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The Palgrave Handbook of Just Green Transitions in the Western Balkans and Beyond

Edited by Erblin Berisha · John Moodie
Ledio Allkja · Marija Jeftić

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Editors

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Editor's Preface

Justice and equity must form an integral part of the transition towards a low carbon world

(UNRISD, 2018)

The transition towards a greener, more sustainable future is one of the defining challenges of our time. As societies across Europe and beyond work to decarbonize their economies, the concept of a Just Green Transitions is emerging as a crucial policy and academic conceptual framework. While the imperative to shift towards carbon-neutral technologies is clear, the ways in which this transition unfolds—its governance, socio-economic implications, and territorial impacts—remain complex and context specific. This handbook, Just Green Transitions in the Western Balkans and Beyond, seeks to unpack these complexities by offering a multi-dimensional analysis of just green transitions from theoretical, policy, and practical perspectives. The genesis of this handbook lies in the collaborative research conducted under the Horizon Europe GreenFORCE Project (2022–2025). As part of this initiative, scholars and practitioners from across Europe have come together to explore the many facets of just green transitions, with a particular focus on the Western Balkans. This region, characterised by its dynamic yet challenging socio-political and economic landscape, provides a compelling case for examining how just green transition policies can be tailored to support sustainable development while addressing socio-spatial disparities. The main motivation for this volume is the recognition that while just green transition policies are discussed at the European level—especially within the framework of the EU's Green Deal and the Just Transition Mechanism—their implementation varies significantly across regions and localities. This handbook aims to bridge the gap between policy discourse and real-world practice by presenting both conceptual explorations and case studies that highlight how different territories are navigating their transitions.

Just Green Transitions (JGTs) address the shift to sustainable, low-carbon economies while ensuring fairness and inclusivity. They are central to global policies, such as the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal, but their interpretation and application remain diverse and complex. JGTs are inherently multidimensional, encompassing social, economic, spatial, environmental, technical, and governance dimensions. These elements interact dynamically, shaping the opportunities and challenges associated with transitioning to sustainable economies and societies. The social dimension emphasises justice and equity, ensuring that the burdens and benefits of green transitions are distributed fairly. This involves addressing vulnerabilities, empowering marginalised communities, and fostering participatory decision-making. Economically, JGTs provide opportunities for regional economic restructuring and diversification, including circular economies and green innovation, but they also entail substantial costs, particularly for high-polluting industries shifting to carbon-neutral practices. Spatial disparities influence the effectiveness of transition strategies, as urban and rural areas experience differing challenges. While some regions may benefit from new economic pathways, others risk economic stagnation or decline. The environmental dimension focuses on achieving long-term sustainability through carbon neutrality, biodiversity preservation, and resilience-building. Meanwhile, governance plays a pivotal role in fostering multi-level collaboration, policy coherence, and citizen engagement. Without adaptive governance structures, JGTs risk becoming fragmented and ineffective. Historically, just transition policies evolved from labour movements advocating for worker protections during industrial shifts. Over time, the framework has expanded to encompass broader socio-economic and environmental considerations. The European Union's policy landscape, particularly the Just Transition Mechanism, reflects this evolution, aiming to mitigate disparities between regions and ensure that no one is left behind in the transition to sustainability. This handbook is structured into five key parts:

- Part I: Theorizing Just Green Transitions—Establishes the conceptual underpinnings of JGTs and their policy relevance.
- Part II: Exploring Key Just Green Transition Policy Themes—Examines critical policy areas such as renewable energy, circular economy, and sustainable transport.
- Part III: Just Green Transitions in the Western Balkans—Investigates regional challenges and opportunities, providing case studies from across the Balkans.
- Part IV: Just Green Transition Practices in Europe—Showcases examples of policy implementation from European countries, illustrating best practices and governance strategies.
- Part V: Future Directions for Just Green Transitions—Looks ahead to emerging trends and policy recommendations that can guide future transition efforts.

This handbook is the result of a collective effort involving 55 scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. We are deeply grateful to all contributors for their valuable insights and dedication. We also extend our appreciation to our institutional partners, including Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development (Albania), CEA (North Macedonia), UB-GEF (Serbia), Nordregio (Sweden), and Politecnico di Torino (Italy), for their support in fostering research excellence on just green transitions. By bringing together a diverse set of voices—including leading scholars, policy experts, and practitioners—we hope to provide a robust knowledge base that informs both academic research and policy design. We hope that this volume serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, academics, students, and practitioners engaged in the ongoing dialogue on just green transitions. By exploring the intersections of sustainability, justice, and territorial governance, we aim to contribute to a more inclusive and resilient green transition across Europe and beyond.

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Reference

UNRISD. (2018). *Mapping just transition(s) to a low-carbon world*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Report—JTRC-2018.pdf.

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The preparation of this Handbook would not have been possible without the joint effort of all the contributors involved. A project of this magnitude, involving experts from diverse disciplines and backgrounds, requires extensive coordination, commitment, and interdisciplinary cooperation. The value of such a collaborative effort extends beyond the publication itself, as it fosters knowledge exchange, strengthens international partnerships, and enhances the understanding of complex territorial and environmental challenges from multiple perspectives.

Bringing together professionals from various fields—ranging from urban and regional planning to environmental sciences, economics, and political studies—has allowed for a truly integrated approach to addressing sustainability challenges. The diversity of expertise ensures that different perspectives are considered, leading to richer discussions, more robust findings, and comprehensive policy recommendations. The process of coordinating such a wide range of contributors has been a challenging but highly rewarding experience, requiring careful planning, open communication, and mutual respect for each other's work. The success of this endeavour is a testament to the power of collaboration across disciplines and borders.

Professionals from different countries have been instrumental in ensuring a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis, making this Handbook a significant resource for academics and practitioners. The project has provided a platform for comparative analysis and knowledge transfer by involving researchers and experts from various European regions, enriching the findings with diverse local experiences and methodologies. This exchange of ideas and best practices has not only strengthened the quality of the research but also fostered long-term collaborations that will continue beyond the completion of this

publication. In this light, we would like to thank our Horizon Europe GreenForce[1] project partners: Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development in Albania; University of Belgrade—Faculty of Geography (UB-GEF) in Serbia; Center for Economic Analyses (CEA) in North Macedonia; Nordregio, pan-Nordic research organization, based in Sweden; Politecnico di Torino, Italy; and the European Union for funding this initiative.

Moreover, a big thanks should go to the authors who have been involved: Aliaj Besnik, Bejko (Gjika) Anila, Böhme Kai, Brunetta Grazia, Buza Dea, Caldarice Ombretta, Cedergren Elin, Cotella Giancarlo, Damian Nicoleta, Dhrami Kejt, Djordjević Aleksandar, Finka Maros, Garvanlieva Andonova Vesna, Giacometti Alberto, Gjiknuri Ogerta, Gjoka Rodio, Gotovska Elena, Grigorescu Ines, Husár Milan, Imami Fiona, Jasso Matje, Katcharava Ketevan, Kraja Temali Irma, Krupalija Mustafa, Kurta Amela, Kurtovic Ilma, Maričić Tamara, Micu Dana, Mitric Bianca, Mohabat Doost Danial, Ndreka Elvis, Nikolov Ana, Nikolov Marjan, Novikau Aliaksandr, Oruc Nermin, Pantić Marijana, Popović Vladimir, Poro Enkela, Protić Branko, Puntillo Erika, Roznoviechi Irena, SeCerov Velimir, Shaker Yahya, Shaneh Aida, Tapia Carlos, Toptsidou Maria, Toska Merita, Valkenburg Govert, Vukovic Azra, Živanovic Zora, erban Paul-Răzvan.

Finally, our gratitude goes to Palgrave Macmillan Publishing for accepting to host the result of our work among their renowned publications, as well as to Rachael Ballard and Naveen Dass for dedicating their time to reviewing our work and developing a foreword for the book. We deeply appreciate their kind and inspiring words and hope that readers will share a similarly positive opinion.

Erblin Berisha
John Moodie
Ledio Allkja
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CHAPTER 12

Between Light and Shadow: Exploring Spatial and Multi-Dimensional Justice in the EU's Green Transition

Grazia Brunetta, *Ombretta Caldarice*, *and Danial Mohabat Doost*

12.1 Introduction: Exploring the Just Dimension of the European Union's Approach to Green Transition

Currently, the European Green Deal (EGD) is one of the most important and progressive European climate initiatives. Its primary objective is to achieve climate neutrality for the European Union (EU) by 2050. This forward-looking common goal requires reducing carbon emissions by a minimum of 50% by 2030 and progressing towards a 55% reduction by 2050 (Fit for 55: Delivering on the Proposals—European Commission). By implementing different environmental, climate, and energy policies for the EGD, the European Union (EU) aims to become the global leader in combating the impacts of climate change. In support of the EGD implementation, there are several areas of intervention that are introduced by the European Agenda which include climate action and emissions reduction; environment and the circular economy; skills, education, and training; greening public and private finances;

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Just Transition; research and innovation (Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, 2020). In addition, the EGD has two key pillars: first, the Green Transition and its financing, and second, the Just Transition to leave no one behind.

The first pillar, Green Transition, aims to fundamentally reshape Europe's economic model and represents a comprehensive strategy to combat climate change, promote sustainable development, and foster a resilient future for Europe. Through the use of EU financial tools, particularly InvestEU, the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, part of the EGD, aims to unlock private money and mobilise public investment of at least €1 trillion (Financing the Green Transition—European Commission).

The other key pillar of the EGD is the Justice dimension of the transition. From a policy point of view, one important instrument to guarantee that the shift to a climate-neutral economy proceeds fairly and leaves no one behind is the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) which offers focused assistance to help mobilise around €55 billion in the most affected regions between 2021 and 2027 in order to lessen the socio-economic effects of the transition (The Just Transition Mechanism—European Commission). According to the EU Commission, the JTM is a key tool to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens fairly, leaving no one behind.

This means that the European Commission recognises that the shift towards a climate-neutral economy will inevitably cause economic and social impacts, particularly in regions dependent on fossil fuel extraction and processing or where carbon-intensive industries are located. The European states and regions that are still heavily dependent on the extraction and production of fossil fuels are more likely to face economic decline as a consequence of the energy transition. This suggests that the transition must follow sustainable regional development on a macro scale. Furthermore, within the impacted regions dependent on fossil fuels, the economic and social impacts of the transition to renewable energies are not equally distributed among citizens. In other words, in the community scale, the cost of transition is not paid equally.

Hence, the JTM is the tool through which the European Commission aims to alleviate the situation and facilitate a fair and just Green Transition to support workers and citizens of the regions most impacted by the transition (Fleming & Mauger, 2021). As mentioned earlier, the EU's primary concern is with areas that depend on the extraction and processing of fossil fuels, such as refineries, or with extremely carbon-intensive businesses, such as cement factories. The Green Transition in these regions will impact a broader array of economic sectors, potentially leading to a larger number of workers facing job displacement. The JTM explains that three main groups will benefit from the JTM: People and citizens most vulnerable to the transition; Companies and sectors active in or comprising carbon-intensive industries; Member States and regions with high dependence on fossil fuel and carbon-intensive

industries (The Just Transition Mechanism—European Commission). Additionally, it points out the manner in which each of these groups is supported, as summarised in Fig. 12.1.

Therefore, the JTM aims first to support individuals who are particularly susceptible to the impacts of transitioning away from carbon-intensive industries through various means, for instance, by facilitating their future employment and guaranteeing their access to energy resources. Businesses and industries heavily reliant on carbon-intensive processes are the following beneficiaries through economic and technological support. Finally, JTM aims to support certain regions and countries that have economies heavily reliant on fossil fuels by providing technical, digital, economic, and infrastructural assistance. Although this mechanism can significantly assist specific individuals, companies, and regions in managing the adverse effects of the Green Transition, there are several areas for improvement within the agenda that this chapter aims to address in the following sections. The aim is to discuss the following issues critically. Which dimensions of spatial justice green policies and actions need to be addressed? How do we address procedural justice

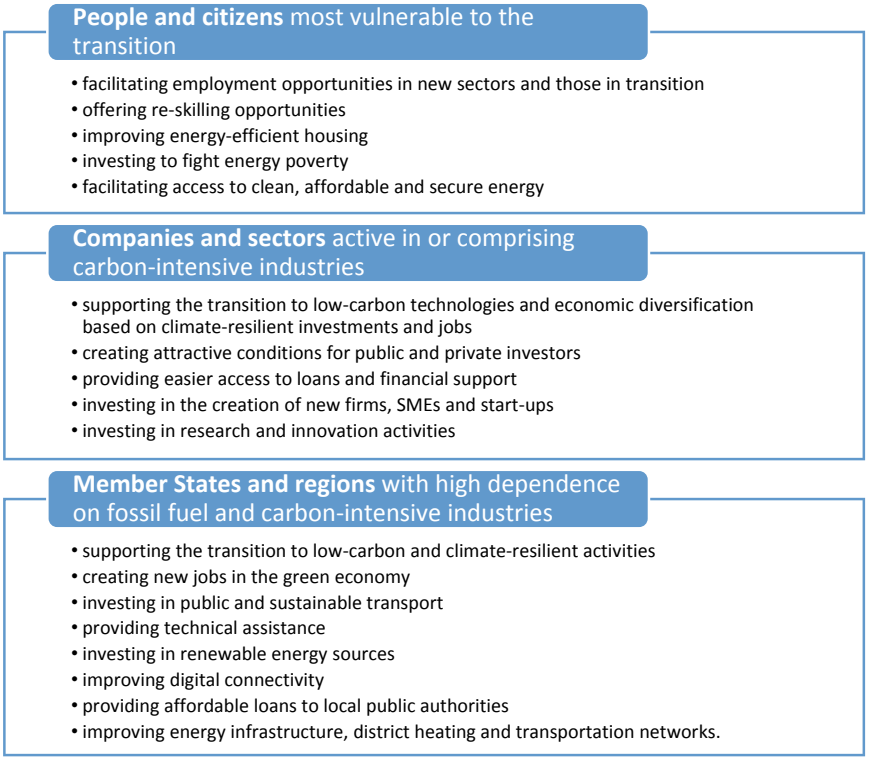


Fig. 12.1 Groups that will benefit from the JTM (*Source* authors elaboration adapted from The Just Transition Mechanism—European Commission)

in national policies and regional strategies? How do we support distributional justice in mitigation and adaptation actions at the local level? How can promoting the idea of spatial justice in the Green Transition help overcome the current limitations of the EU's approach to just transition?

12.2 Questioning the EU's Just Transition Strategy

The term Just Transition, originally proposed by global trade unions in the 1980s, recently became a mobilising concept for promoting green jobs as a necessary component of transitioning away from fossil fuels (Abraham, 2017). The incorporation of JTM's policy framework into the EGD shows the European Union's acknowledgement of the pivotal role of justice in mitigating the socio-economic impacts of transitioning to a climate-neutral economy. However, there remain unresolved debates and uncertainties regarding the EU's approach to addressing justice issues within this transition mechanism.

One critique refers to the insufficient emphasis on the procedural aspect of justice. The other critical aspect refers to the absence of consideration for the spatial dimension. Finally, the last issue refers to the fact that both policy discussions and academic discourse often undermine justice to a secondary role in the context of Green Transition (Heffron & McCauley, 2018). The first two issues are intertwined, as the lack of local involvement in decision-making within the GTM's legislative framework undermines both procedural justice and its spatial implications. Subsequent paragraphs will provide deeper insights into these debates. In addition, Fig. 12.2 represents the three main interconnected critiques of the EU approach to justice in the context of the Green Transition, which are discussed in the subsequent sections.

12.2.1 Overemphasising the Distributive Dimension of Justice While Undermining the Procedural One

In the context of the EGD, the European Union's justice strategy primarily focuses on achieving equitable distribution across various domains, such as jobs, resources, infrastructure, energy accessibility, skills, and digital connectivity. While this approach emphasises the distributive aspect of justice, it is crucial to acknowledge that justice, as posited by numerous theorists and scholars, encompasses multiple dimensions beyond distribution. The subsequent paragraphs will provide a concise overview of these theories, illustrating why it is necessary to delve into a multi-dimensional approach to justice within the context of Green Transition. The concept of justice has historically been predominantly associated with the concerns of equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among members of society (Barry, 1999; Rawls, 1971; Walzer, 1983). This perspective—which is widely adapted in urban policies and planning—focuses on the allocation of societal goods and is known as distributive justice. Distributive justice in societal governance pertains to the

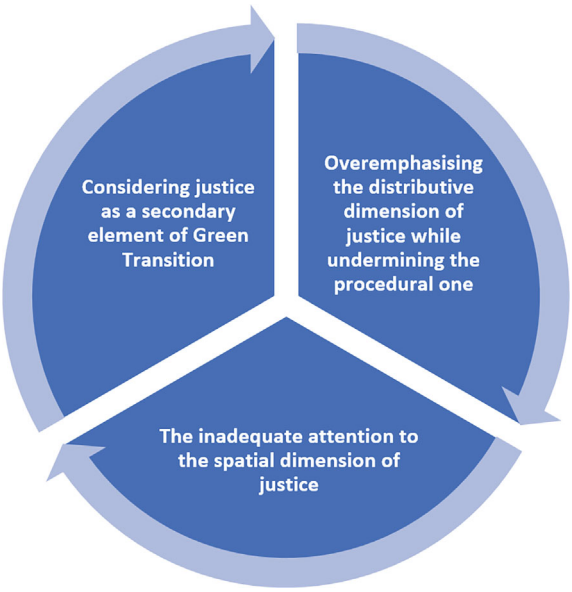


Fig. 12.2 The interconnected critiques of the EU approach to justice in the context of the Green Transition (*Source* authors elaboration)

equitable allocation of both benefits and burdens across populations (Brighouse, 2004). Benefits encompass resources, opportunities, and freedoms, while burdens encompass costs, risks, and limitations. Accordingly, distributive justice governs the fair allocation of societal advantages and disadvantages (Schlosberg, 2009), thereby striving for an equitable distribution of social goods (Rawls, 1971). The distributive dimension of justice from a spatial planning perspective concerns the geographical distribution of both resources and adversities across territories. Populations living in specific urban or rural areas might be more likely to face adversities and less likely to benefit from available resources. In this context, justice encompasses access to jobs, essential services, green spaces, infrastructure, recreational areas, and more. At the same distribution of adversities and burdens plays a key role, including the level of pollution in resources such as air, water, and soi, exposure to different natural hazards, the presence of urban decay, etc. Although the distributive dimension of justice is crucial, contemporary scholars (Fraser, 1999; Honneth, 2004; Schlosberg, 2004, 2009; Young, 1990) challenged the merely distributional understanding by proposing a more nuanced interpretation of justice that encompasses a broader array of interconnected elements. For instance, Schlosberg (2004, 2009) contends that justice, particularly as manifested in political activism such as environmental justice movements, comprises multiple intertwined components, including distribution, recognition, participation, and capability. Thus, while acknowledging the significance of distributive justice, these theorists advocate for a comprehensive approach that also considers individual and communal recognition, participation, and

functioning. This perspective posits that alongside distributional concerns, it is important to address the processes that contribute to unequal distribution, as well as issues of respect and recognition, which are deemed essential prerequisites for procedural justice (Miller, 2001). In expanding the conceptual boundaries of justice, scholars such as Iris Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (1999, 2014, 2020) have emphasised the need to focus on the underlying causes of unequal distribution rather than merely its outcomes. They highlight the significance of recognising marginalised groups within social and political spheres, as the absence of recognition contributes to disparities in the allocation of benefits and burdens (Schlosberg, 2004). Procedural justice concerns itself with the inclusivity and fairness of decision-making structures, advocating for democratic processes as essential components of social justice. Therefore, as suggested by IPCC (2022), procedural justice refers to who decides and participates in decision-making. The empirical study by Susan S. Fainstein (2009) is an excellent example of the importance of this dimension of justice, as it compares the justice issues in the three cities of New York, London, and Amsterdam. She argues that among the three cities, Amsterdam shows higher levels of justice not only because it fosters equality through policies like social housing but also through diversity and participation. In addition, a well-established approach to integrating the procedural dimension of justice is participatory planning. Although there are authors criticising certain aspects of it, participatory planning—if designed properly—can amplify the voices of marginalised groups and provide several additional advantages, such as transforming the planning process into a learning system which, in the long term, leads to a more equitable society. The first step to implementing procedural justice is the recognition of different voices. As Schlosberg (2009) suggests, if people are not recognised, they are less likely to participate, and if they do not participate, they are not recognised. Furthermore, if they do not participate, they are less likely to receive what you truly need. In this sense, the lack of a procedural dimension not only limits participation but also undermines distributive justice. According to this background, the focus of the EGD is on the distributive dimension of justice, and above all, the concern for jobs has become central to the concept of Just Transition (McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Wang & Lo, 2021). While it is very relevant to consider the unequal outcomes that the transition might cause, the question here is how to involve those who will be more affected by the transition's unintended consequences, such as job loss. The importance of the procedural or participative dimension arises from the fact that top-down processes, in which the just procedures for decision-making are not considered, might lead to outcomes that are not necessarily acceptable and fair for all. This is why, for a holistic inclusion of socially just policies towards carbon neutrality, effective governance tools must consider several factors to foster civic engagement, including active communication between citizens, policymakers, and stakeholders. In the context of the Green Transition, procedural justice can be addressed by ensuring that decision-making processes are fair, transparent, inclusive, and participatory. There are

several steps to be taken to do so. First, it is necessary to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including citizens, non-profit organisations, businesses, and, above all, marginalised groups. While it may appear that the most vulnerable group during an energy transition consists solely of those directly impacted by job loss, it is crucial to acknowledge and address other marginalised groups that have historically been overlooked and excluded during transitional phases (Mohabat Doost et al., 2023). In this way, we can transform the transition phase into an opportunity to actively engage these groups in decision-making processes and amplify their voices, facilitating their meaningful participation. The other step is to enhance the transparency of the decision-making process. This will also contribute to creating trust and accountability. In addition, equitable capacity building for the whole society is needed to inform people about their procedural rights and help them understand how they can more effectively participate in making decisions that will affect their lives. To operationalize the participative dimension, the governance system plays a key role. A government that does not undermine bottom-up approaches to decision-making can create more just processes. Many practical steps can be taken, such as establishing open communication venues where different groups and stakeholders can express their opinions and concerns. Additionally, implementing multi-layered governance frameworks with multiple centres of authority is essential, as is considering the needs of marginalised or vulnerable groups at every stage of the decision-making process.

12.2.2 The Inadequate Attention to the Spatial Dimension of Justice

Examining the outlined agenda of GT, it becomes evident that the primary focus lies on specific groups, notably individuals facing job loss and workers, rather than addressing the broader community within a given locality. In terms of spatial dimension, solidarity under the JTM will be limited to the designated regions despite numerous justice concerns regarding the transition to climate neutrality on a local scale. The absence of local-level engagement among residents is notable within the mechanism, as no legal framework mandating such participation exists (Fleming & Mauger, 2021). Due to its ability to facilitate a more thorough analysis of the structural injustices underlying environmental issues, a spatial approach to justice is beneficial. Instead of only treating the symptoms, policymakers can discover and address the underlying causes of socio-economic interactions by examining how they manifest geographically. A spatial conception of justice can play a key role in overcoming certain place-based challenges and helps provide a holistic framework that addresses both the processes and outcomes associated with Green Transition. In brief, the spatial understanding of justice aims to consider social, economic, and environmental factors within specific geographical contexts. Many academics and philosophers from urban studies and planning fields have examined and elaborated on the idea of spatial justice. The French philosopher and social theorist Henri Lefebvre is considered one of the important figures involved in the

development of the concept. In his writings, Lefebvre investigates the relationship between space, society, and power, most notably in his seminal book 'The Production of Space' (Lefebvre, 1991). He makes the case that space is a social product influenced by power relations rather than a mere physical place. Lefebvre's other book, 'The Right to the City' (Lefebvre, 1996), is another globally recognised work that expands upon the concept of spatial justice by incorporating a range of demands in cities, including housing, participation in urban governance, access to public spaces, and prevention of displacement and gentrification, to mitigate spatial inequalities within urban environments. The concept of spatial justice has also been explored in the context of urbanisation and capitalism by geographer and social theorist David Harvey. In works such as 'Social Justice and the City' (Harvey, 1973) and 'Spaces of Hope' (Harvey, 2000), Harvey suggests how to develop more equitable urban planning and development practices and examines how unequal development and spatial segregation contribute to societal inequities. Harvey defines justice within the framework of place and time, asserting that it is impossible to discuss justice without considering its contested nature as a product of power dynamics within specific locations and historical periods (Harvey, 1996). Several other authors are developing the concept of spatial justice. For example, when it comes to planning and policymaking, Fainstein (2014) has contributed significantly to the field by exploring the role of governance structures in shaping spatial inequalities. She suggests that three central concepts must be considered to create more inclusive and socially just cities: diversity, democracy, and equity. In addition, Neil Smith's (2008) theoretical insights on the concepts of uneven development, gentrification, and the relationship between nature and urbanisation emphasise the importance of considering spatial dimensions of inequality and injustice in cities. The theories mentioned above are very relevant in addressing current issues and challenges in the context of the Green Transition. The relevance of spatial justice theories in this context comes from the fact that Just transition is not only about employment and job creation. It is also important to guarantee that all segments of the society have equitable access to the new opportunities of any kind. These opportunities can be related to different actions that are part of the Green Transition, and the benefits vary, from cleaner air and water to more desirable urban spaces or more accessible infrastructures and services. All of these benefits have spatial dimensions, and their accessibility matters in terms of spatial equity and justice. Several studies have shown that so-called sustainable urban development projects do not always contribute to the transition towards a more spatially just future. In some cases, it can even undermine social equity in cities, exacerbating inequalities rather than addressing them.

As an example, a study by Long (2014) discusses that the city of Austin (Texas) is recognised as a sustainable city with strong economic growth, and its ability to address political tensions between development and environmental protection has made it a model for policymakers. However, the popular narrative overlooks key aspects of sustainable development, such as fair political

representation, affordability, and social justice issues. The author shows that Austin, a newly segregated city, is emerging. The downtown area features a sustainable community that is attractive to the affluent creative class, while the outer areas are seeing a growing marginalised working class facing challenges such as limited access to city services, suburban poverty, increased traffic congestion, etc. Therefore, Long views the case as a 'sustainability fix,' related to the concept of the 'spatial fix,' originally introduced by Harvey (1982, 1996). Harvey's theory suggests that capitalism, due to its inherent instability, seeks a spatial fix during periods of cyclical over accumulation. This involves expanding, reconstructing, and investing in infrastructure to open new markets and resources—not to solve the core problem but to alleviate it temporarily. Thus, rather than facilitating a comprehensive green transition, this approach merely acts as a remedy that perpetuates existing economic crises. Ultimately, such an agenda is unlikely to achieve meaningful progress towards justice or a fundamental Just transition.

Another example is provided by Hoover et al. (2021), who analyse the issue from a planning point of view. Their research focuses on the investment in Green Infrastructure (GI) in 19 U.S. cities, showing that although GI is increasingly used to enhance sustainability and resilience, the issues of justice are usually missing. From a spatial planning perspective, investment in GI is a matter of distributional environmental justice, and their research identified numerous spatial siting criteria outlined in the plans, most of which are highly technical or economic in nature, with little emphasis on spatial and environmental justice.

In the same vein, a study by Shokry et al. (2021) showed that in the city of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), Green Infrastructures—which are originally designed to enhance the resilience of communities to climate risks—might lead to gentrification processes. Through a spatial quantitative study, they observe that the GI interventions aimed at enhancing resilience are concentrated in the wealthy and already gentrified neighbourhood of Central Philadelphia. These areas are associated with real estate developments and economic reinvestments for greater profit. This article interestingly points out the critical issue of compliance between greening initiatives and housing policies. In more detail, it mentions that housing programmes are currently disconnected from greening initiatives, which prevents the planning of neighbourhoods that become greener without displacing economically disadvantaged populations. More on that, 'Greening, housing, and other community advocates must therefore work together to guarantee that when greening is negotiated into new developments, that affordable housing—whether through land value capture, inclusionary zoning, or other measures—as well as support for the kinds of social infrastructure discussed in this article—is a key part of the plan' (Shokry et al., 2021, p. 238).

In light of this, academics and decision-makers can create more effective strategies for incorporating spatial justice into the Green Transition agenda,

guaranteeing that the transition is both environmentally sustainable and socio-economically just. Accordingly, future planning and policy responses could also favour a multi-scalar approach, taking into consideration the challenges and opportunities at different spatial levels (Brunetta et al., 2023). In addition, the approach to justice outlined here goes beyond the distributive dimension, which currently emphasises only job loss and economic decline in fossil fuel-dependent regions. Instead, the concept of spatial justice also encompasses the procedural dimension, highlighting the significance of civic participation, equitable capacity building, and bottom-up approaches to transition planning. Considering the justice element of the transition in a comprehensive, multidimensional way can help enhance the solidarity of the green transition towards climate neutrality, which is key to operationalising the foreseen strategies (Sikora, 2021).

12.2.3 Considering Justice as a Secondary Element of Green Transition: A Reductionist Approach

The last critique of the current EU approach to justice issues in the Green Transition refers to the fact that justice is usually considered as a remedy for the Green Transition's unwanted impacts. In other words, the understanding of justice within the context of the Green Transition often falls short, reducing it to merely an element of transition rather than recognising it as the primary objective of transformative change. Many recent authors promote this view when they aim to answer why justice is key to the Green Transition (Fleming & Mauger, 2021; Heffron & McCauley, 2018; McCauley & Heffron, 2018; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Wang & Lo, 2021). Although the need to transition towards a sustainable, green economy is clear, justice is often perceived in a reductionist manner, neglecting its significant implications for addressing the underlying causes of environmental challenges. Indeed, the current climate crisis not only exacerbates existing inequalities but is fundamentally rooted in unjust socio-economic relations. Consequently, the notion of justice as an element to be considered within the transition arises from a failure to acknowledge that the crisis itself partly stems from these inequalities.

According to the widely accepted view of Just Transition, the transition to a green economy is the key objective that inevitably brings about socio-economic challenges. These challenges might lead to regional inequalities, meaning that the dependence on fossil fuel industries in particular regions makes them more vulnerable to change. To alleviate this situation, the transition to a green economy must provide compensation for the most affected regions. However, framing justice solely as a reactionary measure overlooks its deeper significance. Justice should not merely serve as a remedy for immediate injustices but also as a lens through which we can address the structural inequities as root causes of social and environmental challenges. Failure to identify injustice as a structural issue risks causing cycles of inequality and hindering real progress towards sustainability.

Therefore, within the discourse of the Green Transition, justice must not be relegated to a secondary role since this reductionist view fails to grasp the essence of justice as the core objective of the transformation. While the urgency of transitioning to a sustainable, green economy is evident, justice must not be marginalised; rather, it should be recognised as integral to addressing the root causes of environmental crises. Therefore, what is suggested is that justice, instead of being an aftermath of the Green Transition, must become an objective hand-in-hand with it: a transition to both a just society and a green economy.

12.3 Concluding Remarks. Towards an Integrated Framework for Spatial Justice in the Green Transition

The concept of Green Just Transition is closely tied to sustainable development, which aims to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection (Shaker & Berisha, 2025). Green Transition and growth, advocated by organisations like the World Bank and the UN, seek economic growth while protecting the environment (Mandelli et al., 2018). The Green Transition could lead to new green jobs and increased welfare. However, it also poses challenges such as job losses, particularly in fossil fuel-dependent sectors of the economy.

The Just Transition approach emphasises the need to address such issues, including employment and social concerns, in moving towards sustainability. The EGD aims to make green growth and transition work together to implement sustainable development effectively and holistically.

However, as illustrated in this chapter, the EU's approach to justice issues can be improved if some existing limitations are considered. The limitations analysed in this chapter are overemphasising the distributive dimension of justice while undermining the procedural one, the inadequate attention to the spatial dimension of justice, and considering justice as a secondary element of Green Transition. Here, we argue that a spatial conception of justice can help overcome the challenges outlined in this chapter by providing a comprehensive framework that addresses both the immediate and underlying challenges of the just and Green Transition. A spatial understanding emphasises the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors within specific geographical contexts. Therefore, during the whole transition process, it is important for the policymakers to:

- Assess how environmental policies regarding the Green Transition impact different geographies on a local scale. The analysis of these impacts can consider access to resources and basic services, socio-economic changes, and place-based assessments of communities' vulnerability to radical economic changes.

- Guarantee equitable geographical access to the new infrastructures, including urban green, renewable energy sources, new green jobs, etc., in different neighbourhoods.
- Consider that new green job creation policies and plans can be created in disadvantaged areas to support local development and provide opportunities to address socio-economic and spatial inequality.
- Provide fair access to training programmes, especially in disadvantaged areas, and empower citizens by informing them about their ways of involvement in decision-making processes. This can be complemented by additional skills training to prepare the population for emerging job market requirements.
- Enhance the bottom-up decision-making and procedural dimension of equity to ensure that decision-making processes are fair, transparent, inclusive, and participatory. This does not mean that only soft governance tools are crucial; also, hard governance tools are necessary to create more effective outcomes.
- Consider justice issues not only as a remedy for immediate impacts caused by transition but also as a lens through which we can address structural inequities as root causes of social and environmental challenges.

This chapter mainly aimed to study the existing gaps and limitations in the institutional discourse of Green Transition in the European context and proposed some strategies to overcome these limitations. However, it is essential also to consider the potential challenges and barriers to implementing the recommended strategies.

The first challenge refers to the political resistance of the dominant groups whose benefits are not in coherence with the redistributive policies or planning initiatives, and so these policies might threaten their interests. This once again points to the importance of recognising and amplifying the voice of the least powerful and most vulnerable groups in societies and empowering these groups so that they can contribute to the decision-making processes.

The second challenge refers to the distribution of public and private funding across different geographies. Green Transition aims to foster welfare, well-being, and social equity through a sustainable economic path in coherence with EGD. Therefore, to reach this goal, it is crucial to allocate resources based on place-based factors that can prioritise the allocation of resources.

The last challenge is the structural characteristics of governance systems, which can play a crucial role. As an example, rigid local planning laws might be a barrier to implementing justice-oriented policies. Traditional zoning laws that historically favour socio-economic groups over others are an important constraint, for instance. Another example of structural constraints to justice-oriented spatial policies is the institutional inefficiencies usually caused by dysfunctional bureaucratic systems. Spatial justice also has a temporal dimension, for example, due to the displacement of specific groups from one place

to another at a certain point in time. Institutional structures that are not efficient, adaptive to changing conditions, and flexible might create critical delays in the implementation of spatial justice policies. Therefore, the lack of integrated planning creates serious problems. Justice is not a fragmented issue, and disadvantaged people usually suffer from issues that relate to different sectors, from housing to transportation and environmental planning. Finally, fragmented and purely sectoral approaches fail to address the root causes of existing injustices in various places.

In brief, a spatial approach to justice -at different geographical levels, from national to local- also makes it possible to look more closely at the systemic injustices that underlie environmental problems. Policymakers can address the underlying causes of socio-economic linkages instead of just managing their symptoms by examining how these relations emerge regionally. The significance of local knowledge and community views in forming policy responses is emphasised by a spatial definition of justice. Through grassroots stakeholder engagement, policymakers can provide solutions for specific circumstances, with a focus on social justice and environmental sustainability. Importantly, we argue that the existing EU framework for justice within the context of the Green Transition relegates it to a secondary role, primarily focusing on mitigating the transition's adverse effects on particular groups, such as workers in the fossil fuel sector. While acknowledging the importance of addressing these impacts, it is vital to recognise that the concept of a Just Transition extends beyond mere alleviation. It must align closely with the broader goals of energy and environmental transition, operating in parallel to ensure comprehensive and sustainable change.

A potential recommendation for upcoming research is to investigate the outcomes of the EU's JTM and implemented strategies in local contexts. This could entail evaluating their ability to fulfil the requirements of marginalised communities, the sufficiency of assistance for businesses and sectors undergoing transformation, and the consistency and inclusivity of policies designed to achieve a fair transition at a local level.

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