

Press Release

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German Energy Transformation Widely Accepted

Interdisciplinary Research Project Aims to Facilitate Germany's Transition to Renewables

Under the leadership of the Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE, an interdisciplinary team is investigating how the transition to an energy system based on renewables finds durable acceptance among the German population. In addition to Fraunhofer ISE, the partners involved are the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research ISI, the Center for Interdisciplinary Risk and Innovation Studies ZIRIUS at the University Stuttgart and the Institute for Political Science at the University of Münster (WWU). Public utilities and other partners with practical experience in the field supplement the team. The project called "KomMA-P | Strengthening the Acceptance of the Energy Transformation" is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). First results show that there is a large degree of acceptance for the energy transformation within the German population.

"Engineers, political scientists, psychologists and experts from the practice are investigating the options for societal participation to strengthen the acceptance of the energy transformation. Up to now in the techno-economic optimization, social influences have hardly been a point of discussion," reflects Sebastian Gölz, psychologist and project leader at Fraunhofer ISE. "The scientific scenarios show that the energy transformation is necessary and feasible. The KomMA-P project analyses how the social aspects and participation possibilities can be integrated into the scenario in order to create an optimized, all-encompassing plan for the energy transformation.

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As a first step, the research partners surveyed different focus groups on their attitudes with respect to the energy transformation. The majority of the 50 participants, who took part in this study, saw the transformation to renewables as necessary and even accepted a certain cost burden. The results indicated, however, that a surprisingly clear mistrust of “those at the top” exists, while the local public utilities and other regional players enjoy public confidence. Also, participants were critical about perceived injustices, such as the fair distribution of benefits and cost burden of the energy transformation as well as decisions on construction projects.

In order to involve the local public utilities more strongly in the transformation, pilot projects with municipal utility companies are already under way. In Wunsiedel, Bavaria, a publically accessible visualization of the community’s energy flow and the use of a so-called “energy box,” a mini power station to provide electricity and heat to several homes, are planned. The municipal utilities in both Münster and Dortmund are to carry out surveys about the energy transformation. Underlying all activities is the question of how the public, independent of financial investment, can contribute to the success of the energy transformation.

Currently the project partners are developing a model to show the various aspects which influence public acceptance. Based on the model, a representative survey will be developed and carried out. In the final phase of the project, all results will be used to make recommendations on how the techno-economic path of the energy transformation can be optimized for a high degree of public acceptance. The next meeting for all project partners is in October 2014. Additional partners from the practice are warmly welcomed to join the project.

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Informational Material

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Text of the press release can be downloaded from our website: www.ise.fraunhofer.de

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