DUST | Democratising jUst Sustainability Transitions

Deliverable 3.2: Factors impacting the scale and quality of participation of least engaged communities in deliberative governance of transition policies

DUST: Work Package 3, Task 3.2

Final delivery date: 22-08-2024

Deliverable version	V1.0 Final
Dissemination level	PU
Authors	Neli Georgieva (STRATH) Martin Ferry (STRATH)
Contributors	Marcin Dąbrowski (TUD), Thomas Verbeek (TUD), Verena Balz (TUD), Gisela Garrido Veron (TUD), Odilia Van Der Valk (STRATH), Adam Drobniak (UEK), Artur Ochojski (UEK), Adam Polko (UEK), Marcin Baron (UEK), Piotr Rykala (UEK), Grzegorz Trefon (KADRA), Tihomir Viderman (BTU), Anna Grebe (KiJuBB), Remina Aleksieva (CSD), Donka Todorova (SZ REDA), Elin Cedergren (NR), Leneisja Jungsberg (NR), Myriam Chilvers (NR), Rachel Maguire (STRATH)

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 101094869.

Document information

Project Acronym	DUST
Project Title	Democratising jUst Sustainability Transitions
Project Coordinator	Verena BALZ - Technische Universiteit Delft (TU Delft)
Project Duration	36 M (February 2023 – January 2026)
Deliverable Number	D3.2
Deliverable Type	R
Dissemination Level	PU
Contractual delivery date	M15
Delivery date	22-08-2024
Version	v1.0
Pages	130
Work package	WP3 – Analysis of factors conditioning the deliberative participation of least engaged communities in place-based policies for just sustainability transitions
Lead Beneficiary	STRATH
Contributing beneficiaries	TUD, NR, CSD, BTU, UEK, HSSL BD, SZ REDA, KiJuBB, KADRA
Keywords	sustainability transition, just transition, place-based approaches, multi-level governance, participatory mechanisms, arenas of participation, inclusive participation, marginalised / least-engaged communities

Revision history

Date	Version	Author	Description
07.07.2024	v.01	Neli Georgieva	Focus group draft report based on contributors input
07.07.2024-07.08.2024	v.02	Neli Georgieva, contributors	Round of review and editing
07.08.2024	v.03	Neli Georgieva Martin Ferry	Interview draft report based on contributors input
07.08.2024-13.08.2024	v.04	Neli Georgieva, contributors	Round of review and editing
15.08.2024	v.05	Neli Georgieva Rachel Maguire	Final formatting and editing
22.08.2024	v.1.0	Neli Georgieva	Final version submitted to the EC

Table of contents

List of figures

List of tables

Abbreviation list

Term	Description
BAT	Belchatow Area of Transition
BB	Brandenburg
D	Deliverable
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
FG	Focus groups
JTF	Just Transition Fund
KoM	Kick-off meeting
KCR	Katowicki Coal Region
LEC	Least-engaged communities
NPG	National Programme Groningen
NRW	North Rhine Westphalia
TJTP	Territorial Just Transition Plan
StStG	Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions
SZ	Stara Zagora
USCB	Upper Silesian Coal Basin
WG	Working group
WP	Work package
WRL	Economic Region Lusatia (*Wirtschaftsregion Lausitz*)
WSP	Economic and Structural Programme for the future Rhenish District (*Wirtschafts- und Strukturprogramm*)

Executive Summary

Diverse measures have been introduced at the EU and domestic level in relation to sustainability transitions. While some of them have sectoral, nation-wide character, others pursue a territorial, context-sensitive approach. Although there is a lack of full technical and political understanding of the effects that policy decisions regarding sustainability transitions will have in the long-term across societies, territories, and generations, verdicts are being made as to which, or whose, needs and interests will be prioritised. The place-based approach is, in theory, conducive in such context as it could facilitate better recognition of exposure to burdens and equal access to benefits based on territorial specificities. This approach shall also promote the participation of affected communities in problem structuring and policy solutions, which ensures that policy design and implementation reflect bottom-up issue identification, and prioritisation. In such complex transformations, there can be multiple, often competing, identified problem areas, that governments are called upon to tackle within defined budget boundaries. In theory, these dilemmas should encourage the rationale for using dialogue-based forms of participation, facilitating better understanding across divergent opinions and consensus building. The research contained within this report is particularly concerned with how the voices of least-engaged communities are considered in these policy decision-making and dialogue processes. This focus is driven by the acknowledged risks in literature of a transition that is not inclusive, characterised by the (re-)production of inequalities, erosion of institutional trust, social unrest, and a resistance to change, especially from those who feel unfairly burdened or unbenefited by such change.

In an attempt to inform the design of more inclusive participatory processes and sustainability transition policy measures, this research follows a novel comprehensive framework, operationalised via qualitative research methods, to explore factors that condition deliberative citizen participation. The framework distinguishes between policy factors related to the selection of specific sustainability policy measures, and community factors, related to the sentiments held by groups defined on the basis of socio-demographic patterns, who are assumed to be less engaged in policy-making processes. It acknowledges that these policy and community factors may be impacted by a wider context issues.

Under the policy factors, insights from the research show that the scope for citizen participation, and the inclusivity of participatory processes, are affected (i) by the transition rationales that policies define and pursue, (ii) by governance arrangements related to both the balancing between top-down and bottom-up dynamics, and the ensuring of equality of powers within the participatory processes themselves, and finally, (iii) by the approach and rationale policies adopt in identifying and targeting communities. Policy factors also appear affected by certain broader contextual issues applicable beyond analysed policy measures. One significant such factor relates to the restricted capacity of sub-national authorities to implement citizen participation processes, often linked to a lack of relevant skills and tools. Whilst sub-national, especially local-level, authorities are expected to play a leading role in mobilising and organising participatory instruments targeted at communities and citizens, technical and human capacity issues are particularly prevalent at lower administrative levels. Another challenge faced when designing and implementing participatory processes within a place-based policy, which ideally integrates interrelated thematic fields, arises from the distribution of sectoral, or decision-making, responsibilities across different public bodies and levels of government.

Under the community variables, the research underscores the interlinkages between willingness and ability factors that affect community perspectives regarding public policies and participatory

processes organised by authorities for just sustainability transition. Socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, residence, education and place of living prove to impact communities perceptions regarding the relevance of policy measures to their lives, views and experiences with power, knowledge and preferences on language, tone and means of communication. The way these characteristics define the engagement attitudes of communities appear specific to the different geographical and political contexts. Trust plays a significant role for the way various communities perceive the capability of public institutions to navigate through sustainability transitions, devise good policy solutions, and distribute costs and benefits fairly. This factor is relatively universal across engaged groups in the research, with distrust showing to be both a disincentive and an incentive for participation.

1. Introduction

This report represents the second deliverable (D3.2) of Work Package 3 (WP3). WP3 has the overall aim of providing an analysis of factors conditioning the deliberative participation of communities and citizens in place-based measures for sustainability transitions, focusing particularly on communities and citizens that are the least engaged in the design and delivery of such measures. It is based on the premise that place-based transition measures provide advantages for deliberative participation over traditional transition policies and plans. This is supported through the introduction of more functional geographies, which are capable of understanding and incorporating development potentials and bottlenecks affecting different communities, also through use of a multi-level governance system that opens up a set of arenas for deliberative participation, and finally joining up diverse policy goals, that go beyond sectoral concerns to incorporate issues of social inclusion and territorial cohesion.

Following the scoping research in Deliverable 3.1, which mapped out diverse methods of participatory democracy and place-based transition measures, this deliverable places specific attention on examining participatory mechanisms that allow for dialogue and interaction, especially between representative institutions and citizens. For the purpose of this research, such mechanisms are termed as 'deliberative' to distinguish them from methods that do not go beyond basic consultation (i.e. one-way interaction).[1] The research design is informed by DUST theoretical framework sat out in Deliverable 1.1, which identified three broad categories of factors that affect participation – policy, community, and context variable.

This deliverable analyses factors under these categories based on qualitative data, collected via interviews with policy practitioners, and focus groups with selected communities in the eight case study regions. The main objective is to understand what promotes or impedes deliberative forms of participation with citizens and how so, through tapping into policy and citizen (community) perspectives in different contexts. Of particular interest has been to explore policy practitioners' perspectives regarding the use of participatory processes in transition policies, especially those targeting citizen participation. This included investigating decision makers' rationale in utilising, or refraining from, deliberative forms of participation and efforts to engage with diverse socio-demographic groups, especially those that have a stake but tend to be less engaged in policy participatory processes or interventions. Community perspectives can provide better understanding of the perceptions and expectations of the affected communities in regard to sustainability transitions, and unpick the factors (enablers/motivations or obstacles/disincentives) that affect individuals and group sentiments towards participation in policies attempting to alleviate the burden from or facilitate such transitions.

The objectives of other, simultaneously carried out, pieces of DUST research, namely a large-scale population survey and a media analysis, are informed by a similar endeavour to shed light on the factors conditioning the participation of communities and citizens in sustainability transitions, and policy measures related to them. The results of this deliverable, together with above-mentioned research, aims to provide a comparative analysis of the relationship between

[1] This report uses a broader and more flexible definition of deliberative participation, whose formal definition involves a process of weighing alternatives as a basis for consensus formation in pluralistic decision-making environments (Mansbridge, 2015). The main reason for broadening the definition is the limited use of participatory processes which align with this formal, academic, definition when sustainability transition policies are concerned (a key conclusion of D3.1).

the dependent variable (inclusive deliberative governance of just sustainability transitions policies) and independent variables (contextual factors and features of participatory mechanisms). By doing that, it informs the scope and content of the experimental – living lab – stage of DUST (WP4-5).

This report is structured under six Chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 describes the methods used to generate the data on which the report is based. Chapter 3 provides an overview of what policymakers interviewed as part of the research identify as key deliberative participatory processes in selected policy measures. This includes research reflections on variations in the use of participatory instruments, especially in the context of less engaged communities, across and within case studies. This serves as a basis for discussion of factors that can explain these variations and Chapter 4 assesses so-called policy-related variables or factors based on interviews. The structure of the assessment is informed by the key principles of the place-based concept. This allows for understanding as to whether these principles were evident in practice, and the extent to which they facilitated participation of communities and citizens, particularly the less engaged.

Chapter 5 centres on community-based variables, drawing on the research completed through the focus group stage. It distinguishes between a set of willingness and ability factors for participation, based on DUST analytical framework for distinguishing least-engaged communities (LECs). Initial insights are drawn together in Chapter 6 as a basis for the subsequent comparative synthesis of research under WP2 and WP3, which will cover factors conditioning deliberative participation of LECs in just sustainability transition policies.

2. Methodology

This report is based on data gathered through empirical research conducted in the DUST eight case study regions: in Bulgara, the district of Stara Zagora, in Germany, the coal mining areas covered by the Lusatian Lignite District and the Rhenish District, in the Netherlands, the province of Groningen, in Poland, the Bełchatów Area of Transition and the Katowicki coal region, and in Sweden, the regions of Gotland and Norrbotten. The data were gathered applying two research methods: interviews with practitioners and focus groups with individuals, who belong to selected communities. The design of these methods was informed by the DUST theoretical framework set in Deliverable 1.1. The desk research performed for Deliverable 3.1 fed further into the methodology of Task 3.2 and allowed to tailor the two methods in each case study. In particular, Deliverable 3.1 informed this research when it comes to the identification of place-based policies for sustainability transitions and participatory processes as part of them as well as with its initial analysis on communities that have been present or represented in such processes.

The research undertaken for the delivery of D3.2 was also informed by key concepts outlined in the theoretical framework (D1.1), and refined in D3.1. These concepts and the key categories or ranges that have been identified in literature and research so far are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Key concepts in Task 3.2 research

Concept	Categories / ranges
Place-based approach	Explicit territorial focus; Multiple stakeholder involvement in governance, A range of integrated tools; Objectives that apply multiple dimensions to the territory concerned
Deliberative participatory mechanism	Participatory mechanisms that go beyond basic consultation or statements of positions and are associated with more significant interaction between public authorities and stakeholders or communities that directly informs the design and delivery of measures.
Stages of policymaking	Issue identification/agenda setting stage; policy formulation; decision-making; implementation; monitoring and evaluation
Arenas of participation	National level (country), regional level (NUTS2/3 level depending on countries' administrative division), local level (municipal/city level), community level (groups within the city level) and at the level of the functional area (across administrative boundaries)
Depth of participation	Ranging from basic information provision, to consultation, dialogue, engagement and partnership.
Factors /Variables that facilitate or impede participation	Community, policy, and contextual
Less engaged communities	Communities defined in demographic, territorial, ethnic or socio-economic terms that have had little public engagement, including in sustainability transition measures, due to limited capacity and/or willingness.

2.1. Interviews

For the interview-based data collection, regional case study partners selected two place-based policy measures out of the initially identified measures in D3.1. One of these policy measures was unified for all partners, namely their Territorial Just Transition Plans. The second measure was selected by each partner on the basis of several criteria: (i) its significance for the sustainability transition in the region, (ii) a clear effort to use some form of deliberative participatory mechanism (meaning mechanisms that go beyond basic consultation and are associated with more significant interaction between public authorities and stakeholders or communities), (iii) multi-level governance arrangements, (iv) awareness/knowledge (incl. on the

basis of D3.1) that selected measures have comparative differences in experience and use of deliberative participatory mechanisms, (v) access to policy practitioners to interview. Selected measures by each case study are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Summary of selected policy measures and basic description

Case study region	Policy measure	Geographical coverage	Budget
Bulgaria: **Stara Zagora**	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	Stara Zagora District	€1.3 billion from JTF originally / €175,884,407 for Stara Zagora District, Maritsa East Complex
	Integrated Development Plan of Municipality of Stara Zagora 2021 – 2027 (IDP)	Municipality of Stara Zagora	Interventions based on the Plan's objectives will receive funding from the JTF and from other Cohesion Policy Programmes under ERDF and ESF. Total budget is unknown.
Germany: **Lusatia**	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	The geographical scope covers the Lusatian district as defined by the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment. The Lusatian district includes: Cottbus, Landkreis (LK) Dahme-Spreewald, LK Elbe-Elster, LK Oberspreewald-Lausitz, LK Spree-Neiße.	€785 million for Land Brandenburg, of which largest part is foreseen for the Lusatian district.
	Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions (StStG-LA)	The geographical scope covers the Lusatian district as defined by the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment. The Lusatian district includes: Cottbus, Landkreis (LK) Dahme-Spreewald, LK Elbe-Elster, LK Oberspreewald-Lausitz, LK Spree-Neiße.	€40 billion for affected regions in 4 states (*Länder*), of which €10,32 billion for Lusatia (Brandenburg part).This includes funding for structural change, allocated to states, and interventions within the remit of the Federal Government
Germany: **Rhenish District**	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	The geographical scope covers the Rhenish mining area as demarcated by the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment. Rhenish Mining Area covers: the Aachen city region, Districts of Düren, Neuss, Rhein-Erft, Euskirchen and Heinsberg, and the City of Mönchengladbach.	€683 million for North Rhine Westphalia (NRW) (Rhenish mining area and Nördliches Ruhrgebiet), of which €120 million for labour and social policy measures administered by Nordrhein-Westfalen Ministry of Labour.
	Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions (StStG-RD)	The geographical scope covers the Rhenish mining area as demarcated by the Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment. Rhenish Mining Area covers: the Aachen city region, Districts of Düren, Neuss, Rhein-Erft, Euskirchen and Heinsberg, and the City of Mönchengladbach.	€40 billion for affected regions in 4 Germany's states (*Länder*). €5,18billion for structural change, allocated to NRW (Rhenish mining area and Nördliches Ruhrgebiet) and €9,62 billion for interventions within the remit of the Federal Government targeted at the same area.

Case study region	Policy measure	Geographical coverage	Budget
Netherlands: **Groningen**	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	Northern Netherlands (Groningen Province and Municipality of Emmen)	€330 million
	National Programme Groningen (NPG)	Groningen Province	€1.15 billion
Poland: **Bełchatów Area of Transition**[2]	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	Belchatowski Area of Transition	Around €400 million
	Social Agreement (SA)	Bełchatów Area of Transition	Not established so far. The Agreement defined the schedule for coal mine close down along with number of mitigating activities, but without budget assumptions. Funding provisions will need to be approved by the European Commission in light of State aid regulations.
Poland: **Katowicki Coal Region**[3]	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	Katowicki Coal Region	nearly €2.1 billion of EURO (for all 7 coal regions in the Silesia including Katowicki Coal Region)
	Social Agreement (SA)	Katowicki Coal Region	Not established so far. The Agreement defined the schedule for coal mine closedown along with number of mitigating activities, but without budget assumptions. Funding provisions will need to be approved by the European Commission in light of State aid regulations.
Sweden: **Gotland**	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	Region Gotland	approx. €38 million
	Municipal Comprehensive Plan Master Plan (master plan)	Municipality of Gotland	The plan does not include financial provisions
Sweden: **Norrbotten**	Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)	Region Norrbotten	approx. 94 million[4]
	Regional Development Strategy (RDS)	Region Norrbotten	The Strategy does not include financial provisions

Each case study region was tasked to perform semi-structured interviews with officials responsible for the selected transition measures. The key aims of the interviews was twofold:

- to assess whether measures include deliberative participatory mechanisms and if they do not the reasons for this;
- where measures do include deliberative participatory mechanisms, to assess the quality of the process, particularly in terms of the inclusion of less engaged communities, and the factors that determine this.

Interviews were conducted on the basis of a semi-structured interview guide consisting of eight key headings with open ended pre-planned questions covering the key factors that facilitate or impede participation identified earlier in WP1 and WP3. This provided an opportunity for the

[2] Part of the Łódź Voivodeship
[3] Par of the Silesian Voivodeship
[4] Ibid.

researcher (interviewer) or participant (interviewee) to diverge from the pre-defined question to pursue an idea in more detail and uncover new issues or ideas that were not previously anticipated. Annex 1: Checklist for interviews includes the checklist which served as a basis for interview research.

Interviews were carried out between January-April 2024 in each region, either online or in person. The number and type of interviewee varies according to the contexts of measures involved. However, partners were tasked to cover the key bodies and actors involved in the design and implementation of the measures, particularly those with knowledge of participatory mechanisms identified in Task 3.1. More specifically, some key dimensions were highlighted in the provided guidance: (i) representatives from multiple levels of governance involved in the measure, with a focus on sub-national and local levels; (ii) representatives of different types of practitioner. This can include public administration (national ministries and departments, sub-national administrations, municipal authorities etc.) and where appropriate, it can include public agencies (e.g. executive or advisory non-departmental bodies) that have been given key tasks in specific measures), sectoral associations that have been directly involved in decisions on the design and delivery of the measure or other bodies to which key tasks have been outsourced (e.g. consultancy firms). In identifying relevant interviewees, partners were advised to use relevant data from Deliverable 2.3 (APES). Finally, the identification of interviewees was based on a consultation between academic and societal partners within DUST to build on their different networks.

For an overview of the type of interviewees per measure and the number of interviews per case study, see Table 3.

Table 3: Overview of interviews per case study region

Case study region	Type of interviewee per policy measure	Total number of interviews
Bulgaria: **Stara Zagora**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National Government: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works Regional government: Representative of the Stara Zagora District (O*blast*) Governor's Office Academic institution, regional level: Trakia University Stara Zagora Private sector, regional level: Trakia Economic Zone Sectoral representative organisation, regional-local level: Chamber of Commerce and Industry Advisory/consultancy organisation to the national government: PwC	6 interviews
	Integrated Development Plan of Municipality of Stara Zagora 2021 – 2027 (IDP) Regional government: Representative of the Stara Zagora District (O*blast*) Governor's Office Academic institution, regional level: Trakia University Stara Zagora Private sector, regional level: Trakia Economic Zone	
Germany: **Lusatia**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National government: Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action State: Brandenburg Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Energy, The Office of the Commissioner of Brandeburg's prime minister's for Lusatia and Brandenburg Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport Regional/district: Office of the City Major and the Urban Development Department	7 interviews

Case study region	Type of interviewee per policy measure	Total number of interviews
	Local: Major of Spremberg	
	Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions (StStG-LA) National government: Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action State: Brandenburg Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Energy, The Office of the Commissioner of Brandeburg's prime minister's for Lusatia and Brandenburg Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport Regional/district: Office of the City Major and the Urban Development Department Local: Major of Spremberg	
Germany: **Rhenish District**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National government: Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action State (land): Ministry for Economy, industry, climate protection and energy State (land): Youth Support at Rhineland Regional Association State (landesebene): Umbrella organisation of German Catholic Youth in North Rhine Westfalen (NRW) State (land): State youth council NRW Regional: Future Agency – Rhenish District	6 interviews
	Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions (StStG-RD) National government: Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action State: Ministry for Economy, industry, climate protection and energy State: Youth Support at Rhineland Regional Association State: Umbrella organisation of German Catholic Youth in North Rhine Westfalen (NRW) State: State youth council NRW Regional: Future Agency – Rhenish District	
Netherlands: **Groningen**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** Regional: Management Authority North (SNN) and an external consultant coordinator (E&E) Local/regional: Municipality of Emmen Local/regional: Municipality of Groningen	10 interviews
	National Programme Groningen (NPG) National: Representative of the National Programme Groningen National: Ministry of Economic affairs and climate National/Provincial: Regional department of the National Programme Groningen Local: Municipality Het Hogeland Other: Urban design and Landscape company (responsible to carry out participatory processes)	
Poland: **Belchatow Area of Transition (BAT)**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National: Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy Regional: Representative of the regional self-government Lodzkie Marshal Office Sub-regional: Representative of the regional self-government Belchatowski County Local: Agency Belchatow & Kleszczow Industry and Technology Park	8 interviews
	Social Agreement (SA) National: Ministry of State Assets, Department of the EU funds and Development Instruments Sectoral/regional: Trade Union KADRA Bełchatów	

Case study region	Type of interviewee per policy measure	Total number of interviews
	Sectoral/local: Trade Union KADRA, Lignite Mining Bełchatów	
Poland: **Katowicki Coal Region (KCR)**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National: Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy Regional: Silesian Marshal Office, Department of Funds and Transition Local: Trade Union FORUM for Silesia Voivodeship Sub-local: Zimbardo Centrum NGO	8 interviews
	Social Agreement (SA) Regional: Trade Union Association KADRA and Trade Union FORUM for Silesia Voivodeship Local: Member of Regional Council of Just Transition in Silesia Voivodeship	
Sweden: **Gotland**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National government: Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (*Tillväxtverket*) (3 x interviewees) Regional government: Region Gotland	7 interviews
	Municipal Master Plan (comprehensive spatial plan) Regional: Region Gotland (3 x interviewees)	
Sweden: **Norrbotten**	**Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP)** National government: Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (*Tillväxtverket*) (3 x interviewees) National/regional government: County Administration board and region Norrbotten Regional government: Region Norrbotten	7 interviews
	Regional Development Strategy (RDS) National/regional government: County Administration board and now Region Norrbotten Regional government: Region Norrbotten (2 x interviewees)	

2.2. Focus Groups

A second task undertaken by each case study region involved the organisation of focus groups. The FG intended to engage with communities – defined by certain sociodemographic characteristics - who have been less engaged in public life in the region, and particularly in policies attempting to respond to the sustainability transitions in the specific case study. The method was chosen as it allowed to unpick individuals' perspective and collect more detailed/sensitive insights by listening to local voices in communities' own language.[5] FGs were particularly valuable to this research as they provide a window not only to what people think but also why they think so, providing understanding of the context in which opinions are formed and the complexity of the explanations behind them. The FGs took place in the period February-April 2024.

The focus groups aimed to further untangle the community factors that shape attitudes or behaviour of participation, and their design was guided by three aims, namely, to understand:

- how communities perceive or experience a sustainability transition(s) in their lives,
- are communities awareness of responses – public or non-governmental – related to such transitions and do they have any experiences engaging with such so far, and

[5] Barbour, R.(2007). Doing Focus Groups. London: SAGE Publications. 174 pp. ISBN 978-0-7619-4978-7. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *15*(3), 65.

- what are the factors (enablers/motivations or obstacles/disincentives) that affect their sentiments towards participation in policies or interventions relevant to the sustainability transitions, and why.

A set of questions, from introductory to specific ones, was devised under each of these three objectives. All questions were phrased openly, avoiding rigid definitions of concepts such as 'sustainability transition', 'participation', 'trust', while the moderators' guidelines included instructions on a broad approach how to introduce such concepts as well as with prompts and visual materials. The issues selected for discussion regarding the factors affecting participation were selected in line with the analytical framework for distinguishing least engaged communities (LEC) set in D1.1. This included five willingness factors (see Table 4) and five ability factors (see Table 5) that were presented to participants directly. The objective was to stimulate a conversation on the views of the participants, probing whether they perceive these factors as distinctive obstacles or enablers/motivators for their participation in policy making processes related to the transitions and why.

Table 4: Willingness factors

Willingness factors
Trust, e.g. in government and decision-making processes for sustainability transition
Content of public policies for sustainability transition and how they link to own needs and concerns
Impact of one's participation
Attitudes within one's social circle towards the transition and towards participation in public policies supporting the transition
Cultural/social traditions, values, norms (e.g. hierarchical or gender norms)

Table 5: Ability factors

Ability factors
Access to information about sustainability transition, policies in place, mechanisms to get involved in such policies
Knowledge and skills (e.g. understanding of public policies and civic processes; interpersonal skill; jargon; technical language)
Technological access (to information or to online forms of participation)
Physical accessibility to the places where participatory processes are organised
Presence of local leaders, groups or organisations that mobilise the individual or the community they associate with.

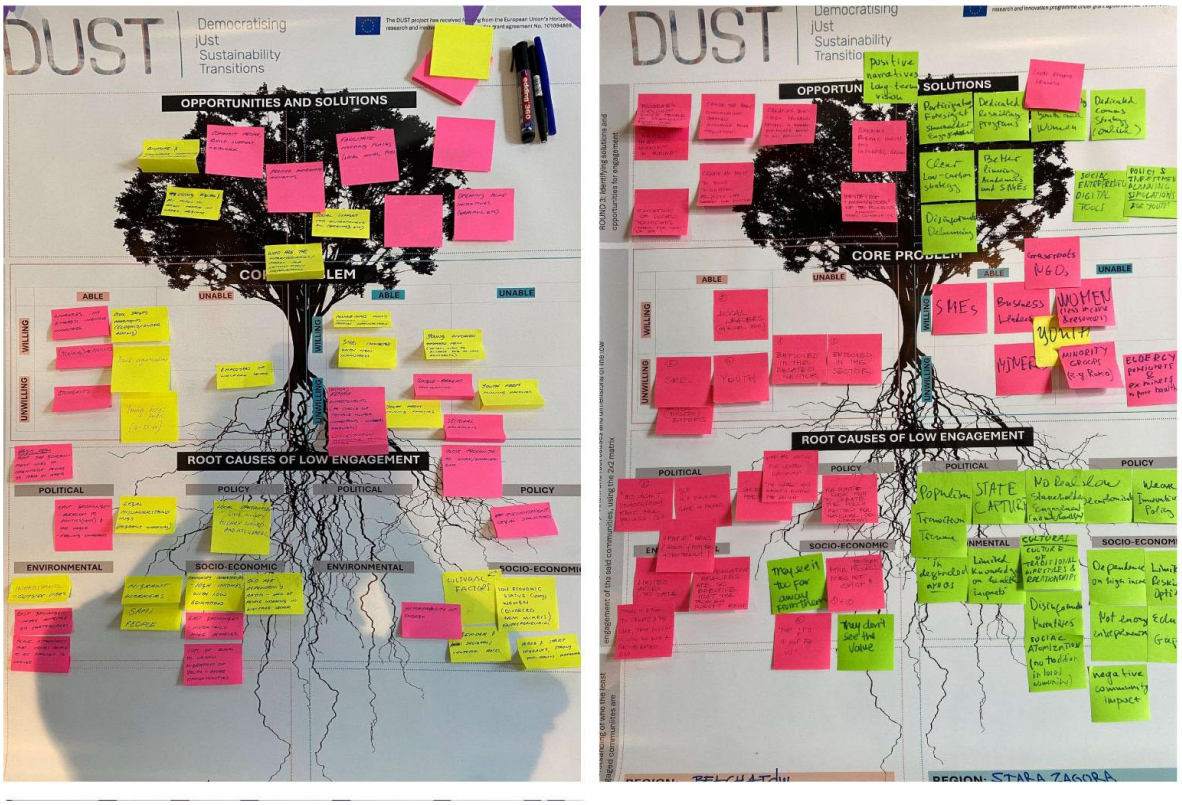


Figure 1 Results from discussions on LEC in DUST case study regions during the DUST KoM (Source: D1.1)

A sampling strategy and research protocol were prepared for each case study partner to follow. As a first step, each case study defined a broad social group (i.e. a group of residents in the case study region defined by socio-economic, demographic or locational criteria) that is less politically engaged, especially in policy and decision-making processes and that is being impacted by the sustainability transition. To identify such a group, a pragmatic approach was taken where each region made a decision informed by the knowledge of academic partners and other regional actors involved in DUST project as societal partners. This broad group is referred to in the report as a 'meta-community' or 'meta-group'.

It should be noted that a dialogue on the question of root causes of low participation in the sustainability transition and how they affect different groups based on socio-demographic and locational aspects, had already been initiated at the DUST kick-off meeting (see Figure 1) and developed further through Deliverable 3.1.

As a second step, the sampling strategy has been closely linked to a definition of sub-communities within the meta-community whose sentiments to participation or participatory behaviour are presumably affected by different factors. These groups are referred to in this report as 'sub-communities' or 'sub-groups'. The selection of these sub-communities aimed to reflect the individual case studies' hypotheses about the dimensions (such as gender, age, income level, education, ethnicity, place of residence, etc.) that are likely to give rise to differing experiences with and sentiments to participation in sustainability transition policies.

The methodology to define these sub-groups was based on the framework developed in D1.1 to distinguish LECs (see Figure 2). This framework captures the dimensions of diversity that the research aims to investigate, namely, different combinations of ability and motivational factors that affect participation and how they play out across different socio-demographic groups. The

selection of sub-communities was key to the comparative analysis of community factors affecting participation within each case study.

Figure 2: An analytical framework for distinguishing LECs (source Deliverable 1.1)

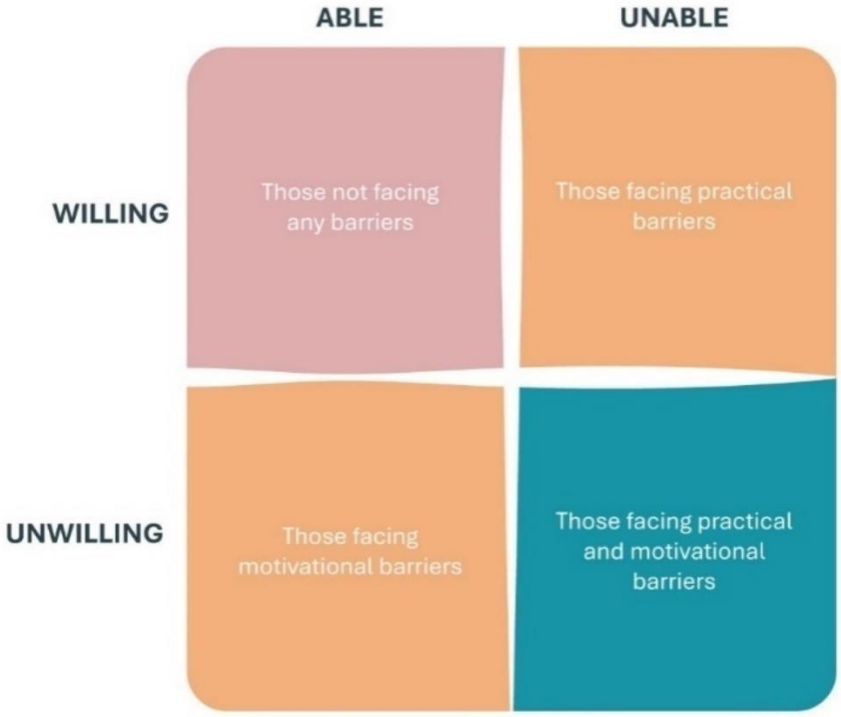


Table 6 provides an overview of the selected meta-communities and sub-communities in each case-study region, as well as the number of focus groups carried out and individuals who took part. While each partner had the task to select at least three sub-communities and perform one focus group discussion with each of them, in practice not all partners were able to meet the target due to organisational difficulties. More information of the selection of the communities in each case study is provided in Chapter 5.

Table 6: Selected meta- and sub-communities for focus groups

Case study region	Meta- Community	Sub-communities	Total number of FGs & participants
Bulgaria: **Stara Zagora**	Women	• Retired employees of the mining and energy sector • Employees of the mining and energy sector • Youth	3 FGs 10 participants in total
Germany: **Lusatia**	Youth	• Female youth • Male youth	2 FGs 12 participants in total
Germany: **Rhenish District**	Youth	• Mix of female and male youth	Format: written survey 5 participants
Netherlands: **Groningen**	Rural communities	• Youth (2 FGs) • Residents of deprived area (Oude Pekela municipality) (2 FGs)	4 FGs 20 participants in total

Case study region	Meta- Community	Sub-communities	Total number of FGs & participants
Poland: **Belchatow Area of Transition (BAT)**	Mining communities	• Retirees from mining or energy sector • Youth from mining or energy sector families (18-19) • Miners and workers in the conventional energy sector or related industries	3 FGs 16 participants in total
Poland: **Katowicki Coal Region (KCR)**	Mining communities	• Retirees from mining or energy sector • Youth from mining or energy sector families (18-19) • Miners and workers in the conventional energy sector or related industries	4 FGs 39 participants in total
Sweden: **Gotland**	Rural communities	• Residents near the cement industry and limestone quarry in Slite • Female residents • Youth (18-24)	3 FGs 12 participants in total
Sweden: **Norrbotten**	Rural communities	• Sami (Arjeplog municipality) • Small rural business owners (Boden municipality) • Youth (18-24) (Boden municipality)	3 FGs 10 participants in total

3. Just transition measures & deliberative participation in case study regions

Following the desk-based review of participatory processes in Deliverable 3.1, interviews with policymakers and focus groups with communities in case study regions explored their perspectives on deliberative participatory processes. This research assessed whether and how sustainability transition policies examined in the DUST case study regions incorporated various methods of participation, thereby opening up the policymaking process to actors beyond governmental institutions.

Assessing these perspectives concerning participatory instruments that are particularly *deliberative* has not been straightforward, as this classification is often absent in policy terminology, and interpretations of deliberative participation vary across case study regions, across governmental or other bodies that have been interviewed and across different communities.

3.1. Variation in use of participatory instruments

As a starting point, interviews with policymakers involved in the selected sustainability transition measures, explored their opinions on the most important deliberative participatory instruments or processes associated with these measures. The data collected indicate that sustainability transition policy measures have often utilized a combination of participatory instruments, incorporating elements such as presenting ongoing policy thinking and collecting feedback from participants, facilitating dialogue or promoting exchanges among participants. Table 7 summarises the key deliberative participatory mechanisms referred to by interviewees per case study, organising them according to different forms.

Table 7: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Meetings in different formats (bilateral, multilateral and *working meetings, focus groups, discussion panels, workshops*) organised under both policy measures with discussions focused on creation of new economic activities and jobs	Various private, knowledge and third-sector stakeholders	Predominantly at national level, with some formats at local level

Table 8: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Lusatia (Germany), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Series of public events organised around the ERDF Programme Brandenburg 2021-27, which funds interventions foreseen in the TJTP. Participants were asked to identify issues within the frame and the topic of each of the events	Representatives of organised interest from business, science, administration and civil society, or experts in relevant fields	State level
	Citizen dialogues (five physical and one online) were organised by the project 'Workshop for Future Lusatia', feeding into the Lusatia Programme 2038, which informs the implementation of StStG	The general public	Organised in collaboration with the 235 municipalities in the Lusatian district
	Working Groups to specific issues/themes organised under the StStG	Interested citizens, businesses, and representatives of various groups (such as youth).	Local level
Committees/ Commissions	Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment was established to inform the design of the StStG	Range of stakeholders	Federal level
	Coordination Committee - BLKG (*Bund Länder Koordinierungsgremium*) reviews the implementation of projects and programmes funded within the StStG, and coordinating between the federal and state levels. Work divided into two levels: steering committee and technical committees	Mainly public administration incl. State Secretaries or State Chancelleries; Meeting sessions involved members with voting rights, advisory members and invited representatives of organised interest from business, science, administration and civil society	State level
	Monitoring Committee under the TJTP	The committee included representatives of Brandenburg's State bodies, representatives of Federal ministries, and economic and societal partners operating at state, federal and regional levels.	State level
Networking platforms	A citizen-led platform - *Bürgerregion* Lusatia - was launched under the StStG to network and engage the public and enhance their involvement in structural transition activities	General public, representative organisations	Across the whole Lusatian district

Table 9: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Rhenish District (Germany), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Various discussion formats organised under StStG (forums, thematic workshops, talks, conferences)	Various representative organisations, public and private actors. Some conferences were also oriented to the wider public, however, the participants were mostly representatives of organised interest groups	Formats were developed by the Agency *Zukunftsagentur* and implementation was mainly coordinated by municipalities.
Committees/ commissions	Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment was established whose report informed the design of the StStG	Range of public, private and third-sector stakeholders	Federal (national) level
	Coordination Committee - BLKG (*Bund Länder Koordinierungsgremium*) reviews the implementation of projects and programmes funded within the StStG, and coordinating between the federal and state levels. Work divided into two levels: steering committee and technical committees	Mainly public administrations incl. State Secretaries or State Chancelleries; Meeting sessions involved members with voting rights, advisory members and invited representatives of organised interest from business, science, administration and civil society	State level
Digital tools	A digital platform was established under the StStG and particularly the programme elaborated for its implementation in the Rhenish District - Economic and Structural Programme (WSP), to provide all the updates and information about different formats of public participation developed by the Agency coordinating the WSP	Targeted at citizens as well as at representative organisations	Rhenish District level
Visioning	Citizens' Vision Workshop organised under the StStG discussing planning visions for the development of the Rhenish District aligned with the key objectives of the WSP. These workshops aimed to inform the drafting of the WSP	The general public	Rhenish District level
Walks	Explorative tours are organised as part of StStG implementation aiming to promote awareness of changes in the physical environment, attributed to the structural transformation process, and discussing perspectives, including vocational orientation	The general public	Local level

Table 10: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Groningen (the Netherlands), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples (Groningen)	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Meetings organised under TJTP, described as "*big gatherings*" to inform regional SMEs and knowledge actors about the just transition process and to look for a confirmation if authorities are "*on the right track*"	Companies, labour organisations, education organisations	National level
	Meetings were organised under NPG with the purpose to discuss and jointly reflect on specific themes: economic development, innovation, labour market (e.g. to develop new curricula), etc.	Diverse stakeholders, according to theme, e.g. on the topic of labour market, main social and educational partners	Provincial level
	Workshops were carried out to present the scope of the NPG and the possibilities for involvement of the different stakeholders with regards to the implementation. Participatory workshops were also in place regarding the implementation of Provincial-led projects and the *Toukomst* projects, with educational purposes and to obtain insights and ideas from for the vision of the Province.	Diverse stakeholders and the general population	Local and Provincial level
Digital tools	Digital platform was created under NPG/*Toukoms* programme for citizens to easily submit their ideas for a local project they would like to be funded by the measure. These ideas were not required to be too detailed.	The general public	Conducted at individual level, covering the Province
Participatory budgeting	Project ideas submitted under NPG's Future's programme (*Toukomst*) were voted by citizens through an online platform and on paper. Every citizen received a newsletter at home with a presentation of all projects and an evaluation form.	The general public	Conducted at individual level, covering the Province
Citizen panel	Under the *Toukomst* programme of the NPG, a citizen panel was set up where selected citizens together with experts were called to assess project ideas for investments	The citizen panel consisted of 20 randomly selected members (according to quotas by age, gender, and postal code) and additional representatives of specific professions (e.g. police, health care)	Provincial level
Serious Games	Role plays and board games with citizens/school children were organised to as part of the NPG's Future's programme (*Toukomst*) to obtain citizens/childrens' opinions on priorities/needs that should be included in the future vision for Groningen. The mechanism also had capacity building purposes ensuring citizens were able to	The general public and youth	Local and community level

Form	Examples (Groningen)	Key actors involved	Arena
	understand the objective of the NPG and *Toukomst* .		
Walks	Walks were organised with citizens in remote areas to talk about different planned redevelopment projects under the NPG and obtain opinions of the citizens.	The general public	Local level

Table 11: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Bełchatów Area of Transition (Poland), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Meetings in sub-sectoral WGs were organised under the SA.	trade unions at BAT level (lignite and energy sector)	Bełchatów Area of Transition
	From general (larger) meetings to smaller working group meetings under the TJTP, with focus on consulting needs, informing and gathering feedback.	various stakeholders; Marshall's office, businesses, NGOs, external experts	Regional level (Voivodship)
	Public, media, and expert meetings organised by the Centre for Ecological Activities Źródła (Bełchatów 2050 project) pre-TJTPs to raise awareness about the transition.	open to general public and institutional actors	Sub-regional level (NUTS3)
	Meetings organised by NGOs and by the university to foster dialogue in regard to just transition.	university workshops targeted youth and women, and involved the broader public as well	Sub-regional level (NUTS3)
Project generation workshops	Workshops preparing projects for implementation phase	various stakeholders; Marshall's office, businesses, NGOs, external experts.	Regional level (Voivodship)
Committees	Steering committees under TJTP, with focus on consulting needs and discussing opportunities.	various stakeholders Marshal's office, businesses and NGOs;	Regional level (Voivodship)
Negotiations	Rounds of negotiations between the Bełchatów trade union leaders and the national government took place in 2022 and 2023.	Trade unions representatives/leaders and the representatives of the national government (Ministry of State Assets)	

Table 12: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Katowicki Coal Region (Poland), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples (KCR)	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Meetings in working groups (WGs) organised under the SA on financial schemes, social security, socio-economic impacts of mining closure, energy security of the country.	Trade unions at regional level (i.e. KCR)	KCR-level
	Communication and information sessions under the SA organised by trade union leaders, gathering groups of employees before the start of their shifts at the mines.	Trade unions and employees-members of the unions	Local level

Form	Examples (KCR)	Key actors involved	Arena
	Meetings organised under TJTP-Silesia to discuss intervention logic, provide information and collect feedback on governmental thinking.	NGOs, SMEs, large companies, trade unions, local self-governments, universities	Regional level (Voivodship)
Project generation workshops	Workshops to facilitate the preparation of project proposals for implementation phase.	NGOs, SMEs, large companies, trade unions, local self-governments, universities (stakeholder lists from earlier policy processes)	Regional level (Voivodship)
Committees	Regional Council of Just Transition had consultative function on the design and final version of the TJTP and currently has monitoring functions.	trade unions, universities, regional administration, NGOs, CSOs, mining/energy companies, and SMEs	Regional level (Voivodship)
	Monitoring Council to monitor JTF implementation.	trade unions, universities, regional administration, NGOs, CSOs, mining/energy companies, and SMEs	Regional level (Voivodship)
	Monitoring Committee under SA, with tasks to analyse and monitor the SA implementation process		
Negotiations	Rounds of negotiations between trade union leaders and the national government took place in 2022 and 2023.	Trade unions representatives/leaders and the representatives of the national government (Ministry of State Assets)	

Table 13: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Gotland (Sweden), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples (Gotland)	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Bilateral meetings held under the TJTP.	Sectoral stakeholders	National level
	Meetings and workshops with thematic (sectoral) and territorial focus organised under the Master Plan. During Covid-19, smaller scale gatherings were organised where the public authority hosted barbeques outdoor inviting people to provide proposals and come with input.	Open and targeted invitations	Regional/local
Digital tools	Interactive digital mapping tool operationalised under the Master Plan. It incorporated a survey mechanism on a map to enable input on site developments linked to specific locations, infrastructures, etc. For example, questions were posed on 'sensitive' places, which are used by citizens and where private developments may not be desirable by the public.	Individual citizens and organisations	Covering the whole municipality/region but input provided individually by citizens
School projects	The government collaborated with with Visby High School and students worked with the theme 'Living on Gotland in 2040' during an entire course. The results from the youth work were integrated into the interactive digital map with input from citizens.	School children	Local – community level

Table 14: Forms of participatory mechanisms in Norrbotten (Sweden), key actors involved and arena where the processes took place

Form	Examples (Norrbotten)	Key actors involved	Arena
Consultative and dialogue meetings	Multiple workshops organised under the RDS. At these workshops regional government and external experts presented some of the main challenges the strategy's intervention areas will aim to address. The challenges presented (or raised by participants) were then discussed in groups. Organisations could host their own workshops as well, either inviting the regional authority to attend or send in their feedback afterwards.	open to anyone but attended by various organisations, businesses, trade unions, experts, the region government and other public authorities	Regional level
	Bilateral meetings held under the TJTP.	Sectoral stakeholders	National level

This overview of deliberative participatory processes identified by policy practitioners and some other key stakeholders provided initial insights on the 'state-of-play' of deliberative participation in selected sustainability transition policies. Several observations based on the overview are made below.

First, the understanding of the concept 'deliberative participation' varied significantly across the countries in which DUST research has been performed. Given the flexible definition taken in the research (see Table 1), interviewees had substantial space to give their own interpretation, often referring to participatory instruments on the basis of their importance.

In a number of cases, deliberative participation was associated by policymakers with consultative and dialogue-based formats, usually involving established, institutional stakeholders. The scope and depth of participation through these formats varied, with some described as large event, while others as dialogues in smaller groups. What becomes evident from the way interviewees spoke about these formats is that sometimes they may fall short of stimulating exchange, assessing different perspectives or reaching meaningful results. Some criticisms from interviewees were particularly evident in the cases of Stara Zagora and Bełchatów Area of Transition casting doubt on whether a true dialogue and deliberation had taken place to stimulate valuable results. In the case of TJTP-BAT, a regional-level interviewee involved noted that many of the consultative meetings they were involved in were 'static' with reluctance or hesitation among participating individuals to voice their concerns or ideas: "*In BAT, the situation was such that essentially, if someone wanted to express their opinion, there was no problem. The bigger issue was getting someone to want to spoke out.*" In Stara Zagora, private and knowledge sector interviewees involved in the TJTP's participatory mechanisms expressed concerns regarding the actual content and focus of these engagements, highlighting challenges in ensuring meaningful and targeted dialogue.

Direct, deliberative participation processes involving citizens was more limited across policy measures. Participatory processes organised by public institutions and targeting citizens or communities are reportedly absent in measures like the TJTPs but also in the second policy measure selected by some of the case studies. Although the selected policies largely recognised that sustainable development and transition away from fossil fuels will have implications over social welfare, livelihoods, and lifestyles, the evidence suggests more limited openness of policy making processes to citizens' perspectives and visions on sustainability and transition compared to processes targeted at institutional stakeholders. In a number of cases, citizen

involvement was largely conducted through indirect representation (i.e. via NGOs, trade unions, professional organisations). Some examples of participatory processes open to the general public was organised by non-governmental actors (e.g. in Bełchatów) rather than by public institutions.

There were some notable examples of policies where a commitment to the deliberative participation of citizens was embedded in policy design and implementation. Efforts to facilitate such participation, in different forms, are evident in the NPG in Groningen, the Master plan in Gotland, and the StStG in the German case studies. In the first two policy measures, a strong commitment to deliberative participation of citizens and communities was embedded since the initial conceptualisation of the policy measure. In the third case – StStG – processes of citizen participation are gaining more prominence during implementation alongside more traditional forms of stakeholder participation, which are more evident during policy design. Various tools were employed in these cases, including:

- **Use of more innovative deliberative mechanisms** such as a citizen panels and role-playing (evident in Groningen's NPG) and vision-oriented methods (NPG and StStG).
- **Use of simple tools and tasks** such as via **walks** can also be recognised as important contributing both to awareness raising about the transition and policy investments and making participants feel comfortable expressing their concerns (NPG and StStG).
- **Use of digital participatory tools.** The examples of Gotland (Master Plan) and Groningen (NPG) are particularly worth highlighting as they represent attempts to **scale up citizen participation** via interactive and engaging approaches to communicate with and collecting citizens' ideas/preferences. **While these tools evidently limit the degree of deliberation, they increase the capacity of the policy measures to capture and respond to collective preferences at a larger territorial scale**. In both cases, these digital tools were used in combination with local, small scale deliberations.

A relatively small number of participatory approaches included explicit mechanisms to facilitate better understanding and discussion of impacts from different dimensions of sustainability/transition (i.e. arrangements that could help participants weigh and balance choices of solutions and, thus, promote a consensus across conflicting opinions). Such arrangements were particularly evident in participatory tools promoting visioning processes, including participatory mapping, as well as in innovative formats like citizen panels. The latter also represented the only format in which citizen participation was conceived with the intention of citizens being involved in decisions regarding distribution of financial resources for sustainability transition.

Finally, there were **differences in the scope and intensity of participatory processes in TJTPs compared to other sustainability transition policies operating in the same regions**. This was the case in Gotland, Groningen[6], Rhenish District and Lusatia. In these cases, it was noticeable that under the TJTPs there was a dominance of consultative-dialogue and committee formats, while more diverse, interactive and open-to-citizen formats were used in the other policy measures analysed in the same region.

[6] The Groningen case is peculiar in the sense that the NPG measure has two 'participatory strands'. The research notes that a distinction can be made between the Future's programme (*Toukomst*), which is part of the citizen engagement approach of the NPG as part of the aims of formulating a regional vision and identifying projects to be funded, and then the participatory mechanisms as part of provincial, municipal or sectoral sub-programmes funded by the NPG.

3.2. Exploring policy and community-based variables

The main objective of D3.2 was to explore in case study regions the factors that can help explain these variations in the use of participatory processes and instruments, particularly by least engaged communities. Drawing on D1.1, the research identified contextual factors that were anticipated to vary across case study regions. These reflected the need to take into account place-based specificities in terms of socio-economic cultural, institutional and geographical factors. Specific issues included: cultural and language barriers; geographical distance; lack of civic capacity among the community; the strength or 'thickness' of institutions in the region; the openness of the policy system/embedded participatory governance, the coordination of national 'top-down' and 'bottom up' local roles in policy governance; (lack of) awareness of social sustainability; (lack of) practical guidance for justice and equity in sustainable development; climate-change-sceptic political, media and community discourses and narratives; and contestation and conflict of transition related measures due to uncertainties. These contextual factors may reinforce the role of certain policy and community variables (see Table 15).

Community variables comprise relevant citizen characteristics in relation to collaboration skills and capacities, interest to participate and be involved in decision making, time, trust in government, etc. These were further differentiated to assess those related to the willingness of citizens and communities to take part in participatory processes or instruments and their ability to do so. The former included levels of interest or apathy in the specific policy or public policies more generally; discontent and disillusionment with democracy; lack of trust in government; perceptions of powerlessness (incl. past experiences of non-recognition); lack of self-confidence; the influence of peers or community representatives. Issues related to the ability to participate included lack of capacity (incl. technical knowledge and technological literacy); lack of time; cultural barriers and levels of social capital.

Policy variables encompass multiple factors associated with attitudes and capacity of policy-making bodies, as well as factors related to how participatory processes are organised and carried out in policy making and implementation. Specific issues related to the dominance of technocratic, sectoral priorities; coordination of 'top down' and 'bottom up' contributions; the capacity and resources to support participatory processes in sub-national authorities; the attitudes of policymakers towards the rationale and mode of participation; asymmetries of power and knowledge and the risk of elite capture of the participation process; regulatory overload.

Table 15: Variables that facilitate or impede participation (source D1.1)

Community variables		Policy variables	Contextual variables
Associated with 'being unable'	Associated with 'being unwilling		
Lack of capacity (incl. technical knowledge and technological literacy); Lack of time; Cultural barriers; Social capital.	Lack of interest/apathy; Discontent and disillusionment with democracy; Lack of trust in government;	Technocratic, sectoral priorities; Disconnected 'top down' and 'bottom up' contributions; Capacity/skills, staff, and sustainability of resources	Lack of civic capacity; Geographical distance; Low/high institutional thickness; (Culture of) Openness of the policy system/embedded participatory governance;

Community variables		Policy variables	Contextual variables
Associated with 'being unable'	Associated with 'being unwilling		
	Perception of powerlessness (incl. past experiences of non-recognition); Lack of self-confidence; Influential community representatives (not)willing to participate.	available at level of sub-national authorities; Public officials' attitudes; Asymmetries of power and knowledge/elite capture of the process; Regulatory overload; Procedural aspects related to the organisation & carrying out of the participatory/deliberative processes incl. timing; communication (channels); selection of participants; choice of mode of participation, (no) clarify how participation will feed into the policy process, etc.; Aspects related to the practice of deliberation and the product of deliberation.	Strong control of the national level; (Lack of) Awareness of social sustainability; (Lack of) Practical guidance for justice and equity in sustainable development; Climate-change-sceptic political discourses and narratives; Contestation and conflict of transition related measures due to uncertainties or high interest in the issue;

The following sections explore these policy and community-based variables in the case study contexts in turn. Chapter 4 assesses policy-related variables, based on interviews with policymakers involved in the design and delivery of selected sustainability transition policies in these regions. Chapter 5 focuses on community-based variables, drawing on focus group research.

4. Policy-related variables

Participatory processes need to be understood in relation to the wider policy system within which they take place. A key objective of this research has been to explore the extent to which *place-based* policy-making – a particular type of policy making which is associated in the literature with specific organising principles - incentivises active, inclusive participation of citizens and communities, particularly those that are usually less engaged, in sustainability transition processes. Although a broad range of policies can be defined as 'place-based', the key organising principles highlighted in the literature are[7]:

- **Regulatory and strategic frameworks to articulate a logic or vision for development** (including sustainability transition processes) and set objectives and actions based on the interaction of local community and general knowledge and the input of endogenous and exogenous actors;[8]
- **Use multi-level governance structures** to inform the optimal territorial mix of resources and investment priorities and achieve necessary coordination, including mobilisation of local actors to make local decisions in order to target investment, enhance local capacities for co-design of policies and strengthen local commitment;[9]
- **Target the needs and potentials of specific territories or communities**, based on a multisectoral perspective that incorporates and supports social, economic and environmental dimensions according to their specificities.[10]

Taken together, these principles should facilitate active participation of communities in sustainability transition policies. Place-based approaches recognise that the relative costs and benefits of transitions - who pays for what and how these decisions are made - have political, economic, and social consequences with a clear territorial dimension. By involving citizens in deliberation and co-creation of these approaches, their governance arrangements seek to empower citizens to increase their role in and ownership of policies.

Research for this deliverable was based on the identification and analysis of sustainability transition policies in case study regions that had place-based principles. The series of interviews with policymakers involved in their design and implementation aimed to explore whether these principles were evident in practice and the extent to which they facilitated participation of communities and citizens, particularly the less engaged. Interviews covered basic elements of the policy system and the following sections looks at each in turn:

- **Regulatory and strategic framing**: did regulations or guidance or the policy's transition rationale incentivise participatory processes?
- **Governance arrangements**: did the policy's governance and implementation arrangements facilitate participation?

---

[7] Barca, F., McCann, P. & Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2012) 'The case for regional development intervention: Place-based versus place-neutral approaches', *Journal of Regional Science*, 52(1), pp. 134-152

[8] Medeiros, E. & Rauhut, D. (2020) 'Territorial Cohesion Cities: a policy recipe for achieving Territorial Cohesion?', *Regional Studies*, 54(1), 120-128.

[9] Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Ketterer, T. (2019) Institutional change and the development of lagging regions in Europe. *Regional Studies*, *54*(7), 974-986.

[10] Green, A. (2023), "When should place-based policies be used and at what scale?", Background paper for the OECD-EC High-Level Expert Workshop Series on "Place-Based Policies for the Future", Workshop 2, 12 May 2023

- **Territorial/community coverage**: did the policy target specific local territories or communities?

4.1. Policy 'framing' and participation

From the outset, it is important to note that policy issues are embedded in regulatory and strategic frameworks that condition the use of participatory instruments.

4.1.1. Regulatory frameworks and guidelines and participation

Formal legislative standards, regulations or guidelines ensured common practices in the design and implementation of policies and instruments and established procedural mechanisms that support participation. Governments can, through regulation or guidance, demand or encourage policy makers and stakeholders to work together, creating 'functional regulatory spaces,' which span policy sectors, governance levels, and institutional territories.[11]

Based on interview data, it was evident that the openness to participatory policymaking in sustainability transition policies was conditioned by regulatory requirements, strategic guidelines and principles. These were important in providing a formal basis for engaging stakeholders, communities and citizens in policies. From the perspective of less engaged communities, there is evidence that in some cases there were officially recognised social groups whose representation in participatory processes was obligatory. Nevertheless, these were broad strategic guidelines and regulatory frameworks that did not have a direct impact on policymakers decisions on the organisation of participatory processes.

- In the Netherlands, so called 'broad prosperity/welfare' concepts were introduced in policy, particularly concerning issues regarding regional development. The concepts gained prominence in guiding territorial investments, placing emphasis on residents' wellbeing and quality of life rather than simply on economic growth.[12] Researchers also highlighted the role of the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI)[13], which emphasises the importance of involving individual citizens along with businesses, and civil society stakeholders in planning processes.
- In the Rhenish District and Lusatia, the institutionalisation of a participatory approach, especially as part of StSTG, is facilitated by the elaboration and adoption of a Citizen Participation Charter, setting a formal standard for engagement. It aims to ensure that civil society and citizen engagement are a recognized and regular part of the measure's governance. A strategic framework, politically driven by the North Rhein Westphalia's State Government, reflects a broader strategic commitment to fostering youth engagement and integration of young people into decision-making processes. At a national scale, a strong commitment to subsidiarity principle has been highlighted by interviewees;
- Gotland's Master Plan had to conform with the Swedish Planning and Building Act, which sets out principles for how master plans are developed in Swedish municipalities. This

[11] Varone, F., Nahrath, S., Aubin, D., & Gerber, J.-D. (2013). Functional regulatory spaces. Policy Sciences, 46(2013), 311–333.
[12] Den Hoed, W. (2019) Enhancing regional cooperation in the Netherlands through the Regional Budget. EPRC, Glasgow: EoRPA Policy Briefing, February 2019.
[13] https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-d58c7b3d-57b8-42b9-9a1d-bba2a54d4992/pdf

has a strong focus on participatory mechanisms and forms good guidance for involved planners. Interviewees also share that Region Gotland has a Citizen Participation Policy.

- In the cases of Stara Zagora and Bełchatów, participatory processes are often attributed to regulations that legally mandate stakeholder engagement. Traditionally, governmental institutions have organised participation processes only when and in the form required by law. There is no established culture, especially within the local and regional administration, of involving citizens in policy-making unless mandated by regulations;
- Across case studies, policy practitioners involved in TJTPs frequently referred to the partnership principle in EU Cohesion Policy and JTF regulation as a reasoning behind the organised participatory processes within this policy measure. Each TJTP had the obligation to describe how it engaged key regional actors so that the measure is approved by the European Commission. There has been no requirement to establish mechanisms that engage directly citizens as part of this regulation. It has been assumed that citizen interests would be broadly represented by interest groups and associations, albeit there were no specific principles regarding the diversity of social groups to be represented. During implementation, citizen participation may be included if different segments legislation requires it. For instance, interviewees from Gotland's TJTP mention that projects concerning land-use and environmental assessments (e.g. the Gotland electricity grid project funded under JTF) may require the participation of citizens whose rights are affected.

4.1.2. Policy rationales and participation

A 'frame of reference' or 'paradigm' conditions thinking on how policy problems can be addressed. This in turn informs the use of participatory instruments (influencing decisions on who should be involved and how). There are many ways in which the same policy problem can be understood and defined and this ambiguity has an impact on approaches to civic and community participation.[14] Policy measures investigated in DUST project were selected on the basis of their linkages with processes of sustainable and just transition. While some of the measures belong to the same policy family and have explicit aims in the realm of just transition, notably the Territorial Just Transition Plans and the Polish Social Agreements, other selected policies addressed sustainability transition issues alongside broader objectives of regional, territorial or spatial development. Despite these differences, all these policy measures had to engage with concepts such as sustainability, sustainable/just transition. In doing so, they faced the common need of translating these concepts and related objectives into policy practice. The challenge in doing so is that these concepts raise context-specific and complex questions such as what is to be sustained, by whom, for whom, and what is the most desirable means of achieving sustainability goals.[15] Policy interpretations in responses to such questions, delineate the policy scope - the kind of sustainability or transition to be pursued – which has implications as to what impact the policy can anticipate, who has a stake and whose participation is relevant to the policy measure.

To analyse how this was done in practice, this section examines collected desk material and interview data regarding the framing of the selected sustainability transition measures (how they defined the challenge, their strategic intervention logic) and the implications for participatory

[14] Dekker, R. (2016). Frame ambiguity in policy controversies: critical frame analysis of migrant integration policies in Antwerp and Rotterdam. *Critical Policy Studies*, *11*(2), 127–145.
[15] Purvis, B., Mao, Y. & Robinson, D (2019) Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. Sustain Sci 14, 681–695.

processes. It is important to provide some contextual background from the outset as the transitions in the different countries have been driven by different logics.

- In **Bulgarian, German and Polish case studies**, the transition was largely defined by commitments to close down fossil fuel sectors like coal/lignite mines, fossil-based energy production facilities and supporting (service) industries. These sectors provide the majority of local employment and income for local communities, while they also play an important role in the countries' energy security. In the German cases, the transition is also associated with the significant challenge to transform the regional economic structure, which encompasses different high carbon-intensive and/or fossil fuel dependent industries, which need to change their energy use and production practices according to the low-carbon commitments.
- In the **Dutch case study Groningen**, the transition process was associated with the phase out of gas extraction and its implications. Interviewees stressed that gas extraction in the region has not been associated with significant regional economic benefits (as opposed to the three case studies mentioned above), while it has been important for the national economy. The extraction process, however, had serious implications on the quality of life in Groningen, which was already compromised by the more significant socio-economic disparities in the region (compared to other Dutch regions).
- In the **Swedish cases of Norrbotten and Gotland**, the transition was framed around the need to adapt large fossil fuel industries to the requirements of a climate-neutral economy. This requires advancements in new clean energy sources. On the other hand, the sustainability transitions are also concerned with broader reduction of environmental impacts, sustainable consumption and use of territorial resources.

Following the above contextual background, several of the selected measures framed the sustainability transition challenge they aimed to address in predominantly technical and sectoral terms and this informed their strategic objectives. Interviewees' perspectives on the strategic approach to designing TJTPs shapes an image that achieving a sustainability transition primarily relies on innovation (novel technologies), renewable energy production and so called 'green' jobs. In line with traditional industrial and innovation policy, this approach seems to emphasize economic transformation in terms of creating new value chains, fostering low-carbon industrial production/products, and entrepreneurial activity. As part of this understanding, supply-side measures are respectively needed in terms of education and training to ensure sufficient workforce. This will offer the potential of 'green' jobs which could compensate for the loss or the transformation of traditional jobs in fossil-fuel intensive industries and ensure that people remain in the regions undergoing industrial decarbonisation. Along this logic, increased research and development funding, collaboration between government, industry and knowledge and research institutions also become important. Such a logic of intervention was generally prioritised in the TJTPs, although with different weight on the separate elements, depending on context and needs. For instance, the emphasis on the social added-value of industrial and entrepreneurial support in the form of creating 'green' jobs is particularly strong in the Bulgarian, Polish and German case studies. The scale of the labour transformation in Silesia is particularly notable, with the JTF aiming to invest in the (re-)training of 100,000 workers many of whom currently work in the fossil fuel-based sectors and equip them with new skills to work in renewable and climate neutral industries, while the TJTP of the region is expected to create 27,000 new jobs.

This logic of intervention is also evident in other policy measures. This includes the StStG in the Rhenish District and Lusatia, although in these cases there is an emphasis on new economic and

education activities driven by publicly owned entities and CO_2 reduction in more diverse sectors such as mobility, urban planning and construction. The transition within the Polish SAs is focused on the energy and coal mining sector, providing public guarantees for the creation of new job prospects by supporting 'green' business developments (via SMEs) reusing the mining/energy infrastructure, albeit without defining in detail what these green sectors would be. Stara Zagora's Integrated Development Plan underscored the role of the energy sector as a 'key engine' of the regional economy, in particular in the three neighbouring municipalities of Stara Zagora, Galabovo and Radnevo, due to the location of three thermal power plants across their territories and the mobility of workers across them. These three municipalities were defined as the focus of measures for economic transformation, adaptation to new economic sectors, workforce re-training and minimisation of negative social consequences. The Integrated Plan also highlighted the importance of promoting the development of industrial parks and zones, which could attract investors, create new jobs, and transform the regional economy towards modern production activities.

In these cases, interview evidence indicate that the technical and sectoral framing of the sustainability transition challenge represented a substantial barrier to direct participation by citizens and communities, including those less engaged. Citizens were considered less capable of providing knowledge on policy topics such as energy transition and innovation as these topics often involve highly technical and specialised knowledge. Understanding the intricacies of energy systems, technological innovations, and regulatory frameworks was considered challenging for individuals and groups without relevant expertise. Moreover, interviewees often considered that citizens might perceive these topics not of their interest or concern. Such considerations led to conclusions that citizens would not be motivated to participate in such policies and limited policymaker attention on this. This general message was identified across cases, particularly for the TJTPs where funding needed to be spent comparatively quickly, prompting a focus on engagement with actors who had established capacities that strengthened the likelihood of successful policy implementation.

- Governmental representatives at regional and local level in **Groningen** underlined that the interpretation of the transition as defined by the scope of the TJTP was among the main reasons explaining the absence of citizen engagement in the measure. At the design stage, interviewees pointed out that the main focus was on determining the main strategic goals and for such process citizen input was not considered relevant. When considering the possibility of citizen participation under the pre-defined interventions centred on business/entrepreneurial development and innovation, policy practitioners concluded that citizens would not find the measure relevant or comprehensible, that citizens will not have much input on objectives like SMEs support or innovation as they lack specialist knowledge or they will not be interested to participate. This is stated as being among the key reasons to discard the possibility of including citizens in participatory processes. The lack of flexibility of such framework to integrate actions that deal more closely with local level issues explain the absence of participatory mechanisms aiming to engage citizens or civil society in the TJTP, according to interviewees. Another closely related reason is the existence of the NPG, which supports community initiatives.
- Policy practitioners and stakeholders in **Stara Zagora** viewed the TJTP largely as sectoral and associated it predominantly with the energy transition. This was evident in the dominance of perceptions that barriers to direct citizen participation relate to issues of the energy transition. For instance, interviewees pointed to the complexity of the language used by authorities on this theme leading to failure among citizens to comprehend the

need for such transition. Further to that, interviewees shared that discussions about the transition related to innovation, new university programmes, new business models which would be operationalised by targeted actors. Discussions in participatory processes were reported by some stakeholders as being 'at the level of general talks', which has so far hindered the process of translating the broader goals into concrete actions and solutions. This was seen to further obstruct participation at the level of individual citizens or communities.

- Policy practitioners at the Swedish national and regional levels involved in TJTP-**Norrbotten** and **Gotland** also considered that the orientation of the Plans towards specific sectors, their internal processes and infrastructure needs, made them too technical and this curtailed citizen and community participation.
- The two **Polish case studies** offer perspectives from policy practitioners and from trade unions as the latter were the main actor working with coal and energy sector employees in the development of the Social Agreements. Interview data suggest that trade unions valued miners' involvement, primarily as a means for the unions to form and refine their opinions, and as a way to keep miners up to date regarding the negotiation process. Miners offered insights derived from their everyday observations at the mines and these ground-level observations were effectively communicated to trade unions via the established communication channels. However, there was notable scepticism among trade unions about involving miners directly in negotiation processes. Interviewees from trade unions indicate that the strategic topics under discussion were often complex and beyond the average miner's knowledge. These subjects included technical and legal issues related to reducing coal production, scheduling mine closures, securing employment guarantees until retirement, and developing new technologies and innovations (in the mine complex) which could create new job opportunities and promote renewable energy production. Negotiations as part of both Social Agreements incorporated planning related to the financial resources required. They relied on the distribution of Just Transition Fund as a key financial source. Consequently, a lot of the discussions and decisions made as part of the SAs determined the frame under which the TJTPs in KCR and BAT were developed.

Thus, in these cases the framing of sustainability transition policies according to a holistic territorial transformative plan or development pathways as part of the design process was absent. This affected policy ability or motivations for direct citizen or community involvement in the governance of sustainability transitions. The Social Agreements in the two Polish regions, for instance, had a significant social focus, achieving higher governmental responsibility towards communities directly exposed to the burden of phasing out coal. However, they fell short of pursuing a holistic planning regarding the possible new prospects for the area and the formation of new pathways beyond the mine complex. Interviewees involved in the Norrbotten and Gotland's TJTPs recognised the dominance of the sectoral approach and noted that a territorial one – focused on a specific area and its future development – could have played an enabling role for citizen and community participation.

The research identified other cases where sustainability transition policies were defined in a more open, holistic way with higher flexibility in regard to the definition of societal or territorial dimensions. In some contexts this created more space for direct citizen or community participation, although this was not guaranteed. The most prominent example is the NPG in Groningen which the government saw as a means of addressing issues of decreasing trust towards the public authorities. In particular, the strong embeddedness of participatory

processes came as a governmental response to increasing perceptions from the population that cost and benefits from economic activity are being distributed unfairly, that their needs are being ignored by the government as they fail to acknowledge or address the problems emerging from gas extraction but also the overall economic inequalities. Seeking policy responses to alleviate distrust among communities towards the government and to re-build institutional image of looking after the public good, provided rationale for citizen engagement. The NPG, explicitly built in flexibility in its strategic objectives to provide space for it to be tailored to specific territorial or community needs. The design approach of the measure was to set generic objectives – to improve economic, social and liveability conditions in the region – which could then be interpreted in different way by different social groups and territorial contexts. For instance, interviewees stated that young people associated the policy with climate change and innovation. It emphasises the importance of 'soft' development capitals, such as social, human, culture capitals of the place. The goal of the approach has been essentially to provide space where "*each citizen could express their vision and provide ideas on the future of Groningen"*. The framing of its objectives supported the perception that the transition had to be tailored to the aspirations of the people living in the region. Ensuring their well-being and quality of life were central considerations in the decision-making process.

As a spatial planning measure, **Gotland**'s municipal Master Plan focused on the availability of certain territorial resources, particularly land and water, and serves as guidance for policy decisions on how such resources can be used and developed in a sustainable and attractive manner. The Plan facilitates a process of making considerations regarding needs and developments of different economic sectors and the potential of different territories – urban and rural. The transition in this measure revolves around the transformation of territorial resources in the future, for instance in terms of land use for new infrastructure and implications for mobility. Interviewees thus see in local indigenous knowledge an opportunity to gain better understanding of citizen lifestyles or experiences with environmental problems, and as a consequence genuinely consider that "*local residents are the experts*". This understanding of the transition also raises a strategic question regarding the spatial distribution of services, particularly in rural and sparsely populated areas.

Some policies targeted representatives of social groups and communities in drafting strategies. This produced a broader definition of strategic objectives though it did not necessarily involve direct community or citizen participation. This was evident in the Regional Development Strategy of **Norrbotten**. Regional interviewees highlighted that thanks to the deliberative process targeting representatives of social groups like youth and ethnic minorities, the strategy has taken up more substantial social sustainability objectives. It can be presumed that one of them relates to "high quality of life", an objective that would require targeted policy actions (at local level) to strengthen civil society and efforts for the inclusion of minorities in social life. It has to be observed, however, that even as a measure that allowed for a broader understanding of sustainability and more open agenda-setting process for transitions, direct citizen participation was not targeted as part of the Norrbotten's Regional Development Strategy. Interviewees share worries that citizens would not have found the participation meaningful provided the strategic nature of the document.

4.2. Policy governance and participation

The research explored policy-makers perceptions of the presence of place-based principles for the management and implementation of sustainability measures and their

utility in supporting participatory processes: were there facilitators or barriers to participatory procedures that are associated with the place-based governance model? Place-based measures emphasise the value of multi-level governance structures. This includes the role of non-state local actors such as communities and citizens in informing or implementing policies and plans. Structures and instruments are established to facilitate input from communities in steering local policies and, in theory, this makes measures better informed, efficient, embedded with stronger local commitment and ownership, and more transparent with stronger accountability at the local level.[16]

Previous research has identified the potential place-based policies offer in generating an environment that is open to participation in policy design and delivery by a wide array of actors, incorporating community-based organisations. This includes research on the mobilisation of local actors in sustainability measures. Higher levels of public administration can serve as a source of funding, overarching coordination and regulation and professional knowledge and capacity for local authorities which in turn can contribute place-specific knowledge to tailor these measures and mobilise civil society institutions, local communities and citizens to create an environment supportive of these measures. On the other hand, place-based policies, including those prioritising sustainability transition, must overcome a series of challenges. These include: information asymmetries as actors at different levels have varied level of access to data needed to inform policies; capacity asymmetries resulting from varied distributions of competences and resources across levels of public administration (particularly insufficient technical or other expertise at the local level) and between different state and non-state actors. These challenges can present barriers to the effective use of participatory procedures in sustainability transition policies. The views of policy-makers on the potentials and challenges of place-based organising principles in sustainability transition measures were explored in the research and the findings are discussed below.

4.2.1. Decentralised governance and participation

One of the benefits offered by place-based policies in terms of participation are their scope to bring the policy 'closer to people' through the delegation or decentralisation of tasks in sustainability transition measures to regional or local levels and to territorial stakeholders and communities. Under the place-based logic, the dispersion of delivery responsibilities across levels is argued to be more flexible and efficient in responding to transition challenges at various territorial scales and the input of regional and local authorities is incentivised. This can be accompanied by new systems, structures and tools that mobilise territorial stakeholders and create spaces to articulate their perspectives.

The research has identified notable but limited examples where multi-level governance systems for sustainability transition measures have facilitated this 'bottom up' participation. This often occurred where existing local governance systems and networks were used to facilitate design and delivery of the measure.

- A prominent example is the National Programme Groningen (NPG) where interviewed policymakers highlighted the use of existing, local networks and established projects as

[16] Iammarino, S., Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Storper, M. (2017). *Why regional development matters for Europe's economic future* (Working Paper No. 7). European Commission Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy.

mechanisms to strengthen 'bottom up' contributions to the programme. The NPG included a strong decentralised element in its governance, for instance involving representatives of municipalities as advisors. Thus, some of the interviewees had worked at the local level and had established connections with different stakeholders with aligned interests and this facilitated meaningful inputs from the community level.

- In Germany, the MLG system for managing the Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions (StStG) and the principle of subsidiarity has facilitated regional participation. The Act has clearly defined multiple level governance scales and is based on the principle of subsidiarity where higher-level authorities should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level. In the Rhenish District, interviewees highlighted the role of the Future Agency (*Zukunftsagentur)*, a limited liability company cooperating with multiple stakeholders in the region in the implementation of the StStG via a dedicated Economic and Structural Programme (WSP). It was the responsibility of the Future Agency to organize and carry out processes in the field, establish contacts and connect with local stakeholders using the snowball effect. Difficult cases and decisions were forwarded up to the next governance level (Structural Change Unit for the Rhenish District). The Future Agency also connected between political, economic and social actors in the region and at the state level as regards different thematic fields of structural policies, and brings them in touch with the broader public. Similarly, in Lusatia, interviewees highlighted the role of the *Wirtschaftsregion Lausitz GmbH* (WRL) which was commissioned as the state structural development company for the region of Lusatia in Brandenburg (BB) in developing a set of innovative instruments and participation strategies.
- In the Silesian case, the Katowicki Coal Region, openness to voluntary participatory forms has been associated with the facilitating role of regional planning culture which has been developing since the 1990s and which stresses the importance of participation. Indicative for this, for instance, is the establishment of the Regional Council of Just Transition.

However, interviewees also identified barriers to participative processes related to the dominance of 'top down' governance dynamics. This dominance stems from both the centralised system of public policy implementation in some countries and from the framing of energy and industrial transition as primarily a national concern. These factors have influenced the extent to which regional and particularly local governments have the capacity and incentives to participate. In some case study regions, higher level authorities have played a dominant role in framing who should be included in deliberative processes, how they should be included and the time and resources available for the process. In contrast, according to several interviewees, local authorities have had limited influence on the process and this has acted as a disincentive to their own participation and to their potentially crucial role in mobilising other local stakeholders.

- A significant barrier, as observed in interviews, stemmed from the history of hierarchical and centralised governance structures, notably in the Polish Bełchatów area of transition and the Bulgarian district of Stara Zagora. These traditions have created working dynamics within municipal administrations which are not conductive to long-term planning, initiative-taking, strategic decision-making, and independent action in the interest of local communities. The work of local self-governments is often driven by external (national/EU) financial resources and associated rules and conditions and is often time-restrained.

- The strategic directions of the Social Agreements in Poland and the IDP-Stara Zagora have been framed by upper-level governmental institutions and closely associated with the energy and industrial transition. In Poland, the Social Agreement for miners was signed by the national government, representatives of trade unions, representatives of associations of Mining Municipalities and Districts, as well as by representatives of coal companies covered by its provisions. Nevertheless, interviewees from regional and local levels noted the limited participation of local self-governments in developing the Agreement. This was largely explained by the perception of the Agreement as sectoral and technical in nature and the dominant role played by central government and national sectoral agencies. For instance, local authorities saw issues related to the Bełchatów mine and power plant as a national-level issue and this made them less inclined to engage.
- Even where governance arrangements were in place to facilitate participation of local actors, interviewees noted barriers. In The Lusatian case of the StStG, local level interviewees highlighted issues related to the centralisation of decision-making and control by higher government levels, which had an impact on participatory efforts. Challenges stemmed from the top-down approach and lack of flexibility from state and federal governments, implying that greater decentralization could improve the implementation of participatory mechanisms.

The dominance of 'top down' dynamics in JTF implementation and the barriers this presented for participation were noted across case studies. In theory, Territorial Just Transition Plans should create opportunities to organize multi-level interactions between the EU, member states, regional and local authorities. EU level interviewees highlighted that the partnership principle was key in JTF. This was stressed in EU negotiations with member states on the TJTP and the request for descriptions in TJTP plans of how underrepresented groups would be involved, including in the implementation of the funding. In practice, however, the processes of in identifying the most affected territories, the transition challenges they face and expected contribution of JTF resources to overcome these challenges were dominated by EU and Member States levels and were frequently perceived by interviewees from local administrations as too bureaucratic, restrictive and remote to facilitate the participation of local communities. These barriers were apparent across different case study regions.

- **In Groningen, the potential for synergies between the TJTP and NPG in the territory was not realised due to administrative, strategic and time constraints imposed at national and EU levels**. While the TJTP was prepared by the regional actors and with inputs from municipalities from the Northern Netherlands (with the most prominent example of that being the inclusion of Emmen in the TJTP as a result of lobbying from that municipality), its content had ultimately to be aligned to centrally defined priorities. The political decision of the Dutch government to centralise the elaboration of the JTF programme, in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Social Affairs, resulted in a less place-sensitive and more top-down approach, leaving much less room for making the regional TJTP more attuned to the needs of the territories and communities, as the regional stakeholders envisaged initially. According to one interviewee, "*When you keep shaping your participation process top down and like I described with the big [participation] sessions [...] then then it will never be fulfilling*." Moreover, the strict timetable for absorbing JTF funding, set at EU level, exacerbated by the prolonged debates at the national level on how to distribute JTF funding, meant that there was little time for genuine inputs and participation from communities and citizens. The time pressure and the choice of priorities at EU and national level, left lower tires of

government with the perception that *'we weren't as free as maybe we would have liked to do what we thought was necessary'*. Under this time pressure, also the choice was made to distribute the JTF resources as part of the TJTP in a smaller number of large calls for university campuses, labour markets, entrepreneurs, etc., which again, according to interviewees from the regional and local levels limited the scope for deliberation and participation of citizens and communities in this process.

- **Regional and local self-governments in the Polish cases struggled to establish their roles in TJTP multi-level governance.** In Silesia, The TJTP is managed by the regional-level Marshal Office but interviewees noted that there was a lengthy period of contestation on the governance model between national and regional levels. Again, time constraints due to spending deadlines set at higher levels had a direct impact on the scope for participatory processes and ultimately on the type of measures supported. To ensure that funding was spent within the relatively narrow time window policy practitioners gave priority to projects with higher maturity that could be executed faster. As the nature of projects under TJTPs resemble types of investments that are supported under other regional development instruments, including mainstream Cohesion Policy programmes, there was scope to adjust project proposals and re-allocate them from one funding stream to another. While the participatory process in Silesia has been reported to include a diversity of stakeholders, the fact that mature projects were selected indicates that there was limited scope to attract actors usually not involved in funding programme. In Bełchatów, sub-regional administrations initial expectations of having a significant role in TJTF management and implementation were not realised. Local administrations initially had interest in the TJTP. Meetings and workshops took place and project ideas developed but these were often not taken forward, supporting the perception that the key decisions were taken at higher levels: 'm*eetings are held, workshops are done, deliberations are welcomed but the real cards shall only be played by the [national] government*'. Without this financial incentive, collaborative efforts established at county level, with participation of municipalities, have lost momentum.
- **In Sweden, the combination of EU imposed time constraints on JTF implementation and decisions taken at the national level on the sectoral orientation of the plans determined the scope for meaningful participation of communities and citizens**. Interviewees from national and regional levels were highlighted to be meaningful, community and citizen engagement processes require time and that this was not available under JTF.
- **In Bulgaria, broader weaknesses in in the institutional framework for public policy governance have limited the role of the local level in JTF**. One interviewee stated that there was neither a structured road map, nor a vision to the implementation of the TJTP for Stara Zagora District, The absence of a proper institutional environment for policy implementation was a significant challenge hindering the effectiveness of deliberative participatory mechanisms and municipal authorities have not played a meaningful role in creating arenas and structures for participation.

Lack of decentralisation and delegation created capacity issues for local authorities that were expected to play a leading role in mobilising communities and organising participatory processes. Frequently, local authorities were anticipated to mobilise communities and citizens in participatory processes after key decisions on sustainability transition measures had been made at higher levels. There was strong evidence from interviews that policy practitioners at multiple scales consider citizen participation to be a responsibility of the local level, whether of the local government or of local associations. However, this role was

highly challenging for the local level. As noted by an interviewee involved in the NPG, innovative approaches to citizen participation requires a change of mindset among public administration and acceptance that the process might not unfold as initially planned. This brings discomfort in public administration that places preference to managerial approaches that have been proven to work . Mobilising local communities and citizens was also challenging for policy-makers at the local level because active participation was often sought after most discussions regarding the necessity of the transition (its nature, impacts, burden and benefits) and the main policy directions had already taken place in higher level arenas where citizens or communities had limited access. Activities to familiarise citizens with the transition and to involve them in pathways for future development were frequently initiated once policy planning processes had been accomplished. Policy practitioners at the local level thus had to cope with difficulties which stem to some degree from the lack of previous engagement. For instance, local policymakers involved in TJTP-Lodz, which covers Bełchatów Area of Transition, noted that some local communities have been left with strong feeling of uncertainty and doubt regarding the policy process of planning the transition. Important decisions regarding the transition were taken in arenas far from the local level, and once implementation was underway local policymakers noted considerable scepticism and reluctance among local communities as they had not been part of processes that articulate the need for of transition and assess policy responses and impacts.

This challenge was compounded where there were specific capacity gaps in sub-national authorities related to lack of skills and tools to implement citizen participation processes. Interviews indicated that in some cases policy makers did not know how to effectively solicit public opinion even when they had genuine intentions to do so. Capacity issues were highlighted across administrative levels and case studies but were again particularly evident at lower levels which were expected to be active in mobilising and supporting communities and citizens in participatory instruments. A specific challenge in designing participatory processes stemmed from integrating different policy sectors and their distinct networks of stakeholders under the sustainability transition heading. In Norrbotten, for example, policy practitioners part of the devolved national administration highlighted the difficulty for the region to develop participatory processes under the Regional Development Strategy as this was a new policy measure that had been transferred to them (previously there had been a strong focus on healthcare issues in the organisation). They were much more used to inward facing strategies, rather than integrated development strategies that looked out to issues such as sustainability and green transition. The interviewee considered that the strategy design and participatory processes were largely based on how the responsible public institutions had traditionally worked.

Public institutions' capacities were important when considering the need to reach out to citizens at the local level and particularly to less engaged communities. As discussed in more detail in Section 4.3, some policy measures recognised that there might be fewer structured opportunities for participation for some communities and citizens and that dedicated instruments and outreach activities were needed. Public administrations' resources and capacities to accommodate such needs played a facilitating role in the cases where more diverse citizen participation mechanisms and dedicated outreach were evident. Conversely, the lack of human and technical resources was reported to have decreased the possibility for local levels to organise citizen participatory processes (e.g. in TJTP-Stara Zagora). In Groningen, NPG participatory events to target diverse local communities involved organising meetings in different locations. Interviewees concurred that the most important arenas were common local premises where citizens often go (e.g. supermarkets, market squares, schools, community centres), however, other places such as farms (in deterioration to be rebuilt) and the nature area around

Groningen were also selected to perform innovative participatory methods. Local authorities played an important role in understanding the preferences of citizens when it comes to incentives that public authorities can provide. An interviewee from the local level noted: "*I asked a lot of questions to people who have visited the Foodbank (Voodselbank) […] I asked them if we bring cake and coffee, and [….] gift for €25*". It was noted that time pressure was not an issue in this case. Yet, the scale of territorial inequalities makes local authorities doubt their capacity in listening to the voices of those most deprived. A local level interviewee recognised that establishing adequate representation of societies living in the region has become more challenging as socio-economic gaps have been widening: "*I'm ambassador of the government and the differences between poor and rich in every way - in health, in money, in opportunities - is getting bigger and bigger*". The challenge seems to be especially acute in deprived neighbourhoods, which, for instance, did not see value in the NPG, and were frequently left out from its participatory processes.

In the Rhenish District and Lusatia, the organisation of local, informal and face-to-face activities was highlight as important in communicating about the transition and engaging citizens in the efforts of implementing structural transformation. In both cases, the agencies created to coordinate the StStG implementation via dedicated programmes help organise mechanisms targeted at citizens, such as info booths at central public spaces (in both regions), explorative tours to observe changes contributed to structural transformation (Rhenish District) and citizen dialogues (Lusatia). In the two German case studies, participation is perceived as an ongoing process where continuous resources and time to reach out to citizens/communities need to be invested. In the Lusatian case, for instance, an interviewee pointed to the need of sufficient capacity and time on the side of public organisations eligible to submit project applications (local authorities, municipal parliaments or districts) because it is at this stage where participation and citizen engagement must take place during the policy implementation. The scale of such resources can be particularly demanding when overall participatory culture is lacking, as highlighted by an interviewee in Lusatia. Additionally, an interviewee from the Rhenish District observed that citizen participation needs to be performed in small groups and in localised context rather than in larger numbers and higher geographical scale. This places further requirements on local capacities, resources and time.

To strengthen and complement public authority capacities to mobilise certain communities – particularly of youth – some measures set up dedicated structures. In Groningen, the NPG established its own Youth Department whose role was to ensure the participation of young people into the policy. The NPG advisor under this heading worked at one of the municipalities of Groningen very closely with youth organisations and this connection helped when designing the approach to engaging with them. Similarly, in the Rhenish District, a process to set up a Youth Committee (*Jugendgremium*) as part of the StStG is underway supported by the performance of strategy workshops. The importance of the existing administrative structures was also highlighted by an interviewee from the Rhenish District, pointing out that all municipalities have experts on youth participation.

Other facilitators and obstacles in making policy discussions more inclusive and accessible to less-engaged communities in particular are discussed in the Section 4.3.

4.2.2. Collaborative governance and participation

In theory, place-based measures offer benefits for participation in terms of taking a collaborative, 'joined up' approach to sustainability transition. This recognises the multi-

faceted nature of transition processes, combining social, economic and environmental dimensions in a specific place and underlining the importance of joint participation across public and private sectors and communities themselves (including assets within communities, such as the skills and knowledge, social networks, local groups and community organisations). Such a 'joined up' multi-sectoral approach, however, often incurs transaction costs that can limit the scope and depth of participatory processes, stemming from the need to consult, deliberate, and potentially negotiate consensus across a range of partners with varying priorities.

Generally, interview research highlighted the difficulties of establishing truly 'joined up' and collaborative models for implementing sustainability transition measures. As noted in Section 4.1, sustainability transition measures have often been framed in a technocratic or sectoral way that limits the potential for collaboration across different policy fields and actors. Beyond this, there are challenges stemming from the complexity of coordinating the range of sectors, actors and organisations that have a stake in transition processes, especially as existing political and bureaucratic cultures are frequently based on rigid and siloed organisational systems. Finally, challenges appear to occur due to the lack of robust rules ensuring that

4.2.2.1. Accommodating a range of relevant policy fields

A basic challenge has been accommodating the range of appropriate economic, social and environmental policy fields. In most countries, responsibilities for these policy fields are dispersed across ministries, departments and agencies, sometimes at different levels of public administration. Drawing these together to facilitate and respond to place-specific issues highlighted though participative processes has been very challenging.

- **The StStG in the two German case studies envisioned the sustainability transition as transformation of multiple economic sectors, and related to these education programmes, research and innovation. Interviewees highlighted that planning and operationalising measures was challenged by compartmentalised policy-making, creating barriers for deliberative participation**. Structural transformation spans various thematic domains - economic, social, spatial, energy and environmental. These are managed sectorally with clearly defined boundaries. Following a subsidiarity principle, discussions on different framework (law), operational (programme) and implementation (project) decisions are led at different governmental 'arenas', with key decisions related to the timetable of mine closures taken at the national arena. Diverse policy measures and funding streams beyond those analysed in the case studies are relevant to different sectoral themes concerning the sustainability transition, which need to contend with different territorial scales, target groups, timeframes or participatory processes. Further complexity is added when participatory work also follows sectoral logic – working with youth; with ethnic minorities, etc. Nevertheless, there is a structured approach to coordination for the implementation of the Structural Reinforcement Act for Mining Regions. The top level is the national/ federal government at the centre with the Department Structural Change in the Coal Regions and 6 federal ministries. This level connects down to the level of state ministries of affected states. In the Rhenish District this is Structural Change Unit for the Rhenish District which connects to ministries and political actors at the state level, and which then connects down to the affected regions and the agency thing. Moreover, interviewees highlighted the importance of informal coordination in Germany's federal system: there is an intensive dialogue between the

relevant state ministries and representatives from the regions concerned aimed at identifying their needs for successful transition. The agencies set up to manage the transition at regional level in the case studies serve as mechanisms of coordination on the ground. They help guide stakeholders into appropriate programmes, including funding that supports promotion of participatory activities. Nevertheless, interviewees recognised that it remains very challenging to map participatory processes on to this complex mix of sectoral processes and for communities and citizens and especially for less engaged groups to understand how to navigate them.

- **Similarly, interviewees from Gotland involved in the Master Plan highlighted the challenge of aligning diverse interests and priorities concerning the green transition**. The Master Plan must consider a complex network of sectoral policies and regulations, many of which fall outside the decision-making powers of those creating the Master Plan. Being a comprehensive spatial planning measure, the plan involves aspects from different sectors such as environment, housing, transport, tourism, service provision, energy, etc. It deals with issues which local communities find relevant to their lives such as the designation of areas where wind power energy can be produced as well as limestone quarrying serving the cement industry. Even security themes such as the re-establishment of the Swedish defence force on Gotland has been mentioned by practitioners as this will have *'a strong impact on the governance of space in Region Gotland'*. While the municipality finds all these themes important to discuss, interviewees highlighted that organising participatory processes has been challenging especially where they touch on issues where responsibility for planning and decision-making lies with another level of government. This regards for instance the environmental permits for limestone quarrying as well as energy planning, which follow partly separate procedures. Policy practitioners underscore that understanding the nature and reasons behind these other procedures, and accessing them require efforts to ensure transparency. They also noted that it can be difficult to reach out and engage communities when there are multiple ongoing and potentially overlapping policy or participatory processes.
- **An interviewee from the Groningen's TJTP noted that there was a challenge in integrating economic programmes with social considerations under the transition heading because the professionals who design and implement these programmes typically lack expertise in social issues**. Policy practitioners dealing with TJTP were primarily experts in economic aspects. As a result, it has been challenging to integrate the economic with social components. Overall, this highlights the difficulty of ensuring that economically-driven policy mechanisms are socially inclusive and responsive due to the gap between economic and social domains among governmental structures.

4.2.2.2. Sectoral collaboration in participatory processes for sustainability transitions

Interview data illustrate that participatory work related to sustainability transitions has involved various sectors – governmental, private (market), and community (third-sector) – each with its own motivations and strategic objectives for organising participatory processes with citizens or targeted communities. The degree to which these different actors' efforts influenced policy measures for sustainability transitions depended on how well public authorities utilised synergies between participatory processes they planned with the participatory initiatives driven by external actors. Evidence suggests that the interface between

governmental and representative organisations was important in developing participatory processes in several cases.

In the **German context**, associations and non-governmental organisations play an active role in promoting citizen engagement. Interviewees from this sector in the Rhenish case highlight that participatory processes in the region such as on youth participation have been developed and implemented for long time and have addressed relevant themes of structural transition, education and qualifications. Such activities need to connect with programmes implemented as part of StStG due to the thematic similarities. Efforts in this direction are currently being made as the measure enters into its implementation phase. Yet, interview data indicate that there are remaining questions regarding whose role the promotion of participation and participatory work shall be at the local level. This issue has been particularly relevant to the German case studies, as transition programmes provide funding for various actors, including citizen associations and individual citizens, to obtain support for activities that link local ideas with transition objectives. According to a youth interest organisation from the Rhenish district, for instance, in very few municipalities instruments aiming to promote proactive participation of communities in such activities have been delegated to organisations outside governmental structures to community-driven associations who are knowledgeable and possess the capacity to carry out participatory work. Community organisations see this as a way for governmental institutions to reserve control over resources. Consequently, grassroots organizations are less willing to commit time and resources to inform the public and pursue participatory processes.

On the other hand, in the **Groningen case**, an effective interface between public authorities and community organisations facilitated implementation of participatory instruments under the NPG. Instruments such as hackathons and school challenges were coordinated with existing initiatives run by community-based, third sector organisations (e.g. a territorial network of high schools). To make sure that such activities did not overlap, the latter aligned their objectives with the NPG.

In the Polish **Bełchatów Area of Transition**, NGO initiatives have fostered awareness and space for knowledge production on just transition (e.g. the Bełchatów 2050 project as well as workshops conducted by NGOs). However, while respondents engaged in such activities observed some positive results (‘*this approach enabled the emergence of several leaders ready to foster dialogue*’), there was doubt as to how these initiatives have joined up with the design and implementation of the TJTP or the Social Agreement. Interview data indicate weak coordination between this bottom-up, third-sector driven approach to knowledge generation and the process led by policy practitioners at the regional level.

Specific to the Polish Social Agreements was the relationship between national government authorities and trade unions in developing the measures. According to sectoral-local / sectoral regional interviewees, the Social Agreement with Energy Sector, was initiated, planned and negotiated by the trade unions with deliberative participation embedded through the role of working groups. However, for national-level actors (including government ministries and national trade union headquarters) the key deliberative process was negotiation meetings among the trade unions representatives/leaders and the representatives of government (Ministry of State Assets). Limited coordination between these ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ dynamics constrained the potential for meaningful participation of communities in mining areas. Consequently, interviewees in these case studies observed that local communities did not view local governments as significant agents of change or arenas for participation. This perception was evident in the input of a representative of the county administration in Bełchatów who underlined that stakeholders' and communities' transition expectations are being framed by a

culture where the national state rather than sub-national levels is perceived as responsible for development and prosperity. While the Social Agreements in Poland were open to participation of local governments where coal mines are located, such participation was minor. Interviewees provided different views on the reasons. One representative from Silesia noted that there were attempts by local mayors but their participation has been limited by trade unions. The motivation of the latter pertains to the risk of politicisation of the discussion as mayors' interests to participate were perceived to link to their belonging to the ruling party or the opposition.

4.2.2.3. Collaborative work at the local level

Traditions of collaborative working at the local level were also noted as important factor in participatory processes by interviewees, with positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences mostly came from interviews on the case of the NPG in the Netherlands. It operates as a multi-partner initiative involving the central government, the province of Groningen, and the various municipalities within the province. Municipalities and other governmental agencies were committed to the development and implementation of the NPG. Arenas for participation were mainly at the local level. Mayors and council members demonstrated political commitment even in more peripheral villages by bridging the gap between grassroots and governance and standing ready to support projects. Their commitment facilitated communication with the community and encouraged most residents to participate in workshops. It is instructive to compare this with the TJTP experience in Groningen scope as the latter was criticised by some interviewees due to "*major disparities in opportunities and challenges encountered across the Groningen region*". Participatory processes in the Groningen TJTP's design aimed at engaging key stakeholders and thus had a focus on specific territories. According to interviewees, the main logic was to capture the voices of companies clustered in several industrial zones (e.g. in municipalities of Emmen, South-East Groningen Province) and knowledge institutions in Groningen municipality. The perception of interviewees was that participatory processes aimed to engage existing actors involved in the regional economic and innovation ecosystem. Criticism from a local public authority was raised about the focus on existing structures and actors spatially concentrated in the capital city Groningen and the key industrial clusters, and the lack of consideration in the TJTP for economic activities across the broader territory.

Lack of coordination and rivalry between local authorities involved in sustainability transition measures was in some contexts a barrier to participatory processes. Interview evidence indicates that while regional and local policy practitioners believed that participatory processes were more manageable at the local level, this was challenged where traditions of inter-municipal cooperation were weak. In these contexts, there was a risk that local governments and their communities prioritised their own interests, resulting in fragmentation or rivalry in engaging with sustainability transition measures and ultimately undermining efforts to co-design solutions at a larger spatial scale.

- Some policy measures such as TJTP-BAT and TJTP-Groningen, were often physically located in and actively promoting participation from the capital or larger cities. This results in uneven spatial representation, often causing lower participation and visibility of more peri-urban or rural areas.

  Envisioning a joint future across municipalities in Bełchatów has been hindered by what a local level respondent perceived as significant rivalry among municipality-level beneficiaries. This disposition among municipal governments benefiting from the TJTP stems from the distribution of revenue from mine exploitation fees, which have so far

been allocated to fewer municipalities than those included in the TJTP. Experiences of the interviewee suggest that municipalities which have not benefited economically from coal mining are prone to believe that TJTP support is unfairly distributed, favouring already wealthy coal mining areas instead of those that have been facing socio-economic hardships. Such sentiments indicate that local participation in transition measures such as TJTP are conditioned and constrained by path dependencies and dominant regional cultures, identities and histories linked to coal.

Insights from an interviewee involved in the NPG in Groningen also suggest some tensions in orienting participation toward the funding of the most strategic, community-driven ideas and more political or redistributive rationales. According to the interviewee, the funding of community ideas via the Toukomst participatory process could have been more optimal if the selection was based on best quality project, while in reality the local interest of each municipality had more weight.

4.2.3. Governance mechanisms to provide equal opportunities for expression of views and impact on policy

Participatory mechanisms across case studies often involved diverse stakeholders with own understandings and perceptions on how sustainability transitions would expose certain segments of society to vulnerabilities or how resources could be distributed more fairly. It can be assumed that this plurality of viewpoints can give rise to certain tensions and contestations. Crucial in this case is the design of participatory processes - do these processes use methodologies to ensure that partners with different expertise, capacity and resources can equally express their views and how are trade-off address in the decision-making phase? A caveat to note is that input from interviewees should be reviewed with caution because a number of participatory processes did not directly involve citizens. As a result, interviewees lacked the basis to assess whether layperson and expert knowledge were balanced and focused rather on the dynamics between institutional actors. These viewpoints are still valuable for the research as they indicate the capacity of public institutions to address trade-offs among different interests.

When evaluating whether participatory mechanisms provided equal opportunities for all participants to express their views - especially considering the potential dominance of well-resourced and experienced stakeholders – interviewees' assessments vary in their level of criticism. In the case of **Groningen**'s TJTP, interviewees emphasised that the participatory processes aimed to engage with an existing ecosystem of players, including large energy companies, SMEs, and universities. This diverse composition posed challenges in equally voicing the interests of all actors. An external expert involved in the TJTP design noted that large economic entities often dominated discussions, despite efforts to balance their influence with that of SMEs. A local policy practitioner also highlighted the importance of fairness in public decisions but echoed the sentiment that large companies had more influence. The need for a sounding board in measures like the TJTP was stressed to ensure balanced participation.

Collected perceptions in regard to the Social Agreements in the two **Polish case studies** related to the strength of barging power among actors who were generally considered as highly experienced. On the positive side, an interviewee from BAT noted the facilitating role of the participatory processes in bringing two sectors like coal mining and energy production on one table and ensuring that they listen to each other. This was considered challenging as each of

these sectors traditionally considered itself more essential than the other. Nevertheless, certain unequal power dynamics were observed when it comes to the position of the national government. Trade unions from Bełchatów observed lack of political commitment to the process, while the presence of high-level figures from the Ministry of State Assets was one of the key elements in moving the negotiation process forward. This made trade unions feel out of place and excluded, despite their efforts in preparing drafts of the measure at the initial stage.

Mining communities were not able to enter into the process of negotiating the Social Agreements, and in fact, working materials were not accessible to anyone else apart from those who were part of the negotiations. This raises an important question regarding the engagement of communities. To what extent has the participation of trade unions increased access of voices of less-engaged communities in shaping the provisions of these Agreements? Formally, the trade unions served as the conduit through which the voices of workers could be brought closer to policy makers. It was acknowledged, however, that these communities were not directly involved in negotiating or deciding on the provisions of these measures. According to trade unions' views, their role was consultative - voicing opinions when prompted by trade unions - but the influence of their views on decisions was limited: "*If someone asked more questions, they could say something, but it certainly wasn't a significant voice*". Some trade union representatives acknowledged that the unions exercised significant control over the process (in comparison to the role of workers): "*the trade union side took it into its own hands and implemented it almost one hundred percent*".

In the case of Gotland' Master Plan and the Dutch NPG, interviewees were able to share observations based on citizen participation processes. Their input highlights that certain individuals based on gender and professional knowledge dominated over discussions or had more significant impact on final decisions. While meetings, organised to feed into the design of the Master Plan in Gotland aimed to balance opportunities for discussion among all participants, organisers observed that **older adults experienced in policy-issues and in particular men tended to dominate conversations**. This highlighted the necessity of meeting in smaller groups where facilitators could more easily monitor the participation of different individuals. In the case of the NPG, some interviewees shared concerns that some project ideas gathered and implemented by the measure came from individuals with links to organisations/institutions that would benefit from the financial investment. **There was a concern that more resourceful individuals - members of local organisations with experience of accessing funds – were more active in submitting projects ideas and obtaining funding compared to 'ordinary citizens'.** According to the interview data this was partly attributed to weaknesses in the citizen panel. The citizen panel, involving 20 volunteers in weighing up project ideas and selecting a limited number of them for financing, experienced knowledge gaps in evaluating project feasibility. This led to the involvement of external evaluators.

4.3. Targeting specific territories/communities

Another principle of place-based policymaking with implications for citizen and community participation is its discretionary nature. In theory, these policies should promote reflections on the potential social and economic benefits and drawbacks from policy interventions for the diverse communities living in the defined territory, and enable

more substantial considerations of distributive aspects of policies.[17] While this principle is defined rather broadly, the transition literature places further focus on the need for inclusive policy process when regional or local economies transform to low-carbon production and their societies to more sustainable working and living. Some transition scholarship emphasises the need in such processes to pay due attention to socio-economic aspects and implications in particular, which implies policy sensitivity to the varied societal exposure to the impact of transitions.[18] Yet other transition scholars argue that there are motivations for a holistic approach in policy thinking when it comes to engaging society in transition processes. They refer to the benefit of public deliberations involving citizens, which can inform policies by producing socially relevant knowledge in various fields, including themes that are traditionally dominated by expert knowledge (e.g. research and innovation).[19] Such co-produced knowledge can result in policies providing more tangible benefits for citizens. It can also serve broader purposes of fostering uniform understanding among communities with different backgrounds and preferences, and counterbalance vested interests when setting long-term sustainability agendas. As a long-term outcome, this can address the risk of exacerbating inequalities through the transition process.

Based on the arguments above, it can be assumed that the pursuit of inclusive citizen participation in place-based transition policies depends on these policies' rationales in defining the social scope for policy intervention and the necessity, stemming from that, to mobilise citizens or specific communities in participatory processes. To shed more light on these issues, this section examines interview data on whether and how policies incorporated a focus on communities that are impacted by or vulnerable to sustainability transition processes, especially less-engaged communities, and what implications there were in terms of their mobilisation in participation and deliberation.

4.3.1. Targeting specific social groups and communities

The research finds different logics or rationales in how the selected policies identified and targeted communities or territories, with variation both within and between the case studies. It is evident that the starting point in policy thinking has been the strategic framing of the measures, as described in Section 4.1.2.

As it was discussed there, for a set of measures (TJTP, StStG, SAs and IDP) the transition has been predominantly associates with a defined sectoral transformation of the energy or industrial sectors. Consequently, **a basic definition of target groups or communities was driven by this framing, particularly when it comes to economic and labour implications that future changes in these sectors would trigger. One strongly evident policy logic in defining these implications was based on the estimated distribution of socio-economic burden in the future.** This informed the identification of one of the key social groups in the TJTPs in Polish, Bulgarian and German case studies, the Social Agreements, the StStG and the IDP, namely employees in key fossil-extraction or fossil-based industries that are being phased out. The reasoning here was that due to the closure of these major employers, employees will be faced with higher displacement risks than workers in any other industry or the society more broadly.

[17] DUST Deliverable 1.1

[18] Cedergren, E., Tapia, C., Sánchez Gassen, N., & Lundgren, A. (2022). Just Green Transition–key concepts and implications in the Nordic Region. Nordregio.

[19] Matschoss, K., Repo, P., & Timonen, P. (2019). Embedding European citizen visions in sustainability transition: Comparative analysis across 30 European countries. Futures, 112, 102437.

Provided the focus on socio-economic burden, the policy measures suggested this group would require support to transition to new jobs, primarily through re-skilling, training or continuous education. It is noticeable, that in the case of StStG in the Rhenish District and Lusatia this groups is more broadly defined including also energy-intensive companies/SMEs which will need to adapt to fossil-free production and, this would have implications for the workforce. Compared to above mentioned TJTPs, the Plans of Norrbotten, Groningen and Gotland appear to have lower sensitivity to this group because the transition in the defined industrial sectors is not perceived to create high risk or large scale of employment displacement.

Along with the above logic, underlying socio-economic inequalities further underpinned considerations of distributional aspects, leading to policy recognition of some communities as being vulnerable to the wider economic implications of the industrial/energy transition. These included unemployed people (TJTP-Groningen/ Norrbotten/Rhenish District) and deprived social groups (TJTPs-Groningen and Stara Zagora) who may be (further) exposed to (energy) poverty and thus needing targeted support (e.g. reintegration into the job market). Under the StStG in the German cases, there was a strong rationale in ensuring that members of disadvantaged communities (ethnic minorities, people with physical handicaps) in particular are involved in the transition measures, especially when it comes to integration into the labour market. The IDP of Stara Zagora further identified deprived and disadvantaged communities such as people living in poverty, people with physical handicaps, elderly, esp. in the rural areas, and the Roma ethnic group who are among the majority of unemployed population. However, these groups were considered relevant to the policy not because they were specifically affected by the phase-out restructuring process but to ensuring that the broader social and labour market service needs of the region are met.

Policy thinking in identifying and targeting communities was further impacted by the need to ensure the necessary workforce and skills in the shift to new or transformed low-carbon industrial activities. While in some cases this logic is linked to aims of alleviating unequal exposure to burden from displacement, there was also a pragmatic recognition of the potential of some groups to contribute to transition objectives such as the creation of new 'green' industries and low-carbon value chains. As previously noted, This shift required skilled workforce and an education system adapted to new demands. Following this thinking, the TJTP-**Norrbotten** recognises the importance to engage under-skilled mine employees in interventions that would provide them with the skills or competence required in the low-carbon industrial production. Similarly, in **Bełchatów and Katowice**, interviewees highlight youth as an important group relevant for the transition goal of creating new value chains. The latter will require deeper modernisation of the education sector in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of the education system. This underpinned some of the activities of the Bełchatów's industrial park, specifically their work with schools and teachers as well as an intervention under the TJTPs offering enhanced educational opportunities to young people. Being asked about the relevance of currently employed and retired miners, as two of the other communities selected in DUST research, interviewees from Bełchatów shared that getting miners involved in transition investments (TJTP) is important, because based on their knowledge, skills and experience, they were considered a target group for future employers in the region**.** It can be assumed that here the reference is to employees that possess particular skillset and education rather than to all employees. Reference is also made to retirees, especially those that were at age allowing them to work and pass on their knowledge to younger employees. Interviewees highlight, however, that neither in Silesia, nor in Lodz, the TJTPs identified or targeted retirees as relevant communities.

In policies where the framing of the sustainability transition was more open and flexible, policy thinking has prioritised a wide territorial and societal coverage. These policies include Groningen's NPG, Gotland's Master Plan and Norrbotten's RDS. In these cases, there were no specific factors in identifying and targeting communities due to the objective to cover the broader society and people from diverse backgrounds. While the types of considerations that informed policy thinking in these cases were also related to socio-economic conditions and implications of the sustainability transition, these considerations were significantly broader from those in the policies discussed above.

The NPG in **Groningen** aimed to reconcile existing, entrenched inequalities with the benefits that a transformation process can bring. A unique characteristic of the measure was its recognition of the social and emotional impacts of transition. In terms of focusing on specific communities, interviewees highlighted residents' anxiety and insecurity, health issues and anger, resulting from long-term economic decline and socio-environmental implications from gas extraction such as property damage, concerns about the integrity of dykes, earthquakes. While some residents, especially homeowners whose houses were affected by earthquakes, were seen as disproportionately exposed to negative conditions, the strategic approach of the measure was not how to compensate groups for disadvantages but how to involve them as actors in a meaningful change.[20] To do that, the NPG, and especially the *Toukomst* programme part of it, aimed to promote community-driven approaches that placed emphasis on the collective efforts of diverse communities to shape a more prosperous future.

Gotland's Master Plan was strongly concerned with the way territorial resources - particularly land and water areas - were used and with ensuring that diverse interests regarding the value of certain areas, territorial accessibility, etc. were taken into account against future spatial development plans. There was awareness among practitioners at local/regional level that this requires trade-offs between different public priorities, and that there were different land and water claims for exploitation and for protection of valuable natural and cultural areas that needed to be reconciled. Communities in this case were not considered by practitioners from a perspective of vulnerability but were approached in a more "*integrative"* manner: "*for example, working with territorial perspectives in the plan or with certain key sectors"*. Interviewees underscored, for example, the sustainability 'dilemma' that emerges between preferences to cluster services and concentrate housing around those (preference of public officials) and the choice to develop all areas (political preference), which means more scattered housing, more pressure on public services and intense private car use. Citizen preferences on this strategic question naturally depended on their place of residence.

The Regional Development Strategy of **Norrbotten** encompassed multiple development fields and policy sectors in economic, social, spatial and environmental domains and a key motivation in targeting a broad range of communities and groups was incorporating local knowledge and expertise to produce relevant and practical solutions. The regional administration suggest that the public authority was aware of its lack of comprehensive information about the intricacies of living and conducting business in the region – not least because it was the first time the region had such responsibility. Therefore, obtaining views from local stakeholders became essential. The aim was to ensure that the assumptions made by the regional authority accurately reflect the existing local identities and activities and that considered solutions to identified challenges resonate with stakeholders' perspectives. To ensure that the Strategy could serve varied interests and be adapted to local contexts, interviewees underlined that participatory processes

[20] Although, compensations targeted at households affected by the earthquakes were provided.

aimed to facilitate broad involvement across communities and social groups. Additionally, the RDS recognised the relevance of some communities, albeit in generic terms, noting the importance of gender equality, youth inclusion and attention to minorities, especially in terms of quality of life. It could be presumed that these groups are identified in the strategy document due to the fact that policy decisions at the local level need to be sensitive to the dimensions of gender, age and ethnicity. The right of participation of organisations representing these communities (officially recognised minority groups and youth in particular) is also ensured by law.

4.3.2. Identifying less-engaged communities

A specific focus of DUST research is the inclusion of less-engaged communities in the governance of transitions and thus it is important to assess the extent of which selected policies incorporate explicit considerations on these communities and mobilised their participation. Across case studies and policy measures, there are variations in the degree to which considerations of groups that are less-engaged were present in the policy thinking. Additionally, understanding which these communities are is impacted by the different approaches to and meaning attributed to participation. A general finding is that identifying and targeting specific, less-engaged communities is often a process that evolves throughout policy design and implementation stages. There is evidence that for a number of policy measures such considerations became more apparent as policies entered into implementation and concerned the outreach of their interventions. For more limited number of measures, targeting of less engaged communities was evident from an earlier stage, and was driven by policies' ambitions to ensure more inclusive participatory processes. Their efforts benefited from previous experience of mobilising communities in policy making.

In some of the measures where citizen participation processes were not prominent (TJTPs, IDP, RDS), considerations about less-engaged communities were reported to be either absent or only apparent during policy implementation. This is broadly the case for the StStG where citizen participation processes were targeted at the wider society and were used once the selected regions started elaborating own programmes to implement the defined policy goals at the national level. Examining interview material, it is evident that for some interviewees that lack of considerations regarding less engaged communities stemmed from the strategic scope of the measure. An interviewee from **Bełchatów** noted, for instance, that '*in the Social Agreement with Energy Sector direct access to BAT communities were not important because the agreement focused on lignite miners and employees from the energy sector only*'. While workers have not been directly involved, the agreement ensured favourable conditions for this group in the process of phasing out coal mining and related energy production activities. Within this broad group, the SAs followed a traditional approach in protecting workers nearing retirement age instead of a balanced inter-generational dimension. In the TJTPs of **Norrbotten and Gotland**, national and regional interviewees also shared that considerations regarding involvement of politically disengaged or more broadly of vulnerable communities in the TJTPs was lacking, apart from one group that is generally recognised as marginalised in political participation – the Sami minority. Policy thinking in these cases seemed to have been guided by the perception that the sectoral transformation would not trigger costs or opposition of the broader society or specific social groups. The national level interviewee highlighted specifically the Sami minority as a group that held sceptical perceptions towards the transition.

Other interviewees reported that in the policy design process there was a recognition that some individual or communities may be less-engaged, however, these were not formally

recognised in the policy itself or its participatory processes. In **Groningen**, an interviewee at the regional level shared that in general, the population of Groningen province is sceptical towards (national) policy makers and political engagement and thus marginalised. This, according to the interviewee, relates to perceptions that the central government tends to overlook the problems of the province and its population, as compared to other provinces. This perception is emphasised in the context of issues such as the negative impact of gas extractions on communities and the presence of refugee camps in the area. Both of these issues are specific to the Groningen province, and the lack of political attention to their consequences may be creating feelings of being left behind, both from territorial and social perspectives. The population of Groningen was also considered, in general, to have more limited access to resources and opportunities compared to other provinces. Despite these conditions, which according to the interviewee shall incentivise community participation in the regional TJTP, the interviewee shares that communities were generally "*overlooked*". In **Norrbotten's** RDS, an interviewee from the regional administration noted the generally embedded culture of representative participation in Sweden, which means that citizen participation in policy making happens indirectly via a variety of interest groups, associations or non-governmental organisations. This implied that citizens that are not organised could be understood as less-engaged, although there was no specific mechanism to map out these citizens. In the TJTP of **Stara Zagora**, less-engaged groups were identified by the work of external consultants to the national level, although it was reported that this did not result in concrete policy actions. One exception seems to be the Roma community, which is recognised as marginalized in political life more generally. This community has low level of understanding about the transition process and general resistance to change.

Across above mentioned policies (TJTPs, IDP, RDS, StStG), interview data indicate some progress in policy thinking on less-engaged communities at the implementation stage[21] and particularly under the implementation of the social and demographic dimensions of some interventions. The rationale was to ensure that social, cultural and labour market actions perceived by governments as easing the burden of the transition or providing a more secure and bright future, engaged groups that were hard to reach or to engage under interventions.

Increased policy attention to youth was mentioned under the TJTP-Groningen and StStG-Rhenish District and Lusatia. While in the Dutch context, this related to the outreach of specific labour market re-integration efforts, in the German case, a broader political prioritisation of youth in interventions and participatory processes emerged with the growing recognition of the excessive transformation burden that would be placed on the younger generation. There has also been a growing awareness in the two German case study regions of the challenges in engaging people, youth in specific, from rural areas due to the lack of physical and social infrastructures (e.g. youth centres). Other criteria in identifying less-engaged communities in the implementation of TJTP-Groningen, along with youth, were gender and caring responsibilities as well as ethnicity. They led to the further recognition of the need to engage with women who stay at home and migrants under the measure's labour re-integration efforts.

Recognition of less-engaged communities also emerged as a result of discontent, which strengthened after some TJTPs were agreed. This is noted by national and regional interviewees in **Norrbotten** and **Gotland**, acknowledging that the importance of some groups could have been better recognised. This includes the residents living close to Gotland's cement factory in Slite

[21] Apart from the Norrbotten's RDS, which was reported to function only at strategic level. Its implementation takes places via the various local policies that need to observe its strategic directions when designing local interventions.

due to the increased environmental burden they are exposed to from quarrying operations, and the residents in rural and inland areas in Norrbotten due to perceptions of unequal share of benefits (i.e. investments) compared to coastal areas.

In a limited number of cases – the NPG and Gotland's Master Plan - targeting specific, less engaged communities took place as part of the process of designing interventions and making strategic or investment choices. Evidence suggests that identifying such communities benefited from past experiences of citizen participation, which revealed barriers related to physical accessibility and time availability, and from policy sensitivity to political discontent and perceptions of being left behind. The efforts in engaging these communities, thus, aimed to facilitate input from groups that faced specific difficulties or lacked motivation in attending participatory processes informing public policy. In **Gotland**, policy practitioners shared that, while the Master Plan aimed to engage the wider society, they did make use of accumulated observations regarding segments of society who have been underrepresented in previous participatory processes. This informed the recognition of groups that were unable to participate due to the location, timing, or format of the participatory processes, namely women, parents of young children and youth. In **Groningen,** NPG interviewees from different levels of administration considered that among those less engaged are communities living outside larger urban areas, namely rural communities. The interviewees recognised the difficulty of engaging individuals from rural areas due to distance (as a result of peripherality and lack of public transport) but also due to low trust in public institutions, which made people unwilling to engage in activities driven by the government. There was also a perception that citizens had more immediate priorities and problems, due to the resent earthquakes, and that would override their perceptions of civic responsibility.

Table 16 summarises all responses collected from interviewees and across policy measures regarding communities which were defined in policies as target groups for policy intervention and those who were targeted in participatory processes and identified as less engaged.

Table 16: Summary of social groups identified for policy interventions or targeted due to the recognition that they are less-engaged in the process

	Demographic	Ethnic	Socio economic	Territorial
SA - BAT			**Coal mining and energy workers** represented by trade unions in participation and targeted in implementation (focus on those close to retirement)	
Master Plan - Gotland	**Women, youth and parents of small children** directly involved in participation, incl. in collaboration with other organisations (e.g. schools)			Individuals, rather than specific communities, involved according to sectoral or territorial issues.
NPG – Groningen	**Youth** from secondary and higher education schools involved in	**Migrant** communities indirectly targeted through school curricula		**Remote communities** involved in participation (focus on generation of project

	Demographic	Ethnic	Socio economic	Territorial
	participation and targeted in implementation (focus on labour market)			ideas and assessment of project proposals as part of *Toukomst*)
SA - KCR			**Coal mining and energy workers** represented by trade unions in participation and targeted in implementation (focus on those close to retirement)	
StStG – Lusatia	**Youth** targeted in implementation (focus on education and job opportunities) and increasingly in local participatory processes.		**Coal mining/energy workers and employees of related industries** targeted in implementation (focus on continuous education and training)	**People lining in rural areas** targeted in participatory processes
RDS – Norrbotten	**Youth** represented in policy design.	**Legally recognised minority groups** represented in policy design		
StStG-Rhenish District	**Youth** targeted in implementation (focus on education and job opportunities) and in participatory processes regarding new investments**.**	**Disadvantaged communities (ethnic minorities, people with physical handicaps)** targeted in implementation (focus in labour market measures)	**Employees of coal-related industries/Groups that need new qualifications** targeted in implementation (focus on continuing education and training)	
IDP-Stara Zagora		**Roma ethnic minority and other minority groups** targeted in implementation	**Deprived and disadvantaged communities** targeted in the implementation of general service provision interventions of the policy: people living in poverty, people with physical handicaps, elderly, especially in the rural areas, and the Roma ethnic community	
TJTP - BAT	**Youth** involved indirectly in design processes and targeted in implementation via organisations in the			

	Demographic	Ethnic	Socio economic	Territorial
	field of education and labour market.			
TJTP-Gotland			**Employees of a cement factory in Slite** represented in policy design via trade unions.	**Communities living close to the cement factory** affected by limestone quarrying and land use change recognised as relevant to the plan following the completion of its design.
TJTP-Groningen	**Youth** (through schools) and **stay-at-home women** targeted in implementation (focus on labour market re-integration)	**Migrants** targeted in implementation (focus on labour market re-integration)	**Deprived social groups** represented in policy design and targeted in implementation (under energy poverty measures) **Unemployed people** targeted in implementation	
TJTP - KCR	**Youth** targeted in implementation via organisations in the field of education and labour market.		**Coal mining and energy workers** targeted in implementation	
TJTP-Lusatia	**Young people** targeted in implementation (focus on education and labour market integration)		**Workers in the lignite-based energy sector** indirectly represented in design stage and targeted in implementation (focus on labour market re-integration)	
TJTP-Norrbotten		Representatives of the **Sami ethnic minority** involved in participation during policy design	**Unemployed or under-skilled mine workers** represented via employment organisations, etc. in policy design and targeted in implementation	**Rural and inland communities** recognised as relevant to the plan following their discontent of being excluded from investments
TJTP-Rhenish District	**Youth** targeted in implementation (focus on education and training)		**Employees of SMEs affected by the transition, coal mining workers and unemployed people** targeted in implementation (focus on qualifications, re-training/skilling)	
TJTP -Stara Zagora			**Coal mining and energy workers** targeted in implementation	

	Demographic	Ethnic	Socio economic	Territorial
			Deprived social groups, incl. Roma minority, targeted in implementation (under energy poverty measures)	

4.3.3. Implications for inclusive citizen participation

This section explores the implications of the previous discussions on whether and how identifying and targeting (least-engaged) communities in policy interventions and participation processes influences inclusive transition governance. **A general insight across policy measures is that defining target groups and recognising communities as less-engaged does not necessarily facilitate their involvement in participative instruments for policy decision-making.** Especially at the stage of policy design, in a number of policies, the identification of target groups stemmed directly from strategic decisions regarding social and labour market interventions that the policies decided to invest in, rather than direct input from these groups. This also excluded the relevance of a broader and open process that could have benefited from wider participation.

Commissioned studies or inputs from representative organisations were frequently used to define and design approaches to target communities. The role of preparatory studies was mentioned by **TJTP-Gotland; Norrbotten; Stara Zagora; and Bełchatów**. While in the case of Stara Zagora, this was part of a task performed by an external consultancy, in the Swedish cases, interviewees referred to existing expertise that was provided by reports on education levels, by regional/local strategies and plans such as Gotland's climate roadmaps and climate policy strategies. In the case of Bełchatów, interviewees mentioned a study at county level which was tasked to look particularly at the impact of the transition on young people, miners and entrepreneurs, which identified youth as the most vulnerable group among the three due to young people's *'unwillingness to look for the future that links them to the place'*. The process of identifying communities vulnerable to socio-economic burdens from job loss or due to underlying inequalities, has mostly increased the involvement of representative institutions in participatory processes. A similar conclusion can be made when it comes to communities who were targeted by policies due to pragmatic reasons, namely their role as workforce in new/transformed renewable or low-carbon industries. These representative organisations were seen by policymakers to possess the most valuable knowledge about these groups, their needs or interests. These stakeholders also represented an efficient channel for public institutions to reach out to these groups during implementation. Following this logic, the direct involvement of communities was not considered relevant. Several examples can be highlighted. During the preparations and negotiations of the Social Agreements covering Bełchatów Area of Transition and Katowicki Coal Region, trade unions drew on knowledge they have obtained in their continuous work with employees. Trade union representatives considered that they had good understanding of workers sentiments towards the transition process, their needs and demands. This was grounded in the strong organisational structures of local trade unions and large experience in negotiations, while trade unions also expressed certainly that workers felt well represented by them. As a result, direct participation of employees was not considered a necessity in the Social Agreements' dialogue and negotiations between the government and trade unions, although employees were continuously informed about the development of the negotiations and were surveyed by trade unions. Interviewees involved in the TJTPs across case study frequently referred to consultative process with stakeholders such as trade unions,

workers organisations, employment agencies, NGOs, and civil society groups in relation to the implementation of objectives regarding re-skills/training.

While the results of commissioned studies and analyses have had a significant impact on the selection of participants in policy processes, additional factors have also been influential, affecting incentives for direct citizen engagement.

The perception of policymakers regarding the extent to which targeted communities would (or would not) accept the measures positively was influential in some cases. For instance, in **TJTP-Norrbotten** targeted communities were not involved due to perceptions that re-skilling/training measures would be seen positively by those affected, while in **TJTP-Stara Zagora**, the resistance to the coal phase-out by miners disincentivised the authorities to engage them in dialogue processes.

Another factor was whether policymakers believed that specific community knowledge that was needed beyond what representative organizations could provide. This was highlighted by national level interviewee in **TJTP-Norrbotten & Gotland**, noting that the involvement of citizens or less-engaged communities would have taken place if there were specific questions requiring direct citizen knowledge.

A third factor, related to capacity-issues already noted, was whether public institutions had the resources to deploy diverse participatory tools suited to different groups. In TJTP-Stara Zagora, the national level interviewee reported lack of capacity/resources to tailor participatory tools to communities that were identified as less-engaged by the external consultants. This would have required designing processes in different times of the day, providing caretaking responsibilities, etc. A lack of participatory skills in policy making processes and sufficient understanding about the (consequences of) transition were highlighted in different case studies as a factor that deterred authorities in involving directly citizens. In the **Rhenish case**, the need for clarity on the understanding of the concepts being used in the processes, such as participation and structural change was underlined. An interviewee from the **StStG** noted the need to "sensitise" citizens to what democracy means, which includes a sense of responsibility to inform oneself proactively in order to be able to participate in decision-making. When it comes to engaging citizens in the regional sustainability transition, the lack of clarity and understanding of key concepts such as 'structural change' was highlighted as a challenge that needed to be further tackled. Considerations of involving local communities directly in calls for funding opportunities under TJTP in **Bełchatów** further raised scepticism among governmental interviewees. Imagining the involvement of the local community in getting information and applying for projects under the measure, a regional level interviewee was doubtful about the success due to the lack of such habits and suitable knowledge: '*even if there is an office responsible for informing people about the opportunities, it is not very popular'*. Similarly, research in the **Katowicki Coal Region** noted the need of further efforts in basic education about the transition and how one can imagine their future in changing coal regions (esp. among youth). A perspective from of an external consultancy who was involved in coordinating the design of **Groningen's TJTP**, however, draws attention to the fact that citizens are not necessarily lacking relevant knowledge. The interviewee noted that language and knowledge styles between lay citizens and experts/policy practitioners is often too different, and this was not sufficiently recognised or tackled. This signifies that policy institutions may act in exclusive and disempowering manner simply vie the conditions of communication they adopt. The interviewee further highlighted that one of the challenges for policy practitioners in recognising citizen input as meaningful is that it is not provided in 'policy language'. Citizen expectations and wishes

would need to be 'translated' into clearly understandable policy options and tangible choices for policy practitioners to see value in them.

> *"Because they (citizens and policymakers) spoke different languages, maybe you need someone who can understand, [...] who can talk to civilians and make the translation from their wishes to a policy"*
>
> External consultant involved in the coordination of the design of TJTP-Groningen

When it comes to the policy implementation stage, as mentioned earlier, some measures considered the engagement of communities from the perspective of their involvement in project-based activities. The rationale was to ensure that social, cultural and labour market actions perceived by governments as easing the burden of the transition or providing a more secure future, engage groups that were hard to reach or to engage under interventions. Targeted approaches in attracting the participation of such communities were evident in Groningen's TJTP and the StStG in the Rhenish District and Lusatia. In the first case, this included discussions with identified less-engaged communities on how labour re-integration measures can be better tailored to their needs and expectations. In the second case, work on developing strategies for social inclusion of disadvantaged communities in the structural transformation is currently underway. However, an interviewee from the coordinating agency (Future Agency) acknowledged that this is a difficult endeavour. To access these communities, support from organised civil society and community structures is perceived crucial, while the agency also plans to approach them via civil registers. Beyond ongoing efforts targeted at certain communities, interviewees involved in StStG in the two German case studies spoke about the foreseen funding in diverse activities that would aim to include participation of the public at large. These activities can fall under any of the key objectives of the respective programmes in the regions to implement StStG. In this way, public institutions aim to respond to observations that only limited number of citizens proactively take part in participatory processes open to the public and make the structural transformation process more transparent and inclusive.

In policy measures where participatory processes explicitly targeted citizen engagement and a balanced representation of society (NPG/Groningen; Master Plan/Gotland), inclusive participation was pursued with targeted efforts. In these cases, interviewed policy practitioners generally shared the priority of designing and implementing different participatory tools in terms of formats of the activities, location and time, so they can suit diverse social backgrounds and age groups. The use of easy-to-understand tools or tasks including digital mapping, walks, etc. was important so that participants feel comfortable expressing their concerns and needs. Scheduling needed to suit different agendas, thus, decisions on the timing was important. Interviewees from Goland also highlight the importance of providing participants with materials in advance in an accessible language and with a clear explanation of the process they were takin part in. As part of this, organisers were aware of the importance of explaining to citizens how their input can impact the final provisions of the measure. These practitioners admitted that this was a difficult task and its success depended on the level of trust between citizens and institutions: "*But this, I put it on us, because it is not really the citizen who is the obstacle, but rather how we meet the citizen",* the interviewee observed.

The primary approach to supporting participants' capacity to engage was through interactive and engaging participatory tools. Playful activities such as serious games and role playing, that are both simple and explore citizen views, were highlighted by an interviewee involved in the NPG. Specific social groups may require more attention and targeted efforts. For instance, elderly and youngsters who tend to think in the frames of individual problems (family level) and need more support in recognising and articulating opinions regarding collective problems. In Gotland, interviewees highlight that citizenship capacities are particularly promoted via CSOs.

In response to the recognition that participatory processes, may still exclude certain social groups, both measures mentioned above, made efforts to tailor participatory mechanisms in a way that can increase the capability and willingness of identified communities to participate. In Groningen, the company responsible for the participatory processes under the *Toukomost* programme invested in efforts to overcome distance barriers, for example. An interviewee from the company reported that they travelled to the remote rural parts of the province in attempt to raise awareness about the programme and attract the engagement of communities living there. Reaching out through organisations that have good access to targeted communities was also mentioned in both case studies, for instance relying on schools to reach to youth. Another example under Gotland's Master Plan was to organise open meetings near arranged activities for small children to engage with their parents. Timing was also highlighted as important for this group, with the participatory process adapted to parts of the day when parents were more likely to be available.

Nevertheless, practitioners from Gotland underlined the capacity demands of integrating direct inputs of all relevant and diverse communities and citizens, particularly those less engaged, in targeting policies. This stemmed both from the difficulty in recognising whose participation needed to be facilitated and because of the reliance on the work of the non-governmental sector. Interviewees shared that as the Master Plan follows a territorial and thematic logic, it can be challenging to identify specific communities whose views should be considered: '*one thematic area is wind power development. But this is not elaborated on taking into account particular social groups*.' Moreover, building capacity and engagement of those that are not part of CSOs was highlighted as challenging. This issue was worsened by the lack of resources and capacity in mobilising citizens, especially among less professionalized community organizations.

Table 17 provides an overview of the community or citizen barriers and facilitators for participation highlighted by interviewees above.

Table 17: Key community or citizen barriers and facilitators for participation highlighted by interviewees, distinguished by category

	Trust and opposition	Knowledge, time and interest	Distance or territorial scale	Social cohesion, culture
SA - BAT				(-) Lack of experience among employees in participating in such labour agreements is perceived as a barrier to their engagement.

	Trust and opposition	Knowledge, time and interest	Distance or territorial scale	Social cohesion, culture
Master Plan - Gotland	(+) Trust between citizens and local government enhances the openness of institutions towards citizens in participatory processes.	(-) Timing of participatory processes, lack of awareness about participation and lack of activities for small children during such processes hinder the participation of youth and families with small children.		
NPG – Groningen	(-) Lack of trust in public institutions among citizens living in rural areas leads to scepticism and resistance to get involved in policy making processes. This is especially recognised in the most deprived neighbourhoods across rural areas.	(-) Difficulties in fully grasping what the measure is about or how it impacts the lives of citizens poses a barrier to participation. (-) Immediate family priorities and problems among some communities are barriers to participation.	(-) Distance and lack of connection with major cities are significant barriers to participation for citizens in peripheral towns.	(+) Sense of belonging to close-knit groups and civic responsibility within them facilitate collaboration and participation, esp. in small villages.
SA - KCR		(-) Lack of relevance of the measure to communities beyond the active mining workers close to retirement leads to lack of interest among these other communities.		
StStG – Lusatia	(-) Male dominance in decision-making processes may be limiting female participation.	(-) Possibly, the lack of interest in the policy measure hinders participation among people living in villages/rural areas.	(-) Distance and limited mobility options hinders participation among people living in villages/rural areas.	
RDS – Norrbotten		(-) The lack of time or motivation among citizens to understand the complexity of the strategy is assumed to represent a barrier to citizen participation.		
StStG-Rhenish District				(-) Diminishing physical and social infrastructures in rural areas affects negatively residents' participatory culture
IDP-Stara Zagora		(-) Complexity of the measure is perceived as a barrier to participation.		

	Trust and opposition	Knowledge, time and interest	Distance or territorial scale	Social cohesion, culture
TJTP - BAT		(-) Difficulties among citizens in fully grasping what the measure is about or how it impacts their lives poses a barrier to participation. (-)Lack of knowledge, skills and routine among individuals in engaging in project development is seen as a barrier to open funding distribution processes to citizens.		(-) Minimal civil society activity in coal regions as a result of 'industrial culture'; inactivity and lack of interest in communal affairs, of new ideas, focusing on work and income (note of the research team)
TJTP-Gotland		(-) The difficulty for citizens to engage in technical and strategic discussions limits the motivation of institutions to engage with citizens.		(+) Smaller community where a collaboration culture exists facilitates participation. (-) Assumption that transitions are viewed as a positive change by citizens and affected communities limits the motivation of institutions to engage directly citizens.
TJTP-Groningen		(-) Lack of capacity and knowledge to meaningfully deliberate on TJTP priorities. Citizen participation would have required developing knowledge on the regional challenges and devising targeted questions.		
TJTP - KCR				(+) Mining community strongly organised via trade unions is seen as facilitator to participation. (-) Weak organisational structures and lack of capacities within local organisations representing youth and elderly seen as a barrier. (-) Minimal civil society activity in coal

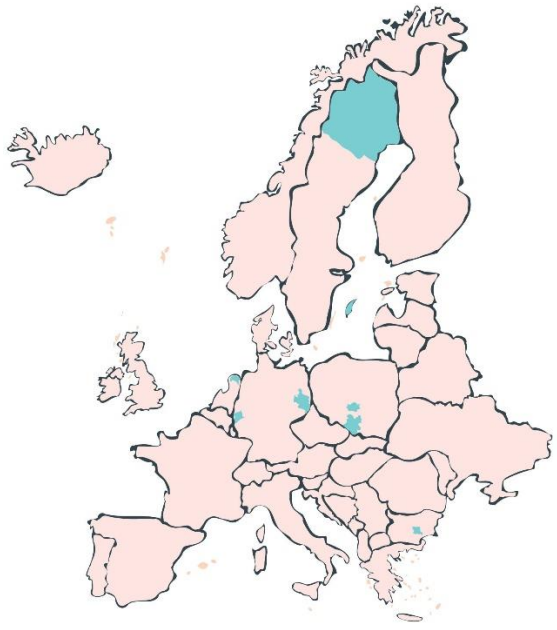
	Trust and opposition	Knowledge, time and interest	Distance or territorial scale	Social cohesion, culture
				regions as a result of 'industrial culture' (notes of the research team)
TJTP-Lusatia				
TJTP-Norrbotten		(-) Difficulty for citizens to engage in technical and strategic discussions		(-) Assumption that transitions are viewed as a positive change by citizens and affected communities limits the motivation of institutions to engage directly citizens.
TJTP-Rhenish District	(-) The persistent opposition to the transition away from coal among communities formed around the mining industries makes their engagement difficult.			
TJTP -Stara Zagora	(-) The scepticism and opposition of some communities (mining workers) to the transition deters openness of institutions to engaging them directly.	(-) Complexity of the measure is perceived as a barrier to citizen participation. (-) The difficulty for some communities in specific (e.g. minorities) to understand the meaning and logic of the (energy) transition hinders their participation. (-) Limited internet access and digital literacy, predominantly among people living in smaller towns and villages hinders awareness on the transition and consequently participation.		

5. Factors affecting deliberative citizen participation – the perspective of communities

5.1.1. Structure of the chapter and key caveats

This chapter focuses on the research outcomes from focus groups carried out with selected communities in the eight case study regions (see Figure 3). Each of the focus group dialogues comprised of three stages: (1) broad layperson description by the research team of the concept of sustainability transitions, followed by a discussion on how groups currently understand these transitions in their everyday life – in terms of ongoing experiences and observations, or anticipations for the future; (2) broad layperson description by the research team of the concept of participation in social life and policy making, followed by a discussion on the groups' awareness of, or experiences with, participatory practices; (3) dialogue on communities' sentiments towards participation in policies for sustainability transition, and perceptions they hold as to which factors (could) facilitate or impede their participation.

Figure 3 DUST case study regions



This chapter provides accounts of focus group discussions. Results are presented on a case-by case basis, to account for different context specificities and allow for the role of socio-demographic characteristics of different sub-communities within the broader community, as selected by the case region. In the Rhenish District, two focus groups were scheduled in April 2024 to gather qualitative data on youth participation. However, there was low attendance, with only one participant joining each session, which made effective discussion impossible. As a result, data collection was shifted to an online questionnaire. Due to the different format of the research in this case study and due to the longer period required to obtain the data, this case study is not covered in this report.

For each region, the first section briefly describes the selected community and the reasoning behind the identified sub-communities. More information on the composition of each focus group within each case study is available in Annex 2.

The second section discusses the understandings that sub-communities hold regarding sustainability transitions, and the implication of this on their life and place of living. Whilst this section aims to set the scene for the later discussion on factors affecting participation, special attention is provided to the degree of similarity, or divergence, between the views of the sub-communities, within the generally selected meta community and the time horizons enclosed in narratives. These characteristics are particularly important for deliberative participatory processes, as they indicate the state of consensus and inclination to look towards the future.

The third section within each case study region presents the core of the focus group research, centred on the role of the communities' willingness and ability for participation. As introduced in the methodology chapter, the research distinguishes between several willingness and ability factors that could positively or negatively impact communities' participatory attitudes and behaviour. While in practice the factors are often interlinked, categorisation helps to distinguish the various aspects in place and how they relate to each other. The categorisation also helps to understand which factors potentially exacerbate or enhance the strength of another/others. In case certain factors were not found to be relevant, and were not discussed in certain case studies, these factors are omitted.

Several caveats should be noted in advance. Cultural differences and variations regarding past experiences of participation have influenced the extent to which participants felt open to spoke and effectively articulate views on the topics they were presented with. For instance, researchers involved in the Dutch case study noted that phrasing questions in a comprehensible way was not straightforward, despite all efforts of adapting the language to a lay citizen level. At the same time, a distinctive cultural characteristic may have proved helpful, as researchers note that participants were outright direct in making clear that a question was not clear to them. Researchers involved in Gotland's case also reflect on the experience of meeting citizens in the focus groups, noting that thinking of participation in a broader sense (esp. when one does not have prior experience) was found more challenging for participants to pin down in terms of what that might mean in practice, and which processes it actually refers to, for who and when. Consequently, the analysis of the material indicates that in some cases participants referred to participation in more general terms, which could be related to participation in community activities or local actions promoting environmental sustainability.

Additionally, what has become evident as part of the research process is that participants did not always discuss the question at hand in reference to the social group whom they were invited to represent in the research. This is evident in instances where participants refer to other groups that they perceive exposed to the transition or facing barriers to participation. It is also worth noting that some participants belonged to a more active segment of the selected less-engaged group. This may have contributed to their tendency to refer to other communities, rather than spoke about their own experiences. Nevertheless, the contributions of these participants are highly valued as they could articulate clearly what (factors) enhanced their ability or motivation to be more active.

Finally, participation in the focus groups in the case regions of Gotland (SE), Groningen (NL), and Norrbotten (SE) was encouraged by means of gift vouchers.

5.2. Bulgaria: Stara Zagora

5.2.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

The meta-community selected for the focus group research is women, chosen due to their unique historical, social, and economic roles within the region. Despite Bulgaria being often described as a patriarchal society, women have historically played a significant role in the social, cultural, and educational spheres. During the socialist era, an ideology of gender equality was promoted, leading to substantial female participation in the workforce, with women comprising nearly half of the workforce by the late twentieth century. Bulgarian women have a high involvement in some traditionally male-dominated fields such as science, mathematics, and engineering. Despite this significant economic contribution, sectoral segregation persists in post-socialist Bulgaria. Certain sectors within the energy industry, such as HR, administration, accountancy, procurement, and lab testing, remain predominantly female domains, while technical roles are largely held by men. Women are seen as underrepresented in decision-making and policymaking, and in sectors like power engineering, where technical jobs are predominantly reserved for men. This marginalisation underscores the importance of focusing on women as a meta-community.

The selection of sub-communities in Stara Zagora aims to explore factors affecting participation across three different generations, incorporating sectoral dimension as well, provided the policy focus on coal and energy sector in the sustainability transition. While age differentiation and sectoral occupation have been the leading rationales in the selection, the description below provides some additional detail on the characteristics of each group that took part in DUST research:

1. Retired employees from the mining and energy sector, aged 62 to 82, with diverse professional backgrounds in the energy sector, including accounting, vocational training, environmental compliance, and infrastructure maintenance; two had university education, while the others entered the workforce after secondary school.
2. Women working in and/or from families employed in the mining and energy sector, middle-aged adults between 45 to 55 years old, employed at different industrial sites, both state-owned and private; all with university education and long work experience in different fields such as project development, accounting, health and safety, etc.

3. Youth from Stara Zagora who currently live in another region due to work and study but connected to Stara Zagora; some come from mining families, while others do not; with experience in project-based activities related to just transition.

Some of the participants within groups have known each other due to common workplaces or activities they occupied themselves in the past. The participants also have known the research team in advance. It is thanks to this previous acquaintance that they agreed to take part in the research.

5.2.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

In Stara Zagora, transitions are associated with socio-economics, quality of life, environmental, and cultural aspects which map across different temporal references. Some interpretations relate to issues relevant for the specific communities, their lives and families, whilst others connect with the region. In minor cases, issues are perceived at national scale.

Socio-economic interpretations across groups are slightly different, and predominantly future oriented, carrying a negative connotation. For the three groups the sustainability transition is strongly associated with *future* **loss of jobs,** and **negative impact on quality of life/well-being** (foreseen lower income which will require spending cuts and adjustments to lower food quality, healthcare, leisure activities, etc.) due to a phase-out of coal mining. Such expectations are built upon comparison to current quality of life, where employees/pensioners from the mining and energy sectors (FG1&2) have been earning comparatively high salaries/pensions. Female employees express both positive and negative stances towards a future that requires re-skilling and occupation in a new field. Their concern pertains to the ability of everyone affected to undergo such professional change, rather than how/if they specifically will be affected. These concerns may stem from the fact that other family members, such as the spouses of some female participants, also work in the industry. Similarly, youth talk broadly about the economic consequences for the region, identifying as a main challenge the **financial insecurity,** and the inability or unwillingness of the affected working class to re-skill. They consider that **people must be supported to choose and transition to their future occupation**. However, the current uncertainty gives rise to scenarios of regional decline. Retirees express concerns about *future* **depopulation** of the region, and female workers spoke about a potential **need for re-location** to another region. It is evident that such interpretations relate to opinions that the government has failed to put in place measures to safeguard the transition in terms of new work places and a broader development vision. Retirees are also concerned with the **price of living,** referring to a possible increase in electricity costs once electricity markets are liberalised.

Aspects concerning the environment are observed predominantly in the *past* and *present*. The three groups indicate awareness and concerns over different issues within this field. Some female employees, presumably due to their occupational background, express awareness that current production practices in coal-fired power plants have been harmful to the environment, and voice health and environmental concerns stemming from overlooked standards regarding a future facility. They suggest that the application of new environmental technologies reducing CO_2 emissions is desirable as they can extend the life of existing mining and energy plants. Such investments are considered positively due to assumptions that they can contribute to a smoother coal phase-out. Retirees make associations between **increasing investments in renewable energy infrastructure and the conflict that such installations trigger with land-use,** leading to a "*wrongful repurposing of arable land*". This brings into the discussion, albeit only briefly, reflections on how rural areas in the region are impacted by the transition processes. On the positive side, retirees refer to **improvements in social practices when it comes to**

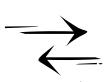
energy renovation on residential buildings. It can be assumed that this improvement reflects substantial investments, supported by EU-funded national programmes (under Cohesion policy), for home energy efficiency enhancements over the past 10 years. Youth participants are acquainted with diverse environmental practices in the region, which they associate with the **shift to a sustainable lifestyle and a growing culture of proactive participation**. This includes endeavours in the field of sustainable clothing, waterway cleanups, and nature restorations. The group perceives that there is an overall resistance to make changes to embedded everyday practices and lifestyle choices, which are not environmentally friendly. When looking towards the future, the youth group associates the transition with environmental improvements resultant of decarbonising the economy. They understand the shift to green economy to help respond to climate change problems. However, knowledge of the effects of climate change is, according to them lacking and this must be improved to achieve a more unified pro-environmental societal stance in the future. A more politicised perspective is brought up by the female employees who spoke on *future* **loss of energy independence and security**, which to them appears unreasonable provided the possession of local brown coal (lignite), referred to as a national treasure.

When the groups discussed a broader interpretation of transitions, it was evident that they perceived recurring or persistent processes and issues over a long time-frame. Retirees spoke more generally about a long-term process of **deepening social apathy,** and the private sector failing to act in ways that protect and benefit society. The current transition also triggers **associations with past experiences of structural transformation** – "*recurrent pattern of transitions failing to take place in Bulgaria"* – and a history of industries closing, for reasons unclear to participants amongst both groups of retired and active mining employees.

Key actors in the sustainability transition, as mentioned by participants, are the national government and large industry players, who are expected to invest in new environmental technologies. The government is seen to have failed to initiate a vision for the development of Stara Zagora, which could have prepared the region for the challenges ahead. A long-term energy strategy is also lacking, whilst considered essential in order to provide stability and security. Participants feel there has been very limited information released by the government regarding plans on the coal phase-out and its timetable. The perceptions of some participants that the transition will be able to deliver new job places hinges on "*a very good dialogue"* involving NGOs, people, businesses, universities, schools, and local authorities. At the same time, there are opinions that politicians hold substantial control and authority over how events (will) unfold – "*politicians dictate the scenarios"*.

5.2.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors



Trust

All three groups perceive that that trust in government institutions is an important factor shaping sentiments towards political participation, however it appears to hold more weight in the attitudes of retired and working females than of youth. Participants representing

retirees and working women spoke predominantly about the lack of trust in government, which significantly influences how they view and engage with political and economic systems. Youth participants do touch upon trust in public institutions. However, they find it more meaningful to spoke about issues of trust among citizens, and between citizens and organisations, initiating sustainability activities, which could facilitate the engagement of youth in a common cause. The sentiments of the three groups build upon experiences from *present* and *past* and relate to different entities: retired and working females refer predominantly to the two self-government levels, the national and local, whilst the youth find it easier to spoke in the context of local community activities.

In terms of the ongoing structural transformation in the region, distrust has been borne from the perceived failure of public authorities to provide the required responses in terms of solutions to economic challenges and a vision for a future development. This is a common view held across groups, although only the working women spoke from personal experience. For instance, references are made to coal-related companies, particularly the private rather than the state-owned, which have unexpectedly shut down recently. The situation triggers feeling of betrayal (especially of those already made redundant) and scepticism that communities will be protected. Female employees also express lack of trust towards trade unions, as the former are employed by the private coal mining sector whilst the latter represent the interest of workers in the state-owned mining sector. Tensions between state and non-state-owned structures appear to exist due to the identified focus of transition policies and trade union actions on the former.

The lack of confidence in governmental capabilities, and scepticism concerning their people-oriented intentions in the transition process, resulted in resistance to change as expressed by female workers. The conversation with retirees reveals that distrust in decision-making can also motivate individuals to become more involved. This is evident in the underlying logic presented in the conversation: participants argue that due to the perceived lack of transparency and inadequate measures to address industrial closures, decision-making processes need to be more inclusive. Thus, through their engagement, citizens can ensure that policy makers will take good decisions aligned with their needs. This seems to drive the group's willingness to scrutinize the process more closely.

Focus group evidence suggests that for retirees and working females the key to improving trust in public institutions is held by policy makers, whilst for youth, the key actors are NGOs/CSOs. Retirees spoke about how trust can be improved based on tangible effects from government actions, particularly in terms of investments in new production facilities and re-skilling schemes. This means that rebuilding trust hinges upon restoring the community's positive expectations towards the governmental capacity (and willingness) to provide what they identify as needed. Female workers' view differs on this as they argue for increasing transparency by more direct democracy. The group makes different suggestions as to the forms of desirable direct democracy – from enabling a fruitful dialogue between different actors incl. citizens, NGOs, businesses, universities, and local authorities, to referenda, which may imply a desire for larger decision-making power to be shifted to citizens. Essentially, they appear to support to a greater extent a role for communities in decision making processes.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

The perceived relevance of policy measures to one's economic and social life emerged in focus group discussion as a crucial factor for the engagement of communities in political life. Both groups of female retirees and active employees identify themselves as relevant target groups of transition measures, while also highlighting that they feel excluded from these. They believe that inclusive transition measures should consider the impacts on workers in the mining and energy sectors and incorporate bottom-up input. Currently, policy discussions on the transition seem to ignore the future of this community, leading to conclusions that policy thinking is not inclusive. This, in particular, refers to the basic need of job security. In the context of Stara Zagora, participants do not see policies to create new jobs for those who have been made redundant being implemented. A sense of exclusion is shaped by the previously mentioned perception that governmental bodies fail to effectively plan for job creation and manage the environmental impact of industry closures. This is felt even more strongly in private coal mining companies, where workers are uncertain that public policy measures targeting coal mine employees will cover them and not only state-owned mining companies. It can be inferred that 'relevance' in this discussion also refers to participations perception of how relevant their life and future socio-economic situation is for policy makers and for transition processes. They talk about the lack of social security, such as the lack of action plans for redundant workers.

For the transition process to be inclusive, focus group participants expect that authorities should be engaged more actively in addressing territorial impacts, asking "*what will be happing here*". By reflecting on such questions, new policies can prepare actions conducive to transforming the "*fate*" of the region or territory, and in particular prepare options for local workforces' transition. Inclusivity of transition measures is therefore understood as policies that would cater for interests of the coal mining workers in socio-economic sense: "*there must be new production facilities to take on this workforce"*.

In summary, both groups recognise the relevance of (economic) transition measures to their life and the region, while noting the perceived lack of a policy direction as to how the region could create new economic foundations to employ workers made redundant. Participants do exhibit strong interest regarding discussions in this topic: "*there should be a direction, new jobs should be created*". It is notable that the government (together with the private sector) is expected to lead on creating such new direction.

The views of the youth group are significantly different from the two other groups, and this can be attributed, at least partly, to the fact that participants do not see themselves as directly affected by the transition. According to them, the region needs investments in community building activities that can stimulate proactive participation. They talk about the lack of public policy attention and investment into the 'social fabric' of the region, which can promote relationships, foster collaborations and a sense of belonging. It can be presumed that such activities are seen relevant by the youth due to a perceived lack of social cohesion, which, according to them, is a stepping stone for proactive participation.

Empowerment/powerlessness

Power, empowerment, and powerlessness were discussed by participants both in terms of the need to undergo (economic) transition and, more generally, in reference to the quality of democracy in the country. These concepts are not discussed based on direct

experiences with power within deliberative participatory processes. The groups share prevailing perceptions of powerlessness vis-à-vis the established system of political decision making, which deters their aspirations for proactive participation. However, as highlighted in the trust section, some participants do hold hopes regarding community empowerment via processes of citizen participation.

Retirees talked about empowerment from the lens of comparison between the socialist regime and 'transition' to democracy in the 1990s. They referred to the lack of actual change, and the perceptions that the political system is dominated by the same actors and culture of the past. The group agrees that "*democracy is just on paper*" and that their participation in decisions related to past transitions is "*illusive*". Similarly, for female workers, sentiments of powerlessness stem from perceptions that the economic transitions (current and past) have been externally imposed. They felt that they – and other citizens - often lack control over their economic future. Instead, their livelihood is vulnerable to abrupt changes based on hierarchical decisions, over which they have no influence. An element in this sense of powerlessness was the lack of information from decision-makers regarding the transition process and investment projects that will affect them directly. Participants expected the national government to "*come up with a clear statement as to what steps should be taken*" but the lack of relevant (and stable) official information reduced their ability to form opinions and influence decisions in any way. The view of this group also aligned with the group of retirees in their perceptions that political participation lacks efficacy. Participants observed that experiences with formal (voting) and alternative (protests) forms of participation did not lead to positive change. They suggested that participatory practices involving citizens, which bring in tangible outcomes, would increase the sense of empowerment and motivate participation.

The youth group shared some similar views, particularly regarding the quality of information about the transition and its effect on empowerment. They highlight that the often-circulated news items on political scandals, lead to a sense of disillusionment with political life. Other sentiments shared by the participants are more unique to this group. They suggested that building a sense of empowerment among female youth is dependent on their perception of own competence on the subject. Currently, this feeling of being competent is lacking and it deters their ability and motivation to spoke up.

Social influence

The affected community of female workers in Stara Zagora reflect on the current fear of losing their occupation and previous experiences of failed industries. They recognised that due to the repetitive or continuous occurrence of economic insecurity and governmental inaction in past decades, there is a prevailing way of spokeing and thinking about a 'transition' and about 'government actions' in society. It is a way dominated by sceptical and cynical language that has become widely accepted. This is evident in the language of focus group participants themselves, spokeing about how "[economic] *transitions fail to take place*" or "*people think that irrespective of what they do, nothing will change*". This increased the likelihood of individuals adopting similar perceptions and understandings as those prevailing in society. Participants also reflect on the potential for this dominant imaginary to change by looking at experiences with participation from abroad, noting the strong role of civil society organisations in Western Europe. They, however, reiterates the negative assumptions that such engagement seems unachievable in the local context.

Another issue raised by the youth group is the repetitive pattern in discussions surrounding the transition. They emphasized that inhabitants in the region are currently discouraged from engaging in such conversations, as previous discussions have frequently led to a deadlock, primarily due to the arguments of some groups that substantial number of people may be left unemployed. The youth participants, however, highlighted that social influence can also be productive in promoting participation. They referred to some local green initiatives led by young people that set a positive example and provide a model that other youth want to replicate. The participants noted that such examples have motivated them to engage in an initiative to envision a climate-change future by developing an escape room.

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

Participants from the group comprised of retirees have long experience being part of the mining community and associate this factor with social norms that developed into an established working culture in the state-owned mining or energy facilities. They note the accepted patterns of work behaviour over generations and across different members of the community, which have supported minimal productivity, inefficiencies and unfairly high pay. In the narratives that the retirees share, this working culture is tied to the reasons why part of the community employed in the sector is resistant to any activities that link to a transition away from coal. Such transition, according to retirees, is associated by these members of the mining community with higher requirements in terms of skills and a demanding working environment.

The youth group instead made reference to existing norms in the way society shapes expectations regarding roles and behaviours. Gender still plays a role in this, imposing gender stereotypes that hinder a more pro-active female participation.

Indirectly, the research work provides a basis to observe the role of family norms and dynamics in decisions to engage in participatory processes on the sustainability transition. This is evident in the actions of one of the invitees to the group of working females who declined to join the group due to a spouse – working in the industry – opposing to her participation. The situation indicates that taking part in discussions on the transition may depend on collective family decision-making and include respecting or adhering to the preferences of a spouse or other family members.

Ability factors

Accessibility

Across different dimensions of accessibility – access to political processes, to information, to venues or the accessibility of the language – two of the groups, the retirees and working women, consider that the lack of access to political decision-making more significantly obstructs their participation. Youth, on the other hand place stronger emphasis on the accessibility to information and language as a barrier to participation.

First, concerning accessibility to political processes, the groups of retirees and working women are much more vocal compared to youth in expressing views of absent dialogue-based or deliberative forms of participation, perceiving this as one of main accessibility

obstacles in engaging with policy measures for sustainability transition. Participants believe that there is a lack of participatory tools deployed by public institutions aiming to engage them in the process of planning the transition. They underscore that their participation in political life has been limited to more traditional forms such as voting in governmental elections.

Second, in terms of access to information and language, it emerged that both groups of retired and working females are highly dependent on electronic media (TV; social media). There is no mentioning of trade unions or other local or non-governmental organisations where participants discuss or obtain information regarding the transition. It can be inferred from the conversation that these communities, esp. the current female employees, are **particularly interested in information that has an immediate effect on their lives** – e.g. the timeline for closure and stages of the transition of their workplaces, as well as in the (national) political decisions regarding coal phase-out and state-supported transition interventions. In this context, the group of female employees notes the **lack of information from mining companies or power plants regarding the planned stages of company closure**. At the same, the working female participants do not discuss or raise issues regarding the accessibility or comprehensiveness of information regarding concrete future actions, which will take place locally and could directly engage communities. Access to information is also perceived as a major barrier by youth, stemming from the **lack of sufficiently trusted, accountable, and neutral sources of information** on the relevant public policies. Another obstacle they highlight is the **mode of communication on the subject, which is excessively technical and complex**. This understanding of the thematic scope of the discussions and discourages the young people to participate. Participants assume the effect is similar across the whole society.

Third, physical accessibility can be an obstacle for youth. The key reasoning is their choice of location for study and work, which can be (temporarily) outside the Stara Zagora region. The participants in the youth group share limited ability to participate, especially in face-to-face meetings. Retirees and working females consider that physical accessibility has not posed any barriers to their participation. Living in the urban share of Stara Zagora municipality, they have not experienced any mobility challenges when reaching to venues where elections, for instance, are organised. These normally take place in public buildings, such as local schools or community centres, nearby citizens' residency.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

The three groups did not discuss explicitly how their own knowledge and participatory skills influence their attitudes or decisions to engage in deliberative participation mechanisms related to the regional transitions. It could be presumed that one reason for this is a lack of experience with such participation, which makes reflections on this factor challenging. However, the evidence gathered during the research supports several observations as well.

Perceived lack of valuable knowledge is potentially a barrier for youth to participate. This can be observed in the hesitation of the participants to this group to take part in the DUST research itself. They often expressed doubt that they could make a valuable contribution to the subject of transitions and democratic participation. Their discussion on the diffusion of confusing notions about the coal-phase out and the required transformation in media or among citizens also signifies the broad challenge of forming an own standpoint.

Resources/Time

Having sufficient time to engage in democratic life was perceived as an obstacle by the youth group in particular. Time is a scarce resource due to work and study commitments, although if such engagements are planned well in advance and via suitable mechanisms, the group does not consider this factor to represent a major barrier. This is evident in the approach to conduct the DUST research as well where the group used digital means and met online. This spokes also about the likelihood of young people to adopt the use of digital tools to make participation more efficient.

Community mobilisation/identity

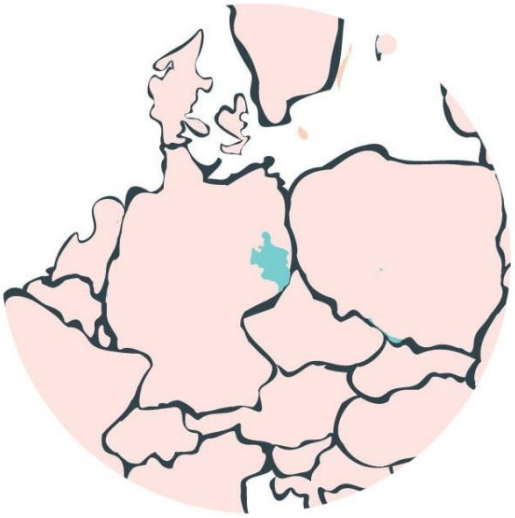
Discussions within the three groups indicate that a lack of sense of community among residents and the lack of local leaders are among the key barriers to participation. The group of working women makes sporadic reference to any community networks and local leaders who have recently mobilised them to take part in political or social life. This already suggests that there is a lack of structures that these groups can identify with and, potentially, a general absence of effective local leadership. Some of the working women explicitly recognise the lack of strong civic engagement mechanisms in Stara Zagora region, and more broadly in the country. They find this problematic when they compare the situation with Western Europe, noting the role of exiting civil society structures in uniting citizens. It also becomes evident that trade unions are not a structure that can mobilise the whole mining community as it represents employees from state-owned mining and power plants and not those from the private ones. As some of the participants in the groups of retirees (and of female workers) belonged to the latter group, they do not identify themselves with members of trade unions and their activities (protests). The retirees rather perceive the individuals mobilised by trade unions as a community which tries to maintain the status quo for own benefit (high-paid job in exchange to low-skilled work).

The youth participants, who have been engaged in community groups, such as within the municipal Youth Council and in project-based activities, considered that being able to join a larger community facilitates citizen participation. The current wide-spread absence of a sense of community is seen to have the counter effect. The participants stated that the root causes of this social fragmentation could be traced back to the traumatic experiences after the fall of the socialist regime that older generations experienced, and the following volatile economic development of the region. Their view was that people are now focused om challenges within their families, having to take care of their own affairs. Wide-spread inactivity among citizens was observed by this group – they had witnessed it within their local environment but assume that it takes place on a larger scale as well. In the field of sustainability and coal phase-out, another barrier to community mobilisation, according to the evidently pro-environmentally oriented group, is the lack of understanding of the consequences of climate change. All of these factors have created a fertile ground for weak social norms that could promote collective engagement or spirit.

Youth participants believed that practical participatory activities in (local) sustainability initiatives to counter this barrier and bring multiple benefits, as they can improve the capacities/skills of (young) people via methods of ‘learning by doing’. According to them, such activities are also conductive to making citizens/youth feel empowered due to the sense of belonging to a larger group with similar thinking. They can facilitate new relationships, including with marginalised groups, build common understanding, and enhance trust among participants.

An important actor mentioned by the youth was the municipal Youth Centre, a structure supported by the municipality of Stara Zagora. The participants of the youth group claimed that the proactive youth citizens who they knew have all been part of the Centre and attribute considerable levels of youth activism to its work. They knew youth leaders in the municipality whose efforts supported various community environmental actions and the construction of a community feeling. Youth mobilisation in sustainable practices was also supported via schools' environmental activities (e.g. engagement of school kids in water quality motioning activities), while participation in political life is cultivated via the competition for young mayor, organised by the local schools and the Youth Centre.

5.3. Germany: Lusatia



5.3.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

The selection of a meta-community in the case of Lusatia is informed by general policy debates regarding the structural transformation in the region and how it will affect different social groups. There is recognition in policy, confirmed through interview research, that the lives of young people will be particularly affected by the decisions made today regarding the transition. Youth will also play a critical role in the future development of Lusatia. However, there is a significant risk that economic insecurity and quality of life factors may drive young people to leave the region. This risk is particularly concerning within Lusatia, where youth make up only about five percent of the population. Stemming from this line of reasoning, young people are targeted as a meta-community in the case study. The term youth refers to a generally accepted definition at national level of individuals aged 14 to 27.

The meta-community is further divided into two sub-communities differentiated by gender. Below, a brief outline of the participants' background under the two sub-groups:

1. Male youth at age between 17-20, coming from several different small (rural) towns, one participant coming from a mining family.
2. Female youth at age between 17-21, also coming from several different small (rural) towns.

Two distinctive characteristics of the participants mobilised at the focus groups are worth highlighting. The first is their residency in small towns and rural areas, which more often face economic hardships. The second is their occupation. Participants are primarily apprentices in various vocational programmes in Sedlitz such as gastronomy and social assistance. The nature of these jobs and labour market conditions in these sectors are expected to be affected by the region's transformation. However, current education programmes do not seem to sufficiently cover topics related to economic transitions or integrate content on sustainability. This is presumed to pose a barrier to one's capacity to understand or imagine how the transition will affect their future.

5.3.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

In the case of Lusatia, the topic of sustainability transitions was introduced in the framework of the so-called structural change (*Strukturwandel*), a concept adopted in the policy domain in Germany, associated with climate neutrality, phasing out functioning open-cast mines, and labour market adaptation.

The two groups of male and female youth shared multiple similarities in the way they experience or imagine this structural transformation to affect them and the region. They drew on contemporary observations and spoke predominantly about the current moment or the near future. In both groups, positive change was mostly envisioned within the environmental and quality of life domains – apart from concerns of rising energy prices - while economic and social impacts triggered more negative considerations.

At first instance, when reflecting on the transition, the youth groups referred to observed changes in terms of **new renewable installations** – PV solar panels on home rooftops and on rural lands, an increase in wind turbines, and new production plants. Participants across both groups associate the reduction in fossil fuel gasses, due to the switch to renewables, with long-term **environmental benefits** in terms of air quality and enhanced protection of wildlife. Further associations are made regarding how renewable energy stimulates new 'green' economic opportunities. These will create jobs targeted at coal workers, according to participants. Male youth highlight the unequal burden this poses on those workers nearing retirement, and the general dissatisfaction among them with the lower wages these new jobs (will) offer.

Both groups perceived that the transition would affect their socio-economic situation in the direction of economic instability and insecurity, including their ability to provide for their families as highlighted by male youth. Neither group makes specific references to how they saw their own occupation changing in the future. They did, however, experience a **rise in living costs**, not least due to energy prices, which are particularly concerning for people with vocational training. Participants in both groups highlighted that these **jobs are not adequately remunerated,** and this can lead to financial instability in the near *future*. Residency in rural areas was seen to exacerbate this perception due to fewer job opportunities. These considerations were also made in the context of already existing challenges to social cohesion, highlighted by male youth. They were concerned with the **strain on community life** caused by income disparities and unequal access to job opportunities, as well as perceptions of unfairness among those working and struggling with low wages and rising costs, compared to those on social benefits who may have better financial security. Participants did not currently see how the transition could improve these conditions.

The perceptions of the two groups were more differentiated concerning environmental or green-oriented changes in spatial terms. Male participants perceived that the key benefits of the transition are being borne within this framework currently and in the near future. They referred to the **reclamation of land** from already closed open-cast mines for the installation of **renewable energy technologies**, as well as the **cultural and recreational offerings** being provided by artificial mining lakes. These create value both for the economy (tourism sector) and for citizens (leisure activities). While female participants also expressed positive outlook towards an increase in youth-relevant leisure activities, even beyond the reclaimed land, they envisioned potentially more negative developments due to **competing land-use claims**. This seems to be

driven by the high value they attached to the natural resources in the area and the assumption that their preservation may be at risks due to commercial developments/mass construction.

Finally, it is worth noting that some interpretations of the interplay between environment, economy, and space by female youth suggest envisioning a more integrated approach. They mentioned, for instance, that the process of adapting economic systems and spatial arrangements must simultaneously consider the preservation of traditions (of coal mining) and the land needs of other sectors (e.g. tourism, agriculture).

5.3.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors

Trust

Both groups of male and female youth identified trust in public institutions as essential in shaping their attitudes towards participation. When trust in public institutions existed, it positively influenced how participants perceived the outcome of their participation, assuming that participation would be meaningful if organized by trusted authorities. Several factors affected the level of participants' trust/distrust in institutions. The groups articulated their perceptions of trust on the basis of observations and experiences in their everyday lives and their surrounding environment, as well as on the basis of the opinions of those with whom they have strong social bonds – their families.

For both groups, trust depended on public institutions' sensitivity to communities' particularities, mainly to youth and those facing economic hardships. Dedicated policy efforts would assure young people that public institutions care about their community and respond to their needs. Following this logic, the groups' lower level of trust stems from experiences that some of their basic aspirations have not been met, namely youth-oriented activities, better public transportation, and safer environments. More generally, however, the groups observed that promises for improvements via ongoing policies have been unfulfilled, leading to **questions regarding the capabilities of public institutions** to form effective policies. The latter did not necessarily relate to the transition process but concerned a wider array of measures affecting quality of life in terms of income, safety, solidarity among citizens, etc. This created a perception of public institutions being unable to provide equal access to jobs and economic opportunities, leading to scepticism regarding their future success in ensuring a fair transition for those most affected.

Both groups recognised that communication on the transition – its consistency, openness, and regularity – was a precondition for trusted relations between citizens and governments. They noted, however, that the level of transparency on the subject the transition from coal to renewable energy, including through media coverage has been limited. Participants found this topic particularly relevant to them as they expressed fears regarding energy prices. **Transparency on the subject would allow them to form opinions on whether policy decisions are made fairly**, especially by those who experience a heavier burden from price

increases. Participants also pointed to the need to communicate regularly on the spending of transition funds allocated to the region, which underlines the **importance of accountability**. There was an expectation, expressed by participants, that key figures of representative democracy, particularly those closest to the local population, such as mayors, would communicate directly to citizens. According to them, such an approach would lead directly to higher trust levels and with increased ability (due to information accessibility) to participate meaningfully.

In conclusion, while both groups expressed doubts about whether public institutions have the competence and ability to achieve the promised outcomes of various (local) policies, they remained interested in transition measures due to the importance of accountability and inclusivity. Participants often made reference to experiences or observations of economic inequalities resulting from policies, and their harmful effect on social cohesion. As a result, the groups have strong aspirations towards inclusive economic planning, which can enhance equity, and a transition that would preserve the territorial capitals the participants perceive crucial for the regional identity – natural landscapes.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

Both groups highlighted that their willingness to participate in policy making greatly depends on the extent to which they perceived the policy measure as directly concerned with their needs. The issue that then arises, is the type of issues and needs participants considered most relevant to them and to what extent these were clearly related to the long-term regional sustainability transition. It is evident that both youth groups referred to their needs from the perspective of quality of life (recreational facilities, youth-oriented programmes, etc.). However, while some of the issues overlap, there were notable differences, with the male participants extensively highlighting community bonds, whilst the female participants mentioned safety and street lighting, daycare facilities and prices. What can also be noted is that when participants (FG2) expressed willingness to engage in more "*abstract*" themes as part of the transition, they refer to the local scale, mentioning decisions about development of town centres.

Talking generally about current policy measures, participants expressed perceptions that these are disconnected from youth needs, from what they regarded their beliefs, emotions, and everyday lives. It is unclear if participants had specific policies in mind, or rather faced difficulties in identifying the presence of positive public intervention in their social reality. Further into the discussion, they noted that public policy was something intangible and abstract to them. They also suggested themes relevant to them, which were usually covered by public policies, but were clearly not effectively communicated to youth. These related to job opportunities, addressing economic disparities, and improvements in the living environment. In part, participants attributed their difficulty in understanding how policy is, or will be, relevant in their lives to a lack of effective methods that engage youth. They referred to the need to create better communication strategies, to use modern communication platforms such as social media (Instagram), and to educate youth on contemporary policy issues and financing.

Another issue that emerged in the discussion with male youth wass the perception that designing policy initiatives is a rigid process, restricted to pre-defined agendas. This inhibited inclusivity and limited the space for diverse perspectives such as youth. If discussions

on policy initiatives favour instead an open exchange, avoiding pre-defined solutions and goals, all relevant issues and perspectives could be more thoroughly explored, according to the group.

Empowerment/powerlessness

Both groups discussed experiences and visions of collaborative participatory processes, which indicated feelings of powerlessness, and affects their willingness and ability to engage in the processes of transition. Being powerless was associated with perceptions of the value of one's opinion and influence from participation, and with the manner in which institutions communicate. On the first issue, female youth share experiences with informal participatory processes – for instance, in the role of student representatives - where they were left with perceptions that their opinions do not have equal or any value in discussions. The perception that contributions have differencing importance within this group indicated the presence of gender norms and stereotypes. Furthermore, participants in both groups expressed more general perception that the established way of taking political/formal decisions has traditionally ignored young people.

The importance of being a valued participant was further evident when the female youth discussed the desired format of a participatory process, emphasising in-person set-up and a workshop style. Both features were perceived as conductive in creating a feeling of commitment to the process on the side of decision-makers. In such a setting, people with power can show that they are willing and interested to spend time with citizens/youth and listen to what they have to say. It is the fostering of a sense of being valued and cared for that matters to the female youth. The conversation with male youth indicated a slightly different notion, in terms of what was important in making their participation influential. A view expressed was that this is ensured by the presence of a figure with power to take decisions, namely politicians. The engagement of the latter in participatory processes fostered a positive sentiment among male youth that participation will be meaningful.

> "Politicians should be involved, someone who can make a difference"
>
> *focus group with male youth*

The second issue, mentioned by both groups, related to regular and informative communication on the transition. For the participants, information is 'power' and thus it has an impact on their perceptions of powerlessness. The lack of comprehensive information on the process of structural change hinders their ability to become 'knowledgeable partners in decision-making processes'.

Social influence

Family discussions and social interactions significantly shaped opinions and awareness about the process of structural transformation and as such affect youth participatory attitudes and behaviour. Both male and female groups highlighted that currently they rely mostly on their close social circles to receive information about the regional transition or about activities in which they can get engaged, particularly those outside of policymaking. Family

conversations are generally the main space where youth discuss political topics. This highlights that the process of making sense and forming an opinion about something complex, such as the sustainability transition, is confined to relatively small circle of people, and presumably one that is comprised of people sharing common values and beliefs.

The formation of youth's opinions was also significantly affected by social media, including influential youtubers whose content is relatable to youth, as well as podcasts. The participants did not reflect extensively on whether this promotes or hinders their participation, but it is notable that an example quoted by one of the male youths is a podcast informing about the economic risks in the country in relation to measures to reduce greenhouse gases. Peers and local organisations in which youth have experience were other actors that affected the way participants understood the transition and its possible future impact on them.

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

While norms and values were not explicitly discussed within focus groups, discussions reflected cultural norms where traditional gender roles are still prevalent, influencing the level of participation and engagement of different genders. Female participants tended to hold stronger perceptions that their opinions are often not valued or taken seriously, although both groups shared observations of age-based hierarchy where younger people are perceived as subordinate.

Ability factors

Accessibility

Accessibility in its various forms had a significant impact on the capability and also the motivation of the groups to participate in policy making processes. Currently, it represents one of the key barriers to youth participation in the region, according to participants. Multiple factors emerged in the discussions and key obstacles were identified.

First, both groups repeatedly highlighted the lack of information on the structural transformation in the region throughout the discussion. They note the importance of communicating on the topic via modern and popular channels that youth use such as social media. As previously mentioned, accessible communication to youth participants means making information available regularly by figures who youth consider powerful to enforce change such as mayors and political parties, and other leaders close to them, namely school principals and club leaders.

Second, an issue that emerged in the discussion with male youth is the importance of comprehensible, honest, and relatable language when information on the sustainability transition and associated policy measures is made publicly available. The conversations with participants suggested that the language fails to bond with youth's own experiences, beliefs, or emotions. Information coming from public institutions was not found relatable and did not connect with youth, thus, its content lacks significance to them. This issue was closely related to the way policy relevance to one's life influences youth willingness to participate. The language

used by public institutions often failed to engage effectively the youth in policy discussions that they may otherwise find relevant to them.

Third, physical accessibility represented a barrier to the youth who live in rural areas or far from central locations. They experience difficulties to reach different venues due to limitations in public transport and thus are concerned with the effects of distance on their ability to participate.

Overall, the groups highlighted that they did not see possibilities to engage in participatory processes informing policies on the transition.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

It was notable that although both groups held knowledge that was relevant for transition, they found it challenging to relate this knowledge to measures. It is noticeable that both groups had significant local knowledge regarding the current state of public spaces, natural and cultural resources, the availability/quality of services relevant to them and desirable improvements in relation to these domains. It can be assumed, therefore, that participants are knowledgeable on issues that pertain to their current everyday life. Their professional occupation was another source of experience they drew on, indicating knowledge on labour market conditions in the fields of trade and hospitality, e.g. in terms of income disparities, unfair pay and general reductions in benefits. The participants, however, found it very difficult to link this knowledge to the practical meaning of structural change within the policy domain.

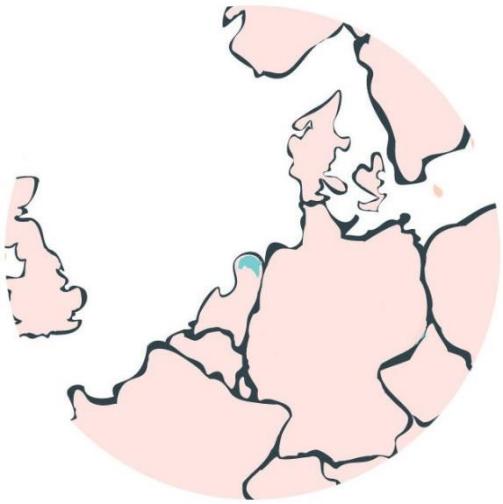
Digital access/tools

Drawing on the discussions within both groups, it is evident that currently, participants frequently use online media or social channels. However, these did not inform them about the structural transformations in their region. This presumably related to previously mentioned obstacles of limited and ineffective communication via such channels. It can be thus concluded, that while participants do not face difficulty in using digital technologies or online platforms, they did not perceive them as enhancing their ability to participate in policy decisions regarding the regional transition. They indicated, however, that social media in particular can facilitate participation in its basic form – provision of information – along with other sources. When considering the role of digital tools for participation, the female youth group highlighted the presence of in-person formats. As mentioned earlier, this stems from associating such formats with clearer perception that policy makers value citizen participation.

Community mobilisation/identity

Local trusted networks to which youth participants belong to can enhance participatory behaviour among youth. While conversations with youth did not indicate that these networks play currently a role in mobilising their participation in policy, it is the closeness and trust that participants have in these entities that make them suitable channels for informing youth about the transition and participatory opportunities. These include local youth organisations, schools, and community groups.

5.4. Netherlands: Groningen



5.4.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

The selection of the meta-community in the case study of Groningen is guided on first place by considerations of territorial disparities. The decision is informed by regional and local statistical data on the socio-economic conditions[22] and demography as well as indicators of "broad prosperity" (*brede welvaart*)[23]. These data sources indicate concentration of territorial inequalities and population shrinkage in rural and peripheral areas of Gronignen Province. This defines the selection of rural residents as a meta-community for the focus group research. The choice of locality for some groups is further narrowed down to the town of Old Pekela (*Oude Pekela),* driven by the scale of poverty, peripherality and acuteness of socio-demographic challenges.

The approach to selecting sub-communities was based on socio-demographic characteristics that are assumed to affect aspects of capacity and motivation for participation, as indicated in the DUST matrix. In the case of Groningen, these characteristics included age, place of origin (i.e. migration background) and socio-economic situation (incl. employment status). These three criteria guided the initial selection of sub-communities, namely youth, elderly, migrants, and those outside the labour market. However, difficulties in mobilising participants from these identified sub-communities led to the formation of two main groups: one defined by age, and the other by residence in a deprived area, specifically the town of Old Pekela. The description below provides additional detail on the characteristics of each group that was formed to carry out DUST research:

1. **Two focus groups gathered youth with rural origins**. Most of the participants currently live in the city of Groningen, but the majority grew up in rural parts of the Province. One participant in the first focus group moved to Groningen recently. At the time of the

[22] Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (n.d.) Informatie voor gemeenten. https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/dossier/nederland-regionaal/informatie-voor-gemeenten

[23] "Broad prosperity" is the well-being monitoring approach promoted by the Dutch central government, which is also used by sub-national authorities. A key source for DUST research purposes was the Sociaal Plan Bureau Groningen (2023). Monitor Brede Welvaart Groningen 2022. https://sociaalplanbureaugroningen.nl/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Monitor-Brede-Welvaart-Groningen.pdf

research, all participants study and/or work . Some of the participants in both groups are members of JOT (JongerenTop), a group of at least 25 young people from various backgrounds who discuss specific topics to provide youth a structural voice and influence government policy and implementation.

2. **Two focus groups gathered residents of a deprived area (town of Old Pekela) representing diverse social groups,** including senior citizens, students, unemployed individuals, and those with vulnerable life circumstances (e.g., psychological health challenges, housewives, individuals from modest economic backgrounds, recipients of state support, formerly homeless individuals). Some participants were active in local politics, action groups, and neighbourhood organizations, while for others, it was their first time feeling welcomed to participate and express their views on changes occurring in their living environment.

Participants were mobilised via collaboration with local organisations. With youth, snowball sampling approach among students at the University of Groningen was also used. The youth focus groups took place online to accommodate different time schedules, while the other two FGs took place in person hosed by local library/community centre. Although efforts were made to include individuals with a migration background by reaching out to organisations supporting migrants in the region, these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful.

5.4.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

In socio-economic terms, youth framed regarding the transition are informed by interpretations of costs and benefits, and how burden is or will be distributed spatially and socially. Partly, they saw socio-economic changes in conjunction with environmental and spatial ones. Their understandings refer to the *present* and the *future*. Most of the participants representing youth had experience with both rural and urban life, which informs their opinion that sustainability transitions are more burdensome on rural areas and farmers in particular than on urban areas. They pointed out that the positive outlook for the farming sector conflicts with the **increasing allocation of rural land for large-scale solar panel installations and wind farms**. Such observations are also made by deprived communities from Old Pekela. Spokeing from experience, the latter cited, however, different implications - **lack of benefits for local communities, changes to the visual aesthetics of the landscape, and potential disruptions to vegetation ecosystems**.

Urban educated dwellers (to which youth FG participants belong) were perceived by the youth groups to be in an advantageous position stemming from expectation that the sustainability transition will create new job opportunities in the *future*. On the contrary, one of the groups with deprived residents from Old Pekela (FG4) reflected on the *past* and *present* moment, noting the lack of employment in the region, especially for low-educated and manual workers and the re-location of traditional industries. Provided the already experienced economic difficulties and struggles with poverty, these participants are particularly concerned with the capacity of the region to recover from the negative impact of the closure of gas extraction in the *future*. The transition was associated with the **need to preserve the economic foundation** (employment) as a critical part of societal structure, as otherwise participants see the survival of the community being at risk.

Deprived communities from Pekela were aware that at *present* there are certain **sustainable social practices** which can contribute to more sustainable living. These include the use of public transport, solar panels/energy saving solutions, electric cars. Participants – especially elderly

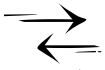
and those experiencing poverty, homelessness, or living in social housing – observed that such practices are largely inaccessible or unaffordable to them. Multiple reasons are cited included the lack of financial means and the lack of public support to increase capacity to use such opportunities. **Consumption practices** represent an area where citizens' preferences may potentially clash, as sustaining increased consumption necessitates a corresponding increase in (large-scale) renewable energy production. Participants also mention **waste** and the perception that certain environmental practices may overlook some negative consequences as in the case of battery waste.

Participants across the focus groups related the sustainability transition with environmental changes at different spatial scales. The youth predominantly make associations with global environmental improvements, while deprived citizens from Pekela (FG4) refer to an expected decrease of CO2 emissions at regional or national scale as a result of Dutch policies. The latter, however, also associate the effects of the stricter environmental regulations on traditional industries with the re-location of manufacturing companies and the loss of jobs among the manual workforces. Similarly to views expressed by the Polish retirees group, participants question the benefit of Dutch environmental efforts at the global scale.

Across FGs, references to the 'Groningen society' or 'people in Groningen' were made frequently. While the youth express wishful thinking that the sustainability transition brings economic opportunities and improvements to the communities in the region, participants from deprived areas are concerned that large companies instead of local inhabitants will reap the benefits.

5.4.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors



Trust

Trust was a significant factor in forming sentiments towards participation across the various groups in Groningen, with a more pronounced role among the groups from deprived areas (Oude Pekela). The majority of participants shared low levels of trust towards the public authorities and consider that this has driven citizens away from engaging in governmental actions, including in participatory processes. Focus group evidence suggests that there are various triggers that have shaped sentiments towards trust in government and trust within society.

The multidimensionality of trust is highly evident in the Groningen context, with several notions of trust (or distrust) being revealed in the conversations. Trust depends on tangible proof that institutions have the capacity to take good decisions and work for the public good of local residents or specific groups. Recent events - earthquakes, migrant crisis, Covid-19 – have shaped the view of institutions as unable to handle crises in a way that protects vulnerable communities. This view was particularly evident in conversations with citizens living in more deprived municipalities, such as Oude Pekela. Similarly, among youth participants, distrust has been rooted in the perceived inability of the (national/provincial) government to adequately

handle certain policy domains or act in response to emerging needs. Participants referred to observed governmental failure to alleviate the negative consequences of the gas extraction (experienced earthquakes in the area) as well as the burden of education costs that youth need to bear. This stemmed from an increased risk of accumulating debt after nation-wide changes in the system providing educational grants.

Trust in policies – particularly in sustainability transition measures – further depended on perceptions regarding whose interests are attended to in the policy and regarding equity in access to benefits. Participants from Oude Pekela believed that national and provincial policies on sustainability transitions do not serve the interests of, or benefit, rural Groningen, and fail to consider local conditions. This is both due to perceptions that rural areas (East Groningen) will have to carry a disproportionate burden from large-scale renewable energy installations - while having little local economic benefit - and that the adoption of sustainable practices, noting pressure to switch to electric cars, to invest in private renewable energy production, is unaffordable. Distribution of governmental compensation following local earthquakes was also considered to fail in applying the right principles of fairness. Citizens consider that allocation of compensations has not been completed in accordance with criteria reflecting who borne the highest cost. This perceived unfair distribution of compensation was felt by participants to have eroded social cohesiveness , with some households becoming envious over the unjustified higher support that others received.

While critical towards the content of policy decisions, it is also evident that participants often referred to procedural aspects of decision-making with which they were unhappy. Lack of transparency and information about current ongoing renewable energy investments exacerbated perceptions of distrust among participants from Oude Pekela. Participants remarked on misconduct on the part of the government, somewhat due to the belief that the governmental agenda is heavily influenced by the lobbying practices of large energy companies (Shell; hydrogen, solar and wind energy industries), and in turn this, diminishes the access by domestic/local actors to territorial resources (which can be harnessed for renewable energy). This led participants to suggest that transparency needs to be enhanced –in terms of how transition policies are communicated, how policies are designed, and how citizen input is utilised when collected via participation. This highlights the link between trust and perceptions of valuing one's voice, where transparency on how one's opinion was considered in the policy process enhances trust towards the policy holder.

Conversations within the groups revealed that (re-) building trust is nevertheless seen as a challenging, complex, and time-demanding process. Certain long-standing and contextual factors identified by the groups have been in play, shaping mistrust towards public institutions. Citizens from deprived areas in Oude Pekela referred to already established feelings of being neglected and left-behind due to peripherality (to national political centres and urban centres in Gronignen). Youth highlighted the sense of distance between public institutions – local governments in particular – and rural citizens, due to the administrative-territorial structure where several villages comprise one municipality. Still, the local level of government appears to be better placed compared to other levels to (re-)build institutional trust. This could be recognised in the opinions of participants from Oude Pekela (FG3) noting strong distrust towards the provincial and national levels, while the municipal level is considered more trustable. This is attributed to perceptions of proximity and the visible effects of municipal actions in citizens' immediate living environment. Trust in this case appears to stem from the generated, or restored, image of the local authority as caring and working for public good. Nevertheless, trust relations

are highly fragile and hard to re-build with everyone. This is evident in the stance taken by the other group residing in Oude Pekela (FG4), who expressed distrust towards the local level as well.

The ultimate notion of trust that participants (youth) bring into the discussion relates to trust towards others, rather than trust in public institutions. While one of the youth groups underscored that people in Groningen value their individual autonomy comparatively higher than other regions, evidence suggests that a sense of solidarity among local residents can be stimulated in the context of governmental inaction. Participants of FG2 spoke about bottom-up cooperative practices – e.g. the citizen initiative Villages of Groningen (*Gronignen dorpen*) – which generates social connections and promotes positive attitudes to participation in social life.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

Across groups, participants shared assessments of policy measures not meeting their community's needs and concerns and identify this as a factor that impedes participation. Youth participants (FG1) had a negative perspective on how sustainability transition policy measures relate to citizens' lives. Talking broadly, they expressed opinions that such measures fall short in meeting rural communities' needs and concerns. This can be attributed to various reasons, among which participants mentioned political representation being dominated by residents of urban areas. Youth (FG2) also recognised that challenging life conditions, such as those caused by earthquakes, significantly affect people's priorities and suggest that due to the pressing nature of their current situation, people are less likely to engage in sustainability-related thinking and actions. Talking from direct experience, participants from deprived areas shared perceptions of lacking ways to benefit from the sustainability transition. While they did not refer to specific policy measures, participants iterate a perception of inequity in terms of how benefits are spread across society, with advantages being yielded by large private entities or wealthier inhabitants. A participant from Oude Pekela also voiced a strong view that policy measures concerned with sustainability were framed in ways that could hardly be related to citizens daily lives, despite this perceived as an important factor. Sustainable development was presented in rather abstract terms and disconnected from the everyday experiences and concerns of most people. As a result, it failed to engage or motivate them to get involved.

It is evident that perceptions regarding the lack of inclusivity referred to diverse comparisons that participants make. A prominent one was between economically deprived and wealthier citizens (FG3), but also between the public (citizens) and private realm (large companies) (FG3,) and finally between Groningen and other regions in the Netherlands (FG4). Similarly to input from Gotland's group with rural women, participants from deprived areas in Groningen considered that the relevance of policy measures must be better articulated in terms of consequences for the local area.

Several actors were valued by participants as facilitating or enabling more inclusive participation. A local organisation - Sustainable Pekela (*Pekela Duurzaam*), which seeks to involve citizens in the development of a solar park and other sustainability measures, and the municipal administration, contributed to making citizens from deprived areas feel more included in the sustainability transition. SMEs were seen by one of the youth groups as important actors for enabling a more inclusive participation as well. SME owners are local citizens themselves, and this helps them have good access to rural communities and knowledge on how to reach out

to citizens successfully. They play a role in strengthen civic cohesion via the events they initiate. Looking forward, youth participants mentioned the importance of strengthening civic literacy education programmes in high schools and universities to foster youth capabilities for engaging in democracy. More broadly, participants from deprived areas (FG3) wished to see stronger considerations of local needs and concerns in provincial and national policies on sustainable transition.

Empowerment/powerlessness

A sense of being a valued participant, and of having an impact on the final decisions, was an important factor that shapes sentiments towards participation across groups in Groningen. Diverse experiences and values across groups bring out different understandings of being empowered or powerless. While seeing a tangible outcome from one's participation was important for most participants, youth appear particularly sensitive to the time horizon of this impact. Spokeing on experiences participating in local community initiatives, one of the youth focus groups highlighted the perceived lack of efficiency and efficacy of the participatory process. This was attributed to multiple reasons – the time that it takes to involve and coordinate large number of people, rules, regulations, and lengthy bureaucratic requirements – which all resulted in difficulty envisioning immediate effects of one's participation. A clear timeline and time horizon as to when the participatory process will bear fruit was important to the youth group. A different conceptualisation of powerlessness emerges among other youth participants (FG2), who focused more on the impact of individual behaviour and choices on global climate efforts. These participants felt that individual efforts may have limited contribution to reverse global climate developments. This perception was seen to negatively affect motivations to participate in sustainability efforts.

The views of participants who are residents of deprived areas were shaped more significantly by perceptions regarding transition policies and the governmental institutions that decide on them. The sense of empowerment for these groups depended on a mix of factors. These include aspects of the policy content and the participatory process: (1) availability of information on the subject matter, (2) reference in the policy to specific target groups with which the community identifies , and (3) participatory mechanisms tailored to the particularities of the different communities. Such facilitating factors were perceived as missing, which leads to perceptions that citizens are not provided with the required empowering conditions to meaningfully participate and impact participatory processes.

Participants from deprived areas also expressed beliefs that their participation shall be valued because they possess useful local knowledge. This needed to be recognised and rewarded by public institutions organising participatory processes (e.g. via a voucher). However, currently participants (FG3/4) expressed the feeling that policy practitioners do not value or trust citizen , and that participatory processes are not designed in ways that aim to accommodate opposing (extreme) views. Participants from both FG3 and FG4 raised issues about the level of equality in individual voices within participatory processes on sustainability transitions. They referred to the stronger position of large-scale businesses in consultations around sustainability policies at provincial or national level, as well as to the unequal standing between the rural and urban areas of Groningen in the eyes of the government. There was also the concern that citizen input does not have the same 'weight' as expert knowledge. This is another impediment to proactive participation.

Finally, a sense of being valued as a citizen was also linked to the language used in policy measures. Participants from deprived areas perceive that some of the terminology used create a depiction of certain citizens as having a particular 'deficiency' that needs to be 'remedied'. A specific example provided by the group is a measure tackling energy poverty via the provision of specialist advise on how private homes can become more sustainable/energy efficient. Participants share that the terminology used "*seems to assume that you are doing things wrong and should be doing things better"*. This excerpt indicates that language plays a role in making communities feel somehow criticised, undervalued, or that their personal autonomy is being undermined. This can create a defensive response towards public measures aimed to foster more sustainable practices.

Discussions highlighted that certain mechanisms can be put into place which can make a difference, such as channels that provide feedback to communities as to how their input was *recognised* and how it *made a difference*. While there is an accountability component there, what participants envision is not a simple checkbox exercise but visibility of the impact. As with some other case studies, groups conclude that participation that impacts policy outcomes can trigger a positive feedback loop and encourage further engagement.

Social influence

Across the different groups, there was a consensus view that one's social circle is influential in shaping views regarding climate/sustainability and sentiments towards participation. Overall, participants spoke about the lack of interest or support within one's social circle or family as a discouraging factor to engage with actions promoting sustainability or participatory processes. The youth attribute this to several reasons, among which that sustainability practices or priorities more generally are not widespread in rural areas of Groningen. This makes the topic of sustainability rather unpopular (as opposed to urban areas where one may rather experience positive social influence). In a complementary vein, participants from Oude Pekela spoke about the role of the widespread scepticism regarding the sustainability agenda, and the perception that peripheral villages and less affluent social groups have more to lose from such transitions. The prevalence of such opinions influences societal attitudes to policies promoting sustainability and participation therein. The source of income for households, and the way it would be affected by the sustainability agenda, also played a role, with being from a farming family seen to trigger resistance to participation due to negative opinions within the household. Similar views were expressed concerning families affected by earthquakes are concerned. Youth also consider that participation in politics more generally has a negative connotation within rural communities due to distrust – participation seen as "*just talking without any effect*". This negative image tended to reproduce demotivation to participation within social circles.

Although peer opinion played a role, some participants suggested that it may not be decisive in choices about actual participation. This was evident in the story of one participant who shares that her views regarding sustainability were not in line with those of her peers, but nevertheless she joined a youth association involved in sustainability actions. The youth also spoke about potential social pressure that people may experience if they publicly expressed (positive) opinions about sustainability. Participants refer specifically to Eastern Groningen.

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

Certain social and cultural norms were recognised by the groups to negatively affect motivations to engage in policy processes, or to do so beyond the local scale. Social norms associated with gender and age-based hierarchy were observed by youth participants to impact the community sentiments towards participation. The group referred to older generations, including among policy practitioners, who tended to view the youth as individualistic and lacking strong sense of civic responsibility when it comes to participatory processes. Additionally, conversations suggested that gender matters when it comes to the legitimacy and authority of youth statements. Participants agreed that particularly female youth felt their contributions were not taken seriously when interacting with the older men who typically shape policies and lead participatory processes.

Participants from deprived areas identified certain cultural traits associated with the (rural) population of Groningen, which are also explanatory when it comes to lacking motivation to participate in activities at provincial scale. This was attributed to fragmented regional identity, characterized by different local areas developing and promoting their own unique characteristics. As a result, local residents were perceived to identify more strongly with the local area they reside in and find matters important to other parts of Groningen Province as less relevant to them. This fragmented regional identity is seen to contribute to perceptions of marginalisation that are generated by earlier mentioned socio-economic and connectivity factors.

Ability factors

Accessibility

Multiple reasons associated with access to information, tone and language of communication, and the familiarity/accessibility of places where participation takes place, influenced attitudes towards participation among groups in Groningen. They considered that there was insufficient information about transitions and participatory processes. This can be attributed to the ineffective communication of public institutions that do not tailor communication according to different generations and community particularities. The right language and tone of communication played a significant role in shaping sentiments regarding the relevance of the policy, or the participatory process, to one's life. Participants from deprived areas highlighted, in particular, perceptions that discussions on sustainability were "*not at their level*" in terms of their social status or education. Sentiments that participatory processes on the transitions are "*not for them*" were also shaped by the complexity of the language. The youth group underlined that to overcome such barriers, outreach communication inviting citizens to participatory processes must clearly state that expert knowledge is not required.[24] Residents in deprived areas (FG3) still considered that information on sustainability policies, and how to take part in their formulation or implementation, must be made more accessible, for instance, by

[24] Researchers involved in the performance of focus groups received similar feedback on the DUST invite noting that they came to the meeting as the flyer literally stated that "prior knowledge was not needed".

setting up a permanent 'information counter' in the community centre, which could also enable direct contact to the municipality.

The type and accessibility of the venue where the participatory process takes place was also important for the majority of the groups. Places where events are organised were seen as intimidating by youth, as opposed to spaces considered safe and familiar (e.g. schools). The accessibility of such venues, however, can be compromised due to poor public transport in rural, and especially peripheral, areas. This was an obstacle highlighted across all groups. To facilitate physical accessibility, especially in small villages, participants from Oude Pekela suggested that events can be organised at popular public spaces such as community/sport centres, libraries, etc. Online tools were suggested by youth to enhance the scale of participation, albeit at the expense of its depth. Youth highlighted that the latter is undesirable as they would like to see concrete changes as an outcome of their participation, which requires face-to-face engagement and can take place in conjunction with free time activities, e.g. music festivals. While youth were in favour of non-profit actors overseeing the organisation of such events, they consider it important that political/policy figures are present too.

As mentioned earlier, the need for more culturally sensitive communication avoiding stigmatising language was also raised.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

Perceptions regarding having sufficient knowledge and the possession of civic education were considered important enabling factors for participation. There were different views across groups and individuals on the type of knowledge one needs to have to feel able or empowered to participate effectively.

Youth (FG1) appeared more likely to think they (and citizens more generally) possess the knowledge to engage in dialogues on sustainability transitions. However, such a positive perception was dependent on participatory processes explicitly acknowledging the value of layperson knowledge when inviting citizens. The group recognised that such acknowledgement is often absent, leading citizens – including themselves - to perceptions of inadequacy regarding their knowledge and ability to form an informed opinion in discussions.

Residents from deprived areas (FG3/4) appeared more doubtful regarding the knowledge they possess on sustainability topics. This stemmed, on one hand, from the higher share of residents in these areas with lower education, and, on the other hand, from the association of knowledge with information that one obtains from public administration. Issues of information accessibility and jargon language as mentioned above are, therefore, identified as hindering the formation of own knowledge. Yet, separate individuals from FG4 recognised that during discussions one happens to realise that they possess useful knowledge based on everyday experience. Such statements underscore that positive perceptions of having valued knowledge, even when it comes from own local experience, can reinforce awareness of empowerment in policy processes. However, the majority of participants in FG3 and 4, lacked platforms and skills to deliberate and learn about how to connect and 'translate' environmental and technical questions around sustainability with their local experiences and own life.

Youth (FG2) discussed also the importance of civic education from an early age. Learning about local politics and political participation at school from the age of 12 was highlighted by the youth group. It could be presumed that these groups consider the current provision of such education

either insufficient or not starting early enough, which represents an obstacle for youth engagement.

Resources/Time

Time was perceived as a practical obstacle among youth in particular. Young people often must manage different roles between work and education, leaving limited private time. Nevertheless, participants agree that if youth are motivated to participate (e.g. by an increased sense of being valued), this factor will not prevent them to do so. Valuing participation can take different forms, with participations mentioning financial remuneration, or a reward with a meal or drinks.

Digital access/tools

Across the groups, discussions on this factor revolved around the role of digital tools as online methods for engaging citizens in participatory processes. Digital tools were assessed predominantly in comparison to physical forms of engagement. Such tools are perceived mostly positively, however, some differing opinions - among one of the youth groups - are evident. Positive views appear dependent on certain preconditions. The usefulness of digital participatory mechanisms was seen particularly in the context of alleviating accessibility barriers related to large distances and poor public transport, as well as in view of efficiency gains. Communities also pointed to potential drawbacks.

Digital tools were perceived to enable wider participation of rural youth communities, as compared to older generations they more often do not possess a private car, and face challenges to access in-person participatory mechanisms. Interestingly, both youth groups (FG1 and FG2) appeared to place a high value on the personal physical engagement. However, while the first group still left room for a possibility to pair physical and virtual mechanisms to resolve accessibility barriers, the second group did not see digital tools as a solution, possibly due to the fear of negative impact on social relations. Communities from deprived areas (FG3) were in favour of digital tools if they would make participation more practical and attractive, noting benefits in terms of saving time. This view was however nuanced in the other group of this community (FG4), who reflect on observations of elderly people who struggle to keep up with the speed of developing digital technologies and lack comprehensive digital skills.

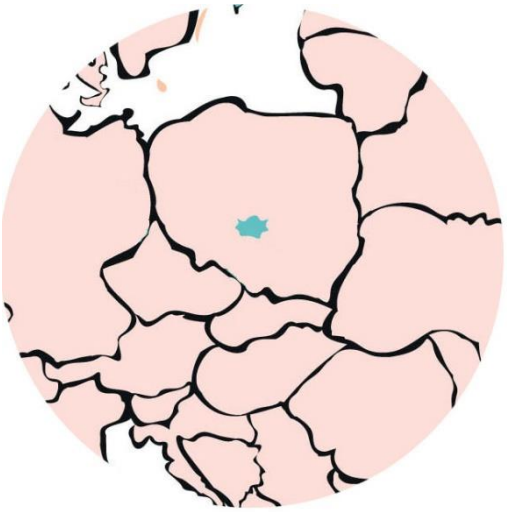
Community mobilisation/identity

Conversations with groups in Groningen provide valuable insights into the critical role of local 'insiders' in deprived areas who enable the participation of communities there, notably, of people belonging to the insiders' social circles or networks. This was demonstrated by participants in FG4, where only a handful of people had experience with policy-related participatory processes and reported getting their information through word-of-mouth. 'Goalkeepers' - such as representatives of municipal councils or local community organizations – play a key role in spreading such information, as they are either involved in organising participatory activities or possess information about such activities. Reportedly, they not only facilitated accessibility to information about participatory opportunities but also helped convey a sense of familiarity and safety which makes residents from deprived areas more willing to join participatory processes.

Focus group outcomes show that community life and participation in such organisations, which can spread out information to more diverse social group and society, is hindered by the relatively low outreach of such organisations. Some of them were especially prominent among youth who mentioned sports clubs (FG1) and diverse youth activities (FG2) being organised, presumably in the more urban areas where they reside. The research, however, highlights, the limited participation in other local community organisations, including elderly or village organisations, who struggle to mobilise people. Conversations (and own experience in mobilising participants for the research) revealed that there may be multiple reasons for that: (i) the individualistic character of people in Groningen, (ii) the lack of financial stability of such organisations, (iii) the lack of capacity and knowledge of such organisation on how to reach out to diverse communities and manage funding effectively. As a result, it appears that even when people are not necessarily unwilling to engage in participatory processes, they may be unable to due to the conditions of the outreach mechanisms and the lack of 'insiders' in their social circles.

Belonging to a social or professional group in the field of sustainability also emerges as an enabling factor for the active engagement of youth participants. Both groups, however, raised issues with how communication and outreach is handled. They pointed out the lack of easily accessible and consolidated information about events or initiatives that target young people (FG1), and the difficulty in filtering through initiatives to choose those of most value and interest for them (FG2). The root cause seems to pertain to the multitude of community initiatives mobilising youth in various local/regional activities, although not necessarily in policy-driven mechanism. One of the youth groups (FG2) suggested that funding was not always spent efficiently, with similar work done by different youth organisations. This did not necessarily ensure the participation of those hard-to-reach, rather, different activities are available to the same target group (the youth in general).

5.5. Poland: Bełchatów Area of Transition



5.5.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

The selected meta-community in this case study is a broadly defined mining community that consists of the households living in industrial or post-industrial districts of towns/cities located within Bełchatów Area of Transition (BAT) (and any other Polish coal region). This broad community includes miners/energy workers and their families, but also other households residing in these districts, providing local services as entrepreneurs, local intelligentsia, local activists, etc. It is presumed that people living in these districts carry rhythms of an industrial culture defined by strong attachment to a traditional family structure, strong conservative attitudes towards changes, and perceptions towards the work in heavy industry as highly valuable due to the societal advancements it has promoted in the past.

Territorially, the scope of this case study is bound to the Bełchatów area of transition consisting of 35 local self-government areas, across two NUTS3 sub-regions (Piotrkowski and Sieradzki). In particular, participants are mobilised predominantly from Bełchatów town, which is located in the vicinity of an operating mine and power plant. As in the Katowicki Coal region, and in fact, in many other regions, coal mining has been associated for a long time with prosperity and progress. Unlike in KCR, coal mining and energy production in BAT began more recently – in the 1970s, however the area has developed a strong industrial profile and hosts the largest power plant in Poland.

The selection of sub-communities in BAT aims to explore factors affecting participation across three different generations within the mining community. While age differentiation has been the leading rationale in the selection, the description below provides some additional detail on the characteristics of each group that took part in DUST research:

1. **retirees from the mining sector**. The group consists of male participants, members of the trade unions, via whom they are mobilised to participate. Provided the early retirement age in coal mining in Poland, they are predominantly long-time retirees (age b/w 64-87). Participants held middle to high managerial positions before retiring.

2. **youth from miners' families or from families connected to the energy sector** and **related industries** who currently attend high school in Bełchatów town. They are trained to become technicians under different specialisations – IT, renewable energy installation, etc. (age b/w 18-19).
3. **male employees of mines and energy power plants** with vocational or secondary education with diverse responsibilities within the industries (related to technology, planning, investment and economics) at age between 25 to 51. Some of them moved to the area for work, however, the research reports that they all have strong territorial attachment.

While all three communities are assumed to be affected by both willingness and ability barriers, employees of the mines/energy sector and youth are considered to possess certain ability patters, esp. when it comes to access to information and technological literacy respectively, while retirees are considered both unable and unwilling. Retirees were observed as particularly cautious to spoke at the start of the focus groups and progressively gaining confidence that their input can be meaningful for the transition.

5.5.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

The three focus groups made strong associations of the sustainability transition with the closure of the lignite power plant near the town of Bełchatów, which, as they stated, has been driven by a political decision. The discussions with participants indicate a significant spatial focus on the mining and power production infrastructure and the city itself, which is reasonable provided the residency of the participants. Articulated views are linked predominantly to the socio-economic dimension of the transition within this defined spatial scope. As noted by the youth group, this area - the town of Bełchatów and territories directly neighbouring to the mine – are more exposed to the unfavourable developments following the closure of mines compared to municipalities closer to bigger cities, such as Lodz or Piotrków Trybunalski. The latter municipalities are perceived to 'lose less'. While currently employed and retired miners and energy workers make references to various timeframes, observing processes from the past and implications for the future, youth participants spoke predominantly based on their current observations, and make brief future-related refences. The youth have a more abstract understanding of the transition, assuming it will be a long-term process that will take place in the next 20-30 years.

Looking in more detail at the discussions in the three groups, economic, environmental, and spatial issues were often interlinked in participants interpretations of the transition and relate to the way the area of the mining and energy installations around the town of Bełchatów will transform. Views of the youth regarding *future* developments of this space have been informed by the media, referring to information that the open-pit brown coal mine is supposedly going to be filled with water, and the area will stimulate the development of tourism industry. The participants considered that plans for the transition shall ensure that the entire infrastructure associated with the mine and power plant does not fall into ruin, and that it serves new businesses. A similar interpretation of what is needed was presented by the retirees associating the transition with the need for **restructuring of the current industrial assets**. They considered that the focus should be on a **process that provides a new industrial future for the region**, which can consequently **create foundation for a good quality of life**. It was notable that retirees talk extensively about the quality of the decision-making process. They referred to managerial

decisions in the sector from recent years being made by people who were politically appointed and lacked the necessary competence, as well as to political declarations to launch new lignite mines, which were supposed to ensure social acceptance. Conversely, what was needed for a successful transition, according to retirees, is good microeconomic thinking by managers and owners of the industrial assets. Due to the poor decisions taken so far, however, the group considered the preparation for the transition process as being delayed. In contrast, the mining and energy workers expressed strong beliefs that the **operations of the mine shall be preserved**. They pointed to the use of advanced technologies that minimise the effect on the environment, but also to the unjustified costs of closing the mine. They made references to global polluters, and the inability to comprehend the ecological logic in the EU green agenda. After all, when the group opens and starts considering alternative economic activities beyond mines, the current mining employees suggested that the transition should encompass **actions that ensure the infrastructure is being used to create another strategically important sector** for the region/area. In thinking of such a new industry, the workers considered also the need to replace the cheap energy sources and mention the establishment of a nuclear powerplant or production of batteries. Other suggestions relate to developing the role of the military sector and also the tourism industry.

Under the social dimension, youth participants observed that some new educational programmes have been emerging in local schools, aiming to teach skills in the field of renewable energy. New businesses and job openings have been recently created too; however, participants of this group point out that these do not match their desired professional development paths. The mining and energy workers were also sceptical towards new job opportunities for them and for young people, they believed that there will be scarcity of attractive workplaces. These assumptions are made in the context of the high incomes that participants and their families have been earning so far (and for several generations). Retirees rather expressed concerns that young people are leaving the region due to the industry closure.

Quality of life in the area is also closely tied to the operation of the mining and energy sector, and the local government's ability to use the income generated from it to foster sustainable economic growth and prosperity. Retirees, drawing from their long experience working in the sector and living in the area, noted a decline in mining companies' social responsibility, observing that the coal and energy sector used to contribute more to local development. Mining workers emphasised the quality of public administration, noting a lack of open-mindedness and entrepreneurial culture. The participants partly attributed the perception of vulnerability to the transition to the missed opportunities for using resources from the coal and energy sector to diversify the economy and provide stronger basis for maintaining quality of life in the future.

5.5.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors

Trust

Trust, especially in the qualities of governmental officials, was an important factor for public engagement in Bełchatów. Across the groups, trust in public institutions depended on communities' perceptions regarding the capacities of public institutions to act honestly and in line with perceived local development opportunities. Based on such judgements, participants largely considered public bodies as untrustworthy. While retirees spoke on the basis of comparison between the wealthy past and the current financial limitations that municipal authorities face (implying difficulties in delivering policies once resources become limited), mining and energy workers made more substantial references to the current phase-out process. Employees particularly referred to distrust regarding the ability of public bodies to plan the industrial transformation and measures that would create new job prospects. This group was aware of the Social Agreement between the government, mining/energy companies and trade unions and their judgement appeared informed by their knowledge on the planned action foreseen in the field of labour market. Referring to propositions regarding reskilling (in the sector of renewable energy), employees were critical towards such new competences as they do not see them aligned with the future needs or opportunities of the area. The conversation evidences that participants are keen to be involved in new business activities that utilise competences and assets already owned locally. Thus, trust of mining/energy workers hinges on the generated or restored belief that the national (and local) government is willing to create local opportunities (development programmes). Trust of this group was further affected by longstanding perceptions that locally made profit (by state-owned companies) is being used to fund initiatives elsewhere in the country.

When it comes to youth, the research underlines their relational conception of trust that is based on tangible evidence of honesty/altruism (as opposed to self-interest) and competence to deliver effectively promised results. Youth build trust on the basis of familiarity regarding one's credibility, which is obtained via past experiences and interactions. As a result, the research highlights that youth tend to trust a narrow social circle comprised of their family, friends and local community. In contrast, the lack of interaction with and interest of public institutions in the opinion of young people generates distrust, which represents substantial barrier to youth's willingness to participation in political life. Enabling open and honest conversations is what they suggest as mechanisms for re-building trust.

Public institutions were also seen as unmotivated to act cooperatively. This was evident in the views of mining workers, who perceived local and regional policymakers as unwilling to join discussions about the transition organized by the private sector. Youth groups expressed similar views. They shareed that their perception of governmental officials is of people who often enter into arguments and lack capacity to build consensus.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

The perception that policy measures respond to one's needs or concerns and that their involvement in designing or implementing the measure was desirable is an important factor for the engagement of studied communities in policies for sustainability transition. Retirees and mining workers made associations with certain policy measures and reached conclusions that to be truly relevant or significant, these measures needed to fulfil particular

conditions. Workers referred again to the labour market instruments that are being planned – such as the development of competencies relevant to the photovoltaic technologies. Apart from statements that these were not relevant to the future of the area, the community perceived that these are not in line with their desired professional path. Key reason is that participants consider their competences "*much higher*" than those required in this field. Speaking more generally, retirees considered that for a policy to be considered relevant, it needs to bring significant changes to the region and therefore require larger budget. This suggests that small-scale community initiatives may not be the type of measures that would incentivise the community to participate.

The lack of knowledge of transition policies or experiences with participation represented a barrier for youth to construct views on this factor. They struggled to identify a policy that they see as relevant to their life and linked to the sustainability transition. Participants assumed that the reason may be the lack of any outreach activities via their schools or other ways that aimed to solicit their opinion on the transition or on measures that concern the transformation of the region. Explicit reference and targeted effort by public institutions and their transition measures towards youth are considered to enhance engagement of this community in political life.

Empowerment/powerlessness

In Bełchatów, groups discussed their perceptions of power, focusing on the absence of participatory processes open to citizen involvement. In this sense, this factor relates to the precious one and perceptions of being excluded. Youth participants stated: "*no one asked us for our opinion on the topic of just transition*". They believed their participation could be valuable on certain topics such as education, leisure activities, and entertainment. However, they felt that public authorities did not regard them as valued participants, and perceive that there is no likelihood of being consulted on large-scale energy-related installations. Similarly, retirees and employees in mining sector expressed views that local authorities do not see value in their knowledge and even if involved they do not believe their voice will be considered by those in power. Retirees attributed the unwillingness of public institutions to give equal voice to mining communities to their tendency to devalue local knowledge. Workers reasoned differently. For them, the lack of clarity regarding actionable goals disempowered them to actively engage in the process of transition. This point seems to go back to a previous argument that there is lack of policy vision as to how the transition can utilise local assets. As a result, both communities saw themselves as unable to participate in policy processes.

> *"They [actors involved in the transition] believe that they are more knowledgeable than us"*
>
> *focus group with retired mining and energy sector workers*

Retirees also discussed perceptions regarding empowerment from a perspective of the past, reflecting on the context in which decisions were made when the mining industry promoted a significant economic growth in the area. They considered that in this period of regional economy prosperity, there were limited stimuli promoting a demand for stronger civic

voice. The government and state-owned companies largely fulfilled diverse social needs by leveraging abundant resources, thereby avoiding the necessity to prioritise competing interests or to delegate power. It can be sensed that retirees' perceptions regarding the current lack of interest in citizens' voice also stems from a perceived lack of sensitivity of local public institutions to citizens' needs or particularities.

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

Following from the above, according to retirees, certain social norms hinder proactive participation among mining communities. These norms, shaped by the historical presence of state-owned mining and energy companies in the community's social life, reflect the dominant role these companies played in sponsoring, donating, or addressing community needs. This led to entrenched norms of inactivity and reliance on external support.

Youth participants also mentioned that traditions and norms can be a barrier to participation, particularly when it comes to breaking up with the industrial legacy of the region.

It is worth observing that conversations with mining communities did not make explicit references to losing cultural assets as a result of the transition. Fear of losing such assets, however, exist, according to the research team who has closer observations on the group. Transition processes are perceived to disrupt deep-rooted industrial culture in several ways. They challenge the value of traditional education profiles, such as those for electricians and miners, and impact career development by threatening well-regarded jobs at the power plant. The community's pride in contributing a quarter of Poland's energy is being undermined, and established daily routines, like commuting to the same job every day, are altered. Additionally, local events and celebrations tied to the energy sector, such as concerts and town festivals, are affected, disrupting a lifestyle that has long defined their identity.

Ability factors

Accessibility

Accessibility to information and participatory processes provided by the government in the context of the coal and energy sector transformation is considered obstructed by the three groups. Coal mine workers attributed this to the fact that the transition covers state-owned assets. Thus, the national government has kept information and decision-making to themselves. Unlike the employees group form Katowice, the Bełchatów one did not make references to trade unions and assumingly does not see them in a similar way as a key channel via which information is made more accessible. Information channels mentioned by the group of retirees comes down to media sources – local media and official industry/governmental press releases made available online. Overall, the group of retirees considered that the way information on the transition is being communicated at the local level hinders participation. They pointed out that this is done in a one-size-fits-all manner and it does not capture attention.

Youth participants reflected on their low level of exposure to information regarding the transition that is ongoing in the region as a major barrier to participation. This is attributed

to the lack of participatory processes in their basic form - information campaigns and discussions at a level close to citizens. They noted, for instance, the lack of discussions on transition themes within schools. Accessibility to information of this group appears also impeded by the fact that youth are attracted to specific information formats – short and concise pieces that are available online (YouTube; social media). While such formats may not provide comprehensive information on the subject, they can spark the interest of youth to inform themselves further. Similarly to the youth group in Katowice, participants highlighted the importance of using language tailored to the audience. The location of participatory processes was important as well with youth noting preference to public spaces, school and locations in proximity to church service.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

Knowledge was explicitly recognised as an important factor for participation by the group of youth and retirees. While the latter appear confident that they possess knowledge that enables them to participate in some policy-driven processes, the former highlights the need to obtain or interact more actively with knowledge generated by science and local practitioners.

Similar to the same target group from the other Polish case study, retirees believed that their technical (engineering) knowledge and their extensive work experience in the mining sector enabled them to effectively participate in discussions on transforming the sector in the future. They recognised that knowledge and capacity to use it in a targeted way facilitates proactive participation. Participants spoke about the capacities/skills one need to in translate knowledge or information into local practical initiatives. Such skills are considered lacking. This discussion was in line with observations from the youth group noting that available participatory tools in the city of Bełchatów such as participatory budgeting attract some citizens to vote but not to actively submit projects.

Youth identifed the need of obtaining further knowledge on the transition. This can significantly improve their ability to engage in policy-driven or voluntary actions on the subject. The discussion evidences that youth consider important the presence of more specialised knowledge, referring to scientific research. This appears important due to the general distrust in information around the need for phasing out coal and closing the mining/energy sector, and the recognised vulnerability to fake news. Due to similar rationale, the group also highlighted the value of practical knowledge of those who experience on daily basis issues relevant to the topic in question. Such knowledge is preferable due to its credibility. The conversation implies that the group did not see itself as interacting with sustainability transitions in their daily life. The role of schools and teachers is, however, contemplated. Educational institutions were mentioned as important arenas where dedicated teachers can encourage interest and discussions in topics concerned with the transition. This does not appear to be case currently as participants stated that "*everything we learn about the transition, we learn outside of school"*.

Mining workers did not see this factor as important for their engagement. It can be assumed that participants consider themselves possessing relevant lived experiences as well as technical knowledge. However, they lack participatory experience in both voluntary or government-driven participatory processes.

Digital access/tools

Similarly to the other Polish case study, the groups in Bełchatów perceived that digital access and technologies facilitate participation. This is enabled by good internet access and skills to use most wide-spread digital technologies. Youth were the most active group that engages in a discussion on the importance of digital tools for participation.

Across the groups, digital technologies appeared to facilitate first and foremost the most basic form of participation – provision of information. Both youth and retirees agreed that access to electronic media sources is important for staying informed. In fact, for youth digital access to information and communication was key, and they advocate for all information to be made available online. Mining workers were more critical underlining the generally limited availability of information on the topic of just transition, no matter what the source is.

Youth participants provided further observation how access to digital communication can also facilitate other forms of participation. They noted that their community is not as active as older generations in engaging in discussions in online news articles. The participants, however, considered that young people are generally willing to take part in one-way forms of participation such as online surveys.

Resources/Time

Resources or time did not appear as substantial factors affecting the ability of the three groups to engage in participatory processes. The youth group expressed certain preferences regarding the time frames of the engagement process. They suggested that weekdays were more suitable rather than weekends as these are for own free time. Organising engagement processes in conjunction with another event or after Sunday's church service could enhance the convenience for youth or other communities to participate.

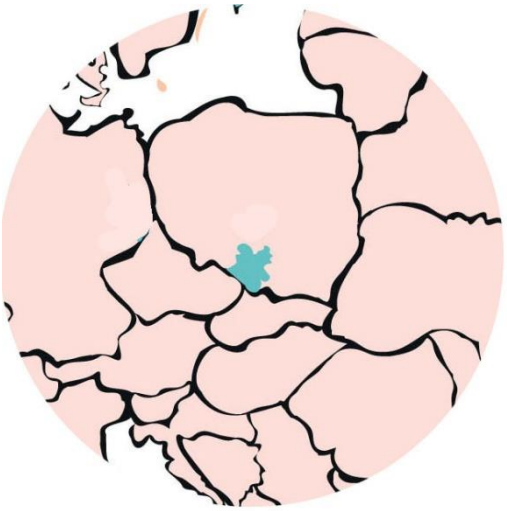
Community mobilisation/identity

All three groups highlighted the lack of local leaders or grassroots initiatives active in mobilising their communities in activities relevant to sustainability transitions. This factor appears to be among the key ones to disable proactive participation. Current and retired mining workers spoke about the absence of such leaders mostly within the local government. They attributed this to institutional inertia reinforced by an entrenched practice of centralised governance. Youth participants rather observed that existing youth-related structures such as the Youth City Council in the city of Bełchatów do not represent youth in a manner that is desirable/inspiring by the participants. They made comparisons with Greta Thunberg noting that there is no local equivalent in terms of activists mobilising youth for climate causes. This highlights the desire of local leaders who can encourage young people to express their opinions and take action in implementation processes.

Considering possible solutions to alleviate the impact of this factor, retirees believed that a good leader should be forward-looking and possess the necessary knowledge and skills to maintain the existing infrastructure (both technical and social) while transforming the coal and energy industry. This perspective aligns with the previously expressed aspirations of current mining workers for transition measures to make use of local assets. More broadly, it suggests a desire for leadership that could preserve the mining history in some way. When the

youth group reflected on the type of community structure they are interested to engage in, they expressed a preference to be part of a formal structure compared to an informal group. They explained this with the ability of such structures to facilitate opportunities to adopt roles or behaviours that can make young people feel more important and provide them with visibility and influence.

5.6. Poland: Katowicki coal region



5.6.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

As in the first Polish case study, the meta-community in the Katowicki coal region is the mining community, broadly defined as a community residing in (post-) industrial districts of towns/cities in coal regions (see Section 5.5.1). The territorial coverage is bound to a NUTS3 area - Katowicki coal region - part of the much larger Upper Silesian Coal Basin (USCB). The selection is sectorally driven by the significant role that coal mining has played in the Silesian context and the orientation of current sustainability transition polity measures towards phasing out remaining coal activities. Hard coal mining in USCB has been known since the mid-sixteenth century with exploitation increasing steadily and significantly via the foundation of state mines since the 1790s.[25] The USCB has been the leading coal supplier in Poland till the 1990s, when mining industry was scaled down or restructured. Before that, however, coal mining provided strong foundation for the industrialisation of the region and Poland, giving rise to the significance of energy production/sector and other large-scale industries. Provided the increasing demand of raw material, the State supported the establishment of new mines in the region in the second half of the 1900s, among which is Halemba. The Halemba Coal Mine is at present times one of the largest mines in the KCR providing jobs for over four thousand miners. It is located nearby the city of Ruda Śląska, whose (post-) industrial residential districts bring together mining communities, including some of the focus group sub-communities mobilised in the DUST research.

Similarly to the Bełchatów Area of Transition, the selection of sub-communities in KCR aims to explore factors affecting participation across three different generations within the mining community. While age differentiation has been the leading rationale in the selection, the description below provides some additional detail on the characteristics of each group:

1. **male employees of mines and energy power plants** with vocational or secondary education tailored to the mining industry (technicians, engineers, and physical workers) at age between 30 to 41;

[25] Dulias, R. (2016). A Brief History of Mining in the Upper Silesian Coal Basin. *The Impact of Mining on the Landscape: A Study of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin in Poland*, 31-49.

2. **youth from miners' families or from families connected to the energy sector** and related industries. Two youth groups took place capturing wider age segment and residential locations. One group comprises of secondary school students from Ruda Śląska (age 18-19), and the second one includes young people (female dominant) currently based in the city of Katowice obtaining their higher education from the University of Economics (age 20-23);
3. **retirees from the mining sector**. Participants are members of the trade unions, via whom they are mobilised to participate and are at comparatively young age provided the early retirement provisions in the coal sector (age 52-65). All participants had senior (mid-management/operations) positions before retiring.

While all three communities are assumed to be affected by both willingness and ability barriers, employees of the mines/energy sector and youth are considered to possess certain ability patters, esp. when it comes to access to information and technological literacy respectively, while retirees are considered to be both unable and unwilling.

5.6.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

Interpretations of the sustainability transitions by the groups in this region related most substantially to socio-economic aspects, together with cultural, environmental, and spatial ones. The most explicit association that youth participants made of these transitions is with *future* **new and better quality jobs**, which are believed to provide them with **higher quality of life**. Participants demonstrated awareness of some green jobs that were potentially advertised, related to PV panels installations and maintenance as a substitute to carbon-related jobs. While they did not discuss in detail their desired career paths, they stated that they do not plan to obtain education or take up a job in energy intensive industry like a coal mine or a steel factory. Current and retired mining workers interpreted the sustainability transition from the perspective of their (past) sectoral occupation and communal life shaped by this occupation. Employees associate the transition with **forced change in profession and career development** and possibly **decrease in quality of life** in the *future***.** They considered that changes will affect not only employment but as a consequence the educational and cultural (identity) fabric of the mining community. Retirees' perspective was oriented towards the *future* generation – they saw this generation following careers away from coal mines and consider that the transition will lead to "*plenty of opportunities for this*" as a result of a diversified economy in the metropolitan area of Katowice.

Divergent views across the groups emerged when the transition was related to an environmental dimension. For both workers and youth groups, this dimension was at the core of the socio-economic changes that will be required within the mining community and neighbourhoods they live in. While youth associated economic decarbonisation with environmental benefits (better air quality), workers disagreed with such perceptions considering decarbonisation agendas an invention of European bureaucrats and 'eco-blinded' activists. Both groups, however, shared views that phasing out coal in Poland or Europe alone will have marginal influence in solving climate change. It is evident that the youth also have a broader interpretation of environmental sustainability, relating it to changes in social practices such as **waste**

reduction and recycling. While waste separation has been introduced in their households, youth participants feel they are "t*he first generation embedded in the process*".

The groups of retirees and youth reflected on the **difficulty in making sense or taking a position on the transition**. Retirees pointed out that many of their peers (mining workers) were not willing to engage in meaningful dialogue or consider different viewpoints on the subject. This was because the green transition is viewed as a strange or unfamiliar concept that does not fit well with existing social beliefs. It is not grounded in logical or practical reasoning but is rather something imposed by the European Union. The group, however, highlighted that they have come to terms with the new – decarbonisation - agenda. Evidence suggests that this has been largely due to the Social Agreement that ensures social securities for workers. Referring to it, participants considered that the transition pathway is acceptable/fair. When it comes to youth, their knowledge and understanding of the transition was largely framed by what they hear within their families and on the news, although views have been in some cases difficult to form due to conflicting messages. Evidence suggests that conflicting media (TV) narratives regarding climate change and environmental sustainability creates challenges to co-construct shared understandings (within mining families/communities) and whether suggested activities such as coal phase-out are adequate/acceptable.

Finally, the groups of retirees and youth associated the transition with some tangible spatial implications for their environment. For retirees, transitions related to the coal-mining processes in the area have been ongoing as phase-outs were present in the past as well. As a result, issues related to economic and spatial changes have been evident in discourses for long time. This concerns, for instance, the state of value chains positioned either globally (external contractors) or locally (local service provides), and brownfield management, which retirees find to have been challenging for long time. One of youth groups also discussed the redevelopment of a coal mine nearby their school, imagining that it can become place where youth can spend leisure time, for instance by developing sports facilities.

5.6.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors

Trust

Across all three groups, trust was assessed to play an essential role for engagement with public institutions. It is among the most important factors shaping participatory attitudes. Trust for them was rooted in historical contexts and cultural values that are shared within families/community.

Notions of trusting and distrusting certain institutions were reflected upon by participants. They referred to public bodies - local and national – as entities they have limited trust in. For them, trust is built on relational basis. Current and retired mining workers talk about their specific relations with the State (as they work or worked for state-owned power plants), with trade unions (where they are members) and with their surrounding community. Trust towards the State, as

described by retirees, was generated on the basis of an expectation of reciprocity where workers agree to do a demanding job in exchange of good living conditions and social security. As long as such reciprocity (general agreement) is fulfilled, workers are not expected to protest against governmental decisions. The research underscores that this general agreement between the State and employees has been broken in the past with experiences of violently suppressed miners' strikes in the 1980s. This event, along with others, possibly shaped a long-lasting image of governmental institutions as autocratic and untrustworthy. In the current transition process, mining workers viewed institutions - national government - as incapable of providing a transformation pathway that protects them and ensures they receive their deserved benefits. Conversely, they conveyed trust towards trade unions' capabilities and benevolence to take care of employees' future and defend their interests.

For youth, relational trust was hard to establish. Institutional systems are particularly abstract and 'anonymous' as they have no experience interacting with them. One of the youth groups described them as a "*parallel world"* to their own. The way institutions communicate with society and youth in particular is ineffective (described as "*paternalistic"*) and further impedes transparency of public policy making. This results in limited understanding and knowledge about how governmental systems function. Consequently, youth face challenges to form own judgements if they can trust institutions and this plays in favour of existing pressure to comply with cultural norms and align with dominant views regarding institutional trust within the family environment.

When it comes to trusting others, the research highlights that mining communities (and beyond) trust a small social circle based on tangible interactions in their economic and social life. Interestingly, the youth note that while they distrust media, they do trust, to certain extent, people on social media, possibly based on general sympathy or social similarity.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

Understanding how a policy is (positively) related to one's life, needs or aspirations was associated with higher willingness for participation across groups. It is noticeable that communities interpreted the concept of relevance in different contexts, however. Relevance of policy measures to one's life was understood by miners in terms of alignment between policy thinking and the community's preferences regarding their economic security in the future. Mining workers' opinion on this factor was particularly placed in the context of transition measures they are familiar with, namely the Social Agreement that aimed to negotiate a compensatory package for vulnerable employees. In this light, participants considered that the relevance - or in fact the alignment - of a policy measure to needs emerging as a result of the transition is a key factor for participation. They noted that if measures do not address their interests, participants would not be willing to participate (at least not with a consensual attitude). This is in line with the previously mentioned resistance to change within the mining community.

Youth participants, speaking rather hypothetically, considered that if a policy is perceived as relevant to their everyday life, this would be a facilitating factor for participation. They imagined that a participatory process of intertest to them should be concerned with aspects important for young people, their community needs or aspirations.

Empowerment/powerlessness

For mining and energy workers, empowerment/powerlessness played a moderate role as a factor shaping views on participation. Participants discussed perceptions of power from the perspective of their recent experience with the Social Agreement between the State, mining/energy companies and trade unions. Some participants recognised that there were barriers to exerting influence on the negotiation process, not least due to difficulties in accessing and reviewing associated technical proposals. Nevertheless, participants did not express actual criticism towards the fairness of the process as they are satisfied by its outcome – they recognise that a number of their interests were protected. The success of the Social Agreement is reviewed in historical perspective, contrasting the current transition with the one of the 1990s when mines were suddenly closed.

While similar appreciation to the achievements of the Social Agreement was expressed by retirees, their judgements of having a voice and influence over planning and decision-making processes were informed by broader considerations. Having a substantial engineering knowledge (and being retired at an early age), retirees expressed motivation to engage in the process of designing masterplans or other measures related to brownfield regeneration/maintenance. They considered however that local expert systems do not trust or value their potential contribution as indicated by the lack of a participatory planning process. While local policy officials were seen as disinterested to listen to the technical input that can be provided by retired mining engineers, the group expressed willingness to get engaged as long as expert systems become more open.

Youth participants appeared to hold sizable sentiments that the voice of young people does not matter in policy making processes. References were generic, mentioning policy makers at local and regional level. Youth perceive that these officials lack interest in listening to citizens, especially themselves. This perception can be largely attributed to the general institutional distrust towards public officials, seen as not committed to serving the public interest. Youth lack actual experience with engaging in public policy and therefore their statements regarding power do not refer to particular (deliberative) participatory processes. These sentiments seem to be important for their propensity to engage in participatory democracy but essentially importance of trust prevails.

Social influence

Social influence was seen mainly as a factor within the youth groups. Both family and peer circles played a role in opinion formation but rather in opposing directions. Family members tended to have a historically limited trust in public institutions at different levels and similarly to other regions this acts as a pressure on youth that discourages their participation in political life. Interest among youth in activities oriented to sustainability and the transition process in particular was noted to trigger disagreement between them and their older family members. On the other hand, youth organisations focused on climate change (e.g. Silesian Climate Action) exposing young people to more progressive and critical thinking that is conductive to the adoption of more positive attitude toward change. The leaders of such organisations were, however, also important for the youth. Collected evidence suggest that some leaders were not seen positively due to youth's sensitivity to leaders' personality, behaviour and leadership approach. There was a preference to engage with organisations led by young people in particular.

Within group of working miners, trade unions are identified as a key actor with social influence and shaping sentiments towards the transition and, in extension, participation. The role of individual miners or their community is seen as rather weak. The research notes that this could be understood within a historical context dated to socialist economy when mining workers were seen as privileged group (depicted as loyal hard workers). Thanks to this position, they received certain benefits, which corresponded to their needs and expectations. This context is seen to have limited their willingness to become change agents.

Within the broad mining community, opposing perceptions towards the transition and one's involvement, were apparent. This was evident in the discussion with retirees where participants highlighted a division among employees/retirees who have been actively involved, notably via the trade unions, and who saw the current arrangements as fair/acceptable and others who were seen as inactive and having negative (demanding) attitudes (such as those who have not been covered by the benefits arranged via the Social Agreement).

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

The groups did not explicitly identify social or cultural norms to affect their attitude to participation in policy measures for sustainability transition. Conversations with active mining workers, however, made it particularly apparent that the industrial culture and traditions generated in places dominated by heavy industry make this community resistant to participate in processes that threaten the existence of this culture. Such resistance to change (and participation), however, was not so evident among the other two groups. This can be attributed to retirees' rational acknowledgement that the transition is unavoidable and to youths' aspirations for different career prospects.

The research also notes the general hierarchical culture in decision making, which spans from policy to family life, with social values of being humble seen as important.

Ability factors

Accessibility

While the role of physical accessibility and openness of political processes to citizens were not considered as important factors for participation (especially due to the role played by trade unions), information and language accessibility were assessed as significant by the groups of retirees and mining workers. They talked about access to official documents outlining the transition pathway and the implications for workers, in particular. Likely due to past experiences, it is evident that participants (mining workers) judge the desired format of information from the perspective of a consultation-like process where documents need to outline the 'problem' and the initially considered 'solutions', on the basis of which they can form an opinion and provide feedback. Trade unions have been the main channel via which employees and retirees have received information about the Social Agreement, however, the level of information on other policy measures and funding channels is assessed as insufficient. The groups also reflected on the importance of language. The language and format of official policy documents was considered incomprehensible. For ordinary citizens, the groups considered that information needs to be provided in a simpler, clear and transparent format, i.e. translated to

"*citizen level*". Mining workers indicated that the language used must allow them to assess if the information is trustworthy to ensure they are not manipulated.

Mechanisms to increase accessibility to information were associated by two groups with public events and community outreach campaigns conducted by local and national governments and coal companies and facilitated by trade unions. For such mechanism to be meaningful, commitment to collaboration and mutual respect between all stakeholders involved should be visible, ensuring that interactions and decisions are beneficial for everyone. Retirees highlighted the possibility of leveraging the outreach mechanisms of local entities like housing associations and cooperatives, and online channels (website and social media) of the municipalities. The latter were seen as a channel that could promote participatory mechanisms offered more broadly in the territory of the municipality.

Unlike the above groups, youth considered physical accessibility as an important factor impacting their decisions to engage in a participatory process. Participants pointed out that when places for participation coincide with those where they spend their free time – e.g. shopping malls, entertainment streets, pubs – the chance that they engage is higher. Conversely, if a participatory process is organised far from their neighbourhood, this was seen as an impediment. Negative sentiments towards participation were also shaped by perceptions that language spoken by policy officials is excessively bureaucratic and unattractive. One reason for this was the potential disconnect or generational gap between policymakers and younger generations. Policy making was seen by the group as dominated by perspectives, priorities, and values of the baby boom generation. This, together with the fact that youth distrust public institutions, make them feel that policy making happens far away from them. This suggests that accessibility per se is not as such a strong factor but rather the appeal of the participatory format tailored to this target group. There was a preference to online formats and organisation and facilitation carried out by young (enthusiastic) people.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

The three groups made associations with different types of knowledge and consider this factor somehow important for their ability to participate in dialogues on sustainability transitions. The youth and the elderly referred to specialised knowledge that they possess. Higher education institutions and the university degrees that some of the youths are currently obtaining were considered to provide them with knowledge relevant to the transition. Youth from secondary schools were more doubtful noting the need to obtain more (specialised) knowledge and highlighting once again the preference to engage with facilitators at an age close to theirs. It can be inferred from the conversation that for some youth participants, knowledge is important for positioning themselves well in the future labour market. Retirees believed that they possess significant technical knowledge in engineering due to their long work experience. Thus, they saw themselves as experts on an equal footing with those in the field whom the public administration listens to. It was evident that the group considers this knowledge is an enabling factor, especially when it comes to their own confidence to participate.

When it comes to mining/energy workers, the conversation develops in the context of the Social Agreement. It is notable that their knowledge regarding this measure and the process of transition as part of it was facilitated by an intermediary – the trade unions. What seems to be a crucial skill from the perspective of workers was the ability to understand if the transition process and its outcome are fair for them and that they are not being manipulated. Therefore, they considered that policy measures need to provide interpretations into "*human language*" avoiding

jargon. Sucha role has been played by the trade unions and has been available for those who are members of the unions' network. Therefore, knowledge gathering and the potential of constricting new knowledge often takes place among relatively like-minded individuals as opposed to groups with diverse backgrounds where opposing views could be expected to emerge and to necessitate deliberation for consensus building.

Resources/Time

Time emerges as an important factor for participation among young people and as rather insignificant when it comes to mining/energy workers and retirees. However, employees of the mining/energy sector do mention a preference for engagement processes to take place during working time. It can be presumed that this view is influenced by the way communication between workers and trade unions functions. These communications seem to typically occur within the mining/energy complex, for instance, before shifts begin.

For youth participants, the time frame when participatory processes take place could play a role for their ability to engage. Due to their engagement in diverse activities – education, social life, work, there was a strong likelihood that participatory processes to coincide with other arrangements. Nevertheless, the group is in agreement that if motivational factors are in place, the issue of time will not be a barrier for participation. Experimenting with online participatory processes was suggested by the group as a possible solution when it comes to limited time to participate.

Digital access/tools

Digital tools played a facilitating role for participation across all groups. All communities noted accessibility to internet and technologies that allowed them to obtain content and interact with others online. Similarly, participants did not raise any concerns regarding skills to use digital tools.

Digital access was perceived important especially from the perspective of obtaining information on the transition. Electronic versions of newspapers and social media are referred to in specific. Naturally, youth highlighted the 'utmost' importance of social media and the role of content created by young and enthusiastic people. Retirees also noted the use of social media for interaction with others. They are prone to engage in discussions on "*controversial issues"* online. While social media served as an important source of information, the participants mention the challenge of identifying fake news/biased opinions. Thus, they considered that the public sector needs to be more active in providing information tailored to different groups (assuming this will ensure access to more reliable information). Online forms of communication and consultation were also used by trade unions when interacting with mining/energy workers (e.g. via emails or other online communication applications).

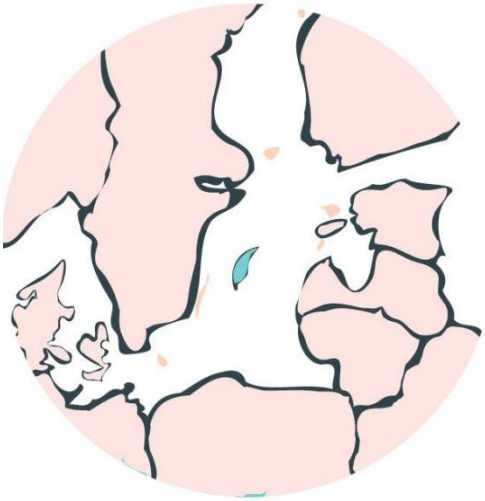
Community mobilisation/identity

Community mobilisation and local leadership were important factors for participation. Both current and retired mining workers emphasize the importance of representative participatory structures, particularly trade unions. The group of actively working miners, however, highlights the shortage of good leaders, which is considered a barrier. Participants note that local community leaders are often inactive in mobilising people to proactively engage in

policy processes. Their approaches to participation may also be outdated (e.g. relying only on paper forms instead of digital formats). Apart from trade unions, the two groups do not appear affiliated or interested in local community-led structures or activities.

Youth considered the factor to be of medium importance, although the conversation revealed that young people tend to be isolated from one another and to lack structures that can effectively engage them in sustainability/community-related activities. There are two reasons that stand out. First, the group shared perceptions of distrust towards community leaders and did not identify themselves with some of the existing structures – including political ones - that can mobilise young people to participate. As a result, the research notes that if young people are motivated to engage with activities related to sustainability transitions, they often do that on their own. What was discouraging consequently was the perceived inability to succeed against the established policy regime and political processes when acting alone. Second, participants noted that citizen movements of interest to young people are often characterised by short-term leadership or membership due to the tendency of young people to change schools or move to other cities for study or work. As a result, activities organised by such structures may be only temporal and ensuring financial stability can become difficult.

5.7. Sweden: Gotland



5.7.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

The selection of the meta-community in the case study of Gotland is guided by its economic and demographic configuration, which is assumed to affect the way sustainability transition is experienced. Gotland is an island in the Baltic sea. It has a small rural and tourism-dependent economy operating under specific conditions, determined by its insularity. Gotland previously held the status of a municipality, encompassing several settlements. However, following a recent national administrative reform, it now also functions as a region. The population is concentrated in rural areas, including the harbour town Slite, where a cement plant is located. Rural residents are presumed to experience climate policies more directly than their urban counterparts due to their closer proximity to energy installations and industrial sites, reliance on cars, and more limited access to public transport. These conditions may contribute to reported during interviews lower institutional trust in rural areas, frustrations stemming from dominant urban perspectives in policy making and feeling of abandonment by the national government and regional/local authorities. Rural households are also more exposed to economic burdens when energy prices fluctuate due to their heating methods and the common practice of running a home business. These economic and demographic characteristics inform the rationale of selecting the rural community as a meta-community for DUST research.

The selectin of sub-communities is further informed by municipal data on socio-demographic characteristics, as well as, by preceding interviews with policy practitioners and planners as part of DUST research. Statistical sources highlight that households on Gotland generally have less financial flexibility than those in other Swedish municipalities, indicating lower financial and time resources to participate. Young people, in particular, are more vulnerable to these financial constraints. Socio-economic vulnerabilities are also more evident in certain areas including the town of Slite. The labour market in Gotland is gender-segregated to a relatively strong degree. Around half of all female residents work in the public sector, while male residents dominate industrial jobs. Interview evidence also suggests that women may be more constrained to participate in policy-making processes due to gender-based distribution of responsibilities, which leaves them with less time for other activities. Interviewees also reported that middle-aged men and experienced developers utilise much more consultation processes to make their voice

heard, giving ground to assumptions that women may experience perceptions of powerlessness in participatory processes. While the green transition is considered to affect society broadly and diverse sectors or aspects of life, there is more visible impact on transport and car dependency, energy consumption and provision as well as the industry(-ies) targeted by the JTF (cement factory and adjacent limestone quarrying). As highlighted by interviewees in DUST, the areas near the cement factory and limestone quarries (Slite/Lärbro/northern part of Gotland) are particularly exposed to conflicts when it comes to the green transition. Some residents strongly oppose the industrial activities due to concerns regarding drinking water, pollution and place attractiveness, while others emphasise the importance of the industry as provider of jobs and income, contributing to the vibrancy of citizens living in the area. Despite these conflictual views, there are assumptions that citizens were not included in relevant policy processes and did not have access to all pertinent information. All these factors inform the selection of the following three sub-communities, whose representatives were mobilised in participate in three focus groups:

1. Residents of Slite and areas near the cement factory and adjacent limestone quarries, aged between 55-75, majority are retired and one is currently unemployed, searching for a job; various backgrounds in terms of previous working life and educational level; balanced mix of genders. men and two women participated.
2. Rural woman; majority retired; all own land and are engaged in small-scale farming; majority moved from mainland; they reside either nearby areas where wind power park is planned or where one was built in the past.
3. Youth, aged 20-25 years; all female; all moved from the Swedish mainland to study.

Gotland has a slightly higher old age dependency ratio in the rural areas compared to the urban counterparts. Thus, older adults are more represented in the focus groups as well (both in the group of rural women and the group of residents near the cement factory in Slite).

5.7.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

Gotland's unique place in terms of geography, natural resources and means of livelihood creates such an environment that its inhabitants – according to their age and background – have specific thoughts and attitude toward the sustainability transitions. Each group's views evolved in distinct directions as they ponder on the regional transformations resulting from sustainability efforts. The interpretations across groups predominantly reflected on the current and near future. The participants of the first (residents of Slite) and second (rural women) groups, as people with more life experience and thus with a broader perspective, spoke also in wider time frames, referring to changes over the last few decades.

In socio-economic terms, the first group – residents of Slite – was mainly concerned about the future of the cement factory and the limestone quarries activity in the area. They expected it to become an issue since the counterbalance between environmental protection and labour market preservation might arise disagreements. When it comes to how individuals can benefit from shifts to sustainable living, they also mentioned the large investments that are required to afford solar power and electric vehicles. Unlike them, the female rural residents from the second group expressed a clear and firm belief that in economic terms sustainability transitions serve large companies in making more profit. These views are shaped by changes they observe in the natural environment and the land use associated with the energy transition. Their sentiments were emotionally charged fuelled by perceptions that such changes have been

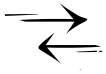
imposed, and that their opinion is completely ignored when trying to give public voice to their concerns. The third group, a representative of the youth in Gotland, consisted of students who live there due to their study enrollments. Understandably, they were interested in the modern amenities the place offers and express their dissatisfaction with the lack of public transport on the island and a better connection with the mainland. They believed that more should be invested in transportation, preferably a kind with less harmful emissions, and in the well-being of the main residents as opposed to seasonal tourists in the area.

Another major aspect of the matter was the environmental impact. Here as well a variety of topics have came to prominence. The young talked about the damage that the means of conveyance causes, especially the exhaust gases from the car fleet and the ferry connecting Gotland with the continent. The women were more concerned about the environmental degradation resulting from spreading of wind power installations and the related infrastructure rather than conventional ecological problems. According to them, therefore, efforts should be aimed at preserving nature - especially forests. Most elaborate in their going-over were the residents of Slite, who were primarily concerned about consumerism as a factor causing environmental deterioration (as a result of climate change). They mentioned lack of biodiversity and restoration efforts as well as lack of climate initiatives from the government. The group also brought up the question of expanding the quarry's activity as a potential problem, referring it especially to the land-use policies and the water shortage issues. Sustainability in the use of agricultural land and forests was another issue that participants raise. A clear positive change in individual behaviours has been the increased rates of recycling.

Cultural and quality of life aspects relevant to the sustainability transitions were also present throughout the discussions, especially among the female group. These are intertwined with the unique geographical context of the region, being an island. The rural women emphasised the lack of holistic perspectives as part of such transitions toward health and lifestyle matters. This related both to recent physical changes in their vicinity resulting from the energy transition but, more broadly, also to increased consumerism. They perceived that they are losing their small-scale, resource efficient lifestyle which is part of their identity and culture. The women had a strong sense that rural areas are significantly affected by the energy transition and that their home villages are losing their countenance.

5.7.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors



Trust

Trust as a factor for participation was evident particularly among the Gotland's female residents group. They expressed sentiments of distrust towards public institutions when speaking of policy measures identified as relevant to their life/community and in conjunction with perceptions of power imbalances. While this group related trust sentiments with willingness for participation, the other groups discuss trust more generally and do not see it explicitly as a factor that shapes their attitudes towards policy processes or participation.

A key difference among the groups of rural women and residents of Slite was in terms of their trust in decision-making processes. The group of residents living near the cement industry stated that they trust the laws and rules governing decision-making, which provide them with certainty that decisions will be procedurally fair and democratic. In contrast, participants were rather sceptical about the extent to which public officials have the necessary knowledge, expertise, and ability to deliver sound climate and sustainability policies. There were perceptions that institutions may lack the necessary skillset to implement measures conductive to reaching climate targets. Knowledgeable and well-educated politicians were therefore desirable as they would know how to take good quality decisions.

Rural women expressed distrust towards various actors, including local and regional governments, energy and wind power companies, public intermediary bodies like the Energy Dialogue Office, and local religious organisations. These entities were seen as being strongly driven by capitalist values of profit-making, which biases public decisions towards private development interests. Such perceptions appeared particularly influential in groups for whom interpretations of the sustainability transition are closely linked to land-use and infrastructure developments. The erosion in public trust also stems from the perception that public bodies do not fulfil their moral obligation to protect vulnerable communities. Rural households, which often have lower financial resources, were seen by the group as particularly at risk in this situation as they may be more prone to agree with compensation measures by companies seeking local acceptance.

For both groups transparency in terms of provision of information on climate and transition topics was important. Trust was dependent on open communication. Such, however, has been lacking when it comes openness about the effects and landscape changes that rural residents can expect from energy infrastructure. This has further fuelled sentiments of distrust among the group of the female landowners, noting views that they have been “served simplified images and explanations” by the public authorities and energy/wind power companies. The latter were not seen as transparent when it comes to the disadvantages of certain decisions, while the group considered that these need to be made explicit in particular. This has enhanced their willingness to get engaged in consultative processes.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

The presence of identified consequence of a policy measure on one’s environment or community appeared to be a significant promoter for participation across the groups of rural women and residents of Slite. The participants of these groups had already been engaged in some forms of participation concerning immediate local issues - e.g. rural women in information meetings and dialogues related to (renewable) energy installations. Thus, they drew on observations from this experience. It is evident that reasons for participation were strongly linked to ensuring that communities’ local interests are taken into account in the policy processes. In particular, what triggered citizens’ concerns, as exemplified with the stories shared by the group of women, was how these policies appear to prioritise certain sectors (and interests) over others. They noted the strong technocratic focus of discussions and attribute it to the policy emphasis placed on economic and technocratic interest of specific industries as opposed to broader concerns such as valuing social, cultural, health or natural resources. It can be inferred from the conversation that the latter were considered as at least equally important and that there is expectation that green transition investments do consider such concerns as

well. **Rural women spoke about the issue while being of the opinion that energy installations will affect their health, land and property, as well as nature more broadly.** The thematic imbalances within the policy discussion, thus, indicate that priorities and values important for the group are being undervalued or neglected in the measure's design and this has triggered the involvement of the group in the participatory mechanisms made available. The discussion on this issue linked also strongly with participants' perception of fairness and the sense of empowerment or powerlessness, which is discussed in the following section.

Rural women also raised concerns regarding how citizens can judge in practice whether a policy measure or investment affects them. For citizens to comprehend the significance or relevance of such measures/investments, there is need for more explicit and multi-disciplinary data regarding the future impact on people. It can be assumed that currently participants are concerned about how investments in energy installations will impact their rural environment and lifestyle, but it is difficult to understand in which ways. Moreover, participants underlined that on the policy side there are already assumptions made regarding who has a stake, for instance, when decisions are made on energy production installations. This narrowed the scope of stakeholders, excluding certain citizens (in the example, nonland-owners) from fully accessing dialogue and consultation meetings.

To make the participatory process more inclusive, participants perceived that targeted outreach methods to ensure participation shall be made available.

Empowerment/powerlessness

The three groups talked about power from different perspectives as some of them had direct experiences of power imbalances in participatory processes while others talked more broadly about citizen impact on policy thinking. It is evident that the groups addressed different scales – the youth focused on the local level, the rural women talked about all three levels of government, while the residents of Slite reflect on the interplay between local and regional interests and national policy making. The thematic scope was also distinctive with residents of Slite discussing climate policy, youth focusing on issues relevant to their everyday life and rural women on wind energy production.

The group of residents in Slite spoke more broadly than the other groups and expressed a sense of powerlessness to advocate for local interests and influence national climate policies. They saw both the citizenry and the local/regional level of government as ineffective at manifesting their interests on a national level. This was discussed particularly in terms of the climate transition and its impact on Gotland as a whole, rather than on a community or individual level. What the group seemed most concerned with is the likelihood that the national government will not meet climate targets and that participants feel they lack any powers to influence relevant national decisions on this. The root cause did not seem to be necessarily the lack of participatory process at the local/regional level but the doubt that engagement in these will have an impact. These sentiments seemed to address a broader issue related to the perceived lack of weight of the local/regional level vis-à-vis the national level.

The rural women expressed strong perceptions of uneven power distribution in discussions and decisions regarding the green (energy) transition. The perceived power imbalance between authorities and private entities on one side, and the citizenry on the other, fostered a sense of unfairness among participants and perceptions of increased vulnerability of rural areas and communities to high-stakes developments. As mentioned earlier, the perceived dominance

of economic goals in decision on green energy infrastructure triggers perceptions that citizens' social, health or cultural priorities were being ignored. Powerful entities (e.g. large corporations, military) were seen to have greater access to decision-makers (and a leeway when it comes to environmental impacts) than locals who face difficulties in effecting a meaningful change with their participation. Voicing and protecting one's interests in this context was further hindered, according to the group, due to the more deprived socio-economic situation of some rural households.

Perceptions of disempowerment dis not necessarily diminish participation, as exemplified by the group of active female landowners. It can be assumed that the direct impact (i.e. relevance) of the discussed policy represents a stronger factor that promotes participation. The sense of unfair power distribution, however, may affect the nature of the discussions, leading to more conflictual dispositions rather than fostering mutual understanding.

The youth group's conversation on issues of empowerment and powerlessness related to topics closer to youth everyday life such as integration into the labour market and fulfilling social expectations to engage actively in community activities. The conversation highlighted the role of the local youth council in generating perceptions of empowerment among participants. Experiences of one's voice being sidelined and unheard were shared by the one participant of the focus group who is non-member of this council.

Discussed mechanisms for empowerment of local residents relates to transparent information and communication (incl. on climate issues), feedback processes that reveal whose input is taken into account and why (or why not), and an enhanced power balance of different voices.

Social influence

Gotland's group comprised of residents of Slite referred to the social life on the island as an important factor that affects one's general perceptions and views about climate and the transitions associated with climate change. This was attributed to the living conditions present on an island. Participants noted that way of living on Gotland can be felt as isolated, therefore, promotion of social linkages, including via community organisations, plays an important role for wellbeing. As a result, participants shared that there are strong connections established, for instance, among neighbours or within small communities. Exchanges within such groups affected how people form their opinion and approach the topic of green transition in general. Another source of strong social influence that the group of rural women mentioned is media – local newspapers in particular. The potential of media to inform the public about interventions which participants are familiar with such as wind power installations was, however, questioned. This was attributed to the perceived lack of critical perspectives that are presented in media.

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

The groups did not identify norms or values as explicitly shaping their motivation to take action in regard to policy measures concerning the sustainability transitions. Nevertheless, female participants across groups provided observations that concern the potential inequality between gender voices. It can be therefore noted that norms and traditions relate to community's or individual perceptions regarding their empowerment or powerlessness. Female participants from the group of residents from Slite and the group of rural landowners found it difficult to have their voice heard in meetings related to energy or other technical topics. Rural landowners

pointed in particular to the dominance of male participants and share experiences of being sometimes laughed at during dialogue meetings. While the dominance of male participants can be partly attributed to their roles as institutional representatives rather than individuals (as opposed to the involved women), the lower acknowledgement of female knowledge in technical fields may also have been influenced by Gotland's relatively strongly gender-segregated labour market. Background research notes that around half of all women in Gotland work in the public sector, in particular in health and social care, while around 80 percent of men work in the private sector. Male dominance is pronounced in sectors that are recognised as important in the climate transition, including the cement and limestone industry, energy, transport and the building sector. Therefore, there may be a tendency to prioritise male voices due to the higher likelihood of their having lived experiences relevant to the discussed technical fields.

The youth group associated this factor with cultural aspects influencing communities' disposition towards individual sustainability practices, noting that older generations are more prone to use private cars than public transport.

Ability factors

Accessibility

The group of residents living in Slite identified the access to information and the language to play a role for their effective participation. Unlike issues raised in other groups and case studies, which predominantly noted limited information, this group highlighted the opposite challenge – the large amount of information that one needs to filter and process when engaging with information campaigns and consultative processes. This seemed to overburden participants. Both the complexity of the language and the flows of information from parallel sources posed obstacles for forming one's views and taking a position. In fact, participants reported that in some cases they became confused and uncertain as to what they were being asked. The group comprised of rural women makes somehow similar statements pointing to the technical language as a potential barrier for ordinary citizens to engaging with policy measures.

For youth, accessibility barriers related largely to the lack of information as to where, when and how they can participate. They attribute this to absent or ineffective outreach methods informing them about participatory opportunities and lack of clarity in public institutions' communication. Such communication needs to be tailored to the age group of the community.

To ensure better accessibility, the group comprised of rural women suggest that media could play a supportive role. It can provide more information about ongoing climate actions and communicate more clearly about participatory opportunities that are open to citizens.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

The three groups discussed different types of knowledge they are in possession of or see necessary in order to participate in sustainability activities and participatory processes. Overall, it is evident that for all three groups knowledge played an important tole.

As mentioned earlier, the groups of residents living near the cement factory and the female rural landowners highlighted that provided information and discussions in participatory processes

were complex and dominated by technical or jargon language. This presented a barrier to interact with this specialised knowledge and to easily position own lay knowledge and views. Across all three groups, the one of female landowners mentioned more significantly the importance of own local knowledge. The recognition of having this knowledge and its relevance to the policy measures that participants engage with was an important enabling factor for their participation.

While youth appeared to obtain ample knowledge on sustainability topics in schools, it was evident that they lack broader knowledge or skills when it comes to how direct democracy works. They shared their experience of difficulties in getting to know how one can participate in policy processes and in what one is expected to do so. Another challenge noted was how to connect or translate their theoretical knowledge on sustainability to real life experiences and their own future. It was noticeable that participants were eager and enthusiastic to have interactions with specialists who can introduce them to new knowledge they can use to make decisions regarding their (career) development. An example that the group provided were study visits to companies or the regional authorities who work in the field of sustainability.

Resources/Time

Resources and time availability were not considered by the groups as apparent factor that impact their attitude or disposition to participatory processes. To some extent, the issue of time mattered to the youth group. Participants mentioned that sustainability topics are being taught and discussed substantially at school and engaging in this field in their private time is essentially not appealing to them.

It is also worth observing that while public reports in Gotland have identified that women are on average less engaged in participatory processes (potentially due to conditions of family life and gender-based distribution of responsibilities), the issue of time is not being mentioned by the female group involved in DUST research. This could be attributed to the fact that the majority of participants are retired and thus do not face the assumed time challenges mentioned above.

Digital access/tools

Access to the internet and to digital media or communication platforms were not perceived to play a significant role for communities' ability to engage in participatory processes. Partly, this could be attributed to the fact that some of the groups involved in the research do not appear interested in online participation on sustainability issues. The group of citizens residing in Slite highlighted, for instance, that they deliberately avoid spending time on social media. The latter is used by the youth group, however, they shared that they prefer to engage on social media with other aspects of life than those they associate with sustainability. More broadly, some youth highlighted the lack of stable internet connection in their rural areas, which presented a barrier to engaging in the digital world.

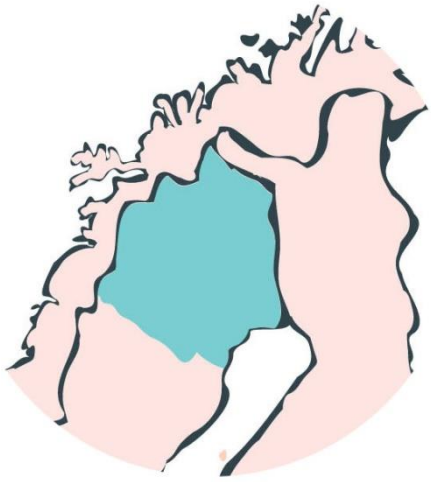
Community mobilisation/identity

All three groups found that participation in processes informing policy making is dependent on the state of one's community life. This was implicitly confirmed by the group of rural women who themselves represent a small community that has formed to oppose the development of wind power installations in their immediate area. These participants spoke about the importance of strong neighbourly cooperation and understandings they share with other

groups in the area which helped to mobilise a common response when public consultations related to wind power developments were initiated. Their story implies that rather than relying on a local community leader, the group was able to shape ad-hoc based on the facilitating conditions of physical and social proximity on the island. This helped eventually the group of rural women to spoke with a more united voice.

Not being born on the island, however, seems to have played a significant role in one's ability to establish strong social relations and consequently to feel as part of a community. This was recognised both by participants who moved to Gotland – some of the residents nearby the cement industry and the youth representatives – as well as by those who have been born on the island. For example, one of the participants living near the cement factory, and who has been born in Gotland, shares that communities in Gotland are rather small and tightly-knit, which can make those outside such communities feel excluded. The conversation with youth, representing students who moved to the island for study, underlined the challenge of identifying oneself with the locals. As these youth have been living relatively short on the island and may not stay there long-term, they feel uncertain as to whether they fall within the target group of public institutions or if their opinion is relevant when the municipality launches participatory processes.

5.8. Sweden: Norrbotten



5.8.1. Selection of (sub-)communities

The logic in selecting the meta-community in the case of Norrbotten is informed by available information on the policy approach to the sustainable – often referred to as green – transition. The policy thinking regarding the transition is often framed by urban perspectives and interests of large mining companies, indicating that residents in peripheral – rural – areas in Norrbotten, may hold perceptions of being marginalised in terms of the targeting of sustainability or other policies. Rural areas are also known to face difficulties in terms of physical accessibility, which further contribute to perceptions of exclusion. There is strong sensitivity in these areas regarding lack of accessible public transport. This stems from geographical conditions and the spatial scope of the region. Norrbotten is the northernmost Swedish region, containing 14 municipalities, each of which includes a main town and significant peripheral areas outside of it. Norrbotten has vast open spaces, sparse population spread across its large geographic area and diverse landscapes characterised by mountains and forests. Similarly to Gotland, rural communities have lower income, making it difficult to prioritise time in favour of participation in public policy. The combination of these socio-demographic characteristics with the policy context regarding the sustainability transition defines the selection of rural communities as a meta-community for DUST research.

This meta-community is divided into three sub-groups. Information below outlines these groups and provides additional background information on the participants who joined DUST focus groups:

1. Sami ethnic minority, with participants of the focus group coming from Boden-Jokkmokk municipality (residency depends on the season). Participants in the research are male members of the same family representing different generations.
2. Small business owners. This group brings together households who operate small – often home-based – businesses. Such practice is common, practical and often necessary given the region's unique geographical and economic conditions. Participants are both male and female.
3. Rural youth, with participants of the focus group coming from Boden/Luleå municipality, at age between 18-21, all female.

All these three sub-communities - identified by their ethnic identity, occupation and age - are assumed to hold perceptions that they do not, or will not, benefit from the sustainability transition, which is considered to affect their overall attitude to the transition process and related public policies. The sub-community of Sami is assumed to be unable but willing to participate, with one considerable barrier being the low impact of their participation, while rural youth are presumed to be both unable and unwilling lacking community identity, information about transition policies and sentiments that these policies are relevant to them.

5.8.2. What do sustainability transitions mean to communities?

There were distinctive differences in the way communities understand the sustainability transitions in the case study region of Norrbotten, especially when comparing the minority Sami community and the groups of youth and rural business owners. The first group placed high value on preservation - of their livelihood, way of life, culture and traditions, while the other two groups associated the transition predominantly with potential improvements to perceived challenges in rural areas. Time frames on which communities draw were also distinct. The Sami group predominantly shaped their expectations based on *past* experiences of growth-driven changes in the physical landscape (Sami's traditional lands), which have required them to adapt to new circumstances continuously. They made frequent references to the fast industrialisation in the region and the incurred high social costs for Sami people since the early 20th century. Youth made sense of the transitions on the basis of *recent* changes in their physical environment and of considerations how the combination of economic and environmental changes can help solve structural rural challenges, increase youth current quality of life and create opportunities for young people to continue living in the region. Similarly to youth, rural business owners conceived the transition in terms of how it could resolve rural development issues in the *future* but *currently* they also observe some drawbacks.

More specifically, conversations addressed experiences and expectations in economic and social terms on first place, which bear consequences for cultural and quality of life aspects. Environmental changes were evident or expected as well.

In socio-economic terms, Sami associated the transition with current and future increased economic burdens. These include additional cost for animal feeding, following the increased use of grazing land for infrastructure (electricity, mining) and deforestation; increased working hours and fuel costs due to reindeer dispersal and difficulties managing their migration (due to similar reasons); increased energy intensity of the work due to climate change (lack of hard snow layer in spring). **Pressure to pursue different sources of livelihood** (e.g. in mining) was felt by Sami adults. It was evident that they are afraid that these pressures will diminish the prospects for their children to take up this traditional work in the *future*. The conversation further reveals that the **young generation increasingly finds rendering herding as less attractive**. All these developments contribute to older generations associating the transitions with increased **risk of losing Sami language, skills in reindeer herding, local knowledge and cultural heritage**. The other two groups of rural business owners and youth from non-minority origins, perceived these transitions in terms of **making the economy greener** in the *future* (mining; energy production), which can lead to the creation of **new jobs** and **population growth**. These two groups conceived such developments and interpreted them positively because they can contribute to their experienced challenges of rural life - dispersed service provision (FG2), irregular public transport and lack of entertainment/cultural activities (FG3). But more broadly, because they could

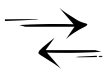
counter the depopulation of rural areas and keep young people in, as a result of **increased provision of services of general interest** (e.g. kindergartens; cultural centre) and **educational opportunities** (in Luleå or elsewhere in the region).

The above described experiences and expectations link with perspectives on how sustainability transitions relate to **quality of life** and **well-being**. The Sami community has observed **increased health problems** associated with experienced pressures and insecurities. In contrast, youth thinking was positioned in the future with expectations of increased quality of life as a result of **new amenities allowing more diverse social activities**.

Concerns over climate, biodiversity, ecosystem losses, and the natural scenery in the rural areas were shared by Sami and the rural business owners. These were attributed to climate change and to diverse infrastructure developments - mines, wind turbines, electricity lines - that utilise natural resources such as land, forests and rivers. The discussion with rural business owners on this evidenced potential conflicts in desired developments, specifically regarding the role of population growth in enhancing rural services and development, while also increasing environmental impact. Unlike the other two groups, youth shared expectations that sustainability transitions will bring **positive environmental benefits** on a global scale, assumingly, due to the association with green solutions in economic and environmental fields.

5.8.3. Communities' discussions on factors affecting their participatory attitudes and behaviours

Willingness factors



Trust

Sentiments regarding trust in public institutions appeared to link with motivations to participation particularly within the Sami community. The other groups discussed trust more generally and despite some frustrations with political officials/local administration, they did not see trust explicitly as a factor that shapes their attitudes towards policy processes for sustainability transition or with participation.

Participants from Sami origin underscored the significantly low trust within the community towards all levels of government. This was based on a complex interplay of feelings of being ignored and betrayed in the past, as well as current perceptions regarding the ability of public administrations to fully grasp the concept of sustainability and their commitment to making decisions in a procedurally fair way.

Past interactions with public institutions have repeatedly suggested a mismatch of values and goals between the Sami community and governmental policies. Participants spoke about long history of unfavourable governmental decisions which have violated Sami's interests and way of life centred around reindeer herding. Distrust extends to multiple actors - forest and mining companies, tourism and leisure industry – whose activities damage the most valued natural capital that the community needs and care for – the land. Participants consideedr that various governmental decisions have been taken in the past that played in favour of such actors.

This was attributed to policy goals placing highest value in economic gains. This hampered their access to land and their ability to sustain their livelihood.

Recent green transition measures were perceived to reframe the concept of sustainability. They were seen rather as promoting growth agendas, focusing on job creation. Participants distrusted the true sustainability intentions of the government as they saw some of the investments labelled as green (new infrastructure for energy generation and grid connectivity) to have long-lasting and potentially irreversible impact on forests and reindeer ecosystems. This was also perceived to threaten the existence of the minority group and its traditions.

As in the group of rural landowners in Gotland, distrust was also rooted in procedural aspects of decision-making and patterns of communication (lack of openness). Prominently, this linked to perception of exclusion of Sami from some key decisions that affect them. An example was given with a decision on new cross-border electricity line extending from Finnish to Swedish territory, which will have significant impact on reindeer herding and which was not made public.

In contrast, among youth and representatives of rural businesses, issues with trust were briefly and indirectly touched upon. Participants did not raise significant concerns regarding the content of governmental policies (apart from accessibility of public services) or procedural aspects of decision-making processes. While participants, especially youth, may have found it challenging to form sentiments regarding trust and relate them to their motivations to participation, the conversation with this group revealed that youth have concerns regarding the ability and willingness of public officials to listen to diverse voices – youth ones in particular. This may also explain why among the youth group, the presence of youth councils at municipal scale and youth involvement in these was seen as essential for existing trust in public policy.

Perceived relevance of the policy measure & inclusivity

It can be inferred form the conversation that perceptions regarding the relevance of policies to one's life and community were among the strongest factor for participation across all groups. The judgements of the three communities were made in regard to different policy domains and different levels of government. Sami tended to spoke generally about all levels of government, rural business owners referred rather to local and national level, while the youth related their opinions to the local level.

Sami participants took distinctive retrospective perspective. The conversation with them indicated that perceptions of exclusion and discrimination are deeply entrenched. They date back before policy actions related to counteracting climate change and promotion of a sustainability transition. They are rooted in long-built sentiments that the Sami community as a minority group has been discriminated by the rest of the Swedish society, and that their needs and rights over the land have been ignored or violated by the government. Referring to policy documents relevant to the green transition in Sweden and Norrbotten, participants from Sami origin spoke about the perceived lack of any meaningful reference to their community and their livelihood based on reindeer herding. On the contrary, there were perceptions that planning of sustainability investments to combat climate change in the region poses a significant threat to the survival of their way of living and their culture.

Rural business owners were particularly interested in how issues linked to rural development are addressed in municipal and national policy measures (rural ones or else). These were not necessarily concerned with business development. References were made for instance to availability of services such as health and public transport, as well as support to the marketisation of local food production. The group highlighted that policies often exclude such aspects, which are relevant to the group. In their views, policies can implement diverse solutions that would include rural development interests such as promotion of local produce in local shops and delivery of homecare in peripheral areas.

Both Sami and the group of rural business owners considered the failing of policies to include or recognise their needs as a major factor behind their proneness to engagement.

Youth struggled to identify policy measures that are introduced in the domain of the sustainability transition that directly link to their needs and aspirations. Perceptions of absent actions of local policies that concern this community are shaped particularly by challenges with availability of public transport in peripheral areas. This irresponsiveness was seen by youth as a factor that diminishes their willingness to engage directly with public institutions.

Empowerment/powerlessness

Two of the groups in Norrbotten – Sami and youth – identifed that negative sentiments toward participation are shaped by experiences of powerlessness in previous participation. Both groups perceived public institutions and political officials as reluctant to listen to voices coming from their particular group. They talked about the discussion failing to be inclusive and to fairly share power.

While the official Sami representatives (Sami parliament) did have a seat on the table in some participatory processes incl. in relation to the green transition, participants from Sami origin believed that these discussions fail in being inclusive and in sharing power fairly. They perceived these processes (consultations) as highly invasive. While developments being discussed threaten to change irreversibly Sami homeland and their livelihood, Sami didn't feel that their voice was provided equal standing in the discussion. The weight of different viewpoints seems unequal to participants. Powerful economic interests oriented towards the exploitation of the natural capital, are perceived to prevail in the consultation processes and have greater impact on final decisions. Such interests were seen as solely profit driven and harmful not only to Sami community but the wider citizenry as well. Participants' description of the process reveals the lack of formats that promote deliberation and cooperation among groups with view of achieving a common decision. In addition, final decision making power is, officially, preserved to governmental bodies. As a result, when it comes to participatory outcomes, the group highlighted that a meaningful public participation is lacking. To Sami, it looks like decisions have been predetermined without their involvement or influence. While this may be factually true, their sentiments seem also shaped by perceptions that their voice has been marginalised for decades. Nevertheless, participants shared that this feeling of disempowerment has rather provoked their participation. This is because of the perceived vulnerability to past and recent (green transition) developments (to economic growth paradigms in general), which requires them to protect their interest.

Similarly to the Gotland's youth group, Norrbotten youth highlighted the important role of participatory institutions, like the youth council, as an interface between young people and

decision-makers. Outside this representative structure, however, participants were in agreement that there are substantial barriers for youth to have an equal standing in front of public bodies and effect any change with their voice. It is notable that the group did not refer concretely to changes related to the sustainability transition but to broader issues they considered important to their life – for instance, the need for better public transport between regional centres and rural areas. Participants also talked more generally about their impression regarding the disposition of policy-makers towards youth, apart from one participant who spokes from experience after engaging with the topic of transport. For this participant, perceptions of one's voice being continuously ignored have led to discouragement and disengagement.

Social influence

The role of social influence was evident to participants from Sami origin in particular. The factor can be seen to promote political engagement - in specific, the participation of elected or nominated Sami leaders. Participants refer to the widespread perception that representation of the community must be strived for in order to preserve it and ensure that it has a future in the region. This creates a strong social pressure on Sami leaders to participate in every arena possible.

Social/cultural traditions, norms & values

Only broader interpretations of social norms and valuesweare evident in the group discussion, highlighting the increased role of women in reindeer herding as the latter has become more labour intensive and the lack of gender equality in society observed by youth.

Ability factors

Accessibility

Among the different aspects of accessibility, the groups in Norrbotten highlight edparticularly the role of access to information (all three groups), followed by physical accessibility (youth) and language (Sami). Some participants in the youth group and the group of rural business owners shared that their ability to participate is impacted by the way information related to participatory opportunities is made available. These participants considered that such information must be sent/addressed directly to them as they appear reluctant to seek information from official sources. This reluctance possibly stems from practical reasons, such as the difficulty of locating the information and time-saving considerations. Receiving a direct and clear invitation for input (poll being mentioned as an example by youth) enhances the ability (and willingness) for participation. The Sami community referred to concrete experiences of occasional and deliberative withholding of information by the industry and the government which has been a barrier to participation.

The group of citizens with Sami origin also highlighted challenges in making accessible some of their traditional knowledge on reindeer herding and forestry to public institutions. The older generation is particularly affected when it comes to making themselves understandable in

Swedish language. This is attributed to the fact that Swedish vocabulary on the subject is not as rich as the distinct Sami language.

Knowledge and skills to effectively participate

Knowledge and skills for effective participation were not mentioned explicitly by any of the groups as factors that affect their participatory attitudes or behaviours. The three groups exhibit previous experience with informal (youth and rural business owners) and formal (Sami) participation, therefore, it can be assumed that they do possess certain skills or understanding how some participatory processes work more generally. It is noteworthy, however, that past participatory experience has not involved deliberative forms of participation. The groups of rural business owners and youth have been part of participatory forms or structures that do not link to policy making per se. Rural business owners, for instance, mention engagements in campaigning for public services in Norrbotten (at neighbourhood/municipal scale) and for Norrbotten's representation in national politics (at national scale). These practices have not been related to specific policy measures. Some youth participants had experience being youth representatives as part of the local youth council. Participants from Sami origin differ from the other groups in that they are aware of a number of participatory instruments at different governmental scales. It is worth noting however that Sami often rely on intermediaries to represent them at such processes.

When it comes to the production of local or community knowledge in the field of sustainability transitions, schools and conversations with teachers were suggested by youth as important channels. While participants from Sami origin do not discuss the issue explicitly, it can be assumed that they consider themselves as possessing unique knowledge about the natural environment where they live, including knowledge and observations that have been passed through generations.[26]

Resources/Time

Time was an important factor for Sami people in particular due to the specifics of their occupation. Participants mentioned that engaging in participatory processes take time away from reindeer herding, which is a seasonal and time-consuming activity. This is also evident in the DUST own research process where focus groups had to be organised at busy time (April) when reindeer spring migration takes place.

Digital access/tools

Digital access or tools made available electronically/online were not considered among the factors affecting participation across the three groups.

Community mobilisation/identity

The groups of Sami and youth emphasised the importance of community structures and leaders that they identify with as important platforms enabling them to voice their views and concerns to governmental authorities. While these structures did not appear to

[26] https://library.arcticportal.org/524/1/EALAT_Reindeer_Herders_Voice_Book_Full_Web_version.pdf

necessarily encourage direct citizen participation, participants see them as important in terms of mobilising a joint voice and representing them in policy processes. The participants from Sami origin underlined that Sami have been traditionally an organised community with various organisations and individuals representing them in different governmental arenas and policy-making processes. It is evident that individuals from Sami origin had a strong sense of belonging to a community and a tradition of being part of structures that enable individuals to spoke with a common voice and be present at as many policy arenas as possible. Participants expressed certain doubts, however, regarding the capacity or the legitimacy of some organisations/leaders, who may not accurately reflect the interests and needs of the entire Sami community (even if perceived to do so by external actors).

The discussion among youth highlighted once again that municipal youth councils are specifically valuable for youth as structures that can mobilise their input to policy processes at the local level. These councils were also conductive for ensuring a more continuous engagement as participants involved with them feel that they have direct access to local politicians and their voice is somehow heard. It can be concluded, therefore, that youth living in municipalities that lack such structures are less able to (effectively) participate in political life. Inclusiveness challenges may, however, limit their role as they appear to often represent certain type of 'elite' youth, and be limited to certain types of themes assumed to appeal more to youth.

6. Key insights

The first part of this deliverable focused on policy factors influencing the deliberative participation of citizens in just and sustainability transition policies. These factors were analysed based on perspectives shared by policy practitioners and other stakeholders involved in participatory processes. The insights relate to the types of participation processes public authorities utilised, the aims they appear to pursue, and factors stemming from policy rationale/framing, and governance arrangements and the targeting of communities.

Interview data regarding the participatory processes utilized by public administrations in policy design or the implementation of selected policy measures reveal a certain variety of approaches across and within cases. Participatory processes are used to generate new collective knowledge, share responsibilities based on expertise, and, in some cases, offer an innovative approach to discussing and deciding how resources are distributed, including those with long-term consequences:

- **Knowledge production processes informing transition-related policy measures and interventions are being opened to actors outside governmental institutions**. In majority of the analysed policy measures, the approach undertaken followed an already well-established or traditional way of working and doing policy. In these cases, policy makers relied predominantly on the engagement of private or third-sector actors. **In more limited cases, the design of policy measures and interventions used more innovative, including digital methods of citizen participation, in pursuit of (i) ensuring better informed and inclusive policy interventions in view of territorial or social inequalities, (ii) of re-establishing or strengthening institutional trust, and (iii) as a way to navigate through long-term transformations that bring out tensions and require acceptance of changes in current social practices**.

- **Voluntary democratic spaces aiming to mobilise and engage broad society or certain social groups have been emerging, and embody the potential of democratic revitalisation.** These are mostly created as part of domestically-run policy measures (e.g. citizen jury in Groningen; youth council in the Rhenish District). Among EU funded TJTPs, one example of representative participation that can be highlighted is the Silesian Regional Council of Just Transition which is a voluntary consultative body for TJTP planning and implementation with more than 70 institutional members.

- **Forms of citizen participation that had a clear aim of assessing different (competing) priorities and building consensus around whose needs or which investments shall be prioritised are evident in two out of the 16 policy measures analysed.** Interview data indicate that these processes truly aimed at reaching more consensual decisions together with diverse communities, although the research points to difficulties during their deployment, especially when it comes to lay citizen capacities.

- **When it comes to sharing decision-making powers with actors outside governmental institutions, the research indicates that governmental bodies remain the key actors with decision-making power** in measures addressing territorial transitions and their resource distribution. National governments and EU institutions are perceived to play a leading role in deciding on overarching objectives and rationales for intervention. Policy measures had differing flexibility in moulding the overarching

framework to local contexts, and this flexibility appears more limited in measures funded under Cohesion Policy. Overall, public bodies retain their discretion in making final choice as to whose views, collected in participatory processes, to incorporate in policies.

- **TJTP's funding from JTF has predominantly distributed key resources (in the form of investments) to a network of actors that are already part of (multiple) other funding channels and programmes, those with already active and strong position in the governance of regional development policy.** These actors are considered resourceful in terms of capacity and experience to implement projects successfully, which supports policy makers' efficiency objectives. These actors have been mobilised following a networked governance approach and were trusted to hold significant knowledge about and outreach to communities to be targeted in the policy measures.
- **Sharing decision-making with citizens (although not in final decisions) is evident in one measure out of the 16 analysed.** This was within a national domestically financed policy measure targeted at the Dutch region Groningen, where citizens were involved in producing project ideas and in assessing project proposals to be funded. This is one example of an innovative way of managing resource distribution as part of a sustainability transition policy measure.

The interview data suggest that how policies frame the sustainability transition - in terms of strategic questions as to what is to be preserved, by whom and how - plays a crucial role in determining whether policies will find citizen knowledge relevant and if they will have the scope to offer new citizen deliberative spaces.

- **The possibility to use citizen participatory processes is facilitated by an open and flexible policy approach in defining the strategic scope of the sustainability transition**. Measures, which adopted a broad understanding of sustainability and transformation, had the flexibility and motivation to work with communities at local level and integrate general objectives with interests and needs based on local contexts. These measures considered citizen knowledge useful and relevant, not least because they aimed to support rethinking, transformation and improvement in social practices and quality of life as part of sectoral transitions.
- **On the other hand, the scope to involve citizens in the design of policies and interventions is hindered when there is a largely pre-defined logic of intervention in relation to strategic national or international decarbonisation objectives**. Measures, where framing of the transition was dominated by how to promote large-scale sectoral change and industrial transformation, reported limited incentives to engage citizens in participatory processes due to the technocratic nature of the objectives and the lack of relevant citizen knowledge in the fields of interest.
- Overall, citizen participation is more prominent in domestic and spatial planning measures as compared to EU Cohesion policy measures. **Especially under TJTPs, policy practitioners felt that sectoral priorities, decided at an early stage, might not allow them to act upon collected input, if they were to engage with citizens.**

Governance arrangements influenced participation across case studies and policy measures in various ways, depending on the extent to which relevant tasks were delegated or decentralized to the sub-national level, or influenced by top-down forces; the capacities

and skills of public institutions; and the level of cooperation among different sectoral organisations and across local level authorities.

- **The dominance of top-down governance, driven by centralised public policy systems and national framing of energy and industrial transitions represent barriers to participation**. This dominance has limited the capacity and incentives for regional and local governments to participate, with higher-level authorities often controlling who is involved in deliberative processes and how they are conducted. As a result, local authorities have had limited influence, which has discouraged their participation and hindered their ability to engage other local stakeholders.
- **Within the TJTPs, the tight timeframe for designing and implementing the Plans disincentivised policy practitioners to attempt organising citizen participatory processes**. Interviewees highlighted that citizen engagement would have required longer preparations and time to carry out meaningfully.
- **The capacities of public institutions were an important factor, particularly regarding the skills needed to organize effective participatory processes, the availability and experience with participatory tools, the willingness to take risks, and the additional resources required to reach out to less-engaged communities.** Lack of suitable participatory tools, difficulties in shifting mentality to work with more experimental approaches and the necessity to organise participatory processes in a context of wide public uncertainty were challenges mentioned by interviewees.

The rationale adopted by policy makers in defining communities relevant to policy measures and interventions along with ambitions and approaches to define less-engaged communities affected the inclusiveness of transition policies and their governance.

- **Identifying and mobilising least engaged communities in policy processes is enabled by policy ambition to reach out to various communities from diverse backgrounds.** This is particularly evident in measures that view the transition as a collective effort to create local spaces of prosperity and distribute territorial and material resources in ways that communities perceive as beneficial, rather than merely addressing assumed vulnerabilities.
- **Identifying communities from the perspective of groups that are vulnerable to the changes necessitated to transform the economy towards low-carbon, does not appear to significantly incentivise policy measures to include such communities directly in the design of the measures.** Labour market implications were among the key considerations that informed policy thinking in targeting communities. As part of this, the targeting of some groups appeared to be driven by pragmatic reasons – existing skills and experiences shall be used in building new value chains. Ensuring that measures reached to those that are perceived as deprived (based on physical disabilities, ethnic backgrounds, etc.) under specific interventions (labour integration; energy poverty) also informed policy rationale in targeting communities. There has been reliance on representative organisations and studies to understand vulnerabilities during policy design stage. In this case, engaging less-engaged communities has become more evident during policy implementation stage. As mentioned earlier, this stage seems to be more conducive to accounting for contextual specificities and mobilising local structures that can support policy outreach objectives.

- the research indicates also potential barriers to inclusive participation related to the lack of robust mechanisms to ensure that all participants who took part in participatory processes had equal opportunity to express their voice or impact final decisions. Large private companies (compared to SMEs or NGOs) and male individuals (compared to female) are identified in different cases to be more dominant in participatory processes.

The acknowledgement and value of citizens practical knowledge in sustainability transition measures remains limited, implicating a need for strengthening the (recognition of the) role of bottom-up knowledge in transition processes to ensure their democratic and inclusive nature. The research provides insights regarding sentiments that policy practitioners hold towards citizens or communities that represent barriers for their engagement or that limit policy incentives to directly engage with these communities. The large scale sectoral transitions pursued in some TJTPs, but also in some other transition measures, require cultural and identity transformations, which take time to accept and to develop. In some cases, **policy awareness regarding community sentiments of opposition towards the transition was not conductive to opening participation to such communities**. In other cases, **perceptions that transitions would be seen positively by affected communities led to conclusions that their direct engagement in policy dialogues was not necessary.** It can be assumed that this further proved fertile ground for uncertainty and contestation on the community side.

While most interviewees supported the view that building the capacity of communities to engage in policy processes is a significant enabling factor for participation, endeavours to build such capacities, especially among the least engaged communities, were more limited. Despite indicated perceptions of lack of democratic capacity among communities, the research indicates that at the policy design stage of majority measures, policy makers did not consider using participatory processes as a way to help build such capacities among communities. In some cases, progress is being made during policy implementation, a stage that is presumably more conducive to considering contextual territorial characteristics. **The research also highlights that there is need of carefully crafted mechanisms to ensure that citizen knowledge is translated into 'policy language'. This may require intermediaries and clear scope where citizens can contribute.**

The second part of this deliverable delved into the perspectives of communities regarding the sustainability transitions and the factors that affect their attitude to participation in associated policy processes. Focus group discussions reveal that, across the board, sustainability transitions are associated with various developments in economic and social life, with changes in spatial terms and in quality of life. While some of these changes have been experienced, other are being expected (or feared) in the future. Youth groups in particular stand out when it comes to associating the transition with impacts in the (more distant) future. Male mining works (esp. those involved in KCR research) stand out as the most reluctant group to imagine themselves or their community undergoing a transition. Transformations in culture, values and traditions have also been observed, and there is a vast diversity of interpretations of what such transformations are in the different regions. Interpretations regarding the current transition are impacted by recollections of past experiences of large-scale transformations. Judgments about the sustainability transition were often emotionally charged, with negative emotions such as scepticism, pessimism, frustration, and even anger being particularly prevalent. These feelings were frequently rooted in concerns about the quality of democracy and past experiences with participation. Pessimism also emerged when participants evaluated regional and national transition and decarbonisation efforts, particularly regarding the perceived

lack of tangible benefits. Concerns about industries relocating, or the continuation of carbon-intensive practices in other parts of the world were raised. A notable source of scepticism especially in rural areas was the perception that resources are disproportionately allocated to large companies or installations, raising doubts about the potential benefits for local communities.

Focus group research suggests that citizens hold specific expectations regarding the decision-making process for sustainability transitions. They anticipate that policymakers will consider the diverse economic, cultural, and emotional impacts of structural transformations on local populations. Furthermore, citizens expect decision-makers to possess a comprehensive understanding of on-the-ground realities. They also emphasize the importance of transparency and timeliness in decision-making, advocating for proactive measures that ensure a smooth and well-managed transition rather than reactive, last-minute decisions.

When it comes to distinctive willingness and ability factors that influence communities' participation in sustainability transition policies, key insights are summarised per case study below.

Sentiments towards participation among groups in the Bulgarian Stara Zagora region are distinct when comparing working and retired female employees in mining companies on one side, and youth, on the other.

- The first two groups highlighted several key factors influencing participation such as lack of trust, feelings of powerlessness, and perceptions of exclusion. Their desire for a more democratic policy making, open to citizens, was strongly rooted in the uncertainty they currently experience and the fear that the transition may leave them without a quality livelihood.
- This distrust towards public institutions stemmed not only from recent experiences related to the sustainability transition but from past experiences of insecurity. Failing industries and transitions during the post-socialist regime have contributed to their scepticism about decision-makers' ability to produce effective policies for a sustainability transition. Working and retired females have been witnesses of a deindustrialisation process in the past and their accounts indicate a traumatic experience related to the sudden closure of different manufacturing facilities and financial insecurity.
- Perceptions of exclusion stemmed from the inability to access participatory processes related to the transition, with additional sentiment among retirees that their voice does not matter because they were no longer part of the active workforce and due to their age.
- In contrast, young females noted different barriers, including participants' workload, non-permanent residency in the region due to work or study elsewhere, and perceived low policy-relevant knowledge on the topic and confidence. Despite these expressed fear or shyness, youth were more engaged on the topic and willing to discuss the just transition issues compared to the other groups. They were motivated to participate in non-governmental project-based activities related to sustainability transition influenced by positive examples in their community.

Reflections on the focus group discussions within the German case of Lusatia indicate a generally low motivation among youth to engage in participatory processes on the transition, likely due to their perception of the theme as distant or disconnected from their everyday experiences and immediate concerns. Many young participants felt that the issues discussed at policy level did not resonate with their daily lives, leading to a sense of detachment.

It was evident, however, that youth desired more democratic policy processes when it comes to decision about the future of valued territorial resources in the region, and some had clear perception of participation as being 'cool'. Male participants more strongly associated positive sentiments towards participation with formats they perceived as impactful - those attended by powerful policymakers – while female participants envisioned a meaningful participatory process as one that can restore the image of public institutions as caring for citizens. Leveraging trusted relationships, with educators, social workers, and community leaders, emerged as an enabling factor to improve communication about the relevance of sustainability transition to youth's life and to facilitate the organisation of participatory events that are more accessible and appealing to young people.

All communities represented in the Dutch focus groups in Groningen, including youth, elderly, those in difficult life circumstances, remote communities, and lower-educated, appear to face significant barriers to participation. These barriers vary by group.

- Time constraints were perceived as a particular barrier by youth, while elderly and lower-educated individuals related disengagement more significantly with the lack of right language, skills, and knowledge barriers.
- The reliance on intermediary organisations and on being motivated by your own social circle also came out as a significant factor.

The research further reveals that being least-engaged arises from the intersection of socio-demographic characteristics, which, when combined, compound the challenges to participation. For example, an individual might be elderly, lower-educated, and from a remote community, which leads to an accumulation of willingness and ability barriers. Some barriers are also closely intertwined. In this case study, such appeared to be trust, communication, and information/knowledge. A lack of trust in the government led to scepticism towards communication from public institutions and the value of participation. Similarly, unclear, non-transparent, or culturally insensitive communication exacerbated distrust and contributed to misinformation or lack of knowledge. The unique life circumstances and needs of each community and the inter-relation among factors that affect their participation underscored the complexity of addressing participation barriers.

Several factors emerge as having a significant impact on public sentiments towards participation in the Katowicki coal region and Bełchatów area of transition, with trust arising as a central issue.

- Trust in public institutions is generally low across retirees, mining, and energy workers, and youth. Discussions with the groups indicate that this distrust was rooted in perceptions of public institutions' inability to act honestly and competently, particularly in relation to local development and the ongoing industrial transition, but also on the basis of perceptions of betrayal in the past (particularly among mining employees). Youth's perceptions of trust in institutions were particularly influenced by their immediate social circles.
- The perceived relevance of policy measures was another crucial factor. For retirees and workers, policy measures must align with their needs and aspirations to be seen as significant, with larger budgetary allocations often equated with greater relevance. Youth, however, struggled to identify policies that resonate with their lives, partly due to a lack of outreach and targeted engagement from public institutions. From more practical perspective, young people would be more motivated to participate if processes took place in a location they spend some of their free time, and if access to a reliable, single

source of information was provided. They expected politicians to actively seek their opinions and believed that outreach through simple, short social media messages was the most effective way to encourage their participation. Youth also valued practical knowledge and consider passionate, experienced experts as the most credible.

- Empowerment, or the lack thereof, was also a significant barrier to participation. All groups express feelings of exclusion from participatory processes, with youth particularly feeling undervalued in discussions about the region's transition. Retirees and workers shared similar sentiments, attributing their disempowerment to a lack of recognition of their local knowledge and a perceived absence of actionable goals in policy planning. Retirees in Bełchatów also reflected on the past, noting that during periods of economic prosperity driven by the mining industry, there was little need for strong civic engagement, a mindset they believe persists today.

Within the Swedish case of Gotland, evidence suggests that youth may be facing the most significant barriers to participation. Youth perceived that a clear invitation to participate in public policies was necessary. Being students and living more temporarily on Gotland, the participants did not strongly identify as locals, and they were unsure to what degree they were welcome to participate in local and regional policy processes. The group appeared the least informed about participatory processes, aside from what they learned through their school or university. In comparison to the other groups, youth also did not appear so inclined to participate. Possibly, a form of fatigue on climate issues was one of the significant underlying reasons, as the topic is being extensively coved in educational programmes. Therefore, at private level, they expressed less motivation to take part in discussions on this subject. Some participants considered that they 'participate' in sustainability transitions via their more sustainable practices such as use of public transport.

Participants, representing residents living near the cement factory in Slite, expressed perceptions that they lacked clear and systematised information about participatory processes. They found it challenging to navigate the numerous ongoing activities, making it difficult to know where and how to start participating. The group deemed participation in policy processes important but were more ambiguous on what and how. They shared views that it was challenging to find a good angle due to an overload of information. At the same time, the group highlighted the importance of a democratic process in the transition.

Female rural women felt capable of participating but did not feel heard or listened to, which they saw as a barrier to meaningful participation. This group was most focused on the importance of participating and making their voice heard. They were most critical on the perceived lack of transparency and fair participatory processes.

The focus groups in the second Swedish case of Norrbotten revealed varying levels of knowledge and experience with the subject of green transition and participatory processes among different groups.

- The Sami showed a strong understanding of the green transition, both in terms of its impact on their lives and its role in public policy. They also had significant experience with participatory processes, particularly through their representative organisations.
- Local business owners also appeared knowledgeable on aspects of the sustainability transition but had limited knowledge of participatory processes beyond those related to rural development.
- Youth had a general understanding of what participatory processes could involve but felt that such processes were not present in their reality. They were mostly familiar with the

youth council as a deliberative space and lacked awareness of other participatory opportunities.

Despite these differences, all groups expressed the desire for more meaningful citizen participation in the sustainability transition.

- The Sami's participation was driven by the perceived critical relevance of the topic to their lives, to the need to protect their culture and existence, leading to high engagement levels.
- A similar driver was evident among the local business owners, albeit with different intensity, stemming from the importance of rural areas for them.
- Youth participation was primarily influenced by the opportunity and invitation to engage.

All communities faced barriers associated with perceived lack of opportunity to participate in policy making processes, or least to do so meaningfully. While access to participation was generally similar across groups, with the Sami community potentially having slightly better access due to legal requirements, the overall impact of participation was perceived limited for all communities, particularly among the Sami.

References

Barbour, R.(2007). Doing Focus Groups. London: SAGE Publications. 174 pp. ISBN 978-0-7619-4978-7. The Canadian Journal of Action Research, 15(3), 65.

Barca, F., McCann, P. & Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2012) The case for regional development intervention: Place-based versus place-neutral approaches, Journal of Regional Science, 52(1), pp. 134-152

Cedergren, E., Tapia, C., Sánchez Gassen, N., & Lundgren, A. (2022). Just Green Transition–key concepts and implications in the Nordic Region. Nordregio

Dekker, R. (2016). Frame ambiguity in policy controversies: critical frame analysis of migrant integration policies in Antwerp and Rotterdam. Critical Policy Studies, 11(2), 127–145.

Den Hoed, W. (2019) Enhancing regional cooperation in the Netherlands through the Regional Budget. EPRC, Glasgow: EoRPA Policy Briefing, February 2019.

Dulias, R. (2016). A Brief History of Mining in the Upper Silesian Coal Basin. The Impact of Mining on the Landscape: A Study of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin in Poland, 31-49.

Green, A. (2023) When should place-based policies be used and at what scale?", Background paper for the OECD-EC High-Level Expert Workshop Series on "Place-Based Policies for the Future", Workshop 2, 12 May 2023

Iammarino, S., Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Storper, M. (2017). Why regional development matters for Europe's economic future (Working Paper No. 7). European Commission Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy.

Matschoss, K., Repo, P., & Timonen, P. (2019). Embedding European citizen visions in sustainability transition: Comparative analysis across 30 European countries. Futures, 112, 102437.

Medeiros, E. & Rauhut, D. (2020) Territorial Cohesion Cities: a policy recipe for achieving Territorial Cohesion?, Regional Studies, 54(1), 120-128.

Purvis, B., Mao, Y. & Robinson, D (2019) Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. Sustain Sci 14, 681–695.Varone, F., Nahrath, S., Aubin, D., & Gerber, J.-D. (2013). Functional regulatory spaces. Policy Sciences, 46(2013), 311–333.

Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Ketterer, T. (2019) Institutional change and the development of lagging regions in Europe. Regional Studies, 54(7), 974-986.

Annexes

Annex 1: Checklist for interviews

1. Existence of deliberative participatory mechanism in the measure

Main question - does the measure include deliberative participatory mechanisms - is commitment to deliberative participation formally embedded in the measure?

- If yes, proceed to Q2.
- If no, please explore the reasons for this (potential factors that can be explored with the interviewee are set out in the table below).

Factor	Importance [0-5]*	Explanation
Measure perceived by practitioners to be of limited relevance and meaning to communities their input of limited value.		
Concern about community capacities – that they will either not participate or will drop out partway through a deliberative process.		
Concern about practitioner capacities – insufficient human and financial resources to organise and run deliberative mechanism given rigid regulations and timelines, complex multi-level governance structures		
Other?		

2. Motivation

Main question - what are the motivations for pursuing deliberative participatory mechanisms in the measure?

- Please explore perspectives and priorities of interviewees based on the Table below. Explore whether motivations differ for direct citizen engagement and deliberation with representatives of organised interest.

Motivation	Importance [0-5]*	Explanation
Efficiency in mitigating uneven territorial impacts – sustainability transition processes can have uneven territorial impacts, participation mitigates this by informing measures with 'bottom up' inputs from those with local experience and knowledge of most pressing needs.		

Inclusivity - creates opportunities for inclusion of specific communities facing serious challenges in measures, 'leave no-one behind'.		
Sustainability – strengthens long-term commitment to measure, consensus-building through participation pre-empts public conflict or stalemate		
Local Transparency/visibility - Increases public awareness of measure and transition issues in region, and community.		
Capacity – can contribute to broader processes: building perception of collective community interests, civic engagement in local development.		
Regulatory – meeting regulations, guidance for participatory policymaking.		
Other?		

Scale: 0 – not important; 5 – extremely important

3. Identification of least engaged communities

Main question - Does the measure consider the mobilisation of communities that are less engaged in participatory policymaking?

- Has the policy thinking during policy design stage and later on during implementation focused on specific communities that are impacted by or vulnerable to the sustainability transition?
- Are there criteria in identifying less-engaged communities and what has been the rationale in that?

Please explore the identification of communities with interviewees based on the Table below.

Community	Identification process and rationale
Demographic	
Ethnic	
Socio economic (e.g. mining)	
Territorial (e.g. remote)	
Other	

4. Identification of key deliberative participation mechanisms

Main question - what are the key deliberative participatory mechanisms in the measure and what are their main characteristics? *[This concerns mechanisms that* go beyond basic consultation or statements of positions and are associated with more significant dialogue or

interaction between public authorities and stakeholders or communities that directly informs the design and delivery of measures.

- What are the most important mechanisms for deliberative participation in the measure?
- What was the rationale behind the choice of these mechanisms (i.e. why chose this specific approach)?
- How have deliberative participatory processes been introduced during different phases of design and implementation of the measure?
- What are the most important arenas for deliberative participation in the measure?
- How have these mechanisms been applied to the participation of least engaged communities?

Please explore the identification of communities with interviewees based on the Table below. Based on data gathered in D3.1, you can fill in under 'Mechanisms' the actual mechanisms you have already identified, together with the arena and the stage. If the latter were not identified on the basis of desk research, please obtain the information via the interview.

Mechanism	**Arena (national, regional, local)**	**Stage in policy process (issue identification and policy formulation; decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation**	**Specific application to least engaged community**
Committees (e.g. monitoring and steering)			
Working Groups (e.g. thematic, territorial)			
Participatory budgeting			
Participatory mapping			
Mini publics (e.g. citizen juries/panels)			
Co-creation, co-production of initiatives			
Other?			

5. Quality of the deliberative process

Main question - what is your perception of the quality of the deliberative participatory process in the measure, especially from the perspective of the inclusion of least engaged communities?

- What was your involvement in the deliberative mechanism – organisation, direct participation , moderation or a mix of these?
- Is the objective of the participation process defined from the outset and linked to the challenge of sustainability transition?
- Is there a public commitment to respond to or act on participants' contributions?
- Is the design of the participatory mechanism and all materials, as well as relevant data, clear and accessible to participants in a timely manner?
- What efforts have been made to improve the capacity of different communities to become involved?

- What efforts have been made to build a consensus between different opinions and (sectoral) interests during deliberation?
- Did the participatory mechanism offer equal opportunity to all participants to express their views and deliberate with the rest (avoiding dominance by well-resourced, experienced stakeholders)?
- Were sufficient resources allocated to support the participatory mechanism?
- How have digital tools supported deliberative participatory mechanisms?

Please explore different dimensions of quality set out in the Table below and ask interviewees to rate them.

Dimension	Rating [0-5]*	Explanation/examples
Transparency of the objective – aims of participation clear to communities from outset.		
Clarity of roles - clear identification of planners and their roles		
Commitment and accountability - political commitment to respond to or act on participants' recommendations.		
Clarity – role and identity of organisers, relevant data and materials all clear and available to participants in a timely manner.		
Inclusiveness. Special efforts made to mobilise and bring together a variety of communities incl. potentially disengaged ones to become involved (e.g. through awareness raising, training, remuneration, covered expenses etc.).		
Balance of influence. Efforts made to address (1) asymmetries of power and capacities among participants, (2) dominance of 'usual suspects', (3) consensus building between different stakeholder interests		
Resource sufficiency. Human, financial, and technical resources available for authority to properly implement participatory processes.		
Monitoring and evaluation. Arrangements in place to gain insights on mechanism from participants and to track results or benefits		
Use of digital tools. To include remote communities, to support active participation, co-creation, to improve transparency, visibility etc.		

Scale: 0-very poor, 5-excellent.

6. Results or benefits

Main question - what are the main results or benefits identified or anticipated from deliberative participatory processes?

- With a focus on least engaged communities, are arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate the results of participation?
- What benefits have been identified or anticipated as a result of benefits of participation of least engaged communities in the deliberative mechanism, based on the Table below.

Benefits	Explanation/examples
Better informed and more effective transition measures	
Raised awareness of transition challenges and potential responses among LECs	
Strengthened social capacity and trust in public institutions among LECs	
Specific benefits related to digital tools e.g. 'e-empowerment' in communities.	

7. Barriers to participatory process

Main question - what are the key barriers to the use of deliberative participatory processes in the measure, particularly in terms of the participation of least engaged communities?

In terms of the least engaged communities, themselves:

- Are there key barriers related to characteristics and capacities of the least engaged communities?
- Are there barriers associated with the capacities of local/regional community organisations?
- Are there difficulties engaging with specific groups within communities (e.g. based on demographic, ethnic, socio-economic characteristics)? Case study regions can refer here particularly to the meta group they will focus on in the FGs.

Please explore these types of barriers with interviewees, based on the Table below.

Community barriers	Importance [0-5]*	Explanation/examples
Lack of capacity within LECs (e.g. time and resources, understanding and language skills, low levels of trust, limited traditions of engagement).		
Lack of capacity within representative community organisations (e.g. funding, staff, time)		
Specific to digital tools – e.g. digital divide**.**		
Other?		

Scale: 0 – not important; 5 – extremely important

In terms of policy barriers related to the features of the sustainability transition measure:

- Are there barriers associated with the strategic objectives and priorities of the measure?
- Are there barriers associated with the geographical scope or coverage?
- Are there barriers associated with the governance of the measure?

Please explore these types of barriers, based on the Table below.

Policy barriers	Importance [0-5]*	Explanation/examples
Dominance of technocratic, sectoral priorities. Transition measures often seen as sectoral and highly technical, less attention to social dimension. Preference for input from sectoral interests and specialists.		
Time pressures and lack of consensus on measure's priorities (e.g. social inclusion versus economic development, innovation, entrepreneurship) minimises scope for deliberation.		
Difficulties in deciding geographical boundaries of participation (e.g. narrow focus on tightly defined communities, broader focus to capture wider interactions).		
Insufficient decentralisation of responsibilities in implementing the mechanism (e.g. measures led by national governments may bypass local channels for deliberative participation).		
Complexity (e.g. excessive number of policy measures, regulations and participatory mechanisms are disincentive for communities with limited capacities).		
Challenges in securing political commitment to participation outcomes.		
Administrative burden for sub-national authorities managing participation mechanism (e.g. limited capacity/skills, staff, especially in centralised institutional settings).		
Specific to digital tools – lack of capacity or willingness among public administrations to use, difficulty in applying them in participatory mechanism.		

Scale: 0 – not important; 5 – extremely important

8. Facilitators

Main question - What are the key factors facilitating the use of deliberative participatory processes in the measure, particularly in terms of the participation of least engaged communities? How important is it to:

- Gain direct access to communities (e.g. through coordination with community organisations, organisation of participatory mechanism close to communities)?
- Develop participatory mechanisms tailored to the characteristics and needs of least engaged communities?
- Provide support and capacity-building activities in these communities to strengthen participation?
- Ensure the appropriate level of human, financial and technical resources in sub-national authorities organising the participatory mechanism?
- Guarantee higher level political commitment to respond to outcomes of participatory process?
- Use digital tools to support the contribution and of least engaged communities to deliberative processes?

Please explore these facilitating factors, based on the Table below.

Facilitator	Importance [0-5]*	Explanation/examples
Outreach and advocacy (e.g. locating participatory mechanisms closer to communities, using local organisations - both community and statutory - networks and individuals).		
Matching participatory mechanism to community (e.g. flexibility in approach)		
Support and capacity-building in communities to support participation (training, financial or other incentives).		
Ensuring sufficient resources in sub-national authorities managing participation (financial, human, technical)		
Ensuring high level political commitment to respond to or act on participants' recommendations.		
Use of digital tools (e.g. on-line platforms) and foresight, visioning, mapping methods, incl. via digital tools.		
Other?		

Scale: 0 – not important; 5 – extremely important

Annex 2: Composition of focus groups

Bulgaria

Stara Zagora meta-community: Women

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Retired female employees of the mining/energy industry	This group consisted of four retirees. Participants can be classified as elderly adults ranging from ages 62 and 82 years. All ladies but one are long-retired. Two ladies have university education, and two ladies entered the workforce after they obtained their school leaver's certificate. All four women come from different professional backgrounds, but with first-hand experience in the energy sector: accounting, vocational training, environmental compliance and infrastructure maintenance.
Women working or from families employed in the mining and energy sector	The participants in this group are all actively working and can be classified as middle-aged adults ranging from 45 to 55 years of age. All of them have university degrees, and half of them have majored in more than one subject of study. Three out of all four ladies who originally consented to participate joined the discussion. The fourth participant cancelled due to family members employed with Maritsa East 2 TPP (the state-owned coal-fired power plant) having openly voicing disagreement about her being involved in a project about the just transition. The professional background of participants is different, incl. investments and project development, accounting, engineering, vocational training and health and safety. Participants work in different industrial sites incl. state-owned mining company Mini Maritsa Iztok EAD and private Contour Global Maritsa East 3 Plant Site. The third participant works with the local brewery currently but shares experiences obtained within the family of working in the US-owned power plant in Maritsa East Complex, AES – Galabovo TPP.
Youth	The participants in group represent an active part of Stara Zagora's youth community. They, however, do not currently reside in Stara Zagora (they are based in the capital city - Sofia - for work and study), but remain connected to friends and family and frequently visit their hometown. They have previously participated in sustainability initiatives, more recently for instance in an EU funded project "EU Teens4Green" related to improving the just transition of EU's regions.

Germany

Lusatia meta-community: youth

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Male youth	Participants are apprentices in gastronomy and social assistance. They come from different towns within the Lausitz region, including Herzberg, Luckau, Senftenberg, and Laubusch. Aged between 17-20.
Female youth	Participants are apprentices in gastronomy and social assistance. They come from different towns within the Lausitz region, including Senftenberg, Sedlitz, Dölau, and Ortrand. Aged between 17-21.

Netherlands

Groningen meta-community: rural community

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Youth	This first youth group consisted of youth that study and live in the city Groningen. Two out of three participants grew up in a village in the province of Groningen, the third person grew up elsewhere in the Netherlands and moved more recently to Groningen.

	The focus group took place online via Teams and all were actively participating in the discussion. One of the participants is part of the JOT (JongerenTop, a group of at least 25 young people from different backgrounds discussing specific topics. The aim of JOT is to give young people a structural voice and influence on government policy and implementation.) The participants were offered gift vouchers of a value of 50 EUR as a reward/incentive.
Youth	The second youth group consisted of youth that grew up in Groningen (both in the city of Groningen as well as villages in the province of Groningen). All are studying and/or working. The focus group took place online via Teams and included five participants. All were actively participating in the discussion. The participants were offered gift vouchers of a value of 50 EUR as a reward/incentive. Three of the participants are part of the JOT (JongerenTop, a group of at least 25 young people from different backgrounds discussing specific topics. The aim of JOT is to give young people a structural voice and influence on government policy and implementation.)
Residents of deprived area (Oude Pekela)	This group consisted of local residents of Oude Pekela. The municipality of Pekela is one of the most deprived areas in the Province of Groningen, with relatively low education levels, poor public transport connections, health issues, population decline and socio-economic hardship. The focus group was held at the local community centre and included six participants. The group cut across different social groups and included representatives of several Least-Engaged Communities (LECs): youth, elderly, unemployed and/or people with difficult life circumstances (psychological health challenges, housewife, relatively modest economic background). The participants were offered gift vouchers of a value of 50 EUR as a reward/incentive.
Residents of deprived area (Oude Pekela)	The same conditions applied as for group 3 and the same number of participants were involved. This group included citizens who are experiencing or have experienced difficult life circumstances (e.g. being dependent on state support due to health issues, being homeless for a certain period), several senior citizens, one member of the local youth. One participant also had a migration background. There was a good coverage of the different least engaged sub-communities. Discussion in this group was harder to manage due to propensity of several participants to dominate, with stronger differences of opinion being expressed, albeit not per se on sustainability transitions and participation.

Poland

Bełchatów Area of Transition meta-community: coal mining and energy sector community

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Youth from mining community	The group consists of high school students from Bełchatów, originating from classes with technical profiles, being trained as automotive technicians, IT technicians, and renewable energy technicians. The students are aged 18-19. Two of them live in the city of Bełchatów, while the remaining three live in neighbouring rural municipalities.
Retirees from mining community	The group was co-hosted by the trade unions and consisted of their members/affiliates were invited. The participants represent male retirees from the mining and energy sector of Bełchatów Area. They had been actively involved in the coal mine extraction / use - holding middle to top managerial positions. They are aged 64 to 87 and were quite reluctant and distrustful to spoke at the very beginning. Later on the group started to show more confidence their voices can be useful for the transition of the area.
Mining and energy workers	The group is composed of active male employees of either lignite mine or power plant. They are aged 25-51. They have shown a rather high sense of belonging to the territory even if some of them come from other areas. Their level of awareness of the processes steering the “life” of the companies is very high. Working with technology, planning, investment and economics of the companies.

Katowicki Coal Region meta-community: coal mining and energy sector community

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Youth	The first youth focus group consisted mainly of students (female) from the University of Economics in Katowice from bachelor's studies (age between 20-23 years old) who live in mining (or energy sector) communities. This means their parents are miners or workers of the conventional energy sector or related coal-intensive industries. One of the participants is also engaged in a regional pro-climate movement (Silesian Climate Youth Movement). This organisation has an informal structure and organises a series of educational or pro-climate actions in the Silesia region. Another one studies sociology in Krakow (at the Jagiellonian University) and prepares a bachelor thesis on social aspects of just transition in coal regions. She lives in Katowice and her parents work for the conventional energy sector.
Youth	The second youth focus group was organised in a secondary school in **Ruda Śląska**, which is currently one of the main mining municipalities in Silesia / Poland / Europe. As for the city, this school is one of the leading ones at the secondary level. The group included "young adults" female (dominant) and male. All living in the city or nearby. Well acquainted with local situation. In many cases having relatives and friends who work in coal mining or other carbon-related jobs.
Employees in the mining and energy sector	This focus group consisted of various workers of the **Halemba Coal Mine in Ruda Slaska** (i.e. technicians, engineers, and physical workers) at age between 30 to 41. All of the group participants are connected with direct coal extractions and have relatively long experiences in working for the mining sector. All of the participants also have educational attainment in mining (and like to continue a job in the mining sector, and in that particular coal mine). The Halemba Coal Mine is one of the biggest in the KCR accounted for over 4,0k miners. The group was identified in cooperation with Trade Union KADRA. The participants form a very closed social/professional group, distrustful of others. They formed a key condition for participation in the focus group i.e. this study must be conducted exclusively by Adam Drobniak - the trade union organisation knew him from works on National Just Transition Plan in 2021 and consultation of Territorial Just Transition Plan for Silesia in 2022.
Retired employees of the mining/energy sector	The focus group was co-hosted by the trade unions and participants were members/affiliates of the unions. All of them were male and retired, some still doing some extra part-time jobs related to mining. On average the group was young as for pensioners (52-65 y/o). This is due to the early retirement age of the Polish coal miners. All participants used to have senior (mid-management/operations) positions before leaving coal mine.

Sweden

Gotland meta-community: rural community

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Residents near the cement factory and adjacent limestone quarries (Slite)	Four participants that reside in Slite or in a rural neighbour village called Lärbro. Three are retired and one is currently unemployed looking for work. All participants were 55+ (up to 75 years old). Two men and two women participated. Various backgrounds in terms of previous working life and educational level. Two out of the four participants came from mainland Sweden and had moved to Gotland (one over 50 years ago and one three years ago). The other two were born on Gotland. None of them had themselves worked in the cement factory, but one of them had family members working there.
Rural women	Four participants. All women residing in rural Gotland. Three are retired and one is working as a nurse at the hospital in Visby. All of them were partly engaged in small-scale farming for household purposes and had their own house/small-scale farm. One has been a farmer for many years as her main livelihood. Three of the participants came from the mainland and one was born on Gotland. Three participants reside in Buttle (central rural Gotland

	which is one of the areas where a larger wind power park is planned) and one resides further south in a peninsula called Näsudden (where one of the largest wind power parks on Gotland is established since decades – at some point, Europe's largest wind turbine was located there).
Youth (20-25)	In the youth group, four students participated in the age span of 20-25 years old. All participants identified as women and came from the Swedish mainland (none were born or had grown up on the island). Two were enrolled in a writing programme in a northern rural village in Gotland at a so called "folk high school" that offers creative courses and vocational programmes. Both of them also lived in this village at the school campus. The two other participants resided in Visby (the only urban area in Gotland) and were enrolled at the Uppsala University Campus Gotland in a social science oriented programme. While none of the participants had grown up or lived for a longer time on Gotland, they still have taken part of activities and have lived experiences as youth residing in Gotland.

Norrbotten meta-community: rural community

Sub-community targeted	Description of participants
Rural Sami	Two participants, father and son, both full time reindeer herders. Three other participants did not show up. This time of year is particularly busy for the Sami. April often marks the spring migration, during which reindeer herds transition from winter grazing areas to summer pastures.
Rural small business owners	Five participants that own small business in rural Boden municipality. Three men and two women.
Rural Youth (18-21)	Three youth aged between 18-21, all women from Boden/Luleå municipality. One of the three participated via Teams.