

ENERGY FUTURES - EMERGING PATHWAYS IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD?

International conference by the Leibniz Research Alliance on Energy Transitions

May 6th - 8th 2020

WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Application requirements

Please submit your 250-word abstracts to the session organizer(s) by December 15th, 2019. All abstracts must include a title, your name, institutional affiliation, and contact information.

Session title

Conceptualizing the future in energy transitions – sociotechnical imaginaries, path creations, assembling the future

Session chair(s)

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Abstract:

How can we conceptualize the future in energy transitions? What kind of theoretical frameworks are helpful when we try to figure out the specific role of the future in reconfiguring an energy system or its essential parts? How can we grasp the temporal dimensions of energy transitions? – It is a key objective of the session to gain a deeper understanding of how energy transition research in social, political, cultural or geographical sciences can conceptualize the future. Contributions to this session will assess the benefits (and possible shortcomings) of specific theoretical or conceptual approaches for the understanding of the future of energy transitions. We therefore welcome theoretical conceptualizations or analytical frameworks for empirical studies on the future of energy transitions – as well as combinations of both perspectives.

One important strand of literature related to energy futures may be the STS concept of sociotechnical imaginaries by Jasanoff and Kim. Sociotechnical imaginaries are collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of scientific and/or technological projects.

However, reflecting about future energy systems and future energy societies is not restricted to this prominent concept. Other important and relevant ways of conceptualizing the future may derive from the literature related to path dependencies and path creations, from other institutionalist approaches, from discourse theory or from assemblage thinking. At the same time, shaping the future can be related to socio-material configurations and their historical roots, to meaning contexts in language, texts and discourses as well as to power relations. Imaginations and visions of sociotechnical futures are often the manifestations and results of conflicts and of power dynamics between different actors in the energy system in the past and the present.

Suggested topics may include (but are not limited to) the following aspects of conceptualizing and researching the future in energy transitions:

- understanding the history and the present of energy systems in order to learn something about energy futures
- competing and contested futures and the related power dynamics and actor constellations
- socio-technical visions and imaginations of the future in energy transitions
- the role of materialities or socio-materialities of energy futures in relational terms as socio-technical configurations, assemblages, spatial metabolisms or dispositives

- the role of space or scale for conceptualizations of energy futures and sociotechnical imaginaries (such as the role of the nation state, the role of place-based solutions, the role of regions and cities, the dimensions of territory, place, scale and network in energy futures)
- meanings of resilience, preparedness or criticality with regard to ways of shaping the future of energy systems

We anticipate 20 minute oral presentations in a multi-paper session followed by a discussion