



Towards a Just Transition

From Extraction to Equilibrium - Transforming Law and Governance

Briefing note 3

What kind of Transition is envisioned?

How do we assess the kind of transition that a proposed governance response might aim for, or lead to? Here, we think two trajectories are relevant. The first is the **degree of change** implied by the governance initiative. Does it aim at continuing with or building on the status quo, reforming it in some way, or indeed transforming the system more deeply? We use the question ‘**How Extensive is the Change Proposed in this governance initiative?**’ to help capture this dimension.

One helpful analytical framework to tease this out further is that proposed by the Just Transition Research Collaborative.¹ They map a continuum of responses reflecting the following -

- **A Status Quo** approach that aims at ‘greening capitalism’ through mainly voluntary, bottom-up, corporate-centred and market-driven changes. Here, states or governments are expected to provide “an enabling environment” for action via incentives to businesses and consumers, motivated by aspirational objectives such as the 1.5°C temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.
- **A Managerial Reform** approach that focuses on achieving greater equity and justice, but within the existing economic system and without challenging existing hegemonies. Certain rules and standards are modified, and new ones can be created (for example improvements on access to employment, occupational safety and health) but the economic model and balance of power do not change.
- **A Structural Reform** approach that aims at institutional change that will deliver greater procedural (e.g., governance processes are more inclusive and transparent) and distributive justice (the benefits and risks of change are fairly distributed). New modes of economic production (e.g., co-operatives, communing, shared use) and of governance are introduced (e.g. participatory budgeting), and not just as one-off experiments or pilot initiatives.

¹ Just Transition Research Collaborative, *Mapping Just Transition(s) to a Low-Carbon World*, (UNRISD, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung & ULIP, 2018). Available [here](#). The description here is adapted from *ibid* 12-15. Note that another, somewhat similar approach is described in Just Transition Initiative, *A Framework for Just Transitions*, (CSIS & SIF, 2021).

- **A Transformative** approach that focuses on deeper and lasting systems changes that reduces and eventually eliminates the causes of both environmental problems and social injustices. This approach usually involves a more systematic analysis of the causes, effects and links between climate change and other kinds of injustices. Common agendas in a Transformative approach include a focus on transforming political governance (more responsive and participative decision-making); economic relations (less commodified, extractive methods of production; more localised ownership); social relations (eliminating racism, sexism, classism, ablism, while fostering relations of solidarity), and relations with our natural world.

A second concern is **the urgency** of the changes needed. Here the question might be **‘What is the likely Pace of Change anticipated by this governance initiative?’** Here, temporal questions are more to the fore including, how long will the changes planned take to prepare, implement and see results? How quickly will their positive effects be felt by those most in need? How responsive will the new initiatives be to any unintended negative effects? How will these governance changes affect other systems of governance?

Excerpt from Siobhán Airey, Yağız Eren Abanus, Hüseyin Eryılmaz & Daniela García-Caro Briceno, *Towards a Just Transition - Walking practices & Legal possibilities* (ESL-CSJ: 2025), 29. Report available [here](#).

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