research highlights

COMMUNITY ENERGY

Bottom-up justice

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Community energy schemes, in which energy generation and supply are characterized by local ownership and partnership, have been growing in number over the last decade. Although they represent only a small fraction of the energy mix, there is increasing policy interest in supporting them, enabling locals to engage with and take control of their energy needs. Such schemes also have numerous benefits for their communities, bringing widespread justice effects. To understand these energy justice effects and how they are negotiated, Alister Forman at Cardiff University, UK, carried out a bottom-up analysis of community energy schemes in Wales.

The research involved semi-structured interviews and participatory workshops with community energy project leaders, project members, and stakeholders, with the aim of exploring distributive and procedural justice issues around the projects. The analysis revealed a broad range of views on distribution, with energy justice being intimately linked to wider social, economic, environmental and cultural concerns for the community. Meanwhile, the research also found difficulties around participation, with tensions arising between expanding project inclusivity among the community and maintaining control for those operating the projects. Overall, while the findings underscore the ability of community energy projects to enhance energy justice, they also highlight gaps in understanding of the benefits of community energy when viewed as a top-down implementation, as well as conflicts between national regulation and local supply objectives.

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