



Contribution of Integral Ecology to Just Transition Policy Evaluation Methodologies

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Abstract. This paper aims to discuss the role of integral ecology in creating and applying novel evaluation methodologies for assessing just transition policies and presents a case study of such application. It addresses key challenges in the methodologies of just transition policy evaluation, which stem from the need to integrate social sub-systems into a differentiated theory of justice and the inadequacy of the mainstream individual-ethics approach to address climate change. By presenting a case study of Lithuania's just transition policy evaluation, the paper demonstrates how integral ecology can bridge significant evaluation methodology gaps and advance innovative methodologies and transdisciplinary approaches.

Keywords: integral ecology, just transition policy, transformational evaluation methodologies, Blue Marble Evaluation, transdisciplinary approaches

The paper seeks to explore the role of integral ecology in developing and implementing innovative evaluation methodologies for assessing just transition policies, and presents a case study from Lithuania illustrating this application. Just transition is now an essential element of climate change debates. The globally accepted definition of just transition, proposed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2015, states that it is a well-managed transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy, which contributes “to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion, and the eradication of poverty” (ILO, 2015, p. 4). As countries fall short of their climate

goals, a just transition is increasingly recognised as a critical enabling factor for more effective climate action (IPCC, 2023; Robins, 2022). A global consensus has emerged that there will be no transition if transitions are not just. Therefore, in today's situation, when the climate crisis poses an existential threat to humanity, just transition has become a powerful ethical imperative, which requires a systemic approach to bring about urgent and profound socio-economic transformations.

However, this growing recognition and the urgency to implement a just transition exposes a fundamental challenge to finding and adopting necessary normative conceptual orientations that could systematically integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions in a differentiated theory of justice. Besides the challenge of social subsystem integration, the just transition imperative must deal with the inadequacy of the mainstream individual-ethics approach to address climate change because the climate is a collective good (Vogt, 2024).

The described conceptual challenge of just transition is reflected in the practice of just transition policy evaluations. When evaluating just transitions, these evaluations must shift from their conventional focus on outcomes-based assessment to consider broader system changes. Achievement of an indeed just transition requires that transformational change is sought in environmental, social, economic, and political systems simultaneously, that is, as a system. Therefore, just transition, as any transition, brings uncertainty because the elements of different systems interact in a not entirely predictable way, the outcome is unclear, and the path to it is debated. Additionally, just transition evaluations need to incorporate questions of social justice, which were not traditionally part of the evaluation process. Despite significant efforts by proponents of transformational evaluations (Magro et al., 2021; Patton, 2020; Van den Berg et al., 2022) and the proposal of several policy guidelines for a just transition (ILO, 2015; Macquarie et al., 2023), evaluation frameworks capable of assessing just transition policy in a transformational and systemic manner are still in their early stages (Delahais & Hassall, 2023).

The normative framework of integral ecology, outlined in the papal encyclical *Laudato si'* (Francis PP., 2015), seems promising for addressing these multifaceted challenges. Integral ecology is a perspective that looks at the environmental issues in the relationship with social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and political ones. The encyclical contains a chapter entitled "Integral Ecology", which "identifies a set of ecologies (environmental, economic, social, cultural, daily life) and articulates their interconnection in light of the common good and intergenerational justice" (Imanaka et al., 2018, p. 52). First, it succeeded in systematically linking social and environmental issues in a comprehensive normative framework focusing on justice (Goeko, 2024). Such a holistic approach to integral ecology, combined with its exceptional attentiveness to the most vulnerable groups during transition, can be instrumental in addressing the lack of methods for the identification of new eco-social vulnerabilities

that any sound just transition policy requires (Breil et al., 2021; Galgóczi & Pochet, 2023). Pope Francis writes: "A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Francis PP., 2015, §49).

Second, integral ecology, with its focus on the orientation towards the common good, constitutes an alternative paradigm to mainstream individual ethics approaches and a well-founded critique of the economic and political systems that led to the climate crisis (Christie et al., 2019; Riordan, 2024; Vogt, 2024). For the purposes of my evaluation research, the encyclical proved helpful, as it offered the necessary framework for the study, proposing transformative approaches not only at the individual level but also across political, economic, and social structures (Francis PP., 2015, §5-6). The climate crisis is framed as an issue affecting all humanity and requiring a collective global response. Most importantly, in integral ecology social justice is emphasised as the central aspect in addressing the global climate crisis, because the most vulnerable people bear the effects of climate change.

Integral ecology's importance for just transition is further highlighted by its ability to address ideological fragmentation and political conflicts in post-secular societies and offer additional motivation for climate action (Bals, 2016; Molina & Pérez-Garrido, 2022; Pechlaner et al., 2024). According to Bals (2016), "in a society where debates about values are often concealed and conducted in a pseudo-objective manner as economic or technical debates, religious communities frequently get a lively response when they link values to powerful intuitions or effective traditional images" (p. 16). The reception and exceptional recognition of *Laudato si'* and its principles of integral ecology in the secular scientific community (Chalupnicek, 2021, Molina & Pérez-Garrido, 2022) only confirm that. Furthermore, integral ecology has the potential to inspire "additional" motivation for action "beyond the existing secular arguments and motives" (Bals, 2016, p. 60). This potential of stronger motivation stems from the morality underpinning the normative paradigm of integral ecology is based on seeing each human person and nature as unique. In *Laudato si'* such approach is derived from the so-called 'ecological spirituality,' which is "grounded in the convictions of [...] faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living" (Francis PP., 2015, §216). This ecological spirituality has more power to motivate a "passionate concern for the protection of our world" than "ideas or concepts as such" (ibid.) In such a way, as a distinctive feature of *Laudato si'*, through "double coding" (Bals, 2016, p. 46) or "dual fluency" (Vogt, 2024, p. 222) Pope Francis translates theological argument from the theology of creation into secular language: "Every living being reflects something of God" and "this leads to his appeal for universal solidarity, which has in mind the uniqueness of excluded people ('option for the poor'), and also of endangered species in the threatened ecological co-world" (Bals, 2016, p. 60). Pope Francis writes about this "great motivation"

in the encyclical letter *Laudato si'*: “Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well” (Francis PP., 2015, §200).

Finally, integral ecology is well-aligned with the key principles of transformational evaluation methodologies. Therefore, the methodological innovations in just transition policy evaluation can build on existing transformational evaluation approaches and complement them with the stronger normative foundation of integral ecology. In my evaluation research of Lithuania’s just transition policy, I applied the Blue Marble Evaluation (BME) (Patton, 2020) approach, which takes its name from the famous photograph of 1972, known as *Blue Marble Shot*. In it, for the first time in history, the astronauts in Apollo 17 captured the whole Earth from space. Indeed, BME is a whole-Earth perspective, looking “beyond nation-state boundaries and across sector and issue silos to connect the global and the local, connect the human and ecological, and connect evaluative thinking and methods with those trying to bring about global systems transformation” (Patton, 2020, p. vii). While BME's global focus is dictated more by practical aspects of sustainability and equity, integral ecology calls for global consensus and solidarity, especially with the vulnerable: "In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters" (Francis PP., 2015, §158). In conclusion, combining integral ecology with transformational evaluation can strengthen the ethical foundation of just transition policies, ensuring a focus on global solidarity and justice.

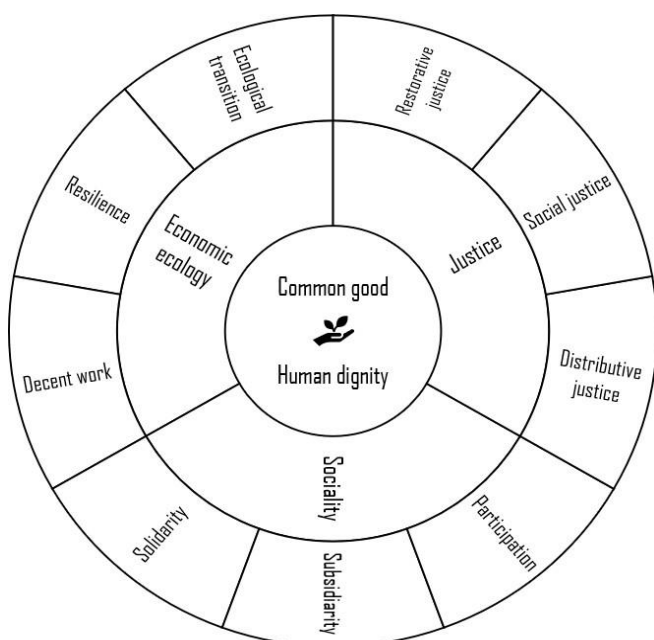
My doctoral thesis, defended in June 2024, presents a case study on Lithuania and, in this way, provides an example of how the paradigm of integral ecology can inform the practice of just transition policy evaluation. The study had a two-fold goal: to propose a new just transition policy evaluation methodology and use it to assess Lithuania's explicit and implicit just transition policy framework. The analysis of Lithuania's just transition policy context and several known socio-environmental inequalities and vulnerabilities revealed the need for such evaluation. In constructing a new evaluation tool, I brought into dialogue the existing just transition policy evaluation frameworks and those principles of integral ecology which are aligned with the concept of just transition. The evaluation research was conducted within transformational evaluations, and the BME approach was adopted. Transformational evaluations focus on "transforming evaluation to evaluate transformation" (Patton, 2021, p. 189) so that it better contributes to the common good.

The construction of the new just transition policy evaluation framework consisted of the following steps. First, I reviewed the existing just transition policy guidelines and evaluation

frameworks. Next, I discussed key dimensions of an integral ecology/common good that are most important for just transition policy orientation towards the common good (Figure 1): economic ecology (E), justice (J), and sociality (S), as well as their subdimensions (E1-E3; J1-J3; S1-S3). Finally, I described the normative coding scheme, in which integral ecology principles were operationalised and evaluation questions for the directed qualitative content analysis (DQICA) formulated, focusing on the substantive policy content (SC), policy process and implementation (PI), planned policy outcomes (PO), and the adaptive and resilient sustainability (AR). At the end, the quantitative scoring procedure was described.

Figure 1

Common Good Dimensions of Just Transition Policies

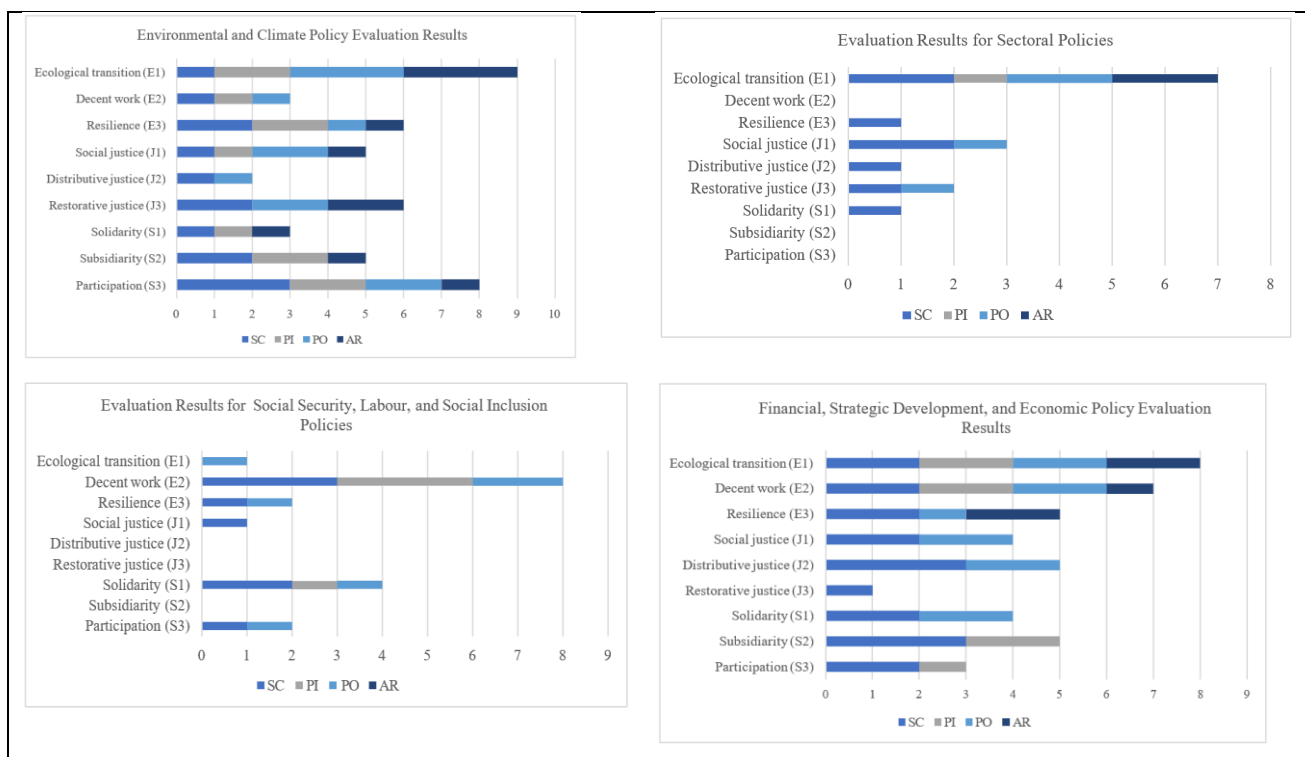


Note. From Author

A sample of 23 Lithuanian strategic policy documents was thematically analysed using the new just transition policy evaluation tool through the DQICA method with the Delve Tool software's help. The policy documents were categorized into environmental and climate policies, sectoral policies, social security labour and social inclusion policies, and financial strategic development and economic policies. After the documents' data analysis was completed, the quantitative scoring results for each policy group were visualised using composite bar charts. Later, the sub-total scores for each document's economic ecology, justice, and sociality dimensions were illustrated in a radar diagram, adding the results for all documents together. The evaluation focused on how well these policies integrate environmental, social, and economic justice and are oriented towards the common good.

The DQICA of the sampled policy documents revealed that while Lithuania is committed to environmental goals, the intersectionality of social, economic, and environmental justice is often inadequately addressed (Figure 2). The environmental and climate policy documents demonstrated that the social impact of these policies is most often discussed in terms of improved human health from reduced pollution and noise, and better waste management. The study indicated that the greening of the economy is often presumed to facilitate a just transition inherently. For this reason, the documents were probably less explicit regarding the intersectionality of social, economic, and environmental injustice. Moreover, not all policies discussed in the documents align well with the strong sustainability concept (Pelenc et al., 2015). Finally, for the sociality dimension, policy performance for the participation was moderate; for solidarity, it was minimal and not integrated sufficiently into environmental and climate policymaking.

Figure 2
Results for Lithuania's Four Policy Categories



Sectoral policies adhere to the environmental and social constraints imposed by the horizontal principles of sustainable development and equal opportunities, and thereby, they perform better in the subdimensions of ecological transition and social justice. The energy policy was mainly focused on reducing energy poverty and increasing the share of renewable energy sources. Finally, in the agriculture and related sectors, the main policy challenges were related to the difficulties of complying

with the environmental standards in agriculture and the need for farmers' motivation to engage in ecological transition. There were instances in the analysed texts when some sectoral policy development goals were framed as conflicting with better environmental and social outcomes. For example, the documents framed the transportation policy as being threatened by the potential loss of freight revenue due to greening efforts. Another example mentioned in the policy documents was about zoning conflicts between urban development and port expansion in Klaipėda city.

The document analysis revealed that social security, labour, and social inclusion policies rarely connected social and environmental outcomes. While the elements of decent work were covered quite comprehensively, they could be connected to environmental outcomes only indirectly through policy compliance with the horizontal principle of sustainable development. The documents addressed the problems of illegal work, discrimination, inadequate job quality, the lack of social dialogue practice and awareness, and employment barriers for specific groups. However, for the policies of this group, I identified a significant gap in addressing environmental sustainability, distributive, and restorative justice, alongside a need for participatory approaches.

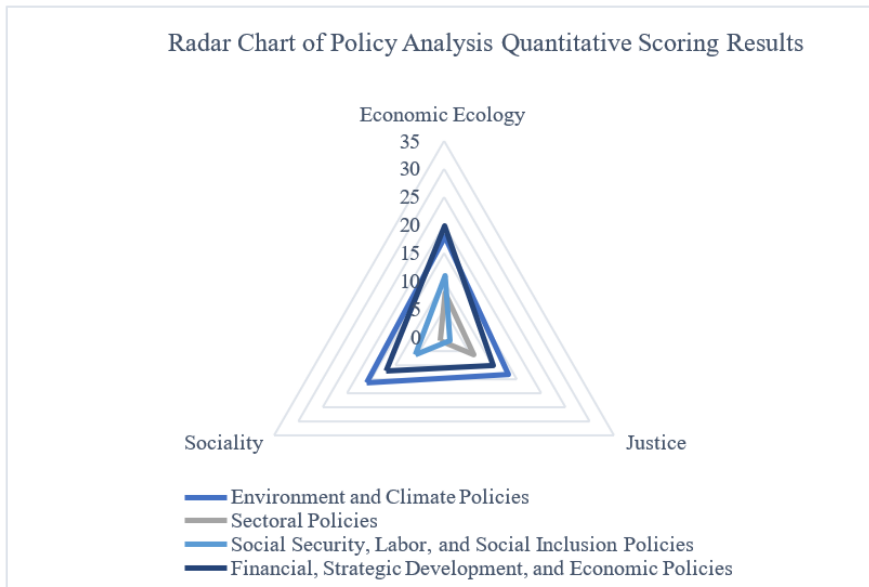
Regarding the social impacts of economy greening policies, the documents of the fourth policy group discuss that it is crucial to create new job places and upskill and reskill workers, especially in Lithuania's Territorial Just Transition Plan (Lietuvos Respublikos finansų ministerija, 2023). However, the other decent work principles were not addressed more broadly in the document of this policy group. The National Progress Strategy (NPS) (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2023) suggested that a more social policy is needed to manage the distribution of costs and benefits of green transitions more equitably. The principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and meaningful participation are acknowledged, especially in the NPS, but they need to be integrated into implementing green transition policies more specifically.

As mentioned, the summary of the quantitative scoring data for the four policy groups generated the radar chart in Figure 3. Each of the three spokes in the radar chart represents one of the common good/human dignity dimensions (economic ecology, justice, and sociality). The outermost layer of the chart represents the reference line (set at 36 quantitative scoring points), which in this evaluation research would correspond to the ideally common-good-oriented just transition policy. The four triangles represent the four policy groups defined for the analytical purposes of this evaluation research. In an ideal-case scenario, all four triangles would coincide with the outermost layer and the maximum scale values of 36 in each spoke. Such representation of evaluation research results could be a helpful tool in a comparative evaluation of just transition policies across different countries. As seen in the radar chart, sectoral policies, although with shallow scores, are still more oriented towards the normative dimension of justice and economic ecology, while their performance in the sociality

dimension is close to zero.

Figure 3

Radar Chart of Policy Analysis Quantitative Scoring Results



On the contrary, social security and labour policies, which also scored low in policy performance, performed relatively better in sociality and economic ecology but poorly in justice. The performance of the remaining environmental and climate policies and financial, strategic development, and economic policies was better distributed across the three common good/human dignity dimensions. Although these policies were far from the maximum level of the indicator (36 points), they still performed better in all three categories compared with the sectoral and social policies.

Overall, the Lithuanian case study demonstrated the practical benefits and challenges of applying integral ecology in just transition policy evaluation, providing a possible model for other countries to follow. Based on the findings of this evaluation research, several policy implications and recommendations were drawn to better align Lithuania's just transition policy framework with the principles of the common good. First, ensuring that environmental and climate policies are fully integrated with social security, labour, and social inclusion policies will be necessary. Next, the policies in Lithuania should promote a culture of solidarity and trust, enhance transparency and government responsiveness, and develop precise mechanisms for the meaningful participation of all stakeholders, especially vulnerable groups, throughout the policy process. The government should also promote educational campaigns and public discourse to increase the population's awareness of the social impacts of climate change and green policies. Moreover, to implement the principle of

subsidiarity, it is necessary to strengthen local and regional expertise and decision-making capabilities, support local and regional solutions, and engage local institutions in national and international climate policy decision-making. Most importantly, it is recommended that just transition is implemented as a horizontal transversal policy. For this purpose, the government should establish an institution to coordinate the interministerial work on just transition.

In conclusion, this paper explored how the principles of integral ecology can enhance just transition policy evaluations. The case study of Lithuania's just transition policy showed that integral ecology can bridge significant evaluation methodology gaps by systematically linking social and environmental justice with a focus on the most vulnerable. This study underscores the essential integrative power of comprehensive normative frameworks like integral ecology. Such frameworks are essential for developing innovative, transdisciplinary methods to tackle today's complex crises. Additionally, they can provide crucial additional motivation and alternative visionary principles for guiding sustainable and inclusive transformations. Consequently, the presented study fills a crucial gap in current evaluation research by contributing to advancing just transition policy evaluation methodologies and transdisciplinary approaches. It proves timely and significant in the context of the urgent climate crisis.

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