

Overhauling Orgreave: Lessons learned for future just transitions

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Abstract

Once the site of a mining community and historic conflict during the 1984 miners' strike, Orgreave has undergone a complex transition and regenerated into a modern advanced manufacturing district. This study examines how community stakeholders narrate and contest the 'success' of Orgreave's post-coal regeneration, and what this reveals about justice in transition initiatives. Through applying a just transition conceptual lens to qualitative interviews with multiple community stakeholders, this study shows the role played by historical and political issues in making transitions socially just, rather than defining success in solely economic terms. Proactive planning, remembrance of the past, and challenging entrenched social inequalities emerge as lessons. Ultimately, these representational, distributive, and recognitional justice elements intertwine to suggest that future just transitions should be tailored to local communities through a meaningful awareness of politicised and contextualised social realities.

Keywords

just transitions, environmental justice, coalfield regeneration, post-industrial communities

Introduction

From the closure of the coking works in 1990 to the present day, on the outskirts of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, Orgreave has been completely overhauled from a solely industrial mining district to a cutting-edge innovation hub and residential community. It could be argued that the site symbolises a successful transition, transforming an area once reliant on a declining mining-based

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economy to one hosting the Advanced Manufacturing Park (AMP), providing a “*home to some of the world’s biggest manufacturers*” (Harworth Group, 2025a). From the mine’s sinking in 1851 to the closure of the coking works in 1990, Orgreave’s 139-year industrial history culminated in the violent 1984 confrontation between miners and police, which represented a pivotal moment in the UK miners’ strikes (Beckett and Hencke, 2009; Jones, 2017; Stratton and Trinder, 2013).

In 2025, as we walk around this site, we see no signs of this history. Questioning the lack, or even denial, of this history forms the aim of our study. Our understanding is grounded in existing studies that both highlight the neglect of social, cultural and political dimensions in transition debates (Banerjee and Schuitema, 2023; Weller, 2018) and call for a stronger engagement with historical accounts (Newell and Simms, 2020). Drawing on historical accounts represents a useful avenue for shedding light on the processes through which transitions unfold (Fouquet, 2016). Exploring and understanding these processes is also paramount to our second aim, which is to explore Orgreave’s transition from a justice perspective. This work addresses recent calls for transition processes and debates to advance beyond their current focus on greener and more profitable solutions to engage with justice and socially equitable changes (Avelino et al., 2016; Cha, 2020).

Such a shift requires a radical transformation of the dominant techno-managerial or eco-modernist (Genovese and Pansera, 2021) views on transitions, addressing the environmental crisis with technological advancement and managerialist action plans. Although sustainability initiatives are usually presented as neutral and benefiting everyone, previous research suggests that they predominantly prioritise the views and interests of governments and business sectors. Such initiatives simultaneously neglect social and cultural issues and, more broadly, the voices of citizens and communities, which are often positioned as passive actors whose compliance matters more than their views (Kaiser and Vassillo, 2024). Against this background, repoliticising and re-radicalising transitions is understood as a process which unsettles the status quo and neoliberal consensual politics, manufactured by suppressing dissent (Valenzuela & Böhm, 2017; Agyeman, 2008). A way through which such unsettling can be done is to learn from and amplify the perspectives of those voices marginalised by dominant narratives.

This study does not claim that Orgreave was a planned ‘just transition’. Rather, it is analysed as a retrospective case of post-industrial transition and regeneration, shaped by both the political economy of pit closures in the 1980s and the significant time lag before later redevelopment. The language of a ‘just transition’, conceptualised as a framework that explicitly aims to secure the rights and livelihoods of workers and communities in the shift towards a greener economy, was not prominent in 1980s and 1990s UK policy. Indeed, environmental concern was not the primary driver of the colliery’s closure; the rationale was largely economic, rooted in the government’s free-market ideology. However, the subsequent regeneration of the site, characterised by replacing a highly polluting industrial operation with advanced manufacturing, is now often presented in official narratives as an environmentally beneficial transition. We argue that applying a just transition framework retrospectively is a powerful analytical tool precisely because it allows us to interrogate such narratives. The official and industry narrative presents Orgreave as a success. The critical views of local stakeholders, however, suggest that the outcomes they experienced fall short of the principles of representational, distributive, and recognitional justice that are central to a ‘just transition’. By using the just transition framework as our analytical lens, we can systematically unpack why this transition is viewed as a failure by those who lived through it and empirically derive ‘lessons learned’ to inform the design of genuinely just transitions in the future.

As such, our study addresses the following question: *How do community stakeholders narrate and contest the ‘success’ of Orgreave’s post-coal regeneration, and what does this reveal about justice in transition and regeneration initiatives?* We address this question by drawing on 18 qualitative interviews with community stakeholders, spanning residents, local and national

government, employers and other interested associations, who have been involved with or have been impacted by the transition of Orgreave. These individuals will be subsequently referred to as ‘community stakeholders’. We recognise that the term ‘stakeholder’ is contested in critical scholarship for its managerialist connotations, and we acknowledge calls for abandoning the term (e.g. [Reed et al., 2024](#)). In particular, we share concerns about the instrumental employment of the term, which, by obscuring power asymmetries, attempts to depoliticise decision-making and societies at large ([Banerjee, 2000](#)). However, we retain it here to denote positional involvement rather than to depoliticise conflict.

Our work makes three contributions. Firstly, by amplifying neglected perspectives and lived experiences, we challenge techno-managerial understandings of transitions, integrating critical analysis of justice and (in)equalities within broader political dynamics ([Avelino et al., 2016](#); [Cha, 2020](#); [Fraser, 2008](#)). Secondly, our historiographical approach ([O’Brien et al., 2003](#)) challenges established beliefs, as we show that looking back at the past to shed light on events of the present can empower marginalised groups ([Parker, 2004](#)). Finally, we produce evidence-based recommendations to advocate social and political engagement within future transition projects. This research first considers how just transitions and justice more broadly are conceptualised, after which the methodological decisions taken by the research team are explored. An overview of Orgreave’s history from 1980 to the present day is then given to apprise the reader of events within the site’s transition. Based on [Fraser’s \(2008\)](#) tripartite model, community members’ perceptions are then retold through representational, distributive, and recognitional justice lenses. Our research question is then reflected on in the concluding remarks section.

Just transitions

In exploring Orgreave’s transition from a colliery and mining community to the AMP, our interest is in justice, as perceived, remembered, and narrated by the local community stakeholders affected by the transition process. Our work is grounded in intersecting debates, highlighting the neglect of justice and, more broadly, social and cultural dimensions in green transitions ([Castán Broto and Westman, 2017](#)). A recent study exploring 400 flagship sustainability initiatives in urban areas found that only 18% considered justice issues, which suggests transformative schemes that recognise disenfranchised communities are an exception ([Castán Broto and Westman, 2017](#): 644). Within this narrative, consideration of the socio-political nature of sustainable transitions is not only neglected but also pre-empted and delegitimised.

Against this background, interdisciplinary debates on ‘just sustainabilities’ ([Agyeman, 2008](#)) and ‘just transitions’ ([Banerjee and Schuitema, 2023](#); [Velicu and Barca, 2020](#)) advance understanding of sustainability enmeshed with justice, transforming the dominant eco-modernist agenda and its perpetuation of systemic inequalities. These critical debates emphasise the inseparability of the environment, human well-being, and justice ([Agyeman, 2008](#); [Steviss and Felli, 2020](#)) on one side, and the need for transformative approaches tackling rooted socio-economic inequalities on the other. In engaging with these debates while addressing our research question, we employ [Fraser’s \(2008\)](#) tripartite conceptualisation of justice. Tripartite justice frameworks, articulated through representational, distributive, and recognitional dimensions, have been frequently used to analyse the level of fairness of transition processes and associated outcomes. While this tripartition appears analytically useful, the involved dimensions cannot be rigidly separated in practice ([Avelino et al., 2024](#); [Fraser, 2008](#)). A transition process might indeed redistribute resources, recognise, or misrecognise social identities and histories, and establish participation processes, while simultaneously reproducing structural inequalities. In this paper, we therefore use representational, distributive, and recognitional justice as overlapping analytical lenses, rather than as a rigid taxonomy which maps onto specific, distinct, and discrete ‘realms’.

The first dimension focuses on who is represented, and who makes decisions, among the various actors involved. This lens, labelled here as representational justice, generally receives less academic focus than distributive justice (Loopmans et al., 2022). However, it is not only the distribution of outcomes that is needed to ensure justice, but also how individuals are involved in the planning of those outcomes (Manganelli, 2024). Representational justice refers to individuals being able to shape and participate in the decision-making process related to the justice system (Suiseeya, 2021). In the Orgreave context, such decision-making processes would relate to the regeneration of the site, both in its inception and subsequent development. Given that power imbalances cause socio-environmental injustices, ensuring decision-making processes that are sensitive to such imbalances can lead to more equitable and just outcomes (Suiseeya, 2021). However, it should be noted that representational justice in the governance of transitional processes has been subject to several critiques. Participation is often framed as inherently democratising, yet this can easily be reduced to tokenistic managerialist consultations which are simply aimed at securing legitimacy, rather than engagement with political dissent. From this perspective, it needs to be acknowledged that participation mechanisms might also operate as depoliticisation techniques, where disagreement, dissent, and antagonisms are contained and neutralised. This critique aligns with Rancière's argument that politics is not the management of consensus, but the disruption of it through the appearance of those previously excluded from the distribution of voice and visibility (Rancière, 1999).

The second dimension examines the distribution of benefits and burdens among different social groups, with the aim of achieving a fair distribution. Distributive justice is probably the most common understanding of justice embedded in sustainability debates and policy, which recognises that sustainability can only be achieved by considering issues of benefits, burdens, and resource accessibility. This distributive view of justice is also prevalent in debates on the labour movement and trade unions, considering collective bargaining for fair wages, improving working conditions, and challenging workplace inequalities (e.g. Gammage, 2015). However, unions have been historically absent in the green economy justice discourse (Stavis and Felli, 2015). Indeed, what constitutes a fair and equal distribution remains a contested issue. For instance, there are radically different perspectives on which principles should underpin distribution, who should be compensated, and the final aim envisioned (Biermann and Kalfagianni, 2020).

Our understanding of distributive justice is informed by critical perspectives that examine deep-seated structural conflicts and injustices, which perpetuate the unequal distribution of privileges and rewards, according to processes of social differentiation organised around intersecting dimensions (e.g. class, gender and race). While we acknowledge that our identities are processual and that use of these pre-given categories risks reproducing patterns of subjection (Velicu and Barca, 2020), through engaging with distributive justice, we find it helpful to position the perspectives of the community stakeholders in their historical context and the prevailing socio-economic order. This firstly implies acknowledging the antagonistic and unequal positions of those involved in the transition we examine, namely the mining community on one side, and political leaders and private actors on the other. Secondly, it requires contextualising these unequal positions within the broader 'Thatcherite project' (Hudson, 2013) and its faith in the free-market and trickle-down effects, the naturalisation of inequalities, and the progressive delegitimisation of trade unions. Thus, drawing on the notion of distributive justice, we explore *who benefited* from the Orgreave transition, from the perspectives of those who were violently silenced in the same place where a modern industrial flagship development has taken place.

The third dimension asserts that all social identities deserve acknowledgement, respect, and just treatment within a system where only certain values, knowledge, and experiences are legitimised (Schlosberg, 2004; Sze et al., 2009). This is captured through recognitional justice, particularly highlighting vulnerable and marginalised communities (Gladkova, 2025; Manganelli, 2024). An

injustice in the recognitional sense can take different forms, such as a failure to recognise (non-recognition), failure to fully appreciate (misrecognition), and disrespect of individuals (Gladkova, 2025). Within a just transition, recognition of individuals can manifest in several ways, such as equal standing of all individuals, respect for culture, and formation of inclusive practices (Tarasova, 2024).

Our contextualisation of Orgreave is necessarily political, and by understanding the lessons that can be learned through repoliticisation of community stakeholders, we offer insights into suppressed issues felt within the transition. Capturing these lived experiences is important at a time when the reality of environmental issues can be depoliticised through their portrayal in discourse (Kenis, 2018). Understanding suppressed concerns is a starting point for meaningful and equitable change in site transitions. This means going beyond finding wage-based employment or green jobs for ex-miners and, instead, promoting greater social equality within the historically working-class community. As such, we offer an overview of the context of the site to locate the transition within the historic political struggle and present-day activities at Orgreave. By drawing on the voices of community stakeholders within the transition, we begin the repoliticisation of justice in our study.

Method

This research employs a historiographical qualitative approach, drawing on 18 semi-structured interviews with community stakeholders, such as senior politicians, campaigners, and current site employees and residents (see Table 1 for further details). We sought to explore the transitional dynamics which have led to the transformation of the former mining district of Orgreave into the contemporary AMP. By taking a historiographical approach to the research, we critically analyse and offer multiple interpretations of past events at Orgreave (Lundy, 2008). Through highlighting

Table 1. Further interview details.

	Role*	Duration (hours)	Format**	Primary transition perspective
1	Current senior politician	1	Online	Past
2	Community development leader	1	Online	Past/Present
3	Senior journalist	1	Online	Past
4	AMRC initiator	1	Online	Past
5	Local urban planning researcher	1	Online	Past/Present
6	Industrial AMP employee	1	Online	Present
7	University AMP employee	1	Online	Present
8	Local trade union representative	1	In person	Present
9	University AMP employee	1	In person	Present
10	Local council representative and resident	1	Online	Present
11	Regional council representative	1	Online	Past
12	Industrial AMP employee	1	Online	Present
13	Miners campaign group member	1	Online	Past
14	Miners campaign group member	2	In person	Past
15	Campaign group member	1	Online	Past
16	University management representative	0.5	Online	Present
17	Local history author and activist	1.5	Online	Past
18	Campaign group member	2	Online	Past

*AMP: Advanced Manufacturing Park, AMRC: Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre.

**Interviews online took place via Google Meet. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

such interpretations of historical events, previously suppressed voices can be embraced in an attempt to begin restoration of a sense of equality (Hoegaerts, 2021). Epistemologically, this study is informed by a critical realist perspective. Our assumption is that the transition of Orgreave has been shaped by real material structures and power relations. This includes institutional decision-making, political economy, and class dynamics, which exist independently of individual perception. Community stakeholder accounts are therefore analysed not as mere subjective experiences, but as situated interpretations through which underlying structural dynamics can be examined. Fraser's (2008) justice framework is employed as an analytical heuristic to interrogate both experienced injustice and the structural conditions that produce it.

To illustrate and contextualise the details around the Orgreave transition, interviews with community stakeholders were chosen as an effective strategy to gain access to rich, nuanced experiences. We use semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility according to the information emerging during the encounter. This facilitated the emergence of new questions or the reformulation of the initial ones, offering a level of reflexivity around community stakeholders' beliefs (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). This study does not aim to produce statistically representative findings about the Orgreave community as a whole. It is rather aimed at offering an analysis of how a diverse set of stakeholders connected to Orgreave narrate, evaluate, and contest the site's post-coal regeneration. The interviews were therefore designed to capture a range of situated perspectives, spanning those involved in the historic coalfield struggle, those engaged in subsequent redevelopment and governance, and those currently working and living on the site. In line with a qualitative research approach, the value of the findings lies not in generalising prevalence across the wider population, but in generating analytically grounded insights into the justice concerns, tensions, and silences that shape how 'successful transition' narratives are constructed and experienced in this context.

A commonality between all interviews is the focus on the transition's historical process from the 1980s to the present-day site and any associated social issues. Given the transitional focus of the paper, community stakeholders cover a range of temporal perspectives, from initiators to current residents. As the site was industrial and not residential until after the regeneration, there are no prior residents to speak to. The perspective of the miners formerly employed on the site is represented in the sample. Wherever possible, a co-interviewing format was employed, meaning more than one researcher was actively taking part in the interview. The five members of the research team come from multiple and diverse disciplinary backgrounds, and their joint involvement in both data collection and analysis enhances the credibility of this work (Archibald, 2015).

Involving multiple researchers fostered a feeling of being more present and focused in the interview process, encouraging probing questions and rich conversation about emerging themes (Velardo and Elliott, 2021). An iterative thematic analysis was undertaken on the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Themes that were extracted by the team focused on what has been overlooked in terms of the social dimension of just transitions, as well as power imbalances in historic injustices. These findings conceptually map onto Fraser's (2008) tripartite model as a way of analysing justice from multiple perspectives. Our results are consequently structured around representational, distributive, and recognitional justice. Before this mapping, a history of the site transition is offered for the reader to contextualise the perspectives of community stakeholders.

A brief history of Orgreave: 1980s to present

"Seems the last day of the miners' strike, was the Magna Carta in this part of town." (Pulp, 2002)

Since the 1980s, there has been a drop in both production and employment in the UK coal industry. In 1980, 130 million tonnes of coal were produced by a 237,000-strong workforce ([UK Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, 2022](#)). In 2021, approximately one million tonnes of coal were produced by fewer than 1000 workers. Although the adverse environmental impact of fossil fuels is now well documented, environmental concern was not the rationale behind the closure of UK coal mines in the 1980s, which led to the 1984 miners' strike and consequently the events at Orgreave. The coal industry in the early 1980s was seen by the Government as unprofitable, with subsidies supporting pits across the country ([Walker, 1984](#)). The coal industry in the UK had historically been a state-owned sector run by the National Coal Board (NCB). Workers in the coal industry had been protected by unions, such as the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The NCB's intention to close mines would result in significant job losses, which led to the NUM triggering strike action. This pursuit of economic logic and power by the Government can be perceived as failing to take account of those within the working-class communities where the striking miners lived, who were infamously referred to as '*the enemy within*' ([Milne, 2004](#)).

Within the 1984 miners' strike was the conflict at Orgreave. This was a confrontation that took place on 18 June 1984 between picketers and officers of the South Yorkshire Police (SYP) and other police forces, including the Metropolitan Police, and was one of the most violent clashes in British industrial history. A truly defining moment, the conflict can be seen as an event that had implications for the conduct of industrial relations and the democratic functioning of the United Kingdom in general. Striking miners were met on the picket lines by approximately 8000 police officers. These miners were then charged at by the police on foot and horseback who were armed with weapons and shields. Although this was portrayed by the media and the Government with the picketers as the aggressors rather than the police, an out-of-court settlement of £425,000 was ultimately paid by SYP to 39 miners ([Gilmore, 2019](#)).

The collapse of the UK coal-mining industry caused substantial employment decline, with national coal mining employment falling dramatically in the late 20th century and regional coalfield economies experiencing profound job losses ([Galgóczi, 2019](#)). In parts of South Yorkshire, historical records show coal mining jobs fell by more than half between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, contributing to enduring labour displacement and local economic disadvantage ([Beatty et al., 2007](#)). While newer initiatives such as the South Yorkshire Advanced Manufacturing Investment Zone (which is deeply based on the developments at the AMP) are projected to support up to 8000 jobs and attract significant private investment by 2030, the majority of these roles are framed as highly skilled positions in advanced manufacturing, reflecting the specialised labour demands of this sector and underscoring the qualitative mismatch between historic coalfield employment and contemporary opportunities ([UK HM Treasury, 2024](#)). [Table 2](#) compares census

Table 2. Census data of the Orgreave area in 1981 and 2021 ([Office for National Statistics, 2026a, 2026b](#)).

Socio-economic classification	% of employed residents		
	1981	2021	Change
Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	8.18%	14.10%	5.92%
Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	5.74%	23.49%	17.75%
Intermediate occupations (including self-employed)	36.73%	26.07%	−10.66%
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	26.40%	7.78%	−18.62%
Semi-routine occupations	17.50%	14.33%	−3.17%
Routine occupations	5.45%	14.23%	8.78%

data of Orgreave residents between 1981 and 2021. Socio-economic groups (SEGs) used in the 1981 Census have been mapped onto 2021 National Statistics socio-economic classifications (NS-SECs). To ensure effective comparison, boundaries of the 1981 ward that featured Orgreave (Aston, Orgreave & Ulley) have been applied to the 2021 census data. The change between 1981 and 2021 empirically demonstrates a shift from technical, semi-routine, and intermediate work toward the extremes of either managerial and professional occupations, or routine occupations (Office for National Statistics, 2026a, 2026b). This temporal and skills-based distance helps to contextualise why some community stakeholders articulate lingering perceptions of marginalisation.

To further illuminate the question of *who* benefits from the Orgreave transition, Table 3 presents Census 2021 data on the distance travelled to work by residents of the Orgreave area. As with Table 2, the boundaries of the 1981 ward that featured Orgreave (Aston, Orgreave & Ulley) have been applied to the 2021 census data to ensure consistency. The data reveal a telling observation: only 15.1% of residents work within 5 km of their home. This percentage excludes those working from home (26.3%) as this likely reflects modern post-pandemic work rather than direct employment on the AMP. Being located on the site itself, if the AMP were the primary employer of local residents, we would expect a much higher proportion to work within a short commuting distance. Instead, the majority of residents commute elsewhere, with 22.8% of residents travelling 5-10 km to work in Sheffield or Rotherham city centres. This spatial pattern is consistent with community stakeholder testimony that local people were locked out of the high-skilled jobs created on-site.

After the ceasing of operations at the coking works in 1990, the Orgreave site became a brownfield urban wasteland. A very senior politician from the South Yorkshire area explained that, in a similar way to the coking works closure, the trajectory that led to the redevelopment of the Orgreave site was not explicitly driven by concern about sustainability. *“The debate of the time had nothing to do with climate change and its environmental impact. There was, however, the notion that the wildlife should be preserved”*, they explained. This was confirmed by a researcher, who stated the *“deindustrialisation of Orgreave was about international competition and cheaper coal”*. A local history author and campaigner mentioned that whilst the environment was not on the agenda at the time, contemporary politicians might bend this narrative now for political gain. For example, *“Boris Johnson saying that Thatcher was a pioneer on environmentalism as she shut the coal mines is a massive spin on our own history. Those things, in the climate we are in now, they can stick”*. A period of economic inactivity was experienced at the site through most of the 1990s

Table 3. Travel to work data for the Orgreave area in 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2026b).

Distance travelled by residents to work	% of employed residents
Less than 2 km	6.1%
2 km to less than 5 km	9.0%
Less than 5 km (sum of the above)	15.1%
5 km to less than 10 km	22.8%
10 km to less than 20 km	13.6%
20 km to less than 30 km	3.7%
30 km to less than 40 km	0.8%
40 km to less than 60 km	1.6%
60 km and over	1.0%
Works mainly from home	26.3%
Works mainly at an offshore installation, no fixed place, or outside the UK	15.0%

(Stubbs, 2022), which began to end with the development of the AMP and the AMRC. *“When the University of Sheffield decided to build on the site, they approached Sheffield and Rotherham City Councils to find out what would be in line with local requirements; however, it was an initiative that started with them”*, the senior politician explained. There was no ‘light bulb moment’; it was a process of gradual development.

The AMP that can be observed today is a result of this gradual development, of which the AMRC is a central part. There is also an AMRC training centre that offers both academic and practical training. An initiator of the AMRC remembers the district grew as additional actors saw its potential. *“Our work to reduce production time caught the attention of other companies, who started dealing with us”*. When considering the financial backing of the AMRC, initial funding came from several sources: the University of Sheffield, multinational corporations, the UK Government, and the EU. Figure 1 shows a timeline of key events in the site’s history to understand this growth. When put into the context of manufacturing sector decline in the area, notably steel, the suggestion to build a manufacturing park was an apparent attempt to salvage the industrial heritage of South Yorkshire. In 2011, the Harworth Group (previously part of UK Coal, which had acquired the NCB) received planning permission for a new housing development neighbouring the AMP. They successfully submitted plans to develop a new community called Waverley, featuring new homes and a primary school (Harworth Group, 2025b).

Representational justice: Who decides?

In retracing the aftermath of the pit closure in the 1980s, some community stakeholders emphasise the absence of government intervention or support. As a local history author and campaigner explained, *“I think it is plain to see that there was no kind of planning or structure put in place for these things. The Government probably thought they were doing good by saying ‘you are on your own now’, which is reckless in my opinion”*. This absence is key to understanding why some former miner community stakeholders perceived the transition as inherently unjust. The senior politician from South Yorkshire explains that a lack of support was seen as a solution, saying *“The Government believed in a free market, articulating this very clearly: the state was part of the problem, not the solution, and the state should simply disengage. It’s not surprising that there was no plan whatsoever about the future of Orgreave”*. It should be noted here that both the Government’s absence and the leading role of funders that failed to engage with mining community stakeholders should be understood within the broader individualistic, self-entrepreneurial, and self-reliant spirit advocated by the Thatcherite project, accompanied by a view of economic inequality as an inevitable component of capitalism (Hudson, 2013).

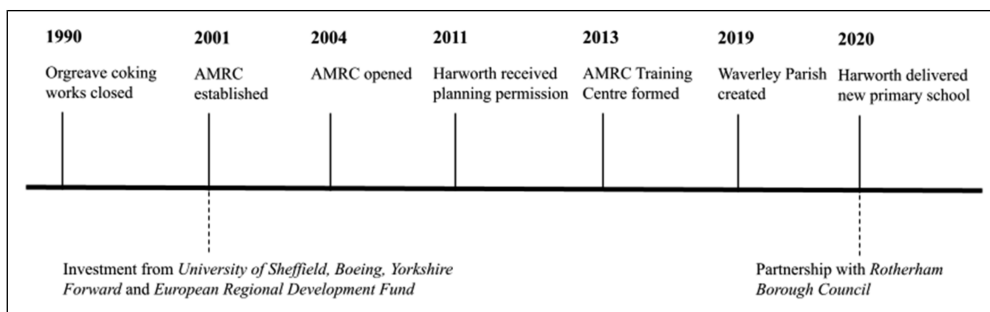


Figure 1. Orgreave site development timeline.

Instead of government support and transition planning, community stakeholders confirm that Orgreave's redevelopment appears to rely on serendipitous circumstances. As one of the AMRC initiators said, *"Why Orgreave? Well, on a ride out one Saturday morning, we found a piece of wasteland. The Council agreed that we could use it. There was no coordinated planning; everything happened in a serendipitous way"*. As [Figure 1](#) demonstrates, the consequent redevelopment of the site has been shaped by an increasing number of different actors, each with their different yet intersecting economic agendas, and none of them considering the interests and aspirations of the former mining community, as we shall explore in the next sub-section.

Distributive justice: Who benefits?

At the time of the pit closure in 1990, much of the local workforce would be considered working class. As already discussed, no support plan was put in place for the community. The rapid and serendipitous transition could explain why some community stakeholders feel the working class previously employed on the site have been left behind in the redevelopment of Orgreave. A third-sector leader working for a local major community development organisation distinctly remembers that community leaders expressed concerns about the inclusion of working-class people, but the redevelopment happened so quickly that they did not adequately consider the social good for the local community. *"Jobs which resulted from these developments were targeted at the graduate level; for many different reasons, the children growing up in areas nearby Orgreave have no access to university"*. Furthermore, the private residential housing built on site, as seen in [Figure 2](#), is prohibitively expensive for those looking for affordable housing. The average house price in Waverley over 2024/25 was approximately £288,000 ([Rightmove, 2025](#)). This is coupled with an average annual council tax bill of £2,225, corresponding to a Band D valuation ([Rotherham Borough Council, 2025](#)). The average house price in Waverley is 16% higher than in the wider Yorkshire region (£245,000) ([Rightmove, 2025](#)).

A way to address the disconnect between a working-class mining community and an advanced manufacturing centre can be seen in educational offerings and reskilling. When just transitions



Figure 2. A street in Waverley.

away from fossil fuels are considered, evaluating ways in which the workforce can reskill is important for reemployment (Gambhir et al., 2018). However, Warrington (2008) argues that local factors and home background can influence the educational aspirations and attainment of younger people within a given locality, having a subsequent effect on gaining employment. One of the AMRC initiators explained that the motivation for setting up the onsite training centre was partly to provide degrees for local people, as well as a pathway to employment in the advanced manufacturing industry. *“There was demand for part-time degrees, and companies decided to pay for the fees and the salary of trainees to retain them after they completed their apprenticeship”*. There also seems to be an understanding around the importance of offering apprenticeships to school leavers. A current AMP employee emphasised that a school leaver could *“come from their GCSEs to the site and work through to postgraduate qualifications”*. Yet, this must be considered in tandem with the knowledge that there was a 23-year gap between the closure of the coking works and the opening of the training centre. Whilst the young people benefitting now might be the children or grandchildren of those employed at Orgreave, these effects remain removed from assuaging the historic injustice felt by others firsthand.

Women have been repeatedly excluded and detached in the just transition process (Boss et al., 2023). To situate gender inequity in this just transition discussion, it is worthwhile reflecting on how equality is perceived in our study. Following the approach taken by Velicu and Barca (2020), equality can be rethought through socio-ecological justice. This goes beyond environmental issues by embracing subjectivity that transcends natural and cultural social divisions (Velicu and Barca, 2020). However, within the historic mining context under investigation, cultural division around gender always existed. Women stayed at home and undertook unpaid care work, typical of the conservatism at that time (Spence and Stephenson, 2009). During the strikes, a role shift took place as women assumed new, vital responsibilities in the movement. The upheaval of community and family life led women to embrace solidarity as a means of resistance (Spence and Stephenson, 2009). New social networks were forged as women started taking formal roles in political organisations, such as the *Women Against Pit Closures* movement.

Although these roles were sufficient to disturb class and gender assumptions after the strike, they were not reflected in wider policy going forward. Any challenge to this was weakened as the displacement of mining activities led to families being dispersed and social links being broken. Additionally, newly created unemployment was seen as a problem concerning men, putting women back in their traditional roles (Spence and Stephenson, 2009). Rather than exacerbating such entrenched inequalities, a just transition should pay attention to how gender roles have been impacted in previous transitions and address these impacts accordingly, enhancing representational justice. A local history author and campaigner reflected on the incredible actions women in their life undertook for their families and each other during the strike. In relation to the liberation that their mother felt during the strike of 1984, they said *“She had seen she could have her independence; she could have her own voice. She could be active in things that she cared about and there were other ways to exist”*. Contrast this liberation with the industrial context of manufacturing and engineering, which remains a male-dominated sector (Deloitte, 2015), and we can see the stark need to address gender inequity as part of a just transition of the AMP site.

Clearly, regeneration of a coalfield is a complex issue, both physically (Biana, 2007; Charles et al., 2002) and socially. Cha (2020) argues that transitions from the mining sector are contentious, given the pivotal role coal can play in a community. The process of deindustrialisation, even accounting for a nostalgic view of the past, can bring with it a weakening of existing community ties, as well as a rise in precarious employment, inactivity and social inequality (Feltrin et al., 2022). Positive government intervention and policies are crucial enablers of a just transition in this context (Cha, 2020; Mayer, 2018). As already explained, this was notably absent in Orgreave. Ideally, policies developed to help such transitions should be broad in scope, covering both those

directly employed by the mining industry and sub-contractors who may feel consequent effects (Kolde and Wagner, 2022).

The absence of a clear holistic initial plan at the beginning of the development phase of the transition still physically impacts today, particularly around transportation and infrastructure. Frustration relating to reliance on private transportation due to the lack of public transport to the AMP is captured by a current employee who works on site: *“You can’t just whack a massive manufacturing park in the middle of a brownfield site, and then not put in transport links”*. Such concerns were cited as an example manifestation of the neglect of the needs of the working class. The move towards a reliance on private forms of transportation is symbolic of the shift towards the middle-class employment offered on the site. Lack of planning can lead to tensions between those who use the site: the lack of public transport, coupled with inadequate car parking facilities, causes vehicles to spill into residential roads. Even though there is a clear attempt to provide new opportunities in the area, these have emerged as a response to particular organisational and political agendas in a reactive way, where associated resources and infrastructure are not able to keep pace. As such, beneficial outcomes are not being distributed fairly across different community stakeholders, highlighting areas of contention and resistance (McCauley and Heffron, 2018).

Recognitional justice: Who is considered?

Recognising identities and values is a fundamental aspect of justice (Gladkova, 2025; Manganelli, 2024), which we extend to the historic remembrance and memorialisation of social and cultural events. The link between location and remembrance is complex and political, with meaning and acts of remembrance ascribed to sites changing alongside opinions, interpretations and values over time (Edensor, 1997). Terrorism often brings about the creation of memorial sites (Micieli-Voutsinas and Cavicchi, 2019), driven by the social haunting collectively experienced after such loss (Okechukwu, 2022). Such social hauntings are not limited to mortality but can also be felt at sites of social violence, with the potential to leave whole communities feeling conflicted (Gordon, 2008). Failure to acknowledge the history around coal communities could end up creating resistance in the local population through a lack of recognition (Sanz-Hernández, 2020).

In 2019, Waverley Parish was created on the Orgreave mining site. The name change can be perceived as an overt method of removing connotations of Orgreave. A local campaign representative expressed how this was a continuation of the demonisation that the community has been through, saying *“People know something bad happened at Orgreave, because of the way the media and the Government demonised the miners, they don’t associate Orgreave as a positive thing”*. The impact of changing the name is also perceived as symbolic of how heritage is respected on-site, with a council representative adding *“the developers have tried to obliterate anything to do with Orgreave, and indeed the wonderful history of mining”*. Current residents also agreed that changing the name from Orgreave to Waverley represents an injustice in a recognitional sense through disrespect (Gladkova, 2025).

Going beyond the conflict at Orgreave, some community stakeholders made it clear that they feel the social identity ascribed to coal communities is not just being ignored but instead being overtly suppressed. This is not to say that a new future for the site is wrong, but that such a future could offer sensitive and meaningful recognition of the events and history at Orgreave. Rather than delegitimising social identities around coal, a transition should aim to address the dependence and solidarity felt by the community (Sanz-Hernández, 2020). This could be through a monument or memorial on site, as captured from a council representative: *“We would want something to acknowledge the sacrifices that the miners made, not just through industrial struggles and strikes, but also by giving their lives to the industry by working in very difficult circumstances”*. Again, this extends remembrance from the strikes to the wider mining industry that the community was built

on. Given what [Cha \(2020\)](#) argued regarding the long-standing and pivotal role that coal can play in a community, and the social haunting that can be found in old coalfields ([Gordon, 2008](#)), it is unsurprising to see a wish to commemorate this industrial heritage.

Whilst important, memorialisation alone does not fully capture the multifaceted and devastating loss of mining felt by the community. The local history author and campaigner notes that justice is not so straightforward, reflecting on being incited *“to rage, anger and frustration”* when thinking about their father who was involved. Whilst their family use *“stoic humour”* as a *“way of suppressing some of the pretty fucking horrible stuff that happened”*, the local history author and campaigner’s emotions have persisted due to intergenerational trauma, which are rooted in the perceived unfair actions of the state. They reflect that their father *“was called an enemy to this country. His neighbours were told to be wary of him. What right do [the state] have to say that to someone who is just going to work? It’s just morally corrupt. And it hurts you know”*. A memorial would address these emotions through demonstrating recognition and accountability. *“Generations going forward should at least have the ability to acknowledge that, whatever we think of coal, and I think rightly - whatever we criticise coal for - it still provided for this country”*. The current housing development on the old pit site can be seen as a *“horror cliché of building a house on burial grounds. It has not been allowed to settle. It’s not been allowed to be resolved”*. Beyond recognition through memorialisation, systemic change and improvement to representational justice is called for, to make sure what happened in the past is not repeated. *“The game was rigged from the off”* as the police were seen as weaponising their resources, drawing on *“archaic laws”* to quash dissent. The importance of this is highlighted with the reflection *“he could have been in prison all his life for doing nothing other than picking his friend up off the floor”*.

Governments are not the only actors identified as playing a pivotal role, with unions also being seen as important in ensuring a just transition for employees by giving them a platform ([Abraham, 2017](#); [Snell, 2018](#)). Given the historic importance of unions at Orgreave, a local councillor suggested that *“One of the best ways of acknowledging the past is to learn from it, build on it and to support workers who are working in that area”*. However, as was confirmed by a local trade union representative, the rate of industry unionisation at the site is substantially lower than other areas of Sheffield. Within a just transition context, union demands can be at odds with environmental concerns, leading to a ‘jobs versus the environment’ debate ([Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011](#); [Evans and Phelan, 2016](#)). However, if the legacy of Orgreave is empowering workers to join a trade union, ultimately securing fair working conditions and pay, then the memories of past actions can continue to shape recognition towards a more socially equitable future.

The Orgreave case has highlighted justice concerns that are not only forward-looking (how transitions should be designed), but also backward-facing (how harms persist and are addressed once the transition is over). Accounts provided by the community stakeholders placed emphasis on unresolved harm, enduring grievance, and demands for acknowledgement and accountability. This includes calls for inquiry, apology, and memorialisation. These themes resonate with a restorative justice perspective, which is based on recognition, responsibility, and repair following harm, and offers a complementary lens for interpreting why symbolic acts of remembrance are understood as meaningful yet insufficient in the absence of broader repair ([Braithwaite, 2002](#); [Killeen, 2022](#)).

Concluding remarks

How do community stakeholders narrate and contest the ‘success’ of Orgreave’s post-coal regeneration, and what does this reveal about justice in transition and regeneration initiatives? We have examined the lived experiences of those involved in the Orgreave site transition and re-politicised the context through highlighting an array of narratives. These have been amalgamated

around Fraser's (2008) tripartite conceptualisation of justice, providing lessons on social justice for those who are in control of such transitions in the future.

To ensure just representation of community stakeholders, there is the need to inclusively plan and support a just transition – something that is so starkly shown in the face of a hostile government and the punishment-like neglect found after the Orgreave strikes. Serendipity in this particular instance led to the regeneration of the site, but a lack of proactive planning led to a reactive present which is attempting to fulfil a multitude of community stakeholder economic and social needs in a piecemeal manner. To understand these needs, recognition of local culture and values is key in ensuring respect for community stakeholders. Velicu and Barca (2020) posited that power asymmetries are influential in shaping the status quo of actors in transitions, aligning with our inclusion of suppressed perspectives. In particular, the narratives relating to the struggles felt by the striking miners and working-class communities have been highlighted in this paper. Addressing recognitional justice for those affected in the conflict at Orgreave and the miners' strikes has been shown to go beyond memorialisation, with understanding, accountability and systemic change ultimately being sought.

When considering fair distribution of justice, some community stakeholders feel the development has had an adverse impact on working-class communities, whose needs and aspirations were neglected, if not suppressed. Such a post-political landscape appears to have exacerbated inequalities and prioritised an economic status quo (Gladkova, 2025). This can be clearly seen in the high-skilled jobs that have been created in the area, which bring new economic opportunities that are not necessarily comparable with the jobs lost before the transition. As with gender equality, more meaningful and targeted interventions in the redevelopment could have taken place if the issues faced by some community stakeholders were initially understood and included in decision-making processes. In the face of the weakening of community spirit perpetuated through deindustrialisation (Feltrin et al., 2022), the need for such interventions is only more acute. Yet, it is clear that although these inequalities have been inadequately addressed so far, wounds can still be healed and past trauma at the site can be a lesson to value equity and inclusivity in future decision-making. Although representational, distributive, and recognitional justice perspectives have been presented sequentially for analytical clarity, their interwoven nature and impact on each other remain acute across the transition timeline.

Our study provides empirical evidence that directly addresses and strengthens the call for repoliticising and radicalising the notion of just transition (Avelino et al., 2016; Cha, 2020; Fraser, 2008; Velicu and Barca, 2020). We have revealed depoliticisation strategies through consideration of a tripartite view of justice: failure to recognise history, marginalising the needs and aspirations of community stakeholders, and concealing that the primary response was shaped by economic interests and agendas. This context demonstrates how post-political narratives of successful just transitions can mask underlying power inequalities and ultimately perpetuate injustice. The hegemonic view of the site today as a South Yorkshire manufacturing renaissance serves business partners and their capital accumulation agendas, obscuring social inequalities and stifling meaningful rectification of justice. As such, this study reveals that the often unquestioned primacy of the economic sphere underpinning approaches to just transitions can be weakened by engaging with silenced community stakeholders (e.g., working class) and agendas (e.g., social advancement and mobility), unveiling different priorities and possibilities for the future. We call for further critical research that engages with and unveils suppressed narratives, subjects and lived experiences within different transitions and contexts. Building on the lessons and recommendations from this study, this approach to research is crucial to further inform wider understanding on perspectives that challenge dominant narratives and power dynamics, leading to more just and egalitarian transitions and societies.

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Ethical considerations

The data was collected in accordance with the ethical guidelines from the University of Sheffield as part of the JUST2CE project. This project was ethically approved by the Sheffield University Management School's ethics review procedure.

Consent to participate

Respondents were given information sheets and opportunity to ask questions, and written consent was sought before starting interviews.

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Data Availability Statement

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available. Please contact the corresponding author with any queries.

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