

Research Note 1

Glossary of Intermediaries

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1. Introduction

This short note reviews SURF's existing work on intermediaries - see references - in order to develop a glossary of six concepts. First, an attempt at a definition of intermediaries. Second, a summary of "strategic" intermediaries. Third, a characterisation of two different 'modes' of intermediation. Fourth, an overview of project intermediaries. Fifth, a review of 'systemic' intermediaries. Finally, an outline of the conditions under which 'active and transformative' intermediation could occur. The references provide a guide to more detailed reviews and developments of each of these concepts.

2. What are Intermediaries?

A basic definition defines an intermediary as 'action between two parties - mediatory' or 'situated or occurring between two things - intermediate'. The latter form refers more to a position within a process or level of achievement. The former, by contrast, refers to an intermediary as an agent in some form, as 'one who acts between others - a do-between or mediator', or as 'something acting between things persons or things'. As actors then, what intermediaries do is mediate, they work in-between, make connections, enable a relationship between different persons or things. Indeed in common parlance the meaning implied by the concept intermediary tends to refer to a neutral player trying to mediate between different sets of interests. The assumption of neutrality is however, problematic. Rather than focus on everything as an intermediary, the interesting question is to ask in what ways, where, when and how particular things, people, organisations etc. are/ become defined as 'intermediaries'. Further still, there is the question of the active role that intermediaries play in defining the relationship between other actors. In other words, intermediaries are not simply arbitrators; they play a role in ordering and defining relationships (see Medd and Marvin, 2007).

2. Strategic Intermediaries - Mediating between Production and Consumption Systems

The organisation of socio-technical networks, that typically cross "technical", "social" and "ecological" boundaries, are complex. There is some difficulty organising innovation, experiments or systemic transitions within - often privatised and liberalised - networks. With this in mind, we are particularly interested in examining those actors that position themselves as strategic intermediaries acting between different sets of things and interests (see Hodson and Marvin, 2007; Marvin and Medd, 2004). *Strategic intermediaries* are deliberately positioned to act "in between" by bringing together and mediating between different interests. Specifically we are interested in how intermediary roles are constituted and what particular functions and processes they perform in relation to reconfiguring relations between production and consumption interests and shaping systemic socio-technical change. For us intermediaries are defined by their strategic function, they become "strategic" intermediaries in reshaping the relations between things and social interests (Medd and Marvin, 2007). Strategic intermediary organizations are significant because of their intentional positioning between the interests of the established institutional representations of the infrastructure sector, namely, utility companies, regulators and the consumers (see Marvin and Medd, 2004). They are also

distinctive because their importance is largely neglected in analysis of infrastructure sector dynamics generally and as a specific class of actor in debates on socio-technical transitions. However, the work of active intermediaries poses a challenge to how we can constructively explore the limits of strategies of projects and experimentation or systemic change in socio-technical networks (see Hodson and Marvin, 2007).

3. Modes of Intermediation – Project vs. Systemic

Different *modes of intermediation* can be seen looking across the literatures. In some cases intermediation is bilateral, taking place between two sets of defined actors. This is the case, for example, in what van Lente et al. (2003) call “project intermediaries” that would work between a particular university and industry. By contrast, it is often the case that intermediaries operate through multi-lateral sets of relationships. The new forms of intermediaries in innovation that act as network facilitators that bridge and facilitate multiple actors are called “systemic intermediaries” by Lente et al. (2003), see Table 1.

	Role	Type of organisation	Function	Core relations
Project Intermediaries	Energy services	Commercial	Supporting the development of shared energy savings strategy	One-to-one support of small to medium enterprises
	Energy Technology Transfer	Public/Private	Forging linkages between universities and industry	Facilitation between particular universities and industrial manufacturers
Systemic Intermediaries	Energy Transition Facilitators	Public sponsored	Articulation of demand, alignment of actors, creating learning environments	Bridging and facilitating multi-actor networks
	Market Shapers	Eco-preneurs	Shaping demand, select configurations of actors	Realigning actors in multi-actor networks

Table 1. Two modes of intermediaries. Source: developed from van Lente et al. 2003

4. Project Intermediaries – reshaping energy production/consumption relations

Project intermediaries stimulate greater energy savings, accelerate the application of new technologies, advance the cost-efficiency and customer-orientation of energy services and generate new jobs in energy management. The liberalisation of energy markets across Europe is radically rearranging the relationship between the energy utility companies and the consumer. Cutting across traditional functional divisions between the generation, transmission, distribution and consumption of energy, new organisations are emerging in the production-consumption nexus to provide new services in the openings created by liberalised markets and in response to new energy policies. Examples of these “intermediaries” range from consultants offering ‘shared savings’ energy conservation, facility managers operating heating/power appliances for industrial users and managers of grid and distribution networks, to energy trading associations of end-users and consumer associations informing private households on ways of cutting bills by using less energy. Intermediaries aim to reshape the intensity, timing and level of energy use. The challenge

to energy researchers and managers is to better understand how these intermediaries operate by creating new social and institutional contexts of urban energy management (For a review of water intermediaries see Medd and Marvin, 2007).

5. Systemic Intermediaries – shaping transitions in energy systems

'Systemic intermediaries' manage transitions in energy systems in particular places (see Hodson and Marvin, 2008), and *actively* seek to re-shape energy infrastructures. More specifically we are concerned with understanding what active attempts to reconfigure the energy infrastructures of cities and regions look like; what sort of transition is envisaged, how is capacity built to enact such a transition, and what are the consequences of attempts to enact a transition? The extent to which an envisaged transition is 'achieved' is thus related to the development of capacity. The possibilities for actively developing capacity in city and regional contexts are constituted on the capability of intermediaries to build this capacity through multi-level networks of "relevant" social interests including political support, economic leverage, technology suppliers, etc and "appropriate" resources such as forms of local knowledge, local political support, corporate investment, national political and financial support, etc.

6. 'Active' and Transformative Intermediation

SURF, working with different clients and funding, has found that successful intermediation requires a pre-understanding and effort among partners to work in the first place (See May, 2008; Simpson et al 2006). The issues that need to be addressed include: examining complex multi-level contexts; operating in networks within and between organizations; forming partnerships and alliances that are sustainable and recognising that actions occur at different scales, times periods and have variable consequences. There are no magic bullet solutions. To achieve active, transformative outcomes, the following issues need to be taken on board. First, broaden and deepen an analysis of existing capacity and desired outcomes in relation to knowledge exchange. Second, set up communication mechanisms to generate comparative understandings that can inform the development of good practice. That means a preparedness to learn lessons from the work of others, but also to develop those according to a good understanding of contexts and desired outcomes. Third, knit streams together. The challenge here is to create cross-working with partners to enable "joined-up" solutions to complex problems. Fourth, develop a foresight capacity. This is not only to influence the direction in which knowledge is deployed, but to act as a form of enrolment in order that different partners have a working understanding of what is needed and how that can occur. Fifth, develop new relationships with "stakeholders". Not only is it necessary to re-visit the basis of relations with existing partners, but also create and bring on board those who might normally be excluded. These are likely to be more complex, flexible and interactive relations, but necessary for the reasons outlined above. Finally, constitute embeddedness through commitment and practice. This is core to the long-term viability and success of developments. If there is commitment to pursue partnerships, then the issue of capacity to deliver is raised and this requires new ways of working in an active and transformative manner.

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