

artec colloquium summer term 2018

Participation and Sustainability

open lecture on 6 June, 2018

Participation as Leverage Point for Sustainable Energy Transformation: How Participation Processes foster Social Learning

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abstract

Continuously changing environmental and social systems, especially driven by the increasingly experienced consequences of climate change, result in the pressure to transform energy systems. Sustainable transitions are not only driven by technological innovation and policy change, but also depend on changes in values, norms, and behaviour. That is why social learning is key to sustainability transitions inducing the necessary social change process, which can be enhanced through public participation processes. However, empirical evidence is missing that shows how participatory processes affect social learning. Numerous public participation processes take place related to the German energy transformation (Energiewende) in the course of both smaller projects such as the construction of renewable energy plants and major projects such as the expansion of the electrical grid or the search for deep geological repository sites. An empirical quantitative analysis is conducted to investigate the assumption that 'good' participation processes foster social learning. Preliminary findings are presented, which indicate what factors (such as participation format, trust, personal characteristics etc.) foster social learning processes.

Biographic Information

Ms. Anna Ernst graduated in Sustainability Science from Leuphana University Lüneburg (Germany). Currently she works at the Forschungszentrum Jülich, at the 'Institute for Energy and Climate Research - System Research and Technological Development'. She coordinated the Low-Carbon Dialogue Germany in the FP7 Project R&Dialogue. Her research expertise is participatory and action oriented research in the field of sustainable development and energy transformation with a special focus on social learning. The working title of her PhD is 'Under which conditions does participation foster the transformation towards sustainable energy systems by facilitating learning?'.

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