

Eco-social Synergies: Legal Challenges at the Intersection of the Environmental and Employment Realms

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PANEL 2. The Key stakeholders in Environmental Protection in the Labour Market and Best Practices

ABSTRACT

Bridging Labor and Environment: A Comparative Study of Trade Union Roles in the Southern EU and the U.S.

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This research project addresses the nexus between labor law and environmental protection, focusing on the pivotal role of trade unions. In the backdrop of increasing environmental precariousness, the study seeks to understand the extent to which trade unions, particularly in the Southern EU (Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France) and the U.S., contribute to fostering an ecologically sustainable working environment. Historically, trade unions have undergone three phases in their approach to environmental concerns. The initial phase, predominant before the 1950s, perceived environmental issues as conflicting with workers' interests. The second phase, lasting until the end of the 20th century, witnessed a shift towards recognizing the alignment between environmental and labor conditions, spurred by international environmental regulations. The contemporary phase, emerging from the 2000s onwards, reflects a heightened societal sensitivity to environmental issues, with trade unions increasingly embracing an eco-social roadmap.

The study focuses on two distinctive trade union models in the selected regions. In the Southern EU, it explores eco-unionist movements that balance existing industries with eco-responsible perspectives. In the U.S., trade unions vary from those advocating for responsible industry practices to those endorsing a radical shift, incorporating pre- and post-transition policies to address environmental consequences. By comparing the Southern EU and U.S. trade union approaches, the research aims to identify best practices and potential collaborative strategies. The chosen regions not only exhibit a growing emphasis on environmental rights but also possess extraterritorial capabilities, influencing global environmental protection through trade and negotiations (concretely, third countries located in the global south). The research unfolds in phases, encompassing a historical study, an examination of legal frameworks, an analysis of trade union policies, and a comparative study. Fieldwork involving conversations with union actors aims to provide practical insights into the realization of environmental protection within the workplace. This study's expected outcome is to showcase the pivotal role of trade unions in driving environmental protection within the workplace. By fostering collaboration between

Southern EU and U.S. trade unions, the research aims to contribute practical solutions to the pressing challenge of balancing environmental improvement and decent employment in the 21st century.