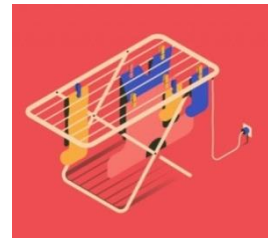


Energy Efficiency

National and international responses to climate change are dominated by policies that promote energy efficiency. DEMAND research shows that far from being a solution, measures to promote efficiency often reproduce carbon intensive ways of life.

‘Energy efficiency’ is about delivering the same or more services (e.g. heat, light, mobility) for less energy input. Research by the DEMAND Centre shows that this way of thinking about energy efficiency depends on comparing the more or less efficient delivery of the same services. Elizabeth Shove explains that to do so, the meaning of ‘service’ must be captured and standardized and the amount of energy involved quantified. Which units of calculation are chosen then shape what become ‘objects’ of efficiency, for example, ‘temperature’ and not ‘comfort’.

This has a number of consequences. First, only some topics are discussed in terms of energy efficiency. For example, while technologies like insulation or heating systems figure prominently in evaluations of efficiency, others such as clothing, carpets and slippers do not. Kris de Decker explains that many low energy technologies such as the clothesline, hand powered drills and thermal underwear are still relevant in the context of climate change, but they do not deliver the same services as tumble dryers, power tools or heating systems and are therefore left of the debate.



Second, calculations of energy efficiency work to fix specific interpretations of comfort, light and travel. For example, assumptions are made about what a ‘normal’ room temperature should be, disregarding the fact this has changed significantly over time. As a result, discussions of efficiency carry certain ‘standards’ of service forward and invisibly embed them in future programmes of research and development. This obscures longer-term trends in demand and societal shift in what energy is for.

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