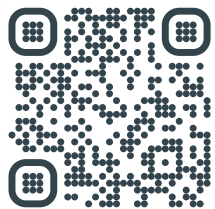


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REGIONAL FUTURES LITERACY LAB ROADMAP



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References: Chilvers, M., Balz, V. E., Moodie, J., & Jungberg, L. (2025). DUST Deliverable 5.2: Policy brief: Expanding the participation of least engaged communities in just sustainability transitions. DUST project.

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Purpose and scope

This handbook presents a roadmap for implementing Regional Futures Literacy Labs (RFLs). The RFL format is designed to engage communities that are vulnerable to transitional challenges in regions that phase out unsustainable energy-intensive industries yet have little or no engagement in transition policymaking at levels of government. The RFL participation process consists of four interactive workshops and one digital engagement application, supported by a series of background actions that inform and enable subsequent steps. The roadmap outlines the engagement process step by step. Key recommendations derived from experimentation with the RFL format in the DUST project are assigned to each step.

The purpose of this roadmap is to serve as a discussion document for policymakers and civil society actors who seek to involve communities in place-based policymaking. It supports planning and reflection on participatory processes, helps to identify effective engagement strategies, and highlights key aspects for successful processes. The roadmap is complementary to the policy brief DS.2 Policy brief: Expanding the participation of least engaged communities in just sustainability transitions.

References: Chilvers, M., Balz, V. E., Moodie, J., & Jungberg, L. (2025). DUST Deliverable 5.2: Policy brief: Expanding the participation of least engaged communities in just sustainability transitions. DUST project.

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Impression of the RFL format composed of photography, artworks, and other materials used or produced during the DUST RFLs in four case study regions. For image authors, see colophon.

What RFLs deliver

RFLs combine innovative design-led territorial and digital tools to enhance direct citizen participation in just sustainability transition policy processes. The following insights come directly from policymakers, and citizens who participated in RFL experiments across the case regions of the DUST project. They show how RFLs reshaped engagement, strengthened capacities, and opened pathways for collaborative, future-oriented territorial governance.

Citizen Learning

Citizen learning strengthens citizens' capacity to contribute local knowledge and engage in policy co-design. The RFL format:

- Increases awareness of sustainability transitions and policymaking, supporting confident engagement.
- Reinforces regional networks and trust, even in least-engaged communities.

Futures Literacy

Futures literacy builds participants' capacity to imagine and reason about long-term futures. The RFL format:

- Helps communities understand time and links long-term visions to actionable goals in the present.
- Helps communities develop clear, detailed visions of the future and the reasoning behind them.
- Changes communities' emotional dispositions about transitions to become more positive.
- Helps policymakers appreciate community realities, motivations, and social dimensions of sustainability transitions.

Co-Design

Co-design focuses on jointly shaping solutions by integrating citizen, expert, and policymaker perspectives. The RFL format:

- Brings together citizen input with perspectives from politicians and civil servants and builds common ground for negotiating interests.
- Adapts policy approaches to local needs and territorial contexts and become more place-based in this way.
- Gives policymakers insight into social and human dimensions of transitions.

Digital deliberation

Digital deliberation enables equitable and transparent democratic participation at scale. The RFL format:

- Extends participation through digital tools to the public realm
- Shows diverse opinions without domination; communities reached high agreement on concrete issues while trade-offs remained debated.
- Anonymisation increases equality, and targeted support amplified least-engaged voices

Regional design and visual representation

Regional design and visual representation reflect on the implications of territorial development at levels and scales and make these accountable. The RFL format:

- Provides insights into policy areas of shared or unshared community and policy concern through the systematic analysis and comparison of territorial assets occurring in visions.
- Establishes regions as a meaningful geography for communities; raises awareness of tangible development across territorial boundaries and regional disparities.
- Makes abstract issues tangible, amplifies unheard stories about territorial development, and carries these into the public realm.
- Sparks dialogue.

How to read the RFL's road map

Active interaction and remote action

The RFL format was designed as a sequence of steps that alternate active deliberation in four RFL workshops and one digital application with the backstage analysis and representation of results per deliberation. Active participation steps have an orange background, and backstage steps have a grey background.

Recommendations

Each step is accompanied by a set of recommendations. Specific recommendations apply to an individual workshop step (orange) or backstage step (grey). General recommendations apply to the whole RFL format and are presented in pink bubbles.

Input and Output

At the top of the roadmap, the input identifies the key elements that are needed for the next step of the process. At the bottom of the roadmap, the output identifies the key elements that are the results of a step. These outputs are used as inputs for following steps.

Contextualizing the format

White spaces allow you to place notes that contextualize the format for your region and community.

Long-term preparation

Long-term preparation begins at least six months before the first interaction. It includes preparing a framework for monitoring and assessing the RFLs. Participation works well when embedded in an organizational culture that respects community governance. The phase therefore also includes the building of sustainable relationships with least engaged communities (LECs), policymakers, and experts and the consideration of resources for participation.

Short-term preparation

Short-term preparation begins at least three months before the first RFL workshop. It focuses on preparing the series of four interactive workshops that are part of the format. Per workshop RFL guidelines and action plans are drawn up to ensure that the workshops build on each other. The timing and location of workshops are defined. Importantly, workshop participants are identified and invited.

Framework for monitoring and assessing RFLs

Glossary

Deliberation

Involves weighing and reflecting on prefer ends, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern

Place-based approaches

Recognize that the relative costs and benefits of development policies have political, economic, and social consequences with a clear territorial dimension.

Just sustainability transition

is the social, economic, and environmental systems that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Least-engaged community (LEC)

is a community that is affected by a sustainability transition yet not involved in related policymaking.

Territorial capital

is the potential of an area for future development. It includes tangible assets, such as infrastructures and nature, and intangible assets, such as knowledge and skills.

Design-led territorial tools

encourage an account of the territorial dimension of development during participation. Through envisioning and comparing development with different scales and time horizons they support imagination and learning.

Futures literacy allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do. It empowers the imagination, ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur.

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is a digital tool for deliberation at scale. Users can agree or disagree on short statements and propose statements themselves. An algorithm identifies opinion clusters and statements that attract broad agreement or polarization.

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