

## Thomas Berger: Fuel Poverty

### Abstract – Work in Progress

Fuel poverty is mostly discussed as a problem that can be solved by the right social policy instruments and a significant amount of research is going into the effectiveness of various social troubleshooting agendas. Theoretical approaches that try to understand the root causalities for this particular social problem are spread rather thinly (as far as my understanding and research goes to date). With the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland no other member state of the European Union has an official definition of the terms “fuel poverty” or “energy poverty” (as it is sometimes called). In these two countries a household is defined as fuel poor when the cost to keep the living area adequately warm exceeds 10% of the overall household budget. So this definition only considers the needed energy for keeping the living space warm and excludes costs for electricity consumption and warm water supply. The 10%-limit-definition in itself is arbitrary and gained its acceptance through use by public agencies and NGOs rather than by scientific discussion and research. It is yet to be determined if this definition fits the contexts of other EU nations (specifically Austria) or if other approaches to define fuel poverty have to be explored.

At the current point of my project I investigate the sociological perspectives on fuel poverty. I do not treat it simply as a problem of consumption or energy supply. There are specific social groups that are vulnerable to fuel poverty. These groups deal with the same financial hardship and challenges, but the origins of their vulnerability differ (e.g. social backgrounds, migration, age, gender). So the status quo of my research culminates in the following question: is fuel poverty merely a sub-category of the general poverty predicament or are there specific sociological qualities to the problem that deserve special examination?