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CHAPTER 27

Pathways to Just Green Transitions: Reflections and Future Directions

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27.1 Introduction

The chapters presented in this volume collectively explore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities associated with Just Green Transitions (JGT). Even though not clearly defined by the literature (Shaker, 2025; Shaker & Berisha, 2024, 2025), the concept of JGT addresses the need for an equitable transition to sustainability, balancing socio-economic resilience, environmental stewardship, and territorial cohesion (Berisha et al., 2025b). According to the European Commission (2019), the transition to a sustainable and equitable future is one of the most pressing challenges of our time. Through the

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diverse lenses of case studies and theoretical frameworks, this volume underscores the complexity of navigating a global paradigm shift towards greener economies and societies while ensuring inclusivity and fairness. The chapters have explored the complexities of JGT, offering a rich tapestry of perspectives that highlight the socio-economic, environmental, and governance dimensions of this global shift. By examining diverse contexts across the Western Balkan (WB), Europe and beyond, these contributions provide invaluable insights into the opportunities and challenges of aligning ambitious climate goals with social justice and territorial cohesion. The collection of chapters has indeed allowed us to reflect on JGT's different conceptual dimensions, bridging the gap between theory, institutional discourse, and practices. This concluding chapter summarises the main findings and warnings, giving special attention to the conditions of the WB. It is structured into three main sections. Besides this brief introduction, the first section focuses on defining the features of effective JGTs, such as multiscalar and flexibility, inclusive governance and participation, and multisectoral and future-orientedness. The second section addresses the risks of unjust green transitions, presenting the main warnings on unfair transition processes. Section three instead presents the main lesson for the WB based on the various experiences the handbook has illustrated. The chapter concludes with reflections on future research directions, emphasising the need for interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches to refine and implement JTG further.

27.2 Features of Effective Just Green Transitions

27.2.1 Multiscalarity and Flexibility

What emerged from this collection of chapters is that each context reflects JGT's measures according to its path-dependent logic, whether contingent or contextual. Reading the variety of contributions from the WB or European Union (EU) Member States, it clearly emerges the necessity to adopt a flexible approach when understanding the topic and its policy and political implications (Berisha et al., 2025a). Even though marked by a similar and interconnected supranational umbrella, the EU Green Deal and Just Transition Mechanisms for the EU Member States and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, how the topic has been implemented largely differs across the various experiences that have been highlighted in this handbook. While in some of the EU countries, JGT have been addressed through the Territorial Just Transition Plans, in the WB, the countries have focused on specific and punctual solutions without a strategic and comprehensive vision. Indeed, a central theme running through this volume is the need for tailored, region-specific approaches to JGT. Whether addressing the high-carbon industries of Italy and Poland (Berisha et al., 2025b) or the climate vulnerabilities of the Romanian Danube Valley (Mitrică et al., 2025), the diversity of contexts

underscores the inadequacy of one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, flexible policies that account for local socio-economic and environmental conditions are critical. For instance, Italy and Poland prioritise economic resilience and workforce retraining to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of decarbonisation, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia, the priority is given to the impact of closing coal mines and providing energy. Similarly, the Slovak Vision 2030 (Finka, 2025) demonstrates how past experiences with economic transitions can inform contemporary strategies, offering a model of iterative learning and adaptation that balances ecological, social, and economic priorities. In this respect, in their chapter, Toska et al. (2025) open a circular economy perspective by turning waste to energy in Montenegro, while Temali Kraja (2025) discusses the use of nature-based solutions in coastal areas for adapting to climate change. Bridging the gap between universal challenges and regional responses clearly shows the need for a heterogeneous.

27.2.2 Inclusive Governance and Public Participation

Governance emerges as a pivotal factor in the success of JGT efforts. JGTs are complex multi-actor processes conducted across multiple levels of governance (Geels, 2002; Geels et al., 2016). How to effectively govern these transitions is potentially problematic in a WB context where countries face various geopolitical, sociopolitical, economic, and institutional capacity challenges (Berisha, 2023), which can negatively impact JGT spatial planning and territorial governance processes. Shaker (Chapter 3) argues that traditional EU Multi-level Governance models do not possess the necessary socio-territorial, institutional policy mixes, and (macro) regional capacities to govern energy transitions. The author points to the need for a meta-level governance framework to homogenise a strategic approach to JGTs across WB countries to aid EU accession processes by enhancing alignment and cohesion in the implementation of the European Green Deal, Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, and New EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. A meta-level governance approach advocates a holistic, adaptive, flexible, and inclusive intergovernmental macro-regionalisation framework aimed at strengthening vertical and horizontal coordination across scales, sectors, actors, and levels of decision-making (Gänzle & Kern, 2016; Jessop, 2011; Tahirović, 2024). Further research is needed to explore how the proposed meta-level governance policy approach links to and interacts with Geels' (2002) multi-level perspective approach developed in the field of science and technology studies. Furthermore, intergovernmental macroregional approaches have faced criticism for fostering top-down policymaking with a limited role for subnational-level actors (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016; Moodie et al., 2021a). National governments in the WBs already have a prominent position in policymaking, so more research is required to examine how subnational-level actors can be more engaged and integrated into macroregional processes to ensure that JGT

policies reflect and address relevant regional and local challenges and opportunities. Indeed, the role of sub-national level institutions and stakeholders, including regional and municipal level authorities, has been curtailed in JGT processes dominated by national-level institutions and industrial sector representatives (Moodie et al., 2021b). The engagement of sub-national-level actors is especially pertinent in a WB context where power is usually centralised at the national and rarely devolved to regional and local levels. Existing power asymmetries can create conditions whereby national and sectoral priorities dominate the JGT policy agenda. Shaneh et al. (2025) argue that this dynamic has been seen in the development of EU Territorial Just Transition Plans, where national and sectoral actors have the technical and economic dimensions over the social dimension. Consequently, some of these plans have been criticised for not adequately addressing regional and local socio-economic challenges and opportunities or the needs of the citizens. As Tapia et al. (2025) note the territorial-specific nature of JGTs means that targeted policy measures are needed that address the specific characteristics of the region, industry, or social groups affected by the transition.

A just green transition under the European Green Deal is sustainable considering, as Brunetta et al. (2025) state, that distributive justice is overemphasised, while procedural justice is neglected. Namely, although equal distribution of resources is important, the insufficient involvement of all social groups in the decision-making process limits the fairness of the transition. Continuing on the previous, authors believe that introducing participatory planning and active involvement of marginalised groups through education and consultation is essential. Spatial justice implies an even geographic distribution of resources and opportunities. However, the current approach does not pay enough attention to it, and it is necessary to carry out localised analyses of the impact of green policies while ensuring that all communities have equal access to new infrastructures and services. Instead of seeing justice as a secondary element, it needs to become the primary goal, with a focus on the structural injustices that cause environmental and social problems. Also, it is necessary to ensure a fair allocation of financial resources based on local needs and degree of vulnerability to avoid problems in distributing public and private funds. Introducing mechanisms for equal distribution of funds can significantly contribute to a fairer transition.

To do that, JGT policymaking processes are expected to be open, equal, and inclusive, ensuring broad participation of different actors who bring a range of knowledge types to policy discussions, including technical expertise, practical, and local knowledge (Cedergren et al., 2022). Valkenburg (2025) supports this perspective arguing that JGTs pose complex challenges that need to be approached using interdisciplinary policymaking models which can integrate a broad range of types of knowledge (Moodie et al., 2025a, 2025b). He continues that epistemic justice needs to become one of several key conceptual ideas that guide JGT policymaking processes to ensure that different sorts of knowledge are equally and fairly included (Valkenburg, 2025). The open and

inclusive participatory planning approach to JGT policymaking suggested by Jaššo and Husár (2025) is built on epistemic justice's logic. They note that traditional hierarchical spatial planning methods, which rely on regulations and legislation, are not sufficient to address the challenges presented by JGTs; more bottom-up, flexible and adaptable JGT planning strategies and tools are required that engage local communities and empower them to shape their own lives through participation, education, information, and technology (Jaššo & Husár, 2025). Promoting participatory policymaking and planning models is especially relevant within centralised governance systems across the WBs, where JGT policymaking is dominated by national governments that collaborate with large industrial sectors. Participatory planning and policymaking processes advocating a more democratic approach to JGTs are important, as citizen engagement in JGT processes has, up to this point, been limited (Georgieva & Ferry, 2023, 2024). Tapia et al. (2025) highlight an interesting paradox in the evolution of JGT policies in relation to citizen involvement in the policymaking process. They point out that early preventative and mitigative policy measures dealt more directly with the socio-economic impacts of JGTs on citizens and workers while not engaging them directly in the policy process. In contrast, more recent adaptive and transformational policies advocate for wide-ranging citizen engagement in JGT policy processes while focusing more on the technical and economic dimensions of JGTs, limiting the potential for citizen engagement.

27.2.3 Multisectoral and Future-Oriented

As humanity confronts the dual crises of climate change and socio-economic inequality, the insights from this volume offer a roadmap for achieving a just and sustainable future. JGTs are not merely technical or economic endeavours; they are deeply political and social processes that require collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to fairness. Embracing the principles of flexibility, inclusivity, and long-term thinking, regions across Europe and beyond can chart pathways that balance environmental goals with the needs of their communities. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the journey towards sustainability is complex and challenging—but it is also an opportunity to build a more equitable and resilient world for future generations. The need to balance environmental and social requirements is manageable through a just energy transition (RCC, 2021) but not only. The potential of renewable energy sources is, for instance, recognised as a key basis for decarbonising Bosnia and Hercegovina's energy system, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, thoroughly elaborated by Novikau and Krupalija (2025). As the authors emphasise, managing the coal mine closure process represents one of the biggest challenges in the country, requiring support for local communities through retraining programs and economic diversification. Due to the interconnected challenges, the authors suggested adopting a multidisciplinary approach to achieve energy sustainability and social justice through

sustainable policies, efficient management and transparent processes. Introducing mandatory and transparent environmental impact assessments and greater involvement of local communities in decision-making is crucial for small hydropower plants. Harmonisation with the legal framework of the European Union is essential for access to funds and support for the transition, as well as intensifying efforts in the implementation of EU directives and regulations, while simultaneously strengthening capacities for monitoring and reporting. The process of coal mine closure must be carefully managed to avoid social and economic shocks. In this sense, the creation of regional transition plans that include alternative industries, infrastructure projects and programs to support workers is significant as well as the creation of regional transition plans that include alternative industries, infrastructure projects and programs to support workers. Besides, cross-border public services (related to environmental protection, disaster risk management, sustainable agriculture, and the circular economy), for instance, play a key role in accelerating a just green transition. They require a coordinated approach and the active role of national and regional actors, specifically considering negative migration trends, climate change and insufficient infrastructure. However, cross-border areas also represent, as Nikolov states, "laboratories of European integration" where new concepts and models of cooperation are tested to achieve common green goals. Regional initiatives, such as the IPA and INTERREG programs, provide significant opportunities for financing and implementing activities that support the Western Balkans Green Agenda. The involvement of regional bodies, such as the RCC (Regional Cooperation Council), and the formation of new working groups can also improve coordination and efficiency (Nikolov, 2025). Similarly to Chapters 9 (Novikau & Krupalija, 2025) and 10 (Nikolov, 2025), Chapters 13 (Garvanlieva Andonova et al., 2025), 16 (Oruc et al., 2025), 17 (Toska et al., 2025) and 18 (Ndreka & Imami, 2025), discuss the interrelationship between JGT, energy transition and waste management in contexes such as Bosnia & Hercegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo*[1] and Albania. Undoubtedly, in the WB, the link between energy transition and JGT is strong, as most countries emphasise a strong focus on energy policies. Meanwhile, these come with high social costs, as demonstrated in Chapters 13 and 16 and should be carefully supported by cost–benefit analysis. Energy transition should not be seen as a sectorial policy objective but in a comprehensive and integrated manner with socioeconomic policies. Both chapters highlight the importance of strengthening policy and institutional coordination, development of re-skilling and alternative employment, subnational-level fiscal resilience as well as addressing social and spatial inequalities. Additionally, Garvanlieva Andonova et al. (2025) suggest that although initially these efforts might seem as costly, when taking in consideration medium to long-term impacts, they are the most cost-effective type of

[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.

action. Meanwhile, Ndreka and Imami (2025) and Toska et al. (2025) discuss the interrelations between energy transition and waste management. Using waste as a source of energy production in some of the high-consuming sectors is seen as a prospect and cost-efficient alternative for supporting the Just Green Transition. This approach helps solve problems of one of the most vulnerable sectors in WB, such as waste management, while at the same time offering a plausible alternative for energy production. Also, from a social perspective, the waste-to-energy perspective creates new jobs or alternative (green) employment and businesses where other sectors easily transfer skills.

A future-oriented approach is paramount, as presented in Maričić and Pantić (2025), Finka (2025), and Toptsidou and Böhme (2025). All chapters reflect on the role of strategic planning in addressing JGT and climate change. While Maričić and Pantić (2025) provide the starting points for developing a future comprehensive JGT Strategy in Serbia, Finka (2025) discusses the case of Slovakia. In the case of Serbia, the authors pointed out the importance of enabling energy independence, economic sustainability and social justice in mining regions (Maričić & Pantić, 2025), among which discussing the cases of Kolubara and Kostolac that are considered the most important ones from the economic point of view. The exploitation of natural resources illustrates the complexity of balancing economic, ecological and social priorities in green transition. As stated in the case of Kopaonik (Protić et al., 2024), due to the depletion of ore reserves, the irrationality and lack of competitiveness of mining production, political problems and restrictions imposed by the protection regime of the National Park, mining on Kopaonik is not a significant economic activity in the region. The potential activation and access to exploit the deposits would raise a number of new issues ranging from economic viability to environmental justification and sustainability (Protić et al., 2024). Similarly, the chapter of Toptsidou and Böhme (2025) on the Adriatic Ionian Region grapples with socioeconomic disparities and demographic challenges as it envisions pathways to a sustainable future. Scenarios that prioritise well-being and ecological restoration highlight the potential for innovative, community-led solutions to bridge gaps between environmental goals and human needs.

Temali Kraja (2025) and Mitrică et al. (2025) paid particular attention to the interplay between climate change and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The Romanian Danube Valley (Mitrică et al., 2025) exemplifies how climate risks, such as heat-related phenomena, intersect with economic fragility, amplifying inequalities and threatening community resilience. Developing a Heat Vulnerability Index in this region provides a data-driven approach to identifying priority areas for intervention, underscoring the need for localised, evidence-based strategies. Chapter 19 (Temali Kraja, 2025) focuses on the fragility of coastal areas and the impact of climate change. The adaptation through the use of green technologies is seen as a solution, and various case studies are taken into consideration. The author identifies three main strategies of intervention for protecting coastal areas: defend, retreat, and co-exist. The latter is a

more sustainable solution through the application of green technologies. This chapter discusses several case studies from different regions such as Northwest Europe (Rotterdam), Southern Europe (Marche Region), and initiatives in the WB such as the Toolbox for the resilience of the Sava River. The chapter advocates that while climate change adaptation in coastal areas has major cost implications, the use of green technologies (nature-based solutions) such as planting of native trees and building of flexible spaces, in essence enhancing eco-system services to adapt, is a viable and cost-effective solution.

27.3 The Risks of Unjust Green Transitions

Several studies have underscored the risks of an unjust green transition (Schuster et al., 2023). Decarbonisation and environmental sustainability, if not carefully managed, may disproportionately impact the most vulnerable territories, certain socioeconomic groups, and even ecosystems and landscapes (Buza & Allkja, 2025), effectively shaping the distribution of "transition costs" (Rodríguez-Pose & Bartalucci, 2023). These costs are not merely economic but also social and political, often exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and territorial disparities. In particular, the way in which the JGT has been implemented in the WB raises critical concerns. Various chapters in this volume (including Chapters 7, 14, etc.) delve into how specific policies and strategies—while aimed at fostering sustainability—may have inadvertently reinforced socio-spatial imbalances, marginalised already disadvantaged communities, and generated resistance to green reforms. The discussion highlights the need for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach, ensuring that environmental goals do not come at the expense of social justice and territorial cohesion.

Economic Displacement and Energy Poverty

The Western Balkans heavily rely on coal for electricity generation, with countries like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia heavily dependent on lignite power plants (Berisha, 2025a, b). A rapid shift from coal without proper planning and social protections could lead to mass job losses, particularly in mining communities with scarce alternative employment opportunities as shown by Oruc et al. (2025) in this volume. Given some areas' high unemployment rates, shutting down fossil fuel industries without sufficient retraining programs could worsen poverty and social instability. At the same time, energy poverty is a pressing issue (see Garvanlieva Andonova et al., 2025). Many households in the WB struggle to afford energy, particularly during harsh winters, and a poorly designed green transition could increase energy costs (Berisha, 2025a). If renewable energy projects are not made accessible and affordable, vulnerable populations could face higher electricity bills, while wealthier segments benefit from incentives for solar panels, heat pumps, and electric vehicles.

Unequal Access to Green Technologies and Investments

There is a risk that the green transition will deepen inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as between socioeconomic classes. Novikau and Krupalija (2025), in their Chapter 7, affirm that to soften the potentially unfair impacts of JGT, it is imperative to ensure a transition process that will not threaten social stability, which is possible by establishing mechanisms for social protection and retraining of workers from the coal sector and economic diversification in regions dependent on coal. It is recommended that investments in solar and wind energy be increased while stricter criteria for small hydropower projects are introduced to reduce their negative environmental impacts. Indeed, access to funding and technology for renewable energy projects, sustainable transport, and energy efficiency measures is often concentrated in larger cities, while rural areas—where much of the population still relies on outdated energy infrastructure—struggle to attract investment. Additionally, while EU funds and international financial institutions support green projects, bureaucratic barriers, corruption risks, and weak institutional capacities in the WB can hinder the equitable distribution of resources. Large companies or well-connected businesses might benefit, while smaller enterprises, cooperatives, and local initiatives are left behind.

Rhetoric JGT and Political Manipulation

In the absence of strong governance and transparent policies, the green transition could be exploited for political and economic gain rather than for real sustainability (Živanović et al., 2025) Some governments may promote "green" projects that do not deliver meaningful environmental benefits but serve as opportunities for corruption and greenwashing. Chapter 14 by Imami et al. (2025) argues that there is also the risk of "purposive" transitions in the context of WB. Taking Albania as a case study, JGT is seen as a "critical juncture" for the country in terms of leapfrogging to a new stage of development. According to the authors, this transition should not be seen as a mere technocratic process but rather a radical socio-political and cultural change (Berisha, 2025a, b). While it holds up a series of opportunities, it can also be undermined by rhetorical policy discussions that do not touch on the roots of the problems. Rhetoric JGT implementation can be observed when it comes to introducing some hydropower projects in the WB that have been promoted as green solutions. However, they have caused environmental degradation and displacement of local communities, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas such as the Vjosa River in Albania and the Tara River in Montenegro. Poorly planned renewable projects that disregard environmental and social impacts could create resistance to the green transition rather than support for it.

Geopolitical and Energy Security Challenges

The green transition in the WB is closely linked to geopolitical influences. The region has historically depended on Russian gas and other external energy sources, making it vulnerable to energy price shocks and supply chain disruptions (Berisha, 2025a). If the transition away from fossil fuels is not well managed, there is a risk of increased energy dependency on external actors

like China, which has been investing in coal and hydropower projects in the region. At the same time, political instability in the WB could delay or distort the green transition process. Governments might prioritise short-term economic or political gains over long-term sustainability, leading to fragmented or inconsistent policies that hinder regional cooperation on climate action.

Social Backlash and Resistance

JGT is sometimes perceived as unjust or elite-driven, which could trigger public resistance and social unrest. If communities feel that environmental policies are imposed without consultation or disproportionately burden lower-income groups, opposition to green reforms may grow. This could slow down the transition, as seen in other parts of Europe where "yellow vest" protests and farmer uprisings emerged in response to unfair climate policies. In the WB, where trust in institutions is already low, a lack of public engagement in green policymaking could fuel scepticism and populist narratives against the EU's Green Deal and climate commitments. Politicians may capitalise on public fears, using anti-EU rhetoric or nationalist sentiments to delay or resist sustainability measures.

27.4 Lessons for the Western Balkans

The JGTs' experiences presented in this volume provide a valuable foundation for policymakers and decision-makers in the Western Balkans. Regional actors can leverage the insights and discussions outlined in this handbook to refine and enhance the ongoing political and technical discourse surrounding the JGT in the region. Drawing from these shared experiences, stakeholders can foster more informed decision-making, encourage cross-border collaboration, and contribute to developing more effective and sustainable governance frameworks.

The Importance of Multi-Level Governance and the Role of Sub-National Actors

Shaneh et al. (2025) point out, WB policymakers can enhance the role of sub-national level actors and citizens by approaching JGT policymaking through a territorial governance and place-based policymaking lens (Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2012; Schmitt & van Well, 2016), based on the principle of active subsidiarity (Aleksieva & Orejarena, 2024; Moodie et al., 2021c). In this respect, Jeftić et al. (2019) argue that effective governance based on flexibility, capability and capacity for participatory planning and decision-making enables the creation of dynamic and sustainable urban environments. Effective governance can improve the quality of neighbourhood planning, the environment and economic productivity, thereby supporting other segments of development (Jeftić et al., 2019). However, the implementation of this concept, as Brunetta et al. (2025) state, is often limited by the structural

features of the governance system, such as rigid planning laws and institutional inefficiencies, which makes it all difficult to implement fair policies in particular in the region (Berisha et al., 2021). Organising training sessions for citizens to become familiar with their procedural rights and active participation in decision-making is crucial in terms of capacity building and informing citizens. It is recommended that institutional coordination be strengthened and bureaucratic obstacles removed for the more efficient implementation of spatial justice policies (Brunetta, Caldarice & Mohabat Doost, 2025).

Enhance Cooperation

Cross-border cooperation is also of key importance for an effective green transition in the WB through establishing joint projects with neighbouring countries and the exchange of best practices, with an emphasis on innovation and sustainable development (Novikau & Krupalija, 2025). Maričić and Pantić (2025) point to the same direction, stating that for Serbia, for example, the cross-border cooperation and exchange of experiences with countries that have successfully implemented the green transition, such as Germany and Poland, represent a significant opportunity. Joint projects with neighbouring countries and learning from their examples can accelerate the implementation of effective measures and encourage the development of innovative solutions (Maričić & Pantić, 2025). Nikolov (2025) supports this perspective, adding that cross-border cooperation is indispensable in the process of a just green transition in the Western Balkans, providing the basis for a sustainable future and inclusive development. Investigating the cross-border dimension of the just green transition in the Western Balkans, she focuses on the cross-border areas of the Republic of Serbia. As Gatarić et al. (2022) state, the geostrategic importance of border areas, such as, for example, eastern part of Serbia, along the border with Romania, is the basis for establishing cross-border partnerships that can enable more efficient use of resources, improvement of environmental protection and support for local communities in the process of green transition. In that respect, Nikolov identified key themes as essential to implementing this transition. She argues that the cross-border dimension of the green transition relies on political and strategic documents that promote territorial cohesion, the reduction of regional disproportions and sustainable development in accordance with the Green Agenda of the WB.

Enhance Public Engagement in Decision-Making

The participatory planning models presented by Jaššo and Husár (2025) provide WB policymakers with practical examples of community-driven JGT policies, which have successfully raised public awareness and knowledge of the benefits of renewable energy and the environmental importance of reducing coal dependence. Proactive citizen engagement in JGT processes is essential within a WB setting where the term “transition” has become loaded with

negative connotations (Toto et al., 2023). Policymakers across the WBs must proactively engage and communicate with citizens throughout JGT processes to ensure acceptance and support for JGT policies. Moodie et al. (2022d) note that there is strong potential for enhancing citizen involvement in EU cohesion policymaking (which provides the framework for the EU Just Transition Mechanism and Funds) using a range of new digital and traditional citizen engagement tools. WB policymakers can also learn from research projects applying innovative citizen engagement tools in JGT policymaking; for example, the ongoing Horizon Europe DUST project is experimenting with Regional Future Literacy Labs as a tool for promoting citizen involvement in sustainability transition policymaking (Balz et al., 2023). Similarly, the recently published "Nordic Tool Box for Just Green Transition" also provides policymakers outside the Nordics with practical tips and tools for developing more inclusive and fairer green transition policies (Sánchez Gassen et al., 2024). Local participation and public dialogue must be at the centre of the transition process. Involving local communities in planning and decision-making will enable a better understanding and acceptance of the green transition. At the same time, informing and educating the population about the benefits of this process can alleviate resistance to change (Maričić & Pantić, 2025).

Importantly, preservation of public interest in the process of spatial planning is the basis for the successful implementation of the green transition, especially in the countries of the WB region facing numerous challenges, including institutional inefficiency, lack of transparency, and the dominance of narrow economic interests over the long-term public good. In some countries, public interest in planning is particularly questionable, often leading to insufficient involvement of local communities and insufficient consideration of environmental aspects in development policies. Starting from the dilemma of the extent to which the public interest is preserved in planning (Jeftić et al., 2019), it is important to establish a clear connection between planning, institutions, laws, planners and citizens. Planners, as actors of public interest, have a key role in cooperation with institutions in order to increase the resilience of urban and regional areas in the context of the green transition (Jeftić et al., 2019).

Education and Workers Rescaling

JGTs require developing new skills and qualifications that will enable workers to be competitive in renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and sustainable production. In this context, Maričić and Pantić (2025) state that introducing new educational programs and courses focused on renewable energy technologies, sustainable development and energy management can significantly improve workers' qualifications and ensure their competitiveness in the labour market. The education system also requires transformation in order to respond to the new needs of the labour market. Depopulating areas, which are

increasing not only in Serbia (Gatarić et al., 2022) but also in other countries of the Western Balkans, lead to a weakening of the local economy and demographic aging. This shows that new economic strategies are needed, including reorientating the workforce towards sectors that are maintained and connected to the green economy. The authors also emphasise that technological innovation and the introduction of sustainable alternatives represent an important aspect of the green transition. The development of solar and wind power plants on reclaimed mining areas, as well as the use of geothermal energy, can contribute to the stability of the energy sector and the reduction of harmful gas emissions.

27.5 Conclusion: Future Research Directions

The transition to a low-carbon and sustainable future is an ongoing and dynamic process that requires continuous adaptation and innovation. This volume has comprehensively examined JGTs in the WB and beyond, highlighting the challenges and opportunities inherent in this transformation. However, several areas require further research and policy attention. First, there is a need for more profound interdisciplinary research on the interactions between the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of JGTs. Future studies should integrate environmental science, political economy, and social justice theory insights to develop holistic transition frameworks. Second, additional research is needed to assess the long-term impacts of JGT policies, particularly in coal-dependent regions, to understand how transitions unfold over time and what adjustments may be necessary. Finally, further work is required to understand the geopolitical implications of JGTs, particularly in the context of EU enlargement and regional integration. The WB's path towards European integration is closely linked to its ability to implement just and green transition policies (Berisha, 2025a, 2025b). Future research should examine how geopolitical dynamics shape the feasibility and effectiveness of these transitions, ensuring that justice remains at the forefront of sustainability agendas. To sum up, JGTs are not merely about technological shifts but fundamentally about reconfiguring socio-economic and governance systems to be more inclusive, democratic, and sustainable. The pathways outlined in this handbook serve as a roadmap for future research, policy interventions, and collaborative actions to realise the vision of a just and sustainable future for all.

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