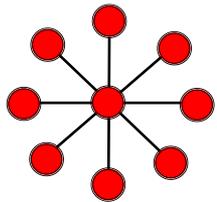# Policy works in surprising ways: sustainability and practices

SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES
RESEARCH GROUP

Nicola Spurling, Manchester University
Elizabeth Shove, Lancaster University

.

Ask how do *forms of intervention* map on to *social-theoretical assumptions* about the *nature of the problem*?

PS. Forms of possible intervention might also influence the way that problems are framed.

Notice that: there are different *forms* of 'policy' involvement

- Setting and shaping voluntary standards
- Providing advice and information
- Regulation and legislation
- Reviews of literature and case studies, documentation
- Taxes, prices, subsidies
- Visions and strategies, shaping normality

Theoretical assumptions	Target/type of intervention
The sustainability challenge can be handled by *technological* innovation, with little change in what people do.	Technology: influence and promote R and D; subsidies. Draw on visions/strategies that reproduce the status quo.
Individuals need to change their *behaviour*. If more information is provided then different choices and actions will follow.	Individuals: Providing information for instance about selecting more sustainable products/technologies and about methods of reducing the rate/volume of household energy and fuel consumption. Prices & subsidies.
Modifying *the elements of existing practices* (materials, skills, meanings) has the potential to reduce their resource intensities.	Practice: Can involve subsidies, R and D and information provision, but with a different focus. Might include setting voluntary standards, regulation & legislation.
Modifying how practices relate to each other has the potential to reduce the resource intensity of everyday life.	Practice: Can involve subsidies, R and D and information provision, but with a different focus. Might include setting voluntary standards, regulation & legislation. Requires visions & strategies that challenge rather than reproduce the status quo.
Modifying *complex systems of practice* and infrastructures has the potential to reduce the resource intensity of everyday life.	Practice: Can involve subsidies, R and D and information provision, but with a different focus. Might includes setting voluntary standards, regulation & legislation. Requires visions & strategies that challenge rather than reproduce the status quo.

Next: introduce practice performance and entity
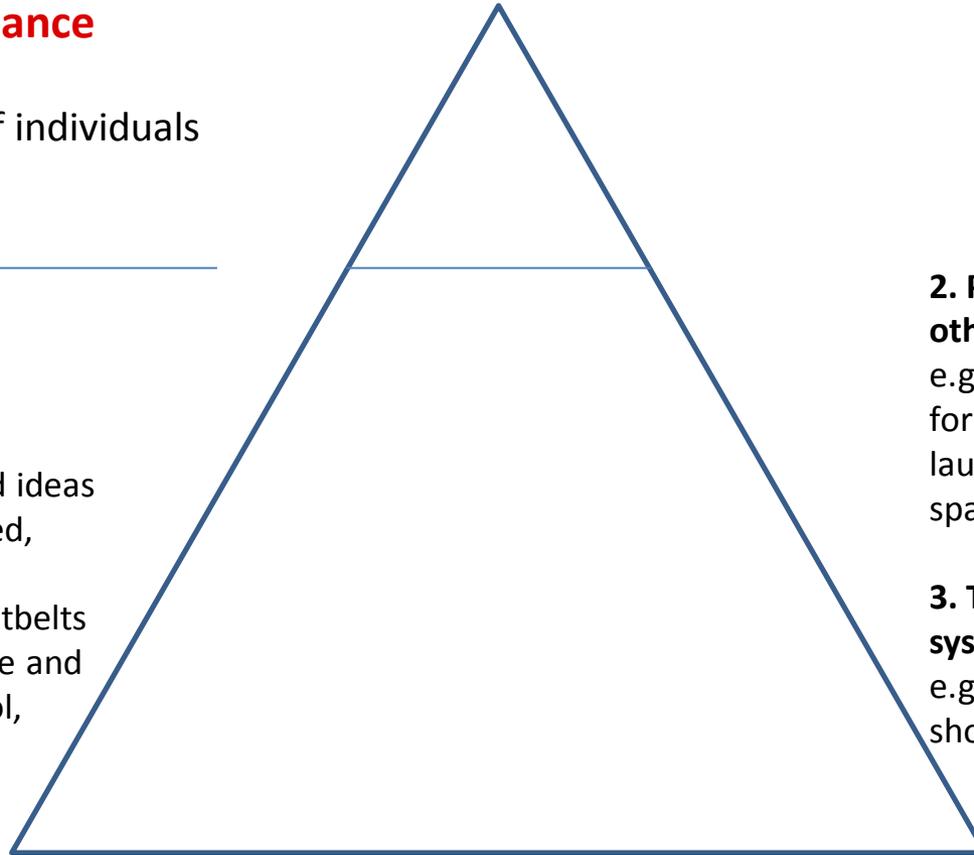
Practice as a unit of analysis and intervention

Practice-as-performance

- Observable actions of individuals

Practice-as-entity

1. Comprised of elements
-Meanings: socially shared ideas such as convenience, speed, freedom
- Materials: car, roads, seatbelts
- Competences: knowledge and skills such as clutch control, steering, judgement of braking distance.

2. Practice are related to each other
e.g. Driving and cycling compete for commuters. Multiple forms of laundry practice compete for space in the home

3. Together form complex systems of practice
e.g. working/driving, showering/working/exercising

Theoretical assumptions	Target/type of intervention
The sustainability challenge can be handled by *technological* innovation, with little change in what people do.	Technology: influence and promote R and D; subsidies. Draw on visions/strategies that reproduce the status quo.
Individuals need to change their *behaviour*. If more information is provided then different choices and actions will follow.	Individuals: Providing information for instance about selecting more sustainable products/technologies and about methods of reducing the rate/volume of household energy and fuel consumption. Prices & subsidies.
Modifying *the elements of existing practices* (materials, skills, meanings) has the potential to reduce their resource intensities.	Practice: Can involve subsidies, R and D and information provision, but with a different focus. Might include setting voluntary standards, regulation & legislation.
Modifying how practices relate to each other has the potential to reduce the resource intensity of everyday life.	Practice: Can involve subsidies, R and D and information provision, but with a different focus. Might include setting voluntary standards, regulation & legislation. Requires visions & strategies that challenge rather than reproduce the status quo.
Modifying *complex systems of practice* and infrastructures has the potential to reduce the resource intensity of everyday life.	Practice: Can involve subsidies, R and D and information provision, but with a different focus. Might includes setting voluntary standards, regulation & legislation. Requires visions & strategies that challenge rather than reproduce the status quo.

Next: consider some specific examples

Case study 1: The King Review of low carbon cars (2007/8) (review)

Theoretical assumptions	**Target/type of intervention**
The sustainability challenge can be handled by *technological* innovation, with little change in what people do.	Technology: Decarbonise car (combustion engine modifications through to electric vehicle) and decarbonise energy supply.
Individuals need to change their *behaviour.* If more information is provided then different choices and actions will follow.	Individuals: Information provision/ campaigns to encourage individuals to undertake fuel efficient driving. Include eco-driving within the driving test. Information provision to choose more efficient vehicles.
Modifying the elements of existing practices (materials, skills, meanings) has the potential to reduce their resource intensities.	*In addition to info provision/campaigns (cultural meanings/social rules), driving lessons (skills), intervene in the infrastructure which partly shapes how driving is done (e.g. Congestion/flow technologies). New regulations for car manufacture?*
Modifying how practices relate to each other has the potential to reduce the resource intensity of everyday life.	*Foster 'competition' for practice performers between alternative practices – such as commuter cycling and commuter driving.*
Modifying complex systems of practice and infrastructures. Develop interventions that influence these interconnections.	*Intervene in the spatial organisation of practices to change how mobility interconnects with shopping, work, habitation. Intervene in the provisioning of food to homes to change driving practice.*

Case study 2: The Code for Sustainable Homes (voluntary standard)

Theoretical assumptions	Target/type of intervention
The sustainability challenge can be handled by *technological* innovation, with little change in what people do.	Reduce resource intensity of all the practices which take place within the home by awarding credits for use of particular materials, and construction techniques, and particular technologies (e.g. outdoor lighting that turns itself off during the day).
Individuals need to change their *behaviour.* If more information is provided then different choices and actions will follow.	Use code level and certification to market homes that are sustainable. Give points, in the Code, for home user guide, devices that show energy use.
Modifying *the elements of existing practices* (materials, skills, meanings) has the potential to reduce their resource intensities.	Use the Code to specify which 'elements of practice' might be included in the infrastructure to make existing practices more sustainable.
Modifying how practices relate to each other has the potential to reduce the resource intensity of everyday life.	Use the Code to promote and provide infrastructures that make new practices possible, that make other practices more difficult, or that encourage existing trends to persist and take hold.
Modifying *complex systems of practice* and infrastructures. Develop interventions that influence these interconnections.	Use this and other Codes to promote and provide infrastructure designed to change where, when and how practices are enacted e.g. Home office.

Does theoretical inconsistency matter?

Some say no: Wilson and Chatterton (2012) argue that different theoretical approaches emphasise different aspects of behaviour and that policy makers can pick and choose according to taste.

Mapping behaviours using the framework points to most appropriate models or theories

Most likely to be emphasised by conventional micro-economics

ACTOR	Individual	Inter-Personal Network	Community	Segment/Group	Population
DOMAIN	Cognitive	Bodily	Technological	Institutional/Social	Infrastructural
DURABILITY	One-Off	Repeated	Dependent	Enduring	Norm-Setting
SCOPE	Discrete	Inter-related	Bundled	Structuring	Lifestyle

Most likely to be emphasised by MINDSPACE

ACTOR	Individual	Inter-Personal Network	Community	Segment/Group	Population
DOMAIN	Cognitive	Bodily	Technological	Institutional/Social	Infrastructural
DURABILITY	One-Off	Repeated	Dependent	Enduring	Norm-Setting
SCOPE	Discrete	Inter-related	Bundled	Structuring	Lifestyle

Most likely to be emphasised by Practice Theory

ACTOR	Individual	Inter-Personal Network	Community	Segment/Group	Population
DOMAIN	Cognitive	Bodily	Technological	Institutional/Social	Infrastructural
DURABILITY	One-Off	Repeated	Dependent	Enduring	Norm-Setting
SCOPE	Discrete	Inter-related	Bundled	Structuring	Lifestyle

We say yes:

because some strategies reproduce the status quo – they reproduce 'normal' practices (as entities) and relations between them – in this they **conflict** with others that challenge the range of practices that exist in society.

	Practice as performance		Practice as entity	
	Stability	Change	Stability	Change
Technology	usually	sometimes inadvertently	usually	sometimes inadvertently
Behaviour*		That's the goal	That's the goal	
Modifying elements of existing practices		always		always
Modifying how practices relate to each other		always		always
Modifying complex systems of practice		always		always

* The idea is to promote more efficient ways of doing the same thing

Notice that classic policy interventions reproduce the status quo

Revisiting policy interventions in these terms

	King review	Code for sustainable homes
Technology		
Behaviour		
Modifying elements of existing practices		
Modifying how practices relate to each other		
Modifying complex systems of practice		

Notice that policy interventions are not generally designed to challenge practices (as entities).

Notice that policy interventions can nonetheless have surprising and unintended consequences – accidently modifying practices (as entities).

Notice that policy interventions differ in how far they challenge practices (as entities).

Notice that noticing these points could inform more effective and more challenging forms of policy intervention

More effective/challenging forms of policy intervention?

	King review	Code for sustainable homes
Technology		
Behaviour		
Modifying elements of existing practices		
Modifying how practices relate to each other		
Modifying complex systems of practice		