

# Participation and acceptance of changes concerning the energy supply system and the role of justice in planning and decision making processes

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## Introduction

While it is commonly accepted that substantial changes are necessary for a development towards a sustainable energy system, the concrete planning and construction of renewable energy plants and new transmission lines for example often lead to much societal controversy. Even though a good part of the key stakeholders on different levels of the political, administrative and economical sphere have acknowledged the importance of the acceptance of the public as well as the persons concerned by any changes, opportunities for participation are still rather rare. Planning and decision making processes, and in particular the question whether participation is offered to those concerned, play a crucial role for the acceptance of the technological changes. Although often referred to (e.g. Matthies et al., 2004; ÖGUT Strategic Group on Participation, 2004; Zoellner, 2008), the direct link between participation and acceptance is rarely thoroughly analysed and explained.

One aim of the research referred to here was gaining a deeper understanding of the different levels and forms of participation, how they are perceived, evaluated and used. Furthermore the relationship between participation and the acceptance of changes in the energy system was analysed. Here different psychological constructs like perceived justice, trust, local identity and competence were included, and their part in this relationship was specified.

## Methods

These questions were addressed for one thing in the context of the construction of renewable energy plants in different

communities in two German federal States, for another thing in two communities affected by the possible construction of new transmission lines. For both fields of application a multi-method approach for the data collection was used. Interviews with key actors and questionnaires (N = 859 and N = 450) were complemented by the participation in two local information events. Additionally the results and recommendations for the practical field were discussed with and verified by practitioners and other researchers in two workshops.

## Results and reflection

In both fields of application the statistical comparison of means points towards a contrast between wishes for and the evaluation of participation; while wishes for participation are high on all levels of participation (from information to acting autonomously) with a slight decline for those forms demanding more action, its evaluation indicates a (perceived) lack of participation offers and a distinct need for action in this field. Among the participation methods favoured most are visits of existing plants and information through media as well as information events. Procedural and distributive justice appears to be of particular importance - regression analyses show their influence on whether and to which extent there exists an active acceptance supporting the acceptable construction of renewable energy plants. In the field of the planning and construction of transmission lines justice becomes a transregional issue, necessitating adequate approaches of compensation, as qualitative analyses of the interviews emphasized. Transparency and trust not only constitute relevant aspects of the relationship between involved stakeholders like residents, local initiatives, operating companies, grid

operators and local authorities but also in the planning and decision making process.

## References

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