

Metaphors of the Energy Transition

Exploring the Case of the News Magazine

Der Spiegel



VIRTUELLES INSTITUT
TRANSFORMATION
ENERGIEWENDE^{NRW}



I. Context



Virtual Institute (VI) „Transformation – Energy Transition NRW“

THE VI „TRANSFORMATION- ENERGIEWENDE NRW“
IS STRUCTURED IN THREE CLUSTERS:



CLUSTER TII

Transforming Industrial
Infrastructures (TII)



CLUSTER G&P

Governance & Participation (G&P)



CLUSTER M&V

Mentalities & Patterns Of Behaviour
(M&V)



I. Context



German Energy Transition

- Concept in public discourse since anti-nuclear protests of 1970s/1980s
- Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster 2011: public consensus for nuclear phase-out
- Public debate changed in 2013: focus now mainly on costs
- New metaphors like „monster-line“, „cost-tsunami“

International Climate Policy

- 2015: two significant international agreements
- UN SDGs, Goal 7
 - „Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all.“
- Paris Agreement
 - Goal of limiting global warming to „well below“ 2 °C
 - Goal of CO₂-neutral world economy



II. Research design

Basic data on the research project

- **Starting point**
 - *How is the energy transition being metaphorically conceptualised in public discourse – more specifically the media?*
 - *How might this mirror common interpretations and conceptions of the energy transition as a phenomenon?*
- **Case study**
 - Weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*
- **Data collection and analysis**
 - **Process:** 03/2015 to 8/2016 via online data-base
 - **Type of data:** magazine articles published between 01/01/2011 and 01/01/2015, “Energiewende” in headline or first paragraph
- **Methodology**
 - Basis: Kruse/Biesel/Schmieder 2011, also: Schmitt 2003, 2011



II. Research design

Methodology Kruse/Biesel/ Schmieder 2011

- **„reconstructive approach“**
 - interpretative paradigm of qualitative social science
- **Taking the researchers‘ conceptual systems into account**
 - Openness of the interpretation process
 - Analysis and interpretation in a research group
- **What is coded as metaphor?**
 - „pragmatic solution“
- **4 steps**
 - I. cutting out/collecting metaphors
 - II. categorizing metaphors
 - III. abstraction/completion
 - IV. understanding/interpretation in context



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- **Researchers**
 - Dr. Steven Engler, Stefan Schweiger and Esther Trost



III. Results



ET IS A VEHICLE ON A ROAD

- *Common metaphor for progress or progressing policies*
- *E.g. “subsidy dead end”, “meander”*
- **Notable about usage for ET**
 - *ET is perceived as progressive*
 - *progress associated with ET is wanted*
 - *destination is not at all questioned*



III. Results



- **ET IS A MACHINE, A MONSTER, A MONSTER-MACHINE**
 - Especially to metaphorize technical realizations of ET
 - “monster-line”, “gigantic rotors”, “mill-mosters”, “monster-pylons”, “a feeling of *endwarfment*”
- **Notable about usage for ET**
 - *ET becomes something archaic and primitive*
 - *Poses threat to the ‘world as we know it’*



III. Results

ET IS WAR



- **ET IS A BATTLEGROUND**

- *Common use of WAR-metaphor for politics*
- *Fight of all against all: “energy companies fight solar power producers, grid operators fight power station builders, DAX-corporations fight SME”*

- **Notable about usage for ET**

- *Victim: “consumer”, “citizen” → costs “explode”, “explosive charge” in the law on renewable energies*
- *Hides e.g. idea of ET being a “common task” of all*

- **ET IS A WEAPON**

- **I)** Against “homeland” and landscape → “destroys the homeland”, e.g. through “a blanket attack on the woods”
- **II)** Against climate change

- **The sacrifice of “the German people”**

- → both metaphors underline a discourse of sacrifice focussing on “the German people”



III. Results



Euer „Ökostrom“ macht mich arm.



Bitte kommt zur Vernunft.

Die EEG-Subventionierung erhöht massiv die Stromkosten. Mehr als 500.000 Haushalte wurde in 2013 der Strom abgestellt, weil sie ihre Rechnung nicht mehr bezahlen konnten.

- **ET IS AN INVESTMENT**

- *Cost and accounting metaphors common in politics/journalism*
- *Mostly: **ET AS MISINVESTMENT***
 - *feeds into metaphor of sacrifice of the German people*
 - *government as dishonest investment broker : “In fact it’s the citizens who pay the bill in the end”*
 - *electricity becomes a “luxury”*

- **ET AS GOOD INVESTMENT**

- *ET as chance to balance past “ecological debts”, the “West” has made during the “unhealthy fossil era”*
- *Currency: CO₂, scarce resources*



III. Results



Findings and Difficulties

- **Central finding**
 - ET is not questioned as a political aim
 - Even common metaphorical concepts might be interesting when looking at details → *How* are they used in the context of the energy transition?
- **Difficulties for Interpretation**
 - Are the metaphors found topic-specific? Or do they rather mirror cultural, journalism- or even journalist-specific stocks of metaphor?
- **Rethinking Methodology**
 - “Self-analysis”
 - “Cultural blueprint”
 - other dimensions aside from semantics?
 - integration with other methods?
- **Interesting points for further research**
 - “Is the discourse on national sacrifice an element of German identity construction? Does it appear in other thematic contexts? In other nations?”



IV. Questions



Questions

- *Which adjustments could be made to the research design to yield more reliable results?*
- *Which potential bears the theory and study of metaphor for understanding major transformations like the energy transition?*



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The End



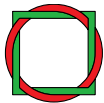
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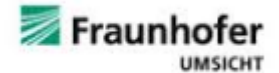
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Thank you very much for your attention!



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