



MISTRA URBAN FUTURES

Low Carbon Transitions: Relevant Lessons from the 1970s Crisis?

SURF/SPRU Workshop in the ESRC Sustainability Transitions Seminar Series, with additional support from the Sustainable Practices Research Group and Mistra Urban Futures

(<http://sustainabilitytransitions.info/>)

25 April 2012, CUBE Building, Portland Street, Manchester

Rationale

Everyone, it seems, is interested in low carbon transitions. But haven't we been here before? The 1970s was a period of economic, ecological and state crisis that spawned conflict, contestation and debate about the future direction of society, of which alternative technologies and re-directed strategies were a critical part. Yet such solutions remained largely at the demonstration or experimental stage and were seen as exemplars of new technologies, lifestyles and diverse forms of social control over what might have been an alternative socio-technical transition in housing, infrastructure, design and cities. By the 1980s it was clear that this space of experimentation was closed down and the emerging logic was the dominance of neo-liberalism. In 2011 we are once again in a period of significant structural change. But what are the similarities and differences between these periods when thinking about low carbon transition? How might similarities suggest deeper, fundamental mobilisations in transitions and how can differences make us more sensitive to the context specificities of transitions?

Purpose of the workshop

This workshop's purpose is to create a context for thinking reflexively and constructively about the wider lessons and insights of the crises in the 1970s for the challenge of creating a low carbon transition today. The workshop is aimed at practitioners and researchers working on contemporary transitions, with a view to making productive use of some historical perspective. To do this the questions that the workshop is organised around are as follows:

- i. What are the similarities and differences between the economic, ecological and political crises we are facing now and those we faced in the 1970s?
- ii. How were/are 'experimental' responses in both periods - new technologies, governance arrangements, patterns of consumption, modes of financing, forms of planning etc - mobilised as responses to crises and what problems were they seeking to address?
- iii. Were/are these experimental responses seeking to produce 'alternatives' to dominant modes of economic activity, in forms of urbanism and housing and also in the organisation of energy infrastructures and technologies?
- iv. If so, in what ways did/do these new ideas, responses and alternatives challenge, transform or even reinforce the pre-existing regime and modes of organisation?
- v. What are the critical insights, limits and opportunities, societal lessons of a comparison of the relations between alternative and the dominant mode of organisation for current concerns about a systemic low carbon transition?

Style of Workshop

The workshop will be highly interactive. Andy Beckett author of *When the Lights went out: Britain in the Seventies* will reflect on the contemporary relevance of his book. Then a pair of researchers will reflect on the questions above through the lenses of economic development, green urbanism, architecture and housing, energy technologies and infrastructures. There will be plenty of time for audience involvement through questions and discussion. We are pleased that our speakers also include Fred Steward and Tim Jenkins, Patsy Healey and Aidan While, Pat Borer and Jenny Pickerill, Dave Elliott and Joanne Wade.

Booking:

If you are interested in booking a place on the workshop please email Vicky Simpson at v.simpson@salford.ac.uk