“Energy, territory and the socio-technical” (EST Monthly seminar) 2011-2012

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are running a joint seminar on the articulation between technology and territory in the field of energy.

Technology is approached by social theories as a system or a network (e.g. « innovation system », «socio-technical system », « technological trajectory », « heterogeneous network »). Technological innovation and deployment is viewed as a hybrid, socio-technical process. Policy makers are thus faced with a challenge: they have to account for a multiplicity of factors when they design policies aimed at sustaining the emergence of new technologies. Shaping technology is recomposing the social.

Social sciences have taken into account an increasing diversity of factors in their analysis of technological development (e.g. actors, institutions, politics, social values, economy and finance ...). Yet, our understanding of the role of the territorial dimension, in the sense of the “geographical milieu” or the “locale” in which new technologies and technology policies are embedded, remains limited, even though this dimension is decisive, both at the experimental stage of technological development (niches) and the more consolidated (industrial / market) stage.

The challenges raised by technological development arguably become more concrete at the local level. Issues raised by the development of new technologies can be shaped, represented and brought into negotiation as they acquire materiality and territoriality – e.g. what changes does the development of renewable energy production bring to landscape, land use or sea use; how does this conflict with or contribute to evolving current values; what are the social processes sustaining these tensions or changes; what can be the role of planning or local politics in these processes; etc. Accordingly, national or supra-national policy frames are brought into local politics through technological development, eventually leading to unexpected developments and innovations.

Opportunities are open for interdisciplinary approaches to these processes, at the crossroads between social studies of technologies (technology as a heterogeneous assemblage or network) and cutting edge developments in human geography around the role of practices, materialities, and the emergence and organization of spatialities (place, territory, landscape).

The monthly seminar is open to doctoral students, academics and practitioners with an interest in discussing these issues, and is based on presentations of either theoretical work or empirical case studies in the field of energy transitions and the development of new energy technologies (renewable energy, energy behaviours...).

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