

Power Dynamics in Energy Transitions: The Case of Disputes over Wind Turbines in Germany and Canada (working title)

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In efforts to decarbonise their economies and stimulate regional economies, countries around the world aim at increasing their share in renewable energy. Germany is one of the frontrunners in this field and has been seen as a role model for other countries. Following the example of Germany, the Canadian Province of Ontario has launched “the largest policy experiment to date within North America to decarbonize an electricity system” (Stokes 2013: 492) and was the first to introduce a feed-in-tariff (FIT) on a large-scale basis in North-America (ibid). Like in Germany, wind energy in Ontario has become a major pillar to reach ambitious renewable energy targets. While the respective support policies in both jurisdictions were the product of intense advocacy by civil society actors, Germany and Ontario have lately experienced massive local opposition to projects of wind turbine development.

Employing a comparative study design between Southern Ontario and the East-German state of Brandenburg, the PhD thesis embraces one major gap in the literature on social acceptance of renewable energy projects: the role of power. The main research question is: How do power dynamics in disputes over wind turbines in Germany and Canada shape controversies and influence social acceptance?

Power heavily shapes negotiation processes around wind energy and is therefore a crucial force behind often controversial decisions in the siting process of wind turbines. By studying discourses around wind energy, the thesis aims at highlighting the role of positional and discursive power in disputes over wind turbines, as the “study of discourse also allows one to see how a diversity of actors actively try to influence the definition of the problem” (Hajer, Versteeg 2005: 177).

References:

- Hajer, Maarten; Versteeg, Wytke (2005): A decade of discourse analysis of environmental politics: Achievements, challenges, perspectives. In *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 7 (3), pp. 175–184. DOI: 10.1080/15239080500339646.
- Stokes, Leah C. (2013): The politics of renewable energy policies: The case of feed-in tariffs in Ontario, Canada. In *Energy Policy* 56, pp. 490–500.