

# Supporting economic diversification: the experience of START technical assistance

**Carlo Della Libera**

Global Practice Leader, Energy and Sustainability  
Ecorys

*Eger, 26 May 2022*



# Initiative for coal regions in transition

The Initiative assists EU countries and coal regions tackling challenges related to the transition to a low-carbon economy



## Connecting stakeholders

The initiative facilitates collective dialogue among regions and the wider stakeholder community, promoting good practices and cooperation, and organises working groups and high-level political events.

[READ MORE](#)



## START Technical assistance

Tailored, needs-oriented assistance and capacity-building help coal regions in the practical steps to transition from the carbon-intensive era towards a clean energy future.

[READ MORE](#)



## Knowledge resources

Toolkits, guidelines and reports covering key transition issues for coal regions, such as governance, environmental rehabilitation, employment, financing, clean air and clean technologies.

[READ MORE](#)

# START Regions



Asturias, Spain

Energy transition strategy and project support.



Midlands, Ireland

Pathway plan for transition, project identification and consultation



Karlovy Vary (Sokolov district), Czechia

Strategy advice (skills & employment, renewable energy etc) and capacity development



Malopolska, Poland

Project identification and support, and capacity development



Peloponnese, Greece

Project assessment of options and assistance, strategy development



Hunedoara County (Jiu Valley) Romania

Project identification, consultation and support



Silesia, Poland

Rehabilitation and repurposing of post industrial area



# Lessons on economic diversification #1

## Connecting local strengths to external and/or internal opportunities

Linking local strengths and assets to **external opportunities** via, for example:

- attracting external investment
- technology transfer
- deployment of government or skills and education functions

## Lessons on economic diversification #2

### Connecting local strengths to external and/or internal opportunities

Linking local strengths and assets to **internal opportunities** via, for example:

- Entrepreneurship including social economy
- expansion & diversification of existing businesses (including anchor companies)

*N.B. diversification is a phased journey of change e.g., Midlands transition pathway plan*

[https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/midlands\\_pathway\\_to\\_transition\\_0.pdf](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/midlands_pathway_to_transition_0.pdf)

# Lessons on economic diversification #3

## Planning and action

There are a **range of mutually self-reinforcing approaches** for stimulating diversification and job creation (rarely one “silver bullet”)

Activities need to be **shaped by a locality's unique** assets and circumstances, and focused on current and emergent opportunities (there is no pre-existing strategy or plan to import)

Weaknesses, such as no university or conventional regional innovation system, can be **overcome with innovative policies**

**Planning and action needs to address the short and long-terms** - change is a long journey and there is a need for ongoing adaptation – Review and programme funding instruments and tools accordingly – JTM, LIFE, S3 etc.

**Local enterprises and residents** need early evidence of policy intent and outcomes to have confidence in the process, and stay engaged

# Lessons on economic diversification #4

## Partnership, learning and capacity

The process **involves a range of actors with differing roles**: public sector, private sector (SMEs, anchor companies, inward investors etc.), civil society, residents

Different **scales of government and business** (local, regional, national and international) are often engaged in the process

Creating **internal and external linkages** and networks is vital – a local economy is not an island

**Policy and practice innovation** is important – failures as well as successes will occur, learn from them

There is need for **local capacity** to deliver the plan for diversification

# Thank you.

[Carlo.dellalibera@ecorys.com](mailto:Carlo.dellalibera@ecorys.com)

[secretariat@coalregions.eu](mailto:secretariat@coalregions.eu)

[Website](#)

[#CoalRegionsEU](#)

Twitter: [@Energy4Europe](#)

[DG Energy's YouTube channels](#)





## Example: using external opportunities for utilising local assets

### Attracting external investment

## Terhills Tourism

### Limburg, Belgium

Terhills is located on the former Eisden mining site and covers an area of approximately 365 hectares, on the edge of Belgium's only National Park. Once known as a industrial mining and gravel quarrying site, Terhills NV, a subsidiary of the Limburg Investment Company LRM, made a EUR 75 million investment to transform the area and started reconvertng the mining site into a tourism hotspot. It hosts the Terhills resort and holiday park, including a cablepark, the Terhills Hotel and the Elaisa Energetic Wellness complex. The area also has a Center Parcs investment. The resort itself now employs 230 people.

<https://www.lrm.be/en/lrm-group/mining-sites/terhills>; <https://terhills.be/en/>;  
<https://www.lrm.be/en/nieuws/center-parcs-zet-terhills-resort-als-premium-park-in-de-markt>

<https://terhills.be/en/terhills-resort/>



## Example: using external opportunities for utilising local assets

### Technology transfer

## BMW Future Mobility Development Centre

### Karlovy Vary, Czechia

On the site of a former lignite spoil tip, BMW is constructing a development centre for testing new automotive technologies (e.g., autonomous driving, electric and hydrogen vehicles).. The planned development centre will occupy 150 ha of the 600-ha site, replicating various road terrains and traffic situations, together with service workshops and offices. The Centre has the potential to eventually offer up to 700 jobs across a wide range of roles, from operators through to mechanics and technicians to highly skilled engineering positions. It is hoped that the Centre will transform the region into a hub for attractive, state of the art technologies. The carmaker has stated it wants to invest more than EUR 300 million euros in the project and construction of the site began in May 2020, with the first test modules planned to be operational by June 2023. The construction work is expected to employ around 400 people on the technically demanding engineering project, requiring special geotechnical solutions.

[https://www.bmw.cz/cs/topics/fascination-bmw/BMW-Polygon\\_en.html](https://www.bmw.cz/cs/topics/fascination-bmw/BMW-Polygon_en.html)



## Examples: using internal opportunities for utilising local assets

### Deployment of skills and education functions

## RenewAcad

### Jiu Valley Romania

The Romanian Wind Energy Association (RWEA) and the Renewable Energy School for Skills (RESS) took on the task of reskilling the mining workforce and direct it towards employment opportunities in the wind energy sector. Following an assessment of the skills-gaps of the mining workforce vis-à-vis the future skills-needs of the renewables sector, a nationwide reconversion project was set. After the success of the project in Constanta, a RESS centre was set in Valea Jiului, training on annual basis over 400 persons based on international standards. As a result, previous miners in Valea Jiului have now the possibility to receive training and find employment either within their region or nationwide. For example, many graduates of the project in Valea Jiului were recruited to work in Fantanele-Cogealac Wind Farm, which is currently the largest onshore wind farm in Europe.

<https://rwea.ro/en/rwea-reskilling-program-for-mining-workforce-from-the-coal-regions-in-transition/>



## Example: using internal opportunities for utilising local assets

Diversification of existing businesses (including anchor companies)

### Brown to Green programme

#### Midlands, Ireland

The Irish company Bord na Móna has been a major energy producer and employer in the rural Midlands region of Ireland. Starting with energy production from peat in the 1930s, the company has a long history of creating jobs and economic opportunities for the communities living in the Midlands. With climate change gaining importance, the company has increasingly invested into renewable energies (wind farms and biomass) as well as recycling, waste management, conservation, carbon sequestration technologies and high value food products. The company announced its shift to low-carbon activities with the publication of the “Brown to Green strategy” in 2019 that will guide the development of new and replacing employment opportunities.

<https://www.bordnamona.ie/bord-na-mona-reports-progress-on-brown-to-green-strategy-and-costs-of-decarbonisation-programme/>;

