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Shaping the regional energy transition together

Plan TieFEn

Cooperative planning and implementation of the future energy system

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The successful implementation of the energy transition requires the involvement of all interested actors. This applies equally to urban and rural areas. Cooperative planning is key to engaging people, aligning more closely with their needs and expectations, harnessing their commitment, and ensuring a fair distribution of opportunities and burdens. In doing so, there is no single, standardized approach that can be applied uniformly across all regions. This is because regions have developed over time through historical and cultural processes and are shaped by different experiences and conditions. The PlanTieFEn[1] project, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE), provides insights into how to design a cooperative planning approach tailored to specific cultural regions. The Energy Cultures Atlas (German: Atlas Energiekulturen) illustrates the results from three regions which may give orientation in this endeavor.

Three key recommendations

„Meaningful early engagement alongside financial participation that serves public interests“

„Streamlining into fewer integrated planning documents rather than multiple standalone concepts“

„Developing joint visions for the future to shape an attractive and fair local energy transition“

Key pillars of a cooperative and fair energy transition

Municipalities as key actors and mediators

Municipalities play a central role in shaping and mediating the energy transition on the ground. Especially on the municipal level there are active key actors who need to be involved early in cooperative planning. As frontrunners in expanding renewable energy, municipalities can set conditions and define requirements for project developers, ensuring that the transition delivers local benefits and creates value for the region and its residents.

The provision of (additional) staff appropriate to local and regional needs, as well as the setting of local priorities, are key starting points here.

Collaborative mapping as a tool for early engagement

Spatial visualizations, such as maps, provide orientation and can serve as a powerful tool for collaboration with local actors. They enable a broader consideration of potential areas, thereby creating scope for negotiation. At the same time, they support a more differentiated perspective on space: making visible both, places of particular local importance – for example for recreation or leisure – as well as identifying areas that are locally perceived as less attractive and thus more suitable for renewable energy installations.

In this way, collaborative mapping provides a valuable complement to traditional approaches to identifying potential areas for renewable energy installations.

Integrated planning documents – strengthening transparency

Municipal and regional planning processes are complex and often difficult to understand – not only for external actors, but also for those involved in planning. There is a wide range of informal and formal concepts, alongside planning regulations for renewable energy that vary across federal states and, in part, also at the regional level. To enhance accessibility and transparency, integrated planning documents are needed that provide a clear overview and include references to all relevant documents.

Ideally, such planning documents are embedded within an integrated digital platform that streamlines the entire planning process as a transparent workflow – map-based, using standardized data formats, and with clear documentation of all planning steps. Platforms such as DiPlanung (in the German federal states Hamburg or Bavaria) or BOB-SH (Schleswig-Holstein) illustrate how such an integrated digital planning approach can be implemented.

Shaping the future together – developing regional energy visions

Energy visions build bridges: they connect a region's past with its future, integrate spatial identities, respond to local needs and aspirations as well as conditions required for their implementation. Through the collaborative development of energy visions, regions can be reflected as a whole and with future generations in mind, formulating requirements for a sustainable, fair, and resilient energy future.

Visions expand the scope of imagination: they enable the development of compelling and positive narratives that can effectively support the energy transition at the local level. What is needed, always, is a joint effort – bringing together planners, municipalities, and citizens in a process of co-design.

Summing up

The energy transition is not only a technical or regulatory task, but a regional process of shaping change together. It can only succeed if municipalities take on an active role, if engagement begins early and is meaningful, if planning remains transparent and comprehensible – and if regions jointly develop an energy vision that they identify as their own.

Planning must better integrate cultural, social, and spatial dimensions, compared to current practice. Only then can solutions deliver on both climate targets and local needs and potentials.

References

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