

MYTHS ON RENEWABLE ENERGY

Lessons from existing debunking efforts in Germany

Local community participation is crucial for social acceptance

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the use of renewable energies in Germany has risen massively. Backed by ambitious political targets, various new actors invested up to 27 bn. Euro per year in renewable energy installations. Although myths concerning the costs and downsides of renewable energies (RE) persist in the public perception, surveys and research from environmental psychology show that social acceptance of renewable energy installations remains on a high level. German Renewable Energies Agency's experience reveals that local community participation is a crucial factor for social acceptance of RE.

The German Renewable Energies Agency is a non-profit organisation, established in 2004 by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture on the governmental side and by the German RE industry and RE associations. The Renewable Energies Agency is jointly funded by the federal government as well as by more than a hundred companies and institutions, ranging from SME, municipal utilities and planning bureaus to big manufacturers and world market leaders. A team of 15 energy experts and campaigners works at the Agency's Berlin offices. As an information platform, the Renewable Energies Agency aggregates unbiased facts and coherent data on the German RE sector which is marked by a decentralised structure of plant operators, manufacturers and political decision makers.

Key messages on Renewable Energy

Explaining potentials, costs and benefits of RE in Germany, the Agency focuses on four key messages:

1. **Security of supply:** RE reduce Germany's dependence on fossil fuels.
2. **Employment and local economic development:** RE strengthen added value and purchase power, especially in local communities.
3. **Citizens' energy:** RE enable direct participation of local communities in energy policy and lead to more transparency and a democratization of the energy supply.
4. **Climate protection:** RE are indispensable for reaching Germany's greenhouse gas reduction target (- 40 % from 1990 to 2020).

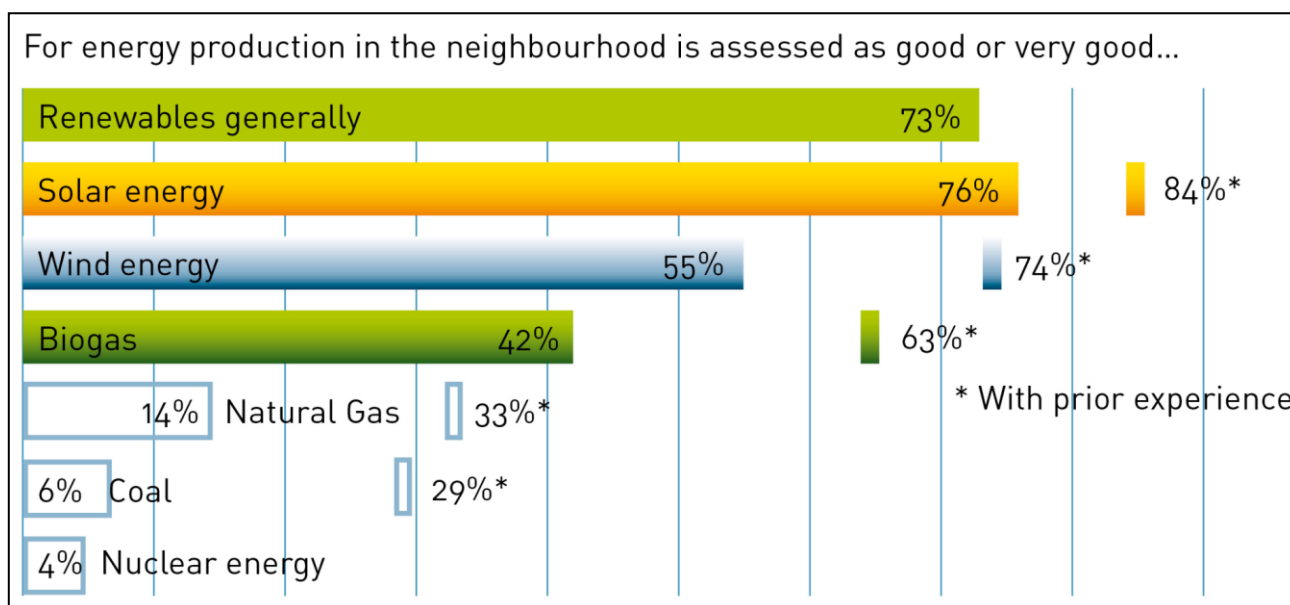
Debunking myths on RE and securing their public acceptance is favoured by the well advanced use of renewables in Germany. As RE installations are widely spread with, e.g. 1.8 million solar heating systems, 1.3 million pv systems, 23,000 wind turbines and 8,000 biogas plants in 2012, renewables are a visible part of the German landscapes. Ownership of renewable electricity generation capacity is also widely spread: In 2012, almost half of the installed capacity was in the hand of private individuals and farmers. Thus, Germans already know what RE are and that they provide a reliable local energy source. The success story of renewables in Germany in the last two decades¹ goes hand in hand with ambitious targets of municipalities and regions, leading their own energy strategies and declaring their will to cover their energy supply with domestic renewable energy sources (RES) entirely: In 2013, 138 German regions (districts, counties, municipalities) were 100 % RES regions aiming at renewable energy autonomy. 22 million people currently live in these regions. Surveys by the German Renewable Energies Agency

¹ German Renewable Energies Agency: A Success Story: Twenty Years of Support for Electricity from Renewable Energies in Germany. In: *Renews Spezial* No. 41, September 2010; http://www.unendlich-viel-energie.de/uploads/media/41_Renews_Special_ENGL.pdf.

showed that 81 % of the citizens demand more ambitious RE policies from their local governments.²

As a consequence of the well developed rootedness of RE in local communities and Germans' everyday life, the typical NIMBY effect, associated with the implantation of new technology projects, cannot be confirmed. Research results from environmental psychology and numerous surveys³ underline that social acceptance of RE installations in the neighbourhood is rising when people have high experience with these technologies.

High experience with renewables facilitates high social acceptance



Source: Representative survey commissioned by the German Renewable Energies Agency, 2012.

The Renewable Energies Agency therefore focuses its communication strategy on best practices with local actors. They can give testimonials, explaining how local benefits of renewable energy projects were triggered through broad involvement of local communities and local actors.

Simultaneously, the Agency is serving as a contact point for journalists, fulfilling several tasks:

- Agenda setting (to strengthen a network of journalists, to publish weekly news services with scientific, political or economic facts on RE, to monitor media coverage, to react to flaws and myths in media coverage - or better prevent them)
- To offer study trips and broad media services (footage, testimonials, image library, charts; providing journalists direct contact with RE experts and activists)

² For statistical data see <http://www.renewables-in-germany.com> and <http://www.unendlich-viel-energie.de>.

³ Agentur für Erneuerbare Energien (German Renewable Energies Agency): Bürgerbeteiligung für Erneuerbare Energien. Erkenntnisse aus Akzeptanz- und Partizipationsforschung (Citizens' RE participation. Results from social acceptance and participation research). In: Renew's Spezial No. 60, November 2012; http://www.unendlich-viel-energie.de/uploads/media/60_Renews_Spezial_Akzeptanz_online_final.pdf.

⁴ Kommunal Erneuerbar: <http://www.kommunal-erneuerbar.de>.

⁵ Föederal Erneuerbar; <http://www.foederal-erneuerbar.de>.

- To explain science (online database summarizing and comparing 500 studies published by German universities and research institutes on RE issues with charts and background papers)
- Annual award for journalists reporting in an innovative way on RE challenges

As the widespread grassroots movement for renewables in Germany is meeting strong local communities and federal states that are leading their own ambitious renewable energy strategy, there is a favourable framework for social acceptance of RE installations. The key messages on social and economic benefits of renewables easily can be spread by numerous local examples of best practice. Nevertheless, RE projects sometimes face resistance or criticism when local communities are not involved, lack information and feel "overruled". Democratic and financial participation opportunities at local level prove to be a prerequisite for social acceptance. So, only transparent and honest communication about problems and potentials of renewables can be successful.

However, with growing market shares, the complexity of the transition to RE is growing. Social acceptance can be jeopardised if reproaches turn out to be too complicated. It needs some time and patience to refute them.

Publishing Details

Issuer:

Renewable Energies Agency

Invalidenstr. 91, 10115 Berlin

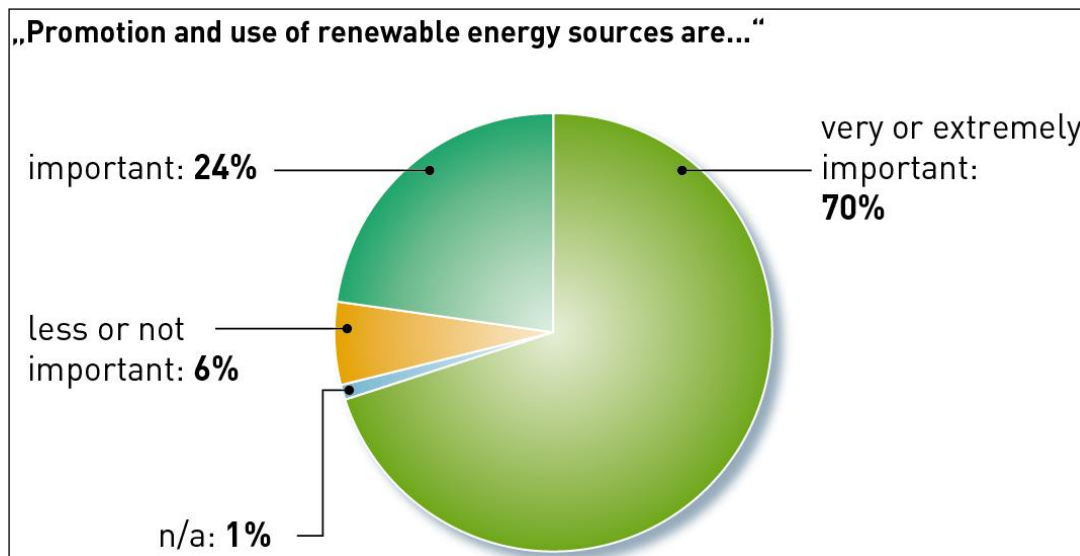
Tel.: 030.200 535.3

E-Mail: kontakt@unendlich-viel-energie.de

Author: Jörg Mühlhoff

Legally responsible for content: Philipp Vohrer

German citizens in favour of more renewable energies



Source: Representative survey by TNS Infratest, 3.798 participants, commissioned by the German Renewable Energies Agency, as of October 2012.