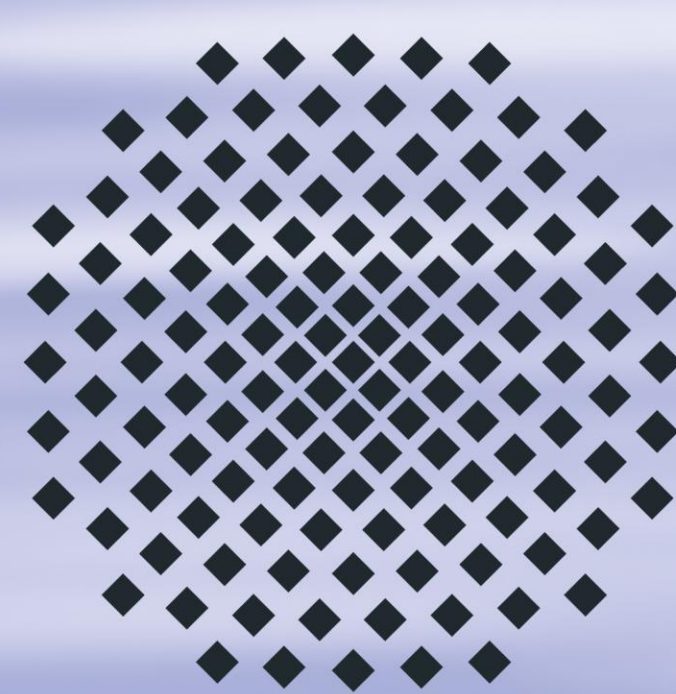


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Behavioural Changes through Consumer Empowerment. Evidence from German case studies

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Project „Consuming energy sustainably – consuming sustainable energy.

Heat energy consumption in the field of tensions between social predictors, economic conditions and ecological consciousness”

(Duration: March 2008 – June 2011)

Funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, as part of the “From knowledge to action – New approaches to sustainable consumption” priority topic, which was part of the “Socio-ecological research” initiative.

Project team (scientific partners)

- Interdisciplinary Research Unit on Risk Governance and Sustainable Technology Development (ZIRN) at the University of Stuttgart
- Institute for Energy Economics and Rational Use of Energy (IER) at the University of Stuttgart
- European Institute for Energy Research (EIFER)
- Bremer Energie Institut (BEI)
- J. W. Goethe University Frankfurt, Institute for employment-, economic- and civil law

Participating practitioners

- Consumer advice centres, energy-related advisory services, chimney sweepers, craftsmen, architects, city planning offices, building societies, technology providers...

Overall research question:

- What are incentives and restraints for an enhanced sustainable heat energy consumption?
- How can restraints be removed and incentives be created?

Goals:

- Scientific: Comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of heat energy consumption
- Practical: Recommendations for action for consumers, actors in the periphery of consumers as well as political decision makers to actively promote the sustainable use of heat energy

Sub-project: Tenant empowerment through information brochures, on site information and involvement

Hypothesis: sustainable consumption is closely related to the idea of consumer empowerment, hence instruments of information and involvement contribute to both goals.

Specific relevance for tenants – a consumer group, often neglected in the debate on sustainable heat energy consumption!

Goal of the sub-project: Identification and analysis of existing instruments for tenant empowerment with regard to sustainable heat energy consumption

Tenant empowerment for sustainable consumption includes the following dimensions:

- clear and target-group specific information
- information for consumers on how sustainable behaviour can be combined with other consumers' individual needs
- information for consumers on how far individual consumption decisions link to global and ecological issues
- motivation for consumers to make more sustainable decisions and change their consumption routines
- information for consumers about their structural constraints, institutional limits, and solutions on how to overcome them
- re-design of market conditions in such a way that they support sustainable consumption
- consumer involvement in the production/renovation process

Methods: quantitative content analysis of information brochures, focus groups with tenants, guideline-based interviews with representatives of the housing industry, group Delphi with experts on energy consumption

Results

Written information for tenants

- Insufficient target group specificity
- Main arguments found: saving money or other individual goals
- Only few brochures show an encompassing understanding of consumer empowerment and inform about structural constraints as well as global and ecological issues
- Only some brochures motivate for action (providing check lists etc.)
- Only interested tenants, already highly aware of the relevance of the issue, may be activated

On-site information for tenants

- Interactive information on site are far more effective
- On-site information on sustainable heat energy consumption are more likely to link individual behaviour and structural surroundings
- The general interest of energy-related issues can be increased

Tenants' involvement

- A general obstacle for tenant empowerment is a lack of self-organization, anonymity, and high fluctuation rates
- Instruments of tenants' involvement in energy-saving renovations can countervail these obstacles.
- Concepts to be found
 - Consultation
 - Co-design
 - Co-determination
- The housing industry profits because
 - Conflicts and expensive complaints procedures can be avoided
 - Acceptance can be raised
 - Specific tenant knowledge can be used
 - Fluctuation rate and vacancies can be decreased

Recommendation for action

Written information

- Adding commercial gimmicks
- Further target group specific differentiation
- Brochures should actively approach consumers' fears and potential problems

On-site information

- Information offices
- Information events
- Apartments for demonstration
- One-on-one talks on-site
- Monthly individual feedback on energy-consumption, ideally in comparison with the average consumption of the entire building

Consultation

- Interviews or questionnaires
- House-meetings
- One-on-one talks and inspections on-site
- Tenant representatives

Co-Design

- Tenant advisory boards
- Workshops

The adequate choice of instruments depends on the organizational structure, the size of the energy saving renovation project and the social structure of tenants.