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CHAPTER 1

Just Green Transitions - An Introduction

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1.1 Introduction

Since the ratification of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the notion of Just Green Transitions (JGTs) has become an increasingly salient topic in contemporary research and academic discourse (Castona, 2024; Heffron and Heffron, 2021; Shaker & Berisha, 2025; Wang & Lo, 2021). JGTs are also a prominent feature in international climate and environment policy frameworks, including

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the European Union's Green Deal (EUGD: European Commission, 2019), the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015, 2023), and the Just Transition Guidelines of the International Labour Organisation (International Labour Organisation, 2015). The EUGD is an ambitious policy framework designed to support the aim to make the European Union (EU) climate-neutral by 2050 by stimulating climate and environmental transitions within a range of policy areas, such as the circular economy, building renovation, biodiversity, farming, and innovation (European Commission, 2019).

The European Union's Just Transition Mechanism, introduced in 2021 under the EUGD, is directly committed to identifying and supporting Europe's most affected regions with the transition's technical, social, and territorial-specific impacts of a low-carbon economy (European Commission 2020a). Financial support is also made available to all member states through the European Union (EU) Just Transition Fund, focusing on those regions highly dependent on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive industries, with citizens most vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of transition (Ibid). While the EU is seen as leading the way in promoting and supporting JGTs, the EUGD faces enormous implementation challenges due to the scope of facilitating multiple and simultaneous transitions across different countries and regions (Shaker & Berisha, 2024).

To become a climate leader, the EU is keen to export its new climate and environmental policy initiatives to neighbouring countries and accession and pre-accession states (European Commission 2022). To facilitate this, the EU provides policy and financial support for developing and implementing the EUGD in EU candidate and pre-accession countries, including those in the Western Balkans (WBs). Besides the mentioned JTM and JTF, the EU has also introduced several other JGT-oriented political measures and economic support packages for accession, candidate, and third countries, including the 2022 Enlargement Package of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the NextGenerationEU (NGEU), the JTM, the Fit-for-55 package, the REPower EU plan, the EU Reform Agenda, and the New EU Strategy for the Potential Enlargement of the European Union (European Commission, 2024). The EU also initiated the idea of creating the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) in 2020 (Berisha, 2025a, 2025b). The GAWB closely aligns with the framework outlined in the EUGD (European Commission, 2020b; Knez et al., 2022). The EU supports the implementation of the GAWB and national climate plans primarily through the Berlin Process and the new EU Growth Plan for the WB Region, providing funding via the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and the Western Balkan Investment Framework (European Commission, 2023; Regional Cooperation Council, 2021).

The shift to carbon neutrality fostered by the EUGD and the GAWB could profoundly impact societies, economies, and governance processes across the

WBs and Europe (Ignjatović et al., 2024). As many European states are experiencing, the socio-economic challenges and benefits of JGTs are not necessarily homogenous, with transitions generating both positive and negative impacts across a diversity of regions and societal groups (Kortetmäki et al., 2025). How JGTs are designed and implemented will have an important effect on regional development across European countries, particularly in regions that historically suffer from slow or stagnant socio-economic growth, such as the WB Region (Rodríguez-Pose & Bartalucci, 2024).

This handbook has been prepared under the auspices of the GreenFORCE Horizon project, aiming to support the WB towards the transition from a carbon-based to a more free-carbon society. It offers a panorama of case studies and initiatives activated in the WB and beyond, showing the heterogeneity of JGT approaches. The handbook represents a first attempt to systematise the concept of JGTs and offers an entry point to understand where the WB stands on this topic. Besides this brief introduction, Sect. 1.2 presents a detailed discussion of the JGT concept, investigating its complexity and why it is a concept 'hard to grasp' (Shaker & Berisha, 2025). After that, Sect. 1.3 presents the state of the art of JGTs in the WB, pointing out its main issues. Section 1.4, instead, presents the handbook focus, aims, and objectives, followed by Sect. 1.5, which delves into the handbook contributions' content—here, each chapter is briefly presented, outlining the logic back to the handbook.

1.2 Just Green Transitions: A Concept Hard to Grasp

The term 'Just Green Transitions' is largely a policy and academic construct rarely used within a societal context or by citizens (Shaker & Persico, 2024). Since the 1950s, the notions of 'Green Transition(s)' and 'Just Transition(s)' have been used regularly and interchangeably in policy and academic discourse, along with other iterations, such as 'Green Transformation(s)' and 'Just Transformation(s)' (Shaker & Berisha, 2024). In recent years, however, it has been increasingly commonplace to find compound references combining both these notions, including 'Green and Just Transition', 'Green Just Transition', and 'Just Green Transition' (Cedergren et al., 2022).

Shaker (2025, in this volume) argues that the JGTs is a meta concept that embodies a rich tapestry of interconnected and concurrent concepts. He continues that within the JGTs terminology, there is no agreed consensus on what constitutes 'green' or 'just', and no clear blueprint for developing and implementing JGTs (Ibid). Furthermore, Shaker and Berisha point out that the use of the words transition(s) and transformation(s) in both singular and plural form creates confusion as to whether JGTs represent a singular phase or goal or several parallel and simultaneous phases and goals (Shaker & Berisha, 2024). Here, it might be helpful to distinguish between 'transition' as a goal, i.e. the shift to carbon-neutral societies and economies, and 'transitions' as a

process, i.e. the multiple ongoing activities across multiple governance levels and policy spheres in helping to meet the transition goal.

The term JGT embodies a range of concepts and serves as an umbrella term that includes different policy themes and sectors, including climate, environment, energy, water, air, soil, and food. While there is no official agreed definition, throughout the Handbook, the term 'just green transition' is used to refer to strategies, policies, and measures that ensure no one is left behind in the transition to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies and societies (Tavares, 2022). While definitions of JGTs are extremely broad, Moodie et al. (2021) note that there are several key dimensions of JGTs that strategies, policies, and measures must try to address, highlighting the complexity and multidimensional nature of shifting to carbon-neutral economies and societies (also see Chapter 2 in this volume). The WBs are in the very early stages of developing and implementing JGTs (Imami et al., 2023), so policymakers can learn from existing policy challenges and good practices from across Europe and the world, in addition to academic contributions defining key JGTs dimensions and characteristics.

1.3 Just Green Transitions in the Western Balkans

The WB is lagging behind its European neighbours regarding implementing JGTs and meeting international climate and environmental goals and targets (Berisha, 2024). Energy systems in the region remain outdated, with coal-powered thermal energy plants accounting for between 60 and 95% of the region's electricity production (Bechev, 2023). Road transport as the dominant transportation mode in the WB countries significantly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. Jeftić et al. are stating that the total share of transport emissions in WB countries is dominated by CO_2 from road transport, which is most evident in large urban areas that also suffer from associated high pollution (Jeftić et al., 2025). In regions with lower population density and underdeveloped public transport, energy consumption per capita in urban transport is significantly higher. The role of public transport in reducing urban energy consumption is crucial, as cities with well-integrated systems show significantly lower per capita energy use (Vračarević, 2021). The slow speed of climate and energy transitions in the region runs counter to the recent policy commitments of national-level decision-makers (Regional Cooperation Council, 2021). All WB countries pledged to cut national greenhouse gas emissions in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement. In the Joint Statement on Clean Energy Transition adopted in February 2019 in Podgorica, ministers of energy and of environment confirmed their will to align as swiftly as possible with the EU's energy, climate, and environmental policies. At the Berlin Process Summit in Poznań in July 2019, WB leaders expressed their willingness and readiness to meaningfully promote and contribute to the implementation of the EUGD and support EU efforts to fight climate change, protect the environment, and unlock the economic potential of the

green, low-carbon, and circular economy in the region (Ibid). In 2020, the leaders of the Six WB countries also signed the Sofia Declaration, which stated, 'we commit to work towards the 2050 target of a carbon-neutral continent together with the EU through mainstreaming a strict climate policy and reforming energy and transport sectors'. (Regional Cooperation Council, 2020). The Sofia Declaration laid out a number of climate and environment related actions, including a commitment of each WB country to align with EU Climate Law and EU Emissions Trading Scheme, set forward thinking 2030 energy and climate targets, prepare and implement climate mitigation strategies, participate in the European Climate Pact, and transpose the EUGD within all climate and environmental policies and interrelated policy sectors (Ibid).

In meeting these commitments, the 2020 Sofia Declaration outlined plans to develop a GAWB, as mentioned above (Regional Cooperation Council, 2020). Introduced in 2021, the GAWB is a growth strategy for the WB designed to support climate and energy transitions and the shift to sustainable carbon-neutral economies and societies across the WBs (Regional Cooperation Council, 2021). The GAWB and the corresponding Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan is expected to support the EU accession processes (Berisha, 2025a) by attempting to build policy links and cohesion between WB countries under key green agenda policy sub-themes closely aligned with the EUGD and other EU climate targets, including: (1) Decarbonisation (Climate, Energy, and Transport); (2) Circular Economy; (3) Depollution (Air, Water, and Soil); (4) Sustainable Food Systems and Rural Areas; and (5) Biodiversity (Protection and Restoration of Ecosystems) (Regional Cooperation Council, 2021). The joint framework seeks to enable coordinated action for WB countries to adopt EU standards while adapting to local contexts. The efforts are also motivated by access to funding and advancing the pre-accession dialogue and the EU accession process. In addition to the GAWB, each country has also developed EU-mandated national-level energy and climate plans (Regional Cooperation Council 2021).

As previously mentioned, JGTs will be crucial in shaping political, territorial, socio-economic, and environmental developments across the WB (Berisha, 2025a and b; Shaker, 2025, in this volume). On a political and territorial level, the extent to which WB align national and regional climate and environmental strategies with the goals and targets of the EU Green Deal will significantly impact on their chances of EU accession while also laying the foundations for enhanced macro-regional and cross-border cooperation and integration between Western Balkan countries (Tziarras, 2019). On a socio-economic and environmental level, JGTs present an opportunity to modernise energy infrastructures, improve energy security, promote economic growth through green foreign direction investment, and bring climate and environmental gains, including less pollution and cleaner air, particularly in larger urban areas, such as Skopje and Belgrade, where there are record high levels of pollution (Berisha, 2025a).

Despite closer alignment with EU climate and environment goals, the extent to which WB countries can maximise the opportunities and benefits presented by JGTs is open to question as the WB Region suffers from an implementation deficit in relation to the GAWB and national climate plans (Bechev, 2023). Operationalising JGTs in the WBs is a major challenge due to existing social, political, economic, and territorial specificities, as well as limited institutional capacities across the region (Bieri, 2015; Berisha & Cotella, 2021; Ignjatovic et al., 2024). Many WB countries are still heavily dependent on coal and thermal power plants for energy production (Berisha, 2025a). The energy infrastructure is dominated by large state-owned companies with undue political influence, so key sectors lack political will and commitment to change the status quo (Bechev, 2023). At a societal level, citizens are both unaware and somewhat resistant to JGTs; the term 'transition' has become loaded with negative connotations, as the WBs have been in a loop of post-socialism transition since the early 1990s, with the slow transition towards liberal democracies, free economies, and EU integration, creating disillusionment and 'transition fatigue' among citizens (Toto et al., 2023).

Overcoming these challenges will be pivotal if the WBs is going to develop and implement effective JGTs that meet regional needs and are accepted and supported by citizens. An increase in national-level political will and ambition, enhanced capacity building, and continued EU-level support and finance is considered essential for JGTs in the WB Region (Bechev, 2023). As the WBs are still in their relative infancy regarding JGTs, they can learn a lot from past and ongoing JGT policy experiences from across other WB and European countries. Shared knowledge and expertise, including best JGT policy practices, can contribute towards helping WB countries to achieve the climate goals and targets set out in the GAWBs and their national climate and environment plans.

1.4 Handbook Focus, Aims, and Objectives

This handbook explores the current JGT research and policy landscape in the WBs and across Europe. Even though the concept of JGTs is rapidly emerging within academic and policy circles, there is no standard definition of JGTs and no way to design and implement them effectively to support WB and European regions and societies. The handbook aims to enhance knowledge and understanding of JGTs by identifying and analysing the latest conceptual and policy developments. In meeting this aim, the handbook has three key objectives:

- Examine the concept of JGTs and its key dimensions
- Explore the core policy thematic areas at the heart of the JGTs and the socio-economic and governance challenges and opportunities within each policy theme

- Provide emerging good practice examples of just green transition policies developed and implemented across the Western Balkans and other European regions

The handbook contributes to the policy and academic debate by exploring the multidimensional aspects of JGTs related to circularity, sustainable development, spatial planning, territorial governance, regional economy, human geography, and spatial and social justice. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to JGTs, and policies must be carefully tailored to meet the needs of different regional contexts and specificities. The findings and results outlined in the Handbook can be used by JGT policymakers and practitioners (e.g. public authorities, industries, businesses, universities, NGOs, and civil society groups) across the WBs and Europe to support the development and delivery of targeted JGTs that address regional challenges and meet the needs of citizens.

1.5 Structure of the Handbook

This final section of the introductory chapter provides an overview of the handbook's structure and presents the individual contributions. The handbook is structured into four main parts:

- Part I: Setting the Context of Just Green Transitions
- Part II Conceptualising Just Green Transitions.
- Part III: Exploring Just Green Transition Policy Themes.
- Part IV: Just Green Transitions in the Western Balkans.
- Part V: Just Green Transition Practices from around Europe and beyond.

1.5.1 Part I—Setting the Context of Just Green Transitions

Setting the context of JGTs is an intricate endeavour. Countries and transnational institutions are currently developing various initiatives attempting to accompany their contexts towards a more sustainable economy and society. Efforts are made at various levels as JTGs seem to be a conceptual challenge as well as a political and technical issue. Part I of this handbook is organised to provide the reader with a minimum of contextualisation from a conceptual and more regional perspective. More in detail, in chapter 1, Berisha et al. (2025a) identify the conceptual gap and the reason why it focuses on the Western Balkans. Moreover, it describes the handbook's focus, aims, and main objectives, offering a better contextualisation. Finally, this chapter details the handbook structure and illustrates how the various chapters contribute to consolidating the JGTs' experiences at various levels and contexts.

In Chapter 2, Moodie et al. (2025a) discuss the multidimensional framework of JGTs that is integral to achieving climate neutrality while ensuring fairness and inclusivity. This framework encompasses social, economic, spatial,

environmental, and governance dimensions, emphasising the need for a holistic approach to transitioning to sustainable, low-carbon economies. More in detail, the chapter discusses (i) the social aspect of prioritising justice and equity, addressing vulnerabilities and empowering marginalised groups through distributional, recognitional, and procedural justice; (ii) the economic aspects of JGTs providing opportunities for regional restructuring, circular economies, and innovation, despite the substantial costs associated with transitioning; (iii) the spatial aspects advocating for tailored policies to mitigate territorial disparities and integrate socio-cultural identities into transition strategies; (iv) the environmental dimension focuses on achieving long-term sustainability through carbon neutrality, biodiversity preservation, and resilience-building and (v) governance dimension underlying its pivotal role in fostering multi-level collaboration, citizen engagement, and policy coherence. Finally, Chapter 3, authored by Moodie et al. (2025b), focuses on the JGTs' policy landscape, providing a context for understanding the policy orientations and implementations at various levels, including national with a WB focus, EU and international levels. The chapter discusses the various attitudes and presents a preliminary landscape of policy frameworks and implementation.

1.5.2 PART II—Conceptualising Just Green Transitions

The concept of JGTs is gaining increasing attention in academic circles in response to recent policy developments supporting the shift to climate-neutral economies and societies. Part II of the Handbook critically reviews the notion of JGTs through conceptually focused chapters that develop our understanding of JGTs and its key elements. Chapter 4 by Shaker (2025) discusses the role of the meta-governance models in effectively developing and implementing JGTs' strategies across scales, actors, and sectors within EU Member States and Candidate Countries. The chapter advocates for a meta-conceptual approach to JGTs, which recognises the multiplicity, simultaneity, diversity, and complexity of transitions, emphasising the important role of spatial planning and territorial governance in achieving both institutional integration and carbon neutrality. The chapter finds that the so-called Just Green Transitions, as envisioned in the EUGD, offer a viable framework for the WB integration into the EU, but only if it is accompanied by a tailored meta-governance approach that addresses the macro-regional challenges and opportunities included in the GAWBs. Chapter 5 by Tapia et al. (2025) examines the evolution of the JGTs concept from a historical perspective, connecting its major conceptual and operational milestones to the development of the international climate policy agenda, from its origins to its current interpretation in practice, policy, and research. The chapter shows how the JGTs paradigm has not evolved in the same way as other strategic frameworks for sustainable development. Most of these were first developed on an abstract theoretical and conceptual level, to be then applied on a more practical level, whereas the JGTs was developed as a practical policy to address workers'

needs before developing into an overarching policy framework and academic concept. Historical evolution of the JGTs policies, highlighting how the focus of JGTs has changed over time, moving from a predominantly preventative and mitigative perspective to a more adaptive and transformational policy. Different JGTs' approaches are not mutually exclusive but complementary, as JGTs policies may require a combination of mitigative, adaptive and/or transformative measures. This contribution leads nicely into Chapter 6 by Jaššo and Husár (2025), which discusses the role of participatory planning culture in promoting a just and sustainable transition. The authors argue that traditional spatial planning methods, which rely on regulations and legislation, are no longer sufficient in addressing the specific and unique features of JGTs, which require adaptable strategies and tools that engage local communities and citizens. They conclude that JGTs require the application of collaborative planning tools that promote citizen engagement and empower communities to shape JGTs through direct participation and increased education, information, and technology. In the final chapter of this section (chapter 7), Valkenburg (2025) explores the role of knowledge and expertise in JGTs policymaking and planning processes. The chapter highlights that JGTs pose complex challenges that need to be faced with an interdisciplinary approach, integrating a broad range of knowledge types. The chapter concludes that considerations of epistemic justice need to be at the heart of JGTs policy and governance processes to ensure that all relevant expertise and voices are heard and no one institution or actor comes to dominate JGTs proceedings.

1.5.3 PART III—Exploring key Just Green Transitions Policy Themes

The notion of JGTs has slowly permeated the policy discourse at all levels of governance (international, national, regional, and local levels). In policy documents, JGTs often acts as a broad umbrella term, which covers a range of key policy thematic areas, such as climate resilience and adaptation, clean and renewable energy, circular economy, environmentally friendly transport, sustainable agriculture and food production, depollution of air, water, and soil etc. This section of the handbook broadens a significant role of public policies in promoting fairness, both in the distribution of resources and in overcoming structural barriers. Based on in-depth analyses, chapters offer recommendations for shaping policies that integrate economic stability and environmental sustainability, drawing on experiences from the region and beyond.

In Chapter 8, Buza and Allkja (2025) discuss landscape design as a tool to foster spatial transformations considering just green transition in the WB. The aim is to analyse current policy frameworks and policy practices in the WB by taking Albania as a main case study in order to understand the potential that landscape planning and design can offer for JGT. It offers a mapping overview of how and if stakeholders are involved in the conceptualisation, development, and implementation of policies regarding the multiple transitions in the region, pointing out the limits of a top-down approach. Chapter 9

by Novikau and Krupalija (2025), instead, provides a detailed analysis of the current energy landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussing the reliance on coal and the significant environmental and health issues this reliance causes. They also examine the potential benefits of transitioning to renewable energy, such as improved air quality, job creation in new sectors, and alignment with EU environmental standards. The authors emphasise the importance of a just transition that includes retraining programs for workers, social safety nets, and community engagement to mitigate the negative impacts of this shift. They conclude that Bosnia and Herzegovina's green energy transition demands a multi-faceted approach which should be supported by collaboration between government agencies, international bodies, private investors, and local communities, etc. and future research as a base to explore best practices for decommissioning coal plants, fostering alternative industries, and developing sustainable, community-supported renewable energy projects. Following chapter 10 by Nikolov (2025) has an overview character, providing a thorough analysis of the legal frameworks and practical aspects of cross-border cooperation in the sensible border regions in the Western Balkans and also offering valuable insights into the potential for cross-border public services (CPS) supporting the Just Green Transition. The author concludes that cross-border cooperation is essential for supporting a Just Green Transition in the Western Balkans, particularly through cross-border public services that facilitate the implementation of the Green Agenda's goals. Furthermore, the author emphasises the importance of leveraging existing cross-border structures, programs, and bilateral agreements, while suggesting that the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) should take on the role of regional CPS (cross-border public services) provider and coordinator of the Action Plan for the Western Balkans Green Agenda. A more detailed analysis of regional CPS bodies and the normative frameworks underpinning them is necessary to fully capitalise on the potential of existing regional institutions to support this transition. Chapter 11 by Maričić and Pantić (2025) provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic and environmental challenges associated with the green transition in coal-mining regions with a focus on Serbia. Coal-mining communities in economically less developed regions, including the Western Balkans, face significant challenges due to severe pollution, outdated technologies, and weak enforcement of environmental standards. In Serbia, where energy consumption heavily depends on coal, regions like Kolubara and Kostolac are economically significant (their municipalities are among the top-ranked in the country in terms of income) but environmentally vulnerable. The chapter offers practical strategies for transforming coal-mining regions, drawing on successful examples from Germany and Poland. Incorporating insights from stakeholder interviews adds depth to the analysis and highlights real-world challenges and opportunities. The authors conclude that while JGT can enhance environmental quality and overall life standards, it poses significant risks of economic deprivation in post-coal-mining regions. To prevent an unjust transition, strong commitments from both national and local

governments are essential. The primary obstacle to implementing JGT in coal-mining communities lies in the conflicting interests of various social actors, such as trade unions, politicians, environmentalists, and mining companies. Lessons from other post-mining transitions highlight the importance of early preparation, financial resource allocation, and inclusive strategies to mitigate decarbonization risks. The labour market will inevitably be reshaped, requiring a coordinated approach, transparent decision-making, and broad stakeholder engagement. In Serbia, despite growing awareness of decarbonization, it is not yet integrated into policy systems or strategic thinking. Examples from Poland and Germany show that success in achieving JGT goals depends on clear, long-term restructuring policies. A place-based, bottom-up approach, involving local stakeholders in policy design and implementation, as seen in the Ruhr region and the UK, is recommended to ensure a smoother transition. In the final chapter of this section 12 by Brunetta et al. (2025) an innovative perspective is introduced by focusing on spatial justice, addressing geographical dimensions often overlooked in policy discussions. The authors provide a thorough critical standpoint of the EU's Just Transition Strategy, highlighting significant gaps in its approach to justice, offering clear recommendations for integrating spatial justice into the Green Transition and providing practical strategies for policymakers. They conclude that the Green Just Transition (GJT) must balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection while addressing systemic injustices that underlie environmental challenges. Current EU approaches overemphasise distributive justice and overlook procedural and spatial dimensions, which limit their effectiveness. A spatial framework is recommended to integrate local knowledge, ensure equitable resource distribution, and support disadvantaged areas through targeted infrastructure, job creation, and skills training. Challenges include political resistance, funding disparities, and rigid governance structures. The authors emphasise the need for holistic, place-based strategies and call for further research on the outcomes of the EU's Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) in addressing local-level inequities.

1.5.4 Part IV—Just Green Transitions in the Western Balkans

Since the beginning of the nineties, the Western Balkan countries have transitioned from a centralised to a market economy, which has led to significant institutional, social, and economic developments (Berisha et al., 2018, 2024; Tsenkova & Nedović-Budić, 2006). Within this context, JGTs have emerged as an important new policy theme for developing collaborative partnerships, enhancing socio-economic growth, and building regional resilience across Balkan countries. These ideas are manifested in the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which presents several challenges and opportunities that just green transition presents for the region. This part of the handbook critically examines different experiences of JGTs processes across the WB and their spatial, governance, economic, social, and environmental (direct or side)

effects. The chapters offer different perspectives regarding processes of the overall JGTs in the WB as well as case studies from the different countries such as Albania, Serbia, Kosovo*,[1] Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Below, there is a short description of what to expect from each of the chapters.

Chapter 13, written by Garvanlieva et al. (2025), presents the current conditions of the Just Green Transition in North Macedonia and, more specifically, in the mine-based SouthWest Economic Region. The socio-economic dimension of green transition is explored in this case focusing on the decarbonisation of the TTP Oslomej. The study uses different costbenefit analyses to offer a basis for policymakers on the impact that JGTs policies may have in the region. The recommendations are of high value for the entire region with a strong energy production base through fossils. Chapter 14, presented by Imami and Aliaj (2025), delves into the risks of purposive transition in Albania. This chapter is based on transition theories and tries to compare theoretical frameworks with the multiple transitions occurring in Albania. The concept of transition has been thoroughly analysed, offering a basis for a better understanding of the processes of change that have occurred in Albania since the early 1990s. This chapter not only offers a new perspective of understanding JGTs through transition theories in Albania but also serves as a stepping stone for further and deeper studies in the WB countries that face similar processes of change. Chapter 15 has been prepared by Živanovic et al. (2025) and focuses on the case study of Serbians' pathway to JGTs. Following a detailed analysis of the international and national policy frameworks on green transition, the chapter delves deeper into the policy analysis of Serbia. The chapter offers interesting perspectives on the limits of (top-down) policy transfer and their impacts in specific regions. Additionally, the chapter analyses the gap between policy objectives and results in reality. This gap is quite evident for most WB countries. Thus, the perspective opened by the discussion in this chapter serves as a tool for policymakers to reduce the gap between formal policy adoption and implementation. Chapter 16 by Oruc et al (2025) assesses the budgetary and distributional implications of expected job destruction of coal mines closures. To address the issue, the chapter estimates on the labour market impact of mine closure using a panel dataset of the BiH Labour Force surveys 2016–2021 and BiH occupational forecasting model by assessing the transition to (un)employment of redundant workers from coal mines, taking into account their education level, occupation and age. Then, the estimated job and wage losses were incorporated into the BiH tax-benefit microsimulation model to assess the impact of such losses on government revenues and poverty and inequality levels among households in BiH, by type of household and region. Chapter 17 focuses on the waste management sector as one of the key dimensions of just green transition. Toska et. al. (2025), analyse

[1] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

in detail the approach of the Montenegrin government and policies in terms of waste management related to green transition. The study focuses on the central region of Podgorica with the aim of understanding the potentials that Refused Derived Fuel and Solid Recovered Fuels can have as a source for energy production. Following a detailed analysis of current waste management practices in the region, the chapter makes a good case for applying principles of circular economy to the sector. This chapter makes a strong argument for moving towards the application of circular economy principles in the waste management sector and gives distinct recommendations for the advancement of green transition in the region. Chapter 18 is presented by Ndreka (2025) and focuses on energy transition in Kosovo. The energy sector is heavily based on fossil resources not only being directly linked to the green transition of the sector but also to deep environmental impacts in terms of air pollution and depletion of resources. The chapter makes a deep analysis of the policy and institutional framework of the energy sector in Kosovo. It focuses on renewable energy and increasing energy efficiency. For each the authors make a detailed analysis of the policy landscape, institutional framework as well as the impact that these policies have. Additionally, it delves into issues of waste management and the concept of waste to energy. This concept offers a great opportunity for rethinking the management system of these sectors and directing them towards a new path. It has a strong link with Chapter 15, which offers a similar perspective in terms of the potential of using waste as a source for energy production in the region. Chapter 19 is prepared by Temali (2025) and focuses on nature-based solutions and green technologies to mitigate climate risk in coastal areas. The article offers a different perspective in terms of green transition actions. Following a theoretical and international policy overview, the chapter delves into different international (European) case studies to create a framework of the successful application of nature-based solutions as a key tool in the hands of planners and architects to transform coastal areas towards resilient and adaptive space under the continuous and inherent threat of climate change impacts. The chapter afterwards focuses on the Albanian case studies comparing *vis-à-vis* international ones to understand the pitfalls and the potentials of green technology applications in the country. The chapter puts a strong emphasis on planning for the future and the role of site-specific projects that interrelate climate risks with green technologies. Berisha, with chapter 20, closes off this part with a roundup discussion on the state of the art of policy frameworks in the WB with regard to green transition and taking up of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkan. This chapter serves as a conclusion to this part as it somewhat makes a recollection of all individual contributions to make a coherent and integrated analysis of the status of policy development and policy implementation in WB countries. It shows how, although countries have taken similar steps in terms of policy development, they are in different stages of preparation. Nevertheless, one key component which unites this analysis is the difficulty that WB countries have to turn green transition into a priority for policy development.

1.5.5 *Part V—Just Green Transitions Practices from Around Europe and Beyond*

The European Union has made just green transitions a central policy objective as part of the EU Green Deal. The implementation of the Green Deal is supported through financial mechanisms, including the EU Just Transition Mechanism and Funds, which are designed to support the implementation of EU Just Transition Plans and other Green Deal policies related to the key environmental themes outlined above (e.g. climate resilience and adaptation, clean energy, circular economy, renewable energies, environmentally friendly transport, sustainable agriculture and food production, depollution of air, water, and soil, and protect biodiversity and ecosystems). This section of the handbook provides fresh contributions that analyse how green transition processes have been developed and implemented across EU Member States. These chapters illuminate good practice JGTs policy examples and evaluate the direct and indirect socio-economic and governance consequences of transition processes.

Berisha et al. (2024), in Chapter 21, examine the Just Transition frameworks of Italy, Poland, Sweden, and the Netherlands within the context of the European Green Deal. The comparative analysis highlights how each country's unique socio-economic and environmental priorities shape its approach to the JGTs approach, underscoring the importance of flexibility and inclusivity. The selected case studies offer insights into the EU's collective path to a sustainable future, stressing the need for tailored solutions that address local challenges while achieving EU-wide climate goals. In Chapter 22, Shaneh et al. (2025) discuss instead the territorial governance dynamics at play in JGTs planning processes. The place-based policymaking concept of territorial governance is employed to investigate the planning procedures implemented during the preparation of EU Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs) in three Swedish regions—Gotland, Norrbotten, and Västerbotten. Finka (2025) in chapter 23, tries to mediate tacit knowledge on JGTs from Central European Countries' perspective by introducing a realistic view on past and current transition concepts as a base for the critical perception of the Green Deal as a political framework from the position of planning practice for multiple transitions in Central Europe, in order to outline possible conceptual and practical solutions suitable for Western Balkan as inherent part of integrated Europe, demonstrated on an example of Vision and Strategy of Development Slovakia 2030. It highlights the potential of just green transition as a running challenging process of learning by doing, bringing together multiple stakeholders with different interests, many innovative solutions and mistakes, as the process of mutual learning in which the Western Balkan countries can bring their own tacit knowledge as the Central Europe including Slovakia did. Mitrică et al. (2025), in Chapter 24, instead focus more on the Romanian sector of the Danube Valley challenges. This study aims to develop a multi-criteria vulnerability assessment by identifying the levels of socio-economic vulnerability by computing a Heat Vulnerability Index (HVI), which considers a

set of indicators grouped into three key components of vulnerability (Exposure, Sensitivity, and Adaptive Capacity). The current research is aimed to be useful for academics by improving the general understanding of heat-related vulnerability in an area under the influence of one of Europe's most important rivers, but also for local decision-makers and planners to further contribute to the local climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Different from the previous contribution, Toptsidou and Böhme (2025), in Chapter 25, explore two distinct pathways towards green transition by 2050, taking the example of the Adriatic Ionian Region. Two territorial scenarios are explored, one focusing on the green transition being part of the quality of life, where health and social cohesion are prioritised. In contrast, the other focuses on a bolder idea of 'giving back to nature' where depopulated and environmentally vulnerable regions are restored as natural habitats. In the diverse landscape of the Adriatic Ionian Region, which faces socio-economic and geopolitical challenges, both scenarios highlight the need for tailor-made, place-sensitive approaches, where policy coordination, innovative solutions, community engagement, and rethinking of current actions need to be considered. The scenarios aim to offer food for thought to develop sound policy choices about the future. Katcharava (Chapter 26) offers a fascinating comparative contribution to the future trajectory of JGTs within Europe's external dimension, explicitly focusing on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The chapter examines the successful practices of WB, which, despite not being an EU member, has pioneered its own Green Agenda. The chapter further explores the policy and governance frameworks needed to build multi-level partnerships in EaP, capable of leading the complexities of the green transition. As the guiding tool, it proposes the specifically tailored JGTs' roadmap to align and deal with regional specificities within the EaP.

Finally, in chapter 27, the editors sum up the main lessons learned and identify a number of future research perspective pointing out the importance of taking into consideration the promotion of tailored region-specific strategies, participatory policymaking, and investment in education and workforce reskilling to ensure fair and sustainable transitions.

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