Lost in (Just) Transition? The Herculean Task of 'leaving no-one behind' in European Climate Adaptation Policy:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the European North-South Divide

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Abstract

In an era of climate emergency, considerations of justice are increasingly gaining traction. The unequal exposure to climate vulnerabilities across the European landscape has created a North-South gap in adaptation, which is examined through the critical cases of Sweden and Greece. Drawing upon Manners' (2002) Normative Power Approach to climate justice, the research speculates the EU's promotion of *just transitions* that underpin its policymaking across the dimensions of *distributional, procedural*, and *recognition justice*. Climate adaptation promotion within the Union is evaluated through the European Green Deal (2019), the Adaptation Strategy (2021), the European Pillar of Social Rights (2021) combined with the Swedish and Greek National Adaptation Strategies. The investigation of injustices is executed through the methodological lens of *Critical Discourse Analysis*. The findings reveal normative ambiguities between the EU's policy ambition and its adaptation policy implementation due to the failure to comprehensively address justice considerations within its strategic documents. Hence, the Union's policy discourse is ineffective in delivering a normative policy response at the supranational and member state level, as illustrated through the presence of injustices in the European North-South divide. Research on the EU's adaptation discourse underlines the need for mainstreaming assessment indicators to deliver policy justice.

Key words: climate justice, climate adaptation, Normative Power Europe, just transitions, North-South Divide

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List of abbreviations

AS	Adaptation Strategy
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
COP	Conference of the Parties
DG	Directorate General
DG CLIMA	Directorate General of Climate Action
DG ENVI	Directorate General of Environment
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EEA	European Environment Agency
EGD	European Green Deal
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MS	Member State
NAS	National Adaptation Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	Normative Power Approach
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1   Just transitions in times of crisis: an inevitable policy response?

> "We must show solidarity with the most affected regions in Europe [...] to make sure the Green Deal gets everyone's full support and has a chance to become a reality".
>
> *Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission* (Timmermans, 2021)

We are already living in the era of climate change and despite the expression, the climate crisis does not 'put everyone in the same boat' (Schlosberg, 2012: 445). The European Union (EU) constitutes an entity that has long pursued ambitious climate policies to tackle climate change, in an attempt to establish itself as an international leader and ethical climate actor in modern global politics (Siddi, 2020: 4). According to the 2020 'State and Outlook of the Environment' report published by the European Environment Agency (EEA), Europe "faces environmental challenges of unprecedented scale and urgency which require systemic solutions" (EEA, 2019: 414). To combat these environmental pressures, a fundamental shift in Europe's responses is required through a unified *adaptation* response (ibid: 394).

Mirroring these structural challenges, the notions of just 'transformation' and 'transition' have rapidly spread amongst the scientific fora for delivering ambitious climate action (Krause, 2018: 509; Robins, 2022: 2). Specifically, the European Commission's (EC) vision for climate neutrality asserts that achieving zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 will require "economic and societal transformations" (EC, 2019: 50). Within the literature, *transitions* are defined as "profound shifts of socio-economic systems to improve the state of the environment but also the quality of peoples' lives" (EEA, 2019: 14). The uneven impacts of climate vulnerabilities within European member states (MSs) urges for enhancing the EU's policymaking role. In order to relieve this burden, the evaluation of the intersection between climate change and social injustice within EU policies is essential.

Justice in environmental matters was formally institutionalized by the United Nations (UN) through the Aarhus Convention (1998), to promote climate democracy by jointly addressing environmental and human rights, through redefining the corrective dimensions of eco-social justice (Antal, 2022). The inquiry into climate justice is concerned with how institutions like the EU allocate responsibilities in climate adaptation (Boran, 2018: 29). Hence, climate change constitutes one of the most imminent threats to promoting justice and an undeniable moral challenge that is not sufficiently addressed by the EU (ibid: 28; Von Lucke,

2021). This omission represents an 'environmental tragedy' as societal questions are fundamental to formulating its policy decisions (Gardiner, 2011: 8, 21; Harris, 2019: 1). To address the climate battle fairly, research should highlight the importance of justice considerations.

1.1   Framing the global policy context: a ticking clock

Nevertheless, achieving policy justice has not been a new addition in the climate agenda. On the global level, the 2015 Paris Agreement presented a paradigmatic shift in the climate regime through referring to a *just transition* within its preamble, by committing to "take into account the imperatives of a just transition [...] in accordance with nationally defined development priorities" (UNFCCC, 2015: 2). Subsequently, at the COP24 climate conference, the 'Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration' was adopted (Declaration, 2018).

Most recently, the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow followed by the COP27 in Egypt elevated this commitment for a *just transition* as a critical social enabler to combat climate change, through delivering equal outcomes by 'leaving no-one behind' in the process (UN, 2022). The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022: 33-36) report was the first to highlight 'justice' as a core component in achieving climate adaptation, stemming from the growing evidence regarding how the most vulnerable have less capabilities to adapt and are the least likely to be heard in the adaptation process, causing the perpetuation of inequalities. The report underlined the unified efforts of the international arena towards mitigating and adapting to climate change (ibid: 35). The failure to account for justice can therefore lead to 'maladaptation' resulting in increased injustices (Breil et al, 2021).

The accumulating scientific evidence and policy shifts suggest that addressing *just transitions* in adaptation represent a moral imperative in line with the EU's core normative values and indicate that the EU's *adaptation* policy making will be more effective when justice and equality considerations are accounted for. As the current global and European landscape explicitly calls for the integration of social factors into adaptation activities, this paper will adopt a climate justice perspective as a means to explain the normativity of current EU adaptation efforts.

1.2   A Europe of different speeds? Why EU policy does not work for all and the need to switch gears

Against the backdrop of the present climate crisis and the shifting global policy context, it is pertinent to critically consider the ambition of the EU to be a champion

of global justice internally. The dominant theme in the climate justice debate has been envisioning the idea of a 'multi-speed' Union where every MS progresses at its own capacity (Schwab, 2017). However, since its inception, the EU has been in almost at a constant state of crisis. In a period where the EU and its MS are witnessing a major socio-economic restructuring in response to the unprecedented COVID–19 pandemic, the unjustified Russian aggression and the rising turmoil from the energy crisis, an assessment of promoting *just transitions* is particularly relevant (Sabato et al, 2022). Hence, creating a more equitable landscape in Europe is critical to 'win' the climate battle. In doing this, the EU needs to find the right approach to take its mosaic of different needs into account.

This research will therefore investigate two critical cases of the EU's mosaic to explore the decisively diverging needs which have to be considered to achieve a just policy response. Hereby, Sweden and Greece represent relevant cases for a European climate justice discussion due to their highly diverse performance in climate adaptation, and their geographical positioning in the European North and South accordingly (Isoard, 2011: 53). Namely, the former represents a Mediterranean state with relatively low eco-social ambitions while the latter is a strong Nordic state with leading climate policies which has created cleavages in adaptation. Additionally, they are impacted by the crisis in different scales of urgency due to their different geopolitical positioning which makes them particularly interesting from an adaptation perspective (see *Appendix B*). As Aguiar et al (2018: 38) explored, the diverse adaptive capacities across different regions in Europe are found to be driven by insufficient resources, the rising uncertainty of climate impacts, and the lack of political commitment. These unequally distributed social impacts of adaptation create a landscape of injustice in Europe, indicating that climate change will exacerbate injustices across EU states (Boeckmann and Zeeb, 2014: 12391).

1.3 Research question and objectives: addressing the 'why' surrounding policy justice

In this landscape of enhanced norm contestation, justice considerations are particularly apt for analysing the EU's climate ambition to safeguard adaptation responses within its policymaking (Sjursen and Vigrestad, 2021: 228). The rising climate justice debate suggests that despite the EU's normative intentions being 'good', its policy implementation may not necessarily 'do good', deeming adaptation a very difficult task for the European agenda. This thesis aims to respond to this call for justice through problematizing the EU's climate adaptation discourse and critically assessing its pursuit for normativity by discussing the following research question:

> *RQ: 'To what extent does the case of the European North-South relations demonstrate the EU's promotion of just transitions in climate adaptation policy?'*

Hence, the research aims to examine the validity of the EU's normative power discourse in adaptation, to interrogate whether it pursues its norms consistently and if it is genuinely committed to them, through employing Manners' (2002) *Normative Power Approach* to global justice, across the IPCC dimensions of *distributional*, *procedural* and *recognition* justice. To achieve this, the thesis will embark on a diagnostic search using Fairclough's (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis* methodology to elucidate whether justice considerations have sufficiently informed the EU's policymaking discourse at the supranational and intergovernmental levels of its competence.

This paper hypothesizes that there is a mismatch between the declared eco-social ambitions of EU policies for a *just transition* and their unjust adaptation impacts across Northern and Southern MSs, urging for policy integration to minimize injustices within Europe as well as enhance monitoring indicators to ensure a truly just transition. The argument holds that climate justice within the EU policymaking is ineffectively addressed, and that the EU needs to better account for social enablers in its adaptation strategies due to the injustices in the North-South Divide on climate adaptation. The significance of the study is to contribute to strengthening the focus on climate vulnerabilities and the reduction of injustices in the EU's adaptation policymaking.

1.4   Paper outline: addressing the structural backbone

The paper will unfold by presenting a detailed review of the literature surrounding *just transitions*. The following chapter will outline the discourse-theoretical foundations behind climate change adaptation. The subsequent chapter will lay out the critical methodological framework that will be employed, as well as the sources of data collection. The analysis will be presented in the ensuing chapter which will critically discuss the synthesised findings. The paper will be wrapped-up by a critical discussion of the main conclusions and suggestions for future research on the topic will be outlined.

2 Literature review: a blossoming literature on climate justice

There is an expanding body of literature that surrounds the EU's role in climate governance when assessing its adaptation policymaking which can be grouped into three predominant themes, namely with regards to *tracing the EU as a global climate actor*, *integrating climate justice into EU policymaking*, and *the North-South divide in EU adaptation policy*. The chapter highlights a gap in the existing literature on the EU's normative actorness in its internal climate policymaking which is significant due to the contestation of its norms at both the supranational and intergovernmental levels. The literature aims to shed light on how climate justice can address this gap to promote justice in adaptation.

2.1 Normative Power Europe? Tracing the idiosyncrasy of the EU as a global climate actor

Climate change governance is widely regarded as the dominant source of anxiety in the global environmental discourse and represents a key case study in the literature of the EU's actorness relating to the topic of planetary ecology (Von Lucke, 2021: 1; Manners, 2021: 66). Reflecting on this challenge, the normative conceptualizations of equity and justice represent a rising debate within the climate landscape, complexed by the latest energy crisis in 2021 and the coronavirus pandemic which have heavily impacted the EU's normative climate ambitions (Coggins et al, 2021:1; Skjærseth, 2021: 38).

Literature on the EU's external action in global climate politics has illustrated that 'normative battles' tend to emanate within its discourse (Von Lucke et al, 2021). Scholar Manners' (2002: 239) seminal work was the first to introduce the Normative Power Approach (NPA) to understanding global politics, arguing that the EU's soft power rather than its material capabilities is its determining feature. Normative theory is anchored in Critical Social Theory which addresses global justice in EU policymaking (Manners, 2020: 146). NPA therefore offers a holistic outlook to understanding the EU in the planetary context through framing justice in both a top-down and bottom-up approach. Both global ethics and morals constitute elements of its normative basis for critique through adopting a radical cosmopolitan ontology (Manners, 2021: 72-73).

The EU's role in climate governance from a global political justice perspective has evolved significantly from the 1990s in line with its normative approach through pursuing an ambitious climate policymaking and global leadership role (Manners, 2021: 70). However, according to Torney et al (2018: 3), the EU's environmental policy remains comparatively understudied within the field of European Affairs. Existing academic reflection in this field has focused primarily on the EU's actorness in multilateral environmental agreements (Delreux, 2014; Oberthür and Groen, 2017; Parker et al, 2017) and its effectiveness in global climate negotiations (Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013; Groen and Niemann, 2013). Scholar Von Lucke (2021) has been the first to assess the Union in the negotiation fora from a global justice perspective, which will be the starting point of this research. Despite previous NPA research having a strong external application, its role in explaining inter-EU dynamics has been underexplored.

Moreover, within the discourse, there are conflicting perceptions of the EU as a climate actor. Many scholars have asserted that the Union has established itself as a strong advocate for progressive environmental action and one of the most important global normative powers, commonly characterised as a 'climate leader' (Chaban et al, 2012: 435; Groen et al, 2012), an 'agenda setter' of global climate action (Kyriazi and Miro, 2022: 8), a 'green normative power' (Von Lucke et al, 2021: 32), a 'just power Europe', (Von Lucke, 2021: 2), an 'ethical power' (Aggestam, 2008), a 'gentle power' (Padoa-Shioppa, 2001) and a 'sustainability leader' (Weber and Cabras, 2021). According to this group of scholars, the EU has consistently strived to push for ambitious climate policies and navigate the 'moral climate storm' through 'leading by example', according to the values of 'principled pragmatism' within its policymaking (Von Lucke, 2021: 33, 48).

However, the EU has recently received significant criticism surrounding its internal climate discourse within the literature, as it is argued to have 'backpedalled' on its ambitious 'solidarist climate agenda' (Von Lucke, 2021: 95), through possessing 'normative ambiguities' in its policy response (ibid: 98). Specifically, the EU is criticised for failing to consider vulnerable groups in adaptation, with many MSs lacking a national adaptation strategy (Breil et al, 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of efficiency in its policy implementation due to MS not acting unilaterally and being impeded by conflicting MS interests (Muhovic-Dorsner, 2005: 240). Finally, scholars argue that its climate ambitions are hindered by its 'hypocritical policy entrepreneurship', through emphasizing more on economic interests than environmental vulnerabilities in its climate actorness (Kyrizi and Miro, 2022: 8). These normative tensions are found to be created due to the EU's insufficient jurisdiction capacity and shared decision-making competences, as well as the lack of MS coordination due to an unequal exposure to climate impacts (Remling, 2018:491).

Hence, there is a rising scholarly debate regarding reconsidering global justice in the EU's policymaking as its changing role from the COP21 in Paris to the COP27 in Egypt has resulted in a mismatch between its ambitious rhetoric and its

unjust policy outcomes on climate adaptation action on the internal dimension which should be problematised (Manners, 2021: 70).

2.2 Integrating climate justice into EU policymaking: the growth of just transitions as an adaptation response

Since the 1990s, the climate policy discourse has witnessed a shift from 'mitigation' to 'adaptation' (Manners, 2021: 70). The work of Paavola and Adger (2002) was the first to highlight the role of justice in climate adaptation. Unlike mitigation, *adaptation* to climate change is mostly interested in bringing forth transformative change and impact assessment (Krause, 2018: 512). Climate justice is therefore a relevant dimension for the monitoring of climate adaptation policies as the climate crisis has resulted in differentiated impacts across regions and social groups, which is conducive to climate adaptation policies distributing socio-ecological burdens in unequal ways (Breil et al, 2021: 16).

The notion of 'climate justice' through the intersection of environmental and societal perspectives has only been beginning to develop within the EU, first crystallized within the prelude of the 2015 Paris Agreement in an attempt to ensure a *just transition* in climate change policymaking (UNFCCC, 2015: 1). This diversity in definitions within the literature illustrates that it constitutes a multifaceted concept (Mandelli, 2022: 12). Pertinent scholarly work by McCauley and Heffron (2018: 2) define *just transition* as the transformation to a post-carbon society in "fair and equitable" manner and argue that despite it being historically linked to environmental justice, it has been overlooked within the scholarship. According to research by Lager et al (2021) and Breil et al (2021), the concept dates back to the international labour movement to promote workers' rights movement in the United States (US) during the 1970s and 1980s and was used as a mobilising term to promote green jobs due to high-polluting industries being impacted by climate policies. Hence, its appearance within global and EU policy literature is more recent, instigated through the transformative premise of 'leaving no-one behind', embedded in the UN principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' which has constituted the cornerstone of the UNFCCC in recent years (UNFCCC, 2021: 3.1; Bettini et al, 2017: 350).

Stevis and Felli (2020) were the first to underline the evolution of the just transition concept from its narrow US focus on job inequalities, to the 'planetary issue' of climate change, through distinguishing between different layers of just transition policies in accordance with their temporal, spatial and sectoral characteristics. With its inclusion in the Paris Agreement and the COP27 in Egypt climate pact, the *just transition* has become a universal concept within the scholarship, widely acknowledged by environmental NGOs and trade unions, as

well as governmental sectors, through addressing different dimensions of justice (Galgóczi, 2022: 357).

Since its inception, the concept has become a key element of recent EU policies related to climate change and sustainability such as the European Green Deal (2019) policy package, the EU Adaptation Strategy (2021), the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (2021), the FIT for 55 package (2020) and the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change (2022) which have institutionalised the concept of just transitions within the Union and now constitute its eco-social strategic framework (Laurent, 2011: 1848; Mandelli, 2022: 30). The former constitutes the first official soft law mechanism that underlined the importance of the social dimension of sustainability transitions to promote just resilience in climate adaptation through the notion of 'leaving no-one behind' and promoting a green transformation in an 'effective and fair manner' (EC, 2019: 4, 16; see *Appendix E*). Due to being a key pillar of the Green Deal, the term 'just transition' has been increasingly used in policymaking to emphasise the importance of sharing the benefits and burdens of transitions in a socially just manner (EC, 2019:3; Kiriazi and Miro, 2022). The overarching aim is to increase citizen participation and support the countries most impacted by this transition (Kivimaa et al, 2021; Stevis and Felli, 2020: 1).

Considering the new salience of this research area for EU policy, there has been increased attention within the literature surrounding the empirical application of just transitions. To name a few, scholars Cha (2020) and Mertins-Kirkwood (2018) investigate 'just transition policies', while Green and Gambhir (2020) propose a 'transition assistance policies' concept. On the empirical level, Galgoczi (2021) and Heyen et al (2020) explored just transitions on the ground through sectoral case studies, while Filipovic et al (2022) delved into the synergies between just transitions and the sustainable development nexus. Similarly, Stockmann and Graf (2022) explored urban transitions through assessing the just implementation of the Air Quality Directive, while Sarkki et al (2022) explored the policy paradox of the EU's Just Transition Fund. Finally, Krawchenko and Gordon (2021) investigated the interplay of just transitions in multi-level governance and Sabato et al (2022) explored the eco-social developments of the European Semester through a just transition lens.

However, the empirical study of *just transitions* as a policy objective within the EU and MS adaptation plans has been overlooked within the literature and represents an important addition to the scholarly debate which open the grounds for further research. Hence, it raises the importance of mainstreaming justice considerations in climate adaptation across the EU and MS levels (Mandelli, 2022: 15).

2.3 Adopting and adapting to climate justice in the EU MSs: an emerging North-South divide?

Within the scholarship, there is an extensive body of research on just transitions in *mitigation*, which focuses on the fair distribution of burdens in the transition process (McManus, 2014; Coggins et al, 2021). Nevertheless, the uneven consequences of climate impacts, namely *adaptation*, has been understudied, despite having crucial importance for improving future climate policymaking (Juhola et al, 2022: 609). Hence, adaptation has been historically viewed as the 'ugly stepchild' of the EU's climate policy, with its adaptation efforts critiqued as ineffective as due to being integrated into other precautionary policy actions, such as disaster preparedness (Kuhl, 2021: 60; Isoard, 2011: 55). Moreover, research in climate adaptation impacts is still in its infancy (Breil et al, 2018: 66), due to the challenges of assessing adaptation outcomes (Berrang-Ford et al, 2019: 440), in addition to the lack of sufficient empirical evidence of national adaptation progress (Leiter, 2021; EEA, 2020). This underlines a critical research gap as just transitions research is linked to the normative nature of climate adaptation and has become a high-level policy area within the EU (Oberthür and Kelly, 2008: 35; Kuhl, 2021: 60).

Eriksen et al (2015: 523) argue that adaptation is a process that has a socio-political nature. Therefore, just transitions in adaptation provides an essential normative objective for eco-social policies across the EU and represents both a political imperative and a policy goal to minimise negative societal impacts (Krawchenko and Gordon, 2021: 6070). However, to ensure that it is equitably implemented, comprehensive adaptation policy mixes need to be more widespread across the Union (Mandelli, 2022: 31). Specifically, there has been growing evidence that suggests that there is a need to advance more just approaches to climate policy in both Northern and Southern countries (Tokar, 2018: 23).

While the Global North and South Divide has been widespread within the literature on climate justice (Eckersley, 2013: 271), with the lingering postcolonial dependency of the North and South in reaching common climate targets in a rather unequal power vacuum, the phenomenon of the North-South divide within the European Union's ecological justice discourse has remained untouched within the scholarship, despite the fact that EU semi-periphery countries are hit the hardest by climate impacts and lack the relevant resources and infrastructure to reach climate targets, while EU core countries are least affected but possess the resources and expertise to help win the climate battle. Literature suggests that these unequal impacts results in insufficiently considering justice implications in national adaptation policymaking due to the politicisation of the climate justice debate (Von Lucke, 2021: 24; Kyrizi and Miro, 2022). This phenomenon is a clear illustration of a North-South cleavage in Europe which has only started to be researched within the climate adaptation scholarship (Briel et al, 2021; Weber and Carbas, 2021; Muhovic-Dorsner, 2005: 244).

Hence, according to Weber and Carbas (2021: 122), the uneven burden of climate change shows a clear North-South divide within the Union, as Southern states are plagued with more direct climate impacts, while Northern states suffer from indirect consequences. This results in 'ecologically unequal exchanges', raising the need for just climate change adaptation measures (ibid: 119; EC, 2019: 5-6). This phenomenon of 'leaders' and 'laggards' in the climate discourse towards just transitions is characterised within the literature as 'environmental racism' (Perez et al, 2015: 2). However, there is a stagnation in existing research on the performance of MSs in *just transitions*. Research by McCauley et al (2023) has been the first to study the North-South linkages in the climate divide, which assessed MS promotion of just transitions in the regions of Scandinavia and the Mediterranean through the analysis of their fossil fuel strategies. Similarly, Krawchenko and Gordon (2021) conducted a policy scoping review comparing regions in North America and Europe focusing on just policy implementation

At the national level, despite most countries recognising how decarbonisation could lead to negative social outcomes, eco-social policies remain relatively scarce across Europe. Specifically, recent research by Mandelli (2022: 30) has uncovered that solely six MSs, namely the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Ireland, and the Netherlands possess national climate adaptation strategies This raises the importance of formulating rigid indicators for the holistic impact assessment of policy measures, through a bottom-up process (Sabato and Fronteddu, 2020: 11).

2.4 Climate justice: unmasking the blind spots

As established, the picture surrounding the EU's normative role in ensuring justice in transitions for climate adaptation policy is a highly complex one (Moesker and Pesch, 2022: 7). From the reviewed literature it can be concluded that the EU's internal just transition discourse is extremely recent and understudied, despite its academic significance for the field of European Affairs. The theoretical framework of the *Normative Power Approach (NPA)* is perceived within the scholarship as a meaningful way of mapping the EU's climate policy discourse and opens the floor for extensive empirical investigation of its ambition to promote climate justice within the post-Paris policy context (2015-2022). To remedy this omission and fill the research gap, this paper aims to provide a current and empirical justice perspective on the EU's policymaking discourse on climate adaptation through assessing its policy intentions at the supranational and national levels of its competence. The question that arises is whether the EU can export its allegedly normative ambition internally to promote just transitions.

3 Theory: mapping climate justice in adaptation policy

Building on the academic literature, this paper aims to examine *just transitions* in the context of climate adaptation policy. Just transitions represent a suitable discursive and policy-oriented framework to assess the EU's normativity and constitute a key mechanism for delivering ambitious climate action. This section will begin by situating the normative assumptions of NPA within the broader eco-social critique of Green Theory, highlighting its explanatory power in contrast to mainstream International Relation theories. The chapter will proceed to underlining the implications of the scholarly shift from environmental to climate justice for unmasking North-South asymmetries. Finally, it will map out the general principles behind just transitions and their preconditions for climate policy implementation through operationalizing the climate justice indicators and underlining the relevance of using justice approaches to study the EU's normativity. Hence, it represents a suitable framework for policy development in the assessment of environmental inequalities through adopting a normative stance to climate justice.

3.1 Disentangling theoretical underpinnings of global justice: environmental justice as a normative inquiry

Despite the existence of a plethora of postcolonial, egalitarian, and Marxist theoretical conceptions behind global environmental ethics within the literature, none of them manage to holistically capture justice in climate adaptation through the perspective of the EU's North-South divide. According to postcolonialism, historical responsibilities and the 'polluter's pay' principle puts the climate burden on industrialised nations (Schlosberg, 2012: 447). Alternative 'carbon-egalitarian' approaches focus on equity in per capita emissions in terms of population size (ibid). Along the lines of the eco-Marxist critique, capitalist systems exploit nature and are a driving cause of the planetary climate crisis (Lysaker, 2020: 215).

However, the normative motivations behind the just adaptation to climate change within the European context are not necessarily imperialistic or capitalist-oriented, but rather based on structural inequalities and unequal starting points within the Union (Winkler, 2020: 1). Hence, advocates of *climate justice* have

emerged as a critical voice in climate diplomacy, challenging the various technocratic and market-oriented approaches to the climate crisis (Tokar, 2018: 13). *Green Theory*, coined by scholar Robyn Eckersley (1992), is useful in exposing ecological blindness in mainstream International Relations theories, through drawing upon the explanatory power of radical green discourses and critical political ecology (Eckersley, 2013: 267). Building upon philosopher Honneth's (1949) biocentric insights, Eckersley presents an eco-centric alternative to the literature through adding a more anthropocentric dimension to critical theorising (Lysaker, 2020: 211; Eckersley, 1992: 179). Therefore, she suggests that critical theory should draw upon an epistemology that avoids nature denial and views reality through a combined ecological and social lens of responsibility (ibid: 213). NPA suggests that there is no such thing as universal ethics, and that there is a need to combine bottom-up and top-down perspectives in the analytical processing (Manners, 2021). Hence, situating the NPA within the grand assumptions of Green Theory allows one to assess the just distribution of the costs of adaptation in the EU's climate policymaking at both levels of its competence.

3.2 From environmental to climate justice: bridging inequalities through the environmental-social-climate nexus

While the foundations of the NPA approach are intrinsically external in nature, as it is focused on analysing the EU as a global actor, this analysis is interested in investigating the internal applicability of NPA to the context of the diverse European adaptation landscape. Specifically, the climate crisis has confronted the Union's complex with a unique constellation of inequalities that differ from former manifestations. Unlike previous external shocks, the lines between cause and effect of climate change are blurred. Consequently, even though climate change will have dramatic effects on future generations and vulnerable groups, who should take the burden of responsibility for the problem is not evident, underlining the need to evaluate climate injustices (Galgóczi, 2022: 355).

Mirroring these developments, the literature has witnessed a shift from *environmental* to *climate justice* (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014: 367). Specifically, while the former concept is concerned with equity issues related to exposure to environmental hazards by local communities, the latter draws upon radical environmentalist perspectives surrounding the Global North-South debate and the asymmetric relationship of responsibility and vulnerability in the context of climate change adaptation (Gore, 2020). Hence, the latter concept is very relevant for the research purposes and will constitute the theoretical backbone of the analysis.

3.3 Operationalizing dimensions of climate justice: a conceptual overview

Justice is defined as a key concept for the assessment of adaptation as expressed in the latest IPCC report, which states that "articulating the goals of adaptation at the international, national, and local levels requires engaging with the concepts of equity, justice, and effectiveness" (IPCC, 2022: 1160). However, it constitutes a broad term with varying definitions and indicators to assess climate adaptation. Since the scholarly interest in just transitions in climate adaptation is growing within the EU, there is a rising need to make the concept operational in order to effectively monitor progress towards making climate adaptation more just (Breil et al, 2021). Juhola et al (2022: 608) define *just climate change adaptation* as the process which "recognises past and current disadvantages in society, identifies the potential unequal way in which climate impacts and costs and benefits of adaptation measures are distributed, is based on inclusive processes throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and restores past inequalities".

Acknowledging that what is deemed as 'just' is contested, this paper will delineate *climate justice* through three core principles, namely those of *distributive*, *procedural*, and *recognition* justice which are embedded within the IPCC report and are summarised in Table 1 (IPCC, 2022: 124; Juhola et al, 2022: 610). These conceptions have varying deontological views regarding how justice is perceived; however, all have dominance as their starting point, which is the essence of injustice and allow for a precise analysis of the EU's role through providing the critical standards for assessing the implications of its policymaking (Biermann and Kalfagianni, 2020). Hence, this paper aims to illustrate that these theorizations are applicable to the EU's approach to justice in adaptation and see how these justice dimensions can be scrutinized internally within the European landscape.

Table 1. Overview of core justice concepts to assess the NPA.

Justice dimensions	*Application to Climate Adaptation Policy* (Kivimaa et al, 2021: 3; B reil et al, 2021; Bennett et al, 2019; Von Lucke et al, 2021: 12)	*Deontology* (Biermann and Kalfagianni, 2020)
Distributional justice	The concept refers to the distribution of burdens due to climate impacts, and the allocation of resources for adaptation resilience-building activities. This dimension is also linked to 'corrective justice' and is aimed at analysing the consequences of adaptation action for different groups.	Critical theory, neo-Marxism
Procedural justice	The concept addresses the fairness and legitimacy of the decision-making process, including inclusive participation. It is linked to distributive justice as a process which can lead to fair distribution outcomes through promoting bottom-up forms of involvement.	Honneth, Rawls theory of Justice
Recognition justice	The concept focuses on the engagement of diverse values, perspectives, and cultures in measuring the impacts of climate change and adaptation action. It is a normative principle that aims to address the underlying causes of injustices, emphasising on what is valued.	Postcolonial and post-structural theories

3.4 Summary: the path towards a research agenda

The *climate justice* theory therefore offers a critically relevant interpretive lens for evaluating the EU's approach to promoting 'adaptation policy justice' emerging from climate change impacts (Maia et al, 2022: 2). By applying a multi-dimensional and explanatory framework of justice (see *Table 1*), this allows the research to assess the normative implementation of policy instruments, in order to examine which principles of justice were considered during the broader policymaking process. Notably, these dimensions do not stand independent from each other, but rather are complementary (Paavola and Adger, 2006: 602, see *Figure 1*).
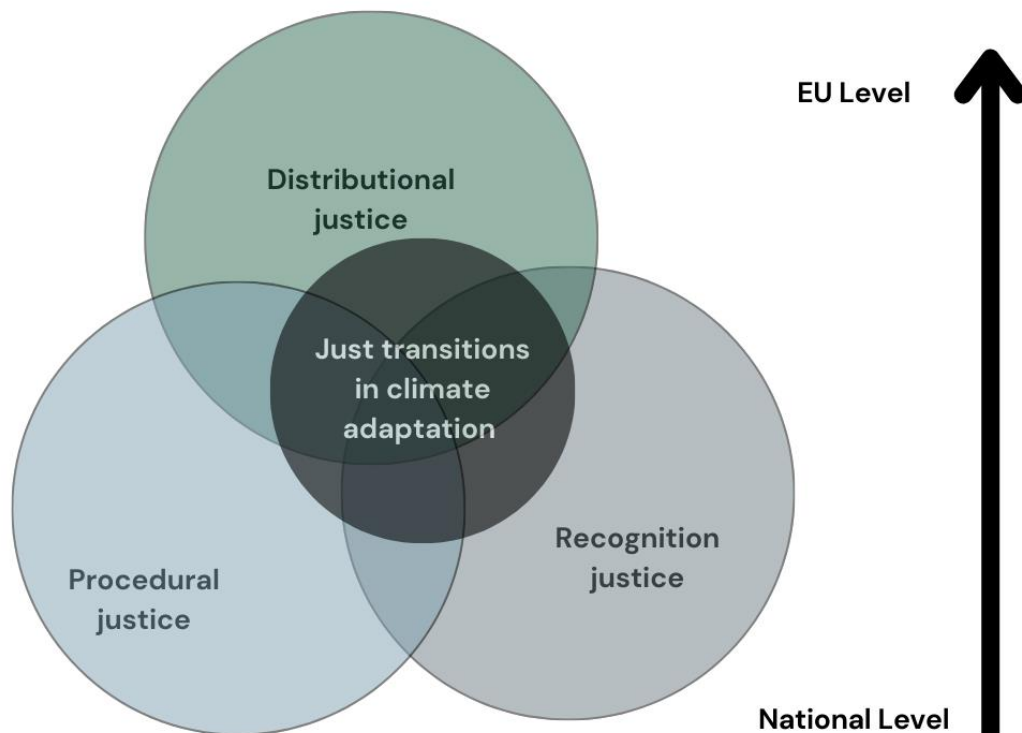
Figure 1. Intertwining climate justice dimensions in assessing just transitions in adaptation (Kivimaa et al, 2021: 6; Bennett et al, 2019: 5).

Building on this tripartite theoretical framework consisting of *distributive*, *procedural* and, *recognition* justice (see *Figure 1*), the thesis aims to investigate whether the Union's presumed normative climate discourse matches its policy promotion for a just transition in the EU and MS levels. Specifically, *distributional justice* is important to uncover the disproportionate effects of environmental destruction by vulnerable groups, *recognition justice* is interested in underlining how these groups need to be acknowledged before any redistribution takes place and simultaneously be supported by the means of *procedural justice* in order to correct existing injustices (Von Lucke, 2021: 2). Hence, facilitating a just response to the climate crisis requires a dynamic balance between all three justice dimensions. As this snapshot of the literature set outs, the aforementioned justice dimensions will be used as a normative yardstick with the aim of assessing whether the EU is moving towards a more just and inclusive climate regime based on Manners' (2002) grounded theory of the NPA (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 137).

The hypothesis holds that the EU is failing to live up to its normative ambitions internally due to the lack of sufficient consideration of social justice implications within its adaptation policymaking, as exemplified through the North-South divide within the EU, underlining a need for raising awareness of injustices within EU policymaking.

4 Methodology: towards assessing justice in EU climate adaptation

After having set out the theoretical foundations, the following section will outline the methodological framework which draws upon the interpretivist logic. Initially, the ontological and epistemological premises of the research will be set out, followed by a detailed presentation of the *critical case design*. The section will proceed by presenting an overview of the qualitative means of data collection, namely the adaptation policy documents that will be used for the analysis. Finally, the method of *Critical Discourse Analysis* will be applied to assess the EU's discursive construction in promoting climate justice in adaptation, as it especially relevant in uncovering policy injustices. The chapter will end by presenting the strengths and weaknesses behind qualitative research, highlighting the importance of researcher reflexivity.

4.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations behind critical research

Since the early 2000's, the study of the EU's actorness has experienced a 'normative turn' in its epistemological premises and a rising methodological pluralism (Sjursen and Vigrestad, 2021: 228). By drawing upon the theory of *climate justice*, the paper aims to contribute to this turn by providing a nuanced critical analysis of the EU's presumed normative climate justice discourse. The research synthesis is ontologically embedded into the hypothetico-deductive and explanatory research model, which utilizes an existing hypothesis to situate the EU as a global actor through the grounded theory of NPA (Lynggaard et al, 2015: 9). Hence, a deductive and theory-testing approach will be pursued to assess how comprehensively and ambitiously the three critical dimensions of climate justice are considered within EU policy making. The research adopts a constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, using 'hermeneutics' as the means of investigating policy justice (Bryman, 2022: 28).

Utilizing current research, I develop a methodological framework for assessing the EU's role as a policymaking actor through analysing the emerging issue of *just transitions* within its climate adaptation discourse. In this research, the EU will be viewed as a multi-level rather than unitary actor, as it is co-constituted by the sum

of its parts to promote a just policy response due to its shared competence. Measuring justice dimensions in adaptation policy represents a key methodological difficulty due to the wide array of interpretations that exist within the scholarly fora. Additionally, it constitutes an emerging policy field, defined by the context-specificity of vulnerabilities and the lack of empirical evidence on adaptation progress (Juhola et al, 2022: 610; Kivimaa et al, 2021). I plan to remedy this omission and contribute to the field through the extensive screening of strategic documents related to climate adaptation. Hence, I will investigate the inclusion of justice indicators within the policy documents and national adaptation strategies within the post-Paris context (2015-2022), since the Paris Agreement was the first to introduce the concept of *just transitions* within the global and EU policy discourse (Heffron and MCauley, 2022). Therefore, it holds high political salience and has a rising research significance for the future of European and international climate governance (Kuhl, 2021: 60).

4.2   Normative research design: a critical case study

The use of normative research is common in the study of European Affairs (Manners, 2021). The design serves the purpose of identifying the extent to which European adaptation policy enables a just transition. In this design, the independent variable is the EU's presumed normative policy entrepreneurship to promote just transitions at both levels of its competence and the dependent variable is its shifting policymaking discourse on climate adaptation in response to unequal climate change impacts. Normative analyses of climate justice have thus far overlooked empirical examinations, and therefore are rich in arguments but poor in case studies (Boran, 2018: 35).

Case study research is useful in providing an in-depth and detailed analysis of a given area, through providing the research with high internal and external validity (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 214, Bryman, 2022: 159). At the same time, it combines theoretical richness and empirical rigour by focusing on the elements relevant to the research purpose (Manners, 2015: 227-228). *Critical case designs* permit space for analytical generalisation through analysing variations of a phenomenon that is significant for testing the theory of climate justice at EU and MS policy level based on a well-developed hypothesis through an intensive analysis of the cases (Bryman, 2012: 70). Hence, critical designs are apt in illustrating the North-South cleavages in climate adaptation and assessing EU's multi-level pursuit for *just transitions*.

Therefore, the aim of the climate justice framework presented in chapter 3.3 is to capture European policy through a multidimensional justice lens and assess the EU's normative power discourse. In this way, policies that were not designed with justice as their main priority, can still be evaluated on their ability to deliver a just transition. This will unveil the extent to which principles of justice were considered

during the broader policy making process to assess the EU's *just transitions* promotion (Kivimaa et al, 2021).

Adopting Juhola et al's (2022: 611) approach, the qualitative assessment of the different dimensions of justice will be complemented with an ordinal scoring evaluation ranging from 0 to 2 which accordingly indicates: 0) no reference to the justice dimension; 1) partial reference to the justice dimension, but nothing concrete; 2) clear mentioning of the justice dimension along with concrete means to address it. This tool is going to be supplemented with normative questions to discursively capture the understandings of justice in the reviewed policy instruments, using the exact wording from the policy documents as textual data at both EU and MS level (see *Table 2*). The obtained scores will reflect how comprehensively the different dimensions of justice are considered within the policy documents and will be summed up in the analysis in a respective bar chart.

Table 2. Operationalization of justice dimensions and respective scoring indicators.

Operationalizing Just Transitions in Climate Adaptation		
Justice Dimensions	*Guiding Questions for CDA (Juhola et al, 2022: 612-613)*	*Qualitative Scoring*
Distributional justice	1. A risk assessment is conducted within the strategy	0-2
	2. There is a process of identifying vulnerable groups	0-2
	3. There is a process that assesses the distribution of benefits from adaptation and the division of adaptation costs	0-2
	4. The strategy identifies the possibility of the distribution of negative impacts (e.g. maladaptation)	0-2
Recognition justice	1. Relevant stakeholders are identified in policy preparation and implementation	0-2
	2. Different worldviews and understandings are recognised in the formulation of the policy instrument	0-2
	3. There is consideration of vulnerable or marginalised groups	0-2
	4. There is consideration of the rights of animals or nature	0-2
Procedural justice	1. The policy details the possibilities for the key target groups to participate in the policy planning	0-2
	2. The policy introduces procedures for multi-scale governance	0-2
	3. The policy introduces diverse participatory measures and capacity-building	0-2
	4. The policy has a structured plan for participation in the implementation of the strategy	0-2

4.3 Critical discourse analysis: towards a social justice framework for policy critique

Increasingly, the study of discourse analysis has risen in presence as a methodological field within the EU scholarship (Manners et al, 2015). In line with Hardy's (2001: 26) definition, discourses are conceptualised as a "practice of talking and writing which bring objects into being through the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts". Chiefly, discourse analysis adopts an interpretivist logic to highlight how the power of intersubjective conceptualisations can advance specific policy outcomes (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 337).

A variant of discourse analysis, *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*, originally coined by scholars Fairclough (2005) and van Dijk (2001), is a research strategy that aims to unveil how social power abuse and inequality are enacted (Eckert and Kovaleska, 2021: 3). CDA derives from Critical Theory and puts a strong emphasis on the role of the social context in the text production and interpretation (van Dijk, 2001: 352). Fairclough therefore urged discourse analysis to account for the broader socio-political context to critically assess the distribution of power in social institutions (Dunmire, 2017: 758, 739).

Thus, CDA underlines how contextual, societal, and textual discursive practices interlink (Lynggaard, 2019: 7). It uses language as a medium through which prevailing representations of power and hierarchy are reproduced (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 339). To conduct an empirical analysis, Fairclough introduced a three-dimensional approach for using CDA. First, he refers to *description*, namely the analysis of the text itself, then he mentions *interpretation* which indicates the relationship between the text as a product in the process of production of the discourse practice, and lastly *explanation*, which illustrates the analysis of the social impacts of the production processes (Fairclough, 1995: 95, see *Figure 2*).

Adopting this understanding of CDA within the premises of this research, the *social analysis* refers to the existence of climate change pressures in adaptation, the *process analysis* uncovers the discursive climate injustices that underlie adaptation policymaking processes, and finally the *textual analysis* refers to the critical examination of EU policy documents and national adaptation strategies that were formulated under these pressures. CDA is a useful approach in this context as it combines macro and micro analytical means for interrogating the EU's policymaking, adopting a broader methodological outlook on linguistic tools (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014: 134). The notion of *interdiscursivity* infiltrates into the institutional identity of the EC which reproduces its role as a justice promoter within its discourse, which will be investigated through finding common intertextual elements across discourses at EU and MS level (ibid: 143). As evidenced from Figure 2, these dimensions are embedded within each other as they co-constitute discursive meaning, which will also be reflected in the analysis, since many justice dimensions interlink.

Three Dimensional Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis

Social Analysis: Political adaptation pressures on policymakers and unequal exposure to climate impacts

Process Analysis: Existence of climate injustices in adaptation policy

Textual Analysis: Language of EU and National Policy Documents
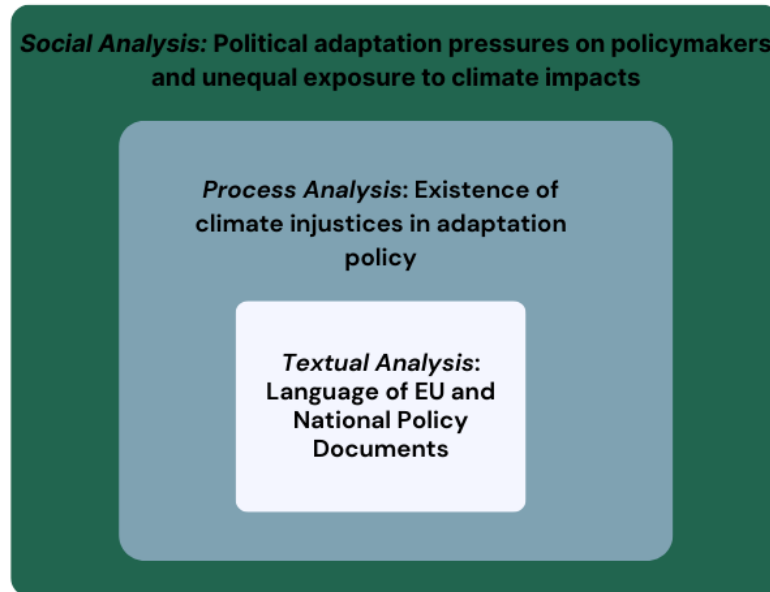
Figure 2. Visual Representation of Fairclough's method of CDA applied to the research design (Fairclough, 1995: 95).

Since CDA's inception, there is an increasing amount of literature on 'eco-critical discourse analysis', underlining the merge of Green Theory and CDA, through combining the study of ecology with linguistic practices (Yuniawan et al, 2017; Delon, 2018). According to Goodman (2009: 510), climate justice is embedded into scientific discourses. Hence, the case of the EU's role in just transitions is relevant to analyse from a critical-discursive perspective, as it is found to be empirically constructed as an ethical climate leader (Larsen, 2018: 67).

To name a few, previous research by Boeckmann and Zeeb (2014), Remling (2018), Eckert and Kovalevska (2021), Juhola et al (2022), Hamdani and Sakhena (2023), Triantis (2023) have conducted CDA to explore the inclusion of social justice dimensions within the EU's policymaking. Similarly, this paper will employ CDA as method to scrutinize the inclusion of justice indicators in key policy documents in order to uncover how social inequalities are expressed in adaptation policy, and how they are enacted through the language and meaning of discursive structures. The NPA will be used as the normative analytical framework for CDA to examine the cases in which the EU considers justice in climate adaptation and will be operationalized through utilising the three justice dimensions outlined in section 3.3. This will be achieved through critically evaluating the language and meanings that are used within the policy documents for the fulfilment of those criteria.

4.4 Data processing and source criticism: evaluating adaptation strategies

The lack of sufficient data on *just transitions* represents a methodological difficulty in measuring the EU's policy progress due to climate adaptation being an emerging policy field. The diversity in the types of policy instruments that exist within the scientific fora represents a further challenge, since they provide very different data sources, disabling the consistent application of the analytical framework. In an attempt to combat this challenge, the paper will employ a two-fold approach to the process of data collection in the *critical case study* design. Primary documents will constitute the predominant source of data, as they carry high analytical significance in micro-level studies for the identification of discursive categories (Lynggaard et al: 2015). To obtain a deeper discursive understanding of the strategies beyond the descriptive level, the findings will be supplemented with secondary literature such as impact assessment reports of the strategies.

At EU level, the three main policy documents that explicitly target justice in sustainability transitions are the European Green Deal (EGD), EU Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (EPSR) and the EU Adaptation Strategy (AS) which will be used as the main data sources for the analysis. These three European policy strategies are currently influential in defining the policy agenda and are highly relevant given their ambitions for achieving a just transition. The EGD (2019) has a dedicated tool for just transitions, namely the Just Transitions Mechanism, the ESPR (2021) is concerned with the EU's social rights, and the AS (2021) evaluates asymmetries between countries and regions, providing a holistic perspective for the analysis. Thus, while having different technical focuses, all the three frameworks are vital in addressing the intersection between climate and social justice. The analysis does not intend to be exhaustive but rather focused on identifying the *relevant* policy mechanisms for understanding *just transitions* in the EU's discourse.

At national level, the research has selected two paradigmatic country examples that are representative of the EU Northern and Southern regions which have been active in climate adaptation planning at the national level due to having a particular interest for the research purposes. Specifically, the case of Sweden, which is deemed within the literature as a climate leader, moral power and strong economy, and Greece which in contrast is represented as a climate laggard due to the lack of effective green infrastructure and fragile economy (Juhola et al, 2022: 611). Moreover, due to their very diverse geographical positioning, climate change will affect Sweden in the long-term, while Greece will be affected directly through short-term impacts which will provide fruitful insights for the analysis (Isoard, 2011: 52, see *Appendix C*). Additionally, these countries were selected strategically for the research purpose as I can read and understand both languages fluently which will facilitate the investigation process when assessing their national adaptation

strategies. Even though the two country strategies are published in different years (2017 and 2016 respectively) and are slightly outdated in comparison to the EU policy documents, they are still representative of each country's climate adaptation fora and are useful in assessing justice implementation for the analytical purposes of this research.

A review of the national adaptation strategies of the two MS as specified on the Climate-Adapt platform, managed jointly by the EEA and the EC, will be executed. This database is aimed at providing a comprehensive scientific overview over all MSs' strategic approaches to adaptation. Additionally, the Directorate General (DG) of Climate Action, has created an evaluation scoreboard mechanism for monitoring MS progress in accordance with the AS, which will be used to support the assessment of the national policy implementation of Greece and Sweden (EC, 2018a).

Therefore, the goal of this CDA will be to analyse themes surrounding social issues and climate change adaptation that will emerge from the strategies based on the exclusion or inclusion of the three dimensions of climate justice. According to Fairclough's CDA, meanings are constituted through what is done, therefore strategic documents encompass meanings attributed to justice and social issues through what they suggest is done as adaptation, and through the language and terms they are using to promote it. The climate justice framework will therefore serve as a normative evaluation guideline for the analysis of the adaptation policy documents. The detailed selection of material is summarised in *Figure 3*.
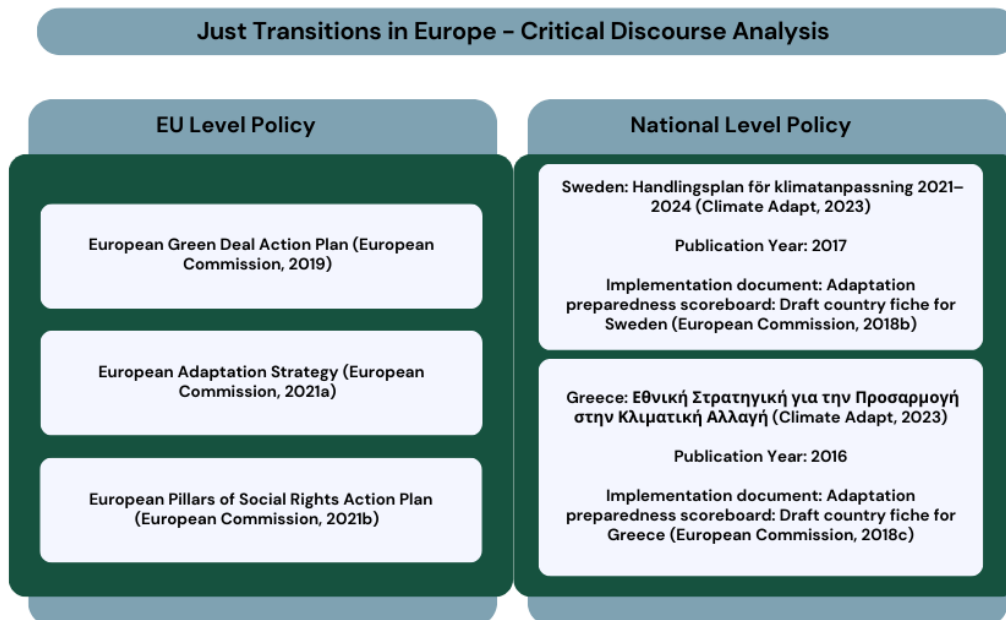
Figure 3. Overview of materials for data processing.

These documents were strategically selected as they constitute current and empirical textual evidence of the EU's climate actorness and have a high normative impact for enabling *just transitions*, forming the core of the analysis. Evaluating official documents represents the most efficient way to interpret the way that the

EU wants to be portrayed by offering contextual understanding of the way it is promoting *just transitions* through unmasking its eco-social policy discourse. Additionally, they are important in prescribing specific actions that shape the future of adaptation in each country.

The CDA will be executed across these EU policy documents and MS' national adaptation strategies in order to achieve a holistic analytical overview on both the supranational and national level on *just transitions*. To collect evidence, a systematic screening of the policy documents will be carried out to develop the knowledge base on the justice implications of climate adaptation actions to problematize how the EU is constructed as a moral policymaking actor. In order to detect to which conceptions of justice specific EU policies correspond to, this thesis will rely on the discursive appearance of the justice dimensions within the policy documents, and the findings will be backed up by secondary literature in the Discussion section. The framework serves the purpose of identifying to what extent European policy at both levels of its competence enables a *just transition*.

4.5   Strengths and limitations in qualitative research

Problematizing linguistic meanings is the cornerstone of critical research, through emphasizing the inherent political nature of empirical sources (Alvesson and Deetz: 2021: 57, 120). CDA therefore constitutes a flexible approach to the evaluation of language, and policy documents are commonly used as a form of data processing within the social science field (Bryman, 2022: 539). The main challenge with the theory-driven CDA approach in small-N case research is researcher bias due to the risk of obtaining a selective impression of the social context (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 223). However, this subjectivity in critical research can be viewed as a strength as it is necessary for the purposes of CDA (Boeckmann and Zeeb, 2014: 12404).

Additionally, the advantages of conducting desk-based research are that it generates 'low-cost' and 'thick' data sources, which are readily accessible in official data archives, allowing for high research transparency (Halperin and Heath, 2017: 180). Moreover, they are digitised which allows for quick and precise text searches, facilitating the accurate conduction of the CDA. Besides, they constitute an unobtrusive method of data collection which suggests that researchers are not involved in the data production process, allowing for a relatively unbiased assessment of the existence of discursive practices within the texts (Bryman, 2022: 243). They are also official data sources, which indicate high validity and reliability of the data (ibid: 288). However, a limitation with policy document research is that it is predominantly concerned with communicating the overall policy narrative but lacks the actionable information that is relevant for the analysis. For instance, they might outline the ambition of 'leaving no-one behind' but lack the substantive

insight into proposing concrete measures to achieve this goal (Bryman, 2022: 289). To remedy this, the analysis will be supported by implementation level documents, such as action plans and reports, which go beyond the descriptive aspects of justice (see *Figure 3*). A further methodological limitation is working across languages on the national level, as they possess different discursive elements of expression. Namely, Greek is more idiomatic and richer in lexicon, while Swedish adopts a more concise and direct language which can impact the data processing.

Finally, using a qualitative justice framework mirrors a normative understanding of climate adaptation which may not necessarily reflect the broader aims of the policymakers who developed the strategies. Hence, since the strategies for the CDA were selected based on their discussion of the social enablers of a *just transition*, there is an inherent bias in detecting reasons for the inclusion rather than reasons for the exclusion of these determinants (Boeckmann and Zeeb, 2014: 12404). However, these challenges should not be exaggerated, as the absence of justice dimensions in itself implies an underlying discursive meaning of the lack of political interest by policymakers to take social impacts of climate adaptation into consideration in order to depoliticize the discourse. Furthermore, the evaluation will be delimited to the aforementioned data sources and cases to assess the EU's North-South relations, suggesting that other strategic documents or case studies could produce different findings in terms of justice considerations. To address these concerns, the analysis will be executed manually which will allow to better capture the meaning behind specific discursive representations, and to link these to NPA's theoretical motivation (ibid).

Equipped with this critical normative toolbox, the paper will investigate the extent to which the EU has shaped the climate adaptation fora to advance its ethical image and hegemonic climate discourse, by speculating on the language it utilizes within its strategic documents.

5 Analysis: A discursive policy exegesis of the pursuit for a just transition from the EU to MS level

Adopting the research design outlined in the previous chapter, the thesis aims to answer the following question: '*To what extent does the case of the European North-South relations demonstrate the EU's promotion of just transitions in climate adaptation policy?'*. The investigation of the EU's role as a climate justice promoter will be executed using the theorization of Manners' (2002) NPA which is operationalized through the *just transition* framework, outlined in section 3.3, namely according to the analytical dimensions of *distributional, procedural,* and *recognition* justice. Using Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional method of CDA, the chapter will follow a sequential and explanatory logic, departing from *textual, process,* and finally *social analysis* to critically assess the discursive framings of justice across strategic documents to evaluate the extent to which the EU's addresses justice in its policy making discourse. To achieve a holistic assessment of the EU's role, this chapter will scrutinize both EU and national level policy on climate adaptation. The analysis of the EU-level documents is important in laying out the inconsistencies in the current strategic framework. The national level strategic analysis will cater for illustrating the diversity of needs in the pursuit of *just transitions*. The analysis will be supplemented by a qualitative scoring component presented in section 4.2 (see *Table 2*) to visualize the representation of the justice dimensions at each level.

5.1 Just transition in EU level policies: navigating through a normative storm, making policy work for all?

Climate policies remain an area of shared competence of the Union, requiring the collaboration between EU and national level actors to achieve a united adaptation response (EC, 2023). Acknowledging the necessity for Europe to adapt to climate change impacts, the EC adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Green Deal, and the Adaptation Strategy in an effort to reimagine its environmental

ambitions at the supranational level. These documents, together with National Adaptation Strategies, constitute key steps for promoting *just transitions*, providing a fruitful knowledge base for a thorough analysis. Combined, they represent essential components to account for when evaluating policy in order to ensure normative adaptation measures.

5.1.1 The EU Adaptation Strategy (AS): Adaptation or Apoliticisation?

The AS was first adopted in 2013 and revised in 2021, outlining three overarching objectives to enhance its policy coherence and implementation, namely by promising to promote "smarter, swifter, and more systemic adaptation" to better address structural injustices (EC, 2021).

Starting off with the *textual analysis*, the first reference to *just transitions* is connected to the *distributional* impacts of climate change, as evidenced through the phrase:

> "The EU already is, and will increasingly be, affected by climate impacts outside Europe through cascading and spill over effects on trade or migration. This makes international climate resilience not only a matter of solidarity, but also of open strategic autonomy and self-interest for the EU and its MSs" (EC, 2021a:1).

The AS has contributed to raising awareness for the notion of 'climate resilience,' referring to adaptation measures being carried out in a just and fair manner, which is an indication of the *distributive justice* dimension and in line with the EU's normative approach. Additionally, it points to channelling efforts to integrate climate adaptation considerations into different EU level policy sectors, indicating elements of *recognition justice* (EC, 2021a: 10).

To identify key indicators for assessing MS's level of adaptation, the Commission adopted an "adaptation preparedness scoreboard" in 2014 and revised it in 2017 for the ongoing evaluation of the AS (EC, 2018a). This takes a process-based approach to EU's policymaking, indicating elements of *procedural justice*. Its indicators are outlined in its adaptation platform and outline different steps in the policymaking process, namely these include:

> "(1) preparing the ground for adaptation, (2) assessment of risks and vulnerabilities, (3) identification of adaptation options and (4) their implementation (5) monitoring and evaluation through key performance areas" (Climate-Adapt, 2023).

Regarding the *process analysis*, it can be argued that the first four steps in the platform refer to *distributional justice* since they focus on climate impact and vulnerability, while step five focuses on *procedural* and *recognition justice* dimensions as it aims to assess where adaptation funding is allocated to and if it

matches with vulnerability in high-impact areas. All steps can be viewed as indications of *procedural justice* as they aim to assess the extent of inclusion of vulnerable groups in adaptation decision-making. The steps also refer to *recognition justice* as they particularly indicate if vulnerable people are included in the adaptation process, in order to avoid 'maladaptation,' and they address the plurality of needs. Overall, the scoreboard facilitates the monitoring of progress on adaptation implementation at national level but is not a mandatory process for MSs (EC, 2018a).

Additionally, the rising cross-border dimension of climate impacts towards vulnerable groups is portrayed by the statement: "even if adaptation challenges are local and specific, solutions are often widely transferable and applicable on a regional, national, or transnational scale" (EC, 2021a: 4). This statement focuses on multi-level accountability in adaptation, illustrating traces of *recognition justice*. An increased securitization is also observed within the discourse, as the AS states that "climate change multiplies the threats to international stability and security, which affect in particular people in already fragile and vulnerable situation" (ibid: 19). Adaptation is therefore presented as a discursive means to prevent future security concerns within the strategy. Hence, according to the AS, "solidarity across and within MSs is essential to achieving resilience in a just and fair way" (ibid: 1). Hence, to achieve *just transition*, the AS encourages MSs to adopt "comprehensive and harmonised" adaptation measures in order to avoid "climate blindness" in its policymaking (EC, 2021a: 6). In this way, the AS aims to mainstream adaptation into all relevant policy areas through stressing the growing need for unity and cooperation across MSs within its lexicon.

Moreover, it is argued that the "the digital transformation is critical" towards achieving a just adaptation response (EC, 2021a: 5). In doing this, the initiative of 'Horizon Europe' is presented as the main funding programme for subsidising the EU's Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change which will strengthen adaptation practices, pointing to *procedural justice*. According to the AS, the mission supports *recognition justice* dimensions through focusing on citizen participation and transformative solutions, as exemplified through the passage:

> "The Mission would test integrated solutions that can achieve the vision of climate-resilience by 2050 with an emphasis on citizen engagement. [...] The Mission proposal aims to support 200 communities to develop solutions for transformative adaptation and scale up 100 deep demonstrations of climate-resilience" (EC, 2021a: 13).

A further indication of *distributional justice* is found within the document by underlining social fairness in employment opportunities towards the disadvantaged through the "European Social Fund," as indicated through the passage:

> "Further strengthening of the social dimension in the EU budget under the European Social Fund will unlock more support to protect the most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, based on estimates of the investment needed to meet adaptation needs, there is a sizeable financing gap for climate resilient investments in Europe" (EC, 2021a: 12).

However, despite the progress made within the AS, there are still prevalent issues in the *procedural justice* domain. For instance, the AS argues that "the lack of access to actionable solutions is one of the main barriers to adaptation" (EC, 2021a: 12). Given the need for increasing *procedural justice* dimensions of policy harmonisation, the strategy also urges that "to avoid 'climate-blind' decisions, data from both the private and public sector should be recorded, collected, and shared in a comprehensive and harmonised way" (EC, 2021a: 6). Additionally, it urges for the strengthening of *recognition justice*, through stating that "dialogue and innovation can greatly increase the climate resilience potential of insurance regimes" (ibid: 16).

Interestingly however, when considering adaptation responses, the AS urges for "cost-efficient policy approaches to address climate change" (EC, 2021a: 23). Additional notions presented are "competitiveness" and "economic growth" which contradicts the EU's normative image (ibid: 27). Finally, the EC's 2021 assessment report underlines the need to acknowledge the *distributional* effects of just transitions through the phrase:

"New actions to reduce the climate protection gap and actions to increase transboundary cooperation address Just Transition policy and the need to 'build back better' after the COVID crisis. Moreover, deepening actions to scale up private finance are aligned with the EU's Renewed Strategy on Sustainable" (EC, 2021c: 61).

In doing this, it urges for concerted action through emphasizing that "to maximise results, the EU and its MSs should work in a coherent and coordinated way" (ibid: 17). The above suggest that there is a growing protectionist tendency in the wording used within the lexicon, undermining normativity.

In terms of *social analysis*, the fusion of the climate-trade-migration nexus within the EU's strategic discourse tends to be an overarching theme through the document, indicating a diffusion of policy sectors due to the rising effects of securitization of the climate crisis, complexed by the pandemic and energy crises. There is therefore a need of mainstreaming *procedural justice* efforts in a more holistic way within the document. Moreover, due to fact that the AS is not binding in its implementation, MSs are reluctant to monitor justice in their national adaptation plans while have not even adopted a strategy on adaptation yet (see *Appendix A*; EEA, 2020: 16). Hence, adaptation activities need to be better aligned within different sectoral policies, and links to justice dimensions need to be further promoted. Despite the securitized context, the actions proposed in the AS are rather apolitical in their suggestions for implementation, contradicting the EU's normativity.

5.1.2 The European Green Deal (EGD): Greening or Growing?

From a *textual analysis* perspective, the communication on the EGD was accompanied by a detailed roadmap for its implementation. Namely, it stated that:

> "[...] 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 (GHG) in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use" (EC, 2019: 2).

The objective of the EGD is therefore focused both on the environmental and societal impacts of the transition. It firstly aims to achieve "zero net emissions of greenhouse gases" by the decoupling of economic growth from resource use. Secondly, it strives to "to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts" (EC, 2019: 2). Evidently, there is a growing attention to the issue of *just transitions* within the EGD, through the notions of fairness and wellbeing in relation to adaptation being embedded within the European policy fora.

The EC further stressed the importance of achieving a socially just ecological transition by organizing the EGD according to eight key action areas in order to ensure that the cost of the transition is not carried by the most vulnerable populations, underlining elements of *distributional* and *recognition justice* dimensions, through stating that the transition must be "just and inclusive" (EC, 2019: 2, 16). To achieve this, it urges that the transition "it must put people first, and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges" (ibid: 2). Its confident tone shows optimism in the EU's policy response. Moreover, the EGD frames environmental action into a globally shared commitment that seeks to enhance stakeholder engagement, illustrating elements of *recognition justice*. This is evidenced through the phrase that "the policy response must be bold and comprehensive and seek to maximise benefits" (ibid: 3).

Moving to the *process analysis*, the EGD presents environmental degradation both as a key challenge and economic opportunity for the transition. For instance, the EGD mentions that:

> "The most vulnerable are the most exposed to the harmful effects of climate change and environmental degradation. At the same time, managing the transition will lead to significant structural changes in business models, skill requirements and relative prices" (EC, 2019: 16).

However, the fact that the transition is portrayed as a business opportunity reveals lingering capitalist motives within the EGD, contradicting the EU's normative discourse. Furthermore, the EGD's discourse to develop new "digital technologies" has sustained that of previous strategic documents, presenting it as critical enabler to endorse the just transition (EC, 2019: 9).

In the same line, the "Just Transition Mechanism" presented within the Strategy could be perceived as the main eco-social policy instrument for promoting justice at the EU level, indicating elements of *procedural justice*. In addition to economic diversification, according to the EC, financial tools are needed for the "upskilling and reskilling of employed workers" and for job search assistance (EC, 2019: 16, 19). This will be done following the principles of "leaving no-one behind," as not all MSs have the same capacity to combat these environmental challenges (ibid: 16). The mechanism therefore focuses on assisting the regions that are most affected, indicating traces of *recognition justice* and is clear normative instrument within the EU's discourse.

With regards to the interaction with societal actors, the engagement of multiple stakeholders needs to be enhanced for the implementation of the EGD, as it states that "the transition can be successful only if policies are designed with the involvement of citizens and accepted by them" (EC, 2019: 22). This underlines *recognition justice* within the document. In the same vein, the EC pledged to launch the "European Climate Pact," in order to promote existing structures for enhancing citizens participation (ibid: 23). More specifically, an "active social dialogue" is recognised as an essential element to ensure a *just transition* (ibid: 16).

Finally, the issue of funding the transition tends to be a prominent element within the discourse of the EGD. Specifically, the plethora of EU financial initiatives that have been introduced within the strategy, such as the "Sustainable Europe Investment Fund", the "InvestEU" Fund, and the "Just Transition Fund" (ibid: 15-16), emphasise the need to redirect public investments towards "green priorities" in order to achieve the greening of national budgets (ibid: 17). This represents an illustration of endorsing *procedural justice*.

The concluding discourse of the EGD, illustrates elements of hegemony and empowers the EU as a strong normative power in accelerating the just climate response, as evidenced through promoting "a fair and prosperous society that responds to the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation" and by "improving the quality of life of current and future generations" (ibid: 23). However, the fact that the *just transitions* notion is only mentioned as a minor component in the EGD and not the overarching objective, being placed alongside with the phrase "financing the transition", is a reflection of its peripheral role within the strategy, as this illustrates a dominance of economic interests within the discourse (see *Appendix E*). Hence, despite the EGD holding significant rhetorical power, its jargon demonstrates opacity as it fails to fully take the EU justice norms into account in the policymaking process, weakening its potential for a truly *just transition*.

According to the *social analysis*, the EU's dual character is defined by a multi-level governance structure, which suggests that policy coherence between institutional and national actors is vital for delivering a coordinated policy response. To cater for this, the EGD introduced the European Semester as a key social mechanism that can contribute to the facilitation and coordination of EU country-specific priorities. What is more, the difficulties in adopting a combined approach

to coupling economic growth with environmental protection and social justice promotion, and the need to pay attention to the potential impacts of adaptation is promoted (EC, 2019: 4). To address this issue, the EGD has introduced the "Better Regulation" to enhance the evaluation procedures within the Union, indicating elements of *procedural justice* (ibid: 19). In achieving this, the European Semester aims to ensure that the EU's economic and social policies are aligned with its climate priorities. Hence, it ensures that policies are sufficiently monitored.

Overall, there is an overarching discourse of portraying the image of the EU as the global leader and ethical actor through being at the "forefront of coordinating international efforts towards building a coherent system that supports just transitions" (ibid: 2). Hence, the EU aims to promote ambitious climate policies through strengthening its "green deal diplomacy" by being a normative standard-setter on climate measures (ibid: 20). This reflects a normative pursuit to be a climate leader in its internal policymaking. However, the phrase "the challenges are complex and interlinked," suggests a rising complexity and securitization of issues in climate governance (ibid: 3). This charged social context is also reflected in the lexicon of the strategy, which is an impeding factor to justice promotion by the EU.

5.1.3 European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR): Inclusion or Investment?

The EPSR is presented as the main reference framework for the EGD to ensure that "[...] no one is left behind" (EC, 2019: 4). This strategy was issued in 2017 by the EC, and it provides a common compass to steer MS's social and employment policies through a set of twenty rights and principles, jointly providing a common framework for EU action. The 2021 EPSR Action Plan aims to make these rights presented in the Pillar operational through proposing rigid implementation initiatives by 2030, ensuring elements of *procedural justice* (EC, 2021b). Hence, it outlines the general principles on the social standards that should be guaranteed in the process towards a just transition.

With regards to the *textual* and *process analysis*, the first chapter in the Pillar is named "a Strong Social Europe for just transitions and recovery" (EC, 2021b: 5). Hence, the EPSR is presented as the core EU document that underlines a just transition through being a "social strategy to make sure that the transitions of climate neutrality, digitalisation and demographic change are socially fair and just," underlining traces of *distributional justice* (EC, 2021b: 2). The excerpt above provides insight into the way in which the EU is constructed as a *just transition* promoter within the discourse.

The alignment of social and environmental priorities is further evidenced through the phrase "taxation should be shifted away from labour to other sources more supportive to employment and in line with climate and environmental objectives, while protecting revenue for adequate social protection" (EC, 2021b: 18) and through urging the need to "enhance social rights and to strengthen the

European social dimension across all policies of the Union as enshrined in the Treaties. This will ensure the transition to climate-neutrality" (ibid: 6). However, the actual policy measures through which these rights are to be implemented tend to be more geared towards an invested-oriented approach which contradicts the EU's normativity. This is evidenced through the phrase: "the EU has been mobilising private investment in the transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and circular EU" (ibid: 35). Hence, there is a need for the EU to promote a rights-based approach to social justice.

Shifting to the *social analysis*, at the context of the EPSR's implementation in 2017, the link between the promotion of environmental sustainability was largely neglected due to Union being impacted by a plethora of external shocks, namely the aftermath of the financial and migration crises (Sabato and Frontenddu, 2020: 18). However, since the post-EGD context, the EPSR has come to the centre of the transition towards climate justice. Therefore, the Pillar is presented as the 'social rulebook' for just transitions and the EU's core social policy to enhance its normative ambitions. However, the discourse reveals that the EPSR seems to be addressed towards furthering the EU's moral role on the national level but fails to provide a bottom-up approach to the transition, through recalibrating the existing social asymmetries faced after the austerity discourse that prevailed in the EU during the financial crisis. Hence, the Pillar needs to change its focus from the traditional finance-oriented actions towards a social inclusion-oriented character to ensure a normative transition.

Overall, it can be concluded from this policy assessment that the EU's discourse on climate justice has witnessed a paradigm shift through capitalizing on the discursive themes of economics and environmental science instead of *climate justice*. The discourse continues to shape the EU's image as a 'green leader', who can influence how its MS can promote *just transitions* on the national level. However, the prevailing rhetoric is permeated by indirect eco-social inequalities, contradicting its normative image.

5.1.4 Summary: delivery of a 'myopic' policy response?

Overall, the assessment has demonstrated that all three EU-level policies are covering social enablers to ensure that adaptation is taking place in a more just way and account for most of the dimensions characterising just transitions at the discursive level. Thus, the strategies constitute a suitable policy framework to ensure such a transition at the EU level, indicating that adaptation is becoming a high-level policy area in Europe, as there is an increasing importance to holistically address it through a whole-of-government approach. Within the 2015-2022 policy context under investigation, the EU is explicitly embracing a just transition response to address the social impacts of climate change adaptation within its rhetoric. All strategies state a strong initiative for promoting just transition response, portrayed through using normative wording such as "leave no-one

behind" (EC, 2019: 4), "put people first" (ibid: 2), "a strong social Europe" (EC, 2021b: 10), "this transition must be just and inclusive" (EC, 2019: 2), and "achieving resilience in a just and fair way" (EC, 2021a: 9).

As echoed through these diverse framings, all dimensions of justice are to some extent discursively represented within the EU's policy documents. The language is therefore characterized by *interdiscursivity* because the same lexicon is present in all documents. For instance, most emphasis is placed on the need for *distributive justice* through expressions such as "fair and decent living" (EC, 2019: 12), "fair wages" (EC, 2021b: 44), and "affordable outcomes" (EC, 2021a: 13). These wordings especially showcase how the strategies aim to ensure a just allocation of benefits and disadvantages. The evaluated strategies also make some reference to *recognition justice*, by including framings such as "social protection" for vulnerable groups (EC, 2021b: 19), stressing to "protect the citizens and workers most vulnerable to the transition" (EC, 2019: 16). urging to "pay particular attention to the role of outermost regions" (ibid: 23), and "fostering social inclusion and combating poverty" (EC, 2021b: 27). Lastly, *procedural justice* is mentioned the least, but to some extent captured in phrases such as establishing "dialogue with social partners" (EC, 2019: 4) and to promote "reskilling initiatives" (EC, 2021a: 9). This suggests that the latter dimension is not a priority for the Union. The results from the discursive analysis are visualized below (see *Figure 4*).
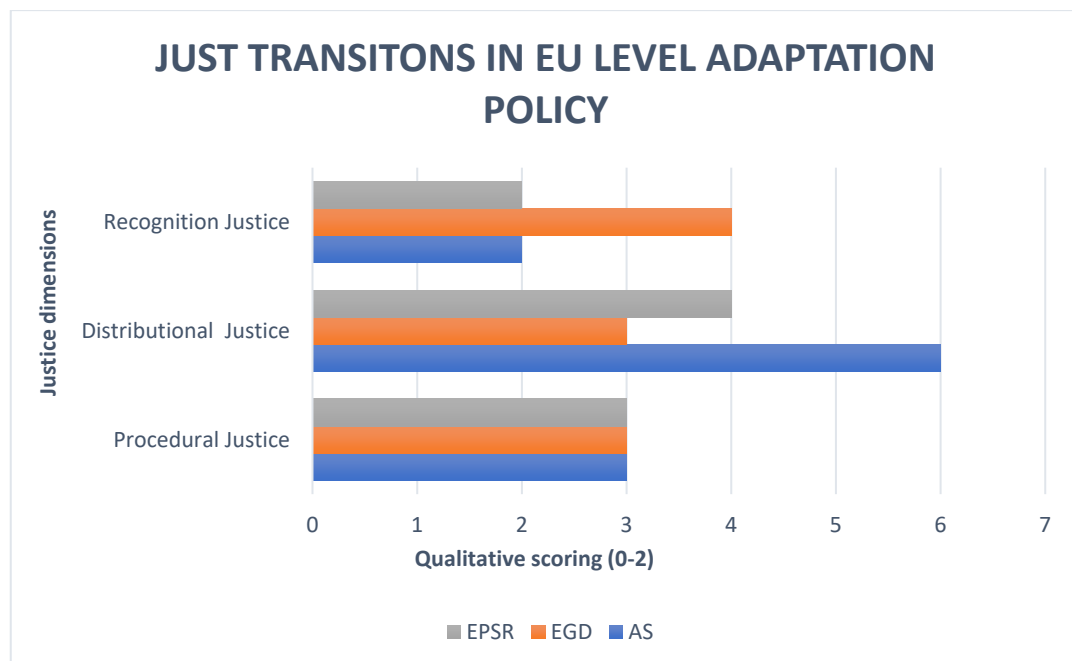
Figure 4. Qualitative scoring of justice dimensions across EU level adaptation policies.

As established from the graph, the EGD has overall performed the highest in all justice dimensions, while the AS has scored the highest in the *distributional justice* component, and lastly the EPSR has been the lowest performing. The results are not surprising due to the fact the EGD is the main eco-social framework for just

transitions within the Union, the AS is specifically designed to correct injustices while the EPSR is predominantly designed to target the procedural elements of social rights. Additionally, the focus of the AS and EGD is primarily on employment and worker's rights, largely reflecting the favouring of a normative framework geared towards *mitigation* over *adaptation* and underlining the need for a stronger horizontal policy integration to achieve just transitions (EC, 2021; Breil et al, 2021).

Consequently, the strategic documents set a high ambition by using discursive framings that allude to wordings of justice (see *Appendix C, D*). However, while all justice dimensions are somewhat mentioned, they are not accompanied by concrete means as to how to achieve the transition in the EU context. Thus, the just transition notion promoted by the EU is narrow in scope, only targeting the most urgent challenges, which are largely financial, giving an understanding of justice as rather 'investment-oriented', as it was found that the main objective of the EU's eco-social policy is aimed at economic growth through enhancing people's participation in the green transition. Furthermore, the existing just transition policies do not represent binding instruments, and the main funds and tools offered to MSs promote a narrow approach to justice, which is insufficient to address the social disparities that countries face in the climate crisis (Mandelli, 2022: 21-22).

Subsequently, the results suggest a tendency towards a more protectionist and realist understanding of the *just transition* within the EU which departs from the normative conceptions of the NPA. Hence, despite the EU's response not being climate 'blind', it portrays 'myopic' tendencies as it fails to address the long-term, structural justice elements of adaptation, but rather focuses on short-term responses.

To explore whether these discursive logics are consistent, the critical cases of Sweden and Greece will be investigated to assess if the EU's adaptation policy has influenced the promotion of justice at the national level to obtain a holistic understanding of the state of adaptation in Europe.

5.2 National level policy response: between leaders and laggards in the transition?

Within the EU, National Adaptation Strategies (NAS) are starting to be adopted in the majority of its MS (see *Appendix A*). Following the introduction of the AS (2021), most of its MSs are currently obliged to report to the EC on their *adaptation* practices in an attempt to mainstream *just transition* policymaking across Europe. Hence, NASs are deemed as appropriate tools for assessing Europe's state of adaptation. They provide a suitable framework for addressing the social implications to identify whether justice is considered in adaptation planning. Nevertheless, EU MSs differ widely in their progress in designing and implementing their NAS, and valuable insights can be learned from their discursive

actions to ensure a *just transition* on the national level. In this section, I attempt to empirically investigate the illustrations of climate justice conceptions in two critical cases of Northern and Southern Europe accordingly, in order to reflect the realities of the centre-periphery gap within the EU on *just transitions*.

5.2.1 Sweden: normativity meets the Nordic model?

The Ministry of the Environment and Energy is responsible for coordinating the Swedish government's climate adaptation framework, illustrating traces of *procedural justice* (EC, 2018b: 5). In terms of *textual analysis*, the Swedish NAS states that:

> "Climate change adaptation is a strategically important question for the Swedish climate diplomacy, and the Government notes that all nations (including the EU) must now consider how climate work can be made stronger. The Government emphasises the importance of national ownership, of integrating the climate into national development plans" (Regerings proposition, 2017: 57, own translation).

Additionally, the NAS underlines considerations of *recognition justice* through urging to create "a long-term sustainable and robust society that actively addresses climate change by reducing vulnerabilities and seizing opportunities" (Regerings proposition, 2017: 62). In doing this, high emphasis is placed on the importance of research and innovation (ibid: 80). To promote climate adaptation, "an ever-increasing part of the government's work has been devoted to addressing national security issues in a coherent manner (ibid: 61). Hence, there are clear links made between the climate and security concerns within the NAS.

What is more, Sweden focuses on a *distributional* dimension of justice within its NAS as it steers its adaptation planning on the predicted societal consequences, through prioritising "vulnerable groups" when engaging in adaptation activities (Regerings proposition, 2017: 27). On the local level, the NAS emphasizes that "heatwaves in Sweden are increasing in frequency, exposing risk groups to even greater danger such as the elderly, young children and disabled people" (ibid: 33, own translation). To combat this, Sweden reported that its southern region has implemented numerous climate proofing initiatives to redress heat vulnerabilities (ibid: 34).

However, the NAS also points to many challenges to *procedural justice* surrounding adaptation, specifically regarding the distribution of responsibility and the lack of funding, as it expressed that:

> "There is no clear structure for monitoring and evaluating climate change adaptation work. One reason why the work at local level has not taken off to the necessary extent is thought to be a lack of clarity in the distribution of responsibility and in terms of financial support" (ibid: 46, own translation).

As evidenced from the excerpt, the NAS addresses climate adaptation through a pragmatic approach, namely using the existing machinery it possesses instead of creating new mechanisms for adaptation, which contradicts Sweden's normative intentions. This results in a lack of *procedural justice*. Looking at the discourse, an emphasis on risk framings was identified, as evidenced by the phrase:

> "In the event of high risk, i.e. when the likelihood of an event, the extent of its consequences and its degree of seriousness are considered to be high, preventive measures should be taken, warning systems and preparedness should be designed, and responsibilities and cooperation should be clarified" (Regerings proposition, 2017: 67, own translation).

The NAS therefore depicts the discourse of climate adaptation as distant and predictable, and climate vulnerability as an external challenge that is faced outside the Swedish borders which requires no transformative change for a *just transition*. Moreover, the NAS suggests that climate adaptation reflects multiple dangers, but only emphasizes on environmental rather than societal hazards. Looking at the linguistic elements, the promotion of climate adaptation within the NAS is formulated with the wording of 'should' instead of 'must'. This results in framing adaptation action in terms of recommendations, rather than an imperative for justice promotion. To illustrate, it is stated that: "the objectives *should* be taken into account in policies, strategies, and planning at the national level and integrated into regular activities and responsibilities" (Regerings proposition, 2017: 62). Hence, it aims to promote a 'multiple sector' approach to adaptation, indicating flavours of *distributional justice* due to urging for a holistic response (ibid: 79).

From a *process analysis* viewpoint, the wording of 'climate justice' is notably absent in the NAS, while there is an overall prioritisation for food and civil security, due to recognizing adaptation as a key threat to national security. According to the Sweden's expert Council for Climate Adaptation (2022), there is a need for stronger wording in the Swedish NAS, as it is currently overly vague and technical in its approach and terminology (Klimatanpassningsradet, 2022: 4). This is exemplified through the phrase that adaptation "should be taken into consideration in policies, strategies and planning at national level, and should be integrated into ordinary operations and responsibilities" (Regerings proposition, 2017: 59, own translation). Evidently, the ways in which this transition should be achieved are not clearly explained, and there is a need to further knowledge-building, clarify responsibility allocation and identify expectations of action.

According to the EC's 2018 evaluation document, Swedish climate risk assessments tend to take the "transboundary elements" of adaptation into account, however, remain largely project-based (EC, 2018b: 9). Regarding *procedural justice*, stakeholder engagement is found to promoted in Sweden, as public and private actors are involved in developing adaptation policy (ibid: 6). Overall, the country's national guidelines for adaptation are not sufficiently supported by policies to guide local adaptation efforts, as jurisdiction on adaptation falls under

the Swedish municipalities which lack efficient cooperation mechanisms. Hence, Sweden's climate adaptation measures do not sufficiently ensure *procedural* climate justice (ibid: 6).

Considering the *social analysis*, Sweden has predominantly focused on sectoral adaptation plans and launched its first NAS relatively late compared to other MSs which contradicts is normative discourse of being a climate leader is ambitious policymaking (Juhola et al, 2022: 615). Within the country, climate threats are highly localized, and the southernmost region of Sweden is predicted to be one of the most affected by climate impacts, as experienced during the unprecedentedly warm summer of 2018 which resulted in forest fires. This deems justice in adaptation a crucial task for Sweden. Additionally, the area of Malmö represents a region that has engaged in greening initiatives where its transformation is primarily based on the participation of its citizens in the adaptation planning, which illustrates clear elements of *recognition justice* (Breil et al, 2021: 51). The vulnerability of the elderly to infectious diseases is highlighted as an added concern within the NAS, as well as the rising exposure of Swedish and Norwegian Sami minorities to climate impacts, underlining the need for promoting *recognition justice* (Regerings proposition, 2017: 69).

Overall, the expert lexicon used within the rhetoric of the Swedish NAS results in de-politicizing the impacts of climate adaptation, through utilizing overly technical and politically uncharged vocabulary. Hence, there is a strategic omission of political questions related to climate inequalities, due to an absence of a discussion surrounding 'winners and losers' in the Swedish climate adaptation agenda. These results support is overall soft power discourse on climate policy.

5.2.2 Greece: from Green to Greek transition?

The Greek Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change is the main governmental body employed for the implementation of climate policy, with the National Climate Change Adaptation Committee established as the formal body for adaptation policy monitoring, indicating elements of *procedural justice*.

Zooming into the *textual analysis* of the Greek NAS, its primary objectives refer to the *distributional justice* dimension, namely:

> "(1) Systematizing and improving decision making process regarding adaptation (2) Linking adaptation with the promotion of a sustainable development pattern through regional/local action plans (3) Promoting adaptation policies and actions in all sectors of the Greek economy with an emphasis on the most vulnerable (4) Creation of a mechanism for monitoring, evaluation and updating of adaptation policies (5) Strengthening adaptive capacity of the Greek society through information and awareness raising actions" (MEEN, 2016: 6-7, own translation).

Hence, from the first pages of the NAS, *recognition justice* considerations are touched upon, as evidenced through the phrase that it "responds to the public feeling for justice and fairness, prioritising the most vulnerable areas and social groups in its measures" (MEEN, 2016: 8). However, throughout the document, the ways of achieving this justice component are missing. Specifically, economic constraints due to the 2011 financial crisis are presented as key factors hampering adaptation action, as evidenced through the phrase:

> "Greece has already been slow to develop a national adaptation strategy. Unfortunately, this period is experiencing an unprecedented economic recession. A crisis as deep as the current one certainly entails serious economic limitations in the implementation of adaptation options" (MEEN, 2016: 11, own translation).

However, it is also argued that "adaptation measures can contribute to the economic recovery effort" of Greece, illustrating a will towards the promotion of adaptation monitoring (ibid: 12). Hence, according to the NAS, "the cost of implementation would be a major obstacle" for materializing Greek adaptation efforts (MEEN, 2016: 150). To this endeavour, the NAS suggests that "a huge amount of information will be required in order to achieve the intended results at the lowest possible cost" (ibid: 74). Additionally, it is stated that the "uncertainties regarding the time of appearance and severity of climate impacts essentially make it difficult to evaluate the investments of adaptation plans and their funding sources" (ibid: 76). Evidently, there is an emphasis on the costs of adaptation as a main constraining factor of the Greek NAS, due to the country's fragile economy.

Moreover, the NAS argues that the lack of green infrastructure is hampering Greek adaptation effectiveness, as "in the absence of adaptation measures, Greece would be faced with a situation similar to the one of developing countries, given its lack of an even basic integrated water management plan" (MEEN, 2016: 148). Lack of climate infrastructure is a dominant issue that is creating a 'laggard' conception within its discourse, plaguing its efforts for normativity. To remedy this, awareness-raising for environmental problems is presented as a key solution for promoting "climate consciousness and adaptability" (ibid: 85-86).

From a *process analysis* perspective, Greece has made some normative commitments within the NAS to enhance its "green infrastructure" as well as endorse "climate resilient investments" (MEEN, 2016: 12, 80). Additionally, mainstreaming adaptation action into sectoral policies as a means of promoting adaptation is stressed for the first time (ibid). However, the NAS has adopted an overly sectoral lens to the climate crisis, resulting in the integration of the local within the regional level, in Greek adaptation policymaking. This hierarchical discursive structure is attributed to the presence of formal and bureaucratic participatory mechanisms for implementation, which weakens its effectiveness in terms of adaptive capacity and perpetuates *recognition injustices*.

According to the EC's 2018 policy evaluation of the NAS, it was noted that regarding *procedural justice*, "despite the significant progress made in the last two

years, there are still significant needs with regard to policy coordination, development and dissemination of good practice, and most importantly in terms of capacity building" (EC, 2018c: 5). On the *recognition justice* front, the policy evaluation states that "stakeholder engagement and public consultation have been made mandatory in Greece" (ibid: 8). To climate proof its infrastructure for the upcoming climate conditions, Greece reported that it aims to include risk groups in the public consultation process of the upcoming NAS, which has now become a mandatory procedure (ibid: 8). With regards to *distributional justice*, monioting systems are implemented to assess the impacts of climate vulnerabilities through the 'Hellenic National Meteorological Service' mechanism. Additionally, Greece has succeded in identifying "the most vulnerable segments of the population" (EC, 2018c: 12).

However, the NAS only outlines guidelines in Greece's strategic orientation and fails to evaluate the practical feasibility of individual adaptation measures within its discourse. Moreover, it is not evident how adaptation will be embedded wihtin other national policy documents. As mentioned in the EC's 2018 evaluation, the implementation of adaptation actions is 'in progress' but at an initial stage. This is uncovered by the fact that the national 'LIFE programme' for adaptation, namely AdaptInGR, only started in 2019 (Adaptive Greece, 2023). Regarding the monitoring of adaptation, there is a lack of evaluation facilities for policy implementation, which illustrates a lack of *procedural justice* in this respect

Finally, regarding the *social analysis,* the socio-political context during which the Greek NAS was published was highly securitized due to experiencing the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, which impacted the cohesion of its adaptation priorities. This is reflected within its adaptation discourse through the passage:

> "The recent waves of refugees from Syria and the dramatic developments that are taking place both in the Greek islands located in the Eastern Aegean as well as in several EU countries have captured the interest of global public opinion [...] Human mobility is an important process for the adaptation to climate change. Climate trends do not only have negative effects on agricultural production and food safety, but also lead to a deterioration of social cohesion with the appearance of local conflicts over the management and use of natural resources" (MEEN, 2016: 92, own translation).

To enhance the delivery of the NAS, Greece published the *2030 Athens Resilience Report* which is structured into four pillars, namely 'open, green, proactive, and vibrant city', with the objective of financing green and blue infrastructure projects such as increasing the existence of parks and green spaces (Rockfeller Foundation, 2019: 5). In addition to improving adaptation justice, these projects are forecasted to enhance air quality and social inclusiveness (EEA, 2020: 60). On the local level, the city of Athens is predicted to boost its green urban infrastructure, through receiving a five-million-euro loan in an attempt to finance the green transition, through contributing to the natural restoration of the Lycabettus mountain. However, the Report identifies a plethora of geopolitical 'stresses'

surrounding Greece's adaptation discourse, which includes the issues of earthquakes, heatwaves, flash floods, poor air quality, civil unrest, ageing infrastructure, the issue of migration, governmental mistrust, civil unrest and depressive macroeconomic conditions due to the crisis which are decisively hampering the country's normative discourse to promote *just transitions* (Rockfeller Foundation, 2019: 15).

Overall, Greece prioritizes *procedural* dimensions of justice in adaptation, as one of the main objectives of its NAS is to strengthen the adaptive capacity of its society through increasing climate awareness which is lacking within its discourse. This is evidenced through the creation of a "National Adaptation Knowledge Hub" providing adaptation information towards vulnerable groups and pooling together relevant data and good governance practices (EC, 2018c: 12). Nevertheless, due to its politically charged social discourse, its NAS is at an embryonic stage and requires further improvements to promote a normative response.

5.2.3 Summary: unequal exposure to unequal impacts?

This chapter has clearly indicated that *just transitions* are slowly starting to be integrated in policymaking from the European to the MS level but are still at a premature stage. Climate change impacts in Europe are distributed unevenly across Greece and Sweden which impact the design of their respective NASs in terms of justice considerations. The differences in what is alluded in NASs amongst the two MSs is considerable, requiring the need for stronger 'horizontal coordination mechanisms' (EEA, 2018: 22). The reported information in their adaptation policies indicates that Greece and Sweden are at an initial stage in addressing the social elements of adaptation as there is a lack of clear monitoring indicators within their strategies. The NASs examined are not yet accompanied by concrete action plans, and there is a need for an improved normative response. Specifically, *procedural* and *recognition justice* considerations associated with climate change adaptation remain inadequately addressed *(*see *Figure 5).*
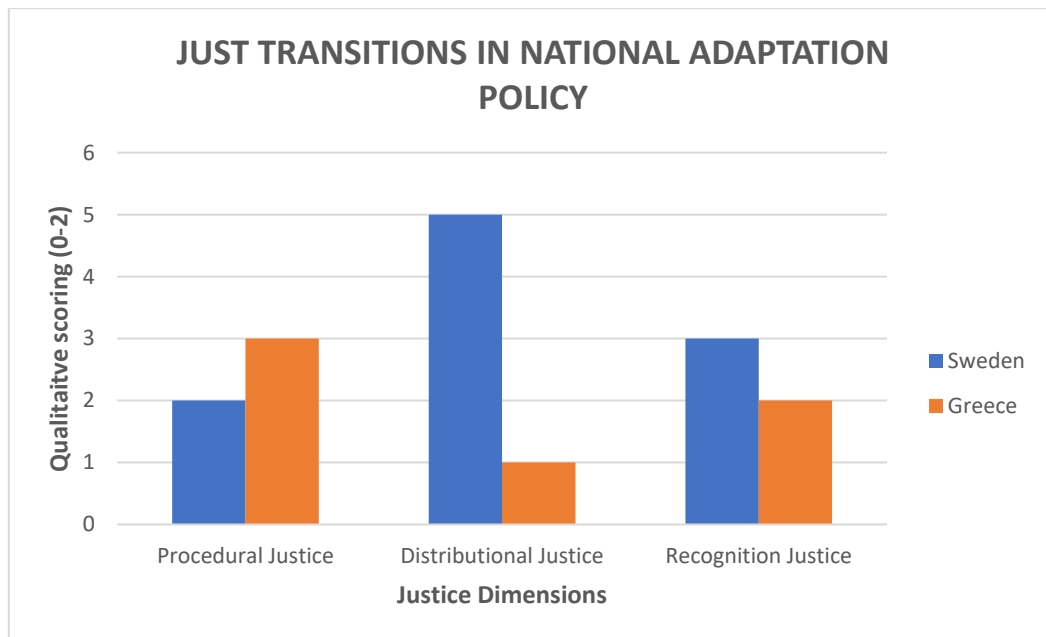
Figure 5. Qualitative scoring of justice dimensions in the national adaptation policies of Greece and Sweden.

As evidenced from the discursive assessment, there is a clear division between the Northern and Southern European cases regarding the social impacts of climate change on policymaking, which capture different dimensions of justice within the strategic discourse. The Swedish NAS is more detailed in scope in terms of adaptation action, but the Greek NAS is more critical in its discourse lexicon. The former pursues a more apolitical approach to adaptation, while the former utilizes politically charged wordings Hence, language is more securitized in the Greek NAS due to being hit by a plethora of external shocks during the time of its production, while the economic component being a limiting factor in both strategies, limiting their normative influence. As evidenced from the graph, this is also reflected in terms of justice considerations, with Sweden outperforming Greece in adaptation due to being indirectly impacted by the crisis and having stronger policymaking capabilities and adaptation procedures (see *Figure 5*).

Specifically, Sweden has scored highest in terms of *distributional justice*, while Greece has prioritized *procedural justice*. This is also reflected within their discourses, with the former country possessing all the structural elements needed to prioritize corrective justice, while the latter still lacking the essential procedural components for climate justice promotion and therefore capitalizing more on greening its climate infrastructure. In terms of *recognition justice*, both countries to large extent fail to account for vulnerable populations in their implementation processes. This suggests that the inequalities within Europe are not only prevalent in socio-economic terms but also persist within the climate domain, formulating clear 'leader' and 'laggard' dichotomies (see *Figure 5*). Hence, evaluating justice requires EU policymakers to rethink top-down approaches to adaptation for less socio-economically developed MS to truly make policy work for all and enable a *just transition*.

6 Discussion: sharing the burden of climate change and undoing socio-ecological injustice?

After having critically scrutinized the EU's climate justice discourse on both levels of its competence through the CDA, the results demonstrate a chasm between its normative imperative to promote *just transitions* on climate adaptation and the unjust policy implementation, due to the lack of sufficient consideration of all climate justice dimensions on the EU and MS levels accordingly. On the EU level, the discursive themes identified were MS reluctance to monitor adaptation and lack of coordination, the rising emphasis on business and investment, and the opaque actions proposed. On the MS level, issues detected were the lack of responsibility allocation, the costs of adaptation, the securitization of the discourse, the lack of mechanisms to achieve adaptation, and the uncertainty of climate change impacts. This results in *just transitions* playing a peripheral role in adaptation policymaking within the Union and will be further discussed in this section from the normative perspective of climate justice.This paradox identified in the analysis suggests that in order to achieve normativity, the EU needs to acknowledge that the EGD, AS, EPSR, and the NASs can lead to *maladaptation* if justice considerations are not adequately addressed. Hence, instead of the Union 'leaving no-one behind,' it should aim to reach the 'furthest behind first' (Sarkki et al, 2022: 761).

6.1 The EU recognizes the need for just climate adaptation policy

As established from the preceding analysis, the EU adaptation strategies together with the NASs, provide key steps towards enabling just transitions within the European policy fora. The EU has established a normative ambition in response to climate adaptation, as reflected in the production of key policy documents, namely the AS, EGD, and EPSR in an attempt to pursue *just transitions* within its discourse. Despite promoting fairness being a central goal in the examined adaptation strategies, the linkages between justice and adaptation were not always explicit. The discussion regarding improving social dimensions such as working conditions and life quality of low-income groups indicates some attempts towards the promotion of normative responses (Remling, 2018: 490). Furthermore, despite the non-binding nature of the policy instruments, they suceeded in outlining the normative practices

that would contribute to a socially just adaptation response. Specifically, the Just Transition Mechanism was developed which seeks to provide support for the regions most affected and the Just Transition Fund was established to finance the necessary investments to support the transition.

Within the EU's policymaking discourse, the EU strategies and NASs fulfilled the role of showcasing leadership in adaptation and illustrating policy entrepreneurship through setting out a normative governance framework for adaptation policy compliance (EEA, 2018: 22). Evidently, the social enablers of adaptation need to be further detailed within the strategies, so that the normative impact of adaptation practices can be sufficiently assessed to produce rigid adaptation strategies that can enable *just transitions*. Thus, this analysis indicated that justice concerns in adaptation are not only present in the Global North-South context, but also extend within the European borders, which in turn influences the delivery of normative ambitions.

6.2 Non-normative entanglements within EU level adaptation policy persist: just transitions for 'whom'?

The interpretive analysis of the discursive logics behind the EU's adaptation policy illustrated that its policies are charged with significant de-politicizing acts, which are conducive in concealing the hegemonic connotations that exist within the strategies and succeed in perpetuating unjust adaptation structures and frameworks within the EU's policymaking (Stephan et al, 2013: 70).

Specifically, there are elements of *interdiscursivity* identified amongst the strategies. Despite the fact that the documents succeed in underlining the EU's ambition in promoting *just transitions* and recognize the need for adaptation, the causes of *maladaptation* are neutralised through objectifying the climate crisis as an external threat to the European agenda (Englund and Barquet, 2023: 1). This underlines a rationalist rather than normative approach to adaptation (Remling, 2018: 489). To illustrate, the issue of financial growth is discursively captured as a prerequisite to achieve justice in adaptation within the policy documents. Additionally, the strategies paint an undifferentiated picture of climate adaptation that obscures the geographical elements behind the climate burden, hence undermining the dimensions of *distributive justice* and the UN principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.' Adopting a confined definition of climate vulnerabilities to 'sectors and regions', further generalises social enablers of justice and obscures their differentiated climate impacts on MS, illustrating a lack of *recognition justice*. Hence, the actions proposed are primarily mainstreaming adaptation objectives into existing policies

instead of creating specified action plans for distinctive needs which is problematic (ibid: 477). Finally, the EU's policy discourse obscures questions regarding the means to achieve climate adaptation within its lexicon, as well as portrays a lack clarity in allocating responsibilities in adaptation, illustrating a gap in the *procedural justice* dimensions

Hence wise, the EU strategies fail to holistically acknowledge the issue of social inequalities within Europe. The presentation of adaptation as solely an ecological problem results in promoting technical adaptation responses and a discursive logic of economic rationality instead of normativity. Consequently, economic motives tend to become the driving factor in EU's adaptation discourse through the transition geared towards social costs and the development of economic markets. Moreover, by promoting low-cost adaptation solutions, there is a false expectation that the proposed measures will benefit everyone, which is unattainable due to the unequal impacts faced by MSs. This apolitical discourse makes the social issues of climate adaptation invisible, preventing the emergence of just solutions to combat inequalities (Remling, 2018: 490).

The discursive findings indicate that the EU has opted for a diplomatic language focused on economic and technological motives to communicate its promotion of *just transitions* within its policymaking (Eckert and Kovalevska, 2021: 3). This lexicon employed obscures communication, contradicting the normative intentions in its policymaking through disabling the holistic evaluation of its adaptation norms. The technical difficulty of the iterations within the strategies due to their ambiguities in conveying meanings, and the lack of clear allocation of actions further endorses an institutional rather than normative response within the EU's discourse. This weakens its ambition in promoting justice in adaptation. Subsequently, the critical policy assessment reveals a dominance of socio-economic and political power structures responsible rather than an emphasis on promoting a structural change in behaviours regarding climate justice within the Union (Remling, 2018: 3).

Consequently, the current spectrum of the EU's policy instruments under investigation in the post-Paris context leaves existing adaptation processes unchallenged and aims to perpetuate an economic rationalist rather than normative discourse in *just transition* pathways.

6.3 Bridging the North-South gap in climate justice: a quest for normative adaptation at the MS level

The second part of the analysis was critical in highlighting the intersection between climate justice perspectives and EU policy actorness through providing an ethical perspective to the European North-South cleavages in adaptation towards a *just transition*. The cases under review revealed key insights into the implementation of

adaptation strategies within Europe, both nationally and locally. Specifically, they illustrated the positive normative influence that EU level action on adaptation can have upon NAS processes, while also uncovering several challenges with regards to implementation.

These include the politicisation of adaptation planning, and the difficulty in mainstreaming strong inter-regional coordination due to geopolitical issues in the case of Greece, and the 'threatification' of the adaptation discourse in the case of Sweden (see *Appendix B*). This can be explained by the fact that there is a structural divide between North and South EU MSs on climate adaptation (Petrić, 2019: 225; Alves et al, 2014: 15). Nordic countries tend to experience lower inequality levels compared to Mediterranean countries which have lower social standards and have undergone multiple shocks in their economies, placing the latter in the EU's semi-periphery while the former in the EU's core (Guillen and Soler, 2020: 35). The following section will walk through this divide and provide a normative explanation through applying the *just transition* theoretical dimensions steered by Manners' (2002) NPA.

6.3.1 Distributional injustices

From a climate justice perspective, MSs of the EU North have a significantly higher historical emissions record than the Southern ones due to having undergone industrialization processes earlier (Petrić, 2019: 229). Notably, however, all Northern states including Sweden have closed their coal industries, while comparatively only a few Southern EU MSs have announced a phase out. In Greece particularly, new coal plants are being constructed (ibid: 230, CCPI, 2022). Additionally, while energy poverty is widespread across Europe, its social distribution is highly unjust.

Specifically, states of the EU South are disproportionately affected by energy poverty due to lower socio-economic conditions and infrastructure (ibid: 233). A further example is air quality, as ambient air is notably worse in the Southern than in the Northern EU MSs (CCPI, 2022). Amongst others, Greece has been exposed as one of the countries having the worst air quality in Europe due to high pollution and the lack of green spaces, while Sweden scores highly in terms of green infrastructure (ibid: 234). This indicates that the EU's polluting industries have now moved from the core to the semi-periphery countries, harming the EU's normative efforts in climate adaptation, which represents a case of *distributional injustice* (Petrić, 2019: 225). Additionally, the climate crisis will result in the loss of jobs in Southern Europe in the agriculture and tourism sectors which has highly impacted the Greek economy and is an incentive to increase its adaptation efforts, as they form its main resource revenues (Breil et al, 2021). Conversely, tourism is expected to increase in Sweden due to the changing climate, resulting in industries being impacted positively in the short-term. Finally, the train derailment in Athens in March 2023 is a further illustration of the lack of rigid infrastructure and resources

for promoting green alternatives such as using trains instead of cars, causing the South to 'lag behind' on climate adaptation practices, compared to Sweden where trains and bikes constitute the main means of transportation (Haq et al, 2023).

6.3.2 Procedural injustices

Additionally, the level of citizen engagement in climate issues differs significantly amongst the EU Northern and Southern countries due to a growing income gap, representing an illustration of *procedural injustice* (Petrić, 2019: 240). Specifically, the Northern MSs predominantly identify climate change as the most vital environmental issue they face, whereas South MSs identify air pollution and waste, alongside other pressing social issues such as war and unemployment as their core concerns (ibid: 241). Hence, EU climate adaptation policies fail to consider the existing differences in attitudes amongst MSs to ensure substantive climate justice (ibid: 242). Another procedural issue concerns the inefficiency of national judiciary systems due to the EU's decentralised competence on climate policy which significantly downscales climate ambitions (Siddi, 2020: 10). This results in a lack of cooperation due the presence of different priorities on the climate debate. Specifically, Northern countries have greater administrative capacities and a more efficient judiciary system compared to the Southern states (Petrić, 2019: 244). Hence, the level of economic development, infrastructure, and wealth impact climate justice progress within the EU MSs, causing procedural inequalities.

6.3.3 Recognition injustices

With regards to *recognition injustice*, there are stereotypical dichotomies surrounding Northern and Southern states that dominate the current discourse of the EU's policymaking, perpetuating lingering 'leader' and 'laggard' hierarchies. Specifically, the latter is confronted with a 'climate unconscious' discourse through failing to be green enough, reflecting a rhetoric of environmental 'ethnicism' steering the justice debate within Europe (Petrić, 2019: 251).

In this respect, despite the EU South being less responsible for the current climate hazards in Europe such as waste tourism, it bears a greater ethical burden with regards to ecological harm than the EU North from the impacts of climate change. Additionally, it lacks the infrastructure to correct these injustices and holds less normative power than the EU North to influence Union decision-making in order to address the climate injustice, creating a clear North-South divide on climate adaptation (ibid: 251). Subsequently, the act of possessing just procedures in the EU, without explicitly inputting substantive normative elements for adaptation planning, does not ensure that justice will be delivered equally in each MS, creating a need for enhancing *recognition justice* efforts within the EU's adaptation discourse.

6.4 Revisiting the normative contours of the EU's climate discourse: what is next for European adaptation strategies?

In sum, the analysis established that the existing climate adaptation framework of the EU is ineffective in promoting *just transitions* due to the lack of a united climate justice approach through the convergence of national, environmental, and societal impacts. The mere presence of policies pursuing a *just transition*, is not sufficient to empirically underpin the delivery of an eco-social justice within the Union at both levels of its competence, which supports the research hypothesis of this paper. Hence, the EU's power structure and hegemonic discourse as a 'policy elite' impedes holistically addressing the actions outlined in its strategic documents (Eckert and Kovalevska, 2021: 3).The EU needs to therefore ensure that its policies are linked to normative climate ambitions, in order to reach the targets presented in Paris Agreement and the objectives set out in its policies in a just manner. Additionally, the increased emphasis of the current adaptation discourse on economic costs reflects the pragmatic turn within EU policymaking which contradicts its normative discourse. Hence, a shift to a normative outlook is required to truly enable a *just transition* in the case of the European North-South divide.

6.5 Research delimitations

The extremely current and ever-evolving nature of this topic makes it by essence analytically difficult to assess due to the lack of sufficient discursive data, but simultaneously undeniably compelling. A key critique raised against current analyses on justice in adaptation is that they are often overly theoretical, focusing on what *would* constitute a just response in adaptation, lacking the component of policy implementation (De Rosa et al, 2022: 2). This paper aimed at remedying this issue through adding an empirical dimension to achieving justice in adaptation through problematizing the case of the North-South divide.

Notably, the analysis did not aim to compare the North and South cleavages in terms of MS performance, but rather aimed at adding an empirical justice dimension on the importance of 'leaving no-one behind' in climate adaptation and providing a normative critique towards the EU's structural differences, which is illustrated through the North-South climate injustices. Moreover, there was difficulty in finding sufficient discursive data at the national level, as NAS data was focused on geographical, sectoral, and technical terms which lacked the theoretical richness for a climate justice discussion on the normative elements of *just transitions*. A more complete analysis would also include an evaluation of the impact of the North-East

divide in European policy making, as well as the inclusion of the *restorative* and *intergenerational* justice dimensions which are only recently gaining ground within the literature (Breil et al, 2022).

7 Conclusion: an EU awakening to the need for adaptation justice?

In conclusion, the research set out to answer the following question: *'To what extent does the case of the European North-South relations demonstrate the EU's promotion of just transitions in climate adaptation policy?'*. Answering the research question, the case of the EU's North-South relations reveals the EU's declining normativity in promoting *just transitions* within its policymaking, creating a clear structural divide in Europe. Consequently, these North-South cleavages in adaptation represent a reflection of the unjust practices within the strategic documents. Specifically, the findings indicated a mismatch between the EU's declared normative pursuit to act in adaptation, its prevailing rhetoric regarding aggravated climate impacts, and the apolitical policy proposed that did little to foster normative adaptation and *just transitions,* through inadequately addressing climate justice dimensions. The EU's quest for policy normativity was assessed through a CDA of three EU-level and two NAS policy documents addressing social justice in adaptation, with the support of secondary data. To achieve this, the explanatory power the NPA was used to evaluate the EU's fulfilment of the climate justice criteria of *distributional*, *procedural* and *recognition* justice set out in the 2022 IPCC report across strategic climate policy documents. The goal of the CDA was to critically examine the hegemonic discourses surrounding climate change adaptation that emerged from the texts. As this study aimed to assess the EU's adaptation policy regarding its potential for *just transitions*, the actions outlined in the strategy documents were of high analytical interest.

The analysis has illustrated that the climate crisis has impacted the EU's normative policymaking discourse, increasing the need to deliver just adaptation practices to effectively respond to climate change. This was crystallized in the production of key climate adaptation policies during the period that was under investigation, namely the AS (2021), the EGD (2019), the EPSR (2021), and NASs at the MS level, in an attempt to strengthen its normative power role. Through investigating the EU's climate discourse, the analysis indicated that the Union's justice claims do not always translate into normative policy actorness. Hence, there are non-normative entanglements within its discourse, as it fails to substantively account for all the inequalities surrounding adaptation promotion.

Specifically, the EU scored highly in the criterion of *distributional justice*, as it considered the unequal burdens of adaptation within its policies and made some references to the risks of maladaptation. However, it still has progress to make in the *procedural* and *recognition justice* dimensions due to its fragmented dual structure which limits its effectiveness as a norm-setter in climate governance and

the highly diverse composition of MSs which possess different socio-economic capabilities. Due to the unaligned green initiatives across MSs, this generates a North-South divide in climate adaptation policy. Despite both underperforming in adaptation, Greece showed a preference for *procedural justice* considerations while Sweden capitalized on *distributional justice* elements which also reflects their foreign policy discourses and respective capabilities. Evidently, there is a growing politicization and securitization witnessed in the EU's normative power discourse in adaptation, questioning its *just transition* motives. Hence, the normative ideal of the EU being 'united in diversity' through 'leaving no-one behind' to achieve climate justice, unfortunately, seems to be of 'herculean' difficulty as established from the policymaking discourse that was analysed.

The EU's lack of delivery of justice indicators reflects the complexity of the climate policy field which has now become a high-level policy area in Europe due to the highly diverse landscape in which adaptation is pursued. Sweden and Greece represent critical cases of North-South injustices in adaptation promotion by the EU. Thus, the EU is to a large extent failing to match its normative discourse with just policy outcomes and appears 'lost in transition'. In the words of European critical scholar Petrić (2019: 266), "redistribution to achieve environmental justice hurts" and there is a need for a 'normative awakening' to effectively pursue a truly *just transition* in Europe.

7.1   Future research avenues

My empirical focus on the selected strategic policy documents did not address the political processes surrounding their emergence, or the broader EU adaptation landscape. The analysis also omitted parallel national and international processes within the IPCC context that may have influenced the EU's policymaking. This wider context in which the European discourse is intertwined requires more detailed empirical investigation. In future research, to further substantiate the findings and obtain richer analytical information, semi-structured expert interviews with EU officials on climate policy could be conducted with officials working at DG CLIMA, DG ENVI, and the EEA, as the constitute key actors in climate adaptation and bridge the gap between research and policymaking.

Longitudinal explorations regarding how climate justice concerns in adaptation are impacted over time would also be interesting for understanding the impacts of diverse policy spectrums (Juhola et al, 2022). Future analyses should also be executed on a larger document sample concerning other relevant EU policy areas such as food and energy, as well as on all MSs that possess a NAS. With these additional elements analysed, the consistency of the policy discourse could be assessed with regards to enabling a *just transition* and more substantive insights into the current adaptation setting could be generated. Consequently, a more holistic

mapping of the justice framings aross the selected EU policy documents can be achieved, leading to a more holistic discursive analysis of how diverse European countries are impacted by injustices. Finally, a more fruitful analysis would be to investigate country performance against the EGD, EPSR and AS headline indicators in order to obtain a more accurate picture of justice implementation (Climate Adapt, 2023).

7.2 Research significance and normative implications for European climate justice

Acknowledging the methodological limitations of taking a concentrated sample of three policy documents to examine the EU's approach to adaptation, the findings make conceptually and empirically important contributions to just adaptation scholarship. By shedding light on the political and normative discourses embedded in the policies, the analysis opened the grounds for a critical evaluation of the EU's shifting approach to adaptation. This discursive shift is particularly relevant in a congested period when climate change responses attempt to 'escape' politics (Remling, 2018: 492). The climate justice analysis therefore provided a useful normative lens for the assessment of existing adaptation policy norms in Europe (Petrić, 2019: 263).

   The significance of this thesis was to raise awareness towards this research niche that is currently evolving and to provide a normative justice assessment of the EU's climate adaptation policy discourse through generating an empirical framework for the evaluation of *just transitions* in Europe and problematizing the EU's normative power discourse. The analysis of justice in adaptation illustrated the importance of monitoring adaptation in Europe (Juhola et al, 2022: 617). Reflecting on this research journey, it became evident that there is a need to better integrate justice considerations into policymaking through rigid indicators (Lager et al, 2021). Overall, the method of CDA was significant in generating critical discussions regarding the normative paradoxes within EU policymaking, but however lacked the ability to generate solutions to these challenges, which deems unlikely that the EU will transform its climate adaptation discourse in the near future (Eckert and Kovaleska, 2021: 18). In doing this, it contributed to the formulation of an innovative approach to adaptation monitoring in the EU, through highlighting the importance of Manners (2002) NPA in explaining the nuances of the EU as a multi-level climate actor, by adding an empirical and innovative justice dimension to the North-South cleavages in Europe. The theory of *climate justice* contributed to interrogating the EU's presumed role as norm-setter in climate politics through assessing the implications of its contribution for adaptation in pursuit of a value-based order, advancing scholarly thinking on EU climate actorness.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A

EEA Member States	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Austria													*		
Belgium															
Bulgaria															
Croatia (¹)															
Cyprus															
Czechia															
Denmark															
Estonia															
Finland										*					
France															
Germany											*				
Greece (²)															
Hungary (³)														*	
Ireland (⁴)															*
Italy															
Latvia (⁵)															
Lithuania															
Luxembourg														*	
Malta (⁶)															
Netherlands (⁷)												*			
Poland															
Portugal											*				
Romania												*			
Slovakia														*	
Slovenia															
Spain															
Sweden (⁸)														*	
United Kingdom															
Iceland															
Liechtenstein															
Norway															
Switzerland															
Turkey															

Legend:
- No adaptation policy adopted
- National adaptation strategy (NAS) adopted
- NAS and national adaptation plan (NAP) adopted
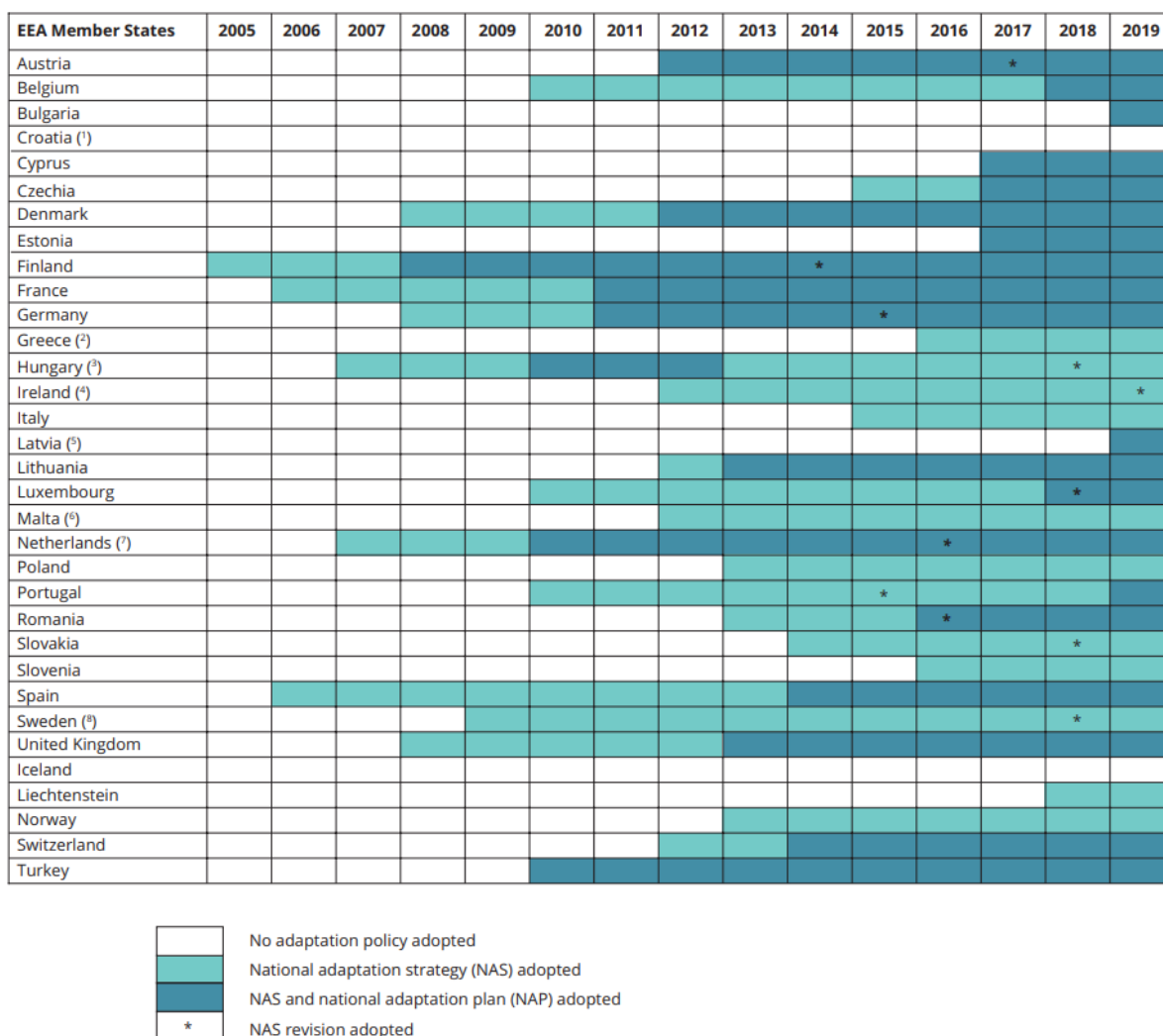- * NAS revision adopted

Figure 6. Overview of evolution of national adaptation strategies by EU MSs (EEA, 2018: 21).

9.2   Appendix B

Figure 7. North-South Divide in Europe on climate adaptation impacts (Isoard, 2011: 52).

9.3   Appendix C

Table 3. Detailed overview of qualitative scoring of EU level policy documents.

EU LEVEL				
Justice Dimensions	**Guiding Indicators for CDA (Juhola et al, 2022: 612-613)**	AS	EPSR	EGD
Distributional justice	1. A risk assessment is conducted within the strategy	1	0	1
	2. There is a process of identifying vulnerable groups	1	1	1
	3. There is a process that assesses the distribution of benefits from adaptation and how adaptation costs are divided	2	1	1
	4. The strategy identifies the possibility of the distribution of negative impacts (e.g. maladaptation)	2	1	1
	Total score	*6*	*3*	*4*
Recognition justice	1. Relevant stakeholders are identified in policy preparation, decisions, and implementation	1	1	0
	2. Different worldviews and understandings are recognised in the formulation of the policy instrument	0	1	0
	3. There is consideration of vulnerable or marginalised groups	1	2	1
	4. There is consideration of the rights of animals or nature	0	0	1
	Total score	*2*	*4*	*2*
Procedural justice	1. The policy details the possibilities for the key target groups to participate in the planning of the policy	1	1	0
	2. The policy introduces procedures for multi-scale governance	1	1	1
	3. The policy introduces diverse participatory procedural measures and capacity-building	0	1	1
	4. The adaptation strategy has a structured plan for participation in the implementation and evaluation of the strategy	1	0	1
	Total score	*3*	*3*	*3*

Summative Table of Qualitative Scoring at EU level			
Climate Justice Dimensions	AS (2021)	EGD (2019)	EPSR (2021)
Procedural Justice	4	4	3
Distributional Justice	6	3	4
Recognition Justice	2	4	2

9.4 Appendix D

Table 4. Detailed overview of qualitative scoring of national level policy documents.

NATIONAL LEVEL			
Justice Dimensions	*Guiding Questions for CDA (Juhola et al, 2022: 612-613)*	*GR*	*SW*
Distributional justice	1. A risk assessment is conducted within the strategy	0	0
	2. There is a process of identifying vulnerable groups	1	1
	3. There is a process that assesses the distribution of benefits from adaptation and how adaptation costs are divided	0	1
	4. The strategy identifies the possibility of the distribution of negative impacts (e.g. maladaptation)	0	0
	Total score	*1*	*2*
Recognition justice	1. Relevant stakeholders are identified in policy preparation, decisions, and implementation	1	1
	2.		
	3. Different worldviews and understandings are recognised in the formulation of the policy instrument	0	0
	4. There is consideration of vulnerable or marginalised groups	1	1
	5. There is consideration of the rights of animals or nature	0	1
	Total score	*2*	*3*
Procedural justice	1. The policy details the possibilities for the key target groups to participate in the planning of the policy	1	1
	2. The policy introduces procedures for multi-scale governance	1	1
	3. The policy introduces diverse participatory procedural measures and capacity-building	1	0
	4. The adaptation strategy has a structured plan for participation in the implementation and evaluation of the strategy	0	0
	Total score	*3*	*2*

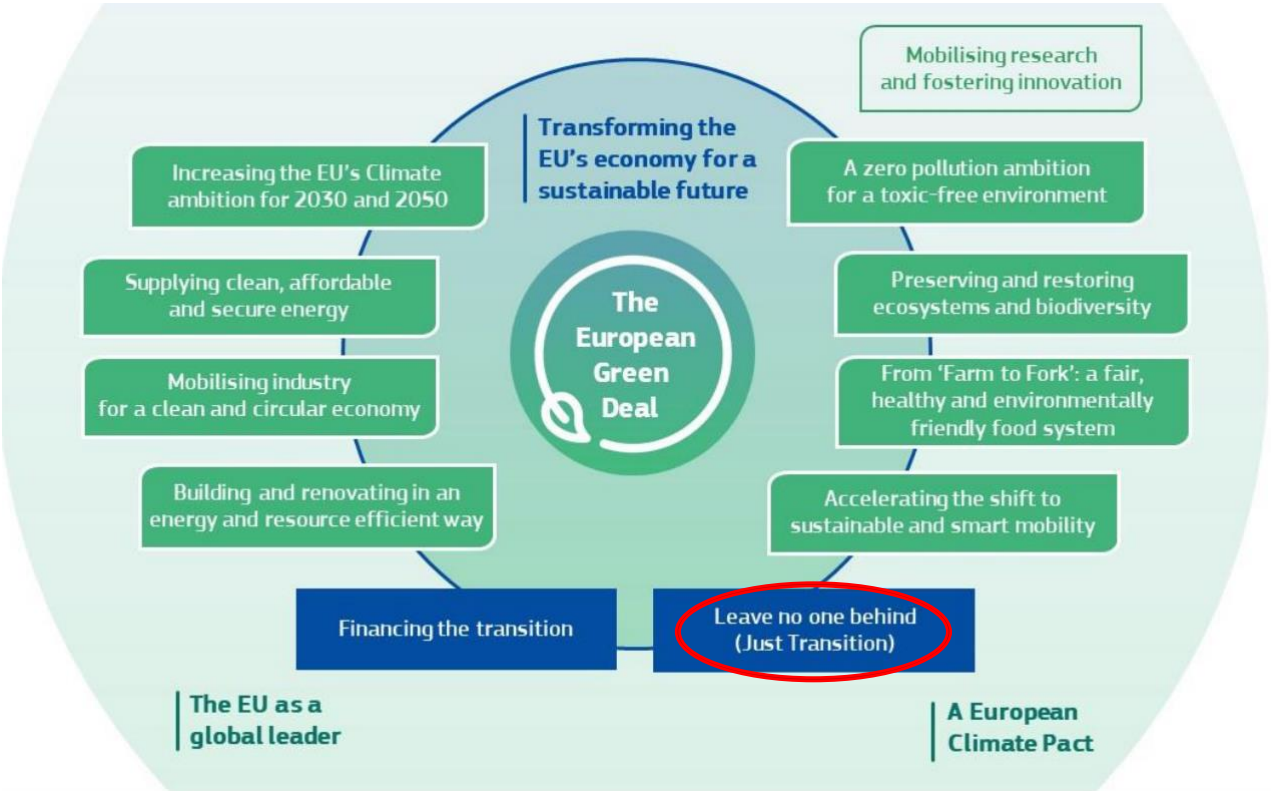| Summative Table of Qualitative Scoring National Level		
Climate Justice Dimensions	**Greece (EU South)**	**Sweden (EU North)**
Procedural Justice	3	2
Distributional Justice	1	5
Recognition Justice	2	3

9.5 Appendix E

Figure 8. The roadmap of the European Green Deal depicting the inception of just transitions (EC, 2019: 4).