

Public interest in the private sphere: how far into the home can local policy-making reach?

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Keywords

policy-making, information, public, private, energy guidance, energy consultant, households, citizens, efficiency, ecological citizenship

Abstract

Environmental problems in the energy system largely originate from everyday activities and choices. The home is a 'node' of daily life and is often seen as our private sphere. However, the privacy of the home can be contested in relation to local policies in general and energy and environmental policies in particular. This paper discusses the private/public divide in energy policies and how this divide appears to Swedish municipal energy consultants. By analyzing the actions of several energy consultants and their efforts to influence households as well as how households perceive this guidance, we can gauge how far policy instruments have penetrated the private sphere.

Municipal energy consultants are careful in providing advice to the households: they preserve a rather large 'no-trespassing' area to avoid interfering in peoples' private sphere. Households can accept information, even individually tailored information, but will not accept requests to do certain things. Authorities can *inform* but not *tell* people how to act: the decision is still the householders'. Looking at exactly how both households and consultants reason about energy efficiency and the public/private divide, we can discern tendencies for what were earlier considered private concerns to be increasingly perceived as common or public concerns. Energy consultants are trying to find ways to influence family lifestyle while householders are requesting individual inspections and want the consultants to keep individual records of family energy use, not regarding this information as too private. Swedish regulations, however,

are hampering this development and delaying the urgent need for changes in both technologies used and energy-related behaviours.

Introduction

The EU directive (2006/32) on more efficient energy use and services states that by 2016 member states should reduce energy use by 9% compared with their average over the five years before 2006. The reduction, to be achieved by improved energy efficiency (SOU, 2008, pp.25, 399), concerns all end-users and energy efficiency measures must be implemented in all sectors. This paper focuses on households as end-users and on one means to achieving the end of better efficiency, namely, information provision, specifically municipal energy counseling in Sweden.

Policy aiming to promote energy efficiency in the household sector must relate to and rely on individuals and on their daily choices, household routines, and everyday lives. The values and knowledge of individuals are important for the development of an efficient and ecologically sustainable energy system. People's understanding of their own responsibilities and willingness to shoulder them are seen as key factors in creating a sustainable society (Kretsloppsdelegationen, 1997). Information provision as a means of control is used by public organizations to inform citizens about how they can reduce their energy consumption and about the energy-efficient technology available on the market. In Sweden, there is a long tradition of mass schooling and there seems to be a strong belief in information campaigns and the ability to foster change through learning. Vedung (1995) asserts that there is good reason to believe that informational policy instruments have become increasingly common as society

has moved towards deregulation and privatization. Information can serve a pedagogical end when the government informs the people about what is good or bad or how they should or should not act. By disseminating information, the government tries to exert influence by convincing, arguing, pleading, or educating. In the case of informational policy instruments, the government's relationship with the ruled is manifested through knowledge transfer and persuasion. The addressees are not *forced* to consider the facts or follow the advice. They are not rewarded or punished in any way, as is the case with economic control means or regulations (Vedung, 1995; Lindén, 2001). Follow-ups of information initiatives have also indicated how difficult it is to influence energy use. Information often targets different groups of people, and this variation causes problems in terms of whether or not, and when information influences behaviour (Ketola 2001; Löfström & Palm 2008).

The paper focuses on municipal energy guidance directed towards households. The Swedish energy guidance model is considered unique for Sweden (Kjeang, 2005). The energy consultants are employed by the municipalities but financed by state subsidies. The purpose of this municipal energy guidance is to disseminate objective knowledge of environmentally friendly energy sources, energy distribution, and energy use. Both the Swedish Energy Agency (SEA) and the commission of an energy efficient Sweden believe municipal energy guidance is especially important when it comes to reaching single-family houses (SEA, 2007; SOU, 2008:25). The municipal energy consultants are important as a communication link between public policy goals and the citizens.

An important restriction on the municipal energy guidance programme, though, is that the consultants can only provide general information and cannot conduct individual house inspections (Swedish Government Decree, 1997:1322). This prohibition is in place so that municipal energy consultants do not compete with private consultants on the market. According to the commission of an energy efficient Sweden, which investigated important public measures to help Sweden achieve a 9% reduction in energy use by 2016, information and education are basic and necessary, but not sufficient preconditions for achieving more efficient energy use. According to the Commission, information provision can influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour (SOU, 2008:25, p.89). The Commission also noted that special problems were encountered in gaining homeowner acceptance of energy-efficiency measures (SOU, 2008:25, p.192). But how can municipal energy consultants, by providing only general information, influence how people behave in the private sphere, how they choose to live their lives? This is a delicate question impinging on how public authorities can and should advise their citizens without trespassing on their privacy. What can these consultants discuss with the households? What subjects are too private? That will be discussed in this paper.

This paper also discusses the private/public divide and how this divide appears in municipal energy guidance. How do these energy consultants try to influence households and how do the households perceive this guidance? How far do the policy instruments reach into the private sphere? Does energy guidance reach so far into the private sphere that privacy is threatened? Alternately, is the respect for our privacy so great

that these policy instruments have become ineffective? These are the questions in focus.

The paper starts by relating the public/private divide to earlier studies of the subject and the more recently discussed concept of 'ecological citizenship'. Then, I describe the field studies on which this paper is based. The results of interviews with municipal energy consultants and householders are then presented. The paper ends with conclusions concerning how the public/private divide is handled by the energy consultants and possible consequences for the efficiency potential of households in the future.

The public/private divide in earlier research

Household energy use has long been treated as a 'black box', something one might, should, or could not intentionally attempt to influence. It has usually been regarded as something only to be regulated by individual consumers. A possible means of control that has developed is general information provision, as formulated in phrases such as: 'Turn off the light when leaving a room', and 'Do not waste water'. In research, informational policy instruments are often regarded as a weak mode of coercion. Bemelmans-Videc (1998) maintains that information is seen as a *modern* form of intervention, which is attractive to policymakers because it can put the 'emphasis on prevention of wrong or stimulation of the right conduct by offering insights into consequences of behavior' (Bemelmans-Videc, 1998, p. 11). The state then tries to influence the private realm or its citizens by using logical argument to persuade them to do the 'right' things.

The private/public divide has been discussed since Plato and Aristotle first explored ideas of the state and its citizens. The meaning of 'public' and 'private' has been of interest since then. Weintraub (1997) delineated four broad fields of discourse in which different notions of public and private currently play important roles:

1. The liberal-economistic model: This model is dominant in most public policy analysis and in everyday legal and political debate. Here, the public/private divide is found between the public sector and the private sector and usually refers to the distinction between governmental and non-governmental. This orientation defines public/private issues as having to do with striking a balance between individual and contractually created organizations, on the one hand, and state action, on the other hand.
2. The republican virtue (i.e., classical) approach: In this model, the public realm (or public sphere) encompasses the political community based on citizenship. Public life is a process of active participation in collective decision-making carried out within a framework of fundamental solidarity and equality.

In the liberal-economistic model, political or public authority is held by the administrative state. In the republican virtue approach, politics refers to a world of discussion, debate, deliberation, and collective decision-making, all in concert with action.

3. **Public life as sociability:** This approach sees the public realm as a 'sphere of fluid and polymorphous sociability, and seeks to analyze the cultural and dramatic conventions that make it possible' (Weintraub, 1997, p.7). In this sense, the public has nothing to do, necessarily, with collective decision-making (let alone the state). The key is not solidarity or obligation but sociability. The private realm is the realm of personal life and above all domesticity, including the emotionally intense and intimate domain of family and friendship. The private realm of personal life is demarcated from the public realm of *gesellschaft*, epitomized by the market and bureaucratically administered formal organizations with their instrumental domains and formal institutions.
4. **Feminism:** private/public as family/civil society. The split between public and private life has been a central organizing theme in feminist theory. According to Weintraub (1997), there has been a tendency in feminist research to treat the family as the paradigmatic private realm, so the domestic/public formulation is often used almost interchangeably with private/public.

In the first and second models, the main conceptual interest is usually in defining the public and its boundaries, the private often becoming a somewhat residual category. In the feminist model, the private sphere or the family is the focus while the public becomes the residual category. According to Weintraub, the third model falls somewhere between models 1, 2, and 4 (Weintraub, 1997, p.28).

To these four models another can be added, born in 'green' theory where the political sphere is often broadened to include aspects traditionally seen as private. Citizens' responsibilities are central to Andrew Dobson's (2005) idea of 'ecological citizenship'. Ecological citizenship implies that ecological citizens are obliged to reduce the ecological footprints created by their consumption and everyday lifestyle, in order not to affect other citizens' opportunities and rights to life and health. Furthermore, ecological citizens do this out of sympathy and a willingness to take responsibility for their actions. They do it to contribute, not out of self-interest or to gain anything, nor do they expect these deeds to be returned. According to Dobson, ecological citizenship takes place in the public as well as the private spheres and recognizes no territorial limitations or boundaries. The whole point of ecological citizenship is that what have been considered private acts have public implications, so the private/public dichotomy needs to be dissolved. When discussing the public/private divide below, I will mainly refer to this ecological citizenship approach and to the first model, the liberal-economistic model identified by Weintraub. In other words, it is the public sector as the administrative state versus the private sector including the market (where citizens act as consumers) and citizen action at home that will be in focus and problematized here.

In the following, I will discuss how Swedish householders and municipal energy consultants relate to the public/private divide.

Methodology

A case study was conducted in a Swedish municipality where homeowners have been part of an energy use reduction project arranged by municipal energy consultants. This was a time-limited project where the energy consultants were allowed to visit the homeowners and conduct individual inspections. In this study, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with the two energy consultants and six of the 10 households included in the project. Four households declined to take part in our research. We asked about the information given by the consultants, what information was included and excluded and why, and what issues were seen as too private to discuss. In another ongoing research project, we interviewed householders who had invested or are interested in investing in wind turbines and/or solar panels and/or solar heating. I then added questions about their energy behaviour and contacted energy consultants in these interviews. Then, another 17 homeowners and three tenants were interviewed about how they perceived the general information they received from the energy consultant and what issues they thought were too private to discuss.

I also interviewed 14 energy consultants in the counties of Östergötland and Dalarna using the above questions. The turnover of energy consultants is quite high, so not all municipalities had energy consultants in place in autumn 2008 when the interviews were conducted. It is also quite common for municipalities to cooperate and share energy consultants. In Dalarna, 12 of the county's 15 municipalities are represented and in Östergötland, 10 of the county's 13 municipalities are represented.

The interviews were recorded using an MP3 recorder/player and then transcribed. All interviewees are anonymized in the paper and I will refer to the respondents as householders A–Z and energy consultants A–N. This still lets the reader see, for example, how often a single interviewee is quoted or referred to.

In the analysis I have used an inductive method with the empirical material stemming from the interviewed consultants and households. I identified different arguments that the consultant and householders put forward when trying to explain how they perceived the public-private divide and I used these arguments to organising the material. I finish the empirical discussion by comparing the consultants and the householders answer to search for similarities and differences in their way to approach this issue.

Energy guidance targeting households in Sweden: a historical overview

Swedish municipalities first began receiving state funding to provide energy inspection and consultancy services to households in the 1978–1986 period. The activities generally involved outwardly directed energy advice, which was often imparted through a guidance office or at special informational meetings. In this period, these activities also involved energy inspections of properties, and compiling associated advice and inspection records. Relatively standardized advice recommending additional insulation, furnace adjustments, and window sealing was often provided in such instances. These municipal energy guid-

ance activities did not target industry, but apartment buildings and detached houses were the focus (Palm, 2004, 2006).

State support for municipal energy guidance was withdrawn from 1986 to 1998, but reinstated on 1 January 1998 (SEA, 1999). This time municipal energy guidance was supposed to target both the general public and small companies and organizations. It was intended to provide impartial and locally adapted information and guidance on energy issues; this guidance concerns areas such as energy, technology, and consumer advice but cannot include inspections. Starting in 2008, it can also address the municipality's own administrative bodies or companies. The Swedish Energy Agency supports municipal energy guidance activities by providing both information and funding. The official purpose of this municipal energy guidance is to disseminate knowledge of environmentally friendly energy sources, energy distribution, and energy use (SEA, 1999; Government Bill, 2001/02, p. 143).

Every year the municipal energy consultants report their activities over the course of the year to the Swedish Energy Agency. This report is related to the state financing of the municipal energy guidance: municipalities only receive state subsidies if they complete and submit this report, which results in 100% submission frequency. According to these the municipal reports all municipalities provided some sort of energy guidance in 2007, and 5% of the Swedish population or 500,000 people had contact with a municipal energy consultant (SEA, 2008a). Information provision over the telephone is the most common activity and the most common issues advised on concern energy subsidies, pellets, heat pumps, and general energy advice. The implemented measures are not evaluated, however. Informational activities are also generally considered hard to evaluate, because of validation problems in isolating and specifying the effect of a single information campaign (Bemelmans-Videc, Rist, & Vedung, 1998). The evaluation done concerns measuring the number of contacts made over a year, though the actual number is not included in the evaluation (SEA, 2008b). In my interviews, however, the energy consultants said that they handled between five and 30 phone calls per week. Most energy consultants have a university degree, often in a technological field; their work experience usually relates to the construction, energy, and environmental sectors (SEA, 2008b).

Results of the field studies

In this section, I present the results of the interviews with municipal energy consultants and households. First, I discuss the energy consultants' view of the public/private divide, then the household perception of this issue.

THE ENERGY CONSULTANTS IN THE COUNTIES OF ÖSTERGÖTLAND AND DALARNA

First, I can conclude that it was difficult for the energy consultant to give a straight answer as to where the divide between public and private is located, simply because this was not a matter to which they had given any deep thought. The spontaneous reaction was that there was really no clear demarcation. In general, they said that because they only *inform*, they did not interfere in people's personal lives. Another reason why energy guidance was seen as impersonal was that technology was often the focus. The households wanted to know about vari-

ous technologies available on the market and what products were comparatively better, and this was regarded as a rather harmless information activity. One consultant said, for example, that energy was much easier to discuss than climate issues in general, because energy use is related to personal finances and everyone is interested in saving money. The climate, on the other hand, is more related to lifestyle and is harder to influence (energy consultant I).

However, when continuing to discuss the public versus private divide, a common response was that the boundary was drawn when energy use was connected to behavioural and lifestyle issues:

Yes, behaviour, I cannot interfere with that, only appeal. I can only make people aware. (energy consultant N)

This energy consultant developed his ideas when he said that he could only appeal to people:

And this with showering and bathing. Yeah, ok, you should know that it costs six, seven kilowatt hours to take a bath and it costs two, three kilowatt hours to shower. If you know that, then it is ok whatever you do. If you want to lie there and have a nice time with a drink and candles or whatever you do, then it is ok. Then the bath has another value. You are not there just to be clean, but to enjoy the moment. ... It is a cost you choose. It is not that you are not allowed to use energy, but it is the awareness that energy costs money. That is what I want to achieve; that is the message. (energy consultant N)

In this sense, the divide between public and private was related to knowledge. The public can only inform the citizens about the *consequences* of an act, if the citizen then chooses to continue engaging in an energy-wasting act, there is nothing the consultant can do. Some of the consultants emphasized that they thought that increased awareness will in the long run change attitudes and benefit energy efficiency.

A lifestyle-related issue cited by several of the consultants as hard to deal with was when they received calls from older people who had high energy costs related to living in a big house:

When they live in a large house that is old and perhaps has an oil boiler there is a lot of maintenance that needs to be done. And I, sometimes I jump right into it and say that I would like to advise you to move to an apartment. But, even though that would be the wisest thing to do, it is not easy. It is a sensitive issue, so you cannot just walk in there and just say that, but you have to ask them and listen to how they react. That can be too private and I have to be careful. (energy consultant M)

According to all the consultants, the obvious advice in this situation was to advise these people to move to smaller living quarters. However, they usually did not give this advice because that would mean crossing an obvious demarcation and entering into the private sphere. Lifestyle-related issues were important but also the most difficult issues to handle for the consultants:

Anything where people regard their quality of life as decreasing is hard to deal with. Even though the things are not really necessary...it is still hard to change. People are used

to having more and more TVs and other technical products in their homes, and even if they don't use them, this habit of acquiring more products is hard to change. (energy consultant J)

This also highlights the problem that people not always act according to their attitudes, so even if the households are aware of the climate change issue and how they should act, it can be hard to put this into practice.

Another 'sensitive' issue, to use the consultants' labelling, was when high energy consumption was related to all the items people collect at home:

You also have to be careful when you think that people have many, very specific gadgets at the same time as they are complaining about overly expensive bills. And they have a lot of equipment that they never turn off, then you need to be diplomatic... a little diplomatic, but at the same time you *want* to say something. But this concerns peoples' everyday life, in people's homes. You cannot say anything. (energy consultant M)

High energy consumption is often related to luxury consumption that, at the same time, is important for people trying to fulfil their goal to live a 'good life'. It is obviously complicated dealing with the complex relationship that usually exists between energy consumption and the dream of a good life:

If they want it to look nice, have some cosiness, then I don't tell them to give that up. But I can mention and ask whether they are aware of how much a waterbed or a Jacuzzi costs. If they are aware that the running cost is high, but they think that they feel good by having this thing, then that is great for them. I don't advise them to throw the things out. It must be reasonable... we have to be able to live and be human beings. (energy consultant D)

There are several behaviour-related trends that point in the wrong direction in relation to the energy use reduction goal of society and about which the consultants felt they had no influence. One such trend was that of garden and patio heaters that make it possible to sit outside or on the balcony even when it is just a few degrees outside. Most people are not prepared to sacrifice these items just to reduce their energy consumption. One tactic used by the consultants in this situation was to make people at least choose an 'energy smart alternative' (energy consultants G and H). However, no consultant argued with the householders about the need for such items – that would be intruding on people's personal lives, according to the consultants.

One consultant discussed how technological innovations could be a problem when trying to implement energy efficient behaviour:

... energy behaviour is very hard to influence, especially when it comes to habits. Many people think that technology will solve everything, that you'll have a sensor when entering a room, and things like this. It is great because then you don't need to think about it. On the other hand, this is part of the problem – [their attitude] that they don't need to think on their own. (energy consultant L)

Technology was otherwise a 'safe' area for the consultants. If they could advise the households to consume energy-efficient technology, then both they and the householders were happy and felt they had contributed to sustainable development.

A problem the consultants mentioned was that citizens often phoned them with a specific question in mind: often they wanted to know whether there were any subsidies for a particular investment, or what product was the best to choose in a given situation. The consultants often felt that the household would be better off if they had a systemic perspective and perhaps started with another issue. The most common question in Sweden in the autumn and winter concerns the heating system, due to the cold climate. For a while, there has been a trend to invest in heat pumps, so the homeowners call the energy consultants to get more information about various related products available on the market. The consultants, however, thought that the homeowners were starting with the *last* question, and that they should start by investigating their building envelope before comparing various heating products on the market. If they started by changing windows and insulating the walls or attic, then they could invest in a smaller heat pump, which would make them save more money in the long run. This was the tricky part for the consultants. The citizens just wanted comparative information on the products on the market and did not want to discuss consequences or alternatives. The consultants felt they had to answer the specific question asked them, and found it hard to direct the discussion towards energy-efficiency measures and reduced energy use (energy consultant L).

One consultant said that 'people hear what people want to hear', meaning that often people called him for confirmation that a planned investment was good:

When we perhaps mention some critical or negative aspects of the investment, then they can be a little disappointed and think that we just mess things up. (energy consultant J)

A restriction for the energy consultants was then also:

I am not like a door-to-door salesman or telemarketer or the like /.../ I don't want to annoy people. (energy consultant M)

It was important for the consultants to maintain good relations with the citizens; they are public servants after all, as some of them stressed. These good relations were obvious in the time-limited project 'the Energy Hunt', run in 2005–2006 by energy consultants in Linköping. Ten detached-house owners were involved. The goal of the project was to foster 'sustainable energy use'. The included families received energy counselling over the course of one year on how to reduce both household energy costs and environmental impact. Every family received an energy inspection in their home, during which the consultants followed a set routine. In every house, they inspected the insulation, windows, ventilation, and how the building envelope in general was constructed. In terms of energy use, they examined the household electricity use of appliances and noted the ages of the fridge, freezer, dishwasher, washing machine, and electric stove. Every family also received advice on energy-efficiency measures, such as insulating the attic, sealing windows and doors, buying a new water heater, and converting to a system with water as heat carrier. At the first meeting, the homeowners

ers also received a bag of useful products, such as a low-energy lamp, electricity meter, sealing strips, an indoor thermometer, and brochures.

The consultants emphasized that a key to success was to create a comfortable relationship with these families:

We wanted them to feel that this was a nice thing to participate in and not that we were some odd people who came and went without respecting their integrity. And I actually think that most of them thought that our meetings were nice. (energy consultant A)

The consultants were a little bit disappointed at the results of the project: most of their suggested investments were not made because the households thought they were too expensive. One consultant said that the lack of ability to offer subsidies to the households was a big problem, and it was hard to go any further without subsidies (energy consultant E).

In this project, the divide between public and private was obvious and was drawn at the threshold of the house. The consultants suggested various measures and informed the households of available options, but they did not interfere with the decision made. That they left up to the families. They did not question any decision the families made and preferred to maintain pleasant relations with them rather than try to convince them, for example, to replace an oil burner, which could be an alternative strategy for the consultants.

It is generally clear from the interviews with all the consultants that it is hard to interfere with people's choice of investments. One common comment was that as long as citizens can afford to pay for high energy consumption, then they will do that. The energy consultants have no weapon to wield against that. Consumption seems to be part of the private realm. It is the consumer who must pay for the investment; the consultants cannot interfere with any investment decision, but only point out the different options available and their impacts on the environment and on household finances. Household finances are a private issue. Why some expensive measures are implemented while others are not is also difficult for the consultants to understand:

There are some expensive measures that can reduce energy consumption, but that are also the most difficult for households actually to implement. At the same time, other measures are also really expensive but are implemented anyway, for example, ground-source heat pumps. On the other hand, many talk about changing windows, but the barriers to investing in those seem so much higher. And this isn't easy to explain. (energy consultant M)

One consultant said that households often wanted him to calculate what measures were most profitable. However, he would not agree to do that because he thought that it was always debatable in what way a measure was profitable. Perhaps it would be more profitable for a household to run the old boiler another one or two years instead of buying a new one and instead invest in a new car. He tried to broaden perspectives and mention other possible investments good for both the households' finances and the environment (energy consultant K). Another strategy used was to highlight the economic benefits

the household could realize on an investment and then sneak in the environment:

Some measures have a really short pay-off time, and then I can advise them to do them to earn this amount. And then I add that then you can also do a huge favour for the environment. (energy consultant G)

Many of the issues raised by the energy consultants were also discussed by the householders; their input will be discussed next.

HOUSEHOLD PERCEPTIONS OF THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DIVIDE

When the public/private divide was discussed at a more general level with the householders, a common response was:

All measures are OK to use to reach people, but they must be mediated through free and independent sources. (householder C)

They did not spontaneously see energy-related issues as threatening the private sphere. The households thought no advice or policy means were too private because they related the question to existing regulations and measures used to reach the households:

There is nothing that is too private to request people to do. Not in the energy area – there is mostly information. (householder P)

The households did not perceive existing policy means as interfering with their privacy. They generally believed that government and authorities should undertake a greater number of intensive initiatives to change energy behaviour. Another common householder view was that *other* people needed to become aware. The interviewees felt themselves to be conscious of their energy use and they knew and sympathized with the importance of reducing energy consumption to save the environment; *other people*, however, needed to become aware. These 'others' were sometimes symbolized by young people. One common sentiment was that government needed to focus on youth, who, according to the interviewees, did not care about energy efficiency. This was often exemplified by a young person's habit of taking a long hot shower just because it felt good. It is worth noting, though, that all our interviewees were over 30 years old.

Household C thought that the divide between public and private was changing incrementally and that people generally accept more government interference today than they did just five years ago. They took the 'A labelling' of refrigerators and freezers as an example. When it first turned up, the man in one household had felt that this was rather 'unattractive top-down governing'; now, however, he accepted it and even thought that A labelling should be used on many more goods.

Energy labelling was something several householders cited as a good example of government regulation that was informative but not too private. 'You communicate with us, but you don't interfere with our decision', as one householder put it (householder D). The government signals what they believe is a good choice, but it is still up to the consumer to decide.

When discussing this further and when the householders gave examples and developed their ideas, the answers became more divergent than when the public/private divide was dis-

cussed at a general level. Householder C thought that regulations should be used much more than they are, that the government should use 'all measures available'. They exemplified that by citing the explosion of SUVs in cities. This development was something that should be forbidden by law, according to the household. They reasoned that because there is no real use for SUVs in the city, forbidding them cannot really interfere with someone's privacy. They wanted 'a strong environmental protection act, but first and foremost prohibitions'. They also wanted a ban on all vehicles using more than 0.5 L/10 km, a ban on all cars in the city centre, a ban on all mining (because there is enough extracted metal in the world), and a ban on all large tractors. Householder K spoke in a similar way, saying that existing policy means were far from interfering with the private sphere and that regulations could be much more extensive. He also mentioned that SUVs should be prohibited and that the polluter-pay principle should be applied in the domestic area as well.

Householder E, on the other hand, said that regulations and prohibitions were useless and too often reached too far into the private sphere. Individual advice and guidance were more legitimate and because of that more useful, according to this householder. Householder R felt that only subsidies and information were acceptable, and that all other means would be too private; how to make people act in line with this information was another matter, according to this householder.

Householder D emphasized the importance of nagging about the need to improve energy efficiency. He felt that advice to switch off the light, lower indoor temperatures, etc., can never be too personal. That such information could not be too personal was also part of the problem in reducing energy consumption, according to householder D. He believed that authorities needed to make information personal for people to react. He thought that the Swedish Energy Agency should conduct a marketing campaign where they told people what gadgets they could buy after they had reduced their energy use, because 'people like buying stuff. They like that. I think that kind of information is needed to get people really to understand.' He did not believe in the strategy of relating energy use reduction to doing a good deed for nature, because 'they don't care; that is what I believe anyway' (householder D).

A common sentiment was that households were happy to receive information, but that it should then be up to them to decide how to act; for example:

It is completely legitimate to give advice and make requests on how to save energy. That is not too private. It is only information and people act as they want to anyway. (householder H)

I gladly receive tips and advice, but then it is up to me what to do with it, what suits my home the best. I want to decide on my own. (householder L)

Alternately, as householder G put it, 'There is nothing that is too private and that authorities should not ask people to do'. He added later in the interview, though, that 'all people have the right to decide what they will do anyway'. This householder was rather sceptical of the possibility of reducing energy consumption, because 'society is built around energy-consuming activities and we are stuck in the lifestyle we have' (householder G).

Another way to reason about the public/private divide was to state that authorities could make sure that people had the opportunity and information to make good choices if they wanted to, but that they did not need to tell them how to act: 'But they can facilitate those of us who want to contribute to the environment' (householder S).

Not all households, however, were grateful for all information and tips. Householder M was annoyed at the requests, for example, to shower for less time and not use the tumble drier. In such cases, he felt that the government had trespassed on his private sphere long ago: 'This makes me only angry, and this is something that I should decide on my own'. He believed that a better method would be to give every household an individual report on their energy use, i.e., how much was used by the tumble drier, heating, various appliances, etc. Then it should be up to every individual to decide what s/he wanted to give up. The individual report should only show the potential energy savings instead of requesting specific things to do (householder M).

It was rather surprising, I feel, that several householders said they wanted more individual inspections where the consultants measured all energy-related activities and appliances in their homes and gave them feedback on what they could do to reduce their energy consumption. That these inspections would result in figures seemed to make such advice neutral and could explain why the householders did not feel such supervision threatened their private sphere. Alternately, as householder N said when explaining how general information could be complemented with individual statistics and still be acceptable, 'No sentimentality, but straight on, easy and simple information about your energy use and costs' (householder N). These householders still thought it was important for the government not to try to govern the private sphere, but that family energy use should be visualized in a 'neutral' way. Notably, Sweden has lacked debate about the installation of 'smart meters' in relation to the emergence of a 'Big Brother' society, a debate that has appeared in other countries.

Householder E, who was rather critical of municipal energy consultants, said that they should make individual inspections because they needed to

... go to the individual consumer and look at individual needs in order to suggest suitable solutions: what can different individuals in different phases of life do to reduce their consumption, how are individuals living, what habits, priorities are they doing, and so on (householder E).

This statement was related to the desire that authorities should inform citizens better about how to behave in various situations. Instead of 'interfering in people's lives', as householder R put it, government should give concrete advice on how to act in various situations. Householder R cited an example of a question related to a hot water tank: should she turn it off or was it more energy efficient to keep it on when going away on vacation? Several households lacked such specific and useful information.

In the 'Energy Hunt' project, the energy consultants visited the participants' homes and gave practical tips on how to save energy. Even though these inspections were seen as a positive element of the project, some of these households felt that the

consultants could have been even more specific during the individual inspections and given even more practical tips. Householder J, however, reflected on the difficult situation the consultants confronted in their inspections, which concerned the problem of knowing when advice touched on the private sphere:

It probably is a balancing act. Some people don't like it when you poke into their lives and tell them what to do. They probably had a hard time finding out how far they could go in their advice and in their remarks. To find a balance (householder J).

The households were generally supportive of the Energy Hunt. For the households involved, the main motive for taking an interest in energy efficiency was the possibility of saving money. Energy was seen simply as a cost for these households.

Not that many of the suggested measures had been implemented by the households, however, for two main reasons. The most common reason was economic: the suggested measures were simply too expensive. As well, how the family prioritized among different investment options was a private issue, according to all households; this, the consultants could and should not interfere with. The other reason was related to design, and that was also a private issue. It was important, for example, that a new more energy-efficient door should match the overall design of the house. If the homeowner could not find such an item, then the measure was postponed until they found one (householder I). One family, for example, had handmade windows that they wanted to keep at any cost (householder A). Household I could not 'sacrifice' an aesthetically attractive thing for one that was more energy efficient. Several of the suggested measures were rejected by the households because they could not find solutions for their house design.

One homeowner had electrical heating; all the measures suggested to deal with it were expensive and the household had rejected them all (householder F). Finances were more important than environmental concerns, and the woman in the household said:

We don't do a lot of unnecessary things to pretend that we are environmentally aware. There must be some logical thinking involved and also economic benefits (householder F).

This household said that they needed to prioritize their actions and could not think about energy all the time:

We cannot turn off the lights just to save energy, but have to decide what it is worth paying for it [i.e., to keep them on] (householder F).

When asked what the consultants should do to help the suggested measures be implemented, the householders said that the only thing they could do was inform people about the consequences of various measures. The authorities could not interfere with household decisions because this was obviously in the private sphere, according to the households.

Householder Z was critical of the lack of economic calculations concerning the proposed measures:

Are you a homeowner? Talking about energy use reduction should be directly connected to saving money. But that

connection was never made and we criticized that. We discussed it with them, and I think it is a weakness that energy consultants cannot make such calculations. All the measures should be connected to calculations (householder Z).

Householder Z also thought that the consultants did not consider the family situation in their consultations and that the consultants focused too much on energy:

A family looks at energy cost rather than energy use. They [i.e., the consultants] discussed energy reduction as an issue of its own. We should save on the energy because that is a scarce resource. But you must also consider the family's point of view, see to the needs of the individuals. Here there was a mismatch (householder Z).

The energy consultants and householder Z had obvious communication problems. Householder Z focused on reducing costs and related everything to economic factors. The energy consultants focused on energy efficiency and kWh, which the family had difficulties understanding in terms of their economic view. Householder Z said:

Energy is important, but it is also important to live. You must relate it to what people are prepared to sacrifice (householder Z).

Householder Z was also annoyed that the consultants suggested measures that they could not afford and that the consultants did not consider 'the family's situation' – which probably was another way of saying that the consultants focused on aspects other than those the family expected them to. For example, the consultants advised the household to replace a relatively new pellet burner with a more efficient one. In making this recommendation, the consultants criticized the household's choice of pellet burner. The family, on the other hand, regarded themselves as aware and said that they already knew everything that the consultants were talking about. The suggestion to replace the pellet burner thus seemed rather challenging or even rude to the household. The advice became something that interfered with the private sphere of the family. The consequences were that the family rejected the whole project and all the measures suggested.

The Energy Hunt mainly concerned material aspects and changing heating systems, appliances, light bulbs, insulation, and so on. Such consultation was generally regarded as not too private and the consultants did not try to push the households to do things to which they objected. They did not discuss lifestyle issues and behaviour, which could have been more sensitive than changing technologies. The consultants preferred to maintain a nice atmosphere and did not start arguing or trying to convince the households to implement any measures. They upheld their mission, which was to give neutral and objective information and let the families both make the calculations and form opinions regarding the measures suggested. To follow the advice, the households needed to start a process including scanning the market for existing technology, comparing different options available, calculating the cost of the measures, and finding way to finance the investment.

Several householders also stated that they appreciated that the energy consultants chose to inform rather than moralize and acted in an instructive way. The consultants managed, ac-

Table 1. Summary of the arguments the consultants and the households agreed and disagreed on.

Agreements	Disagreements
In general energy policy uncontroversial	Interference in consumption patterns
Information acceptable	Need of more prohibitions
The householders have decision power, because they pay	Energy reduction measures only for environmental concern
Cannot force people to implement measures that reduce quality of life	If you can pay for your consumption no one else should care
Energy reduction of economical reason	
Information must be personal	

cording to these householders, to explain the energy-related problems in the house without judging the families' ways of life, which they emphasized was a positive aspect. Householder I, for example, said that the consultants cared very much for the family and were looking out for its best interests: 'They were accommodating and all our questions were taken seriously' (householder I). Such treatment was important for the households, which the consultants also recognized.

COMPARISON OF THE ARGUMENTS MADE BY THE CONSULTANTS AND THE HOUSEHOLDS

When comparing how the consultants and the households reasoned about the public-private divide it is important to notice that the consultants are a much more homogeneous group than the households. With this in mind it is still interesting to highlight some similarities and differences between the groups as done in table 1.

On a general level both groups meant that energy policy was a rather uncontroversial issue that seldom interfered with the private sphere. Both groups agreed, in general, on that information, advice and tips were ok to give to the households, as long as the consultants did not interfere with people's decisions. Some householders were however annoyed over the tips that for example interfered with their personal hygiene. There seems to be a general agreement that because the householders pay for their energy consumption they also have to decide on energy reduction measures. The consultants said that it was more or less impossible to interfere with anything where the householders' quality of life decreased. Most householders argued in the same way and meant that for example their garden lights were of private concern. Both groups agreed that the main motif for households to take interest in energy reduction measures was to be able to reduce their costs. They also agreed on that information needed to be personal for each household and they wanted more individual inspections where all energy related activities and appliances were measured

In some issues the disagreement between the groups became rather obvious. The consultants meant that they could not interfere with peoples' consumption patterns with energy demanding products or luxury consumption. This was something that some of the households opposed and they wanted to see more regulations and prohibitions to what they perceived as unsustainable consumption. The consultants meant that energy efficient measures could and should be implemented of only environmental reasons. This was something most households disagree on and they meant that it must be some economical benefits involved too. Some of the householder also believed that if you can pay for your consumption no one else should

care. This is something that at least some of the consultants should object to.

There were also some arguments highlight by one group, but that the other group did not mentioned at all. The energy consultants highlight the importance of subsidies to have measures implemented. This was not mentioned by the households. The household thought that energy efficient measures needed to fit into the house design. This was nothing that the consultants saw as important.

Conclusions

Municipal energy consultants are careful in providing advice to households: they preserve a rather large 'no-trespassing' area to avoid interfering in peoples' private sphere. They rarely challenge the demarcation between public and private, and in this sense they uphold the existing order and perception of what constitutes public and private concerns, also in relation to the traditional liberal-economistic mode. It is important for them to maintain the role of objective and neutral public servants who do not take a stand for any technology or interfere with the private affairs of citizens. They also mainly discuss energy-efficient technology available on the market but rarely discuss behaviour-related issues.

The consultants found it problematic to discuss behavioural issues because they did not know how to relate to people's everyday life activities without crossing over to private and personal matters. At the same time, they realize that many important energy-efficiency measures relate to lifestyle issues, which in turn relate to these tricky behavioural matters. Ecological citizenship theory demands a rather far-reaching citizenship in which such lifestyle issues definitely belong among public interests and should be dealt with by the commons. According to this view, for moral reasons and out of concern for neighbours, nature, and future generations, all householders in Sweden should reduce their energy use. This is something that the consultants also acknowledge and try to relate to, even though they need to act carefully to avoid trespassing on people's private sphere.

The result of their guidance, however, is often advice to consume, to buy new, more energy-efficient products. This is safe advice, because the consultants can inform the households about the most energy-efficient products on the market; then it is up to the households what to do with this information. In this way, they maintain the traditional demarcation between public advice and private consumption and cannot be criticized for interfering in the citizens' private concerns. However, from an ecological citizenship perspective, it could be questioned whether more consumption is the answer to climate problems or if the answer rather in to decrease the consumption level in

general. Another related issue that can be raised in this perspective is whether new products are always better than old ones from a lifecycle perspective.

The households emphasize at a general level that they are aware of the problems related to high energy consumption and how to reduce their energy use. Ecological citizenship could perhaps be applied when they relate to their *neighbours'* ways of life rather than their own. Their *neighbours* need to be more aware of energy-efficiency issues and need to reduce their ecological footprints. The government also needs to regulate other people's lives and preferably also prohibit their bad behaviours.

At a general level, the households think that all kinds of measures are acceptable in order to develop sustainable energy systems. When the questions relate more directly to their own lives, however, then the picture changes. Then it is obvious that their own consumption, what measures to invest or not invest in, is a private issue. The public cannot interfere with that. In addition, issues concerning design or aesthetic qualities belong to the private sphere.

The households are quite aware of behavioural issues and how to behave in an energy-efficient way. Information campaigns about switching off the lights, lowering indoor temperature, washing with a full machine, etc., have reached the households. They are aware, but sometimes actively choose to act in energy-wasting ways. They defend this behaviour by saying that such morally questionable behaviour is acceptable because they have prioritized it and paid for it. Notably, however, most households feel that they need to defend this 'wrong' behaviour. This could indicate that change is on the way in what are regarded as personal decisions and what are regarded as matters with which others can acceptably interfere.

When it comes to how families accept the authorities' interference in their own lives, then they draw limits. They can accept information, even individually specified information, but they do not accept requests to do certain things. Several of our householders mentioned energy labelling as an acceptable means of control that they think should be developed to encompass more products. Such labelling informs them but does not tell them how to act: the decision is still the householders'.

It is also interesting, however, that conducting individual inspections and keeping individual statistics regarding family energy use is not seen as the consultant trespassing the private sphere. That this could expose and give a rather detailed picture of family life is not problematized. Instead, the householders highlight the possibilities of such mapping, letting the consultants give them specific information on how to change behaviour to reduce energy consumption.

Individual inspections and keeping energy statistics on households would be a way for consultants to encourage the active involvement of householders in energy-efficiency measures. The consultants could discuss both new investments and behavioural issues in terms of kWh or money spent on a special activity, and in this way discuss lifestyle issues without judging or moralizing on the household's way of life. The households perceive figures and statistics as neutral and objective knowledge. If the consultants inform them by visualizing their actual consumption patterns and point out various ways to reduce energy consumption, leaving implementation decisions to the

families, then most of our householders think that the consultants have not intruded on the families' private sphere.

The problem for the Swedish consultants, however, is that they are not legally allowed to go far enough into the home that they can give such specific advice. This prohibition means that the consultants are forced to keep giving general advice with which the households are already familiar and to inform them about technology available on the market that the householders have already found for themselves on the Internet. The result is that the householders only want to hear confirmation of the choices they have already made. Problematising lifestyle issues and examining how to achieve sustainable household practices under these conditions seem rather impossible.

Both consultants and householders see the need for more specific guidance concerning how families should live their lives. This would entail moving the boundaries and allowing the public (i.e., the consultants) to give advice on what are traditionally deemed private issues, and this is held back both by the law and by the consultants' view of themselves as traditional neutral public servants. To seriously discuss ecological citizenship or the size of people's ecological footprints, and to achieve comprehensive energy use reduction, the public/private divide needs to be challenged. At the same time, it is clear from the interviews that the consultants have tried in various ways to discuss lifestyle-related issues and have found ways to do so without trespassing on the householders' privacy. The householders, on the other hand, demand guidance on how to act in more energy efficient ways. The beginnings of a broadened concept of citizenship, where responsibility and rights are expanding to encompass environmental issues and responsibilities to nature and future generations can be discerned. In addition, there is a tendency for what were formerly regarded as exclusively private practices to be perceived as of common or public concerns. This bottom-up process, however, is opposed by state regulation, where individual inspections are forbidden, which can only delay the urgent need for changes in both technologies used and energy-related behaviours.

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Acknowledgements

The research for this paper forms part of the research programme, Energy Choices in Households: A Platform for Change, funded by the Swedish Energy Agency.

