

UK Energy Transition: Ideational Variety and Differential Change

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New Thinking For Energy



Summary

- Takes socio-technical transitions literatures, and Transitions Management, as a starting point upon which to build understandings of low carbon transition
- Add in sociological institutionalism and role of ideas in both constraining, colouring and enabling change
- Principal claim is that governance interventions to support low carbon transition are highly contested
- Case study of UK energy governance change over the past 10 years shows multiple drivers beyond the need to transition to a low carbon economy

Socio-technical Transitions

- Governance intervention as vital to this unprecedented energy transition (Scrase and Smith 2009; Fouquet 2010; Meadowcroft 2011; Markard et al 2012)
- Governance institutions to manage energy system change through supporting niche innovations
- TM: learning by doing; co-ordination; leadership
- Not neutral politically (direction): for many governance institutions this implies a significant change to:
 - How they prioritise innovation and change
 - How they interpret low carbon energy transition
 - How institutions are structured including mandates
 - How they make decisions, who they listen to and why

Politics and Transition

- Gaps already identified: *existing* ideas, interests and institutions effect attempts at transition:
 - System change is related to how pressures are articulated and the capacity of governance institutions to deal with these pressures (Smith et al 2005)
 - Impacts of existing institutions/paradigms on innovation policy in the Netherlands (technology bias) (Kern and Howlett 2009)
 - Climate governance literatures claim that market liberal governance structures support existing fossil fuel interests (Peter Newell; Michael Jacobs; Matthew Patterson; Steven Bernstein)
- Add to the study of pre-existing institutions to look at how different ideas about energy influence a variety of changes to energy policy – not all in support of transition

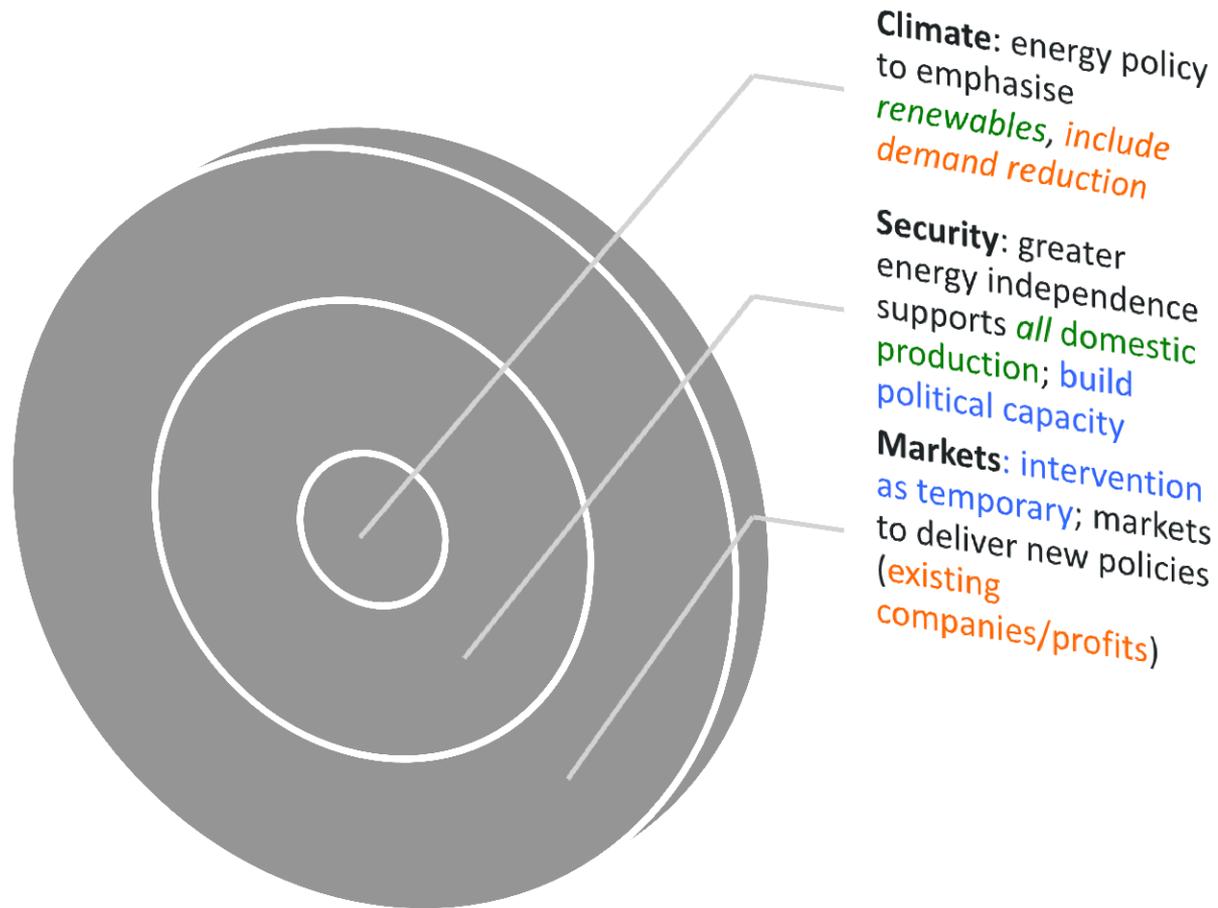
Ideas as Driving Structural Change

- Ideas (i.e. market liberal) can become embedded within governance institutions: drive perceptions of policy area; objectives; design of institutions; instrument choice...
- But ideas *can* also successfully contest embedded policy paradigms:
 - By identifying problems – change related to crisis/uncertainty
 - By relating crisis to existing policy/institutions (prove failure)
 - By offering new solutions that restore certainty
 - If they are comprehensible/tangible/appeal to existing ideas
- Examples of shifts to Keynesian and then to neoliberal economic policymaking (Washington Consensus)
- Elements of old paradigm persist: *direction* of change as interaction between new ideas and existing institutions

Ideas Driving Policy Change (UK)

- Climate Change (new scientific knowledge):
 - Current energy use as a threat to the global commons/society
 - Energy policy one possible solution (source; efficiency; demand)
 - Socio-technical: support niche innovations; co-ordinate; lead
 - Radical: limits to growth – fundamental social change
- Neoclassical economics (old paradigm response):
 - Energy as economic policy (commodity; good; service)
 - States inefficient but climate change as market failure at scale
 - Intervene to incentivise and guide markets to change
 - State intervention to recede when equilibrium restored
- Security (cognitive authority):
 - Energy as ‘lifeblood’ of modern society – threats to supply as national security issue (politicisation of energy)
 - Ongoing role for state in protecting access and independence
 - Infers support for existing infrastructures in providing continuity

Tensions within UK Energy Policy



Conclusions

- Energy policy change takes place as a result of interactions between different ideas about energy, and how it should change, and existing institutions
- Each set of ideas infers different types of policy, institutions and objectives – not all of which are complimentary – especially if not acknowledged
- Analyse and understand complexities, contexts and offer solutions that recognise different socio-political contexts
- Develop further interconnections between governance institutions and other areas within socio-tech. systems