

CALL FOR PAPERS

International workshop on

'Constructing and contesting spaces for low-carbon energy innovation'

November 26-28, 2013, School of Innovation Sciences, Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands

Abstract submission deadline: April 1th, 2013

Convened by:

Rob Raven / Bram Verhees (TU/e); Adrian Smith / Florian Kern (SPRU); Staffan Jacobsson (Chalmers)

Aim

This workshop aims to bring together leading scholars who study the construction and disruption of socio-political 'spaces' for low-carbon energy innovations from different conceptual and theoretical perspectives. The aim is to critically reflect on the analytical advantages, and limitations, that 'spaces' thinking brings to understanding low-carbon innovation.

Background

World-wide energy systems are facing major pressures to transform into more sustainable systems of production and consumption. Climate-change, depletion of resources, the need for competitive prices and economies, access to energy services for development and poverty reduction, and security of supply are all demanding a restructuring of current energy systems.

Over the past decades numerous, potentially more sustainable energy innovations have been proposed, studied, developed and implemented to varying degrees including, for example, on- and off-shore wind energy, solar PV technologies, carbon capture and storage, bioenergy innovations, insulation technologies, zero-energy buildings, electric vehicles and other greener cars, and so on. Some innovations like on-shore wind and bioenergy have become well-established innovation systems and part of regular investment and policy portfolios in some regions, while others like carbon capture and storage are struggling to become established.

What all these innovations have in common is that they are or have been characterized by (sometimes fierce) contests for social, industrial and political attention and legitimacy. Innovation advocates need to engage with debates and discourses in the wider world in order to maintain the flow of resources, lobby for favorable contextual changes such as institutional reforms and strategically team up with or argue against incumbent innovation systems or competing niche innovations. As our point of departure, we will loosely refer to these dynamics as the construction of socio-political 'spaces' for low-carbon energy innovations.

Practical examples in the creation of spaces for low-carbon innovation include attempts to lobby policy actors or corporate decision makers for necessary resources such as money and human skills, which can trigger further development of a low-carbon innovation. In addition to mobilization of resources for development, many of these innovations also require more fundamental changes

within incumbent energy systems such as the construction of smart grids for decentralized energy generation, e.g. building-integrated solar PV systems. Low-carbon innovation advocates may engage in attempts at actively changing their selection environments, for example, by generating media attention in order to influence public discourse or participate in campaigning for changing national or international legislation, or technology and infrastructural standards. All this occurs in the context of competing societal, policy and corporate agendas, problem definitions and proposed alternative solutions. Consequently most sustainable energy innovations involve (at varying degrees) contestation, e.g. over their costs, desired locations, sustainability, required policies, future potential, alternatives and so on.

As such, there are recursive relationships between low-carbon innovation processes on the one hand, and the wider contexts in which they happen on the other. These recursive relationships can be studied from a variety of analytical perspectives. From an evolutionary perspective, for example, we can see niche spaces as providing shielding from prevailing regime selection environments in ways that allow a low-carbon innovation to be nurtured towards a more competitive form beyond niche space; or in-depth studies of legitimation processes in emerging technological innovation systems. Conversely, a more networked perspective might see low-carbon innovation as involving the active negotiation and enrolling of favorable context conditions (the practice of 'contexting') into the socio-technical configuration of a low-carbon development, such that the network itself constitutes the space for low-carbon innovation. Alternatively, a neo-institutional perspective could entail the study of collective institutional entrepreneurs advocating institutional reforms to enable wider diffusion of innovative practices within transformed organizational fields.

Workshop contributions and topics

We welcome contributions to the subject from the above - and other - analytical perspectives, including (but not limited to):

- Socio-technical transition studies (e.g. multi-level perspective, strategic niche management)
- Innovation studies (e.g. technological innovation systems)
- Science and Technology Studies (e.g. actor-network theory, practice theory)
- Institutional theory (e.g. institutional entrepreneurship, organizational field theory)
- Discourse analysis (e.g. framing, narrative analysis)
- Political science (e.g. corporate political strategy, social movement theory)

The workshop seeks to host rich, empirically-informed contributions that address questions of theory development such as (but not limited to):

- How do 'spaces' for sustainable energy innovations emerge, what constitutes them, how (and by whom) are they maintained, how do they disappear, and with what consequences?
- What are the power- and political relations involved in constructing / contesting spaces, and with which consequences for low-carbon innovations?
- Who or what do low-carbon innovation spaces exclude and/or *disempower*?
- How do policies (e.g. feed-in-tariffs, demonstration programs, market creation incentives) create, maintain or disrupt spaces for low-carbon innovation and with what consequences?
- What is the role of formal evaluations and other technology assessment procedures in the dynamics of spaces for low-carbon innovation?

- Which methodologies are appropriate for analyzing socio-political spaces for low-carbon energy innovations?
- What practical lessons does such analysis provide for lobbyists, practitioners and policy-actors?
- What are the limitations to adopting a 'spaces' approach to the politics of low-carbon innovation?

Practical information

The three-day workshop will take place November 26-28, 2013 (starting and ending at noon) at the School of Innovation Sciences of the Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands. The workshop can accommodate around 15 contributions. Hotel accommodations for max 2 nights (presenters only) and meals during the workshop will be provided, but participants will need to cover their own travelling costs. The workshop will require full-paper submissions before-hand (see schedule below), and will be organized around discussants. The workshop organizers will invite one or two 'key-note listeners' close to the policy domain to reflect on the discussions and results of the workshop. Selected participants will be invited to collaborate in a special issue proposal to Energy Policy, Technological Forecasting & Social Change, Technology Analysis & Strategic Management, Environmental Innovation & Societal Transitions, or similar.

Abstract submissions

Abstracts (max 300 words) should be submitted to r.p.j.m.raven@tue.nl.

Schedule

Abstract submission: April 1st, 2013.

Acceptance notification: May 31th, 2013.

Full-paper submission: October 1st, 2013.

Organizing Committee

Rob Raven and Bram Verhees (Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands)

Adrian Smith and Florian Kern (SPRU - Science and Technology Policy Research, UK)

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