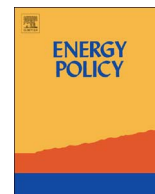




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## Energy Policy

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/enpol](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/enpol)In pursuit of energy justice<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Energy Justice provides a framework to perceive disparities in our energy system. The foundation of energy justice draws heavily from the environmental justice movement, grounded in larger issues of representation, economic relations between the state, firms and social groups. This article draws from the environmental justice movement to explore concepts of universal and particular justice. *Universal energy justice* holds to values stemming from judicial and philosophical groundings based in procedural, distributional and cosmopolitan justice issues. *Particular energy justice* relies on recognition justice of cultural and environmental factors influencing choices around energy technologies and policy preferences for the distribution of energy services. Empirically, this article examines tensions within the energy system in the European Union. It does this in two areas: First, by examining how universal energy justice is spread through National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) dealing with energy; Second, particular energy justice is exemplified by a political solution to energy poverty in Bulgaria, rather than a regulatory response, this contrasts with a Western European approach. The aim of the article is to show the pursuit of energy justice attempts to resolve tensions between groups and differing politics to both access and provide energy services.

## 1. Introduction

This article establishes two definitions of energy justice accounting for global and local interpretations of energy justice: universal and particular energy justice. This examination informs – but also challenges, a more singular universal interpretation of energy justice (Heffron et al., 2015, p. 437; Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015, p. 170). The centrality of energy as a basic right, underpinning health, economic advancement and education places the state at the center of providing access to energy resources and services. Therefore, actions of the state are important to examine to understand implementation of energy justice. Nonetheless, justice holds different interpretation at the local and global level. This article examines and expands on a universal and a more local interpretation of energy justice.

The tensions within energy justice literature are apparent between two different definitions. The definition for a universal energy justice stretches across countries, there is a “transboundary nature of energy injustice [which] requires a similar conception of the reach of moral and political responsibility” (Sovacool et al., 2013, p. 29). Universal application of the eight aspects of energy justice (such as affordability, good governance and sustainability) assist building just universal energy systems (Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015). The definition of particular energy justice embraces local debate and choices by understanding justification for local decisions, actions (Heffron and

McCauley, 2014) and even resistance to global economic policies (see Heffron et al. (2015)). Examining the local is even more salient in an age of rising populism which places a country's citizenry first, over global cooperative efforts.

Energy justice literature requires vocabulary that assists differentiating between universal and particular actions. There can be either a uniformity of solutions applicable across borders or different solutions applicable in localities. Reacting to *Harvey's Chapter 12 (1996)* marshalling for a uniform solution in environmental justice, Schlosberg states a movement “can be unified, but it cannot be uniform. An insistence on uniformity will limit the diversity of stories of injustice, the multiple forms it takes, and the variety of solutions it calls for” (Schlosberg, 2007, pp. 534–535). The foundation of energy justice draws heavily from the environmental justice movement, which is grounded in larger socio-political issues of representation, economic relations between the state, firms and social groups, including a universal and local application of justice (Harvey, 1996; Jessop, 1990; Miller, 2001; Schlosberg, 2013, 2007, 2004; Walker and Day, 2012; Young, 1990). This article is an attempt to extend this discussion into the energy justice literature; providing a vocabulary giving voice to local actions and interpretations of energy justice. Ignoring this difference denies the energy justice literature the same vocabulary used in environmental justice which differentiates between universal and particular forms of justice. (Harvey, 1996; Jessop, 1990; Miller,

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2001; Schlosberg, 2004, 2007, 2013; Walker and Day, 2012; Young, 1990).

The establishment of National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) is represented in this article as a state institution attempting to deliver a universal form of energy justice through procedural methods, as carried out by energy regulators. However, particular interpretations of energy justice also influence how a just energy system is delivered. Thus, energy regulators in an economic system balance competing demands for efficient and just energy systems with local perceptions.

The outline of the article provides a conceptual examination to explain different political actions towards energy poverty. The next section develops definitions of both universal and particular energy justice. This is followed by a description of the attempt by state institutions to deliver just energy services through politically independent NRAs that hold universal and particular characteristics. The third section looks at the role of NRAs and political involvement in Europe and the attempt to provide different forms of energy justice dependent on local context in Western or Eastern Europe. Hungary and Bulgaria are examined in context of energy poverty and energy justice. A contrast is developed between the lack of political representation in the United Kingdom (Walker and Day, 2012) and the presence of political representation for Eastern European households (LaBelle and Georgiev, forthcoming). The final section assesses the viability of two different definitions of energy justice and the policy implications for developing two overarching definitions to energy justice. The results indicate these two definitions contribute to a better understanding of how energy justice is applied, but are more fully present when there is misalignment between social and political interpretations of justice.

## 2. Concepts of energy justice

Universal and particular forms of energy justice are embedded in political and economic systems. The definition outlined here uses critical social theory to position energy justice within society. This is important as “a critical theoretical approach to justice begins with the insight that any normative or social theory is and should be conditioned by the particular historical and social context in which it speaks” (Young, 1990, p. 75). There is a strong social value placed on energy infrastructure and impact on the environment and society (Goldthau, 2014; Miller et al., 2015).

Defining universal and particular energy justice requires examining other forms of justice that are subsets of these two interlinked forms. For example, the pursuit of a universal form of energy justice is defined by eight elements proposed by Sovacool and Dworkin (2015). Universal energy justice is defined as, a “global energy system that fairly disseminates both the benefits and costs of energy services, and one that has representative and impartial energy decision-making” (Sovacool and Dworkin, 2015, p. 436). This definition embraces the universal applicability and burden sharing among a global citizenry. Echoing debates in environmental justice, this turns into a universal check-list for energy justice. As pointed out by Schlosberg (2004, pp. 534–535), universal justice needs to be open to voices expressing non-universal experiences and methods to access energy services and resources.

Universal energy justice stems from established interpretations of justice. *Universal energy justice* holds to values reliant on historical judicial and philosophical groundings that are based in (a) *procedural justice*, (b) *distributional justice*, and (c) *cosmopolitan justice* (for a discussion of these forms see Heffron et al. (2015), Jenkins et al. (2016), Sovacool and Dworkin (2015)). *Procedural justice* is defined as the delivery and protection of energy services through administrative or judicial means (Sovacool et al., 2013, p. 439) including the right to appeal. National regulatory agencies (NRAs), are an example of a universal institutionalized form of procedural justice. *Distributional justice* facilitates other human rights like education and health, including access to energy services (Heffron and McCauley, 2014, pp.

435–436; Walker and Day, 2012, pp. 69–70). *Cosmopolitan justice* is defined as a collective approach to creating “meaningful global change specifically in energy behaviors and attitudes” (Heffron et al., 2015, p. 170). This extends our perspective to future generations and beyond short-term economic thinking (for a discussion of these forms see Heffron et al. (2015), Jenkins et al. (2016), Sovacool and Dworkin (2015)).

Particular energy justice contextualizes justice within local experiences. The particular approach is defined as a nuanced accounting of localized issues and interpretations of social, political and economic actions affecting access to energy resources and services. It gives voice to grievances even within seemingly universally just energy systems. Cultural and environmental factors influence the choice of energy technologies and policy preferences for the distribution of energy services. Within this type of justice is *recognition justice*, which provides cultural and political representation of groups with distinguishing features such as social, ethnic and gender differences; freedom from distortion, devaluation, degradation and physical threats by other groups (Heffron and McCauley, 2014, p. 436). Just as an application of a uniform lens on local stories cannot appreciate the variety of solutions (Schlosberg's (2004), pp. 534–535), the actions of local activists, can claim particular solutions based on unique locally and socially based features (Fuller and McCauley, 2016, p. 2). This normative approach to justice connects well with Fuller and McCauley ‘framing of energy justice’ through activists perspectives and actions which mobilize and interpret events, “in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents” (2016, p. 2).

Fitting these two forms of energy justice together is not a contradictory process. Even within a universal consideration of energy justice there is exploration and acknowledgement of the importance of recognition justice. “At the core of our conception of *energy justice* is *recognition* of the imperative to respect the dignity of each and every human being” (Sovacool et al., 2013, pp. 29–30). Re-aligning energy justice to language used in modern interpretations of justice related to environmental and social movements, ensures energy justice builds upon existing contributions and differentiate further a universal and particular acknowledgment of access to energy. Central to the recognition of justice movements are state institutions which can institutionalize and deliver energy justice.

State institutions are important because they implement government policies, assist citizens, and provide services. In the realm of energy policy are important activities regulating energy markets, consumer protection and pricing. Access to energy services stems from a basic right of all citizens to claim universal human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). This is important in the universal interpretation because access to energy services reinforces other “basic goods to which human beings are entitled, like welfare, security, health care, education, and the right to employment” (Sovacool et al., 2013, pp. 25–26). State institutions ensure access to the distribution of these rights.

Distributional and procedural justice is the state's method to provide universal services in a coherent fashion. The social justification to pursue the lowest possible cost stems from the principle that “Energy inequality exacerbate(s) other forms of inequality: economic, social, and political” (Sovacool et al., 2013, p. 25). Energy regulators (i.e. NRAs) symbolize this attempt to balance the pursuit of profits and access (discussed below). Workers in state institutions attempt to ensure procedural justice adheres to universal standards, in an effort to provide services to all. However, this process lacks the flexibility to account for particular differences. There is a threat that “Decisions and actions will be evaluated less according to whether they are right or just than according to their legal validity, that is, whether they are consistent with the rules and follow the appropriate procedures” (Young, 1990, p. 77).

Universal justice is embedded in institutional routines, such as

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