

Contested Transitions: Policy Instruments as Sites of Conflict in Europe's Green Transition

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Abstract: The European Green Deal (EGD) represents the EU's central strategy for achieving climate neutrality by 2050. It has sparked broad scholarly interest, particularly regarding its governance innovations, discursive framing, and eco-social implications. While Europe's green agenda has proven resilient in times of crisis, questions remain about its transformative potential. In this introduction, we set the stage for the Symposium *Europe's Green Transition – Policy Instruments and their Politicization* by shifting focus from high-level ambitions to the contested politics of implementation. We explore key dimensions of political contestation within the EU's ecological transition and argue that policy instruments are crucial yet underexplored sites of conflict in Europe's green transition. As the contributions to this Symposium illustrate, the politics of policy instrument choice offer a valuable analytical lens for understanding why ecological change often unfolds incrementally and how it is shaped and limited by structural, institutional, and discursive constraints.

Keywords: European Green Deal, Ecological Transition, Politicization, Policy Instruments, Implementation, EU environmental policy

Umkämpfte Transformationen: Politikinstrumente als Konfliktfelder in Europas grüner Wende

Zusammenfassung: Der Europäische Green Deal (EGD) stellt die zentrale Strategie der EU dar, um bis 2050 Klimaneutralität zu erreichen. In der politikwissenschaftlichen Forschung wurden der EGD und die europäische ökologische Transformation insbesondere im Hinblick auf Governance-Innovationen, Diskurse und öko-soziale Implikationen betrachtet. Obwohl sich Europas ‚grüne‘ Agenda in Krisenzeiten als widerstandsfähig erwiesen hat, bleiben Fragen nach ihrem transformativen Potenzial bestehen. In dieser Einleitung zum Symposium *Europe's Green Transition – Policy Instruments and their Politicization* legen wir den Fokus auf Konflikte und Politisierung im Kontext des ökologischen Wandels. Wir argumentieren, dass die Instrumentierung der Transformation ein entscheidendes, bislang aber wenig untersuchtes Konfliktfeld darstellt. Die Beiträge dieses Symposiums zur Politisierung rund um Policy-Instrumente bieten einen wertvollen analytischen Ansatz, um zu verstehen, warum ökologische Transformation oft nur schrittweise erfolgt und geprägt bzw. begrenzt ist durch strukturelle, institutionelle und diskursive Faktoren.

Schlagwörter: Europäischer Green Deal, Ökologische Transformation, Politisierung, Policy-Instrumente, Implementation, Europäische Umweltpolitik

1 Introducing the Symposium¹

The European Green Deal (EGD), launched in 2019, constitutes the European Union's strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. It seeks to integrate various areas such as climate, energy, transport, agriculture, and biodiversity policy under a unified sustainability agenda. While the EU and its member states have long pursued nature and climate protection, the EGD provided new impetus for policymaking and introduced the vision of a far-reaching transition towards a society living within planetary boundaries, all while ensuring a just transition.

The EGD and the EU's broader ecological transition have attracted wide-ranging scholarly attention. A major focal point has been its governance innovations and the stability of Europe's green agenda in turbulent times. Scholars have analysed the governance architecture and modes of governance found in the EGD (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2024; Knodt, 2023; Schoenefeld, 2021), the EU's evolving climate policy mix (Oberthür & von Homeyer, 2023; Skjærseth, 2021), and the role of prominent actors such as the European Commission (Domorenok & Graziano, 2023; Pollex & Lenschow, 2024) and the Council (Rosamond & Dupont, 2021). Scholars have found the agenda to remain relatively stable during crises and turbulence but have raised concerns about whether the EGD and subsequent policies will be sufficient to meet climate goals (Bocquillon, 2024; Dobbs et al., 2021; Dupont et al., 2020; Eckert, 2021; von Homeyer et al., 2022; Wendler, 2023). Furthermore, research addresses sector-specific developments, including energy (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2024; Christou, 2021) and agricultural policy (Boer & Aiking, 2023; Cuadros-Casanova et al., 2023), and points to sectoral shortcomings, such as in biodiversity protection (Paleari, 2022).

A second key focus in research on the Green Deal and the EU's broader transition agenda has been the analysis of discourse around the transition. Scholars have identified a tension between the Green Deal's far-reaching policy agenda and its narrowing focus on green growth perspectives. Several contributions point to the EGD marking a paradigmatic shift in the EU's sustainability discourse, centring environmental goals and shifting the EU's policy agenda towards climate neutrality and sustainability (e.g. Schunz, 2022). Both the Commission and the European Parliament strategically employed narratives to foster consensus and support for the green agenda (Domorenok & Graziano, 2023). At the same time, research identifies a depoliticization of climate policy in EU narratives, narrowing debate to market-based or growth-aligned policies and marginalising alternative visions (Samper et al., 2021). Such depoliticization can reduce opportunities for societal engagement in shaping the transition (Machin, 2025). In this context, research also highlights the critical role of democratic elements within the EGD itself and its legitimization (Buzogány et al., 2025; Çelik, 2025). While a majority of EU citizens support climate action, studies have drawn attention to the distinction between general public support for climate action and specific support for individual

¹ We are grateful to all reviewers who provided valuable feedback on the articles in this Symposium.

measures, emphasising how the design of policy instruments, including questions of redistribution, can affect polarization (Tatham & Peters, 2023).

Third, the Green Deal's environmental objectives are closely tied to social issues. The Commission linked its proposals to the idea of a just transition. Scholars have critically engaged with this idea and examined concrete social policies proposed under the Green Deal aimed at mitigating social conflict (Sandmann et al., 2024; Zimmermann & Gengnagel, 2023). Research further points to variation in policy programmes in the EU's multi-level system and different focal points in debates on this just transition (Pollex, 2025; Theodoropoulou et al., 2025; Waltrup et al., 2025). Scholars argue that the EU's macroeconomic framework and industrial policy do not adequately support its eco-social objectives and may restrict the extent of the ecological transition (Pianta & Lucchese, 2020).

Despite this extensive research, Green Deal implementation across the EU's multi-level system remains underexplored. Key avenues for further research include identifying enabling and constraining conditions (Dupont et al., 2024). As Pierre Bocquillon (2024) notes, despite the resilience of Europe's green agenda, "cost concerns, protests and their political use by right-wing populists also raise questions for implementation, possibly dampening ambitions going forward" (Bocquillon, 2024, p. 125). Implementing the ecological transition is not merely a technical issue but a highly political one. Notably, politicization can constitute both an enabling and a constraining factor (Dupont et al., 2024). Against this backdrop, this Symposium, titled *Europe's Green Transition – Policy Instruments and their Politicization*, systematically distinguishes dimensions of political contestation and explores how policy instruments become focal points of conflict. We argue that, in the context of the ecological transition, policy instruments are critical sites of political conflict that have so far received insufficient scholarly attention. The contributions to this Symposium underscore that instrument choice is not a purely rational, technocratic decision, but a deeply political one. Policy instruments are embedded within contested policy paradigms. They can be interpreted and framed as manifestations of broader concepts, such as regulatory approaches (e.g., state vs. market), or visions of the ecological transition (e.g., green growth vs. degrowth) (see Gerstenberg & Schnapp, 2025a, 2025b; Lüken genannt Klaffen, 2025; Porak, 2025, all in this Symposium). Instrument choice can be driven by more foundational beliefs, reflecting more general positions and conflicts that are renegotiated (see also Wenz-Temming, 2025, in this Symposium). In addition, instrument choice and calibration unfolds within political dynamics where strategic party-political considerations, stakeholder network interactions and micro-politics can enable or impede efforts towards an ecological transition (see, e.g., Braun & Gross, 2025; Postpischil, 2025; Steiner et al., 2025, all in this Symposium). Another key factor influencing ecological transition policy and instrument choice are institutional legacies, which can relate to 'locked-in' regulatory arrangements as well as persistent discourses and narratives (Künzler, 2025; Lüken genannt Klaffen, 2025, both in this Symposium).

Our goal with this Symposium is twofold. First, we contribute to a differentiated understanding of political conflicts that emerge in Europe's ecological transition. Second, we explore how the politicization of policy instruments shapes this transition – offering deeper insights into the forces that drive or hinder Europe's path toward climate neutrality and sustainability. The contributions collected here reflect the multilevel and cross-sectoral nature of this transition. They examine dynamics and processes at the European and national levels, in policy areas such as climate policy, energy policy, and fisheries policy. Ultimately, they highlight that Europe's green transition depends not only on policy ambition, but also on how

various political conflict dimensions are addressed throughout the policy cycle and how policy instruments need to be recognised both as important levers of the transition and sites of conflict.

2 Dimensions of political contestation in Europe's ecological transition

The EGD and the subsequent *Fit for 55* legislative package introduced new and revised policies across sectors such as energy, transport, and agriculture (see also Bocquillon, 2024; Dupont et al., 2024). This includes a revised European Emissions Trading System (ETS), a new and a separate ETS (ETS2) for buildings and road transport, a revised Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR), revisions to the Renewable Energy Directive and the Energy Efficiency Directive, and updated CO₂ emissions performance standards for cars and vans. Sectoral frameworks, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), support environmental goals in more specific areas.

First evidence indicates that the Green Deal's bold rhetoric has been backed by policy action (Pollex & Lenschow, 2024), marking a departure from earlier phases of EU environmental policy, which were often characterised by implementation gaps and symbolic commitments (Knill et al., 2020). The shift towards a more ambitious climate policy was supported by climate activism (de Moor et al., 2021; Soßdorf & Pollex, 2023) and the electoral gains of Green parties, both at the European and national level (Dostal, 2021; Pearson & Rüdiger, 2020).

In recent years, climate scepticism has become more prominent in political debates. Sceptical actors challenge the urgency of climate action, question scientific consensus, and sometimes promote conspiracy narratives around environmental regulation (Böcher et al., 2022). Some populist and Eurosceptic parties deny climate change (e.g., AfD, 2025). In the European Parliament, there is an increasingly vocal opposition to ambitious climate targets and to the crisis framing of climate change (Pollex, 2025). Similar dynamics are unfolding nationally (Küppers, 2024). These developments point to a deepening politicisation and polarization of climate and environmental policy (Marquardt & Lederer, 2022; Zilles & Marg, 2022).

But politicisation in the context of Europe's ecological transition is not limited to ideological battles between climate activism and populist denialism. There is also contestation among actors who generally affirm climate policy. Political contestation around transition efforts can play out across multiple dimensions, ranging from deep-seated paradigm disagreements to contestations of knowledge to highly specific implementation disputes (Brendler et al., 2024). This is evidenced, for instance, by competing paradigms about causality, responsibility, and future trajectories. One key divide is found between the 'green growth' paradigm, positing that economic growth can be decoupled from environmental degradation, and the 'degrowth' or 'post-growth' perspective, which argues that ecological limits require a scaling down of material production and consumption (D'Alisa et al., 2015; see also Gerstenberg and Schnapp, 2025b, in this Symposium). Political conflict and societal resistance also arise around specific measures and sectoral regulations. Farmers' protests in

the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland, as well as pushback against emissions standards for cars and the planned phase-out of combustion engines, illustrate that resistance often centres not on climate goals per se, but on specific measures and instruments (Mathiesen et al., 2024; Tatham & Peters, 2023).

In this Symposium, we stress that conflict around the ecological transition manifests on several dimensions simultaneously – in complex, interrelated ways. Policy instruments lie at the intersection of these conflict dimensions: They reflect underlying policy paradigms and belief systems, are interpreted as more or less beneficial to different actors' interests, and often become focal points of broader political struggles.

3 The Politics of Instrument Choice

Policymakers can use various instruments, differentiated by the level of state intervention (Böcher & Töller, 2007): *Persuasive instruments* are on the 'soft' end of the spectrum, influencing behaviour through information, education, or symbolic incentives, such as environmental labelling. *Cooperative instruments* build on voluntary engagement, including stakeholder dialogues, round tables, or self-commitments. *Procedural instruments* do not regulate outcomes directly but rather structure decision-making processes, e.g., environmental impact assessments. *Market-based instruments* use economic incentives and price signals, such as taxes, subsidies, or tradable permits. At the most coercive or 'hard' end, *regulative instruments* impose binding legal obligations, including bans or emission limits.

Such descriptive typologies clarify different kinds of instruments and the mechanisms they use. To understand *why* certain instruments are chosen, policy analysis has developed several explanatory approaches, ranging from actor-centred perspectives to functionalistic and discursive frameworks (e.g., Kassim & Le Galès, 2010; Saurugger, 2013).

Institutionalist approaches emphasise formal rules, administrative cultures, and established routines. Historical institutionalism highlights the importance of path dependency – how past decisions and institutional legacies shape the set of options seen as viable in the present (Pierson, 2000). Deeply rooted regulatory styles – and sectoral regulatory legacies – create path dependencies that make certain instruments more 'thinkable' or politically acceptable than others, even when new challenges emerge (Hall & Taylor, 1996; van Waarden, 1995). Over time, institutional inertia, administrative routines, and actor expectations consolidate around certain toolkits, reinforcing continuity in policy instrument selection (Bouwma et al., 2016; Brendler, 2022, 2023).

Rational-choice approaches conceptualise policy actors as strategic decision-makers operating within institutional constraints (Scharpf, 1997). Instrument choice is viewed as the outcome of cost-benefit calculations, with actors selecting those instruments that maximise their preferences (Böcher & Töller, 2012). As the contribution by Anna Wenz-Temming (2025) to this Symposium illustrates, the costs of EU noncompliance can recalibrate the cost-benefit balance and spur national policymakers to reevaluate instruments that have previously been deemed undesirable.

Actor-centred approaches emphasise that preferences themselves are shaped by social and institutional contexts. These approaches also stress the role of coalition-building. Ac-

cording to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), coalitions of actors with shared beliefs shape preferences over time, often producing gradual and negotiated change (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). As Anne Gerstenberg and Kai-Uwe Schnapp (2025b) show in this Symposium, actors can pursue certain instruments strategically, even though they do not necessarily align with their core interests. Policy network theory adds that instrument selection frequently results from the dynamics of interaction and bargaining within complex, multi-actor settings (Rhodes, 2008), where resource asymmetries and access to policymaking channels affect which tools are prioritised. In this Symposium, Noa Steiner et al. (2025) provide an analysis that reveals how actors' reliance on information from networks results in biased beliefs, which in turn contributes to ineffective instrument choices.

Constructivist and discursive approaches shift attention to ideas. From this perspective, instrument choice is about problem definitions and understandings. Policy paradigms – shared belief systems about the nature of problems and legitimate responses – play a central role in shaping what kinds of instruments are seen as appropriate (Schmidt, 2008). Several contributions to this Symposium draw on these perspectives. For instance, Laura Porak (2025) analyses how Europe's green agenda embeds an industrial policy rooted in entrenched economic ideas, thereby limiting opportunities for transformative change. The contribution by Johanna Künzler (2025) examines narratives in Germany's energy and gas policy, revealing the persistent dominance of carbon-centric narratives. Gerstenberg and Schnapp (2025a) highlight the added analytical value of constructivist perspectives within the Advocacy Coalition Framework.

4 Contributions

This Symposium pursues a twofold objective: first, to contribute to a more differentiated understanding of the political conflicts emerging in Europe's ecological transition; and second, to explore how the politicization of policy instruments shapes this transition, offering deeper insights into the forces that drive or hinder Europe's path toward climate neutrality and sustainability.

The contributions to this Symposium offer detailed empirical insights into these dynamics, highlighting both the struggles and strategies that define the green transition. We briefly introduce each article before turning to the broader implications and contributions to the literature.

Focusing on the European level, several contributions interrogate how long-standing ideational and institutional patterns shape the formulation and trajectory of green policy, shedding light on conflict structures and ideational constraints at the supranational level. In *Displacing ordoliberalism in favour of EU sovereignty*, Porak analyses EU industrial policy through a Cultural Political Economy lens. She shows how the European Commission seeks to position EU industrial policy as a strategic guideline for the green transition yet remains constrained by ordoliberal paradigms that prioritise competitiveness and fiscal discipline. The article thus illustrates how entrenched economic ideas shape the use and reinterpretation of policy instruments, and how such ideational conflicts limit transformative change.

In *Instruments as Belief-Driven Entities*, Gerstenberg and Schnapp theorize how policy process theories underrepresent the politics of policy formulation and overlook instruments as normatively charged meaning structures. They reconceptualise the interplay of beliefs and policy instruments by combining a concept of policy instruments from post-functionalist instrument theory with the ACF belief system approach. By bringing these two concepts together, they develop an analytical approach for individual policymakers' conceptions of policy instruments.

In *The Politics of Climate Policy Instruments*, Gerstenberg and Schnapp apply the belief systems approach of the ACF to EU multi-level climate policy and the Emissions Trading System. They uncover how policymakers' beliefs politicize climate policy through instruments, even amid agreement on goals. They identify five distinct 'worlds of thought' that map how actors link instrument preferences to deeper visions of a climate-mitigated world. Central cleavages revolve around the state-market relationship, distinguishing carbon pricing purists from interventionists. Former purists increasingly accept policy mixes due to instrument-based learning, while discursively marginalized degrowth supporters pragmatically endorse the ETS. Other actors deploy the ETS rhetorically while simultaneously undermining it to shield industrial interests.

Steiner et al., in *EU Common Fisheries Policy failure?*, focus on the role of information network structures in shaping preferences and instrument choice aimed at the 'blue' EGD component. Using a combination of social network theory and non-cooperative bargaining models, they reveal how policymakers and stakeholders perform and are influenced by communicational lobbying from established networks, leading to biased beliefs and reinforcing ineffective policy choices. The complexity of policy instrument mixes as well as informational asymmetries and initial biased beliefs of actors – due to politicized narratives – are shown to hinder learning and adaptive governance, ultimately producing suboptimal outcomes.

At the national level, contributions focus on how EU climate and energy objectives are filtered through domestic politics, administrative routines, and discursive framings. In *The long haul or a short run of policy change?*, Wenz-Temming explores Germany's adoption of CO₂ pricing in the transport and heating sectors. She shows how compliance with EU emissions targets occurs within a multi-level governance framework, where party politics, interest group dynamics, and varying degrees of ideological support or resistance shape the choice and enforcement of policy instruments. Her analysis of multi-level compliance dynamics underscores that the national implementation of Europe's green policy agenda, particularly the choice and calibration of instruments, is a politically contested process, not merely a technocratic adjustment.

Hermann Lüken genannt Klaffen, in *Exploring the System Security Veil*, analyses the implementation of EU energy policy across several EU member states. His focus lies on the design of capacity remuneration mechanisms and how their adoption reflects both functional requirements and broader institutional constraints. While formal change occurs, it is shaped by national policy legacies, administrative path dependencies, and sectoral routines. In addition, he highlights the political – especially party-political – factors that influence whether states lean towards market-based or state-led instruments to ensure system security. These choices, in turn, affect how compatible the selected mechanisms are with the integration of renewable energy. His findings thus contribute to the broader debate on the evolving balance between market and state in the governance of the energy transition.

In *Micropolitics in Carbon Pricing*, Rafael Postpischil offers an ethnographic account of how Germany introduced its emissions trading system. His analysis reveals the fine-grained ‘micropolitics’ that accompany instrument introduction, showing that change was driven by interpersonal relations among stakeholders, policy makers’ own experience with climate change, and partisan framing according to tacit beliefs. These micropolitics unfolded within macro factors such as climate protests or EU climate targets and helped overcome long-standing resistance.

Daniela Braun and Martin Gross, in *When do political parties engage with environmental issues?*, investigate how parties vary their emphasis on environmental issues. Analysing party manifestos of German parties, they show that strategic considerations, not just ideology, drive these shifts. Non-left parties reduce emphasis when facing strong Green competitors, while left parties consistently stress environmental policies, particularly those involving state intervention. Parties across the board emphasise environmental issues when economic conditions are favourable, which highlights the role of contextual factors.

Künzler, in *Measuring Discursive Lock-In with the Narrative Policy Framework*, analyses public debates on fossil gas in Germany. Despite external shocks and mounting pressure for decarbonisation, carbon narratives remain remarkably stable. The findings underscore the discursive lock-in that reinforces existing fossil pathways and constrains shifts in public and policy discourse, even when the policy direction appears to be changing.

At both EU and national levels, environmental policymaking is constrained by entrenched institutional routines and long-standing belief systems. Economic ideologies such as ordoliberalism and market-centred paradigms continue to shape how problems are understood and which policy tools are deemed legitimate. Rather than witnessing bold, transformative action, what emerges is a pattern of incremental adjustments, negotiated compromises, and strategic positioning. Political actors and institutions remain embedded in inherited practices, discourses, and power structures, which restrict their capacity for adaptive governance. Discursive lock-ins around fossil fuels, administrative path dependencies, and the strategic calculations of political parties all contribute to a system that appears to change on the surface but resists deeper transformation.

In essence, the EU’s ecological transition unfolds within ideational and institutional constraints, where innovation is shaped, and often restricted, by the legacies of the past. While commitments to green goals are visible at both EU and member-state levels, the practical realisation of the transition remains limited by institutional inertia, conflicting economic interests, and contested visions of sustainability. The relevance of institutions – and institutional inertia – has long been a central theme in political science (e.g., Hall & Taylor, 1996; March & Olsen, 1989; Pierson, 2000). It is not surprising that these dynamics play a critical role in the green transition. Yet this also underscores a deeper point: Even a strong EU-level agenda, such as the EGD, cannot easily produce far-reaching transformations across governance levels and sectors. This challenge is amplified by the EU itself continuing to reproduce a growth-oriented paradigm, which limits more radical visions of ecological sustainability.

The multilevel nature of governance, spanning EU, national, and subnational arenas, introduces additional layers of ‘micropolitical’ negotiation and contestation (Postpischil 2025, in this Symposium), further complicating implementation. Politicization emerges as a double-edged sword: It can catalyse adaptation and learning but can also entrench resistance and limit transformative potential.

5 Conclusion and avenues for future research

The EU has embarked on an ambitious path towards sustainability and climate neutrality. With the overarching Green Deal agenda and the extensive Fit for 55 packages, the EU and its member states have committed to wide-ranging policy changes across climate, industrial, trade, energy, and agricultural sectors. This Symposium's insights into the instrumentation and negotiation of green transition measures engage with several major themes in EU research. First, the contributions speak to research on the trajectory of EU environmental and climate policy. Over the past 60 years, EU environmental legislation has experienced alternating periods of intense activity and relative stagnation (Knill & Liefferink, 2021). While the Green Deal and accompanying measures represent a major leap forward, their implementation remains subject to negotiation between diverse actors and world views at the EU, national and subnational levels, as several articles in this Symposium show.

Second, the contributions to this Symposium touch on questions of governance, including the crucial relationship between governance frameworks and implementation challenges. The EU's multi-level governance system theoretically provides opportunities for fit-to-purpose solutions, customized approaches, and policy learning (e.g., Bondarouk & Mastenbroek, 2018; Brendler & Thomann, 2023). However, there is evidence that such opportunities are not always utilised at lower levels (Gollata & Newig, 2018). Moreover, flexibility for lower levels can result in administrative overload (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2024). On the one hand, the European Green Deal marks a shift towards more top-down, binding policies, moving away from more flexible governance modes used in the past. In several cases, the European Commission revised existing policies by replacing Directives, which offer member states greater flexibility, with Regulations, which are directly applicable across the EU – as seen, for example, in the EU's battery policy (Pollex & Lenschow, 2024). On the other hand, Europe's ecological transition governance architecture represents a mix of 'hard' and 'soft' elements (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2024; Knodt, 2023; Schoenefeld & Knodt, 2021). Whether this leads to *better* implementation or sparks conflicts at national and subnational levels remains an open question for future research. Considering the contributions in this Symposium, continued struggles over the concrete realisation of the transition are to be expected. Differences between member states are likely to sharpen, shaped by variations in administrative traditions, party-political dynamics, particularly regarding a contestation of climate and environmental protection (e.g., Berker, 2024), and dominant policy framings – as illustrated, for instance, by France's oppositional stance on renewable energy policy (Messad, 2024).

Finally, several articles in this collection shed light on the increasing politicization of climate and environmental policy as the Green Deal moves from agenda-setting to implementation. Over the past few years, political conflicts over climate measures have intensified (Marquardt & Lederer, 2022). By analysing how specific instruments become focal points of contestation, the contributions to this Symposium advance research on the politics of implementing Europe's green transition under conditions of societal resistance, party competition, and competing policy paradigms.

While ambitious goal setting remains crucial, the contributions to this Symposium highlight that the implementation of Europe's green transition deserves greater systematic attention. Implementation, including the selection and design of policy instruments at European, national, and subnational levels, is a politically contested process shaped by regulatory

and ideational legacies, established policy networks and ongoing negotiations between actors and interests. The articles collected here illustrate how change is often incremental and constrained by structural, institutional, and discursive factors. Future research should continue to explore the politics of implementation and instrumentation in Europe's green transition to better understand how ecological agendas are translated into practice – and where they risk falling short.

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