

# Onshore wind: Societal conflicts and social acceptance

Julia Zilles  
EERA JP Wind Innovation Forum  
Amsterdam, September 21, 2022

# About myself...

- **Academic Background:**
  - Political Science, Philosophy, German Literature
  - 2014-2021 Research Associate at Göttingen Institute for Democracy Research
  - Research Projects:
    - „Citizens‘ Protests in Times of Energy Transition (2014-2017)
    - „Demokon – A democratic Culture of Conflict for Energy Transition“ (2019-2021)
- **Current position** since September 2021:
  - Scientific Coordinator of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Energy Research Centre of Lower Saxony (EFZN); member of its research service
  - Based at SOFI, Göttingen

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# About my research expertise...

- **Research Focus:**
  - Local conflicts in the context of energy transition
  - Protests against wind energy
  - Questions of justice and participation
  - Polarisation
- **Recent Publication:**
  - Zilles, J., & Marg, S. (2022). Protest and Polarisation in the Context of Energy Transition and Climate Policy in Germany: Mindsets and Collective Identities. German Politics, 1–22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2059469>



# Outline

1. Social local Conflicts in the Context of Energy Transition
  - Who protests?
  - .... and why?
2. Social Acceptance in the Context of Energy Transition
  - What helps?
  - And what does not?
3. Societal Polarisation
  - Why it is important to extend the focus beyond the wind energy sector?



# Part 1: Social local Conflicts in the Context of Energy Transition

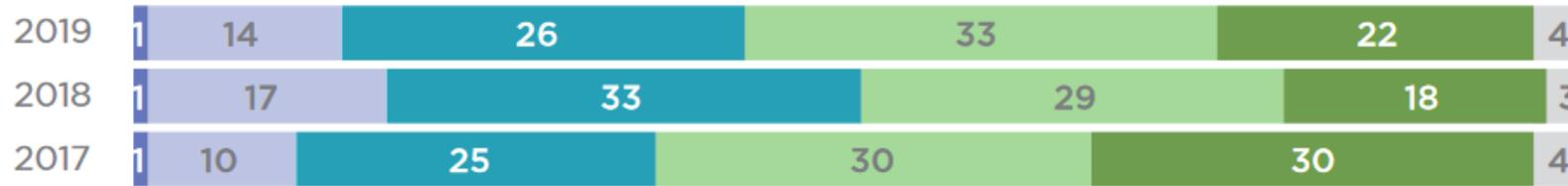
Who protests? ... and why?

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# (1) Local conflicts – who protests?

## WILLINGNESS TO PROTEST AGAINST PLANNED WIND TURBINES IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Can you imagine yourself signing a petition or participating in a protest or citizens' initiative against planned wind turbines in your locality?



Basis: 2019: 6,383; 2018: 6,434; 2017: 7,226 | data source: IASS/dynamis | percentage figures | deviations from 100 percent due to rounding<sup>2</sup>

Source: [https://www.iass-potsdam.de/sites/default/files/2020-12/IASS\\_N-barometer\\_21x21cm\\_EN\\_201207.pdf](https://www.iass-potsdam.de/sites/default/files/2020-12/IASS_N-barometer_21x21cm_EN_201207.pdf)



### Response categories

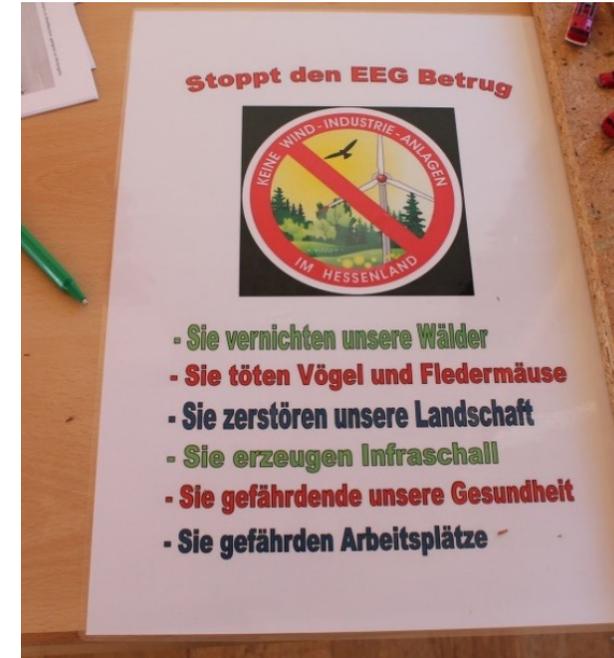
- I am already engaged in such activities.
- I can well imagine that.
- I can imagine that under certain circumstances, for example, if I was directly affected.
- I find that rather hard to imagine.
- I can't imagine that at all.
- Don't know/not reported

Germany 2021: 15% of general population against wind energy, 21% in regions where there are already a lot of wind parks

Teune et al. 2021

# (1) Local conflicts – who protests?

- The composition of the citizens' action groups against wind energy is rather **typical** for citizens' action groups in general:
  - male
  - Elderly
  - highly educated
  - with high resources regarding professional skills, knowledge and especially **time** (Walter 2013)
  - Living in rural areas
- Prevailing **urban-rural divide** in the transformation of the energy system
  - People living in the countryside express the feeling of not being represented and having their interests considered in decisions made by urban elites.



# (1) Local conflicts – who protests?

## Self-Perception

- The collective identity of activists against wind energy is shaped by being **responsible, engaged** and **caring** citizens → Advocats of the **Common Good** (Zilles/Marg 2022) → contrast to public debate
- Activists decry a **lack of responsibility**:
  - *‘I always think things are getting twisted around. That entire time, we took social responsibility because others refused to do so. We are basically filling a vacuum of responsibility. And this is something becoming ever more obvious: they are not taking responsibility.’ (Activist, interview, 2014)*
- The activists are often deeply disappointed by what they had expected to be a fair decision making process.
- Participation offers are often perceived as **‘pseudo-participation’**:
  - *‘It is merely a kind of pseudo-participation. Protest is the only means we have now. There is no formal way for us [...] Because of that, all citizens are going to fail, because of these formalities. [...] [a]nd I believe this is designed to work like that.’ (Activist, interview, 2014)*

# (1) Local conflicts – who protests.... and why?

- The opponents of wind energy express strong **attachment to the place** they live and to nature in general:
  - *‘This is a place that has been the summer health resort of the region. People used to go there in summer, enjoying the view. This is Heimat, this is Heimat attached to social events, spread throughout the year, always on fixed dates. It’s like if something totally different happened at the place where normally a spring festival or thanksgiving services would be taking place. It’s like something that belongs to the region is taken away. And then someone says: “This is now a construction site and an industrial area”.’ (Activist, interview, Wind energy, 2014)*
- Main goal: The local opponents want to preserve their **Heimat** and ‘pristine’ nature for future generations:
  - *‘Regarding my children and grandchildren. I don’t want them to blame me for not having done everything to prevent this [the wind energy project].’ (Activist, interview, Wind energy, 2014)*



Source: Own pictures, demonstration in Wald-Michelbach, Juni, 7th 2018

# (1) .... and why?

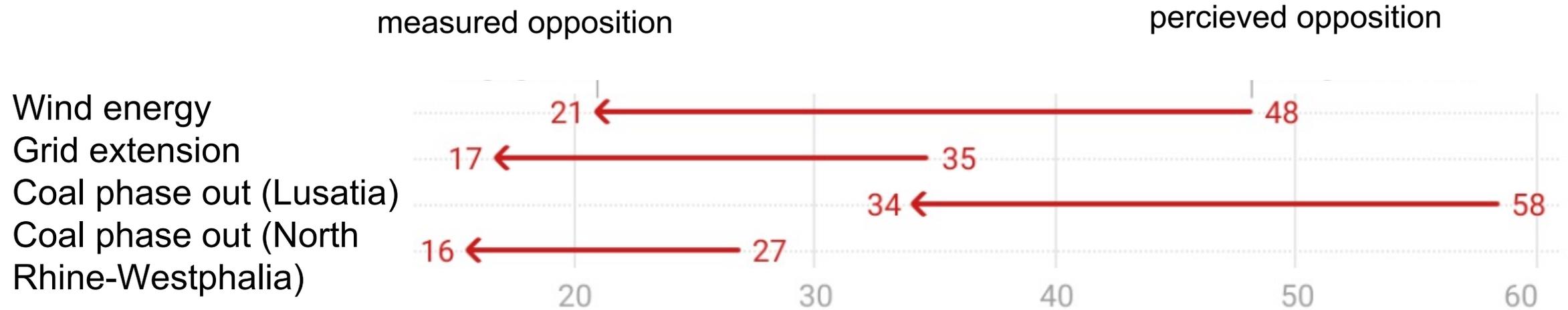
- The opponents fear ‘**industrialization**’ (activist, interview, 2014) and the ‘**asparagus-isation**’ (Lintz/Leibenath 2020) of the whole region → ‘landscape stewardship’ (Arifi et al. 2020)
- **Green-on-Green conflicts** (Warren et al. 2005) → climate protection vs. Nature conservation
- Concerns about negative impact on **surrounding nature** most important argument against wind energy projects (Weber et al. 2017, Colell et al. 2022), in particular when it comes to **specialy protected areas** (forests, swamp, etc.)
- Very strong motivation based on **nature conversation**, many activists are as well engaged in nature conversation organisations
  - Moreover: strategic aspect, in Germany especially important since nature conservation association have the right to take nature related concerns to court.



Source: Jörg Rehmann, Trailer:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCIKa61lCxc>

→ Far beyond NIMBYism

# (1) Local conflicts – discrepancy between measured and perceived opposition



Source: translated from Teune et al. 2021

## Part 2: Social Acceptance in the Context of Energy Transition

What helps? And what does not?

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# (2) Social acceptance in the Context of Energy Transition

## What helps? ... Money?

### Meta-study of conflict studies (Knodt et al. 2022):

- **1. Compensation at individual level**

- At first sight this might be the most attractive solution.
- Study of Lienhoop 2018: conclusion that the impact of the local infrastructure projects is perceived as so severe that money is not appropriate to compensate.
- Partially, financial compensation at the individual level is perceived as bribery.
- Leads to social tension in communities, if only some profit but everyone is confronted with negative impacts.

- **2. Shares**

- Better than individual compensation, but here again there is a lot reservation.
- Moreover, it fosters social inequality since the distribution of the opportunity to engage financially is not equally distributed (education, financial background, time).

- **3. Compensation at the local level / municipalities**

- Most attractive option
- The municipalities profit as a whole financially from the infrastructure projects and are thus able to reinvest in the 'common good', such as public swimmingpools, free lunch in kindergarten,...

# (2) Social acceptance in the Context of Energy Transition

## What helps? ... Distributional and Procedural Justice

For a successful energy transition distributional as well as procedural justice needs to be taken serious (Eichenauer & Gailing 2020).

### Distributional Justice:

- Who profits from the project?
- If individuals and municipalities should profit financially, this should be introduced at an early stage of the project development (Eichenauer 2018).
  - Then, it might lead to higher acceptance.
  - Later on, it might be considered as bribery.
- Spatial justice and fair distribution

### Procedural Justice:

- Most crucial point of critique in local conflicts on energy transition is a perceived lack of procedural justice (Simcock 2016).
- Processes are often not perceived as open and fair → „Pseudo-Participation“ (Zilles 2021), leads to even more frustration (Fink/Ruffing 2020)
- Recommendation (Eichenauer & Gailing 2020):
  - Clear expectations
  - Short timelines
  - Coherent solutions (at least) at the national level
  - Spatial justice

## (4) Conclusion

1. It is important to study local conflicts and to listen to people resisting against wind energy projects.
  - Not: in the sense to stop a project because individuals are expressing opposition.
  - But: to gain a better understanding for deeply rooted societal conflicts and polarisation processes which have the potential to grow (Zilles/Drewing/Janik 2022).
  - Potential of invited participation is limited, „we need to shift attention to social conflict as self-organized participation“ (Cuppen 2018).
2. „Big hurry“ / „Imperative of speed“ (Delina/Sovacool 2018) vs. Time intensive processes of democracy, public participation and deliberation.
3. Money alone is not the solution, municipalities as a whole should profit from wind energy projects.
4. Procedural and distributional justice and related social questions remain crucial and need to get addressed.

## (5) Recommendation:



Source: <https://anchor.fm/ntnu-energy-transitions/episodes/30-Is-Funding-Technology-Enough-Social-Sciences-and-Humanities-in-the-Energy-Transition-with-Prof--Chris-Foulds-e1n7f5r/a-a8f85u6>

- Podcast with Chris Foulds
- Good explanations why it matters to include SSH perspectives in energy research
- Points to structural shortcomings in interdisciplinary research funding, domination of economic perspectives

*Royston/Foulds (2021): The making of energy evidence: How exclusions of Social Sciences and Humanities are reproduced (and what researchers can do about it), published in Energy Research & Social Sciences*

Thank you very much for your attention!

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## Part 3: Societal Polarisation

Why it is important to extend the focus beyond the wind energy sector?

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### (3) Societal Polarisation – Sample overview

		Local opponents of energy transition (Marg et al. 2013)	Local opponents of energy transition (Hoeft et al. 2017)	Local opponents of wind energy	Participants of the Global Climate Strike
<b>Sample period</b>		2012	2014-2015	2018	2019
<b>Total number of interviewees</b>		49	9	5	22
<b>Gender</b>	female	14	3	1	11
	Male	35	6	4	11
<b>Age</b>	< 35 years	1	-	-	8
	36-55 years	18	4	2	6
	> 56 years	28	4	3	7
	unknown	4	1	-	-
<b>Education</b>	Low education	-	-	-	-
	Middle education	10	1	1	4
	High education	30	7	1	13
	unknown	11	1	3	2

### (3) Societal Polarisation

#### **Cluster I** **Fridays for Future /** **climate strike** **participants**

- Young generation, urban centres, more female activists
- Exerting pressure on the political system
- put the issue of climate justice (explicitly framed as intergenerational justice) on the political agenda

**VS.**

#### **Cluster II** **Opponents of projects** **in the context of energy** **transition**

- Rather old, rural, periphery, more male activists
- Fear of changes of their surrounding landscape (Hoeft et al. 2017)
- feeling of being culturally and economically disadvantaged
- feeling a lack of representation and not having their interests seen in political decision-making (e.g. Eichenauer 2018)

### (3) Societal Polarisation:

## ‘Us‘ and ‘Them‘ in the polarised field of energy and climate policy

‘Us‘ – Self-perception and collective identity

‘Them‘ – Conceptualisation of the ‘others‘

Opponents of projects in the context of energy transition

#### ‘Advocates of the Common good‘

- Engaging for the common good
- Filling ‘vacuum of responsibility‘
- Hands-on attitude (‘We take responsibility for things that should actually be done by politics‘)
- Positive attached to *Heimat* and surrounding nature, rural and ‘pristine‘ landscape
- Place-attachment
- Motivated by reasons of nature conservation
- Preserving *Heimat* and nature for future generations
- Relying on alternative scientific expertise

#### ‘Green Ideologists‘

- ‘green Mainstream‘
- Cosmopolitan, urban elite
- Federal government, decoupled from the place where energy transition is taking place
- Urban population without any true relationship to nature and *Heimat*
- Corrupt politicians ‘are in bed with economy‘

Climate strike participants

#### ‘Savers of Future‘

- Environmental friendly, prefigurative, urban lifestyle
- Cosmopolitan and international orientated
- Future orientated
- Believing in science and resulting imperatives
- Politicians as addressees to take political responsibility and to stick to international treaties
- Discrepancy between claim for ‘system change‘ and trust in politicians to take action

#### ‘Reactionists‘

- Not-future orientated / reactionary
- Deniers of climate change and science
- Climate-damaging lifestyle
- AfD-partisans / sympathisers

Quelle: Zilles/Marg 2022

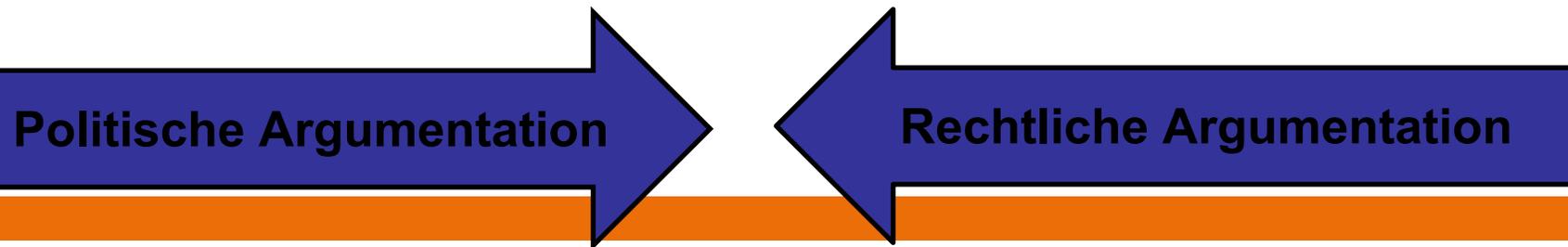
# (3) Societal Polarisation

## Inter-cluster overlap

- Clusters share a **collective identity** – common conception of who they are as a group and what role they play in society
- Clusters share the **conceptualisation of their counterparts**
- Face each other like **two distinct poles**: global climate protection vs. protection of local nature; urban lifestyle vs. rural living environment; high expectations towards cosmopolitan-orientated elite vs. deep disappointment with politicians
- But: **inter-cluster overlaps**:
  - 1. attachment to nature and environment → global perspective/mitigate climate change vs. preservation of local nature
  - 2. Ambition to serve the common good → global vs. local → Krüger 2022
  - 3. Disappointment with political performance → call for policy-making based on experts and facts
  - 4. Relying on science → References to scientific (or at least to which is considered as such by the respondents) studies. Activists from each pole try to emphasise their claims by drawing on studies concerning the contested topic. Moreover, studies by the other side are discursively degraded as either 'pseudo-science' or politically vested and biased science.
- Bilder einfügen → entscheiden, ob die Folie mit drin bleibt → evtl. als Backup

## Konfligierende Kommunikationslogiken

- In den Konflikten treffen die **Kommunikationslogiken** einer politischen Entscheidung und der rein rechtlichen Verwaltungsverfahren aufeinander und verfestigen die lokalen Konfliktlinien – sofern keine „**Übersetzungsleistung**“ stattfindet (s. Hoeft, Messinger-Zimmer & Zilles 2017, S. 235ff.)
- Häufig unklar: „Ob“ oder „Wie“?
- Beteiligung oft zu spät, zu voraussetzungsreich und bestimmte Argumente rechtlich ausgeschlossen (Huge & Roßnagel 2018)
- Zudem: großes Narrativ fehlte lange Zeit
- Systemische Überforderung der Lokalpolitik



## Quotes - Heimat

- This strong attachment to the alliance of nature and *Heimat* is exemplified by an activist who opposes wind energy:
- ‘This is a place that has been the summer health resort of the region. People used to go there in summer, enjoying the view. This is *Heimat*, this is *Heimat* attached to social events, spread throughout the year, always on fixed dates. It’s like if something totally different happened at the place where normally a spring festival or thanksgiving services would be taking place. It’s like something that belongs to the region is taken away. And then someone says: “This is now a construction site and an industrial area”.’ (Activist, interview, Wind energy, 2014)
- The local opponents want to preserve their *Heimat* and ‘pristine’ nature for future generations and thus addressing worries about sustainability. It is important to note that they speak about ‘nature’ whereas in the environmental movement the term ‘environment’ has prevailed.

## Quote – sustainable lifestyle

- Overall, there is a tendency in the group towards a more sustainable lifestyle, an assumption that can be derived from the indication of certain behaviours such as reduced meat consumption or vegetarian diet, use of the bicycle instead of the car, purchase of unpackaged food and rejection of mass consumption. Understanding themselves as part of the movement, leads to reflection on one's own consumption:
- 'I try to adapt my market behaviour, in any case! Okay, I can't say "I never buy meat!" or "I'm vegan!". But: I now go shopping more consciously in the supermarket. For example, I don't buy meat in the supermarket, but I still eat it sometimes in the canteen. [...] Yes, and to be frugal in general, and not to buy new clothes all the time.' (*Fridays for Future* activist, interview, Hamburg 2019)

## Quote – Political Agenda

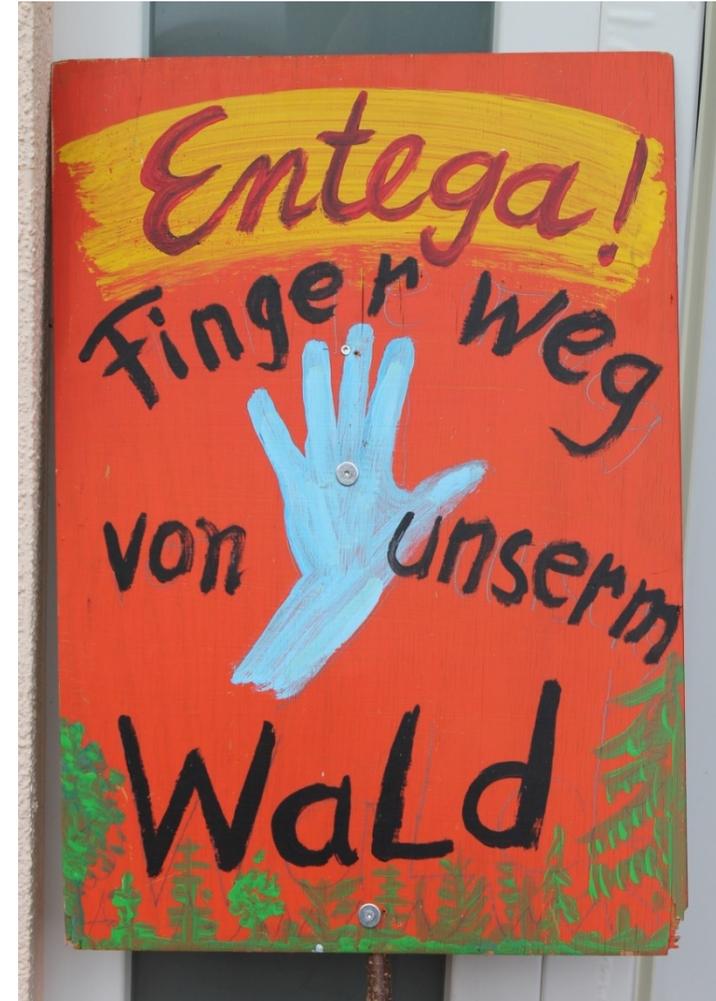
- ‘Yes, for me *Fridays for Future* is first and foremost a movement which brings the issue back into of people’s consciousness and thus hopefully also onto the political agenda. I think that’s the most important thing.’  
(*Fridays for Future*, Focus Group, Hamburg 2019)
- Many (not all) *Fridays for Future* activists in our sample still address politicians as reliable actors and describe them as party-oriented. Those interviewees support the actual decisions of politicians (Paris Climate Agreement, phasing out nuclear and coal energy, etc.) and reclaim to stick to the self-set goals:
- ‘In fact, they [*Fridays for Future*] just want politics to do the things, they have already promised years before. They are not even against the system or want something totally new. But yes, they want politics to do their job.’  
(*Fridays for Future* activist, interview, Hamburg October 2019)

## Quote – difference

- Some of the *Fridays for Future* activists express awareness of the fundamental difference between their living and working conditions and of those opposing energy transition policy such as workers in the coal industry.
- ‘This is a big question: not only, how can we convince these people? Furthermore, what alternatives can we offer given the economically weak character of the region? This is very, very important, because otherwise a profound anti-attitude will emerge and that will support the respective movements and parties who are able to use this attitude for themselves.’  
(*Fridays for Future* activist, interview, Hanover, October 2019)

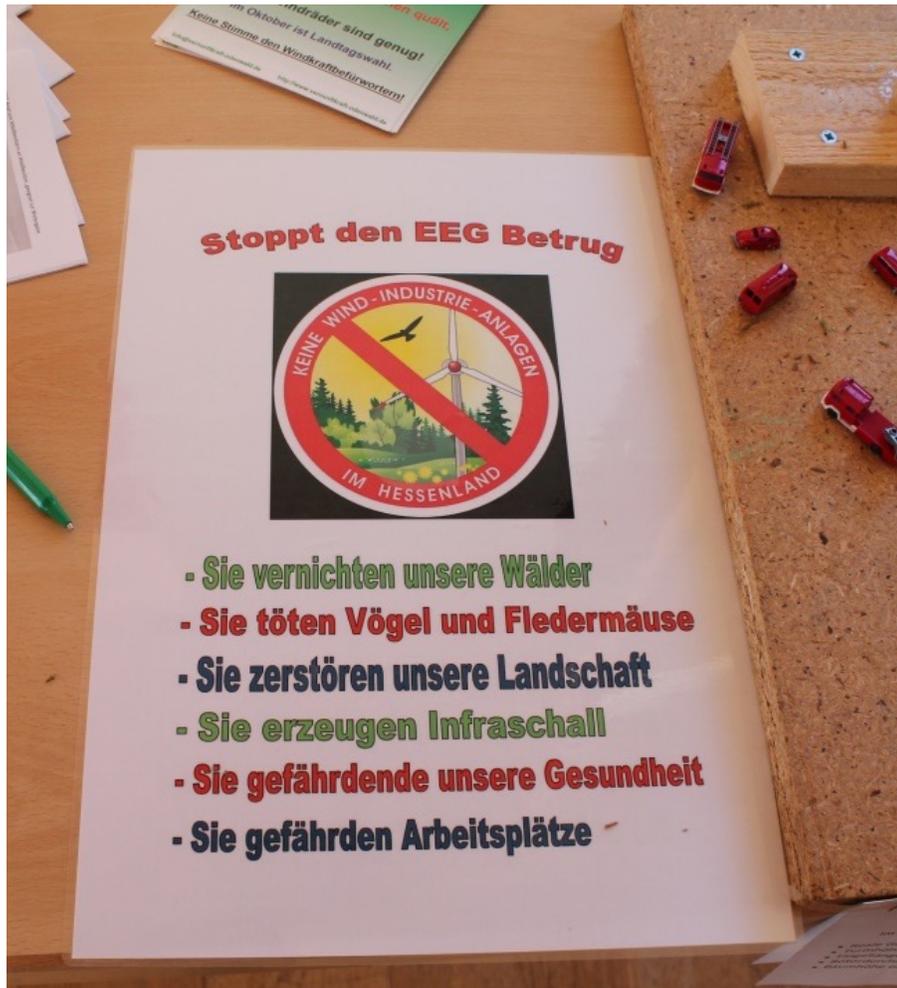
# Gemeinwohlkonflikte

- Timmo Krüger (2020) „Gemeinwohlkonflikte in der Energiewende“:
  - Grundannahme: zunehmende Auseinandersetzungen darum, „welche Interessen als Interessen der Allgemeinheit und damit als legitime Interessen anerkannt werden und welche nicht“ (S. 6)
  - Konfliktlinie nicht:: öffentlich vs. Private Interessen
  - Sondern: partikular vs. Gemeinwohl
- Daher: In lokalen Konflikten wird immer (auch) verhandelt, welche Interessen als legitime Gemeinwohlinteressen gelten **und** wer diese vertreten kann (Messinger-Zimmer/Zilles 2016)
  - **Bürgerinitiativen?**
  - **Lokalpolitik?**
  - **Bürgerbefragung?**



Quelle: Eigenes Fotos, Demonstration  
Wald-Michelbach, 7. Juni 2018

# (1) ... and why?



Source: Own picture, public event, Michelstadt-Würzburg, Germany, 20. June 20, 2018

- Weit über „NIMBY“ hinaus
- Natur- und Artenschutz
- Percieved lack of procedural justice  
Verfahrensgerechtigkeit
- Lärmbelastung
- Tourismus
- Erhalt eines lebenswerten Umfeldes
- Wertverlust von Eigenheimen
- „Das Maß ist voll!“
- Teilweise: Nutzen von Windkraft generell
  
- (S. auch Roßmeier et. al 2018)
  
- → müsste es als Übersetzung geben
  
- Text: Keep in XXX and birdfriendly?