



Just: show it and then you know it?!

Just resilience

Highlights from the 3rd Just Transition Dialogue 2022



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Authors/team

Thies Reemer (eds.), Yael van Assendelft, Monica van Alphen, Ingrid Coninx, Marijke Dijkshoorn-Dekker, Eunice Likoko, Tossa Harding, Esther Koopmanschap, Bertram de Rooij, Emma Termeer

Design

Bertram de Rooij

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Street kids in Les Cayes, Haiti (Chris Dennis/350.org via Flickr.com)

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Introduction

Now the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt worldwide, European countries step up their efforts to support adaptation for increasing resilience to its effects. The most vulnerable groups are still the most affected as noted by the European Environment Agency, for example older people, children, groups of low socio-economic status and persons with health problems. In recent years, justice is stronger on the policy agenda with terms such as “Just Transition” and “Just Resilience”. The EU committed itself to achieving SDG 10 on reducing inequalities and to Leave No One Behind (LNOB), as part of its pledge to the UN 2030 agenda.

On the 12th of October, a group of 30 researchers, practitioners and policy makers from 10 countries met in an online dialogue as part of a series on justice in sustainability transitions. Organised by Wageningen University & Research in collaboration with the Europe office of the Covenant of Mayors, the dialogue focused on urban areas in Europe. The EU Adaptation Strategy provided the policy context for the dialogue, highlighting the role of the European Environment Agency to provide sound and independent information to all involved, while the Covenant of Mayors provided the challenges and good practices to operationalise Just Resilience at the local level. Participants joined in the discussion.

The main question on the table:

“What is the role and the potential of indicators in operationalising just resilience?”

At the virtual table, Pavla Vidanová, Petya Pishmisheva and Kati Mattern joined. Pavla Vidanová represented the EU Directorate General Climate Action (in short “DG Clima”), Petya Pishmisheva shared with us the perspective of the Covenant of Mayors about challenges and practices to operationalise Just Resilience at the local level and Kati Mattern joined from the European Environment Agency (EEA) to take us along their current work on indicators for just resilience.

This provided a solid start for the follow-up discussion. Participants joined tuned in the discussion, worked together in subgroups and made a deep-dive on four specific issues that build on:

- just mapping tools
- just processes and decision-making
- just adaptation
- just comparability

In this report the main points deriving from this dialogue are brought together.





Figure 1:
*Illustration used by the EU for the Climate
Adaptation Strategy 2021*

How to make

“smarter, more systemic and faster adaptation” also just?

The EU strategy of smarter, more systemic and faster adaptation to climate change reinforces the pledge of equitable sharing of benefits & burdens and Leaving No One Behind. Pavla Vidanova pointed at the lack of practical tools and approaches for Just Resilience. How can we then guide member states on measuring progress of just resilience?

The EU adaptation strategy was adopted in February 2021, aiming at a climate-resilient EU society by 2050, fully adapted to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The strategy sets out objectives that are translated into 14 “actions, elaborated in more detail in 48 “commitments”. Internally, 230 “measures” have been identified in detail that should support adaptation to climate change. In the strategy “justice” is explained in terms of fair sharing of costs and benefits of adaptation, and that no one should be left behind.

Apart from the strategy itself, DG Clima provides guidance to Member States to develop their own national adaptation strategies. Pavla indicated this is not an easy task.

The efforts centre around justice considerations at every step of policy cycle, starting from planning. For example how to conduct a climate risk assessment that includes the perspective of vulnerable groups. And of course the challenge of how to measure just resilience: how to set a baseline with meaningful indicators to track progress.

“I must say it’s quite challenging to think about how to translate these theoretical concepts into something that should be used in practice”.

Pavla Vidanova

“Almost one in every six cities noted the need to receive more support on just resilience and unpack the concept of what it means in practice”

Petya Pishmisheva

Where to find the good practices and the experts?

Petya Pishmisheva of the Covenant of Mayors, a movement supporting climate adaptation in over 10,000 municipalities of all sizes, added that there are hardly any experts on Just Resilience to assist municipalities. What is the way forward?

The Covenant of Mayors supports municipalities to achieve and exceed the EU climate and energy targets by answering to specific needs of cities regarding adaptation, and link them with experts. Just resilience is one of the topics. On most topics there is an abundance of experts, however Just Resilience is relatively new and complex, and there are many question marks and challenges for cities to address.

Generally, cities understand Just Resilience as engaging citizens in the design of adaptation strategies. This means a limited focus within the area of “procedural justice”. Currently, to talk about operationalising Just Resilience mostly means talking about challenges!

Some challenges

- Local administrations find the topic elusive and too general to really embrace it. With the understanding of engaging citizens, cities focus on actions like greening and shelters against heat and flooding, with efforts to make these accessible for citizens irrespective of their social setting. The Covenant of Mayors argues that it is not as simple as that, there is a need to unpack it further, set some indicators and an operational framework to advance just resilience.
- So, there is not enough just resilience practice out there! And therefore also limited examples for municipalities to take inspiration from.
- Silo's: climate or environment departments within municipalities are often disconnected from social services, which makes it also unclear where the capacities on Just Resilience should be developed.
- Traditional risk and vulnerability analyses methodologies and processes do not always consider justice aspects. Particularly, there is gap of assessing negative impacts of adaptation action to specific vulnerable groups. Their voices need to be magnified during planning and prioritisation of the actions to adapt to climate change.
- Adaptation can be very context specific, yet one size fits all solutions (mainly infrastructural solutions such as for flood prevention, cycle paths, space for greening) tend to be replicated without taking the population composition into account. Moreover, these investments focus on neighbourhoods of middle class inhabitants while ignoring peripheral districts where lower income inhabitants live.

Although good practices are still scarce, there are some good examples.

Adaptation indicators are complex

Focus on transparency of information

Kati Mattern pointed out that the EEA and ETC/CCA already made efforts to bring out justice aspects in adaptation processes with evidence and data. The results are several papers and reports, for example about access to green spaces, cooling of buildings in cities, health and other issues.

Kati mentioned the current study about how just resilience could be measured, aiming to inform EU and Member State adaptation policies. Indicators would enable progress reporting at EU and Member State levels and would help to prepare input for next EU funding schemes. The work did not result in detailed guidance for cities yet, the current focus is at EU and national levels. The past decade has shown how complex the setting of indicators for climate adaptation is, let alone for justice. Not to get lost in the many available sets of indicators, we review policies to see which require justice indicators and investigate causal relationships leading to injustice in climate adaptation. This involves for example the distribution of benefits and burdens of adaptation. The idea is that we thus focus on indicators that can be supported with a reliable data sources.

EEA sees its role as ensuring that scoping of justice indicators remains policy and practice relevant, and support practitioners with practical overviews of causal relationships that are known between climate change impacts / adaptation actions.

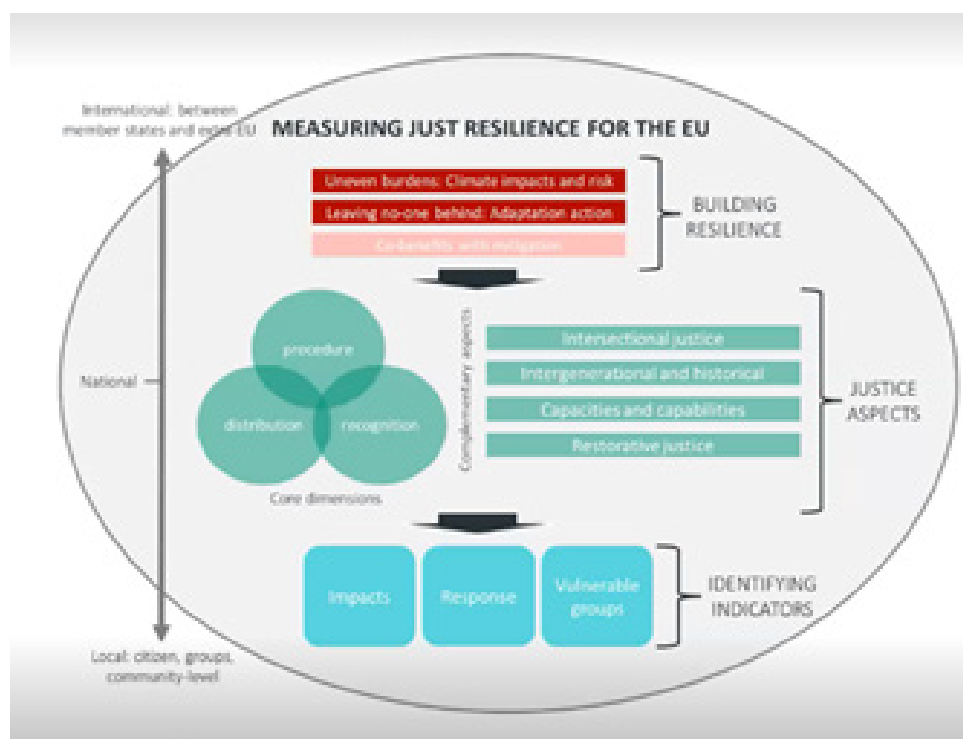


Figure 2:
EEA model for measuring just resilience
in the EU

The idea of showing injustice on maps

One of the ideas for measuring just resilience is to show injustice in mapping tools. A sub-group dived into the question: what we should be able to show on these maps?

There is a risk of drowning in the wide range of possible indicators. Mapping tools – like climate effect atlases – are all about spatial distribution and making issues visible and linked. There is a need to link existing risk and vulnerability data to demographic data and perhaps also sector specific data (i.e. employment). Or maps indicating flood-risk areas combined with information about poverty or other forms of deprivation.

In Glasgow the flood-prone areas are the poorer areas, where emissions are low. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivations – SIMD – perhaps not ideal but useful could be cross-referenced with maps showing levels of flood risk. Or perhaps areas with industries that are affected by transitions (oil and gas) to show where in cities there is a need to safeguard people's jobs and livelihoods.

Extending mapping tools with these kind of demographic and societal layers sounds promising, so that people who are at risk and who cannot afford appropriate action to reduce the impact can be more easily reached.

However, it comes with some constraints:

- Where to start?
- How to find vulnerable individuals and groups with the current privacy regulations?
- What level/scale?
- How to link distributional, recognitional and adaptive capacity to the maps? What is the story to tell?

There is a common feeling that connecting narratives, based on causal relations, helps in building/extending mapping tools. The aim should be to better inform society and policymakers by showing the actual and factual maps. If you show it, and then you know it. However, that does not yet mean giving vulnerable groups a respected voice.

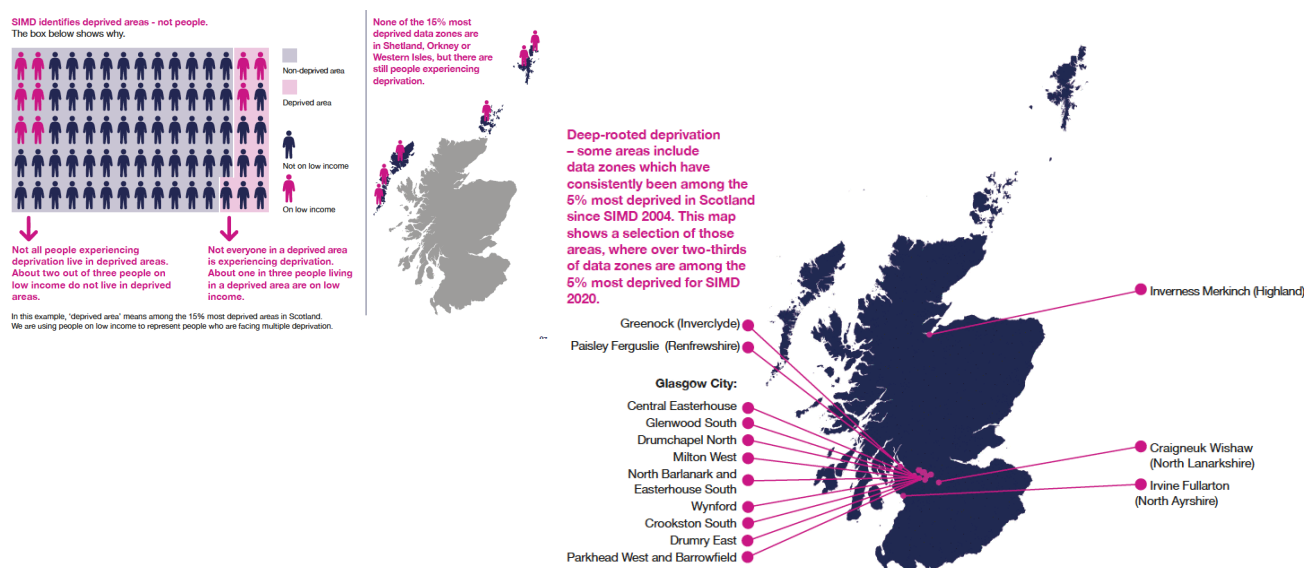


Figure 3:
Examples SIMD Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020
(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-multiple-deprivation-2020>)

More just adaptation

processes and indicators

for decision making

Another sub-group shared about interventions to make adaptation processes and measures more just, and deliberated how indicators be set and used properly in decision-making.

"Creative approaches instead of technical adaptation processes are needed".

What we see in most adaptation processes is that the usual suspects are involved in the process and only the problems that are already on the surface are addressed. This way, adaptation processes and measures become more and more 'technical'. Many groups are still not at the table. This is not only problematic from a justice perspective, but also because the challenges are so complex and require a diversity of stakeholders perspectives and ideas to resolve. Creative approaches enrich adaptation processes and also help reach the 'unusual suspects', such as young people. Creative processes can take place through (sub)fora, dialogues or initiatives on websites.

"Focus first on recognitional justice in adaptation processes".

At this point, it is good to be careful not to focus blindly on completing a set of indicators. In parallel, we must also improve the process, better understand the situation on the ground and overcome framing by justice indicators. "Recognitional justice" as the first step is important when considering indicators. Involve everyone and create a good space to talk to them, and then look at the indicators again, as a secondary step.

"Continuous learning is very important."

Each crisis creates new inequalities and thus new indicators to monitor. For example, the energy crisis, the financial crisis, the covid crisis, all these crises change the individual needs for certain groups. For example, we see that during covid green places to relax nearby have become increasingly important for certain groups of people. Although there is currently a need to combine energy poverty and social geographic indicators. We should keep track of the drivers of inequality and continuous learning is very important in this regard. Therefore, it is difficult to establish these indicators from the beginning and work with a static set of indicators. To make adaption processes more just, the disadvantaged should be compensated, and who and how differs over time.

"We need a focus on the 'how' instead of the 'what'".

Just transition contains normative topics that we all agree are important. There is a risk that Just Transition becomes a buzzword, rather than action on the ground. We know what needs to be done, but not how; we need processes to achieve these normative goals. We need new indicators, but how do we get them? How do you put it into practice? There must be good Just Transition processes that tackle this topic.

Detecting maladaptation

requires listening and adaptive planning

Maladaptation is a term that is used for measures to adapt to climate change that actually make things worse for some individuals or groups. One group discussed how to make adaptation measures more just, how to set indicators and how to use these in decision making. Detecting maladaptation is an important way to promote justice.

Firstly, maladaptation can be detected through scenario analysis to try to predict where costs and benefits of adaptation measures would be felt. A well-defined and validated model of our society, coupled with the ecology, would help to come up with scenarios that can identify constraints in the future. But no one can make up everything from behind their desk. Pre-set indicators will not work because of the complexity, and therefore it is essential to keep talking to people and different groups.

Secondly, a more action oriented approach could be used by applying justice frameworks to concrete cases. A culture of reflexive monitoring would be needed within the ways of working of the different teams involved, to recognise emerging issues.

Thirdly, just ask people how they would experience certain adaptation measures. Art and stories from people have a huge power to put issues forward to influence adaptation processes, and there are other creative methodologies to detect where things (may) go wrong for certain individuals and groups that are yet to be brought to the fore.

Why try to compare cities

on just resilience?

Another reason to come up with indicators is to compare progress on just resilience between cities. The Covenant of Mayors wondered in the past whether benchmarking was needed regarding justice in adaptation processes, but they decided against this. Cities are so diverse, because of their location, population, size, risks they face and many other factors! Cities should develop their own indicators and be inspired by successes and failures of other cities. A long list of indicators perhaps with examples how these have been used by other cities can be helpful to pick and choose from, but not a universal list for comparison. The involvement of people from different groups in choosing indicators, and the transparency about that process could be more important for success than the exact choice of indicators.

Before talking about indicators the goal of Just Resilience must be embedded in the way cities approach adaptation to climate change. This requires a change in mindsets and this is where efforts should initially be focused on.

To conclude

The general sentiment about indicators was that it is really not just about the figures or the numbers, it is about the mindset change of planning and managing adaptation efforts with a justice lens. A key lesson was also that although success stories may inspire, these may not be the most effective to really teach us how to promote justice in adaptation to climate change. Failures on the other hand can reveal which assumptions were wrong, and what actions contributed to injustice or lack of ownership of groups in society of the adaptation process.

The discussion shows us that we need to build bridges between vulnerable groups and between departments and pioneers, since everyone holds a piece of the complex puzzle. People need to pro-actively reach out to each other to put the pieces together. City and national administrations need to move away from the focus on assets and technologies, to focus on vulnerable groups (and people in general) and process. Meaningful stakeholder consultation should be part and parcel of adaptation planning, from the start to the climate risk assessment to the development of indicators and measures.

Zooming out to policy level, the differences in knowledge about justice between sectors is striking, and needs to be addressed. Agriculture, water management and health sectors are relatively well covered, while little is known about rural populations that are increasingly cut off from public services due to climate change. Vulnerable populations do not have a strong voice and nobody is reporting on their behalf. Researchers could have a very valuable contribution if they would take a broader overview approach rather than focusing on for example a sector, to watch out more systematically for injustices that are overlooked and underreported. A call to the academic community!



Wageningen University & Research
P.O. Box 47
6700 AB Wageningen
The Netherlands
T +31 (0) 317 48 07 00
www.wur.eu

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