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The Carbon Frame: Condensed Version

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Chapter I: Introduction to the Thesis

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

This thesis investigates lobbying for renewable energy (RE) in the European Union (EU). The findings indicate that framing key policy language is crucial for successfully lobbying RE policy. Lobbying is “strategic communication of specialized information” (M. Nilsson, L. Nilsson, Ericsson 2009: 4455) and serves as a backbone for European energy politics by forming parameters for debates. Policymakers need specialized information and lobbyists supply this in exchange for political influence. Similarly this information needs to be understood by citizens so they may enter informed decisions when voting. One way lobbyists can articulate this information is through framing policy language. Framing is “interpretative schemata that allow individuals or social groups to locate and situate social phenomenon” (Goffman 1974). A case study has been conducted here in order identify the constraints to the environmental non-governmental (ENGO) RE lobby in the EU. The carbon frame has been found to be the most significant constraint to this lobby.

The carbon frame uses carbon as a central pillar for energy debates. This key energy frame needs to be reframed to focus on energy production, which can encourage local energy solutions. A strong RE lobby should reframe the central carbon frame because presently it aligns too well with conventional energy systems. Conventional energy systems burn fossil fuels for energy (coal, oil, natural gas; and uranium), releasing green-house-gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere as a byproduct; other related problems are securing fossil and uranium energy and building massive infrastructure projects to
support fossil fuel pipelines.

Of course there are environmental problems associated with conventional energy systems. However, within a social scope these systemic problems should be addressed because the strict environmental scope may weaken an argument promoting RE. Though limiting emissions from fossil fuels has become a generally accepted way to halt systemic malfunctions, indicated by instruments such as emissions trading, it glosses over the central causes of emissions. The carbon frame has successfully maintained the idea that limiting carbon emissions will solve these multiple crises.

The illogical method of energy production, rather than the waste byproduct of that energy production, should be addressed by RE lobbyists. The carbon frame has decoupled the method of energy production from the resulting waste. If the problem is re-framed to address the method of energy production, lobbyists pressing for progressive RE changes can begin to situate arguments within a social context. This can promote local and democratic energy decisions. Producing the majority of society’s energy needs from fossil fuel and uranium is an illogical method, resulting in dangerous increases in GHGs (rather than simply carbon emissions as the carbon frame assumes).

A shift in this debate, spearheaded by an intelligent RE lobby coalition, can reverse the misinformed view of RE as a solution to an environmental dilemma, when it is in fact a significant step forward in human development. This shift can allow citizens to better understand the issue, while RE lobbyists may also gain power by stepping outside the carbon frame. The carbon frame has engulfed a large part of the RE legislative process. Thus renewable energy policy is overshadowed by emissions policies, which mainly attack carbon. Meanwhile, extremely harmful emissions, such as methane
and nitrogen (due to agricultural practices), are largely unregulated because carbon has become the sole focus. Thus the intelligent RE lobby should understand the possibilities for this language shift.

**Research Questions and Theoretical Framework**

Framing involves selecting appropriate language to gain leverage over political decisions. Similarly, it is critical to understand timing and venue choice or, in other words, when and where to use certain frames. This is a key tactic for the RE lobby because it is an inexpensive way to increase lobby power. Power and economic resources are usually not readily available to the RE lobby. Therefore a successful RE coalition should successfully re-frame to increase lobby power, and expose energy choices to citizens, while remaining cognizant of correct venues and timing for re-framing.

A concentrated RE coalition is different from the ENGO RE lobby because it can have a small membership with diverse actors. This coalition could include, for example, The International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE), a cities for 100% RE organization, and an electrical workers union. All coalition partners would understand and agree on the social benefits for moving towards a 100% RE-based society. INFORSE would provide expertise on RE policy language at the EU level; the city network could gather data about local RE implementation and regional RE legislation, while the electrical workers union could support the argument that RE provides jobs and stimulates the economy. The final research questions explore how this coalition should be created and function, and are discussed in the conclusions and recommendations section.

**Methodology**
This research synthesizes two methodologies, qualitative interviewing and participant observation, in order to understand the carbon frame and expose avenues for a new RE lobby coalition. I was able to gather pertinent data from within the EU legislative process by lobbying for INFORSE. Qualitative interviewing exposed lobby positions and highlighted the prevalence of the carbon frame, while participant observation allowed re-frames and coalition ideas to be tested.

**Significance of The Project**

The first significant result of this project is an exposure of the carbon frame. This paper questions carbon emissions debates so long as they remain in a neo-economic framework. Presently carbon trading is an instrument generating wealth without significantly increasing the share of RE. A re-frame of systemic causes, explicitly due to concentrated energy extraction methods, is one of the most vital steps for a successful RE lobby. This could have repercussions for the climate change policy at many levels, since the carbon frame is presently quite dominant. A second significant output is an added understanding of RE lobbying in the EU with direct avenues for intelligent policy change. This is useful to a NGO, a RE firm, or any stakeholder interested in building more effective RE policy in the EU. Some findings may also apply to lobbying for RE in Washington.

Other research has not specifically connected the carbon frame’s constraint on the RE lobby to the need for a new RE coalition. This paper demonstrates how large ENGOs (for example Greenpeace, WWF, Friends of Earth etc.) have some difficulty re-framing RE language because they have a broad scope of action covering many varied
environmental problems. Whereas a coalition for RE energy can focus predominantly on local sustainable energy solutions, environmental groups currently lobbying RE policy are plagued by lobbying for all environmental causes. In many instances these environmental lobby efforts interfere with each other.

The narrow environmental scope is a major pitfall because ENGOs lose entry points for accessing key decision-making. The ENGO then has difficulty scripting policy language. Stepping outside the environmental scope opens up the social and political dilemma inherent in the transmission and use of conventional energy. By implementing renewable energy, old energy power structures weaken, allowing more local energy production. As a bonus the climate and environment will benefit from RE.

As a primary result, RE offers more social equality, higher quality of living, and more freedom to choose livelihoods among other, nearly basic, human rights. The right to harness and use energy is nearly a basic right because it is essential for survival, just like food, water, and shelter.

**Limitations**

Qualitative interviewing helped compile data regarding dominant frames and ENGO lobby techniques. Likewise, participant observation allowed re-frame testing at different venues. However these methods failed to expose some hidden data, particularly lobby positions actors didn’t want to reveal, such as particular frames. If I had acted as a researcher at policy conferences, some of this data could have been exposed because I would have been a more neutral participant.

A main limitation in this research was lack of resources, both personally and
within INFORSE. This year INFORSE received no EU funding so all conferences and
debates I attended were paid with school loans. Some important conferences I was unable
to attend and thus could not follow too closely with the current debate. I therefore was
unable to put forward some of my most important ideas, including some criteria for to
building a strong lobby coalition. Also, working as an intern with INFORSE, I have
developed a slight bias towards renewable energy.

Other limitations to this study are institutional power relations, entrenched
interests, and government monopoly of energy sources. Power relations among energy
suppliers and government are strong throughout the EU. Likewise, entrenched interest by
both industry and government in the field of energy continue to dominate the outcome of
many RE policies in the EU. National governments in the EU-27, represented by the
European Council, are becoming increasingly wary of the EUs encroachment on their
energy decision-making powers. This limits the results of this research because re-
framing and coalition building are bold recommendations inside such a power vacuum.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature reviewed underscores the importance of framing for achieving
desired lobby results and criteria for building a RE coalition to this end. Framing is
defined and explored in the present EU RE policy, then integrated into an understanding
of groups and coalitions.
Framing, Re-framing, and Mis-frames

In terms of lobbying, framing refers to specific language employed to gain desired policy results. Framing allows diverse actors to discuss a common subject, contributes to the understanding of the subject, and establishes parameters. “Frames refer to interpretative schemata (Goffman 1974) that allow individuals or social groups to locate and situate social phenomenon within their life space in a way that makes these phenomenon meaningful (Snow et al., 1986)” (Mayer et al., 2010: 757). In this sense framing brings a particular subject into the limelight; subsequently, framing allows policymakers to address the framed subject. Framing can also be defined as “ways of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting” (Rein and Schon 1993). The RE coalition will develop frames able to organize the RE into clearer language emphasizing local solutions. Building important re-frames will persuade policy-makers to act to develop more progressive RE policy by allowing local solutions for sustainable energy.

Framing is an “access good” (Crombez 2001) sought after by astute lobbyists. This access good is one of a few key points of entry to influence EU political Institutions (ibid). Interest groups can gain access goods by demonstrating to policymakers that legislation directly influences their industry; the former therefore have integral knowledge about how legislation should be crafted (Mazey and Richardson 1993; Kohler-Koch 2003; Greenwood 2007). Interest groups are an integral part of policymaking because they bring information to policymakers outside the scope of the policymaker’s general knowledge (ibid). Therefore, a RE coalition with ties to worker
unions, by representing a measurable percentage of the economy, can build credibility for RE lobbying; however the industry connected with the coalition must be sufficiently convinced of the possibility to move towards a 100% RE society.

**The Coalition for 100% Renewable Energy**

The RE coalition should remain concentrated in size because a smaller group, with concentrated membership, is much more efficient when lobbying RE policy. A smaller group can also focus solely on social aspects of RE, rather than large ENGOs lobbying for all environmental legislation; this envelopes the ENGO RE lobby in environmental frames. Large groups run into problems securing power because each additional member will receive a smaller portion of the lobby results. Thus each added member is increasingly more unlikely to act in the interest of the group, or unsure of when and where to act.

Furthermore large groups, particularly ENGOs, lobby on many different causes which sometimes conflate with each other. These two factors affect the lobbying for the majority of ENGOs in the Green-10. “The marginal cost of additional units of the collective good must be shared in exactly the same proportion as the additional benefits. Only if this is done will each member find that his own marginal costs and benefits are [met]” (Olson 1965: 33). This means that a specific RE legislation, for instance the proposed Energy Efficiency Directive (EED), makes up only a fraction of the lobbying for each member of the Green-10. Smaller groups can provide all members with an adequate piece of the pie, enticing members to act with purpose, and making it easier for a member to choose when and where to act.
A coalition with INFORSE, as a concentrated sustainable energy NGO, and another concentrated organization can be very successful because of small membership. An example of INFORSE already carrying out specific, concentrated, lobby actions is the eco-design legislation where INFORSE regularly consults with the EU to develop more energy efficient products. In this case INFORSE has a specific access-good, as opposed to other ENGOs without this specific energy knowledge, and therefore INFORSE is able to lobby strongly for energy efficient products. All coalition members could have clear-cut responsibilities, specifically allowing members to choose when and where to re-frame, a lobby option unavailable for larger ENGOs. This means, as opposed to Greenpeace or WWF who must remain in an environmental lobby structure, the coalition can represent sectors of society benefiting from 100% RE. That is a shift from the large, environmentally-based lobby to a concentrated, socially-based RE lobby.

The importance of alliances and coalitions is found in research on German wind organizations (Michaelowa 2005). The German wind lobby created alliances among farmers and regional policymakers in order to build a strong lobby voice (ibid). Early alliance formation was a crucial step in order to build a coherent voice and to source local information. The lack of involvement of large banks and corporations, in setting up new wind farms, avoided NIMBY (“not in my backyard”) arguments and citizen disapproval (ibid: 195). Citizens were empowered to build and maintain wind farms, benefiting from sourcing their own energy, and were in turn able to feedback knowledge to policymakers. The German wind lobby successfully created feedback loops (ibid: 197) to exchange important information among the coalition. Feedback loops connect knowledge between local, national, and international actors. This is an integral technique for the
successful RE coalition to employ in order to increase awareness, innovation, and social acceptance.

City network organizations in Europe promote city legislation initiatives outside EU policy creating unique and progressive laws ahead of European RE policy. “Unlike hierarchical Europeanization, the emerging “foreign policy” of cities opens up new transnational spaces for local actors” (Kern 2010: 4). The RE coalition could integrate a city network with the impetus to arrive at a 100% RE sourced city. Feedback loops could then be built with the RE coalition and the cities to develop local RE knowledge and support the coalition lobby voice. The idea of para-diplomacy, or local international diplomacy efforts (ibid), can have a profound impact on the power of a RE coalition in Brussels; para-diplomacy, independent of some governmental structure, could be an important step to leapfrog stagnant RE legislation at the EU level (ibid). Instead of awaiting more progressive EU RE legislation, cities could embody 100% RE visions.

Chapter III: The Project and its Development

Introduction

The project developed while I was working as an intern for the International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE) in Aarhus, Denmark from August through October 2011. During this internship I was responsible for updating policy on the website (inforse.org/europe), representing INFORSE at RE conferences, and networking with ENGOs, policy-makers, and other energy lobbyists. Below is a table showing the RE conferences with main outcomes.
Project Development

The main objectives of the project were to expose weakness in the ENGO RE lobby while locating gaps for a coalition. This required attending conferences throughout the EU as a RE lobbyist (working for INFORSE). The conferences were an important venue to pose questions, interview various actors, and ascertain evidence of gaps in the RE lobby. In addition, the conferences were important to attempt re-frames and question mis-frames hampering more progressive RE policy development in the EU.

Minutes and summaries from the conferences expose gaps in the RE lobby specifically the carbon frame. Summaries also demonstrate the prevalence of the frame. Therefore the summaries and minutes from the project support the thesis by indicating the carbon frame's inhibiting factors for RE policy development while showing areas where an effective RE coalition can enter to promote stronger policy.

Chapter IV: Data and Discussion of Findings

Introduction

The central research question addresses the carbon frame’s dominant role in RE policies in the EU and how this impedes on the effectives of the ENGO RE lobby. The carbon frame holds an explicit monopoly over RE policy language, but why? Why had the ENGO lobby not realized arguing within the carbon frame continued to stifle lobby efforts? Subsidiary questions investigate reasons for the carbon frame’s restriction, why the ENGO lobby rarely attempts to reframe carbon, and in what ways a different coalition could carry out these tasks. Why did RE lobbyists, working for ENGOs, not attempt to reframe the carbon frame? What prevents ENGOs from re-framing key RE language?
Under what criteria should the coalition form?

The findings indicate the carbon frame has limited the success of RE legislation and related advocacy for intelligent implementation of renewable energy legislation in the EU. It has severely inhibited the ENGOs lobby. While other frames aside from carbon have limited the RE lobby as well, these are out of the scope of this paper. However, some re-frames are suggested in the recommendations section in Chapter V.

Data

The carbon frame has prevented more progressive RE policy in the EU by invading RE policy debates. Renewable energy emits virtually zero emissions; it has merely a derived relation to carbon emissions. There is no need to cloud over RE legislation with the carbon frame because it distorts and confuses pivotal actors from decision-making and innovation.

Adhering to the carbon frame, ENGO RE lobbyists fail to confine RE into a social, local, citizen-based issue. Instead, the carbon frame is focused on the end result of using fossil and uranium fuels, rather than the systemic problem of the energy infrastructure. A secondary ENGO lobby weakness is their marriage to environmental frames, evidenced by their satisfaction with the carbon frame regardless of its blatantly negative consequences for RE legislation. These findings point to the need for an entirely new lobby coalition in Brussels to address pivotal policy frames such as carbon. This coalition will focus on local sustainable energy solutions throughout Europe, while at the same time maintaining an intelligent and effective lobby voice at the EU level.

Five key points are pulled from the data to support the overall thesis and guide
subsequent objectives: (1) the carbon frame’s prevalence in the RE lobby; (2) gaps in the ENGO lobby; (3) MS sovereignty issues; (4) participant observation re-frames and results; (5) criteria for building an effective RE coalition.

Discussion

The data show constraints to policy-making, actors and their resources, and weaknesses in the ENGO RE lobby. This is evident by inconsistent and stratified ENGO lobby activities for the proposed EED. Constraints are mostly due to the structure of the ENGO lobby which limits reframe abilities. Framing is the greatest resource for a RE lobby; framing is not used to its full potential by the present RE lobby, specifically evident in the cursory frame discussion during the CAN-workshop. Most importantly the maligned, and misaligned, carbon frame, if not understood and re-framed by RE lobbies, significantly limits progression in RE policy as power remains in the most pivotal economic actors. The carbon frame forms a type of income security, by strong actors owning the rights to emit carbon, without achieving the desired effect of decreasing emissions or directly increasing RE share.

The five key findings support the two central arguments of this paper: the carbon frame limits the RE lobby and hence progressive RE policy; and a coalition formed with specific goals to reframe key language can fill the RE lobby gap. A concentrated RE coalition, integrating members from different societal sectors, has the greatest potential to influence European renewable energy and energy efficiency legislation by adjusting frames quickly and with purpose. This coalition could develop local sustainable solutions outside the scope of EU or national governance structure, by acting as a liaison between industry, citizens, investors, and other important actors. Communication and knowledge
gaps could be filled with this coalition by representing different societal sectors while maintaining a goal to promote 100% RE.

**Conclusive Remarks on Key Findings**

The danger of the carbon frame, the potential power inherent in re-framing, and the lack of an effective coalition highlight areas the RE lobby needs to address. In general, these findings point to the inefficacy of global climate mitigation strategies, including the COP meetings, and suggest reasons for slow progress on international agreements. In addition, the findings indicate an agreement on emissions, if based on neo-economic theories (e.g. cap and trade, carbon trading etc.) most likely will not lead to more RE. While RE attacks the problem at its source, trading carbon among heavy polluting industries only opens up a string of loopholes, or lock-ins. This will potentially ensure fossil fuel and nuclear power dominance for many decades to come. If the RE lobby continues to lobby within the carbon frame, their efforts will render below par policy results.

The findings show ENGOs weaknesses and general inability to deliver on progressive RE policy in the EU. This is a major problem because without radical, yet decisive and intelligent policy implementations, misleading legislation will prevail. A prime example of such unwanted legislation, from the RE lobby perspective, is the ETS though many ENGOs continue to support it. There are a few fundamental constraints to the ENGO lobby. These include a stratified lobby strategy, without the ability to frame and reframe very well, and also lacking the ability to choose reframe venues or apply reframes to the correct actors.
All findings point to the need for a highly dynamic, concentrated, and cross-sectoral lobby coalition to decisively drive progressive RE legislation. ENGOs within the Green-10 are unable to fulfill some of these criteria mainly because, due to their large organizational structure and infrequent meetings, they cannot carry out specific RE frame tasks very well. The main finding is that a RE coalition with several distinctly different coalition partners can carry out reframes because it will create and disseminate frames more efficiently. This coalition should focus on local solutions, while always remaining acutely aware that EU policy is expansive and necessary to lobby intelligently. Therefore the coalition can reframe to suit social concerns, while also tying in economic and political issues, and deliver finely tuned frames to different actors. This is possible by maintaining feedback loops from the local to the national and international policy levels. Feedback loops can help create and disseminate powerful RE frames.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

The focus on carbon and emissions trading reduces society to only the climate problems […] When things are only focused on the climate change they come to the wrong methods […] the reasons to shifting to renewable energy are far more beyond the climate crisis. [The] emissions-trading concept […] is purely technocracy. […] what we need is the ability for society to organize their energy change, not wait for [a UN agreement]. (Scheer 2010)

Introduction

The case study presented in this paper, ENGO lobbying RE policy in the EU, supported by empirical research lobbying as an ENGO actor, exposes avenues for lobbying RE policy. Through a better understanding of lobbying and framing in the RE lobby, weaknesses are exposed and gaps opened for a new coalition. The lack of re-
framing of the carbon frame is a primary gap in the RE lobby. The carbon frame ignores
social phenomena, does not attack the problem at source, and adds to patchwork
decision-making. The RE lobby has limited power while using the carbon frame because
it remains confined to the frame’s parameters. This evidence is supported by empirical
findings, while other support for this claim is found in the literature reviewed.

Three key findings can be drawn from this research: the constraints of the carbon
frame, the ENGO lobby does not adequately reframe, and there is potential for a dynamic
coalition to carry out this reframe. Using inductive reasoning the key findings lead to
other auxiliary conclusions. If a dynamic RE coalition is built, it will have the power to
re-frame key language; most importantly, the carbon frame. This will unlock some of the
power which continues unabated by way of the carbon frame. The coalition will then
have the ability to reconstruct pivotal frames, and building frames easily mutable when
applied to various actors. This will happen by steering away from the carbon frame to
allow RE to enter the debate as a sustainable, local, democratic human right. Or, for
instance, the coalition could support future legislation similar to Guarantees of Origin,
which refocus the debate to the origin of energy production. Sound economic frames
must be reinforced by positive social changes, under separate and distinct auspices, when
lobbying venues change from lobbying with policy-makers, industry lobbyists, citizens or
other actors. The reframe will need to draw ENGO frames away from the environmental
reasoning and back into the social realm; that is, from carbon frame which is dominated
by certain key players, into the social frame where the majority of energy is used.

The Carbon Frame
The findings of this research indicate the carbon frame has severely impeded the success of the RE lobby in the EU. The frame has become intricately woven into each debate related to renewable energy and energy efficiency, even when debates have only slight association to carbon emissions. The logic in renewable energy is that it solves many of the central energetic problems at source.

Other research has shown how industry co-opted the carbon frame in order to create lucrative investment opportunities via mitigation instruments (Markussen and Svendsen 2005). This means that industry lobbyists crafted the ETS legislation for their benefit, without capacity to actually limit carbon emissions. My research has shown that ENGOs continue to argue within the ETS frame without realizing that industry lobbyists had largely written the ETS legislation. Thus ENGO lobbyists appear to underestimate the perils of the carbon frame.

The carbon frame is the most destructive idea for climate change mitigation because it systematically dislocates causes and effects. Limiting carbon emissions concentrates on only a section of the effects, emissions, whilst the cause, fossil and uranium energy, are blurred over. Other effects are global climate change, mass migrations due to changing landscapes and agriculture, loss of species diversity, rising sea levels, etc. The causes are explicitly due to the misappropriation and use of energy, coming predominantly from conventional energy sources, with final waste expelled into the atmosphere. This endogenous, systemic malfunction disrupts the earth because it dramatically increases entropy. By placing the blame solely on carbon, a majority of the focus is misdirected to only a fraction of the negative causes.

The strategy is to move towards a 100% renewable-energy society in the EU, in
the USA and around the world. This should be done as rapidly as possible, while consistently taking measures to curtail shortsighted strategies. The carbon frame is completely isolated from this 100% renewable-energy strategy. Giving carbon a prices is a weak attempt to patch derivations of the main cause which is the way energy is harnessed and used. A price on carbon gives incentives to “de-manufacture” it (e.g. CCS: to earn carbon credits). In addition, focusing only on carbon completely ignores other, perhaps much more dangerous, emissions such as nitrogen and methane.

This research uncovers the fact that ENGOs haven’t understood the detrimental effects of the carbon frame. This concurs with other research indicating that the master frame will fall under control of the most experienced and dominant lobbyists (Nilsson et al. 2009). In the EU RE lobby, the most dominant lobbyists are industry mostly represented by Eurelectric (EU electricity suppliers alliance). My findings show that this group continually uses the carbon frame to sideline RE by driving the main discussion into the subject of carbon emissions, rather than energy efficiency (EED Parliament Debates). At the same time ENGO lobbyists support this frame, allowing Eurelectric to continue mis-framing, separating causes from effects.

The carbon frame also severs public understanding and public participation from the renewable-energy strategy because they have limited access to carbon trading. This distances ordinary citizens from the renewable-energy strategy, which is completely the opposite of what is required to implement and monitor RE. A 100% renewable-energy society can only exist if local solutions are understood and implemented with results disseminated between other local actors around the world.
Many actors use the word carbon (for instance carbon reductions, carbon emissions) as a springboard for speaking of energy and climate dilemmas. Through this case study it has become evident that the word carbon has become a dominant part of related language.