

Normative Energy Ethics

Lecture Series



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What does Energy Justice mean?

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What does energy justice mean? The scholarship offers many answers to this question. Energy justice is often defined as consisting of distributive, recognition-based, and procedural tenets. Other times, energy justice is defined by broad visions of 'just' energy systems. Frequently the field is defined as aiming to produce guidance for policy and decision-makers. But are these answers useful?

The same question often escapes critical strands of the scholarship. These strands highlight the omission of prior and ongoing emancipatory justice movements or the methods and argumentation that should underpin enquiries surrounding injustice. Neither explicitly probes what the field is doing. I argue that without understanding the field, we risk inadvertently committing to a set of assumed agendas.

In response I explore avenues to clarify and better define the field. First, drawing on Iwińska et al (2021), I claim we should embrace energy justice as a boundary object, but one which reflects a broad, plural and dissent-embracing field. I position this as a means to understand the field and offer it as a point of departure from otherwise pre-assumed goals that may implicitly be shaping research enquiries. I then turn to Amartya Sen's distinction between the transcendental and realisation focused comparison as a means of discussing the aims of energy justice. I argue this distinction illuminates the pitfalls of seeking 'just energy systems' in an unjust world.

Iwińska, K., Lis, A. and Mączka, K., 2021. From framework to boundary object? Reviewing gaps and critical trends in global energy justice research. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 79, p.102191.
Sen, Amartya. 2011. *The Idea of Justice*. London, England: Belknap Press.



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