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**“Local Governments as Public Actors in the European Just Transition
Framework: Case Study of Slovakia”**

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Abstract:

The European Union (EU) has committed to a Just Transition Framework to ensure inclusivity and equity in transitioning to a green and digital economy. This shift impacts national and regional policies, particularly in adopting renewable energy, managing non-standard work arrangements, and promoting circular economies. Local governments play a critical role in this process, as highlighted in agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the European Green Deal. However, their responsibilities vary across EU countries, with limited roles observed in some, like in Germany and Malta, and undefined roles in Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. This variation points to asymmetric involvement of local governments in Just Transition policymaking.

This study, guided by Multi-level Governance (MLG) and Path Development theories, investigates local governments' roles in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), focusing on constraints and opportunities within existing public administration frameworks. MLG theory suggests that distributing authority across different levels can empower local governments to implement climate policies addressing specific community needs. However, CEE's centralised administrative traditions often limit local autonomy, impacting local governments' roles in policymaking and resource allocation. Path development theory offers a historical perspective, highlighting how past institutional structures shape current capacities for managing Just Transition goals, which could provide an outline of how we could shape the future direction of the roles of these actors.

Using Slovakia as a case study, this research examines how local governments in CEE can leverage their administrative expertise and regional knowledge to support sustainable transition policies. It explores ways to adapt centralised governance to enhance local contributions to EU Just Transition objectives.

Keywords: Just Transition, Local Governance, Actor Empowerment, Central Europe, Regional Development