

Mobilizing grassroots capacities for sustainable energy transitions: path improvement or path change? (MobGIs)

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Project Summary:

Climate change is affecting our lives and will continue to do so if we do not take drastic measures to reduce our carbon footprint. This calls for transformations of energy systems worldwide. Such transformations are hard to achieve since these are not only a technical issue, but also a social and economic issue. Despite attempts to manage transformations, change is occurring tediously slow and incremental. This can be attributed to the difficulties in finding technically and economically viable alternatives, as well as the entrenchment of vested interests. On the other hand, small scale initiatives turning to renewable energy sources are mushrooming everywhere in Europe and provide various sets of social and technical possibilities. These 'grassroots innovations' (GIs) are diverse and vary from cooperatives, citizen groups, businesses to local governments. As 'bottom' up initiatives, they have an important potential, yet much of it remains untapped due to regulatory, economic and political constraints. To overcome this, GIs connect among each other to exchange knowledge, marshal public support and forge political alliances. This project studies these connections using different methods: mapping techniques and digital methods, content analysis of media items and policy statements, and in-depth case studies. The project also provides hands-on knowledge for fostering networking and enhancing critical mass. Three countries are explored manifesting different kinds of barriers: Denmark, with a traditional strong grassroots impact which are increasingly absorbed by large business interests, Sweden, in which GIs are marginalised by the dominance of local authorities, and The Netherlands, where despite the strong wish to benefit from GIs, more radical forms of change remain countered by vested interests. Research and stakeholder engagement will focus, in particular, on the potential capacity of GIs to provoke radical change in the search for sustainable energy transitions.