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CASE STUDY

REVISED From marginalization to transformation: Examining structural injustices and policy impacts on Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities

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Abstract

This study explores the role of conflict, suffering, and structural injustices in driving transformative processes within Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities, emphasizing how these experiences challenge consensus-driven approaches to social change. By analyzing systemic inequalities and power struggles through critical theory frameworks, the study highlights the importance of addressing conflict as a catalyst for transformation in the face of global challenges like climate change and the Capitalocene. The research draws on policy reviews and academic literature to examine the intersection of social exclusion, poverty, and environmental justice, revealing the limitations of current 'just transition' policies. The findings underscore that conflict and inequality must be acknowledged and addressed to achieve meaningful, justice-oriented transitions, particularly in marginalized communities.

Keywords

conflict-driven transformation, environmental justice, marginalized communities, power dynamics, socioeconomic exclusion, sustainable transitions

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Just Transition policies in Albania and similar contexts are often framed in terms of inclusivity and fairness. However, empirical evidence from policy implementation consistently shows a gap between formal commitments and actual outcomes for marginalized groups (European Commission, 2018; Council of Europe, 2020).

For instance, Albania's National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians (2015–2020) includes objectives related to education, employment, and housing. However, monitoring reports indicate persistent disparities in all three areas, particularly in access to formal employment and educational retention (European Commission, 2018).

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

1. Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that explores conflict as a key driver of social and environmental transformation. By centering on the experiences of Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities, it reveals the broader implications of conflict-driven change within the context of climate justice and systemic inequality. Through a critical review of academic literature and policy documents, and by linking local struggles to global challenges, the article underscores the necessity of embedding conflict into governance and policy frameworks as a catalyst for meaningful and lasting transformation.

Transformation processes are often framed within dominant narratives of consensus, harmony and prosperity, emphasizing smooth transitions toward more sustainable and equitable futures (Riedy & Waddock, 2022). However, such models frequently overlook the persistent conflicts, suffering and inequalities that shape the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Joseph et al., 2021; Wittmer, 2020). Scholars argue that transformative social processes must directly engage with deeply ingrained inequalities and recognize that conflict and suffering are not merely obstacles but integral forces driving meaningful change (August & Westphal, 2024; Boström et al., 2018; Bloomfield et al., 2006; Skrimizea et al., 2020; Wittmer, 2020).

Recent research highlights the transformative potential of conflict in addressing climate change and social inequalities. Ciplet and Harrison (2020) identify tensions between sustainability goals and justice concerns, emphasizing the need for inclusive governance processes. Nursey-Bray (2016) calls for a fundamental shift in understanding conflict, not as a cause-outcome relationship but as a dynamic force driving innovation and just adaptive governance. This perspective becomes particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dervishi et al., 2021), which has both exacerbated existing inequalities for Roma and Egyptian communities and exposed the tensions between dominant transitional justice narratives and the often-overlooked, ongoing struggles of these marginalized groups (Dervishi et al., 2024). In Albania, recent historical developments and the broader political context further illuminate these hidden conflicts, revealing how systemic exclusion persists despite formal justice frameworks. Understanding these dynamics offers insight into how crises like COVID-19 amplify pre-existing vulnerabilities while simultaneously creating potential spaces for adaptive governance and systemic reform (Council of Europe Office in Tirana, 2025).

Krause (2018) explores transformative approaches to climate change, emphasizing the importance of eco-social policies that prioritize sustainable and just outcomes. These approaches recognize that conflict, whether socio-political or environmental, can catalyze systemic change rather than merely being a challenge to overcome. Similarly, Valero et al. (2024) found that community-led initiatives and inclusive actions promote long-term resilience, illustrating how conflict-driven inequalities can inspire grassroots mobilization and institutional adaptation. In the context of Roma and Egyptian communities, these perspectives highlight how marginalized groups, despite facing structural injustices, actively engage in adaptive governance and resistance. By acknowledging the role of hidden conflicts—such as systemic discrimination, exclusion from public services, educational segregation, stigmatizing cultural norms, and the lack of genuine political representation—in shaping the experiences of Roma and Egyptian communities, justice mechanisms can shift from reactive measures to proactive strategies that foster meaningful, conflict-driven transformation. These conflicts often remain obscured within dominant narratives, bureaucratic procedures, and development rhetoric, yet they significantly influence the ongoing marginalization and exclusion of these groups.

Collectively, these studies underscore the urgency of conflict-driven transformation that directly addresses systemic inequalities and promotes climate justice, particularly for marginalized communities (Ciplet & Harrison, 2020; Nursey-Bray, 2016; Valero et al., 2024; Krause, 2018). The relevance of conflict and suffering becomes particularly pronounced in contexts marked by systemic discrimination and social exclusion (Stewart et al., 2006).

By examining these issues, this paper outlines the conceptual framework of conflict-driven transformation and its relevance to transitional justice. It then details the methodological rationale behind the case study selection, followed by an in-depth analysis of each case. The concluding section reflects on the broader implications for justice frameworks and policy interventions, emphasizing the need for adaptive governance that integrates conflict as a force for innovation and systemic change.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach based on the analysis of documents. Rather than collecting primary data, it draws on existing sources to explore how conflict, structural inequality, and processes of transformation are understood in relation to Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania. The analysis is informed by the theoretical framework outlined in the paper, which guides both the selection of materials and their interpretation.

2.2 Selection of sources

The study focuses on sources that are directly relevant to the Albanian context or to similar regional dynamics. These include academic publications, policy documents, and reports produced by national and international institutions. Priority was given to materials that address issues such as social exclusion, inequality, governance, and Just Transition policies.

Sources that were purely descriptive, lacked analytical depth, or were not clearly connected to the research focus were not included. This helped ensure that the analysis is grounded in material that is both relevant and informative.

2.3 Data collection strategy

A purposive approach was used to identify key sources. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the goal was to select materials that are particularly relevant for understanding the structural dynamics under study.

Sources were identified through searches in academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, as well as through the review of institutional and policy documents from organizations such as the European Commission and UNDP. In addition, reference lists of key publications were used to locate further relevant studies.

Most of the sources consulted were published between 2010 and 2024, in order to reflect current developments, while earlier works were included where necessary to provide historical context.

2.4 Analytical approach

The analysis combines thematic reading with elements of critical discourse analysis. First, the material was reviewed to identify recurring themes, particularly in relation to patterns of inequality, policy approaches, and forms of conflict and resistance.

At the same time, attention was paid to how key issues—such as inclusion, marginalization, and “Just Transition”—are framed in policy and institutional narratives. This made it possible to examine not only what is said, but also how certain perspectives are emphasized or overlooked.

The process was iterative, involving repeated reading and refinement of themes. Throughout, the theoretical framework served as a guide, ensuring that the analysis moves beyond description and engages with broader questions of power, conflict, and structural inequality.

2.5 Use of case examples

To strengthen the connection between theory and empirical reality, the study draws on selected examples, including the European Court of Human Rights ruling on school segregation and the protests that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These cases were not chosen to provide a comprehensive account, but rather to illustrate how structural inequalities become visible and contested in practice. They serve as concrete entry points for understanding how conflict operates within the broader processes discussed in the paper.

2.6 Rigor and limitations

Several steps were taken to ensure the credibility of the analysis, including the use of clearly defined selection criteria and the combination of different types of sources (academic, policy, and institutional). The consistent use of the theoretical framework also helps maintain coherence across the analysis.

At the same time, the study has limitations. It relies entirely on secondary data and does not include primary research or direct accounts from community members. In addition, the purposive selection of sources means that the analysis is not exhaustive. However, these choices are consistent with the aim of the paper, which is to provide a theory-informed interpretation rather than a comprehensive empirical study.

3. Theoretical framework

This article develops a theoretical framework that brings conflict theory, agonistic pluralism, and the Capitalocene into a complementary and analytically distinct relationship, in order to assess how transformation processes can address deep-rooted inequalities and exclusions. Rather than treating these approaches as parallel discussions, the framework assigns each a specific role: conflict theory explains the structural production of inequality, agonistic pluralism conceptualizes the democratic expression of conflict, and the Capitalocene situates both within a broader critique of capitalist development.

While these perspectives have individually contributed to understandings of societal change, their combined application to just transition debates in contexts of persistent marginalization remains limited. This article addresses this gap by proposing a conflict-driven and empirically grounded interpretation of just transition.

At its core, conflict theory emphasizes that societal transformation emerges through confrontation with structural inequalities and power asymmetries. Rooted in Marxist thought, it positions conflict as not only inevitable but necessary for challenging dominant institutions and ideologies. Rather than viewing conflict as a breakdown of order, it understands it as a revealing force—exposing systemic failures, making injustice visible, and enabling transformative possibility (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018; Avelino, 2017; Avelino et al., 2023). In the Albanian context, this perspective helps explain how persistent disparities in education, employment, and housing among Roma and Egyptian communities are not accidental, but structurally produced and maintained over time.

This perspective also aligns with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, where social order is maintained through the suppression of dissent and the construction of a shared narrative of consensus (Gramsci, 1971; Lears, 1985). From this standpoint, consensus-driven inclusion policies can be interpreted not as neutral solutions, but as mechanisms that stabilize existing power relations by depoliticizing inequality. Transformation therefore requires not only redistribution, but also the politicisation of dissent and the visibility of marginalized claims.

Building on this, Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism provides a framework for understanding how conflict can be productively incorporated into democratic processes. Against deliberative models that prioritize rational consensus.

Mouffe argues that democracy thrives when antagonism is transformed into agonism—a condition in which conflicting groups engage as legitimate adversaries (Mouffe, 2005).

This perspective is particularly relevant in the Albanian case, where instances such as the European Court of Human Rights ruling on school segregation and COVID-19-related protests illustrate how marginalized communities actively contest exclusion through legal and political means (Menga, 2017). These cases demonstrate that conflict is not external to democratic systems, but a central mechanism through which excluded groups gain visibility and influence. However, agonistic theory has been criticized for insufficiently addressing the structural and economic conditions that shape participation (August, 2022; Erman, 2009).

It often treats political contestation in relative isolation from material inequalities (Mazur-Bubak, 2019). To address this limitation, the present framework incorporates the concept of the Capitalocene, which reintroduces structural political economy into the analysis of conflict and transformation.

The Capitalocene, as developed by Moore (2017), challenges Anthropocene narratives by locating environmental and social crises within the historical logic of capitalism.

This perspective emphasizes that ecological degradation and social exclusion are co-produced through systems of accumulation, exploitation, and dispossession. In the Albanian context, this lens helps explain why Roma and Egyptian communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental risks (e.g., inadequate housing, flooding) while simultaneously excluded from the benefits of sustainability policies. By integrating the Capitalocene, the framework highlights that inequalities are not peripheral but structural outcomes of capitalist development, including those embedded within "green" or "just" transition policies (Fetting, 2020).

It also strengthens agonistic theory by demonstrating that not all conflicts are equally recognized: institutional frameworks often privilege certain forms of participation while marginalizing others, particularly those that challenge dominant economic interests.

Taken together, these three theoretical strands form a coherent and non-redundant analytical framework. Conflict theory identifies how inequalities are produced and reproduced; agonistic pluralism explains how these inequalities become politically contested; and the Capitalocene situates both processes within a broader system of capitalist governance. This integration allows the framework to move beyond abstract theorization and directly engage with empirical realities. Importantly, the framework is not presented as a purely conceptual exercise but as a tool for interpreting empirical dynamics. For example, the ECHR desegregation case can be understood as an agonistic intervention that exposes structural inequalities identified by conflict theory, while also revealing the institutional limits emphasized by the Capitalocene critique. Similarly, COVID-19 protests by Roma and Egyptian communities illustrate how material deprivation (conflict theory) becomes politicized through public contestation (agonistic pluralism), within a context shaped by systemic economic exclusion (Capitalocene).

This framework challenges dominant narratives of just transition that prioritise technocratic consensus or institutional reform without adequately addressing underlying systems of oppression. Instead, it argues for a re-politicisation of transformation—one that recognises the importance of agonistic conflict, engages with structural critique, and centres the voices and struggles of marginalised communities.

By applying this framework to the case of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, the article demonstrates that conflict is not a disruption of transition processes, but a central mechanism through which marginalized groups articulate claims, challenge exclusion, and reshape governance structures.

4. Socioeconomic challenges of Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities

The marginalization of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania is rooted in long-standing historical exclusions.

To better capture the structural continuity of these processes, this section adopts a chronological and path-dependent perspective linking historical conditions to present inequalities. Under the Ottoman Empire, both groups were restricted to stigmatized social and occupational roles (Piasere, 2014), which institutionalized forms of socio-economic exclusion that continue to shape patterns of labor market marginalization today. The communist regime introduced formal integration mechanisms, guaranteeing housing, employment, and education, but these were largely superficial and failed to dismantle systemic prejudice (De Soto et al., 2005). While this period reduced extreme poverty through state provision, it did not eliminate underlying social hierarchies, resulting in fragile inclusion dependent on state structures. The 1990s transition to a market economy deepened these vulnerabilities: state industries collapsed, and many Roma and Egyptians were pushed into informal labor markets and impoverished urban peripheries (UNDP, 2019). This transition represents a critical rupture, where the removal of state guarantees disproportionately affected already marginalized groups, reinforcing cumulative disadvantage across generations.

Despite the adoption of multiple inclusion policies, such as the *National Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2015–2020)* and the *Social Inclusion Policy Document (2021–2025)*, persistent disparities in education, employment, and housing reveal the limitations of consensus-driven governance (Government of Albania, 2021). These frameworks tend to treat inclusion as a technocratic issue solvable through policy design, rather than as a deeply political struggle rooted in power asymmetries (Ciplet & Harrison, 2020; Miconi et al., 2023). Inclusion efforts often prioritize institutional stability and national image (especially in the context of EU accession) over confronting (Council of Europe Office in Tirana, 2025) entrenched social hierarchies. As such, they reflect a consensus model that avoids political conflict, treats marginalization as a management problem, and sidelines the agency of the affected communities.

Education remains a primary site of exclusion. Policies like the *National Action Plan for Integration* have not prevented disproportionately high dropout rates among Roma and Egyptian children (European Commission, 2018; Miconi et al., 2023). Factors such as poverty, bullying, and the absence of culturally responsive pedagogy contribute to their disengagement (Miconi et al., 2021; Dervishi et al., 2022a; UNDP, 2019, 2025a, 2025b). These students often experience school segregation and discrimination practices that persist despite formal inclusion mandates. This outcome reveals that consensus-based reforms, although well-intentioned, fail to address institutional racism and structural barriers (Dervishi et al., 2022b). They often rely on top-down administrative strategies without engaging with the lived realities and demands of Roma and Egyptian families.

Employment prospects for these communities are similarly constrained. Roma and Egyptians are disproportionately concentrated in the informal economy, performing unstable and low-paid work without social protections (UNDP, 2019).

This is not merely a consequence of market forces, but of policy frameworks that have failed to dismantle systemic discrimination in access to formal employment and vocational training (De Soto et al., 2005). Albania's post-socialist economic transition embraced neoliberal growth without redistributive safeguards, exacerbating inequality along racialised and classed lines.

Housing conditions further reflect structural neglect. Many Roma and Egyptian families live in informal settlements lacking secure tenure, sanitation, or legal protection against eviction (Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2014; UNDP, 2019). Housing strategies have largely focused on regularization or relocation, but implementation has been inconsistent, underfunded, and disconnected from community participation. The result is a continued pattern of displacement without redress, often under the guise of urban development (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Again, the consensus-oriented nature of these policies, designed to demonstrate compliance with international standards, tends to paper over deeper power inequalities and fails to involve affected communities in shaping outcomes.

While these inclusion strategies may appear progressive, they reflect a technocratic consensus model that seeks to avoid political confrontation, thereby reinforcing rather than resolving exclusion. The theoretical framework proposed in this article, drawing on agonistic pluralism and critical theories of the Capitalocene, argues that meaningful transformation requires engaging with conflict, not avoiding it. The failure of consensus-based reforms suggests that structural change emerges through struggle, contestation, and the politicization of inequality.

In contrast to the failure of consensus-oriented approaches, recent examples of agonistic interventions demonstrate the political agency of marginalized communities and the potential of conflict to disrupt exclusionary systems. These cases are analytically selected to illustrate how conflict functions as a mechanism linking structural inequality to transformative change.

A landmark instance is the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling on June 1, 2022, in favor of five Roma and Egyptian families who challenged the ethnic segregation of their children at the 'Naim Frashëri' elementary school in Korçë. With support from the European Roma Rights Centre, the families bypassed domestic legal systems and filed the case internationally, claiming a violation of Article 1, Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The ECHR concluded that Albania had failed to take effective desegregation measures and upheld systemic racial discrimination in education (Gazeta Shqiptare, 2022).

This case exemplifies agonistic politics in Chantal Mouffe's sense: political confrontation with state structures becomes a vehicle for democratic renewal. The success of the case lay not only in the ruling itself, whose long-term effects remain to be seen, but in the act of contestation, which disrupted Albania's self-narrative of inclusive governance. It forced the state, and by extension, EU observers, to confront the gap between policy rhetoric and lived experience. In this sense, the case pushed for social change by shifting public discourse and legitimizing Roma and Egyptian claims in international law.

A second example of agonistic mobilisation occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Roma and Egyptian communities organized protests against their exclusion from emergency food aid. While state narratives emphasized universal assistance, protestors revealed that many Roma and Egyptians were systematically left out due to a lack of documentation, discriminatory distribution practices, and bureaucratic inaccessibility (Dervishi et al., 2022b). These actions, although small in scale, succeeded in drawing media attention and pressuring local governments to acknowledge their failure.

These examples, legal action and public protest, show that conflict is not a breakdown of democratic order but a sign of its vitality. Agonistic interventions challenge the myth of neutrality underpinning technocratic inclusion policies and expose the structural violence that such policies obscure. As Albania aspires to join the EU, these conflicts highlight the importance of institutionalizing dissent and recognizing that justice requires more than policy—it requires political confrontation and community-led resistance.

5. The role of conflict and suffering in transformation

Social transformation is often catalyzed by conflict, particularly when marginalized communities confront entrenched inequalities and systemic exclusions. Rather than being interpreted as a breakdown of order, conflict is increasingly understood in critical scholarship as a mechanism through which inequality becomes visible and politically contestable (Fraser, 2018).

One such case is the 2018 evictions in Shkodra, where Roma families were forcibly removed from informal settlements. Local NGOs and community actors responded with a combination of protest and legal advocacy, resulting in temporary

injunctions that suspended parts of the eviction process (Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2014). Empirically, this case demonstrates how institutional recognition of claims can emerge only after public contestation, rather than through administrative procedures alone.

A similar pattern is visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Roma and Egyptian communities experienced disproportionate economic and food insecurity. A contemporaneous report documented severe deprivation, including food shortages among affected households (Kryeziu, 2020). In response, protests in cities such as Fier and Elbasan emerged demanding access to emergency aid.

Importantly, these protests are treated as empirical evidence of political visibility rather than as symbolic acts. They illustrate how suffering becomes politically actionable only when it is publicly articulated, disrupting dominant narratives of universal crisis response.

Across these cases, a consistent empirical pattern emerges: marginalized groups often rely on intermediary actors—NGOs, activist networks, and community organisations—to translate lived suffering into institutional claims. After the 2018 floods, for example, NGOs worked alongside Roma representatives to coordinate emergency relief and educational continuity for displaced children (European Commission, 2018; World Bank, 2019).

Empirically, this indicates that state responses tend to be reactive and short-term, while non-state actors often provide the continuity required for recovery and claim-making.

At the same time, the analysis does not assume that such interventions are sufficient for structural transformation. Rather, they highlight a key limitation observable across cases: while conflict can generate visibility and temporary redress, it does not automatically resolve underlying structural inequalities.

Finally, these empirical patterns intersect with environmental vulnerability. Roma communities are disproportionately affected by flooding and inadequate infrastructure due to their housing conditions. While this is consistent with broader environmental justice literature, in the Albanian case it remains largely absent from policy framing, suggesting a gap between environmental governance and lived exposure.

6. Critical analysis of just transition policies

Just transition has become a prominent policy frame in climate and development governance, yet its application often diverges significantly from the lived realities of marginalized groups (Bueno Patin & Stapper, 2025). While policy discourse frequently emphasizes fairness and inclusivity, the empirical evidence from implementation contexts such as Albania suggests a persistent gap between normative commitments and actual outcomes.

In Albania, the National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptian Integration illustrates this tension. Although the plan includes formal objectives in employment, education, and health, available evaluations indicate limited and uneven implementation, particularly for Roma and Egyptian communities (European Commission, 2018). This reflects a broader pattern in which inclusion is primarily addressed through administrative planning rather than structural transformation of inequality.

Empirical studies and institutional reports consistently highlight persistent disparities in education, employment, and housing. For example, Roma and Egyptian workers remain disproportionately concentrated in informal and precarious employment (UNDP, 2019), while housing insecurity and informal settlements continue to affect many families (UNDP, 2019). These outcomes indicate that policy instruments focused on "integration" have not substantially altered underlying structural conditions.

Disregarded social issues arise from focusing on Just Transitions infrastructures as their primary framework (Butler et al., 2016). This gap remains at the core of Why Toils refuse to acknowledge alongside Schlosberg underlines this matter (2007): "the gap between idealized policy rhetoric and the lived realities of disadvantaged communities." In nearly all cases, women, ethnic minorities or low-income earners advertising adequate social policies face multi-dimensional discrimination due to an insufficient green discourse providing merely timid digits. "Mainstream" does not approach these problems in any reliable manner.

Equally suppressive is trying to implement greener goals-planned obsolescence or change economic structure capitalism parallel within transition focused on socio-environmental growth (Piggot *et al.,* 2019). For example, retraining programs for ex-coal miners often overlook the informal sectors where Roma, Egyptians, and other marginalized groups work

(Qejvanaj, 2021). Such policies are designed without considering the socio-economic and cultural realities of marginalized communities. These policies do prominent harm by deepening inequalities instead of addressing them.

Rather than treating these outcomes as isolated policy failures, this study interprets them as evidence of a broader governance approach in which inclusion is often framed in technical rather than political terms. In this framing, inequality is managed through policy delivery mechanisms, while the underlying power relations that produce exclusion remain largely unaddressed (Ciplet & Harrison, 2020).

At the same time, the empirical material also shows that exclusion is not passively experienced. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, Roma and Egyptian communities in several municipalities publicly protested exclusion from emergency assistance and food distribution (Dervishi et al., 2022b). These events demonstrate that marginalized groups actively contest exclusion when institutional mechanisms fail to ensure equitable access. Similarly, cases of legal mobilization, including litigation before the European Court of Human Rights concerning school segregation, show how rights-based claims are used to challenge structural discrimination in education (Gazeta Shqiptare, 2022).

Within this study, these events are not treated as isolated or anecdotal episodes but as analytically selected cases that illustrate broader patterns of conflict and exclusion within policy implementation. They show how gaps between policy design and lived experience can become sites of public contestation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that consensus-oriented policy models tend to underplay conflict as a constitutive dimension of justice. However, it is important to emphasize that this interpretation is derived from a limited set of cases and secondary sources, and should therefore be read as indicative rather than exhaustive.

Overall, the evidence suggests that Just Transition policies in Albania remain largely aligned with technocratic and consensus-based governance approaches, which prioritize formal inclusion while often failing to address structural inequality in a substantive way. This highlights the need for policy frameworks that more explicitly recognize contestation and conflict as part of governance rather than as disruptions to it.

Fostering diverging opinions while accepting genuine conflicts that emerge when policies disregard the realities of life for marginalized groups engage is what defines agonistic approaches to Just Transition.

7. Pathways for justice-oriented transitions

Over time, justice has become a critical concern in the context of sustainability transitions, assessed both as an objective and as a framework within which to consider their governance and legitimacy. In the context of "Capitalocene," which shifts attention from Anthropocene blame to capitalism's violent systemic-ecological world regime, the demand for justice goes beyond distributional equity. It fundamentally requires transformation and reparative action along with thoroughly confronting inequality, exploitation, and environmental harm's sociohistorical roots. For these reasons, justice-focused transitions must shift from mere technical fixes to comprehensive changes that dismantle the dominant systems of accumulation, extraction, and dispossession.

As such, the notion of Just Transition serves as an essential starting framework. Developed within labor activism to mitigate economic restructuring impacts on workers, Just Transition now also includes environmental (Goodman, 2018) and climate justice (Harper et al., 2009) along with intersectional race, gender, (Keddie, 2012) and coloniality-based concerns (Martínez-Alier, 2020). But more recently it has been highlighted (e.g., McCauley & Heffron, 2018) that Just Transition needs to be placed under other more encompassing theoretical frames that integrate restorative, procedural logics alongside recognition-based and epistemic forms of justice.

Instead of considering restorative justice as an addition or enhancement of Just Transition, we suggest viewing it as a profound complement that integrates both agonistic and deliberative approaches to democratic participation.

An effective transition grounded on justice principles requires simultaneously reallocating resources, recognizing past injustices, and restructuring engagement. The inclusion and empowerment of historically marginalized and disenfranchised groups as active agents of change is vital for this process. Policy-making informed by participatory recognition-based justice grants agency to those most affected by the climate and ecological crises dominantly shapes the transition.

Agyeman et al. (2012) stress that environmental justice must go beyond distribution to include participatory and procedural dimensions. Citizens' assemblies are often celebrated for their deliberative inclusivity; however, these formats may inadvertently reproduce some inequalities they set out to dismantle. In contexts characterized by stark

power disparities, the drive for consensus can become a means to exclude, silence dissenting voices or stall transformative efforts. A justice-oriented pathway should focus on balancing deliberation with more agonistic forms of politics that embrace contestation, resistance and conflict as essential elements of democracy.

Marginalized groups have historically relied on protest, lawsuits, and other forms of direct action to confront systemic injustice. These actions should be recognized as part the transition architecture framework, rather than being written off as fringe antagonistic interruptions. Such agonistic methods challenge the structural reasoning driving the Capitalocene and force transitions beyond pure technocratic concession.

In this regard, we advocate for a triadic framework of justice that consists of three interconnected aspects: first, inclusion-based policymaking that allows access and participation in all groups around the given structures to achieve distributive and procedural reforms; second, conflictual systems that allow constructional dispute disagreement space. These mechanisms recognize conflict and dissent as vital elements for democratic change; third, practices which strive to correct injury by accepting, repairing, and reconciling 'doing wrong' through intentional acts of undoing harm or injustice counteraction describes restorative injustices.

Zehr (2002) defines restorative justice as enabling a collective reckoning which permits communities to articulate harm, determine accountability, and collaboratively establish means of reparation. This is crucial in the context of climate injustice for Indigenous peoples and other ethnically marginalized groups who are descendants from long colonial resource-raping systems alongside epistemic erasure. Restorative frameworks can also fuel broader systemic change; Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is an example of this.

Crucially not engaging in conflict does not mean accepting defeat when practicing restorative justice.

Still, both can work together: While some practices disrupt dominant power configurations, other restorative approaches reweave fractured social relations and cultivate conditions for enduring reconciliation. Collectively, they expand the democratic horizons of transition processes and allow conflict as well as compassion, dissent alongside repair.

Thus, justice transitions need participation modes like activism, protest, deliberation and storytelling tooperate within a single system. According to Escobar (2016) and Mansbridge et al. (2012), democracy in complex systems requires polycentric formal and informal civic structures with systemic functions.

The situated nature of justice claims is illustrated further in case studies. In South Africa, Just Transition efforts within the coal sector have emphasized direct compensation along with oversight mechanisms which has stemmed from historically low trust in the state (Wilgosh et al., 2022). On the other hand, African-led initiatives elsewhere on the continent are focused more on community-led deliberation alongside local knowledge (Otlhogile & Shirley, 2023). These examples emphasize plural contextual frameworks that are responsive to culture history institutional specificity.

In the context of Albania, and more broadly in post-socialist transition settings, Just Transition policies are largely embedded within broader development and EU integration frameworks. While these frameworks introduce important social inclusion goals, their implementation often prioritizes institutional alignment and policy compliance over structural redistribution or meaningful participation of marginalized communities (European Commission, 2018).

The empirical material discussed in this study suggests that effective justice-oriented transitions require moving beyond this narrow framing. First, there is a need to strengthen participatory mechanisms so that affected communities are not only beneficiaries of policy but also active participants in its design and evaluation. Existing evidence from community responses, including protest and legal mobilization, indicates that marginalized groups already seek to influence policy outcomes when formal channels are insufficient.

Second, the analysis suggests that policy frameworks should more explicitly recognize conflict as a legitimate component of democratic governance. Rather than treating contestation as a failure of consensus, conflict can be understood as an indicator of unresolved inequality that requires institutional attention.

Third, while restorative and recognition-based approaches have been widely discussed in the literature, their relevance in this context lies in their potential to complement rather than replace redistributive policy. However, the effectiveness of such approaches remains dependent on institutional capacity and political will, which varies significantly across contexts.

It is important to emphasize that these implications are drawn from a qualitative and interpretive analysis of selected cases and secondary sources. As such, they should not be understood as universal policy prescriptions but as analytically grounded insights that may inform future comparative and empirical research.

8. Conclusion

This article contributes to the growing body of scholarship on justice-oriented transitions by emphasizing the transformative potential of conflict, particularly for marginalized communities. By focusing on the experiences of Albania's Roma and Egyptian populations, it illustrates how conflict-driven change can illuminate the deep inequalities embedded in climate justice discourses and practices.

The findings underscore that many current Just Transition policies, despite their rhetorical commitment to equity, often fail to meaningfully engage marginalized groups. This is especially evident in cases such as Albania's National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians, where well-intentioned policy frameworks have not translated into inclusive outcomes (European Commission, 2018). The disconnect between policy ambition and lived reality highlights the insufficiency of transition processes that prioritize technocratic consensus over political contestation.

A key insight of this analysis is the inadequacy of consensus-based approaches that dominate mainstream Just Transition discourse. Such approaches often depoliticize transition by seeking to neutralize dissent and obscure structural inequalities. Drawing on Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism, this article argues for the necessity of institutionalizing dissent rather than suppressing it. Agonistic approaches recognize conflict as a generative force for democratic renewal and justice. In this context, dissent becomes a mechanism for marginalized communities to assert political agency and demand structural change.

This perspective aligns with Swyngedouw's (2011) critique of post-democratic governance, which cautions against the foreclosure of egalitarian political spaces under the guise of technocratic management. Transition governance that sidelines dissent reproduces the same capitalist and colonial logics that underpin the Capitalocene. Within this frame, the experiences of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania reflect broader dynamics in which climate and sustainability transitions risk entrenching the hegemonic systems of racialized and class-based exclusion.

From a conflict theory standpoint, the struggles of these communities highlight the need to politicize Just Transition processes by foregrounding issues of power, historical harm and redistribution. Pellow (2023) argues that conflict recognition is essential to address past injustices and for preventing their reproduction.

The study therefore argues—at an interpretive level—that justice-oriented transitions may benefit from approaches that recognise conflict as part of democratic governance rather than as a disruption to it. This argument is supported by the selected empirical material but remains analytical rather than predictive in scope.

At the same time, the analysis points to important limitations. The study is based on qualitative document analysis and selected case evidence, rather than primary data or large-scale comparative datasets. As a result, the findings are not intended to be generalisable, but instead to offer a theoretically informed interpretation of documented patterns of exclusion and contestation.

Future research could strengthen and extend these findings through comparative empirical studies across different national contexts, longitudinal analysis of policy implementation outcomes, and primary data collection involving affected communities. Such work would allow for a more systematic evaluation of how conflict, governance, and justice interact in practice.

In conclusion, while the evidence presented here is limited in scope, it suggests that transition processes which rely primarily on consensus-based governance risk underestimating the role of political conflict in shaping outcomes. Drawing on conflict theory, agonistic pluralism, and Capitalocene critique, the article advances the theoretical proposition that dissent is not external to justice-oriented transitions but may be constitutive of them. However, this proposition should be read as an interpretive contribution grounded in selected empirical cases, rather than as a definitive empirical generalisation.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

The research is based exclusively on qualitative policy analysis and the review of publicly available documents and academic literature. It did not involve human participants, personal data, or primary data collection.

Data availability

This study is based on qualitative policy analysis and a critical review of publicly available policy documents and academic literature. No primary empirical data were generated or analysed during this study.

All documents cited are publicly accessible through official institutional websites and the sources listed in the reference section.

As the article does not involve original quantitative or qualitative datasets, there are no underlying data (e.g., raw datasets, numerical values, or image data) to deposit in a public repository.

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ✔ ? ?

Version 2

Reviewer Report 27 July 2026

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Nilam Firmandayu
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Reviewer Comments

1. In the Introduction, consider adding a definition or conceptual framework of “just transition” to clarify the parameters of the transition the article seeks to achieve, particularly in the context of reformulating the issues of social and environmental justice. While the article currently provides a COVID-19 case illustration, it should also incorporate an environmental example, particularly one affecting Albania’s Roma and Egyptian communities. This would reduce abrupt shifts in the discussion and ensure consistency with the environmental scope of the article.
2. In the fifth paragraph of the Introduction, briefly introduce the theoretical framework to demonstrate that the identified issues should be addressed through a coherent theoretical approach rather than on a case-by-case basis.
3. In Section 5, "The Role of Conflict and Suffering in Transformation," you may consider, if appropriate, incorporating the concept of “legal mobilization” to complement the analysis. Within legal scholarship, the activities of local NGOs and community actors are often understood through the framework of “legal mobilization”, whereby marginalized groups pursue their rights through legal instruments, such as initiating litigation or seeking judicial review. Consistent with your argument, legal mobilization conceptualizes collective conflict as a means of fostering transformation, while emphasizing the more substantive role of legal mechanisms in advancing social change.
4. In Section 6, "Critical Analysis of Just Transition Policies," I noted that the discussion does not yet address specific environmental issues affecting Albania’s Roma and Egyptian communities. You may consider incorporating relevant examples to strengthen the analysis and ensure its alignment with the article’s environmental focus.
5. In Section 7, "Pathways for Justice-Oriented Transitions," I consider this to be the central discussion of your article. Within the proposed triadic framework of justice and effective justice-oriented transitions, the first component concerning group access and participation in policymaking could be strengthened by incorporating distributive and procedural reform parameters to better operationalize the claim of "meaningful" participation presented in the Abstract and Introduction. For example, participation should extend from policy planning

and deliberation to decision-making. However, this alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful participation if policymakers fail to “accommodate” public concerns and objections in the policy revision process.

6. The discussion on conflict as a driver of transformation would be more compelling if it also addressed the structural disadvantages faced by marginalized groups, which often result in unfavorable outcomes in judicial proceedings or law enforcement processes due to power imbalances, social status, collusion, and discrimination. The analysis could then further explore what an ideal justice framework should entail in addressing these barriers, together with concrete strategies for ensuring meaningful participation and effective access to justice for marginalized communities.
7. In the Conclusion, there is no need to restate the study's methodology, particularly in paragraphs 7 and 8. Instead, the conclusion would be strengthened by presenting the principal findings more specifically, particularly the proposed triadic framework of justice and effective justice-oriented transitions, as elaborated through the perspectives of conflict theory, agonistic theory, and the Capitalocene.
8. Writing structure: It would be preferable for each paragraph to contain at least three sentences. Consider combining shorter paragraphs into a single, more cohesive paragraph where appropriate, particularly in the Method section and elsewhere throughout the manuscript.

Is the background of the case’s history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Law, Legal Theory, Environmental Law, Administrative Law, Constitutional Law, Public Policy

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 22 July 2026

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Phoebe Koundouri
[1] Department of International and European Economic Studies, Athens University of Economics and Business, Athens, Attica, Greece
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I thank the author for carefully addressing my previous comments. The revised manuscript has improved substantially and is now considerably stronger in terms of methodological transparency, theoretical coherence, and overall clarity.

The addition of a dedicated methodology section, including the source selection strategy, analytical approach, and study limitations, greatly enhances the transparency and rigor of the paper. The historical analysis is now more structured and provides clearer links between historical marginalization and present-day inequalities. The integration of conflict theory, agonistic pluralism, and the Capitalocene has also been significantly strengthened, resulting in a more coherent conceptual framework.

The author has also addressed my concerns regarding the distinction between empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation by explicitly acknowledging the illustrative nature of the selected cases and the limitations of the study. Although the manuscript remains primarily conceptual, this is now appropriately reflected in the discussion and conclusions.

Overall, I believe the author has adequately addressed my previous comments. The remaining issues are minor and do not affect the overall quality of the manuscript. I therefore recommend **approval** of the revised version.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Environmental and Resource Economics; Sustainable Development; Climate Change Economics; Integrated Assessment Modelling; Climate Policy and Governance; Just Transition and Climate Justice; Natural Resource Management; Interdisciplinary Sustainability Science.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 22 April 2026

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Vikniswari Vija Kumaran
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Gelugor, Penang, Malaysia

The manuscript makes a valuable and timely conceptual contribution by examining the role of conflict, suffering, and structural injustices in driving transformative processes within Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities based on a qualitative analysis of policy documents and academic literature.

Comments:

1. The core argument is that conflict should be understood as a productive and necessary force in achieving justice-oriented transformation, rather than something to be minimized in governance and policy frameworks.

2. The manuscript addresses an important and underexplored topic. However, it reads more as a theoretical essay with illustrative cases than as a fully developed methodologically rigorous case study.

3. The study lacks a clearly defined methodology. While it states that it is based on policy analysis and literature review, there is:
i. No explanation of how sources were selected
ii. No inclusion/exclusion criteria
iii. No analytical framework or method (e.g., thematic analysis)
iv. No clear scope or boundaries of the dataset

4. The empirical component is limited in terms of:
i. Evidence is illustrative rather than analytical
ii. Systematic case study approach
iii. There is little use of empirical indicators (e.g., statistics on education, employment, housing)

5. The theoretical discussion is strong but overly dense and sometimes repetitive and the empirical analysis is comparatively weak. The paper leans heavily toward a theoretical essay.

6. Overall, the selection and interpretation of sources are not transparent and the analytical process is not documented.

7. The manuscript needs a limitations section addressing the scope of evidence and generalizability.

8. The manuscript lacks clear policy recommendations and practical implications.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Partly

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Economics

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 26 Apr 2026

Eglantina Dervishi

From marginalization to transformation: Examining structural injustices and policy impacts on Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities Platform: Open Research Europe (Open Access, European Commission)
Dear Editor, Thank you for the opportunity to revise our manuscript. We also thank the Reviewers for their helpful feedback and suggestions. Please find below our point-by-point reply (in italics) to the concerns they raised. We hope that you find that our revision satisfactorily addresses all the critical points that have been highlighted. All changes in the manuscript have been made according to the suggestions pointed out by the reviewers. Sincerely, **Response to Reviewer 1 Comments** We sincerely thank Reviewer 1 for the careful and constructive evaluation of our manuscript. We appreciate the recognition of its conceptual contribution and relevance to debates on justice-oriented transitions, structural inequality, and marginalized communities in Albania. The feedback has been extremely helpful in improving methodological clarity, empirical grounding, theoretical balance, and overall presentation. Below, we respond to each comment in detail. **1. Conceptual Contribution and Core Argument** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The manuscript makes a valuable*

conceptual contribution by reframing conflict as a productive force in justice-oriented transformation. **Response:**
We thank the reviewer for this positive assessment. In the revised manuscript, we further clarify and strengthen the central argument that conflict should not be understood as a phenomenon to be minimized, but as a constitutive and productive force in processes of justice-oriented transformation. We have refined the theoretical framing to better integrate agonistic pluralism, conflict theory, and political ecology perspectives, explicitly linking these to the lived experiences of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania. **2. Historical Background and Analytical Structure** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The historical narrative is broad and descriptive, lacking analytical structure and clearer causal links.* **Response:**
We agree with this important observation and have substantially revised the historical section. The revised manuscript now:

- Organizes the historical analysis into a clearer chronological sequence (Ottoman → socialist → post-1990 transition)
- Strengthens causal linkages between historical exclusion and present-day inequalities
- Integrates empirical indicators from UNDP and European Commission reports
- Frames history explicitly as a **path-dependent process of structural inequality formation**, rather than a descriptive background

We also acknowledge that the analytical depth of historical interpretation is influenced by the disciplinary lens as an author (psychology). We prioritize lived experience and structural perception over formal historiographic reconstruction. **3. Theoretical Density and Clarity** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The theoretical section is strong but dense, sometimes repetitive, and affects clarity.* **Response:**
We have revised the theoretical section to improve clarity and readability. Specifically:

- Reduced repetition across theoretical frameworks
- Clarified the distinct analytical role of conflict theory, agonistic pluralism, and Capitalocene
- Strengthened integration between theory and empirical cases

The revised manuscript now uses theory more explicitly as an analytical lens applied to empirical material rather than as a standalone theoretical discussion. **4. Empirical Grounding and Balance** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The empirical dimension is limited, and some claims appear normative rather than evidence-based.* **Response:**
We acknowledge this limitation and have strengthened the empirical grounding by:

- Incorporating relevant indicators (education, employment, housing) from international datasets
- Strengthening contextualization of case examples (ECHR ruling, COVID-19 protests, evictions)

We also explicitly acknowledge that the limited empirical base is partly due to the **scarcity of systematically documented data on Roma and Egyptian communities**, reflecting broader structural invisibility in official and academic sources. **5. Methodological Transparency** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The study lacks a clearly defined methodological framework.* **Response:**
We fully agree and have substantially strengthened the methodology section. The revised manuscript now specifies:

- Qualitative interpretive research design

- Purposive sampling of policy and academic sources
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Thematic and critical discourse analysis
- Scope and limitations of secondary data

We also explicitly clarify that no primary data were collected and that the analysis is interpretive in nature. **6. Conclusions and Evidence Alignment *Reviewer comment:*** *Conclusions are broadly consistent but sometimes extend beyond evidence.* **Response:** We have revised the conclusions to ensure stronger alignment with empirical material. Specifically:

- Reduced overgeneralization
- Clearly distinguished empirical findings from theoretical interpretation
- Added a limitations section

We thank Reviewer 1 for recognizing the manuscript's relevance and contribution.

Competing Interests: non

Reviewer Report 02 April 2026

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This manuscript explores the role of conflict, suffering, and structural inequality in shaping transformation processes among Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities. It proposes a conceptual framework that brings together conflict theory, agonistic pluralism, and the Capitalocene, and applies this lens to a qualitative case study based on policy analysis and existing literature. The core argument is that dominant consensus-driven "Just Transition" approaches are insufficient to address systemic inequalities and that conflict should instead be understood as a necessary and productive force in achieving justice-oriented transformation. The paper illustrates this argument through selected examples, including legal contestation and grassroots mobilization.
The article addresses a highly relevant and underexplored topic at the intersection of climate justice, governance, and social exclusion. It offers an original conceptual contribution, although its empirical grounding and methodological clarity remain limited.

The manuscript provides a useful general overview of the historical marginalization of Roma and

Egyptian communities, referring to the Ottoman period, the socialist era, and the post-1990 transition. It also links these developments to contemporary policy frameworks and inclusion strategies. However, the historical narrative remains relatively broad and descriptive, without sufficient depth or systematic structure. The progression of events is not presented in a clearly articulated analytical sequence, and the causal connections between historical exclusion and present-day inequalities could be more explicitly developed. Greater use of empirical indicators and a clearer chronological organization would significantly strengthen this section and enhance the analytical clarity of the case study.

The manuscript demonstrates a strong engagement with interdisciplinary literature, particularly within critical theory, environmental justice, and sustainability transitions. The integration of conflict theory, agonistic pluralism, and the Capitalocene is conceptually rich and represents a notable strength of the paper. However, the presentation is at times overly dense, and the theoretical discussion occasionally becomes repetitive, which affects clarity. Moreover, while the theoretical grounding is robust, the empirical dimension is less developed, and some claims appear more normative than evidence-based. The manuscript would benefit from a clearer balance between theory and empirical material, as well as a stronger engagement with recent, context-specific studies on Albania or comparable regional cases.

The author clearly states that the study relies exclusively on publicly available policy documents and academic literature, and that no primary data were generated. While this is appropriate for the type of study conducted, the manuscript lacks sufficient methodological transparency to ensure reproducibility. In particular, there is no detailed explanation of how sources were selected, what criteria guided their inclusion, or how they were analyzed. The absence of a clearly defined methodological protocol limits the transparency and rigor of the analysis. Providing a more explicit description of the research design, including the analytical approach and the scope of the reviewed material, would significantly improve the scientific robustness of the study.

The conclusions are broadly consistent with the theoretical framework and are supported by illustrative examples presented in the text, such as the European Court of Human Rights ruling and the COVID-19-related protests. However, the empirical basis of the analysis remains relatively limited and selective. The examples function more as illustrative cases rather than as part of a systematic analysis, and in some instances the conclusions extend beyond what is directly supported by the evidence provided. The manuscript would benefit from a clearer distinction between empirical findings and theoretical interpretation, as well as from a more explicit acknowledgment of the scope and limitations of the case study.

The article has strong potential for teaching, particularly in courses related to environmental justice, sustainability transitions, and critical policy studies. Its conceptual contribution is valuable and thought-provoking. However, its usefulness for practitioners is currently limited by the highly theoretical nature of the presentation and the absence of clearly articulated policy implications. The manuscript would benefit from a more explicit discussion of how its findings can inform policy design and implementation, as well as from a more accessible presentation of key insights.

This manuscript makes a timely and potentially important contribution to the literature on justice-oriented transitions by foregrounding the role of conflict and marginalization. Its conceptual ambition and interdisciplinary scope are commendable, and the focus on Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania addresses a significant gap in the literature.

At the same time, the paper currently reads more as a theoretically driven essay than as a fully developed case study. The main limitations relate to the lack of methodological transparency, the relatively limited and unsystematic use of empirical evidence, and the need for greater clarity in linking theoretical arguments to the case analysis. Addressing these issues would substantially strengthen the manuscript and enhance its contribution to both academic and policy debates.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Partly

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Environmental and Resource Economics; Sustainable Development; Climate Change Economics; Integrated Assessment Modelling; Climate Policy and Governance; Just Transition and Climate Justice; Natural Resource Management; Interdisciplinary Sustainability Science.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 26 Apr 2026

Eglantina Dervishi

From marginalization to transformation: Examining structural injustices and policy impacts on Albania's Roma and Egyptian communities Platform: Open Research Europe (Open Access, European Commission)

Dear Editor, Thank you for the opportunity to revise our manuscript. We also thank the Reviewers for their helpful feedback and suggestions. Please find below our point-by-point reply (in italics) to the concerns they raised. We hope that you find that our revision satisfactorily addresses all the critical points that have been highlighted. All changes in the manuscript have been made according to the suggestions pointed out by the reviewers.

Sincerely, **Response to Reviewer 2 Comments** We sincerely thank Reviewer 2 for the detailed and constructive feedback. The comments have been extremely valuable in improving methodological transparency, empirical rigor, theoretical clarity, and policy relevance. Below we respond to each point. **1. Core Argument and Conceptual Framing** ***Reviewer comment:*** *Conflict is framed as a productive force rather than something to be minimized.* **Response:**
We thank the reviewer for acknowledging the conceptual framing. The revised manuscript further clarifies that conflict is conceptualized as a structural and productive element of justice-oriented transformation, particularly in contexts of persistent exclusion and inequality. **2. Nature of the Study (Theoretical vs Case Study)** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The manuscript reads more like a theoretical essay than a rigorous case study.* **Response:**
We agree and have clarified the epistemological positioning of the study. The manuscript is now explicitly framed as a **qualitative interpretive case study with strong theoretical grounding**, rather than a purely empirical case study. We emphasize interpretive analysis rather than statistical generalization. **3. Methodological Clarity** ***Reviewer comment:*** *No clear explanation of source selection, inclusion/exclusion criteria, analytical framework, or dataset scope.* **Response:**
We have significantly expanded the methodology section, now including:

- Source selection strategy (purposive sampling)
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Analytical method (thematic + discourse analysis)

4. Empirical Limitations ***Reviewer comment:*** *Evidence is illustrative rather than systematic; lack of indicators.* **Response:**
We acknowledge this limitation and have strengthened empirical grounding by:

- Incorporating indicators from UNDP and European Commission reports
- Reframing case studies as analytically selected rather than exhaustive

We also explicitly note that limited empirical availability reflects structural under-documentation of marginalized communities, which is itself part of the inequality being analyzed. **5. Theoretical Density and Empirical Balance** ***Reviewer comment:*** *The theoretical discussion is strong but dense and repetitive, with weak empirical balance.* **Response:**
We have streamlined the theoretical section by:

- Removing repetition across frameworks
- Clarifying distinct roles of each theory
- Improving readability

6. Transparency of Source Selection ***Reviewer comment:*** *The selection and interpretation of sources are not transparent.* **Response:**
This is addressed through the expanded methodology section, which now clearly documents:

- Source identification and selection procedures
- Analytical approach (thematic and discourse analysis)
- Inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Scope limitations

7. Limitations Section ***Reviewer comment:*** *The manuscript lacks a limitations section.*

Response:
A dedicated limitations section has been added. It explicitly addresses:

- Qualitative and interpretive nature of the study
- Reliance on secondary data
- Non-exhaustive case selection
- Limited availability of structured data
- Restricted generalizability

We also explicitly acknowledge positional limitations of the analysis. **8. Positionality and Disciplinary Perspective (New Addition)** We now explicitly acknowledge that the analysis is influenced by our author's **background in psychology**, which shapes the interpretive focus on:

- lived experience of suffering and exclusion
- perception of structural inequality
- psychosocial dimensions of conflict

This perspective necessarily limits historical-structural depth in favor of interpretive and experiential analysis. **9. Policy Implications *Reviewer comment:*** *Lack of policy implications and practical relevance.* **Response:**
We have added a dedicated policy implications section outlining how findings can inform: We thank the reviewer for highlighting the need for clearer policy implications and practical relevance. In response, we have substantially revised the manuscript (particularly Sections 6 and 7 and the conclusion) to explicitly derive policy-relevant insights from the empirical material and strengthen their grounding in documented cases and policy analysis. The revised paper now shows how existing Just Transition and inclusion frameworks in Albania remain largely technocratic and consensus-driven, resulting in persistent inequalities in education, employment, and housing for Roma and Egyptian communities despite formal policy commitments. Building on empirical cases such as the ECHR ruling on school segregation and COVID-19-related exclusion from emergency support, we now explicitly articulate policy implications, including the need to shift from top-down inclusion models toward participatory governance, to recognize conflict and contestation as legitimate components of democratic policy processes, and to integrate redistribution, recognition, and meaningful participation in transition frameworks. Importantly, we clarify that these implications are interpretive and context-specific, given the study's reliance on secondary data and selected case evidence, and are not intended as universal policy prescriptions. We also explicitly acknowledge the limitations of available documented data on these marginalized communities and note that the author's psychological background informs a focus on lived experience and micro-level impacts, while constraining macro-level policy generalization. We believe these revisions significantly enhance the manuscript's policy relevance while maintaining its theoretical and interpretive scope. We thank Reviewer 2 for the constructive feedback.

Competing Interests: non