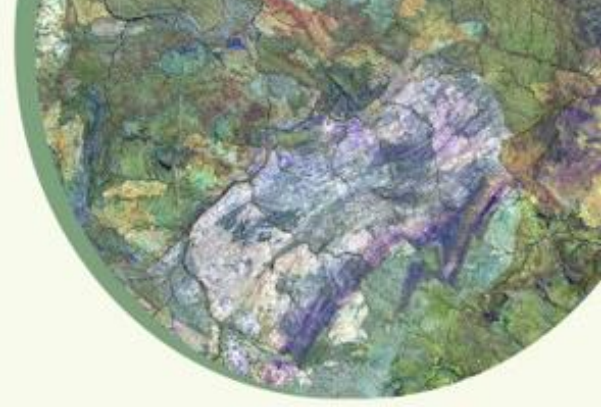




Bridging Organizations and marginalized
communities for Local Sustainability
Transitions in EuRope



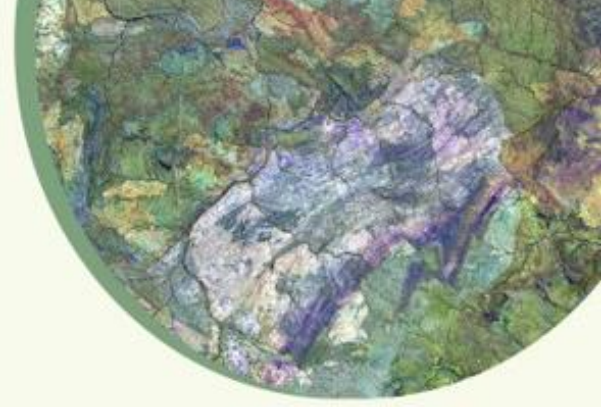
From consultation to collaboration: Rethinking participation in EU Cohesion policies

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Key-messages/Summary

- There is a high variety in how civil society organizations and (marginalized) communities were involved in the design process of TJTPs
- The primary actors involved in partnerships and engagement were mostly 'usual suspects'
- Organize participatory processes in such a way that vulnerable communities are represented
- Strengthen the position of local NGOs



1. Introduction

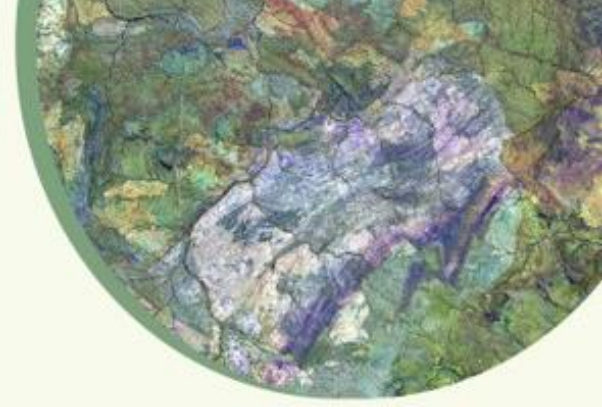
The European commission has stated that the transition towards a carbon neutral Europe should be achieved in a fair way, leaving no one behind^[1]. European citizens most vulnerable to the transition should be protected through the so-called Just Transition Mechanism^[2]. The Horizon Europe research consortium BOLSTER has investigated how European citizens – including the most vulnerable and marginalized – have been involved in policy processes linked to the Just Transition Mechanism. In this policy brief, we highlight the main research findings and recommend policy changes to improve the way citizen engagement is organized.

The European Commission has introduced the Just Transition Fund (JTF) in order to support regions with a high concentration of carbon-intensive industries (especially coal-mining regions) that are at risk of losing jobs and opportunities due to the European Green Deal. The guiding principle of the JTF is 'to leave no one behind'. In order to receive funding from the Just Transition Fund, regions had to develop

'Territorial Just Transition Plans' (TJTPs), that outline how those regions would achieve a just transition. The TJTPs should have been prepared 'in social dialogue and cooperation with the relevant stakeholders^[3]'. According to the code of conduct on partnerships in European structural and investment funds, civil society should be included in 'the whole programme cycle consisting of preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation^[4]'. Moreover, civil society should be represented, and special attention should be paid to 'the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, which are at highest risk of discrimination or social exclusion, in particular persons with disabilities, migrants and Roma people^[5]'. The BOLSTER consortium has investigated to what extent the principle of 'leaving no one behind' and the regulations on partnerships have been applied.

2. Methods

The BOLSTER consortium investigated the participatory processes of TJTPs in seven regions: Hainaut (BE), Saxony-Anhalt (GE), Silesia (PL), Prahova (RO), Stara

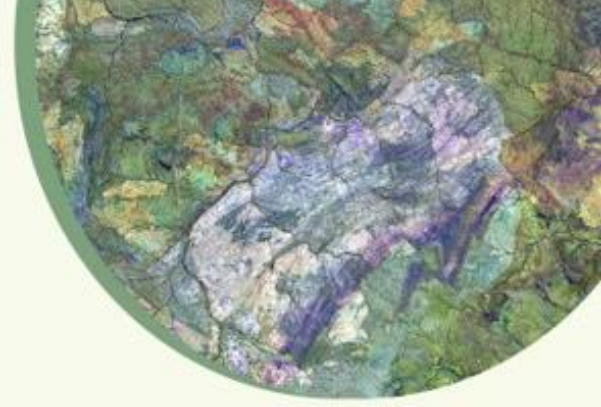


Zagora (BU), León (ES) and Istria (HR). These regions were selected because they represent some of the largest (ex) coal-mining regions – Saxony-Anhalt, Silesia, Stara Zagora and León – or represent regions that are dependent on other carbon-intensive industries, such as cement, chemicals or oil – Hainaut, Prahova and Istria. Moreover, they represent a mix of West and East European countries. We did extensive desk analyses of the TJTPs and relevant policy documents. Next, in the regions we have done interviews with 120 representatives from government agencies, civil society organizations and industries. Moreover, we have done interviews with 70 representatives from marginalized communities and focus groups with 100 participants who represent marginalized communities.

3. Main findings

The findings from our study show that there is a high variety in how civil society organizations and (marginalized) communities were involved in the design process of TJTPs. Whereas some regions – Silesia, León and Saxony-Anhalt – had

extensive participatory processes with the inclusion of many different actors, other regions – Hainaut, Istria, Prahova and Stara Zagora – had limited opportunities for engagement. In Silesia, León and Saxony-Anhalt, meetings with key actors, public meetings and consultations were organized. Although those meetings were extensive, there is a lot of unclarity about what happened with the input of participants. Moreover, it should be noted that the participatory processes organized in León, Silesia and Saxony-Anhalt, were part of larger, nationally coordinated, processes to engage citizens on the question of the phase out of coal mining and the climate transition. Both the Spanish and the German governments also designated large national funds to achieve a 'just transition'. In the Balkan area (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania), there is less experience with organizing participation and there is less administrative capacity to organize those processes. [MS1] Although Romanian regions like Hunedoara and Gorj had higher participation from different actors than Prahova, the Romanian region included in this study. The high participation in Hunedoara and



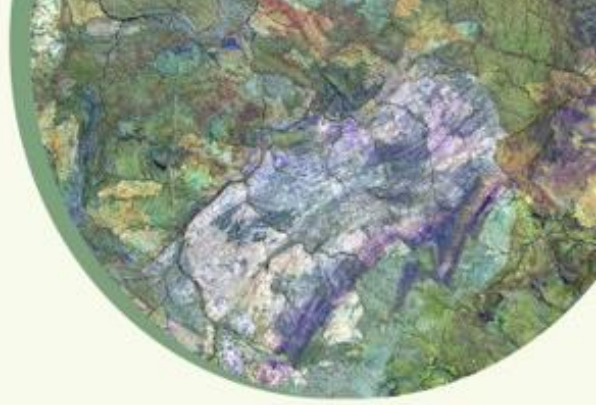
Gorj was mostly due to the work of local and national NGO's (e.g. the Jiu Valley NGO Association and Bankwatch Romania).

However, we noticed a pattern in all the regions. The primary actors involved in partnerships and engagement were mostly 'usual suspects' including national and regional government agencies, representatives from large city administrations, large corporations, and industries, and to a lesser extent research and education institutions. Smaller cities and SMEs have been less involved. Trade unions have been the major participants representing NGOs and civil society. The interests and concerns of other civil society groups, such as environmental groups or groups representing woman, youth, people with disabilities, Roma or migrants have largely been left outside of engagement opportunities.

Based on our research with vulnerable and marginalized communities, we found that most vulnerable and marginalized people were not aware of the European Commission's aim to achieve a 'just transition'. Moreover, in our focus groups, they often voiced different needs than were outlined in the

TJTPs. Whereas, the TJTPs focused on the creation of jobs, vulnerable and marginalized people highlighted the obstacles they face in accessing employment (-and reskilling/uptraining or other education) opportunities. Next, the focus and the language in which vulnerable and marginalized communities speak about climate change and economic challenges is fundamentally different from the TJTPs. The TJTPs describe the need to lower carbon emissions, whereas the participants talk about changes in weather (which lead to crop failures for example), waste and pollution. There is support to deal with changes in the seasons, waste and pollution, but there is distrust concerning official climate plans.

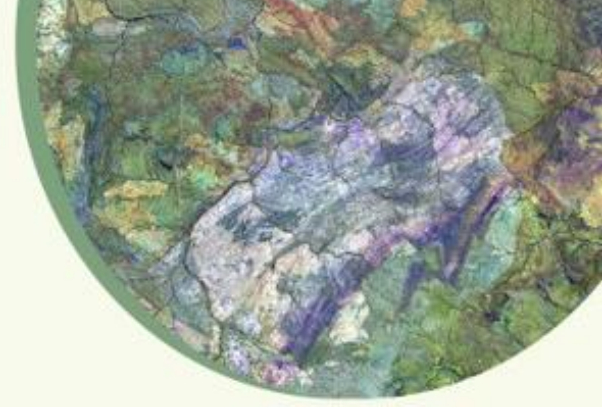
This means that mostly governmental authorities, large corporations, and industries shape debate around the TJTPs. The regulations of the partnership principle regarding civil society organizations and vulnerable and marginalized groups have not been applied in a sufficient way. Even in cases such as Silesia, Léon, and Saxony-Anhalt, with an extensive participatory process, vulnerable and marginalized groups have only had very limited opportunities



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to engage in discussions around the just transition. This implies that the idea of 'leaving no one behind' is mostly shaped without the people that are at risk of being left behind. Moreover, due to the mismatch of the priorities of vulnerable and marginalized communities and the TJTPs, there is a risk that even the JTF can lead to growing political polarization. Participation is organized in the context of the structural barriers that many vulnerable and marginalized communities face. This makes the access to participation unequal. We provide solutions in the section hereafter, but it should be noted that changes in

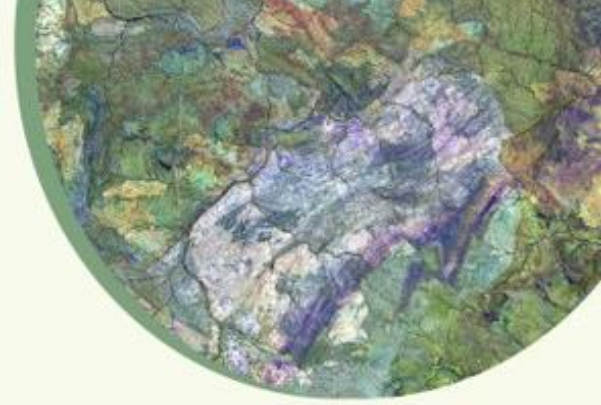
participatory effort alone will not be sufficient. There should be structural changes within the way cohesion funds combine economic and social goals, with a better understanding of limits to the accessibility to opportunities provided by cohesion funds. Next, participation should be linked to outcomes, for example by evaluating whether the outcomes of participatory processes are addressed in projects and policies. Moreover, local, community-based and civil society organizations should be able to access cohesion funds more easily.



4. Solution

The regulations of the European Commission on the Just Transition Fund and partnerships ensure that participatory processes are organized. However, they do not ensure the quality or the scope of those processes. Therefore, BOLSTER proposes ideas to improve the engagement with civil society organizations and the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. It is important to note that local managing authorities often lack the capacity to do these activities. Therefore there should be funding available from the technical assistance budget to strengthen the capacity of local managing authorities or private organizations (via subgranting) to perform these tasks:

- 1** Map community-based and voluntary organizations that offer services and organize activities for the most vulnerable and marginalized communities in an affected area before participation is organized.
- 2** Map other civil society organizations, such as environmental groups and advocacy groups in an affected area and country, before participation is organized.
- 3** Organize focus groups with representatives from these organizations in order to understand the priorities of their constituents. Share the invitations to focus groups openly using local networks. Organize these focus groups in community centers, close to the places where their daily lives take place. Make sure that the focus groups are organized in timeslots that work for them and use non-technical language. Next, compensate them for attending the focus groups. See vulnerable and marginalized communities as experts; take their language, their ideas, and priorities seriously.
- 4** Summarize the discussions in a policy note and ask the participants of the focus groups whether the policy note reflects the discussion in the focus group.
- 5** Ask representatives of both the community-based and voluntary organizations and other civil society organizations to join meetings concerning the whole cycle



of the programme; including preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Compensate them financially.

6

Create guidelines endorsed by the European Commission to organize engagement specifically for vulnerable and marginalized communities.

7

Create an observatory to scrutinize participatory processes that are linked to the Just Transition Mechanism and other cohesion funds, where best cases are identified and there is a systematic monitoring of participatory processes.

Next, BOLSTER proposes adjustments in the European code of conduct on partnership:

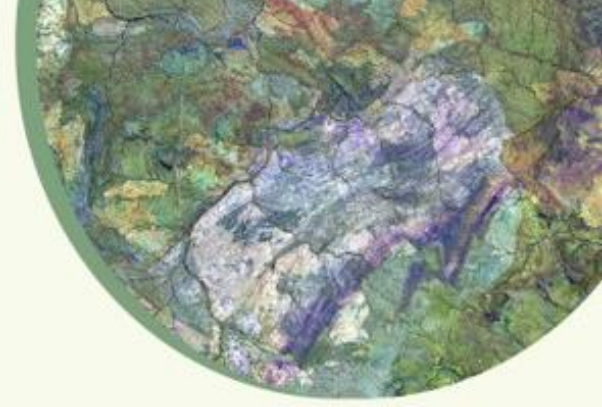
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The partnership principle should be applied to all EU funds and policies in order to make cohesion policy a model of partnership, openness, inclusiveness and dialogue, bringing about a systematic change in the management of public funds

2

Participation should be organized through the following principles:

- a. There is a fair representation of different social groups and key actors within a designated area. The representation will be monitored throughout the process and evaluated after the process has ended.
- b. Participatory ambassadors will be appointed to engage with underrepresented groups – such as youth, women, people with disabilities, people with a migration background and Roma people.
 - i. They will be appointed to ensure fair representation of underrepresented groups in participatory efforts and decision-making processes.
 - ii. They will be financially compensated through technical assistance funds.
 - iii. They will receive an official accreditation from the European Commission as participatory ambassador.



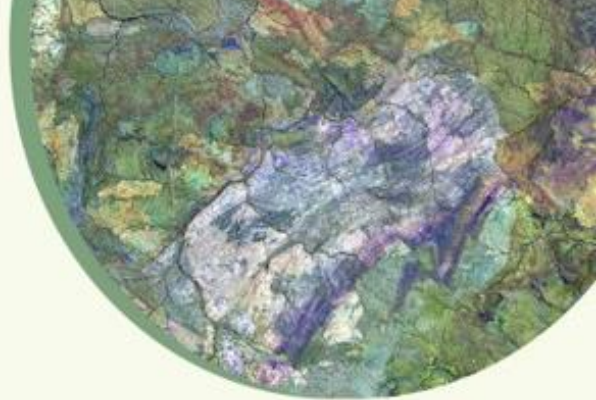
- iv. They will have an official meeting with representatives of the European Commission to discuss their perceptions on the participatory process.
- c. The participatory processes will be summarized in an official document – a participation report - in which it will be made clear how the needs and concerns of participants will be addressed in plans and policies.
 - i. Projects funded through European funds have to be transparent about how the participation report will be addressed.

3 Civil society organizations – environmental groups, advocacy groups, community-based and voluntary organizations – should represent at least a quarter of the official partners for programmes and Partnership Agreements.

4 Civil society organizations – environmental groups, advocacy groups, community-based and voluntary organizations – should be financially compensated for their work. Financially compensation should be available when:

- a. Civil society organizations deliver specific forms of expertise to design, implement, or evaluate plans and policies. This can be funded through technical assistance funds.
- b. Civil society organizations receive specific tasks, such as community organizing or raising awareness about European policies. This can be funded through technical assistance funds.

5 The position of civil society organizations should be strengthened in the monitoring process. The rules of procedure for monitoring committees should be supplemented with additional requirements that specify a minimum time frame for committee members to adequately review, evaluate and consult on documents. This will prevent committee members from being overburdened with an excessive workload that compromises the quality of their input and engagement.



6 Technical assistance plays a key role in supporting partners. The provisions in the Code of Conduct should further specify that managing authorities must support partners in strengthening their institutional capacity. In particular, priority should be given to partners who lack the resources, skills and confidence to contribute to the monitoring committees in order to ensure the inclusive participation of these marginalized groups.

7 Civil society organizations – environmental groups, advocacy groups, community-based and voluntary organizations – should receive an official capacity-building course that explains their rights and powers.

Next, BOLSTER proposes adjustments on the regulation of the Just Transition Fund:

1 The TJTPs should include a reflection on participatory processes organized to design the TJTPs, including the main needs of different social groups, such as women, youth, migrants, Roma, and disabled people. Next, a justification should be given on how these needs are addressed in the TJTP.

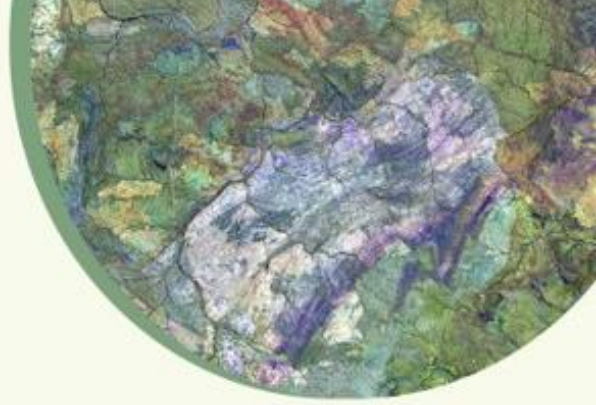
2 Before TJTPs are approved, the European Commission has a meeting with representatives of civil society organizations and vulnerable people. In the meeting their perspectives on the needs of their communities will be discussed.

3 The governance and monitoring structure of the TJTPs should include civil society organizations – including community-based and voluntary organizations – consisting of at least a quarter of all the partners. These organizations should be financially compensated for their work and receive an official capacity-building course that explains their rights and powers.

4 Indicators to monitor the implementation of the TJTPs should partly be created based on ideas, priorities and needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities.



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References

[1] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en

[2] Idem

[3] Article 18: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1056/oj>

[4] Article 2: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014R0240>

[5] Article 4: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014R0240>

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