

# Trust and Social Licence: Reflections on a decade of controversy

UKUH Insight Discussion

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Article



# Framing 'fracking': Exploring public perceptions of hydraulic fracturing in the United Kingdom

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# How to understand (latent) public unease with UK publics?

Strategies for reconfiguring policy



# FRAMING THE LANDSCAPE

## Research questions

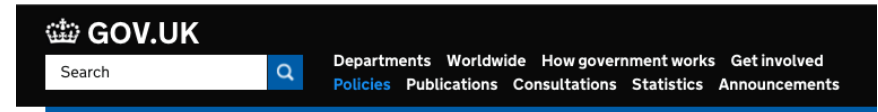
- How the debate is being framed by institutional actors?
- How these institutional framings align with public responses?

# UK Gov Institutional framing of fracking (2011–2014)

- Core objectives
  - Support public engagement
    - “helping people understand the facts about unconventional gas and oil production and what it could mean if it takes place in their area”
  - Support environmental risk assessments
    - “to provide a full picture of the risks and impacts to inform effective engagement with local communities”

“[i]f neighbourhoods can see the benefits – and are reassured about its effects on the environment – then I don’t see why fracking shouldn’t receive real public support”  
(David Cameron, 11 August 2013)

“health, safety and environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing [...] as a means to extract shale gas can be managed effectively in the UK as long as operational best practices are implemented and enforced through regulation”  
(RS/ RAEng, 2012: 4)



## Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil (OUGO)

OUGO sits within the Department of Energy and Climate Change’s Energy Development Unit. The Unit is responsible for encouraging and overseeing energy development in the UK, including licensing oil and gas exploration and production to ensure we make the best use of our available natural resources.

### Contents

- [Make the most of our natural resources](#)
- [Enable development, protecting the environment and safeguarding the public](#)
- [Ensure local communities benefit from development in their area](#)
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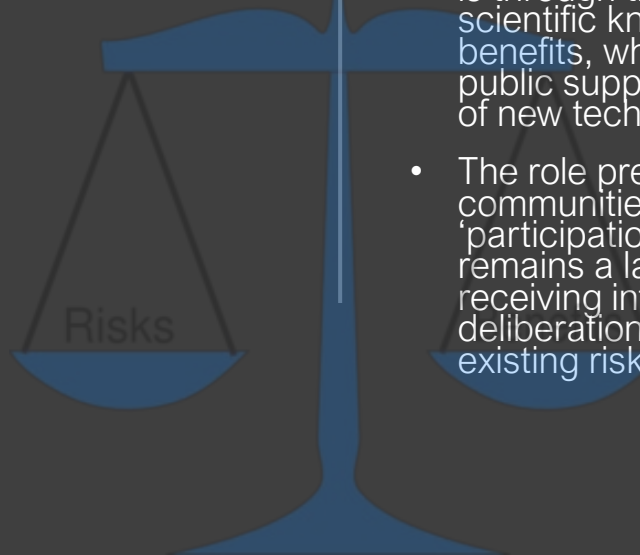
Unconventional gas and oil can enhance our energy security, provide economic growth and be an important part of our transition to a low carbon future. The Government’s Office of Unconventional Gas and Oil (OUGO) aims to promote the safe, responsible, and environmentally sound recovery of the UK’s unconventional reserves of gas and oil. This covers the [development of shale gas and oil](#) and other forms of unconventional production such as coal bed methane.

Successful exploration of unconventional resources in other countries, notably the United States, has proved an important source of energy. The UK has large shale resources but we do not yet know how much of that unconventional energy is recoverable.

# A 'classic' information deficit approach

This helped reinforce a policy narrative in which the sole legitimate barriers to achieving 'real public support' are seen to be a failure on the part of the public to recognise the benefits of fracking and to be reassured by institutional commitments to effective risk assessment and management

- According to this deficit model of science communication it is assumed that public unease is caused primarily by a lack of sufficient knowledge (a deficit of understanding)
- That the best way to overcome this is through the provision of accurate scientific knowledge on risks and benefits, which will best engender public support and the acceptance of new technologies
- The role prescribed for 'local communities' in processes of 'participation' and 'engagement' remains a largely passive one of receiving information, and where deliberation would be dominated by existing risk-science.



# Research methodology

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- A deliberative focus group methodology with lay publics in the north of England
- Groups selected purposively as representing theoretically significant interests in the risks and benefits of fracking
  - Relationship with 'the earth' and the environment (allotment holders, ex-miners, wildlife trust employees)
  - Relationship with progress and the future (Mothers with young children, local history society members, parents of university students)
- Discussion
  - Wider energy and society landscape
  - Technique of fracking
  - Potential benefits of fracking
  - Potential risks of fracking



# Research methodology

**Table 1.** Selection criteria used to recruit focus group participants.

Group	Name	Age	M/F	Class	Place	Topic-specific variable
1	Allotment holders	33–68	M/F	B–D	Newcastle	The earth (digging)
2	Mothers of young children	33–44	F	A–D	Newcastle	Time (the future)
3	Local history society	34–68	M/F	A–D	Nottingham	Time (the past)
4	Ex-miners	45–66	M	B–D	Nottingham	The earth (extraction)
5	Lancashire Wildlife Trust	22–67	M/F	A–D	Lancashire	The earth (environment)
6	Parents of university students	43–60	M/F	B–D	Lancashire	Time (the future)



# Lay responses (2013)

- The energy and society landscape
  - Industry behaviour (motivated by greed and profit)
  - Good governance (have we already left it too late)
- Technique of fracking
  - Some enthusiasm (jobs, size of resource, feasibility)
  - Punctured as conversation developed (uncertainties, unforeseen consequences, lack of involvement)
- Benefits
  - idea that they would directly experience the benefits from fracking viewed as highly dubious due to distrust of energy industry
- Risks
  - Tendency to imagine worst case scenario
  - Assumption that the risks of fracking are safely manageable (assuming 'operational best practices') viewed as an example of naive sociology

# Do they not give you a choice?

Janet: “Surely we as the people of the UK should have been informed that this was possibly going to start happening.”

Marylin: “Do they not give you a choice?”

Emily: “To me, this seems like a massive thing to happen.”

Janet: “To not have been ...”

Emily: “I can’t actually believe I didn’t know.”

(Focus group 2: Mothers of young children)

# Summary

The framing of the issues by lay publics were poorly aligned with current, dominant institutional framings

- Participants questioned the trustworthiness of institutional actors and were reluctant to extend trust to industry or governance actors
- Participants expressed the importance of inclusive and democratic decision-making processes and sensed a lack of inclusion
- Participants expressed unease over the perceived somnambulism promoted by the restrictive 'safety and feasibility' institutional framing of the issue
  - Somnambulism – the condition of walking while asleep or in a hypnotic trance – is here employed as a metaphor to express the under-considered policy drift towards fracking perceived as already underway by many participants
- Participants expressed a prevalent epistemological pessimism whereby uncertainty, ignorance and the 'worst-case scenario' were emphasised, and where experts tended to be characterised as naïve (in relation to assumptions about society) and complacent (in relation to an unruly, elusive nature)

# Reflections: a lesson how not to do policy



PHOTO: CARL COURT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Responsible  
research and  
innovation

A methodology  
to align  
innovation with  
and for society

*“Responsible Research and Innovation is a transparent, interactive process by which societal actors and innovators become mutually responsive to each other with a view on the (ethical) acceptability, sustainability and societal desirability of the innovation process and its marketable products (in order to allow a proper embedding of scientific and technological advances in our society)”*

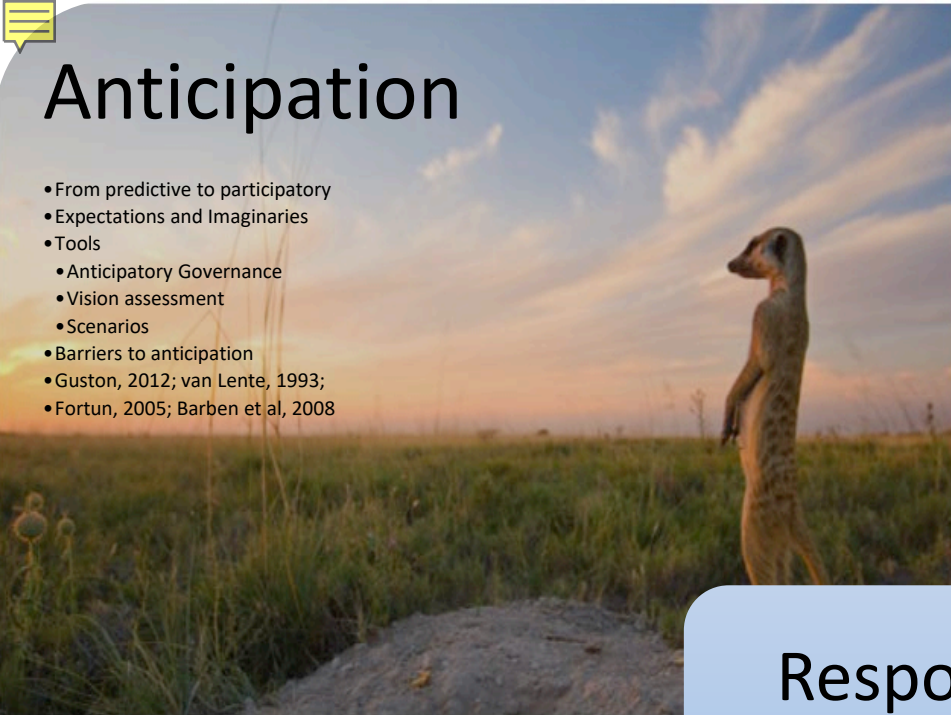
(von Schomberg 2011)

*“taking care of the future through collective stewardship of science and innovation in the present”*

(Stilgoe, Owen and Macnaghten 2012)

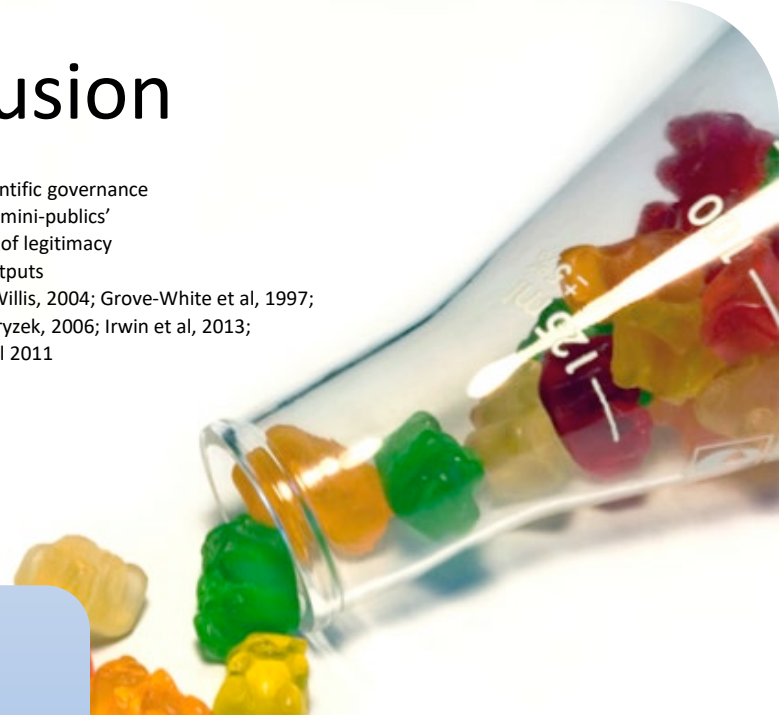
# Anticipation

- From predictive to participatory
- Expectations and Imaginaries
- Tools
  - Anticipatory Governance
  - Vision assessment
  - Scenarios
- Barriers to anticipation
- Guston, 2012; van Lente, 1993;
- Fortun, 2005; Barben et al, 2008



# Inclusion

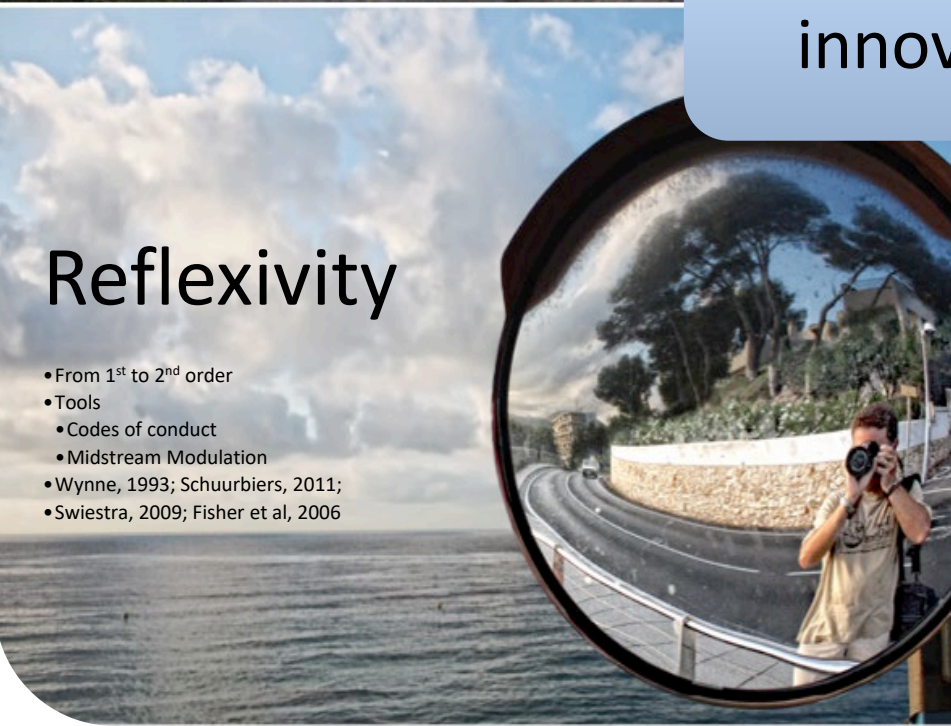
- The 'new' scientific governance
- Dialogue and 'mini-publics'
- The challenge of legitimacy
  - Input and outputs
- Wilsdon and Willis, 2004; Grove-White et al, 1997;
- Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Irwin et al, 2013;
- Lovbrand et al 2011



## Responsible innovation

# Reflexivity

- From 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> order
- Tools
  - Codes of conduct
  - Midstream Modulation
- Wynne, 1993; Schuurbiens, 2011;
- Swiestra, 2009; Fisher et al, 2006



# Responsiveness

- Answering and reacting
- Diversity and resilience
- Value-sensitive design
- De facto governance
- Political economy of innovation
- Responsibility as metagovernance
- Pellizoni, 2004; Collingridge, 1980; Friedman, 1996; Stirling, 2007; Kearnes and Rip, 2009



Thanks

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