



Tracking geographies of sustainability transitions: Relational and territorial aspects of urban policies in Casablanca and Cape Town



Ulrich Mans

University of Amsterdam, Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies, Plantage Muidergracht 14-16, 1018 TV Amsterdam, Netherlands
Centre for Innovation, Leiden University, Campus The Hague, Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 February 2014

Received in revised form 22 August 2014

Keywords:

Geographies of sustainability transitions

Green-driven growth

Renewable energy

Varieties of glocalisation

Casablanca

Cape Town

ABSTRACT

Many countries in the Global South work on greater sustainability. Transition and economic geography scholars are well-positioned to contribute to a better understanding of these processes and their underlying dynamics. However, there is a lack of attention to the role of the city. In this article I apply a 'varieties of glocalisation' lens to explain the interplay between national, urban and global developments in the context of sustainability transitions. This article presents empirical data from Morocco and South-Africa about current renewable energy ambitions. These cases illustrate the cities' differences; while Cape Town was able to foster economic development in the slipstream of national policies, Casablanca's renewable energy sector is less developed. The green-driven growth triangle is then presented as a new analytical framework for future research on geographies of sustainability transitions.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

In transitions literature, there is a growing interest in policy agendas that are geared towards greater sustainability (Foxon, 2011; Geels, 2010, 2011b; Hodson and Marvin, 2010). Within this discourse, attention is increasingly devoted to securing a cleaner energy supply, reflecting the fact that the idea of low-carbon energy transitions is gaining prominence across the world. Unfortunately, this work has thus far been delinked from spatial considerations; many of the studies in this field are driven by the wish to look at the systemic level i.e. national energy regimes. In this, the so-called multi-level perspective (MLP) has established itself as an important field of enquiry, which keeps a clear focus on the dynamics of national regulatory policies and related institutional innovations.

In times of rapid urbanization, this is an important omission. By 2050, the world urban population is expected to increase by 72 per cent to 6.3 billion (from 3.6 billion in 2011) (UNDESA 2012, p. 2–3). Urban leaders have become more pro-active in developing their own policy visions and various sustainability scholars have taken up the task to investigate the limits and opportunities of this new type of urban responsibility. For example, there is a growing body of literature that investigates urban experiments aimed at finding low-carbon futures (Bulkeley, 2013; Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Bulkeley et al., 2011b; Dhakal, 2011; Spaeth and Rohrer, 2011) and the emergence of 'eco-cities' in many

locations around the world. Arguments differ however over the extent to which these developments indeed foster sustainability in the environmental sense (Caprotti, 2014).

Cities in the Global South are of particular interest in this regard. The United Nations estimates that by 2030, for each urban dweller in the more developed world there will be 3.7 urban dwellers in the less developed world, compared to a factor of 2.7 in 2010.¹ Many of these countries have high economic growth rates and they are expected to account for 90 per cent of the world's additional energy demand between 2010 and 2035 (International Energy Agency, 2011: 1). This leads to major challenges for cities in the Global South, as they face increasing environmental damage coupled with the risk of uncertain energy supplies.

It is clear that there are important economic underpinnings of the latter. For (urban) policy makers in the Global South, sufficient energy is not-negotiable, but renewable energy is still considered above all a cost-factor and has not entered municipalities' priority lists as a consequence. At the same time, sustainable energy solutions carry the potential to stimulate local economic development if production and services emerge as part of a new sector. The latter effect I have referred to as 'green-driven growth', and is central to this paper's argument. The notion of green-driven growth highlights economic development geared towards the production of sustainable energy technology. The counterpart of the green-driven

¹ Calculated on the basis of UNDESA's "World Urbanization Prospects. The 2011 Revision" Database. Available online at: esa.un.org. Accessed on 22 August 2012.

E-mail addresses: u.mans@uva.nl, u.mans@cdh.leidenuniv.nl

growth trajectory is 'green-conscious growth', which instead puts emphasis on making production techniques more environmentally friendly (Mans and Meerow, 2012: 151). For urban authorities with a sustainable energy vision, the idea underpinning a green-driven growth pathway holds the promise of financial benefits through e.g. the creation of jobs and additional revenue in the renewable energy sector (see also Jaenicke, 2012; University of Amsterdam and ICLEI, 2012). This is not without challenges. Some cities have more administrative power than others; and urban leaders might choose to be pro-active in pushing for a pro-sustainability agenda as a consequence. When municipalities (are forced to) follow a more passive strategy, external developments might shape their opportunities to benefit from a green urban economy. Each city faces a distinct set of issues – determined by a city's economic footprint, its political context or its position in the global market place. However, the interlinkages between these dimensions – global, national and urban – have thus far received little attention in the sustainability transitions discourse.

In this paper, I argue that conceptual approaches from economic geography – which have long embraced the urban as a scale of increasing importance – can help inform the emerging discourse on sustainability transitions in such a way that a city-perspective is added to the current debate. In order to build this argument, I (a) discuss the relationship between urban economic development, national energy policy and global market developments; (b) present empirical evidence on the ongoing national renewable energy schemes in Cape Town (South Africa) and Casablanca (Morocco); and (c) develop a new heuristic framework, the 'green-driven growth triangle', based on van der Heiden and Terhorst's notion of 'varieties of glocalisation'.

In doing so, I contribute to the recent debate about geographies of sustainability transition: which businesses are involved, what can municipal authorities do themselves in order to foster local economic development in this sector, and how does a city connect to national policies and to global geographies of these emerging business networks (see also Coenen et al., 2012; Hansen and Coenen, 2013)? I thus combine the current thinking on sustainable energy transitions with insights from economic geography in regard to glocalisation processes. This illustrates how both discourses complement each other's strengths: the transition literature helps understanding the dynamics that underpin processes of socio-technical change in the context of sustainable energy policies, which has thus far not been tackled in the economic geography discourse. In turn, economic geography provides a valuable perspective on the tensions between the territorial and relational geographies of urban policies (McCann and Ward, 2010).

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the emerging discourse about the geography of sustainability transitions, and explains why there is no consensus on how to pinpoint the role of the urban scale in such transitions. The third section presents the economic geography debate about regional economic development, and proposes to use the varieties of glocalisation approach in order to bridge transition literature with economic geography for an enhanced understanding of urban economic developments. Section 4 splits into two parts; it first explains the recent trends in renewable energy and why this part of the sustainability business provides for an insightful case study; second it investigates the geographic patterns of renewable energy procurement schemes in the two case studies: Casablanca and Cape Town. Section 5 discusses the findings and presents the green-driven growth triangle as a new heuristic framework.

The missing link between the urban scale and transition studies

Within transition literature, the multi-level perspective has established itself as an important part of the current debate. Rip

and Kemp first introduced the MLP's three interrelated concepts of landscape, regime and niche in an attempt to 'order' the multiple levels of innovation dynamics (Rip and Kemp, 1998: 328). Its logic puts emphasis on the developments that originate from radical 'niches', how these interact with relatively stable 'regimes', and the way the 'landscape' level exerts pressure on niche and regime. The notion of landscape refers to the external context, in which a certain socio-technical regime is embedded (e.g. the growing international pressure to act on climate change). The regime level depicts the current way things are done regarding a certain aspect of socio-technical development (e.g. the way cars are being produced, regulated and used). The niche level relates to specific fields of initiative and innovation, where small-scale changes are being tested (i.e. car-makers investing in a new type of low emission engine). As Jørgensen (2012, p. 997) writes, the "MLP approach has been instrumental in coining the notion of socio-technical transitions and has provided a fruitful set of tools for historical case analysis and for staging the need to understand transition processes." More recently, it has also become a central theme within the growing literature on resilience, sustainability and environmental innovation.

However, when looking at the role of cities in transition processes in general and regarding sustainability transitions in particular, the MLP has shown little ambition to tackle this aspect in depth. The regime level argument of the MLP instead tends to zoom in on national-level debates. Urban-level developments only come to the forefront when the MLP considers the interplay between niche actors, such as businesses driving innovative practices, and how these develop in certain urban environments (for example Geels, 2011b). Geels further argues that the role of cities is limited to either "actors" (e.g. initiators of local policies) or "locations" (e.g. executors of national policies), and doubts whether it is justified to specifically study urban transitions: "[a]lthough the focus on cities and low carbon transitions is important and interesting, [...] an exclusive focus on cities may be unwarranted (Geels, 2011b, p. 26). He argues that the broader regime should be the focus of enquiry, in order to understand how agency and structure shape societal change in continuous, incremental interaction (Geels, 2011). From a MLP point of view, regimes are relatively static and are often marked by routine and a low appetite for fast decision-making. In this interaction, rules, arrangements and institutions play an important role in shaping gradual processes of socio-technical change within the limits of what the various stakeholders wish (not) to change.

It has thus far remained unclear within the MLP debate how the definition of regime can be applied when looking beyond the national context (Smith et al., 2010; Hodson and Marvin, 2010). I argue that this is unfortunate, as the MLP's focus on regimes neglects the growing interest among transition scholars to understand developments at the urban scale, which is considered of major importance within this multi-level playing field (Baud and Dhanalakshmi, 2007; Bulkeley et al., 2011a; Hodson and Marvin, 2010). The recent climate change debate further illustrates this argument. First, because climate change impacts urban agglomerations much more than entire countries: many urban populations already face the direct consequences of increased flooding, droughts or heat waves – and this trend is expected to continue. Second, scholars increasingly point to the apparent failure of inter-governmental negotiations regarding climate policies in Copenhagen 2009, Cancun 2010 or Durban 2011 to agree on concrete policy action against climate change. Bulkeley and Newell argue that this impasse is met with a growing interest in sustainability from below: "Traditionally conceived as a global problem requiring global solutions, the urban politics of climate change has been a key factor in challenging research and policy communities to reconsider how the governance of global environmental problems takes place" (Bulkeley and Newell, 2010: 230).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5073946>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5073946>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)