
Part 1: People and Place

2 Knowledge Co-production and Behavioural Change: Collaborative approaches for promoting low carbon mobility

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Introduction: the behaviour change conundrum

If you've ever attended a policy seminar or workshop on how to promote sustainability amongst publics, it's likely that the conversation will focus on a discussion of three broad approaches. First, there is often the assertion that in some way people's attitudes are *wrong* and require *correction*: 'if only *we* could get people to see the problem *our* way; that would be a start'. Second, the means by which to achieve this shift in attitudes is often viewed as an issue of awareness-raising: 'communication is clearly the problem; *we* need to give people better *information*'. Finally, we arrive at what is often regarded as the golden bullet: 'if only *we* could get people to change *their* behaviour and make better choices'. These three logics of arriving at a behavioural change 'solution' (as it is so often framed) evidently have a number of conceptual and empirical problems, but we argue here that the most significant challenge posed by this seemingly compelling approach is really about how both

policy makers and many academic researchers have positioned themselves in relation to the publics whose behaviours they seek to influence and change.

In this chapter, we propose that for behavioural change to be both a meaningful and useful approach for promoting sustainability, we need to contest embedded assumptions about knowledge production and formations of 'expert' and 'lay' in formulating campaigns for behavioural change. In other words, the binary that exists between *us* and *them* needs to be questioned in a context where publics are becoming ever more sceptical of science and experts (Owens, 2000; Lupton, 2013). In this way, we draw on research from Science Technology Society (STS) studies in the social sciences (Lupton, 2013; Whatmore *et al.*, 2009), to demonstrate how issues of implementing attitude and behaviour change urgently need to be re-cast as ones that are much more about co-identifying problems, co-researching approaches and co-creating campaigns with consumers. In pursuing this approach, we argue for a need to develop both new forms of engagement and innovative perspectives on changing wider social practices for sustainability so that new possibilities for social change can be developed and low carbon transitions realised.

The behaviour change 'problem'

As academic researchers, we are working in an environment where questioning the logic of particular kinds of behavioural change and the political undercurrents that have led to their enthusiastic adoption is often challenging and outside of the mainstream (Shove, 2010). Yet we argue here that researchers need to recognise that behavioural change, as it is currently formulated in most political discourse, presents scholars with a major challenge on three levels. First, there are fundamental and emergent debates surrounding the role and place of behavioural change as a strategy for achieving the goals of sustainability, particularly when the 'wicked' policy problem of low carbon mobility is concerned (Crompton & Thøgersen, 2009).

As we have argued elsewhere (Barr *et al.*, 2011; Barr & Prillwitz, 2014), critical questions surround the apparently compelling logic of promoting incremental behavioural change as a strategy for dealing with mega-issues like anthropogenic climate change. This concern is founded on our argument that particular kinds of behavioural change have attained a privileged position in many policy contexts, which has much to do with the underpinning logics of a shift towards a neo-liberal way of governing that upholds the status of the free market and individual choice (Giddens, 1991). As a result, policies for promoting behavioural change have become focused on the choices of individuals that embody the 'citizen-consumer' (Clarke *et al.*, 2007): an individual who simultaneously embodies the responsible (ecological) citizen and also exercises full choice as a consumer. In this way, individuals are necessarily bounded in their choices, so that these are 'better' (DEFRA, 2005) and more easily manipulated through a form of Libertarian Paternalism (Jones *et al.*, 2011). As such, through adopting particular forms of behavioural change, such as behavioural economics, the state acts as arbiter over the 'right' choices to make. Such

approaches clearly crowd out alternative voices, opinions and logics that would prefer to see behavioural change as a component of wider strategies for achieving sustainability; ones that recognise the relationships between apparent individual choice and the broader economic and social structures within which individuals, households and communities act (Barr & Prillwitz, 2014; Shove *et al.*, 2012).

A second level on which behavioural change can be critiqued relates to the dominant ways in which we have come to understand and intellectually frame (un)sustainable behaviours. Shove (2010) has highlighted the particular kinds of research cultures and practices that have come to dominate the intellectual and policy landscape of behavioural change and without doubt, this has been characterised by a focus on the use of behavioural economics, insights from social-psychology and the use of psychological models to understand and influence behaviour. As seminal meta-analyses of pro-environmental behaviour research have demonstrated (Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Hines *et al.*, 1987; Oskamp, 2000), there is a vast body of scholarship that has sought to identify the key factors that determine participation in a range of pro-environmental behaviours.

The field of travel behaviour studies has until recently been dominated by the logics of psychological modelling of behaviours (e.g. De Groot & Steg, 2007; Heath & Gifford, 2002) using frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1977). These and numerous other studies utilise the underpinning logic of rationalistic behaviour change (Owens, 2000) in which general models of behaviour can be used to predict particular outcomes. Yet the logics of such models have recently been questioned and heavily critiqued within other parts of the social sciences (Spaargaren & Mol, 2008) not least because they tend to focus on individual cognition and the quantification of 'factors'. This has enabled scholars from disciplines such as sociology and human geography to advocate an alternative approach for framing pro-environmental behaviours, as *practices* (Huddart *et al.*, 2015; Kasper, 2015; Reckwitz, 2002; Shove, 2003). In this way, researchers have argued for a deeper, contextually rich and holistic approach to the traditional behavioural problem by focusing on the intersections between individuals, technologies and practices (Barr, 2015; Kasper, 2015). In the field of travel behaviour research, this is marked by an increasing awareness of the challenges posed by research that does not place transport mode choice into a wider setting afforded by, for example, a mobilities perspective (Freudendal-Pedersen, 2009).

These two critiques of contemporary approaches to behavioural change are gaining traction in the social science community (Huddart *et al.*, 2015) and are being considered by a policy community that is frustrated with the inability of individualistic approaches to deliver change (Wilson & Chatterton, 2011). Yet there is a third challenge connected to these two critiques with which researchers and policy makers need to grapple if we are to realise our aspirations to deliver meaningful change for low carbon mobility, and to do so in ways that are engaged and long-lasting. This problem is one that *we* have, as an academic community, and one