



Social science prospects for radical change

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Purpose of talk/paper

1. Critique achievements of social sciences in effecting emissions reduction
2. Propose future directions for more radical focus and approaches

Terms of reference/scope

Approaches aiming to *directly influence* the way people live their lives: behavioural and cross-disciplinary

(As opposed to other 'radical' social science)



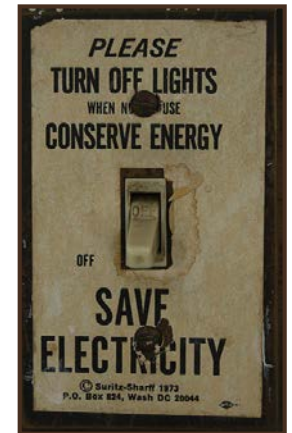
Changing people for climate change: Two decades of attempts

“Climate change is primarily driven by GHG emitting human behaviors ... and therefore may be largely mitigated by changes to those behaviors”¹

➤ Variety of approaches used to alter personal contributions to climate change → 5-10% reductions in energy use

■ Majority of interventions target ‘simple, painless’ action, but...

“the mantra ‘little changes can make a big difference’ is bunkum, when applied to climate change”²



Constraints on attempts to change people

human obstinacy - scientific conventions - politics

➤ The desire for *change without change* / safe zones

■ Recycling, switching appliances off standby...

➤ No financial/convenience cost;
fits with current political assumptions

versus

■ Diet, mobility, consumerism/consumption

➤ Disturbs normal ways of doing things;
at odds with current political assumptions



What would a more radical social science look like?

1. Promotion of behavioural and lifestyle change as a normative aim
2. Explicit recognition that 'simple, painless' needs to become 'large, difficult'
3. More coherent work across disciplinary divides



Proposal for a more radical approach (1): addressing emissions from mobility

Why mobility?

- Large part of UK household emissions
- Unpopular and difficult

How?

- Requires integrated approaches:
 - Mobility as behaviour, culture, structurally determined

And furthermore...

- Zero(?) direct attempts to address flying as behaviour/practice

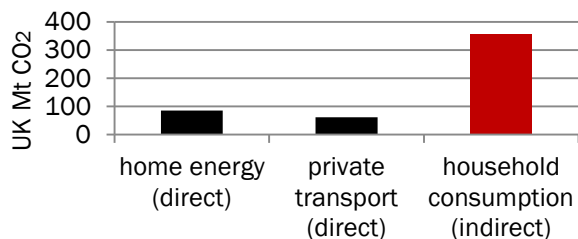


Proposal for a (much) more radical approach (2): challenging consumption

Majority of personal CO₂ –
yet largely untouched, deemed off-limits

“[R]educing embedded emissions is rarely suggested... it is conceptually harder to relate embedded emissions to personal responsibility”¹

- Consumption/consumerism as behaviour, culture, structurally determined



Source: Baiocchi et al., 2010

Linkages...

- Changing attitudes and practices around consumption in the context of new economic perspectives



Summary points

- 20+ years of research has provided valuable insights, and demonstrated capacity to effect some emissions reduction, however...
- To meet the challenges of *radical* emissions reduction, a step change in approach and emphasis would be needed

Difficulties, limitations

“[C]hanging people’s behaviour [is] a slow and humbling process”¹

- Risks: backfire, rebound, ‘hair-shirt’ criticism
- Current, deeply entrenched political and economic system
“Any policy-maker proposing e.g. a ‘cap’ on consumption levels probably would not last long”²
- Much social science hard/impossible to quantify in terms of ‘effects’

Thank you

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References

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