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**Towards a Just Transition:  
the EU's Green Energy Transition Policies and the Marginalization of the  
Places 'that Don't Matter'**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how the role of the Global South is framed in the European Union's (EU) energy transition policies. Despite the EU's claim that this transition policy is a just and beneficial one to the Global South, findings from independent bodies suggest otherwise, reporting patterns of old colonial relations exploiting the Global South. It is with this knowledge in mind that this thesis aims to examine the language of the policies and question the intentions and meaning behind the EU's international green transition policy. The thesis will utilize a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, analyzing the EU's Communications on the Green Deal and on the Hydrogen Strategy. Reports from independent bodies published by the associations Ukama and Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) will be used to corroborate the findings of the CDA on the two EU Communications. The results suggest that the EU's green transition policy might not be as just and beneficial as the EU claims it to be. The cooperations that are framed by the EU as being contributive to the sustainable growth of the Global South, in reality, do not live up to such claims. Instead, the language used by the EU positions these partnerships in a way that frames the Global South primarily as suppliers to advance the EU's own gains, rather than being equal beneficiaries of the proposed sustainable development partnerships. In summary, it can be argued that the EU's international energy transition policy risks reinforcing neo-colonial hierarchies that marginalize the Global South, undermining the principles and intentions of a just transition.

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Aim and Research Problem.....	2
<b>2. Theoretical Framework .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Conceptual Model .....	5
2.2 Hypotheses/Expectations.....	5
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Background of the Documents .....	7
3.2 Data Analysis.....	8
3.3 Limitations and Ethics.....	9
<b>4. Results.....</b>	<b>9</b>
4.1 European Green Deal.....	9
4.2 The Hydrogen Strategy.....	13
<b>5. Discussion .....</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1 Perpetuation of Power Imbalances .....	14
5.2 Lack of Place-Sensitive Policies .....	16
5.3 Marginalization of Agency .....	17
5.4 Mismatch between Mechanisms and Just Transition Principles .....	17
5.5 Policy Recommendation.....	18
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>7. Bibliography.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>8. Appendix.....</b>	<b>22</b>

# 1. Introduction

The Global South is bearing a disproportionate share of the impacts caused by climate change and environmental degradation – despite having limited historic contribution to its causes – as presented in figure one. Even in the present day, the contribution of the Global South to the worsening climate catastrophe remains negligible in comparison to the burden that they are facing as a result of the overflowing emission of the Global North (Arnold, 2023). Globally, first world G8 nations – including the EU – contribute disproportionately to the carbon emission problem as they are responsible for 85% of excess global CO2 emissions in 2015 (Hickel, 2020).

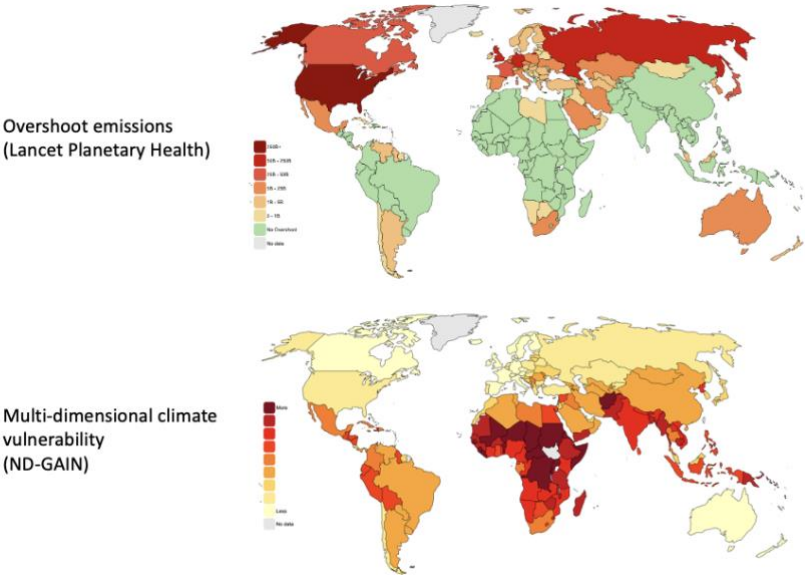


Figure 1: top map showing nations most responsible for excess emissions, bottom map showing those most impacted by it (by Jason Hickel, as presented in (Arnold, 2023))

In lieu of this, the European Union (EU) has committed to cut their emissions by 20% by 2020 (European Commission, 2010), further committing towards climate neutrality by 2050 conforming to the goals of the Paris Agreement (Consilium Europa, 2024). The European Green Deal strategy comes as a manifestation of this commitment as a foundation for the EU’s path to the green transition (European Commission, 2019). To also aid lower emissions internationally, the EU aims to promote “opportunities for cooperation on clean hydrogen with neighbouring countries and regions, as a way to contribute to their clean energy transition and foster sustainable growth and development” through partnerships with third countries (European Commission, 2020, p. 19).

## 1.1 Research Aim and Research Problem

One part of the European Green Deal is the Hydrogen Strategy which helps to facilitate the EU's green transition through the use of clean hydrogen energy with renewables to be sourced from African countries (European Commission, 2020). The EU establishes partnerships with other nations such as the US, Canada, and Japan, forming a research alliance (European Commission, n.d.), while partnerships with African countries are appealing to the EU for hydrogen production due to the abundance of renewable energy (Dagnachew, et al., 2023). However, the partnership with African regions specifically is of interest in this thesis, as findings suggest it may resemble old colonial patterns that go within the realm of an unjust energy transition (Eberhardt, 2023).

The social motivation behind this research is 'just transition' concerns in relation to the move towards renewable energy. The term itself has gained traction in the recent discourse of climate change, with the IPCC emphasizing just transition principles to ensure an equitable and socially inclusive transition towards net-zero emissions (Nguyen, 2022). Despite the European Green Deal document stating that "this transition must be just and inclusive" (European Commission, 2019, p. 2), findings from independent bodies contradict this statement, showing patterns of exploitation that reinforce old colonial relations questioning EU's own call for a just transition.

For example, conflicts have arisen in the Boegoebaai region, designated for a green hydrogen processing plant in South Africa, as residents fear losing their land to the construction of an export facility as part of EU's Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) (Eberhardt, 2023). This conflict exemplifies the territorial discontent and polarization highlighted by Rodríguez-Pose (2018) in his article 'Revenge of the Places That don't Matter', where greater polarization is happening in many parts of Africa, fueling concerns about potential for conflicts.

Scientifically, current research on sustainable energy transitions has been criticized for perpetuating Eurocentric values that marginalize the Global South. The current framing of the Global South as connected to narratives of a "Third World" or "periphery" areas outside of Europe and North America fails to capture the heterogeneity of these locales which should not be seen as wholes (Abnave, 2016; Dados & Connell, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to decolonize this field of study by decentering Western values and to amplify indigenous worldviews and agency from the Global South that have historically been overshadowed (Ghosh, et al., 2021; Jolly, 2022).

To address this imbalance and fill the research gap, this research will conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on the European Green Deal and the Hydrogen Strategy. It aims to demonstrate how the language used by the EU in its Communications has a tendency to reinforce colonial hierarchical relations based on its partnership approach with third countries, further marginalizing certain groups, particularly those in the regions left behind.

Motivated by the societal and scientific relevance above, the following research question is therefore asked:

How do European Union policies on the green transition construct the role and representation of the Global South?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theory of ‘Places that Don’t Matter’ introduced by Rodríguez-Pose (2018) refers to the declining regions that have economically been left behind compared to the more prosperous places. These are regions that have experienced persistent poverty and economic decay due to factors such as globalization and the concentration of economic dynamism in major agglomerations. Despite being portrayed as having little economic potential, he argues that many of these places do have untapped potential that could be harnessed through place-sensitive development policies tailored to their unique geographic contexts.

Expanding on this notion, Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci (2023) emphasize the importance of place-sensitive policies in facilitating a just green transition. They warn that the challenges and opportunities prompted by large-scale greening initiatives such as the European Green Deal will not be territorially evenly spread. While some regions may tap into the opportunities offered by it, those in the ‘places that don’t matter’ risk falling further behind without these place-sensitive strategies.

This concern over regional inequality is also echoed by Feffer (2023), who acknowledges the potential for the energy transition to exacerbate tensions between the Global North and the Global South, wherein the Global South is expected to adhere to old neoliberal models through exploitative partnerships, serving the role as a supplier of resources to fuel the North’s ambitions rather than an equal partner in sustainable development.

Building on these insights, Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci (2023) contend that these place-sensitive policies are crucial for mitigating territorial discontent and enabling more successful regional development strategies, as this place-sensitivity helps “aid policymakers with the transferability of findings for the development of more successful regional development strategies” (p. 2).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2023) defines the concept of ‘just transition’ as a set of principles aimed to ensure that no people or regions are left behind in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It emphasizes the need for targeted measures from governments and agencies to minimize the negative impacts of the transition while maximizing benefits for those disproportionately affected. The key principles underlying a just transition include: respect for vulnerable groups; social dialogue and democratic consultation; and social protection. While the IPCC provides a defining framework for achieving a fair transition, practical challenges emerge when integrating the perspectives of indigenous/vulnerable groups, as advocated by Jolly (2022). Additionally, navigating the complexities of specific regional characteristics, as highlighted by Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci (2023), poses further obstacles in implementing these principles.

In approaching this discourse on inclusive green transition policies, Goodin’s (1992) theory of agency explains how governments and institutions, as agents, use mechanisms like regulations, incentives, and agreements as tools towards green goals. These mechanisms can be employed to coordinate collective efforts and steer society towards achieving environmental goals. This theory can provide insights into how the EU, as an agent, employs measures that align (or do not align) with the IPCC’s just transition principles to achieve this collective goal and ensures no one is left behind in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Finally, Jolly (2022) underscores the importance of *indigenous* agency in addressing alternative worldviews. This focuses on the viewpoint of indigenous communities in the Global South, advocating for sustainability transitions to be reoriented to prioritize the traditional norms and practices of these communities. By tailoring these green initiatives to the unique practices of those in the Global South, this approach resonates with Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci’s (2023) notion of place-based approach which increases the likelihood of achieving an equitable and socially inclusive transition that upholds the IPCC’s call for the key principles towards a just transition.

## 2.1 Conceptual Model

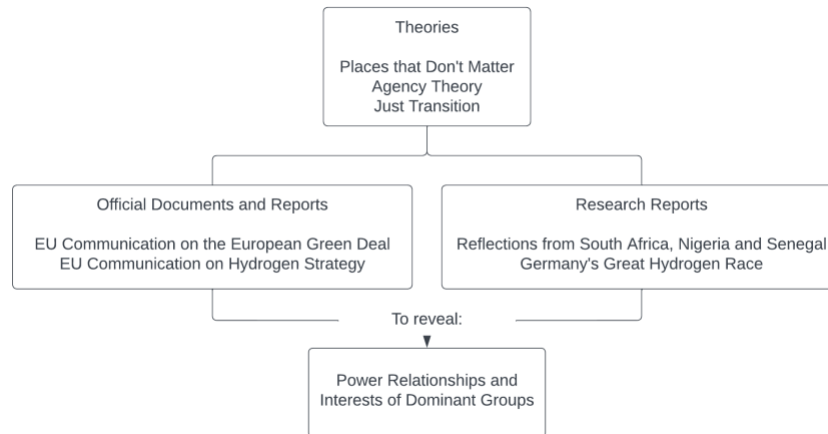


Figure 2: Conceptual Model (by Author)

Figure 2 shows the conceptual model that will help guide this paper. Building upon the theories, I will conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to answer the aforementioned research question as I aim to reveal power relations and interests of the EU that implicitly underlies their official documents and reports. These documents are the Communications on the Green Deal and on the Hydrogen Strategy. Furthermore, two research reports will also be used as a way to contrast official EU reports to materialize the findings to strengthen this thesis and arguments. Having revealed the power dynamics between dominant groups (i.e., between the EU and African nations) I aim to offer policy recommendations to be applied to aid in a just energy transition between the Global North and the subaltern Global South, taking into account the three theories that underline the analysis.

## 2.2 Hypotheses/Expectations

Drawing upon concerns that the EU's energy transition perpetuates old colonial patterns as elaborated by Eberhardt (2023), and Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci's (2023) warnings that the Green Deal's effects might not be equally territorially spread, this study expects to find that the language used in the EU's energy transition policies may perpetuate power imbalances and neo-colonial dynamics, which positions the Global South as unequal partners in the EU's sustainable development policies.



### 3. Methodology

Taking into account the complex systemic interdependencies of environmental problems and the material and power effects that environmental discourse has on practices of power relations, the social sciences field often examines the role of language and ideas of power through a discourse methodology (Feindt & Oels, 2005). The urgency of climate change calls for a rapid introduction of sustainable energy policies, in which the linguistic framing of said policies can play a role in sustaining the dominance of existing policy processes (Scrase & Ockwell, 2010). It is based on this that this research paper aims to employ CDA to the topic of energy transition.

A critical discourse analysis is a “discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). Noting how language reflects power dynamics, conducting a critical discourse analysis prompts researchers to scrutinize the processes of policymaking and how the dominant narrative marginalizes others through power relations (Hewitt, 2009). This research selects two policy documents drafted by the EU for the CDA (the first two in table one), while the latter two documents will be used to contrast the EU’s documents and materialize the CDA findings.

<b>Document Name</b>	<b>Abbreviation/ Short Name</b>	<b>Issuing Body</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>
Communication From the Commission: The European Green Deal	EGD	European Commission	2019
Communication From the Commission: A Hydrogen Strategy for a Climate-Neutral Europe	Hydrogen Strategy	European Commission	2020
Just energy transition partnerships in the context of africa-europe relations: Reflections from South Africa, Nigeria and Senegal	Reflections	Ukama	2022
Germany’s great hydrogen race: The corporate perpetuation of fossil fuels, energy colonialism and climate disaster	GHR	Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)	2023

Table 1: documents analyzed (by Author)

### 3.1 Background of the Documents

The selection of the EU's Communications on the Green Deal and on the Hydrogen Strategy as primary documents is due to their role in shaping the EU's policy framework and strategic vision for achieving climate neutrality and transitioning towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy. As the EU positions itself as a global leader in the energy transition, these documents guide the underlying principles, measures, and objectives that steer its efforts.

The EGD lays out the EU's comprehensive roadmap for transforming its economy to align with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Given its far-reaching implications across various sectors and regions, critically examining the language and framing of this document is needed to understand the EU's approach to the climate crisis and its potential impacts, especially on the Global South.

The Hydrogen Strategy, as part of the EGD, provides greater elaboration on the EU's intended collaborations and partnerships with third countries, including those in the Global South. By also examining this dedicated strategy, it allows for a more comprehensive examination of how the EU frames its engagement with the Global South, which complements the analysis of the EGD.

Analyzing these two documents allows for scrutinizing the language, narratives, and assumptions that underpin the EU's approach to its green transition agenda. As official documents, they offer important institutional perspectives that can reveal underlying societal norms and practices (Jupp, 2006). These primary, official sources provide direct insights into the EU's official framing and policy approach towards achieving its climate goals.

Since relying solely on the EU's Communications may present a one-sided perspective, two independent reports will also be analyzed to critically examine the potential impacts of these policies on the Global South. The decision to include the reports by CEO and Ukama can help to identify potential blind spots in the EU's official narratives, and to assess whether these partnerships truly align with the principles of a just transition as outlined by the IPCC.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

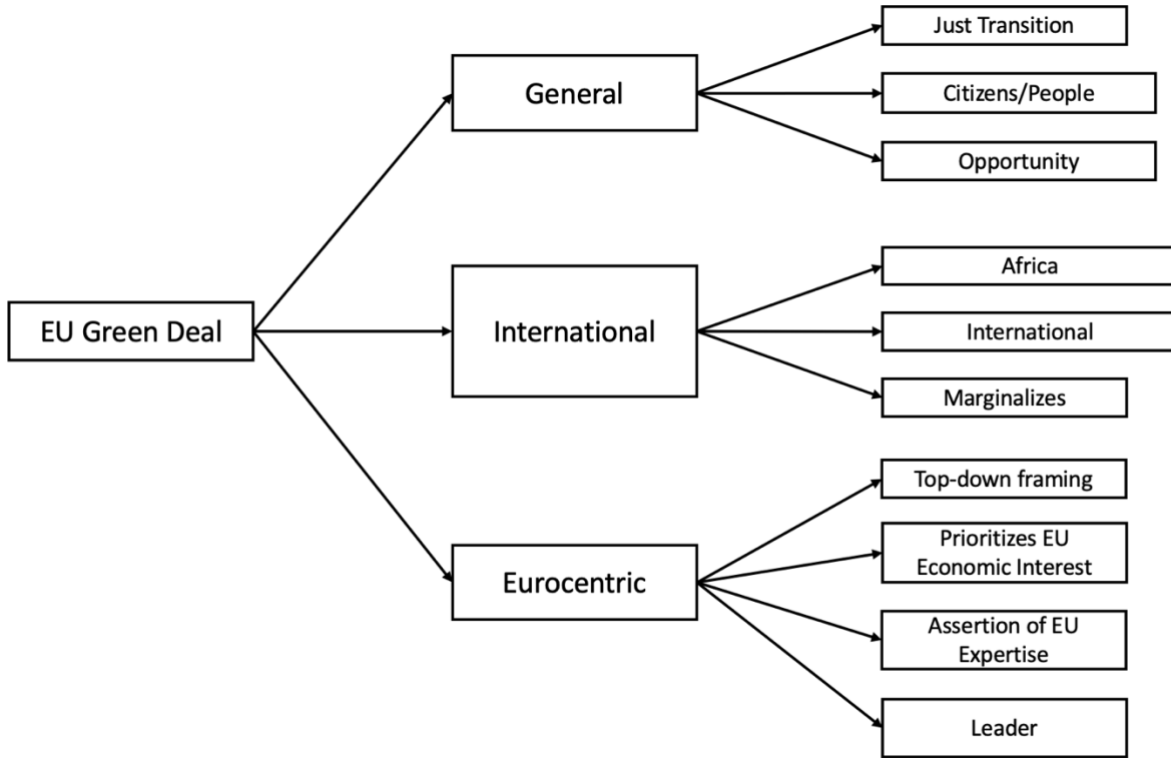


Figure 3: atlas.ti coding tree for the EGD (by Author)

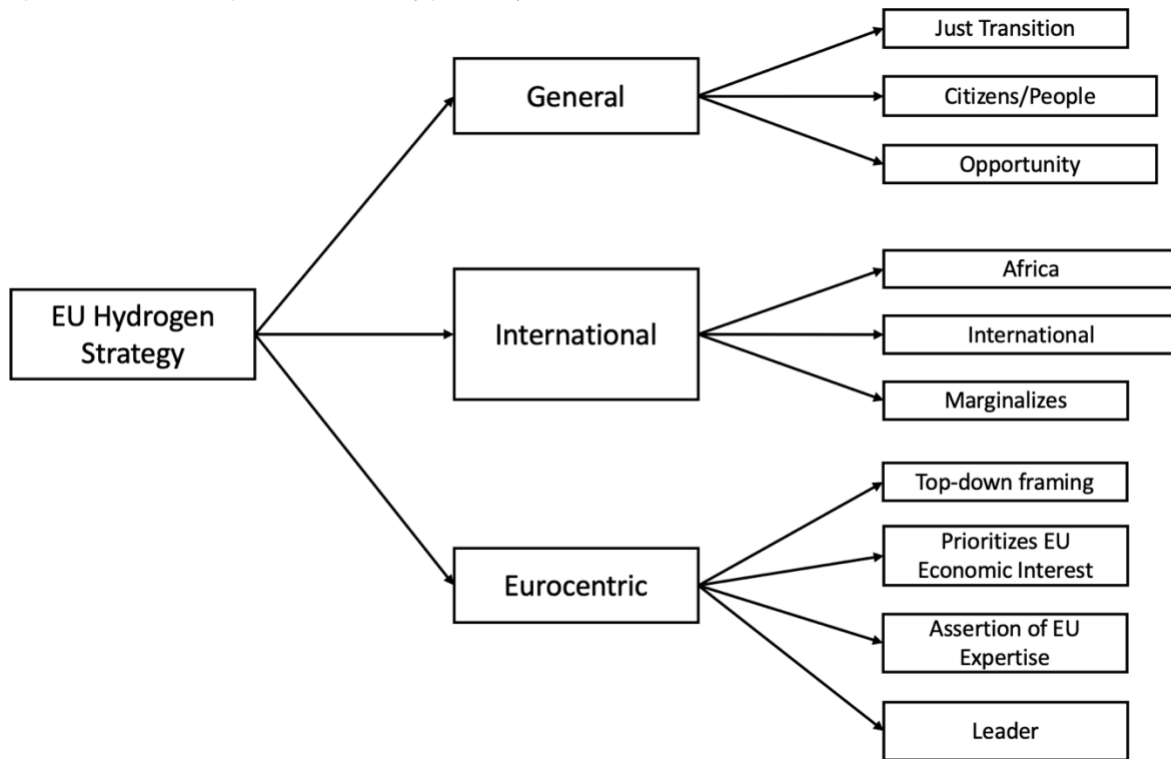


Figure 4: atlas.ti coding tree for the Hydrogen Strategy (by Author)

The two EU Communications are analyzed in atlas.ti. Figures three and four show the code tree that is used to help guide the analysis. I identify three key themes which are general, international, and Eurocentricity. The key words used to conduct the CDA – stemming from the three themes – take into account the research’s theoretical framework, for example the IPCC’s principles for a just transition among others, which helps to analyze the framing of the Global South as presented in the two documents.

### 3.3 Limitations and Ethics

It is also important to note that my positionality plays a role in the critical discourse analysis and may therefore be interpreted as a limitation. As a 20-year-old Southeast Asian man coming from a postcolonial, Global South country, my views in analyzing the EU’s policy on the Global South may be biased. Widdowson (1995) for example believes that CDA is a biased interpretation due to a-priori judgements of the researcher (as cited in Meyer, 2001). However, one can also argue that there is also no such thing as unbiased research (Delbosc, 2022). Thus, this subjectivity can be viewed as strength and not a limitation as it is expressed explicitly, while at the same time offering a Global South – non-Western-centric – perspective myself which can aid policy recommendation.

Seeing that the research utilizes secondary data, I am not overly concerned with matters regarding informed consent, data storage, and other ethical considerations related to primary data collection activities as those are not within the scope of this study. I will, however, ensure to uphold academic integrity and ethical standards by citing all sources by adhering to proper referencing practices to avoid any potential instances of academic fraud or plagiarism.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 European Green Deal

The European Green Deal starts out with the subheading “turning an urgent challenge into a unique opportunity” (p. 2) which discourses ecological modernization and environmental challenge as an “urgent challenge” that ideally turns into a “unique opportunity”. Of course, “at the same time, this transition must be just and inclusive. It must put people first, and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges” (p. 2). Yet, this transition towards

climate neutrality is further presented as “an opportunity to expand sustainable and job-intensive economic activity. There is significant potential in global markets for low-emission technologies, sustainable products and services” (p. 7).

The emphasis on expanding “sustainable and job-intensive economic activity” by tapping into the “potential in global markets” constructs this transition primarily as an economic opportunity for the EU. Aiming to both tap into the global market to be the forerunner in the global economy is in complete contrast with the claims that the transition is going to be a “just and inclusive” one, as the EU frames these issues as merely economic and continues with its narrative of opportunities through promising funding and job opportunities.

**“As long as many international partners do not share the same ambition as the EU,** there is a risk of carbon leakage, either because production is transferred from the EU to other countries with lower ambition for emission reduction, or because EU products are replaced by more carbon-intensive imports. If this risk materialises, there will be no reduction in global emissions, and this will frustrate the efforts of the EU and its industries to meet the global climate objectives of the Paris Agreement.” (p. 5).

While the paragraph above notes the importance of their international partners, it frames it in a sense that is lacking positive engagement. It lacks the recognition of potential collaboration with the Global South, emphasizing the notion that they are unable to “share the same ambition as the EU”, shifting the blame towards them.

Furthermore, this framing is still Eurocentric, portraying the EU as a proactive actor in the fight against climate change, while positioning other international partners as less ambitious. This dichotomous framing - those who share the EU’s ambition and those who do not - ignores the complexity of global dynamics and approaches to sustainability in different regions, and thus setting a top-down, assertive EU framing. This top-down framing can be seen in the language of the following paragraph, where if other countries do not match the EU’s increased climate ambition, it is implied that the EU will unilaterally impose a carbon border adjustment mechanism. The focus is also placed on imports from third countries, controlling their pricing, rather than what the EU could do with its own exports.

“Should differences in levels of ambition worldwide persist, as the EU increases its climate ambition, the Commission will propose a carbon border adjustment mechanism, for selected sectors, to reduce the risk of carbon leakage. This would ensure that the price of imports reflect more accurately their carbon content. This measure will be designed to comply with World Trade Organization rules and other international obligations of the EU. It would be an alternative to the measures that address the risk of carbon leakage in the EU’s Emissions Trading System.” (p. 5).

“Should differences in levels of ambition worldwide persist,” frames countries as unable to match the EU’s standards, which often includes those in the Global South, as laggards which hold back global progress. The paragraph also implies that the primary motivation of the EU is its economic competitiveness, “this would ensure that the price of imports reflect more accurately their carbon content,” which, when combined with the first sentence, implies the lack of ambition to reach an equitable goal with the rest of the world.

### *The International Dimension*

The Green Deal Communication does not get into detail about the international dimension - the mechanisms and role of the international actors - up until at least page 20. The discourse here starts with the subheading “the EU as a global leader”. This presents the EU, playing the role of the leader in the global environment transition, with a chance to assert its global leadership and influence. By positioning itself at the forefront of sustainability efforts, the EU could solidify its authority on the international arena where the global environmental discourse has become a much stronger factor in world politics than ever before.

“The global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation require a global response. The EU will continue to promote and implement ambitious environment, climate and energy policies across the world. It will develop a stronger ‘green deal diplomacy’ focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share of promoting more sustainable development. By setting a credible example, and following-up with diplomacy, trade policy, development support and other external policies, the EU can be an effective advocate.” (p. 20).

The European Union, in the paragraph above, demonstrates its authority and leadership by aiming to be perceived as the most responsible, environmentally friendly actor in the global arena. It also uses its power to influence other nations to contribute to environmental sustainability. The statement “take on their share” in promoting sustainable development implicitly constructs the EU as an all-knowing agent shaping the meanings of sustainability. Furthermore, the phrase “by setting a credible example” implies that its climate goals should be the international benchmark, while at the same time also promoting the assertion of EU expertise on the global sustainability market.

Furthermore, the main narrative of the international dimension of the Green Deal seems to be centered around the EU as the leader in setting standards through a top-down approach overlooking inclusive participation. There is little mention of inclusive processes to genuinely incorporate Global South perspectives in shaping tangible green transition policies. The focus is on the EU’s “diplomacy”, “engagement”, and establishing its own “innovative forms of engagement”. Significant emphasis is further placed on the EU using trade policies and regulatory standards to facilitate its own transition and economic gain through access to resources.

“The EU will use its diplomatic and financial tools to ensure that green alliances are part of its relations with Africa and other partner countries and regions”. (p. 21).

The use of the phrase “diplomatic and financial tools” is of specific interest as it carries concerning implications from a CDA perspective. It frames the EU’s approach as potentially coercive, unilaterally imposing its agenda on Africa and other regions, as the word “tools” has connotations of the EU using its clout and resources as instruments of power to leverage over other partner countries. This language suggests that the EU views itself as the authority on defining sustainable development norms and standards, while African and other countries must align with this through these “green alliance” arrangements facilitated by EU mechanisms.

Finally, the Green Deal’s generalization of referring to African countries collectively as “Africa” only perpetuates old colonial framing. Moving back into the research aim, where these entities shall not be seen as a “pre-given, stable unities or wholes” (Abnave, 2016, p. 35), it can be seen that this Communication lacks that. Homogenizing a highly diverse continent with vastly different contexts and challenges to sustainable development overlooks this diversity and nuance and only frames the EU’s Green Deal Strategy as one that is a top-down, paternalistic approach, going

against its own goal of a “new growth strategy”, also lacking Rodríguez-Pose’s (2018) call for a place-sensitive approach.

## 4.2 The Hydrogen Strategy

Scholars have investigated this Hydrogen Strategy framework (Barnes & Yafimava, 2020; Bleischwitz & Bader, 2010) and concluded that energy security in Europe cannot be managed by European energy supply alone. Rather, the EU will have to continue to rely on energy imports from partner countries. With the need to decarbonize a large share of the EU energy consumption by 2050, hydrogen as an energy carrier has gained attention globally and more specifically in the EU. The dedicated Hydrogen Strategy published in July 2020 promotes the development and deployment of clean hydrogen in the European Union.

“Hydrogen is enjoying a renewed and rapidly growing attention in Europe and around the world. Hydrogen can be used as a feedstock, a fuel or an energy carrier and storage, and has many possible applications across industry, transport, power and buildings sectors. Most importantly, it does not emit CO<sub>2</sub> and almost no air pollution when used. It thus offers a solution to decarbonise industrial processes and economic sectors where reducing carbon emissions is both urgent and hard to achieve. All this makes hydrogen essential to support the EU’s commitment to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and for the global effort to implement the Paris Agreement while working towards zero pollution.” (p. 1).

The introductory paragraph above shows the growing interest in hydrogen as a versatile energy carrier and its potential to be applied in a diverse setting to support the EU’s goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 through “cooperation with our third country partners” (p. 2).

The international dimension of the Hydrogen Strategy is outlined on section seven under the subheading “the international dimension” (p. 19) which the EU defines as an “integral” part of the EU approach. The framing of the Global South vs the Global North countries could be questioned here.

“The EU, together with the US and Japan, developed the most ambitious research programmes addressing different segments of the hydrogen value-chain” (p. 19).



Which, in comparison to African nations, are framed as a supplier:

“For example Africa, due to its abundant renewables potential and in particular North Africa due to geographic proximity, is a potential supplier of cost-competitive renewable hydrogen to the EU requiring that the deployment of renewable power generation in these countries strongly accelerates.” (p. 19)

This shows the contrasting roles that the Global North and South countries play. The EU, the US, and Japan are portrayed as leaders and pioneers in developing “the most ambitious research programmes” across the hydrogen value chain. In contrast, the document frames the countries in the Global South, particularly (Northern) African countries as “potential suppliers of cost-competitive renewable hydrogen to the EU”. This representation reduces their role to that of energy exporters to meet the EU’s hydrogen demands.

The statement “requiring that the deployment of renewable power generation in these countries strongly accelerates” further reinforces the notion that the Global South’s role is contingent upon accelerating their renewable energy deployment to serve the EU’s interests.

This contrast in framing creates a concerning dichotomy where the Global North is portrayed as the knowledge and technology leader, while the Global South acts as a supplier of energy and resources to meet the Global North’s needs. The document perpetuates a narrative of dependency and a unidirectional flow of expertise from the Global North to the Global South.

This framing implies a power imbalance wherein the Global North dictates the terms and conditions for the Global South’s participation in the hydrogen economy which potentially leads to exploitative or unequal partnerships.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Perpetuation of Power Imbalances

The findings of the CDA on the EGD and Hydrogen Strategy resonate with the key theoretical perspectives outlined in the theoretical framework. Firstly, the strategies employed by the EU continue to align with Rodríguez-Pose’s (2018) notion of the ‘Places that Don’t Matter’. The language used by the EU often positions the Global South primarily as a supplier of resources and

energy which perpetuates a narrative of unidirectional flow of expertise from the Global North to the Global South.

I argue that this framing continues to “increasingly divide places between those that matter and those that don’t matter” (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, p. 192). Growth in “consumption cities” in Africa has mostly been associated with wealth derived from resource exports (Gollin et al., 2016, as cited in Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Therefore, the EU’s narration of using the Global South as resource supplier is only going to further perpetuate this finding, creating further divide between the places that matter and those that don’t. This goes against the IPCC’s goal of ensuring that no people or regions are left behind in the transition to a low-carbon economy under the ‘just transition’ umbrella.

While it can be argued that in this case the Global South does not truly “not matter” as they still play a role in the energy transition, the overarching supplier role of the Global South as described by the EU still perpetuates the notion that they are worth less than the Global North whose partnership is framed as having “the most ambitious research programmes” (Hydrogen Strategy, p. 19).

“The drivers of climate change and biodiversity loss are global and are not limited by national borders” (EGD, p. 2).

“The EU has already started to modernise and transform the economy with the aim of climate neutrality. Between 1990 and 2018, it reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 23%, while the economy grew by 61%.” (EGD, p. 4).

The EU understands, as shown in the first paragraph above, that the drivers of climate change are global, yet they have ignored the fact that they contribute disproportionately to this problem. The second paragraph highlights the EU’s progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while growing its economy, yet it seems that the EU is choosing to ignore its colonial past of resource extraction on the Global South. While the EU has made progress on reducing its own emissions, it disregards its ecological debt and responsibility towards the Global South stemming from centuries of unequal power relations to build its economic power. None of the EU’s past record of how they contribute to the climate crisis is mentioned in either the EGD or the Hydrogen Strategy.

This unequal power relations continues to be perpetuated by, for example, Germany. The GHR report states that the nation plans to cover two-thirds of its future green hydrogen supply through imports which sets the nation as the biggest importer of the gas in Europe, with an estimated 60-70% share of the future EU/UK import demand (Eberhardt, 2023). The same report also raises concerns of the framing of the Global South as suppliers, questioning Germany's Minister for Economic Affairs Robert Habeck's statement that "the last thing we can accept is a kind of new energy imperialism" (GHR, p. 24).

A closer look into Germany's plans reveals a less equitable scenario. Resources such as land and water are being appropriated for their use leaving behind ecological impacts. Many countries on Germany's roadmap to hydrogen import are among the most water-stressed regions in the world, including Morocco in Northern Africa, which leads to concerns in water supply to the local population as demands rise (GHR, p. 25).

## 5.2 Lack of Place-Sensitive Policies

Rodríguez-Pose and Bartalucci (2023) have warned against the challenges prompted by greening initiatives such as the Green Deal which these places 'that don't matter' could face if the importance of place-sensitive policies is ignored. This warning is perfectly exemplified in the gas dilemma as elaborated in the Reflections document.

The Reflections document notes the difference the role that gas should play in Africa's energy transition plan. EU Institutions (e.g., the European Investment Bank (EIB)) have decided *against* financing fossil fuels in order to align with their Paris Agreement commitment. However, as the EU is moving away from gas, several African nations, including Nigeria and Senegal, *still* rely on the use of gas as transition fuel, which is especially important in their industrialization process.

The Reflections document presents the EU as hypocritical, as the Member States dash for bilateral gas deals under the scarcity caused by the war in Ukraine. Yet, at the same time, the EU is denying financial support for Africa's access to gas which is abundant in the continent. This is confusing for the African perspective as Europe's position is not always clear, sending mixed signals to the continent.

The disconnect between the EU's approach to gas in the African continent and the reality faced by the continent shows the lack of consideration for a place-sensitive strategy. The EU's stance against financing gas projects in Africa fails to recognize this nuanced regional context and the diverse pathways required for a just energy transition across different geographies.

### 5.3 Marginalization of Agency

Consistent with Jolly's (2022) advocacy for indigenous agency, the findings reveal a lack of meaningful consultation and feedback processes with local groups. The lack of indigenous agency is still apparent in the EU's external Green Deal diplomacy. The GHR report even states that some indigenous communities in Africa and Brazil have suggested that there should be no hydrogen production at all in the most water-stressed regions. This is also supported by the Reflections document, in which the Senegalese authorities are warning against the lack of social dialogue and diplomacy, due to the EU prioritizing its own energy security.

Furthermore, a Nigerian paper notes that despite the idea of equal partnership between Africa and Europe, there is a high risk that EU's investments will be perceived as part of a tendency by Europe to "want to decide on behalf of Africa what is good for that continent" (Reflections, p. 7). Concerns on indigenous agency are further raised as the Reflections report points out that the JETP was not developed through a feedback process with local groups but rather by international consultants using proprietary methods (p. 9). This setting aside of indigenous agency and traditional knowledge contradicts the IPCC's emphasis on social dialogue, democratic consultation, and social protection.

### 5.4 Mismatch between Mechanisms and Just Transition Principles

The Green Deal introduces itself as a transition that "must be just and inclusive" (EGD, p. 2). Yet, the Reflections and GHR research reports show instances of ecological and humanitarian abuse that implicitly resulted from the EU's pursuit of the Green Deal objectives, especially in relation to developing countries in the Global South.

The use of mechanisms by the EU, such as the regulatory frameworks that are the EGD and the Hydrogen Strategy, may not align with the principles of a just transition as envisioned by the IPCC. While terms like "sustainable", "green", and "inclusive" are all mentioned and emphasized in the

text, this green transition is “inclusive” and “just” only when the rest of the world complies with EU standards and as long as they help in supplying energy security to Europe.

The underlying narratives and power structures suggest that the EU is using the EGD as a mask to prioritize its own economic interests and energy security over the principles of equity, inclusivity, and respect for vulnerable groups as defined by the IPCC. The EGD recognizes the potential for renewable energy development based in the Global South given the abundant resources in many of these countries to help “put Europe firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth” (p. 2), prioritizing the EU’s own gains.

## 5.5 Policy Recommendation

Referring back to the original aim of offering a policy recommendation and to address the shortcomings of the EU’s green transition policies, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 1. Enhance inclusive participation and indigenous agency

The EU should consider a more inclusive participation that is more transparent (Hege, et al., 2022). The JETP issue currently lacks transparency, which calls for the development of a culture of an inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue. This will also support Jolly’s (2022) notion of indigenous agency as it bridges the gap with the IPCC’s principle for a just transition through social dialogue and democratic consultation.

### 2. Equitable partnership through a place-sensitive approach

Taking into account the current framing of the EGD that seems to imply that the Global South receives a less equitable partnership, the EU should thrive to establish partnerships based on mutual respect and a shared goal. Drawing upon Goodin’s (1992) theory of agency, the EU could use its mechanisms as tools in steering society towards its green goals. However, as Rodríguez-Pose (2018) has advocated, the solution needs to be place-sensitive. This place-sensitivity means policies that are informed by empirical evidence that can respond to the structural opportunities, potential, and constraints of each place.

Due to the infancy of the hydrogen project, future research could revisit the implementation and impacts of the EU's Green Deal and the Hydrogen Strategy. Its engagement with the Global South could also be further studied as the strategy progresses and more empirical evidence becomes available. As advocated by Abnave (2016), Ghosh et al., (2021), and Dados & Connell (2012), there still is the need to shift from a Western-centric perspective towards a decolonized perspective by amplifying indigenous perspectives.

## 6. Conclusion

The green transition discourse is plagued with buzzwords around sustainability. This CDA has demonstrated that the framing of the EU's green transition seems to perpetuate old colonial relations in which the Global South is positioned at the less equitable end of the stick under the EU's green transition policies. Furthermore, this top-down narrative where the EU is framed as a leader continue to color the policies. Policy recommendations have been provided to align the EU's green transition policies closer towards a just transition framework as defined by the IPCC by taking into account place-sensitive policies (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) and indigenous agency (Jolly, 2022). A more inclusive, equitable approach should be considered by the EU to genuinely take into account perspectives and concerns of communities in the Global South who may negatively be impacted by the green transition.

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## 8. Appendix

	6 Communicatio...	Totals
	62	
◇ Africa	4	3
◇ Assertion of EU Expertise	9	9
◇ Citizens/People	4	4
◇ International	16	16
◇ Just Transition	1	1
◇ Leader	9	9
◇ Marginalizes	4	3
◇ Opportunity	3	3
◇ Prioritizes EU (Economic) Interest	11	11
◇ Top-down Framing	7	7
Totals	66	66

Figure 5: EGD atlas.ti code analysis

The figure above shows the codes used to analyze the EU's Communication on the Green Deal. The word "international" is mentioned 16 times, while the most relevant code being "prioritizes EU (Economic) Interest" with 11 queries, and the "top-down framing" with 7 queries. Just transition is only mentioned once in the whole document which is of concern seeing that the EU claims their strategy to be just and inclusive. The code analysis for Hydrogen Strategy is not included due to the relevancy of the Strategy being just the international dimension, as the rest of the document concerns the technicalities of hydrogen which is not of concern in this thesis.