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Antonin Pottier, Dr.

maître de conférences

École des hautes études en sciences sociales,
Paris

Born in 1984 in Tours, France
Studied Mathematics and Physics at the École Normale Supérieure and
Economics at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales

ARBEITSVORHABEN

“Power to Act,” a Practical Concept for the Climate Transition

The transition to low-carbon societies, a necessity to curb and stop climate change, raises formidable challenges. One, and not the least, is the possibility of making this transition while preserving and possibly enhancing social justice. The project aims at developing a concept of “power to act,” referring to people’s differential capacity to modify their way of living to reduce greenhouse gases emissions, a capacity rooted in possibilities offered by the social environment they live in. This concept conveys the fact that people always have an ability to behave and act differently than they actually do, so that GHG emissions are reduced. The “power to act” is a relational concept that links an emission of GHG to an agent that has the ability to make it not happen. From the point of view of emissions, it points to the agents who can act on them; from the point of view of agents, it points to the emissions they have the most power to reduce.

The concept of “power to act” thus seems well suited to tackle several difficulties identified in the current conversation about climate transition and social justice. For example, instead of imposing a constant carbon price, irrespective of the “power to act” of the actors, such a policy targeting the emissions on which agents have the “power to act” could probably lead to less social disturbance. It can also be viewed in a dynamic way: public policies could be set to increase agents’ “power to act” (such as developing public transportation) to further reduce emissions in a second stage, and more easily.

The intuition guiding the project is that the concept of “power to act” has the potential to reframe these issues and several others.

Recommended Reading

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