

# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition

Steven Engler & Esther Trost



VIRTUELLES INSTITUT  
TRANSFORMATION  
ENERGIEWENDE<sup>NRW</sup>



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Structure:

- Introduction
- Project “Mentalities and Patterns of Behaviour”
- Why Socio-Cultural Perspectives?
- Conclusion



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Introduction





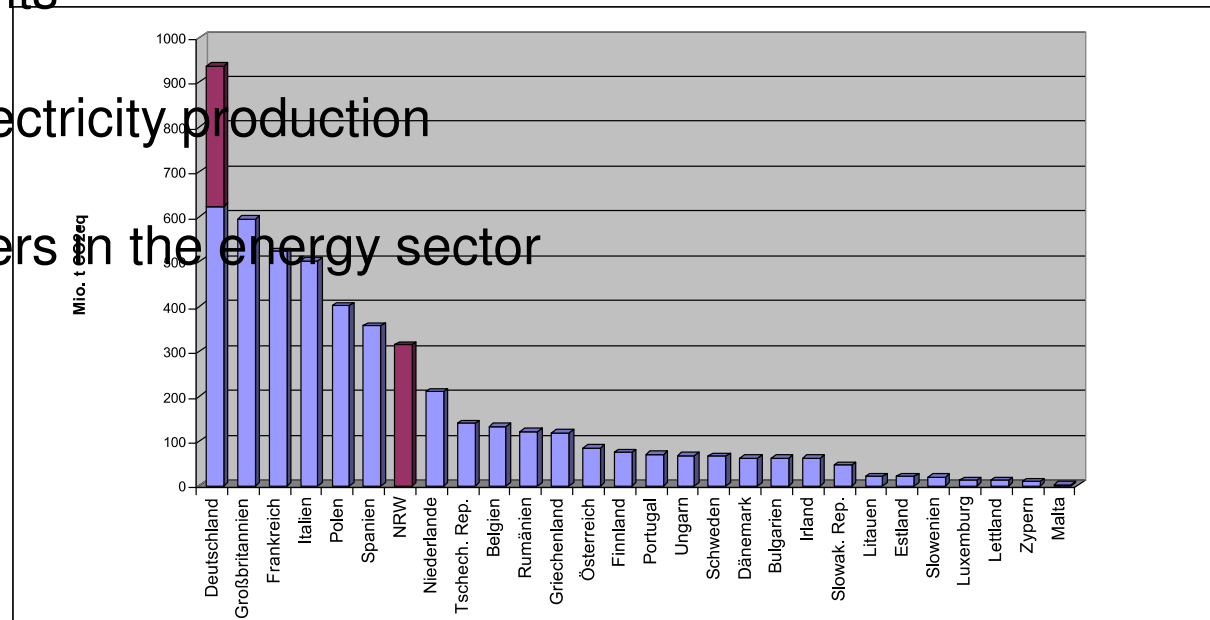
# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Introduction

### Why NRW?

- 18 Million Inhabitants
- 33% of German electricity production
- 1,1 Million employers in the energy sector



Source: Fishedick 2014

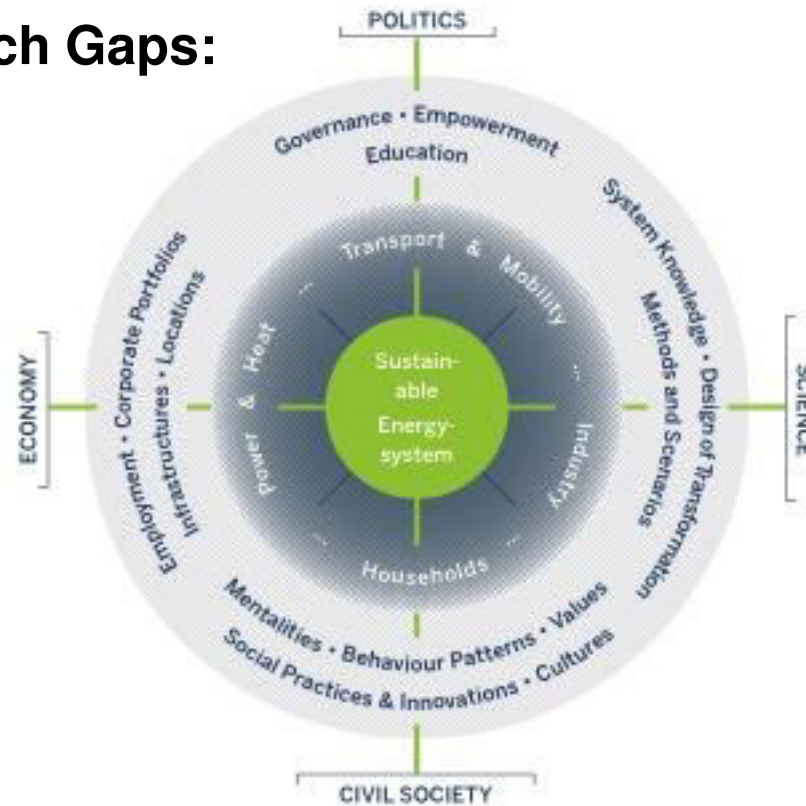


# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Introduction

### Topics / Research Gaps:





# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Project „Mentalities & Patterns of Behaviour concerning the Energy Transition in North Rhine- Westphalia”

- **Project Idea/Research Questions:**
  - Impact of energy-related mentalities and patterns of behaviour on the success of the North Rhine-Westphalian Energy Transition
  - Attitude-behaviour-gap
- **Coordination:**
  - Forschungszentrum Jülich
- **Cooperating partners:**
  - Bochum University of Applied Science, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, RWTH Aachen University, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy
- **Funded by:**
  - Ministerium für Innovation, Wissenschaft und Forschung (MIWF); Cluster EnergieForschung.NRW
- **Duration:** 03/2015 – 05/2017



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Approaches in the cluster **Mentalities & Patterns of Behaviour**

- Which energy-related mentalities and patterns of behaviour currently exist in North Rhine-Westphalia? How do the two relate?
- Which barriers inhibit energy- and resource-saving practices on the level of households and individuals?
- How do actors frame the energy transition and make sense of it? What does this tell us about dominant perceptions of the energy transition?
- What kind of energy futures does the affected population wish for and what are their priorities?



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Approaches in the cluster **Mentalities & Patterns of Behaviour**

- Which energy-related mentalities and patterns of behaviour currently exist in North Rhine-Westphalia? How do the two relate?
- Which barriers inhibit energy- and resource-saving practices on the level of households and individuals?
- **How do actors frame the energy transition and make sense of it? What does this tell us about dominant perceptions of the energy transition?**
- What kind of energy futures does the affected population wish for and what are their priorities?





# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Some selected preliminary results

### Press Analysis (WI): Duisburg and HSK

- Coverage rather critical of the energy transition (33 %)
- significant differences between the case studies according to the different impacts energy transition policies have on local environment (costs, wind power plants)
- → „North Rhine-Westphalia has numerous opinions on the energy transition.“

### Analysis of Online Communication of Central Stakeholders (KWI): HSK

- mostly negative evaluations of the *implementation* of the energy transition; ET as general political aim is rarely being questioned
- Main critique: „*ET is a top-down policy*“, „*ET is insincere*“, „*ET is destructive*“, „*ET is inefficient and threatens the economy*“



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



**Stoppt**



**diesen  
Irrsinn!**

two significant frames		
	"ET is a top-down policy"	"ET is insincere"
<b>Problem definition</b>	The Energy Transition is a top-down policy which does not take into account the views of the population concerned or local political priorities.	The Energy Transition is part of an insincere policy, pushed by disingenuous politicians by means of deliberate disinformation. Often it is rather a matter of money than of pursuing ecological goals.
<b>central quote</b>	"citizen's movement", "resistance"	"Lobby Lie Energy Transition"; "Wind Energy - The great Fraud"; "propaganda masterpiece"
<b>Causal Interpretation</b>	policies of the federal government, of the government of NRW, of the regional government; "the Greens"	money, profit; "the government", "the Greens", managers of wind power plants
<b>Evaluation</b>	negative	negative
<b>Treatment Recommendation</b>	"stop wind power"; pay more attention to priorities of affected population	



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Which preliminary insights might be relevant for other renewable energy projects?

- Relevance of the local level and the specific local impact of energy policies for people's perceptions/opinions
- → adequate communication and participation at all stages of the planning and implementation process
- → taking into account local and citizen's priorities (adapted policies)



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Why Socio-Cultural Perspectives?

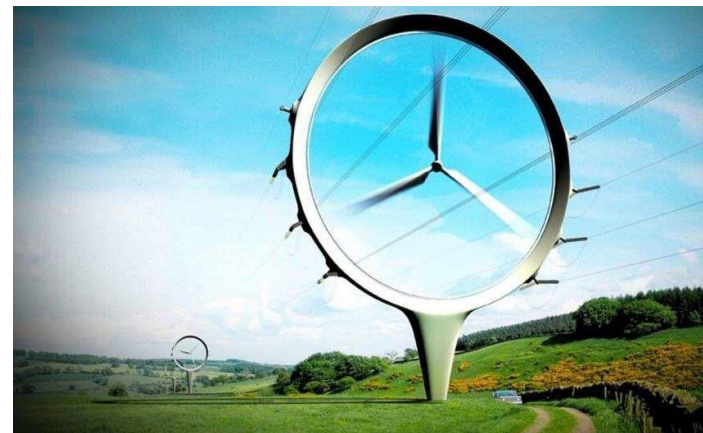
- Technical Innovations fail despite being useful
- People observe, experience and “feel” the Energiewende
- Social innovations might be even more productive
- Social and cultural research highly connects to politicians



# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Why Socio-Cultural Perspectives?



Source: Fishedick 2015





# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



## Conclusion

- NRW and socio-cultural aspects are of high importance
- Socio-cultural research can help understanding specific local contexts, that play a crucial role for the perception and success of energy policies.
- Policies need to be to a certain degree locally and culturally adapted: importance of participation and probably even perceivable benefits for the community.
- Socio-cultural research influences future technical innovations



VIRTUELLES INSTITUT  
TRANSFORMATION  
ENERGIEWENDE<sup>NRW</sup>

# Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Energy Transition



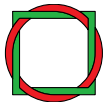
KULTURWISSENSCHAFTLICHES  
INSTITUT ESSEN

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED  
STUDY IN THE HUMANITIES



STIFTUNG  
MERCATOR

Ministerium für Innovation,  
Wissenschaft und Forschung  
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen

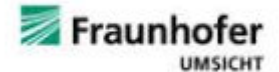


**Wuppertal Institut**  
für Klima, Umwelt, Energie  
GmbH



KULTURWISSENSCHAFTLICHES  
INSTITUT ESSEN  
FORSCHUNGSKOLLEG DER  
UNIVERSITÄTSALLIANZ METROPOLE RUHR

## Thank you for your Attention!!!



[www.vi-transformation.de](http://www.vi-transformation.de)



E.ON Energy Research Center



Energy Research & Scenarios gGmbH  
Energienmärkte erforschen - Entscheidungen verbessern.