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Decarbonisation and its discontents: A critical justice perspective on four low-carbon transitions

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What are the types of injustices associated with low-carbon transitions? Relatedly, in what ways do low-carbon transitions worsen social risks or vulnerabilities? Lastly, what policies might be deployed to make these transitions more just? The presentation answers these questions by first elaborating an "energy justice" framework consisting of four distinct dimensions—distributive justice (costs and benefits), procedural justice (due process), cosmopolitan justice (global externalities), and recognition justice (vulnerable groups). It then examines four European low-carbon transitions—nuclear power in France, smart meters in Great Britain, electric vehicles in Norway, and solar energy in Germany—through this critical justice lens. In doing so, it draws from original data collected from 64 semi-structured interviews with expert participants as well as five public focus groups and the monitoring of twelve internet forums. It documents 120 distinct energy injustices across these four transitions. It then explores two exceedingly vulnerable groups to European low-carbon transitions, those recycling electronic waste flows in Ghana, and those mining for cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The presentation aims to show how when low-carbon transitions unfold, deeper injustices related to equity, distribution, and fairness invariably arise.

Join in ZOOM **passcode: cesr2021**

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Dr. Benjamin K. Sovacool is Professor of Energy Policy at the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU) at the University of Sussex Business School in the United Kingdom. There he serves as Director of the Sussex Energy Group. Professor Sovacool works as a researcher and consultant on issues pertaining to global energy policy and politics, energy security, energy justice, climate change mitigation, and climate change adaptation. More specifically, his research focuses on renewable energy and energy efficiency, the politics of large-scale energy infrastructure, designing public policy to improve energy security and access to electricity, the ethics of energy, and building adaptive capacity to the consequences of climate change.

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The Center for Engineering Sustainability and Resilience convenes diverse thinkers across Northwestern and beyond to accelerate the development of ideas, technologies, and people to attack the massive challenge of environmental degradation.