

UiO : **Centre for Development and the Environment**
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Why energy is a social good and what this means for 'energy savings' research and policy agendas

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Aims

- Underline the urgency of recasting energy as a social good
- Explore conventional and new approaches to energy consumption and savings
- Give special attention to the power of social practice theory to capture energy 'behavior'
- Suggest policy implications of a practice perspective

Conventional approaches

- For much of its history, the human aspects of energy use ignored altogether in energy savings theory and policy
- When addressed, energy consumption has most often been cast as an individual activity (calculating, rational and self interested); and energy savings policy reduced to economically grounded information.

Reframing energy consumption

‘Behavior’ is shaped in the interaction of knowledge embedded in the social, cultural and material contributions to everyday practices

New frontiers of research acknowledge and explore:

- Social performance
- Embodiment and en-culturation of demand
- Habits
- Material agency

Social Performance

- Veblen's pecking order
- Bourdieu's social space
- Wilhite and Lutzenhiser: Social loading
- Shove's work on the power of being normal:
keeping up is as important as getting ahead

Culture and Embodiment

Comfort (heating and cooling), cleanliness (hot water and soap), lighting are each influenced by cultural anchoring (Wilhite, Nakagami, Masuda, Yamaga and Haneda et al. 1996)

Habits

- Under certain conditions, repeated performance of a given energy using practice can lead to habit
- Changing habits implies a different theoretical frame than is usual for energy policy and opens for a discussion of new forms of policy instruments

Material agency

Things have knowledge. In other words: important aspects of energy demand are embedded in the material world.

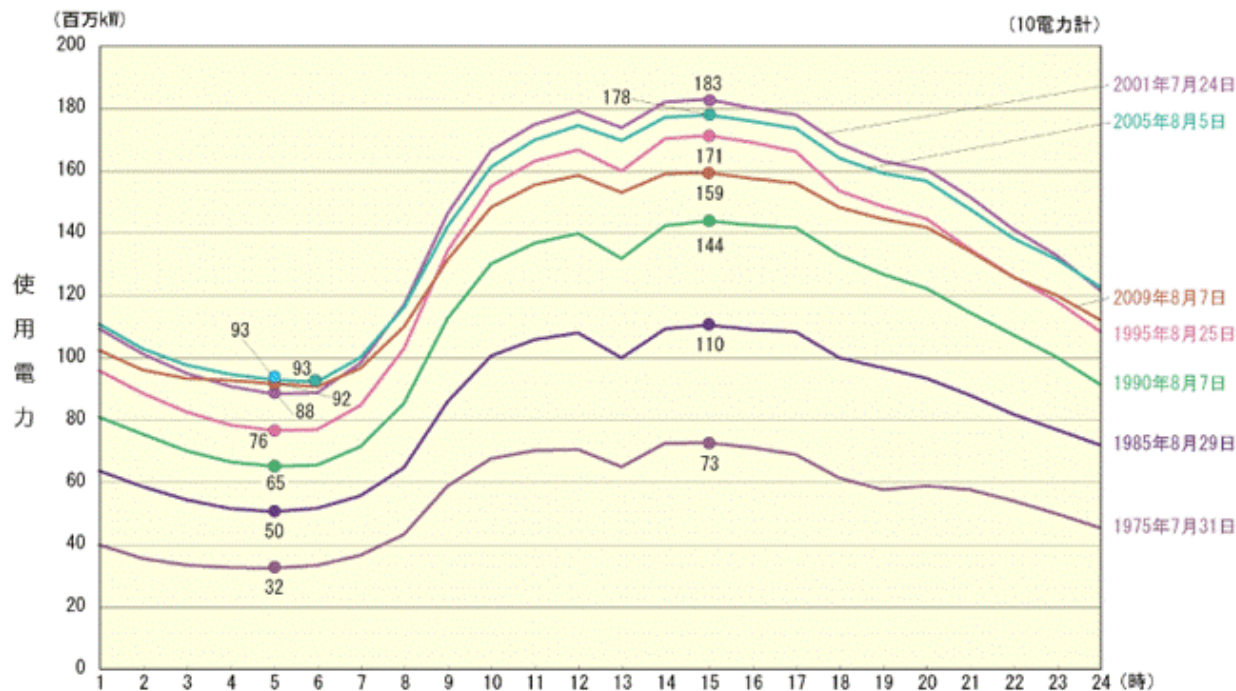
Material agency: two examples related to refrigeration

- Refrigerator: Research from India shows that latent potentials for storing foods and cooling drinks have overcome Indian food ideology, have paved the way for enormous changes in food practices and opened for new regimes of food technologies
- Air conditioning (next slide)

Summer Peak Load, Japan

Courtesy of Jyukankyo Research Institute, C. Murakoshi

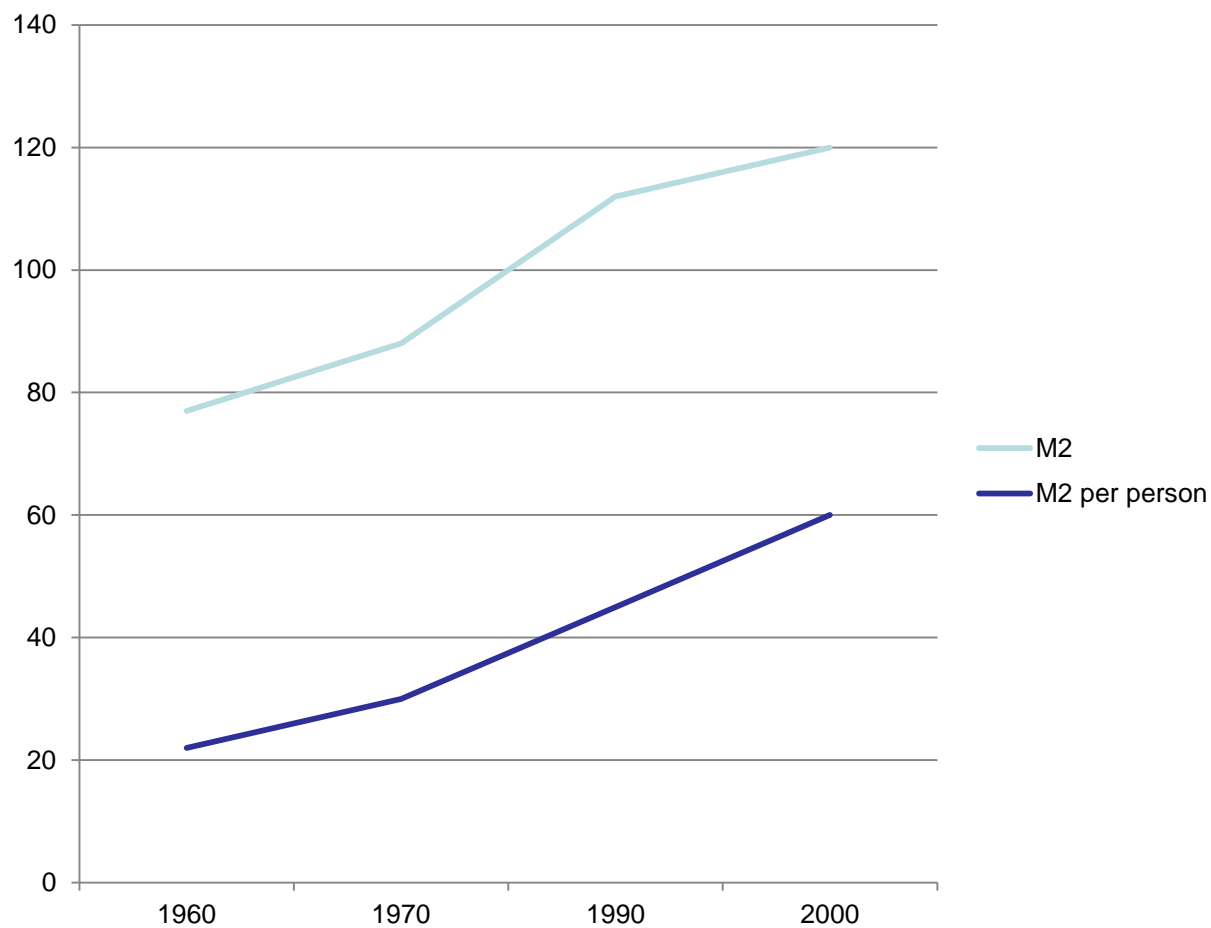
最大電力発生日における1日の電気の使われ方の推移



(注) 1975年のみ9電力計

Norwegian house size, historical

Data source: SSB



Social practice theory

- Energy consumption is theorized as taking shape in the interactions between individuals (bodies and minds), things (material contexts) and experientially embedded dispositions for action.
- From this practice perspective energy savings policy should aim at each of these and their interactions.

Broader policy implications

- Emphasize experiments, exposure and social networks of practical knowledge
- Reconfigure provision (buildings, technologies and other energy using commodities) in order to enable saving 'behaviors'.
- Confront this question: Is a reduction in the energy intensity of 'behavior' possible in an economy framed by growth?