

Abstract for the STS Conference Graz 2014

Conference theme: “ Towards Low-Carbon Energy Systems”, Special Session 2: Energy systems in transition – strategies of incumbent actors

Involving Incumbent Actors in Local Strategies for Energy System Transformations. Examples from three Case Studies.

The urban energy system is a key field for coping with environmental changes and for a sustainable development of cities. Its forms and practices are decisive for resource consumption, but it also has important impacts on social and economic development. Cities are major context for the consumption of resources as well as centers for innovation and privileged level for experimentation and implementation of new approaches.

The paper presents findings on local strategies for energy system transformations, focusing on local experimentations of new approaches. These are conceptualized as local niches in the sense of a development and testing of new configurations of structural elements (Konrad et al. 2004). It refers to the multilevel perspective which analyses transformations as interplay of three different levels: landscape, regime and niches.

Results of case studies conducted in three major metropolitan areas in Germany (Berlin, Frankfurt/Main and Ruhr Metropolis) reveal different context specific local pathways and strategies. One common point, realized in different ways, is the (endeavor of an) integration of local incumbent actors in the reconfiguration of the local energy system. The paper will present findings regarding this aspect of local strategies as well as reflections on the role of local incumbent actors.

This work is part of a PhD thesis realized in the framework of an interdisciplinary researcher group on urban infrastructures (2010-2014) at the Technical University of Darmstadt.

The results are based on the analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews with local actors and experts, a literature study, official documents and a media analysis. For each city/metropolitan region, two local experiments are analyzed in detail.