

2: Thinking Post-oil: Conceptualizing Alternatives

Solarpunks or Sunken Poles: Visions of Alternative Energy Futures

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Abstract

This paper looks at contemporary visions of alternative energy futures from literature, film, and art. These futures are facets of a “cultural fact” that circulates, shapes, and transforms ideas of what is possible and, more importantly, what is probable. This paper will consider a range of alternative energy futures as cultural facts, critically addressing the cultural work they perform and how they perform it. It will assess how such futures are bound up with our fossil-powered modernity, how that shapes our speculative efforts, and whether these alternative futures can nonetheless suggest practices of transformation and ways to re-invest our desires and values towards a post-fossil future. This paper stands at the beginning of, and will gesture towards, a larger project on how we imagine alternative energy futures, and how that imagination circulates across distinct genres and media - from SF literature and film, to advertising and radical activist manifestoes, to official government scenarios.

Norwegian citizens' conception of energy and energy transition

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Abstract

Within the project “Pathways to energy transition”, this paper presents some provisional results from a study aiming to generate new knowledge about Norwegians' understanding, opinions and attitudes related to energy and energy transition. Transitioning towards a low carbon society requires both political and individual action. Thus it is crucial to reveal potential barriers and opportunities for action; opposition vs support for policy, and to investigate how conceptions vary according to age, gender, education, profession, location. In a cross-disciplinary approach (political science and linguistics), focusing on open-ended questions, we combine quantitative and qualitative text analyses. The experiment was undertaken autumn 2016, including three open questions to three different groups. We asked what the respondents think when they hear or read the words *Oil and gas* (groupe 1), *Energy* (groupe 2), *Transition* («Omstilling» in Norwegian), (groupe 3). Through the 3,233 answers (oil & gas 1,110; energy 1,088; transition 1035 respectively), we got a broad picture of the respondents' associations with these fundamental notions related to the issue of moving towards a carbon free society. We see conceptions related to both wealth/success and decline; a Norwegian success story of an oil-rich nation, with some negative perspectives related

to loss of work places. Concerning energy sources, we see a focus on both oil/gas and renewables (new and traditional). Surprisingly, there is a quasi-absence of associations with climate change.

Bridging concepts: Applying energy transformation imaginaries to the empirics of solar uptake

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Abstract

This paper takes its point of departure in epistemic politics to problematise the mapping of energy sector trajectories using mid-level or ‘bridging concepts’. It focuses on energy governance research within the broader field of energy studies, whose somewhat technical nature has till recently led to its being largely ignored by social scientists, who are now directing both critique and more constructively-couched analyses of transformative potential at practices that determine sectoral trajectories towards imagined clean, inclusive energy futures. The rising affordability of solar technologies coupled with recently incremental divestment from thermal energy makes an understanding of the dynamics of multi-scalar shifts towards solar energy, situated within multiple regional political economies, of relevance to influencing energy sector trajectories in the Global South. I employ the tension between positions of advocacy and claims of objective knowledge as a productive lens through which to address questions of power at the service of sectoral transformation towards sustainability. Towards this end, I foreground attention to ideas and perspectives put forward by researchers within interdisciplinary social sciences who are working on the scope for solar energy solutions to decentralise control within bureaucratic, large-scale sectors historically characterised by a lack of downward accountability and institutional rigidity. Informed by operational realities and political economic drivers, I build on a diverse set of recent conceptual groundings to generate mid-level analytical concepts towards fashioning robust ways forward for applied researchers anxious to mobilise sustainable energy futures premised on the widespread adoption of solar solutions. This is done in a manner that recognises and works towards reconciling constraining tendencies such as path dependency and incumbent vested interests with emergent transformative possibilities premised on relational, structural and material changes.

Deep city: Cultural heritage as a resource for urban sustainability

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Abstract

The sustainable city of the future is typically envisioned as smart, creative and disruptive, assuming that urban sustainability is achieved through new technology and innovation. However, considering that the built environments of our cities are highly durable, there is also a need to focus on how resources brought from the past – histories, artefacts and places – may be used for promoting urban sustainability. We label this a “deep city” perspective on urban transformation. By looking at Røros, a World Heritage Site in central Norway with its dense and historic wooden urban centre, we investigate how its heritage and protection facilitate the maintenance of a compact urban centre. We hold that a shared sense of place and heritage – the deepness of a city – may serve as a resource *against* unsustainable sprawl and mall-oriented development.