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Just Transition in Lower Austria

Abstract

This master's thesis explores how the concept of Just Transition manifests in the public discourse of Lower Austria and the positions taken by key policy actors. The research question addressed is: "How does the issue of Just Transition manifest itself in the Lower Austrian public discourse, and how do the policy actors take position towards it?" To answer this, a qualitative document analysis is conducted on key documents from the workers' side, the business side, and the political-administrative system.

The analysis shows that there is consensus on the necessity of a transition to a sustainable economy; however, the actors' perspectives differ significantly from each other. The workers' side emphasizes social justice, workers' protection, and fair and just measures for those most affected by the transition. In contrast, the business side focuses on technological innovation and economic growth, with less emphasis on social aspects. The political-administrative system seeks a balance in between, aiming for economic growth but fostering social inclusion and social measures.

The findings underline that "Just Transition" is a multifaceted and contested concept, with varying interpretations depending on the actor's perspective. This thesis contributes to understanding the differing positions of the Lower Austrian actors and highlights tensions in achieving a balanced and inclusive "Just Transition."

Abstract auf Deutsch

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie sich das Konzept Just Transition im öffentlichen Diskurs in Niederösterreich manifestiert und welche Positionen die wichtigsten politischen Akteure dazu einnehmen. Die Forschungsfrage lautet: „Wie manifestiert sich das Thema ‚Just Transition‘ im öffentlichen Diskurs in Niederösterreich und wie positionieren sich die politischen Akteure dazu?“. Zur Beantwortung dieser Frage wird eine qualitative Dokumentenanalyse von Schlüsseldokumenten der Arbeitnehmer:innenseite, der Unternehmensseite und des politisch-administrativen Systems durchgeführt.

Die Analyse zeigt, dass es zwar einen Konsens über die Notwendigkeit des Übergangs zu einer nachhaltigen Wirtschaft gibt, dass sich die Perspektiven der Akteure jedoch deutlich unterscheiden. Die Arbeitnehmer:innenseite legt den Schwerpunkt auf soziale Gerechtigkeit, Arbeitnehmerschutz und gerechte Maßnahmen für diejenigen, die vom Übergang am stärksten betroffen sind. Im Gegensatz dazu konzentriert sich die Unternehmensseite auf technologische Innovation und wirtschaftliches Wachstum und weniger auf soziale Aspekte. Das politisch-administrative System versucht beides zu vereinen, indem es zwar Wirtschaftswachstum anstrebt, aber auch eine breite soziale Integration und soziale Maßnahmen fördert.

Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen, dass Just Transition ein vielschichtiges und umstrittenes Konzept ist, das je nach Perspektive der jeweiligen Akteure unterschiedlich interpretiert wird. Diese Arbeit trägt zum Verständnis der unterschiedlichen Positionen der Akteure in Niederösterreich bei und zeigt die Spannungen auf, die beim Streben nach einem ausgewogenen und inklusiven „Gerechten Übergang“ auftreten.

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Introduction

Change does not come easy, neither do transitions. According to Williams and Doyon (2019), transitions, meaning long-term processes of (fundamental) change, have huge impacts on the people, other species, and environments linked to the transitioning system. There are harms and benefits that arise during the process, and according to the authors, it is crucial to examine these processes and effects and include them in attempts to foster the transition (Williams & Doyon 2019). This is the main idea behind the concept of Just Transition. It addresses social consequences that arise with the transition process and tries to distribute burdens and benefits equally. However, there is not only one concept of Just Transition, but manifold understandings and strategies (Wang & Lo 2021).

Talking about the current energy transition, the fossil fuel energy system is intertwined with numerous societal aspects, which need to be considered when shifting to a new system. These aspects include, for example, the job loss of individuals working in the fossil fuel industry, who often face huge difficulties finding new jobs and have to make compromises in their future careers and social lives. Also, other businesses may suffer from the disappearance of the fossil fuel workers since these were their clients. Further, fossil fuel industries are important for the revenue of regions; they may suffer from lower local tax revenue due to a phase-out, which will strongly affect public services. The burden of lower income, higher energy costs, and negative externalities (land use, infrastructure, etc.) is further mostly impacting disadvantaged groups like people of color or countryside residents. Lastly, the identity and culture of individuals and communities suffer from the transition. Not only does a phase-out of the old system create these challenges, but the benefits of the new system are also unevenly distributed. Marginalized groups benefit less from newly created “green jobs” than others; they are less involved in decision-making processes, and access to new technologies is reserved for higher-income households since the upfront costs are high (Carley & Konisky 2020).

Snell (2018) writes that such inequalities and vulnerabilities pose *“a major barrier to achieving meaningful outcomes in national and international environmental politics”* and that the concerned regions need government intervention (Snell 2018, p. 551). Such interventions mean that adaptive capacities are built up, which will enable people and regions to handle the

transition. Williams and Doyon (2019) believe that a transition cannot be successfully sustainable if it is unjust. They argue that leaving behind justice concerns erodes political support for the transition attempts. According to them, transition research has to explicitly consider justice, by which Williams and Doyon (2019) mean *“the fair, equitable, and respectful treatment of humans, other species, and the environment.”* (Williams & Doyon 2019, p. 145). According to them, the rather technology-focused transition perspective of transition needs to engage more with social justice issues, as it is done by the Just Transition concept (Williams & Doyon 2019).

According to the Green Deal, Just Transition aims to leave no one behind, neither people nor regions, during Europe’s transition towards a resource-efficient and competitive economy. The ILO specifies that Just Transition tries to *“(…) maximize the social and economic opportunities of climate action, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges”* (ILO 2024). Dating back to the labor movement in the USA in 1970, Just Transition is a concept with a rich history. The term and concept behind have changed throughout the times, being used differently by different actors, up until now. Just Transition has found its way into global policies like the European Green Deal with its Just Transition Fund. In this context, Just Transition is applied in various European regions. Also, several Austrian regions are eligible to receive support from the Just Transition Fund, so two regions in Lower Austria, namely Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen and Niederösterreich-Süd.

Lower Austria is the largest region of Austria with its 19180,08 km² and second largest in terms of population with 1,723,723 inhabitants on 01.01.2024 (Statistik Austria 2025). Lower Austria’s capital is Sankt Pölten, where the government is based, with the ÖVP currently being the strongest force under Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner (Amt der NÖ Landesregierung 2025). The region lies in the eastern part of Austria, encloses Vienna, and borders the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the north and east, as well as the Austrian region Burgenland in the east and southeast, Styria in the south, and Upper Austria in the west. The landscape ranges from the foothills of the Alps to flatland in the Danube regions, and agriculture and forestry play an important role in Lower Austria (Hemetsberger 2022). Also, culturally, Lower Austria has a rich history, being located in a central place of Europe and with influences from southern and northern climatic conditions (Niederösterreich-Werbung GmbH – Offizielles Tourismus- und Kulturportal des Landes Niederösterreich n.d.). Apart from that, Lower Austria is also a very

heterogeneous region. The differences are noticeable in various aspects such as demographics, economic structure and dynamics, purchasing power, and labor potential, as well as in supply and accessibility (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ¹). In 2021, regarding population dynamics, Lower Austria saw more arrivals than departures, particularly in the region surrounding Vienna. In the alpine region, however, there were more departures, underlining the tension between rapidly growing central regions and peripheral areas. The close location of Vienna is also a factor enhancing commuter mobility (Hemetsberger 2022; Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ). According to the economic strategy of Lower Austria, the region is a dynamic economic area with solid economic growth, often surpassing the Austrian average. The region also has key transport routes, including road, rail, waterways, and the Airport Vienna-Schwechat. According to the IV (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE), Lower Austria has a rich industrial history. Still today, the industry contributes to around 30% of the economic performance of Lower Austria and secures 55% of the generated wealth. Exports are an important factor since almost half of the turnover is generated abroad (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE). Their strong reliance on industry is one reason why two Lower Austrian regions are eligible for the Just Transition Fund. In order to qualify as a region to receive the funding, the greenhouse gas intensity of the economy must be 85% above the Austrian average. There must be an above-average proportion of employees working in the GHG-intensive economic sectors (12%, AT average: 5%) or in industry and commerce (38%, AT average: 23%) (JTP Ö). The Just Transition Fund supports the regions during their transition towards a sustainable economy in order to ensure a balance between environmental, economic, and social goals.

According to the Austrian Just Transition Plan, several Austrian regions (including the two Lower Austrian regions) currently receive the Just Transition Fund, and they are seemingly trying to implement a Just Transition. It seems like the public discourse on the topic is not very present. This appears to be a discrepancy, given that climate change is a very pressing matter and publicly known. Also, the risks of climate measures can be heard here and there in daily life. However, the argument that there is the concept of Just Transition being applied to avoid negative outcomes does not seem to be present. This also prevents any discussion on the designed concept and the exact ways of implementation. Out of the observation of this discrepancy, that Just Transition is being applied but is not very well known in the population,

¹ References like this one, quoted without year, are documents used for the analysis. They are listed in the Annex.

questions arise, such as: How is the topic being treated by the region itself? Does Lower Austria take into consideration the fact that the Just Transition Fund is partly funding them? To what extent is Just Transition discussed in their discourse? Out of these reflections, the research question arises for this master thesis:

How does the issue of Just Transition manifest itself in the Lower Austrian public discourse, and how do the policy actors take positions towards it?

What public discourse is and who the policy actors are remains to be defined. According to the dictionary (Collins 2025), “public” means the people in general, all or from a particular country or community, while “discourse” is the spoken or written communication between people, especially on serious topics. The “public discourse” is part of a dynamic process in which policy actors try to assert their understandings, ideas, and political goals (Turowski 2010). “Policy actors” are individuals or groups that are directly or indirectly affiliated to or affected by the policy process. Governments, businesses, NGOs, civil organizations, communities, and individuals can be policy actors (Dubé & Schmithüsen 2003). For this master thesis, the public discourse of Lower Austria will be represented by three major parts of society: workers on the one hand, businesses on the other, and lastly, the political-administrative system. The workers' side will be represented by ÖGB and AK, representatives of interests for workers/employees. The business side will be represented by WKÖ and IV, representatives of interests for businesses/employers/industries. The political-administrative system represents itself via publications of the federal state of Lower Austria and affiliated organizations. The public discourse in Lower Austria should be represented quite well by these organizations.

Why is this topic even relevant? According to Wang and Lo (2021), there are several strands of literature on Just Transition and manyfold theories and definitions on the topic. However, authors (Snell 2018; Wang & Lo 2021) state that there is a lack of empirical evidence of practical applications of Just Transition. The efficiency and problems of currently applied Just Transition projects are barely treated in literature. This master's thesis contributes to filling this research gap on the practical implementation of Just Transition by conducting research on the manifestation of Just Transition in the Lower Austrian public discourse. It represents the implementation of Just Transition in Lower Austria. Depending on the results, further

research in this direction can be done, bringing up even more details on this example, which can potentially lead to supporting a successful Just Transition in Lower Austria or sharpening the concept and implementation of Just Transition there.

The goal of this work is to answer the research question. This will be done through a qualitative content analysis of documents from the respective organizations.

After this introduction, the theory on the relevant topics and the policy context will be elaborated before the research methods are explained. The results section follows, first a short quantitative overview and then the detailed qualitative results. The results are interpreted and discussed together with the literature in the discussion. After this, the limitations of the research and an outlook are presented. The thesis is wrapped up in the last part, and the research question answered in the conclusion.

Conceptual perspectives

This theoretical part elaborates on the underlying concepts and academic literature on Just Transition, explaining what a Just Transition is, why it is necessary, and reflecting on different forms of justice. Further, the organizations that have been analyzed are introduced.

Just Transition Literature

The term Just Transition is discussed a lot in recent literature. Generally speaking, Just Transition is often understood as the attempt to consider vulnerable groups when planning a transition and to limit negative effects on them (Wang & Lo 2021). The International Labor Organization (ILO) specifies that this transition is needed to tackle pressing environmental challenges. In this context, they define the Just Transition as a greening of the economy in a fair and inclusive way for everyone concerned. *“A Just Transition involves maximizing the social and economic opportunities of climate action, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges”* (ILO 2024).

History of Just Transition

Following Stevis and Felli (2015), the origins of Just Transition date back to 1970 in the USA, where the energy and chemical sectors were affected by environmental policies, putting in danger the workers in the corresponding industries. Tony Mazzocchi, a leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW), held the opinion that the liberal capitalist system shifted negative externalities of an environmental transition to workers and communities. The unions' role here was to prevent a negative outcome for the affected workers and communities, but at the same time, it was admitted that environmental protection was also important. Mazzocchi was aware that an environmentally friendly economy could also create an equal amount, if not more, jobs than the unsustainable sectors, so that according to his perception *"environmental protection and jobs are not inherently at odds"* (Stevis & Felli 2015, p. 32). A superfund for workers was created to mitigate negative environmental impacts by financing retraining and social protection programs. In 1990, the concept was broadened when the OCAW allied with environmental justice groups. The international diffusion of Just Transition principles happened by the union's participation in global environmental negotiations (Wang & Lo 2021). In 1997, the OCAW made a resolution calling explicitly for a "Just Transition". That time was also what Stevis and Felli (2020) define as the first period of usage of the term "Just Transition". Between 1980 and 2000, the term Just Transition was used to describe a democratic socialist strategy and a discussion between unions and environmentalists. The focus here was mostly on hazardous sectors, like, for example, toxins (Stevis & Felli 2020). The CLC (Canadian Labor Congress) created a whole program of action on the matter of Just Transition, and the British Trade Union Congress set up a Just Transition agenda in 2007 (Stevis & Felli 2015). According to Stevis and Felli (2020), this falls into the second period, which was between 2001 and 2008, when the term Just Transition was abandoned in the US but was used by unions elsewhere as well as by global union organizations. In Spain, for example, the term has been institutionalized, and a labor environmentalist NGO developed out of this (Stevis & Felli 2020). The UNEP, the ITUC, and ILO worked together to promote green jobs as part of JT. Unions were more and more involved in international organizations and more active in climate negotiations, being observers at the COPs and also creating resolutions demanding more emission reduction. The unions have become important societal stakeholders fighting for decent green jobs and a Just Transition, which was finally agreed on in 2010 at the UN Climate Change Conference (Wang & Lo 2021).

This is how the Just Transition concept became global and how the global labor unions organizations got their role in the environment (Stavis & Felli 2015). However, during that time, the great recession occurred and opened up the third period of using the term Just Transition. Since the green growth part of the Just Transition concept stirred hope for an end to the crisis then, a more pronounced focus was laid upon green growth and green capitalism. Before, these had been secondary factors of Just Transition, but since then, organizations like the UNEP, ILO, or ITUC put the Just Transition part second after Green Jobs as a priority. However, at the same time, labor environmentalists and climate justice activists started to work together instead of just parallel to each other (Stavis & Felli 2020). The fourth period of usage of the Just Transition term is described by Stavis and Felli (2020) as the full planetarization of the concept since 2013. More and more statements and strategies by international unions, organizations, and even the World Bank emerged. Just Transition was recognized in foreign policy and was adopted by several countries (Stavis & Felli 2020).

Yet, there is a variety of opinions towards the environment within unions and also a variability in strategies due to the union's positionality and preferences in the political economy. Anyway, Just Transition and Green Jobs have served as a common frame for holding different opinions together and have become important representatives of the voice of labor in global negotiations (Stavis & Felli 2015). Being initially a union initiative on hazardous sectors, the Just Transition concept has finally become broader than it was originally conceptualized. It evolved over the past four decades into a complex policy framework and was adopted and adapted by academics, environmentalists, and governmental and non-governmental organizations (Galgóczy 2020; Snell 2018; Stavis & Felli 2015; Stavis & Felli 2020).

Why is a Just Transition needed?

The sustainability transition wants to transform the current unsustainable system and put in place a sustainable one. Transitions, however, never come easy. For a transition process, not only does the new system need to be put into place, but the old system also has to come to an end. For example, it is not enough to create more and more renewable energy sources; the old system of fossil fuels needs to be actively stopped simultaneously. The same is true for other unsustainable practices. This so-called “phase-out” is linked to complex challenges. Williams and Doyon (2019) emphasize that transitions, meaning long-term processes of

(fundamental) change, have huge impacts on the people, other species, and environments linked to the transitioning system. There are harms and benefits that arise during the process, and according to the authors, it is crucial to examine these processes and effects and include them in attempts to foster the transition (Williams & Doyon 2019). Talking about the current energy transition, the fossil fuel energy system is intertwined with numerous societal aspects, which need to be considered when shifting to a new system. These aspects include, for example, the job loss of individuals working in the fossil fuel industry, who often face huge difficulties finding new jobs and have to make compromises in their future careers and social lives. Also, other businesses may suffer from the disappearance of the fossil fuel workers since these were their clients. Further, fossil fuel industries are important for the revenue of regions; they may suffer from lower local tax revenue due to a phase-out, which will strongly affect public services. The burden of lower income, higher energy costs, and negative externalities (land use, infrastructure, etc.) is further mostly impacting disadvantaged groups like people of color or countryside residents. Lastly, the identity and culture of individuals and communities suffer from the transition. Not only does a phase-out of the old system create these challenges, but the benefits of the new system are also unevenly distributed. Marginalized groups benefit less from newly created “green jobs” than others; they are less involved in decision-making processes, and access to new technologies is reserved for higher-income households since the upfront costs are high (Carley & Konisky 2020).

Snell (2018) writes that such inequalities and vulnerabilities pose *“a major barrier to achieving meaningful outcomes in national and international environmental politics”* and that the concerned regions need government intervention (Snell 2018, p. 551). Such interventions mean that adaptive capacities are built up, which will enable people and regions to handle the transition. According to Carley and Konisky (2020), these could comprise workforce and economic diversification programs, energy and weatherization assistance programs, enlarged access to energy technology, collective action initiatives, and new business models. The policies should also go further than that and not only include the endangered workforce but also marginalized groups in general. They point out that social assistance programs are generally very useful for energy justice because of their effort for general welfare (Carley & Konisky 2020). Williams and Doyon (2019) believe that a transition cannot be successfully sustainable if it is unjust. They argue that leaving behind justice concerns erodes political support for the transition attempts. According to them, transition research has to explicitly

consider justice, by which Williams and Doyon (2019) mean *“the fair, equitable, and respectful treatment of humans, other species, and the environment.”* (Williams & Doyon 2019, p. 145). The rather technology-focused transition perspective needs, therefore, to engage more with social justice issues, as it is done by the Just Transition concept (Williams & Doyon 2019).

Following this goal, to include matters of justice in the sustainability transition, the concept of Just Transition has received increasing attention in the past years. However, there are different strands of literature on Just Transition. Several attempts have been made to categorize the different understandings of Just Transition, as well as the underlying concepts. The research of Wang and Lo (2021) is one of such attempts. They conducted a literature review on Just Transition definitions and identified five themes around which Just Transition has been discussed. One theme of research is centered around a rather historical approach on how Just Transition emerged from the labor movement and is seen as a labor-oriented concept. There is also literature linking Just Transition to justice-related literature presenting it as an integrated framework for justice (Wang & Lo 2021). Wang and Lo (2021) write that in fact, this category of Just Transition literature is an open space for interdisciplinary approaches, and that justice approaches have to be combined to make a robust framework. Another strand of Just Transition literature is based on the sociotechnical transition framework, the Multilevel Perspective by Geels and the transition management approach (Wang & Lo 2021). According to the authors (Wang & Lo 2021) Just Transition is also seen as a governance strategy by one strand of literature emphasizing the importance of a broad coalition of actors and engagement with local initiatives. The last strand of literature they mention treats Just Transition as a public perception. The public perception of different energy sources and energy transition and their influences are subject to this strand of literature. It is emphasized here that the acceptance of renewable energy has to be facilitated in order to succeed in an energy transition, so there needs to be fair compensation, trust-building, and enough attention paid to locally relevant social values (Wang & Lo 2021).

According to Wang and Lo (2021), there are tensions between the different understandings of Just Transition (Wang & Lo 2021). They found that each approach identifies different causes of injustice. However, among all the understandings, there is a shared goal. According to Wang and Lo (2021), the shared goal is to identify the vulnerable, but the approaches do have different understandings of who is considered vulnerable. Some focus on male-dominated

workers, so mainly unemployment compensation and skill training are used as strategies. Others have a more holistic view of injustice along factors like low income, rural areas, or health issues, so the injustice is more rooted in race, class, and gender. From a governance view, the political system is at the root of injustice. Further, there can be large-scale injustices but also decentralized, unfairly distributed harms and benefits.

Snell (2018) points out that Just Transition lacks conceptual clarity. The author, however, sees this lack of clarity of the concept as a strong benefit, as this provides the necessary flexibility to translate theory into practice. As the attempts to apply Just Transition to real cases may differ largely from one another, diverse conceptualizations may be useful for the different contexts and understandings of specific cases (Snell 2018). The same counts for Felli (2014), who states that “‘*Just Transition*’ owes its success to the fact that it has somehow become an empty signifier through which conflicting visions can be expressed without, however, having to expose their disagreements.” (Felli 2014, p. 379). Wang and Lo (2021) take into consideration these disagreements. They state that the term Just Transition has become more complicated in the last years since there are different definitions, viewpoints, and understandings of it. There are tensions between the different understandings of Just Transition, and it is not always clear from which strand of literature the according understanding of Just Transition stems, so, according to Wang and Lo (2021), it has become more and more important to differentiate them and recognize the tension between the strands.

For this work, it is helpful to have a bigger overview and understanding of different strands of literature; however, the analysis will need to look deeper into the approaches to Just Transition and underlying justice concepts. This is why the following will focus more closely on those conceptualizations.

Justice and Just Transition Frameworks

Justice can mean many different things, so it is important to first shed an eye on what is understood by justice before diving into Just Transition. One very basic concept of justice that is recurrent in different approaches is distinguishing different aspects of justice. Here a short resumé of them:

- Distributional justice looks at how burdens and benefits are distributed (Heffron 2021; Williams & Doyon 2019).
- Procedural justice is about the legal process and steps, as well as the inclusion and exclusion of people within processes (Heffron 2021; Williams & Doyon 2019).
- Recognition justice is on which groups of people (also marginalized groups) and their pluralist needs are considered (Heffron 2021; Williams & Doyon 2019).
- Cosmopolitan justice takes into account the effects that go beyond borders and the global context (Heffron 2021).
- Restorative justice treats injustices that should be rectified (Heffron 2021).

Furthermore, several scholars consider the three scholarships of climate justice, environmental justice, and energy justice (CEE) as fundamental to Just Transition (Heffron 2021; McCauley & Heffron 2018). McCauley and Heffron (2018) analyze each of the three justice scholarships along the justice aspects of distributional, procedural, and restorative justice, which they can find in all three scholarships, however, to different extent:

Environmental justice, rooted in activism, balances social and environmental aspects of transitions. It includes distributional, recognition, and procedural justice, but they mention that it focuses more on local issues and does not address a broader context of social problems. Some labor-driven Just Transition organizations are criticized for just shifting unsustainable practices elsewhere without easing environmental-economic tensions (McCauley & Heffron 2018).

Climate justice advocates for global fairness and equity and addresses social inequalities by framing historical responsibility, finance, loss and damage, human rights, and adaptation. It also includes intergenerational, restorative, distributive, and procedural justice (McCauley & Heffron 2018). Wang and Lo (2021) suggest linking climate justice with Just Transition through more grassroots approaches.

Energy justice extends to environmental justice, focusing on fair energy distribution and inclusive decision-making. The procedural, distributional, recognition, and restorative justice are included. They aim to reduce and reveal injustices; however, according to Wang and Lo (2021) the approach lacks an understanding of social injustice issues as political and economic structures are not looked at and injustices are just identified but not solved. Some adaptations have been made, and Healy & Barry (cit. after Wang & Lo 2021) finally say that energy justice

could benefit from engaging with the Just Transition concept. It could help to theorize social benefits and changes beyond the energy sector (Wang & Lo 2021).

According to McCauley and Heffron (2018), there was an evolution within the three scholarships (CEE) from a rather quantitative reflection on distributional justice, especially within the environmental justice scholarship, which, as was said above, focused a lot on proximity. Later on, procedural justice became more of a focus as a more qualitative approach was adopted. Restorative justice is, according to the authors (McCauley & Heffron 2018), still underdeveloped. They conclude that, in general, a more rapid transformation is needed, that justice concerns must go beyond the local scale, and that scholars in justice branches must urge for a more global scope of justice. Williams and Doyon (2019) additionally stated a lack of consideration of power and politics within the transition literature.

As McCauley and Heffron (2018) write, all three concepts suffer from a *“lack of joint conceptual space for reflection”* (McCauley & Heffron 2018, p. 1). They argue that scholars must stop treating their concepts as separate constructs but reflect on them together and unite them under a new understanding of Just Transition, where especially distributional and restorative justice must be present. Heffron (2021) states literally: *“A Just Transition is a societal goal, and the three communities of CEE justice scholars need to think together and have as their common purpose a Just Transition.”* (Heffron 2021, p. 16). For too long, justice has been aimed for through just one of the lenses, leaving behind certain other aspects of justice. According to Heffron (2021), such a union can increase public acceptance and understanding and finally reduce inequality and injustice in society (Heffron 2021). Heffron (2021) also puts forward that geography must be more closely linked to law when it comes to the topic of justice. Legal and geographical research must work interdisciplinary here, so he applies a *“legal geography”* perspective. Here, all five justice forms (distributive, cosmopolitanism, recognition, restorative, and procedural) are seen as necessary to ensure human rights across the energy life cycle, and space and time are also considered (Heffron 2021). Based on such reflections, Heffron (2021) has developed the JUST framework that shows in a structured way the different justice aspects that a Just Transition should entail, uniting the aspects of justice that are also found within the three justice scholarships (CEE). The Letters JUST stand for Justice, Universal, Space, and Time, and the 5 different justice forms are all part of the framework. It shall enable the identification of problems and the provision of research and policy-led conclusions (Heffron 2021).

Stavis and Felli (2016) also provide a framework to address the matter of justice. They state that there are various (and contested) approaches to Just Transition, with different importance assigned to aspects of justice within these approaches. Stevis and Felli (2016) develop a typology of (in)justice, where different types of justice and their upsides and downsides are outlined. In contrast to other authors, they do not focus on the often-used dimensions of distribution, recognition, participation, etc., within their typology, but distinguish between social or environmental focuses of the justice concept. The social standing can range from social equality to social inequality. (Only here will distribution or recognition set in, as inequality may stem from bad distribution, for example.) The environmental standing ranges from denying that nature has any ontological or moral value, the so-called anthropocentrism, to the primacy of nature, the strong ecocentrism. Combining these extremes results in four types (Stavis & Felli 2016):

- Social inequality and anthropocentrism (environmental injustice)
- Social equality and anthropocentrism (environmental justice)
- Social inequality and ecocentrism (ecological injustice)
- Social equality and ecocentrism (ecological justice)

Environmental injustice is where there is social inequality happening and an anthropocentric world-view applied. Environmental justice is a state of social equality, so for example, equally distributed harms and benefits; however, there is still an anthropogenic worldview in the sense that there is adaptation to harms, for example via technology, rather than their mitigation (ecomodernist technological utopias) (Stavis & Felli 2016). Ecological injustice is marked by social inequality combined with an ecocentric worldview. This means, for example, that land is preserved at the expense of vulnerable groups or forced displacement happens for the sake of nature. Ecological justice also applies an ecocentric world-view. However, social equality is met anyway, social choices are embedded with nature, and nature's wellbeing is a parameter that informs policy (Stavis & Felli 2016).

Stavis and Felli (2016) also mention temporal injustice, which may occur when some practice is exercised in the hope of having better technologies later to solve the resulting problems or unintentionally displacing costs and danger across time. Concerning space, they created a typology of the geographies of justice, taking into account the scale, meaning the location of an activity and its scope, so what and who is included, e.g., only one branch or a whole value

chain. Four combinations of narrow or broad scale and scope result in this framework. According to them (Stavis and Felli 2016), narrow scale and narrow scope combinations are prominent in neoliberal solutions. Here, the responsibility lies on an individual; the solution/project is not embedded in a broader reorganization of space and economy, for example, an isolated green building or green jobs without being part of a broader green and just economy. A narrow scale and broad scope solution is, for example, the greening of a city. It is described as an island of sustainability that may cause more resource and energy consumption outside. The formal scale is the city, where diverse practices may indeed be more sustainable, but the impact on the broader scale is not taken into account. An example of a broad scale and narrow scope solution is the lifecycle of an individual product. Broad scale and broad scope would be the greening of the world's political economy (Stavis & Felli 2016). Another important overarching point in their differentiation is whether the Just Transition approach is affirmative or transformative towards the current political economy. Combining the Varieties of (in)justice with these two results in four Ideal types. Affirmative environmental justice, for example, wants to avoid environmental burdens on the weak via politics, so it affirms the current system and tries to create change within it. A transformative approach sees less potential in the current system and wants to transform the system deeply in order to solve the problems (Stavis & Felli 2015). The authors (Stavis & Felli 2015) point out that some positions are more self-serving than others; here, the particular interest comes before the general interest. This results in what Stevis and Felli (2015) call “militant particularism,” where competition and individual interest are put forward. However, many approaches are still based on ethos and searching for social justice. Here, collaboration and the general interest are of higher value. According to Stevis and Felli (2015), the goal of the Just Transition Strategies should be to minimize dynamics that lead to militant particularism.

As the above-mentioned characteristics show, “Green” is not always just. Stevis and Felli (2015) state that the varieties of justice reflect the politics of their various advocates. According to several scholars (Felli 2014; Cahill & Allen 2020; Snell 2018; Krawchenko & Gordon 2021; Stevis & Felli 2015; Stevis & Felli 2016; Wang & Lo 2021) there is no such thing as **one** definition of Just Transition, but the different positions and approaches result in different Just Transition Strategies: According to Felli (2014) Just Transition can mean anything ranging from “including workers into discussions” to “revolution”. Cahill and Allen (2020) explain that the topic is vague and vast due to the manifold underlying disciplines and

ideologies, each of which has its own definition of just transition. In their framework, they describe and visualize the broad landscape of Just Transition definitions by mapping the possible distributional impacts and intention of transitions as well as the extent of social inclusion comprising recognition and procedural justice (Cahill & Allen 2020). Snell (2018) categorizes the differences between Just Transition interpretations according to three criteria: fairness, the role of the state, and responsibility. According to Krawchenko and Gordon (2021), the Just Transitions literature comprises 'jobs-focused', 'environment-focused', and 'society-focused' interpretations of Just Transition. Each of them has a different understanding of how to focus their governmental policy support and investment. The authors Felli (2014) and Stevis and Felli (2015; 2016) categorized different Just Transition approaches that prevail among Labor Unions. They stated that there is an overlapping consensus on the importance of social justice and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to avoid negative effects on workers throughout the transition and that this shall be managed mainly by means of public investment (Keynesianism) in order to create a green sector. However, they identify conflicting versions of Just Transitions that prevail even among labor unions (Felli 2014; Stevis & Felli 2015; Stevis & Felli 2016). Felli (2014) developed the three ideal-type strategies of international labor unions, namely a deliberative, a collaborative growth, and a socialist view of Just Transition (Felli 2014). Similarly, Stevis and Felli (2015) identified the three approaches: the shared solution approach, the differentiated responsibility approach, and the social ecological approach (Stevis & Felli 2015). The approaches' solutions differ in affirmation or rejection of the current system. They have different points of view on the origin of environmental destruction and social injustice, and so the proposed solutions are accordingly different. Some focus more on market solutions, while others aim for restructuring, for changes in the balance of power and the socioeconomic context. They put different emphasis on the necessity of competitiveness, public provision, and collaboration and propose different means to reach the goals, such as dialogue or more confrontational pressure from society. Later, Stevis and Felli (2020) published their approach of Planetary Just Transition, which puts into focus the global scale and emphasizes that a broader perspective has to be kept in mind since renewables can also be exploitative and include socially unjust practices.

Critical voices – Potential pitfalls

Scholars have explored not only the Just Transition's history and conceptual characteristics, but they have also raised concerns about potential weaknesses or pitfalls of the concept and its implementation.

Morena et al. (2020) write in their article that the long history of the Just Transition is often not considered by scholars. According to them (Morena et al. 2020), there is a disconnection of the Just Transition Framework from its roots: Since the inclusion of the Just Transition in the Paris Agreement, the concept has paradoxically separated it from its origin. They state that it must not be lost out of sight that the Just Transition is based on four decades of debate, campaigns, and struggles by frontline communities and labor movements. To lose the sense of this origin is described as a de-historicization/uprooting, which could empty the concept of its transformative potential. Analyzing several papers, Morena et al. (2020) reveal that some academic analyses put Just Transition as an ahistorical concept for policymakers, downplaying the essential function of mobilization. They further sum up other scholars' complaints that there were not enough practical empirical examples. Morena et al. (2020) admit that the academic research is young and does not have plenty of empirical examples. However, they remind us that there is a long history of applied programmatic research on the topic conducted by labor unions and organizations. The authors state that it is understandable that the scholars focus on the contemporary use of Just Transition given the urgency of the topic; however, they mention the risk of downgrading and omitting the grassroots and labor contributions to the low-carbon transition (Morena et al. 2020).

Other scholars particularly criticize the domination of the neoclassical school in policymaking nowadays. According to Heffron (2021) many approaches and policies are focused on market-based solutions. According to Heffron (2021), many policymaking approaches to sustainability and just transition exist. In their analysis of national and regional government Just Transition initiatives, Krawchenko and Gordon (2021) confirm such a neoliberal trend. They state that the initiatives mainly focus on jobs and the environment but that the language of social justice in the industrial transition policies is absent. They identified gaps in the use of the social security system, which would, however, be of huge importance to strengthen the population's resilience during a transition (Krawchenko & Gordon 2021).

As shortly mentioned above, since the great recession, a big focus has been laid on the green growth part of Just Transition; however, Stevis and Felli (2016) state that green is not always just. The direction toward green capitalism left behind the initial focus of Just Transition (Stevis & Felli 2020). Heffron (2021) makes this economic focus of the transition responsible for the slow and difficult progress of Just Transition. Eco-efficiency, which means increasing efficiency, is currently very popular; however, if there are not necessarily specific environmental goals and limits behind it, it will have a rebound effect (lower price, more demand, etc). Such solutions, which are badly embedded in a broader reorganization of space and economy, are very prominent in neoliberal solutions, according to Stevis and Felli (2016). Concrete examples are the greening of isolated buildings or the greening of a whole city, which may bring some benefit on the spot. However, the consequences outside the region or further social consequences are not taken into consideration. According to the authors, Just Transition needs to be more focused on the social component and not be a means for “green” capital accumulation or “greenwashing” (Stevis & Felli 2016). Heffron (2021) elaborates that traditional economics have not delivered a positive “just” outcome or sufficient transformation until now but have only increased social inequality. He says that it has to be avoided that the Just Transition policy will be another policy distorted by traditional economic thinking. Rising inequality is a clear policy failure, and the solutions sought are not far-reaching enough (Heffron 2021). Stevis and Felli (2020) mention that renewable practices, technologies, and policies can also be exploitative and socially unjust. With a focus on economic growth in the first place, it is, however, possible that such practices, technologies, and policies are implemented regardless of their negative impacts as long as they support competitiveness (Stevis & Felli 2020). Also, Pianta and Lucchese (2020) state in their analysis of the Green Deal that market-based processes are expected to work poorly. McCauley and Heffron (2018) write that we must stop deliberately committing or tolerating policy failure in the context of neoliberalism and that we need an actual Just Transition instead.

However, within the current system, there are well-established power relations that make it difficult to change the status quo (Baumgartinger-Seiringer 2022). Swilling et al. (2016) state that nothing will happen if there is just policy without thinking of underlying power dynamics and paradigms. This topic of power relations is brought up by several authors (Heffron 2021; Newell & Mulvaney 2013; Evans & Phelan 2016; Healy & Barry 2017; William & Doyon 2019; Stevis & Felli 2020). Newell and Mulvaney (2013) touched upon the topic of power relations

when they explained that “... *the ways in which uneven exposure to environmental benefits and harm is often not accidental and unintentional, but rather a product of a particular way of organising production and its constitutive social relations.*” (Newell & Mulvaney 2013, p. 133). According to Heffron (2021), the dominance of economics and big energy companies had an influence on the rather late arising of the energy justice field. Also, according to Evans and Phelan (2016), fossil fuel actors have hegemonic power in the energy sector. This hegemonic power manifests in some misconceptions around the coal industry that are recurrent in their case study: the population in the concerned region estimates that the coal industry employs many more people than is actually the case (Evans & Phelan 2016). This links well to the statement of Healy and Barry (2017) that power relations need to be taken into consideration for a transition in order to avoid ongoing tensions between decarbonization and justice. Assessing politics, power dynamics, and the political economy of a transition will unveil underlying causes and not just show the unjust consequences of a current system. This lack of consideration of power and politics has also been stated by William and Doyon (2019) in their analysis of transition literature. Power relations are repeatedly mentioned in the energy justice literature (William & Doyon 2019). The power of some very influential actors is particularly problematic as, according to Stevis and Felli (2020), they seek to participate in decision-making, especially when it comes to topics that are important to them. Due to their privileged positions, they will be able to shift parameters in the direction that the capital prefers (Stevis & Felli 2020). Newell and Mulvaney write: “*Because [of the fact that] energy relates so closely to economic growth, security and war, it assumes a prominent place in the geopolitical and economic strategies of ruling elites.*” (Newell & Mulvaney 2013, p. 135). They further state that the interests of the global elites are not aligned with the energy needs of society and environmental vulnerabilities. These uneven power relations and the resulting potential conflict and violence are the reason why attention has to be paid to the political economy of global environmental justice when planning a Just Transition. Since energy allocation and consumption decisions are taken for the public but not democratically, it comes to contradictions between energy security and human rights. The authors remind us that decarbonization strategies can have the patterns of dispossession and exploitation as the current global political economy. Examples are oil purchases from conflict areas or non-democratic countries, land grabs for the sake of renewable fuels, etc. That is why not only social and environmental consequences need to be taken into account for a Just Transition

(Newell & Mulvaney 2013) but also underlying power dynamics and paradigms have to be considered (Swilling et al. 2016).

The authors (Swilling et al. 2016) propose some advice for doing so. According to them, the four dimensions of power dynamics, paradigm commitments, state organization, and policy programs should be respected by policy-related action in which a wide range of actors should be involved inside and outside the formal political system. Stevis and Felli (2015) give some advice on how to deal with this neoliberal focus of Just Transition. There should be a social safety net, public ownership of resources, democratic planning, and production subordinated to human and planetary needs and not to profit. All this has to be achieved by constant pressure from trade unions and allies in society on governments and capital, according to the authors (Stevis & Felli 2015).

Policy context

The Just Transition concept is visibly not standing alone but embedded in a wider policy context. In the EU, this context is, namely, the Green Deal and the Just Transition Fund. They will be introduced in the following.

Green Deal

With the Climate Crisis being one very pressing matter, the Paris Agreement was agreed on by almost all countries worldwide at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015. It has been recognized that the Climate Crisis needs to be addressed globally by transitioning current environmentally unsustainable systems towards systems with more environmentally friendly practices. Since then, the countries have tried to create or adapt their strategies in order to support reaching the goals of the Paris Agreement. In 2019, the European Green Deal was presented by the European Commission. According to them, the European Green Deal shall be an integral part of the UN agenda for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (Sabato & Fronteddu 2020). It is a policy concept that supports the transition of Europe towards a resource-efficient and competitive economy. The concrete overarching goals of the Green Deal are (European Commission 2023b):

- Zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050
- Decoupling growth from resource use
- Leaving no one behind, neither people nor regions

In order to reach these goals, they work on several topics, such as Climate, Energy, Environment and Oceans, Agriculture, Traffic, Industry, Research and Innovation, Finance, regional development, and the New European Bauhaus (European Commission 2023b). These topics each comprise different projects, strategies, and goals, and they are intertwined with each other. The Just Transition Mechanism, for example, is part of the finance and regional development topic, while it is being applied to several projects on various topics. The Industry topic also naturally contains many of the mentioned areas or related ones as mentioned by the Industrial Strategy illustrating the industrial ecosystem: *“14 industrial ecosystems are: aerospace and defence, agri-food, construction, cultural and creative industries, digital, electronics, energy intensive industries, energy-renewables, health, mobility – transport – automotive, proximity, social economy and civil security, retail, textile and tourism”* (European Commission 2023a). With the Just Transition Mechanism being an integral part of the European Green Deal, a Just Transition is explicitly addressed (European Commission 2023a).

Several authors assess the role of the European Green Deal for Just Transition. Sabato and Mandelli (2023), for example, do an overall assessment of the EU's Just Transition initiatives in order to understand their policy instruments and potential. Sabato and Fronteddu (2020) attempted to assess if the European Green Deal is a suitable policy framework to combine environmental and economic objectives with social fairness. The European Green Deal is described as a growth strategy that aims for no emissions. With its eight macro areas, the European Green Deal shall be an integral part of the UN agenda for the SDGs, according to the European Commission. However, there is no clear priority set between environmental, economic, and social objectives. In their research (Sabato & Fronteddu 2020), the European Green Deal policy approach seems to be close to the SDG agenda and is seen as a coherent policy framework. The European Green Deal has a targeted approach to Just Transition with its Just Transition mechanism. This one focuses on negative implications and has a marked geographical and sector-specific character. However, there is no reference to inequality and social rights, but it relies mostly on social investment. Furthermore, it seems to be neglecting broader distributional effects of climate policy, social protection, and inclusion; however, the European pillar of social rights is probably there to take care of these issues, according to the authors. They state that the European Green Deal can be suitable for uniting environmental and social goals but that it has to be looked at through the actions (Sabato & Fronteddu 2020). Sabato and Fronteddu (2020) criticize that the European Green Deal is based on neoclassical

economic theory, on assumptions and debatable ideological foundations of the European Commission, which do not have consensus in academics (Sabato & Fronteddu 2020, p. 37). In 2023, Sabato and Mandelli (2023) also analyze the European Green Deal, more precisely the Just Transition Fund, the EU recovery and resilience facility (an instrument for Next Generation EU), and the social climate fund. They state that the European Green Deal is mainly oriented on economic growth and competitiveness but with a focus on environmental objectives (net-zero). They acknowledge that attention is being paid to trade-offs between economic, environmental, and social objectives, yet they mention that in some inter- and intra-institutional discussions it has been thought of giving more weight to social measures and buffering through social security nets, but the opposition was big enough to avoid this. As a result, the European Green Deal is now more focused on enabling (social investment) than on buffering, which represents the versus “market-making” against “market-correcting” (Sabato & Mandelli 2023). However, the European Commission explicitly stated that one of their main goals was to leave no one behind. Their instrument for reaching this goal via the Just Transition Fund will be further explored in the following chapter.

Just Transition Fund

As mentioned above, achieving climate neutrality by 2050 is part of the European Green Deal. As a consequence, structural changes are necessary in many regions. This sustainable transition is especially hard for regions that rely largely on unsustainable practices. To counter this problem, the regions that meet certain criteria can get support from the Just Transition Fund for sustainable structural changes in order to maintain their competitiveness. 17.5 billion euros are to be invested across the EU between 2021 and 2027, including 135 million in Austria (JTP Ö). The regions in Austria which, according to the JTP Ö, are particularly affected by the transition and therefore require support are identified based on the following (JTP Ö):

- Greenhouse gas intensity of the economy is 85% above the Austrian average
- Above-average proportion of employees work in the GHG-intensive economic sectors (12%, AT average: 5%) or in industry and commerce (38%, AT average: 23%)

The greenhouse gas-intensive industries in Austria that need to be addressed for the sustainable transition are, in particular, the paper and printing (15%), chemical and pharmaceutical production (13%), metal production and processing (13%), and processing of

mineral raw materials (15%) sectors. Industries such as lignite mining, peat extraction, and oil shale production are no longer relevant for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Austria, as this phase-out has already been completed. The aim is to break up the path dependencies of the relevant industries and redesign processes and products without causing relocation to third countries (JTP Ö).

The defined regions in Austria are the following (JTP Ö):

- Lower Austria (Niederösterreich): NUTS 3 AT122 Lower Austria-South (Niederösterreich-Süd), AT121 Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen
- Carinthia (Kärnten): NUTS 3 AT213 Lower Carinthia (Unterkärnten), parts of NUTS 3 AT 211 Klagenfurt Villach (district of Villach Land), parts of AT 212 Upper Carinthia (Oberkärnten) (district of Feldkirchen)
- Upper Austria (Oberösterreich): NUTS 3 AT315 Traunviertel; parts of NUTS 3 AT312 Linz-Wels (districts of Wels-Stadt, Wels-Land); parts of AT 314 Steyr-Kirchdorf (district of Kirchdorf an der Krems)
- Styria (Steiermark): NUTS 3 AT223 Eastern Upper Styria (Östliche Obersteiermark), AT226 Western Upper Styria (Westliche Obersteiermark); parts of NUTS 3 AT221 Graz (district of Graz-Umgebung), parts of AT225 Western and Southern Styria (West- und Südsteiermark) (district of Deutschlandsberg)

These regions will face the greatest socio-economic challenges in transitioning to a climate-neutral economy, and the Just Transition Fund is intended to help overcome precisely these challenges. For this thesis, Lower Austria (NUTS 3) is of particular interest since it contains the two regions AT122 Lower Austria-South (Niederösterreich-Süd) and AT121 Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen, both entitled to receive support from the Just Transition Fund.

The strongly emitting branches are embedded in a system of other sectors that are connected to their activities (supplier, toolmaking, forwarding, gastronomy, education, and research) and which will also be affected by a transition. This is why the transition needs a systemic perspective, and the measures have to be embedded in the regional ecosystem. According to the Just Transition Plan, there are two directions to take (JTP Ö):

- Transformation → Public service helps companies to transform, not funded by the JTF (JTP Ö)

- Diversification and employment → JTF helps to finance new economic activities that go hand in hand with the Green Deal, create a good framework for innovative economic development, and shape the labor market (JTP Ö)

Some lead companies (e.g., Voestalpine, Zellstoff Pöls AG) have their own decarbonizing strategies that will also not be funded by JTF (JTP Ö).

There are already several business support systems in the regions, decentralized regional development management organizations, and clusters in relevant topics. The measures to take shall be place-based, based on existing structures and competencies. Existing industrial and technical competencies shall be used to implement the Just Transition Plan (JTP Ö). More concretely, the planned measures comprise investment in employment and sustainability, as well as support of R&D and projects for low-emission technologies. It is aimed at the development of competencies and qualifications for shaping the labor market, and the measures shall complement and be coordinated with EU programs. These measures described in the Just Transition Plan are not region-specific, and they are also not to be understood as a uniform development concept. They rather serve as an orientation on what projects are to be funded by the Just Transition Fund (JTP Ö).

In Austria, the JTF is not one single fund in itself, but it has been integrated into the two national funding programs IBW/EFRE & JTF and ESF + employment & JTF (JTP Ö, p. 21-22). In each of them, the JTF has its own priority. In the IBW/EFRE & JTF, the measures are focused on innovation and investment-based interventions for diversification and employment in the region. The second funding program, ESF + Employment & JTF, is complementary to that focused on qualification and employment of unemployed. The regions implement the Just Transition Plan, leaning on their regional strategies in order to take into account the regional potentials (JTF-EFRE).

Organizations representing Lower Austria

As mentioned in the introduction, the public discourse of Lower Austria will be represented by analyzing material from the representatives of interests from the workers' side and from the business side, as well as material from the political-administrative system. The workers' side is represented by the organizations ÖGB and AK, the business side by WKO and IV, and

the political-administrative system by material from the Lower Austrian administration itself as well as from organizations being owned by Lower Austria or working closely together. The organizations will be presented briefly in the following section, starting with the worker's side, then the business side, and lastly, the political-administrative system.

Worker's side

The ÖGB and the AK represent workers' interests. Although they have their own agendas, they also work together and complementarily to ensure that workers are well-represented at all levels, using research-based demands and collective actions to secure better conditions for employees.

ÖGB

The Österreichische Gewerkschaftsbund (ÖGB, engl. Austrian Trade Union Federation) is a non-partisan representation of employees, trainees, the unemployed, and retirees, with 1.2 million members, advocating for workers' interests against employers, the state, and political parties. Its mission is to ensure social security, fair wealth distribution, work conditions, and equal opportunities for all, regardless of age, gender, employment status, health, or origin. The ÖGB explicitly states its opposition to any form of discrimination, racism, fascism, or dictatorship. They also support employee representatives in protecting workers' rights, offer legal support, insurance services, and other benefits to its members, strengthening their rights and promoting workplace democracy. While being a non-partisan, the ÖGB influences political decisions, supports social partnerships, and engages in legislative processes. They negotiate collective agreements on wages, working hours, and benefits, ensuring fair conditions for workers. If negotiations fail, the ÖGB is ready to resort to strikes as a means of advocacy. There are regional sections of ÖGB in every federal state, including in Lower Austria (Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund 2025).

AK

The Arbeiterkammer (AK, Engl. Chamber of Labor) represents the interests of nearly 4 million workers in Austria, advocating for their rights at work, fair wages, and legal protection. Membership is automatic for all employees under the "Arbeiterkammergesetz" (Labor Chamber Act), including trainees, the unemployed, and those on parental leave, who can access the full range of AK services. The AK focuses on representing the social, economic,

professional, and cultural interests of workers. They provide assistance with job issues, unemployment, pensions, and consumer protection, among others. With over 2 million consultations per year, the AK offers support in various fields, including labor law, tax law, and social security. Beyond assistance, the AK promotes education through their education vouchers for members and operates educational organizations across Austria. They also support youth career orientation and conduct research that informs political work, particularly in collective bargaining negotiations. The AK fights for workers' rights, ensuring that their concerns are also considered in lawmaking processes. Their experts check and propose laws, securing important labor rights, such as paid vacation, parental, and caregiving leave. The AK points out that these rights, which many take for granted today, were achieved through the joint efforts of trade unions and the AK. They equally have an AK in each federal state of Austria (Bundesarbeiterkammer 2025).

Business side

The WKO and the IV represent business interests. In addition to their individual agendas, they also work together to better advocate for business interests, as in the document *Wege-aus-der-Krise*, which is part of the analysis.

WKO

The Wirtschaftskammer Österreich (WKO, Engl. Austrian Chamber of Commerce) serves as a strong voice for the interests of the business community and represents over 540,000 businesses across Austria. It consists of the national Chamber of Commerce (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich) based in Vienna and nine regional chambers. The organization is divided into seven sectors: Trade and Crafts, Industry, Commerce, Banking and Insurance, Transport and Traffic, Tourism and Leisure, and Information and Consulting. These sectors link specialized organizations to the Chamber and connect businesses and their respective industries.

The WKO advocates for a business-friendly environment through policies like tax relief, reduced bureaucracy, and secured funding. They promote entrepreneurial thinking, excellence in education, research, and innovation. The WKO offers services such as expert advice on labor law, customs, and more, and supports business competitiveness through educational organizations like WIFI. They also emphasize sustainability, social responsibility, and fair competition at national and international levels, advocating for self-administration

and regional development. Their departments focus on areas like education, finance, health, and international trade, offering vital support and resources for businesses and entrepreneurs (WKO 2024).

IV

The Industriellenvereinigung (IV, engl. Federation of Austrian Industries) is an independent, voluntary representation of Austria's industrial sector and related industries. With over 5,000 members, including those in manufacturing, banking, infrastructure, and industrial services, the IV works for their members at local, national, and European levels. They serve as a platform for influencing industry, economic, and societal policies, supporting their members in shaping these areas. The IV is an interface between businesses and politics, acting as an interest representative, think tank, network hub, and service partner. As a member of the European employer's association BusinessEurope, the IV also represents the voice of Austrian industry on the European level. They also have subgroups for each federal state of Austria (Vereinigung der Österreichischen Industrie 2025).

Political-administrative system

For the representation of the political-administrative system in Lower Austria, different organizations and documents provided by the administration of the federal government have been used. The economic strategy, a climate- and energy strategy, and a local development concept are published directly by them (Amt der NÖ Landesregierung 2025). Nevertheless, some other organizations play a role in the representation of the Lower Austrian political-administrative system:

Ecoplus is the economic development agency of Lower Austria, based in St. Pölten. They serve as a key partner for businesses, innovation, and regional development, offering comprehensive services, advice, and expertise. As the first point of contact for businesses, Ecoplus facilitates collaboration between companies, research organizations, and the public sector. The agency supports innovation and international expansion, provides business sites, and assists with site selection, project planning, and funding. They also promote regional infrastructure investments and support project realization. Ecoplus, fully owned by the government of Lower Austria, plays a central role in driving economic growth and supporting

the success of businesses in the region (ecoplus. Niederösterreichs Wirtschaftsagentur GmbH. n.d.).

Dorf- & Stadterneuerung is the primary partner for regional and municipal development in Lower Austria. The organization works closely with municipalities and regions, offering expertise in local development and a deep understanding of regional needs. They act as a process facilitator, funding guide, and advisor, with many of their services supported financially by the state of Lower Austria. Their approach is focused on renewing villages and towns efficiently and directly by finding innovative solutions for regional challenges. Each municipality has a dedicated advisor as a first point of contact. Operating from five regional offices, Dorf- & Stadterneuerung covers the entire region, working with partners to maximize benefits for local communities. Through regional associations, the organization helps implement community interests and supports holistic regional development in line with the main regional strategy (Dorf- & Stadterneuerung 2024).

The Energie- und Umweltagentur des Landes Niederösterreich (ENU, Engl. Energy and Environment Agency of Lower Austria) was established in 2011 and is fully owned by the state of Lower Austria. ENU serves as the central hub for energy, climate, environment, nature, and mobility in the region. With a team spread across six locations, ENU works to raise awareness about resource management, sustainable consumption, and environmental responsibility. They provide support to citizens, businesses, and municipalities, offering advice and assistance on ecological issues and sustainable practices. The ENU's initiatives align with the state's goals for environmental protection and climate action, fostering innovation through projects that address contemporary challenges. Additionally, ENU aids local communities and companies in achieving sustainability targets, promoting regional products, and facilitating the transition to clean energy (Energie- und Umweltagentur des Landes NÖ 2024).

The Klima- und Energiemodellregionen (KEM, Engl. Climate- and Energy Model Regions) is a program of the Climate and Energy Fund. Through this program, regional climate protection projects and regional model management are co-financed. Being a KEM-region provides access to a broad network, exclusive training, support, and funding opportunities. The concept aims to eliminate dependency on expensive oil imports and the fear of gas crises by promoting clean energy from local sources like solar, wind, water, and bioenergy. The goal is to transition away from fossil fuels completely. Each model region is led by a region manager who works

with local partners to implement projects in areas such as renewable energy, energy consumption reduction, sustainable building, mobility, agriculture, and awareness-building. The program is co-financed by the Climate- and Energy Fund, offering regions access to a broad network, training, and financial support. Special focus regions, selected through a competitive process, receive up to 1 million euros for the implementation of their projects, with past themes including tourism, bioeconomy, and circular economy (Klima- und Energiefonds 2024).

The Territorial Agenda and Just Transition plan by the ÖROK have been involved as well, even if they are on a higher level, since the Just Transition Plan (JTP Ö) is of major importance for the definition of a Just Transition and serves as a basis for all the other strategies. Details on this one have been explained in the theoretical part of this thesis. What can be elaborated here is that the Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz (ÖROK, Engl. Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning) is an organization supported by the federal government, provinces, and municipalities that coordinates spatial planning and regional development at the national level in Austria (ÖROK – Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz 2024; JTP Ö).

Methods

A qualitative document analysis was carried out to answer the research question. A qualitative approach was selected because the research questions asked for information that cannot be expressed quantitatively. It is asked for the “how,” the way Just Transition manifests itself in Lower Austria and the position that policy actors take towards it. The information to answer these questions had to be collected, analyzed, and interpreted qualitatively in order to lead to a meaningful result. A document analysis was further chosen since the relevant organizations have published manifold documents on relevant topics that reflect their point of view towards them. By analyzing these documents, the essence of their positioning became tangible.

The documents for the analysis were selected based on the assumption that the three sectors of politics and administration, workers, and businesses represent the region's perspective in a multifaceted way. Within each of these three groups, documents of representative

actors/organizations were selected. More concretely, it was searched for strategies, position papers, articles, or other contributions to the topic of sustainability, transformation, social justice, employment, etc. In the best case, the documents were specifically written by a Lower Austrian section of the organization or on an even lower regional level. If no sufficient number of documents was available or their inclusion made sense for some other reason, national documents could also be used. The earliest date of their publication should be in 2019 and the latest in May 2024. A first broad selection of documents was then reduced by inductively scanning the material for relevant topics, meaning Just Transition, Transition, Sustainability, Climate Change, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, economic strategy, development strategies, and regional planning. A representative amount of the most relevant material was chosen to stay, meaning between 4 and 11 documents per organization. The final selection of research material was subjected to a content analysis.

Content analysis is a very frequently used analysis method that emerged in the first half of the 20th century and, according to the original idea, deals with the capture of manifest content in texts. There are quantitative and qualitative content analyses. In quantitative content analysis, as the name suggests, text content is quantified and statistically analyzed. Qualitative content analysis may also be done, but the focus is on capturing latent meaning in the texts (Mayring & Fenzl 2014). As Mayring (1997, cit. after Mayring & Fenzl 2014) describes, a content analysis can "interpret" various things from a text depending on the research interest. The manifest content of the text can be captured, the state or intention of the communicator of the text can be interpreted, or the effect of the text on an audience can also be in the focus. This master's thesis is about the content of the texts and the resulting position of the communicator in relation to the content. That is why a qualitative content analysis makes sense here since it cannot be assumed that the topic of Just Transition is always explicitly mentioned in the texts. Also, for the context and the underlying intention of the publishing organization, the possibility to capture latent meaning is useful. The analysis was done mixed deductively and inductively, as suggested by the Qualitative Content Analysis of Gläser und Laudel (2010). Departing from the theoretic basis, some categories were defined beforehand (deduction), and during the analysis, where these categories were applied to the material, categories could still be modified and added (induction). The model of Qualitative Content Analysis by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2022) has been particularly useful for guiding the process of the analysis. After having coded and refined the codes according to their approach, the

analysis was carried out. First, the data was structured along the main categories before it was summarized in several steps. The organizations' documents represent different cases, which can be looked upon together as a group. Lastly, the data of the groups were compared to each other, and the results were translated into text. The interpretation of the results was done during the discussion and finally led to the answer to the research question. A more detailed insight into the steps of the analysis will be provided directly in the material in the following chapter.

Results

Quantitative overview

For a first overview, the occurrence of the term "Just Transition" in the documents is presented. The term was explicitly mentioned 81 times in the documents of ÖGB, out of which 73 explicitly "just transition" and the other 8 times german equivalents, combinations of the words "faire(r)" / "gerechte(r)" / "nachhaltige(r)" / "Nachhaltigkeits-" and "Wende" / "Transformation" / "Übergang" ². The AK mentioned Just Transition 7 times by explicitly this term, the above mentioned german equivalents have not been used. There are 10 mentions of Just Transition by the WKO, 3 explicit uses of the term and 7 german equivalents. The term is mentioned only once by IV, explicitly, and the political-administrative system mentioned Just Transition 10 times, 9 times explicitly and once "Gerechter Übergang".

² Engl [transl. by author]: fair/just/sustainable/sustainability- & turn/transformation/transition

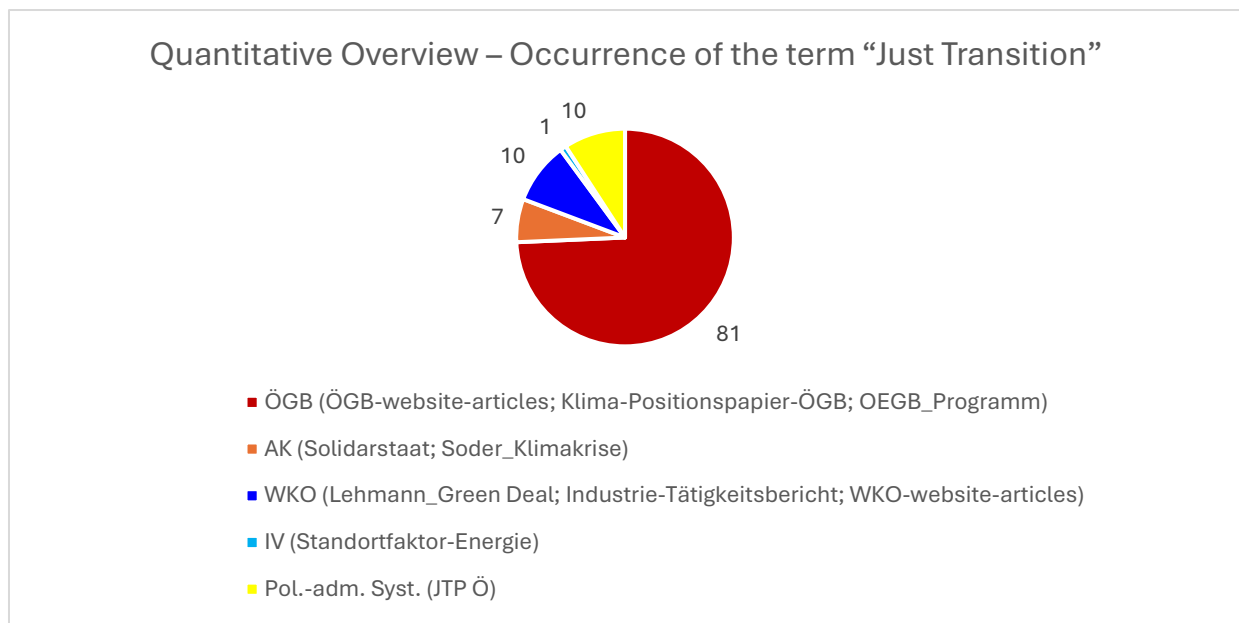


Figure 1: Quantitative Overview – Occurrence of the term “Just Transition”

It is evident that the term Just Transition is not mentioned in all the documents to the same extent, which does, however, not mean that some of them do not express their position on the topic or that they are not relevant for this thesis. It is possible that some documents use even other wording, such as sustainability transition, fairness, change, etc., and also the fact that Just Transition is not being mentioned can be a relevant detail. This work contributes to a better understanding of whether Just Transition is a topic for the analyzed organizations, even if not explicitly mentioned, and how the topic is treated.

In order to do so, a qualitative content analysis was carried out. The documents were first imported into the Software MAXQDA. To proceed with the analysis, a code-system was generated deductively, with the codes being, namely, “transitions are mentioned”, “technological focus”, “societal focus”, “pro-position towards transition”, “contra-position towards transition” and “social/justice-matters concerning transition are mentioned”. The documents were imported into the coding software, were reread, and the relevant text passages were assigned to the according code. In a second round, the codes were refined with inductively generated sub-categories, and the category “economy” was added. A third round of checking, correcting, and reallocating the codes was made, resulting in the following final code system:

Codes		2040
Transitions mentioned		0
General information		94
Infos/Definition of Just Transition		52
Technological focus		0
Technology		315
Construction measures		88
Natural Area		47
Societal focus		0
Cooperation between different social groups/trading partnerships		60
Funding/measures/consulting by institution		0
Legal/political matters/strategy		179
Services and funding		216
Training/further education		49
Impact on people/society/Social innovation		164
Awareness/individual action by the population required		68
Economy		0
Systemic view/structural change		20
Circular economy		38
Criticism of the current economic system		24
Desire for economic growth/competitiveness/affirmative		93
Business location/jobs		54
Economy/Companies/Jobs at risk		43
International trade/dependencies		15
Pro-position towards transition		87
Contra-position towards transition		60
Social/justice issues relating to transition		0
Social measures important		62
Resistance/acceptance of the population		13
Distributional Justice		55
Procedural Justice		50
Recognition Justice		14
Cosmopolitan Justice		15
Restorative Justice		21
Intergenerational Justice		16
Zitate?		28
Sets		0

Figure 2: Analysis – MaxQDA code system

Quantitative results were generated to get a first overview after finishing the coding process. It is important to mention that these are not actual representations of any final results but first impressions of the material that was to be further interpreted qualitatively.

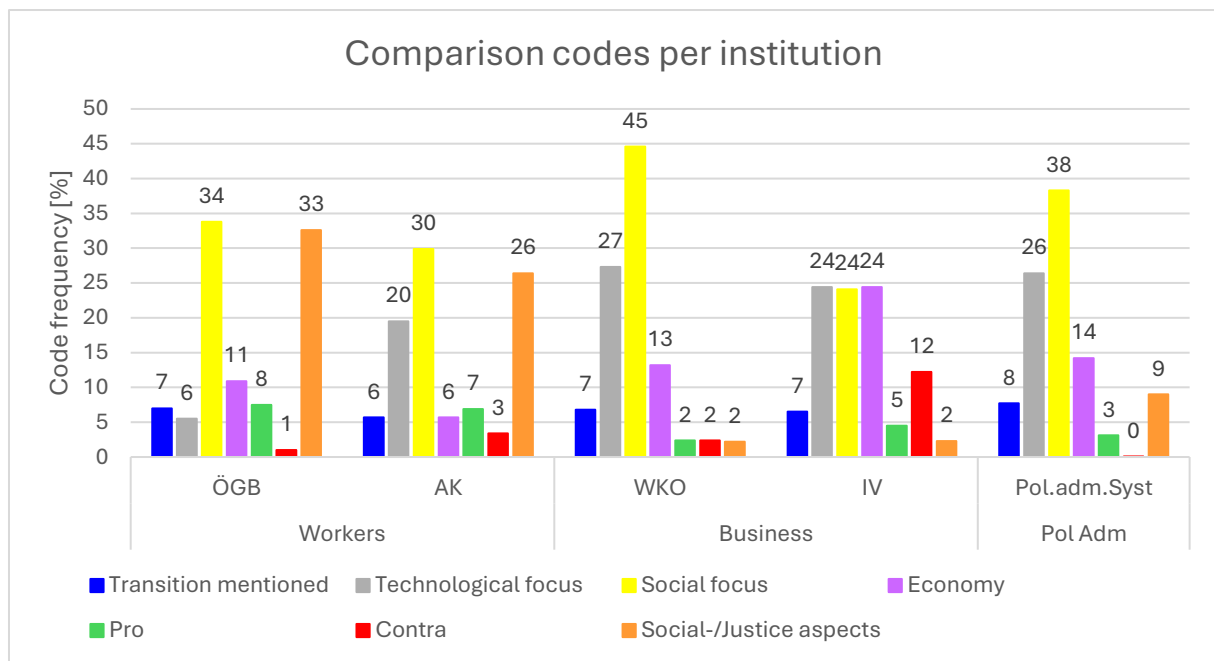


Figure 3: Analysis - Comparison codes per organization

In the graph above, you can see the different organizations on the x-axis and the code frequency on the y-axis. The different codes and the frequency of their occurrence are shown per organization. It is visible that, overall, the code “social focus” was used most by all organizations. This alone is, however, not a meaningful result, since the social focus comprises sub-categories like funding measures, consulting, etc., which do not give input on what will be funded or worked towards, but just tell us that social organizations and social practices like laws, politics, etc., are used as a means to go in a certain direction. The direction in itself becomes more evident only when looking at the content of such measures.

Interestingly, the two organizations from the employer’s side (IV & WKO) and the political-administrative system focus on technology in the first place, and all of them to almost the same extent. The AK mentions technological solutions quite often; however, the two employee-side organizations (AK & ÖGB) have a more pronounced focus on social/justice matters. The code economy is used most by the IV, followed by the political-administrative system and then the WKO. Here the difference to the employee side is not very large, however, again, it has to be kept in mind that the pure numbers do not mean very much here, since also within the category economy there are sub-codes pointing to different ideological directions (e.g., critique on current economic system vs. wish for economic growth). The same is true for the codes transition mentioned, pro and contra. The pure numbers of their occurrence are not of importance for answering the research question, and the content of the

coded paragraphs in these categories can be quite divergent. That is why this quantitative visualization of the results is useful and interesting just to get a first impression. However, it is inevitably necessary to take a qualitative look into the categories in order to understand how Just Transition is actually perceived and presented by the organizations and how they position towards it.

Qualitative results

In order to generate qualitative results, it was necessary to look closely into the coded segments. This was done in a first step by using the summary grid, which allows reading and summarizing the content of all the coded segments within each code/subcode for every document. With the summary explorer, these summaries were reviewed organization for organization, and the content was further summarized to produce final summaries of each organization's position towards each code/subcode. In the last step, these final summaries were put together into a comprehensive and coherent text that will be presented in the following section.

Worker's side – ÖGB & AK

The ÖGB and the AK represent the workers' side. Their discourse and positioning concerning the Just Transition will be summarized and presented in the following. First, the organization's definitions of Just Transition and their positioning towards it will be discussed, followed by a closer look at the technological topics raised, social-institutional matters, their positioning towards the economy, and justice forms present in the documents.

The AK documents are all from the AK of Lower Austria, except for one document (Soder_Klimakrise), which is a document provided by AK Wien. In contrast, most of the analyzed ÖGB documents come from the national level since no relevant documents from the level of Lower Austria were found. There is only one document from the regional level included, a journal from the Lower Austrian region Mostviertel (Mostviertel Blatt); however, it contains only one short paragraph that treats the sustainability topic briefly. It is supposed that the Lower Austrian sections of ÖGB are oriented strongly on the positions of the national level ÖGB, so the documents were used anyway to conduct the analysis.

Definition of and position towards Just Transition

The ÖGB understands and defines "Just Transition" (JT) as a comprehensive process aimed at managing the transition to a sustainable, CO₂-neutral economy in a way that ensures that no one is left behind. The following quote illustrates ÖGB's far-reaching understanding of the transformation: *"Familiar paths and structures must be abandoned and certain technologies replaced"* [transl. by author] (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB, p. 23). They see this transformation as a profound societal change that will disrupt the economic structure and significantly affect all aspects of life, including the labor market. Within the idea of Just Transition, workers have to be protected not only from the negative impacts of climate change but also from those of the transition process, which has to be designed in a socially fair and inclusive way. This involves redistributing the costs of the transformation in a fair way, especially in sectors that will face the most significant changes (e.g., energy-intensive sectors). Vulnerable populations have to be protected, workers supported through retraining and upskilling programs, and the benefits of the transition are to be widely distributed. The workers should also be involved in decision-making processes related to the transition. Just Transition is thus viewed as a concept that links environmental, labor market, and social policies. The transition to a green economy, with green jobs, should not only address ecological concerns but also ensure social sustainability by offering quality jobs and enhancing workers' living standards and social security. (ÖGB-website-articles; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; OEGB_Programm).

In contrast to the ÖGB documents, Just Transition is not as exhaustively mentioned by the AK documents. They do mention that managing the climate crisis in a socially just way is central and that there are different dimensions of justice in transformation processes. Just Transition to them is not one Just Transition but *"multiple interdependent transition processes"* [transl. by author] (Soder_Klimakrise, p. 2). However, the climate crisis and justice concerns are taken very seriously by the AK documents.

Both organizations have a positive attitude towards Just Transition and the sustainability transition. They support the concept of a "Just Transition" to a climate-neutral economy and welcome the idea that the costs of the transition should be distributed in a just way across society (AK-Mobilität; Erwerbspendelverkehr; ÖGB-website-articles). The ÖGB advocates for a sustainable prosperity model and integrating social dimensions in environmental policies. They stress that both the education system and the labor market must act as safety nets,

helping workers transition to new opportunities in a sustainable and socially just way (OEGB_Programm; ÖGB Articles). Additionally, the ÖGB puts forward that their interests align with those of climate activists in advocating for justice for all, ensuring that workers are not left behind in the transition (ÖGB-website-articles). Here, the AK even goes one step further since they suggest that connecting work councils and climate activists helps to put more pressure on politicians and present concrete solutions (Treffpunkt).

However, both organizations also voice critique. The ÖGB points out that the positive effects of green structural change are unevenly distributed. Thus, they explicitly call for "change by design" rather than "change by disaster", meaning that the transformation should be planned and managed to minimize negative consequences. Further, both organizations doubt whether the measures are sufficient. In the ÖGB articles as well as the Klimapositionspapier, they voice their skepticism that the planned funds provided for the Just Transition (for investments in infrastructure and future technology) are sufficient and also, the rigid EU debt rules are seen as problematic (ÖGB-website-articles; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB). The AK sees the insufficiency not only in the amount of money available but also in the target of the suggested plans and solutions. *"This is because the measures contained in the plans are predominantly monetary and not structurally orientated. Although the measures are essential building blocks in shaping the transformation, it remains questionable whether they are sufficient to build a sustainable edifice for a 'just transition'"* [transl. by author] (Soder_Klimakrise, p. 3).

Position towards technology

In the documents of AK and ÖGB, technology is mentioned, but not to a very large extent. Both mention some technological topics, such as the need to expand renewable energy and mobility infrastructure and to invest in new technologies in general. Sustainable construction is another important topic, and both organizations agree that technologies for CO2 reduction should be funded by the public hand. The ÖGB further sees such technologies as important to have for competitiveness. The AK states that technology and technological advances can solve environmental and resource problems; however, both organizations agree that technology is not a main goal in itself. According to AK, not only technologies have to change, but also society's practices and habits. The ÖGB points out similar reasoning: *"The key point is that the energy transition is not a purely technical issue, but a challenge for society as a whole, whose social dimension must take centre stage and be combined with ecological requirements."*

[transl. by author] (OEGB_Programm, p. 16). (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; OEGB_Programm; ÖGB-website-articles; Mostviertel Blatt; Soder_Klimakrise; Erwerbspendelverkehr; AK-Energie; AK-Mobilität; Treffpunkt).

Position towards economy

The position of ÖGB and AK towards the economy are rather similar. However, the AK does not put a strong emphasis on economic matters, while the ÖGB discusses the topic in much more detail (Erwerbspendelverkehr; Soder_Klimakrise; Zukunftsprogramm2021; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm). According to the ÖGB, the transition towards a sustainable economic system is an inherently economic topic that touches also upon the ÖGB's influence sphere, since economy and labor market are deeply connected. Both organizations see a potential for the economy in the transformation (Zukunftsprogramm2021; ÖGB-website-articles; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; OEGB_Programm). The ÖGB explains more precisely that Austria has to maintain its involvement with important and potentially economically exploitable value chains. The green structural change may make some conventional jobs obsolete; however, new jobs in green sectors and key technologies are arising (ÖGB-website-articles; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; OEGB_Programm). However, according to the ÖGB, social dimensions have to be regarded, and holistic approaches need to be applied. The ÖGB as well as the AK state clearly that the transformation has to come along with a structural change. Outdated structures have to be abandoned, and fair legal frameworks, social justice, and participation have to be promoted (Soder_Klimakrise; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm). The AK and the ÖGB see the need to overcome neoliberalism. Soder (Soder_Klimakrise) puts forward in the AK document that the measures taken so far are insufficient to create a viable framework for a Just Transition since they are mainly monetary rather than structural (Soder_Klimakrise). The ÖGB criticizes the economy and its neoliberal policies for being too market-oriented and not focusing enough on people. It is unsuitable for ensuring services of general interest or climate neutrality. *"The short-sighted and neoliberal policies of recent decades have led us into a dead end. It not only jeopardises the industrial location, but also our welfare state and prosperity."* [transl. by author] (OEGB_Programm, p. 8). Instead, the ÖGB calls for a more active role of the state and more democratic participation. A stable welfare state is seen as very important for fostering innovation and supporting green structural change, as well as for providing social security and new opportunities to those

affected. They note that, of course, decarbonization must not lead to deindustrialization, but dependence on large corporations and their arbitrariness must be reduced anyway. Corporate decisions, the costs of which are often passed on to the public sector, should be more strictly regulated. According to the ÖGB, large public investments in future fields are certainly necessary for the transformation, but the economy should be more oriented towards the common good. The circular economy is part of such a model since it helps reduce resource consumption and fosters more sustainable production. Without fundamental change, resource problems will not be solved, and the number of people at risk of poverty will rise (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm).

Social-institutional focus

The documents of AK and ÖGB mention many concrete ideas and measures and several topics to be implemented by social organizations via law, funding, networking, etc., or targeting social innovation or awareness. These parts do not necessarily concentrate on justice matters, neither on economic nor technological topics, but can be rather seen as part of the administrative/institutional side of the transition.

The AK focuses a lot on mobility. They emphasize the need for investment in rail infrastructure, the expansion of bus and train services, increased frequency, electrification, attractive cycling paths, and the introduction of on-call buses and shared taxis for the "last mile" (AK-Mobilität; Erwerbspendelverkehr). Additionally, the AK emphasizes the need for subsidies for mobility management in companies, alongside soft measures like public relations and awareness-raising efforts. They highlight the importance of employee involvement, as their acceptance is crucial for the transformation, since also habits and practices in society must change (Erwerbspendelverkehr; Soder_Klimakrise). Also the ÖGB points out the importance individual awareness and they reflect on their role in that regard, as trade union education work draws attention to the risks and effects of the climate crisis, promotes public acceptance of the transition measures, and shows employees and trade unionists their room for manoeuvre (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; OEGB_Programm). However, the individual action alone does not seem to be enough for the ÖGB. They criticize that climate policy measures are often not checked for their effects outside the climate and that there are no accompanying measures. Climate policy is social policy for the ÖGB, and they do not only want to manage the crisis but also shape it together. They stress the importance of comprehensive strategies to meet

climate targets while ensuring social and economic stability (ÖGB-website-articles; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; OEGB_Programm). According to them, there has been a depoliticization of the economic order, but the state must now be stronger again in order to overcome the crisis. They propose a Just Transition Agency to support roadmaps and enforce policies, and they are urging for stronger state intervention in providing services of general interest (OEGB_Programm). The AK also considers the state as an important instance, so they hosted a presentation on the effects of digitalization and transformation on the solidarity state and employees (Solidarstaat). Just like the ÖGB, they also stand in for a collaboration between climate activists and work councils; however, the AK points out that this could put more pressure on politicians (Treffpunkt). Compared to this, the ÖGB stays with the softer term of collaboration, which they also recommend for all administrative levels, businesses, and households (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm). Both organizations call for legal and regulatory amelioration, for example, concerning spatial planning, energy laws, or the adaptation of the labor market (Erwerbsspendelverkehr; Soder_Klimakrise; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB). The ÖGB proposes several further measures to manage the transition, of which the AK also mentions some concerning financial support for sustainability renovation for low-income households (AK-Energie; OEGB_Programm; ÖGB-website-articles). Further ideas by ÖGB include services for society like one-stop-shop advisory and support services and the creation of education and training programs in sustainability and green jobs since they help to take opportunities for employment and value creation arising from structural change (OEGB_Programm; ÖGB-website-articles).

Justice forms and social equity

Within the AK's and the ÖGB's documents, there is a strong emphasis on different justice forms and social security. They point out that the social dimension of the climate crisis must be taken seriously and that questions of social justice must be linked to those of ecology. *"The key point is that the energy transition is not a purely technical issue, but a challenge for society as a whole, the social dimension of which must take centre stage and be combined with ecological requirements."* [transl. by author] (OEGB_Programm, p. 16). Both organizations state that the transition must be socially acceptable because if the transformation is perceived as unfair, there will be political resistance and upheaval. Unequal distribution of costs and profits leads to distortions, jeopardizes public acceptance, and creates the risk of a social backlash such as the yellow vests movement (Erwerbsspendelverkehr; Soder_Klimakrise;

Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm). *"Measures to combat the climate crisis will only be politically successful if they take social inequalities into account. Otherwise, they will fail due to justified social resistance to the measures."* (Soder_Klimakrise, p. 1).

From this perspective, the ÖGB voices critique as they say that services of general interest must not be left to the free market, as this would be doomed to failure. Both organizations agree that the public sector must actively shape and expand services of general interest and that people must take center stage as a priority above the aim for profit. According to the ÖGB, it is a good starting point that Austria is a stable social and welfare state. The welfare state proves its worth in times of crisis, as people still have a certain amount of room for manoeuvre if they lose their jobs, and working conditions and wages remain good overall. Those negatively affected must be supported, and new opportunities must be distributed in a fair way. Investments shall be made and strategically important value chains secured (AK-Mobilität; Solidarstaat; Soder_Klimakrise; Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm).

All the justice forms treated by the literature are found in the ÖGB's documents, almost all of them in the AK's documents, with an exception for cosmopolitan and restorative justice, which are not or are only indirectly mentioned. The different justice forms and how they are utilized by the AK and ÖGB will be elaborated on in the following.

- Distributional Justice

In their documents, the AK explicitly describes that distributional justice aims at reducing unequal economic conditions. They write that everyone has different predispositions on how to deal with the transformation, such as their income, wealth, age, education, gender, and health. The ÖGB also does the same. However, they write much more extensively about the topic. The organizations agree that the costs of the transition should be borne in a just way by all and not passed on to the employees or households. They state that the transition has to be actively guided in order not to create social distortions. Both organizations, however, do not only focus on mitigating the negative social consequences of transition but also mention the need for exploiting and fairly distributing the opportunities and potential of change (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm; Soder_Klimakrise).

The ÖGB further criticizes the market logic, which they believe does not allow for this justice. They argue that the logic of the market should give way to the common good so that the basic needs of the energy-poor and those at risk of poverty can be met (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm).

- Procedural Justice

The AK and the ÖGB mention procedural justice. According to the AK, procedural justice means aiming to provide easy and adequate access to information, counseling, legal proceedings, and rights of appeal to people. Both organizations state that democratic co-determination is needed to get employees through the transformation process, meaning that employees and labor unions should be actively involved throughout the process of decision-making and the implementation of climate protection measures and Just Transitions on all levels. The ÖGB further suggests that employees are the key players and important innovators in the process. They say that all those affected should have the possibility to participate and that there is a need for new structures that enable action for all. According to the ÖGB, less market and more democratic co-determination are needed to overcome the crisis (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm; Solidarstaat; Soder_Klimakrise).

- Recognition Justice

Recognition justice is a topic in the AK and ÖGB documents, insofar as they mention that this form of justice considers the different starting positions of social groups and affected people. It means that groups at risk of marginalization are taken into consideration, which facilitates their participation and co-determination (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm; Soder_Klimakrise).

- Cosmopolitan Justice

In contrast to the ÖGB, AK does not mention Cosmopolitan Justice. The ÖGB, however, speaks about it indirectly when talking about their collaboration with the European Labor Union (EGB) and their commitment to avoiding unfair concurrence of businesses from economic areas with different climate protection regulations. They say that the EU should be a role model for other regions of the world. A strong welfare state, social dialogue, and strong trade unions with international solidarity should be global values that form the basis of all EU trade agreements and are also upheld in global supply chains. The ÖGB speaks about global justice very explicitly

in the context of exploitation of the global south: *“(...) the exploitation of the Global South is the resource for the wealth of the countries of the North. The response of the rich countries cannot be to fight refugees, but to work together to eliminate the causes of flight and to engage with people in the Global South in order to empower them to ensure a better life for themselves locally. We must also take responsibility for this in Austria and ensure the survival of humanity on Earth”* [transl. by author] (OEGB_Programm, p. 9) (ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm).

- Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is mentioned indirectly by both organizations. The AK talks about subventions and aids, such as the replacement of heating systems being subsidized by Lower Austria, especially for low-income households (AK-Energie). The same is true for the ÖGB, who mentions Restorative Justice insofar as they evoke problems and the corresponding measures to alleviate them. These are adaptation measures like ensuring a better working environment for the affected employees and ameliorations for particularly affected communities or people who lose their jobs. Training and qualification programs, as well as financial compensation for the affected ones, are thought of. Further, ÖGB says that there should be more support for volunteers and civil servants providing disaster management services (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; OEGB_Programm).

- Intergenerational Justice

The AK and ÖGB both mention intergenerational justice briefly. They write that a sustainable future for future generations is aimed for. However, both also refer to the present time, pointing out that the consequences of the climate crisis are already affecting people right now. The ÖGB further states that the present generation is not only the first one to feel the impacts of climate change but also the last one that can do something about it (Klima-Positionspapier-ÖGB; ÖGB-website-articles; Soder_Klimakrise).

Employer's side – WKO & IV

The WKO and the IV represent the employer's side. Their discourse and positioning concerning the Just Transition will be summarized and presented in the following. First, the organizations' definitions of Just Transition and their positioning towards it will be written about, followed

by a closer look at the technological topics raised, social-institutional matters, their positioning towards the economy, and justice forms present in the documents.

Out of the nine documents selected to represent IV, three are from the Austrian level. One of them has been included due to its explicit focus on energy (SOS-Wohlstand; Industrieland-Reloaded; Standortfaktor-Energie). Out of the eight WKO documents three also come from the Austrian level (Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; wkoe-geschaeftsbericht-2022; Zukunftsbild 2025). Two IV documents come from the European level and were included because they allow a broader perspective (IV-Standpunkt; europamanifest-kurz). There is one document from the magazine „ÖKO + Fachmagazin für Ökonomie + Ökologie“ provided by WKO but not directly written by them. The main focus, however, has been set on the Lower Austrian documents, both for the WKO and for the IV.

Definition of and position towards Just Transition

Both the WKO and IV hardly mention Just Transition by this term. In the documents of IV, Just Transition is explicitly mentioned only once, and this in the context of a numeration of EU-funding instruments. However, climate change and the sustainability transition are topics treated by IV. Also, within the WKO documents, sustainability plays a role; however, Just Transition is not an explicit topic either. The concept is mentioned and explained shortly in the context of the European Green Deal, mentioning that the Just Transition Mechanism has been designed to support regions and employees affected by the transition via retraining and economic diversification. The Green Deal is mentioned to be *“not only an environmental project but also a social and economic program”* [transl. by author] (WKO-website-articles, Pos. 14). The WKO points out the importance of balancing environmental and economic goals, and emphasizes the need for a fair distribution of costs, particularly for businesses. The justice aspect for them is centered on ensuring that the economic impacts on businesses are reduced while enabling them to contribute to sustainability. Similarly, the IV highlights the need for a competitive business environment to ensure a successful transition, which they believe will, in turn, benefit society and create international role models. Both organizations underline the importance of stable energy supplies, infrastructure development, and technological innovation as key components of a successful and just transition. They aim for a sustainable transition in which companies play a central role in investing in future technologies. They also promote measures like retraining and economic diversification, but their main concern

remains ensuring that Austria's industries have economic success and can compete globally. The same counts for the IV since their focus lies primarily on the economic opportunities arising from the sustainability transition, particularly in how they can strengthen Austria's industrial sector. They emphasize that climate change offers opportunities for industries through energy-efficient production processes and the development of renewable energy technologies. Like the WKO, the IV is critical of overly strict regulations that pose barriers to businesses and their competitiveness and bear the risk of industries relocating. They argue that the Green Deal must work with the industry, not against it, and should foster innovation and growth. The IV also stresses that measures such as electricity price compensation are necessary for supporting energy-intensive industries during the transition to prevent job losses and maintain competitiveness.

Overall, both organizations, the WKO and IV, acknowledge the necessity of a Just Transition. However, they focus on the economic aspects, particularly how the sustainability transition can support businesses and industrial competitiveness. Their approach to justice is mainly framed around protecting the interests of companies, ensuring their ability to innovate, and preventing burdens that could undermine Austria's economic position in the global market (IV-website-articles; Positionen-Sept; Jahresbericht-IV-NOE; IV-Standpunkt; SOS-Wohlstand; Standortfaktor-Energie; Industrieland-Reloaded; WKO-website-articles; Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; WKOE-Geschäftsbericht-2022).

Position towards technology

Generally speaking, the WKO and the IV both put huge importance on technology for two reasons: Technology is seen as a possible solution to the current societal (climate) problems, but technology is also seen as a great opportunity to strengthen the economy. The IV literally states: *"With the help of technological progress and digitalisation, products can be manufactured more energy-efficiently, and greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced."* [transl. by author] (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE, p. 17). Their belief in the crucial role of technology for future development is further expressed as follows: *"We must consistently focus on technology development and transformative production changes in key sectors, because those who control the technologies determine the future"* [transl. by author] (IV-website-articles, Pos. 175). This is the link that the two organizations see between the climate crisis and economic strength. In their opinion, *"Only financially stable and resilient companies are in a position to manage the ecological renewal and decarbonisation process through the development and*

application of environmentally friendly technologies.” [transl. by author] (wkoe-geschäftsbericht-2022, p. 87), as the WKO states literally. A strong economic position is seen as necessary for businesses to contribute to decarbonization and transformation, as well as to maintain employment. The organizations both point out the importance of the state to provide laws and financial support that enable Lower Austria to take a leading economic position in technological sectors. Interlinking technological and social topics, the WKO writes that technological schools are supported in Lower Austria to have high-quality employees for the local economy later. Further, they offer digital tools as services for businesses, which shall give them advice on the potential utilization of technologies for their economic success. They also mention that the more frequent use of electronics should go hand in hand with a stronger culture of repairing and designing products more sustainably (WKO-website-articles). Both organizations urge for a greater openness to technology, with energy infrastructure and "green technology" seen as major priorities. Sustainable growth and competitiveness are identified as critical goals, and the market economy is envisioned as the framework within which technology and innovation can drive the transformation (Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; Wkoe-geschaeftsbericht-2022; Zukunftsbild 2025). Examples of supported technologies are technologies in all kinds of renewable energy, gas diversification, hydrogen technology, power storage, mobility, digitalization, Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage (CCUS), advanced materials, and AI. Heating and thermal systems are also topics, as are recycling, light systems, construction, and increased efficiency in the industrial process. It is further stated that the power grid and the whole energy-infrastructure-network must be expanded since the energy use is rising due to electrification (WKO-website-articles; Standpunkt). According to IV-NÖ-Präsident Kari Ochsner, these power projects need to be supported in order to assure competitiveness. *„Because every day that energy costs in Europe are too high, the grids are not expanded and renewable energy sources are not integrated sensibly, companies lose competitiveness and jobs are jeopardised,”* he warned.” [transl. by author] (WKO-website-articles. Pos. 317-318) (Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; Lehmann_Green Deal; Jahresbericht-IV-NOE; Wege-aus-der-krise-brochuere-screen; IV-website-articles; Positionen-Sept; WKNOE Förderupdate; WKO-website-articles; Standpunkt; WKO-website-articles; wkoe-geschäftsbericht-2022).

Position towards economy

The WKO as well as the IV both emphasize the importance of a balanced approach to sustainable economic transformation and environmental responsibility. Interestingly, the IV explicitly calls for a holistic climate and energy strategy, with the Green Deal serving as a model for Europe. They also call for promoting a circular economy, emphasizing the importance of recycling resources and decoupling economic output from finite resources. However, it becomes obvious that both organizations are very focused on the goal of economic growth and competitiveness. In this context, the circular economy, as well as the transition itself, is seen as an opportunity for innovation, new markets, and increased competitiveness. Both organizations support initiatives that encourage businesses to align with environmental and social responsibility through sustainable practices and products; however, according to them, economic growth must remain at the forefront of policy decisions. The documents of IV and those of WKO do not question but assume the necessity of growth and come to arguments on why and how to assure this growth. The IV explicitly advocates for a market-driven approach, minimal bureaucracy, and limited state intervention. Affordable energy, resource efficiency, and a focus on innovation are seen as key drivers for sustaining jobs, prosperity, and industrial growth in the eyes of both organizations. In their opinion, policies must encourage the development of new energy-efficient technologies without burdening industries with high costs or regulatory complexity. The IV points out that excessive regulations could harm competitiveness, particularly in energy-intensive industries, and the WKO sees the need to reduce the bureaucratic burden. Both support the idea that energy-intensive industries should be particularly supported to ensure their economic success and prevent the relocation of these industries to third countries. Globally, WKO and IV both aim to position Austria and Lower Austria economically in a leading role, maintaining cooperation with trading partners and developing more diversified supply chains and resilient value chains while ensuring strategic autonomy.

The general tone of IV and WKO differs a bit insofar as the IV seems to be more concerned about potential risks and problems coming along with climate policies and doubting more about the economic feasibility of the envisaged measures. They prioritise the maintenance of (Lower) Austria's industrial competitiveness. Economic growth, innovation, and competitiveness are central to their strategy, and they support a market-driven transformation to a climate-neutral economy as long as it is economically viable and does not

overburden businesses with excessive regulation or costs. The WKO also has these concerns. Nevertheless, they focus more on the possibilities that such a transformation can bring instead of pointing out risks. The benefits for the economy and its competitiveness are also central to them; however, they argue repeatedly that only stable and resilient businesses can contribute to and manage the decarbonization process. Healthy companies are therefore necessary for social and ecological development (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE; IV-website-articles; Positionen-Sept; Industrieland-Reloaded; Wege-aus-der-Krise; Standortfaktor-Energie; WKNOE Förderupdate; Lehmann_Green Deal; Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; WKO-website-articles; wkoe-geschaeftsbericht-2022; Zukunftsbild 2025).

Social-institutional focus

Both the WKO and the IV documents suggest numerous measures that should be applied by politicians or strategies that deal with the transformation. These measures emphasize research, technology, innovation, renewable energy, and efforts to reorganize the economy. efficiency, and sustainable technologies are important topics for both organizations, with the Next to supporting a sustainable transition, a main goal behind the measures is to improve economic performance with a strong focus on the business sector. Both organizations emphasize the importance of strategic planning, technological development, and investment in infrastructure as key drivers of the transition to a more sustainable and competitive economy. Energy infrastructure, renewable energy, resource WKO pointing out especially the role of innovation and research in these areas. At the same time, the IV emphasizes the importance of market-driven solutions and investment incentives to support these goals. The WKO further stresses the need for stable value chains and the development of a circular economy, and the IV mentions a diversified energy supply and resilient production processes. Apart from these rather technological topics, another area of consensus between the WKO and IV is the importance of education and training. Both point out the need to enhance qualifications and educational opportunities in areas that are crucial to sustainable transformation, such as technical fields, sustainable technologies, and digitalization. The WKO offers programs aimed at skills development for businesses, with a particular focus on sustainability and crisis resilience. At the same time, the IV advocates for the expansion of technical schools and universities of applied sciences to ensure a skilled workforce that can support Austria's industrial competitiveness in the long term. Further, both organizations call for regulatory improvements to support the transition. They see the need for accelerated

approval processes, for regulatory frameworks that facilitate the expansion of renewable energy and technological innovation, and for funding for infrastructure. The IV suggests putting greater emphasis on market-based solutions and minimizing state intervention. The WKO supports government involvement in facilitating the transition, especially in areas like energy costs and sustainability initiatives. They both see the need for investment in critical infrastructure and are concerned about the impact of rising energy costs for the industry. Thus, they both propose that the state guarantees financial support for businesses to alleviate these burdens and to protect energy-intensive industries from competitive disadvantages.

While both the WKO and IV underline the need for cooperation among various social groups and stakeholders, the WKO places a stronger focus on such collaborations, participation processes, and partnerships at the regional, national, and international levels. The WKO participates in several EU and international initiatives and supports cooperation with NGOs on sustainable development. The IV, while also advocating for cooperation, especially in energy partnerships with other countries, stresses the need for strategic autonomy and a more localized approach, such as promoting regional cooperation and investment in Lower Austria.

The two organizations seem to take slightly different positions regarding social innovation and broader societal benefits. The WKO takes a more holistic approach, aligning its strategies with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and recognizing the importance and benefits of societal topics. They offer advisory services and advocate for topics like mobility transition, recycling, diversity, and inclusion as part of their strategies. The IV, on the other hand, also offers consulting services on innovative topics. However, they focus more on economic growth and competitiveness, advocating for social measures primarily to enhance business performance and workforce development. All in all however, the WKO as well as the IV are focused on providing support for businesses and industry and, despite some minor differences, they both share a commitment to fostering a competitive, sustainable economy that can meet the challenges of the future and maintain economic growth (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE; IV-website-articles; IV; Standortfaktor-Energie; Wege-aus-der-Krise; Industrieland-Reloaded; Positionen-Sept; WKO-website-articles; WKNOE Förderupdate; wkoe-geschaeftsbericht-2022; Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; Standpunkt; Lehmann_Green Deal; Zukunftsbild 2025).

Justice forms and social equity

As mentioned above, neither WKO nor IV put an explicit emphasis on Just Transition, so unsurprisingly, justice forms are not present to a large extent in their documents. It is mentioned in the WKO's documents that economy, ecology, and society are to be treated equally. However, social wellbeing and justice seem to be seen as a positive effect of a strong economy, and not the other way around. Similarly, the IV voices their opinion that social security for all, industrial competitiveness, and employment in the country are important and that they can only be guaranteed by striking a balance between environmental, economic, and social interests. However, as IV explicitly mentions, not all economic and social activities can be subordinated to the goal of climate neutrality. In the WKO Förderupdate, social responsibility is mentioned next to security of supply and strengthening of international competitiveness and cooperation. However, it is sought for justice rather within the economic competition and from the state towards businesses (Industrieland-Reloaded; Standortfaktor-Energie; WKNOE Förderupdate).

- **Distributional Justice**

The IV does not explicitly mention distributional justice. The only implicit reference that there might be is their insistence on an electricity price compensation, which shall "redistribute" the high costs of electricity in order not to burden energy-intensive industries. The WKO, however, explicitly calls for a fair distribution of the costs associated with the transition, ensuring that investments can be made securely and predictably, allowing businesses to continue their investments in renewable energy. However, the primary focus of the WKO is on the business sector. When discussing a fair distribution, the WKO primarily refers to fairness for businesses, although they also highlight the importance of protecting employees during the transition (Industrie-Tätigkeitsbericht; WKO-website-articles; IV-website-articles).

- **Procedural Justice**

Procedural Justice is not an explicit topic in the IV's documents. The WKO, however, touches upon this justice form since, as a representative of interests, it seeks to collaborate with entrepreneurs in shaping societal and economic changes. For sustainable development, the WKO is actively engaging in a participatory process, involving employees, functionaries, member companies, and other stakeholders within its sphere of influence (wkoe-geschaeftsbericht-2022).

- Recognition Justice

Recognition Justice is not mentioned by WKO and IV, neither explicitly nor implicitly.

- Cosmopolitan Justice

Cosmopolitan Justice is mentioned when the IV writes about the internationally unequal framework conditions on climate change topics and how they are difficult for the Austrian and European industry. If the climate protection rules in Austria are too strict compared to other countries, industrial companies may move to other parts of the world, with the counterproductive result that emissions will rise there and jobs will be lost here. The IV also calls for European solutions on issues such as migration, external security, international trade, and climate change in order to cope with such global challenges (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE; IV-website-articles; europamanifest-kurz). Similarly, the WKO stresses the importance of ensuring that supply chains, including international ones, are designed to be future-proof, sustainable, and fair. However, their notion of fairness seems to go beyond the IV's understanding, which asks especially for fair conditions for Austrian businesses. The fairness mentioned by WKO shall reflect the broader global responsibility in economic processes since their basic principles shall be based on human rights, labor standards, environmental protection, and the fight against corruption (WKO-website-articles).

- Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is mentioned by IV when they suggest measures such as the electricity price compensation that should support businesses during the energy crisis and alleviate the negative effects so they do not have to shut down production. Also, do they write about a fund for the damage caused by climate change that will be developed, mentioned at COP28 (IV-website-articles). The WKO also shortly touches upon restorative justice when they mention measures to support affected regions, businesses, and workers, for example, by support for economic diversification, electricity subsidies, or retraining programs (WKO-website-articles; wkoe-geschaeftsbericht-2022).

- Intergenerational Justice

The IV explicitly states its commitment to intergenerational justice; however, this statement is not further explained (Jahresbericht-IV-NOE). The WKO recognizes the major global challenge of stopping global warming in order to secure the livelihoods and economic basis of future generations (WKO-website-articles).

Political-administrative system

The political-administrative system analysis has been conducted based on documents of different Lower Austrian organizations. That is why their content might be more divergent than it has been for the documents within each of the above-mentioned organizations. However, all of them can be directly linked to the federal state of Lower Austria. Only the two farther-reaching documents on the Territorial Just Transition Plan (Territoriale_Agenda_A3; JTP Ö) go beyond the Lower Austrian level.

Definition of and position towards Just Transition

The term Just Transition is explicitly mentioned only in one document of the political-administrative System, the Territorial Just Transition Plan of Austria. They explain that the JTF is an instrument of cohesion policy, and Just Transition supports sustainable structural change in severely affected regions, ensuring competitiveness of the local economy. According to them, the transition has to be just for all citizens and EU territories, and all the criteria and plans for the Just Transition regions are described in this document (JTP Ö). However, it has to be noted that this document is the framework for all of Austria and does not represent, more specifically, Lower Austria's position. However, sustainability and social justice also play an important role in the other documents. The political-administrative system in Lower Austria positions itself as a forward-thinking, green region that wants to combine economic success with environmental responsibility, aiming for a sustainable future through collaboration and innovation. This positive attitude towards the transition is reflected in the manifold measures and actions described by the documents. The Klima- und Energiefahrplan puts forward that they are dedicated to achieving carbon neutrality as quickly as possible and actively managing the impacts of climate change. Economic growth and environmental protection should work together for mutual benefit. That is why Lower Austria is carrying out ambitious projects in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and environmental topics and wants to position itself as a leader in these areas. Circular economy and reduction of CO₂ and resource use, for example, are seen as drivers of innovation (Klima- und Energiefahrplan; ecoplus_landesstrategie).

Companies are urged to reflect on their environmental, climate, and societal impacts and to promote future-oriented and responsible economic practices, and there are services supporting them in doing so. The economic strategy aims to help businesses develop and implement ecological and societal solutions, creating new business fields and technological

advancements. Professional location development shall go hand in hand with sustainability goals. Nevertheless, there are also services and initiatives offered for municipalities that help them manage societal and climate change. This shall support Lower Austria's competitiveness and job creation while supporting environmental protection and international marketability (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ; Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; klimafitte stadt). Compared to all the other organizations, it is noticeable that the political-administrative system voices no critique or doubt on the transition or its implementation.

Position towards technology

The political-administrative system places significant emphasis on technology as a driver of the transformation process both for its climate-friendly impact and as a driver for economic development. Key focus areas include sustainable construction and renovation, renewable energy systems, energy provision, sustainable mobility, digitalization, and developing essential technologies. A particular focus is placed on the sustainable renovation and construction of public spaces as well as the protection of biodiversity, natural areas, and soil, with digitalization and technological innovations seen as valuable tools in this process (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; Klimafitte Stadt; Energie- und Umweltagentur; Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; KEM).

According to the Energie- und Umweltagentur, Lower Austria aims to be a leader in using renewable energies. The documents (Klima- und Energiefahrplan; ecoplus_landesstrategie) recognize an important economic opportunity in green technologies, noting that they create jobs and strengthen the region's economic standing and value generation. The Lower Austrian economic strategy (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ) highlights the growth potential of technology and digitalization but also outlines the necessity of state support for expanding internet infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, where the market alone cannot meet demand. Various organizations, including Ecoplus, Dorf- und Stadterneuerung, and ENU, offer consulting, funding, and guidance initiatives to communities on topics related to energy, e-mobility, and green technologies more broadly (Modellregion Mostviertel; LeitfadenOEK; Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; Klima- und Energiefahrplan).

In alignment with Lower Austria's documents, Austria's Just Transition Plan (JTP Ö) also emphasizes the need for key technologies. Technological innovation and economic growth are seen as essential to advancing decarbonization. The plan calls for increased efficiency,

expanded renewable energy use, and substituting fossil fuels with biogenic resources or recycling. Furthermore, the closure of carbon cycles and the implementation of thermal renovation are critical, with green technologies seen as integral to securing an international market position.

Position towards economy

Lower Austria brings up a quite holistic view. In their document, it is stated that a systemic perspective is needed. The following quote underlines this position: *“The transition to a system based on efficiency and renewable energies requires a fundamental structural change on the scale of a new industrial revolution.”* [transl. by author] (Klima- und Energiefahrplan, p. 8). They call for a fundamental structural change on the scale of the industrial revolution to transform the energy system into an efficient and renewable system. The energy used should be clean and renewable; however, they also see that even this renewable energy is not available in unlimited quantities and conclude that a reduction of energy use is needed in any case. They further state that the measures must be embedded regionally to make a long-term contribution (Klima- und Energiefahrplan; JTP Ö). Only the Lower Austrian Economic Strategy (23_WST3_Wirtschaftsstrategie_2025_EN) has not applied a view as holistic as the two above-mentioned documents. The only statement referring to structural change in the text is: *“Produce something new, preserve the good, discard the outdated”* [transl. by author] (23_WST3_Wirtschaftsstrategie_2025_EN, p. 10). However, seen in the context, it becomes evident that the “outdated” they talk about refers primarily to economically inefficient practices, and it is not necessarily about environmentally or socially harmful practices (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ).

Despite the rather holistic perspective of most documents within the political-administrative system, it is still clear that economic growth is pursued and must not be subordinated to climate neutrality. *“The goal of climate neutrality is supported and pursued by the industry. At the same time, not all economic and social activities can be subordinated to the goal of climate neutrality. In terms of a holistic understanding of sustainability, the balance between ecological, economic, and social interests must be maintained. This is the only way to ensure the competitiveness of industry, employment in the country, and social security for all.”* [transl. by author] (Standortfaktor-Energie, p. 8). It seems to be the general opinion that growth is both good and necessary, and it is believed that this growth can benefit both the climate and

the social situation. *“The economy creates the essential foundation for the quality of life of the citizens of Lower Austria and the preservation of their living space. It therefore makes an important contribution to the social cohesion of society.”* [transl. by author] (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ, p. 7). Sustainable growth is a key concept (ecoplus_landesstrategie; Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; JTP Ö). Thus, under the premise of offering its citizens more than other regions, Lower Austria aims to foster entrepreneurial friendliness, competitiveness, sustainable growth, and prosperity (ecoplus_landesstrategie). All the documents agree that Lower Austria should be an attractive location for sustainable companies and green start-ups, positioning itself as a pioneer in environmental and climate protection and offering the necessary infrastructure for companies (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landesstrategie; klimafitte stadt; Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; JTP Ö). Human resources are also critical; hence, training, qualifications, secure jobs, and a high quality of life must be maintained in the region to counteract the loss of jobs and job profiles during the transition and ensure continued economic growth (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landesstrategie; 23_WST3_Wirtschaftsstrategie_2025_EN). Affordable energy is also seen as key for competitiveness and the economy's success during this period of structural change, with renewable energy contributing to this in the long term (Klima- und Energiefahrplan).

Municipalities play an important role in shaping the economic landscape, according to Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung. In order to support their role in regional planning, municipalities are provided with advisory services, such as those from Ecoplus, which also manage infrastructures and services in business parks like IZ NÖ-Süd (klimafitte stadt; 23_WST3_Wirtschaftsstrategie_2025_EN; JTP Ö). The document Klimafitte Stadt highlights the importance of integrating sustainability into site development and business park renewal. According to the Klima- und Energiefahrplan, the economy and environmental protection benefit from one another. In general, green technologies are viewed as bringing many qualified and secure jobs to Lower Austria (klimafitte stadt; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; JTP Ö). This is why particularly disadvantaged regions are to be promoted as growth drivers, with sustainable growth being a key principle. For example, business models such as the circular economy or sharing economy are promoted (ecoplus_landesstrategie). The support provided by the JTF is intended to maintain the competitiveness of the local economy and, in turn, maintain and increase employment (JTP Ö).

Social-institutional focus

The measures suggested by the political-administrative system are manifold, and the consensus behind is that climate protection, economic development, and social justice must go hand in hand in order to ensure a sustainable future. Key ideas include a renewable and efficient energy network, climate-friendly building concepts, and a reduction of land consumption. The mobility system has to become more sustainable, for example, through car sharing and e-mobility (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landesstrategie; klimafitte stadt). Further, clear framework conditions and legislative changes (e.g., less bureaucracy) are seen as facilitators of the implementation. Regional economic development is promoted through investments in sustainable projects and support for SMEs and businesses in difficulties. Sustainable infrastructure and regional business hubs aim to improve quality of life and economic performance, particularly in rural areas, while fostering innovation and job creation (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landesstrategie; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; klimafitte stadt; Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ; Territoriale_Agenda_A3; JTP Ö). They also emphasize the need for education and training to create a skilled workforce aligned with emerging industries, particularly in green technologies (Klima- und Energiefahrplan; JTP Ö; ecoplus_landesstrategie). Social innovation is acknowledged as an important part of the transformation. Regional solutions and measures, including the local communities, like energy communities and networking, are targeted. There are initiatives to promote social welfare and awareness and offer advisory services on sustainability options. This kind of advisory support measures exists not only for individuals but also for municipalities, investors, and businesses through consulting services, project assistance, and funding. Further, volunteer work is an important topic in Lower Austria and is tried to be fostered. Cooperation at all societal and administrative levels is essential, for example, between businesses, municipalities, regions, and federal states, supported by funding programs and EU initiatives. The strategies and initiatives should be closely linked to EU strategies such as the Green Deal and Horizon Europe (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landesstrategie_noe_2030_kleine; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; Territoriale_Agenda_A3; JTP Ö). The Klima- und Energiefahrplan (2020-2030) emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the economy and environmental protection to combat climate change while ensuring prosperity and quality of life (Klima- und Energiefahrplan; KEM).

A very holistic understanding of sustainability seems to be expressed by the Energie- und Umweltagentur when they say that sustainability has to become a core matter of action. However, overall, the main goal seems to be to achieve sustainability and quality of life in Lower Austria by improving economic performance. The strategies want to transform Lower Austria into a more sustainable and attractive region for businesses and individuals, with particular attention given to rural areas and vulnerable populations. Lower Austria is actively engaged in various projects (Energie- und Umweltagentur; Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landesstrategie; JTP Ö).

Justice forms and social equity

Overall, it is visible that justice and social equity play a role in the political-administrative system. They implement social measures and consider vulnerable groups, both targeting the transition and measures aimed at social support. According to Ecoplus (ecoplus_landesstrategie), Lower Austria supports households in difficult situations and wants to be a state for young families where work and family life are compatible. Health and care services should equally be expanded, and social services should support the transformation. They state that it is Lower Austria's economic strength that makes it socially strong (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ; Klima- und Energiefahrplan; KEM). Interestingly, the aimed-for strength of Lower Austria is set in contrast to what other regions should be able to offer to their population: *“We want Lower Austria to be and remain the region that makes more of its future. A region that can offer its citizens more than others.”* [transl. by author] (ecoplus_landesstrategie, p. 3)

According to the national and international territorial agenda, social policies such as quality of life, services of general interest, digitalization, and Just Transition are needed to address growing inequalities. The local labor market needs to be shaped with public support, for example, through guidance systems, training opportunities, target-group-specific support, and mitigation of negative social impacts (Territoriale_Agenda_A3; JTP Ö).

The documents contain all the different forms of justice from Just Transition Literature; however, they are present to different extents.

- **Distributional Justice:**

Distributional Justice is not emphasized a lot by the political administrative system, apart from the fact that they mention the existence and support of disadvantaged groups of society.

Explanations of processes on how this imbalance in opportunities and possessions came to be are not mentioned. In the context of the transition, it is just briefly mentioned that different areas do have different proportions of employment in GHG-intensive sectors, so people are affected to different degrees (ecoplus_landestrategie; JTP Ö).

- Procedural Justice:

In the documents of the political administrative system, procedural justice is a topic. Most of the documents explain that they involve citizens, different experts, and stakeholders in their decision-making processes or strategy development. Dorf- und Stadterneuerung, for example, states that citizens should be involved in the local quality of life. Initiatives directly from the population are seen as particularly important (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung). According to the Ecoplus Landesstrategie, there is also a need for personal exchange, and the people of Lower Austria should be able to express their opinions on a regular basis, which is why political education work and democratic forms of participation should be supported (ecoplus_landestrategie; Klima- und Energiefahrplan). However, they do not only rely on the population's perspectives and ideas but find it necessary to draw on international expertise and scientific knowledge as well as strong partnerships involving local authorities, the population, energy companies, and local businesses (Klima- und Energiefahrplan; ecoplus_landestrategie). Also, the economic strategy of Lower Austria (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ) included a participation process for all stakeholders, meaning companies, experts, researchers, citizens, and students (Wirtschaftsstrategie NÖ). Interestingly, Lower Austria seems to have a strong culture of volunteer work and wants to support further and foster this practice (Dorf-Stadt-Erneuerung; ecoplus_landestrategie). However, it can be questioned whether relying on voluntary work to complement social services and react to climate impacts is not a rather neoliberal, individualizing approach that shifts the burden onto individuals, externalizing social problems rather than finding solutions at higher levels and applying structural solutions.

- Recognition Justice:

Recognition justice is not explicitly mentioned in the documents of the political-administrative system of Lower Austria. However, they clearly state that equality, diversity, and inclusion are important values. Awareness should be raised for specific target groups, and discrimination should be combatted. People of different genders, ethnicities, religions, ideologies,

disabilities, ages, and sexual orientations should not be disadvantaged, and there should be appropriate support programs, inclusion, and diversity in the education system. According to the Ecoplus Landesstrategie, these are important design principles for the future (ecoplus_landesstrategie; Klima- und Energiefahrplan).

- Cosmopolitan Justice:

Cosmopolitan justice is not mentioned explicitly, but it is still a topic in the documents of the political-administrative system. According to the Territorial Plan for a Just Transition, a transition should be fair for all areas and citizens in the EU. The Territorial Agenda states that common action is also needed at all geographical levels to ensure a positive future for all in Europe because there are increasing disparities and inequalities between people and places, including demographic, global embeddedness, and regional dependencies. (Territoriale_Agenda_A3; JTP Ö). In the Lower Austrian document Klima- und Energiefahrplan, it is mentioned that actions in one place impact ecological and economic systems elsewhere in the world. Their conclusion is that Lower Austria must, therefore, act responsibly and support its involvement in cross-border projects on the global dimension (Klima- und Energiefahrplan).

- Restorative Justice:

Restorative Justice is not explicitly mentioned in the documents of Lower Austria since most measures seem to focus more on alleviating future impact than compensating the current burden of the transition. The support granted for the regions most affected by the Just Transition Fund can possibly be counted as a kind of restorative justice. Due to the impact on the labor market, training will be needed, and new prospects must be offered to those affected (JTP Ö).

- Intergenerational Justice:

The Klima- und Energiefahrplan (Klima- und Energiefahrplan) states that restructuring the energy system is a generational project, which will have a massive impact on the livelihoods of future generations. According to them, the transition has to set the course for a future that is suitable for grandchildren; anything else is irresponsible towards future generations. There was the Lower Austrian Youth Climate Conference, where pupils debated with the state parliament and made proposals. In the Ecoplus Landesstrategie, they state that there should be a nice coexistence of old and young and mutual understanding. This is especially necessary

in structurally weak regions. This is not extremely linked to the Just Transition topic, but it shows a consideration of different generations and age in regions in general (ecoplus_landesstrategie).

Discussion

After the summarized results in the chapter above, this chapter discusses them.

According to the literature, Just Transition can mean anything from inclusion to revolution (Felli 2014). Cahill and Allen (2020) say it is a vague and vast topic and that Just Transition strands can be based on many different ideologies and disciplines to form many different definitions. According to Snell (2018), this results in a lack of conceptual clarity, which on the one hand provides flexibility for the implementation, but on the other hand, Just Transition can also become an empty signifier, disconnected from its roots, losing its transformative potential (Felli 2014; Morena et al., 2020). Wang & Lo (2021) agree on the existence of manifold definitions and contribute by their literature review to categorize existing approaches. They see less of a problem in a lack of conceptual clarity; however, they say that the different definitions must be clarified.

That is why, in the following, the results of the analysis are brought together with the literature on Just Transition in order to embed each organization's position within the existing frameworks. The goal was to answer the research question of how the topic of Just Transition manifests itself in Lower Austria and which positions the different policy actors take. The answer to this question was found by interpreting the outcomes presented in the chapter above and the relevant theoretic literature on Just Transition mentioned in the conceptual part of this master thesis. The frameworks of Stevis and Felli (2016) were of particular interest since they proposed interesting dimensions for analysis and allowed an approximate visualization of how to categorize the approaches of the different organizations. Their graphic "Varieties of (In)justice" (Stevis & Felli 2016, p. 36) served as a basis for the development of a graphic visualization of the results of this master's thesis.

The visualization and interpretation of the results allowed finding parallels and differences between the Just Transition characteristics described in the literature and what can be found in the analyzed documents. Also, the differences between the organizations were interesting

results, and the parameters used for the visualization were helpful in describing the appearance of Just Transition in Lower Austria and the position of the organizations towards it, finally answering the research question.

Visualization and interpretation of the results

As explained above, the framework of Stevis and Felli (2016) has served as a basis for interpreting the results of this master thesis. The authors develop a typology of (in)justice, where different types of justice are outlined. They distinguish between social or environmental focuses of the justice concept, with the environmental standing ranging from denying that nature has any ontological or moral value, the so-called anthropocentrism, to the primacy of nature, the strong ecocentrism, and the social standing ranging from social inequality to social equality. These two ranges are visualized in their graphic “Varieties of (In)justice” (Stevis & Felli 2016, p. 36) and have been used as the basis for the graphic developed for this master’s thesis as x- and y-axis. Unlike the graph by Stevis and Felli (2016), the ranges from social inequality to social equality, as well as the one from ecocentrism to anthropocentrism, are not fully depicted in the graph below. Only one side of the ranges has been used since all the examined organizations fit into these sides of the axis. All the organizations focus more on the anthropogenic side. The same counts for social inequality: despite differences in the amount of justice and equality sought for by the organizations, none of them is actively engaged in social inequalities. In the graph below, a z-axis has been added, representing the extent of intended change. This newly added axis, however, is fully displayed and ranges from one extreme to another, affirmative to transformative intention of change. This one is inspired by Stevis and Felli’s (2015) differentiation between affirmative and transformative approaches. Some strategies might aim for structural change, for completely transforming the current system in order to reach their justice goals. Others, however, are satisfied with the functioning of the current system and affirm its existence and its capability to deliver the wished-for outcome within the current structures. What also adds to this axis is further if the change the organization wants to foster is seen in a bigger picture and thought of in a broad context or if the proposed solutions are rather selectively focussed (Stevis & Felli 2015). In the following, the graphic visually representing the results extracted from the analysis of the Lower Austrian organizations is provided, with further explanations given below:

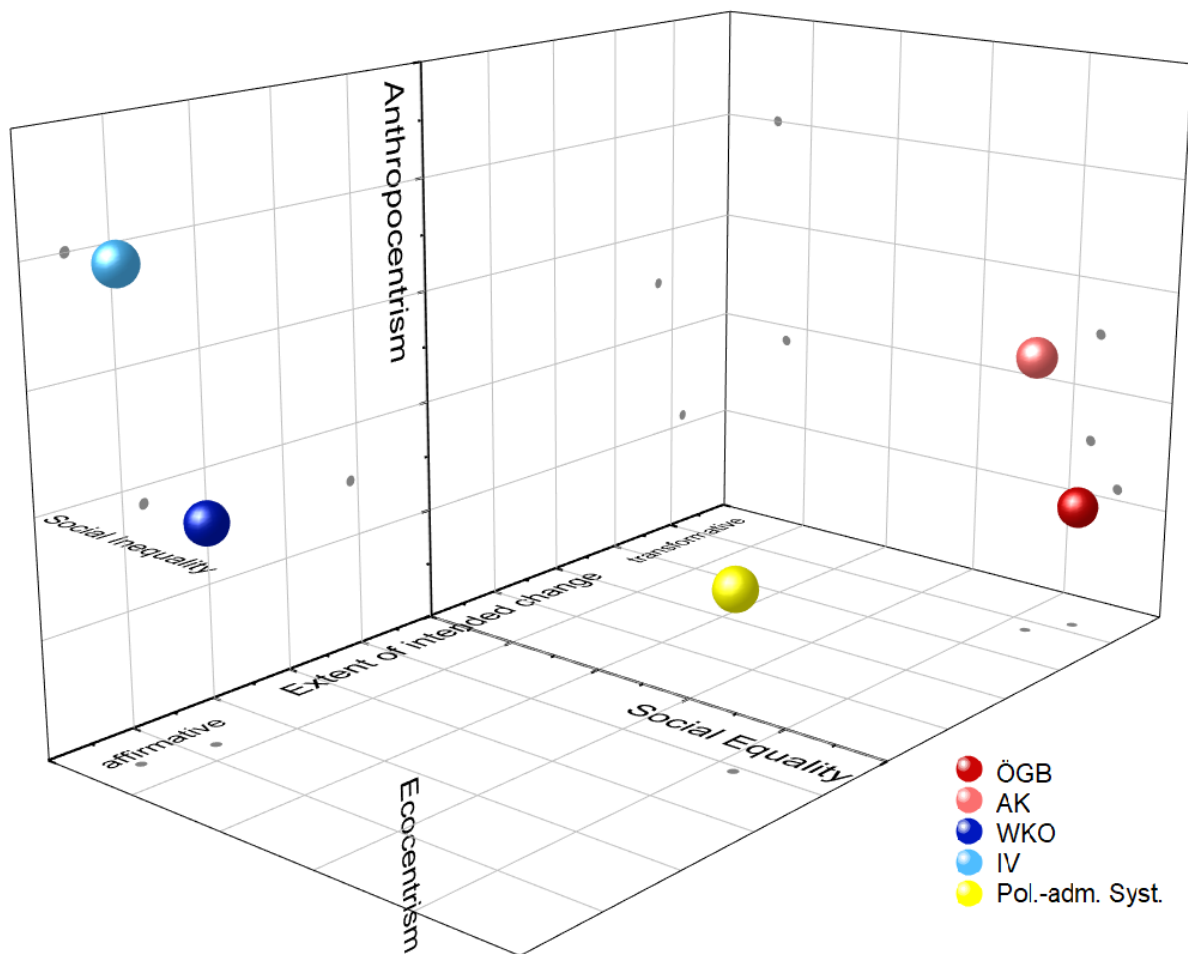


Figure 4: Just Transition Landscape Lower Austria – approximative visualization of qualitative results

The bullets represent the organization's position in this 3-dimensional space, with the grey dots indicating the corresponding projections on the 2-dimensional planes. Each bullet represents one organization as indicated in the legend. The values chosen for locating the organizations within the 3-dimensional space derive from the qualitative results presented in the chapter above and their interpretation in the context of the Just Transition literature. They are, therefore, an approximative approach to represent qualitative results visually, so no guarantee for quantitative accuracy and completeness can be given. In the following, it will be explained how the positions of the bullets came to be based on the results of the analysis brought together with the corresponding literature.

- Workers' side

The ÖGB, represented in dark red, and the AK in light red, are located in a similar graph area. Both show a strong tendency towards social equality, as can be clearly seen on the graphic with the bullets close to the end of the axis of social equality. In contrast to the others, the

ÖGB is the organization that mentions Just Transition explicitly several times, and their statements in the ÖGB-documents paint a clear picture of how they envision the transition. For the ÖGB, Just Transition means transitioning to a CO₂-neutral economy without leaving anyone behind. They are conscious about the harms and benefits that arise during a transformation, and it is important to them to aim for an equal and fair distribution. Social measures are emphasized repeatedly within the ÖGB documents. Thus, fairness and justice seem to play a huge role for them. The justice forms of distributional, procedural, recognition, cosmopolitan, and restorative justice are all mentioned in the ÖGB documents, and notions of space and time are present. Hence, their vision of Justice seems to be quite expansive. They are aware that inequalities would hinder a successful transformation. Just as their fellow representative of the worker's side, the documents of AK also explicitly mention the Just Transition, however less pronounced as the ÖGB. They emphasize the need to manage the climate crisis in a socially just way and take it very seriously. It is acknowledged that both harms and benefits arise out of the climate crisis and the corresponding climate policies. Low earners are mentioned several times as being particularly at risk of being burdened, but also, other marginalized groups are considered. The unjust distribution of benefits, however, is hardly mentioned. In order to alleviate the burdens, the AK calls for social intervention because, just like it is mentioned in literature (Carley & Konisky 2020; Snell 2018; Williams & Doyon 2019), the AK sees equity as of key importance for the transformation. The existence of different forms of justice is acknowledged by the AK. However, not all of them are actually present to the same extent and not as exhaustively as in the ÖGB documents. Distributional justice seemed to be most present in the AK documents, but also, procedural justice is mentioned several times, and recognition, restorative, and intergenerational justice are shortly mentioned. Cosmopolitan justice is not mentioned at all, and the documents in general seem to have their focus more on the local scale and are targeted primarily to employees. The measures are mostly concrete projects to support the vulnerable, expand infrastructure, and foster social innovation. Overall, the AK seems to address social equality quite well since it is very important to them to reduce inequalities not only on a narrow scope but in several aspects of life, like financial predisposition, gender, age, education, and wealth. The treated topics to work on are equally vast, from mobility, energy, and working conditions to construction and renovation, financial support, social innovation, and behaviour change. The

AK is therefore located quite on a high level of social equity on the axis, however not as far as the ÖGB since they emphasize social justice even more.

On the axis of the extent of intended change, both organizations are located close to the transformative extreme of the range. For the ÖGB, it is clear that the Just Transition concept stems back to the Labor Unions trying to protect vulnerable groups while performing environmental protection. The history of Just Transition is thus considered by ÖGB, which prevents the concept from losing its transformative potential, according to Morena et al. (2020). Further, the ÖGB seems to apply a quite broad approach. Their suggested and supported measures and solutions seem to be embedded in a larger vision. The ÖGB repeatedly voices the goal of transforming the system more fundamentally, not only on a local or sectoral level but on a broader global scale and scope. The ÖGB aims at delivering stable framework conditions for a transition, such as social security as a safety net for crises, broad infrastructure expansions, funding options, and a deep structural change towards more public control and a less neoliberal market economy. For these reasons, the bullet is located close to the extreme of transformative intention of change. Despite being literally the “Chamber of Labor”, the AK does not mention the origin of the Just Transition Concept in the labor movement, bearing the risk of using it as an empty signifier, according to Morena et al. (2020). However, the AK does aim for fundamental change as well, as they suggest that the current solutions are not enough in order to achieve a Just Transition, but that a more structural change is needed. The state plays an active and important role for the AK since it shall provide funding, public investment for services of general interest, and social security. It is even explicitly mentioned that pressure has to be put on the politics, so it seems to be a quite confrontational approach, which leads to AK’s position on a high level of intended transformative change. However, the level of AK is still a bit lower than the one of ÖGB since they consider a less expansive scope of change. Despite several aspects of life being taken into consideration, the AK has a less global and holistic perspective, which leads to this slightly less transformative position.

On the axis of anthropocentrism, the ÖGB is located on a rather low level. The ÖGB went slightly toward anthropocentrism since they clearly state that people have to enter center stage. Nature and environmental sustainability are topics; however, there is a bigger focus on the human side and on social-justice measures. Despite technological solutions being mentioned to mitigate environmental problems, the ÖGB still did not fit into the frame of a

purely anthropogenic worldview since the ÖGB does not see technology as the best solution to solve the current problems. It is pointed out several times that the measures need to take into account social and ecological aspects, resulting in a quite balanced yet anthropogenic position between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism. The AK's position is visibly more on the side of anthropocentrism. Ecology is mentioned only in the context of climate change as a reason behind the transformation but is not explicitly focused on in the further treatise of impacts and measures. Instead, the humans take center stage, which explains the rather high level of anthropocentrism in which the AK is positioned. However, unlike a purely anthropogenic world-view would propose it, technological solutions are mentioned but not seen as the saviour for adaptation to climate change. Hence, the position of the AK on this scale stays at a moderate level.

- Business side

The dark blue bullet represents the WKO on the graph. It is, just as the light blue bullet representing the IV, located quite on the opposite side of the graph compared to ÖGB and AK. In what concerns their standing on the range of social equality, both the WKO and the IV are on a quite low level. Certainly, both organizations from the business side claim to aim for justice and a fair transition. The WKO mentions that a fair distribution of transition costs is important, that those affected have to be supported, and that there is a social responsibility. However, it also became clear that this fairness is wished for businesses and WKO members in the first place and that socially positive outcomes are more a consequence of economic success and not the main motivation behind the WKO's activities. Economic competitiveness being one of their main goals did not seem to leave much space for an elaboration on justice matters. None of the justice forms is extensively treated; all of them are rather short, implicit, and not very concrete. The most prominent ones are recognition justice, cosmopolitan justice, and restorative justice. However, they all focus mostly on businesses to be treated justly. The same counts for the IV, yet here it was even less clear how far they are actually aiming for social equality. The documents do not particularly emphasize different burdens and benefits arising with the transition, except the economic opportunities and risks for businesses and industry. Also, the distribution of these burdens and benefits is not detailed. The different forms of justice - distribution, recognition, procedural, and intergenerational justice - hardly come up in the documents. Social security is mentioned, and social concerns are considered

for the transition planning. However, social topics like education are mentioned in the first place to provide a qualitative workforce to benefit competitiveness.

On the range of anthropocentrism, the IV are not located so close to each other. The WKO mentions several times environmental objectives and the inclusion of environmental protection into the businesses' activities and strategies, and they provide services for businesses to check their environmental impact. A healthy natural environment is mentioned to be important, yet their position does not fit on the ecocentric side of the range anyway. They have a huge focus on economic success, and also their interest in sustainability and environmental protection seemed to stem from the economic opportunities that arise from it. In this way, their interest in the environment is centered around the benefits for humans and for the economy. Also, they suggest that technologies are key to solving current problems, so with this belief in technology and the economy as "saviours" in crises, their approach reached a moderate anthropocentric standing on the corresponding axis. The IV, however, reaches an even higher level on this axis since they have a huge focus on the human side of transition. While nature and the environment do not play an important role to them, the well-being of the economy is a key priority for the IV. Further, technologies have been put forward several times as great solutions to sustainability concerns.

In what concerns the extent of intended change, the IV as well as the WKO are both far on the affirmative side of the range. The WKO very strongly orients on the European Green Deal, aiming to unite economic growth with environmental protection. Their approach seemed to fit into what Stevis and Felli (2020) call the third period of using the term Just Transition, when the opportunity of growth via a Just Transition became attractive. Since then, green growth and green capitalism have been focused on first before the other characteristics of Just Transition, and this also seemed to be the case for the WKO. The approach is non-conflictual, and the socioeconomic context and power relations are not questioned. As a consequence, the WKO's approach has been positioned as being not transformative but very affirmative towards the current economic system. The same has been done with the light blue bullet of IV. In their documents, the market economy is mentioned to be very important, and the main goal is to foster economic growth. Change is aimed for via reform and not transformation, and also, the distributional impacts are quite focused since they are not elaborated. The IV has a slightly closer position to the end of this axis since their approaches seem to be a bit less broad

than those proposed by WKO but more focused on Lower Austrian prosperity and more critical about any potential threats to the goal of economic competitiveness.

- Political-administrative system

The political-administrative system, represented by the yellow bullet, is located somewhat in the middle between the workers' side and the business side, yet not exactly. The concept of transition by the political-administrative system of Lower Austria is quite wholesome. They have a very broad approach to the transition. However, they do not mention Just Transition explicitly (except the Territorial Plan for a Just Transition). Nevertheless, environmental protection and social well-being are still important to them, and they voice their opinion that economic, environmental, and social goals have to go hand in hand. The political-administrative system mentions several stakeholders and fields of action, with manifold examples of measures. Social justice seems to be important; however, the main goal is economic growth in Lower Austria. When locating their position on the axis of social equality, the political-administrative system reaches a rather high level, just as the AK and ÖGB do. The documents mention all justice forms, and space and time are taken into consideration. There are various participation processes, some of which foster very independent action by the social groups and give them a lot of responsibility. Also, they are not only recognized, but they can speak up and actively engage. This is, for example, the case when students were working on suggestions for environmental measures. Local volunteers are encouraged to maintain sustainable mobility concepts or be part of community-owned energy solutions. Different societal groups, especially vulnerable ones, are considered, and social security and support are aimed at them. In most documents, it is not explicitly pointed out that the transition in itself may be at the origin of unequal distribution and that this is what has to be addressed throughout the transition. However, social measures seem to be important for Lower Austria anyway.

Concerning the axis of anthropocentrism, the political-administrative system, just like the ÖGB, is not on a very high level. This is because the environment and protection of nature come up several times; however, technology also seems to be seen as a solution to environmental problems, which is why the political-administrative system has a slightly higher level on this scale than the ÖGB. Furthermore, social and especially economic goals lie in the focus, putting the human very much into their focus. Pure anthropocentrism, however, is also

not right, since preserving the environment is a topic. However, economic goals and technological solutions are more focused on this direction.

The extent of the intended change seemed to be quite broad; the documents write about manifold different areas of action, from social support to consulting over fostering business success, economic growth, technology, administration, international relations, and construction energy and infrastructure. However, the measures seemed to be quite specific to each of them, and so are there, for example, village places being rebuilt sustainably or local e-mobility projects being carried out, which is a rather narrow understanding of transition. But it is also mentioned that a fundamental structural change, on the scale of the industrial revolution, is needed. These quite different points of view do not support either a purely affirmative or a purely transformative approach. Nevertheless, the intention of change voiced by the political-administrative system lies more on the side of reform, affirmative towards the current system. It is mentioned that a huge structural change is necessary; however, the specific measures and the orientation on economic growth still seem to confirm that they have a rather affirmative position. State and capital are not seen as responsible for the crisis, and the political-administrative system does not question power relations. Market-based solutions and technological fixes are seen as very useful for the transition. However, the state is seen as an important actor, and state intervention and social safety are regarded as possibly helpful for the transition.

All in all, it can be said that all organizations agree on the necessity of a transition. Their positions, however, differ significantly in terms of social equity, economic growth, and the extent of transformation they propose. The ÖGB and AK place a strong emphasis on social equality, meaning social well-being and different justice forms are put forward and call for social security as a social safety net. They both support an inclusive and social Just Transition aiming for a transformative approach towards structural change. They voice extensive critiques of neoliberal solutions and advocate for less market-based approaches and more state involvement and public ownership. Their position seemed to be closest to the criteria for a successful Just Transition formulated by academic literature (Williams & Doyon 2019; Snell 2018; Carley & Konisky 2020; Heffron 2021). In contrast to them, the WKO, IV, and also the political-administrative system of Lower Austria adopt affirmative positions towards the current system, focusing on economic growth, market-driven solutions, and limited state intervention. They both strongly advocate for the principles of the free market, which stands

in hard contrast to the recommendations made by literature to not rely on market-based solutions to solve the climate crisis. Since the WKÖ and IV are both representatives for businesses and industry, this is, however, not surprising. They might stand in for justice and sustainability along the value chain. Yet, they clearly say that sustainability can be supported only if it does not negatively affect competitiveness. Their approach corresponds with the neoliberal trend that scholars (Heffron 2021; Krawchenko & Gordon 2021; Sabato & Fronteddu 2020; Sabato & Mandelli 2023) identify in the current sustainability policy and in the Green Deal. The direction the Just Transition Plan in Austria (JTP Ö) pursues is the strategy of “diversification and employment”. New economic activities going hand in hand with the Green Deal are to be financed, and a framework for innovative economic development and shaping of the labor market is aimed for, as this is what the JTP Ö suggests.

The political-administrative system finds itself in between, acknowledging social issues but still emphasizing the importance of economic growth and technological solutions. They see the state as an important actor and consider social measures. However, there is no opposition to neoliberalism, but affirmation of the current system and market-solutions seen as adequate approaches. Their approach can represent a compromise, balancing economic and social concerns but remaining within a reformist, market-oriented framework. Whether the tendency of the political-administrative system to also go towards affirmation of the current system stems from the influence of powerful actors on them is certainly an interesting question, yet not answerable by this research.

Limitations and Outlook

The research that was conducted did, as we can see, deliver quite interesting results. While the worker’s side (ÖGB and AK) advocates for a transformative, inclusive Just Transition that addresses the needs of vulnerable groups, social justice and structural change, the business side (WKÖ and IV) takes a more market-driven approach, prioritizing economic growth and competitiveness with a more limited focus on social equality or environmental concerns. The political-administrative system of Lower Austria represents a compromise, balancing social well-being with economic growth but leaning towards an affirmative approach and market-based solutions.

During the process of this research, some limitations have presented themselves. In a very first approach, the initial idea was to look upon the region Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen, one of

the two Lower Austrian regions eligible for the Just Transition Fund support. During the material collection, however, it became clear very soon that there is almost no material on such a local level touching upon relevant topics for this thesis. The research question had, therefore, been adapted to examine Lower Austria as a whole.

During the interpretation of the results, another limitation appeared. The results have been visualized and interpreted in the context of the literature. The visualization may, at first sight, give the impression of being a mathematical construct with precise locations spotted on the graph. This is, however, not the case since the generated results derive from a qualitative analysis. The graph does, therefore, even if it may look like it, not represent quantitative numbers. The bullets are placed approximately on the spot indicated by the qualitative interpretation. For precise quantitative results, another analysis would have to be conducted. Such an analysis, however, goes beyond the possibilities of this work and was not its main goal. Further studies may, however, take up this subject and follow up with quantitative research.

Moreover, the analysis of documents did not allow us to dig deeper into some questions that came up during the analysis and interpretation, for example, why the topic Just Transition is not addressed more explicitly by many organizations. The organizations' positions on the topic have been revealed as far as the documents allowed to connect their statements to the topic of a Just Transition. However, for further research, it could be useful to conduct interviews with representatives of the organizations in order to understand better how far they link their organization's activities with the Just Transition Mechanism and Just Transition principles. Doing so went beyond the scope of feasibility for this research. However, it is an interesting starting point for further research. It could reveal explications for the organizations' positions and ultimately lead to suggestions on what concretely could be done to speed up the transformation and make sure that the region wisely uses the Just Transition Fund. Also, questions about power relations had to be mentioned since their further treatise goes beyond the scope of this research and could be subjected to further research in the context of Just Transition.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how the concept of Just Transition manifests itself in the public discourse of Lower Austria and how policy actors take position towards it. Representing the public discourse documents from the workers' side, the business side, and the political-administrative system have been analyzed in order to see how they approach the topic, how they frame the transition, and the roles that they envision for themselves in this process.

Through the qualitative document analysis, it became clear that while these actors share an understanding of the necessity for transition, their perspectives diverge significantly in terms of priorities and strategies. On the one hand, the workers' side, represented by ÖGB and AK, emphasizes the social and justice dimensions of the transition. For these organizations, Just Transition is first and foremost about social fairness and ensuring that the workers who are most vulnerable to the impacts of the transition are supported, retrained, and compensated adequately. The transition must, in their view, be both green and socially just, with policies aimed at protecting jobs, securing decent wages, and upholding workers' rights. Without considering the social and justice implications, a transition cannot be successful, according to them. For ÖGB and AK, the Just Transition concept is not just an environmental issue, but it is an issue of social equity. Their approach is in line with what scholars from the Just Transition literature also envision as a desirable Just Transition concept.

In contrast, the business side, represented by WKÖ and IV, places much more emphasis on technological innovation, economic growth, and market-based solutions. For these organizations, the transition is seen as an opportunity for economic development through green technologies, energy innovations, and new industries. While they acknowledge the importance of social justice in the process, they focus primarily on ensuring that businesses remain competitive and can adapt to new market conditions. The transition, for WKÖ and IV, is framed as an opportunity for economic growth driven by innovation and investment in green technologies. Social and justice concerns are less present, especially if they are not in relation to the job market and the provision of a qualified workforce for the economy. Their approach aligns with the European Green Deal, thus fitting into the neoliberal trend in current sustainability policies and neglecting points of critique and improvement identified by scholars from the Just Transition literature.

The political-administrative system, represented by documents of Land Niederösterreich and agencies such as Ecoplus, Dorf- & Stadterneuerung, and ENU, is positioned somewhere in the middle between these two quite opposite positions. Social support is an important topic in the political-administrative system of Lower Austria, and they encourage broad social inclusion in the process of transformation. The political-administrative system advocates for balancing economic and social considerations by supporting projects fostering innovation and regional development. They emphasize sustainability and regional resilience, seeking to ensure that the transition happens in a way that is both economically viable and socially inclusive. Their approach affirms the current system aiming for economic growth and not searching for a more fundamental transformation despite their broad consideration of social matters.

Although there is general agreement on the importance of transitioning to a low-carbon economy, the paths to achieving it are very divergent. The social dimension of the transition, focusing on justice and inclusivity, is most prominently emphasized by the workers' organizations. In contrast, business organizations focus on technological solutions and economic growth. The political-administrative system seems to bridge these two perspectives, yet the challenge lies in integrating these often-conflicting priorities into a coherent strategy that works for all.

The document analysis provided useful insights into how these organizations discuss the transition. The theory of Just Transition also brought up important points on the topic and allowed us to look at the analysis results through the lens of a theoretical framework. One key takeaway from this thesis is that the transition cannot be understood solely regarding technology or economics. According to the literature, it must be seen as an integrated process that brings together environmental sustainability and social justice. In the public discourse, the policy actors from the workers' side are the ones whose position is closest to this academic point of view. The policy actors from the business side put economic success forward. They do not neglect the importance of a Just Transition; however, they do see the need to first deliver a successful economic performance, which will then allow social wellbeing. The policy actors from the political-administrative system position themselves between the two; they still consider the current system and economic growth as important but also emphasize social security and inclusion measures.

A further-reaching sight into research on the European Green Deal suggests that shortcomings in the implementation of Just Transition may derive from the conceptualization of the Just Transition Mechanism. The strong emphasis of the European Green Deal on economic growth and social investment instead of a strong social security basis and more consensus and dialogue can be one reason why such a focus is also to be found in the implementation of Just Transition in Lower Austria. Established power relations might be a reason why fundamental structural change is hard to implement and why the logic of the neoliberal market-economy is perpetuated. However, these implications go beyond the scope of the master's thesis and are to be explored in further research.

In conclusion, this thesis has contributed to the understanding of the positions and approaches of key actors in Lower Austria regarding Just Transition. The findings highlight the diverse ways in which Just Transition is interpreted, as well as the discrepancies between the suggestions made in the academic literature and their application and suggestions made by the organizations. This, however, underlines what has been stated by literature: Just Transition is a contested and multifaceted concept. It leaves us with the challenge to integrate these diverse perspectives, to overcome old structures and inhibiting forces, and to move on to a fair and inclusive transition for all.

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