

Mutual learning: Ensuring sustainable energy supply and recultivating former coal mining sites

exchangeEU: study visit implemented in Weißwasser (Lusatia), Germany

From March 13-14, the region of Lusatia in Eastern Germany welcomed a delegation from Zgorzelec in Poland. The visit was part of the exchangeEU programme and focused on sustainable energy infrastructure and the recultivation of post-mining areas. Both regions came together to share best practices and develop new ideas of how to overcome prevailing challenges on their just transition pathways.

Representatives from Zgorzelec shared their experiences with building energy communities to provide clean and safe energy supply for Polish citizens.

Furthermore, tangible ideas for sustainable infrastructure projects, such as building a cross-regional energy valley based on a new carbon-neutral energy model, were jointly developed and discussed. These ideas were shared with other German and Polish stakeholders, such as representatives from the Saxony State Ministry or the German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU).

In and around the City of Weißwasser the delegations visited several just transition lighthouse projects:

- a soon-to-be-opened vocational training centre to attract (young) workers to the region
- a re-purposed former glass factory that now offers meeting and event spaces
- Weißwasser's Communication and Nature Conservation Center 'Turm am schweren Berg' which offers views over the open-pit coal mine and an overview of the region's coal mining history
- a Boulder Park in Nochten, where a former coal mining area was converted to a landscape-garden featuring erratic mountain boulders and a variety of blooming plant species

Inspired by these best practice examples, the delegations further deliberated on additional project ideas linked to repurposing post-mining lands, such as hiking and adventure trails, connecting both regions while displaying the regions' mining history on boards along the trails.

Future opportunities for collaboration

Regardless of the many challenges identified during the exchange, the participants took the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and lay the foundation for a fruitful collaboration. Their unique situation as neighboring regions allowed them to develop feasible project ideas to implement jointly. Lusatia and Zgorzelec, for example, plan to continue exchanging on best practices for their ongoing Just Transition processes.