

## Panel 5:

### NIG colloquium “Energy and Climate Governance”

#### Panel session topic: Governance of decentralised initiatives in energy transition

NIG annual work conference 2015, Nijmegen (the Netherlands).

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The proposed panel session is part of a series of academic events organised by the NIG research colloquium on “Energy and Climate Governance”. After having organized panel sessions with a rather broad scope for the last three years, the research colloquium members decided to have a more focused topical approach for the panel session at the 2015 NIG annual work conference. The central topic of this year’s NIG panel session is: “Governance of decentralised initiatives in energy transition.”

#### **1. Theme description (max. 800 words).**

In October 2014 the EU leaders i.a. agreed on increasing energy efficiency levels and the share of renewable energy. Those two targets involve national, regional, local governments, companies, NGOs and last but not least citizens, since the latter directly affect energy production and consumption patterns. In addition to the political will, liberalisation of the European energy market fosters tendencies of decentralised (renewable) energy production. In this context a growing number of regional, localised, and citizen-led initiatives have started producing decentralized, often sustainable forms of energy, and challenging the dominant actors of the traditional energy systems.

To date, the research focus on initiatives in energy transition mainly lies on identifying patterns of success in national contexts, i.e. their influence on political, technical, social and economic transition processes towards enhanced incorporation of renewable energies, and increased citizens’ control of energy management at local and regional scales. While the ‘social’ side of technological transitions has been noticed years ago, the debates on political participation in citizen-led initiatives and socio-technical innovations of the initiatives still remain unconnected. Hence this panel session pursues the goals of bringing together hitherto unconnected approaches in a pan-European context.

The roles of decentralised governments (municipalities, regions, provinces) in energy and climate issues are ambiguous. On the one hand they have a role in setting targets, norms and standards. On the other hand they often lack the authority and competence to demand that societal and market parties to achieve targets in terms of fixed rates of reduction in energy consumption or reduction in terms of greenhouse gases emitted, following the agreements made concerning the implementation of the Kyoto protocol.

In the proposed panel session we want address research questions like:

- To what extent are regional, localised and citizen-led initiatives legitimate and how do they relate to democratic values?
- Which forms of governance do they challenge, which innovations in governance do they evoke and how do governments respond to their large-scale emergence?
- What is the role of political and public leadership in decentralised energy transition?
- How to identify cross-national transferable patterns of best practices on a European level?
- Are questions on social and political acceptance of transition processes towards a low carbon economy conceivable in European contexts, and to what extent are they bound to localities?
- To what extent do policies implemented by local and regional governments succeed in attaining pre-set (low carbon, energy neutral, or other energy transition) goals? And what are the side effects of these policies?
- And to what extent do local (particularly cities) and regional government intervention strategies contribute to energy transition at the national scale?

The theoretical focus of the panel session will be on understanding the transition towards a sustainable energy economy from a public administration and policy studies perspective (and hence with a focus on regions and localities). This is innovative since the dominant theoretical approach in analysing transitions (or rather called ‘system innovation’) stems from Science, Technology and Society studies (STS), in which the research object – the transition from a traditional ‘dirty’ economy towards a ‘sustainable-sound’ economy – is analysed from an ecological evolutionary, and neo-institutional economic perspective. Not surprisingly, analytical efforts remain one-sidedly economic and only focus on historical long term developments. In our opinion, the role of government and governance (also considering short term ‘how’-questions), and the institutional conditions and settings under which transitions may occur, need more attention. This implies paying attention to the multi-level and –actor dimensions in governance modes, and use of theoretical frameworks relevant to issues that are traditionally associated to the domains public administration and policy studies: for example, policy networks (on relations between interdependent organizations), public management (public organizations and their capabilities in relation to performance), discourse analysis and advocacy coalition frameworks.

We encourage authors to contribute papers in which the theoretical approach towards the governance of renewable energy allows a broader or more specific focus than which is usually the case in transition studies. We are of the opinion that these theories need to be elaborated with theoretical insights that are relevant from a public administration and/or policy studies perspective.

## **2. Relation between main topic and NIG theme “multi-actor governance in complexity”**

Multiple public and private stakeholders are involved in local-level decision-making on energy and climate issues. The theme is quite broad and involves multiple layers of governance and multiple (types of) actors. Due to their sheer numbers, their wide array of interests, and the fact that not all of them are ready to compromise, there is a high degree of complexity. Energy and climate issues and the quest for the transition towards a carbon free society may be classified in terms of a ‘wicked’ or at least ‘poorly structured’ problem. Indeed, conformity on achievable goals and a coherent strategy

is absent, let alone the selection of a coherent policy mix and roadmaps to incrementally contribute to a strategy to bring this transition about.

### **3. Description of papers that can be submitted**

The panel accepts papers that are considered relevant to the central topic of “Governance of decentralised initiatives in energy transition”. However, we judge it necessary that the papers have a theoretical perspective that (a) is in line with public administration and/or policy studies and (b) deals with issues relevant to the call. The proposed panel session is not limited by the use of particular research designs, methodologies or theoretical approaches. We welcome both case studies, comparative studies, theoretical/conceptual papers, or quantitative studies. However, given this year’s focus on ‘decentralised energy transition’ the papers should address either the regional or local level.

At least four papers need to be submitted if the panel is to proceed. We will not allow more than ten papers. If more papers are submitted we will select the best papers on the basis of relevance to our topic and academic excellence.

### **4. Panel organisation**

The panel session is organised by three researchers from two Dutch universities: Dr. Thomas Hoppe (University of Twente), Prof. dr. Ellen van Bueren (Delft University of Technology) and Dr. Maurits Sanders (University of Twente).

### **5. Expected output**

With the papers that will be presented at the panel session we aim to attract an academic journal in publishing a special issue on the topic of governance of decentralised energy transition. In previous panel sessions of this NIG research colloquium special issues were published in the academic journals of *Bestuurswetenschappen* (2013) and *Energy Sustainability and Society* (2014; <http://www.energysustainsoc.com/series/GCCE>).