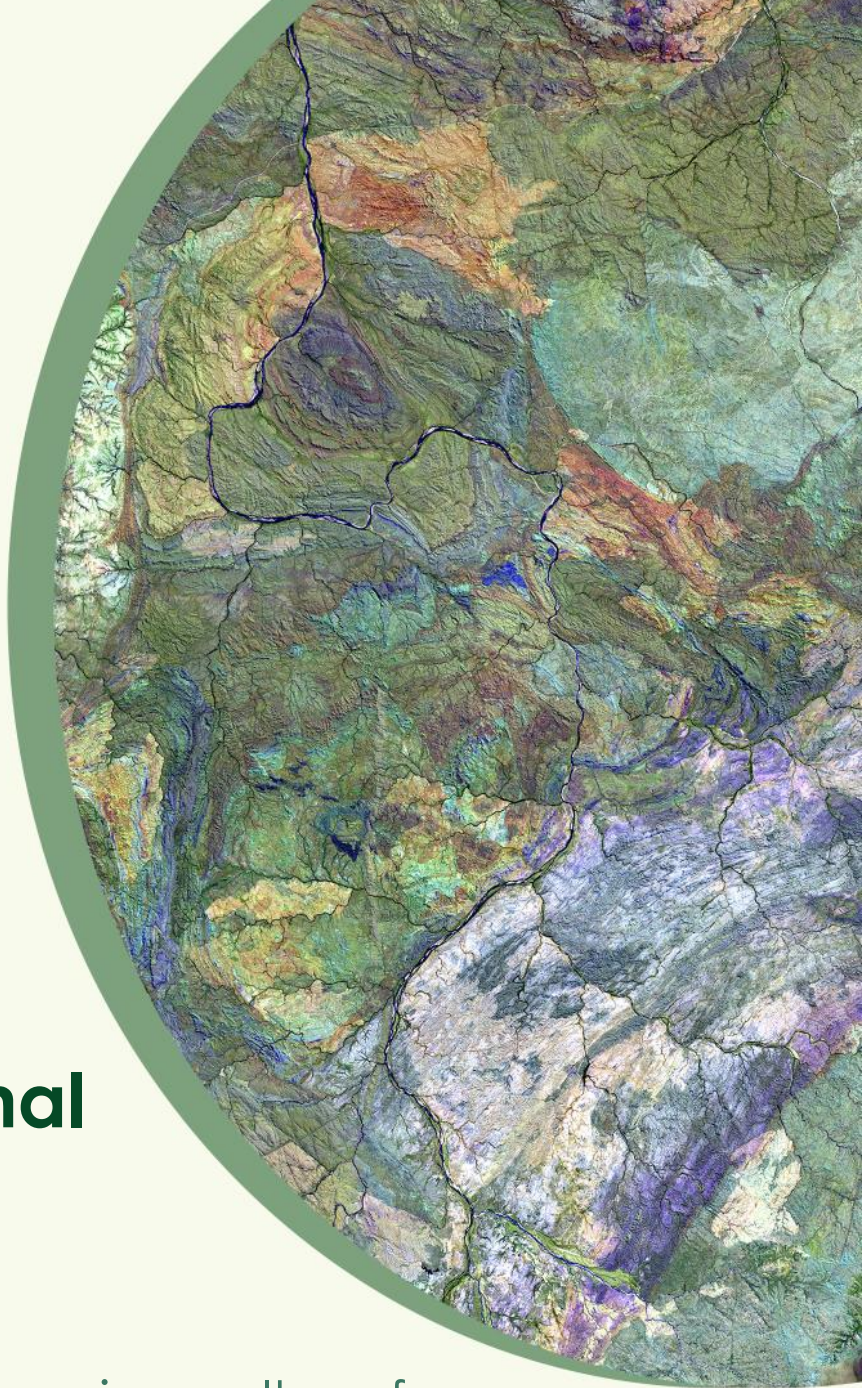




Bridging Organizations and  
marginalized communities for Local  
Sustainability Transitions in EuRope



## 5<sup>th</sup> BOLSTER regional policy dialogue

Beyond the mines – Leveraging culture for  
a just transition in former mining regions



11 June 2024 - 10:00 - 12:30 CEST



Online



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## 5<sup>th</sup> BOLSTER's regional policy dialogue

### Beyond the mines – Leveraging culture for a just transition in former mining regions

On June 11th, the [BOLSTER](#) project (Bridging Organizations and marginalised communities for Local Sustainability Transitions in Europe) held its fifth regional policy dialogue. This event was one of ten regional dialogues organised by ECAS within the project framework. The dialogues aim to facilitate cross-regional policy learning on just and green transition processes.

With a focus on **León, Spain**, the event was dedicated to the role of culture in driving societal transformation within former mining regions.

The dialogue began with presentations by **Nevelina Pachova** and **Adriana Veran** from [RMIT Europe \(Spain\)](#), who introduced the current state of just transition in León, as well as the local adaptations to the coal phase-out. The interviews and the participatory workshops carried out in the region by the BOLSTER team revealed that coal mine closures had a significant impact on society, including outmigration due to job losses and the resulting strain on social services. Therefore, communities affected by the transition struggled to adapt to the new reality, and their frustration is further exacerbated by the visible remnants of a once-thriving industry.

Despite these challenges, several revitalisation initiatives emerged, such as nature conservation training programmes, repurposing old mining infrastructure for community use, and encouraging critical reflection on the legacy of the mining sector. Local schools and civil society organisations have participated in the transition process through activities like mural paintings, open-air cinemas, and literary routes. The goal of these initiatives is to reconnect residents with their local culture and environment. However, current policies lack of a more integrated and community-focused approach to the exploitation of arts and culture's potential for societal transformation.

**Ammalia Podlaszewska** from [Culture Goes Europe Erfurt e.V. \(Germany\)](#) provided an overview of the just transition planning and funding in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. Ms. Podlaszewska showcased local initiatives that stimulate engagement and enable culture and activism in the region impacted by the coal phase-out. Examples included a community garden project in Halle, Germany, which aims to create spaces for social connections and green skills education (particularly for marginalised women) and the repurposing of an old library in Zeitz to host community programmes. Nevertheless, Ms. Podlaszewska highlighted that grassroots initiatives struggle not only to obtain financial resources but also to secure sufficient human resources.

**Concepción Fernández, Director for Culture at CIUDEN (Spain)** detailed CIUDEN's efforts in driving the energy transition towards decarbonisation, emphasising the pivotal role of museums, heritage, and culture in economic and societal revitalisation. She showcased how Compostilla I Thermal Power

Plant, now [La Térmica Cultural](#), and the Thermal Power Plant of Minero Siderurgica de Ponferrada, now [La Fabrica de Luz](#), were transformed from industrial landscapes to vibrant cultural spaces. These spaces host exhibitions, educational programmes, and cultural events, attracting thousands of visitors every year while preserving the mining heritage and exploring the region's energy history. Ms. Fernández also introduced the [Dinamiz-ARTj project](#), which strengthens cultural activities in these transition zones by promoting community engagement and economic opportunities through art and cultural events.

With a solid foundation laid by the speakers on revitalisation efforts at different levels in Spain and Germany, the dialogue transitioned into a panel discussion. The introductory tour de table with the panellists began with **Mario Cañizares Herbon** from [Sangre Minera \(Spain\)](#). Sangre Minera aims to preserve and promote the rich mining culture of the region, which is driven by retired miners and community members passionate about maintaining their heritage. The Sangre Minera initiative, inspired by a [documentary](#) made by founder Javier de la Viuda, mobilised the local community and led to several projects aimed at celebrating and sustaining their cultural legacy. Key pillars of the initiative include preserving intangible culture, utilising physical remnants of their mining past, and revitalising local towns through cultural and outdoor activities. One notable project is the immersive mining experience, which offers visitors an educational insight into the miners' lives, guided by former miners using original mining materials and tools.

Afterwards, **Santiago Asenjo** and **Alejandro Asenjo** from [A plena Cultura \(Spain\)](#) took the floor. Founded in 2020, A plena Cultura is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to enhancing cultural life in small villages with a coal mining heritage. Their mission is to encourage social and cultural engagement in these aging communities through various initiatives. They have established two libraries in León: Biblioteca del Concejo Villamartin del Sil, with over 8,000 books, and Biblioteca de Poesia de Busmayor, focused on poetry with 1,500 volumes. Both libraries rely on volunteers to sustain the project. Additionally, A plena Cultura has set up small, free book exchange libraries in rural areas, hosted poetry festivals in collaboration with other organisations, and organised summer cinema events for both children and the elderly, featuring films related to local traditions.

The panel discussion, guided by four Slido questions, underscored the multifaceted role of arts and culture in fostering social inclusion and transformation in just transition regions.

- Arts and culture help create a sense of community and local identity, integrate marginalised communities, and promote unity. However, challenges include securing financial resources, navigating bureaucratic hurdles, ensuring inclusivity, and addressing infrastructure and accessibility issues.
- To support cultural initiatives, civil society needs freedom and support to develop projects, while policymakers should integrate arts and culture into broader development plans and provide financial backing.

- The EU can increase funding for cultural projects, support networks for sharing best practices, and develop integrated policies connecting cultural heritage with broader development goals.

In conclusion, leveraging arts and culture for a just transition in former mining regions requires a collaborative and community-centric approach. By fostering social inclusion, economic opportunities, and sustainable development, these initiatives can transform former mining communities into vibrant cultural hubs, preserving their heritage while building a sustainable future.

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