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YOUTH OUTMIGRATION AND INDUSTRIAL CULTURE CROSS-BORDER STRATEGY

*University of Graz, Department of Geography and Regional Science
Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts,
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Založba ZRC

YOUTH OUTMIGRATION AND INDUSTRIAL CULTURE
CROSS-BORDER STRATEGY

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG (GER)

Die Abwanderung junger Menschen und der demographische Wandel stellen zentrale Herausforderungen in vielen Regionen Europas dar. Jedoch fand das Thema der Jugendabwanderung in der Literatur bisher nur wenig Beachtung und offenbart somit eine Wissenslücke sowohl auf akademischer, als auch auf angewandter, politischer Ebene. Das Projekt YOUIND adressiert diese speziellen Herausforderungen im Kontext kleiner und mittelgroßer Industriestädte, welche im Kooperationsraum (Österreich-Slowenien) zahlreich vertreten und sozioökonomisch relevant sind.

Diese Strategie hebt junge Menschen als eine der bedeutendsten demographischen Gruppen für die Regionalentwicklung hervor, deren Mobilität und Bevölkerungsdynamik, Lebensstile und komplexe Alltagsbedürfnisse als eine ständige Herausforderung der Stadt- und Regionalplaner zu berücksichtigen sind. Ziel der Strategie ist es, ein besseres Verständnis der unterschiedlichen Bedürfnisse junger Menschen in Industrieregionen zu erlangen. So werden besondere für Industrieregionen relevante Push-Faktoren aufgezeigt, von traditionellen Familienwerten, über hierarchische Entscheidungsstrukturen, fehlende soziale und wirtschaftliche Infrastrukturen (z. B. Kinderbetreuung, Dienstleistungs- und Kreativwirtschaft) bis hin zu wenig differenzierten, technisch-industriell geprägten lokalen Arbeitsmärkten.

Des Weiteren wird die strategische Rolle der spezifischen „industriellen Kultur“ im Kontext von Jugendabwanderung thematisiert und auf die intrinsischen, positiven Werte und Traditionen von Industriegemeinschaften wie Solidarität, Multikulturalismus und Toleranz verwiesen. Bemerkenswert ist ebenso der vorherrschende Innovationsgeist von Individuen und Unternehmen in den Regionen. Die vorliegende Strategie beinhaltet Empfehlungen, um diese Werte für die Schaffung eines lebenswerten und kreativen Umfelds für Rückkehrende und Neuzuwandernde zu nutzen und so auch den Erhalt dieser industriellen Gemeinschaften zu sichern. Zusätzlich sollten integrative und wertschätzende Strukturen für junge Menschen, die sich für einen Verbleib in der Region entscheiden, initiiert werden.

Anhand der Analyse von acht spezifischen Herausforderungen für junge Menschen in kleinen und mittelgroßen Industriestädten, gewährt die Strategie einen mehrdimensionalen Blick auf die unterschiedlichen Wünsche und Werte junger Menschen in industriell geprägten Lebenswelten. Darauf aufbauend formuliert das Strategiepapier konkrete und gezielte politische Empfehlungen für lokale und regionale AkteurInnen, die in einem Policy Brief zusammengefasst werden.

POVZETEK (SLO)

Izseljevanje mladih in demografske spremembe predstavljajo velik razvojni izziv v številnih evropskih regijah. S tega vidika se v projektu YOUIND osredotočamo na specifične izzive številnih malih in srednje velikih industrijskih mest, ki na območju sodelovanja SI-AT in opravljajo pomembne družbeno-gospodarske funkcije. Na splošno je bilo selitvam mladih doslej posvečeno malo pozornosti, kar kaže na vrzel v znanju tako na akademski kot na praktični politični ravni.

Pričujoča strategija poudarja dejstvo, da mladi predstavljajo eno najpomembnejših demografskih skupin, njihova mobilnost in prebivalstvena dinamika ter sodobni življenjski slog in kompleksne vsakodnevne potrebe pa so stalen izziv za urbanistične in regionalne načrtovalce. Ta dokument zato predstavlja korak k boljšemu razumevanju različnih potreb mladih na industrijskih območjih. V povezavi s tem strategija razkriva značilne migracijske vzorce (potisne dejavnike), ki morda bolj veljajo za industrijske regije kot za druga območja. To so na primer tradicionalne družinske vrednote, hierarhične odločevalske strukture, pomanjkanje družbene in gospodarske infrastrukture (na primer otroško varstvo, storitve, ustvarjalne dejavnosti) ali tehnična in rokodelska usmerjenost lokalnih trgov dela.

Dokument na različne načine poudarja strateško vlogo »industrijske kulture« v zvezi z begom možganov. Opozarja na notranje pozitivne vrednote in tradicije industrijskih skupnosti, kot so solidarnost, večkulturnost in strpnost. Prav tako poudarja pogosto navzoče inovativne pristope ljudi in podjetij v tovrstnih regijah. Besedilo vsebuje strateške nasvete, kako uporabiti te vrednote za ustvarjanje in vzdrževanje industrijskih skupnosti z njihovimi izrazitimi značilnostmi ter narediti življenje bolj privlačno za povratnike in priseljence. Strategija prav tako zagovarja vzpostavljanje vključujočih in spoštljivih struktur za mlade, ki so se odločili ostati.

Na podlagi obravnave osmih specifičnih izzivov, s katerimi se soočajo mladi v malih in srednje velikih industrijskih mestih, strategija ponuja večdimenzionalni pogled na različne želje in vrednote mladih v industrijskih okoljih. Na podlagi teh ugotovitev strategija podaja konkretna in ciljno usmerjena politična priporočila za lokalne in regionalne deležnike.

SUMMARY (ENG)

Youth outmigration and demographic changes pose significant development challenges in many regions across Europe. However, the topic of youth outmigration has hardly been discussed in the literature so far, revealing a knowledge gap that exists on both an academic and a practical, applied policy level. Thus, the YOUIND project ('Youth in industrial towns') focused on these specific challenges in small and medium-sized industrial towns, which are numerous and perform important socioeconomic functions in the Slovenia-Austria (SI-AT) cooperation area.

This strategy paper is centred on the fact that young people represent one of the most significant demographic groups in industrial towns; their mobility and population dynamics, contemporary lifestyles and complex everyday needs present constant challenges for urban and regional planners. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to foster a common understanding of the various needs of young people living in industrial areas. Specifically, this paper pinpoints the distinctive migration patterns (push factors) that may be more relevant in industrial regions than in other regions, such as traditional family values, hierarchical decision-making structures, lack of social and economic infrastructures (e.g. child care, service economy, creative industries) or the technical and manual focus of local labour markets.

Furthermore, it highlights the strategic role of industrial culture in the context of youth outmigration. Industrial culture refers to the intrinsic positive values and traditions of industrial communities, such as solidarity, multiculturalism and tolerance. In this regard, the paper also emphasises the persistent, innovative spirit of the people and companies in these regions. Notably, the paper provides strategic advice on how to use these values to create and sustain industrial communities with distinct characteristics, thus making life more attractive to return and new immigrants. It also argues that inclusive and respectful structures should be provided for young people who decide to stay.

By analysing eight specific challenges of young people in small and medium-sized industrial towns, this strategy provides a multidimensional picture of the various desires and values of the youth in industrial settings. Based on these, a concrete and targeted policy brief is provided to aid local and regional stakeholders.

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FOREWORD

Youth outmigration and demographic changes pose significant development challenges in many regions across Europe. However, the topic of youth outmigration has hardly been discussed in the literature so far, revealing a knowledge gap that exists on both an academic and a practical, applied policy level. Thus, the YOUIND project ('Youth in industrial towns') focused on these specific challenges in small and medium-sized industrial towns, which are numerous and perform important socioeconomic functions in the Slovenia-Austria (SI-AT) cooperation area.

Against this background, the present transnational strategy paper draws up policy recommendations based on the results and knowledge gained from the activities of the YOUIND project. It addresses policymakers from municipalities and regions with similar characteristics and problems, paving the way for improved youth outmigration policies and industrial culture in industrial towns and regions.

This strategy paper aims to raise awareness about youth outmigration among stakeholders and disseminate the existing knowledge on this topic, thus enabling the establishment of policies for creating and sustaining communities with distinct characteristics. This would, in turn, make living in these communities more attractive to return and new in-migrants as well as provide inclusive and respectful structures for young people who decide to stay. Progress in this regard entails rethinking the social and cultural infrastructure necessary for demographic change, with a firm focus on the needs of younger inhabitants.

The transnational strategy is based on the scientific findings and tested approaches in the YOUIND project. It particularly draws on the results of two input papers and is connected to the YOUIND output 'Young people in industrial towns – Catalogue of good practices'.

The strategy was designed by the two academic partners involved in the YOUIND project, namely the University of Graz (Department of Geography and Regional Science) and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Anton Melik Geographical Institute). It was supported by the YOUIND regional partners, namely the Association Steirische Eisenstrasse and the Municipality of Idrija.

Additionally, the findings of the strategy were analysed and discussed with the following external stakeholders via a consultation process:

- Špela Berlot (CIPRA - Commission Internationale pour la Protection des Alpes, Slovenia)
- Dr. Markus Gilbert Bliem (Carinthian Provincial Government, Head of Spatial Development Unit, Austria)
- Anica Draganić (Cultstore Novi Sad, Serbia)
- Anja Fortuna (Vice-President at European Youth Forum)
- Nela Halilović (IPoP - Institute for Spatial Policies, Slovenia)
- Nicole Hüttenbrenner (Youth coordinator Trofaiach, Austria)
- Susanne Leitner-Böchzelt (Head of the MuseumCenter, Leoben, Austria)
- Mag. Martin Nagler (Styrian Provincial Government, Head of State Planning and Regional Development Unit, Austria)
- Matevž Šlabnik (Idrija 2020 Association, Idrija, Slovenia)
- Dr. Angelika Sternath (Carinthian Provincial Government, Statistical Unit, Austria)
- Gerfried Tiffner (LEADER-Manager Steirische Eisenstrasse, Austria)

The authors thank these individuals and their institutions for their valuable input to this strategy.

INTRODUCTION – YOUTH AND INDUSTRIAL TOWNS

Industrial towns have almost vanished from the European political agenda over the last few decades. If they are discussed, they are overtly portrayed negatively, often as places that have been ‘left behind’. However, contrary to this stereotype, studies from Europe show that smaller towns often form a significant part of the industrial sector and that some industrial towns prove to be more resilient in crises. Furthermore, reindustrialisation in Europe may result in the existing industrial areas proving to be important centres for further growth. Overall, industrial towns remain important entities in Central Europe. They function not only as important places of manufacturing but also as sites of vibrant industrial heritage, culture and values, providing vital social infrastructure and jobs for their hinterlands. Therefore, it is important to assess the development opportunities and challenges related to industrial towns in a realistic and balanced way.

The relevance of youth in the development of small and medium-sized industrial towns and the connected aspects of demography, migration and mobility are rarely discussed. If they are, the topic is often contextualised to match the prevailing narrative of industrial towns as ‘rusty’ regions offering no future for young people. Industrial towns are widely associated with an ageing and shrinking, population as well as brain drain, but the reasons and processes behind this phenomenon are usually underexplored. This knowledge gap is especially striking because even successful industrial regions, which often offer a wide range of employment opportunities for young people, face demographic challenges and outmigration. Such outmigration from economically successful regions contrasts with the widespread belief that economic factors are what primarily trigger outmigration, thus challenging many of the long-held understandings of spatial development in general.

Overall, many industrial towns and regions face the challenge of youth outmigration. The consequent demographic changes can have severe impacts on social and public infrastructures, and the decline in local labour pools increasingly affects existing companies. Therefore, the phenomenon of youth outmigration deserves specific attention in the context of local and regional development. A shift in perspective is particularly required in this context,

acknowledging the fact that young people, especially in the highly mobile European society, leave communities for a wide range of subjective, biographical, and/or relational reasons, only some of which are directly linked to the local availability of jobs. Rather than focusing on economic factors alone, it is important to consider the social dimension of outmigration processes and the specific situation of youth in industrial areas. For instance, with education and family being important drivers of youth outmigration, outmigration trends might point towards local mismatches in employment, education, leisure offers and social infrastructures, such as housing or kindergartens.

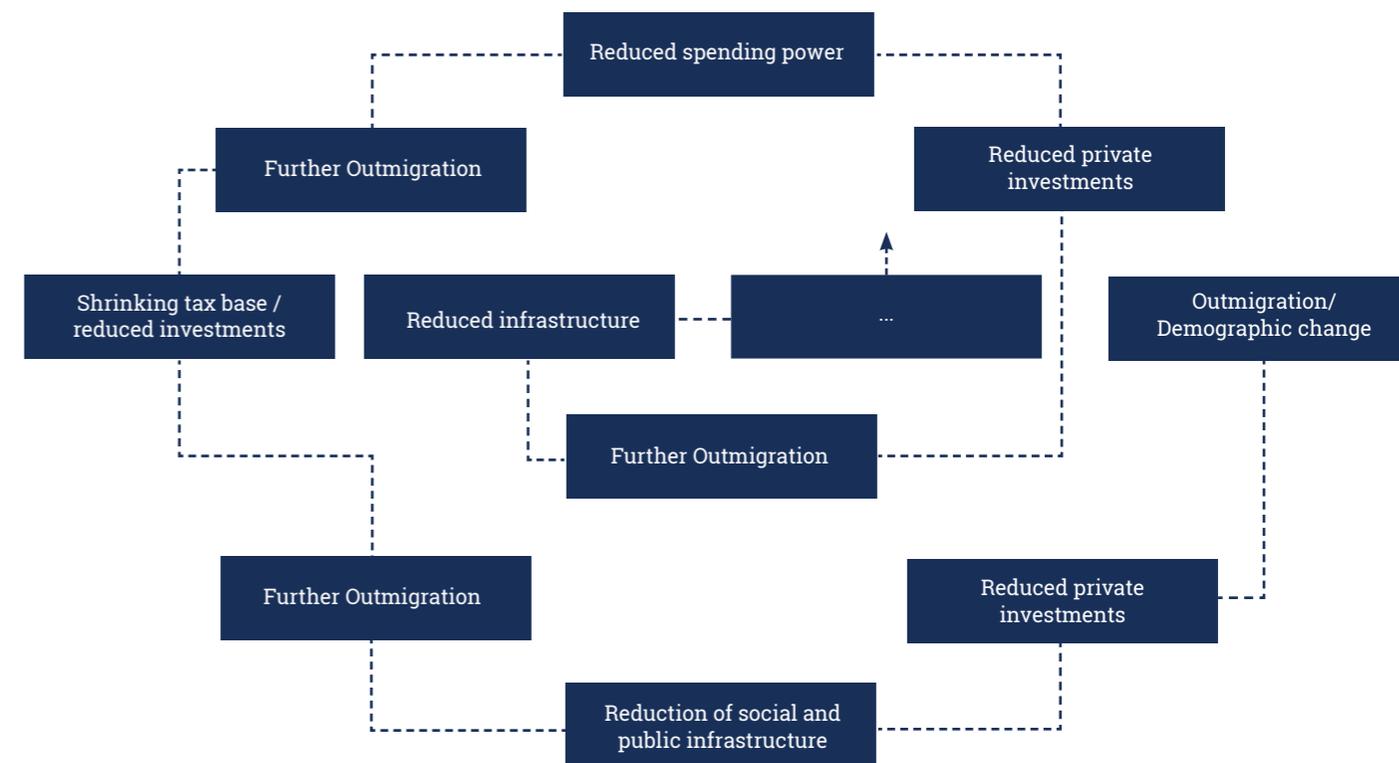


Figure 1: The filtering-down process of demographic change (Harfst et al. 2021)

This strategy paper focuses on small and medium-sized industrial towns comprising 5,000–100,000 inhabitants. From a development perspective, these places are hard to generalise – much is dependent on their specific spatial and functional contexts, and there are many successful as well as problematic examples of industrial towns across the SI-AT cooperation area. Nevertheless, some features, stemming from periods of structural adjustments of their economies, are often quite similar among industrial towns, particularly an economic, social or cultural decline in the urban system and outmigration of the skilled labour force. Although these features might only appear in certain periods of development in most industrial towns and the characteristics of industrial labour have changed rapidly over the last decades, there is a persistent, overtly negative picture of industrial towns. In the SI-AT cooperation area, as in Central Europe as a whole, such industrial towns constitute an important element of polycentric development.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES OF YOUTH IN INDUSTRIAL TOWNS

Understanding youth challenges in industrial towns

Young people represent one of the most significant demographic groups in industrial towns; their mobility and population dynamics, contemporary lifestyles and complex everyday needs present constant challenges for urban and regional planners. Therefore, addressing and understanding the needs and challenges of young people living in industrial areas can influence their decision to stay, leave or return. Analysing the specific challenges of youth in small and medium-sized industrial towns provides a multidimensional picture of the various needs and values of the youth in industrial settings. It is important to note that this section's focus on challenges is not to deny the fact that many young people enjoy living in industrial towns and regions and cherish 'industrial values' such as solidarity, creativity, and 'do-it-yourself' attitudes. Rather, the persistent challenges encountered by the youth are highlighted to devise better policies in the field of youth outmigration.

Results in YOUIND are based on the one hand, on an in-depth analysis of two case study regions, the Steirische Eisenstrasse (Austria) and the town of Idrija (Slovenia). On the other hand, an extensive literature review was carried out, analysing case studies from different

parts of developed countries in Europe, North America and Australia. From this research, eight such challenges were identified. The literature discusses the various challenges present at different levels, and the relationship between industrial towns and youth is often described as 'problematic' – this should be kept in mind when reading and interpreting the current section, which discusses the topic in more general terms. There are various industrial towns in the SI-AT cooperation area, each with its unique problems and advantages. Therefore, this paper discusses the challenges faced by most industrial towns to a certain degree, but these may not apply to all industrial towns per se. Accordingly, some readers might fully recognize the following challenges, while others might do so only partially.



Figure 2: Youth challenges in industrial towns and regions (adapted from Kozina et al. 2021)

Challenge 1: Identity and values

- **Declining industrial identity:** Industrial identity is often not as relevant for young people in the present day and age as it was for past generations.
- **Loss of social and cultural capital:** With the devaluation of industrial identity and decreased role of support structures (via family and companies), young people often fail to acquire the necessary social and cultural capital.

Challenge 2: Power hierarchies and social inclusion

- **Social exclusion and juvenile delinquency:** Social exclusion and juvenile delinquency can be at significantly high levels in places experiencing economic decline or sudden deindustrialisation.
- **Importance of social networks:** Maintaining social networks (friends and family) is important for the youth to cope with adverse socioeconomic conditions and their own changing values and identities.

Challenge 3: Employment

- **Lack of interest in industrial jobs:** There is a lack of motivation among the youth towards industrial jobs compared to more prestigious jobs. On the one hand a loss of traditional industrial jobs due to economic restructuring can be detected, on the other hand a lack of skilled workers can be noticed.
- **Rising precariousness:** Compared to permanent and lifelong employment in the traditional industrial sector, new jobs are often more precarious and involve short-term contracts, flexibility and wage instability.

Challenge 4: Education, training and skills

- **Inadequate or inert education system:** Industrial restructuring is often not supported by changes in curricula to meet the needs of the labour market, leading to low self-esteem and resistance to education among the youth.
- **Gender issues:** The gender gap widens when traditional industrial education in schools and apprenticeships are considered 'masculine', while non-industrial education is perceived as 'upper class' or 'feminine'.

Challenge 5: Creativity and innovation

- **Neglected local creativity:** Locals are considered less creative than newcomers, because of which their tacit industrial knowledge might not be recognised properly by schools and policymakers.
- **Own expression of creativity matters:** Creative work emerges through the passions, skills and hobbies of industrial youth, who thus establish their own creative industries.

Challenge 6: Built environment and infrastructure

- **Lack of basic infrastructure or outdated infrastructure:** Industrial cities usually lack the basic infrastructure necessary for young people's living, such as recreational facilities, public transport and affordable housing.
- **Symbolic message of deprived areas:** Deprived areas often foster feelings of abandonment and present a poor outward image.

Challenge 7: Demography and spatial mobility

- **Factors of emigration:** Young people often migrate from industrial cities because of a lack of jobs; other push factors include a lack of social infrastructure, cultural activities and educational opportunities.
- **Connection with hometown:** Youth often stay connected to their industrial hometown and values, even in the case of emigration.

Challenge 8: Participation and governance

- **Conformity of political programmes:** Political programmes often consider the aspirations of the middle class and neglect the voices of working-class youth.
- **Relevance of youth clubs and initiatives:** Promoting youth clubs and initiatives is important for policy implementation; they act as hubs for youth participation.

Youth challenges and youth outmigration

The results of the YOUIND project highlight that youth migration trends are determined not only by economic factors but also by diverse soft factors. While a range of distinct push and pull factors for migration are given in the academic literature, the YOUIND results point to the following distinctive migration patterns (push factors), which may be more relevant in industrial regions than in others:

- Traditional family values and hierarchical decision-making structures that hinder the professional careers of women in the region
- Lack of realisation/appreciation of local (employment) opportunities
- Lack of social and economic infrastructures (e.g. child care, service economy, creative industries)
- Outdated image of companies in the region (due to their focus on manufacturing, often associated with conservative mindsets, resistance to change and local clientelism)
- Traditional, technical and manual focus of the labour market

These aspects negatively affect women and people with higher education (especially in fields outside manufacturing) and can serve as significant push factors for those groups to emigrate. This is an especially negative outcome, as these two groups are important drivers of economic, social and demographic development in industrial regions.

POLICY CHALLENGES AND THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF INDUSTRIAL CULTURE

Youth outmigration as a specific policy challenge

Policy responses related to youth outmigration and associated demographic changes remain patchy. Competences and policy approaches remain divided across various organisations and governance levels, and knowledge gains from projects or initiatives are often not mainstreamed. Policies addressing youth outmigration and demographic changes are usually devised at the local and regional levels; in contrast, a lack of understanding and coordination prevails at the national level regarding this issue. While stakeholders in some regions have realised

the importance of addressing outmigration, joint actions – whether in the economic or social sector – remain scarce. Instead, single solutions by single companies or institutions prevail.

In general, there is a need for more coordinated, cross-sectoral approaches within industrial regions as well as more knowledge exchanges at the national and European levels. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on good practices in relation to measures mitigating youth outmigration. More comprehensive, inclusive strategies also need to be developed, considering the soft factors that would retain people in industrial regions. When policies do exist, they often display a lack of understanding of the needs and perspectives of the youth, especially the differences in education level and gender. One policy option that is often pursued focuses on ‘winning back’ people who have left or attracting complete ‘newcomers’. While this is viewed as valid in many regions, some pressing questions remain unaddressed, especially in relation to specific target groups’ needs and real sizes and the actual impact of such campaigns. This policy focus may also lead to groups already present in the region, such as people with migration backgrounds and refugees, being overlooked. Therefore, further research and practical evidence are needed to properly assess such policies.

Industrial culture as a strategic policy instrument

Structural change often results in economic and social difficulties in industrial communities. This may not only lead to negative outside perceptions but also result in lost pride and lower self-esteem among the existing population. The youth in industrial towns experience difficulties that prevent them from thriving, especially because the economic and social systems often do not address their needs or capabilities. Education, governance and employment frameworks often introduce programmes that do not fit into the industrial context. In many cases, these systems ignore the place-specific industrial culture of these regions.

Industrial culture is grounded in the specific institutionalised routines and incorporated conventions, beliefs and production patterns of industrial structures as well as the interlinked social factors beyond the structures themselves. Industrial culture involves a special, place-bound setting with a concentration of expertise, attitudes, values, traditions and physical structures. It serves as a bridge between the past, present and future of industrial places, thus creating new identities and values.

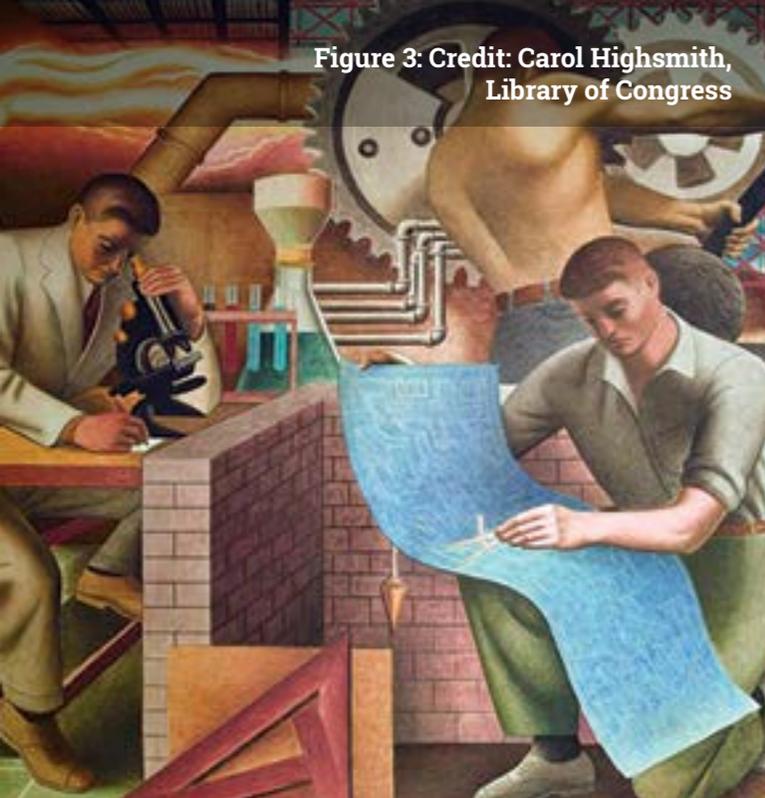


Figure 3: Credit: Carol Highsmith, Library of Congress



Figure 4: Credit: IFA teched, CC BY 2.0



Figure 5: Credit: Garry Knight



Figure 6: Credit: US Embassy

Through pilot actions, such as festivals and school initiatives, the YOUIND project partners tested the strategic utilisation of industrial culture within the context of youth outmigration by highlighting the positive values and traditions of industrial communities, such as solidarity, multiculturalism, and tolerance, as well as by stressing the persistent innovative spirit of people and companies present in the regions today. Without denying the negative effects of industrial labour and structural change, the project paints a more balanced and realistic picture of how industrial regions have become what they are today.

Notably, the overall aim of the YOUIND project was to foster a better understanding of industrial places among young people by linking traditional and shared social practices to the youth's environment, thus enabling them to integrate those aspects into their own everyday culture. Activities organised to this end included festivals and events with an industrial heritage background, education via different formats, such as events and competitions, and (cross-border) exchanges between similar communities and people. These activities were supported by long-term strategic planning and broad networking with different regional stakeholders from administrative fields, heritage institutions, youth clubs, schools and private companies. The aim was to create a new forward-looking approach, which would strengthen the youth's positive relations to the region.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTLOOK

Based on the practical results of the YOUIND project and the interconnected research activities, this section of the strategy paper highlights some concrete policy recommendations related to youth outmigration in small and medium-sized industrial towns, which are expected to benefit local and regional stakeholders.

It is important to note that detailed strategic policy options have to be tailored to each town's needs, challenges and opportunities, which differ across local and regional settings. In the YOUIND project, this was done via the Regional Action Plans for the Steirische Eisenstrasse (Austria) and the town of Idrija (Slovenia). Bearing this in mind, the current cross-border strategy paper lays down generalised policy options and recommendations, highlighting the various aspects that should be considered when dealing with the issue of youth outmigration. The recommendations given below are clustered according to the eight youth challenges discussed earlier (see Chapter 3), and they draw attention to specific aspects of the complex phenomenon of youth outmigration or demographic changes at the local or regional level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressed challenge: Identity and values

- Foster connections between the youth and the industry, industrial culture and schools, and **keep in touch with youth that have left**.
- Utilise the **potential of industrial heritage** to establish new development programmes and projects.
- Do not underestimate the ability of **leisure and tourism** activities to reproduce cultural identities.

Keywords: apprenticeships, summer jobs, family days, school visits, sense of belonging

Addressed challenge: Power hierarchies and social inclusion

- Take into account that young people in (post)industrial settings rely heavily on **social networks (friends and family)** for identity formation and support.
- **Avoid severe and rapid deindustrialisation without a mitigating 'plan B'**, as it can have detrimental effects on social relations and lead to various forms of resistance.
- Provide **social programmes and youth services and allow for youth participation** to alleviate juvenile delinquency and prevent social exclusion.

Keywords: youth clubs, mentorship, advocacy programmes, integrative, community-wide approach

Addressed challenge: Employment

- **Communicate industry-connected job advantages** to the local youth, and relate them to topical subjects (e.g. green transition, high-tech industries, fablabs).
- **Reach out to existing industrial firms** to co-create events with youth organisations; get them to communicate and understand each other's needs and expectations.
- **Invest in social programmes and participatory projects** targeting vulnerable and marginalised youth to improve their options in the labour market.

Keywords: info events, social programmes, mutual understanding, marketing campaigns

Addressed challenge: Education, training and skills

- **Promote industrial educational values** to students through initiatives such as 'career days'.
- **Address gender issues** to foster inclusion in educational programmes.
- **Integrate tacit knowledge and traditional industrial skills** with modern curricula to ensure the transfer and promotion of practical knowledge.

Keywords: targeting and marketing women, learning by doing, thesis, vocational curriculum

Addressed challenge: Creativity and innovation

- Organise regular **creative thinking events** for young people, including vulnerable and marginalised youth, as well as policymakers and entrepreneurs.
- Ensure young people have opportunities to **express themselves creatively** by providing them with the required spaces, equipment, infrastructure and funding.
- Offer young people the opportunity to participate in shaping **technological and social innovations**.

Keywords: redesign empty spaces, studios, workshops, creative events, co-creation

Addressed challenge: Built environment and infrastructure

- Provide **affordable housing and recreational facilities**, and ensure their **accessibility** (e.g. outdoor sports via public transport).
- Revitalise abandoned industrial sites in a new and creative context to show that they are not neglected.
- Improve **social and cultural activities and infrastructure provisions** (including public spaces) to improve the **outward perception** and image of a place.

Keywords: summer camps, youth bus, housing, art installations, graffiti lessons, cooperation

Addressed challenge: Demography and spatial mobility

- Foster **collaborations between authorities, universities, youth clubs and firms** to attract and retain young people in industrial regions.
- **Reconnect** with emigrated youth, offering them ways to return.

- To retain youth, provide **jobs** as well as appropriate and diverse **social infrastructure and cultural activities**.

Keywords: social media, participation, university–industry partnership

Addressed challenge: Participation and governance

- Foster **serious dialogue** between young people and decision makers.
- Integrate young people as **co-creators** into local and regional development programmes.
- Acknowledge the **importance of youth clubs and initiatives** for policy implementation.

Keywords: participatory planning, mutual respect, bottom-up approach, inclusiveness



Figure 7: Credit: Stephanie Weislein, CC BY-ND 2.0



Figure 8: Credit: Pxhere



Figure 9
Credit: Libreshot



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Figure 14:
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POLICY BRIEF

Summary

The relevance of youth in the development of small and medium-sized industrial towns and the connected aspects of demography, migration and mobility are rarely discussed. Despite industrial towns being widely associated with a shrinking and ageing population, as well as brain drain, the reasons and processes behind these phenomena are underexplored. This reveals a knowledge gap on an academic and a practical, applied policy level.

Research related to the YOUIND project has revealed the complexity of the migration decisions made by young people, highlighting both hard (economic) and soft factors (education, infrastructure) in this regard, often in association with the general challenges faced by youth in industrial towns and regions. Regarding policy, it was found that few approaches can coherently deal with these challenges while simultaneously outlining recommendations to improve the local and regional approaches to these challenges. Notably, one such approach – the utilisation and valorisation of industrial culture – was tested as part of the YOUIND project; it was found that engagement with the historical, economic and social past form the backbone for a revived regional identity and commitment and could influence young people's decision to stay or return.

Industrial towns and youth – a problematic relationship?

Youth outmigration and demographic changes pose significant development challenges in many regions across Europe. The YOUIND project focused on the specific challenges faced by small and medium-sized industrial towns, which are numerous and perform important socio-economic functions across Central Europe.

Young people represent one of the most significant demographic groups in industrial towns; their mobility and population dynamics, contemporary lifestyles, and everyday complex needs present constant challenges for urban and regional planners. Therefore, understanding and addressing the challenges of young people living in industrial areas can influence their decision to stay, leave or return.

Industrial regions have some distinctive migration patterns (push factors) that may be more

relevant compared to those of other regions. These can be named as traditional family values and hierarchical decision-making structures, hindering especially professional careers of women; a lack of appreciation of local (employment) opportunities; insufficient social and economic infrastructures (e.g. child care, service economy, creative industries); an overall outdated image of companies and the regions as such; and a technical and manual focus of local labour markets. These aspects are selective, negatively affecting women and people with higher education (especially outside the manufacturing sector) and can serve as significant push factors for those groups to emigrate.

Utilising industrial culture and youth involvement

The YOUIND project partners have tested via pilot actions the strategic utilisation of industrial culture within the context of youth outmigration by highlighting the positive values and traditions of industrial communities, such as solidarity, multiculturalism and tolerance, as well as by stressing the persistent innovative spirit of people and companies present in industrial regions today. Without denying the obvious negative effects of industrial labour and structural change, the project paints a more balanced and realistic picture of how industrial regions have become what they are today.

Notably, the overall aim of this project was to foster a better understanding of industrial places among youth by linking traditional and shared social practices to younger people and their environment, thus enabling them to integrate those aspects into their own everyday culture. Cross-sectoral and long-term strategic approaches that (at least) mitigate long-term demographic changes and outmigration, which can trigger negative development cycles, are required. The essential first step in this regard is to raise awareness and build the capacity to act on the topic in industrial regions.

Realising the problem and taking action

Overall, the challenges of youth in industrial towns and regions are specific and multidimensional, requiring place-based solutions tailored to the region's needs, especially from local and regional authorities. Promoting awareness at the local and regional levels is a central policy field of regional development. The existing policy responses in the field reveal that project-based approaches are favoured over long-term thinking, and competences and policy approaches remain split across various organisations and governance levels, with knowledge gains often not mainstreamed. Thus, there is a need for more coherent action.

Stakeholders should aim for a long-term, holistic strategy that considers different sectors, thereby combining multiple actors from different backgrounds and fields, e.g. youth and heritage institutions, private companies and administration. Special focus should be given to soft factors (e.g. image building) that trigger out- and return-migration, which are often underestimated in the literature on the topic.

Additional sources for further reading

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Original research

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ABOUT THE YOUIND PROJECT

YOUIND deals with the issue of youth outmigration faced by peripheral industrial towns and regions from an industrial cultural perspective.

The SI-AT INTERREG programme area is characterised by a relatively large number of industrial enterprises, which are often located in small and medium-sized towns. These places are facing new challenges resulting from new trends (e.g. Industry 4.0) and an increasing demand for highly skilled workers. These employees are difficult to find; young people in particular, do not perceive these regions as attractive and migrate to other places, rarely returning. These developments not only threaten the industry but also affect the socioeconomic development of entire regions within the programme area.

To address this largely neglected issue, the YOUIND partners combine their academic and regional knowledge to raise institutional capacities. Both partner regions – Idrija and the Steirische Eisenstrasse – have rich industrial pasts and presents; both are on UNESCO's heritage list and are sites of global companies such as Kolektor and Voestalpine in the present day. The project seeks to use the industrial culture of a place to strengthen the institutional capacity for youth outmigration and bring young people closer to their region.

YOUIND's strategy to raise awareness on the topic involves the following:

- Fostering cross-border knowledge exchanges among stakeholders and developing long-term network structures involving the youth, businesses, and institutional actors in industrial regions
- Jointly developing highly visible pilot activities related to youth and industrial culture
- Developing long-term regional action plans and transnational strategic advice

YOUIND's aim is to promote social innovations and improve institutional capacities through pilot actions and long-term action planning. The partners have translated their project findings to transnational policy recommendations, with the objective of distributing knowledge on emerging topics within the programme area.

The YOUIND project is implemented by the SI-AT cross-border INTERREG A programme and co-funded by ERDF. The project runtime is from spring 2020 to spring 2022. For more information and regular project updates and results, please visit <https://www.researchgate.net/project/YOUIIND-Youth-outmigration-and-institutional-capacities-in-industrial-towns>

For more information on the project partners, visit:

www.geographie.uni-graz.at

www.eisenstrasse.co.at

www.zrc-sazu.si

www.idrija.si



This transnational strategy paper provides policy recommendations based on the results of the YOUIND project ('Youth in industrial towns'). It targets policymakers from municipalities and regions within and beyond the Slovenia-Austria cooperation area, which have similar characteristics and problems associated with industrial development and youth outmigration. This paper aims to raise awareness, add to the knowledge available, and help shape cross-border policies related to youth and youth outmigration in industrial towns. Accordingly, the paper highlights policy options for stakeholders in affected communities.