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Energy Transitions in Japan and Germany – Policies, Perceptions, and Practices
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ABSTRACT

The Role of Households in Energy Transitions – Can We Open the Black Box of Household Behavior?

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Private household directly account for between a quarter to one half of final energy consumption in OECD countries. Households use energy for heating, for cooling, for lighting and a host of other uses. An indirectly, through transportation, food consumption etc., households account for even greater share of energy consumption. This implies that however ambitious governmental plans for energy transitions, it is what happens inside millions of individual households that will decide whether these plans will be succeed or fail.

Despite their importance for energy transitions, the determinants of energy-relevant decisions of households are insufficiently understood and remain a challenge to researchers. A key reason is that the household remains largely a 'black box' for the researcher: Many of decisions that households take are difficult for an outsider to observe or to link observed behavior on the market place to other household characteristics. Yet, efforts are under way to open the 'black box' of the household and to make more intra-household decision making accessible to researchers.

Against this background, this presentation has three objectives. The first is to review recent economic evidence on energy-related household behavior across a number of OECD countries, key among them the US, Japan, and Germany. The second is to assess how much light this evidence sheds on the totality of household decision-making. And third and final objective is to explore the potential and obstacles for further research on energy behavior of households, using a number of examples for Germany.