

Scoping the agency of EU policymakers to facilitate a fair energy transition

KEYWORDS Marginalised groups; Coal regions; Digitalisation; Justice

TIMEFRAM Fellowship meetings with the Associates took place in March and April 2020

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This Energy-SHIFTS Policy Fellowship report is part of a wider collection published in November 2020 describing dialogue between 21 energy policyworkers and [86] social scientists and humanities scholars, available via energy-shifts.eu.

Policy context

As Head of Knowledge for the Energy Union Unit at the JRC, Efstathios Peteves supports the European Commission's Energy Union strategy for secure, affordable and clean energy, and fostering sustainable and efficient mobility in Europe. The Commission has a keen interest in better understanding justice implications of the energy transition, with the ambition of making the change fair and just for all EU citizens¹. This includes greater consideration of marginalised demographic groups such as ageing citizens or citizens with lower income levels. These principles are enshrined in key political strategies to lead the clean energy transition in Europe, such as the *European Green Deal*² or the European Commission communication *A Clean Planet for All*³.

Efstathios indicated that the JRC wants to develop an understanding of the concerns and fears of marginalised groups in relation to energy. This is complicated by uncertainty about the future pathways that the energy system will have to undertake to meet the 2050 climate-neutrality objective. Also, for this reason, he aims to learn more on the latest research outcomes on how to make the energy transition inclusive and to achieve wider engagement and participation.

As a specific example within the context of fair transitions, the transition of coal or carbon intensive EU regions is a challenging policy problem of current interest: *“Over the past years, we have done a lot of work with coal regions in transition and we have a big interest to continue this work. We looked into how coal regions transition to clean energy generation and take advantage of their industrial heritage and skills of their employees”*. In this respect, it is seen as of utmost importance to develop a clear understanding of the (negative) effects of the energy transition on local employment and economy as well as to communicate effectively to the affected citizens the reasoning behind the transition.

Another area of interest to Efstathios is related to the digitalisation of the energy system and how new technologies, robotisation and artificial intelligence are challenging the democratic values of our societies. In his view there is a need for more reflections on the emerging ethical issues that digitalisation and the energy transition are bringing about.

Due to his managerial position, Efstathios is currently less directly involved in research, and therefore in taking up the Energy-SHIFTS Policy Fellowship he was especially interested in acquiring knowledge of state-of-the-art Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research, rather than addressing topics related to SSH research tools (e.g. research methods, survey design, public consultations, etc.). He was keen to help build a tighter network between energy-SSH researchers and policymaker communities, as he considers the energy-SSH research community to be able to greatly support future policymaking in the EU.

“ This programme is a great challenge to force myself to interact, debate and account for options that include SSH considerations. ”

Efstathios Peteves

Policy challenges

Efstathios applied to the programme with a wide-ranging list of policy issues addressing change in behaviour and attitudes, the societal distribution of costs and the effects of technological innovation on democracy. While his initial question concerned behaviour, and he therefore was grouped within the ‘Behaviours’ thematic category, in discussion with the Energy-SHIFTS team his interests and questions soon broadened far beyond this issues.

Thus the questions he chose to focus on with Associates concerned two main themes: first, Efstathios argued how it is necessary to ensure the engagement of marginalised people, seniors, and the (lower) middle class in the energy transition. In carbon intensive regions facing transition (e.g. coal regions) it will also be necessary to address labour

1 The Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) is a key tool for making energy transition fair. More information available: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism

2 See: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

3 See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018D0073&from=EN>

market issues. Second, the digitalisation of all the sectors of the economy, including energy, is having an impact on our democratic values, especially regarding loss of privacy. Efstathios' questions therefore concerned:

Ensuring wide participation, engagement and fair distribution of costs:

- How can EU policymakers ensure that the energy transition will be fair and just?

Monitoring the impact of digitalisation of the energy sector on democratic values:

- (How) Is technological innovation challenging our democratic values?



Matched Policy Associates

The Energy-SHIFTS team facilitated the involvement of five Policy Associates to work with Efstathios and provide him with SSH insights into his policy challenges. Given the breadth of Efstathios' policy challenges it was deemed appropriate to seek quite a range of different perspectives and topic expertise, to support his policy work. The five matched Policy Associates were:

Uta Burghard - Researcher/ Project Manager, Competence Center Energy Technology and Energy Systems, Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research, Karlsruhe, Germany. Uta has a background in Social Sciences, particularly Psychology, and her research interests focus on social acceptance of the energy system transformation. Her expertise was sought to provide insights about the needs of marginalised groups, and resistance to change.

Spyridon Karytsas - Scientific Member, Geothermal Department, Center for Renewable Energy Sources and Saving, Pikermi, Greece. Spyridon's current research interests include engagement of local communities in renewable energy projects. Spyridon was also invited due to his background in Economics, in order to provide this perspective on ways to achieve a just transition.

Christian Klöckner - Professor in Social Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway. Christian was invited due to his research expertise on factors that influence environmentally relevant behaviour, especially the interaction between structural and psychological aspects.

Andrea Kollmann - Project Manager, Energy Institute, Johannes Kepler University, Linz, Austria. Andrea is an Economist, invited due to her specialism in investigating the social acceptance dimension of energy efficiency measures and energy infrastructure.

Jay Sterling Gregg - Senior Researcher, United Nations Environment Programme partnership with the Technical University of Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark. Jay holds a PhD in Geography, and his current work is focused on socio-technical transitions. He is particularly interested in how innovation patterns and the adoption of new technologies can affect social structures, local economies, the environment, and quality of life. His expertise was particularly relevant to addressing questions on the effects of digitalisation on citizens' lives and democratic values.

Discussion points and SSH insights

Efstathios had bilateral calls with each of his Policy Associates over March and April 2020, for which each Associate had prepared a written response to his policy challenge questions in advance. Efstathios also participated in an online

workshop with other Fellows and Associates working under the same thematic category at the end of May 2020. This section reflects four key discussion points from Efstathios' interactions during the Fellowship programme.

Three forms of justice

Justice and fairness have become central questions for the success of energy transition. Associates discussed with Efstathios how previous research has recognised three forms of justice including *distributional justice* (how goods and risks are shared in a community and society), *procedural justice* (legislative and jurisdictional process), and *recognition justice* (representation, attention and respect). Policy makers working on a fair and just energy transition need to acknowledge these different types of justice in a balanced manner, addressing not only the economic aspects but also take into account non-monetary aspects such as impacts on identity.

The impacts of transitions on identities

As Efstathios identified at the start of his Fellowship, the negative impacts of energy transitions on certain (e.g. coal or carbon intensive) regions should be taken into account when planning transition policies. Although it is recognised that the energy transition will also create economic growth and jobs, this will not necessarily take place in the same location and timescale, nor will it always benefit the same people that have been negatively affected. Discussion included the notion that for these regions, the potential negative impact is not *only* related to employment and economy, but also to regional and individual identities and image. Here it may be important to consider the development of societal counter or protest movements (which of course can run pro- or anti-climate action). Recognising issues early on and addressing them with full transparency are key factors for policy planning. The policy processes should directly engage and involve the affected groups of citizens in shaping the future of the region, with co-design of transition policies together with affected citizens.

No one-size-fits-all solution for supporting citizens

Previous research has shown that successful energy transition strategies need to take account of individual lifestyles and lifestyle choices, and the resultant behaviours associated with these. According to certain psychological theories, lifestyle choices can be described as a series of decisions a person makes about how to live and behave, according to the individual's intentions and values, available opportunities, social and structural context, and perceived incentives. It is clear that the underlying factors driving the lifestyle choices are very diverse by nature, leading to no one-size-fits-all policy solutions supporting the citizens towards less carbon intensive lifestyle choices. Here the role of effective narratives that citizens can relate and connect to was highlighted as important by Associates. By narratives, researchers mean stories that connect and explain a carefully selected set of events, experiences, or the like, and which are intended to support a particular viewpoint or thesis. Divides between southern and northern Europe, different age groups, education levels, labour conditions, and income levels are important factors to be considered in the narratives shared with citizens, and for deciding on how to engage with citizens in transition processes. The role of local authorities and community level initiatives are also deemed particularly important, especially to engage marginalised or vulnerable groups of citizens.

Digitalisation: potential effects on democratic values

Digitalisation as a technological innovation has an impact on society at large. In some cases, digital technologies can offer more democratic access to information and better allow for citizen participation. There are however concerns in the public opinion related to how digital technologies are used, related to perceived loss of privacy by citizens, or unregulated access to private information by multinational companies. The benefits and threats of digitalisation equally apply when considering digitalisation of the energy sector. For instance, smart grid technologies offer more options for citizens to manage their electricity consumption, but at the same time the technology permits more control by third parties and a loss of privacy. Key factors to build and maintain trust of citizens include empowering them and ensuring transparency and transferability of data collection, permission of data use and data ownership.

Translations to policy impacts

“ The original key policy problems have not changed, but my answers to them have expanded ”

Efstathios Peteves

As the above quote illustrates, overall, the programme gave Efstathios' new perspectives to the key policy problems through different conceptualising and ways of thinking, and re-emphasised for him the need for policy-researcher interaction to be further encouraged. He shared the insights he gained during the programme in a number of ways

1. **Internal knowledge sharing at JRC.** Efstathios has already shared the insights he gained during the Policy Fellowship programme with the members of his unit at the JRC. These exchanges of emails including links to additional resources and publications as flagged by Associates, are expected to contribute to the on-going work of JRC on a just and fair energy transition, particularly in carbon intensive regions, as well as to the preparation of a report in collaboration with the company KIC Innoenergy looking into major conclusions from Horizon 2020 projects on SSH in relation to the energy transition.
2. **A more detailed exploration of the achievements of H2020 funded energy-SSH projects.** The participation in the Fellowship programme resulted in a recommendation of better stocktaking of the achievements of energy-SSH research (see quote below). The Fellowship programme stimulated interest in better involving JRC with H2020 energy-SSH projects going forward, e.g. through regular meetings with the project coordinators.

“ We don't seem to capitalise enough on the knowledge created. It would be useful to have information on the project results produced so far more systematically available. ”

Efstathios Peteves

3. **Establishing a sustainable network of SSH researchers.** Efstathios has been engaged in follow-up emails with the Policy Associates with more detailed responses or suggestions for further reading. Overall, he considers that the Fellowship programme allowed him to achieve a snapshot of state-of-the-art of energy SSH research in Europe, and to see how the research community has evolved and expanded over the years to a multi-disciplinary research field involving a wide variety of researchers. As several of the Fellows noted (and was prevented by the Covid-19 pandemic) he would be interested in having follow-up face-to-face meetings with Associates when possible.
4. **Feed-in to 'Social Innovation in Energy' JRC publication.** A final immediate consequence of the Fellowship has been the facilitation of Efstathios and colleagues to seek comment from the Energy-SHIFTS network of SSH experts on an upcoming JRC report.

“ Now I have access to a pool of experts who I can contact for collaboration in future policy processes ”

Efstathios Peteves

Reflections from Associates

Associates were asked to reflect on their virtual meeting with Efstathios, and what they learnt from them about on-the-ground energy policy challenges. Here we share some of their reflections, which emphasise the Fellowship programme as an effective means of two-way exchange.

“It was very interesting for me to **get to know an EU policymaker** and to learn from his policy problems and to discuss them with him. The expenditure of time was also well manageable.”

“It was a very **interesting exchange of opinions** on subjects such as market acceptance of RES [Renewable Energy Sources] technologies, overall benefits of energy efficiency actions (to the economy, the uptake of the building sector, etc.), **energy communities in relation to public acceptance**, etc.”

“[I learned] that policy makers have many of the same concerns we have in the research community. That **policy makers have a healthy scepticism about model results**, but that there isn't a very good alternative at the moment. [...] policy makers try not to be overly reliant on large scale models, and that the behaviour and attitudes of individuals are significant in policy decisions. Anecdotes and case examples also carry a lot of weight.”

“It is always interesting to see **how policymakers actually make policies and how much of this is based on catchy narratives** (ideally based on personal experience or something someone told them). SSH scientists seem to assume that we have such compelling findings that they will convince policymakers if we just present them, but reality is more that in general policymakers have already rather established assumptions which they (as any other human) rather try to confirm than challenge. As a result, what is picked up on depends a lot on if it matches the existing narrative or not. I think SSH needs to be better to tell stories.”

“[I learned] that there is an **urgent need to find strategies that can speed-up processes**, especially regarding consumers' involvement and their willingness to become more active in the energy system.”