

How to gain public engagement for climate action?

Challenges and opportunities for energy transitions in mountainous and rural areas



Policies and/or activities supporting climate neutrality are often contested.

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**Teuer.
Nutzlos.
Ungerecht.**



Missratenes
CO₂-Gesetz
Nein



SWI swissinfo.ch

Swiss perspectives in 10 languages

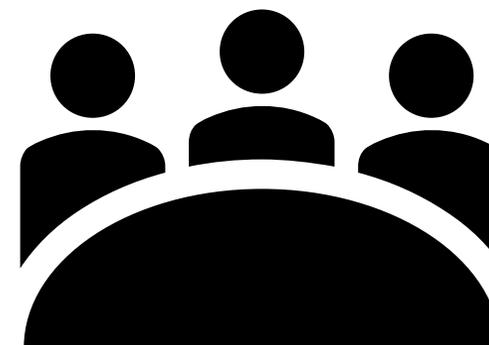
Climate change

Swiss wind power held up by legal challenges



Policies and/or activities supporting climate neutrality are often contested.

- Social acceptance is key for sustainability transitions (Ingold et al., 2019), especially true in a Swiss context.
- Inclusion and public participation can enhance societal acceptance and facilitate behavioural change (Drews & Bergh, 2016; Langer et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019).
- However this poses several communication challenges
 - Developing common understanding of the problem, as well as how to solve it
 - Inclusion



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A. Introduction research project

“Local Energy Transition Experiments” for a low-carbon society transformation –
Piloting a transition management process in the Bernese Alps

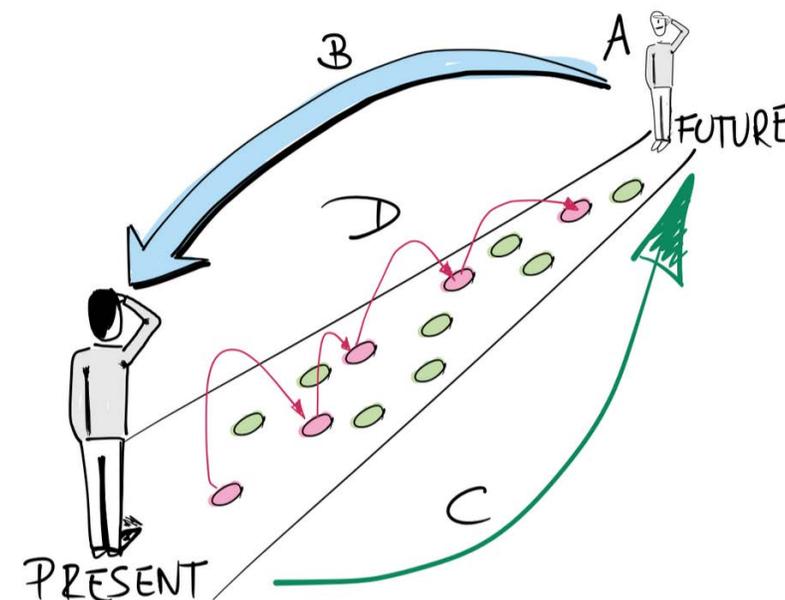
Goal

We aim to improve understanding of how energy innovations can lead to social transformation on behalf of climate neutrality, and how this process can be actively supported and shaped by appropriate policy measures at different levels.

Study approach

Regional Conference ‘Oberland-Ost’ made it a strategic goal to become climate neutral.

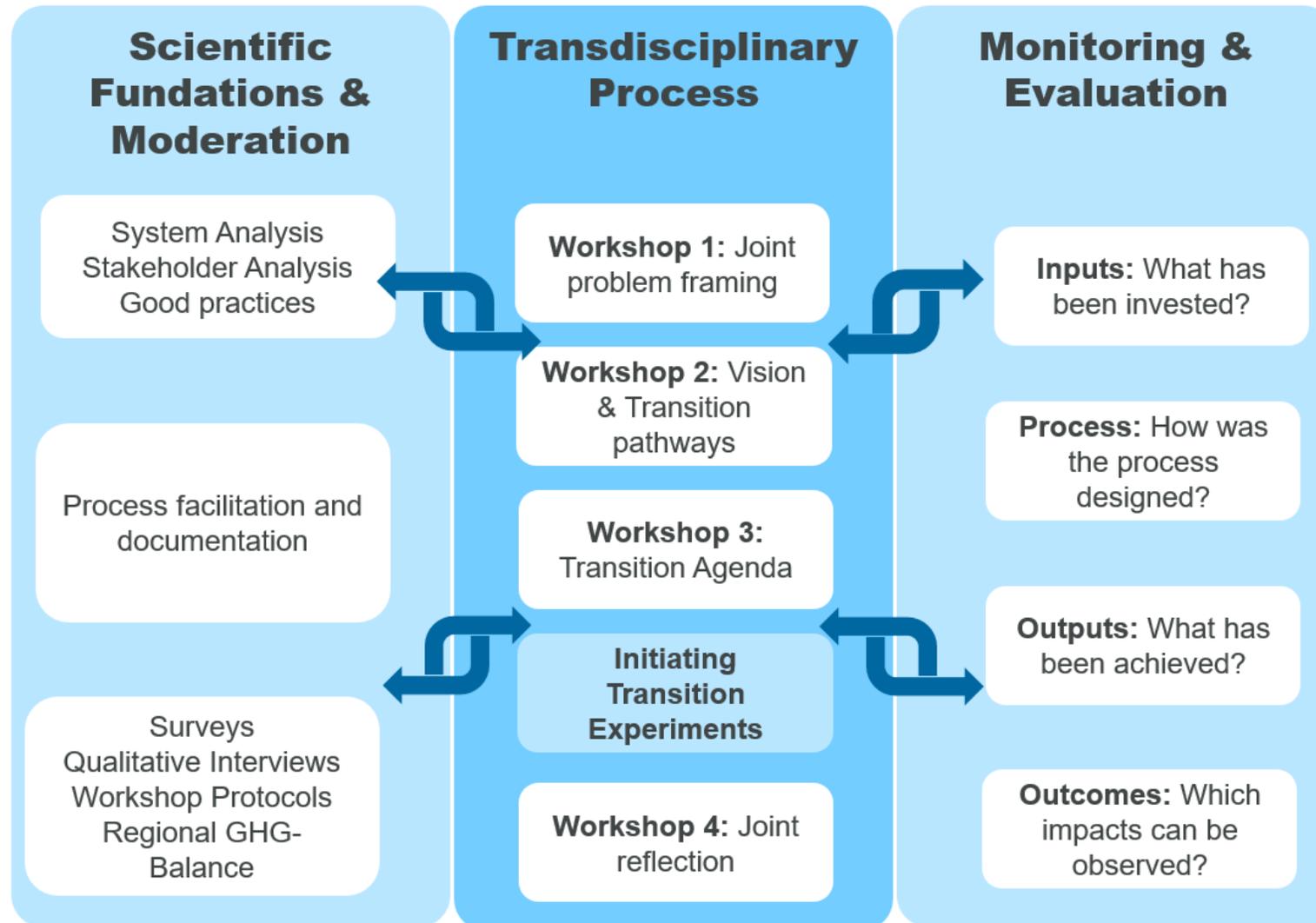
Research project between 2021-2023 in the region Berner Oberland Ost, to facilitate a transition towards climate neutrality.



B. Theoretical background

- Transitions as socio-technical processes (Geels 2019; Loorbach et al. 2017).
- Rise of scientifically guided multi-actor initiatives which aim to support sustainability transitions (Hyysalo et al., 2019; Luederitz et al. 2017).
- However, these processes also come with several communication challenges, such as who to include and developing a common understanding of the situation at hand, a shared vision and agenda to act.
- Different roles of involved actors as described by Wittmayer (2016)
 - Transition Team – Initiation and guiding of the process
 - Transition Arena – Develops a common vision and agenda
 - Transition Networks – Implements elements of the agenda

C. Project overview



C. Project overview

September
2021

December
2021

June
2022

Summer
2023



- System- and stakeholder-analysis
- Interviews with local actors
- Preparation of workshops

Workshop 1
Joint Problem Framing

Workshop 2
Vision & Transition pathways



Workshop 3
Transition Agenda

Local actors
Joint experimentation and implementation of transition agenda



Workshop 4
Joint reflection

Survey 1

- Local population and tourists
- Attitudes towards vision developed in the workshops
- Attitudes towards climate neutral activities

Survey 2

- Local population and tourists
- Appraisal of transition experiments
- Attitudinal change towards climate neutrality

C. Project overview



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Transition team



Kanton Bern
Canton de Berne



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Transition arena

Around 40 representatives from i.a. municipalities, energy sector, tourism sector, mobility sector, agricultural and forestry sector and civil society and more...

Transition networks

Work in progress...

D. Study Region

- We focus on the Alpine region Berner Oberland Ost
- 28 municipalities, which are all represented in the 'Regional Conference'
- Tourism and agriculture most important economic sectors

"If global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise unchecked, the most pronounced warming in Switzerland will be seen in the Alps, potentially around 2–4 °C by the middle of this century."

(CH-Climate scenarios, 2018)



Around 2,7 Mio.
Overnight stays in the
region (2019, before
COVID-19)

Share of holiday
residences between 17-
66% depending on the
municipality

Mountain tourism
and ski resorts

Dairy farming

E. Communication challenges

- System- and actor analysis showed similarities to common issues raised in climate communication literature.
- Perceived political agenda from left and elitish groups (Jaques et al. 2008; Anshelm & Hultman 2014).

“when something is perceived as coming from the green or left party, it quickly becomes a matter of political principles” (Interview 8)

- Defeatism, as people perceive themselves as ‘powerless’ (Heyd, 2011).

“One cannot make a difference as a small region” (Interview 1)

*“new ideas have a hard time here anyway”
(Interview 7)*

E. Communication challenges

- Who to include?
 - Close cooperation and exchange with local actors on how to balance invitations for workshops
- How to minimize detrimental political dynamics?
 - Invite actors based on their societal/organisational roles, instead of political ones
 - Bring in external experts which can provide neutral inputs
- How minimize defeatism sentiments?
 - Provide examples of good practices, which seem achievable by the target audience. For example by showing examples from similar regions, organisations and/or actors.

F. Insights Workshop 1 - Joint Problem Framing

- Participants could raise issues by sectors:
 - Mobility
 - Tourism
 - Housing
 - Energy production and distribution
 - Consumption and nutrition
 - Private sector, agriculture, forestry
- Also space for uncategorized issues
- Prioritization with stickers



G. Future outlook

- Based on the group exercises of workshop 1 we identified several 'problem areas'.
- From these we developed several visions per sector, which forms the starting point for workshop 2

Example housing sector:

Problem area

In almost all groups, the main focus was on the lack of substitution of fossil-fuel based heating systems (replacement of oil heating e.g. by wood heating or district heating)

Positively
reformulated
into a vision



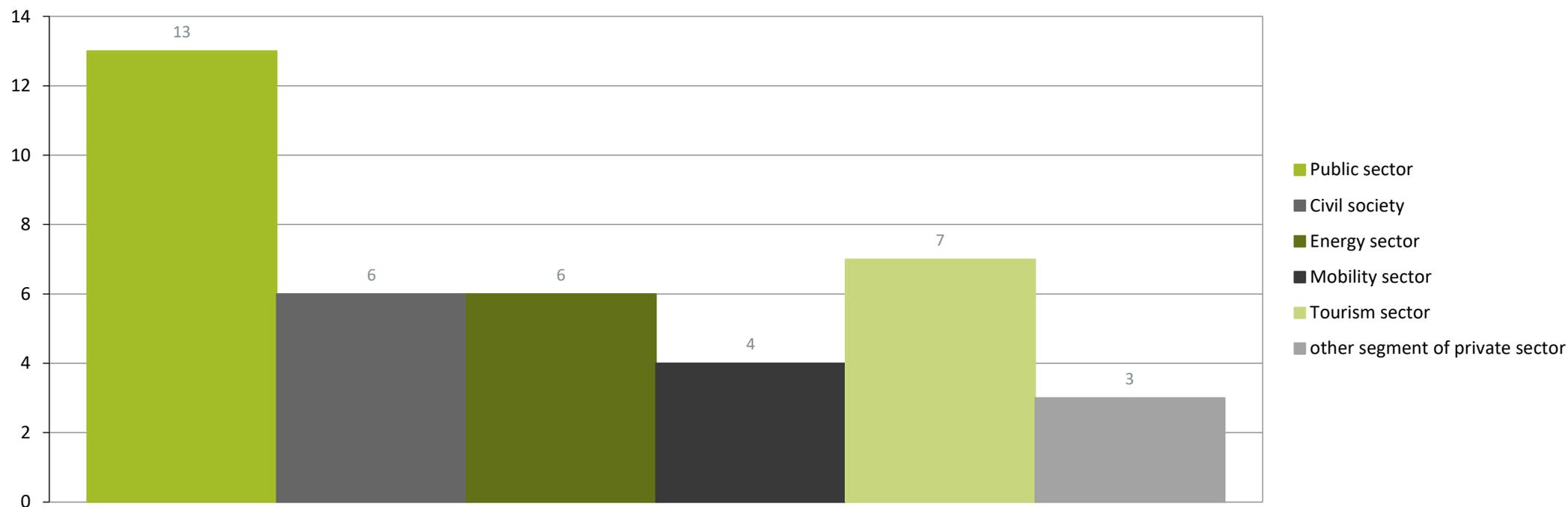
Vision

Fossil-fuelled heating systems are replaced by systems based on renewable energies (especially regional energy sources such as timber or district heating).

H. Discussion

Communication challenge: Who to include?

- Relatively diverse group of actors, however we aim to include more representatives from the agricultural sector.

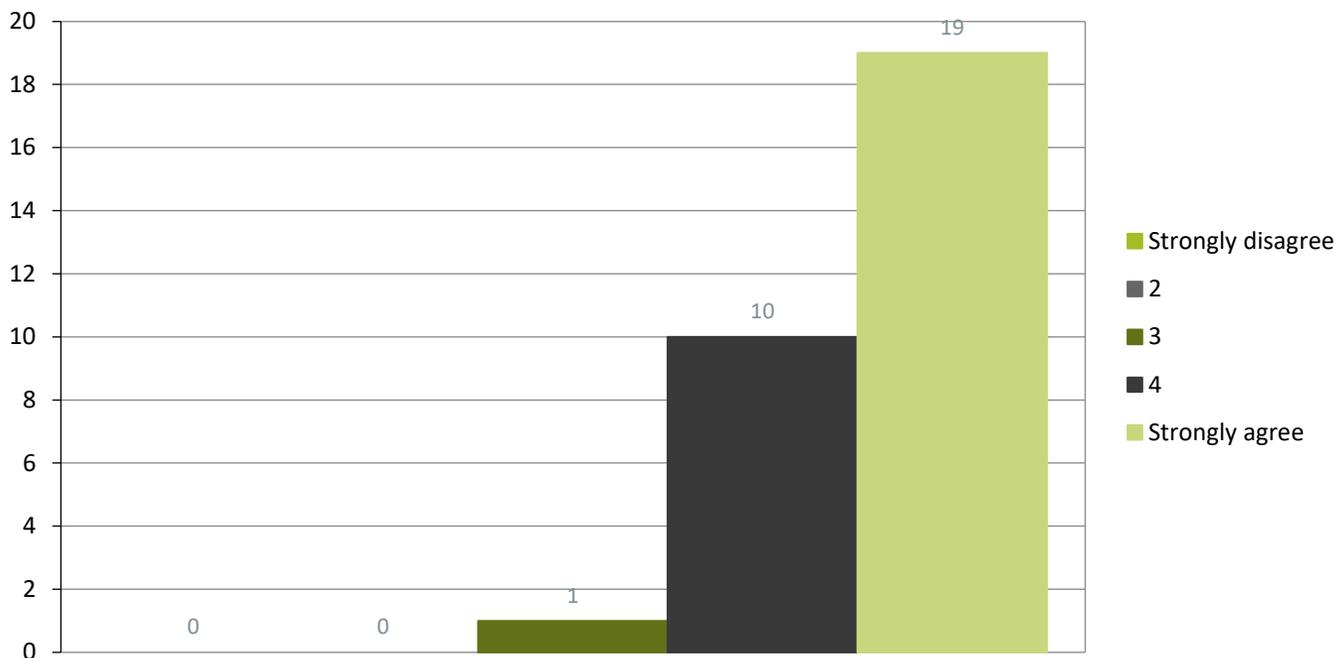


H. Discussion

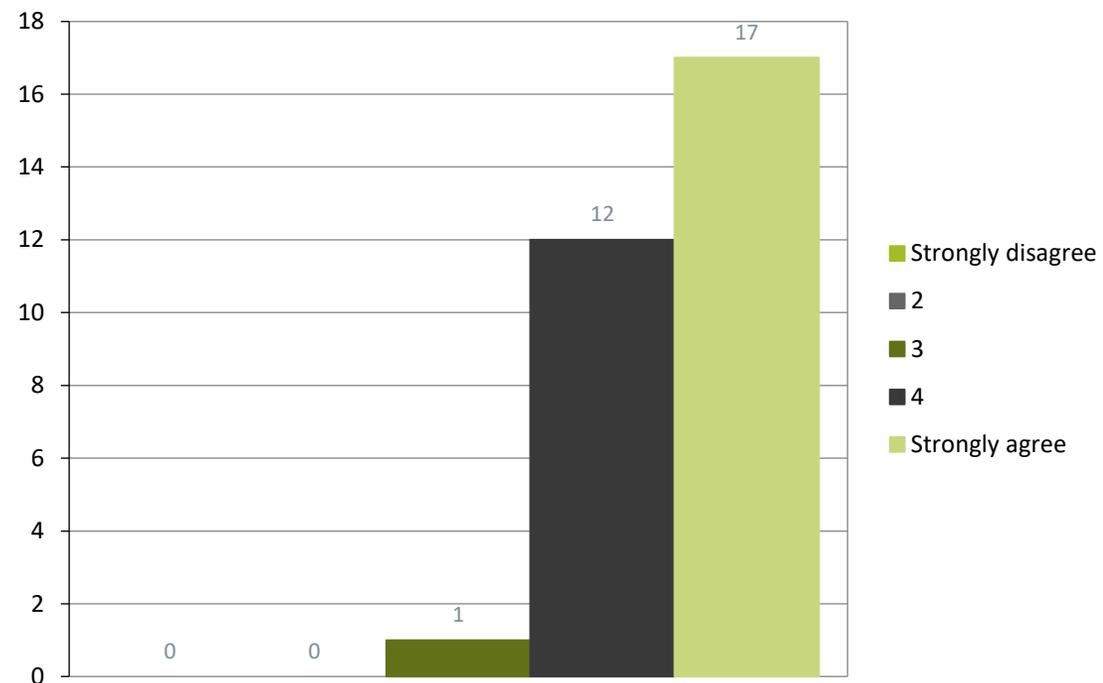
Communication challenge: How to minimize detrimental political dynamics?

- Constructive atmosphere was reflected in feedback of the participants.

My views and concerns were taken seriously in the group discussions and were incorporated in the results.



The speakers were relevant, informative and understandable.

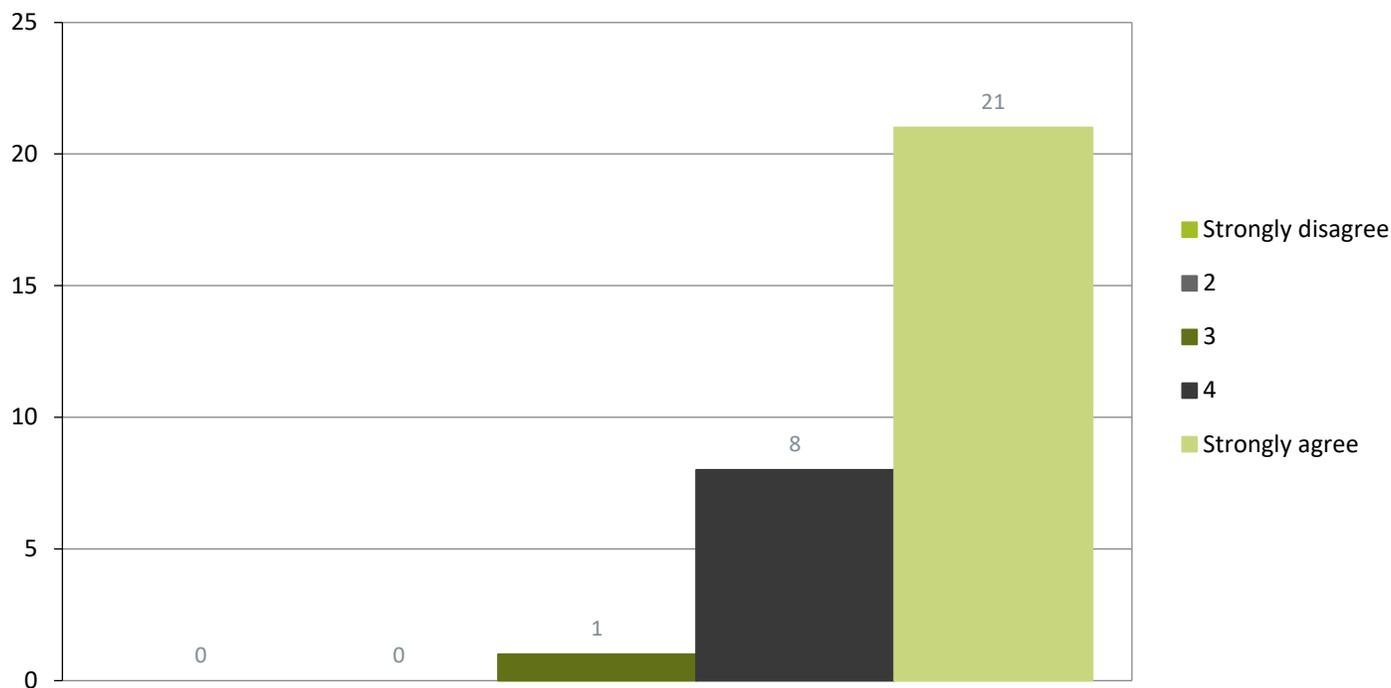


H. Discussion

Communication challenge: How minimize defeatism sentiments?

- Participants stated to be motivated and want to stay involved.

I am motivated to involve myself and my organisation in the planned process and to work on joint solutions for the region.



H. Discussion

- Positive start of the project.
- However difficult to draw conclusions at this early stage.
 - Talking about problems is of course easier than solving them
- Building transitions networks to implement the transition agenda will require more actors and also comes with more communication challenges.

Thank you!

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Images

Slide 2:

- Wirtschaftskomitee «Nein zum CO2-Gesetz». (2021) [Picture]. <https://teuer-nutzlos-ungerecht.ch/>
- SWI swissinfo.ch. (2021) [Picture]. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/swiss-wind-power-held-up-by-legal-challenges/46027692>

Slide 5:

De Vicente Lopez J. 2016. [Picture] Visual toolbox for system innovation. A resource book for practitioners to map, analyse and facilitate sustainability transitions. Bruxelles, Belgique: Climate-KIC Transition Hub Series. pp. 111. <https://transitionsHub.climate-kic.org/publications/visual-toolbox-for-system-innovation/>.