

# Exploring public perceptions and implications for a Just Transition to Net Zero

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# Decarbonization

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To limit warming to 1.5 degree C, reducing CO2 emissions by 45 % from 2010 levels by 2030 and zero emissions is urgent (IPCC, 2018)

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Supply side: reduce emissions from energy production & increase energy produced from renewable resources in the energy portfolio

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Ireland is taking necessary steps towards meeting emission goals; Climate Action Plan 2019 states 70% energy from renewables by 2030; net zero by 2050

## Changes in energy production in the Irish Midlands

- An Bord Pleanála decision (July 2019) refusing ESB to operate the West Offaly power plant and ash disposal at Derrylahan; closure of peat-fueled electricity
- Bord na Móna close 17 bogs by 2020 and remaining 45 within 7 years
- Affecting how workers and community members live, work, raise families and make meaning of life



## Changes in energy production in the Midlands

- Many of these bogs can be used for developing wind farm
- For example, Derryadd Wind Farm in County Longford
- Development of 24 wind turbines; blade tip height of 185 meters
- Proposed distance to the nearest house is 750 meters

Source: [www.derryaddwindfarm.ie/the-project/](http://www.derryaddwindfarm.ie/the-project/)



# Our study

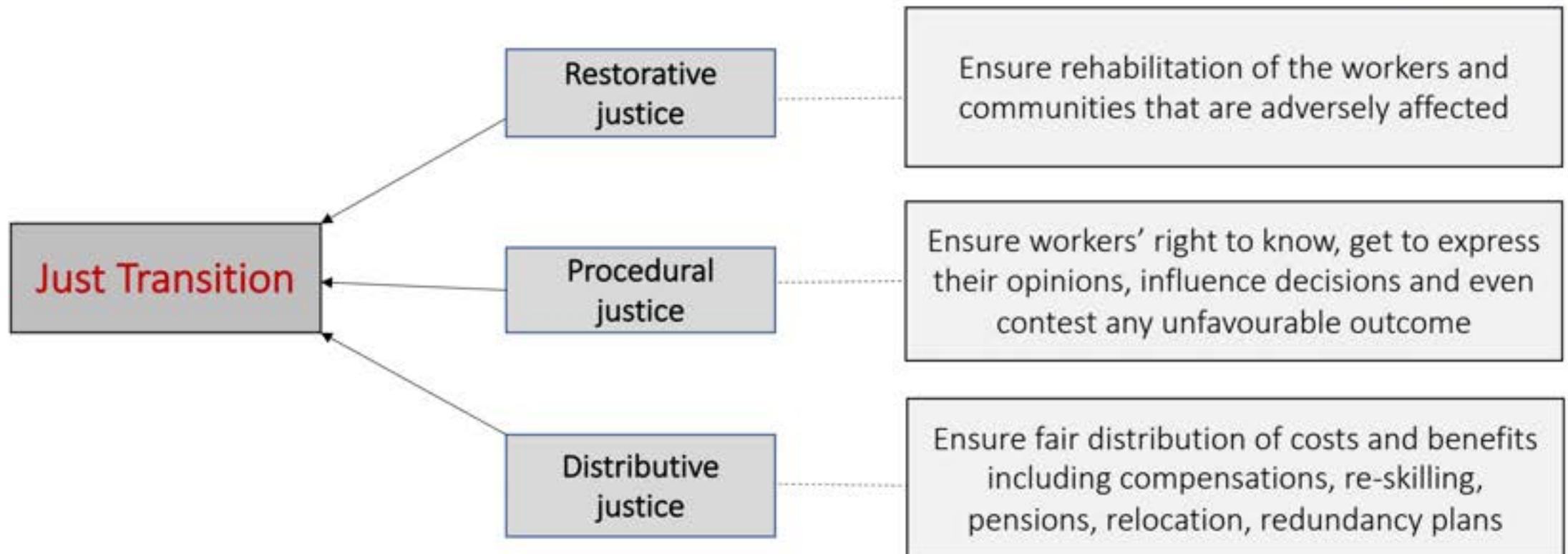
## Research question

- How do host/ frontline communities perceive the impacts of energy developments in the area?
  - Closure of Bord na Móna peat production
  - Wind farms on local Bord na Móna bog lands and other surrounding areas

**Finding answers can inform Just Transition**



# Tenets of justice in **Just Transition**



McCauley et al., 2013

Restorative, procedural and distributive justice are inter-connected and interlinked; one cannot be achieved without the others



## What we did (Research Methods)

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in 2019-2020

- Door-to-door surveys in the community of Lanesborough, Co. Longford (a community of Lough Ree Power plant, surrounded by BnM bogs, close to Derryadd Wind Farm)
- Semi-structured interviews with community leaders, BnM workers and people living close to the Derryadd Wind Farm
- Participant observations attending election rallies and public conferences on Just Transitions in the Midlands
- Follow-up phone interviews in 2021; tracking social media and newspaper articles over two years



Results

# Distributive, procedural, & restorative justice

- Some evidence of **Distributive justice** evident in the BnM's and Government plans for a Just Transition; reskilling and retraining programs; investment in the region under the Just Transition plans for innovative businesses
- Some evidence of **Procedural justice** evident in the formation of the Just Transition commission who had repeated sessions with relevant actors in the region and informed government
- Some evidence of **Restorative justice** evident in government more than 47 projects in the Midlands (€27.8 million) under the Just Transition plans to assist communities transitioning out of peat harvesting; €108 million for [Bord na Móna's large-scale peatlands restoration project](#)

# Perceptions of Distributive (in)Justice

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- Not all stakeholder concerns were addressed; pensioners were left out
- Though training programs were provided, not tailormade for workers needs or interest. Lifelong skills needed to unlearnt and new skills learnt
- No local jobs created to employ the workers; projects funded under the Just Transition fund may not benefit peat workers with employment due to the nature of the projects
- No jobs locally and workers various reasons for immobility: age, family ties, kinship, sense of community, sense of self, identity

*“There's a lot of training going on ... there's people doing courses. It doesn't make sense. I was offered a course that I could have gone and done welding courses. I've welded okay for 40 years. Why would I need to go and do anymore? ... because this money is coming in, I think that you can spend it on training people. You go for a couple of days course; it's not adequate training. It just looks good, and you can say, look, we're providing training.”*

(Interviewee B018)



## Perceptions of Procedural (in)Justice

- Closure of peat industry sudden, too soon, no alternative plans
- Lack of time to plan to consult adequately with workers; sparse social dialoguing; no consensus
- Lot of uncertainties due to the lack of dialogue and transparency
- Pandemic made things more difficult; training sessions were stopped midway; workers still unaware about how Just Transition funds would benefit them ; procedural (in)justice high

*“I think it’s the level of frustration that people like myself feel as trade union representatives is the lack of engagement, real engagement, with people who represent the workforce. And particularly the lack of engagement with the company... ESB announced the closure of the stations in November, we’re three months down the road now, and we’ve had no real engagement with the company around what we believe a Just Transition should look like”*

Interviewee B027

# Restorative justice

- BNM Transition Plan suggest that workers can be employed in the wind energy division;
  - workers were apprehensive of jobs in renewable sector as jobs are limited, mostly maintenance jobs as manufacturing is not local;
  - inadequacy of skills;
  - inadequacy in industrial policies to ensure major local alternatives of BNM;
  - peripheralization due to unequal regional development
- Bog rehabilitation jobs were not adequate; may not be as well-paying, secure or long term as peat extraction

# Just Transition: paper talk?

*“I would have very little faith in the Just Transition, to be honest. That’s my honest opinion. The Just Transition is really a political thing. It’s politicised and it’s all a game, is my honest opinion. Politicians don’t want negative PR and it’s about soundbites. It’s soundbites for the politicians to cover up these little happenings at the moment until it’s done and dusted. I guarantee you that Just Transition will be a bygone word here in about two years’ time, or three years’ time.”*

Interviewee B024



Contestations around wind energy projects

*“I said, no matter what you get, you will never replace this industry (BNM). That's my view. Okay, the other thing, I suppose, wind. There is scope for wind, but it's not going to create employment. Solar, there is scope for that as well, but it's not going to create long-term, sustainable employment. I don't know, it's going to be very hard to replace employment in the Midlands”*

Interviewee B018

# Conclusion

- Just Transition should guarantee justice for workers in the peat industry
- Rural communities that host electricity project should not be neglected in Just Transition discourses; align projects with community identity and ensure participation
- Use of fair and just procedures; transparency
- Free, prior and informed consent; create and respect community ability to say **NO**
- **Regenerative Rural Development** based on Equality, Fairness, Participatory Democracy, Reciprocity, Respect can be a solution

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