

Long Abstract

Introduction

One central question in the current 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 Ecological Economist Manfred Max-Neef (Max-Neef 1991). It focuses on individual well-being and provides a definition thereof. Core element of this approach is that it includes not only material aspects, but also non-material aspects as being, doing and interacting into the understanding of needs. Our assumption is that this understanding of human needs contributes to a wider societal transition towards sustainability.

Civil society is 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 from nuclear and carbon to renewable energy production. 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

EC 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. Currently, more than 900 EC most prominently for wind and solar power exist all over Germany. 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 EC 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 resources; 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. 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. Max-Neef and his colleagues developed both, a taxonomy of human needs and a process by which communities can identify their "wealths" 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. Those needs are assumed to exist 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, and, of course, the relative importance given to one or the other (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 currently been put in practice in six German EC as case studies . One workshop is held in each EC with its members, who 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. To find out more about the impacts of the workshop in depth interviews with the workshops members are held six to eight weeks after the workshops. The process results in recommendations for action to put the strategies into practice together with the management boards of the EC.

Expected outcomes

In a reflection the strategies of the different cooperatives are listed and are analyzed 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. 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 feasibility of transferring a methodology 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.

References

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