The Eco-Social Polity?

Theoretical, Conceptual and Empirical Issues

Edited by
Ekaterina Domorenok,
Paolo Graziano and
Katharina Zimmermann

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Introduction

Ekaterina Domorenok, Paolo Graziano and Katharina Zimmermann

In light of the aggravating climate crisis, the issue of social and environmental well-being has gained prominent attention from both academia and policy makers. In this context, scholarly research on the interaction between social and employment policy domains has flourished (Bohnenberger, 2023; Hirvilammi et al, 2023), reflecting on the ecological and social risks and costs of climate change (Gough, 2020), sustainable welfare (Fritz and Lee, 2023), new social movements prompted by green transitions (Sovacool and Dunlap, 2022) and public opinion with regard to the potentially conflicting environmental and social goals (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023). Part of this debate has focused on the evolution and challenges of the welfare state in view of emerging environmental and climate issues (Koch, 2022), along with the increasing social costs and concerns for the so-called green state (Gough, 2016) and the emerging eco-welfare regimes (Zimmermann and Graziano, 2020; García-García et al, 2022). A particularly rich research strand has developed around the European Green Deal, exploring the EU's strategy for just transition in terms of policy design and implementation of its most relevant instruments, that is, the European Just Transition Mechanism and the Just Transition Fund, the Social Climate Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Facility within the NextGenerationEU plan (Crespy and Munta, 2023; Mandelli et al, 2023; Sabato and Mandelli, 2024).

As most studies acknowledge, the interplay between social and ecological dimensions represents a universal challenge which remains to be further unpacked and elaborated upon from both theoretical and operational policy perspectives. From a normative stance, environmental sustainability and social equity are deeply interconnected and must be dealt with together for holistic and long-lasting solutions. Ecological problems often stem from social systems that prioritise economic growth and resource exploitation over equitable distribution and environmental protection. This dynamic results in practices that degrade the environment and disproportionately affect marginalised populations, exacerbating social inequalities. And just as social inequities can drive ecological degradation, ecological crises can worsen social inequities. Environmental events like climate extremes, pollution and resource depletion often hit the most vulnerable populations hardest, deepening existing social divides and creating new forms of social injustice. Integrated policy approaches, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals,

call for the combining of social and ecological goals. Addressing poverty, inequality and economic development is seen as inherently linked to sustainability, climate action and environmental protection.

However, as – for instance – the chapter by Hirvilammi and Kortetmäki in this volume illustrates, the normative reading of the 'eco-social interconnection' does not imply that such a link has consolidated, either in academic research or extant public policies. This apparent paradox can be explained by different factors: as for academia, although interdisciplinarity is advocated, an eco-social approach is very difficult to realise for both organisational and professional reasons. More specifically, universities and organisations of knowledge production are still following traditional disciplinary boundaries where social and environmental fields are separated. Whereas socio-economics is more established, to our knowledge no Eco-Social Department exists. From a professional perspective, given the nature of academic recruitment, scholars either specialise in social politics and policies or in environmental policies and politics, which are underpinned by different theoretical and analytical approaches. The only contexts where the eco-social nexus is present is in Schools of Public Affairs or in Political Science Departments particularly focused on public policy analysis.

However, even with highly integrated eco-social approaches, there will inevitably be winners and losers. Policies that promote environmental sustainability and social justice can result in disparities where certain groups benefit while others bear the costs. For example, transitioning to renewable energy might create jobs in one sector while leading to unemployment in fossil fuel industries. Recognising and addressing these trade-offs and power dynamics within societies is key to understanding the nexus between the ecological and the social question.

While the number of studies concerned with this nexus between the social and the environmental domains has been rapidly growing over the last decade, involving different analytical angles and disciplines (Cotta, 2024), the theoretical and conceptual landscape of this recent strand of research still appears to be patchy and extremely heterogeneous (Mandelli, 2022). Against that backdrop, this volume provides a comprehensive and critical overview of the so-far fragmented scholarship on the eco-social linkage, illustrating the main theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the current political and academic debates, identifying the major research gaps and reflecting on possible future research pathways across a variety of disciplines and policy areas.

By collecting a wealth of contributions that depart from different theoretical, analytical and empirical angles, the volume aims to unpack the multifaceted nature of eco-social policies, politics and polity, reflecting on how consolidated institutions, policies and societies transform in the

endeavour to cope with the twofold eco-social challenge of climate change. Since the extant literature has been primarily focusing on European cases and the eco-social nexus has become particularly salient from the political and social perspectives, the volume reflects this academic state of the art and privileges this geographical area. However, the scholarly debates covered in the book are of broader relevance, and some chapters (for example, the one by Ruiz-Campillo) do cover non-European countries.

Given the nature of the volume, from a methodological perspective most chapters have relied on extensive literature review and desk research, although some authors have also conducted original analysis on policy documents and statistical data.

In addition to providing a full range of original theoretical and conceptual insights that help analytically frame and unpack the eco-social linkage, the book presents a plentiful array of empirical findings that could be valuable for practitioners to understand the practical implications of reconciling environmental and social goals, including political and ideological conflicts, policy overlaps and inconsistencies, as well as costs, benefits and risks across a variety of policy sectors.

The book is organised into four sections. Part I introduces the main normative and theoretical perspectives on the eco-social linkage in the current debate, while Part II explores eco-social politics, including institutional actors, movements, democratic challenges, public participation and support. Part III covers the policy dimension, analysing policy strategies, instruments and governance settings of eco-social policies at the European, national and local levels across a range of sectors, such as energy, housing, industry, food and labour, to mention a few. Part IV addresses the eco-social link from a global perspective, considering macro-comparative views on international organisations, Global South and Global North perspectives, as well as urban- and micro-level viewpoints.

This state-of-the-art volume provides a guide to the current eco-social debates and studies and offers several ideas on how to proceed with this research agenda. First, and foremost, it argues that a common conceptual (if not theoretical) framework should be shared by scholars in order to bridge the gap between various academic disciplines and provide real added value to studies exploring in detail the eco-social nexus. Second, broader debates regarding the link between eco-social politics and policies and the development of capitalist economies (and their leading neoliberal paradigm) should be further explored in order to better grasp the political and economic factors which are connected to the rise (and in some cases fall) of the eco-social nexus. A more fine-grained understanding of the preferences of actors in multilevel settings would be extremely beneficial for a better understanding of eco-social conflicts and decision making. Third, the geographical coverage of eco-social studies has so far been limited mainly to Europe and some

other 'Western' cases (US, Australia, and so on). More research is needed to cover both the international level (as mentioned by Cigna et al in their chapter) and places where we do not register fully fledged eco-social policy implementation but do see environmental and social conflicts which could be better understood by adopting eco-social lenses.

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PART I

Normative and theoretical perspectives

In the first part of this book, six chapters explore diverse understandings of the eco-social nexus, ranging from integrating social and ecological goals in policy frameworks to transforming underlying economic and social structures for sustainability. By juxtaposing and integrating both anthropocentric (that is primarily focused on human welfare) and ecocentric (that is also including non-human life and planetary processes) perspectives, the six chapters provide different conceptualisations of the eco-social nexus and represent the varieties of approaches in the current eco-social debate:

- The first two chapters in this section are dedicated to discussing questions of sufficiency and well-being from different angles. 'Eco-social policies for planetary well-being' by Tuuli Hirvilammi and Teea Kortetmäki critiques current understandings of the eco-social nexus that narrowly focus on human well-being and economic growth, advocating for a transformative shift towards 'planetary well-being', which respects the intrinsic value of Earth's ecosystems and supports both human and non-human life. 'Wealth and income maxima for sustainable welfare: ecological reasons for economic limitarianism', authored by Katharina Bohnenberger, discusses the ethical implications of planetary boundaries for a cap on economic affluence. The chapter shows that economic limitarianism, which is usually justified on egalitarian grounds, is also required by the less demanding assumptions of sufficientarianism – if an eco-social nexus is acknowledged.
- The following two chapters then aim at situating modern welfare states in an ecological sustainability context. 'Sustainable welfare as a new paradigm in social policy' by Martin Fritz, Kajsa Emilsson and Jayeon Lee presents sustainable welfare as a new paradigm in social policy that bridges the gap between social and ecological objectives within the eco-social nexus. 'The growth-independent welfare state' by Laua Wiman, Raphael Kaufmann, Katharina Bohnenberger and Steffen Lange critiques the dependency of welfare states on continuous economic growth, which overlooks ecological limits. It argues for growth-independent concepts of the eco-social nexus that align social welfare with ecological sustainability.
- Finally, 'When the lifeworld colonises the system: the uncertain political prospects of eco-social transitions', by Daniel Hausknost, and 'Conceptualising consensus: constitutive elements of a political sociology

of eco-social contestation and conflict', by Vincent Gengnagel, challenge the eco-social debate by pointing towards questions of hegemony and contestations. Daniel Hausknost draws on a social-constructivist perspective to question the assumption that the capitalist growth hegemonic order can be replaced by a sustainable alternative, given sufficient societal support. He argues against the notion of the state as a neutral terrain, cautioning that not all hegemonic projects have equal chances of success, particularly given the entrenched reality-construction mechanisms of the capitalist growth model. Vincent Gengnagel offers a neo-Gramscian perspective to maintain an analytical distance from the narratives produced in governmental discourses and to ask how far policy analyses suffer from a built-in bias towards assuming the feasibility of an implementable and societally legitimate eco-social polity, omitting its conflicting and inherently political character.

By laying out these different perspectives, the chapters in Part I also provide a foundation for understanding the diverse epistemologies and philosophical perspectives in the subsequent sections of the book. While the perspectives in Part I diverge in their epistemological foundations, views on human needs and approaches to policy and change, they all agree on the necessity of integrated approaches, ethical considerations and the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems. This tapestry of ideas forms a robust theoretical base for understanding and advancing concepts within the eco-social nexus, aligning sustainable welfare policies with ecological realities and social justice.

However, while the chapters provide this robust theoretical base, additional areas merit further exploration to enrich this field. One important perspective is eco-feminism, which examines how environmental degradation disproportionately affects women and marginalised communities and advocates for integrating gender justice into eco-social policies. There is literature examining how existing social hierarchies and power dynamics influence access to resources and environmental benefits, highlighting the need to address these inequities and create frameworks that support equitable resource distribution and respond to the needs of marginalised communities.

Furthermore, the influence of cultural narratives and values on perceptions of sustainability and welfare are not addressed explicitly – albeit they are mentioned in different chapters (for example, 'European trade unions and the eco-social nexus', 'Public support for eco-social policies: insights from focus group studies in Germany and Italy', or 'Just transitions in climate and sustainable governance: a perspective from the South'). Here, existing literature explores how cultural contexts shape societies' engagements with the eco-social nexus. Comparative studies have examined different cultural frameworks, such as Indigenous worldviews that emphasise the

interconnectedness of all life forms, contrasting with Western paradigms prioritising economic growth or human well-being.

Another theoretical perspective not explicitly covered in the book is the debate on behavioural drivers behind public acceptance and participation in environmental or eco-social policies, which are discussed in behavioural economics and psychology. Research in this area investigates the reasons behind support or resistance to certain policies and the psychological factors influencing sustainable behaviours, enhancing policy design and implementation. Effective communication strategies that foster public engagement and behavioural change towards sustainability are also essential and have been explored within this literature.

While these perspectives have been touched upon only en passant in the different chapters of this book, their comprehensive exploration lies beyond its current scope. Nonetheless, the book offers a rich foundation of insights and theoretical frameworks that set the stage for deeper scholarly engagement with the complexities of the eco-social nexus.

1

Eco-social policies for planetary well-being

Tuuli Hirvilammi and Teea Kortetmäki

Introduction

Research on eco-social policies and sustainable welfare states has been developed to better understand how social and environmental goals interact in the context of sustainability transformations. While the emerging eco-social policies aim to integrate both goals, such efforts may not be transformative and sustainable enough. This might stem from two problems. First, eco-social policy suggestions may be grounded on patchy and inadequate understandings of key policy goals. How well-being, equity and ecological sustainability are understood matters for policies geared to promote them. Second, the eco-social policy framework may reproduce the human-centred normative tradition that approaches environmental sustainability narrowly as supporting human well-being only: more-than-human well-being for its own sake is neglected. *Anthropocentrism* tends to dominate both scientific and public debates, although environmental ethics has frequently proposed that anthropocentric Western value systems are among the root causes of ecological crises (for example, Rupprecht et al, 2020).

In the field of sustainable welfare and eco-social policy research, the concepts of *sustainable well-being* or *sustainable welfare* have been used to discuss human well-being in relation to sustainable development and environmental challenges (for example, Büchs and Koch, 2017; Gough, 2017; see also O'Mahony, 2022). In natural and philosophical studies, emerging research has aimed to integrate social and ecological aspects of well-being and inclusion of more-than-human well-being by developing concepts like multispecies sustainability (Rupprecht et al, 2020) and *planetary well-being* (Kortetmäki et al, 2021). Here, we draw on the viewpoint of planetary well-being that shifts the focus from social and economic outcomes to Earth system and ecosystem processes that underlie all need satisfaction. Planetary well-being means a state where the integrity of Earth system and ecosystem processes remains unimpaired to a degree that species and populations can persist to the future and both human and non-human organisms can achieve well-being (Kortetmäki et al, 2021).[1]

In this chapter, we lay down a transformative normative bedrock for eco-social policies by arguing that the goal of eco-social policies should be seen in terms of planetary well-being. We understand well-being as the degree to which organisms (humans included) can satisfy their needs and point to the importance of eco-social policies for providing the environmental, social and economic conditions that support sustainable need satisfaction. Eco-social policies are necessary to avoid need thwarting and the devastating consequences that occur when human activities transgress planetary boundaries (Richardson et al, 2023). Yet, they can strive higher than avoiding devastation: promoting inclusive and sustainable well-being respectful for life itself. In this spirit, we suggest that eco-social policies should be evaluated by examining their effects on planetary well-being: whether people can satisfy their needs with systems and practices that secure the integrity of the processes central to planetary well-being so that other forms of life and other human beings can also satisfy their needs.

Eco-social policies are, by definition, integrative. Our theorisation of planetary well-being seeks to demonstrate how adding 'eco' to 'social' policies is more than connecting climate issues to social justice or paying attention to the social impacts of green transition. Bringing 'eco' and 'social' together in a life-sensitive manner should overcome the untenable human/nature dualism and leave behind the anthropocentric paradigm. We argue that a focus on relationality and planetary well-being calls for a deeper integration where 'eco' is a necessary element in two senses. First, respecting the planetary processes necessary for life on Earth is a fundamental precondition for social policies. Second, seeing 'eco' as a grounding of anything that is 'social' invokes ethical respect for all life by acknowledging its moral standing.

From anthropocentric values to relationality

Sustainability literature has mostly continued the anthropocentric (human-centred) normative tradition (for example, Rupprecht et al, 2020). An anthropocentric set of normative values maintains that only human beings have moral standing in themselves, and other entities matter for instrumental reasons, not for their own sake. Environmental protection is supported because environmental ignorance would in the long run harm humanity. According to a strongly human-centred position, the consequences of human activity on non-human nature[2] must be considered mainly when they are beneficial or harmful to people,[3] which would mean that more-than-humans lack moral standing.

To question anthropocentric values and framings that are prevalent in most of the sustainability discussion, we draw on environmental ethicists who have defended the moral consideration of non-human nature for its own sake. They emphasise that humans do not have moral permission to systematically

undermine the opportunity of non-humans to exist, to continue their lineages (species existence) or to realise their species-typical characteristics. For example, Arne Næss (1990), David Schlosberg (2007) and Paul Taylor (2011) have elaborated on different theoretical justifications for the need to respect or 'leave room' for non-human life forms to continue to exist and pursue well-being. This critique is also changing our understanding of how humans are related to themselves, to other species and to more-than-human nature, since different perspectives provide different answers to a quintessential question: What is it to be human?

Stemming from anthropocentric and individualist values, the assumption model of *Homo economicus* with its focus on rational self-interest has taken precedence over the more socially embedded and altruistic image of human nature. The model of *Homo economicus* has, however, been criticised for being too narrow and overestimating the rationality of human beings (for example, Raworth, 2017). It also falsely ignores humans' fundamental dependency on each other and on nature. It is based on an anthropocentric 'human exemptionalism paradigm' that sees humans as separated from nature and superior to other species, which has made well-being research and social policies focus on the personal and social features of human beings and ignore the broader ecological context (Hirvilammi and Helne, 2014).

The *relational paradigm* perspective sees all life forms on Earth as interconnected and humans as relational beings: so called *Homo iunctus,* 'connected human' (Helne and Hirvilammi, 2017). This relational view can be characterised with three fundamental principles:

- Humans exist always in and as part of nature. Because of the constant material and energy flows between humans and the rest of nature, we belong to the same metabolism. Thus, ontological human/nature dualism is untenable.
- Human beings are fully dependent on Earth system and ecosystem processes. We exist in the multitude of close relationships with non-human life and processes, including those necessary for human well-being: nutrient cycling, climate regulation and water purification, for example. As human needs connect to the entire biosphere and its processes, human development is subordinate to these processes and the laws of thermodynamics, which eventually set limits for well-being and social institutions (including economy) (Daly and Farley, 2010).
- A human being exists in the web of relationships, not isolated. We live embedded in rich and intricate networks with both humans and non-humans. Humans are 'active organisms who are oriented toward developing and refining their capabilities by interacting with the physical and social environment' (Niemiec et al, 2010, p 175). Human needs can

thus only be satisfied via interactions with other forms of life and via participating in various social-ecological processes.

The view of human well-being as fully dependent on, and manifested in, the web of relationships has important implications for eco-social policies. Rather than focusing on enhancing individual well-being or approaching well-being as isolated to individuals, eco-social policies should take care of social coherence and the resilience and integrity of the social-ecological systems. Non-anthropocentric eco-social policies pursue human well-being in ways that also enable other forms of life to flourish and Earth's ecosystems to thrive. This points towards planetary well-being as an important goal for eco-social policies.

Planetary well-being: preconditions for need satisfaction

All living individuals, and even non-individual life forms such as ecosystems or species, can be viewed as having their own state of well-being. If something can be said to be good or bad for a living entity – as enough water is good for plants and some pesticides are bad for pollinators – the referred living systems can be thought to have well-being, even if that is not experiential as well-being is for humans and other sentients. *Non-human well-being* is relational like human well-being: as the notion of planetary well-being highlights, 'all living systems come into existence (emerge), develop, and behave in ways that result from complex sets of causal relations and patterns of species association' (Kortetmäki et al, 2023, p 28).

Previous research has conceptualised, studied and operationalised non-human well-being in many ways. For example, research about the behaviour and needs of sentient (experiencing) animals has significantly influenced the interpretations of well-being and morally acceptable treatment of such animals. It is acknowledged that their well-being requires at least the opportunity to behave in species-typical ways, satisfy their needs and avoid unnecessary suffering. Today, the well-being and moral standing of sentient animals is embraced not only by prominent social justice philosophers, such as the capabilities theorist Martha Nussbaum (2006), but also recognised institutionally. For example, the EU's constitutional basis states that the welfare of sentient animals must be considered in the planning and implementation of EU policies. In addition, environmental ethicists (see above) often commit to the view of recognising the well-being of non-individual living systems. Even some researchers in environmental sciences have adopted the language of well-being or flourishing into their vocabulary, presenting corresponding metrics like the Ecosystem Well-Being Index. Different concepts such as vitality or flourishing are also used, yet the idea remains similar

to well-being: organisms and non-individual entities such as species, populations or ecosystems can 'be well' in their way.

Planetary well-being conceptualises well-being in a way that suits describing it beyond its subjectively experienced manifestations. It refers to well-being as the satisfaction of needs in a way that contributes to the functional integrity of living beings. Exemplary needs of non-sentient entities include self-regulation, regeneration and adaptation. Well-being, generally, requires the integrity of various critical processes to allow the system to continue its existence but also to realise its system-specific characteristics and capacities (see Kortetmäki et al, 2021). To concretise this, we can think about bog ecosystems. Functioning water and nutrient cycles and the ability to store enough water are prerequisites for functional integrity (well-being), which bog draining for energy or food production destroys. From this perspective, the well-being of an ecosystem is more than just the sum of individuals therein: bog draining–related harms are irreducible to harms experienced by individuals cohabiting the bog.

The consideration of planetary well-being involves looking beyond the individuals' actual needs satisfaction. The focus is, rather, on the preconditions that ground different ways of being well. While the functional integrity of individuals comprises their well-being, the functioning of certain planetary and ecosystem-level processes constitutes the shared condition for the well-being of most life forms. For example, a relatively stable climate and sufficient biospherical integrity, including biodiversity, are prerequisites for life to flourish in its various forms. Capturing this idea, planetary well-being means the integrity of those larger-level processes that are central and create conditions favourable to the well-being of human and non-human individuals, ecological systems, species and populations.

Processes that are constitutive to planetary well-being include, for example, the carbon cycle, nutrient cycles and processes that regulate the circulation and accumulation of harmful substances, such as air-cleaning by large coniferous forests or water purification by soils, while listing all relevant processes needs future research (see Elo et al, 2024). Similar processes are considered in the well-known planetary boundaries approach. However, planetary well-being differs from that framework in two crucial respects (Kortetmäki et al, 2023, p 35). First, it is less anthropocentric because it sets limits for acceptable harm in terms of more-than-human well-being, while the planetary boundaries framework determines safety limits for securing the conditions for human well-being. Second, the requirement of functional integrity in planetary well-being focuses more on the processes instead of looking only at the points after which the risks for unpredictable and unmanageable changes, leading to system collapse, clearly increase.

If the transformational role of non-anthropocentric valuation and the inclusion of non-human well-being is acknowledged to matter inherently,

the attention in policy making is to be shifted to the wide-ranging effects of human activity on the larger-scale ecosystem and planetary processes, and vice versa. This perspectival shift helps evaluate and restore ongoing damages to planetary well-being. For example, the current social-ecological processes that constitute industrialised food systems function with huge land and freshwater use impacts, biodiversity degradation, eutrophication and significant greenhouse gas emissions causing one third of human-caused climatic emissions (Willett et al, 2019). The current food system is, therefore, very harmful to planetary well-being and very unequal in terms of human needs satisfaction. To develop more sustainable social-ecological processes for people to live well within planetary processes, eco-social policies would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of human needs and need satisfaction.

Human well-being as need satisfaction

Eco-social policies can approach human well-being in various ways; objectively or subjectively and from the viewpoint of life satisfaction, capabilities or needs, for example. These different approaches have partly differing policy implications. Previous research on sustainable well-being is commonly grounded on needs-based theories that perceive well-being as a state in which it is possible for people to have their needs met. Human needs are non-substitutable, (mostly) satiable and cross-generational. Unlike preferences or wants, needs imply absolute and fundamental rights and justice claims on public policy institutions and economic structures. Needs can thus provide a solid foundation for evaluating and promoting sustainable well-being (Gough, 2017).

Needs-based understanding resonates well with the idea of planetary well-being. The innate needs of human beings are not so distinct from those of other organisms. Our well-being also requires the opportunity to behave according to our species-typical characteristics. We shall satisfy our needs to be free from unnecessary suffering. Like other sentient and non-sentient creatures, we have needs for regeneration. We also need the capacity to self-regulate and adapt in order to encounter the various challenges of life. Akin to the idea 'that plants need certain key nutrients (that is, sun, soil, water) to grow', we as human beings need 'nutriments that support the inherent organismic tendencies toward psychological growth and adaptation' (Niemiec et al, 2010, p 176). Besides that, we need material nutriments that support our needs for subsistence and physical health.

As with the difficulties in identifying an exhaustive list of the planetary processes necessary for planetary well-being, it is challenging to derive a cemented list of universal or objective human needs that would be valid in all cultural contexts. Different need theories have provided diverse lists of

needs. When scrutinising well-being in the sustainability context, theories by Len Doyal and Ian Gough (1991) and Manfred Max-Neef et al (1991) have been used frequently (for example, Koch et al, 2017; Gough, 2020; Guillen-Royo, 2020). Doyal and Gough (1991) argue that all people share the universal goal of reaching minimally impaired social participation. They define two basic needs: physical health and the autonomy of agency (referring to mental health, cognitive understanding and opportunities to participate). Need satisfiers for these basic needs that have universal characteristics include adequate nutritional food and water, protective housing, non-hazardous work and physical environment, appropriate healthcare, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical and economic security, safe birth control and basic education. Access to all these need satisfiers could become the focus of new eco-social policies.

In their framework, Max-Neef et al (1991) have identified nine values-related needs that unite all people: subsistence, security, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creativity, identity and freedom. These needs are understood to be satisfied with diverse need satisfiers that vary depending on cultural and individual differences. Need satisfiers are socially constructed as they represent constellations of different conditions and processes related to need satisfaction. They are, for example, material and non-material means, different actions, products, infrastructures and institutions (Di Giulio and Defila, 2021). Yet, identifying need satisfiers can be confusing because consumerist culture creates wants and preferences that are unrelated to need satisfaction and may weaken well-being in the long run. The classic examples of such 'pseudo-satisfiers' (Max-Neef et al, 1991) are status symbols, such as luxury cars or jet set travelling. Nowadays we may add to the list the satisfiers whose origin depends on marketing or social media, such as annual holiday flights or fast fashion. These are often considered necessary regardless of their considerable environmental impacts.

Missing in many of the need theories is the relational approach to well-being, which bears a risk of maintaining anthropocentric and individualist values. To fill this gap, we take inspiration from the Having-Doing-Loving-Being framework developed by Tuula Helne and Tuuli Hirvilammi (Hirvilammi and Helne, 2014; Helne and Hirvilammi, 2015; Helne and Hirvilammi, 2022) and from the self-determination theory developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (for example, Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2001). They both fit well with the notion of planetary well-being and the aim to support eco-social policies based on adherence to that goal. Both stem from systems thinking and highlight the importance of functional integrity in both mental and physical terms. They approach human beings as social organisms with innate universal needs that are in relation with the needs of other species. When developing their theory, Deci and Ryan suggest 'an organismic dialectic' where humans are 'active,

growth-oriented organisms' who naturally incline to integrate themselves into larger social structures (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p 229). Integration is done by actualising physical and mental capacities, engaging in interesting activities and pursuing connectedness in social groups (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p 229).

The 'Having-Doing-Loving-Being' framework regards the embeddedness of human well-being in the ecosystems as a foundational starting point. *Human need satisfaction* is seen as part of ecosystems: first, by understanding how ecosystem processes are the preconditions to human well-being, and second, by acknowledging the environmental impacts caused by the need satisfaction. In this framework, well-being is defined in terms of four need categories or 'dimensions of well-being': *having, doing, loving* and *being*. Having refers to the needs for material resources and a sufficient standard of living. Doing refers to the needs for meaningful and responsible activities. Needs for belonging and relatedness are captured within the 'loving' dimension; close relationships with others are significant for well-being. Being is a mode of existence involving full health, creativity and self-actualisation. All dimensions are crucial to achieve holistic and balanced well-being. The four need categories sum up the central conditions of human well-being and can be used when outlining eco-social policies (Hirvilammi and Helne, 2014). This holistic understanding of relational well-being can be further nuanced with attention to the growth-oriented psychological needs.

In self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan argue that all human beings share three deep-level psychological needs: for competence, relatedness and autonomy. Competence refers to the desire to be competent and self-determined, and to the feelings of efficacy (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p 233). Relatedness as a 'desire to feel connected to others' (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p 231) echoes relational thinking. While the species-specific forms of relatedness also characterise humans, Deci and Ryan underline how a relatedness-related tendency towards social coherence is prevalent 'in species ranging from slime molds to primates, so much so in fact that the line between individuals and aggregates in many species is difficult to draw' (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p 253). Autonomy, the third basic psychological need, relates to the development of an integrated self. Experiences of integrity, volition and vitality are important for it, as well as coherence in actions, self-organisation and self-regulation that coordinates multiple demands.

These need theories help approach human and planetary well-being as mutual processes. Human needs depict *organismic necessities* for human beings, which link them to the general definition of planetary well-being as the capacity of a living system to continue its existence (owing to sufficient functional integrity). However, the improvement of well-being is not only about satisfying *deficit needs* at a minimum level or about preventing need thwarting so that a human person can continue their existence. It is also about growth-oriented activities in which need satisfaction is not only the

replenishing of deficiencies but a never-fulfilling process of self-realisation that also motivates action for other than deficit-related reasons. As Deci and Ryan (2000, p 230) articulate, all people are naturally inclined 'to act on their inner and outer environments, engage activities that interest them, and move toward personal and interpersonal coherence'. The pursuit of *growth needs*, such as the needs for self-esteem or creativity, direct human activity towards active self-realisation. At least in principle, the pursuit of human well-being and personal growth does not end with the satisfaction of deficit needs but can continue indefinitely (Maslow, 2011). This understanding of both deficit and growth needs has two benefits. First, it helps conceptually decouple personal growth from the growth in economy or in resource use, assuming that growth needs are addressed with less tangible and material-intensive need satisfiers (personal growth can also be promoted with unsustainable means such as air travel). Second, it encourages developing eco-social policies in a way where personal growth includes growing into ecological citizenship and engaging in seeking and promoting common good. Third, it helps in rethinking the socially constructed conceptions of need satisfiers in current societies. Power and domination are unavoidably present in the construction and definition of appropriate need satisfiers, which may not work for the benefit of the disadvantaged and less powerful people. It is thus relevant to pay attention to intersectional injustices and disempowerment in the context of needs satisfaction.

Endorsing planetary well-being with integrated eco-social policies

In this chapter, we have presented a perspectival shift that moves away from anthropocentric thinking and embraces creating integrative eco-social policies. Eco-social policies should aim to support human need satisfaction while also minimising harmful impacts on processes that constitute planetary well-being. As the theoretical understanding of human well-being shows, human beings share an organismic tendency towards well-being, which actualises under conditions that provide appropriate physiological and psychological nutriments. Being aware of the constituents of human well-being and its dependence on planetary processes helps in the design of eco-social policies that can provide suitable and sustainable nutriments for good life for all.

While extensively elaborating policy proposals for planetary well-being is beyond the scope of this chapter, some promising examples are discussed next. For example, the needs of many living beings can be met simultaneously by eco-social policies that promote sustainability transitions in food systems. Currently, animal-rich diets are common despite their being detrimental to human health and planetary well-being. Promoting plant-based diets

with eco-social policies could, thus, increase both human need satisfaction and food system sustainability (Willett et al, 2019). Additionally, urban gardening or food cooperatives can be eco-socially valuable, helping to reduce the negative impacts of food production while supporting the needs for relatedness and meaningful activities.

Participatory income (Laruffa et al, 2022) is another example of eco-social policy in line with planetary well-being. It is a new kind of 'green conditional basic income' targeted to help people engage in projects related to environmental and cultural activism or ecological restoration. Participatory income could also support people build local post-growth economic initiatives, such as consumer cooperatives, circular economy activities or care services based on the social and solidarity economy.

Planetary well-being requires reducing negative environmental impacts from human activities to planetary and ecosystem-level processes rapidly and remarkably. Profit-driven economies causing increased material and energy production and consumption are among the main issues that need transformation. Thus, eco-social policies that cut excess through *sufficiency measures* are pivotal. Sufficiency measures are concerned about two limits: the minima of decent need satisfaction to avoid deficiencies and enable well-being, and the maxima beyond which satisfiers no longer contribute to well-being yet would cause harm to ecosystem processes, other species and other people. Making lives fit within these limits is a collective project (Kallis, 2019): it urges structural changes that support collective moderation and self-limitation. Examples of eco-social sufficiency policies include working time reduction, progressive taxation and ceilings on income and wealth (see Gough, 2022; Khan et al, 2023). Additionally, *universal basic services* in terms of social and health services, affordable housing, education and public transportation could help citizens leap out of the work-and-spend cycle and limit their use of natural resources (see Coote, 2021). Eco-social policies can also address other sufficiency-related questions concerning insatiable psychological growth needs: for them, collective action is required to determine how to collectively self-regulate the availability of growth-need satisfiers that may indeed continue to improve well-being 'indefinitely', yet some of them are also very costly to planetary well-being. Limits to marketing, for example, might be needed to reduce the signalling of the opportunities to satisfy competence and autonomy needs by travelling around the world to 'enrich one's worldview'. Research is needed on the impacts of sufficiency policies that support combining growth-need satisfiers with satiable need satisfiers. For example, could policies that foster belonging and relatedness experiences in eating practices promote the adoption of plant-based eating practices (currently perceived by many as an impoverished eating experience)?

We argue that both researchers and policy makers should evaluate the emerging eco-social policies by examining their effects on planetary

well-being. This requires interdisciplinary research and cross-sectoral policy making. Both research and policy experiments are needed to create eco-social policies that support human need satisfaction with such systems and practices that secure the integrity of the processes central to planetary well-being so that other forms of life can also satisfy their needs.

In this chapter, we have suggested that planetary well-being can function as a comprehensive vision and an overarching normative goal for new eco-social policies. The viewpoint of planetary well-being helps us understand, in theoretical terms, how human well-being and social justice can be built through integrative eco-social policies. Protecting other species for their own sake and taking care of the integrity of global and local ecosystem processes is a fundamental policy goal that should be in sync with well-being policies. Attention to planetary well-being enables eco-social policy making to move away from anthropocentrism to better acknowledge the value of more-than-human nature not only as a precondition and foundational context of human need satisfaction but also as comprising numerous cohabitants of this planet whose well-being matters. It justifies integrative eco-social policies to enable people and other species to be well on the shared planet.

Notes

[1] Planetary well-being broadens and deepens the framework of sustainability in two ways. First, it pays more attention to those foundational 'primary' processes that ground the 'secondary' processes and constituents that determine the well-being of human individuals at a societal level (like the social elements in 'the Doughnut' for just and sustainable well-being, see the chapter by Milena Büchs in this volume). Second, it challenges the anthropocentric paradigm characteristic to most sustainability discourses (multispecies sustainability being the exception).

[2] Hereafter, with 'nature' we refer both to all nature and non-human nature, distinguishing these only when analytically useful.

[3] Weakly human-centred positions suggest that human impacts on nature may also need consideration when they can be paid attention without compromising human interests: for example, animal welfare might need attention in food production systems, but not to the extent that any human interests (such as cheapness) would need to be compromised. Moral anthropocentrism concerns values and differs from epistemic or perspectival anthropocentrism (acknowledging that we can perceive and know the world only through our human perspective; we cannot know how the world looks from the perspective of a rhino or a bee, for example).

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2

Wealth and income maxima for sustainable welfare: ecological reasons for economic limitarianism

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Introduction

In the 20th century, most social questions dealt with distributional justice. More specifically, the distribution of *income* and *wealth* became the central focus of moral disputes. The changes in *welfare state* design resemble the discussion in political practice. For the 21st century, the environmental question is predicted to become the new social question. Nonetheless, most welfare state research remains separate from debates on climate crisis and other environmental problems. Sustainable welfare is a novel research field that seeks to close that gap. It is both a research agenda and a political proposal for resilient welfare states within *planetary boundaries* (Hirvilammi and Koch, 2020; Bohnenberger, 2023). Limiting income and wealth to an environmentally acceptable maximum is one policy recommendation widely endorsed in this field (Buch-Hansen and Koch, 2019; Hirvilammi and Kortetmäki in this volume). However, most justifications for caps on affluence rest within an egalitarian worldview – making the endorsement contingent upon egalitarian principles that are not universally shared. In this chapter, I argue that even with more modest – sufficientarian – assumptions, one can make the case for maximum income and maximum wealth.

Sufficientarianism is a good starting point for this endeavour: it only calls for lower limits of provisioning, which shall not be undercut. The idea of lower limits is also akin to the idea of satisfiable basic human needs (Lamb and Steinberger, 2017), the meeting of which is also a key goal of sustainable welfare (Bohnenberger, 2020). Lower limits resemble what one could call 'a minimum requirement of the welfare state'. Hence, sufficientarianism as a parsimonious moral assumption suits real-world concepts of the welfare state. Even scholars less inclined to concede egalitarianist proposals or non-anthropocentric views of well-being (Hirvilammi and Kortetmäki in this volume) might be willing to agree with conclusions from sufficientarian assumptions.

Recently, the idea of upper limits started to gain awareness, with Robeyns' proposal on *limitarianism* marking a new stream of problem-driven political philosophy (Robeyns, 2017). Within this discourse one can distinguish 'economic limitarianism' (Timmer and Neuhäuser, 2022), which argues for maximum income and maximum wealth, and 'ecological-resources-limitarianism' (Robeyns, 2017), which argues for maximum consumption of natural resources. There are plausible cases put forward by philosophers and other scientists such as ecological economists for 'ecological-resources-limitarianism'. There also exist convincing arguments for economic limitarianism to be necessary for economic and political participation. In this chapter, however, I seek to show why economic limitarianism is required for ecological considerations under a sufficientarian proviso.

The first section of the chapter introduces sufficientarianism and the considerations of economic limitarianism. The following section describes how the framework of 'resources-needs cascade' allows us to demarcate the steps connecting planetary boundaries and human needs, followed by a section that presents four arguments why, in the absence of upper economic limits, needs fail to be met within planetary boundaries. The final section concludes that taking the eco-social nexus seriously implies that even very modest assumptions about the social goals of the welfare state require limits on wealth and income to preserve the ecological foundations of sustainable welfare provisioning.

Sufficientarianism and limitarianism

Sufficientarianism originated as an alternative to egalitarianism. It states that 'what is important from the point of view of morality is not that everyone should have the same, but that each should have enough. If everyone had enough, it would be of no moral consequence whether one had more than others' (Frankfurt, 1987, p 21). Different versions of sufficientarianism can be distinguished, but the key element of all of them is the 'positive thesis', which states: 'it is important that people live above a certain threshold, free from deprivation' (Casal, 2007).

The pure version of sufficientarianism also includes the 'negative thesis', which 'denies the relevance of certain additional distributive requirements' above this 'enoughness' (Casal, 2007). Allocations above this level might be beneficial to the recipient, but they are irrelevant for the justice obligations of the welfare state. As a consequence, pure sufficientarianism demands the deployment of the prevention principle in order to make sure the needs of (future) people are met, even at the expense of leaving no means for expenses beyond the minimum level (compare Kanschik, 2015). Since economic affluence is identified as the strongest determinant and the strongest

accelerator of increases of global environmental destruction (Wiedmann et al, 2020), pure sufficientarianism gives strict priority to minimising the *risk* of unmet needs due to global environmental change and advocates for maximum income and maximum wealth as a tool to minimise the risk of unmet needs.

The negative hypothesis has, however, not remained without criticism. Based on philosophical considerations and given the practice of welfare state activity, it seems counterintuitive that economic affluence above some minimum income, the sufficientarian line, is not at all morally relevant. Hence the question arises: Under which conditions may the state allow for economic affluence at the risk of not meeting some people's needs below the sufficientarian line?

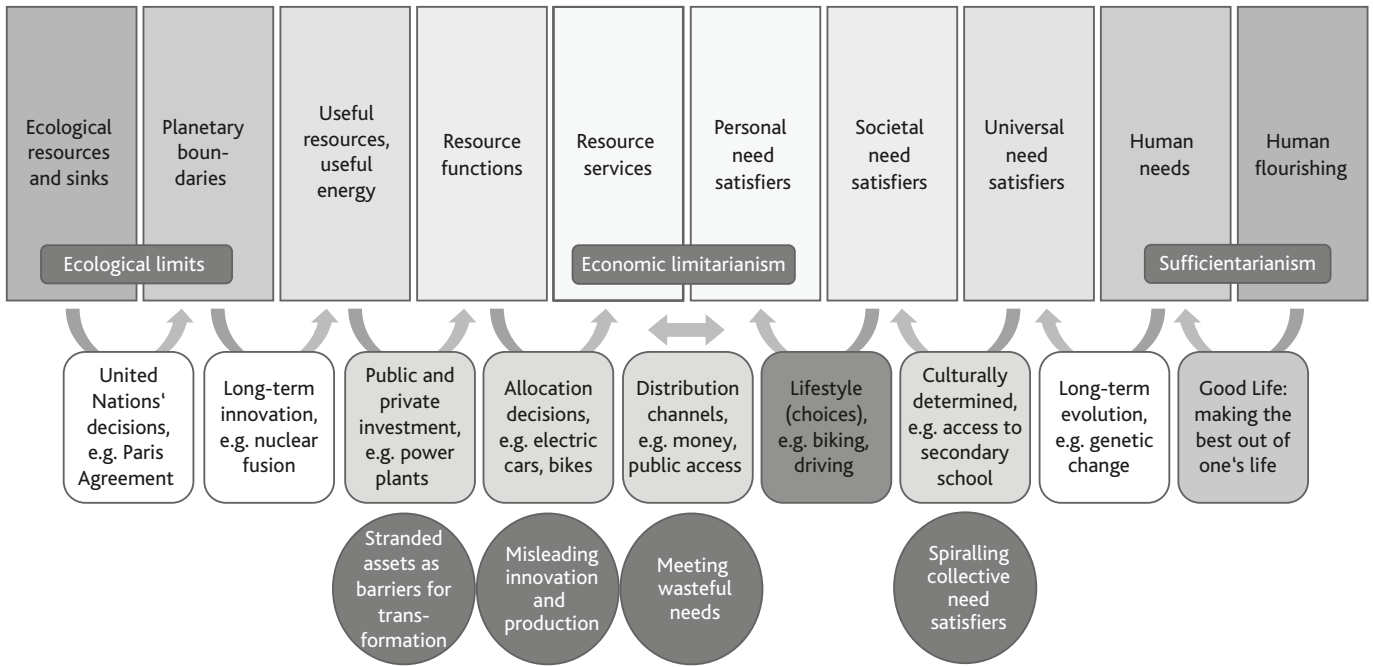
In the following section I argue that in a society functioning more or less as ours today, economic limitarianism is required to ensure a high enough likelihood that human needs are met and environmental limits are not surpassed. I present a resources-needs cascade (Figure 2.1) that illustrates the steps that link ecological resources and the satisfaction of needs and show how maximum income and wealth influences the steps in between.

Resources-needs cascade: connecting minimum social limits and maximum ecological limits

Recently, several researchers have proposed frameworks to understand the relationship between energy and resource use and their environmental impact on the one hand and human well-being on the other hand (for example, Brand-Correa and Steinberger, 2017; Kalt et al, 2019). In reference to this and adopted to the purpose of this chapter, I propose a framework which dissolves this relationship into ten steps of transformation. The processes of transformation are subject to natural, societal or individual activities.

The resources-needs cascade connects human flourishing with environmental resources and sinks that can absorb ecologically harmful substances (see Figure 2.1). Human flourishing and preservation of ecological resources are the two starting assumptions for the argument: For ecological resources, *planetary boundaries* define this moral claim based on knowledge about ecosystems and their impact on human life. These limits are not natural; they are societal decisions on justifiable risks (Kallis, 2019). The Paris Agreement exemplifies that agreement is possible: It is acknowledged that the acceptable risk for unmet needs due to climate change is to be set at 1.5 °C global warming. Similar moral assumptions are taken at the other side of the resources-needs cascade: human flourishing requires that human needs are met and sufficientarianism calls to give strict priority to meeting people's needs. However, having needs met is no guarantee for a fulfilling life, and

Figure 2.1: Resources-needs cascade: dependencies between ecological limits and sufficientarian conceptions of human well-being



Notes: First row: Saturation from light to dark mirrors invariance in the cascade's steps. Planetary boundaries and human needs are considered fixed for the observed time span, hence the dark grey boxes at the margins mark observations of ecological and human conditions on which the moral decisions on limits are based (ecological limits, sufficientarianism).
Second row: Boxes describe the processes by which the steps of the resources-needs cascade are connected. White fields can be considered unchangeable, while mid grey fields are subject to societal organisation and dark grey fields denote the scope of individual choices.
Third row: Circles describe the four obstructions of excess affluence in the societal organisation of meeting human needs within planetary boundaries.

humans can still choose lifestyles that lead to unfulfilling lives despite their needs being met.

Planetary boundaries translate into a volume of justifiable *useful resources* and *useful energy* (for instance, land, water resources or greenhouse gas budget). In the very long run there might eventually be new resources like other planets and new technologies for making use of existing resources (for example, nuclear fusion). However, for the time frames we consider for the most pressing environmental problem – the translation of planetary boundaries into useful resources and energy – can be considered set.

Subsequently, public and private investment determine for which purpose useful resources and energy are applied. Thereby, investments shape long-lasting *resource functions.* For example, land can be used to grow grain or as somewhere to build houses. Wealth and excess income have great power in determining investment purposes.

Allocating resource functions to different *resource services*, which can provide products or services humans can make use of, is another step during which wealth and income, particularly of the potential consumers, influence the resources-needs cascade. For example, whether grain is used to produce bread or biofuels is a question largely influenced by income distribution.

Closing the resources-needs cascade from the other side, we need to understand how human needs translate in everyday lifestyles and consumption and production patterns. Here, the distinction between needs and *need satisfiers* is of particular importance (Gough, 2020). While needs – such as autonomy, physical health and so on – are universal, adequate needs satisfiers vary depending on time, society and the person considered. Based on varying levels of modifiability, I propose to further distinguish need satisfiers into the categories of universal, societal and personal.

For example, basic education is a *universal need satisfier* that is necessary for all humans to be able to meet their human needs. Only in the very long term might evolution change universal need satisfiers and add, alter or free us from some universal need satisfiers. For example, animals need no education but are able to survive and flourish independently just after birth. However, what is considered 'basic education' varies between societies. While one hundred years ago, learning to write and read might have been sufficient to fully participate in society, today, access to a secondary school might be considered necessary.

How societies are culturally and economically organised specifies which *societal needs satisfiers* every human requires in the specific society to meet her or his needs, for example, health insurance or employment. Which societal need satisfiers are required is beyond the influence of individuals. Nonetheless, collectively – for example, through states, elections or other strategies of collective action – societal need satisfiers can be transformed purposely. And even in the most rigid societies, individuals have some

lifestyle choices from the available sets of societal need satisfiers, such as occupational or dietary choices.

These choices in *personal need satisfiers* are not irrelevant, and particularly wealthy individuals could contribute to environmental protection by voluntarily considering their ecological impact and adapting their lifestyles accordingly. However, voluntary lifestyle changes are not enough. In what follows I illustrate that excess wealth and income undermine human needs even if rich consumers choose more sustainable lifestyles.

The final link in the resources-needs cascade is the match between personal need satisfiers and resource services. In today's world distribution of resource services mainly takes place through money**.** Obviously, wealth and income have paramount power in this link. Economic limitarianism, the case for maximum wealth and income, has its core implications at this rung of the resources-needs cascade.

From environmental limits and sufficientarianism to economic limitarianism

While some steps in the resources-needs cascade (Figure 2.1) are fixed (white fields) and some steps relate to individual decisions (dark grey fields), four steps remain to be determined in societal organisation. In these four steps, economic distribution – particularly wealth and excess income – is crucial. The following four arguments describe the role of wealth and excess income in the respective steps and show that limits on wealth and incomes are necessary to guarantee successful integration of ecological limits with sufficientarianism.

Wealth as stranded assets and transformation barriers

To understand the first obstruction of richness, let us consider the forms wealth can take. Most wealth is money invested in productive capacities (firms, plants, machines and buildings) for the purpose of preserving and extending one's wealth. However, if we take ecological limits seriously, large shares of the productive capacities are obsolete as, for example, the production causes too much environmental damage or the products from these plants cannot be marketised in a climate-neutral world. The only value of the plants will be construction materials recyclable for other purposes.

This argument is quite the opposite of other arguments put forward for economic limitarianism. Robeyns, for example, argues that the green transformation requires an enormous amount of financial means that can only be financed through taxing top incomes, which will ultimately lead to a maximum income and maximum wealth (Robeyns, 2019). Even if we

accept the claim that new investment is required for the green transformation, taxation of affluence is not the only way of funding it. New debt-financed green public investment or expansionary monetary policy by the central bank might equally raise the funds necessary for a green transition. Contrary to individual households and companies, national central banks can create money: The proposals of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issuing new loans for national health infrastructures as a response to the COVID-19 crisis illustrate that available funding is less a question of taxation than of political will (for a similar argument, see Alexander, 2014). This is why the 'funds for *green investment*' argument makes no convincing case for maximum income and maximum wealth.

However, the green transformation requires changes in investment, with some sectors indeed requiring more input. Yet, if green investment only comes on top of environmentally destructive *brown investment*, negative environmental impact is not reduced. Thus, divestment is of even greater importance. *Exnovation*, the deliberate phase-out of brown infrastructure that is taking place, for example, in the course of coal exits, means the owners' wealth is reduced or owners receive compensation for exnovation processes.

Exnovation without compensation results in opposition from the owners and lobbyism against transformation. Most wealth is a stranded asset in a climate-neutral world and therefore forms a barrier against transforming the economy to keep within planetary boundaries. Rich people and their representatives at companies will fight for the conservation of their brown wealth – which is only possible if no climate neutrality is reached. Therefore, many argue that 'the existence of a class of very wealthy individuals constitutes a major obstacle to solving the environmental crisis; an obstacle that can be dealt with by imposing a maximum cap on incomes' (Buch-Hansen and Koch, 2019).

The only conflict-free option for exnovation is to transform brown wealth into green wealth, either voluntarily by making green investment more profitable or indirectly by making brown investment less attractive than green assets. For the latter, I see no plausible way of reducing the attractiveness of fossil fuel investment fast enough for environmental protection and slow enough to avoid backlashes by fossil fuel owners at the same time. However, if there was a cap on wealth, brown assets would likely be the first to be dropped by individuals, reducing transformation obstacles.

Furthermore, preserving wealth and only turning it green is likely to result in greenwashing. The environmental problem is not only the production type but the size of production. For example, just replacing combustion engines with electric cars is no sustainable solution. Current research shows that climate targets can only be reached if consumption and production is reduced and not just greened (Wiedenhofer et al, 2020). Green investment, therefore, also means less investment; hence, there will not be enough good

investment opportunities to replace the volume of brown wealth. This makes it necessary to reduce assets in productive capacities, and thereby wealth.

The second form of wealth is ownership of finite or hardly replicable resources, which allow owners to extract rents by waiting for the resources to become scarcer and more precious. Stratford warns: 'if environmental protections are introduced before opportunities for private rent extraction are closed, we could see intensified rent-seeking … if ecological limits … make it difficult to grow output, rent-seeking is likely to intensify' (Stratford, 2020). Rent-seeking has negative consequences for the availability of resources for non-wealthy individuals (for example, access to housing or water). Considering investments into housing and land-grabbing, we can already observe the negative consequences of wealth preservation in a barely growing economy. Ensuring that needs are met in such a scenario is only possible if market power is equalised, for instance through wealth and income caps. Rich people would have little incentive for rent-seeking when wealth was limited anyway.

The third form of wealth is speculation. Other than investment into productive capacities and rent extraction, speculation does – theoretically – not require economic growth nor increasing power over scarce resources. Speculation with artificial values such as art pieces, cryptocurrencies, debt and so on is potentially ecologically not very problematic. There might be regular crises in which wealth is 'destroyed' or redistributed among the rich, making some of the wealthy more so and others less. As long as this speculation remains within the abstract sphere and has no impact on the real economy, it is irrelevant for meeting human needs. Unfortunately, modern societies haven't found a way to prevent these speculations from resulting in financial, economic and political crises. Economic and financial crises made it more difficult for states to meet human needs. The only way of solving the crises has been through further economic growth, intensifying environmental problems. Regular monetary wealth reduction, for example, through debt and wealth jubilees, would be a more organised way of adapting monetary wealth volume to the real economy. In the absence of unorthodox interventions such as debt cancellation, also stirring wealth into government bonds imposes a growth imperative on states (Stratford, 2020). Furthermore, the risk of speculation translating into real-world consequences remains despite unorthodox interventions. For example, there is no way of making sure speculation into cryptocurrencies does not lead to more energy being used to mine cryptocoins. Furthermore, speculation is hard to disentangle from rent-seeking behaviour leading to social problems, for instance due to rising housing costs or extended production like the constructing of new houses. In fact, there is a trade-off between the harmlessness of speculation and its capacity to absorb excess wealth, because speculation with immaterial goods such as art pieces or

digital currencies is only taking place because of the option to convert the immaterial assets into material goods.

To summarise, excess wealth undermines necessary exnovation and leads to overproduction and rent-seeking or speculation, which disables conversion of useful resources into adequate resource functions, like the absence of fossil infrastructure. A reduction of economic wealth, specifically through a maximum income and particularly a cap on wealth, is required to allow transformations without jeopardising human needs.

Misleading innovation and production

Furthermore, wealth and excess income lead to misallocation of resource functions to resource services. In a market economy, products and services are being made for the ones with the monetary capacity to purchase them. And the wealthier people are, the more likely it is that they consume products and services that do not meet needs but serve comfort and luxury. Hence, with increasing wealth and excess income, transformation of resource functions into resource services becomes less relevant for meeting needs. Overall, the efficiency of an economy, measured as resource use for needs met, is decreasing with excess affluence. This does not require that wealthy people actually purchase comfort and luxury goods; it is enough that product developers target product design to the preferences of the rich as they expect to yield the most profit from this customer group.

As a result, many products serve wants, not needs, and even products that meet needs are being developed to match the preferences of the rich. This results in many resources, innovations and work hours being spent on the development of products that meet needs in an ecologically wasteful way. This is the case because rich people hold other relative preferences about the qualities of products than poor people (such as monetary price versus security versus time required). For example, rich people prefer faster transport as they have a higher propensity to pay more for time saved.

The mere existence of excess wealth and income is problematic because progress, standards and innovations are tied to the ecologically wasteful tastes of the wealthy. For example, new construction takes place as spacious housing for wealthy 'double-income-no-kids couples', not for single parents. Cars are not becoming more efficient – which would save poorer people's budgets – but larger, heavier and more emission intensive, because compared to the comfort gained, higher energy prices are of little significance for the rich. While this forms a moderate problem for consumables, it is a very serious problem for the factories producing the consumables and for durable goods that receive a second life for poorer households, like flats or second-hand vehicles.

Overall, excess wealth results in resource functions being allocated to the production and provision of environmentally inefficient resource

services. Wealthy people can attenuate but not fully avoid this mechanism by individually shifting their consumption to greener products, because the real sale of products is not relevant for the product development and production – what counts for the motivation of innovation is the potential sale with the highest expected profit.

Inefficient distribution to wasteful needs satisfiers and wants

The third problem of excess wealth rests within the possibilities of rich people to buy off the incentives of markets to signal scarcity in resources. While moderately rich people might still incorporate price incentives into their behaviour, for the super-rich monetary price incentives do not work. This is problematic because richer people have a higher environmental impact and more financial means to change consumption patterns. If we want to keep the economy within planetary boundaries while meeting today's human needs, it is highly inefficient to do so without changing the lifestyles of the rich.

However, one might argue, nothing is ecologically problematic about being rich as long as income or wealth is not spent. Yet, in practice the only option to ensure limited expenditure by the rich, thereby reducing emissions, would be through income and wealth caps, because little can be done to keep people from spending their financial means. Governments have little possibility to keep wealthy households from consuming a larger share of the resources, with less remaining for poorer households. Governments' only solution for meeting needs despite increased resource use by the rich is through more economic growth and increasing exploitation of resources. This, however, jeopardises future generations' needs.

Indeed, meeting human needs today comes close to consuming all sustainably available resources. Research on OECD countries indicates that the carbon budget is minimal, non-existent or even negative when the minimum expenditure required to meet need satisfaction is translated into the associated carbon emission. There would not be any room for an additional maximum income that is in line with aggregate emission reductions staying below the 1.5 °C limit. For Finland, for example, a study shows that the material footprints of minimum income receivers are smaller than of an average Finn, but they still exceed what is estimated to be an ecologically sustainable level of natural resource use (Hirvilammi et al, 2013). Similar research is available for the UK (Gough, 2017), where emissions reduction would not even be enough if no citizen emitted more than the minimum greenhouse gas emissions according to reference budgets. Buch-Hansen and Koch therefore conclude: 'By implication, the "needs satisfaction line" and the "affluence line" (and the minimum and maximum income limits) would have to be set in closer proximity to one another' (Buch-Hansen and Koch,

2019). Hence, in the Global North the maximum income line might be identical to the income level that is required to meet needs.

Another option for improving distribution is to reduce the goods and services that can be acquired through the market, for example, by providing them through rights or requiring a secondary – ecological – price for goods and services to be paid along with the financial price. If these allowances were distributed equally or according to need, excess financial means would be kept from translating into environmental overconsumption: 'it would make more sense to use a currency or various currencies that are more directly related to the environmental problems that are the reason for introducing a maximum: for instance, greenhouse gas emissions, fresh water (in areas of water scarcity), and protein supply' (Spengler, 2016, p 15). The major risk of this proposal is that the introduction of ecological allowances in some domains, for example, greenhouse gas emissions, does not prevent other ecologically sensitive resources (such as land use) to replace that resource and become equally overexploited.

Affluence and economic activity are, both at the country and at the personal level, still the best predictors for a number of ecological impacts, such as greenhouse gas emissions. Limiting overconsumption by the rich can only be ensured through a cap on expenditure, which comes close to a de-facto limit on wealth and income.

Ecologically and economically spiralling societal needs satisfiers

So far, the arguments addressed primarily economic inequality, its problem for sufficientarians and why maximum income and wealth are good solutions for reducing inequality. There is one further argument: why maximum income and maximum wealth are necessary. Earlier, I described why the existence of wealthy individuals leads to misallocations of resource functions into inefficient resource services. Long-lasting consumer goods that receive a second life interlace into the lifestyles of less wealthy households, which spreads inefficient resource services among society. A similar mechanism operates in the formation of societal need satisfiers: Many goods, services, positions and amenities are positional, for example, expenditure for conspicuous consumption, like status symbols. The spread of expenditure for these goods and services leads to a normalisation through which it becomes psychologically necessary to possess these goods and services to be recognised as a full member of society. In many countries school classes are probably the best places to observe this mechanism for brand clothing.

Even more problematic are the spiralling efforts and financial costs of material goods required to meet universal needs, such as education, work, housing or transport. Excess wealth leads to rising costs for access to positional goods (for example, good schools, increasing internationality of

work experience to get hired in job application processes, or rising costs for housing in central locations). Overspending and overconsumption by wealthy households of scarce and positional goods then forces others into unsustainable need satisfiers. For example, poorer households need to commute longer distances because housing in central locations is too expensive or dedicated to the holiday flats of the rich.

Wealth and excess income also lead to new technologies, goods and services with higher environmental impact replacing resource-lighter societal needs satisfiers. Mattioli et al recount how car ownership has become a requirement for participation in many Western countries (Mattioli et al, 2020), enabled by excess wealth and with rising resource requirements for meeting needs. Today, new digital tools and technologies, like smartphones with ever-increasing computer power, have become necessary to meet one's needs.

The spiralling costs of societal need satisfiers also translate into more income required for households or more welfare state expenditure. For example, increasing mortgage payments compel households to spend more time in paid work (Stratford, 2020). Workers have to increase their income, work longer and, in order to reconcile job and household duties, buy time-saving goods and services (such as faster transport modes, dryers or childcare). Social security systems have to pay for the rising costs of living (for example, in pensions, unemployment benefits and social assistance). Without the political means to pay for the rising expenditure through debt or wealth taxes, governments depend on economic growth. The treadmill of production and consumption is spiralling (Pineault, 2017), with the negative environmental consequences the 20th century illustrated. Taxing excess income and wealth could raise the funds required to meet needs and limit spiralling costs for need satisfiers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that in an ecologically constrained world, even advocates that want to restrict welfare states to providing only for human needs should call for caps on excess income and wealth. Sufficientarians who attribute moral value only to needs should promote economic limitarianism as a strategy to minimise the likelihood of unmet needs. Sufficientarians who give priority to human needs but allow for other valuable properties should also endorse economic limitarianism. I provided four arguments to support this claim: First, wealth is an obstacle in dissolving stranded assets and transforming infrastructures that are incompatible with planetary boundaries. Second, the existence of rich consumers leads to misleading allocation in production. Third, overspending by wealthy and high-income individuals corrupts a resource-efficient distribution of goods and services that meet human needs. Fourth, wealth and excess income involve spiralling needs

satisfiers, which require growing economies that trade planetary boundaries against human needs.

To meet human needs within planetary boundaries, reliance on voluntary actions by the wealthy will not suffice. Welfare states that strive to guarantee minimum conditions for human flourishing also need to restrict the economic affluence of citizens to maximum limits.

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3

Sustainable welfare as a new paradigm in social policy

Martin Fritz, Kajsa Emilsson and Jayeon Lee

Introduction

In this chapter, we argue that the social and ecological risks of our time are interconnected and that overcoming them requires integrated eco-social solutions that provide welfare without transgressing planetary boundaries. Since around the year 2010, this new direction in policy development has been discussed increasingly in social policy research under the term *sustainable welfare*.

Sustainable welfare is not just a new concept, as it has been described in much of the literature so far (Gough, 2015; Brandstedt and Emmelin, 2016; Büchs and Koch, 2017). In the following we introduce sustainable welfare as a new paradigm in social policy research responding to the unfolding socio-ecological crisis. Just as the term social policy is used for both a research field and a policy area, sustainable welfare could be understood either as a scientific paradigm or as a policy paradigm, or as both. Policy paradigms, first systematically discussed by Hall (1993), can be defined as an internally coherent set of ideas that are held by policy actors and that contain underlying values, a conception of the problem, specific goals and solutions (Daigneault, 2014). Since ideas of sustainable welfare are only beginning to spread among policy actors but have emerged first in academic debates of social policy research, we assume that sustainable welfare is not yet a policy paradigm but an *emerging scientific paradigm* in the sense of Thomas Kuhn's (1996) conceptualisations (see also Fritz and Lee, 2023). According to Kuhn, paradigms are universally recognised scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners (Kuhn, 1996). In the process of 'normal science', unexpected results that contradict the existing paradigm accumulate until a critical mass is reached, which would then cause a crisis and ultimately lead to the rejection of the existing paradigm. At this point a new paradigm is created or emerges, which enables the reconciliation (not the replacement) of the old results with the new anomalous results (Kuhn, 1996, pp 43–51).

In the following sections, we attempt to apply the theory of paradigm change in science to the field of social policy. The goal is to describe the development of social policy research in three stages: from the period of the Fordist industrial economy to the post-Fordist period and to the currently unfolding period characterised by interlinked social and ecological crises (for a similar periodisation, see Chapter 4 in this volume). The elements in the process of paradigm change according to Kuhn are i) problems, ii) solutions, iii) new empirical material, and iv) a crisis. We discuss the relevant problems for each period and how these were intended to be solved by social policy (see Figure 3.1). Moreover, for each period, we highlight how new economic and societal conditions, partly shaped by new empirical findings in science and social policy research, have challenged the existing paradigm and how this led to a crisis and ultimately, a paradigm shift that brought new problem definitions and solutions to the fore.

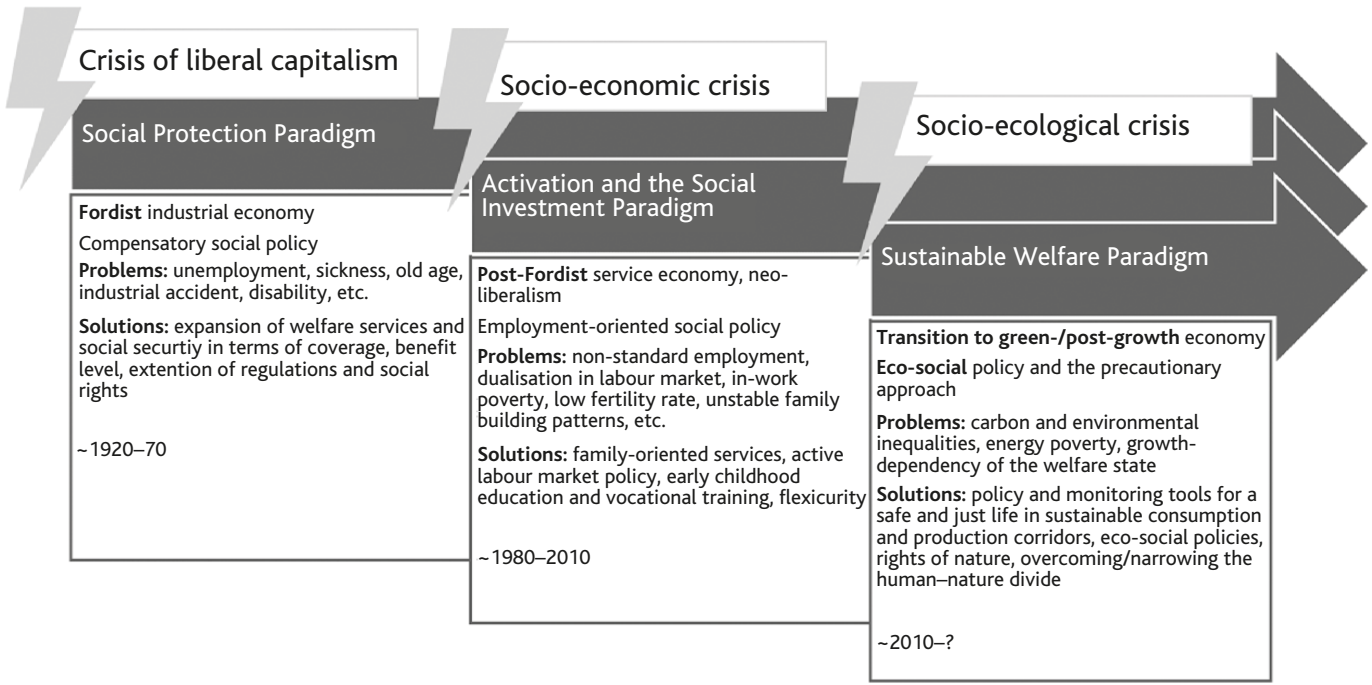
From Fordist social protection to post-Fordist activation and investment

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company in the early 20th century, introduced standardised mass production for his famous Model T ('available in any color as long as it is black') and promoted a demand-oriented as well as scientifically planned organisation of work. Faced with the low productivity of the masses of low-skilled, poorly paid and unmotivated workers – typical for early liberal capitalism, which had reached a state of crisis due to the widening gap between the rich and the poor (Polanyi, 1944/2001) – the entrepreneur looked for new ways to expand production and generate more profit. He started to pay higher wages and built houses for his workers with the goals of offering long-term employment prospects, raising workers' living standards, increasing their purchasing power and stimulating domestic demand. In a paternalistic exchange for the benefits of the Fordist system, the workers were expected to be loyal to the company and to integrate into the rigid norms of industrial production on the Fordist assembly lines. The practical insights of the entrepreneur found their echo in the world of science when macroeconomist Keynes demonstrated the feasibility of anticyclical state interventions to raise public welfare and stabilise the economy through increasing demand.

Fordist industrial development and the social protection paradigm

After the Second World War, the realisation of the ideas of Ford and Keynes contributed to Western nations' high productivity increases and rapid economic growth, the building of public infrastructure and the expansion of welfare states (Hall, 2022). More people, for example, family members, were

Figure 3.1: Paradigms in social policy research over three periods of the Western welfare states



covered by social protection schemes, and security systems were extended to cover more risks, such as elderly care and health insurance. Also, benefits were raised to levels that enabled the majority of the population to meet minimum basic needs. Moreover, the welfare state stipulated regulations and social rights (for example, employment protection, co-determination) that improved material living standards and provided possibilities for people to take part in economic development. While the development of social expenditure and programmes before the war was selective, targeted to the deserving poor, the post-war development of social protection in Western European countries can be characterised by their relatively universal and encompassing ambitions, covering not only workers but increasingly the wider population (Nullmeier and Kaufmann, 2010). Old-age pensions, sickness benefits, unemployment insurance, employment injury insurance, maternity benefits and so on comprised the backbone of the welfare states with their inbuilt mechanism of redistribution, underpinned by collective risk pooling and obligatory coverage (Hicks et al, 1995; Rehm, 2016).

The *social protection paradigm* of social policy was thus based on a class compromise between workers and employers (Koch, 2006), characterised by loyalty, a strong performance ethos and a (working) lifelong membership in a company on the one hand and decent wages and employment protection on the other hand. Under the conditions at that time, the provision of decent social protection functioned as a solution for at least two problems. First, the improving material living standards of populations of democratic welfare states secured stable political conditions, and second, the domestic demand, sustained by interventionist economic policies and social protection systems, strengthened the national economy. This in turn generated sufficient economic growth and profit levels that satisfied corporate interests and capitalists.

The Fordist compromise worked relatively well as long as economic growth was high enough to finance welfare systems. From today's perspective, however, this model appears to be doomed to fail in the long run because of its strong dependency on economic growth and industrial mass production, which both contribute highly to the destruction of nature. In addition, it is geared towards male breadwinners and traditional family forms, excluding and disadvantaging many others. The economic success of Western nation states was significantly built on further appropriating resources from the Global South and the former colonies (Hickel, 2020, pp 51–54). The productivism of this period deepened the *human–nature divide* that emerged at the dawn of the modern era (Merchant, 1990; Salleh, 2017). Since then, modern humans would increasingly be alienated from nature and nature itself be seen as a big resource pool, subordinated and determined to be used and dominated by humans. As famously depicted in Charlie Chaplin's movie 'Modern Times', the Fordist mode of industrial production carried this to

new extremes with its standardised and scientifically planned and measured workflows that were dictated by the rhythm of machines.

Post-Fordist neo-liberalism and the paradigm of activation and social investment

The demise of the 'golden age of welfare states' (Pierson, 1998; Castles, 2004) was driven by several factors that disrupted the regulation of industrial capitalism under the social protection paradigm. First, the oil price crises of the 1970s triggered economic recessions in many Western nations, constraining social expenditures due to rising unemployment and state debts. Second, demographic changes, such as an ageing population, increased female participation in the workforce, and rising rates of divorce and single parenthood created new needs for social security systems. Third, the globalisation of the economy intensified competition, leading to the relocation of industrial production to countries with lower labour costs, thereby transforming Western economies structurally.

These changes led to the rise of the service sector and an increase in atypical forms of employment, challenging the traditional notion of lifelong employment for industrial workers. While a new class of knowledge workers emerged, benefiting from upskilling and education and finding employment in lucrative service sectors, another group of working poor faced unstable employment and limited career prospects in low-wage service jobs. The growing disparity between these groups highlighted new social risks (Esping-Andersen, 1999), leading to labour market dualisation (Emmenegger et al, 2012).

Beginning in the 1980s, it became widely accepted that expanding the welfare state was no longer sustainable to address emerging social risks and economic challenges. Instead, a political shift towards liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation occurred where social expenditures, including public services and cash transfer programmes, came under attack for allegedly hindering productivity growth and fostering 'welfare-dependency' (Mead, 1992).

During the 1990s, a new rhetoric in the defence of social policy interventions in the neoliberal era developed: The British Third Way approach (Giddens, 1998) used the concept of human capital and emphasised 'active' social policies focusing on 'enabling' productive workers at the expense of social transfers for the sick and the unemployed, which were referred to as 'passive' social policies (Gilbert, 2004).

Faced with these new social risks or problems and the inadequacy of the welfare policies designed for the male breadwinner model, the policy solutions suggested the reallocation of social expenditures towards family-oriented services, active labour market policy, early childhood education

and vocational training in order to increase the human capital of individuals, improve the productivity of the labour force and achieve high employment rates in the new economy.

The *paradigm of activation and social investment* provides a powerful legitimisation for the importance of social expenditure and social policy interventions by states, reframing what was previously perceived as 'cost' into 'investment' (Cantillon, 2011; Hemerijck and Vandenbroucke, 2012). The role of social policy was redefined from one of 'repairing' to one of 'preparing', underscoring a future-oriented approach and supporting long-term economic growth and competitiveness. While this fosters environmentally detrimental productivism (Dukelow and Murphy, 2022), critique has also been raised regarding the emphasis on self-enhancement and flexibility in the labour force during the neoliberal era, which would have detrimental effects on societal trust, democracy and the ability to envision a shared future (Sennett, 1998; Bauman, 2000) as well as individual psychological effects such as depression and burnout (Ehrenberg, 2010). It can be concluded that the paradigm of activation and social investment is not only subject to the growth imperative, just as in the case of the social protection paradigm during the Fordist era, but also that it exacerbates the challenge of balancing self-care and caregiving responsibilities, further widening the gap between humans and nature.

The paradigm of sustainable welfare in times of socio-ecological crisis

The biggest crisis in human history to date has developed over the decades of the Fordist and post-Fordist periods: the *socio-ecological crisis*. During these periods, contemporary welfare states relied on an expansive economic model that assumes infinite economic growth and continuously rising material living standards (Corlet Walker et al, 2021). The dependence on growth continues today and contributes to the socio-ecological crisis through increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions and the appropriation of nature and human labour (Koch and Mont, 2016a). Thus, what is being perceived as desired forms of welfare and human well-being occurs at the expense of ecosystems, particularly in Western countries (O'Neill et al, 2018).

The relevance of incorporating the ecological dimension in social policy was already recognised in the 1980s when some scholars started discussing and questioning the expansionary economic model of Western welfare societies: 'Green social policies require an ethical rethinking, so that material growth and consumerism are no longer regarded as the yardstick of well-being and 'welfare sustainability' becomes an organising principle of welfare reform' (Fitzpatrick, 2001, p 187). But only since the beginning of the 21st century, the scholarly discourse in social policy has gained

momentum and expanded in scope, culminating in the emergence of a new paradigm: sustainable welfare (for example, Koch and Mont, 2016a; Gough, 2017; Matthies and Närhi, 2017; Hirvilammi et al, 2023).

Sustainable welfare refers to 'the satisfaction of human needs within ecological limits, from the intergenerational and global perspective' (Koch and Mont, 2016b, p 5). We thus have to rethink human well-being and human needs satisfaction beyond continuously rising material living standards, and moreover to understand social welfare systems as being 'embedded in ecosystems and in need of respecting the regeneration capacity of the biosphere' (Koch, 2022, p 448).

In summary, the paradigm of sustainable welfare can be understood as an attempt to solve the newly recognised *problem* in social policy: how to achieve the provision of human well-being within planetary boundaries. In the next sections, we discuss key *solutions* to this problem proposed within sustainable welfare research. First, we consider alternatives to the growth-dependency of the welfare state (see also Chapter 4 in this volume). Second, we delve into relational conceptualisations of well-being and discuss how these imagine reconnection with nature, even on the individual level. Third, we address the role of public support and participatory democracy for sustainable welfare.

Alternatives to the growth-dependency of the welfare state

Although economic growth has been recognised as a significant driver of greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2022), the dependence of welfare states on growth persists (Corlet Walker et al, 2021). Advocates of green growth claim that ecological impacts can be decoupled from economic growth. In some instances, increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that are larger than the associated increases in carbon emissions have been achieved, but actual reductions in emissions in a situation of economic growth are considerably less common (Haberl et al, 2020; Hickel and Kallis, 2020). Consequently, sustainable welfare seeks to establish links to alternative economic models such as post-growth, degrowth and steady-state economies (Daly, 1991; Schmelzer et al, 2022).

One prevalent economic model in the sustainable welfare literature is the doughnut model, visualising how social and ecological goals can be achieved in synergy (Raworth, 2017). The inner ring of the doughnut reflects the social foundation and includes 12 basic human needs. The outer ring symbolises ecological ceilings based on the concept of planetary boundaries (Rockstrom et al, 2009). In various applications of this model as policy tool, for example, at the country level (Domazet et al, 2023), needs and boundaries are operationalised with indicators to monitor whether social shortfalls and ecological overshoots can be avoided. Instead, there is a 'safe

and just operating space' between the inner and the outer rings in which needs are met without transgressing planetary boundaries.

A similar approach is represented by sustainable consumption corridors: 'Such corridors would be defined by minimum standards, allowing every individual to live a good life, and maximum standards for every individual's use of resources guaranteeing access to sufficient resources (in terms of quantity and quality) for others, both in the present and the future' (Di Giulio and Fuchs, 2014, p 184). While the notion of minimum and maximum levels of consumption is crucial for sustainable welfare, Bärnthaler and Gough (2023) argue that it may be more important to highlight the role of production in causing excess consumption, promoting destructive needs satisfiers and reproducing class structures, as it is the owners of the means of production who decide what is produced and available for consumption, not the consumers. The lower boundary of their production corridors is marked by 'essential production', including the foundational economy of daily essentials as well as unpaid care and reproductive activities. The upper boundary consists of excess production which arises through unnecessary labour – 'bullshit jobs' (Graeber, 2018) – and also includes parts of the financial, military and luxury sectors.

Besides overcoming the need for constant economic growth, democratically set limits are also discussed for defining desirable boundaries to social acceleration and blind technological solutionism in order to enable a good life for all (Kallis, 2019). Along these lines, sustainable welfare is linked to philosophical discussions about *limitarianism*, where drawing an absolute affluence line is suggested (Robeyns, 2024) to stay within ecological boundaries *and* to avoid the socially detrimental effects of extreme wealth and inequalities. Finally, sustainable welfare draws on the principle of *sufficiency*, or 'enoughness', which stresses the importance of absolute reductions of energy and material use (Jungell-Michelsson and Heikkurinen, 2022).

Sufficiency, the idea of using an amount that is enough, optimal or satisfactory, is in stark contrast to the dominant social paradigm of Western modernity that is geared towards continuous progress, growth and expansion. The logic of expansion produced eco-social problems as 'side-effects' that were externalised (Lessenich, 2019), but today it has become apparent in the socio-ecological crisis that 'spaceship' earth is a largely closed system where nothing can be externalised.

Schneidewind and Zahrnt (2014) argue that in order to avoid a breakdown of ecosystems, more careful and 'resource-light' lifestyles would need to be promoted by a politics of sufficiency. They highlight four strategies of sufficiency: decentralisation, de-cluttering, deceleration and decommercialisation. While these strategies could be put into practice on the societal level through designing and implementing the eco-social policies that are discussed in the sustainable welfare literature (see Part III) – for example,

income and wealth caps (François et al, 2023) to achieve de-cluttering or working time reductions to decelerate (Hidasi et al, 2023) – there is also an individual dimension of sufficiency which is reflected in the call for not only resource-light but also more relational lifestyles.

Relational well-being and reconnecting with nature

Sustainable welfare also draws on the interdisciplinary discussions about different conceptions of human well-being. In recent years, the previous focus on material resources and standards is complemented by a *relational* understanding of well-being (Hirvilammi et al, 2023). It highlights the importance of social relationships and human interactions, as well as human–nature relationships, both from a physical and mental health perspective. It has been emphasised, for instance, in efforts to conceptualise 'green social work' or 'eco-social work' (for example, Matthies and Närhi, 2017) and the 'well-being economy' (Fioramonti et al, 2022).

The relational understanding of well-being is elaborated by Hirvilammi and Helne (2014). They analyse the hegemonic anthropocentric paradigm and its basic assumptions, such as the separateness of humans from nature, the superiority of humans over nature, materialism, individualism and a subordination of intuition and emotions under rationality. The goal of a relational and nature-inclusive understanding of well-being would be to overcome the dichotomies of anthropocentrism (Helne 2021, p 220). Based on Kuhn's concepts of scientific paradigms, the authors notice the emergence of a relational paradigm with roots in, among others, Arne Naess' deep ecology and Erich Fromm's humanist psychology. The basic assumptions of the relational paradigm would be i) the interconnectedness of humans and nature; ii) respect for the boundaries and capacities of nature; iii) the intrinsic value of all living beings; iv) the importance of caring for others; v) long-term orientation; vi) consideration of non-material dimensions of progress; vii) the precautionary principle; viii) critical use of technology; ix) prioritisation of ecological and social goals over economic growth and profits; and x) emotions, wisdom and intuition being equally valued as intelligence. Moreover, Hirvilammi and Helne (2014) conceptualise relational well-being as a multidimensional HDLB scheme, where H stands for 'Having', which is the material dimension and refers to ensuring a decent and fair living standard. D stands for 'Doing' and highlights that well-being involves meaningful and responsible activities. L stands for 'Loving', which is at the core of relational well-being and includes connective and compassionate relations to others including nature. B means 'Being' and consists in what the authors call 'alert presence' in the sense of a good mental and physical health as preconditions for self-actualisation. Just as in the case of the politics of sufficiency, these four dimensions of relational well-being can be supported

by eco-social policies and practices: for example, a basic income, income and wealth caps as well as taxes can be used to regulate 'Having', while green jobs and working time reductions can improve 'Doing'. Strengthening invisible and unpaid care activities in society and promoting green care contributes to 'Loving', and generally slowing down in life and downshifting consumption are good for 'Being' (Hirvilammi and Helne, 2014, p 2169).

Narrowing the divide between humans and nature is key to conceptualising sustainable well-being within planetary boundaries. Similarly, ecopsychology calls for an identity transformation to reconnect humans with nature. Koller (2021), for example, highlights the central role of shifting from a *defensive suppression* of existential fears – which would encourage extrinsic orientations towards wealth, fame and the like – to a *reflexive engagement with* existential fears and respecting the limits of the biosphere, such as our own mortality. This would be linked to intrinsic motivations to seek competence, relationships and autonomy. It is a rather inconvenient thought, but the idea of sufficiency, or 'enoughness', ultimately is, on the individual level, reflected in how we deal with the finiteness of our lives and contrasts sharply with the recent efforts of an anthropocentric science to achieve longevity and defeat ageing.

Public support and participatory democracy

How can the task of collectively defining 'the safe and just operating space' be done? What social, cultural and political conditions are needed for reaching a democratic consensus on the ecological 'ceiling', or 'enoughness'? How can we reflect not only individually but also collectively on questions about relational well-being or our connectedness to nature?

These are crucial questions when thinking about the implementation of policies within the new paradigm of sustainable welfare. Efforts to answer such questions have resulted in a range of different empirical studies. To date, scholars have mainly focused on public support for eco-social policies. Research shows that support is rather modest, but not negligible. In an international comparison, Koch and Fritz (2020) found that in some countries like Sweden, Finland or Germany around one third of the population supports sustainable welfare, while in other countries such as Ireland, Poland or Portugal these are only around 15 per cent. Despite cross-national variations, there are also some general patterns. Carbon taxes, for example, find little agreement, while subsidies for renewable energies are met with much higher support (Koch and Fritz, 2020, p 99). Different studies discovered the common pattern that various kinds of eco-social policies are more supported by politically left-leaning persons and those who are in socio-cultural occupations and positions (Otto and Gugushvili, 2020; Fritz et al, 2021; Khan et al, 2022; Emilsson, 2023; Fritz and Eversberg, 2023).

Overall, the political legitimacy of sustainable welfare measured in terms of public support is limited.

A possible way to gain more traction could be through 'citizens' assemblies' or 'citizen councils', which have taken place in several European countries in recent years through public deliberation of policies for addressing the climate crisis in socially just ways (Lage et al, 2023). The citizen assemblies can be understood as attempts to activate an element of participatory democracy. In contrast to current mainstream policy discussions, scholars found that European citizens, as a result of such deliberation processes, support to a large extent measures that are in line with the sufficiency principle (Lage et al, 2023).

Other studies have explored the potential of democratic processes for bottom-up public deliberation with a more explicit focus on sustainable welfare (Lee et al, 2023; Lee and Koch, 2023). Through participatory and deliberative citizen forums, the importance of nature for human well-being was affirmed, while it was also shown, for instance, that principles of sufficiency were seen as positive needs satisfiers. While sustainable welfare literature highlights the importance of participatory democracy (Gough, 2017; Büchs et al, 2024), it is contested whether the policy recommendations that result from participatory citizen forums can gain wider public support in practice, not least due to well-known structural barriers to ensuring truly inclusive representation of all socio-economic and minority groups.

Conclusions

This chapter discussed sustainable welfare as a new scientific paradigm in social policy research. We traced the development from the social protection paradigm during the Fordist industrial era to the paradigm of activation and social investment that emerged in the post-Fordist development, and lastly to the newly emerging paradigm of sustainable welfare. Each period was characterised by its specific crisis, problems and solutions within the respective paradigms. We highlighted that sustainable welfare responds to the socio-ecological crisis and the problem of how to provide human well-being within planetary boundaries. We then described in more detail three solutions proposed within interdisciplinary research on sustainable welfare: building a politics and economy of sufficiency, promoting relational well-being and strengthening participatory democracy. Finally, we point to some critical questions for which we need more research efforts.

An urgent task, also in view of secular stagnation, is to better understand the growth-dependency of the welfare state (see also Chapter 4 in this volume), especially its fiscal dependency on continued economic growth (Bailey, 2015). How can alternative fiscal bases for sustainable welfare be secured in non-growing economies, for instance for the provision of

encompassing de-commodified public services to meet basic needs (for some initial discussions see Büchs et al, 2024)?

The magnitude of the cultural and societal transformations that are required to truly go beyond the human–nature divide is huge. Even though the new paradigm of sustainable welfare provides ideas and concepts for bridging the human–nature divide, it still needs to be elaborated what this means in practice, for example, regarding issues such as animal and nature rights. From a normative sustainable welfare perspective, possibilities should be investigated how we as humans can use our power in responsible ways *with*, not *against*, nature. As the societal process of agreeing on the necessary structural changes to enable a good life for all within planetary boundaries should be democratic and involve critical, reflexive thinking about the current human–nature divide, future sustainable welfare research could explore how to scale up the positive experiences from citizens' assemblies to dimensions that can trigger deep and fast transformations in all areas of society to overcome the socio-ecological crisis.

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4

The growth-independent welfare state

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Introduction

Though welfare is more than the economy, the welfare state appears to tie its faith to economic growth. The biophysical processes and things that make up the 'economy' cannot expand forever within planetary boundaries, and economic growth competes directly with environmental targets such as emission reduction pledges. The end of economic growth may mean the end of welfare states as we know them.

The currently dominant 'green growth'[1] policy doctrine explains this problem away by assuming enormous improvements in the material and energy efficiency of the economy. At first glance this may seem plausible, since we are used to thinking of the economy abstractly. The most typical way to define the 'size' of the economy is as a sum of all exchange (gross domestic product, GDP). However, all exchange is in practice associated with energy use, materials use and waste or pollution. This is intuitive if you think of any concrete case of consumption or production. It is also an empirical association across many types of environmental harms (Haberl et al, 2020; Wiedenhofer et al, 2020). Green growth faces a burden of proof regarding sufficient efficiency improvements that are immense in scale, so far unmet and probably impossible to meet in target time (Vadén et al, 2020; Vogel and Hickel, 2023). Growth-independent visions of the future are needed.

Other chapters of this book argue that welfare policy should be reoriented towards new normative goals, and that this may lead to a new class of welfare state. In this chapter, we introduce additional requirements for welfare states that stem from the growth dependence of capitalist and welfare state institutions. Growth-dependent institutions are in the 'eco-social nexus' because under biophysical limits they generate unemployment, constrained welfare state financing and lower and more costly pensions. Some of the reforms discussed here are similar to those discussed in other chapters, but growth dependence also steers our thinking in some unique directions. As

long as growth dependence is not even recognised as a problem, it raises an enormous political barrier to implementing eco-social programmes that might reduce production, consumption and investment.

As things stand, many of our societal institutions appear to need economic growth to function normally. Growth 'stabilises' the economy, creates and protects employment, reduces distributional conflicts and allows welfare systems to function (Ferguson, 2018). Growth dependence as a concept acknowledges this problem but considers it an outcome of specific institutions that can be reformed. Petschow et al (2018) give us a working definition of growth dependencies as 'areas of society, structures, institutions, etc. (1) that fulfil a socially desirable function, or that contribute to a widely socially accepted objective and (2) whose functional capacity or contribution under the present framework conditions depends on the economy growing continually' (p 91). Dedicated research into welfare state growth dependencies has been uncommon, and analysis has mostly been limited to identifying possible problem areas (for an overview, see Walker et al, 2021).

In this chapter, we first recount how economic growth has always been central to how the welfare state and its policy options are justified. We then discuss three economic issues that facilitate welfare state functions and that are arguably growth-dependent: employment, welfare state finances and pension fund performance. Being specific about problem areas helps us articulate possible reforms. Since these new welfare state institutions cannot be justified with productivity and growth, new underlying principles of welfare are needed. Growth-independent welfare is possible to achieve, but it requires adopting new policy doctrines or paradigms.

Changing narratives of growth and welfare states

Chapter 3 of this book provided a history of the welfare state in terms of how it interacts with ecological crises. Here, we recount this history more briefly, highlighting the connections between welfare states and economic growth in particular.

Democratic legitimation has always been an important function of the welfare state. Governments had to act in the interests of a common good that transcends economic interests to achieve support from its electorate (Offe, 1984; Hausknost, 2020). Nonetheless, the welfare state was only possible insofar as it was made compatible with the imperative of capital accumulation. Overall, it facilitated the reproduction of the labour force (Gough, 1979; O'Connor, 2002) while satisfying the demands of the labour movement 'to cushion the working class against the dislocations of capitalism' (Dryzek et al, 2002, p 662). The welfare state continues to function as a conflict resolution mechanism between different interest groups.

To serve this conflict resolution function, the welfare state has always been justified and assessed in relation to economic growth and employment. Varieties of welfare regimes place different importance on employment in access to welfare systems (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In the case of conservative welfare states, with large shares of social insurance, the welfare state was constructed around the risk of inability of gainful employment. The first social insurance systems covered the risks of not being able to gain income due to a lack of available jobs (unemployment insurance), age (pension insurance), sickness (health insurance) and long-term disability (accident insurance) (Clegg, 2018). Next to employment-related systems, social assistance from state, churches or communities always co-existed (Kuhlmann, 2018). These benefits, which covered social risk unrelated to employment (for example, financial child support), were provided on a voluntary basis, not as entitlements. Many researchers still associate growth dependence with reliance on employment, highlighting the enduring link between the establishment of welfare systems and employment within capitalist industries (Richters and Siemoneit, 2019).

The narrative where economic growth and welfare state expansion are thought to reinforce one another may be labelled the Keynesian expansion and is associated with the 'golden age' of Western welfare states. Starting around the 1970s, a contrasting narrative – neoliberal retrenchment – emerged, claiming that dismantling the welfare state would promote economic growth. The absence of economic growth became associated with shaky welfare states.

The narrative around economic growth and the welfare state shifted again around the 1990s as social expenditures started being seen as investments in 'human capital'. We can call this the *social investment paradigm* (Morel and Palme, 2018). Welfare expenditure started protecting against 'new' social risks concerning, for instance, childcare and education (Armingeon and Bonoli, 2006). The coverage of 'new' social risks was, and continues to be, mainly tax funded. As more of welfare was tax funded, the growth–welfare relationships expanded from social insurance systems to the general financial situation of the state. Welfare competes directly with all other public expenditure, like military spending or industry subsidies.

With ecological crises worsening and economic growth becoming increasingly viewed as incompatible with planetary boundaries, the relationship between economic growth and welfare states might change again. For one, welfare systems need to be able to survive long-term economic stagnation and even quite steep contractions (Bailey, 2015; Walker et al, 2021). Additionally, growth-fuelled ecological crises lead to new eco-social risks (see Chapter 18 of this volume). Meeting modern social risks without dependence on growth could lead to a new narrative of growth-independent welfare states, as part of a broader sustainable welfare paradigm. Table 4.1 summarises this lineage of welfare state developments.

Table 4.1: Phases of Western welfare state development

	1950s–60s	1970s–80s	1990s–2020s	Since 2020s?
Narrative/phase	Keynesian expansion	Neoliberal retrenchment	Investive recalibration	Growth independence
Relationship between economic growth and welfare provisioning	Economic growth and welfare provisioning reinforce one another	Economic growth is prioritised over welfare provisioning	Welfare expansion aims at economic growth	Welfare provisioning is independent of economic growth

Note: The time periods are illustrative and vary between countries.

Aspects of growth dependence

In the first section of this chapter, we saw that the welfare state has always been justified in economic terms and that growth facilitates its democratic legitimation. In this section, we discuss specific economic sources of welfare services and benefits that are considered to come under strain without economic growth: employment, welfare state revenues and pension fund performance. Employment enables social contributions and helps keep social service costs to the welfare state down, state finances in general enable state provisioning, and pension funds channel financial market returns to pensioners.

Employment

Welfare states rely on employment in multiple ways. First, losing employment may mean reliance on safety nets and welfare services. This adds to state costs and puts strain on public willingness to maintain tax-funded welfare systems. Second, social insurance systems are to a large extent funded by social contributions from labour incomes. Failure to gain contributory entitlements means falling back on tax-funded schemes. Third, labour incomes are an important source of tax revenue. Fourth, employment leads to taxable economic activity more broadly by enabling consumption and positive economic outlooks.

In both economic science and economic policy discussions, economic growth is widely viewed as necessary to prevent an increase in unemployment or to create additional employment. The statistical relationship between growth and employment goes by the name Okun's Law, as Okun (1962) was the first to empirically indicate their positive correlation. Many contemporary studies also confirm this correlation (Knotek, 2007; Ball et al, 2013). However, the strength of the relationship varies between countries (IMF, 2010), so conditions across time and regions seem to make a difference.

A common explanation for rising unemployment in no-growth conditions is rising labour productivity. A constant level of employment under increasing labour productivity requires expanding the quantity produced and sold. Another relevant dynamic is that profit-seeking investment is an 'engine' of capitalism: it drives growth and employment, which justifies further investment. If the economy is not expected to grow, investment may retract. At worst, self-reinforcing poor expectations generate a crisis spiral that keeps unemployment high (Tokic, 2012).

However, we can also think of future prospects that support employment. Economic transformation towards a sustainable economy could entail a different orientation of efficiency improvements and challenge Okun's Law. When there are limits to using natural resources like fossil fuels, biodiversity services, soil and so on, these production inputs become more expensive. Thus, the price of using energy and material resources relative to labour may rise (Petschow et al, 2018). Directing technological change at increasing resource productivity rather than labour productivity could reduce the growth dependence of employment (Lange, 2022). Furthermore, the share of working-age people out of the whole population is declining in many countries (Rouzet et al, 2019). Declining labour supply can counteract other reductions in labour demand without growth.

In summary, employment has been growth-dependent over the past decades in high-income countries, and poor economic expectations is a valid concern without growth. However, labour-intensive sustainability transformations and demographic ageing can also push unemployment down.

Welfare state finances

The functionality and stability of welfare states depends on their ability to finance their provisioning systems (Offe, 1984). Since taxes and social contributions from employment constitute a major share of welfare state revenues (Obinger, 2021), employment, as already discussed, is a key underlying issue in the fiscal growth dependence of the welfare state. However, the totality of state revenues also entails other taxes and debt financing. Therefore, the composition of welfare state revenues from different tax bases is an important determinant of welfare states' growth dependence (Kaufmann, 2022). Increasing the diversity of funding sources can improve the stability of welfare financing in a non-growing economy.

If so, Bismarckian welfare states which emphasise labour-based social contributions appear 'more growth-dependent' than Beveridgean welfare states that primarily finance welfare through tax revenues and can adjust tax policy relatively flexibly (Bonoli, 1997; Morel and Palme, 2018; Kaufmann, 2022). We can also apply this perspective at the level of welfare programmes. Addressing traditional social risks such as unemployment and old age, which

rely heavily on contributory systems, may exhibit greater dependence on economic growth compared to provisioning for 'new' social risks.

A focus on tax bases also offers insights regarding the risk of welfare state retrenchment in the absence of economic growth. From the perspective of retrenchment, Bismarckian welfare states and programmes covering 'old' social risks are actually more resilient to non-growing economic conditions, because provisioning is institutionalised fairly independently of governments and their discretionary fiscal policies (Kaufmann, 2022).

Regarding public debt, a common concern is that without growth the cost of government debt rises because investors become unsure that the state will keep its promise to pay back. Thus, this important source of financing is arguably growth-dependent. The common counterargument in post-growth discourse is that states that take on debt in their own currency cannot go bankrupt (Olk et al, 2023), so the cost of state borrowing should not skyrocket due to any default risk. In fact, if there are fewer high-yielding opportunities in low-growth conditions, demand for safe government debt could rise, lowering the cost of borrowing. A limitation of this point is that a large group of states in the Eurozone do not nationally issue their own currency (Ehnts and Höfgen, 2019). On the other hand, the European Central Bank has committed to protecting states from debt crises under certain conditions.[2] Whatever the real limits of deficit financing are, if states are believed to face a bankruptcy risk, this is enough to constrain welfare spending.

We can summarise that the absence of economic growth can lead to declining tax revenues and lower the ability or willingness to take debt. The strength of the link is mediated by the makeup of the tax base and the institutions and conventions governing public debt.

Pension fund performance

Welfare states have tied themselves to financial markets through their funded pension systems that take contributions from working members and invest them for interest. The idea is that under 'regular' growth-economy interest rates, each contribution becomes worth more over time, enabling a lower cost of pensions. Funded pensions are key instruments of welfare states because membership is often mandatory by law or collective agreement. Pension funds also help raise pensioners out of poverty (Kuitto et al, 2023) and, therefore, can reduce their reliance on tax-funded welfare systems. From a growth dependence perspective, there is a common intuition that low growth could lead to low interest rates and pension fund underperformance (for example, Hickel et al, 2022).

The connection between the end of economic growth and interest rates is not direct, but mediated by a wide range of societal factors that also vary

by asset type. Fund returns are also not the only variable that steers funded pension outcomes, as low inflation or improved career earnings can to an extent counteract low interest. Furthermore, because pension funds are allocated internationally, we cannot automatically reason that low growth in one region puts funds in that region under strain. Many types of pension fund scenarios without growth are possible, deserving further analysis (Wiman, 2023). However, since investment risk is a valid concern, we can understand growth dependence by looking at how the three main types of funded plan share risk differently.

Individual defined contribution plans are essentially personal savings accounts with no benefit promise. Savers carry risk individually, and retiring soon after an asset crash leads to losing much of one's savings. *Collective defined contribution* plans share risk across the membership by pooling assets, which is a good shield against momentary crises (Otsuka, 2023) but may not help as much if interest remains low for a long time. If these two fund types underperform, their benefits and replacement rates decline. Raising one's contribution could counteract the effect if long-term rates are positive.

The third type, *defined benefit funds*, are collective funds that promise some amount of pension for each contribution. They usually have a liable sponsor, like the employer, who carries the investment risk. If the fund balance reduces to a deficit after interest rate assumptions are revised downwards, the sponsor must raise their contribution to bring the fund back into balance.[3] Already promised benefits cannot be cut, so in this sense, according to plan rules, benefits and replacement rates are safe. However, the accrual rate of new benefit rights could be revised downwards to shield the sponsor.

Overall, pension funding creates possible growth dependence of pensioners' benefit sizes, replacement rates and costs. Absolute potential losses are greater for higher earners since a larger portion of their pension is expected to come from earnings-related funded plans. However, the lower-income end of plan members is more easily pushed into poverty if funds underperform, and in that sense have more at stake.

Reforms towards growth independence

The end of economic growth could result in higher unemployment, lower state revenues and lower pension fund returns. These effects would jeopardise the functionality of welfare states and thus undermine states' democratic legitimacy. In this section, we discuss strategies of controlling these effects through economic and social policies and other societal changes. We also underline how the reform options depart from historical welfare state narratives.

Employment

Securing employment without growth

Policies should promote employment in low-growth, low-investment conditions. One approach is job guarantees and public works programmes that provide jobs for anyone willing to engage in employment (Unti, 2015). Thus, the state would act as a major 'employer of last resort' to maintain macroeconomic stability. Such active state involvement goes against mainstream policy doctrines in which employment is expected to be primarily generated by labour markets and private investment. Yet this principle may need to be loosened in a non-growing economy where profit-seeking private investment and employment may retract.

The state could also encourage reforming the administration and distribution of work. Working time reduction and work-sharing practices are a common suggestion to prevent rising unemployment if labour productivity were to increase without economic growth (Jackson and Victor, 2011; Zwickl et al, 2016). Social enterprises that aim at social goals instead of only profits might retain staff better during economic crises. Worker cooperatives, since workers own and manage the company, can have a similar effect. One legislative path to reforming the 'purpose' of business would be to reform corporate law, which currently requires that corporations prioritise profits (Hinton, 2020). All these options challenge the idea, historically paired with welfare states, that firms and individual workers should aim at maximal production and incomes.

Tax reforms can also help maintain employment in a non-growing economy. A common proposal is to shift the emphasis of taxation away from labour towards resource- and energy-intensive capital. If labour becomes a less costly factor of production compared to capital, labour-saving technologies are discouraged, which mitigates the growth dependence of employment. This supports lowering labour taxes and social contributions and increasing environmental taxes (Lange, 2018; Petschow et al, 2018). Such reforms arguably discourage investment against mainstream policy doctrine. However, the tax system of a growth-independent welfare state should not seek to maximise investment, because investment and economic growth are tightly connected[4] and private investment can be a driver of excessive accumulation and inequality.

Securing basic needs without employment

Though securing employment is a central policy goal, full employment might not always be reached. The growth-independent welfare state should aim to decouple basic needs satisfaction from employment. To these ends, welfare state provisioning can shift emphasis from earnings-related entitlements

towards universal social policy programmes (Bohnenberger and Fritz, 2020). In particular, social policy proposals such as a Universal Basic Income, Universal Basic Services, and Universal Basic Vouchers (Bohnenberger, 2020) can promote needs-based welfare provisioning.

Universal welfare provisioning is not in principle radical or novel. All welfare states of wealthy economies have at least some universal safety nets in place, and particularly social-democratic welfare states have traditionally had many universalist functions. In any case, welfare states have historically been justified as facilitating production, employment and capital accumulation. The growth-independent welfare state would depart from this by viewing well-being as an end in itself (Pinto, 2020).

Welfare state finances

If the state manages to maintain high levels of employment, for instance following the reforms described earlier, this already contributes to a more stable tax base. Furthermore, higher taxes on capital incomes, wealth, inheritances and land coupled with financial transaction taxes and a progressive taxation of corporate revenues (Bailey, 2015; Büchs, 2021; Kubon-Gilke, 2021) can decrease the welfare states' fiscal growth dependence. These options diversify the state's revenues and provide a more stable revenue stream during economic downturns compared to employment (Kaufmann, 2022). Land, for instance, constitutes a particularly suitable funding source since it is essentially fixed in supply (Gaffney, 1994; Ryan-Collins et al, 2017), meaning that as a tax base it is strictly growth-independent (Kaufmann, 2022). These options can depart from the mainstream by challenging the primacy of investment and private accumulation.

If tax and social contribution revenues nonetheless fall short of welfare state needs, taking public debt remains a valid option. Private financial institutions might desire low-risk and low-yield bonds in a stagnating economy, which helps keep the cost of borrowing low.[5] If these institutions are pension funds, they would be funding the welfare state while also protecting pension savers from financial risk. Still, we might expect public debt to play a lesser role without economic growth, since debt is currently justified with future growth and high government debt could generate a political growth imperative (Stratford, 2020).

An alternative to taxes and debt is monetary financing (Olk et al, 2023), which effectively means that the central bank provides the money that the state needs. The economic limit to this is demand, as monetary financing with insufficient corresponding demand would lead to inflation. There can also be ideological or rules-based barriers. In any case, using debt or monetary financing without economic growth requires a narrative shift where central banks are viewed as guarantors of public finances.

Finally, policies can focus on prevention**,** meaning that they tackle the circumstances that give rise to social risks and welfare costs in the first place rather than treating their ramifications ex-post (Gough, 2015; Berghman et al, 2018; Bohnenberger and Fritz, 2020). This can include prevention of sickness, more equal distribution and better access to public goods, or investment in the employability of citizens, which would simultaneously help delink employment from economic growth.

Securing pensions without growth

If pension funds are vulnerable without economic growth, their direct alternatives are unfunded pensions, or pay-as-you-go pensions. These include both tax-funded minimum pensions and contributory, earnings-related pensions. Unfunded pension systems can work as long as employment remains high and government revenues are secured, for instance following the policies already discussed.

The spirit of funded pensions is that people save for their own retirement, though the financial logistics vary by plan type. In contrast, since unfunded plans directly redistribute between generations, they are easily perceived as 'paying for someone else', even if each member eventually becomes a beneficiary (Booth et al, 2005, p 632). The amount of pension one can receive through unfunded plans is also more directly constrained by the productivity of other members or the working-age population broadly. If there were to be a shift in emphasis away from funded plans towards unfunded plans, citizens and policy makers would need to adopt a less individualistic attitude to pensions.

A cross-cutting issue: reducing inequality without growth

To wrap up, we can note that lower inequality means less need for welfare spending to begin with (see, for example, Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010) and therefore lower conflict around many of the redistributive reforms already discussed. Post-growth researchers often discuss raising minimum incomes and setting income and wealth caps (Buch-Hansen and Koch, 2019). While these could be achieved with redistribution, reforms should also create institutions that already result in relatively equal economic outcomes before corrective policies (O'Neill, 2020). High unionisation may promote this aim, along with the prior-mentioned cooperative and work-sharing practices. Different kinds of shared property models that distribute profits among employees are already common in the technology sector (Cao et al, 2022). Regulation of compound interest or debt forgiveness (Hartley and Kallis, 2021), and regulation of rent extraction and monopolies (Stratford, 2020) can be additional safeguards against runaway economic inequality in a non-growing economy.

Conclusion

Current evidence on the decoupling of economic growth from environmental harms calls green growth visions into question. When the biophysical throughput of the economy is reduced to sustainable levels, the 'size of the economy' is likely to stop growing. In high-income economies, low growth is already putting pressure on welfare states.

Growth dependence as a concept accepts that we 'need' economic growth under existing institutions, but also that these institutions can be reformed. We discussed three distinct yet interlinked adverse phenomena: rising unemployment, pressures on welfare state finances and pension fund underperformance. These economic effects undermine the provisioning functions of the welfare state and thus erode its capacity to provide democratic legitimacy.

Many of the potential reforms towards growth independence clash against current and historical growth- and productivity-oriented welfare state narratives. Reforms may therefore need to be presented as comprehensive policy packages along with new narrative justifications. Some principles for a growth-independent welfare state include: valuing well-being outcomes for their own sake; moderating individual enrichment and steering investment towards social purposes within limits; and allowing the state to take a larger economic role if this is required to prevent social harms. The multiple, novel and synergistic institutions that are required for growth independence may amount to a new welfare policy 'paradigm'.

The degree to which growth dependencies manifest is conditional to institutional qualities and economic scenarios. What is judged as an adverse effect to be avoided is also a value judgement. Further research on this novel topic is needed to better understand growth dependence and to evaluate reform options critically. Achieving growth independence is necessary for the eco-social welfare state to maintain and enhance its democratic legitimation function and thus enable well-being for all within biophysical limits.

Notes

[1] Perhaps the most prominent example of green growth thinking is the European Commission's growth strategy 'The European Green Deal' (European Commission, 2019).

[2] The state is otherwise fiscally careful, and the risk of debt crisis is 'not warranted by country-specific fundamentals' (Arnold, 2022).

[3] Notice that changing assumptions about the future, or even the way future projections are accounted, can be enough to raise the contribution rate of a defined benefit plan.

[4] In theory, for the size of the economy to be stable, there should only be as much investment as there is 'wear-down' of prior assets, or capital depreciation (Lange, 2018, pp 510–515).

[5] Such a dynamic has kept Japanese public debt cheap despite low economic growth (Yoshino and Taghizadeh-Hesary, 2014).

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5

When the lifeworld colonises the system: the uncertain political prospects of eco-social transitions

Daniel Hausknost

Introduction

As the climate crisis is unfolding, it becomes clear that industrialised states so far have failed to initiate the 'fundamental societal and systems transformations that would be required for limiting warming to 1.5 °C' (IPCC, 2018, p 45). While some states are making limited progress in pushing sectorial transitions of their energy systems ahead and some advanced economies are beginning to show signs of 'absolute decoupling' from greenhouse gas emissions (Hubacek et al, 2021), the overall dynamic and depth of change is insufficient to stop humanity's journey on the 'highway to climate hell' (UN, 2022), and modern states remain stuck underneath a structural 'glass ceiling of transformation' (Hausknost, 2020).

In light of this lack of progress, scholars, activists and policy makers are increasingly putting their hopes in new strategies that combine social and environmental policy goals in order to make climate policy both more popular and more effective. Dominant versions of this overall strategy, like the European Commission's (2019) European Green Deal, trust in the pursuit of 'inclusive green growth' and put the focus on combining traditional welfare and labour market policies with more rigorous climate measures in an 'attempt to reconcile economic growth and ecological demands' (Laruffa, 2022, p 823). In academic and activist circles, however, more radical versions of an 'eco-social nexus' approach are being debated which aim at a deeper integration of social and ecological objectives and which, crucially, should allow societies to do without further economic growth. According to this view, a profound socio-ecological transformation is more likely to become feasible if states provide for a new type of 'sustainable welfare' (Koch and Mont, 2016) that embeds society in a 'safe and just operating space' (Raworth, 2012) that secures a 'good life for all within planetary boundaries' (O'Neill et al, 2018). The 'safe and just operating space' is defined by an outer and an inner boundary (or ceiling and floor), where the outer boundary can

be derived by the calculation of per-capita energy and resource use in line with biophysically defined planetary boundaries. Quite clearly, a global and equitable observance of the outer boundaries would mean a rather substantial downscaling of consumption levels in advanced capitalist countries. To make such a perspective socially and politically feasible, it is important to define an inner boundary, in the sense of a minimum or sufficiency level of needs satisfaction, which would allow everyone to lead a decent life. For this purpose, scholarship on sustainable welfare typically resorts to theories of human basic needs that are seen as 'objective' measures of well-being (Koch and Hansen, 2023, p 3). Following Max-Neef's (1991) Human Scale Development methodology, human needs (like subsistence, protection, affection and leisure) are universal and therefore objective, whereas the respective 'satisfiers' of those needs are culturally and historically specific and can be more or less environmentally sustainable. The task is now to define eco-social policies that guarantee 'needs satisfaction for everyone at minimal environmental impacts' (Büchs, 2021, pp 325–326).

Following this logic, the scholarly and activist community discusses such eco-social policy proposals that are directed towards safeguarding the upper boundary (for example, caps on income and taxes on wealth or meat) and others that are aimed at guaranteeing the floor (universal basic income, universal basic services, the reduction of working hours or voucher systems) (Bohnenberger, 2020; Coote and Percy, 2020; Koch, 2022a). Some proposals, like the reduction of working hours and the provision of a universal basic income, are believed to work in both directions by providing social security and at the same time limiting spending power.

The trouble with the eco-social nexus

In terms of strategy, the eco-social literature builds on its superior normative rationale: as soon as one accepts the existence of planetary boundaries and commits to the idea of global justice, one almost automatically arrives at some notion of 'collectively defined self-limitation' (Brand et al, 2021) in terms of a purposively defined 'operating space' or 'corridor' (Fuchs et al, 2021; Bärnthaler and Gough, 2023) within which a universal mode of existence is possible. Despite its normative appeal, however, the sufficiency-oriented eco-social approach so far has not gained much popularity beyond specialised academic and activist circles. In a survey testing the popularity of several eco-social policy measures in Sweden, Max Koch found that participants rejected measures in particular that are geared towards setting the ceiling. He concludes that there is indeed 'a considerable gap between the far-reaching measures that scientists consider necessary to meaningfully address climate emergency … and the measures that citizens of an advanced welfare state such as Sweden are presently prepared to support' (Koch, 2022a, p 454). In

another study, Paulson and Büchs state that 'the idea of downscaling overall production and consumption … was seen by most as an unnecessary and undesirable impingement on freedom and progress' (2022, p 7).

Despite this apparent lack of popular support, proponents of the eco-social literature typically defend the political viability of their project with a view to ongoing power struggles and changing norms and values: its lack of popularity today does not mean it cannot become hegemonic in the future. Max Koch, in particular, points to the 'thorough inculcation of the growth imperative in people's minds, bodies and day-to-day social practices'. This 'inculcation', in turn, can be undone gradually by engaging in bottom-up struggles that 'expand already existing spaces, where alternative, sustainable and cooperative forms of working and living together are tested' (Koch, 2022a, p 454). Building on materialist state theory in the wake of Nicos Poulantzas, who regards the state as the material condensation of social forces, Koch argues that the shape and contents of the state depend strongly on the social struggles that are going on at its fringes: 'If mobilisation by socio-ecological and growth-critical groups reached a critical momentum …, the existing state apparatus could be used to initiate a transition that breaks the glass ceiling of current environmental states' (Koch, 2020, p 127). Ultimately, a sustainable welfare state could be achieved by dismantling the ideological and praxeological inculcation of growth and productivism in people's minds and bodies through collective struggles and prefigurative practices in civil society. And, one would need to add, by the inculcation in people's minds, bodies and day-to-day practices of a *new* love of societal boundaries, self-limitation and 'social freedom, defined as the right not to live at others' expense' (Brand et al, 2021, p 264).

It is this explanation of the empirical and political weakness of the eco-social nexus approach that this chapter takes issue with. At the core of this explanation lies the critical-materialist fallacy that if the state is the material condensation of social forces, then any hegemonic order can, in principle, be replaced by any other hegemonic project, given that it articulates a strong enough base of support in civil society. This view mistakes the state for a neutral or constitutively 'empty' terrain that is shaped by the struggles between social forces. It claims that capitalist, growth-dependent democracy can be turned into a sufficiency-based, solidary and sustainable democratic state by way of articulating and practising a new *common sense* in society. Another implicit claim is that such a democratic sustainable welfare state could remain politically stable in the longer run. Against this view, it is important to caution that not all hegemonic projects are equal in terms of their chances of success and longevity, which implies that hegemony is not a neutral term that can be filled with contingent contents. I argue instead that the capitalist growth model is hegemonic because it allows for a certain way of constructing social reality (see the following discussion), and not because

capital interests manage to inculcate the growth imperative in our minds and bodies. Arguably, the eco-social counter-hegemonic project would not have comparable means of reality construction at its disposal and would therefore always fight an uphill battle against disintegrative dynamics. In what follows, this argument will be unpacked.

The political precedence of the lifeworld over the (earth) system

The problem with the critical-materialist ontology of state resides with its privileging of social struggle as the key variable to determine the contours and contents of social order: if only emancipatory forces managed to engage enough people in their cause they will be able to gain power and reshape the institutional and political-economic order according to their emancipatory ideals. The stability of the resulting order will result from hegemonic power (through the construction of a common sense in both ideological and praxeological terms). What helps in the process of constructing the new common sense is the emancipatory project's normative superiority: once people realise that they have been blinded by consumerism and the growth ideology, they will happily join in the project of collective self-limitation simply because it is the right thing to do: freedom is the 'right not to live at others' expense (Brand et al, 2021, p 264) according to the solidary doctrine. This perspective, while normatively compelling, obstructs the view to underlying mechanisms of social reality construction that may be analytically more essential to the understanding of social order and stability than the claim to normative superiority and human solidarity. The social-constructivist perspective, offered here as an alternative, shares the normative objectives of the critical-materialist project but aims at providing a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms of societal self-stabilisation. These mechanisms are located in a different register than normative thinking as they organise the social *perception* of reality, not its *judgement*.

In a first step, the function of the environmental welfare state is reinterpreted through the phenomenological lens of the *lifeworld* (Schütz and Luckmann, 1973). As a heuristic, I propose the analytical distinction of *lifeworld sustainability* (LWS) and *system sustainability* (SYS) (Hausknost, 2020). In Schütz and Luckmann (1973), the lifeworld constitutes the sphere of everyday reality – the realm of perception, practice and social interaction. The lifeworld is central to the understanding of human societies as it is the sphere through which more abstract levels of reality, like our institutions and theoretical constructions, are mediated: we cannot ultimately escape the lifeworld we inhabit. Politics, despite its various theoretical underpinnings, is ultimately anchored in the lifeworld as it relies on resonance with peoples' everyday experiences, perceptions, emotions and judgements. The concept

of LWS is therefore directly linked to the notion of well-being (Dean, 2012; Hirvilammi et al, 2023), as it captures a desirable state of the lifeworld that citizens aspire to or aim to sustain. LWS certainly includes important environmental qualities or 'need satisfiers' like clean air and water, intact stretches of nature for physical and mental recreation, healthy food and other qualities that can be summarised under the name of environmental health (Moeller, 2011). But LWS arguably also includes, in contemporary societies, notions of material wealth, consumer choice, individual mobility and hedonic pleasures. In short, LWS is a compound category that does not refer to a specific, scientifically determined state of nature, but to a subjectively desired state of the lifeworld of individuals and groups.

SYS, by contrast, refers to the 'objectively' determinable characteristics and dynamics of the earth system, as encapsulated in the 'planetary boundaries' concept. Its scope is not local and subjective but global and objective in terms of quantifiable limits to human activity. The point of the distinction is to show that the political logic of the environmental (welfare) state has so far been geared towards LWS at the expense of SYS and that the resulting decoupling of LWS from SYS since the 1970s has led to the entrenchment of their functional separation. The environmental state (in the OECD world) has created an environmentally refurbished lifeworld for its citizens that is epistemically separated from its own systemic unsustainability: the everyday perception of clean air, safe water and lush nature in many OECD countries hides from our view the highly unsustainable social metabolism these countries entertain with other parts of the world and with the earth system. For example, the environmentally reformed lifeworlds of advanced consumer societies are tele-coupled with countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, China or India via highly destructive resource flows that are responsible for vast embodied greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification and human exploitation. These destructive flows contribute decisively to LWS in the global North: they reinforce the subjective perception of a reality in which air and water are clean and forests are lush while clothes, meat, electronics, gasoline and many other amenities of consumer societies are affordable and abundantly available. Or, as Hirvilammi et al (2023, p 10) put it, 'the current state of wellbeing in welfare states has been achieved by deteriorating the wellbeing of impoverished populations, other species, and future generations worldwide'.

While the political logic of the environmental welfare state has thus been to prioritise LWS at the expense of SYS, the eco-social or 'sustainable welfare' state (Koch, 2022a) would need to turn this priority around, or at least to satisfy LWS without encroaching on SYS, with consequences for institutional stability that have not been sufficiently addressed in the eco-social literature. Shifting the priority of the state to SYS would mean to let SYS set the boundaries within which LWS can be achieved. This would

constitute a radical break with the logic of modern statehood as we know it. To date, SYS has been the dependent variable of LWS, which means that measures towards systemic sustainability could only be implemented to the extent that they did not negatively impinge on citizens' lifeworlds. Climate policies, for example, had to be designed in such a way as to have an invisible effect on the lives of citizens. Any allusion to self-limitation had to be couched in terms of individual responsibility and ethical consumerism, not as a political project.

This project of a *reversal* of state priorities from LWS to SYS would arguably run into a massive legitimation crisis, which would arise, paradoxically perhaps, precisely *because* of the new priority's normative superiority. While not to live at the expense of other people, species or generations is an incontrovertible moral proposal, it would contradict the modern state's inherent logic of drawing its institutional stability from practices of living at the expense of the outside world. The belief in a reversal of this logic simply by force of the construction of a counter-hegemonic common sense may turn out to fall short of a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that stabilise social order.

The 'passive legitimacy' of the modern state

Elsewhere, I outlined what I believe to be some of the key mechanisms of societal self-stabilisation under the name of *passive legitimacy* (Hausknost, 2023). While active legitimation refers to activities that justify acts of power or institutional order, passive legitimation results from strategies to *avoid* the very need for active legitimation. Where active legitimation reacts to problematisations of entities (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), the aim of passive legitimacy is 'the absence of questions about or challenges to an entity' (Tost, 2011, p 692). An institutional order remains stable to the extent that it manages to exempt large parts of social reality from the need for active legitimation, that is, to render the very question of legitimacy as much as possible a 'muted issue' (Conolly 1984, p 3) that is not relevant to everyday political life. To apply an astrophysical metaphor, passive legitimacy is like the invisible 'dark matter' that constitutes the largest part of the universe and without which the cohesion of galaxies cannot be explained (Hausknost, 2023). The key to understanding social order, according to this view, is to understand the mechanisms through which the need for active legitimation is effectively confined.

There are three such key mechanisms: *reification*, *exclusion* and *performance*. Reification refers to the ability of an institutional order to externalise the production of social reality, that is, to separate the locus of institutionalised power from the sphere from which the facts of reality are perceived to emerge. In distinction from the Marxist tradition, where reification has a

normative implication in terms of making something virtual appear real at the expense of a deeper layer of reality that is hidden (like in 'commodity fetishism'), the social-constructivist reading of the term makes no such ontological claims but focuses on its ordering function: it simply refers to the construction of a source of facticity that is situated outside the institutional order and therefore outside the controvertible sphere of *wilfulness*. For Berger and Luckmann (1966), reification is an indispensable feature of *any* social order in that it renders certain strata of humanly constructed social reality an 'inert facticity' (1966, p 89) that hides their constructed character. That way, it 'immunizes' (Berger, 1967, p 87) the institutional order from its own contingency and thus from constant problematisation. The key stabilising function of reification is thus that institutionalised (political) power is not perceived as the *source* of reality, but as a *reactive medium* that administrates a reality that is exogenously given. Historically, the most effective mechanism of reification has been the construction of a divine and thus supra-human source of reality that renders secular power its mere executive agency (Berger, 1967). Throughout modernity, however, a comparably effective mode of reification could only be achieved through capitalist market relations. Through the eclipsing of social causality in the price mechanism and the subjection even of labour, land and money (Polanyi, 1944) to the logic of commodification, capitalism is able to create an epistemically separated source of reality that functions as a sphere of coercive facticity in relation to which the political sphere of institutional power is positioned as a managerial, reactive and administrative medium. Reality is not generated in parliaments, but parliaments have the function to administer a reality that is perceived as emerging from an exogenous black box. The secret of liberal statecraft is never to jeopardise this separation of reality into a generative (exogenous) and an administrative (endogenous) sphere that shields the institutional order from the need of active legitimation. Whatever crisis there may be, let it be perceived as an exogenous reality against which the political realm offers protection; conversely, never let the political sphere be perceived as the causal origin of a problematic reality!

As a source of passive legitimacy, however, reification rarely works alone. Exclusion is a second powerful mechanism. It refers to the delimitation of the range of individuals in relation to whom active legitimation is required. The smaller the group of people in front of whom a reality must be justified in the first place, the smaller the risk of profound discord. Typically, the main instrument of exclusion is the limitation of citizenship. Slavery is perhaps the most drastic example. The majority of individuals living within the confines of ancient democratic Athens, for instance, were slaves to whom burdensome and unpleasant labour was downloaded without granting them the possibility of holding those powers accountable that determined their fate (Anderson, 1974). Limiting citizenship of the 'demos' to male

Athens-born individuals with a certain pedigree had the clear stabilising function of confining the very scope of contention within the democratic order to such issues that were relevant to the privileged few: warfare and external affairs as well as economic planning and legal issues. Modern mass democracies, of course, have other ways of excluding relevant individuals (and non-human species) who do the 'dirty work' for the citizens or who suffer the consequences of their privileged lives – primarily through the limitation of citizenship to populations within spatially defined boundaries. Our 'slaves' live in distant lands, or they live as immigrants in our midst, or they are non-human species to which we download the 'externalities' of our highly entropic lifestyles (Brand and Wissen, 2021; Valdez, 2023). While exclusion in the eco-social literature mainly figures in its normative guise as a matter of injustice, the social-constructivist perspective is interested primarily in its function for societal stabilisation. Institutionally, its main function consists in the separation of the realm of *politics* proper from the realm of *ethics*. While those *included* in terms of possessing political citizenship are in the position to advocate for their own interests, those *excluded* depend on a proxy at the inside for their interests to be represented. For example, the interests of workers in France or Germany can be represented by their own organisations and parties within their respective polities, while the interests of child labourers in Bangladesh or smallholders in Peru, who supply German and French workers with cheap clothes and coffee, can only be represented in Germany or France through NGOs or parties that (purport to) speak in their names. Put differently, while the interests of the former can be translated directly into *political power* in representative institutions, the interests of the latter can be translated only into *moral pleas* to constrain ourselves in favour of the institutionally absent and unrepresented. The excluded lack power by definition. That way, universalist demands (for example, concerning the self-limitation of the included to a corridor of material prosperity in the name of global justice) are necessarily relegated from the register of politics to that of ethics.

The third dimension of passive legitimacy concerns the performance of the institutional order. The logic here is simply that as long as institutional power is perceived to deliver certain highly regarded goods and services, there will be fewer inconvenient questions and challenges that problematise that power. For example, as long as a government provides for job security, consumer choice, affordable housing and public health services, certain questions about the ways in which or at whose expense these goods have been produced will have less political salience and probably only concern an intellectual minority. Political sociology since Max Weber (2019) has analysed the performance of political power as a prerequisite to muting unpleasant questions regarding the legitimacy of authority. While performance may be the mode of passive legitimation that is most amenable to the eco-social

literature and its approach to provide for a strong 'floor' or lower boundary in terms of needs satisfaction, one should not forget that historically the performance of welfare states has been intimately tied to mechanisms of exclusion in terms of imperialism, the global appropriation of labour and resources and the downloading of externalities into global commons (confer Koch, 2022a). Severing this structural tie between performance and exclusion may undermine the state's ability to perform at the required level.

From this perspective, the problem now is that as a project designed to satisfy universalist normative objectives, the eco-social state would arguably have to relinquish critical capacities of passive legitimation that prevalent liberal capitalist states standardly rely on. Firstly, it would have to roll back the reifying properties of the market, as it would need to make collective decisions on many questions of production and consumption that would affect prices and consumer choice. Thus, governments would be perceived as directly accountable for many socio-economic facts that were hitherto generated exogenously in the global market system. Secondly, the eco-social state would not be able to rely substantially on exclusion anymore as its very purpose is to organise *internal* (lifeworld) reality according to principles of *global* (systemic) sustainability and justice. This would mean that externalised burdens and ills would have to be politically internalised and – for lack of reification – accounted for. The abdication of exclusion would, thirdly, affect the state's performative capacities, which would weigh all the heavier in a situation where this lack of performance cannot be compensated by a higher level of reification. Although it may be possible for an eco-social state to provide certain basic need satisfiers within planetary boundaries, it is unlikely that the level and quality of these satisfiers would satisfy the demands of contemporary industrial citizenries. It is likely that any such 'floor' would instead be perceived as a regression towards more basic standards of provisioning for which political authorities would be directly accountable.

In sum, the eco-social state would need to actively legitimise a much larger share of social reality, while at the same time faring worse in terms of performance. Through its prioritising of SYS over LWS, it would arguably lose much of its passive legitimacy and in turn enter a legitimation crisis as social reality would be perceived as politically created (instead of externally given) to a very large extent. The pressure to actively justify a plethora of social facts that are variously perceived as problematic and liberty-constraining would possibly overburden the capacity of the state to secure institutional stability.

Conclusion

The social-constructivist perspective on the eco-social state may be a sobering one as it dims the hope for an eco-social counter-hegemony that

thrives on normative persuasiveness and successful social struggle. Against the view of the state as the material condensation of social forces (Poulantzas, 2014), the concept of passive legitimacy provides an explanatory framework for the functional conditions under which an order akin to hegemony can emerge. None of these conditions is particularly favourable to the eco-social project.

By way of conclusion, however, I would like to sketch one or two scenarios in which a transformation towards an eco-social state may be feasible after all, albeit at a cost. The first scenario builds on a dynamic progress of the planetary crisis. To the extent that climate crisis and ecological collapse begin to invade the lifeworld of industrialised societies, the public may expect the state to manage that crisis and to halt the rapid decay of their lifeworld. This is a complicated situation for the state as expectations will not be homogenous and probably not fully in line with the normative requirements of the eco-social state. On one hand, governments may perceive an increasing mandate to build the 'floor' of sustainable welfare, that is, to 'decommodify' some systems of provision and to provide for social security and perhaps for some universal basic services. In a situation of an ever more tangible climate crisis 'at home', governments may even see scope for the introduction of some upper limits to excess consumption in terms of 'emergency measures'. However, the pressure will also rise for governments to ramp up certain forms of exclusion within that dynamic, as the public may not be willing to share scarce resources like water with neighbouring countries or to relinquish an already threatened standard of living for the sake of global justice. Also, there might be an increasing temptation to apply stronger forms of domestic exclusion, that is, to define who gets to be *above* the 'floor' and who is pushed *underneath*. Ultimately, an eco-social state emerging in a dynamic reaction to climate emergency may well develop frightening similarities to an eco-fascist state. It is impossible to tell *ex ante* if a democratic mode of governance could be sustained under conditions of an accelerating climate crisis that undermines socio-economic stability.

Democracy, and deliberative democracy in particular, is a key normative feature in all visions of the eco-social state (Koch, 2022b; Bärnthaler, 2024). Another – and arguably less likely – scenario would thus be the emergence of a novel type of democracy that is functionally adapted to the challenges of the eco-social transformation rather than to the administration of a growing capitalist economy. If the functional premises of passive legitimacy are accepted, then a transformative type of democracy would have to rely less on representation and more on direct forms of decision making, perhaps in combination with deliberative instruments. This is because representative institutions are coming under enormous legitimation pressure when being perceived as the source of unpalatable facts like high prices or scarce goods,

whereas a direct decision by the public does not lead to a legitimation problem for the institutional order. The same caveat as above also applies to this scenario, however: there is no guarantee (perhaps not even a great likelihood) that democratic decisions would go in the direction of the eco-social normative aspirations; the temptation for many citizens to revert to modes of exclusion that secure their own standard of living at the expense of others may be too high and democracy may be used not to realise universalist human aspirations but particularistic and national objectives. This does not rule out the emergence of some features of the eco-social state as outlined in the literature, but it may be selective features that focus more on establishing the floor than observing the ceiling for the citizens of the new state.

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6

Conceptualising consensus: constitutive elements of a political sociology of eco-social contestation and conflict

Vincent Gengnagel

Introduction

The immediate and increasingly urgent challenge of climate change is, among other disciplines, also a task for the social sciences (Ibrahim and Rödder, 2022). This chapter argues that Political Sociology offers concepts that help us to better understand how the efforts for an urgently needed eco-social transformation have to resonate with a socio-political understanding in the very societies that caused the incoming climate catastrophe in the first place (Page, 2008). Adding to the repeatedly established scientific insight that a transformation is objectively necessary (Lade et al, 2020), a critical sociological lens does not only problematise the precarious legitimacy of the eco-social challenge from a positivist point of view, but rather points out that the transfer of this scientific imperative into societal practice hinges on several conditions: in Western democracies, eco-social policies have to be deemed adequate and proportionate; the imminent social change taking place during a 'green' social transformation has to be legitimate beyond progressivist milieus; and finally, the democratic legitimacy of an eco-social governmental project is contingent on a socio-political discourse in which the eco-social challenge is broadly understood as a universal goal (Gengnagel and Zimmermann, 2022a). In this setting, latching any kind of green transformation project onto existing growth-driven welfare regimes is both *necessary* and *problematic*. It is necessary because welfare regimes offer the means to soften the blow of immediate climate policies, potentially even nullifying their disproportionately severe impact on the most vulnerable. Ideally, this would strip anti-transformative populists of material reasons to mobilise against what they depict as an elitist green project (Martin and Islar, 2021; Humpert and Möstl, 2022). No longer confounded by socio-economic injustice, any regressive backlash against an eco-social polity would be limited to merely ideological arguments. While that would open

the door for the eco-social transformation to become a society-wide shared universal interest, however, it is unlikely that current welfare regimes can in fact play such a successful consensus-enabling role. Given the problematic interdependence between welfare regimes and economic growth, adding the requirements of ecological policies into the mix necessarily creates new social conflicts and perpetuates old ones beyond the means of growth-driven consensus and respective temporary societal compromises. The chapter aims at pointing out some conceptual conflicts that have to be accounted for when considering future constellations of an eco-social polity.

A sociological understanding of legitimacy has to observe popular and governmental discourses that give social reality to the concept of an eco-social polity – which is, then, not to be understood as an undertaking defined by governmental strategies alone. Instead, it emerges as a societally recognised governmental goal only insofar as people participate in the construction of an eco-social nexus in societal power relations, of which scientific expertise is but one element. In a similar vein, attitudes towards eco-social policies do not immediately align with political programmes either but are much more tied to everyday practices of sense-making, cultural distinctions and gut feelings that carry contradicting expectations of a 'just transition' (Mau et al, 2023, pp 228–234). *Contestations* of eco-social policies, then, are a constitutive – and inherently conflictive – element of a democratic discourse in which the immediacy and catastrophic urgency of climate change have to be relatable. If its systematic causes are to be addressed, the eco-social polity would have to turn into something that is seen as legitimate and of universal interest. Neither governmental decree nor administrative or scientific insight can constitute that relation by themselves, however, and might even be rejected by 'populist' notions of sovereignty (Nichols, 2017; Bogner, 2021).

This also holds true for EU institutions that take on an eco-social agenda. Applying a Weberian notion of legitimacy (Lepsius, 2017), European institutions are not only measured against their functional capability to deliver on eco-social goals, but also against the extent to which they facilitate the participation of societal stakeholders in democratic procedures. In other words, to establish and uphold a collective belief in eco-social policies, eco-welfare hinges on input and 'throughput legitimacy' (Schmidt, 2013). Relying on 'normative power', the EU already extended its normative reach to all of humankind (Manners, 2002, pp 243, 253). The current iteration of legitimising knowledge production (Young and Ravinet, 2022) links the European project not only with universal human rights, but with both the responsibility for the planetary ecosystem and the promise to maintain a capable welfare regime during the necessary eco-social transformation. The contestations – which the former and the latter both face – are a constitutive element of socio-political discourse on just transition as a societal endeavour: on the one hand, there is an increasing and increasingly undeniable pressure of an objectively changing

climate; on the other hand, there is a politicisation of the pathways that promise to lead towards 'a climate-neutral yet prospering continent' (Gengnagel and Zimmermann, 2022b), with EU Commission President von der Leyen over-ambitiously claiming to present 'a new growth strategy that is more giving back than it takes away. It is a growth strategy that is more caring' (after Gengnagel and Zimmermann, 2022b, p 285).

Is an analysis of the societal embeddedness of eco-social policies really necessary? In the author's view, it is not only a constructivist addendum to analysing the eco-social nexus. Instead, it is fundamentally relevant in order to maintain an analytical distance to the narratives produced in governmental discourses. While a materialist sociological perspective maintains that the emergence – or failure to emerge – of an eco-social polity is not a matter of a priori definitions but of societal practices, it might still be useful to take the envisioned integration of ecological and social policies as a point of departure to reflect on the conceptual premises of said integration. *How far might policy analysis suffer from a built-in bias towards assuming the feasibility of an implementable and societally legitimate eco-social polity?* Both critical social policy research (for example, Koch et al, 2016; Laruffa, 2019) and critical governance studies (Samper et al, 2021) remind us of the conflictuous and contested nature of the respective policy goals and caution us against the reproduction of governmental narratives that gloss over what is aptly discussed as the 'eco-social growth trilemma' (Sabato et al, 2021, p 15).

The following section introduces the idea that conflict is a necessary element of political discourse and challenges the liberal bias towards a notion of legitimacy that is narrowed down to an expertocratic representation of societal consensus and underlying assumptions of the actual feasibility of policy goals. This bias becomes topical in both the analysis of green transformations and the comparatively older tradition of analysing social policy regimes. In both cases, built-in dilemmata have potential for fundamentally conflictuous struggles over the respectively required polity. While remaining on a conceptual level, even a brief sketch of social policy as a merely temporary 'distributive pacification' (Offe, 1980, p 113) forces us to consider that what barely worked for post-war nation states of the 20th-century – while externalising the socio-economic and ecological costs of their polity (Lessenich, 2019) – has to be analysed very cautiously in terms of promises of eco-social synergy, win-win-win outcomes and successful policy integration.

Liberal consensus as ignored conflict: a neo-Gramscian perspective on policy analysis

From a neo-Gramscian perspective (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), *critical policy analysis* has to account for the antagonistic nature of structuring society – the

inherently political will to govern in a particular fashion, irreducible to functional efficacy or expertocratic management. From such a point of view, any polity is characterised by a manifest or latent conflict between particularistic articulations that express themselves as universally legitimate, for example, as hegemonic, insofar as counter-hegemonic discourses are suppressed. Mouffe describes this violent determination as antagonistic politics, for instance, when counter-positions to liberal policy are dismissed as 'unreasonable' instead of being understood through a common political discourse over agonistic oppositions. Her demand, therefore, is that an open conflict must be carried out in which the otherwise undefined enemy is respected as a participating opponent. The 'cosmopolitan illusion' (Mouffe, 2005), accordingly, consists in the notion that all individuals supposedly have the freedom to participate in an enlightened public sphere through acts of communicative reason (Habermas, 1981) – while in reality this is prevented in the name of an exclusively high-cultural understanding of reason. According to Mouffe, a symbolic act of violence is embedded in what she describes as the hegemonic liberal discourse. Anyone who wants to articulate criticism of liberalism and its premises is discursively only perceived as representing an unobjective, not goal-oriented and ultimately unreasonable position – for example, unworthy of consideration in terms of communicatively testing the better argument. The articulation of certain policies can thus be understood as the presentation of universally applicable particular 'solutions', while omitting the antagonistic contradictions and the political character of their strategies. If successful, the policy outcomes are no longer seen as mere hegemonic projects but accepted as legitimate vis-à-vis unrealistic and unreasonable alternatives. On this fundamental discourse-theoretical level, eco-social policies are a battleground of political projects precisely because the discourse of universal urgency and collective global interest is so pervasive.

Integrating a trilemma: temporary trade-offs or fundamental failure

What kinds of conflicts are manifested in eco-social policy analysis, especially on a European level? A great point of departure has been presented by Sabato et al (2021), who describe an 'eco-social-growth trilemma': analytically, economic, social and environmental spheres are differentiated as:

> separate systems, each of them relying on its own principles of performance and quality, normative claims and policy goals. Thus, the environmental sphere is based on the imperative of preserving the natural environment, with the goal of preventing deterioration due to the depletion of natural resources and pollution. The key objective

> pursued in the economic sphere is, according to this approach, to promote economic growth, while the imperative of the social sphere is the (re)distribution of welfare, preventing social risks and ensuring social justice, equity and cohesion. (Sabato et al, 2021, p 15)

Accordingly, they posit that some objectives can be pursued together and form synergies, while others represent trade-offs and incompatible functional logics – with the latter presenting a '*trilemma*'. For Sabato et al (p 15), this 'is useful to understand the governance of the interconnections between the three spheres and the challenges with which decision-makers are confronted while trying to pursue potentially incompatible objectives'. However, a neo-Gramscian perspective might add that it is not necessarily the political sphere providing decision making in this 'trilemmatic' structure, but that it is already the representation of synergies and trade-offs that shape the realm of the politically feasible in the first place.

Sabato et al distinguish different approaches to the trilemma (2021, p 16). First, in how far a synergetic 'integrative capacity' is posited at all – here, the policy ambition is to create win-win situations and, if a triple win-win-win seems all too implausible, to at least address the consequences of unfavourable trade-offs. Second – since this ambition is counteracted by conflicting systematic interests – the approaches to the eco-social-growth trilemma are differentiated according to the relative importance they give to the three system logics, resulting in 'growth-first', 'degrowth' and 'balanced' approaches. Remaining on an analytical and normative level, the discussion does not touch the political landscape of these concepts, which are inherently conflictuous: obviously, the growth-first agenda enjoys political hegemony; the counter-discourse on degrowth is promoted mainly academically and in social movements; and what Sabato et al call 'balanced approaches', for example, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, are conceptually powerful compromises with little political impact in terms of a mitigation of systematic interests. It remains unclear how the political decision making towards a balance (and a definition thereof) could come about.

Following the visual representation of the trilemma as a triangle, a fourth system looms outside: politics is conceptualised as *the other* of the three clinching policy logics. While the eco-social policy trilemma is highly instructive as a concept, a neo-Gramscian perspective has to point out that the four functions identified for welfare states in the green transition are geared towards an optimistic and consensus-oriented expectation. Where welfare states – aptly, but not conflict-oriented – are conceptualised as benchmarks, enablers, buffers and 'consensus-builders or conflict-management tools' (Sabato et al, 2021, pp 20–21) for a green transition, they might as well be roadblocks against sustainability, dependants of capitalist growth policies, and

arenas for populist backlash and the defence of unsustainable privileges. In short, the eco-social polity is fundamentally political.

In this direction, the neo-Gramscian analysis of the European Green Deal (EGD) by Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo (2020) is an instructive addition. They are critical of the EGD being presented as a third alternative between growth and degrowth discourses, promising 'prioritizing ecology without welfare loss' (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, 2020, p 1).

> The main features of the traditional green growth discourse as propounded by the EU and other powerful governance actors … are the beliefs that environmental protection and GDP growth are compatible, and that green technology will solve the ecological crisis. Existing power structures are thereby left more or less unchanged. We have then examined to what extent the EU's Green Deal perpetuates the traditional green growth discourse and to what extent it diverges from it, forming a possible third way between green growth and degrowth. The EU's Green Deal is yet another version of the green growth model through its endorsement and reinforcement of the middle-class lifestyle and of the traditional vision of industrial society, including its large-scale technologization, mechanization and automatization. (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, 2020, p 11)

According to their analysis, the concept of green growth and its 'technological solutionism' is supposed to address the eco-social nexus by reinforcing current capitalistic structures, all but ignoring the trilemmatic structure at play. The identified four tentative and conceptual openings briefly touched upon in the EGD point out arenas of socio-political struggle and can hardly be framed as consensus-prone – some aspects are actively conflicting with climate goals and might best be discussed as elements of 'climate obstruction' (Haas et al, 2024).

What's more, as Stegeman and Oosewaarde have stressed in 2018 (before the Green Deal was presented), the neo-Gramscian figure of a liberally repressed political discourse leading to populist invocations of the political holds true for the discourse on green transformation as well:

> While the EU repeatedly promotes sustainable development in the context of its greened hegemonic economic discourse, its member states' frustrations regarding the EU's integrative policies have been a breeding ground for counter-hegemonic populism. Such anti-EU and typically right-wing populism promotes national and conventional modes of energy production that is emancipated from foreign providers, science, and EU legislation; and it reveals post-truth tendencies in the

> sense that it relativizes conventional knowledge as well causation and correlation. (Stegeman and Oosewaarde, 2018, p 25)

Ultimately, the invocation of a 'trilemma' can be seen as a contemporary reiteration of earlier debates about the paradoxical structure of capitalist welfare regimes that aim at overcoming their inherent antagonisms by painting over the cracks. As materialist welfare studies always maintained – in exemplary fashion, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* by Claus Offe (1980) – the post-war stability attained in parts through the enlargement of the welfare state and the subsequent growth-based 'distributive pacification' (Offe, 1980, p 113) of broader strata of society only worked temporarily, and only for a very specific type of Western society – the global interdependence of which had to be accounted for almost immediately after the social-democratic promise of depoliticised but inclusive liberal market societies had been established. Due to this structural change, modernity has been in a crisis of reproduction and meaning since 1968 at the latest (Wallerstein, 2001). As early as 1972, Claus Offe described the political dilemma of technocracy in his programmatic study on the structural problems of the late-capitalist state (Offe, 1980, pp 107–122), which, for him, consists in the fact that the supposedly depoliticised technocratic rule is not able to overcome the 'traditional socio-economic stability and adaptation problems' of capitalist democracies (Offe, 1980, p 108, own translation). Offe's political sociology thus opposed the functionalist assumption discussed in the technocracy debate of the immediate post-war period – according to which the rational operation of modern technology would not depend on socio-cultural legitimacy. Offe claimed that the 'continuation of technocratic development tendencies cannot fulfil the function attributed to them of suppressing social conflicts and contradictions, and thus freezing or deproblematising the historical process of movement in late-capitalist societies at the given level of power distribution' (Offe, 1980, own translation).

Lessenich and other critical theorists have – somewhat triumphantly, after having endured a period of increasingly 'depoliticised' welfare research – pointed out that Offe is still right: a capitalist welfare regime will always create more problems than it may temporarily solve, and the unsolved political contradictions will re-emerge as a problematisation of social policy not tackling enough aspects of ever-multiplying socio-political crises, being too costly and so on. On the one hand, the Western 'externalization society' (Lessenich, 2019) is fundamentally based on and increasingly confronted with its exploitative and non-sustainable systemic impact on the whole earth system and social world – both historically and in terms of present and future rollbacks. On the other hand, late-stage capitalism and its representative democratic organisation in welfare regimes undergo

a crisis of their political legitimacy among their own constituency: under conditions of austerity and welfare retrenchment, neoliberal policies aim at internalising capitalistic contradictions as intra-personal matters of citizens supposedly in need of individual activation. Instead of status-based benefits and collective ethico-political discourse over the social (re)distribution of historically and socially specific privileges, a moralisation of each citizen's action is at the centre of public contestation (framed by Lessenich in 2010 as a 'neosocial' appellation). Understood by neo-Gramscian writers as a crisis of 'the political' in general (Gengnagel, 2021), the incapability of governmental polity agendas to account for or incorporate antagonistic tensions and to allow for a political sphere in which policies produce winners and losers, cut or rearrange privileges, and so on leaves the political field open for 'populist' positions that cater to 'the losers' of a green transition, while liberal discourse all but denies that, in fact, degrowth hurts – and that it might be down to eco-social policies to shape the how and who.

Conclusion

It might therefore be worthwhile to pay attention to what is *not said or accounted for* in policy proposals and respective analyses. For some decades, conflict and contestation appear to have been overridden by an expertocratic focus on policy efficacy and an increasing ignorance vis-à-vis the political economy of capitalist welfare regimes. The addition of environmental dilemmata, emphasising yet another and existentially urgent dimension of capitalist externalisation, invites a neo-Gramscian perspective to be even more sceptical of the technocratic promises and depoliticising narratives prevalent in green growth policies and their academic reflections. This chapter argued that conflict and contestation are fundamental elements of any eco-social policy. It pointed out the necessity to develop the conceptual work on eco-social welfare states along the lines of 'the other' of liberal policy discourse: democratic politics facing a populist backlash, the capitalistic and nationalistic protection of privileges and the political fragility of a 'universal' eco-social world polity.

Precisely because of this 'other side' of the political ambition towards an eco-social polity, the latter has to be conceptualised not only in regard to the 'actual' efficacy of policy goals, but also in regard to how the political landscape is framed and which political projects are considered. Are local adaptation projects favoured over global mitigation strategies? How are social policy benefits defended against the calls for reparation on behalf of the Global South's past generations as well as future generations everywhere? Far from being mere tools towards a green and just transformation, welfare regimes also have the potential to be major roadblocks or, to label it more openly, to become once again major arenas of political struggle (be it in

terms of post-truth contestation, religious fundamentalism, nationalistic fervour, classic ideological movement or otherwise).

As Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo (2020, p 11) mention, EGD policy concepts at least carry some grains of a counter-hegemonic discourse, and the development of a movement that would go beyond the green growth narrative may hinge on exploiting these insights further instead of accepting the EGD's own policy proposals as sufficient:

> We have identified four tendencies in the Green Deal that may make it become a third way, depending on its further interpretation and implementation. The first one concerns the idea of the ecological commons that must be protected against private appropriation. Though the EU does not have recourse to this terminology explicitly, it does acknowledge the importance of ecosystems. Secondly, it cautiously points to the problem of traditional industry that still largely relies on the extraction of resources. Thirdly, its emphasis on an inclusive transition evokes different power structures. And finally, certain fragments suggest support for more democratization and hence resistance to technocratic policy and decision making.

While this might be grasping at straws, at least it does not immediately fall for a discourse saturated with promises of 'innovation' and 'optimisation' of existing welfare regimes. There are many and some good reasons to stick to such affirmative policy discourses – but overstating their capacity to solve inherent contradictions of today's political economies is not one of them.

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PART II

Eco-social politics

In this part of the book, the influences and dynamics of various actors and stakeholders in the pursuit of sustainable welfare are explored. Through five insightful chapters, this part focuses on the interplay between social and environmental dimensions within diverse policy contexts, highlighting the interconnected nature of eco-social goals and the strategic actions of involved entities. The chapters are organised along three central themes that encapsulate the complexities and multifaceted dimensions of eco-social policy making: Institutional and Organisational Roles, Public Perception and Participation, and Mobilisation and Advocacy for Eco-Social Change:

- The first two chapters discuss political and social actors like trade unions and political parties in advancing eco-social agendas. 'European trade unions and the eco-social nexus' by Bianca Luna Fabris and Philippe Pochet focuses on European trade unions, particularly the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and their efforts to champion just transition measures. It highlights the strategic responses of sectoral trade unions to the multifaceted impacts of climate transition, emphasising the importance of harmonising diverse stakeholder interests to promote sustainable welfare within the EU context. 'Politics, environment and justice in the European Union' by Jan Pollex, shifts the focus to political parties within the European Parliament and their influence on eco-social transitions. The chapter provides insights into how diverse party preferences and environmental justice orientations shape legislative processes related to the European Green Deal. Through an analysis of statements by Members of the European Parliament, it illustrates the navigation of distributive issues, intergenerational justice and human rights within the broader framework of sustainable development.
- Two further chapters explore the essential themes of public attitudes and involvement in shaping effective and just eco-social policies. 'Public support for eco-social policies: insights from focus group studies in Germany and Italy' by Adeline Otto, Dimitri Gugushvili, Katharina Zimmermann, Vincent Gengnagel and Benedetta Cotta presents qualitative evidence from Germany and Italy to reveal how public perceptions of eco-social policies, particularly the closure of fossil fuel industries and the retraining of workers, are influenced by trust in institutions, perceived state capacity and socio-economic factors. The

chapter provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding public support for integrated eco-social policies. 'Public participation in eco-social policies: exploring mechanisms for bridging the gap' by Nicolas W. Jager and Benedetta Cotta extends the discussion by examining the role of public participation in eco-social policy making. Drawing on theories of collaborative governance, deliberative democracy and eco-social policy, the chapter conceptualises how citizen and stakeholder involvement can influence policy outcomes. It identifies mechanisms through which public participation can enhance or hinder the coherence of eco-social policies, offering a critical assessment of both opportunities and challenges in participatory processes.

- Finally, 'Social movements and eco-social transition', by Katrin Uba, focuses on social movement mobilisation for social and environmental justice, highlighting the historical development, strategies and political impacts of movements that advocate for eco-social transformation. The chapter traces the evolving discourse from ecological conservation to integrated social change agendas and emphasises the significance of collective action in pushing for eco-social change amidst multiple global crises.

The chapters in Part II collectively underscore the importance of understanding the interconnected nature of social and environmental policy goals. The discussions illuminate how the goal of achieving sustainable welfare demands an integrated approach that harmonises diverse interests, fosters synergies and acknowledges conflicts among various actors and policy domains. A recurring theme is the intricate relationship between institutional actions and public attitudes and participation. Furthermore, the dynamic between collective action and policy implementation surfaces as a pivotal element, particularly through the interplay between social movements and institutional efforts towards just transitions. The complexity and context-specificity of public support for eco-social policies are vividly highlighted, revealing that public perceptions are deeply influenced by trust in institutions, perceived state capacity and socio-economic contexts. Additionally, the chapters underscore the imperative of navigating policy trade-offs and enhancing coherence across social and environmental objectives. The pursuit of distributive justice, intergenerational equity and human rights within the eco-social framework necessitates a delicate balance and negotiation, demonstrating the importance of a holistic approach to policy making. Through these interconnected themes, the chapters in this part offer a comprehensive narrative of the interactions and interdependencies between various actors and policy perspectives in eco-social politics.

7

European trade unions and the eco-social nexus

Bianca Luna Fabris and Philippe Pochet

Introduction

The effects of climate change on the world of work are both undeniable and multifaceted. Over the past few decades, European trade unions have openly embraced environmental issues while bringing increased attention to the social dimension of green transitions. The policy preferences of the labour movement at local, sectoral and national levels are increasingly addressed in the literature (Felli, 2014; Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020; Räthzel et al, 2021), yet the role of the European trade union movement has so far been overlooked. This chapter[1] analyses how the European trade union movement – particularly the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European sectoral federations – have embedded environmental concerns within their political priorities and have pushed for eco-social policies and just transition measures within the EU policy sphere.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it provides an overview of the existing literature, followed by an exploration of the global emergence of the key concept of just transition. It then analyses the development of the position of the European trade unions towards climate change from the early 1990s to the present day and concludes by highlighting the ETUC's role in shaping a harmonised yet dynamic perspective on the green transition, given the sometimes diametrically opposed interests within the labour movement.

Trade unions navigating the environmental crossroads

The comparative political economy and environmental literature generally portrays unions as conservative actors (Häusermann, 2010; Palier and Thelen, 2010; Uzzell and Räthzel, 2013) that champion first and foremost the rights and interests of their primary constituents, their members. Following this argument, we might expect unions to disregard issues that go beyond work and employment matters in the narrowest sense, such as environmental concerns. Yet, historical analysis suggests that they have consistently championed broader civil issues that go beyond mere employment

concerns. These encompass women's rights, social protection (including non-contributory social assistance), parental benefits (Cigna, 2023; Cigna and Fabris, 2024) and, more interestingly for our analysis, environmental concerns and sustainable development.

As climate change is reshaping the world of work, inevitably it broadens the range of issues that unions are taking on as part of their mandate. It is well known that the decarbonisation of the economy has complex impacts that vary considerably across countries, regions and industrial sectors. This situates trade unions at the crux of reconciling employment objectives with environmental imperatives, especially for those that operate in sectors rooted in carbon-intensive or energy-intensive sectors such as mining, chemicals or automotives. Yet, it is worth noting that these sectors typically exhibit elevated unionisation rates and are covered by protective collective agreements (Zwysen, 2024). Conversely, many of the emerging 'green' jobs, often with poorer working conditions, are characterised by low unionisation rates (Zwysen, 2024). In the context of declining power resources and a generalised decline in union density (Waddington et al, 2022), we could expect some unions (particularly sectoral unions in the metals sector) to defend existing carbon-heavy jobs and, in general, to take protective stances towards decarbonisation. For such unions, climate change presents a dilemma: backing strong climate measures could distance (some) unions from their core membership while creating conflicts with environmental groups and risking the loss of broader public support. However, unions do not solely operate in energy-intensive or polluting sectors, and thus the reality is much more nuanced; the impacts of the climate emergency and the related eco-social risks are having a severe impact in a number of sectors, from agriculture to tourism and from healthcare to construction.

Trade unions have been interested in environmental issues for several decades, and the very concept of just transition was developed by unions themselves. In the 1970s, unions in the US developed the forerunner of the concept, originally referred to as a 'superfund for workers' meant to provide financial support and opportunities for workers displaced by environmental protection policies. In this first phase, the term emerged as a response to a mix of environmental and health and safety concerns, particularly for those workers managing hazardous substances. It was not until the early 1990s that the just transition concept emerged, spearheaded by key proponents like Tony Mazzochi from the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union. These were pivotal in shaping early discourses, asserting that environmental protection and job prospects were not mutually exclusive (Felli, 2014). Since then, such a notion has undergone significant evolution, both in scope and reach.

Over time, the role of the international labour union movement in global environmental negotiations has become more prominent, especially starting

in the 1990s (for an overview, see Thomas, 2021), and labour unions, including at European level, have embedded key environmental concerns, primarily just transition and the creation of high-quality green jobs, within their mandate. These efforts have been reinforced by collaborations between supranational organisations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) (ILO, 2015) and the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP et al, 2008).

The European Trade Union Confederation and climate change

For our analysis we employed a qualitative historical approach and reviewed a range of trade union documents, internal documents, congress manifestos and action plans, and press releases. Together with the document analysis, we acquired direct insights through 14 semi-structured interviews (see Table 7.1) with trade union officials at different levels; such interviews were triangulated with interviews of representatives of NGOs, CSOs and advisors to political parties at European level. The selection of interviewees was informed by document analysis and snowballing techniques.

The ETUC was founded in 1973 to be the voice of workers at European level and now represents 45 million members from 93 trade union organisations. The first steps in integrating environmental concerns in its agenda can be traced back as early as the Luxembourg Congress in 1991,

Table 7.1: List and description of interviewees

Int. no.	Category	Role
1	IndustriAll Europe	Advisor
2	IndustriAll Europe	Elected official
3	ETUC	Former elected official
4	ETUC	Elected official
5	Greens/EFA in the European Parliament	Advisor
6	Solidar	Officer
7	Social Platform	Officer
8	EFFAT	General Secretary
9	EFFAT	Deputy General Secretary
10	EFFAT	Officer
11	ETF	Head of sector
12	ETF	Officer
13	EPSU	Deputy General Secretary
14	EPSU	Officer

the direction of the discussions indicating a growing acknowledgement of the importance of Europe-wide environmental policies (ETUC, 1991). This Congress not only emphasised the emergent theme of environmental protection but also accentuated the crucial role of the ETUC as a European-level negotiator. However, while environmental issues were acknowledged in congressional documents for the first time, they were not given significant political priority (Fabris and Pochet, 2023).

In parallel, and similarly to what happened at international level, concerns about the environment initially revolved around the health and safety of workers, especially regarding issues like hazardous chemicals, waste management, energy and transport (Degryse and Tilly, 2013, pp 120–121). Throughout the 1990s, trade union organisations in different EU member states initiated several campaigns to address specific environmental challenges. However, they 'often face[d] dilemmas between socioeconomic and environmental demands', as highlighted in one of the initial discussion papers on the subject, jointly published by the ETUC and the European Trade Union Technical Bureau for Health and Safety (now part of the European Trade Union Institute, ETUI). This shows how divisive and complex the topic was throughout this decade (ETUC and TUTB, 2001, p 7).

However, only with the turn of the new millennium did environmental concerns really start to emerge in internal discussions (Fabris and Pochet, 2023). During the period under review (2000s–present day), five elected trade union officials were responsible for environmental issues within the ETUC: Joël Decaillon (France, Confédération Générale du Travail); Józef Niemiec (Poland, Solidarność); Judith Kirton-Darling (UK, Trade Union Congress); Montserrat Mir Roca (Spain, Comisiones Obreras); and Ludovic Voet (Belgium, Confédération des syndicats chrétiens). We distinguish three distinct phases: 2000–09, during which the ETUC made the first concrete steps in building a climate change agenda; from 2009 to 2014, when climate concerns became second-order issues; and the gradual return of environmental concerns in the ETUC's priorities from 2015 to 2023. Since then, it seems that climate has again become a less prominent issue and that the traditional repertoire of fighting against austerity measures and for union rights has regained pre-eminence.

First steps in the ETUC's environmental stance (early and late 2000s)

Following the Gothenburg European Council in 2001, the Lisbon Strategy was formally adopted. It included a 'sustainable development' component and sought to reconcile economic, social and environmental concerns (Steurer and Berger, 2011). In response, the ETUC adopted a resolution in which it set out its vision for an environmental policy linked to European employment policy by calling for a stronger social dialogue together with

economic and fiscal policies that favoured investment geared towards sustainable development (ETUC, 2001).

The subject gained prominence in particular following the Prague Congress of 2003, becoming a priority of the ETUC Secretariat driven by Joël Decaillon (ETUC, 2003). The burning issue on the table was the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) that the European Commission proposed in the wake of the dioxin crisis of 1999. This proposal put the European trade union movement under strain (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2024). While several affiliates backed the system to enhance chemical hazard prevention at work, the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation (EMCEF) largely sided with the industry and strongly resisted the proposal, fearing significant job losses. To find the middle ground, the ETUC established a task force and ultimately passed a resolution supporting REACH (ETUC, 2004). According to Decaillon, this decision was a notable milestone: 'a turning point in the history of trade unionism in the sense that we [the European Trade Union movement] were no longer seen solely as defending jobs, but also as taking responsibility for the consequences for society as a whole of what we produced' (Degryse and Tilly, 2013, p 121). In interviews, it was confirmed that the introduction of REACH stimulated internal discussions on sustainable industrial practices, green jobs and climate change.

The ETUC deepened its knowledge and research in this domain, exemplified by the 2007 study on climate change's impact on employment (Syndex et al, 2007). In Decaillon's view, this study, which covers sectors such as transport, energy and construction, helped clarify the European trade union stance on the issue (Degryse and Tilly, 2013). Indeed, it was a pioneering study within Europe, gaining recognition at the ILO and becoming a blueprint for the European Parliament and the ETUC.

By connecting occupational health and safety with consumer protection, the ETUC expanded its alliances. The ETUC co-founded the Spring Alliance alongside the European Environmental Bureau, Social Platform (the European umbrella organisation representing civil society organisations) and Concord (the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation). This was the first time that the ETUC had openly and proactively worked together with social and environmental NGOs on climate-related issues. A significant achievement of the Spring Alliance was the joint manifesto in 2009 outlining future objectives for the EU that later shaped the Europe 2020 Strategy (Degryse and Tilly, 2013, p 78; Laurent and Pochet, 2015, p 22).

Moreover, during the 2000s, the ETUC started integrating the concept of just transition in its policy documents. Adherence to this concept among ETUC affiliates was varied, based on ideological stances and geographical differences. Unions from areas like Scandinavia, the UK, Spain and Belgium

were especially in favour. However, there was noticeable caution among affiliates from eastern Europe (Thomas and Pulignano, 2021), the response of Polish trade unions towards coal industry transitions being a prominent example as they actively lobbied to postpone pertinent decisions (Bernaciak and Lis, 2017).

Environmental agenda takes a back seat during the crisis (2009–14)

As subsequent paragraphs demonstrate, the ETUC continued to make progress on environmental and climate issues. However, these were not at the forefront of its demands. Amidst the global financial crisis, protracted struggles such as combating climate change had to make room for immediate and critical issues like the challenge against widespread deregulation, austerity measures, structural reforms and the alteration of economic governance.

Despite the redirection of the political focus, ETUC resolutions suggest a gradual integration of environmental concerns within the agenda (ETUC, 2010). In 2010, the ETUC's Executive Committee formally endorsed the 'Resolution on a Sustainable New Deal for Europe' calling for a development strategy to secure Europe's recovery from recession and urging the adoption of just transition to create millions of decent, sustainable and green jobs (ETUC, 2010). The term also made its initial inroads into official public documents, as the concept was adopted in the ETUC's Rio+20 Resolution on just transition (ETUC, 2011b) and was included, thanks to the joint efforts of the ETUC and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), in the final agreement of the 16th COP, held in Cancun in 2010. However, its interpretation remained broad, in part due to the varied perspectives within the movement itself. Nonetheless, these overarching themes provided a uniting framework, helping to articulate a collective labour voice in global negotiations, even in the face of internal diversity. The manifesto of the 2011 Congress in Athens encapsulated this sentiment as it called on the European Union to push for a just transition to a sustainable, green economy, emphasising the creation of quality jobs (ETUC, 2011a).

The reemergence and downfall of environmental concerns (2015–present day)

In the wake of a relatively dormant phase in European policy making, environmental and climate change considerations increasingly assumed prominence in the EU's policy discourse after the mid-2010s. Throughout this period, the ETUC and the European trade union federations (ETUFs) actively included climate change and just transition within their political priorities.

In 2015, the ETUC took the significant step of allocating a special section within its action plan to campaign for the creation of a policy framework that would ensure a just transition (ETUC, 2015). This concept gained significant recognition in the historic Paris Agreement at COP21. This international treaty underscored the need for a just transition for workers as well as decent work and high-quality jobs, an acknowledgement that represented a substantial victory for trade unions (ITUC, 2015; ETUC, 2016). From our interviews it emerged that during the second half of the 2010s, the ETUC lobbied the European institutions to adopt a just transition agenda, having a role in the shadows of policy making.

The importance of climate change policies became even more pronounced in 2019 when the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, introduced the European Green Deal (EGD) – a strategic blueprint on behalf of Europe's transition towards sustainable and climate-neutral growth. During this phase, the ETUC switched to a reactive role rather than a proactive one. From the interviews conducted for this research, it emerges that the Commission took stock of earlier discussions with the trade unions; however, the ETUC (and the federations) did not have a prominent role in its development. Shortly after, in June 2020, the ETUC adopted a detailed resolution advocating a set of initiatives under the EGD. These included the Climate Law, the EU Sustainable Investment Plan, the Just Transition Fund Regulation and the new EU Industrial Strategy (ETUC, 2020). The resolution demonstrates a supportive stance towards the measures and provides a more refined notion of just transition (Fabris and Pochet, 2023, p 34).

The subsequent COVID-19 crisis highlighted the urgent need to safeguard global health and welfare. The Commission's recovery plan put forward in the wake of the pandemic in early 2020 consisted of a novel Multiannual Financial Framework coupled with a 750 billion euro boost from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, offering newfound financial means to meet green transition goals (Crespy and Munta, 2023). Soon after, the EGD's rollout was anchored by the 'Fit for 55' package, introducing two new tools between 2020 and 2022: the Just Transition Mechanism, which includes the Just Transition Fund (JTF), and the Social Climate Fund (SCF) to assist member states where the transition towards climate neutrality had the greatest impact. The JTF, while possessing constrained resources, is principally devoted to assisting coal-dependent regions to address the socio-economic repercussions stemming from the gradual cessation of coal utilisation. Conversely, the SCF, set to be operational from 2026, has a very specific target: namely, to fend off the detrimental distributional effects of a new emissions trading system for buildings and transport, although its financial endowment is far from what would be necessary given the magnitude of the challenges at hand.

This realignment of political priorities was groundbreaking. For the first time, the social ramifications of EU climate policies were included in EU official documents. This evolution reflects the broadening acceptance of the just transition concept, which has migrated from trade union circles to become a central tenet of EU political discourse (Mandelli et al, 2023), although the understanding of it within the EU EGD framework – at least as evidenced by the measures that exist to date – is rather narrower. As the EU agenda started to encompass a greater number of measures tackling climate change, the ETUC's lobbying activities greatly intensified. This included advocating the incorporation of a just transition legal framework within the EGD, urging the Commission to move beyond mere recommendations to member states and calling for concrete legislative proposals to strengthen collective bargaining and social dialogue and, finally, for workers' rights to information and consultation as well as the creation of quality jobs (ETUC, 2021).

Moreover, in the past couple of years, the ETUC has shown nascent curiosity in post-growth economic models, representing a significant deviation from traditional trade union stances (Fabris and Pochet, 2023). The ETUC has participated in several high-level meetings on post-growth, internalising such ideas by openly calling for the adoption of beyond-GDP indicators and metrics in general, and especially in relation to the EGD in policy assessments (ETUC, 2023a, p 34).

At the ETUC's Berlin Congress in 2023, just transition and climate change mitigation policies more generally remained in the list of priorities but were ultimately mainstreamed in the action programme for 2023–27 (ETUC, 2023a). This marked a clear departure from the 2019–23 programme, in which just transition had a dedicated environmental chapter (ETUC, 2019). More recently, in light of the EU's new economic governance rules, which could lead to a new wave of austerity, the ETUC launched a traditional protest campaign with little emphasis on green themes (ETUC, 2023b). The ETUC has thus seemingly adopted a trend echoing what we witnessed during the 2007–08 recession, suggesting that environmental concerns and climate-related issues may have to take a back seat, leaving greater space for 'core' trade union issues such as collective bargaining, social dialogue and monetary policies.

The European trade union federations and climate challenges

The narrative becomes more nuanced considering the sectors likely to experience pronounced disadvantage from the climate transition, either direct (for example, automobile and mining industries) or indirect (for example, chemical and energy sectors), compared to those that will reap benefits (for example, construction or public transport). At European level

there are ten sectoral trade union organisations, of which we sketch here the current position of three.

IndustriAll**,** the European federation for industry and manufacturing workers, has placed growing emphasis on the imperative of a European policy strengthening the industrial sector, in line with the theoretical expectations laid out in the first section of this chapter. IndustriAll represents workers that will be most affected by the energy transition, so it comes as little surprise that such a topic has risen to a position of paramount political importance. Just transition measures were recognised as a central priority at the federation's mid-term Congress in Thessaloniki in 2023 (IndustriAll, 2023) and in its flagship Just Transition Manifesto in 2022, in which it advocates reshaping the economy in a way that is equitable and inclusive, with the goal of preserving and generating high-quality employment. It stresses that the involvement of workers and their unions in proactively managing and adapting to industrial change is essential, encapsulated by the principle: 'Nothing about us without us!' (IndustriAll, 2022, p 2).

EFFAT, the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions**,** has focused on the recent heatwaves, cold snaps and floods that have affected agricultural yields, disrupted markets and forced the food processing chain to start adapting. Increased political attention has been devoted to the health and safety concerns of workers, such as those in agriculture, who are exposed to unprecedentedly high working temperatures (EFFAT, 2023). Moreover, the securing of social conditionality for European agricultural subsidies by trade unions during the 2021 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) constitutes an alternative approach to intertwining social and environmental concerns (EFFAT, 2021).

Finally, EPSU, the European Public Service Union, appears most attuned to the discourse on alternative indicators and a degrowth pathway (Nitsche-Whitfield, 2023). Given the direct implications of environmental transitions for public services, this sector presents a fresh vantage point from which the merits of public services can be championed. Notably, EPSU was central to the campaign advocating the recognition of water as a common good (EPSU, 2012).

This highlights how the climate transition has a differential impact on sectors and that, following the EGD and the Commission's numerous substantive proposals, European federations have seized green issues as an opportunity to (re)construct a genuine trade union agenda.

Conclusion

European trade unions have demonstrated a dynamic evolution in addressing climate change and just transition policies. The last 30 years show a transition through distinct phases, each reflecting a shift in unions' strategic orientation and priorities. From the early 1990s, and more decisively since the early

2000s, the ETUC began integrating environmental issues in official trade union documents, while still navigating complex sector-specific interests. The financial crisis of 2009–15 saw a moderation in environmental action, yet the concept of just transition took root. Starting in 2015, the ETUC reinvigorated environmental imperatives and pushed the climate agenda more forcefully, leveraging EU policy frameworks like the EGD to advocate workers' rights amidst climate challenges. Sector-specific interests only really started to emerge once the EU climate agenda was more concretely under way, starting from the mid-2010s. The analysis reveals that the ETUC has played a key role within the European trade union movement in pushing for a climate agenda, essentially acting as a harmoniser, keeping together the diverse and sometimes conflicting sector-specific interests of the ETUFs. What also emerges from the analysis is that the ETUC often reacts more to issues that are immediately at hand, potentially overlooking the broader strategic vision necessary for achieving systemic changes and fully adopting an eco-social perspective. This suggests that there might be a need for a more forward-thinking, ideational strategy that embraces long-term environmental and social goals.

Note

[1] This chapter is in part based on Fabris and Pochet (2023).

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8

Politics, environment and justice in the European Union

Jan Pollex

Introduction

Most contributions to research on ecological and social transitions relate, in one way or another, to the idea of sustainable development. With the *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al, 1972) and the Brundtland Report (1987), the idea to ensure that future generations can meet their needs and that present actions should not endanger such prospects became a hallmark of research, activism and public debate. However, this idea and the general concept of sustainable development are, as catchy as they are, open for interpretation. Hence, different views on what this concept entails and how policy makers should act to achieve it emerged. With the recent wave of climate activism, in particular the Fridays for Future movement, questions of how to ensure development and at the same time ensure a healthy planet, combat climate change and allow future generations opportunities to meet their needs rose to the top of political agendas. This marked a change from the previous decade in which economic crises and a focus on recovery and economic growth dominated policy making in many areas and environmental and climate policy (for example, Zito et al, 2020). Yet, the debate on how to link environmental and climate protection and, at the same time, ensure a just and socially responsible development is far from settled. On the bright side, the ongoing debates about the status of environmental protection and sustainability are an expression of democratic processes in which many actors put forward their views and preferences. However, considering recent developments, for example, populists seriously challenging the fact that climate change is a danger to humankind (see Marquardt and Lederer, 2022), these debates evolve not only around ways to achieve sustainability but are also impacted by actors challenging the need to do so. In this context, the *political arena* is crucial to understanding societal developments.

Recently, scholars started linking eco-social transition research with political science perspectives. Eco-social perspectives emphasise the interlinkages between environmental and social policies that are at the core of sustainable development. However, political science perspectives

have yet to address these links fully (Cotta, 2024). Overall, a closer look at politics is necessary to capture developments regarding eco-social transitions fully. Therefore, this chapter emphasises that transitions – similarly to other policy fields – result from negotiations and compromises between actors in the political arena. Jordan et al (2022) clearly point to genuine political questions on, for example, the distribution of costs and benefits related to such a transition: 'it is not a lack of scientific understanding or the relative unavailability of technological solutions that is holding society back …, but the politics of who does what, where, when and in what order, a process which will be shaped by the exercise of political power' (p 2).

Against this backdrop, the chapter emphasises *politics* and the crucial role of actors, their different conceptions of sustainability and the political debates around the issue. More specifically, it considers political parties and their preferences and positions regarding eco-social transitions. While there is considerable research on parties and their environmental and climate policy proposals, these contributions often focus on economic vis-à-vis environmental positions and rarely relate to the much more complex concept of sustainable development, which addresses, for example, social or justice-related issues. To illustrate these perspectives, the chapter then focuses on the European Parliament and its political groups to highlight differences between actors' preferences. This focus on the EU Parliament is motivated by the recent turn of the EU towards sustainability with the Green Deal that not only emphasises environmental and climate protection but addresses various aspects to ensure more sustainable development (Graziano, 2023).

Sustainable development, post-growth and environmental justice

The Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987) provided the most influential attempt to define and concretise sustainable development as a 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p 43). In emphasising human needs, the concept takes an anthropocentric stance, placing it within the economic, technological and political context of international development. The report contributed to sparking a vivid academic debate on what sustainable development actually means. While this chapter cannot review this extensive debate, I want to highlight some crucial elements of it. First, with research on the term and attempts to provide a conceptual clarification, the three sectors, *environment, economy* and *society* and their relation to one another received considerable attention (for example, Giddings et al, 2002). Some interpretations of sustainable development moved on to emphasise the potential for a mutually beneficial development of the economy that allows for environmental protection. Perspectives like

environmental modernisation (for example, Mol, 1999) highlight this positive relation between the two aspects. At their core, these accounts, often linked to the notion of weak sustainable development, understand economic growth to be 'compatible with environmental protection' (Jacobs, 2013, p 198). However, this conception has received considerable criticism. Scholars point to, for example, a conceptual ambiguity or the lack of evidence supporting this notion (Fisher and Freudenburg, 2001; Brand, 2012; Grunwald, 2018). More precisely, criticism is directed at the policies that focus on market mechanisms to solve environmental problems, for example, by setting prices on pollution. While such approaches have been implemented, they fail to bring about fundamental changes due to, for example, their limited focus as sectoral policies that do not contribute to a more fundamental change in ways of production and consumption. Moreover, scholars also point to more fundamental dynamics contributing to environmental degradation and hindering sustainable development. For instance, profit-driven and growth-focused economic actions and – more general – societal orientations have proven to contribute to the exploitation of natural resources and rather obstruct than facilitate transformations towards sustainability (for example, Brand, 2012, p 30).

Second, and in contrast to notions captured under the header *weak sustainability*, perspectives relating to the notion of *strong sustainability* (Neumayer, 2010) emphasise the value of nature and the functions it provides for human life. Thus, its protection is conceived not merely as an objective achievable through market corrections or technical innovations. Instead, proponents of such perspectives question the existing patterns of society, production and consumption and advocate for fundamental transformations that completely refocus societal activity. For instance, debates revolving around the idea of *degrowth* point out the negative consequences of human behaviour on the environment. They argue that such a growth focus is not only the driver of economic activity but is deeply entrenched in Western societies (Asara et al, 2015; Kallis et al, 2020). Thus, transformations towards sustainability hinge on a more fundamental shift in societal values and ideas that abandon the perception of economic growth as a foundation of societal development but instead focus on well-being and global justice. In this sense, degrowth represents a core concept of a counter-culture that not only challenges established mental infrastructures but also related power structures maintaining the status quo to protect their own interests (Parrique, 2019, pp 225ff; Blühdorn, 2020).

Overall, these perspectives emphasise the necessity for more fundamental societal transformations to achieve sustainable development by pointing to the need i) to reduce the environmental impact of human activities; ii) to address the distribution of costs of global economic development and environmental degradation; and iii) to promote a transition from a materialistic to a

participatory society (Cosme et al, 2017). Hence, they conceptualise environmental, economic and social domains as interlinked. More recently, research has started to explicitly focus on this 'eco-social nexus' (Cotta, 2024). Under this header, the double challenge of transitioning to a sustainable society that stays within planetary boundaries – and at the same time not only prevents social imbalances but also promotes a fairer society – is being discussed. Thus, environmental policy is not simply understood as a vehicle to protect the environment but as a means to ensure a good and healthy life for humans. These issues are also intensively discussed in research on *environmental justice* (EJ) that emphasises questions of distribution, participation or the value of biodiversity and non-human life on earth (Novotny, 2000; Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). Research on EJ originated in North America when activists pointed to racial discrimination and the disproportionate exposure of, for example, African American communities to environmental pollution. The debate evolved to include further underlying social inequalities or general discrimination against the working class or indigenous people (Mohai et al, 2009, p 407). While this chapter cannot fully and comprehensively discuss the existing research on EJ, the author wants to point to some core elements of the concept. Overall, EJ perspectives relate to notions of political ecology, conceptualising environmental protection as a political issue that is impacted by, for example, power relations. Thus, it goes beyond nature conservation and emphasises the need to alter societal and economic structures to allow for proper environmental protection (Giugni and Grasso, 2015, p 340; Pollex and Zorell, forthcoming). EJ points to questions of 'distribution' (that is, the relation between affected communities of environmental pollution and responsible actors); 'participation and recognition' (that is, the need to ensure procedures and processes creating opportunities for equal participation in decision-making processes that also recognise and respect the voices of affected communities), 'intergenerational justice' (that is, the task of ensuring future generations' well-being and opportunities for development) and the need to respect 'human rights' as well as 'non-human' life on earth (see, for example, Mohai et al, 2009; Schlosberg, 2013; Pollex, 2024). In sum, EJ perspectives are helpful in highlighting the different aspects of environmental policy and politics. They contribute to underlining the multi-dimensional character of environmental problems. Put differently, environmental degradation poses, on the one hand, challenges in terms of protecting landscapes or ecosystems but, on the other hand, needs to be understood as a result of broader societal developments and its interconnectedness with the environment.

All in all, these perspectives emphasise the multi-dimensional nature of environmental problems and the need to understand environmental politics as an equally multi-dimensional policy area. Focusing on demands for a transformation to sustainable development and climate neutrality, such

perspectives are central to uncovering barriers to such a transformation. This chapter links these debates to a politics dimension. When modern environmental movements emerged in the 1960s, they questioned existing power structures and state activity that had led to, for example, environmental degradation or unjust distribution of pollution. Over the last decades, these movements developed into political parties (for example, green parties in Europe) or established environmental organisations and 'effectively performed environmental democracy by defending and utilising the rights, regulative ideals and institutions of liberal democracy to win legitimacy for their environmental claims' (Eckersley, 2019, p 217). Not only were they successful in anchoring environmental and climate protection as a core purpose of the modern state (Meadowcroft, 2008; Eckersley, 2019), but by using the means of democracy, environmental movements and organisations have strengthened these very institutions and structures of democratic decision making. Given this background, this chapter focuses on political parties and their perspectives and conceptions of environmental and climate policy.

Political parties and their role in environmental politics

Political parties are crucial in linking governors and the governed (White, 2006, p 5) and provide several critical functions for democratic decision making. Following Sartori (2005), parties perform three main functions: participation (that is creating opportunities for citizens to take part in decision making), expression (that is giving voice to societal demands and ideas) and electioneering (that is participating in elections and mobilising voters). In particular, they provide room and the institutional setting to collect, combine and communicate different societal ideas and develop political platforms according to these ideas. Given this central role, environmental research has devoted attention to political parties and their environmental positions. In brief, two aspects concerning parties in environmental politics need to be considered. First, green parties developed out of the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s and pushed issues related to environmental and climate protection on the political agenda and in democratic decision making. As early as the 1980s, they were successful not just in gaining vote shares but also in becoming coalition partners in governments, for example, on the sub-national level in Germany. Second, with the rise of environmental movements and green parties, established political parties, for example, social democratic or conservative ones, were challenged to find answers and positions on issues raised by environmental activists and politicians. Overall, research shows a 'greening' of political parties, by which centre-left and centre-right parties also included environmental issues in their manifestos (Carter, 2013). However,

the extent to which parties address environmental and climate protection varies considerably. In connection with the perspective of partisan politics (Hibbs, 1977), research assumes differences in parties' positions regarding environmental policy based on their general ideological positions. Generally, centre-left parties often take more ambitious environmental stances than centre-right parties and right-wing populist parties, which were on the rise, for example, in Europe over the last decade, and which often completely dismiss environmental protection measures and even question the need for them (see Jahn, 2016; Farstad, 2018; Green-Pedersen, 2019).

Yet, measuring party positions in the area of environmental and climate politics has proven challenging. Most frequently, the analysis of party positions is linked to more general stances, for example, parties' general position on a left–right axis or their stance on the desired degree of state intervention in markets. Yet, these analyses risk conceptualising environmental and climate protection as a unidimensional issue. Considering the broad research on sustainable development or justice aspects in environmental politics (mentioned earlier), this often does not comprehensively reflect the complex nature of environmental problems and related politics (Pollex and Berker, 2022).

In this vein, attempts to provide assessments moving beyond a unidimensional conception of environmental politics combine several measurements and party positions on several issues (for example, Abou-Chadi, 2016; Carter et al, 2018). Yet, these contributions rarely reflect on issues related to perspectives like EJ or deep ecology (for example, Sessions, 1987). Some contributions seek to integrate such perspectives in their measurements in this context. In brief, research generally shows differences between parties' environmental preferences to largely correspond with their position on a left–right axis. However, there are considerable differences between parties of the same family. For instance, some left parties, for example, in Sweden, emphasise environmental protection more than others. The same applies to liberal parties. While the liberal NEOS in Austria puts quite some emphasis on environmental protection, the German Liberal Party takes a much more restrained position (Pollex and Berker, 2022). Building on this research, this chapter takes a closer look at the European Union and the debates in the European Parliament and investigates the stances of political groups.[1]

The EU Parliament, the Green Deal and environmental justice

Overall, the EU has earned a reputation as a global frontrunner in environmental and climate policy due to its extensive and ambitious body of legislation seeking to foster sustainable development (Lenschow and Pollex, 2022). In this context, the European Parliament (EP) has taken a special role

as the EU's environmental and climate champion (Burns, 2005; Burns, 2012; Pollex and Berker, 2024) pushing the EU towards more ambitious measures and keeping environmental and climate policy high on the agenda. Most recently, the EU has again committed itself to environmental and climate protection. With the Green Deal, the EU has introduced an extensive agenda combining several policies to increase environmental protection and achieve climate neutrality.

Interestingly, the Green Deal explicitly emphasises the need for a just transition, pointing out that some people are faced with severe challenges, for example, loss of employment due to the phasing out of fossil fuels (Graziano, 2023). Against that backdrop, this chapter analyses debates in the EP as it is the main arena for exchanging political views and finding compromise between different standpoints. Other than the Commission, which is to a lesser degree characterised by partisan politics, the EP's work is strongly structured along the lines of its political groups (Hix et al, 2006). While the groups are less cohesive than parliamentary factions on the national level, they are nevertheless the most important structure impacting decision making in the EP, as illustrated by research on partisan politics in several policy areas (see, for example, Vogeler, 2022).

To investigate different views on the eco-social transition in the EP, this chapter draws on EJ research and the different aspects discussed above. It considers three EP debates (debate on the European Green Deal, 1 December 2019; EU Strategy on Biodiversity, 7 June 2021; Action Plan on Circular Economy, 8 February 2021). This selection represents different topics covered in the Green Deal, ranging from the general discussion of the agenda to nature-focused issues (that is, in the Biodiversity Strategy) to industry and the product-focused agenda (that is, the Circular Economy Action Plan). While this does not represent an extensive analysis, it helps illustrate differences between actors, in particular the EP's political groups. The study is designed as a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004) and was conducted in a two-step procedure. The coding categories follow the dimensions of EJ identified in the existing literature. Based on these dimensions, a preliminary coding scheme was created and subsequently refined. The data was then qualitatively analysed to highlight distinct emphases within the debates. Table 8.1 provides an overview.

The analysis shows two main insights. First, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and political groups in the EP address the dimensions of EJ differently. Most statements identified relate to distributive and intergenerational justice. For instance, 61 per cent of all references made to EJ-related themes address distributive justice, while 21 per cent address intergenerational justice. The other four dimensions are considerably less prevalent in the debates.

Most references made to EJ dimensions fall into the dimensions of distributive justice, with 60 per cent of references. Slightly more than 20 per

Table 8.1: Coding scheme and examples

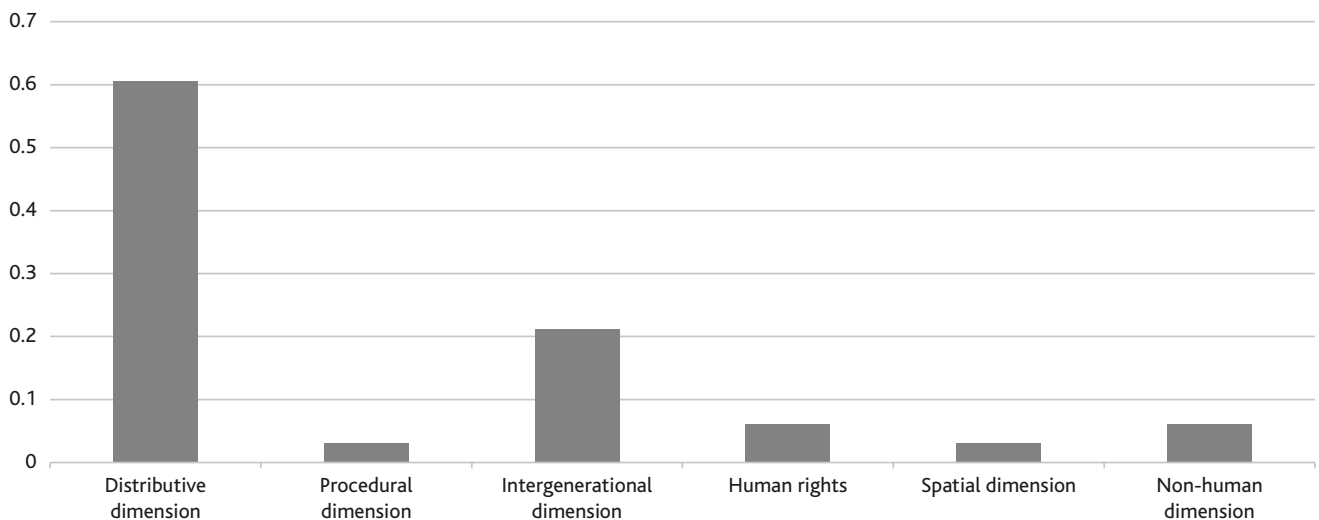
Coding dimension	Code description
Procedural	References to participation opportunities, recognition and inclusion of societal groups or stakeholders
Distributive	References to distribution of burdens, costs, benefits
Intergenerational	Reference to future generations and their opportunities
Human rights	References to (in)justices and their link to basic human rights, e.g. gender justice
Spatial	References to global dimensions and interlinkages of sustainable development
Non-human life	References to non-human life and effects of human behaviour on nature

cent of references were made to intergenerational justice. Less than 10 per cent of references were made to each of procedural, human rights, spatial and non-human justice (see Figure 8.1).

Second, there are differences between the political groups in how they refer to EJ. Regarding frequency, the Greens, Social Democrats (S&D) and the conservative European People's Party group (EPP) address EJ aspects equally often (eight times). The liberal Renew group refers to EJ aspects five times, followed by the populist right and Euroskeptic group ECR[2] (twice). Other groups, like the Euroskeptic ID group, do not address EJ aspects. While they refer to a distribution of costs for climate and environmental protection, they utilise these arguments to criticise the EU's Green Deal fundamentally. They deny the existence of climate change and argue that the costs related to protection measures are a burden on EU citizens rather than a contribution to long-term sustainable development. Regarding the distribution of references to the different dimensions of EJ between the political groups, the S&D group sticks out. The Social Democrats refer to most dimensions (five) of EJ, followed by the Greens and the liberal Renew group (each with references to three different dimensions); see Figure 8.2. The EPP group refers to two dimensions, and the ECR only addresses distributive justice. All the groups address distributive aspects. They clearly make up the largest share of references to EJ. Moreover, all groups also refer to intergenerational justice, except for the ECR. Yet, shares vary: While the liberal Renew group addresses intergenerational justice in 50 per cent of its references to EJ, the Greens and Social Democrats refer to this dimension in only 11 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively, of references to EJ. Only the S&D addresses human rights and spatial aspects, and only the Greens refer to procedural justice. Interestingly, MEPs of the Left Group did not address EJ aspects in their statements. As mentioned earlier, the extreme-right group ID

Figure 8.1: Overall share of references to the EJ dimensions

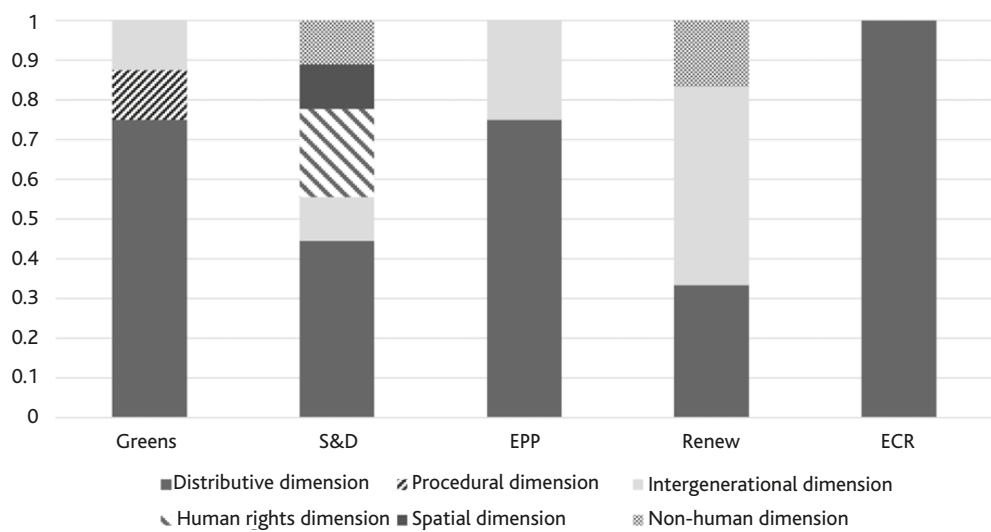
Distributive dimension	Procedural dimension	Intergenerational dimension	Human rights	Spatial dimension	Non-human dimension
61%	3%	21%	6%	3%	6%



Source: Adapted from Pollex (2025); see also Pollex (2024)

Figure 8.2: References to EJ in the three EP debates by political groups

Party	Distributive dimension	Procedural dimension	Intergenerational dimension	Human rights dimension	Spatial dimension	Non-human dimension
Left						
Greens	75%	13%	13%			
S&D	44%		11%	22%	11%	11%
EPP	75%		25%			
Renew	33%		50%			17%
ECR	100%					



Source: Adapted from Pollex (2025); see also Pollex (2024)

(as well as some MEPs with no group attachment) refer to the distribution of costs for climate change but turn these arguments against environmental and climate protection to utter their climate change–sceptic positions.[3]

Overall, considering the existing research on partisan politics and the differences in political parties' environmental stances, centre-left political groups in the EP should refer to EJ most frequently and also more comprehensively, that is, by addressing more dimensions of EJ than centre-right political groups. Yet, the results of this analysis do not fully follow these expectations. Although the two centre-left groups refer to EJ frequently, the liberal Renew group, as well as the conservative EPP group, address EJ aspects almost as often as the two centre-left groups. In addition, the left group did not refer to EJ aspects in the three debates considered in this brief analysis. Thus, the four groups spanning the centre-left to centre-right spectrum show a more similar stance regarding EJ than expected. However, turning to the number of EJ dimensions addressed, the picture is slightly different. In this regard, the Greens, S&D and Renew groups refer to most EJ dimensions (three to five), while the EPP group only addresses distributive and intergenerational justice. The ECR group only addresses distributive aspects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on political parties as central actors in democratic decision making. Although existing research has dedicated considerable attention to party positions in general as well as in environmental and climate policy making, these existing accounts often conceptualise environmental protection measures one-dimensionally as the opposite of economic growth and related policies. Yet, this does not correspond with the broad research on sustainable development, EJ or post-growth and degrowth that points out the multi-dimensional nature of environmental and climate policy. Analytically, the focus was on the European Union and, more specifically, on the EP. With the Green Deal, the EU has embarked on a path to achieve sustainability and climate neutrality that also provides just transitions and attains to citizens' needs in such transitions. Thus, it puts environmental and climate policy in a broader societal context. Given the central role of political parties in democratic decision making, I have concentrated on the political groups in the EP and their stances regarding EJ. Utilising the research on EJ allows for detailed conceptualisation of an eco-social perspective, as it highlights different dimensions and the links between environmental protection and social policies. Based on a differentiation of six EJ dimensions, MEPs' statements were analysed in three crucial debates related to the Green Deal. The inquiry shows differences between the groups and their emphasis on specific themes related to EJ. Overall, distributive issues

play a major role for the political groups, and all of them refer repeatedly to the costs and burdens of environmental transitions. However, there are also some interesting differences between the groups. For instance, the liberal Renew group is the one that addresses intergenerational justice and future generations' prospects for development most frequently. Moreover, only the social democratic group S&D emphasises human rights aspects.

All in all, this brief analysis shows that political groups differ not only in their general preference for environmental protection vis-à-vis economic growth but also regarding their preferences related to EJ, for example, intergenerational justice or questions of distribution. Clearly, this is only a first look at the political groups based on a limited dataset. In addition, the groups' preferences in this chapter were presented based on individual MEPs' statements only, which should be interpreted cautiously since the groups consist of various national parties. On a more general note, this chapter shows that research on EJ provides valuable perspectives to concretely investigate different aspects, themes and emphases in the context of eco-social policy making. Differentiating between sub-topics, for example, a human rights or intergenerational perspective, allows us to analyse different actor positions and reflect the breadth of policy debates.

Notes

[1] In the European Parliament, the political groups largely correspond with the Europarties. However, in some cases (for example, the Greens/EFA group) these groups consist of several Europarties. A more detailed discussion lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but see, for example, Raunio (2014).

[2] This group combines several parties from member states; in part, these are also radical right groups. However, a broader discussion lies beyond the scope of this chapter (see Ripoll Servent, 2019).

[3] Such patterns have been identified in research on national politics, for example, in Germany. A more detailed analysis lies beyond the scope of this chapter, but see, for example, Böcher et al (2022).

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9

Public support for eco-social policies: insights from focus group studies in Germany and Italy

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Introduction

In light of the ongoing climate crisis, the notion of just transition is increasingly endorsed by scientists and policy makers in Europe. The concept implies that the costs and benefits of the transition to a 'net zero' – a state in which the overall emission of greenhouse gases is limited to the volume the ecological system can absorb – should be fairly distributed across territories and social groups (Wang and Lo, 2021). A critical tool for facilitating a just transition is eco-social policies, which pursue 'both environmental and social goals in an integrated way' (Mandelli, 2022, p 334). This integration can come from both sides, either by adding a social dimension to climate policies or by designing social policies in an ecologically sustainable way. The former often involves redistributive policies to ensure environmental measures do not increase social inequalities (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023).

However, there are multiple occasions when social and environmental objectives come into conflict with each other. One prominent example is the closure or downscaling of the fossil fuel industry, which can lead to permanent unemployment for some workers. Another one is the increasing pressure on public budgets to finance large-scale environmental policies, which in turn may force the governments to cut spending on welfare provision – by far the largest spending item in European welfare states (Armingeon and Bürgisser, 2021).

Against this background, an important question becomes how the broader public perceives environmental and social policies in general and how these broad-brushed eco-social ideational predispositions relate to people's positions concerning specific eco-social policies (first research question). Even though several recent studies investigate the intersection of attitudes towards environmental and social policies (for example, Fritz and Koch, 2019; Otto and Gugushvili, 2020; Emilsson, 2022a; Ronchi et al, 2023), a

lot is yet to be learned, especially about attitudes towards specific eco-social policies and related trade-off scenarios. Moreover, the existing evidence is exclusively quantitative, limiting an in-depth understanding of the reasoning behind people's opinions. How different social groups make sense of their policy stances on eco-social policies and trade-off scenarios remains unclear (second research question).

In this chapter, we aim to help narrow this knowledge gap by providing original qualitative evidence on people's attitudes towards two types of public policies – retraining laid-off workers from fossil fuel industries (an eco-social policy) and closing these industries (a trade-off scenario). Our analysis draws on survey and discussion data collected during several focus groups in Germany and Italy in 2022. Findings suggest that attitudes towards general climate and social policies are somewhat related to attitudes towards specific integrated eco-social and trade-off policy scenarios. However, people's opinions also depend on various other factors, including their socio-economic position, perceptions of state responsibility and capacity to address social and climate objectives in an integrated way, and existing levels of welfare provision. In what follows, we first discuss existing public opinion research on eco-social attitudes and formulate several working hypotheses. Next, we describe our data and present the results. The concluding part examines the theoretical implications of our findings and proposes avenues for future research.[1]

Eco-social divides: a conceptual perspective

Only recently, scholars have started studying environmental and social policy preferences in combination. Accordingly, the relevant literature is still in its infancy. In a pioneering study, Spies-Butcher and Stebbing (2016) sought to understand the social policy preferences of the Australian political constituency supporting climate action in the 2007 national elections. Their analysis showed that identifying climate change as a top policy priority was associated with a higher preference for additional social spending over tax cuts. However, the association between prioritising climate change and the preference for income and wealth redistribution to ordinary people was actually negative, even if statistically non-significant.

Later, Jakobsson and colleagues (2018) explored the relation between environmental and welfare issues from a cross-national perspective. Using data from three waves of the International Social Survey, they tested whether people supporting income redistribution are more willing to pay for environmental policies ('double-worry' hypothesis) or are more opposed to it ('crowding-out' hypothesis). While the country-level analysis did not find any correlation between the two aspects, the individual-level results supported the crowding-out hypothesis, implying that pro-redistribution

individuals were less willing to pay for environmental protection. However, further decomposing the analysis to the country level revealed a significant heterogeneity in the link between the two sets of attitudes – with 'double worry' present in some countries, 'crowding out' in others and no relation in still others.

An alternative approach is offered by Otto and Gugushvili (2020). Instead of measuring linear correlations between environmental and welfare attitudes, they focused on identifying four attitudinal sub-groups based on survey respondents' views on the two sets of policies. These groups are 'eco-social policy enthusiasts' ('ENTHs': people supporting both ecological and social policy measures), 'environmental devotees' ('ENVIs': people with high preferences for environmental measures combined with low support for public welfare provision), 'welfare enthusiasts' ('WELFs': pro-welfare people with low support for environmental policies) and 'eco-social policy sceptics' ('SCEPs': people opposed to both sets of policies). To record the occurrence of these eco-social attitudinal groups in European countries, the authors used data from the 2016 round of the European Social Survey. They measured welfare attitudes with three questions about the government's responsibility to ensure a reasonable living standard for the old and the unemployed and sufficient childcare services for working parents. Environmental attitudes were approximated by three questions about respondents' views on increasing taxes on fossil fuels, subsidising renewable energy and banning the sale of the least energy-efficient household appliances. The analyses revealed an 'eco-social divide' whereby each of the four attitudinal groups was represented in European countries, but their actual size varied. Regarding the group composition, 'ENTHs' were more likely to be women, higher educated people, urban residents and people with an egalitarian worldview and high levels of trust in public institutions. By contrast, 'SCEPs' were mainly male, rural residents, lower-educated people, those with low trust in public institutions and those opposed to egalitarianism. 'ENVIs' were found to be comparable to eco-social enthusiasts in their socio-economic profiles but more likely to earn higher incomes. 'WELFs' were more likely to be low-skilled, low-income earners supporting egalitarianism and demonstrating low trust in public institutions.

While the existence of such socio-economic eco-social divides (Otto and Gugushvili, 2020) was also confirmed by other authors (Fritz and Koch, 2019; Emilsson, 2022b; Ronchi et al, 2023), in particular, one crucial limitation remains: existing datasets address social and environmental attitudes separately. Combining preferences towards social and environmental policies, for instance, via the categorical grouping approach developed by Otto and Gugushvili, can tell us much about the distinct profiles and preferences of different attitudinal groups – but it leaves us with an incomplete understanding of what people think of cases where environmental and social policies are

explicitly interlinked or weighed against each other. One of the very few studies so far addressing eco-social trade-off scenarios showed that in the absence of a trade-off between the two policies, left-wing voters were more supportive of social and environmental policies than right-wing voters, and earning a higher income decreased social policy support but had no significant effect on environmental policy support (Armingeon and Bürgisser, 2021). However, once the respondents had to choose between income redistribution and environmental protection, the impact of political ideology disappeared while that of income remained. The authors interpret this as an indication that in the case of policy trade-offs, myopic self-interest (for example, maximising current income) overrides people's ideological positioning. These findings indicate possible conflicts but give policy makers little insight into the public's position on specific eco-social policies and how people justify their stances.

To address this gap, we carried out an integrated analysis of (non-representative) survey data and focus group discussions. Drawing on Otto and Gugushvili's four attitudinal sub-groups, our study aimed to investigate, on the one hand, to what extent public support for various climate and social policies relates to support for specific integrated or conflicting eco-social policies. On the other hand, we sought to capture the beliefs, perceptions and nuanced attitudes individuals hold when faced with different eco-social policy scenarios. Specifically, we investigated people's views on retraining workers laid off in fossil fuel industry jobs and on preserving jobs in these industries, which involves a trade-off between environmental and social objectives. We expected that individuals' grouping along the four attitudinal sub-groups could, to a certain extent, approximate their positions on the two policy options. However, this relationship is likely to be influenced by other factors at the individual and the country level. For instance, we might expect that, due to social considerations, WELFs will oppose climate policies with extensive social consequences (such as closing polluting companies). However, they might support such measures if they were accompanied by social investment or compensatory policies. ENVIs should support closing polluting industries, but they may also support retraining fossil fuel workers to spur decarbonisation infrastructure and technologies and to weaken opposition to the energy transition. The position of ENTHs is more complicated to anticipate. It likely depends on whether social or ecological concerns weigh more concerning a specific eco-social or trade-off policy scenario. Finally, SCEPs are expected to oppose both measures as they do not prioritise environmental or social protection.

Mapping eco-social attitudes: the focus group survey

To address the identified research gap, we employ focus group data from the research project 'The social legitimacy of welfare measures in the *green*

transformation' (see Zimmermann and Gengnagel, 2022). In the project, a total of 76 participants in Germany (DE) and Italy (IT) discussed in 12 focus groups (6 per country; 5–7 participants per group) the subjects of climate change, climate and social policies, social inequalities, the role of the state and scientific expertise. The focus groups took place online in July 2022. They lasted 90 minutes each, were led by research teams in both countries and were professionally recruited and moderated by a multinational market research firm. In each country, half of the participants had a higher socio-economic position (income above 150 per cent of the median net household income; at least upper secondary education/ International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 3), and the other half had a lower socio-economic position (below 75 per cent of the median net household income; at most intermediate education). In addition, participants varied systematically in terms of their values (conservative versus liberal, measured, for example, by approval of same-sex relationships) and had a mix of gender, age, occupation and place of residence (urban/rural).

Before the discussion started, all focus group participants completed a survey with several items. After this, participants discussed issues such as decarbonisation effects on jobs and the economy, redistributive questions in the context of green transitions, sustainable consumption and the role of science. These discussions were recorded, transcribed and studied using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2019). From the survey part, we use seven items to answer the first research question of how attitudes towards several social and climate policies as attitudinal predispositions relate to attitudes towards concrete eco-social and trade-off policies. The items used to measure respondents' eco-social predisposition include two of the classic social policies and the three climate policies used by Otto and Gugushvili (2020), namely whether the government should be responsible for a standard of living for i) the old and ii) the unemployed, and to what extent respondents favour iii) an increasing of taxes on fossil fuels, iv) subsidies for renewable energy, and v) banning the sale of the least energy-efficient appliances to reduce climate change. For opinions on integrated eco-social and trade-off policy scenarios, participants were asked to what extent they agree with governmental action to retrain workers laid off in fossil fuel industries and action to preserve these jobs. We chose the 'jobs versus environment dilemma' (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011) as a salient and widespread social issue in the public energy transition debate. All answer categories were originallymeasured on a five-point Likert scale and later recoded for analytical simplicity (1: opposition to the policy in question, 2: neither/nor, 3: support for the policy in question).

Calculating the average values for social and climate policy–related survey responses by each focus group participant, it is possible to group participants in the four different attitudinal eco-social sub-groups: those

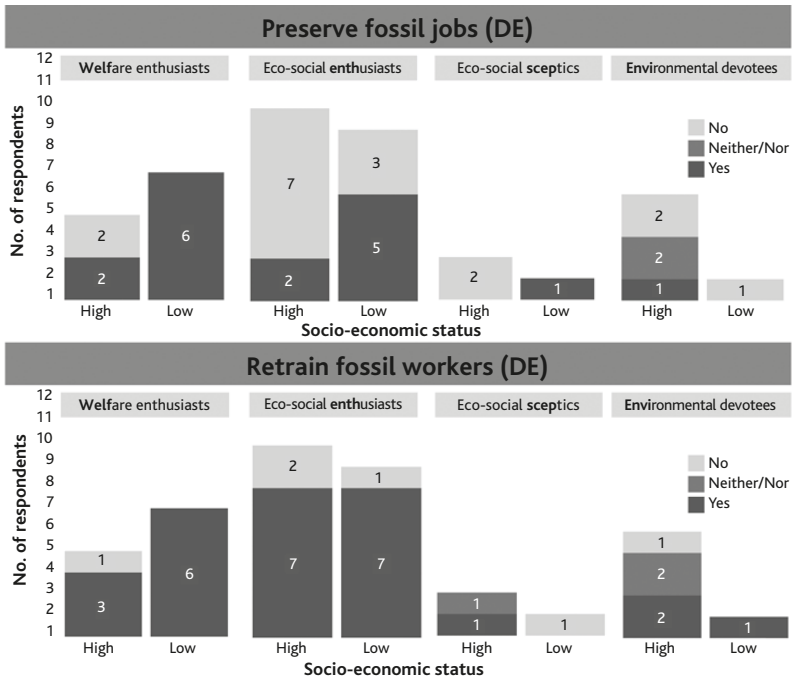
with average values above 2 for the three climate policy items and the two social policy items are grouped as ENTHs; those with average values above 2 for the climate policy items and average values equal to or below 2 for the social policy items are labelled as ENVIs; those with average values above 2 for the social policy items and values equal to or below 2 for the climate items are grouped as WELFs; and those with average values equal to or below 2 for climate and social policies are assigned to the group of SCEPs.

For both countries, this exercise shows that most focus group participants place themselves in the ENTH group, supporting climate and social policies (48.6 per cent in DE; 47.5 per cent in IT). The second largest group in both countries consists of the WELFs (27 per cent in DE; 30 per cent in IT). While the ENVIs are still represented by 16.2 per cent of the participants in DE and 17.5 per cent in IT, the SCEPs are rare in both countries (8.1 per cent in DE; 5 per cent in IT). Concerning the socio-economic composition of these groups, there are slightly more participants with a lower socio-economic position among the WELFs and the ENTHs. Relating to the eco-social and trade-off policy scenarios, we see that 'retraining fossil fuel workers' receives strong support in both countries (75 per cent in DE; 81.6 per cent in IT). By contrast, 'preserving fossil fuel jobs' is less supported and much more controversial (47.2 per cent in favour, 47.2 per cent against, remaining neither/nor in DE; 55.3 per cent in favour, 23.7 per cent against, remaining neither/nor in IT). When checking how support for the two controversial eco-social scenarios is distributed among the four eco-social attitudinal sub-groups and across socio-economic backgrounds, an interesting picture emerges (Figure 9.1).

In Germany, focus group participants identified as WELFs support both retraining fossil fuel workers and preserving the jobs in these industries. However, participants from the lower socio-economic group especially hold a positive opinion on these two controversial aspects. So, both policy scenarios seem to resonate with their social concerns. Participants identified as ENVIs are expectably critical of fossil fuel job preservation and more supportive of retraining fossil fuel workers. While participants identified as SCEPs are critical towards both, the stances of those grouped as ENTHs are more complicated. Comparable to the WELFs, ENTHs support the retraining policy, with the lower socio-economic group being slightly more favourable than the higher one. However, in contrast to our expectations, we also see ENTHs (especially those from the lower socio-economic group) supporting preserving fossil fuel jobs. Keeping these jobs could resonate with these ENTHs' interest in social policy issues.

In Italy, the situation is more complex. As Figure 9.2 demonstrates, for WELFs, the situation is comparable to the German one. Participants supporting public social policies also strongly support retraining and – to

Figure 9.1: Policy response patterns by attitudinal predisposition and socio-economic status, Germany

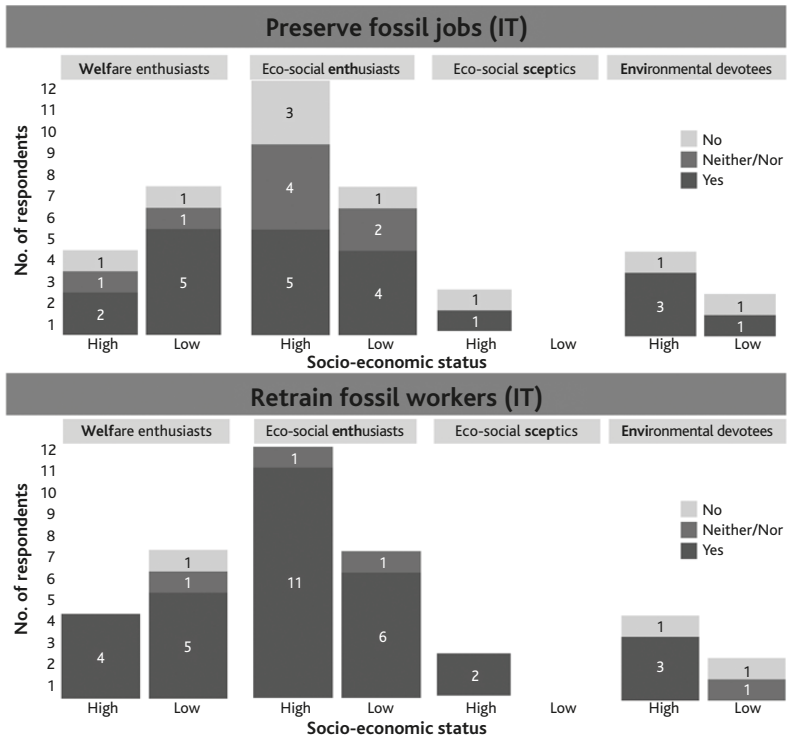


Source: Own data

a lesser degree – job preservation, with the lower socio-economic group being particularly positive about job preservation. SCEPs and ENTHs in Italy and Germany hold comparable opinions. The few SCEPS in the Italian sample show little interest in the two policy options studied; the ENTHs support both, with the lower socio-economic group being more positive about job preservation than the higher one. However, the response patterns of ENVIs in Italy are quite different from those of their German counterparts. ENVIs almost exclusively reject retraining – a green transition measure that we expected to be of interest given their attitudinal predisposition and social vulnerability. By contrast, ENVIs with a higher socio-economic status surprisingly support preserving jobs in fossil fuel industries.

Returning to our first research question, eco-social attitudinal predispositions are – except for the ENVIs in Italy – largely consistent with the positions on specific eco-social policies and trade-off scenarios. However, these positions appear socio-economically structured. To gain better insights into the different attitudes and trade-offs of the focus group participants, we analysed qualitative narratives and reasonings in the focus group discussions.

Figure 9.2: Policy response patterns by attitudinal predisposition and socio-economic status, Italy



Source: Own data

Making sense of survey patterns: the focus group discussions

To better understand whether and how the preferences of the different eco-social attitudinal sub-groups (ENTHs, ENVIs, SCEPs, WELFs; Figures 9.1 and 9.2) might clash in the interaction of climate and social policy issues, we explored how related aspects such as climate change, climate policies, state action, social inequalities and welfare policies were discussed in the focus group discussions. The following paragraphs group these discussions by attitudinal sub-group and socio-economic status.

As demonstrated in the previous section, support for retraining and preserving fossil fuel jobs is comparatively high among the WELFs in Germany and Italy. In line with this survey pattern, both the German and Italian discussions showed that concerns about jobs and economic conditions prevail among participants identified as WELFs when considering eco-social trade-offs. For example, Erik from Germany and Loris from Italy (all names were pseudonymised) share the hope that today's transition-related job loss will turn into a job creator in the future:

Erik (WELF; DE, higher socio-economic group; 56 y, real estate agent):	Of course, jobs will be lost in one sector, which will damage the economy, but we have to use this labour force and use it to go into areas where we can build a future. There will be gaps at first, but in the end, there will be work for everyone again and we will be much better off.
Loris (WELF; IT, lower socio-economic group, 44 y, store clerk):	If we think about an environmental future, when we think about the planet, we must not think about the average citizen today, but of future generations. … If radical measures were taken, they would certainly hit those hardest who have not yet been able to adapt to climate change, who depend on gas and diesel, those who exploit intensive livestock farms and produce meat.

At the same time, WELF's in both countries pointed towards different dimensions of social hardship related to job loss and retraining:

Safira (WELF; DE, higher socio-economic group, 21 y, university student):	If I imagine I'm 50, I've worked in this [fossil] field all my life and suddenly I'm supposed to do something else … I don't think I'd be able to cope with it.
Mario (WELF; IT, lower socio-economic group, 53 y, construction worker):	I think we need to consider today's citizens, too. Specifically, when considering the social impact of climate action, I find there is a social divide. The lower-middle social class is hit harder than the rest [of the population].

These country-specific concerns already point towards different implicit baseline assumptions that underpin certain lines of arguments in our two country cases. While German participants seem to take at least some basic social assistance for granted and are more worried about status loss (like Safira), Italian participants more frequently point towards existential needs or material losses. It was also striking that among German WELFs with a lower socio-economic background, jobs were only a secondary concern. Instead, an overall critique of green transitions as such was expressed and state interventions for the sake of climate policies were criticised sharply by them:

Moderator:	The state could enact retraining and the like to cushion the consequences [of climate mitigation interventions]. What's the supporting argument?
Anita (WELF; DE, lower socio-economic group, 68 y, retired):	It's already intervening far too much!
Florian (WELF; DE, lower socio-economic group, 46 y, waste disposal worker):	It's already a planned economy.
Eva (ENVI; DE, higher socio-economic group, 56 y, clerk in crafts business):	Isn't that self-evident? When I look at nuclear power, which will be history at some point, a lot of people are employed there. They shouldn't be lost. They have to be taken along. I didn't think that was a question, I thought it was a fact.
Moderator:	Is it self-evident that the state should be held responsible?
Eva:	Yes. (several others agree)
Nicole (WELF; DE, lower socio-economic group, 59 y, social security clerk):	The state will then take away my job.

Interestingly, this opposition against and low trust in statutory action was a remarkably clear pattern in Germany. Almost all participants identified as WELFs from the lower socio-economic group tended towards a regressive, anti-science, anti-climate mitigation stance (while for Eva as an ENVI, the transformation was already taken for granted, as her quote illustrates). We interpret this as a form of heightened status anxiety – or status anger – that is not alleviated by measures like retraining guarantees. Even if they are not directly at risk of job loss due to the green transition (being retired, a waste worker and a social security clerk, respectively), Anita, Florian and Nicole perceive themselves as part of a social group that, in their view, can only lose from environmental policies.

When we turn towards the ENVIs, the observed differences between Germany and Italy in the survey responses (Figures 9.1 and 9.2) are also

visible in the group discussions. In Germany, they generally expressed positions similar to the German ENVI Eva in the discussion snippet presented earlier. They frequently put forward arguments for a green transition of the economy with a statutory responsibility for social concerns. Moreover, as Eva's expression 'it's also the state's job to get these people back into suitable work' suggests, German ENVIs might also put environmental over social concerns, as they expect the social ones to be already covered by existing policies.

Findings for the ENVIs from the Italian focus groups indicate that ENVIs strongly support environmental protection. However, they seem to have little hope that society at large or the Italian government in particular would actually live up to the required action:

Teresa (ENVI; IT, higher socio-economic group, 50 y, water purification employee):	It would be right to protect the environment, but comforts [use of oil or air conditioning] are hard to give up.
Alessandra (ENVI; IT higher socio-economic group, 50 y, employee in legal sector):	Companies abroad work for the climate, in Italy they don't. … Companies must invest [in reconversion], it takes money, the state must help them otherwise they do nothing.
Riccardo (ENVI; IT, lower socio-economic group, 24 y, university student):	Now we spend billions every autumn on landslides and floods. Here, billions could be spent on reinvesting in helping those who work with oil.

Environmental devotion here is clearly paired with pragmatism and distrust in governmental capacity, which in our eyes probably fuelled the puzzling survey response pattern of a relatively high share of Italian ENVIs supporting the preservation of fossil fuel jobs.

Looking at the ENTHs' contributions to the focus group discussion, we can make a highly instructive observation: eco-social enthusiasts in both countries discuss questions of environmental protection, jobs, economy and social protection from a relatively integrated perspective. They also express their relative preferences for either environmental or social policy dimensions against the backdrop of how they judge the system they live in (like the German participants Walther and Gert; the former pointing towards economic risks, the latter highlighting the basic social security principle):

Walther (ENTH; DE, higher socio-economic group, 71 y, retired):	If we promote renewable energies, we also need workers. At the moment, there aren't enough skilled workers to

	install enough solar systems on roofs. In other words, we are hindering technical progress!
Eva (ENVI; DE, higher socio-economic group, 56 y, clerk in crafts business):	If the state decides that an industry is dying out, like coal or nuclear power, then it's also the state's job to get these people back into suitable work in some way.
Gert (ENTH; DE, lower socio-economic group, 70 y, pensioner):	After all, we have a Auffanggesellschaft ['rescue society'; refers to social security principle].

Our interpretation is that, if confronted with an eco-social trade-off scenario, German ENTHs might feel comfortable opting for the environmental side if they take the social dimension as taken for granted.

Also, in the Italian focus group discussions, ENTHs discuss social and environmental issues from an integrated perspective:

Saverio (ENTH, IT, lower socio-economic group, 30 y, administrative employee):	You need both: economic growth and stopping carbon emissions. You need to balance the two. … Every single person can contribute to reconcile these two ambitions.
Matteo (ENTH; IT, higher socio-economic group, 22 y, university student):	More than ruining the economy, [climate change] necessarily transforms it.
Emanuela (ENTH; IT lower socio-economic group, 40 y, medical clerk):	Climate interest in Italy damages the economy [… because the state] wants to do everything green …, but in the end, it does not put the citizen in a position to do so.
Giuseppe (ENTH; IT, higher socio-economic group, 64 y, manager in public administration):	The unemployment created by shutting down large companies that pollute, it's clear that the state has to intervene, there's absolutely no doubt, that's its main task.

As we can see, in Italy, the 'embedded reasoning' also clearly applies: particularly from Emanuela's and Giuseppe's statements, it becomes clear that they perceive the state to be responsible for steering integrated social and

environmental policies. However, in contrast to the German interviewees, they do not necessarily have sufficient trust in their government and their social security schemes to address the social concerns, which is why they probably supported job preservation in the survey.

Finally, as we only have very few SCEPs in both countries (participants who are critical towards social and environmental protection), their group discussion patterns are hardly meaningful. Therefore, we refrain from discussing them. However, having only a few participants categorised as SCEPs in our dataset does not mean we did not find scepticism in our group discussion: as already outlined, German WELFs from the lower socio-economic group especially expressed sharp scepticism against climate change, the state and science. Similarly, Italian participants (in particular ENVIs) expressed scepticism about whether the Italian state or society can handle climate mitigation properly.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we analysed data from focus groups in Italy and Germany, including a non-representative survey among the participants and transcripts of focus group discussions to better understand people's perceptions of the interaction of social policies and climate mitigation policies. We departed from findings in the literature that people have different attitudinal predispositions on both environmental and social aspects (ranging from welfare enthusiasts to environmental devotees and eco-social enthusiasts to eco-social sceptics), and we assumed that these might also shape their views on the interaction of the two domains (that is, in a trade-off or an integrated scenario). Our analyses confirmed our expectations regarding how the attitudinal sub-groupings influence people's perceptions of interacting eco-social scenarios: welfare enthusiasts show great concern for social implications when confronted with an eco-social trade-off, and environmental devotees strongly argue in favour of climate measures.

However, as our analyses of the group discussions revealed, people's stances towards social or climate mitigation instruments in a trade-off or an integrated eco-social scenario are also fundamentally shaped by their overall trust in institutions, their perception of state responsibility and capacity (and society's capacity), and to what extent they took existing structures for granted (for example, the welfare system). While the general social and environmental attitudinal predispositions were relatively stable across both countries in shaping people's positions towards eco-social policy scenarios, references to these structural dimensions varied between Italy and Germany (and, to a certain extent, across socio-economic groups). For instance, German welfare enthusiasts from the lower socio-economic group were predominantly extremely negative towards any climate mitigation and expressed very low

trust in the state. In Italy, trust issues rather emerged among environmental devotees (and more among members of the upper socio-economic group). They did not express fundamental distrust in the state but rather doubted governmental capacities to steer climate mitigation. Similarly, while Italian eco-social enthusiasts emphasised the need for a strong state that could deal with environmental and social challenges, Germans from the same attitudinal sub-group seemed to be more comfortable taking the environmental side, as they took the German welfare system and its capacities to buffer social costs to a certain extent for granted.

As we operated with low case numbers and non-representative data, our evidence has little external validity. However, its high internal validity provides a solid ground for future research scaling up our findings. Therefore, we hope these insights will inspire larger, more representative and in-depth mixed-method studies to further explore these dynamics on the societal embeddedness of eco-social policy support.

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10

Public participation in eco-social policies: exploring mechanisms for bridging the gap

Nicolas W. Jager and Benedetta Cotta

Introduction

The growing body of research on eco-social policies has put the nexus between environmental and social issues centre stage by highlighting the mutual interdependencies between policy goals in both areas (Mandelli, 2022; Cotta, 2024). When assessing the roles for different actors in eco-social policies and drivers for eco-social transitions, most studies focus on states and government actors (Cotta, 2024). The state is perceived as a 'social and environmental arena' (Koch, 2022, p 2) with the responsibility for action (Lindellee et al, 2021) and with the capacity, functions and competences (Gough, 2013; Krause, 2021) to act as an initiator (Koch, 2020; Bonvin and Laruffa, 2022) or facilitator (Coote, 2022) of eco-social policies. Yet, at the same time it is recognised that 'state "top-down" policies can only be successful in initiating the required ecological and social transformation if they react to and reinforce "bottom-up" mobilizations' (Lindellee et al, 2021, p 330) through, for example, civil society participation, bottom-up civil society mobilisation, or *citizens' co-production of* and *co-participation in* public services (Lindellee et al, 2021; Gough, 2022; Laruffa et al, 2022).

While mostly prescribing what citizens should do, civil society and the public usually play only a rather limited role in the eco-social literature as addressees of public policies or as actors within their individual sphere (Laruffa et al, 2022). Even though public participation plays an important role in both environmental and social policy individually (for example, Lub and Uyterlinde, 2012; Bodin, 2017; Beresford, 2019; Jager et al, 2020), less attention is paid to citizens and stakeholders as potential political agents for navigating the inherent tensions and synergies in eco-social policies and contributing to holistically positive policy outcomes (Lindellee et al, 2021; but see for example, Gough, 2022; Jager and Newig, 2024). Instead, citizens are often seen as producers of public opinion on environmental and social matters (for example, Jakobsson et al, 2018) and as agents of their

individual socio-economic and political activities. When it comes to citizens' *collective action* through civic associations and policy communities, though, research on welfare and social policies, from which the eco-social literature has mostly derived, often assumes a state centralisation that encourages the 'clientelization of welfare' (Fitzpatrick, 2011, p 64) which is passively received by citizens.

Against this backdrop, we explore the potential roles of citizens and stakeholders in eco-social policy and decision making. We chart the academic landscape as to how and through which mechanisms public participation may shape eco-social policies and especially the tensions and coherence between interrelated social and ecological policy goals. We approach this aim by beginning with the literature on collaborative governance (for example, Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015) and environmental policy (for example, Newig et al, 2018), and further include works from the fields of deliberative and participatory democracy (for example, Willis et al, 2022), the recently emerging field of eco-social policy (for example, Laruffa et al, 2022; Hirvilammi et al, 2023) and others to provide a conceptual and exploratory analysis of those mechanisms.

After defining and conceptualising public participation, as well as our operationalisation of eco-social policies, we specify distinct causal pathways through which public participation affects the substance of policy outputs. We will pay specific attention to the trade-offs and coherence between ecological and social policy goals and the ways in which the balance between those may be improved or aggravated by different forms of public participation.

Conceptual background

Public participation can be defined as those 'processes and structures of public decision-making and management that engage actors from the private sector, civil society, and/or the public at large, with varying degrees of communication, collaboration, and delegation of decision power to participants' (Newig et al, 2018, p 273). As our definition already implies, public participation can be split up in three separate analytical dimensions (Fung, 2006):

- *Actor involvement*, that is, *who* is involved? Within this dimension, participatory processes can be distinguished according to their modalities of recruitment (for example, open access, sortition or targeted selection) and participant composition (for example, individual citizens, stakeholders, business).
- *Interaction*, that is, *how* do participants interact? This dimension embraces the manner, direction and intensity of communication flows (for example, direct face-to-face dialogue, deliberation or written consultation) and

the ways in which interests are aggregated (for example, consensus – qualified – majority vote).
- *Influence*, that is, *what* can participants decide? This dimension grasps the extent to which influence is afforded to participants over policy decisions to be taken, ranging from, for example, being merely informed, through the opportunity to voice recommendations and preferences, up to co- and self-governance.

While these dimensions are in principle independent of each other, in reality they may correlate depending on the chosen process formats (Jager et al, 2020). Potential formats range from formalised hearings, different forms of 'mini-publics' (Ryan and Smith, 2014) and mediation processes to long-term institutionalised collaborative regimes (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Scott and Thomas, 2017; Jager, 2023).

These dimensions form the basis for the *causal mechanisms* that we identify here, linking specific traits of public participation to the quality of eco-social policy outcomes. We will explore through which mechanisms public participation addresses trade-off and synergies between ecological and social policy goals. Mechanisms are understood here as providing a 'continuous and contiguous chain of causal or intentional links between the explanans and the explanandum' (Elster [1989] in Hedström and Ylikoski, 2010, p 51). Such mechanisms can involve multiple steps and form causal chains, where intermediate factors mediate the relationship between public participation and eco-social policy outcomes. Intermediate factors might be linked to particular societal process outcomes, such as conflict resolution, capacity building or learning, that in turn become instrumental in shaping the content of eco-social policies (Jager et al, 2020).

The term 'eco-social policy' was developed to indicate a nexus between environmental and social dimensions of public policies (Cotta, 2024), where policies explicitly integrate environmental and social goals (Mandelli, 2022). Such policies can range in their scale and focus, for example, from affecting local land-use decisions up to large EU policy frameworks. One example of the synergetic nature of these policies can be seen in the European Green Deal (EGD) Commission's Communication presented in December 2019. This framework of actions intends to cut greenhouse gas emissions for Europe to become the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. At the same time, it strives to foster a 'fair and prosperous society' by creating jobs and improving Europeans' quality of life (European Commission, 2019). Hence, the EGD considers environmental and social aspects as interconnected and mutually reinforcing objectives (Mandelli, 2022), not prioritising one over the other. Instead, it recognises the synergetic relation but also potential trade-offs, especially in relation to the EU's energy efficiency and climate policies (European Commission, 2019), which should be taken into consideration.

Participation and eco-social policies

Building on the existing literature, in this section we suggest a first analytical framework linking the different dimensions of public participation to the coherence and trade-offs of policy goals in eco-social policies. The included causal mechanisms are not to be seen as deterministic (nor complete) but reflect existing scholarship on potential causal influences of public participation on the quality of policy decisions. In this vein, the framework should be seen as a collection of mechanisms setting a research agenda for eco-social policy scholarship rather than providing definitive answers. The framework is summarised in Figure 10.1.

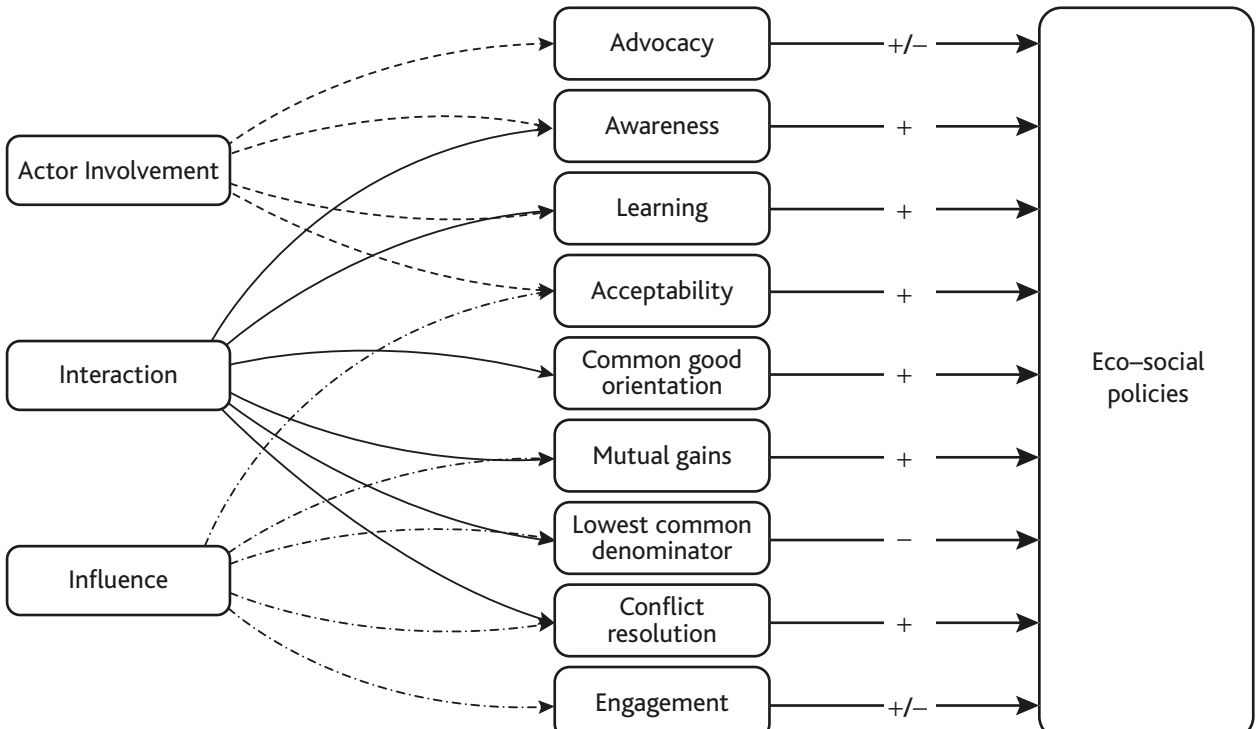
Actor involvement

When addressing the topic of participation in policy making, the first aspect to be considered is the question of who participates and what is their motivation. Potential participants include a wide spectrum that ranges from individual citizens and citizen initiatives, who represent themselves, to various forms of organised interests, such as non-governmental and civil society organisations (NGOs and CSOs), different branches of government and the administration, and multinational companies and business. Main motivations for participation lie in individual cost–benefit calculations (Turner and Weninger, 2005) and the desire for policy influence and change (Börzel, 2005; Bradford, 2020).

Public participation processes are expected to offer opportunities for these actors and their interests to enter the policy processes and shape governance outcomes, especially for those interests that felt marginalised before (Fung, 2006). In this way, their *agency* may have a positive effect on decisions themselves by reflecting this diversity and by including often-underrepresented social and environmental interests (Brody, 2003; Fung, 2006). Additionally, *social acceptability* of decisions may be fostered (Newig et al, 2018), as, for instance, studies on the involvement of local communities in energy transition projects highlight (Lennon et al, 2019). Considering participants as *knowledge holders*, their participation may have positive effects for the quality of decisions (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015) as they improve the information base by incorporating new and relevant knowledge for addressing the problem at hand (Fischer, 2000). Beyond that, they may contribute to mutual awareness and understanding between stakeholders and responsible authorities (Laird, 1993).

However, eco-social policies may have their intricacies when it comes to actor involvement. *Interest constellations* in eco-social policies can be located in what has been framed as an 'eco-social-growth trilemma' between environmental and social spheres and their link with economic growth

Figure 10.1: Collection of mechanisms linking public participation to eco-social policies



Note: Different line types highlight the influence of the different participatory dimensions: involvement (dashed lines), interaction (solid lines) and influence (dot-dashed lines). The symbols on the arrows denote the direction of the potential impact of each mechanism on the quality and coherence of eco-social policies: positive (+), negative (–) and mixed (+/–).
Source: Authors' elaboration

(Mandelli et al, 2021). As stakeholders may favour one goal over the others, divisive tensions may occur between these interests. These tensions may be aggravated as interests in eco-social policies correlate with other stakeholder characteristics, which ultimately affect representation in participatory venues. Studies on self-interest in welfare public opinion have stressed how people from low- and middle-income groups support welfare and social provisions as they will benefit from them directly (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023). Hence, when acting as participants, these actors often speak directly for themselves and their own material self-interest, such as securing wage earnings and defining employment ethics (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Environmental interests such as around nature preservation or biodiversity conservation, by contrast, are often less tangible and without direct beneficiaries, although they may affect future generations or non-human others (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Studies on eco-social attitudes in Europe highlight how high-income and educated groups support environmental protection policies, together with an increased green activism and electoral support for green parties (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023). At the same time, the constituency promoting environmental interests remains fragmented (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023). Bridging these patterns of interest representation, social status and direct affectedness poses a particular challenge for the participatory process in eco-social policies.

Against this background, previous research highlights the positive potential of equal participation of social and environmental interests for eco-social policy making (Mandelli, 2023). Broad involvement of a diversity of perspectives and their equal and fair exchange might lead to balanced decisions within the eco-social-growth trilemma and improve their acceptability. Yet, if a group has more voice in comparison to another, there is the risk of a political capture and the prioritisation of one aspect over the other in eco-social policy making (Mandelli, 2023). This risk becomes even more prevalent given the characteristics of the various stakeholders and their direct affectedness. Previous studies suggest that if direct self-interest is at stake, these interests might outplay other, more immaterial factors (Newig et al, 2023). Taken together, these aspects highlight the importance of paying close attention to the question of 'who is involved' in order to realise also the potential positive effects of public participation for balanced eco-social policy making.

Interaction

While participants individually may provide additional gains to decision-making processes, participation can also have a multiplication effect in that the interaction of participants yields solutions that could not have been developed by participants individually (Smith, 2003). We describe mechanisms capturing the effects of different kinds of dialogic processes

(that is, negotiation, open dialogue, deliberation and consensus seeking), the types of solutions they can produce (that is, mutual gains, conflict resolution and common good orientation) and their implications for the coherence of policy goals in eco-social policies, both positive and negative.

Intensive communication, usually involving direct face-to-face interaction (Ansell and Gash, 2007), creates the conditions for participants to discover each other's interests, needs and preferences (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015). Once these become clear, negotiation or bargaining can be instrumental to resolving existing conflicts and discovering common goals and solutions that appear beneficial for all interests (for example, mutual gains or 'win-win' solutions; see Ansell and Gash, 2007). In eco-social policy making, conflict resolution and mutual gains may help to balance social and environmental considerations by identifying a common ground between diverse interests. Negotiation in this respect can be seen as a less ambitious form of interaction – as compared to deliberation – where parties pursue only their self-interest and do not develop a shared value basis or purpose (Newig et al, 2018).

However, negotiation may not always lead to the identification of mutual gains. Particularly under conditions of consensus decision making, but also beyond, discussions among many actors with diverse viewpoints may end up in solutions that can be characterised as *lowest common denominator* or *joint-decision trap* (Scharpf, 1988). Such decisions imply only minimal changes from the status quo (Tsebelis, 1995) and little transformative action to reach eco-social policy goals (Hirvilammi et al, 2023). Public participation in eco-social policies is particularly prone to this hazard, as participation increases the number of potential veto players within the process and includes those actors with different backgrounds and diverse viewpoints, where congruence between positions is potentially lacking.

Interaction in the form of intensive exchange of perspectives and knowledge often sets in motion learning processes, where individuals or groups may gain a better understanding of the policy matter itself, but also of each other's perspectives (Gerlak et al, 2020). Such exchange, especially between very diverse participants, may stimulate innovative ideas and even the transformation of perspectives and values via critical reflection (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015; Hirvilammi et al, 2023). In the field of eco-social policies, learning may play a role to foster those transformative capacities needed to bring together ambitious ecological and social policy goals and to craft impactful, integrative eco-social policies (Hirvilammi et al, 2023).

The normatively most promising, but also practically most demanding form of interaction is *deliberation* (Newig et al, 2018). Deliberation 'is grounded in an ideal in which people come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss the political issues they face, and based on those discussions, decide on policies that will affect their lives'

(Bächtiger et al, 2018, p 2). Hence, it strives for a process of collective problem-solving characterised by a safe and protected space for participants and a trustful atmosphere, undistorted by deception, delusion and power play (Dryzek, 1990; Birnbaum, 2016). Under these conditions, participants enter transparent, fair and structured discussions to arrive at considered judgements based on good evidence and rational argumentation (Fung and Wright, 2001). Processes striving for this ideal are expected to produce 'preferences and justifications which are "public-spirited" in nature [because] preferences held on purely self-interested grounds become difficult to defend in a deliberative context' (Smith, 2003, p 63). This 'common good orientation' helps participants to see beyond their initial preferences and to find solutions that are beneficial for the welfare of the community at large. This ideal serves also as a conceptual foundation for the many 'mini-publics' that are currently installed, for example, climate assemblies and citizen juries (see, for instance, Gough, 2022; Willis et al, 2022; Boswell et al, 2023), to tackle some of the most pressing eco-social challenges.

For matters of eco-social policy, deliberation may be instrumental to improving the coherence and quality of policies in two ways (confer Willis et al, 2022). First, the way in which deliberation orientates participants toward the common good opens up the space for consideration of the interests of future generations as well as non-human others (Smith, 2003) and for identifying shared goals and objectives (MacKenzie, 2018). Second, given its fact-regarding nature, deliberation requires the consideration of evidence, but it also recognises that in political reality there may be different sources and forms of evidence beyond technical ones (Willis et al, 2022). Through its egalitarian approach, it explicitly includes moral and ethical considerations and values knowledge held by differently situated actors, for example, those that are particularly vulnerable (Hammond et al, 2020). In this manner, deliberation may be particularly apt to address the double challenge inherent in eco-social policies and contribute to coherent and impactful policy decisions.

Influence

Multiple studies, both in the environmental and social realm, have highlighted the value of granting participants substantial decision-making powers, both as an end in itself and as a tool for achieving high-quality decisions and policies (for example, Newman et al, 2004; Cattino and Reckien, 2021; Newig et al, 2023). Indeed, there is a widely held assumption that genuine and meaningful participation, which actually gives actors a say, should improve decision making (Cattino and Reckien, 2021).

Reasons for this effect may go back to various mechanisms. Sufficient powers to shape decisions and execute influence for many actors may be

a pivotal reason to join a participatory decision-making process in the first place (Fischer and Leifeld, 2015). On the one hand, if a process fails to attract support and buy-in by stakeholders, outputs might become biased and sub-optimal, or processes may be abandoned altogether (Lubell et al, 2023). Additionally, if processes are regarded as merely tokenistic and decisions as pre-given, acceptance of decisions will be lacking (Diduck and Sinclair, 2002). On the other hand, where stakeholders feel empowered by a process, they may be more likely to engage substantially and contribute to finding meaningful solutions (Edelenbos et al, 2011). This may lead to higher decision ownership on the part of the participants, with positive effects for acceptance and implementation of policies (Brody, 2003). The willingness to engage and a feeling of empowerment might play a particular role for eco-social policies. As these policies often involve complex and conflict-prone issues that especially concern vulnerable groups in a society (for example, spatial planning decisions in marginalised communities), such a feeling of being taken seriously and of empowerment can be essential for the participation of these actors (Lub and Uyterlinde, 2012). Their buy-in and engagement in the process, in turn, might be instrumental in reaching a balanced eco-social policy decision that takes all relevant perspectives on board, and which might eventually gain broad acceptance.

Apart from this direct effect, the voice granted to participants may also influence eco-social governance decisions in an indirect way by providing the foundation for meaningful negotiation and conflict resolution. Previous research has emphasised that the resolution of conflicts, and the development of shared understandings and win-win situations, depends on participants having space to explore alternatives and being able to make decisions (Jager et al, 2020). This may appear pertinent in the realm of eco-social policies, where – as outlined above – finding a common ground between different interests and perspectives may be particularly pronounced.

Conclusion

With this chapter, we aimed to provide a first analytical orientation as to which roles public participation of citizens and stakeholders can play in the field of eco-social policies. We relied on the three basic dimensions of participation (Fung, 2006) – actor involvement, interaction and influence – and explored how these dimensions may influence, positively or negatively, the quality and coherence of eco-social policies. In this vein, our chapter may be understood as exploratory. We do not assume that the identified mechanisms are deterministic or work in every case, nor that our collection may be complete; instead, we want to set the agenda and orientate future research to test these mechanisms in the field of eco-social

policies, and to substantiate, adapt, complement or abandon them, based on empirical insights.

When researching these mechanisms, however, it appears important to place them in a broader context and consider some additional points: First, while we explored actor involvement, interaction and influence separately, in reality they appear together in various participatory formats, such as public hearings, citizen juries or round-table discussions. Such formats can be seen as different configurations of these three dimensions of participation, which highlight patterns of co-occurrence and trade-offs between them. For instance, involving a maximum number of participants in an open information event may come at the cost of intensive face-to-face interaction. These patterns and trade-offs are important to specify and consider, as they might imply that some mechanisms may strengthen or weaken each other.

Second, while we aimed to provide a nuanced picture that includes opportunities as well as pitfalls, we mostly highlighted the promising potentials of public participation for realising balanced and high-quality eco-social policies. Yet, this should not put aside the perils and difficulties of participation. Especially around eco-social policy issues, participatory processes might face particularly high levels of conflict, political costs and need for mediation, as compared to more 'mono-topical' issues. But also, on a more general level, public participation may be subject to various hazards. These include the replacement of expertise and reason with public opinion in decision making (Geissel, 2009), the reproduction of inequality and marginalisation and the co-option of participants by powerful interests (Glimmerveen et al, 2022), the slowdown and rise in costs of decision making (Taverne, 2005), distortion of accountability structures (Papadopoulos, 2003) and other pitfalls. Analyses of public participation should bear these in mind and be open for even further ones more specific to the context of eco-social policies, for instance when it comes to the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Finally, processes of public participation should be seen in the wider policy context in which they are embedded (Font et al, 2018; Laruffa et al, 2022). Eco-social policies often find themselves entrenched in a complex web of decision-making processes dispersed across various levels and following distinct spatial rationales (Domorenok and Trein, 2024). Participation is, thus, usually one aspect within this larger web of public decision-making processes where participatory outputs are considered to a greater or lesser extent (Font et al, 2018). Additionally, public participation alters the relationship between citizens and their political representatives into one that is based on dialogue and interaction rather than one that focuses on elections and voting intention (Mansbridge, 2019; Willis et al, 2022). In this way, public participation plays a role in the wider policy system beyond the immediate decision making and vice versa.

Public participation can surely not guarantee to 'solve' the challenges of eco-social policy making. But the approach deserves closer scrutiny as it

might have the potential to offer political spaces within which the political, moral and epistemological challenges of eco-social policy making may be considered and where collective and balanced action may emerge.

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11

Social movements and eco-social transition

Katrin Uba

Introduction

Social movement mobilisation for social and environmental justice and, in more general, for sustainable welfare is an inherent part of contemporary societies facing the climate emergency. Bridging the nexus of social and environmental issues has not, however, always been straightforward for movement activists. While some ecological movements (for example, the anti-nuclear power movement) were already seen as essential social change transformers in the 1970s, the conservationism-oriented movements were less focused on the issues of social change at the time (Brulle, 2000; Rootes, 2004). Due to their specific primary goals of preserving nature and neglected attention to social justice, as well as the lack of representation of vulnerable social groups, there were animosities between the ecology and environmental justice movements in the early 1980s (Di Chiro, 1996; Diani, 1995). Since then, however, there has been growing attention to combining the environmental, ecological, workers' rights, welfare and social justice claims by social movement activists in the US, Western Europe and beyond. The disagreements over combining climate change and climate justice claims have not entirely disappeared among some environmental activists (Pezzullo, 2022). Still, within the context of an increasing number of 'ecological distribution conflicts', we can talk about the existence of the global environmental justice movement (Martínez-Alier et al, 2016). With the economic crisis of the 2010s, the climate crisis, the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020s and the new escalations of military conflicts (for example, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the war between Israel and Hamas since October 2023), the mobilisation for socially just environmental and climate policies have become particularly important. We have also seen new waves of protests mobilised by young climate activists concerned not only for the future of society's environmental and social well-being but also for the possibilities of achieving eco-social transformation and an ecologically sustainable society (de Moor et al, 2021b).

This chapter will provide a short overview of social movements that have been of particular importance in the mobilisation across the ecological and social nexus in various geographical locations and transnationally. We focus on historical development, some significant lines of division, mobilising strategies and the eventual political consequences of movements that mobilise for environmental and climate justice, as well as degrowth. Additional information about environmental and eco-social movements in different regions can be found, for example, in Grasso and Giugni (2022) and Snow et al (2019). Further discussion about labour unions and their concerns for just transition, sustainable welfare or climate justice from the perspective of trade union movements can be found in the Chapter 7 by Fabris and Pochet in this book.

Different movements for eco-social transformation

The most typical examples of movements aiming at ecological sustainability relate to the ideas of 'act locally, think globally'. These are movements belonging to various networks of global and environmental justice movements. The beginning of the environmental justice movement is usually dated to 1982, when civil rights and environmental activists joined forces to mobilise protests against the disposal of toxic waste at a landfill in Warren County, North Carolina, in the US (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). These developments were also characterised by the central 'conflict' within environmental activism because of the diverse views on conservationism and eco-social transformation (see also Doherty, 2002). Over time, the movement unified a diverse set of actors, ranging from urban environmental groups to occupational health and safety activists, as well as the Indigenous land rights and various social and economic justice movements. The emerging coalition for environmental justice called for more attention to be paid to the broader societal consequences of environmental damage, bringing forward multiple claims often used by the Indigenous, African American and poor communities: ecological unity, vulnerability and ecological racism (Bullard 2000). The claims of environmental justice also travelled geographically outside of the US – to Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and South East Asia (see, for example, Carruthers, 2008; Carmin et al, 2011). Today, we can, for example, observe the conflicts over environmental injustices via the Global Atlas of Environmental Justice (https://ejatlas.org; see also Temper et al, 2018).

Content-wise, the significant addition to the movement was the development of the 'climate justice' frame in relation to the first Climate Justice Summit during the COP6 meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2001 (Schlosberg, 2012). Still, the previous tensions between different views on conservation and social transformation did not

disappear, and the discussions of 'climate justice' and 'systemic change' added another layer to the debates. Often, these differences were related to the diverging understanding of what has to be changed in the economic and political systems in order to achieve the goals of climate justice. Although the use of the climate justice frame allowed the environmental movement to turn back to its initial goals of achieving change via local action and reconnecting to other movements (della Porta and Parks, 2014), the adoption of the climate justice frame among the activists has taken time. For example, it has been shown that only relatively few participants of the protests related to the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Brussels, Copenhagen or London adhered to the frames of 'climate justice' (Wahlström et al, 2013). According to a recent social media analysis, between 2018 and 2021, the climate strike Twitter discourse in English focused more on the themes related to responsibility for the use of fossil fuels (13 per cent) and diverse policy issues (13 per cent) than on climate justice (4 per cent) (Chen et al, 2023). Svensson and Wahlström (2023) examined the prevalent frames of the participants of the global climate strikes in 2019. They used the term 'civic system change' to connect the climate justice frame to the discourse of 'civic environmentalism'. It calls for a transformation of modern capitalist society with the aim of reaching an equitable and sustainable climate future (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 2007). Svensson and Wahlström (2023) show that even in 2019, climate strike participants more frequently used frames that focused on regulatory actions of the government or individual behaviour rather than frames of 'system change'.

In the context of Western Europe, the focus on social transformation and sustainability was certainly not new, even though much of the scholarship discusses such mobilisation in the framework of 'new social movements' (Buechler, 1995). Many movements of the 1970s focused on the transformation of economic relations and emphasised the idea that the social system built on constant economic growth is not ecologically sustainable. As a solution, they saw local, decentralised alternative economies and a more vital welfare state (Hajer, 1997). The development of the European movements' interest in the broader socio-ecological transformation cannot be seen in isolation. There was a growing global civil society mobilisation, which involved the establishment of large international NGOs such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and several international summits that combined the interest in social and environmental issues: for example, the 1974 World Food Conference in Italy, the 1985 UN World Conference of Women in Kenya, and the 1992 Rio Conference on the Environment and Development (Pianta, 2001). One could suggest that different local grassroots mobilisations that combined the concerns for ecological, environmental and socio-economic transformation and eventually built up the ties to develop the *global justice movements* (GJMs)

in the late 1990s and 2000s (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; della Porta, 2007) were the first indicators of the transnational movement over the eco-social nexus. The specific developments of various movements within the GJM network addressing the environmental and social questions in Europe, for example, the mobilisation of the Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Citizen's Action (ATTAC), are well described in Fillieule and Accornero (2016). While many of the European environmental movements struggled with the internal divisions of conservationists and supporters of political ecology in the 1970s and 1980s, the intense networking during the 1990s helped to change their agenda so that the majority of the larger groups, such as Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, acknowledged the importance of economic issues and sustainability for solving environmental problems (see more in Rootes, 2014).

After the peak of global (social justice) mobilisation in the early 2000s, many of the movements turned back to the local level. Eventually, each country, both in Europe and beyond, also had its local communities that used the claims of eco-social transformation. These have become evident in relation to increasing alternative solidarity activism after the recent economic crisis of the 2010s (Kousis and Paschou, 2017). For example, in the Italian context, we can talk about 'sustainable community movement organisations' that use various alternative forms of economic activism and political consumerism (Forno and Graziano, 2014). These movements, which could also be labelled as *environmental alternative action organisations* (EAAOs; see also de Moor et al, 2021a), aim to create new economic and cultural spaces, providing a framework for collective action and enabling the deployment of alternative lifestyles that promote eco-social transformation. In a comparative analysis of nine European countries, Kousis and Uba (2021) have shown that EAAOs, and particularly the movements of alternative consumption, are also present in France and Spain, to a much lesser extent in Greece and almost not at all in Sweden or Poland. Still, there has been a general emergence of groups that combine the concern for sustainable welfare and eco-social transformation with direct action at local food cooperatives, solidarity or community-supported agriculture, community gardening, repair cafés, bike kitchens, libraries of things and co-housing projects (Butzlaff and Deflorian, 2021). These movements, sometimes also labelled as 'lifestyle movement organisations' (Haenfler et al, 2012), usually focus on the change in individual behaviour and lifestyle. These are the goals that might seem easier or faster to achieve than the significant political or economic changes needed for eventual social transformation.

Before turning to the specific strategies of movements aimed at eco-social transformation, it is essential to introduce probably the most typical strand among the collective action for sustainable welfare – the mobilisation for degrowth. While for a long time constant economic growth was seen as

almost a precondition for the development of stable democracy and the welfare state, the growing need for economic expansion and, especially, the increasing need for natural resources have shown that such a process is not environmentally sustainable. Although the critique of economic growth had already appeared in the 1970s, the critical analysis of Western development aid programmes in the 2000s, the Great Recession of the 2010s and the emerging climate crisis have intensified the discussions about the problems of economic growth (Petridis et al, 2015). The movements for degrowth argue for 'an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions of the local and global level, in the short and long terms' (Schneider et al, 2010, p 512). Even though some observers suggest that 'green growth' and a renewable energy-based economy could be a solution to climate and environmental concerns, the proponents of the degrowth movement are mobilised around the argument that this type of growth is also unsustainable (Polimeni et al, 2008). Their imagined radically transformed society is not only free from 'growth addiction' but is also concerned with justice, democracy, biophysical limits and environmental degradation of the Earth (Petridis et al, 2015).

While there is no single degrowth movement mobilising for a simpler, just, democratic and ecologically sustainable society where the 'consumer' is replaced by the 'citizen', the ideas of degrowth have been adopted by the various social movements all around the world. In addition to the solidarity networks or alternative action organisations mentioned above, well-known movements such as Indignados in Spain have also adopted the ideas of degrowth and social-ecological transformation (Asara, 2020). Other examples of movements emphasising the opposition to economic growth, extractivism and industrialism are found in France (Demaria et al, 2013), Germany (Treu et al, 2020), as well as in South Asia and Latin America (for example, Rodríguez-Labajos et al, 2019).

Even some parts of the recent youth movement for climate, especially Fridays for Future (FFF), have adopted claims reflecting environmental and climate justice and degrowth under the slogan 'System change, not climate change!'. In the case of the FFF protest participants in Sweden, Emilsson and colleagues (2020) have shown that some activists, mainly with a trade union background, did prioritise economic growth as much as environmental protection, while for other protesters, the environment came before the economy. Other recent climate movements, such as Extinction Rebellion, also support the degrowth frame, but they more frequently emphasise individual responsibility and change (Buzogány and Scherhaufer, 2023). Nevertheless, like the initial disagreements between conservationism and social transformation, there are still internal tensions between more radical ideas of degrowth and more pragmatic claims for ecological modernisation prevalent in the contemporary climate and environmental movements

(Cassegård and Thörn, 2022). Some of these tensions are reflected in the scholarly debates of how radical or pragmatic contemporary environmental activism should be for achieving its goals (see more in de Moor et al, 2021a), and there are also cross-national differences which most likely reflect the diverse opportunities and movement practices (Svensson and Wahlström, 2023).

The repertoires of action

While contentious actions in the form of more or less disruptive protest tactics are the typical repertoires of action for social movements, eco-social movements combine different strategies: direct action and campaigns for changing public opinion, as well as peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience. Direct action or, more specifically, collective action, which aims at directly transforming some specific aspects of society rather than just demanding changes from the targets such as the state or business (Bosi and Zamponi, 2020), has been an integral part of the early eco-social movements. Although non-violent direct action could take the form of civil disobedience with primarily conservationist goals (for example, anti-logging forest blockages or community mobilisation against extraction; see, for example, Almeida et al, 2024), in relation to eco-social mobilisation, it is more common to think of it as grassroots activists setting up small eco-villages or environmental communes – a practice growing since the 1970s.

With the increasing importance of individualistic and post-material values, more people opted for do-it-yourself types of activities and various lifestyle changes to advance eco-social transformation. One well-known strategy here is 'political consumerism', which assumes that 'consumers potentially can and in certain circumstances do collectively influence societal developments through what they decide to purchase [buycott], what they decide not to purchase [boycott], and how they relate to consumption in general through discourses and lifestyle projects' (Boström et al, 2019, p 14). Hence, those motivated by goals of eco-social transition or sustainable welfare often opted for actions such as supporting community agriculture and local food collectives, boycotting specific products or mobilising against consumer culture (Lorenzini, 2019). Such 'lifestyle' environmental activism with transformative goals and the development of alternative economic institutions became particularly visible at times of different crises, especially in relation to the economic recession of 2008–2010 (Kousis, 2017).

Similar to the tensions mentioned above around the goals and level of ambition of environmental mobilisation, the choice of strategies is also discussed in different environmental and climate movements as well as by scholars. The focus is on the potential intended and unintended consequences of using particular strategies. While some radical or reformist strategies are

complementary, others might lead to conflicting outcomes. For instance, Balsiger (2016) has shown that some market-related tactics such as movements collaborating with producers to introduce new labels in relation to sustainable clothing or ethical fashion might have self-defeating effects as collaboration might allow enterprises to sidestep some demands for sustainable production. While many activists aiming for eco-social transformation have used civil disobedience as a reasonable strategy due to the state of urgency and failure of the institutionalised actions (Hayes and Ollitrault, 2019), other actors, mainly the public and media, are debating the possible adverse effects of such actions. Still, the majority of mobilisation for sustainable environmental development is non-violent and peaceful (Sovacool and Dunlap, 2022), and it has been suggested that confrontational strategies of the recent climate movement have not affected the general public opinion with respect to climate change (Fisher et al, 2023).

The outcomes: achieving the eco-social vision of the future

Although the mobilisation for social-ecological transformation has been going on since the 1970s, the political and social consequences of these movements have not been widely studied. The wave of activism faded a bit in the 1990s and has found its second wind with the current wave of climate activism. Considering that it takes time to achieve social movements' goals of political and social change (Bosi et al, 2016), it is not surprising that we cannot yet talk about significant political changes as a result of mobilisation for eco-social transformation. Although Petridis et al (2015) suggest that the mobilisation for degrowth has made the public more aware of its social consequences and proposed alternative ways to build socially sustainable societies, there is still no clear majority support for such solutions among the public in Europe or elsewhere (Fritz and Koch, 2019). In Sweden, scholars have asked to what degree the general public supports specific visions of the future for reducing carbon emissions, and the one related to degrowth: 'People work less, can afford fewer things and have more time for communal activities and personal development' was considered desirable by 61 per cent of the respondents (Wahlström et al, 2024). Still, while some of the political solutions promoted by the degrowth movements have found their way to the policy agenda of several countries (for example, basic income or the reduction of working hours), it is not clear if these also have the desired effect on the environment (Kallis et al, 2013).

On the other hand, the above-mentioned direct-action type of mobilisation (eco-villages, repair shops and local agricultural communities) has clear economic and social consequences and could aid in the further mobilisation of concerned citizens. There are also several clear examples of how protest mobilisation of movements against the extraction of raw

materials have managed to stop or postpone the process in Latin America (Arce, 2016), Europe (Fjellborg et al, 2022) and the US (Vasi et al, 2015). Still, anti-extraction movements and Indigenous environmental activists also face physical repression all around the world (Menton and Le Billon, 2021). Repression is used even against other types of mobilisation for eco-social transformation (Temper et al, 2020). In Australia, scholars have shown the existence of widespread rhetoric supporting the criminalisation of climate protest, portraying protesters as threats to economic and political interests and national security (Gulliver et al, 2023). Similar tendencies are noticed in the US, where protests close to critical infrastructure (for example, petroleum refineries and pipelines) are increasingly banned (Gordon, 2024).

Conclusion

Combining effectively the goals of environmental conservation and social justice is not an easy task, and we have shown that this has created tensions within environmental and climate movements. It is undoubtedly usual that social movements face dilemmas and tensions in relation to their goals and strategies (Jasper, 2004), and movements for eco-social transformation are no exception. While the disagreements between the strands of 'climate justice', 'ecological modernisation' and 'green technology' have probably been more noteworthy among the social movements active in northern developed countries (the US and Western Europe), these are also present elsewhere. Many young climate activists have adopted the calls for 'climate justice' and institutionalised environmental social movement organisations such as Greenpeace criticise market solutions to the current environmental and climate crisis. This has led to some, but by no uniform, public support for the ideas of sustainable welfare (Otto and Gugushvili, 2020).

Furthermore, few political developments address eco-social transformation, especially on a global scale. Even though countries participating in the UN's global climate summit in 2023 called for a transition away from fossil fuels to prevent the harmful effects of climate change, the agreement was far from the demands of climate justice advocates. Thus, we can be sure that the mobilisation for sustainable welfare continues, and activists will combine innovative direct-action strategies with more traditional collective action repertoires of social movements. Future studies could pay even more attention to how eco-social movements all around the world develop visions of what a fossil-free and just society could look like and how to mobilise individuals, communities and political or economic institutions to work for such a future.

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PART III

Eco-social policies

In addition to overviewing the variety of eco-social policies developed at the European, national and sub-national levels, this part presents a range of conceptual insights that help capture the nature of the linkage between the social and environmental domains across strategies, individual policy instruments and governance settings. The notion of a 'just transition' appears to be central to both the conceptualisation of eco-social policies and the concrete policy strategies and instruments implemented on the ground. Beyond the European Union's Just Transition Fund and Social Climate Fund, which have been launched under the umbrella of the European Green Deal's strategy for just transition, this part illustrates how an eco-social approach has spread, albeit to a limited extent, throughout different sectors at the national and local levels, involving industry, energy, housing, food, public procurement, education and labour. Analytically, the chapters within this part are structured around two central themes that encapsulate the broader approaches and challenges in eco-social policy integration, namely the assessment of specific policy dimensions and the interplay between governance and policy implementation.

- Four chapters address specific policy dimensions, such as sustainable welfare policies, eco-social food policy design and residential energy poverty. 'Proposals for sustainable welfare policies', by Milena Büchs, advocates for social systems that prioritise human needs within planetary boundaries, challenging the traditional focus on economic growth. The chapter introduces key policy proposals such as Universal Basic Services (UBS), Universal Basic Income (UBI), working time reduction and the reduction of social inequalities as means to create sustainable welfare systems. 'Eco-social food policy design: getting food systems inside the doughnut', by Jeroen Candel, addresses the need for a systemic reform of the global food system to meet both ecological and social objectives. Using the metaphor of the doughnut economy, the chapter discusses innovative governance arrangements and policy designs that can transform the food system, emphasising the importance of policies that integrate social justice with environmental sustainability. 'Combating residential energy poverty in existing dwellings: eco-social policies and sustainable welfare in Denmark and Ireland', by Nessa Winston, Jesper Ole Jensen and Orla Dingley, explores the challenge of residential energy poverty through the lens of eco-social policies. The chapter evaluates the extent to which

integrated eco-social policies are being implemented to retrofit existing housing stock in Denmark and Ireland. It highlights the dual injustices faced by low-income households in coping with and affording climate mitigation and adaptation measures, advocating for more comprehensive and equitable energy policies. 'Synergies and trade-offs between social and green public procurement', by Miriam Hartlapp, then delves into the use of public procurement as a pivotal policy tool within the eco-social nexus. The chapter conceptualises green and social procurement along sectoral and cross-cutting dimensions, assessing potential synergies and trade-offs between these goals. It underscores the importance of public procurement in addressing both social and ecological challenges and discusses the complexities that arise when balancing these dual objectives.

- Two other chapters explore how different governance structures and institutional frameworks facilitate or hinder the development and implementation of eco-social policies. These chapters collectively reveal the need for more integrated and ambitious strategies to achieve a just transition that addresses both the immediate and long-term social risks associated with decarbonisation. 'The European Green Deal and the gradual emergence of an EU framework for a just transition', by Sebastiano Sabato, delves into the EU's strategic steps towards embedding the concept of a just transition within its legislative and policy frameworks. It critically examines the European Green Deal and its associated policies, highlighting how the EU aims to ensure a socially just green transition. The chapter discusses the transformative ambitions of the EU's approach while also pointing out its limitations, including an over-reliance on economic growth and competitiveness. 'Implementing just transition efforts across the EU: from decarbonisation to eco-social policies', by Matteo Mandelli, builds on this by providing a comprehensive mapping of just transition policies across various EU countries. The chapter reveals significant disparities in policy adoption and illustrates how some countries have developed comprehensive strategies while others have only made preliminary commitments. The chapter emphasises the need for more integrated and ambitious eco-social strategies to tackle the social risks associated with decarbonisation effectively.

As the chapters collected in this part illustrate, although the need to address the social costs and risks of green and energy transitions has been widely recognised, the eco-social policy integration has not been straightforward, characterised by different speeds, ambition and scope across countries and sectors. Overcoming a 'silo-based' approach, developing rules and values that enhance mutual synergies while reducing trade-offs, and building inclusive governance architectures to ensure public consensus around eco-social policies are among the major cross-cutting concerns.

12

Proposals for sustainable welfare policies

Milena Büchs

Introduction

Policy making communities currently face multiple interlocking crises such as the climate emergency, increasing inequality within countries and heightened social conflicts. In this context, calls for policies that address the social-ecological nexus are becoming more widespread (for example, Snell et al, 2023). In this chapter, the social-ecological nexus refers to the idea that social and ecological issues are intrinsically interlinked and therefore need to be addressed in a more coordinated fashion. A critical question for the literature on social-ecological policies is whether tackling ecological and social issues in conjunction is compatible with pursuing economic growth. Within the social-ecological policy literature, the sustainable welfare perspective adopts a *post-growth*[1] position (Hirvilammi, 2020; Koch, 2022; Büchs et al, 2024) because there is currently no empirical evidence that economic growth can be decoupled from environmental impacts in absolute terms, at the global level and at a speed that is required for meeting climate and other ecological targets (for example, Haberl et al, 2020). Sustainable welfare therefore promotes social policy systems that prioritise the satisfaction of human needs within planetary boundaries over economic growth (Koch, 2022; Büchs et al, 2024).

This chapter presents some of the key policy proposals that have been made to promote sustainable welfare. These include: the prioritisation of social and ecological goals over economic growth and profit maximisation; decoupling of work and welfare, for instance through Universal Basic Services (UBS) and Universal Basic Income (UBI), working time reduction and the reduction of social inequalities. A major challenge that sustainable welfare policies face is the current mutual dependency between welfare states and economic growth (Bailey, 2015; Büchs, 2021b; Corlet Walker et al, 2021): on the one hand, welfare states depend on economic growth to keep employment stable and to raise sufficient revenues for social expenditures (Corlet Walker et al, 2021; Koch, 2022); on the other hand, current welfare states are designed to promote economic growth, for instance by improving 'human capital'

through education and by 'activating' the workforce to increase employment (Cerny, 2010; Hassel and Palier, 2020). This chapter will discuss the capacity of these policies to contribute to greater independence between welfare states and economic growth. The final section will address some of the key challenges that present themselves in adopting and implementing sustainable welfare policies. The chapter is based on a review of the existing literature on sustainable welfare and eco-social policy.

Sustainable welfare policy proposals

Prioritisation of ecological and social objectives

Following the concept of the 'just and safe space for humanity' (Raworth, 2017), sustainable welfare proponents call for a prioritisation of social and ecological objectives over economic growth in the design of all policies. Welfare systems would therefore be reoriented from a focus on supporting economic growth to ensuring that they support a decrease of material and energy throughput to the economy, as well as achieving a fairer distribution of resources and needs satisfaction for everyone. At the same time, policy makers would support businesses to prioritise social and ecological objectives over profit maximisation. Proposals for alternative institutional frameworks that could support the operation of businesses in this way are starting to emerge (for example, Foundational Economy Collective et al, 2018). Prioritising social and ecological objectives in policy making and business operations is thought to increase the growth-independence of welfare states because resources would more directly be channelled into achieving social and ecological goals (Büchs et al, 2024).

Many scholars in this field argue that the prioritisation of social and ecological objectives over economic growth would need to be guided and supported by replacing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with other indicators (Hoekstra, 2019; Van den Bergh, 2022). GDP has become a globally dominant indicator for measuring economic and social performance, but it was never intended to serve such a broad function by its inventor, Simon Kuznets (O'Neill, 2015). Furthermore, GDP is problematic from an ecological economics and sustainable welfare perspective as it does not subtract the cost of environmental and social problems that growth can contribute to. In fact, GDP often increases in the short term in response to environmental and social issues, for example, when reconstruction measures and healthcare interventions increase in the aftermath of environmental disasters. At the same time, GDP does not include the value of informal activities which contribute positively to people's well-being or the environment (for example, unpaid care work, walking by foot rather than driving a car and so on). There is no shortage of proposals for alternative indicator frameworks. Instead, the main challenge to adopting a new framework is that this would need to be

agreed internationally and that existing powerful infrastructures such as the United Nations-backed System of National Accounts would need to be replaced (Hoekstra, 2019; Van den Bergh, 2022).

Several initiatives have emerged that support governments, local authorities, businesses and other organisations in prioritising social and ecological objectives over economic growth or profit maximisation. For instance, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance was founded in 2018 and supports a group of Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGos) which have signed up to prioritise ecological and social objectives in policy making. The WEGos currently consist of New Zealand, Iceland, Finland, Scotland, Wales and Canada. 'Doughnut economics' refers to Raworth's proposal to design economies such that they move into the 'safe and just space for humanity' (Raworth, 2017, p 9), which means staying within planetary boundaries (Steffen et al, 2015) while also fulfilling all basic needs and other social objectives. The Doughnut Economics Action Lab[2] assists local authorities and businesses in adopting 'doughnut economics' (Raworth, 2017) evaluation and policy planning tools. Numerous local authorities, for instance, Amsterdam, Brussels, Barcelona, Grenoble and Cornwall, have created 'doughnut portraits' which evaluate social and ecological performance at the city or local authority level along local and global dimensions. This evaluation serves as a first step towards planning for improving social and ecological outcomes.

Research on the characteristics, functioning and outcomes of WEGos, doughnut economics or similar initiatives is only starting to emerge. However, first assessments indicate that these initiatives do not yet fully align with sustainable welfare criteria. For instance, Mason and Büchs (2023) find that while most WEGos seek to complement GDP with alternative indicators, none of them have abandoned GDP as a measure. While WEGos have also pledged to put more resources into improving social and ecological outcomes, they have not stopped pursuing economic growth. Other recent evaluations of WEGos come to similar conclusions (Hayden and Dasilva, 2022; McCartney et al, 2023). Comprehensive evaluations of doughnut economics initiatives are lacking so far and require further research (but see Wahlund and Hansen, 2022; Khmara and Kronenberg, 2023).

Reducing inequality

There are several reasons why the reduction of inequality is one of the key components of sustainable welfare policies. The first is that inequality might increase without intervention in a post-growth context; the second is that tackling inequality acts as a preventative measure, reducing demand for welfare expenditure in the long term, making welfare states more growth-independent; and the third is that needs satisfaction is easier to accomplish in a more equal society.

Several authors warn that inequality could increase in a post-growth context. Over the last decades, inequality has risen in many countries, including in Europe and the United States (Piketty, 2014; Chancel et al, 2022).[3] Piketty (2014) argues that without intervention, capital tends to accumulate and become more concentrated over time, leading to increasing inequality. Low growth rates can contribute to this process: if the rate of return on investment is higher than the economic growth rate, the proceeds of growth mainly benefit capital owners (Piketty, 2014). This pattern has occurred in many countries affected by rising inequality and could thus present a problem in a post-growth economy with zero or negative growth rates. However, the post-growth literature has consistently emphasised that redistribution and the achievement of social objectives would need to lie at the heart of post-growth strategies (Büchs et al, 2024). Post-growth economies would therefore fundamentally differ from economic crises in the existing growth-focused context, which are often associated with rising unemployment and austerity policies. Modelling by Jackson and Victor (2016) has demonstrated that income inequality can be stabilised or even reduced in the absence of growth if the substitutability of labour with capital is low. Progressive taxation can make an additional contribution to greater income equality in the context of low substitutability of labour with capital (Jackson and Victor, 2016).

Research has also shown that inequality often aggravates numerous social issues, including mortality rates, mental health problems, crime rates and so on (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2015). Inequality thus increases the demand for social expenditures to address these social issues. Tackling inequality therefore serves as a preventative measure as it reduces issues caused or worsened by inequality.

Finally, needs satisfaction for all is easier to achieve in more equal societies. In highly unequal societies, a high proportion of resources (energy, materials, financial resources) is allocated to serve the satisfaction of wants or desires that are above sufficiency levels. In a post-growth context, in which the throughput of energy and material resources is limited, such luxury consumption hijacks critical resources required for the satisfaction of basic needs of the majority (see Chapter 1).

Pre- and re-distributive policies that have been proposed in the sustainable welfare literature to reduce inequality include progressive income and wealth taxes; a more equal distribution of wages, salaries and assets; as well as 'consumption corridor' approaches which would set minimum and maximum incomes and/or consumption levels (Buch-Hansen and Koch, 2019; Fuchs, 2020; Gough, 2020). Some inequality-reducing policies could also contribute to making welfare states more independent from growth. For instance, taxes on wealth – such as on financial assets, property, land, inheritance, natural resources and so on – are thought to make state revenues less dependent on growth because these assets are stocks, not flows, unlike

income or consumption, which fluctuate more strongly with economic cycles (Büchs et al, 2024). And as previously mentioned, reducing the demand for social expenditure through preventative policies, of which the reduction of inequality is one important approach, can also make welfare states more resilient in a post-growth context.

Decoupling of work and welfare

Many scholars within the sustainable welfare literature have proposed policies that decouple welfare from work (Koch, 2022; Büchs et al, 2024). Decoupling welfare from work is regarded as important dependent on labour market participation, often in conjunction with 'welfare-to-work' and 'activation' policies (Serrano Pascual and Magnusson, 2007). However, current economic systems exhibit growth dependency in that keeping employment levels stable in a context of technological labour-saving developments requires continuous economic growth (Antal, 2014). Policies that focus on ensuring that everyone's basic needs are met, independent of labour market participation, can therefore facilitate growth-independence of welfare states. Examples of policies that have been discussed in this context include UBS and UBI or income guarantees (Gough, 2019; Coote and Percy, 2020; Büchs, 2021a). UBS would offer publicly or collectively provided basic services such as health and social care, education and housing – as well as policies that contribute to people's basic needs for home energy, transport and internet access – to everyone free of charge based on need. UBI would pay everyone in society a regular cash income to support needs satisfaction. If financed through redistributive income and/or wealth taxes, wealthy people would lose in net terms while less wealthy people gain. By supporting needs satisfaction through in-kind and cash income, unconditional on labour market participation, UBS and UBI have in common that they can contribute to a *decommodification* of labour. Greater independence from the labour market would also free up time that people can spend on other socially or ecologically beneficial activities, such as nurturing relationships, care, cultural and ecological conservation work or democratic participation, as well as energy-saving but time-intensive 'slow' travel and food practices.

UBS and UBI both have specific advantages and disadvantages. For instance, UBS directly caters for people's needs by providing basic goods and services while UBI provides cash. Needs satisfaction under UBI is thus dependent on market provision of the required goods and services at the right quality and cost, something that cannot be taken for granted (Coote and Percy, 2020; Büchs, 2021a). Another advantage of UBS is that public or collective providers can directly design the provision of these goods and services in an environmentally friendly way. How environmentally friendly the provision through UBI and markets is depends on the quality of

environmental regulations (Coote and Percy, 2020; Büchs, 2021a). However, a criticism of UBS is that it relies on public/collective definitions of needs and needs satisfiers. Critics are concerned that this could make UBS a 'top-down' or 'paternalistic' approach (Coote and Percy, 2020). UBS proponents have therefore stressed that democratic decision-making processes, user input and strong accountability mechanisms need to be embedded in the provision of UBS (Coote and Percy, 2020; Büchs, 2021a). In view of the different advantages and disadvantages associated with UBS and UBI, it has been argued that they could be combined if embedded in wider regulatory and institutional frameworks that limit their respective disadvantages (Büchs, 2021a). If combined with UBS, UBI would need to be 'partial' to contain cost, that is UBI would only contribute part of the resources required for subsistence, with the other part provided by UBS. In such a situation, UBI could cover needs that are difficult to address through UBS, for instance, where provision needs to be more diverse and responsive to personal circumstances such as food, clothing and other consumer items.

Working time reduction

Working time reduction and redistribution of work are other much-discussed proposals in the ecological economics and sustainable welfare literatures (Schor, 2005; Victor and Rosenbluth, 2007; Fitzgerald et al, 2018). Without intervention, unemployment is likely to increase in post-growth economies if labour-saving technologies continue to expand. Working time reduction would address this issue by generating additional jobs and redistributing work. One controversial issue is whether working time reduction should be implemented with or without income loss in line with reduced hours. A disadvantage of reducing income equivalent to the reduction in hours is that low-earning workers may not be able to afford such a reduction in pay and that such a reduction would compromise their needs satisfaction. However, reducing hours while retaining previous levels of pay would reduce the capacity for employers to free up jobs for other people. Whether or not pay will be reduced in line with the reduction of hours worked is also likely to influence the environmental impacts of working time reduction. The environmental impacts of working time reduction are affected by several factors, including the total hours of work in society and levels of productivity, which together determine the amount of goods and services produced. In addition, environmental impacts of working time reduction depend on what people would do with additional leisure time. If that time is spent on carbon-intensive activities such as high-carbon travel or other consumption, environmental impacts might actually increase. However, if people use additional leisure time for environmentally friendly but more time-consuming activities – such as travelling by foot, bicycle or public

transport, spending time with friends and family, caring for someone and so on – working time reduction is more likely to have positive environmental and social outcomes. It should be mentioned that some authors in the field advocate a reduction of productivity in the economy, which could increase the amount of work needed (for example, Mair et al, 2020). Here, the argument is that low-productivity work tends to be more environmentally friendly (for example, manual tasks or service sector activities require fewer energy inputs) and that it can be more fulfilling and conducive to people's health and well-being (for example, work in the health and social care, education and cultural sectors). Whether working time or productivity reduction would become more important in a post-growth context will also depend on how post-growth would impact on technological developments. However, in either scenario, sustainable welfare policies would aim to distribute work fairly and in a way that minimises unemployment and organise it such that it is as fulfilling and fairly paid as possible.

Discussion: challenges to sustainable welfare policies

Introducing sustainable welfare policies faces many challenges. Sustainable welfare approaches that advocate the prioritisation of social and ecological objectives over economic growth and profit maximisation in policy making and businesses challenge the very basis of welfare capitalism. Capitalism inherently relies on and generates economic growth because it forces capital owners to continually accumulate and then reinvest profits to reduce production costs and expand market shares to survive in the competitive market environment (Harvey, 2017). Prioritising social and ecological objectives in decision making in the public and private sphere therefore constitutes a fundamentally different logic to running the economy, one which would require a democratisation of economic decision making.

How the transformation towards sustainable welfare policies embedded in a post-growth economy could take place is not yet well conceptualised and understood (Knox, 2023). When it comes to thinking about transformation, the post-growth literature has so far mainly focused on the question of which strategies can and should be applied to advance post-growth economies (for example, Barlow et al, 2022). Following Erik Olin Wright's (2010) typology of 'anti-capitalist strategies', most of the authors contributing to this debate agree that a mix of strategies will be required, consisting of 'symbiotic' (reformist, operating within and through state institutions), 'interstitial' (civil society led, operating outside or beyond state and capitalist institutions), and 'ruptural' (revolutionary) strategies at organisational or local scales (Barlow et al, 2022). Promoting, adopting and implementing sustainable welfare policies through state institutions would represent 'symbiotic' strategies. The challenge for achieving system-level change is that it requires a transformation

of established power asymmetries and institutional path dependencies (Feola et al, 2021). Buch-Hansen (2018) has identified several 'prerequisites' that would need to exist for such transformational change to happen, including multiple 'deep crises', an 'alternative political project', a 'comprehensive coalition of social forces', and 'broad-based consent'. The presence of 'deep crises' is undeniable, and many advances have been made in formulating an alternative political project. What is less clear is whether there is a sufficiently broad 'coalition of social forces' and 'broad-based consent' among stakeholders and citizens to support such an alternative project.

It is therefore worth examining which actors might support sustainable welfare policies. Even though some governments have signed up in principle to support sustainable welfare principles (for example, the WEGos discussed above), no government currently fully pursues such policies (see, for example, Hayden and Dasilva, 2022; Mason and Büchs, 2023). The situation is similar when it comes to political parties: except for the more radical wings of some green parties, political parties across the spectrum remain focused on pursuing economic growth and hence social and environmental policies that are subordinated to this goal.

Both trade unions and employer organisations are also unlikely to support sustainable welfare approaches. For trade unions, growth-oriented employment policies and social protection systems are a cornerstone of welfare capitalism that they seek to preserve. Trade union positions might vary across sectors, however. For instance, public sector trade unions may be more open to sustainable welfare positions compared to those in private and especially high-carbon sectors.

Research and education are important fields of action in this area too, given that academics play a key role in providing policy advice and education systems shape the training of future policy makers and business leaders. Academic organisations that support sustainable welfare agendas have gained public visibility, such as the European and International Societies for Ecological Economics, and the International 'Sustainable Welfare and Eco-social Policy Network'. Professional social policy organisations such as the European Network for Social Policy Analysis, increasingly feature conference streams on social-ecological and sustainable welfare topics. Several universities in the world now offer ecological economics courses (which often cover social-ecological and sustainable welfare topics), for example, at the Universities of Leeds, Edinburgh, Vienna, Tolouse, Chile, Mexico and Vermont, to name a few.[4] However, the impact of these developments on policy making are hard to measure and likely to take time to manifest.

Furthermore, the power of actors sympathetic towards sustainable well-being to influence policy discourses, political decisions and business practices so far remains constrained by the dominant position of 'mainstream' actors. Large and powerful international organisations such as the United Nations,

International Labour Organization and World Bank do not publicly or as a whole support more transformational sustainable welfare policies. Since business leaders and the vast majority of economists within political institutions continue to be trained in neo-classical economics, growth-critical and sustainable welfare thinking remains at the margins within these institutions. International and national businesses in the high-carbon industry still act as extremely powerful lobby groups seeking to prevent, or at least water and slow down, government action on climate change (Lamb et al, 2020). Large private conservative media corporations continue to have a significant impact on political and economic discourses worldwide, downplaying the need for climate action, greater equity and social justice.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of sustainable welfare policies. These policies were presented as a special case of social-ecological policies in that they take seriously the assumption that an absolute decoupling of economic growth and environmental impacts will be difficult to achieve at the global level and at the speed required to meet ecological targets. Sustainable welfare policies therefore advocate that welfare states and social policies should be made more independent from economic growth. The policies discussed in this chapter include: the prioritisation of social and ecological goals over economic growth and profit maximisation; decoupling of work and welfare, for instance through UBS and UBI; working time reduction; and a reduction of social inequalities. It was argued that these four policy approaches can contribute to making welfare states more independent from growth, while they also support needs satisfaction for all within ecological limits. Prioritising social and ecological objectives over economic growth and profit maximisation does so explicitly, leading to alternative decision-making processes for allocating financial and other resources to achieving these goals. Decoupling work and welfare would support people's needs satisfaction independent from labour market participation. This could be an important measure since the overall demand for employment might fall in a post-growth context as long as productivity levels through labour-saving technologies increase. Working time reduction makes a similar contribution to needs satisfaction as it helps to redistribute paid work more evenly in this context. At the same time, working time reduction and policies that can help to decouple work and welfare are thought to contribute to more environmentally friendly time use and provisioning. Finally, reducing inequality through re- and pre-distribution is a cornerstone of sustainable welfare policies to make welfare states more growth-resilient by preventing social issues and reducing the demand for social expenditures, and by supporting needs satisfaction for all through a more needs-efficient allocation of resources.

As discussed in the last section, the transformation towards sustainable welfare policies faces significant challenges. It remains to be seen whether continued national and international polycrises will increase pressure for policy makers to search for new solutions, whether broader supportive political coalitions can be built, and whether broad-based public support for sustainable welfare policies can be achieved in the longer term.

Notes

[1] In this chapter, I use 'post-growth' as an umbrella term which covers several approaches, including degrowth, a-growth, doughnut and well-being economics.

[2] For more details, see https://doughnuteconomics.org/ [Accessed 14 November 2023].

[3] Income inequality within countries is at a historic high today, and even though income inequality between countries has slightly decreased since the 2008 financial crisis as low-income countries have been catching up, it is still vastly higher compared to the 1820s when measurements started (Chancel et al, 2022). Wealth inequalities are even more pronounced than income inequalities, and income and wealth at the very top have become more and more concentrated over time (Chancel et al, 2022).

[4] See here the list of courses provided by the International https://www.isecoeco.org/category/graduate-programs/and European Society of Ecological Economics https://ecolecon.eu/ecological-economics-courses-and-programmes/.

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13

Eco-social food policy design: getting food systems inside the doughnut

Jeroen Candel

Introduction

One of the most pressing challenges in eco-social policy design is bringing about a reform of the global *food system*.[1] As food system activities, from primary production to consumption, account for approximately a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, food system reform is vital to effective climate change mitigation (Crippa et al, 2021). Agriculture is a primary driver of land use change, causing the collapse of terrestrial ecosystems and a rapid decline of global biodiversity (Van der Esch et al, 2017), while overfishing endangers marine and freshwater ecosystems. Moreover, the food system's functioning is associated with water and air pollution, the depletion of freshwater and other natural resources, and an increased vulnerability to droughts and floods. Besides these pressing environmental impacts, the current food system has various negative impacts on the well-being of humans and animals. Almost a billion people are chronically undernourished, while over two billion more suffer from a lack of access to sufficiently nutritious food. At the same time, the spread of the Western diet has led to a global increase of obesity and diet-related disease, such as type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Finally, the distribution of wealth and power in the global food system has raised urgent questions about social injustices, as corporate concentration in the food system has arguably undermined the livelihoods of millions of farmers and workers (Clapp, 2021), as well as the exploitation of other animals in intensive livestock sectors. These impacts show that the linkage between ecological and social concerns are at the heart of food system debates.

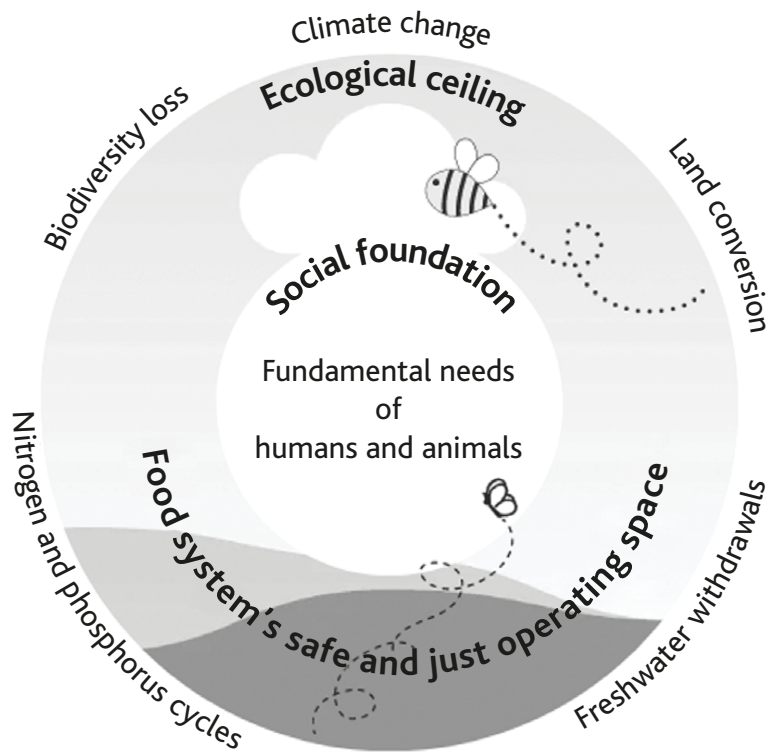
It is for these reasons that calls for a 'transformation' or 'transition' of the global food system have rapidly grown in strength in recent years. In 2021, the UN, for the purpose of debating such a transformation, organised the first-ever Food Systems Summit, although it was criticised for its lack of inclusivity (Clapp, 2021). The International Panel on Climate Change

(IPCC) highlighted a shift of diets away from animal-based products as well as the reduction of food waste and loss as two key directions to alleviate the food system's climate impacts. In the European Union (EU), the European Commission adopted the objective of realising a food system that has a neutral or positive environmental impact, while ensuring food security and public health, as part of its Green Deal agenda.

One way of envisioning these calls for a food system that contributes to both social and ecological objectives is to use Kate Raworth's (2017) metaphor of the *doughnut economy*. The central challenge of a food system transition, then, is to realise a food system that operates within planetary boundaries as well as adhering to a social foundation by respecting the fundamental rights and needs of humans and animals. This space 'inside the doughnut' may be considered a safe and just operating space for a future food system (see Figure 13.1).

Food system reform may not be possible without fundamental changes to the way in which the food system is *governed*, as current food and agricultural policy regimes have been dominated by vested interests and

Figure 13.1: Food system doughnut



Source: Adapted from Raworth (2017); De Boer et al (2019); RDA (2020)

neoliberal, productionist policy beliefs, often at the cost of broader social and ecological concerns. Following the emergence of food systems thinking and an increased sense of urgency, governments across contexts and levels have recently started to experiment with innovative governance arrangements and policy designs. Notable examples, which will be further described in the next section, include the emergence of urban food policies, the adoption of national food (security) strategies, and the EU's ambitious Farm to Fork agenda for food system change. Despite the high hopes surrounding these initiatives, however, considerable governance challenges remain. Drawing on the recent food policy literature as well as adjacent scholarships, this chapter discusses four of the most pressing among these governance challenges: the need for strengthened policy integration, diversifying policy framings, transition management and fostering food democracy. Without addressing these challenges, food system transitions may lack the pace and depth that is required to realise a safe operating space in time.

Promising food policy initiatives

The emergence of urban food policy

Cities have developed into the spaces in which, to date, the most ambitious and concrete food policy efforts have been undertaken. An increasing number of local governments across the globe have committed themselves to fostering local food system transitions and have adopted ambitious food strategies (Ilieva, 2017). A possible explanation for this engagement is that the local level is where symptoms of a malfunctioning food system – food insecurity, health inequalities, environmental degradation – are most visible, putting pressure on local decision makers to take action even if some of these issues do not fall within their traditional policy remits. Moreover, local governments operate at the level that is closest to citizens and companies and are therefore the most accessible administrative level to turn to for sharing concerns or when asking for public support for new societal initiatives. In various parts of the world, such as the EU and US, subsidiarity – the notion of resolving societal issues at the most immediate level if possible – is even a general principle of law.

As there are considerable differences in food system challenges, jurisdictional powers and political preferences across localities, research has found a large diversity in the goals and instruments local governments have adopted within their food policies (Barbour et al, 2022), though generally including both social and ecological objectives. The most common policy goals for local governments to focus on are the strengthening of short value chains, promoting more sustainable (urban) agriculture, stimulating local economic development, fostering food literacy and increasing food security

(Candel, 2019), many of which combine social and ecological food system concerns. In terms of instrument mixes, although there is a large variety in policy design, regulatory instruments tend to be less common, possibly because cities in most contexts lack regulatory jurisdictions. Instead, most popular policy instruments include the use of grants and subsidies, providing information and advice, spatial planning and facilitating access to (public) land and public procurement (Candel, 2019).

A much-cited example of an urban food policy frontrunner is the city of Toronto, Canada, in which the local food policy council, a network of citizens and local food system actors, played a pivotal role in introducing programmes to promote urban agriculture, organise food assistance and foster composting. In the Global South, the Brazilian City of Belo Horizonte has been widely lauded for its integrated food security approach, encompassing subsidised markets, school lunches and the procurement of local and sustainable produce.

Various national and international networks have contributed to international policy diffusion between local governments (Moragues-Faus, 2021). Perhaps the most influential of these networks is the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), which was set up during the World Expo of 2015 and has since grown in size. Cities subscribing to the MUFPP pledge to foster local food system transitions, in which they are assisted through annual conferences, awards and the development of a food policy monitoring framework (Sibbing et al, 2022).

The adoption of national food strategies

Compared to food policy development at local level, national governments have so far been less forthcoming in designing food system or food security strategies. 'Food policy' in that sense remains a rather fragmented domain, with agricultural, environmental, social policy and public health ministries typically having jurisdiction over only a subset of food system issues, causing major policy incoherencies. That said, following long-standing academic pleas for better integrated or more joined-up policy efforts (for example, Barling et al, 2002), a gradual turn of the tide seems visible in recent years, as an increasing number of governments have either adopted or been debating the adoption of comprehensive food strategies (Candel and Pereira, 2017).

In the Global North, recent examples of the adoption of national food strategies include those of Sweden (2016), Finland (2017), Canada (2019), the UK (2022) and Flanders (2022). Most of these strategies focus on a combination of economic, social and ecological objectives. For example, the 'Food Policy for Canada' prioritises six outcomes: i) vibrant communities, ii) increased governance spaces and partnerships within food systems, iii) improved food-related health outcomes, iv) strong indigenous food

systems, v) the reduction of environmental and climate impacts, and vi) inclusive economic growth. Whereas these strategies set out long-term food system visions and serve important agenda-setting functions, they have so far resulted in hardly any actual policy change, for example, redirecting financial incentives from unsustainable towards more sustainable and healthier food system practices. Quite the contrary, sustained austerity measures and economic downturns have resulted in increased concerns about food poverty in high-income countries and decreased the appetite for accelerated environmental action as citizens feel transition costs are shared unequally.

In the Global South, Brazil's Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) programme (2003) under the first Lula presidency has been the most lauded integrated food security strategy. Copied from Belo Horizonte's urban food security policy, Fome Zero was highly successful in reducing the prevalence of food insecurity in Brazil through a combination of direct aid, food education, subsidised restaurants, distributing micronutrients and supporting small family farms, among other measures. The Brazilian government subsequently invested in transferring its policy design to other contexts, notably sub-Saharan Africa (Marcondes and De Bruyn, 2015). Most sub-Saharan African governments have over time adopted integrated food or nutrition security strategies (Candel, 2018), often codesigned by international organisations and donors. However, many of these strategies have barely proceeded beyond paper realities due to a lack of institutional capacity, resources and political will (for example, Namugumya, 2021). In other places, such as South Africa, seemingly integrated strategies became heavily skewed towards an agricultural, productionist focus in their implementation phases (Pereira and Ruysenaar, 2012).

The EU's Farm to Fork Strategy

As food system drivers and outcomes transcend national jurisdictions, international collaboration is essential to mitigating current social and ecological pressures originating from the global food system. The European Union may well be the most ambitious international organisation in terms of designing international food systems legislation, while also sharing a large part of the responsibility for the historical development of the current malfunctioning global food system. As part of its overarching Green Deal agenda – aiming for climate neutrality by 2050 and decoupling economic growth from nature resource use while leaving behind no regions or population groups ('just transition') – the European Commission adopted the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy**,** which sets out its food system objectives and legal and non-legal actions to realise these. The strategy explicitly aims for reconciling ecological and social objectives, for example, by ensuring a decent living for farmers, fishermen and their families (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020).

Despite covering the whole value chain from primary production to consumption, the F2F Strategy is somewhat skewed towards the production side, as the EU has much stronger competences in the agricultural domain compared to food consumption, with the exception of labelling. Consequently, agricultural objectives are more clearly defined and complemented with more compelling legislative action compared to food environment, retailing and food consumption ambitions. The most conspicuous targets of the F2F Strategy include: i) a 50 per cent reduction of the use and risk of pesticides, ii) a 50 per cent reduction of nutrient losses and 20 per cent reduction of fertiliser use, iii) a 50 per cent reduction of sales of antimicrobials for agriculture and aquaculture, and iv) 25 per cent of total farmland under organic farming, all of which are to be achieved by 2030.

While setting out an ambitious policy agenda, at the time of writing, it remains an open question to what extent the Commission will be successful in getting its proposals adopted into legislation which is of similarly ambitious levels (Schebesta and Candel, 2020). The outbreak of the war in Ukraine has, for example, resulted in a major backlash against the Commission's legislative proposals on nature restoration and pesticide use, as a coalition of conservative politicians and agricultural interest groups have seized the momentum provided by the war to ask for a delay and watering down of environmental policies, invoking 'food security' concerns. At the same time, civil society movements and academics have argued that drought-induced harvest losses, a rapid deterioration of insect numbers and the exploitation of seasonal and illegal migrants in the EU's agricultural sector show that an accelerated transition of the EU's food system is key to safeguarding long-term food security.

There is also a considerable debate about the international dimension of the F2F Strategy. The European Commission aims to protect its farmers and industries from competition from countries with lower standards and has, in the absence of a well-functioning World Trade Organization (WTO), been considering increasing standards in free trade agreements or through due diligence legislation and so-called mirror clauses. Producers from low-income countries, however, fear that these unilateral efforts will restrict their access to the EU market, especially as they may lack the resources to change to more sustainable production methods.

Governance challenges

While the previous discussion shows that the food systems paradigm and food policy development have gained significant momentum in recent years, considerable governance challenges remain. This section elaborates four of these governance challenges, drawing on recent scholarship that has sought

to connect the food policy literature with adjacent theoretical debates in the political sciences and transition studies.

Policy integration

The adoption of overarching food strategies, be it on local, national or international levels, is only effective in steering food systems towards more sustainable outcomes if it is followed up by the integration of food system concerns across relevant policy domains. For example, shifting towards more sustainable food production practices generally requires agricultural, fisheries and environmental policy reform; increasing vulnerable people's access to food touches upon social policy schemes; while increasing people's 'food literacy' may require educational policy instruments. Apart from this horizontal policy integration challenge, there is a similar need for vertical coordination: as the previous section showed, food system competencies are spread across levels of government.

Following this quest for food policy integration, studies on the issue have given rise to broader theorisation about policy integration, connecting with adjacent debates on environmental policy integration, climate policy integrationand gender mainstreaming. Food policy scholars have, for example, contributed to debates on joined-up governance (Barling et al, 2002), conceptualising and operationalising policy integration (Candel and Biesbroek, 2018), and social mechanisms driving shifts of policy (dis)integration over time (Biesbroek and Candel, 2019). Building on this work, Candel and Pereira (2017) distinguish five key steps in fostering policy integration: i) constructing resonating policy frames that foster collective action; ii) formulating policy goals, involving the setting of priorities and questions of coherence between goals; iii) involving relevant sectors and levels so as to enable both horizontal and vertical coordination; iv) fostering connectivity between different jurisdictions in a polycentric governance landscape; and v) designing consistent policy instrument mixes that will eventually result in behavioural change across the food system.

Most studies on food policy development have found that, to date, an increasing number of governments have adopted broader and generally more coherent sets of policy goals on food systems, as exemplified by the adoption of food strategies, but that instrument mixes lag behind (for example, Candel, 2019; Sibbing et al, 2019). Regarding the latter, most governments have opted for relatively uncontroversial interventions, such as information campaigns or subsidy programmes, while more coercive, and possibly more effective, measures such as pricing mechanisms, regulation and abolition of subsidies for status quo practices have generally been avoided. Moreover, food policy development and implementation is frequently dominated by a single sector, such as agriculture in the case of South Africa, resulting in poor

coordination and skewed policy approaches. Similarly, as further explained in the next sub-section, policy framings have remained rather sectoral, favouring dominant policy beliefs over alternative food system framings.

It has proven particularly challenging to strike a new balance between social and ecological objectives in food policy making. Across contexts, agrifood policies have long been dominated by the protection of socio-economic interests of farmers and rural communities, often at the expense of vulnerable and Indigenous groups, animals and ecosystems. Despite a burgeoning scholarly literature on eco-social policy design (Mandelli, 2022), which emphasises the need for developing synergies between ecological and social considerations as, for example, promoted in the doughnut model, such ideas have not yet been translated into better integrated policy mixes. Even the EU's F2F Strategy, with its emphasis on a 'just transition', only pays lip service to such integrated policy design, as supportive policy instruments largely remain lagging.

Policy framings

Recent decades have witnessed the emergence of an extensive literature reflecting the discourses, paradigms and belief systems – here referred to as *policy framings* – underpinning the current food system. Studying the ways in which societal issues are framed is crucial for understanding how problem perceptions change over time, what issues make it to the agenda of decision makers, and how problem definitions shape solution spaces.

Food policy scholars have been rather critical of dominant framings within food policy debates, as they argue these ideational configurations legitimise the continuance of unsustainable and unjust food system practices. The political use of the concept of 'food security', for example, even though in theory also encompassing social and sustainability dimensions (Clapp et al, 2021), has been criticised for underpinning productionist and neoliberal approaches to tackling malnutrition, at the cost of more complex and multi-dimensional approaches that would include social and ecological dimensions (for example, Lang and Barling, 2012; Tomlinson, 2013). Similarly, critics of the EU's F2F Strategy have cited food security concerns in the aftermath of the Ukraine war to oppose green legislation that would foster a sustainable transition of the EU's food system (Candel, 2022a).

To counter hegemonic food policy framings, scholars and civil society movements have proposed alternative framings that more explicitly bring in eco-social dimensions such as 'food sovereignty', 'food justice' and 'food democracy', which draw attention to questions of democratic participation, social inequality and agro-ecological practices (for example, Hassanein, 2008; Patel, 2009; Smaal et al, 2021). Similarly, Raworth's doughnut economy model has become an increasingly popular frame to counter the dominant

economic logic underpinning modern food systems. At the same time, while these concepts have enriched debates on food systems – which one could argue is an ideational innovation in itself – and food sovereignty has been officially adopted as a policy objective in various places in the Global South, in most political systems they have not yet resulted in major policy and institutional change. Jackson et al (2021), for example, show how debates about the F2F Strategy remain dominated by understandings of food as a 'commodity' rather than alternative framings such as food as a 'human right' or 'commons'. Similarly, de Krom and Muilwijk (2019) found that out of five societal framings of sustainable food, 'business-as-usual' and 'technological optimism' perspectives proved dominant in Dutch food policy debates. Diversifying such policy frames in political arenas may be a prerequisite to governing food systems towards a safe and just operating space.

Transition management

A third governance challenge involves the governing or managing of food system transition processes, a subject that is central to the discipline of social-ecological transition studies (for example, Kemp et al, 2007; Loorbach, 2010). While transitions and transformational change have been conceptualised in different and sometimes competing ways, a key tenet of these fundamental and rapid societal and economic change processes is that they are disruptive, unpredictable and therefore accompanied by high degrees of uncertainty. This makes the political steering of transitions no easy task, also because the social gains and costs of a transition may not be distributed evenly, raising questions about 'justness'. Steering is further complicated by the unequal distribution of power between vested interests and innovative initiatives, or even future generations or non-human agents, in contemporary political systems. The fact that tomorrow's solutions and associated societal benefits are not yet known today means that short-term economic and political considerations tend to prevail in current food governance arrangements.

It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to review the entire body of scholarship on how best to manage transition processes. One could, however, synthesise the majority of recommendations under the slogan 'changing governance, governing change': a change of governance, including policies, institutions and leadership, is prerequisite to fostering more sustainable practices and outcomes. In terms of policies, this requires an enabling innovation system which fosters and incentivises emerging societal and economic initiatives through long-term and consistent legal standards, well-targeted public support, experimentation space and investments in the dissemination of knowledge, skills and science (confer Reichardt et al, 2016). Moreover, governments may steer markets towards more ecologically and socially sustainable outcomes by putting a price on undesired 'externalities',

for example, introducing the 'polluter pays' principle through emission pricing schemes. By abolishing public support to polluting or unhealthy practices, such as meat promotion campaigns in the EU, governments can shape a playing field in which more sustainable and healthier alternatives can scale up at an accelerated pace. The adoption of more generous social welfare schemes could dampen some of the income effects of these ecological policy efforts, particularly for groups with a lower socio-economic status, as such distributing the costs more evenly while increasing the perceived legitimacy of interventions (confer Mandelli, 2022).

Despite the bourgeoning literature on transition management and the recent emergence of food policies across levels of government, these have not yet resulted in a shift of public support away from the status quo towards supporting the food system's transformative potential. For example, Buitenhuis et al (2020) found that the EU Common Agricultural Policy system of hectare-based income support puts a brake on moving towards a system in which farmers would be rewarded for providing public goods. Moreover, most governments have so far been reluctant to take demand-side measures, such as through reshaping food environments, public procurement or fiscal interventions. Complementing agricultural policy with policy efforts further down the food system would be essential to get all relevant actors to adjust their social practices in a more or less concerted manner, and as such realise more societally beneficial outcomes.

Fostering food democracy

A fourth governance challenge in fostering a food system transition involves the lack of democratic participation of citizens and food system actors in decision making about food policy. Even many farmers, whose interest groups are generally considered to have strong relationships with decision makers, experience a considerable gap between political decision making and their farming practices (for example, Huttunen, 2015). This lack of involvement is problematic, as it negatively impacts the quality and legitimacy of policy outputs, for example, because (the linkages between) social and ecological concerns remain underrepresented. As a result, policy outputs are unlikely to bring about the scale of behavioural change that is necessary to realise more sustainable food system outcomes. This is obviously even more applicable to countries governed by non-democratic regimes. These democratic shortcomings have been particularly central in the food sovereignty scholarship, which has argued in favour of bringing food systems back under people's control, although what such control would entail concretely has remained somewhat obscure (Edelman, 2014).

To address food systems' democratic deficit, civil society and mostly local governments in various parts of the world have started experimenting

with new ways of involving citizens and food system actors into decision-making processes. What many of these experiments share is that they seek to reconcile ecological and social objectives in their attempts to future-proof food systems. Examples include the emergence of local and regional food policy councils, deliberative citizen summits and citizens' tribunals, such as the International Monsanto Tribunal. These initiatives have given rise to a nascent literature on 'food democracy'. The central assumption of this body of scholarship is that food democracy initiatives, by complementing more traditional representative modes of democracy, may result in larger citizen buy-in and better policy design, as such increasing the potential for collective action towards desired directions. Adjacent bodies of scholarship have reflected on how to also include the voices of non-human agents, such as animals or ecosystems, in such novel arrangements (for example, Darpö, 2021; Donaldson et al, 2021).

In spite of the high hopes surrounding food democracy initiatives and a rapidly growing body of scholarship, evidence on whether these initiatives indeed contribute to democratic goods and, ultimately, more effective and legitimate food policy remains sparse and fragmented. In a recent review of the state-of-the-art on food democracy initiatives' contributions to the democratic goods of inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement and transparency, Candel (2022b) found that participation seems to be highest among food system professionals, governmental actors and NGOs, whereas citizens from marginalised groups tend to be underrepresented. In terms of popular control, food democracy initiatives proved to have the strongest influence on agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation, while decision making and evaluation proved largely out of their hands. The degree of considered judgement (that is, the quality of deliberations) and transparency appeared to be largely overlooked in existing studies. These insights show that there is still much need for a more systematic and comparative research agenda on the emergence of food democracy, perhaps most importantly to inform more equitable designs of democratic innovations.

Conclusion

Fostering a transition towards a global food system that contributes to eco-social objectives is one of the greatest political challenges of our time. Not only is the food system itself rife with injustices, with billions of people suffering from food insecurity, changing the ways in which we produce and consume food is also central to solving adjacent problems such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. This chapter conceptualised this challenge as the quest for getting the food system 'inside the doughnut'.

On a positive note, the chapter has shown that there are promising initiatives towards food policies that pay more attention to the eco-social

interconnections in the food system and the detrimental impacts on planetary health. These initiatives range from local food policies to international strategies, such as the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy. Perhaps even more importantly, these political efforts complement and are complemented by bottom-up societal initiatives, such as community kitchens, community-supported agriculture and a plethora of events raising awareness about the food system. Moreover, global market forces seem to be getting increasingly interested in developing plant-based and other types of alternatives to animal products, suggesting that markets may rapidly respond if governments finally dare to change the incentives. An important political and research question that has remained largely unaddressed is to what extent and how these developments could be managed in a way that they would come to contribute to a 'just transition', in which eco-social costs and benefits would be fairly distributed.

Despite promising developments, the overall impact of the food system has remained largely unaltered, meaning that more effective public governance is required to bring about an accelerated transition. The third section of the chapter synthesised four governance challenges that need to be overcome in order to do so: fostering policy integration, diversifying policy frames, organising transition management and promoting food democracy. Moreover, while addressing these governance challenges, it would be important to also consider the interactions between the food system and adjacent systems, such as the functioning of social welfare states as well as biophysical earth systems. While further increasing complexity, the malfunctioning of various of these adjacent systems may be due to similar root causes – the dominance of neoliberal paradigms, regulatory capture, malfunctioning democratic institutions – which require a certain degree of *meta*-governance for resolution (confer Gjaltema et al, 2020). As such, food system reform could become a (more) prominent domain of investigation in a future eco-social research agenda.

Studies of the food system and food policy have evolved into a flourishing scientific field which is characterised by a high degree of inter- and trans-disciplinary learning. To date, this has resulted in a much better understanding of the feedback loops within and affecting the food system, as well as suggestions for governance arrangements and interventions that may allow more effective and equitable food governance. While this important work should continue, we have now arrived at a point where it is up to political decision makers to reap the harvest of this work and use their political craftmanship to realise a better future.

Note

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14

Combating residential energy poverty in existing dwellings: eco-social policies and sustainable welfare in Denmark and Ireland

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Introduction

Residential energy poverty (EP) is a significant challenge in many countries, including relatively wealthy ones. It has both ecological and social dimensions, and adopting an eco-social perspective reveals a range of important challenges which are not easily addressed by traditional social and environmental policies. For example, some lower-income households depend on fossil fuels because they cannot afford renewable energy systems. Similarly, their homes may be poorly insulated, causing them to consume more (fossil fuel) energy than would be the case if they were insulated. EP contributes to and exacerbates some significant social and environmental problems, including poor mental and physical health; social exclusion, stress and stigma; lower educational outcomes; and fossil fuel usage and energy consumption levels which are unhealthy for humans and the planet. Some climate mitigation strategies can have disproportionate negative effects on lower-income or vulnerable households and disproportionately benefit higher-income groups (Wang et al, 2016; Büchs et al, 2021; Lowans et al, 2023). These policies may undermine the effects of social policies aimed at improving the situation of EP households or even increase poverty (Schechtl, 2022). A *just transition* requires that mitigation strategies be progressive, that is, have a positive effect on those at the lower end of the income distribution, but some social policies to address energy costs have regressive distributional effects (Barrett et al, 2022).

Eco-social policies (ESPs) aim to tackle poverty and environmental problems (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Gough, 2017; Koch, 2018; Stamm et al, 2020). They intend to address the 'double injustice' (Walker and Day, 2012) where the poorest households who are least responsible for environmental damage are in the worst position to cope with and afford climate mitigation and adaptation. It would entail a shift away from a focus on strategies which

emphasise environmental behaviour change and education towards systemic issues of poverty and inequality (Büchs, 2021).

This chapter explores the extent to which ESPs to address residential EP are evident in two case study countries: Denmark and Ireland. These cases represent different welfare regimes in different climatic or geographic regions. The first section starts with a discussion of sustainable welfare, the conceptual underpinning of our analysis. This is followed by a review of the literature on EP. The subsequent sections provide an analysis of EP in each case and evaluate their residential energy policies and instruments to assess the extent to which ESPs are in place to retrofit the existing housing stock.

Data and methods

Our principal research method was secondary analysis of existing data. Following an extensive literature review, we conducted a comparative analysis of relevant policies and strategies in each of the case study countries. To contextualise this, we examined relevant data on the housing and welfare systems for each setting as well as the EP situation using the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and national-level databases. EU-SILC is the established source for statistics on material deprivation and poverty across the EU, and the paper draws on two indicators of EP from that dataset, available on the Eurostat website: i) inability to keep homes warm in winter; and ii) arrears on utility bills. Data on 'home uncomfortably hot in summer' was only collected in 2012, therefore we exclude this, but regular inclusion of this question in EU-SILC is essential to provide a more complete picture of residential EP. While there are some limitations to data on household perceptions of EP as an indicator (Bouzarovski et al, 2014), subjective experiences are important, because if people feel that they are not warm enough or not able to afford energy, they may view more extreme coping mechanisms as legitimate, which could lead to other health and social problems (Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015, p 152).

Sustainable welfare and ESPs

Many social policies are disconnected from environmental and climate policies, which can result in substantial ecological footprints for welfare states. Hirvilammi and Koch (2020, p 448) argue that 'welfare states should be seen as embedded in eco-systems and in need of respecting the regeneration capacity of the biosphere'. Calls for more sustainable welfare have been increasing, including in the energy sector (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Gough, 2017). Sustainable welfare systems have been defined as the 'satisfaction of basic human needs within ecological limits in an intergenerational and global perspective' (Koch and Mont, 2016, p 107). They involve policy

integration – linking social and environmental policies – to develop ESPs which protect vulnerable social groups from the impacts of environmental challenges and policies while also addressing the environmental impacts of social policies. Progress on this policy integration is limited (Zimmermann and Graziano, 2020). Reasons for this include issues of compatibility and trade-offs between social and environmental challenges (Fritz and Koch, 2014); challenges for political actors promoting ESPs (Domorenok and Trein, 2024), including complexity of coordination across policy domains (Cotta, 2024), and power differentials of social groups in their capacity to influence the development of ESPs (Zimmermann, 2024). Domorenok and Trein (2024, p 76) highlight 'the need to ensure consistency, coherence and congruence between goals, instruments, and subsystems that deal with both environment and social policy matters'. Much of the early scholarly work on ESPs was impeded by being normative rather than descriptive (Cotta, 2024, p 3). However, Mandelli's (2022) descriptive and analytical work makes some advances on this. He defines ESPs as: 'public policies *explicitly* pursuing both environmental and social policy goals in an *integrated* way' (p 7, italics in original). He creates a typology of ESPs based on i) the direction of ESP integration: reactive (socialising the environmental welfare state) or proactive (greening the welfare state); and ii) links to economic growth: investment (contributing to growth) or protection (not contributing to growth). This results in four types: reactive eco-social protection policies, reactive eco-social investment policies, preventive eco-social protection policies and preventive eco-social investment policies (Mandelli, 2022). This analytical clarity may help progress ESPs.

Residential EP

Residential EP is considered to be a function of energy prices, low and unstable income, dwelling energy inefficiency, poor dwelling quality, energy-inefficient appliances and the specific energy needs of households (Hills, 2012; Snell et al, 2018; Oliveras et al, 2021). Structural determinants of EP include policies and markets for energy, housing and labour as well as political, economic and welfare policies (Karanikolos et al, 2013; Bouzarovski, 2014; Dagoumas and Kitsios, 2014; Fitzpatrick, 2014; Marí-Dell'Olmo et al, 2017). Existing research identifies the wide range and severity of its social and environmental impacts. Low-income households spend a much higher proportion of income on energy than other households, which reduces their capacity to purchase other essential goods (Snell et al, 2018). There is substantial evidence of the negative impacts of EP on the physical and mental health of adults and children (Healy, 2003; Hernandez, 2016; O'Meara, 2016; Peralta et al, 2017;; Thomson et al, 2017; Bosch et al, 2019; Da Silva-Pedroso et al, 2024). Households unable to keep their homes adequately warm most

of the time are almost twice as likely to visit a doctor and twice as likely to use a hospital outpatient department compared with those who are able to heat their homes (Evans et al, 2000). EP is linked to increased stigma, social isolation and stress, each of which detracts from health (Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015). An increased likelihood of depression among parents experiencing EP is linked with negative child outcomes (Mohan, 2021). Studying in cold, damp, ill-lit environments reduces educational achievement (Marmot Review Team, 2011). Low-income households are more likely to use polluting fuels with negative effects on residential and neighbourhood air quality and greenhouse gas emissions (Santamouris, 2016). Their use of coal or wood results in higher likelihood of respiratory disease than energy-poor households connected to district heating (Sokolowski et al, 2020). The inability to cool the home is also crucial due to heat-related illnesses and ambient temperature mortality rates (Baccini et al, 2008).

Existing research suggests some eco-social solutions are limited for households at risk of EP. Many low- and middle-income households dependent on fossil fuels cannot afford to change energy systems or adopt measures to reduce energy use and emissions (Pye et al, 2015). Retrofitting loans are inappropriate for low-income households, as Middlemiss and Gillard (2015) find that taking on debt is considered only in 'hard times' and they cannot guarantee a steady income to pay back loans. Lack of social support makes a financial risk like taking on debt with an energy supplier very difficult. By contrast, more successful strategies might adopt area-based approaches, building capacity among community organisations and local authorities to address retrofits in 'hard to treat' properties (Bouzarovski and Petrova, 2015, p 37).

EP contextualised: Denmark and Ireland

The countries examined here represent contrasting cases (Table 14.1). Each experienced substantial energy price inflation since 2021 due to the war in Ukraine, but 2022 prices were highest in Ireland. Denmark is a social democratic welfare regime, while Ireland is generally classified as liberal. There are significant differences in poverty risk between them. However, the differential impacts of tax and social transfers significantly reduce this risk in both cases, so that after transfers there was little difference in their poverty risk (12 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively). Housing quality is similar in each case. However, these indicators do not cover insulation, and poorly insulated housing is a significant part of the problem in Ireland due to the later and more limited regulations there (1990 in Ireland versus 1976 for Denmark). Indicators of EP are available from the EU-SILC: ability to keep one's home warm and going into arrears with utility bills. In 2022, the proportion of households unable

Table 14.1: Country profiles

	Denmark	Ireland
Region	Northern Europe	Western Europe
Climate	Temperate Oceanic	Temperate Oceanic
% in dwelling with leaking roof, damp walls, floors, foundation, rot in window, floor*	16.8	16.6
% at risk of poverty *after* social transfers**	12.4	14
End-user energy price € per kWh: electricity (gas)***	35.56 (13.51)	47.12 (16.22)
Welfare regime	Social Democratic	Liberal
% unable to keep home warm+	5	7.2
% in arrears with utilities++	3.5	10.6

Sources: * EU-SILC ilc_mdho01 (2020); ** EU-SILC ilc_li02 (2022); *** Household energy price index 2022; +EU-SILC ilc_mdes01 (2022), ++ EU-SILC ilc_mdes07 (2022)

to keep their homes warm was higher in Ireland (7 per cent) than in Denmark (3 per cent). However, these national figures mask the fact that high proportions of poor households in each jurisdiction experienced EP problems (Table 14.2). Ireland has lower rates for poor households than Denmark, but poor households in Ireland have a more significant problem with utility bill arrears than their Danish counterparts. Some of the worst figures on both indicators involve households with dependent children. There are variations in the recognition, definition and approaches to EP in each country. In Ireland, EP has been on the agenda since the late 1980s (Healy, 2003). It is currently defined as being when a household spends more than 10 per cent of its income on energy (DECC, 2022), by which standard 29 per cent were experiencing this problem in 2022, the highest rate since 1994–1995 (Pillai et al, 2022). The Danish case is worth highlighting because it illustrates how national figures and household survey data underestimate EP among more vulnerable groups. For example, 35 per cent of poor households with three or more adults and dependent children and 29 per cent of poor households with two adults and three or more children could not keep warm (Table 14.2), yet there is no official definition or indicators for EP in their National Energy and Climate Plan. Long-standing building insulation regulations provide housing with high energy standards, and widespread use of combined heat and power offers affordable district heating, plus a social democratic welfare system means relatively few people are socially distressed. Yet, case

Table 14.2: Characteristics of poor households experiencing energy poverty (%)

Poor and unable to heat	Denmark	Ireland
Three or more adults with dependent children	35.2	0
Two adults, three or more children	28.9	3.8
Single	23	27.7
Single adult with dependent children	9.7	15.8
Two adults younger than 65 years	6	11.1
Poor and in arrears	**Denmark**	**Ireland**
Three or more adults with dependent children	0	47.8
Two adults, one dependent child	0	45.7
Single adult, dependent children	26.9	36.1
Two adults, two dependent children	0	30
Two adults younger than 65 years	4.3	19.2
One adult younger than 65 years	8	17.3
Two adults, three or more dependent children	16.6	15.1
Single	6.6	14.7
One adult 65 years or older	3.6	12.4

Sources: EU-SILC ilc_mdes01 (2021); EU-SILC ilc_mdes07 (2022)

studies reveal problems in peripheral regions with ageing populations, declining housing markets and poor-quality housing (Jensen, 2017). Some vulnerable groups migrate to these regions due to unaffordable housing elsewhere and welfare cuts; there, they live in poor-quality private rented housing, which is cheaper than social housing in these regions. Struggling to keep warm, many apply for social housing for winter but move again when it is warmer (Byplan Nyt, 2017). Hidden EP is a problem in Ireland too (for example, Kennedy and Winston, 2019).

Current residential EP policies in Denmark and Ireland

This section presents the range of measures to address residential EP in each jurisdiction (Table 14.3; Table 14.4). Measures may have ecological goals (reduce emissions and so on), social goals (meet the needs of more vulnerable social groups, such as those on lower incomes) or eco-social goals (aim to do both). Policies may have unintended consequences, so environmental measures may have socially regressive outcomes, for example, disproportionately benefiting higher-income groups. Similarly, social measures may have negative environmental outcomes, for example, reducing indirect taxes on fossil fuels decreases cost but increases emissions.

Table 14.3: Current ecological, social and eco-social policies to address energy poverty in Denmark

Eco	Social	Eco-social
• Energy retrofitting grants ('*Bygningspuljen*')	• Heat aid for pensioners (permanent scheme)	• Local initiatives that indirectly reduces EP (for example, outreach to vulnerable families living in poor conditions) and efforts to prevent housing speculation (for example, removal of vacant single-family houses)
• Local climate and energy programmes to motivate local homeowners towards energy retrofitting and to shift energy supply	• Targeted heating allowance (new scheme) • Energy cost deferment scheme (new scheme)	• The National Building Fund initiates large renovation schemes in the social housing sector that include energy improvements

Denmark

Social measures: For many years, a national heat aid scheme has been in operation, where pensioners can apply for subsidies if heat costs exceed a certain amount. Following the energy crisis in 2021, a 'heat cheque' was established, aiming to help the hardest hit households with their energy bills in 2021–2022, and this was extended in the first part of 2023. This is a targeted scheme with a single payment of €500 to approximately 320,000 households with incomes below €75,000 per year. It also targets households in the following categories: heated by gas boilers; located in areas with district heating with a share of gas over 65 per cent or a combination of gas and heat pumps that results in the same increases in prices; or with electric radiators or heat pumps as the primary heat source, with a corresponding price increase. The cheque is paid automatically to the target group, and recipients are identified by building and person registers. In the first round, flaws in the registers led to payments to households that did not qualify. In the 2023 round, households could apply for the cheque if they belonged to the target group which resulted in 2,000 households automatically being grant-aided, and 34,000 applications.

An 'energy cost deferment scheme' was introduced in 2021 that made it possible to defer a portion of energy bills for four years, after which payment of the amount plus 2 per cent interest was due. The scheme ended in 2023 but repayments are ongoing. Each of these social measures helps keep costs down but fails to solve the cause of high energy bills.

Ecological measures: To improve the energy performance of existing buildings, '*Bygningspuljen*' (the building scheme) was introduced in 2018 for dwellings with Energy Performance Certificates E, F or G. In 2023 it was divided into a heat pump scheme and an energy retrofitting scheme.

The latter gives subsidies to improve insulation, windows and ventilation. Before that, different schemes had been in operation, such as a one-stop shop for energy retrofitting, which had limited success, and local authority schemes to part-subsidise energy retrofitting. In general, those arrangements tended to target homeowners with some resources and, to a lesser extent, low-income households. Under the 'heat cheque' initiative, gas boilers are no longer installed in Danish households, and the roll-out of district heating has increased. However, 2023 gas price deflation meant shifting to district heating was more expensive and less attractive for many homeowners.

Eco-social measures: Initiatives to improve the residential energy efficiency of low-income families are rare in Denmark. However, some municipalities in peripheral regions with shrinking populations have introduced outreach initiatives to assist low-income families at high risk of EP. These tenants are renting poor-quality dwellings from private landlords, and some municipalities are declaring the houses unsuitable for living, demanding the owner renovate or demolish it (condemnation), and in some cases offering to demolish the house using national subsidies. In the public housing sector, continuous efforts to improve energy standards are made via the National Building Fund, which uses rental income to upgrade buildings, including energy performance. Under a national agreement from 2021 to 2026, energy saving measures have been prioritised.

Ireland

Social measures: Several measures target vulnerable groups in Ireland to support them with energy costs. These have no environmental dimension, and expenditure on them exacerbates emissions as 86 per cent of Ireland's energy comes from fossil fuels (SEAI, 2023). These measures include a long-standing 'fuel allowance' scheme which is a winter months, means-tested measure to assist low-income households in receipt of social protection and those over 70 years with fuel costs. Another means-tested scheme (the household benefits scheme) operates throughout the year to assist older and disabled people with the cost of electricity and gas. Finally, a one-off payment for exceptional heating or electricity costs can be obtained via the means-tested additional needs payment scheme for those on low incomes or in receipt of social protection. Those with 'medical heating needs' in receipt of social welfare can obtain support for heating costs throughout the year. All these schemes operate through the Irish social protection system, which is heavily reliant on means testing. During the current energy crisis, a new universal measure (the electricity costs emergency benefit scheme) has been introduced whereby all households are given electricity credits via energy suppliers. In addition, two energy supplier obligations are in place. First, the Commission for the Regulation of Energy Utilities (CRU) operates a

universal moratorium on disconnections for vulnerable customers, defined on medical, age and disability grounds, from March to November each year. Second, companies cannot disconnect those who depend on electric equipment for health, independent living or age reasons. Customers must register for these schemes, and the CRU is trying to increase registrations. In addition, energy suppliers can sign up to a voluntary code whereby they refrain from disconnecting 'engaging customers' who are in arrears or at risk of disconnection. Finally, current policy responses include a reduction in value-added tax on electricity and home heating fuels, which exacerbates existing subsidies for burning fossil fuels, has a significant cost to state revenue in terms of taxes foregone and is regressive in its distributional outcomes. The gains are largest for lower-income households proportionally more affected by price increases, but most of the costs are due to higher-income groups who spend more on fuel (Barrett et al, 2022, p 23).

Ecological measures: Improving the energy efficiency of the Irish housing stock is essential given the late and limited introduction of energy regulations. The establishment of the national energy agency (SEAI) in 2002 resulted in the introduction of a range of schemes involving grants for homeowners covering partial costs of retrofitting. Similarly, there is a solar panel grant for owners of homes built before 2021 and a tax relief for owners wishing to renovate their homes. The latter has ended but claims for work completed can still be made. These schemes are all socially regressive as only wealthier households can afford them due to partial cost coverage, the requirement for up-front payment or grant paid up front, but there are inflationary impacts on costs due to delays in the work being conducted.

Eco-social measures: Local authorities have been energy retrofitting a portion of their housing stock over the years, which has benefited some of their tenants. They have also operated a long-standing housing aid scheme for low-income older homeowners, which could include insulation. In addition, the SEAI now operates full-cost schemes for low-income homeowners of dwellings built before 2006, at risk of EP and in receipt of certain social welfare supports. They also have a grant for private landlords who wish to introduce one or two energy improvements and a one-stop-shop grant for those wishing to apply for a group of measures. A home renovation tax relief for private landlords was introduced; this has now ended but claims can still be made. It is unclear what proportion of the work constituted 'energy retrofitting'. A similar point can be made regarding i) a grant for refurbishing vacant or derelict private homes for private use or renting and ii) a local authority repair and lease scheme targeting owners of vacant dwellings with financial support for the work as long as the property is available for social renting. While these schemes increase the value of the homes for landlords who can afford them, they can benefit renters if the property remains in the rental sector. Community-level approaches are more efficient, and the

Table 14.4: Current ecological, social and eco-social policies to address energy poverty in Ireland

Eco	Social	Eco-social
• Energy retrofitting grants: homeowners	• Fuel allowance: means tested; for those receiving social welfare or aged more than 70 yrs; winter months	• Housing aid for older people (means tested, homeowners, some insulation)
• Solar panel grant: owners of pre-2021 homes	• Household benefits: means-tested electricity/gas support for older/disabled people and carers; all year	• Local authority repair and lease: owners of vacant units, €80,000 per unit including furniture, social housing
• Better energy homes scheme: retrofitting grants for 1–2 items; homeowners; not full cost, payment after	• Heating supplement: social welfare and medical heating needs (no fixed rate/duration)	• Social housing retrofit: energy efficiency (insulation, heating system)
• One-stop shop energy upgrade grants: group of measures; homeowners; up-front partial payment (80%); inflation, pay more	• Additional needs: means test, low income/social welfare; one-off exception for heating/ electricity costs; no specified rate/time lag	• Warmer homes scheme: free energy upgrades for homeowners of pre-2006 homes at risk of EP and on particular social welfare benefits
• Home renovation incentive: tax relief for homeowners (ended, but claims can still be made)	• CRU: universal moratorium on disconnections mid-Dec–mid-Jan; moratorium for vulnerable customers (medical, age, disabilty/health) Nov–March	• Better energy homes scheme: retrofitting grants for 1–2 items; homeowners and private landlords; not full cost, payment after
	• Energy suppliers' voluntary code (7/12): will not disconnect engaging customers in arrears and at risk of disconnection	• One-stop shop; energy upgrade grants for group of measures; homeowners and private landlords; up-front payment but not 100% (80%); inflation, applicant pays more
	• Energy suppliers and vulnerable customers: cannot disconnect if dependent on electric equipment on health/independent living/ age grounds; self-register	• Community energy grant scheme for rental properties
	• Electricity costs emergency benefit scheme (universal)	• Better energy communities: community-level (% of homes at risk of EP)
	• Reduced VAT on fuel: socially regressive and negative environmental impact	• Home renovation incentive: tax relief for landlords (ended, but claims can still be made)
		• Vacant property refurbishment grant: €50,000 for vacant homes; up to €70,000 for derelict ones; recipients must live in/rent property after refurbishment

SEAI has a scheme for rental properties and one for communities where a proportion of dwellings are at risk of EP. Finally, under the energy efficiency obligation scheme, energy suppliers can obtain credits if they assist owners at risk of EP with home improvements.

Conclusion

Denmark and Ireland have a long history of socially regressive ecological measures and ecologically regressive social welfare schemes. While ESPs are emerging in both countries, there is a need for more of the explicitly integrated ESPs as suggested by Mandelli (2022), including reactive eco-social protection policies, reactive eco-social investment policies, preventive eco-social protection policies and preventive eco-social investment policies. However, both countries would really benefit from more reactive eco-social investment policies, which could involve prioritising funding for area-based approaches to full-cost retrofitting of the homes of lower-income and vulnerable households. This would be an equitable solution while shortages of qualified labour and supplies exist. In both countries, more research is required to explore how to accelerate these and other kinds of ESPs.

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15

Synergies and trade-offs between social and green public procurement

Miriam Hartlapp

Introduction

Public procurement refers to the regulation and governance process 'by which public authorities, such as government departments or local authorities, purchase work, goods or services from companies'.[1] It applies to anything from purchasing footballs for public schools, to the supply of medical equipment, to large-scale infrastructure tenders. Over the last decades public procurement has gained in importance. Privatisation of public production and outsourcing of formerly public services increased the share of GDP spent via public procurement (Hartlapp, 2020, p 77). The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated the importance of public buying to deliver services and implement policies that directly affect citizens. Not least, the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility boosted public investment and debates about economic sovereignty, underlining the role of states' strategies and practices when purchasing. This chapter attempts to contribute to understanding what studying public procurement has to offer for the eco-social nexus perspective. To this end, it proposes to conceptualise green and social procurement along a sectoral and a cross-cutting dimension, and to assess possible synergies and trade-offs between green and social goals in substantive policies, and in organisation and governance.

What constitutes the eco-social nexus perspective? There are a multitude of perspectives and definitions on the eco-social nexus. They share an interest in the challenges the welfare state faces and the potentials it encounters given the increasing importance of climate change and ecological considerations (Meadowcroft, 2005). The theoretical focus is on the relationship between the economic, the social and the environmental spheres, which each follow their own goals and rely on their own principles of performance. Mandelli (2022, pp 337–338) highlights that the three spheres can interconnect differently: in a 'green growth' or 'just transition' perspective, growth dynamics should

be greened, but without questioning the predominance of the economic sphere; a 'balanced perspective' understands the three domains to be of equal importance; and 'degrowth' or 'post-growth' approaches put environmental concerns first. The relative importance of and the relationship between these three spheres is central to understanding public procurement policy.

What, then, does the topic of public procurement offer for debates on the eco-social nexus? First, given the volume of spending, public procurement is a public policy that can play an important role in addressing the challenges and exploiting the potentials of the eco-social nexus. In 2021, OECD countries spent almost 15 per cent of their GDP on procurement, much of it in sectors related to the welfare state (OECD, 2023, p 121). With its enormous buying power, public procurement is considered an important lever for a green and sustainable transition. Examples are utilities and waste management that orient towards higher ecological standards, low carbon emission vehicles purchased for public transport or public constructions using ecological building and insulating materials.

Second, public procurement is also of interest to the eco-social nexus from a conceptual and theoretical perspective. Public procurement is widely considered an economic policy. This chapter argues that it is also used to pursue environmental and social public policy agendas. The economic sphere dominates where public procurement policy assures an exclusive market orientation by emphasising competitive pricing. According to many, this is the best remedy to avoid the mismanagement, nepotism and corruption that leads to losses of taxpayers' money. However, the state can also procure strategically when purchasing decisions are not made on the basis of price but by considering criteria that support other public policy goals. The literature refers to these *strategic goals* also as 'sustainable', 'secondary' or 'horizontal' goals (for example, Hafsa et al, 2022). Among these strategic goals, green and social goals are of particular importance for the eco-social nexus. Analytically, green and social goals are similar in constituting a contrast to public procurement as focused on price only and putting the economic sphere first. Yet, where competitive pricing is not the only or even the primary goal of public procurement, this raises questions as to the relative importance of the social and environmental sphere. Meeting different strategic goals at the same time can be challenging, for example, the decision whether to purchase emission-friendly products or those produced in sheltered employment by minorities.

The chapter offers a conceptual contribution that addresses these questions one after the other. It starts off by making explicit the analytical perspective on procurement as public policy and regulation. Next, it sketches the importance and development of sectoral and cross-sectoral social and green procurement in the EU and OECD world. This is followed by a section dedicated to the relationship between social and green procurement, offering

a conceptualisation and assessment of possible trade-offs and synergies. Finally, the last part concludes the discussion.

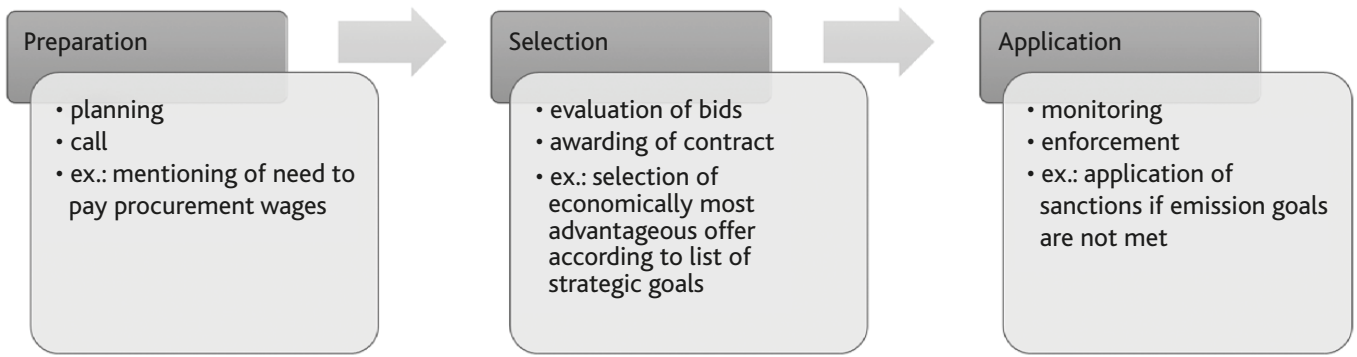
Analytical perspectives on public procurement

It is not possible to discuss the eco-social nexus in public procurement without offering some more general information on public procurement that clarifies the analytical perspective of this chapter. First, public procurement is studied as a public policy. It is not a new feature of modern states: For many decades it has been part of public policy in the sense that governments regulate for and decide about public purchasing to affect the economy and society. This is visible in an expansion of its volume, rulemaking and bureaucratic structures, as well as the set-up of agencies and governance networks in procurement. Public procurement is a contested policy, displaying deeply grounded perspectives on the role of the state and featuring complex patterns of electoral politics (Dahlström et al, 2021) and of support and opposition, for example, between countries (Kono and Rickard, 2014) or between government and challenger parties (Hartlapp, 2024).

Second, public procurement is studied from a regulation perspective. Regulation as opposed to legislation involves a potentially greater range of collective actors. In procurement, the state is not only the buyer but also sets the rules of the game for private and other public actors. Public actors as the regulated are officials in other portfolios or at lower levels of government, such as municipalities or towns, where the largest part of actual procurement takes place (64 per cent of EU procurement spending, according to OECD, 2021). In addition, in public procurement there is an increasing number of intermediaries (for example, Barraket, 2020). Intermediaries broker between actors, but at the same time constitute and structure interactions when they certify products, rank and rate bidders, label products, gatekeep access, screen behaviour, monitor performance or blow the whistle on misbehaviour (Abbott et al, 2017). Complementary regulation, such as guidelines that specify legislative standards or codes of conduct that regulate implementation, can also be formulated by other actors. Typical examples are business interests and trade unions. What is more, the regulation perspective comprises the formulation of rules as well as their monitoring and enforcement. Thus, more than a legislation perspective, it goes beyond what is 'in the books' to stretch the policy cycle and include potential impact (Selznick, 1985).

The procurement process runs from preparation to selection and application (see Figure 15.1). It starts with the planning and formulation of a call for tenders at the preparation stage. The authority purchasing goods, services and works can set social or green procurement goals as compulsory or facultative, or they can be entirely absent at this stage. During the selection

Figure 15.1: Stages of public procurement process



process, evaluation and awarding of the contract can follow a list of strategic goals made explicit ex-ante, increasing their potential impact, or bids can be evaluated against goals more inductively. Where the only criterium is the lowest price, goals seeking wider environmental or societal benefits are, by definition, excluded. Rules can require considering price first and social or green goals only afterwards or at the same time, altering the influence of other goals. Ambitious regulation might apply a tender qualification model that integrates strategic procurement goals at the front end of the selection process, thereby directly altering competition for awarding the contract (McCrudden, 2007). A strategic goal that seems important when a new rule is drafted, however, might matter little in practice due to a narrow field of application or a lack of enforcement. Finally, rules have to be monitored, assessed, sanctioned or enforced by other means. Importantly, there is a direct steering capacity of procurement rules along the cycle. Frequently, we also observe a substantial indirect effect when a large number of competing bidders change their future behaviour to conform with government goals in calls for tenders (Hartlapp, 2020, pp 69–70).

Importance of and developments in social and green procurement

Social procurement: importance in volume and historical significance

OECD states spend on average almost 13 per cent of their GDP via public procurement; among EU member states the average is almost 15 per cent. However, there are large differences between countries, ranging from almost 21 per cent in the Netherlands to less than 7 per cent in Costa Rica (Table 15.1). The importance of public procurement for the welfare state is both sectoral and cross-cutting. Starting with the sectoral view, in most countries the greatest share of public procurement is spent on social functions like health, education and social protection (31.9 per cent, 10.7 per cent, and 9.8 per cent averages for 2021; confer Table 15.1). Thus, much of our welfare states are enacted through public procurement, for example, regarding social services such as elderly care or kindergarten, infrastructure for public hospitals, and purchasing of medical equipment, masks or employment services. This sectoral distribution is relatively stable across countries, with health showing the highest share of public purchasing in all OECD countries but Switzerland, the US and Romania. Turning to the cross-cutting view on *social procurement*, we can distinguish different social goals. Historically, maximum working hours have the longest tradition. They date back to the 19th century in the US, when President Van Buren issued an executive order on a 'Ten Hour Work Day' in public works (McCrudden, 2007). Soon, requirements to respect minimum wages and other working conditions, such as health and safety standards or collective agreements, followed in the

US and many other countries (for example, Sack and Sarter, 2018). Later, social criteria expanded to cover the insertion of underrepresented groups in the labour market, focusing on ethnic minorities (Noon, 2009), the unemployed or the disabled (Conway, 2012). These social goals are mostly employed in purchasing works and sometimes services. A more recent development is social goals that focus on goods and address their socially sustainable production according to International Labour Organization (ILO) core labour standards.

Hartlapp (2020, p 78) conceptualises the different social goals as 'production sub-regime', 'insertion sub-regime' and 'product sub-regime'. The 'production sub-regime' regulates the conditions under which goods and services are produced for the state and covers the above-mentioned working conditions and wage regulation as well as gender equality measures. The 'insertion sub-regime' regulates access to the labour market for economically disadvantaged groups like apprentices, the disabled, the unemployed, veterans and war widows/widowers, as well as minorities. Percentage goals, set-asides and mandatory purchasing for one or all of these groups serve as instruments through which the goals can be put into practice. The 'product sub-regime' regulates goods and services for a more just and solidary society through barrier-free infrastructure and the above-mentioned application of ILO core labour standards when supplying, producing, assembling or handling products in other countries and down the supply chain (Hartlapp, 2020, p 78). Countries differ in the relative importance of sub-regimes depending on their existing welfare states, institutions and political interests.

In the 1970s to 1990s, international rules and European directives turned against the use of procurement as a broader public policy instrument. Strategic goals were considered to distort markets, add unnecessary complexity and increase prices. Many countries favoured a strengthening of the market. This has changed over the last 20 years, and strategic goals are subsequently reintegrated into public procurement regulation (see review article by Hafsa et al, 2022). Today, governments highlight the potential of social goals to incite change in their economies.

In sum, social procurement is constituted by a sectoral as well as by a cross-cutting perspective. In all OECD countries the greatest share of public procurement is spent on social functions. Social goals apply across sectors and are of historical importance, with an increasing use in the last two decades. However, overall, the economic sphere continues to dominate over the social sphere in public procurement.

Green procurement: a latecomer easing the ecological transition

The EU defines *green public procurement* (GPP) as 'procuring goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life

Table 15.1: General government procurement spending (as share of GDP and by function as a percentage of total procurement spending, 2021)

Country	As share of GDP	General public services	Defence	Public order and safety	Economic affairs	Environmental protection	Housing and community amenities	Health	Recreation, culture and religion	Education	Social protection
Austria	15.6	11.5	1.3	2.6	20.7	1.2	0.6	40.7	3.4	8.1	10.0
Belgium	15.2	11.8	2.1	2.1	12.8	2.9	1.1	47.6	2.6	6.5	10.5
Bulgaria	10.3	7.3	7.2	4.0	13.8	5.7	8.4	37.4	2.8	10.8	2.6
Costa Rica	6.5	4.6	0.0	7.6	12.2	3.9	3.6	39.5	1.2	17.0	10.4
Croatia	15.2	8.9	2.5	5.2	23.5	3.7	4.5	33.5	4.7	9.8	3.7
Czech Republic	14.1	7.9	3.1	4.1	22.3	5.1	3.0	36.7	4.6	9.0	4.1
Denmark	13.8	14.4	5.1	2.7	9.0	1.2	0.6	36.5	4.7	10.9	14.8
Estonia	14.2	8.8	9.7	4.2	18.9	3.0	2.6	27.5	6.3	14.3	4.7
Finland	18.9	22.2	3.8	2.0	12.2	0.6	1.4	24.7	3.6	11.3	18.2
France	15.4	7.2	5.9	2.6	12.5	4.1	3.4	41.9	4.1	5.9	12.3
Germany	18.1	11.2	3.9	3.1	9.1	1.9	1.0	42.9	3.2	6.5	17.1
Greece	12.4	15.1	8.7	1.6	15.1	4.4	1.7	38.4	3.3	7.1	4.6
Hungary	16.4	15.0	4.2	2.8	29.7	3.5	2.3	20.5	8.2	10.5	3.4
Iceland	16.5	10.0	0.5	4.0	18.8	2.6	2.2	27.0	9.0	18.0	7.8
Ireland	7.7	4.6	0.8	4.0	13.4	2.3	5.1	39.1	3.5	8.5	18.6
Israel	15.5	5.8	18.4	2.9	11.1	2.6	2.0	28.3	4.2	13.7	11.0
Italy	11.8	12.4	4.2	3.5	13.4	6.8	2.6	43.7	3.9	4.3	5.2
Japan	18.1	6.3	3.4	1.8	15.2	5.2	1.8	45.1	1.4	6.5	13.2

Table 15.1: General government procurement spending (as share of GDP and by function as a percentage of total procurement spending, 2021) (continued)

Country	As share of GDP	General public services	Defence	Public order and safety	Economic affairs	Environmental protection	Housing and community amenities	Health	Recreation, culture and religion	Education	Social protection
Korea	14.5	5.6	11.4	2.9	15.3	4.0	6.3	32.2	2.8	12.9	6.6
Latvia	14.4	6.4	12.2	4.9	20.7	2.4	5.2	26.1	4.5	13.3	4.3
Lithuania	9.4	7.0	8.4	3.5	18.3	3.5	4.3	32.1	5.6	11.5	5.9
Luxembourg	11.5	13.2	1.4	2.9	21.4	4.6	2.2	23.6	5.0	7.8	17.9
Netherlands	20.9	5.5	3.0	3.5	11.3	4.6	1.4	35.3	3.2	8.3	23.7
Norway	14.6	10.0	7.8	2.6	21.9	3.8	3.7	27.4	4.6	9.4	8.9
Poland	12.0	5.3	5.7	4.6	26.7	2.7	3.6	32.1	5.6	10.0	3.7
Portugal	10.3	11.9	2.4	3.1	20.2	4.3	4.0	37.0	4.8	8.3	4.0
Romania	11.0	9.1	5.3	2.6	29.5	4.3	8.3	27.5	4.0	6.1	3.4
Slovak Republic	12.4	9.4	4.6	3.9	23.2	4.0	2.7	39.6	3.4	7.1	2.1
Slovenia	13.7	10.0	3.2	3.3	23.3	3.1	3.5	33.7	5.0	10.4	4.7
Spain	11.6	9.7	3.5	2.8	16.1	6.4	2.8	33.7	5.1	10.9	9.0
Sweden	16.2	17.7	5.2	2.9	13.5	2.2	2.7	23.7	3.6	15.3	13.2
Switzerland	9.6	21.4	5.5	5.5	14.8	3.9	1.5	6.7	2.8	18.2	19.7
United Kingdom	15.7	3.1	9.7	6.2	11.8	3.6	2.6	37.9	2.2	9.2	13.8
United States	9.9	10.7	20.2	6.4	21.9	0.0	2.4	16.3	1.6	16.4	4.1
OECD	12.9	9.2	9.9	4.2	16.4	2.7	2.4	31.9	2.7	10.7	9.8
OECD-EU	14.8	10.2	4.2	3.1	13.7	3.6	2.2	39.0	3.9	7.6	12.5

Sources: OECD National Accounts Statistics (database); Eurostat Government finance statistics (database)

cycle'.[2] In the literature green procurement is also referred to as 'green' or 'environmental friendly purchasing', 'eco' or 'sustainable' procurement or 'environmentally responsible procurement' (for example, Chersan et al, 2020).

From the sectoral view, environmental protection makes up a comparatively smaller share, with 2.7 per cent of public procurement spending across the OECD (confer Table 15.1). Again, this distribution is relatively stable across countries, as procurement in environmental protection scores above 5 per cent of procurement in only five OECD countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Japan and Spain). The potential of green procurement, thus, does not lie in a sectoral approach. Rather, the cross-cutting approach is decisive by considering green goals when purchasing in any sector.

Much like for social goals, different sub-regimes can be conceptualised. The 'product sub-regime' refers to products with low environmental impact, for example, recycled office material, emission-friendly public transport vehicles and purchases from certified sources (Dimand and Cheng, 2022). According to a widely used definition by the OECD, green procurement considers not only the immediate but also the future impact of public procurement under a life-cycle approach to products. The 'production sub-regime', in turn, relates to the sourcing and manufacturing practices in production and services. Typical examples are requirements to reduce waste and pollution, carbon emissions and energy consumption, or the restoration of biodiversity and protection of wildlife. Take the example of a public canteen that serves food using cutlery, glassware and crockery, and that collects and separates the waste produced in carrying out the procured service (Palmujoki et al, 2010, p 255). Sometimes the role of public procurement to incite innovation in production and products with positive ecological effects is also mentioned.

Compared to the historical importance of social goals in public procurement, green goals are of more recent appearance. This makes sense as scholars typically highlight the 1970s as a starting point for the ecological state (for example, Meadowcroft, 2005, pp 18–19). More consideration of environmental concerns coincided with a period where thinking prevailed that the state's role in procurement was to assure a strong market orientation, emphasising competitive pricing. This changed rapidly in the last two decades (Chersan et al, 2020): a recent OECD study highlights the wide recognition of GPP, with 94 per cent out of 34 OECD countries surveyed reporting to have an active national GPP policy or framework (OECD, 2023, p 123). Developments on green goals are dynamic. Many countries reform existing frameworks 'to target high-impact sectors and to move towards cleaner products more rapidly' (OECD, 2023, p 122). And while social goals remain mostly optional targets in national procurement regulation, the OECD survey shows that mandatory green goals are most typical (14 of 34 OECD countries surveyed, 41 per cent) followed by non-binding targets

(10 countries, 29 per cent). Only Finland, Chile and Hungary have neither mandatory requirements nor targets on green goals (OECD, 2023, p 125).

In sum, environmental procurement is constituted in regulating green goals across sectors rather than in the importance of sectoral spending. Also, the development of green goals is more recent than social goals, and today, green procurement is widely believed to be a key lever for the environmental and energy transition. Competitive price is still the primary goal of public procurement policy, but we see a trend towards more balancing of the economic, social and environmental sphere over time – in particular where green procurement is compatible with the lowest price.

Conceptualising the relationship between the environmental and social spheres in public procurement

The increasing importance of social and environmental goals in procurement raises questions about their relationship. Meeting different strategic goals at the same time can be challenging, and frequently, choices have to be made on prioritising one or the other sphere of the eco-social nexus. This section conceptualises the relationship between green and social goals in public procurement along two dimensions. The first captures the type of procurement policy addressed, the second the direction of the relationship.[3]

The first dimension conceptualises the *direction* of the link between the green and the social goals outlined above. Studies on the relationship between different policy goals flourished around the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to end poverty and other deprivation. At the core lies the recognition that there is not one strategy, but that 17 different goals have to be tackled hand in hand. Scholars discuss positive interactions between SDGs as 'co-benefits', 'synergies' or 'levers' (Anderson et al, 2022; Partzsch, 2023). Where two or more goals work together, they enable overall problem solving and lower costs compared to pursuing goals in isolation. Negative interactions are referred to as 'trade-offs' or 'hurdles' to describe situations where goals contradict or constrain each other, or even cancel each other out (Anderson et al, 2022; Partzsch, 2023). This literature informs the first dimension of the suggested conceptualisation. It ranges from a positive relationship, where social and green goals are indivisible and where progress on one goal automatically delivers progress on the other, to cancelling out, where progress on one goal automatically has a negative effect on the other.

The second dimension addresses the *type of procurement policy*. The policy integration and coordination literature in public policy research distinguishes between a policy-oriented and an organisational perspective (Trein et al, 2019; Domorenok et al, 2021). As the name indicates, the policy integration perspective focuses on the substantive policy dimensions,

that is, on policy output in the form of instruments and tools (Trein et al, 2019, p 335). The organisational perspective studies the institutions and processes that structure the interaction between sectors, for example, inter-departmental committees, coordination boards, task forces or specific functional charts (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1975). The way these institutions are set up and operate guides the integration and coordination, rendering specific types of interaction more or less likely. Based on public policy and political economy research, it can be hypothesised that countries differ in their ability to coordinate via existing organisational structures and institutions (confer Hall and Soskice, 2004). In a liberal market economy like the UK, organisation and established processes are likely to support market exchange and competitive pricing. In contrast, in a coordinated market economy like Germany, public procurement is more likely to draw on organisational resources and existing infrastructure for coordination. The two literature strands, thus, highlight different aspects of procurement policy: substantive policies as reflected in formal legislation or informal rules on the relationship between green and social goals, and organisational processes and institutions that govern the public procurement process (confer Figure 15.1).

Table 15.2: Conceptualisation of trade-offs and synergies in green and social procurement

Type of procurement policy				
Substantive policy				**Organisation and governance**
Goals are intrinsically linked; gains are mutual gains	**Indivisible**	Direction of link	Strong synergies	Joint structures and processes
Goals pursue in principle similar objectives, but hierarchy in goals possible; joint added value is created	**Enabling or reinforcing**		Synergies	Support exchange; provide mutually beneficial information; reduce uncertainty across goals
Independent co-existence	**Neutral**			Operate in parallel but isolated
Goals pursue fundamentally different objectives; winners and losers are distributed unequally	**Contradicting or mutually contesting**		Trade-offs	Likely to create irritation, reinforce differences and (punctual) conflict
Goals are inherently opposed; gains for one (goal) are losses for the other (goal)	**Cancelling out**		Strong trade-offs	Structurally engrained opposition, destructive interaction

Table 15.2 depicts the direction of the relationship, stretching from strong synergies to strong trade-offs, and the type of procurement distinguishing substantive policy from organisation and governance for green and social procurement goals.

Indivisible social and green goals

Legislation and rules can render social and green goals indivisible. The direction of the link is positive. Substantive policies create gains that are mutual, for example, requirements to purchase only products that are manufactured with materials that protect the health of workers at the same time as they protect the environment. An indivisible relationship in substantive policies is particularly likely for the product sub-regimes of social and green procurement.

Where the procurement process is characterised by joint structures and processes for green and social goals, organisation and governance are indivisible. Here, institutions are set up in a way that supporting one goal automatically attains progress on the other. Examples are agencies for sustainable procurement that push implementation of green and social goals at the same time and where no difference in the support offered for either type of goals can be observed.

Reinforcing and enabling green and social procurement

In substantive policies, social and green goals can enable or reinforce each other. Objectives pursued by formal legislation and informal rules for green or social goals can either have knock-on effects for the other sphere by default or can be brought about by agency. In both cases, joint added value is created across green and social procurement. Reinforcement should work across different sub-regimes. An example is a life-cycle approach for products purchased. Life-cycle approaches frequently come along with increased need for in-house maintenance and craft repairs. This can create a need for local employment and give a boost to the insertion of unemployed or disabled people.

Regarding organisation and institutional governance of procurement, an enabling relationship exists where interaction between actors in the social and in the environmental sphere is eased by formal and informal institutions. They support exchange, provide mutually beneficial information and reduce uncertainty across goals. Where such organisational structures and processes exist, they offer opportunities for social and green goals to reinforce each other. Think of inter-ministerial working groups between the environment and social policy ministries that offer room to overcome differences in culture and (in the case of coalition government) partisan orientation (see, for the

Commission, Hartlapp et al, 2014, pp 88–92), or institutions that provide for constant networking and exchange across different governance levels. Institutions that foster longer time horizons in decision making should generally be conducive to reinforcing green and social goals as they allow for balancing short term trade-offs or work around tight budgets and high investment costs.

Neutrality between green and social procurement

Green and social goals can be pursued unrelated. This means that green and social goals co-exist in a situation of independence at the level of legislation and rules. An example is the 2014 EU procurement regime that addresses social and green goals but does not address their relationship by incentivising synergies.

Regarding organisation and governance, neutrality is characterised by processes and institutions to support green and social procurement, which largely operate in isolation. Take, for instance, a procurement agency specialised in green goals or intermediary institutions pushing social goals, yet without addressing goals from the other sphere.

Contradictions and constraints between green and social procurement

Green and social goals can contradict or constrain each other in substantive policies. Gains in social goals are likely to produce losses in green goals and vice versa, where the spheres pursue fundamentally differing objectives. Analytically, one type of goal is likely to be given priority over the other (confer Mandelli, 2022, p 337). This could be the case where social goals push growth dynamics, for example, higher wages leading to increased consumption and production, and therefore contradict green goals like zero emission (for example, Partzsch, 2023, p 11). What is more, an uneven fit to a focus on price might constrain the relationship between green and social procurement indirectly. The production sub-regime in particular is likely to conflict with price efficiency via working conditions in construction or services procured. Green goals seem to have more potential to go hand in hand with low costs, for example, emission-friendly transport vehicles that secure competitive advantages because they consume less combustibles.

Tensions might equally exist regarding the organisation and institutional governance of public procurement. Existing processes and institutions can create irritation, empower actors from the green and social spheres unevenly, and reinforce differences between actors. This will affect the ability of governance arrangements to balance out conflict. Examples are rivalling structures between levels and portfolios.

Cancelling out between green and social procurement

The relationship between social and green goals can be clearly negative, with one type of goal cancelling out the other in substantive policies. In this case gains for one goal result in losses for the other automatically and trade-offs cannot be solved. Theoretically, this situation alludes to the 'degrowth' or 'post-growth' approach, and it is reasonable to assume that in a production logic in particular, social and green goals are inherently opposed.

Organisation and governance can cancel out the relationship between green and social goals where existing processes and institutions structurally engrain opposition or make interaction impossible: Examples might be decision rules in coordination that operate in a zero-sum logic.

Based on this conceptualisation, 25 different combinations in the relationship between green and social goals in public procurement can be distinguished – each category of substantive policy can combine with each category of organisation and governance. The high number of possible combinations builds on the premise of analytical independence of both dimensions. De facto, however, some combinations are much more likely than others. On the one hand, substantive policies that link requirements for ILO core labour standards and eco-labels frequently should be likely to come along with governance arrangements that assure these standards along the supply chain, for example, certification portals. On the other hand, we should be more likely to see contradictions in the processes and institutions of governance where trade-offs between social and green goals exist in substantive policies in the first place. Importantly, each of the 25 combinations offers particular opportunities for synergies and for (more or less) challenges in terms of trade-offs. Thus, the conceptualisation along the two dimensions not only offers a systematic assessment of different situations in green and social procurement, but also allows us to capture their potential to contribute to a public procurement policy that is balanced between the economic, social and environmental sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that procurement is an important public policy and merits raising the question of the role of the eco-social nexus. Albeit little researched, there is a historical importance of procurement for the welfare state. More recently, this met the quest to use public buying power to support the ecological and energy transition with green goals. Green and social procurement share important characteristics, but there is also the question whether and how states pursue these different goals at the same time without cancellation or contradictions but rather to support and enable problem solving. The chapter suggests that the eco-social nexus can

be captured by studying social and green procurement from a sectoral and cross-cutting multisectoral perspective. It also offers a conceptualisation of the relationship between the environmental and the social sphere along two dimensions: the direction and the type of procurement policy. A discussion of the 25 possible manifestations of the relationship highlights that synergies are particularly likely where social and green goals mutually support each other or complement and enable each other regarding not only the policy substance, but also the governance underpinning public procurement regulation. More generally, this suggests that future research should consider governance features more systematically when assessing the eco-social nexus. In public procurement, a good example is agencies and intermediaries set up to push strategic goals but differing substantially across countries in terms of mandate, resources and interaction with municipalities. What is more, the conceptualisation suggests that systematic differences exist between procurement sub-regimes. Strategic goals in the product sub-regimes are more likely to relate positively between the social and the environmental sphere. Production sub-regimes, in contrast, seem to have higher potential for a negative relationship. Future research could exploit differences and similarities in the relationship across sub-regimes more systematically to gather insight into the greatest challenges for developing a positive eco-social nexus in the future.

Notes

[1] See https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/public-procurement_en [Accessed 28 August 2023].

[2] See https://green-business.ec.europa.eu/green-public-procurement_en [Accessed 1 September 2023].

[3] There might also be trade-offs between different green goals, for example, in production between solar water heaters and biofuel water heating or between social goals, for example, regarding 'fair trade' products and local production. Addressing these trade-offs, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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16

The European Green Deal and the gradual emergence of an EU framework for a just transition

Sebastiano Sabato

Introduction

Since the publication of the European Green Deal (EGD) in 2019, the notion of a 'just' or 'fair' green transition has gained traction at the European Union (EU) level. The European Climate Law of July 2021 codified into EU legislation the EGD's goal to make Europe's economies and societies climate neutral by 2050, emphasising the need to achieve such an objective in a socially just manner. In a nutshell, the EU acknowledges that, besides providing opportunities, the green transition will have significant social impacts, hence the need to achieve a just transition, ensuring that both the opportunities and the risks of the green transition are fairly distributed across territories and social groups, 'leaving no one behind' (European Commission, 2019).

While gaining a central role in both academic and political debates, the notion of a 'just transition' is also growing into a contested concept, characterised by blurred conceptual boundaries and a multiplicity of interpretations and usages (Stevis et al, 2020). This notwithstanding, the just transition is an inherently 'eco-social' notion: it aims at addressing the eco-social nexus of the transition towards a more sustainable model of development, promoting a better integration between ecological and social objectives. Understanding the implications of this transition on welfare policies, and the role that the welfare state could play to support the transition, appears key.

Against this background, this chapter aims at answering two main questions. First, how has the notion of a just transition been interpreted in the EGD and in key initiatives for its implementation? Second, which functions are welfare policies expected to perform in EU initiatives for a just transition? To answer these questions, qualitative research methods have been used, notably a text analysis of EU legislative and non-legislative documents and the analysis of relevant scientific literature. Document analysis has been

complemented by the findings from a number of semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in EU policy making.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. After some preliminary considerations on the notion of a just transition, it discusses how this notion has been used in the EGD and reflects on the functions that the welfare state could perform in the context of the green transition. Then it describes the key initiatives implementing the EGD adopted by the EU between 2021 and 2023 and assesses the role therein attributed to welfare policies. These initiatives, the author maintains, constitute the building blocks of an emerging EU framework for a just transition. Lastly, it discusses the main findings of the analysis and concludes.[1]

The EU just green transition and the welfare state

Preliminary considerations on the just transition

Originally proposed by trade unions in the United States in the 1960s, the notion of a just transition was then put forward by the international trade union movement, including on the occasion of several international negotiations and conventions on sustainable development and on climate change as of the 2000s (JTRC, 2018; Galgóczi, 2019). The 2015 Paris Agreement refers to the 'imperative' of ensuring the 'just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs' (UN, 2015, Preamble), while – more recently – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stressed that 'prioritising equity, climate justice, social justice, inclusion and just transition processes can enable adaptation and ambitious mitigation actions and climate resilient development' (IPCC, 2023, p 33). The International Labour Organization (ILO) is deemed to have played an important role in promoting this notion on the international and national agendas, proposing a comprehensive framework for just transition policies and guidelines for their implementation. In the ILO's (2015) view, the just transition is closely linked to the implementation of the UN sustainable development agenda. The notion of a just transition can indeed be seen as a way to address the socio-ecological nexus of sustainable development, providing an answer to the so-called 'eco-social-growth' trilemma (Mandelli et al, 2021). However, this answer is at once unifying – potentially bringing together a variety of actors aware of the need to conjugate ecological and social objectives – and ambiguous, given the many different views on how to conjugate these two spheres and with which implications (JTRC, 2018, p 10).

In this respect, understandings of the just transition seem to vary alongside three key dimensions: i) the scope of the transition (in terms of challenges addressed and groups/territories supported); ii) its transformative ambition; and iii) the '(eco)-social policy mixes' needed to achieve such a transition. As

for the former dimension, interpretations of the just transition range from targeted approaches aimed at supporting specific categories (of workers or citizens) or territories to broader approaches highlighting the need to enact more comprehensive policy frameworks covering the society as a whole. As for the transformative ambition, interpretations range from approaches supporting (more or less deep) adaptations within the current economic system to approaches highlighting the need for a systemic change, notably moving to post-growth (or degrowth) economies and societies. Hence, the Just Transition Research Collaborative (JTRC) (2018) identifies a continuum made of four ideal-typical approaches to a just transition, ranging from approaches preserving the status quo (with some correctives) to fully transformative approaches. Krawchenko and Gordon (2021) distinguish between 'jobs-focused', 'environmental-focused' and 'society-focused' interpretations of the just transition, while Mandelli (2022) distinguishes between 'narrow versus broad' interpretations of the just transition and 'affirmative versus transformative' approaches.

The scope and transformative ambition of the various understandings of the just transition arguably determine the '(eco-)social' policy mixes (Mandelli, 2022; Petmesidou and Guillén, 2022) envisaged for its achievement. Narrower interpretations are usually accompanied by a focus on social investment policies, in particular human capital development measures allowing workers to adapt to a 'greener' economy. Conversely, broader interpretations (such as, for instance, the ILO one) highlight the importance of more comprehensive sets of policies, including both social investment and social protection policies. More transformative interpretations of the just transition, questioning current development models based on the imperative of economic growth and existing power relations in capitalist systems, call for innovative and integrated eco-social policies, somehow going beyond the distinction between social investment and social protection policies that has characterised European debates on the welfare state during the last two decades. This is, for instance, the case in the sustainable welfare approach (see Büchs et al, 2024).

The EGD and the just transition

The EGD is meant to be 'a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use' (European Commission, 2019, p 2, bold in the original removed). To do so, the EGD identifies eight macro areas for action, considered as interlinked and mutually reinforcing (European Commission, 2019, p 4). These include policies related to climate, environment, energy and industrial strategies and

to circular economy, transport, agriculture, ecosystem and biodiversity. The objective of combining growth and competitiveness with the achievement of climate neutrality and a high level of environmental sustainability is the building block of what, in EU discourses, is labelled as 'the green transition'. Moreover, the EGD recognises the interconnected nature of the policy objectives that it pursues: while synergies between economic, environmental and social objectives should be created, they should not be taken for granted, and attention should be paid to trade-offs (European Commission, 2019, p 4). When it comes to addressing trade-offs and exploiting synergies between climate/environmental policies and social objectives, the EGD stresses the importance of achieving a 'socially just' green transition – that is, of ensuring that the cost of the transition is not borne by the most vulnerable populations (European Commission, 2019, p 16).

In the EGD Communication, the reference to the notion of a just transition has a political value, deriving from the necessity to ensure political and societal consensus on the strategy (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020; Crespy and Munta, 2023; Domorenok and Graziano, 2023; Kyriazi and Miró, 2023). A closer look at the just transition dimension of the EGD Communication on the basis of the three dimensions discussed in the previous section should start from the premise that the EGD is a growth strategy: the main objective is to achieve a green growth/ecological modernisation pattern for the EU, combined with the aim to simultaneously pursue inclusiveness and fairness in the transition, primarily by cushioning possible adverse impacts on the 'most vulnerable' (Mandelli et al, 2021; Petmesidou and Guillén, 2022; Zimmermann and Gengnagel, 2022; Sabato et al, 2023). In this respect, first, the EGD departs from 20th-century productivist models (Crespy and Munta 2023, p 248) insofar as climate and ecological objectives are central to the strategy and there is more recognition of possible eco-social trade-offs than in the past, and it differs from purely 'economic adaptation' strategies for the green transition promoted by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (Cigna et al, 2023). However, the transformative ambition of the EGD is rather moderate and based on an 'affirmative understanding' of the just transition that does not question fundamentally the capitalist, growth-based socio-economic model or tackle the related, underlying causes of inequalities (Haas et al, 2022; Crespy and Munta, 2023). Second, ambiguities concern the scope of the just transition envisaged by the European Commission (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020; Mandelli, 2022). On the one hand, in the EGD Communication, the scope of this notion is rather narrow, being characterised by a marked sectoral and territorial focus, with an emphasis on addressing the negative implications that the green transition will have on specific European territories and economic sectors, such as those relying on fossil fuels or GHG-intensive industries. Besides this sectoral focus, an 'issue-specific

focus' on energy poverty can also be detected. Third, as for the eco-social policy mixes envisaged, the emphasis of the 2019 EGD Communication is on social investment policies, focusing on the social policy areas with the highest potential to provide workers with the skills needed in a 'green economy' (notably, education and training policies) (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020; Mandelli, 2022; Zimmermann and Gengnagel, 2023). Importantly, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is presented as the reference framework to ensure that 'no one' is left behind in the transition (European Commission, 2019, p 4), thus potentially broadening the scope of EU just transition initiatives and of the policies implemented. However, no details are provided on how, concretely, the EGD would have been linked to the EPSR, the latter being a social policy initiative without any explicit environmental dimension (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020; Crespy and Munta, 2023).

Welfare states for a just transition

The EGD being a strategic and programmatic document, analyses of concrete policy initiatives and instruments for its implementation would be needed to fully understand the key features and implications of the notion of a just transition as used in EU policies. Additionally, in order to identify eco-social policy mixes characterising EU just transition policies, a more refined understanding of the role that welfare policies are expected to play in the green transition would be needed, going beyond a dichotomic differentiation between social investment and social protection policies. In this respect, building on the principles of distributional, restorative and procedural justice characterising many conceptualisations of the just transition (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; McCauley and Heffron, 2018), one could identify four key functions that traditional welfare states could perform in the green transition (Sabato et al, 2023).

First, at a more normative level, welfare states could serve a 'benchmarking function', when the principles and rights embedded in welfare states are referred to when designing and implementing green transition policies. Examples at stake are provisions ensuring a preferential access of vulnerable households to measures enhancing the energy efficiency of residential buildings or consideration of the distributional consequences and the impact on the most vulnerable when designing environmentally friendly fiscal systems.

Second, welfare states could perform an 'enabling function', when welfare policies directly facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the green transition. On the one hand, this concerns social investment policies targeted at the provision of skills needed for a greener economic model or aimed at facilitating transitions of workers between economic sectors. On the other hand, welfare policies (and the related social infrastructure) could

be purposely designed to reduce the ecological footprint of the welfare state, for instance through the provision of carbon-neutral services.

Third, welfare states can perform a 'buffering function', when provisions are aimed at ensuring that citizens are protected from or compensated for the possible negative consequences of green transition policies (including transition-related increases in inequalities). This would be, for instance, the case of social protection and inclusion policies providing income protection when linked to green transition policies (for example, unemployment and minimum income schemes or pensions).

Fourth, at a more procedural level, welfare states could perform a 'consensus building/conflict management' function. In this respect, welfare state institutions could be used to build a consensus on the green transition or to manage the associated conflicts. Both social dialogue structures and broader instances of civil dialogue could perform this function.

The emergence of an EU framework for a just transition

Following the publication of the EGD in 2019, an EU just transition framework has gradually emerged, comprising policy orientations, legislation and funding aimed at ensuring that the EU and its member states can make the most of the opportunities deriving from the green transition while addressing the related social challenges. EU initiatives more explicitly related to the promotion of the just transition, that is, the building blocks of such an EU framework are: i) the Just Transition Fund (JTF); ii) the Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality (hereafter, the 2022 Council Recommendation); and iii) the Social Climate Fund (SCF). While both the JTF and the SCF are based on binding legislation (regulations) and provide member states with funding, the 2022 Council Recommendation is a non-binding instrument.

Approved in 2021, the JTF (European Union, 2021) is one of the three pillars of a broader Just Transition Mechanism, directly referred to in the 2019 EGD Communication as a part of the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan. The JTF is endowed with €17.5 billion (2018 prices) for the period 2021–2027. In terms of scope, the JTF has a marked territorial-sectoral dimension: it is conceived as a cohesion policy instrument, intended to address the economic, environmental and social costs of the transition towards climate neutrality for specific sectors and territories identified as the most vulnerable in the transition. These are regions that rely heavily on fossil fuels for energy use or GHG-intensive industries. The JTF can finance productive, infrastructural and social investments in these territories, with a view to supporting their economic development, the circular economy, investment in energy, and transport infrastructure. The direct recipients of JTF resources include small and medium-sized enterprises, business

incubators and consulting services, universities and research organisations. Looking at the eco-social policy mixes, the JTF has a strong focus on the enabling function of the welfare state, notably on measures for upskilling and reskilling workers and jobseekers, job-search assistance and active inclusion measures for jobseekers. Some provisions of the JTF Regulation also envisage the possibility of using resources to improve the energy efficiency of social housing (hence, 'greening' some social infrastructure). In terms of benchmarking function, the JTF Regulation points to the need to prioritise the objective of reducing energy poverty when implementing measures to improve the energy efficiency of private buildings. As for the conflict management/consensus building function of the welfare state, to access financial contributions the member states must elaborate Territorial Just Transition Plans setting out the challenges in each territory, the objectives to be met and the types of measures envisaged. These plans should be prepared in social dialogue and cooperation with the relevant stakeholders. No measures related to what has been defined as the buffering function of the welfare state emerge from the analysis of the JTF Regulation.

Adopted in June 2022, the – non-binding – Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality calls on the member states to adopt and implement 'comprehensive and coherent policy packages, addressing the employment and social aspects to promote a fair transition across all policies, notably climate, energy and environmental policies, as well as to make optimal use of public and private funding' (Council of the European Union, 2022, art. 2). These policy packages should consist of a comprehensive and coherent set of measures integrating social policies with green transition policies through a coordinated cross-sectoral approach. In terms of scope, compared to other EU just transition instruments, the 2022 Council Recommendation broadens the range of potential targets. Indeed, it identifies a broad range of 'vulnerable groups' to be supported, meaning 'people and households most affected by the green transition', with an invitation to pay particular attention to groups who were already vulnerable irrespective of the transition. When it comes to the eco-social policy mixes proposed, the integrated policy packages to be implemented by the member states should include measures ensuring: i) active support to quality employment; ii) quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, as well as equal opportunities; iii) fair tax-benefit systems and social protection systems, including social inclusion policies; and iv) access to affordable essential services and housing. Hence, policies and measures referred to in the 2022 Council Recommendation attain to all the four functions of the welfare state, including an invitation to better adapt social protection and inclusion schemes to the green transition and to the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation.

Adopted in May 2023, the Regulation on the Social Climate Fund (European Union, 2023) accompanies the proposal to include the buildings and road transport sectors in the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). Since this revision of the ETS is expected to entail an increase in fossil fuel prices, the SCF aims to address the social and distributional impact of the proposed new emissions trading system on the most vulnerable households, micro-enterprises and transport users. The SCF will enter into force in 2026, and the amount of resources made available for the period 2026–2032 has been estimated at €86.7 billion. In terms of scope, the SCF primarily targets households and individuals in situations of energy or transport poverty[2] and, in general, vulnerable energy users and vulnerable transport users (that is, low-income and lower-middle-income households and individuals significantly affected by the price impacts of the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions from buildings and road transport). Besides households and individuals, the SCF also provides support for micro-enterprises particularly affected by energy price increases. When it comes to the eco-social policy mix, the SCF has a strong benchmarking function. In particular, SCF-funded measures for the decarbonisation of heating and cooling in buildings and for granting improved access to zero- or low-emission mobility and transport should be targeted to vulnerable households, micro-enterprises and transport users, with a further prioritisation of households and individuals in a situation of energy or transport poverty. Similarly, measures promoting and supporting renewable energy communities, citizen energy communities and other active customers to promote the uptake of the self-consumption of renewable energy should contribute to achieving energy savings or to reducing energy poverty. In terms of the enabling function, the EU Regulation on the SCF refers to actions improving the energy efficiency of social housing. As for the consensus building/conflict management function of the welfare state, the member states are requested to draft Social Climate Plans following a public consultation with, among other actors, representatives of economic and social partners and relevant civil society organisations. Importantly, the EU Regulation on the SCF contains some provisions close to our definition of buffering function, notably the possibility to use EU resources for the provision of direct income support to vulnerable households and vulnerable transport users to reduce the impact of the increase in road transport and heating fuel prices. Such support is expected to be temporary and to decrease over time.

Conclusion

The 2019 Commission Communication on the EGD set the objective of ensuring a socially just green transition, leaving no one behind. In doing so, the European Commission has complemented the ecological modernisation/

green growth approach of the EGD with an attention to the possible negative social implications of green transition policies. In this sense, the transformative ambition of the EGD can be qualified as moderate, being based on an understanding of the just transition that does not fundamentally question a socio-economic model based on a prioritisation of economic growth and competitiveness; rather, it aims at cushioning the adverse social consequences of green transition policies. Additionally, a narrow understanding of the just transition emerges from the 2019 EGD Communication, which adopts a marked territorial-sectoral approach coupled with an issue-specific focus on a limited set of challenges (notably, related to energy). In terms of eco-social policy mixes, the EGD Communication refers to the EPSR as a benchmark to ensure fairness in the green transition and highlights the role of social and civil dialogue in building consensus on and managing transition-related conflicts. However, only a limited set of social policies are explicitly and more concretely addressed in the EGD Communication, notably education and training policies (in a social investment/activation vein).

The three initiatives implementing the EGD considered in this analysis – constituting the building blocks of what can be defined as an emerging EU framework for a just transition – are embedded in the ecological modernisation/green growth approach of the EGD, thus displaying a moderate transformative ambition when it comes to the interpretation of the just transition. In terms of scope, the two binding initiatives providing funding to the member states are characterised by a territorial-sectoral focus (the JTF) or by an issue-specific focus (the SCF, with its emphasis on energy and transport poverty). The non-binding 2022 Council Recommendation can be seen as an attempt to broaden the scope of the EU just transition framework, identifying a broader range of vulnerable categories of the population to be targeted. In terms of eco-social policy mixes emerging from those initiatives, the enabling function of the welfare state appears well developed when it comes to proposing social investment policies aimed at endowing the workforce with the skills needed in the green transition and increasing their employability. Conversely, less emphasis is put on the need to reduce the ecological footprint of the welfare state, with the exception of some measures on improving the energy efficiency of social housing. The benchmarking function of the welfare state often consists in the recommendation to member states to prioritise the most vulnerable groups of the population in the design and implementation of (some) green transition policies. While such a recommendation is usually at a rather generic level, it becomes more concrete only in relation to households and individuals in a situation of energy poverty (or, more recently, transport poverty). In terms of the consensus building/conflict management function, references to the important role to be played by stakeholders and citizens are present in the three initiatives included in this analysis: the constitutive national plans

of two key instruments providing funding for the just transition – the JTF and the SCF – are expected to be defined and implemented through social dialogue and the involvement of key stakeholders, leaving to the member states decisions on the breadth and modalities of this involvement. The buffering function of the welfare state appears underdeveloped in EU just transition initiatives, with the recent exception of the possibility to use SCF resources to provide monetary buffers to citizens confronted with energy and transport poverty. The 2022 Council Recommendation has the ambition to launch a reflection on how to better adapt social protection and inclusion systems to the green transition and to the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation.

Overall, the emerging EU framework for a just transition appears as not comprehensive enough in terms of scope and incomplete in terms of the eco-social policies mixes proposed, being welfare policies and green transition policies not fully connected. The 2022 Council Recommendation is the initiative that goes further in the direction of broadening the scope of the EU just transition framework and reflecting on a broader set of eco-social policies. However, the Council Recommendation is non-binding and implementation is left to the willingness of the member states. The emerging EU just transition framework should be strengthened and completed, but the possibility of doing so by elaborating more integrated EU eco-social policies is likely to be limited by an increasingly evident asymmetry of competences at the EU level. The EU's willingness to act through binding legislation and targets in the environmental and climate domains is not matched by equally strong competences in the social domain.

The willingness of EU institutions to continue with the implementation of an ambitious green transition agenda and to strengthen the emerging EU just transition framework is, however, uncertain. If and how the EU will continue on the path traced by the EGD will probably depend on a combination of international factors (the evolution of the geopolitical situation and the dynamics of global competition) and internal factors (the outcomes of the elections to the European Parliament in June 2024 and the subsequent appointment of a new European Commission). At the time of writing (April 2024), the situation appears uncertain and somehow contradictory. On the one hand, in its February 2024 Communication on setting the 2040 climate target, the European Commission (2024) envisaged a scenario based on an acceleration of the green transition, and it highlights the need for more ambitious and effective just transition policies. On the other hand, signs pointing to a possible retrenchment of EU policies for a just green transition are apparent. First, reluctance or even open opposition regarding the EU green transition agenda are growing across the political spectrum and in some sectors of European society, leading to repeated calls for a 'legislative break' in the implementation of the EGD or to attempts to

block the adoption of key legislation (for instance, the Nature Restoration Law). Second, some recent initiatives implementing the EGD display a narrow social dimension. This is, for instance, the case with the Green Deal Industrial plan (February 2023), whose just transition dimension is limited to recommendations to prioritise the enhancement of workers' skills with a view to addressing skills shortages in sectors particularly relevant to the green transition. Third, doubts have been cast on whether the reform of the EU economic governance framework will leave enough budgetary margins for the member states to implement ambitious green transition and social policies (let alone more integrated eco-social policies) or whether, instead, a new wave of 'austerity' is to be expected (Theodoropoulou, 2024). Against this background, rather than broadening the EU just transition framework, there is the risk of a selective implementation in the future, with a narrow focus on those 'green' and social policies deemed as more likely to enhance EU's economic growth, competitiveness and security in an increasingly competitive and conflictual geopolitical scenario.

Notes

[1] This chapter draws on (and further develops) Sabato and Mandelli (2023); Sabato et al (2023) and Mandelli et al (2023).

[2] Importantly, the Regulation on the SCF includes a EU definition of 'energy poverty' and the first ever EU definition of 'transport poverty'.

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17

Implementing just transition efforts across the EU: from decarbonisation to eco-social policies

Matteo Mandelli

Introduction

Through the 2019 European Green Deal (EGD), the European Union (EU) and its member states are more than ever committed to transitioning towards a less carbon-intensive economic model. In this scenario, novel social risks are expected to emerge, raising new demands for a *just transition*. However, little is still known about the role of public policies in the pursuit of such a just transition in Europe. Against this background, this chapter strives to fill existing gaps by providing a mapping of just transition policies (JTPs) in EU countries, which are a particularly salient example of eco-social policies in the context of decarbonisation. It adopts a qualitative method, notably a systematic, manual textual analysis of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). The identified JTPs are carefully described to capture their eco-social features, disentangling their three constitutive components: strategy, instrument and governance.

Results show that JTPs are still relatively rare in the EU: only six countries – Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands – have already adopted comprehensive JTPs, while others have put forward only partial JTPs or just general commitments to develop these policies in the future. A bird's-eye view of the current empirical landscape also reveals that, with rare exceptions, existing JTPs are mostly narrow, hence targeting only the most urgent 'low-hanging fruits' of decarbonisation; they often emphasise the role of investment-oriented measures; and they provide governance structures for stakeholder consultation.

With respect to the structure of the chapter, the first section is dedicated to reviewing the literature on decarbonisation and just transition. The subsequent section defines the object of this study, which is JTPs, and the following section presents the methodological premises of the study. A further section is dedicated to mapping and describing national JTPs, distinguishing strategies, instruments and governance. Finally, the findings are discussed in the conclusion.

Decarbonisation and just transition

Climate change is increasingly becoming a prominent political issue because of its catastrophic ecological consequences (IPCC, 2021). Countries around the globe have been mobilising to limit the global temperature rise to 2 °C above the pre-industrial level, aiming at 1.5 °C, through the 2016 Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015). At the industrial level, curbing climate-altering emissions is primarily affected by a process referred to as decarbonisation. This expression indicates a peculiar type of sustainable socio-technical transition (Markard et al, 2012) entailing 'a change in sources of energy supply, conversion, infrastructure, or energy use' (Sovacool et al, 2021, p 2), replacing carbon-intensive technologies and practices with low-carbon ones (Green and Gambhir, 2020). Thus, by definition, decarbonisation is an intentional process, heavily driven by policy choices and characterised by political conflicts between winners and losers (Köhler et al, 2019). A report by the Climate Action Network (2018) finds a high heterogeneity in EU countries' ambition and progress in reducing carbon emissions, with Sweden, Portugal, France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg ranking highest, while Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Malta and Poland rank lowest.

Different societal groups are predicted to be disproportionately affected by decarbonisation (Galgóczi, 2022). While according to the OECD the aggregate net employment impact of decarbonisation is expected to be limited worldwide (Botta, 2018), workers employed in emission-intensive sectors – which are normally concentrated in peripheral and often economically disadvantaged areas – will likely experience job reallocations, new skill needs and redundancies (Thomas and Doerflinger, 2020). Besides employment challenges, other social risks generated by industrial decarbonisation include 'the need for enterprises, workplaces and communities to adapt to climate change to avoid loss of assets and livelihoods and involuntary migration' (ILO, 2015, p 5).

Available data lead us to predict that the new social risks of decarbonisation will be distributed unevenly across EU countries. McCauley et al (2023) rank them with respect to 'fossil fuel energy dependency', placing Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Poland and Spain as the most dependent EU countries, whereas Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Luxembourg, Latvia, Cyprus and Malta rank lowest. 56.8 per cent of the total EU employment in the coal and lignite sector is in Poland, followed by Romania (14.5 per cent), Czechia (9.6 per cent) and Germany (7.0 per cent) (European Commission, 2020). Europe Beyond Coal (2022) shows that most EU member states have committed to phasing out coal before or by 2030, whereas Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia set later targets. Poland is again a negative outlier here, as the only remaining member state without a coal phase-out target. Among already coal-free countries, Austria, Belgium,

Portugal and Sweden stand out, since they managed to get rid of this fossil fuel after signing the Paris Agreement. The accelerated phase-out of coal in the EU has caused substantial redundancies: 'between 2010 and 2018, coal jobs decreased from 239 400 to 161 930, a decline of 32 %' (Alves Dias et al, 2021). Besides coal, decarbonisation will also affect other fossil fuels, such as peat, 46.6 per cent of which is produced in Ireland (European Commission, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the concept of just transition is becoming increasingly popular in both academic and political debates as a way to address the social implications of decarbonisation. This idea, first originated within the North American trade union movement in the 1980s, recently underwent a resurgence and a global diffusion until it found its way into the United Nations' climate policies (Stevis et al, 2020). A defining moment in the history of just transition came through the 2015 Guidelines by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2015), which were later mentioned in the Preamble of the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015). At its core, just transition is meant to challenge the 'jobs versus environment dilemma' (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011), and in the context of decarbonisation it can be defined as 'a fair and equitable process of moving towards a post-carbon society' (McCauley and Heffron, 2018, p 2). With increasing popularity, just transition is gradually growing into a contested concept (Stevis et al, 2020) applied to a wide variety of contexts and topics (Wang and Lo, 2021).

Many alternative interpretations of what a just transition should be exist (McCauley and Heffron, 2018; Stevis and Felli, 2020; Galgóczi, 2022). First, the literature typically distinguishes between narrow and broad conceptions of just transition, depending on the scale and scope – that is, the spatial-temporal reach – of the challenges considered. Second, just transition claims can be 'affirmative' or 'transformative', depending on the extent to which they strive to challenge the current socio-economic system based on capitalist and growth-intensive modes of production and consumption. Third, and finally, various studies differentiate between distributive just transition, which concerns the (re)allocation of resources, and procedural just transition, which has to do with participation in policy making and governance.

Just transition policies as an example of eco-social policies

Among the various aspects of the multifaceted just transition concept (Wang and Lo, 2021), just transition as a type of public policy has so far received relatively little attention, with only a few explorative exceptions (Mertins-Kirkwood, 2018; Cha, 2020; Green and Gambhir, 2020). This is surprising if we consider that decarbonisation is by definition policy driven. Against this background, this chapter focuses on JTPs. These are hereby defined as public policies explicitly aiming to integrate a social dimension into decarbonisation,

with the ultimate view to make it socially just. The scope is here further restricted to the productive sector, hence to industrial decarbonisation. This choice reflects the importance of industrial restructurings in the current climate policy debate and also allows us to control for the heterogeneity that we would have encountered if we were also to take into consideration consumption-side policies.

JTPs can be seen as peculiar examples of eco-social policies. The growing literature on eco-social policies deals with the integration between welfare and environmental policy goals, going way beyond the decarbonisation context. Most scholars studying eco-social policies advocate for a sustainable approach, aiming to meet human needs within ecological limits (Gough, 2017). This literature is dominated by prescriptive and outcome-based perspectives (Mandelli, 2022), leaving little space for the empirical analysis of policy outputs, aside from a few descriptive exceptions (for example, Schøyen et al, 2022). Therefore, studying JTPs allows us to introduce an empirical policy analysis perspective in the eco-social policy literature. Existing studies show that since the publication of the EGD in 2019, a just transition policy framework has emerged in the EU, notably leading to the adoption of the Just Transition Mechanism to channel investments in territories with carbon-intensive economies (Sabato and Mandelli, 2024). However, empirical studies on JTPs at the national level are visibly lacking.

JTPs are constructed through policy integration, a process that normally requires a high degree of complexity. Integrated policies indeed often come in the shape of policy mixes, hence a complex arrangement of different interconnected components (Rogge and Reichardt, 2016). Three of such components appear as the most relevant: a *strategy*, that is, a plan defining the scale and scope of the problems to be solved and setting overarching policy goals; an *instrument* component, entailing a set of policy measures targeted to specific agents in order to achieve the strategic goals; and *governance* mechanisms establishing institutional structures and procedures for the delivery of the policy mix. For JTPs to be comprehensive, they should comprise all three of these components, since these constitute the core building blocks in the architecture of the policy mix.

Methodological premises

The NECPs are selected as reference documents to map JTPs in Europe. Introduced under the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union (European Union, 2018), the NECPs are integrated multiannual plans monitoring national performances concerning decarbonisation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. Member states were asked to submit draft NECPs by the end of 2018 and a final version in late 2019. The NECPs have been chosen here as the reference documents for the analysis because

they are supposed to contain – among other things – indications about whether and how member states address, or are planning to address, the social impacts of their climate policies.

The systematic mapping of NECPs has been performed through a manual qualitative textual analysis of the final version of these documents, assessing whether they mention existing or proposed eco-social strategies, instruments and governance mechanisms. For each EU country and each component of JTPs, a positive score ('+') was attributed to already-adopted policies, whereas a negative score ('–') signifies that JTPs are missing. Finally, an uncertain score ('?') indicates the country's declared intention to adopt JTPs in the future. The analysis was carried out first by carefully reading sub-sections 5.2 of the NECPs, which are dedicated specifically to the social impacts of decarbonisation, and second, by searching for keywords such as 'employment', 'jobs', 'education', 'training', 'skills', 'social', 'just(ice)', 'fair(ness)' and 'equal(ity)'. As a cross-check, this was complemented by reading the 27 Staff Working Documents with which the European Commission assessed the NECPs.

Basing the analysis on the NECPs should provide a bird's-eye view of the diffusion of JTPs across the whole EU. However, this methodological approach also entails some potential shortcomings, including that NECPs were published a few years ago, and hence they might already be outdated; that NECPs might not be exhaustive, but rather potentially omit relevant information; and, finally, that cited national documents should be cross-checked to verify the information in the NECPs.

Mapping just transition policies in the National Energy and Climate Plans

The results of the cross-country mapping exercise are summarised in Table 17.1. The following sub-sections will be dedicated to presenting the findings in detail, which are all derived from the analysis of the NECPs.

The strategic component of JTPs

Among the 27 NECPs, only seven explicitly refer to existing just transition strategies. Several NECPs make references to a 'just', 'fair' or 'equitable' transition, but in some cases (Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Romania) this objective has not yet been translated into any concrete strategy. Existing just transition strategies can be classified in two types, those focusing solely on coal phase-out and broader strategies linked to climate mitigation as a whole. Firstly, the Czech, German, Greek and Slovak strategies are constructed by incorporating a social dimension into coal phase-out plans. In Germany, the Final Report of the Commission on Growth, Structural Change,

Table 17.1: EU member states' just transition policies (by component)

EU Countries	Strategy	Instrument	Governance
Austria	-	-	-
Belgium	-	?	-
Bulgaria	-	-	-
Cyprus	-	-	-
Czechia	+	+	+
Germany	+	+	+
Denmark	-	?	-
Estonia	?	?	-
Greece	+	+	+
Spain	+	+	+
Finland	-	-	?
France	?	?	?
Croatia	-	-	-
Hungary	?	?	-
Ireland	+	+	+
Italy	-	+	?
Lithuania	-	?	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-
Latvia	-	?	-
Malta	-	-	-
Netherlands	+	+	+
Poland	?	+	-
Portugal	?	?	?
Romania	-	+	-
Sweden	-	-	-
Slovenia	?	?	-
Slovakia	+	+	-

Source: Mandelli (2023)

and Employment – which was later translated into legislation – provides recommendations on socially responsible phase-out by 2038. In Czechia, Greece and Slovakia, just transition strategies are tailored to some specific coal territories. The 2015 Czech RESTART Programme is described in the NECP as a 'comprehensive framework for the restructuring of the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions, which should contribute to

the fair transformation of coal regions' (Government of Czechia, 2019, p 314). The Greek government's 2020 Just Development Transition Master Plan is characterised as an integrated plan to accompany lignite phase-out in Western Macedonia and Megalopolis. This plan encourages tax incentives, the adoption of new infrastructures and technologies, support to local economies, the retraining and security of workers, and job creation. Finally, in Slovakia, the Upper Nitra Development Action Plan was approved in July 2019 to address the economic and social impacts of coal mining reduction.

A second group of countries, comprising Ireland, Spain and the Netherlands, set up just transition strategies by incorporating a social dimension into climate policies, hence – at least in part – transcending the fossil fuel sectors. In the Netherlands, a set of recommendations to enhance the opportunities and mitigate the social risks of the green transition was proposed by the Social and Economic Council and later inserted in the 2018 National Climate Agreement. In Ireland, 'just transition' is explicitly featured in the 2019 Climate Action Plan through a series of targets and actions so that 'the burdens borne are seen to be fair and that every group is seen to be making an appropriate level of effort' (Government of Ireland, 2020, p 122). Throughout Europe, Spain appears to be the only country with a stand-alone just transition strategy. This was adopted in 2019 to anticipate and manage the impact of the transition in carbon-intensive regions.

Despite only seven EU countries having already adopted initiatives that can be classified as just transition strategies, several other NECPs express commitments to put forward such strategies in the future. Proposed fossil fuel phase-out plans featuring just transition principles – or at least a significant social dimension – are found in the Estonian NECP, with reference to oil shale mining in Ida-Virumaa; the Hungarian NECP, targeting the revitalisation of the lignite-powered Mátra power plant; the Polish NECP, which commits to developing a 'restructuring plan for hard coal and lignite mining areas'; and the Slovenian NECP, which proposes a strategy for abandoning coal and restructuring coal regions. Finally, the French NECP indicates that 'a fair transition for everyone' will be included among the cross-sectoral guidelines of the National Low-Carbon Strategy, whereas Action Strategy No. 8.1 in the Portuguese NECP promises to develop a Fair Transition Strategy.

The instrument component of JTPs

Concerning the instrument component of JTPs, most European governments have either developed or are in the planning stages of developing measures to address the social repercussions of decarbonisation. Important exceptions are Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden. Predictably, countries exhibiting positive scores on the strategic

dimension also articulate policy instruments to achieve strategic objectives. However, the cases of Italy, Poland and Romania show that policy instruments addressing the social consequences of decarbonisation can also exist in the absence of a just transition strategy.

The instruments identified in the mapping exercise can be clustered into four types: i) active labour market policies for workers affected by decarbonisation; ii) passive labour market policies also for these workers; iii) funds for the socio-economic development of impacted territories; and iv) education and training measures promoting green skills across the population or workforce. The latter measures emerge as the most prevalent across EU member states, even though they consist only of generic commitments to enhance education curricula or develop training facilities for green skills. Such commitments are found in Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia.

Much more substantial are active labour market instruments. These aim to enhance or redirect workers' skills, as well as to facilitate their relocation in a transformed labour market. Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands allocate financial resources for this purpose, whereas Estonia, France, Hungary, Latvia and Poland pledge to do so in the future. For example, the Dutch government created a €22 million facility to address the employment effects of the energy transition by providing 'from-work-to-work' guidance and reskilling. In Italy, a maximum of €20 million per year will be channelled to a 'Fund for vocational retraining in areas in which coal-fired power plants are located'. Ireland adopted a national Just Transition Fund to provide, among other things, support for the retraining and reskilling of workers in the peat industry. In Spain and Greece, active labour market policies for coal and lignite workers are provided respectively through an Urgent Action Plan for Coal-Mining Regions and Power Plant Closures and the Just Development Transition Master Plan.

Passive labour market instruments are present in coal-intensive countries, offering direct monetary compensation to redundant workers. These policies were often originally conceived as part of state aid to the coal sector, but they have been later recalibrated in the context of decarbonisation. This is the case in the 1992 Czech Plan to end coal mining in uneconomic underground mines and quarries, which also covers the social costs for workers and communities, for instance through health benefits for miners. State aid benefiting redundant coal miners was also put forward in Slovakia and in Romania. Finally, the German NECP mentions that the government will guarantee 'transition monies to workers employed in the hard-coal mining sector', including through early retirement schemes.

The last types of just transition instruments mentioned in the NECPs are development funds for economic diversification and job creation in coal-dependent territories. Such funds are already present in several countries,

while Estonia and Romania intend to adopt them soon. Funds are dedicated to lignite regions in Greece, the peat-intensive Irish Midlands and the coal-dependent Polish regions of Silesia, Małopolska and Wielkopolska. In Czechia, periodic territorial development plans are set up to implement the RESTART Programme in the Ústí, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions, whereas the German government put forward a Structural Development Act for all its coal regions. Finally, it is important to note that numerous NECPs recognise EU funds and facilities – primarily the Just Transition Mechanism – as crucial instruments to address the social consequences of decarbonisation at the domestic level.

The governance component of JTPs

The governance component of JTPs is crucial to foster social consensus and mitigate conflicts associated with decarbonisation through dedicated institutional structures or formalised procedures for stakeholder engagement. The majority of NECPs register no governance schemes, and these are typically found where just transition strategies are also present. Slovak JTPs instead lack a governance component, despite scoring positively in the strategic component.

Regarding stakeholder engagement, various EU countries proposed multi-stakeholder platforms to promote a just transition. In Czechia, a Coal Commission was established in 2019 to assess the future needs of the lignite sector and to explore possibilities for diverting from it. This commission comprises 19 members, including representatives from ministries, governmental offices, trade unions, industrial associations, non-profit organisations, regions, members of the Chamber of Deputies and academics. Similarly, Germany established a multi-stakeholder Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment in 2018, responsible for formulating recommendations on national energy policies. Finally, Ireland and the Netherlands mandated their national Economic and Social Councils to provide participated recommendations about the social dimension of decarbonisation.

Greece, Ireland and Spain established ad-hoc institutional structures to facilitate the implementation of their JTPs. In Spain, a Just Transition Institute was established within the Ministry for Ecological Transition. This institute is responsible for developing and implementing Just Transition Agreements with at-risk sectors and territories, via the involvement of local authorities, business organisations, trade unions and other non-governmental organisations. The Spanish case stands out because stakeholders are not just consulted but also given proper decision-making powers through the Just Transition Institute and Agreements. Greece set up an Inter-Ministerial Committee to coordinate the Just Development Transition Master Plan

following inclusive procedures for the consultation of local administrative bodies and stakeholders. Finally, the Irish government appointed a Just Transition Commissioner with the duty to engage with relevant stakeholders in the Midlands.

The NECPs of France, Italy, Portugal and Finland express these countries' intentions to establish governance structures for a just transition. The French NECP mentions that the multi-stakeholder National Council for Ecological Transition will start dealing with the economic and social impacts of low-carbon strategies. The Italian NECP commits to organise sectoral working groups within the Ministry of Economic Development to safeguard jobs in regions significantly affected by decarbonisation. Finland plans to establish a Peat Industry Working Group to ensure geographic and social fairness in the government's efforts to halve peat use by 2030. Finally, the Portuguese NECP pledges to design a Fair Transition Strategy through a multi-stakeholder process.

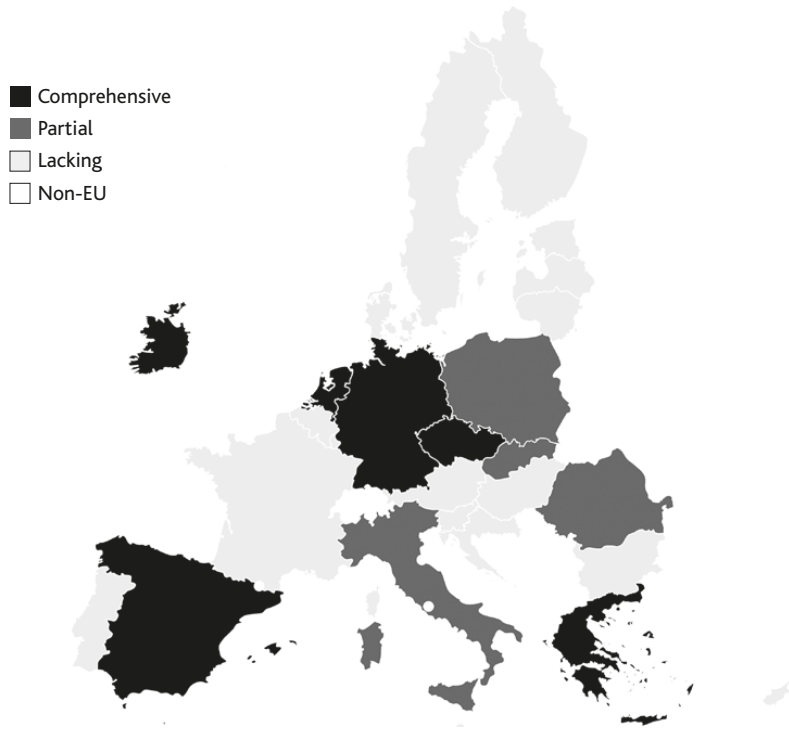
Conclusion

Just transition is becoming an increasingly popular narrative to address the social risks of industrial decarbonisation, but the empirical diffusion of deriving public policies remains limited. The comparative analysis of the NECPs has brought to light some puzzling findings. The first and most notable is that JTPs are still relatively rare across Europe. Only six EU countries – Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands – have already adopted comprehensive JTPs comprising strategies, instruments and governance mechanisms. Italy, Romania and Poland have adopted some instruments without a governance or a strategic component, while in Slovakia only the governance component is missing. Therefore, only in ten European countries are JTPs already in place. Figure 17.1 illustrates these ten countries, distinguishing those that have adopted comprehensive JTPs (in black) from those that introduced only partial JTPs (in dark grey).

Some NECPs contain commitments to put forward national JTPs in the future, whereas seven countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden – feature no existing or foreseen policies to address the social consequences of industrial decarbonisation.

Concerning the content of existing JTPs, the mapping exercise indicates that EU countries are promoting an understanding of just transition that is not so distant from the supranational approach envisaged in the EGD. First, just transition most often has a narrow scope, with deriving policies mainly targeting challenges that are framed as the most urgent. This translates into a strong focus on coal, with a more marginal role for other fossil fuels and energy-intensive industries. Only Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands adopted a slightly different approach, adding a social dimension to climate mitigation

Figure 17.1: Just transition policies in the EU



Source: Mandelli (2023)

as a whole, hence addressing – at least on paper – challenges that go beyond the most carbon-intensive sectors. Second, most national JTPs overstate the role of investment-oriented measures, including active labour market policies and training and development funds, which are largely preferred to more passive social protection instruments. Third, and finally, when present, the governance component of JTPs allows for multi-stakeholder consultation. However, governance schemes do not attribute proper decision-making powers to non-governmental agents, with the sole exception of Spain.

These findings show that a fully fledged eco-social perspective to accompany Europe's decarbonisation efforts is still very much in its infancy. However, it should be noted that EU countries do not enter the low-carbon transition from the same starting point. Facing a pressing risk appears to be associated with the emergence of JTPs: with the notable exceptions of Ireland and Slovakia, the ten EU countries having introduced partial or comprehensive JTPs are in the top half of the most fossil-fuel-dependent countries in Europe, with Germany and the Netherlands leading the rank. However, in the group of six countries that have adopted comprehensive JTPs, there are both climate leaders (the Netherlands and, to a lesser

extent, Germany), but also laggards (Czechia, Greece, Spain and, above all, Ireland). The fact that just transition is often endorsed by fossil fuel-intensive climate laggards shows that JTPs are often politically used to slow down decarbonisation efforts, with the allegation that abandoning fossil fuels would be too socially disruptive. In this sense, JTPs often problematically lack the ambition that they should have to be considered transformative eco-social policies.

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PART IV

The eco-social nexus from a global perspective

Building on the extensive empirical analysis presented in the previous parts, this final part shifts the perspective to a global scale. So far, most chapters in Parts II and II had a specific regional focus: Chapter 7, 8, and 13 focused on the European level, and Chapter 9 addressed Italy and Germany. Chapter 14 compared eco-social welfare policies specifically in Denmark and Ireland, and finally, Chapter 17 provided a comprehensive mapping of just transition policies across multiple EU countries, including Czechia, Germany, Greece, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Italy, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden.

Part IV seeks to move beyond a European context by providing a broader perspective on the eco-social nexus, reflecting on how it materialises globally. Chapters in this part are structured around two central themes that encapsulate the broader approaches and challenges in eco-social policy integration: urban and regional eco-social transitions, and the role of international organisations and governance structures.

- The first two chapters in Part IV both address the urban and regional level. 'The eco-social nexus in urban climate transitions', by Jeroen van der Heijden, reviews the literature on the integration of ecological and social dimensions in urban climate transitions. It highlights the need for holistic approaches that address both ecological and social challenges to create sustainable and equitable urban environments. 'Just transitions in climate and sustainable governance: a perspective from the South', by Xira Ruiz-Campillo, extends the discussion to the Global South. It examines how just transition concepts are adapted and applied in developing countries such as India, Kenya and Argentina. The chapter underscores the unique challenges and opportunities in these regions, stressing the importance of social equity and climate justice. Jointly, the chapters show that although cities and urban regions play a central role in eco-social transitions, there is limited knowledge on how these dynamics translate to policy and practice. Participatory decision-making processes have been considered crucial in fostering inclusive and equitable eco-social transitions in different contexts, and an interdisciplinary approach is essential for grasping the multifaceted nature of the eco-social nexus across different territorial levels.

- The final two chapters then turn towards the supranational level. 'Eco-social policy in the liberal world of welfare: the institutional opportunities for socio-ecological transitions in Anglo-Saxon regimes', by Paul Bridgen, examines the institutional frameworks of liberal welfare regimes, with a focus on the UK. It explores how these frameworks can be both obstacles and opportunities for eco-social transitions, particularly in policy areas like working time reduction. 'International organisations in the eco-social transformation: strategies, policies and programmes', by Luca Cigna, Torben Fischer, Emina Hasanagic Abuannab, Elke Heins and Philip Rathgeb, analyses the role of international organisations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in promoting eco-social policies and just transitions. The chapter provides an empirical application of an analytical framework that examines the goals, policy instruments and governance methods employed by these organisations, highlighting their influence on global policy making. Jointly, the chapters collected in this part illustrate how the eco-social nexus has progressively consolidated in the political agendas of important international organisations, including the United Nations, the ILO and the IMF. While sharing the need to combine and reconcile ecological and social goals in development policies, each organisation has developed its own conceptual framework of just transition, paving the way for a variety of programmes and policy guidance to be implemented around the globe.

As all chapters in this part indicate, multiple barriers exist for strategic narratives on just transition to evolve into influential policy instruments due to the lack of clarity, coherence and consistency within and between them. The degree to which public intervention and resources are deployed to support just transition strategies – by anticipating or compensating social costs and risks of transition processes – is among the key issues in the debate on both the role of international organisations in just transition and the transformation of welfare capitalist regimes in view of climate change. A Global South perspective on these processes brings to light further critical aspects, such as the scarcity of economic resources and immature employment, social protection and equality policies. The integration of climate justice and social equity in these regions is not just an ethical imperative but a practical necessity to ensure that the most vulnerable populations are protected and empowered. This perspective emphasises the need for international support – including technology transfer, financial assistance and capacity-building initiatives – to facilitate sustainable and inclusive transitions.

18

The eco-social nexus in urban climate transitions

Jeroen van der Heijden

Introduction

Urbanisation has been instrumental in bringing about human prosperity (Taylor, 2013). However, there are significant challenges associated with urbanisation in general and cities in particular, including deterioration of the natural environment, growing social inequalities and declining physical and mental well-being (van der Heijden et al, 2019). To address these problems, city planners, architects, policy makers and other stakeholders have employed planning, design and state-of-the-art technologies since the early 1900s, resulting in various urban planning paradigms from the 'sanitary city' to 'eco-urbanism' (Pickett et al, 2011; Sharifi, 2016) – the former urban planning paradigm aims to create cities that maximise economic efficiency and productivity, while the latter seeks to address the challenges posed by climate change and resource constraints in urban areas.

Scholars have studied the effects of cities and urbanisation on human well-being and planetary well-being, with early urban scholarship focusing on *urban segregation* and *urban inequalities* (see, for example, Jacobs, 1961; van Eijk, 2010). Recently, scholars have shifted their attention to the role of cities and urban regions in the global climate crisis. Initially, they presented cities and urban regions as a central cause and victim of the climate crisis (see, for example, Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003). Later, they began mapping the innovative technological, economical and behavioural climate actions taken at the local, regional and global levels by cities and urban regions, as well as the regional and global collaborations cities and urban regions are involved in (see, for example, van der Heijden, 2014; Westman and Castán Broto, 2018).

More recently, scholars have turned their attention to the eco-social dimension of urban climate transitions, which encompasses both the social and ecological dimensions of cities and urban regions (also termed the 'social-ecological' or 'socio-ecological' dimension in this literature). They argue that not all citizens and cities benefit equally from the innovations and actions that drive urban climate transitions, and that the ecological and social

dimensions of urban climate transitions must be integrated in both theory and practice (Frank et al, 2017). Failure to integrate the two dimensions could result in missed synergies and sub-optimal urban climate transitions (Gough, 2017; Berghauser Pont et al, 2022).

This chapter seeks to review the literature on the eco-social nexus in urban climate transitions in four sections. In the first, it provides a brief overview of the ecological and social challenges of modern cities and urban regions. In a next step, it summarises the literature on the role of cities and urban regions in the urban climate crisis, which has flourished since the 1990s. The following section focuses on the eco-social discourse within this urban scholarship, highlighting the need for integration of the ecological and social dimensions of urban climate transitions. The final part concludes the discussion.

Social and ecological challenges of cities and urban regions

It goes without saying that cities and urbanisation have played a crucial role in human prosperity. The concentration of people and resources in urban areas has led to increased economic growth, job opportunities and cultural exchange (Taylor, 2013). Urbanisation has enabled the development of complex social and economic systems that have enabled advancements in technology, science and the arts. Urban centres have facilitated the dissemination of knowledge, allowing individuals to learn from one another and access education and healthcare (Glaeser, 2011). Additionally, urbanisation has contributed to increased social mobility and the formation of diverse communities (Mumford, 1961). In short, the growth of cities and urbanisation has been a key driver of human progress and prosperity.

However, cities and urbanisation have also long been associated with social challenges such as urban segregation and inequalities. Urban segregation refers to the uneven distribution of populations in different areas of a city, often resulting from poverty, racial, ethnic or gender dynamics, and gentrification (van Eijk, 2010). Urban inequalities, on the other hand, refer to unequal access to opportunities, resources and services within a city, which can also be related to race, class, gender and other social factors (Castells, 1983). In her seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs (1961) argued that traditional urban planning approaches based on rigid zoning regulations and separation of land uses often lead to the creation of isolated, homogeneous neighbourhoods that lack diversity and vitality. Instead, she advocated for a mixed-use approach that would foster social interactions and support local economies.

More recent research has highlighted the persistence of urban segregation and inequalities in many cities around the world, despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. For example, in the United States, studies have shown

that residential segregation by race and income has remained relatively stable over the past few decades, leading to persistent gaps in access to quality education, healthcare and job opportunities (Mijs and Roe, 2021). In Europe, research has shown that migrant populations are often concentrated in urban areas with high levels of poverty and unemployment, leading to *social exclusion* and *marginalisation* (Benassi et al, 2020). In some cases, urban inequalities have also been linked to environmental issues, such as the uneven distribution of pollution and lack of access to green spaces (Kephart, 2022). To address these social challenges, scholars have called for more inclusive and participatory approaches to urban planning and governance, which involve a diverse range of stakeholders in decision-making processes and prioritise the needs and aspirations of marginalised communities (Gough, 2017).

In a related vein, cities present a range of ecological challenges, including heat island effects, air and water pollution, loss of green spaces, and species degradation (Pickett et al, 2011). *Heat island effects* are a result of the large number of paved surfaces and lack of green spaces in cities, leading to higher temperatures and increased energy demands for cooling. This is of particular concern given that heat waves are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change (Kim and Brown, 2021). *Air and water pollution* are also significant challenges for urban areas, with high levels of pollutants in the air and water contributing to a range of health problems and species degradation (Janhall, 2015). The *loss of green spaces* in cities is a further concern, as these spaces provide important benefits such as air purification, cooling and mental health benefits, as well as providing habitats for wildlife (Frank et al, 2017). Further, as cities expand, green spaces are often converted to built environments, leading to a *loss of biodiversity* and increased vulnerability to ecological disruptions (McPhearson et al, 2022).

Addressing these ecological challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including the promotion of green infrastructure, such as green roofs and walls, parks and green spaces, and the restoration of degraded urban ecosystems (Krueger et al, 2022). It also requires the adoption of more sustainable practices, such as the use of renewable energy, the reduction of waste and pollution and the promotion of more sustainable modes of transportation (Sharifi, 2016).

Social and ecological challenges of urban climate transitions

Much has been written about the role of cities and urban regions in the climate crisis. Given the abundance of data available, it is easy to perceive cities as a significant contributor to climate change (Solecki et al, 2018). While cities cover less than 5 per cent of the globe, they account for 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and consume 70 per cent of global resources (UN, 2016). Over 70 per cent of global GDP is generated

in cities, and over half of the world's population already lives in cities, a number that is projected to grow to 70 per cent by 2050 (UN-HABITAT, 2016). Because urban lifestyles are considerably more resource-intensive than rural lifestyles, the negative impacts of cities on climate change are expected to grow exponentially (Bai et al, 2014). At the same time, cities are often considered a central victim of climate change. They are likely to be the most affected by the effects of climate change due to their high population densities and location in areas prone to climate-related disasters such as sea-level rise, extreme droughts, flooding and heatwaves (Sanchez et al, 2018). Poor and marginalised groups in cities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their settlement in the more vulnerable parts of cities and lack of access to societal safety nets (Chu et al, 2016).

Since the early 2000s, cities are increasingly presented as promising sites for climate action, with cost-effective technologies available to reduce resource consumption and generate resources at a city level (Booth et al, 2010). It is expected that these interventions hold the most promise in cities due to their relatively high densities and the possibilities of scaling up and scaling out niche interventions. Much progress has also been made in understanding how to improve the behaviour of individuals, households and organisations to reduce their resource consumption and waste production through regulatory, economic or other *nudge-type incentives* (van der Heijden, 2020). Together, these technologies and interventions may even result in *regenerative cities* that create a net positive impact through urban development (Hes & Bush, 2018). The ease of collecting *big data*, advances in big data analysis techniques and improvements in artificial intelligence can only further tap the potential of cities to reduce their negative impact on global climate change and make them more resilient to the negative consequences of climate change (Bibiri, 2018).

More recently, cities have even been presented as 'saviours of the planet' in the face of climate change, with polemicists, advocacy organisations and local governments driving this perspective (Brescia and Marshall, 2016). This narrative portrays cities as the essential link between available solutions – technology and behavioural change – and climate action. Advocates of this perspective cite scholarly literature to support their arguments, pointing out that cities often set higher climate governance ambitions than the nation states to which they belong and collaborate in trans-local and sometimes trans-national networks. They are critical of state-led regulatory interventions and hopeful about bottom-up collaborations involving citizens, businesses, NGOs and local governments (for example, C40 and Arup, 2017).

However, these sweeping claims made by polemicists and advocacy organisations are being critiqued too. The narrative of cities as saviours draws on a relatively small number of front runners in climate action, not on the majority of cities and citizens around the globe (van der Heijden,

2017). Scholars are increasingly pointing out that it is all too easy to mistake or selectively present quantitative evidence as a sign of a global tendency of cities to act on climate change (Westman et al, 2022). In many cities around the world, traditional matters such as housing provision, sanitation and waste disposal are the more urgent areas for urban governance and action, and climate change remains ungoverned or is a complement rather than a key topic in urban development and planning (Johnson et al, 2015).

Increasingly, also, urban climate transitions are being scrutinised by scholars for their challenges in achieving equity and justice. While much has been written about justice and climate change as well as action in cities separately, little work has been carried out to consider their intersection (Fitzgerald, 2022). In line with the earlier concepts of 'the *right to the city*' (Harvey, 2003) and 'the *just city*' (Fainstein, 2010), scholars studying urban climate transitions argue that these transitions should move beyond the dominant focus on reducing environmental 'bads', such as carbon emissions and resource consumption (van der Heijden et al, 2019). Scholars like Sara Hughes and Matthew Hoffmann advocate for a focus on '*just urban transitions*' (JUTs), which they define as 'the fusion of climate action and justice concerns at the urban scale' (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020, p 2). To achieve JUTs, these and other scholars contend that it is important to raise questions about *procedural justice* (that is, power distribution in the planning process and who participates), *distributional equity* (that is, allocation of benefits and burdens of climate action among different communities), and *recognition* (that is, representation of minority groups and communities in the planning process).

The eco-social discourse in scholarship on urban climate transitions

From the previous two sections it has become clear that the broad scholarship on urbanisation as well as the more targeted scholarship on urban climate transitions are actively engaging with the central theme of this volume – that is, the eco-social nexus. While it remains a niche area in these literatures, scholars increasingly argue that the transition to a *low-carbon urban economy* must be accompanied by a transformation of social relations and institutions to ensure that the benefits of such a transition are equitably distributed and that marginalised groups are not left behind. To gain a better understanding of the eco-social discourse in scholarship on urban climate transitions, the following sub-sections provide an overview of the key themes from this literature.

Environmental justice

The notion of environmental justice is gaining prominence in the literature on urban climate transitions. It involves addressing the disproportionate

environmental burdens that vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities and communities of colour, often face (Gough, 2017). It is argued that urban environmental justice requires recognising the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues and considering the needs and perspectives of diverse communities (Agyman et al, 2016). Likewise, the importance of understanding power relations in shaping environmental injustices and achieving a just sustainability transition is emphasised in the literature (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020). To these ends, scholars advocate for a socio-ecological urbanism approach that combines environmental and social concerns in research and practice in order to advance environmental justice in urban areas (Berghauser Pont et al, 2022).

One of the key challenges in addressing environmental justice is the lack of participation by and representation of marginalised groups in decision-making processes. Low-income and minority communities often have limited access to political power and resources, making it difficult for them to have a meaningful say in the planning and implementation of urban climate policies (Agyman et al, 2016). This can result in the prioritisation of policies that may not align with the needs and perspectives of these communities. To address this challenge, scholars have proposed various participatory and inclusive approaches to decision making, such as community-based research, citizen science, and co-production of knowledge and policies (Krueger et al, 2022).

Environmental justice also highlights the need to consider the social and economic dimensions of sustainability in urban climate transitions. For example, the use of market-based approaches to addressing climate change may not benefit vulnerable populations and may even exacerbate existing inequalities (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020).

Social equity

Social equity is another key theme in the eco-social discourse on urban climate transitions. Transitioning to a low-carbon urban economy should not only aim to reduce carbon emissions and resource consumption but also ensure that the benefits and burdens of the transition are equitably distributed across different social groups (Agyman et al, 2016). As mentioned earlier, studies have shown that marginalised communities, particularly low-income communities and communities of colour, often bear a disproportionate burden of the costs of climate action (Fitzgerald, 2022). These communities are more likely to live in areas with high levels of pollution and less access to green spaces, making them more vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels and air pollution (Wolch et al, 2014).

To address these social inequities, scholars call for policies that explicitly prioritise the needs and interests of marginalised communities (Agyman et al, 2016). For example, community-led initiatives that empower marginalised

communities to take control of their own environmental and social futures have been proposed as a way to achieve more just and equitable outcomes in urban climate transitions (van der Heijden et al, 2019). Such initiatives can involve collaborations between community organisations, local governments and other stakeholders to identify and address the specific needs and priorities of marginalised communities (Checker, 2011).

In addition to addressing social inequities through policy, scholars argue that urban climate transitions must also involve a transformation of social norms and values. Such a transformation can help to ensure that sustainable and just forms of consumption and production become the norm rather than the exception in urban regions (Nguyen et al, 2019). For example, campaigns aimed at promoting neighbourhood clean-ups by residents or community-based e-waste repair and recycle centres have been proposed as ways to shift societal norms and promote sustainable behaviour (Heacock et al, 2016). Such campaigns can also help to build a sense of collective responsibility and action towards the shared goal of a more sustainable and just urban future (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014).

Political ecology

Political ecology is a third key theme in the eco-social discourse on urban climate transitions. Scholars argue that the transition to a low-carbon urban economy must be accompanied by a transformation of the underlying economic structures that contribute to climate change (Frantzeskaki et al, 2012). This includes a shift away from growth-oriented economic models that prioritise short-term profits over long-term sustainability and towards more sustainable and equitable economic systems that prioritise the well-being of people and the planet (Liao, 2019). One aspect of this transformation involves rethinking the role of the state in urban climate transitions. Scholars argue that the state has an important role to play in shaping the transition to a low-carbon economy through policies and regulations that support sustainable and just forms of urban development (Castán Broto, 2020).

However, there is also recognition that the state is often limited in its capacity to drive transformative change, due to factors such as political and economic constraints, resistance from vested interests, and neoliberal ideologies that prioritise market-based solutions over government intervention (van der Heijden, 2014). As a result, scholars argue that urban climate transitions must also involve the mobilisation of alternative forms of political and economic power, beyond the state and traditional economic actors (Swyngedouw, 2010). This includes grassroots movements, community-based organisations and other forms of civil society that can challenge existing power structures and advocate for more sustainable and just forms of urban development (Bulkeley et al, 2015).

In addition, scholars argue that urban climate transitions must also address the intersection of climate change with other forms of inequality and oppression, such as race, class and gender (Stissing et al, 2018). This requires an understanding of how these intersecting forms of oppression shape the distribution of power and resources in urban areas, and how they interact with climate change to create unique challenges and opportunities for different social groups (Lwasa, 2018).

Just transitions

A final key theme in the eco-social discourse on urban climate transitions is the concept of just transitions. Scholars argue that urban climate transitions must prioritise the needs and interests of marginalised communities, and that the transition to a low-carbon urban economy must be accompanied by a redistribution of resources and power to ensure that the benefits of this transition are equitably distributed (Burch, 2021). This requires a focus on social justice, which addresses the inequitable distribution of benefits and costs associated with climate change and urban development (Fitzgerald, 2022). To achieve just transitions, scholars suggest a range of strategies, including *participatory planning processes* that engage diverse stakeholders in decision making and build capacity among marginalised communities (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020). Such processes must prioritise the needs of low-income communities and communities of colour, which are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and the least able to adapt (Fainstein, 2010).

Moreover, just transitions require attention to the distribution of benefits and costs associated with climate action. Because the costs and benefits of urban climate transitions are often unevenly distributed, a focus on distributional equity is critical to achieving just transitions (Keenan et al, 2018). This requires an understanding of the social and political processes that shape the distribution of benefits and costs, and the development of policies that explicitly address the needs and interests of marginalised communities (Agyman et al, 2016).

Finally, scholars argue that just transitions require a transformation of social norms and values to ensure that sustainable and just forms of consumption and production become the norm rather than the exception. This requires a focus on recognition, which addresses the ways in which different social groups are included or excluded from decision-making processes and the distribution of benefits and costs associated with climate action (Hughes and Hoffmann, 2020). Recognition also involves addressing historical injustices and inequalities, and acknowledging the ways in which race, class, gender and other forms of identity intersect to shape the experiences of marginalised communities (Stissing Jensen et al, 2018).

Conclusion

Cities and urban regions play a critical role in addressing climate change. Effective urban climate actions must tackle both ecological and social challenges in an integrated manner. Although scholars have called for urban climate transitions that pursue both ecological and societal goals for over two decades, little is known about how this translates to policy and practice (Frank et al, 2017; Bärnthaler, 2023). Furthermore, the existing knowledge is largely based on a small number of case studies from cities in developed economies such as Australia (Gulsrud et al, 2018), the US (Anderson et al, 2019), Singapore (Liao, 2019) and Sweden (Khan et al, 2020). Future scholarship on the eco-social nexus in urban climate transitions must move beyond making normative calls for linking ecological and social goals and instead focus on empirical investigations in both developed and developing economies to identify promising outcomes.

To achieve this goal, it is crucial to explore new ways of studying the eco-social nexus in urban climate transitions in a manner that facilitates comparison across different studies. One promising approach is the use of systems thinking, which provides a holistic perspective that recognises the interconnectedness of social, economic and ecological urban systems. For example, the concept of Social-Ecological Urbanism (SEU) offers a broad conception of urban climate transitions by addressing cities at the relevant systems level (Berghauser Pont et al, 2022, p 1). Similarly, the social-ecological-technological systems (SETS) framework provides a systems perspective that considers the reality of cities as complex systems and provides a baseline for developing a science of and practice for cities (McPhearson et al, 2021, p 173). These analytical frameworks allow for the study of what is essentially a highly complex cross-disciplinary research topic.

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19

Just transitions in climate and sustainable governance: a perspective from the South

Xira Ruiz-Campillo

Introduction

In its last report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) pointed to human activities as unequivocally being the cause of the emissions of greenhouse gases. Those emissions mainly come from the use of unsustainable energy, land use and how that use changes lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production (IPCC, 2023). This should lead us to reconsider our current way of producing, consuming and living. The IPCC (2023) states that equity, climate justice, social justice, inclusion and just transitions should be prioritised to enable adaptation and climate resilience. And this is best done through political commitment, multilevel governance, laws, policies, strategies and improved access to finance and technology.

It is clear that transitions will be different depending on where they take place. Access to funding, expertise or human resources is crucial, but so is giving attention to the social dimension of this transition. There seems to be a consensus around the need for a socially legitimate, fair and progressive transition to avoid adding new social conflicts (Büchs et al, 2011; Gough, 2013). However, a double challenge that lies ahead is how to reduce environmental degradation without increasing social inequality, not only that based on income, but also that related to access to socio-technical systems or the uneven distribution of the gains and risks of that transition (Kanger and Schot, 2019). Scholars on energy, environment and climate have encapsulated this process into what is commonly known as a 'just transition', which can encompass research areas like energy justice, environmental justice or climate justice (Green, 2018; Heffron and McCauley, 2018). Another strand of the literature proposes a whole-system approach with four justice dimensions – recognition, distribution, procedure and restoration – each of them showing different issues to be considered (Abram et al, 2022).

In all cases there exists a consensus on the need to drive the ecological transition, making sure that the decarbonisation process takes into

consideration its impact on workers, employment and social benefits. For instance, Laurent and Pochet (2015) point to three main axes of what they call a social-ecological transition: equality, employment and social protection. Equality would link the idea of environmental justice and greater responsibilities for those who have contributed more to the current climate crises. This would be accompanied not only by the boosting of jobs in green industries, investment in public transport systems and household energy efficiency, and the use of taxes (Otto and Gugushvili, 2020), but also in the need to rethink the current labour paradigm: more productivity does not always lead to more growth and well-being (Laurent and Pochet, 2015). And the third axis of social protection would require an active role from institutions, who are expected to care for and protect the population from the consequences of climate change (for example, disasters after floods or droughts).

In this regard, some authors highlight that climate change policies are likely to have a more negative impact on poor and vulnerable populations, since these policies tend to have a regressive effect (Büchs et al, 2011; Markkanen and Anger-Kraavi, 2019). This is why it is important to consider the specific circumstances the ecological transitions will meet in the Global South, since both 'globals' depart from different starting points. Some researchers in the Global South have also pointed out that sustainability transitions in this region are imbued with the views and technologies of what Northern countries think a transition should be, leading to social injustices and ecological degradations (Kanger and Schot, 2019). Indeed, it is difficult to apply the very Eurocentric eco-social concept to Southern realities, where the concept of just transition better suits Southern problems and contexts. Although the just transition movement has branched into several sections, such as just urban transitions, just rural transitions or just energy transitions (Shirley, 2021), the use of the just transition linked to the impact of climate change in the energy sector and on jobs is one of the main focuses. Indeed, one of the most accepted definitions of just transition is that of the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015a), who defined it as 'greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind'.

With this in mind, and while trying to bring together the eco-social and the just transition concepts, the remainder of the chapter will focus on how the three main elements of a social-ecological transition as identified by Laurent and Pochet (2015) – equality, employment and social protection – and the concept of just transition are approached in the Global South, as well as how the particularities in the South are addressed. The three countries that will be used to exemplify how those transitions are being approached are India, Kenya and Argentina.

Understanding (just) transitions in the Global South

Although the Paris Agreement (2015) does not make any explicit reference to the process of a just transition, let alone eco-social transitions, its preamble does portray a just transition of the workforce as an imperative and links it with the creation of decent work and quality jobs. To be embraced widely, the transition should leave as few people behind as possible, which could be a realistic aim if this transition were used as a strong driver of job creation, social justice and poverty reduction (ILO, 2015b). It is important that this transition happens in the Global South, since that is where the most vulnerable populations and countries exist. They will be more affected than those countries that are historically more responsible for this challenge. For instance, the IPCC (2023) states that the increasing frequency of extreme weather and climate events is exposing millions of peoples in Africa, Asia and South America to acute food and water insecurity, consequently driving increasing displacement. All this is happening in areas already suffering from inequality, poverty and population growth, as well as profound economic and social inequalities.

The concept of just transition has been developed mainly in the Global North, though the Global South is also exposed to multiple challenges, many of which are far from those in the North. As a result, transitions are to be adapted to each specific reality. Latin America, for instance, heavily relies on natural resource extraction, while the levels of energy production and consumption have increased in the last decade (Pucheta and Sánchez, 2022). When examining the creation of *green jobs* in Latin America, some prospects suggest the creation of 22 million new jobs in the areas of sustainable energy, agriculture, forestry and construction, paired with the loss of 7.5 million jobs linked to fossil fuel extraction and electricity generation, or animal-based food production (Saget et al, 2020). One of the main obstacles, however, is the lack of workers with appropriate skills that could help to increase the gains that the population could benefit from with the ecological transition in the region. For instance, while 13.4 million new green jobs will be in medium-skill occupations and 1 million in high-skill work, 23 million young people were not in education, employment or training in 2019 (Saget et al, 2020). Therefore, this can be used as an opportunity to boost education and the economy within a greener path.

In the case of Africa, most of the economies are largely undiversified and rely predominantly on agriculture, putting a special burden on smallholder farmers and on food security (Carleton, 2022). The United Nations Environment Programme foresees the creation of millions of green jobs in Africa in areas including renewable energies, sustainable digital infrastructure (like internet connectivity solutions or e-waste management), transport or

sustainable agricultural supply chains (UNEP, 2023). This, in a country with the largest rates of informal work in the world (76 per cent; Otlhogile and Shirley, 2023), has the potential of improving the lives and working conditions of millions of people.

Asia is home to 90 per cent of coal-fired power plants under 20 years of age, and any transition is seen as having negative consequences in the social and labour sectors. In 2024 it is foreseen to become the third-largest coal-consuming region in the world (IEA, 2020; Anbumozhi et al, 2023). The ILO estimates that more than 14 million (net) green jobs could be created in the Asia-Pacific region by 2030 if necessary conditions are met (ILO, 2018). However, just like in other regions of the Global South, the transition will need to deal with the lack of teachers and trainers in new green areas, along with ensuring that workers have the necessary skills (ILO, 2019).

As already described, one of the challenges of transitions in Southern countries is that their economies are not only dependent on heavily polluting activities such as mining or energy, but also on some that will be impacted the most by climate change, like agriculture. Also, these economic sectors face high rates of informality and precariousness, which add to the ongoing high inflation and to classic gender disparities in access to jobs (Pucheta and Sánchez, 2022; Otlhogile and Shirley, 2023). Illegality or legal ambiguity is also identified in the land rights of Indigenous populations, who often find that the lands they have lived on for centuries have been offered as concessions to timber or oil companies (Atteridge et al, 2022). In this regard, several publications highlight the need for incorporating all these actors (whose activities are sometimes labelled as 'illegal') into discussions to ensure a just transition (Atteridge et al, 2022; Pucheta and Sánchez, 2022).

Linked to this is the impact of external forces in the perpetuation of unfair employment conditions. One example is when the extraction of cobalt for mobile phone production is done under despicable work conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and those same devices end up in vast dumps in Ghana when citizens in the North decide to change their mobile phones (Sovacool et al, 2020). Other examples include coal mining and the textile and garment sector, which have a significant weight in many countries in the region, both because of the negative environmental impact and the high rates of employment in those sectors (ILO, 2019, 2022). Both sectors are closely linked to consumption patterns in developed economies, where the use and disposal of all kinds of products is a scourge. Therefore, we must consider how injustices in developing economies are perpetuated by the lifestyles and regulations in developed economies. Not acknowledging this will almost certainly accentuate inequalities and socio-economic divisions, further destabilising these regions (Otlhogile and Shirley, 2023).

No just transitions for the South?

India, Kenya and Argentina are three developing economies on three different continents with very diverse economic and social situations. While the three of them are leading economies in their respective regions, their needs are not alike. India is focused on providing energy to its population and on poverty reduction. Kenya has an emerging urban middle class and is highly dependent on agriculture. Out of the three, Argentina is the most developed economy, with around US$10,600 GDP per capita in 2021, and with high levels of development in all areas. Meanwhile, both India and Kenya had a GDP per capita of around US$2,000–3,000 in 2021.

To analyse how India, Kenya and Argentina are approaching the just transition and eco-social processes, two main sources have been examined: Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), a system where countries relate how they will face climate change to comply with the Paris Agreement (2015), and the voluntary national reports (VNRs) on the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The concept of just transition is not necessarily embraced by Southern countries. However, this research seeks to identify how they approach employment, equality and social protection in these national documents, which somehow envisage their plans and initiatives to live more sustainably during the following decades.

Not a just transition in India

In its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) (MOEFCC, 2015) and its updated first NDC (MOEFCC, 2022), India does not use the word 'transition', let alone the concept of a just transition. However, the INDC and NDC include the term 'climate justice' in their titles, as well as the idea of 'social justice'. While equality is also a term foreign to these documents, the INDC mentions the need to eradicate poverty as the first goal through the promotion of economic growth and social development.

In the last few years, the country has added new electricity connections for 50 million citizens (IEA, 2022), reaching a stunning 97 per cent of electrification (Agrawal et al, 2020). Given that electrification has been achieved through fossil fuels, fossil energy consumption is rapidly growing in India. In its INDC (2015) (MOEFCC, 2015), India suggests that the technology and finance from developed economies is required to ensure economic growth and is achieved with a low level of emissions. The clean energy transition is already under way: the country has surpassed the goal of meeting 40 per cent of its power capacity from non-fossil fuels almost a decade ahead of its commitment to the Paris Agreement, thanks to the spectacular growth of the share of solar and wind plants (IEA, 2022). The

country is well placed to become a global leader in renewable batteries and green hydrogen (IEA, 2022), but it also faces a few challenges, such as the spike in the price of energy and how to ensure that this transition benefits its population. Among its initiatives to achieve affordable and clean energy, the government is strongly focused on comparatively low-cost renewable energy and the improvement of energy efficiency enforcement standards and labelling (NITI Aayog, 2020).

The concept of just transition is also absent in India's SDG VNR, but the idea of equality is somehow present, if mostly related to gender equality. However, the 2030 agenda is embraced as a framework to ensure faster economic growth, equality and inclusion. The agenda underlines that these goals will be achieved, for instance, through the promotion of income growth, access to education, social protection measures or financial inclusion (NITI Aayog, 2020). The document mentions initiatives on sustainable urbanisation and mobility, sustainable food systems, waste management and clean energy (NITI Aayog, 2020), all of them being key sectors for increasing employment levels with a smaller footprint.

The idea of social protection, although mentioned in the VNR, is not connected with how to protect those most impacted by an energy transition, but with the need to improve livelihood support, health protection or income assistance to vulnerable populations (NITI Aayog, 2020). Despite all of this, the idea of how to reduce the impact of climate change on citizens is not present. In all likelihood, it is the 2030 Agenda rather than the Paris Agreement which promotes some goals that eventually will help reduce the intensity of the impacts of an energy transition in the country, namely SDG7 on clean and affordable energy, SDG8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG12 on sustainable consumption. These SDGs are promoting ideas like the improvement of wages, the promotion of labour rights or the need for resource efficiency (NITI Aayog, 2020). However, there is not a link to how these sectors can be oriented in a way that they contribute to an energy transition and citizens' resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Leave no one behind in Kenya

Kenya's leading source of emissions in 2015 was agriculture, mainly due to livestock and the use of fertilisers (MOEF, 2020). For Kenya, poverty alleviation and sustainable economic development are key priorities. The country underlines that climate change is to be addressed on a fair basis, considering historical responsibility and respective capabilities (MOEF, 2020).

Kenya's NDC mentions the concept of just transition only once. It identifies a just transition with the need for social protection, and for dialogue with different stakeholders to ensure all interests are included in the climate action (MOEF, 2020). Although superficially, and not strictly connected to

a just transition, the NDC states that the country adopts an 'all of society approach' in tackling climate change, engaging all its actors as part of its adaptation and mitigation priorities. While it does not contain the concept of just transition per se, Kenya's development agenda is guided by the Kenya Vision 2030, a long-term development road map that comprises three main pillars: economic, social and political. Eventually, these pillars present very similar ideas to the SDGs Status Report (PS Planning, 2019). It includes the concept of 'leave no one behind', acknowledging the requirement to increase access to education and income, end poverty and ensure that all people have clean water, sanitation and energy. However, the 'leave no one behind' framework is more oriented towards the development of the country than to reducing the impacts of an energy transition on society.

The SDGs Status Report also mentions a Green Economy Strategy to address key challenges such as poverty, unemployment or environmental degradation. It is connected, however, to accelerating growth, to having a cleaner environment and to having higher productivity, but not to enhancing the well-being of people (PS Planning, 2019).

Kenya's National Adaptation Plan 2015–30 recognises that climate change has negative economic, social and environmental impacts, and therefore adaptation and development goals should complement each other (MENR, 2016). The Adaptation Plan includes the Vision 2030 initiative and, for instance, in the section on gender, vulnerable groups and youth, it highlights strengthening social protection for these groups. Even the section on human resource development, labour and employment considers reducing the vulnerability of Kenyans through economic growth and more employment opportunities as a part of 'climate-compatible development'. Training and development of new skills to increase national resilience to climate change is also mentioned (MENR, 2016). However, it is difficult to deduce from this plan alone that the country has integrated a genuine social-ecological prism that considers the impacts that a transition will have on its citizens.

Argentina's just transition

Argentina's Second National Determined Contribution is a perfect example of how to integrate the 2030 Agenda in the country's plan to address climate change. Throughout its NDC, references to a just transition – citing how to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on citizens – are constant. The country embraces the need to drive its people towards a just transition: an Argentina that is resilient, sustainable, inclusive, innovative and that does not leave any of their citizens behind (MAyDS, 2020).

The NDC includes a section on labour and just transition, where it is underlined that the creation of new sustainable jobs will be fostered, and that it will be guaranteed that workers have access to financial resources so they

can adapt their activities to climate change (MAyDS, 2020). A section on just transition highlights the need to adapt productive systems, the tripartite dialogue, the importance of creating sustainable jobs, and appropriate training. References to equity and harnessing the fight against climate change to improve the life of citizens are also included in the document (MAyDS, 2020, p 26).

Argentina's 2022 SDGs voluntary report delves into the same idea. It envisions a country that is more sustainable, supportive and fair. It urges the country to assume the energy transition as a priority and to take advantage of the potential of the transition and the environmental sustainability to create green jobs in different areas (Presidencia Argentina, 2022). It could be argued that the case of Argentina is a perfect example of how to integrate the three pillars of the social-ecological transition as framed by Laurent and Pochet (2015): fostering equality, employment and social protection as the main axes.

Conclusion

It is likely that the idea of a social-ecological transition can be better applied to developed economies than to developing economies. A transition as Laurent (2021) proposes, which includes progressive taxes, reduction of fossil fuel subsidies, social spending and the building of a social-ecological protection system, is surely better implemented in European countries than in countries where access to energy is the main concern. Indeed, most of the studies on eco-social policies focus on the European Union or other developed economies (for instance, Laurent, 2021; Mandelli, 2022; Mandelli et al, 2023), overlooking the realities of the rest of the world and ignoring their problems, needs and priorities. As it has been revealed above, the framework of 'just transition' seems a better fit for required changes in the Global South, but even the concept of just transition is absent in the documents examined from India and Kenya, which are more focused on development than on just development.

If just transition processes are to succeed in the Global South, sustainable development and climate action must occur simultaneously to address the different political, economic and social challenges that each country faces. This means that developed economies will have to give developing economies access to technology, investment and transition-relevant resources and infrastructure, skipping the need for using fossil fuels in their development, as has occurred in the Global North.

Additionally, there are several elements to ensuring the appropriation of the processes and the implementation of projects: community engagement, dialogue with local communities and access to the right equipment at the right price (Richardson-Barlow et al, 2022). Dialogue

and community engagement will be necessary in any transition that strives to be equitable. At this point, special care should be given to ensure that traditional cultural practices and habits in Indigenous communities are respected in a way that acculturation is avoided. For example, the impact of electrification and internet access on cultural traditions should be considered (Hege et al, 2022; Richardson-Barlow et al, 2022). Another issue to consider is how international climate finance is focusing on implementing techno-economic transitions, which is the view of Northern countries, and leaves little to ensure that transitions are environmentally, economically and socially fair for the population (Atteridge et al, 2022). As some researchers in the South suggest, it is important that transitions in the South consider their own resistances, struggles and culture (Gosh et al, 2021).

The three cases examined show very different approaches to climate change, to energy and to the concept of just transition. Kenya and India see the climate crisis as an opportunity for the country's development, but they do not link it with a just transition or with the need to ensure that the most vulnerable populations and those most impacted by that transition are protected, despite incorporating the 'leave no one behind' framework in their policies (in the case of Kenya). The case of Argentina is quite different, and the idea of a just transition is all over its NDC and the implementation of the Agenda 2030 (PS Planning, 2019). In this regard, it would be interesting to examine whether the use by governments of the just transition or the social-ecological transition concept has anything to do with the economy's level of development or the advancement of the welfare state.

Additionally, at the practical level, there could be potential in including an eco-social gaze at transitions, especially in the South, since incorporating aspects such as equality and social protection in the implementation of policies could contribute to minimising the impacts of climate change on millions of citizens. An eco-social gaze can also help at the academic level to understand both analytically and empirically the benefits and obstacles to these processes, and therefore contribute to potential better practices.

In any case, transitions will necessarily be different in Northern and Southern 'globals'. Since the main emissions on each side come from different sources, and since the levels of equality, employment and social protection are radically different, approaches towards transitions will need to be different too. For instance, while energy consumption is the greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions in European countries, this is not the case in most developing economies, like Kenya or India, where great pockets of energy poverty or low electricity access rates exist. This is why the energy sector is not always seen as a priority in the Global South. Indeed, in the absence of cleaner and fair-priced technology, fossil fuels are seen as the only available option for their development.

The training of workers with proper skills is key in any energy and ecological transition for both the North and the South. Green jobs are to be promoted considering the impact the transition will have on workers. It will be more the social support than the economic growth that will contribute to a fair and just transition for all. It is true, though, that without finance, little social support can be delivered.

Given all these considerations and the multiple crises ahead, there are several areas of research that could help advance eco-social transitions, thus having a positive impact on the population of the Global South. One possible line of research could be the way that technology from the North can accelerate transitions in the South. Another possible field of study could be good practices in the North and requirements on how transitions in the South may be harmful for ancestral practices and Indigenous communities. It would also be interesting to understand the paths to eco-social and just transitions to identify the links between development levels and welfare states. In all cases, we need both conceptual advances – for instance, what eco-social transition means in a Southern country – and empirical works that help understand the difficulties in translating Northern practices to Southern realities and the theory to practice.

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20

Eco-social policy in the liberal world of welfare: the institutional opportunities for socio-ecological transitions in Anglo-Saxon regimes

Paul Bridgen

Introduction

In responding to the environmental crisis, most social policy commentators suggest Global North welfare states will at least require adjustment to compensate their worst-affected citizens. More fundamental change would be necessary under the low- or no-growth scenarios some argue will be required to adequately reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (for example, Buch-Hansen and Koch, 2019). The concept of eco-social policy has been developed to describe such developments. It refers to interventions which simultaneously seek to address environmental and social goals (Gough, 2017). Scholars have identified various existing policies as potentially eco-social (for example, Mandelli, 2022), such as just transition commitments made in the European Green Deal (EC, 2020), but the term has also been applied to normative proposals developed by scholars working on possible post-growth welfare state futures (for example, Gough, 2017).

Comparatively, *welfare capitalist regime theory* (WCRT) has been used to assess the institutional arrangements likely to facilitate or obstruct the development of eco-social policies (Gough, 2017). Associated particularly with Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) and the varieties of capitalism literature (for example, Hall and Soskice, 2001), this suggests the prospects for welfare state reform are determined primarily by the social embeddedness and institutional path dependencies (Pierson, 2000) associated with at least three welfare regime types: conservative, liberal and social democratic. Based loosely on this framework, Dryzek (Gough et al, 2008) 'provisionally concluded' that social democratic regimes were best placed to coordinate successfully environmental and social interventions to develop eco-social policies, with liberal ones most problematic. More recently, this conclusion has been theoretically and empirically challenged (Buch-Hansen and Koch, 2019; Graziano and Zimmermann, 2020).

However, as this chapter shows, much work in this area relies on quite superficial conceptualisations of the causal mechanisms and processes by which existing institutional frameworks are said to inhibit or facilitate reform, with most explanatory attention given to corporatist institutions. Largely absent is any systematic engagement with the array of more recent regime-related analytical concepts (for example, self-undermining policy feedback and policy entrepreneurs) used to explain unexpected welfare state change in the last two decades (Häusermann, 2010; Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). As will be explained below, this creates particular problems for the theorisation of eco-social transitions in the liberal world.

To address this issue, and thus surface additional possible processes for eco-social change in liberal welfare systems, this chapter uses the recent WCRT literature to highlight the various ways existing welfare state institutions offer opportunities as well as obstacles to reformers – how institutions can be destabilised and reformed in the face of endogenous policy pressures and exogenous structural challenges, for example, population ageing, deindustrialisation and so on. Following Häusermann (2010), it will be suggested that the concurrent nature of such challenges opens up multi-dimensional policy spaces, particularly in circumstances of policy instability, important for eco-social transitions because of their potential in generating cross-class, multi-actor coalitions as drivers of welfare state change.

Empirically, the chapter uses these tools to consider the recent rise of one proposed eco-social policy – working time reduction (WTR) – on the public agenda of a liberal welfare system, the UK. This development is unexpected using the standard WCRT model given liberal regimes have been strongly associated institutionally with long working hours (to be discussed later in the chapter). The UK case study details the generation of self-undermining feedback in this policy space in the face of broader structural labour market changes, exacerbated by a contingent 'dramatic focusing event', the COVID-19 pandemic (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). This has taken the form of worker burnout and labour shortages, which importantly have influenced some employers to reconsider their support for the long hours regime. The case study shows how policy entrepreneurs associated with eco-social agendas have used the resulting multi-dimensional policy space to engineer new coalitions for change. This process remains at an early stage: the UK's long hours paradigm retains strong supporters, but the case shows liberal systems can create institutional opportunities, not just constraints, to the advantage of proponents of eco-social change.

The chapter is organised as follows. First, the standard WCRT model explanation of eco-social transitions is explored and the potential role for more dynamic forms is outlined. In a second step, this dynamic framework is applied to the recent UK politics of WTR.

WCRT and theorising eco-social transitions

Welfare capitalist regimes have provided the conceptual foundation for comparative social policy analysis for over three decades. They are conceptualised as self-reinforcing, complementary institutional configurations, the features of which are determined over time by the developing balance of economic, political and social forces (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall and Soskice, 2001). They have been used analytically to explore the interaction between institutional arrangements set up at a previous historical juncture to address a range of contemporaneously salient social issues, and the institutional arrangements required at a later date to address significantly new issues. WCRT expects earlier arrangements to strongly influence later policy developments, with each world of welfare responding distinctively to new external challenges (Pierson, 2001). Such processes are influenced by institutions' social underpinnings – a legacy of earlier class-based interest and ideological struggles – and path dependencies (Pierson, 2000). The latter include the costs of starting again or establishing new capacity; the fact that political actors' skills, practices, beliefs and expectations are strongly attuned to the current paradigm; and external social actors' resistance to changing institutions upon which significant economic and social decision have rested (Pierson, 2000). All generate self-reinforcing feedback.

In considering the implications for social policy of climate change, Dryzek loosely used this framework to reach the 'provisional conclusion' that social democratic, coordinated capitalism was most suited to managing environmental and social policy interaction in a way that mainstreams both environmental and equality concerns (Gough et al, 2008, p 330). He focused on the state's size and nature in such regimes, particularly the incorporation of corporatist institutions. Thus, strong, inclusive and integrated welfare institutions create bureaucratic capacity and interest intermediation well suited to manage holistically the eco-social challenge (Gough and others, 2008). Ideationally, these arrangements are framed by 'ecological modernisation' discourses, facilitating business support. Proportional electoral systems integrate Green Party representation, further embedding this approach (Gough, 2017).

Liberal welfare capitalism is less conducive, according to Dryzek, mainly because its state is not corporatist (Gough et al, 2008). Here, strong liberal ideological and institutional legacies mean smaller and less coordinated states. The preference for neo-liberal market solutions (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall and Soskice, 2001) inhibits environmental and social policy interaction particularly because of the power of carbon-based energy producers (Gough, 2017). Majoritarian, first-past-the-post electoral systems constrain minor party growth (Carter, 2013). The development of eco-social policies is

thus unlikely to move beyond targeted compensations for those affected by transitions (Gough, 2017).

Dryzek accepted his 'provisional' conclusion required much fuller exploration, but this has not so far been forthcoming. Instead, the focus has been mainly on empirical tests of the regime-based argument (Koch and Fritz, 2014; Zimmermann and Graziano, 2020). These are still at an early stage, are mainly quantitative and tend not to operationalise eco-social developments in ways designed to highlight policy interaction.

However, more importantly, this research area is inhibited by the limitations of its theoretical foundations. The focus on corporatism in determining environmental and social policy interactions leads particularly to the inference that these are unlikely in liberal welfare states. In the next section, it is suggested that the greater institutional fluidity in all regimes highlighted by more recent WCRT-related scholarship means this conclusion at least requires more nuance.

WCRT and institutional change

The standard WCRT model did not rule out institutional change entirely but argued it was strongly bounded (Pierson, 2001, p 415). Increased attention to the circumstances in which more significant institutional change occurs arose in light of empirical evidence from the early 2000s of greater than predicted welfare state reform (for example, Bridgen and Meyer, 2014). In this more dynamic form, WCRT has been used to highlight how institutions shape as well as constrain change and the varying strategies political actors use to facilitate such developments. The conceptual tools generated are valuable, as will be seen, in understanding recent eco-social policy development in the following case study and, it is argued, more generally in liberal regimes. Attention is given to three main processes: i) the generation by institutions of self-undermining feedback (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015); ii) the existence of concurrent structural challenges to welfare states that generate new multi-dimensional policy spaces (Häusermann, 2010); and iii) the importance of strategic interaction and policy entrepreneurship in this fluid reform context (Häusermann, 2010).

Self-undermining feedback refers to the generation by existing institutions of 'unanticipated losses' which undermine rather than reinforce existing arrangements (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). These can develop because of new structural contexts (exogenously) or be created by repeated incremental reforms to existing frameworks (endogenously). Particularly when losses strongly affect erstwhile supporters, this can lead to a search for policy alternatives (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015, pp 444–449). Transformational change might occur where 'unanticipated losses' are concentrated or where a 'dramatic focusing event' concentrates policy makers' attention (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015, pp 444–449).

With regard to structural challenges, recent analysis of welfare state change has highlighted the broad range of pressures concurrently confronted (for example, post-industrialism and globalisation). This generates widespread institutional 'misfits' and unexpected losses (self-undermining feedback), with varying implications for different policy actors (Häusermann, 2010). Reform debates become multi-dimensional, with a variety of policy actors proposing a range of reforms to deal with the losses they perceive as most important.

This multi-dimensional policy space creates opportunities for coalition formation to challenge existing institutional arrangements. Alliances can form between groups who favour change even if the particular nature of the change they desire is different. Packages of reform are often the consequence (Häusermann, 2010). Policy entrepreneurs and brokers are vital to such processes, facilitating coalition formation by publicising problems, developing workable policy solutions (Sabatier and Wiebe, 2007; Häusermann, 2010) and increasing support by 'demonstrations of credibility' of policy proposals (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015, p 449).

Importantly, with respect to eco-social transition in liberal regimes, processes based on these dynamics can create opportunities for ostensibly weaker social forces. Thus, Häusermann shows how, in a multi-dimensional policy space, gender equality in continental pension systems has improved in recent years (2010, pp 4, 23), notwithstanding that women's political power has not markedly increased.

In short, dynamic WCRT provides a well-established foundation for understanding the circumstances in which, in the context of concurrent structural challenges to welfare states, cross-class political coalitions can form to engineer significant reforms taking advantage of self-undermining feedback. In what follows, these insights frame a case study of the recent UK politics of working hours which shows how liberal systems can create opportunities for eco-social change as well as obstacles. This analysis starts by outlining the reasons WTR is regarded as a potential eco-social policy.

Working time reduction as an eco-social policy

WTR is a normative eco-social policy proposal particularly associated with post-growth commentators (see also Büchs in this volume). Environmentally, it is argued this could substantially reduce GHG emissions and broader environmental degradation by lowering economic output – reducing income and consumption – and thus limiting the throughput of natural resources (for example, Knight et al, 2013). Increased leisure time might also encourage people to engage in time-intensive and more sustainable consumption patterns (Druckman et al, 2012). Some evidence suggests rebound effects, due to increased leisure-related emissions (for example, Buhl and Acosta, 2016), but this is less likely where income is reduced (Shao

and Shen, 2017). With respect to the UK, King and van den Bergh (2017) project that the introduction of a four-day week could realistically reduce GHG emissions by 15 per cent. Socially, evidence suggests WTR could ease unemployment (Jackson and Victor, 2011), with shorter working hours also linked to individual health and well-being improvements and lower stress (Buhl and Acosta, 2016).

Working time reductions and liberal welfare states

Under the standard WCRT model, moves towards WTR would be unexpected in liberal welfare regimes given their political economies and associated institutions. Long working hours, it is argued, are an inherent feature of their market-based production systems' approach to ensuring the supply of collective goods, transferable skills and industrial peace (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Burgoon and Baxandall, 2004). Markets are thus left largely unfettered to coordinate wage, skill and investment decisions in the absence of coordinating and collaborative state, social partner and industrial and financial institutions. Labour market regulation is absent and productivity improvements rely on low non-wage costs and employment maximisation. Welfare systems are complementary: benefit levels are low, reducing reservation wages, with work a precondition for more generous welfare support. Employees adapt to the regime's reward of mobility, flexibility and 'switchable' general skills. Unregulated labour markets and low tax regimes lead to comparatively generous disposable incomes for skilled employees. Lower-waged employees use employment flexibilities and long hours to maintain a basic standard of living. Empirically, with respect to working hours, most data over the last 30 to 40 years confirms this model, consistently showing hours longest in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, although the gap with countries in other regime types has recently narrowed (Burger, 2021).

The contemporary politics of working time in the UK

Yet, notwithstanding these institutional constraints in liberal regimes, WTR has emerged quite strongly on the public policy agenda of some liberal countries in recent years (for example, the UK and New Zealand). In the UK, this has involved supportive parliamentary motions (Chung, 2022), social movement mobilisation, large pilot studies involving employer implementation of four-day weeks (4 Day Week, 2023a) and polls suggesting quite high levels of business support (Ibbetson, 2019). These developments are detailed and analysed below. They have occurred in economic circumstances (low growth, declining real wages) not obviously conducive to such a policy. In the following sections, these developments and their limitations are explained using the dynamic WCRT conceptual

tools outlined. We start by considering the structural challenges faced by the UK labour market in recent decades.

Concurrent structural challenges

The UK has been affected by both the two main structural challenges comparative political economists suggest have affected working conditions and hours in Global North labour markets over recent decades (Burger, 2021). The first involves increasing precariousness at the lower end of the labour market as a product of changing international markets, increased global competition in manufacturing and a concomitant growth of service sector employment (Eurofond, 2018). Among many lower-skilled workers, further upward pressure has been put on working hours as means to ensure income reaches subsistence level. Core workers have generally been shielded from these pressures, but many in these groups have faced the second challenge: intensified competitiveness of skilled and professional labour markets due to a mix of internationalisation, information technology and increased education, which has expanded the size of the skilled middle class (Burger, 2021). Employment vulnerabilities have risen, work has intensified, and hours have lengthened.

While it is not fully clear in the UK whether lower- or higher-skilled workers have been most affected by these challenges, there is strong evidence that the proportion of full-time workers undertaking extreme hours (that is, more than 49 hours a week) in the last three decades has risen compared to the 1970s and 1980s (Burger, 2021). Comparatively, the most recent International Labour Organization data shows the proportion of full-time employees working more than 49 hours per week in the UK significantly in excess of selected European comparators (ILOSTAT, 2023) (see Table 20.1).

The rise of self-undermining feedback

Until the last few years, only unions and the left wing of the Labour Party expressed concern about the impact on working conditions and hours of

Table 20.1: Average annual share of full-time workers working 49 hours or more in the UK, Germany and Sweden 2012–19 (%)

	UK	Germany	Sweden
Total	21.3	15.8	13.4
Male	24.8	18.7	16.3
Female	14.6	10.0	9.2

Source: ILOSTAT

the UK's low-regulation labour market (Bell, 2019). Existing arrangements seemed firmly locked in, the basis for employers' and employees' work-based decision making and policy makers' assumptions about labour market policy.

In the last five or so years, and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, this paradigm has begun to be challenged by some employers as well as the 'usual suspects'. This is in the face of rising evidence of self-undermining feedback generated by the UK's liberal labour market, to which the 'dramatic focusing event' (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015, p 448) of COVID-19 appears to have directed concentrated attention. Two developments are most important. The first is evidence of rising well-being problems, specifically employee burnout. This condition is defined by the World Health Organization as 'a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed' (WHO, 2019). It can lead to a range of (mainly mental) health conditions, which in turn increases absenteeism, worker turnover and other problems (Demerouti et al, 2021), and is more likely when work intensification increases, particularly when this involves long hours (Schaufeli, 2018). Workers in the UK seem to have been particularly susceptible to burnout in work undertaken since the 1970s (Demerouti et al, 2021), but the COVID-19 lockdowns significantly worsened the situation. Research undertaken by Glassdoor (cited in Mayne, 2024) found a significant spike in employees reporting issues with burnout in their regular reviews of workplace attitudes. Comparatively, a McKinsey survey of 30,000 employees across 30 countries soon after the pandemic found the UK had the third worst employee mental health score, and the worst for a European country (Brassey et al, 2023).

The second development is related to the first. There is evidence since COVID-19 of a sharp increase in employees permanently leaving the labour market, particularly those within ten years of retirement. Commonly known as the 'Great Resignation', this has led to significant labour shortages. Thus, according to the Labour Force Survey, in the two years up to August–October 2022 there was a 1.3 percentage point rise in the number of 16–64-year-olds in the UK reporting themselves as inactive (House of Lords, 2022, p 12), with the rise in numbers much greater among workers above 50. Health problems related to COVID-19 was one driver of these developments, but not the most important. Rather, many workers in their late 50s and early 60s, mainly from the middle sections of hourly wage distribution, used the opportunity presented by COVID lockdowns to permanently leave the workforce, often using early access to occupational or private pensions to do this (House of Lords, 2022, pp 26–30). For many this was a 'lifestyle choice', a conscious move out of the workforce to escape work intensification and stress (House of Lords, 2022, p 29).

Significant labour shortages experienced by UK employers in the last two years have in part been caused by these developments. These peaked

in June 2022, when UK job vacancies rose above 1.25 million, an almost 50 per cent rise compared with just before COVID-19 (ONS, 2023). They have fallen back since but remain close to a million, with the number of employers reporting worker shortages the middle to higher-wage part of the labour market in the year up to July 2023 rising by around three percentage points (ONS, 2023).

In summary, the UK's long hours and work-intensive labour market has recently generated important 'unexpected losses' – self-undermining feedback – as a counter-weight to the self-reinforcing feedback traditionally associated with liberal UK institutions. These developments have been thrown into sharper relief by a 'dramatic focusing event', COVID-19. Such processes are expected, in the framework already outlined, to stimulate a search for policy alternatives, particularly when they negatively affect erstwhile supporters of existing institutions. As the next section shows, there is evidence this has been occurring.

Reform dynamics in a multi-dimensional policy space

The question of working hours and conditions has risen on UK employers' agenda as part of a broader consideration of how to address employee motivation, labour shortages and productivity. Employers are complaining of facing 'acute recruitment and retention challenges', with rapid staff turnover and the competition for people affecting firms in all sectors of the economy (CBI, 2023). This situation seems to have been exacerbated by Brexit. In this context, increased interest in WTR has taken two main forms. First, business consultants, particularly those associated with human capital management, are strongly active in this area, publishing reports, surveys and press briefings generally sympathetic to the need for business to at the least critically review the long hours culture (CIPD, 2023). The role of such advisers has long been recognised as important in the development of 'normative pressure' for change in the business world, legitimating new approaches and initiatives in circumstances of uncertainty and bounded rationality (Thrift, 2001). Second, a significant number of businesses have taken part in pilot experiments with shorter working hours, often implementing change permanently after the pilot and publicly extolling the benefits of doing so. Thus, between July and December 2022 the UK saw the 'world's largest four-day working week trial', which involved 61 companies and around 2,900 workers. Of these companies, 56 companies (92 per cent) continued with the four-day week after the trial, with 18 confirming it as a permanent change (4 Day Week, 2023a). Other surveys have found significant general support for WTR among employers (CIPD, 2023).

Crucially, into this multi-dimensional WTR policy space, now involving a range of cross-class actors with varying interests, policy entrepreneurs are

operating as agents of eco-social change. For example, 4 Day Week and Autonomy, the two campaigning organisations leading the campaign, have strong connections with the influential, green-oriented New Economics Foundation and are strongly embedded in academic networks associated with post-work and post-growth agendas (for example, Autonomy, 2023). They are facilitating multi-interest coalition formation based on campaigns and the development of workable policy solutions, particularly using 'demonstrations of credibility' to enhance the plausibility of WTR (Jacobs and Weaver, 2015) such as the employer pilots mentioned earlier (4 Day Week, 2023b). These organisations are careful to frame the case for WTR inclusively, highlighting particularly the productivity benefits to employers (4 Day Week, 2023b), but the connections and professional backgrounds of the actors involved attest to their more ambitious eco-social goals.

These developments do not mean any significant change is imminent, particularly in legislation. Many employers continue to question the feasibility of change and are unsure it is in their interests (CIPD, 2023). Among the more supportive employers, moreover, interest in WTR is focused particularly on productivity: the prospect that because shorter hours improve employee well-being, commitment and motivation, more will be done in a shorter amount of time (4 Day Week, 2023a). This is clearly at odds with the post-growth case for WTR, which focuses on reduced throughput and resource use.

However, overall, the case shows how liberal institutions can create opportunities for – as well as obstacles to – eco-social change. A significant and unexpected reform dynamic has developed on WTR, stimulated by the interaction of concurrent structural challenges and the unintended consequences of existing policies, facilitated and coordinated by policy entrepreneurs acting as agents of eco-social change.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the utility of recent WCRT-related theorising on welfare state change for understanding the politics of eco-social transitions in liberal capitalism. To this end, it has focused on the recent politics of WTR in the UK context. WTR is a normative eco-social policy proposal associated mainly with the post-growth, sustainable welfare perspective, which would not be expected to gain much traction in the liberal world.

Yet, the UK case study shows the embryonic emergence of a cross-class coalition on WTR, facilitated by eco-social policy entrepreneurs, that involves some employers, business consultants, the labour movement, campaigning groups and think tanks. Framed in the context of the case for a Four Day Week, this has unexpectedly placed WTR quite strongly on the UK public policy agenda. Important and most unexpected, in this regard, is the increasing openness of the business world to change in this area.

The more dynamic forms of WCRT that were utilised highlighted conceptually that an important stimulus of recent reform dynamics was self-undermining feedback generated by existing institutional arrangements. Essential features of the liberal model, low-regulation labour markets and long hours, were shown to have generated 'unexpected losses' in the face of broader structural challenges to labour markets. Policy entrepreneurs, mostly associated with eco-social agendas, have taken advantage of these challenges, using the 'dramatic focusing event' of COVID-19 and 'demonstrations of credibility' using pilot experiments, to advance their prescriptions for addressing the structural challenges posed by the environmental crisis.

As expected in the dynamic WCRT literature, the WTR policy space in the UK is multi-dimensional. The interests of the various actors are not identical: employers' focus on increased productivity and unions' concerns about pay are not always consistent with the arguments made for WTR by post-growth proponents. Yet, as seen in other policy areas (Häusermann, 2010) once issues are placed on public agendas as part of such processes, increased opportunities develop for less powerful groups to embed their interests as part of reform packages.

The chapter has thus shown how institutional contexts associated with the liberal world might shape eco-social transitions rather than simply making them less likely. While it is highly unlikely the processes described in the UK case will recur exactly elsewhere in the liberal world, the dynamic institutional processes and mechanisms described are likely to be present in most policy areas, offering similar opportunities to proponents of eco-social change. The conceptual tools described in the chapter provide a good basis for identifying and understanding them.

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21

International organisations in the eco-social transformation: strategies, policies and programmes

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Introduction

In the post-war welfare era, international organisations as diverse as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank or the International Labour Organization (ILO) have portrayed economic development and social protection as intertwined, placing both concepts at the centre of their agendas. More recently, 'eco-social policies' have gained some traction among governments and international actors. Eco-social policy does not sit easily with conventional economic growth paradigms, which have generally been framed as in conflict with the respect of planetary boundaries (Bärnthaler and Gough, 2023). It needs to be clarified how international organisations (IOs) balance ambitions for reconciling ecological, social and economic growth goals (Lakeman, 2021), which eco-social policy approaches they use and implement in their programmes, and how they steer them across different governance levels.

We follow Mandelli's (2022, p 340, original emphasis) understanding of eco-social policies as 'public policies *explicitly* pursuing both environmental and social policy goals in an *integrated* way'. Building on this definition, the first part of the chapter provides a brief review of current scientific debates and the state of IOs and eco-social policy strategies, focusing on how different actors have incorporated this novel approach to social policy in the last two decades.

In the second part, we illustrate how two key international organisations (ILO and IMF) have developed their eco-social strategies along the concept of a 'just transition', though following quite distinct patterns. We propose an original analytical framework to capture three dimensions of eco-social strategies, paying specific attention to the *ideational goals* these actors prioritise within the so-called 'eco-social-growth' triangle (Mandelli, 2022), the preferred *policy instruments*, and operational aspects such as the *governance*

method and mode of interaction with social partners. The chapter ends with a summary of the results and an outlook on avenues for further research.

Strategies: sustainable development, green growth and just transition

IOs have been instrumental in diffusing strategies and concepts related to eco-social policy. Since the 1970s, actors such as the UN have used such concepts in high-level conferences and reports (Sabato and Mandelli, 2020; Hvinden et al, 2022). Three (broadly speaking) 'eco-social' approaches are usually identified in the literature: sustainable development, green growth and just transition. These approaches can be distinguished regarding the role of growth and the emphasis on integrative synergies between social and environmental objectives (Sabato and Mandelli, 2018; Sabato et al, 2022). While green growth and just transition are characterised as growth-centred approaches with different emphases on eco-social objectives, sustainable development aims to balance all three goals (Schøyen et al, 2022).

Among the three, the concept of *sustainable development* has received the most attention from policy makers and researchers alike. In 'Our Common Future' (also known as the *Brundtland Report*), the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987). The report focused on the nexus between global development, especially eradicating widespread poverty in the Global South, and environmental protection by living within the planet's ecological means. Based on the understanding that a 'world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes' (WCED, 1987), the report laid the ground for linking social, economic and ecological dimensions as core pillars of sustainable development (Mensah, 2019) and called for new comprehensive and integrated (global) governance concepts to achieve these goals. This conceptualisation would later serve as a frame of reference for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 and the UN 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from 2015 onwards (Sabato and Mandelli, 2020; Hvinden et al, 2022).

Whereas the MDGs focused on supporting developing countries via financial and technical assistance from the Global North, the 2030 Agenda formulated 'universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike' (UN, 2015). This holistic approach was inspired by the so-called 'triple bottom line approach to human wellbeing' (Sachs, 2012), according to which environmental, economic and social aims should be achieved simultaneously (UN, 2015). Critics, however, stress that the SDGs do not explicitly draw attention to the contradictions

that may arise from trade-offs between different SDG targets (Schleicher et al, 2018).

In the context of the 2008 global financial crisis, the concept of *green growth* became prominent internationally (Jacobs, 2013). In 2009, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) called for a 'Global Green New Deal'. The initiative promoted sustainable growth to revive the global economy and boost employment while simultaneously accelerating the fight against climate change, environmental degradation and poverty (UNEP, 2009; see also UNEP, 2011). At the time, various IOs, such as the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), saw the crisis as an opportunity to incorporate 'green' investments in the stimulus packages implemented to spur economic recovery (Jacobs, 2013; Ferguson, 2015). The 'green economy' was also a significant aspect of the Rio+20 UN Summit (UNCSD, 2012).

At its core, green growth is about reconciling the priority of economic development with strategies for environmental protection. Central is the assumption that economic growth can be *decoupled* from unsustainable consumption of natural resources and harmful impact on the climate and environment (Koch 2018; Terzi, 2022). Importantly, this concept does not challenge the existing economic growth paradigm, but envisions development where capitalism aligns with responsible environmental practices (Jacobs, 2013). The green growth discourse emphasises technological advances, green investments and the need for major industrial transformations as sources for overcoming fossil-fuel-based industrial systems and the creation of new sustainable jobs and products (Capasso et al, 2019). The focus is on the economic, industrial and financial sectors which are particularly relevant for economic growth and employment and where reduced carbon emissions could significantly affect climate balance. This should be achieved, for instance, by removing subsidies for environmentally harmful activities and investing in green industries and jobs. However, the lack of evidence of an absolute decoupling between GDP growth and carbon emissions is a central point in criticism of green growth, particularly by 'no-', 'post-' or 'degrowth' proponents (Koch, 2018).

As in the case of green growth, the concept of *just transition* relies on the idea that greening the economy will be an engine to boost growth and jobs. However, just transition pays more attention to inclusiveness and the possible adverse social consequences of the green economy, for example, industrial restructuring of fossil-fuel-based industries (Wang and Lo, 2021). Just transition has been devised as an approach able to ensure that the transition to a green economy is socially fair, especially to groups that are most likely to be impacted by the conversion process itself (that is workers, local communities or vulnerable groups; for example, see Galgóczi, 2020). In particular, just transition aims to mitigate these negative welfare impacts

through employment as well as social protection and training policies, especially for workers in the energy sector or fossil-fuel-dependent industries (Sabato and Mandelli, 2018).

Initially adopted by North American trade unions to reconcile workers' rights with the necessity to protect the environment in the 1970s, the concept of a just transition broadened in scope over time (Stevis and Felli, 2015). Since the 1990s, the global workers' movement promoted a just transition in the context of climate change conventions and negotiations, for example, the Kyoto Conference in 1997 and the landmark Paris Climate Conference (UN, 2015), indicating widespread international political recognition of the concept (Bergamaschi, 2020).

Recently, diverse IOs have tried to integrate environmental and social prescriptions into their platforms (Cox and Béland, 2013). While distinguishing between these approaches is analytically helpful, conceptual boundaries often become blurry as political actors reframe concepts according to their core mandate. Indeed, almost all IOs refer to all three strategies, often conflating such definitions. For instance, the World Bank (2012) remarks that 'inclusive green growth is the pathway to sustainable development'. As we discuss below, this conceptual ambiguity may reveal the inherent weakness of these strategies, making it difficult for IOs to translate eco-social principles into policy practice (Newell et al, 2023).

Overall, three tendencies characterise eco-social strategies at the international level. First, IOs have been agenda setters for eco-social policy approaches in recent decades. While not implementing fully fledged eco-social strategies, their original contribution loosely framed social and ecological needs as intertwined. Second, there is a focus on growth-dominant approaches, somewhat hinting at synergies between the three objectives of growth, social justice and environmental protection. Third, strategies vary depending on the organisation's mandate and function. Whereas representatives of the Global South and IOs in the social and environmental areas have been more assertive on the eco-social nexus, economic and financial global institutions such as the IMF or the World Bank have adopted more cautious and reformist approaches (Faccer et al, 2014; Cigna et al, 2023).

Eco-social policies and programmes of IOs

In recent years, eco-social strategies have enjoyed broad diffusion across a vast range of actors. These include the UN and its specialised agencies such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IMF and ILO; networks of NGOs and INGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace and Human Rights Watch; and regional bodies such as the European Union (EU) and

the African Union (AU), as well as global policy forums such as the OECD. In terms of governance, non-political IOs (that is UN-family organisations and international financial institutions) have mostly adopted an advisory role in designing and implementing eco-social policies (Niemann et al, 2021), limiting the scope of these programmes to utilising donor funds.

While these programmes, their outcomes and recommendations have the potential of offering sound policy advice, the conceptualisations and normative prescriptions of eco-social programmes by IOs are seldom operationalised on a policy level or translated into concrete policy measures (Smith, 2005; Stevis and Felli, 2015, p 33). Several obstacles make such a mission particularly difficult, including conceptual ambiguity resulting in multiple interpretations, relatively weak agency vis à vis nation states, and different mandates or priorities across world regions and countries. However, there is variation in the extent to which IOs influence eco-social agendas at the national level (Gough, 2013). The following section will focus on these international actors and discuss their efforts in designing and implementing eco-social policies and the challenges they face in doing so.

Organisations such as the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, the ILO and UNESCO emphasise the importance of regional integration with a strong social dimension to foster *inclusive development* (Yeates, 2014). Additionally, initiatives for regional social policies, including regional redistribution mechanisms, regulations and social rights, have been put forward by bodies like the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, aiming to alleviate poverty and promote social development on a regional scale exclusively through instruments of social protection (UN, 2021). Many such programmes confer an *advisory* role to IOs: to implement programmes at the national level, IOs generally join forces with state-level governing bodies. Programmes stemming from the UN family seem characterised by a high degree of state involvement, especially in the implementation phase. Apart from governments and their administration, these IOs must sometimes gather high support from social partners to implement policies.

The Bretton Woods institutions, namely the IMF, World Bank and the WTO, generally rely on more specific governance approaches, for example, conditionality, enforcement or sanctions, to achieve their policy goals. So far, these organisations have rarely engaged with eco-social strategies directly, for instance by jointly developing programmes with national governments. However, they retain substantial power over the financial instruments and resources which are (potentially) relevant for implementing eco-social policies. In these cases, states often have less agency in influencing programme design and implementation (Gough, 2013).

Despite an initial stance in 2008 downplaying fiscal implications, recent evidence suggests that the IMF has increasingly focused on just transition

(Cigna et al, 2023). The World Bank, through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Developments Global Environment Facility, supports biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable land management and protection of international waters while at the same time addressing critical social issues such as social protection, safety nets and skills development through its Climate Change Action Plan and Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice. The WTO has developed many instruments to facilitate global responses to climate change; these include facilitating trade, for example, through the Trade Facilitation Agreement; regulating government procurement, for example, through pushing for Green Government Procurement policies; promoting international standards for energy efficiency certification, for example, through the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade; and pushing for agenda setting of reviewing import tariffs (WTO, 2023). These initiatives show an increased involvement of financial institutions in eco-social policy development and implementation, considering that the IMF had earlier described its role in social policy as 'indirect' and 'limited' (IMF, 1995). However, these efforts are often limited to capacity building, climate assessments and developing and maintaining public and private climate financial markets (Gough, 2013; Newell et al, 2023). Only the World Bank deals directly with social protection, while the other two institutions focus more on direct interventions to address climate change implications.

This brief overview suggests that UN-family organisations, funds and programmes call for more significant state intervention. By contrast, Bretton Woods institutions advocate for more market-driven measures to design eco-social policies. Similarly, we may expect UN-family organisations to prioritise social protection issues. In their limited programmes, Bretton Woods institutions put more emphasis on direct climate implications, only selectively touching upon social protection issues and mostly related to activational policies such as training and skill development.

Concerning the challenges IOs face when formulating eco-social strategies, researchers identify not only variation in the policy sets proposed by IOs, mainly reflecting their core mandates, but also a disconnect between eco-social narratives and policy 'realities' (Cigna et al, 2023; Newell et al, 2023). For some IOs, policy contradictions are diagnosed because the aim of achieving 'transformative change' is inconsistent with parallel 'initiatives that prioritise financial interests' (Newell et al, 2023, p 427). For instance, the proposal of new social protection schemes and green industrial policy collides with 'trade and investment agreements, investor protection … and the removal of safety nets' (Newell et al, 2023, p 427). Similarly, Newell et al (2023) identify four gaps in the global governance of just transitions that apply to eco-social policies in general: a horizontal gap (siloed division between economic, social and environmental IOs in pursuing eco-social

policies), a vertical gap (disconnect between the global level of goal and policy formulation and national or regional policy implementation), gaps between rhetoric and reality, and policy inconsistencies. Likewise, Gough points at a 'fragmented' global social policy governance system due to many agencies and programmes addressing similar social and environmental concerns (Gough, 2013).

Moreover, compared to other policy areas, eco-social policy approaches require a higher degree of cooperation between IOs (and subsequently donors) to ensure coherence in design and implementation. Policy integration research points out that the 'policy silo' mentality among policy makers (at the nation-state level) is a challenge for eco-social policies, which by definition impose multiple trade-offs while aiming for synergies across policy sectors (Domorenok and Trein, 2024). This problem is arguably magnified at the international level, notably for organisations that retain a more specific policy focus – such as enhancing growth or contrasting social inequality.

Varieties of eco-social policies at the international level: just transition approaches of the ILO and the IMF

The preceding brief overview suggests that research on the eco-social policies of IOs has generally been confined to the conceptual level. The analysis of eco-social policy instruments and their implementation and governance is much rarer. Only a few studies integrate the conceptual, instrumental and governance level into a coherent scheme for empirical investigation. Such analyses are generally limited to empirical cases in an exemplary fashion, thereby lacking a systematic approach.

This is the point of departure for our contribution, which attempts to provide a multidimensional analytical framework focusing on eco-social policies in general and just transition strategies in particular. In this section, we briefly present the approach we have developed in detail elsewhere (Cigna et al, 2023) and analyse two key IOs whose work is influenced by notions of a just transition – the ILO and the IMF – to describe the added value of our proposed framework. We compare diverse just transition strategies by looking at three dimensions: goal, policy instruments and governance (see Table 21.1). Our analysis proceeds in three main steps.

First, on a *conceptual* level, we assess the relative importance that IOs attach to different goals within the eco-social growth triangle. The literature discussed in previous sections suggests that IOs have placed more or less emphasis on three main objectives: social provision (via welfare), economic growth and climate protection. Although eco-social policies aim for policy integration and synergy effects, tensions exist between the three goals, often imposing trade-offs. In practice, the transition strategies of IOs may

Table 21.1: Just transition approaches of the ILO and IMF

	Goal	Policy instrument			Governance	
	Framing	State intervention	Social investment	Social protection	Social partner involvement	Governance competences
ILO	Welfare-centred	High	High	High	High	Soft law
IMF	Growth-centred	Low	Low	Low	Low	Soft law

prioritise one goal over others, depending on their political mandate. Hence, we synthetically differentiate between 'welfare-centred', 'growth-centred', and 'climate-centred' strategies. Our research interest is to verify if IOs 'lean' towards one of these extremes or adopt a balanced approach that successfully integrates two or all three objectives.

Second, from a *policy* standpoint, we assess whether and how IOs integrate welfare schemes into their agendas in view of pursuing just transition goals. Here, we follow the well-known distinction between 'social protection' and 'social investment' policies (Häusermann et al, 2022). The former aims to compensate for income losses through (early) retirement, unemployment benefits and other social transfers, while the latter focuses on long-term human capital formation through active labour market policies, reskilling or upskilling. Just transition stances can also vary regarding the scope of public intervention and the role of the state, from weak to strong. Weak state intervention is characterised by limited regulatory and financial state involvement. In contrast, strong state intervention policies refer to an active involvement of the state in securing a socially just and green transition.

Third, we analyse the *governance* dimension of just transition approaches, that is, the strategies of policy implementation and enforcement promoted by IOs. While these actors have been relevant agenda setters for a just transition in recent years, welfare–climate policy formulation and implementation are still mainly national competencies. Here, we conceptualise governance competencies as a continuum ranging from non-law to hard law (Saurugger and Terpan, 2021). Finally, our framework also looks at the role given to non-state actors, especially social partners, in the governance of just transition.

The IMF prioritises the growth dimension of decarbonisation relative to its welfare dimension (IMF, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). Most recently, the IMF's key term on the climate–economy nexus is *adaptation*, defined as 'the process needed to minimise losses and maximise benefits from climate change' (IMF, 2022a, p 3). Rather than framing climate change as an opportunity or necessity to *transition* into a new type of economy, the IMF advocates for 'constant and dynamic readjustment of consumption, production, and public policies', which would resemble an

'optimisation problem under uncertainty' (IMF, 2022a, p 3). At its most basic, the implication for the IMF is to integrate climate risks and the costs of adaptation into macro-fiscal policy making, thereby factoring in the costs of short-term climate disasters, long-term risks arising from changes in both average and extreme events, and related adaptation policies (IMF, 2022b). While acknowledging that global heating is unavoidable, the IMF further argues that adaptation needs to go hand in hand with 'mitigation' because adaptation alone would otherwise become impossible or too expensive (IMF, 2022c). The task is therefore to prevent climate risks and their impacts as much as possible.

Whereas the IMF's reports are meticulous in defining problems and solutions for reconciling economic and environmental objectives, they are much less outspoken on the welfare dimension of net-zero transitions. The term 'just transition' is not only mentioned little in quantitative terms in key documents; it is also more restrictively defined in its qualitative scope, that is, focusing only on 'vulnerable groups' (IMF, 2021a, p 12) and providing merely 'targeted assistance' (IMF, 2021b, p 3). Elsewhere, there are vague mentions of a 'just transition' (IMF, 2021c, p 10), which should accordingly ensure to 'repurpose human and physical capital' (IMF, 2021c, p 10) and build infrastructure for a low-carbon economy (IMF, 2019, 2020). More recently, the term has resurfaced in a different light (IMF, 2022a, p 3), implying that a 'just transition' requires international support for small and vulnerable developing economies to help them in their adaptation efforts. The IMF's usage of the 'just transition' concept seems rather defensive and residual. Within the social policy domain, the few proposed measures mostly fall into our social protection category, geared to compensate the losers of decarbonisation, mentioning 'socially productive investments' at one point (IMF, 2021a, p 12) but without providing any further details.

Regarding the governance dimension, the IMF's framing is one of 'soft law' – that is, 'assisting members' in responding to climate change (IMF, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Interestingly, the Executive Board concedes that it has not had the resources necessary for covering macro-climate analyses until recently, perhaps to legitimise efforts to expand and train its workforce in this direction (IMF, 2021c, pp 8–9). To live up to its mandate to oversee lending, economic and capacity development, however, it proposes to include climate change–related policy challenges in its Article IV consultations, that is, in its member-country visits every five to six years, and more frequently to the largest emitters of greenhouse gases. To what extent the IMF will make financial lending to its member states conditional on decarbonisation efforts remains to be seen.

The ILO was one of the early adopters of the just transition concept, which strongly links to the ILO's decent work agenda (Poschen, 2017; Cigna et al, 2023). The ILO helped to increase acceptance of the concept

in the international institutional sphere by developing a 'just transition framework' since 2008. In 2015 the ILO set up some *Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All* (ILO, 2015). The document frames the broader ILO agenda and functions as a reference point for member states to streamline social policies in a way that explicitly acknowledges the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development, which must be addressed in a coordinated way. For example, mainstreaming environmental sustainability (climate dimension) in national 'decent work' employment policies (welfare dimension) needs to be done through cooperation and social dialogue between all stakeholders, including but not limited to governments, private actors and trade unions (ILO, 2015, p 4).

While all three dimensions of just transition are present in ILO documents, more weight is put on the welfare and climate dimension. In contrast, the growth dimension is seen as secondary and instrumental. The ILO recognises the financial toll of a just transition (growth dimension) but does so to anticipate potential social asymmetries the transition may create. Compared to the IMF, costs, risks and budgets are not as prominent in the ILO's work despite the relevance of core ILO policies around social security and benefits being closely related to fiscal issues. While social aspects – notably minimum income and decent work (for example, ILO, 2008) – and environmental issues are highly prevalent in ILO documents, economic considerations are mainly concerned with issues around the distributive effects of policies at the national level.

Regarding the type of social policies the ILO promotes, social investment and active labour market policies to enhance skills for green jobs and education are featured in ILO documents (for example, ILO, 2022c). However, the ILO emphasises skills development together with social protection floors, especially prioritising the needs of vulnerable groups (ILO, 2023). Overall, the ILO gives importance to both social protection and social investment. In its governance, the ILO only has soft law powers and is limited in issuing policy recommendations and guidelines. As a tripartite organisation, the ILO emphasises that '… it is crucially important to involve those who will be impacted – workers, employers, communities – in the decisions to be made' (ILO, 2022b, p 3).

The ILO stresses the welfare-oriented component of eco-social policies much more than the IMF. Despite recent acknowledgements of the social challenges of decarbonisation, the IMF's approach remains predominantly growth-centred and technocratic in orientation. Hence, the IMF documents do not pay particular attention to the role of social partners when engaging with political questions of just transition approaches. Whereas the ILO attaches great importance to the involvement of social partners as a way of mobilising consensus and expertise in the politics of just transition, the

IMF focuses more on the role of fiscal policy frameworks and economic incentives – notably carbon taxation – to steer governments and businesses towards decarbonisation in a market-conforming (that is growth-friendly) manner.

Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to the study of eco-social policy in general, and just transition approaches in particular, in two main ways. First, following a brief review of current research debates and the state of IOs and eco-social policy, we have proposed an original analytical framework to capture three dimensions of IO approaches (goal, policy instruments, governance) at the nexus between social and environmental domains. Second, we have provided an *empirical* application of our framework to the just transition approaches of two IOs – the ILO and IMF – with considerable agenda-setting capacity at the international level. In this way, we have attempted to make an empirical contribution to the growing field of eco-social policy research, which has been dominated mainly by normative discussions. At its most basic, our findings call for a more nuanced and critical understanding of the term 'just transition' in academic and political debates.

There is scope for future research to apply our analytical framework to other IOs, national governments, political parties or interest groups such as trade unions and business associations facing eco-social policy challenges. From a comparative and international perspective, interesting questions also arise concerning aspects of policy transfer between IOs as well as between IOs and nation states. This chapter only focused on the concepts of sustainable development, green growth and just transition, but arguably degrowth – perceived initially as a more radical fringe concept – might become an important new strategy for inter- and trans-national actors and should be given more attention in policy analysis and practice.

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Conclusions

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This volume has explored the intricate nexus between the ecological and social dimensions, presenting a rich mix of theoretical, empirical and policy-focused analyses. At its core, it uncovers multiple approaches to understanding and articulating the nexus between 'the ecological question' and 'the social question'. These approaches range from theoretical (and also normative) perspectives to detailed empirical investigations and policy analyses. Some of the key approaches identified include transformative perspectives, institutional and political dynamics, policy dimensions and implementation challenges, and global and urban perspectives.

Transformative and normative perspectives were prominently discussed in Part I, where the chapters highlighted transformative shifts towards concepts like planetary well-being and economic limitarianism, advocating for deep structural changes to align human activities with ecological boundaries. Sustainable welfare as a paradigm that integrates social policies with ecological sustainability was also examined, critiquing the dependence on economic growth. At the same time, the debate was also challenged by reflections on hegemony and contestations.

Part II mapped out actors such as trade unions, political parties and social movements in advancing eco-social agendas. It scrutinised how actors' actions are shaped by and influence public perceptions and participatory processes. The importance of harmonising diverse stakeholder interests and addressing socio-political complexities was underscored, especially in the context of just transitions.

In Part III, the book explored specific policy areas, including welfare, food systems, energy poverty and just transition strategies at the European level. These chapters revealed the practical challenges and opportunities in implementing integrated eco-social policies, with comparative analyses across different countries highlighting varied policy adoption rates, levels of ambition and integration efforts.

The final section, Part IV, shifts the perspective to a global scale. It addresses urban and regional levels, discussing the integration of ecological and social dimensions in urban climate transitions. These chapters underscore the unique challenges and opportunities in regions such as India, Kenya and Argentina, emphasising the importance of social equity and climate justice. At the supranational level, the consolidation of the eco-social nexus

within the agendas of significant international bodies like the International Labour Organization and the International Monetary Fund is highlighted, exploring both the potential and limitations of these institutions in facilitating just transitions.

Throughout the book, a range of epistemologies, methodologies and perspectives offer a nuanced understanding of the eco-social nexus. By juxtaposing anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives, it explores how human welfare and planetary well-being can be reconciled, integrating sociological, political and economic viewpoints to address the multifaceted nature of eco-social challenges. The chapters employ a variety of research methods, including qualitative case studies, quantitative analyses, policy mapping, theoretical critiques and comparative studies. This methodological diversity enriches the insights and offers robust evidence for policy recommendations. Overall, the interdisciplinary nature of the contributions highlights the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems, providing a holistic perspective on eco-social transitions.

Despite the diversity in approaches and perspectives, several common threads run throughout the chapters. A recurring theme is the necessity of integrated policies that harmonise ecological and social goals. The chapters collectively argue for policy frameworks that simultaneously address environmental sustainability and social equality, avoiding silo-based strategies. Issues of social justice, equity and fairness are central to the discussions. Whether addressing energy poverty, food systems or urban climate transitions, the chapters emphasise the need for policies that protect and empower the most vulnerable populations. Many chapters focus on the practical implications of eco-social policies, highlighting the challenges of policy implementation, governance structures and stakeholder engagement. The book offers insights into overcoming barriers and fostering inclusive decision-making processes.

By consolidating disparate strands of eco-social research, this book pushes forward our knowledge in the field in several ways, since it i) provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical and practical dimensions of eco-social policies, ii) identifies critical gaps and future research pathways, and iii) offers valuable empirical findings that inform both academia and practice. The volume's rich interdisciplinary and cross-regional insights contribute to the establishment of a more coherent and consolidated eco-social research field, paving the way for original and critical research and innovative and effective policies to achieve sustainable and just futures for all.

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