

## Article

# Dilemmas around the Energy Transition in the Perspective of Peter Blau's Social Exchange Theory

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to present the complexity of social mechanisms related to the systemic energy transformation from the perspective of the classical social exchange theory. Considering the direction of actions taken to reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere as obvious, the author of the article analyses the issue through the prism of social and economic dilemmas of the process, focusing on the mechanisms of energy transition in relation to Peter Blau's exchange theory. The dilemmas of the systemic energy transition are presented in relation to the diverse games of interest that mark the social playing field around the analysed issue. The article outlines the social playing field of energy transition using the example of an economically strong country seeking to strengthen its position and a developing country interested in gaining energy independence. The analysis of the systemic conditions and the political activities carried out made it possible to define possible strategies of action for both countries with reference to the constitutive conditions of power defined by Peter Blau. Contrary to programme declarations of a "just transition", the analysis made it possible to define the privileged position of economically powerful players and to point to the mechanisms blocking the implementation of the strategy of a developing country. Reference to the classical exchange theory, on the other hand, made it possible to identify the mechanisms indicating the presence in the energy transformation project of both overt and covert projects related to the pursuit of advantage in influencing the shape of the global energy economy.

**Keywords:** energy transition; exchange; power; game of interest; economy



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## 1. Introduction

Pollution and degradation of the environment are major issues currently dominating public debate. All available data leave no doubt that these problems should form the basis of a redefinition of the relationship between humanity and the environment. As a result, many specialist studies appear in the scientific literature on the possibilities of reducing carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere by using modern technological solutions [1]. Among other things, opportunities are being sought to integrate energy from renewable sources into existing energy systems [2], and experts are trying to create a model of sustainable, low-carbon urban agglomerations in which more than half of the world's population already lives today [3]. Achieving carbon neutrality and switching from conventional energy sources, i.e., fossil fuels, to clean and low-carbon renewable energy sources has also been intensively addressed by supranational organisations in recent years. In March 2019, the 6th GEO report was published, providing detailed information on the state of the environment. The report was prepared at the initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme and published at the UN Environment Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, where politicians from around the world met to discuss critical issues related to the need to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals and other international agreements. It showed that the transformation should encompass entire social systems and structures, and cultural values and norms, as well as sectors of economic activity, including industry, agriculture, construction, transport, and energy. According to the report's authors, renewable energy

sources as well as energy-efficient, green buildings and low-emission transport should become the standard [4]. In February 2021, the topic of climate security once again figured prominently at the UN Security Council. Similarly, in February of this year, the 5th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) took place, where the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) medium-term strategy for the years 2022–2025 was presented, followed by UNEP's publication of a report synthesising scientific research on the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises [5].

A notable difference between the 2019 and 2021 arrangements is the radicalisation and dynamization of the transformation strategy, which are increasingly coming under criticism especially in light of rising electricity prices. At the same time, it is obvious that the achievement of certain goals must be accompanied by specific strategies. Meanwhile, as in the case of many systemic changes, the most privileged beneficiaries of the energy transformation, who at the same time impose its rules, seem to be the players with the largest economic capital, often responsible, through the energy policy pursued so far, for adverse environmental changes and the degradation of ecosystems. In sociological terms, it is also important that advantages in influencing the shape of the global energy economy constitute advantages in the area of systemic transformation in many other spheres, being one of the basic sources of power and domination.

Taking the above into account, the aim of this paper will be to analyse mechanisms in reference to Peter Blau's exchange theory. The article assumes that the adopted energy transition strategies are primarily political in nature and aim to strengthen the economic position of strong global players.

The paper consists of an introduction, discussion of the results, literature review, and chapters presenting theoretical and empirical considerations based on statistical data and expert commentaries. The issues of social exchange are presented on the example of two EU member states: an economically strong country aiming at strengthening its position, i.e., Germany, and a developing country interested in gaining energy independence, i.e., Poland. For the purpose of the article, a distinction was also made between interest groups and groups of interests that influence the shape of world politics in a definitely different way. The article ends with conclusions and generalisations that may form the basis for further analyses.

Outlining the social playing field in the area of energy transition in relation to Peter Blau's theory of exchange provides an example of the system analysis taking into account overt and covert transformation projects, which can form the basis for the analysis of many other social processes. The adopted theoretical perspective also allows us to look at the energy transition process from the perspective of behind-the-scenes mechanisms of power and control.

## 2. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the systemic conditions and implemented political actions in the scope of processes connected with the energy transition was carried out taking into account statistical data and expert commentaries published in specialized, professional journals in July and August 2021 and on the basis of UNEP reports. All the collected information became the basis for determining the strategy of action of two countries with reference to the constitutive conditions of power defined by Peter Blau [6]. On the example of the conducted analysis, it was shown that political and economic strategies undertaken in the course of the energy transition process prevent a fair distribution of wealth. The main conclusion from the analysis is that the dynamics and principles of the energy transition visibly strengthen the position of economically powerful players, deepening inequalities and determining the structure of global society incoherent in terms of its system.

The energy transition process has not yet been analysed with reference to social exchange theory. This perspective makes it possible to uncover the political dimension of the process, also drawing attention to its behind-the-scenes mechanisms and the important

role which groups of interest with their particular approach to social processes play in the presented process besides interest groups.

### 3. Literature Review—Power and Exchange

Bertrand Russell stated that “Power is the fundamental concept of the study of society” [7] (p. 4); accepting this statement, this article seeks to justify the dynamics of the energy transition process, not in the space of ecological threat, although this is undoubted, but in relation to the mechanisms of power and domination that affect many social processes through the application of social influence [8]. Alongside many researchers of the phenomenon of power—Talcot Parsons [9], David Easton [10], Harold Dwight Laswell [11] and Karl Wolfgang Deutsch [12]—for the purposes of this article, Peter Blau’s theory of exchange, which perfectly captures the essence of social games of domination in energy space, was adopted as the basis of analysis.

Peter Blau’s social exchange theory assumes that the basis of social life is exchange. The processes of social exchange, in turn, set in motion other processes and social relations: integration, differentiation, organisation, power and opposition, which crystallise at increasingly higher levels of the social structure. Exchange theory takes into account the complex interdependence between social substructures of many types that intersect at different levels. Peter Blau argued that in order to understand the laws governing complex social structures, one must first understand the laws governing their constituent elements, and that intergroup relations theory can also encompass phenomena occurring at the microstructural level, that is, within the social relationships between individual members of small groups.

These assumptions of Peter Blau are fundamental to the assumption that groups of interest influence patterns of social relations in intergroup relations, including political and economic relations in which power and domination are embedded.

Power, therefore, understandably from this perspective, occupies a very important place in Blau’s theory of exchange, and it is on its constitutive conditions that we will focus for the purposes of this article. Peter Blau, referring to Max Weber’s [13] (p. 192) and Richard Tawney’s [14] (p. 229) definition of power, points out that the definition of power should take into account the ability of individuals or groups to impose their will on others despite their resistance. This can be done through deterrence in the form of withholding rewards on a regular basis or through punishment—both of which are negative sanctions. Power is therefore a one-sided dependency. Interdependence and mutual influence with equal influence indicate a lack of power [6] (p. 121).

Bearing in mind that the trans-state energy transition in question shapes important new sources of goods and services, it is to be assumed that it also constitutes a source of power and domination in a global perspective. Taking the above into account, it is important to refer to the way in which Blau develops his analysis of power relations on the basis of a scheme for the study of power relations as well as dependencies and their consequences [15] (pp. 27–41).

According to exchange theory, power appears in social relations when one party needs the services that the other party has to offer but is unable or unwilling (a relatively rare case) to choose any of the options that counteract subordination. Firstly, it is not possible to exchange the service for another good or service. Secondly, it is impossible to obtain the service elsewhere because there is a monopoly on it. Thirdly, it is not possible to force the provision of a service (usually through coalition advantage). Fourthly, it is impossible to learn to do without specific services; i.e., it is not possible to revise needs.

Of course, there are different interests on each side. The relationship between the party having power (interested in strengthening power) and the party over which power is exercised (interested in strengthening independence) revolves around the four possibilities indicated above. Thus, in order to maintain power, the party in power must remain indifferent to attempts to build exchange relations, prevent access to alternative sources of services by maintaining a monopoly, prevent the acquisition of services by force by, among

other things, preventing the formation of coalitions, and, finally, intensify the sense of absolute necessity of certain services or goods.

The party over which power is exercised should instead acquire strategic resources that will allow it to gain independence by means of exchange, break monopolies by seeking alternative sources of needed goods and services, build coalitions capable of using force to induce the handing over of services or goods, or reduce the feeling of necessity of goods or services (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Strategies of groups interested in consolidating power and gaining independence.

Strategies of Groups Interested in Consolidating Power	Strategies of Groups Interested in Gaining Independence
1. Not accepting exchangeable offers	1. Gaining exchangeable strategic resources
2. Reinforcing the monopoly	2. Breaking the monopoly
3. Counteracting the possibility of using force	3. Strengthening coercive power
4. Reinforcing the sense of necessity of strategic services	4. Abandoning offered services

Source: own elaboration.

In the case of creating and reinforcing social needs, it is important that groups and individuals in power participate in perpetuating and disseminating the relevant social values and in opposing oppositional ideologies that depreciate these values. Therefore, even those dominant groups whose power is based on different values and who have conflicting interests with regard to the common interest of maintaining or changing the social structure that allows them to retain power can act together [6] (pp. 122–126).

Applying the above theory to the energy transformation process, one should first of all assume that the power industry, as a branch of industry dealing with transformation of available forms of energy into the form used for powering all industrial processes and everyday devices, is a strategic branch of industry enabling development of world economies. It is therefore impossible to give up the good that is energy, which is the basis of social development. The possession of energy sources or energy generation technologies is therefore a tradable strategic resource, which makes it possible to gain and maintain power and dominance on a macro-social scale. Coal and lignite, which have so far been the dominant sources of energy for both electricity and heat, are increasingly being replaced by renewable energy sources [16], and temporarily—in accordance with the adopted transformation strategy—by natural gas [17]. The target direction of the changes does not arouse major social objections; however, the principles on which this process is taking place, indicating the existence of both overt and covert transformation projects connected with global interest groups, are becoming more and more often a subject of social debate, being an expression of fears for economic and political balance in the world.

#### 4. Energy Transition and the Exchange Strategies

Analysing the basic principles on which the new energy policy is implemented, it is assumed that the social playing field around the energy transition is more complex than one might think from public media messages.

The basic issue causing a great deal of controversy is the principles adopted by the European Commission for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by the Member States compared with the scale of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by the world's economies, especially China, which is not bound by any obligations in this area. The countries most responsible for global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are: China—29% of global emissions; USA—14% of global emissions; India—7% of global emissions; Russian Federation—4% of global emissions; Japan—3% of global emissions; Germany—2% of global emissions [18]. Only the latter country, which is an EU member state, is obliged to apply CO<sub>2</sub> reductions. However, the strategies adopted by Germany, resulting primarily from its economic strength and the political alliances it has formed, mean that the “imposed” reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> not only does not pose a threat to its development, but also strengthens its position among European nations. This situation is

due to the EU's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions trading scheme, which allows rich Member States to buy EU certificates on the exchange enabling them to keep their emissions constant. However, in the face of the policy adopted, developing countries, mainly as a consequence of the post-pandemic crisis, are selling their allocation of free allowances, which is resulting in an increase in the real costs of generating energy as well as manufacturing products and services. The EU energy policy is therefore systemically inconsistent as it prevents sustainable development of all Member States.

On the official website of the European Union [19] one can read that: “The EU ETS is a key element of the EU's climate change policy and its primary tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective manner”. However, the economic consequences of the climate policy adopted are not the same for all EU Member States and non-EU countries. The consequences of the adopted energy policy indicate that the principles of the energy transition, including the market in carbon dioxide emission allowances, include a programme allowing the richest countries to remain in a privileged strategic position [20].

At the same time, developing countries with less economic capital—particularly the post-communist countries in Europe—are placed in the position of an interested party in gaining energy independence, with the possibility of exchange blocked and with a limited possibility of implementing any of the strategies allowing independence to be maintained within the framework of the “green deal” policy.

Looking at this issue with reference to the theory of exchange, we can compare the possibilities of strategic actions of an economically strong state that seeks to strengthen its position, e.g., Germany, and the strategies of a developing state interested in gaining energy independence, e.g., Poland. The possible actions within the framework of the first strategic option are multifaceted, as they concern dynamic transformation and the solutions adopted within its framework (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Strategies adopted by Germany and Poland with reference to exchange theory (selection).

An Economically Strong EU Member State—Germany (Strategies for Gaining Advantage)	EU Member State Developing Country—Poland (Strategies for Gaining Independence)
1. Not accepting exchange offers	1. Gaining exchangeable strategic resources
Building its own energy market based on RES, natural gas (Nord Stream 1 and 2) and coal	Blocked opportunity to use own fossil resources and build capacity to use alternative sources, lack of own technologies and access to own alternative energy sources
Economically driven ability to buy back CO <sub>2</sub> emission allowances	Selling the allocation of free CO <sub>2</sub> emission allowances
(Economic strength “exempts” from the need to apply the restrictions imposed on other EU countries)	(Counterproductive strategy—as a result, energy prices increase in the absence of alternative energy sources)
2. Consolidation of monopoly	2. Breaking the monopoly
Nord Stream 1 and 2 project with Russia	Baltic Pipe project with Norway and Denmark
(Nord Stream 2 implemented despite the opposition of the Baltic States due to the threat of energy blackmail from Russia and German hegemony in Europe in the absence of any counter-indications and environmental recommendations)	(In 2021, the Danish Environment and Food Commission revoked the permit issued by the Danish Environmental Protection Authority in 2019—justification: need for additional environmental studies)
3. Counteracting the use of force	3. Strengthening coercive power, building coalitions
Strong political position in the European Union (real influence on European policy-making, including energy policy)	Establishment of the Tri-City Initiative on the initiative of the presidents of Poland and Croatia (the assumed objectives: boosting economic development of the post-communist countries and strengthening the cohesion of the EU, currently the observers such as Germany and the USA make attempts to join the Tri-City)
4. Strengthening the sense of necessity for strategic services	4. Withdrawal of services offered
There is no need—energy is essential for economic development	Not possible—energy is essential for economic development

Source: Own elaboration.

The global project strongly monopolising the energy market in Europe—Nord Stream 2—is coming to an end, despite the opposition of Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic States. It is somewhat coincidental that, at the same time, the Danish Environment and



Food Commission revoked the permit for the Baltic Pipe project. The situation is taking place against the background of the election of a new US president and the United States' lack of clear opposition to an energy policy that threatens energy blackmail from Russia, but at the same time strengthens Germany's position as a state unifying the energy market in Europe and thus gaining real power and the ability to set conditions for other states.

Germany's position is also strengthened by the market in EU ETS certificates, since, thanks to the country's economic advantage, Germany can buy CO<sub>2</sub> emission allowances, among other places, on the German stock exchange in Leipzig. The auctions are open, which means that any economic entity can buy allowances in any Member State. In view of the rapid increase in the price of certificates, only the economically strongest players can in reality afford to buy them. This prevents economically developing countries, such as Poland, from developing economically.

According to the Polish stock exchange newspaper *Parkiet*, citing calculations by a Polish politician: over three years, the free allocation of allowances in Poland for installations will be 40 million tonnes/year. Poland will also receive a free allowance pool, which it will be able to sell at auctions, averaging 65 million tonnes per year. The total free allocation for Poland will thus reach 105 million tonnes per year. Emissions from installations in this period will amount to about 170 million tonnes per year. The deficit in allowances in the years 2021–2023 will therefore reach 65 million tonnes per year on average. At the price of 54 EUR/t and the exchange rate of 4.5 PLN/euro, the Polish economy will irretrievably transfer PLN 47.4 billion, i.e., PLN 15.8 billion annually, for the purchase of CO<sub>2</sub> emission allowances in the years 2021–2023. This is the cost for Poland of EU climate regulations, the consequence of which will be drastic increases in heat and electricity price [21]. As a result, Poland, having no real capacity to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> at the imposed rate and on the imposed principles (which does not mean that it has no such capacity at all), will be forced to implement climate projects that will support the export of RES technologies from Germany or Russian gas from Nord Stream, thus fully losing its energy sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Germany's strong political predominance in the European Union, resulting, among other things, from the fact that the Group of the European People's Party, the largest political group in the European Parliament, is headed by a German politician and entrepreneur, limits the possibility for developing countries to form broad coalitions. At the same time, the joint initiative of the presidents of Poland and Croatia, the Trimarium Initiative—an international economic and political project bringing together 12 European Union countries located near the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas, the primary objective of which was to boost the development of the post-communist countries and to counteract the hegemony of any of the European countries—is becoming an object of German and US foreign policy. These countries, so far remaining in the role of observers of the project, in July this year at the Tree Seas (Trimarium) summit in Sofia called for the Tree Seas (Trimarium) initiative to become part of European policies and investment instruments. Acceptance of such a concept would mean closing the possibility of realising the basic objectives that the Tree Seas (Trimarium) project has adopted including measures to promote energy independence in developing countries. At the same time, Germany, as Europe's leading CO<sub>2</sub> emitter, is strengthening its position in the market for modern energy technologies, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions only marginally in relation to environmental needs because it is lignite that still plays a very important role in Germany's electricity sector. In 2019, it accounted for 18.6% of electricity generation, being the largest source of electricity—ahead of onshore wind (16.5%) [22]. It is also worth noting that companies owned by Czech capital—LEAG and MIBRAG—are responsible for half of Germany's domestic lignite mining, which may have had a significant, though only assumed because behind-the-scenes, influence on the decisions taken by the Court of Justice of the EU on the Czech initiative in the case of the Polish lignite mine in Turów. It should also be noted that the suspension of lignite extraction at the Turów mine will force Poland to purchase this raw material from Germany or the Czech Republic, which is another element of the strategy making Poland dependent on external energy sources [23].

Even assuming that news agency reports and newspaper articles may be subject to the risk of misinterpretation, factual and statistical data indicate the existence of clear strategies adopted by economic players within the framework of energy policy and the formation of strong coalitions to build dominance. In this area, there is an increasingly clear trend towards the emergence of energy monopolies under the banner of a global “free market”, which threaten the economic balance of the world.

The problem of economic and economic imbalances on a global scale was described by Joseph E. Stiglitz—the World Bank’s chief economist in 1997–2000, later winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics—who, analysing markets operating in conditions of asymmetry, wrote *“I have seen with my own eyes how devastating the impact of globalisation can be for developing countries ( . . . ) I am convinced that globalisation—the removal of barriers to free trade and the closer integration of economies on an international scale—can be a force for good and that it has the potential to improve the situation of all people in the world, especially the poor. But I also believe that for this to happen, the way it is done . . . needs to be fundamentally rethought”* [24] (p. 7).

Assuming, according to the principles of open systems to which society belongs that the process of globalisation is an inevitable and natural stage of social development, it is important for sociological knowledge to define the mechanisms on which globalisation takes place from the perspective of morphogenetic processes. This “glimpse” from a close distance into the field of social games undertaken by complex interest groups and groups of interest would probably allow many complex issues of contemporary social life to be explained.

## 5. Interest Groups and Groups of Interest against the Background of Global Politics

All radical systemic transformations, including energy transformation, are associated with the possibility of economic profits for beneficiaries who possess strong economic, social or cultural capital at the very beginning [25].

Considering the presented mechanisms of the global energy transition, the existence of interest group games should be assumed in the field of global energy transition, where the social playing field is very complex.

In the sociological functional–structural view, “interest” is considered in the context of the game that takes place between actors, i.e., participants in a particular social situation. Interests are understood through the prism of values—they are therefore not autonomous factors of the social game. In the sociological perspective, the process of formation and maturation of a group interest is important, i.e., the situation when the achievement of some state of affairs beneficial to a particular group is objectively possible, and when the members of a given group are aware of this opportunity [25] (p. 30). An interest group is therefore an organised association that aims at influencing politics. The pursuit of influence is external and not linked to aspirations to assume power in a formal sense [26] (pp. 336–341). In American culture, the operation of interest groups is based on proven procedures and social techniques, which primarily include lobbying techniques [27] (pp. 250–251). Such an interest group in the case of the energy transition process is undoubtedly the pro-environmental circles, including the European Green Party (EGP). Interest groups, on the other hand, seek to create a playing field within which they will attempt, usually informally, to exploit the opportunity to improve their situation through transactions of exchange of goods or services. Interest groups are organisations that are not accountable to the general public and that try to promote their private interests by influencing politics [27] (p. 239). Interest groups as “masked actors” are most often systemically dysfunctional.

Taking into account the global systemic imbalance in the economic dimension, it should be assumed that besides the (formal) interest groups, the groups of interest operating in the social space between economy, politics and administration also take part in the political decision making. The interactions that take place between the actors operating in this space are oriented on the constellation of different types of interests. The game may concern economic and political interests—most often co-occurring—and the

players play on their behalf, although it is not always a game only for their own interests. Sometimes elite leaders of interest groups join the game of interest groups if these are important for the final decisions. The groups of interest are therefore structures with a decidedly elitist character; one can assume that they include a small group of people with financial, social or knowledge capital. Influential groups of interest have all this capital at their disposal, effectively influencing certain political and economic decisions in a covert way [25] (pp. 33–34). In a situation of systemic equilibrium both interest groups and groups of interest “naturally” arise and disappear, while when the system is in a state of imbalance due to transformational changes, the regulatory and control functions of states are weakened. This means an increase in the influence of groups of interest and finally a consolidation of power of a dysfunctional nature. This can lead the system into structural dysfunction, which can only be removed through a structural reorganisation of the system [28] (p. 439).

In relation to global politics, it seems difficult to identify specific participants of the systemic game belonging to groups of interest. Analysing the available data, it can be assumed that a group of far-reaching decision makers, meeting the criteria ascribed to groups of interest, is the Bilderberg Group, the meetings of which are attended by high-ranking politicians, board members of global corporations, banks and institutions. However, the secretive nature of the actions and arrangements of the members of this group, as probably of at least several other groups of interest existing in the global space, does not allow for empirical analysis. However, one cannot overlook the fact that many social processes cannot be explained in a rational manner other than through the prism of achieving the objectives of groups of interests. In this area, one can also take into account the dynamics of the energy transition processes, which even for an economically strong country like Germany is starting to pose a problem.

In the above context, it seems justified to criticise liberal views on pluralism according to which power in pluralistic political systems, as a result of open competition, would not be cumulative and would be shared by many actors in social life in accordance with the principles of the social contract [29]. This view is subject to criticism in which it is pointed out above all that certain groups dominating the economic field have mastered the political decision-making process [30]. In extreme views, the importance of political parties can be read as marginal because economic power is held by the ruling class [31]. Parliamentary politics in such a configuration of events becomes a strategy that diverts attention from the real sources of political power.

The political and economic consequences of the energy transition, the principles and dynamics of which inevitably lead to energy dependence of developing countries by blocking the possibility of exchange opportunities, but also in the long term may become unfavourable for economically powerful countries, seem to point more and more clearly to the realisation of an extreme vision of the global order, where power is exercised by an economic ruling class [32] (pp. 61–84). Zygmunt Baumann writes about the emerging new social structures as follows: “Weak states are precisely what the New World Order, which suspiciously often looks disorderly, needs to ensure its survival and reproduction. Weak quasi-states can easily be reduced to the useful function of police districts, providing a bit of the order needed to do business; and there is no need to fear that they could effectively restrict the freedom of companies and enterprises” [33] (pp. 82–83).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in their philosophical dissertation assessed by *The Sunday Times* as a new “big idea”, write about the emergence of a new system of power to replace the sovereignty of the nation state. This system, described by the authors as an Empire arising as a consequence of the emergence of the global market and production chains, becomes a political entity that controls global exchange and exercises sovereign rule over the world. It has no borders and therefore rules over the whole world and sets the social status quo. The essential feature of Empire, according to the authors, is a situation in which power extends to all levels of the social order and the object of its rule is social life as a whole [31]. The authors started writing their book after the end of the Gulf War and put



it into print shortly before the outbreak of the war in Kosovo. Despite the passage of time, the vision presented in the book is still relevant, perhaps even more in tune with current social reality than at the time of its writing and publication.

## 6. Conclusions

When analysing economically motivated social processes, it becomes clear that there is a need to change the rules of “political games”, which in their current configuration—as indicated by world researchers and thinkers, e.g., [6,25,27]—threaten to cause global imbalance and consequently systemic disturbances.

To sum up the considerations undertaken in this article, it should be noted that:

1. A change in energy policy, as part of a redefinition of the human relationship with the environment, is a necessary social measure but it should be of a nature that allows a fair distribution of tradable goods and services, which is not impossible given the current political strategies; the example of Germany and Poland shows that the EU energy policy is systemically inconsistent as it prevents sustainable development of all member states.
2. It is highly likely that the rightly promoted need to redefine the human relationship with the environment is part of a game of interests that seek to gain economic advantage in the global economy; the existence of interest groups with a real interest in pro-environmental activities overlaps with the activities of interest groups interested mainly in gaining global economic advantage.
3. The dynamics and rules of the global energy transition are visibly reinforcing the position of economically powerful players, deepening global inequalities and determining the systemically incoherent structure of global society. When the system is in a state of imbalance due to transformational changes, the regulatory and control functions of states are weakened. This means an increase in the influence of groups of interest and finally a consolidation of power of a dysfunctional nature. This can lead the system into structural dysfunction, which can only be removed through a structural reorganisation of the system.

In addition to the need to redefine the relationship between man and the environment, it seems necessary, in light of the above considerations, also to redefine the political strategies in the field of energy transformation. In view of the above, it is important to undertake political corrective actions that may change the course of global social games that in their present form threaten the proper functioning of the open system that is society, and as a result, threaten its degradation, with manifestations in the form of global economic crises [34].

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