

Energy biographies, psychosocial research and sustainable living



Karen Henwood is a social psychologist and Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. She uses established and develops bespoke social science methodologies to investigate issues of real world importance and to understand how and why questions of risk (both environmental and social) matter to people in their everyday lives. She has also worked collaboratively with networked members of the arts, sustainability and low carbon energy communities on engaging the public in reflecting on major risk issues such as climate change) and psychosocial aspects of risk.

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Social Science and Media Studies Building, Room 2135

Arguments about how to bring about change in contemporary ways of living and to address intractable climate and related risk issues are not uncontroversial: it is not so obvious how to take forward our individual and collective efforts to live more sustainably. The position we have adopted on the energy biographies research project (www.energybiographies.org) is that any such change needs to be liveable change for the humans currently alive on this planet. Our ways of working towards this, therefore, have involved seeking to understand the often highly embedded nature of routine, everyday energy practices which frequently underpin difficulties in changing them, as well as opening up reflective spaces for thinking about possibilities for change. The presentation will focus on efforts by the energy biographies research team to conduct methodologically innovative research involving a combination of narrative, multi-modal, and qualitative longitudinal data collection and analysis methods that are suited to investigating patterns of everyday energy usage and which offer rich research resources for the interpretation and analysis of empirical data. The presentation of research will suggest that patterns of practices in and of themselves cannot be viewed as responsible for the continuance of unsustainability, and that there is also a need to go deeper and broader in thinking about how people become participants in such practices.