Sustainable energy supply and gender relations. The social construction of gender in the context of heat energy consumption in residential buildings

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The dissertation project is part of a research project on social, ecological and economical dimensions of sustainable energy consumption in residential buildings, financed by the German Federal bureau of education and research within the research program of "sozial-ökologische Forschung". The aim of the project is a deeper understanding of buying decisions for energy-saving or sustainable energy supply technologies in order to give advice to political and marketing actors.

My dissertation project investigates sustainable domestic heat consumption from a Science and Technology Studies perspective, putting special emphasis on the role of gender relations.

Based on the assumption that technology and gender have to be thought together and that "(...) technology is both a source and consequence of gender relations and vice versa" (Faulkner, 2001), I approach the field of domestic heat consumption as a socio-technical constellation with three distinctive dimensions: interactions, technologies, and institutional structures (cf. Rohracher, 2002). Gendering processes are investigated in each of these dimensions.

The analysis focuses on: 1. interactions (cf. between users and consultants or sellers, but also between users and technologies) 2. institutional structures (cf. patterns of gendered work division in the household or the gendering of space in houses) and symbolic representations (cf. the question with which forms of masculinity and femininity technologies considered sustainable are linked) 3. technologies (which can be gendered, e.g. through their design or through the context in which they appear).

The objective of the study is to gain deeper understanding of the co-constitutive relation between gender and technology and the processes of doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in the area of sustainable heat energy technologies.

