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Practices and acts of energy citizenship

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ABSTRACT

Both academic and political discussion on energy citizenship have, to a high degree, focused on participation of enthusiastic and knowledgeable citizens as a catalyst for energy system transformation. Likewise, discussion on energy democracy calls for increased and informed public participation in the energy system and its transition. However, to better understand the dynamics of citizen participation in the energy transition, we need to understand the non-constructive side of citizenship as well as the complexity of democratic processes. In this article, we build on research with housing cooperatives in Finland as emerging energy communities to discuss alternative and complementary forms of energy citizenship and their role in developing better energy democracy. We focus on acts of citizenship to illustrate these various forms of participation, which include active resistance towards policy agendas, such as sustainable energy initiatives, in the processes of collective decision making. Moreover, we employ a practice-theoretical approach to picture the interconnectedness of decision making and everyday life, having implications for performing energy citizenship. Our framework broadens the concept of energy citizenship and discusses the implications of these various forms of participation for energy democracy.

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1. Introduction

The transition of the energy system, i.e. the established ways of producing, distributing and consuming energy in the present societies towards carbon neutrality, involves more than substituting fossil fuels with renewable energy. It implies a transformation in collective, shared practices of governing and managing the energy system and the emergence of new social roles (e.g. Ryghaug & Skjølsvold, 2021; Schot et al., 2016). In recent years, the notion of ‘energy citizenship’ (EC), in which the public and the people are conceived as active rather than passive stakeholders in energy system evolution, has gained growing attention both in policy developments and academic literature (e.g. Pel et al., 2021). EC has also gained centrality in the existing governance frameworks, providing legal and technical definitions for the operation of citizen energy communities (e.g. EC, 2019). Relatedly, the concept of ‘energy democracy’ (ED) has proliferated in Europe and globally in reference to ongoing energy transitions and their directions and aims to facilitate broader public participation in energy policy and governance (Nadesan et al., 2023).

The existing literature, however, carries a rather restrictive and predetermined understanding of EC, which might not capture the full scope of the emerging change and various roles and actions within it and might even limit the meaningful ways of engagement in the transition (Lennon & Dunphy, 2023; Silvast & Valkenburg, 2023). This impacts the policy-relevant conclusions and formulation of future visions on the energy transition. If we look at theoretical developments in citizenship studies and broader research on democracy, we realise

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that defining citizenship only in terms of positive or progressive contributions to the ongoing processes quickly becomes problematic. In this article, we provide a sympathetic critique on the literature on EC and ED and propose potential means of expanding EC into a more analytically powerful and broadly applicable concept. This expansion happens in two directions. Following Isin (2009), we focus on *acts of citizenship*, the actual things citizens do in democratic settings – whether constructive or reactive in nature. We also focus on the level of social practices (e.g. Warde, 2005) – the more routine and mundane ways of performing EC in relation to consumption and everyday life. This conceptual reworking of EC allows us to look at both the more salient democratic acts for and against sustainable energy projects as well as connect them to the level of everyday consumption and the morality that lies behind it.

The context of citizenship in this study is with Finnish housing cooperatives as existing urban communities engaged in energy transitions. Housing cooperatives,¹ with annual meetings for homeowners and boards chosen yearly to run the cooperative, create democratic arenas for energy-related decision making. They provide an interesting context to study EC and ED, as they allow us to see how EC is performed as part of the existing democratic processes within the communities, where energy has traditionally generated little interest. Although the technical details of the system are specific to Finland, in practical terms, governance and common ownership are mechanisms that can, to a degree, be found in almost all countries (e.g. Ruonavaara, 1993; Treffers & Lippert, 2020).

The article starts with a brief review of the literature on EC and ED. We then introduce the theoretical framework of our approach and provide some examples and suggestions for broadening the existing conceptualisation of EC. We suggest that EC is not solely driven by the presumption of a rationally and calculatedly acting liberal individual that willingly follows market incentives, environmental signals, techno-scientific imaginaries, or other available policy scripts. Rather, we need to expand the vocabulary and scope of our analyses to touch on both: (a) EC that is connected to everyday *practices* of managing energy use in the home and building, and (b) the actual *acts* that constitute EC, whether constructive or reactive in nature. Finally, we summarise the discussion with lessons on current energy transition policies.

2. Energy citizenship and energy democracy – a brief review of literature

In this section, we briefly outline the concepts of EC and ED, as well as the more general principles of citizenship and democracy underlying these concepts. We also discuss some critical comments brought up in the literature regarding EC and ED, especially from the perspective of community engagement and participation in democratic processes.

Politically, one of the traditional ways of understanding citizenship has been as status: it signifies identity and membership in a political body, such as the state, carrying with it both rights, such as the right to vote as means of political participation, and duties, such as the responsibility to observe laws. Economically, and notably in the energy system, citizens are viewed as economic actors ‘voting with their wallets’. Their participation in society is based on their role as consumers, having the educational, organisational, financial, property and time resources to manage their energy use (Lennon et al., 2020). As noted by, for example, Becker and Naumann (2017), the current centralised energy systems are not structured to give agency or power to their users, leading to disconnection of citizens in relation to energy policy. The ‘out of sight, out of mind’ energy policies, institutions, and technologies (as described by Devine-Wright, 2007) have limited the opportunities for public engagement with the energy system (Nadesan et al., 2023).

Challenging this idea of passive end user, and drawing on environmental citizenship, Devine-Wright (2007, p. 77) sees energy citizens as active participants in the energy system, who can:

feel positive and excited about new energy technologies rather than apathetic and disinterested; be aware rather than ignorant of the scale of its potential impacts on political institutions, the environment, and everyday lifestyles; and be willing to engage not just as individuals but as collectives in shaping technological change at local, regional, and national levels.

Rather than merely following a set of legal obligations and entitlements ‘from above’, or consumerism (van Veelen & van der Horst, 2018), *energy citizenship* conjoins material and non-deliberative forms of

participation, as the shift to decentralised and distributed energy systems will likely make energy production and decision making a more mundane matter for a growing number of people (Devine-Wright, 2007; Mullally et al., 2018; Ryghaug et al., 2018). Chilvers and Longhurst (2016), among others, have suggested moving beyond the deliberative-individualist or citizen-consumer dichotomies to define more constructive understandings of EC, the complex relationships between people and energy technologies and the different roles people can adopt as, for example, energy producers, consumers, prosumers, supporters, and protesters. These relational roles also entail citizen positioning under the broader umbrella of *energy democracy*.

The participation of citizens in the political steering of the energy transition is strongly included in the ED agenda, which is associated with the increased role of individual prosumers, energy cooperatives, not-for-profit organisations, and the public sector, emphasising the redistributive aspects of energy production and consumption, participation, and environmental sustainability (Szulecki, 2018). Thus, ED has a normative agenda for greater inclusivity, equity, and legitimacy as well as more pragmatic aspects, as decentralising economic and political power to control energy systems and developing new organisations and ownership models serves the public interest and delivers community benefits outside the energy system, such as increased employment (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Burke & Stephens, 2017, 2018).

The concepts of EC and ED are thus tightly connected yet not congruent. The question of citizenship is particularly important for democracy, as the legitimacy of democratic governance depends on the extent to which democratic structures and practices are recognised and supported by citizens (van Veelen & van der Horst, 2018). ED emphasises many of the normative commitments, such as sustainability and justice, which get lost in the pragmatic notions of EC (Pel et al., 2021). Both concepts have included questions of ‘humanising’ the energy transition by exploring new ways of thinking about public engagement and participation, going beyond more traditional forms of governance (Wahlund & Palm, 2022). Both concepts open the possibility of conceiving participation not solely in deliberative but also material forms, which raises questions on the changing boundaries between the public and private spheres (Ryghaug et al., 2018; van Veelen & van der Horst, 2018). This is particularly apparent in the ways a prosumer is being described as an ‘ideal typical citizen of energy democracy’ (Szulecki, 2018, p. 22) who participates in the energy transition both by engaging in political action and via material engagements of energy provision (e.g. Campos & Marín-González, 2020).

Although both concepts of EC and ED are increasingly accepted, they remain somewhat underdefined (e.g. Dunphy & Lennon, 2022; Pel et al., 2021). ED, for example, may be seen as a process, an outcome, and a normative goal (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Szulecki & Overland, 2020; Wahlund & Palm, 2022). There are also various narratives of energy citizens, which see the citizens in a different manner, from ill-informed recipients of information to members of communities and participants in the decision making across governance levels (Dunphy & Lennon, 2022). Our review raises further questions regarding the individualisation in EC, ED as part of broader democratic processes and the role of consumption and everyday life for EC, which we discuss next.

The first criticism is related to the responsibility of transition to individual citizens and local communities. As described above, ED ideally implies a particular form of EC that is expressed through the leveraging of resources such as personal finance, material assets such as the roof of one’s house and manual and organisational labour (e.g. Van Veelen, 2018). These discussions of ED and EC remain centred on prosumers and energy communities as sources for change, undermining the role of the state, incumbent energy companies and other actors in creating conditions that foster local engagement (Pel et al., 2021). Moreover, this kind of participation can lock in and reinforce existing inequalities, as people who have the time and (financial or socio-cultural) resources to participate in the energy transition tend to be already privileged (Szulecki & Overland, 2020). In the studies by Ryghaug et al. (2018) on solar PV, smart-home systems and electric cars, the new energy practices are situated in established, middle-class ways of living, emphasising the situatedness of certain types of EC and their development. Silvast and Valkenburg (2023) even describe prosumerism as an ‘elitist phenomenon’, disregarding the age, socio-economic positions, gender, and ethnicity of the expected energy citizens. Although energy prosumers and communities contribute directly to the democratisation of energy in their immediate local contexts by more decentralised processes of energy production and decision making, the national political contexts remain instrumental to ED due to the governance of market

regulations, national grids and support instruments that set boundary conditions for access to the energy system (Keahey et al., 2023; Silvast & Valkenburg, 2023).

Second, as argued by, for example, Szulecki and Overland (2020) and Lennon and Dunphy (2023), how energy democratisation plays out in practice might have unpredictable and counterintuitive effects that go against the good intentions of increased participation. Widening ownership does not necessarily equate to more shared control, and the ideals of inclusive and participatory decision making can be at odds with the practicalities of meeting them (e.g. Becker & Naumann, 2017; Parag et al., 2013; Van Veelen, 2018). Citizens may, for a variety of reasons, have insufficient willingness, motivation, or capabilities to participate with energy production and decision making, even despite the financial savings implied in the energy system change (Burke & Stephens, 2018). Moreover, there is no natural connection between engaging with novel technologies and endorsing low-carbon transitions (Silvast & Valkenburg, 2023), and decentralised energy production does not necessarily uphold environmentally responsible practices (Keahey et al., 2023). As many types of local politics in communities such as neighbourhood organisations and housing cooperatives demonstrate, shared interests cannot be taken for granted (Szulecki & Overland, 2020). Agonistic processes of contestation and negotiation are an elementary part of day-to-day, democratic governance despite efforts towards cooperation and consensus-building (Van Veelen, 2018). This highlights the need to navigate between various ideals and realities of democratic processes, of which ED is a part of, and to provide room for different ways to perform EC in communities and in everyday life.

The third issue we want to raise is related to consumption and everyday life, which has gained little attention in EC literature (van Veelen & van der Horst, 2018; Wahlund & Palm, 2022). Historically, citizenship has been defined through a series of exclusions based on, amongst others, gender, race, and class. For example, women were long excluded from civic participation. These divides have implications on the ways energy consumption in private spaces and domestic work have been left much unnoticed in the discussion on EC (Bell et al., 2020; Lennon et al., 2020). While the understanding of consumers solely as economic actors provides a rather narrow account of consumption – limiting it to the monetary transaction and passive reception of energy services – the sociological approach to consumption as a critical part of socially shared practices steers the attention to what energy is used for. Questions such as how energy use is tied with interconnected everyday practices and related gender and power dynamics and infrastructures come to fore (Shove & Walker, 2014; Warde, 2005). For example, several studies have shown how the shared ideas of cleanliness, care and representability have an impact on energy consumption for washing laundry and how, in turn, the ideas of sufficiency and sustainability can be introduced in everyday practices in homes, making consumption less energy intensive (Godin et al. 2020; Sahakian et al., 2021). Empowerment of citizens, or consumers, to question the social norms, conventions and expectations underpinning mundane energy use and to normalise less-energy-intensive ways of living without necessarily engaging with novel technologies or systems of energy provision might allow for the development of new notions of EC, recognising the need for wider societal and structural changes.

These issues bring up the question of who counts as an ‘energy citizen’ (Silvast & Valkenburg, 2023). While prosumers are considered ideal types of energy citizens, less attention has been given to people who are not or do not want to be involved – the so-called ‘silent majority’ (Pesch, 2019). Construing energy citizens as politically engaged citizens, environmentally conscious consumers or citizens collaborating in energy communities provides a rather narrow and even exclusive account of participation (Pel et al., 2021). EC should thus be understood as a ‘continuum of expressions’ in both public and private aspects of life (Dunphy & Lennon, 2022), which challenges the current understanding of EC.

3. Broadening the concept of energy citizenship: acts and practices

To broaden our ways of analysing EC, this section highlights the need to understand the specific *acts* where citizenship is enacted and the routinised everyday *practices* of citizenship. For a more comprehensive understanding of EC as a dynamic process rather than a static feature, it is crucial to pay attention to how the two performances of citizenship are interconnected.

Isin and Nielsen (2008) suggest that, instead of focusing on actors and their statuses, the analysis of citizenship should focus on concrete acts producing citizens (see also Luhtakallio et al., 2024). This move shifts the focus from membership categories (e.g. belonging to a particular state) and from what people say (e.g. opinions, perceptions, or attitudes) to what people do: the encounters, performances, and enactments. At the core of ‘acts of citizenship’ is the process: a shift from the question ‘who is the citizen’ to ‘what makes the citizen’ (Isin, 2009, p. 383; see also Andrijasevic, 2013; Wood & Kallio, 2019). This approach attempts to overcome the limits of the dualistic mode of thinking of citizenship as an either-or question (i.e. dividing people to citizens and non-citizens, or active and passive citizens). It also opens possibilities for a broader understanding of participation, complementing the traditional forms of participation through, for example, deliberation, consultation, and mobilisation with practices that traditionally might not have been seen as performances of (energy) citizenship, such as knowledge production and acts of resistance (Rasch & Köhne, 2016).

Taken to the context of the energy transition, focusing on acts of citizenship steers the attention to how (energy) citizenship is mediated between lived experiences and formal entitlements to map out, confine, extend, name, and enact the boundaries of belonging to a (energy) polity (cf. Andrijasevic, 2013). The key issue is to examine the process and the acts through which new actors emerge and the contradictions and paradoxes become visible. In the context of energy transitions, this opens space for detecting the ways in which those who do not consider themselves, or are not considered by others, as energy citizens can act as ones. It might also help us to recognise that not all acts of EC are positive in nature (Silvast & Valkenburg, 2023). Following Neveu (2002), we must be able to use our conceptual tools to also understand actors who hinder what we think is the general interest – in this context, the energy transition. It is far too easy to picture actors knowingly acting against renewable energy on a community level for us to totally forgo this possibility in our conceptual tools. If we focus on acts, we can also begin to include this kind of ‘negative energy citizenship’ and possibly find answers to the problems it poses. Rosanvallon (2008) has written about exercising ‘veto-rights’ as crucial ways of performing citizenship (see also Eranti, 2023).

Resistance is not a new topic in the literature on energy transitions. Bosch and Schmidt (2020), for instance, provide examples of the resistance of the German *Energiewende*, and similar examples can be found in many countries. They describe the development of an ‘energy underclass’ of residents who feel excluded from decision making in politically powerless and peripheralised areas. This topic is also strongly present in the energy justice literature, as the parity in energy access and use has been countered by dynamics where the cost and availability of energy are becoming increasingly volatile, putting the future – and even present-day – citizens in highly different positions (Jenkins et al., 2018). The roots of energy justice discourses can be found in the American labour union movement in the 1980s, which included seeking to influence the distribution of benefits and harms within energy systems and advocating the recognition of coal workers in transition (Healy & Barry, 2017). This history shows how the conceptual debate over participation and justice is embedded in the broader discussion on societal roles and materially constituted practices. These examples illustrate the multitude of ways people can act, or decide not to act, in energy transition. Indeed, opening up and extending understandings of participation with respect to energy decision making and knowledge production have a crucial part to play within the context of a just energy transition, showing how local action is not always positive as well as the existing struggles within energy communities (Forman, 2017).

Huttunen et al. (2020, p. 202; see also Dunphy & Lennon, 2022) note how environmental citizenship ‘becomes’ in multiple mundane actions that do not necessarily take place only in relation to the state. Citizenship and the subjectivity it entails are both constrained and enabled in relation to a particular time and space, as well as other people (Pel et al., 2021). Citizenship thus involves addressing the variety of ways that human beings organise, remake, and resist their ethical-political relations with others and redefine their ways of being political – being a citizen. Acts of EC can thus be studied from the perspective of social practice theories and their focus on both doings and sayings that make the practice (e.g. Shove & Walker, 2014) – as well as on the habitualised nature of this action. These routinised practices, and the acts that follow from them, can be seen from a broad Habermas (1989) perspective as a way of re-enacting a certain kind of moral citizenship: through these acts, a kind of normative vision of what is good (energy) citizenship becomes visible. Social actors are,

however, intersected by many different practices that can carry different, and even conflicting, notions of appropriate and expected ways to act (Warde, 2005), and performances of practices contain constant negotiation of and balancing between these notions, as shown, for example, in studies on indoor thermal comfort (Laakso et al., 2021).

The action-focused understanding of environmental citizenship can thus enable wider inclusivity and a more diverse understanding of what citizenship is about and the ways EC is performed in situated practices of both energy service provision and consumption (Becker & Naumann, 2017; Fadaee, 2017). We can outline two ways of looking at EC that broaden the scope of the concept and its analytic potential beyond the more traditional engaged active citizens. The first is the focus on acts and with it the possibility of including resistance towards energy transitions in the analysis of EC. The second is the practice-level normativity of moral citizenship – of acting in a ‘right’ way that produces everyday acts of EC. Moreover, as our examples below will show, EC can take forms that involve both acts and practices, while being embedded in the very mundane ways of community engagement and democratic participation.

4. Performing energy citizenship – examples from Finnish housing cooperatives

In this section, we discuss the potential means of expanding the energy citizen definition and scope to meet changing conditions on political participation in the current energy transition. We further develop our argument by providing illustrative examples on the highly institutionalised setting of Finnish housing cooperatives and how EC is performed in the context of everyday life, collective action and decision making in housing cooperatives. Because of the transition away from combustion-based technologies in cities and the national policies to incentivise energy retrofits and dispersed energy production in the housing sector, many housing cooperatives are turning into energy communities with decisions regarding technology investments and daily energy practices more frequently on their agendas.

The examples are derived from interviews with residents (N = 23), board members (N = 23) and housing managers (N = 4) from eight Finnish housing cooperatives in Helsinki, Vantaa, and Joensuu. All housing cooperatives had engaged with retrofitting actions aiming at energy efficiency, such as smart metering and control for heat demand response, and thus had recent experience of energy-related decision making. Our aim was not to evaluate these projects as such, but engagement in the projects was rather seen as an indicator for interest towards, and experience in, sustainable energy solutions, in line with the energy community or prosumer approach of energy citizenry. The semi-structured interviews took place between December 2019 and May 2020 in person or, after the COVID-19 breakdown, by video conferencing tools. The interviews discussed personal engagement with energy and main sources of information; the most recent and planned energy renovations and activities; the collaboration and communication within housing cooperatives and with other actors; and the available information, financial or other support (for further details, see Laakso & Lukkarinen, 2022).

We offer three examples. The first illustrates the more traditional view of EC as active citizens engaged in energy use and carbon footprint reduction and actively participating in related decision making – or at least being present to passively approve decisions. The second highlights that acts of EC can also be negative and counter-productive by showing local community resistance to sustainable energy retrofits. Finally, the third highlights the everyday level of social practices in EC.

4.1. Example 1: active energy citizenship

Some of the residents who took part in our interviews can be described as ‘feel[ing] positive about new energy technologies’, following the definition of EC by Devine-Wright (2007, p. 77). As one of the housing managers described, there are active residents who suggest that there should be, for example, motion sensors installed for stairwell lights, and these lights should be replaced with LED lights. However, there are also less technologically oriented yet aware residents paying attention to energy use in the building, as illustrated by an example from one of the housing managers: ‘There was an old lady who had used her own thermometer to measure the

temperature in the storage rooms, and she said how the temperature was 23 degrees. Some of the residents even called for opportunities for more active EC, such as *'more concrete advice on what to do, as a shareholder in the housing cooperative, and as a resident, to decrease one's carbon footprint'*. These examples illustrate the desire for acting in a 'right' manner with more frugal ways of living that are better in balance with the environment and by engaging with the material conditions they currently have, rather than by investing in new technologies. Yet, they also illustrate how the responsibility of sustainable energy initiatives cannot be put solely on individuals – even active ones – as they need to be realised by the boards and housing managers.

Active participation in energy issues was, at least to some degree, related to the collectivity in the housing cooperative. Some of the interviewees noted how it was easy to bring up ideas and get their opinions heard if the neighbours knew each other, and there were other collective, and informal, actions in addition to annual meetings. For some, just showing up to the meetings and keeping up with what was going on was enough, and it was considered valuable by those who were making the decisions in the boards, as described by one of the board members:

[In evening meetings for the residents] some people are very active, but most people just sit and listen. It does not mean that everyone should be loud, it is just those active people asking questions and even criticizing. But most people mainly listen, and it is also important that they are there to be informed.

This highlights the role of the community in bringing up energy citizens and how energy-relevant participation could be related to many other issues and broader democratic engagement. Relying on the representative form of political action and allocating power to those representing the residents in the board of the housing cooperative could be seen as an act of EC, where the own agency is given to someone else considered to make better use of it. The mere participation of the 'silent majority' (Pesch, 2019) can be seen as an act of support for the energy action. And naturally, some of the actors for whom the power is delegated might act in a manner that is detrimental to overall goals of energy transition.

What these examples show is that, even within the more-or-less active energy citizens, most of the time the technologies involved are not novel – the actual energy initiatives can be far from radical. An old-fashioned thermometer or window insulation might be enough to perform EC, while simply showing up to the meetings can signal acceptance towards energy initiatives and other decision making of the housing cooperative. Moreover, some of the interviewed residents were active in energy issues outside the 'formal roles' of the housing cooperatives, in which they adopted a rather passive role, as they, for example, crowdfunded solar PV owned by the municipal energy company. In other words, they had to change the register of EC depending on the social context and between the situations from private, active prosumerism to passive acceptor over collective decisions. People can thus have both active and passive ways of acting as energy citizens, depending on the context.

4.2. Example 2: resistant and counteractive energy citizenship

The main way to perform EC that was raised in our interviews was to participate in the annual meetings of the housing cooperative and take part in energy-related decision making through this traditional way of prosumerism or allocate the responsibility for action to the elected board of representatives. The annual meetings were seen as an important forum for discussion but also too formal and distancing, with limited room for new ideas and suggestions. Some of the interviewed residents made the decision to not participate in shared activities and decision making in the housing cooperative, thus giving their power over energy and other issues to someone else.

On the level of acts, in the annual meetings, some residents were in active resistance towards energy renovations. Especially the investors (who own flats without living in the building) or those owning bigger apartments (and hence holding more shares) could be influential in preventing any improvements they considered 'unnecessary'. There is a juxtaposition between residents who rent and those who own the property. Those not living in an apartment they own are not always interested in initiatives to improve the quality of living, such as investments in balancing the heating or improvements in lighting. However, they are the ones making the

investment decisions, whereas the residents renting their apartments have no right to participate in the meetings. This makes an interesting case from the perspective of energy justice and excluding citizens from (energy) democracy.

Some of the interviewees acting in housing cooperatives' boards described residents as 'brakes', not having enough knowledge about or interest in energy issues to be able to make reasoned decisions. As one of these interviewees described, in one annual meeting '*a less-knowledgeable shareholder opened their mouth, raising a wave of conservatism, and the board was basically restricted to doing nothing [about the ground-source heat project]*'. The reasons for resistance varied from not wanting to spend money any more than necessary to doubts regarding novel and unfamiliar technologies, illustrating how the present energy system has become disconnected from citizens and their everyday practices (see also Lennon et al., 2020). Yet, if a resident actively blocks investing in energy improvements within their community in a democratic decision-making process, an act of citizenship of some kind was quite clearly performed. Often, resistance was not only individual resistance but also mobilising other households to resist the planned projects. This was naturally frustrating for those in favour of energy improvements in the building.

These quotes illustrate how the value of deliberation and of broadening participation is often not acknowledged in housing cooperatives. Allowing room for discussion was seen to only cause quarrel and not lead to anything constructive, even if there could be a possibility for more informed decision making in the actual annual meetings due to these discussions; resistance thus created opportunities for better-informed decisions (cf. Coy et al., 2021). At the same time, more informal and inclusive opportunities for discussion and community building were clearly hoped for, as they were seen as important in building trust, sharing information and finding common ground.

4.3. Example 3: everyday energy citizenship

As shown in the brief literature review above, the concept of EC has partly emerged from the critique towards seeing individuals as mere consumers, and it has been discussed whether consumption can be conceived as an act of citizenship. However, consumption has historically had many political forms, such as Earth Hour encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to turn off non-essential electric lights for one hour as a symbol of commitment to the planet. These forms of non-consuming, i.e. saving energy, have become even more pressing due to the Russian military attack in Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent calls to save energy, for example by turning down heating, by institutions such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) and state energy efficiency company Motiva in Finland.

The practices distancing residents from the energy system were present within the housing cooperatives. For example, one of the board members described how '*[energy] is not a matter of everyday life for the residents*'. This kind of thinking became apparent in both quotes from housing managers, board members and residents, supporting the finding from previous studies that everyday life practices and the ways they are linked to the energy system are often lacking from discussions on EC and ED (e.g. Wahlund & Palm, 2022).

Some of the interviewed residents, however, described themselves as being conscious about saving energy in their homes, although they were not actually 'interested in energy'. This relates to established, frugal habits and the value of 'not wasting any resources', i.e. practicing EC through sufficiency in energy consumption, as described by one of our resident interviewees: '*I'm such an energy saver. I don't even know why because I have energy-saving light bulbs everywhere, but still, I would rather turn them off if I'm not in the room*'. Another interviewee explained how they had checked their energy consumption, compared it with the average consumption and noted how their energy consumption was 'significantly less'. They estimated that the reason was that they did not own 'unnecessary appliances', such as a dishwasher or a washing machine. These are examples of sustainable everyday practices as 'means of self-governance' for individuals to contribute to the energy transition, as described by Wahlund and Palm (2022, p. 4), and as a reflection of the moral grounding of EC – a good energy citizen acts out their everyday energy consumption in a frugal manner.

Some residents recognised the tension between sustainability goals and patterns of their own energy use and discussed the role of policy in steering consumption instead of putting the pressure on individual

consumers – a critical issue in EC and ED research (Lennon & Dunphy, 2023). According to Ryghaug et al. (2018, p. 291), this kind of ‘mundane EC’ begins with a physical, embodied experience, which in turn opens ‘opportunities for connecting to new issues, new concerns, and, through this, new ways of enacting energy citizenship’. Following Dobson (2007), the most important characteristic of environmental citizenship is its public implications, meaning that environmental citizens’ behaviour protects or sustains the environment, and this is also applicable with EC. Within this framework, both private and public actions are considered to have public environmental implications; hence, consumption, or saving energy by non-consumption, should be seen as performing EC in the ‘private sphere’ (cf. Dobson, 2007).

5. Concluding discussion

‘Energy citizenship [...] expresses itself in a multitude of forms, and new forms and expressions are probably invented as we write’ (Ringholm, 2022, pp. 4–5). In this article, we have tried to contribute to this discussion on the forms and expressions of EC by opening both the specific acts of EC and the moral underpinnings of everyday consumption as citizenship to analysis within the EC framework. We believe future research on EC should be able to step forward from the positive participation-centred conceptualisations.

The urgency of the climate crisis and the need for accelerating energy transitions may not offer us the benefit of waiting for the grassroots-driven emergence of EC. Rather, many existing communities are already pressed to rediscover themselves as energy actors with public incentives and obligations, as changes in energy system governance necessitate dispersed energy production, flexibility, and efficiency improvements (see also Pesch, 2019). Thus, looking closer into consequences of creating EC through various forms of participation in different situations, as well as between them, is important. What does EC entail, for example, for those economically less privileged, less interested in technologies or politically disengaged? Or how is the EC performed in the collective, semi-democratic decision making of housing cooperatives, linked in many ways with practices of everyday life? ED should thus be viewed as a process of reshaping social relations, roles, and collective action rather than merely achieving outcomes such as decarbonisation. By taking examples from our research with Finnish housing cooperatives, we suggest that the narrative of active, material participation as EC falls short in covering the various political and everyday situations within which EC is being performed. Rather, acts of resistance or passivity should be seen as performances of EC. This suggestion extends the idea of EC to new groups of people excluded from the previous understanding of energy citizens and ED. The danger in thinking of EC via diverse acts and actions, according to Huttunen et al. (2020, p. 205), is that ‘everything and consequently nothing’ becomes political, making it necessary to make a distinction between what is understood as EC and what is not. One solution for this is to include only motivated, intentional, or oriented action towards shaping the society as acts of citizenship (Devine-Wright, 2007; Kallio et al., 2020). However, this includes the intentional and oriented resistance towards energy improvements in the buildings – ED should entail both responsibilities and rights, such as the right to disagree. As EC becomes ‘less of an elevated ideal or an identity of certain leaders in social change’ to a more widely spread, mainstream mode of living, it also becomes more diverse and entails less desirable yet important variations (Pel et al., 2021, p. 27). Furthermore, diversifying energy agency can enable better acknowledgment of mundane requirements and fears of people in the development, design, and dissemination of the technologies.

As our examples show, everyday practices of energy use (and, even more importantly, non-use) and the mundane acts of energy frugality in the housing cooperatives are becoming even more relevant as performances of EC. Amid the recent energy crisis, these acts are also increasingly political. The spatio-temporally bounded practices as sites of EC should be addressed more broadly, recognising that it is not only the installation of solar PV or smart-home technologies but also, for example, the very simple expressions of frugality that could be seen as doing one’s part in an energy transition. As shown in our empirical examples, these practices can vary in different contexts. Via shared practices and material arrangements, these mundane performances of EC are also intertwined with practices of decision making, policy making and (energy) provision, shedding light on the co-evolution of practices with technological, institutional, and infrastructural developments (see also Becker & Naumann, 2017; Schmid et al., 2020; Shove & Walker, 2014). Moreover, the normative stance of

‘doing the right thing’ is strongly dependent of the existing set of norms and conventions towards appropriate performances of practices (such as of ‘being a good citizen’; Lennon et al., 2020), thus highlighting the collective, material, and deliberative reconfiguration of everyday practices towards sustainability.

Because our research was done in the context of housing cooperatives, our results are broadly applicable to multiple forms of collective ownership of flats, units, or condominiums, as well as to a broad spectrum of cooperatives and democratic associations in other spheres of life (see e.g. Lacey-Barnacle & Nicholls, 2023). Our findings echo the notion of ED as a multi-scale concept by Szulecki (2018) and show how the current discussion on ED should address the existing democratic structures, such as those of housing cooperatives, in between formal democratic processes and individual (energy) citizens. On one hand, these structures can act as barriers for EC, as the examples from frustrated residents failing to promote sustainable energy initiatives in their buildings illustrate. On the other hand, they provide forums for deliberation as close to everyday living as possible, making ED a part of mundane governance and management of the building as part of the energy system. The context of housing cooperatives makes an interesting case to study the relationship of these two concepts, as the (energy) citizens are participating not only in ED via sustainable energy initiatives of the building but also in the democratic processes of collective decision making with various financial interests and demands for comfortable living and other everyday practices, potentially at odds with the normative goals of sustainability and democratic participation. This undeniably poses challenges for and requires further research on embedding the ED agenda, with its normative and pragmatic aspects, within the parallel democratic processes at multiple scales from household to municipality and (inter)national levels.

It is critical to ask, in the name of sympathetic critique, if all different manifestations of ED could, and should, be addressed in an energy transition and what is their relationship to each other. This also brings us back to the normative ideas of democratising and decentralising energy and pragmatic questions of the governance of broad networks and infrastructure (see also Becker & Naumann, 2017). Does participation make ‘better governance’ and ‘better citizens’, as pictured by Szulecki (2018, p. 37)? Or just allow more various performances of citizenship? We hope that our examples encourage further conceptual discussion on more open, inclusive, and critical forms of energy citizenship and energy democracy.

Note

1. In Finland, a housing cooperative (which has also been translated as housing company, housing association or housing condominium depending on use) is by jurisdictional definition a corporation managing the apartments, offices, and business premises of a building, where a single share or a group of shares gives their owner proprietary rights to specific property and voting rights in the annual meeting. The homeowners thus collectively own the whole building through a company. The housing cooperatives are a form of collective ownership and decision making in the living environment, which varies between country contexts regarding specific rules (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

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