



Introduction

Niche-regime interaction remains understudied. Regime actors are supposed to have opposite interests from niche actors and therefore engage in defensive behavior. However, both types of actors not only have different interests, but also operate on the basis of different values, goals, and assumptions. We argue that this mismatch of ways of operating and thinking is an important feature of transition processes. Hence, in this study we go beyond mere interests and go deeper into:

- the 'institutional logics' behind the behavior of the different actors
- how the actors interact
- how institutional logics may explain changes in behavior

Case: Biomethane injection into the natural gas grid

Before, all Dutch gas flowed from the Groningen-field to the customer. This monopoly is now broken by downstream injection of biomethane by new actors. Biomethane is biogas upgraded to natural gas specifications and is produced by actors from the waste, food processing, and agricultural sector. They need to meet the network operator's requirements for gas quality. A government subsidy scheme granted producers 1 bln euro for biomethane injection in 2010. However, a uniform and final institutional framework is lacking: for gas quality, liability issues, and cost allocation. Furthermore, there is a mismatch of institutional logics between the actors involved.

RQ: What is the role of institutional logics and their development over time in the case of biomethane injection?

Theory

Institutional logics are actors' practices (ways in which they operate) as well as the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs, that produce and reproduce their social reality. Institutional logics can change through competition with other logics, for example when different types of organizations are forced into association. Realignment of logics may occur through a search for consistency between different logics, and between logics and behavior. New logics allow for new types of behavior, new behavior requires new logics. Actors need to 'wake up' to move from routine behavior to exploring new opportunities within or beyond their logics. Change or at least better mutual understanding is facilitated by 'boundary bridging' activities: conscious efforts by 'hybrid' actors at translating between different logics.

(Mis)matching institutional logics: when farmer Johnson meets the network operator

The Dutch case of biomethane injection into the grid



Producers

- Institutional logics:
- Profit oriented
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Efficient use of resources
- Sustainability minded
- Regional development
- Quick decisions
- Informal style



Government subsidy scheme creates forced association between biomethane producers and network operators, while institutional framework is incomplete.



Diverging institutional logics complicate communication and create lack of trust.



Some actors engage in 'boundary bridging': they translate between the different logics and thus create more mutual understanding and help to see previously unexplored opportunities.

Boundary bridging happens both between and within organizations.



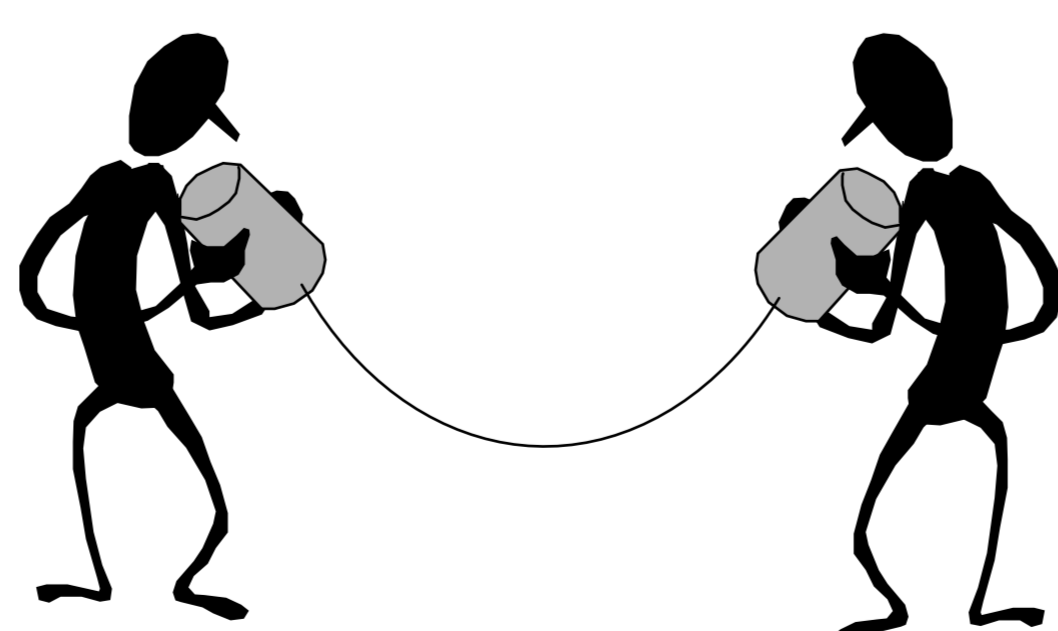
Network operators

- Institutional logics:
- Safety first
- Gas Law determines behavior
- Reliability
- Control minded
- Large scale orientation
- Slow decision-making
- Formal style



Methodology

Database of over 250 news articles related to biomethane injection during the period 2003-2012. Literature search of policy documents, annual reports and research reports. 15 Semi-structured expert interviews.



Conclusion

The institutional logics of producers and network operators are very different and largely incompatible. This mismatch creates miscommunication and lack of trust.

Boundary bridging activities are important both between organizations and within organizations. Intermediary actors translate between the different logics, enabling communication, or carefully ease actor within an organization towards new ways of operating.

Diverging institutional logics can complicate transition processes even when interests are not opposed.