

*This Project was the result of cooperation between the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung offices in Berlin, Brussels and Warsaw. The tour included representatives from trade unions, NGOs (local and international), academia, media, and public policy.*

At the top of a spoil heap in Loos-en-Gohelle, participants from the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung's *Green Jobs Tour 2014* reflected on their 7-day journey through Poland, Germany and France.

The man-made mountain of mining spoils, a leftover artifact from the town's industrial past, was somehow symbolic in the context of the tour. The relic beneath their feet provided them with a picturesque view of the former mining town and the greater Nord-Pas-Calais region. This region, like Silesia in Poland or North-Rhine Westphalia in Germany, is still recovering from years past, when coal reigned king and jobs were plenty.

Nowadays, king coal has more or less ceded his throne. The era of cheap, accessible coal has ended, and all three regions are faced with the same dilemma: what next? How can policymakers, civil society and the private sector replace the dying incumbent industries with green alternatives and create jobs at the same time? This dilemma, or rather opportunity, was the overarching theme of the *Green Jobs Tour* site visits, meetings, and roundtables.

### **Silesia, Poland**

The trip kicked off on November 12<sup>th</sup> in Silesia, Poland with a quick tour of the city of Katowice. During the tour, participants learned about the ways that Silesia has dealt with, and continues to deal with the closure of its many coal mines. In a city where the Arch cathedral's alter is made of coal, it's hardly surprising to hear that public policymakers are reluctant to embrace an energy transition. After the city tour, the group headed to the Watt factory headquarters in Sosnowiec where participants received a guided tour of its manufacturing processes. Watt is the world's third largest solar collector manufacturer, and its workers produce one standard solar panel every 90 seconds. The group ended a very busy day with a trip to Nikiszowiec, a former coal miner's settlement, where they engaged in lively debates about urban revitalization with local NGO Fundacja Nowy Nikiszowiec.

On day two of the trip to Silesia, the group visited the renowned renewable energy city of Bielsko-Biała. Participants were particularly impressed by ZGO, Bielsko-Biała's brand new recycling and waste recovery facility. Before heading to our dinner debate in Gliwice, the tour stopped by the small renewable energy consultancy Centrum OZE. Centrum OZE helps consumers (many of them private citizens) select appliances for their energy-efficient homes. After this pit stop, the participants headed to Złoty Osioł for a fantastic vegetarian feast and heated discussion with guest speakers Ryszard Płaza, Vice President of the Coal Miners Union and Malgorzata Tkacz-Janik, member of the Silesian Regional Parliament. The discussion helped the non-Polish participants better understand the nuances behind the seemingly stagnant Polish renewables policy.



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### North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany

The next stop on the tour was the German federal state of North Rhine Westphalia (NRW), a state traditionally known for its energy-intensive industry. At the EnergieAgentur.NRW, the participants learned about some of the steps this energy-intensive federal state has taken to reduce its carbon footprint. Head of Foreign Trade Department, Mr. Stephan Lintker, highlighted some best-practice examples of regional manufacturers who changed their gearbox production outputs (formally designed for extractive industry) to better accommodate the growing wind market. The evening concluded with



an in-depth exchange with Deputy Minister Peter Knitsch from NRW's environment ministry.

On day two of the tour in NRW, the participants visited the community of Saerbeck- a small town with about 7,200 inhabitants. The town aims to reach complete energy self-sufficiency by 2030, and given that it already produces 250% of its electricity demands with renewables, this goal seems very reasonable. Saerbeck is an excellent example of how community-oriented, bottom-up policies can produce meaningful change.

The town of Saerbeck's ambitious climate policy is featured in the KlimaExpo NRW, a project coordinated by the regional government and located in Gelsenkirchen. The KlimaExpo NRW highlights successful political, economic, social and scientific projects aimed at reducing emissions. At the KlimaExpo's office in Gelsenkirchen, the group met with Green MEP Terry Reinke and learned about the ways in which energy transition can be encouraged at the European level.

Before heading to France, the group visited the UNESCO world heritage site Zeche Zollverein in Essen. The Green Jobs Participants from Poland were particularly inspired by the renovation and rehabilitation of the former mine.

### Nord-Pas de Calais, France

The last stop on the tour's journey was the French town of Lille. On the first day of the French *voyage*, the participants were greeted by representatives from organizations operating out of the Environment and Solidarity Regional House (MRES). The house hosts 112 different environmental NGOs, including the organization Virage-énergie Nord-Pas de Calais, which specializes in renewable energy and energy reduction research. The group was fortunate enough to



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have a sneak peak at their newly released publication, “Scenarios on energy sufficiency and societal transformations: changing lifestyles and social structures to make energy savings.”

After some discussion with MRES representatives and Green MEP Karima Delli, the participants headed to EDFs nuclear power facility at Gravelines. While it might seem outlandish to visit a nuclear facility during a “Green Jobs Tour,” the group felt it was also important to get a holistic view and hear from the “other side.” After a quick meeting with a representative from EDF’s PR department, the group headed to the town of Grande-Synthe, pilot town for biodiversity, for a sustainable development tour. Over half of the community’s inhabitants live in public housing projects and unemployment is a huge problem; nevertheless, the municipality has enacted programs to improve the lives of the unemployed and working poor. Over the past decades, the town has sponsored community garden projects designed to provide fresh, organic food for people living in public housing. Similar projects are underway in the former mining town of Loos-en-Gohelle, a pilot town for sustainable development, where the municipality offers trainings for those who want to learn how to tend their gardens without the use of pesticides or herbicides.

Following these hands-on sustainable development tours, the group returned to Lille, where participants discussed the Nord-Pas de Calais region’s “Third Industrial Revolution,” in the Maison de l’Écologie Régional. The “Third Industrial Revolution”, as explained by Claude Lenglet, is the regional transition from a fossil fuel-based economy into a circular or zero-waste economy. This vision is exemplified, among other places, in the Centre Valorisation Organique waste-to-energy facility, which the group visited on its last day in Lille. This energy-efficient municipal facility turns separated organic waste into compost and also helps provide the region with natural gas, i.e. for public buses.



### **The Road Ahead**

The Polish, French and German participants who took part in the tour hailed from different cultural and professional backgrounds, and the diversity of perspectives truly enhanced the quality of the discussions. The group dynamics were essential in fostering a pan-European dialogue on energy transition. As one participant testified in his evaluation, “This trip proved to me once again, that the exchange between different actors and nations is very valuable.” Many of our participants noted that they intend to stay in contact with the other group members, and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung hopes to facilitate a follow-up event in the future. The foundation hopes that the participants will act as “multipliers” and share the

experience, knowledge and connections made on the tour.

By: Mackenzie Nelson