

“Building a Path to a Just Energy Transformation of Rural Areas. Social and Spatial Aspects”

The transition to renewable energy is a crucial step in addressing climate change, but its impact on rural communities remains underexplored. My research focuses on the social and spatial dimensions of a just energy transition in rural areas, with a comparative analysis of Poland and Scotland.

This study aims to bridge the gap in existing literature, which predominantly examines coal regions, by analyzing how rural communities perceive and experience the energy transition. The project is guided by the framework of good governance, assessing the role of local authorities in ensuring fairness, inclusivity, and responsiveness in the transition process. The research will explore key dimensions of justice, including social, environmental, and systemic justice, to determine how policies and governance structures can facilitate equitable energy transformation.

The methodology combines quantitative (analysis of statistical data on rural energy transitions) and qualitative approaches (semi-structured interviews with local decision-makers, members of non-governmental organizations, activists). The case studies focus on rural areas in north-east Scotland (primarily Aberdeenshire), and central-western Poland (primarily Wielkopolskie), providing insights into contrasting socio-political and historical contexts. This comparative approach allows for the identification of best practices that can inform policy recommendations across different governance models.

The findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how rural areas can navigate energy transitions without exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities. The study seeks to provide actionable insights for policymakers, ensuring that rural communities are not marginalized but actively involved in shaping their sustainable futures.

By aligning with the Sustainability, Innovation, and Regional Development theme of the ERSa Summer School, this research underscores the need for innovative governance approaches that empower local communities and support equitable regional development in the context of climate action.