

Abstract for STS Conference Graz 2015

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Abstract for session 16: Local Innovation Impulses and the Transformation of the Energy System

The role of local bottom-up initiatives as “change agents” of energy transition

Renewable energies widely disseminated within the paths of decentralized diffusion systems where local actors often played a predominant role – as developers, early adopters and/or users of an innovation. This especially holds true for the early dissemination of renewable energies in Denmark or Germany. Despite the since long continuing professionalization of the renewable energy sector local bottom-up initiatives from civil society still play an important role as “change agents” (e.g. in Germany, Austria or the UK), displaying a wide range of innovative social practices in the field of energy transition. What we can observe here is on ongoing differentiation of institutional forms, organizational targets and roles of actors involved in local activities concerning the implementation and/or spreading of renewable energies.

The proposed contribution discusses key success factors as well as obstacles for local innovative practices in the field of energy transition, putting a special emphasis on local actor constellations and forms of governance as well as on the availability of inner-organizational resources of action. A theoretical point of reference will be transition theory, whereby the paper will put an emphasis on the issue of niche-regime interaction and discuss the conditions under which local bottom-up initiatives could contribute to a regime change towards a novel energy system structure based on technological decentralization, economic diversity, societal pluralism and environmental sustainability.