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JUST TRANSITION – A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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MIKULÁŠ ČERNÍK, MARTIN ČERNÝ, PATRIK GAŽO, EVA FRAŇKOVÁ
Beyond a Czech-The-Box Exercise: Proposals for Meaningful
Stakeholder Participation in the Just Transition

ABSTRACT *The post-carbon transition presents an opportunity to address the inequalities in economic and political power faced by (semi-)peripheral regions. One such opportunity is the European Union's (EU's) just transition policies. However, the EU's policies fall short in terms of questioning existing socio-economic and power inequalities. Their implementation often relies on technocratic measures and selective expert advice. Particularly in the semi-peripheral regions of Central and Eastern Europe, meaningful – as opposed to 'pro forma' – participation of all stakeholders in formulating just transition policies is lacking. Using the Czech Republic – a major brown coal producer in the EU – as an illustrative case, we examine the existing obstacles to such meaningful participation and propose how to achieve it. We suggest that meaningful participation requires the direct involvement of diverse, especially underrepresented groups, such as workers in the industries at risk of job losses, and the shifting of the role of experts from a position of privilege to an equal position with non-expert stakeholders. We conclude that involving all affected stakeholders through deliberative methods opens a space to diverse just transition policies. Such policies would create an opportunity to challenge the dominant development narrative proposed by core countries and institutions.*

KEYWORDS *just transition, meaningful stakeholder participation, coal phase-out, semi-periphery, post-normal science*

1. Introduction

We live in a world of rising temperatures and inequalities (IPCC 2023; Chancel et al. 2022). These two challenges are interlinked (Diffenbaugh/

Burke 2019; Gore 2021) and should be addressed simultaneously (Rockström et al. 2023). Just transition is one of the concepts that embodies these insights, by trying to reconcile ambitious decarbonisation goals with social well-being (European Commission 2021; Morena et al. 2020).

Just transition mirrors the whole range of approaches to sustainability and justice, from techno-optimist fixes to deep social-ecological transformations (Brand 2016; Christoff 1996). While potentially offering opportunities for balancing existing structural inequalities within and among countries or regions (Garvey et al. 2022; McCauley/Heffron 2018), its actual impacts can materialise in quite the opposite way and further deepen current vulnerabilities, injustices and inequalities (Sovacool et al. 2021). These dynamics can often be (re)produced between the core and (semi-)peripheral regions (Cairó-i-Céspedes/Palacios Cívico 2022; Gagyí 2021; Golubchikov/O'Sullivan 2020).

Even the countries of the core – often considered pioneers of climate change mitigation (Torney 2019) and just transition – often struggle to fulfil the expectations of achieving climate, energy and environmental justice at the same time (McCauley/Heffron 2018; Sovacool et al. 2021; Zografos/Robbins 2020). The task is even more challenging for regions of the (semi-)periphery, which are more reticent to adopt climate mitigation policies, such as the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Četković/Buzogány 2019; Gündüzyeli/Moore 2020).

The Czech Republic serves as a vivid example of such a country, combining remarkable socio-economic dependence on coal extraction and car manufacturing (Gažo et al. 2022; Sivek et al. 2020), often concentrated in long-term structurally disadvantaged regions (Frantál et al. 2022), with weaker trust in public institutions and policies (Horáková 2020). Just transition in this context is thus urgent (European Commission 2023), sometimes hotly debated (Galgoczi 2019), yet not successfully implemented.

Public participation is often seen as a tool that can improve the legitimacy and acceptance of implemented policies (Birnbaum 2016). Many authors agree that meaningful participation (Roche 2020) – as opposed to a merely formal involvement of stakeholders – is a crucial tool which can not only minimise the negative social impacts of decarbonisation, but also provides an opportunity to transform the current socio-economic and power imbalances in order to avoid their (re)production (Morena et al. 2020; Stevis/Felli 2015). Nevertheless, specifically in the context of the EU

Just Transition Mechanism, there is a lack of genuine stakeholder participation (Moesker/Pesch 2022).

The goal of this paper is therefore to explore the potential for meaningful participation that aims at significant structural changes towards sustainability and justice in the context of an EU semi-periphery. By analysing the barriers to meaningful participation, we suggest principles and methods to overcome them. The EU semi-peripheral context is instructive since it is not primarily advantageous to the spirit of just transition. Participation that goes beyond a ‘check-the-box-exercise’, i.e. beyond its ‘pro-forma’ version (Roche 2020) that only formally follows the EU (or any other) guidelines often prevails, thereby running the risk of reproducing or deepening existing socio-economic and power inequalities.

In Section 2, we discuss the role and use of participation in different notions of just transition, and argue that it is crucial to engage large, hard-to-reach and heterogeneous groups such as workers and local residents. In Section 3, we scrutinise existing attempts at participation and identify the main barriers to meaningful participation as based on the Czech experience (but relevant also to other countries and regions in a position of economic dependency). In Section 4, we outline several principles and methods to address these shortcomings. We argue that the roles of expert and non-expert stakeholders need to be redefined in order to open up a space for diverse just transition policies. We underpin our arguments with reference to post-normal science (PNS), which proposes the incorporation of non-expert knowledge into decision-making processes. Finally, we synthesise implications for the development trajectories of the regions that are subject to just transition policies. Section 5 draws together our conclusions.

2. Just transition(s) and the role of participation

2.1 Approaches to just transition and their resonance in the EU context

The concept of just transition originated in the 1980s at the intersection of the trade union and environmental movements, and demanded that environmental interventions be coupled with social policies securing workers’ rights and livelihoods (ITUC 2015; Morena et al. 2020). In the

context of climate change, its ambition is to represent “a set of principles, processes and practices that aim to ensure that no people, workers, places, sectors, countries or regions are left behind in the transition from a high-carbon to a low carbon economy” (IPCC 2022). Stakeholder participation is seen as a crucial demand of just transition (Wang/Lo 2021).

Despite the ambitious aspiration of ‘no one left behind’, most just transition institutions and policies (such as the EU’s Just Transition Mechanism) are not based on a profound critique of the socio-economic and power relations associated with existing social and climate inequalities among and within regions (Akgüç et al. 2022; Brand 2016). Instead, they align more closely with a so-called ecological modernisation approach, where policies are frequently designed from the top-down by bureaucrats, politicians, experts and businesses, all aiming for green growth (Pichler et al. 2021).

The EU’s just transition policies and mechanisms often blend ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ conceptions of ecological modernisation (Dias et al. 2020), where participation levels differ. While there is an attempt to involve diverse actors in a participatory manner and reform certain economic and institutional structures (‘strong’ ecological modernisation), the practical implementation tends to be ‘weak’, rigid, and technocratic, with a focus on expert and technological solutions to complex challenges (Rösch/Epifanio 2022).

This contrasts with a social-ecological approach to just transition, which challenges the very idea that the growth-based economy and the capitalist mode of production can be transformed into a socially and environmentally sustainable system (Brand et al. 2021). The social-ecological approach strives for more equitable socio-economic arrangements and power relations, democratisation of the economy and socialisation of production. It is also characterised by a stronger emphasis on the intensive participation of transition-affected groups (Barca 2014, 2012; Kreinin 2020; Räthzel/Uzzell 2011; Stevis/Felli 2015).

In the countries and regions of CEE, and notably in the Czech Republic, both weak and strong ecomodernist conceptions have some standing (Patočka 2020). However, even the weak notion of ecological modernisation in the CEE region meets with substantial criticism (Gürtler/Herberg 2023; Skoczkowski et al. 2020). On the other hand, even

some social-ecological initiatives are present (Re-set 2022), but with rather a minor bearing on the public sphere (Lehotský/Černík 2019). As we argue in Section 3, this situation brings a specific set of challenges for meaningful participation.

2.2 How to define meaningful participation

In the “Governance of Transitions” toolkit (Roche 2020), the European Commission promotes ‘meaningful’ participation in contrast to ‘pro forma’ participation, where the latter only formally addresses the task. Still, the term is used there rather loosely, referring in general terms to ‘awareness raising’, ‘stakeholder empowerment’ and ‘effective participation’. Thus, for more nuanced insights, we make use of typologies of civic participation from other areas of governance.

According to Yeh (2020), participation is meaningful when (1) the purpose and the process are clearly understood by the participants, and (2) when the participants have appropriate opportunities to shape the outcomes of the process. Therefore, the desired process is transparent and continuous, based on mutual exchange of information between the stakeholders and the administrators (Yeh 2020).

To gain a more nuanced understanding of the levels of stakeholder participation, Pretty (1995: 1252) developed a useful typology (original descriptions were shortened):

1. Manipulative participation: fake participation with no real power.
2. Passive participation: stakeholders are informed about what is or was already being decided, and what the outcome is.
3. Participation by consultation: stakeholders provide information about their opinions or preferences, but do not have any decision-making power.
4. Participation for material incentives: stakeholders provide resources (e.g. knowledge, time, labour etc.) in exchange for a reward (financial or other).
5. Functional participation: the process might be interactive and might involve joint decision-making, but the main steps are taken outside the participatory process.
6. Interactive participation: stakeholders participate in the preparation of the decision-making and its rules. Participation is seen as a right.

7. Self-mobilisation: the initiative comes from the stakeholders, who fully control the process. Institutions and experts provide technical and facilitation support.

Pretty's typology is close to others such as the "ladder of citizen participation" of Arnstein (1969) that groups levels of participation into three main blocks: non-participation, tokenism (superficial or symbolic efforts at inclusion, especially of underrepresented groups), and citizen power (Arnstein 1969). Similarly, White (1996) defines four main types of participation: nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative. All these approaches share the view that at one end there is a 'fake' participation (the 'pro-forma' participation). Then there is a 'middle' level (tokenism, instrumental and representative levels) that gives stakeholders some decision-making power, but the framing and control is still external. This corresponds to the ecological modernisation approach. The 'highest' level of the participation ladder then corresponds to the ideas of the social-ecological approach, where participation is seen as an end in itself, and as a (potentially) transformative tool (White 1996).

While we use the term 'meaningful participation' mainly in the sense of Yeh (2020) and referring to the 'highest' level of the participation described above, the key aspect is an appropriate combination of the participation levels (with the exception of manipulative and fake participation) in a comprehensive participation plan (see e.g. OECD (2022)). Only after deciding (1) whether and (2) with what objectives participation should be carried out at all, and (3) basing this on a thorough stakeholder mapping, can a combination of methods be chosen and appropriate communication, implementation and evaluation planned. In particular, identifying relevant stakeholders is crucial, as reaching out to them – and including the hard-to-reach and most affected, though not necessarily the most influential stakeholders – is essential for meaningful participation (OECD 2017).

2.3 Who is the (relevant) stakeholder?

Although there is a vast amount of literature on identifying stakeholders (e.g. Bendtsen et al. 2021; Colvin et al. 2016; Leventon et al. 2016; Luyet et al. 2012; Reed 2008; Reed et al. 2009; Sharpe et al. 2021), the oper-

ationalisation of how to delimit large, loosely defined and vaguely represented groups remains challenging. In a thematically and geographically related case study mapping stakeholder perspectives on climate change in the Polish coal region of Silesia, Skoczkowski et al. (2020: 468) list the following stakeholder groups:

- Public administration: ministries; regional councils; local municipalities; public institutions, such as job centres;
- Private sector: industrial companies in declining sectors; companies in emerging sectors; the unions of employers; chamber of commerce;
- Experts/academia (representing different opinions on the future of coal in the region);
- (E)NGOs; civil society organisations;
- Banking sector.

Interestingly enough, the two biggest groups of stakeholders by size, i.e. local residents and workers employed in the sectors concerned, are not on the list. In societies with representative democracy, it is generally expected that the opinions and interests of these large groups are advocated by their respective representatives: namely local residents by (local) politicians and workers by trade unions. However, as we demonstrate in Section 3.2, in the case of Czech workers affected by transition, this assumption is not necessarily realised in practice – in reality, the choice of stakeholders is often rather selective and arbitrary.

According to Jessop (1999), the exclusion of certain actors from policy-making is a reflection of the power that specific economic classes hold within state institutions. This selectivity is ingrained in the structure of the system and is also evident in the actions of the actors involved. These actors make, in Jessop's words, 'strategic calculations' – decisions on whom to factor in and whom not – based on the prevailing structural conditions, which further perpetuate the exclusion of certain groups from participating in the policy-making process (Jessop 1999). Such 'meta-power', influencing who has the ability to influence policy debates, processes and outcomes, constitutes the conditions for participation in a way that omits certain important groups from the decision-making processes and thus predetermines the results so as to reinforce current inequalities (Malin et al. 2019).

To avoid reproducing such inequalities, just transition needs to address power imbalances. As the ecological modernisation approaches generally lack these considerations (Gibbs 2009), meaningful participation within just transition goes more effectively along with the social-ecological approach that emphasises the unequal distribution of power and wealth in the capitalist system (Stavis/Felli 2015). Practically, this implies that once having striven for meaningful participation, it is necessary to actively work for the integration of underrepresented stakeholders in order to open up the space to a plurality of perspectives on what needs to be achieved and by what means.

3. Barriers to meaningful participation from the Czech experience

3.1 Czech semi-peripheral context

Given its geographical location in Central Europe and annual GDP per capita, the Czech Republic could be described as a high-income country that belongs to the global economic core. However, considering the disparities in political and economic power relations between the countries within the EU and between the extraction-dependent regions within the country, it is more accurate to speak of a semi-periphery. The Czech Republic's per capita carbon emissions were the fourth highest in the EU in 2017 (McKinsey & Company 2020), which implies the need for fundamental industrial restructuring in the light of the post-carbon transition.

Economic dependency is typically based on relatively cheap and unorganised labour, and energy and material extractivism (Pucheta/Sánchez 2022). These trends are amplified in the internal peripheries of north-west Bohemia and northeast Moravia (Silesia), both coal mining regions. These regions suffer from structural inequalities as expressed in socioeconomic indicators and, broadly speaking, in lower quality of life (Frantál/Nováková 2014). The concentration of the coal industry in particular regions further intensifies vulnerability to the coal phase-out and exposure to the exploitation of resources, where affected regions become “energy peripheries” (Garvey et al. 2022; Golubchikov/O’Sullivan 2020).

Therefore, the country holds a position of dependency characteristic of the semi-periphery, particularly concerning the coal mining regions. The

key characteristics of such dependency are the lack of economic and political power, along with a symptomatic lack of trust in public institutions (Horáková 2020), which can undermine people's confidence in both the processes and outcomes of just transition. The workforce in the affected industries directly bears the costs in terms of potential job losses and the economic decline of the whole region. For this reason, the meaningful participation of workers in the formulation and implementation of just transition policies is essential. However, as we explore in the next section, this has not happened so far in the context of existing participatory bodies in the Czech Republic.

3.2 Attempts at stakeholder participation in the Czech Republic

To demonstrate the barriers to meaningful participation with a concrete example, we analysed the functioning of national and regional stakeholder platforms and related participation options that were established in the context of just transition and that focused on structural changes in the energy system in the Czech Republic, most notably coal phase-out. On the national level, this included three bodies: the Independent Energy Committee, the Coal Commission, and the Transformation Platform, which were all established by the government to gather various stakeholder perspectives. We reviewed publicly available documents to map the objectives of these bodies and the criteria of their members' selection, with particular attention to the involvement of workers as one of the stakeholder groups critical for the legitimacy and meaningfulness of the just transition.

The background of these three bodies is as follows: (1) The Independent Energy Committee was set up in 2007 as a government consultation body. It is problematic to call it a stakeholder body, because the members were experts nominated by political parties, sometimes without any specifically relevant expertise. The interests represented by the experts are not made clear in the founding documents and status. (2) The Coal Commission was established in 2019 from members selected by the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Environment. The majority of these members represented public administration institutions and industrial umbrella organisations, with the minor involvement of environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic institutions, and unions. (3) The Transformation Platform was organised by the Ministry

of Regional Development as a participatory body for the preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan, again involving public administration institutions, including representatives of regional councils. It followed up on the Re:start programme, established in 2015 for the restructuring of the economy of the coal regions.

The Re:start programme – in a way a predecessor of the Transformation Platform – focused on the economic restructuring of the Czech coal mining regions, and is still presented as a successful example of a participatory approach. However, it had been oriented towards a mere monitoring of the absorption capacity of financial instruments in the regions, instead of identifying needs of the stakeholders (including underrepresented groups). Predominantly, it was focused on private companies and regional institutions and on enhancing their capability to develop investment projects. Although the programme organised several meetings and seminars for the public, in total there were very few participatory opportunities and it had not provided any coherent vision or goal of the transformation that would be based on monitoring the needs of local residents and workers.

A more favourable situation occurred at the regional level, within Regional Transformation Platforms. In northeast Moravia, the regional council managed to include the issue of just transition as part of public strategic planning, and thus many activities took place with the public, at schools, and with businesses and experts. However, in the other two regions the variety of participation options were more limited – usually reduced to a combination of public seminars focused on financing from the Just Transition Fund and a chance to provide comments and opinions via an online form (Černík et al. forthcoming).

If we focus specifically on the representation of workers' voices within the platforms, only the Coal Commission and the Transformation Platform featured one representative who advocated for the affected workers (Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions, ČMKOS). To understand this situation better, we decided to reach out to the stakeholders who either represented or could potentially represent workers within the established participatory structures. We focused on the extent to which the participation attempts, as perceived from the perspective of these stakeholders were (in)consistent with meaningful participation described in Section 2.3. Specifically, we investigated their (i) assessment of the current

governance of just transition (understanding of the purpose and functioning of the respective participatory bodies), and (2) collaboration with other stakeholders and the perceived role of the respective stakeholders in the transformation process (e.g. the availability of adequate opportunities to shape the outcomes).

In addition to ČMKOS, which was represented in the two platforms (see above), we selected stakeholder groups which have direct contact with workers, regardless of whether they participated in the existing stakeholder platforms or not. Based on these criteria and further use of snowball sampling, we focused on stakeholders from the following groups: coal mining companies, ČMKOS and other trade unions, educational and research institutions (e.g. secondary schools that provide programmes related to coal mining, often in collaboration with mining companies), and regional employment offices. From this pool, we identified 41 individual stakeholders to whom we sent interview requests. Over the course of winter 2021 and spring 2022, we conducted a total of 17 interviews with representatives from all these groups.

Based on the review of the existing participatory bodies and supplemented by the interviews, we identified six key challenges for the meaningful participation of stakeholders whose work is affected by changes in the energy system within just transition.

3.3 Key challenges to meaningful participation

Lack of an accountable plan for stakeholder participation: All three national participatory bodies were supposed to prepare a transparent plan for stakeholder participation. However, it was difficult to identify when opportunities were opened for stakeholders to get involved, e.g. during the preparation of the final outcomes of the respective bodies (such as the official recommendations of the Coal Commission for the coal phase-out), or in the following steps (assessment and evaluation). Moreover, the political nomination of the Independent Energy Committee and the Coal Commission creates difficulties for the continuation of their work beyond the timespan of one election period.

Limited variety of participation opportunities: The prevalent idea of stakeholder participation was based on membership of representative bodies, such as the Regional Transformation Platform, accompanied by

some general option for the public to provide comments and ideas, usually via an online form. Whereas the Platform can serve as a good coordinator and guarantor of the whole participation process, the attendance of meetings and commenting on documents of a few selected individuals cannot fulfil the potential of meaningful participation. For this, a much broader scope and variety of participative methods is needed, including those from the 'higher' levels of the "ladder of citizen participation", such as workshops, public consultations, citizen assemblies etc.

Lack of transparency in the selection of participants in existing participatory bodies: As described by Hronová (2021), the nomination of the members of the Coal Commission was not systematic, and without clearly defined rules. Due to the lack of transparency regarding the nomination process, a "Shadow Coal Commission" (Stínová uhelná komise 2022), has been established as a grassroots initiative. It addresses the concerns raised by stakeholders who were not nominated to the Coal Commission, including local residents and experts in the labour market, and provides them with a platform to voice their perspectives.

None of the three participatory bodies effectively addressed practical conditions of meaningful participation, including potential financial reimbursement for the time which the participants dedicated to the process. Whereas some members participated within their main working time, others were supposed to manage the same tasks beyond their regular occupations. This imbalance translates to uneven possibilities to shape the outcomes of the participation body.

Lack of representation of workers: The directly affected workers are represented solely via the unions in two out of three existing participatory bodies. However, in the Coal Commission it is only one member out of 19, while in the Transformation Platform, it is one out of 32 members. Although the unions perceive their role as being the key representative of the workers, they are often not in close contact with the majority of them; instead, they collaborate with the employers, notably in the particular workplaces directly at risk of closure.

Ignorance regarding the worker's perspective in the debates is described by one trade unionist: "The only ones willing to discuss the worker's perspective with us now are the employers, the companies." (Trade Unionist 1, 1.2.2022) Despite the common assumption that the unions act

as a counterpoint to the management of the companies, they often work hand in hand, as acknowledged even by the other side. As one of the managers said: “The unions are in fact our partners and it’s actually ‘our’ people who only sometimes wear the union vest.” (Manager 1, 7.2.2022) This notion supports our insight that the representation of the transition-affected workers is significantly limited.

No clarity regarding how to influence the outcomes of the process: In the case of the Coal Commission and the Transformation Platform, some participants expressed doubts about the impact of their involvement in the respective platform in contrast to other participants. This perceived varying ability to shape the process and the outcome eventually led to their loss of trust. As commented by a trade unionist: “The Coal Commission ran for over a year but failed to produce a single thing of importance to the people. (...) I can tell you that it was a mere discussion group, nothing else. Huge disappointment on my part.” (Trade Unionist 2, 10.2.2022)

Lack of a common understanding of overarching goals and objectives of just transition: None of the analysed platforms set the goal of completely phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with renewable energy resources. The Independent Energy Committee (Nezávislá odborná komise 2008: 6) has the objectives of: (1) reducing energy intensity; (2) satisfying society’s energy demand; (3) motivating innovation and emissions reductions; and (4) limiting the risks of fluctuations in energy supply. The Coal Commission “analyses the options for future coal phase-out” (MPO 2019: 1), rather than having a shared objective of the earliest possible, and simultaneously socially just, end of coal use. The primary concern in this context is the emphasis on energy security rather than prioritising the development of a new energy system that addresses climate risks and simultaneously aims to improve socio-economic conditions in the coal regions.

The decarbonisation goals are perceived as imposed by the EU, without giving stakeholders (including the workers) the right to decide or get involved in the decision. This is illustrated by a certain bitterness, as expressed by one trade unionist: “I am not going to hide here that the trend is set by politics. Let us be frank, it is very difficult to influence the policies of the European Commission or the European Parliament in any way. You can only make some comments, but again these are decided then by the big players.” (Trade Unionist 3, 25.3.2022)

The technocratic focus of the Coal Commission on a mere replacement of coal within the current energy mix, without broader socio-economic considerations, restricts possible scenarios and excludes other actors with relevant expertise in the social aspects of the transition. Among other things, because of this limited focus and unwillingness to consider non-technical aspects of the transition, the final recommendations for coal phase-out by the Coal Commission were accompanied by the resignation of its two members representing environmental NGOs.

Based on this experience, we propose four guiding principles for the design of meaningful participation, including some suggestions for concrete methods. Subsequently, we argue in favour of a broader change in the role of expert and non-expert stakeholders to ensure that a plurality of perspectives is truly represented in the participatory process and we discuss its implications for semi-peripheral regions.

4. How to achieve meaningful participation within just transition

4.1 Principles and methods for meaningful participation

Accountable stakeholder mapping: Stakeholder mapping is based on creating a structured overview of all affected groups, their possible representatives, their relationships and other relevant characteristics (Reed et al. 2009). Creation of a comprehensive stakeholder map does not mean that all groups need to be actively engaged, at least not with the same intensity. However, only by creating this complete overview can one make informed choices about the further participatory process, based on the specific objectives of the participation guarantor (OECD 2022). Moreover, different methods could be tailored to particular groups of stakeholders according to their needs (OECD 2017). The accountability of the mapping process then stems from the transparent justification of the choices made based on the mapping, in contrast e.g. to rather erratic political nomination (as was the case of the Czech participatory bodies).

Considering the uneven power relations among the stakeholders, as discussed in Sections 1 and 2.3, the stakeholder mapping in the context of just transition should be made with a special focus on large and hard-to-reach groups, such as workers and local residents.

Including underrepresented groups: the case of transition-affected workers: We use the example of workers whose jobs might be at risk from the coal phase-out to illustrate what can be done to engage the large and hard-to-reach groups. First, such groups need to be properly defined. They comprise all whose jobs are associated with products to be phased out – the so-called ‘supply chain perspective’ (Fritz et al. 2018). Workers in all jobs in at least the sectors directly at risk (e.g. coal mining), and indirectly in their supply chains, should be considered. Analysing the total number of jobs should be supplemented by analysing their sectoral and spatial distribution, skill level, and other socio-demographic characteristics of the workers relevant to their involvement in the participatory process.

Traditionally, input-output (IO) models have been used to estimate the number of jobs at risk (e.g. Alves Dias et al. (2018); Miller/Blair (2009); Oei et al. (2020); Vogt-Schilb/Feng (2019)). Yet the IO approach does not provide accurate information on the number of jobs actually at risk, nor on their spatial distribution and the socio-demographic characteristics of the workers in sufficient detail (see further limitations in Frankowski et al. (2023)). In a study on coal mining in Poland, Frankowski et al. (2023) therefore propose using data on the contracts of companies in the coal mining sector to assess the quantity, sectoral, and geographic location of the jobs at risk. However, this approach may run up against a reluctance of companies to provide this data (if they are not required by law to do so).

We therefore propose to complement IO modelling with national statistics on enterprises and the workforce. After identifying the most affected indirectly vulnerable sectors by the IO model (defined, for example, as the largest suppliers of the coal mining sector relative to their total production), it is possible to identify enterprises operating in these sectors using the system of national accounts. National statistics also usually describe at least an approximate number of jobs in the enterprises concerned, and their geographical location.

In order to determine the specific companies whose main economic activity is really at risk in the event of coal phase-out, it is, however, necessary to gather additional information from the companies’ websites or web search engines. Finally, at the level of specific jobs, sectoral classifications can be matched to skill classifications, such as proposed in Černý/Luckeneder (2023).

Long-term multi-method interaction, rather than one-off consultations:

Once the stakeholders are defined in a balanced way and without a serious risk of underrepresentation of some of the most affected groups, various participatory methods can be considered. Although some information can be revealed during a one-off exercise, most important in-depth aspects relevant to decision-making usually appear as a result of repeated interaction (Nygrén 2019) with a clear set of referential milestones to assess and possibly adjust the progress, as mentioned in Section 2.2 in the context of the need for a participation plan. This should increase transparency, clarity, and establish mutual trust.

Methods covering the full range of levels of participation described in Section 2.2 – except for the bad practice of manipulative or fake participation – should be considered. Information collection methods such as surveys can help to collect basic quantitative data generalisable to the respective group. This can concern, for example, education, professional experience, preferred requalification strategy and so on. Surveys can be supplemented with interviews to get qualitative, in-depth information, for instance to identify the most pressing issues or to map political power.

For meaningful participation, however, it is essential to include so-called deliberative methods – interactive and inclusive processes contributing to the (trans)formation of actors' preferences (Zografos/Howarth 2010). Examples include transformative scenario workshops (Kahane 2012; Nygrén 2019), public meetings, participatory rural appraisal, or citizen juries (De Marchi/Ravetz 2001; OECD 2020). Deliberative methods open up space for social learning processes when changes in understanding, knowledge, skills and possibly changes in attitudes or behaviour occur through social interaction (Collins/Ison 2009; Reed et al. 2010), as well as promoting the development of trust and relationships. This may in turn form the basis for a common understanding of the system or problem at hand, and lead to subsequent agreement and collective actions (Muro/Jeffrey 2008: 339). This is illustrated, for example, by Garmendia/Stagl (2010) in the case of energy and natural resource management workshops.

Clearly articulated objectives throughout: On the one hand, meaningful participation, by definition, opens space for a plurality of perspectives and allows a balancing of stakeholder power. On the other hand, it is important to distinguish general 'non-negotiable objectives' that frame

the participatory process and are not within the participatory body's power to change (e.g. decarbonisation of the energy sector). This does not imply that concerns cannot be raised regarding these general objectives. Ideally, the participatory process should bring these concerns to light. However, it is essential to transparently acknowledge that such an agenda exists and serves as the initial foundation of the process.

The open acknowledgement and discussion of assumptions and visions behind the participatory process is also essential for further work with its outcomes, such as the creation of transition scenarios and the subsequent formulation of (just) transition policies. For example, the concept of "Vision-driven Policy Cycle" (Sgouridis et al. 2022: 9) mentions the importance of stakeholder engagement in formulating desirable visions for energy transition ('storylines') as the first step for quantitative scenario modelling. Such an approach is intended to ensure that any important segment of the plurality of existing perspectives is not missed.

Thus, participants can bring in more progressive perspectives; for example, instead of ecological modernisation based on renewable energy transition, the preferred strategy could be energy democracy together with lowering energy consumption, which is currently challenging even for pioneering initiatives, e.g. in Greece and Spain (Tsagkari et al. 2021). The capabilities, experience, and skills of the workers could be used to support such a turn.

However, there may also be efforts to preserve the status quo as much as possible until stakeholders are assured that they will not experience any detrimental effects throughout the process. Similarly, as members of communities directly affected by mining, workers should have a 'right to say no' in the process of meaningful participation (Friends of the Earth Europe 2021). However, granting this right should not be misused to block the achievement of the overarching 'non-negotiable objectives' of decarbonisation.

4.2 Transforming the roles of expert and non-expert stakeholders to diversify development trajectories

Developing just transition policies in a transparent way that avoids underrepresentation of certain stakeholders, engages them in deliberation, and acknowledges 'non-negotiable objectives' implies a fundamental

change in the roles that various stakeholders hold. The traditional participatory setup corresponding to the ecological modernisation approach (see Section 2.1), where experts bring in evidence and non-experts provide preferences (at best), is de facto systemic disadvantage to non-expert perspectives. Experts (typically scientists or researchers) traditionally hold significant power in setting the “languages of valuation” (Zografos 2023), selecting information for decision-making and influencing the related processes.

When describing his participation typology (see Section 2.2.), Pretty (1995:1252) criticises researchers for aspiring to participation, but still actually holding control over the participation processes and rarely supporting local stakeholders to fully develop their citizen power. A similar criticism applies to policymakers who, on the one hand, seek public agreement, but on the other hand fear people’s involvement because it makes things less controllable (Pretty 1995: 1252).

To change this logic, we need a different approach to the role of experts on the one hand and non-experts (local residents, workers, ...) on the other. This shift in roles is advocated by post-normal science (PNS). PNS argues that ‘normal’ scientific discourse has been unable to provide satisfactory answers to many environmental issues, and proposes that scientific insights should be considered equivalent alongside others (e.g. lay ones) (Zografos/Howarth, 2010). Instead of providing evidence and formulating scenarios, experts within PNS provide room for the co-creation of these scenarios to those affected by their potential implementation.

According to its proponents, PNS is relevant where “facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes are high, and decisions urgent” (Funtowicz/Ravetz 1993: 744). This is very much the case for just transition due to the competing values and interests, challenges in assessing the impacts of the transition, and the pressing need to transform the energy system for climate change mitigation. Yet, explicit linking of energy transformation or just transition to PNS has been infrequent (Floyd et al. 2020; Ravetz 2006; Tainter et al. 2006).

We see the relevance of PNS to just transition, and especially to meaningful participation within just transition, in at least three important points. First, both meaningful participation and PNS place a strong emphasis on deliberation (Tognetti 1999; Zografos/Howarth 2010). This means highlighting the importance of direct, longer-term and interactive involvement of the affected stakeholder groups. Only under such condi-

tions can deliberation occur and transform the views and experiences of participants through the process of social learning – which can occur both on the side of non-expert and expert stakeholders.

This implies that to achieve meaningful participation within just transition, it is not enough to involve a few representatives of large, hard-to-reach and non-expert groups (as trade unionists might do for workers). Conversely, it is essential to involve members of these groups directly, in a role where they are on an equal footing with experts and policymakers. Meaningful participation is therefore not as much about conveying the (supposed) views and attitudes of the affected groups via representatives, but more about enabling the direct exchange and possible transformation of their views and attitudes, which cannot happen without long-term, direct, and above all ‘mass’ direct involvement of the respective groups. PNS thus implies a far-reaching shift in the scope and aspirations of meaningful participation processes, from principally small representative bodies with a specific agenda (e.g. managing the spending of resources from transition funds) towards broad, society-wide long-term processes with transformative potential.

Second, this aspiration corresponds more closely to the social-ecological approach than to ecological modernisation (see Section 2.1). However, it does not automatically mean that just transition according to the social-ecological approach would take place. According to Floyd et al. (2020), this process might open avenues for less techno-optimistic trajectories, which admit reduced energy consumption in the economy. However, the aspiration of both PNS and meaningful participation is to open the way for all development trajectories that the affected stakeholders might prefer, shaping just transition policies according to the needs, perspectives and experiences, based on the locally specific context of the affected regions.

Third, this approach marks the beginning of a discussion of different just transition conceptions and policies in an atmosphere of mutual listening and seeking to understand the perspectives of other stakeholders. This is particularly relevant for semi-peripheral regions, where one of the key characteristics is the aforementioned distrust in institutions (see Section 3.1) and the feeling that policies (and thus, more broadly speaking, the development narrative) are dictated from above, that is, from the core – in the case examined here, mostly from the EU (see Section 3.3).

Meaningful participation should not contribute to the legitimisation and adoption of a just transition agenda designed from the core, but rather to start a two-way communication about why, where and how the transition of the affected semi-peripheral regions concerned is heading. At best, this should begin to eliminate some of the negative characteristics of a region in a position of dependency (see Section 3.1). Namely, it should incentivise workers to organise (as deliberation leads to an exchange of perspectives, familiarisation and thus improved conditions for, for example, workers' organisation) and improve trust in public institutions (as deliberation leads to increased mutual trust between stakeholders). Consequently, this could increase the political power of the semi-peripheral regions, challenge the dominance of the core, and increase the emancipatory potential of the just transition.

5. Conclusions

Participation in a just transition should not reproduce or reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities, but represent the views and interests of all stakeholder groups affected by the transition equally. However, this is rarely the case in its practical implementation. The context of semi-peripheral EU countries is instructive, as these countries are subject to the EU's just transition policies, but at the same time suffer from weaker trust in institutions, which amplifies many of the obstacles to the successful implementation of the just transition.

To achieve meaningful participation where all relevant stakeholders have real decision-making power and are equally represented, just transition is a matter of broad deliberation within various longer-term participative formats, rather than discussion in small expert and policymaking circles over the implementation of expert-prepared input. In particular, the direct participation of affected stakeholders, notably the hard-to-reach groups, such as workers, is crucial to enable the exchange and transformation of perspectives between different stakeholders. The principles and methods for meaningful participation proposed in this article go in this direction and provide an alternative to mere technocratic implementation of just transition policies.

We argue that meaningful participation implies balancing the roles of experts and non-experts as suggested by post-normal science (PNS). However, according to Ravetz (1999: 653), PNS “should not be interpreted as an attack on accredited experts, but rather as assistance” in terms of defining their role in a deliberative process to reveal diverse trajectories that may not always be on the radar of experts and policymakers.

In the context of a semi-peripheral country, the opposite of such diverse trajectories would typically be the dominant development narrative manifested in policies in line with ecological modernisation. Breaking out of this dominance could help design just transition strategies and practices while maintaining cultural and regional differences and specificities, rather than adopting or opposing the adoption of just transition policies transferred from the economic core. Engaging hitherto underrepresented stakeholder groups and balancing their position with the experts and policymakers within the participatory processes could thus balance the relationship between the core and (semi-)peripheries.

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*ABSTRACT Der Übergang in eine postfossile Zukunft bietet die Chance, die Ungleichheiten hinsichtlich wirtschaftlicher und politischer Macht anzusprechen, mit denen (semi-)periphere Regionen konfrontiert sind. Eine dieser Möglichkeiten stellt die Politik für einen gerechten Übergang der Europäischen Union dar. Wenn es darum geht, bestehende sozioökonomische Ungleichheiten und Machtverhältnisse in Frage zu stellen, greift die EU-Politik allerdings zu kurz. Sie stützt sich oft auf technokratische Maßnahmen und selektiven Expertenrat. Insbesondere in den semi-peripheren Regionen Zentral- und Osteuropas fehlt es an einer sinnvollen Einbindung – im Gegensatz zu einer Pro-forma-Beteiligung – aller Interessengruppen bei der Formulierung von Politiken für einen gerechten Übergang. Am Beispiel der Tschechischen Republik, einem der größten Braunkohleproduzenten der EU, untersuchen wir die bestehenden Hindernisse für eine sinnvolle Beteiligung und erläutern, wie eine solche erreicht werden kann. Wir schlagen vor, dass eine sinnvolle Beteiligung die direkte Einbeziehung verschiedener – vor allem unterrepräsentierter – Gruppen erfordert, wie zum Beispiel Arbeitnehmer*innen in von Arbeitsplatz-*

*verlust bedrohten Branchen, und dass sich die Rolle der Expert*innen von einer privilegierten hin zu einer mit nicht fachkundigen Interessengruppen gleichgestellten verändern muss. Wir kommen zu dem Schluss, dass die Einbindung aller betroffenen Interessengruppen durch deliberative Methoden verschiedene Politiken für einen gerechten Übergang ermöglicht. Solche Politiken bieten die Chance, das vorherrschende und von Ländern des Zentrums und deren Institutionen repräsentierte Entwicklungsnarrativ zu hinterfragen.*

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