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The University of Manchester  
Sustainable Consumption Institute

Sustainable Consumption Institute

SCI Newsletter

Winter 2016

# SCI announce exciting collaboration in China

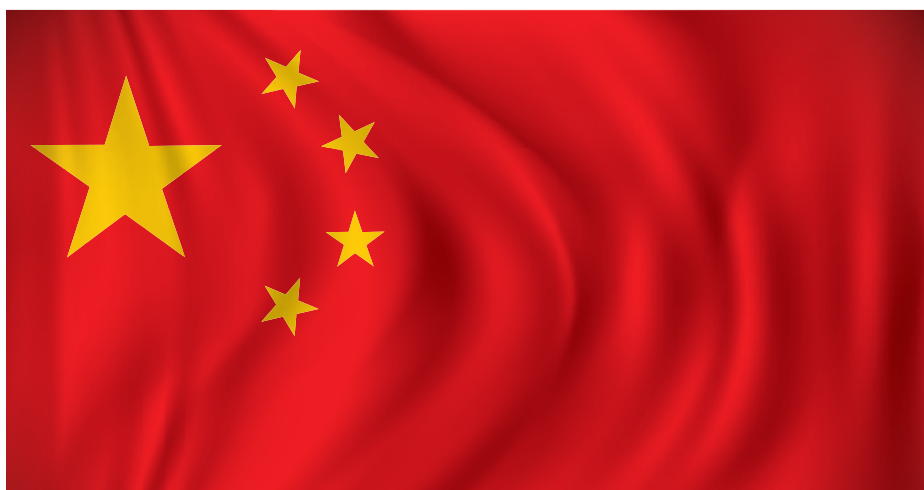
**Andrew McMeekin** (SCI Research Director)

Over the last six months, we have been delighted to welcome a host of new faces to the SCI: Sherilyn MacGregor joins us as Reader in Environmental Politics; Helen Holmes as a Hallsworth Fellow; and Cameron Roberts as Research Associate. We also welcome five new PhD students. You can read more about our new arrivals in the pages of this newsletter.

The last period kicked off in conference season at the end of last summer. SCI researchers went *en masse* to three of the key conferences in our field: the International Sustainability Transitions conference in Brighton, the European Sociology Association conference in Turin, and the Royal Geographical Society conference in Exeter.

Perhaps even more exciting was the signing of a formal collaboration between the SCI and the highly prestigious Chinese Academy of Social Science. The rise of a Chinese consumer society over the next decades will feature prominently in debates about sustainable societies, and our collaboration will facilitate the development of research projects and staff exchanges with our new partners. The collaboration agreement was launched at a conference in Beijing during September, in which a SCI delegation discussed with our new colleagues the latest advances in sustainable consumption research and policy.

January 2016 marks the publication of the SCI-edited special issue of *Discover Society*,



the online magazine published by The Policy Press. This issue contains a wide range of articles capturing the most recent thinking from across the SCI and also features an illuminating interview with Committee for Climate Change Chief Executive Matthew Bell. In November, the SCI also co-hosted 'On the Home Front' as part of the University of Manchester's annual Policy Week. The event attracted a great crowd to discuss and debate how domestic energy consumption could be reduced.

Alongside a raft of new publications in leading social science and environmental science journals, the recent period also saw publication of Alan Warde's new monograph, *The Practice of Eating* and Mike Hodson's co-edited volume, *Retrofitting Cities*.

Finally, it would be amiss to close without a mention of the Paris COP21. The SCI contributed to the final major conference before the negotiations and has posted several blogs outlining reactions to the agreement. The Paris outcome was stronger on agreeing targets than on elaborating how they might be met – and that means there is now an even greater demand for better social-scientific understanding of how production and consumption systems will need to be reconfigured over the next few decades.

We hope you enjoy reading about these and other SCI activities in this Newsletter.

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How do we deliver a more sustainable future  
without compromising our quality of life?

# SCI Collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

**Dr. Daniel Welch reports on an SCI delegation to Beijing for a workshop with the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences**

The SCI's Dr. Alison Browne, Prof. Alan Warde and myself travelled to Beijing in September for a workshop, organised by Dr. Zhu Di of the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and Alison Browne. The workshop saw the signing of a memorandum of understanding between CASS and the SCI to explore possibilities for collaboration between the institutes. The workshop was part of a research project lead by Alan Warde, funded by the British Academy and CASS, comparing Chinese and UK policies for sustainable consumption, which will see Dr. Zhu Di visiting the SCI for three months in 2016, and a further workshop in Manchester. The two day workshop (Sept. 9-10) consisted of a day of presentations from the SCI delegation, and sociologists at CASS, as well as colleagues from Guangdong and Hong Kong, followed by a day of roundtable discussions on possibilities for research collaboration.

Since China introduced widespread economic reforms in 1978 there have been vast socio-economic changes that have driven massive urbanisation, and since the 1990s a consumer revolution. Levels of rural-urban migration unprecedented anywhere in history have seen well over half the Chinese population now living in cities, and per capita CO2 emissions approaching the average level of E.U. countries. Total CO2 emissions in China already equal the combined emissions of the E.U. and the U.S. and the annual growth rate of emissions make China the major driver of global CO2 emissions. The explosive growth in consumer society standards of living in China mean that sustainability issues in China are now fundamentally linked to global sustainability crises, including, beyond fossil fuels, issues of deforestation and

**Total CO2 emissions in China already equal the combined emissions of the E.U. and the U.S....**

global food security. For China itself, urban air pollution, soil degradation, water scarcity and pollution and food security present fundamental problems to continued growth, while urbanisation and the consumer revolution pose critical issues of inequality, especially in the rural-urban divide, macro-economic imbalances, housing, mobility and social cohesion. The rise of Chinese consumer society and the challenges it poses for sustainable consumption are discussed in an article by Dr. Alison Browne, Dr. Zhu Di and colleagues available in the current issue of online magazine Discover Society ([discoversociety.org](http://discoversociety.org)).

Alan Warde opened the workshop, presenting on behalf of SCI Director Dale Southerton, on the challenge posed by consumption to climate change and the SCI's core research themes. CASS Institute of Sociology Director Prof. Chen Guangjin welcomed the goal of flexible and open collaboration between CASS and the SCI, and reflected on the Chinese context, in which the State aims to rebalance the economy towards domestic consumption. Alan went on to give the keynote address, reflecting on the development of the study

of consumption in sociology and the analytical achievements it has afforded the study of sustainable consumption. Alan suggested that the key challenges of the research agenda for the sociology of sustainable consumption concerned: the theoretical relationship between consumption and production; a sociological account of collective action; issues of public, corporate and collective consumption; and developing a mode of critique adequate to the challenges of sustainable consumption.

Alison Browne discussed issues around conventions and practices of domestic water use, and the practice theoretical approach to water consumption that she has pioneered in recent years. With water scarcity and pollution a major issue for China, the importance of changing the trajectory of development from the profligate domestic consumption of water that has become the norm in advanced industrial societies is critical. My own contributions were, firstly, on behalf of Dr. David Evans, work developed from the 'Households, Retailers and Food Waste Reduction' project considering 'the consumer' as a powerful and pervasive rhetorical and conceptual category, and suggesting a critical approach to the responsibilities commonly accorded the consumer in discussions of sustainable consumption. Secondly, I discussed sociological approaches to brands and branding and then reflected on their relation to sustainable consumption. Brands may have an important role to play in the development of sustainable consumption in China, especially in the context of the very different historical development and political context of civil society, which has been central to the emergence of issues of sustainable consumption in the West.



Prof. Alan Warde, Dr. Alison Browne, and Dr. Daniel Welch from the SCI, with workshop organiser Dr. Zhu Di (second from right) and colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing.

CASS Institute of Sociology Director Prof. Chen Guangjin presented on consumption patterns and trends in urban and rural China. Social stratification and inequality are central issues for Chinese sociology. Although rural incomes have increased substantially, rural-urban income inequalities have also increased, as Dr. Tian Feng demonstrated from analysis of social survey data. Rural incomes still only support basic expenditure – and enhancing consumption for the poorest groups is an important policy issue, requiring reform of the market, as well as welfare provision.

Dr. Ho Wing Chung from City University of Hong Kong provided a perspective on consumption and mobility amongst young Western migrants in Hong Kong, from a research collaboration with Goldsmiths in the UK. Prof. Wang Jing (CASS) discussed the housing market in urban China. 87% of urban housing is privately owned (far higher than the UK) – and there is much concern over the speculative nature of the market, with vacancy rates running at 22% (compared to 9% in the EU). Prof. Shi

Changhui reported on a CASS-Norwegian collaboration addressing conceptual frameworks for measuring sustainable development.

Prof. Wang Ning, of Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangdong, widely acknowledged as the leading sociologist of consumption in China, discussed the problem of the common paradigm of consumers sending market signals regarding environmental and economic value in the Chinese context. For the majority of Chinese consumers, suggested Prof. Wang, 'more is better'.

Lastly, our host Dr. Zhu Di presented on the evolving policy mechanisms addressing sustainable consumption in China. The global sustainability impacts of the Chinese consumer revolution are vast, and the potential for sustainable consumption policy to mitigate these impacts is therefore of huge global significance.

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How do we align our personal desire for a better life with a shared need for a better future?

# On the Home Front:

## SCI and CIED at Manchester Policy Week

November 5th for the SCI and the Centre on Innovation and Energy Demand this year was about home fires not bonfires, as the research centres contributed to Manchester Policy Week with an event focused on challenges of reducing household energy use. 'On the Home Front' brought together leading thinkers from the world of social science, policy and practice, with fellow academics, local activists and students, to discuss how households can dramatically reduce their energy consumption, the lessons of UK domestic energy policies and how the social sciences can inform the debate.

The event kicked off with organiser Dr. Victoria Johnson (SCI and CIED) introducing a workshop of around 40 delegates to the place of household energy demand reduction in the wider context of climate change. The workshop then split into groups to discuss a number of 'provocations' around the issues, facilitated by SCI researchers, as a process to develop informed and insightful questions to be posed to a panel of experts later that evening.

Provocations included issues such as: "Financial incentives are the only way to reduce household energy consumption"; "Should the government no longer have to subsidise solar photovoltaics through the Feed-in-Tariff"; and "Was the government right to abandon the Zero Carbon Homes Standard?". My own group, tackling the last of those provocations, was made up of two third year undergraduates embarking on energy related dissertations, a postgraduate researcher working on sustainability in industrial systems, a member of Manchester's Carbon Co-op with personal experience of home retrofitting and someone just about to embark on building a passive house for retirement.

Lively discussion ensued covering everything from the tension between behavioural change and background smart technologies, the effect of abandoning the



Zero Carbon Standard on the mainstream and sustainability specialist construction industry, the UK housing crisis, and the marginal higher costs of zero carbon new builds in the context of inflated land prices.

After feeding back group discussions to the workshop as a whole we carried on the conversations at a networking reception, surrounded by the historic stained glass windows of Manchester's Mechanics Institute.

Following the reception, 'On the Home Front' moved onto 'Energy Question Time', a panel discussion ably chaired by the Carbon Co-op's Jonathon Atkinson. The

panel consisted of the SCI Research Fellow Dr. Alison Browne, Richard Segar (Senior Policy and Projects Officer, ResPublica, and author of 'After the Green Deal' report), Councillor Kate Chappell of Manchester City Council (Executive Member for the Environment), architect Marianne Heaslip of Urbanism Environmental Design, Dr. Mari Martiskainen (Research Fellow at the CIED) and Ron Bailey, Head of Parliamentary Affairs, Sustainable Energy Association.

A wide ranging and informed debate followed covering diverse topics, including: Manchester City Council's plans to establish a collective energy supply deal for local residents; the future of the solar installation industry; how the Sustainable Communities Bill might be used to leverage local supply deals from community energy generation projects; the social equity of the Feed in Tariff; and difficulties of engaging householders with energy efficiency programmes.

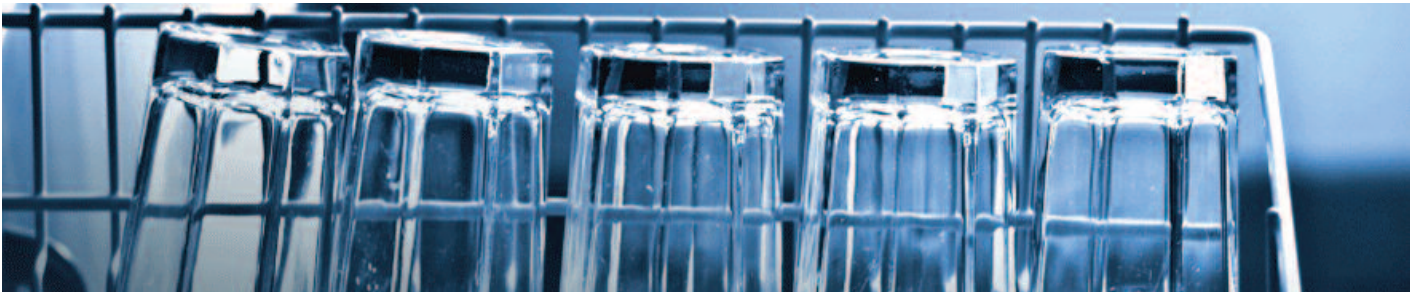
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### Publication:

**Doyle, T., McEachern, D. & MacGregor, S. (2015) Environment and Politics, 4th Edition, London: Routledge**

The SCI's Sheryl MacGregor along with colleagues, Timothy Doyle and Doug McEachern recently published the 4th Edition of Environment and Politics which is a concise introduction to this ever-expanding interdisciplinary field, explaining and illustrating how concepts, conflicts, movements, political systems and the practices of policy-making can be analysed in a systematic way. This book provides a comprehensive overview of the key themes that shape the field, and examines a diverse range of environmental problems and policy solutions found in different countries and cultures.



# SCI Professor elected to the prestigious Academia Europaea



Congratulations to Prof Frank Geels of the SCI on his recent election to the Academia Europaea.

The Academia Europaea is a functioning European Academy of Humanities, Letters

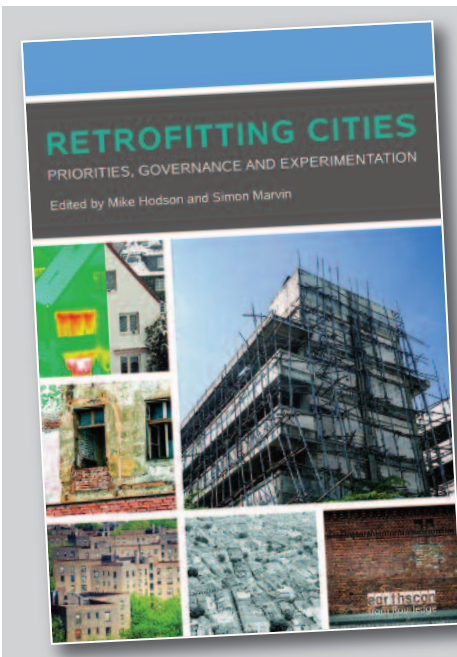
and Sciences, which elects members based on outstanding scholarship. Membership is by invitation only and is offered only after peer group nomination, scrutiny and confirmation as to the eminence of the

individual in their chosen field. Frank joins the ranks of other eminent scholars including:

**Archer, Margaret S.  
Boudon, Raymond  
Castells, Manuel  
Elster, Jon  
Giddens, Anthony  
Goldthorpe, John  
Hall, Peter  
Mayntz, Renate  
Nowotny, Helga  
Streeck, Wolfgang  
Touraine, Alain**

The photograph above shows Frank (5th person from left) at the 'Our Common Future Conference' held at the UNESCO Head Office in Paris last Summer, where he gave a keynote address entitled '**System innovations and socio-technical transitions**'. Frank is also currently Chairman of the Sustainability Transitions Research Network and you can find out more about his work by visiting [www.sci.manchester.ac.uk/people/professor-frank-geels](http://www.sci.manchester.ac.uk/people/professor-frank-geels)

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## Publication:

**Hodson, M. & Marvin, S. (eds.) (2015) Retrofitting Cities: Priorities, Governance and Experimentation, Routledge: Abingdon.**

The SCI's Mike Hodson together with Simon Marvin has developed an up-to-date critical framework for analysing urban retrofit, this is the first book to examine urban re-engineering for sustainability in a socio-technical context. Retrofitting Cities examines why retrofit is emerging as an important strategic issue for urban authorities and untangles the mix of economic, competitive, ecological and social drivers that influence any transition towards a more sustainable urban environment.

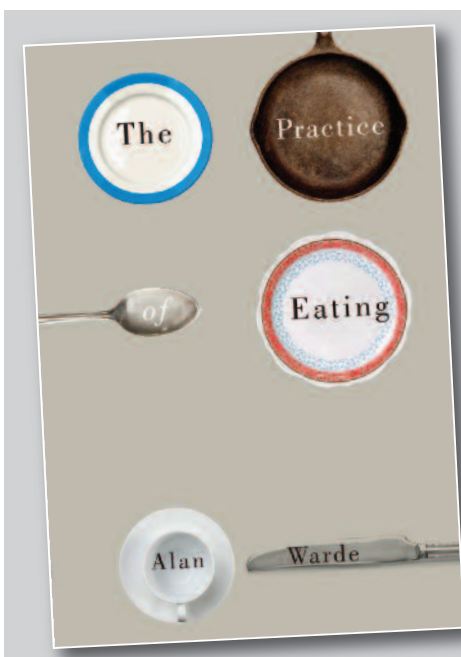
How do we deliver a more sustainable future without compromising our quality of life?

## SCI Special Issue of Discover Society

The January 2016 edition of online magazine Discover Society presents a special issue on Sustainable Consumption, showcasing SCI research. The issue, edited by SCI Director Dale Southerton and researcher Dan Welch, features contributions from a full 15 SCI researchers on diverse topics: from the neglected issue of gender in sustainable consumption, to understanding the diffusion of low carbon technological systems, to the provocative promises of the kitchen-less home.

Contributions from further afield include an interview with Matthew Bell, CEO of the Committee on Climate Change, and reflections on sustainability communications from Steve Connor of pioneering agency Creative Concern, as well as academic colleagues from Denmark, China, Estonia and Norway. Dale Southerton and Dan Welch provide an overview of the new directions in sustainable consumption and production research offered by the SCI, and guest authors address sustainable consumption in the contexts of China, and of India, and the role of media in everyday consumption practices.

*Discover Society 28 Special Issue on Sustainable Consumption is available now at [www.discoversociety.org](http://www.discoversociety.org)*



### Publication:

**Warde, A. (2016) *The Practice of Eating*, Cambridge: Polity.**

This book reconstructs and extends sociological approaches to the understanding of food consumption. It identifies new ways to approach the explanation of food choice and it develops new concepts which will help reshape and reorient common understandings. SCI Professor and leading sociologist of food, Alan Warde, deals both with abstract issues about theories of practice and substantive analyses of aspects of eating, demonstrating how theories of practice can be elaborated and systematically applied to the activity of eating.

## SCI Seminar Series

**24 Feb 2016**

**Professor Sergio Schneider**

Professor Sergio Schneider, Professor of Rural Development & Food Studies, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, will be giving the SCI Seminar on the 24 February 2016, further details to follow.

**29 Jun 2016**

**Professor David C Gibbs**

Professor David C Gibbs, Professor of Human Geography, University of Hull, will be giving the SCI Seminar on the 29 June 2016.

*Details of these events can be found on our website: [www.sci@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:www.sci@manchester.ac.uk)*



## Welcome to the SCI...

**Sherilyn MacGregor** joined the SCI in October 2015 as Reader in Environmental Politics, after nine years as a Senior Lecturer at Keele University

One of a small number of scholars in the UK specialising in the interdisciplinary field of gender and environmental politics, Sherilyn's research explores themes of environmental (un)sustainability, gender (in)equality, and theories and practices of citizenship. Her research is animated by critical questions about power relations, environmental and social justice, the gendered divisions of labour and responsibility, and strategies for eco-social transformation in affluent societies.

Her research has been published in a range of journals including *British Politics*, *Sociological Review*, *Hypatia*,

*Local Environment*, and *Energy Policy*. Recent books include *Environmental Movements around the World: Shades of Green in Politics and Culture* (co-edited with Timothy Doyle; 2014) and the fourth edition of *Environment and Politics* (co-authored by Timothy Doyle and Doug McEachern; 2015). She is currently editing the *Routledge International Handbook on Gender and Environment* (to be published in 2016) and has been joint editor of *Environmental Politics*, the top journal in her field, for the past four years.

In her new position in the SCI and Politics discipline area in the School of Social Sciences, Sherilyn will further develop her thinking in a theoretical monograph on gender, power and environmental politics (provisionally titled, *The Green*



*Elephant*) and pursue a number of new research projects relating to sustainable consumption and social justice. For example, in summer 2016 she will work on a collaborative project with an architect/planner at the Delft University of Technology (funded by the

EU COST Action genderSTE) titled 'urban co-housing as a climate mitigation and adaptation strategy: a critical evaluation through a feminist intersectional justice lens'. She also has a keen interest in researching the design and delivery of 'sustainability services' that can simultaneously address the needs for more and better socialized care and low-carbon/low impact living.

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## Newly appointed Hallsworth Fellow at the SCI

**Helen Holmes** is a newly appointed Hallsworth Fellow at the Sustainable Consumption Institute. Her project: 'Makers, make do and mend: a newly thrifty consumer?' is exploring thrift within contemporary society. It aims to investigate how thrift as a concept is mobilised by households either as a necessity or as part of a lifestyle choice.



thrift and how these practices intersect with time and objects. This will involve exploring how thrift is enabled or constrained by time, be that time of the household, in other words, having enough time, but also time of materials and objects and how their lives are extended or altered as part of being thrifty.

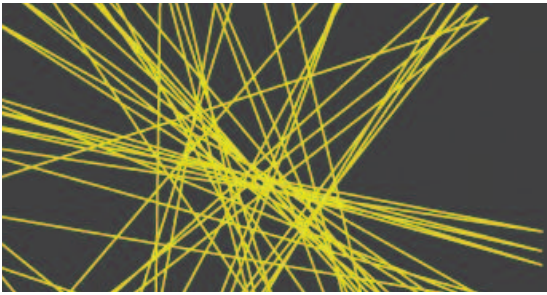
The project builds upon Helen's previous research exploring the intersection of practice, time and materials through her PhD on hair and the craft of hairdressing, as well as studies into the conduits of waste disposal.

As a qualitative researcher with ethnographic expertise, Helen is keen to use the project to explore different and innovative methods. To this end, Helen

will be deploying a mixed methods approach, combining a quantitative time use diary alongside qualitative approaches including: participant observation in several voluntary organisations; household interviews involving innovative material culture methods, such as cupboard audits; and also issuing a Mass Observation Directive on the subject of thrift. The project has the support of several organisations including The Trussell Trust, Marks & Spencers, Incredible Edible and Lancashire County Council.

Overall, the project aims to enhance and develop conceptualisations of consumption, particularly within wider political and cultural debates on austerity, overconsumption, sustainability and waste.

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# Welcome to the SCI...



**Steffen Hirth**

PhD title: *Relational geographies of food as areas of conflict between private affairs and political issues: spatial and social localisations of responsibility in 'sustainable' food discourses and practices*



**Malte Rodl**

PhD title: *The evolution of 'meat analogues': a comparative analysis of the interconnectedness of changing consumption and production practices*



**Joe Blakey**

PhD title: *The Ontological Politics of Carbon Metrics*



**Harald Wieser**

PhD title: *The Temporalities of Consumption and Divestment*



**Anna Weinhues**

PhD title: *Just Footprints: Distributing Ecological Space across Species, Place and Time*



**Ema Johnson**

PhD title: *Alternative models of food provisioning systems and their capacity to transition to a more sustainable food system*

## New Research Associate Cameron Roberts



Cameron Roberts' background is in the history of technology, which he applies to develop historical case studies to investigate past transitions.

He just completed a PhD at the University of Manchester, where he developed an analytical model of the development of discursive storylines during socio-technical transitions. This was tested using primary historical research into opinion journalism, advertising, political speeches, and other forms of popular media covering the transition from a rail-dominated transport system to a road-dominated transport system in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Cameron's project at the SCI concerns the subject of accelerated technological diffusion. Cameron will be using historical case studies of technologies which diffused more rapidly than normal; particularly if this was the result of an intentional effort by a government or other institution. These case studies will be used to develop a model of how accelerated diffusion can be successfully encouraged.

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