



21.10.2024

PRESSEMITTEILUNG

Wind energy: Misinformation about wind farms is widespread

Study by the University of Hohenheim: misinformation about wind farms is widely accepted. This is more due to worldviews than a lack of knowledge.

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Wind turbines are harmful to health and economically inefficient - such misinformation undermines the social acceptance of wind turbines. However, they are widespread and meet with great approval: over a quarter of respondents in representative studies involving the University of Hohenheim in Stuttgart agree with a variety of misinformation. This mainly depends on the worldviews of those surveyed rather than a lack of knowledge – which makes a fact-based discussion more difficult. The expansion of wind energy is widely regarded as an important component of the energy transition and sustainability transformation. The results of the study has been published in Nature Communications <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-53278-2>

In order to achieve their climate targets and reduce CO2 emissions, many nations are focusing on the expansion of wind energy. In addition to factual arguments for or against wind power, false or misleading claims are also spreading in public discourse. “Until now, little was known about the extent to which people agree with misinformation about wind turbines”, says project leader Dr. Kevin Winter, post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Sustainable Behavior and Management at the University of Hohenheim.

Together with Prof. Dr. Kai Sassenberg from the Leibniz Institute for Psychology (ZPID) in Trier and researchers from the University of Queensland (Australia) and the University of Bremen, Dr. Winter has now investigated this agreement in several studies with a total of over 6,000 participants.

High approval of misinformation about wind turbines

In representative surveys conducted in Australia, the UK and the USA, over a quarter of respondents agree with a variety of false or misleading claims about wind turbines. For example, around 20 percent of respondents believe statements about the supposed health risks of wind turbines. As many as 40 percent assume that there are secret arrangements and manipulated information regarding the expansion of wind energy. Another representative survey in Germany

shows slightly lower numbers.

“We were surprised that the same people agreed with thematically very different false statements”, explains Prof. Dr. Sassenberg. For example, those who believe that wind turbines have a harmful effect on health are also more likely to agree with the assertion that wind turbines are economically inefficient.

Agreement with such claims is also reflected in a lower level of support for political measures to expand wind power and a greater willingness to protest against the construction of wind turbines.

Not a question of knowledge, but of worldviews

The results of the study also show that approval of misinformation about wind turbines depends primarily on the worldviews of those surveyed. A conspiracist world view proved to be particularly central: those who generally tend to suspect conspiracies behind social events are more likely to agree with the misinformation.

A strong scientific knowledge, on the other hand, hardly reduces agreement, and the respondents' level of education plays no role at all. “It is likely to be difficult to counter misinformation simply by providing facts as long as they do not fit into people's worldview”, concludes Dr. Winter.

It could be more promising to use campaigns to highlight the personal benefits - for example financial participation opportunities - in order to convince people with a negative attitude.

Text: Winter/Elsner

Media Contact:

Dr. Kevin Winter, University of Hohenheim, Dept. of Sustainable Behavior and Business
+49 711 459 24947, kevin.winter@uni-hohenheim.de

Prof. Dr. Kai Sassenberg; Leibniz-Institut für Psychologie (ZPID)
+49 (0)651 201-2963, ksa@leibniz-psychology.org