Invisible energy policy: A new agenda for research and intervention

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DeMand
DYNAMICS OF ENERGY, MOBILITY AND DEMAND

Research Councils UK
Energy
For a Low Carbon Future

How is **energy demand** affected when:

- Planners project a doubling of demand for air travel?

- School holidays begin?

- Labour markets are liberalised?

- Development agencies subsidise road building ?

- University promotion committees treat attendance at international conferences as a marker of research performance?

- Hospital trusts are merged and health services are centralised?

- High speed broadband is rolled out, nationwide?

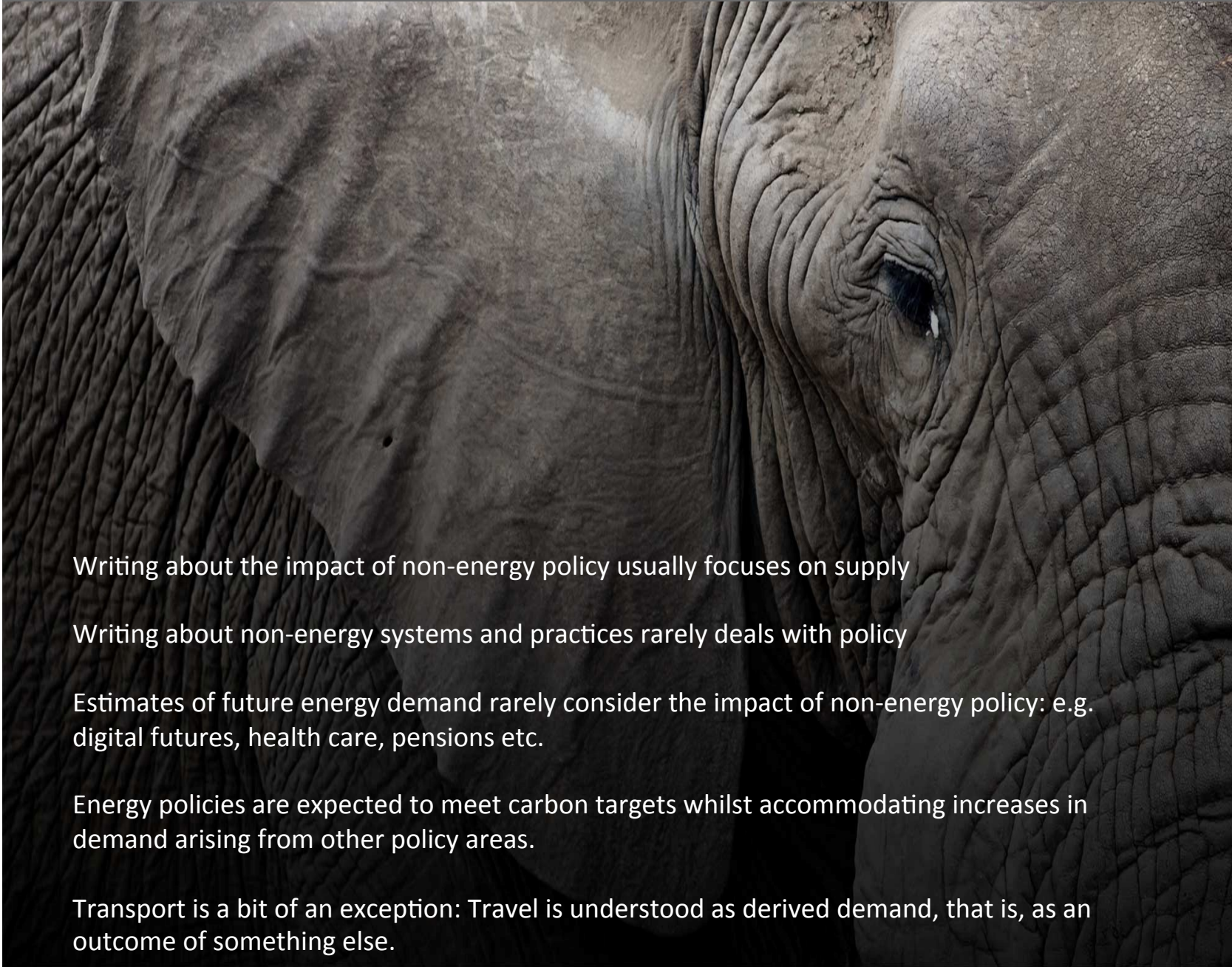# Not all policy that matters for energy demand is energy policy

Regulations: e.g. health and safety
Standards: e.g. for office space
Liberalisation
Growth
Austerity
Devolution

Universities keeping libraries open all night – an energy intensive response to the pressure to compete for students, to rise up the rankings.

We use the term invisible energy policy to refer to non energy policies which have impacts on energy demand that are unintended, unseen or ignored

Hidden in plain view

Writing about the impact of non-energy policy usually focuses on supply

Writing about non-energy systems and practices rarely deals with policy

Estimates of future energy demand rarely consider the impact of non-energy policy: e.g. digital futures, health care, pensions etc.

Energy policies are expected to meet carbon targets whilst accommodating increases in demand arising from other policy areas.

Transport is a bit of an exception: Travel is understood as derived demand, that is, as an outcome of something else.

What is seen, what is invisible and what can be acted upon reflects divisions within organisations.

Energy managers

See:
Efficiency
Equipment
Controls

The energy/
non- energy
divide

Non energy managers

See:
Opening hours
Space standards
Institutional rhythms
Working procedures
'Core business'

Don't see:
Opening hours
Space standards
Institutional rhythms
Working procedures
'Core business'

Don't see:
Efficiency
Equipment
Controls

Divisions between energy and non-energy policies are reproduced
at all institutional scales

National government

The energy/
non- energy
divide

Local and regional
government

Individual
organisations

Accounting for invisibility
Why this split?

Practical and political reasons
Governance
Complexity
Tractability
Competing priorities

Intellectual reasons
Disciplines
Traditions

Can the effects of this split be overcome?

Can non-energy policies be used to reduce demand?

Maybe, but only by establishing a new agenda for *invisible* energy policy. Such an agenda rests on six propositions

1 Energy efficiency alone is not up to the challenge of energy demand reduction

This is mainly because energy efficiency reproduces current expectations of service.

2 To reduce energy demand we need to focus on what energy is used for and how this changes

3 Policy is a key element in the social making of demand

4 Both energy and non energy policies shape demand

Policy objectives – saving lives, increasing mobility, promoting growth etc. define 'core business'

5 Non-energy policy has impacts on energy demand through policy objectives and policy processes

Policy processes are the ways in which decision-making and governance are done and how responsibilities are defined and bounded.

6 Most non-energy policy impacts on energy demand are barely visible

Building on these propositions, an invisible energy policy agenda involves

Revisiting the ways in which energy problems are bounded and defined

Better understanding the relation between non-energy policy processes and objectives and how these impact on energy demand

Identifying which non-energy policies have significant energy impact

Comparing the impact of non-energy policies at different institutional scales and across sectors

Identifying methods of mobilising non-energy policy as a means of reducing energy demand

Working with invisible energy policy: cautions and suggestions

We **are** talking about making policy visible in the making of energy demand. This involves more than making 'energy' visible, e.g. through targets.

We **are** talking about revising non-energy policy objectives and processes to enable long term demand reduction.

An invisible energy policy agenda would involve programmes of energy demand reduction achieved and realised through many and varied forms of non-energy policy.

Examples might include developing higher education policies that are compatible with less resource intensive meanings of 'quality', performance and service.
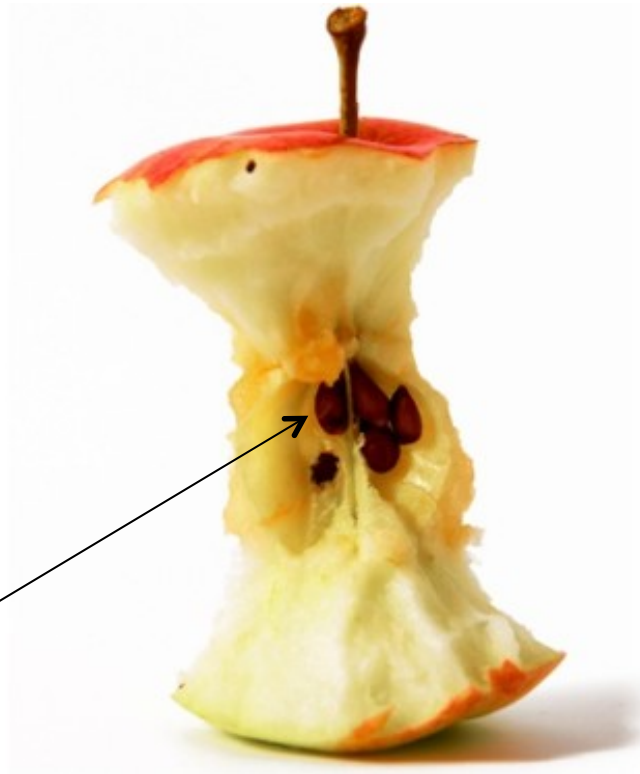

University libraries that close at night

More broadly, there might be ways of embedding energy demand reduction as part of the core business of non-energy policy areas.

There are precedents. Issues like those of gender equality or of health and safety are now embedded in institutional objectives and processes. They have been 'mainstreamed'.

Energy demand reduction as part of core business?

If 'mainstreaming' has been possible in these other areas, why not in relation to energy and carbon?

We are interested in:

Other experiences
Other countries
Parallels from other sectors

Energy demand reduction as part of core business?