

Fuel Poverty Policy in an Age of Austerity: Affordability of policy to Governments or energy in homes?

Emerging Findings from RP2: 'The Impact of Devolved Administrations'
(Elizabeth Errington)

Overview

Fuel Poverty policies respond to three 'problems': low income, energy efficiency of homes and energy prices. Emerging findings suggest that UK wide budgetary constraints on affordability support and energy efficiency schemes focus additional pressure on the already politically salient issue of energy prices. This in turn implies additional pressure on the institutions held accountable for energy prices. This is common across the UK despite specific powers, regulatory frameworks and thermal efficiency challenges in the individual UK nations. The energy justice framework highlights the importance of understanding how institutions design and deliver interventions in terms of their participatory processes and recognition of the diverse experiences of accessing affordable energy.

Analysis

RP2 explores the formulation of fuel poverty policy, particularly concepts and definitions of fuel poverty, within each of the devolved administrations. It explores the energy justice implications of any differences between the nations of the UK, in particular, what implications do devolved administrations' fuel poverty formulations have for recognition and procedural justice concerns?

The work draws on documentary analysis and elite interviews with experts within organisations involved in the development of policies. The distribution of interviewees across four categories of actors is provided in Figure 1.

From this work emerges:

Differences across UK Nations

1. Policy levers concerning the funding of insulation schemes in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
2. Participation opportunities for some actors are specific to the devolved administrations.

Consistencies across UK Nations

1. A narrative of the right to a warm home in Parliaments and Assemblies.
2. The affordability of *delivering* fuel poverty policy schemes is the dominant frame.
3. Articulation of the more straightforward and affordable insulation measures.
4. Changes in the scale of challenges regarding income related to benefit changes, wage stagnation and levels of personal debt.

Figure 1: Elite Interview Participants (by organisation or institution)

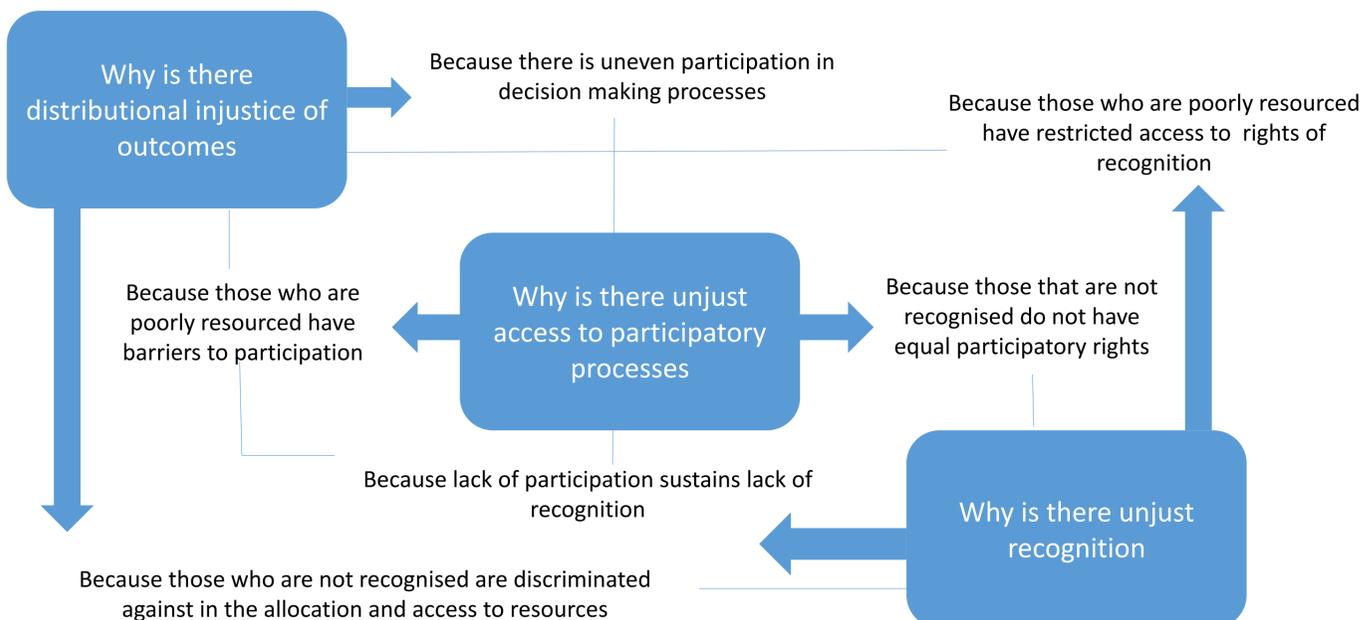
Adapted from Howlett (2011)

Public Core Actors Formal expertise role for formulation Government Departments Regulators 9 Current (4 Strategic level), 7 Ex 4 UK, 1 Scotland only, 5 NI only	Public Peripheral Formal expertise role for advising formulation Parliamentary Committees Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body 11 Current (2 Strategic level), 8 Ex (2 Strategic level) 8 UK, 1 Scotland only, 2 NI only Statutory Consumer Advocates - 6 (2 Strategic level) Statutory Consumer Advocates - 6 (2 Strategic level)
Private / Procured Formal expertise role on behalf of core actors Consultancy Delivery of Public / Governmental schemes 1 Wales only, 2 NI only, 3 Ex Firms - 6 (GB) Charities - 3 (1 NI only, 2 Strategic Level)	Private Outsiders Stakeholders with expertise feeding into formulation processes 14 Current (3 Strategic), 2 Ex 1 England only, 1 UK, 12 GB

Figure 2: Proposed adaptation Energy Justice Framework

(Originally Scholsberg, 2007 and Walker, 2012)

Emerging findings suggest an adaptation of the Energy Justice Framework is required to incorporate experiences of fuel poverty policy design.



Fuel Poverty and Justice

The most significant focus of fuel poverty and injustice is distributive justice and this emphasises providing resources to particular groups identified as 'in need'.

It is the phrase 'in need' which highlights the importance recognition justice. Emerging findings highlight that responding to fuel poverty recognition and representation of social groups. In particular, this arena uses particular definitions of 'vulnerable' and / or 'marginalised'.

This raises procedural justice concerns regarding the access of all to decision making processes and the ability to influence them.