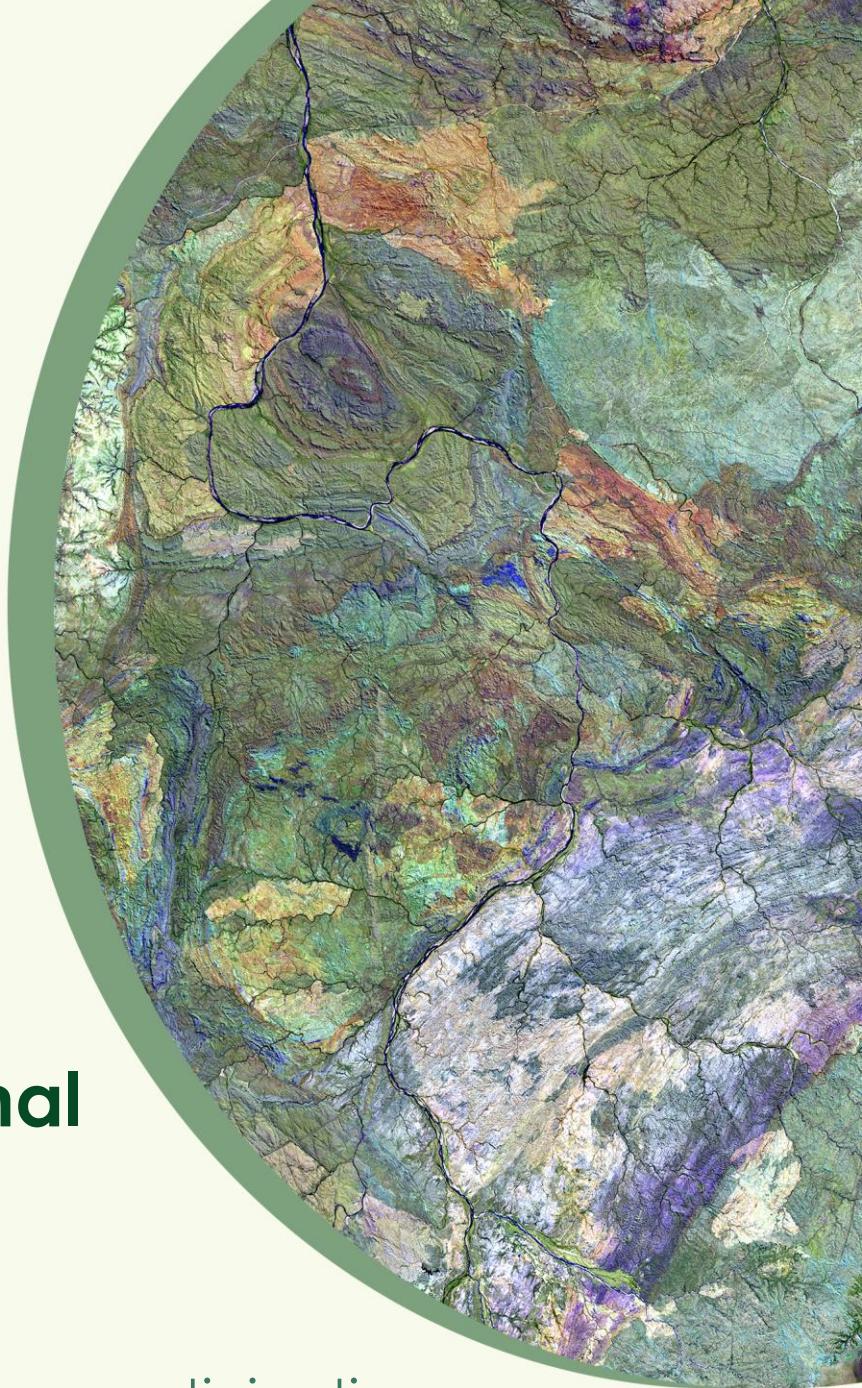




Bridging Organizations and
marginalized communities for Local
Sustainability Transitions in EuRope



4th BOLSTER regional policy dialogue

Green transition and citizen participation:
how to foster inclusive engagement



15th April 2024 - 10:00 - 12:00 CEST



Online



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4th BOLSTER's regional policy dialogue

Green transition and citizen participation – How to foster inclusive engagement?

On April 15th, the [BOLSTER](#) (Bridging Organizations and marginalised communities for Local Sustainability Transitions in Europe) project hosted another successful regional policy dialogue, part of a series of 10 organised by ECAS within the project framework. These dialogues aim to stimulate cross-regional policy learning on just and green transition processes.

During the dialogue, the speakers shared their insights on citizen engagement in the green transition, with a spotlight on the **Hainaut region in Wallonia, Belgium**. The discussions centred around challenges and best practices for fostering inclusive citizens engagement in the green transition, particularly the inclusion of marginalised communities in the broader climate debate.

Jessica Clement from [HEC Liege \(Belgium\)](#) presented findings from BOLSTER's fieldwork in Hainaut's marginalised communities, targeting women, youth, and post-industrial neighbourhoods in Charleroi, Mons, and Tournai. Through interviews, multi-actor fora (MAFs), and photovoice, three central themes emerged: collective challenges like community loss, insecurity, mobility issues, and pollution; barriers including economic challenges, COVID-19 impacts, and political mistrust; perceptions of a just future including aspirations for access to food, jobs, fair treatment, and equality. Through a compelling narrative, Ms. Clement illustrated how these themes intertwined, emphasising the adverse effects of the loss of community vitality, political mistrust, and pessimism about achieving a just future. She highlighted the importance of citizen participation in addressing these challenges, advocating for inclusive processes that empower marginalised communities and foster meaningful engagement in the green transition, a core principle of the BOLSTER project.

Afterwards, **Ammalia Podlaszewska, Chairwoman at [Culture Goes Europe Erfurt e.V. \(Germany\)](#)** introduced BOLSTER's Re-Activate Campaign, aimed at empowering marginalised communities through capacity building and participatory action. The campaign integrates community leaders into multi-actor fora to enhance their engagement and secure funding for Just Transition initiatives. Key activities include capacity building sessions, study trips to Just Transition regions, and community project development. Ms. Podlaszewska emphasised making projects relevant to local needs to ensure long-term engagement. Challenges include identifying and engaging marginalised groups, fostering local collaboration, and sustaining engagement beyond the campaign's duration. A highlighted pilot project in Germany showcased how active community members can collaborate on local initiatives, serving as a model for sustaining engagement and addressing Just Transition impacts.

The dialogue then continued with a panel discussion. The initial *Tour de table* with the panellists started with **Valérie Xhonneux, Climate Advisor for the [Walloon Ministry for Climate, Energy, Mobility, and Infrastructure \(Belgium\)](#)**. In her introduction, Ms. Xhonneux shared insights into their efforts to engage citizens in climate action through a citizen panel. Despite challenges, they organised five weekends of discussions covering topics like climate issues, sustainable mobility, and food. Special efforts were made to include young people, vulnerable individuals, farmers, and single parents, ensuring diverse perspectives were heard, even amidst COVID-19 restrictions.

Marine Sonet, Head of the Participation and Climate project at [Forum des Jeunes](#), highlighted their work in engaging French-speaking youth (16-30 years old) in climate policies in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. As part of one of their activities in the bilingual region of Brussels, Forum des Jeunes surveyed approximately 400 French-speaking and 400 Flemish-speaking young residents, revealing that 60% felt they had no voice in climate policy and 30% believed citizen participation processes were ineffective. Despite their mistrust in politicians, 70% of young people expressed a desire for direct dialogue with policymakers. The survey also highlighted a lack of awareness about participation mechanisms, with many young people wanting more information and engagement through schools and social media, including apps and online surveys.

Elisa Lironi, European Democracy Programme Director at [European Citizen Action Service \(ECAS\)](#), highlighted her expertise in digital democracy and the use of ICT for citizen engagement with governments. She shared insights from [CODE Europe](#), a project that crowdsourced citizens' opinions on air quality in 10 European cities, involving consecutive phases of identifying challenges, proposing solutions, e-voting, and co-creating policy recommendations. Besides policy recommendations, several [recommendations](#) for citizen participation and effective crowdsourcing emerged, including the need for accessible digital platforms, inclusive participation strategies, and the importance of providing feedback to ensure citizens feel their contributions have an impact.

The interactive panel discussion, guided by five key questions, highlighted several important points regarding the engagement of marginalised groups in the green transition process.

- Marginalised groups include women, single-parent households, elderly people, and those with limited mobility.
- Local challenges and experiences vary; therefore, it is essential to pay close attention to each region's unique context when identifying marginalised communities. This involves actively seeking out and listening to voices that may be overlooked by policymakers.
- Obstacles to engaging marginalised groups include distrust in politicians, ineffective consultation formats, and a lack of perceived benefits for participating.
- Encouraging participation requires ensuring privacy, data protection, and tailored communication.

- Local and regional governments need clear frameworks for engagement to build trust and manage citizens' expectations. Collaboration with intermediaries like NGOs and community associations is vital.
- Civil society can design new engagement formats, share knowledge, and promote inclusive participation.

Overall, the discussion emphasised the importance of a socially inclusive approach to the green transition – one that addresses the specific needs and realities of marginalised groups, while fostering trust and active participation through clear, accessible, and collaborative processes.

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