



Original research article

Enough pain, cold, and illness! Social movements in response to energy poverty in Europe

Ana Stojilovska^{a,*}, Hyerim Yoon^b, Jan Frankowski^{c,d}^a Department of Government and Public Policy, Institute for Political Science, HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary^b Department of Geography, Institute of Environment, IMA-UdG, University of Girona, 17071 Girona, Spain^c Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland^d Institute for Structural Research, Warsaw, Poland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Energy vulnerability

Empowerment

Energy justice

Just transition

Neoliberal agenda

ABSTRACT

Energy affordability challenges are increasingly generating collective dissatisfaction in Europe, but also collective solutions. We study the experiences of three social movements of relevance to energy poverty across Europe (in North Macedonia, Poland, and Spain) that have pushed for or proposed legislation acts in parliaments to promote new governance models prioritizing the needs of energy-poor households. These movements reflect the demands for political representation of energy-vulnerable groups in each country, advocating for policies addressing structural inequalities and highlighting the universal right to essential services. In contrast to the neoliberal energy agenda which favors market-based approaches to tackle energy poverty, social movements demonstrate that those affected by energy poverty and marginalized within the dominant energy paradigm can effectively expose injustices and underlying political economy mechanisms contributing to this issue. In the current EU context where neoliberal policies are suggested for a more inclusive energy transition within the existing energy market framework, we argue that collective but constructive discontent manifested by social movements may offer a more effective pathway towards achieving a just energy transition.

1. Introduction

Energy poverty has garnered substantial attention and has become a prominent research area with policy implications in Europe. Nonetheless, the more advanced European and national policy initiatives often marginalize salient, genuine social responses to this challenge. The motivation of this work was to reverse the perspective and cast an eye on the bottom-up social reactions to energy poverty, understood in our paper as the inability to attain a socially and materially necessitated level of domestic energy services [1], reconstructing social movements as independent and citizenship-based activities directly focused on mainstreaming and alleviating energy poverty. In this work, we define social movements as “loosely organized collectives acting together in a non-institutionalized way in order to create a change in this society” [2], but with a capacity to incorporate direct democracy instruments other than protests and demonstrations, such as pushing for or submitting legislative acts as well as advocating to achieve their goals.

The emergence of new social movements was initially driven by aspirations to reconstruct the prevailing socio-political system,

envisioning a more democratic and transparent order. During the transformative juncture of the 1980s and 1990s, eminent scholars such as Claus Offe, Larry Ray, and Alain Touraine drew inspiration from the political metamorphoses witnessed in Central and Eastern Europe and South Africa, seeking novel societal paths dubbed ‘the third way’ [3–5]. Alain Touraine forged a connection between the concept of new social movements (NSMs) and the broader landscape of social change, conceiving social movements not merely as transformation agents but also as a consequence of replacing hibernated structures with new, better-suited agents aligned with the contemporary system. Social movement researchers expressed hopes that the activities of NSMs would engender a restorative shift from the language of politics to a realm characterized by authentic communication and heightened civic engagement [5]. Several decades after those classical works, we contemplate the significance of these categories, examining whether social movements can transform the discourse and policy setting in terms of energy poverty alleviation.

The EU energy transition policies are well-established within the free market paradigm, which had implications for energy poverty. This

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Ana.Stojilovska@tk.hu (A. Stojilovska), hyerim.yoon@udg.edu (H. Yoon), jan.frankowski@ibs.org.pl (J. Frankowski).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103627>

Received 30 November 2023; Received in revised form 23 May 2024; Accepted 31 May 2024

Available online 15 June 2024

2214-6296/© 2024 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

paradigm, reflected in the energy market liberalization [6], asserts the need for greater competition and less government involvement, with more efficient operations through lower costs [7], putting efficiency at the heart of utility service provision. Despite that energy market liberalization was introduced to reduce energy costs, studies have shown that this process has led to increased energy prices for households [7,8]. Similarly, privatization as one of the main pillars of applying market rules has failed to increase the satisfaction of energy consumers [9]. For former communist countries, the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms promoted the market as the solution to all of the region's energy-related challenges [10]. However, Central and Eastern Europe faced alarmingly increasing prices after the liberalization of the energy market which along with inadequate social safety nets and poor thermal quality of dwellings led to an increase in energy vulnerability [11]. Furthermore, hybrid economies, such as rollback neoliberalism opened the doors to favoring private interests, and quasi-market relations [12]. Also, the Spanish case of liberalization has created an oligopolistic market, where the energy price has disproportionately increased during the past decades [13,14] with an unsuccessful attempt to create an effective policy that significantly alleviates the cost burden for energy-poor households [15,16]. More recently, the market-oriented discourse in approaches to defining the role of citizens in the energy transition disregards matters of inequality and exclusion [17]. Even during the 2021–2022 energy crisis, the neoliberal policy paradigm has been about securing privatized energy markets and the interests of electricity and fossil capital [18]. As such, citizens have not been sufficiently protected from the privatization and liberalization of energy services which is one of the contributing factors to experiencing energy poverty.

The latest EU tool to alleviate energy poverty is energy communities. Energy communities are another form of social organization around energy transition that intends to meet consumption needs, environmental goals, and support prosumerism [19,20]. Only a few cases of energy communities include alleviating energy poverty in their objectives, and overall there is little evidence that energy communities decrease energy poverty and involve vulnerable communities in practice [21–23]. This underused potential can be explained by the growing focus on economic objectives rather than their social or political goals and less attention given to the communities' collective and grassroots processes of participation in energy transitions [24]. Energy communities facing a lack of support and incentives to involve vulnerable groups, remain profit-oriented first and therefore are not equipped to achieve the social benefits of the energy transition on their own [25,26]. Despite their potential to democratize the energy space, the initial approach to energy communities considers them a commercial project with limited space to address social challenges. Social movements as a new governance actor represent the unheard voice of vulnerable citizens demanding the right to energy services and contesting the neoliberal energy agenda. As such, social movements constitute an unexplored governance and democratization tool, indicating that energy poverty is not necessarily tackled through market opportunities.

Social movements related to energy poverty have been developed by necessity as a result of the unheard needs of vulnerable groups. As such social movements bring an element of governance that has not been yet explored regarding its potential to expose energy poverty drivers, confront neoliberal narratives, and contribute to a more just energy transition. Governance refers to institutions and actors from but also beyond governments meaning that the government is not the only power center of a state [27]. Therefore, this paper aims to assess social movements' capacities and activities as well as their role as agents of change in energy poverty alleviation policies based on three case studies in Central, Southeast, and Southern Europe strongly affected by energy poverty. We asked three questions: 1) What triggered the involvement of social movements in energy poverty activism? 2) How do they perceive justice through the lens of existing market regimes and energy transition? 3) How do they envisage alleviation of energy poverty, including

proposing legislation, which fulfills the condition of effective action? And, the more general one: How far and under what conditions do they still make a difference in shaping energy policy activities? We acknowledge that there are many forms and goals of social movements and related grassroots activities in the realm of energy transitions, such as opposing urban projects on economic, social, or environmental grounds [28] or the location of a wind farm in the style of NIMBY (not-in-my-back-yard) [29], and the pan-European movement of farmers striking against principles of European Green Deal. However, we focus explicitly on social movements of relevance to experiencing energy deprivation and vulnerability.

We undertook a multiple-case study to answer these questions by studying social movements struggling against energy poverty in North Macedonia, Poland, and Spain by looking at AMAN (meaning: It is enough), the Tenants movement, and the Alliance against Energy Poverty (APE), respectively. These social movements were selected based on having a common result of pushing for and submitting a legislative proposal to their legislative body, geographic diversity, and various spatial operation scales (national in North Macedonia, regional in Catalonia, Spain, and local, city-focused, in Warsaw, Poland). In each studied country, we chose a movement not limited to the ephemeral gatherings but that forced agenda through changes in the legislation process. Then, using various qualitative methods: interviews, participant observations, and documentary analysis we reconstructed the birth, legislative process, and aftermath of social movements referring to the period after the legislative process ended.

Our research contributes in three distinct ways. Firstly, we integrate the well-established sociological concept of NSMs with the field of energy poverty, employing contemporary frameworks of empowerment and justice for an in-depth analysis. Our findings indicate a shared objective among these movements, centering around opposing neoliberal energy policies and advocating for guaranteed access to basic services. We argue that social movements responding to energy poverty reflect the demands for political representation of energy-vulnerable groups advocating for access to basic services while challenging the neoliberal energy agenda co-creating fertile ground for energy poverty. Additionally, we explore the potential for their activities to be translated into tangible legislative proposals. Our approach encompasses social movements at the national, regional, and local levels, addressing not only energy poverty but also interconnected concerns related to housing, air quality, and water access. By challenging any rigidity within the field, we aim to ensure the relevance of our study to policy-makers, energy poverty researchers, and a broader spectrum of environmental sociologists, political scientists, human geographers, and activists.

Our paper is structured as follows. First, we provide a brief overview of the concepts of empowerment and justice, and we define social movements. Then, we review the methodology, elaborating on the research methods and techniques employed. Next, we present results using three stages of each social movement: birth, legislative process, and aftermath, to analyze the trajectory of each movement. In the discussion section, we compare the results to illustrate the conceptual contribution, and finally, we summarize our study in conclusions. In the Appendix, we provide additional information in the form of a template for collecting and coding data for the selected social movements.

2. Conceptualizing social movements, justice, and empowerment: demand for more democracy

Social movements are conceptualized as an opportunity to challenge existing socio-economic structures. In the context of the energy transition agenda, we can distinguish between anti-fossil social movements [30–32], those highlighting deficiencies in social policies [33], those focusing on broader income equalities [34], and those working to mitigate energy poverty [35]. Additionally, social movements aimed to democratize the energy system while bringing social justice, representing marginalized communities, advocating for public ownership over

utilities, and opposing large utility companies [30,31,36,37]. Social movements challenge existing energy incumbents [38] and can modify political structures [39]. Citizen knowledge and participation are central to social movements. A key feature is their bottom-up grassroots nature [36,40], where the co-production of everyday knowledge occurs to contest existing power relations [41]. Culture and identity can also play a role in mobilizing or hindering social movements [31,42,43]. Ultimately, social movements highlight the importance of material forms of participation and inclusive decision-making processes to influence the policy agenda [44]. Social movements resemble grassroots democratic movements that focus on uncovering and challenging systematic injustices that adversely affect citizens.

Energy justice as a concept serves to understand the relationship between justice and energy, applying principles of justice to evaluate energy policies, production and consumption, energy security, climate change effects, and, other related aspects, including social activism [45,46]. Energy justice directly appeals to three main tenets: distribution, recognition, and participation [45,46], highlighting the utility of this framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas and policy choices related to energy [46–49]. The analytical framework of the three tenets is the most prevalent [50]; however, other conceptualizations distinguish global justice, such as cosmopolitan justice, based on the rich and diverse agenda of environmental sociology, which focuses on the externalization of costs by developed countries and emphasizes the need for a comprehensive analysis of the entire energy resource supply chain [49,51]. Moreover, restorative justice involves compensating those harmed and restoring an area to its original state [52]. Finally, inter-generational justice is frequently invoked in climate activism to ensure leaving the planet in a suitable condition for future generations. These principles are often transformed into the demands of social movements.

As energy justice is a practically oriented framework; it assesses where injustices arise; whom they affect; and what processes cause them [46]. It then offers tools to reconstruct the social movement activities and put the ideologies and norms behind particular policies in this framework, including solidarity and empowerment. An overarching goal of energy justice is to ensure “safe, accessible, and sustainable energy for all individuals in all areas” [45]. Emphasizing equity positions the concept's authors and contributors as advocates of stronger state intervention, treating energy as a basic good rather than a marketable commodity. In this context, the related notion of ‘just transition’, refers to respecting and considering societal goals when introducing a new energy system [53] or, more literally, preventing old inequalities from growing and creating new ones when transitioning to less carbon-intensive technologies [54]. The energy justice framework can also be used to identify hidden injustices such as weak social welfare systems, the financialization of the real estate sector, and monopolistic or oligopolistic market practices [55,56]. In this regard, overarching justice issues lie at the heart of social activism; however, in terms of energy poverty and social activism, according to our knowledge, they have not yet been systematically analyzed.

Empowerment refers to the process of expanding the agency of the less privileged to feel capable of controlling their decisions as a means to realize their values [57]. In alleviating energy poverty, empowerment is increasingly gaining proponents as the key solution to tackle the root of the problem in contrast to common palliative measures that temporarily reduce the energy poverty impact, such as energy discounts, vouchers, and social tariffs [58]. Especially, the critics of ‘assistentialist’ approaches underline that the relationship between client and social services or customer and energy companies, due to its innate nature, results in overlooking the root of the problem and rather focusing on the symptoms leading to (re-)production of the palliative measures [59]. Examples of practices of fostering empowerment demonstrate that with Collective Advisory Assemblies and monitoring campaigns, energy-poor households gain collective knowledge and control to actively work on cases as emotional burdens are shared and lifted, to optimize supply, and to improve thermal comfort at home [60]. Empowerment-based policies

like the Weatherization Assistance Program enhance one's long-term ability to have control over energy use and planning and regain a sense of control over their future energy situation [58]. However, due to the urgency and severity of some affected households, others argue (including the authors of this paper) that the support of palliative measures should also be accompanied to attenuate the suffering during the empowerment process [61].

The empowerment approach seeks to increase one's autonomy and expand freedom of choice as it deploys tools related to education, problem-solving, and communication skills. Moreover, it may also be related to psychological support in terms of one's self-image, motivation, stress management, or even related to the spirituality of an individual [62]. Therefore, empowerment is individual but strongly related to social support [63,64]. Recent studies on social movements have highlighted the empowering aspect of grassroots movements [65]. Strong social movements in relevance to energy poverty have contributed to the empowerment of the affected bringing significant changes in the energy poverty policy at the regional level [66]. The collective action taken in movements generates individual empowerment as participants actively take a role in becoming one of the activists demanding legislative change and building a strong sense of identity, empathy, and solidarity [67]. Collective actions exercised in a social movement embody households' lived experiences and these can help them get rid of the mental burden and avoid coping strategies that are detrimental to their health [66]. Empowerment is also considered crucial in feminist and gender studies. Energy poverty is a gendered problem where women and women-led households are disproportionately affected. Therefore, empowering women by allowing them to access adequate information to gain confidence in making choices for energy services and providing contractual rights is considered crucial in alleviating the problem at the household level [61]. Overall, empowerment can be seen as the opposite of vulnerability as social movements can change affected people's (self-) perceptions and experiences of energy poverty.

The work of the social movements in response to energy poverty is closely related to the demands of organizations and supporters of the concept of ‘right to energy’. A right to energy can be a legal right, both in terms of ‘human rights’ or ‘consumer rights’, or as a moral right for a human in the modern world [68]. The right to energy approach, which is closely related to the right to adequate housing and other rights, is primarily focused on persons as primary subjects with vital stakes in access to good quality, affordable, and continuous energy services for achieving decent living standards [69]. This approach is considered an essential element for changes in the paradigm around energy that safeguards primary access to energy for everyone affected by or falling into energy poverty [70]. The right to energy perspective is empowering as it calls for rights to participation, information to access justice, and accountability working towards energy democracy considering both energy production and consumption [71].

3. Methodology

The research design comprises a multiple-case study including three examples of social movements struggling against energy poverty in Europe: AMAN (meaning: it's enough) in North Macedonia, tenant movements in Warsaw (Poland), and APE (Aliança contra pobresa energètica in English: Alliance against Energy Poverty) in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). The selection logic is based on the tangible consequences of their actions, not limited to the street protests but also resulted in a concrete legislative and policy proposal that managed to reach the national or local governments. Acknowledging that case studies generate context-dependent knowledge [72], each one employed a combination of qualitative techniques, including interviews, participant observations, and document analysis to explore the circumstances in an in-depth manner. Analyzed documents included written materials, official publications, and reports, aiding in the reconstruction of the causes and consequences of social movement activities. Interviews with

social movement representatives and other stakeholders across their agendas allowed for an in-depth study of people and communities [73]. Furthermore, participant observation as a vital technique to understand any group, event, or process, in their natural setting [74], served to experience the dynamics of social movement protests. The latter involved action research as collective self-reflective inquiry [74]. After the key stage of data collection for each of the case studies, researchers continued to observe the development of the social movements until the beginning of 2023, reflecting on their work amidst the pandemic crisis and destabilization of the energy market, further exacerbated by the Russian military aggression in Ukraine.

Table 1 summarizes the key methods utilized in each investigation of the social movements. In the Macedonian case study, the key analyzed documents were retrieved from the website of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia concerning the procedure around the draft energy law proposed by citizens and materials from the internet page of the social movement AMAN. Additionally, the understanding of the context is supported by participant observation in one Parliament hearing about the draft law, as well as spending time among the protesters. In the Polish case study, the key documents included protocols of city and district council, and press articles addressing reprivatization claims, energy poverty, and housing inequalities in Warsaw. To complement these materials, several interviews were conducted with various urban stakeholders, including the Parliament members, as well as participatory observation of the protest, focused on providing district heating and decent housing conditions in municipal buildings. In the Barcelona case study, the key documents were sourced from the website of the social movement APE including press releases, informational documents for the affected households, publications, and minutes of their assembly. The participatory observation conducted during the period 2015–2017 and 2018 provided the foundation for gaining a deeper insight into the *modus operandi* of the organization. Since 2018, the author intermittently engaged with different tasks within the organization. The most recent interview with an APE member was conducted in February 2022.

We rely on thematic synthesis as a methodological framework to integrate qualitative datasets from three distinct case studies. Although

we conducted our studies separately and at different periods, thematic synthesis enables us to stay true to the results of the primary studies while generating new concepts based on free line-by-line coding [75]. Next, the independent datasets were analyzed qualitatively following the three common research questions, guided by the key concepts used. Following this coding process, the qualitative data were collected into a single repository for all three cases and analyzed following data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing [76], with the detailed results of comparison available in the Appendix. The results section presents one case study after another to preserve the story narrative, and each case study is structured to present the birth of the social movement, the legislative process, and the aftermath referring to the period after the legislative process has ended.

4. Results

4.1. North Macedonia: И бол и бес (both pain and anger)

4.1.1. Birth

The social movement about energy poverty in North Macedonia appeared in 2012–2013 led by an informal organization of citizens named AMAN attracting over 13,000 supporters (and signatories of the draft law). It was triggered by the increase in electricity and district heating prices in 2012 and it manifested itself as street protests in front of the Regulatory Commission because it regulates the energy prices [77,78]. The social movement found it essential to highlight that they are independent of any political party affiliation and are fighting for justice [78]. AMAN received backing from civil society organizations working on labor, human rights, and poverty issues, some of which leaned towards leftist ideologies [77]. AMAN as a self-proclaimed independent representation of citizens standing for a right to be able to afford their energy bills, successfully mobilized a large number of protesters on the streets for months. This sustained effort gradually formed a community strong enough to pass the threshold of 10,000 signatures to propose a draft law to the Parliament. This achievement can be seen as the source of their empowerment.

AMAN's posters conveyed messages of social justice and citizens' activism, for instance: “*Stop against the increase in prices. You have taken our bread (=livelihood). Social justice. Power of the people. No more silence*” [77,78]. AMAN's motto demonstrated their understanding of energy poverty and the energy transition, and their dedication to social justice. They supported the low carbon transition but opposed neoliberal market-driven approaches and privatization of ownership. Their stance was clear:

“(Our goal is) to ensure a decent living standard for all citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. This means that the prices for electricity, oil, gas, and heating should align with the standard of living of the majority of citizens of Macedonia. As we must pay for electricity, heating, and gas (some of the basic needs for modern life), the state should ensure that everyone will be able to (pay for energy), without cutting back on other basic needs such as education, health care, and food. We believe the most appropriate way to achieve this is for the state to invest in domestic renewable and clean energy sources such as solar, geothermal, and wind power, which must not be owned by a private corporation.” [77].

The energy liberalization process contributed to rising energy prices for households, as previous prices had been below the market rate. This increase is one underlying cause of the social movement. Additionally, at that time consumers were ‘entrapped’ into using the electricity supplied by a privately-owned monopoly and district heat from two possible suppliers that cover different parts of the capital, the larger of which was privately owned. Previous research indicates that consumers in North Macedonia faced disconnection from electricity services after a single unpaid bill [79] while private monopolist energy utilities have been misusing their position, thus affecting human rights [55].

The birth of the social movement can be attributed to broader socio-

Table 1
Overview of key data sources used in the examined social movements.

Social movement	Key data sources used
North Macedonia	- Website of the social movement AMAN - Draft Law to Amend the Energy Law (proposed by AMAN) - Legal Committee hearing report (summary of the hearing of the draft law at the Legal Committee of the Parliament) published by the Parliament - Economic Committee hearing report (summary of the hearing of the draft law at the Economic Committee of the Parliament) published by the Parliament - Parliament hearing report (summary of the hearing of the draft law at the full Parliament) published by the Parliament - Participatory observation in the formulation of the draft law and the Economic Committee hearing
Poland	- Protocols from the meetings of the city council and social dialogue committees - Press articles systematically analyzed - Interviews with social movement representatives and local policy stakeholders - Video recording of the social movements documenting conversations with tenants in the area of energy poverty - Website and social media profiles of the organizations constituting the social movement
Spain	- Participatory observation of the tenant movement strike - Website of the social movement APE - Interviews with social movement participants - Text of Catalan law 24/2015 of 29th of July 2015 - Participatory observation of assemblies - Reports published by APE in collaboration with other social movements

economic and political conditions in the country. North Macedonia has been affected by a durable and deep form of energy poverty [79] with 26.8 % of households in 2012, at the start of the social movement, unable to heat their homes adequately [80]. On top of that, this movement opposed the 'regime of Gruevski', a period during which the country was referred to as a state capture defined as the political dependence of institutions [79]. This increased an environment ripe for social movements protesting various issues, such as police brutality, the cutting of trees in urban areas, and the imprisonment of a journalist. Gruevski's regime operated in a clientelist manner abusing public office, clientilizing essential institutions while prosecuting political opponents, journalists, and members of civil society [81].

4.1.2. Legislative process

The protestors' demands were articulated in a draft law, an amendment to the Energy law which garnered 13,169 citizen signatures as a citizen initiative and managed to be debated in the Parliament [82]. However, it was ultimately not accepted.

The main goal of the draft law was the protection of the economic and social rights of citizens by protecting them from energy monopolies, namely, monopolistic energy utilities [82]. The main requests from the social movement participants in the draft law included exempting disconnected consumers from paying any fees for district heat, gas, and electricity while they are disconnected; and introducing a cheap daily electricity tariff for households¹ applicable for 3 h between 10 am and 6 pm [82].

This draft law underwent three levels of discussion in Parliament. On the 7th of February 2013, the Parliament's Committee on Economic Affairs reviewed it as illustrated in Fig. 1, followed by the discussion on the 11th of February by the Parliament's Legal Committee. Ultimately, the full Parliament discussed it on the 13th of February. All three debates concluded that the majority of the members of the Parliament did not support the adoption of this draft law [83–85]. The members of the ruling Macedonian party VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) voted against the draft law, the ruling Albanian party DUI (Democratic Union for Integration) was reserved, while the Albanian party in opposition DPA (Democratic Party of Albanians) supported the draft law [78].² The largest Macedonian opposition party SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) was absent from Parliament due to an earlier event known as Black Monday during which they were forcefully removed from Parliament while the budget for next year was being discussed [86].

During the Parliament debate, proponents of the proposed draft law argued that citizens needed protection from monopolies, especially considering that the country is affected by widespread material deprivation that left them vulnerable to increasing prices [85]. The key argument from the protestors was in line with the right to energy concept, expressing that citizens were not seeking 'free energy', but rather a dignified life where they were able and capable of paying their energy bills. This showed their knowledge of the clash between neoliberal energy policies driven by the energy transition and these policies' impacts on energy poverty, material deprivation, and human dignity. An AMAN representative highlighted the struggle of citizens, stating:

"Our standard of living doesn't match the bills we receive from EVN (the single electricity supplier). Macedonia has one of the lowest salaries in the

region. We want to be responsible citizens, but we cannot pay our bills. As a result of this price increase, and knowing that the electricity price will continue to increase, we wonder how we are going to survive till the end of the month... I'm speaking on behalf of those who are in no condition to pay their bills. Their dignity is affected." [85].

Opponents of the draft law displayed neoliberal views having sided with the open market and claiming that cheap energy was a thing of the socialist past. The key market argument against the draft law was that introducing the cheap daily electricity tariff would increase the price of electricity [85]. Additionally, the opposing side relied on the EU's authority to argue that cheap energy is not feasible in the EU. For example, a member of the ruling Macedonian party stated: *"If we want to become a member of the European Union, we should forget about cheap tariffs because they do not exist."* [85]. By expressing the right to energy and their supportive attitude towards a decarbonization process as a socially just transition, we can argue that AMAN had valuable citizen knowledge which contrasted with the expert narratives expressed by the majority of the members of the Parliament [87]. This contrast underscores the social movement's demands for energy justice (procedural as a way to improve the existing legislation and recognition to acknowledge them as a relevant stakeholder) versus the narratives of the decision-makers treating energy as a commodity aligned with the neoliberal principles of a deregulated energy market.

A series of arguments were put forth, suggesting that the historical availability of the cheap daily tariff and the upbringing contributed to developing a culturally-relevant behavior around the use of energy among the population. The cheap electricity tariff at the time of this event started at 10 pm which according to AMAN influenced their habits as they were compelled to do laundry, cook, and bathe after 10 pm, affecting their efficiency at work the following working day [85]. The ruling Albanian party representative, although voted reserved highlighted the cultural practice of economizing energy:

"They (AMAN) do not ask for anything exclusive or luxurious, rather they simply demand to reinstate a right which the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia enjoyed in the past, for years and decades. As members of Parliament, many of us come from middle-class backgrounds and have been taught that we need to economize electricity as much as possible. I still remember my mother ... she raised us with the same logic, to turn on the boiler and the washing machine during the cheap tariff hours, and I think that is a really good behavior, to do good energy-saving practices." [85]. These remarks show the awareness among the representatives of ethnic minorities that ethnic minorities are significantly affected by energy poverty, a concern highlighted by other studies [66,88,89]. The illustrations of struggles to adjust their daily needs and habits to accommodate the restrictions and opportunities of energy service provision reflect citizens' lived experiences of energy self-restrictions and constant adaptation within the existing market situation.

Lastly, the democratic capacity of the country to organize an initiative of direct democracy was discussed. The signatures were collected in barely 30 working days while members of AMAN faced threats, obstacles, and pressure [85]. This explains their lived experience of not only dealing with energy deprivation but also facing a shrinking democratic space which inhibited their access to democratic tools such as proposing legislation.

In the end, the draft law failed. This can be attributed to the absence of the opposition in Parliament, while the demands of the social movement were entangled in national political and economic constraints.

4.1.3. Aftermath: silence and unattributed semi-achievement

After the failure to adopt the draft law in 2013, the social movement AMAN 'died' with its leaders ceasing visible activities. As the energy prices increased during the 2021–2022 energy crisis, the country declared a state of energy crisis in 2021 and 2022. Among the most vulnerable, a new phenomenon arose as many at risk of energy

¹ This applies to all household electricity consumers who can use at certain times lower tariffs of electricity per kWh, which is usually in the evening hours and weekends when the electricity demand is lower.

² Albanians are the largest minority group in the country, and since the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001 when the representation of minority groups in institutions has been ensured, it is common for a winning Macedonian political party at an election to make a coalition with at least one Albanian political party to form a government.



Fig. 1. Economic Committee hearing on the 7th of February 2013.

disconnections turned increasingly more often to charity for help. It appeared the capacity and ability to raise one's voice and demand rights were silenced, with people resorting to their coping strategies and survival on their own [88].

Interestingly, despite that the citizen initiative was unsuccessful when the opposition came to power the two demands from the draft law were fulfilled but without any acknowledgment of AMAN. It indicates that as a citizen movement, AMAN was not taken seriously by the 'political elite'. The cheap electricity tariff was revoked during the energy crisis in 2022 and reintroduced in December 2023. Additionally, since 2020 stricter regulations were introduced making it more difficult to disconnect from the district heating, such as requiring approval from the majority of other flat owners in the building and demonstrating that they are using more efficient and environmentally friendly means of heating. Despite that AMAN failed to adopt the draft law, it implicitly raised awareness about energy poverty in the country, expressing the feeling of being locked in a situation forced to pay high energy bills to monopolies. A final observation is that the country's democratic conditions were not ripe enough, but the downfall of the regime brought some sensitiveness among decision-makers regarding AMAN's demands for the right to energy.

4.2. Poland: *Dość: długów, chorób, wysokich kosztów ogrzewania prądem!* (enough: debts, illnesses, and high electric heating costs!)

4.2.1. Birth

Tenant movements in Poland formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s around the legal, political, and economic aspects of housing in the context of the transition towards private ownership-dominated models [90]. Their main goal was to improve the housing conditions of municipal tenants [91]. In the second half of the 2010s, there were 40 informal tenant associations in Poland, in Warsaw alone, researchers of social movements list several organizations affiliated with the tenant movements [92]. These movements, representing less affluent groups of residents living in municipally owned, multi-family buildings [93], rarely take a vote directly about the energy policies.

The tenant movement was created by left-wing organizations in consultation with tenants (...). It gave such a left-wing perspective to people who suffered from housing exclusion but could not express themselves within the framework of the official, existing liberal ideology that says "If you don't have a private apartment, you're a loser because you didn't make it" or "Take a loan, change your job," and so on. This whole ideology has been prevalent over the past thirty years, and tenants knew nothing else. They were ashamed to admit that they had a housing problem because they were taught that it was a shameful and individual problem. So as a result, they, in their language, would not have developed such a slogan as

“housing as a right, not a commodity.” (Interview with Tenant Movement Member, 2022).

Warsaw's best-known tenant groups include the Warsaw Tenants Association (Warszawskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów; WSL), the Committee for the Protection of Tenants' Rights (Komitet Ochrony Praw Lokatorów; KOPL), and the Social Justice Office (Kancelaria Sprawiedliwości Społecznej; KSS). These organizations provide legal advice on housing assistance, organize eviction blockades, and review proposals for legislative changes and urban housing policies, emphasizing the right to housing and universal access to affordable heating. In the case of municipal buildings with several dozen residents, at least one person is in contact with the movement's decision-making center, so it remains a bottom-up structure, working as a registered organization or as an informal network. The exact number of members is therefore hard to assess. These are several people who participate in strikes, but far more observe or support the organization online. At the beginning of November 2023, the most recognized tenant organizations had 6,300 (KOPL), 4,400 (WSL), and 9,600 (KSS) followers on social media.

4.2.2. Legislative process

Tenant movements publicized the consequences of reprivatization: a return of real estate to claim holders to tenement multi-family houses nationalized after World War II. The movements circulated information about evictions stimulated by the claim holders and related life stories of residents, requested information about housing plans, and challenged the legality of certain administrative decisions. In 2016, the tenant and urban movements enforced legislative changes, the so-called Anti-Reprivatization Act. This included, among other things, the outlawing of the most controversial and brutal practices, such as returning a building with tenants to the plenipotentiary of the prewar building owners and evicting them through large rent increases combined with media disconnections or extremely cumbersome renovation works. Although the government prepared the legal act on its own without consultations with the tenant's organization, the new law was considered the most important postulate and was positively assessed by tenant movements. Interestingly, the political divide in the Parliament was not in line with the typical worldview polarization axis, characteristic of the Polish political scene, but more on the economic beliefs. After their first successes, the movements received social credit for more effective advocacy in other areas, such as retrofitting multi-family buildings and energy poverty alleviation.

Energy poverty figures prominently among the issues being addressed by tenant movements, especially in municipal housing. In Warsaw, municipal housing apartments constitute almost 8 % of all housing stock or nearly 81,000 apartments. The majority of the housing stock remains in poor technical conditions. Since 2017, the Warsaw Tenant Association has advocated for universal access to district heating in municipal buildings, targeting city authorities, neighborhoods, and property management companies. The follow-up campaign about the enormous electric heating costs in municipal buildings led to the convening of a particular city and neighborhood council. During the energy poverty alleviation campaign, the Warsaw Tenant Association highlighted the lack of district heating access in one of every four municipal apartments, as well as the impact of poor housing conditions on health. According to their estimations, this problem affected 45,000–55,000 of Warsaw's inhabitants [94]. In the following years, the Committee for the Protection of Tenants' Rights publicized the widespread energy poverty problem in municipal buildings, caused by reprivatization claims on the one hand, and the market-oriented policy on the other. Resistance by tenant movements took various forms: demonstrations in front of neighborhood offices and during neighborhood council meetings, and banners hung on balconies, fences, and stairwells of buildings [95]. Their idea was also to empower the tenants and reverse the shaming; they offered tangible administrative as well as emotional support through joint meetings to integrate the community

and generate the feeling that there is a committed intermediary between their rights and decision-makers.

The demands of the tenant movements were aimed primarily at urban policy. Protest organizers contested ignoring the needs of the least well-off residents: letter carriers, cleaners, pensioners, the unemployed, and workers and employees of grocery discounts, implicitly linking the issue of energy poverty to inequality in the labor market [96]. Tenant movements required universal access to district heating (recognition justice), information access (procedural justice), financial compensation for reprivatization victims (restorative justice), and canceling debts caused by high electricity bills (distributive justice) also illustrated in Fig. 2. The tenant movement demonstrations were one of the few grassroots social mobilizations around housing and energy poverty in Poland. Through these actions, they mainstreamed the concept of energy poverty into the urban policy discourse, using it interchangeably with the category of ‘energy exploitation’ [94].

The tenant campaign was highly successful and forced a change in distribution priorities. In December 2017, the city's deputy mayor acknowledged that connecting buildings to the district heating network is a priority and that *“any neighborhood that reports the need to connect municipal buildings to central heating will receive funds from the City Office to carry this out”* [94]. Thanks to the reprivatization act, it was also easier to do this in multi-family buildings with old reprivatization claims. The decision to prioritize investments connecting these buildings to the district heating network was also maintained in subsequent years. In 2021, the president of Warsaw indicated that *“despite the coronavirus pandemic and the difficult situation of the city's budget, we do not change our renovation plans in municipal housing. This is one of our priorities for raising the standard of living in the city”* [97]. The city office and district mayors accelerated the schedule for connecting buildings to district heating and started reporting the progress of the investments on social media:

Because it is necessary to help the residents, we agree, both we and they (tenant movements). They adopt different methods, we adopt different methods, but ok, that's how it's done. No one will praise us for connecting more buildings, that we connected 23 buildings last year, but rebuke us for 1, that is not connected. (...) Because there is no longer a discussion on whether to connect buildings, we all know that - to connect as many as possible. Now I know that a huge push exists to fight this problem. I sometimes throw in the information that we are retrofitting another building. I used hashtag #energypoverity, that we are fighting this energy poverty, such a systemic problem affecting residents, who find it very difficult to get out of it until the city starts investing in more buildings (Interview with decision-maker in neighborhood office, 2020).

Because it's such a game between social movements and the district authorities that we, by making a scandal, force them to do some activity. Then they credit themselves with the success of doing it. But this is, let's say, a price you can pay to provide people with decent housing conditions, and this is fine, despite the cynicism with which the authorities approach it (Interview with Tenant Movement Member, 2022).

The tenant campaign's success was due to social mobilization and the use of professional, various, and unconventional data to prove the scale and intensity of energy poverty. The tenant movements mapped the reprivatization claims and district heating connections, conducted their survey, and funded technical expertise to assess the building condition. Another effective strategy used by the tenant movements was to refer to examples of specific building addresses affected by the ownership problems and the existing electricity bills, which were paid to a private company, unlike the rest of the country. In this way, the tenant movement, functioning alongside the Polish research and political debate on energy poverty, even constructed measures of household energy poverty on its own (measured by the presence of damp, mold, being ever disconnected, and having an electric heater received from the municipality), initiating the debate about the right to energy and housing at the local scale. Outreach activities bolstered the analytical activities of the



Fig. 2. Transparent on the municipal building fence in Warsaw (District: Praga-Południe): Enough: debts, illnesses, and high electric heating costs!

tenant movements: a manifesto against energy poverty reprinted in the press [94], social media posts, and leaflets distributed in electric-heated buildings. In particular, it is essential to highlight the breadth of direct actions that helped engage older people in the protest, especially women, who are usually a political force less involved in such events but remain highly exposed to energy poverty in Poland [98]. The involvement was expected to lead to the mass mobilization of tenants, change how they communicate with the city, and introduce systemic solutions. The demands of the tenant movement eventually caught the attention of the press, radio, and television, including nationwide coverage. However, while the city agreed to change its distribution priorities regarding housing and energy, other problems raised by tenants, for instance, the *ad hoc* nature of social assistance measures such as fuel allowances, bill payment support, or the ineffectiveness of energy allowances, which require changes at the national level, went unnoticed and unresolved.

4.2.3. Aftermath: recognition of energy poverty in legislation

The campaign's success and the promise of connecting all buildings and apartments to the district heating network changed the gravity point of tenant demands. In line with a change in distribution priorities, the weight of the discourse on energy poverty in social housing shifted from the district heating connections to ensuring better living conditions in properties with ownership claims. Urban real estate management companies recognized the value of the tenants' information sources and declared to maintain contact and jointly monitor the progress of the housing investments. Thus, once the priority for building connections to the district heating network was recognized, there was a shift from a struggle for distributive and recognition justice to the demand for procedural justice. In this regard, several problematic and unresolved issues remained, which included a lack of influence by the city on the timing of connections to the network of specific buildings or the launch of service in them, due to the lack of control over a monopolistic private district heating company. In this case, privatization of the monopoly did not cause a skyrocketing heating price, but hampered decisions about the access of particular locations. However, the example of the tenant campaigns showed that not only air pollution and energy efficiency but also energy and heat prices, seemingly related only to policies at the

central level, can become an 'urban question' and a field for urban policy discussions on various dimensions of justice. The success of the social movement, which was mainstreaming the reprivatization issue and enforcing legislative changes regarding stopping evictions in reprivatized buildings, also helped in terms of the energy poverty alleviation in the city, as energy poverty was recognized and addressed in important local strategic documents.

4.3. Barcelona: *Ni set, ni fred, ni fosc* (no more thirst, cold, or darkness)

4.3.1. Birth

Recognition of energy poverty as a major social problem in Spain began around 2014. At the time, only several publications estimated that about 10 % of Spanish citizens suffers from energy poverty [99]. The most recent data unveils that 9.3 % is the share of those who have reduced their energy expenditure abnormally low (Low absolute energy expenditure, known as $M/2^3$), and 16.4 % is the share of those overburdened by the high energy cost in proportion to their income (High share of energy expenditure in income, known as $2M^4$) [100]. The social movement Alliance against poverty (APE abbreviated from *Aliança contra la Pobresa Energètica*) was born at the beginning of 2014 in Barcelona with strong support from social movements and non-governmental organizations. The economic crisis that had created a severe housing crisis since 2010 and its prolonged impact resulted in a rise in the number of households with energy supply problems in Catalonia and nationwide. The strong social fabric woven from the indignados (anti-austerity) movement of 15-M (abbreviation of May 15, 2011, the day of the occupation of Plaza Cataluña which influenced the Occupy Wallstreet Movement) – the spirit of occupying illustrated in Fig. 3 - gave a driving force for Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH abbreviated from *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*)

³ $M/2$ indicator refers to the share of households whose absolute energy expenditure is below half the national median.

⁴ $2M$ indicator refers to the percentage of households whose share of energy expenditure in income is more than twice the national median.



Fig. 3. Occupying Endesa, the major energy company on the 20th of February 2017.

to expand. This strong sense of social union remained as a backbone for the citizens of Barcelona, especially for those leftists and activists.

PAH's practice and the militant style of action dealing with housing problems inspired the birth of APE to provide space for issues related to managing energy and water service at home, which was a frequent topic brought up in the PAH. The affected households are introduced to the movement through biweekly collective advisory assemblies. The bottom-up process results in transforming the affected households – an individual – into *more* empowered members and activists of the movement, creating a safe environment where they no longer have to feel ashamed of their situation. They are invited to share their experience openly, not being judged but supported in their emotional burdens. Participants are also invited to participate in an inclusive environment where tasks are divided and taken up by the affected households, consequently making them feel useful, helpful, and empowered to solve their work and contribute to others. They actively re-educate the affected about the oligopolistic structure of the energy system in Spain and re-shift the discourse from shaming individuals to demanding an appropriate recognition of the problem from the company and administration. In their fight, APE brought changes in guaranteeing the connection for vulnerable households, debt clearance for water-poor households, and bringing awareness of the hidden issues such as disconnection in irregular housing, debt accumulation from arrears, and abusive debt collecting practices. APE treats energy more broadly as part of social reproduction, “to secure all that is required to reproduce ourselves as healthy and flourishing subjects” [101]. APE is supported by 30 active members and around 100 attendants who remain in contact with APE through an online chat group (Member of APE, personal interview, 02/03/2022). Considering that there are affected households who solved their case and stopped participating, the outreach of APE is considered greater but unfortunately, they do not know exactly how many participated since its foundation.

4.3.2. Legislative process

APE promoted ILP Vivienda – a citizen legislative initiative on housing and energy poverty in collaboration with other organizations including PAH. At a politically opportune moment, when social emergent issues were at the center of political debate, the regional government passed ILP Vivienda unanimously. This achievement is considered an exemplar of the procedural justice of energy-poor households. Law 24/2015 of urgent measures to tackle housing and energy poverty emergencies was promulgated on 29th of July 2015 meanwhile numerous activists celebrated their victory in front of the Catalan

Parliament, who had collectively raised support of 150,000 individual signatures. Even though the articles regarding housing were brought to the Constitutional Court and suspended, the policy on energy poverty survived with a strong reinforcement of protection for vulnerable households based on the precautionary principle. The cut-offs were banned at all costs and authorized only to those proved to be not vulnerable – making sure that ‘no one is left behind’ while guaranteeing the right to energy. This strong protection measure addressed distributional justice and the right to stay connected to the supply. Moreover, as seen in quotes such as “... do not do business with our rights.”, it is upheld in defiance of the idea of energy as a commodity [102].

Since the successful enactment of the regional legislation in Catalonia, APE continued to work in the correct application of Law 24/2015, educating in their biweekly assemblies on the rights of the affected, to not fear disconnection, and rightfully requesting their right to be connected. They work on the areas where the system easily overlooks or ignores such as unexpected high or low bills, severe indebtedness, and other inhumane practices applied in the current scheme run by companies. They effectively mobilize collaborative efforts of affected households using the collected knowledge [103]. The affected individuals were empowered by knowing the adequate means to deal with their situation and by building a sense of family, where they can seek support but also be the help for others. In sum, the assemblies provide an inclusive environment where the affected are respected, invited to share their vulnerability and become resilient through solidarity. In everyday practice, the tasks within the movement were divided between members to give a sense of inclusion and efficacy. Those involved in the movement for longer than 3 months were invited to join the coordination group. Recently, APE also started to address the health issues focusing on the emotional well-being of the affected households and the impact of assemblies on it [60].

Several consequential works followed since. First and foremost, APE demanded the correct application of Law 24/2015 from companies as despite the regulation a tragic death took place in 2016. A senior citizen lost her life due to a fire in a disconnected home. Illegal cut-offs were detected by the affected households and administrations, resulting in penalties for private companies. One of the main concerns regarding the question of ‘who is responsible for energy poverty and who pays the debt?’ was left out of the draft law 24/2015 due to political reasons so that all parties could vote in favor. By taking a rather strategic approach, the question of debt was dealt with afterward by a convention negotiated between the administration and energy service providers. APE constantly pressured both parties until it was finally signed in 2021

almost 6 years after the adoption of law 24/2015. The energy system's responsibility in this social problem was finally recognized as a convention that allocated a considerable amount of debt to be paid by the private company. The electricity company bore the full cost of the debt of vulnerable households for the period from the 6th of August 2015 to the 31st of December 2018. The debt for 2019 and 2020 was equally shared by the energy company and administration (Catalan government to bear 75 % and supralocal administrations to bear 25 %) [104]. About 35,000 households cleared accumulated debt between 2015 and 2020 and were also promised no further debt accumulation. This marked one of the great successes that APE achieved for low-income households, yet again leaving an important precedent for vulnerable households in Catalonia [105]. At the same time, the affected households sought further debt clearance from the companies and brought to justice bad practices around debt collection. APE continues the action and media exposure to mainstream discussion on energy poverty at the national level. The increased awareness of the topic also instigated the Spanish government to plan a strategy for energy poverty (Estrategia Nacional contra la Pobreza Energética 2019–2024, Real Decreto 15/2018). Lastly, APE continues to open spaces to discuss problems such as energy poverty in occupied housing (recognition justice), during summer, and in the process of the energy transition.

4.3.3. Aftermath: uninterrupted fight for the right to energy

During the pandemic lockdown, APE had stalled for several weeks until they reorganized the assemblies online. Water-disconnected households were identified as the municipal fountains were closed. Energy as a basic right became clearer for the government as they decreed emergency measures to put a moratorium on all cut-offs for basic services. After the pandemic, APE advocated for the prolongation of the emergency moratorium to guarantee connection to energy and water. The Royal Decree Law 8/2021 of the 4th of May adopted urgent measures in the health, social, and jurisdictional order. These measures were to be applied after the end of the state of alarm declared by Royal Decree 926/2020, on the 25th of October, by which the state of alarm is declared to contain the spread of infections caused by SARS-CoV-2, prolonging the moratorium till the end of 2023. The recent enactment of the Royal Decree Law 8/2023 of the 28th of December extended the moratorium to be effective until the 30th of June 2024 [106]. APE and more than 20 other organizations are demanding an extension as the end date approaches, foreseeing a crisis as a large number of cut-offs may take place at once. As the government advanced in recognizing the importance of guaranteeing consumers basic service, it enabled various social movements to collaborate on making policies that guarantee minimum vital consumptions at the national level.

Moreover, APE is leading various discussions regarding energy poverty and securing basic utility services for vulnerable households. It has a particularly important role in increasing awareness of the difficulties of energy-poor households. Their most recent work involves restorative justice as APE discloses the phone call harassment of debt collectors performing illegal practices. This revealed the psychological burden that these households have to bear and the illegal practices used by the electricity companies. The discussion on suffering from thermal discomfort during summer became one of the main topics during the summer of 2022 as Spain experienced the hottest summer since record existed.

In the agenda of APE, energy transition is a rather new frontline, seen as a necessary step to take to redress the community's energy demand and distribution. They posted recently the need to tackle *"the climate crisis and avoid indebting society on more fossil fuel infrastructure for decades while these continue to enrich the energy oligopoly."* According to APE, energy transition is perceived as a way to redistribute power from the oligopolistic energy system. *"We need an energy model that is 100 % renewable, decentralized, efficient, distributed, but above all democratic."* Additionally, they address the lack of inclusive EU legislation towards energy transition as it excludes the most vulnerable population who do

not live on their own property. APE argues for the need to prioritize these populations as first targets. *"...The majority of European funds are not being dedicated to improving energy issues for the most vulnerable families who live in rentals. The most vulnerable neighborhoods and families demand prioritizing the rehabilitation and subsidies for renewable self-consumption facilities, regardless of the property ownership regime."* [107].

5. Discussion

We contrasted the European energy transition agenda manifested through a preference for liberalized and privatized energy markets with the demand for basic services and energy justice expressed through the activities of social movements proposing legislation to reduce energy poverty in three European countries. Our conceptual contribution lies in understanding the emergence of new social movements as a reflection of the demands for political representation of energy-vulnerable groups and as agents advocating for structural reforms aimed at mitigating energy poverty.

All three cases illustrate citizen-led movements exposing monopolized decision-making processes that disproportionately affect vulnerable citizens. The Barcelona movement perceived the energy transition as an opportunity to dismantle oligopoly in the provision of essential services. The movement in Warsaw advocated for re-municipalizing monopoly under social and political control, aiming to ensure affordable energy and equitable access to district heating rather than solely focusing on individual distributed generation. Additionally, in North Macedonia, the movement was placed as opposing a captured state which impeded its effectiveness due to the absence of mechanisms to challenge the closed top-down decision-making. However, some of the demands of the social movement in North Macedonia were accepted after the fall of the 'captured state'. It indicates that social movements can have a transformative potential when the political context allows [56]. The social movements envisage alleviating energy poverty by addressing the less recognized drivers, such as monopolized energy and housing markets [31,33], and demanding social justice [30,36]. The documented energy liberalization and privatization were identified as contributing factors to the exacerbation of energy vulnerability [108–110].

The social movements broadcast the message about striving towards the right to energy while demanding justice and good governance from institutions. The right to energy stands out as a prominent claim by activists and academics arguing that energy matters to the degree that it is more than just another commodity [111] but an "energy as a right of people living in modern political communities" [112]. The right to energy serves as a catalyst to prompt governmental and stakeholders' action to guarantee access to energy services [113]. This notion is closely linked to ensuring a dignified life (North Macedonia), decent housing and energy services (Poland) while leaving no one behind (Barcelona). Consequently, these social movements addressed broader societal issues beyond solely addressing energy poverty, including housing concerns in Poland, pro-democratic efforts in North Macedonia, and water poverty in Barcelona. The act of protesting against unjust energy policies disproportionately affecting marginalized groups is prominent and can be interpreted as increasing the visibility of growing inequalities (distributive justice) [46], the voice of those impacted, and their visibility within society (recognition justice) [114,115], and especially uncovering those responsible for generating injustices (procedural justice) [55,116]. Ultimately, the aim of the examined social movements can be seen as reflecting the ideas of reducing existing inequalities while pursuing the low-carbon transition [54,117,118].

Another crucial aspect of understanding the contribution of social movements is the inherent value of everyday knowledge they represent [41,87,119]. The social movements have been led by independent grassroots or activists standing for social justice (North Macedonia), or striving to improve the lived experience of the affected households (Barcelona and Poland). In essence, social movements serve as the voice

of (vulnerable) citizens demanding the fundamental right to access basic services which mirrors the need for good governance to achieve that. The everyday (citizen) knowledge, even the lived experience of the energy poor is the crucial resource utilized by participants in these social movements to suggest policy improvements. These insights add to the understanding that bottom-up actors are more receptive to the lived experience of the energy poor and can complement existing policies to more effectively address this issue [120]. Finally, the social movements made the challenges of certain groups visible, such as ethnic minorities in North Macedonia, disabled, migrants, and women in Barcelona, and the less affluent working class and retirees in Warsaw. Despite the exclusion of various vulnerable minority groups from the benefits of energy transition [89,121] social movements have succeeded in elevating their visibility and amplifying their voices.

The engagement in street protests and the process of submitting legislative and policy proposals has been an empowering experience for the participants in the social movements. We can observe their active role in sharing the vision of energy transition (North Macedonia), experiencing individual empowerment through participation (Barcelona), and building collective identities based on the struggle for improved housing conditions (Warsaw). This highlights the significance of culture and identity in developing a social movement [42,43,67], with a key distinction being the sense of agency gained by individuals to control their own decisions [57]. Throughout these movements, we observed knowledge sharing, collective approaches, and collaboration between citizens and supportive stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, all in the direction of building a community. Such collective coping mechanisms can mitigate energy poverty including sharing of mental burdens [62,66] contrasting with ‘assistentialist’ approaches which might overlook the root of the problem [59,122]. Furthermore, we also observed the citizen knowledge in each of the social movements, such as considering obstructed access to district heating as an energy poverty driver as well as framing energy poverty as energy exploitation in Poland, borrowed from radical workers’ movements. In the case of Barcelona, social movement participants linked the climate crisis, fossil fuel industries, and power dynamics in the energy sector with the right to essential services. North Macedonia’s social movement participants exposed policies of energy liberalization and privatization which neglect the human development aspect.

In Fig. 4, we summarize the responses to our research questions. We explain that crucial conditions that evoked the birth of the studied social movements were rooted in neoliberal energy policies, characterized by price increases, privatization, lack of social control, and monopolized energy decision-making, embedded in law and therefore implemented under everyday institutional practices and technocratic means of governance. As a result, these conditions obstruct access to basic energy rights such as affordable housing and energy services, resulting in manifestations of energy poverty, disconnections, evictions, and a lack of representation of the needs of energy-vulnerable individuals.

Participants in these social movements articulated their social discontent and resistance by ultimately proposing legislation to align with the idea of the right to basic services and a socially just and democratic energy transition as a way to alleviate energy poverty. Finally, the actual adoption of the proposed legislation, the sustainability of the critical mass of social movement participants, and the democratic capacity of the legislation body in question played a pivotal role in determining how social movements can shape energy poverty alleviation policies.

We acknowledge several limitations of our study. Firstly, the findings are restricted to specific cases of social movements in Europe addressing energy poverty, particularly those involved both in activities on the ground and proposing legislation to governmental bodies. We recognize that numerous other social movements have occurred in Europe, such as the protests in Bulgaria in 2013, which resulted in the collapse of the government or the activities of the Yellow Vests Movement in France, five years later. However, these movements did not directly mention ‘energy poverty’ combined with the ‘right to energy’ in their core agenda. Furthermore, there are other forms of social movements beyond the realm of experiencing energy vulnerability. The uniqueness of the cases explored in our study, along with their inherent differences, present a coherent narrative of an informal and vulnerable group of citizens who took to the streets and subsequently pursued legislative action as a democratic means to oppose dominant energy policy-making that contributes to energy poverty.

6. Conclusions

The article assessed new social movements as an agent of change in energy poverty alleviation policy. We explored the collective lived experiences of social movements in North Macedonia, Poland, and Spain as an instrument of critical citizens’ voices that brought significant shifts in the discourse surrounding energy poverty, while also recognizing their potential for demanding fair energy transition. As summarized in Table 2, the social movements exhibited at different scales, rose as a new separate movement or embedded in existing activities related to decent housing conditions. All movements were initiated by affordability and access challenges which aggravated the situation with energy poverty, showing that a wide set of energy services have been affected. The social movements exhibited direct actions in the form of protests, ultimately resulting in a legislative proposal to the respective legislative bodies. The narratives of inclusion and democratization of energy service provision were instrumental for the social movements opposing monopolistic and private ownership of utilities. The findings resonate with the underlying motivations of new social movements, which seek to reshape existing socio-political systems with greater democratic participation.

These three social movements were significant because they left a footprint of direct democracy in their respective legislative branches and scales of government demanding more affordable energy access and supply conditions (North Macedonia), protection of vulnerable

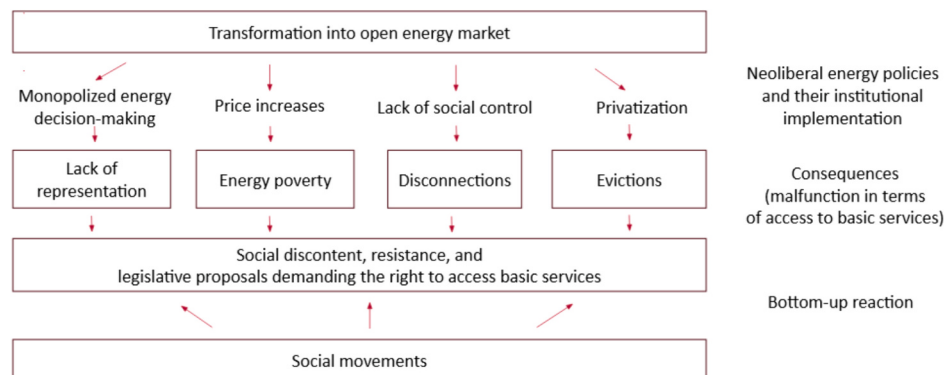


Fig. 4. Conceptualizing the development and contribution of social movements in response to energy poverty with a legislative proposal.

Table 2
Summary of the key components of the studied social movements.

Social movement / key characteristics	North Macedonia	Warsaw (Poland)	Barcelona (Spain)
Issues that initiated the movement	Affordability challenge due to electricity and district heat price rise	Unfair access to district heating, poor health conditions in multi-family municipal buildings	Affordability challenge that aggravated during the prolonged economic crisis and increase of cut-offs
Energy transition agenda	Locally owned renewable energy, opposing privatized energy monopolies	Inclusive energy transition through district heating connection	Energy democratization
Scale of change	National	Municipal	Regional
Existence of a social movement basis	Newly born movement	Tenants movement	14 social and environmental organizations backed APE
Legislation changes achieved	Draft energy law was not adopted in 2013, although some aspects of the draft law were accepted years later without any reference to AMAN	Anti-Reprivatization Act (2016, 2020) facilitated the removal of reprivatization claims and eased investment of public money in retrofitting, including district heating connection	Catalan law 24/ 2015 of urgent measures to tackle housing and energy poverty emergencies prohibits utility disconnections for vulnerable households
Knowledge co-production strategy	Direct action, citizen science	Mapping, direct action, tenant surveys	Citizen science, direct action, militant action
Energy carriers and consumer groups	Electricity and district heating for households	District heating for social housing	Electricity, gas, and water for vulnerable consumers and people with access-to-the-supply issues

consumers from disconnections (Barcelona), and challenging the reprivatization leading to evictions (Poland). While the Polish and the Barcelona cases were successful, the Macedonian social movement was buried by the politicized Parliament overpowered by the captured state. The Barcelona and the Polish movements persist in providing support to initiatives aimed at reducing energy poverty and improving housing conditions (Poland) and water poverty (Barcelona), while some of the demands of the movement in North Macedonia were adopted after the fall of the captured state. While the Macedonian movement as an informal body has been dismantled, the Barcelona and Polish movements continue to serve as watchdogs, ensuring proper implementation of legislation and policy declarations by utility companies and local authorities. All three cases demonstrate the demand of citizens for good governance and energy justice as a means to alleviate energy poverty. Throughout their lifecycles, these cases showed the importance of building communities that support individuals affected by energy poverty, eviction, or disconnection triggered by liberalized energy services [7] and serve as instruments for taking action. As evidence shows that community sharing can be upscaled through restructuring institutions, and initiatives supported by strong and lasting institutions [123], social movements engage as a new stakeholder. They voice the challenges faced by citizens deprived of basic energy (water and housing) services and oppose monopolized energy and housing decision-making, which contribute to energy poverty and material deprivation.

The three cases are meaningful as they exemplify the prefigurative role of new social movements in imagining a different energy model. The liberalization of energy services, dominated by monopoly or oligopoly markets is perceived as an unequal power relationship that

places vulnerable populations at risk of service cut-offs or price rises. In various ways, these social movements address the right to energy, indirectly emphasizing the principles of justice (distributive, recognition, and procedural). Commonly, they discussed a new path to addressing energy poverty either away from the existing model of energy management or in the form of inclusion of vulnerable populations into the current system. While the EU discussions on energy transition often follow a neoliberal approach where the distribution of social power affects access to energy services and participation in decision-making [124], these social movements might shift this dynamic towards greater inclusion and more balanced power-sharing. Therefore, the ongoing struggle for energy poverty alleviation aligns with the broader goal of fostering a socially just and democratic energy transition.

Social movements represent a unique social arrangement that challenges the current energy system and its transition. While new solutions to energy poverty often become marketized, other bottom-up actors, such as Ombudspersons can democratize the energy transition [125]. Incorporating the lived experience of energy poverty into existing policies could render better policy outcomes [126,127]. Recently, energy solidarity appears to reframe the narrative and push for energy communities to be supported to achieve their social goals, such as alleviating energy poverty [128]. Furthermore, the European Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement to protect vulnerable consumers from electricity disconnections. This signals a recognition that structural change, both in policy and economics, is needed to break the cycle of reproducing inequalities and to address the lack of democratic capacity that disregards the needs of vulnerable communities, thus widening the gap between winners and losers in the energy transition. Rather than viewing energy communities as a panacea to inclusiveness, we argue they should be designed with caution as they tend to work within the functions of the energy market with the limited possibility of alleviating energy poverty, but with a high possibility of reproducing the dominant energy paradigm. Therefore, the contribution of social movements that expose energy poverty drivers is to point out the structural drivers of energy poverty while suggesting policies aimed at securing a fair and just energy transition for vulnerable citizens.

The conducted study opens new research avenues. On a broader policy level, further research is needed to explore the link between energy poverty and democratic processes, the evolution of energy democracy, the translation of the neoliberal paradigm into everyday institutional practices and technocratic governance, and the effectiveness of efforts to alleviate energy poverty while democratizing the energy transition. Moreover, the role of bottom-up actors including other informal and formal non-governmental organizations in identifying and mitigating energy poverty remains relevant. As we have not studied in detail the more intense activities during the pandemic and post-pandemic crises which due to the weakening of well-established common social relations and the more difficult access to the policy institutions, went to the internet, could be the subject of further studies. Emerging initiatives, such as pan-European farmers' strikes against the Fit for 55 Package, and continuing the Yellow Vests movement's activities, also merit further investigation, as some of their postulates directly refer to the energy and climate policies and their relation with poverty and overall structural inequalities. Finally, at a micro-level, the representation within social movements and empowerment of individuals, considering factors such as gender, ethnicity, and class, is worthy of further exploration.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ana Stojilovska: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Hyerim Yoon:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization,

Visualization. **Jan Frankowski:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Visualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability

Additional data is provided in the Appendix.

Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge the COST ENGAGER project which helped bring the researchers together. The authors are thankful for the practical comments provided by the members of the Department of Government and Public Policy and are grateful for the detailed and constructive comments provided by Sergio Tirado-Herrero. The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their detailed engagement with the manuscript and for providing insightful comments. Jan Frankowski would like to acknowledge the support received by the National Science Centre under grant 2019/33/N/HS6/02565. Ana Stojilovska would like to acknowledge the support received by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office, Hungary under the grant PD_23 OTKA no. 145881.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103627>.

References

- [1] S. Bouzarovski, S. Petrova, A global perspective on domestic energy deprivation: overcoming the energy poverty–fuel poverty binary, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 10 (2015) 31–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2015.06.007>.
- [2] P. Sztompka, *The Sociology of Social Change*, Zak, Krakow, 2015.
- [3] C. Offe, *New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics*, Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, New School for Social Research, New York, 1985.
- [4] A. Touraine, An introduction to the study of social movements, *Soc. Res.* 52 (4) (1985) 749–787, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970397>.
- [5] L. Ray, *Social Theory and the Crisis of State Socialism*, Edgar, 1996.
- [6] V. Lauber, E. Schenner, The struggle over support schemes for renewable electricity in the European Union: a discursive-institutionalist analysis, *Environmental Politics* 20 (4) (2011) 508–527, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2011.589578>.
- [7] L. Chester, A. Morris, A new form of energy poverty is the hallmark of liberalised electricity sectors, *Aust. J. Soc. Issues* 46 (4) (2011) 435–459, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2011.tb00228.x>.
- [8] D. Streimikiene, J. Bruneckiene, A. Cibinskiene, The review of electricity market liberalization impacts on electricity prices, *Transformations in Business & Economics* 12 (30) (2013) 40–60.
- [9] L. Ceriani, R. Doronzo, M. Florio, Privatization, Unbundling and Liberalization of Network Industries: A Discussion of the Dominant Policy Paradigm in the EU [Internet]. Rochester, NY [cited 2024 Feb 28]. Available from: <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3202145>, 2009.
- [10] S. Bouzarovski, S. Tirado Herrero, S. Petrova, J. Frankowski, R. Matoušek, T. Maltby, Multiple transformations: theorizing energy vulnerability as a socio-spatial phenomenon, *Geogr. Ann. Ser. B, Hum. Geogr.* 99 (1) (2017) 20–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1080/04353684.2016.1276733>.
- [11] S. Bouzarovski, S. Tirado Herrero, S. Petrova, D. Ürge-Vorsatz, Unpacking the spaces and politics of energy poverty: path-dependencies, deprivation and fuel switching in post-communist Hungary, *Local Environ.* 21 (9) (2016) 1151–1170, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2015.1075480>.
- [12] S. Petrova, Contesting forest neoliberalization: recombinant geographies of 'illegal' logging in the Balkans, *Geoforum* 55 (2014) 13–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.04.008>.
- [13] International Energy Agency, Spain 2021 Energy Policy Review [Internet], International Energy Agency, Paris, France, 2021. Available from: <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/2f405ae0-4617-4e16-884c-7956d1945f64/Spain2021.pdf>.
- [14] S.T. Herrero, L.J. Meneses, Energy poverty, crisis and austerity in Spain. People, Place and Policy [Internet] [cited 2024 Mar 6]; Volume 10(Issue 1). Available from: <https://webtest.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online/view-all-volumes/energy-poverty-crisis-and-austerity-in-spain/>, 2016 Apr 20.
- [15] G. García Alvarez, R.S.J. Tol, The impact of the Bono Social de Electricidad on energy poverty in Spain, *Energy Econ.* 103 (2021) 105554, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2021.105554>.
- [16] L. Bagnoli, S. Bertoméu-Sánchez, How effective has the electricity social rate been in reducing energy poverty in Spain? *Energy Econ.* 106 (2022) 105792, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2021.105792>.
- [17] B. Lennon, N. Dunphy, C. Gaffney, A. Revez, G. Mullally, P. O'Connor, Citizen or consumer? Reconsidering energy citizenship, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 22 (2) (2020) 184–197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2019.1680277>.
- [18] G. Fearn, The end of the experiment? The energy crisis, neoliberal energy, and the limits to a socio-ecological fix, *Environment and Planning E, Nature and Space* 7 (1) (2023) 212–233, <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486231172844>.
- [19] G. Dóci, E. Vasileiadou, A.C. Petersen, Exploring the transition potential of renewable energy communities, *Futures* 66 (2015) 85–95, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.01.002>.
- [20] J. Lowitzsch, C.E. Hoicka, F.J. van Tulder, Renewable energy communities under the 2019 European clean energy package – governance model for the energy clusters of the future? *Renew. Sustain. Energy Rev.* 122 (2020) 109489, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2019.109489>.
- [21] V.Z. Gjorgievski, S. Cundeva, G.E. Georgiou, Social arrangements, technical designs and impacts of energy communities: a review, *Renew. Energy* 169 (2021) 1138–1156, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.renene.2021.01.078>.
- [22] F. Hanke, R. Guyet, M. Feenstra, Do renewable energy communities deliver energy justice? Exploring insights from 71 European cases, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 80 (2021) 102244, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102244>.
- [23] F. Hanke, J. Lowitzsch, Empowering vulnerable consumers to join renewable energy communities—towards an inclusive design of the clean energy package, *Energies* 13 (7) (2020) 1615.
- [24] T. Bauwens, D. Schraven, E. Drewing, J. Radtke, L. Holstenkamp, B. Gotchev, et al., Conceptualizing community in energy systems: a systematic review of 183 definitions, *Renew. Sustain. Energy Rev.* 156 (2022) 111999, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2021.111999>.
- [25] F. Hanke, R. Guyet, The struggle of energy communities to enhance energy justice: insights from 113 German cases, *Energy Sustain. Soc.* 13 (2023) 16, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13705-023-00388-2>.
- [26] F. Hanke, R. Guyet, M. Feenstra, Energy communities' social role in a just energy transition, in: S. Löbbe, F. Sioshansi, D. Robinson (Eds.), *Energy Communities* [Internet], Academic Press, 2022, pp. 195–208 [cited 2023 May 26]. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9780323911351000274>.
- [27] Y. Keping, Governance and good governance: a new framework for political analysis, *Fudan J. Hum. Soc. Sci.* 11 (2018) 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-017-0197-4>.
- [28] Renau L. del Romero, Lozano A. Valera, From NIMBYism to the 15M: a decade of urban conflicts in Barcelona and Valencia, *Territ., Politics, Gov.* 4 (3) (2016) 375–395.
- [29] I. Botetzagias, C. Malesios, A. Kolokotroni, Y. Moysiadi, The role of NIMBY in opposing the siting of wind farms: evidence from Greece, *J. Environ. Plan. Manag.* 58 (2) (2015) 229–251, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2013.851596>.
- [30] M.J. Burke, J.C. Stephens, Energy democracy: goals and policy instruments for sociotechnical transitions, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 33 (2017) 35–48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2017.09.024>.
- [31] I. Campos, E. Marín-González, People in transitions: energy citizenship, prosumerism and social movements in Europe, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 69 (2020) 101718, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101718>.
- [32] G. Evans, L. Phelan, Transition to a post-carbon society: linking environmental justice and just transition discourses, *Energy Policy* 99 (2016) 329–339, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2016.05.003>.
- [33] K. Grossmann, E. Trubina, How the Concept of Dignity Is Relevant to the Study of Energy Poverty and Energy Justice, *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities* 3 (2021) 644231, <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2021.644231>.
- [34] S. Fuller, D. McCauley, Framing energy justice: perspectives from activism and advocacy, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 11 (2016) 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2015.08.004>.
- [35] K. Dereniowska, G. Jigla, U. Dubois, A. Sinea, F. Martín-Consuegra, M. Dereniowska, et al., The critical role of trust in experiencing and coping with energy poverty: evidence from across Europe, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 76 (2021) 102064, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102064>.
- [36] G. Joshi, K. Yenneti, Community solar energy initiatives in India: a pathway for addressing energy poverty and sustainability? *Energ. Buildings* 210 (2020) 109736, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enbuild.2019.109736>.
- [37] S. Becker, T. Blanchet, C. Kunze, Social movements and urban energy policy: assessing contexts, agency and outcomes of remunicipalisation processes in Hamburg and Berlin, *Util. Policy* 41 (2016) 228–236, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jup.2016.02.001>.
- [38] K. Szulecki, I. Overland, Energy democracy as a process, an outcome and a goal: a conceptual review, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 69 (2020) 101768, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101768>.
- [39] T. van der Schoor, H.J. van der Windt, Negotiating Dutch citizen-led district heating projects: managing internal, external, and material networks to achieve successful implementation, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 102 (2023) 103166, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103166>.

- [40] B. van Veelen, D. van der Horst, What is energy democracy? Connecting social science energy research and political theory, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 46 (2018) 19–28.
- [41] H. Yoon, D. Saurí, No more thirst, cold, or darkness! – social movements, households, and the coproduction of knowledge on water and energy vulnerability in Barcelona, Spain, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 58 (2019) 101276, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.101276>.
- [42] D. Banerjee, S.L. Steinberg, Exploring spatial and cultural discourses in environmental justice movements: a study of two communities, *J. Rural. Stud.* 39 (2015) 41–50, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.03.005>.
- [43] D.J. Hess, Energy democracy and social movements: a multi-coalition perspective on the politics of sustainability transitions, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 40 (2018) 177–189, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2018.01.003>.
- [44] M. Wahlund, J. Palm, The role of energy democracy and energy citizenship for participatory energy transitions: a comprehensive review, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 87 (2022) 102482, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102482>.
- [45] D. McCauley, R. Heffron, S. Hannes, K. Jenkins, Advancing energy justice: the triumvirate of tenets, *International Energy Law Review* 32 (3) (2013) 107–116.
- [46] K. Jenkins, D. McCauley, R. Heffron, H. Stephan, R. Rehner, Energy justice: a conceptual review, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 11 (2016) 174–182, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2015.10.004>.
- [47] B. Sovacool, R. Heffron, D. McCauley, A. Goldthau, Energy decisions reframed as justice and ethical concerns, *Nature Energy* 1 (2016) 16024, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nenergy.2016.24>.
- [48] S. Sareen, H. Haarstad, Bridging socio-technical and justice aspects of sustainable energy transitions, *Appl. Energy* 228 (2018) 624–632, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2018.06.104>.
- [49] K. Jenkins, B.K. Sovacool, D. McCauley, Humanizing sociotechnical transitions through energy justice: an ethical framework for global transformative change, *Energy Policy* 117 (2018) 66–74, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2018.02.036>.
- [50] S. Williams, A. Doyon, Justice in energy transitions, *Environ. Innov. Soc. Trans.* 31 (2019) 144–153, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2018.12.001>.
- [51] B.K. Sovacool, M. Martiskainen, A. Hook, L. Baker, Decarbonization and its discontents: a critical energy justice perspective on four low-carbon transitions, *Clim. Change* 155 (2019) 581–619, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-019-02521-7>.
- [52] M. Hazrati, R.J. Heffron, Conceptualising restorative justice in the energy transition: changing the perspectives of fossil fuels, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 78 (2021) 102115, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102115>.
- [53] M. Jakob, J.C. Steckel, F. Jotzo, B.K. Sovacool, L. Cornelsen, R. Chandra, et al., The future of coal in a carbon-constrained climate, *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 10 (2020) 704–707, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0866-1>.
- [54] S. Abram, E. Atkins, A. Dietzel, K. Jenkins, L. Kamba, J. Kirshner, et al., Just transition: a whole-systems approach to decarbonisation, *Clim. Pol.* 22 (8) (2022) 1033–1049, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2022.2108365>.
- [55] A. Stojilovska, Energy poverty and the role of institutions: exploring procedural energy justice – ombudsman in focus, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 25 (2) (2023) 169–181, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1940895>.
- [56] S. Tirado-Herrero, Energy justice and housing, in: *Handbook on Energy Justice* [Internet], Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023, pp. 112–130 [cited 2023 Nov 29]. Available from: <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781839102967/book-part-9781839102967-15.xml>.
- [57] S. Ibrahim, S. Alkire, Agency and empowerment: a proposal for internationally comparable indicators, *Oxf. Dev. Stud.* 35 (4) (2007) 379–403, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810701701897>.
- [58] J. Lee, H. Kim, J. Byrne, Operationalising capability thinking in the assessment of energy poverty relief policies: moving from compensation-based to empowerment-focused policy strategies, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 22 (2) (2021) 292–315, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.1887108>.
- [59] M. García-Lamarca, Creating political subjects: collective knowledge and action to enact housing rights in Spain, *Community Development Journal* 52 (3) (2017) 421–435, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsx025>.
- [60] J. Ortiz, M. Jiménez Martínez, A. Alegría-Sala, S. Tirado-Herrero, I. González Pijuan, M. Guiteras Blaya, et al., Tackling energy poverty through collective advisory assemblies and electricity and comfort monitoring campaigns, *Sustainability* 13 (17) (2021) 9671, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13179671>.
- [61] C. Pirotte, A.S. Žemva, EmpowerMed Cross-Pilot Analysis Exploring the Situations of Households Affected by Energy Poverty, 2022.
- [62] C. Feste, R.M. Anderson, Empowerment: from philosophy to practice, *Patient Educ. Couns.* 26 (1–3) (1995) 139–144, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-3991\(95\)00730-N](https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-3991(95)00730-N).
- [63] D.D. Perkins, M.A. Zimmerman, Empowerment theory, research, and application, *Am. J. Community Psychol.* 23 (5) (1995) 569–579, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506982>.
- [64] J. Rappaport, In praise of paradox: a social policy of empowerment over prevention, *Am. J. Community Psychol.* 9 (1) (1981) 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00896357>.
- [65] Santos B. Sousa, *Descolonizar el saber, reinventar el poder*, Ediciones Trilce, 2010.
- [66] A. Stojilovska, H. Yoon, C. Robert, Out of the margins, into the light: exploring energy poverty and household coping strategies in Austria, North Macedonia, France, and Spain, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 82 (2021) 102279, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102279>.
- [67] Casellas A, Sala E. Home Eviction, Grassroots Organisations and citizen empowerment in Spain. In: Brickell K, Fernández Arrigoitia M, Vasudevan A, editors. *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance* [Internet]. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK; 2017 [cited 2023 Aug 30]. p. 167–90. Available from: doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51127-0_8.
- [68] M. Hesselman, A. Varo, S. Laakso, The Right to Energy in the European Union [Internet], ENGAGER, 2019. Available from: <https://www.engager-energy.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ENGAGER-Policy-Brief-No.-2-June-2019-The-Right-to-Energy-in-the-EU.pdf>.
- [69] M. Hesselman, S. Tirado-Herrero, New narratives and actors for citizen-led energy poverty dialogues [Internet], ENGAGER, 2020. Available from: <https://www.engager-energy.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/WG3-Policy-Brief-Sept-2020.pdf>.
- [70] G. Jigla, S. Bouzarovski, U. Dubois, M. Feenstra, J.P. Gouveia, K. Grossmann, et al., Looking back to look forward: Reflections from networked research on energy poverty, *iScience* 26 (3) (2023) 106083, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2023.106083>.
- [71] ENGAGER, Moving forward on the right to energy in the EU, Engagement Toolkit (2022). Available from: <https://www.engager-energy.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ENGAGER-Right-to-Energy-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>.
- [72] B. Flyvbjerg, Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research, *Qual. Inq.* 12 (2) (2006) 219–245, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>.
- [73] A.C.G.M. Robben, J.A. Sluka, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, 673 p.
- [74] K.F. Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London: Thousand Oaks, Calif, 2005.
- [75] J. Thomas, A. Harden, Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews, *BMC Med. Res. Methodol.* 8 (2008) 45.
- [76] M.B. Miles, A.M. Huberman, J. Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, Calif, 2014.
- [77] AMAN, Citizen Initiative AMAN [Internet]. Граѓанска иницијатива Аман [cited 2023 May 29]. Available from: <https://amanmk.wordpress.com/%d0%b0%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%bd/>, 2012.
- [78] A. Stojilovska, Synergies between Heating and Energy Poverty: The Injustice of Heat, Central European University, Budapest, 2021, 350 p. (CEU Department of Environmental Sciences & Policy PhD theses).
- [79] A. Stojilovska, Energy poverty in a subsistence-like economy: The case of North Macedonia, in: *Perspectives on Energy Poverty in Post-Communist Europe*. George Jigla Anca Sinea Ute Dubois Philipp Biermann, Routledge, 2020, pp. 99–116.
- [80] Eurostat, Inability to keep home adequately warm - EU-SILC survey [Internet] [cited 2023 Nov 6]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_mdcs01/default/table?lang=en, 2023.
- [81] O. Vangelov, Stalled European integration, the Primordialization of nationalism, and Autocratization in Macedonia between 2008 and 2015, *Intersections East European Journal of Society and Politics* 3 (4) (2017) 17–40, <https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v3i4.342>.
- [82] Draft Law to Amend the Energy Law, 2013.
- [83] Economic Committee Hearing No.23 Report. Skopje, 2013.
- [84] Legal Committee Hearing No.83 Report. Skopje, 2013.
- [85] Parliament hearing no. 54 report. Skopje, 2013.
- [86] S.J. Marusic, Tensions rise as Macedonians clash over budget [Internet]. Balkan Insight [cited 2023 May 29]. Available from: <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/12/24/tensions-rise-as-macedonian-parties-confront-over-budget/>, 2012.
- [87] S. Moles-Gruoso, A. Stojilovska, Towards spatializing consumer energy sustainability. Empirical findings about the policy and practice of energy conservation and poverty in Barcelona and North Macedonia, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 24 (4) (2022) 407–420, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.2008234>.
- [88] A. Stojilovska, D. Dokupilová, J.P. Gouveia, A.Z. Bajomi, S. Tirado-Herrero, N. Feldmár, et al., As essential as bread: fuelwood use as a cultural practice to cope with energy poverty in Europe, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 97 (2023) 102987, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.102987>.
- [89] S. Bouzarovski, M. Burbidge, A. Sarpotdar, M. Martiskainen, The diversity penalty: domestic energy injustice and ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom, *Energy Res. Soc. Sci.* 91 (2022) 102716, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102716>.
- [90] A. Domaradzka, F. Wijkström, Urban challengers weaving their networks: between the 'right to housing' and the 'right to the city', *Hous. Stud.* 34 (10) (2019) 1612–1634, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2019.1657561>.
- [91] K. Jezierska, D.V. Polanska, Social movements seen as radical political actors: the case of the Polish Tenants' movement, *Volunt. Int. J. Volunt. Nonprofit Org.* 29 (2018) 683–696, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9917-2>.
- [92] D.V. Polanska, G. Piotrowski, The transformative power of cooperation between social movements: squatting and tenants' movements in Poland, *City* 19 (2–3) (2015) 274–296, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1015267>.
- [93] P. Pluciński, M. Nowak, E pluribus unum? Źródła i specyfika ruchów miejskich we współczesnej Polsce, *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 66 (3) (2017) 115–135.
- [94] A. Wiesztort, Wyzysk lokatorów na chłódno. O drastycznych kosztach ogrzewania w Warszawie. *Codziennik Feministyczny*, 2018.
- [95] J. Frankowski, Navigating urban tensions and injustices in domestic heating transitions: a case study of coal phase-out in social housing. *J. Hous. and the Built Environ* [Internet], 2024 Jan 19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-023-10100-7> [Cited 2024 Feb 28]; Available from:.
- [96] S. Bouzarovski, Energy and labour: thinking across the continuum, *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 46 (3) (2022) 753–774, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211051478>.

- [97] Warsaw City Hall, Centralne ogrzewanie zamiast kopciuchów, Polish Press Agency [Internet] (2021 Jan 22). Available from: <https://um.warszawa.pl/-/centralne-ogrzewanie-zamiast-kopciuchow>.
- [98] J. Mazurkiewicz, A. Prusak, J. Sokołowski, J. Frankowski, Ubóstwo energetyczne kobiet w Polsce (Energy poverty of women in Poland) [Internet]. IBS Research Report 01/2023, Available from: https://ibs.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RR_01_2023_Ubostwo-energetyczne-kobiet.pdf, 2023.
- [99] S. Tirado Herrero, J.L. López Fernández, P. Martín García, Potencial de generación de empleo derivado de la rehabilitación energética de viviendas, Asociación de Ciencias Ambientales, Madrid, 2012, pp. 1–120.
- [100] MITECO, Actualización de indicadores de la estrategia nacional contra la pobreza energética [Internet] [cited 2023 Nov 26]. Available from: https://www.miteco.gob.es/content/dam/miteco/es/ministerio/planes-estrategias/estrategia-pobreza-energetica/actualizaciondelosindicadoresdelaestrategianacionalcontralapobrezaenergetica-2022_tcm30-549718.pdf, 2022.
- [101] J. Angel, Irregular connections: everyday energy politics in Catalonia, Int. J. Urban Reg. Res 43 (2) (2019) 337–353, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12729>.
- [102] APE, Por una nueva normalidad sin cortes de suministros. La energía es un derecho, no un negocio [Internet]. Available from: <https://pobresaenergetica.es/es/2021/02/17/por-una-nueva-normalidad-sin-cortes-de-suministros-la-energia-es-un-derecho-no-un-negocio/>, 2021.
- [103] S. Tirado-Herrero, M. Guiteras-Blaya, L. Živčić, Collective advisory assemblies. Social innovation for empowering people affected by energy poverty [Internet] [cited 2023 Nov 26]. Available from: <https://www.empowermed.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Collective-advisory-assemblies-STH2.pdf>, 2023.
- [104] Barcelona Housing, Agreement to eradicate energy poverty [internet], Housing (2021) [cited 2023 Nov 3]. Available from: https://www.habitatge.barcelona/en/noticia/agreement-to-eradicate-energy-poverty_1054386.
- [105] Empowermed, Agreement with Endesa will free more than 35,000 vulnerable families from their debts on electricity bills (Catalonia) – Empowermed [Internet] [cited 2023 Nov 29]. Available from: <https://www.empowermed.eu/agreement-with-endesa-will-free-more-than-35000-vulnerable-families-from-their-debts-on-electricity-bills/>, 2021.
- [106] BOE, Real Decreto-ley 8/2023, de 27 de diciembre, por el que se adoptan medidas para afrontar las consecuencias económicas y sociales derivadas de los conflictos en Ucrania y Oriente Próximo, así como para paliar los efectos de la sequía [Internet]. BOE núm. 310, de 28/12/2023, Available from: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2023/12/27/8/con>, 2023.
- [107] APE, La reforma del mercat elèctric europeu i les llars vulnerabilitzades [Internet]. Available from: <https://pobresaenergetica.es/category/comunicats/>, 2023.
- [108] S. Bouzarovski, Herrero S. Tirado, The energy divide: integrating energy transitions, regional inequalities and poverty trends in the European Union, European Urban and Regional Studies 24 (1) (2017) 69–86.
- [109] S. Buzar, The ‘hidden’ geographies of energy poverty in post-socialism: between institutions and households, Geoforum 38 (2) (2007) 224–240, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.02.007>.
- [110] H. Koďoušková, A. Ilavská, T. Stašáková, D. David, J. Osíčka, Energy transition for the rich and energy poverty for the rest? Mapping and explaining district heating transition, energy poverty, and vulnerability in Czechia, Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 100 (2023) 103128, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103128>.
- [111] G. Walker, The right to energy: meaning, specification and the politics of definition, L’Europe en Formation. 378 (4) (2015) 26–38.
- [112] G. Jigla, M. Hesselman, A. Dobbins, K. Grossmann, R. Guyet, S. Tirado Herrero, et al., Energy and the social contract: From “energy consumers” to “people with a right to energy, Sustainable Development 32 (1) (2024) 1321–1336, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2727>.
- [113] C.W. Shyu, A framework for ‘right to energy’ to meet UN SDG7: policy implications to meet basic human energy needs, eradicate energy poverty, enhance energy justice, and uphold energy democracy, Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 79 (2021) 102199, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102199>.
- [114] N. Simcock, J. Frankowski, S. Bouzarovski, Rendered invisible: institutional misrecognition and the reproduction of energy poverty, Geoforum 124 (2021) 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.05.005>.
- [115] N. van Uffelen, Revisiting recognition in energy justice, Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 92 (2022) 102764, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102764>.
- [116] M. LaBelle, Energy Cultures: Technology, Justice, and Geopolitics in Eastern Europe, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, 2020.
- [117] M. Feenstra, L. Middlemiss, M. Hesselman, K. Straver, S. Tirado Herrero, Humanising the Energy Transition: Towards a National Policy on Energy Poverty in the Netherlands, in: Frontiers in Sustainable Cities [Internet], 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2021.645624> [cited 2023 Aug 29];3. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2021.645624>.
- [118] H. Koďoušková, D. Bořuta, Energy poverty in Slovakia: officially defined, but misrepresented in major policies, Energy Policy 168 (2022) 113095, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.113095>.
- [119] J. Frankowski, Herrero S. Tirado, “What is in it for me?” a people-centered account of household energy transition co-benefits in Poland, Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 71 (2021) 101787.
- [120] D. David, H. Koďoušková, Official narratives vs. lived experiences: contrasting views on energy poverty in the Czech Republic, Energy Research & Social Science 97 (2023) 102991, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.102991>.
- [121] M. Feenstra, G. Özerol, Energy justice as a search light for gender-energy nexus: towards a conceptual framework, Renew. Sustain. Energy Rev. 138 (2021) 110668, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2020.110668>.
- [122] P.J. Hill, THE ETHICS OF HELPING: a comparison of the role of self-reliance in international affairs and pedagogy, Metaphilosophy 12 (2) (1981) 181–205.
- [123] H. Westskog, T.E. Julsrud, S. Kallbekken, K. Frenken, J. Schor, K. Standal, The Role of Community Sharing in Sustainability Transformation: Case Studies from Norway. Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy 17(1), 2021 Jan 1, pp. 334–348.
- [124] G. Bridge, S. Barca, B. Özkaynak, E. Turhan, R. Wyeth, Towards a political ecology of EU energy policy, in: C. Foulds, R. Robison (Eds.), Advancing Energy Policy [Internet], Springer International Publishing, Cham, 2018, pp. 163–175 [cited 2019 Jul 8]. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99097-2_11.
- [125] A. Stojilovska, Fostering a democratic and socially just energy transition: how do ombudspersons in Europe frame energy poverty? Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 107 (2024) 103363 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2023.103363>.
- [126] P. Ambrosio-Albala, L. Middlemiss, A. Owen, T. Hargreaves, N. Emmel, J. Gilbertson, et al., From rational to relational: how energy poor households engage with the British retail energy market, Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 70 (2020) 101765, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101765>.
- [127] N. Longhurst, T. Hargreaves, Emotions and fuel poverty: the lived experience of social housing tenants in the United Kingdom, Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 56 (2019) 101207, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.05.017>.
- [128] CEES, Energy solidarity: towards a shared understanding [internet], CEES (2021) [cited 2023 May 26]. Available from: <https://www.energysolidarity.eu/energy-solidarity/>.