

# Justice in energy transition scenarios: Perspectives from Swedish energy politics

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*In this article we justify why justice ought to be considered in scenarios of energy transitions, stipulate what dimensions should reasonably be considered, and investigate whether such considerations are taken in Swedish parliamentary debates on energy policies. Through interviews we investigated how Swedish parliamentary politicians think through justice in energy transitions, providing a practical perspective. We conclude that while there is some overlap between minimal conditions for energy justice and the issues brought forward by Swedish politicians, several issues are omitted. Examples include procedural justice and recognizing Sámi interests. On the other hand, principles of energy justice omit economic issues, which are however often brought up by respondents. It can be argued that justice issues, and not only the technical and economic issues that currently dominate the political debate, should be considered in energy transitions. It is therefore unfortunate that questions about justice are not adequately recognized by Swedish members of parliament, as outlined here by interview results. Stronger conclusions would require more empirical work, but the article points out several discrepancies between the topics discussed in the research literature on energy policies, and the topics discussed by elected parliamentarians having a specific focus on energy policies.*

**Keywords:** energy justice; energy transitions; Swedish energy policies; climate justice

## Introduction

Energy system transitions are prerequisites for avoiding dangerous climate change while also maintaining the energy levels required for well-being. Given the wide-ranging social, economic and environmental impacts of energy transitions, justice becomes a relevant dimension, including issues such as ‘which segments of society are affected (and ignored), and which procedures exist for their mediation in order

to reveal and reduce these injustices' (van de Graaf & Sovacool 2020: 119). Energy transitions risk perpetuating existing injustices (Carley & Konisky 2020). Unfortunately, justice is often overshadowed by topics related to technological and economic development, despite 'energy justice' being a burgeoning field (van de Graaf & Sovacool 2020; Sovacool 2013; MacCauley 2018; Jenkins et al. 2016). In this article, we will first solidify reasons for why justice ought to be considered in energy transitions and then map different normative considerations that ought to be included in practical reasoning and, ultimately, decisions about energy transition policies.

We compare those considerations with politicians' views on justice in energy transition scenarios. Several motivations exist for taking such a practical view. First, if justice ought to be considered in energy transition scenarios, as we argue below, then such issues ought to be considered by politicians. Second, prior results have shown that issues of justice are rarely considered by Swedish MPs when putting up motions for consideration. For that reason, we have opted to interview politicians directly. Third, the topic contributes scientifically by fusing discussions from political philosophy with the practical perspectives of Swedish MPs, on one of the most central challenges of our times: limiting further climate change emissions while ensuring access to green energy.

Our material is limited to Swedish members of parliament. Sweden stands out as a country with ambitious transition policies, having set goals to double energy efficiency in 2030 relative to 2005 and to have no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2045. To reach the goals of climate neutrality and no net emissions of greenhouse gases, the Swedish government points out the need for a transition in railway and shipping transportation and the electrification of the vehicle fleet. Within industry, the use of methods for carbon capture and storage may be necessary (Regeringens skrivelse 2017/18: 238), and further expansion of wind power is needed (Regeringens proposition 2017/18: 228).

Sweden is a relevant case not only due to its ambitious national objectives for energy transitions but also because of how Swedish politics have historically had a commitment to social justice and welfare, ideally giving Sweden an opportunity to become a decarbonized green welfare state. In light of this, it is reasonable to expect that Swedish parliamentarians focusing on energy policies would include justice in their reasoning, given the extent of the impacts that large-scale energy transitions are likely to have.

In this article we investigate three separate but interrelated questions. First, should justice be considered in energy transitions? We will argue in Section 2 that this question ought to be answered affirmatively, leading to the second question and topic of Section 3 – how should justice be considered in energy transitions? Finally, in Section 4 we investigate how Swedish parliamentarians consider justice issues in energy transitions, in view of the dimensions discussed in covering the second question.

## **Why should justice be considered in energy transitions?**

Several reasons need to be considered before concluding that justice should be included in energy transitions. First, energy justice is a very small disciplinary field, and very few political philosophers engage with it. Though exceptions exist (Arler 2020; Jenkins et al. 2016; McCauley 2018; Sovacool 2013), 'energy justice' as a field

is virtually non-existent compared to climate justice, for instance, which for decades has generated much discussion in political philosophy, often related to topics such as mitigation burdens (Gardiner, Caney, Jamieson and Shue 2010; Jamieson 2014; Shue 2014). Moreover, the notion that justice should be considered is often asserted or assumed, but rarely justified by arguments. Second, should no reasonable or justified reasons exist for considering justice dimensions of energy transitions, there is little point in analysing the extent to which Swedish parliamentarians discuss justice. Third, establishing why justice ought to be considered in energy transitions helps us to define what is meant by energy transitions. Not all actions intended to impact the production, distribution or consumption of energy will necessarily be encompassed by justice or have the same degree of influence. A household installing solar panels will surely not have the same impact as a government establishing incentives for households to install solar panels.

Energy policies are 'reduced to technical issues and matters of cost', neglecting the fact that they at their core 'involve political and moral choices about the kind of society we want to live in' (Van de Graaf & Sovacool 2020: 2). The involvement of political and moral choices would thus assert that justice ought to be considered. For example, there is a growing demand for critical materials, minerals and metals, and a significant growth in e-waste, including *inter alia* 'discarded wind turbine components, electric vehicle batteries, solar panels, smart metres, heat pumps' (Sovacool et al. 2020). An example of the growing demand is the metal cobalt, used as a critical input to batteries, superalloys, plastics and dyes, magnets and adhesives. The demand for cobalt is growing in conjunction with the demand for electric vehicles, and lithium ion batteries are one of the fastest growing contributors to global e-waste (Sovacool et al. 2020: 3). Extracting and processing these materials, needed to realize energy transitions, impose great environmental and public health risks to local communities. The impacts of installing wind power parks also affects communities. The Sámi of northern Sweden, whose interests are often infringed upon during such installations on their land are one such example (Kårtveit 2021). The large potential impacts of energy transitions should motivate us to make decisions that are consistent with justice and that include justice in energy scenarios. Transitions run the risk of perpetuating existing injustices, as well as giving rise to new ones (Carley & Konisky 2020). However, the local impacts from fossil fuel operations are often substantially greater than the impacts from clean energy production (Carley and Konisky 2020: 570).

Despite the above, there may still be reasons to be hesitant about including justice as a dimension to consider in energy transitions. The conceptualization of energy policies as concerning mainly technical and economic issues is a constant consideration, but in works such as van de Graaf and Sovacool (2020), justice issues are merely asserted and not justified, and it is not self-evident *why* justice dimensions ought to be considered. After all, many people are affected by domestic policies, even in other countries and by the undertakings of businesses, without this necessarily invoking claims that justice ought to be given greater room. Examples include the controversies of corporate social responsibility. For instance, the undertakings of large trans-national companies may have significant social and economic impact in many states, but a common, though criticized, view is that a company ought only answer to shareholders (Friedman 1970). However, a narrow view on responsibilities is difficult to uphold in a globalized economy when the

impacts of corporate decisions have such large-scale policy, social, economic and environmental impacts. Opting instead for recognizing stakeholder views as a matter of justice deserves consideration (for criticism of the ‘shareholder view’ in corporate social responsibility, see Freeman and Phillips 2002; Matten and Crane 2005). Similarly, given the large impacts of energy transitions, justice ought to be among the considerations.

Another objection to incorporating justice in energy transitions is to suggest that while justice may be a part of large-scale energy transitions, few energy transitions are large-scale. After all, how are principles of justice relevant for whether a household wishes to install solar panels? Decarbonization implies ‘rapid, simultaneous transformations across several low-carbon systems and technologies’ (Van de Graaf and Sovacool 2020: 169), and some scholars have argued that ‘truly “transformative change” must be the result of alterations at *every* level of the system, simultaneously’ (Van de Graaf and Sovacool 2020: 169). The very definitions of ‘transitions’ often entail ‘radical shifts in the provision of services such as energy, transport, or food and sanitation’, and ‘often refer to a change in the state of a system rather than merely a change in technology or fuel source’ (Newell and Simms 2020: 2). Given the substantial decarbonization of energy systems that are required, both doing it piecemeal by small steps or decarbonizing whole sectors will require significant impacts on how energy is produced, distributed, and consumed.

An additional objection to including justice in energy transitions is that while they have large impacts, they do not concern the basic principles of justice, and the basic structure of a just society is what justice is all about. Principles of justice are limited to the basic structures of well-ordered societies (Rawls 1999[1971]). Other questions to be discussed after establishing such basic principles (Rawls 2005: 20; Gardiner 2011: 130) include issues such as ‘intergenerational justice, international justice, justice for those with disabilities’ (Gardiner 2011: 130). Energy would perhaps most aptly be included in such later topics. A comparison can be made with how Rawls discusses policy areas like education, health care and environmental policies. Such policies are no doubt central to any society, but they are not explicitly included in the basic principles of justice for a well-ordered society. Health care is required both for evening out asymmetries in natural primary goods and for reasons of maintaining self-respect, and to ‘restore people by health care so that once again they are fully cooperating members of society’ (Rawls 2005: 184), which can be dealt with at a legislative level. Education, on the other hand, is handled by fair equality of opportunity in education to grant citizens the capacity to be cooperating members of society (Rawls 2005: 184). But the exact form education takes will most likely be dealt with after the principles of justice have been established. Regarding the environment, Rawls concludes that ‘the status of the natural world and our proper relation to it is not a constitutional essential or a basic question of justice’ (Rawls 2005: 246). Yet Rawls suggests that ‘it seems reasonable to hope that if [justice as fairness] is sound as an account of justice among persons, it cannot be too far wrong when these broader relationships are taken into consideration’ (Rawls 1999[1971]: 449). However, environmental issues, and questions of whether to establish national parks and similar issues, are legislative questions.

However, Rawls’ narrow scope has been criticized (see Gardiner 2011). Health care, education, and the environment are highly important to realizing the primary

goods encompassed by the basic principles of justice, and the same could be stated regarding access to energy services. If justice is a pivotal dimension of energy transitions, political philosophy offers valuable tools if energy policies are not 'susceptible to resolution by the "hard" or "objective" disciplines of physics, mathematics, economics, and engineering' (Van de Graaf and Sovacool 2020: 2).

Justice as a dimension of energy transition scenarios needs to be explicated, not merely asserted. This is due to their aggregated impacts on society, economy, environment and individuals. Moreover, given their large-scale impacts, political philosophy can offer much-needed guidance in explicating and determining the impacts of energy transition scenarios. Lastly, different interests must be recognized in order for such transitions to be fair. These are good reasons for including justice in energy transitions, and they counter the view that energy policies are merely technological or economic decisions but rather concern a policy area that affects basic dimensions of well-being.

### **Defining justice: How should energy transitions scenarios be considered just?**

Before scrutinizing the empirical material, we offer a brief critical survey of different ways to recognize justice in energy transitions. Some aspects have been hinted at above, and here we will clarify the conditions by which to assess the fairness and justice of energy transitions to establish a framework for scrutinizing the empirical material in the next section.

There are different ways of specifying how justice ought to be considered. One way is through establishing principles. Sovacool (2013) suggests that energy justice consists of eight principles: (1) Availability; (2) Affordability; (3) Due process; (4) Information; (5) Prudence; (6) Intragenerational justice; (7) Intergenerational justice; and (8) Responsibility. The principles suggest *inter alia* that affected communities must be involved in deciding about projects, and there is furthermore a responsibility to protect the natural environment (Sovacool 2013: 222). Tentatively, an energy transition that fails to consider any of the eight principles without justifiable reasons could be considered unjust.

While perhaps being adequate for global energy justice, these principles risk being too vast and covering too large a set of issues to be suitable as a framework for analysing parliamentary views of a single state. For instance, 'affordability' includes fuel poverty, which is rare in Sweden. In a 2013 overview of EU member states, an average of 12.1 percent of households reported being unable to pay to keep their home adequately heated (Thomson & Snell 2013). The corresponding share for Sweden was slightly above one percent, although the percentage of households that reported arrears on utility bills within the last 12 months was slightly above 5 percent in Sweden compared to the EU average of 7.8 percent (Thomson & Snell 2013: 567). Consequently, concerns over fuel poverty *per se* might justifiably be excluded by Swedish politicians – although increasing consumer costs could be a concern.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the 'resource curse' of some countries that have high levels of poverty despite having significant natural resources prompts the need for transparency and information accountability (Sovacool 2013: 90). Such issues may be primarily *indirectly* relevant to nation states such as Sweden, who should arguably be interested in acting consistently with

demands of international justice and thus, embracing transparency in energy consumption in this context.

Risks of conflicts between the principles are more problematic, which Sovacool's framework neglects. This neglect challenges practical implementation. Sovacool is not clear about the extent to which they are *prima facie* principles that can be trumped, and under what conditions overruling a principle is justified. This is unfortunate, as the conflicts between them are many. One common example could involve conflicts between intergenerational and intragenerational justice and under which conditions resources should be devoted to current generations or to future generations. This concerns the overarching question of discount rates, and what value to give future generations in current decisions (Caney 2014; Jamieson 2014). As another example, Principle 8 entails that 'all nations have a responsibility to protect the natural environment and minimize energy-related environmental threats' (Sovacool 2013: 219). But often conflicts emerge between economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development, making it questionable as to whether economic growth can be decoupled from environmental exploitation (Jackson 2009). It has been suggested that the principles ought to be considered hierarchical (Sovacool and Dworkin 2014: 371ff). Consequently, a possible way of managing conflicts is that a principle higher up the scale would trump a principle lower down the scale. But this can only get us so far, as the potential conflicts and dilemmas suggested above are likely to persist, and it is unclear under what conditions a higher ranked principle would override others or whether it would do so under all circumstances.

Another approach is to consider tenets or dimensions of energy justice. Such approaches do not rely on specifying principles. An example of 'core tenets' is found in Jenkins et al. 's (2016) overview of energy justice. They suggest that an account of energy justice must '(a) identify the concern – distribution, (b) identify who it affects – recognition, and only then (c) identify strategies for remediation – procedure' (Jenkins et al. 2016: 175). Thus, distributive justice, recognition and procedural justice are the three core tenets of energy justice in their accounting.

Distributive justice investigates and explicates 'where energy injustices emerge in the world', whereas recognition considers 'which sections of society are ignored or misrepresented', and procedural justice entails 'exploring the ways in which decision-makers have sought to engage with communities' (Jenkins et al. 2016: 175). Jenkins et al. (2016) distinguish between two dimensions of distributional justice, namely the unequal allocation of environmental benefits and ills and the uneven distribution of responsibilities (2016: 176). The second core tenet is recognition, relating to the question of who is affected. Building upon Fraser (1999), there are three main categories of *misrecognition*; cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect (McCauley 2018: 15; Jenkins et al. 2016; 177). Recognition concerns whose interests are considered in decisions and what impacts are included in energy transition plans and scenarios. Just recognition of social differences is also central for procedural justice (Jenkins et al. 2016). Recognition-based justice entails that the impacts on ethnic minorities or indigenous people be considered, being groups that are often ignored or misrepresented (Jenkins et al. 2016: 175). In Sweden, this includes the aboriginal Sámi, where wind and hydropower affect their interests and ways of life in substantial ways (Kårtveit 2021).

Arler has formulated an example of dimensions of energy justice (2001; 2020). Arler suggests three dimensions of ethical consideration in energy, as shown in Figure 1 (from Arler 2020: 8).

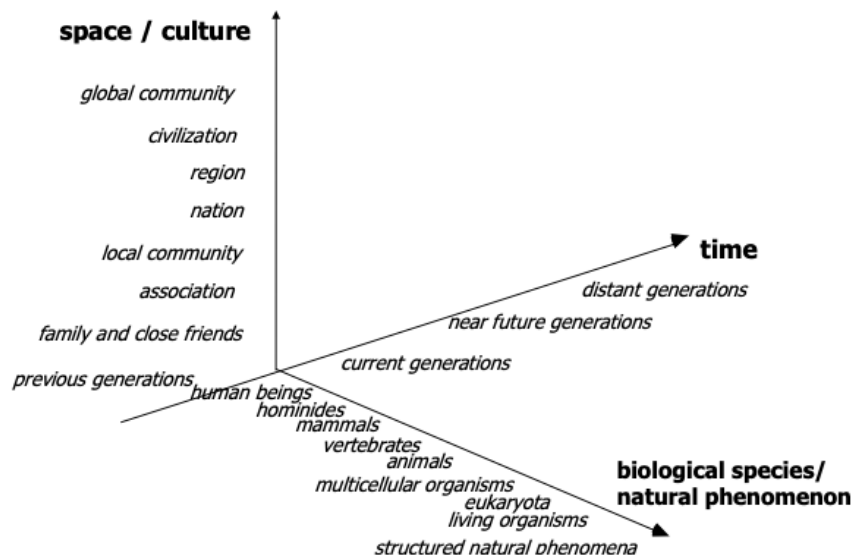


Figure 1. Dimensions of energy justice (from Arler 2020: 8)

At the core of sustainable development lies the temporal dimension. The dual objectives of energy transitions – to avoid contributing to dangerous climate change while also maintaining energy availability at sufficient levels for well-being and economic growth – both concern future generations, first due to the necessity of avoiding dangerous climate change, and second to secure long-term availability of green and sustainable energy systems. The intergenerational issue also involves other energy sources, such as nuclear power and storage of spent nuclear energy. This is relevant in the case of Sweden, where nuclear energy in 2020 provided approximately 27 percent of energy needs (IEA n.d.).

Questions regarding the spatial dimension of energy policies include issues such as dividing burdens to enable energy transitions. While the differences in burdens are encapsulated in the UNFCCC ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, such a principle is often specified through other principles, such as ‘ability to pay principle’, ‘beneficiary pay principle’ and ‘polluter pay principle’ (Caney 2020; Caney 2010). Moreover, the spatial and cultural dimension includes the width of the sphere of moral relevance. The issue of whether there are special obligations due to community belonging, or whether fully global principles are applicable to all, are complex issues in political philosophy (Caney 2005; Kymlicka 2001). Again, an additional aspect is the relevance of groups, such as the Sámi people in Finland, Norway and Sweden, whose interests are often neglected when wind power infringes on their land (Kårtveit 2021).

Along the third axis we find issues often discussed in environmental ethics, regarding the potential ethical and political weight of other animals, species and ecosystems. Sovacool (2013) also includes environmental concern in his eight principles, and others discuss interspecies justice as a dimension of energy justice (McCauley 2018; Frigo 2018), but it is often unclear what substantiates such principles, and what their status is relative other principles, which may lead to

moral conflicts. Discussions of interspecies justice have arisen regarding potential environmental impacts during siting of hydropower and wind power, and environmental management can vary due to differing values or different perceptions regarding the normative status of conservation practices.

Arler's framework has several benefits. First, it is not based on formulating rigid principles, but neither is it an overly permissive accounting. Instead, it is what Arler calls 'midway ethics' (Arler 2020: 6). That is, the dimensions adhere to the challenge of finding 'a conception that is both theoretically justifiable and empirically recognizable', but also that is neither 'so demanding that no one will ever be able to comply with its demands nor [...] so unchallenging that just about anything goes anywhere at any time' (Arler 2020: 6).

Above we have intended to show different conceptions of energy justice and examples of what ought to be considered for energy transitions to be deemed just. These provide a 'mapping' of the ethical concerns in energy justice that are relevant for considering justice in energy transitions and will be used to discuss the empirical data in the next section. Not all of the issues are fully relevant, and the mapping is not intended as a score card by which to assess how Swedish energy transition politics hold up relative to the demands of justice, but rather as a way of navigating the field of energy justice and making sense of the empirical data. Nor are all relevant justice topics included. For instance, it is noteworthy that gender is missing, as there are gender differences between contributions to climate change and energy consumption, and the impact of climate change and energy transitions (Bell, Daggett and Labuskito 2020; Gaard 2017).

The 'maps', most fully Arler's account, provide issues that ought to be taken into consideration to meet the demands of justice. Moreover, Arler's account, by being 'midway ethics' that can be both theoretically justified as well as empirically recognizable (2020: 6), makes it suitable for assessing empirical material. It is neither theoretically detached from practical concerns, nor is it normatively empty and lacking critical accounts of practical politics.

## **Justice in practice: Which dimensions of justice are considered by Swedish politicians?**

In this section we will analyse how Swedish MPs discuss justice in energy transition scenarios, following a brief methodological account.

### *Methodology*

This study includes qualitative, explorative interview data investigating how energy justice is conceptualized and discussed by Swedish parliamentarians. The primary data of the study are interviews with Swedish parliamentarians representing all of the parties in the Swedish parliament, presented here from left to right as the Left Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats.

We conducted the interviews during the autumn of 2020, thus before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, which has not only securitized energy issues in Europe but also framed or enhanced crisis discourse surrounding European energy politics. In Sweden, energy issues and in particular their economic impacts actually became one of the top priorities in the parliamentary elections in September 2022



(SVT 2022a, Novus 2022). Prices of oil, coal and gas escalated (Feveile Adolfsen et al. 2022), affecting the Nordic countries. On 3 September 2022, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson warned that Sweden now faced a ‘winter of war’ because of Russia’s ‘energy war’ (SVT 2022b). Several energy policies and bills have been introduced in Sweden since the Russian aggression on Ukraine, supporting the energy bills of both private households and businesses. Yet, the political energy discourse still follows similar ideological lines and preferences as they did before the war in Ukraine. Consequently, we suggest that the interviews give us a valuable insight into how Swedish parliamentarians conceptualize energy justice.

The interviews were anonymous in the sense that the names of the politicians are not used, but complete anonymity is not possible because the respondents in question are democratically elected representatives of political parties. All interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were recorded, and respondents signed a written consent form allowing us to use the interview material in our research.

We organized each interview in a semi-structured manner around an interview guide. The interview guide contained questions aimed at gathering respondents’ views on which justice aspects, if any, they deemed important to consider in energy transitions and scenarios. However, the guide did not initially stipulate any specific definition of central concepts such as justice, leaving the respondents free to conceptualize and interpret it as they saw fit. Consequently, neither specific theories nor definitions of justice were initially provided to the respondents, so no specific theory or conception could be favoured. Following recording, each interview was transcribed. The extracts quoted in the article were translated by the authors.

The interviews are grouped in two categories:

- Left block: the Left Party, Social Democratic Party, and Green Party
- Right block: the Centre Party, Liberal Party, Moderate Party, Christian Democrats, and Sweden Democrats

This distinction coheres with the background political ideologies of the parties and how they have historically collaborated. However, it should be noted that the government 2018–2022 consisted of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party forming a relatively weak minority government with support from the Centre Party and the Liberal Party. This means that our categories reflect historical ideological backgrounds and shared views on issues such as markets and welfare, but not the power distribution of the government (2018–2022) during the time the interviews were conducted in Autumn 2020.

The interview data will be analysed by utilizing the mapping of ethical concerns in energy policies derived from scholarly debate presented in the previous section. This allows for a comparison between the energy justice topics raised by Swedish politicians on the one hand and the topics raised in scholarly debate on the other. The analysis will focus on overlaps between the two data sets in addition to assessing whether Swedish politicians unjustifiably exclude topics that one would expect them to cover to meet the minimal standards of energy justice. Critical scrutiny in instances of overlap will help to assess whether the topics brought up by Swedish politicians are consistent with how they are discussed in the scholarly literature. Exceedingly large disparities between the two sets would signal either that Swedish parliamentarians do not include what are commonly held to be

relevant and reasonable principles of energy justice, or that principles of energy justice omit issues that are of practical importance.

### *Distribution*

Do Swedish MPs consider justice in energy transition scenarios in a way that meets the demands of justice, or are there reasons to change the considerations that should be taken in frameworks of energy justice? Regarding the very idea of whether energy scenarios are justice concerns, one respondent reflected on energy as a policy area in the following way:

‘One approach, I would say, is that energy policy often gets quite technical. We discuss how much energy is needed to start a malfunctioning electrical system from a technological perspective... or what the pros and cons of different energy sources are’. (*Right block politician*)

An analysis of the Swedish parliamentary debate shows that most parliamentary motions relating to energy emphasized, or solely considered, technical or economic issues, while justice played a marginal role (Melin, Magnusdottir and Baard 2022). These results are relevant here, given that they concern the same population (Swedish MPs), and the same topic (energy). Thus, energy policies are ‘reduced to technical issues and matters of cost’, neglecting the fact that such policies at their core ‘involve political and moral choices about the kind of society we want to live in’ (Van de Graaf & Sovacool 2020: 2).

Some respondents explicated the function of energy as a provider and a means for other purposes:

‘I do not see energy and electricity as some luxury, I think it is basic infrastructure, a basic standard for people. That all children should be able to do their homework, that all expressions for human creativity and entrepreneurship and cultural creativity can blossom with energy as some form of basic infrastructure’. (*Right block politician*)

This attitude shows an awareness of the relevance of energy availability to basic functioning of society and states the importance of energy for a wide array of activities.

During the interviews it often became apparent that most respondents could, by way of open questions, bring up several issues implying distributive, procedural, and recognition justice. These are also the three dimensions that we will utilize to structure the material below, drawing on Jenkins et al. (2016), but while also incorporating the dimensions explicated by Arler (2020).

Distribution was the justice concern that was most readily brought up during interviews. While some respondents stressed the role that energy availability plays on an individual level, a more prevalent distributional topic was affordability. A concern here were the differences and fluctuating stability of prices in different parts of Sweden. The issue of price also included stability and that industries had to consider energy prices because they are too volatile. Again, it should be noted that the interviews were conducted before the significant price increases that followed Russia’s aggression on Ukraine during 2022 (Fevle Adolfsen et al. 2022).

A more common topic in the context of distributive issues concerned the role that energy availability plays for economic growth:

‘I think that few people actually foresaw that it would be lack of energy or efficiency that put a stop to economic growth. I mean, it could be the case that there’s no more money, that it is a recession, or.. You know, appeal processes, but not that energy is what’s making it difficult to build this housing’. (*Right block politician*)

While energy availability was raised as a specific worry on a social level, and as having an impact on economic growth and societal development, many interviewees raised specific concerns regarding future increased energy demand. Some pointed out that there is already a growing capacity shortage that could put the brakes on economic development, such as the establishment of new companies, new housing areas, and electrification of parts of the industrial and transport sectors.

Several of the respondents wanted to expand energy issues to also cover climate change and fuel:

‘I usually try to think of it as an emissions budget that we have to manage globally. And that budget must be distributed in some manner. And we know that to date it has been distributed, and continues to be distributed, in a very skewed manner, to the extent that it is the rich parts of the world, and the richest in the rich part of the world, who are the cause of emissions’. (*Left block politician*)

Thus, the distributive concern for Swedish MPs was primarily availability, for individual customers, but more importantly on a societal level, and the impacts of energy transitions on economic growth. We found a partial overlap between topics brought up in scholarly literature on energy justice and the topics brought forward by Swedish politicians, the latter having a heavy focus on the impact that energy transitions will likely have on industry and business. Such topics, while important, exclude other important distributive issues, such as discrepancies between households with different economic incomes, relations with other nations, and past emissions resulting in the burdens of taking on significant transition costs.

In the methodology, we suggested proceeding by identifying discrepancies between the academic literature and the interview results. The emphasis in the interviews seems to show such a discrepancy, as its predominance led to a neglect of distributive issues. However, rather than suggesting that the respondents failed to consider all, or even most, of the dimensions of energy justice, an alternative interpretation is that the literature on energy justice fails to account for economic issues. In more general political philosophy, economic issues are covered. An example is John Rawls discussion on the Pareto principle. Calling it ‘the principle of efficiency’, Rawls considers it a possible candidate as a principle for judging the efficiency of economic and social arrangements (1999[1971]: 58ff; see also Heath 2006). Though he ultimately discards it as serving as a sole conception of justice – suggesting that it must be supplemented (Rawls 1999[1971]: 62) – it is noteworthy that the insistence on economic issues found in the interviews fails to cohere with the literature on energy justice, where it is rarely considered. Consequently, a possible conclusion is that energy justice must pay greater attention to economic issues if it is to be practically relevant as an applied research field – even if economic issues must be supplemented with other principles of justice.

Global issues were considered, as evidenced by the above interview extract referring to justice and a global emissions budget, yet few MPs discussed

distribution outside of Sweden. Nor did many statements consider the impacts on other species. Most statements are most reasonably placed on the ‘spatial/cultural’ dimension in Arler’s account, where the impacts on different groups are stated. However, the greatest emphasis was on how businesses and economic growth would be affected. Consequently, the conclusion that energy scenarios and transitions primarily concern economic issues was readily apparent.

### *Recognition*

Many of the topics of distributive justice were intertwined with recognition. Assessing how impacts will be distributed partly reveals what claims are considered to be valid as a matter of justice. Thus, based on the above, recognition was primarily limited to stating the importance of providing industry with secure energy availability, or energy availability for private customers regardless of geographical differences or increasing consumer costs. The interests of industry and business, and to a lesser extent consumers, are recognized as valid justice claims. This neglects many of the dimensions in Arler’s account.

Some topics discussed under the theme of who is affected by transitions had a longer reach, however, and addressed issues of intra-generational justice and environmental justice. In the case of intra-generational justice, several respondents expressed concern about consuming products manufactured in high-emitting countries. Stated differently, this concern involved not including the consumption of imported goods in Sweden in the Swedish carbon budget. Analyses have shown that ‘developed countries have reduced their share of domestic energy use to satisfy their demands and at the same time they have increased their welfare’, but ‘this has been done at the expense of a higher energy use in emerging economies and by means of international trade’ (Arto et al. 2016: 7). As suggested by Arto et al., thanks to international trade, a country can maintain its development level while reducing its energy use, since part of the energy requirements to satisfy its consumption has been shifted to another country and emissions are attributed to the latter country (2016: 4). In this context, some respondents discussed taxation rates, but also potential duties to ‘help those nations with technology and innovations, but also investments, getting access to green electricity’, as one Left block politician formulated it.

Two other themes related to recognition emerged from the interviews, namely environmental impacts and future generations, both of which can be included in the issue of whose interests should be recognized and incorporated in analyses, policies and decisions. However, environmental impacts were rarely expanded upon or prioritized. The respondents who mentioned future generations recognized their relevance in motivating climate change policies, but rarely expanded on the topic and what weight to formally give to them in energy transitions. This did however show an awareness of the normative questions underlying climate change policies.

### *Procedural justice*

Procedural justice is integral to both dimensions above because procedural justice ensures participation in and influence on decisions having distributional impacts and concerns whose interests are recognized (Jenkins et al. 2016: 178). On the rare occasions when processes were brought up by the interviewees, it was in a manner

different from what is conventionally included in procedural justice. For example, some pointed towards the time-consuming processes for obtaining permits to install solar panels by individuals. It was suggested by one Left block interviewee that the time-consuming processes impede on the willingness to invest and become a self-sufficient 'prosumer'. Transitions run the risk of taking a long time due to path dependencies and being locked into high levels of per capita energy use and massive energy infrastructures (Newell & Simms 2020: 4). One Left block respondent saw this as a weakness when policies lag behind permit processes and consequently take too long. The permit discussion reveals a narrow focus on a specific group in society – middle class homeowners – who might already be better represented than low-income earners within political and governmental institutions and thereby enjoy more procedural justice. This narrow approach is inconsistent with the energy justice literature, specifically the literature on procedural justice, which 'manifests as a call for equitable procedures that engage all stakeholders in a non-discriminatory way' (Jenkins et al. 2016:178).

One Right block respondent raised the issue of the need for locally anchoring decisions to install renewables and suggested that public consultation with local populations was a bit of a challenge – 'one had to do it in the right way from the beginning, otherwise it could turn into a conflict' (*Right block politician*). The respondent did not expand on what the 'right way' was. One interpretation that lay close at hand is an 'instrumental' use of participation, mentioned above (McLaren, Krieger and Bickerstaff 2013). This indicates that there is a difference between merely inviting people to participate and actually including and considering their views and seriously investigating the validity of their claims in a manner akin to recognition.

Thus, procedural justice was brought up by Swedish parliamentarians in a manner different from the principles of procedural justice and participation. Standards of procedural justice in the context of energy transitions, such as those suggested by McLaren (2012) include: access to information with fair notice, participation with a right to be heard and to engage in the procedures at all stages, impartiality such as an independent judge or panel, accessibility of a venue, objectivity in the sense that reasons are given for decisions, and respect for different backgrounds, cultures, and capabilities (McLaren 2012: 356; McLaren, Krieger & Bickerstaff 2013: 166). But this raises the question of why procedural justice was rarely mentioned, or was mentioned in a way that departs greatly from its conventional demands. The question is insistent given how energy policies, such as transitions to renewable energy, increased use of biofuel or carbon capture and storage, will likely affect many people due to transforming land use. Adding to the importance of procedural justice is the central role that social acceptance takes to fair transitions. The EU, for instance, emphasizes that ensuring a socially fair transition is deemed pivotal 'to ensure a politically feasible transition' (EU 2018: 23). The silence on procedures and participation for these factors is noteworthy.

### Summary remarks

As illustrated above, normative statements are often implied and not specifically asserted or defended. The interviews of Swedish MPs revealed a very narrow focus on economic impacts. This is unfortunate, for two reasons: The interviews reinforce a view of energy politics focused on technical and economic issues. Second,

normative statements that are merely implied are not available for critical scrutiny, and the principles that guide political decision-making are thus not transparent. Given that energy transitions will involve both benefits and losses amongst different groups, there are good reasons to include justice dimensions in energy scenarios even when focusing on the economic dimensions.

Furthermore, the interview results show that some parts of the ‘map’ in the defining justice section were missing. One example of this is how the processes described significantly departed from reasonable principles of procedural justice. Participation processes are integral to decisions having environmental impacts in Sweden and might explain the omission of procedural justice. But the omission is also intriguing because imperatives for participation are ingrained in Swedish environmental decision-making processes. For instance, Sweden has signed the Aarhus Declaration, which states that each party ‘shall provide for early public participation’ as well as ‘allow the public to submit, in writing or, as appropriate, [...] any comments, information, analyses or opinions that it considers relevant to the proposed activity’ (UNECE 1998). Similar imperatives are found in the Swedish Environmental Code. Consequently, one could either expect respondents to express stronger procedural justice views than was currently the case, or procedural justice is so ingrained in the processes that it was left out of the respondents’ answers.

The indigenous Sámi were another aspect that we might expect to be addressed but which was not mentioned by any respondent. Unfortunately, this is consistent with prior analyses of motions by Swedish parliamentarians (Melin, Magnúsdóttir and Baard 2022). Even if Sámi interests are considered in other motions, they do not occur when discussing just energy transitions with Swedish MPs. Yet Sámi interests are affected by energy politics. For instance, research shows that Sámi interests were ignored when the first large-scale hydroelectrical power plants were built (Össbo 2014). Similarly, the expansion of wind power on Sámi land disturbs Sámi reindeer husbandry (Cambou 2020). Somewhat similarly, it is noteworthy that gender was excluded. No justifications were provided for these exclusions.

Conversely, economic issues were one aspect that respondents brought up but that did not align with the literature on energy justice. Indeed, the conceptualization of energy issues as being about economic and technological issues often seems to be downplayed in the literature, which opts instead to consider other principles. Consequently, good reasons may exist both for the literature on energy justice to encompass practical concerns to be empirically recognizable, as well as for practitioners to pay greater attention to more dimensions of the elements of energy justice.

In short, the material discussed here seems to reinforce the view that energy scenarios and transitions, and energy politics more generally, have a narrow focus on economic activities and technology. Although interviewees brought up issues concerning distribution, recognition and procedural justice, as well as the three dimensions of energy justice (see Figure 1), the inconsistencies between the topics identified in scholarly literature and parliamentarians were considerable. This is of concern for a nation with ambitious energy transition policies and long-term commitments to justice and equality, but is consistent with prior research findings (Melin, Magnúsdóttir and Baard 2022).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It should however be noted that both the above-referenced work and the interviews were conducted prior to Russia's aggression towards the Ukraine, the aftermath of which saw energy prices escalate dramatically and governmental subsidies introduced in Sweden for businesses and consumers during winter 2022/2023.

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