

NESS Workshop: Just Transition and the Role of the State

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This workshop is aimed at the intersection of two related and occasionally conflicting areas of social scientific thought: a desire to strengthen the welfare state to enhance the provision of social justice and a desire to build greener states to ensure ecological sustainability. The movement for a just transition to sustainability seeks to bring these concerns together but this movement raises many questions. What is the role of the state vis-à-vis other actors in orchestrating a just transition? How to manage the unavoidable tensions between the need for boldness and timeliness of action to address irreversible global ecological problems like climate change and biodiversity loss, versus the need for inclusiveness, justice, and orderliness to ensure democratic legitimacy and political support. This also raises familiar tensions between political pragmatism and radicalism while also raising challenging questions regarding the fiscal and administrative capacity of contemporary welfare states to fund and manage and equitable greening of society. The empirical record thus far is mixed. We welcome theoretical and empirical research on all the roles of the state in just transition, including case studies on particular state initiatives (including successes and failures) including the establishment of special ministries, agencies or commissions to manage ecological transition. The ‘state’ is broadly construed to include welfare and (neo)liberal democratic states, as well as national and/or sub-national levels of government.

We also welcome submissions from across social science that explore the various theoretical and empirical dimensions of just transition. Submissions could comprise, but are not limited to, studies of justice in theory and/or practice; just transition and intersectionality, and de/reconstructions of the philosophical underpinnings of different approaches. Thus, we also welcome theoretical and normative papers on the principles of just transition (and the meaning of ‘justice’ that goes into just transition) and the role of the state (and also the limits of the state) vis-à-vis other actors in orchestrating and managing the transition process. This extends to case studies of non-state initiatives that demonstrate whether the state is indeed necessary, or how the state might have assisted and/or thwarted the initiative.

The following questions point to some key themes that the workshop is interested in exploring.

- just transition emerged to take care of the needs of workers and regional communities dependent on the extraction and burning of fossil fuels (mainly coal); what is the potential of extending the idea of just transition to larger societal challenge of ecological transition, especially to one of negative growth and/or a zero or low carbon society?
- why has there been little interaction between research on socio-technical transition and just transition and how might they be brought closer together?
- how should we theorise the justice component of ‘just transition’? There are many different dimensions of justice, some of which have been under-appreciated, such as transitional justice. How should we theorise intersectionality in just transition? What would a gender lens contribute to just transition?

- what is the role of the state in ensuring a just transition? Is it indispensable? How might the state's role be facilitated by dedicated transition agencies and institutions (such as Spain's 'Ministry for Ecological Transition' and Germany's Coal Commission)?
- what have we learned from empirical case studies of just transition initiatives and have some important questions or issues been missed?
- what does just transition mean in the international and global context? How has the Paris Agreement dealt with this issue?

The NESS workshops follow a standing session format (similar to ECPR), which allows for substantive discussions on research in progress. The conference invites scholars from multiple disciplinary backgrounds in environmental social science. The overall **objective** of the **workshop** is to facilitate and encourage participation, equality and collaboration between younger and more established scholars. Each paper is expected to relate to the theme of the workshop, and the participant submits and presents a paper (or work in progress) for the discussion. Workshop participants will be asked to comment on at least one other paper in the respective workshop and participate in the general discussion of the other papers presented. Participants should only choose and attend one workshop for the duration of the conference. The ambition with this format is that the workshops allow for in-depth and coherent discussions of the respective themes and provide opportunity for potential joint publications or other continuing collaborations between the participants.