



Sustainable Places
Research Institute
*Sefydliad Ymchwil
Mannau Cynaliadwy*

Enacting Energy Justice?

**Community Energy and the (Re-) Distribution of Power:
Evidence from a Welsh Case Study**

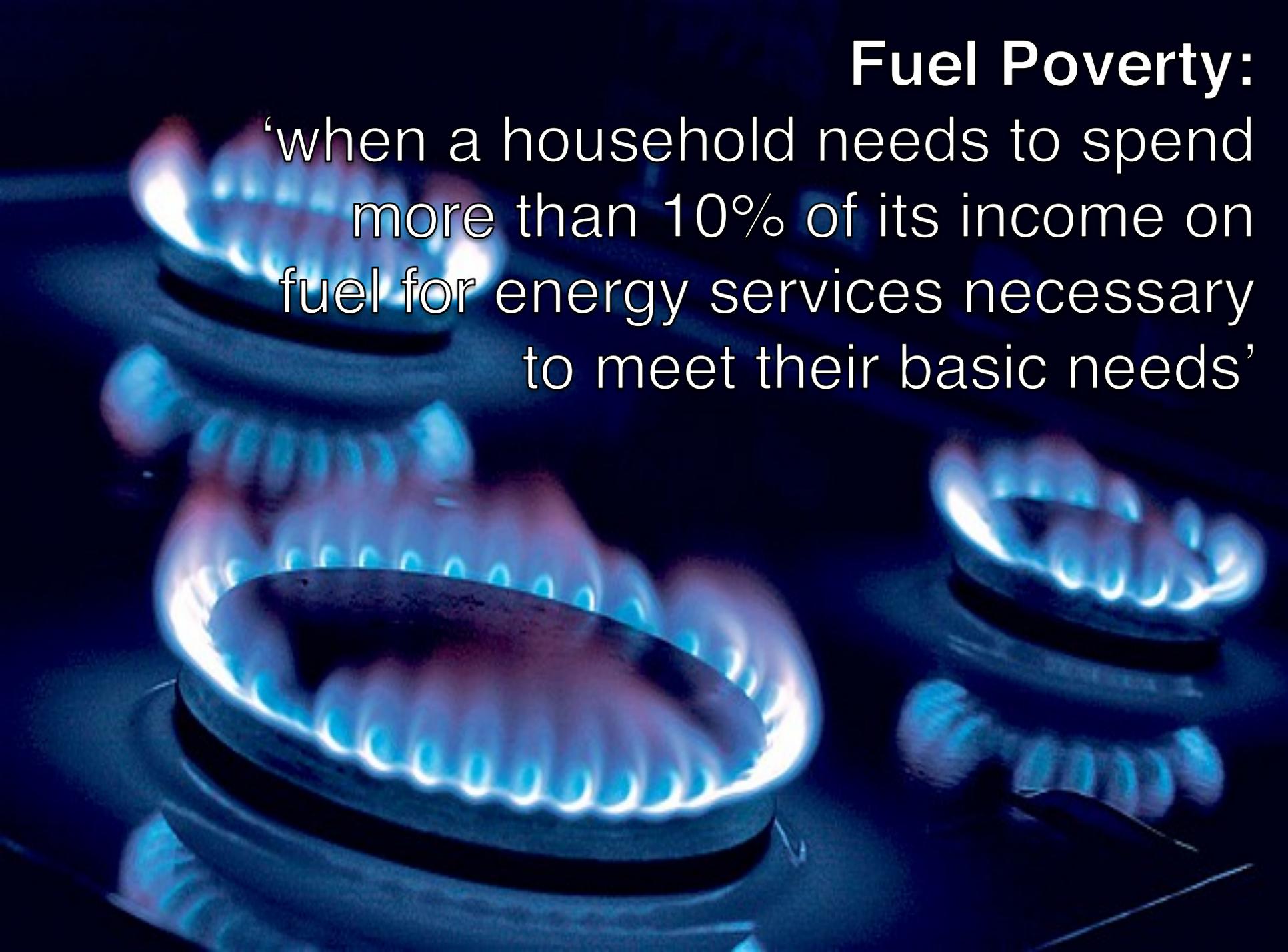
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Overview

- Research Context –
- Empirical Approach –
- Observations from Fieldwork –
 - Exploring Rationales for Community Energy in Wales
 - On Distributive Outcomes of Community Energy in Wales
- Conclusions –
 - What can we Learn from Community Energy in Wales?

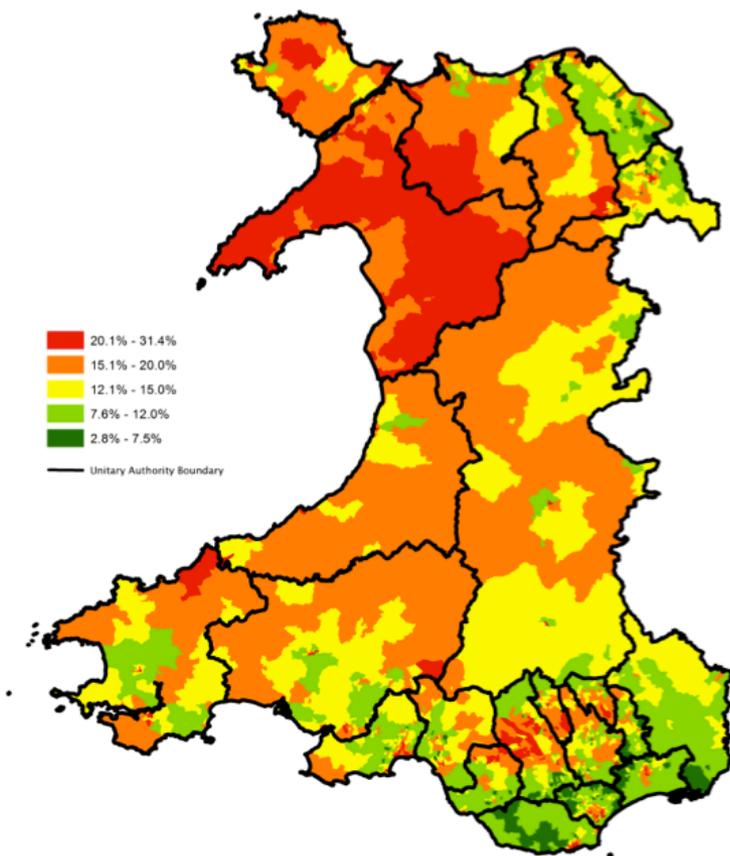


Fuel Poverty:

‘when a household needs to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel for energy services necessary to meet their basic needs’

Depth of Fuel Poverty

Estimated percentage of Full Income Fuel Poverty Households in 2004
by 2001 Census Lower Super Output Area



Source: Gordon, D. and Fahmy, E. for Welsh Government, A small area fuel poverty indicator for Wales, September 2008

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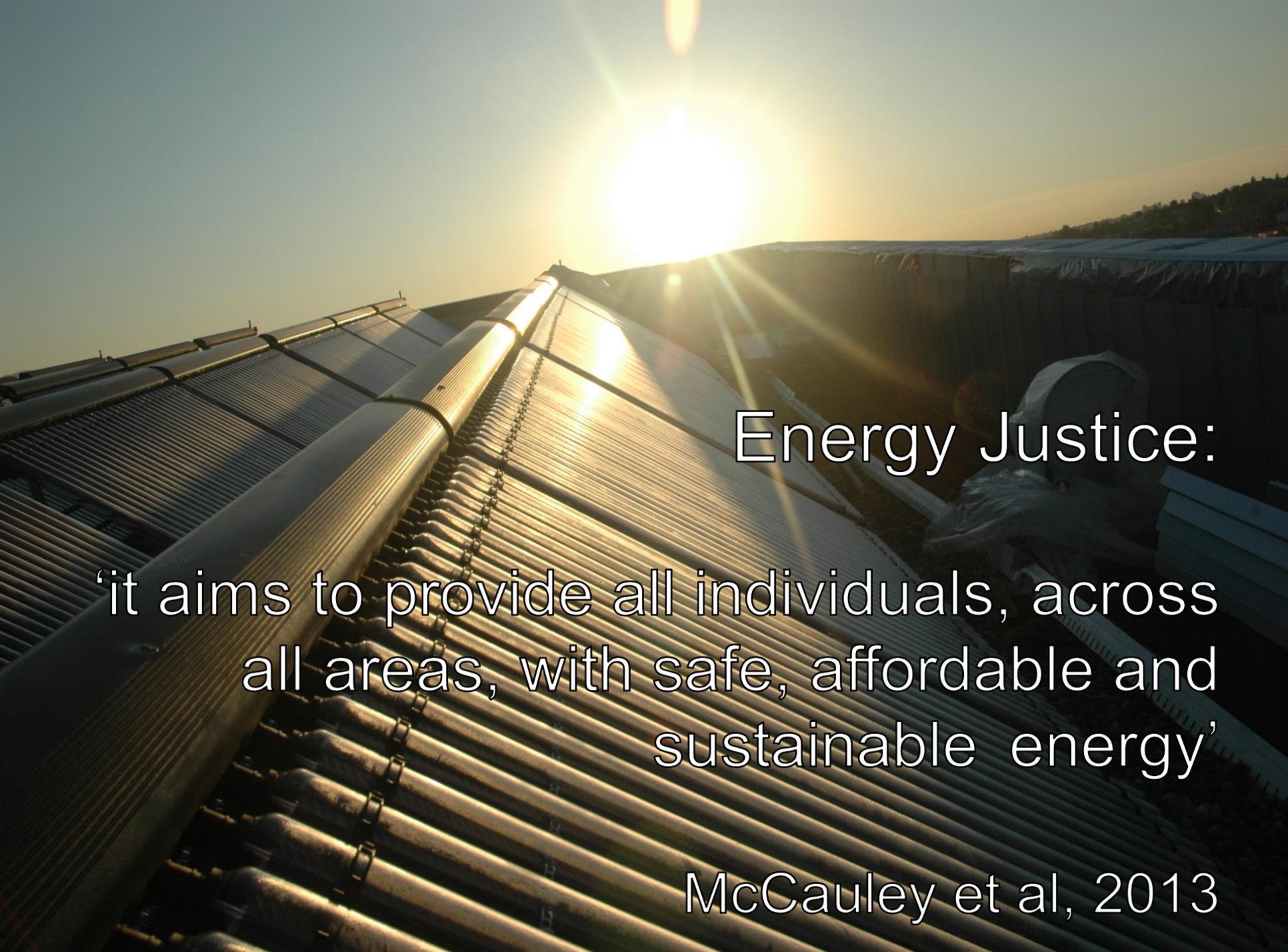
TABLE 1: FUEL POVERTY LEVELS IN THE UK BY COUNTRY, 2012 AND 2013 (DECC)

| COUNTRY | NUMBER OF FUEL POOR HOUSEHOLDS (MILLIONS) | | PERCENTAGE OF FUEL POOR HOUSEHOLDS (%) | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | 2012 | 2013 | 2012 | 2013 |
| ENGLAND | 2.61 | 2.73 | 12% | 12% |
| SCOTLAND* | 0.84 | 0.94 | 35% | 39% |
| WALES | 0.39 | NO ESTIMATE AVAILABLE | 30% | NO ESTIMATE AVAILABLE |
| N. IRELAND | 0.29 | NO ESTIMATE AVAILABLE | 42% | NO ESTIMATE AVAILABLE |

Sources:

[Above] NEA (2015) Fuel Poverty Monitor 2014-15
Newcastle: NEA

[Left] Gordon, D. and Fahmy, E. (2008) A Small Area Fuel Poverty Indicator for Wales Cardiff: Welsh Government

A large solar farm with rows of solar panels stretching into the distance under a bright sun at sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and casting long shadows across the panels. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

Energy Justice:

‘it aims to provide all individuals, across all areas, with safe, affordable and sustainable energy’

McCauley et al, 2013

What's Driving CE in Wales?

Surprises await ye in the field!

1. Fuel Poverty:

- *'Not explicitly, part of that was obviously trying to reduce energy use and hence deal with fuel poverty within the community'*
- *'There's probably not as much of an appreciation of the energy efficiency and fabric measures that can help fuel poverty because they're just looking at getting an income stream in order to fund some of these more tangible measures'*

2. The Justice Problem:

- *'Most environmental action is about social justice as well'*
- *'When I think about justice ... I think about ... actually if you were generating energy here to support people to insulate their houses then you've got this kind of nice virtuous link haven't you?'*

3. Environmental Narratives:

- *'The climate change emissions reduction side is there ... but we probably don't see it as much or notice it being as prominent because these projects either live or die on the cash flow'*
- *'If you can foster [pro-environmental attitudes] from the very smallest thing up to the biggest thing that's only got to be a good thing... Whether people know it's happening or not'*

4. (Lack of) Participation:

- *'If a community co-operative gets too big then that ... defeats the object of a community co-operative'*
- *'[The participation strategy] needs to be rationalised and it needs to be kept to a manageable amount of people'*

What's Driving CE in Wales?

Distributive Outcomes - Conflicts and Contradictions

1. Loss of Control:

- *'It feels important to give people an option to own the company... It feels important to give that but then, in a strategic sense, it feels like it ought to be driven a bit more by the project'*
- *'I really, genuinely, do want to make sure that the community are empowered to apply for this, that it's representative of them ... that it's fair and open but ... you've got to draw a line somewhere'*

2. Apathy:

- *'It's not very empowering [for them or us] just going around repairing peoples houses'*

3. Justice for Whom?:

- *'Even if they could just give a shit about having to pay one hundred quid less on their energy bills... I don't care what their motivations are because we know what the bigger results are'*
- *'Communities of interest [are] far ... stronger communities than many communities of geography'*
- *'People in fuel poor areas... Do they really give a fuck about the reasons for doing these sorts of things?'*
- *'Steve Jobs... Look at how he innovated... The most successful gadgets in human history have been totally the result of a not participative process'*

What's Driving CE in Wales?

Recurring Connections

1. Contesting Narratives:

- *“It's trying to take on the big institutional problems instead of potentially applying band aids to it which is what a lot of poverty measures do”*
- *‘The vision is about people power, it's about social justice... Energy is huge in that... It's a vision for a more fair society’*
- *‘The ideal vision is taking on the supermarkets, taking on the energy companies, and taking on the banks. We don't need those things, we really don't!’*

2. Protecting Culture:

- *‘People want to leave the rat race so they come up to North Wales and try to set up an organic goat centre or some other nonsense’*
- *‘Without a strong economic base then there's a migration of all the young people out of the rural areas’*

3. Independence Narratives:

- *‘This is as special a community as any other and deserves the opportunity to be independent financially and to improve themselves’*
- *‘We look around and we have nothing here except our natural resources and that's a way for us to take something back’*
- *‘It's about taking people off-grid and creating energy independence’*
- *‘That's kind of the point really, is to become independent, and not be subject to the ... comings and goings of funding’*

4. Communitarian Narratives:

- *‘It started out with a genuine good-hearted intention to make things better for the community’*

Conclusions

- Extent to which communities think about what they're doing in terms of energy justice is questionable
- BUT!
- That doesn't mean that people aren't engaging with issues around social justice, instead depends what's important to people locally.
- And, to the extent that community energy involves a desire for greater autonomy, it's not to say either that the eventual outcomes might not be more profound than what an energy justice lens alone might imply.



Any Questions?

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