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The green energy transition and civil society in Tunisia: Actions, motivations and barriers

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Abstract

The green energy transition must be understood as a complex process requiring the involvement of many actors. Civil society stakeholders' opinion on energy sources began to influence energy policy formation and implementation. It plays a significant and complementary role to central government's actions in raising awareness about the green energy transition and positions themselves in the move towards a sustainable energy future. Greater understanding of civil society motivations towards the promotion of renewables will present both opportunities, and highlight challenges, for the delivery of an energy policy and action-taking aimed at progress towards energy sustainability. Previous researches have tended to analyze civil society participation from a more broadly perspective which interrogated the dynamic of group formation apart from the work we present in this paper which explores the civil society's motivations and barriers to promote renewable energies in Tunisia through a qualitative research.

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1. Introduction

Despite the growing awareness for the importance, benefits and potential of renewable resources, to solve energy crisis and ensure environmental and socioeconomic sustainability [1], social controversy was recognized as an

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important barrier shaping the widespread implementation of some developed and advanced renewable energy technology (RET). With due consideration to these particular constraints, actors from civil society, that aim to educate or enable the collective procurement of renewable energy technologies or actually provide (i.e. generate, treat or distribute), energy derived from renewable resources for consumption by inhabitants, participants or members has emerged. It's commonly assumed that the ambitious sustainability targets to accelerate the deployment of renewable energies require strengthening cooperation between relevant stakeholders. Webb [2] reveal that the environmental, social and economic problems can only be effectively addressed through a systematic, coordinated use of rule instruments, institutions, and processes, employed by a combination of state, private sector and civil society actors. This calls for a stakeholder approach that brings together partnerships between government, international financial institutions, private sector actors and civil society. Such partnerships are key to pursuing sustainable development in a globalized world [3]. Partnerships are critically important for meeting the challenge of energy transition. The notion of partnership is between the state, capital, (i.e., the private profit-making), and civil society. Hence, building strong relationships with the key stakeholders have proven to be valuable for the implementation of renewable energy project. Several scientists have devoted considerable attention to the role of the state and private actors to the renewable energy development. However, our theoretical framework proposes to widen the focus on the new approach of partnership transcending civil society involvement to ease the transfer of renewable energy technologies and for implementing real renewable energy projects and consequently, undermining the intrinsic motivations of civil society and the barriers that hinder their efforts to promote renewable energy.

The paper is developed as follows. In the first section, we address the role of civil society in the energy transition. Second, we expose the related works evoking the civil society's involvement in Tunisia. Consecutively, we describe our structured research method based on content analysis. Finally, results and discussions are developed, followed by further research agenda.

2. Literature review

2.1. *The role of civil society in the energy transition*

The vital step in any participatory project is understanding who the stakeholders are and how they are engaged in the process is necessary for improving the responsible development of renewable energy technologies [4]. But first let's take a closer look to the meaning of civil society. The concept of Civil Society has been in vogue since the 18th and 19th centuries, but the 1980s saw a resurgence of interest in it. Social scientists, outlined that civil society which commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power may have a role important enough to make it a 'third sector' in our worldview. The term of civil society has a range of meanings in contemporary usage. It is sometimes considered to include the family and the private sphere, and referred to as the "third sector" of society, distinct from government and business [5,6]. While [7] defines civil society as referring to formal and informal groups of "*citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable*". Despite the rapid rise of interest in the civil society role, it is still a "vague" concept that pervades various interpretations [8]. [9] point out that the term civil society lacks conceptual clarity. As in 2005, the term civil society is also a contested concept [10]. Recognizing this vagueness, some civil society theorists have tried to find a way out. They argue that behind the vagueness and confusion, there is a core idea of civil society that is composed of a variety of different yet ultimately related conceptions [8]. In other words, [11] suggests that the different approaches to the civil society fall under three main categories namely as a good society, an associational life and as a public sphere. As a good society (as opposite to "uncivil society"), is viewed as the domain of "values" linked to a set of civic norms and democratic practices that distinguish it from other areas of human interaction.

As a form of associative life, civil society is considered as part of a modern democratic society and distinct from states and markets. From the public sphere perspective, the civil society is considered as the forum in which societal issues are debated and negotiated [9]. In fact, civil society is seen as an arena for public deliberation, rational dialogue and the exercise of active citizenship in the pursuit of the common good. These three approaches of civil society complement one another but it is the second definition - civil society as associational life that is capturing an

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