



HAL
open science

Interrogating the transformative power of renewable energy support instruments: the example of feed-in tariffs for photovoltaics

Béatrice Cointe

► **To cite this version:**

Béatrice Cointe. Interrogating the transformative power of renewable energy support instruments: the example of feed-in tariffs for photovoltaics. *Our Common Future Under Climate Change*, Jul 2015, Paris, France. hal-01677322

HAL Id: hal-01677322

<https://hal.science/hal-01677322>

Submitted on 8 Jan 2018

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Interrogating the transformative power of renewable energy support instruments: the example of feed-in tariffs for photovoltaics

BEATRICE COINTE

Centre International de Recherche sur l'Environnement et le Développement (CIRED), Nogent-sur-Marne, France

contact : cointe@centre-cired.fr

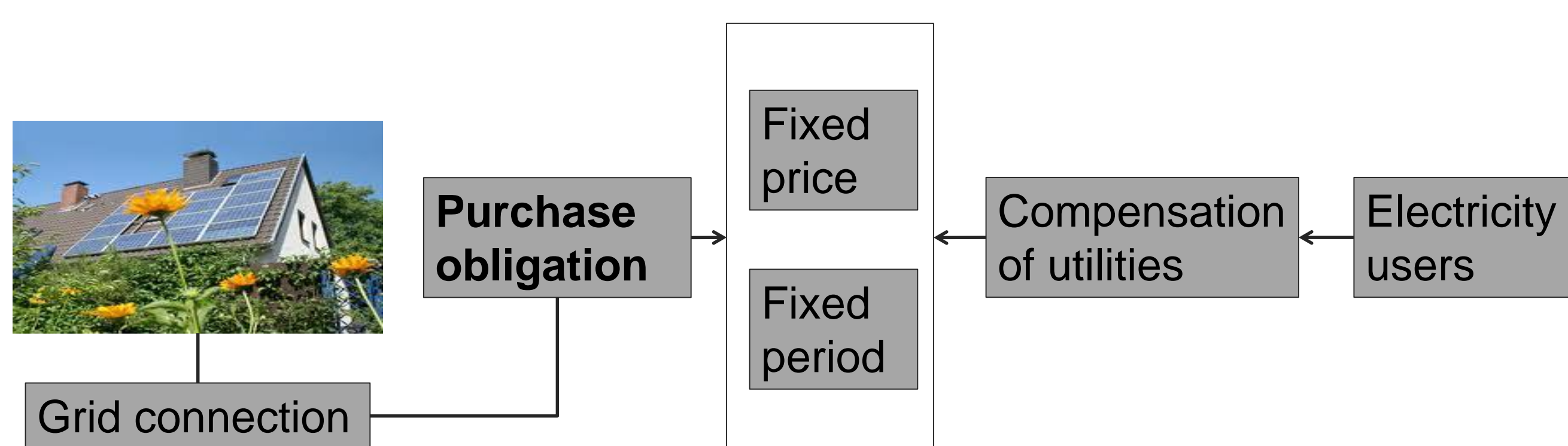
1 Investigating the effects of FITs

Renewable energy policy in Europe largely relies on market-based instruments aimed at inducing change in socio-technical systems. In the case of photovoltaics (PV), these have indirectly contributed to dramatic cost reductions and driven an exponential increase in installed capacities. Installed PV capacity in Europe has increased by **373 times between 2000 and 2012** (Jäger-Waldau, 2013).

Feed-in tariffs (FITs) have been a central instrument in these evolutions. They have transformed markets and technologies but also society and politics. Looking at the effects of FITs « in action » sheds light on the implications and challenges of achieving political objectives through the creation and engineering of markets.

2 What is a feed-in tariff?

FITs guarantee the financial viability of PV installations relying on 3 elements: a **purchase obligation**, a **fixed price**, and a **fixed period** of time (Jacobs, 2010). They are usually paid for by electricity users.



In Europe, the evolution of FITs was co-shaped by the development of **EU objectives and guidelines** for renewable energy policy, of **Member States policies**, and of **theoretical research**. They have grown **increasingly sophisticated and specific** as various RE technologies and markets have developed.

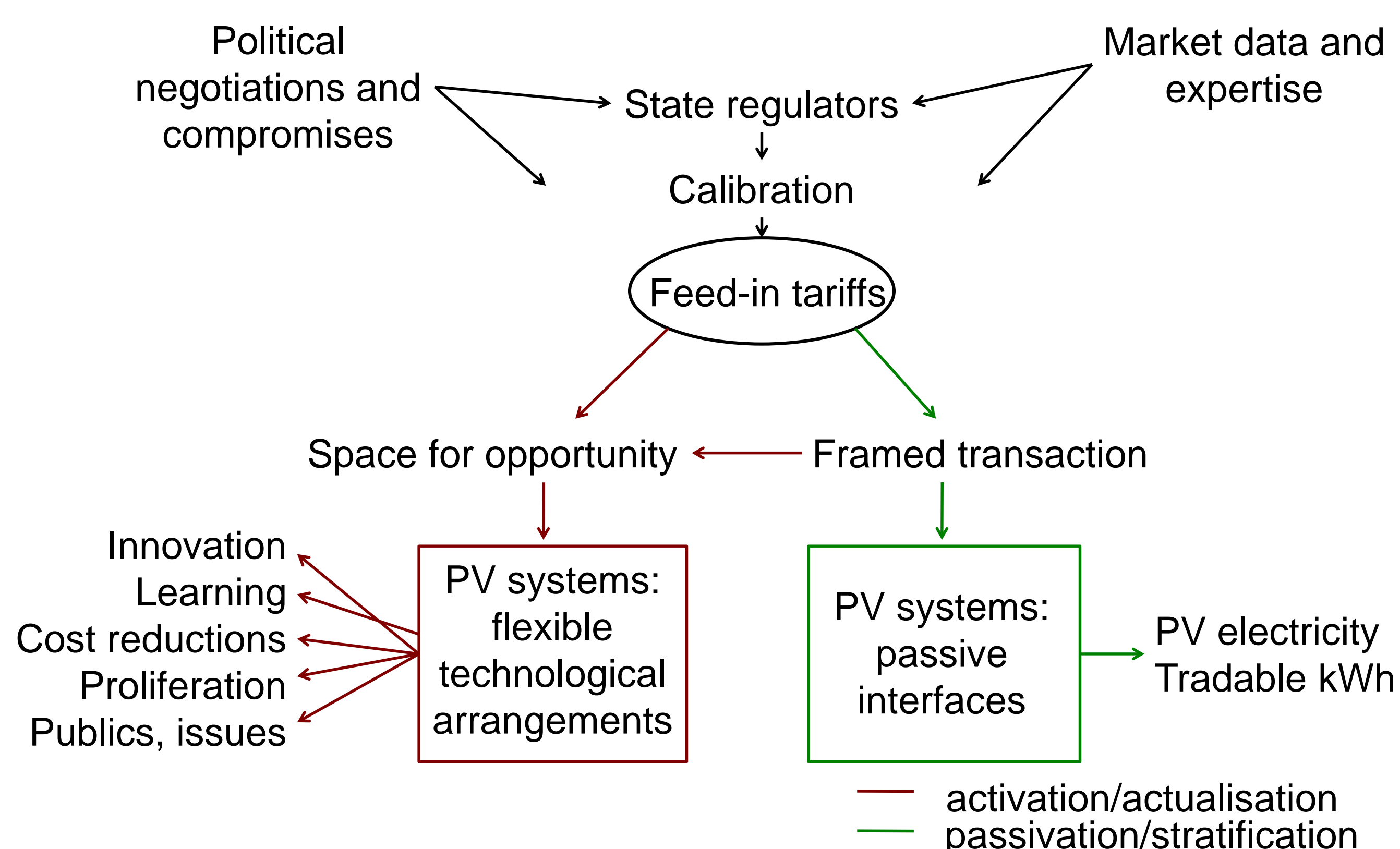
	Evolution of EU renewable electricity policy	Evolution of FITs
1988	Integration of renewable energy into electricity markets and policies	Emergence and integration of FITs in the legislation
1996	Elaboration of an EU-wide renewable energy policy around the objective of market integration	Constitution of FITs as an option for renewable energy support and for "levelling the playing field"
2000	Scale-one experimentation, sophistication of instruments	Sophistication of FITs to adjust them to photovoltaics and to market dynamics
2001	Crisis and reforms of PV-support instruments	Taking the specificities and effects of FITs for PV into account
2007		
2008		
2013		

3 A sociological perspective on FITs

FITs:

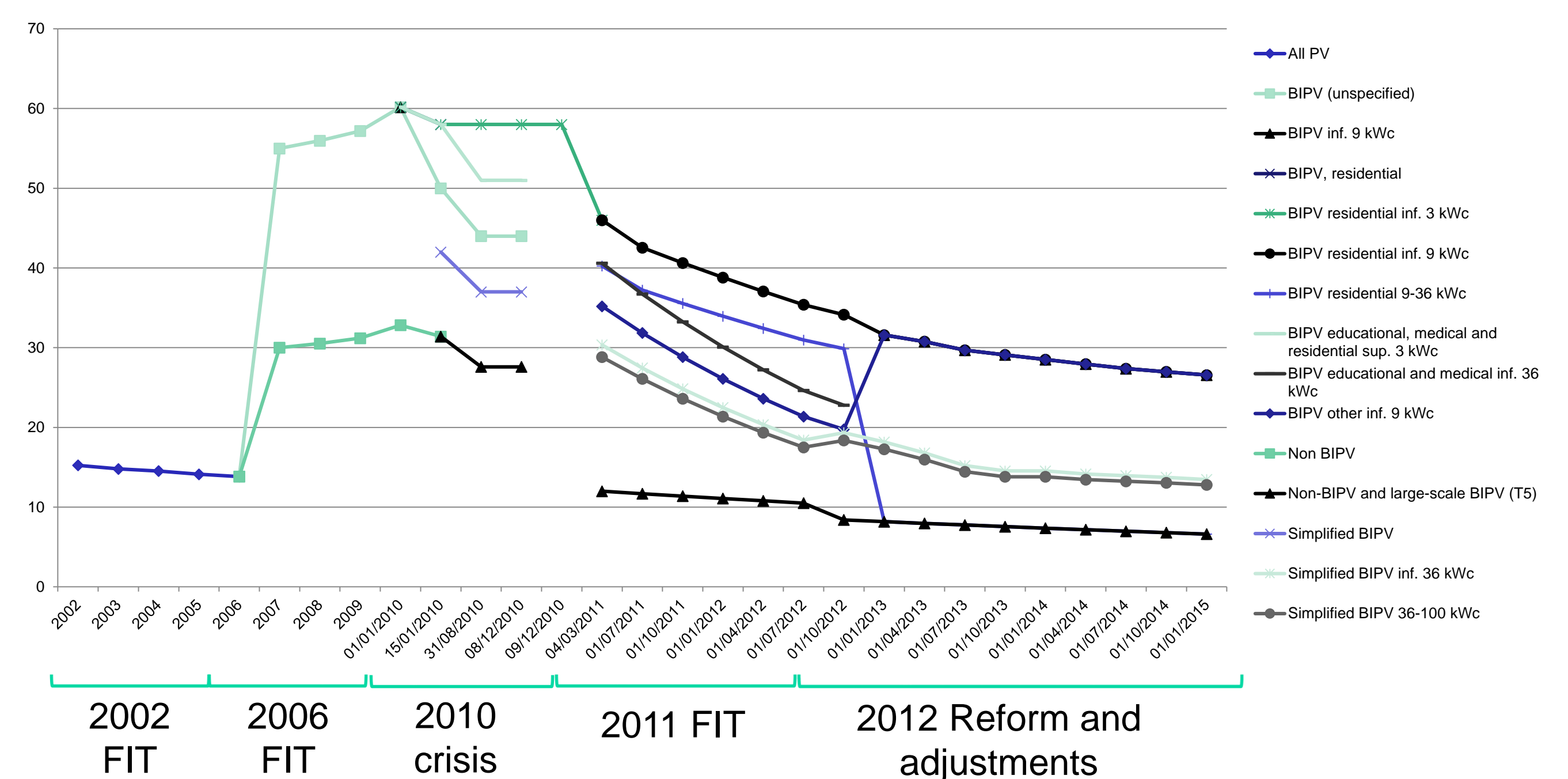
- **Frame regulated markets** for PV electricity
- Rely on **political objectives** and management
- Aim for **large-scale deployment** with no cap on quantities
- Are meant to **induce innovation** in technologies, electricity markets and business models
- Have **unintended**, transformative effects

FITs can be viewed as **political market agencements** (Callon, 2013). *Agencements* are **heterogeneous arrangements** of material, conceptual, technical and social elements that both **frame and trigger action**. By providing a frame that formats and constrains economic and political activities, they allow for innovation and experimentation.



4 MisFITs: the overflow and crisis of French PV

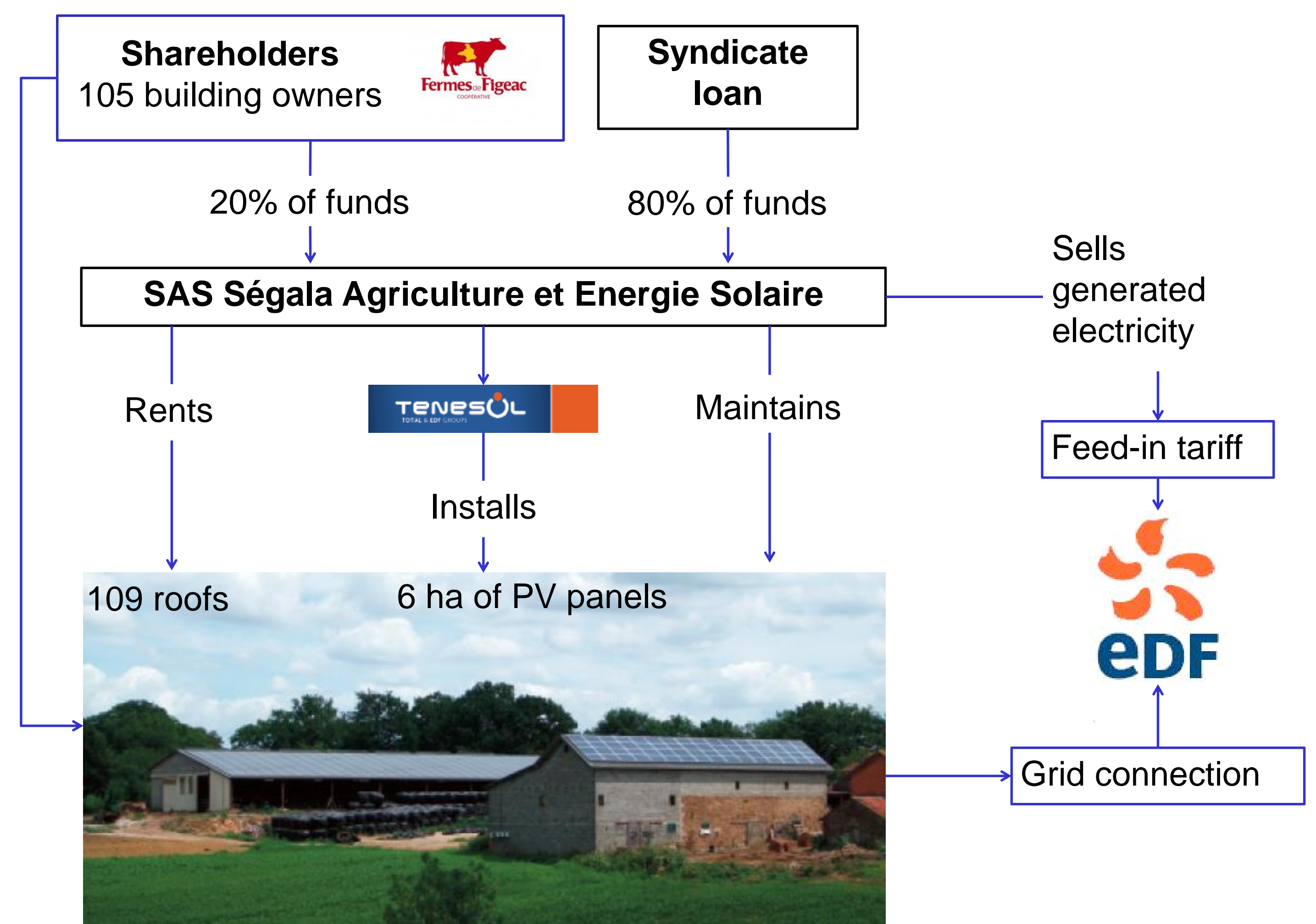
- 2002:** first FITs for PV in France
- 2006:** reform and increase of FITs for PV. Polyvalent and unbridled system.
- 2008-2009:** dramatic decrease in PV module costs, uncontrolled expansion of French PV market
- 2010:** attempts at ad-hoc regulation by refining FIT scheme
- 2010-2011:** moratorium on FITs for PV and organisation of a *concertation*
- 2011:** self-adjusting FITs, cap on market development



- The **uncontrolled expansion** of the PV market in 2008-2010 turned into a **political crisis** when the government decided on a moratorium and consultation.
- During the consultation, actors of the PV sector emerged as a **concerned public** (Marres, 2007).
- The consultation **failed to provide a reliable representation** of the « French PV sector».
- The outcome was a reform of FITs that **closed down** both the space for market development and for political action.

5 BeneFITs: the Fermes de Figeac project

A territorial innovation articulated around the FIT opportunity



- FITs for PV are seized as a **financial and political resource**.
- Through a business models articulated around FITs and a commitment to mutualisation and territorial innovation, FITs and PV are **turned into instruments for territorial development**.
- Mutualisation and local implantation are turned into **means to maximise the benefits** from FITs and PV.
- The success of this project is an example of the **possibilities offered by FITs**.
- To benefit from these possibilities, actors have to **conform to the financial framing provided by FITs**: the capacity to transform FITs depends on the capacity to conform to them.

6 References

- Callon, M. (2013). Qu'est-ce qu'un agencement marchand? In: Callon, M. et al. *Sociologie des agencements marchands. Textes choisis*. Paris: Presses des Mines, 325-440.
- Jacobs, D. (2010). Fabulous feed-in tariffs. *Renewable Energy Focus*, p. 28-30.
- Jäger-Waldau, A. (2013). *PV status report 2013*. JRC Scientific and Technical Reports. Ispra: European Commission Joint Research Centre.
- Marres, N. (2007). The issues deserve more credit: pragmatist contributions to the study of public involvement in controversy. *Social Studies of Science*, 37, 759-780.