

Navigating Lusatia's Structural Transition Between Consensus and Dissensus

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8 July 2025



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101094869



2019 Germany's coal exit decision

Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment

Kommission für Wachstum, Strukturwandel und Beschäftigung (KWSB)

2020 Strukturstärkungsgesetz Kohleregionen (StStG)

Structural Development Act for Coal Regions

- **€40 billion in nationwide funding**
- **€10.3 billion allocated to Brandenburg's share of Lusatia**
- **Designed to support “just transition” through infrastructure investment, human resource development, innovation clusters, and participatory governance**

Ökonomische Katastrophe

Strukturbruch Mitte der 90-iger Jahre / einseitig ausgerichtete Wirtschaft (Kohlekommission)

Verlust Einwohner Lübbenau: - 7.000 Einwohner, Lübben: - 500



Bildquellen:

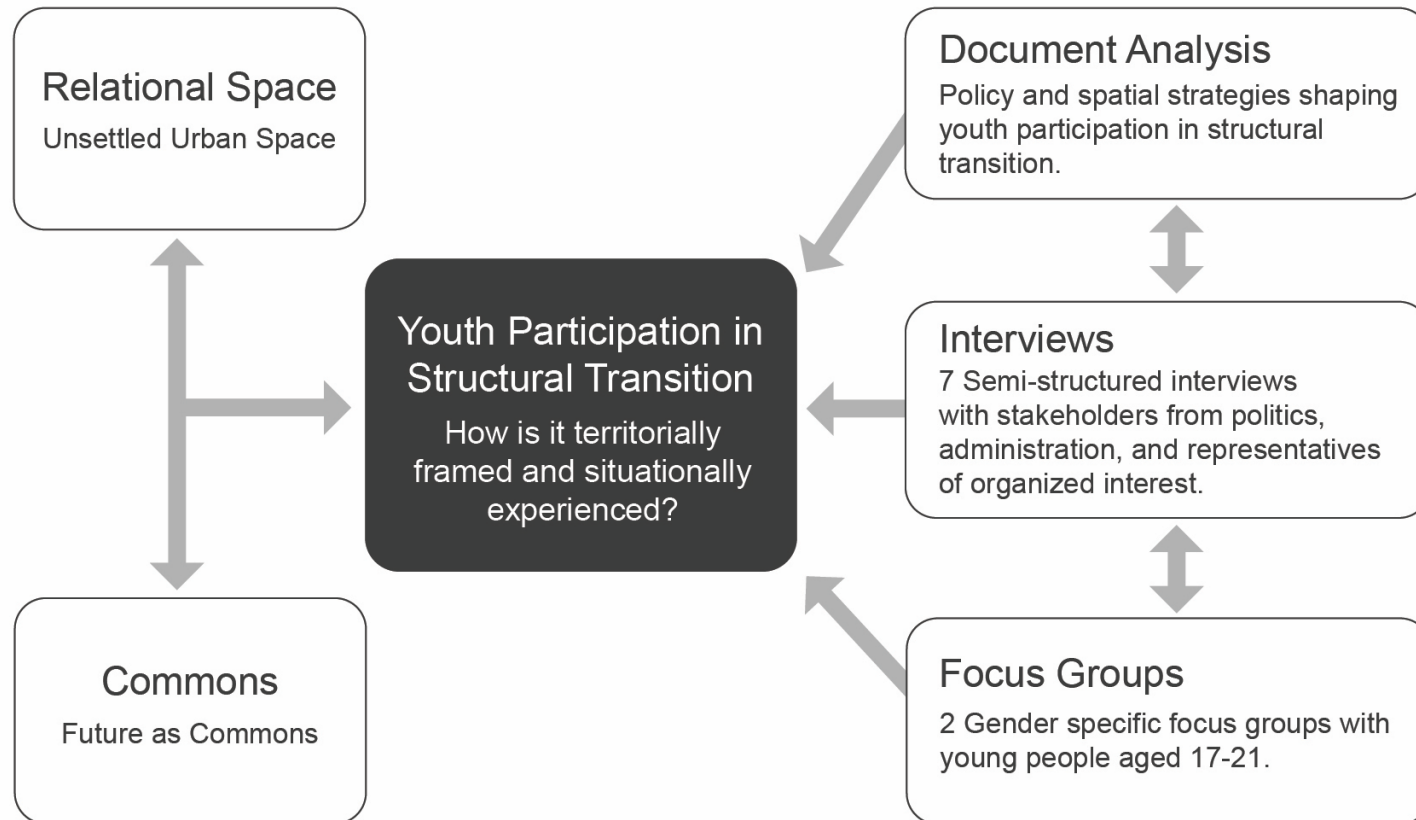
Abbildung 1 (oben): www.cottbus.de; Abbildung 2 (unten): www.luftschadstoffe.de

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*Theoretical
Framework*

*Empirical
Approach*





Urban policies support creative actions and industries, while...



...creating a good stage design

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CONSENSUS: SHIFTING GEOGRAPHIES OF PROSPERITY

Economic prospects are still associated with the traditional sectors of mining and lignite-fired power generation:

Employing only 3% of the region's work force, average income in this sector is more than a double above the region's average income.

Ambitions to implement post-coal economic paradigms promoted at the national level:
Pre-scripted frameworks centred on categories such as employment, infrastructure, and innovation



Strategic concepts for the entire region based on an multi-level interdisciplinary approach, developed by *Wirtschaftsregion Lausitz GmbH*, an interest association spanning all the region's districts (*Kreise*).

BROAD CONSENSUS ACROSS POLITICAL MAINSTREAM

The multi-level governance arrangement to articulate and communicate the inevitable consequences of urban change, but also great opportunities waiting therein (*evoking positive associations and delivering flagship projects*).

All mainstream parties align behind the growth-centered goals. Decisions are largely treated as technical necessities tied to climate commitments and economic logic.

STAGING LUSATIA AS A SPACE OF OPPORTUNITIES.

DISSENSUS. STRUCTURAL TRANSITION AS AN ENDURING CONDITION

**Stories tend to depict unsettled if not dissatisfied population and intolerant urban
environment fearing change and difference.**

Unmet expectations and a perception of uneven distribution of benefits.

**Radical-right movements exploit fears of cultural loss, economic insecurity, and
distrust toward elites.**



The region that could be proud of massive landscape restorations...
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...is infamous for radical extremism
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ONTOLOGICAL DISJUNCTION IN PARTICIPATION

Institutional frameworks rely on territorial and linear logics of participation that do not resonate with those they are meant to engage.

Emphasis of scripted participatory formats on access and impact

VS

***Multiple and uneven rhythms of everyday life:* Situated ways in which young people relate to space and the future through contingent experiences of economic pressure, social norms, and uncertainty**

TRANSFORMATION AS A NARRATIVE

**Transition as a territorial project focused on growth and competitiveness.
In this narrative, young people appear primarily as future workers or cultural
assets to bolster regional image.**

**This framing sees the (compartmentalized) futures through economic and social
indicators to be reached through investment and innovation.**

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: LIVED TEMPORALITIES AND CONTINGENT FUTURES

**For young people themselves, the future is not structured by policy categories like “innovation clusters” or “regional competitiveness.”
Instead, it’s experienced through concerns over wages, rents, and ability to support family – often tying futures to traditional success markers.**

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: LIVED TEMPORALITIES AND CONTINGENT FUTURES

PERCEPTION OF TRANSITION

Structural transition was interpreted through landscape images, job prospects, financial stress, and skepticism.

MORAL REGISTERS

A strong attachment to traditional social models of productivity, merit, and autonomy. Several voiced resentment toward those perceived to receive support without contributing labor.

UNCERTAINTY

Work is primarily about providing for one's family, and financial expectations are rooted in traditional wage-based models.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES: LIVED TEMPORALITIES AND CONTINGENT FUTURES

(GENDERED) ASPIRATIONS

The male group expressed strong anxiety about wages, autonomy, and traditional success markers like home ownership. Future independence felt out of reach.

CONFLICTED COLLECTIVITY

Despite resentment discourses, participants valued togetherness and belonging. Affective contradictions—solidarity and exclusion—co-existed.

EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPATION

Participation often feels tokenistic. Perceived lack of confidence and language to navigate formal settings. Being informed is the prerequisite for meaningful participation.

Well-being and collective living are central issues for participation.

A just transition two perspectives

Policy/ Institutional perspective:

TERRITORIAL LOGIC

Staging a space of opportunities through a territorially bounded planning logics, including infrastructure, human resource development, innovation clustering, and participatory governance.

Consensus. Participation as a stabilising intervention.

Issues of access, procedural fairness, representational gaps, or policy impact.

Youth perspective:

RELATIONAL LOGIC

Future as lived and not as a planned endpoint. It is encountered in fragments—everyday routines, shifting landscapes, material insecurity, and the affective uncertainties of imagining one's place in the future.

Moral and material negotiation: Futures are emotionally charged and situated within unsettled present conditions.

Issues of structural injustice and the challenges of building collective forms of life across difference.

ONTOLOGICAL DISJUNCTION IN PARTICIPATION

TERRITORIAL VS RELATIONAL LOGIC

Institutional frameworks rely on territorial and linear logics. Young people relate to space and time in relational, uncertain, and affective ways.

Futures as relational—not as abstract goals, but as situated, uneven terrains negotiated through lived experience, overlapping rhythms of everyday life and interdependence.

Threat that the oppositional spaces will be occupied by exclusionary radical-right discourses, leaving little room for more nuanced or radical imaginaries.

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UPCOMING:

Viderman et al. (2025) Unsettling Youth Participation in Relational Space and Commons. *Tracce Urbane* 17

<https://www.dustproject.eu/>

AESOP Thematic Group Public Spaces and Urban Cultures

<https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures>

