

# “We’re not talking about lab experiments”: Emerging Governance Practices for Sustainable Energy in the UK

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# Why Start With Practice?

- To have explanatory power, theory has to be responsive to practice
- *Dialogical* model of theorising as co-operative enterprise
- Interaction between diverse perspectives
- Interpretative methodology
- Embedding in socio-historical context
- Attentiveness to
  - 'Complex actors'
  - Dispersed agency
  - Whose vocabularies/discourses become dominant and why/how?
  - What this tells us about societies and social change

# Sustainable Energy in the UK

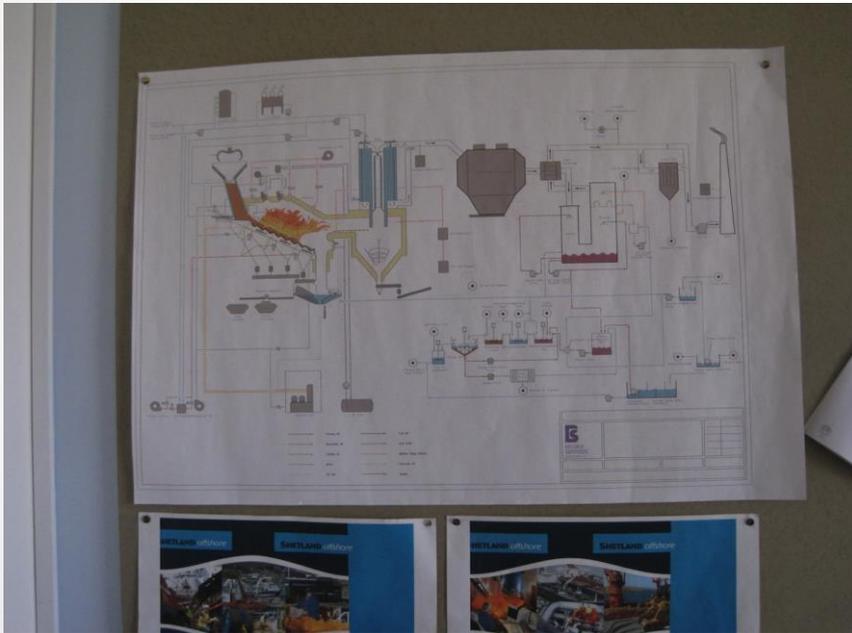


# A problem of collective action

- Policy ambition for clean, affordable energy
- Recognised energy, cost and carbon saving value of decentralised energy in urban areas
- Context:
  - liberalised, and centralised, UK energy markets
  - finance capitalism
- What emerges?
- What potential for cities as complex actors?

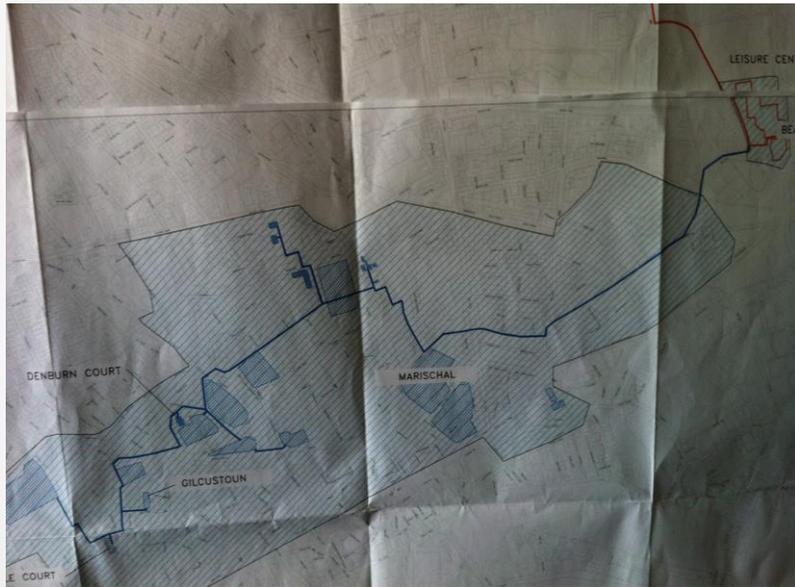


# Urban CHP and Heat Networks – Project Data



- Semi-structured interviews with local developers, policy-makers and cosmopolitan experts/practitioners
- Observation of project meetings
- Documentary analysis
- Knowledge development with District Energy Vanguards' Network

# UK Urban Energy Projects



- Limited local authority powers, resources, and capacities, limited supportive institutions
- Produces patchy development of CHP/DH
- Responsive to periodic finance and local political priorities
- Improvisatory local governance solutions

# ABERDEEN: a non-profit company for the benefit of citizens



# **BIRMINGHAM:** risk aversion and ambitions for local economic regeneration via private partner



# WOKING: environmental politics, executive leadership and local enterprise



# European Comparison: One Liberalised Energy

## Market or Many Variants?

- UK liberalised model high transaction costs for local governance:
  - Resolution of political struggle over contested understandings of value, risk and legitimacy
- Same discourse deployed in different variants of practice
  - Netherlands and Norway adopted a more coordinated approach to sustainable energy governance
- Different models have different implications for
  - Identities and configurations of lead actors,
  - Heat sources
  - Users
  - Likely shares of costs and benefits

# Forms of Governance to Accelerate UK Deployment?

- Liberalised model:
  - Market will discover value - financial return on investment
  - Address 'market barriers'
  - Scale of development decided by calculus of financial risk
- 'Barriers' cited by local authorities:
  - Limited knowledge
  - Lack of capital funding
  - No planning framework
  - No mandate



# Governance for Decentralised Energy

- Change in dominant frameworks of value/evaluation?
  - value creation through local economic action
  - Counter-balance to value extraction
- Institutional innovation to
  - legitimise provision,
  - govern investment,
  - set technical standards,
  - Create transparent pricing and customer protection frameworks
- 'Command and control'?
- Reflexive, coordinated action between local governments and devolved administrations of UK state?
- Changing regulatory parameters reshapes risk calculus
- Political will?
- Civil society in the centre?