

There are no translations available.

Publication year: 2012

Source: Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Available online 2 February 2012

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Due to its environmental impact, the mobility system is increasingly under pressure. The challenges to cope with climate change, air quality, depleting fossil resources imply the need for a transition of the current mobility system towards a more sustainable one. Expectations and visions have been identified as crucial in the guidance of such transitions, and more specifically of actor strategies. Still, it remained unclear why the actors involved in transition activities appear to change their strategies frequently and suddenly. The empirical analysis of the expectations and strategies of three actors in the field of hydrogen and fuel cell technology indicates that changing actor strategies can be explained by rather volatile expectations related to different levels. Our case studies of the strategies of two large car manufacturers and the German government demonstrate that the car manufacturers refer strongly to expectations about the future regime, while expectations related to the socio-technical landscape level appear to be crucial for the strategy of the German government.

Highlights

□ We study the relation between expectations and actor strategies in the automotive industry. □ Changing expectations contribute to the volatility of sustainability transitions. □ Actors refer in their strategy to different types or levels of expectations. □ Expectations about the future regime are important for the strategy of car manufacturers. □ Expectations about the future socio-technical landscape are relevant for government actors.

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