



4th International Conference on Power and Energy Systems Engineering, CPESE 2017, 25-29
September 2017, Berlin, Germany

Conceptualizing civil society attitudes towards the promotion of renewable energy: A case study from Tunisia

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Abstract

This paper reviews the significant importance of the civil society stakeholders (CSSs) in promoting renewable energy. Indeed, the share of renewable energy has more than doubled within the past decade and CSSs has been an important driver for increasing renewable energy generation to date. Operationally, when it comes to promoting renewable energy, civil society along with a partnership with key actors may add a value because of their capacity to provide efficient public services. Despite the fact, that we, recently, have witnessed a proliferation of the literature about civil society, reviews have regularly omitted the stream of research conducted by social scientists. Furthermore, empirical studies have only focused on understanding civil society as a politically meaningful concept.

Therefore, through a systematic review of academic literature and by using the theory of reasoned action (TRA) [1] as a theoretical framework, the current research attempts to propose a conceptual model focusing on CSSs attitudes toward the promotion of renewable energy from a Tunisian perspective.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the scientific committee of the 4th International Conference on Power and Energy Systems Engineering.

Keywords: Civil society; Renewable energy; Environmental concern; Attitude; Promotion; Qualitative study

1. Introduction

Profound changes in the energy landscape and the shift from traditional fossil fuels and nuclear power to green energy, have created opportunities and pressures, spurring the creation of millions of CSSs (NGOs, Think tanks, Associations, etc.) around the world devoted to promoting renewable energies, giving rise to exciting models for citizen expression and generating increasing involvement in global governance processes to a sustainable energy future. Within this context, a precise definition of civil society is necessary. Indeed, there seems to be two major competing definitions of civil society. According to [2], “*civil society stands stridently and at least partially in opposition to the state*”. Marxists such as Gramsci [3] identify “*civil society with realms outside the power of the state*”.

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Civil society actors are considered as key players in the global development scenery that aim to deliver social services and implement development programs focusing on environment, human rights and gender equality, as a complement to government action. To the best of our knowledge, little of the literature on CSSs has addressed the actual attitudes they have adopted towards renewable energy. Thus, by adopting an abductive logic where we iteratively synthesize existing theory and field work, this article addresses this knowledge gap and proposes a comprehensive model based on a qualitative study on Tunisian’ attitudes towards the promotion of renewable energy. Accordingly, this article will enrich the literature on renewable energy in two ways: by exploring the drivers behind promoting renewable energy and by attempting to extend the theoretical field of CSS attitudes towards the promotion of renewable energy.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 examines the global trends and concepts of environmental activism of civil society. Section 3 presents the proposed conceptual model highlighting the key factors that explain CSSs’ favorable attitudes in support of renewable energies. We detail in section 4, the methodology adopted and the findings obtained from the conducted study. Finally, we conclude in section 5 with the importance of CSSs in promoting green sources of energy and thoughts about future works.

2. Key trends in the environmental activism of civil society

Environmental concern represents a broad concept referring to a wide range of indicators such as beliefs that the environment is under threat, that there are adverse consequences to environmental degradation and general concern for human-caused environmental problems [4]. The research efforts proposed in [5,6] reveal environmental concern as a general attitude, which centers on the cognitive and affective evaluation of the environmental protection. Opinion polls studies conducted among members of the European community show that pollution was regarded as the most important problem ahead of inflation, poverty and unemployment. It was confirmed in 1976-1978, that “nature conservation” and “pollution control” were and still among the three most crucial concerns.

According to [7], environmental concern can have a significant impact on the degree to which individuals are motivated to change their behavioral practices in order to help alleviate environmental problems while the work in [8] proposed that the environmental concern is usually related to rational behavior preserving ecosystems: “Environmental concern has been treated as an evaluation of, or an attitude towards facts, one’s own behaviour, or others’ behaviour with consequences for the environment. It seems then as if environmental concern may refer to both a specific attitude directly determining intentions, or more broadly to a general attitude” [9,10,11,12].

Extant research has focused on classifying types of environmental strategies. It’s now widely known that there was a surge of interest in ecological awareness in the last decade. Ecological awareness is referred to as a deeper understanding of ecosystem processes and fostering a closer connection to nature. Previous researches in marketing indicate that the term “ecological awareness” has led an increasing number of individuals to engage in environmentally friendly behaviors in their everyday life through “actions that contribute towards environmental preservation and/or conservation” [13]. This point of view puts ecological behavior at least partially into the moral domain [14,15,16].

The oldest and simplest model of ecological awareness was based on a linear progression of environmental concern leading to ecological behavior. These facts are in line with the proposition in [8] announcing that the environmental concern is usually related to rational behavior preserving ecosystems (see figure 1).

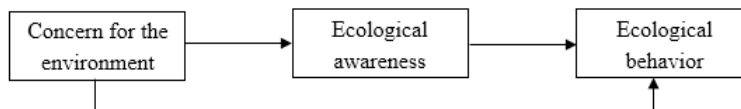


Figure 1 Leading dimensions to ecological behaviour

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