

# POLICY BRIEF

## DELIBERATE GOVERNANCE INNOVATIONS TO ACCELERATE JUST DECARBONISATION DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

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## Summary

This policy brief draws on the results of TIPPING+ research, case studies, published and ongoing publications, on how **deliberate multi-level governance innovations** can support the emergence of **fast, just and structural changes, as well as transformative capacities of agents in coal and carbon intensive regions (CCIRs)**. In governance systems, tipping points can be understood as a discontinuity, where a given system of reference fundamentally changes its original structure and dynamics. Enacting deliberate positive tipping points in governance requires innovations that put **justice at the core of new forms of coordination and interaction among actors**.

Moreover, whilst transformations may be incrementally achieved, the **governance of positive tipping points**, e.g. to achieve carbon neutrality, or realise **Sustainable Development Goals**, entails identifying four types of phenomena: (1) the **social, political and economic contexts** where potential abrupt changes may occur (2) the possible **tipping events** that may accelerate or trigger the change, such as closing a coal mine, (3) the feasible and more **just interventions** required to transform the system towards a desirable dynamic state and bring it towards a tipping point, and (4) the different kinds of impacts or **course of action** after the tipping point. All these aspects are interrelated in the way that a tipping event or process qualitatively disrupts the social and economic structure of a region.

**Fostering experimentation and learning feedbacks** at different levels of action is thus key in governance innovations aiming at refining strategic interventions. Such policy experiments are also crucial in introducing new just policy criteria, as well as triggering further cycles of **positive feedback learnings** at different levels of governance, toward sustainable decarbonisation trajectories. Hence, a key issue for applying an **incrementally transformative strategy** in governance is building upon **clear vision and orientation**, especially when combining a diverse portfolio of policy measures at different scales.

## Objective



The **governance of positive tipping points** aimed at achieving **deliberate systemic changes**, such as net-zero and sustainable development pathways, requires **coherent yet distributed efforts** to bring in actions by **multiple stakeholders** at different policy levels and scales. This includes **tailor-made interventions** by public authorities, initiatives by business actors, and civil society organisations working at local, regional, national and international levels. Based on this, the **successful transition** toward net zero pathways in CCIRs, will depend on identifying the required **administrative capacities** at different governmental levels and actors.



The aim is to identify **coordinated actions** between multiple levels of governance, while moving towards a common vision of **structural change**. This policy brief highlights the importance of translating such **long-term transformative visions** at the regional level, and the role for **regional leadership** in ensuring the alignment of policy measures and incentives, as well as, the full cooperation among governmental levels. Hence, in order to overcome potential and initial resistances, it is crucial to provide **early and just benefits** of the transition to the most **vulnerable citizens** in the CCIRs, ensuring that both vertical and horizontal **coordination, engagement and communication** exist among a wide range of stakeholders.

## Background

The principles and the concept of **multi-level governance** have strongly influenced EU policy making in recent decades, by acknowledging the importance of developing **institutional innovations** able to recognise and coordinate many kinds of authority structures, that operate at different levels of action. In complex **policy landscapes**, local, regional and national **stakeholders** and **organisations**, both public and private, operate both as independent and interdependent entities. In certain aspects of decision making, a **double political trend** was observed. On the one hand, power has been increasingly delegated to both **regional and international organisations**, while on the other hand, there has been a concerted effort to reduce the level of power wielded by **national governments**.

In this context, the recent acceleration towards the EU's climate and decarbonisation targets, largely caused by exogenous factors such as the war in Ukraine, requires the urgent establishment of **novel institutional arrangements**. These arrangements are essential to guarantee fair and fast coordination mechanisms, both at vertical and horizontal level, capable of deploying the required capacities and resources at the right level of governance.



## Key Messages

- ✓ Research within TIPPING+ has highlighted the **importance of governance** in triggering positive tipping points, able to transform the interactions of various stakeholders in CCIRs, both traditional such as miners, but also new ones, such as green entrepreneurs. The utilization of explicit policy principles and strategies, or other **innovations in governance**, can help to trigger **positive feedbacks** aimed at transforming agents' **behaviours and lifestyles**, creating the conditions for disruptive technologies and businesses to emerge. At the same time, they support the upscale of successful **policy experiments** and ensure future cycles of systems' learning and transformation. Hence, governance can be understood as a means of triggering **social-ecological tipping points** or as an element that can tip itself.



✓ It is important to recognise that **learning cycles** occur within and across different levels of governance. Fast **structural changes**, as the ones required to achieve the EU policy targets of climate neutrality by 2050, or the intermediate target of achieving at least 55% net reduction on GHG by 2030, demands the engagement of large sectors of the population who operate at local, regional, national and EU levels. Novel institutional arrangements are needed to accommodate the interplay of these complex networks, but above all to **ensure that lessons learned at different scales, sectors, and purposes contribute to transformative feedback in institutions, regulations and new policy orientations**. Distributed learning coalitions, public-private partnerships and boundary organisations are required to integrate and share scientific and policy knowledge from the actual implementation of regional transformative actions, and to adapt successive stages of the policy process aimed at systemic change. In this respect, an early identification of the limitations of existing policy arrangements and the recognition of potential institutional obsolescence is of central importance.

✓ At the level of CCIRs, an approach based on **governance innovations** to promote and coordinate continuous learning and transformative feedbacks at different levels of governance, would focus on **ensuring that local and private perspectives**, as well as those from **scientific and other sources of relevant knowledge**, are adequately embedded in the regional institutions. The governance objective, therefore, is not just to implement a top-down agreed policy target, but **to create the conditions for agents' learning and reflectivity**. Also, whenever necessary, to question or exceed set targets, in order to shift the system towards **sustainable development pathways**. That is, not only to limit actions to the governance of energy transition, but also to include a whole set of conditions and agents to attain broader systems' goals and visions, related to community welfare, policy trust and good quality of life, aligned with sustainability transformations.

## Insights from Case Studies

In **Germany**, since energy policy is generally considered a national task, measures and interventions at the local level had little immediate impact on accelerating decarbonisation processes. It was only after the national and state decisions to phase out coal, when local level actors were triggered to embrace new visions moving beyond the coal era. From that moment, the cities of **Duisburg** and **Essen** have built on existing capacities and new ideas to steer the local identity and perception beyond "coal". Thus, although **local governments** had limited political power to intervene in larger systemic questions (e.g., energy policy), they eventually showed their ability to influence the local perceptions, visions and narratives.



The case study of **Upper Silesia in Poland** showed that the regional and sectoral policies related to decarbonisation were either competing, or cooperating, or in some aspects, ignoring themselves. In fact, there was even the perception that coal phase-out and energy transition processes could cause a decline in Silesia's regional political power, and that regional actors may lose the ability to influence national energy and industrial policy, undermining the widespread doctrine that Silesia is Poland's industrial and energy heartland. Better policy coordination and clear priorities are required to manage fast ongoing decarbonisation processes.

The approval of the Climate Change and Energy transition Act in 2019 may be understood as a tipping intervention towards the low-carbon energy transition process in the **Balearic Islands of Spain**. The high level of ambition of the act, the level of consensus achieved among political parties, and the state's pioneer and holistic character (focused on promoting a decentralised approach and the democratisation of the energy model) constitute real elements of hope for shaping the future of the islands towards decarbonisation. However, the efforts promoted by the regional government can be severely diminished or even nullified by emissions from international marine transport (harbours) and airports, which do not fall under the scope of the Act and depend on national and international regulations. Hence, tipping interventions at one scale, may have limited scope if not harmonised at other levels of governance and policy.



In the case of **Andorra (Spain)**, where several coal mines and coal-power plants were located, social and local agents have criticised the lack of participation in the design of support schemes for the transformation of their region and the fact that policies were carried out in a top-down manner. This has led local stakeholders to mistrust and scepticism regarding proclaimed government's immediate projects for fast structural transformations towards local decarbonisation, creating an atmosphere of distance between local stakeholders and governments. Recently, a public participation process regarding the drafting of the **Just Transition Plan** was carried out, in which 67 actors of the territory were involved and 173 proposals were collected. However, still some local organisations report a lack of involvement of the local population, especially farmers, in these processes. Thus, **building trust** among relevant stakeholders is the basis for mutual learning and productive communication, and a precondition for social-ecological tipping in regions involved in fast decarbonisation processes.



## Policy Recommendations



### **Support institutional innovations aimed at fostering transformative learning feedbacks across multiple levels of governance.**

*In an increasingly complex and networked world, agents influence and operate at multiple levels of governance. Hence, consider policy experiments integrating and applying diverse sources of knowledge at different levels of governance, in a way that are able to integrate and share the multiple learnings among large groups of stakeholders.*



### **Empower and support regional leadership in CCIRs.**

*Help on building coalitions of regional leaders, able to demonstrate the feasibility of implementing alternative development pathways, following a long-term, place-based transformative, low-carbon vision. Take particular attention in engaging women, the youth and immigrant populations in taking such transformative leadership role.*



### **Combine different sensitive interventions to trigger disruptive changes in different sectors and systems.**

*The systemic effect of tipping interventions may differ in various systems, i.e., some being more resistant to change than others. Different policy measures may also be needed at different stages of the deliberate tipping policy process. Hence, an analysis of sensitivity or criticality to potential abrupt changes in various sectors or governance arrangements is needed. This will help to design tailor-made governance innovations, improve the coordination of policy measures, and multiply their potential positive synergistic effects.*

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## About TIPPING+

TIPPING+ provides an empirical in-depth social science understanding of fundamental changes in sociodemographic, geographical, psychological, cultural, political, and economic patterns which give rise to Social-Ecological Tipping Points (SETPs), both positive and negative in relation to socio-energy regional systems. Such empirical and theoretical insights sheds new light on the interdependencies between changes in regional socio-cultural structures and the technological, regulatory and investment-related requirements for embracing (or failing to embrace) low-carbon, clean-energy and competitive development pathways in selected coal and carbon intensive case study regions (CCIRs). The overall goal is to understand why and under which conditions a given social-ecological regional system heavily dependent on coal and carbon-intensive activities may flip into a low-carbon, clean energy development trajectory – or on the contrary may fall into an opposite trajectory with all its negative implications. Towards this goal, main focus of TIPPING+ is the participatory co-production of knowledge on the driving forces and deliberate tipping interventions leading to the emergence of positive tipping points toward clean energy transitions in European CCIRs.

[www.tipping-plus.eu](http://www.tipping-plus.eu)

## WHO WE ARE



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