

Swiss Energy Governance

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Editors

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Political, Economic and Legal Challenges and
Opportunities in the Energy Transition



Springer

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ISBN 978-3-030-80786-3 ISBN 978-3-030-80787-0 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80787-0>

Published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation

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Foreword

Concerns about climate change and the risks induced by nuclear power have led many countries to induce a transition toward an energy system based mostly on renewables. This transition is likely to take several decades, to require substantial investments, and to be at least partially enabled by changes in individual behavior.

Given the challenges involved in such a transition, several countries have decided to provide dedicated research funding for large-scale projects that result in insights and innovations for accelerating the energy transition or reducing its costs. In Switzerland, this has resulted in the creation of eight Swiss Competence Centers for Energy Research (SCCER), among which the Center for Energy, Society and Transition (SCCER CREST) is conducting research on non-technical aspects of the energy transition.

This collective volume presents results from several research groups that have worked on the *governance of energy transitions* in the context of the SCCER CREST. It illustrates the unique possibilities arising in large-scale projects that span more than the usual 3–4 years and that involve researchers with strongly differing backgrounds and perspectives. Furthermore, it exemplifies how to successfully navigate the pitfalls that arise when academic research is confronted with demands to provide simple and unified answers.

The contributions to this volume cover a wide range of topics in energy governance. Some contributions relate to the international context of energy policy—for example, analyzing the question of how non-EU countries like Switzerland can influence the development of EU energy policy. Other contributions investigate national regulatory strategies—for example, whether past ideas, such as unbundling, are still appropriate in a decentralized system or how legal settings can inhibit or foster the development of new technologies. Finally, there are contributions that connect policy and individual behavior, as illustrated by the study on the effects of policy risks on wind power development as well as by the study of media coverage of energy policy and its influence on voting behavior. Despite using different perspectives and approaches, the studies published here do not only cover a wide

range of topics, but they do so in a way that provides an overall picture of challenges and potential solutions in governing an energy transition.

This illustrates important advantages of large-scale research projects: the ability to decide jointly which topics are to be covered, to conduct research on similar topics simultaneously, and to exchange results between individual teams early on. Due to this coordination and exchange, individual research projects provide added value to each other, and the overall achievement becomes more than the sum of the individual projects.

The above examples also point to another important advantage of large-scale projects: Such projects provide the funding required to analyze important questions not only from a single but from several disciplinary perspectives. Imagine a collective volume on energy governance written solely by political scientists, solely by legal scholars, or solely by economists. Even if all of these imagined books were based on top-quality research, all of them would be impecunious compared to the volume you are reading. Each of the above disciplines has its own way of perceiving the world, of analyzing problems, and of inferring solutions. These ways overlap only partially. Joining these perspectives provides a picture that is, albeit more expensive in terms of research funding, much more informative.

But this scale of funding is not only a chance but also a challenge. Often, large-scale research projects are asked to not only analyze a question from different perspectives and compare results but also to arrive at joint results, preferably based on joint approaches. Such demands are important for communicating overarching recommendations to persons outside academia.

But, if taken too far, such demands impoverish research. Progress in science stems from controversies, from the unwillingness of researchers to accept easily what they perceive to be false, from the drive to convince others who hold different views. If contrasting views have to be merged, results become vague and consensual with little prospect to provoke new ideas. If disciplinary methods are exchanged completely for “interdisciplinary” approaches, the precision on which scientific work hinges is diluted, and the ability to place results in an appropriate scientific context is lost. Finally, the false ideal might be served (once again) that there is a single “scientifically correct” answer to societies’ needs and questions.

This collective volume exemplifies how to step around these pitfalls. The contributions are based on perceptions and methods stemming from different disciplines. They do not seek consensus at all costs but feel free to provide diverging, and, in some instances, even contrasting, perspectives and conclusions. Yet, it is clearly visible that the contributions originate from a joint project, that the authors have fruitfully engaged in discussions, and that they work toward common goals. The collective volume thus provides a picture of energy governance that is not a total perspective, where each element is configured to be a designated part of the whole, but rather a coordinated arrangement of individual perspectives. This provides the contrast and the level of detail that lead to a vibrant and informative picture.

In addition to these points, the collective volume provides a compelling argument that research on energy governance has a vital role in facilitating a timely and efficient transition to a new energy system.

It is a futile hope that technological innovations will automatically induce a broad deployment of “green” technologies or that large-scale transitions will not have to rely on changes in individual behavior. Consequently, a timely energy transition will require adjustments to policies, institutions, and framing conditions. But the transition will still take decades and will require the active engagement of a large and highly diverse set of actors. Therefore, such adjustments have to be developed taking into account the necessity of maintaining public support, of keeping essential actors engaged, of integrating new policies and institutions in the context of existing ones, and of ensuring coherence with international developments.

The contributions to this volume show how difficult it is to meet these challenges but also how much research in energy governance can contribute toward easing the energy transition. Even though research on energy governance has no shiny new technologies to show, its impact on the success of the current energy transition is likely to be substantial.

In summary, this collective volume is a remarkable achievement, thanks to the quality of the contributions and to the efforts of Prof. Hettich and Prof. Kachi, who not only initiated and edited this volume but also created and coordinated the work package in the SCCER CREST that provided the frame for the research published here.

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Acknowledgments

This book is part of the activities of SCCER CREST (Swiss Competence Center for Energy Research), which is financially supported by Innosuisse under Grant No. KTI. 1155000154 and is published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation. Many researchers of this book have also been involved in and been funded by the National Research Program “Energy Turnaround” (NRP 70) of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The editors and authors of this book wish also to express their gratitude to the many academic institutions as well as the public and private entities which have generously leveraged the funds provided by Innosuisse.

We also thank Dr. Nicole Pohl, Julie Freyer, MLaw, and Michael Vierbauch, B.A. HSG in Law, for their careful review and comments. The contents of and the mistakes in this book are the individual authors’ sole responsibility. They do not necessarily represent the views of other contributors to this volume or of other members of SCCER CREST. We are grateful to receive any comments which our careful readers may have.

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