

The green transition, while vital for addressing climate change, gives rise to societal risks and uncertainty – particularly for communities already vulnerable to economic disruption, geographic marginalization and political exclusion. As governments and institutions accelerate decarbonization efforts, top-down stakeholder engagement practices frequently overlook or silence those most affected, exacerbating resistance, mistrust and socio-political tensions. These conflict dynamics represent critical, yet underappreciated risks to the implementation of inclusive and sustainable climate policy and governance.

This paper explores the role of mediation as a conflict-sensitive governance tool that can address these societal risks and foster more just and resilient societal transformations. In contrast to conventional stakeholder models, which often prioritize efficiency or legitimacy over equity, mediation actively engages with competing interests, identity-based claims and power asymmetries. By reframing conflict not as a disruption but as a signal of deeper systemic vulnerability, mediation offers an opportunity to identify risks early, facilitate dialogue and co-create solutions that reflect diverse stakeholder priorities.

Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from conflict resolution, transition studies and environmental justice, the paper identifies three core deficiencies in current engagement strategies: lack of access for marginalized groups, procedural shortcomings that stifle authentic participation and inequitable outcomes that deepen social divides. It then outlines how mediation – through stakeholder mapping, facilitated dialogue and interest-based negotiation – can mitigate these governance risks and enhance adaptive capacity in green transition planning and projects.

While this contribution is conceptual in nature, it aims to advance a cross-disciplinary framework that situates mediation within broader risk governance and sustainability transitions. The paper does not present empirical case studies or sector-specific applications but instead proposes a methodological lens for future investigation. Further empirical work is needed to test the effectiveness of mediation in specific green transition contexts – such as renewable energy projects, extractive industries or urban mobility/housing planning – where conflict and resistance frequently arise. In doing so, the paper invites dialogue across disciplines and sectors in order to critically assess the potential and limitations of mediation in addressing the societal risks and uncertainties inherent in the transition toward sustainability.