

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ENERGY DEMOCRACY FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Energy is a hot topic today with the reasons of increased consumption, increased cost, depleted natural resources, our dependence on foreign sources and the impact on the environment and the danger of global warming. Something has to change. In recent years, many countries have implemented policy measures to promote renewable energy. However, the policy makers face with subjective opinions on energy and environment policy. Assessment of environmental impacts in specific projects or sites often are necessary. Any site selection should consider the economic, social and environmental aspects.

Energy consumption in Turkey is expected to double from 2010 to 2020. To facilitate this necessary increase in energy production, the government has made several critical decisions, including changes in laws, privatization of state-owned companies, and the invitation of foreign energy companies to invest in Turkey. These policies have facilitated a massive increase in construction of electricity production and in energy infrastructure during the last years (Knudsen, 2015).

Governments that implement aggressive economic development strategies within the neoliberal framework may tend to ignore demands that environmental groups raise. These governments may even try to repress environmental protesters who raise environmental demands that pose challenges to their policies shaped around economic interests (Ozen, 2014). However, since environmental issues have turned at the global level into prominent social issues of public participation in the last few decades, it has been increasingly hard for these governments to declare themselves against environmental demands. The surge of environmental protest in

Turkey has been interpreted as above politics activism that strengthens civil society, fosters alternative expressions of identity, and creates new forms of agency outside the state.

Over the last twenty years, a number of local protest movements have emerged in Turkey against new investments and power plants, planned to be constructed all over the country. Most of these movements have been considerably effective in terms of mobilizing communities both at the local and national level, attracting the attention of the mass media and the wider public to some extent, and winning court decisions in their favor. Some villagers, activists, chamber of city planners and metropolitan municipalities are rallying against the threat of land expropriation for the construction of new power plants. Some campaigns and petitions are on the way.

This study queries how the greatest environmental protests happened in the last twenty years in Turkey, how the process was progressed, who participated in this process and what needs to be done for solutions. The concept of 'Energy Democracy' is being discussed which aims to meet the energy needs of the regions for developing social issues between the private and the public sector within the scope of the public participation and social interaction. The empirical data for this study was collected using interview with environmental advocates and academicians, and documentary sources. The documentary sources of the study mainly include newspaper and internet reports circulating between 2003 and 2016.

The main selected environmental protests are:

- Izmir Bergama Gold Mining Protest,
- Hasankeyf Protest,
- Mersin Akkuyu and Sinop Nuclear Power Plants Protests,
- Gezi Protests,
- Protest against Third Bridge and Third Airport in Istanbul,
- Manisa Soma Yirca Village Protest,
- Rize Camlihemsin Green Road Protest,
- Ordu Fatsa Cyanide Protest,
- Artvin Cerattepe Mining Protests and Amasra Thermal Power Station Protest in Turkey.

Research questions of the study are:

- What are the reasons for the protests?
- Who makes these choices?
- What factors should be considered for the site selection of new power plants?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks?
- Which stakeholders support the project? Which stakeholders do not support it?
- What are their reasons? Are these valid reasons? Why or why not?
- What are some of the social, environmental, political, and economic factors that affect these stakeholders and energy policy learning?

Energy democracy is a political, economic, social, and cultural concept that strengthens and transforms technological energy transformation with democracy and public participation. It depends on encouraging local energy ownership within the framework of energy efficiency and decentralization (Wikipedia website). As green technologies increase, new actors will emerge in transformation such as prosumers (producer + consumer), renewable energy cooperatives, and municipal or community power stations, centralized power units. This concept is adopted by the renewable energy sector, local people, workers' associations, think tanks and NGOs. At the German climate camp in 2012, energy democracy has offered 'sufficient energy for everyone', it has to be produced without destroying the environment and communities, socialization and democratization in production, and change in attitude and vision in energy consumption. In 2014, energy democracy was defended in the city of Boulogne-Billancourt in France and the city stated its vision of independency from fossil fuels and reducing energy consumption citywide. This concept will lead to new discourses for ecological movements and social, economic justice.

Energy democracy proposes change in the resource and ownership of energy. The management of energy systems must be operated by the public in a transparent, accountable manner. In this concern, the citizens should have the right to say (Transnational Institute website). It is important that communities contribute to energy production through cooperatives. Equity in the distribution of energy, fair distribution regardless of socio-economic situation, and governance

of energy systems are indispensable for energy democracy (Renewableenergy World website). In many places, small-scale cooperatives are supported that generate renewable energy.

The General Directorate of Cooperatives of the Ministry of Customs and Trade made an attempt in Turkey. It will be possible to establish Renewable Energy Production Cooperatives, where at least seven members of the cooperative will be able to produce electricity up to 5MW in the same local distribution area (YEUK, 2016).

In summary, democracy is an important indicator for sustainability. Everyone is equal (horizontal and heterarchical approach, no hierarchical and no top to bottom) (Joubert & Alfred, 2007). Socially and ecologically sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and democratic and provide a good quality of life. It is not possible to reach ecological sustainability and social interaction by globalized firms, which aim to increase their profits, international competitiveness and economic growth. It can be succeeded by small local communities to meet their requirements from local resources. This will happen if communities develop economic cultures to improve their quality of life within the limits of their own locales, while building the integrity and stability of the ecological world. Today's global economic model succeeds in creating competition by dividing people from one another. To build cooperative, harmonious societies we need an approach that creates more opportunities for people from different places and ages to interact- work together, have social interaction together. A happy society is one that encourages close ties and mutual interdependence, granting each individual a net of unconditional emotional support. A happy society includes caring about future generations.

Keywords: Important Environmental Protests in Turkey, Energy Democracy, Public Participation, Sustainable Communities.

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