P10 / ACHIEVING JUST TRANSITION IN ASIA PACIFIC - POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Topic : ENVIRONMENT, SDGs, ENERGY

Chair : Samantha Sharpe (University of Technology Sydney)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The process of a Just Transition – achieving sustainability transitions in a way that is “just" to the workers and communities involved, ensuring no one is left behind – is rapidly becoming a guiding concept for the transformation that is occurring in many sectors across economies including in energy, industry and natural resource management. A Just Transition ensures that while working towards a more ecologically sound economy, we also plan for positive outcomes for those communities and people negatively affected by our global efforts to decarbonise. The unequal distribution of positive and negative effects means that just transition ‘hotspots’ will exist, and that the policy mix to address a just transition will need to be specific to these contexts (ASEAN, 2021).

This process will be policy-driven and across multiple levels to ensure:

· business and sectors are encouraged to become more sustainable

· that we have sufficient skills development and an adequate workforce to deliver the transition

· that women’s and other marginalised groups unequal participation in labour markets and skills acquisition is addressed

· that social protection is available to workers and communities that are negatively affected by transition

The policy mix for promoting just transition, is broad, encompassing many policy fields including development and employment policy, energy policy, industry policy, training and skills development, as well as sectoral level policies and policies at different jurisdictional levels. This means that policy coherence and coordination are also critical issues.

The objective of the special session is to contribute to a better understanding of the context and drivers of transition and the factors of ‘just’ transition in the Asia Pacific region. With many of the countries in the region also pursuing sustainable development agendas to achieve quality employment (decent work), adequate social protection systems and poverty reduction alongside decarbonisation goals. At the same time the Asia-Pacific region – particularly low and middle incomes countries and Small Island Developing States are also managing increasing climate impacts, with the region one of the most climate vulnerable areas in the world.

Just transition planning is a new skill set for policy makers (ASEAN 2021). Just transition planning and implementation are emerging policy issues in many countries in Asia-Pacific region. New policy models and combinations of policy mechanisms will be required. This Panel aims to identify what policy elements are needed and what is already in place to support just transition and how just transition can be operationalised to address social development goals and remedy longstanding inequalities in labour markets and livelihoods.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The combination of socio-economic context and policy development and implementation capacity, together with the region’s high climate vulnerability highlights the need for a unique and context specific approach to the just transition policy and practice mix. This policy mix will need to diverge from the examples presented in Europe and the US. The scale and pace of change required to rapidly decarbonise economies and to do this in a way that is just means that there is significant interest and need for peer learning – to understand options and examples and share knowledge both with policy and academic communities.

This session invites papers and discussions that investigate the progress of just transition policy and planning in the Asia-Pacific region, including:

- Contextualising just transitions processes in the region

- Identify and analyse policy mixes supporting just transition in sectors

- Identify and discuss the role of specific actors and groups of actors in just transition processes and how

under-represented groups can be empowered

- The role of social dialogue processes and how these can shape the direction of plans and investments

- Examples of transition pathways for impacted communities to new employment and livelihoods, especially when obvious low carbon industrial activities are not readily available.

- Investigate how gender transformative change can be accelerated through just transition processes.

- Mechanisms and examples of policy coordination and coherence for just transition.

Papers should aim for 5,000 words with contributions highlighting particularly examples of just transition policy development/ or implementation in the Asia Pacific region, comparative examples would be particularly welcome.

Papers can be presented in -person or through hybrid format.

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Session 1

Wednesday, July 2nd 13:45 to 15:45 (B6)

Just Sustainability in Urban Transitions: Public Perceptions of Procedural and Distributive Justice

Seulki Lee (Sungkyunkwan University, South Korea)

Yoonhee Jung (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

Cities worldwide are adopting urban sustainability plans, yet debates persist about whether these initiatives truly render urban environments economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. While the concept of 'just sustainability'—which integrates environmental justice, equity, and civic engagement—has been widely discussed in urban planning literature (Agyeman, Bullard, & Evans, 2002), little is known about how the public perceives and supports these principles in practice (Isenhour, McDonogh, & Checker, 2015). This study aims to fill this gap by assessing how citizens perceive an urban sustainability planning process that incorporates social justice and equity, specifically regarding its legitimacy. We examine two fundamental dimensions of just sustainability: procedural justice and distributive justice (Agyeman, 2005; Pearsall & Pierce, 2010).

Procedural justice entails inclusive engagement, transparency, and accountability in governance, ensuring that diverse stakeholders have a voice in decision-making processes. A planning process that adheres to procedural justice principles enhances legitimacy by fostering trust and perceptions of fairness (Bennett & Satterfield, 2018). Distributive justice, on the other hand, concerns the equitable allocation of benefits and burdens arising from urban sustainability policies. Historically, distributive justice research has highlighted disparities in exposure to environmental risks based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Kaswan, 2003; Althor & Witt, 2020). More recently, the concept has expanded to include access to environmental benefits, such as clean air, water, and green spaces, as vital contributors to societal well-being (Mears et al., 2019). This study investigates how both procedural and distributive justice considerations influence citizens' perceptions of legitimacy in urban planning.

We conducted a vignette-based factorial survey experiment with a representative sample of US adults to test our hypotheses. Our findings suggest that distributive justice significantly enhances legitimacy perceptions, while procedural justice has a comparatively weaker impact. Notably, this effect varies based on respondents' political ideology: among Democrats, both procedural and distributive justice positively and significantly influence legitimacy perceptions, whereas among Republicans, neither factor shows a significant effect.

This study deepens our understanding of just sustainability principles and their impact on public perceptions of policy processes. As cities implement sustainability transitions, ensuring procedural and distributive justice can enhance public trust and foster more inclusive policymaking. Moreover, our findings highlight the need for targeted communication and engagement strategies that account for political and ideological variations in perceptions of just sustainability. By providing insights into the legitimacy of sustainability planning, this study informs policymakers on how to design more equitable and publicly supported transition strategies in the pursuit of a just and sustainable future.

Exploring the role of National Determined Contributions (NDCs) in coordinating just transition policy mixes - evidence from Southeast Asia

Samantha Sharpe (University of Technology Sydney)

Countries are rapidly adopting low carbon strategies to meet international commitments like the Paris Agreement and mitigate climate impacts. While these strategies are essential for decarbonisation, they often

create uneven burdens - some communities face disproportionate costs and negative impacts while receiving fewer benefits from emerging green economies. The concept of just transition addresses this imbalance by promoting equity and fairness throughout economic transformation.

Implementing just transition requires a broad policy mix spanning development, employment, energy, industry, skills training, and various sectoral policies across different jurisdictional levels. This complexity demands strong policy coherence and coordination. However, despite growing ambition for just transition, there is limited practical evidence of effective policy mechanisms that systematically translate these goals into impact.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement represent a key policy mechanism available to most countries. NDCs detail national decarbonisation pathways, identifying priority sectors and required support for emissions reduction. These documents increasingly integrate adaptation and disaster resilience strategies, along with workforce and social development measures. NDCs are also beginning to incorporate just transition goals, providing an overarching framework that connects economic transformation with equitable distribution of benefits and costs. This positions NDCs as potential critical mechanisms for coordinating just transition policies.

This paper examines the NDCs of ten Southeast Asian countries to analyse how these documents currently address just transition goals and how they could serve as effective policy coordination mechanisms. The findings reveal that while just transition narratives are still emerging in most countries, NDCs could provide valuable coordinating linkages with other national development strategies, thereby strengthening just transition implementation. The paper concludes with recommendations for nations preparing NDC updates ahead of COP 30.

Towards a just transition: the role of international city networks in Southeast Asia

Akiko Hiratsuka-Sasaki (Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO)

Fedor Myasoedov (Independent researcher, Japan, Fukuoka)

Since the Paris Agreement in 2015, the concept of just transition has become mainstream. It has been mobilised by various initiatives at different levels, from global to local. While a just transition is largely discussed in the context of energy transitions and how to secure affected workers and communities, it also entails the urban perspective; how cities can take climate action while considering justice to ensure that no one is left behind, especially in vulnerable communities. This paper sheds light on international city networks and their member cities in Southeast Asia. The growing membership and influence of international city networks has positioned cities as important actors in international climate policy debates. But what does the emergence of such networks mean for urban climate justice? How does their justice discourse influence the urban climate policies of member cities? And how will they contribute to a just transition towards a decarbonised future in the Asia-Pacific region? By examining the relationships between city networks and member cities in Southeast Asia, this study aims to clarify the role of the city networks in shaping an inclusive climate policy agenda in urban settings. The research was conducted in two steps. First, a qualitative data analysis was conducted with the selected international city networks working on climate and urban sustainability: C40 Cities, ICLEI, UCLG and CITYNET. It examined how the city networks incorporate the concept of justice in their strategic documents and promotional materials, and assesses the implications for distributive, procedural and recognition justice. Preliminary findings suggest that the shift in the orientation of climate debates from economic to more justice-focused after the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM movement, particularly in C40 cities. However, it also revealed that many references to justice in the documents were rather tokenistic across all networks. Second, interviews were conducted with the Asian regional offices/headquarters of these networks and with member cities: Jakarta, Indonesia and Quezon City in the Philippines in August 2024. The interviews aimed to understand how the city networks engage with climate action plans of the cities and how climate justice is positioned. Based on the findings of the document analysis and the interviews, the paper attempts to explore how the city networks function within the process of making climate policies and how their discourse of justice interferes with the climate policies of the member cities. The paper intends to contribute to the session by discussing the role of specific actors, international city networks and cities, and how just transition can be achieved through urban climate action and empowering vulnerable communities.

How Just Transition gets complicated due to informality: case-studies from Bangladesh

Nabil Haque (Transparency International Bangladesh)

Pollution intensity from informal sectors collectively is higher than formal industries Bangladesh is known for.

Certain manufacturing and services that are pollution intensive, and have low global exposure through exports, are dominated by the informal sector. Leather tanning, electroplating, metalworking, brick and tile making, printing, auto repair, wood and metal furnishing, charcoal making, paint manufacture, and food processing have received the most attention in the literature. However, plastic and e-waste recycling are also dominated by informal workers in Bangladesh. While informality in recycling can be beneficial considering their collection efficiency, the process of recycling undertaken by the informal sector is environmentally damaging. By definition they are outside the purview of government regulations. However, their numerous, small-scale and geographically dispersed operations make them difficult to monitor. Although they sustain the poorest, their operations are highly cost competitive resulting in lack of decent labor and environmental management. This study critically examines the question of whether just transition is possible in Bangladesh with informality. Using three case-studies from the country where informality is a common trend, this study lays out the historical context of demand for just transition and the exclusionary lens the just transition warriors adopts for informal sectors. The first case-study covered is plastic recycling, where new Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) rules under consideration have not addressed the issues of informality. The second case-study is about the proliferation of electric rickshaws in Bangladesh significantly challenging urban traffic and lead acid battery recycling initiatives. The third case-study features brick manufacturing where sustainability transition has not gained traction despite decades of government intervention and development cooperation. All three sectors employ millions of people, but their greening intentions have neglected the workforce through policy instruments of bans and mandates. Insights from this country reflections will be useful to design policies for just transition across Asia.