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A Just Transition



A Just Transition

Edited by
Susanne Rogers
John McGeady

A horizontal row of dark grey silhouettes of people of various ages and ethnicities, standing together. The silhouettes are of different heights and shapes, representing a diverse group of individuals.

Social Justice Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

The fundamental principle of a Just Transition is to leave no people, communities, economic sectors or regions behind as we transition to a low carbon future. Such a transition means changing how we travel, communicate, work, what we eat, wear and even the entertainment we consume. A Just Transition requires that we fairly share both the benefits and challenges of our new way of living. In order to transform how our society and economy operate, we must invest in effective and integrated social protection systems, education, training and lifelong learning, childcare, out of school care, health care, long term care and other quality services. Social investment must be a top priority if those people, communities, economic sectors and regions who are most affected are to be supported as we make the difficult transition to a carbon neutral economy.

Ireland and the wider world are moving steadily towards the 2030 deadline for the delivery of the Climate Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals. While seven years remain before reaching that deadline, there seems little awareness among many, including some policy-makers, that substantial changes will have to be made at every level – individual, local, national and global – if the agreed targets are to be met. Even where this necessary awareness is apparent, there is no evidence that sufficient measures are being put in place to meet these goals. Ensuring that these changes are made, and that the impact of change is shared fairly by all, will require huge adjustments in all our lives. It is essential that a just transition process is put in place to enable people to reach this new way of living.

A transformation of how we live is coming one way or the other; climate change is already taking its toll on both our natural environment and human society. The question will be whether public policy is used to shape that future in a way that is humane, ecologically sound and just. We must generate momentum to accelerate a just transition towards a low-carbon economy, especially for rural communities. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomed the commitment to a Just Transition in the Programme for Government and the Climate Action Plan and we welcome the recent establishment of the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund. A successful move to a sustainable future for all requires a process that involves all stakeholders. Social dialogue is an effective mechanism for fostering trust and adopting a problem-solving approach to transition.

Transition is about harnessing the benefits to transform both our society and our economy. A Just Transition requires a social protection system – along with appropriate services and infrastructure – that prevents poverty and social exclusion for those who lose employment or income due to the effects or mitigation of climate change, or who face additional cost-of-living pressures such as soaring energy prices. Addressing such pressures and taking steps to eliminate poverty should be a key pillar of any Just Transition platform. In particular, Rural areas are among those that will be most impacted by the transition to a carbon-neutral society. They will also be impacted by the potential changes of technology and automation on employment and the future of work. An ongoing dialogue on how to support transition and adaptation and a place-based approach is essential to ensure that vulnerable rural communities are protected, supported to meet future challenges, and not disproportionately impacted. A sustainable society requires balanced regional and rural development.

The papers gathered here reflect on transitions to new ways of working, wearing, moving, living and being and make suggestions for new initiatives. Ultimately, a Just Transition means that we make the necessary change, while ensuring that we can all be well, safe and fulfilled, and furthermore that this also be the case for the generations to come.

These papers were originally presented at a conference organised by *Social Justice Ireland* on the theme: A Just Transition.

Social Justice Ireland expresses its deep gratitude to the authors of the following chapters who made this publication possible. They brought a great deal of experience, research, knowledge and wisdom to their task and contributed their time and obvious talent to preparing these chapters.

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Social Justice Ireland advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and evidence-based policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for society as a whole. We work to build a just society through developing and delivering credible analysis and policy to improve society and the lives of people. We identify sustainable options for the future and outline viable pathways forward. In all of this, we focus on human rights and the common good. This publication is a contribution to this process.

In presenting these chapters *we* do not attempt to cover all question that arise around this topic. This volume is offered as a contribution to the ongoing public debate around these and related issues. We trust that those engaged in shaping Ireland's future for the coming decades will find it of value.

Susanne Rogers
John McGeady

A Just Transition

A row of dark grey silhouettes of people of various ages and ethnicities, standing together. The text 'Social Justice Ireland' is centered over the lower part of these silhouettes.

Social Justice Ireland

1. The Costs, Benefits and Stakeholder Analysis of an Irish Social Housing Deep Energy Retrofit Case Study

Shane Colclough*

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview & Objectives

The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) requires that a clear vision for a decarbonised building stock by 2050 be set out in national roadmaps across the EU for renovation with concrete milestones and measures.¹ In June 2019 the Irish government committed to retrofitting 500,000 homes to higher energy efficiency standards by 2030², a significant target given that currently 23,000 units per annum (pa) are upgraded, mainly to shallow retrofit standard, rather than the required Building Energy Rating (BER)³ of B2 (or higher). In 2017, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) launched the Deep Energy Retrofit (DER) Pilot Programme⁴ to inform the approach towards a large scale deep retrofit of the housing stock, and by the end of 2019, 325 homes were upgraded, 12 of which have undergone a Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) and are considered here. The case study follows a typical ‘fabric first’ approach of reducing heating energy consumption via upgrades to insulation and airtightness etc., with the residual heating demand being met with a Heat Pump (HP).

¹ Directive (EU) 2018/844 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 2010/31/EU on the energy performance of buildings and Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency (Text with EEA relevance). vol. OJ L. 2018.

² Climate Action Plan n.d. <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action/publications/Pages/Climate-Action-Plan.aspx> (accessed January 9, 2020).

³ Building Energy Rating BER. Sustain Energy Auth Irel SEAI n.d. <https://www.seai.ie/home-energy/building-energy-rating-ber/> (accessed February 16, 2021).

⁴ Deep Retrofit Grant. Sustain Energy Auth Irel n.d. <https://www.seai.ie/grants/home-energy-grants/deep-retrofit-grant/index.xml> (accessed January 9, 2020)

* This paper was previously published in the Journal of Physics: Conference Series: 02/12/2021

The POE has detailed significant reductions in energy consumption from the worst Building Energy Rating (BER) of (F&G) to the best (A) along with high internal temperatures and high occupant satisfaction rates.

This analysis quantifies costs and estimates the multiple financial benefits (both direct and indirect) for the tenant, landlord and government in order to determine the financial attractiveness of the approach. Through the case study, it is hoped to gain insights into stakeholder motivations and make a contribution to understanding how best to progress the ambitious Irish Government's home retrofit objectives.

1.2 Description of Deep Energy Retrofit Project and Costs

The scheme of 12 x 1 bed 30.77 m² social house dwellings (Fig 1.1), located in the south-east of Ireland underwent a DER in 2018, which resulted in an average BER of A2, similar to that typically achieved by a new nZEB building. The dwellings provide housing for Wexford County Council (WCC) Local Authority (LA) tenants, typically pensioners.

Figure 1.1: College View, Wexford town, County Wexford, Ireland



Table 1.1 gives an overview of the energy parameters for the dwellings both before and after the energy upgrade, along with the associated upgrade costs - €300,000 ex VAT, or €339,000 incl VAT. €146,000 was paid by WCC with the remainder paid by the SEAI DER Pilot Project. Each of the direct and indirect benefits are quantified below for the scheme of 12 dwellings over 15 years. The benefits are assigned to the beneficiaries of tenant, Central Exchequer or Housing Association/Local Authority (HA/LA). In this specific case study, WCC are responsible for providing the social housing, but HAs also provide social housing, and play the same stakeholder role.

Table 1.1: Energy Efficiency Upgrade Measures

Measure	Before	After	Cost {€ '000}
External insulation	1.8 W/m ² K	0.2 W/m ² K	60
Attic Insulation	0.16 W/m ² K	0.12 W/m ² K	10
Windows and Doors	2.8-3.1 W/m ² K	0.8 W/m ² K	60
Heating	OFCH / BB	4 kW HP	84
Renewable energy	None	6 x 285W PV	60
Ventilation	Natural	Demand Controlled	24
BER / Overall	4 x "F", 8 x "G"	1 x A1, 10 x A2, 1 x A3	298 + VAT Total €339

2. Quantification and assignment of Direct Benefits

2.1 Overview

The DER direct financial benefits were quantified by using the before and after BER calculations. This gives the regulated load energy consumption⁵, and provides an estimate for the energy savings and the associated financial benefits of the reduced expenditure on energy and lower carbon taxes based on the financial parameters in Table 2.1. Other direct benefits such as reduced property maintenance costs and cost reductions due to avoidance of chimney fires were also calculated based on WCC expenditure records. It is noted that the time value of money was not incorporated given prevailing marginal inflation and low interest rates.

⁵ Building Regulations n.d. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d2af-building-regulations/> (accessed February 16, 2021).

Table 2.1: Key Financial parameters used in Multi Beneficiary Analysis of Irish 1 Bed Dwelling

NZEB Multiple Benefits – 1 Bed Retrofit Dwelling Ireland	
Timeframe Analysed {years}	15
House size {m ² }	30.77
Value of Mid Terraced House {Euro}	110,000
Value of End of Terrace House {Euro}	120,000
Cost per kWh (Electricity) {Euro}	0.1617
Cost per kWh (bag of std coal) {Euro}	0.0591
Cost per kWh (Oil) {Euro}	0.0807
HP Efficiency - COP	2.5
Oil Boiler Efficiency	0.90
Primary energy conversion factor for Electricity	2.6
Primary energy conversion factor for Oil	1.1
Primary energy conversion factor for coal	1.1
Carbon emissions for 1000 kWh (oil) {Tons}	0.32
Carbon emissions for 1000 kWh (electricity) {Tons}	0.498
Cost of Carbon Emissions {Euro/ Ton}	70
Euro - US Dollar conversion rate (25 June 2019)	0.875
GDP per household (Euro)	147,292

Quantified values are given for each of the four direct benefits identified (fig 2.1);

- energy consumption reduction,
- reduction in GHG emissions (carbon tax),
- reduced public expenditure on maintenance costs
- reduced public expenditure due to the elimination of chimney fire costs.

The direct costs and benefits accrued over the 15 year period amount to €320k while total costs amount to €339k (fig 2.1). The details for the direct benefits are given below. The analysis is carried out at the level of the scheme of 12 dwellings,

as this most closely matches the perspective of the (landlord) decision-maker i.e. the HA/LA.

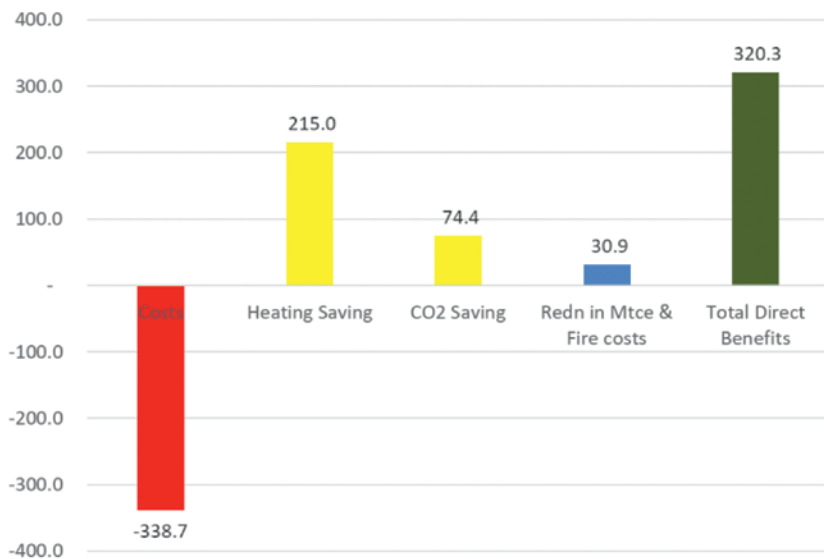
2.2 Energy consumption reduction – Tenant benefit

Based on the BER data, the saving per dwelling ranged from €0.4k per annum to €2.0k pa with savings predominantly related to heating bills. It is noted that the saving of €2.0k pa, based on the BER calculations is unlikely to be achieved in practice, as the more likely scenario is that the tenant would not have heated the building to the BER - expected 21°C in the living room and 18°C elsewhere for the daily eight-hour periods assumed by the software. The more likely scenario is that the tenant would have suffered from temperatures in the dwelling being below those required for healthy living. The total energy-related cost reduction in the regulated load amounts to €214.9k for the 12 dwellings over the 15 year period.

2.3 CO2 savings – Tenant benefit

The carbon tax savings amount to €74.4k for the 12 dwellings over the 15 year period.

Figure 2.1: Costs and 15-year Direct benefits for scheme of 12 dwellings



2.4 Reduction in Maintenance and fire Costs – LA/HA Benefit

All the dwellings had problems with damp and poor thermal bridge performance before the upgrade. Due to the “fabric first” approach of upgrading the building fabric and eliminating thermal bridges, direct savings in maintenance in addition to energy consumption will continue to accrue.

The annual OFCH maintenance cost amounts to €250 per dwelling for the 7 dwellings with OFCH and €40 for the six dwellings with back boilers. The annual cost for carbon monoxide sensors (€11) is avoided given HPs were installed, as the annual mould remediation cost of €17.22.

Post retrofit, costs of €65pa are incurred in the maintenance of the HP’s. Taking the above costs into account, the annual saving per dwelling amounts to €213 for houses with OFCH, €3 for houses with back boilers, and €253 for houses with dual central heating with a total maintenance cost reduction across the 12 properties for the 15 year period amounting to €23.2k. As a direct result of the removal of chimneys, the costs associated with chimney fires can be eliminated amounting to a saving of €7.7k.

3. Quantification and Assignment of Indirect Benefits

3.1 Overview

The Multiple Benefits (MB) of Energy Efficiency (EE) have been reported on by a number of organisations including the International Energy Agency⁶ and (various) academic publications.^{7,8,9&10} The significant and far reaching Multiple

⁶ IEA. Capturing the Multiple Benefits of Energy Efficiency: A Guide to Quantifying the Value Added. Paris: 2014.

⁷ Lazar J, Colburn K. Recognizing the Full Value of Energy Efficiency (What’s Under the Feel-Good Frosting of the World’s Most Valuable Layer Cake of Benefits) Regulatory Assistance Project. Available from www.raponline.org. September; 2013

⁸ Kerr N, Gouldson A, Barrett J. The rationale for energy efficiency policy: Assessing the recognition of the multiple benefits of energy efficiency retrofit policy. *Energy Policy* 2017;106:212–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2017.03.053>.

⁹ Bleyl JW, Bareit M, Casas MA, Chatterjee S, Coolen J, Hulshoff A, et al. Office building deep energy retrofit: life cycle cost benefit analyses using cash flow analysis and multiple benefits on project level. *Energy Effic* 2019;12:261–79. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12053-018-9707-8>.

¹⁰ Úrge-Vorsatz D, Kelemen A, Tirado-Herrero S, Thomas S, Thema J, Mzavanadze N, et al. Measuring multiple impacts of low-carbon energy options in a green economy context. *Appl Energy* 2016;179:1409–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2016.07.027>.

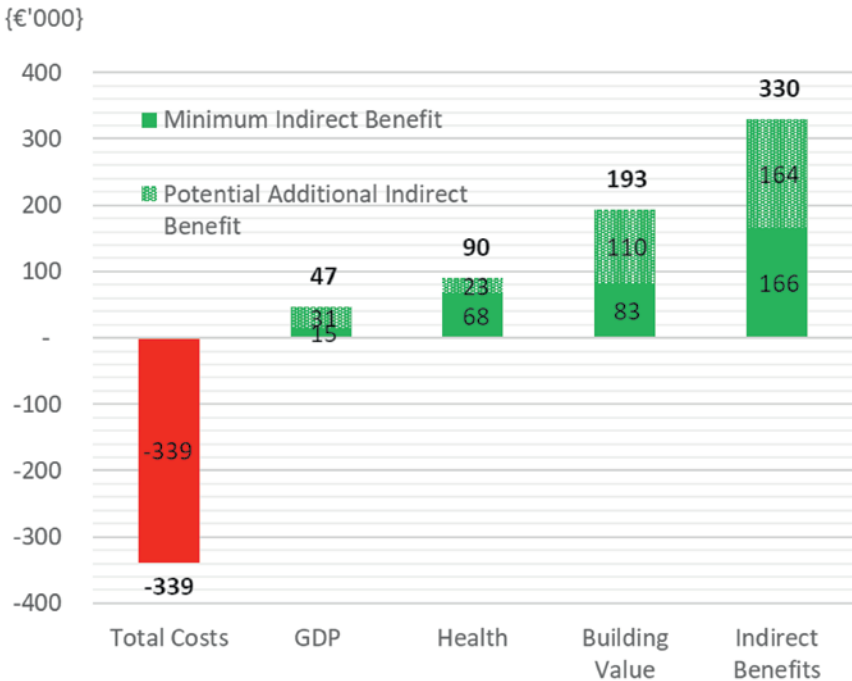
Benefits¹¹ of EE range from the elimination of fuel poverty, improved comfort and better health outcomes, to knock-on benefits to the local economy etc.. The following indirect co-benefits have been quantified for the DER scheme:

- improvements in the economy
- improved health outcomes
- increase in the value of the property.

Given the imprecise nature of quantifying the indirect / co-benefits, in this analysis, they are given an estimated range of values, quantifying both a lower bound and upper bound (based on varying methods identified through a literature review. Figure 3.1 gives the lower and upper estimates for each of the indirect benefits for the energy upgrade project. The calculations method is given below.

¹¹ Christine Liddell, Susan Lagdon, Chris Morris,. KIRKLEES_PROJECT_and_COST_BENEFIT_REPORT.pdf. Jordanstown: Ulster University; 2011.

Fig 3.1: Upper and Lower estimated 15-year Indirect benefits for scheme of 12 dwellings



3.2 Economic benefits - Central Exchequer Benefit

Based on Turner et al¹², a 5% decrease in energy consumption could lead to a 0.1% improvement in GDP. The GDP of Ireland¹³ is reported by the IMF to be \$331.6 (€295bn), equating to £147,292 per household per annum, (based on 2.003m households¹⁴). Therefore the project could lead to a contribution to the economy of €15.4k over the 15 year period analysed. Based on the Cambridge

¹² Turner K, Riddoch F, Figus G. How improving household efficiency could boost the Scottish economy. <https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/id/eprint/57955>. 2016.

¹³ IMF. Report for Selected Countries and Subjects 2019. https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/01/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=33&pr.y=16&sy=2016&ey=2020&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=178&s=NGDP_RPCH%2CN

¹⁴ Housing Stock - CSO - Central Statistics Office n.d. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp1hii/cp1hii/hs/> (accessed August 6, 2019).

Econometrics report, the contribution to the local economy would be €46.8k¹⁵ (scaling over the 15 years required).

3.3 Health benefits - Central Exchequer Benefits financially

Based on the Kirklee 0.2:1 cost benefit ratio¹⁶ and the total DER project cost of €339k, the lower estimate for the health benefit is €67.7k. Based on the UK CMO calculation method¹⁷, the total benefit for the Collegetree project amounts to €90.3k. These financial benefits accrue to the Central Exchequer given that the tenants qualify for medical cards.

3.4 Energy Efficiency-based Increase in Value of Property – LA/HA Benefit

Fuerst¹⁸ noted that A rated dwellings sold at a premium of 5% compared to D rated dwellings, and F rated dwellings sold for 1% less than D rated dwellings. The price premium between F and A dwellings is assumed to be 6%. Based on the value of each Collegetree property, this equates to an increase of €83k for the 12 properties. The EE improvements equate to an increase of 13 BER points (13%) for some dwellings and 14 BER points (14%) for others. These percentages improvements indicate an increase in the property values of €193k based on the Lyons study.¹⁹

4. Summary and Analysis – Systemic/Societal Level

Figure 4.1 gives the overall costs (€339k) and the direct (€320k) and indirect benefits (€166k to €330k) over the 15 year period analysed. Considering only direct benefits, 94% of the investment is recouped over 15 years. Considering also indirect benefit, the benefits range between 143% and 192% of the €339k

¹⁵ IEA. Capturing the Multiple Benefits of Energy Efficiency: A Guide to Quantifying the Value Added. Paris: 2014.

¹⁶ Christine Liddell, Susan Lagdon, Chris Morris,. KIRKLEES_PROJECT_and_COST_BENEFIT_REPORT.pdf. Jordanstown: Ulster University; 2011.

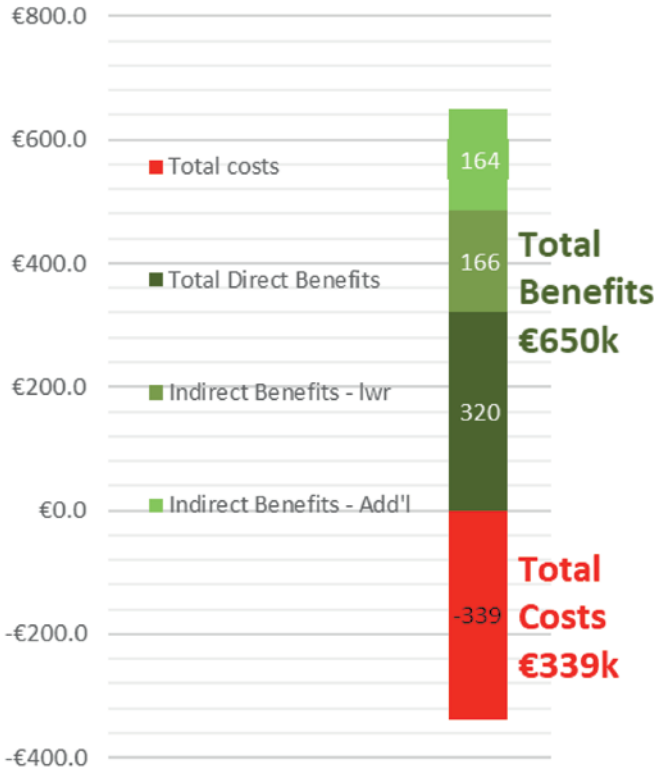
¹⁷ [ARCHIVED CONTENT] On the state of public health: Annual report of the Chief Medical Officer 2009 : Department of Health - Publications n.d. https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130105021742/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/AnnualReports/DH_113912 (accessed March 10, 2021).

¹⁸ Fuerst F, McAllister P, Nanda A, Wyatt P. Does energy efficiency matter to home-buyers? An investigation of EPC ratings and transaction prices in England. Energy Econ 2015;48:145–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2014.12.012>.

¹⁹ Stanley S, Lyons RC, Lyons S. The price effect of building energy ratings in the Dublin residential market. Energy Effic 2016;9:875–85. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12053-015-9396-5>.

invested. These (undiscounted) figures reveal that the project is viable and the direct benefits almost ensure full payback within the 15 years, and overall (direct and indirect) benefits provide a payback of almost twice the invested amount. However a stakeholder analysis is pertinent.

Figure 4.1 Costs and Benefits (15-year) for Case Study Scheme



5. Stakeholder perspectives

Figure 5.1 gives an overview of the costs and the direct and indirect benefits per stakeholder or beneficiary. The LA/HA invests €146k, with the remaining €193k being met by central government. Direct benefits are realised by the tenant (€289k), the LA/HA (€31k), and the Central Exchequer (€74k). Indirect benefits

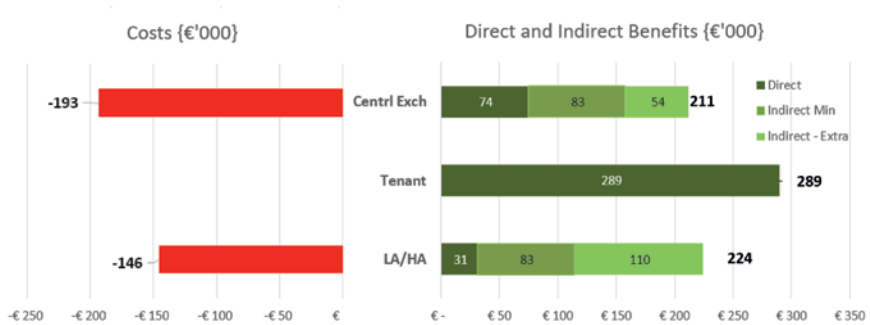
of €83k to €137k are enjoyed by the Central Exchequer, and the HA/LA also accrue indirect benefits of between €83k and €193k due to the increase in the property value.

The financial perspective of the LA/HA: Direct benefits (reduced maintenance costs and reduced costs associated with chimney fires) total €30.9k. If this is the only benefit considered, the 15 year return is 21% based on the investment made by the LA/HA. When the additional indirect benefit of increased capital values of the property is also considered, it is seen that the total potential return could amount to between €113k (60%) to €224.1k (116%), indicating that the LA/HA have a potentially financially attractive project over the 15 year period. While the increased capital value is considered primarily a “book value”, (as the properties will typically not be sold), the additional value could assist a HA in raising funding for other projects as its overall market capitalisation will be increased, reducing loan to value ratios for the lender.

The financial perspective of central government: for a total cost of €193k, the indirect benefits include lower healthcare costs and increased economic activity and total between €83k and €137k. There are direct benefits of €74k in carbon taxes collected from the tenant (on the basis that the polluter pays). The Central Exchequer will bear the cost of international carbon emissions penalties. However, carbon taxes are not currently ring fenced by the central exchequer for payment of the international fines. If these €74k benefits are considered as general income, the Central Exchequer could benefit by in excess of €200k, indicating that returns will exceed investment over the 15 year period. If the €74k carbon tax is assumed to be paid directly in International fines, the net central exchequer 15 year benefit will be 71% of the investment (via the benefits of decreased health costs and increase in GDP).

The financial perspective of the tenant: He/She has no role to play in the decision-making process, makes no investment and yet will accrue direct benefits in excess of €289k due to reduced energy and carbon tax costs. The DER project is very attractive to the tenant given the increased comfort, reduced running costs and improved health outcomes associated with the project.

5.1 Costs, and Direct and Indirect Benefits per Stakeholder/Beneficiary



6. Discussion & Conclusion

An evaluation tool has been developed to understand stakeholder motivations for upgrades to much needed Energy Efficient (EE) standards which can be applied across jurisdictions and scenarios. The “Multi-Beneficiary Analysis” is used here to quantify direct and indirect EE financial benefits for an Irish DER project and assign them to the beneficiaries. It is shown that at a societal level the direct financial benefits cover the investment, and when indirect benefits are included, the 15 year return can accrue to almost twice the investment. For the individual stakeholders, the investment and return vary significantly. While tenants enjoy significant financial benefits and the Central Exchequer benefits financially, the key decision-maker (Local Authority or Housing Association) incurs significant financial risks/losses. The provider of Social Housing (e.g. HA or LA) is seen to bear significant increased capital costs whilst only benefiting directly in reduced maintenance costs, and indirectly through increased capital values of the asset, (a performance metric on which they are not assessed).

A clear picture is emerging of the need for the Central Exchequer to support providers of Social Housing in delivering low-energy dwellings, not only for the benefit to the local economy and the avoidance of excessive future upgrade costs, but also for the immediate benefit of the tenants including the associated health and comfort benefits and the elimination of fuel poverty.

This may be through an augmentation of schemes such as the DER grants or through the provision of appropriate sources of finance and funding or through other incentives.

In addition, the analysis suggests that it would be beneficial for all stakeholders if a mechanism could be constructed whereby the tenant would have the ability/empowerment to initiate/drive the upgrade project thereby avoiding the potential current stalemate where the HA does not have the means to do DER at scale, yet the tenant would benefit physically and financially and yet does not have an ability to influence the upgrade decision. Consideration could perhaps be given to investigating mechanisms whereby the HA could finance their portion of the investment if the tenant agreed to contribute a fraction of the savings enabled by the ongoing reduced energy bill. Looking at the specific case study, heating costs have been reduced by an average of €1,189 pa. If qualifying tenants were to forgo their fuel allowance, a contribution of €840 pa could be used to assist the HA finance the DER. This could be sufficient to enable the HA (for example) to make a business case and raise the required capital, thereby unlocking the multiple benefits of the DER, whilst also giving the tenant a financial surplus. The POE analysis indicates that the DER resulted in very high occupant satisfaction, excellent indoor environmental quality (IEQ) and very low cost of heating. Furthermore an holistic financial analysis demonstrates that the DER is self financing, even without considering the considerable indirect financial benefits. However, the stakeholder analysis demonstrates that the government's DER targets are unlikely to be achieved in the social housing arena without enabling mechanisms such as the heating allowance reallocation suggested. In this case study, the simple act of allocating the tenants fuel allowance to the housing association could save the tenant money and simultaneously enable all the multiple benefits of DER to be achieved by all stakeholders.

2. Using the SDGs to solve the just transition Rubik's Cube

Meaghan Carmody

Introduction

Imagine a Rubik's Cube. All of its colours are messy and muddled. You play around with it and manage to make one of the 6 sides yellow, but the rest remains shuffled. Have you solved the Rubik's Cube?

The answer of course is no. In order to solve a Rubik's Cube you must solve all sides simultaneously. This is what makes the challenge so difficult.

It is the same with sustainable development.¹ Efforts to decarbonise (i.e. reduce carbon emissions) without paying due regard to societal and ecological impacts presents an unequal, 'unsolved' approach to development, resulting in an unjust transition to a greener economy.

An 'urgency dilemma'

Ireland, like most countries, finds itself in an 'urgency dilemma'. Average temperatures have increased by approximately 1.1°C since before the Industrial Revolution, while the overarching goals of the legally binding Paris Agreement stipulate that the global community should hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels." Meeting this ambition is looking increasingly unlikely with every broken temperature record.²

Ireland boasts the unsavoury accolade of having the second highest greenhouse gas emissions per person in the EU (EPA, 2023). Nevertheless, the internationally ground breaking climate law - the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 - legally compels the Irish government to reduce

¹ This analogy is borrowed from Timothée Parrique (2023).

² See 'July 2023 sees multiple global temperature records broken (2023)' from the Copernicus Institute. Available at: <https://climate.copernicus.eu/july-2023-sees-multiple-global-temperature-records-broken#:~:text=The%20month%20started%20with%20the,hottest%2029%20days%20on%20record.>

Ireland's 2018 baseline of greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030, and to reach net zero emissions by 2050. This herculean task is underpinned by three carbon budgets that have been set for 2021-2025, 2026-2030 and 2031-2035, each of which contain sectoral emissions ceilings (SECs) for various parts of the economy and aim to set Ireland on a pathway to climate neutrality by 2050. In its Annual Review 2023, the Climate Change Advisory Council says that, "at the current rate of policy implementation", Ireland will miss its targets for both the 2021-2025 and 2026-2030 carbon budget periods "unless urgent action is taken immediately and emissions begin to fall much more rapidly". We have already eaten the lion's share of the 2021-2025 budget and any extra emissions for this period will be carried over to the next budget, making the emissions reduction for that period even more challenging.

It is evident that drastic changes must be made, but significant effort will be required to ensure that the political decisions to drive the climate transition account for the particular challenges some sections of society, such as those with disabilities, will face as part of this inevitable process.

The urgency of the situation is clear, but the dilemma is this: how to square the circle of reducing greenhouse gas emissions at an unprecedented scale and speed, while also ensuring that the distributional effects of this transition don't cause harm to those least able to bear it? This is the overarching challenge of our time and one which, if we don't get right, will have enormous and far-reaching consequences.

This paper explores the political economy of the just transition in Ireland and offers the Sustainable Development Goals as a useful framework for ensuring that nobody is left behind as we make the transition to a greener economy.

Sustainable development and just transition: Two branches of the same root

Just Transition

A transition has been defined as a "radical shift in the provision of services such as energy, transport, food or sanitation" (Newell and Simms, 2020, p. 2). This is supported by the IPCC (2018, p. 42),

"While transitions are underway in various countries, limiting warming to 1.5°C will require a greater scale and pace of change to transform energy, land, urban and industrial systems globally...There is an urgent need for deeper and more rapid transitions to limit warming to 1.5°C. Such transitions have been observed

in the past within specific sectors and technologies. But the geographical and economic scales at which the required rates of change in the energy, land, urban, infrastructure and industrial systems would now need to take place, are larger and have no documented historic precedent.”

Geels (2005) notes how the term ‘socio-technical transition’ refers to deep structural changes in systems involving long-term and complex reconfigurations of policy and infrastructure landscapes. Some academics say that the term transition does not adequately capture the scale of what is required. Leach et al. (2020) claim that what is needed is in fact a *transformation* rather than a transition, as a fundamental, structural, systemic change is needed rather than simply a linear change from one state to another.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, a ‘just’ transition is an integrated approach to sustainable development which brings together social progress, environmental protection and economic success into a framework of democratic governance (UNECE, 2023). One of the earliest formulations of the concept was developed in the 1980s by the US trade union movement in response to regulations to prevent air and water pollution which resulted in the closure of offending industries (Newell and Mulvaney, 2018). The International Trade Union Confederation’s (ITUC) 2017 definition includes protecting jobs in vulnerable industries in cases where those jobs would be offshored in a process of globalisation, or in situations where the organisation in question has not adequately prepared for the transition to a greener economy resulting in job losses that otherwise would not have been required.

The offending industries above, which in their closure resulted in the loss of numerous jobs, were also the industries that spurred a global examination of how to reconcile the tension between economic growth and environmental degradation. In other words, how to continue to develop for the long-term without incurring environmental harm that would hinder human and economic progress.

Sustainable Development

The term ‘sustainable development’ was first defined in the seminal ‘Our Common Future’ Report of 1987 as:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987).

More commonly known as the Brundtland Report³, it was the outcome document from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) which had been established in 1983 and tasked with developing an approach to development that could reconcile global development with a reduction in environmental harm. Three contextual situations led to the establishment of the WCED: severe environmental disasters in the 1970s and 1980s; the acceleration of an increasing liberal⁴ approach to the economy which prioritised deregulation and the exploitation of natural resources for the purposes of economic growth; and stark levels of poverty around the world, in particular in the Global South. Today, over 35 years later, we are tasked with the same challenge. How do we meet the needs of all without transgressing the Earth's planetary boundaries?⁵

In 1992, five years after the Brundtland Report was published, the world saw the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or 'Earth Summit' take place in Rio de Janeiro. At this event the first ever agenda for Environment and Development, known as Agenda 21, was adopted which required countries to draw up a national strategy of sustainable development. The summit also led to the establishment of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

Ten years later, in 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg led to more governmental commitments and helped extend the concept's reach into the areas of business, local government and civil society.

Yet another ten years later, in 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as Rio+20) was held as a 20-year follow up to the 1992 Rio Summit. At the Rio+20 Conference, a resolution known as 'The Future We Want' was reached by member states. Among the key themes agreed on were poverty eradication, energy, water and sanitation, health, and

³ After its Chairperson, Gro Harlem Brundtland who would go on to become Prime Minister of Norway.

⁴ Neoliberalism: A political-economic approach or philosophy that prioritises free trade, deregulation of industry, free market competition, a state with a relatively smaller role in managing the economy and meeting public needs when compared to other political-economic approaches, and reduced welfare. See Neoliberalism exposed by Dr. Rory Hearne <https://www.tasc.ie/blog/2016/06/15/neoliberalism-exposed/>

⁵ The planetary boundaries concept presents a set of nine planetary boundaries within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come (Rockström et.al. 2009).

human settlement. It was at this Conference that the idea of a set of sustainable development goals that would apply to all countries was first raised.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2013, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals was established to identify specific global goals for the period 2015-2030, and in 2014 the President of the UN General Assembly, appointed Ireland's UN Ambassador in New York, David Donoghue, and his Kenyan counterpart, Machiara Kamau, to lead negotiations between world governments on this new set of goals. These goals were agreed in September 2015 and adopted by 193 UN member states.

A set of 17 interconnected 'global' goals, they seek to holistically address complex problems in a coherent manner via a process of 'Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development' (PCSD). The 17 SDGs and their underlying targets and indicators⁶ constitute the driving force behind Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the follow-on agreement post Agenda 21. Agenda 2030 is grounded in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and international human rights treaties, drawing particular attention to the importance of empowering women and vulnerable groups such as children, young people, persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

Leaving no one behind: The Political Economy of the Just Transition

The 'how' of transition matters greatly to whether it succeeds (Graeber, podcast, 8:21). Ignoring where the socio-economic burden of transition falls risks hindering the entire project of transition. Decarbonisation will only be truly sustainable in the long run if the socio-economic dimension is adequately appreciated, as actors who feel unfairly affected are likely to revolt if the burden of adjustment is perceived as unfair. There is no greater example of this than that of the 'Gilets Jaunes' in France, which powerfully demonstrated that climate policy should not be pursued by governments without consideration for the distributional impacts of these policies. A just transition influences public support for renewable energy projects and climate change policies and, if absent, tends to undermine trust in the relevant industries and government as a whole (Banerjee and Schuitema, 2022).

⁶ <https://sdg.humanrights.dk/en/goals-and-targets>

However, discussions around making a transition to sustainability can sometimes appear to be devoid of questions of social power and distribution (Newell et al., 2020), ignoring the aforementioned groups highlighted by the SDGs. The just transition will have to centrally address the key political economy questions of ‘who wins, who loses, how and why’ as they relate to the existing distribution of energy, who lives with the side effects of its sites of extraction, production and generation, and who will bear the social costs of decarbonising energy sources and economies (Newell et al., 2011).

This is bolstered by Dr. Mary Murphy who in her 2022 book, ‘Creating an Ecosocial Welfare Future’ claimed that “the wider social consequences of poverty and inequality are less considered in Ireland [in contrast to the concerns of the labour movement] particularly from a gendered and intersectional perspective or from the perspective of those most vulnerable and already left behind” and the National Economic and Social Council which describes transition as a process “aiming to leave nobody behind. Those most impacted, or most vulnerable, must be supported to embrace the transformation” (NESC, 2020, as cited in Murphy, 2022).

To leave no one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. LNOB not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, as well as addressing the root causes of inequality and injustice. The LNOB principle compels a focus on the impact of multiple and intersecting inequalities.⁷ It highlights that the barriers people face in accessing services, resources and equal opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability of resources, but rather are the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave particular groups of people further and further behind.

Procedural justice: ‘Nothing about us without us’

By neglecting to seek consensus on how a just transition can be achieved in practice, strong negative emotions and distrust among those who are affected are likely to emerge. In turn, this may result in a sub-optimal just transition process, which may stall or even reverse the energy transition locally and therefore globally.

⁷ Intersectionality: the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Oxford).

An approach to just transition informed by the SDGs could be described as an approach to reconciling development and environment that fully includes those at risk of being ‘left behind’, summed up in the phrase, ‘Nothing about us without us’. This slogan captures the idea that no policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy (Charlton, 1998), in other words, reflecting the concept of procedural justice. This approach states that in order for the ecological transition to be ‘just’, there must be a process for enabling vulnerable groups, workers and communities to formally participate in the decisions that affect them, all the while acknowledging that participation in such processes may often be new and challenging for them (Banerjee and Schuitema, 2022).

Public participation and deliberation around questions of energy governance has traditionally been very weak, and even when public participation is encouraged, it often serves more to legitimate preordained decisions than to involve stakeholders in shaping outcomes. For example, in many cases consultation input is sought on a limited range of policy choices which are based on models and forecasts, the assumptions of which are not open to scrutiny and the parameters of which are not open to change. Therefore procedural justice is critical to a just transition as decisions to allocate, use and consume energy in particular ways for particular purposes are mostly made out of the public eye (Newell and Mulvaney, 2018). The SDGs, with their focus on leaving no one behind, explicitly accounts for the importance of procedural justice.

Distributive justice: Who should bear the burden?

Transitions are just as much about the decline of incumbent industries as about the rise of new ones (Fouquet, 2016, p. 9) and so there is no doubt that the transition will result in inconvenience at the very least to some sectors and groups. According to Oisín Coghlan, Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth,

“Because of where we’re starting from [on climate action], there is no smooth path, and if we’re going to stop it [climate breakdown] from being destructive, it’s going to involve inconvenience” (2023).

The question then arises, who should bear the burden of inconvenience? This is a question of distributive justice, the perceived justice of the distribution of costs and benefits inherent in any transition (Banerjee and Schuitema, 2022). A just transition process based on distributive justice would aim to prevent an inequitable or unequal distribution of harms and benefits across groups in society (McCauley and Heffron, 2018).

In order to secure a truly just transition, policy measures must be based on the needs of those affected and vulnerable, not the lobbying power of vested interests. In practice however, decisions regarding who bears the burden of adjustment are intensely political. For example, Irish Travellers (an ethnic minority) experience significant levels of energy poverty, and are largely still dependent on the burning of fossil fuels. However, Traveller families in trailers are excluded from access to retrofitting grants, and current policies and structures make it difficult for Travellers and Roma to switch to using low-emission mobility.

Another group disproportionately affected by the existence of certain policies or lack thereof are older people. It is estimated that more than 300,000 poorly insulated homes (60% of all homes with Building Energy Rating (BER) of E, F or G) are occupied by older persons, making them especially at risk of fuel poverty, and more than half of an estimated 586,000 older person households have low home insulation (Age Action, 2022). Yet even these two groups - Travellers and older people - are clearly two of the most negatively impacted by a dependence on fossil fuels, the aviation industry continues to receive an excise exemption (government subsidy⁸) costing the state €273 million in 2021 (CSO, 2023).

A transition can only be just and fair if it can ensure social justice for the vulnerable groups in society (Heffron and McCauley, 2018). This is what the SDGs can offer given their focus on leaving no one behind.

Restorative justice

Bord na Móna, a Irish company established in the 1940s to industrially harvest peat, is required to exit its traditional peat-based businesses in the next 5-10 years, and they have already begun proceedings to transition. Affected workers, many of whom had worked their entire careers in the company, were ostensibly offered retraining in order to soften the blow of redundancy. However, despite the workers identifying various areas in which they lacked skills or needed support, these areas were not actually included in the training programmes eventually offered. This is an example of restorative injustice in practice.

Restorative justice implies rehabilitating those affected by an industry's end of operations. There will be situations in which job losses will simply be unavoidable, and in these cases adequate support for the affected people and sectors should be provided via compensation and retraining (ITUC, 2017).

⁸ A fossil fuel subsidy is any subsidy that directly incentivises or supports an increase in these activities.

However the new roles cannot just be any roles - they must constitute ‘decent’ work, conceptualised as paying a living wage, providing decent working conditions, being accessible to those with a range of skills and offering clear career progression opportunities (Bird and Lawton, 2009). It is crucial that the retraining opportunities are appropriate to the individuals, even if this is challenging to achieve in practice (Bannerjee and Schuitema, 2022).

Many workers whose jobs were lost in Bord na Móna perceived a lack of effort to integrate them into their communities after the job losses (ibid.). Simultaneously, many interviewees felt that, as they themselves were losing their jobs, energy produced from renewables was on the rise locally but created no space for them as the bulk of the jobs were created abroad. One interviewer even called this process “globalisation on a local scale” (ibid., p. 5), highlighting that there was a dearth of jobs in local wind farms since the bulk of manufacturing was taking place in Germany.

Offshoring injustice? Sustainable development, from local to global.

The SDGs are a set of *global* goals and the aim is that they are achieved everywhere. If Ireland manages to transition to a sustainable economy within its national border while leaving no person in Ireland behind, but does so at the expense of people and nature elsewhere, can this be called a just transition?

This question problematizes Ireland’s approach to development more broadly, as an attempt to achieve a just transition within Ireland via a strategy of growth of all industries, regardless of their impact on sustainable development more broadly, offshores an *unjust* transition and threatens the achievement SDGs in other countries which we depend on for resources.

Take for example the policy goal of achieving one million EVs (electric vehicles) on our roads by 2030. This may indeed (partly) address one element of sustainability - greenhouse gas emissions produced by burning fossil fuels - however when the true concept of sustainability is appreciated which takes into account the full ecological footprint of this policy goal (material consumption and production), then it’s clear that a goal to constantly grow the number of EVs will have profound ecological and societal impacts on the areas of the world where raw materials for EV batteries etc. are sourced. A recent study by New York University and the Geneva Center for Business and Human Rights finds that major auto, battery and electronics manufacturers are doing too little to ensure the cobalt they’re using doesn’t involve child labour at Congo’s numerous

unsafe “artisanal” mines (Baumann-Pauly, 2023). It’s clear that the effort to continue growing the number of eclectic vehicles on our roads without recourse to the impacts of this approach abroad could result in environmental justice infringements around the world.

Critical scholarship on the spatial fixes⁹ that are employed to avoid crises in the core of the global economy by sourcing solutions elsewhere or into the future (through carbon trading, biodiversity offsets, water grabs and the like) is helpful in understanding these dynamics (Harvey, 2003). An effort to transition via ‘spatial fixing’ abroad represents an effort by states to avoid domestic restructuring (Newell, 2020b). Transition *within* countries may be characterised by a pattern of exploitation and dispossession *in other countries* unless a commitment to a globally just transition is prioritised.

To remain in line with Agenda 2030 and the principles of sustainable development, developing a just transition should consider everyone within the entire supply chain, with a special focus on respecting human rights. An example of where this did not take place can be found in the manufacture of semiconductors needed for solar photovoltaic panels, which in the 1970s and 1980s produced vast amounts of toxic waste sites which disproportionately impacted immigrant women workers (Newell and Mulvaney, 2018). Without consideration for human rights and an appreciation of all elements of sustainable development, existing inequalities risk being exacerbated and already vulnerable groups risk being exploited even further.

Addressing the ‘economic roots’ of an unjust transition

In order for new sources to become dominant, the service it provides has to be cheaper than the incumbent energy source, as well as offer enhanced characteristics such as ease of use, exclusivity, cleanliness, status etc. (Fouquet, 2010). This presents a dilemma for transitioning within our dominant economic system which demands that non-State enterprises require a significant surplus value, i.e., profit, in order to remain viable.

Investing in new, less ecologically intensive and harmful pathways may be less profitable or convenient (at least in the short term) than the alternatives with which they are competing, making those endeavours potentially less appealing to investors. Indeed, according to McKinsey, between now and 2050, almost half

⁹ The “spatial fix” theory explains the process of geographical expansion and development as a solution to the crisis of capital over-accumulation (Harvey, 2003).

the investment necessary for decarbonisation will not meet standard investment criteria relating to security, rate of return etc. (2021). In the period to 2030, less than 40 per cent of renewable technologies will be justifiable on commercial grounds. In industry and buildings, two sectors where emissions are hard to abate, a tiny fraction of the necessary investment will generate an adequate profit (ibid., as cited in Tooze, 2021).

According to Leach, Newell and Scoones (2015), we “need to get to the economic roots” of the climate crisis in order to address it in a just way. This will require changing what are seen as legitimate pathways to making money, as we simply can no longer have an economy that rewards damaging the environment. The State must steer investments to maximise the impact on jobs, create quality jobs with access to social protection, manage risk and protect vulnerable populations to make the energy transition ‘just’ for all, both in Ireland and abroad. This will require significant state support and investment, as it is likely that the drive for profit will prevent private spending happening in the right areas to enable decarbonisation at the speed and scale required.

National integrity: Matching words to actions

Ireland continues to leave vast swathes of its population behind, let alone its impacts on those in other countries. Over a third of Irish households are threatened by energy poverty despite attempts from the government to tackle this through an Energy Poverty Action Plan. Initiatives to retrofit homes risk leaving some people further behind, as the upfront costs make it inaccessible to many. The free energy upgrade scheme designed to target households in energy poverty is not accessible to tenants in the private rental sector. As mentioned earlier, two of the most vulnerable groups in Irish society - Travellers and older people - are being left behind when it comes to retrofitting. There are many more people in Ireland being left behind and at risk of being left behind, for example persons with disabilities, people living in direct provision, those with long-term health issues, one-parent families, homeless people (especially children), those in poverty, refugees and asylum seekers. Reaching a 51% reduction of 2018 levels GHG emissions by 2030 will require serious change, and who bears the burden is ultimately a political question.

Ireland in September 2023 recommitted to the Sustainable Development Goals, with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar stating that he “commits to bold, accelerated, just and transformative actions...anchored in international solidarity and effective

cooperation, to create a sustainable future for all.”¹⁰ However, the declaration that a transition is ‘just’ is not tantamount to fact (Banerjee and Schuitema, 2022). The Just Transition Commission has been delayed until 2024, despite the most recent Climate Action Plan (2023) including a commitment to establish a commission with a target timeline of the middle of 2023. It is evident that a coherent approach to sustainable development remains lacking, and Ireland’s grand words are not yet matched by equally grand actions.

According to the head of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) in October 2023, “too much discussion around climate and biodiversity relies on slogans with not enough examination of what businesses actually need to do... just transition is another slogan. The hard yards are actually identifying what needs to be done.” The same criticism could be levelled at the Irish government who, as aforementioned, endeavoured to deliver a just transition for the Bord na Móna workers while ignoring the crucial tenets of procedural and restorative justice.

Conclusion

“Transition is inevitable; justice is not”

(Climate Justice Alliance, 2023).

Not all paths to a safer environment are just. It is possible to transition sufficiently fast but to do so in an unjust way (Scoones et al., 2015). The Irish government has a choice; rapid but socially regressive transition involving the reorganisation of the economy and social contracts, or rapid lock-in of climate breakdown along unsustainable lines (Newell and Simms, 2020). Concrete, sufficient, sustained action on the part of the State is required in order to ensure distributive, procedural and restorative justice in the face of intensifying climate breakdown.

The SDGs can be the tool by which we make the just transition politically viable; for ensuring climate action is just. It’s time for politicians to pick them up from the shelf, dust them off and finally put them to their intended use in Ireland, for local impact, and global, so that we can finally solve the Rubik’s Cube of sustainable development, and transition in a just way.

¹⁰ https://estatemements.unmeetings.org/estatemements/10.0010/20230918090000000/m2I3qkeWGcpM/Dr0poy2oUqoM_en.pdf

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3. Just transition: a conflict transformation approach

Damian McIlroy, Seán Brennan and John Barry*

Introduction

The planned retreat from a carbon-based economy is an essential component of addressing the root causes of climate breakdown. Nevertheless, how just, inclusive and equitable this transition might be is not guaranteed. With its origins in the trade union movement, the just transition stands as an energy transition pathway that can challenge head on dominant and comfortingly narratives on ‘win-win’ and ‘greening business as usual’. The reality is that moving to a low-carbon or post-carbon economy and society means the end of the fossil fuel energy system. This throws up a host of complex issues ranging from the role of the state (national and local) in managing or coordinating the transition, issues of democratic voice and procedure, reframing fossil fuels as ‘carbon resources’, to divestment and reinvestment energy strategies.

Central to all these, and under-acknowledged in the literature, is to recognise that conflict and conflict transformation will frame and characterise the low-carbon energy transition. Therefore, lessons arising from the application of conflict transformation within the Liberal Peace paradigm will have to be recognised and radically reimagined if an emancipatory just energy transition is to be realised. This paradigm, arising after the Cold War, promoted the concept that liberal states were peacefully inclined yet advanced a neoliberal marketisation methodology that sustained levels of structural violence to exacerbate conflict and maximise profitability (Newman et al. 2009, p.12). While the potential for a just transition can lead to a net benefit for society as a whole, any transition will inevitably produce winners and losers in the process. Hence, the shift from one energy system to another is not as simple as switching from one fuel or source to another. The losers, particularly affected workers and communities, will have to be accommodated if the transition is to be considered just.

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For example, the dominant carbon-based energy system must be considered as forming a deep-seated 'petroculture' (Wilson et al. 2017). Awareness of culture formation is to be cognisant that any energy-climate transition is a political and political economy transition, and that as well as producing winners and losers, given the fundamental importance of the energy system to any social order, there will always be a 'dirty politics' of any 'clean energy transition' (Healy and Barry 2017, p. 453). As understood here, a just transition is the transition to a low-carbon economy and society explicitly orientated to ensure sustainability and climate action goals as well as the achievement of public health, worthwhile work, social inclusion and poverty eradication objectives. The chapter begins by tracing the origins of the just transition concept within the trade union movement in the 1970s to the most recent international instantiation in the Silesia Declaration and the inclusion of just transition in the preamble of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement (UNFCCC 2015). In the following section, we continue this trade union (and broader labour movement) focus on policy implementation, the state and (constrained) trade union agency. The fourth section offers a constestatory account of the just transition which problematises the domesticating and consensus generating and compromising logic of social dialogue and the green growth frame which is at the heart of most official just transition strategies. Following this, we develop this constestatory analysis further by directly critiquing social dialogue within official (state, business and trade union) understandings of just transition and suggest that what is needed is a more agonistic conflict transformation framework. We seek to move just transition processes beyond the consociational model of elite, top-down decision-making and agreement, and suggest that conflict transformative perspectives require social mobilisations and contestation outside any formal and state-centred just transition process. The final section examines some strategies for these extra-official forms of agonistic and localised opposition ranging from protests to boycotts and tax/rate strikes.

The chapter suggests that the development of current structures to manage and implement a just energy transition are, while welcome, also woefully inadequate both to the planetary emergency we face and to the positive societal transformative opportunities presented by responding to that planetary crisis. What is urgently required is a far more confrontational narrative and the construction of self-emancipated spaces for dissent to challenge the uneven distribution of power within the negotiating arenas for just transition.

Origins and Genealogy of Just Transition: Towards the Silesia Declaration and beyond

The origins of just transition are in trade union campaigns to protect workers and communities during the environmental and social damage of the Industrial Revolution, securing health and safety at work, freedom from disease (such as miner's black lung) and better living and environmental conditions for workers and their families. The phrase 'just transition' itself was coined in the US trade union movement by Tony Mazzocchi, leader of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union (OCAW), who worked to bring trade unionists into the 'ban-the-bomb' peace movement, together with a campaign to protect atomic workers in the transition to nuclear disarmament (Roessler 2016, p. 6). Mazzocchi developed the idea to reconcile ecological and social concerns about jobs that were either unsafe or unsustainable and therefore needed to be retired or eliminated, but in a just and democratic manner (Stevis et al. 2020, p. 10). In the ensuing decades, the transformative possibilities of just transition were picked up and augmented by other unions, most notably the Spanish Comisiones Obreras that formed SustianLabour. During the course of SustianLabour's existence it 'played a critical role in the diffusion of labour environmentalism at the global level and around the world' (Stevis and Felli 2020, p. 2).

Nevertheless, it was the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 and the first Conference of the Parties (COP) in 1995 which created the institutional, policy and political space that facilitated the development of an international just transition policy. Having defined and developed the concept of just transition as a comprehensive opportunity to address interrelated social, economic and environmental issues (Galgóczy 2020), the international trade union movement set about strategically engaging with the 'social partners' in global business and through supranational government structures since the 1990s to establish a 'common narrative' (Rosemberg 2020, p. 36). From this, a set of principles that both governments and business would adhere to emerged, regarding industrial development and transition planning. Over the past decade the role of global unions and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) then sought to secure conditions for a transition that was fair to workers and sufficiently ambitious to realise the decent and well paid job creation potential of a low-carbon future (Sweeney and Treat 2018). This original intention was reflected by the ITUC at its second congress in 2010 in its resolution to combat climate change, which stated:

“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 needs are respected and gender equality achieved.” (ITUC 2010, p. 1)

The wider societal aspiration and ambition of this statement is evident, utilising a just transition as a catalyst to tackle other long-standing injustices within a framework of democratic control, beyond financialised neoliberal markets and top-down policy reforms. The trade unions’ journey with this just transition project is decades old: the slogan of ITUC ‘No Jobs on a Dead Planet’ has become synonymous with the global movement for climate justice, and underpins union’s attempts to reconcile the need to protect the interests of vulnerable workers, a stable climate and a habitable planet. Set against the backdrop of complex international negotiations, an ideological rapprochement between jobs and the environment was hard fought for by the ITUC. As regards the common acceptance of a just transition, Anabella Rosemberg, former Environment Policy Officer for the ITUC, rightfully questions ‘Would it have been possible to imagine such a trade union slogan, anchored on social justice, but also on environmental protection, only a few decades ago?’ (Rosemberg 2013, p. 19). Probably not, and despite its limitations at the negotiating table, without the efforts of the international trade union movement using the science, the notion of a globally recognised framework for a just energy transition might never have got started.

The inclusion of ‘just transition’ in the Paris Agreement, the International Labour Organization (ILO)’s adoption of a just transition agenda in 2013 and publication of its guidelines (ILO 2015) have all contributed to enshrining the concept in international and national policy domains. As the preamble of the Paris Climate Agreement states, the imperative is ‘of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities’ (UNFCCC 2015, p. 2). However, the most significant development to date in the Just Transition international policy is the ‘Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration’ (2018) agreed at COP24 in Katowice, Poland. This declaration adopted by 37 countries and the European Union (EU) builds upon the explicit acknowledgement of a just transition in the Paris Agreement. The Silesia Declaration not only outlined provisos to protect vulnerable workers but also announced:

“the intrinsic relationship that climate change actions, responses and impacts have with equitable access to sustainable development and eradication of poverty;

Recognizing [sic] the specific needs and special circumstances of developing countries, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change". (Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration, COP 24 2018, p. 1)

Here we see a clear diversification of the just transition concept and the influence of the ITUC in its efforts to remediate, ‘the ethical obscenity of the most vulnerable in world suffering most from actually existing unsustainability’ (Barry 2013, p. 228). This recognition of the interaction among climate change, inequity, poverty and the needs of developing countries outlined in the declaration is undeniably significant, and an unambiguous recognition that a just transition is not simply about climate or energy.

The Silesia Declaration also highlights the challenges faced by ‘sectors, cities and regions in transition’, emphasising the ‘importance of a participatory and representative process of social dialogue... when developing nationally determined contributions’ (Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration, COP 24 2018, p. 2). The inclusion of sectoral and place-based references and an implementation imperative premised upon participatory social dialogue speaks directly to the need for a different and more emancipatory type of industrial planning for just energy transitions.

Problem-Framing and key concepts: Policy implementation, the nation state and trade union agency

The potential of current just transition planning was unpacked further in a report entitled ‘Implementing just transition after COP 24’. The report outlined a ‘multi-scalar and multi-stakeholder’ approach that required ‘collaboration between the state, local communities and trade unions’ with the ‘centre of these discussions ... positioned at the national level’ (Jenkins 2019, p. 9). In addition, the international fora are designated as arenas for the ‘dissemination of information, exchange of experience, drawing of comparisons’ (Jenkins 2019, p. 9). This is an important distinction since it provides clarity on the types of information and initiative expected from each layer of social dialogue. Furthermore, in the report, we glimpse the intention of the international labour movement to create a supplementary conceptual space which also gently challenges the economic status quo and current modes of production, stating:

“Stakeholders should define the scope and nature of change during the process of coalition-building and policy design and pressingly, policy coordination and integration, considering whether it is transitional or transformative. Transitional

change continues with the current economic model, whereas transformative change is more radical, moving towards a broader conception of communities and more collaborative energy production and ownership.” (Jenkins 2019, p. 11)

While the report is meant as a vigilant policy briefing, immediately after the Silesia Declaration at COP24, it does highlight the evolving scope of ambition and the practical limitations of international trade union movement negotiating positions. There remains a ‘distinct gap between international decisions and domestic positions’ (ITUC 2017, p. 8). Individual nation states are not moving fast enough. In all of this it is important to note that the units for innovation and participation to promote a just transition are the signatory nation states. The recognition of this reality has critical implications for the types of social solidarity and coalition-building required to deliver sufficient levels of industrial planning, premised upon the understanding that the current and future trajectory of a just transition is nothing without the ‘emancipation of workers’ (Stevis et al. 2020, p. 21). Therefore, the emancipation of workers requires a deeper appreciation of the inequities of climate breakdown and how these are intertwined with pre-existing and long-standing economic, democratic, gender and class injustices within workplace relations (Shantz 2002). So, this conception of a just transition is resolutely not the decarbonisation of capitalism with trade union input. Instead, it is a much more politically radical and opposition strategy for a transformation beyond capitalism, based on the transition beyond carbon energy. Thus, the just transition debate potentially puts domestic corporate green capital on the spot, pinning the hypermobility of finance and forcing business to ‘clarify its story’ (Moussu 2020, p. 71).

In this regard, there is also no reason why national and regionally delineated trade-union led campaigns cannot become more challenging and ‘primarily concerned with tackling and reducing unsustainability, inequality and harm, full stop, rather than feeling forced (as much of the green movement has) to also develop a costed, evidence based, policy ready alternative sustainability model’ (Barry 2013, p. 229). This logic provides a self-determining prerogative for the trade union movement and allows it to consider radical proposals with depth and ambition regarding, ‘a fresh narrative, one that is deeply ecological and capable of connecting workers’ needs to a vision for a truly sustainable society’ (Sweeney 2012, p. 13). It also repositions the contribution of trade unions as part of a wider socio-political and ecological dialogue together with other groups and allies. The call for additional alliance-building between trade unionism and other progressive social movements as a prerequisite to create the necessary socio-economic conditions for a deeper just transition is a common theme among many scholars and activists of labour environmentalism and

left-green or eco-socialist political economy. This popular position also implies that it is not wise to assume that an ecologically sustainable world can simply be engineered through the normal policy reform process. Extra-parliamentary popular movements and mobilisations (such as Extinction Rebellion, general strikes and Youth Strike for Climate) will be needed beyond the confines of any formal social dialogue, adding deliberate conflict exacerbation as a necessary element of any conflict transformative energy and climate transition process.

Contentious issues and standpoints: Winners, losers and limits of social dialogue in the eco-modernist frame

A key feature that defines a genuine approach to a just transition is the honest recognition that responding to climate breakdown and creating a low-carbon green economy means there will be winners and losers. The ‘win-win’ logic dominant in mainstream discourses around energy and climate (especially within techno-optimist variants) appear neither valid nor honest. The shift from a carbon-based economy does mean that some industries, such as the fossil fuel sector, will lose out and will have to be retired, quickly. Hence, it is important to ensure, as far as possible, that no one is left behind in the energy transition or that the costs and burdens of the transition fall disproportionately on one section of the community or the economy (Barry 2019).

We can envisage the difficult, but we would suggest necessary, strategy of balancing the deliberate delegitimisation of fossil fuel extraction and use, while simultaneously valorising and not demonising fossil fuel workers and communities (Healy and Barry 2017); hating the sin but loving the sinner as it were. On the one hand, there is a need to undermine the social legitimacy (or social licence to operate) of the carbon energy system, including the economic and cultural practices and values associated with it. On the other, as part of the necessity for developing working-class environmental consciousness, the alienated fossil fuel workers and communities cannot be portrayed as climate criminals or positioned as disempowered recipients of exploitative green capitalist enterprise. The views of former Irish President and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson, are important (and eloquently align with a worker-focused view of the just transition) when she stresses that:

“as we make the transition to clean energy, we must remember the millions of fossil fuel workers around the world who spend their lives extracting the fuel that has fed our economies. They too are victims of climate change and deserve to be treated with dignity. Their story is part of the struggle to climate justice. Others working in energy intensive industries – steel, iron, aluminium, power

generation, and road transportation – will also be affected by carbon reduction and elimination”. (Robinson, M. 2018, pp. 113–14)

The most important conclusion the trade union movement can draw from the stark reality we face is this: the transition to a low-carbon, sustainable future cannot be left to the investor class, chief executive officers (CEOs) of multinational companies, or governments that refuse to break with the current capitalist, carbon and endless growth economic paradigm. Therefore, can social dialogue as a diplomatic mechanism really deliver or is something additional required to move the ground? The answer to this question depends upon your interpretation of the just transition. Hampton (2015) notes that there is plasticity in the concept of just transition that allows for a more radical interpretation. On this issue, ecosocialist/feminist Jacklyn Cock also outlines this alternative position which ‘views the climate crisis as a catalysing force for massive transformative change with totally different forms of producing and consuming, perhaps even moving towards socialism, but a new kind of socialism which is democratic, ethical and ecological’ (Cock 2018, p. 222).

In this regard, largely, the international trade union movement paradoxically embraces the discourse of eco-modernism and a green growth paradigm which continues to put economic activity on a collision course with planetary limits (Barry 2013; Cock 2018; Sweeney and Treat 2018). Critical voices, such as Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED), take issue with the ITUC and the ILO for not challenging the economic status quo more robustly. Sweeney and Treat of the TUED are unambiguous in their analysis:

“Those in charge of the transition to a resilient low-carbon future have failed. What we have witnessed is more than two decades of talk with nothing like the sort of action necessary to back it up. This is not a problem of ‘political will’; it is a problem of the capitalist political economy and the imperatives of perpetual expansion on which it is based”. (Sweeney and Treat 2018, p. 18, emphasis added)

It is perhaps unfair to dismiss the protracted and serious efforts of the ITUC as a failure but a just transition that genuinely protects workers, communities and the planet necessitates a deeper reflection on what needs to be done. Just transition policy-making at an international level has been fully appropriated by dominant discourses, eco-modernisation and neo-classical economics, as evidenced in the provisos of the Silesia Declaration which calls for a ‘paradigm shift’ in energy use and consumption but also, in the same sentence, seeks ‘high growth’ (Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration, COP 24 2018, p. 1).

At the heart of this green growth perspective lies a fundamental contradiction, first, if the accumulation imperative of capitalism is the root cause of climate breakdown, then it seems strange to rely on the capitalist mode of production for solutions and an illusionary response to the ecological crisis (Fremaux 2019, p. 168). Sweeney and Treat (2018) suggest that a just transition is not inevitable, indeed it is not even likely without a radical shift in policy, away from a green capitalist paradigm towards public and social ownership models with more democratic control of key economic sectors such as energy.

Therefore, the clamour to enforce one definition of a just transition over another could create a 'false binary decision, a distinction which fails to distinguish between the long-term and short-term interests of labour' (Cock 2018, p. 222). Therefore, perhaps, the long-term interests of labour can be met with a more radical approach that pursues a deep restructuring of the global economy but where the short-term needs of vulnerable workers in extractive industries can be addressed as a matter of urgency. However, the short-term and long-term interests of labour, society and nature will not be best expressed or even heard within a formal process of social dialogue which is underpinned and dominated by an economic paradigm that is also the root cause of climate breakdown (Sweeney and Treat 2018). While the mechanism of social dialogue is designated to sort out short-term and long-term issues for a just energy transformation, it is simply not equipped to do so because it 'rejects any serious challenge to current arrangements of power, ownership and profit, opting instead to draw comfort from an uncritical endorsement of "win-win" solutions and "green growth" for all' (Sweeney and Treat 2018, p. 3). Arguably then, the internationally agreed frameworks for a 'just transition' are nothing more than, 'spectacular reassurance strategies' (Gunderson 2020, p. 260) that are not designed to challenge the status quo; but tactical ploys that mitigate environmental concern with the public while simultaneously maintaining or accelerating the social-structural causes of environmental harm, weaponising financial capital with new green markets to exploit. Similarly, with a mixture of seriousness and humour Stevenson determines this type of illusionary discourse as, 'the concept of bullshit' which 'captures the mistruths and inconsistencies we observe in global climate governance' but also 'draws our attention to the insidious effects of deceit and helps us grasp the type of reform needed' (Stevenson 2021, p. 87). The problem with the carefully constructed spaces for social dialogue is the distribution of power and the premise of consensus among unequals (Ruser and Machin 2017). There are currently no official vents for dissent, conflict and confrontation to counter the 'bullshit' and we are running out of time.

Open questions and transformative potential: Beyond social dialogue towards an agonistic conflict transformation framework

A conflict transformation framework develops a ‘prescriptive direction’ to reorient people from destructive and unstable relationships towards cooperative ones. It does this by first analysing the ‘root causes’ of conflict then engaging ‘top leadership’, ‘middle-range leadership’ and ‘grassroots leadership’ to help them move collectively from ‘issues to systems’ through grassroots training, problem-solving workshops and high-level negotiations that produce sustainable solutions beneficial to all (Lederach 1998, p. 39).

The opportunity for social dialogue as expressed in an international just transition policy, such as the Silesia Declaration, upholds the fallacy of win-win-win (accumulative growth, workers’ rights and ecological sustainability). Just transition needs to be appropriated and reconfigured into an explicitly agonistic framework that allows conflict to be brought out into the open, debated, possibly democratically resolved, and provisional agreement and action created. It is a strong position among scholars and activists that a deeper just transition will only be possible if it is driven by a broad, democratic and progressive counter-movement outside official decision-making systems. This could create conditions on the ground for a more ambitious programme of radical reform that sits in opposition to the growth imperative of greening capitalist business-as-usual (Barry 2012b, 2013, 2019; Shantz 2002, 2012; Sweeney 2012; Cock and Lambert 2013; Felli 2014; Hampton 2015; Cock 2018; Stevis et al. 2018; Sweeney and Treat 2018; Barca 2019; Bell 2020; Goods 2020).

There are now several counter-theories that challenge the green growth imperative. The matter of conjoining steady state/degrowth/post-growth theories and just transition, in what-ever configuration, is complicated by the current position of institutional trade unionism that is tied to a growth paradigm within the eco-modernist turn. In this regard, Barca (2019) outlines an inescapable truth that just transition will lead to massive layoffs of workers within the extractive fossil economy and industrial agriculture, therefore any ecologically sustainable transition policy must include concrete recommendations for socially and economically sustaining livelihoods and communities in the transition process. Furthermore, sustainability transition politics, such as degrowth, ‘will remain politically weak unless it manages to enter into dialogue with a broadly defined global working class – including both wage labour and the myriad forms of work that support it – and its organizations’ (Barca 2019, p. 214). Both degrowth and just transition must be seen as converging aspects of the same struggle.

Barry (2012b, p. 141) concludes that ‘post-growth critique must necessarily lead to a post-capitalist alternative and related political and ideological struggle’. Thus, the critical intersection of just transition and degrowth/post-growth economic planning directs us towards a deepening culture of decommodification, work not growth and the development of functional abundance within planetary limits. In this manner, a radical just transition cast within a degrowth/post-growth model is explicitly oppositional to neoliberal, financialised capitalism, exacerbates tension and initiates conflict, even as it is also concerned with democratically resolving those conflicts.

This provocative, agential opposition of an unjust transition links to what Martínez-Alier (2002) terms the ‘environmentalism of the poor’; those movements, mostly in the Global South, that resist extractivist, exploitative fossil capitalism. In so doing, this opposition, whether against extractivism or corporate or state ‘unjust transitions’, can contribute to a larger political purpose. This explicit opposition and the deliberate creation of political and ideological tensions, can open up the space for debate on how communities and societies can develop coping mechanisms, if not solutions, to localised instances of ‘actually existing unsustainability’ (Barry 2012a). Part of this oppositional agonistic politics of a just transition (which will, and should, involve non-violent direct action, in our view) is about the inclusion of non-energy and non-sustainability issues and problems, such as poverty reduction, tackling socio-economic inequality and wealth disparities, as suggested above.

As a veteran of the Northern Ireland peace process, former First Minister Peter Robinson has noted of his experience of peace negotiations, ‘when a problem cannot be solved, it needs to be enlarged. [We] need to broaden the agenda and open up more scope for trade-offs and hopefully the inclusion of other issues upon which common ground might be found’ (Robinson, P. 2018). Therefore, to expand the common ground for the common good necessitates the inclusion of social and environmental inequalities, constituted by the relations of domination and exploitation that maintain capitalism. Theoretically, the conflation of social and environmental inequities to the debate for a just energy transition can be viewed as green republican approaches, in which contestation is seen as important (if not more important) as consensus (Barry 2019; Barry and Ellis 2010), based on an account of democracy as non-violent disagreement (Barry and Keller 2014). As well as foregrounding the common good, a green republican perspective on the just transition would highlight the importance of contestation over consensus for example, thus disrupting the compromise for consensus logic of social dialogue in orthodox and official processes of just transition. Also, in valuing active citizenship (both instrumentally and

intrinsically), a green republican approach to just transition necessarily requires a focus on grassroots mobilisation. This is in opposition (or an agonistic complement) to the elite, technocratic, top-down and often consociational model observed in consensus-based and state-centric just transition strategies. Sociologically and strategically, this could manifest itself as a coalition of social movement mobilisations outside any formal just transition mechanism.

Social movements of this scale and range would also imply significant contestation with the eco-modernist turn, challenging the existing arrangements of ownership and power within just transition policy and planning spaces, regionally, nationally and internationally. The climate/conflict narrative for just transition, in respect of problem and solution, is informed by an understanding that the exploitation of workers' relations and nature are inextricably linked to the capitalist mode of production. As Silverman (2004, p. 133) explains, 'exploitation is the unifying term, which makes the common enemy common; both kinds of exploitation result from one process. ... This interconnection allows a unified approach to workers' problems and the environment's needs. It encourages a common solution and offers a profound basis for alliance with environmentalists around the world'.

Untangling the influence of capitalism as the dominant economic means of production in the push for a just transition will probably be a very complex, protracted and conflict-generating process. A meaningful just transition will require more than social dialogue, with a deep conflict transformation process that could create sustainable structural and cultural changes, allowing new institutions and practices to emerge that address the outstanding issues of moving from a carbon to post carbon society.

However, this will inevitably create tension, disagreement, suspicion and resistance, especially from those who will be, or see themselves, as losers from this energy transition. Therefore, the dynamism of a radical conflict transformation process, sustainability itself, can become more about developing political coping mechanisms that enable demonstrable change to emerge that is beneficial to affected workers and communities. This stands in stark contrast to the unrealistic and utopian technological 'solutions' currently based on 'managing the planet', which can be observed in proposals for 'earth systems management', such as geoengineering and large-scale carbon capture and sequestration (Fremaux 2019, p. 70).

Conflict, creativity and democratised and localised agonistic contestation and co-creation

A challenge in transforming conflict within any just transition is how, inter alia, activists, business, environmentalists and policy-makers can be moved from a rigid rationalist approach towards a more 'combined linear and process-driven' methodology that addresses unforeseen changes or conflicts as the transition evolves that is truly democratic, emancipatory and open to amendment rather than ignored. This would mean that it can be modified as the process develops insights on how to sustain both attitudinal and structural transformations (Rupesinghe 1995, p. 76). This processual approach suggests that for a just transition conflict transformation process to succeed, it needs to move beyond macro state or corporate needs, to find mutually compatible goals at the local level, particularly where local actors can have a voice in the design and management of multi-scalar and multi-stakeholder collaborations. Hence, the centrality of localised, bespoke, inclusive, participatory and institutionalised practices aimed at radical and transformative just transition processes. In addition, at the same time there need to be agonistic, oppositional and contestatory social mobilisation processes outside those institutionalised democratised dialogue and decision-making processes.

Lessons from liberal approaches to peace-making demonstrate that for conflict transformation to be successful all participants need to have the 'moral imagination' to 'sustain the change processes engendered by an accord' (Lederach 1998, p. 47). This is why, ideally, a shared and agreed transition vision is important in energy and climate politics. A shared vision can only emerge from open dialogue, contestation and deliberation, not technocratically from the top-down or from the centre of political power to the conflicted periphery. The latter, especially in relation to fossil fuel extraction (notably coal, oil and fracked gas) is often ecologically and public health-wise deemed a 'sacrifice zone', even as it is also a place of jobs and orthodox, unevenly distributed, economic development (Scott and Smith 2017). Therefore, any just transition needs to be agonistically transformed with the active participation of those deemed losers from the transition away from fossil fuel extraction. This is so, not least, to enable affected communities to be both compensated and their creative energies enabled to co-create sustainable, workable and localised solutions within participatory processes, that go well beyond elite level social dialogue, as applies to official just transition positions.

What transformative just transition processes require are 'post-liberal' green political approaches that move beyond the capitalist, growth-oriented 'neoliberal

development model' (Richmond 2011, p. 35), which is ecologically and socially unsustainable, that is, ecocidal and unjust. These radical, post-liberal approaches 'confront direct, structural, or governmental power at the international and state levels or local elite power' (Richmond 2016, p. 33) and create opportunities for new employment opportunities for those deemed collateral damage in a sacrifice zone. Therefore, if a radical, eco-socialist political economy is to advance a just transition worthy of the name, it needs to learn lessons from neoliberal attempts to promote conflict transformation as a technology to transition polities from war to a structurally violent peace. Moreover, just as non- or extra-democratic technological-technocratic approaches to 'solving' the planetary crisis are deeply flawed (Barry 2012a), so are neoliberal technologies of conflict transformation (Brennan 2017).

Within this context, while the theoretical framework for conflict transformation is valid, any future transitional activities, and policies arising, within a green political economy need to shift the language away from condoning the neoliberalism and structural violence of sacrifice zones towards an emancipatory low-carbon cooperative future which is rooted in the communities it seeks to transform. These actions need to transform individuals and social systems so they can develop strategies and practices that transition polities beyond carbon, and beyond capitalism. In following established conflict transformation theory, this will require a vision, with short- and long-term objectives that are based on achieving basic human needs and rights, and ensuring human well-being for all, for ever (Gough 2017).

These objectives will require a new green economy, including a new conceptualisation of 'economics' (Barry 2012a, 2012b) that tackles the root causes of our growing planetary emergency through an integrated framework, inclusive of connected and networked local, national and international actors and actions to tackle the root causes of climate violence. One that is co-produced by engaged grassroots leaderships in processing and progressing just transitions at the local level. These transformative processes need to address both the relational dimensions and structural dimensions to help envision and identify those leaders skilled and knowledgeable in transitioning people, place and planet into a low-carbon economy. They also need to build the capacity, and develop the potential, of grassroots leaders to design and advocate for an emancipatory just transition within the administrative and governmental processes that manage polities at the everyday level. Being rooted in the grassroots of an emancipatory green political economy, these localised transitions may then produce the sustainable transformation required to address both the episode and epicentre of the planetary crisis. This may be realised by radically reforming

the personal, relational, structural and cultural norms that inform and shape the governance of a polity and its political economy, especially its energy system. This inclusive, participatory decision-making is required to produce and enact the imagination and local creativity required to move populations through a just transition towards the construction of relations that prevent a relapse into climate extinction.

These transformative objectives will require, as indicated previously, large-scale social mobilisations by different groups ranging from students, environmentalists, trade unions, workers and faith communities. To realise these outcomes, grassroots leaders and environmental activists need to utilise and promote a form of *Métis*, forms of practical cunning and strategy, tactics and ways of operating that can enable grassroots communities to produce ‘victories of the “weak” over the “strong”’ (de Certeau 1988, p. xix). It can also include acknowledge that sometimes ‘you have to pick a fight to win it’ as Martínez-Alier (2002) suggests in his analysis of the ‘environmentalism of the poor’). For de Certeau,

“Métis is a type of intelligence and thought... It implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years. It is applied to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous, situations which do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation, or rigorous logic”.
(de Certeau, 1988, p. 3)

In many respects, *Métis* could be viewed as ‘virtues’ of social mobilisation and agonistic contestation. That is, dispositions, character traits and learned and inherited and invented strategies of grassroots opposition, rooted in place and time as opposed to some grand or universal theory of change. Practices of *Métis* can be protests, parades or planning objections to climate extinction practices or unjust energy transitions. In utilising their microphysics of power, through this form of ‘antidiscipline’, where these communities oppose policies and macro planning objectives or utilise their purchasing power to withdraw support from businesses damaging their communities, such leaders and activists may then self-generate a transformative outcome from their own actions. This focus on the consumer and household is important for a number of reasons pertinent to transformative accounts of just transitions. First, it calls attention to the importance of the consumer/consumption dimensions of just energy transitions to balance the predominant focus on primary energy resource extraction and energy production and industrial use in most accounts of just transition analysis

(this is logical given the trade unions origins of the concept of course). Focusing on the consumer means widening and deepening the just transition focus to ensure that, for example, higher renewable energy prices should not be the outcome, since this would unfairly and disproportionately hurt low-income and vulnerable populations. Linking back both to the oppositional and green republican insights, a just transition, as we understand it, should mean ‘no carbon taxation without participation and agitation’ (Barry 2019). Secondly, this focus on the consumer highlights the strategic and disruptive opportunities of tactics such as consumer boycotts and withholding payment for energy services, including withholding taxes or rates owed to the local or national government, as part of localised, context-specific grassroots activism. This organised and sustained activism could result in the institutions of the state (including the local state), as well as multinational carbon energy and related industrial organisations, changing policies and practices in a more transformative and less ‘business as usual’ direction.

Conclusion

The transformation of the energy system in addressing climate breakdown could and should fundamentally change society, the economy, culture and politics for the better. However, for these multiple benefits to be achieved, the urgent and rapid transition to low-carbon energy has to be achieved in a manner that is open, democratic, inclusive and, most importantly, just and fair. Moreover, this just transition requires the honest recognition that we should avoid the lure of a ‘win-win’ policy-reform or techno-optimistic logics and/or top-down solutions. Instead, a just transition acknowledges that while there will be multiple benefits, there will also be downsides, losers and adjustment burdens, and therefore conflict and disagreement. Hence the need for conflict transformation processes and insights to be integrated within thinking and planning for a just energy transition.

Also, this conception of a just transition requires we move decisively beyond perceiving the energy transition as the greening of business as usual or the decarbonising of capitalism. These approaches may achieve the latter, and this is the reason why such mainstream political and policy approaches to addressing the climate/energy crisis are dominated by such status quo-reinforcing reformism. However, the acceptance and encouragement of non-violent conflict, contestation and agonistic disagreement around any energy transition (the green republican position) creates the space and, we would argue, necessity for moving beyond neoliberal capitalism objectives and business as usual outcomes. The vision of a just transition, outlined previously, can be captured

in paraphrasing the Scottish novelist, Alasdair Gray: ‘Let us transition as if we are in the early days of building a better society’, or as the spark that lit the youth strike for climate movement, Greta Thunberg, has put it,

“Avoiding climate breakdown will require cathedral thinking. We must lay the foundation while we may not know exactly how to build the ceiling. Sometimes we just simply have to find a way. The moment we decide to fulfil something, we can do anything. And I’m sure that the moment we start behaving as if we were in an emergency, we can avoid climate and ecological catastrophe. Humans are very adaptable: we can still fix this. But the opportunity to do so will not last for long. We must start today. We have no more excuses.” (Thunberg 2019, p. 67)

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4. Delivering a Just Transition for Ireland – some policy options¹

Michelle Murphy

In ‘Our Shared Future’, Government has committed to a Green New Deal and a new social contract (Government of Ireland, 2020). This paper will outline policy options that have the potential to progress both a Green New Deal and a new social contract in both a fair and inclusive manner.

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges we face, how we adapt and mitigate now will in large part determine the type of world in which future generations will live. When adapting to meet this challenge, we must also grasp the opportunity to address social and economic challenges that already exist, making sure that the actions that we take begin to address these problems rather than exacerbate them. This requires a Just Transition approach, both to meeting climate goals, and addressing the multifaceted social and economic challenges that we have failed to address for many years.

Climate commitments

Ireland is committed to legally binding climate-based goals in 2030 and a national commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Meeting our climate goals and delivering the social and economic transformation required for a new social contract will be challenging. In terms of climate targets, Ireland is on track to miss its carbon budgets without urgent action (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2023) and is on track to overshoot the 2030 emission reduction targets (EPA, 2023). To meet our 2030 targets every measure in the Climate Action Plan will have to be fully implemented. Given challenges in implementing previous climate policies it is reasonable to question whether every measure in the plan will be implemented by 2030. If current trends continue, the commitment to a Green New Deal would seem out of reach.

¹ This paper is an extract from forthcoming policy briefing ‘Delivering a Just Transition for Ireland: policy options’.

Some progress has been made with the publication of the Climate Action Plan and the country's first ever series of carbon budgets to 2030. However, a significant gap remains between climate action policy and climate action delivery. Current projections also suggest the 2030 targets will be missed (EPA, 2023) and that Ireland will fail to meet the targets in the first and second carbon budget periods without immediate and urgent action to rapidly reduce and prevent emissions (Climate Change Advisory Council, 2023). Ireland is significantly off-track from paths that deliver long-term transition to climate neutrality and our 2050 national policy goals. Ireland's provisional greenhouse gas emission estimates for 2021 (EPA, 2022) are a considerable cause for concern in relation to achieving Ireland's binding Carbon Budget targets. The current provisional numbers indicate that 23.5 per cent of the Carbon Budget for the 5-year period 2021-2025 has already been used. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, staying within the current carbon budget now requires deep emission cuts of over 8.4 per cent per annum over the period 2022 to 2025. The Climate Change Advisory Council (2023) finding (based on EPA projections) that Ireland is very likely to exceed the limit set in the first carbon budget (2025), and indeed is likely to exceed the second carbon budget (2030) is very concerning. The Council notes that failure to take action early has negatively impacted the prospects for meeting the cumulative target to 2030, and that this will have serious consequences for future carbon budgets.

Social contract

Delivering on the commitment to a new social contract is similarly challenging. Despite robust headline economic figures for GDP and GNI* growth, windfall corporate tax revenues of at least €6 billion in 2023 (Government of Ireland, 2023) and record employment levels, Government has not managed to deliver the transformative change required for a new social contract. In contrast to our strong economic performance, our social indicators make for more sobering reading. According to the most recent figures from the Central Statistics Office, 13.1 per cent of the population (over 670,000 people) are living in poverty, of whom more than 188,000 are children, over 133,000 have a job and more than 143,500 are over the age of 65 (CSO, 2023).

The prospect of either owning or buying a home remains elusive for many. Between 2012 and 2022, residential property prices rose by 75 per cent, private rents by 90 per cent, while wages rose by just 27 per cent (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2023). A persistent homelessness crisis continues, with a record number of people accessing emergency homeless accommodation exceeding 12,6911

in August 2023, including 3,895 children.² Our health system is also under increasing strain, with just over 84,000 in-patients waiting for treatment, of whom 9,805 are children³ to June 2023 and more than 598,000 outpatients were waiting for treatment, of whom more than 85,600 are children in the same period.⁴ *Social Justice Ireland* sees a Just Transition as a key pillar of a new social contract.

What is understood by ‘Just Transition’

The Government, in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, situates a just transition to a climate neutral economy as a process, within the wider statutory framework of climate action, which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to maximise employment opportunities, and support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition (Government of Ireland, 2021). In the Climate Action Plan, Government details a Just Transition Framework outlined in figure 1. This framework is made up of four principles (Government of Ireland 2021:40):

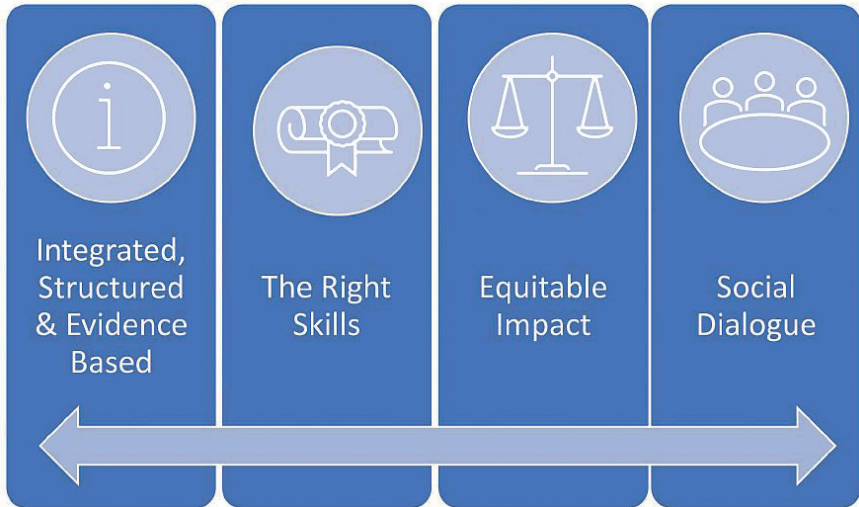
1. An integrated, structured, and evidence-based approach to identify and plan our response to just transition requirements.
2. People are equipped with the right skills to be able to participate in and benefit from the future net zero economy.
3. The costs are shared so that the impact is equitable and existing inequalities are not exacerbated.
4. Social dialogue to ensure impacted citizens and communities are empowered and are core to the transition process.

² <https://assets.gov.ie/271953/f141495e-fac0-483b-a61a-416797f8c02f.pdf>

³ <https://www.ntpf.ie/home/pdf//2023/06/nationalnumbers/in-patient/National01.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

Figure 1: Government Principles for a Just Transition



Source: Climate Action Plan 2021:40

Social Justice Ireland understands a Just Transition as leaving no people, communities, economic sectors or regions behind as we transition to a low carbon future. Transition is not just about reducing emissions. It is also about transforming our society and our economy and investing in effective and integrated social protection systems. It is about delivering quality services and a robust social infrastructure through investment in education, training and lifelong learning, childcare, out of school care, health care, long term care and public transport. Social investment must be a top priority of transition because it is this social investment that will support those people, communities, sectors and regions as we make the difficult transition to a carbon-neutral economy, transforming how our economy and society operates. Solidarity between generations is vital as we begin to implement the policies to meet our target of carbon neutrality by 2050 in a fair way, through a Just Transition process that leaves no-one behind.

What could a ‘Just Transition’ look like from a policy perspective?

From a policy-making perspective, a ‘Just Transition’ process requires moving to sustainable economy, one that is no longer underpinned by linear economic principles. Transition to a sustainable economy can only be successful if it is inclusive and if the social rights and wellbeing of all are promoted. Policy must support a social, environmental and economic transition, and one must not come at the expense of another. This requires embedding sustainable development, ‘development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) across all of Government policy - through design, implementation and delivery.

A Just Transition requires a social protection system – along with appropriate services and infrastructure – that prevents poverty and social exclusion for those that lose employment or income due to the effects or mitigation of climate change (NESC, 2020). It also requires a comprehensive mitigation and transition strategy to ensure there is public support for our domestic and international environmental and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This strategy must pre-empt some of the challenges we face as we move to a more sustainable form of development. The development of a national mitigation and transition strategy to accompany the Climate Action Plan is a matter of priority if there is to be public support for the significant and fundamental changes required in the years ahead.

Transforming national policy also means ensuring that a just transition effects change at all levels. This must include social protection systems being updated to uphold an operational and fair Social Contract, planning for an ageing population through implementation of updated care policies and the recognition of unpaid labour in our economy and society. If Government is to deliver our 2030 targets, strong policy coherence; the mainstreaming of climate adaptation into fiscal policy; and governance focused on addressing inequalities is required.

Policy options for a ‘Just Transition’

Investment

Public investment in a productive and balanced portfolio is an important aspect of a Just Transition for Ireland. Investment in renewable and clean energy, climate related research and development, commercial and residential retrofitting and

other key sectors should be prioritised by Government. Government should pursue a policy of climate, human capital and social investment to ensure that existing inequalities are not exacerbated. Government must also increase public investment in climate related research and development. At present our investment in climate research and development is among the lowest in the OECD (OECD, 2021). Government should increase this investment annually, with a specific focus on small and medium-sized enterprises rather than larger corporations. This public investment should improve public access to innovations and green technologies for all and support innovation.

The output and learnings from climate research and development must remain a public good which is accessible to all.

- Apply the principle of the ‘common good’⁵ to public investment into climate research and development to ensure the resulting innovations remain a public good and accessible to all.
- As a general principle, investment rather than tax subsidies should be the preferred policy tool to support and develop climate infrastructure.
- Invest 0.01 per cent of GDP in climate research and development annually to 2030.

Energy Transformation

Energy is the third largest driver of emissions in Ireland. Energy-efficient homes help reduce our carbon footprint as they require less fuel to heat. One of the most cost-effective measures to promote sustainable development is to increase building energy efficiency through retrofitting. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) estimate that €35 billion would be needed over the coming 35 years to make Ireland’s existing housing stock ‘low-carbon’ by 2050. More than 50,000 homes will have to be retrofitted every year to meet the targets set out in the Programme for Government. Investment in renewable energy and retrofitting on the scale required to meet our national climate ambition requires large scale investment in infrastructure.

In order to significantly reduce Ireland’s emissions, investment in retrofitting and the national grid should be a priority.

⁵ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2021-09/2014-10-08-thecommongood.pdf>

- Government should develop a national retrofitting strategy of sufficient scale, using the learning from the SEAI deep retrofit pilot programme, with an ambitious target to deep retrofit the entire existing housing stock in a 20 year timeframe and concurrent plans to increase capacity within the construction sector.
- An upgrade of the national grid must be a key element of infrastructure investment so that communities, cooperatives, farms and individuals can produce renewable energy and sell what they do not use back into the national grid, thus becoming self-sustaining and contributing to our national targets.
- Integrate a Building Renovation Passport Scheme⁶ into the National Retrofit Plan. This plan should be fully aligned with the existing Building Energy Rating (BER) system and existing retrofitting finance and regulatory measures. This would facilitate a step-by-step approach to retrofitting which could be more financially appealing and manageable for many households.

Taxation and renewables

Subsidies are an element of the environmental tax code that should be reviewed. Eliminating harmful subsidies mean that government has a wider fiscal space available to it in terms of climate policy and taxation. The value of environmental subsidies in Ireland is substantial (€2.9bn in 2021).⁷ The OECD Environmental Review of Ireland (OECD, 2021) recommends gradually removing remaining tax exemptions and rebates that encourage wasteful fuel use in agriculture, fishery, heating and transport. A review of fossil fuel subsidies is a vital first step. Eliminating harmful subsidies mean that government has a wider fiscal space available to it in terms of climate policy and taxation and can allow for the redirection of these funds towards creating a green economy and facilitating a Just Transition. In light of the current energy crisis, its impact on the cost of living and the challenges presented by the ongoing war in Ukraine, a move to renewable energy must be an immediate policy and investment priority. Government should review all fossil fuel subsidies in 2024 and set out a roadmap to remove them by 2030. The savings from their removal should be invested in renewable energy to support a Just Transition.

⁶ <https://www.igbc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Introducing-BRP-In-Ireland-Feasibility-Study.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ffes/fossilfuelsubsidies2021/>

- Review all fossil fuel subsidies and environmentally harmful tax expenditures in 2024 with a view to removing those that do not align with our national climate goals. This previously foregone revenue should be invested in renewable energy, improving our national grid infrastructure and schemes to address energy poverty.
- Set out a roadmap to remove all fossil fuel subsidies by 2030.

Industry

Industry is a key driver of emissions and therefore can be a key driver of change. Emission reductions in industry will require using materials more efficiently, reusing and recycling products and minimising waste. The introduction of a circular economy would reduce emissions and contribute to restoration of natural capital. Embedding the circular economy principles into our economic framework is a key step towards decoupling economic growth from resource consumption and meeting the targets set out in the Climate Action Plan and the carbon budgets. Recent progress in this regard is welcome, with ‘Living More, Using Less’ - Ireland’s first circular economy strategy - focussing on policy coherence in order to deliver on our national ambitions. Among the objectives of the strategy are a national policy framework for Ireland’s transition to a circular economy; a commitment to reduce Ireland’s circularity gap, so that Ireland’s rate is above the EU average by 2030; and promoting increased investment in the circular economy in Ireland, with a view to delivering sustainable, regionally balanced economic growth and employment. Ireland can learn from international best practice and examine how for example key elements of the Finnish circular economy programme (which is seen as a core pillar of Finland’s target of carbon neutrality by 2035) which could be applied to Ireland such as the mainstreaming of the sharing economy and sustainable products and services; choices that strengthen a fair welfare society and the sustainable use of natural resources ensuring materials remain in circulation longer.

- Government should implement a polluter pays principle across industry and other transformative policies investing in the circular economy and to convert industry to a sustainable sector within the Just Transition.
- Further progress the Circular Economy Strategy and examine the potential for piloting best practice internationally in order to mainstream the sharing economy and sustainable use of natural resources.

- Invest in the development and expansion of Living Labs in each region focusing on areas such as plastics, renewables, zero carbon buildings.

Agriculture and Land Management

Sustainable land management is crucial to Ireland moving to more sustainable agricultural practices and achieving a Just Transition. The Climate Action Plan sets out the indicative range of a 22-30 per cent reduction in Agricultural emissions by 2030. The European Commission's proposals for the Common Agricultural Programme (CAP) for 2021 to 2027 (informed by the Green New Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy) stipulate that at least 40 per cent of the CAP's overall budget and at least 30 per cent of the Maritime Fisheries Fund would contribute to climate action. Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 notes the strong emphasis on higher environmental ambition at an EU level, and the incorporation of this ambition and 'Green Architecture' into Ireland's CAP 2023-2027. The new CAP system will incentivise more sustainable practices. However, the new CAP will also have a reduced budget meaning there are less funds to be allocated within Ireland. Resourcing and funding for agriculture in Ireland should prioritise sustainable agricultural methods that reverse biodiversity loss and mitigate climate change among others.⁸ Sustainable land management is crucial to Ireland moving to more sustainable agricultural practices. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines sustainable land management as the use of land resources to meet changing human needs while ensuring the long-term productive potential of these resources and the maintenance of their environmental functions. The adoption of sustainable land management would reward sustainable forms of agriculture and acknowledge the role of farmers as custodians of this vital national asset. Ireland will have to adapt to this new reality with sustainable agricultural policies, sustainable land management, protecting biodiversity and rural social and economic development guiding policy.

- Government should publish Land Management and Farm to Fork strategies for 2024 in order to progress towards sustainable agricultural practices.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

- Farm sustainability passports: Government should pilot Farm Sustainability Passport scheme to support farmers to move to environmentally friendly and sustainable agricultural methods.

Transport

Transport contributes significantly to Ireland's emissions. A Just Transition must ensure that transport policy serves all communities, including rural communities and lower socio-economic groups. Reducing the number of private cars on the road through improving public transport and cycling infrastructure and the introduction of congestion charges in urban centres must be part of the transition to sustainable energy. Emissions from aviation are not taxed directly. Jet kerosene use increased by 1.2 per cent in 2019, and is now greater than petrol use, and air travel is now second only to private cars as a share of transport energy. As we begin to look at what measures are required to deliver on the policies in the Climate Action Plan, we must look at the aviation sector and the policy levers that are available to ensure that it makes a contribution to our climate targets. *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently argued that the aviation sector should make a contribution to Ireland's emissions targets⁹ and outlined proposals as to how this could be achieved. Government must implement the key recommendations of 'The Impacts of Aviation Taxation in Ireland' (ESRI, 2021), in particular the recommendation to target the taxation of CO₂ directly by abolishing the Jet Kerosene exemption. This would ensure that air travel makes an appropriate contribution to the sectoral carbon budget for the transport sector and to our national climate targets.

- Government should proactively pursue the removal of the exemption of Jet Kerosene from excise and carbon taxes at EU level. In the interim, Government should introduce a commercial air transport tax which would ensure air travel makes a contribution to carbon budgets for the transport sector in line with the 'Polluter Pays' Principle and the Environment Liability Directive. Revenue accrued should be invested in improving public transport to reduce urban congestion, improving

⁹ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/its-time-price-flying-reflected-true-cost>

regional and rural public transport connectivity and in expanding active transport options beyond urban centres.

Policy Coherence

Policy coherence, and well-designed policy packages that support innovation and capacity building are key to reducing emissions. These include economy-wide packages that support mitigation and avoid negative environmental outcomes, meet short-term economic goals while reducing emissions and moving towards sustainable development. In order for effective, well-designed policy to be implemented it must have clear adaptation goals, defined responsibilities and commitments and must be coordinated across both Government and sectors. Climate adaptation therefore must be included in our annual budgetary cycle, with regular assessment and mainstreamed into fiscal policy and governance.

- Government should integrate climate adaptation into the annual budgetary process, while also publishing a green budget within the annual national budget and create targets and a reporting system for each SDG in order to ensure accountability on targets at a national level.

Social protection

Social protection is a key component of wealth redistribution and the delivery of quality services under a functioning social contract. The redistribution of wealth contributes to a more equal society. The provision of quality public services ensures the well-being of all.

Ensure social protection systems adequately provide a safety net and minimum social floor for those most vulnerable to the shocks of a Just Transition and provide services and supports for those facing lifestyle changes due to a changing society and economy.

- This requires benchmarking core social welfare rates to 27.5 per cent of average weekly earnings, with a commitment to indexation over time and an audit of services and infrastructure on a place-based approach, informed by the rural proofing model currently under consideration by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Care

Care, in its various forms is required throughout all stages of the life cycle; healthcare, childcare and long-term care should be local, affordable and

accessible. Receiving care is an essential part of the life cycle, in early years, later years and for some, throughout all stages of their lives. Whether paid or unpaid, carers contribute significantly to society each year. Care work is people-centred, green work and should be viewed as such in the Just Transition.

Care is also an essential service that allows people to live well and age well in their communities. Initiatives taken towards a statutory entitlement to home care in recent years are welcome, but publication of details and implementation are regrettably delayed. Supporting people to live at home requires an integrated approach that ensures access to a range of supports in the home as well as transitional facilities (including step-up, step-down, convalescence, assessment and review, respite and rehabilitation services). To achieve this, deficits in infrastructure need to be addressed urgently with an emphasis on replacement and/or refurbishment of facilities.

- Government must recognise the essential contribution of carers to society and provide adequate income and protection for those providing care. Government should pilot a Universal Basic Services and a Universal Basic Income Scheme for Carers in line with the Programme for Government Commitment to a Carers Guarantee.
- Create a statutory entitlement to Home Care Services which has the required resourcing to support people to live and age well in their own homes, and can keep pace with increased demand.

Work, education and training

The green transition will drive a transformation of local labour markets, with new skills needed, and others becoming redundant. This shift to a sustainable and net-zero economy will result in a significant transformation of local labour markets, as workers move into different occupations and sectors. New skills will be needed throughout the economy, whether it is retraining construction workers on environmentally friendly materials and techniques, or reskilling automotive workers for electric vehicle production.

Skills development and retraining are vital to ensuring that workers have the right skills to prosper in a changing world of work and are a prerequisite for making the green transition a just transition. Lifelong learning, training and education allow for people to gain, improve and learn new skills. Appropriate education and training systems facilitate labour market participation, reduce impediments to accessing the workplace and allow for sustained labour market participation in the face of changing skillsets and workplaces. Apprenticeships

and Traineeships are an essential part of meeting the employment and training needs during the transition. With both the challenges and opportunities of the green transition being place-specific, local actions or national initiatives tailored to local realities are needed.

Government should resource the upskilling of those who are unemployed and at risk of becoming unemployed through integrating training and labour market programmes and must recognise the challenges of long-term unemployment and precarious employment and adopt targeted policies to address these.

- Resource the development of place-based strategies which are key to supporting communities during the transition, as risks and impact will vary across different regions and sectors. Learnings from past transitions both in Ireland (Bord na Móna closure in the Midlands) and further afield regarding what policies work best must be applied to the green transition. The Just Transition Commission, as proposed in the Climate Action Plan, could and should play a key role in preparing and implementing policies to support a fair and socially inclusive green jobs transition.
- Develop new apprenticeship and traineeships to support climate mitigation measures with a focus on place based, on the job training, focussed on those in the labour market in positions that have been identified as at risk, and address age profile issues by making apprenticeships and traineeships more attractive to those aged 30 and over.
- Ensure those in employment have access to quality employment, where possible having the option to work remotely. Government should facilitate working from home, hybrid models and the expansion of remote working hubs around the country, not only to facilitate improved work-life balance, but also as remote working reduces transport emissions associated with daily commutes.

Conclusion

In order to develop a sustainable society, services and infrastructure must be well-planned and capable of adapting to the changing needs of the population over time. This means that policy planning and design should, from the very beginning, include potential future changes, and as far as possible should be designed with these in mind. An on-going social dialogue structure is required to ensure the appropriate services and infrastructure are delivered, and that there is ongoing public support for the pathway by which these services and

infrastructure will come on-stream. There is an increased responsibility on local and national government to engage with communities on this issue and build local capacity (Climate Change Advisory Council,2020). This dialogue should also focus on what is required to transition Ireland to a low-carbon future, and how such services and infrastructure can be delivered and managed in a sustainable way. This requires input from all stakeholders. Such a mechanism would ensure that there is support and understanding as to how services and infrastructure are to be resourced and rolled out at local, regional and national level.

At present, there appears to be a strong degree of policy incoherence at national level, with government pursuing policies that result in increased emissions and inhibit the achievement of our climate-related goals. The increased emissions from both agriculture and transport mean that Ireland will have to purchase emissions allowances from other member states and face the prospect of being subject to fines for not meeting our European targets. The resources required to purchase emissions allowances could be better used in measures to actively pursue our climate targets. Energy policy is similarly affected through a mismatch between pursuing a policy of data centre expansion, and the pressure that this will put on energy resources whilst simultaneously trying to reduce our energy emissions and incentivising households to reduce energy usage at peak times.

To deliver a truly ‘Just Transition’ policy must support the most vulnerable people and communities who will be impacted by climate action. This will require coherence and collaboration across all Government Departments, state agencies and local authorities. It requires moving beyond actions to implement carbon budgets and the Climate Action Plan, which are vitally important and must be implemented, and also focussing on addressing current social and economic inequalities and infrastructure deficits. Aligning and transforming our economic policies to support our social and environmental goals, measuring progress and wellbeing, investing in social protection systems and a robust social infrastructure, resourcing quality services in areas such as education, care across the lifecycle and public transport must all form part of a whole of Government approach to a Just Transition. The Just Transition, as proposed in the Climate Action Plan, has the potential to play a key role in shaping and delivering a Just Transition for Ireland.

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5. The Four-Day Work Week - Learnings from Companies at the Forefront of Work-Time Reduction*

Josh Bersin, Julia Bersin, Joe O'Connor and John P. Trougakos

Introduction

Imagine if organizations around the world could work one less day per week, without a reduction in pay.

While it may sound improbable, the reduction of work hours has been spanning almost a century. In 1869, President Ulysses Grant first mandated a maximum 8-hour workday for government workers. Later, in 1926, Henry Ford limited the work week to 40 hours when he realized it optimized productivity.¹ Considering this historical background, one may wonder if we are witnessing the start to a similar shift today toward a four-day work week.

In the last few years, the four-day work week has become a buzzy topic for companies around the world. Many organizations boast its benefits such as increased productivity and reduced employee burnout, while others remain apprehensive. We're certainly seeing a growing number of companies pursuing new, more flexible ways of working, which has become imperative in today's Post-industrial Era. Our research shows that "dynamic organizations," those leading the way with superior business, people, and innovation outcomes today, are experts at adapting their working models. These organizations prioritize practices like upskilling for productivity and fostering flexibility and autonomy around work.²

Amid this context, where does the four-day work week fit in? Is it one of many models that companies can use to increase productivity and flexibility, or does it represent a stand-alone movement? Moreover, which types of organizations

¹ "[The history & evolution of the 40-hour work week](#)," Sophia Lee/Culture Amp.

² The Definitive Guide to Building a Dynamic Organization, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2023.

* This paper was previously published online at <https://joshbersin.com/the-four-day-work-week/> and is reproduced here with kind permission.

are seeing success with this approach, what specific problems are they solving, and how are they managing the transition effectively?

In this report, we unpack the concept of work-time reduction, and specifically the four-day work week. The report also provides a historical overview, practical insights, opportunities, challenges, and what may be coming next. To uncover these findings, we spoke to nine organizations that have successfully implemented work-time reduction programs. Real-world examples from these organizations are included throughout the report to illustrate how this concept is put into action. Further, we connected with experts in the field to paint a fuller picture of how this new way of working is evolving.

The History of Work-Time Reduction

The concept of a reduced-hour work week, including the fourday week, isn't new. As far back as the 1930s, economist John Maynard Keynes first suggested the possibility of employees working as little as 15 hours a week. In 1956, the idea of a reduced-hour work week had made its way to the most powerful office in the country. President Richard Nixon even predicted a future where employees would be working a fourday week.

During the 1960s and 1970s, several organizations attempted to implement four-day work weeks. Unfortunately, most of these initiatives fell short of the anticipated results and were generally abandoned. By attempting to cram a full 40 hours of work into four days, these initiatives failed to consider a few critical factors. First, there is a nonlinear relationship between hours worked and productivity, including a diminishing rate of productivity for each additional hour worked. Additionally, longer working hours are associated with an increase in errors and work-related injuries, as well as a decline in employee wellbeing indicators like satisfaction and engagement.

In recent years, an increasing number of organizations appear to have cracked the code. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that reduced work hours for the same pay, rather than simply condensing workdays, are not only feasible when it comes to maintaining outcomes but also potentially advantageous.

Starting in 2015, early positive signs of reduced working hours emerged from a pilot in Sweden and a subsequent public rollout in Iceland. Following the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, Joe O'Connor, CEO and cofounder at the Work Time Reduction Center of Excellence, initiated the world's first coordinated pilot program for a four-day work week in Ireland. Later, at 4 Day Week Global,

he expanded this model to large-scale global trials in North America, the UK, and Australasia throughout 2021. Despite the necessary costs, some trade-offs, and varying levels of work required to prepare for each trial, the results consistently demonstrated positive impacts on employee wellbeing, retention, and even business outcomes.

While not perfect, these pilots have shown encouraging results and laid the groundwork for improving the process. The impact of the pandemic, coupled with tight labor markets and the Great Resignation, has compelled companies to seek innovative methods to stay competitive in their talent practices. Considering the growing trend toward work-time reduction, it is important to answer two questions: first, what exactly is work-time reduction from a practical perspective, and second, how can it be achieved successfully?

Defining Work-Time Reduction

Let's begin with an explanation of work-time reduction policies. These policies focus on reducing the number of hours that employees work while maintaining the same levels of pay, service, and productive output. In other words, we're asking people to produce the same outcomes in less time.

Although the four-day work week has gained significant attention, there are a variety of different models. Examples include six-hour workdays, nine-day fortnights, half-day Fridays, flexible or "freedom" Fridays, summer Fridays off, and "half-day" Fridays with workers clocking off between 12 PM and 2 PM.

Healthy Organizations: Why Companies Are Trying It

One of the primary reasons organizations choose to adopt these policies is to foster healthier and more sustainable work environments. As employee burnout and other work-related health issues plague employees, workers are increasingly seeking opportunities for healthier and more balanced relationships with their jobs. And based on our research, organizations that have been most successful in this transition have been taking a holistic approach, incorporating flexible working models as part of their offerings for employees.³ In pursuing these policies, companies can reduce costs associated with burnout, including reduced productivity, sick leaves, and turnover rates.

³ The Definitive Guide to Wellbeing: The Healthy Organization, Josh Bersin and Janet Mertens, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, October 2021.

Our research reveals that healthy organizations are more than three times as likely to engage and retain their workers.⁴ And in today’s competitive labor market, where attracting and retaining top talent is a continuous challenge, adopting a reduced-hour work week can be an attractive benefit for job-seekers. As such this can potentially give organizations a significant competitive advantage.

Beyond employee concerns, implementing reduced-work hours initiatives can serve as a tool to assess and improve productivity. This approach also uncovers inefficiencies and cost savings in the process. Companies aiming to reduce work hours by up to 20% must undergo substantial work redesign while maintaining business outcomes. The preparation exercises alone to streamline operations, remove administrative burdens, and prioritize high-impact work can improve company productivity substantially. Moreover, with the reduction in working hours as a driving force, the stakes become even higher.

To successfully transition to a reduced-hour work week, organizations need to undergo not just the tactical steps we cover in the next section but more importantly a cultural shift toward continuous improvement, with a focus on performance, collective responsibility, communication, and accountability. Our research indicates that organizations with supportive and innovative cultures—characterized by strong norms of communication and trust—create what we call an “irresistible” employee experience.⁵ These organizations are best positioned to implement these changes effectively. Furthermore, having leaders who are experimental and forward-thinking—traits that define the change-ready leaders that help companies thrive in the Post-Industrial Age⁶—is also an advantage in this regard.

These elements are common themes in the stories of many companies that have already made the leap to the four-day work week. In the next section, we’ll delve into the tactical steps the organizations we interviewed undertook to develop their programs, taking into account their unique workforces, industries, and cultures.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ The Definitive Guide: Employee Experience, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2021.

⁶ The Definitive Guide to Leadership Development: Irresistible Leadership, Josh Bersin and Janet Mertens/The Josh Bersin Company, 2023.

Implementing Work-Time Reduction: Common Practices and Learnings

The transition to a shorter work week should be approached as an operational excellence project. Like any change initiative, there are various ways to achieve the intended outcome. However, our conversations highlighted several consistent factors critical to each organization's success. These factors fall into a few categories: redesigning work for productivity, tackling policy and operational shifts, and planning a successful pilot. In this section, we have compiled the components of each category, along with some specific examples.

Redesigning Work for Productivity

An early misconception of the four-day work week was the assumption that it meant squeezing five days of work into four, a practice proven to fail historically. Given the initiative to improve wellbeing and engagement, and considering the science of productivity, simply condensing work hours without reprioritization is unlikely to work.

To successfully implement a reduced-hour work week without sacrificing outcomes, it's imperative to undertake work redesign. This process starts with establishing clear business goals, assessing which work is contributing to outcomes, and removing obstacles that hinder employees from making meaningful contributions. Here are some of the practical tips we heard from our interviews to ensure reduced work hours are spent in the most effective and impactful ways.

- **Clearly define the work that matters.** Organizations often use OKR (objectives and key results) frameworks to define both companywide and team-level goals to ensure all efforts are aligned with these goals. While the ideal scenario involves dedicating most of our time on work directly contributing to business outcomes, it's important to approach this with some flexibility. For example, people managers may spend more time in one-on-one meetings, which are important for building rapport and a trusting relationship within the team, even if these meetings do not directly contribute to outcomes-focused work. Consider incorporating the value of connection, collaboration, teamwork, and activities surrounding professional development alongside tasks that are directly focused on achieving outcomes.
- **Run a meeting audit.** Meetings are often criticized for being unproductive time, and it's true that the time spent in meetings

can often exceed the actual productivity achieved during that time. Shopify, a Canadian e-commerce company made a radical move in 2023 to reduce unnecessary meetings by eliminating 12,000 of them at the start of that year.⁷ Our interviews find that auditing and ultimately reducing meetings was another essential practice to create more time for productive work.

CASE IN POINT

Mäd

Mäd, a Cambodian digital transformation consultancy, has always taken a flexible approach to work, and a four-day work week felt like a natural next step during the pandemic. As part of the team’s approach to preserve productivity, it took special care to free up designers and engineers from attending too many meetings since these individuals’ output required focused, uninterrupted time.

- **Allow employees to operate “top of license”.** In addition to attending meetings, many employees often find themselves bogged down with various administrative or menial tasks that take time away from their essential work. We call these obstacles to operating “top of license,” or engaging in the work that matches employees’ unique skills and for which they are hired.⁸ Once assessing which work matters, it’s crucial to decide which activities to stop, outsource, or automate with technology. Next, it is essential to take the time to understand the individual strengths and passions of each employee and allow them to spend most of their working time on the tasks that align with their expertise and interests. As we discuss in *The Definitive Guide to Building a Dynamic Organization*, when people are doing work they’re passionate about, they will find ways to do their job more efficiently.⁹

⁷ [“Shopify’s CFO explains how its new meeting cost calculator works, and how it will cut 474,000 events in 2023: ‘Time is money.’”](#) Sheryl Estrada/Yahoo! Finance, July 14, 2023

⁸ *The Definitive Guide to Building a Dynamic Organization*, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2023.

⁹ *The Definitive Guide to Building a Dynamic Organization*, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2023.

- **Embrace asynchronous communication.** When teams adopt a four-day working schedule where employees aren't all off on the same day, asynchronous communication becomes essential. Project management tools can be helpful for project-specific communications, and employees can control their notification preferences easily. Defining new norms around how chat tools like Slack and Teams are used will also be important. Along with reducing live meetings, embrace written or recorded status updates, which allow employees to consume the information at a time that works for them. While live conversations are still valuable, with one fewer overlapping day or perhaps more when teams rotate days off, asynchronous communication should become the norm in most cases, rather than the exception.

CASE IN POINT

PRAXIS PR

The team at PRAXIS PR, a marketing agency based in Toronto, Canada, uses project management software to update client projects before final approval. This ensures that the next team taking over the following day or week has all the necessary information without needing to connect to facilitate the handoff.

Mäd

Mäd works with clients in different time zones around the world and uses collaborative design software and project management tools to work asynchronously with clients and provide additional visibility into the work being done.

- **Empower employees to adopt their own productivity practices.** While work-time reduction provides a framework to increase productivity, it doesn't necessarily compel the specific methods. In addition to the organizationwide policies or norms governing the utilization of work time, each employee upholds the responsibility for sticking to those norms, as well as maintaining their own level of focus. Some of the organizations we spoke to came up with a list of best practices around work habits, even offering training to employees. Others may prefer to leave it up to the individual to determine what

works for them. Given the prevalence of digital distractions, it can't hurt to reinforce or even encourage employees to share how they're cultivating better focus during workdays.

CASE IN POINT

Inventium

Amantha Imber, the founder at Inventium, a workplace consultancy in Australia, is a champion for putting productivity practices into the hands of employees. In her team's process of preparing for a four-day work week pilot, she developed productivity training intended to help employees more effectively utilize their time. Some of her team's productivity practices include calendar blocking, turning cell phones off for blocks of time, and scheduling deeply focused work around when each employee is most productive. With the right tools and knowledge, employees are encouraged to take ownership of their time and utilize it in the way that works best for them.

- **Redefine what requires an “escalation”.** Escalations— or urgent situations that typically need to be addressed quickly—are common at client-facing or professional services organizations, but they can happen on internal facing teams, too. Whether it's an urgent request from a customer, or a team-specific fire drill, escalations are a quick ticket to task-switching and often require employees to reprioritize what they were working on to take on the issue at hand. While some escalations are inevitable, others may be avoidable, and defining what truly requires an escalation is important. This can help to preserve employee focus during the workday, as well as employees' days off if action can wait. Consider being very specific about what requires an escalation, including who should be brought in and when. If you are rotating days off, try to ensure coverage for those who are off on specific days. If everyone has the same day off, be very specific about what requires involvement outside of working hours.

CASE IN POINT

The Ross Firm

The Ross Firm, a law firm based in Ontario, Canada, began trialling a four-day work week in 2020 following a clear uptick in employee stress surrounding the pandemic. Despite an increase in business at that time and the high-pressure environment that typically exists in law, CEO Quinn Ross was committed to giving the four-day week a shot while maintaining the same level of attention for clients. His team took a thoughtful approach to handling escalations, which could have inhibited four-day work week success. “If it can wait a day or two on a weekend, then it can wait a day on a weekday,” said Ross. This kind of perspective takes a concerted effort to define what constitutes an escalation, and thoughtful judgement on the employees’ part to decide if something needs to be addressed immediately, or if it can wait.

If squeezing five days of work into four is a concern for employees or leadership, one consideration is Parkinson’s Law, which states, “Work expands to fill the time allotted for its completion.” In other words, employees will fill the time they have to complete tasks. If we reduce the amount of time available, we just may surprise ourselves with how much we’re able to complete. Furthermore, removing excess time spent on administrative or unproductive tasks will free up tangible hours to put back into productive work.

Redefining Policies and Norms Upfront

Shifting to a four-day or reduced-hour week requires a significant number of operational components to address. While answers will depend on the specific organizations, here are some of the areas that the companies we spoke to had to think through as they adopted work-time reduction practices.

- **Determine which days employees will take off in an equitable manner.** Some of the organizations we spoke to take Fridays off; others have a 50-50 split between Monday and Friday, while others rotate different days throughout the week. For shift work models, this may become more complex, as weekends and additional hours must be taken into account. These organizations considered the amount of coverage needed for clients, as well as equity for employees.
- **Revisit vacation and sick leave policies to align to a four-day week.** With 52 fewer working days, less vacation will naturally accrue. Think

through whether your existing vacation policy will need to shift. The same may be true with sick days. This is something that may be helpful to address in advance.

- **Address policies around companywide holidays.** Similar to vacation days, holidays are additional days off on top of the 20% fewer working days. Some organizations remove the scheduled day off if a vacation day falls in the same week, while others keep both if that's what the schedule mandates.
- **Establish clear internal and external communication norms for days off.** Determine the expected response time for clients. Clarify what constitutes as an “emergency” or “escalation” as described in the previous section. Further, establish communication standards and specifically, asynchronous communication best practices for specific tools or channels like email and chat.
- **Determine the program's level of flexibility.** Clarify how strictly you expect employees and/or leaders to adhere to the four-day work week program. For example, determine whether the days off should be treated like weekend days or if some work is expected under specific circumstances. Additionally, establish the conditions under which the company can revert to a standard five-day work week during exceptionally busy periods. To elaborate on the point around flexibility, here is what we heard from our conversations:
 - A leading practice among the organizations we consulted involved maintaining flexibility around the four-day week, knowing there may be times where it needs to be adjusted to accommodate heavy workloads, tight deadlines, or client escalations.
 - According to John Trougakos, professor at the University of Toronto and an expert on organizational behavior and employee wellbeing, if it is truly a day off, employers should not dictate how employees spend their time. He stated that engaging in intrinsically motivated behaviors during this time can lead to greater personal benefits.
 - In Quinn Ross's experience, the only hard rule during the pilot was the visible participation of leaders in the four-day week. It was critical that the executive leadership and practice leads adopt the program and demonstrate its potential, ensuring it was perceived across the organization as an authentic and credible approach to work within the company. This was especially important in the initial part of the pilot.

Implementing a Well-Defined Pilot

Without exception, all the organizations we interviewed that successfully implemented a four-day work week began with a well-defined, minimum three-month trial period to assess whether a reduction of work hours could be done successfully based on specific KPIs (key performance indicators). The pilots were thoughtfully developed with preparatory measures such as work redesign and operational shifts as described previously. These measures were accompanied by documentation and employee training well in advance, with a clear start and end point. Subsequently, the measured outcomes would determine whether the organization would return to the previous working model, continue the trial with some course corrections, or continue with the four-day week on a long-term basis. Here are some tips from the organizations we interviewed.

- **Get buy-in from leadership and employees.** A radical redesign of work cannot be done without buy-in from both leaders and employees at all levels within the organization. Every participant plays an essential role in driving the necessary cultural and work shifts required. If they are not brought into the underlying principles, objectives, and responsibilities they carry, the initiative is unlikely to succeed. Whether an organization decides to gauge interest from employees through team meetings, surveys, or explicit opt-in procedures, cultivating internal commitment is vital to the success of a four-day work week initiative.

CASE IN POINT

PRAXIS PR

PRAXIS PR was interested in trying out a four-day work week to help with recruitment and retention during the Great Resignation in 2022. Leadership decided to bring the idea of participating in the North America 4 Day Week Global trial to its employees directly. “We have found that it doesn’t work unless employees are engaged and buying into it,” says Matt Juniper, Associate Managing Partner at PRAXIS. Leadership began by going to managers, who were initially excited and then surfaced some hesitancy about whether their teams would be able to get work done with 20% fewer hours. Once they went through some training, 100% of managers agreed that they wanted to move forward with the pilot. When it came to employee buy-in, once PRAXIS agreed to participate in the pilot, employees received opt-in letters to clarify what their expectations were and give them an explicit choice around their participation. “There’s an expectation that I’m opting in because I’m part of the equation here; I have to work more efficiently, effectively, use the training I’ve been given, etc. So, it’s all opt in,” said Juniper.

- **Position the pilot as an experiment with clear expectations.** Communication and positioning are important elements in successfully establishing a four-day work week. This starts with defining the pilot clearly, treating it as a trial rather than a given, and clarifying expectations for participating employees. Specifically, calling the pilot an experiment emphasizes its provisional nature, enabling employees to grasp the anticipated work or productivity outcomes required in exchange for the extra day off. Experiments require clear definitions: What’s the hypothesis? What specifically are we testing, and what’s each employee’s responsibility so that it’s a clear and effective test? How will success be measured? Defining these elements upfront will provide the pilot program with a solid structure and ensure more valid results.

CASE IN POINT

Inventium

Amantha Imber at Inventium describes the importance of positioning the pilot as an experiment. “Experiments can fail,” says Imber. “Set clear hypotheses, take measurements seriously, and see what happens.” Inventium ran a six-month pilot before rolling out a four-day work week on a long-term basis. The company refers to the program as the “Gift of the Fifth,” indicating that the day off is a gift and not a given, and it’s maintained by collectively getting work done efficiently and maintaining outcomes. It also means there may be busier months when employees need to work that fifth day, and that’s a preset understanding for the team. Inventium has also made participation in its four-day work week program optional.

Healthwise

Healthwise, a health education and software company headquartered in Boise, Idaho, decided to pilot a four-day week to support the wellbeing of its employees during the stress of the pandemic. The team put together clear messaging around expectations for employees, which was that they would receive 100% pay for 80% of their time in the work week, assuming they had 100% output toward organizational goals. “It was always clear that having the four-day week was contingent on us being able to meet our commitments,” said LaDonna Speiser, Senior Director of Internal Operations at Healthwise. In that spirit, Healthwise employees did temporarily return to a five-day work week to ensure the timely release of a new product, which was a way to rally around meeting organizational goals.

- **Crowdsource potential obstacles and ideas from employees.** Obstacles may arise when rolling out a fourday work week, and while organizations cannot predict everything in advance, asking employees for their input may uncover potential concerns to address.

Furthermore, based on our research on both employee experience¹⁰ and inclusion¹¹, employee listening is a leading practice tied to positive business outcomes. Incorporating employee input into how the pilot is executed can foster trust, surface innovative ideas for success, and boost collective engagement. Employees often possess insights into obstacles that leadership or HR might not anticipate. Involving employees in the conversation early on, and in some cases, allowing them autonomy in bringing the fourday work week to life, can yield significant benefits.

CASE IN POINT

Common Future

Common Future, a nonprofit focused on racial and economic equity, decided to pilot a four-day work week as part of an initiative to improve wellbeing and flexibility during the pandemic. As part of its preparation process, Common Future held focus groups with different cohorts of employees to understand their concerns and address them in advance of rollout. “One of our goals is to model a new way of working, and that includes creating an innovative, employee-first workplace of the future,” said Joann Lee Wagner, VP of People at Common Future. This also means that employees get to help pave the way for what that workplace looks like.

¹⁰ The Definitive Guide: Employee Experience, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2021.

¹¹ Elevating Equity: The Real Story of Diversity and Inclusion, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2021.

CASE IN POINT

Outcomes First Group

Outcomes First Group, a leading specialist provider of education and therapeutic care, has had unique challenges to consider when rolling out their reduced-work week. They are responsible for providing education and care that spans beyond the traditional Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5 work week. The organization empowered leaders to plan how the reduced-work week could be possible in their own teams, trusting that those leaders and their teams know best about what will work for them. Helen Williams, Head of Communications and Engagement at Outcomes First Group, reflects, “Another learning point in terms of preparing for the pilot was to encourage our head teachers, registered managers, and team managers to source ideas from their team and not try to figure this out by themselves. Their team would most likely have some ideas they may not have thought about.”

- **Be transparent with clients and external stakeholders.** When organizations consider adopting a fourday work week, one common hesitation revolves around upholding standards, especially with external stakeholders operating on a five-day or in some cases, a seven-day schedule. Many of the organizations we spoke to, particularly in the professional services industry, prioritize direct client interactions, making communication a critical part of managing client expectations. This often includes some combination of giving customers advanced notice about the pilots, creating resources or FAQs to address client concerns, incorporating information about the designated day off in email signatures, and developing coverage plans for team members who are out of the office.

CASE IN POINT

Tyler Grange

Tyler Grange is a UK-based environmental consultancy. When the company was considering a four-day work week pilot to mitigate burnout and support better employee wellbeing, communicating this with its 3000+ clients was an essential part of the preparation process. Prior to the trial, the company sent a newsletter and FAQs to every client, and it took an even more personalized approach with top clients. “We did one-to-one phone calls or meetings with our top clients to talk them through it and sort of tell them not to be scared of it,” said Jon Berry, Cofounder and Owner of Tyler Grange. The outreach in advance also set expectations that the team was committed to maintaining the same client standards as before and opened up a dialogue for honest feedback. While some clients had reservations, most reacted positively, and some have even asked the organization to teach them how they might be able to roll out the four-day week.

Awin

For Awin, an affiliate marketing organization based in Europe, the four-day work week (known internally as “Flexi-Week”) became another flexibility offering for employees. Teams are still expected to serve customers on an ongoing basis, so team leaders are ultimately responsible for determining what the four-day work week looks like such that it doesn’t interrupt client expectations. Employees work directly with their managers to determine which day they have off.

While each organization addresses customer communication and positioning slightly differently, their priorities remain the same: maintaining the best possible experience for their clients. And to ensure they’re continuing to do so, they keep a pulse check on metrics like project completions, customer NPS, client satisfaction scores, and one-on-one client feedback.

- **Set up key metrics for success.** A well-designed experiment requires both a hypothesis and defined measurements to determine success. In our discussions with many organizations, it was evident they kept a close eye on key metrics throughout and after their pilots to decide whether to continue. Although most of the organizations were primarily focused on improving people-related outcomes,

such as burnout, retention, and recruitment, the pivotal metrics for continuing the pilot were linked to maintaining business and customer outcomes. Improvements to wellbeing could not compromise financial and productivity outcomes, nor client satisfaction. See Figure 1 below for a list of common metrics that companies measure during their pilots.

Establishing goals in advance and consistently measuring them during and after the pilot can serve as a valuable gauge of success. Furthermore, effectively communicating these objectives and corresponding measurement methods to employees will further emphasize the purpose behind the program and highlight every employee’s role in its success. In the next section, we’ll share some of the specific outcomes that organizations have observed as a result.

Figure 1: Common Metrics for Four-Day Work Week Pilots

Category	Metrics
Program Adoption	Employee participation rates, hours worked on 5 th day
Employee Outcomes	Recruitment, retention, employee engagement, employee burnout, eNPS ¹² , sick leave, absenteeism
Customer Outcomes	NPS, customer satisfaction scores, client retention
Business Outcomes	Total revenue, revenue per employee, project completions, business goal attainment, productivity*

** One question that often arises for organizations concerns how to measure productivity. According to the BLS, the classic way involves dividing output by the total number of hours worked.¹³ It is crucial to define “productive output” since the total amount of output or work being done might decrease, but the goal is to maintain productive output. In this context, we would clarify “output” to mean business outcomes, indicating that if companies can maintain business outcomes despite working fewer hours, they are increasing their total productivity. See “business outcomes” above for examples of business outcomes that can be measured.*

Source: The Josh Bersin Company, 2023

¹² [Net Promoter Score](#) - commonly used to track customer loyalty

¹³ [“How Is Productivity Measured? > Calculating Productivity,”](#) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

CASE IN POINT

PRAXIS PR

PRAXIS PR spent extensive time determining how they would measure productivity during their pilot. With a roughly 20% reduction in hours, they focused primarily on cutting back on meetings and administrative processes. Leveraging time-tracking software to monitor billable and nonbillable hours, they were easily able to see the number of hours spent on administrative tasks, allowing them to significantly reduce this aspect. Additionally, they tracked client satisfaction closely to ensure the same standards were being met and that project completions were met as before. When it came to people metrics, PRAXIS closely tracked recruitment, retention, employee satisfaction, and wellbeing.

Benefits and Challenges

Reducing work hours effectively may require a lot of preparation, but according to the companies we talked to, the potential benefits from well-organized pilots are significant. However despite substantial preparation, certain challenges did arise as well. To present the full picture, we will delve into some of the more specific outcomes organizations have seen from the four-day work week, as well as some of the challenges they had to address along the way.

Benefits Beyond Wellbeing

Work-time reduction has been demonstrated to yield huge benefits for organizations that get it right. Recent findings from pilots in the U.S. and Canada, as well as the UK showcase positive outcomes for both employers and employees. See Figure 2 for specific examples from the recent trials. Additionally, Figure 3 shows specific outcomes from the companies we talked to.

While some of the outcomes were anecdotal, across the board these organizations say their employees love the program and are incredibly grateful to spend their days off doing things that are uniquely important to them.

Figure 2: Four-Day Work Week Trial Results

In the 2022-2023 U.S. and Canada trial of 41 organizations:	In the 2022 UK trial of 61 organizations:
100% of participating companies planned to continue with the four-day week beyond the trial period.	92% of organizations planned to continue with the four-day week.
Average revenues increased by 15%, compared to the previous period.	Absenteeism reduced by 65% among trial participants.
Customer Outcomes	NPS, customer satisfaction scores, client retention
Life satisfaction, mental health, and work-life balance all improved for employees.	Employee turnover decreased by 57% over the trial period.

Source: *4 Day Week Global 2023 Long-Term Pilot Program Report, 2023*, and *The UK’s Four-Day Week Pilot, 2023*.

Figure 3: Company Outcomes

<p>PRAXIS</p> <p>Observed a 26% increase in mental health, 42% improvement in work-life balance, and 15% decrease in time spent on internal and administrative tasks.¹³</p>	<p>The Ross Firm</p> <p>Exceeded its business targets after moving to a four-day week and saw sick days taken nearly disappear.</p>	<p>Outcomes First Group</p> <p>Received tremendously positive feedback from its workforce; they truly love and appreciate the time they’ve gained back from that extra day.</p>	<p>Tyler Grange</p> <p>During the trial, Tyler Grange saw productivity reduction in hours, producing 102% of their previous work. However, performance over the first full financial year improved even further, reaching 109% of their work outputs across four days in 2022/23.</p>
<p>Inventium</p> <p>Noted a 26% increase in productivity, a 21% increase in energy levels, and an 18% decrease in stress for employees.¹⁴</p>	<p>Awin</p> <p>Postpilot results at Awin indicated 92% of surveyed participants reported increased productivity; 94% said work-life balance has improved, and a 33% reduction in regrettable employee turnover.¹⁵</p>	<p>Healthwise</p> <p>Witnessed a massive drop in attrition after rolling out its four-day week.</p>	<p>Common Future</p> <p>Collected data on sentiment throughout the pilot and its further continuation, and it has seen very high sentiment as reported by employees in regard to the benefit and work-life balance.</p>

Source: *The Josh Bersin Company, 2023*

Avoiding the Panacea Pitfall

Given the opportunity for positive outcomes with a four-day week, what challenges could arise? As Banks Benitez, former CEO at Unchartered, which merged with Common Future in 2022, and now Head of Venture Development at Ezra Climate, said, “I tell teams a lot that if you think the four-day work week is a panacea to all the problems in your business, you misunderstand it, and that actually it’s more powerful as a diagnostic tool.” The four-day week can surface problems in communication and trust, work inefficiencies, and barriers to productivity; and while it can therefore provide an opportunity to address these challenges, Joe O’Connor adds, “This is not a cheap fix; this is very hard work.”

Although the preparation and work redesign outlined in this report are intended to mitigate some of the challenges that could arise when moving to a four-day week, it’s impossible to tackle everything upfront. Here are some of obstacles that can arise, and how you can go about addressing them.

- **Lack of infrastructure in place to make work-time reduction possible.** Without the proper preparation and concerted efforts to remove administrative burdens, address communication challenges, and properly distribute work, it will be very challenging to expect employees to deliver the same level of productivity while working 20% fewer hours. If your organization is currently dealing with unsustainable workloads, where employees regularly work way over and above their contracted hours, your first step should not be introducing an entirely new work-week structure. Instead, the principles and practices successfully applied by four-day week companies can help drive efficiency and improve prioritization within the existing work model so that employees have greater control over their workday and balance in their working lives.¹⁴¹⁵
- **Lack of adoption.** Successfully implementing a four-day work week requires a cultural and work style shift. If several employees or leaders don’t embrace this change, whether due to personal preference or perceived limitations, it can set expectations among other employees that they should be working beyond the intended schedule. And this can be a slippery slope. It is crucial to monitor adoption closely,

¹⁴ “Our 4-Day Week Trial: The Results Are In!” PRAXIS.

¹⁵ “Company implements four day work week with ‘fantastic’ results,” Dr. Amantha Imber/ Inventium, February 20, 2021.

and if you notice a shift or a few employees that are consistently working a fifth day, try to get to the root cause. Encourage leadership to set a positive example as well. You can also introduce policies that allow for flexibility to work on the fifth day without disrupting others, reinforcing a sense of autonomy and empowerment among employees.

- **Entitlement from employees.** The organizations we spoke to set clear expectations with their employees that maintaining productivity and meeting goals was essential to maintaining the four-day work week. However, during busy periods, some organizations temporarily reverted to a five-day work week¹⁶ or required employees to work on those days off. This usually led to pushback from employees who considered the four-day week as a perk that was being taken away from them. In such cases, proper realignment around expectations can be helpful, and this is also why it's important to very clearly set expectations around the program's contingency upfront.
- **Reduction in social connection time.** When condensing work time, one of the nonessential areas that can be impacted is the time for social connection—whether virtual or in person. That said, social connections at work are important to foster engagement, collaboration, and a positive culture. One organization expressed that the lack of social time was a challenge. As a result, they deliberately focused on creating connection through all-hands sessions and weekly standups, because relationship-building is important to prioritize and make time for.
- **Industry-specific complexities.** Challenges can arise for organizations with onsite or frontline workers, talent shortages, or those operating on nontraditional hours that require specific coverage. In the nonprofit space, funding can be based on the number of hours that employees are working, making it difficult to navigate a 20% reduction in hours. While our research largely covers organizations in knowledge work or professional services, Outcomes First Group is a great example of an organization tackling some of these challenges in education and caretaking. They've empowered each frontline team to get creative around how they can make work-time reduction happen, considering the unique requirements of their roles.

¹⁶ Case study: [Awin's four-day work week wonders](#), Peter Crush/TLNT, July 25, 2023.

It is also worth noting that while our research included companies with roughly 10 to 4,500 employees, it did not include any very large enterprises. The truth is, rolling out a four-day week may be easier to tackle at a smaller organization with fewer silos where it can move more quickly. However, that's not to say it cannot be done at larger organizations. Unilever in Australia and New Zealand and Microsoft in Japan are two examples of larger companies that implemented fourday-week pilots for a portion of their workforce. In larger, more complex organizations with significant differentiation across countries and time zones as well as functional groups, this can often look more like a 12- to 24- month transformation project rather than a 3- to 6-month pilot.

What's Next?

With growing evidence supporting the viability and effectiveness of four-day work weeks and other reduced work-time models, we expect a gradual, steady increase in their adoption over the coming years. This shift will be driven by organizations' competitive drive to distinguish their employee value propositions and give themselves an edge when it comes to talent attraction and retention. Other organizations will become fast followers in response to the competitive pressure from early adopters in their industry. While the critical mass of adoption to date has by and large been among small and medium-size enterprises, we expect to see a sizable number of strategically significant, mid-market firms make this switch across various industries within one to two years.

A shorter work week now stands as one of a suite of different options for workplace flexibility available to HR and people leaders. It is not only a more ambitious and attractive model from a benefits perspective for employees than many other options but also it offers other unique virtues. It serves as a structured form of flexibility, ensuring fair and universal access and distribution of rewards while incentivizing collective responsibility, accountability, engagement, and action, which more discretionary, individualized models do not achieve. Moreover, there are signs that after decades of individual employee preferences that were geared toward increased consumption and luxury over leisure, Gen Z and future generations are now prioritizing sustainability, experiences, and time. Organizations will need to respond to this trend in the incentives and benefits they offer.

Finally, artificial intelligence and other advances in technology and automation cannot be overlooked as another driver of exponential growth for reduced-hour work models. This has already greatly expanded the scope and potential for

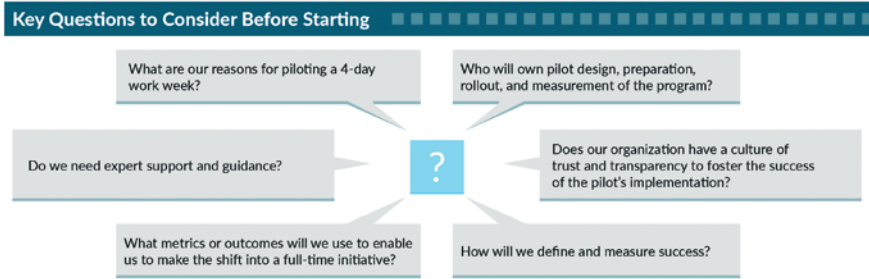
workplace efficiencies by helping organizations fill talent gaps and enabling employees to focus their time on more meaningful work.

As we continue moving forward in the Post-Industrial Age, organizations must be more dynamic to stay ahead. This requires the ability to adopt new ways of working and pivot quickly to adapt to the market and the needs of their employees.¹⁷ We predict that the leaders of tomorrow will be those who embrace technology, optimize productivity, leverage flexibility, and attract and retain the best talent through an employee proposition that centers around a greater quality of life.

¹⁷ The Definitive Guide to Building a Dynamic Organization, Josh Bersin and Kathi Enderes, PhD/The Josh Bersin Company, 2023.

The Four-Day Work Week Action Guide

PURPOSE: This guide summarizes key considerations and tactical steps for implementing a four-day work week.



Pilot Preparation

<p>Get buy-in from leadership and employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will we gauge interest in running a pilot? Will we create a formal policy around this initiative for employees? What kind of opt-in will we allow for? 	<p>Position the pilot as an experiment with clear expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is expected of employees to carry the pilot forward? How will we communicate our expectations to employees? 	<p>Crowdsource potential obstacles from employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we solicit input from employees prior to rollout on what obstacles they anticipate? What does employee listening look like? 	
<p>Redesign work for productivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What defines productive work? How can we use technology to scale or automate processes? What are best practices in preserving productive work time? 	<p>Think through operational changes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which day will employees have off? How will we handle vacation days, sick days, and holidays? What are our communication norms on days off? 	<p>Be transparent with clients and external stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will we communicate our pilot with external stakeholders? What are our client communication expectations on days off? How will we measure client satisfaction? 	<p>Set up key metrics for success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will we define success? What metrics will we measure around productivity, financial, people, and client outcomes?

Measuring Outcomes

Category	Metrics
Program Adoption	Employee participation rates, hours worked on 5th day
Employee Outcomes	Recruitment, retention, employee engagement, employee burnout, eNPS, sick leave, absenteeism
Customer Outcomes	NPS, customer satisfaction scores, client retention
Business Outcomes	Total revenue, revenue per employee, project completions, business goal attainment, team productivity
Other	Energy use

Source: *The Josh Bersin Company, 2023*

The Josh Bersin Company Membership

The Josh Bersin Company provides a wide range of research and advisory services to help HR leaders and professionals tackle the ever-evolving challenges and needs of today's workforce. We cover all topics in HR, talent, and L&D. The Josh Bersin Academy— built on our research and powered by Nomadic Learning— helps HR practitioners grow key foundational skills. Our corporate membership program provides HR teams and senior leaders with the skills, strategies, and insights to build cutting-edge HR and people strategies through a combination of research, assessments, professional development, exclusive events, and community. In 2022, The Josh Bersin Company introduced the Global Workforce Intelligence (GWI) Project to guide market-leading businesses and their leaders through the challenges of industry convergence while remaining future-focused. For more details, contact us at info@bersinpartners.com.

The Work Time Reduction Center of Excellence

The Work Time Reduction Center of Excellence is on a mission to change the way the world works. It is the world's leading consulting and research organization supporting future-forward businesses to implement shorter work weeks. Its world renowned experts help organizations work smarter, not longer, to deliver sustained results. The company designs shorter workweek solutions, helps streamline processes, and provides operational diagnostic assessments. For more details, go to <https://worktimereduction.com>

The world around us is changing ever more rapidly. Those changes are impacting all of us but not equally. The core of a Just Transition is that no people, communities, economic sectors or regions are to be left behind as we transition to a low carbon future.

To ensure a Just Transition we need to:

- Support sustainable agricultural practice to ensure the long-term viability of the sector and consider how the projected increase in agricultural emissions can be offset.
- Resource and deliver a Just Transition programme which should contain as a minimum re-training and support for those communities who will be most impacted by the loss of employment.
- Increase investment in sustainable public transport and introduce hard infrastructure for cycling.
- Invest in renewable energy and retrofitting on the scale required to meet our national climate ambition and maintain energy security.
- Ring-fence carbon tax for a Just Transition.

A transformation of how we live is coming one way or the other; climate change is already taking its toll on both our natural environment and human society. The question will be whether public policy is used to shape that future in a way that is humane, ecologically sound and just.

The chapters in this book were presented at a policy conference on the topic of 'A Just Transition' organised by Social Justice Ireland.



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