

INDUSTRIAL LEGACY CITIES AND THE JUST TRANSITION

Topic briefing for COP24

Originating in the trade union movement, the topic of Just Transition will be one of the key focus themes of the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference COP24 in Katowice. Recognizing the International Labour Organization's ["Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all"](#), the Polish Presidency will announce an official **Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration**. The "Just Transition" concept emphasizes the need for decent work and equitable development while accelerating the transition towards low-carbon economies. The pressing relevance of addressing social transition challenges recently became visible in Germany, where the public debate on the planned felling of Hambach forest for mining purposes has been heating up. Ambitions to preserve remaining parts of this ancient forest in line with the emerging coal phase-out have been pitted against fears that mine workers could lose their jobs and livelihoods. After a [preliminary court rule stalled the felling](#) and protest culminated in a huge celebration in the "Hambi" forest, it will now be up to the courts to decide on the next steps.

The transition out of coal as an energy source is a key step to reduce carbon emissions and improve human and environmental health. Frankly, the end of fossil-fuel related jobs can merely be postponed, so trying to preserve the status quo means missing the opportunity to make forward-looking decisions early. Recognizing the urgent need to address climate change, frontrunner cities and regions across the globe are driving the coal phase-out forward. However, the socio-economic consequences need to be considered and planned for seriously – ensuring that no citizens or social groups are left behind in the transition. With jobs and livelihoods at risk, targeted social and labor policies are needed to create a safety net and provide new opportunities for individuals and communities affected by the transition. Workers' rights and social security standards are regulated in national policies and have thus not been the core focus of ICLEI's work. However, it is the local level where the impacts of environmental pollution directly strike, new economic models are initiated and greater social transitions are sparked. At the 2018 Urban 20 Mayors Summit in Buenos Aires, the OECD presented a [White Paper on Inclusive Growth and Social Cohesion in Cities](#). While emphasizing that high and persistent levels of inequality generate important social and political costs, the framework highlights the crucial role of cities and local governments in addressing this challenge. ICLEI has a long history of working with local governments and their communities towards shaping inclusive, people-centered transitions out of fossil-fuel based economies and associated lifestyles.

The conversations around the social impacts of climate policies are far from new: Across the globe, cities with an industrial legacy – cities like Pittsburgh, Essen, Katowice and Shijiazhuang in ICLEI's [Urban Transitions Alliance](#) (UTA) – have been dealing with similar challenges for decades. The decline of industrial manufacturing in developed countries had a significant impact on the cities that relied on industrial growth for their overall economic and social development. Experiencing the closing of mines or steel mills, that were drivers of growth and major employers, confronted many cities with surging unemployment and rapid population loss in relatively short periods of time. The remaining negative remnants of pollution and poverty reinforced trends of under-investment and often lead to a loss of identity for the city. Already vulnerable social groups faced the biggest hurdles when adapting to the new conditions. Acknowledging existing transition experiences and achievements of industrial legacy cities can provide great value in the current debate on the coal phase out and the Just Transition framework.

Learn to anticipate future trends and act early.

Many industrial legacy cities tell similar stories of hoping in vain for the “golden” industrial times to return – while the environmental and health-related benefits became more and more tangible. These cities have learned to embrace the opportunities of ongoing urban transitions and actively shape their local environments.

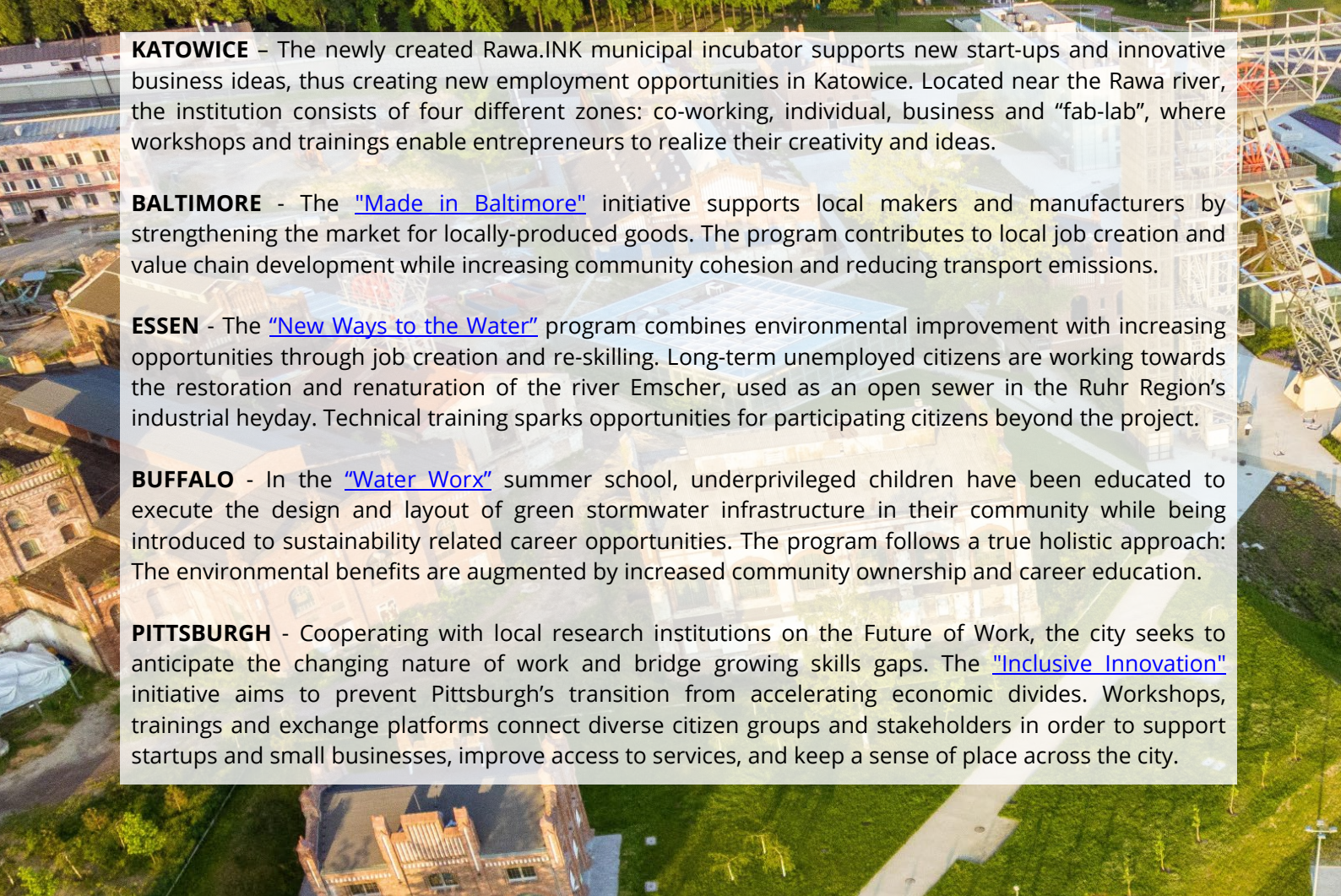
Seek partners and include local communities.

UTA cities have been exploring innovative ways to ensure that their policies are informed by the diverse concerns and visions of their citizens, especially of those whose voices are often not heard. They recognize that structural inequalities affect progress, while inclusive diversity sparks creativity and innovation.

Value the unique fabric and identity of each place.

Industrial legacy cities in the Alliance are working with their communities to reshape their urban identities and strengthen the sense of place and belonging for citizens. Shared visions that reconcile industrial legacies with new sustainable pathways are essential to (re-) build identification, cohesion and trust across the cities.

Recognizing the need to re-structure their social and economic systems, cities in the Urban Transitions Alliance have embraced transitions that led to new opportunities but in a way that prioritized the needs of their local populations. These cities chose to actively steer their transitions and create new local jobs, leverage their heritage and improve their local environments and the lives of their residents. Developing their own paths towards more vibrant, sustainable economies and more resilient urban systems, these cities have designed inclusive programs and policies to navigate their transition.



KATOWICE - The newly created Rawa.INK municipal incubator supports new start-ups and innovative business ideas, thus creating new employment opportunities in Katowice. Located near the Rawa river, the institution consists of four different zones: co-working, individual, business and “fab-lab”, where workshops and trainings enable entrepreneurs to realize their creativity and ideas.

BALTIMORE - The [“Made in Baltimore”](#) initiative supports local makers and manufacturers by strengthening the market for locally-produced goods. The program contributes to local job creation and value chain development while increasing community cohesion and reducing transport emissions.

ESSEN - The [“New Ways to the Water”](#) program combines environmental improvement with increasing opportunities through job creation and re-skilling. Long-term unemployed citizens are working towards the restoration and renaturation of the river Emscher, used as an open sewer in the Ruhr Region’s industrial heyday. Technical training sparks opportunities for participating citizens beyond the project.

BUFFALO - In the [“Water Worx”](#) summer school, underprivileged children have been educated to execute the design and layout of green stormwater infrastructure in their community while being introduced to sustainability related career opportunities. The program follows a true holistic approach: The environmental benefits are augmented by increased community ownership and career education.

PITTSBURGH - Cooperating with local research institutions on the Future of Work, the city seeks to anticipate the changing nature of work and bridge growing skills gaps. The [“Inclusive Innovation”](#) initiative aims to prevent Pittsburgh’s transition from accelerating economic divides. Workshops, trainings and exchange platforms connect diverse citizen groups and stakeholders in order to support startups and small businesses, improve access to services, and keep a sense of place across the city.