

# Making energy social

integrating practice theory, the social norm approach  
and community action

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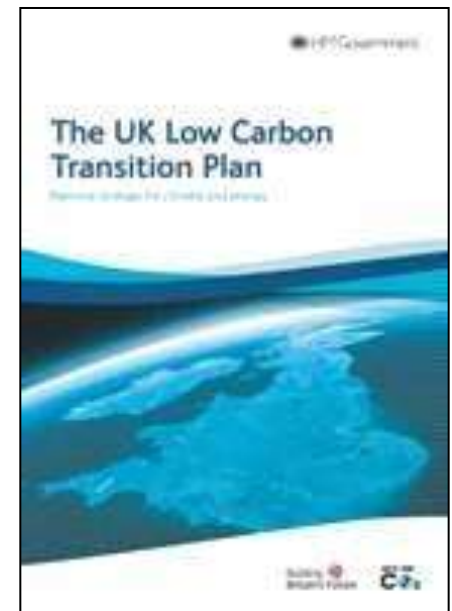
**CHARM**\*

Smart Communities

**When energy  
isn't social**

# UK Low Carbon Transition Plan

- Published by Department for Energy and Climate Change in July 2009.
- Noticeable emphasis on behaviour change (alongside infrastructural and technological developments)
- Emergence of officially-sponsored 'behaviour change programmes'





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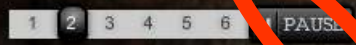


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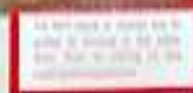
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PAUSE



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# Where is the social?

- Limited impacts of such approaches
- Embodied in such programmes are assumed relationships between communication, information, education, awareness, attitudes, incentives and behaviour.
- Knowledge deficit models (cf PUS)
- Values-action gaps models
- These approaches have been criticised as
  - (overly) individualistic and rationalistic (and drawing solely from social psychology and behavioural economics)
  - Neglectful or unaware of the social (contextual, contingent, multi-rational, experiential) nature of such relationships

# **Three social approaches**

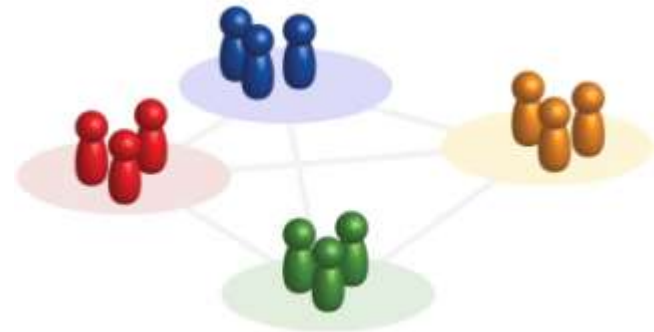
# Practice theory

- A suite of analytical approaches
- Employs practices as the focus of analysis
- eg: cooking, cleanliness, recreation
- ‘Behaviour’ recast as ‘doings’ in a practice (thinkings, understandings, things, norms, contexts, linkages) (Schatzki, Reckwitz)
- Practices as
  - taken-for-granted, habitual (Shove)
  - stable, yet malleable (Shove)
- Energy as invisible within practices (Wilhite, Shove)
- Energy consumption derives from practices (cf Warde)
- However, practice theory lacks empirical or practical application in the context of ‘behaviour change’



# The social norm approach

- Rooted in (social) psychology theories of conformity: *people tend to conform to what other people do*
- Particular behaviour can be encouraged by *telling people about the social prevalence of that behaviour*
- The social norm approach has been applied to
  - Campus issues: alcohol, smoking, drugs (Berkowitz, Perkins)
  - Sustainability: energy consumption, hotel towel re-use, conservation (Cialdini, Schultz)
- The social norm approach in CHARM

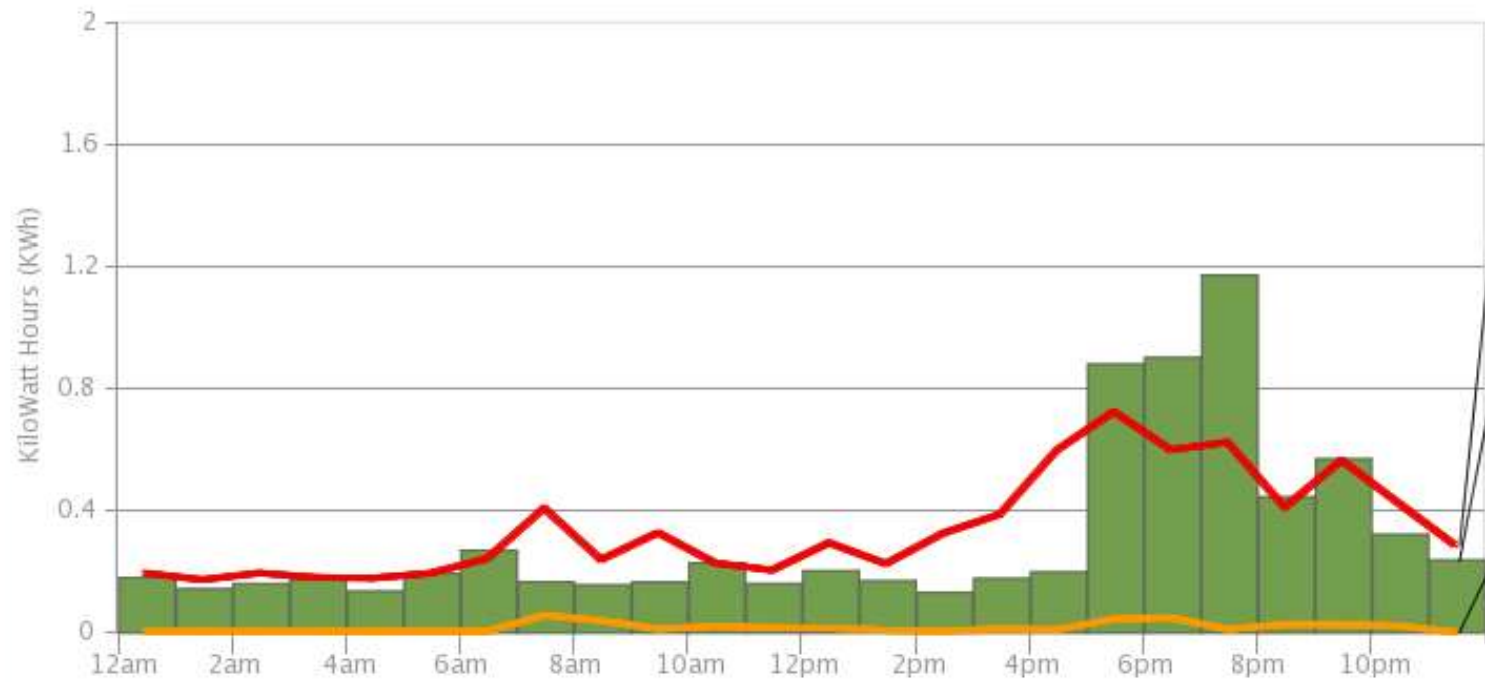


# Electricity Consumption



Your energy consumption is just below average 😊 Well done, keep it up!

Yesterday



The average in your neighbourhood

Your energy consumption 😊 Well done, keep it up!

The best 20% in your neighbourhood



Today



Yesterday



Last week



The whole study



Energy saving tips



Change password



Log off

# The social norm approach

- The social norm approach provides a socially-based injunction
- However, within the social psychology contexts in which it has been developed, 'behaviour change' itself is understood, acted upon and investigated at the level of the individual
- The potential of the social norm approach in a community context has not been examined
- We argue that a modified social norm approach can be used as a community approach, but without the social psychology baggage

# Community action

- An important element in action research approaches to energy and carbon (Heiskanen, Darby, Middlemiss)
- Can facilitate
  - Social learning (Darby)
  - Catalytic potential of specific individuals and institutions, and proximity and locale
  - Changes in attitudes and behaviour
  - Social memory and capacity
- Practice theory has been employed as a analytical framework in community action research on energy, but has not been employed as an empirical tool
- Social norm approach has not been employed within a community context





# **The Smart Communities approach**

# Practice theory as deliberative framework

- The sensibilities associated with practice theory will be employed and evaluated as a framework in community deliberation
- Make reflection of and discussion of the practice part of the practice
- Make reflection of and discussion of energy and energy reduction part of the practice
- Disrupt the habitual and taken-for-granted nature of the practices of households in a community
- Identify areas of relative individual and community agency within practices, such as behaviour and other household measures
- Identify energy reducing practices and norms that the community wishes to purposively develop as new community low carbon norms



# Social norms as community catalyst

- The social norm approach will be employed and evaluated as an approach to support the widespread adoption of the new community low carbon norms
- Information will be recorded by the community on a community web site *and* social norm feedback will be provided to the community, regarding
  - Pledges to try new norms
  - Trying out new norms
  - Adoption of new norms
  - Energy consumption itself
- Engaging with the social norm feedback itself will become part of the practice



# Community action

- Five project partners
  - Local school (further energy monitoring and work on practices, importance of children)
  - Local authority sustainability team
  - Local authority library services team (eco gadget lending library and web-access)
  - Local sustainability group
  - Energy Savings Trust
- Community participants
  - Households of children at the school
  - Other households in the vicinity of the school (approx 1000 in total)
  - Local mavens
- Community-led wherever possible
  - Community meetings
  - Cycles of action tackling different practices



# Thank you

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