

Project title: Understanding the Just Transition through the lenses of Wellbeing, Justice, and Equity

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Co-applicants: Dr. Colin Hickey (Faculty of Sciences); Dr. Aslin Unan (Faculty of Humanities); Prof. Christina Eckes (Faculty of Law)

Societal case

SDG7 aims to provide access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.¹ SDG3 seeks to advance good health and wellbeing, including by reducing deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water, and soil pollution and contamination. SDG13 aims to uphold action against climate change. Yet the dominant methods of electricity production degrade ecological systems and thus represent an impediment to human health and wellbeing for millions of people, particularly those whose suffering is often invisibilised in the Global South. Hence the above SDGs stand in tension. Extractivism and burning of fossil fuels to produce electricity cause pollution, which has devastating implications for the wellbeing of humans and the ecology. Around the world, roughly 2 million people die each year from air pollution alone. We offer a South-North analysis that establishes a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between SDG7, on the one hand, and SDGs3 and 13, on the other. On this basis, we provide a law, political science and ethics framework to investigate to what extent just transition policies embrace or resist neoliberal capitalism and a fossil fuel-driven economy. Finally, we formulate innovative policy suggestions better suited to the complexity of the issues at stake.

Scientific case (200 words)

The project will investigate the concept of just transition as understood and applied in both South African and European policies from the perspective of its intersections with ecological integrity and well-being, as well as its implications for climate justice and litigation.² It will engage with the complexities rooted in the need to provide access to energy, whilst ensuring human health and wellbeing inherently bound up with ecological wellbeing both in the Global North and Global South.³ To this end, the project will resort to an interdisciplinary methodology encompassing the following disciplines: Law and Policy; Ethics; Political Science. The above disciplines will interact in the following way.

The Law and Policy team (Fermeglia and Eckes) will analyse how conceptions of justice undergird the arguments and choices by parties, policy-makers and judges in just transition policies and litigation. The Ethics team (Hickey) will scrutinize the ethical assumptions behind the concept of justice being deployed (implicitly and explicitly) across Just Energy Transition Partnerships, assessing the strengths and limitations of such conceptualization. The Political Science team (Unan) will analyze policy trade-offs between SDGs from a North-South perspective, considering stakeholder views to understand how just transition policies intersect with political processes and social inequalities.

Contribution to the aims and success of ENLENS

¹ IEA (International Energy Agency). Access to electricity. Paris: 2023.

² De Neve, JE, Sachs JD, The SDGs and human well-being: a global analysis of synergies, trade-offs, and regional differences. *Sci Rep* 10, 15113 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-71916-9>.

³ Khavari B, Ramirez C, Jeuland M, Nerini FF. A geospatial approach to understanding clean cooking challenges in sub-Saharan Africa (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-022-01039-8>; Fisher S, Bellinger DC, Cropper ML, Kumar P, Binagwaho A, Koudenoukpo JB, et al. Air pollution and development in Africa: impacts on health, the economy, and human capital. *Lancet Planet Heal* (2021). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(21\)00201-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00201-1).

The project will: a) establish a body of knowledge and a research community through 3 Faculties at UvA from and beyond the disciplines involved in the project (e.g, with regard to political geography, economics, etc.), and b) develop a new epistemic view of the concept of just transition, breaking with the (within Europe) dominating Global North perspective, and establish it within the burgeoning body of literature in social sciences. The project will broaden the community beyond the project team through collaborations with the following stakeholders: University of Cape Town, Institute of Marine and Environmental Law; Climate Litigation Network – Urgenda; South Africa Environmental Law Association; Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria.

A research assistant will be hired for the project. Student assistants will be included in the project team. We will teach and report on lessons learned about interdisciplinary learning and research processes in our BA and MA programmes: Climate Change Law (Matteo Fermeiglia); European Internal Market Law and Sustainability (Matteo Fermeiglia); The Power of Law (Matteo Fermeiglia); Energy and Climate Change (Colin Hickey); Ethics and the Environment (Colin Hickey); Political Economy of Sustainable Governance (Asli Unan); Principles and Foundations of European Law (Christina Eckes); Climate change, trade and investment (Christina Eckes).

At least two researchers and an assistant will deliver guest lectures and seminars at Cape Town University around the topics of the project; The research assistant will benefit from a research stay at Cape Town University.

The project’s communication and dissemination activities will include the following: Presentations at the Future of Energy Seminars and international conferences; Project workshops (half-way, in South Africa and closing, in Amsterdam); Social events at SPU125 and in South Africa; Op-eds and interviews in newspapers and magazines; Recording of podcast series on SDG7 and SDG3 implementation; Academic outputs (project book/Special Issues in peer-reviewed journals).

Project budget

The budget will be spent as described below. The costs outlined below are needed as they would otherwise hardly be supported by Faculty/Department and individual structural research funds, in particular with regard to travel and accommodation costs and funding coverage for students/research assistants and for research stays. No specific equipment costs are envisaged for the project.

Faculty of Humanity (15000,00 EUR)	
Project workshops organization – Travel, accommodation, organizational costs	3300,00
Research assistant (3 months, 0.5 FTE)	3500,00
Travel and local expenses for research stays and attendance to international Academic events	6500,00
Project team meetings	500,00
Communication and dissemination activities, including project public events	1200,00
Faculty of Science (15000,00 EUR)	
Project workshops organization – Travel, accommodation, organizational costs	3300,00
Research assistant (2 months, 0.5 FTE)	3500,00
Travel and local expenses for research stays and attendance to international Academic events	5000,00
Student assistant (3 Months)	2500,00
Communication and dissemination activities, including project public events	700,00
Faculty of Law (15000,00 EUR)	
Project workshops organization – Travel, accommodation, organizational costs	3300,00
Research assistant (2 months, 0.5 FTE)	3500,00
Travel and local expenses for research stays and attendance to international Academic events	5000,00
Student assistant (3 Months)	2500,00
Communication and dissemination activities, including project public events	700,00
Total budget:	45000,00