

COST Action 16232 ENGAGER: European Energy Poverty | Workshop report

Prospects and limits of indicators: Scalar perspectives on energy poverty metrics

During 22-23 February 2019, ENGAGER sponsored a workshop titled ‘Prospects and limits of indicators: Scalar perspectives on energy poverty metrics’. A call was circulated among COST Action members to enable multi-country groups of authors to meet and make progress on collaborative manuscripts. Three teams were selected, featuring 11 researchers from a wide range of European countries (Belgium, Greece, Poland, UK, Spain, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Portugal and Norway) and academic disciplines (political science, human geography, social policy, development studies, sociology, environmental engineering, science and technology studies, mechanical engineering and economics). The workshop was convened by co-chair of Working Group 2 on energy poverty indicators, Siddharth Sareen, University of Bergen, and hosted by João Pedro Gouveia, NOVA University Lisbon.



While the workshop was organised as a lightly structured writing retreat, it capitalised on the opportunity to hear from the research group led by Prof. Julia Seixas at the Centre for Environmental and Sustainability Research about their cutting-edge work on developing energy poverty metrics in Portugal using innovative methods such as smart meter data and building energy certificates to develop a composite index centred on a building typology. A research visiting on an STSM from Madrid, Fernando Martin-Consuegra, contributed a complementary talk, and so did locally based Ana Horta from the University of Lisbon.

This set of richly situated insights got participants in the right mindset to take forward discussions on their papers in the three author groups, and the morning went by in a jiffy. The afternoon was reserved for presenting works in progress to the other author groups, so as to benefit from the intellectual breadth and depth of the diverse group of researchers. It was a beautifully sunny afternoon in Lisbon, unusual for winter even in Portugal, which made the grassy lawns of the university campus far more appealing than the indoor workspace.



The remaining time was spent on taking ideas forward into manuscript form, drafting sections, reflecting on research gaps, potential contributions, and the nature of the problem. Now that energy poverty, long disregarded as a significant issue in Europe, is gaining prominence on both discursive and executive platforms, its measurement is being operationalised in increasingly sophisticated ways that seek to map progress by capturing complex outcomes. Metrics are measurements privileged as standards. For comprehensive coverage that minimises biases in representations of outcomes, energy poverty metrics must be sensitive to multi-scalar phenomena and feature both quantitative and qualitative components. This requires commitment to explication of data hybridity informed by methodological versatility and epistemic pluralism. A step in this direction is to combine vibrant traditions within scholarship on energy poverty and metrics. The former understands the socio-political and techno-economic particulars of measuring energy poverty; the latter problematises the act of measurement itself, within science and technology studies traditions. Together, such fields can offer tenets of energy poverty metrics that are both pragmatic and critically defensible, to generate actionable knowledge. This led to engrossing discussions.



The contributions shaped during the workshop were oriented towards a focused, accessible discussion on the measurement of energy poverty. Alongside these productive collaborations, participants experienced traditional hospitality in Portugal and explored Lisbon together.

