

Justice in the Age of Planetary Challenges
International Conference November 7–9, 2024
EnJust Network, University of Hamburg

The fifth international *EnJust* conference, titled *Environmental Justice in the Age of Planetary Peril: Concepts, Agencies, Mobilizations*, took place this time in cooperation with the Institute of Geography at the University of Hamburg. Around 100 participants from 20 different countries - including Mexico, India, Colombia, Italy, the USA, and Germany - gathered for three days at the Warburg House and the main building of the University of Hamburg. Some program highlights, such as keynote lectures by Rita Floyd (University of Birmingham) and Andrew Baldwin (Durham University), were open to the public.

The conference explored the scope for action and opportunities available to environmental justice movements in an era of planetary dangers and uncertainty, as well as the conceptual frameworks needed for their analysis. A key argument put forth during the conference was that the escalating climate crisis, along with urgent calls for swift and effective solutions, risks reinforcing existing global inequalities and power structures while simultaneously undermining demands for justice. Decarbonization efforts, such as the energy transition, are often embedded in discourses of technological solutionism and neoliberal governance, which in turn contribute to legitimizing post-fossil extractivism and “green colonialism”.

This dynamic becomes particularly evident when unused land and resources in the so-called “Global South” are appropriated to meet the allegedly imperative demand for “clean energy” in the capitalist centers of the so-called Global North, often leading to land grabbing and displacement. At the same time, climate change and its direct and indirect consequences - such as rising sea levels and migration movements - are reviving outdated notions of national security and territorial enclosure. Against these strategies of technological solutionism and securitization, however, stands a growing number of movements that understand climate change as a fundamental question of justice and advocate for socio-ecological transformation and alternative forms of sustainability. The tension between urgency, security, and justice was at the heart of numerous panels, interventions, lectures, and discussions.

In this way, the *EnJust* 2024 conference built directly on the previous year's conference in Chiapas, Mexico, which examined existing and emerging justice concepts and discussed their political feasibility. However, given the increasing threats of planetary scale and the fundamental questioning of established human-nature relationships - an issue that has gained momentum in recent discussions about the Anthropocene and the so-called “planetary turn” - this year's conference focused even more strongly on the adequacy of existing justice concepts and the need for new approaches and theories capable of better capturing planetary forces and threats.

The conference combined inter- and transdisciplinary approaches with creative and experimental approaches (such as activist interventions, film documentaries, and artistic performances) to offer a broad range of diverse perspectives on environmental justice issues.

Justice Concepts and Pathways Toward a Just Transformation

This year's keynote lectures were delivered by Andrew Baldwin (Durham University) and Rita Floyd (University of Birmingham). In his talk on *Racial Futurism*, Baldwin explored how security discourses in climate policy shape power relations, often at the expense of social justice. Floyd's lecture, *Achieving Climate Justice via Securitization?*, examined both the risks and potential opportunities of security-based approaches to advancing climate justice.

The thematic focal points of the sessions included conflicts of transformation, knowledge politics, climate litigation, energy transition processes, and water justice. A recurring question was how certain technological or political measures - such as the expansion of energy infrastructures or extractive industries - generate social tensions in affected communities, often leading to resistance. These dynamics were critically examined, for example, in the session *Mega-Projects and Infrastructural Violence*.

Another key topic was the potential role of environmental justice claims in de-escalating conflicts arising from resource disputes and environmental destruction. This issue was central to discussions in the sessions on *Environmental Peacebuilding*. In addition to critically engaging with technocratic and neoliberal approaches to tackling environmental issues and climate change, the conference also explored alternative strategies for a more just transformation. A major focus was the demand for a more comprehensive inclusion of non-human actors and planetary forces in justice frameworks and legal systems, such as the concepts of *planetary justice* and the institutionalization of *earth system law*.

Postcolonial perspectives played a crucial role in these debates. Many participants called for a deep decolonization of environmental justice and emphasized the need for greater epistemic and ontological diversity in relevant studies and climate protection measures.

Environmental Justice and Peace

The *EnJust* 2024 conference underscored that environmental justice is not only a matter of sustainability and social equity but also a key factor in peace and conflict transformation. The conceptual and political link between environmental justice and peace research was explored on multiple levels, particularly in light of current ecological challenges.

At the same time, the conference fostered an intense exchange on the development of innovative approaches to achieving fairer and more peaceful futures. Environmental conflicts—whether caused by climate change or extractive practices—can only be sustainably resolved through the just distribution of resources and the comprehensive participation of affected communities. Bridging local and global perspectives, as well as integrating activist movements that originally brought the idea of environmental justice into public discourse, remains essential.

Strengthened by the discussions in Hamburg, the *EnJust* network continues to serve as a platform that fosters dialogue between academia, activism, and the arts, while amplifying the voices of those affected by environmental destruction, extractivism, and colonialism.

The next international *EnJust* conference is expected to take place in the summer of 2026.