



Local action against fuel poverty in Austria

Karl-Michael Brunner

Institute for Sociology and Social Research

Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

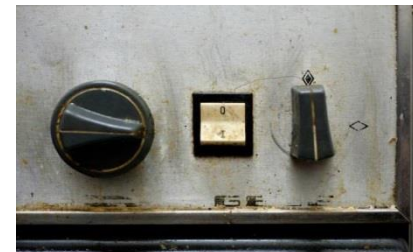
Sylvia Mandl, Anja Christanell, Michaela Leitner

Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development

Katharina Kirsch-Soriano da Silva

Caritas Vienna

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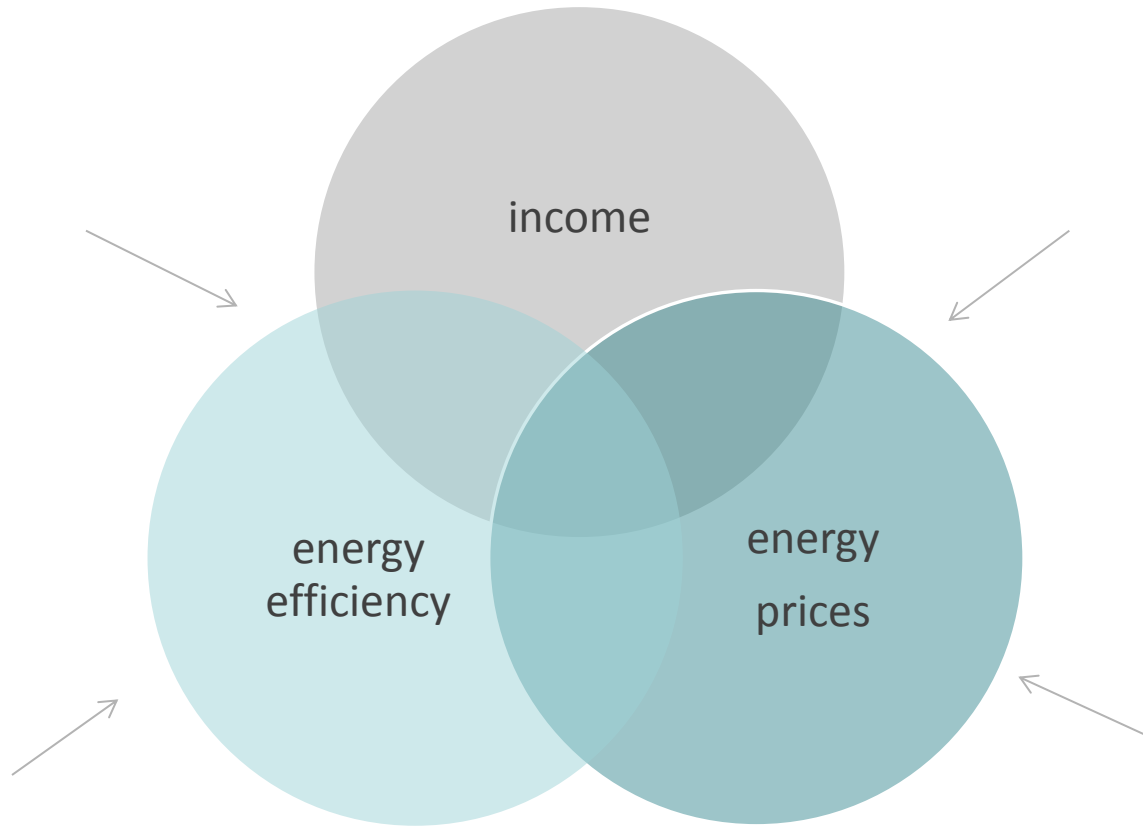
Fuel poverty

the problem



- **Fuel poverty:** (industrialized countries)
 - inability to heat or light the flat sufficiently
 - expenses above average for energy provision
 - energy inefficient flats, heating systems and household appliances
 - health hazards caused by bad housing conditions and reduced thermal comfort
 - debts with energy suppliers
 - power cuts because of outstanding payments
 - cutbacks in other areas in order to pay for energy (EU: ~50-125 million people → but: no official definition available)

Fuel poverty reasons



- A combination of factors accounts for fuel poverty:
high energy prices, low incomes and low energy efficiency of flats/appliances

Fuel poverty in Austria

- no comprehensive debate on fuel poverty on the level of society or politics
- mainly discussed by social organizations and the media
- None of the ministries assumes responsibility for this issue
- no official definition of fuel poverty in Austria (→no precise numbers)
- increasing number of research projects and measures to tackle fuel poverty on different governance levels
- New Austrian Federal Law on Energy Efficiency (issued in July 2014)
- Local level initiatives leading in implementing and (partially) evaluating concrete support actions for fuel poor households

Fuel poverty in Vienna

the first, qualitative project



- Qualitative research project investigated the living conditions and daily energy practices of low-income households in Vienna
- 2008-2011
- financed by the Austrian Climate and Energy Fund
- grounded theory approach
- 50 qualitative interviews in low-income households

selected results

energy burdens and coping strategies

- many households live in deprived conditions, carrying multiple burdens
- numerous households react to the burdens with a clear lowering of their living standards – Economizing as a way of life
- majority of households lives in energy-inefficient dwellings
- household appliances often energy-intensive and source of hazards



selected results

energy burdens and coping strategies

- Coping strategies: characterized by low necessity for investment
- efficiency & sufficiency strategies in energy practices
- 2/3 perceive their energy expenses as a burden
- 1/4 already had one or more power cut-offs
- differences in financial management
- reluctance to change energy providers



Fuel poverty in Austria

Pilot project against fuel poverty



- **Practical and implementation-oriented continuation of the qualitative project**
- **2012 – 2014**
- **Financed by the Austrian Climate and Energy Fund**
- **Project is based on 3 hands-on projects of Caritas**
 - *implementation & evaluation of target-group specific advice models in 400 Austrian households*
 - *elaboration of a data-based programme against fuel poverty*
- **Two aims:**
 - *improvement of energy efficiency and mitigation of the burdens*
 - *recommendations for policy measures*

Fuel poverty in Austria implementation



- **Energy consultings & first data survey 2012/2013**
- Development of a standardized questionnaire
- Online database
- Consultations & surveys (402 households)
- Evaluation: One year after the first intervention
(2013/14)

Fuel poverty in Austria

3 sub-projects



1. **Grätzeleltern** (Caritas Vienna & Vienna Gebietsbetreuung urban renewal)

- **Focus:** structurally disadvantaged residential areas
- **Speciality:** residents as multipliers within their neighbourhood

2. **Energy-Savings-Check Vorarlberg** (EU-financed regional project)

- **Focus:** urban, suburban and rural areas in Western Austria
- **Speciality:** free emergency assistance if required (eg switchable power strips)

3. **VERBUND-sponsored Caritas Electricity Assistance Fund** (Verbund & Caritas)

- **Fokus:** urban, suburban and rural areas nation-wide
- **Speciality:** replacement of energy inefficient major domestic appliances

Fuel poverty in Austria

Selected results from survey (all 3 projects)



- Two thirds of households: income less than 60 percent of the median Austrian household income
- Nearly half of households spend more than 10 percent of their income on energy, more than 10 percent even more than 20 percent
- the average energy consumption for heating (and electricity) is below the Austrian average
- Expenses for rent including operating costs are above the average Austrian expenditure
- Regarding energy efficiency of the buildings: in comparison to the Austrian average, the households frequently live in houses build before 1980

Fuel poverty in Austria

Low energy efficiency of flats



Fuel poverty in Austria

Selected results from survey (all 3 projects)



- One third of households live in flats with leaking windows, almost half of them have leaking doors
- Half of interviewees report cold walls and floors
- One third of households report mould inside their living space (Austrian average: 12%)
- Appliances: refrigerators/freezers markedly older than average
- Lighting equipment: 11 light fixtures on average (Austrian average: 40.9)

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Lighting/ energy consumption



Fuel poverty in Austria

Burdens: e.g. energy bills



Fuel poverty in Austria

Selected results from survey (all 3 projects)



Burdens caused by fuel poverty:

- One third of households are unable to keep the living area warm enough in winter to feel comfortable
- 42% of households: heat fewer rooms than they would like
- 57% stated to be limiting illumination for financial reasons
- 83% indicate that they were worried about paying their energy bills
- 71% reported difficulties in paying their energy bills
- 47% had received an arrears letter from their energy suppliers during the past 2 years
- 13% had been affected by a power cut

Pilot project against fuel poverty

Local action: „Grätzeleltern“ (neighbourhood parents, NP)

- one of three sub-projects which form part of the pilot project
- **Initiator:** Caritas Vienna and urban renewal office of Vienna
- **Target group:** two boroughs of Vienna with a high proportion of residents with significant housing-related challenges, energy problems and difficult living situations
- Following the principle of **capacity building**: selected residents of these areas receive training on topics of energy, housing and community life
- They pass on the gained knowledge as multipliers (so-called “**Neighbourhood parents**”) in the course of home visits



Pilot project against fuel poverty

Local action: „Grätzeleltern“ (neighbourhood parents, NP)

- Dual focus: a) strengthening the competencies of the residents and supporting their empowerment, b) reducing fuel poverty
- Improving energy efficiency and fighting fuel poverty by an “area-based approach” (but: small in scale)
- Neighbourhood structures and social networks as crucial starting points for the successful realization of the project
- Two target groups: a) households in difficult housing conditions who have no easy access to already existing counselling services or are out of reach for these services; b) Austrians and people with an immigrant background ready to act as NPs

Pilot project against fuel poverty

Local action: „Grätzeleltern“, NP)

- NP provide a low-threshold approach in 23 different languages; building up trust in the counsellor a crucial element for success in the intervention
- focuses on strong intercultural cooperation: NP come from a variety of backgrounds, work in interculturally composed tandems

Project goals:

- Increasing energy efficiency
- Low-threshold-knowledge transfer
- Promotion of existing offers (e.g. energy counselling)
- Strengthening neighbourhood structures
- Developing competencies of the residents
- Stimulate active participation in society through capacity building (empowerment)

Fuel poverty in Austria

Selected results from NP survey



Overall situation even worse than in all 3 projects taken together:

- More unemployed people in comparison to the other 2 projects
- Large number of households with migration histories: 31 different nationalities
- Relatively high rental prices, but smaller apartments
- Widespread under-consumption of energy (health hazards)
- Majority of households live in houses built before 1919
- More than half of households are confronted with mould which represents a health hazard

Fuel poverty in Austria

Selected results from NP survey



- One third of interviewees had been affected by a power cut
- 59 %: unable to keep their living area warm enough to feel comfortable
- 61%: felt that their well-being was limited by the cold in their flats
- To sum up: objective and subjective indicators clearly show that the households interviewed by the “Neighbourhood parents” are more severely affected by fuel poverty; many of them could be considered living in deep fuel poverty

Fuel poverty in Austria

Targeting of households in deep fuel poverty



some outcomes

- NP reached a larger number of immigrant households who are confronted with a variety of barriers which often limit their scope of action
- NP reached a larger number of households in deep fuel poverty
- NP found ways of accessing groups that are both socially disadvantaged and difficult to reach and therefore often disappear from the field of view of society
- NP: able to support these households in developing opportunities for action and building bridges to a number of professional centres and institutions

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Some outcomes



- a significant reduction of burdens regarding the payment of energy bills was observed
- On average, energy consumption was reduced after the counseling process (NP: 2-3% savings)
- The percentage of energy-saving-lights in all households has risen from 28% to 43%
- Arrears letters from energy suppliers were significantly reduced
- widening of scope of action and increase of energy know-how
- All in all, the counseling processes had a positive effect regarding the energy situation and the overall living conditions of the households

Fuel poverty in Austria

„Fuel poverty cannot be counseled away“



- NP could help in some ways (e.g. energy savings, reduction of strains)
- But single measures are likely to have only limited effects in the face of the multiple roots of fuel poverty
- NP could not solve the structural roots of the problem
- These are: e.g. the access to affordable living spaces and access to employment, income, social security and social and cultural recognition
- Certain measures can be sensible and effective, but:
- comprehensively fighting fuel poverty requires coordinated actions and a consistent strategy

Fuel poverty in Austria

„Fuel poverty cannot be counseled away“



- integrated measures aimed at all causes and manifestations of fuel poverty with different time horizons and depths of effects are required
- Fuel poverty is a multi-dimensional and cross-sectional venture
- Situated between conflicting priorities of different areas of politics (e.g. energy and housing, environment, health, social affairs)
- Multiple benefits of EE not recognized yet
- Interconnectedness of the environmental and the social should be taken more fully into account
- **Although small in scale, local actions like the NP can be a step in this direction!**

Please visit:

www.energiearmut.com

**For more information
regarding fuel poverty in
Austria!**

Thank you
for your attention!

Contact:
karl-michael.brunner@wu.ac.at

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