Invisible Energy Policies

Energy demand is shaped by a wide range of policy priorities and processes, some of which are directly to do with energy and its consumption, but most of which are not. DEMAND research shows that very little attention has so far been paid to the role of 'non-energy' policies in increasing and potentially reducing demand.

Energy demand is rarely a priority in policy areas like welfare, health or defence. But many of these fields have wide-ranging consequences for how much energy is used. For example, shifts in Higher Education funding in England and Wales (with reduced state grants and increased tuition fees), have made student experience a top priority for universities. This has led to increased investment in new facilities and energy-intensive services such as 24 hour libraries.

DEMAND researchers explain that boundaries between 'energy' and 'non-energy' issues are important for how demand is seen and understood. Such distinctions exist in many settings, from the division of portfolios among government departments, to the job descriptions of individual employees. For example, government energy policy tends to focus on reducing consumption either through technological efficiency or by persuading people to consume less, e.g. via price signals and smart meters: it is not often about the energy implications of non-energy policies. Similarly, in UK universities, there are clear boundaries between those responsible for improving student experience and managing libraries, and those whose job it is to provide and manage the energy required to deliver these goals.

Because non-energy policies have a significant impact on energy use, the research suggests that there is significant scope for working with non-energy policy to actively reduce consumption. As well as showing what this might involve, DEMAND researchers argue for expanding the 'energy' agenda in order to understand and influence institutional and government policies that shape the very foundations of energy demand.

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