



Università
degli Studi
di Ferrara

Viviana Asara (with Marco Caligari),
Università di Ferrara

A critical examination of the Just Transition.

What coalition politics?

POE 7° Annual Workshop
Democratic planning and labour alliances beyond growth
Scuola Normale Superiore, 28 November 2024



The research project

“Just transition in the factory. Workers' mobilizations and participatory innovation in emergent Italian experiences” (PRIN 2022), coordinated by Luigi Pellizzoni

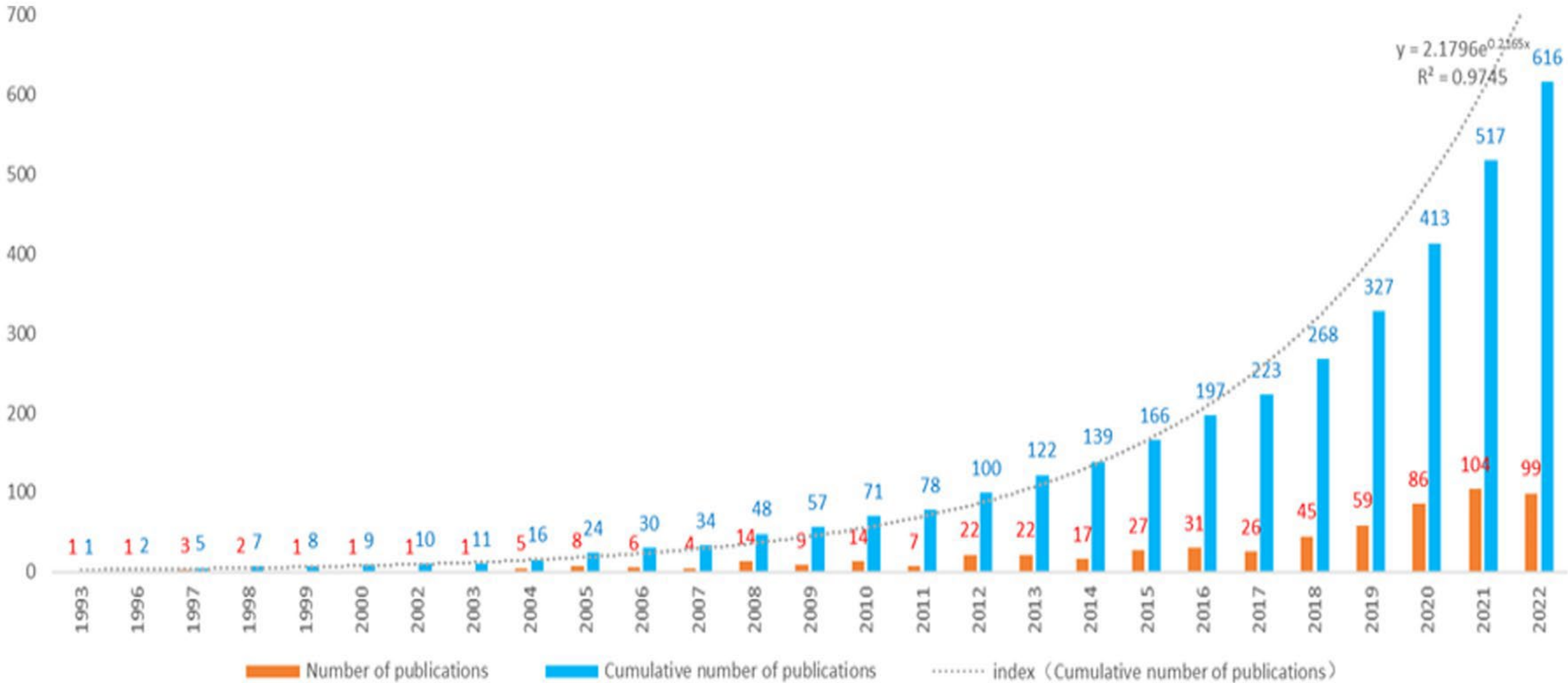
Other members:

- UniBO (Federico Chicchi, Emanuele Leonardi, Matteo Lupoli)
- SNS (Barbara Bastos)
- UniBG (Domenico Perrotta, Camilla Macciani)
- UniPI (Matteo Villa)

> Work in progress (preliminary findings)

Energy and the debate on the just transition (JT)

- **Energy sector** responsible for 73% of GHGs. Reduction by 25-30% by 2030 (UN 2021). Coal should decrease by 59-78% by 2030 compared to 2010
 - Green Deal: - 55% GHGs by 2030. Just Transition Mechanism: 100 million euros between 2021-27
- European Commission's JRC: loss of 27,000 jobs in coal industry by 2030 (Alves Dias et al 2018). Failure to take social justice issues into account will undermine popular support for the energy transition (Healy & Barry 2018; Cantoni & Brisbois 2024, Sanz-Hernandez 2024; Vona 2019, Newell & Mulvaney 2013)
- JT developed as a trade union claim in U.S. and Canadian mobilisations: environmental goals should converge with social concerns, so as not to jeopardize workers' rights
- Conceptual and literature **expansion, institutional recognition** and consolidation in international law
→ **mainstreaming** of the debate on the JT



Temporal distribution of studies related to just the energy transition (1993–2022). Source : Sun et al 2023

Contested concept and the role of participation

- Definitions of Just Transition (JT):
 - “conceptual framework in which the labor movement captures the complexities of the transition toward a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, highlighting public policy needs and aiming to **maximize benefits and minimize hardships**” (ILO)
 - “fair and equitable process of moving toward a postcarbon society”, including environmental, energy and climate justice (McCauley & Heffron 2018)
 - “a just transition is the transition to a low carbon economy and society explicitly oriented to ensure **sustainability and climate action goals** as well as the achievement of **public health, decent work, social inclusion and poverty eradication** objectives”(McIlroy et al 2022)
- **Procedural & recognition** vs. distributive dimension of justice, **normative bias** vs empirical analyses. Participation important (ETUC, ILO’s Agenda for Just Transition) but not analysed empirically
 - Participation as key element to make the transition more socially accepted (Cantoni & Brisbois 2024), together with binding commitments, political steering, and social protection funds

Critical perspectives on JT and the role of trade unions

- More **critical perspectives**:
 - The concept **mainstreaming** in the UN space and through ITUC/ILO vision
→ **sustainable capitalism «through dialogue and democratic consultation»** (Barca 2024) that can **hide lingering tensions and conflicts**, reproducing relations of power and inequality, and erasing a vision of a **worker-controlled democratic social ownership**
 - Crisis management tool for green capitalism and green growth proposals, a corrective of the tensions of the green transition through safety nets
→ corporate capture (Stavis Morena Krause 2020)
- **Work on expertise**: “not so much as an actor attribute, but as a practice open to contestation and redefinition, [which] is going to assume relevance in conflicts over environment, health and territory” (Pellizzoni 2011)
 - Claim for democratisation of science. Co-production model as ““synergy among participants, each of whom puts in his or her own” (ibid)
- **Role of trade unions**: Environmental Labour Studies: reasons, conditions, processes for delaying or opposing transitions vs supporting them
- The contradictory effect of the **neoliberal turn** on trade unions

The case study: ENEL coal-fired power plant in Torrealvaldliga Nord (Civitavecchia, Rome)

- ENEL is the second largest electricity multinational in the world, with 75,000 employees, of whom 36,000 in Italy (Galgoczi 2020)
- In 2015, it launched the Futur-e program for the energy conversion of 23 thermoelectric power plants, evaluated as a good EJ example
- Potentially emblematic case of just planned energy reconversion with strong civil society mobilisation: from new gas-fired power plant to offshore wind farm

Research questions

- How does the vision of JT emerge throughout conflicts linked to the ecological transition?
- What are the different interpretations of JT?
- What kind of coalition politics that is able to coalesce environmental and workers struggles? How and why has the alliance between labour and environmental movements evolved?

Methodology

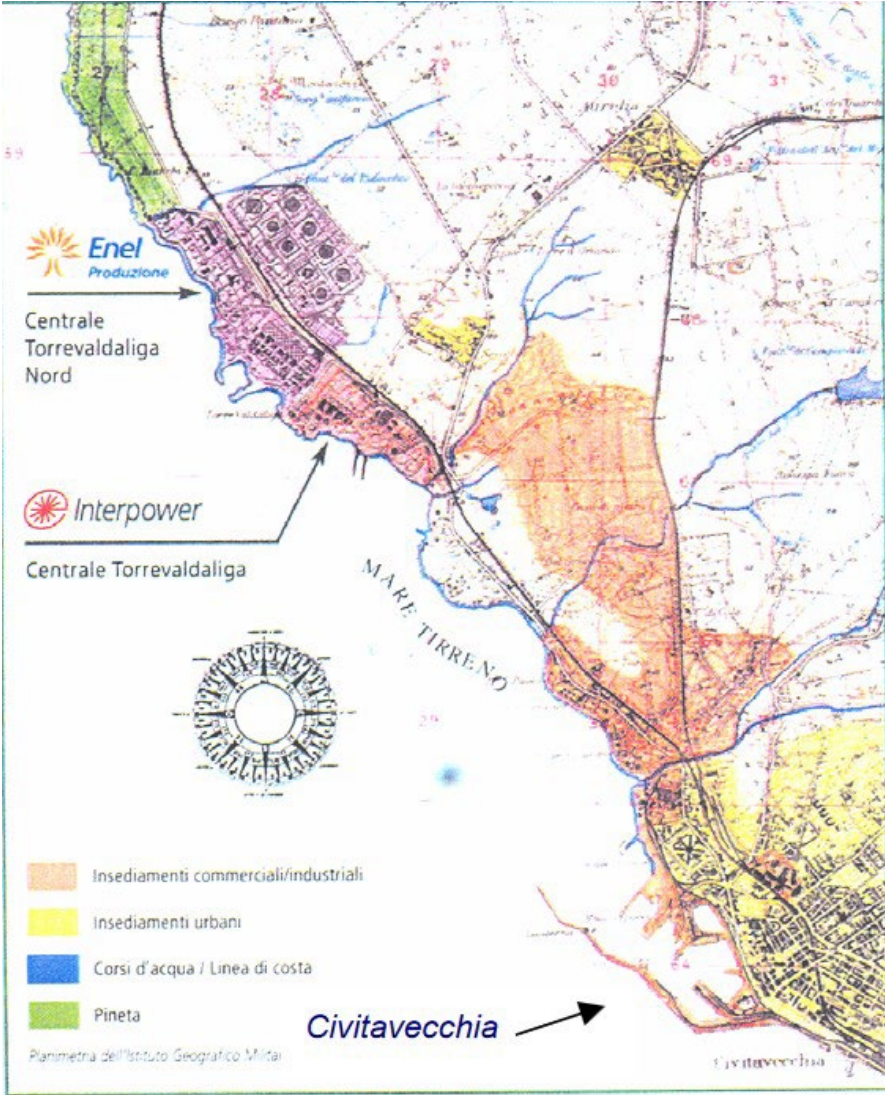
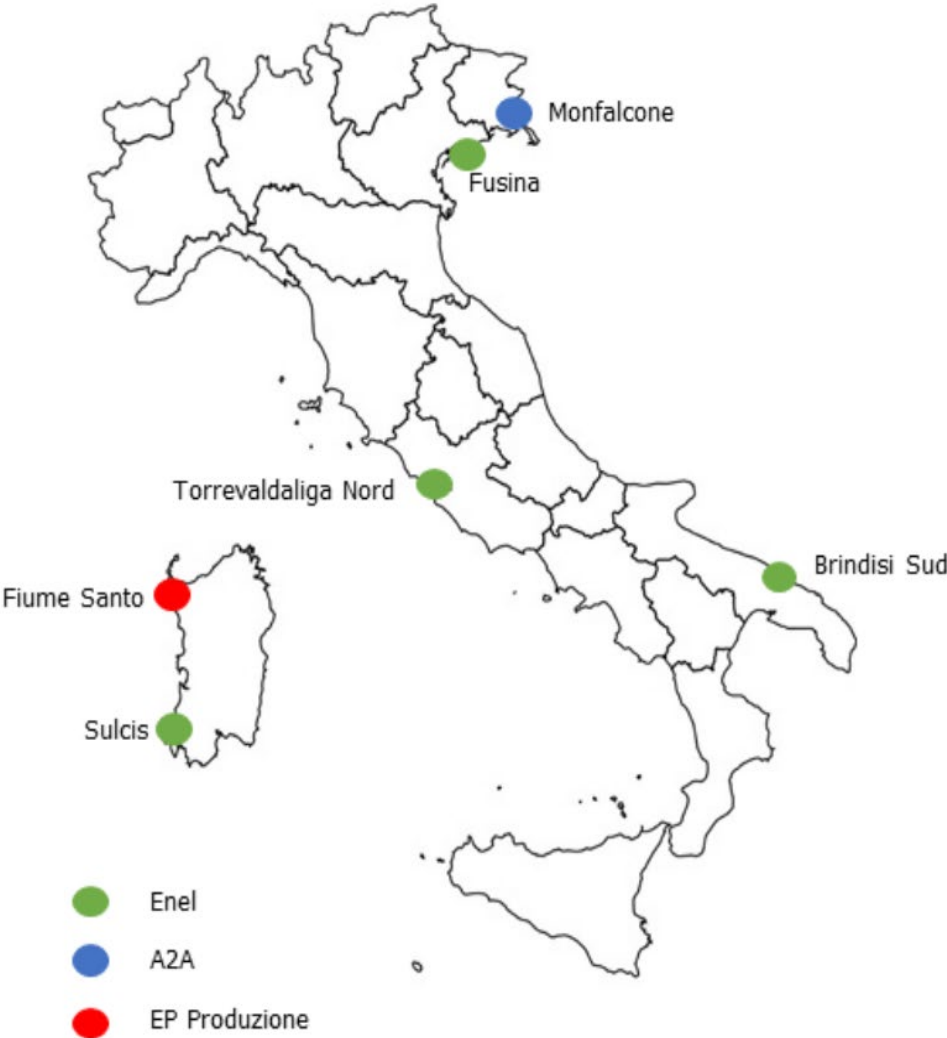
- 33 in-depth interviews with technicians, workers, trade union members, environmental associations, government officials, firm executive personnels and managers (ENEL and port company) manager and other civil society organisations in the city of Civitavecchia.
 - New interviews are being carried right now by Marco Caligari in Civitavecchia
- A focus group

Context and history

- Civitavecchia is a city of 50,000 inhabitants, part of the Rome metropolitan area, 80 km northern than Rome
- 4 power plants (2 still functioning): Fiumaretta, **Torrevaldaliga Nord** (TVN), **Torrevaldaliga Sud** (TVS), Montalto di Castro
- “Civitavecchia was to for energy, as Mirafiori was to the car” (I)
- Harbour (second largest cruise port in Europe), and an ex-cement factory (Italcementi)

The geography

Carbon power plants in Italy



From 60s to 1990s: dense oil and the shift from public company to liberalisation

“Civitavecchia was to energy as Mirafiori was to the automobile. **Unionization was also very high**, with CGIL dominating. It was a **red island**. I entered a phase of very high gains in workers' rights (...) A massive presence with a high level of employment. **ENEL had a mission** (...) the worker was part of a process of evangelization and the work transcended “wage labor,” as they were part of the **mission to provide energy to the nation**, it was the idea of the **public company**, a brand that was present everywhere at the level of **identity**” (USB trade unionist)

- Pride, sense of class membership, but also illnesses from harmful work
- ENEL's building of hegemony in the public discourse

From 2000s to 2018: conversion to coal, job blackmail and clash between environmentalists and workers

- Mobilisations against conversion to coal and rejection of the argument of ‘clean coal’:
 - **No Coke Committee** (environmentalists, citizens, dockworkers and other workers), but not able to combine labour with environmental issue. Part of STOP Enel campaign, connections with Brindisi
 - Local city councils
 - Coordination of doctors and pharmacists
- Popular consultation in 2002 with 85% inhabitants against coal, in 2003 the new plant the authorisation for the construction was issued by the Ministry of Productive activities
- 2003-2008 construction of the plant, with thousands of workers and many subcontracting companies
- **‘Fratricidal war** and ‘fracture within the city’, families, political parties
- Coal production involves **3 main categories of workers**: electrical, metalworkers and dockworkers. Coordination between the Central Mediterranean System Port Authority, ENEL, Minosse company, Civitavecchia Port Company
- Health and safety: asbestos insulation, high noise and temperatures, vibrations

2018/2019-today: alliance between labour and environmentalists

- **Announcement of phase out** of coal-fired power plants by 2025, included in the National Integrated Energy and Environment Plan (PNIEC) in 2020
- May 2019 Enel submitted documentation for the **replacement of coal-fired units with natural gas units** to the government (gas as transition strategy)
 - Expected reduction in jobs from around 800 to around 40 workers
- 2019 as a year of **discontinuity**: surge of a heterogeneous network of environmentalist associations collaborating with trade unions, workers, in strikes, demonstrations and actions. Unprecedented alliance, of technicians, workers, environmentalists
- Energy servitude and working-class environmentalists
- Trade union protagonism, important role of city council and regional councilors
- **2 projects elaborated with technicians: environmentally sustainable redevelopments of the port** (Porto Bene Comune – Zephyro), and **offshore wind farm** (which the region made its own, and then was authorised by the Ministry of Environment in March 2024)
 - + wind blade production and shipbuilding for metalworkers
- In June 2021, invitation for expressions of interest for a wind farm off the coast of Civitavecchia, in 2022 approval of the Regional Energy Plan (exclusion of fossil power)
- Green IT-a joint venture between Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, ENI Plenitude and the Danish renewables fund Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners
- Anticipation of the closure of the TVN power plant (July 2024)

“And there, there happened the biggest epiphany, that **we realized that we weren't making anything up and that the first ones against the coal plant were the ones who worked there**, so it was the measure of the circles, we said well, let's work together” I don't mean they were the first ones who wanted to be unemployed, I mean they were the first ones who **experienced the discomfort of working with a polluting material like coal**, between those who dumped it and those who physically then had to clean the plants where the coal was burned. So we said we're not a vanguard and let them speak, sometimes we were able to get people who were in the supply chain to speak directly, and other times we did information gathering and took their instances to the streets” (FFF interviewee)

“at a certain point the S.O.L.E. Committee understands that **if you don't unite the environmental struggle with the struggle for jobs, you don't go anywhere**” (Comitato SOLE activist)

«To oppose since the first months of 2019 the conversion to turbogas of the Torrevaldaliga Nord power plant was a **conscious choice of the territorial CGIL**, born as a **utopia that we can now make concrete (...)** We chose to take our organization to the streets of the city. **We hosted in our home**, in the Chamber of Labor, **a debate that over time grew with movements**, environmental associations, technicians and scientists who made an amazing elaboration contribution» (CGIL Secretary at Civitavecchia, in Mastrandrea, 2022)

Some preliminary insights and conundrums

- Facilitator: lose-lose solutions for both labour and environment
- ‘From mobilisation against to proposal of alternative solutions
- However **risk of corporate transition from top-down**, and great uncertainties over future developments (Meloni government)
 - Solar versus wind technologies: energy democracy: what kind of JT?
 - Divide cutting across the workers-environmentalists alliance: no just transition without energy democracy, just transition as ‘simply’ preserving jobs that will be greened
- Important role of trade unions: «from labour dispute to territorial dispute»
- Energy servitude, decolonial debate and «sacrifice zones»
- Fracture between the three workers categories → different visions of transitions

Thank you!
Viviana.asara@unife.it