

Normative Energy Ethics

Lecture Series



May 17,
2023
16.00 CET

Energy poverty and energy vulnerability through a capabilities lens: conceptualisation and implementation

Rosie Day, Associate Professor in Human Geography, University of Birmingham, UK



Rosie Day

It is well understood that energy and energy services are indispensable for socio-economic development and human wellbeing. The phenomenon of energy poverty is generally framed and understood as insufficient access to good quality, reliable energy (UN, 2018), or more progressively, to energy services (Bouzarovski and Petrova, 2015). This however keeps the emphasis and focus on the resource of energy, rather than on what people are able to do or not do as a result of having or not having access. Moreover, energy poverty is usually conceived of at household scale; this both obscures intra-household difference in access, needs, or consequences, and overlooks how energy and energy services might be accessed outside of the home.

The Capability Approach (CA) provides an alternative way to conceptualise the relationship between resources and human wellbeing, which puts the emphasis on what people are able to do and achieve, rather than on the

resource itself (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2000). This pushes us to consider poverty, development and the ethics of resource allocation in a different way. Additionally, its methodological focus on the individual aims to shine a light on otherwise hidden inequalities, such as according to gender, age or impairment. In this talk, I will consider how the capability approach can be applied to thinking about the nature of energy poverty, and what using this approach might lead us to do differently as researchers and practitioners.

With the focus on practice-relevant energy research, I will go on to discuss some ways in which the approach might be operationalised, as well as some of the conceptual and practical challenges of doing so. Along the way I will draw on some different recent and ongoing research projects across 3 continents, which all address aspects of energy poverty, energy vulnerability, and its alleviation. Notwithstanding inherent challenges, the aim in these projects is to shift the discourse of energy poverty to one which is more attuned to context and diversity, and better promotes individual and community flourishing.



register here

www.itas.kit.edu/philetas_nee

contact: energy-ethics@itas.kit.edu