



Deliverable Proof – Reports resulting from the finalisation of a project task, work package, project stage, project as a whole - EIT-BP2020

Name of KIC project	A BOOST FOR RURAL LIGNITE REGIONS
the report results from that	WP1: developing a mutual understanding of regional
contributed to/ resulted in the	ecosystems
deliverable	Case study: Eastern Greater Poland
Name of report	Policy Brief Eastern Greater Poland
	"A Boost for Rural Lignite Regions" aims to empower stakeholders in the design and exploration of alternative future pathways in three European energy transition areas: Lusatia in Germany, Eastern Greater Poland in Poland, and Gorj in Romania. In this policy brief, we report on the mental landscape of stakeholders in Eastern Greater Poland.
Summary/brief description of report	Perceived uncertainty about the future and the question about new identify that could provide an alternative for the currently dominant identity as a coal region were revealed by the research in the REBOOST project. However, stakeholder interviews also suggest that most of them have in general positive attitudes towards the transition. The regional challenges as well as the extent to which the perceptions differ are presented in this policy brief.
Date of report	25.05.2021





Policy Brief, May 2021 Eastern Greater Poland

Key messages

- Most stakeholders are optimistic about the transition process but desire transparency.
- Almost all stakeholders wonder which identity will replace the old one.
- Perceived potentials:
 - General social acceptability of the energy transition;
 - Increasing cooperation among stakeholders in Eastern Greater Poland;
 - Business potential of geographical location (in the center of Poland);
 - All stakeholders want to feel more heard and seen in the process.
- Perceived challenges:
 - Government lack of experience;
 - Lack of investors;
 - Lack of transparency of the process;
 - Lack of active participation of all stakeholders into the process;
 - Communication between civil society and government;
 - Uncertainty about the final outcome of the transition.
- Advantages of the process should be emphasized more.

Introduction

"A Boost for Rural Lignite Regions" aims to empower stakeholders in the design and exploration of alternative future pathways in three European energy transition areas: Lusatia in Germany, Eastern Greater Poland in Poland, and Gorj in Romania. In this policy brief, we report on the mental landscape of stakeholders in Eastern Greater Poland.

Wielkopolska Wschodnia (Eastern Greater Poland) could lead as a pilot region in Poland reacting to the growing urgency for a low carbon energy transition pressured by the EU. This lignite mining region is situated in the centre of Poland and is historically shaped by mining, energy generation and heavy industrial activities. Future fears are rampant among the population as coal mining goes hand in hand with the regions identity and foreclosing the sector puts the citizens of Konin at risk.

Perceived uncertainty about the future and the question about new identify that could provide an alternative for the currently dominant identity as a coal region were revealed by the research in the REBOOST project. However, stakeholder interviews also suggest that most of them have in general positive attitudes towards the transition. The regional challenges as well as the extent to which the perceptions differ are presented in this policy brief.





Demographics

Wielkopolska Wschodnia is situated in the centre of Poland. While its northern and western part is pervaded by forest with many reservoirs, touristic and recreation sites; the southern and south-eastern parts are mainly agricultural and related processing industries¹ and shaped by mining, energy generation and heavy industrial activities. Although only 2,000 workers are directly employed in coal mining, the jobs from lignite extraction and coal power generation make up almost 8.5 % of jobs in Konin region³.

Due to the decreasing mining activity, the population is declining and aging, and unemployment is rising⁴. However, the 40 universities are home to 9,1% of all students in the country⁵ and the number of graduates is rising⁶.

Key facts

- 1031 km², five districts;
- 230,00 inhabitants;
- Steady population decline^{4;}
- Unemployment (Poland): 3.77%⁴, Konin: 8.5 % (Statistics Poland, 2019);
- Mining, energy and heavy industries located in Konin;
- 2,000 jobs directly in coal mining and 6,000 jobs from lignite extraction and coal power generation⁶.

"The state should be an instrument and not replace the opinions of society, but rather stimulates its development"

Konin as an energy region

Poland's key electricity production source is coal, compromising roughly 73.6% (2019) of the total electrical energy mix⁷. Poland is the largest hard coal producer and second largest lignite producer in the EU⁸. Since 1960, Wielkopolska region was driven by mining, energy generation and heavy industrial activities⁹. Consumer coal prices and the coal industry were strongly subsidised to assure the feasibility of coal mining until 1993, after large financial losses, due to rising coal prices, overemployment, and maintenance costs subsidies decreased ¹⁰.

The energy sector in the Wielkopolska region is solely privately owned by ZE PAK S.A, employing around 5,500 people⁹. ZE PAK's main power plants are in Konin (powered by biomass and primarily supplying heat energy to the inhabitants of the City of Konin), and Pątnów (the largest and most modernized plant which accounts for roughly 6% of Poland's energy production demands)¹¹.

As a result of its coal dependence, the region has become an economic monoculture imperiling the region's economic stability. Poland has not set out a clear plan to end coal mining as illustrated in the current National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021-2030. As many doubt Poland's ability to shut down all coal mines by 2030 the new target year is 2050. Due to the historical and geographical characteristics of Wielkopolska region and its lead in RES installations, the region is likely to be the first region in Poland's coal exit future¹².

From 2005 - 2013, Poland saw a significant increase in investments in renewable energy. Some first initial steps towards a greener Konin were made by Green Energy Konin, who intend to create a cooperative network of businesses to promote a low carbon future.

Policy Implications

Future policies made should cater to youth employment in the region and re- allocation of coal displaced workers. A new regional identity can be forged in collaboration with its inhabitants perhaps through a consensus. There is a need for further consensus studies and platforms for direct communication about the process and phases. The policy and decision-making process should be bottom up and address the new income disparities. In summary, addressing the decline of coal and coal complementing industries, creating infrastructure for the new renewable energy industry, improving labor qualification in line with the transition, perhaps more courses on RE, gaining experience through transition studies, EU collaboration and improving the attractiveness of the region for its young inhabitants and investors. The success of the energy transformation depends on joint public and government efforts that promote decentralized renewable energy systems and a policy that addresses the current and future needs of the populace.

Figure 2: Stakeholder Map for Eastern Greater Poland, Poland (own depiction)



Stakeholders' Mental Landscapes

The majority of interviewed stakeholders perceived a positive general social acceptability of the energy transition and increasing cooperation among stakeholders in the eastern greater Poland region but emphasised the lack of transparency and participation of the whole process. Especially miners' unions feel left out of the conversation. While communication between towns government and corporations is generally perceived as well-developed yet it is not evident between citizens and the government. Another limitation mentioned by all is the government's lack of experience due to the novelty of the situation and the difficulty in refurbishing the regional coal identity as well as generational mentalities and patterns. While stakeholders from the government and coal business sector spoke less, stakeholders of the civil society seemed to have more to say about the energy transition and their futures.

Many, especially governmental stakeholders wonder how to give citizens another sense of identity. They worry most about the lack of financial support or of investors. Coal business representatives highlight the need to show advantages of the transition and give prospects to the citizens. Stakeholders from environmental organizations feel that they can have an impact on the transition but are fearful that the process will be top down rather than bottom up. Although most stakeholders are optimistic about the transition process, they are uncertain about the final outcome. Improved participation of stakeholders in the decision-making processes can improve their ability to cope with uncertainty and increase their involvement in the transition process.

Endnotes

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