

Why are some countries more able to establish Community Energy Schemes than others? A cross-cultural perspective

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UK still lags far behind Germany, Austria and Denmark

- in terms of the percentage of energy consumption generated renewably
- in terms of the percentage of renewable energy generated in community-owned schemes.

Germany 600+ cooperatives

Britain 50

This is due to

- the way the energy market is organised in different countries
- differences in national legislation
- institutional obstacles.

In Germany, communities have had

- favourable feed-in tariffs
- the right to access the energy they produce at wholesale price
- control of distribution and grid management

A further factor determining the success of renewable energy cooperatives: societal norms, expectations and values.

Significant differences between the cultures of local energy activism, and the attitudes towards the co-operative model in different countries.

These derive from historical experience and cultural tradition.

Two general principles: the acceptability of local renewable energy initiatives is determined by

- the scale of the proposed plants
- their ownership.

Large plants, whether wind farms or solar PV installations, tend to alienate locals.

The extent of community ownership of the plant also determines the degree of local support. In Denmark they say “Your own pigs don’t stink”: this seems to apply to wind power.

In 2004, in the UK 98% of capacity of wind power installations was owned by utilities/ large corporations; in Germany 55%, in Denmark a mere 12%. Farmers only owned 1% in the UK, but 63% in Denmark.

It seems likely that cooperative ownership at least partly accounts for the difference in the success of community energy schemes in the two countries.

STRONG DIFFERENCES IN 'ENERGY CULTURES'

(Ownership of Onshore Wind Power Installations 2004, by % of total capacity

Type of owner	UK	Germany	Denmark	Netherlands
Utilities/ corporate	98	55	12	60
Farmers	1	35	63	34
Co-ops	0.4	10	25	6

Attitudes towards renewable energy, the centralisation of power supply (which favours larger power plants) and shared ownership in co-operatives vary significantly from one country to another.

They depend on historical experience and its legacy in social values and cultural traditions.

Germany will be my main example, followed by a briefer comment on Denmark.

Germany 1

Support for renewable energy derives from self-image as a people close to nature

Description of Germanic tribes in Tacitus, *Germania* (98 AD) as leading a simple, natural life

Powerful Romantic movement

Late, rapid industrialisation after unification in 1871 left a polarisation between supporters of development and large technological projects, and critics of modernisation

After the Second World War, national feeling in Germany discredited

Revival of pride in the nation in the 1970s associated with its record of environmental concern

Germany 2

A second difference from France and Britain: strong regional and local identities.

Pride in the city or region, especially in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg

Baden-Württemberg the scene of the anti-nuclear struggle in the 1970s

Striking difference between German attitudes towards energy and British ones: rejection of nuclear power

Germany 3

The environmental movement was dominated for its first decade by anti-nuclear action

Fears of the hazards of nuclear technology revived by Chernobyl, Fukushima

In Germany and the Netherlands the strength of the anti-nuclear movement has undoubtedly contributed to the high level of interest in alternative energy

Anti-nuclear feeling in Germany bound up with concern about monopolies

Also linked with Germany's decentralised structures and tradition of municipal autonomy

Germany 4

Nuclear power associated not only with the atom bomb, but also with fascism

In the second half of the 1970s, fear that nuclear power stations would turn the country into a police state (Robert Jungk, *The Atomic State*, 1977)

Jungk personified, as a Jew who had been in the Resistance, the link between anti-fascism and the anti-nuclear movement.

Multiple historical reasons for the German fears of the dangers of nuclear technology, which fed into opposition to centralised forms of energy production.

France

Mirror image of Germany

Highly centralised nation with a centralised energy system, dominated by large conglomerates, heavily into nuclear power.

Poland

Renewables mainly wood and water

A major coal producer

Denmark

The success of community renewable energy in Denmark due to ownership by co-ops

Strong organisational tradition going back to agricultural co-operatives formed in 1880s

Consequence of Nikolaj Grundtvig and the Danish folk high school

Attended by farmers' sons

Community energy in Denmark has benefited from this tradition of cooperative production and marketing, and local entrepreneurship. (“We can do something in our locality”.)