

# Biofuels – a contested alternative

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Over the past few years, biofuels - mainly bioethanol and biodiesel produced from biomass - have received increasing attention throughout Europe and the rest of the world as renewable alternatives to fossil fuels in the steady growing transport sector. Simultaneously, however, biofuel technologies have become highly disputed in public debates, in which the introduction of biofuels is alternately presented as a solution to problems of energy supply, climate change, and regional development - or as a source in itself of further environmental and social problems.

The paper will outline and discuss findings from a qualitative sociological study of the public's perceptions of and attitudes towards biofuels, in light of the increasing biofuel debates as well as the complexity of the concerns involved. Particular attention is given to popular perceptions of the risks and uncertainties associated with biofuels as well as to the issue of problem solving responsibilities in relation to climate change in general.

The study indicates that the general attitude towards the introduction of biofuels is positive, as biofuels are perceived to be beneficial for the climate and the environment as such. However, when respondents are introduced to some of the diverse and often opposing points of view which have been raised in debates about biofuels, their support for the technology is somewhat modified. Acceptance is conditioned on whether or not solutions are found to some of the problems associated with the introduction of biofuels. Generally, the respondents express a demand for solutions to the problems of climate change to be found and ask for decision-making to be based on a broad discussion among politicians and regulators on a global and/or local level. Several respondents underline the importance of the public acting as consumers, pushing and demanding for a higher degree of sustainability. Thus, they are aware of the individual as well as political issues (and dilemmas) involved in implementing solutions. These topics will be in focus in the paper.

Keywords: Risk perception, uncertainty, responsibility, transport, biofuels