

## **Urban Regeneration and Just Energy Transition: Lessons from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods in the Apulia region, Italy**

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**Abstract** Urban regeneration strategies are paying increasing attention to energy transition goals, in line with the decarbonisation imperative and the main EU and global policies for sustainable urban development and climate change mitigation. This is reflected in the growing inclusion of energy efficiency measures and the development of renewable energy sources. However, this integration often takes a technocratic and market-driven approach to energy transition, paying little heed to the complex social, institutional and cultural dynamics that shape access to energy. This oversimplification is particularly problematic in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where long-standing vulnerabilities and multiple forms of energy poverty can intersect to hinder just transitions.

Since 2005, the Apulia region, in Southern Italy, has promoted regeneration policies and programmes with a clear focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods and social justice, as well as an increasing emphasis on green and energy transition objectives. Nevertheless, recent reflections are revealing critical tensions between these objectives and actual implementation capacities. While their integrated and place-based approaches have at times fostered transformative practices and more just outcomes, their contribution to just transitions remains partial and uneven.

Adopting the multidimensional and intersectional lens of energy and spatial justice, encompassing distributive, procedural, and recognitional dimensions, this paper examines how regeneration programmes and projects in the Apulia region have addressed, or failed to address, disparities in energy access through integrated and place-based approaches. The analysis draws on a review of regeneration practices in urban areas where various attempts to integrate energy-related objectives have produced mixed results. Both positive and problematic examples are discussed, paying attention to the governance arrangements that enable or constrain more just outcomes.

Findings suggest the need to reframe regeneration not merely as a vehicle for decarbonisation, but as a driver of transformative change guided by the justice principle. This requires acknowledging local specificities, enabling meaningful community involvement, and designing strategies that redistribute not only resources, but also voice and agency. Only through such a reframing can urban regeneration genuinely support just and sustainable transitions in Europe's most fragile territories.