

## **How to Meet a Global Challenge? Germany's Envisioned Energy System Transformation in the European Context**

**Daniel Barben**, (RWTH Aachen University)

In a bold and very surprising move, in the aftermath of the Fukushima catastrophe the German government under Chancellor Merkel decided on a radical U-turn in energy policy. For, just half a year earlier, it had decided to reverse the previous government's (a coalition of Social Democrats and Greens) decision to phase out nuclear power, by significantly extending the running time of Germany's nuclear reactors. In the spring and summer of 2011, the executive and legislative branches of government agreed upon an ambitious plan for a sustainable energy system transition (commonly referred to as "Energiewende") that would meet both challenges concerning climate change and sustainable energy. Key aims are to phase out nuclear power altogether by 2022, to increase the market share of renewable energy to 35% by 2020 and to 80% by 2050 and to cut the use of primary energy by half until 2050.

In this paper, I will analyze the societal context in which the plan for a sustainable energy system transition was implemented, together with the challenges, opportunities and displacements which have been articulated from various perspectives in order to support or undermine the rationality and legitimacy of this "grand project." I will focus on the interrelationships in the technological, political, economic, and socio-cultural configuration of the future energy system planned for Germany, including issues concerning its European contextualization.