

ENERGY FUTURES - EMERGING PATHWAYS IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD?
International conference by the Leibniz Research Alliance on Energy Transitions
May 6th - 8th 2020
WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Application requirements

Please submit your 250-word abstracts to the session organizer(s) by December 15th, 2019. All abstracts must include a title, your name, institutional affiliation, and contact information.

Session title

Contested Futures: The European energy transition between local protests and populist discourses.

Session chair(s)

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Abstract

In many European countries (right wing) populist parties are very influential or even in power. Many of them deny anthropogenic climate change, oppose against the further expansion of renewable energies, and are skeptical of further European integration, also in the energy sector. At the same time we observe that the number of local protests against energy transition projects has increased substantially, the character or 'tone' of local protest has become more aggressive. Local discourses and the organization of local protests get 'mainstreamed', and populist influence is growing—threatening the diversity of local protests.

The European energy transition is finding itself in a dangerous 'sandwich' position, constrained by populist meta-narratives both on the top- and on the ground-level. Researchers need to better understand the phenomenology and dynamics of this process, analyze the social and political drivers of populist discourses in the energy sector, understand local protests both as differentiated *and* populist influenced social movements, and to get hold of what the 'silent majority' thinks (and if or to what degree it is at risk). This encompassing and transdisciplinary endeavor should form the basis of ideas for solutions, preventing the European energy transition to come to a halt. In the light of our findings, we should propose ideas for a new conflict culture, for a more democratic anchoring of the energy transition, for dialogues with citizens and policy makers, and for institutional reforms of the energy transition itself, if necessary.

The session wants to address the following questions:

- How do European populist parties view the European energy transition, are there (national) differences?
- What is the phenomenology of local conflicts today, which role do populist narratives play here?
- Do we have indications of how the general public might be susceptible to populist narratives? How could we measure or even monitor this?
- Do we have positive examples of how populist narratives have been successfully overcome? What have been the success factors for this?
- What future research questions and programs would we need to follow critical developments?

We would like to encourage researchers, especially from the social sciences, to report their findings or share their ideas. We would explicitly invite experts in populism to share their knowledge with us, as energy issues have up to now not been at the core of populism research. We are happy to receive country or local studies, but invite them to extrapolate their on a Europe-wide scale.