

# ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND POVERTY

A case study of vulnerable  
households in Vienna, Austria

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# ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND POVERTY – The Problem

- Growth in energy consumption in Austria
- Poor households disproportionately affected by rising energy prices
- 12% of Austrian population in risk of poverty, 6% in manifest poverty
- Many poor households: Problems with energy costs





# ENERGY CONSUMPTION

## from a social science perspective

- Understand energy behaviour from the consumers' point of view
- Social differences in energy consumption
- Differential environmental impacts of various lifestyles
- Heterogeneity of low-income households





# ENERGY CONSUMPTION

## from a social science perspective

- Various lifestyle groups show different “energy cultures”
- Energy consumption characterized by day-to-day-invisibility
- Energy choices tangled up with non-energy concerns
- Necessary to understand the social and cultural dimensions of energy consumption



The background of the slide features a photograph of a weathered, light-colored wall with visible vertical cracks and peeling plaster. In the background, two dark-framed windows are visible. A solid pink vertical bar runs along the right edge of the slide.

## THE PROJECT

### „Sustainable energy consumption and lifestyles in poor households“

- Financed by Austrian climate and energy fund
- Goal 1: investigation of energy consumption in poor households in Vienna/Austria
- Goal 2: Identification of potentials for energy efficiency and saving and assessment of measures
- “Grounded-Theory”-Methodology
- 50 qualitative interviews





# RESULTS

## Living conditions

- Daily constraints
- Distress
- Supporting structures necessary
- Habitus of necessity and frugality



# RESULTS

## Domestic equipment and energy efficiency

- Degree of equipment generally low
- Second hand, energy inefficient appliances: “energy boomerang”
- Faulty equipment sometimes life-threatening
- Financial constraints: cheap or old equipment?



# RESULTS

## Energy saving: Limited scopes

- Many interviewees conscious about energy saving and acting accordingly
- But: personal scopes are limited
- Energy efficient equipment hardly affordable
- Various energy saving strategies
- But: lack of control



# RESULTS

## Energy saving: ex-/internal constraints

- bad living conditions
- slow building refurbishments
- Fulfilment of basic needs (already on very low level)
- Psychological strains
- Children
- Social isolation



# ENERGY CONSUMPTION

## Uncertain costs, lack of control

- downward-spiral of indebtedness possible
- No direct feedback
- Lack of control
- Change of energy supplier as high-involvement-decision
- Problem of disconnections



# CONCLUSIONS

- Creating win-win-situations regarding energy efficiency
- Target-group specific information and action strategies
- Redevelopment of housing stock
- Developing feedback instruments
- Environmental sociology: more attention to problems at the intersection of environment and social inequality



The background image is a photograph of a building's exterior. The left side shows a wall with significant peeling and cracking of the paint, revealing a rough, textured surface underneath. To the right, two rectangular windows are visible, each with a white frame and a dark interior. The overall color palette of the photograph is muted, with various shades of brown, tan, and grey. A solid, bright green vertical bar runs along the right edge of the image, extending from the top to the bottom.

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