

# The role of local union representatives in just and sustainable transitions

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**work**

**climate crisis**

**environment**



UiO 

# environmental labour studies

«The way in which **nature and labour are intrinsically linked and equally threatened** by globalising capital provides the theoretical rationale, while the **development of environmental trade union policies worldwide** provides the empirical rationale for an area of study that we suggest calling environmental labour studies.» (Uzzel and Rätzzel 2013: 10, my emphasis)

Two political-academic projects: **greening work vs climate jobs**

- «Greening the long chain of production and concentrating on greening the present jobs...» (Lipsig-Mumme 2013)
- “[A]ll alliances for climate jobs are framed in opposition to market-based versions of the transition to low emission societies” (Ytterstad 2021: np)

Two analytical perspectives on worker agency: **roles and role incumbents**

- the impact of individual activists (e.g. Lundström 2018)
- the transformative capacity of roles (e.g. Houeland and Jordhus-Lier 2022)





# the municipality as a change agent

“[R]ecognizes the important role of non-Party stakeholders, including civil society, indigenous peoples, local communities, youth, children, **local and regional governments** and other stakeholders, in contributing to progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement” *(from COP16 statement)*

“The municipalities can contribute to several million tons in emission cuts, primarily through their role as planning authorities, local coordinators and through societal development. Substantial cuts can also be achieved through internal organisational measures.” *(Kommunenes sentralforbund, www.ks.no website)*

“The municipal sector employs almost 500.000 workers. If we can mobilise them in a green transformation at work, this will yield visible results. The social dialogue is meant to ensure close contact between municipal management, staff and union representatives.” *(Gunn Marit Helgesen, chair of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities KS)*

Institutionalisation of policy areas through **habitualisation**: “[S]tarting with municipal organisation and gradually involving the local community, businesses and daily life. Ideally, it will result in a full integration of climate policies into societal processes.” (Westskog et al. 2022: np)



# the main agreement

«The parties emphasise the importance, in the context of workplace relations, of creating awareness and understanding for the organisation's impact on the outer environment and the climate. The parties agree that climate-related and environmental measures furthering the sustainable development goals are **part of workplace relations** under the main agreement.» (*Hovedavtalen KS, 2020*)

«Referring to [the above], the local parties **should deliberate** climate-related and environmental measures in the municipality.» (*addition, Hovedavtalen KS, 2022*)

# translating sentences into local practice

## **unions are complex beings!**

- several individuals in Utdanningsforbundet, NITO and Fagforbundet open to (even impatient for) including climate-related measures into tariff agreements and local workplace relations
- the employer association is perceived to be cautious (or even deliberately slow) in reacting
- the negotiation units of the trade unions hesitates to incorporate this issue into their mandate

## **national-level actors call for local sources of inspiration (best practice)**

- local union representatives lack concrete instructions



# translating sentences into local practice

- developing arguments and strategies for «greening» local workplace relations
- in collaboration with three unions (Fagforbundet, Unio, NITO)
- using the launch of the report to engage the employer side, and facilitate experiments



# conclusion

- attempts to rescript union roles in a climate crisis are impeded by a lack of experiential knowledge: *role incumbents are awaiting new role descriptions, and vice versa*
- local union are likely to remain in a defensive, reactive mode until this new ecological mandate is given substance through shopsteward training, clearer signals from above
- having established the *why*, can researchers provide central actors with a better understanding of the *how*?



# references

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