IASS POTSDAM

Beyond Grassroots Innovation - The Politics of Institutionalizing Community Energy in European Energy Transition Governance

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about: me

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The Politics of Community Energy in Europe – Analyzing the Role of Ideas and Agency in Sustainability Transformation Politics

How do Community Energy Movements shape and get shaped by European energy transition politics and policy?

Empirical comparison of the emergence of Community Energy Movements and coalitions as political forces in EU and German energy transition politics

Structure

1. Puzzle: From Consumer to Citizens and Communities
2. Theoretical Framework: Politics of Energy Transition and Discursive Interaction
3. Methods
4. Findings (preliminary)
   a. Storylines
   b. Discourse Coalitions
   c. Discursive Interaction
5. Conclusion

From Consumer to Citizens and Communities

Community Energy Movements

EU Energy Union Vision

*"Our vision is of an **Energy Union with citizens at its core, where citizens take ownership of the energy transition**, benefit from new technologies to reduce their bills, participate actively in the market, and where vulnerable consumers are protected." (European Commission, 2015)*

EU Clean Energy Package 2020-2030

Acknowledgement
Definition of „Renewable/ Citizen Energy Communities" and „Active/ Self-Consumers"

A set of basic rights
to produce, store, consume and sell renewable energy individually and collectively

Enabling Framework
to support development of energy communities in EU Member States

	Renewable Energy Communities	Citizens Energy Communities
ELIGIBILITY	**Members/shareholders that are:** · Natural persons. · Local authorities (including municipalities). · SMEs.	**Members/shareholders that are:** · Any entity.
CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY (alternative to for-profit)	**Primary purpose:** Environmental, economic, social community benefits for members or local areas of operation rather than financial profits.	**Primary purpose:** Environmental, economic, social community benefits for members or local areas of operation rather than financial profits.
OPEN & VOLUNTARY MEMERSHIP	· Participation must be voluntary · Participation in renewable energy generation projects should be open to all potential local members based on non-discriminatory criteria.	· Participation must be voluntary. · Participation should be open to all potential members based on non-discriminatory criteria.
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE & OWNERSHIP	· Must be autonomous - no disproportionate control by individual members/outside partners in decision-making. · Effective control by members/ shareholders that are in 'proximity' to RES projects.	· No autonomy principle, but decision-making powers should be limited to members not involved in large scale commercial activity and where the energy sector does not constitute a primary area of economic activity. · Effective control by members/ shareholders that are natural persons, local authorities (including municipalities) and small and micro-enterprises.

Source: REScoop.eu

Turn to Collective Action

Community Energy as grassroots innovation

Niches as drivers of sustainability transition through replication, scaling-up and translation of models, practices and ideas.

(Hargreaves et al. 2011; Seyfang and Smith 2007)

Community Energy as transformative social innovation movement

New ways of doing, thinking and organizing to challenge, alter or replace dominant configurations. Locally embedded, trans locally connected. Movements that prefigure and mobilize for alternative systems.

(Avelino 2019; Haxeltine et al. 2017; Pel et al. 2019; Pelenc et al. 2019; Smith 2014)

Research questions

- How can the shift in EU energy policy and politics from passive energy consumers to active energy citizens and communities be explained?
- What is the role of emerging *Community Energy Movements and Coalitions*?
- What are the lessons that can be drawn from this case study for sustainability transitions (scholarship)?

The Politics of Energy Transitions

Politics

"politics is about power; about the forces which influence and reflect its distribution and use; and about the effect of this on resource use and distribution; it is about the 'transformatory' capacity of social agents, agencies and institutions; it is not about government or government alone" (Held and Leftwich 1984, 144)

Policymaking from a critical policy studies perspective

Power-laden, non-rational and contested process of problem framing, meaning-making and agency with regards to designing, decision-making, implementation, adaptation and discontinuation of public policies (Fischer et al. 2015)

The politics of (Community) Energy Transitions

How and why do energy policies change? Analyzing how Community Energy Movements mobilize discourse and knowledge to influence policy and politics

Analytical Framework

Discourse
"stripped of postmodernist baggage…encompasses not only the substantive content of ideas but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed. Discourse is not just ideas or "text" (what is said) but also context (where, when, how, and why it was said). The term refers not only to structure (what is said, or where and how) but also to agency (who said what to whom)" (Schmid 2008, 305).

Institutional Change

Changes in policy ideas, programs and philosophies (Schmidt 2008)

Storylines

Narrative constructs to make sense of and attach meaning to social reality (Hajer 1995)

Discourse Coalitions

Relatively stable configuration of actors held together by common storylines and discursive practices (Hajer 1995)

Methods

Qualitative case study design

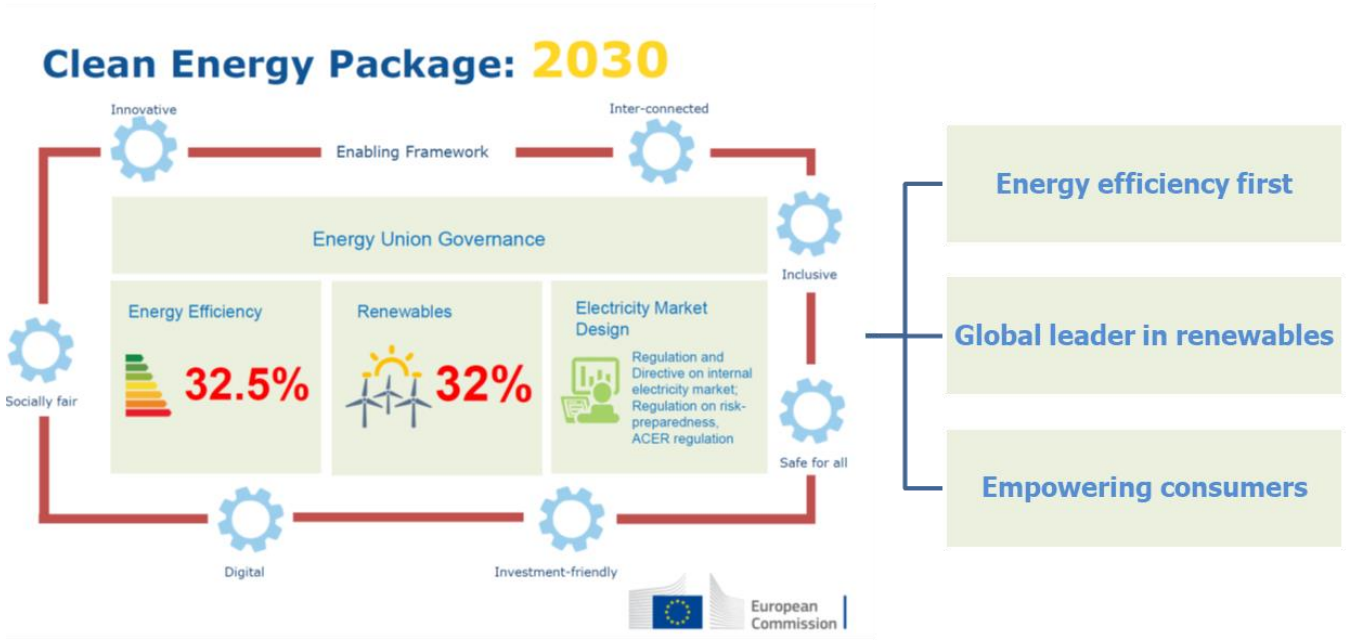
Driven by empirical research interest

Longitudinal analysis of EU Energy politics 2013-2019

Tracing the role of ideas and agency in political process

Data collection	Data analysis
21 semi-structured expert interviews	Theoretically informed data sample
Participant observation 2014-2019	Theoretically informed questions set
Primary documents (charters, newsletters, reports, policy statements, consultations, meeting minutes, etc.)	Open coding and constant comparative method
	Building of categories and themes

Background: EU Energy Policy 2020-2030



Clean energy for all Europeans package - legislative process

	European Commission Proposal	**EU Inter-institutional** Negotiations	**European Parliament** Adoption	**Council** Adoption	**Official Journal** Publication
Energy Performance in Buildings	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	17/04/2018	14/05/2018	19/06/2018 - Directive (EU) 2018/844
Renewable Energy	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	13/11/2018	04/12/2008	21/12/2018 - Directive (EU) 2018/2001
Energy Efficiency	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	13/11/2018	04/12/2018	21/12/2018 - Directive (EU) 2018/2002
Governance of the Energy Union	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	13/11/2018	04/12/2018	21/12/2018 - Regulation (EU) 2018/1999
Electricity Regulation	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	26/03/2019	22/05/2019	14/06/2019 - Regulation (EU) 2019/943
Electricity Directive	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	26/03/2019	22/05/2019	14/06/2019 - Directive (EU) 2019/944
Risk Preparedness	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	26/03/2019	22/05/2019	14/06/2019 - Regulation (EU) 2019/941
ACER	30/11/2016	Political Agreement	26/03/2019	22/05/2019	14/06/2019 - Regulation (EU) 2019/942

Source: own based on EU Commission

Community Energy Storyline(s)

A fair, decentralized and democratic energy transition in Europe

Diagnostic Elements

Problems	- Multiple crises (climate & environment, economy, geopolitics, socio-economic) make energy transition necessary - Energy transition will fail without citizen participation and ownership - EU energy regulation lags behind growing trends of small and decentralized participants
Causality and responsibility	- Oligopolistic structures and incumbents obstruct action - Old thinking focused on large, centralized and fossil-fuels based energy systems - MS and EU have not acted sufficiently

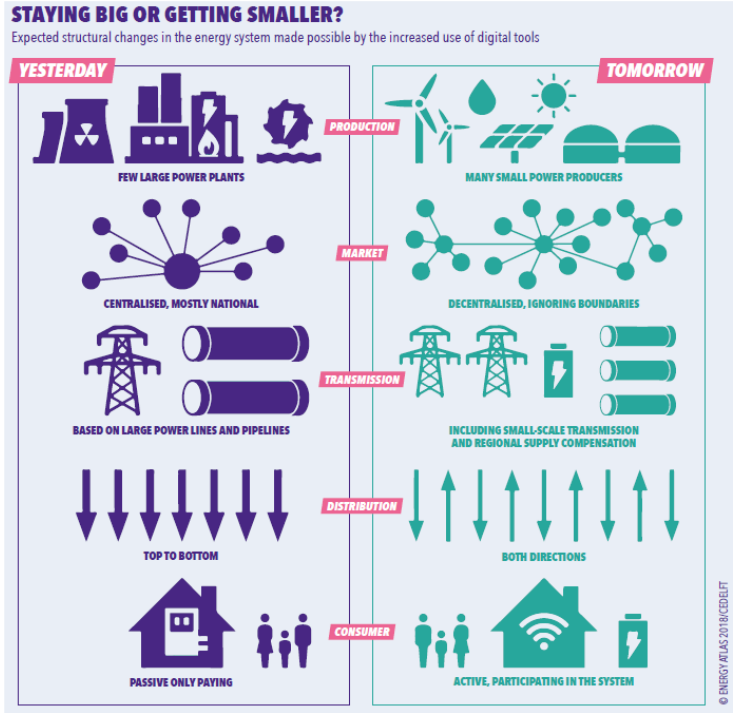
Prognostic Elements

Solution	- Transition to decentralized renewables, owned and governed democratically by citizens, communities, and local municipalities - Citizens collectively or individually produce, consume, store and sell energy
Benefits	- Private investments, local added value and acceptance though ownership and participation - Energy security and flexibility through local supply and use - Growth in RES production, improvements in energy savings and greenhouse gas emissions reductions
Preconditions	- Recognition of energy communities as unique market actor - Policy support to level the playing field

Motivational Elements

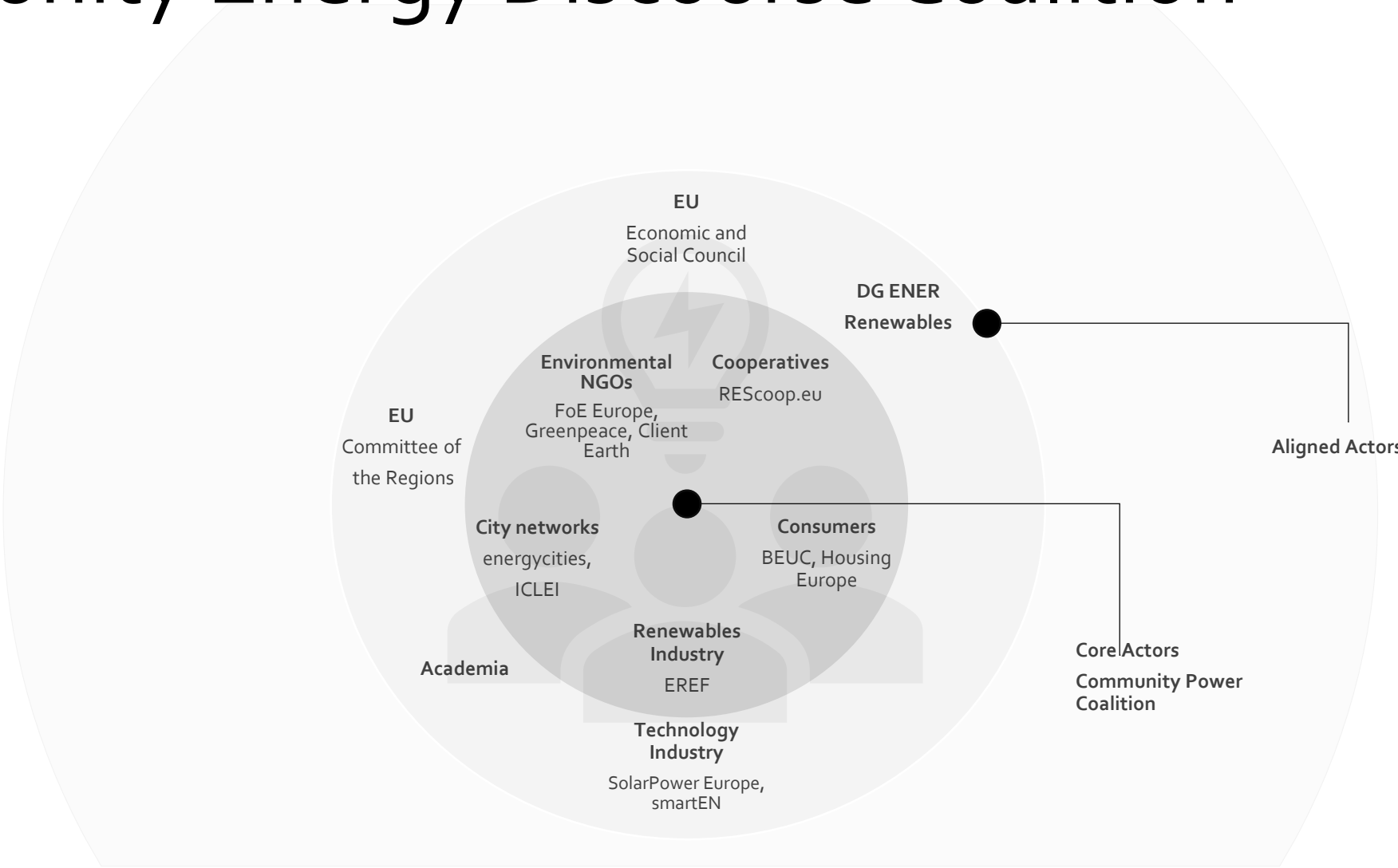
Legitimacy	- Representation of citizens´ interests, common set of principles and values (moral authority) - Proof of concept, expertise and scientific evidence (cognitive authority)

Symbols, e.g.“ old“ and “new“ energy world



Source: Heinrich Böll Foundation 2018

Community Energy Discourse Coalition



Discursive Interactions and Political Process

Institutional setting & meaning context
- From "if" to "how": second phase of the energy transition
- Post 2020 EU Energy and Climate Framework

Discursive interaction
- REScoop.eu and Community Power project emerge funded by EU and develop "Energy Democracy" and "Community Ownership" storylines
- Sharing stories, codifying practice and knowledge, building coalitions

Agenda Setting 2013-2015

Policy Formulation Phase (2015-2016)

Discursive interaction
- Community Power Coalition emerges
- Increasing interaction with decision- makers and stakeholders at events, bilaterally, through reports, consultations etc.
- Storyline translates into policy demands (recognition, level playing field, support): "We just had to make the case with the Commission" (Interview 2)

Institutional setting & meaning context
- Energy Union opens discursive window of opportunity: "citizens at the heart of the energy market" and "empowering consumers"
- EU Commission prepares the Clean Energy Package

Discursive interaction
- Community Power Coalition engages in advocacy work to improve Commission proposal with Parliament and defend against Council
- Different stakeholders align with storyline (consumers, cities, RE industry, etc.)
- Counter-coalition emerges with system operators, utilities and regulators: "Same rights, same obligations!"

Institutional setting & meaning context
- Self-consumption highly politicized
- Member State politics impact EU, e.g. government changes in Spain and Italy

Decision Making Phase (2017-2019)

Discussion: The Politics of Community Energy

Community Energy storyline institutionalizes in EU energy discourse and policy

→ Salient, credible, legitimate: cognitive and moral authority through translating knowledge and practice into storyline and policy ideas
→ Window of opportunity through discursive and institutional shift of EU Commission towards consumer empowerment
→ Broad and deep discourse coalition including aligned actors

Transformative? Paradigmatic shifts towards citizen and consumer empowerment in EU policy **but** policy effects likely to be ambiguous (e.g. deliberate pragmatism in storyline and repertoires of action, capture by powerful interests, unclear implementation by Member States)! Analysis to be continued…

Conclusions for Energy Transitions

This case study illustrates…

… that energy transitions are characterized by moments of path creation, e.g. political process & policymaking

…that changes of societal structures require not only innovation as they are typically brought about by political organization, mobilization and meaning-making. E.g. “scaling-up” is a political process!

…how meaning is constructed and institutionalized in discursive interactions

Thank you for your attention!
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