

ANNE MAASSEN

Work in progress meeting abstract (28/01/2010)

This presentation introduces my PhD research on the uptake of solar photovoltaic (PV) technologies in three European cities (Barcelona, London and Paris). The background to this research is the growing interest in both energy policy and urban areas in the context of climate change. While energy-related processes result in the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions (over 90 percent by some estimates), these are often convergent with large urban centres, which is leading to a growing recognition of cities' importance in the climate change agenda. This gives rise to questions about what evidence there is of urban areas' reacting to the climate change imperative, their ability, and indeed willingness to do so – previous research shows that one means of reorienting cities is by means of reconfiguring the way energy is used in the city through the introduction of renewable energy technologies. The contribution to the study of the deployment of renewable energy technology from an urban geography perspective is to view these processes of technological change as spatial-temporal processes, whereby new technologies, such as PV or other renewable energy technologies, are embedded into already existing urban spaces. My research attempts to recast processes of PV deployment as a threefold exercise, where problems that the technology is thought to solve are constructed in a specific way, according to which strategies are designed and deployed to facilitate the uptake of new technologies, finally resulting in the creation of new spaces for the technology, which are both physical and discursive, social and technical, material and semiotic. This presentation introduces the PhD research and provides an outline of the argument of the thesis, drawing on specific examples to illustrate the content of the case studies, developing some conceptual ideas that will form the basis of the theoretical contribution of the thesis.