

Community energy and social innovation: a situational analyses approach to an international comparison

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Research context

Previous focus points of community energy research: Community as actor, scale and/or place of policy innovation.

- Improvement and/or acceleration of technology implementation.
- Build/increase trust and acceptance of energy projects.
- More recently: Organizational innovation (e.g. reinvigoration of cooperatives).

Research project

Research Question

Do community energy projects provide experimental spaces of social innovation for the *Energiewende* through identity, process and network?

Case Studies

International comparison: Germany, Denmark, England, Scotland

Community projects: Majority ownership and management by community, active in >2 of generation, distribution, retail, services (efficiency, reduced consumption, storage etc.), active for >2 yrs.

Corresponding scientific debates

Strategic Niche Management

How does social innovation complement and extend the role of technical innovation in energy transitions?

cf. Hargreaves et al. 2011; Seyfang & Smith 2007; Seyfang & Haxeltine 2012.

Social Movements / Citizen-Consumers

What role for action based and community oriented initiatives in socio-econ. transformation? Can social practices reconcile ideologies of consumerism and citizenship?

cf. Byrne et al. 2007; Busa & Garder 2015; Hoffman & High-Pippert 2010; Johnston 2011

Political Ecology of Citizenship

How do processes of sustainability transitions interact with concepts of citizenship and community identity?

cf. Devine-Wright 2007; Dobson 2003, 2006; Harvey 2005; Stone 1972, 2006

Analytical approach

Community energy projects as grassroots drivers of sociotechnical configurations

Resource mobilization of community energy actors towards collective goals

Ecological citizenship and community identity as grassroots resources

Identity

Process

Process

Network

Method: Situational analysis

Mapping according to specific analytical axes.

Structuring of situations, social and political arenas and discursive positions. Not voice to individual but social as full situation of enquiry.

‘Situational’: important human or non-human elements of research situation; ‘Social worlds/arenas’: aggregate collective actors or key elements and arenas of their negotiating processes. ‘Positional’: positions assumed or neglected in the research context in reference to specific discursive axes. (Clarke, 2003, 554)

Not “basic social process” but mapping of multiple alternatives. Analyses of complexity and difference rather than convergence and commonality (Clarke, 2003, 556, 559).

Innovative potential of research.

Internat. comparison of social practices of community energy

Complementary to the analysis of community energy projects as implementors or accelerants of a technology and resource based energy transition.

Grassroots innovations for sociotechnical configurations

Broadens the analytic perspective on community energy research beyond a SNM focus on innovation originating in the grassroots.

Fundamental social science research and applied research

Expands methodological perspectives of both academics and practitioners in mediating between 'fundamental social science research' and the practice of community action.

Thank you.

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