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**Public Engagement in
EU policy: Making the
Just Transition
Successful in Czech
Republic**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract

The goal of the thesis is to emphasize the necessity of actor engagement in energy transitions in the EU. The policy paper aims to examine the issue of participation and engagement of actors during the preparation of Territorial Just Transition Plans on the case of Czech Republic. Based on the analysis of the situation, there is a subsequent realization of the crucial lack of public engagement. Possible policy solutions are provided and evaluated on their viability. At last, after the evaluation, the paper chooses a final recommendation.

Statutory Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written the submitted Bachelor's Thesis concerning the topic of **Public Engagement in EU policy: Making the Just Transition Successful in Czech Republic** independently. All the sources used for the purpose of finishing this thesis have been adequately referenced and are listed in the Bibliography.

In Brno 18 May 2021

.....
Viktória Gašparíková

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List of Terms and Acronyms

EU	- European Union
EGD	- European Green Deal
TJTP	- Territorial Just Transition Plan
TJTps	- Territorial Just Transition Plans
JTF	- Just Transition Fund
JTM	- Just Transition Mechanism
MS	- Member State
MSs	- Member States
NGOs	- Non-governmental organizations
ILO	- International Labour Organization

1 Introduction

The EGD is set to change the running of life in the European Union. Climate change becoming a more and more serious threat that can no longer be ignored is meant to be addressed through a massive transformation of the economy with the aim to produce zero net emissions by 2050. The vast transformative character of the plan is to inevitably affect everyone's lives, especially those living in regions where the coal industry is the employer. One of the leading tenets of the EGD is the notion of "leaving nobody behind," upon which the JTM is constructed. It aims to ensure a just transition, especially in the coal-dependent regions that are to be affected the most (European Commission, 2019a, and 2020d).

The success of just transition is faced with numerous challenges that particular MSs must overcome while preparing their TJTPs. As each MS, whose regions are eligible to receive funding, handles the preparations of transition in their own manner, some progress with more success than others. In order to deliver a truly just transition that is fair, people directly affected should not be side-lined from the process. Achievement of transition goals lies with direct communication with affected parties – local authorities, NGOs, local communities, the public, workers, and labour unions. Without the participation of various actors and lack of transparency, the cushioning of impacts of transition as well as the whole process might be threatened (Mathiesen, 2020; Verma et al., 2019; Treadwell et al., 2019, Dupré et al., 2020).

Despite this, in various countries of the EU, it is seen that the process of writing TJTPs is not always ideal and, in many cases, conducted under various constraints. The thesis examines the case study of Czechia,

where public participation is lacking. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to provide policy recommendations and solutions in the context of raising public engagement for a Member State, the Czech Republic, to increase chances for smoother, just, and equal transition from coal.

1.1 The European Green Deal and the Just Transition Mechanism

Explaining in short, the EGD is an action plan designed to tackle challenges stemming from climate change and environmental degradation. In 2019, the European Commission announced a Communication on the European Green Deal, a plan meant to lead Europe towards a new sustainable growth policy. This Communication holds that the aim is, citing, to “transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use” (European Commission, 2019a).

At the same time, the transition towards conserving and enhancing natural resources and protecting citizens' health from environmental risk must be just and inclusive (European Commission, 2019a). Socio-economic impacts in the most hit regions by the transition towards a climate-neutral economy are to be alleviated by JTM.

In line with implementing the objectives in a just and fair order, the EGD has presented a Just Transition Mechanism, whose goal is “to leave no one behind.” Economic, social, and land restoration are the top priority areas the JTM is to cover. It includes three pillars (1) Just Transition

Fund to provide grants, (2) InvestEU scheme to access private investments, (3) loan facility of the public sector to mobilise investments. The main difference among the pillars is that JTF shall be allocated to the territories requiring robust transition whilst the rest of the pillars comprise broader support of energy transition (European Commission, 2020c, and 2020a).

As mentioned above, the goal of the JTF is to address difficulties and discrepancies formed by climate neutrality transformation. However, not all MSs, regions, and cities will be affected equally by the transition. This distribution is to reflect MSs' capacity in tackling the change. The allocation is based on several factors, e.g., greenhouse gas intense regions, challenges in potential job losses, mining production, and economic development (European Commission, 2020c). As for funding capacity, the European Commission (2020d) expects the fund to surpass EUR 30 billion and even reach EUR 50 billion. Together with the Union resources and financial resources supplemented by MSs, a forecasted total is around EUR 150 billion by the entire mechanism (European Commission, 2020d). Complementation by relocating finances from MSs' European Social Fund Plus and European Regional Development Fund is expected (Jourde & Widuto, 2020). Although in July 2020, the EU leaders significantly reduced the size of the JTF to EUR 17.5 (Lawton, 2020), the post-covid recovery of the economy alleviated by the Next Generation EU will essentially complement the JTF as well (Ionescu, 2020).

Utilization of the JTF is to be held through communication between the Commission and each MS to identify necessary actions. The role of MSs is to develop TJTPs with correspondence to their already published National Energy, and Climate Plans that will provide a draft of the transition process until 2030. Subsequently, TJTPs should establish social,

economic, and environmental challenges to be targeted. Importantly, conditionality is added to the JTF, meaning that TJTPs will only be approved when MSs provide a significant commitment to the transition process consistent with their National Energy and Climate Plans to reach climate neutrality by 2050. Then the approval opens access to the second and third pillars of JTM. JTF resources are supposed to be distributed by 2025 (European Commission, 2020c).

Moreover, the second and third pillars that complement the JTF will back a wider sphere of investments to support to low carbon transformation, energy efficiency, renewables, decarbonisation projects, transport and gas infrastructure, district heating, etc. Also, the financing of local authorities will be enabled through public sector loaning. The major difference between these two pillars from JTF stems from the fact that they can cover areas not included in the JTF, thus having broader geographical scope (European Commission, 2020c).

1.2 Methodology

This policy paper has been constructed by gaining insights into the development of just transition in the EU. The beginning of the process was based on an analysis of official EU communications, reports, scholarly articles, websites, and newspapers. After initial research, a literature review provides an analysis of the general opinions of advisors and experts in the area of just transition and the EGD. Upon advising and recommending pathways towards successful EGD, a correctly performed just transition has been described as a necessity (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020; Marty 2020; Cameron et al., 2020).

Whilst, at the same time, fair transformation entangles many intricate parts, there has been a consensus that engagement, dialogue, and inclusion of those directly affected by transition is one of the most salient elements (Webster & Shaw, 2019; Zinecker et al., 2018; Hatch et al., 2017; Dupré et al., 2020; Marty, 2020). Consequently, the EU has already presented various opportunities and options to tackle the necessary implications of the engagement of actors as regional authorities, mayors, the general public, labour unions, NGOs. However, at the level of individual MSs, there is a hindrance of methods in delivering their TJTPs.

Approaches towards preparing for consequent coal phase-out are varied throughout the MSs. After analysing the situation in several MSs, Czech Republic has been chosen as a case study to specify and analyse the process due to identified shortcomings. The situation around TJTPs in Czechia seems at first glance ideal, with having many different actors present in the decision-making process. Although, after thorough research, many point out the crucial lack of public engagement. (Vondrová, 2020; CEE Bankwatch Network 2020; CEE Bankwatch Network 2021; Stínová uhelná komise, 2021). People directly affected are often left out, their opinions unheard of, making the process non-transparent and misunderstood. According to a survey reported by Havelka (2020), most of the general public does not know about the EGD (around 70%) but approximately 56% realizes that climate change should be addressed. At the same time, half of the people asked, believe that the Czech industry might be severely damaged due to changes brought about by transition and the EGD. Therefore, by improving the manner of public dialogue, Czechia could be on a better path of reaching a successful just transition.

Continuously, for the purpose of this thesis, recommendations and solutions connected to public participation and increased transparency

will be proposed with the focus on the case study of Czechia. The chosen policy approaches are distilled opinions and methods that utilize public engagement as an instrument for the energy transition. Some of them are supported by direct examples from other MSs to provide an example from the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

They were selected according to their prevalence in scholarly literature. Nevertheless, there is not simply one single approach towards public participation to be suitable for everyone. Thus, in addition, those solutions are chosen under the assumption of the best possible utilization as well.

It goes without saying that many limitations are constricting the thesis, and quite possibly, none of the proposed solutions can solve the problem entirely as there comes a wider variety of issues that are too complex to include in the thesis. Due to lack of information, and transparency especially with the connection to the case study, the data from which this thesis draws is highly limited. There might be distortions between the actual process and the available information used as the backbone of the thesis.

Lastly, at the time of writing this thesis, the TJTPs are still developing and are possibly going to be publicized within the second quarter of 2021. The final propositions of TJTPs might entangle the issue from a different perspective or might show that it has been solved.

2 Literature Review

From the point of view of scholarly literature, JTM is heavily discussed concerning the realization of the EGD. Many authors place significant salience on the mechanism without which the EGD success would be possibly unlikely (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020; Dupré et al., 2020; Laurent, 2020; Heyen et al., 2020; Buratti & Warnier, 2020; Marty, 2020; Cameron et al., 2020; Tagliapietra, 2020).

As not everyone is beginning from the same position, and certain high-carbon regions are predisposed to suffer higher transitional consequences than others, there is a need for tools mitigating the transition (Cornelis, 2020). In case of a transition, as the EGD proposes, there may be disruptions in economic and employment spheres, pressure on areas with a lack of diversification and limited innovation, and the disproportional effect of rising energy prices on low-income households (Heyen et al., 2020). Adler & Wargan (2020) provide an estimate to underline the importance of just transition claiming that 140 million people are at the edge of poverty, one of three cannot "cope with unexpected financial expenses." Although by 2030, around 160 000 direct jobs can be lost due to the transition (Alves Dias & Kanellopoulos, 2018), another potential 315 000 jobs might be created by 2030 by deploying clean energy production technologies (Kapetaki & Ruiz, 2020). Communities that are already shut from economic opportunities are hard to be expected to carry the burden of climate mitigation. Thus the significance of connecting social and environmental justice is rising to prominence and is virtually unavoidable (Schröder, 2020).

Taking an example from Marty (2020), he underlines that by supporting mostly affected territories, the EU demonstrates that it brings

added value to citizens and gains political legitimacy of climate transition for upcoming years. Cornelis (2020) and Heyen et al. (2020) draw on the experience from the Yellow Vests movement and point out that without consent and collaboration with people, achieving goals set by the EGD is very improbable. What is more, social inequality caused by poorly managed transition could fuel extremism, according to Kirton-Darling (as cited in Lawton, 2020). Regions subjected to profound changes in the transition process might be easily snatched by populists to promote their agenda (Lawton, 2020). According to Heyen et al. (2020), it is historically supported that transitions do not happen without any type of trade-off since transition disrupts established employment, values, and behaviours, which consequently cause conflicts or resistance. Not only that, but communities often have attachments, whether cultural or social to their local industries, especially in coal mining regions where the industry is connected to a sense of identity and value to locals (Treadwell et al., 2019).

Hence, scholars express a wide range of criticism towards the JTM (Dupré et al., 2020; Laurent, 2020; Marty, 2020; Colli, 2020; Gündüzyeli & Moore, 2020; Cameron et al., 2020). Marty (2020) worries about financing capabilities or possible unfairness in allocation due to unstable datasets. In addition, Cameron et al. (2020) and Marty (2020) both advice to forgo part of environmental and land restoration goals and instead place more focus on the social component of the JTM. On the other hand, Laurent (2020) criticizes that the JTM project is very concentrated on companies, and their reconversion and just transition for ordinary people is notably missing within the context of environmental inequali-

ties. Explaining some of those inequalities, Laurent (2020) provides examples of lacking decision-making procedures that prevent citizens from engaging in decisions that directly impact them.

2.1 Role of actors in transitions

Consequently, a noteworthy amount of literature is devoted to the importance of various actors within the decision making process of transitions, and salience is given primarily to actors tightly connected to the changing environment, such as local communities, employers, labour unions, NGOs, or local authorities (Zinecker et al., 2018; Hatch et al., 2017; Webster & Shaw, 2019; Chilvers & Lonnghurst, 2016; Lennon et al., 2019).

Zinecker et al. (2018) further stipulate that all energy transitions are about people and propose just transition strategies. One of the critical elements in the strategy is identifying the concerns and attitudes of various actors and an understanding of their role within transitions. At the same time, emphasis is given to communication. Precisely, communicating and social dialogue are deemed to be essential and believed to be a key to finding solutions and support for the transition. Colli (2020) exactly points out that the inclusion of different trade unions, civil society organisations, and other social actors should be ensured to avert possibly overlooked impact on consumers and citizens. Especially the inclusion of various actors as public stakeholders, labour unions, employers, and workers into decision making has been described as the most salient component towards shutting out possible inequalities as direct dialogue with people from the industry can ensure successful just transition (Treadwell et al., 2019; ILO, 2015; Studničná, 2020).

Implementing, many of those scholars and studies (Hatch et al., 2017; Zinecker et al., 2018; Gass, 2019; The B Team and Just Transition Center, 2018) draw upon examples of case studies in order to demonstrate processes of transition where engagement of various actors has been underway. One of the leading examples that often appears as a role example of the handled transition is the Canadian transition process. Canada set out a “Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities” (European Commission, 2019b).

The task force, consisting of the private sector, NGOs, academics, and local government representatives, is to engage all relevant stakeholders, workers, and communities. By collecting information and identifying challenges and opportunities, the task force is to provide a coherent outlook and recommendation for the Canadian government to follow. The creation of relationships among different actors and shared decision-making process has led actors to coordinate and collaborate, which in turn set on “transformation to greener and equitable economy” (Hatch et al., 2017).

Providing another example of successful coordination, social dialogue in Denmark concerning employers, unions, and the government has led to a common and strong policy of transitioning from coal power to wind (The B Team & Just Transition Center, 2018).

Kirton-Darling (as cited in Lawton, 2020) warns that by ignoring the scope of responsibilities of labour unions and employers in managing the transition, the concrete benefits of transition policy might entirely miss the specific needs of the industries across Europe (Lawton, 2020). Treadwell et al. (2019), in their briefing paper, suggest long-term strategies to reach a successful just transition. They are entirely based on the local arena where local actors are to create economic analysis, create a

transition plan, and define all responsibilities and investments. Therefore, long-term plans should bring together communities, policymakers, experts, and investors. All of the parties involved should be able to contribute as well as learn from each other. Because, citing, “local citizens have an unrivalled insight into the situation and desires of their community, whilst experts play a role in translating those visions and desires into implementable policy” (Treadwell et al., 2019 p. 8). But ordinary citizens are often not part of the process and only are approached after experts have made most of the decision, and so far, promising initiatives are often in shortage of perspective and urgency (Treadwell et al., 2019).

2.2 Actor engagement in Just Transition

Looking back at the EU level, to include regional involvement within the EGD, the European Commission has introduced a “Climate Pact” that aims to raise awareness, mobilize and connect people, and enable them to share knowledge empower citizens (Grabbe, 2020). What is more, a working group has been set up by The European Committee of the Regions, whose objective is to guarantee the involvement of regions and cities in numerous initiatives within the EGD. A certain amount of help to foster cooperation on various levels could be provided by the Structural Reform Support Programme that can provide expertise to national or regional authorities on assessing impacts of transition and build common goals between stakeholders, citizens, communities to reach just transition (Ferreira for the Commission, 2020). In addition, the European Commission has set out a procedure that allows an external consultant to aid the design of TJTPs (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2020).

Whilst, guidelines to successful just transition reported by the ILO (2015) precisely stipulate and underline the necessity for inclusion of all social partners (national, regional, sectoral, local) in building policy framework, Sabato & Fronteddu (2020) observe that there is, in fact, an overlap between the recommendations from ILO and the EU's just transition policies. In spite, they realize that a higher degree of "policy integration and coordination between institutional and societal actors" is necessary (Sabato & Fronteddu, 2020).

Considering the role of Member States within the transition, they are currently creating their TJTPs. It can be observed that some MSs are cooperating with neither unions nor employers. They are defining the spending of money without consultations, thus creating a situation where the money will miss its potential in job creation or maintenance (Lawton, 2020). According to a survey, at least in half of all the cases, the proposals of trade unions are not considered at all, and the process of participation is often politically motivated or only just a formality (Denis & Rodriguez, 2018).

Further, Marty (2020) questions the capacity of administration at a local and regional level to structure required policies, especially in economic aspects. Daniela Gabor is cited in an article by Adler & Wargan (2020), and her critique is aimed chiefly at national and local authorities. She warns against "funneling transition money to local businesses," especially by local elites without ever reaching workers.

Due to those inadequacies, it has been described by Samson, chief of staff of Frans Timmerman (Simon, 2020), that the EU bodies are struggling to solve the challenge of creating a just transition. Although various factors cause the situation, one of them is a lack of coordination with different groups and interests (Lawton, 2020). Kirton-Darling also supports

this for Lawton (2020), whose assertion highlights the issue at hand, citing, “In some Member States, neither unions nor employers have been involved in defining the national priorities for spending the money. It’s an incredible situation” (Lawton, 2020). For example, the issue with participation can be observed in Bulgaria. Despite being one of the largest receivers of the JTF, Bulgaria has not created a plan for a coal phase-out, and neither is the government making enough effort to complete a successful TJTP. The government has formed a national advisory body that is meant to entail discussions on the EGD, but no members of civil society or NGOs have been invited. It is suggested that that proper participation has not been reached, and coal workers are left without any clarity on the issue (Pavlov, 2021; CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021).

To conclude, the importance of just transition is undoubtedly within the context of the EGD, and the JTM is the mechanism aimed at fostering the transformation. Many hurdles remain in accomplishing it, and the JTM itself does not have enough instruments to solve them. However, one of the most salient elements for the success of the just transition that this policy paper draws upon is the direct participation of regional actors such as trade unions, local authorities, workers, NGOs in the affected regions. As proven, the utilization of TJTPs in the hands of MSs might entirely miss out on the importance of public engagement.

Hence, regarding the energy transitions, the following section discusses a case study of the Czech Republic and the process of creating TJTPs, with the analysis of deficiencies present within the context of engagement and transparency. Continuously, opinions and suggestions of scholars will be outlined in the context of improving the practice of public inclusion (Haf & Robison, 2020; Renn et al., 2020; Beauchamp & Walsh, 2021).

3 Case study: Czech Republic and making of Just Transition

Under the JTM, Czechia's three regions are eligible to receive funding – Moravskoslezský kraj, Ústecký kraj and Karlovarský kraj. The Czech government is said to be currently working with an amount of approximately €1,5 billion, which represents a total share of 8,3% of the entire JTM funding (Truchlá, 2020). However, it must be pointed out that the JTM financing is currently being aided by the Next Generation EU recovery fund.

Coal mining in Czechia has a long tradition, and even though a decrease in coal production has been reported in the recent time period, it is estimated that about 44 million tons of coal are extracted each year. Not only does coal contribute 36% to domestic electricity consumption, but it also employs more than 28 thousand people. Transforming those regions and moving away from coal is to result in the loss of about 25 thousand jobs. On the one hand, only 0,5% of the entire working class is connected to coal mining, and general levels of unemployment would only rise by about 0,4%. On the other hand, employment in the coal industry is heavily concentrated, and the threat of unemployment generates bigger risks for the specific regions. It is observed that work in mines is paid above average and has a long tradition in families and communities. Hence, the concerns about the future of people whose lives have been connected to coal for generations are voiced and should be heard in order to tackle the transition effectively (Zindulková, 2020).

Leading up to the preparation of coal phase-out, a Transformation platform has been created that is to define actions necessary to be taken

to reach successful transformation and define TJTP. The platform consists of 32 members including – governmental ministries, labour unions, regional representatives, and NGOs (Transformační Platforma, 2020). Within this platform, there was a team formed to coordinate the writing process (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2020). Plus, the entire project is mainly covered under the Ministry of Regional Development. The external consultant for technical assistance with preparing the TJTPs is the Frankfurt School of Management and Finance, together with the Czech Technical University of Prague and Cambridge Econometrics and Trinomics (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021).

According to the official sources, there are only three meetings of Transformation Platform reported. The report from the first meeting presents the role of the platform in implementing the Just Transition Operational Programme (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021) and introduces the planned structure of the TJTP for Czechia. It also calculates costs of possible projects in the three affected regions, stipulates the basic framework of the expected JTF budget, and informs about the timetable of future plans and meetings. As for the participation and communication within the process of writing the TJTP, the input is to come from the Platform, regional working groups, and governmental ministries (Presentation of MMR, 2020).

In order to extract as much as possible from the JTF, the regions are vigorously preparing projects to draw the funds. Thus, the second meeting was mainly focused on the inputs from the three coal regions and their preparation of projects. (Presentations of KVK, ÚK, MSK, MMR 2020). For instance, Karlovarský kraj has prepared over 100 projects (Pavlíková, 2020). While preparing to utilize the funds, all of the regions are trying to incorporate and educate different actors, especially from

the public, into decision-making. They organize workshops, webinars, appeal to the public through media, and even invite people to propose their own projects (Presentations of KVK, ÚK, MSK, MMR, 2020).

Additionally, a Coal Commission has been formed in 2019 and serves as an advisory body for the Czech Government and recommends how and under what circumstances transition should occur. Like the Transformation Platform, the Commission has many different members, from ministries and local representatives to environmental organizations representatives. In total, there are 19 members and three working groups dealing with the coal phase-out timeline and identification of negative consequences of transition and their elimination (Pavlovič 2019, Uhelní Komise 2019).

Nevertheless, the entire process of preparing TJTP is being challenged due to its deficiencies. Media, scholars, experts, and even direct participants in the process are criticizing shortcomings in the communication and engagement area. As mentioned in the literature review, direct participation serves to stimulate public consensus. The key to fair transformation is the inclusion of the public, labour unions, experts, local authorities, and the government. Even though it is viewed as beneficial that two renewable business associations and one civic association are present and there is a diverse representation of various actors, the process is largely characterized as non-transparent and disclosed from the public. There is also relatively low participation of regional authorities or mayors. Especially, the incorporation of the public is being challenged as one of the greatest missing elements that may endanger successful coal phase-out (Vondrová, 2020; CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021, CDE, 2021).

The analyses of CEE Bankwatch Network (2020, 2021) provide a coherent status evaluation of TJTPs in Eastern and Central Europe. Having released two evaluations in October 2020 and March 2021, not much has changed in the case of the Czech Republic. At first, there is confusion about how are inputs from other stakeholders (actors) – mayors, civil society, and business sector – included (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2020). In the second evaluation report, the creation of the Transformation platform is positively accepted. However, the process under which the platform works and makes decisions is unknown and not open to the public. It is unclear how and when, and if other actors or stakeholders can enter the process, and under what conditions they are selected to participate. In spite of the fact that regions have provided opportunities for project submissions, webinars, or workshops, they are difficult to reach and connect to, and these instruments often serve only for informing rather than participating. Thus, even if local communities are interested in the changes, they are poorly informed about the TJTPs, and the possibility of their involvement remains vague for many (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021).

With the public being mostly exempt due to lack of transparency, much confusion is being created. At the moment of writing, there is almost no information on how the plan is going to look like, nor has any draft been provided. That is why leaked documents of planned financial allocation of the JTF caused a backlash. The leaked documents reported that the government plans to invest from coal to gas and fund large energy companies (Princlová, 2020). CEE Bankwatch Network (2020) sees the leaked news as “outrageous” and citing: “money meant to be spent by coal communities on transforming their economies in a sustainable direction is going to large corporations, without real consultation of the

affected people.” Thus, this example underlines the issue of lack of public engagement and the urgency to solve it.

The Coal Commission, being the main advisory body for the government on transition, has been further criticized for its inadequacies and inability to connect and engage. In response to perceived ineffectiveness, a Shadow Coal Commission has been formed. Members of the Shadow Commission are independent experts and people from coal regions directly affected by the transition. They are delivering comments, criticism on the Coal Commission’s qualification and legitimacy, as well as provide recommendations. They ask for a change in membership to avert political influence and incorporate more people from regions. Moreover, public communication and transparency are once again rebuked, requiring the government to facilitate a constructive dialogue on transition and compulsory briefings from the Coal Commission meetings (Stínová Uhelná Komise, 2021).

Due to lack of transparency and a consequent unclear view of how inputs of particular stakeholders are considered - another issue arises. The Coal Commission has been facing criticism due to its approach towards decision making. Several members of the Commission from environmental groups have recently left their position on the premise of a delayed coal phase-out date that has been set from 2030 to 2038. One of the leaving members, Jan Rovenský, has described that there is no chance for them to enforce anything, as their voice is almost always ignored. He concludes that the Coal Commission has resigned on the chance to bring about just transition (ČTK, 2020).

To summarize the situation, the creation of TJTP in Czechia is largely undisclosed to the public. Although official sources point out rig-

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orous participation and engagement, the lacking public inclusion is notable. Local people often do not have the sources to participate, do not understand the process, and are simply left out. The next chapter provides possible solutions for Czechia to solve the issue.

4 Raising the level of public engagement in Czech Republic

As the transition from coal and lowering carbon emissions has a direct effect on the lives of citizens, there are many scholars, experts, and organisations that are tackling the question of participation in energy transitions (Renn et al., 2020; Haf & Robison, 2020; Verma et al., 2019; Blomkamp, 2018; Olivadese et al., 2021; Campos & Marín- González, 2020; Schroeter et al., 2016). They offer various solutions and recommendations on how to best deliver transition, focusing on the public's involvement. They often distinguish between various methods of how civic society can become part of the process of decision-making.

The most traditional ways are focused on indirect participation in the form of protests, voting, membership in political parties, forming interest groups, surveys (Renn et al., 2020). Emphasis is also placed on local authorities that are deemed as one of the leading actors that can support public projects or initiatives (Verma et al., 2019; Haf & Robison, 2020). To more directly create a participation scheme, the usage of deliberative or participative democracy is also often mentioned from which derive solutions in the form of citizen juries or assemblies (Haf & Robison, 2020; Verma et al., 2019; Renn et al., 2020; Beauchampet & Walsh, 2021).

Therefore, citizen participation can be divided into two subcategories: invented participation and invited participation. The former is based on bottom-up policies, whilst the latter is focused on a top-down approach where content and scope of participation are already decided beforehand in the shape of surveys or consultations, and people are

viewed passively (Renn et al., 2020; Haf & Robison, 2020). However, invited participation and the top-down approach are often heavily criticised and deemed as undermining deeper local engagements (Renn et al., 2020). Due to this reason, the subsequent policy recommendations are based on the bottom up-approach that views the public as an active element within the transition process.

4.1 Creating energy citizenship

Simply speaking, the notion of energy citizenship encompasses public realization of its responsibilities toward climate change from which stems the possibility of collective energy actions (Campos & Marín- González, 2020). Under this notion, people and the general public are viewed as directly and democratically affecting energy transitions. It is estimated that energy citizenship greatly contributes to accepting energy transitions by the general public (Beauchampet & Walsh, 2021). Under the notion of energy citizenship, the people are changing from passive consumers of energy into active participants in energy policy; by building upon this concept, more opportunities for the public arises (Brauers et al., 2020). That is the reason for being the first proposed solution; energy citizenship, in fact, further enriches and makes the recommendations more viable.

Rather than being a specific policy, energy citizenship can primarily serve as a tool for creating the policies (Beauchampet & Walsh, 2021). In Czechia, under-informed public and shortage of education are present in the preparation of TJTP. It has been reported that people often do not have any understanding of the issue of transition and therefore are unable to participate (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021). By adopting the goal

of achieving energy citizenship, Czechia can possibly create a general acceptance of the transition process as people would be given a feeling of inclusiveness (Haf & Robison, 2020).

Further, it is valuable for citizens to learn about similar projects that have ended successfully. Moreover, the provision of information in schools, media, local organisations, churches, and other communal institutions should be readily available. Constant campaigning, public events, usage of social media, news outlets are advised as well. It is perceived that by educating and raising awareness among the public on energy matters, their attitude towards the environment might change (Verma et al., 2019).

Starting from the bottom up will bring a broader range of people to the problem that can contribute to the diversity of opinion and suggest possible solutions (Verma et al., 2019). On a smaller scale, the principle of energy citizenship could have been observed in the Dutch transition from natural gas. Local authorities focused on increasing environmental responsibilities among households and concluded that energy citizenship does have „instrumental potential to achieve the transition“ (Beauchamp & Walsh, 2021).

4.2 Utilizing co-design approach

The employment of a co-design approach in Czechia could serve as a helpful tool and solution for lacking public presence. Coincidentally, eastern European state Estonia under preparations of TJTPs has used the co-design approach, and the process is deemed as being very helpful. Questions are raised if co-design could pave the way for indeed just transition

(Sillak, 2021). Raising awareness and utilizing energy citizenship can ultimately support the policy of co-designing decisions. The value of co-design increases if more citizens are acknowledged with transition issues as they can deliver local experiences and knowledge into the process of policymaking. Explaining, co-design is a way of policymaking that utilizes participatory and creative principles to involve a variety of people in public decision-making (Blomkamp, 2018; Haf & Robison; 2020).

4.2.1 Estonia and Public Participation in TJTPs

The region of Ida-Virumaa, where shale oil is being extracted, is one of the main contributors to the greenhouse gases in Estonia. The amount of €340 million from the JTF is to be allocated here. Even though there are still troubles with public discontent, Estonia is currently viewed as one of the best practitioners of public engagement in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021).

Briefly explaining, to coordinate the process design, there is a National Steering Committee consisting of 21 members from state actors, NGOs, vocational institutions, to labour unions. They gather inputs from stakeholders and submit opinions to the government for decisions. The work of the committee is complemented by working groups and regional activities. Additionally, there is an independent think tank to provide current reports from the region. Information of progress and summary of meetings can be easily found on official dedicated websites as well (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021). Therefore, the whole process of designing TJTPs is quite transparent and available, unlike in the case of Czechia, for example.

As for the participation of local communities and the public, Estonia already has a history of transparent decision-making with direct consultations on legislative with the general public. Estonia is committing to developing an information system where citizens can be directly involved in policy development. Thus, decision-making is moving from public consultations to public co-design (Lopez & Saltane, 2020).

In 2020, an experiment of co-designing proposals for energy efficiency and energy renewables within just transition was created under the activities of the Association of Ida-Virumaa Municipalities, the Ida-Virumaa Enterprise Centre, and others. Over 30 organizations from the public were, in the end, involved in the process. The core of the whole process were workshops from which 18 policy proposals have been drawn. Upon the assessment of the proposals, it has been observed that their implementation would benefit the environment, local people, and the economy. Concluding, almost all of the proposals have been added to the draft for the TJTP (Sillak, 2021).

Therefore, co-design is viewed as a great tool for policymakers. Its usage supports the implementation of policies that resemble the wishes and needs of citizens, fosters trust, and provides new innovative notions (Blomkamp, 2018). In energy transitions, top-down participation does not work well, as mentioned before, and co-design is one of the leading examples of the opposite – creative, forward-looking, bottom-up approach towards public participation (Haf & Robison, 2020).

4.3 Deliberative public dialogues

Using the bottom approach to form a policy under the concept of deliberative democracy differs in small aspects from co-design. While co-design “uses creativity, design thinking, and creative methods,” deliberative approaches are more focused “on rational dialogue and exchange of arguments under rational discussions” (Blomkamp, 2018).

Scholars elaborate on the participation of the public in the energy transition by distinguishing various deliberative methods (Demski & Pidgeon, 2017; Renn et al., 2020). The fundamental similarity among them is that they are formed by the so-called “mini-public.” Mini-public is to reflect and represent the population structure on a smaller scale (Escobar & Elstub, 2017; Renn et al., 2020). Through this way, the creation of citizen assemblies is possible. Citizen assemblies are usually active for several months, and their outputs are detailed and informed proposals for the government (Haf & Robison, 2020).

Nevertheless, for the citizen assembly to work properly, activities and support from the local authorities are essential (Beauchampet & Walsh, 2021; Haf & Robison, 2020; Verma et al., 2019). A survey by Verma et al. (2019) revealed that for around 43% of citizens, local authorities play the most salient role in the energy transition. Thus, interactions between citizens and local authorities that are positive develop a greater level of acceptance towards new technologies and changes. In fact, local authorities played an important role in initiating a citizen assembly in Slovakia in the early stages of creating TJTPs.

4.3.1 Slovakia and Public Participation in TJTPs

To provide a wider perspective on the TJTPs preparation process in Slovakia, each selected region has its own working group, whilst there is one national working group. Those working groups consist of various actors that work under the Project Steering Committee led by the PricewaterhouseCoopers Company. Slovakia and its making-of TJTPs in the context of overall participation and planning are deemed as one of the most promising. Slovakia has started the process of transitioning at the end of 2018. Even though there is a total of four regions in Slovakia that are eligible to receive funding under the JTM, the most hit coal region is Upper Nitra, where three out of four underground mines are located, supplying heat to over 13,000 households (Ilčíková, 2019). Thus, the transition in this particular region is bound to be the most troublesome, and at least half of €459 million bestowed to Slovakia by the JTM are to be allocated here (MIRRI, 2020).

Before 2018, coal phase-out in this region was deemed as a taboo topic. The change came through the results of local elections where winning candidates started to call for a coal phase-out. Local authorities were the leaders in launching the process of transition. They initiated a discussion with the local people of Upper Nitra. By the cooperation of mayors, the mining centre, and the local Association of towns and villages of Upper Nitra, an Action Plan for the transition from coal has begun to take shape (Ilčíková, 2019).

The beginning of the transition process was underlined by strong public engagement and communication. All of the actors mentioned above have brought together citizens through local media to contribute with their ideas and thoughts. There were no limitations as to who is eligible to come. In consequence, over 60 have participated ranging from

public servants, entrepreneurs, heads of schools, NGO representatives. There were in total 15 meetings that concluded with defined priorities and pillars for the transformation. The outcome was later used as a basis for the Transformation Action Plan from which the TJTPs are to be derived and eventually becoming a national strategy (Ilčíková, 2019). Consequently, the citizen assembly has been deemed as successful as their suggestions as citizens were given an opportunity to speak their vision for the region (CEE Bankwatch Network, 2021).

4.4 Digitalising Participation

Usage of digital innovations to increase participation belongs under the approach of participatory democracy, where people are given a greater sense of self-rule and self-determination (Blomkamp, 2018). It allows citizens to use various digital platforms that are in many ways resembling social media to participate in policy processes and development (Stark, 2017; Haf & Robison, 2020). Numerous different technologies can be used, such as the usage of big data, data analytics, blockchain, and others (Verma et al., 2019). However, those are rather top-down approaches. To implement a grassroots approach, various new applications and interfaces are available.

Provided that, an example of such a tool is Decidim, which is an „open-source participatory democracy tool“ (Stark, 2017; Haf & Robison, 2020). It is a tool used for self-organization that helps foster collaboration, democracy, and decision-making among thousands of people. Decidim enables the creation of spaces for participation in the form of initi-

atives, assemblies, processes, or consultations while using multiple features to enhance the experience like face-to-face meetings, proposals, voting, comments (Decidim, 2021).

The platform has already been used in various European cities such as Helsinki or Barcelona, where the results exceeded expectations with over 3500 participants in decision-making (Haf & Robison, 2020; Decidim, 2021). Another additional example of a platform for participation is POCITF, which brings together policymakers and local communities while working on solutions (Olivadese et al., 2021). The usage of those innovative technologies to ensure participation could connect people of Czech mining regions with the ability to contribute to the process meaningfully.

5 Evaluation of proposed solutions

All of the mentioned solutions for participation in energy transition have shortcomings regarding their applicability in Czechia. The downfall of energy citizenship is, most importantly, the necessity of time. The process of creating a perception of active “proconsumerism” is a lengthy one and requires a thorough bottom-up approach of the government towards citizens (Campos & Marín- González, 2020). Additionally, to successfully change the position of passive consumerism of energy, there are many financial, institutional, infrastructural, and regulatory obstacles that the government must overcome (Olivadese et al., 2021). Not only that, it has been observed that local authorities also play an essential role in fostering energy participation. Thus they should be more approachable for citizens with an open-door policy (Haf & Robison, 2020). Unfortunately, time shortage and the advanced stage of designing TJTPs indicate that it might be too late for energy citizenship to be effectively utilized.

Theoretically speaking, Czechia should start with information spreading through various means of communication. Such an approach could result in suppressing any possible sense of irrelevance or spread of misinformation and eventually even affect public opinions (Brauers et al., 2020). TJTP has not been released yet, and lack of information about it could stir public discontent once published.

It goes without saying that there are disadvantages in policy co-design as well. One of the most pressing is lack of time, as the dialogue needs a long period of discussions. Disregard and mocking of the initiative by some state actors have been present in the case of Estonia and can theoretically be witnessed in Czechia as well (Sillak, 2020). More, the

legitimacy of co-design might be questioned by relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries (Blomkamp, 2018).

In fact, the issue of taking public participation as a formality and not as valuable input is present in all of the stages of proposed recommendations. What is more, the usage of co-design in Czechia might be challenging to implement as neither the public nor the government is accustomed to such an approach. Particularly, there might be an increased feeling of “diminished control” as too many actors are involved. In the end, the idea of policy co-design in Czechia might also suffer from much complexity (Blomkamp, 2018) and lack of active participatory behaviour among the public.

Applying the concept of citizen assemblies in the case of Czechia could theoretically work similarly to Slovakia. However, there is a new challenge. Speaking once again about time, assemblies must be formed at the very beginning of the transition process (Demski & Pidgeon, 2017). Czechia, slowly reaching the end of TJTPs preparation, might not have enough room to leverage the citizen assembly for a valuable output.

Several challenges are entangling the organization of assemblies. Olivadese et al. (2021) underline the need for equality, reason, autonomy, and representation of participants in the assembly. The creators or organizers have to make sure that “participants are motivated, cognitively able and culturally empowered to believe in making a difference” (Olivadese et al., 2021). Another aspect that must be considered is political legitimacy and whether Czech officials can ensure that outcomes of such a deliberative process will not be dismissed. Such a result could be very unfavourable and deepen distrust in politics altogether (Olivadese et al., 2021). If there is enough time, creating an assembly through the

initiative of local authorities could have had a meaningful impact on the final version of TJTP, just as it was in the case of Slovakia.

In the case of implementing technological innovations to foster public engagement in Czechia's coal regions, it must be pointed out that even though an increasing amount of people have access to digital innovations, there are still people with no connection (Haf & Robison, 2020). Even though the TJTP is to be revealed soon and handed to the Commission for evaluation, a citizen's input through such a platform could still be possible. Despite missing space and time for direct utility, their input could be at least in the form of feedback and comments on the plan. This could increase transparency at the very least and give added value to citizens.

All in all, the absence of transparency and engagement in Czechia could be altered by combining and adopting few elements from the proposed solutions – utilizing a digital participatory platform, spreading more information, and increasing the support of local authorities, especially in the three regions. The usage of the digital platform might still serve to support the inclusion of the public and therefore decrease the lack of empowerment, time, and finance. People, especially those directly affected by transitions, could comment on proposed policies for transition or vote on various initiatives. Especially adding enforcement of more robust media coverage and leading visible campaigns to affect the public could entice citizens for higher engagement (Brauers et al., 2020). Additionally, the participation of local authorities and their support for such initiatives serve as a tool for recognition and visibility (Haf & Robison, 2020). Even though this may seem like a rather top-down approach, it can contribute to supporting the reachability of the digital participatory tool.

EVALUATION OF PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The best feasibility would be to combine those aspects as none of the solutions alone is sufficient and enforceable on its own at the moment. However, they can serve in other areas of transition or help deepen the awareness of climate change and make corresponding changes, serving as a valuable tool for future decision-making.

6 Conclusion

The upcoming transition in line with the EGD goals and zero net emissions will affect many people across Europe. The most hit are coal regions, where substantial energy transition must take place. To make the transition just for all, a just transition initiative has been formed. It works under the JTM, which is to provide funding for the regions experiencing coal phase-out. Those MSs with affected regions are preparing their TJTPs to be handed for approval to the Commission.

Scholars stress the necessity of broad engagement of actors in the preparation of TJTPs. Despite this, it has been identified that the EU faces challenges in delivering such engagement of all concerned actors. Accordingly, a case study of the Czech Republic is explored, which uncovers the non-transparent design of creating TJTPs with almost no public participation. Consistently, recommendations and solutions on this issue are based on a bottom-down approach towards policy making and mostly serve as tools for increasing public engagement. Those options include the formation of energy citizenship, using a co-design approach, supporting public dialogues, and utilizing digitalized participation.

Based on their analysis, three features from each of the possible solutions were identified – increased media coverage, opinion-based digital platform, and support of the role of local authorities. The combination seems to be the most manageable one at the current time. Hopefully, upon the release of TJTPs in Czechia, the impact on communities will have been carefully taken into consideration, and adequate communication will have taken place.

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