

## Emission-generating activities – their benefits and normative distributive significance

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Research field “Normative Theory: Climate justice and legitimate expectations”

Research question 1 | Cluster 3

Links to showcases Schulev-Steindl 1, Kirchengast 1 and 2, Maraun 1, Sass 1, and Steiner 2

**Background:** One of the central questions of climate justice is how the global emission budget ought to be distributed when we limit this budget in such a way that we respect the rights claims future people have vis-à-vis currently living people. According to one understanding, the good to which standards of justice are applied when answering this question are the (normatively relevant) benefits that the use of emission rights makes possible for individual human beings and not the emission rights themselves (Caney 2010). Emission rights are understood to be beneficial in so far as they allow for realizing these benefits in carrying out emission-generating activities. Thus, one understanding of what the shorthand of “distributing emissions” ultimately amounts to is distributing (by distributing emission rights) the benefits of engaging in emission-generating activities (Meyer & Roser 2010). In other words, this issue concerns both the principle of distribution and the currency of justice.

**Goal:** The project investigates how best to understand the various benefits from emission-generating activities, how to measure them, how to understand the relation between the amount of benefits realized and emissions caused, and which such benefits can be considered normatively significant and why. In particular, the project develops an understanding of both future and inherited benefits from emission-generating activities. Those who engage in emission-generating activities may realize benefits for themselves. At the same time, they can benefit other people. Also, currently living people often will be the beneficiaries of past people’s emission-generating activities. When it comes to, e.g., infrastructure that past people built, such inheritance can be understood as inherited capital that embodies emissions. Further, the project investigates alternative interpretations of the normative relevance of both future and inherited benefits from emission-generating activities for the allocation of emissions to the various agents and respective countries along (international) production chains (Steininger et al., 2016) and the distribution of the remaining permissible global emission budget among these agents.

**Methods and disciplinary background:** This is a project in philosophy and normative theory. It employs the methods of normative analysis and wide reflective equilibrium. At the same time measuring and attributing the various benefits of emission-generating activities requires both interpreting economic empirical findings of benefits realized and investigating alternative approaches of allocating emissions to the various agents.

### References:

- Caney, S. (2010). Climate Change and the Duties of the Advantaged. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 13(1), 203–28.
- Meyer, L. and Roser, D. (2010). Climate Justice and Historical Emissions. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 13(1), 229–53.
- Steininger, K.W., Lininger, C., Meyer, L.H., Munoz, P., Schinko, T. (2016), Multiple carbon accounting to support just and effective climate policies, *Nature Climate Change* 6: 35-41, DOI:10.1038/nclimate2867