

Motivating transitions: The possibilities and pitfalls of modifying behaviour

Dr Johanna Wolf

Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research

University of East Anglia

Norwich, UK

Overview

- Framing the issue
- Understanding individual agency
- Conceptualising transitions
- What tools can motivate systemic change?
- What are the limitations of these tools?
- Synthesis

Framing the issue

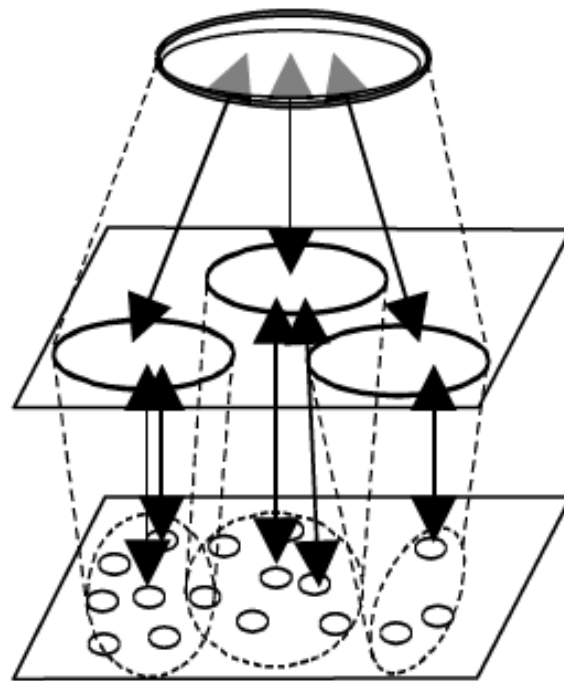
*Individuals respond well to economic incentives
but*

incentives work best for incremental change.

→ **What tools can motivate, catalyse, facilitate
systemic change?**

- Disciplinary challenges: rationalisation of lifestyle, ethical consumer, environmental citizen, or engaged and informed individual?
- Theoretical challenges: Beyond ecological modernisation? Transition theory (Geels 2005, Nykvist & Whitmarsh 2008)

Conceptual tools: Transition theory



Landscape

economic, ecological and cultural conditions

Regime

dominant actors, institutions, practices and shared assumptions

Niche

Individual technologies, grassroots movements

(From Geels 2002)

Landscape – changing social, economic and cultural conditions

Regime – tendency toward optimization of current system

Niche – typical loci for radical innovation; niche development necessary

Understanding individual agency: a dense field

- Cultural geography of consumption
 - Old: Knowledge deficit model (Kellstedt et al. 2008)
 - New: Structuralist critique of individual agency in effecting change – Importance of context: culture, social networks and institutions (Hobson 2006)
- Environmental psychology: pro-environmental behaviour
 - Cognitive approach: pre-existing fundamental attitudes as determinants of behaviour (e.g. Kaiser & Shimoda 1999)
- Risk perception
 - Climate change a remote risk, other risks more immediate (Lorenzoni et al. 2007)
 - Awareness high, understanding limited (Bord et al. 1998)
 - No consensus on 'dangerous' climate change (Lowe & Lorenzoni 2007)
- Environmental politics
 - Various green citizenships (Smith 1998, Dean 2001, Dobson 2003)
 - Ecological citizenship (Wolf & Brown, in review)
- Int'l. Development
 - Individual empowerment (Chambers 1983, 1997; also community psychology)


A 'thicker' understanding

Synthesising individual agency:

- Behaviour part of negotiating identity
- Socio-cultural context matters: social norms
- Self-efficacy: perceived ability to act
- Niches: Political engagement beyond the vote – social networks
- Broader objectives: Sustainable communities

What tools and mechanisms **could** motivate social change?

Decreasing orthodoxy



Changing structure

- Policies & regulation
- Economic incentives
- New authorities and institutions

Changing agency

- Knowledge: informing choices; long term: education system
- ‘Super-ordinate goals’: e.g. Sustainable communities

Middle ground

- Domestic tradable quotas
- Environmental citizenship
- Propagating specific norms
- Aligning old and founding new religions

What tools and mechanisms **could** motivate social change?

Middle ground

- Domestic tradable quotas
 - Cap-and-trade personal carbon allowances
- Environmental citizenship
 - Civic responsibility for sustainable living
- Propagating specific social norms
 - Social marketing: e.g. SunSmart campaign (AU)
 - Segmented guerrilla/viral social marketing?
 - Spill-over effects (Thøgersen & Ölander 2003), catalyst behaviours (DEFRA 2008), forming specific habits
 - Aligning old and founding new religions

What are the limitations of these tools?

Changing structure

- Policies & regulation
 - Economic incentives
 - New authorities and institutions
- Policies and regulation: Political cycles – permanence?
 - Incentives: Achieve incremental changes; permanence?
 - New authorities: How to link to existing institutions? (Young 2003)
 - Marketing techniques: Permanence?
 - New religions: Legitimacy?

What are the limitations of these tools?

Changing agency

- Knowledge: informing choices; long term: education system
- ‘Super-ordinate goals’: e.g. Sustainable communities

- Individual cognitive barriers
 - Cognitive dissonance, biased assimilation
 - Choices contingent on socio-cultural context & norms
 - Unlikely to change over long-term
 - Social segmentation
- ‘Knowledge deficit’ paradigm has been fatally challenged
- Super-ordinate goals – lack of evidence on limitations
- Informed only by developed country empirical research

What are the limitations of these tools?

Middle ground

- Catalyst behaviours
- Environmental citizenship
- Propagating specific norms
- Social marketing & guerrilla marketing
- Aligning old and founding new religions
- Catalyst behaviours: No empirical research on energy behaviour
- Green citizenship: Difficult to operationalize
- Propagating specific norms: Legitimacy?
- Social marketing: Permanence?
- Aligning old and founding new religions: Legitimacy? Fragmentation and hijacking of faith?

Is individual agency ill-conceived?

- Changing behaviour? What about changing **attitudes**?
 - Could improve permanence
 - Reduce cognitive barriers
 - In itself illegitimate?
 - E.g. DEFRA 2008
- Void of research from developing countries: Implications?
- Discomfort around making the individual an explicit actor in a climate change context

Synthesis

- Knowledge: effectiveness of information encumbered by cognitive barriers
- Public engagement: localised, targeted messages and empowerment work best
- Identity: resistant behaviours closely linked to identity – argument for shifting social norms
- Self-efficacy & empowerment: perceptions essential for effective & sustained motivation
- Broader objectives: engagement driven by local conceptualisations of sustainability

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