



Democratising
jUst
Sustainability
Transitions

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Abbreviation list

Term	Description
CCN	Community Champion Network
CC	Community Champions
APES	Actor Process Event Scheme
FS	Fire Souls (term used in Sweden for Community Champions)
JST	Just Sustainability Transitions
LEC	Least Engaged Communities
RFL	Regional Futures Literacy Labs

1. Introduction

Task 6.6 saw the construction and operationalisation of the Community Champion Network (CCN), beginning in Month 9 and running until the end of the project. The CCN is a network of organisations, initiatives, and social groups in each of the Case Study regions, managed by the Institute for Urban Excellence. The goal of the CCN was to strengthen the societal impact of DUST by utilising the content and capacities in the project for the benefit of different stakeholders in the Case Study regions. It also provided a regional channel for the dissemination of project results and outcomes. The CCN saw activities split into two categories that aimed to provide tangible benefits for Community Champions (see Section 3):

1. Communication, dissemination and networking activities to build the capacities of Community Champions, support their activities and channelling knowledge from the project.
2. Peer-to-peer learning activities between Champions in Case Study regions and the whole CCN.

The CCN was constructed using a case-by-case approach, with societal and academic partners identifying an initial set of Community Champions in each Case Study region based on existing contacts. This approach supported reflection on CCN activities and the identification of additional stakeholders. By the end of DUST's second year, a complete set of Community Champions had been defined and engaged in Poland, Bulgaria, Sweden, and the Netherlands (see Section 2).

The CCN included a range of Community Champions to ensure representation of different Least Engaged Communities (LECs) across the Case Study regions. Representation was continuously assessed by comparing Community Champions against expanded regional LEC lists developed in collaboration with other work packages. LECs were classified as represented, partly represented, or not represented, and prioritised using the able/unable and willing/unwilling participation framework. This informed the identification of additional stakeholders and the design of CCN activities.

This deliverable documents the establishment, composition, and operation of the Community Champion Network (CCN) within the DUST project. It outlines the construction of the CCN, the identification and engagement of Community Champions, and the activities implemented to support knowledge exchange, capacity building, and dissemination of project outcomes. It also includes annexes detailing LEC representation and observations from CCN workshops.

By the end of the project, the CCN had engaged a diverse group of Community Champions across the DUST case study regions, exceeding initial participation targets in most contexts and ensuring broad LEC representation. Through communication, dissemination, capacity-building, and peer-to-peer learning activities, the CCN strengthened regional networks, supported knowledge exchange, and provided a flexible mechanism for enhancing citizen engagement in just sustainability transitions.

2. Case-by-Case Construction

The CCN was constructed by building separate networks in each of the Case Study regions and then connecting these into one international CCN. This approach allowed for continuous reflections on the representation of LECs in the CCN in each of the Case Study regions. Construction of the CCN took place between M11 and M24 (see Section 4).

Each Case Study region was first considered independently, and a collaborative process was conducted with project partners to define and engage stakeholders. This began by utilising the contacts of societal and academic partners in each region to define a first set of Community Champions, many of whom were engaged in regional focus groups and with whom engagement activities were run with the goal to:

- Explore and understand stakeholder landscapes in each Case Study region.
- Identify stakeholders to engage in the network who were representative of the LECs.
- Evaluate the design of CCN activities in their capacity to meet regional needs.

The process of defining a first set of Community Champions with DUST societal and academic partners and running engagement activities with these Champions is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Process of defining and engaging a first set of Community Champions

Defining and engaging a first set of Community Champions	
Stage	Activity
1	Defining a first set of Community Champions
	One meeting between ISOCARP and DUST societal and academic partners per country to present the task, define roles and organise the translation of material. Partners are provided a document for listing stakeholders.
	Societal and academic partner are provided a short documents to fill, listing stakeholders to be engaged in the network and the LECs they (may) represent.
	Following review of lists of stakeholders by ISOCARP, DUST societal and academic partners invite eligible contacts to an introductory meeting.
2	Engaging a first set of Community Champions
	One online introductory meeting with stakeholders invited by DUST societal and academic partners and ISOCARP to present the project and the CCN, in which the activities and benefits of the CCN are outlined. Stakeholders are asked to confirm their involvement in the CCN after the meeting.
3	Defining a complete set of Community Champions
	Following the introductory meeting, a complete set of Community Champions should be identified in each Case Study region.

We aimed to engage at least 5 Community Champions per Case Study region where experiments will occur and at least 3 in Case Study region where experiments will not occur. The table below illustrates the number of Community Champions we were able to engage, which exceeded initial objectives thanks to the strong efforts of DUST partners.

Table 2: Number of Community Champions in each Case Study region

Where experiments will occur	Where experiments will not occur
Katowice: 17	Groningen: 14
Norrbottnen: 14	Belchatow: 12
Stara Zagora: 7	Gotland: 0
Lusatia: 1	

Due to the adapted implementation of the CCN and RFLLs in Lusatia and the selected least-engaged community of youth, the Community Champion network was adapted here to operate through the civil society partner in the region: Humaju. Rather than interacting directly with organisations and youth groups in the region, contact with these groups was conducted by Humaju, drawing on resources provided through the CCN. Similarly, due to the limited number of designated DUST partners in Gotland, it was difficult to engage potential Community Champions; consequently, none were identified.

The full list of Community Champions can be found in Annex 1.1.

3. Activities conducted with Community Champions

Following the identification of a complete set of Community Champions in each Case Study region, activities were run that sought to benefit Community Champions by connecting the expertise and learnings from the project to their ongoing work. Activities were run per Case Study region and were divided into two categories:

2. Communication, dissemination and networking activities to build the capacities of Community Champions, support their activities and channelling knowledge from the project.
3. Peer-to-peer learning activities between Champions in Case Study regions and the whole CCN.

The following sections document activities in each of these categories.

3.1. Communication, dissemination and networking activities to build the capacities of Community Champions, support their activities and channelling knowledge from the project.

Communication and dissemination material was produced to inform Community Champions about the project, channel useful learnings, and connect them to each other. This was carried out through the DUST website, social media channels, the online Forum, and later through email newsletter-style blasts.

Three blog posts were created to advertise the Community Champion Network, shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Blog posts advertising the Community Champion Network

Post	Release Date	Channel	
1	The Community Champion Network: coming to a case-study region near you!	May 8, 2024	Website, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter)
2	DUST Champions: the CCN forum is live!	Oct 9, 2024	Website, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter)
3	DUST Trails: A Look into our Community Champion Network Workshop in Sweden	Mar 11, 2025	Website, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Bluesky

An online Forum was initially developed as part of the DUST website to enable exchange among Community Champions across case study regions and to support feedback collection during project workshops. The Forum included thematic categories such as General Discussion; DUST

Findings (including the APES tool and STEP Index); Events; Support Tools; Intercultural Communication; and summaries of DUST activities, as well as country-specific sections.

Engagement with the Forum was limited. As a result, the consortium shifted to direct email dissemination. Regular email communications were sent to Community Champions in each case study country and translated into local languages where applicable. Short consultations with regional partners were conducted to identify relevant topics. A record of email communications can be seen in Table

Some delivery issues were identified, including emails being filtered as spam. To address this, partners forwarded the communications to additional relevant groups, expanding dissemination. The resulting email communications targeted both Community Champions and RFL participants and included standardised project updates alongside region-specific content reflecting local priorities (e.g. gender equity and environmental initiatives).

Table 4: Record of email communications to the CCN in each country

Poland	Bulgaria	Sweden	Netherlands
Introduction and welcome to the CCN blasts	Introduction and welcome to the CCN	Introduction and welcome to the CCN	Summary of the Focus Group Sessions
Summary of the Community Champion Network Workshop	Summary: Community Champion Network Workshop	Summary: Community Champion Network Workshop	
Building connections and networks	Zoom-in from CCN	Structure of civic engagement in Sweden	
Opportunities and challenges of the sustainable transition	Workshop: More attractive retraining and support programmes	<i>Zoom into CCN workshop</i> : Mentimeter results – citizen participation	
Shifting mindsets to support the transition	Zoom-in from CCN Workshop: Representation of women	<i>Zoom into CCN workshop</i> : Mentimeter results – green initiatives	
	Understanding the complex: Making information accessible	Role of women in community activities and gender equity	

3.2. Peer-to-peer learning activities between Champions in Case Study regions

Case study workshops for the Community Champions Network (CCN) were held in Poland, Bulgaria, and Sweden. In Poland and Bulgaria, the CCN workshops provided an opportunity to clarify ideas presented during the focus group meetings, refine them, and finalise planning before launching the RFLs in Katowice and Stara Zagora. In contrast, in Norrbotten, Sweden,

the CCN workshop offered a chance to continue discussions from RFLs one and two that could not be fully addressed in RFLs three and four due to time constraints. Further insights from the CCN workshops can be found in Annex 1.2.

The CCN workshops followed the structure outlined below:

Part 1: Introduction to the CCN and its integration within the DUST project

1. Overview of the aims of the CCN:

- Provide a channel to share and disseminate DUST project results and outcomes.
- Create a network of initiatives to ensure citizen voices are heard in just sustainability transitions.
- Engage communities to participate in activities and workshops that increase capacities.
- Bring together community representatives, leaders, and other groups to exchange ideas and knowledge.

2. Explanation of the benefits of the CCN: Amplify citizen voices; understand community insights; exchange knowledge; join an international network; explore e-democracy; spark public discussions; and find solutions together.

3. Explanation of how the CCN works: Initially intended to take place on the DUST Forum before shifting to email blasts, the CCN enabled participants to share and exchange thoughts, ideas, and resources; connect with like-minded individuals regionally and internationally; and receive updates and access results from the DUST project.

4. Overview of upcoming DUST activities: RFLs (only CCs in Katowice, Stara Zagora, and Norrbotten); DUST Academy (open to all CCs, including those in Belchatow); and the storytelling handbook.

Part 2: Regional personalisation

The second part of the workshops focused on regional contextualisation and alignment with both Community Champion (CC) interests and DUST project objectives.

In Katowice and Bełchatów, the workshops included contributions from youth climate activists and representatives of the Marshal's Office. Discussions built on focus group findings and addressed issues such as livelihood impacts, limited trust in public institutions, and approaches to participation in accessible local settings. In the Bulgarian case study, discussions further developed focus group results, including concerns about job security, perceived gaps between democratic discourse and practice, and the complexity of language used to communicate the energy transition.

In Sweden, the workshop was held after the first two RFLs and further developed themes from earlier sessions. Using Mentimeter, participants discussed representation, regional sustainability priorities, and key challenges. Additional topics included the national context for citizen engagement, gender equity, and examples of effective practices. Detailed outcomes are documented in Deliverable D6.6 and in the annex below.

Due to the lack of an on-the-ground team in Groningen and the adapted implementation of the CCN in Germany, no case study workshops were conducted in these locations.

Annexes

1.1. LEC representation in regional CCNs

This annex presents an assessment of the representation of least engaged communities (LECs) within the Community Champion Networks (CCNs) across the DUST case study regions. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the extent to which the composition of each CCN aligns with the project objective of maximising relevance and value for both Community Champions and the DUST project.

The annex first outlines the analytical approach used to assess LEC representation, drawing on conclusions from WP3, which identified priority LECs in each case study region. The analysis examined the inclusion of relevant actors across civil society, public and private sectors, and, where applicable, the cultural sector, with an emphasis on collective actors rather than individuals. In addition, the assessment considered whether Community Champions acted as direct representatives of LECs or as intermediary actors working with them, in order to capture different forms of engagement with LEC perspectives.

Poland

A comprehensive list of proposed Community Champions in Poland was shared by DUST partners from UEK and KADRA. The least engaged communities (LECs) from both Polish regions, Katowice and Bełchatów, focus on mining communities, including youth, and retired as well as current miners or workers. Each LEC is represented by at least one Community Champion from either civil society, the cultural, public, and/or private sectors. The specific breakdowns for each LEC are as follows:

Youth

The youth are particularly well represented by various sectors in both regions, with a mix of direct and indirect representatives. Direct Community Champions include students from both Katowice and Bełchatów who are keen to be involved in just transitions, some of whom are active members of sustainability initiatives such as the Silesia Climate Movement and/or come from mining families themselves. Additional Community Champions include the director of the Silesian Association of Municipalities, the head of Napraw Sobie Miasto (Repair a City for Yourself), an NGO working on educational projects for young people, and cultural sector actors from the Association of Christian Music. Representatives from the Bełchatów-Kleszczów Science Park who initiate several projects for entrepreneurs, including youth, are also Community Champions.

Current miners and energy sector workers

Current miners and energy sector workers are generally well represented by Community Champions from civil society as well as the private and public sectors, with both direct and indirect representatives. For instance, the chairmen and heads of the KADRA Trade Union in both regions, along with a group of miners themselves, are keen to be Community Champions. They are interested in learning more about the transition that directly impacts their livelihoods. Additionally, the director of the Silesian Association of Municipalities and the head of an NGO with experience in successful social revitalisation in post-mining districts are also involved.

Retired miners and energy sector workers

Retired miners and energy sector workers in both regions are largely represented by indirect representatives from the public sector, namely the Secretary of the Bełchatów County Council and the director of the Silesian Association of Municipalities. Equally, a group of retirees were also engaged in Katowice.

Additional interested Champions

There are a handful of Champions whose objectives align with those of DUST, although they do not represent specific LECs. For example, representatives from the Ministry of Funds and Regional Development are interested in the coordination of sectoral and territorial transition in coal regions like Bełchatów. Meanwhile, the former director of the Ministry of State Assets and the director of the Bełchatów Chamber of Commerce are keen to be involved with their vast network of contacts and extensive knowledge about the Bełchatów area. Lastly, an academic from the University of Łódź, is interested and engaged in Bełchatów’s transition, viewing DUST as a way to enrich the transition.

Table 1: Community Champions in Katowice and Bełchatów, Poland

Type	Collective	Brief description	LEC
Public sector			
-	(Director) Silesian Association of Municipalities	Have contact with all municipalities in the Silesia voivodeship, including information/communication and education projects for local self-governments.	(Katowice) youth, retired miners and energy sector workers
-	(Proxy/Secretary) Bełchatów County Council	Interested in just transition projects.	(Bełchatów) youth, current miners and energy sector workers, retired miners and energy sector workers
-	(Chairmans/heads) Trade Union KADRA	Represent interests of miners at the Halemba Coal Mine in Ruda Śląska and KWB Bełchatów	(Katowice & Bełchatów) current miners and energy sector workers
Private/non-public sector			
	(Head) Napraw Sobie Miasto (Repair a City for Yourself)	Have experience in post-industrial city revitalisation, and	(Katowice) youth

Non-profit & non-governmental organisation		youth engagement in just transition.	
	(Head) Centrum Zimbardo NGO	Have success with social revitalisation of Nikiszowiec (a post-mining district in Katowice).	(Katowice)
	Bełchatów- Kleszczow Science Park	Initiates projects for entrepreneurs, including youth.	(Bełchatów) youth
Civil society & cultural sector			
Social clubs/activities involving LECs	Bełchatów Association of Christiana Music	-	(Bełchatów) youth
Citizen groups	Students	From UEK, mining families or involved in sustainability/transition movements and/or collectives previously involved in DUST focus groups.	(Katowice & Bełchatów) youth
	Miners	From the Halemba Coal Mine in Ruda Śląska previously involved in DUST focus groups.	(Katowice) current miners and energy sector workers
	Retirees	-	Katowice) retired miners and energy sector workers
Additional Community Champions			
Lobbyists	Ministry of Funds and Regional Development	Interested in coordination of sectoral and territorial transition in coal regions.	Katowice & Bełchatów
	Ministry of State Assets	Responsible for energy and just transitions, interested in coal and energy sector transition.	Katowice
	Bełchatów Chamber of Commerce	Have vast contact network and knowledge about the Bełchatów area	Belchatow

Academics	University of Łódź	Interested and engaged in Bełchatów transition,	Bełchatow
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Bulgaria

In accordance with WP3, women form the umbrella group under which more specific LECs follow, including young women, as well as retired and women currently working in the energy sector. Each LEC is represented by at least one Community Champion from either civil society, the public and/or private sector.

Women

Unlike the Polish context where distinctions between different least engaged communities (LECs) were more pronounced, the Community Champions in Stara Zagora are representative of general women's groups. These groups encompass more specific subgroups identified in WP3, including young and retired women as well as those currently employed in the energy sector. Key representatives include public sector representatives, such as SZ REDA, as well as private sector non-profit organisations and charities working directly with LECs. For example, World Without Borders, is a non-profit focused on health, social and humanitarian activities, education, youth, and Roma inclusion. The Community Donation Fund Stara Zagora is a charity that promotes philanthropy and volunteerism on topics relevant to the project and impacting LECs. Similarly, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Stara Zagora, is an NGO representing regional businesses and providing specialised services, with members from LECs. The Chamber is part of the unified system of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI).

Moreover, diverse civil society groups conducting social activities that include LEC members are involved in DUST as Community Champions. The Mission Wings Foundation has over 20 years of experience managing projects aimed at empowering disadvantaged groups and addressing issues such as child protection, foster care, disabilities, and family problems, including support for vulnerable women. The Ecotopia Caring Community engages young people in designing their own futures. Such collectives also work with migrant families, particularly children from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries.

Lastly, LIPA Civil Club, a lobbyist and activist group, plays a significant role. LIPA, an acronym for liberal economics, progress, and activity, is a non-profit organisation with experience in business, local self-governance, and civic participation. It is dedicated to promoting prosperity for the Stara Zagora region and Bulgaria as a whole.

Table 2: Community Champions in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Type	Collective	Brief description	LEC
Public sector			
-	SZ REDA	Aims to support local and regional authorities and businesses in integrating with the European Community by developing policies for	Women

		sustainable and economic development.	
Private/non-public sector			
Non-profit & non-governmental organisation	World Without Borders	Develop their work in 5 key directions: health, social and humanitarian activities, education, youth, Roma inclusion.	(Roma) women
	Community Donation Fund - Stara Zagora	Aims to promote philanthropy and volunteerism.	Women
	Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Stara Zagora	Aims to represent and protect employer interests and providing its members and clients with specialised business services who form this voluntary association of regional businesses.	Women
Civil society			
Social clubs/activities involving LECs	Mission Wings Foundation	Have 20 years of experience in managing projects regarding empowering disadvantaged groups; protecting children at risk; supporting the social functioning foster care and adoption, disabilities, violation, family issues, addictions, early intervention, etc.	(Vulnerable) women
	Ectopia Caring Community	Aims to engage young people in the designing process of their own future.	Young women
Lobbyist/activist group	LIPA Civil Club	Have experience in business, local self-governance and non-governmental sector, with active civic participation, underpinned by achieving prosperity for Stara Zagora Region and the country.	Women

Sweden

As indicated by WP3, the targeted meta-community in Norrbotten consists of people living in rural areas. This broader group is represented by 14 "Fire Souls", a term used in Sweden for Community Champions, who come from either civil society or the public sector, specifically the municipalities of Boden and Överkalix. The representatives from civil society advocate for the interests of businesses, youth, the elderly, and volunteers.

Although the Sami community was initially listed as a Local Energy Community (LEC) in WP3, bureaucratic challenges and the need to ensure mutual benefit unfortunately prevented their inclusion.

Type	Collective	Brief description	LEC
Civil society			
Citizens	-	Advocate for the interests of communities, volunteers, businesses, elderly and youth in rural areas of Norrbotten	Rural communities
Public sector			
-	(Civil servant) Bodens Municipality	Represent and advocate for the interests of citizens	Rural communities
-	(Civil servant & business manager) at Överkalix Municipality	Represent and advocate for the interests of citizens	Rural communities

Netherlands

As indicated by WP3 in the Groningen region, the target LECs consisted of residents of rural areas, including young people, unemployed individuals, and older adults. In practice, participation in CCN activities largely aligned with these expectations: most of the fourteen Champions were young or middle-aged residents of rural villages, with a smaller number of students from the city of Groningen. However, no older adults were engaged. It should be noted that, in line with privacy requirements, no detailed information was collected that would allow for full verification of the demographic characteristics of all participants, particularly regarding employment status. Partners also sought to involve civil society actors, namely collectives, such as village organisations and social groups involved in youth work and neighbourhood mediation, but these organisations ultimately did not participate due to internal capacity constraints.

Germany

As indicated by WP3, the target LECs in Lusatia consisted of young adults.

1.2. Observations and notes from CCN workshops

This annex outlines notes and observations from partners in Bulgaria, Poland, Sweden and ISOCARP based on the CCN workshops held in Katowice, Bełchatów, Stara Zagora and Norrbotten. Insights can potentially contribute to other DUST tasks and activities, such as the Regional Futures Literacy Labs (RFLs), storytelling, research on affective communication, and the DUST Academy.

Engagement with LECs in both Lusatia and Groningen necessitated differentiated approaches to the CCN workshops. In Lusatia, this was primarily due to time constraints among participants, while in Groningen it stemmed from internal personnel limitations. Therefore, unlike in other regions, no notes or observations from CCN workshops were produced.

Poland

Katowice

Meanings of transition

- Several participants see **opportunities** that come with the transition such as:
 - Advancements in technological development and diversification.
 - Increasing qualifications as a result of (re)training programmes and courses.
 - Strengthening the economic participation of social groups previously underrepresented social groups, e.g. women.
 - Transitioning from a high-carbon economy to low/zero carbon one.
- Participants also highlighted various **threats**:
 - The pace of transformation, rather than the transformation itself, was a concern. Several youth representatives expressed that the lack of sufficient knowledge and transparency makes the transition more daunting. Some youth noted that they were only introduced to the concept of transition in university.
 - Job losses.
 - Migration to larger cities.
 - The potential failure of SMEs within the planet's value chain
- Some aspects of the transition were viewed neutrally by participants:
 - New ways of thinking about professional stabilisation and the economic security of the region.
 - Replacing some processes with others, rather than viewing liquidation as the sole option.

Ways to be involved in the transition

- Having a chance to be heard and openly discuss change/transition processes.

- Practicing joint decision-making alongside local governments, PGE GiEK, social groups, and SMEs. Participants noted that public consultations and social organisations sitting on government-related committees allow for more influential participation.
- Implementing and using the ideas of social groups to discuss and act within the transition. For example, climate groups often feel their perspectives are dismissed. Nevertheless, they openly discuss feelings of fear, despair, and confusion (mirroring symptoms and processes of ecological grief), which helps to create feelings solidarity and support.
- Participating in competitions for innovative research projects.
- Maintaining the role of trade union representation.
- Shifting mindset to being motivated and determined to participate, with one participant noting, "Sometimes you have to push yourself."
- Monitoring transformation activities and sharing information with others.

Networking and connection

- Participants stressed the importance of forming new alliances and connections between groups that would not ordinarily interact. Trade union representatives mentioned that "transition starts with social dialogue." Meanwhile, young climate activists, government officials, and trade unions expressed appreciation for the networking opportunities that arose from the workshop.

Increased access

- Access was a recurring theme, with participants discussing both physical access (location and time) and digital access to information. Trade union representatives highlighted the value of regular meetings, while other participants suggested holding activities on Saturdays to increase engagement.
- In the past, engaging participants in Silesian renewal programmes was coordinated by priests who would communicate with people in their parishes. Miners indicated that this would still be a beneficial way to engage older people in more rural areas.
- Youth indicated that they would appreciate some kind of science club on the transition, where people could be part of a team to improve informed decision-making and representation.
- Trade unions and retirees mentioned how invites may be shared to engage people, but questioned whether there is also a genuine interest/intention to connect with certain groups. Instead, they suggested making such information and invites available on social and regional media platforms.

Additional and non-verbal observations:

- A strong age hierarchy was observed, where elders typically speak first. Though Adam was unconventional in his approach as he gave the floor to the youth to respond to workshop questions first.

Sheets where participants recorded their responses to workshop questions will be retained for future RFL sessions.

Bełchatów

- When inviting participants for the CCN workshop in Bełchatów, partners noted the difficulty of consistently engaging with youth groups, particularly student representatives. As explained by partners at UEK and KADRA, this can be partly attributed to the stronger relationships partners have in Katowice compared to Bełchatów. UEK built relationships and trust with student representatives over time, positively influencing youth engagement in the CCN workshops and DUST's further activities.
- Participants indicated a desire to have greater influence on regional policy and debate, where citizen opinions are sought and given to create a "Bełchatów in the region's orbit".
- Formality, respect, and hierarchy are evident in how people address each other. For example, it's not Adam, it is Professor Adam, even amongst his peers who are of a similar age/position.
- Participants wore rather formal attire and sat around a long rectangular table, creating a networking event atmosphere with a mix of representatives from the public and private sectors, and a smaller group of youth Champions.
- From the automatic translation feature on Teams, it appears that instead of saying LECs, Polish partners say 'most sensitive groups' [observation to be validated by the Polish partners].
- A large portion of the session was dedicated to sharing the conclusions/outcomes from focus group discussions as requested by participants. This regular sharing and keeping participants abreast of progress also helped them feel more engaged in the project.

Bulgaria

Discussion points before the presentation and non-verbal observations

- At the outset of the discussion, attention was drawn to the development of a tool for municipalities and NGOs to measure citizen engagement and policy alignment

Representation of women

- A key issue raised was the lack of representation of women in the energy sector and local policymaking. Nonetheless, aligning with LECs in the region, there were four participants in the workshop (three women and one man). The man remained largely silent, though he appeared attentive, and the women encouraged him to speak.

Increased access to reliable information

- A major difficulty highlighted was the complexity of communicating energy transition topics, with technical terminology proving difficult to understand.
- Participants underscored the need for reliable, clear, and accessible information on sustainability transitions. They commented that authorities inconsistently communicate their projects and policies, and tend to stay silent when issues are politicised, preventing people who might want to engage from engaging. They further expressed concern that there is no communication strategy at either the central or local

level regarding social and investment programs in the region. This fuels social tensions and further widens the gap between governmental authorities and citizens.

Economic/employment stability & retraining

- In the context of PWC's consultation on territorial plans and local experiences, it was concluded that there is no unified state policy regarding public and private coal plants. TPP Maritsa East 2 is seen as more of a social service, sustaining employment at the expense of its economic viability.
- Without a social package with support measures, vulnerable groups would struggle to find employment in a non-transitional environment. Feedback indicated a lack of awareness and understanding of the energy transition, leading to confusion. Many coal-fired power station workers prefer financial compensation over retraining, seeking unrealistically high salaries without pursuing alternative careers. However, certain marginalised groups seem more open to modern economic development.
- Retraining programs remain vague and unorganised, with no clear alternative job pathways or career guidance. Companies rely on employee opinions without equally fostering innovation and high-value industries.

Unifying solutions

- Participants spoke about how it is difficult to discuss unifying solutions other than those related to improving access. One reason for this is previous policies that deliberately excluded certain communities such as the Roma who are largely isolated. Meanwhile, governmental financial support for coal workers is targeted only at workers in state-owned enterprises.
- Participants expressed anticipation to speak more about solutions relating to the transition as opposed to only the issues and challenges, presenting an ample segue to the RFLs.

Non-verbal and additional observations

- The workshop reaffirmed the importance of hospitality and food in helping people feel comfortable in a space. For example, partners presented a spread of pastries and sandwiches, juice, and a popular Bulgarian yogurt drink laid out on a tablecloth.
- Donka presented and spoke with the participants while sitting around a table, creating an atmosphere akin to having dinner in a house. This was a conscious decision by Donka, who knows many of the workshop participants and wanted to create a relaxed atmosphere.
- Participants regularly took pictures of the screen. Partners explained that the reception of the CCN and DUST project was fairly positive, with participants happy to have a community where experiences can be shared, a major benefit of being involved in DUST.
- Use CCN as a vehicle for better engagement to understand why JST is important.
- Partners recommended Facebook as an effective channel to communicate with Champions aged 30 and above for the CCN platform. Partners explained that Facebook

is a key channel for dissemination. For example, mining protests were organised through Facebook (as such should Facebook be used, risks of using the platform need to be monitored).

- Beneficial for all meetings to be recorded in the future.

Sweden

Based on previous DUST research and recent discussions with Fire Souls (Community Champions, hereafter FS) in Norrbotten, facilitators and organisers in both Sweden and the Netherlands identified the need to explore citizen participation frameworks. This initiative aimed to provide FS with additional tools to enhance their capacity for community engagement.

As part of this effort, a brief presentation was delivered, outlining the significance of citizen engagement in Sweden, relevant governance structures, and common methods for involving citizens in decision-making processes. However, some FS participants expressed concerns regarding the relevance of this section to their specific contexts. This was only the first part of the session, after which we transitioned to a more interactive segment of the online workshop that generated significant engagement and could have continued for a longer duration.

The online meeting required the use of a digital collaborative platform, namely Mentimeter to allow participants to share their thoughts and identify areas of consensus or diversion. This platform facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the priorities and concerns of the FS regarding citizen engagement. The key findings from the discussions are outlined below.

Citizen priorities and concerns

- **Preferred engagement methods:** local events, physical meetings, and digital platforms emerged as the most effective means of citizen engagement.
- **Key stakeholders:** farmers, foresters, the general public, and businesses were identified as priority groups for involvement. However, certain groups, such as Sámi communities and civil society organisations, were notably absent from the discussion.
- **Primary green transition focus areas:** transport and infrastructure, sustainable forestry, and renewable energy were the most frequently mentioned priorities. Although climate adaptation and resource allocation received comparatively less attention, some participants emphasised their significance.

Challenges and opportunities in voluntary work

A recurring theme in the discussion was the challenges associated with voluntary work, particularly the often-overlooked contributions of women.

- **Gender disparities in volunteering:** in many communities, women frequently undertake unpaid roles, such as organising events and preparing meals, while men are more commonly found in financially compensated leadership roles, such as board positions or chairperson roles. Participants highlighted the need for measures such as stipends or small financial incentives to better recognise and support voluntary contributions.

Success stories and effective engagement strategies

Several successful initiatives demonstrating the positive impact of citizen engagement were discussed:

- **Wind farm project in Boden:** a wind farm development project in Boden successfully engaged key stakeholders through an inclusive and well-structured collaborative process. The organisers' preparedness and expertise contributed to a model example of participatory decision-making.
- **Youth engagement strategies:** youth groups highlighted the importance of tailoring language and communication tools to enhance accessibility and encourage broader participation.
- **Extended engagement through digital tools:** one initiative successfully implemented QR codes, allowing participants to provide input for up to a week after an event. This approach facilitated broader participation and ensured that more voices were heard.
- **Engaging younger generations:** encouraging youth participation in voluntary work remains a significant challenge. However, small incentives, such as providing refreshments or covering minor expenses, were identified as effective strategies to enhance youth engagement.