EURAGRI ‘The Human Dimensions in the Bioeconomy Framework’

What value aspects are connected to these issues? What values could guide us when employing new technologies and new organizational settings and how should they be handled in research, development and practice?

To secure a holistic approach to the challenges that lie ahead, I make a provocation by suggesting that we move beyond values as an intervention point for changing consumer behaviours. This draws from a well-established tradition in sociological research and theory as well as socio-technical studies. In this introduction, I put forward a ‘reconfiguration’ position. This argument is set out in the attached paper by Geels et al. (2015) and is a position that moves beyond the dichotomies of ‘reformist’ and ‘revolutionary’ standpoints in Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) research that currently frame much of the debate about socio-technical transition towards more sustainable arrangements. A reconfiguration perspective draws on practice theory (see Warde 2005 for an account of this tradition, attached) and Multi-level Perspective (MLP - see Geels for more on this) in order to take seriously the interaction between agency and structure. It looks to understand the interactions between patterns and conventions of daily life and the structures that support and reproduce them, and in turn, influence their co-evolution It sees a circular causality between agency and structure, and therefore considers a focus on individual consumer values as an inappropriate intervention point for policies designed to inculcate change towards more sustainable ways of life. This perspective requires that we focus on a new unit of analysis: not the individual but the interactions between larger structures and patterns pf everyday life. We might ask, what are the patterns of activity that underpin resource intensity in everyday life? It’s not that people don't have values and motivations (practice theory appreciates that there are conventions and meanings governing everyday life) but that we have to look at their interaction with materials, institutions, structures and patterns in daily life activity in order to find new nexus points at which to intervene in order to inculcate change. The attached articles and project reports make this argument with examples form domestic food provisioning, among others.

References and key readings

* Geels, F. McMeekin, A, Mylan, J. and Southerton, D (2015) A critical appraisal of sustainable consumption and production research: the reformist, revolutionary and reconfiguration positions, *Global Environmental Change* 34 pp. 1-12.
* Paddock, J. (2015) ‘Household Consumption and Environmental Change: Rethinking the Policy Problem through Narratives of Food Practice’, *Journal of Consumer Culture* DOI: 10.1177/1469540515586869.
* Nicola Spurling, Andrew McMeekin, Elizabeth Shove, Dale Southerton, Daniel Welch (2013) Interventions in practice: re-framing policy approaches to consumer behaviour, *Sustainable Practices Research Group Report*, September 2013.
* Warde, A. (2005) Consumption and theories of practice, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5 (2) pp. 131–153.
* Welch, D. Warde, A. and Paddock, J. (forthcoming) ‘Studying consumption through the lens of practice’ in *Routledge Handbook of Consumption*, European Sociological Association.