

12 Resources and Skills of Low-Income Households to Tackle Energy Poverty in France

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12.1 Introduction

Low-income households, due to socio-economic conditions or housing characteristics, are particularly sensitive to energy environment tensions such as sudden price increases. Moreover, they face difficulties adapting to and coping with them (Bouzarovski et al., 2014). Inequalities in terms of access to resources affect their ability (i.e., their room to manoeuvre) to adjust their practices and cope with adversity.

Energy poverty has been recognised as a systemic issue in many European countries, including France, since the early 2000s, both in academic literature and public policy (Brunner et al., 2010). Several surveys have highlighted the complex interrelationships, such as building quality, and repercussions, such as social well-being and health impact, of energy poverty in individuals' daily lives (Devalière, 2008; Dubois, 2012). Energy poverty is considered a multifaceted problem involving dynamic and interconnected factors (Bouzarovski et al., 2014; Baker, Mould, and Restrict, 2018; Duvoux, 2009; Middlemiss et al., 2018). It encompasses situations in which access to sufficient and “appropriate” levels of energy for heating, lighting, and cooking is not ensured. Energy poverty often arises from a complex interplay of technical and social factors. Some authors (Bouzarovski et al., 2014; Thomson et al., 2016; Walker, 2014) have explored the relationship between building thermal quality, energy consumption, and energy poverty, highlighting the ways in which poor thermal quality can exacerbate difficulties in accessing affordable energy. This chapter builds upon the research of Bartiaux et al. (2018), which proposes a systemic approach to analysing energy poverty as a restriction of multiple capabilities in the context of Belgium. In a similar vein, the present chapter focuses on the French context and aims to identify the various capabilities that individuals may possess or lack in order to cope with fuel poverty. In France, the link between energy and inequality has indeed crystallised around the notion of energy poverty (Villalba & Semal, 2018), which encompasses the barriers to energy consumption and all associated services, making it an exclusionary phenomenon.

In this context, a lived experience of energy poverty approach (Misset & Siblot, 2019) allows us to go beyond concepts of energy poverty in terms of deficiencies by also highlighting the resources and skills available to the most precarious when coping with such a phenomenon. Indeed, several solutions to tackle energy poverty are deployed in everyday life by those who are directly affected. These solutions include energy-saving measures, such as closing doors and windows to prevent heat loss; community-based solutions, such as using mutual support for on-line administrative procedures; sharing resources, such as using a relative's washing machine; and reducing comfort measures, such as staying in a heated public place for several hours.

The aim of the conducted study is to gain insight into the diverse practices of individuals in dealing with energy poverty by examining the perspectives and practices of those directly

affected. The inability to access energy services is not solely an economic issue, but also impacts fundamental aspects of human well-being, including “deprivations of freedom” (Duvoux, 2009). Such deprivation can undermine human dignity by challenging core capacities such as physical integrity or health (Oris, 2009). Capabilities are central to understanding energy poverty. Energy is not an end in itself (Duvoux, 2009), but a crucial means to enable the mobilisation of capabilities. Capabilities refer to the question, “what is this person able to do and be?” (Oris, 2009, p. 39), which is best understood as the ability to convert resources into capabilities. Among the range of potential responses to this question, the focus is on the “ability to develop strategies to overcome constraints and cope with difficulties” (Hitchings & Day, 2011), commonly known as coping strategies.

Therefore, this chapter contributes to the existing literature on energy poverty through the prism of the lived experience of individuals facing energy poverty and the emotional dimension associated with it. While recent literature has explored the concept of capabilities in the context of energy poverty, little attention has been given to valuing the existing capabilities of energy-vulnerable citizens. This study focuses on the resources and skills already present in the households surveyed, with the aim of rethinking public policies based on these findings. While the energy transition has the potential to improve living conditions for all, it also poses risks for the most vulnerable. Therefore, it is important to consider the current experiences of those in energy poverty when thinking about a fair and just transition¹, for all and developing solutions for energy justice (Middlemiss et al., 2019).

This chapter is based on a case study conducted in France among individuals directly affected by energy poverty. Qualitative research was carried out to identify the strategies employed by these individuals to cope with energy poverty. Through in-depth interviews and observations, I was able to grasp the diversity of resources and capabilities available to vulnerable populations.

12.2 Views from the literature

A lived-experience understanding of energy poverty allows us to go beyond viewing it solely as deficiencies and sheds light on the resources and skills available to those who are most vulnerable in coping with it.

In discussing the phenomenon of energy poverty, I adopt a bottom-up approach by providing a precise description of the lived experience. This allows us to capture the discourse of individuals and understand the strategies, emotions, and repercussions of energy poverty in various aspects of daily life such as work, family, education, and health. My work builds on previous research on the lived experience of energy poverty by highlighting the multiple dimensions of resources for dealing with this phenomenon (Chatman, 1996; Giuliani, 2009; Hobfoll, 2001; Middlemiss et al., 2018; Stojilovska et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of energy poverty is commonly understood in terms of three aspects: limited financial resources, energy prices, and the poor energy performance of buildings. However, some authors (e.g., Middlemiss et al., 2019) provide a more systemic perspective by studying the relationships between different factors that influence the likelihood of experiencing energy poverty. These factors include not only people’s life circumstances but also social and political dimensions (Middlemiss & Gillard, 2015).

Recent research highlights the dynamic nature of energy poverty, which is not a fixed determinant but an expression of instability among various elements such as low income and inadequate housing quality, as well as externalities like rising energy prices (Brunner et al., 2010). It is the fluctuating interplay of these elements that allows us to fully grasp the phenomenon. The shifting nature of energy poverty is largely influenced by the instability of individuals’

situations, including economic privilege, family circumstances, health, residential environment, and other factors (Middlemiss et al., 2018).

I place capabilities at the heart of understanding energy poverty, drawing on Day et al.'s (2016, p. 260) definition of energy poverty as "an inability to realise essential capabilities as a direct or indirect result of insufficient access to affordable, reliable and safe energy services, and taking into account available reasonable alternative means of realising these capabilities". Consuming energy provides access to capabilities and services that are essential for individuals to fully participate in society. This perspective adds to the previous discussion by highlighting the importance of capabilities in assessing the impacts of energy poverty beyond just the material aspects of affordability and availability of energy services.

The conceptual framework of capabilities captures the complex relationship between the experience of energy poverty and the capabilities of individuals and how they mutually influence each other (Middlemiss & Gillard, 2015). Understanding the interplay between energy poverty and capabilities is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions that address the multi-dimensional nature of energy poverty and its impacts on individuals' well-being and opportunities. By adopting a capabilities perspective, we can better grasp the nuanced and dynamic nature of energy poverty (Middlemiss, 2022) and develop strategies that promote holistic and sustainable solutions.

Unlike previous scholarly work that has primarily focused on the negative repercussions of energy poverty, which often reduce or disempower individuals (Bartiaux et al., 2018; Duvoux, 2009; Retière, 2003), the current research takes a different approach. In addition to examining the challenges faced by individuals experiencing energy poverty, this study also highlights the capabilities and resources that are available to them through qualitative research (discourse analysis and observation). I, therefore, mobilise the conceptual framework of capabilities while reinscribing their mobilisation in a specific context: temporal and spatial scale, socio-technical framework (energy market, the energy efficiency of the housing stock, etc.) (Lees, 2014). By adopting a more nuanced perspective, this research sheds light on the agency and resilience of individuals facing energy poverty and underscores the importance of recognising and leveraging the strengths and capabilities of these individuals. This approach can inform the development of more empowering and sustainable strategies to address energy poverty and promote social and environmental justice.

I view energy poverty as a dynamic phenomenon (Middlemiss, 2022). Like Jouffe et al. (2015), I adopt a capabilities approach that recognises the significance of social relationships and collective action in the acquisition and utilisation of capabilities rather than relying solely on an individualistic perspective, such as low income or a lack of education. Social relations play a crucial role in shaping access to resources, opportunities, and capabilities, and these factors are crucial for understanding the experience of poverty. In the context of energy poverty, Ibrahim' and Evans' works suggest that it is not enough to focus solely on individual-level factors such as income or energy efficiency in the home. Rather, it is important to consider how social relations and power structures may shape people's access to affordable and reliable energy services and how these factors may interact with other dimensions of poverty and inequality. By taking a more relational approach to energy poverty, we can gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this complex phenomenon.

It is crucial to recognise that resources and skills vary greatly among individuals, shaped by their unique situations and life trajectories. Not everyone is equally equipped to face the challenges associated with energy poverty. While it is important to acknowledge that individuals are capable and competent, it is also important to acknowledge that these competencies may not always be readily mobilised in the face of all challenges, and they may not be equally distributed across societies.

12.3 Context

This chapter is based on the results of a doctoral research project, provides an analysis of the lived experience of energy poverty in France, and therefore situates itself in the context of the Global North. It is important to consider the socio-technical framework and the energy market in France, including the price of energy and the various public action measures that exist, such as financial aid for bill payments and energy renovation. In addition, in France, there are energy-saving awareness programmes targeted towards the most vulnerable population with the objective of “greening the poor” (Malier, 2019; Robert, 2021).

12.3.1 Study area

The European Commission has insisted on the need for a “universal energy service”, that is, a service that “must be provided in all the member states at a reasonable price for all users and guarantee non-discriminatory access conditions” (Day et al., 2016). In Europe, poverty is typically measured using a poverty rate⁵², which is a threshold set at 60% of the median living standard. In Europe, the indicators for identifying the phenomenon are based on ratios measured in terms of energy bill expenditure to income.

Energy poverty in France is primarily identified by the indicator of households whose income per unit of consumption falls below the 3rd income decile, which corresponds to the poorest 30%. In 2022, 10.5% of French households were identified as experiencing energy insecurity, spending more than 8% of their income on energy bills (Tableau de bord de la précarité énergétique – Edition 2022, 2022). Moreover, in France, a subjective indicator, the feeling of cold, is also considered in understanding energy poverty. About 40% of households reporting discomfort from the cold attribute it to poor thermal insulation of their housing, while 36% attribute it to financial limitations. Indeed, 60% of French people have declared reducing heating at home to avoid high bills, as per the National Energy Mediator (*ibid*).

The statistics of the National Observatory of Energy Poverty highlight the proportion of French people affected by the phenomenon through different variables. These include the socio-economic characteristics of households, housing characteristics, and energy practices. According to indicators in France, those most affected by energy poverty are typically individuals who are unemployed, disabled, or living in rented housing, both in social and private markets (constituting 52.6% of households in energy poverty). Other vulnerable groups include single-parent families and foreign households. Energy insecurity in France is predominantly characterised (by the government) by challenges in paying energy bills, with 19.1% of the low-income population reporting unpaid bills in the last 12 months of 2021 or facing difficulties in accessing energy services.

The structural characteristics of buildings and heating conditions play a crucial role in energy consumption. Indeed, electricity is the primary source of Energy, used by a third of the French population, and its cost, along with that of gas more recently, has been steadily increasing for over a decade³.

12.3.2 Research approach

This research was carried out in France between 2016 and 2018, with a sample of low-income households from the first three deciles. The households were diverse in terms of living arrangements, social components, family composition, and professional status.

The methodology employed for this research utilised a mixed qualitative approach, which involved several components: (1) observation and participation in awareness-raising workshops;

(2) longer interviews with professionals and with residents who were facing various challenges related to energy poverty.

This analysis was conducted at two locations in France. The first location was in La Courneuve, a suburb of Paris that has been identified by the local authorities as being affected by energy poverty due to its old and energy-inefficient housing stock. In La Courneuve, the survey was conducted through door-to-door visits with the residents.

The second study area was in Nantes, one of the largest cities in France. Access to the field activities of interest was obtained through the city's social action department (CCAS, Community Centre for Social Action). One activity was the teaching flat, or "energy cafe". Additionally, participation in these collective workshops on energy saving provides an opportunity to meet and interact with individuals who were later interviewed individually to gain a better understanding of their reception and perception of energy advice.

A categorisation of resources and skills was established based on discourse analysis and observation of household practices in energy poverty, as shown in [Figure 12.1](#). This wheel depicts the various barriers and opportunities for the deployment of coping strategies. It maps the different types of resources that were mobilised and observed during the study, illustrating the multidimensional approach to coping strategies. For example, to be able to request financial assistance, multiple types of resources, such as relational, administrative, or territorial resources, could be mobilised. This diagram helps identify the types of resources that are necessary to carry out specific activities related to coping with energy poverty.

12.4 Findings

Individuals facing precarious circumstances deploy a set of strategies in their daily lives to constantly adjust to unstable living conditions, which may include health issues, financial challenges, and residential instability. To provide a concise overview of the diverse resources available to these individuals, [Figure 12.1](#) presents a summary diagram based on examples from the field survey.

It should be noted that a single practice may simultaneously involve the activation of several resources at the same time. For instance, the use of energy meters necessitates physical resources (such as access to an energy meter, as well as socio-linguistical capabilities to understand the data).

Energy poverty is not solely determined by economic and material disparities but also by the social resources that individuals possess. For instance, support from friends and family in tasks like cutting firewood, moving gas bottles, or assisting with administrative procedures can play a significant role in coping with energy poverty. These everyday supports not only challenge the perception of individuals as lacking resources but also highlight the coping strategies employed by the most economically disadvantaged to mitigate the deprivation of access to essential resources.

Possessing social skills has a positive impact on various aspects of an individual's life, including engagement in social groups, the development of emotional bonds with others, and self-confidence. According to Riggio et al. (2020), social skills are crucial in building self-assurance and ease in interaction with others. These skills encompass both social control skills and social expressiveness and are acquired through experiences with peers, influencing interpersonal abilities (Siblot, 2006, p. 339). The authors highlight that the acquisition and deployment of social skills are lifelong. These skills play a significant role in social situations where "role-playing" skills are essential for maintaining social dignity, in other words, "saving face" (Groves et al., 2019). Possessing such skills allows individuals to make a positive first impression and receive favourable judgements from professional counterparts, particularly in evaluative contexts.

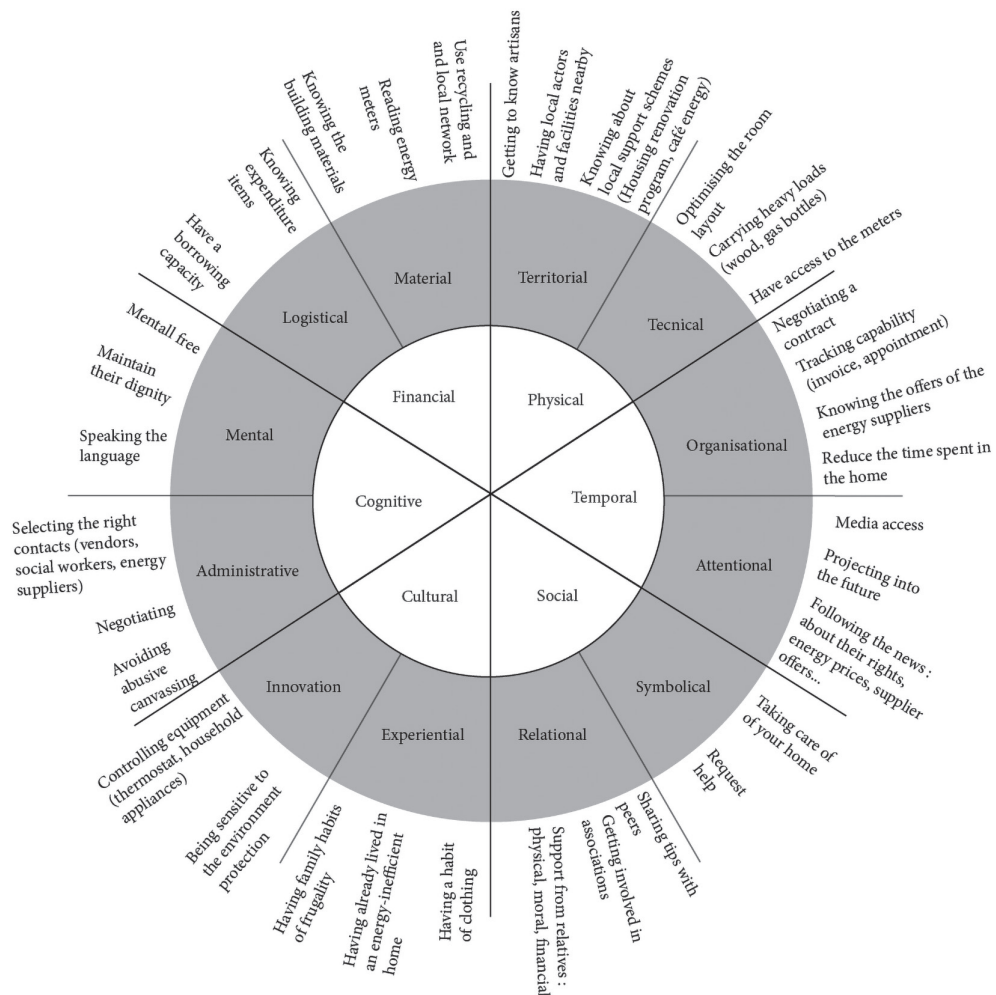


Figure 12.1 Types of resources for dealing with energy poverty.

The use of donated objects is also prevalent among the respondents analysed. However, this can lead to an “energy boomerang” effect (Chard & Walker, 2016), where the satisfaction of receiving donated equipment, such as additional heating, leads to a sense of belonging to consumer society while energy efficiency takes a backseat. Moreover, these individuals may not be able to choose items that best meet their needs, such as those with lower energy consumption.

Resources are also mobilised in accessing rights, namely, the ability to defend oneself or seek help in doing so, which impacts citizenship (Longhurst & Hargreaves, 2019). Non-take-up of social rights is a significant issue in poverty alleviation policies, including those addressing energy poverty. The determinants of non-take-up can be at both the policy and individual levels, where the process may seem complex or time-consuming, for example. At the same time, low-income households may claim their rights when they access public services, such as the right to housing⁴ (Sifres, 2018). For example, one respondent mentioned the support of an associative actor to set up an insalubrity file on her former home and to carry out requests for social housing. This resource person “made her aware of everything that she was entitled to”.

Solidarity networks play a crucial role in times of hardship, as highlighted by Stojilovska et al. (2021). The survey reveals the significance of associative involvement in accessing resources, such as knowledge of aid mechanisms, sharing of tips, moral support, and more. These associative networks serve as important sources of assistance for individuals facing challenging circumstances.

“I do not have a big income, but I am quite independent in my red tape (with welfare service), in all of the following: phone calls, going to see people, meeting people, I am quite sociable so that does not bother me.”

SOPHIE, <1ST INCOME DECILE, 43 YEARS OLD, LOOKING FOR WORK, TENANT OF AN APARTMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, LIVES IN A SHARED APARTMENT IN NANTES

Access to information is a deciding factor, as emphasised by Chauffaut and Dauphin (2012) and Boubaker Nobilet (2017) in the context of social groups, underlining the influence of belonging to a social group. I concur with this perspective, viewing it in terms of “informational poverty” or wealth, which relates to the ability to access, process, and use information. Some respondents in the survey keep a variety of leaflets or guides to retain relevant information, particularly for future use. This requires the ability to sort through diverse information sources, prioritise documents, and project future needs addressed by these leaflets. Such resources prove valuable in navigating the energy market (Fawcett & Boardman, 2009, p. 234), especially in negotiating contracts with energy suppliers, where administrative resources are mobilised for comparing offers. For instance, one respondent mentioned conducting their “own market research” on regulated tariffs and commercial offers.

Commitment to association and participation in social life, as highlighted by Riggio et al. (2020), fosters the development of communicative resources, including the ability to express oneself in public. Investing in associations can be a valuable resource in the context of energy insecurity, contributing to the “capital of autochthony” (*ibid*). For instance, two respondents shared how they received mutual aid from their local community. One participant reported learning about specific financial aid programmes through their neighbourhood association, while another respondent mentioned receiving assistance from their neighbour to complete administrative procedures online.

Local anchoring, despite the injunction to mobility for employment and social inclusion (Lee et al., 2021; Vignal, 2016), can offset such pressures. Furthermore, it is not solely the length of time lived in a particular location that determines local integration. Local embeddedness can occur quickly, without any residential seniority. The resources derived from residential seniority are more related to individuals’ investment in mobilising a local network. However, it’s important to note that people’s inner circle can help to improve daily life without necessarily leading to an effective exit from poverty. Local anchorages can serve as a support system for resources, including symbolic ones, for the most vulnerable through donations, the exchange of services, and other means.

The local context also plays a significant role in shaping people’s capabilities. Local anchoring provides resources, particularly symbolic ones, for the most vulnerable. The availability of services and amenities near residential areas is a crucial factor in determining people’s ability to cope with daily challenges. Access to services and amenities, such as second-hand purchasing networks, is facilitated by the presence of accessible service offerings. Living far from services results in time and budget costs to access them, as highlighted by Guirdarlal (Hamilton & Catterall, 2008, p. 39), who underscores the impact of discount supermarkets located close to areas with high levels of precariousness on reducing consumption inequalities.

The proximity, especially in terms of walkability, to essential services such as the post office and customer service agencies of energy suppliers has an impact on the capacity of individuals. The gradual disappearance of local services and physical meeting places contributes to the vulnerability of the most disadvantaged.

In fact, the implementation of dematerialised procedures requires electronic equipment (computer, smartphone) and internet access, resources that are unequally shared.

“In fact, at that time, we still had the possibility to go to EDF, to move. If we had a question to ask, we could ask someone! And not to a wall (...) Now, we can't do that anymore!”

VALERIE, < 1ST INCOME DECILE, 45 years old, INACTIVE, TENANT OF A SOCIAL HOUSING APARTMENT, LIVES ALONE IN LA COURNEUVE

The importance of proximity to a service area is a dimension that was emphasised several times during the interviews. This contributes to a feeling of trust and consideration of not being left out. Geographical distance from institutions and services has a negative impact not only on access to services but also on close relationships with professionals. Valerie is disabled and unable to walk. To apply for energy bill payment assistance (municipal aid), she must make an in-person application at her local council. Since Valerie cannot walk, she has to pay for transport in a medical vehicle.

Understanding energy poverty requires an appreciation of time as a critical resource (Groves et al., 2019). Over time, changes in both individuals' circumstances and their perception of those circumstances can impact their ability to take action (Middlemiss et al., 2018). The households surveyed have experienced many challenges in their life trajectories, all of which have led to moments of vulnerability that have sometimes undermined their confidence in the future. Consequently, the ability to plan ahead or deal with unexpected events becomes a resource that is unequally distributed among individuals, based on their personal experiences.

For some respondents, as for inactive individuals with limited financial resources, the amount of available time may serve as a variable for adjustment. This time can be used to opt for less costly but slower modes of transportation or to schedule the use of household equipment during off-peak hours. Such adjustments can help tailor energy usage to the household's routine, such as heating only when the children return from school. But the time resources are also more solicited for the precarious people who have to accomplish a diversity of administrative steps, for example.

Postponing certain purchases or waiting to turn on the heating until a more cost-effective time can be effective ways to save money. Taking the time to look for a “good deal” and accumulate savings for new equipment can also be beneficial. However, the most vulnerable individuals may find themselves waiting due to various factors, such as lengthy administrative procedures, slower modes of transportation, and so on.

Being attentive to one's budget, consumption, and comfort levels is essential for managing energy usage. However, this level of energy and attention is not evenly distributed across society, with the most vulnerable individuals often bearing a greater mental burden in order to ensure that they are not overspending or wasting energy unnecessarily. These individuals may have limited financial resources and may need to make difficult decisions about how to allocate their limited funds. They may also be dealing with substandard living conditions or a lack of access to basic energy services, which can further exacerbate their mental burden.

“I got up at night to do the accounts huh I'm not kidding!”

NADIA, 3RD INCOME DECILE, 70, RETIRED, HOMEOWNER, LIVES IN NANTES WITH HER HUSBAND

Attention to others (caring) also shapes the way individuals manage their energy consumption (Groves et al., 2019, p. 17). Indeed, individuals with caregiving responsibilities for children or frail individuals adjust their consumption practices by prioritising certain expenditure items and focusing on the comfort of other household members.

This is evident during the Christmas period, where individuals use illuminations to please children, whereas during the rest of the year, they pay more attention to the lights (Chard & Walker, 2016). This underscores the importance of recontextualising resources and skills in relation to specific contexts (seasonality, religion).

The maintenance of dignity is observed in personal narratives as well as in the presentation of oneself and one's home to others. This management of appearance is a strategic process (Groves et al., 2019; Siblot, 2006, p. 352) that involves avoiding negative judgements, such as being perceived as cheap, a bad house guest, or a bad parent (Chevallier, 2012; Goffman, 1973). The institutional biographical injunction⁵ (Fawcett & Boardman, 2009) also calls for the activation of resources on the part of the individuals concerned to put their experiences into words. Those who are more familiar with social action tend to be more comfortable with the exercise and are able to take advantage of existing mechanisms to either mask or highlight certain living conditions, depending on the audience.

"Being active" is a way to avoid being perceived as "assisted" and to meet the expectation of being "proactive" (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993, p. 80). This enables individuals to differentiate themselves from those who are perceived as disengaged or passive. According to Misset and Siblot, volunteering is particularly important for working-class individuals, but its relevance depends on the context. Volunteer work can serve both civic and social purposes and lead to the development of specific social practices. For individuals who are experiencing precariousness, the act of "giving of one's time" can serve as a source of support (2019, 88).

Low-income households often rely on coping skills at a moral and psychological level to maintain their dignity and self-worth (Groves et al., 2019). Individuals adapt their practices based on what they deem acceptable, often using the "least worst" logic. This resilience also involves embracing frugality and reducing their needs to gain greater control over their material and financial environment one must negotiate. Participating households demonstrate skills in "knowing how to live" through the daily management of their home, using do-it-yourself or sewing skills to improve their domestic comfort. They show ingenuity and resourcefulness in repurposing household objects to cope with sensations of cold and drafts, using them in new and unconventional ways, such as making draught excluder of old clothes.

12.5 Discussion and conclusion

Coping with energy poverty is an ordeal in which individuals mobilise resources based on their lived experience and the previous challenges they have faced. In this sense, it does not contribute to the empowerment of individuals. On the contrary, the constrained framework in which the practices of energy consumption or budget management are carried out hinders the mobilisation of their resources and skills. In a constrained situation, individuals deploy their resilience and adaptation capacities by mobilising available psychological and emotional resources. Resources and skills both play a crucial role in shaping energy consumption practices, and their value can vary depending on the society and culture in which they are situated (Ibrahim, 2013). This means that access to resources and the ability to acquire certain skills are highly dependent on social and cultural factors. For instance, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may have limited access to financial resources or the education necessary to develop certain skills, while those from more privileged backgrounds may have easier access to such resources and skills.

This understanding of the social and cultural situatedness of resources and skills is important in the context of fuel poverty, as it can help explain why certain groups may be more vulnerable to energy poverty than others.

This chapter highlights the dual reading of capabilities, in that they can be both a support for emancipation and help fight against energy poverty thanks to their mobilisation. They can also be reduced and constrained during limited access to energy services. As Middlemiss and Gillard (2015, p. 227) point out concerning the link between social relations and energy poverty, these resources can “both enable access to energy services, and be a product of such access”.

Recognising that individuals are capable and competent does not mean that these skills are mobilised in the face of all challenges, nor does it mean that skills are equally distributed among individuals. Resources are unevenly distributed with respect to social class, gender, age, or socio-professional category (Gillard et al., 2017; Pellicer-Sifres et al., 2021). As such, not everyone has the same room for manoeuvre to deal with challenges and situations. Individuals are also constrained by a material and technical environment. The environment conditions the “possibility of”, in addition to the “competence to”. Being competent is not enough.

It is also necessary to deconstruct the projection made by institutions and professionals, as policymakers but also street-level bureaucrats, of the resources and skills of the most precarious. Indeed, if institutional discourses participate in the promotion of a daily ecology largely based on “small gestures”, it is advisable to recall that these are already practices anchored in the lifestyles of the most precarious. These individuals already mobilise resources and skills to save energy. By deconstructing the resources deployed to deal with energy poverty, it is then possible to identify potential blockages or, conversely, points of support using the logic of empowerment.

The lived experience approach has allowed us to highlight the multidimensional nature of the resources involved. It also underlines the diversity of domains where positive repercussions can be observed during the deployment of energy poverty measures, including the fight against social isolation, access to rights, and symbolic valorisation of applied knowledge. Our results underline the importance of acting on different resources in order to improve public action instruments. These include the improvement of mobility options such as the public transport network, the maintenance of physical resource spaces in local areas, and action against social isolation. Public action must focus on providing conditions conducive to the deployment of individuals’ resources, in addition to improving material and technical conditions. To create effective public policies that promote social and energy justice (Bartiaux et al., 2021; Misset & Siblot, 2019), it is important to have a deep understanding of people’s everyday lives. This includes understanding their daily routines, their access to resources and services, and the challenges they face. Only by understanding people’s lived experiences can policymakers create policies that will truly address their needs and promote fairness and energy justice.

Notes

- 1 By “just transition” I mean considering the impact on different social groups so as not to impact them negatively in the various changes in the energy transition. The goal is to interweave social justice and environmental transition objectives. See [Chapter 1](#) for more details on this issue.
- 2 In France, the standard of living of individuals corresponds to household income divided by consumption units (1 unit for the first adult, 0.5 for the second adult and 0.3 for children under 14).
- 3 This rise in electricity prices is the result of a combination of various factors related to economic and political circumstances (promotion of renewable energies), investments in infrastructure (almost half of the French nuclear fleet being non-operational during the winter of 2022–2023), as well as changes in the energy market (price fluctuations due to supply and demand, production costs, energy policies, and geopolitical developments).

- 4 In France, “right to housing” is included in the law since 2007, understood as the obligation of the courts to protect this right and to find a place for families to stay in an adequate home.
- 5 In other words, a form of narration of one’s history, one’s path, and the difficulties encountered, adjusted for an agent of the institution. This autobiography is translated into “the internalization of the norms promoted by the institution” (Duvoux, 2009).

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