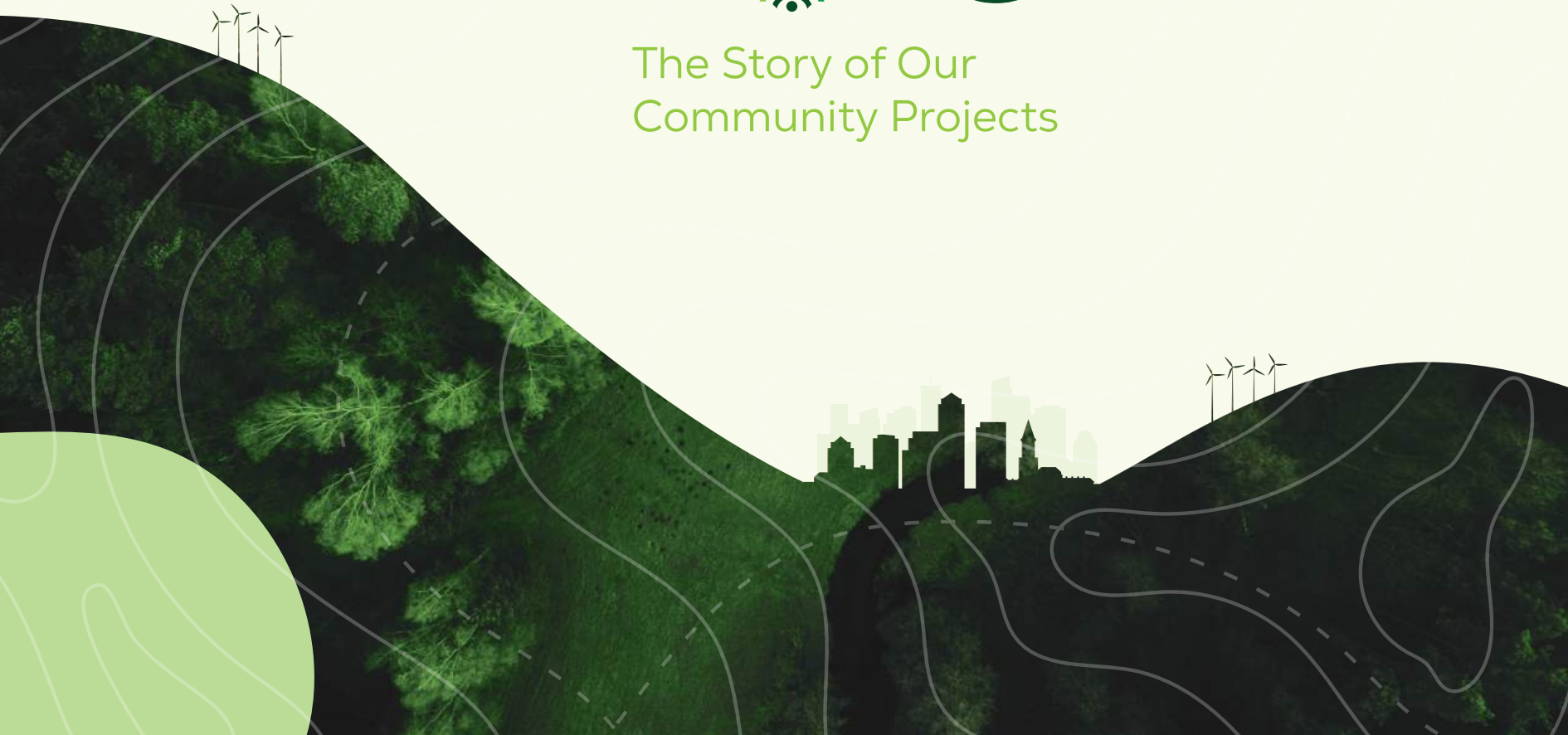


BOLSTER

The Story of Our
Community Projects





As Europe moves towards a greener and more equitable future, guided by the European Green Deal and the Just Transition, the **BOLSTER**'s goal was to strengthen community leaders to get directly involved, include and engage marginalized groups in crucial decision-making processes.



***What if the power to build
a better future comes
from within the heart of a
community?***

That's the primal idea behind the BOLSTER project. Brought by the European Union, this venture wasn't about telling communities what to do; it was about empowering them to lead their own journeys toward a sustainable future. This booklet is a celebration of that idea in action, showcasing real "Community Projects" where local dreams were turned into reality across seven unique European regions.

As Europe embarks on a journey, guided by the promise of the European Green Deal and a Just Transition, we knew we had a vital mission. Our goal was to make sure this shift to a greener, more equitable world was truly shaped by the people.

This meant strengthening the hand of local leaders so they could get directly involved. And, perhaps most importantly, it meant opening the door wide for marginalized groups, making sure their voices weren't just heard on the sidelines, but also making part of important decisions.

The BOLSTER project, funded by the European Union, successfully brought local communities to lead their own sustainable transitions. This booklet showcases the impactful “Community Projects” that were one of many activities of the project, bringing to life local ideas, across seven European regions.



What Were BOLSTER's Community Projects?

The BOLSTER Community Projects were locally-driven initiatives, co-created and implemented by community members themselves across seven European regions, as part of the “Re-Activate Campaign”. They were undertaken to ensure that the transition towards a sustainable future, as envisioned by the European Green Deal, was truly inclusive and empowering.

These mini projects aimed to give voice to marginalized communities, build local capacity, strengthen community bonds, and demonstrate practical, grassroots pathways to a just and sustainable transition, ensuring that the benefits of change were felt by all.

The BOLSTER initiative is centered on **Community Projects**. These projects got the support and funding they needed to begin, focusing on environmental awareness and education.

The work done from the community project call in 2023 to their implementation in 2024 was always based on active engagement and building local skills and knowledge.

We invite you to explore the diverse and inspiring Community Projects that unfolded across seven European regions. Discover the activities

undertaken, the results achieved, and the lasting lessons learned from this collaborative journey of community-led transformation.

The BOLSTER Community Projects were true grassroots missions, sparked and brought to life by communities themselves across seven European regions as part of the “Re-Activate Campaign.” They were championed to ensure the great journey toward a green Europe, as inspired by the Green Deal, would be a future we could all build and belong to.

These powerful projects sought to amplify the voices of those often unheard, nurture local talent, and forge stronger community bonds. They lit the way, charting practical, on-the-ground pathways toward a just transformation, so the triumphs of this change could be shared by everyone.

Fueled by vital support and funding, each mission became a beacon for environmental awareness and education. From the first call for ideas, our work was always a true partnership, dedicated to awakening local skills and shared wisdom.

In these pages, we invite you to step inside this incredible journey. Discover the diverse and inspiring missions that literally flowered across seven European regions. Witness the bold activities, celebrate the triumphs, and carry forward the powerful lessons from this shared story of community-led change.



Freedom To Create Their Own Ideas

Each community project began with the local people, residents, associations, and grassroots groups, identifying their own needs, challenges, and aspirations for a more sustainable future in their region.



Collaboration Was Key

BOLSTER facilitated a process where community members actively participated in designing and developing their projects. This “co-creation” meant that local knowledge, skills, and perspectives were central to shaping practical and relevant solutions.



Empowerment Through Action

These projects provided a platform for communities to voice their ideas and take concrete action. By leading these initiatives, participants developed new skills, built more confidence and experienced firsthand the power to make a difference.



Focus on Local Impact

From revitalizing public spaces, promoting green skills, fostering social inclusion to environmental awareness, each Community Project was tailored to deliver tangible benefits within its specific local context.



What Communities Made Part of This Project?

The BOLSTER aimed to provide the necessary support and tools to help communities transform their visions into reality. This involved fostering partnerships, encouraging shared learning and ensuring that the projects were truly owned by those who were meant to serve.

The BOLSTER Community Projects unfolded across seven European regions, each with its unique context and challenges, yet united by the common goal of fostering a just and sustainable transition.

The seven regions were: **Hainaut in Belgium, Stara Zagora in Bulgaria, Istria in Croatia, Halle (Saale) (Saxony-Anhalt) in Germany, León in Spain, Upper Silesia in Poland, and Prahova in Romania.** In each of these areas, local communities became the protagonists, developing and implementing projects that addressed their specific needs and aspirations for a better future.



● León ES

● Hainaut BE

● Halle Saale DE

● Upper Silesia PL

● Istria HR

● Prahova RO

● Stara Zagora BG

THE HAINAUT PROJECT

BELGIUM



In **Hainaut, Belgium**, particularly in the city of Tournai, BOLSTER's activities were brought by the **"La Milpa" project**. The inspiration came from the traditional "milpa" farming method, where different crops grow together, supporting each other. The main idea was to apply this concept to the community: creating spaces and activities where families, children, parents, and the local environment could thrive together.

THE SCENE

Two local associations worked together to carry out these activities, focusing on families, including vulnerable communities of women and immigrants.

THE MISSION

A festival called "La fête du vivant" (Eco-Cosmic and Poetic Festival), held in August 2024. This event celebrated life and friendship, bringing together around

THE WORK



Practical eco-workshops, which involved dozens of people, sharing knowledge about ecological practices.



"Kids camps" for children with vulnerable families, which engaged about 25 families. These camps provided contact with the natural environment and learning opportunities.



A series of **eco-workshops and five conferences** on food sovereignty, organized in partnership with the "La Pepinière" community hub.



The central aim in Hainaut was to cultivate a sense of shared care and collective well-being, where each community member could contribute and benefit, much like the diverse plants in a milpa field.

THE STARA ZAGORA PROJECT

BULGARIA



How do you build a greener future, one seed at a time? In the heart of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, a remarkable mission called the “Greenalized Zagora Project” has shown us exactly how it’s done. Brought to life by the BOLSTER project, this journey is all about revitalizing the local environment and, just as importantly, bringing the entire community, especially its young people, along for the ride.

THE SCENE

On November 5, 2024, the schoolyard of the XI Nikolay Liliev Primary School was buzzing with energy. Students didn’t just watch; they rolled up their sleeves and dug into the earth, actively planting 15 new trees. This single day of action was a cornerstone of the BOLSTER project’s venture in the city.

THE WORK



To show the depth of this community commitment, Pavlina Delcheva, the Deputy Mayor of Stara Zagora, stood shoulder-to-shoulder with first-graders to plant a beautiful magnolia tree. In total, the schoolyard was graced with five thujas, five ginkgo biloba trees, and five magnolias. The idea was simple, yet profound: each class would “adopt” one of the saplings, nurturing it as it grew. A beautiful lesson in responsibility and care. Reinforcing this spirit of leadership, it was shared that another Deputy Mayor, Nadezhda Chakarova, would also adopt one of the magnolias, a personal pledge to the city’s greener tomorrow.



This wasn't a solo effort. It was a true collaboration, a testament to what's possible when people come together. The "World Without Borders" Association (Сдружение „Свят без граници“) spearheaded the initiative, working hand-in-hand with the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) and in partnership with the Municipality of Stara Zagora.

It was a key achievement in the association's wider reforestation efforts under BOLSTER. The autumn campaign also reached out to revitalize other parts of the city, including cleaning up and planting new trees around social housing areas just a few days earlier, around November 2, 2024.

THE ISTRA PROJECT

CROATIA

In Istria, Croatia, the BOLSTER project came alive, igniting a green transition that brought the community together and captured its imagination. Its missions wove together a vibrant community fabric, inviting everyone from the youngest students to established entrepreneurs to take part.

THE SCENE

A Green Library, Lectures and workshops, partnerships, Living laboratory and Conferences. Imagine a library not just for books, film screenings that inspire and much more. This is what took root.

THE MISSION

Accelerate a sustainable transition by educating the public, empowering youth with green skills, and fostering collaboration among local entrepreneurs to build a more resilient and equitable future.



THE WORK



Film Screenings: In October 2024, the Valli Cinema screen glowed with stunning ecological films like “Where Man No Longer Rules,” “We Are All Made of Mud,” and “The Underground Astronaut,” sparking new perspectives.



Lectures and Workshops: *How can you have fresh food all year?* A September workshop with organic gardener Silviya Kolar-Fodor showed people how, arming community members, (especially women from marginalized groups) with powerful, hands-on gardening skills.



A Green Transformation for a New Generation: This mission was about forging a green future, one young mind at a time. What began as a “scientific and social garden” at the Pula Gymnasium has blossomed into a permanent feature, with the City of Pula now planning to fill the space with native plants as part of the Horizon Europe program.



Conference for Entrepreneurs and Craftsmen in Pićan: Here, entrepreneurs, artisans, local associations, and Istria County representatives shared their triumphs and faced the real-world challenges of a just transition, together.



The Istria project ensured that the push for sustainability was not just a niche interest but a shared community-wide effort, supported by the public, driven by the youth, and integrated into the local economy.

THE LEÓN PROJECT

SPAIN

In León, Spain, the BOLSTER project activities were part of the “Re-Activate Campaign,” focusing on fostering Just Transition through diverse micro-projects. These initiatives engaged various local actors and communities, addressing social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the transition.

THE SCENE

Placed within communities actively shaping their “Just Transition,” where diverse, locally-driven micro-projects were supported and shared through collaborative work sessions to build a sustainable and inclusive future.

THE WORK

Open to individuals, public entities, private companies, and non-profits, these work sessions were collaborative events that brought together a wide range of local actors committed to the sustainable and inclusive development of León’s mining regions.



The 4th work session, for example, held in the Ciñera-Matallana mining basin, focused on presenting the progress of BOLSTER’s research, explored possible scenarios for a Just Transition in León, and, crucially, shared the direct experiences from the “Re-Activate Campaign” micro-projects being implemented by the local community.



Micro-project “Quercus” in Fabero: This project was focused on environmental actions and masterclasses.



Micro-project “Bierzo Intercultural” in Ponferrada: On Wednesday, June 19, 2024, the Bolster project was presented – Intercultural Interaction among Women toward a Transformative Just Transition in El Bierzo.



Outdoor Area Development in Ciñera, La Pola de Gordón:

A social activity was organized by the local council at a new outdoor area near the local school. This space was implemented via the Re-Activate campaign.



Intercultural Solidary Market (Mercadilho Solidario Intercultural):

Creation of a women-led intercultural community in Ponferrada to connect and empower migrants from diverse backgrounds.



A planting activity was organized by the “Association Laciana con los 5 Sentidos” (Laciana with the 5 Senses):

This took place in an inclusive forest developed with support, once again, from the Re-Activate campaign, aiming to make nature accessible, potentially for people with special needs.



The projects in León highlighted a community-driven approach, using local partnerships and social media to engage residents in creating a more inclusive and sustainable future for their transitioning region.

THE HALLE ZEITZ PROJECT

GERMANY

In Halle, a group of women from Afghanistan and Iran shared a common dream: to cultivate a community garden of their own.

THE MISSION

Named "Halle 'Nature's Canva'," their vision brought a forgotten patch of earth near their meeting place to vibrant life. What began as a simple wish for fresh vegetables quickly blossomed into so much more.

THE WORK



Hands in the soil, the women built their garden from the ground up. Together, they raised beds for herbs and vegetables, shared gardening wisdom, and even crafted a makeshift tent from upcycled materials.



THE HARVEST

The garden became a true gathering place with the community connected. Children, neighbors, and friends would stop by to lend a hand and share in the bounty. For women who had never touched soil this way, the project nurtured a powerful sense of confidence. A visit to another city's thriving garden sparked fresh inspiration, planting seeds for their own garden's future.

For Zeitz, a city at a crossroads after the coal phase-out, a question lingered: How do you build a new, sustainable future together? A mission was born to breathe life back into the community.

THE SPARK

The answer, titled "Rethinking for the Future," came from the people themselves: the "Zeitzer Aktionstage" (Zeitz Action Days), a street festival powered by community spirit.

THE PARTNERSHIP

In an open meeting, the community chose its path. A diverse alliance of activists and residents, retirees and families, then spent months weaving this shared dream into reality.

THE CELEBRATION

The festival reclaimed a main city square, filling it with activity. Imagine the public seating built from salvaged materials, retirees sharing mushroom-foraging secrets, a tent buzzing with swapped books and clothes, and lively discussions on green energy. Children were everywhere, planting seeds and giving old items a new purpose.



Not even the rain could dampen their spirits. The festival was a triumph, a vibrant testament to what people can create when they unite. It drew everyone out to connect, learn, and imagine a brighter future, with the local newspaper capturing and celebrating its impact.

THE UPPER SILESIA PROJECT

POLAND

In Poland's Upper Silesia, the BOLSTER project is fueling community-led missions in towns whose heart once beat to the rhythm of the coal industry. These projects help people navigate a challenging economic shift, empowering residents and youth to forge a positive, sustainable future in the places they call home.

Here's how these transformations are taking root in two different communities:

“In Bieruń: A “Green Relax Zone” at a Secondary School

Imagine a secondary school in Bieruń, a town with coal in its veins, now facing a quiet future. The school itself, once a training ground for miners, is reinventing itself for a new world of work.



THE WORK

An idea sparked by the students themselves. They wanted to do more than just learn about the “Just Transition”; they wanted to live it. Together, with the passionate support of their teachers and school director, they decided to reclaim an unused open-air lobby and transform it into a vibrant “Green Relax Zone.” With sleeves rolled up, the students are designing and building their vision.



Once finished, this corner of the school will be a hub where students and teachers can unwind, connect, and even hold classes under the open sky. More than a space, the mission has shown students their own power to spark change, arming them with real-world skills and a true sense of purpose.

“In Katowice: “Climate Education for Kids” at a Kindergarten

In Katowice, a city shedding its identity as a center of heavy industry, Kindergarten No. 82 wanted to create something special for its children, even with a tight budget.

THE VISION

A true partnership blossomed between the kindergarten director, teachers, and parents. Their shared goal: to enrich the outdoor world for their youngest learners.

THE WORK

The team imagined and brought to life a garden buzzing with life. With materials from UEKAT (University of Economics in Katowice) via the BOLSTER project, they built multi-tiered raised beds, a sandbox for digging, a mud kitchen for messy creativity, insect houses, and a host of colorful plants and much more.



The garden is now an enchanting outdoor classroom and playground, giving city children a vital, hands-on connection to the natural world. It transforms the children’s daily world at the earliest age.

THE PRAHOVA PROJECT

ROMANIA



In Prahova, Romania, a region living in the shadow of its fading oil and manufacturing legacy, the BOLSTER project began with a simple, profound question: Has anyone actually asked the people living through this change what they need? The mission was to ground the lofty idea of a “Just Transition” in human reality, empowering communities often overlooked in political conversations.

Two groups brought this mission to life in their towns; Urlati where a cycling revolution took place, and Mimi, Ploiești, where Women Built a Safer Future, Home by Home. Let’s focus on the work in Mimi

“In Mimi, Ploiești: Women Building a Safer Future, Home by Home

In the overlooked Mimi neighborhood of Ploiești, a determined group of eight Roma women, mothers, youth, and seniors, forged

a partnership with the Concordia Foundation. Living with the environmental scars of a former refinery, they faced daunting injustices like a lack of running water or paved roads.

THE MISSION

While systemic change felt distant, they focused their collective strength on a challenge they could confront together: the dangerously poor energy efficiency of their self-built homes.

THE JOURNEY

With a modest budget, they launched a “materials bank” and a shared blueprint for action. Guided by an engineer, architect, and builder, they completely rebuilt and insulated the roofs and ceilings of two homes. In another, they reinforced a critical structural beam, averting disaster. Four other families received materials to spearhead their own vital home improvements.



The project brought immediate, life-changing relief to seven of the most vulnerable households, boosting their safety and warmth. It also armed these families with expert knowledge for the future, opening a door to conversations from which they had long been excluded.



Lessons We Got From the Community Projects

So, what did these journeys teach us? These projects in various corners of Europe revealed a powerful truth: community action is a muscle that needs exercise. Regardless of the size of town, language, or culture, the results are astonishing. Every challenge and its results show us that vital steps prove that by grounding big ideas in practical action and championing local voices, we can begin to weave truly visible changes in the heart of each community.

BOLSTER's Community Projects tell a simple story but also powerful. What happens when we move from working for

a community to working with one? Across seven distinct European regions, a spirit of true partnership revealed a wave of creativity, resilience and inspiring leadership. The gardens, workshops, and festivals, and many other activities, brought the most unique outcomes, confidence and human bonds that will continue to nourish these communities for years to come.



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