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Title: The quest for citizen governance of energy resources

Abstract

In the Netherlands more than 500 local initiatives seek to reshape the energy system, in the face of constraints embedded in technical, cultural, economic and political traditions. Increasingly, these local energy initiatives team up in regional and national networks.

In this paper we investigate the formation of these new networks, both in the North of the Netherlands and on the national level. We trace how they channel demands for more democratic control of energy resources from local communities to the national government and how they negotiated the Dutch Energy Covenant.

Our analysis combines Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Social Movement Theory (SMT), to allow a dynamic analysis of collective strategies. ANT is mobilized to carefully describe the local and regional networks consisting of human actors as well as institutions, buildings, energy technologies and infrastructures.

Moreover, we employ SMT to study the development and activities of regional and national networks for community energy, positioning their activities as a quest for citizen governance of energy resources.

Our theoretical contribution is to combine SMT and ANT in the analysis of recent attempts to decentralize and decarbonize the energy system. While we used the microanalysis of ANT we also circumvented its myopia by tracing the national and regional networks that form the community energy movement. Likewise, we followed political moves with SMT without ignoring its blind spot: the technological embeddedness of social movements.

Our findings give new insights in the technical and political constraints the community energy movement encounters while transforming the energy system.