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Perspective

A perspective on energy citizenship and transitions in Europe

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ABSTRACT

The European Union (EU) is committed to achieving a just and inclusive energy transition. Positioning citizen participation is an integral practice of this goal. The expectation for increased citizen engagement in energy initiatives has been conceptualised as energy citizenship. However, despite publicly committing to encouraging active, bottom-up participation, top-down, state-led approaches to promoting energy citizenship have been criticised for constraining citizen agency, often inadvertently leaving individuals feeling disempowered in their contributions to energy transitions. This paper examines a foundational EU policy document, *Clean Energy for All Europeans (CEFAE)*, to unveil how the EU conceives the role of citizens within the energy transition. The findings suggest that the EU's conceptualisation of energy citizenship is shaped by liberal and neoliberal assumptions about citizenship itself. This is reflected in the frequent reference to citizens as 'consumer(s)' and the implicit framing of citizenship according to these democratic conceptions within the directives and regulations used for the implementation of the energy transition. Underlying conceptions of citizenship establish assumptions about what forms of citizen participation are considered suitable and appropriate in conceptualisations and operationalisations of energy citizenship in situ. By comparing the EU's articulation of energy citizenship with the three classical dimensions of democratic citizenship—membership, basic rights, and participation—this study identifies the underlying narrative of citizenship in the document and uncovers tensions that limit the potential for meaningful citizen engagement. In doing so, it contributes to the evolving discourse on energy citizenship by advocating for a more inclusive, citizen-led approach to the recognition of energy citizens and the definition of their agency.

1. Introduction

The role(s) citizens could play in policy implementation has emerged as a focal point for the EU, especially for policies requiring systemic changes in norms, institutions and technology, as well as alignment of values, interests and resources from diverse groups of people. The decarbonisation of energy systems is such a policy context. As Bellamy [1] aptly states: "Whatever the problem may be, the revitalisation of citizenship is canvassed as part of the solution." (p. 28). *Energy citizenship* represents a concept of citizen engagement and involvement in the energy transition, and their related rights and responsibilities to that end [2,3]. Energy citizenship has emerged as a lens through which to understand how to balance these rights and responsibilities between different stakeholders, especially considering the modes of public participation in the energy domain and as part of decarbonisation pathways put in place to meet the 2030 Paris Agreement goals [4–6].

In the context of realising decarbonisation pathways, policy

arrangements shape the extent to which citizens can act, exert influence, and bear responsibilities. Institutional settings define and perpetuate identities and perceptions of the public, which shape participatory practices in situ [8]. Governmental institutions, including the EU, increasingly use the concept of energy citizenship to outline their expectations for citizen participation in the energy transition, emphasising active engagement in, and assuming responsibility for, energy production and consumption [9]. These manifestations of citizenship are influenced by implicit conceptions of citizenship as they relate to (Western) conceptions of democracy itself [10]. The type of energy citizens that governmental institutions aim to cultivate reflects their interpretation of who and how citizens can become active in the energy transition and, with that, the 'membership' that energy citizenship entails. This perspective argues that the underlying conceptions of democratic citizenship inform the specific practices of energy citizenship that are endorsed in policy.

This paper critically examines how the role of citizens is presented in

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a key strategy document that is part of the EU Green Deal, titled *Clean Energy for all Europeans* (CEFAE). Published in 2019, this document summarises the benefits and intentions of the Clean Energy Package (CEP), the EU's fourth energy package developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council, and the Parliament. The CEFAE is a clear and accessible report that provides a non-technical summary of the eight directives and regulations established in the CEP that facilitate the EU's transition from fossil fuels to a carbon-neutral economy. These directives and regulations update the targets of greenhouse gas emission reductions to 40 % of 1990 levels, increase the percentage of renewable energy sources in the EU's energy mix to 32 %, and raise the energy efficiency target to 32.5 % to the baseline scenario established in 2007. The directives and regulations set out common principles, goals and binding legislative acts including:

- *Energy Performance in Buildings Directive (EU) 2018/844*: The Directive sets specific provisions for better and more energy efficient buildings.
- *Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001*: The Directive sets a binding target of 32 % for renewable energy sources (RES) in the EU's energy mix by 2030.
- *Energy Efficiency Directive (EU) 2018/2002*: The Directive sets a target of 32.5 % for energy efficiency for 2030, compared to a baseline scenario established in 2007.
- *Electricity Directive (EU) 2019/944*: The Directive sets rules for the generation, transmission, distribution, supply and storage of electricity. It also includes consumer empowerment and protection aspects.
- *Governance of the Energy Union Regulation (EU) 2018/1999*: The Regulation sets a new governance system for the Energy Union. Each Member State is to establish an integrated 10-year National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) for 2021 to 2030.
- *Electricity Regulation (EU) 2019/943*: The Regulation sets principles for the internal EU electricity market. It focuses mainly on the wholesale market as well as network operation. It includes provisions that affect certain articles in the electricity network codes.
- *Risk Preparedness Regulation (EU) 2019/941*: The Regulation requires Member States to prepare plans on how to deal with potential future electricity crises. They are to use common methods and identify the possible electricity crisis scenarios.
- *ACER Regulation (EU) 2019/942*: The Regulation updates the role and functioning of the European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER). The Clean Energy Package also increases the competence of the ACER in cross-border cooperation.

The CEFAE was selected for analysis, as it represents the most recent and comprehensive discussion of all new legislative acts introduced under the Clean Energy Package (CEP). It is a document meant to convey the EU's vision for the role of citizens and to garner public support for the new legislation. The CEFAE represents the dominant discourse espoused by the EU about the idealised forms of citizen engagement in the energy transition, for example, improving market conditions for the formation of energy communities, but also enhancing digitisation and energy labels to encourage energy efficiency practices, as well as monitoring energy poverty.

1.1. Critically assessing the agency of energy citizens in EU policy

Making implicit assumptions in discourse explicit enables the transcendence of conceptual boundaries, creating alternative solution spaces for energy governance i.e., redefining individual's responsibilities and introducing new policy options. To this end this paper applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) [10]. This methodology is used to compare between top-down narratives of the concept and on-the-ground manifestations, revealing gaps and/or overlaps in the balance of expected rights and responsibilities of energy citizens. CDA is a qualitative

approach that examines linguistic nuances to identify underlying ideological stances in text, which shape perceptions of what is normal and accepted as "common sense" in the context under scrutiny [11]. Using CDA facilitates a systematic examination of all references to citizens in the CEFAE and provides insight into how the document portrays their level of agency, or 'agentic space', and role in energy transitions.

The findings of the analysis show that the discourse as brought forward by the EU can be labelled as neoliberal. This conclusion was derived from the agentic space of energy citizens being predominantly defined through their financial means and consumer decisions. The text's tendency to refer to citizens as "consumers" (44 times) more frequently than "citizens" (42 times) is also an indicator of neoliberal conceptions. In the CEFAE document, the relation between the EU and energy citizens is characterised by freedom and minimal public demands on individual lives. Democratic conceptions bring forward what is perceived to be suitable and appropriate for citizen participation in the energy transition [12]. As such they also define the starting point for transcending the established boundaries in energy citizenship through these implicit notions.

For the development of the concept of energy citizenship in this policy context, this research recommends drawing on democratic theories beyond neoliberal conceptions of citizenship, to explore alternative understandings of how agency and responsibility can be allocated to citizens in the energy transition. The agentic space that was identified by critically assessing the policy document is narrow and excludes large segments of the population. The EU is advised to acknowledge the presence of neoliberal conceptions reflected in this narrow formulation of energy citizenship, and, in forging more effective policy pathways, it should consider new knowledge emerging around collectivism and communitarianism in advocating citizen participation in energy transitions. Also, perspectives such as psychological citizenship can introduce notions that reinforce citizens' self-efficacy and enable more citizens to resonate with how policy makers envision their role in energy transitions.

1.2. Citizenship and energy citizenship

Recent research on energy citizenship proposes exploring the interconnections between democratic conceptions and the concept to transcend its current, definitional boundaries [13]. Despite the axiomatic connection between citizenship constructions and democratic theory, contemporary conceptualisations of energy citizenship fall short of contemplating the democratic assumptions that underlie their constructions. Accordingly, this paper uses democratic theory to examine democratic conceptions within the formulation of energy citizenship as presented in the CEFAE. In examining how a governmental body invites citizens to participate in energy transitions, this study is inherently dedicated to examining normative notions of energy citizenship. Energy citizenship research encompasses both empirical manifestations of the concept and normative frameworks for participation. This paper scrutinises the normative, desirable modes of energy citizenship, excluding other empirical expressions of the concept that, while acknowledged in literature, are not expressed in how the EU invites citizens to be energy citizens. This distinction between empirical and normative interests in energy citizenship highlights a distinction in who determines who is an energy citizen. The normative approach, as studied here, focuses on how institutions define citizen engagement in energy transitions, while the empirical approach also recognises citizen-driven, grassroots forms of engagement. These empirical expressions of energy citizenship generally warrant its further conceptual development, especially in terms of agency and self-efficacy [5,6,14–16].

Normative, state-led manifestations of energy citizenship focus on citizens that 'play their part' by actively changing their lifestyles and consumption habits and those citizens that engage in policy processes and decision-making [3,14]. These normative frameworks of energy citizenship have been criticised for the state allocating responsibilities to

citizens in the energy transition, while not providing the political agency that would enable citizens to fulfil those responsibilities [17]. This leaves citizens feeling disconnected and disempowered in the process of trying to participate in the energy transition [18] and limits the capacities in which energy citizens are recognised [15]. Such mismatch between rhetoric and enabling action undermines the EU's commitment to a "just and clean energy transition" in which "no one is left behind" [19]. If citizens' agency is restricted, it raises questions about their capacity to meaningfully participate and how they are expected to 'act' effectively. Moreover, failing to reflect the diversity of citizen populations compromises efforts that promote democracy and equity within energy systems and, ultimately, fails in "leaving no one behind".

These issues underscore the need to expand existing, asymmetrical conceptualisations of energy citizenship within normative frameworks in both scholarship and practice. In response, this perspective refines its critical analysis of the CEFAE by specifically asking: what kind of citizens are energy citizens invited to be? Through this inquiry, it reflects on the implications of democratic conceptions for how citizens are empowered and assigned agency within this policy document. The paper draws on classical definitions of citizenship and compares them to the EU's formulation of energy citizenship. This approach is grounded in the premise that theoretical preconceptions of citizenship shape how the concept is given functional meaning in societal contexts [12] such as the energy transition. There exists a dialectical relation between constructions of citizenship and its enactment in everyday life [10] – that is, what is considered reasonable and desirable when defining citizenship within social and policy contexts [20]. Examining what kind of citizens energy citizens are invited to be, through the lens of citizenship theory, highlights tensions in linking citizenship to energy transitions and reveals how underlying citizenship conceptions affect the allocation of agency and responsibility to energy citizens within this context. Without this critical reflection, it is foreseeable that citizen participation in the EU's energy transition will remain limited to one that is dependent on citizens' financial and solicited public participation, leaving it inherently exclusionary in nature.

In the following sections, we first introduce the three core dimensions of citizenship as articulated in classical citizenship theory. In three respective subsections, we assess how the EU's articulation of energy citizenship (derived from the CDA) in the CEFAE document resonates with these dimensions. The predominant resonance with the participatory dimension of citizenship facilitates a discussion regarding who qualifies as an energy citizen by the EU's definition and the conditions required for their recognition within the document. The discussion then shifts to the reflection on the agency and empowerment outlined in the participatory position of energy citizens within the document.

2. Classical citizenship conceptions

The scope of citizenship theory is potentially infinite [21]. However, generally, a citizen is defined as a member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership [22]. Turning to various theorists, the concept of citizenship is generally composed of three main dimensions [1,23]. The formulation of energy citizenship in the CEFAE is analysed using the three dimensions of (classical) citizenship: (1) membership in a democratic political community, (2) basic rights associated with this membership, and (3) participation in political, economic, and social processes [1]. In his book "*Citizenship: A Very Short Introduction*", Bellamy [1] defines citizenship through these conceptual dimensions, deliberately avoiding excessive jargon to make the subject accessible to a general audience, as this is one of his main critiques to existing, general introductions to citizenship. Rather than striving for an exhaustive account of citizenship, Bellamy's accessible definition is deemed suitable for the purpose of this paper. Before advancing to the descriptions of each of these dimensions, it is essential to stress that this perspective does not seek to fit energy citizenship into

these dimensions of classical citizenship. The dimensions are used to develop an understanding of the deeper narrative on citizenship in the document under scrutiny. Any identified discrepancies between the EU's articulation of energy citizenship and these dimensions do not automatically imply an adjustment of the concept to fit into this tripartite framework.

2.1. Citizenship as membership

CITIZENSHIP: "Status of being a member of a free city or jural society, (civitas) possessing all the rights and privileges which can be enjoyed by any person under its constitution and government, and subject to the corresponding duties." [24].

Aristotle laid the foundational idea for our understanding of citizenship, conceiving it as a fundamental social relationship with the scope of political belonging being confined to the city-state and its 'free men' [25]. Today, as articulated by Bellamy, citizenship assumes the form of a unique social relationship, one that binds an individual to a state or society [1]. Possessing the status of citizenship grants access to the benefits associated with membership in a political community [1]. This 'membership' lies at the heart of citizenship, and it formally acknowledges an individual as constituent of a sovereign state [26]. Consequently, individuals hold their citizenship status in accordance with the laws and international agreements upheld by democratic states [1]. Not only does this legal connection grant them the status of being a citizen it also forms an individual's nationality [1,27]. As such it supports national citizenship, fostering a sense of (constitutional) belonging among the diverse groups that make up modern societies [1].

2.2. Basic rights and citizenship

While the substance of citizenship has evolved over time, it fundamentally delineates the relation between the state and individuals in the language of constitutional rights [28]. Citizenship laws provide the parameters for acquiring and losing one's citizenship status within the framework of constitutional norms [29]. Traditionally the obligations associated with citizenship status are about civil obedience of the law [20]. Citizens must obey a set of laws to ensure justice and democratic equality and in return their rights are protected [30]. This, minimalist, constitutional conception of citizenship signifies the legal anchor that sustains the sovereignty of states through the rule of law and the protection of citizens' rights [31,32]. The practical political landscape underscores the idea that citizenship is always 'tailored'—shaped according to the requirements of a given political system and adapting to changing needs [33]. However, given that all citizens maintain the same legal connection with the state and enjoy equivalent basic rights protection, every citizen within the same polity is inherently meant to be 'equal' by that definition [27].

2.3. Citizenship as public participation

Beyond the legal definitions and the bundle of rights associated with citizenship the third dimension transcends these formal aspects [29]. States do not just rely on institutional regulations of citizenship but also on the civic practices of individuals, including their capacity to cooperate, deliberate and participate [21]. Marshall's articulation of citizenship marked a shift from a narrowly political definition of citizenship centred on the individual's connection with the state toward a broader interpretation of citizenship [34]. It made the status of citizenship not only encompass a set of inherent rights and obligations but also the capacity to actively engage in political and socio-economic life of the democratic polity [1]. It underlined the position that without public involvement, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force [35].

In essence, all democratic theories are built upon assumptions concerning the capacities and inclinations of individuals in public

participation [28]. Public participation is the translation of a set of virtues that citizens are desired to embody into a set of practices that they are expected or invited to partake in [36]. Participation arrangements establish what is expected of citizens and how they are ought to fulfil these roles. Such roles are defined by the responsibilities and duties assigned to citizens, as well as the agentic space afforded to them by the state to enable their participation and ways to act [37]. Public participation arrangements serve as strategies for states to translate democratic norms, beliefs, and values into practice, while also addressing deficits in desired democratic behaviour [38,39].

3. Energy citizenship conceptions

This section proceeds by analysing how the *Clean Energy for all Europeans* (CEFAE) document reflects these dimensions of citizenship in its definition of energy citizenship. Through this analysis, we gain insight into the underlying narrative on citizenship in the policy document and address the key question: what kind of citizens are energy citizens invited to be? It reveals how the EU invites citizens to be energy citizens and, from their perspective, under what conditions citizens are acknowledged to be energy citizens.

3.1. Energy citizenship as membership

The traditional understanding of citizenship lies in the membership status of individuals within a city-state, characterised by specific rights and obligations that bind the citizen and the state together [40]. Energy citizenship does not come in a comprehensible, written form that delineates what it means to acquire the status of being an energy citizen. In the CEFAE document energy citizens are not recognised through their connection to a larger group or supranational entity but by desired actions in relation to energy systems. This ‘relation’ between energy systems and individuals is not accurately described as a membership. The EU defines the essence of this relation by a set of actions individuals can undertake and, as such, being an energy citizen, or not, is based on whether you perform these actions, or not.

An important element of the constitutional membership that classical citizenship entails, is that it is a status that individuals can both acquire and lose [32]. People acquire their citizenship status, often unconditionally and automatically at birth or through naturalisation [41]. Energy citizenship is not a status that is granted through a legal framework and, therefore, cannot be formally revoked by another entity. Nor does it suggest any unconditionality in maintaining this status since energy citizens are recognised primarily through their ability and willingness to engage in specific, predefined energy-related activities. This raises pertinent questions about the recognition of energy citizens by the EU, such as: What conditions must be met to be recognised as an energy citizen? and Who is to decide what these conditions are? These questions will be addressed in the subsequent sections of this perspective.

3.2. Basic rights and energy citizenship

Within the policy document, energy citizenship does not constitute a formal or legal status, nor does it establish a set of protected rights like those granted to formal citizens of democratic states. This stands in contrast to the promising title of the document, *Clean Energy for all Europeans*, which frames clean energy as a right – suggesting that all citizens are inherently equal in their legitimate claim to access it. The document further reinforces the impression of establishing an equal position for all energy citizens by, for example, stating its aim to ensure “the protection of European citizens against energy crises” and repeatedly affirming its intention to “leave no one behind” [19], thereby suggesting a commitment to citizen protection. In traditional citizenship frameworks, such protection is grounded in a set of basic rights that define what citizens are unconditionally entitled to by virtue of their status. The CEFAE document does not articulate specific rights or legal

guarantees that ensure the protection of energy citizens or clean energy for all Europeans.

Generally, scholars acknowledge that the only recognised rights in the context of energy citizenship are statutory consumer rights tied to their roles as energy consumer or producer [37]. This is illustrated in this policy document as well. The only rights that are elaborated in the document are consumer rights with a single reference to the right of consumers to “request a smart meter” [19]. Protection of citizens in the energy transition throughout legal rights is, however, well established within energy justice discussions [42]. These define energy rights based on the reframing of energy systems as human systems integral to daily life, rather than mere technological grids [43] and characterise energy as a necessity, not as a commodity [14]. Conceptualising energy as such gravitates the concept toward the sphere of human rights and highlights responsibilities of public bodies in safeguarding energy access and safety for all [37]. Important to note here is that considering energy as integral to all citizens’ lives, energy rights should be understood as part of citizenship constitutions rather than as a distinct feature of energy citizenship. This perspective, already present in current debates in the energy citizenship scholarship, raises the question of whether all citizens, by virtue of energy being a necessity rather than a commodity, aren’t inherently already energy citizens [44]. If so, the allocation of energy rights does not fall exclusively within the domain of energy citizenship but is an integral component of national legal citizenship structures.

3.3. Energy citizenship as public participation

Much of the existing work defining energy citizenship signifies its emphasis on public participation [45]. Official narratives and policy cycles frequently highlight the need for individual behaviour change, promoting citizen involvement in energy efficiency initiatives at both the household and collective levels [14,46]. Some scholars even argue that the vision of an engaged, active citizen is so pervasive that describing energy citizenship as participatory is redundant [45]. This focus is evident in the policy document analysed for this paper. While the dimensions of membership and rights are not strongly emphasised, the participation dimension is prominently present. Public participation involves a set of expectations about citizens’ roles, reflecting the actions that expected from citizens when they voluntarily engage in these roles [35]. The CEFAE document primarily defines energy citizenship through such expected actions that citizens are encouraged to undertake in the energy transition. The EU explicitly promotes an active and central role for energy citizens. They define this role almost exclusively through empowering citizens to make informed consumer choices and actions that are formulated on the account of citizens are strongly focused on producing, selling, sharing and storing their energy [19]. This empowerment is facilitated through provisions such as improved access to information, transparent energy billing, clearer contracts, the right to request a smart meter, and enhanced investment opportunities [19]. There is a dominant narrative in how the EU formulates the participatory position of energy citizens. It consistently involves rules, mechanisms, or information that enable them to perform specific actions related to energy production or consumption.

Within the document, the scope of the agency allocated to energy citizens is primarily focused on reinforcing their role as energy consumers, emphasising their ability to make independent decisions about their energy consumption and production. The agency articulated for energy citizens is characterised by them “making their own decisions on how to produce or sell energy,” “having more choices in their homes and flexibility to reduce energy use,” or “investing more easily in renewable energy” [19]. Essentially, the agentic space largely relies on other actors creating an unrestricted pathway for energy citizens to make financial decisions concerning their interaction with energy systems and their energy consumption or production.

4. Discussion

Analysing the discourse around energy citizenship in the policy document reveals the inherent conditional nature of the way citizens are invited to be energy citizens by the EU. Unlike the membership and basic rights dimensions, which grant citizenship status unconditionally – regardless of an individual's participation or capacity to do so – the CEFAE document frames energy citizenship exclusively through citizen's responsibilities. In the document, the potential to participate in the energy transition is not extended to all who are consumers of energy (i. e., everyone) but is instead reduced to those who have sufficient resources to meet any mode of participation. Citizens are not energy citizens by right, but solely through their ability to participate. This makes the EU's articulation of energy citizenship inherently exclusive. Research supports this view by stating that those who are 'energy poor' are also those who lack the support to be active energy citizens, given existing injustices and socially structured needs [16]. This approach blurs the distinction between the membership and participation dimension as formulated in conventional citizenship theory, because here, gaining recognition as an energy citizen is entirely dependent on one's participation. Consequently, the democratic essence of citizenship—grounded in the unconditional nature of membership and basic rights—is lost within this conception of energy citizenship. This undermines the EU's self-defined goals for achieving equity and inclusivity in the energy transition.

We recognise that the emphasis on the participatory dimension in the policy document's portrayal of energy citizenship is largely unavoidable, considering the difficulties in effectively establishing the concept within the other two dimensions of Bellamy's framework. The absence of a direct constitutional relationship between the EU and, specifically, energy citizens makes it difficult to apply the notion of membership like in the classical citizenship concept. While calls for basic rights in the realm of energy systems are prevalent, these rights are generally applicable to all citizens rather than being specific to energy citizenship. Employing Bellamy's framework to analyse the underlying citizenship narrative in the EU's approach to energy citizenship still yielded valuable insights into the conditional nature of its articulation in the CEFAE. For individuals to be recognised as energy citizens, they must engage in the specific modes of participation prescribed by the EU. The inevitability of this participatory nature of the 'status' of energy citizenship makes it essential to critically examine participatory arrangements that establish the recognition of energy citizens, in order to better support equity and inclusivity.

The EU expresses a clear intention to include more citizens in the energy transition in a central and active role, however, in concretising what type of citizens energy citizens are invited to be, it formulates an agentic space that is out of reach for many citizens. This results in a performative juxtaposition: while the EU rhetorically encourages a diverse range of citizens to engage as energy citizens, the roles it defines are narrowly framed and exclude those lacking specific capacities or resources. The document's articulation of agency thus limits the recognition of energy citizens to a restricted set of participatory roles. It is essential that the EU takes responsibility for enabling the agency it advocates in the first place, by ensuring that all citizens are provided with opportunities to meaningfully engage as energy citizens.

Within the energy citizenship scholarship, alternative and more inclusive dimensions for recognising citizens have already been coined. Where classical statist approaches to citizenship focus on citizen's legal status and state-based recognition, contemporary perspectives highlight alternative ways through which (energy) citizenship can be enacted and recognised. Expanding beyond conventional dimensions of citizenship like rights, responsibilities and prescribed actions can reveal new ways of defining agency more broadly, thereby also broadening normative understandings of energy citizenship beyond the constraints of neoliberal policy frameworks. For example, Hamann et al. [47], drawing on the concept of psychological citizenship, argue that energy citizenship is

rooted in people's beliefs about their rights. Beyond the formal grant of rights, believing one is entitled to specific rights is in fact a key predictor of political behaviour and collective action [46]. Based on this they define 'psychological energy citizenship' as *"people's belief that they as individuals and as collectives have rights and responsibilities for a just and sustainable energy transition, and their motivation to act upon those rights and responsibilities"* (p. 4). Contrary to traditional approaches, such perspectives prioritise the need for identity and belonging as precursor for recognition of citizens [48]. In their typology of energy citizenship Dunphy et al., [45] included categories of energy citizenship that are both participatory and non-participatory. In the energy access category, three archetypes are defined based on people's limitations in accessing energy, meaning people are recognised as energy citizens without them participating according to a set of bureaucratised virtues. Recognising these citizens as energy citizens, even in the absence of formal participation, allows for, at a minimum, trying to understand the activities and capabilities they enact in interacting with energy systems and what type of policies can eventually be instrumental for this type of 'participation'. Given the integral role of energy and energy systems in our daily lives, energy citizenship should be recognised based on any form of interaction – or even the lack thereof – between individuals, energy and energy systems.

Reimagining the recognition of energy citizens by addressing dimensions like identity and belonging brings this discussion back to the distinction between empirical and normative energy citizenship. Empirical modes of energy citizenship emerge from citizens' mobilisation of individuals or collective action, reflecting a core understanding of agency and self-efficacy originating from citizens themselves. This shifts the recognition of (energy) citizenship from a state-centric to a citizen-driven approach, thereby reimagining how, and by whom, participatory modes in energy transitions might be articulated. It emphasises energy citizens as not merely subjects of state power but as active agents that formulate their own empowerment in energy transitions. For the empowerment of citizens to be genuine and to foster active and inclusive participation, normative constructs of energy citizenship must expand and normalise agency from the perspective of citizens themselves. This would require validating grassroots forms of participation where citizens define their own roles and actions. In contrast to the EU's current articulation of energy citizenship, which inadequately allocates meaningful agency to citizens, integrating grassroots initiatives into policy is crucial to enhance inclusivity and agency within normative frameworks of energy citizenship. True agency is realised when citizens are empowered to determine their roles as energy citizens, with their initiatives and actions subsequently acknowledged and legitimised at the policy level. Energy policy should aim to integrate and recognise empirical expressions of energy citizenship within governmental frameworks for citizen engagement, particularly in how governments invite citizens to participate as energy citizens. This would bring normative conceptualisations of energy citizenship closer to genuine empowerment and agency as articulated and exercised by citizens themselves, on the ground.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ted Limbeek: Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **BinBin J. Pearce:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Udo Pesch:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT 4o to improve readability and correct mistakes in the text. It has not been used for the interpretation and analysis of the data, nor has it been used to draw conclusions. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the

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