Scales of Sustainability
Community and urban responses

One-day Workshop
Université du Luxembourg
Wednesday December 14, 2016

Venue: Black Box, Maison des Sciences Humaines, Esch-Belval

8h45	Coffee & Refreshments
9h00	Welcome from MARS
9h15	Opening Remarks
9h30 – 10h15	**Critical mirco-politics of community** Emily Creamer Discussant: Jan-Tobias Doerr
10h15 – 11h00	**Community and social policymaking** Liz Dinnie Discussant: Tom Becker
11h	Tea/Coffee Break
11h30 – 12h15	**Energy markets, communities and the state** Will Eadson Discussant: Benedikt Schmid
12h15 – 13h00	**Where now for grassroots research?** Kersty Hobson Discussant: Bérénice Jung-Preller
13h	Lunch (with optional walking tour of Belval, from Evan McDonough)
14h30 – 15h15	**Urban sustainability as a stop frame** Rob Krueger Discussant: Connie Carr
15h15	Next Steps
16h	Closing Remarks
	Apéro
19h	Dinner

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Programme Notes

Emily Creamer, University of Edinburgh
The critical micro-politics of government-funded community-led action in remote rural Scotland

Community is frequently identified as an important component of sustainability policy – both as the means through which to achieve policy goals, and as an end goal of sustainability policy in itself (Creamer, 2015). These two roles are often considered co-constitutive: local delivery of community-led (low-carbon) initiatives is believed to be effective in strengthening and empowering communities and, consequently, making them more resilient and more capable of successfully pursuing local initiatives in the future (Assadourian, 2008). Inherent in this rationale is an assumption that 'the community' is a tangible entity, capable of being harnessed to deliver environmentally orientated projects. Yet, in practice, community-led initiatives are typically delivered by a few committed local individuals, often "the most visible and vocal", wealthier, more articulate and more educated groups (Botes and van Rensburg, 2000, p.45). This partial engagement has been previously observed and identified as normatively problematic within the context of community-led sustainability transitions (Svensson, 2012; Barr and Devine-Wright; 2012; Grossmann and Creamer, 2016). There has been little examination, however, of the impact that this has on the efficacy of projects seeking to encourage more sustainable lifestyles at the community level. Particularly, to what extent the empowerment and cohesion expected to materialise from these projects is felt beyond the small group of individuals actively involved in delivering them.

This paper seeks to address this gap by drawing on ethnographic research with two government-funded, community-led sustainability initiatives in remote rural Scotland, to examine the micro-politics that surround such projects. The way in which projects were funded was observed to have a substantial influence on the nature of the projects, and on the individuals delivering them, which, in turn, influenced who did, and did not, participate in, and benefit from, the projects. The paper highlights, in particular, the continued relevance of 'incomer' and 'local' identities within rural Scottish communities, and the implications this has for government policy aiming to employ 'the community' as the means of delivering sustainable lifestyle change.

Liz Dinnie, James Hutton Institute
Community and social policymaking

The term community has proved to be remarkably resilient in social policy making. Its enduring appeal can be seen in its appearance across a range of policy discourses, where it is used to encourage participation of individuals and institutions in the mechanics of governing, to deliver multiple benefits. Policy discourses often use the term community in a common-sense way, assuming that communities exist or can easily be created, and that everyone understands what is being referred to by this concept. These discourses therefore fail to take account of the diverse ways in which communities are constructed, experienced and enacted by different actors – the so-called 'sense of community' – and the multiple and complex ways in which community can be understood. Furthermore, policies and governance relating to community empowerment and resilience often rely on the creation of formal community-led organisations operating alongside other institutions in multi-level partnerships. Following research with two rural communities in Scotland this paper explores different experiences of community-in-place, asks how this sense of community affects the creation and maintenance of formal community-led organisations, and what this means for policies of community empowerment and resilience, and rural governance more widely.

Will Eadson, Sheffield Hallam University
Energy markets, communities and the state

This paper looks at the role of community as a policy tool for governing energy markets. This draws more broadly on considerations for the relationship between state and market, and the challenge faced by governments when on the one hand sanctifying markets as the central mechanism for allocating resources and organising behaviour, while on the other recognising that markets fail. In other words - to take a Polanyian concept - we are interested in the role of the state in managing processes of embedding and disembedding markets. This is central to the issues faced by governments seeking to enact energy transitions. In this paper we show how communities (broadly conceived) have been constructed as policy objects in the quest to manage these tensions through a 'double double-movement' by embedding markets within society through embedding society into markets. We draw on empirical material from across a number of research projects, each focusing on different aspects of the UK government Community Energy Strategy, exploring the different ways in which this overarching logic plays out through different governmental programmes, the ways in which communities are represented and constructed as a result, and what the implications are for just energy transitions.

Kersty Hobson, Cardiff University
Where now for grassroots research? Impact, scale and the role of the academy in sustainable transitions

There now exists a substantial academic and policy literature on community groups and / or grassroots initiatives that aim to contribute to broader sustainable transition shifts. These groups and initiatives take on a plethora of forms, and have diverse rationales, members, activities, and outcomes – all of which are reasonably well-documented in this literature. In addition, broader policy discourses and interventions have been thoroughly dissected, particularly around notions of 'community': that is, the roles ascribed to such groups in reducing greenhouse gas emissions whilst initiating a more enlivened and active citizenry at the local level. Overall, we therefore now have valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges these groups face, as well as broader (and constantly shifting) socio-political contexts. But where now? Whilst members of groups, particularly prominent ones, are experiencing 'research fatigue', the literature points to the many challenges of 'scaling up' alternate framings and practices, to touch and affect beyond 'the local'. For those wanting to contribute further to research and practice in this field, questions now exist about how to contribute to such an agenda in ways that respond to the multiple demands on groups and the academy (i.e. having provable impact), to be part of broader sustainability transitions. This paper aims to dig deeper into these questions, to examine where this body of work could and arguably should go now.

Robert Krueger, WPI & Université du Luxembourg
Variegated Epistemologies of the Urban: Urban Sustainability as a Stop Frame for Understanding Urbanization

In recent years we have witnessed, yet again, a major rupture in the confidence of urban theory to explain 'urbanization' (Brenner and Schmid 2014; Wachsmuth 2014). It seems apropos here to paraphrase Manuel Castells (1976: 59) who, a generation ago, wrote: "the one subject that remains unexplored in urban theory is its subject matter". More recently, at a conference that brought together representatives from the so-called LA, Chicago, and NY schools of urban theory, Dear and Dahmann (2011: 77) remarked that, "we urgently need to revise our obsolete theoretical and analytical apparatuses". Calling for a more ambitious move, Neil Brenner (2009) argues that we need to excavate 20th century urban theory for alternative cartographic and conceptual frameworks. This is to say we need to focus our analysis on the *transformative* potential brought by the current social formation, but also engage in a focused analysis of the attendant systematic exclusions, oppressions, and injustices wrought by them.

In an effort to make my own modest contribution toward these goals, in this paper I want to begin developing the following argument: sustainable development is a 'still frame' of urbanization, a snapshot in a larger and longer term process of urbanisation. Following Wachsmuth (2014), I argue that cities are not so much things as processes. Wachsmuth writes, "Stop the process at any point in time, and the discreet spaces you observe are the extent of urbanization" (p. 82). For me, sustainable development can be conceptualized as one of these 'still frames'.

To develop my argument I present a 'reading' of urban sustainable development as a policy discourse and set of ideological practices that position it as a coherent historical moment, an active and coherent set of social and material relations, and a process of creative destruction for overcoming contradictions of capitalism. Put simply, understanding urban sustainable development as a 'still frame' of the process of capitalist urbanization may enable us to more clearly elucidate the variegated epistemologies of the city.