocoded survey data is used from the SCoRE project, conducted online in May 2017 and completed by 8133 respondents. The respondents were sampled from a standing panel of the survey company GfK, and is representative of the Dutch population at NUTS-level 3. See table 3 for an overview of the data.

Type of representation	Indicator	Period	Observations	Source
Descriptive representation	Place of birth	1994-2021	1 188 MPs	PDC (Parlementaire Documentatie Centrum, Leiden University)
	Place of residence			
Substantive representation	Written parliamentary questions	1994-2021	67 686 unique PQs	Official announcements (officielebekendmakingen.nl)
			99 344 non-unique submitters	
Symbolic representation	Regional discontent	2017	6 970 respondents	SCoRE
	Institutional trust	2020	~7 500 respondents	CBS (Statistics Netherlands)

Table 3: Data overview

5.3.6 Case description: A brief historic overview of regional representation in Dutch parliament

In the 16th century the first independent Dutch nation-state was created to form a united front against the Spanish Empire. Duchies, counties, lordships and alike were integrated into a confederation of sovereign regions: The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (1588 - 1795). The representatives of the various parts of the country formed the States General, the forerunner of the current parliamentary system (Israel, 1995). After the demise of the Republic and a period under French rule a new political institution of the Netherlands was established in the form of a constitutional monarchy. Due to the country's geopolitical vulnerability after the Napoleonic wars, in 1814 a national unitary system was preferred over the old federal structure (Toonen, 1990).

Amidst a revolutionary wave in Europe and growing discussions on clientelism in the Netherlands (Kaal, 2016), a democratic revision of the constitution in 1848 determined that members of the House of Representatives were to be directly chosen by the eligible voters in constituencies rather than by an inner circle of the king (Toonen, 1990). In this new electoral system candidates needed an absolute majority from the upper-class men in their district. Due to strong personal ties it generally led to a continuation of an established political elite in the districts (Kaal, 2016). Conservative candidates criticised liberal candidates by portraying them as ''men from the Hague' – the seat of the Dutch Parliament – who were only in it for the money, rarely visited meetings of parliament and were more concerned with securing well-paid

jobs than serving the needs of their districts' (Kaal, 2016: 491). A very similar sound to todays' critique on the political elite.

In the beginning of the 20th century the absolute majority system was replaced by a system of nationwide proportional representation with universal suffrage (Andeweg, 2008). This was the result of social upheaval over the political exclusion of all women and lower-class men (Toonen, 1990), as well as of ongoing debates on gerrymandering (Andeweg, 2008). Nowadays the States General is a bicameral parliament with a House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*) consisting of 150 members, and a Senate (*Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal*) with 75 members indirectly elected by the Provincial Council. Votes of the Provincial Council are weighed according to population size of a province, and seats in Senate are not bound to a region. Interest representation of regions and claims of regional injustices in parliament are therefore foremost dependent on the agenda of political parties and MPs' individual preferences (André and Depauw, 2018).

5.4 Findings

5.4.1 Descriptive representation: a disproportionate large share of MPs live in the large urban regions in the centre

In this section we look at the regional seat distribution of the House of Representatives based on MPs' place of birth and place of residence, in the period from 1994 to 2021. In doing so, we weighed for population size by calculating how many MPs were coming from each region per 100 000 inhabitants. For both place of birth and place of residence the regional average is 0,8 MPs per region. Figure 2 and 3 show maps with the numbers of MPs per 100 000 inhabitants based on place of birth and residence at NUTS-level 3. The colour scale ranges from regions with a disproportionate low number of MPs (in red) to regions with a disproportionate high number of MPs (in blue).

Figure 2 demonstrates that relatively many MPs were born in The Hague agglomeration, the political capital of the Netherlands. Yet, also many of the MPs in the last 27 years were born in several peripheral areas, in comparison to the regional shares of the population. Especially in the Northern provinces of Friesland and Groningen.

Average MPs per 100 000 inhabitants based on place of birth (1994-2021)

	0,0 - 0,1
	0,1 - 0,2
	0,2 - 0,3
	0,3 - 0,4
	0,4 - 0,5
	0,5 - 0,6
	0,6 - 0,7
	0,7 - 0,8
	0,8 - 0,9
	0,9 - 1,0
	1,0 - 1,1
	1,1 - 1,2
	1,2 - 1,3
	1,3 - 1,4
	1,4 - 1,5
	1,5 - 1,6
	1,6 - 1,7
	1,7 - 1,8
	1,8 - 1,9
	1,9 - 2,0

Note: Regional average = 0,8 MP
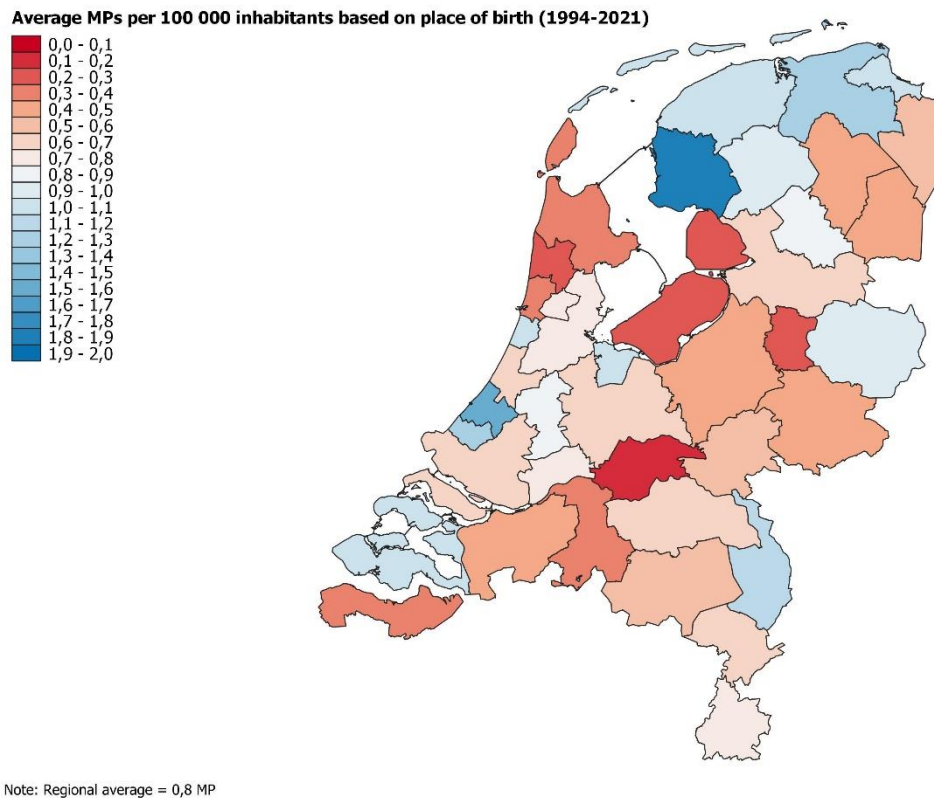
Figure 2: MPs per 100 000 inhabitants based on place of birth 1994-2021. Source: own work.

The map of MPs place of residence is a bit different. Most importantly, the regional distribution is more unbalanced. Figure 3 shows a disproportionate overrepresentation of MPs who live in the large urban areas in the centre. The large urban regions in the centre are the most populated areas of the country and therefore the large share of MPs residing there catches the eye, see also figure 5. The map in figure 3 also shows that there are quite some peripheral regions that are well-represented in terms of MPs residing there. Yet, at the same time many other peripheral regions are relatively poor off with much lower scores. Figure 5 shows that the disproportionate overrepresentation of the regions in the centre is stronger for MPs' place of residence than birth. Over time, little has changed. Between 1994 and 2021 the descriptive regional representation has been relatively stable. This means that when it comes to regional background of MPs, the relatively underrepresented regions have been underrepresented for at least 27 years.

Figure 3: MPs per 100 000 inhabitants based on place of residence 1994-2021. Source: own work.
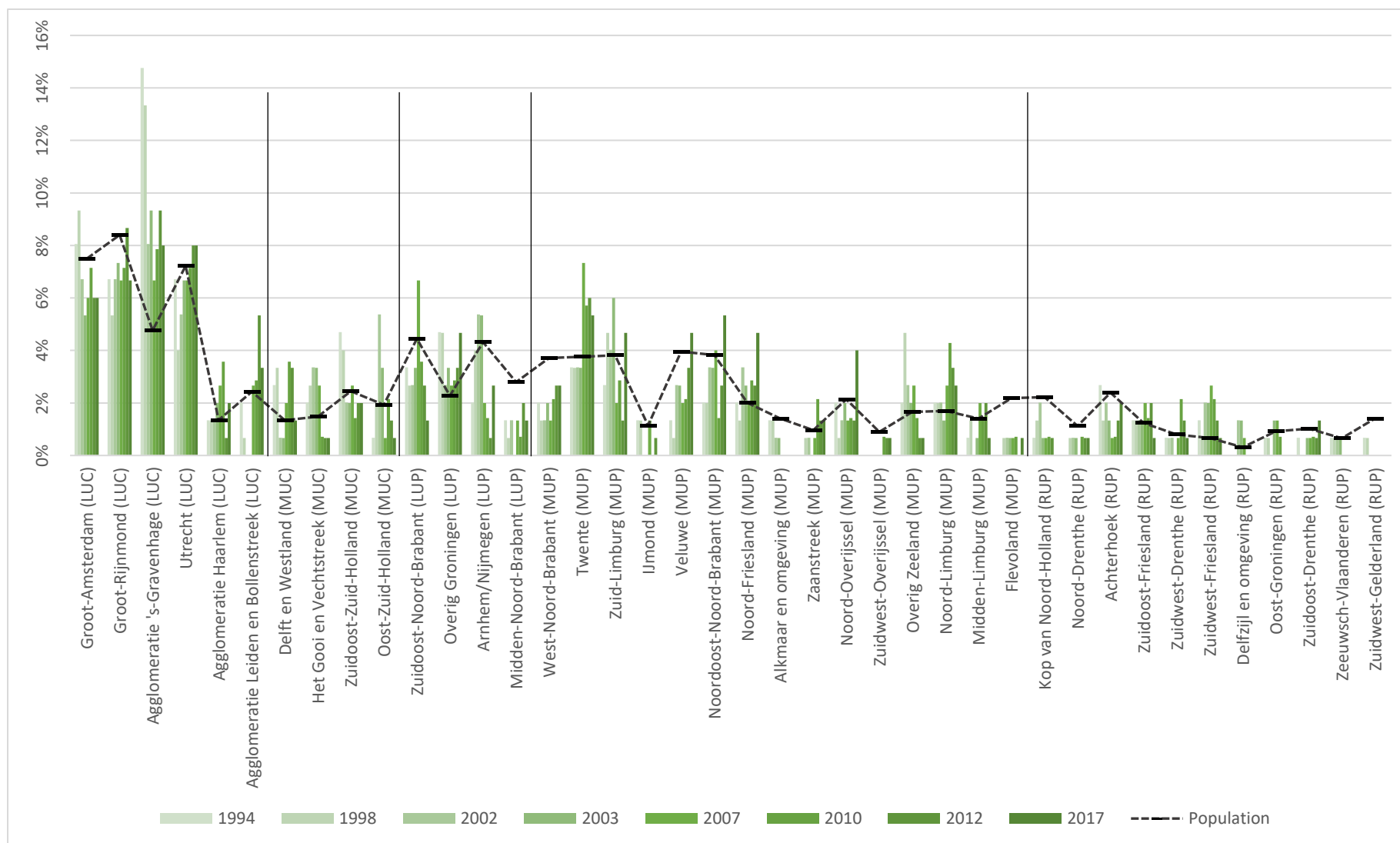
Figure 4: Regional representation in House of Representatives based on MPs' place of birth. Note: Population is calculated as the average share between 1994 and 2021. Regions are sorted according to regional typology and then share of national population (from left to right).
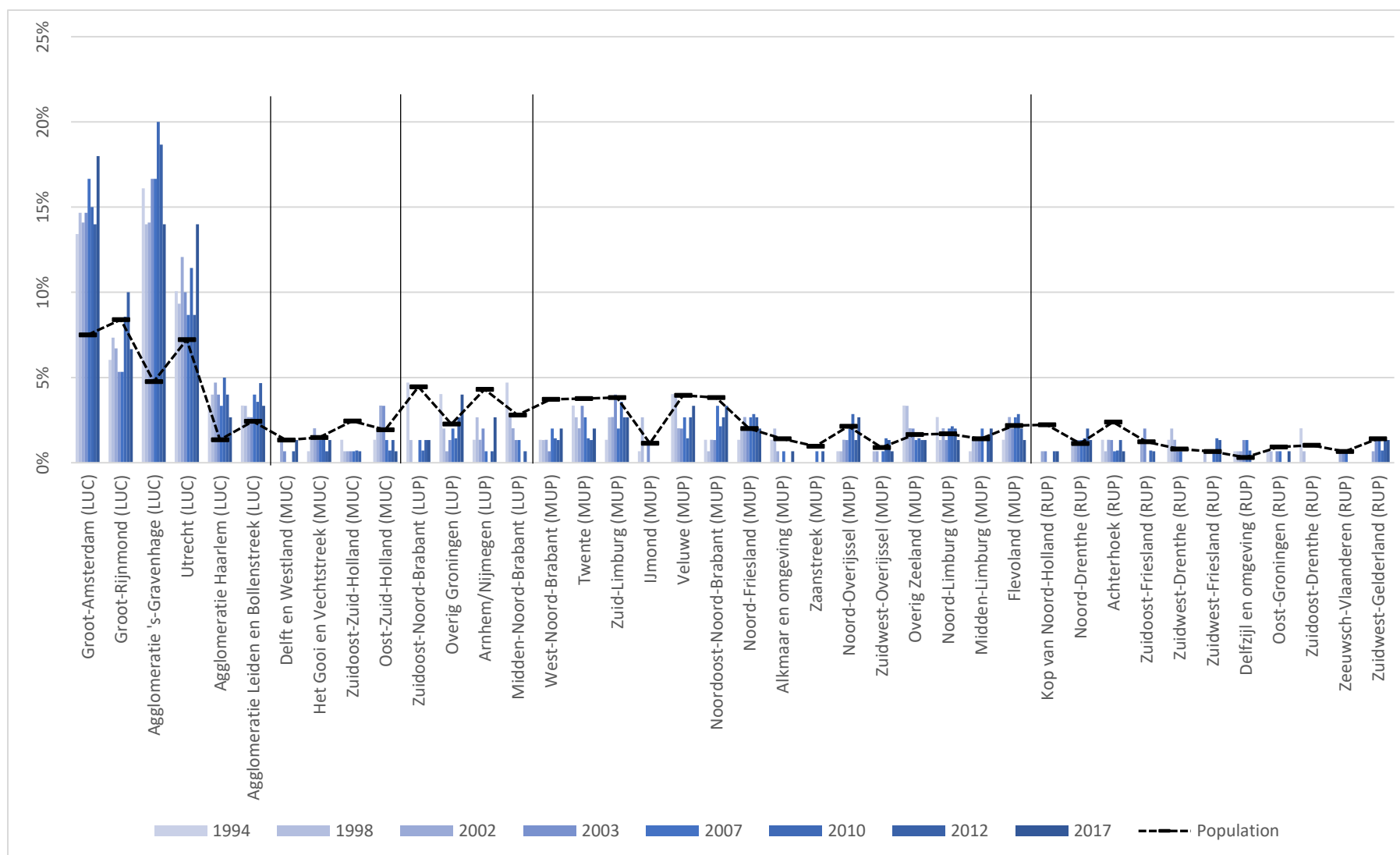
Figure 5: Regional representation in House of Representatives based on MPs' place of residence. Note: Population is calculated as the average share between 1994 and 2021. Regions are sorted according to regional typology and then share of national population (from left to right).

5.4.2 Substantive representation: a disproportionate large share of PQs mention large urban regions in the centre and parts of the periphery

In the named entity recognition analysis of written parliamentary questions, we did not specifically analyse the content. Yet, simply by looking over the list of geo-entities we detected that many frequently mentioned places are also essential locations for physical and social infrastructure. For instance airports, seaports, rail roads, highways, dikes, power plants, nature areas, military bases, hospitals, judicial complexes, courts, and asylum seeker centres. Especially small municipalities with relatively a lot of mentions noticeably revealed their infrastructural purpose. Even though these infrastructures can be arguably of national importance, the (negative) impacts are often experienced by surrounding local communities. For instance, noise nuisance from airports or the regional service of hospital care. These concerns are also addressed in the parliamentary questions. Moreover, infrastructure was certainly not the only reason nor the only places addressed in MPs' parliamentary questions. Therefore, we argue, the mentioned geo-entities can indicate for acts of regional representation.

Looking at the geographic distribution of places that were mentioned in PQs, we see that a disproportionate large share of PQs mention large urban regions in the centre, but also parts of the periphery. Table 4 shows that compared to the share of population, places in the large urban in the centre were disproportionately overrepresented in the parliamentary questions. In sum, 44% of the locations mentioned in PQs compared to 39% population. The map in Figure 6 shows the share of mentions in PQs weighed for population size, compared to the regional average. The bar chart in Figure 7 presents the most frequently mentioned geo-entities in the parliamentary questions (in dark yellow) and the least frequently mentioned geo-entities (in light yellow), at the regional scale. On the one hand the regions of the three largest cities were mentioned frequently, both in absolute and relative terms. See Appendix 1 for the top 20 most frequently named geo-entities. Especially the region of Amsterdam occurs relatively frequent, see Figure 7. 14,8% of the geo-entities mentioned in the PQs were located in the region of Amsterdam, while it hosts 7,5% of the national population. The high score for the region of Amsterdam is likely due to the presence of the national airport Schiphol. Other frequently mentioned large urban regions were the areas of Rotterdam and The Hague.

Outside the strongly urban regions in the centre there are also peripheral regions that are mentioned relatively a lot. When looking at Table 4 we see that on average peripheral regions are disproportionately low on the political agenda of the House of Representatives, albeit to a small extent. However, the regional averages in Table 4 have flattened out the variance within the periphery. Figure 6 and 7 present that some peripheral regions are mentioned relatively

frequently – such as in Groningen, Limburg and Zeeland, while others peripheral regions are not – such as in Noord-Brabant and Gelderland. Three regions that are among the most frequently mentioned regions are in the province of Groningen (in the north-east of the Netherlands). The relatively high frequency of places in Groningen are likely to be explained by a large gas field, and especially by the earth quakes in that area due to gas extraction and the political aftermath since 2012 (see Van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015).
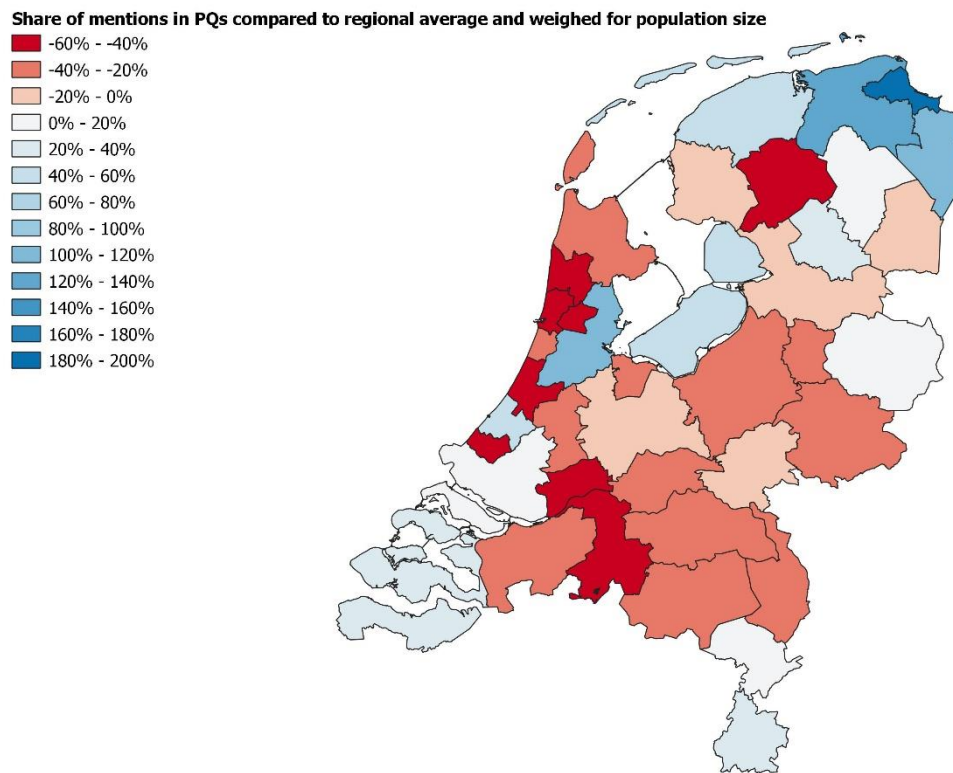
Figure 6: Share of places mentioned in PQs 1994-2021 compared to regional average, weighed for population size. Source: own work.

			Population	MPs' place of birth	MPs' place of residence	Mentions in PQs
NUTS-level 3 (40 regions)	Centre	LU regions (6)	32%	34%	56%	40%
		MU regions (4)	7%	9%	4%	4%
		All (10)	39%	43%	60%	44%
	Periphery	LU regions (4)	14%	11%	7%	13%
		MU regions (15)	35%	29%	24%	31%
		RU regions (11)	13%	9%	7%	12%
		All (30)	61%	48%	38%	56%

Table 4: Regional representation in the Netherlands (1994-2021). Note: Shares are calculated as the sums of regions sorted by regional type.
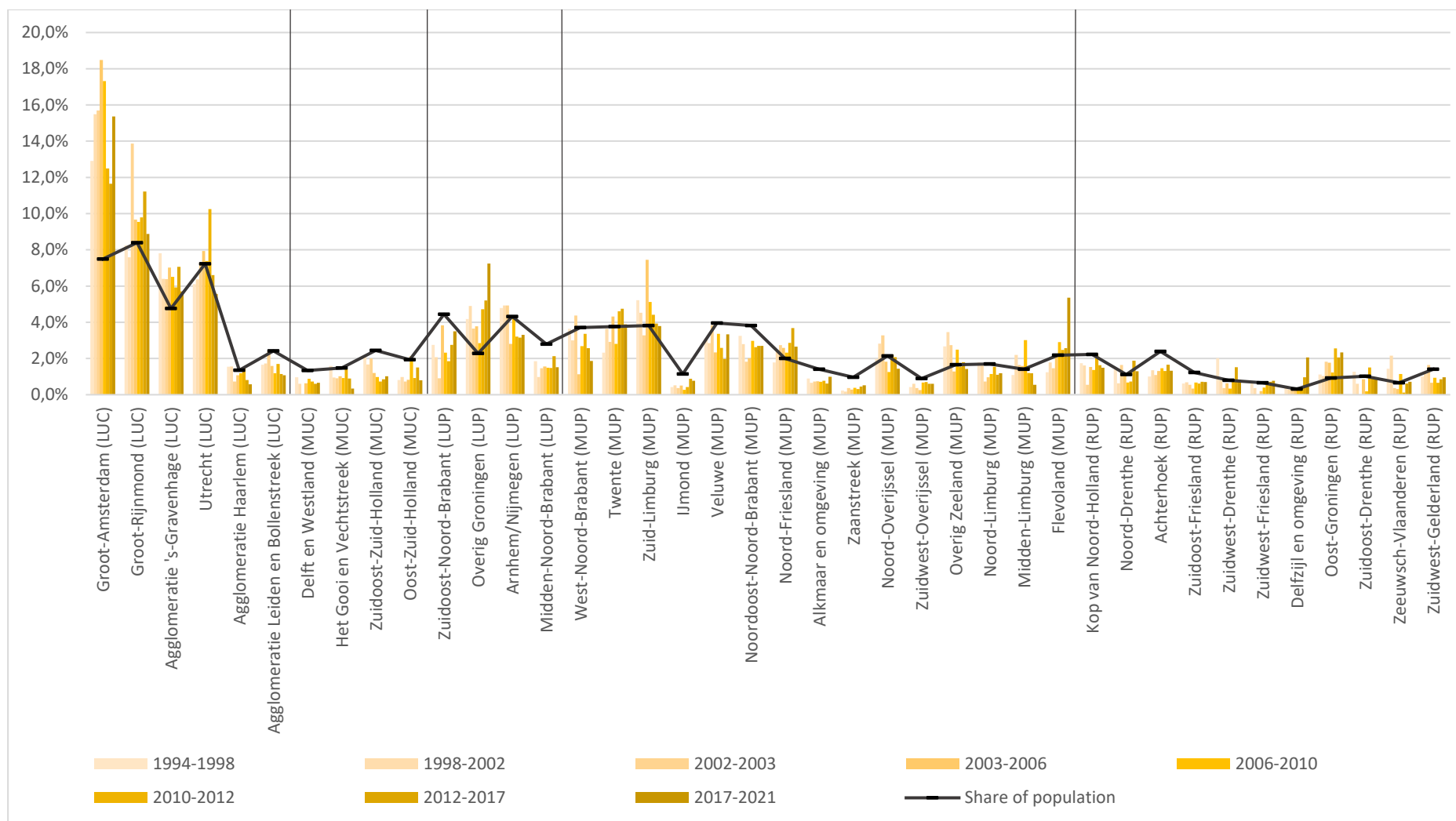
Figure 7: Regional representation based on mentions of locations in parliamentary questions. Note: Share of population is calculated as the average share between 1994 and 2021. Regions are sorted according to regional typology and then share of national population (from left to right).

5.4.3 Descriptive-substantive link: MPs act for their 'own' region, especially MPs living in peripheral regions

This study also looked for evidence about whether MPs are acting for their 'own' region or not. Our analysis shows there is a clear link between the place an MP is coming from and the places he or she mentioned in the written parliamentary questions. On average the frequency of places mentioned in the PQs were higher when MPs were born there or lived there when they got elected. This strong descriptive-substantive relationship established at both NUTS-2 and NUTS-3 levels. The strongest was at the provincial level: with 16,0% based on place of birth, and 23,9% based on place of residence. Also, at NUTS-level 3 the descriptive-substantive link was substantial, see table 5. See also Appendix 2 and 3, for the cross table at provincial level. Table 5 also shows that MPs from the periphery are acting more strongly for their own region than those from the centre. MPs residing in the periphery mention place names from the province they live with 18% more often than average, while this percentage is much lower for MPs living in the centre (7,8%). At NUTS-level 3, one can see that the MPs living in the large urban and mid-urban regions are acting most strongly for their own region, mentioning places from their own region with 8,9% and 8,2% more frequently than average.

Thus, MPs asked substantially more questions to ministers in power about their 'own' region, when weighed for population size. Assuming that mentioning a place could broadly be interpreted as an act of addressing an issue within that region, our analysis shows that in general Dutch MPs are in fact acting more strongly for their 'own' region. Especially the MPs living in the peripheral areas mention places of their 'own' region more frequently. So the descriptive-substantive link is strongly present in regional representation in Dutch parliament, especially for MPs coming from the periphery.

			Place of birth			Place of residence		
			Own region	All regions	Diff.	Own region	All regions	Diff.
NUTS-level 2 (12 provinces)	All		16,0%	8,3%	7,6%	23,9%	8,3%	15,6%
	Centre		17,0%	13,8%	3,3%	20,5%	12,7%	7,8%
	Periphery		15,6%	6,5%	9,1%	24,9%	6,9%	18,0%
NUTS-level 3 (40 regions)	All		5,3%	2,5%	2,8%	9,1%	2,5%	6,6%
	Centre	LU region	8,4%	6,6%	1,7%	10,8%	5,8%	5,0%
		MU region	1,9%	1,0%	0,9%	4,1%	0,9%	3,2%
	Periphery	LU region	6,3%	3,4%	3,0%	12,3%	3,4%	8,9%
		MU region	4,6%	2,1%	2,5%	10,5%	2,3%	8,2%
		RU region	4,3%	1,1%	3,2%	6,2%	1,3%	5,0%

Table 5: Average mentions of places in PQs, sorted to MPs' place of birth and place of residence. Note: Averages are calculated as share of mentions of place names by MPs (at NUTS-level 3 and 2 regions).

5.4.4 Symbolic representation: overrepresented peripheries yet discontented

To further explore the relation between the three different forms of representation, we conducted a simple correlation analysis. With that we aimed to find to what extent the different variables can be associated. Figure 8 shows the individual correlations between the five variables, using standardised scores of 40 NUTS-level 3 regions. The steeper the linear trend line, the stronger the individual correlation between the variables. There is a strong association between MPs' place of residence and mentions in PQs: the more MPs lived in a region, the more these regions were often mentioned. Likewise mentions in PQs are strongly associated with regional discontent: the more mentions of a region in PQs, the more regional discontent was higher. We can conclude from this that a proportionate descriptive representation of a region does not indicate for lesser regional discontent in the peripheral regions, nor does substantive representation. Substantive representation by mention in PQs actually indicate for higher levels of regional discontent. This means that the issues of these regions are likely to be very much on the political agenda in the House of Representatives.
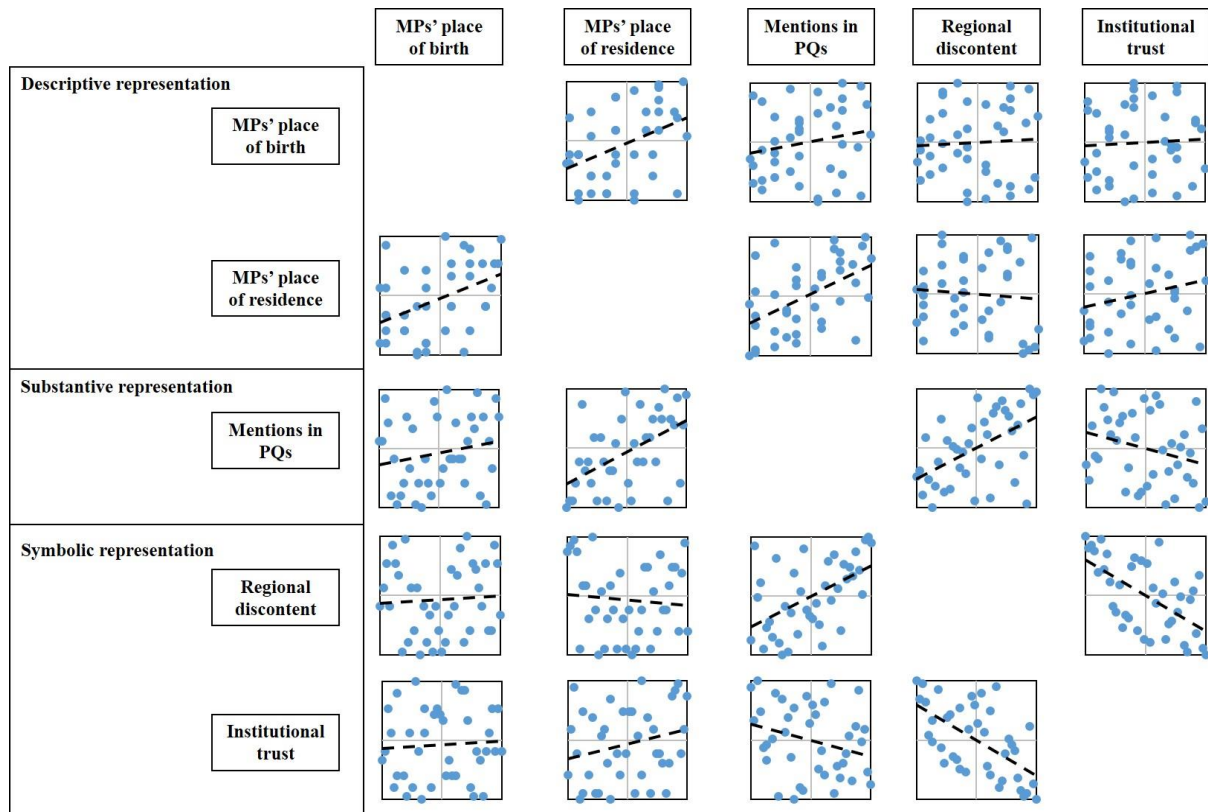
Figure 8: Correlation plots of regional representation at NUTS-level 3. Source: own work.

Finally, we look for new regional classifications by conducting an analysis of percentile scores. First, to make a rough dichotomy between regions where citizens experience regional discontent more than average and less than average, we ranked all regions in either top 50% or bottom 50% of regional discontent. This split regions into relatively contented and discontented regions. Subsequently regions were further sorted according to high or low descriptive representation. Both contented and discontented regions were divided into two subgroups based on the average of both place of birth and place of residence, making a top 50% and a bottom 50%. Descriptive representation was measured by MPs' place of birth and of residence weighed for population size. In total, this division based on percentile scores set out four categories: contented and overrepresented, contented and underrepresented, discontented and underrepresented, and discontented and overrepresented.

For the interpretation of these results, we added two more variables to capture all three forms of representation. Substantive representation was calculated here as the relative difference between share of mentions and share of population. For symbolic representation we used regional discontent, and added institutional trust to check whether there are no large attitude discrepancies with the survey study of regional discontent. In addition to this ranking we also considered location according to the centre-periphery divide. From this percentile

analysis we distinguished four new regional classifications: a dominant centre, a comfortable middle, a vocal periphery, and an unseen periphery. Figure 9 shows the range and regional averages of these classifications. See Appendix 4, for the percentile scores of all NUTS-level 3 regions. Figure 10 maps out the regional classifications across the Netherlands, as defined by us.

The dominant centre consists of regions that are disproportionately overrepresented, and are relatively very satisfied in terms of feeling that politicians are acting for them and fellow citizens valuing their region. Moreover, on average institutional trust is relatively high. Second, we detected a silent though comfortable middle. These regions belong to the lower 50% when combining place of birth and residence, and are also relatively not much discussed in PQs. Since people there are not so discontented about regional representation and institutions, this may suggest they live in quiet and peaceful places where there is not much going on. These regions are predominantly located just around the centre, forming an intermediate zone between the discontented peripheries. A vocal periphery consists of regions that have, proportionately speaking, many MPs coming from there. Yet average regional discontent and institutional distrust is highest in these regions. Lastly there is an unseen and discontented periphery. These regions had a very small delegation of MPs in parliament, however their territories are mentioned in PQs quite accurately according to population size. Like the vocal periphery, inhabitants are generally feeling their region is overlooked by government and are less trustful towards institutions.
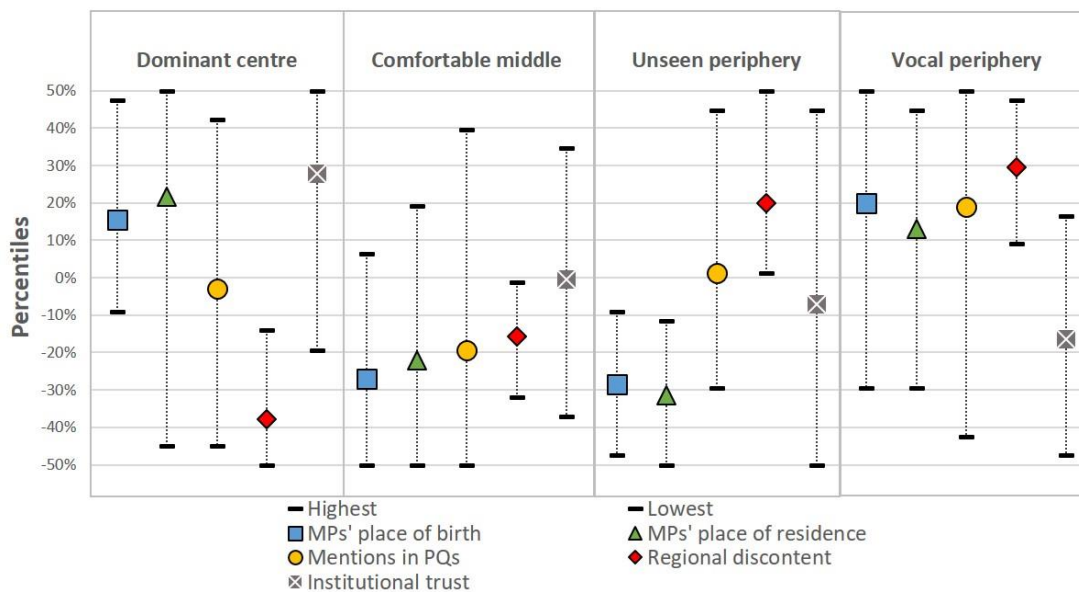
Figure 9: Descriptive information of new regional classifications based on regional representation in the Netherlands at NUTS-level 3. Source: own work.
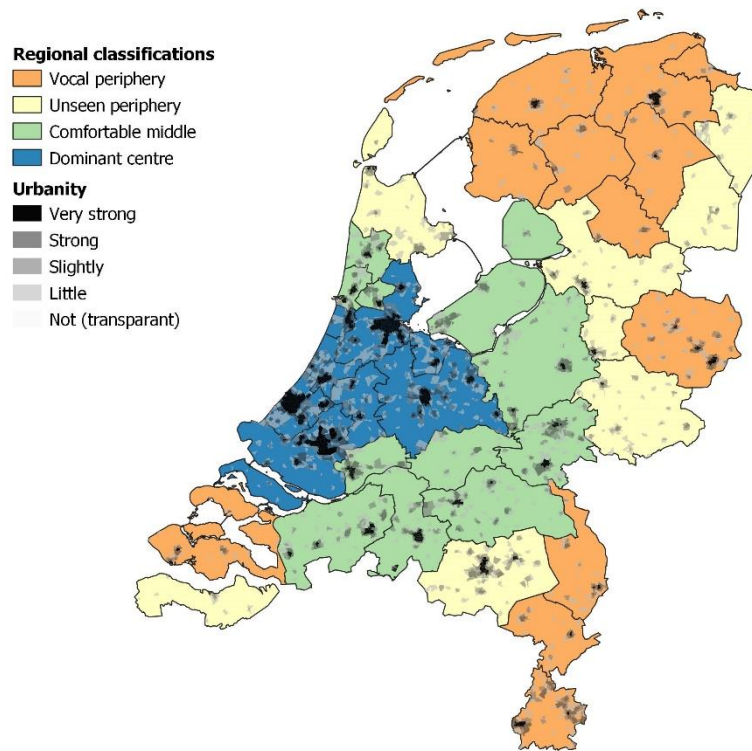
Figure 10: Regional classifications for representation in the Netherlands. Source: own work.
Note: Urbanity levels are from 2017.

5.5 Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we provided new and rigorous empirical evidence about how uneven regional representation is related to the geography of discontent in Dutch proportional democracy, a parliamentary system without district seats. This research shows that, besides earlier detected representational gaps in gender and migration (Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2006; Mügge et al., 2019), and in education (Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Bovens and Wille, 2017; Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020; Noordzij et al., 2021), we can also speak of a regional gap in Dutch political representation. The results are based on a unique large dataset we built, which covered the period from 1994 till 2021. First, we provided an overview of descriptive under- and overrepresentation of regions based on the place of birth and of residence of 1 188 MPs. Second, we presented an overview of substantive under- and overrepresentation of regions based on 67 686 written parliamentary questions. Third, we studied to what extent MPs voice issues concerning their 'own' region. Fourth, we examined whether regions with a balanced representation or overrepresentation in parliament show lower levels of regional discontent. These steps enabled us to distil four different types of regions based on empirical evidence: a dominant centre, comfortable middle, vocal periphery and unseen periphery.

The results show a regionally imbalanced parliament in the Netherlands. Indeed, our findings show that since the mid-90s there was a politically dominant centre in the Netherlands. Large urban regions in the Randstad area were structurally and disproportionately overrepresented, when looking at descriptive representation captured by MPs' place of birth and residence. Overrepresentation by the centre was strongest for place of residence at time of elections. We found what one could call a reversed 60/40 pattern between descriptive representation in parliament and population in the Netherlands: while about 40% of the population lived in the Randstad area, around 60% of the MPs lived there. This makes a structural and disproportional overrepresentation of the – geographically viewed – largest group. Yet, there is also what we call a vocal periphery: regions in the periphery that were structurally well- or overrepresented by MPs when weighed for population size. This was also signalled in earlier research (Latner and McGann, 2005). We also found a comfortable middle of regions that are less represented but also relatively contented. Importantly, there is also an unseen periphery in which very little MPs were born or resided when they were elected for office.

In contrast to what we hypothesised, people living in the peripheral regions that were relatively well- and overrepresented by MPs were not less discontented than underrepresented

peripheral regions. In fact, disproportionately overrepresented peripheries even show higher levels of regional discontent and institutional distrust. In terms of Pitkin's conception of representation (Pitkin, 1967), higher descriptive and substantive representation of regions were not associated with higher symbolic representation in regions of the Netherlands. This study found that it is likely that the more a region was mentioned in parliamentary questions (weighed for population size), the more regional discontent there was. Discontented regions are thus very much on the political agenda of the Dutch House of Representatives. Mentions of geo-entities in PQs are likely to indicate for the presence of place-based political issues. Earlier studies showed that inhabitants of peripheral regions are more frustrated about one's region being left out by central government and undervalued by fellow citizens (De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022). This study adds that people living in a vocal periphery were actually even somewhat more frustrated than those in an unseen periphery.

In regards to the international literature on the geography of discontent (e.g. Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, 2020), the question about whether a more regionally balanced proportional democracy could temper regional discontent, can be answered in two ways. First, we conclude that well- or even overrepresentation of one region in parliament by itself is not likely to temper regional discontent. However, discontent might possibly be triggered by political overrepresentation of the geographic 'other', rather than underrepresentation of one's own region per se. In such a case of relative deprivation, the geography of discontent could still partly be explained by the structural overrepresentation of the centre.

In line with our hypothesis, this study also found evidence for a strong descriptive-substantive link in regional representation. In correspondence with studies that showed that representatives in the Netherlands are likely to raise more issues concerning their 'own' group (Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Aydemir and Vliegenthart, 2016; Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020), in terms of educational level, gender and migration background. In a geographic sense, this tendency to strongly act for one's 'own' region is also present, and notably stronger among MPs from peripheral regions. This coincides with earlier attitude research in which MPs from the periphery indicated more importance to regional interest representation than those from the centre (Thomassen and Andeweg, 2004). However, in contrast to what is regularly claimed in public debate and in protests, this study showed that MPs coming from the centre were not blind for 'other' places within the country. In fact, they were relatively regionally diverse and balanced in terms of substantive representation.

In this last paragraph we state a few limitations of our research and recommendations for future research. For once, in this study all MPs are treated equal, but in reality some MPs might be more equal than others. That is to say, MPs who have prominent position in their political party might have more public outreach and therefore potentially more impact on people's perception of regional misrepresentation. Also, in this research we have not looked into possible contextual or compositional factors that might explain the variance in representation. It requires further research to find out what social context characterises the unseen and vocal peripheral regions, such as low economic development, demographic pressures, or rural resentment. Are these vulnerable local communities that are easily sidelined or ignored by central government? The most discontented regions were relatively well represented in the House of Representatives, and place-based problems were most likely raised in parliament. The question for future research is: where does this discrepancy substantive and symbolic representation come from? Do citizens in the vocal periphery simply fail to see that they are well represented in politics? Or were the regional interests of discontented citizens not in line with the interests of (regional) representatives? Or, is the social change that representatives were pressing for not being translated into policy actions by the central government? To deepen the understanding of regional representation and the geography of discontent, literature would benefit from studies looking into these potential explanations for the gap between centre and periphery.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:   Top 20 most frequently mentioned locations in PQs (1994-2021)

Named entity	Count	Annota	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM	Natura	Municipality	NUTS-level 3	NUTS-level 2	NUTS-level 1
Amsterdam	4215	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Amsterdam	Groot-Amsterdam	Noord-Holland	West-Nederland
Rotterdam	2992	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Rotterdam	Groot-Rijnmond	Zuid-Holland	West-Nederland
Schiphol	2654	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Haarlemmermeer	Groot-Amsterdam	Noord-Holland	West-Nederland
Den Haag	2128	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		's-Gravenhage	Agglomeratie 's-Gravenhage	Zuid-Holland	West-Nederland
Groningen	1930	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Groningen	Overig Groningen	Groningen	Noord-Nederland
Utrecht	1868	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Utrecht	Utrecht	Utrecht	West-Nederland
Limburg	1387	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM				Limburg	Zuid-Nederland
Zeeland	914	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM				Zeeland	West-Nederland
Eindhoven	809	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Eindhoven	Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant	Noord-Brabant	Zuid-Nederland
Lelystad Airport	784	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Lelystad	Flevoland	Flevoland	Oost-Nederland
Maastricht	675	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Maastricht	Zuid-Limburg	Limburg	Zuid-Nederland
Arnhem	637	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Arnhem	Arnhem/Nijmegen	Gelderland	Oost-Nederland
Noord-Holland	632	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM				Noord-Holland	West-Nederland
Gelderland	624	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM				Gelderland	Oost-Nederland
Drenthe	600	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM				Drenthe	Noord-Nederland
Leeuwarden	584	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Leeuwarden	Noord-Friesland	Fryslân	Noord-Nederland
Nijmegen	564	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Nijmegen	Arnhem/Nijmegen	Gelderland	Oost-Nederland
Friesland	505	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM				Fryslân	Noord-Nederland
Gouda	504	E	WP	WS	GS	GM	OSM		Gouda	Oost-Zuid-Holland	Zuid-Holland	West-Nederland

Appendix 2: Descriptive-substantive representation

The share of locations mentioned in parliamentary questions by MPs per province (1994-2021), sorted by place of birth

			Mentions												Total X
			North			East			West				South		
			GRO	FRY	DRE	OVE	FLE	GEL	UTR	NH	ZH	ZEE	NB	LIM	
Place of birth MPs	**North**	**GRO**	23%	6%	7%	6%	2%	7%	5%	13%	14%	2%	10%	4%	100%
		FRY	7%	17%	2%	5%	6%	6%	4%	21%	16%	2%	6%	7%	100%
		DRE	7%	6%	9%	10%	3%	4%	7%	18%	19%	2%	8%	6%	100%
	East	**OVE**	7%	4%	7%	9%	2%	9%	6%	18%	18%	5%	8%	8%	100%
		FLE	15%	5%	4%	7%	0%	8%	0%	16%	28%	0%	7%	11%	100%
		GEL	5%	4%	4%	6%	5%	14%	7%	17%	18%	6%	9%	6%	100%
	West	**UTR**	10%	3%	4%	6%	3%	10%	6%	18%	18%	5%	10%	6%	100%
		NH	4%	3%	2%	4%	5%	8%	7%	22%	22%	5%	9%	8%	100%
		ZH	6%	4%	4%	7%	3%	9%	6%	18%	23%	4%	10%	7%	100%
		ZEE	4%	4%	2%	8%	2%	6%	4%	11%	17%	32%	6%	5%	100%
	South	**NB**	6%	4%	3%	5%	3%	9%	7%	19%	18%	4%	13%	10%	100%
		LIM	3%	3%	1%	6%	3%	8%	5%	15%	17%	3%	12%	24%	100%
Average			8,1%	5,3%	4,1%	6,6%	3,2%	8,1%	5,2%	17,2%	18,9%	5,7%	9,0%	8,6%	100%
Share of population			3,5%	3,9%	2,9%	6,8%	2,2%	12,1%	7,3%	16,1%	21,3%	2,3%	14,8%	6,9%	100%
Average - population			4,6%	1,4%	1,1%	-0,2%	1,0%	-3,9%	-2,1%	1,1%	-2,4%	3,4%	-5,8%	1,7%	0%

Note: The colour scale is sorted from lowest (blue) to 50th percentile (white) to highest (red)
Mentions are unique, which means that one location is counted max. as one per parliamentary question.
Share of population is calculated as the average over a period from 1995 till 2021.

Appendix 3: Descriptive-substantive representation

The share of locations mentioned in parliamentary questions by MPs per province (1994-2021), sorted by place of residence

			Mentions												Total X
			North			East			West				South		
			GRO	FRY	DRE	OVE	FLE	GEL	UTR	NH	ZH	ZEE	NB	LIM	
Place of residence MPs	North	GRO	35%	6%	6%	3%	1%	5%	4%	12%	14%	3%	7%	3%	100%
		FRY	7%	25%	4%	4%	3%	6%	3%	16%	16%	4%	5%	7%	100%
		DRE	12%	7%	23%	11%	1%	9%	4%	12%	9%	3%	6%	5%	100%
	East	OVE	3%	4%	3%	24%	3%	11%	4%	16%	16%	2%	7%	6%	100%
		FLE	3%	4%	1%	7%	10%	8%	7%	22%	20%	3%	10%	7%	100%
		GEL	4%	4%	3%	6%	5%	18%	7%	16%	18%	3%	10%	5%	100%
	West	UTR	6%	5%	4%	6%	3%	10%	10%	17%	18%	5%	10%	7%	100%
		NH	6%	4%	3%	6%	4%	8%	6%	25%	20%	3%	8%	7%	100%
		ZH	5%	4%	2%	4%	3%	8%	6%	21%	26%	4%	10%	7%	100%
		ZEE	5%	2%	4%	5%	2%	4%	3%	9%	13%	40%	8%	6%	100%
	South	NB	7%	3%	3%	4%	2%	10%	5%	13%	18%	6%	19%	9%	100%
		LIM	3%	3%	2%	6%	3%	6%	5%	14%	14%	2%	11%	31%	100%
Average			8,0%	5,9%	4,8%	7,1%	3,4%	8,5%	5,4%	16,0%	16,7%	6,4%	9,3%	8,4%	100%
Share of population			3,5%	3,9%	2,9%	6,8%	2,2%	12,1%	7,3%	16,1%	21,3%	2,3%	14,8%	6,9%	100%
Average - population			4,5%	2,0%	1,9%	0,4%	1,2%	-3,5%	-1,9%	-0,1%	-4,6%	4,1%	-5,5%	1,5%	0%

Note: The colour scale is sorted from lowest (blue) to 50th percentile (white) to highest (red)
Mentions are unique, which means that one location is counted max. as one per parliamentary question.
Share of population is calculated as the average over a period from 1995 till 2021.

Appendix 4: Percentile scores of regional classifications 1994-2021 at NUTS-level 3

Regional classification	RC code	NUTS-3 code	Name	Centre or periphery	Large urban, mid-urban or rural	Average number of MPs per 100 000 inhabitants based on place of birth	Average number of MPs per 100 000 inhabitants based on place of residence	Share of mentions in PQs compared to share of population	Regional discontent	Institutional trust
Comfortable middle	CM01	CR13	Veluwe	Periphery	MU region	-0,3	0,0	-0,1	0,2	0,1
	CM02	CR40	Flevoland	Periphery	MU region	-0,5	0,2	0,4	0,1	-0,3
	CM03	CR35	Noordoost-Noord-Brabant	Periphery	MU region	-0,1	-0,2	-0,1	0,0	0,3
	CM04	CR27	Delft en Westland	Centre	MU region	0,4	-0,4	-0,4	0,4	0,2
	CM05	CR34	Midden-Noord-Brabant	Periphery	LU region	-0,4	-0,1	-0,3	0,1	0,2
	CM06	CR30	Zuidoost-Zuid-Holland	Periphery	MU region	0,1	-0,4	-0,5	0,2	-0,3
	CM07	CR19	Alkmaar en omgeving	Periphery	MU region	-0,5	-0,2	-0,3	0,3	0,3
	CM08	CR16	Zuidwest-Gelderland	Periphery	RU region	-0,5	-0,2	-0,1	0,2	-0,2
	CM09	CR20	IJmond	Periphery	MU region	-0,4	-0,1	-0,4	0,3	-0,1
	CM10	CR22	Zaanstreek	Periphery	MU region	0,1	-0,5	-0,5	0,2	-0,1
	CM11	CR15	Arnhem/Nijmegen	Periphery	LU region	-0,2	-0,4	0,0	0,1	0,3
	CM12	CR33	West-Noord-Brabant	Periphery	MU region	-0,3	-0,4	-0,2	0,0	-0,4
Dominant centre	DC01	CR26	Agglomeratie 's-Gravenhage	Centre	LU region	0,5	0,5	0,3	0,3	0,1
	DC02	CR23	Groot-Amsterdam	Centre	LU region	0,1	0,4	0,4	0,5	0,4
	DC03	CR17	Utrecht	Centre	LU region	-0,1	0,4	0,1	0,4	0,4
	DC04	CR21	Agglomeratie Haarlem	Centre	LU region	0,3	0,5	0,0	0,4	0,4
	DC05	CR25	Agglomeratie Leiden en Bollenstreek	Centre	LU region	-0,1	0,4	-0,4	0,5	0,5
	DC06	CR29	Groot-Rijnmond	Centre	LU region	-0,1	0,1	0,2	0,1	-0,2
	DC07	CR28	Oost-Zuid-Holland	Centre	MU region	0,2	0,1	-0,2	0,3	0,2
	DC08	CR24	Het Gooi en Vechtstreek	Centre	MU region	0,3	0,1	-0,3	0,4	0,5
Unseen periphery	UP01	CR10	Noord-Overijssel	Periphery	MU region	-0,1	-0,1	0,1	-0,1	0,4
	UP02	CR01	Oost-Groningen	Periphery	RU region	-0,2	-0,3	0,4	-0,5	-0,5
	UP03	CR31	Zeeuwsch-Vlaanderen	Periphery	RU region	-0,4	-0,4	0,3	-0,2	-0,2
	UP04	CR36	Zuidoost-Noord-Brabant	Periphery	LU region	-0,2	-0,4	-0,2	-0,1	0,1
	UP05	CR14	Achterhoek	Periphery	RU region	-0,3	-0,3	-0,3	-0,2	0,1
	UP06	CR18	Kop van Noord-Holland	Periphery	RU region	-0,4	-0,5	-0,1	0,0	-0,4
	UP07	CR08	Zuidoost-Drenthe	Periphery	RU region	-0,3	-0,3	0,0	-0,4	-0,3
	UP08	CR11	Zuidwest-Overijssel	Periphery	MU region	-0,5	-0,1	-0,2	0,0	0,3
Vocal periphery	VP01	CR03	Overig Groningen	Periphery	LU region	0,4	0,2	0,5	-0,4	0,2
	VP02	CR32	Overig Zeeland	Periphery	MU region	0,3	0,3	0,3	-0,3	-0,1
	VP03	CR04	Noord-Friesland	Periphery	MU region	0,3	0,2	0,4	-0,4	0,0
	VP04	CR09	Zuidwest-Drenthe	Periphery	RU region	0,2	0,2	0,3	-0,1	0,0
	VP05	CR37	Noord-Limburg	Periphery	MU region	0,4	0,2	0,0	-0,2	-0,4
	VP06	CR05	Zuidwest-Friesland	Periphery	RU region	0,5	0,0	0,1	-0,2	-0,2
	VP07	CR02	Delfzijl en omgeving	Periphery	RU region	0,3	0,4	0,5	-0,5	-0,4
	VP08	CR12	Twente	Periphery	MU region	0,2	-0,1	0,1	-0,3	0,0
	VP09	CR39	Zuid-Limburg	Periphery	MU region	0,1	-0,1	0,2	-0,3	-0,4
	VP10	CR38	Midden-Limburg	Periphery	MU region	-0,1	0,1	0,2	-0,3	-0,5
	VP11	CR07	Noord-Drenthe	Periphery	RU region	-0,3	0,2	0,2	-0,4	0,0
	VP12	CR06	Zuidoost-Friesland	Periphery	RU region	0,2	-0,3	-0,4	-0,1	-0,1

6. Conclusion and discussion

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.
- Michel Foucault (1978)

6.1 Conclusion

6.1.1 Introduction

The goal of dissertation was to better understand the geography of discontent from a spatial justice viewpoint, by investigating how discontent is spread across regional divides and which regional disparities can be considered as likely sources of discontent. With a mixed-method design and a multidimensional theoretical framework this study focussed on matters of spatial (in)justice in the Netherlands. As argued in the introduction, the Netherlands is a least likely case for a geography of discontent for being small and densely populated country with a thriving economy and a proportional democracy. How then does the geography of discontent look like in the Netherlands, and what can we learn from this?

In this conclusion, I will answer the research questions I formulated in the introduction of this dissertation. I will first summarise the key findings in regards to the subquestions, and then answer the main research question. In the discussion, I will highlight the contributions to literature, the limitations of this research, and make recommendations for policy and future research.

Main research question (MRQ):
How is contemporary discontent spread across regional divides in the Netherlands, and what regional disparities are likely to explain this?

Subquestions:
- RQ1: Which insights into regional divides can be generated when departing from a spatial interpretation of Fraser's concept of social justice?
- RQ2: To what extent may the uneven distribution of socio-economic prosperity between regions explain feelings of regional discontent?
- RQ3: From which principle of justice do novel regional development policies depart, and how does that affect the redistribution of regional investments?
- RQ4: How (mis)balanced is the regional representation in Dutch parliament, and is this likely to explain regional discontent?

6.1.2 A spatial interpretation of Fraser's social justice framework

RQ1: *Which insights into regional divides can be generated when departing from a spatial interpretation of Fraser's concept of social justice?*

In her eminent work on social justice, philosopher Nancy Fraser provided a very insightful theoretical framework for grasping struggles of injustice. However, Fraser disregarded the spatial context. In chapter 2, I presented a *scoping review* of state-of-the-art literature (see Peters et al., 2015), in which I systematically collected relevant empirical papers revolving regional inequality and categorised them according to matters of spatial injustices. These led to an empirically-informed understanding of Fraser's theoretical concepts in a regional context.

Recent studies in geography that examine the distribution of resources across regions look h into two matters of spatial maldistribution: *economic marginalisation* and *social deprivation*. The former discusses the negative consequences of a growing disbalance between regions in economic development. Studies show that from the 1990s onward industrial transformation led some regions to prosper while others were 'left behind' in economic decay. In regards to social deprivation, peripheralisation studies, among others, pointed to the negative consequences of population loss on quality of life in sparsely populated communities. I also found two conceptions of place-based misrecognition in rural sociology and environmental justice literature: *disrespect* and *non-recognition*. This typically addresses issues that come from social hierarchy of territorial status, varying from sentiments of being ridiculed for a rural lifestyle to ignoring environmental risks and industrial pollution in rural areas. When it comes to political representation in a regional context, I came across two matters in literature that revolve around *misframing* and *misrepresentation*. For long scholarship around territorial politics focused on regional minority conflicts over borders, culture, and ethnicities. Studies in a new field of the geography of discontent revealed that in economically disadvantaged regions people felt misrepresented by an urban establishment.

6.1.3 Regional distribution pathways: persistent economic inequalities and challenges of shrinkage

RQ2: *To what extent may uneven distribution of socio-economic prosperity between regions explain feelings of regional discontent?*

Discontent is frequently explained by long-term economic decline in regions that are left behind in industrial transformation. In chapter 3, I argued that is relevant to look beyond industrial

productivity pathways, and sort out place-based economic hardship and social liveability in communities. Therefore I examined inequality trajectories along the centre-periphery and urban-rural divides, when possible from the mid-90s in the Netherlands. Using long-term empirical data of income, wealth, and unemployment rates at the regional level, showed that socio-economic distribution in the Netherlands is regionally unbalanced and mostly to the detriment of the rural periphery. However, over time there was no strong decline nor divergence in economic development for households across regions. Even though average household income in the rural periphery remained lowest, there was also structural income growth for all regions in the Netherlands. Moreover, this study found that large urban areas were afflicted by lower median wealth and higher employment peaks. With that, this study exemplified that recent changes in economic development are not likely to explain feelings of political discontent across regions in the Netherlands. A correlation analysis did, however, show that institutional distrust and feelings of being overlooked by government are strongly associated with regions that on average have low household incomes, low population changes and high shares of elderly population.

In terms of pathways of social deprivation, there were substantial developments in demographic change. From 1995 there was a national trend of ageing, which resulted in a large increase of elderly population in the rural regions in the periphery. In the same regions I observed a period of population decline between 2010 and 2014. Due to this demographic shift, communities in the Dutch rural periphery are faced with disproportionate challenges (see Gieling et al., 2019; Ubels et al., 2019; Thissen and Content, 2022), such as the decrease of public services. Even though the rural periphery is faced with more socio-economic challenges, chapter 3 also showed that people in peripheral regions are more prone to be satisfied with their living environment than people in other parts of the country.

6.1.4 Regional redistribution: inclusion yet no priority for weak regions in a new regional development fund

RQ3: *From which principle of justice do novel regional development policies depart, and how does that affect the redistribution of regional investments?*

Recent studies showed that the geography of discontent partly results from the feeling that one's region is not receiving their fair share in redistribution and is excluded from regional investments (see for example Cramer, 2016; Huijsmans, 2022). Recently the Dutch government developed a new regional investment programme, the 'Region Deals' policy programme in the

Netherlands (2018-2022), which comprised a €950,- million budget for boosting 'broad prosperity' (CBS, 2019; PBL, 2022; Thissen and Content, 2022). With a critical policy analysis, chapter 4 examined how the Dutch government framed the eligibility of regions for a region deal, what they considered as a fair redistribution of a regional development fund and how this affected the allocation of regional investments.

Inspired by the work of Buitelaar and colleagues (2017; 2020), I sorted government rationalities into four different principles of distributive justice. This showed that the policy problem in the novel Region Deals was discursively represented from a mixture of orientations to distributive justice: both utilitarian (creating general growth) and prioritarian (supporting the left behind). The RD policy was patchy and inconsistent. Driven by growth and efficiency, central government claimed on the one hand to strive for maximum regional wellbeing across the whole country, and on the other to also specifically invest in people who are left behind in the progress of the country and feel unheard. Even though government discursively problematised people who are left behind, chapter 4 also pinpointed that the RD policy tools were not designed to specifically invest in structurally weak places. Allocation of investments took place in two ways. In the coalition agreement six regions were preselected, which already covered about half the fund. Subsequently, regions – often inter-municipal co-operations – had to apply themselves through two competitive procedures for much lower investments. With that, there was a certain discrepancy between what central government claimed and how central government acted to stimulate regional development. I conclude here that as a result of a largely utilitarian policy design for regional development investments, the recognition of structurally weak regions by central government was limited.

6.1.5 Regional representation: a geographic misbalance in parliament

RQ4: *How (mis)balanced is regional representation in Dutch parliament, and is this likely to explain regional discontent?*

In many liberal democracies people feel that one's place is being overlooked by politics. Chapter 5 assessed the political representation of regions in Dutch proportional democracy, a parliamentary system without district seats. A unique geo-referenced dataset was built for the period of 1994 till 2021, which consists of (a) 1 188 MPs' place of birth and of residence, (b) 67 686 written parliamentary questions, and (c) survey data of regional discontent. This allowed me to measure and compare the following sorts of political representation as defined by Pitkin (1967). First, I gave an overview of descriptive representation of regions based on MPs'

regional background. Second, I presented an overview of substantial representation of regions, based on the geographic spread of issues that MPs put on the political agenda. Third, I clarified to what extent MPs voice issues concerning their 'own' region. Finally, I explored to what extent proportionate regional representation can temper regional discontent.

The findings showed that since the mid-90s there was a politically dominant centre in the Netherlands. Large urban regions in the Randstad area were structurally and disproportionately overrepresented, when looking at MPs' place of birth and residence. Their overrepresentation was strongest for place of residence. Roughly 40% of the population lived in the centre, but about 60% of the MPs were living shortly after they were elected. Since these regions held relatively large populations, overrepresentation may also easily catch the eye. Yet, there is also what I termed a 'vocal periphery'. Some regions in the periphery were structurally well- or overrepresented by MPs when weighed for population size, which was also signalled in earlier research (Latner and McGann, 2005). In addition, this study found that weighed for population size, the peripheral areas are more frequently mentioned in parliamentary questions, especially the vocal periphery. Regions of a comfortable middle are sometimes well-represented and mostly underrepresented in terms of MPs born or living there and are relatively little mentioned in parliamentary questions. Importantly, there is also an 'unseen periphery' in which very little MPs were born or resided when they were elected for office. Thus, I conclude that next to the dominance of large urban areas in the centre, parts of the periphery are very much included in the political process.

This study also found that MPs strongly act for their 'own' region, especially MPs coming from the periphery. This result is in line with studies that showed that representatives in the Netherlands are likely to raise more issues concerning their 'own' group (Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Aydemir and Vliegenthart, 2016; Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020). In a geographic sense, this tendency is much stronger among MPs from peripheral regions (see also Thomassen and Andeweg, 2004). In contrast to what is regularly claimed in public debate and in protests, this study showed that MPs coming from the centre were not blind for 'other' places within the country. In fact, they were relatively regionally diverse and balanced in terms of the places they mentioned in the parliamentary questions. In contrast to my expectations, inhabitants of peripheral regions that were relatively well- and overrepresented by MPs and in parliamentary questions, were not less discontented. Mentions of geo-entities in parliamentary questions are strongly associated with regional discontent. My findings show that people living in the vocal periphery were actually somewhat more frustrated than those in an unseen periphery. Therefore,

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it may well be possible that the more a region is mentioned in parliamentary questions indicates for more place-bound issues and regional discontent.

6.1.6 Regional discontent in the periphery

In this section, I focus on the first part of the main research question: how is contemporary discontent spread across regional divides in the Netherlands? This study underscored that recent feelings of discontent were most prominent in the rural periphery of the Netherlands. In line with the work of other scholars who studied contemporary discontent in the Netherlands (De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022), I found that regional discontent cut strongly along the centre-periphery divide. Multiple survey results at NUTS-level 3 regions (in chapter 3 and 5) point out that this form of *peripheral discontent* is essentially political estrangement, fuelled with sentiments of being overlooked and misunderstood by government. This is based on stronger feelings of one's region not receiving their fair share of government investments, perceived misrepresentation of one's region by the political centre, and perceived misrecognition by people from other regions (see also De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022; Vermeij and Schyns, 2019). Moreover, this study found higher levels of institutional distrust in the peripheral regions, which corresponds with international studies that found lower levels of trust in economically disadvantaged regions (see Lipps and Schraff, 2020; McKay et al., 2021).

Even though inhabitants of peripheral regions experience more place-based discontent, the results in chapter 3 also showed that people in peripheral regions were generally happier with the place they live in than people in other parts of the country. This resonates with many other affluent countries in western Europe, in which subjective wellbeing is higher in rural areas than it is in urban areas (De Dominicis et al. 2020). Other studies also showed that living in the countryside is often imagined as a rural idyll, where a sense of normalcy, familiarity and natural quality is maintained (Van Dam et al., 2002; Stockdale and Haartsen, 2018; Van der Star and Hochstenbach, 2022). People living in rural areas are especially attached to their landscape and community, as well as living near family (Morse and Mudgett, 2018). The fact that inhabitants of large urban areas in the Dutch centre are less likely to be satisfied with their living environment compared to regions in the periphery could be explained by the disadvantages of big city life, such as a lack of affordable housing, high levels of criminal offenses, high levels of feeling unsafe, less green spaces, and high levels of air pollution (CBS, 2020). Dissatisfaction with residential area can be considered as a specific form of place-based discontent from *urban overdevelopment* (see Florida 2021).

I conclude here, that regional discontent can be primarily understood as a wide-shared feeling of one's place being estranged from the central state, which is strongly present in peripheral regions. For many inhabitants of the peripheral regions, in which people are more strongly attached to their living environment and where residents rely more on social cohesion and local engagement, the central government feels at a great distance.

6.1.7 Explanations for peripheral discontent

In this section, I answer the second part of the main research question: what regional disparities are likely to explain the spread of discontent the Netherlands? In doing so, I lay out how peripheral discontent relates to three dimensions of justice: the (re)distribution of wealth and resources, the apportion of social status and recognition, and the representation of political voices. I am specifically interested in whether perceptions of peripheral discontent are aligned with empirical evidence of a political establishment in the centre that estranged from peripheral regions.

First, in terms of distribution of socio-economic prosperity, strong populist support from 'the places that don't matter' has frequently been explained by economic decline due to a lack of industrial transformation (see for example Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, 2020). In most of the affluent countries, the closing of mining, shipyards, and factories led to high unemployment levels and huge population declines in old-industrial areas. In parts of peripheral France, peripheral England, southern Italy, and eastern Germany the populist surge is explained by deindustrialisation and employment decline (Essletzbichler et al., 2018; Diemer et al., 2022; Greve et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020; Evenhuis et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2018). In the Netherlands, studies about trajectories of regional economies highlighted a skewed growth between regions (Raspe and Van der Berge, 2017; Butkus et al., 2018; Iammarino et al., 2018; Thissen et al., 2019; Oevering and Raspe, 2020), primarily based on measurements of GDP and industrial settlements. In general, economic frontiers became even stronger while weaker regions experienced relatively little productivity growth. With the exception of few innovative regions, such as Brainport Eindhoven (Groenleer and Hendriks, 2018; Oevering and Raspe, 2020).

Looking beyond industrial productivity with a more household focussed approach to social and economic inequality trajectories across regions, chapter 3 showed that economic *divergence* or *decline* is unlikely to explain peripheral discontent in the Netherlands. This study found that regions characterised by low incomes, low population change, and ageing were more prone to being alienated from government actions and institutions. While wealth,

unemployment rates, and public service distance had very weak associations. Across all Dutch regions there was a general growth of incomes, yet relative inequality remained stable in the last decade: rural peripheries remained at the bottom. Peripheral discontent was strongly associated with the persistence of income deprivation of peripheral households and population loss. This can be explained in two ways. From a contextual perspective that looks at regional developments (see for example Diemer et al., 2022), one can argue that the source of discontent is relative deprivation. Rural regions in the periphery were structurally in the lower echelons of economic development and afflicted by structural challenges, such as a lack of middle- and high-income jobs and the increased pressures on public services and quality of life. Qualitative studies proved that the closing of a supermarket, for instance, leads to feelings of loss and decreased social attachment in such places (see Gieling et al. 2019; Haartsen and Gieling 2021). It may help to ensure minimum standards for public services in all areas. Looking into the composition of population (see for example Maxwell, 2019), one can also argue that discontent comes from a geographic clustering of low-income groups that think-a-like about politics, such as anti-establishment attitudes and rural lifestyles. The composition explanation tends to overlook region-specific characteristics. I note here that one explanation does not have to exclude the other.

In terms of redistribution of regional investments by central government, I showed in chapter 4 that an urban-dominance is still not overcome. Since the 1980s, spatial planning was mostly designed according to urban neoliberalism (Van Loon et al., 2019), in which neoliberal regimes with a pro-growth agenda pursued national economic success through reinforcing a few successful cities (Florida, 1996; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Glaeser, 2011; Crouch and Le Galès, 2012). Likewise, urban neoliberalisation in the Netherlands led national government to move away from investing in underdeveloped regions, towards facilitating clusters in urban cores to compete with global superstar cities (Fainstein, 2001; Van der Wouden, 2016, 2021; Van Loon et al., 2019). By looking at sustainable development challenges at the regional scale, the Dutch Region Deal policy broke with decades of conventional policymaking for urban economic development.

Despite long-lasting urban-centric investments and the severe challenges for sustainable development in rural and old-industrial areas, I found that there was no strong priority for structurally weak regions in allocating a new regional development fund of €950 million. In contrast to, for instance, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which purpose is specifically to contribute to reducing uneven regional development within the EU (Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi, 2004; Kołodziejski, 2020), the least favoured regions were included though

not prioritised in the Region Deals. This study uncovered that the largest investments of the region deals were generally preselected in a first round that was set in stone in the coalition agreement. In a second and third round, regions had to apply for a limited and smaller investment in a form of competition. Moreover, in chapter 4 we proved that some of the largest investments were given to places closer to the centre and included deals for urban development only. With that, one can speak of a lack of recognition of peripheral regions and the challenges they faced, at least in the regional development fund of Region Deals between 2018-2022.

In terms of political representation, this dissertation uncovered in much detail that the Netherlands had a regionally imbalanced parliament between 1994 and 2021. Besides earlier detected representational gaps in gender and migration (Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2006; Mügge et al., 2019), and in education (Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Schakel and Van Der Pas, 2020; Noordzij et al., 2021), this study showed that we can also speak of a gap in Dutch regional representation. There was a political overrepresentation of MPs from the centre, in which roughly 40% of the population lived but about 60% of the MPs were living shortly after they were elected.

A numerically imbalanced (descriptive) representation of regions in Dutch parliament, I conclude, is also a possible explanation of peripheral discontent. Considering that regional authorities in the unitary state of the Netherlands are rather limited (Hooghe et al., 2010; Groenleer and Hendriks, 2018), parliament has strong legislative power in all regions. Chapter 5 demonstrated moreover that some parts of the periphery were very vocally present as 'their' MPs would (substantively) represent their interest frequently in parliament by way of parliamentary questions. It is interesting to note that the peripheral regions that were in that manner very well substantively represented in the political process were slightly more discontented than peripheral regions whose interest were less represented in parliament. Therefore I conclude that a proportionate representation of one region in parliament, in terms of descriptive and substantive representation, by itself is not likely to temper peripheral discontent in that specific region. However, regional discontent is possibly triggered by the descriptive (numerical) overrepresentation of MPs from the centre. In this latter case, the problem of peripheral discontent could partly be explained by the structural overrepresentation of a majoritarian centre, rather than the underrepresentation of one's own region.

6.1.8 Politics out of place

This dissertation concludes that in the Netherlands *politics is out of place*, in which peripheral regions are generally bearing more burdens. When looking at the geography of discontent there

is an imbalance between centre and periphery. First of all, I come to this conclusion by reason of an uneven geography of regionally-based discontent with government and policy decisions. Large shares of the population, mostly based in the peripheral areas, perceive that national politics is less engaged with one's region. Second, there is a persistent income deprivation of peripheral households, and on top of that these areas are faced with the challenges of population decline. Third, disadvantaged regions were still not prioritised by government in recent policy decisions for regional investments. Fourth, at least from the mid-90s Dutch parliament has been structurally and disproportionately overrepresented by MPs from a dominant centre and a vocal periphery, yet the latter remained particularly regionally discontented. Similar to national governments across Europe, Dutch central government is perceived to be out of touch with peripheral regions, and is challenged to reconnect with citizens from all over the country.

6.2 Discussion

6.2.1 Contributions

This dissertation contributed to academic literature in different ways, particularly to the bodies of literature of the geography of discontent and spatial justice. In this section I illuminate three contributions to academic literature: a conceptual contribution, an empirical contribution, and a methodological contribution. Moreover, I discuss the social impact of this research.

First, this dissertation contributed by filling a conceptual knowledge gap. In the introduction of this dissertation, I argued that geographic divides are strongly determined by the socio-spatial dialectic (Soja, 1980, 2010; Lefebvre, 1992). This dissertation proposed a philosophically grounded and empirically informed spatial interpretation of social justice. Inspired by Carolan's (2019) approach to justice in the countryside, this study further explored a spatial interpretation of Fraser's tridimensional theoretical framework of social justice. Fraser's (2009) tripartite understanding of social justice acutely sorted the major matters in justice theory: the distribution of wealth and resources, the apportion of social status and recognition, and the inclusion of voices in political decision-making. The spatial understanding of the triparte model of social justice, is helpful to scholars interested in exploring unjust geographies with an encompassing approach.

Social justice theory uncovered – and still uncovers – much about institutional mechanisms that (re)produce uneven outcomes for people from different walks of life. The body of literature revealed the ways people are mistreated by reason of belonging to a specific group, based on class, sexual orientation, gender, race, age, or other social background. This

approach is very suitable for grasping struggles of justice in multiple realms of a changing society. Like many other scholars, Fraser neglected the socio-spatial dialectic in her work. Spatial justice literature then illuminated that people are also from different geographic walks of life. Until recently, this body of literature mainly involved inequalities within cities and between countries. By grasping regional divides across the Netherlands, this dissertation showed that it is very relevant to assess this particular framework in regards to the geography of discontent. It enables to explore the geography of discontent beyond dominant populist perspectives on the one side and traditional economic inequality models on the other side.

Second, this dissertation also contributed to literature with empirical evidence from an in-depth case study of the Netherlands, which particularly added to the geographic knowledge gap on the geography of discontent. At the beginning of my PhD trajectory, most studies into geography of discontent (published in English) were conducted in the US, UK, or EU in general. In the last years, more and more studies breached out of these geographies with in-depth studies that have contributed tremendously to deepen the understanding of the geography of discontent. In the introduction the Netherlands was presented as a least likely case for a geography of discontent, which means that the explanations for peripheral discontent are likely to be applicable for other countries (Levy, 2008). In addition to other recent case studies (published in English) of the Netherlands (see Van Leeuwen et al., 2021; De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022), and published in Dutch (see Cordeweners, 2020; Van den Berg, 2020; De Voogd and Cuperus, 2021; Van den Berg and Kok, 2021), this study contributed by confirming that the Dutch regional discontent is particularly strong in the periphery, and by adding empirical evidence to better understand regional sources of discontent.

Third, with an interdisciplinary approach this dissertation contributed to literature by applying diversified and novel methods in spatial studies. These methods come from various disciplines such as economic geography, sociology, and political sciences. I highlight two methods here. In chapter 4, I used a critical policy analysis with a WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) method of Bacchi (2009). This was a cutting-edge study by bringing the WPR method from social policy analysis to regional policy analysis. The WPR method proved to be very helpful in uncovering government rationale in designing policy for regional development. With that, this study showed that the WPR method is a very useful method that allows scholars to critically distil government rationale in spatial planning and policies.

In chapter 5, a named entity recognition method was applied for textual data analysis. This is a novel method in computational sciences (Goyal et al., 2018), and especially in the field of geography and sociology. In this study, the method was used in regards to political

representation. More specifically, to uncover which locations were mentioned in written parliamentary questions submitted by MPs. To perform a named entity recognition analysis required well-developed digital skills. It was also a time consuming activity to verify and validate the results, as at first there were many false negatives in the recognised geo-entities linked to *OpenStreetMap*. Finally, much manual work was needed to sort out the annotations. The result was a very detailed and reliable overview of which places were mentioned disproportionately frequently and infrequently, and provided unique evidence for regional representation.

In terms of social impact, during this PhD trajectory I also 'came down' from the ivory tower to engage with policymakers and general public. The findings help policymakers and a general public to confirm/debunk myths about geographic divides in the Netherlands, and work towards more 'just' outcomes. Besides various (forthcoming) publications in peer-review journals (see for example Van Vulpen and Bock, 2020; Van Vulpen, 2022), based on this doctoral research I published several Dutch articles outside academia and gave several lectures. Moreover, I helped organising a conference for Frisian policymakers on local and regional governance of broad prosperity. Together with Caspar van den Berg I published a book chapter on regional representation in Dutch parliament, in a book published by the Montesquieu Institute that collected scientifically informed responses to a report of a parliamentary committee (Van den Berg and Van Vulpen, 2019). Moreover, we published another chapter about regional governance in a book for policymakers published by the Netherlands School of Public Administration (Van Vulpen and Van den Berg, 2020). In addition, I published several op-eds in both national and regional newspapers (Van den Berg and Van Vulpen, 2019; Van Vulpen, 2022b, 2022a). Finally, with the help of experts from Centre for Information Technology of the University of Groningen, I built an interactive public website about regional representation in which users can create their own maps with the data I collected. In these ways, I aimed to share knowledge and exchange insights not only with researchers but also with policymakers and a general audience.

6.2.2 Limitations

Of course this doctoral research is also limited. I would like to highlight two points here, which both relate to empirical data. First, this dissertation lacks data of personal experiences of misrecognition by people living in the periphery. Several studies showed that experiencing disrespect, disdain, or contempt from an urban out-group over local traditions and rural ways of living, can fuel resentment towards an urban establishment and government (Cramer, 2016;

Wuthnow, 2018; Carolan, 2019; Munis, 2020; Florida, 2021). One way to better understand struggles of place-based misrecognition is with a Weberian approach of *Verstehen*, which aims to understand why people act the way they do by empathising with their perspective. Qualitative studies allow to grasp detailed insights into misrecognition by paying attention to the meanings that people assign to place-based in- and outsiders and to related motivations for their actions.

During my PhD trajectory I started with a qualitative case-study of north-east Fryslân, a rural and economically sidelined region in the Netherlands. Using interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, I aimed to get a deeper understanding of what place-based misrecognition entails and triggers by capturing personal stories. Unfortunately, the data collection was strongly delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, and to my deepest regret, I was not able to finish this particularly paper on time to include it in this dissertation. Yet, I followed a wise advise for this struggle: rather than viewing this dissertation as incomplete, consider it as a first next paper for after my PhD.

Second, this research suffered from a population gap in available survey data. In the Netherlands, but also in Europe, attitude data is mostly measured for social groups with non-spatial indicators such as educational level, gender, income, and migration background. If groups are measured with geographic indicators, often there are insufficient sample sizes for a detailed and diversified geography. For instance, at urbanity level, implying that both cities and countryside are similar across the nation. Or, at provincial level, which is rather broad. As a result, attitude data on regional and local level is currently too meagre. To validly measure the role of centre-periphery tensions of polarisation and discontent, we need better geographic samples in survey studies. In order to do this, I highly urge research institutes, specifically government agencies, to collect survey data with samples that are geographically diversified and representative at regional or better yet local level. The survey research conducted for the SCoRE project is a superb example, which aimed to capture samples in all municipalities across the Netherlands. I cannot thank the researchers involved in the SCoRE project enough for sharing their valuable data with me, which helped to fill this population gap.

6.2.3 Recommendations for policy and research

A sense of alienation in the periphery

This least likely case study of the Netherlands showed that, when looking beyond the populist surge, there is a widely shared sentiment of regionally-based discontent strongly rooted in the periphery. In peripheral regions, especially rural peripheral regions, people strongly felt one's

place is estranged from central state. Here, I suggest that this sentiment can be best understood as a form of peripheral alienation. With that, I draw on the classic conception of alienation as feeling powerless or without of control to shape one's own life and destiny, famously used by Marx (see Thompson, 1979; Flohr, 2023), and later interpreted in a spatial context by Lefebvre (1991). Taking this idea of a lack of control into the spatial constellation of centre-periphery tensions, I argue that the process whereby inhabitants of the periphery feel detached, distanced from the central state and feel deprived of co-shaping the – cherished – surrounding in which their everyday life takes place, can be viewed as a *sense of alienation in the periphery*. While I do not go as far as claiming that these groups are deprived of their human nature and of a profound right to individual autonomy – as Lefebvre (1991) claimed in relation to alienation in everyday urban life, evidence clearly shows that in the periphery there is a strong sense of misrecognition of one's place by central state and of estrangement from political power. The Dutch periphery is characterised by historically strong social cohesion and dependency on local engagement in community building, which is likely to make inhabitants have a very strong sense autonomy over 'their' land and everyday life in 'their' region. At the same time, many peripheral residents feel that central state power is estranged from them and inconsiderate of their voice in shaping 'their' region.

Supported by the findings in this dissertation, I argue that the sense of peripheral alienation in the Netherlands, contributes to a resentment of a spatially-bound class of a wealthy, progressive, self-centred elite in the Randstad area, who is blamed for dominating the way the country is governed and for overshadowing the interests of people in the periphery (see also Noordzij et al., 2021; De Lange et al., 2022; Huijsmans, 2022). This spirit is grounded in a spatial consciousness. It is comparable to the rural consciousness in the United States, as described by Cramer (2016), in which ruralites feel unfairly ruled by a self-centred cosmopolitan elite in the large cities. Hochschild's 'Strangers in their own land' adds that these feelings are, especially in the southern states, grounded in a sense of historical lack of self-determination. I find it important to note here that peripheral alienation is very likely to have been around for much longer in the Netherlands. Historic evidence showed that already in nineteenth century, affluent men of the political establishment were criticised for their close ties to The Hague and neglecting the interests of peripheral regions (Kaal, 2016: 491). Perceived alienation from central state power is likely a long-standing sentiment in the periphery which is continuously (re)ignited with new developments in society that can be interpreted along the constellation of the centre-periphery divide.

The right to the periphery

Peripheral discontent, or peripheral alienation, puts forward questions about – a sense of – ownership in shaping the spaces of everyday life, and the mutual dependency between centre and periphery. There are very sound reasons for conceiving populism as a threat to liberal democracy (see Bermeo, 2016; Mudde, 2019), I argue that if researchers and policymakers strongly care about exclusion and marginalised groups we should further deepen research into uneven geographies and the right to space.

For many decades, responses to spatial injustices have been framed in terms of 'the right to the city'. Lefebvre first coined 'the right to the city' in 1968, which he understood as the right to belong to and the right to co-produce the urban spaces (Lefebvre, 1996). In Lefebvre's revision of Marxist theory, he argued that city dwellers had the right not to be alienated from the spaces of everyday life (Aalbers and Gibb, 2014). It was an argument against exclusion and alienation, and for resident participation in the making of the city. An argument, that is still very much debated to this very day. The findings of this doctoral research makes one rethink the geographic focus: where is the discussion about the right to the periphery?

To better understand both regional development as well as the geography of discontent, it is relevant to further study what Lefebvre (1992) calls the production of space. Spaces are continuously transformed and redesigned. Governments around the globe are challenged by urgent matters of spatial planning, such as the energy transition and physical infrastructures. But, are citizens and representatives of peripheries included in the production of space, and how? One can think of the allocation of locations for wind and solar farms, new housing, new infrastructure, and settlements for asylum seekers. What are the social impacts of planning and design of the built environment on local communities, which stakeholders are included, and what are principles of justice in decision-making processes? This certainly applies for the small and densely populated country of the Netherlands, where space is even more scarce.

Civic engagement and community involvement in deliberative democracy can be designed in various ways (Abelson et al., 2003; Bock, 2016), and has many positives and negatives sides (Gaventa and Barrett, 2012; Curato et al., 2017). Research showed that often a very select group of 'active citizens', generally highly educated seniors, is committed to the interests of the neighbourhood or village (Snel et al., 2018), which risks creating further inequality (Uitermark, 2015). Reasons for non-engagement by a majority of residents are for instance having other priorities, feeling incapable, or feeling that the responsibility belongs to the local government (see Ubels et al., 2020). Moreover, self-organisation is not easy to stimulate within government's urge for uniformity (see Uitermark, 2015). In tackling peripheral

alienation, it is necessary for policymakers and researchers to think in terms of the right to co-produce space and find ways to ensure it.

A spatial consciousness in policymaking

This study found that even if regions were well-represented by members of parliament and in parliamentary questions, inhabitants felt overlooked by their government, as shown in chapter 5. Moreover, this dissertation found that in recent investments for regional development there was no strong priority for weak regions. Future research should look into the (mis)recognition of regions in the redistribution of central government investments and in unintended consequences of central government policies. Policymakers and academics should rather be aware to (new) spatial diversity and potentially polarising effects of spatial planning and policy choices.

The policy analysis in chapter 5 can be interpreted as a first step in the research on spatial justice in place-based development (see also Fainstein, 2015; Jones et al., 2019; Weck et al., 2021). However, the policy results of this study should be treated with caution due to the restricted case study of the Dutch Region Deals. Next to the explicit policies aimed to shape place, such as regional development and spatial planning, there are also policies that implicitly shape place. Some policies are place blind by design, but not place neutral in its consequences. These policies – often market-oriented – are not explicitly targeted at nor designed for particular places, but due to implicit spatial disparities the effects are different among places. I specifically mention the accessibility of public services that is under pressure in sparsely populated areas, such as (digital) infrastructures, health care services, schools (see also Salemink, 2016; Anderson, 2019). A proper spatial understanding of the way in which place-blind but not place-neutral policy measures might burden the periphery, is essential to better understand the geography of discontent. Future research should look into the government rationale and consequences of explicit policies for space as well as the generic policies that can have spatially diverse impacts, for example with rural proofing that aims to 'think rural' when developing and implementing policies (Atterton, 2008).

An environmental justice approach to geography

In this study, I approached the spatial distribution of resources in a rather socio-economic way. By explicating regional inequality trajectories, this study revealed patterns of persistent income deprivation of households and population decline in the rural periphery, which are strongly associated with feelings of institutional distrust and insufficient government investments. With

low income areas in the rural periphery, which are especially vulnerable to external threats, it is important to grasp the many forms of uneven geographies. In future research, the focus on matters of spatial justice should include the realm of environmental risks, industrial pollution, and climate change. More specifically, in relation to geography of vulnerable households and sidelined communities.

Ecological catastrophes and environmental degradation are unevenly spread across the planet, countries, and regions (IPCC, 2022), the impact on local environment and communities can vary a lot. Governments at all scales are forced to act. Regions are included in taking action on climate adaptation and sustainability transitions (EU, 2020; OECD CFE, 2020), not in the least in rural and old-industrial areas. For the implementation of effective climate adaptation and mitigation measures, we need insights from social sciences, including sociology and geography. With that, it is of the utmost relevance to study who suffers the burden and where burdens are suffered. For years central state ignored the complaints and protests of inhabitants of north-eastern Groningen about the earthquakes caused by gas extraction and later the feeble damage settlements by the state (Van der Voort and Vanclay, 2015; Perlaviciute et al., 2018; Otjes et al., 2020).

Since environmental issues have an inherent spatial character and the impact can vary greatly regionally, it is important to find out to what extent it has a – further – divisive effect on geographic cleavages. With an environmental justice approach one can move towards a better understanding of where social inequalities are situated, and which groups are exposed to greater levels of pollution, toxics, natural hazards, and climate change impacts (Ashwood and MacTavish, 2016; Pellow, 2017). Researchers can help to assess whether marginalised groups or small communities are recognised and not excluded from decision-making bodies, they can help to identify ways of 'fair' treatment, and help to design deliberative procedures for 'just' solutions and landscape management.

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Summary (in English)

In the last decade a new *geography of discontent* spread across the globe. The political landscape was shaken up by a new wave of populist leaders that took power in long-standing liberal democracies, which started off with the election of Trump in 2016. The populist vote is generally considered as an expression of protest by citizens who are frustrated with the way the country is governed by the political establishment. Pioneering studies from geographers found that new social cleavages developed strongly across regional divides within countries. The international surge of populism became known as 'the revenge of the places don't matter' and 'rural resentment', in which areas severely afflicted by socio-economic decay and characterised by rural lifestyles were flagged as prominent places of discontent.

Despite the increased knowledge about the geography of discontent, only little is known about the different sentiments of discontent as well as the multiple sources that are at the root of contemporary discontent. First, there is a content gap related to the geographic context of studies. There is a lack of studies that are conducted outside the specific context of the most likely cases of the US and the UK. Second, there is an empirical knowledge gap. The geography of discontent is often merely seen as a populist threat, while there is much more to uncover about the different sentiments of discontent inhabitants might share regardless of their voting behaviour. Third, there is conceptual knowledge gap. With a conceptual view of social justice, discontented citizens are also seen as potentially vulnerable groups who are possibly afflicted by economic hardship, social exclusion, and maltreatment by the state. Yet, a rather urban-centric focus in spatial justice literature has long ignored the countryside.

This dissertation endeavoured to deeply understand the geography of discontent, by investigating how sentiments of discontent are spread across regional divides and which regional disparities are considered as likely explanations for contemporary discontent. In pursuing that research aim, this dissertation provided a new conceptual perspective of spatial justice theory. More specifically, this study provided a spatial reinterpretation of Fraser's three dimensions of justice: the (re)distribution of wealth and resources, the apportion of social status and recognition, and the representation of political voices. This dissertation took the Netherlands as a case study, which is considered a *least likely case* for a geography of discontent. Besides that the Netherlands is small and densely populated, it is very affluent country with a proportional democracy without a district system. There are, however, signs of a geographic split. In various recent outbursts of social unrest, such as the farmer protests,

outraged Dutch citizens blamed the political establishment from the centre – known as the Randstad – for ignoring and mistreating their place.

This dissertation addressed the following main research question: how is contemporary discontent spread across regional divides in the Netherlands, and what regional disparities are likely to explain this? To answer this a mixed-method research design was applied to collect and analyse empirical data. Moreover, this is an interdisciplinary research that built on empirical evidence and applied methods from economic geography, spatial planning, rural sociology, social policy, political geography, and political science.

Chapter 2 presented an empirically-informed understanding of Fraser's theoretical prism of justice in a regional context. With a systematic literature review of state-of-the-art literature, this study selected 134 relevant empirical papers about regional disparities in Europe and categorised them according to matters of spatial injustices. Findings emphasised the negative consequences of growing uneven regional development and of population decline in peripheral communities. Also, studies showed the effects of social hierarchy in territorial status, from being disrespected for a rural lifestyle to ignoring the interests of local communities. In terms of political representation, the results found bodies of research around misrepresentation by an urban establishment and traditional conflicts over suppression of regional minorities and territorial borders. With that, this study provided a philosophically grounded and empirically informed review of how regional disparities relate to spatial justice.

Chapter 3 examined regional divides in the Netherlands by unravelling how recent regional discontent relates to regional inequality trajectories. Based on quantitative analyses of longitudinal data on NUTS-level 3, this study found a persistence of social and economic inequalities over the last decade(s). The findings showed that socio-economic distribution in the Netherlands is regionally unbalanced and mostly to the detriment of the rural periphery. The main finding is that evidence for economic decline at the regional scale is limited, and is unlikely to account for contemporary regional discontent in the Netherlands. Pathways of regional divergence and decline were mostly found in demographic change. Discontent across Dutch regions was strongly associated with regions with on average low income, population loss, and ageing.

In chapter 4, this study critically examined an empirical case of novel policy for regional development in the Netherlands. Development funds can be unfolded with different government rationalities about what spatially just redistribution is. This dissertation took a case study of the 'Region Deals' policy programme in the Netherlands (2018-2022), comprising a €950,- million budget. With a critical policy analysis, chapter 4 examined what central

government perceived as a just redistribution of this regional development fund and how that affected the allocation of regional investments. The findings showed that even though Dutch central government discursively problematised regions that are left behind, the policy tools were not designed to specifically invest in the structurally weak places. This study concluded that as a result of a largely utilitarian policy design for regional development investments, the recognition of weak regions by central government was limited.

Chapter 5 assessed the political representation of regions in Dutch proportional democracy, a parliamentary system without district seats. This study built a unique geo-referenced dataset for the period of 1994 till 2021, which consists of (a) 1 188 MPs' place of birth and of residence, (b) 67 686 written parliamentary questions, and (c) survey data of regional discontent. To analyse this large dataset, I applied descriptive geo-analysis and an innovative method of named entity recognition. The findings showed a regional gap in political representation in the Netherlands. Indeed, since the mid-90s a dominant centre took much of the political space, mostly in terms of MPs living in the centre. Besides that this study detected a comfortable middle: people in regions that are generally underrepresented yet have low levels of regional discontent. Yet there were also 'vocal' regions in the periphery that were disproportionally overrepresented though very discontented with central government. Importantly, there was also an 'unseen periphery' in which very little MPs were born or resided when they were elected for office. This study found that weighed for population size, the peripheral areas were more frequently mentioned in parliamentary questions, especially the vocal periphery. This study also provided evidence for that MPs greatly act for their 'own' region, especially MPs coming from the periphery.

This least likely case study of the Netherlands, thus, underscored that contemporary regional discontent was most prominent in the rural periphery of the Netherlands. Multiple survey results at NUTS-level 3 regions pointed out that regional discontent can be primarily understood as a wide-shared feeling of one's place being alienated from central state, which is strongly present in peripheral regions. Inhabitants of peripheral regions are generally more satisfied with their living environment while large urban areas in the Dutch centre are less satisfied, which can be considered as a specific form of place-based discontent from urban overdevelopment. This dissertation detected a form of discontent in the periphery, which consists of sentiments of misrecognition of one's place, distance from central state, and deprivation of co-shaping the surrounding in which their everyday life takes place. Yet, peripheral discontent with central state power is likely a long-standing sentiment which is

continuously reignited with new social issues that can be interpreted along the constellation of the centre-periphery divide.

What then are likely explanations for contemporary regional discontent? This dissertation concluded that in the Netherlands politics is out of place, in which the burdens weigh heavily on the peripheral regions. When viewing discontent across regional divides in the Netherlands, there is an imbalance between centre and periphery. Chapter 3 showed that economic divergence and decline are unlikely to explain regional discontent in the Netherlands. This study found that regions with low incomes, low population change, and strong ageing were more prone to being alienated from government actions and institutions. Therefore discontent is strongly related to persistent relative deprivation of peripheral households in terms of income, and to the impact of population decline on quality of life in these regions. In terms of regional redistribution by central government, disadvantaged regions were not thoroughly recognised in recent policy design for regional investments. And lastly, a regionally imbalanced representation in Dutch parliament is also a likely explanation for peripheral discontent. At least from the mid-90s Dutch parliament has been structurally and disproportionately overrepresented by MPs from a dominant and relatively satisfied centre. Even though there are also rather vocal regions in the periphery, discontent was relatively high here.

This dissertation ends with recommendations for policy and future research. Similar to other countries across Europe, many citizens, mostly in peripheral regions, perceive that Dutch central government is out of touch with their place, and national politics is challenged to connect with citizens from these parts of the country. First, to dampen the geography of discontent it might be fruitful to think in terms of the right to co-produce space, and ensuring the right to the periphery. What are the social impacts of new plans for the built environment on peripheral communities, which stakeholders are included, and what are principles of justice in decision-making processes? Second, future research can benefit from further unravelling government rationale of spatial justice in the allocation of place-based investments, as well as from examining spatially diverse impacts of generic – or place-blind – policies. Third, with the change of current social problems, the focus on matters of spatial justice should include environmental risks, industrial pollution, and climate change. More specifically, in relation to vulnerable households and sidelined communities.

Samenvatting (in het Nederlands)

In het afgelopen decennium vormde zich een nieuwe geografie van onvrede in de wereld. Het politieke landschap werd opgeschud door een nieuwe golf van populistische leiders die macht verworven in landen met gevestigde liberale democratieën, met de verkiezing van Trump in 2016 als eerste steen in de vijver. De populistische stem wordt algemeen beschouwd als een uiting van protest door burgers die ontevreden zijn met de manier waarop het land wordt bestuurd door het politieke establishment. Geografen wezen er al gauw op dat langs regionale grenzen binnen landen zich sterke maatschappelijke scheidslijnen ontwikkelden. De internationale golf van populisme werd alom bekend als 'de wraak van de plaatsen die er niet toe doen' en 'plattelands ressentiment', waarmee gebieden die werden geteisterd door sociaaleconomisch verval en die gekenmerkt werden door een landelijke leefstijl, werden gemarkeerd als prominente plaatsen van onvrede.

Ondanks de toegenomen kennis over de geografie van onvrede – ook wel maatschappelijk onbehagen genoemd – is er maar weinig bekend over de verschillende gevoelens van onvrede en over de vele bronnen van de hedendaagse onvrede. Ten eerste is er gat in de wetenschappelijke literatuur die voortkomt uit de geografische context van studies. Er is een gebrek aan onderzoeken die zijn uitgevoerd buiten de specifieke context van de meest waarschijnlijke gevallen (*most likely cases*) zoals de Verenigde Staten en het Verenigd Koninkrijk. Ten tweede is er gebrek aan empirische kennis. De geografie van onvrede wordt vaak enkel gezien als een populistische dreiging, terwijl er nog veel meer te ontdekken valt over de verschillende gevoelens van onvrede die inwoners zouden kunnen delen ongeacht hun stemgedrag. Ten derde is er een gat in de literatuur door de toepassing van conceptuele kennis. Met een conceptuele kijk op sociale rechtvaardigheid kunnen ontevreden burgers ook gezien worden als potentieel kwetsbare groepen die mogelijk worden getroffen door economische tegenspoed, sociale uitsluiting en mishandeling door de staat. Een nogal stedelijke focus in de literatuur over ruimtelijke rechtvaardigheid heeft echter het platteland lange tijd genegeerd.

Dit proefschrift trachtte een grondig begrip te krijgen van de geografie van onvrede, door te onderzoeken hoe gevoelens van onvrede verspreid zijn over regionale scheidslijnen en welke regionale verschillen waarschijnlijke verklaringen bieden voor hedendaagse onvrede in Nederland. In nastreving van dat onderzoeksdoel biedt dit proefschrift een nieuw conceptueel perspectief op de theorie van ruimtelijke rechtvaardigheid. Specifiek biedt deze studie een ruimtelijke herinterpretatie van Fraser's drie dimensies van rechtvaardigheid: de (her)verdeling van rijkdom en middelen, de verdeling van sociale status en erkenning, en de politieke

representatie van sociale groepen. Dit proefschrift nam Nederland als casus, dat wordt beschouwd als een minst waarschijnlijke casus (*least likely case*) voor een geografie van onvrede. Behalve dat Nederland klein en dichtbevolkt is, is het een zeer welvarend land met een proportionele democratie zonder districtenstelsel. Er zijn echter tekenen van geografische kloven. Bij verschillende recente uitbarstingen van sociale onrust, zoals de boerenprotesten, gaven verontwaardigde Nederlandse burgers de schuld aan het politieke establishment uit het centrum – de Randstad – voor het negeren en miskennen van hun streek.

Dit proefschrift heeft de volgende hoofdonderzoeksvraag: hoe verspreidt de hedendaagse onvrede zich over regionale scheidslijnen in Nederland, en welke regionale verschillen zullen dit waarschijnlijk verklaren? Om deze vraag te beantwoorden werd een *mixed-methods* onderzoeksaanpak toegepast bij het verzamelen en analyseren van empirische data. Bovendien is dit een interdisciplinair onderzoek dat voortbouwde op empirisch bewijs en toegepaste methoden uit de economische geografie, ruimtelijke planning, plattelandssociologie, beleidssociologie, politieke geografie en politieke wetenschappen.

Hoofdstuk 2 biedt een empirisch onderbouwd begrip van Fraser's theoretische prisma van rechtvaardigheid in een regionale context. Met een systematisch literatuuroverzicht van de meest recente literatuur, selecteerde ik 134 relevante empirische artikelen over regionale verschillen in Europa en categoriseerde ze volgens kwesties van ruimtelijke onrechtvaardigheid. Veel artikelen benadrukten de negatieve gevolgen van toenemende economische ongelijkheid tussen regio's en van bevolkingskrimp in perifere gemeenschappen. Studies toonden ook de effecten aan van sociale hiërarchie in territoriale status, van minachting vanwege een plattelands leefstijl tot het negeren van de belangen van lokale gemeenschappen. In termen van politieke vertegenwoordiging toonden de resultaten van andere onderzoekers dat onvrede ook bestaat uit een verkeerde voorstelling van politieke zaken door een stedelijk establishment en traditionele conflicten over de onderdrukking van regionale minderheden en territoriale grenzen. Daarmee biedt hoofdstuk 2 zowel een filosofisch gefundeerd als een empirisch onderbouwd overzicht van hoe regionale verschillen zich verhouden tot ruimtelijke rechtvaardigheid.

In hoofdstuk 3 onderzocht ik hoe recente regionale onvrede zich verhoudt tot regionale ongelijkheidstrajecten. Op basis van kwantitatieve analyses van longitudinale gegevens op NUTS-niveau 3 – ook bekend als COROP-regio's – vond deze studie een persistentie van sociale en economische ongelijkheden in de afgelopen tien jaar. De bevindingen toonden aan dat de sociaaleconomische ontwikkeling van regio's in Nederland niet in balans was en dat vooral de plattelandsregio's in de periferie aan het kortste eind trekken. De belangrijkste

bevinding is dat het bewijs voor economische divergentie en achteruitgang op regionale schaal beperkt is, en dat het onwaarschijnlijk is dat dit de huidige regionale onvrede in Nederland verklaart. Paden van regionale divergentie en achteruitgang werden voornamelijk gevonden in demografische veranderingen. Ontevredenheid in de Nederlandse regio's werd sterk geassocieerd met regio's met gemiddeld lagere inkomens, bevolkingskrimp en vergrijzing.

In hoofdstuk 4 van dit proefschrift werd nieuw herverdelingsbeleid voor regionale ontwikkeling in Nederland empirisch geanalyseerd. Ontwikkelingsfondsen worden ontplooid met verschillende overheidsrationaliteiten over wat een ruimtelijk rechtvaardige herverdeling is. In dit proefschrift is een *case study* genomen van het beleidsprogramma 'Regio Deals' in Nederland (2018-2022), met een budget van € 950,- miljoen. Met een kritische beleidsanalyse is in hoofdstuk 4 onderzocht wat de rijksoverheid als een rechtvaardige herverdeling van dit fonds voor regionale ontwikkeling beschouwde en hoe dat de toebedeling van regionale investeringen heeft beïnvloed. De bevindingen toonden aan dat hoewel de Nederlandse centrale overheid regio's die achterblijven in woord problematiseert, de beleidsinstrumenten niet zijn ontworpen om specifiek te investeren in de meest zwakke gebieden. Dit onderzoek concludeerde dat als gevolg van een grotendeels utilitair beleidsontwerp voor investeringen in regionale ontwikkeling, de erkenning van zwakke regio's door de centrale overheid beperkt bleef.

In hoofdstuk 5 onderzocht ik de politieke vertegenwoordiging van regio's in de Nederlandse proportionele democratie, een parlementair systeem zonder districtszetels. Deze studie bouwde een unieke geo-gerefereerde dataset op voor de periode van 1994 tot 2021, die bestaat uit (a) de geboorte- en woonplaats van 1 188 parlementsleden, (b) 67 686 schriftelijke parlementaire vragen, en (c) enquêtegegevens van regionale onvrede. Om deze grote dataset te analyseren, heb ik een beschrijvende geo-analyse en een innovatieve methode van *named entity recognition* toegepast. De bevindingen toonden een regionaal verschil in politieke vertegenwoordiging in Nederland. Inderdaad, sinds het midden van de jaren 90 nam een dominant centrum een groot deel van de politieke ruimte in beslag, vooral in termen van parlementsleden die in de Randstad woonden. Daarnaast toonde dit onderzoek een comfortabel midden: mensen in regio's die over het algemeen ondervertegenwoordigd zijn maar toch een laag niveau van regionale onvrede hebben. Toch waren er ook 'vocale' regio's in de periferie die onevenredig oververtegenwoordigd waren, maar zeer ontevreden waren over de rijksoverheid. Belangrijk is dat er ook een 'ongeziene periferie' was waarin heel weinig parlementsleden werden geboren of woonden toen ze voor hun ambt werden gekozen. Uit dit onderzoek bleek dat de perifere gebieden, gewogen naar de bevolkingsomvang, vaker werden

genoemd in parlementaire vragen, met name de vocale periferie. Uit dit onderzoek bleek ook dat Kamerleden zich sterk inzetten voor de 'eigen' regio, met name Kamerleden uit de periferie.

Als *least likely case* voor de geografie van onvrede onderstreept dit onderzoek over Nederland dat de hedendaagse regionale onvrede ook aanwezig is in Nederland, waarbij hogere concentraties van onvrede voornamelijk aanwezig zijn in de plattelandsstreken in de periferie van Nederland. Uit meerdere enquêteresultaten in regio's van NUTS-niveau 3 bleek dat regionale onvrede in de eerste plaats kan worden opgevat als een breed gedeeld gevoel van vervreemding van de centrale staat, die sterk aanwezig is in perifere regio's. Inwoners van perifere regio's zijn over het algemeen meer tevreden met hun woonomgeving, terwijl grote stedelijke gebieden in het Nederlandse centrum minder tevreden zijn, wat kan worden beschouwd als een specifieke vorm van plaatsgebonden onvrede door stedelijke overontwikkeling. Dit proefschrift onderstreept een sterke vorm van onvrede in de periferie die voortkomt uit gevoelens van miskenning van iemands woonplaats. Deze plaatsgebonden onvrede bestaat uit een gevoel dat de nationale politiek geen oog heeft voor 'hun' leefomgeving, waardoor mensen zich onmachtig voelen in het mede vormgeven van de omgeving waarin hun dagelijks leven plaatsvindt. Toch is perifere onvrede met de nationale politiek waarschijnlijk een al lang bestaand gevoel dat voortdurend opnieuw wordt aangewakkerd met nieuwe sociale kwesties die kunnen worden geïnterpreteerd langs de constellatie van de scheiding tussen centrum en periferie.

Wat zijn dan waarschijnlijke verklaringen voor de hedendaagse regionale onvrede? In dit proefschrift werd geconcludeerd dat de politiek in Nederland niet op zijn plaats is, waarbij de lasten zwaar wegen op de perifere regio's. Bij het bekijken van onvrede over de regionale scheidslijnen in Nederland, bestaat er een onbalans tussen centrum en periferie. Hoofdstuk 3 liet zien dat economische divergentie en achteruitgang de regionale onvrede in Nederland waarschijnlijk niet verklaren. Uit deze studie bleek dat regio's met lage inkomens, bevolkingskrimp en vergrijzing vatbaarder waren voor vervreemding van overheidshandelen en -instellingen. Onvrede houdt dan ook sterk verband met regio's met lagere inkomens en met de impact van bevolkingskrimp op de levenskwaliteit in deze regio's. In termen van regionale herverdeling door de centrale overheid, werden structureel zwakkere regio's niet grondig erkend in het recente beleidsontwerp voor regionale investeringen. En tot slot is een regionaal onevenwichtige vertegenwoordiging in het Nederlandse parlement ook een waarschijnlijke verklaring voor perifere onvrede. In ieder geval vanaf het midden van de jaren 90 is het Nederlandse parlement structureel en onevenredig oververtegenwoordigd door

parlementsleden uit een dominante en een redelijk tevreden Randstad. Ook al zijn er in de periferie ook nogal vocale regio's, waar de onvrede relatief groot was.

Dit proefschrift eindigt met enkele aanbevelingen voor beleid en toekomstig onderzoek. Net als in andere landen in Europa, hebben veel burgers in Nederland, met name in perifere regio's, het gevoel dat centrale overheid weinig binding heeft met hun leefomgeving. De nationale politiek wordt uitgedaagd om weer verbinding te maken met burgers uit deze delen van het land. Ten eerste kan het, om de geografie van onvrede te temperen, vruchtbaar zijn om te denken in termen van het recht om ruimte te co-creëren en zo 'het recht op de periferie' te waarborgen. Wat zijn de maatschappelijke effecten van nieuwe plannen voor de gebouwde omgeving op perifere gemeenschappen, welke belanghebbenden worden erbij betrokken en wat zijn rechtvaardigheidsbeginselen in besluitvormingsprocessen? Ten tweede kan toekomstig onderzoek baat hebben bij het verder ontrafelen van de rationaliteiten en ideeën van rechtvaardigheid die overheden toepassen bij de toewijzing van plaatsgebonden investeringen, en bij het onderzoeken van ruimtelijk diverse effecten van generiek – of plaatsblind – beleid. Ten derde, met de verandering van de huidige sociale problemen, zou de focus op kwesties van ruimtelijke rechtvaardigheid ook milieurisico's, industriële vervuiling en klimaatverandering moeten omvatten. Specifiek met betrekking tot de bescherming van kwetsbare huishoudens en kleine lokale gemeenschappen.