



NTNU

Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

**Involuntarily unsustainable and (in)voluntarily
sustainable: living on low income in times of
energy crisis and sustainability transitions**

COJUST

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, NTNU
FME NTRANS Annual Conference Oslo 07.12.2022

The energy crisis and social inequity

In Norway:

- In 2020, 11% of the population (excl. students) classified as low-income, and 10,1% as permanently low-income (aka poor)
- In 2021, 21,2% belonged to a household not able to afford an unexpected expense
- In 2022?
 - High electricity prices
 - High food prices
 - High interest rates (housing loans)

-> Tensions increasing?

Linda (53) har ikke råd til å lage mat eller fyre opp huset: - Det er helt jævlig



Høye drivstoffpriser forsterker elbil-forskjeller

26.7.2022 07:00:00 CEST | NAE



15. nov. - Levekostnadene øker og flere rammes

15. november 2022 kl. 21:20 · 40 min

KOMMENTARER
Fattigdom i Norge:

De fattige drømmer om smuler

Fattigdommen er tilbake, og ønsker seg et viskelaar og en regnjakke til jul. Det er som om Alf Prøysen har våknet til live.



Her gjør Sandy noe ulovlig: - Jeg gjør dette fordi jeg må



- Det haster å hjelpe dem som sliter mest med strømregningene.





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Generic

Focus of the talk

What are the justice implications of sustainability transitions?

- What role do Norwegian energy and climate policies construct for (low-income) citizens in sustainability transitions?
- What are the social impacts of energy and climate policies?
- How do low-income groups experience sustainability transitions?

We reflect on how injustices and inequities related to sustainability transitions are amplified by the energy crisis

The COJUST project

Co-producing energy and climate policies: Justice and equity in sustainability transitions (COJUST)



Main objective: to co-produce energy and climate policies with and for low-income groups in Norway

Secondary objectives:

1. To recognise and amplify low-income group views on energy and climate policies
2. To understand the possible social impacts of energy and climate policies and how these policies can overcome social justice challenges
3. To understand low-income groups everyday practices within the three topic areas mobility, shelter and consumption patterns

Funding:
Research Council of Norway

Empirical material

- 1) Municipal and national climate plans
- 2) 14 storytelling workshops
- 3) 22 individual interviews

In total: 73 informants from low-income groups

NB: data collected in autumn/winter 2021/2022



RESULTS: POLICY ANALYSIS

What role do Norwegian energy and climate policies construct for (low-income) citizens in sustainability transitions?

Three lines of action and constructions of sustainable citizen



1) Reconfiguring the economy towards green growth:

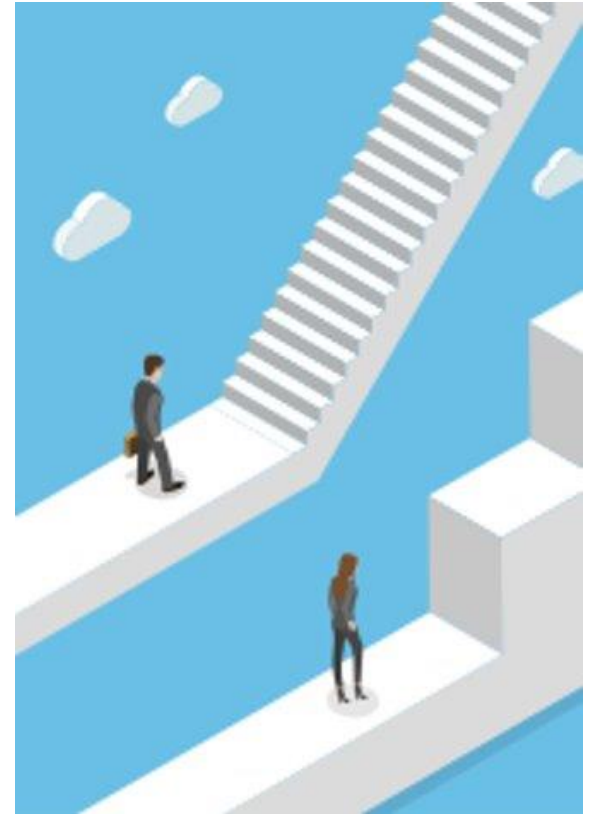
- Citizens as investors in low-emission technologies (risk taking, early movers, economically rational)
- Citizens as green and local consumers (local food, second hand, caring)

2) Facilitating the freedom to act green:

- Citizens as “free to act green” (sustainability is the "easy" choice in daily life)
 - Citizens responsibility: be open to change and willing to engage with new technologies
- In sum: an active mode of participation for citizens with economic resources

3) Sheltering the vulnerable

- Policies are conscious towards the economic effects of climate actions
- Justice is understood as preventing harm.
- No-one should suffer from climate policies: “No-one left behind”
 - climate actions should “to the least degree give negative economic consequences for the common citizen” or cause “unreasonable costs”
- Focus on affordability– things should be cheap enough to be attractive to buy
- In sum: a passive mode of participation for the economically vulnerable citizens



RESULTS: INTERVIEWS AND STORYTELLING WORKSHOPS

What are the social impacts of energy and climate policies?

How do low-income groups experience sustainability transitions?

Negative impacts

- Low-income groups attribute the following negative impacts to transitions/climate policies:
 - High prices for public transport (vs. support for buying electric cars)
 - High prices for gasoline and road tolls
 - High electricity prices
 - High prices for second-hand clothes

≠ the economically protected citizens

≠ «leaving no one behind»

Exclusion and shame



- Climate change mitigation and environmental protection considered as important
 - Wish to participate/be included in transitions
 - Feeling excluded from transitions due to their economic situation:
 - They cannot afford electric cars/bikes. Often health problems make walking/biking difficult.
 - They cannot afford energy-efficient and climate friendly homes (isolation, windows, heating etc.)
 - They cannot afford local, healthy and organic food and high-quality long-lasting clothes etc.
 - Experience to be pointed at by the «moral finger» for «unsustainable» practices:
 - Driving an old diesel car
 - Wasting energy due to low standard homes
 - Buying low-quality, cheap and unsustainable food, clothes etc.
 - The transition seems to be increasing the number of issues to feel shameful about
- ≠ «free to act green»**

Invisible sustainability work

- Sustainability is interpreted and performed in relation to their own economic context
 - Walking or biking, public transport
 - Low general consumption
 - No extra travels
 - Saving energy by drastic means
- In line with de-growth and sufficiency
- Sustainability work is not acknowledged and valued -> invisible

≠ investors in low-emission technology

≠ green and local consumers



Concluding remarks

- Current policies increase, rather than decrease low-income groups' experience of social inequity and contribute to feelings of exclusion and shame
- Producing ambivalence towards climate strategies (balancing wish to participate vs. costs of participation)
- «Sub» relations towards sustainability transitions are emerging within low-income groups
- No climate change denial – still support sustainability transitions
- Energy crisis exacerbates injustice and inequity for low-income groups
- Tensions may increase as an increasing numbers of citizens find themselves in the situation of the low-income groups in our study
- Strong need for more diverse climate strategies that combine a focus on «early movers» with addressing needs of vulnerable groups and that enable their participation/inclusion in transitions



Check out www.cojust.org and COJUST/NTRANS policy briefs with recommendation for socially just climate strategies:

POLICY BRIEF

COJUST NTRANS

POLICY BRIEF 00/2022

Klimastrategier for mobilitet som ikke forsterker sosiale og økonomiske forskjeller

Robert Næss*, Gisle Solbu*, Marius Korsnes*, Sara Heidenreich*, Ruth Woods*, Ida Marie Henriksen*, Stina Oseland**

* NTNU, Institutt for tverrfaglige kulturstudier, ** Bergen kommune



Hvordan oppleves dagens situasjon knyttet klimatiltak og energitiltak innenfor mobilitetsområdet og sosial ulikhet?
Hvordan kan gode beslutningsprosesser etableres i kommunale og statlige klimaplaner og strategier for å sikre at klimastrategier forsterker sosial ulikhet?

Bakgrunn

Dette er en policy-brief fra en workshopserie i FME NTRANS og forskningsprosjektet COJUST. Arbeidet involverer forskere fra ulike samfunnsvitenskapelige fagområder og aktører i kommunal sektor. Bakgrunnen for workshopserien var at ulike aktører og aktører i utformingen av klimaplaner og strategier ønsket innspill på hvordan kommunale og statlige klimaplaner og strategier ikke forsterker sosial ulikhet. Vi identifiserte tre tematiske områder som workshopserien belyser basert på forskning.

POLICY BRIEF

COJUST NTRANS

POLICY BRIEF 00/2022

Klimastrategier for bolig som ikke forsterker sosiale og økonomiske forskjeller

Ruth Woods*, Gisle Solbu*, Sara Heidenreich*, Robert Næss*, Marius Korsnes*, Ida Marie Henriksen*, Stina Oseland**

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POLICY BRIEF

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POLICY BRIEF 00/2022

Klimastrategier for forbruk som ikke forsterker sosiale og økonomiske forskjeller

Gisle Solbu*, Marius Korsnes*, Sara Heidenreich*, Ruth Woods*, Robert Næss*, Ida Marie Henriksen*, Stina Oseland**

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