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EVIDENCE BRIEF
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EVIDENCE BRIEF · INDUSTRY EVENTS AND MARKETS

Fields Are Built Event by Event

Can a series of events build a new field?

Energy and environmental technology fill dozens of European trade fairs each year, and new technologies often arrive through conference programs. Studies of a solar conference series in Finland and electric mobility projects in Germany show how a sequence of events can build a new field, and how a project can shut one down.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 Finland, Germany, Europe

●●●●● **4 studies** · 1 industry source

event series | conference series | new industries | solar energy | electric mobility | sustainability transitions | technology legitimacy | industry expectations | trade shows | innovation policy

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KEY FINDING

A planned series of events can build a new field: in Finland, eight solar conferences over four years turned a narrow export story into a shared agenda, drew in energy and construction incumbents and led to policy steps. Long projects can play the same role or close a debate for a decade, as German electric mobility shows.

Four studies, 2014–2021; industry data 2026

Key findings

- **A conference series built a solar field in a sun-poor country.** Between 2011 and 2014, eight conferences in Finland, each with 60 to 300 attendees, built legitimacy for solar energy and a shared agenda among firms, incumbents and public bodies[1].
- **Incumbents had to be invited.** The first conference, open only to small firms and researchers, drew a passive response; the organizers then invited large energy and construction firms and moved to showcase venues[1].
- **The sequence led to policy steps.** Its outcomes included a prepared tax change, a ministry working group and an updated national energy strategy[1].
- **The story widened over the series.** Across ten solar events from 2010 to 2013, a narrow narrative about exports grew into several complementary narratives, from industrial growth to home markets[2].
- **Projects can close a debate.** A 1990s electric car trial on the island of Rügen reinforced critical narratives in Germany, and the number of registered electric cars fell from 2,632 in 2000 to 1,436 in 2008[3].

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FOR THE MARKET

Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	A field-building series needs an organizer with a mandate, a sequence of themes and the deliberate inclusion of large incumbents; showcase venues and festive formats signal that a technology has arrived. Workshops rarely produce conclusions, but the series as a whole guides advocacy.
Investors & advisers	Event series and flagship projects shape the expectations that steer funding for new technologies. A failed demonstration can close a market for years, while a platform with stable positive narratives keeps it open even when targets are missed.
Academia	Sequences of events, rather than single events, are the unit that explains field creation; outcomes such as policy changes need to be traced over several years.

Events that build new fields

New technologies meet their markets at events. In 2025, UFI's Euro Fair Statistics counted 45 certified fairs for energy, oil and gas and 32 for environmental protection in 13 European countries, which together rented more than 760,000 square meters of net space[4]. Three kinds of events matter for new fields: field-configuring events build legitimacy and agendas, trade shows move knowledge

between distant actors, and hybrid forums bring excluded groups into the debate[5].

Single events rarely build a field. Studies of conference series and long projects show how a sequence does.

Solar in Finland: a field built by conferences

Finland is one of Europe's least favorable places for solar energy, and authorities were skeptical[1]. From 2011 to 2014, a sequence of eight conferences, five of them organized by the national innovation funding agency Tekes, set out to create a solar field[1]. Each drew between 60 and 300 attendees[1].

The sequence learned as it went. The first, small conference invited only small firms and researchers and met a passive response, so the organizers invited large, credible actors and held key conferences at showcase venues with international speakers[1]. Construction firms joined because solar could help meet EU zero-energy building targets, and an energy incumbent joined over the sustainability of the energy system[1]. The sequence moved from convincing true believers to persuading a wider audience[1].

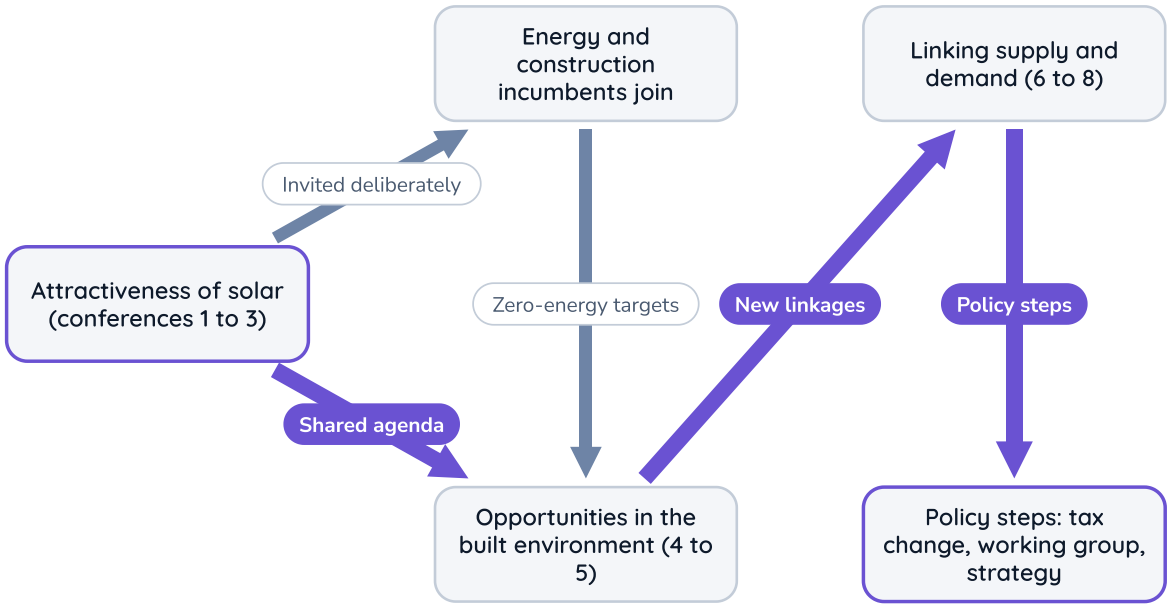
Over three years, the series produced policy steps: a prepared change in taxation, a working group at the ministry and an updated energy strategy[1].

Phases of the solar energy conference series in Finland from 2011 to 2014

Sequence of phases and their main contribution; the highlighted route shows how legitimacy turned into policy steps.

Main route Other links

Arrow width marks the main route, not a measured value · dashed: weak or no link



Source: Nissilä · Release date: 2015 · Region: Finland · Period: 2011 to 2014 · Number of conferences: 8; interviews: 11

Expectations across a series

Narratives grow over the events. Across ten solar events in Finland between 2010 and 2013, observed through 80 presentations, the story widened from support for small exporters to the international business potential of solar and finally to a home market[2]. The events were organized by intermediaries such as the funding agency, an energy cluster, the trade promotion agency and a university, rather than by the weak industry association[2].

In an early field, the events aimed at legitimacy for the whole community, so competition between technologies was absent[2]. Workshops at several events

produced no concrete conclusions, yet the series as a whole guided advocacy[2].

PHASE	CONFERENCES	FOCUS
Attractiveness of solar	1 to 3, 2011 to 2012	Legitimacy for solar; incumbents invited from conference 2[1]
Opportunities in the built environment	4 to 5, 2012	Construction industry and zero-energy buildings[1]
Linking supply and demand	6 to 8, 2013 to 2014	Home markets and links between suppliers and buyers[1]

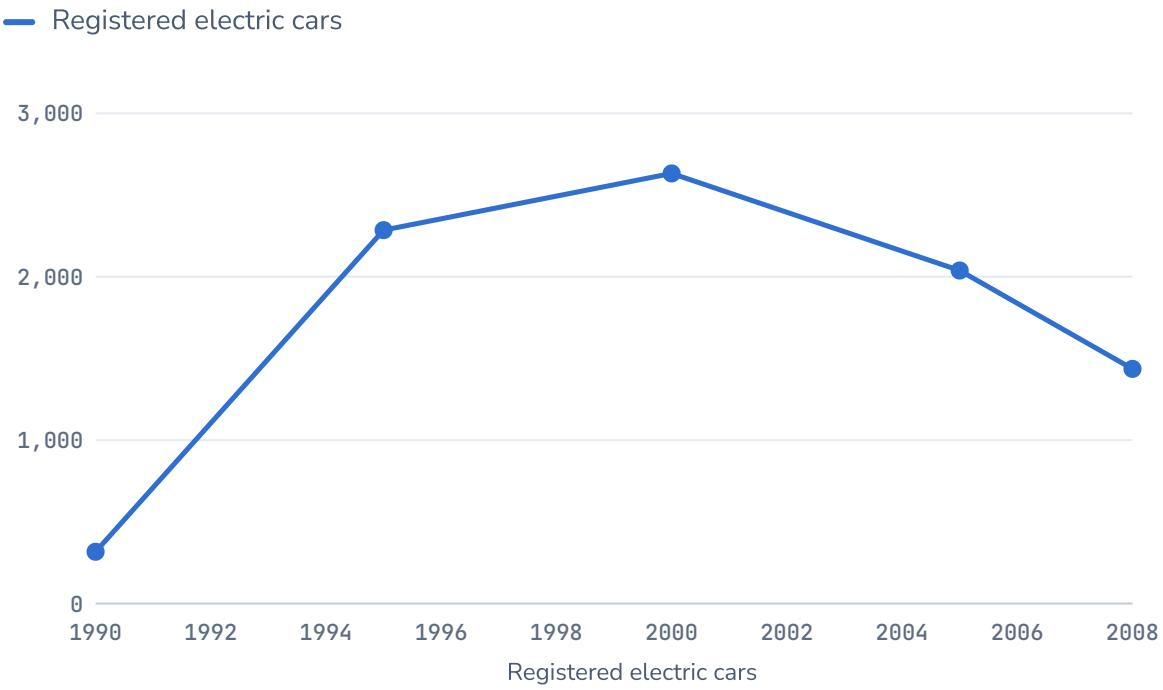
Projects that open and close debates

Projects can configure a field as events do. An analysis of 24,849 German newspaper articles on electric mobility from 1990 to 2017, with project reports and 15 expert interviews, compared two projects[3]. The Rügen trial of 1992 to 1997, with around 60 electric vehicles driving more than one million kilometers, reported short ranges, vulnerable batteries and high emissions, and critical media coverage peaked in 1997[3].

The trial became proof that electric cars were not ready: the number of registered electric cars fell from 2,632 in 2000 to 1,436 in 2008, and only eight were newly registered in 2007[3]. The National Platform for Electric Mobility, launched in 2009, reopened the debate with positive narratives about Germany as a lead market; it missed its target of one million electric cars by 2020, but positive narratives dominated from around 2008[3].

Number of registered electric cars in Germany in selected years from 1990 to 2008

Number of registered electric cars.



Source: Bohn & Braun · Release date: 2021 · Region: Germany · Period: 1990 to 2008

Notes on the data

The figures are based on four studies published between 2014 and 2021: two studies of the same Finnish solar event series, with observation of 80 presentations and 11 interviews, a conceptual review of event literatures, and an analysis of German press coverage and two projects[1–3,5]. The Finnish outcomes are partly attributed through interviewees' accounts, and the German study analyzes discourse rather than direct effects. Registration figures are available for selected years only.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Nissilä, H. (2015). Conferences as Sequential Arenas for Creating New Sustainable Fields [Journal article]. *Industry and Innovation, 22(3), 209–228*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2015.1033840 First-hand

2 Nissilä, H., Lempiälä, T., & Lovio, R. (2014). Constructing Expectations for Solar Technology over Multiple Field-Configuring Events: A Narrative Perspective [Journal article]. *Science & Technology Studies, 27(1), 54–75*. https://doi.org/10.23987/sts.55334 First-hand

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4 UFI. (2026, October). Euro Fair Statistics 2025: Certified key figures of exhibitions in Europe [Report]. Retrieved November 12, 2026, from ufi.org First-hand

5 Jolly, S., & Nissilä, H. (2015). Collective and participatory action for sustainability transitions: Exploring role of field configuring events, trade shows, and hybrid forums [Conference paper]. *Paper presented at the 6th International Sustainability Transitions Conference, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK*. First-hand

The evidence

4 studies · 1 industry source

SAMPLE

Four studies: ten solar events with 80 presentations, eight conferences with 11 interviews, a conceptual review and 24,849 newspaper articles with 15 interviews; one industry report

YEARS

2014–2021 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Observation of conference series in Finland, topic modeling of German press coverage with project analysis, a review of event literatures

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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