

Understanding conflict within renewable energy cooperatives

Abstract

Due to reforms of the renewable energy act (EEG), renewable energy cooperatives in Germany are losing the feed-in tariff as their most important revenue stream for new projects. Subsequently, they need to adapt their business strategies to the changing environment.

This paper explores issues of power and identity at stake in the energy transition from a standpoint *within* renewable energy initiatives in Germany. It examines conflict concerning their organizational identity and their strategic decisions during significant political change.

Analysis draws on qualitative data collected through participant observation in annual general meetings of 15 cooperatives in 2014 and on semi-structured interviews with their members (ongoing).

We conceptualize renewable energy cooperatives as 'hybrids' between social-, ecological- and business enterprises (Huybrechts 2013). Hybrid organizations are regarded as important actors in societal transitions while facing very specific challenges: internally, hybrid organizations are prone to conflict regarding their organizational identity. Externally, it can be difficult for them to gain organizational legitimacy (e.g. as volunteer-run organizations in the business sphere). Finally, they are always at risk of 'mission drift', losing one part of their hybrid identity (e.g. the ecological part) in favor of another (e.g. the identity as a business organization).

By investigating these challenges through the analysis of conflict, we aim at gaining a better understanding for the dominant logics and societal power dynamics and their relevance on the micro level. We argue that in order to better understand the workings of power dynamics in the energy transition, we need to take micro-processes into account.

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Publication bibliography

Huybrechts, Benjamin (2013): The Role of Networks in Gaining Legitimacy for Hybrid Organizations: The Case of Renewable Energy Source Cooperatives. Edited by UCL. Namur (1er Congrès Interdisciplinaire du Développement Durable. Quelle Transition Pour Nos Sociétés?).