



# Transforming Energy Policymaking for a Just Transition: Centring Energy Justice

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# Abstract

We are entering a significant, unprecedented global energy transition. This great transition must be technically, economically, and justly achieved in the urgent global pursuit of a low-carbon future. The just transition pathways for the energy transition rest on many, and one key actor in this transition is the government, specifically the policymaker. This paper critically discusses Just Transitions scholarship, drawing out the well-documented barriers to just transitions, specifically seeking to understand the role of the energy policymaker. The analysis, using the JUST Framework, identifies that the normative practices of the policymaker are hindering their ability to play a role in enabling energy justice. The contribution of this paper is zooming in on the role of the policymaker, attending to the required behaviour change of the policymaker to become more energy-justice centred. The paper discusses interventions that address the lack of energy justice knowledge, lack of agency to advocate for energy justice, and a lack of embedded action in policy-making processes. By building energy justice into policy frameworks, we can pave the way for a just transition, where the benefits of renewable energy are accessible to all, and the burdens are shared equitably.

Keywords: Just Transition, Energy Justice, Energy Policy

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# 01 Introduction

# Introduction

The global energy landscape is changing at a dramatic and unprecedented rate. In this urgent global pursuit of a net-zero carbon future, the transition must not only be delivered reliably and feasibly but also justly (Henry et al., 2020; McCauley et al., 2019; Mundaca et al., 2018). At its core, Just Transitions (JT) advocates for fairness and equity throughout the energy transition, ensuring no one is left behind. However, despite the rhetoric in clean energy policies for just transitions, evidence that energy justice is materially factored in and implemented is under debate (Chapman et al., 2016; Harrahill & Douglas, 2019). According to the International Energy Agency's Policies Database, 126 countries have active renewable energy policies (Levenda et al., 2021) the question is, do these go far enough to address energy justice? Emerging research shows a lack of understanding of just transition by policymakers and stakeholders in energy transition: Who needs justice? What effect is desired if we get a just transition right? (Harrahill & Douglas, 2019; MacNeil & Beaman, 2022). A growing body of scholarship focuses on creating a shared understanding of JT so that it can be consistently understood and applied (Cha, 2017; Healy & Barry, 2017; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Sovacool et al., 2019; Winkler, 2020). An essential dimension of energy justice goes beyond concepts and analysis to decisions; thus, decision-makers, including policymakers, have a central role in enabling just transitions (McCauley et al., 2019; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015).

The policymaker is a key actor in shaping and influencing energy transitions because they must grapple with the intricate dimensions of energy justice and create policies and strategies that consider factors such as access to affordable energy, environmental and health outcomes of different sources of energy production, cross-border ownership structures in the electricity sector, equitable distribution amongst individuals and regions, and economic development (Levenda et al., 2021; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Smith, 2017). However, energy policymakers have been criticised for their traditional economic paradigms, which tend to produce clean energy policies disproportionately emphasizing sustainable energy technology development, energy systems, and related economic impacts. In contrast, the social outcomes of clean energy policies are weak, with few positive social effects (Harrahill & Douglas, 2019; Heffron, 2022; Mundaca et al., 2018).

This paper, in part, responds to the assertion made by Shelton and Eakin (2022) that energy justice and just transition scholarship often generalize the roles of specific actors, such as policymakers, thereby causing an absence of understanding of their roles, motivations, tactics, and contexts. The opportunity to centre the discussion on the policymaker concentrates insights to enable changes that can create a lasting effect on JT in energy transitions.

This paper focuses on the role of the policymaker and asserts that the lack of integrated energy justice frameworks and recognition of the interventions required to change policymakers' behaviours undermines just transitions. This is evidenced by ongoing criticisms of energy (in)justices and contested success of energy policies (Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). Therefore, by building energy justice into the policy design process, social and economic disparities are addressed, thereby creating pathways toward a more inclusive and harmonious low-carbon future for everyone (Santos Ayllon & Jenkins, 2023; Upham et al., 2022). This paper explores three issues centring on the policymaker: a) While energy justice is central to just transitions, why are policymakers not effectively doing it? What are the barriers? b) What can the energy policymaker do to address these barriers? What solutions are available? And c) What are the implications for policymakers to be energy-justice-centred?

This paper begins by defining Just Transitions (JT) and governments unique role in championing energy justice. This is followed by a discussion on the eco-system of stakeholders who advocate for energy justice, offering context in which the policymaker navigates when undertaking energy policy. Then, the paper will discuss the barriers to JT, drawing out the criticisms from the literature that identify the shortcomings of the policymaker. Then, a discussion on the solutions that can shift policymakers practices to address the barriers to JT so that energy justice can be applied consistently and with efficacy to energy policies.

# 02 Just Transition is More than a Concept – it is a Function of Good Governance

# Just Transition is More than a Concept – it is a Function of Good Governance

Just Transition (JT) is much more than a theoretical concept; it is a critical function of good governance and a key determinant of sustainable energy policy. This section defines JT as a pluralistic use of moral concepts and the rationale behind why this is so important in our energy transition. This follows with the focus on the role of government as a key modulator of justice. The emphasis on the government's role and the role of the policymaker acting as agents enabling energy justice in the work of energy policy setting and implementation.





# Just Transitions Defined

The concept of transition stems from a set of literature on ‘socio-technical transitions’ that is increasingly applied to the energy transition (Geels & Schot, 2012; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). Socio-technical transitions refer to “deep structural changes in systems such as energy that involve long-term and complex reconfigurations of landscapes of technology, policy, infrastructure, scientific knowledge and social and cultural practice toward the sustainable end” (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013, p.2). In the last ten years, climate, energy, and environmental scholars have emphasized justice within the socio-technical transitions (Cha, 2017; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). The landscape of energy transitions is a complex set of actors, motives, and tactics (Abram et al., 2022; Shelton & Eakin, 2022). This means “just” transitions ask the critical question: For whom and what are we seeking justice? Just Transitions are “underpinned by justice theory, such as fairness, equity, and trade-offs between competing needs and priorities” (Hagele et al., 2022, p. 90). At its simplest, just transition is a fair and equitable process of moving towards a post-carbon society (McCauley et al., 2019; McCauley & Heffron, 2018). The limits of this view are that it is inherently ambiguous and lacks the practical guidance to turn these important concepts into reality.

In an attempt to address the ambiguous nature of the concept of JT, Heffron and McCauley developed the JUST Framework, as illustrated by Table 1, which has evolved from combining climate, energy, and environmental justice discourses into a unified framework to encourage a more integrated view of energy justice (Droubi et al., 2023; Heffron, 2022; McCauley & Heffron, 2018).

*Continues to next page.*

**Table 1**

<b>J</b>	T R A N S I T I O N	<b>Justice</b>	Justice takes the form of 3 forms
			Distributional
			Procedural
			Restorative
<b>U</b>		<b>Universal</b>	Universal takes the form of two universal forms of justice
			Recognition
			Cosmopolitanism
<b>S</b>		<b>Space</b>	Space brings in location, where are 'events' happening? (in principle, at local, national and international levels)
<b>T</b>		<b>Time</b>	Time brings into transition timelines such 2030, 2050, 2080 etc. and also 'speed' of the energy transition (i.e is it happening fast enough?).

Source: *Just Framework for a Just Transition* (Heffron, 2022)

The JUST Framework states that energy justice needs to satisfy five forms of justice: (a) Distributional, (b) Procedural, (c) Restorative, (d) Recognition, and (d) Cosmopolitan (Heffron, 2022). In addition to these five dimensions, a just transition can be understood in terms of the time or target year when the transition needs to occur, for example, 2030 versus 2050 versus 2080, and the space or location the transition attends, such as local, national, or international contexts. This peer-reviewed framework is gaining further application and increasingly informing the evaluation of the effectiveness of energy policies (Banerjee & Schuitema, 2022; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Moesker & Pesch, 2022). These frameworks demystify and clarify energy justice, essential to establishing a more sustainable and equitable world.

# Why is there a Need for Energy Justice in Energy Transitions?

There are several reasons why energy justice needs to centre on the energy transition. First, unless retrospective views are taken, then pre-existing injustices will ensue through the energy transition, e.g., energy poverty, vulnerable communities further disengaged, and environmental degradation (Mundaca et al., 2018; Sovacool et al., 2019; Winkler, 2020). Second, without intention, there is a risk of new injustices and vulnerabilities in society as we shift to sustainable energy systems. Many scholars and practitioners are concerned that the emphasis on technical, economic, and political dimensions of transition will create unintentional injustice for many groups of people and the natural environment (Aroa & Schroeder, 2022; Lamb et al., 2020; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). For example, gender inequality in the renewable energy sector, with the current global trend of male dominance in high-paying roles, or the absence of first nations and marginalized groups and their values in the process of energy policy and projects (Aroa & Schroeder, 2022; Wang & Lo, 2021). Third, the literature points out that energy transitions' successes and failures depend on the extent to which energy justice has been achieved in energy policies and projects from the pre-transition stage and during the transition (Lamb et al., 2020; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022; Sun et al., 2023). This means that the social license and acceptance of decisions to move to renewable energy must result from engagement and co-determinacy. Evidence exists in such countries as Denmark and Germany, where conscious engagement with citizens and the wider community has unpinned successful energy transitions (Swilling, 2020). Given the long-term nature of transitions, ongoing adherence to identifying and addressing any injustices is essential to achieve a just transition. The decision-makers are critical in centring energy justice, and a key decision-maker are governments (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015; Upham et al., 2022).

# What Role Does Government Fill in Just Transitions?

Governments play a crucial role in the transition process because they are decision-makers in how countries and regions transition. They formulate energy policies and mechanisms that create the conditions to enable transition. This function of market and social structures requires interventions at multiple levels, and if energy justice is not considered, then energy justice can be routinely violated (DellaValle & Sareen, 2020). Additionally, they serve as investors, owners of state enterprises and infrastructure, and employers of public sector workers. With a comprehensive view of the entire economy and access to various tools such as fiscal measures, education, research and development, infrastructure, and social protection, governments are essential participants in just transition processes (McCauley et al., 2019; Shelton & Eakin, 2022). Not only do they drive climate action through policies and mechanisms, but they also ensure the provision of decent work opportunities, social protection, and social inclusion for all. By leveraging their power and resources, governments contribute to a fair and sustainable transition that benefits the economy and society (Healy & Barry, 2017; Santos Ayllon & Jenkins, 2023; Smith, 2017). Therefore, the emphasis on the role of the policymaker and how they can practically embed energy justice is an essential actor to pay attention to, and to fully appreciate their impact in just transitions is of utmost importance.

# Why Improve the Policymaker's Role in Energy Justice?

The extent to which energy policymakers attend to understating, applying, and embedding energy justice in practice is contested (Aroa & Schroeder, 2022; Cha, 2017; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). This may be attributed to the ambiguity of JT, and the oversimplification of energy justice defaulting to distribute justice e.g., economic fairness measures such as minimising job loss and maximizing job creation. Others have argued it is attributed to classical neoliberalism in which most policymakers have been educated, which avoids collaborative and participatory requirements to enable energy justice (Droubi et al., 2023). These arguments likely explain the need to address the gap in policymakers' application of energy justice, as well as the compounding complexity of the stakeholders' needs. This increasing pressure from energy justice advocates places demands on policymakers to meet these expectations more effectively. This raises important questions about what is expected from policymakers, and as Swilling discusses, we are entering the age of new ways of learning and researching to enable JT best (Swilling, 2020). The need to better define and articulate how policymakers can pragmatically be energy-justice-centred is increasing in demand. This paper explores these requirements by making sense of the drivers of injustices that consistently occur and then seeks to understand the changes that can be made at the policymaker level.

# 03 Approach

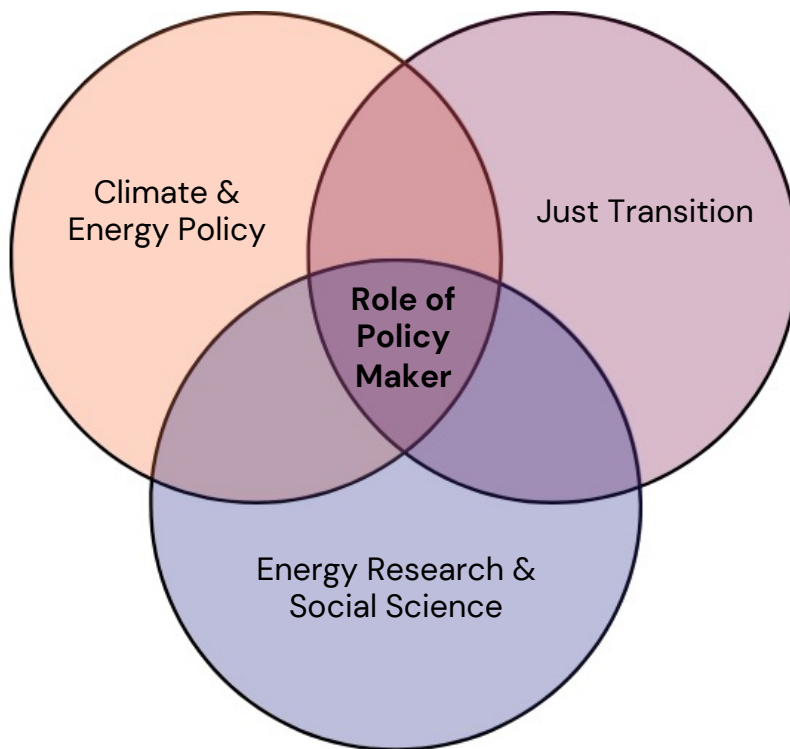
# Approach

The literature review followed a deductive and inductive qualitative approach to understanding energy justice and the government's role, specifically that of the policymaker. It is important to note that the literature draws from 2015, and in the last few years, an increasing number of studies have been published about the lessons and insights from just transitions. This reflects the rapidly changing context of countries undergoing transition, and more data is becoming available. The literature has evolved from theories of transitions to more applied practices, and given the focus of this paper on the practical aspects of just transitions at the policy level, more recent studies have been reflected in this review.

The literature was identified through 4 stages. In stage 1, the initial search terms included energy justice, just transition, energy policymaking, and applied just transition. The search included academic databases, such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. Additionally, general Google searches identified sources in the grey literature, such as industry and government reports. These sources are important because they reflect the real-world energy transition activity and provide important data that informs this paper. In stage 2, the academic literature was narrowed based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) the article was peer-reviewed, (b) the articles contained concepts of just transition and energy justice, (c) the article examined the critical role of different agents, including government, and (d) article contained reference to fossil fuel and clean energy transitions because this is where a more extensive data set was found on just transitions (Santos Ayllon & Jenkins, 2023). In stage 3, taking a deductive analysis of the literature, the JUST Framework was used to organize the obstacles that prevent the adoption of an energy-justice approach. In stage 4, selected literature that draws on possible solutions policymakers can take to enable more just transitions in their work. The selection of solutions is based on the following selection criteria: (a) solution discussed in a peer-reviewed article, (b) solution applied to transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy, and (c) role of the policymaker could be analyzed.

The resulting scholarship sits at the nexus of Climate and Energy Policy, Just Transitions, and Energy Research and social sciences, as illustrated by Figure 1. This scholarship offers a blend of theory and practical case studies that reflect on the effectiveness of energy policies in terms of positive social outcomes and just transition challenges experienced globally.

**Figure 1**



*Figure 1: Literature Review Scope (Source: Author)*



# 04 Understanding the Ecosystem of Energy Justice Advocacy & Barriers

# Understanding the Ecosystem of Energy Justice Advocacy & Barriers

The energy policymaker works in a complex and political context. This section explores the nature and characteristics of this landscape in two ways. First, a critical discussion on the diverse groups of stakeholders who advocate for energy justice – their motives and urgent demands for participation in the decision-making processes of energy transitions. Second, a critical reflection on the literature that describes barriers to realizing energy justice and how the policymaker contributes to these injustices.



# Who Advocates for Energy Justice? A Stakeholder Analysis

One substantial study conducted by Shelton and Eakin (2022) looked at 23 peer-reviewed papers covering 52 countries' energy transitions and identified 46 types of stakeholders fighting for energy justice. The sheer magnitude of stakeholders highlights the complexity of engaging different perspectives in the energy policy process. The most common type of energy justice advocates are those who are “locally affected by energy extraction, generation or consumption in both fossil fuel and clean energy” (Shelton & Eakin, 2022, p. 14). The authors discuss the motivations for advocacy, which range from “procedural injustices, environmental degradation, energy ownership, recognition injustices, changed livelihood opportunities, and opposition to proximate energy infrastructure”(Shelton & Eakin, 2022, p.7). The policymaker sits in this multiplicity of motives and diverse stakeholders. The analysis by Shelton and Eakin is limited to claims that the government, and implicitly the policymaker, need to “create spaces for participation that reveal issues of (in) justice rather than evade them” (Shelton & Eakin, 2022, p. 17), but it is silent on how the policymaker ought to do this. It is also silent on the relational aspects of this ecosystem and the power dynamics that are at play between the policymaker and various stakeholders. The question that needs to be asked is how the policymaker might better navigate the stakeholder ecosystem in a coherent and integrated way, thereby more fully addressing the energy (in)justices. Importantly, Shelton and Eakin’s work reinforces policymakers' challenge in navigating these many stakeholders and their motives. To further understand the barriers to energy justice and the role of the policymaker in these barriers, the following section discusses the barriers using the JUST Framework (Heffron, 2022).

# Barriers to Energy Justice

The energy transition is a complex and disruptive entangled set of policies and transition pathways that affect society in a multitude of ways: from workers being displaced, to communities accepting clean technology projects to equitable access to fair, reliable, and affordable energy (Abram et al., 2022; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Sovacool et al., 2019). There is growing evidence, however, that many energy policies need to be improved, and this failure reflects the inordinate complexity and the inability to engage on an integrated energy justice path (Lamb et al., 2020; Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). The role of the policy maker is central to these observations, and looking at the barriers to energy justice provides insight into the necessary practice changes of policymakers to become more energy-justice centred. In this section, two key barriers to energy justice are discussed: (1) the nature of the energy policy process and its current limitations, and (2) the failure of the policymaker to grasp the multi-modal dimensions of energy justice, thereby repeatedly creating common injustices.

# Barrier 1: The Process of Energy Policy Design and Implementation

The energy policy process, discussed by Chapman et al. (2016), can be understood in five standard stages: a) Issue identification: understand the issues that require resolution, including the energy system issues and needs; b) Policy formulation: define the mechanism for change, typically developed by ministries and cabinets with critical experts in energy transition; c) Decision-making: informed by consulting and engaging with stakeholders; d) Implementation: the role of regulators and independent bodies to administrate the policy instruments that delivery to the policy intent; e) Evaluation: the effectiveness of the policy intent is to assess and timely feedback improve policy and administration. In reality, this process is intensely political and messy (Healy & Barry, 2017). The energy policy process has been criticized for its inadequacy in producing sustainable outcomes (Chapman et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2020; Howard, 2005; Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). Howard argues that these poor sustainable outcomes are because of “the existence of numerous decision makers, the high degree of competition and contestability among sources of policy advice, and the substantial impact of previous policies on new efforts” (Howard, 2005, p.3). Jenkins et al. assert that “energy decisions are all too frequently made in a moral vacuum” (Jenkins et al., 2018, p.71). These observations of the efficacy of energy policy to produce positive social outcomes are under increasing debate (Shelton & Eakin, 2022; Sun et al., 2023), and the central argument for change is the policy process and the methods by which policymakers incorporate energy justice.

Emerging research proposing new frameworks and models to situate energy justice in the policy cycle indicates that there is concern that the standard policy process is limited and requires alteration. For example, Sun et al. (2022) discuss introducing a social impact assessment methodology to ensure energy policy locates energy justice factors. Upham et al. call for an integrated approach to energy justice, which refers to a more unified view of energy justice (Upham et al., 2022). These proposals call for better tools and stages to be considered in the policy process to increase the success of a just approach in energy policy decision-making. The scholarship on the energy policy process avoids discussion of the policymakers’ skills,

knowledge, mindset, and overall capability to conduct activities that would allow energy justice to be explored and designed into energy policies. The policymaker's required skills and capability for enabling energy justice are evident in the discussion of the barriers to energy justice, covered in the next section.



# Barrier 2: Failure to Grasp the Multi-Dimensions of Energy Justice

As the world moves towards a post-carbon future, policymakers must grapple with the intricate dimensions of energy justice and create strategies that consider factors such as access to affordable energy, environmental and health outcomes of different sources of energy production, cross-border ownership structures in the electricity sector, equitable distribution amongst individuals and regions, and economic development (Banerjee & Schuitema, 2022; Cigna et al., 2023; Mundaca et al., 2018). Unfortunately, these critical issues are often ignored or overlooked, resulting in policies that can be environmentally damaging or leave certain groups out – perpetuating existing social hierarchies. This section critically discusses the barriers to the five forms of energy justice, drawing out the implications for the policymaker.

## **Failure to Understand the Proportionate Impact (Distributional Injustice)**

Distributional injustice is the unequal distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens in society (McCauley & Heffron, 2018). This concept means that “both the costs and the benefits must be fairly distributed in society” (Droubi et al., 2023, p.7). The criticisms of failed distributional justice have been attributed to barriers such as: a) decision-makers fail to understand a complex system of consequences and possible benefits to communities (Abram et al., 2022); b) disregard the social benefits that are advocated by diverse groups of citizens and communities in transition objectives (Hagele et al., 2022); and c) technopolitical narratives that avoid the emotional and social aspects of energy transition (McCauley et al., 2019; Newell et al., 2021). These criticisms reflect the policymaker’s inquiry skills to understand the complexities within societies impacted by energy transition. At the energy policy problem and formulation stages, existing and potential distributional injustices could be identified by asking such questions as: Are the costs and benefits of renewable energy initiatives distributed equitably across all segments of society? Do the current policies favour certain communities or social groups over others? Are there measures to alleviate the potential negative impact of energy transitions on marginalized communities? Do low-income households have access to affordable, sustainable energy options? How the policymaker answers these questions depends on how much they take a procedural justice approach in their policy design process.

## **Avoidance of Participatory Approaches (Procedural Injustice)**

Procedural justice is respect for environmental and human rights law governance, with fair and equitable procedures that aim to engage all stakeholders non-discriminately (McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Mundaca et al., 2018). Across the literature, procedural injustice is the most discussed because it is considered one of the foundational means to understand injustices and allow pathways to resolve them (Lamb et al., 2020; Shelton & Eakin, 2022; Sun et al., 2023). The barriers stakeholders experience when they cite government procedural injustices includes: a) the inability to affect decisions when governments mobilize communities and others in public meetings, hearings, and public submissions (Shelton & Eakin, 2022); b) the avoidance of broad engagement because “participatory approaches create a highly complex arena that is difficult to manage”(Abram et al., 2022, p.1039); c) participation and inclusion used to engineer consensus rather than allow room for genuine discourse and contestation (Abram et al., 2022); d) failing to engage a plurality of perspectives, with a bias to those who have the resources and are equipped to participate in the policy processes, such as environmental organisations (Shelton & Eakin, 2022; Sun et al., 2023); e) formal participatory processes are “often absent, inaccessible, or leave community concerns unrecognised” (Shelton & Eakin, 2022, p.15). These observations reflect one significant deep paradigm in energy policy setting: who has the right to decide? Decision-making is a contested territory, and at minimum, policymakers need to ask, at all stages of the policymaking process: Is there adequate representation of all affected communities in the decision-making process? Are the procedures for decision-making transparent and understandable to all stakeholders? Do all communities, especially marginalized groups, have the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns? Are there effective mechanisms for all stakeholders to appeal decisions or seek redress? Are the outcomes of decision-making processes communicated effectively to all concerned parties? These questions centre on the stakeholders of the existing and future communities impacted by transition, but past restorative inequities also need attention.



### **Failure to Identify Past Inequities (Restorative Injustice)**

Restorative justice is the prevention of harm, and if harm occurs, the intent is to undertake the restoration of some kind (Abram et al., 2022; McCauley et al., 2023). This concept aims to remedy historical injustices and disadvantages that have resulted from traditional energy policies (Droubi et al., 2023). It involves recognizing and addressing the disparities and inequities that specific communities, often low-income or marginalized groups, have experienced due to energy production and consumption practices. The barriers to restorative justice are usually complex, meaning complex restorative needs are often missed (Abram et al., 2022; Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). Instead, there is a tendency to focus on job loss or other economic parameters instead of “various dimensions of loss... loss of community, culture, landscape or sense of place” (Abram et al., 2022, p.1041). The proposal that policymakers reconceptualize restorative justice requires questions throughout the policy process such as: What historical injustices and disadvantages have certain communities faced due to traditional energy policies? How can current and future energy policies acknowledge and address these past injustices? What measures can be taken to prioritize disadvantaged communities for investment in renewable energy initiatives? How can subsidies or other supports be structured to help these communities overcome barriers to accessing sustainable energy options? How can energy policies foster a more sustainable future, rectify past injustices, and promote a more equitable energy landscape? Restoring past injustices also extends to wider groups impacted by energy transition.

### **Failure to Recognise the Rights of Different Groups (Recognition Injustice)**

Recognition of justice is the universal principle that the rights of different groups are recognised in the energy policy process (Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). Injustice is when there has been a systematic disadvantage of groups, particularly indigenous groups and vulnerable socio-economic groups, as a result of traditional energy policies. The barriers to recognition justice are similar to restorative justice, additionally: a) “decision-makers can overlook the true impact

on neglected sections of society” (McCauley et al., 2019, p.917); b) marginalization or vulnerable communities is limited to economic recognition and not environmental concern or other social outcomes (Hagele et al., 2022, p.104), c) failure to adequately identify and specify the groups such as vulnerable energy users, local residents and indigenous peoples (Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022); d) inadequate and meaningful engagement to gain social acceptance (Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). Restorative justice requires policymakers to acknowledge and address these disparities, ensuring that all communities have their voices heard in energy policy discussions and that there is an understanding of the lived experience of those impacted, either past, present, or future generations (McCauley et al., 2019; Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). The critical questions to be asked in the early stages of the policy process include: What groups experience existing inequities in energy production, distribution, and consumption that need to be addressed? How can energy policies be designed to reduce, rather than exacerbate, these inequities? How can we ensure all communities, especially marginalized or disadvantaged ones, are represented in energy policy discussions? The focus on the community-level for justice is critical for national policy settings, but energy justice requires the policymaker to extend their attention to an international justice context.

### **Failure to Incorporate International Injustices (Cosmopolitan Injustice)**

Cosmopolitan justice is the universal principle that “justice accepts all human beings have equal moral worth and that our responsibilities to others do not stop at borders” (McCauley et al., 2019, p.917). This concept states that it is unacceptable to create disadvantages in other parts of the world as countries transition; for example, mining rare minerals for batteries creates injustices for some communities while others transition (Droubi et al., 2023). In the context of energy policy, cosmopolitan justice would advocate for equitable access to sustainable energy resources worldwide, regardless of geographical location. These discussions fail to explore the implications for national policymakers, such as a need for international cooperation, which can be challenging to achieve due to differing national interests, policies, legal systems, and levels of economic development. This injustice also draws geopolitical dimensions between wealthier nations and nations with energy poverty and inequity.

# The Energy Justice Gap for Policymakers

The previous discussion on energy justice barriers highlights a practical gap for policymakers: there is no single integrated energy justice framework that provides a coherent and systematic approach to applying energy justice in the energy policy process. The energy policy process needs more concrete methods and approaches that centre energy justice. The following section identifies several ways policymakers can mitigate these barriers to energy justice.



# 05 What can Policymakers do to Mitigate Barriers to Energy Injustice?

# What can Policymakers do to Mitigate Barriers to Energy Injustice?

The barriers to energy justice discussed reflect actions and approaches that policymakers have failed to do well in terms of energy justice. A way to reframe this analysis is that the normative practices of the energy policymaker have been inherently under question. The change in normative practices presents an opportunity to mitigate energy injustice. As Santos Ayllon and Jenkins (2023) conclude from their research on the Scottish energy policy context, “by embedding flexible, robust justice frameworks like energy justice into the core energy policy-making process, there is a better chance of effectuating JT towards genuinely sustainable socio-energy systems in the long run” (Santos Ayllon & Jenkins, 2023, p.11) The notion of “embedding” means a behaviour change; therefore, this section discusses a set of solutions that can shift the behaviour of policymakers to be energy-justice centred. Using the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity framework (Hughes, 2007), as illustrated in Figure 2, to change policymaker behaviour, three gaps must be addressed: knowledge, agency, and action.

Figure 2



Note: Mitigating Energy-Injustice Barriers for Policymakers (Source: Author)

# Address the Knowledge Gap: Education

The lack of an integrated energy–justice approach implies that education is a critical foundation for policymakers to become energy–justice centred. Droubi et al. (2023) claim that “education has a transformative role to play in promoting a just transition to a low–carbon economy” (Droubi et al., 2023, p.1) because energy justice knowledge will place a proportionate emphasis on energy policies (Sovacool & Dworkin, 2015). The opportunity is to advance different dimensions of energy justice so that the policymaker can usefully apply it in energy policy formulation and guide energy policy implementation through mechanisms forming structures to meet just transition outcomes.

Education prepares the policymaker's mindset and paradigm to better approach JT's complex challenges. For example, by taking an energy–justice approach, policymakers can apply whole systems thinking and embrace complexity (Abram et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2023); be willing and able to engage with diverse views (Hagele et al., 2022); conduct a critical analysis of structural inequalities and the disadvantaged (Abram et al., 2022; McCauley et al., 2019) and be adaptive and transformative by “seeking to identify the disrupters to the drivers of entrenched inequities, and recognise that JT is not a passage to a predefined future, but a set of continuously evolving processes” (Abram et al., 2022, p.1038). An important element of this education is the requirement for application and learning through action and experimentation to take into account localized factors (Winkler, 2020). Education raises awareness and knowledge. However, this alone does not create conditions for action, so the next gap to be addressed is motivation to advocate for energy justice.

# Address the Agency Gap: Motivate Advocacy

Energy justice advocacy, as discussed, involves actors, motives, and tactics (Shelton & Eakin, 2022). The central issue is the motivation to advocate for energy justice. Appealing to motives that are both reliable and durable in their effects on behaviour should be where we focus (Oskamp, 2000). One area of motivation is policy success. The policymaker is more likely to advocate for energy justice if it increases the success of energy policy intent. Research shows that energy policy is more likely to succeed when there is democratic participation because social and environmental burdens are understood early and minimized in the design and implementation of policy (Levenda et al., 2021; Mundaca et al., 2018; Sokolowski & Heffron, 2022). This calls for more practical case studies demonstrating how policymakers enable just transitions. For example, Mundaca et al. (2018) draw out an exemplary energy transition case study in Samsø, Denmark, where policymakers enabled different community consultation models, full disclosure of information, and transparency in the energy policy process, which greatly enhanced the energy transition's success (Mundaca et al., 2018). If policymakers can see patterns of how others have applied energy justice and their role in it, it will help normalize what they can do to promote energy justice.

Another motivation is encouraging specific, concrete actions that are effective in realizing energy justice. The activation of communities and stakeholders in the energy policy process is one clear opportunity. The policymaker can take practical steps to convene and create alliances of change agents (Winkler, 2020). There are useful guides on alliance-making, and participatory democracy practices e.g. 'Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all' (International Labour Organization, 2015). By using the relevant guidelines, policymakers can act as an agent to influence decision-makers and key stakeholders (Leppanen & Liefferink, 2022) by promoting co-determination models as critical governance structures to enable participation (Aroa & Schroeder, 2022; Cha, 2017; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). The policymaker can create clear democratic legitimacy in the energy decision-making process (Schnaudt et al., 2021). The centring of energy justice can be normalized by becoming more overt in the good policy-making process.

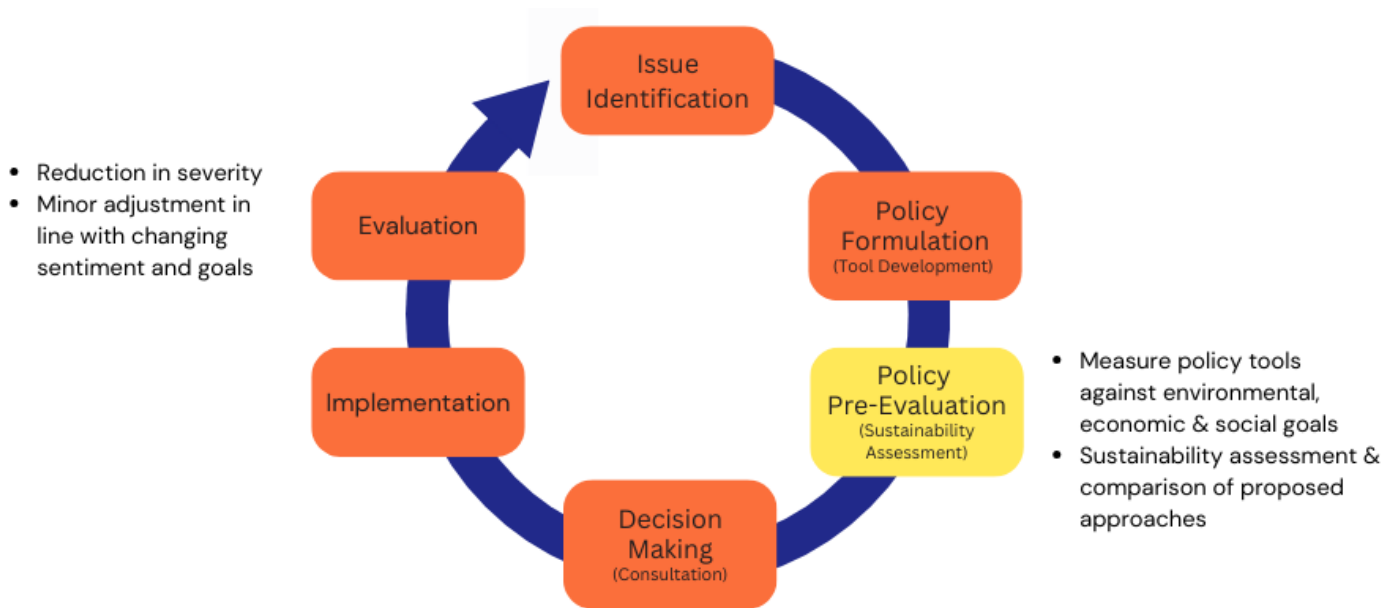
# Address the Action Gap: Embed Energy–Justice in the Policy Process

The role of policymakers in JT will be to ensure they embrace a comprehensive set of objectives every time they approach an energy policy process. Studies on the energy policy design in the European Union found that “a narrow view of justice reduces the potential of action” (McCauley et al., 2023, p.8). As this paper has highlighted, there is a tendency for different aspects of energy justice to be treated in isolation from each other (McCauley et al., 2023; Upham et al., 2022). In practice, an integrated view of energy justice, such as the JUST Framework, is helpful. This means policymakers consider social justice and social costs and benefits of energy policies every time they start the energy policy process (Mayer, 2018). The JUST framework presents an opportunity to be turned into a guideline or heuristic that policymakers could use to drive a line of policy intent to decide on energy justice goals. To further embed this in the policy cycle, Chapman et al.(2016) propose adding a stage to the energy policy process, as illustrated by Figure 3. The “policy pre–evaluation” stage provides a pre–decision point in the policy cycle, presenting a formal opportunity to assess energy justice implications. Chapman et al. discuss the opportunity to use a pre–evaluation stage to draw attention to evaluating all energy policies' sustainability and social impacts before any decision–making or implementation. It also introduces a distinct policy design step in the policy cycle where “specific expertise can be allocated” (Chapman et al., 2016, p.13), especially if it is not present in the policymaker's organisational context.

*Continues to next page.*



**Figure 3**



*Note: Revised energy policy-making process (Source: Chapman et al., 2016, p.15)*

In order for the policy-making process to be energy-justice-centred, methods and tools to assess and design energy justice will be required. For example, Sun et al., propose a social impact assessment methodology “that reasonably assesses the impacts of a just transition in terms of economy, income, and security; employment and education; land use and territorial aspects; population mobility; environment, health, and safety and human rights” (Sun et al., 2023, p. 9). The opportunity for a suite of methods and tools to equip policymakers with the ability to pay greater attention to “equality-proofing and democracy-proofing decarbonisation policies” (Healy & Barry, 2017, p.453) is *ana rea* for further research.

The practice of policymaking for JT requires a “whole systems approach (to energy justice) that is iterative, flexible and inclusive” (Abram et al., 2022, p. 1044), and if it is situated in the policy-making process, then sustainable and equitable policies will more likely be realised.

# 06 Conclusion

# Conclusion

With the dynamics of energy transitions across the globe well underway and at an accelerated rate, the underlying assumptions of just transitions are not likely without a further understanding of how this can practically be done. This paper has endeavoured to understand one specific role in just transitions – the role of energy policymaker. This paper has explored the Energy Justice scholarship, specifically seeking to answer the questions: (a) what are the barriers to energy justice? (b) how can policymakers address these barriers? In response to these questions, this paper has argued that policymakers must shift their behaviors and practices to become more energy-justice-centered if they are to enable just transitions. This shift is based on three core interventions, which may contribute to a change in how the policymaker engages and implements energy justice in their work. The first immediate need is to address the ambiguity and avoidance of energy justice by educating policymakers on what and why an integrated and holistic view of energy justice is necessary to create just transitions. The second is to encourage the application of this knowledge by tapping into the motivation of policymakers: energy policy will more likely be successful when energy justice has been designed into transition policy and pathways. Thereby, the policymaker, as an advocate, can create the conditions for the wider eco-systems of stakeholders to co-create conditions for just energy transition. Moreover, finally, formalising energy justice into the policy-making process ensures that commitment and governance to energy justice are acknowledged and realised. To create a low-carbon future that is just, the energy policymaker is one of the central actors who can assure this will happen. The goal must be to enable them to be the greatest advocates for energy justice. This will only happen if a conscious agenda of action is created to target behaviour change of the policymaker. This will elevate our chances of a successful, just, and equitable low-carbon future for all future generations across the world.

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