Human Scale Development – the case of energy cooperatives.

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Long Abstract

Introduction

One central question in the degrowth debate is how to reach the normative goal of sustainable development (SD). The success of efficiency and consistency strategies remains deficient whereas sufficiency strategies still are connoted with deprivation. One way to overcome this flaw may lie in a change in perspective concerning the concept of "needs". The "old-fashion" understanding of "needs" in the Brundtland Report focuses on material aspects and thereby legitimates mono-dimensional economic growth (WCED 1987). As an answer to this utility-based perspective approaches with a wider understanding of "human needs" has been developed (Sen, 1984, Wiggins, 1987a, Doyal and Gough, 1991). One of them is the Human Scale Development Approach (HSDA) of the Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef (Max-Neef 1991). It focuses on individual well-being and provides a definition thereof. Linking the HSDA to sustainable development requires conceptual framings that allow normatively inspired processes to evaluate, design, and implement sustainability transitions on the ground. This understanding of human needs contributes to Degrowth where downscaling from production and consumption and an increased individual well-being through convivial and frugal lifestiles is a main aim. The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WGBU) identifies the civil society as one important protagonist of transition (WGBU 2011). In this paper we focus on Energy cooperatives (EC) as an example of participation of citizens in the German energy turn. We first describe particularities of German EC. Looking from a multi-level-perspective (Geels 2011) EC are quite established and can be seen as niche phenomena that influence the regime by showing their transformative potential. Understanding EC as protagonists of niches and their members as pioneers of change raises the question of their transformative potential. Carving out the motivations for pro-social behaviour of members of EC, the paper focusses on the feasibility of the HSDA as a tool to support local initiatives and pioneers on a transformative path in industrialized countries.Therefore it describes the HSDA which is to be applied in 6 German EC and finally discusses the advantages and limitations of this approach.

Energy cooperatives

Generally, a cooperative is based on social values such as self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. These principles are also required to serve as practical guidelines for cooperatives. As a general remark, one of the strongest motives to form cooperatives or to join one is

thought to be contributing to a better society; that is, a concern for the community and a willingness to contribute to social change. Energy cooperatives have the more specific aim to enhance changes in the energy sector. They are an increasingly important player for the transformation processes of current energy systems towards sustainability and decentralization in Germany. EC are generally perceived as a new form of socio-economic organization in an energy system since they are a form of community-based ownership of energy production or consumption. They are grounded on values such as democracy, subsidiarity, collectivity and regionality. There has been a considerable growth in the number of EC since 2006. In 2012, approximately 750 EC existed that mostly produced wind and solar energy. In their variety they build a heterogenous field: EC vary not only in their size, age and location (if they are rural or urban) and by the energy form they are producing; there exist EC that are grid-storage or production cooperatives (or a mixture). And they can also be classified by their different goals: If they want to buy a public energy grid (as it is the case in Berlin, Hamburg or Oldenburg); if they (just) want to produce energy; if they combine their goals with social engagement, such as collaboration with third-world-projects; or if they built up a bioenergy village (Volz 2012).

The democratic organisation of EC, related to the source of their financial assets, makes them a special actor for creating public acceptance for system transformations in energy turns. Being a member of energy cooperatives or even a user of its services may alter one's quality of life. Participation or membership in EC can be seen as means and ends at the same time. From an instrumental perspective it can be seen as capability to manage energy ressources; at the same time being member of EC has an intrinsic value of engaging in non-materialistic activities that enhances the quality of life.

EC offer several possibilities to influence strategies to meet the needs of their members and users, ranging from an economic return on investments to more social group creation effects to psychological effects based on identity or self-efficacy. The latter might play a prominent role as people reject knowledge about global warming etc. due to perceived helplessness. Being member of EC may offer ways to strengthen individuals´ freedom of action to act sustainably that link self- and other regarding goals and thereby increase the overall well-being.

The HSDA Methodology

The aim of Max-Neef's HSDA is to empower local communities in rural and urban areas. Human Scale Development is "focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state" (Max-Neef 1991). Max-Neef and

his colleagues developed both, a taxonomy of human needs and a process by which communities can identify their "wealth's" and "poverties" according to how these needs are satisfied. Max-Neef describes human needs as few, finite and classifiable. The needs are: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, recreation, identity and freedom. Later he added a tenth need for spiritual development that he calls transcendence. Those needs are assumed to be constant through all human cultures and across historical time periods. What changes, both over time and through cultures, is the way or the means by which the needs are satisfied (Max-Neef 1991). These satisfiers can be either the idea or realization of how needs are to be realized, taking into account internal abilities and external circumstances. The differentiation between needs and satisfiers is a main aspect of the HSDA.

Needs can be satisfied along the existential categories of being (lists personal or collective attributes expressed as nouns), having (lists institutions, norms, mechanisms, laws, tools not in a material sense etc.), doing (lists personal or collective actions expressed as verbs) and interacting (lists locations and milieus). Each need can be satisfied at different levels and with different intensities. From these dimensions, a 36 cell matrix is developed which, in the participatory community process, is to be filled by the ways how the community or the individuals of the community satisfy their needs.

Quality of life is the focus of the HSDA and its matrix of needs and satisfiers offers an alternative model of qualitative growth to conventional development thinking where quantitative growth is key. Following the HSDA, we define quality of life as the potential of individual stakeholders to meet their needs through appropriate strategies. This implies the assessment of elements and conditions that inhibit peoples´ possibilities of adequately satisfying their desired personal well-being and collective welfare.

Application of the HSDA in EC

The HSDA methodology is to be put in practice in six German EC as case studies in form of one workshop in each EC. The workshops are held with the members of EC and they are asked to fill in the matrix in a participatory manner. In a first step the members carve out barriers that impede the satisfaction of needs within the EC (negative matrix); in a second step they identify positive or utopian strategies to fulfill their needs (positive matrix); and in a last step EC members discuss and point out the strategies that contribute best to the development of the EC from the point of view of their members. The process results in recommendations for action to put the strategies into practice together with the management boards of the EC.

In a reflection the strategies of the different cooperatives are listed and are analized concerning their commonalities and differences. On the basis of the analysis and reflection of the process we propose an enhancement of the methodology and discuss its advantages and limitations.

Expected outcomes

Applying the HSDA methodology in EC on the one hand has a concrete practical outcome by generating strategies for the development of EC that contribute to an increased quality of life of their members and contributions to sustainability. On the other hand, the scientific outcome lies in reflecting the feasability of transfering a methodolgy that has been widely used for human development in a Third world context to using it for sustainability issues in a country of the Global North.

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