

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

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Purpose

- Discuss information provided by municipal energy guidance to households.
- How do these energy consultants try to influence households and how do the households perceive this guidance?
- What can these consultants discuss with the households? What subjects are too private?
- 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?



Municipal Energy Guidance

- 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.
- The municipal energy consultants are important as a communication link between public policy goals and the citizens.
- A restriction on the municipal energy guidance programme is that the consultants can only provide general information and cannot conduct individual house inspections



Public/private in the liberal model and in green theory

The liberal—economistic model: public/private divide is found between the public sector and the private sector and usually refers to the distinction between governmental and non-governmental.

(Weintraub, Jeff & Kumar Krishan (red. 1997) Public and Private in Thought and Practise. Perspetives on a Grand Dichotomy, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press)



Green theories and ecological citizenship

- 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.
- Ecological citizens do this out of sympathy and a willingness to take responsibility for their actions.
- 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.



Interviews

- 23 home-owners and 3 tenants that have been in contact with an energy consultant
- 14 energy consultants in the counties of Östergötland and Dalarna



Results

The energy consultants





The energy consultants

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.



When continuing the discussion...

- The boundary is drawn when energy use is connected to behavioural and lifestyle issues:
- "Yes, behaviour, I cannot interfere with that, only appeal. I can only make people aware". (energy consultant N)
- "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." (energy consultant J)



Inform but not interfere

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.

"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)



Technology often in focus

Technology was 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.



Results

Householders





Energy advice do not threatening privacy

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)



Other people need...

A 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



Inform but do not interfere

"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)



Divergent answers

- Householders C and K wanted more prohibition, for example they wanted to forbid SUVs in cities. They reasoned that because there is no real use for SUVs in the city, forbidding them cannot really interfere with someone's privacy.
- Householder E said that regulations and prohibitions were useless and too often reached too far into the private sphere. Individual advice and guidance were more useful and easier to accept



Individual inspections and feed-back

- Several householders said they wanted more individual inspections where the consultants measured all energyrelated 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.

"No sentimentality, but straight on, easy and simple information about your energy use and costs" (householder N).



Finances important

Often the measures suggested were expensive.
 Finances were more important than environmental concerns, and one householder 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)



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 Cannot force people to implement measures that reduce quality of life Energy reduction of economical reason	Energy reduction measures only for environmental concern If you can pay for your consumption no one else should care
Information must be personal	



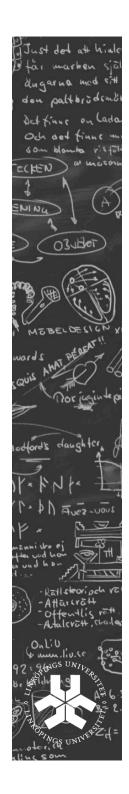
Conclusions – energy consultants

- Municipal energy consultants are careful in providing advice
- Problematic to discuss behavioural issues because they did not have tools.
- They also mainly discuss energy-efficient technology available on the market but rarely discuss behaviourrelated issues.
- The result of their guidance is often advice to consume, to buy new, more energy-efficient products.
- Maintain the traditional demarcation between public advice and private consumption and cannot be criticized for interfering in the citizens' private concerns.



Conclusions – the households

- The government needs to regulate other people's lives and preferably also prohibit their bad behaviours – Ecological citizens
- When it comes to how families accept the authorities' interference in their own lives: can accept information, even individually specified information, but they do not accept requests to do certain things.
- What measures to invest or not invest in, is a private issue. The public cannot interfere with that – the liberal model.
- Interesting that conducting individual inspections and keeping individual statistics regarding family energy use is not seen as the consultant trespassing the private sphere – no big brother discussion



- Today the information is too general according to both householders and advisers
- But it is 'safe'
- But more individual related information is requested
- Such mapping with specific information is a way to discuss behaviour and lifestyle issues.

