

Book review

Post Carbon Inclusion: Transition Built on Justice

Edited by Ralph Horne, Aimee Ambrose, Gordon Walker and Anitra Nelson
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The climate crisis is a global issue that has increasingly dominated public, policy and academic debate in recent decades. Much of the recent debate has focussed on how the transition from carbon to post-carbon economies can take place and what a 'just' transition could look like. Just transition refers to an overarching debate about how economic systems can transition to more sustainable alternatives that are inherently fairer or more just than our current carbon economy. A key part of the debate also concerns how both the responsibilities and benefits of a post-carbon world can be shared more equally. While the idea of a just transition can trace its origins to the North American union movement in the 1970s, it is only in the context of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement that the idea became mainstreamed in intergovernmental thinking and contemporary policy debate (Hizliok & Scheer, 2024). Key themes for just transition scholars include issues such as the relationship between developed and developing economies, the relationship between workers and corporations, and the way that society interacts with modern economic systems.

Post Carbon Inclusion is an edited volume that looks to provide new conceptual and empirical insight into some of the key issues that stem from the transition to a post-carbon world. In doing this, it also provides illustrative examples of what a just transition could look like. The collection pays specific attention to the problems of addressing inequality through the post-carbon transition, with a key focus on some of the more underexplored areas within the academic literature. This includes areas such as challenging high consumption and debates on degrowth. Two overarching questions guide the exploration of the varied transition themes presented in the edited volume: (1) how can efforts to respond to the climate crisis be made more sufficient? and (2) to what extent can future action promote justice and inclusion? The book responds to these questions through a tapestry of conceptual contributions and varied case studies that gather insights from across different policy areas and places. These contributions both explore the factors holding back more sufficient and just action and provide novel insights into what more ambitious and equitable responses could look like.

Post Carbon Inclusion explores a diverse range of topics in relation to a just transition. This includes more conceptual topics such as degrowth, as well as specific policy areas such as recycling, housing and energy. Alongside this, there is a mix of case study insights drawn predominantly from examples in Western Europe and Australia. Despite the range of topics explored, there is a strong cohesiveness throughout the book that helps to tie these disparate policy themes and case studies together. The bringing of these contributions together helps build up a collective picture of how a just transition might best be realised through a more radical post-carbon transition.

A key strength of *Post Carbon Inclusion* is the breadth of insights that the editors have pulled together. Both theoretically and empirically, the book provides a critical reflection against which contemporary climate action and inaction takes place. These insights, although in many ways diverse in terms of their focus on specific places or sustainability themes, broadly align and reinforce the four key premises that run through the book. First, that rapid decarbonisation and radical responses to the climate crisis are necessary. Second, that inequalities are worsening and are likely to be exacerbated by the climate crisis. Third, that attempts to decarbonise and tackle inequalities are rarely joined up. Fourth, that now is an important time to revisit post-carbon inclusion agendas and to critically evaluate ways forward. The edited works collectively engage with and further substantiates these core premises.

Every chapter of *Post Carbon Inclusion* engages with the core themes of inclusion, justice and alternative responses to the status-quo that defines current climate action. Chapters 5 and 11 offer particularly thought-provoking challenges to the mainstream paradigm of climate action by challenging the notion that just climate action can occur without addressing the tendency of economic systems to promote high consumption. These insights connect to recent debates in political economy that critically challenge the possibility of developing truly inclusive transitions through a neoliberal economic paradigm. This effective linkage allows the book to complement and add to the growing literature that is helping to establish alternative paradigms and solutions. For example, the work of Eckersley (2020) that explores greening states or recent scholarship that looks at the application of energy policy in Europe (Vezzoni, 2023).

Elsewhere, the book provides novel solutions to more specific policy areas. For example, Chapter 6 – *Housing Narratives for Post-Carbon Inclusive Societies* – makes a compelling argument for creating new housing narratives that can help support and develop novel degrowth policy agendas that both enable the rapid decarbonisation of society and reduce economic financialisation. Many of the contributions in the book successfully extrapolate more general lessons for a just transition from their specific areas of focus. For example, the policy challenge inherent in retrofitting homes that is discussed in Chapter 12 also tells us about how we might design more inclusive policy solutions in other areas through a greater focus on social practices.

It should be noted that *Post Carbon Inclusion* does not include contributions that sit outside traditional Western or Anglo-sphere polities. This absence is acknowledged by the editors, as are the implications it might have on the collection's ability to challenge some of the disparities that exist in the global political economy. While this absence does not significantly undermine the broader points on inclusion and equality that the book makes, it does mean some key insights might be missed in the book. For example, the lessons that might be learned from other societies or alternative visions for the global economy beyond the Western world. These missed insights might have provided alternative perspectives as to how the post-carbon transition can both accelerate climate action and address inequality. This absence also leaves aside one of the key issues present in the current just transition debate: the ongoing and historical inequalities inflicted by Western countries through colonialism that exacerbate both the climate crisis

and global inequality (see for example Perry, 2023). As with any edited book, it is not possible to consider all insights and this shortcoming does not detract from the core messages of the book and the ability of its contributions to advocate for radical climate action to address inequalities.

The conclusions of *Post Carbon Inclusion* provide several reflections that are relevant to policymakers. Two of these are particularly pertinent to current debates on the climate and a just transition. First, the importance of designing more ambitious and effective policy that actively includes people as we transition to a post-carbon economy. Second, the need for equity to be the guiding principle for policymakers when considering how they design policy responses in specific areas. The book's contributions support these conclusions by providing new evidence and insights as to how some of the more structural barriers to radical and inclusive climate action can be overcome, as well as how specific policy areas can be renewed and reinvigorated to help ensure a just transition. Overall, *Post Carbon Inclusion* offers innovative perspectives that can help support policymakers to develop a just transition. The book also enriches academic debate and adds new insight on what a just transition could look like in different places, as well as what it might look like in different policy areas.

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