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Managing Urban Socio-Technical Change? Comparing Energy Technology Controversies in Three European Contexts

In recent years an emerging body of literature has highlighted the systemic, multi-level, multiissue and multi-actor nature of socio-technical transitions. This literature has explored the possibilities for “managing” systemic socio-technical transitions in response to contemporary challenges posed to energy, water and transport systems of production and consumption. In this view management of transitions is seen not in terms of top-down control but as a process of steering multi-level transitions. Though we are sympathetic to transitions approaches they say little about the urban contexts within which socio-technical transitions often take place. In this paper we address this shortcoming through bringing a concern with urban governance 333

together with transitions approaches. Bringing transitions approaches and urban governance literatures together, we develop a fruitful set of themes to understand the (in-) active urban “management” of socio-technical change. We explore and compare these themes through research into controversial energy technology siting issues conducted in three urban contexts, Bracknell (UK), Lund (Sweden) and Languedoc (France). We conclude by characterising the different roles that new energy technologies take on in relation to urban governance and consider what insights the different technologies bring to our understanding of siting controversies.