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SPECIAL ISSUE

The Politics and Policies of Energy Transition: Territorial Conflicts and Asymmetries between Centres and Peripheries

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CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The energy transition – understood as the shift from a society centred on the use of fossil fuels to renewable or low-carbon energy sources – is now a central theme in public and political debate. Energy policies are intertwined with economic, security and environmental issues. In particular, the worsening climate crisis has made the energy transition an imperative – at least formally declared – at both international and European level. At the same time, however, the proliferation of war scenarios and the instability characterising international relations have intensified states' respective concerns regarding supply sources and, ultimately, energy and economic security. The energy transition is therefore proving to be a complex process, in which differing interests and needs often clash, involving various levels of government – international, European, national, regional and local. The complexity of the transition is also linked to the inequalities that may arise in the distribution of costs and benefits, in decision-making processes and in the recognition of local communities' claims, raising issues of distributive, procedural and recognition justice.

Firstly, asymmetries arise from exclusion from the benefits of the transition. This is the case of geographical areas and sectors of the labour market trapped in 'carbon lock-in', or of social groups experiencing forms of energy poverty. Secondly, the installation of renewable energy technologies requires large portions of land and is frequently resisted by local communities. Such resistance has been regarded as an expression of a 'NIMBY' syndrome, and many studies have sought to identify the factors that might foster social acceptance. More recent research, however, has highlighted the complexity of these conflicts, emphasising that the areas concerned are often economically marginalised and with high levels of depopulation; this makes them more attractive to investment by large multinational corporations. From this perspective, processes of extractivism (of land, raw materials and the landscape) are set in motion that do not translate into tangible benefits for local populations, thereby perpetuating the socio-spatial asymmetries of the fossil fuel era.

From another perspective, however, the transition can also be an opportunity to rethink models of energy production and consumption, as in the case, for example, of energy communities. These contribute to decentralising energy production and to strengthening the autonomy of local communities. Here too, however, the question arises as to who is driving the initiative, what relationships are established between the public and private spheres, and who is included and who is excluded.

In this special issue, we intend to examine the dynamics outlined above by focusing on centre-periphery relations, exploring both territorial aspects and the distribution of economic resources

and power. Specifically, the aim is to explore how energy policies and the energy transition intertwine and interact with the socio-economic and spatial asymmetries of contemporary capitalist societies, and whether and how they reproduce them.
We aim to explore these dynamics in Italy, a Mediterranean country at the forefront of climate change, that plays a key role in the implementation of the European Union energy and climate strategies. Italy has vast potential in terms of renewable energy development but faces issues related to the uneven geographic distribution of such potential, the resistance of fossil fuel incumbents, ambiguous central government policies and historic legacies of extractive and unequal policies towards the South and other marginalised areas. The South, as well as the inner and economically marginalised areas of the country – which suffer from long-standing and deep-rooted structural weaknesses in welfare and essential public services – suffer most from the repercussions of the energy crisis and are, at the same time, called upon to contribute to the national energy transition strategy by hosting most large-scale renewable energy projects. In these areas, therefore, the conflicts arising around energy issues are intertwined with broader economic and social problems embedded in the asymmetries of the relationships between the centres and the peripheries. Last but not least, Italy is engaged in international energy relations (pertaining to energy policy-making, procurement and investments) that may imply North-South or other spatial asymmetries with regard to Northern Europe or the Global South.

We invite abstracts of maximum 250 words focusing on the politics of centre-periphery relations in the energy transition in Italy. Proposals comparing the Italian case with international case studies are also welcome. Beyond the North-South divide, centre-periphery relations can also be explored through the dichotomies of coasts-inner regions, city-rural areas, and urban centre-periphery, as well as global asymmetries in which Italy is engaged.
Papers may take either a theoretical or an empirical approach and may focus on energy transition policies, conflicts arising from the introduction of renewable technologies, or socio-economic and labour issues resulting from the transition or the lack of transition.

Abstracts (maximum 250 words) should be sent to giulio.citroni@unical.it, marco.siddi@unica.it and valeria.tarditi@unical.it by 1 December 2026.

Authors will be notified of the outcome by 15 December 2026.
Full manuscripts must be submitted through the journal's online platform by 15 April 2027, and publication of the special issue is expected in autumn 2027.