

NGOs, values and the role of research in biofuel controversies

ASFPG 2014

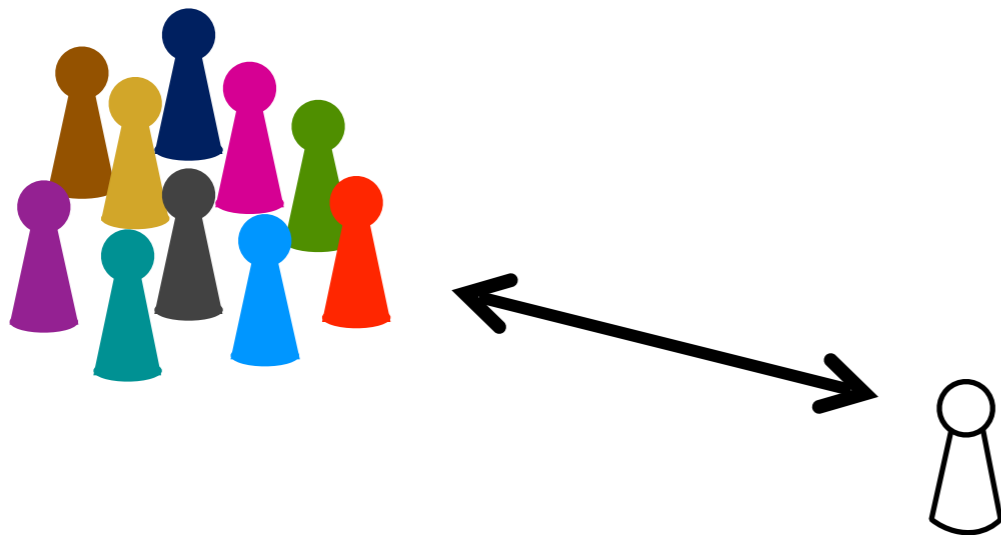
Robert Smith, University of Nottingham

In this talk I will present an initial analysis from a short set of in-depth and semi-structured interviews with representatives from a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in the biofuels field. Following a period of extended senescence during the 20th Century in the UK, biofuels again rose up the energy policy agenda between 2002 and 2003 when targets for production were set in the EU and member states. Following this period, the environmental, human and energy-producing credentials of biofuels were challenged and a controversy emerged, peaking and achieving some public salience around 2008. Industry groups, policy makers, expert consultancies, NGOs and researchers were all highly active in producing evidence and often conflicting assessments during this time. NGOs are particularly interesting in this process because despite a broad absence of ‘lay’ voices within this case, NGOs are increasingly enacted into research governance processes and sought out as representatives of a public voice.

As a whole, my research uses the biofuels controversy and subsequent responses to it as an opportunity to examine different constructions of ethics, ethical responsibility and ethical research. Broadly, I take ethics as something which can be ‘produced’ by different actors, with ethical boundaries being drawn in the process.

Although an analysis could be cut in many ways, here I focus on three main points. My first focus is on the issues associated with the development and deployment of biofuels that are seen as relevant and important. Here the interest is less about producing counts of issues and categories and more as a route into understanding different constructions of ‘ethics’. These constructions have implications for addressing issues that are deemed to be important. As such, the second focus is on the perceived role and responsibility of scientists in addressing the issues that were raised by NGOs. Finally, I focus on the role of values within research. Although all groups used science, and seemed to advocate some form of science-base decision making, a number (of especially larger NGOs) appear to advocate a different approach to research. Here, I link this to a notion of ‘value-lead-research’ and ‘back-casting’, borrowing terms from ‘value-lead-design’.

NGOs, values and research in biofuel controversies



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Structure

| Context |

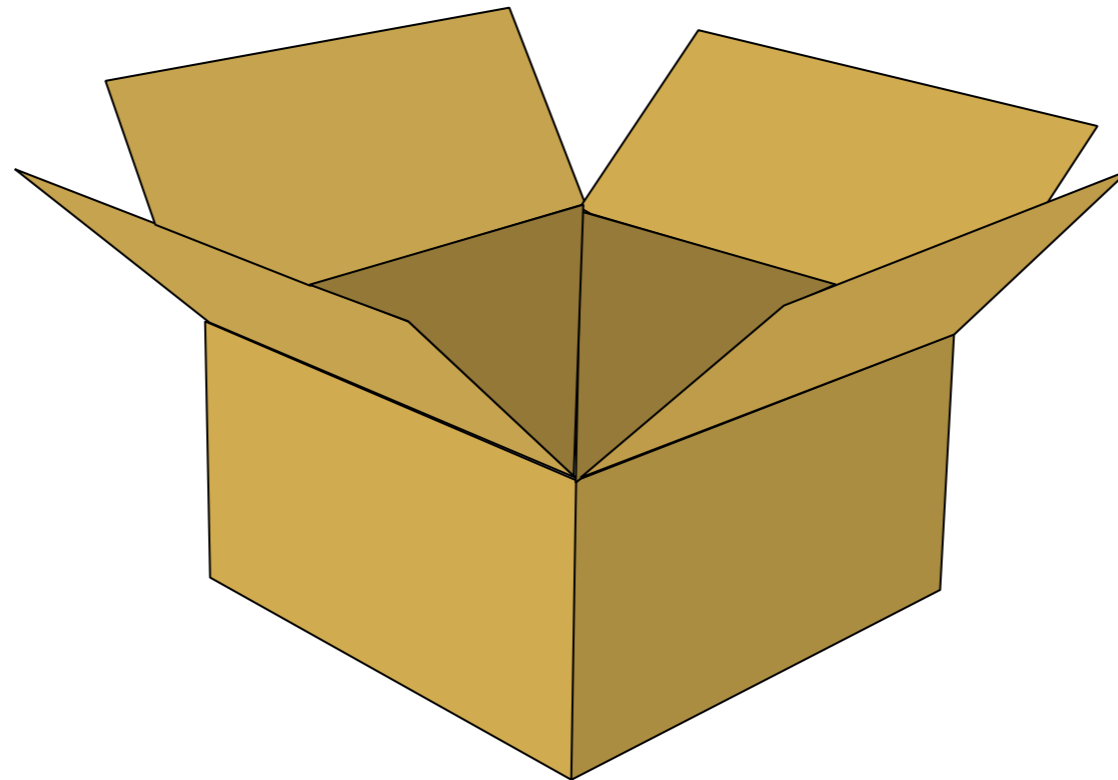
| Methods |

| Analysis - focusing on two/three aspects of analysis |

| Consequences |

Some context

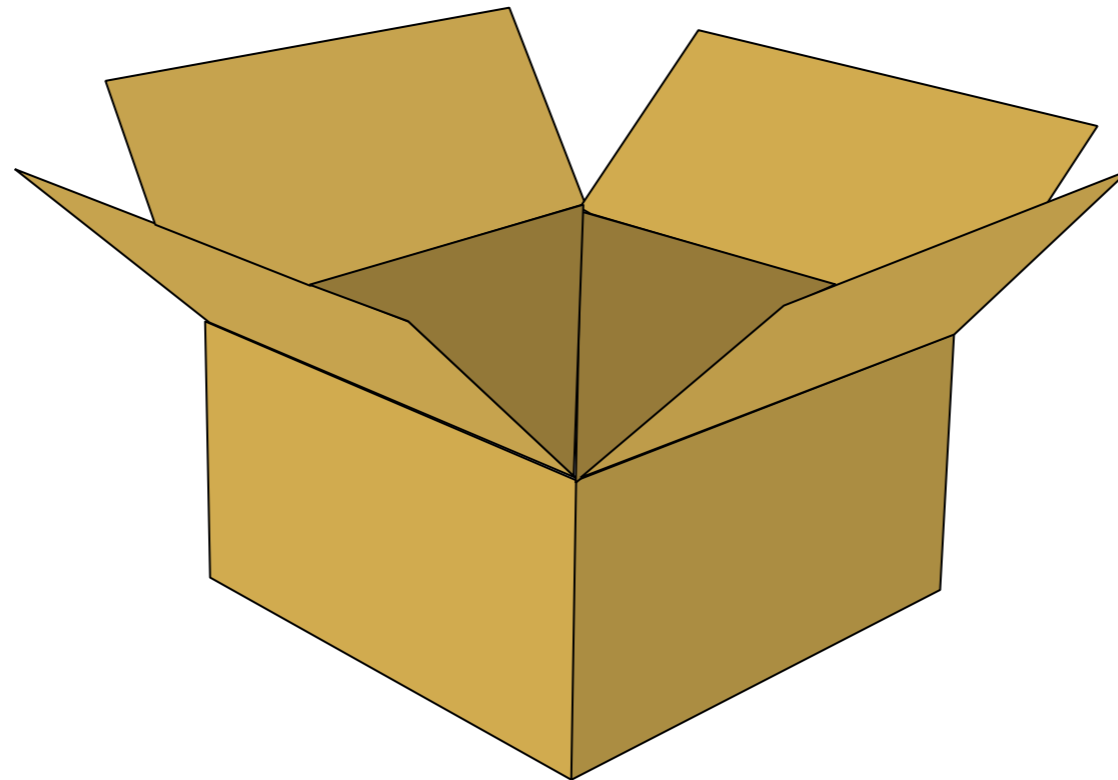
Controversy opens up science & technology



“In a sense it is possible to profit from controversies. In many cases, controversies provide partly conflicting assessments of technologies or of the impacts of actual or proposed projects, that are further articulated and consolidated in the course of a controversy. Thus informal technology assessment occurs.” (Rip, 1986)

Controversy opens up science & technology

In which ways do each of the three groups of actors construct social responsibility & ethics in science?

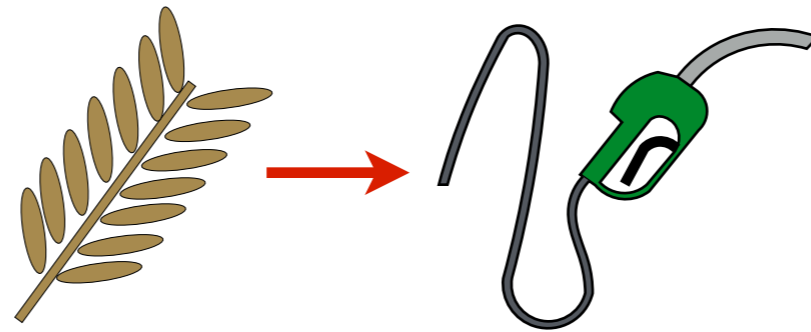
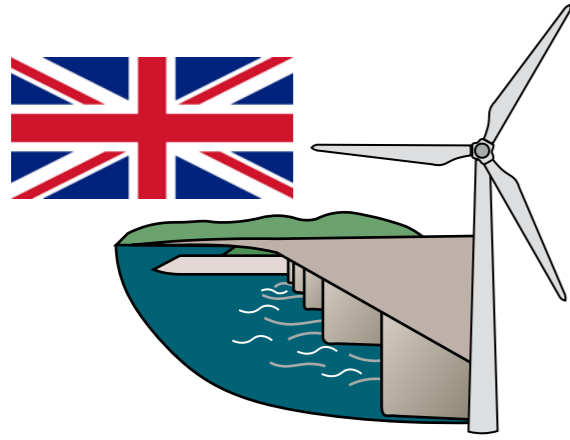


Where do the different groups say responsibility for shaping the outcomes of research lie within the network?

How do different groups interactions and perspectives produce opportunities and barriers for a socially robust and responsible research practice in the practice of biofuel research?

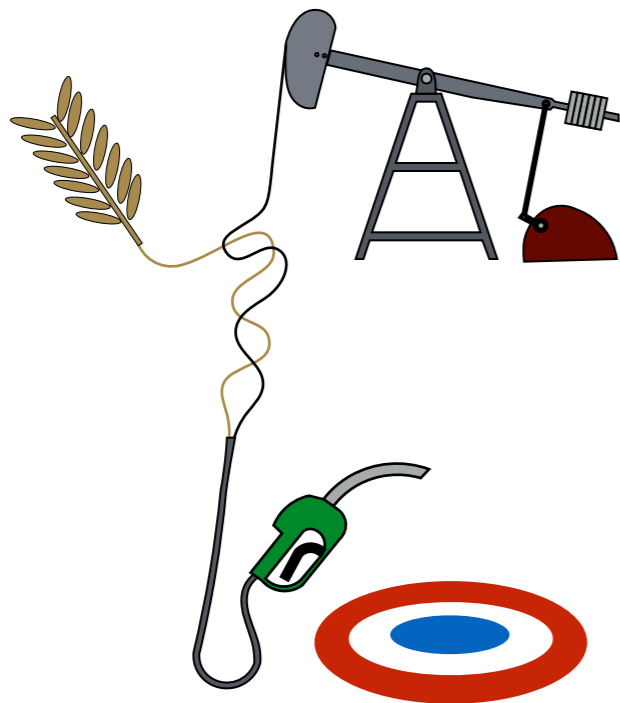
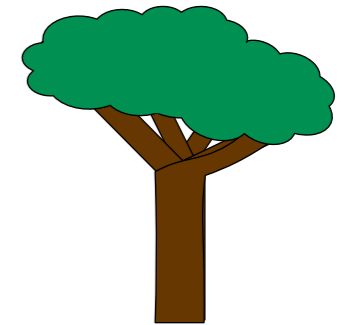
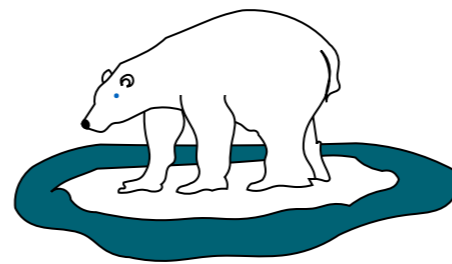
Biofuels policy, research & controversy

1970s-



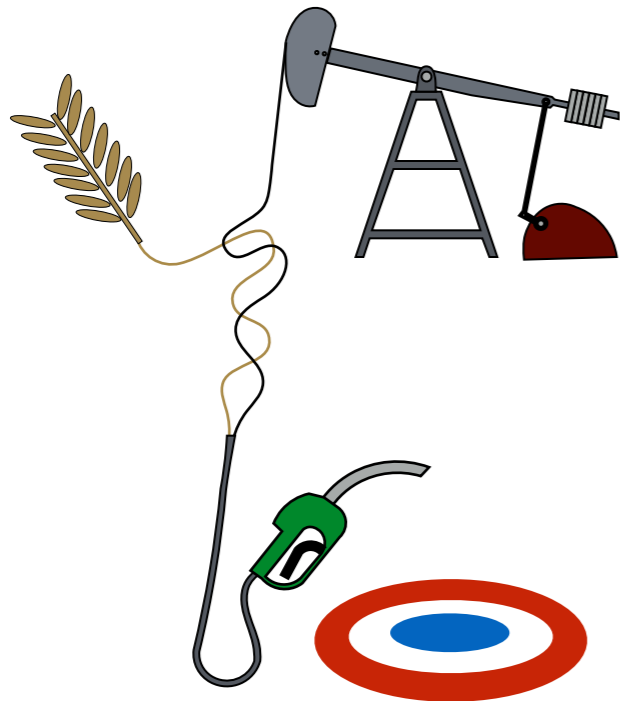
Biofuels policy, research & controversy

2001-

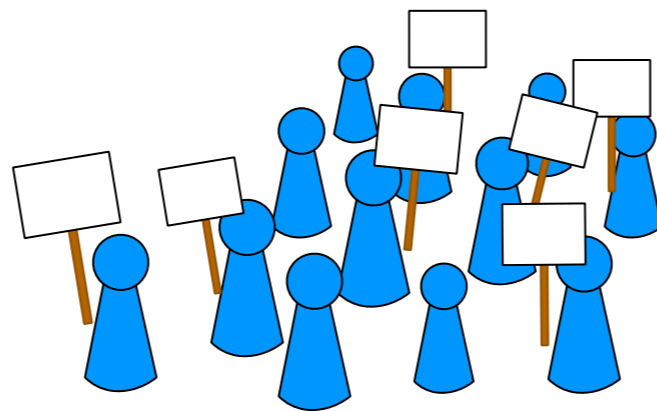


Biofuels policy, research & controversy

2001-

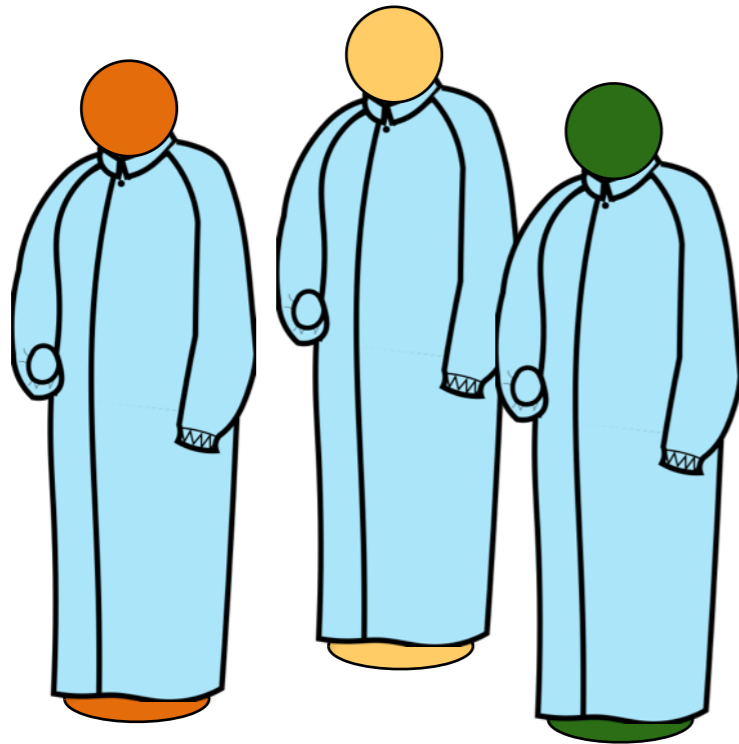


2006-



BBSRC Sustainable
Bioenergy Centre

The role of NGOs in the controversy



Friends of the Earth



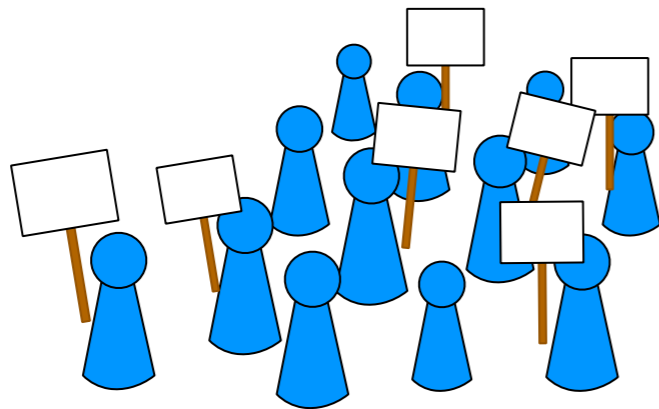
WWF



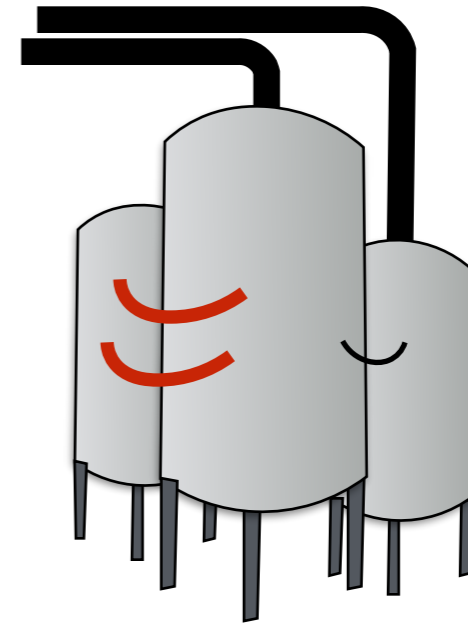
Oxfam

biofuelwatch

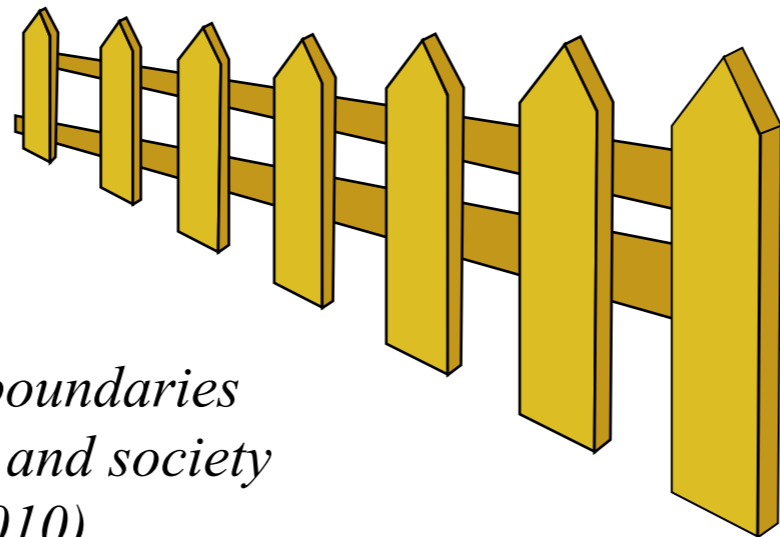
Who do NGOs represent?



*A campaigning public (Mohr,
Raman & Gibbs 2013)*



*Equivalent to industry
(Harvey & Pilgrim 2010,
Tait 2012)*

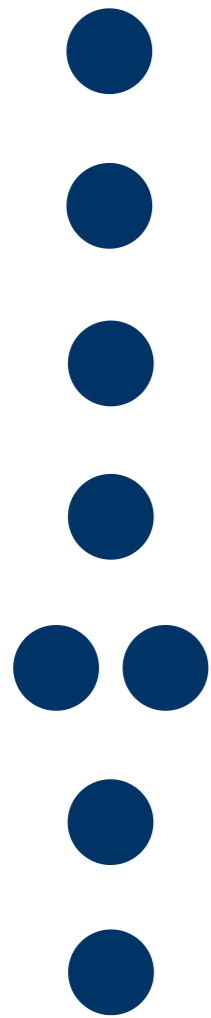


*Hybridise the boundaries
between science and society
(Eden 2010)*

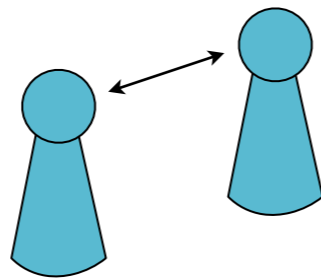
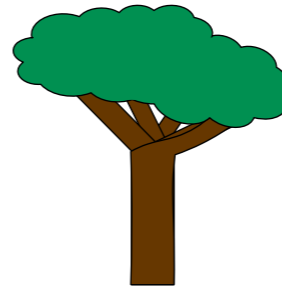
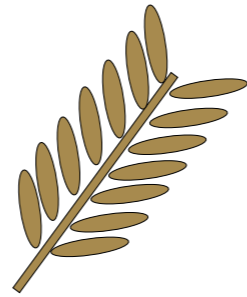
Method

Method and analytic approach

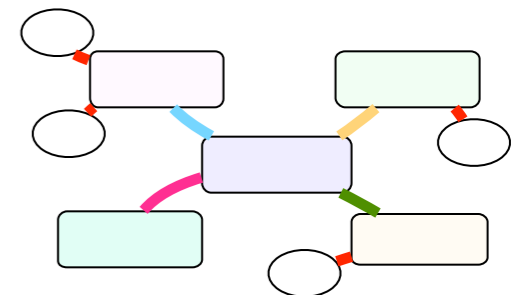
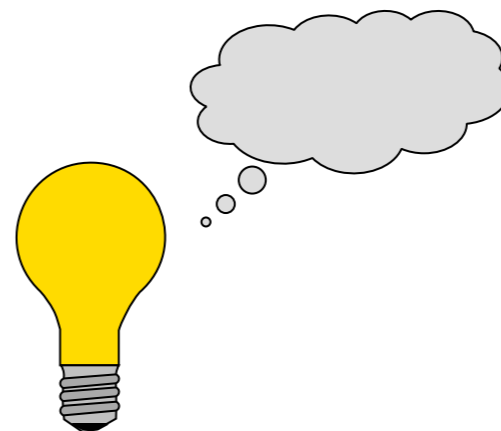
2011



2012

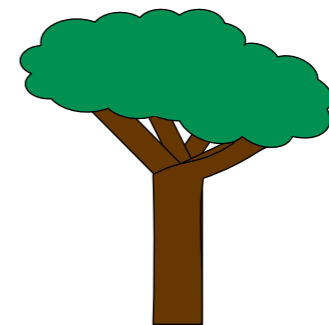


$\bar{x} = 1:35$

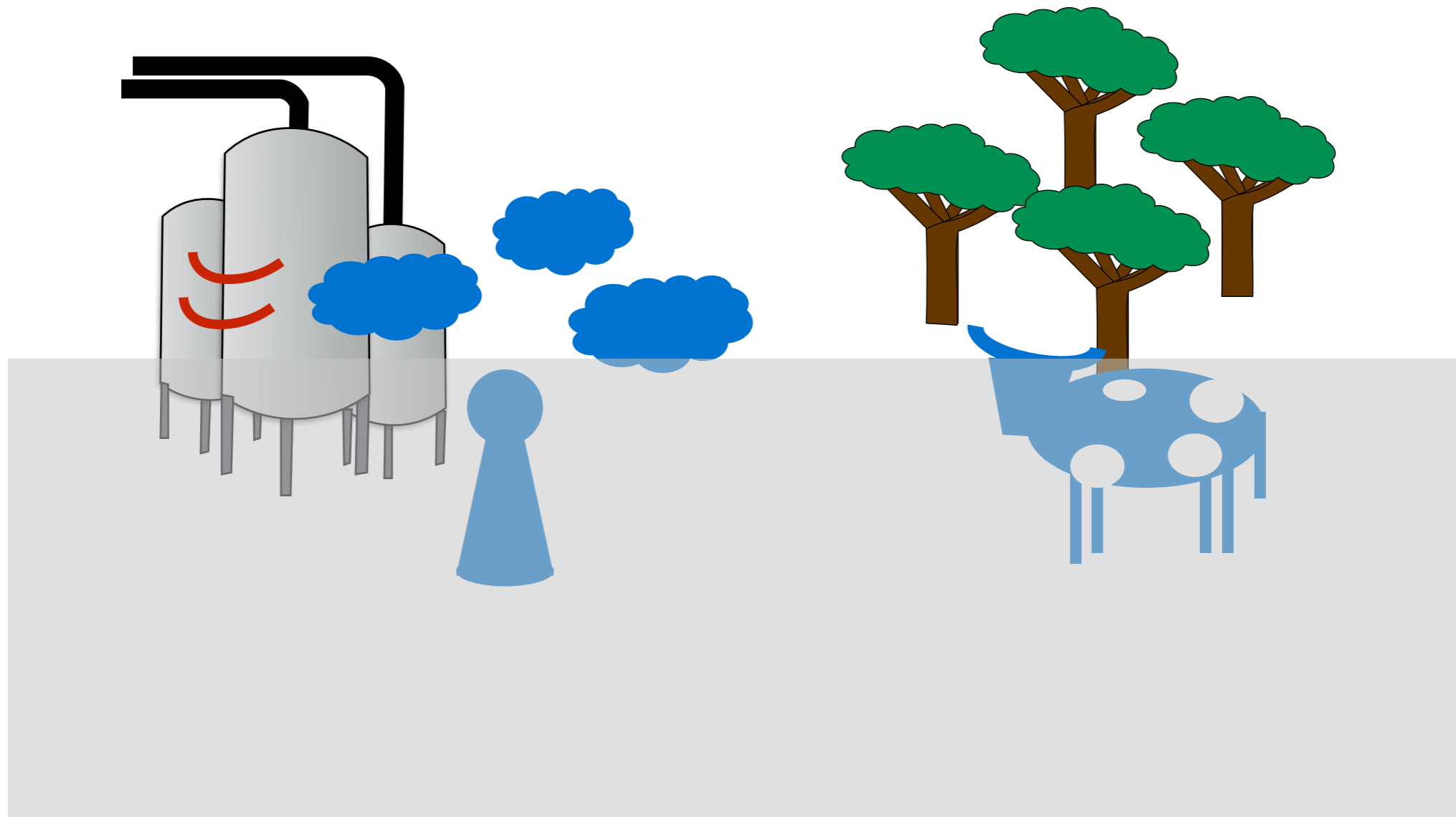


Themes of analysis

Analysis: Issues

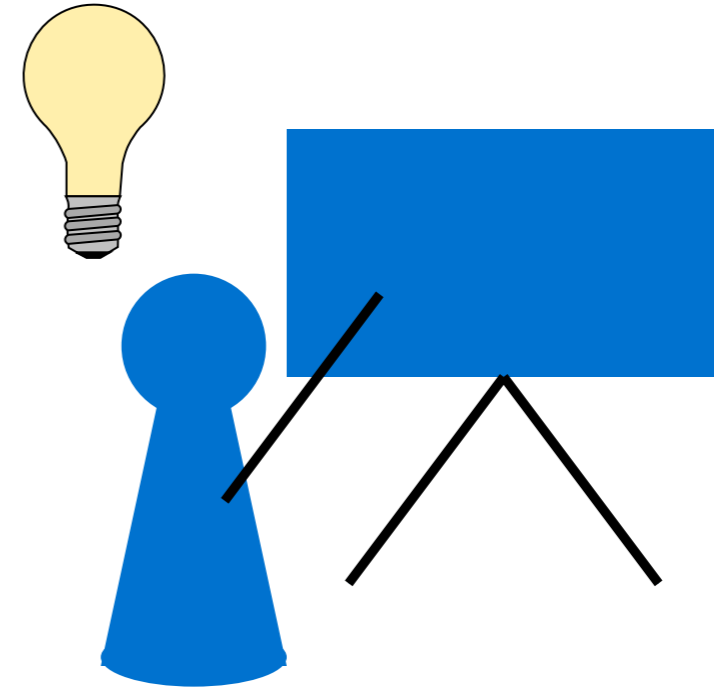


1) Explicit — Implicit Ethics



2) The use and production of research

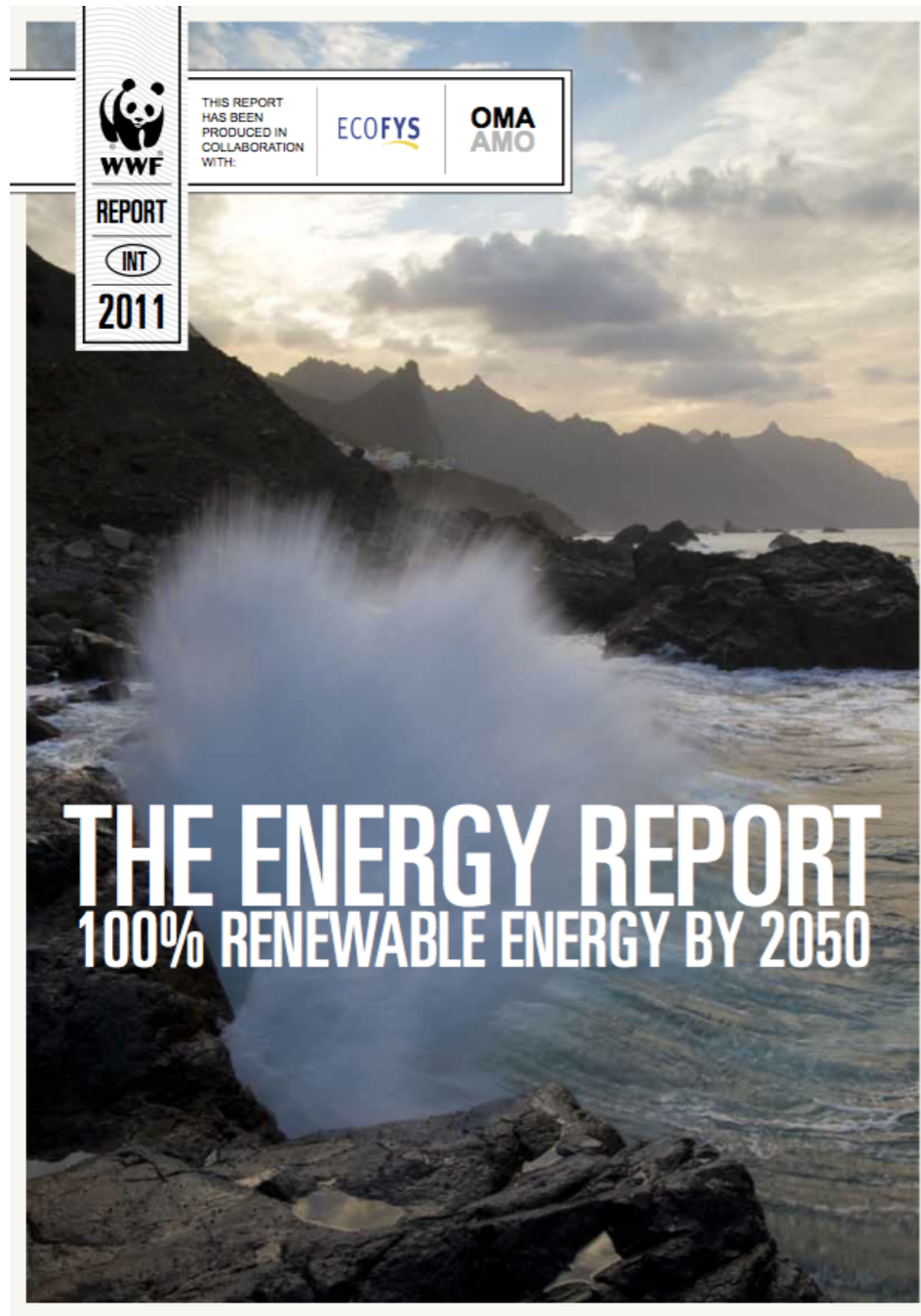
Produce reports
Advise industry
Certification
Review research
Implementation /
Technology Development



The Greenpeace approach is not anti-science...but neither is it science. So what is it? It is moral philosophy at least, and religion probably. All that scientists can say to Greenpeace is: sorry, your application for membership of the scientific community has been carefully considered and rejected”

(Milne, 1993, page 27 cited by Eden 2006p.1062)

3) Value-veiled and value-lead research



ZERO
CARBON
BRITAIN
2030

A NEW ENERGY STRATEGY
The second report of the
Zero Carbon Britain project

3) Value-veiled and value-lead research

Yeah, I think if you've got actual people who are trying to do the engineering of second generation biofuels I don't think the ethical things are likely to be uppermost in their minds, only because quite recently that's not their problem. [...] **I've been in the sort of the scientific social responsibility field, ever since the late sixties, when it all sort of started. So then we, we were scratching our head then, what is, everything that you do in the lab, everything that you think about, you've always got to have this thing at the back of your mind. Could this have an ethical dimension? And what I mean, it sort of drives you mad in the end** [...] But on the other hand, to actually have a definite ethical component that comes in and shines the light on it, and says what might this mean, is very important. That's good

[...]

Yes. I think that's important. Well I think what's interesting about **what we've been doing is that it actually comes the other way round**. It's ethically driven, it's come from the ethics and then the ethics have said well this, this and this are likely prospects, these are unlikely prospects, what would be a fully ethical solution to the physical dilemma, and of course we saw climate change, **we basically translated everything else into basically into carbon emissions as a grand proxy for all environmental problems.** (CS7)

Conclusions / binding it up

“Moral environmental authorities” (Mol 2010)

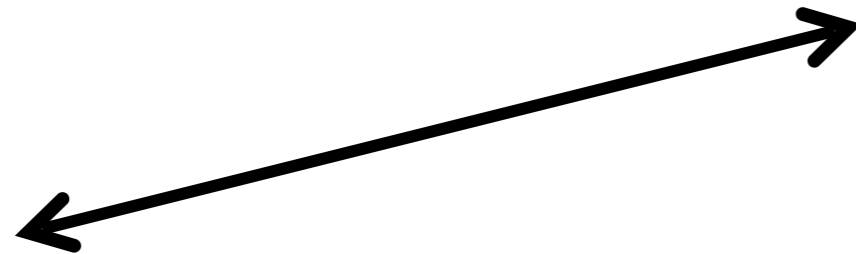
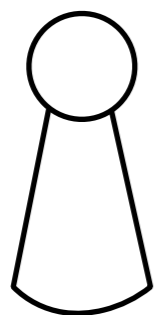
Parallels to scientists

Negotiating boundaries of science (Eden, Donaldson & Walker 2006)

Links to agenda setting

Thanks for listening

(references on request)



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keywords: ngo, biofuels, europe, policy, markets, transport. *Sociological Research Online*, 15(3).
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