

RIFS-Blogpost

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Cooperation is Powering Local Energy Transitions]



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Silke Wesselmann together with the district's Chief Administrative Officer Dr. Martin Sommer and representatives of Bürgerwind Hörstel GmbH & Co. KG at Hörstel community wind farm.

The Office for Climate Protection and Sustainability in the district of Steinfurt aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2040. Local authorities recognised early that they could not reach

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this goal alone, as their own activities account for only a fraction of total emissions. Local businesses and communities would need to be involved.

To support this, the district has established a range of consulting and education services, along with other initiatives. In 2015, the district joined forces with municipalities and local businesses to establish Energieland Association (Energieland e.V.). This multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) is based directly in the Office for Climate Protection and employs around ten of the bureau's over 20 staff members.

1.1 Innovative governance with a proven instrument

Researchers and practitioners alike are looking for innovative ways to enable local government to deliver effective climate action through solutions that embrace the principles of co-creation and collaborative governance. In Germany, registered associations (Vereine) are a tried and tested instrument that can be used to organise local multi-stakeholder partnerships.

As the most common form of non-profit organisation in Germany, registered associations are easy to set up, democratically governed, and flexible in their focus. A new RIFS Study prepared by the Franco-German Forum for the Future, examines how associations can enhance local capacity for action toward achieving climate neutrality.

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1.2 Partnerships among equals

The example of Steinfurt district shows that registered associations provide a forum where different stakeholders can work together on an equal footing. Here, and in the case of associations studied in the Siegen-Wittgenstein and Waldeck-Frankenberg districts, the



board is made up of equal numbers of representatives from local government, businesses, and municipalities. Meetings are frequently attended by representatives from municipal utility companies, local government offices, municipalities, as well as industry and business associations. “Even when different groups are at loggerheads, the association can step in to organise and facilitate the debate – and we can bring all of the partners together at the same table,” explains Silke Wesselmann, who chairs Energieland e.V. and leads the Office for Climate Protection.

The important thing here is that the various representatives meet as equals and have the same decision-making rights. Associations also provide opportunities for dialogue before and after meetings, as one business leader confirmed: “The discussions in the car park before and after the meetings are just as important for strengthening cooperation as the discussions in the official meetings”. All of this has helped to build trust between the various sectors over the years.

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1.3 Delivering win-win outcomes

It is crucial for the success of multi-actor partnerships that the various partners themselves benefit from their involvement with the association. In the associations we analysed, partners were able to access advice, secure additional funding, and even enhance their public image. This is because the shared goal of achieving climate neutrality in the district serves as a unifying focus, bringing all stakeholders together. However, members will only stay engaged in the long term if they perceive a clear benefit from their membership.

In light of the study’s promising findings, the Forum for the Future has recommended that the German government take steps to



promote cooperation for the energy transition in districts across Germany. Cooperation at this level can deliver a veritable cascade of effects, as the experience in France has shown. Administered by the development and investment bank Banques de territoires, the Territoires d'Innovation funding programme requires municipalities, local stakeholders, business and industry partners, researchers, and civil society to work together to “co-create” projects. A similar funding programme could likewise have a strong leverage effect in German municipalities.

