

# Uncertain society: Inconsistencies and doubts about climate change and the transition to a low carbon economy

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## Introduction

The research project GILDED targets socio-economic, cultural and political influences on individual and household energy consumption through five regional case studies in different countries of the EU. Here we focus on some inconsistencies and doubts that people express when thinking about the low carbon transition process and climate change.

## Methods

Altogether 202 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted in summer 2009 in five European countries, including United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic and Hungary (see map for study sites). Our sampling methods aimed to achieve a high diversity of respondents regarding their socio-demographic characteristics. Thus results are not representative, but they reveal deeper insight into people's ideas and thoughts. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed with a grounded, open-minded approach.



### Further reading:

Anke Fischer, Vera Peters, Jan Vávra, Mirjam Neebe, Boldizsár Megyesi (2011), *Energy use, climate change and folk psychology: Does sustainability have a chance? Results from a qualitative study in five European countries*. Global Environmental Change 21 (3): 1025-1034.

Nick Gotts, Imre Kovách (eds.) (2010), *Climate change and local governance: Alternative approaches to influencing household energy consumption (A comparative study of five European regions)*. Studies in Political Science 3. Institute of Political Studies of Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest. online: <http://mek.oszk.hu/09300/09355/09355.pdf>.

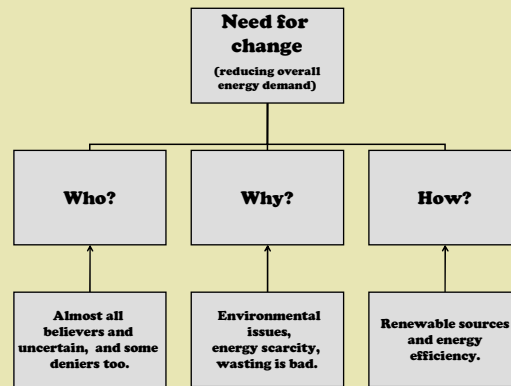
Research reports, policy briefs and more information at [www.gilded.eu.org](http://www.gilded.eu.org).

This poster in A4 size online at <http://www.ecoology.org/wp-content/uploads/uncertain-society-poster.pdf>.

## Results

### Overall agreement on Need for change

Almost all respondents agreed on a "need for change", usually connected with the need for reducing energy demand due to energy scarcity, overall environmental issues or just the idea that wasting is not good and not sustainable. Enhancing renewable energies and energy efficiency were the most favoured and acceptable ways how to achieve a reduction in energy demand.



## Conclusions

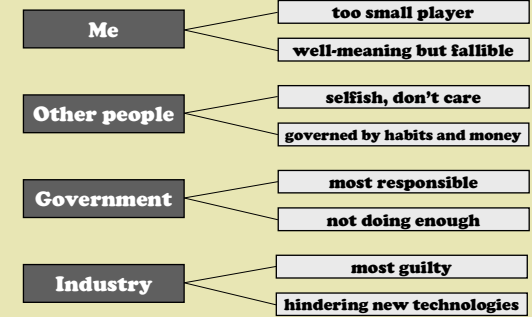
### Doubt 1 Nature of climatic changes

Climatic changes were often perceived directly through weather changes, sometimes indirectly through media. Two big and one smaller group could be discerned. Many people believed that climatic changes were caused by humans (believers). A second group was not sure and thought that climatic changes were a natural phenomenon but that humans could contribute to it (uncertain). Third, significantly smaller, group of people denied climatic changes or any human contribution to it. However, even the uncertain agreed with a need for change.

### Doubt 2 Media coverage and scientific process

Opinions on this were very variable without one idea being dominant. Scientific messages were sometimes perceived as contradictory and unclear: "For every scientist there is another saying something different". Media must sell the news, they often scaremonger and exaggerate the problem according to the respondents. On the other hand, messages of sceptical scientists were sometimes perceived as not relevant and having inappropriate big attention in media.

Despite all the doubts, the broad agreement on a need for change and the shared criticism of today's situation offers a chance for effective governmental policies - however, these need to respect people's



### Doubt 3 Government, industry and me

Governments were perceived as the most important players in reducing energy demand. Either because of the often mentioned human convenience and lack of concern (see Fischer et al. 2011) or because of individuals seeing themselves as small players without abilities to influence anything. Industry was often seen as the most guilty party, the link between industry and individual consumption was rarely mentioned. Both industry and governments were believed to be very important but in fact not doing enough. Sometimes they were accused (together with oil producers) of hindering technological changes and to profit from the present situation.

understanding of the situation. From sociological point of view, the uncertain society seeks for small and acceptable changes - not for radical changes leading to an uncertain future post-carbon society.

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