

Track 2 - The smart energy system transition in cities and regions

Title of the proposed paper

Shifting focus from increasing capacity of producing renewable energy to that of reducing energy-use: The case of energy use in residential housing in Norway

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3 keywords

sustainable energy

Text abstract (max. 300 words)

The debate on the relationship between energy consumption and climate change, and the need to reduce energy consumption in order to avoid an unacceptable global climate change, adheres to a continuous scientific discourse, initiated in the early 1970`s. Embedded in this early discourse were a strong critique of economic growth as a superior goal for the development of nations and the formulation of physical limits for growth. The 1987 World Commission Report on Environment and Development renewed impetus to this discourse by advocating the need for rich industrialized countries to reduce their energy consumption by at least 50 %. This discourse has recently been further developed under the heading of 'degrowth'. Concerns regarding climate change have for the last decade become the most important policy driver for changing energy policies in rich industrialized countries. So far, this has first of all resulted in changing energy production policies, even though the EU 20-20-20 goal also includes that of making energy use more efficient. Energy use in households has increased since the 1950s in most rich, industrialized countries. This has been a desired development, in the sense that increased household energy use has been part of the process of modernisation and increasing standards of living. However, some countries – like Norway – have experienced an unforeseen levelling out in household energy use since 1990. In this paper I will reveal the nature of this development, discuss the possible causes for this shift and present perspectives on how to possibly change the environmental policy discourse in the direction of focussing far more on reducing energy-consumption – applying energy use in residential households as a case.