

SEMINAR SERIES: MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY TRANSITIONS FOR REGIONS AND CITIES

SEMINAR 1: Managing the transition to a climate-neutral economy

17 May 2019; 9:30 - 17:00

OECD Headquarter, Chateau Room D, 2 rue André Pascal, 75016 Paris

Background

In the Paris Agreement, parties have agreed to a long-term goal to limit climate change to well below 2°C and make efforts towards 1.5°C. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warns that global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C as early as 2030 if it continues to increase at the current rate, and urges further action of all actors.

There is a growing recognition that reaching a climate-neutral and more circular economy will require a paradigm shift. In other words that deep innovations in societal systems ('system innovations'), by means of profound changes to the dominant structures, practices, technologies, policies, lifestyles, and more, are needed to overcome persistent problems such as climate change and resource scarcity. At the same time, embedding such transition in the wider need for ensuring wider well-being objectives (for current and future generations) is also needed. "Mitigation policies are likely to be more feasible to implement, politically, economically and socially, as well as more cost-effective, when there is a two-way alignment between climate action and broader goals of human well-being and sustainable development" (OECD, forthcoming).

The need for such transitions has been increasingly documented and the concept has now entered the EU policy debate. However, whereas there is no doubt that the achievement of this transition requires systemic changes at regional and local level, more analytical work is needed on the role of regions and cities, the particular actions that need to be undertaken by regional and city authorities and the type of investment that they will need to undertake. There is also a need for improving understanding of the potential challenges that cities and regions might face (e.g. distributional impacts) and how these can be minimised and ultimately mitigated; as well as the ways in which better synergies between climate and wider sustainability goals can be increased.

The first part of the seminar will focus on a more theoretical discussion on different pathways to the transition, including the role of place-based approaches, the need for governance strategies, the potential risks that can come with the transition, and the relevance of public involvement. It will also explore the potential of adopting a systemic approach for the transition; addressing diverse "leverage" points in the different systems that cities and regions can act on to achieve a successful transition. Along these lines, discussions will aim at providing a general overview on the type of policy instruments, infrastructure, and institutional dynamics that can make a difference between delivering marginal change and triggering transformation.

Debate during the afternoon part of the seminar will concentrate on practical experiences and examples of policies used to help regions and cities to manage the transition. Discussions will highlight cross-cutting urban and regional policies, but will also address sector-specific policies in a number of sectors (e.g. urban and land use planning, buildings and the residential sector, mobility, energy supply, consumption, food systems). Special emphasis will be given to identifying barriers and caveats for expanding implementation of policies that have demonstrated to have relevant impact. Insights on some of the challenges for aligning policies among governments and across levels of government will also be discussed.

Questions to address: How can regions and cities manage the transition to a climate-neutral economy?

- How can better understanding of city systems and city-regional linkages help in undertaking the transition to a carbon-neutral economy?
- How can the transition to a climate-neutral economy be embedded in achieving wider well-being goals?
- What policies, approaches and best practices are available at urban and regional level for managing the transition to a low-carbon economy?
- How can the potential of this transition be harnessed while limiting the downsides and avoiding lock-ins at urban and regional level?
- How can EU and national policies help regions and cities during this transition?
- How can a broad range of actors and stakeholders (businesses, consumers) be engaged in the transition process?