

12. Just Transition? Post Carbon Democracy in the Making (Workshop)

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Facing climate urgency, many countries in Europe and around the world are reconsidering the role of fossil energy sources for their future, while others continue to build national economies on such resources. With a focus on energy transition processes we aim to look at the urgency and the promise of inclusiveness surrounding political projects to phase out coal, oil and gas extraction. However, the transition to a post fossil society is shaped by conflicting conceptions of "future," of "urgency" and "justice." Political instruments developed to foster a 'just transition' are, thus, being contested and challenged.

Following T. Mitchell's analysis of "carbon democracies", this panel suggests that the exit from carbon resources leads to reshaping democracy. We investigate how contested knowledges inform post-carbon democracy, participation and struggle. These inherently conflictual, open-ended, and entangled processes of emergency and emergence comprise a diversity of collaborations and experimentations. We invite papers that problematize imaginaries of uni-linear transition to a clearly defined post-fossil society, and which analyse de-resourcification as a multi-directional transformation.

Relevant questions could be:

- What visions of post-fossil futures are communicated through transnational, national and regional policies?
- How are 'Just Transition' instruments translated between political scales and adapted in local contexts?
- How does de-resourcification affect local communities?
- How do communities relate to and contest political plans of an inclusive and just transition – with which forms of political struggle?
- What alternative visions of a future society and justice are being negotiated?
- How can anthropological knowledge contribute to opening spaces for post-carbon democracies to emerge?
- How do these processes play out in countries in which resourcification is still ongoing?

Between 'Park' and 'Energy Transition Zone': Contesting Just Transition in Aberdeen

William Otchere-Darko, Newcastle University

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This research considers the transformation of Aberdeen, the self-declared oil capital of Europe, against the backdrop of an unfolding energy transition and a global climate crisis. Specifically, we examine the ambivalent responses to plans for an Energy Transition Zone (ETZ) situated adjacent to Aberdeen's South Harbour expansion, the St. Fittick's Park nature reserve, and the working-class neighbourhood of Torry. Backed by major Scottish and UK government funding and by what activists describe as a web of local corporate and political influence, the ETZ invokes future imaginaries of 'just transition', undergirded by expert forecasts, innovative low-carbon technologies, as well as regional and national policy discourses. By contrast, its opponents highlight how the ETZ will damage the wellbeing of the area's human and non-human locals. We take the dispute around the Aberdeen ETZ as a vantage from which to explore the relationship between notions of 'just transition' and projects of economic growth in the Scottish region. While the ETZ is proposed as testbed for novel techno-material and commercial opportunities, the activists' responses query this effort as spatial, legal, and temporal enclosure. Specifically, they reveal a propositional politics of what justice might mean in the context of Aberdeen as a post-oil city.

Just Struggles: How a Just Transition Could Look Like in a Small Karoo Town, South Africa

Boitumelo (Tumi) Malope, Stellenbosch University

The Just Transition in South Africa involves two sides of the same coin and current debates are focused on the one side. On this side, in 2018 the biggest trade union in the country, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) almost successfully interdicted the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) on the basis that its rollout would lead to job losses in the coal sector. On the other side, community members of Loeriesfontein, a small rural town in Northern Cape Karoo embarked on a protest which was triggered by being overlooked for employment in the construction of wind farms 60 kilometres outside of the town. The wind farms were constructed under REIPPPP, a flagship programme that aims to decarbonise the country's highly fossilised energy sector, and at the same time obliges renewable energy companies to undertake community development in "host" communities located

within a 50km radius. In this paper I draw on in-depth fieldwork conducted for my PhD and extended into my postdoc in the town of Loeriesfontein, to show how community development initiatives by renewable energy companies are entangled with political struggles over access and control to resources in the local municipality.

Navigating Between Coal and Post-Fossil Futures in Times of Energy Crisis in North-East Poland

Magdalena Dąbkowska, Humboldt University, Berlin

This proposal is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Gmina Płoskinia, a rural administrative district in North-East Poland, near the border with Russia. The area was home to several coal-importing companies which bought Russian coal and sold it in Poland. Some of it was sold to individual consumers, as to this day almost four million households in Poland rely on coal for heating. In recent years local residents had formed a pressure group that drew attention to the environmental damage and pollution caused by the companies and their operations. The group had engaged local authorities in its efforts to impose restrictions on the companies' activities to minimise negative impact on the community and the local environment. Nevertheless, many local residents worked for the companies which were important employers in the region. After the introduction of an embargo on Russian coal in April 2022, many companies shut down, leaving local residents jobless. Empirical material based on interviews with local communities aims to highlight how transition to a post fossil society is shaped by conflicting conceptions of a 'just transition', and ultimately asks how power-laden negotiations make up a particular reality - a starting point from which future(s) can be created.

Desirable Futures and What they Hide in Late-Carbon Non-Democracies

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"The only sustainability that matters is that of the salary." This comment was made by an Egyptian service worker in the United Arab Emirates whom I discussed the country's contradictory public narrative of sustainability on the one hand, and the promise of rapid and unlimited growth that will eventually reach the outer space, on the other hand. Neither of these promises was the concern of my worker friend, however. He was busy with building a bigger house on the outskirts of his native village. These future visions - sustainability as a technology fix; modernity as a constant increase of speed, size, and range; stability as a reproduction and improvement of the here and now - mark the contours of an unsolvable, productive

contradiction: the possibility of desired-for futures is predicated on destructive processes; and yet stopping those destructive processes would deprive people of their ability to pursue those futures. Hydrocarbon energy allows us to temporarily live that contradiction, hide processes of production, and thereby imagine ourselves as being on the way to a post fossil society without doing so. The possibility of post-carbon democracies needs be thought along with the powerful reality of late-carbon non-democracies that are successfully posing themselves as models for a desirable future.

The Stickiness of *Carbon* – Re-Resourcification Policies and Contestations of Industrial Relations in Germany’s Energy Transition

Felix Lussem, University of Cologne

As the increasingly undeniable urgency of climate protection has accelerated plans to phase out the German coal industry, the process of energy transition is already well underway in the Rhineland’s brown coal mining region. While regional planning agencies, politicians and industrial actors imagine a future where a “circular bioeconomy” underpins linear “green” growth, critical civil society actors point to entangled urgencies of the Anthropocene that will potentially disrupt these official visions of technical governance. Since these “coal-critical” _inhabitants have experienced the regional nexus of state institutions and extractive industry as undemocratic for many years, they hoped for stronger political participation in the process of structural transition. Instead, my ethnographic research shows that governance institutions aim to transform the region into a resource for renewable energy generation, bioeconomy, agrobusiness and tourism, thus maintaining “carbon democratic” relations of dispossession and exploitation, despite the official turn to a post-carbon economy. Against this regional re-resourcification for corporate profits and job preservation, engaged locals argue for a just transition that goes beyond the inclusion of (industrial) workers, to account for non-human actors and future populations as well, thereby opening a space for the negotiation of post-carbon democratic futures.

Affective Transitions: Female Perspectives on Coal Mining, Strukturwandel and Future-Making in Lusatia

Maria Lidola, University Konstanz

German policies for energy transition and structural change [Strukturwandel] following the announced end of coal mining, materialize for the people in mining regions not only through economic and social consequences and respective

measures. They also affect people emotionally. Using the example of Lusatia, the paper engages with this affective and emotional dimension and argues that it significantly shapes the perceptions and assessments of a just transition to a post-carbon society at the local level. The focus is on women and their affective relation with mining and Strukturwandel. Women have represented a high proportion of the workforce in and around mining since the expansion of the mining district in the 1950s. After the first Strukturwandel in the 1990s, many of them worked in the administration of liquidations, renaturalization, and recultivation of former open pits, thus being actively involved in the (re-) designing of the social and environmental landscapes. At home, they faced the task not just of often being the main breadwinner but also of family reorganization and of emotional work during the following years of economic instability. I argue that a just transition should consider this dimension alongside the economic and political ones, and the meaning of democracy itself.

Implementing the New European Bauhaus: Just Transitioning with a Project-oriented Planning Approach?

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Project-oriented planning towards innovation is booming - not only at the administrative level of cities and regions, where there has been a quantitative increase in laboratory and experimental formats, but lately also for a policy tool of the European Commission - the *New European Bauhaus (NEB)*. Experimental formats are used to develop new solutions that address urgent spatial developmental challenges and change the trajectory of certain spatial excerpts. One main objective of the *NEB* is to integrate social cohesion and environmental standards with economic growth by experimenting with new policy designs. The search for new policy design becomes urgent, because the "implementation of the planned [climate-neutrality 2050]" (Siebel 2015: 259) is not proceeding at a pace set by its makers. The „just transition in Europe“ is supposed to be even „faster [...] and [...] better“ (von der Leyen 2020). Against this background, the presentation highlights the connections between multiple practices of scaling that have their starting point in different political sites in Europe. The different practices of scaling will be described using the example of the European „Just Transition Fund“, the *Strukturwandel*, the *Just Transition Plan* of Saxony-Anhalt, and the integral role of the *NEB* within the context of spatial development.

Achieving *Verkehrswende* in Central Germany: Transition to a Post-Carbon Democracy or Passive Revolution?

Julia Kühl, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg

Ingo W. Schröder, Philipps-University Marburg

The paper adopts a Gramscian perspective to critique the assumption that the phasing out of a carbon-based economy signifies a fundamental shift in capitalist accumulation strategies, let alone herald a new mode of democratic participation. Much more appropriate seems to us Gramsci's notion of passive revolution insofar as state strategies use the labels "energy transition" or "traffic turn" to obfuscate a politics that in fact reaffirms a hegemonic post-political consensus concerning the existing capitalist accumulation strategy and domination of the ruling class. A Gramscian-ethnographic approach investigates how struggles over the hegemonic vision of a capitalist post-fossil future are played out at the local level. Focusing on the implementation of policies supporting a modal shift (strengthening public transport and cycling), we base this paper on 2 months of participant observation and additional formal interviews in the district administration of the Saalekreis in Saxony-Anhalt. We look at discursive and non-discursive forms of power among different actors and the socio-cultural mechanisms through which different forms of knowledge (expert – common-sense) and different visions of a carbon-free future are negotiated vis-à-vis one another. Our paper thus contributes to the workshop's questions on contested knowledges and modes of participation that inform post-carbon societies.