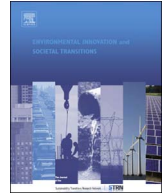




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Original Research Paper

A struggle for change—The formation of a green-transition advocacy coalition in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Finland aims to increase the share of renewable energy to over 50% of all energy consumption by 2030. Even more ambitious visions exist of a 100% renewable energy system by 2050. To spur the process, campaigns promoting renewable energy and a new association have been established, creating a new energy political advocacy coalition in Finland. This article studies the green-transition advocacy coalition's formation in the field of Finnish energy policy. The article identifies coalition actors' core beliefs, and analyzes the coalition's impact on policy change. The coalition has certain values in common, but is nevertheless divided by different views. The green-transition coalition in Finland could potentially be an important change agent but its impact is weakened due to divergent views in relation to the actual energy transition.

1. Introduction

In order to keep global warming below the 2 °C limit, a tenfold increase in the use of renewables combined with large-scale deployment of negative emissions technologies is needed (Manoli et al., 2016), prompting the emergence of a growing interest in sustainability transitions. Understanding transitions is especially important when the currently dominant solutions contribute to unsustainable development. Although novel initiatives might offer more sustainable alternatives, difficulties in overcoming path dependency and lock-in exist (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Seyfang et al., 2010). New technologies are not taken up for economic, social, cultural, infrastructural and regulative reasons (Geels, 2005). A host of vested interests make the transition difficult (Haukkala, 2015).

There are numerous visions of what a future energy system might look like: a mix of renewables and nuclear, or a fully renewable-based energy system such as the solution Germany has opted for (for respective scenarios for Finland, see e.g. Child and Breyer, 2016; Greenpeace, 2013; Greens of Finland, 2014). Change does not occur in a vacuum, but is generated in the course of intentional action on the part of many actors, such as states (governments), the private sector (business, the market) and civil society (Fischer and Newig, 2016), as well as science in some respects (Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016; Farla et al., 2012; Grin et al., 2011).

Traditionally, agency in transitions has been attributed to states and business, neglecting the role of civil society actors as potential change agents. This article investigates the green-transition advocacy coalition's formation in the field of Finnish energy policy. It does so within the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), and provides a civil society agency perspective on the transition. The article continues the discussion about agency in transitions (Bakker, 2014; Grin et al., 2011; Kern, 2015) and, more specifically, the role of advocacy coalitions in energy transitions (Markard et al., 2016). In particular, the article addresses the gap in the study of civil society actors and coalitions in the energy transition. The article applies the ACF, which assumes that actors can be aggregated into advocacy coalitions composed of those who share similar beliefs and engage in co-ordinated activities over time (Sabatier, 1998).

The article identifies coalition actors' core beliefs and analyzes the coalition's impact on policy change. It is not possible to

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examine the whole political coalition field in Finland within this article and it is therefore limited to studying the green-transition advocacy coalition that consists mainly of civil society actors aiming for a 100% renewable energy system. The actors under study comprise four groups of key participants: a) the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Greenpeace and WWF Finland, b) a newly established renewable energy association – the Finnish Clean Energy Association (FCEA) that consists of organizations, firms, researchers and individual citizens, c) a project entitled *Uusi energiapolitiikka* ('New Energy Policy', NEP) that involved academic professors and firms, and d) an energy transition campaign entitled *Energiaremontti* ('Energy Renovation') that included people from the two NGOs, the FCEA and individual citizens. The empirical material consists of semi-structured interviews, structured surveys, reports, website material, notes from a report launch event and documents from political parties. The time frame covers the take-off stage of the coalition between 2013 and 2015.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework, methods and material; Section 3 provides the background to the Finnish political field and energy system, and describes the historical development of environmental movements in Finland; Section 4 analyzes the results of the research, while Section 5 discusses the findings and concludes the article.

2. Theory and methodology

2.1. Transition studies, agency and civil society

To date, a number of energy transitions have taken place in the world. The new energy sources have not always been cheaper, but they have offered other benefits. In the past, consumers have desired a transition to new energy sources because they have been easy to use, they have offered flexibility and cleanliness, or they have been seen as exclusive, novel and status alternatives (Fouquet and Pearson, 2012).

During the past two decades, a body of literature on sustainability transitions has emerged, with frameworks of, for example, technological innovation systems (e.g. Bergek et al., 2008; Jacobsson and Bergek, 2011), strategic niche management (e.g. Kemp et al., 1998; Raven et al., 2010; Schot and Geels, 2008) and a multi-level perspective (MLP) (e.g. Geels, 2005; Geels and Schot, 2007; Rotmans et al., 2001). This literature has mainly focused on technology producers and intermediaries, business and government actors, although it has subsequently been complemented with more actor-related patterns (Geels, 2005; Geels et al., 2016).

In general, there has been a lack of attention to the role of agency in sustainability transitions (Pesch, 2015), but it has, however, been recognized (e.g. Geels and Schot, 2007; Smith et al., 2005). For the purposes of this article, agency in transitions can be defined as the ability to make a difference to the regime through exercising political, economic and/or institutional power (Smith et al., 2005). Although agency and power go hand in hand, the majority of interpretations in the literature seem to value stability over change. Hence, Avelino and Rotmans (2009) have developed a new framework for interdisciplinary research. The most important concept in their work concerns the relationship between regimes and niches. Normally, the regime has more power than niches in a state of dynamic equilibrium. If, however, niches are able to resist a lock-in by the regime, they become a threat to the system's equilibrium, which is a necessary condition for a transition to continue. The take-off stage in this process is one of imbalanced power relations and struggle.

During the past decade, increased attention has been paid by researchers to the role of civil society actors. Several new perspectives on the role of civil society actors in transitions, such as the Grassroots Innovation model, Social Practice Theory and Theories of Social Movements have emerged (e.g. Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012; Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Seyfang et al., 2010; Smith, 2010). However, most extant works do not examine how civil society is part of a wider political field. Civil society includes voluntary social organizations that are not public or for-profit organizations. Civil society actors have over the decades challenged the views of energy policy and business elites and generated pressures that play a role in unsettling incumbent energy regimes (Smith, 2010).

Finnish society can be divided into three main sectors: the public sector, the private sector consisting of private firms, and civil society. Finnish civil society consists of civic and organizational activities, churches and religious organizations, trade unions, political parties, small-scale cooperation, foundations and non-formal adult education (Harju, n.d.). Civic activities are activities performed in cooperation with other people, which are directed outwards and which work for the public good (Harju, 2003, 10–12). Finnish civic activities take place for the most part within civic organizations (Harju, n.d.).

2.2. Advocacy coalition framework

This article applies the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), which focuses on actors and their beliefs, and puts the emphasis on external shocks as a key mechanism for change. The integral elements of ACF are: 1) *policy participants*, or *actors* that are considered to be experts in a specific policy field, 2) *a policy subsystem*, namely a set of policy participants, and 3) *advocacy coalitions*, which are groups of policy actors that share similar belief systems and coordinate actions to translate their belief systems into a policy change (Sabatier, 1987, 1998).

Policy actors are assumed to hold beliefs that are either *deep core beliefs*, referring to worldviews that are very difficult to change, or to *policy core beliefs* that reflect basic positions in a policy subsystem and are almost equally difficult to change (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). Generally speaking, only an external shock can have a sufficient impact to change core beliefs. Two sets of exogenous variables can affect the constraints and opportunities of subsystem actors: 1) the basic constitutional structure, socio-cultural values, and natural resources of a political system, and 2) major socio-economic changes, changes in public opinion and in the systemic governing coalition, and policy decisions and impacts from other subsystems (Sabatier, 1998).

Much of the extant ACF research aims to explain the formation and stability of coalitions, learning within and between coalitions,

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