Advancing energy justice: the triumvirate of tenets

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*I.E.L.R. 107 Introduction

This paper proposes a new research agenda in "**energy justice**". It challenges researchers to address **justice**-based concerns within **energy** systems, from production to consumption. **Justice** is a combination of *ensuring* and *recognising* the basic equal worth of all human beings together with a commitment to the "*distribution* of good and bad things" (Campbell, 2010). Theoretical debates on **justice** have developed since the time of Aristotle. Indeed, a key distinction in *Book V of Nicomachean Ethics* between distributive and corrective **justice** endures today as social and legal **justice**. Adam Smith, Karl Marx and John Rawls have all sought to debate what **justice** is and should be. The discussion on **justice** below begins with a more contemporary, relevant and under-studied set of literature that sheds light on environmental pollution and **justice**, namely environmental **justice** (Dryzek et al, Schlosberg, 2013; Walker, 2012). In an age of resource depletion and fuel poverty, researchers need to pay greater attention to **justice** concerns in **energy** policy.

The exciting new concept of "**energy justice**" is therefore founded in literature on environmental **justice** (Schlosberg 2009, 2013), and more recently, climate and atmospheric **justice** (Dawson, 2010; Vanderheiden, 2008). Environmental **justice** emerged in 1970s America as a response to the unequal distribution of environmental ills—pollution and waste facilities for example—along the risks associated with them, which were more often than not situated next to poor, coloured communities (Davies, 2006). The movement represents a concern for the

"fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies" (Bullard, 2000: 7)

and is driven by aspirations for empowerment, social **justice**, and public health. At its root then, is a calling for democratic and egalitarian societies (Foreman, 1998). However, the scope of environmental **justice** has grown substantively since its inception to include more overtly global (Baskin, 2009; Vanderheiden, 2008) and local (Bruno and Ferraz, 2012; Evans 2010) concerns over climate and social **justice**.

In contrast, **energy justice** (the focus throughout here) carries the same basic philosophy, however, it aims to provide all individuals, across all areas, with safe, affordable and sustainable **energy**. The focus here is firmly on **energy** policy and the key theme of **energy** systems. It is argued here that **energy** policy needs to address the "the unequal distribution of ills" from decisions on infrastructure siting, (e.g. wind farms, nuclear waste facilities, etc.), subsidies (e.g. renewables, nuclear **energy**), pricing (e.g. fuel poverty) and consumption indicators (e.g. smart meters) within the context of global and local pressures. **Energy** policy increasingly requires a nuanced understanding of social **justice** concerns within **energy** systems, from production to consumption. In this article, we advance three core themes or tenets of **energy justice** that have emerged in **justice** literature for **energy** policy: *distributional*, *procedural*, and *recognition* **justice**. These three pillars of **energy justice** are interlinked and there are many overlapping issues. The next section offers an initial definition of each tenet and posits that each of these areas will grow into a major new avenue for research.

The triumvirate of tenets in energy justice

The first tenet of **energy justice** is *distributional **justice***. **Energy justice** is an inherently spatial concept that includes both the physically unequal allocation of environmental benefits and ills and the uneven distribution of their associated responsibilities (Walker, 2009), for example exposure to risk. Thus, **energy justice** can appear as a situation where "questions about the desirability of technologies in principle become entangled with issues that relate to specific localities" (Owens, 2008: 4414) and represents a call for the distribution of benefits and ills on all members of society regardless of income, race, etc. UK research demonstrates that it is often the poorer and less powerful social groups that are disproportionately impacted (Todd and Zografos, 2005). One avenue for*I.E.L.R. 108* research is for example, to consider to what extent the siting of **energy** infrastructure in the United Kingdom and Scotland is leading to distributional injustices.

For example, in the United Kingdom, wind **energy** projects are facing distinct local opposition, although this is different from the opposition that nuclear **energy** projects have faced in the past, which has tended to be from national environmental movements and not at the local level (where they in many cases receive report, e.g. at Wylfa in Wales). Other major projects, such as coal plant projects, and even transport projects such as Heathrow Terminal 5 and the prospective high-speed rail project (HS2-London to Birmingham High-speed Rail Project) would receive more or as much opposition in the planning process as a nuclear **energy** project. Already, the search for shale gas in the United Kingdom is receiving strong objections due to the "fracking" process involved. However, objections can contribute to rectifying injustices and should not always be considered as detrimental to a project in terms of contributing to delay. In some cases, they can restore a sense of equity within a project; Greenpeace contributions to the consultation processes for the *2008 White Paper, Nuclear Power* actually identified areas of clarification and helped create a more robust and fair final White Paper at the end of the process (Heffron, 2013a).

*Procedural **justice***, secondly, manifests as a call for equitable procedures that engage all stakeholders in a non-discriminatory way (Walker, 2009; Bullard, 2005). It states that all groups should be able to participate in decision making, and that their decisions should be taken seriously throughout. It also requires participation, impartiality and full information disclosure by government and industry (Davies, 2006) and appropriate and sympathetic engagement mechanisms (Todd and

Zografos, 2005). The research aim here is to assess to what extent such a procedural **justice** is observable in **energy** policy. In this context, for example, it is notable that the Scottish Government has put public consultation at the centre of its **energy** strategy and environmental decision-making.

There is also the issue of full information disclosure. In particular, whether the public are in full knowledge of what subsidies different **energy** sources in the **energy** sector receiving. There was a lack of research into how level the "playing field" is for different **energy** sources (Heffron, 2013b). This has a direct effect as to which sources of electricity should be preferred so as to benefit other state policies, (i.e. so as to improve the environmental policy or decrease carbon emissions). All across the **energy** industry subsidies are an everyday modus operandi. It is difficult to calculate subsidies (both direct and indirect) received by each **energy** source. Nevertheless, when environmental factors are taken into account Heffron (2013b) states that in a review of calculated subsidies, fossil fuels have been in receipt of major subsidies in industrialised nations and specifically so in the US. Further, analysis is underway in the United Kingdom (by the UK Environmental Audit Committee) to determine the exact levels of subsidies that are being received by different **energy** sources in the United Kingdom, and how this could then inform public decision-making on what represents the best choice of **energy** for the future.

The third tenet of **energy justice** is *recognition justice*. Recognition is not the same as participation, instead manifesting as "the process of disrespect, insult and degradation that devalue some people and some places identities in comparison to others" (Walker, 2009: 615). Recognition **justice** is more than tolerance, and states that individuals must be fairly represented, that they must be free from physical threats and that they must be offered complete and equal political rights (Schlosberg, 2003). A lack of recognition can therefore occur as various forms of cultural and political domination, insults, degradation and devaluation. It may manifest itself not only as a failure to recognise, but also as misrecognising—a distortion of people's views that may appear demeaning or contemptible (Schlosberg, 2003). Thus it includes calls to recognise the divergent perspectives rooted in social, cultural, ethnic, racial and gender differences (Fraser, 1999; Schlosberg, 2003).

One application of recognition **justice** relates to the fact that government policy on "fuel poverty" in Scotland, Wales, and the United Kingdom has only relatively recently begun to recognise the specific needs of particular social groups—such as the elderly and infirm—and their reliance on higher than average room temperatures (Walker and Day, 2012). This shift has begun to counteract a long-standing tendency to stereotype the "**energy** poor" and their "inefficient" use of scarce **energy** and monetary resources. Government-sponsored programmes have thus treated the "**energy** poor" as suffering from a "knowledge deficit". Initiatives have focused on the provision of "objective" information as well as on economic subsidies and other incentives for increasing the **energy** efficiency of the housing stock and electrical appliances. But hardly any attempts have been made to find out the motivations behind the consumption patterns of the "**energy** poor" or to engage with how they interpret **energy**-related issues, and what kind of improvements and strategies they would propose and endorse (Catney et al, 2013).

Besides the relative "invisibility" of particular social groups, organised misrecognition and disrespect could arise in many cases of siting decisions for **energy** generation facilities in the United Kingdom. For example, regulators, the renewable power industry and environmental NGOs often deride local campaigns against wind farms as "not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) protests by self-interested and

misinformed individuals who care much less about the public good than about undisturbed scenery and property values. The arguments, feelings, and values articulated by opposition groups, however, reveal a deep-seated "cultural rationality" that informs their evaluation of wind farms as unwanted, undemocratic, and alien to "indigenous", rooted communities thriving in landscapes of "natural beauty" (Barry et al, 2008:*I.E.L.R. 109* 73ff.). Supporters of wind farms, by contrast, frequently rely on "technical" rationality and utilitarian cost-benefit analysis. They also exude a degree of confidence about wind power as inevitable progress which may border on arrogance. Their mode of reasoning and superficial engagement with opposition groups represents a "pre-emptive closing down of discursive processes [… around the] settlement of subjective aesthetic and value-based disagreement" (ibid: 87). This not only denies respect and recognition **justice** for local anti-wind groups, but could also deepen public resistance to new forms of low-carbon **energy** installations and undermine any attempts at crafting both a lasting societal settlement and a feasible, coherent, and long-term **energy** strategy.

Conclusion: from energy policy to energy systems

The challenge of **energy justice** is to apply this three-pronged approach not only to **energy** policy but to the entirety of the **energy** system. **Energy** policy often deals with only one section of the **energy** system to the detriment of its overall effectiveness. In support of new ventures such as "earth system governance", more pronounced systems-thinking is needed. Earth system governance argues that new perspectives and research are needed to understand the complex relationship between the global transformation of social and natural systems (Biermann and Gupta, 2011; Biermann, 2012; Dryzek and Stevenson 2011). Therefore, this paper advocates an attempt to bring together the social science account of **energy** (policy) with its natural science counterpart (systems). This approach in essence extends the exploration of distributional, procedural and recognition based **justice** issues within the context of both **energy** *production* and *consumption*.

In this context, **energy justice** is concerned with social responsibility by the private sector, the government and the public. The choices they make will have a significant impact both on global climate change and, in particular, on intergenerational **justice**. The advancement of " **Energy Justice**" as a new research avenue has only just started at a national level, in particular in the United Kingdom, and is also being pursued at an international level. Increasingly, it will become of relevance as societies become ever more closely involved in **energy** policy-making and are—deliberately or indirectly—transforming **energy** systems around the world.

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