

Summary of Workshop on 'The Right to Energy' Groningen, 8-9 January 2020



The ENGAGER Workshop '*Co-creating The Right to Energy in Theory and Practice*' was co-organized by ENGAGER WG 3 and 4. It aimed to examine and co-create the meaning, purpose, rights, and duties associated with the 'right to energy' in a dialogue across theory and practice. Over the course of two days the workshop attracted over 50 participants from 17 different countries.¹ The first day focused on a more academic discussion of the 'right to energy', allowing researchers from diverse fields and contexts to share and debate their research. The second day contrasted these presentations with the lived experiences and practice of social movements, activists and policy-makers. (Programme is attached below)

Day 1 - The workshop kicked off with a warm welcome by Marlies Hesselman, local host at the University of Groningen; Prof. Stefan Bouzarovski (U. Manchester), introducing the ENGAGER network and its ongoing work; and Anaïs Varo (U. Girona) co-organiser of the event, and presenting ENGAGER's Policy Brief on [The Right to Energy in the EU \(2019\)](#).

The academic event started with two **keynote speakers**:

Prof. Sovacool (U. Sussex) shared his latest study developed in collaboration with other researchers from both the Global North and South on the global 'decarbonization divide' caused by current decarbonisation policies and the necessity of 'whole systems frameworks' in energy justice research (2020). Prof. Sovacool specifically highlighted the need for more integral assessments of the (in)justice and (un)fairness produced by energy systems, including the contradictions between current decarbonisation paths and increasing risks for vulnerable collectives globally. Prof. Walker (U. Lancaster) built on his earlier conceptual work regarding the meaning and specifications of the right to energy (2015), discussing the role of the 'Right to Energy as Politics' and articulating it with the well-known theory on climate justice. Prof. Walker defended the political strength of rights talk but also recognized the complexities of its situated meaning and implications in different contexts. During the final debates it emerged that the practical implications of the right to energy remain uncertain and are under-researched.



The second part of the academic debates consisted of **three panels** discussing the Right to Energy from: a) the legal and policy point of view b) a philosophical/ethics point of view using concepts like capabilities and ethics of care, and c) the formulation and defence of the right to energy from a bottom-up and community perspective. Presenters stemmed from the disciplines of law, political science, sociology, philosophy and anthropology.

During these sessions, lively and interesting discussions raised several important aspects of the right to energy, such as the right's universal character; the confrontation between *consumer's* rights, *human* rights, and *citizen's* rights perspectives; and the necessity of shaping rights-based agenda's through lived experiences of people. While it was agreed that the eventual formulation of the right to energy in the European framework still lacks clarity, there is a need to contextualise what the right to energy might mean in different contexts (thus possibly incorporating a relativity element) and in relation to climate emergency and energy transition scenario's.

¹ Australia, Belgium, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, South Africa, Taiwan, Uganda, United Kingdom.

Day 2 - The second day began with two **key note presentations** from civil society organisations fighting for the right to energy in practice. *Pablo Sanchez* from the European Public Service Union (EPSU) (part of the Right to Energy coalition) presented EPSU's recent publication on how 20 years of liberalisation have negatively affected peoples' (rights to) energy access. EPSU calls for energy systems to be placed back into public ownership for the common good of society, so that energy systems can be decarbonized and be able to deliver affordable energy, under democratic control. *David Kabanda*, executive director of Ugandan NGO CEFROTH, is a human rights lawyer/advocate who has been taking energy companies and governmental bodies to court to stop the electricity disconnection of hospital serving a large local community, for reasons of non-payment. His based on constitutional and international human rights such as the human right to life and the right to health. So far, a first Ugandan court decided that the matter is largely a contractual (consumer) rights issue. However, the decision is appealed and CEFROHT looks forward to build on the workshop to further build his legal case.

Before and after lunch, **three workshops** unpacked the right to energy through **practical exercises and case-studies, break-out groups and plenary discussions**. *Workshop 1* studied six stories of energy poor households, debating how their stories give rise to specific claims for 'rights to energy' or specific components o (see pictures below, right). *Workshop 2* discussed three real court cases about electricity disconnections and basic energy access in Europe, Colombia and South Africa. Participants debated opportunities and constraints of using (existing) human rights law to further rights to energy, and how (legal) claims might be framed better. *Workshop 3* involved four conversation tables to identify which gaps, barriers and opportunities there are in ensuring that people have better 'access to justice' – for example through 'alternative dispute resolution' mechanisms in place in many European countries.



The workshop ended with a **plenary on 'how to take action and debate on the right to energy forward'**. Three pitches by (grass-root level) civil society actors shared their experiences and specific ideas on what can/must be done. What stood out from the presentations especially, is the power and knowledge present in communities themselves, and the importance of mobilizing their agency and voice. Presentations and ensuing debates identified as **key points to take forward**: (a) changing narratives around energy by careful use of (empowering) language – for example by resisting (neo-liberal) terms like (vulnerable) consumer, in favour of (public, social) concepts like people/citizen/community, rights or commons; (b) harness and learn from lived experiences and knowledge of people at grass-roots level; (c) confront power imbalances in energy decision-making; (d) question (private) ownership in energy systems and reinforce public/state/community control over energy; (d) ensure stronger governance structures for energy; (e) resisting neo-liberal narratives and policies on energy provision (f) (re)enforcing idea of energy provision as 'commons', 'public good' or a (local) 'community' affair; (f) linking rights-based discourses to sustainability and energy transition-discourses (g) build movements and alliances across social (rights) & environmental (rights) movements.

Programme:



INTERNATIONAL ENGAGER WORKSHOP

CO-CREATING THE 'RIGHT TO ENERGY' IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN | 8-9 JANUARY 2020

8th January 2020

9:15h | Welcome to ENGAGER Workshop

Stefan Bouzarovski (U. of Manchester)
Marlies Hesselman (Groningen U.) and Anaïs Varo (U. of Girona)

9:45h | The right to energy in theory

Gordon Walker (Lancaster U.)
Benjamin Sovacool (U. of Sussex)

11:30h | Panel 1: Defining the Right to Energy in Law and Policy

Chian-Woei Shyu (National Chung-Cheng University)
Alberto Quintavalla, Irakli Samkharadze and Franz Kienzl (Rotterdam Institute of Law and Economics)
Ana Stojilovska (Central European U.)

14:00h | Panel 2: The Right to Energy: Dignity, Capabilities and Ethics

Katrin Grossmann (U. of Erfurt)
Giovanni Frigo and Rafaella Hillerbrand (Karlsruhe Institute of Technology)
Chris Groves (Cardiff U.)

15:45h | Panel 3: The Right to Energy: Community Perspectives

Umberto Cao (Centre Norbert Elias)
Anca Sinea (Center for the Study of Democracy think-tank of Babes Bolaj University)
Anaïs Varo (U. of Girona | Northeastern U.)

9th January 2020

09:15h | Panel Discussion: the Right to Energy in Practice

Pablo Sanchez (European Public Service Union)
David Kabanda (Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights, Uganda)

10:15h | Workshop 1: Right to energy: framing the concept through analysing cases from practice

Facilitator: Lidjia Živčić (FOCUS Association)

11:30h | Workshop 2: The Right to Energy in Global Courts

Facilitator: Marlies Hesselman (U. Groningen)

14:00h | Workshop 3: Right to energy or energy rights? How can we make sure energy-poor and vulnerable consumers get their rights enforced?

Facilitator: Marine Cornelis (Next Energy Consumer)

15:30h | Plenary: Co-creating the Right to Energy: Taking Debate and Action Forward

Alliance against Energy Poverty (Catalonia, Spain)
Community Experiment La Pile (Belgium)
Carmen Lence (Spanish Ombudsman Office)

MORE INFORMATION

RIGHT2ENERGY2020@GMAIL.COM

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