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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Politics, voice and just transition: who has a say in climate change decision making, and who does not

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The city of Bristol, UK, set out to pursue a just transition to climate change in 2020. This paper explores what happened next. We set out to study how just transition is unfolding politically on the ground, focusing on procedural justice. Over the course of a year, we conducted interviews and observations to study decision making at three levels – public sector, private sector and civil society. We found that not only is it difficult to define what just transition means, even for experts, but that the process of deciding how to pursue such a transition is highly exclusionary, especially to women and ethnic minorities. We therefore argue there is an urgency to revise decision-making procedures and ensure that there is ample opportunity to feed into decision-making processes by those who are typically excluded. Inclusive decision making must be embedded into the process of just transition from the beginning and throughout its implementation – it is not a step that can be 'ticked off' and then abandoned, but rather an ongoing process that must be consistently returned to. Finally, we conclude that cities have the unique opportunity to pilot bottom-up participatory approaches and to feed into the process of how a just transition might be pursued at the global level – for example, through their participation in the United Nations Framework for the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) processes.

Key words just transition • procedural justice • climate change • city •
inclusive decision making

Key messages
- Decision making around just transition to climate change is exclusionary.
- Just transition to climate change is hard to define for policy makers.
- Procedural justice must be embedded into the process of just transition.
- Cities have the unique opportunity to feed into the framing of just transitions at the global level.

Introduction

The city of Bristol, UK, set out to pursue a just transition to climate change in 2020. This paper explores what happened next. We set out to study how just transition is unfolding politically on the ground, focusing on procedural justice. Over the course of a year, we conducted interviews and observations to study decision making at three levels – public sector, private sector and civil society. Here, we set out our findings and reflect on what they mean for just transition more broadly. The paper begins with a brief overview of the literature, where we argue that the concept of just transition has become ever more pliable, which indicates the importance of procedural justice for understanding the local context. However, we find literature exploring issues of procedural justice, especially at the city scale, lacking. Next, we turn to discussing the reasons for choosing the city scale and Bristol, in particular, and outline our mixed-methods approach. Following this, we discuss our two main findings: first, decision making around just transition in Bristol is exclusionary, and second, the concept of just transition is not easily defined, even by climate stakeholders. We therefore argue there is an urgency to revise decision-making procedures and ensure that there is ample opportunity to feed into decision-making processes by those who are typically excluded. Inclusive decision making must be embedded into the process of just transition from the beginning and throughout its implementation – it is not a step that can be 'ticked off' and then abandoned, but rather an ongoing process that must be consistently returned to. Finally, we conclude that cities have the unique opportunity to make space for bottom-up participatory approaches for the conceptualisation of just transitions and what this means for the diverse community groups they represent, and to feed into the process of just transitions at the global level.

Literature review

The concept of just transition has undergone considerable historical evolution over three distinct phases (Morena et al, 2018). From 1970 to 2000, the concept emerged and developed as part of the US labour movement and was principally framed around a narrow argument that public policy both could and should reconcile its environmental objectives with their potential social and economic costs. In the next phase, 2000–10, the concept became embedded in the international labour movement within the Global North. During that time, the wider diffusion of the concept, its evolution within the labour movement, and its encounters with the environmental justice movement led to more extensive conceptions of justice being integrated into the just transition framework. Consequently, that framework came to include dimensions of procedural, recognition and restorative justice (McCauley and Heffron, 2018; Abram et al, 2022). Additionally, just transition began to incorporate wider concerns about the potential impacts of environmental and post-carbon transitions beyond those directly affecting workers. Finally, in the third and current phase – from 2010 onwards – the concept has gone mainstream in climate change debates, become globalised,

and been co-opted by a diverse range of actors, organisations and movements. The concept has proliferated far beyond its initial meaning, become ever more elastic and increasingly been deployed in very different ways by numerous different actors (Stevis and Felli, 2020; White, 2020). Responding to that development, scholars have arranged the prevailing visions of just transition into typologies according to their scale (over what spatial and temporal span is transition envisaged?), scope (which actors and concerns are considered relevant to the transition?), and ambition (how radical is the transition envisaged?) (Morena et al, 2018; Cha et al, 2021; Just Transition Initiative, 2021; Wilgosh et al, 2022).

The emergence of such typologies reflects the fact that just transition has – over the course of its 50-year history – shifted from being a relatively well-demarcated and clearly grounded concept to an increasingly all-encompassing policy objective containing a diverse and continually evolving range of goals and priorities. In doing so, however, the concept has become so generalised and abstract that it is now untethered from any specific policies, political objectives or normative priorities (Stevis and Felli, 2020; White, 2020; Bainton et al, 2021; Just Transition Initiative, 2021). Indeed, while there are overlaps between the different visions of just transition, there are significant aspects of those visions that directly contradict one another. So, while high-level endorsements of just transition as a policy ambition – such as the Silesia Declaration (COP24 Presidency, 2018) or the 2015 Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2016: 2) – are encouraging, it is important to remember that the concept itself remains heavily contested, and that the abstract nature of such declarations can serve to mask contestation.

Researchers and policy makers must therefore bear in mind that while just transition has become increasingly popular and widely endorsed, the concept itself is impossible to operationalise without confronting hard political choices between different competing visions (Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Healy and Barry, 2017; Wilgosh et al, 2022). The literature, then, highlights the fundamental importance of securing procedural justice and inclusive decision making as part of just transition. Policy makers cannot begin by adopting an abstract definition of just transition but should instead recognise that any such definition is always already the outcome of a political process. Inclusive decision making must therefore be embedded into the process of a just transition from the beginning and throughout its implementation.

Empirical research on just transitions has lacked a recognition of the importance of inclusive decision making. Although the potential exclusion of marginalised people in just transition decision making is frequently cited to support policy recommendations by intergovernmental bodies, trade unions and international non-governmental organisations interested in procedural justice (ILO, 2015; ITUC, 2018; Jenkins, 2019; European Commission, 2020; Carrosio and De Vidovich, 2021), these factors are less often considered in academic work that explores just transitions. Instead, the existing literature has tended to highlight the relationships, decisions made, and interpretations of just transition by relatively powerful organisations such as governments, trade unions and businesses. Cha (2020), for example, probes local contestation to just transition in the US by interviewing representatives from unions, coal companies, government and the civil service, while Normann and Tellmann (2021) analyse conflicting policy interventions and interpretations of just transition between energy sector trade unions in Norway. Many existing studies are focused on interactions between unionised workers and their communities with state policy,

and do not substantively explore other power relations or social divisions (Bray and Ford, 2021; Murphy et al, 2022). Those most marginalised, for example those in poverty or from ethnic minority backgrounds, have received much less attention in the literature. One exception is a United Nations report of the Just Transition Research Collaborative, which argues for 'a transformative approach' that involves democratic decision making and challenges structural oppression; however, here the findings are largely based on secondary policy reports rather than direct observation of individual actors (Morena et al, 2018: 14). Another notable exception is Mertins-Kirkwood and Deshpande (2019), who conclude that the benefits of Canada's various transition policies flow primarily to White men born in Canada and that a truly equitable just transition must be more inclusive. Even here, however, the focus is almost entirely on jobs and the workforce, and the research is based on secondary policy-analysis.

What is missing, then, is research that explores gender, race, marginalisation and decision making at the micro scale. Gender, in particular, has only very tentatively been explored in studies on procedural justice and just transition. While existing literature has explored women's agency in coal transitions overseen by male-dominated unions (Walk et al, 2021), and the ways that an authoritarian, 'petro-masculine imaginary' is helping to shape visions of just transition in a Citizens Assembly in Lebanon (Shehabi and Al-Masri, 2022), we were unable to find any examples of work that looks at gendered divisions in just transition decision making. Relatedly, while there has been policy and research emphasis on just transition participation by Indigenous communities in North America (Castillo Jara and Bruns, 2022), commentators have rarely attended to the voices of other marginalised groups in these processes. Salient work that does includes recent studies from the Global South. Shehabi and Al-Masri (2022) and Okpanachi et al (2022), for example, draw attention to the postcolonial dimensions of energy transitions in Lebanon and Morocco respectively, arguing that historical and contemporary forms of colonialism limit democratic participation in just transitions for ordinary citizens. In the context of the Global North, one important study that does pay meaningful attention to the ways that race, ethnicity and racism create barriers to participation in just transition decision making is the US-based Just Transition Listening Project, and yet this union-produced work still prioritises workers and jobs in its analysis (Cha et al, 2021; 2022). Our research builds on some of this emerging work to address the literature gap on the inclusion and exclusion of marginalised voices in the just transition process.

Finally, while there has been attention given to climate change politics at the city level, some of which includes a focus on marginalised communities, these studies do not focus on just transition, leaving another important underexplored gap in the literature. While there is a body of research that attends to public participation in climate policy and activism in cities, that research has focused on different but related debates in environmental and/or climate justice, rather than specifically on just transition. For example, several studies have pointed to a lack of diversity or attention to social justice in the everyday governance of Transition Cities in Canada (Bardos, 2016), Belgium (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014) and the UK (Smith, 2013; Grossmann and Creamer, 2016), and others have used urban case studies from around the world to develop innovative frameworks for inclusive, 'climate-just cities' (Steele et al, 2018; Granberg and Glover, 2021). Still more studies have focused on relationships between local government and non-governmental stakeholders to map the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals in UK cities, with much of this work being

undertaken in Bristol (Carden-Noad et al, 2017; Fox and Macleod, 2021; see also Perry et al, 2021 for similar work in Sheffield and Manchester). Furthermore, there is a strong tradition of environmental justice research in urban contexts, which has emphasised the need to engage with marginalised communities (Caniglia et al, 2017; Corburn, 2017; McCauley et al, 2019). Similarly, justice as recognition literature underlines the importance of ensuring the social and political recognition of different groups in the attainment of both distributive and procedural justice, including by informing how climate vulnerability and adaptation are approached (Schlosberg, 2007, 2012; Whyte, 2018).

However, none of this existing work focuses on just transition in cities. Conversely, just transition research tends to centre around rural populations and the regional or international scale (Evans and Phelan, 2016; Murphy et al, 2022; Banerjee and Schuitema, 2022; Castillo Jara and Bruns, 2022) rather than urban contexts and the city scale. There is a very small body of emerging research that explicitly looks at just transition in cities – however, the focus here is on distributive rather than procedural justice (Murphy et al, 2021; Hamouchene, 2021) or relies on secondary literature analysis rather than direct observation (Patterson and Smith, 2017; Burch, 2021). Crucially then, we understand our study to be the first that explores just transition and procedural justice at the city scale using observation of and interviews with policy makers and community groups.

Methods

Our study focuses on the city of Bristol, in the UK, which set out to pursue a just transition to climate change in early 2020. Our research is centred explicitly around procedural justice, making use of interviews with stakeholders in climate policy and community groups as well as observations of decision-making processes. Here, we set out the importance of the city scale and the city of Bristol in particular, as well as discussing our mixed-methods approach.

The city of Bristol as a case study

Cities are, at least on the surface, seen as a site where implementing a just transition is more straightforward than at the global level. Cities can create and tailor fine-grained climate change plans and can take into consideration the voices of those most affected (García, 2021; Dietzel, 2022). Cities are often innovative policy leaders because of their significant role in causing climate change, for example by teaming up with larger initiatives such as C40 Cities and sharing resources and ideas across different sectors. In addition, cities are seen to be increasingly seeking to lead on confronting global challenges, including climate change (Bulkeley et al, 2011; Swilling and Annecke, 2012; Hughes et al, 2018; Fox and Macleod, 2021). For all these reasons, the city scale seemed an ideal place to focus our efforts on looking at just transition unfolding on the ground.

Bristol presents a fitting case to demonstrate the role cities can play in just transition, because it is widely known for being one of the most radical spaces for climate change action in the UK. Bristol became the first 'Transition City' in 2007, aiming to 'work towards a low carbon, socially just future with resilient communities' (Transition Network, 2022). Although the Bristol Transition movement wound down between

2017 and 2022, it leaves behind a lasting legacy and the push towards a just transition has by no means ended. Bristol is home to an engaged citizenry that cares deeply about climate change. The city council has a significant Green Party presence (as of February 2023, 36 per cent Green, 34 per cent Labour, and 20 per cent Conservative) and is home to many ambitious non-state environmental initiatives such as the Bristol Advisory Committee on Climate Change. It also has a thriving climate activist scene (Dietzel, 2022), and citizens of Bristol have localised Sustainable Development Goals by pushing for them to be included in the city's environmental policies (Fox and Macleod, 2021).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Bristol was the first UK city to declare a climate change emergency and that it has one of the most ambitious city-based climate change plans in the UK. The UK government has committed to cutting emissions by 78 per cent compared to 1990 levels by 2035 (UK Government, 2021: 284). By contrast, Bristol's One City Climate Change Plan sets out that the city will be carbon neutral by 2030 (Bristol One City, 2020: 1). The One City Climate Change Plan calls for 'transformative action' (Bristol One City, 2020: 4) and sets out to 'radically rethink how we live, work and invest in the city' (Bristol One City, 2020: 1). The Climate Plan points out that there are 'entrenched market and wider forces that will support existing fossil-fuel dependent, consumption-based systems', which must be challenged (Bristol One City, 2020: 1). This kind of radical language is rare – and Bristol presents a unique city that is taking climate change extremely seriously (Dietzel, 2022).

Most importantly for our study, the One City Climate Change Plan is seen as an 'opportunity to take a collaborative, inclusive and citywide approach to make this a fair transition' (Bristol One City, 2020: 1). Bristol aims, by 2030, to 'have achieved a fair and inclusive transition, capturing opportunities of new jobs and investment, improved health, wellbeing and education, and a better environment for local people' (Bristol One City, 2020: 4). 'Fair' is defined as 'maintaining a democratic mandate, ensuring there are opportunities for all to participate in the benefits of change with its costs shared fairly' (Bristol One City, 2020: 7). This clear statement of intent to pursue a procedurally fair transition in the city of Bristol is what ultimately led us to selecting Bristol as our case study. Inspired to find out what happens once such a promise is made, we set up a qualitative study in late 2020, detailed below.

Methodology

Our study was guided by three broad questions:

1. How is just transition understood?
2. Who makes decisions on just transition? and
3. How are those decisions on just transition made?

To answer these questions, we focused on six actors engaged in climate policy in Bristol: two from the public sector (Bristol Advisory Committee on Climate Change, Bristol One City Boards), two from the private sector (Arup, Cycle Works) and two from civil society (Liveable Neighbourhoods, Black and Green Ambassadors). The aim here was to get a sense of decision-making processes and outcomes from across

sectors, to see whether there were any notable differences in practice. We chose these actors by consulting with Bristol Green Capital Partnership, who represent over 1,000 climate change organisations within the city of Bristol and were able to suggest a broad range of participants for the study.

We ran a mixed-methods study from November 2020 to July 2021, which involved observations of each organisation in order to get a sense of how decisions were taken, as well as semi-structured interviews with two leaders from each organisation to ask in-depth questions. We observed over nine hours of a range of meeting styles including steering groups, public-facing events, and workshops. We took note of who was in the room and who was speaking, whether climate change, climate justice, just transition and the One City Climate Strategy were mentioned, as well as noting down general observations about the decision-making processes. To preserve anonymity, we will discuss our overall findings on meetings without calling attention to any organisation by name. We also conducted 12 semi-structured interviews. Here, we asked questions about just transition, decision-making styles, the One City Climate Strategy and climate justice more broadly. The interview participants will not be named to protect their identity.

When coding our observation notes and interview transcripts (74,785 words of data), we focused on four broad categories. The first was procedural climate justice, which included the subcategories of participation in decision making on climate change (who participates and who does not), access to information on climate change (which information is available to whom) and access to justice (who has recourse to accountability mechanisms to challenge unfair decisions). The second was just transition, which included the subcategories of understanding of just transition (how was it defined, how was it understood), climate vulnerability (were those most vulnerable to climate impacts present and/or discussed) and exclusion/inclusion (who was able to make decisions and who was not). The third category was the One City Climate Strategy, with subcategories including the role of the strategy (did it factor into decision making), components (which parts were used or mentioned) and relevance (was it relevant to climate stakeholders and/or used by them in practice). Finally, we had an emerging narratives category, where we were open to discovering ideas that we had not expected – for example several participants brought up the impacts of COVID-19.

Before discussing our findings, we want to highlight some limitations of our study. First, this was a small-scope pilot project and should not be seen as definitively representative of the city of Bristol as a whole. Second, we had to conduct all our interviews and observations online, due to pandemic restrictions in the UK at the time of the study. This may have influenced meeting styles and how participants shared information in interviews. Third, although we made important findings on exclusion, these were based on our own assumptions and visible gender and ethnic minority status as personal data on this was not collected from individuals. Relatedly, although it would have been interesting to research other types of exclusion, for example centring on class, education or income, it was not possible for participants to disclose these characteristics in our observations. This was to protect anonymity in line with the ethical implications of collecting sensitive personal data. Finally, although Bristol Green Capital Partnership, our gatekeeper for selecting participants, represents over 1,000 organisations, and we were very careful to select a wide range of policy makers, it is possible we missed certain groups by consulting with them alone.

Empirical findings

Our findings can be summarised into two key overarching themes. The first is that decision making around just transition in Bristol is exclusionary, particularly to women and ethnic minorities. The second is that there is no universal definition of just transition even among stakeholders in climate policy, and that there is a need to recognise that the concept will be interpreted according to the context and according to who has the power to make decisions in that context. Given the first finding, this points to the importance of more equal representation from a diverse range of groups in climate change decision making. There is an urgent need for more inclusive decision making, and not just in formal policy–making spaces but in the broader formation of policy, and in the civil society and private sector initiatives that feed into these processes. The final section puts forward policy recommendations for moving forwards.

Exclusionary decision making

In one of the first meetings we observed, we immediately noticed a pattern of decision making emerging: White men seemed to be speaking more than all other participants. We therefore began to count who was speaking, broken down into four categories of visible ethnic minority and gender status. If a White man spoke, the 'White men' column was ticked, if a woman of colour spoke, the 'women of colour' column was ticked, and so on. We also noted down how many people were in the meeting under the same categories, to get a sense of comparison between presence in the room and number of times spoken. We ultimately found that White men made up 40 per cent of participants in meetings and spoke 64 per cent of the time. White women, by comparison, made up 41 per cent of participants in meetings and spoke 33 per cent of the time. This gender breakdown was not a complete surprise given what is known about workplace gender dynamics (Kendall and Tannen, 1997; Jacobi and Schweers, 2017). However, we were especially concerned to find that women of colour made up 14 per cent of participants in meetings and only spoke 2 per cent of the time, and men of colour made up 5 per cent of participants in meetings and only spoke 1 per cent of the time. This compares to Bristol 2022 demographics: 84 per cent White background, 16 per cent ethnic minority background. These findings are illustrated in Figure 1.

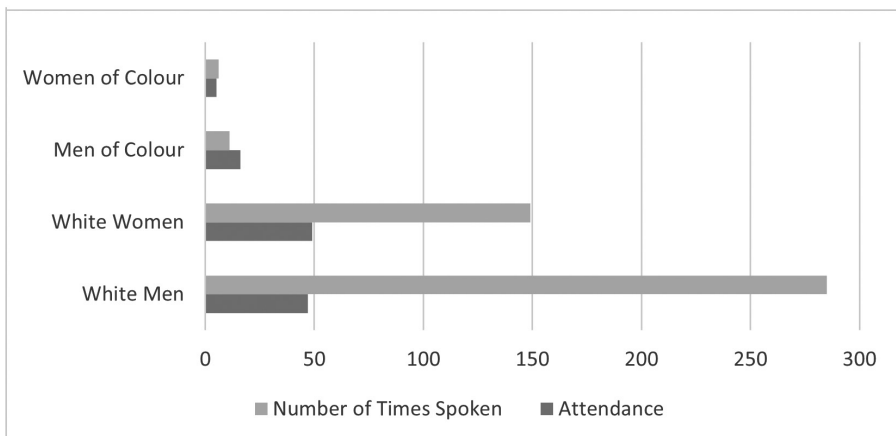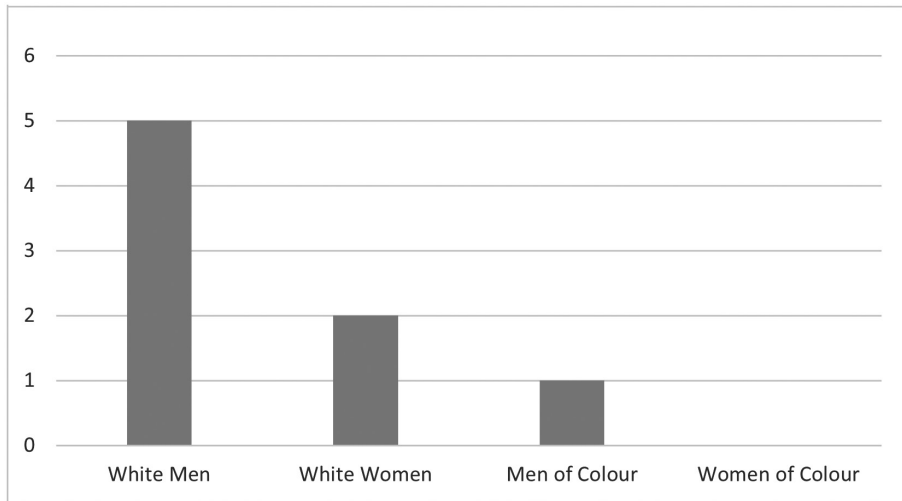**Figure 1:** Meeting attendance and number of times spoken

Figure 2: Meeting chairs

We also found that chairs tended to be White men, as illustrated in Figure 2.

From these findings, it is obvious that even where representation appeared equal in terms of who was in the room, the number of times White men spoke still far exceeded other participants. We also noticed that in all observed meetings, men of any ethnic background tended to interrupt women, speak over them, and speak for longer amounts of time. However, White men were most likely to interrupt non-White people regardless of their gender. One of our participants shared her experience of being a woman of colour in an interview with us: "I've noticed men speak over me a lot". Finally, we found that women tend to use the chat function in an online meeting space more than men, but that this was often ignored or not fed into the conversation by chairs, particularly if the chairs were men.

These issues were known to our participants, who discussed the imbalances of decision making openly in interviews. One of our participants noted "there seems to be a good gender balance, but absolutely no racial balance". This critical awareness is positive, but there was confusion over how to include and engage people of colour, as well as climate-vulnerable groups including disabled people, communities living in poverty, children, and elderly people. These populations will be affected more severely by climate impacts (Venn, 2018), so their inclusion is key to fair decision making on just transition (Dietzel, 2019). According to some of our participants, excluded communities are often misunderstood, for example when people assume "they don't care and aren't engaged". This is highly problematic, because as one interviewee explained, "saying 'they don't have time to think about it' or 'they're not wealthy enough to think about it' [is] kind of pushing the whole community aside". At the same time, contributions by people of colour are downplayed or ignored. As another participant put it, "there's a lot of cultural erasure of contributions that Black and Brown communities have made to the environment". Barriers to inclusive decision making, then, include confusion about how to best engage marginalised communities and remedy against implicit (and often explicit) biases.

There was severe confusion about what to do next to improve decision-making processes. One participant said, "we're still not getting the very, very marginalised, elderly, disabled, poverty groups. And that's really much more challenging to engage people". The divided nature of Bristol was also discussed, with one participant noting "I think Bristol feels like a lot of different small local communities. Which is great, but it's fed into this kind of ghettoisation of the city and I think that needs to be overcome for there to be a just transition". This leaves questions about what should happen to resolve exclusion unanswered. Another participant made the very important observation that the responsibility for achieving change should not fall on under-represented communities: "I think there's a danger of expecting rather a lot of some [...] communities currently under-represented to suddenly represent themselves hugely in this debate". It is clear that shifting power dynamics and representation in climate decision making will not be easy, especially in light of historic sociocultural divisions in cities like Bristol.

The homogenous nature of decision making on climate change, which is dominated by one section of society, raises issues for just transition. In particular, a lack of engagement with climate-vulnerable populations and those at greatest risk of suffering adverse impacts from climate change policies may lead to ineffective decision making. A just response to climate change will require a rapid transition of existing climate change policy towards one that is much more radical and moves us beyond the current state of affairs (Dietzel, 2022). In our study, we found very little critical engagement with existing policies. Often, there was no space or time in meetings to be critical of existing ideas and narratives, or to challenge existing policy processes and systemic problems. Climate justice was only mentioned in one of the eight meetings we observed, and climate vulnerability was not mentioned at all. Meetings instead felt very busy, filled with packed agendas and talking points, with little opportunity to make radical suggestions for change. As one of our interviewees noted, "there's been more of a sort of endorsement process than a decision-making process in the sense we've been given choices and gone maybe this rather than that". Another said "yes, people are coming from the right place, but [...] normally there's a lot on the agenda. So yeah, [decision making is] within limits all the time". As one interviewee explained,

> 'we've got all these boards and their all meetings, and the minutes are checked each meeting and it becomes something which is just a set of meetings rather than a process and a point of account. So, I think that imagined role of it being the place where these issues are considered relatively intensely and sort of chased and sort of pushed [...] I don't think it's there yet'.

Overall, then, not only was decision making exclusionary, but it also offered little opportunity to stray from business as usual. We saw no instances in over nine hours of meetings of radical suggestions for change being made. Given the huge societal shifts required for just transition to occur, this is concerning.

Defining just transition

In our interviews, we asked each participant to define what a just transition looks like in Bristol. Although the concept was clearly well understood, there was acute awareness by all the participants that the concept does not have a fixed definition

and that it will look different according to context. As one participant put it, "you don't know what justice or fairness looks like to somebody else unless you ask". It is not necessarily surprising that just transition does not have a universal definition in practice, given the ongoing disagreements in the literature. However, what is problematic is that limited voices are being represented in meetings that concern the pursuit of a just transition. In combination, these two findings clearly point towards the importance of procedural justice as integral to a just transition. Decision making must be fair and inclusive if we are to understand what just transition means to a city.

Just transition was framed in two primary ways by our participants: as a matter of equality and as a matter of responsibility. In terms of framing it as an issue of equality, one participant said "we really need to work at delivering [our initiatives] in such a way that they increase equality rather than making places less equitable. I think that they could be fantastic for that if they're delivered across the city, not just in White, middle-class areas". Another said "for me the fairness bit is really about being present and [...] having awareness that there will be unequal [climate] impacts. And being quite honest about that and saying [...] we're going to do everything we can to make this as equal as possible in terms of lifting everyone up". Finally, one interviewee reflected that "moving forward with equity as kind of the central or the underpinning piece of decision making going forward [...] not pretending that people are equal all along the journey and not pretending that things are fair or that you can make things fair". Here, we can see normative reasoning by all three participants – the discussion is not focused on economic systems or jobs or any particular sector, but is about equality much more broadly conceived. This was a surprise, given the history of the concept and its strong roots in labour movements.

When discussing responsibility, one participant said,

> 'climate justice means accountability or responsibility for people or groups that have created the situation we're in. [...] [T]hat's not just who pollutes the most. I mean that in a broader sense of exploring the why of things as well as just the what. So you know, why is the UK the most powerful or one of the most powerful countries in the world despite its size and why is it one of the highest polluters[?]'

Another interviewee observed:

> 'so, if I just think about Bristol, I think as an affluent, developed city, we are a contributor to underlying injustice for other people and we ought to be aware of that and we ought to be conscious of the steps that we've taken either to make that worse or to make that better. So I do think [climate justice] is important. It does perhaps help some people to think about their role in it rather than saying, "Oh, well, it's out of my control"'.

We therefore see participants showing acute awareness of differing levels of responsibility, including their own, which has been widely discussed by climate justice scholars (Caney, 2005; Shue, 2014). Again, this goes beyond a narrow understanding of just transition as an economic issue, as it has been defined historically by scholars of the concept. Transition is being viewed in a holistic sense in Bristol, which was unexpected.

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Beyond having different conceptions of just transition themselves, our participants were highly aware of the importance of active listening. As one explained,

> '[our role] is not try and persuade them that [our initiatives] are a great idea because a bunch of White, middle-class people turning up and telling you what you should be doing in your area, it's not going to convince anybody, but just saying to them, "This is the campaign. This is what we're doing. What do you think? What are we doing right? What are you worried about?", and really listening'.

Another interviewee emphasised the importance of "understanding how people feel, both how they feel climate change will affect them, but also how they feel that the solutions will affect them". Finally, one interviewee noted that we need to ask people what "their green future looks like or we won't understand it". This is why exclusionary decision making is so problematic – there is no universal definition of just transition, and active listening and understanding of different lived experiences is key to ensuring the transition is just for the most people in our societies.

Taking together both of our key findings, then, it seems obvious that decision making must become more inclusive. This is not only out of a sense of procedural fairness, but because just transition is not easily defined, even by policy experts working in a city that has declared it is pursuing just transition. It is important that people from all walks of life in a city can feed into the process of how just transition will unfold – especially those who are most vulnerable to climate change. Interestingly, some justice in recognition scholars have identified structural oppression as the underlying reason for why creating participatory decision-making processes are often insufficient to produce just outcomes. Further discussion between the fields of just transition and justice in recognition is therefore warranted. Most importantly, however, inclusive decision making must be embedded into just transition from the beginning and throughout its implementation. In the next section, we begin to explore how this might be realised by making some policy recommendations for moving forwards.

Moving forwards

The realisation of a just transition in Bristol will require a fresh approach to climate decision making, with a clear focus on increasing inclusivity and meaningful participation. Here, we make three main recommendations. The first is that space needs to be made for a variety of community perspectives to feed into decision making, with an emphasis on the participation of groups that are vulnerable to both climate impacts and to the impacts of climate policies themselves. This will require, as a minimum, vulnerability, and risk assessments to be conducted for communities across the city to assess the projected impacts, feeding in the lived experiences of individuals from these groups. Civil society groups in Bristol, including the Black and Green Ambassadors and the Bristol Disability Equality Forum, are already working to raise awareness of the disproportionate climate-related impacts experienced by marginalised groups including, for example, the health impacts of air pollution exposure in Black and minority ethnic communities, and the climate policy barriers encountered by people with disabilities.

To illustrate this point further, while our findings revealed high levels of awareness of the One City strategy goals, some participants expressed concern with the representativeness of the policies and targets contained within it. One interviewee remarked on inclusivity "I don't think the One City plan is the way to do that because it's all the same usual suspects who are asked for their input on it and are using it as a tool", while another noted that "I can't speak for them, but I can't imagine it being helpful for a small community group trying to do their thing and I can't see how they would feel part of that bigger movement by the One City plan being there". The importance of embedding participation early in the policy process was similarly flagged in discussions with our participants who noted that "we kind of felt like we were coming halfway and how many years into it, as opposed to being there from the beginning". Making space for the participation of civil society groups along with members of impacted groups in the decision-making processes on the formulation and implementation of policies for the Bristol One City climate strategy is therefore crucial.

Our second recommendation is to be very careful to avoid tokenism in this process of creating space for a variety of perspectives. An example of bad practice might be, for example, inviting one or two select representatives to articulate the views of entire groups. In our study, one interviewee observed that "it's that tokenism boundary that you've got to be careful of. Just because one or two different people are asked doesn't mean it's actually representative of anything". Additionally, the impact that this approach has on individuals is significant, as one of our participants highlighted, "I often feel slightly uncomfortable if I'm the person speaking [...] on behalf of all these communities. Of which sure I've more experience of them [...] than a White person but I still definitely feel uncomfortable kind of going, well this is how you approach Brown communities for example". In one of our observations, we witnessed this type of tokenism, with the one ethnic minority participant in the room being asked to discuss how to approach "people from their community". The type of participation we are suggesting should be far more inclusive, built, for example, upon early and long-standing engagement with community groups, along with frequent feedback opportunities, and adequate means of holding decision makers to account if adverse impacts are being experienced in practice.

Finally, we suggest innovating public consultation processes. One example of such innovative practice is the Bristol Citizens' Assembly, which took place in 2021. The Assembly brought together 60 residents designed to be a sample that was 'reflective of Bristol's local diversity in terms of age, sex, disability, ethnicity, geography, deprivation, and employment' (Bristol City Council, 2021: 8) to hear from experts, and discuss and produce recommendations on the COVID-19 recovery for the city. The final report of the Assembly included a set of recommendations on reducing the impact of homes on climate change, for example by creating 'innovative financing options including grants, and/or loans to support homeowners and landlords to improve the energy efficiency of every home' (Bristol City Council, 2021: 10). Those recommendations were then reviewed and responded to by senior leadership with a commitment from the Council and City Office to provide progress updates every six months. Strengthening the follow-up processes will be crucial in building public trust in this model of participatory governance, as one of our interviewees observed, "I think they're really interesting kind of models to try and get that diversity of input and it could really have an impact [...] and yet I'm never quite sure about

what's actually locked in place in terms of acting upon what comes out of those". Of course, Climate Assemblies have their own problems, with a recent study finding they cannot be treated as a standardised object with predictable effects on legitimacy and governance capacity (Boswell et al, 2022).

All three of these suggestions will take effort and time on the part of city officials and policy makers. There are of course smaller steps to be taken along the way. For example, on the back of our findings, we have offered training on unconscious bias to climate change policy makers in collaboration with the Diversity Trust and will soon be running workshops on inclusive meeting spaces. However, our suggestions of creating space for community engagement, avoiding tokenism and innovating public consultation processes are ultimately what we recommend for lasting change that can act against the exclusionary decision-making processes we found in Bristol.

Conclusion

In this paper, we made the case for a research project that focuses on procedural justice as part of just transition in response to a substantial gap in the current literature. Following this, we set out the main findings of our year-long study in Bristol: decision making around just transition is exclusionary, and the concept of just transition is not easily defined, even by experts. We put forward some ideas for shaking up existing decision-making structures, by embedding inclusive participation at an early stage of just transition and by following up frequently throughout, with a particular focus on those at greatest risk from climate impacts and climate policies. We explained that there is a clear need to go beyond 'business as usual' meeting structures to make room for more meaningful engagement with a wider range of participants and to enable radical ideas including for tackling entrenched structural barriers to be raised and discussed. We summarise these recommendations under three broad headings: create space for community engagement, avoid tokenism and innovate public consultation processes. In sum, fair and inclusive decision making must be an ongoing process that must be returned to time and time again as part of just transition.

We believe that cities have the unique opportunity, on the one hand, to make space for bottom-up participatory approaches to the conceptualisation of just transitions and what this means for the diverse community groups they represent, and on the other, to feed into the framing of just transitions at the global level, for example through their participation in UNFCCC COP processes. This is exemplified by the thematic focus on 'Cities, Regions and the Built Environment' forming part of the discussions at COP26 in Glasgow (in 2021) and by the active participation of city leaders including Bristol mayor Marvin Rees in these global climate processes, albeit within the confines of being excluded from closed State Party negotiations. Cities can lead by example and demonstrate that just transition will vary from context to context, but that there are elements of good practice that can be shared both between cities and with wider global governance structures.

For us, the next step will be to run a cross-city comparative study to learn more about just transition in different contexts and to draw out examples of inclusive decision making that could be shared. Bristol was an excellent place to start – as one of our participants put it, "[the One City Climate] strategy I think is better than what I've seen from other places, it's more grounded in an understanding of the sorts of conditions that need to be created rather than the technology that needs to be fitted

or subbed out". It is clear from our research project that Bristol, as a city, is committed to just transition, even if this is difficult to achieve. Engagement with just transition is generally high in the city and there is goodwill among climate stakeholders in Bristol to implement the climate strategy in a fair manner, and to improve participation and consultation moving forward. We hope to find the same goodwill in other cities and will continue to draw out important findings on procedural justice that can feed into the just transition literature and wider policy context.

Data availability
The authors take responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the analysis. We are unable to share the data because of the conditions of our ethics approval.

Experimentation on humans and animals statement
We received ethics approval from the School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies (SPAIS) Ethics Working Group on 11 November 2020. We can confirm that we are in compliance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were over the age of 16 and had the capacity to give full prior and informed consent to participate in the project. Consent was sought via a signed written consent form in advance of all interviews and observations. All participants were provided with an information sheet at least one week in advance of the interviews and observations and given space and time to follow up and ask questions about the project.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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