



HAL
open science

Towards ecological embeddedness in democratised workplaces: addressing climate change as a labour issue

Philippe Askenazy, Claude Didry

► To cite this version:

Philippe Askenazy, Claude Didry. Towards ecological embeddedness in democratised workplaces: addressing climate change as a labour issue. Kalina Arabadjieva, Nicola Countouris, Bianca Luna Fabris and Wouter Zwysen. Transformative ideas – ensuring a just share of progress for all, ETUI aisbl, 2023, 978-2-87452-674-9. halshs-04138296

HAL Id: halshs-04138296

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04138296v1>

Submitted on 23 Jun 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Public Domain

Transformative ideas – ensuring a just share of progress for all

Edited by

**Kalina Arabadjieva, Nicola Countouris,
Bianca Luna Fabris and Wouter Zwysen**

etui.



Transformative ideas – ensuring a just share of progress for all

Edited by

**Kalina Arabadjieva, Nicola Countouris,
Bianca Luna Fabris and Wouter Zwysen**

Brussels, 2023

© Publisher: ETUI aisbl, Brussels

All rights reserved

Print: ETUI printshop, Brussels

D/2023/10.574/16

ISBN: 978-2-87452-673-2 (print version)

ISBN: 978-2-87452-674-9 (electronic version)



The ETUI is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the ETUI. Neither the European Union nor the ETUI can be held responsible for them.

Contents

Kalina Arabadjieva, Nicola Countouris, Bianca Luna Fabris and Wouter Zwysen Introduction	7
 Part I Learning from the past and reimagining the future	19
Danny Dorling Chapter 1 From the pandemic to the cost-of-living crisis: what are we learning?	21
Béla Galgóczi Chapter 2 Inequality in the green transition	39
Hamid R. Ekbia Chapter 3 Commodities or collectives? The fight over the future of technology	57
Colm O’Cinneide Chapter 4 Equality, rights and the ‘stickiness’ of the current political moment	67
 Part II Alternative narratives and policy solutions	79
Olivier De Schutter, Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson Chapter 5 Equality as an ingredient for a post-growth world	81
Nicola Countouris and Valerio De Stefano Chapter 6 The future concept of work	93

Guy Standing	
Chapter 7	
The era of chronic uncertainty: a transformational opportunity	105
Rania Antonopoulos	
Chapter 8	
Has the time for a European job guarantee policy arrived?	121
Part III Trade unionism and workplace democracy	133
K.D. Ewing	
Chapter 9	
'A just share of the fruits of progress': the role of collective bargaining	135
Philippe Askenazy and Claude Didry	
Chapter 10	
Towards ecological embeddedness in democratised workplaces: addressing climate change as a labour issue	147
Reingard Zimmer	
Chapter 11	
Against authoritarianism: participation, solidarity and (direct) democracy in the world of work	163
List of contributors	175

Chapter 10

Towards ecological embeddedness in democratised workplaces: addressing climate change as a labour issue

Philippe Askenazy and Claude Didry

Introduction

The climate crisis and associated public policies entail the transition of large industries, from energy generation to car manufacturing. The consequences for workers in these industries have attracted the attention of trade unions, which have proposed ambitious *manifestos* towards a ‘just transition’. The scope of such a just transition is limited mainly to activities and communities directly impacted by climate policies and to state regulations. The energy transition tends to focus on the problem of reducing or even eliminating highly polluting sectors. This is particularly true of the coal and oil industries, where the prospect of job cuts is pushing trade unions to resist the necessary adjustments. It is true that the oil industry union in Norway has undergone an important evolution by initiating negotiations on restructuring, paying due attention to social considerations (Normann and Tellmann 2021). But environmental concerns are still being promoted first and foremost by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The judgment of a Dutch civil court in 2021 ordering the supermajor Shell to reduce its worldwide CO₂ emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 (compared with 2019 levels) followed a request by Friends of the Earth and a multitude of other environmental associations.

From an environmental labour studies standpoint,¹ this chapter explores how workers and trade unions in Europe can address environmental issues in all activities, including those not directly targeted by ‘just transition’ policies. Ecological conversion across the economy should emerge from the actions of workers themselves, going beyond the mere adaptation of workers in threatened occupations. This therefore leads us to consider grassroots initiatives within the workplace or local community. By departing from the so-called ‘creative destruction’ spiral, they are more likely to meet population needs, even new collective and individual needs, and improve labour relations.

Such initiatives contribute to the design of new production strategies. This intellectual dynamic we define as *ecological embeddedness* is already being pushed by ‘citizens in the workplace’ and local actors, and allows us to explore the concrete environmental issues at stake in working at an environment–labour nexus. At the same time, this dynamic brings to the fore the role of trade unions and democracy at the workplace level. This anchoring of environmental issues in economic sectors by workers themselves gives rise to a redefinition of environmental initiatives by collective actors, usually at national or even international level.

1. See Rätzl et al. (2021) for an introduction to this emerging transdisciplinary research field.

In Section 1 we discuss the successes and limitations of the concept(s) of just transition long promoted by trade unions. Section 2 presents two cases – the cultural sector and local initiatives in a manufacturing area – that illustrate the process of ecological embeddedness via transformative ideas of citizens in the workplace and communities. Before concluding with policy perspectives for Europe, we explore, in Section 3, paths by which trade unions might promote deliberative democracy at work on ecological issues and thereby achieve embeddedness.

1. Just transition today: a mainstream concept

1.1 From a trade union concept to a pillar of the European Commission's strategy

The concept of a 'just transition' emerged at the end of the previous century. In a special issue of the *International Journal of Labour Research* entitled 'Climate change and labour: The need for a "just transition"', Rosemberg (2010) traces it back to an online text by a Canadian trade unionist Brian Kohler posted in 1998.

During the next decade, the concept of a just transition matured and became a flagship of the union movement (Pochet and Galgóczi 2012). At its second Congress the International Trade Union Confederation declared that just transition is key to the union approach to the climate challenge: 'Congress is committed to promoting an integrated approach to sustainable development through a just transition where social progress, environmental protection and economic needs are brought into a framework of democratic governance, where labour and other human rights are respected and gender equality achieved'.²

Most global and regional industrial confederations are now supporting just transitions with almost the same pillars. Take IndustriALL, a global union created in 2012 that represents 50 million workers in 140 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors, which are in the frontline of public policies on decarbonisation. IndustriALL's just transition manifesto calls for:

- an industrial policy fit for ambitious climate goals and good quality jobs;
- adequate resources to fund the transition;
- stronger collective bargaining and social dialogue to negotiate transitions;
- a toolbox of workers' rights and companies' duties to anticipate and shape change;
- tackling new skills needs and a right to quality training and lifelong learning for every worker in support of the just transition.

As Rosemberg (2010) and Pochet and Galgóczi (2012) highlighted over a decade ago, a just transition is a supporting mechanism of climate and, more generally, environmental action based on a consensus that environmental and social policies can reinforce each

2. See https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/2CO_10_Sustainable_development_and_Climate_Change_03-10-2.pdf

other. The just transition is for its promoters also a necessary condition for ensuring social and democratic acceptance of the transition towards a decarbonated economy.

This inspiring approach did not remain confined to the labour movement or environmental NGOs. In 2015, the ILO adopted the *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*. It calls for ‘coherent policies’ to provide ‘a just transition framework for all to promote the creation of more decent jobs, including, as appropriate: anticipating impacts on employment, adequate and sustainable social protection for job losses and displacement, skills development and social dialogue, including the effective exercise of the right to organise and bargain collectively’.

Its popularity has yielded a variety of ‘just transition’ concepts, ranging from a ‘neoliberal’ one to a ‘socio-ecological transformation’ (Kreinin 2020). Mainstream institutions (such as the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD) are forging their own versions of just transition narrowed down to ‘ecological modernisation’.

The European Commission’s interpretation of just transition has particular structural importance. It is a pillar of its Green Plan to meet European commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Its Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) is presented as ‘an essential tool to ensure that the transition to a climate-neutral economy takes place in an equitable way, leaving no one behind. It provides targeted support to mobilise around €55 billion over the period 2021–2027 in the most affected regions to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the transition.’ This will thus allow Member States to benefit from EU support in carbon-intensive regions and those in which the fossil fuel sector is a major provider of employment. But in the Commission’s presentation, just transition appears to be a recycling of the flexicurity that was at the heart of its employment recommendations in the 2000s. It addresses the problem of employment losses in highly unionised sectors through social compensation and flexibility, without considering the capacity of workers themselves to develop transformative proposals for the economic activities in which they are involved.

1.2 A Schumpeterian approach

One criticism of this just transition approach is that by focusing on climate challenges, it does not embrace all environmental issues, especially preservation of biodiversity. Here we point out another double caveat. First, fundamentally, just transition is a response to the destruction of old carbonised activities and the creation of ‘neutral’ ones and ways of accelerating this transition. Therefore, the main targets are agriculture, energy, manufacturing and transport, the workers in these sectors, and the regions in which these industries and their workers are historically settled. This leaves large portions of the economy, territories and workforce outside the scope of just transition. In this framework, the global outlook for Europe seems encouraging because the EU has reached its own target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (though without integrating carbon leakage, such as offshoring manufacturing to China). Second, it does not depart from ‘Schumpeterian’ growth that encourages the exploitation of nature;

on the contrary, it puts Schumpeterian technological innovation front and centre in building a sustainable world. In that framework, however, rentier capitalism and even financialisation can indulge in greenwashing.

This narrowed version of just transition leads to two dead-ends. The first is the scale of emissions reductions required and the preservation of biodiversity, which mean that all economic activities need to be involved, not just the most emitting sectors. The second is democratic. In the process of destruction that the transition implies, what distinguishes a just transition from an unjust transition is the implementation of social measures to tackle job losses. Having said that, the just transition is based on a view of a hierarchical organisation of economic activities, in which public policies are relayed by company managements. This framework may legitimise the view that environmental issues are a corporate prerogative, part of corporate social responsibility, thereby excluding various stakeholders, such as trade unions, workers and citizens in general. This gives rise to profound challenges to the economic fabric, which may tend over the medium to long term to turn unemployed workers and, more broadly, part of local populations against transition, whether just or unjust. In the United States, the climate-hostile policy promoted by Donald Trump has reinforced an already strong opposition on the part of employees and areas that have benefited from the revival of coal following the restarting of thermal power stations. Similarly, the success of extreme right-wing populism in Europe also feeds on industrial nostalgia and is gaining ground in deindustrialised territories, even within the framework of deindustrialisation justified by ecological transition. Furthermore, the European energy crisis in the wake of the Russian aggression in Ukraine fuels arguments for maintaining the use of coal to secure European independence. Even the ambitious agenda of the socio-ecological version of just transition will find it hard to overcome this political impasse.

Even if the just transition has been successful to date, it remains politically fragile and is now a victim of its own success: co-opted by mainstream institutions, it is losing its capacity to carry transformative ideas.

Unionisation seems to encourage a shift among workers toward greater acceptance of the need to prioritise environmental issues (Rinqvist 2021). But here again, a hierarchical vision of society prevails in which it is up to the trade unions to relay public policies. Moreover, the hypothesis of a systematic trade union orientation towards a pro-ecological transition has been questioned: environmental labour studies highlight the contradictions that run through trade unionism.³ The challenge is then both to question production processes in all economic sectors, including expanding ones, to support workers in their reframing initiatives and to forge an ecological hegemony based on workplace democracy. To rephrase the statutes of the First International, the ecological emancipation of the workers must be the workers' own doing.

3. German and Austrian industrial unions have been examined particularly closely by the literature (for example, Kraemer 2018; Barth and Littig 2021; Pichler et al. 2021). Their positions also express an attachment to maintaining the industrial activities at the core of their domestic economies, on which they can build or support transformative initiatives.

2. Ecological embeddedness

2.1 What could be the next step in addressing this challenge?

Workers' collectives and local initiatives are inspiring. They have basically two motives: the decarbonisation of the industry in which they work and/or the local environmental impact of current and future production. This reframing addresses the whole production process, including the location of workplaces and human resource management. The nature of the final output may also be called into question. As a result of such questions ecological issues may become *embedded* within production, and not just an adaptation to climate change or new regulations for the market economy which is at the heart of the European construction. This means, in Polanyi's perspective, the reduction of criticisms of a socially disembodied economy to the market principle as the most efficient allocation system in history (North 1977). By contrast, ecological issues can be raised within the material processes of production by the workers themselves. This echoes the notion of a 'new economy of the labour contract [suggesting] the characteristics of new industrial relations which, oblivious to the impersonal laws of the competitive economy, must immerse themselves in a context where "everything is the environment"' (Lyon-Caen and Perulli 2022). Interestingly, this orientation is outlined by initiatives emerging in industries not targeted by government climate/environmental policy. In this section we present two illustrations: bifurcations in the cultural sector and a local initiative in a French manufacturing area.

But first, a few remarks about so-called 'slow fashion' (a term coined by design activist Kate Fletcher). Fashion is at the intersection of culture and manufacturing. The concept of slow fashion generally describes a holistic approach that opposes the dominant fast fashion model: long-lasting clothing, made locally, mainly from fair trade and sustainable sources. Slow fashion – sustainable fashion, more broadly – has attracted considerable attention in the fashion world, from the press to NGOs, and even among academics, who have written hundreds of articles on the subject. It still has only a marginal market share, however, and despite a strong increase it is not expected to become really significant within the next 10 years. This raises the idea that sustainable fashion is a myth (Pucker 2022). But this failure derives not from the behaviour of consumers, especially those on lower incomes (von Busch 2022), but from the strategies of large companies, which have managed to water down slow fashion by multiplying their 'organic', 'fair trade' and 'clean' labels, claims of corporate social and environmental responsibility and promises of recycling and second-hand products. Finally, the workers in this ultra-segmented industry have not been able to get involved in the transformation of production. This is the essential difference from our case studies (see below).

2.2 Slow culture

The culture sector is fundamentally characterised by creation and innovation. But it has become a prime example of a maelstrom of creative destruction, driven by financialisation, the growing commodification of public goods and services, and

competitive pressures, including on public institutions facing budgetary restrictions in the wake of the implementation of New Public Management techniques. In a race for prestige and funding opportunities, museums, theatres or philharmonic institutions have continued to inflate their annual offerings. A concert that requires many sessions to rehearse can thus give rise to a very small number of performances over the course of a season, perhaps even one or two, and is categorised as ‘exceptional’. This bulimia is accompanied by a rapid rotation of artists and technicians, invitations of foreign orchestras, the moving of physical artworks, and so on, all with a heavy carbon footprint. Moreover, these practices allow only a few motivated connoisseurs to access art. By contrast, to boost profitability, many prestigious festivals aim to attract a growing audience and across increasing geographical distances. In addition to the travel of the spectators and the artists, gigantism requires the use and displacement of massive equipment from one event to another. Furthermore, unregulated financialisation continues to spread rapidly in the cultural sector. In just a few quarters, for example, the non-fungible token (NFT) market has attracted billions of dollars, creating income opportunities for artists but also speculative and exclusive markets based on energy-intensive blockchain technology.

These trends also have direct consequences for workers in the cultural sector. In addition to the precariousness of their jobs, artists and technicians often have to settle in very large urban centres, offering the best opportunities for work at national and international level. For example, in France, a quarter of all performing arts workers are packed into inner Paris, which accounts for only 3 per cent of the total French population, and another quarter live in Greater Paris.

The first initiatives for environmental sustainability emerged around three axes: since the late twentieth century, cultural projects have often formed part of the transitions of historical extractive or manufacturing sites.⁴ The cultural sector can influence citizens’ values and awareness of environmental issues (the ‘Don’t Look Up’ effect). Finally, it can improve its own production processes to limit its carbon/environmental footprints.⁵

More recently, cultural workers’ environmental and decarbonisation concerns have instigated discussions on a bifurcation of productive approaches to production.⁶ Their transformative potential is such that they can lead to the correction not only of environmental but also of social drift (Askenazy 2022).

-
4. For example, former mines or plants are transformed into museums as part of industrial installations: examples include the UNESCO World Heritage Zollverein Coal Mine Industrial Complex in Essen and the Cité des sciences at the Belval steel plant in Luxembourg.
 5. Various calculators, toolkits and specific actions have been developed to reduce this footprint. For example, the German Association of Museums has compiled a list of recommended actions to save energy; the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Modern Art offers a ‘Toolkit on Environmental Sustainability in Museum Practice’; in France, the Ecoprod initiative of TV channels and public funders has produced a guide for ‘eco-production’ in the TV/film industry; in the United Kingdom, the Albert Consortium promotes ‘A screen new deal – a route map to sustainable film production’; and throughout Switzerland, OFFCUT collects a variety of used and discarded materials for creative reuse in sculptures or stage sets.
 6. Covid-19 has also stimulated thoughts on a bifurcation of culture in certain countries, such as Belgium: <https://linard.cfwb.be/files/Documents/futur-culture.pdf>

One exemplary form of practice is to extend the duration of performances or exhibitions, shifting from a logic of creative destruction to what we call here *slow creation*. If building a spectacle or exhibition can itself be considered creation, and attracting artists from elsewhere as enrichment, they should be offered to the widest possible public and at the lowest possible environmental cost. An alternative production model might comprise a smaller repertoire, with more performances: preparation time and the number of rehearsals would be reduced in favour of performance time and so a wider audience, with fixed and limited equipment. Low-carbon residencies would replace serial and ephemeral invitations. Gig workers would gain stability and more complete work periods. In addition to changes in the internal production model of each cultural institution, incentives could be established to facilitate pooling between cultural establishments in the same geographical area, including across borders, whether on a permanent or a seasonal basis, for instance for festivals. Performing arts professionals have suggested a systematic mutualisation of invitations of international artists, reducing their ecological cost, while opening up the financial possibility of attracting new guests.⁷ A commitment by establishments to use local labour would allow these workers to relocate, which would also foster stability and reduce the number of long professional journeys. Through this twofold pooling, culture would become both more local and more international, more sustainable and democratic, and more creative.

Innovation also flourishes outside institutions. Inspired by short-circuit initiatives in the social and solidarity economy, such as fruit and vegetable baskets from local producers,⁸ grassroots initiatives propose to redesign the relationship between ‘consumers’ and art and artists, offering new prospects for the latter in terms of income security and visibility. They are springing up in metropolises such as Brussels (Kilti) or in small towns such as Alençon in Normandy (Transtopie). These associations offer ‘cultural baskets’, often on a monthly basis, for prices ranging from 10 to 20 euros. The ‘basket’ includes a selection of shows, local art objects or artistic workshops. The buyer can discover new arts and local artistic offerings. Some associations also collect donations from micro-patrons, thus reclaiming the advantageous tax status of patronage and charity (which hitherto has been largely captured by the wealthy and corporations). Local artists are finding a new, relatively stable and permanent source of income.

2.3 Local creative conservation in manufacturing

The starting point in this case is a restructuring of a plant along lines familiar in the age of global capitalism. This plant is owned by the company La Chapelle-Darblay, located near Rouen (France), which is a subsidiary of Finnish group United Paper Mills (UPM). In response to falling demand for newsprint, the group organised the sale of La Chapelle-Darblay in 2019. This decision is part of a global strategy to close plants. By

7. See, for example, <https://theshiftproject.org/article/decarboner-culture-rapport-2021>

8. Vegetable box schemes in the United Kingdom and Solidarische Landwirtschaft in Germany. Even in France, thousands of Associations pour le maintien d’une agriculture paysanne have been created, which account for less than 1 per cent of all farms in France in terms of agricultural exploitation (Paranthoën 2020). In contrast to slow fashion, however, the agro-industry has not been able to co-opt or dilute these initiatives.

limiting paper production, however, it has fuelled an increase in its price and boosted the profitability of the remaining plants (the EU Commission is also investigating a potential cartel of European producers).⁹

The facility ceased its activities in 2020 and most of the staff (228 employees) were made redundant (in June 2021). Within the sector the prevalent feeling is that ‘it is very Schumpeterian. Some sites are closing, others are opening’, according to an insider quoted in *Le Monde* (11/09/2019). Over five years (2014–2019), employment in the sector fell from 15,000 to 11,000 in France. Within this corporate group, this has become routine since the mid 2010s, in the context of declining newspaper readership. The French subsidiary, one of the last of this group in France, produces one quarter of the newsprint in the country and remains profitable, but its production seems to have no future in the age of digital press. White knights are thin on the ground, but in October 2021 the group received an offer of an alliance between two large family-owned French firms: Paprec, which plans to develop heat production through the incineration of waste after its sorting, and Samfi, which plans to construct a hydrogen production installation. Most of the workforce of La Chapelle-Darblay has been laid off, but the project aims to instigate an industrial dynamic that evokes Schumpeterian ‘creative destruction’. Waste sorting and hydrogen production are not central to the restructuring, which seeks to improve profitability, but they would help to ‘green’ the group’s basic financial motivation.

This green aspect of the project was called into question by the fact the plant being closed already recycles about 40 per cent of paper waste in France. This argument was crucial for the three trade unionists who were among the last employees involved in securing the site. Two of them belong to the CGT and the third is an elected representative of CGC (for management employees). These trade unionists mobilised the support of a new and improbable alliance launched by the CGT, Greenpeace and the French anti-globalisation organisation ATTAC. This alliance, which also includes many other associations, entered the public arena in May 2020, publishing a bifurcation plan based on a variety of proposals, ranging from Covid-19 prevention to agricultural and food transition. It covers ecological (conversion of production), social (employment) and political (democratisation) issues.¹⁰ Its creation was followed by a rapid mushrooming of local sections addressing local issues.

The mobilisation sparked by the closure of La Chapelle-Darblay became an ecological cause at the local level and eventually at the national level. The leaders of the CGT, Greenpeace and ATTAC visited the facility, and ecological activists were impressed by the expertise of local unionists. Meanwhile, the trade unionists managed to develop an association between Veolia, a French multinational in the utilities sector, and Fibre

9. UPM is also trying to maximise its profits by slashing the *acquis* of workers. During the first half of 2022, UPM had to cope with a strike in Finland, which has become the longest strike in the country’s history. This strike was caused by the group’s challenge to the single paper industry agreement dating from the 1940s and the introduction of company-specific collective agreements in order to achieve flexibility (by unbundling working conditions at the company level) and competitiveness (by making concessions on working time).

10. https://cdn.greenpeace.fr/site/uploads/2021/08/plan-de-rupture.pdf?_ga=2.182039716.2015194825.1664314791-810678325.1664314791

Excellence, a Canadian multinational in the paper sector¹¹, which had made a proposal that UPM refused to consider. The main aim was the rescue of an industry anchored in the circular economy, preserving French recycling capacity with regard to collected waste paper. In other words, ecology was at the core of the project. This went hand in hand with an evolution from graphic paper to cardboard (linked to the increase in e-commerce) without dismantling the existing equipment. This evolutionary dynamic is far removed from creative destruction and it preserves industrial potential and employment in the local area. It shows that industry does not necessarily conflict with ecology, as its preservation enables controls and improvements in production processes that relocation to more permissive countries would impede.

This mobilisation has changed the fortunes of La Chapelle-Darblay dramatically: at the end of 2021, the sale of the factory to Paprec-Samfi was halted by the Métropole Rouen Normandie (the public body grouping Rouen and its suburbs). They threatened to exercise their pre-emptive right in property sales ‘in the public interest’. It was not a question of assuming control over company assets, but of being able to arbitrate in favour of a takeover that would promote recycling and contribute to the development of the circular economy.

This position taken by local elected officials provoked a reaction from central government. It first rejected the alternative project, citing the existence of a neighbouring facility that already produces cardboard and thus a risk of overcapacity. But the mayor of Rouen (a former ATTAC activist, but now a leader of the Socialist Party), together with other left-wing mayors in Normandy, argued that the two facilities are in fact complementary. A transpartisan petition against the government’s position was signed by 50 mayors of the region, including former centre-right prime minister and also mayor of Le Havre, Édouard Philippe. Eventually, UPM gave up its initial plan, and the project developed by the local union representatives and NGOs was approved.

These two case studies in very different activities share common characteristics regarding a bifurcation based on the embedding of ecological features in the production process. Their starting point is the environmental concerns of workers and of local actors. The upshot was the proposal not only of alternative and economically sustainable production processes, but also of alternative outputs that may better meet demand or the needs of local communities. They depart from the creative destruction spiral: creation and innovation remain central, but destruction is limited.

The environment is not merely a tool for promoting old agendas, such as increasing wages and preserving jobs, in order to mitigate the impacts of modern capitalism. Embedding responses to various environmental issues (climate, circularity, biodiversity) in both the logic and the means of production made it possible to tackle social rifts, not cause them.

11. The paper sector is highly concentrated on a global scale, which is evidenced in the case of Excellence Fibre, by a shareholding dominated by an Indonesian family.

3. What roles for trade unions?

Ecological embeddedness can thus become a new horizon for the labour movement, combining its social and ecological objectives. In that perspective, the firm is a key level. Specifically, it is in the workplace that the current instrumental relationship with nature and the race for short-term profits are imposed, innovations are disseminated, and labour relations and democracy – including conflicts – are located. How can trade unions operate within the firm or community to promote transformation? In this section, we outline a few avenues.

Historically, trade unions have made demands on behalf of employees in relation to pay, employment and working conditions. These issues remain crucial for unions, especially in a period of inflation. They are essentially a question of sharing economic value added, including gender equality. At the same time, investment is called for in order to preserve or increase employment. Environmental issues are still addressed mainly in relation to working conditions, including occupational safety and health at work and work–life balance. In this perspective, trade unions are facing not only an environment–labour nexus in industries in transition, but also a wage–nature nexus, including in some expanding sectors. Their aims seem difficult to reconcile with the reframing of company business models to mitigate the economic rents extracted from the direct or indirect exploitation of nature. Generally speaking, demanding state regulation and state intervention, including nationalisation (as in the just transition agenda) neglects the dilemma at the firm/local level between protecting jobs and protection of the environment.¹²

In our view, in order to overcome this dilemma, unions should strive to become an institutional voice of ‘citizen workers’ and try to cultivate appropriate values among their members. This approach could be implemented in three steps at the workplace/firm level.

A **first** step is to collect and then disseminate information on environmental issues among workers. Many trade unions across Europe already disseminate knowledge on climate change or shrinking biodiversity. The challenge is to focus on the production processes in which workers are involved.¹³ Trade unions can utilise their expertise in

12. The case of Taranto described in Greco (2023) is particularly suggestive. Taranto is home to Europe’s largest steel mill, which accounts for about 40 per cent of Italian steel production. Using coal, the plant is carbon-intensive. After a court ordered production to be stopped because of environmental and health damage (the site emitted about 8 per cent of Europe’s total dioxin), despite government orders to allow production to continue, the unsustainability of the current steel plant became clear. For the unions, the employment–environment dilemma was acute: even so-called ‘green steel’ would lead to redundancies. Their support for the renationalisation of the plant was a way of avoiding this dilemma somewhat by at least bringing to an end private shareholders’ quest for short-term profits. Eventually, the government is planning a transition to green steel with EU support: Taranto is one of the two Italian regions supported by the Just Transition Fund (see Section 1).

13. Unions can try to obtain new information rights for works councils and other workers’ representative bodies across Europe. For example in France, thanks to a law enacted in 2021, employers have to provide the Economic and Social Committee (CSE) in firms with 50 or more workers with a database including statistics on the ‘environmental consequences of the company’s activity’. The CSE can also appoint a chartered accountant who provides it with information on ‘all the economic, financial, social or environmental elements’ needed to understand the firm’s strategic orientation.

occupational health and safety to tackle the environmental externalities of production. They could conduct employee surveys to identify companies' environmental footprints. In many countries, they could mobilise mandatory information tools or request external audits on employment prospects, major organisational changes and so on, systematically demanding an environmental component. If relevant, such information could be shared with local communities or associations. This step also includes the mobilisation of trade unions against discrimination or sanctions against whistleblowers warning of the environmental damage caused by their companies.

A **second** step would be to organise discussions on environmental issues at workplace level involving not only trade union members but all workers, who are both citizens of the polity and 'citizens in the firm'. In large organisations, discussions could be limited to a random assembly of workers. We can expect that such a process would yield shared transformative ideas. Well-informed citizens' assemblies on climate change – admittedly in another framework – have proved able to reach a consensus based on breakthrough measures.¹⁴ And fundamentally, as we illustrated in Section 2, collectives of workers can develop or encourage the development of comprehensive proposals to overcome the job/rent-seeking/nature Gordian Knot. Workers' knowledge of production processes is essential to understanding not only the negative externalities of activities, but also their environmental potential. As we have seen, in the cultural realm and the case of live performances, the cohesion of work collectives makes it possible to capitalise on the advantages of extending the runs of particular shows for the benefit of both the workers involved and the population. In the case of the Rouen paper mill, paper recycling is crucial within the framework of environmental mitigation.

Such an approach would not necessarily be limited to employees, but may also satisfy the longer-term interests of companies or industries planning beyond the immediate satisfaction of shareholders.¹⁵ Consensus remains exceptional in the context of global financialisation, however, in which climate change is difficult to address even in the most polluting industries.

Therefore, in a **third** step, trade unions as representative bodies have to present workers' ideas to the employer. This can be handled by union representatives trained in or dedicated to environmental issues. In the United Kingdom, the Trades Union Congress and its affiliates have already appointed such 'green reps' in many workplaces. British trade unions are campaigning for better rights for these reps to help them influence the environmental agenda at work, emulating the rights of health and safety representatives. Institutions already in place can be used. For example, in France, the social and economic committee expresses 'the collective voice of workers

14. See for the Irish Citizens' Assembly, Devaney et al. (2020), and for the French Citizens' Climate Convention, Giraudet et al. (2022). Proposals of the Citizens' Climate Convention (PT 4.2 and PT 6.1) were transcribed into the 2021 French law to open up new rights for works councils (see note 13).

15. For example, in contrast with the Taranto case (see note 12), the Steel Action Concept in Germany is supported by both the German Steel Federation and IG Metall. This 'concept' drawn up under the leadership of the Federal Ministry for the Economy, designates an industrial policy involving the social partners in the implementation of public subsidies to transform the steel industry into a low-carbon industry and to preserve German jobs and competitiveness. Nevertheless, even with this plan the German steel sector would exceed its sectoral CO₂ budget for the 1.5 °C climate goal (Harpprecht et al. 2022).

so that their interests can be taken into account on an ongoing basis in decisions relating to the management and economic and financial development of the company, the organisation of work, vocational training and production techniques, particularly with regard to the environmental consequences of these decisions'. In addition, every three years, firms with at least 300 employees have to bargain with union delegates on the firm's strategy for jobs and career paths, in particular taking into consideration the 'challenges of the ecological transition'. Trade unions can thus embed environmental issues concerning production processes in these mandatory negotiations. In the German codetermination framework, workers on the executive board can directly promote the proposals developed in step 2.¹⁶

As we have seen with the case of La Chapelle-Darblay, trade unions should not neglect the support of other stakeholders: local populations, local authorities and NGOs. In the face of financialised capitalism, achieving ecological embeddedness can even involve the threat of nationalisation or other forms of public control.

Such a trade union approach can help to cement democracy. Indeed, in terms of Dewey's conception of democracy (Festenstein 2019), 'informed' citizens – here workers and their representatives – are able to take part in deliberations aimed at designing the future of activities and jobs. This deliberative process could thus deliver substantive democracy (Cohen 1996).

4. Policy perspectives for Europe

The pandemic crisis has proved the crucial role of workers' initiatives at workplace level in fostering the resilience of social and economic activities, especially in so-called essential sectors. At present, European policy on tackling the climate crisis still focuses on pushing agents to decarbonise their activities using a variety of technocratic tools: carbon pricing (at domestic level and across borders), reducing fossil fuel subsidies, regulations and subsidies or direct investment for decarbonisation, including innovative technology. In this framework, a just transition aims primarily to ensure the social acceptability of this strategy rather than a 'great transformation' in Polanyi's sense (2001 [1944]).¹⁷

In addition, this strategy does little to bring citizens on board. The carbon market will remain a speculative and opaque market despite recent reforms. Furthermore, regulations and taxes fuel the 'punitive ecology' argument, in the words of French far-right leader Marine le Pen, namely that environmental measures tend to be implemented at the expense of citizens, workers and local areas. The political risk, then, is that a conservative-nationalist majority in Europe would derail any ambitious climate policy.

16. See also on the role of codetermination in Germany, Zimmer's chapter in this volume.

17. According to Polanyi, the 'great transformation' resulted from the contradictions of a market-based society. It encompassed major institutional bifurcations during the 1930s, oscillating between the totalitarian revolution of Nazism in Germany and the democratic revival of the New Deal in the USA.

Our analysis suggests that another, more ‘democracy-friendly’ strategy should be deployed to overcome this social and political deadlock: promoting initiatives involving workers and union representatives to embed ecology in the production process at the workplace level, where an absolute decoupling between production and emissions has to be achieved. We also show how local anchoring is crucial when tackling an industry’s climate impact. This local anchoring appears to be the right level for raising awareness among workers and communities. In this process, as Pochet (2022) concludes, the ‘model of exchange [based on] providing the consumer with ever cheaper products from ever further away ... has become outdated’. A circular-economy approach paves the way for revamping the European Single Market towards the reshoring of local industrial activities in order to address socio-environmental dumping and to secure supply chains following lessons from the current ‘polycrisis’.

We have proposed various measures that unions might take up in response to the polycrisis, but how can the European Union also help to encourage transformative ideas from citizens and workers? First, the European social *acquis* should be expanded. The directive of 2002 on workers’ information and consultation (in firms of more than 50 employees and establishments of more than 20 employees) can be updated to include environmental issues. But we also advocate the introduction of new European instruments in the area of collective bargaining in order to provide European unions with tools to participate in decision-making on the future of firms and the world of work. In particular, public subsidies to companies could be made conditional on workers’ involvement in the organisation of decarbonised production, in contrast to the current Just Transition Fund, within the framework of which this is merely voluntary. This involvement could be institutionalised on the basis of a socio-ecological dialogue at workplace, local or industry levels.

References

- Askenazy P. (2022) Faire culture, in *Économistes Atterrés, De quoi avons-nous (vraiment) besoin?*, Les Liens qui Libèrent, 123-150.
- Barth T. and Littig B. (2021) Labour and societal relationships with nature: Conceptual implications for trade unions, in Rätzhel N., Stevis D. and Uzzell D. (eds.) *Palgrave handbook of environmental labour studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 769–792.
- Cohen J. (1996) Procedure and substance in deliberative democracy, in Benhabib S. (ed.) *Democracy and difference: Contesting the boundaries of the political*, Princeton University Press, 95–119.
- Devaney L., Torney D., Brereton P. and Coleman M. (2020) Ireland’s citizens’ assembly on climate change: Lessons for deliberative public engagement and communication, *Environmental Communication*, 14 (2), 141–146.
- Doorey J. (2017) Just Transitions law: putting labour law to work on climate change, *Journal of Environment Law and Practice*, 30 (2), 201–239.
- ETUC (2019) Position: Key demands to build a Just Transition and boost climate action after the EU elections, 25.04.2019. <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-position-key-demands-build-just-transition-and-boost-climate-action-after-eu>

- ETUC (2022) Resolution on Ukraine, 17.03.2022. <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/etuc-resolution-ukraine#:~:text=ETUC%20denounces%20and%20condemns%20the,repercussions%20of%20the%20sanctions%20or>
- Festenstein M. (2019) Dewey's political philosophy, in Zalta E.N. (ed.) Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey-political/>
- Giraudet L.-G. et al. (2022) 'Co-construction' in deliberative democracy: lessons from the French Citizens' Convention for Climate, Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 9, 207.
- Greco L. (2023) A just transition: Insights from the labour unions of a steel locality (Taranto, Italy), Economic and Industrial Democracy [Forthcoming]. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X221111417>
- Harpprecht C., Naegler T., Steubing B., Tukker A. and Simon S. (2022) Decarbonization scenarios for the iron and steel industry in context of a sectoral carbon budget: Germany as a case study, Journal of Cleaner Production, 380 (2), 134846.
- ILO (2020) The role of the ILO in addressing climate change and a just transition for all. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_736774.pdf
- IndustryALL (2022) Just Transition and oil and gas – what it means for workers, 05.09.2022. <https://www.industriall-union.org/just-transition-and-oil-and-gas-what-it-means-for-workers>
- Kraemer B. (2018) Germany: Trade unions' approach to climate change policies, 30.01.2018. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2018/germany-trade-unions-approach-to-climate-change-policies>
- Kreinin H. (2020) Typologies of 'just transitions': Towards social-ecological transformation, Ecological Economic Papers No. 35, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business.
- Lyon-Caen A. and Perulli A. (2022) Vers un droit du travail écologique, Revue de Droit du Travail, 7/8, 429-433.
- Normann H.E. and Tellmann S.M. (2021) Trade unions' interpretation of a just transition in a fossil fuel economy, Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions, 40, 421-434.
- North D.C. (1977) Markets and other allocation systems in history: The challenge of Karl Polanyi, Journal of European Economic History, 6 (3), 703-716.
- Paranthoën J. (2020) From opposition to the GATT to the creation of AMAPs: the birth of a movement that has become representative of the SSE, RECMA, 356 (2), 50-67.
- Pichler M. et al. (2021) Beyond the jobs-versus-environment dilemma? Contested social-ecological transformations in the automotive industry, Energy Research & Social Science, 79, 102180.
- Pochet P. (2022) A single market for the future, Social Europe, 19.04.2022. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/a-single-market-for-the-future>
- Pochet P. and Galgóczi B. (2012) How trade unions cope with the challenge of the green transformation in Europe?, in De Munck J., Didry C., Ferreras I. and Jobert A. (eds.) Renewing democratic participation in Europe. The challenge of social and civil dialogue, Peter Lang, 235-252.
- Polanyi K. (2001 [1944]) The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time, Beacon Press.
- Pucker K.P. (2022) The myth of sustainable fashion, Harvard Business Review, 13.01.2022.
- Räthzel N., Stevis D. and Uzzell D. (eds.) (2021) The Palgrave handbook of environmental labour studies, Palgrave Macmillan.

- Ringqvist J. (2022) Union membership and the willingness to prioritize environmental protection above growth and jobs: a multi-level analysis covering 22 European countries, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 60 (3), 662-682.
- Rosemberg A. (2010) Building a just transition: The linkages between climate change and employment, *International Journal of Labour*, 2(2), 125-161.
- von Busch O. (2022) 'What is to be sustained?': perpetuating systemic injustices through sustainable fashion, *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 18 (1), 400-409.

All links were checked on 07.02.2023.

List of contributors

Rania Antonopoulos is Senior Scholar and Director of the ‘Gender Equality and the Economy’ program of the Levy Economics Institute in New York, USA. Previously she served as Professor of Economics at New York University; Macroeconomic Advisor of UN-WOMEN; Visiting Scholar and Guest Lecturer at the Shanghai Academy of Social Science; Visiting Professor at Barnard College of Columbia University. Her political appointments include Member of Parliament, Ambassador of Greece at the OECD, as well as Alternate Minister of Labour of Greece during which a Job Guarantee program that reached 200,000 unemployed was implemented.

Kalina Arabadjieva is Researcher in the Economic, Employment and Social Policies Unit of the European Trade Union Institute, with a PhD in labour law and collective labour rights. She works on gender equality in the workplace, including relevant EU legal frameworks on equal pay and work-life balance, as well as on EU just transition policies and the relationship between labour law and environmental law.

Philippe Askenazy is Senior Researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre Maurice Halbwachs), associate professor of economics at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Paris), researcher at the Paris 1 School of Economics and research fellow at the Institut zur Zukunft der Arbeit (Bonn). His research focuses on the sources and consequences of the mutations of work. His last book is ‘Share the Wealth’ (Verso, 2021).

Nicola Countouris is Director of Research at the European Trade Union Institute and Professor of Labour Law and European Law at the Faculty of Laws of University College London. His research focuses mainly on labour law at national, comparative and European/international levels.

Olivier De Schutter is Professor of International Human Rights Law, European Union Law and Legal Theory at UC Louvain, as well as at Sciences Po in Paris. Former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food and member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, since 2020 he is the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

Valerio De Stefano is the Canada Research Chair in Innovation, Law and Society at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto. Before joining Osgoode in 2022, he had been Professor of Labour Law at the Faculty of Law of KU Leuven since 2017 while, between 2014 and 2017, he was an officer of the International Labour Office. He holds a PhD in law from Bocconi University, Milan (2011).

Claude Didry is a sociologist (labour, law and industrial relations), and Director of Research at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre Maurice Halbwachs). His research articulates investigations on legal and institutional frameworks in labour and industrial relations, and social practices such as labour coordinations, workforce participation in representative bodies and collective bargaining. His last publication is (with D. Giordano) *‘Extension du domaine de la négociation d’entreprise. La négociation d’entreprise sous l’emprise du groupe ?’*

Danny Dorling is Halford Mackinder Professor of Human Geography at Oxford University. He is the author of ‘All That Is Solid’, ‘Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists’ and ‘A Better Politics’. His most recent book, written jointly with Annika Koljonen is titled ‘Finntopia: what we can learn from the world’s happiest country’. He is currently working on a book titled ‘Shattered Nation: Inequality, and the geography of a failing state’ to be published in September 2023.

Hamid R. Ekbia is University Professor and Director of Autonomous Systems Policy Institute at Syracuse University, where he is affiliated with the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and the School of Information Studies.

Keith D. Ewing has been Professor of Public Law at King’s College, London since 1989. He worked previously at the Universities of Edinburgh and Cambridge and has held multiple academic appointments in Australia and Canada. He is President of the Institute of Employment Rights, and President of the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom. He is also Legal Editor of *International Union Rights* and works closely with trade unions in the UK and elsewhere.

Bianca Luna Fabris is Researcher in the Economic, Employment and Social Policies Unit of the European Trade Union Institute, and a PhD candidate in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh. She works on social protection, politics of labour market policies and trade union renewal.

Béla Galgóczi has been Senior Researcher in the Economic, Employment and Social Policies Unit of the European Trade Union Institute since 2003, working on capital and labour mobility in the EU. His current research focus is the just transition towards a carbon neutral economy, in particular the issue of fair labour market transitions in carbon intensive sectors and regions.

Colm O’Cinneide is Professor of Human Rights Law, Faculty of Laws, University College London (UCL). Formerly he acted as Vice-President of the European Committee on Social Rights (2010-4) and expert legal advisor to the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the UK Parliament (2008-2010).

Kate Pickett is Professor of Epidemiology and Associate Director of the Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity at the University of York (UK). Kate is also Director of Health Equity North. She is co-founder and Patron of The Equality Trust.

Guy Standing is Professorial Research Associate at SOAS University of London, and a founder and co-President of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), an NGO promoting basic income as a right. He has held chairs at the Universities of Bath and Monash (Australia) and was previously Director of the Socio-Economic Security Programme of the International Labour Organization.

Richard Wilkinson is Professor Emeritus of Social Epidemiology at the University of Nottingham, Honorary Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London, and Visiting Honorary Professor at the University of York. Richard has played a formative role in drawing attention to social class differences in health, and the health and social effects of income inequality. He was one of the founders, and is now a Patron of The Equality Trust.

Reingard Zimmer is Professor of German, European and International Labour law at the Berlin School of Economics and Law. Previously, she was a visiting professor at the University of Hamburg and led the research office of labour and social law at the WSI at the Hans-Böckler Foundation. Her research focuses mainly on (collective) labour law at national, European and international level, as well as on gender equality (gender pay gap).

Wouter Zwysen is Senior Researcher in the Economic, Employment and Social Policies Unit of the European Trade Union Institute, working on labour market trends and inequalities, the future of work, and migration and mobility. He obtained his PhD in 2016 in applied social and economic research at the University of Essex and is affiliated with the Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA) of KU Leuven and the sociology department of the University of Essex.

Transformative ideas – ensuring a just share of progress for all

Edited by Kalina Arabadjieva, Nicola Countouris, Bianca Luna Fabris and Wouter Zwysen

This edited volume explores the need for a transformative approach to envisioning a just social and economic model. A cross-disciplinary team of academic experts was formed to develop this approach, with the aim of proposing concrete policy ideas that are both transformative and original. While these ideas should not be contingent on a revolutionary reconfiguration of the current relationship between capital and labour, they may lead to a radical rebalancing of power structures within societies.

Crises are becoming an almost permanent feature of our societies, occurring ever more closely together and increasing uncertainty. The recent crises had and are having profound effects on key institutional arrangements underpinning our societies, such as labour markets and welfare states. This has forced societies to reassess the role of the state in regulating markets, as well as the level of control to which private individuals can be subjected, either by the state or by corporate actors. The post-pandemic period offers a unique opportunity to transform the global economic system, making it more resilient to future shocks, while ensuring environmental sustainability, intergenerational fairness and a dignified existence. It is a time to cast a new social-ecological contract for the future, ensuring a just share of progress for all.

D/2023/10.574/16
ISBN: 978-2-87452-673-2



9 782874 526732