Unveiling Community Dynamics:

An Analysis of Decision-Making in Sieben Linden

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Abstract

Traditional bottom-up implementation theory has focused primarily on local-level processes, but this perspective may not fully empower all relevant actors. Regarding the combat of the climate crisis, the implementation process must account for those who are directly affected by the policy's outcomes. Implementation theory could be re-examined through a feminist theoretical lens in order to better comprehend and engage multiple actors. Feminist perspectives cast light on the significance of collaborative decision-making and the complexity of the variables that influence implementation outcomes, including positionality, performance, and diversity. This paper investigates the feminist strategies used by the case of Sieben Linden Ecovillage, a local initiative, to achieve its objectives. This study utilizes qualitative research methods, including field research and thematic analysis, to investigate the community's decision-making efforts. This paper focuses on the community's creative strategies and how they align with a feminist approach in implementation theories. This study contributes to a greater understanding of the value of feminist approaches to implementation and their capacity to effect positive social change.

Key words: implementation, feminist approach, ecovillage, Sieben Linden, decision-making
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1   Introduction

„If you want to change the world, change your country.
If you want to change your country, change your city.
If you want to change your city, change your street.
If you want to change your street, change your house.
You want to change your house, then change yourself."

– Laotse (jetztrettenwirdiewelt.de, 2016)

The world faces a climate crisis, which requires the action of every human being to feel fewer consequences and gain enough resources for living. If nations and people do not act now, our planet will be in a dark place. The effects of the climate crisis are unevenly distributed across the globe. In some parts of the planet, regions are inundated, while on the other, forests are engulfed in flames (IPCC, 2022). The diverse outcomes require the adoption of diverse strategies. This quote exemplifies the objective behind this master's thesis on climate change, which concentrates on local communities and individuals who effect change at the grassroots level, which includes for example self-organizational strategies to reach more sustainability (Kooij et.al., 2018). Regarding the economy and the environment, businesses, individuals, and politicians must reduce their carbon footprint. Therefore, a hands-on strategy is required to tackle the problems at their origins. The requirement to intervene more at the local level and to give local policies and individuals more voice and authority may assist in modifying our behavior. There are a variety of grassroots initiatives, but this thesis examines the concept of an ecovillage and how they implement the aims and policies they devised. Ecovillages empower the individual and adapt an inclusive governance for decision-making to decarbonize in their social and environment context (Schwab/Roysen, 2022).

Over the years various approaches were implemented and examined in implementation theory. The thesis challenges conventional top-down implementation processes and emphasizes the significance of negotiation and consensus-building in decision-making by adopting a feminist perspective. Therefore, the feminist theories are based on a bottom-up approach, which seek to

empower the local levels and groups affected by policies. This thesis focuses on the instance of an ecovillage, which has its own decision-making strategies, and attempts to comprehend its process through a feminist lens.

1.1   Aim and Research Question

This master's thesis focuses on an ecovillage as a case for an alternative initiative that has emerged over the past decade. In response to the pressing need to fight the climate crisis, ecovillages have emerged as a significant alternative lifestyle. These green communities are founded on a grassroots social movement and have been studied in a number of academic fields. Ecovillages are distinctive in that they prioritize participant decision-making and self-sufficiency. They strive for this by making decisions such as growing their own food, utilizing renewable energy, and especially residing in a community that is close together (Litfin, 2014).

Sustainability represents the main objective of all ecovillages. Sustainability includes the general understanding for "integration of environmental health, social equity and economic vitality in order to create thriving, healthy, diverse, and resilient communities for this generation and generations to come. The practice of sustainability recognizes how these issues are interconnected and requires a systems approach and an acknowledgement of complexity" (Sustainability Committee, 2016, p.2).

Accordingly, the thesis focuses on the various strategies for decision-making to reach the similar goals of ecovillages. It appears that the ecovillage decision-making idea strive for the feminist approach, because it reflects on critically of the top-down and of the bottom-up approach in implementation theory and subsequently implementation aligns with the decision-making.

The primary argument for the significance of a feminist approach in implementation theory is that it improves the efficacy and inclusiveness of the implementation process by addressing power dynamics, promoting diverse perspectives, and emphasizing participation and collaboration among multiple actors (Carey et.al., 2017).

The thesis aims to understand to what extent the implementation process of the case of a German ecovillage called Sieben Linden shows similarities with the feminist approach. Therefore, the research is guided by the following research question:

How can we understand the decision-making process among members of Sieben Lindens' aspects of community life from a feminist perspective?

Considering implementation theory in this case involves leadership, communication, and feedback mechanisms, which influence the implementation process and plays a crucial role in decision-making. These factors determine whether policy implementation is effective or not.

This study also examines the implementation process of Sieben Linden, with an essential focus on environmentally friendly principles that are vital to the well-being of future generations. My curiosity was piqued by the absence of decision-making practices and the community's advocacy for greater participation.

Furthermore, it has been debated whether policy implementation requires policymakers to impose stringent conditions, as in the top-down approach, or whether it should be looser and more flexible, as in the bottom-up approach (Imperial, 2021).

Ecovillages typically adopt a bottom-up implementation theory perspective, because of this greater participation in decision-making (Fischer, 2017). Sieben Linden stands out, however, because of its seemingly connection to feminist theories. By involving multiple actors, promoting laxer regulations, and encouraging creative implementation, the community's objectives remain adaptable despite their width (Carey et.al., 2017). This approach seems to align with Sieben Linden's decision-making process.

In this sense, the paper does focus how the actors in Sieben Linden interact with each other. It tries to understand the dynamics and effectiveness of the guiding principles, and how they improve failed situations. Due to the importance of communication in Sieben Linden, this study evaluates the decision-making process and outcome to determine if they appear to have a feminist perspective. Their entire mechanism for achieving the objectives outlined in their policy paper, which serves as the foundation for Sieben Linden, is based on conscious communication. Consequently, the Sieben Linden Ecovillage does not represent a perfect world or

a utopia, the residents and the councils are constantly working and evolving their current ideas and situation (Bocco et.al, 2019).

Sieben Linden is selected as a case study because the diversity of each ecovillage depends on the results of the decision procedures. The decision-making process in Sieben Linden will be the primary focus of this study.

As a native German speaker, my decision to concentrate on Sieben Linden is influenced by the availability of data collection, which eliminates language barriers.

1.2   Outline of the Thesis

The subsequent section provides an outline of the following thesis, which begins with a section on the context of ecovillages, why their criteria are unique, and how they compare to other local initiatives. In addition, this section describes the objectives and strategies of Sieben Linden. The literature review illustrates the lack of research on the implementation of specific objectives and policies. The theoretical framework, which intervenes in the literature review, discusses the aforementioned implementation theory approaches and how I utilize the theory in understanding Sieben Linden's community life aspects. The section on methodology will analyze the collected data prior to discussing the findings and conclusions.

2   Background

Before delving deeper into theory and methods, a discussion of the apparent problems, why an alternative way of life is necessary, and how it relates to ecovillages is crucial. The second stage in gaining an understanding of the bottom-up movement is to examine the historical context of ecovillages. Last but not least, the background section clarifies Sieben Linden's objectives and the means by which they intend to achieve them.

Economic growth plays an important part in our capitalistic world and everything depends on the model of a high GDP in welfare states. GDP reflects on the wellbeing in our societies, although it has been discussed differently by various scholars. GDP does not measure the quality and quantity of the existing economy, as one argument stated. The implementation of GDP dates back to the 20th century, when it was coupled to measure the finances of the wars (Lawlor, 2013). GDP might be outdated as a measurement for the future, because it ignores important pieces of a functional economy, such as resources or climate change. A high GDP is not justifiable anymore, as the resources of the planet do not grow fast enough. Rethinking economic growth in the long run depicts the challenge of policy makers and implementation policies, which address these problems but fail to enforce measurements (Baumol et.al., 2007).

Environmental protection is a political issue, as well as a personal one that may be changed by the individual by starting small, such as taking the bus or train instead of driving a car. However, a potential solving of climate change and transformation in behavior, production and consumption.

People already desire an alternative lifestyle in order to escape today's society and its capitalistic structure. These people reside in ecovillage communities and try to minimize their carbon impact in all facets of life (Temesgen, 2020).

Ecovillages differ significantly from each other, which is discussed in more detail in this section. They especially differ in their number of residents, whereas some

only live in small ecovillages with twenty or forty people and other communities exist with hundreds of people (Jackson, 2004). Consequently, the mechanisms on how to implement goals and policies depend on the number of residents. Ecovillages with more than hundred residents try out different systems for decision-making, for example sociocracy or participant governance.

However, the people living within in the communities work with each other and every person plays a part, because they share their resources and are very inclusive in their decision-making (Hall, 2015). Therefore, ecovillages aim to minimalize their carbon footprint, strengthen social inclusion and collective decision-making. As Harold Wilhite explained, ecovillages challenge the capitalist system of "private ownership and individual accumulation" (Temesgen, 2020, p.18). Ecovillages rethink the relationship between individuals and communities (Avelino/Wittmayer, 2018). Ultimately, ecovillages attempt a bottom-up social change, which starts with the individual and its household and then goes further from this point (Litfin, 2014). This corresponds to the quote from the introduction, only the other way around.

There exist three characteristics, which the ecovillage concept took as motivation for their change of living: social, ecological and spiritual elements. These three factors intervene in the way of living and most ecovillages links them (Jackson, 2004). Each ecovillage does connect or live these three characteristics differently, though. For example, the Findhorn ecovillage in Scotland is based on a strong spiritual factor, which led to a strong foundation within the community. People share the same values, which keep them together (Temesgen, 2020, p.12).

In ecovillages, the social aspect plays an equally vital function as sustainability. Most ecovillages characterize themselves as labor hubs and constantly developing networks (Fischer, 2017). They are not scared of new ways of thinking, which makes them flexible in their own ways of thinking and of permanent rethinking of their values or principles. Accordingly, the research of ecovillages in their constant change and development could help to improve policy implementation on the local level.

In order to comprehend why ecovillages are one option for alternative living, a broad discussion on the concept of ecovillages requires a profound description in the following section.

Each ecovillage has a unique living system and means of subsisting; some have private property, some adhere to communist principles, which they share everything and then there are all variations in between the two extremes. Most ecovillages frame a two-class society with renters and owners. It depends on the ecovillage, but the owners could be individuals or institutions and corporations. Furthermore, the residents work either in the "outside world", which means in neighboring villages or cities or are employed by the ecovillage institutions or corporations. For example, in some ecovillages working places such as hairdresser, plumber, but also dance and yoga teacher exist and a lot of people claim responsibility for education and teaching in seminars and workshops. The ecovillages earn money through offering these seminars about sustainability but also spiritual ones and they offer them for people, who do not live in the ecovillage (Litfin, 2014).

In this context, ecovillages try to think long-term and be independent off of the larger economy in potential collapse in the future, because there are no more resources. Residents intent to live self-sufficient by sharing goods and concepts such as "elegant simplicity" and focuses on less consumption (Litfin, 2014, p.81). With the concept of doing less and keeping an eye on the future, they create a balance between social life, the economy and ecological issues.

To achieve these goals, residents act as differently as the ecovillage itself. Some residents try to live sustainably only in their daily lives, while others try to influence the outside world and share their knowledge with non-residents (Erdgas, 2010). However, the main goal is sustainability, which is defined differently by various scholars such as politicians, economists, and even ecovillagers themselves.

In conclusion, researchers try to identify characteristics of the ecovillage concept: Firstly, an ecovillage is built by individuals, who are the residents and not a government or company. Secondly, the community hold a strong bond to each other and the decision-making bases around the rule of consensus. Thirdly, the ecovillage tries to utilize their own resources and takes control of them. Fourthly, the residents share the same values regarding to changing their life because of the climate change. Last but not least, they provide education for everyone who is interested (Wibawa, 2021).

2.1 Ecovillages and other Initiative Concepts

For further understanding of the case of ecovillages, the classification of ecovillages in the context of ecovillages and other initiatives follows in this part. In this context, the criteria of ecovillages, aforementioned in the background section, will be compared to other local sustainable initiatives and how they implement their goals on a local level. The goals include sustainability and to reduce the carbon footprint, because of the rising air pollution in most cities. There exist various solutions to fight the climate crisis, but the ecovillages go the most radical way with their concept as it says it breaks with the capitalistic world and the residents live by their own. However, this concept got more flexible for most ecovillages in comparison to the past and they try to connect with their surrounding communities and share knowledge. Other local initiatives also make decisions in a mostly bottom-up approach and by participatory governance, which will be outlined in the following paragraph.

Some communities did already address the problem of the climate change and many do change their living especially in transition to renewable energy. Since nuclear power and its concerns got into the spotlight in the 1980s, people think of alternatives. Municipalities play an important role in transitioning the energy power to a more sustainable one. Stakeholders in these communities have a major impact on whether sustainable energy implementation takes hold, and furthermore, each community has a different strategy for achieving its goals (Fenton et. al., 2015). Researchers compare municipalities to try to find out the different strategies. It shows that the rational choice shifted to more communicative models and alternative factors influence the development (Fenton et.al., 2015). Therefore, different strategies take place in different areas around the world to make a change and communities try to be more self-sufficient in relation to energy power. This aspect is one main goal of ecovillages, but the social aspect and closer community living reach for further action.

One of the most important initiatives in a broader sense are grassroot initiatives, which are created by a group of people within a community, which build awareness of sustainable development and improve living with mostly technological resources

and social innovation (Magnusson, 2018). Grassroot initiatives define themselves as community-based work which includes people, who want to make a change on the ground (Ricee, 2020). The main concept of these initiatives includes people's voluntary involvement and strong motivation for environmentally friendly actions (Middlemiss/Parrish, 2010). Lucie Middlemiss and Bradley Parrish found several strategies about grassroot initiatives in relation to carbon footprint reduction, which plays the most important role in clarification of goals. First, these initiatives can help communities reduce their carbon footprint. Second, the initiatives address different capacities within the community, for example, personal capacity, which includes individual understanding of sustainability, and infrastructural capacity, which expounds housing and transportation. Third, grassroots initiatives define their own path to sustainability within their available capacity. Lastly, they create new mechanisms within the community that enable social change (Middlemiss/Parrish, 2010, p. 7566). Grassroot initiatives therefore are not particularly different from ecovillages in terms of diversity and surrounding resources, especially because ecovillages define itself within grassroot initiatives. However, the initiatives support existing communities rather than building a new one, because they act within the social economy. Subsequently, they try to intervene with existing policies and depend on institutional change (Kooij et.al., 2018).

One movement that has grown in the last decade is the so-called "Transition Town" initiative. They emerged around 2005 in the United Kingdom and are defined similarly to ecovillages. This initiative builds on existing local communities and promote carbon footprint reduction on the local level. They primarily seek to be self-sufficient by supporting local businesses and having their own food system. These factors have similarities to an ecovillage and the knowledge they are aiming to achieve, to be more sustainable and sharing knowledge, also plays a role. In addition, the Transition Town initiative also creates a guide to an alternative way of life. The guide, as Lockyer describes it, needs to be concrete, but also flexible to adapt and respond to different obstacles at hand. The most important goal of the guide is to reduce fossil fuel use and dependence on society (Lockyer, 2010). The implementation process in these initiatives proceeds through volunteers who are committed to the community and they provide the skills and tasks for topics such as climate change and economic implication. Furthermore, the main committee

creates other committees, which address sub-topics as food and transportation in relation to reduce the carbon-footprint. The plans get implemented by the committees within the community (Lockyer, 2010).

The contact between Transition Town initiatives and other nearby communities is the fundamental distinction between ecovillages and these initiatives. The residents of Transition Town initiatives seek to create a link between themselves and the outside world (Lockyer, 2010). Ecovillages are an attempt by society to break away from the status quo, and their initial concept implied exclusion from civilization. Although ecovillages are working harder than ever to assist their surroundings to become sustainable and to share their knowledge with other local communities as well as the Global Ecovillage Network, this change is happening slower than planned (Andreas, 2013). Every social movement, especially grassroot initiative presents a special diversity, because the people and every individual have different knowledge and thoughts about the topic they focus on. Ecovillages seem very similar to other grassroot initiatives and their concept develop through time, because they are in constant change and network with other non-residents.

The main critical part of ecovillages relies in the social distance to the outside world. Most people in society have not heard about ecovillage and the phenomena arose not long ago. Therefore, other initiatives with focus on sustainability get more common and local communities and cities try to be more sustainable in their own way and without changing the people's life in a radical way.

Ecovillages focus on themselves shows that they have an own way of implementation, which constitutes as an advantage as they have their own economic cycle. The independency of ecovillages appearance that the barriers and obstacles which come with institutional structures, do not occur in these villages.

The next part of this thesis concentrates on the literature about ecovillages and how their implementation has been studied.

2.2 A brief History of Ecovillages

In the following part the history of ecovillages will be outlined to show where the bottom-up movement came from and how it grew and got popular over the decade. They developed from a green movement to a more social community and focus on a strong bond within the village.

Communities that live sustainably have been around longer than the term ecovillage came along. Co-housing is one of the main features of an ecovillage, but the concept of co-housing has been around since the concept of multigenerational houses. So, alternative or sustainable housing in social terms possess a long tradition. However, the social movements in the 1960s and 1970s increased the rethinking of society and especially the discussion concerning the use of nuclear power facilitated an increase of emerging green movements (Litfin, 2014).

The first ecovillages, which focused on ecological principles, were founded in Germany in 1970 to fight against nuclear waste (Farkas, 2017). From that moment on, the concept of sustainable living spread throughout the world. The roots of ecovillages lie in intentional communities that originated as early as the Roman Empire (Farkas, 2017). Intentional communities built on close social aspects and share the same values (Encyclopedia, 2023). The phenomenon became more popular around the globe in the 20th century, and Findhorn in Scotland was an important community established in 1962 (Farkas, 2017).

However, it was not until the 1990s that the term ecovillage emerged, and most of these intentional communities defined themselves as ecovillages from then on. With the establishment of the Global Ecovillage Network in 1995, the term and the widely used concept of an ecovillage developed (Jackson, 2004). The developed concept represents an alternative sustainable way of life. The network should support similar initiatives and have an educational factor (Farkas, 2017). Furthermore, two big goals were established which include the social factor and close community living with environmental friendly values in practice (Magnusson, 2018). These goals can be found in a combination of social, economic, and environmental factors, which were defined during this period (Wagner, 2012). These factors also interact with each other in any intentional community, and mostly a community begins with one and ends with an alignment of all three factors (Jackson, 2004). Consequently, these factors represent the basic concept of

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ecovillages, and each ecovillage implements their regulations and policies on the base of these.

Ross Jackson, one of the founders of Findhorn and the Global Ecovillage Network, described this social movement as a new but necessary global movement and ecovillage residents believe that everyone must eventually live like ecovillage residents. The reason for the creation of this the movement lies in the goal they want to achieve: breaking out of the neoliberal economic system, which fails to focus on the consequences of resource degradation. The social movement takes place by distancing themselves from demonstrations and trying to change their entire lifestyle by building their own community based on "limited resources with personal commitment" (Jackson, 2004, p.1ff.).

However, the radical idea of distancing from society shifted in the last decade. The awareness of sharing the knowledge about alternative living increased. Ecovillages intent to remain in contact with their neighboring communities and support them with different projects. Furthermore, the possibility to share knowledge online also helps to connect with different initiatives as transition towns and the younger generation in ecovillages try to reaches out to people who are interested in this lifestyle (Magnusson, 2018). The goals stayed the same through the decades, which solidifies the argument for a potential success of implementation.

2.3   Sieben Linden Ecovillage

For further understanding of the case, the following section represents the ecovillage Sieben Linden, how they are organized, structured and what their goals are. This section provides an overview of the structure of the ecovillage Sieben Linden, which is located in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. It defines itself as a "social-ecological settlement", which means the residents live very closely in the community and combines the two factors of the ecovillage concept: social and ecology (Gerace/Pollini, 2019). It is located near infrastructure such as public transportation, which the founders specifically considered when building the ecovillage, and thus residents have a connection to the neighboring area.

The concept of this particular ecovillage began, as mentioned earlier, with the discussion of nuclear waste and people's desire for an alternative life compared to the capitalist world. However, the idea of the radical change to an alternative lifestyle is more of a utopia than a realistic concept. Thus, the idea shifted to a community living model and from this point the community values and organization were created.

This concept of communal living was created by a cooperative. From the beginning it was assumed that in order to become self-sufficient it must also create other cooperatives and associations, which offer jobs within the village.

The Siedlungsgenossenschaft (settlement coorperative) and the Wohnungsgenos-senschaft (housing coorperative) own most of the ecovillage and manages its finances. In addition, the Freundeskreis Ökodorf e.V. (Friends of the Ecovillage Association) takes care of public relations, for example, seminars or workshops. These three organizations also employ most of the residents. The association Naturwaren Sieben Linden e.V. for example, takes care of supplying the residents with organic food and cosmetics (Gerace/Pollini, 2019).

Another structure which has been built through the years, because of the number of residents include the subcommunities. Each resident lives in one, but can also switch to another. Each subcommunity takes responsibility for the common values and work (Gerace/Pollini, 2019). The definition of subcommunities in relation to Sieben Linden include the housing possibilities. Residents, who would like to live in a house are responsible for the building and finding other residents, who would like to live together. In this sense, they are also responsible for the financing of the house and also how they would like to live, for example: in one household, several apartments or in a shared kitchen model (Althoff, 2023). It represents the goal of self-responsibility, which means every resident is responsible for their own development as an individual and the awareness of how they feel and speak up, if they feel different about decisions, housing etc.

The following part discusses the goals of Sieben Linden and the vision they have in mind when they implemented the guidance principle in the policy paper. The ecovillage started with the goal of the cooperation between human beings and nature. This means, they seek for decentralized structures, self-sufficiency and self-responsibility. These three goals intervene with each other and in more detail, it

means the awareness of other people and the awareness that resources are limited, which shaped the daily business in Sieben Linden (Kunze, 2016).

The goals interact in each aspect of community and individual life and are framed within a policy paper. The plan includes principles to follow in relation to buildings, diet and mobility. These three factors illustrate a magnificent part of reducing the carbon footprint individually (Gough/Meadowcroft, 2011). They therefore challenge the status quo by looking for alternative practices in daily life. It means they are recrafting, substituting and interlocking in these three factors (Kunze, 2016).

The principles of the ecovillage present strict guidance for each organization, which need to be adapted by new members and guests. However, what does these fundamental goals mean in the outcome?

In relation to housing, the balance between building with the surrounded resources and how the houses have been built needs to be kept in mind. The materials are mostly wood and natural resources. Most of the residents share a lot in relation of work tasks, food, but also housings. It its strictly forbidden to own houses and only the Wohnungsgenossenschaft or a registered association owns them (Gerace/Pollini, 2019).

In regard to food, it presents the same with housing. The whole community takes the responsibility the of shared food with the own food production from the garden. They produce 70% of their own food, which has been set as a goal from the Naturwaren and represents the goal of self-sufficiency (Naturwaren Sieben Linden e.V., 2023).

Mobility has the same requirements, as the people share cars in the ecovillages, but residents also own private cars. All in all, to reach the goal of climate protection the residents try to minimize the usage of cars. Firstly, they have alternatives as carsharing, bikes, or being close to public transport. Secondly, residents who work for an employer, which does not exist in the ecovillage, try to work in a home office concept within the ecovillage (Gerace/Pollini, 2019).

These regulations have been implemented by the Siedlungsgenossenschaft and the Wohnungsgenossenschaft. They built a framework of rules and visions, to reach the goals (Kunze, 2016).

However, the regulations of how to build a house, how to grow food or how to make use of mobility have not been explained in the policy paper from 2015 (Ökodorf Sieben Linden, 2015).

The system of the councils does not get explained in the policy paper, but reflects on the decentralized structure they aimed for. The councils have been implemented in 2008. The goal of the council system expounds that not everyone has to attend every meeting and the different councils are built on trust. Currently there are seven councils represented by the associations mentioned above. The councils operate on the base of autonomy and consensus. Each year, all residents elect new councils, and the councils are responsible for decision-making, except for decisions involving new residents or investments of more than 40,000€. Moreover, their consensus is based on a two-thirds majority (Sieben Linden, 2023). This close community living concept also decides on choosing new members. New members require a substantial integration in the community, which includes "a two-week seminar, followed by a one-year trial stay" (Gerace/Pollini, 2019, p.9).

3 Literature Review

The following literature review reflects on the existing study of ecovillage goals and their implementation process. In addition, the review focuses on the development of implementation theory and its different approaches.

The literature review will take a closer look at the existing literature on ecovillages and their goals, as the following arguments will be used to analyze the research gap. However, in order to understand implementation theory, an overview of the theory is needed first, and then the different approaches to implementation theory are discussed. The different approaches help to strengthen the theory and to further understand the case. The theory presents many obstacles in practice, but an ecovillage presents the case of a successful practice. They question the status quo and therefore rethink their coexistence with people and nature. Ultimately, they implement their goals and strategies differently than countries.

3.1 Ecovillages' implemented Goals

This section reviews the literature on the main ecovillage goals and how researcher intent to scale them up to other social contexts. The review assists a broader understanding of how ecovillages have been studied.

Researchers sought to understand the concept of ecovillages and whether it could be applied to a broader and even global context, as the success of ecovillages intrigues different people and could provide an alternative lifestyle for today's society. Most studies began in the 1990s and continue today as the number of ecovillages increases.

The sustainable social movement impressed researchers because it brought about a radical change in people's lives and the intention of leaving the capitalist system. The success of the ecovillages piqued the interest of researchers. Such an alternative way of life received more attention and researchers linked it to different approaches,

because goals of ecovillages addresses topics such as social inclusion, sustainability, and empowering individuals (Schwab/ Roysen, 2022).

Comparisons with other existing approaches became more popular in research. To make sense of these comparisons, studies tried to apply them to a broader concept. This remains the most important task for researchers, because ecovillages could be a solution to combat the climate crisis as their main goal represent to be sustainable in every way. For example, how can the concept of ecovillage be applied in the Bandung region, Indonesia? (Wibawa, 2021). In this work, the sustainable concept of the ecovillage is intended to improve slums. The goals of an ecovillage, which represents environmentally friendly behavior and social interaction, were studied and it was examined whether it is possible to transfer this concept to other local levels such as slum. In the slum, different mechanisms such as a recycling system and the construction of houses with natural materials were introduced. In the end, the researcher pointed out five characteristics of ecovillages that can be transferred to other local levels. By prioritizing environmental goals and living closer together in the community, slum dwellers were able to enjoy a higher standard of living (Wibawa, 2021). In this sense, the main factor for successful implementation of ecovillages is that they share the same values and strive to decentralize power.

Another concept that has been studied by Robert Hall and compared with ecovillages is the improvement of the concept of wellbeing contained in the welfare state, and that wellbeing fails to be linked only to income or economic status (2015). The argument made in the research, that sustainable development and the improvement of well-being should be sought, is the need to combine different resources in the implementation process. The research states that ecovillages have successful implementation because they have "developed techniques and procedures to retain a balanced and integrated approach to planning, budgeting, and execution so that all aspects are considered." (Hall, 2015, p.31). Therefore, the argument of implementation theory requires cross-boundary work at different levels and is further elaborated in the implementation literature review. The main goal for ecovillages also symbolizes the "subjective wellbeing" of each resident and a higher quality of life (Hall, 2015, p.31). Therefore, the individual is as important as the collective, and the goals respond subjectively and require flexibility that cannot be fulfilled if a policy is written down with requirements that are very precise.

The concept of performance evaluation shows how sustainable ecovillages are depicted in reality (Aoki Bissolotti et.al., 2006). This approach to assessing sustainability in different ecovillages is very popular. Due to the differences between ecovillages, there exist different definitions of sustainability. When comparing concepts with ecovillages, people try to apply them to the broader concept, but it remains difficult because the scale of the large society creates obstacles.

In conclusion, most of the literature on ecovillages focuses on two different approaches how people in the ecovillages implement sustainability: Individuality and Community.

3.1.1 Individual Implementation

Ecovillages in Western countries are typically small communities where individualism matters (Hall, 2015). The overarching goals have been set by the ecovillage, but individuals subjectively practice how to implement these goals and achieve sustainability in their daily affairs, as each person and thus ecovillage residents are different (Erdgas, 2010). For example, driving cars are usually not allowed in ecovillage's properties, but residents own cars and park them off-site and still drive to various events (Erdgas, 2010). The controversy of achieving sustainability and the strict policy of no cars allowed on the property shows a clear requirement of the ecovillage. However, in this sense, residents are allowed to achieve their goal of sustainability individually, because they argue everyone is responsible for their own actions.

3.1.2 Community Implementation

Sustainability is the central definition and represents the theoretical framework in most literature on ecovillages. However, it is not only about becoming economically sustainable, but also representing a goal in other areas of life, such as the cultural and social spheres. Bijay Singh, Martina Keitsch, and Mahesh Shrestha noted that sustainable development is rooted in regional identity rather than in the individual (2019). Therefore, ecovillage residents share the same values of sustainability, but also social inclusion, which helps to implement goals as a community.

Ecovillage literature emphasizes the desire for self-sufficiency and the use of techniques such as solar panels and growing own food (Wibawa, 2021). The entire community participates in the acquisition of materials for and implementation of these techniques, ensuring that they correspond with the ecovillage's objectives. Literature on the concepts and various definitions of sustainability as they relate to ecovillages shows that ecovillages are achieving their goals but generally have the potential to achieve higher levels of sustainability. However, in ecovillages, as in other intentional communities, there exists obstacles such as the different opinions of residents. Accordingly, ecovillages develop different strategies for how they make decisions and to implement them.

3.1.3 Decision-making

In this part, literature on ecovillages addresses decision-making, participation, and governance. The concept of ecovillages shows that decision-making in communities is based on consensus and that each resident can express their opinion. Researchers such as Frank Fischer described participatory governance in Sieben Linden and concluded, similar to others, that consensual decision-making is a difficulty, as it is in any other constellation of a community or society (2017). In this case, ecovillages have established hierarchical structures in some ways to make day-to-day decisions. Therefore, residents can focus on their way of living sustainable and do not have to attend every meeting (Waerther, 2014). In addition, literature related to participatory governance and decision-making presents the goals and policies in a broader framework. It examines the process and development of strategies for decision-making rather than looking at the actual goals in detail (Fischer, 2017). The process of how they implement their goals and the process of decision-making takes on an important role in the implementation process because the implementation of policies begins with decision-making and continues through the process to the actual outcome (Cerna, 2013).

The broader presentation of ecovillage goals in literature shows a gap in this research area. On the one hand, most researchers do not go into detail because they are conducting larger studies on different ecovillages such as Karen Litfin and comparing ecovillages with each other. There exist specific topics in research on

ecovillages, and also the theories or concepts used, apply to different ecovillages around the world. Literature on ecovillages also stresses a specificity in every respect as it deals with single ecovillages in depth. The detailed study of Sieben Linden by Susanne Pollini and Martina Gerace focused on a small scale on the Sieben Linden leadership, which they had taken from the research of Iris Kunze. They explained the interaction between different areas of life: food, mobility and housing (Gerace/ Pollini, 2019). Although they did not focus on the implementation process of the guidelines, they listed the broader goals of the ecovillage in their research. The exploration of the Sieben Linden goals has been presented in more detail by Iris Kunze. She examined Sieben Linden's development in the three areas mentioned above where individuals can reduce their ecological footprint the most (Kunze, 2016). Furthermore, she expounded that the leadership and structures in ecovillages in general require flexibility for the needs of individuals (Fischer, 2017). Her research also supports the fact already explained in the literature review on ecovillages. The policies and structures in ecovillages intent to be responsive to individual needs and open to different situations.

However, literature describes the goals as very broad and researchers try to evaluate sustainability, which remains the main goal of any ecovillage. The controversy whether ecovillages are achieving the sustainability they seek has been the most studied, as it represents the most reliable research to apply to other local or even national levels.

The success of policy implementation in ecovillages is mainly related to the fact that residents share the same common ground but have free choice on how to live this choice (Waerther, 2014). This argument supports the main objective of this research, as ecovillages rethink their decision-making.

Further, each ecovillage has strict policies, but mostly policies are not described in detail in literature as research compares ecovillages to other initiatives or concepts such as wellbeing and view the broader goals of ecovillages such as self-sufficiency. Therefore, the in-depth research of this master's thesis fills the gap with a single case study of the decision-making process of Sieben Linden's goals and how it can be understood with a feminist perspective.

3.2 Implementation Theory

The literature on implementation and how it has been established and researched is covered in the next section. To understand how implementation theory works, a basic summary is first provided. The criticisms of implementation will next be addressed with the various approaches and how it has been used to reevaluate implementation theory.

	Paradigm	Focus	Value base	Goal
First wave policy implementation	Public administration	Top-down	Control	Generalisable theories of implementation
Second wave policy implementation	New public management	Bottom-up	Local diversity	Generalisable theories of implementation
Third wave policy implementation	New Public Governance	Complexity	Plurality	Capture and understand complexity
Feminist perspectives on implementation	Unsettling assumptions	Challenge orthodoxy	Diversity	Give voice

Table 1: Approaches to policy implementation (The Power To Persuade, 2017)

The complexity of implementation theory reflects on the practices as countries differ in their political, economic and social context (Cerna, 2013). As a result, there exist no general implementation theory, and the implementation theory that will be applied to the case is developed in the following literature analysis.

The process of policy implementation depicts a rather difficult mechanism. It shows the link between the written policy and taking it into action. For fulfilling a policy, different institutions are established with its resources (Seraw/Lu, 2020).

The theory discusses both the efficiency of the implementation process and also the relationship between a policy's execution and its outcome. As a result, several individuals or organizations have an impact on the result (Jackson, 2001). Additionally, the effectiveness of the policy is determined by how it was actually applied in practice, and various elements influence implementation such as actors, feedback, and communication (Cerna, 2013).

Implementation theory is based on the framework, which the government presents as principle and the institutions as agents. The principle-agent model shows several issues, for example how agents interpret a policy with their knowledge. Both actors, principal and agent are limited in their knowledge, which depict a boundary. Therefore, the communication between those groups plays an important role and how the policy is interpreted by different actors and if there exists space for flexibility. Although, the principal-agent issue fails to depict strengthen in the context of an ecovillage, because there exists no clear definition or separation of the principal and agent in an ecovillage compared to the national level. There exist issues of the residents in the council, who make decisions and the residents who have to implement the decision. This implementation process requires further insights.

The understanding of the ecovillage implementation represents a magnificent role for studying implementation theory, because firstly, they start by employing various techniques to achieve their objectives, for example by meeting several times and giving room to speak up. Secondly, its feedback mechanism functions as intended, which is cited as a crucial component of an effective implementation process. Therefore, the above three elements, actors, feedback, and communication play the main role in terms of implementation theory in this thesis.

In this respect, the study is less concerned with state or national legislation and more with the implementation of the ecovillage's own goals and regulations.

3.2.1 Development of Implementation Theory

Historically, implementation as a theory did not receive attention in research until the 1970s when the first connection was made (Carey et.al., 2017). Erwin Hargrove identified a missing piece in policy processes and in the study of government intervention in social processes, which ultimately represents the concept of implementation. Questions of how polices were "designed, communicated, interpreted and delivered" got into the spotlight and these questions depict this concept of implementation (Carrey et.al, 2017). The general understanding of the implementation process shows the objective side of the master thesis in relation to the case of Sieben Linden. Sander stated that, "policy making often continues in [to the implementation] phase and leads to modification of the adopted policy, or the

realization of only parts of it" (2018, p.487). Therefore, decision-making is a necessary component of implementation and I will consider Sieben Linden's decision-making process in light of this implementation theory (Sander, 2018).

In addition, Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky influenced studies in the 1970s with their book *Implementation* (1973) (Hill/Hupe, 2002). Their studies represent a radical origin in that policy sets goals and implementation examines the difficulties that can accompany the process (Hill/Hupe, 2002).

Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian are among the most important researchers in the field of implementation theory. They have provided a framework for understanding the implementation process and the variables that influence that process. The framework includes three categories defined as independent variables: first, the tractability of the problem, for example behavior of groups; second, the state's ability to structure implementation, for example clear objectives or hierarchical integration; and third, the non-statutory variables, for example socioeconomic conditions or "media attention to the problem" that influences implementation (Bowman/Lester, 1989, p.733). The categories are linked to different stages in the implementation process, which are the dependent variables (Bowman/Lester, 1989). Their framework has been used for several explanations of the different policy implementation processes. This framework gives a broader overview on implementation, which helps to understand the implementation and its factors in general. The thesis does not use the categories of the framework, because the framework reflects on rather a top-down model, which fails to include the context of an implementation process. The critique of a top-down approach shows the simplification of the implementation process by ignoring the institutional environment at state and especially local levels (Imperial, 2021). Moreover, the success or failure of an implementation process depends on the administration and the way policy requirements are set. Mazmanian and Sabatier stated that successful policy implementation involves "clear and coherent policy directives" (Imperial, 2021, p.5). Whereas this real process of implementing a policy occurs at this level, the top-down approach is ineffective because it ignores the complexity of institutions and the interactions between individuals and institutions on local levels.

In the instance of Sieben Linden, the visions, goals, and policy paper are already evident. This thesis emphasizes the requirement of diverse actors, which focuses on the implementation theory from a feminist perspective. The feminist approach of implementation theory underlines a complexity of the process and how actors interact with each other rather than how actors should best implement policies, which reflects on a top-down model (Carey et. al., 2017). This thesis therefore focuses on the fundamental claim that actors' knowledge, communication, and interactions with one another are necessary for the effectiveness of a policy's implementation. Ultimately, the rethinking includes this focus on local level in implementation theory.

Two other key researchers who have influenced implementation research are Michael Hill and Peter Hupe. Their research focuses mainly on public policy and the various actors in government and its institutions. They also explain that implementation plays the main role in how a policy can become effective. The process and whether the policy is implemented in reality as it is written down depends on the implementation. Therefore, in reality, there are many failures in the implementation of policies, and the research focuses on the debate about the "expected" results compared to the "achieved" ones (Carey et.al., 2017, p.2). The purpose of this study, which examines the Sieben Linden's policy paper and goals, is to understand the power dynamics inside the ecovillage and how they have been able to achieve their goals. The topic of the thesis directly relates to this debate. Accordingly, the evaluation of the Sieben Linden implemented goals with a feminist approach takes place.

3.2.2 Bottom-up Approach

In the following part the bottom-up approach will be presented, which the thesis uses for the understanding of the urge to involve multiple actors in the process.
In general, the process of implementing a policy is very complex one with many actors involved. As mentioned earlier, implementation studies were based on a radical model that has evolved over the decades to a more interactive model, and implementation studies can be more flexible than initially thought (Hill/Hupe, 2002). Implementation theory therefore encompasses mainly the debate over a

bottom-up or a top-down approach, which present the first waves in implementation research. However, in this master thesis implementation theory focuses on the bottom-up approach, which will be discussed in the following part.

Michael Lipsky is the leading researcher in this area, and his research relates to the staff in government agencies, the "street level bureaucrats", who are responsible for policy implementation. The success of implementation, as Lipsky states, depends on street-level bureaucrats who establish routines for daily decision-making and knowledge on how to go about their day-to-day business under pressure (Hill/Hupe, 2002). The problem with a top-down approach for street workers is the lack of flexibility and interaction with clients. Each client has a different background story that requires different needs, which is a greater obstacle if the policy is presented too strict in the requirements. Therefore, Lipsky explains the need for different ways to deal with different clients, for example private ones (Hill/Hupe, 2002). The bottom-up approach gives more room to interpret a policy with own knowledge.

In summary, the researchers of the bottom-up approach focus on the action of the state and the local level with their street workers. Therefore, the model they use leads to decentralization and federal control, which leads to more success because there is less conflict, more negotiations, and compromise. The bottom-up approach proves to be the more appropriate approach for the implementation of environmental policies, as the consequences of the climate crisis are felt differently in different regions and at the local level and people on the ground need to deal with the extraordinary situations and unexpected flexibility. Ecovillages deal with these situations in their surrounding area, because they only focus on themselves and its resources, which they get from their surroundings. Furthermore, their social life and community living reflects on the constant interaction with people in the daily-business.

However, Mark Imperial also criticized this approach, stating that the bottom-up focus is like "looking at the moves of only the white pieces or only the black pieces" in a chess game (Imperial, 2021, p.7). Implementation theory is based on game theory, and in order to play a game, people need to understand the structure and rules of the game, which depicts the context (Imperial, 2021). Therefore, in relation to ecovillages residents adapt to the structures and somehow to the rules of the ecovillage, for example as cars are not allowed on the property. The structure is also

determined by the different corporations or associations, which ecovillages have built.

The bottom-up approach shows weaknesses as well as the top-down approach. However, these two approaches represent the most likely discussed in the implementation theory discourses and to improve the bottom-up approach it requires to consider other approaches. Besides the discussion on bottom-up or top-down approaches, for the successful implementation it requires rethinking policy processes, because of the lack of context (Imperial, 2021).

Ecovillages include the key factors of a bottom-up approach. Firstly, the intentional community is described as a bottom-up movement. Secondly, as aforementioned, the will to decentralize power plays a main role in the implemented goals of the ecovillage. Third, the flexibility that street-level bureaucrats require is reflected on the goals of an ecovillage, as individuals live sustainable in multiple and flexible ways. The bottom-up approach fits on the characteristics of an ecovillage. Ecovillages however show more interaction in decision-making and implementation than the bottom-up approach cover. Therefore, it requires another approach to improve implementation theory. The bottom-up approach will not be considered in the methodology part and the policy paper of Sieben Linden will not be evaluated in a bottom-up approach. The bottom-up approach shows rather the general understanding of the ecovillage on a how they work structurally, because implementation theory focuses mostly on national policies rather than on local levels and definitely not on ecovillages. Sieben Linden exists in a democratic system and follows the rules and laws, but implement their own regulations based on the goals of sustainability, which means less resources and self-sufficiency. The utilization of implementation theory includes the implementation process, how Sieben Linden formulated their goals and the strategy of how they realize it.

3.2.3 Feminist Approach

In the following section the understanding of the feminist approach within implementation takes place. First of all, it needs a deeper understanding, why it requires feminist theories in implementation. The different waves from table 1 show limitations, because there exists a bilateral relationship between government and institutions rather than a unilateral one (Cerna, 2013).

In addition, a feminist approach provides a critical perspective on implementation theory, particularly its top-down approach, by emphasizing the importance of contextual factors. The process of implementation is inherently complex, involving intricate interactions and individual behaviors. According to the literature review, the traditional approaches of the first and second waves (Table 1) of implementation theory frequently regarded the process in a rational and inflexible manner, which is acknowledged as a flaw (Carey et al., 2017).

The second phase of implementation theory, which was influenced by the emergence of new public management concepts, reveals an additional flaw. On the one hand, it acknowledged the significance of multiple actors outside of the government in policy-making processes (Klijn/Koppenjan, 2000). This transition to new public management resulted in the introduction of the concept of policy networks, in which actors collaborate and possess unique resources. On the other hand, recognizing that the achievement of policy objectives depends on the collaboration and contributions of various actors, policy networks develop rules to regulate actors' behavior and resource allocation. This represents the institutional framework within which actors cannot act freely and be flexible. As a result, these principles affect the strategic behavior of each actor in pursuit of their own objectives (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000).

Gemma Carey, Helen Dickinson, and Sue Olney's study sought to compensate the weaknesses of the top-down and new public management models by linking them to feminist theories, which could represent a new rethinking of political processes and build on the bottom-up approach. This link between feminist theories and implementation theory is outlined in the next part and used in particular to analyze the data in the methods section.

They argue that the reasons for implementation failure depend primarily on missing cross-border work, which concludes a bigger context and involves different perspectives to consider every consequence of a policy. That is, interaction between multiple actors, which includes communication as a central element (Carey et.al., 2017).

Carey, Dickinson, and Olney used poststructuralist feminist theory to frame the problems in implementation, which misses flexibility on local context. This theory

helps to understand the structures and power relations and support a new understanding of public management (2017). A viewpoint of poststructuralist feminist theory is the understanding of the world in terms of knowledge, truth, and power, which contributes to the understanding of power relations. Moreover, the world exists in a subjective manner and people position themselves with knowledge and there exists no neutrality. Feminist theories therefore seek to engage with the world, develop it, and support change. In this sense, the application of feminist theory to the concept of an ecovillage is similar with ecovillage residents' ideas about profoundly altering their lifestyles. Each resident of an ecovillage reflects individually and has their own thoughts and knowledge. Carey, Dickinson, and Olney concluded that "policy work, whether design or implementation, involves working across departmental, organizational or sectoral boundaries" (Carey et.al., 2017, p.9).

In light of the fact that multiple actors are required for the successful implementation of a policy, this thesis examines the decision-making process. Feminist theories explain the necessity of multiple actors. Moreover, a feminist approach empowers the individuality and subjectivity, which must be considered for successful implementation (Carey et al., 2017). The concept of ecovillages appears to be a suitable illustration and case for connecting feminist theories with implementation theory. Carey, Dickinson, and Olney have developed a framework for cross-boundary work, which includes positionality, performance, and diversity, among other characteristics.

3.2.4 Cross-boundary Work

In the following part cross-boundary work with its concept will be outlined and defined.

In policy implementation theory the boundaries of different sectors and actors were strictly separated for a long time. It was divided in private or public, government or federal sectors. Further types of boundaries constitute "jurisdictions, agency units, or broader social and epistemological boundaries" (Cyphers, et.al., 2019, p.364). However, implementation, which has a strict distinction of sectors and actors make the process inefficient and it should shift to more interventions between different sectors or actors. Literature on cross-boundary work "highlights the importance of

engaging non-state actors to leverage resources, participatory decision-making, and flexible authorities with broad goals that leave space for tailoring specific implementation strategies to local contexts" (Cyphers, et.al., 2019, p.364). An example of successful cross-boundary work presents the research on the policy project of Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership. In this case, the boundary constitutes the private-public sector in relation of owning landscape. Two agencies, one working for the private landowners and one for the national department worked together to minimize the carbon footprint (Cyphers, et.al. 2019). However, in this case to apply cross-boundary work to the ecovillage it requires a combination of the residents working in the council and the residents who do not work in councils. A further boundary defines the knowledge barriers of each person. Therefore, everyone is limited to their own knowledge (Carey, et.al, 2017).

3.2.5 Positionality

Moving on to the different characteristics includes firstly the positionality of the actors. There exists no neutrality or objectivity in this world and every actor positions themselves in some way to a topic. Positionality includes knowledge which defines individuals by class, gender, race "and other aspects of identity" (Maher/Tetreault, 1993, p.118). The acknowledgement of the individual's position is crucial in relation to context (Maher/Tetreault, 1993). The variety of people's positions strengthen the cross-boundary work (Carrey et.al. 2017). However, groups with different positionalities might struggle with differences. To overcome this problem the communication requires clear and well-articulated. Furthermore, it must be understood that only one's own perspective can be articulated (Carey et.al, 2017). Therefore, in sense of cross-boundary work, each different positionality can help to fill in missing minority perspectives and combine different knowledge. An example of specific positionality presents the research on the debate of undergraduate education. For educating students in relation to a multicultural world, "they need to include the perspectives and voices of those who have been traditionally excluded from academic discourse – women of all backgrounds, people of color and all men and women who perceive their education as at odds with who they are" (Maher/Tetreault, 1993, p.118).

3.2.6 Performance

The second characteristic explains the performance management of actors, which was developed in the second wave in relation to new public management. Performance management includes first strategic planning, second data collection and analysis and third decision-making on the basis of the previous data utilization (Olvera/Avellaneda, 2017). Performance management focuses rather on the outcome than the process.

However, in relation to feminist theories, the performance during collaboration and negotiation plays the important part. Actors perform in different ways, because of their motivation for the outcome (Dickinson/Sullivan, 2014). Performance subsequently does not represent rational management, as mentioned earlier, but requires the consideration of emotions in implementation and the subjective effectiveness of the actors (Carey, et.al.2017). Dickinson and Sullivan explained that emotions often get in the way of policy processes and blocks the decision-making in public management (2014).

Moreover, as with the second wave, a successful implementation process requires interaction among multiple actors. The availability of the various resources and the cooperation within the policy network make up the character of the performance (Klijn/Koppenjan, 2000). In addition, actors may not know that they are interdependent, blocking the availability of resources. Another problem in actors' performance is disagreement and conflict. However, this problem can be overcome if actors formulate common goals and achieve the same policy outcome. As Klijn and Koppenjan noted, this always requires a learning process (2000).

3.2.7 Diversity

Last character includes diversity, which depicts as the main concept in the feminist approach to implementation. The concept reflects on the two other concepts: positionality and performance. Aforementioned, performance originally came up in the second wave, in the bottom-up approach, which requires a local diversity to improve the outcome of a policy. The feminist approach takes one more step and not only covers diverse local actors, but includes more boundary crossing with for example private people or NGO's; see Table 1 (Carey, et.al., 2017).

It includes the active searching for different groups or individuals to give them a voice. Therefore, it leads to a greater success of policy implementation, if those diverse groups get involved in the implementation process (Carey et.al., 2017). The awareness of different needs arises if different perspectives flow into the process from the beginning. Carey et.al. described "a feminist approach to implementation could lead the field to more effectively embrace a multiplicity of voices, subjectivities and ways of knowing and doing" (2017, p.10).

This approach is considered as evaluation of the Sieben Linden case in the methodology section. For further understanding and structuring the different approaches Table 1 helps to make sense of implementation theory and the thesis only focuses on the feminist perspective.

3.3   Theoretical Framework

This section describes the theoretical framework of the master's thesis, which seeks to provide a feminist interpretation of Sieben Linden's objective implementation. This framework enhances the understanding of implementation processes involving multiple actors by integrating feminist perspectives into implementation theory.

Based on the review of the relevant literature, the feminist approach emphasizes the interaction between actors and advocates for diverse voices in decision-making and implementation. Thus, the theoretical framework concentrates on how the various Sieben Linden actors interact with positionality, performance, and diversity. These characteristics, identified in the literature review, serve as crucial components of the framework and the subsequent analysis (Carey et al., 2017). One of the motivations for coupling a feminist approach to implementation theory is the recognition that traditional processes and decision-making lack creativity and transformative potential. (Carey et al., 2017) The feminist approach emphasizes

participation in decision-making and implementation and encourages cross-boundary collaboration for success.

Given that the ecovillage represents an alternative living environment, it is essential to investigate how it correlates with feminist characteristics. By examining Sieben Linden's goals, the analysis will determine whether or not their implementation strategies adhere to feminist principles. The examination delves deeper into the overall process and policies than the specific objectives themselves.

In the context of an ecovillage, the thesis also acknowledges the broader implications of a feminist approach. The urgency of addressing climate justice and the unequal vulnerabilities resulting from the climate crisis highlight the need to include and value diversity at all levels. In implementation theory, a feminist approach not only acknowledges local diversity, as represented by the bottom-up approach, but also values the representation and voices of various groups affected by policies.

The three principal goals of Sieben Linden—self-sufficiency, self-responsibility, and decentralized structure—summarize the comprised goals. Although the thesis does not exclusively analyze these specific goals, it attempts to comprehend how Sieben Linden residents interact during decision-making and goal implementation. The successful implementation of these goals is a result of the community's shared common ground, which corresponds with a feminist approach that promotes consensus-building and the recognition of diverse knowledge (Carey et al., 2017). The ecovillage's incorporation of sociocracy demonstrates the theoretical framework's consideration of power dynamics and inclusive decision-making processes.

This master's thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive feminist interpretation of the ecovillage's goal implementation by refining the theoretical framework and its connection to Sieben Linden, shedding light on the significance of feminist principles in alternative living communities.

In the following table the strategies on how to reach their goals and policies of Sieben Linden have been summed up. The link between the characteristics of a feminist approach and each strategy has been operationalized within questions, which aims to be answered by the end of thesis.

Carey/Dickinson/Olney (2017) feminist approach:	Operationalization:
Cross-boundary work: Requirement of collective action	Do the residents actually raise their voice? Do the councils engage with the residents? How does the feedback mechanism work? How do they communicate with each other?
Positionality: No neutrality, different positions because of different knowledge	Do they "combine" different people in councils to think about every possible outcome?
Performance: Consideration of emotions, common goals	How are the regulations affecting the residents? How do they handle emotional decisions? How can the residents raise their voice?
Diversity: Considering the needs for marginalized groups	Do they create space to express themselves? Do they show connection to the outside world and engage with the outside world?

In the following part, the understanding of the feminist characteristics in relation to the Sieben Linden case is outlined and it is shown that they are interconnected and intertwined.

The reaching of a consensus with people who have different knowledge levels plays a strong role in the ecovillage, because the social aspect got more important during the time of the existence of the ecovillage. Sieben Linden tries to find consensus in decision-making with different steps of communication and the awareness and acceptance of people's opinion.

Examining the concept of positionality through the lens of feminist epistemology. Sieben Linden acknowledges that the decision-making process is influenced by the distinctive knowledge and viewpoints of each participant. Incorporating standpoint theory encourages residents to contribute their perspectives to the decision-making process, thereby enhancing it.

The next step is to conceptualize performance within a feminist framework that emphasizes power dynamics and agency. Informed by performativity theories, the ecovillage emphasizes the significance of actions that are aligned with individual and communal goals. The policy paper outlines broad, adaptable goals to accommodate diverse aspirations and encourage a sense of shared purpose. Performance relies on the awareness of different people with its different opinions based on their background. People act because of specific behavior, emotions and mostly to aim for their own goal. Performance in this case means the transparency of the actors and how they perform to get what they want or to what extent they perform in accordance with the community. In addition, Sieben Linden builds on new residents and new ideas and the constant development.

The characteristic diversity plays the most important role as it is represented in each other characteristic. Diversity in a sense of feminist theories and general how we understand it, fails to be represented in Sieben Linden. Sieben Linden exists of mostly white, privileged people and in therefore diversity shows a very low level of distinction.

However, the diversity in this work represents the process of implementation with as many people as possible. Sieben Linden rules with a concertation concept, which means the people who get effected by the consequence of the policy are allowed to speak up their opinion on the decision and are responsible for the implementation. Additionally, it shows that diversity exists if the councils, who make the decision are actively looking for the minority groups in Sieben Linden and make space to give voice.

4 Methodology

The next chapter addresses the research's goal of how the ecovillage implemented their goals and if the process takes a feminist approach. Overall, the research takes a qualitative research that includes triangulation of methods.

The theoretical framework explained the different characteristics for a requirement of a feminist approach and how we can understand this approach in relation to practical policy implementation on a local level. The methodology section explores whether the characteristics can be found in the case of Sieben Linden.

Furthermore, it looks at the theory from an inductive perspective. In other words, the thesis is guided by the feminist approach to implementation theory, and the characteristics increases their significance when placed in the context of a practical case.

The qualitative approach investigates the usage of a combination of three different methods, namely documentary data that includes the website and a book about Sieben Linden ecovillage and its policy paper, unstructured interviews during an information weekend at the Sieben Linden ecovillage, and participant observation. The combination of these three methods allows us to triangulate and fill the gap between the methods. Each method shows advantages and disadvantages of the case and one perspective, the combination of those three presents the bigger picture of the structural implementation process in Sieben Linden. The further explanation of triangulation will be outlined in the data gathering section.

4.1 Ontology and Epistemology

In this part the epistemological and ontological perspective will be outlined for a further analysis of the data. First, the epistemological perspective emphasizes the interpretivist aspect of social phenomenon. Ecovillages were developed in response to the climate catastrophe and the idea that social actors may affect social reality because humans are responsible for the issue and the security of future generations (Jackson, 2004). The ontological position within qualitative methods include a constructivist point of view. It acknowledges that both the outside world as well as its meaning and norms depend on social actors and their interaction with one another (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, the meaning and norms with a feminist perspective shows the urge for diversity and the awareness of positionality and the performance of different actors. Sieben Linden tries to be flexible in their substantial goals, however implements stricter guidelines in the different associations and corporations.

"Strict rules but soft implementation" (Althoff, 2023, course instructor)

4.2 Case Selection: Sieben Linden

The next chapter includes the explanation of the case selection and why the case requires studying in relation to theory and qualitative research.
Sieben Linden, as aforementioned, depicts a case, which is highly studied in the field of ecovillages, because Sieben Linden itself exists for over twenty years now and shows success in its existing (Fischer, 2017). Especially the governance structure in Sieben Linden reflects on the success, because as Fischer stated, the flexibility of responding to individual needs constitutes a fundamental goal in Sieben Linden (2017). Therefore, the theoretical framework with its feminist characteristics of rethinking the implementation theory matches the case, as the case presents an alternative living with new structural thinking in a small community. Additionally, Sieben Linden develops new strategies for implementing their goals

and the visions encourage individuals to speak up, which aligns to the feminist approach as giving voice to different individuals and groups depict a main similarity for adapting a feminist approach to implementation theory.

Furthermore, a single-case study in relation to an inductive research allows the researcher to gather in-depth understanding about the case (Liu, 2016). The epistemology approach to interpret the case supports this understanding of social effectiveness. In relation to ecovillages, multiple-case studies have been researched, but the generalization of the phenomenon of ecovillages appears rather difficult, because ecovillages show in some way similarities for example in the vision of self-sufficiency. However, they differ in any other way, because the individuals, who come together reflect on these differences and they work out vision for themselves and their community (Litfin, 2014). Accordingly, a single-case study has been picked, due to the diversity in ecovillage research and secondly because of the focus on the in-depth understanding of one case. Furthermore, a single-case study allows to question "old theoretical relationships and explore new ones" (Gustafsson, 2017, p.3). This means that the thesis' object depicts an understanding of decision-making processes, which seem to align with a feminist perspective to implementation theory.

4.3 Data Gathering

Before moving on to the methodology section, three data collection methods for the subsequent research will be described. In qualitative research, triangulation of document analysis, participant observation, and interviews is the most common method (Brymann, 2012). The following key terms provide support for data collection in document analysis and unstructured interviews to address operationalization questions from the table of the theoretical framework: *diverse, knowledge, truth, subjectivity, objectivity, structures, decision-making, people, individualists, transparency, perform, position, voice, communication.*

For understanding the in-depth case, a purposeful sampling has been chosen for data gathering, because it provides detailed information about the social phenomenon and the participants show different and their own experiences with the phenomenon (Statistical Solutions, 2019). A purposeful sampling also stresses subjectivity, which reflects on the theoretical framework itself, because the feminist theories explain that the world cannot be seen in a neutral way, and individuals show different knowledge and truths, which links to implementation and decision-making (Carey, et.al., 2017).

4.3.1 Document Analysis

Firstly, a document analysis represents an integral method in qualitative research and shows the gap between policies and practice (Brymann, 2012). It gives a first impression and understanding on the ecovillage's implementation strategies, which have been listed in the theoretical framework's table above.

The policy paper also offers the perspective on how the goals have been written down, but it only includes rather broad goals and the social aspect of living in a community. Furthermore, the website helps to summarize the three big goals of self-sufficiency, self-responsibility and decentralized structure, but also include the system of the councils in theory, because the policy paper does not outline the council structure. In addition, Christoph Strünke sent me the documents of the various councils' missions, which contain an analysis of the detailed regulations established therein. Furthermore, the book *Der Gemeinschaftskompass* written by the resident Eva Stützel, has also been analyzed as well in relation of decision-

making. This method is also commonly used in the study of ecovillages because, as mentioned earlier, most researchers visit these ecovillages and therefore the literature review is based on the experiences of other researchers.

4.3.2 Unstructured Interviews

Secondly, the unstructured interviews include a visit to Sieben Linden. I participated during an information weekend, which gives a practical perspective and first-hand knowledge how decision-making and implementation occur in Sieben Linden. Furthermore, they give information about history, and community life in general. However, a weekend only represents a short insight into the ecovillage and results in a narrow view, because the weekend included only four different residents, who gave information and their experience with Sieben Linden. The seminars are with mainly one resident who represent the course instructor and he talk about various factors. The main interaction includes room for questions and conversations between residents and participants. The weekend concludes with a tour of the ecovillage area and a meet and great at the Sieben Linden "Sunday café", which neighboring communities can also attend.

During these group sessions, I took notes, and therefore my interviews are unstructured and I had to be flexible about how the weekend went. Mainly, the participants of the information weekend asked questions which shows another form of unstructured interviewing. Unstructured interviewing aims for openness of the respondents and flexibility to listen to their story (Brymann, 2012).

That means I got first-hand knowledge from them. Before the weekend began, however, I had an interview or rather a conversation with a resident, who is responsible for research about Sieben Linden. He explained the requirements and answered more questions, which are related to the topic of the thesis. Therefore, the unstructured interview began with more general questions and topics rather than leading the interview with specific questions; these general questions are listed in the appendix (Brymann, 2012).

4.3.3 Participant Observation

Common data collection in the ecovillage literature involves a visit to the ecovillage. Mostly, researchers interact with residents and observe them and their activities on a daily basis. Thus, the researchers conduct the data on a more ethnographic way. Participant observation constitutes as the last piece of the triangulation for observing participant behavior first hand. In this research the participants know my role as a researcher and therefore the role can be defined as full participant observer. One disadvantage of this method includes the subject's behavior and the knowledge that a researcher observes, which could affect their behavior (Brymann, 2012). However, in this sense, participant observation focuses more on the participants and the course instructor of the information weekend and not on the residents, because the information weekend is more about getting to know the ecovillage rather than interacting with residents, which constitutes a disadvantage for this research, but provides a critical view on the ecovillage due to the exchange with other participants. Therefore, constructive feedback shows how they see the ecovillage decision-making process in a feminist alignment, which will be discussed in the following section. Equally I am also a participant at the information weekend and asked questions during the group session, the same as the other participants. The role of mine as a researcher was identified by the participants of the weekend and put all us in a situation, where we would like to learn something about the ecovillage.

4.4 Data Analysis

For analyzing the collected data, the aspects of community life, which includes the decisions and whether they show similarities of their decision-making process in a feminist perspective will be interpreted in context to Sieben Linden. The use of epistemological interpretivism takes a common place in studying ecovillages, mostly if they aim towards sustainability (Singh et.al., 2019).

The analysis utilizes a thematic approach. Thematic analysis emphasizes on reality and people's experiences or social constructs, thereby representing the impact of events or meanings (Braun/Clarke, 2006). The analysis is consistent with our understanding of the Sieben Linden implementation procedure. The themes are guided by the feminist approach and its characteristics, which include cross-boundary work, positionality, diversity, and performance.

However, a critical reflection on the feminist approach to implementation theory shows that the inclusion of these concepts fails to occur in detail in the work of Carey, Dickinson and Olney. Therefore, consideration is given to how they are to be interpreted in the local context. In other words, the characteristics only acquire significance in context.

Braun and Clarke investigated six steps for a thematic analysis, which depicts the framework for the following analysis: first familiarizing yourself with the data; second generating initial codes; third searching for themes; fourth reviewing themes; fifth defining and naming themes; sixth producing the report (Braun/Clarke, 2006, p.87). The reason for choosing thematic analysis with a theoretical approach is to allow greater flexibility within the theoretical framework and data analysis (Braun/Clarke, 2006). The characteristics in the theoretical framework are quite broad and interact with each other more than usual. Therefore, the flexibility of the analysis plays an important role.

Thematic analysis in an inductive way also allows the data to become themes. The thematic analysis includes a rather old school analysis with a mind map which represents the feminist approach to implementation theory and the field notes get sorted in the mind map. The mind map has groups for each characteristic, thus the ecovillage notes are arranged by topic and presented in a distinct color for each

grouping. Within the mind map the thematic analysis takes place and the themes get coded.

The reason for analyzing the data without software is that two of the data collection methods only involve one weekend in the ecovillage, which is not a large data set. The advantage of a manual analysis of the data include first a more in-depth analysis. Second, it is not necessary to invest into getting used to a software (Mattimoe et.al., 2021). However, there exist limitations of the manual analysis as well. The manual analysis has been outdated or is called a "frustrating process" (Mattimoe et.al., 2021, p.2).

However, before diving into the analysis and results. The data analysis had two phases. The first period included the document analysis before the end of march and therefore before the information weekend in the ecovillage started. It included the analysis of the policy paper of Sieben Linden. In the second phase after the information weekend occurred, the data analysis of participant observation and unstructured interviews and therefore the analysis of the field notes took place.

4.5 Limitations

This section of the research's limitations focuses primarily on the limited data collection, which consisted of unstructured interviews and participant observation during a single weekend at the ecovillage.

One limitation illustrates the subjectivity of the study and the influence of embodied research on data acquisition. Consequently, I must be conscious of my own perspective on the topic at hand, as I am passionate about sustainable living and believe that our political system requires more fundamental reform.

In addition, my field research for this thesis is typically conducted over longer periods of time rather than a single weekend of participant observations, so I was aware of the impending shortages when I was at the ecovillage. On top of that, the other participants from the weekend posed questions to our course instructor that were extremely useful for my research, while I played the role of observer. In addition, being more the observer was advantageous, as I took detailed field notes because the fieldwork employed a micro-ethnographic approach.

The credibility of this study depends on the investigation of the displayed ecovillage and the simulation of communal daily life. The information weekend participants will remain anonymous, and the collected data will be transparent to a fundamental degree. This research depends less on individual participants, such as interviews, and more on the notion of interaction. In this context, the terminology "participants" refers to the non-residents who joined the informational weekend. Other residents compared to the course instructor were difficult to converse with for two reasons: first, they were all preoccupied with their own duties, and second, the observation gave the impression that they do not wish to hold a conversation with outsiders. Due to the fact that the participants and I only spoke with three separate residents, the weekend data is more biased. However, the expense of travel and, more importantly, my own funds limited my participation in this study, as individuals pay hundreds of Euros for these informational weekends, including food and accommodation, which I paid for on my own. Although I was equally privileged to attend and participate as residents who can invest in the ecovillage in order to live there, I was unable to afford a full information week, which would have provided me with more objective data.

4.6   Ethics

All participants on the information weekend gave me their consent of making notes through the courses. However, I did not audio record the group sessions as I tried to do no harm and to fulfill the role as participant and also having less of a research atmosphere during the weekend. I discussed a lot with the participants about Sieben Linden and how they feel about the information weekend, so therefore I tried integrate myself, but also remain in an observing role. Therefore, I anonymized their data which involved asking questions during the group session (DeWalt/DeWalt, 2011). But also, considered of not looking at only individual as a case but seeing the case as a whole (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, the course instructors gave me their consent in naming them and using their responses and explanations of stories from their perspective of Sieben Linden as data collection.

5   Results

The key themes identified in the thematic analysis correspond to the characteristics of the feminist approach listed in the theoretical framework table and are essential to comprehending Sieben Linden's goal within the implementation process. These themes consist of decision-making, knowledge, individualism versus community, and diversity. They are interdependent, mutually influential, and comprise the entire process of implementation. Moreover, these themes represent general implementation strategies aimed at achieving the community's major goals of a decentralized structure, self-sufficiency, and self-responsibility.

The feminist approach, which focuses on cross-boundary work, positionality, diversity, and performance, posits critical questions that are investigated to determine the extent to which Sieben Linden achieves these objectives from a feminist standpoint. Given the complex context of multiple actors' interactions and the need for flexible policies for successful implementation, particularly at the local level, the implementation process aligns with a feminist perspective.

Despite the fact that Sieben Linden may not identify as a feminist ecovillage, the purpose of this thesis is to determine to what extent their decision-making process, including implementation, can be understood as feminist to some degree.

5.1.1 Decision-making

Decision-making in this context of Sieben Linden in relation to a feminist lens shows similarities to cross-boundary work. Cross-boundary work plays the main role in taking a feminist perspective into account. To make sense of cross-boundary work it needs to be put in context. Therefore, the questions in the theoretical framework in relation to Sieben Linden are answered in this following part.

Sieben Linden places a significant emphasis on decision-making because they employ a variety of decision-making strategies. In addition, making the correct choice is a component of effective implementation, and the two processes are interdependent. As stated in the literature assessment, the process of implementation begins with decision-making. This implies that decision-making must consider the various positions, performances, and the diversity of the participants. The feminist approach is not limited to implementation alone, but also emphasizes the decision-making process, as decision-making persists throughout the implementation process and is not a linear procedure.

In addition, the theme of decision-making reflects on the objective of Sieben Linden's decentralized structure, as various functions have been delegated to different councils with decision-making authority.

Numerous factors and actors are involved in Sieben Linden's implementation procedures. Initially, the community created a policy paper with broader visions during an intensive period in which all residents drafted visions that represent their alternative way of life (Strünke, 2023). In terms of performance, this procedure was founded on a shared set of values and a common ground, reflecting a feminist perspective. This reflects on the three major objectives of decentralized structures, self-sufficiency, and self-responsibility, because establishing common goals helps to resolve conflict. The founders of Sieben Linden initiated this process by establishing community-defining objectives.

The policy paper can evolve or change over time. In this sense, Sieben Linden fulfills the feminist approach in relation to flexible policies and makes space for creative implementation strategies within the policy paper. In other words, the policy paper describes more general visions of the ecovillage such as decision-making and communication, which include more social aspects (Strünke, 2023).

The policy paper addresses the goals of how the residents try to link human beings and nature again. The implementation process of the policy paper constitutes very flexible as the policies are in constant development, because the residents have the possibility to raise their voice. To support the argument of flexibility and also sustainable thinking in Sieben Linden, Reinhard Weusthoff explained the subcommunities and house construction, for instance. The homes have been constructed with flexibility in mind, allowing for the relocation of parts or kitchens, for example. This adaptability results in the changeability of both subcommunities and group constellations (Weusthoff, 2023).

However, as Strünke explained in a conversation, the policy paper does not have as much influence as the four organizations with their councils and regulations, namely Siedlungsgenossenschaft (Si-Ge), Wohnungsgenossenschaft (Wo-Ge), Naturwaren Sieben Linden e.V., and Freundeskreis Ökodorf e.V. (2023). In addition, there are three other councils: the Bau-Rat (Construction Council), the Sozial-Rat (Social Council) and the Ankommens-Rat (Arrival Council). Therefore, there exist detailed goals for each council. However, the different regulations set by the organizations differs in every way. For example, the "mission and goals document" from Naturwaren explains the strategy and the responsibility on how they would like to be self-sufficient in more detail than the mission document of the Siedlungsgenossenschaft, which depict their missions and goals less specific.

The conversation with Christoph Strünke was mainly about the structure of Sieben Linden and he explained how they vote and what differences there are between visions, goals and regulations. Additionally, on the question whether they make decisions in a feminist approach, Strünke answered:

"So maybe people have that in the background when they bring it in, when they formulate a vision but don't officially call it that." (Strünke, 2023).

The structure of Sieben Linden was also explained in a session at the information weekend and the participants were very interested, especially in decision-making. Sieben Linden organizes around the concept that people are encouraged to decide with the councils when the consequences affect them. In practice, however, Stefan Althoff stresses, few people participate in the process. For example, only about twenty or thirty of approximately eighty adult residents attend the plenary assembly

because there is no attendance requirement (Althoff, 2023). Therefore, the question on if residents actually raise their voice shows a low level of participation in reality. On the one hand, decision-making is based primarily on the trust of the councils, because the residents have many other tasks in their daily business and do not always manage to attend the plenary meetings, communicate by e-mail and read through all the protocols. Althoff's view of the councils' system is that they should do their jobs and then they can focus on their work (2023). As a result, there is little interest in participating in decision-making in Sieben Linden and not every resident participates, which was the goal of implementing the council system, as mentioned on the Sieben Linden website. However, in a feminist perspective the system of the council discourages individuals for more participate decision-making, because the interest decreases and different voices do not get heard, even the decisions affecting all of the residents. Furthermore, the engagement between the decision-maker as the councils and the implementers as the residents also decreases, because the communication happens mostly by email and, as Althoff expressed over the information weekend, it depicts a rather annoying communication mechanism (2023). Additionally, this impacts the goal of self- responsibility, as each resident is an individual who is responsible for themselves whether they read through the protocols or not.

On the other hand, decision-making constitutes a long process, because if more people discuss different topics it takes longer to come to an agreement. This shows that people perform for their aimed outcome and different people have different resources which are needed for the implementation. Therefore, the cross-boundary work involves the residents who are involved in the decision-making. However, one resident on the information weekend explained that after the agreement then

"80% find the decision good instead of only three people and the rest not"

(Westendorff, 2023).

The decision requires being acceptable and sustainable, Althoff emphasizes repeatedly, as this is the most crucial factor in Sieben Linden's decision-making. Sieben Linden's system of decision-making is intricate, and there are some areas where theory and practice diverge. The councils make decisions despite their lack of knowledge of the issues at hand.

Let us elaborate on that claim: The information weekend included a movie night, about the ecovillage Sieben Linden from a resident's perspective. A critical aspect was the decision-making about the composting toilets and waste management. The filmmaker attended a meeting where the Si-Ge Council decided on waste management, which fails to depict the best solution, but enough for that moment. They planned to review it in half a year if the decision took a successful implementation. Half a year later they came to the same decision with no changes and the filmmaker drew attention to it. However, council members did not remember their decision half a year ago, even though they are required to write protocols (Würfel, 2020). In practice, council members show uncertainty and the fact that they are council members pushes them to decide. Residents rely on them even if their expertise is limited, and in this case, they could not have decided because none of the members have knowledge of waste management. The interpretation of this scene shows the low awareness of the council members' position and knowledge about an issue. Moreover, the performance here interacts with positionality, because being the council members, they strive to decide without thinking about their limited knowledge. Therefore, the other themes intervene with decision-making as it depicts the greatest role in Sieben Linden for a feminist implementation process.

Sieben Linden has specific strategies for making decisions, but also for implementing them successfully.

The analysis of the policy paper revealed that the strategy is mainly an intentional community and awareness of other people's opinions, which is the fundamental basis in Sieben Linden.

In this sense, it refers to the clear formulations of visions and goals in the policy paper. It formed a framework for fixed rules. According to Hanna Westendorff:

> *"There are firm rules from the founders and they were thinking something when they set them"* (Westendorff, 2023).

However, with this framework, they also created space for the organization to make its own rules and create diversity to some degree.

Additionally, Sieben Linden developed a concept of sociocracy that involves decision-making with "good enough for now and safe enough to try" (Stützel,

2021). This means that decisions do not have to be perfect, but tolerable for the community in the moment. A progressive strategy for decision-making and especially for implementation shows whether the decision can be implemented as it was made. It shows whether the decision can be improved. Sieben Linden has been following this strategy for some time, and the most important thing, Althoff said, is setting a date to reconsider the decision in six months (2023). Therefore, it is discussed again and shows whether the decision will be final implemented. This approach requires a lot of effort, time and resources, but shows success in practice in Sieben Linden as a village with 140 inhabitants.

The sociocracy approach shows the flexibility of a policy to change in the future and the admission that a policy may fail during the implementation process, but is necessary for policy improvement.

This leads to the point that feedback mechanisms play a magnificent role in the implementation process. In Sieben Linden, feedback mechanisms prevail and therefore, as already mentioned, decision-making remains a longer process. First, because theoretically any resident with voting rights can intervene and can give feedback. Second, councils can receive feedback by sending protocols to residents. Plenary assemblies, in particular, take longer to complete (Althoff, 2023).

5.1.2 Knowledge

The feminist characteristic of positionality includes the urge for different knowledge, because every individual has a different truth and the world cannot be seen a neutral. The different positions are shaped by the individual's social background. Therefore, the context of positionality depicts the theme of knowledge in context of Sieben Linden, which will be discussed in the following section.

Knowledge was discussed several times over the weekend because the structure of the councils reflects on different functions and tasks. Therefore, people with different expertise are elected to different councils. This means that they look at the councils with "project affiliation" (Strünke, 2023). Part of this is that in electing the councils, the assembly tries to mix the councils with residents who have lived in Sieben Linden for a long time, as well as residents who are relatively new to Sieben Linden. This awareness of combining different people together, applies to the

characteristic of diversity to some extent, but diversity as a theme will be discussed in the next section.

Different perspectives provide new input. Furthermore, including different knowledge reflects on the goal of decentralized structure and the awareness of inclusion.

New input is a goal that Sieben Linden is always striving for, because an ecovillage is defined as a laboratory hub, which represents Sieben Linden in the ecovillage context. Althoff describes it as a constant learning process that promotes living together in a closer community (2023). In addition, residents at Sieben Linden also engage in more specific topics during intensive times to create a closer connection between residents. A more detailed explanation of intensive times takes places in the theme individualism versus community (chapter 5.1.3). For example, the last intensive time came up very often during the information weekend. In terms of knowledge, Sieben Linden has invited experts on the topic of trauma. The last intensive time in January included workshops on trauma and how people can deal with each other when triggered by various occurrences (Althoff, 2023). The fact that they are aware of their limited knowledge in this case reflects on the fact that they need other people for their input and also rely on new residents to get involved in councils, for example. In this case of intense times, however, the focus was not so much on the decision-making process, but rather on how people's behavior affects others and how they interact with each other.

Knowing the difference between an emotional and an objective issue is crucial to Sieben Linden's decision-making process and implementation. Therefore, they try to understand the emotional basis of a resident and then distinct the emotional basis from the facts for making a decision. This proves that people are aware of both objective and subjective issues.

According to Althoff they try to

> *"argue and discuss with checked facts"* (2023).

In this case, positionality is evaluated and awareness of limited positionality plays a role in Sieben Linden, as residents explained. So, it depends on the residents how they see the facts and in reality, a different perspective shows up.

Althoff is not a council member and his perspective on the structure of Sieben Linden is therefore very subjective, which limits the analysis. The topic and the

information weekend are based on the subjective perspective and therefore the poststructuralist feminist approach fits here, because there is no world without subjectivity. Furthermore, people get emotional about issues with their own opinions and knowledge and especially when they live so closely together. Therefore, emotions are included in the performance of people, which could block an implementation process, but in Sieben Linden it takes awareness of how people perform, because of their involved emotions.

Another aspect of involving people with expertise, but only within the ecovillage is represented by the case of a resident who was on the board of the Naturwaren e.V. association for a long time. There was a discussion about more storage space for the food that they grow themselves and that should be fresh. There was a discussion about building an "earth cellar" or cold storage. The knowledge of the residents led them to request the cold room. However, other residents were against it because of reaching the goal of sustainability and low energy consumption. The process of decision-making represented a very long process over years. In the end, it was important that the resident's logical reasoning and expertise succeeded (Weusthoff, 2023). The basic ecological understanding of the residents of Sieben Linden shows that they have common ground and ultimately strive for the same goals. Common ground depicts as an important factor for reaching cross-boundary work to support a successful implementation. Conflicts resurface, but expert knowledge is also heard. Sieben Linden creates space for discussions and often shows a longer period of time to make logical decisions. In this context, sustainability is defined by the aspect of considering all consequences of a decision and its implementation. This aspect reflects on literature on ecovillages in general, as they have developed a strategy to consider all aspects of life, including living together, but also the costs and the nature that surrounds them.

5.1.3 Individualism versus Community

This section discusses performance in Sieben Linden. When performance is put into context, the theme of individualism versus community comes up. The connection between performance and individualism versus community exists in the realization that individual actions and performance contribute to the community's aggregate

outcome. Individual decision-making may impact performance, but collective implementation and outcomes ultimately determine the success of a community. This relationship raises concerns regarding how individualism and community dynamics influence performance in ecovillages. Ecovillages construct their community on both definitions, which has been discussed in the literature review. Consequently, Sieben Linden also defines individualism and community separately, but Althoff demonstrates that the distinction is less than obvious in practice (2023).

Some ecovillages are more individualistic in their implementation of goals than others, and some are focused entirely on living as a community, with no room for individualism. Both of these themes emerged repeatedly during data collection and how Sieben Linden defined them for itself. According to Althoff, there are many individualists living in the ecovillage who have come together and strive for the same goals. As Althoff said:

"here lives a bunch of individualists" (2023).

This makes it perceivable in the implementation process, because when new regulations or policies or goals have been decided it is meant for the specific organization to implement them (Strünke, 2023).

"That are goals for the organization, not goals of the individuals" (Strünke, 2023).

As an example, he stated that the Si-Ge Council is responsible for ensuring that the energy supply is fully renewable in ten years. This goal set the organization and therefore takes responsibility to implement it. However, the members of the SiGe Council are all residents as a requirement to be in the ecovillage. Individual goals are not important in this sense, but the implementation of the goals of the organization depends on them.

Although the new structure should create more clarity by setting the goals of each organization on paper, and therefore the different functions of the organization should be better sorted, the boundaries between individual and community are blurred (Strünke, 2023).

According to Würfel, "structural diversity" dominates in Sieben Linden (2020). That is, the community is in the foreground, but leaves room for the free development of individualism. However, it is challenging to distinguish between

individualism and community, revealing the limitations of this theme. The question of how residents can raise their voice demonstrated for instance the film shown during the weekend. It depicted a scenario in which a resident felt uncomfortable about other residents taking international vacations. Therefore, this resident went to a community council and described her issue with the community's efforts to reduce its carbon imprint while still allowing individuals to take vacations via airplane, which is incompatible with the concept of a sustainable ecovillage. However, the council determined that flights have no effect on the community and that everyone is responsible for their own actions. In the end, the one resident had to live with the behavior of the other residents, but she was able to express her opinion and sentiments about it, and a solution was discussed (Würfel, 2020). This is a crucial aspect of empowering the individual and, therefore, a feminist viewpoint on action implementation.

In addition, the explanation of intensive times take place in this part. These periods happen three times a year and focus more on social processes than on content-related aspects. These specific time-periods therefore contribute to a closer community life, as residents come together and talk a lot about how they feel about certain topics individually, but also in relation to the community (Strünke, 2023). The main factor of this intensive time is the fact that there will be fewer conflict situations in the future, because if people have a free space to talk about their feelings without judging them, others have the opportunity to accept their feelings (Althoff, 2023). The aspect of letting people be who they are, and thus reinforcing individualism, came up several times in the data analysis, and the residents I spoke with were very much in agreement on this point. This strategy represents more of a feminist approach, as feminist theories take different people and their opinions as they are. The basis for discussion and successful implementation involves a lengthy process and consideration of all possible outcomes.

The fact that Sieben Linden is a constant learning process is its most important strategy. Ecovillages are by definition laboratories, so residents are eager to grow as individuals while connecting with others. The key to an ecovillage, then, is to encourage individuals on trying to live differently. For example, Althoff mentioned that they have been testing a "bidding system" for the cost of food. As a resident of

Sieben Linden, you make a one-time investment payment and then add on the ongoing costs. Some residents ultimately felt the ongoing cost of food was too high. The Si-Ge Council took this feedback and then organized meetings with smaller groups. They wanted to see if they could reach that amount if each resident paid as much as they could. Each resident had the opportunity to talk about their finances in these smaller groups, and everyone was allowed to contribute as much as they could. Overall, they concluded that the decision was good enough for now and is currently in place. In this case, performance is evaluated by transparency and open discussion in a more feminist approach, as residents depend on each other and work together to achieve a goal. Therefore, their performance is associated with more trust and truth. Especially the money and the different salaries are a challenge for some. However, the trusting interaction leads to a stronger community and less conflict.

The discussion of individualism versus community correlated with the other themes. Therefore, all themes intertwine and a clear distinction is rather blurred.

This reflects on the features of the theoretical framework of diversity, positionality, and performance, which are also intertwined in the context of cross-boundary work, which represent the fundamental concept. The Sieben Linden case and the feminist approach show that many different aspects or actors in life need more interaction, whether on a political, social or environmental level.

5.1.4 Diversity

Diversity as a characteristic, but also as a theme came up several times on the weekend, because the residents are quite similar in their background and do not present diversity in any way. Therefore, diversity in Western ecovillages receives little attention and is criticized by researchers in the literature, because the people who come together are mostly privileged to think of an alternative lifestyle. They are mostly "white", middle-class and have higher-education (Fonseca et.al., 2022, p.5).

In Sieben Linden, everyone who intends to live in the ecovillage with voting rights is required to contribute to the community's capital, which is typically used to cover expenses. The capital contribution is 25,000 euros, paid in two phases. Large sums

play a role in the discussion with other participants over the course of the weekend when they consider moving to the ecovillage. Consequently, relocating to an ecovillage is a privilege, and those without savings are precluded from doing so. It demonstrates that a sustainable lifestyle is only feasible for those with a certain income level. Consequently, the level of diversity in Sieben Linden is minimal.

Strünke negated a question when asked if Sieben Linden is aware that they make decisions based on a feminist perspective. In addition, he stated that they do not have residents from various cultures and backgrounds to address diversity (Strünke, 2023). My attention was drawn to the controversy surrounding the vision of being open-minded and welcoming to all types of people, which was stated in the policy document but does not manifest in practice. In this way, the ecovillage provides fewer opportunities for diversity and does not include a feminist perspective in the implementation process or the final outcome. The realization that Sieben Linden lacks diversity turns out with little interest.

At the information weekend, during the group meeting, we participants had the opportunity to speak with Hanna Westendorff, a young, female resident who is in the process of becoming a full resident with voting rights.

The majority of the senior residents of the Sieben Linden Ecovillage are white and range in age from the mid-40s to the mid-60s. According to Westendorff Sieben Linden is a:

"old white project" and *"it is very German, very white"* (Westendorff, 2023).

On the other hand, this knowledge about Sieben Linden does not represent anything new before the field research weekend. The diversity in this case shows how they include everyone in the decision-making and implementation process, which has already been discussed in the previous two sections. Therefore, in terms of my definition of using diversity to the case, it shows that Sieben Linden, in theory, tries to include all residents' opinions and create space for people to be heard. In practice, however, the process is somewhat more complex. While the councils are responsible for decision-making, members of the various organizations or associations are responsible for implementing policies or regulations. For example, in the film about Sieben Linden, it was shown that one member of the council was angered by the other members of the organization because they did not implement a new rule that the council had decided on, because they had a different opinion on

the topic (Würfel, 2020). This shows, that the implementation of policies depends on the members of the organizations and associations and they consist of the residents. The free space for letting people be with their own knowledge and opinions can decide if they like new regulations and implement them. The empowerment of letting the residents think for themselves, which Sieben Linden tries to increase through decentralized structures depicts this example of a new regulation's implementation process.

The aspect of different opinions on topics plays an important role in Sieben Linden because they value people speaking their minds and being heard. The main factor that contributes to successful implementation and supports the push for feminist theories in implementation shows the basic understanding of different opinions in Sieben Linden. Westendorff stated that:

"there are different opinions, but the point is not to understand the opinions or backgrounds, but to accept them and finding a basis for discussion" (Westendorff, 2023)

This points out, that negotiation, conflict but also compromise and a common ground for aiming the goals exist in Sieben Linden. The feminist perspective encourages exactly this increase of understanding and accepting, but also more discussion (Carey et.al, 2017).

Another aspect that I have included in the diversity theme is the fact that Sieben Linden lives in a bubble, as discussed in the literature whether ecovillages in general are similar to islands (Andreas, 2013). The input that Sieben Linden would like to have in order to develop further includes the fact that they engage with the outside world. The policy paper and also the website show a great interest in achieving this goal, and Sieben Linden has never thought of isolating itself. The first reason is that they do not have their own economy or currency, like other ecovillages in the world. Second, they grow up to 70% of their own food, but have to buy the remaining 30% in the neighboring villages and cities. In addition, Althoff and other residents have agreed that Sieben Linden wants to be involved in the region around them. Althoff is the person responsible for communication between Sieben Linden and the city of Beetzendorf, with whom they do a lot of public work together (2023). As stated by Westendorff:

"we do not want to be an ecological bubble and we carry it out to the world, because we experiment" (Westendorff, 2023).

However, the feeling that emerged during the weekend when observing the participants, as well as the residents we got to see, was mostly limited to the people who were intrinsically included for the weekend. Conversations with residents other than Althoff, Westendorff, and Weusthoff presented challenging. This fact also limits this study, as I only solicited opinions from a small number of residents and the analysis is a very subjective.

6 Discussion

The discussion section examines the essential elements required to answer the research question of understanding a feminist approach in Sieben Linden's decision-making process. Despite the fact that the community places a high value on decision-making, it is essential to view this process through a feminist lens. This perspective acknowledges that decision-making and implementation are intricate and interdependent processes that are influenced by larger social, economic, and political contexts. Sieben Linden's approach to decision-making is consistent to some extent with feminist principles because they contemplate all potential outcomes prior to making a final choice.

In actuality, however, the lack of expertise among council members frequently leads to decisions that reinforce patriarchal norms. Despite this, residents have delegated decision-making authority to council members, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and equitable decision-making process in Sieben Linden. Their performance is determined by their ability to decide and the desire to achieve a result, as opposed to collaborating with actors who have the required expertise. On the one hand, it seems Sieben Linden lives in a bubble. Their decision-making also suffers regarding less engagement with the outside world and less collaboration with various organizations, as cross-boundary represents. On the other hand, residents generally lack interest in decision-making participation. First, the majority of plenary assemblies are modest, and second, the email communication with residents lacks encouragement. Observing the inhabitants reveals that they are all too preoccupied with themselves to interact with tasks like decision but also with outsiders. Consequently, as noted by Andreas in his work, ecovillages continue to do too little to connect not only with the neighboring region, but also with other regions or countries that can include the next level of policy (2013).

Therefore, comprehending the implementation process is part of Sieben Linden's decision-making process, and implementation is a relatively minor step. The study remains constrained by the fact that the implementation process in Sieben Linden

is only partially understood and only entails actors within the ecovillage. Consequently, comprehending the implementation process of the Sieben Linden goals entails decision-making predominance. Moreover, sociocracy encompasses both the evaluation of a decision and the evaluation of its implementation. When deciding and implementing new rules and goals, Sieben Linden attempts to keep in mind that they are mutable and do not need to last long if they do not achieve the top three objectives. Decentralized structures, self-sufficiency, and self-responsibility are the grand visions for which Sieben Linden stands and towards which regulations and policies aim.

However, I wondered over the weekend if the village next door, Poppau, which has approximately 160 residents, only 20 more than the ecovillage, could adopt the ecovillage concept, because politics on every level need to think about the climate crises consequences and an ecovillage aims mostly to be sustainable in every aspect of life. Althoff shook his head because they lack the common ground necessary to construct a closer, more sustainable community. It also reflects on the ability to show similarities with a feminist approach to have firstly a common ground and secondly negotiate and compromise on that to make decisions and implementing them.

In the case of Sieben Linden, the contradictory nature of their decision-making illustrates a controversy that reflects the complexity of the case. They have strict rules, such as no vehicles or WiFi on the premises. Nevertheless, Althoff explains that they have strict principles but flexible implementation, so as a feminist approach to implementation, there is space for individual implementation and creativity despite the existence of strict regulations. Moreover, the main point of how to comprehend the implementation process is that there are regulations primarily from the founders, but there is no "rule book" and self-responsibility is the most important aspect of this close community (Westendorff, 2023).

However, the feminist approach advocates for looser regulations. Therefore, they adopt a feminist approach in part, but not to its maximum capacity. In this sense, analyzing the policy paper with its broader visions fits the feminist approach rather than the further regulations of the different councils. However, the visions do not affect the daily business as Strünke explained (2023).

Another aspect that becomes increasingly apparent as the data was examined, indicates that the implementation theory limits the study and the theory's fit with

the case challenged. Nevertheless, the implementation theory with a bottom-up approach would have been a better match than the feminist approach, given that cross-border work occurs only within the ecovillage and not with the outside world, as stated previously. Therefore, the feminist approach posed a greater challenge than attempting to comprehend the case. For instance, Sieben Linden makes extensive use of the feedback mechanism, which emerges in the implementation theory more generally than within a feminist-specific influencing factor.

7 Concluding Remarks

The conclusion corresponds to the thesis presented in the Discussion and Limitations sections. Due to the limited data collection over a single weekend, it is essential to remember that the implementation from a feminist perspective does not precisely suit the case. However, the feminist characteristics are partially met because the data collection permits a comprehension of Sieben Linden's decision-making process through a feminist lens. On the one hand, residents are aware that their knowledge and diversity are limited and that emotional processes are lengthy. On the other hand, the structural norms that are still present in an ecovillage demonstrate that they are unable to completely break the cycle in order to develop innovative solutions for decision-making and implementation. Thus, the dynamics of individuals and the efficacy of policies or regulations are comparable to traditional implementation theory approaches.

Additional research could encourage people to remain in the ecovillage for an extended period of time, attend council meetings when decisions are made, evaluate the decisions six months later, and then analyze the data. Ethnographic research necessitates more in-depth data acquisition, particularly regarding how residents are involved in decision-making. If researcher spend more time and for an extended period of time in the ecovillage, additional research could be conducted to comprehend the implementation process of the ecovillage in greater depth.

However, the information weekend provided not only details about the ecovillage as a whole, but also the opinions of notable individuals regarding the ecovillage. The other participants had very insightful ideas, and the discussions shed light on the ecovillage: only those who are serious about altering their way of life are drawn to this initiative. Therefore, Sieben Linden's network does not reach the outside world as effectively as they would like. Ecovillages are largely obscure to the majority of society. Literature on ecovillage has attempted to comprehend the phenomenon of ecovillages involving their neighboring regions, but more networks are required for the concept to be transferred to other local levels.

The concept of an ecovillage could assist smaller communities in reconnecting with one another and, most importantly, with nature. However, for this step, common ground is required, and to combat the climate crisis, everyone must work together.

8   References

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9　Appendix

The conversation with Christoph Strünke was arranged before the start of the information weekend and mainly consisted of him describing the structures of the Seven Linden Ecovillage.

Since this research is generally guided by the feminist approach in implementation theory, I already had questions and keywords in mind before visiting the ecovillage. However, I let Christoph Strünke talk so that the conversation would have a flow rather than a structured interview. He talked mostly about decision-making, and to start the conversation I had broadly outlined questions, which are listed in the bullet points below:

- Wie sieht die Entscheidungsstruktur in Sieben Linden aus?

    (Translation: How does the decision-making process look like in Sieben Linden?)

- Wie sieht es mit Diversität in Sieben Linden aus?

    (Translation: How does diversity look like in Sieben Linden?)

- Habt ihr einen feministischen Ansatz in Sieben Linden?

    (Translation: Do you have a feminist approach in Sieben Linden?)