

SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS IN LUSATIA

Positioning Lusatia's Young
People in Sustainability
Transition Policy



DUST

Democratising
jUst
Sustainability
Transitions

COLOFON

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PAPER PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy position paper presents the expectations, hopes, and visions of young people in Lusatia regarding the future direction of sustainable transitions in the region. It contrasts these perspectives with prevailing policymaking approaches and situates youth concerns within the broader policy landscape.

As part of the Horizon Europe DUST project, Regional Future Literacy Labs (RFLLs) brought together young residents and stakeholders to explore the main challenges and opportunities that structural transformation poses for Lusatia. The process engaged participants through creative, discussion-based, and deliberative methods. These formats encouraged reflection on everyday experiences, the imagining of probable and preferred futures, and the development of concrete policy recommendations.

Young participants and relevant stakeholders agreed that the perspectives of young people should be better represented in debates on structural transformation and sustainability. Including their views helps shape a more inclusive process grounded in lived experience and place-based knowledge.

This paper addresses three key audiences:

1. **Policymakers** at EU, national, regional, and local levels, to ensure that structural transformation policies respond to the lived realities and aspirations of young people in Lusatia.
2. **Organisations and NGOs**, to amplify youth voices and connect them with broader debates on structural transformation.
3. **Young people**, to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities that the structural transformation presents, and to foster intergenerational and territorial dialogue in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE IN LUSATIA

Young people in Lusatia, engaged through an inclusive and deliberative process, have made it clear that they do not wish to remain passive recipients of structural transformation policies but want to act as active partners in shaping them. A central concern raised in the DUST workshops was the disconnect between strategic visions for transformation and the lived realities of younger generations in the region. Policies are often concerned with structural conditions, with a strong focus on economic development. As these are not directly intertwined with the living conditions of young people, and remain remote from their lived experience, young people do not clearly perceive how structural change policy affects their opportunities, mobilities, and quality of life.

Young people and stakeholders alike argued that youth participation should not be framed simply in terms of young people as beneficiaries of investment or as a demographic to be retained. Instead, it should mean active involvement in transformation processes, with young people acting as agents with fresh ideas and practical knowledge drawn from everyday life. In response, the DUST workshops articulated a new narrative: one grounded in capability, creativity, and collaboration. They emphasised that the success of Lusatia's transformation depends on recognising and mobilising local assets such as social connections, practical skills, and a deep knowledge of the region's places and networks.

This perspective aligns with emerging policy priorities at European, national, and regional levels that emphasise place-based and inclusive approaches to structural transformation. It also resonates with wider public interest in ensuring that transformation is socially just and benefits all parts of the region.

Young people in Lusatia assert that targeted investment and sustained attention to their priorities are essential for ensuring that structural change creates fair and lasting benefits. Through the DUST process, they identified four priority areas for strategic action:

1. **Strengthening social and educational professions**
2. **Housing affordability and neighbourhood quality**
3. **Mobility and accessibility**
4. **Communication, participation and public services**

These priorities are grounded in lived experience and align with wider debates on regional resilience, equity, and the future of work, services, and mobility in post-coal Lusatia.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONS

Across the RFLI workshops, participants emphasised that the shortage of staff in social, care, and educational professions is a major barrier to wellbeing and quality of life in Lusatia. This includes teachers, social workers, youth workers, elderly care providers, and other health-related care roles. These professions are essential for both the younger and older population, supporting learning, health, social participation, and everyday security. However, they are often undervalued, underpaid, and subject to high workloads, making recruitment and retention difficult. Shortages are especially acute in smaller towns and rural areas, where the closure of services can leave entire areas without accessible care or learning facilities.

Participants stressed that maintaining these professions is not only a matter of labour supply but also of recognising their social importance, improving working conditions, and ensuring that services are available close to where people live.

The quotes below were shared by Lusatia's RFLI participants.

"It's just strange, so to speak, when you get to kindergarten and most of the people who are instructors should actually already be retired."

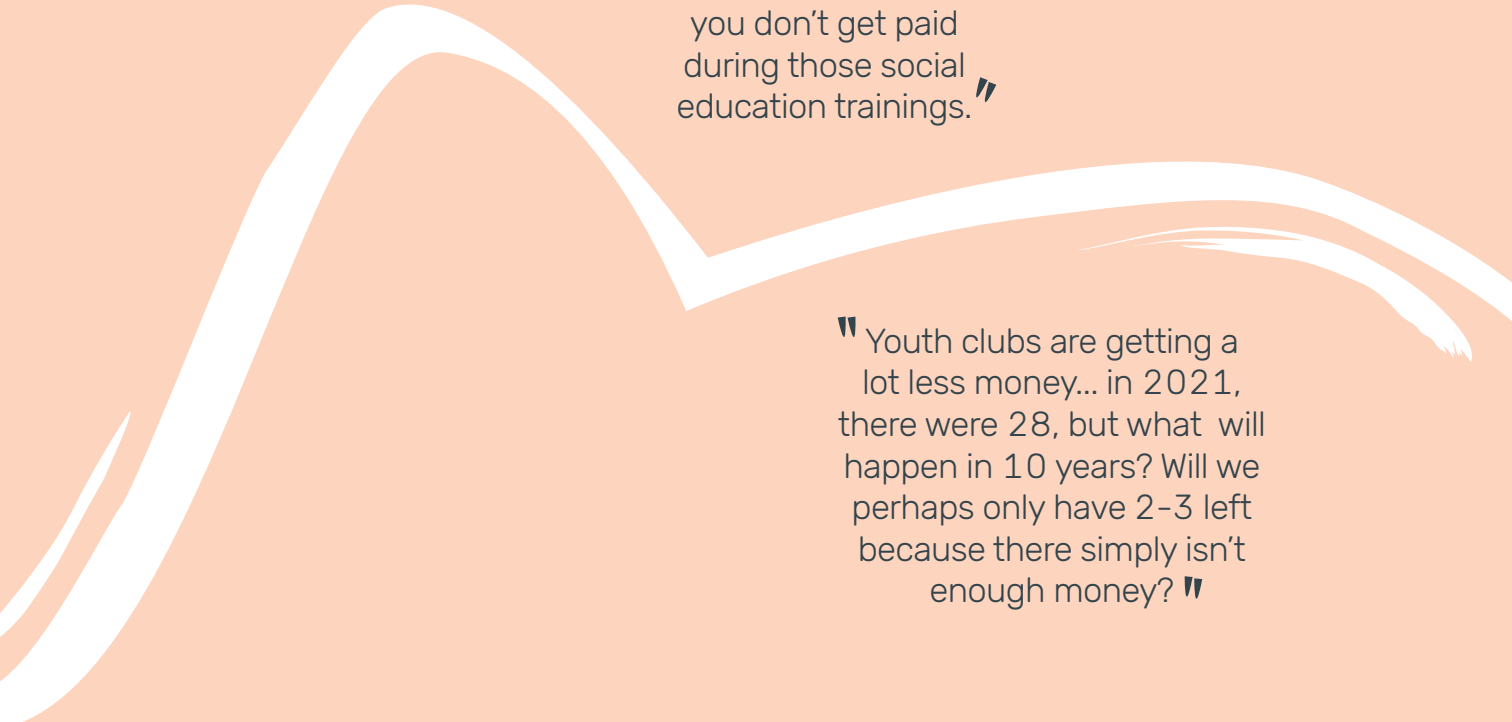
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish targeted bursaries, training pathways, and mentoring schemes for youth entering social and educational professions

Relevant for the regional government, education and labour ministries, and vocational training institutions: “There aren’t enough teachers and social workers, especially in smaller towns.” Participants suggested bursaries and clear career pathways to attract young people into these fields.

Maintain and expand pedagogically supported youth clubs and safe, inclusive spaces for young people

Relevant for municipalities, regional youth services, and funding bodies: youth clubs were valued as inclusive places to meet, learn, and get guidance. Closures due to funding cuts were a major concern.



“The next step is to make pedagogical training more attractive... —because you don’t get paid during those social education trainings.”

“Youth clubs are getting a lot less money... in 2021, there were 28, but what will happen in 10 years? Will we perhaps only have 2-3 left because there simply isn’t enough money?”

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD QUALITY

Across the RFLl workshops, participants highlighted growing concerns about housing affordability. Rising rents, the loss of affordable units, and the risk of displacement were seen as especially pressing in Cottbus and towns experiencing redevelopment. Accessible, barrier-free housing is limited, particularly in older buildings, and neighbourhood design often fails to meet the needs of all residents.

Participants also stressed the cultural dimension of neighbourhood quality. Cultural venues and spaces for subculture are important to young people's sense of belonging and creativity, yet they often face insecure funding or redevelopment pressures. Integrating youth perspectives into regional identity campaigns and creating shared cultural calendars were suggested as ways to strengthen connections between places and young residents.

The quotes below were shared by Lusatia's RFLl participants.

"There's a housing shortage and everything is getting more expensive. And if I dare, especially students or apprentices, they will then have to pay these 500 euros if it goes on like this. And that is a future outlook that I wouldn't wish on anyone."

"I also think often it's dead spaces [...] where these fear zones arise. For example, in an underpass or something. Or huge department stores that are not properly used or just stand empty, where nothing happens, where no eyes are on you somehow. Because there's no community."

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Preserve affordable housing and prevent displacement through rent controls, preservation of existing housing stock, and targeted upgrades

Relevant for municipalities, regional planning authorities, and housing associations: housing has become increasingly less affordable. Upgrades should not force out existing residents, especially those on lower incomes.

Ensure barrier-free housing and neighbourhood design

Relevant for municipalities, the construction sector, and disability advocacy organisations: housing for people with disabilities is scarce, and accessibility standards are often unmet in older buildings.

Support cultural venues and spaces for subculture in planning and funding frameworks

Relevant for municipalities, cultural agencies, and the regional government: cultural and subcultural spaces contribute to neighbourhood vibrancy and youth engagement but often face funding insecurity.

Integrate youth perspectives into regional identity campaigns linked to structural transformation

Relevant for the regional government, tourism and marketing bodies, and the civil society: youth want to be part of shaping how Lusatia is represented in public campaigns and narratives.

Facilitate a regional calendar and joint programming for youth-oriented cultural activities

Relevant for municipalities, cultural institutions, and youth organisations: a shared cultural calendar could help link events across towns, improve participation, and strengthen regional identity.

Support youth-led public space improvement actions (e.g., clean-up days) as part of a civic engagement programme

Relevant for municipalities, schools, and civil society organisations: hands-on activities were seen as a way to build skills, improve the environment, and increase youth visibility in local decision-making.

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Mobility was identified as a central concern across the RFLI workshops, with young people emphasising that reliable, affordable, and sustainable transport is essential for accessing education, employment, leisure, and cultural activities. Public transport outside peak hours, especially in the evenings and on weekends, is often limited or absent, making it difficult to participate in activities beyond one's immediate town. Rural areas face particular challenges, with entire villages lacking viable public transport connections.

Participants stressed the importance of flexible mobility solutions such as on-demand shuttles, shared e-bike systems, and micro-mobility infrastructure to bridge gaps in the network. They also highlighted the need for safe, continuous cycling and pedestrian routes, along with targeted traffic calming to improve safety and accessibility for all.

The quotes below were shared by Lusatia's RFLI participants.



"If you miss the bus in the evening, you can't get home."

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand regional public transport frequency, coverage, and weekend/evening services

Relevant for regional transport authorities, municipalities, and public transport providers: public transport was seen as unreliable and infrequent outside peak hours.

Support rural mobility with flexible options such as on-demand shuttles, e-bike schemes, and micro-mobility infrastructure

Relevant for the regional government, municipalities, and mobility providers: in villages, public transport is often absent. Flexible services like shared taxis, community buses, or e-bike stations were suggested as alternatives.

Improve cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and introduce targeted traffic calming measures

Relevant for municipalities, transport departments, and road safety authorities: participants noted unsafe cycling routes and poor pedestrian facilities, particularly on busy roads.



"What has turned out to be ideal for me are these e-scooters that are available everywhere... I'd like to see a bit more of in the future is for public authorities to offer something like this..."

COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION, AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Workshop participants underlined that effective communication and meaningful participation depend on accessible information, regular contact with decision-makers, and opportunities to shape local cultural and social life. Many felt that municipal websites and official channels do not encourage citizen feedback. They suggested combining improved online tools with in-person outreach through schools, youth clubs, and public events to reach a broader audience. Cultural and leisure opportunities were also seen as essential for making towns attractive to young people, particularly when they are affordable and located in central, accessible areas.

Participants proposed a regional youth networking platform that blends physical and digital formats, as well as targeted media training and guidance to support youth engagement with local and regional press. They also called for regular thematic exchanges with decision-makers and a clear, up-to-date overview of available youth initiatives and funding to make participation easier.

The quotes below were shared by Lusatia's RFL participants.

"In the future we need to reconsider how to build new channels that truly reach everyone. It's not easy to reach grandma at the kitchen table, compared to young people on Instagram. Still, we need to find a solution."

"And how difficult it actually is for the young people to read their way through this bureaucratic landscape, how can I apply for something, how can I network, how can I register for public appearances..."

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Redesign municipal websites to include intuitive, prominent reporting and feedback tools for citizens

Relevant for municipalities, IT departments, and civic engagement offices: participants found existing websites hard to navigate and lacking clear ways to submit concerns or ideas.

Combine online outreach with regular in-person contact formats, using schools, youth clubs, and public events

Relevant for municipalities, schools, and youth services: “Not everyone follows the city’s Facebook page.” In-person formats reach those less active online.

Support affordable leisure activities and diverse cultural life in central locations

Relevant for municipalities, cultural agencies, and funding bodies: cultural life is often concentrated in a few places and can be too expensive for young people.

Create a regional youth networking platform combining physical and digital formats

Relevant for the regional government, youth organisations, and NGOs: a shared platform could connect youth initiatives across towns and improve collaboration.

Develop a youth-friendly guide and training programme for engaging local and regional media

Relevant for media organisations, schools, and youth organisations: participants wanted support for writing press releases, giving interviews, and using social media effectively.

Establish regular thematic exchange formats for youth to engage directly with decision-makers

Relevant for municipalities, the regional government, and youth councils: structured dialogue sessions could help young people influence decisions on topics they care about.

Create and maintain a clear overview of youth initiatives and funding

Relevant for municipalities, the regional government, and youth services: a central, up-to-date resource would make it easier for young people to find opportunities.

Improve transparency and monitoring in the allocation of public funds

Relevant for municipalities, the regional government, and funding agencies: participants wanted clarity on how youth-related funds are spent and stronger accountability.

COMMUNITY AND POLICY FUTURES: VISUALISING DIVERGENT PATHWAYS

We recommend unfolding the poster when reading this section, to explore the artwork in context.

Imagined probable futures

Based on the workshop discussions, participants anticipated that Cottbus would continue to dominate as the economic, cultural, and institutional hub of the region. Large scale flagship investments such as the university expansion, the medical campus, and the Cottbuser Ostsee were seen as central pillars of development. These projects were expected to attract new residents, strengthen the local job market, and raise the city's regional and national profile. Improvements in public transport, cycling infrastructure, and urban greening were viewed as likely outcomes, supported by structural transformation funding. Nature restoration projects and the creation of high quality public spaces were also considered probable. Participants cautioned that this image oriented approach could overshadow smaller, locally driven improvements, especially in rural municipalities, and could lead to uneven distribution of benefits across Lusatia.

Imagined preferred futures

Participants across the DUST workshops described a preferred future for Lusatia in which structural change results in a socially inclusive, ecologically sustainable, and culturally vibrant region. They emphasised that transformation should not only focus on flagship projects in Cottbus but should also strengthen smaller towns and rural areas. In their vision, housing is affordable, accessible, and diverse, with neighbourhoods offering inviting public spaces, cultural venues, and spaces for subculture. Schools, youth clubs, and care facilities are well staffed and widely available, supported by attractive career pathways for those working in social, educational, and care professions.

Mobility in this future is reliable, affordable, and sustainable, with public transport running frequently and connecting even the smallest villages. Flexible rural mobility options, safe cycling routes, and pedestrian-friendly design make it easy to move without a car. Public services and information channels are transparent and easy to navigate, and young people are directly engaged in shaping decisions through regular exchanges with decision-makers. Cultural life is diverse and accessible, with joint programming across towns, a shared regional calendar, and youth-led events supported by stable funding.

Nature restoration and renewable energy projects are balanced with the protection of landscapes valued by local residents. The regional identity is built collaboratively, integrating youth perspectives into campaigns and public narratives. Participants stressed that this preferred future depends on recognising young people as active partners with agency,

creativity, and practical knowledge, and on ensuring that opportunities, resources, and benefits are distributed fairly across the region.

As voiced by the RFLP participants:

"[People] go to the multi-generation house and cook for the neighborhood"

"The surroundings are characterized by many beautiful green spaces that are used together by different people. It evokes in me a feeling of hope and togetherness. It reminds me of the time with my friends at the youth club."

"[People] take the train to the lake or shopping because the city is now car-free."

"There are many opportunities to meet new people and create something together. Especially in the heart of the city, at the gigantic department store Sternchen Caree, I like to spend time with my friends there. We play video games in the game café, drink Spezi, and eat vegan food."

Policy futures

One of the results of DUST workshops is a mapping of sustainability transition policy measures. In the policy future discussed during the workshops, structural change in Lusatia is largely guided by strategies developed at regional and national levels, with a strong emphasis on economic development, innovation, and large-scale infrastructure projects. Policy agendas centre on attracting investment, creating high-skilled jobs, and positioning Cottbus as a leading hub for research, health care, and renewable energy. Measures for transport, housing, and public services are framed as complementary to these growth-oriented priorities, often linked to the needs of the new institutions and industries.

While funding programmes exist for social, cultural, and environmental initiatives, participants noted that these are often competitive and project-based, making it difficult to sustain long-term impacts. Youth participation is recognised in policy documents, but mostly in relation to retaining young people in the region or engaging them as beneficiaries of investment. Broader forms of youth agency and co-decision are less systematically embedded. Policies in this scenario tend to prioritise visible urban improvements, which can overshadow smaller-scale, locally driven initiatives and the needs of rural municipalities.

This policy trajectory aligns with official visions of a modern, innovative, and competitive Lusatia, but workshop participants cautioned that without a stronger social and cultural dimension, benefits may remain unevenly distributed and the lived experience of young people may change less than anticipated.

TERRITORIAL CAPITAL: OVERLAPS AND DIFFERENCES

The workshops explored how Lusatia’s resources, strengths, and opportunities are understood from different perspectives. Participants discussed territorial capital in terms of human, natural, economic, built environment, and infrastructure dimensions. While official policy documents and strategies often emphasise large-scale investments, innovation, and sector-specific

growth, the workshop discussions highlighted assets and priorities grounded in everyday life, local knowledge, and social connections.

The tables below summarise these perspectives, showing where policy and community views align on region’s core assets and challenges, and where they point to different priorities for the region’s future.

Natural capital

Policy perspective	
Landscape restoration projects	Renewable energy expansion
Climate protection targets	Tourism potential linked to natural areas
Nature reserves	

Community perspective	
Everyday access to lakes, forests, and open spaces	Integration of nature restoration with recreation
Community involvement in environmental projects	Protection of valued landscapes

Economic capital

Policy perspective	
Attraction of large-scale investment	Focus on high-tech industries, health and research sectors
Economic clustering in Cottbus	Regional marketing for competitiveness

Community perspective	
Support for small and medium enterprises	Cultural and creative economy
Balanced development across towns and rural areas	Local entrepreneurship
Youth-led initiatives	

Built environment capital

Policy perspective		Community perspective	
Major urban development projects in Cottbus (medical campus, Ostsee, university facilities)	Housing modernisation Infrastructure upgrades	Affordable and accessible housing	Preservation of existing housing stock
		Neighbourhood public spaces	Cultural venues
		Spaces for subculture	Barrier-free design

Human capital

Policy perspective		Community perspective	
Skilled workforce development focused on structural change sectors (energy, research, health)	Training linked to flagship investments University expansion Retention of young professionals	Engagement of young people as active partners	Career opportunities in social, educational, and care professions
		Social connections	Strong local networks
		Local practice knowledge	

Infrastructure capital

Policy perspective		Community perspective	
Expansion of regional public transport	Road and cycling infrastructure investments	Frequent and affordable public transport including evenings / weekends	Flexible rural mobility (on-demand shuttles, e-bike schemes)
Digitalization initiatives	Mobility hubs in larger towns	Safe cycling and walking routes	Easy access to digital tools and services



DRAFTING THE STATEMENTS FROM WORKSHOP FINDINGS

Based on the perspectives gathered in the RFL1 and RFL2, a set of clear and engaging statements was developed for use in the Pol.is deliberation. RFL3 invited participants to refine the initial proposals in small groups, adding new ideas and phrasing them in ways that connected to everyday life. This process ensured that the statements were grounded in the futures discussed in RFL1–2 while remaining practical and easy to respond to.

The statements reflected the priorities expressed in the workshops, covering themes such as mobility, housing, cultural life, public space, and digital accessibility. Examples include calls to expand evening and weekend public transport, introduce flexible rural mobility options, improve cycling and pedestrian safety, preserve affordable housing, ensure barrier-free design, strengthen cultural venues, and make municipal feedback channels more visible and user-friendly. The full list appears in the Annex of this paper.

In RFL4, the statements were shared in mixed roundtables with young people and stakeholders. Materials on the tables combined the statements, visual diagrams, and earlier RFL outputs, making it easy for participants to connect the wording to lived situations and to ongoing policy processes. The format encouraged creative discussion, highlighted shared priorities, and supported commitments to carry ideas forward.

GAUGING THE REGIONAL PUBLIC OPINION

Five fast facts about the Pol.is deliberation in Lusatia

1. **Total participants:** 97 people took part in the online deliberation.
2. **Original statements:** 22 statements were drafted based on community and policy discussions.
3. **Added statements:** 21 new statements were submitted by participants during the deliberation.
4. **Total statements evaluated:** 43 in total (original + added).
5. **Total votes cast:** 3058 votes were cast—this includes all agree, disagree, and pass responses across all statements, showing how actively participants engaged with the material.

The Pol.is deliberation offered an accessible way for people across Lusatia to share their views on the statements developed in the RFLI workshops. The process was open to anyone with the link, making it possible to gather responses from different age groups, towns, and rural areas. The online tool presented each statement and invited participants to agree, disagree, or pass, while also allowing them to add their own ideas.

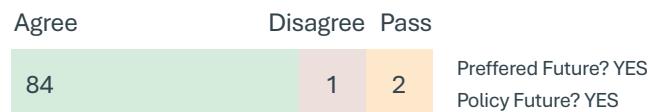
This approach created a dynamic and transparent exchange. Participants could see in real time how opinions were forming and how different perspectives related to one another. In Lusatia, the tool helped highlight areas of broad agreement, such as improving public transport connections, making cycling and walking safer, supporting cultural life, and ensuring barrier-free access to public spaces. It also brought forward suggestions that had not been discussed in depth during the workshops, enriching the overall picture.

The results of the Pol.is deliberation provided valuable input for both local and regional policy discussions. They confirmed the relevance of the workshop themes for a wider audience and demonstrated that many priorities resonate strongly across the region. These insights will help guide the next steps in aligning structural change initiatives with the aspirations and everyday needs of people in Lusatia.

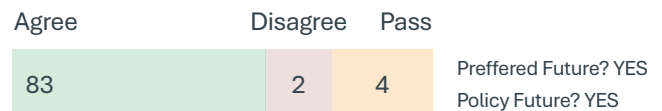
The Pol.is table on the right page illustrates the consensus statements and includes agreement levels for each.

Consensus statements

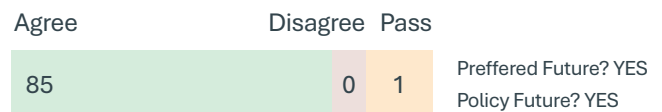
Public transport should be strengthened through more frequent services and better connections, including to peripheral areas and smaller towns (e.g. with regular timetables also in the evenings and on weekends, to be involved in society and therefore included in societal development).



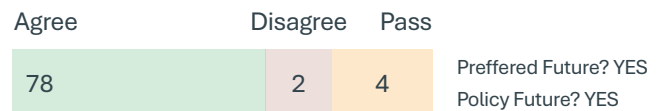
Regional connections between Cottbus, smaller towns, and surrounding areas should be improved through an expanded public transport network (e.g. direct routes, better frequency, convenient transfers).



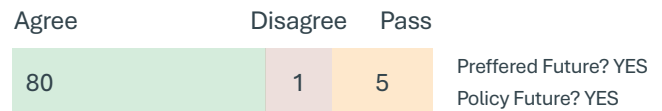
The cycling network should be expanded to create safe and direct connections between city districts, as well as between rural areas and regional centres.



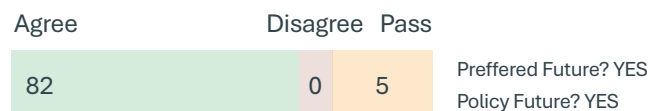
New, affordable housing should be created in central locations in Cottbus (mix of rental, subsidised, cooperative models) to make vibrant, inclusive neighbourhoods.



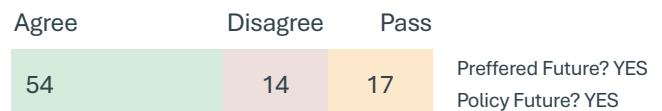
Existing affordable neighbourhoods in Cottbus should remain affordable long-term (rent controls, stock preservation, targeted upgrades without displacement).



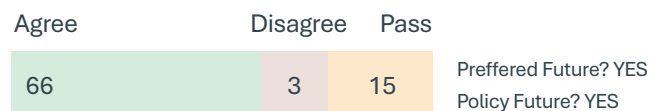
There should be more housing for the growing number of students and trainees.



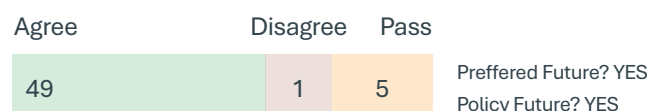
Focus more on direct communication formats (events, notices, in-person contact points) rather than primarily investing in websites.



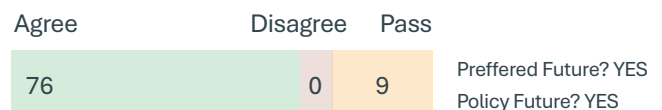
Transparency in the allocation of public funds should be significantly improved.



There must be space for subculture. Cultural venues should be enhanced transgenerationally, and young people should be involved in shaping the city.



Affordable leisure activities for young people, such as bowling or bouldering, should be offered in the city centre.



REGIONAL FUTURE LITERACY LABS: STEP BY STEP PROCESS

The Regional Futures Literacy Labs (RFLLs) were conducted in the four case study regions of Norrbotten (Sweden), Lusatia (Germany), Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), and Katowice (Poland). In each region, a distinct social group affected by transition was involved. Each lab followed these steps:

- 1. Preparatory step:** The impacts of local, national, and EU sustainability transition policy measures were mapped.
- 2. First workshop:** Members of the affected social groups and policymakers met for the initial RFLL workshop to discuss the projected impacts of transitions and transition policymaking on communities. At the end of the workshop, participants decided on the scope of upcoming deliberations.
- 3. Second workshop:** Participants discussed their expected and preferred futures in relation to sustainability transitions.
- 4. Futures analysis:** An analysis of the conversations enabled the visualization of the futures that participants expect to happen—referred to as plausible futures—as well as the futures they would prefer—referred to as preferred futures.
- 5. Policy comparison:** A comparison between the futures anticipated by participants and policy impact projections —referred to as policy futures—provided insights into participants’ opinions and positions on local, national, and EU policymaking.
- 6. Third workshop:** Participants developed these positions into policy statements.
- 7. Public deliberation:** The policy statements were then submitted for public deliberation in each case study region. The e-democracy tool Pol.is enabled the public to vote on and comment on the statements.
- 8. Fourth workshop:** In the final RFLL workshop, participants translated the outcomes from earlier steps into practical recommendations for policymakers at various levels of government.



Photo credits: Tihomir Viderman
and Maximiliano Flores

SETTING THE SCENE

Why are community-led sustainability transitions important?

Sustainability transitions involve deep socio-economic changes that impact various social groups in diverse and unequal ways across Europe. These transitions can bring both opportunities and challenges, especially in regions with slower economic growth. For transitions to be fair and effective, they must be designed through place-based, community-led policymaking that empowers citizens, increases awareness, and builds resilience. Active citizen involvement ensures policies are accountable, inclusive, and tailored to local needs—especially those of underrepresented groups.

What is the current status of sustainability transition in Lusatia?

Lusatia is a historically and culturally distinctive region spanning Brandenburg and Saxony in eastern Germany and extending into Poland. Shaped by lignite mining and other extractive industries, it has navigated successive periods of change — from socialist industrialisation to post-reunification economic restructuring — and now the coal phase-out. These experiences have fostered a wealth of knowledge, skills, and adaptability that form a strong foundation for shaping the current transformation.

Following the 2019 national decision to phase out coal, the 2020 Structural Development Act for Coal Regions (StStG) created an ambitious framework for supporting affected areas. Nationwide, €40 billion has been allocated, with

around €10.3 billion designated for Brandenburg's part of Lusatia. The programme's goals of fostering sustainability, innovation, and regional cohesion are pursued through targeted investments in infrastructure, human resources, research, and mobility systems.

Multi-level governance ensures close coordination between federal, state, and local levels, with the Brandenburg state government and the regional agency Wirtschaftsregion Lausitz GmbH (WRL) playing central roles. WRL acts as a connector across authorities, providing advice on project development, supporting funding allocation, and facilitating participatory processes. Investments are strengthening industrial and business parks, research hubs, renewable energy infrastructure, and transport links, creating momentum for economic diversification and regional competitiveness.

Participation formats accompany implementation, engaging stakeholders from across governance, business, and civil society. These provide a platform for dialogue and help align local initiatives with strategic priorities. Programmes such as the federal STARK initiative and the Brandenburg Participation Fund, launched in 2024, expand opportunities for children, young people, and civil society actors to contribute their ideas and energy. Project funding supports activities that combine ecological, economic, and social goals; from skills development and start-up creation to cultural projects that enhance Lusatia's attractiveness. These initiatives contribute to a shared vision of Lusatia as an open, innovative, and forward-looking region, actively shaping a sustainable future.

See Viderman et al, 2025 for more detailed description of sustainability transition in Lusatia.

Why are young people less engaged in Lusatia's transition?

Young people in Lusatia bring creativity and valuable local knowledge close to everyday life experiences to the region's future, yet many of their contributions take place in informal spaces rather than formal transformation processes. This reflects the fact that much of their engagement happens through cultural, environmental, and social initiatives that are not always directly connected to the structural change agenda. By building stronger links between these vibrant activities and official programmes, and by offering more accessible, youth-oriented participation formats, there is great potential to make young people's perspectives a regular and influential part of Lusatia's transformation.

HORIZON EUROPE'S DUST PROJECT & THE REGIONAL FUTURE LITERACY LABS

The DUST project, funded by Horizon Europe, aims to democratise territorial responses to sustainability transitions by increasing citizen participation and trust. Through **Regional Future Literacy Labs**, the project fosters inclusive, place-based dialogue between citizens and policymakers in transition-vulnerable regions.

These labs help citizens imagine and prepare for the future, increasing their capacity to adapt. They aim to:



The labs follow an eight-stage structure, using both in-person workshops and the digital engagement tool *pol.is*.



ANNEX

Complete list of analysed policy

- » BauGB, Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1960). Baugesetzbuch (BauGB), last ammended in 2023.
- » BbgKVerf, Land Brandenburg (2008). Brandenburgische Kommunalverfassung, last ammended in 2023. <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/115438/d7ed644e1b7fac4f9266191459903c62/15-kinder-und-jugendbericht-bundestagsdrucksache-data.pdf>
- » Landtag Brandenburg (2022). Beteiligung von Kindern und Jugendlichen am Strukturwandelprozess in der Lausitz stärken. Drs. 7/5532.
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- » Staatskanzlei des Landes Brandenburg [Publisher] (2020). Das Lausitzprogramm 2038. https://lausitz-brandenburg.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Lausitzprogramm-2038_20200914.pdf [Accessed 22 June 2025].
- » StStG, Bundesrepublik Deutschland (2020). Strukturstärkungsgesetz Kohleregionen.

Complete list of seed statements

- » Young people from the region should be specifically encouraged and trained to pursue social professions such as care work or education. Since these roles are currently performed mainly by older people, better training pathways and working conditions are needed to make these careers more attractive for the younger generation.
- » The region should actively seek to attract new people from outside who can take on social professions such as care work or education, thereby helping to secure these socially important roles.
- » New, affordable housing should be created in central locations in Cottbus, for example through a mix of rental apartments, subsidised housing, and cooperative models. This can create attractive, vibrant neighbourhoods for a plurality of population groups.
- » Existing residential neighbourhoods in Cottbus that are currently affordable should remain affordable in the long term, for example through rent controls, preservation of the building stock, and targeted upgrades without displacement. These neighbourhoods also make an important contribution to attractive and socially inclusive districts.
- » Public transport in the region should be strengthened through more frequent services and better connections, including to peripheral areas and smaller towns — for example with regular timetables also in the evenings and on weekends.
- » People in rural areas should be able to afford their own car to remain flexible and reliably mobile — especially in smaller towns with only limited public transport connections.

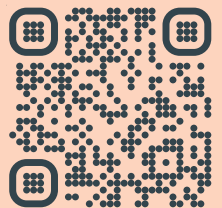
- » Regional connections between Cottbus, smaller towns, and surrounding areas should be improved through an expanded public transport network — for example with direct routes, better service frequency, and convenient transfer options.
- » Regional mobility should primarily be improved through investments in infrastructure and services for e-bikes, e-scooters, and other flexible mobility options such as on-demand shuttles — rather than through large-scale expansion of traditional public transport networks.
- » The cycling network should be expanded to create safe and direct connections between city districts, as well as between rural areas and regional centres.
- » The expansion of cycle paths should be limited, as it reduces road space for cars and makes traffic conditions more difficult.
- » The websites of municipal and regional institutions should be updated regularly and made more user-friendly in order to make information more accessible and strengthen public participation.
- » Instead of primarily investing in websites, municipal and regional institutions should focus more on direct communication formats such as local information events, public notices, or in-person contact points to better reach residents.
- » Affordable leisure activities for young people, such as bowling or bouldering, should be offered in the city centre.
- » The city centre of Cottbus should be a place with a wide variety of restaurants and nightlife options.
- » There should be projects that help older people become familiar with digital tools such as various apps or online shopping.
- » The city should offer physical shops and services for people who cannot or do not want to use digital services.
- » There should be more housing for the growing number of students and trainees.
- » The number of students and trainees should be reduced to ease pressure on the housing market.
- » Transparency in the allocation of public funds should be significantly improved.
- » Decisions on the allocation of public funds should be made solely by the city administration.
- » A youth district management office should be established in all districts, enabling young people to actively shape their surroundings.
- » Responsibility for neighbourhoods should lie entirely with the city administration in order to ensure professional and consistent management.
- » Already in place in Cottbus. As a result, communication about this should be strengthened through networking.
- » In Lusatia, thinking still too often happens in parallel – looking beyond one's own remit means pooling rather than duplicating, creating rather than merely managing.
- » The contact point for addressing right-wing violence in everyday life must be strengthened.
- » More protection for victims of right-wing violence.
- » Shift work is exhausting and unhealthy, so pay must be much higher – essential professions need genuine financial recognition.

- » Participation in public life, especially leisure activities, must be affordable and publicly supported through funding.
- » Barrier-free accessibility must also be ensured.
- » Yes, ideally barrier-free and as diverse as possible.
- » Yes, it is also important to ensure there is sufficient affordable, barrier-free housing.
- » Unfortunately, it is very rarely actually implemented.
- » There must be space for subculture. Cultural venues should be enhanced in a transgenerational way, and young people should be involved in shaping the city.
- » Public transport in rural areas should be expanded and, above all, made more efficient.
- » Instead of building new out-of-town shopping centres and multi-storey car parks in city centres, large pedestrian zones and cycle streets should be created.
- » Speed limit of 30 km/h in the city centre to increase safety for children.
- » An open and liveable region requires low-threshold services and greater investment in social matters and sustainability.
- » In future, thinking and planning must take place on a supra-regional level, as measures often have impacts that extend far beyond the urban area.

DUST

Democratising
jUst
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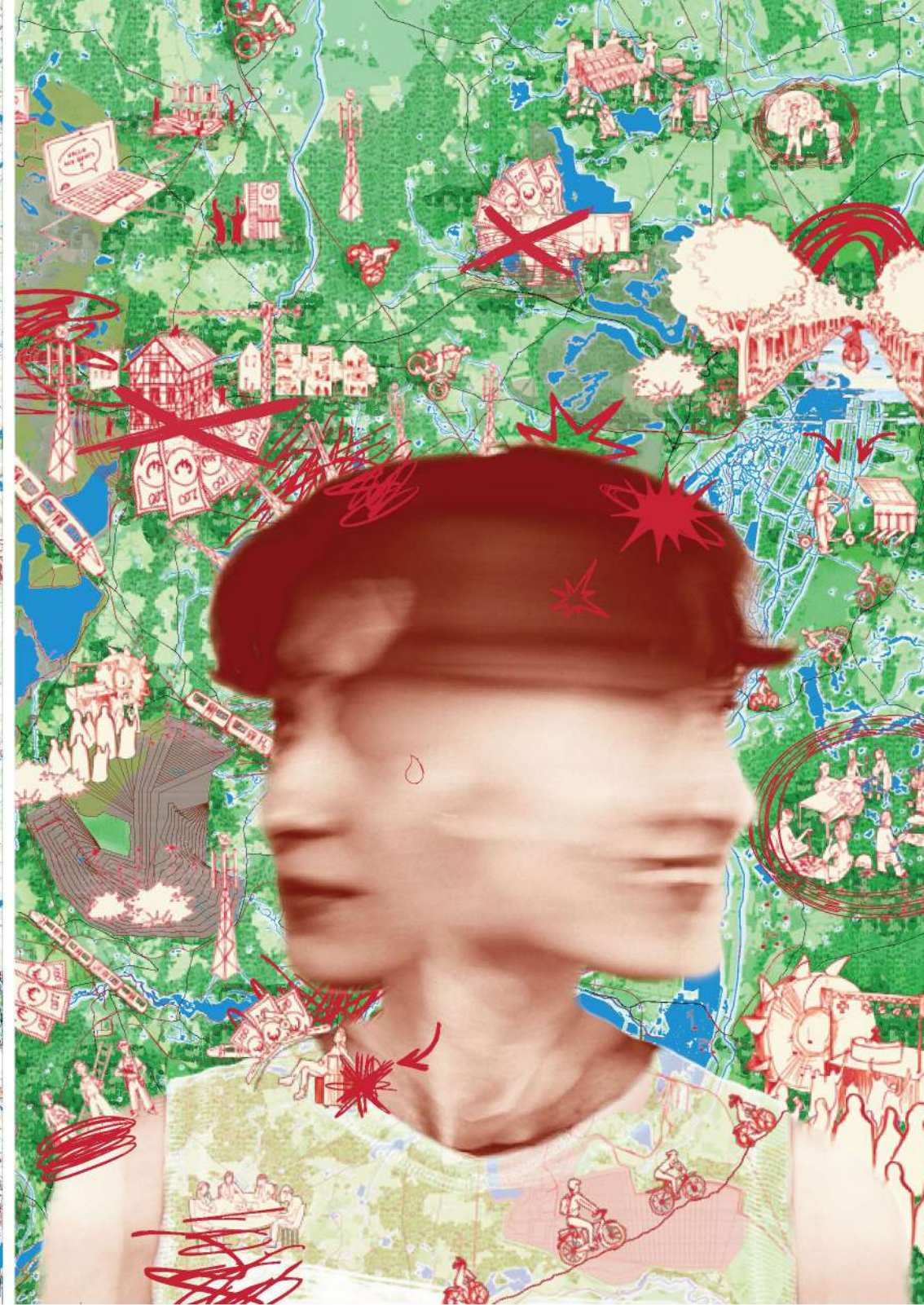
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Die Zukunft der Lausitz gemäß politischer Leitlinien der Region

A vision for the Lusatian region according to regional policy



Träume und Ängste junger Menschen in der Lausitz

Youths' fears & dreams of the Lusatian region



Die Wünsche junger Menschen für die Entwicklung der Lausitz

Youths' preferred future for the Lusatian region



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Democratising
Just
Sustainability
Transitions



Artwork by 00ZE architects & urbanists.
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