

Does Participation Foster Sustainable Energy Transformations? An Evaluation Concept to Measure Social Learning within Participation Processes

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One-page Poster Summary

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Participation is discussed and also applied to foster the energy transformation to reach a sustainable energy system. However, an evaluation concept is missing, proving the particular impact of participation on social change. Therefore, this poster will present an evaluation concept to measure whether social learning is an outcome of participation processes related to energy policy or not.

Research Gap

Participation is discussed as an important leverage of transformations towards sustainability. In political science it is presumed that the success of transformation processes depends to a large extent on social change. Social change can be described as learning processes by which existing behaviour and values are adjusted or even replaced. Participation processes seem to offer a governance tool to foster such underlining social change processes. However, presently no empirical proof exists that participation actually promotes social learning and thus the transformation towards sustainable energy systems. Evaluation concepts are mainly applied for environmental management processes but hardly any data exists that concentrates on the outcome of energy related participation processes.

Composition of an Evaluation Concept

Evaluation is defined as a systematic assessment of value and performance of an object. In this specific case, evaluation is applied as a judgemental process by which participation processes are analysed and rated. Therefore a concept needs to be developed, which is based on indicators that represent the relevant aims and impacts of the object under consideration. In a first step a normative concept needs to be created, which summarises the aims and values participation should generate. This normative concept is important in order to compare the actual situation to a target value. Here I want to find out, if participation is contributing to a social learning process. That is why a concept of social learning will be developed, which represents the dependent variable. The independent variable is methods and conditions of participation processes. Once more a concept, based on criteria and indicators from exciting studies concerning participation and also learning research, will be designed.

Intermediate Conclusion

Social learning is a concept that has many definitions, depending on the context or author in question. Furthermore, a wide variety of learning theories demonstrate the complexity and interdependence of learning. That's why the developed evaluation concept has to be designed by applying findings from multiple disciplines. Even though this approach will allow an in-depth analysis of the outcome of participatory processes, it can only investigate a specific hypothesis. However, this evaluation approach can be transferred and thus applied to other aspects related to participatory and social change processes.