

Urban Challenges and Sustainable Technological Revolution

Special Session Proposal

FACING THE CHALLENGES OF THE JUST TRANSITION IN EUROPEAN REGIONS

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Abstract

The European Green Deal (EGD) aims to transform the regions of EU into a fair and prosperous society. With climate neutrality in 2050 European societies should undergo a transition towards a carbon-neutral society. The EGD seeks to design deeply transformative transition strategies, under the principle of leaving no one behind. This implies that no European citizen should be put at a disadvantage because of the EGD. The EU introduced the Just Transition Mechanism to show solidarity with the most polluted and affected regions in Europe (https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_en).

Regions across Europe are now designing and implementing just transition plans to receive funding and support from the Just Transition Mechanism. However, there are three major knowledge gaps and barriers concerning the regional acceptance of transition strategies. First, research has shown that citizens want more influence on how the transition will take place in their regions. However, meaningful ways of deliberation are rare and tend to reproduce social inequalities. Second, the link between transition strategies and the impact on marginalized communities remains poorly understood. Transition policies have the risk of predominantly benefitting already privileged citizens. Less visible and more vulnerable groups have less opportunity to reap the benefits of the transition. Third, more research is needed on the causes and consequences of growing polarization vis-à-vis transition strategies. Low acceptance of transition policies has been a significant barrier to the implementation of those policies and can lead to political polarization. Therefore, we believe that there is a mismatch between the understanding of marginalized communities, participatory governance, and transition plans, which leads to social and political opposition to those plans.

We seek to understand how marginalized communities are affected by EGD-related policies and learn whether involving them in decision-making processes increases the support for transition plans. In this context, several questions emerge:

- How do the transition processes question territorial development in regions (especially the coal-mine regions)? How do they contribute to the renewal of models, methods, and approaches?
- What is the institutional setting necessary for the transition to successfully happen?
- What are the key challenges (internal and external to regions) enabling / hindering the participation towards the ambitious transition?
- What are the research approaches and specific methodology challenges targeting the just transition that need further mastering?

- What are the methods (tools, techniques) that best suit the needs of visioning the transition and/or the evaluation of its implementation?

This special session is open to papers from all disciplines of regional science, whether they present theoretical reflection and/or empirical results.

Keywords:

EGD, transformative transition strategies, leaving no one behind, territory, marginalized communities, participatory processes, governance, policy implementation and evaluation