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ENERGISING RESEARCH WORKSHOP

3rd SCORAI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, Copenhagen, Denmark

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ENERGISE ENTRUST AND SHAPEENERGY ▸ 6/29/2018

ENERGISE
EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RESEARCH, GOOD PRACTICE AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

SHAPEENERGY
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES FOR ADVANCING POLICY IN EUROPEAN ENERGY

ENERGY SYSTEM TRANSITION THROUGH STAKEHOLDER ACTIVATION, EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
ENTRUST

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Background

On Friday 29th June 2018, during the 3rd SCORAI International Conference, the ENERGISING RESEARCH WORKSHOP took place from 9am - 10.30am. The aim was to draw on insights from three large European energy projects (ENERGISE, ENTRUST & SHAPE ENERGY) to explore some of the opportunities and challenges involved when trying to spread or diffuse knowledge and good-practices on local energy transitions in policy spheres, academia, and wider society. Over 20 attendees participated in the 90-minute workshop, which adopted a world café style format. Following a short introduction to each of the three projects, participants were asked to consider and collectively discuss the following questions:

1. What challenges do you see when trying to spread/diffuse knowledge/best-practices on local energy transitions in (1) policy (2) academia, (3) wider society?

2. What strategies have you experienced or would you expect to work well to overcome/address these challenges?

Discussion

Academia

In relation to the challenges that participants identified when trying to spread or diffuse knowledge and best practices on local energy transitions in academia three core areas arose:

Integration:

- Difficult to integrate SSH into research on energy systems
- Poor integration of production and consumption aspects of energy
- Different interpretations of sustainable energy systems exist within and across disciplines, and it can be difficult to build consensus
- SSH is often used to overcome social 'problems' within existing energy systems and structures, rather than using SSH to challenge and seek to change the existing system (e.g. employing SSH researchers to liaise with indigenous populations in order to access fossil fuel resources).
- It can be difficult to communicate the value of SSH research
- There needs to be a recognition and appreciation of the broad range of SSH disciplines.

Funding:

- Funding structures favour production orientated research
- Little focus on energy demand
- We need to consider who sets the agenda in energy research, and what their values are. These are often narrow understandings of the energy system that neglect the human dimension.
- There often exists a lack of opportunities for SSH energy researchers in university structures.

Disciplinarity:

- It can be challenging to cross existing university disciplinary boundaries.
- It can be challenging to develop opportunities for researchers to experience first-hand interdisciplinary (and SSH) research
- More established SSH disciplines (e.g. economics) dominate the field
- Transdisciplinary research can generate a breath of research, but some research depth may be sacrificed.
- For researchers with previous practical work experience, it can be a challenge to integrate practical knowledge into research.
- PhD students that undertake interdisciplinary research projects may be less employable as academics because departments often seek specialised researchers.

The workshop produced the following ideas for overcoming challenges:

Broaden the criteria that are used to measure the impact of research, both for individual researchers in considering promotions, etc., and for university ranking systems. For example, include engagement with policy, civil society, etc., in evaluation criteria.

Provide students with a broad range of experience in their education that includes exposure to SSH subjects, regardless of the degree undertaken.

Provide opportunities for a broad range of researchers to experience SSH (and interdisciplinary) research.

Set up dedicated interdisciplinary departments within university structures.

Include SSH researchers on a broad range of panels that set energy research agendas (H2020, IPCC, etc.).

Policy

The following were identified as barriers to policy diffusion of good practice transition actions:

- *Metrics:* Academics primarily judged on their peer-reviewed publication history not on policy diffusion. More meaningful acknowledgment of policy engagement required. This then enables the researcher to potentially become a champion and less cynical.
- *Training:* Researchers typically develop skills and competences in critical thinking and academic writing for proposals/papers rather than dissemination to policy actors. Often lack the skills of policy diffusion. Indeed the difficulty of finding the appropriate balance between maintaining scientific objectivity and engaging in lobby type activity was highlighted.
- *"Gate Openers":* Hard to identify the gate openers i.e. those in the best position to influence initiate change
- *Nature of information:* Policy actors typically favour quantitative economic type information rather than ethnographic style information.
- *Credibility:* The requirement of convincing policy makers of the "proof" or "evidence" that the project will work and it's scalability
- *Local infrastructure:* Local infrastructure may not have the capacity to absorb the idea. Conflict may arise if the local systemic policy infrastructure is unsuitable to repeat how things were done in the successful example project.
- *Governance structures:* The pre-existing governance structure at the local may not have the power or authority to implement the project due to boundary issues. Cannot directly replant initiative
- *Pre-existing skills/competences/attitudes:* "That's not how we do things here". "Haven't done this before". Don't know how project will work out in the medium to long term.
- *Flow of knowledge:* Traditional perception of linear flow of academic recommendations to policy makers is wrong. Distinction b/w policy and academia is a mistake. Need to create conditions where there is no boundary.

Ideas for overcoming challenges:

Coalition Building: get to know the right people, build agenda and knowledge required

Engagement with research-distance between policy maker and research: Need to engage, get the policy makers involved in the data. Need to link Policy makers to think about the problems and subsequent solutions. Policy makers are individuals, if they figure something out for themselves then they are more likely to implement change to solve the problem. Find interested intermediaries. Co-production – policy maker knows more about policy diffusion.

Find windows of opportunity for co-production: example was given of local authority did not know what to do with some unoccupied buildings that they wanted to keep alive and energy project stepped in an provided a solution

Look for young policy makers as they are generally more open to new ideas and change.

Partner with civil society/ advocacy groups who are more experienced with policy diffusion

Connect to national agendas strategic alliance

Improve Energy Literacy – especially in the younger age groups

Find 'amplifiers' who can help spread the message

Engage in transdisciplinary research and Listen to the concerns of stakeholders - these are likely to be in the policy makers mind. Need to be aware of stakeholder perspectives

Campaign for More Open research calls that allow for the implementation of project plans specific to local conditions and allow for co-creation elements

Do not over emphasise the scientific perspective-risk of alienation

Learn to speak the language of policy audiences

Engage with community/groups/municipalities that are looking for solutions

Find locally appropriate practical solutions i.e. avoid upscaling diffusion mantra

General public

The following core areas arose in the discussion on challenges.

Using the right language and adopting the right (appropriate?) attitude:

- It is challenging to translate scientific and academic findings into 'everyday' language.
- There are lots of different stakeholders incorporated into the term 'general public', and we need to be able to talk to all of them using the language and content that is relevant and understandable to them.
- It's challenging to relate research and science to everyday life and workplace processes.
- Often scientists talk down to the general public, and adopt a paternalistic attitude, which needs to change.
- We as scientists should not talk to the 'general public' with pre-formed ideas in our minds.
- We need genuine participation: it should not be used only as a communication of already worked out methods and theories, but should be used right at the beginning and then research should really build on input by the 'general public'.
- Scientists and researchers often do not consider local issues and what is important to local people, and then build solutions based on them.
- We often use a very linear kind of innovation and diffusion of information process, which is not helpful.
- Good practices are often seen as imposed from the outside and not co-designed (or designed) by the general public.

Feeling of disempowerment and not being interested:

- The general public is often not interested in energy, partly because energy is invisible to them.
- Disinterest also comes from the fact that they do not feel qualified to discuss energy related issues, they feel they lack the expertise.
- There is a pre-occupation with the supply side of energy.
- There is often no space provided for civil society when discussion energy-related challenges and solutions.
- There is an overload of information relating to energy and it is difficult for the general public to find their way around and make sense of it.

Work with the 'general public' is not included in researcher assessment:

- Researchers and scientists often do not spend enough time working with the general public and developing novel, more suitable methods for working with them as this kind of work is not included in their evaluation and in their carrier development. They often have to do this voluntarily, in their own time.

Ideas for overcoming challenges included:

- Involve the 'general public' in expert/advisory group panels.
- Include and involve the target group (or general public) in projects in different ways, throughout the project, and give them space and opportunities for setting the agenda.
- Include non-academic literature (e.g. business studies, local municipal strategies, general media, etc.) in literature reviews.
- Look for already existing solutions, practices, designs, etc., and not only in the academic literature.
- There are existing games that can help with the diffusion of scientific findings and ideas.
- Use 'traditional' local organizations to approach the general public as well as to help translate ideas, findings and messages (e.g. church groups, NGOs, sport associations, etc.).
- Develop narratives that people can relate to and issues that they care about. In this make use of 'windows of opportunities' (i.e. big life events that create a window for change, e.g. marriage, birth of first child, etc.).
- Participate in the training of and/or create training programmes for members of the 'general public' (e.g. train shop assistants in energy efficiency and eco labels).
- Expose people to good examples and successful solutions: organize demonstrations, visits, etc. Use the above-mentioned tradition organizations to facilitate this.
- Integrate working with the 'general public' in research proposal applications as well as in target indicators.
- *Idea from "Participatory methods and sufficiency" session:* Collect, publish and discuss researcher stories on how they worked with the general public, which methods worked, etc.

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About the Projects

ENERGISE is an innovative pan-European research initiative to achieve a greater scientific understanding of the social and cultural influences on energy consumption. Funded under the EU Horizon 2020 programme (Grant Agreement No. 727642) for three years (2016-2019), ENERGISE develops, tests and assesses options for a bottom-up transformation of energy use in households and communities across Europe.

Coordinated by the National University of Ireland, Galway Web: http://www.energise-project.eu/, Email: info@energise-project.eu

ENTRUST is an international multi-disciplinary research project working to achieve a greater understanding of people's relationship with energy. An intersectional approach is taken to assess how multiple identities and social positions (e.g., gender, age, socio-economic privilege) combine to influence energy-related practices, behaviour, and attitudes. The project uses this newly developed knowledge and insights on the technical, policy and socio- economic aspects of the energy system to inform innovation and widespread stakeholder engagement.

Coordinated by University College Cork.
Web: www.entrust-h2020.eu

Contact: n.dunphy@ucc.ie

SHAPE ENERGY aims to develop Europe's expertise in using and applying energy-SSH. Funded under the EU Horizon 2020 programme for two years (2018-2019), the innovative Platform bring together those who 'demand' energy research – including businesses, policymakers, and NGOs, who can use it to develop practical initiatives – with those who 'supply' that research.

Coordinated by Anglia Ruskin University

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