



**TRANSATLANTIC
DIALOGUE ON THE
INDUSTRIAL
HEARTLANDS**

NEW PATHS TO PROSPERITY IN INDUSTRIAL HEARTLAND REGIONS

**Report from the Industrial Heartlands
and Democracy Study Tour**

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**DESPITE DIFFERENT LEGAL
FRAMEWORKS AND VARYING
LOCAL CONDITIONS AND DE-
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MATION.**



**— PETER BERKOWITZ,
EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE OF REGIONAL
AND URBAN POLICY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can we, economically and socially, revitalize former industrial heartland regions while promoting a green transition? This question sat at the heart of our Industrial Heartlands and Democracy Study Tour held in November 2023, which brought together officials and economic changemakers from the US Midwest for a transatlantic exchange with their European peers.

The tour took us to several iconic mining and steel regions: Charleroi, in Belgium's Wallonia region; the Saarland linking Germany and France; and Saxony in Germany's former East. We gained vital insights into the practical daily work of policy and

program shaping as well as community engagement and empowerment. Lessons learned include, for one, that transformation can succeed if it is embedded in local identities and taps into people's pride in their communities. For another, local actors must be given the tools for proper governance, and decision-making should be regionally centered for effective place-based policy. This ensures that quality of life and place can be broadened, and investments in good public services are targeted well. After active and continual transatlantic learning, we can observe that much experimentation in place-based policy is underway, and much more is needed.

THE PATHWAYS TO NEW PROSPERITY

Prior work has shared the variety of ways in which similarly situated industrial regions, after difficult and often very painful economic restructuring driven by global economic change, *have found paths to grow again*, creating a new round of community-wide economic and social vitality. In North America, Europe, and beyond lie many regions that share a common developmental arc and storyline, as crucibles of mining, steel-making, and manufacturing that powered their nations' 20th century economy, but that saw their signature industries' decline or even disappear over recent decades.

Once again in November 2023, we brought officials and economic changemakers from the US Midwest to tour and talk with peers across Europe—trade notes and share strategies around successful economic transformation strategies. As with a *similar 2022 study tour* for European economic development officials and leaders across the Midwest, this latest tour for American decision-makers was rich in illustrations of the variety of successful pathways to new prosperity found on both sides of the Atlantic, and offered fresh insights into key organizing principles that undergird them. It also clearly illuminates the importance of this work. Effective industrial heartland region economic transformation restores pride and brings new hope and optimism to residents of these regions—and in so doing does much to diminish feelings of neglect and resentment that, left untreated, today pose such a challenge to the health of our democracies.

Organized and facilitated by our partners with the German think tank *Das Progressive Zentrum* and supported by the German Ministry of the Economy and Climate Action's European Recovery Program, I was joined on the tour by Wolfgang Mössinger, Chicago's former German Consul General; former Pittsburgh *Mayor Bill Peduto*, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation CEO *Missy Hughes*, Former Michigan Congressman *Andy Levin*, Midland, Michigan County Administrator *Bridgette Gransden*, Indiana State Representative *Phil GiaQuinta*, Wausau, Wisconsin *Mayor Katie Rosenberg* traveling across Europe. (The itinerary is included in the addendum.)

Our study tour took us in person to several iconic heartland mining and steel regions: Charleroi, in Belgium's Wallonia region; the Saarland linking Germany and France; and Leipzig and Saxony region in Germany's former East. In each we saw a community fabric that mimicked other iconic and more familiar former coal and steel regions whose economic evolution we *have reported on*—such as Germany's Ruhr, and Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania.

In all these regions one looks out on a landscape of massive, hulking, steelmaking complexes; bumpy hills, tailing piles, switching yards, and power stations. Milling, machining, and chemical-making support facilities; cramped and crumbling older neighborhoods of worker housing.

And our transatlantic convenings, discussions, and learning exchanges that were also part of the tour took us virtually to many other communities and regions. Guided by leaders and economic change agents from North America, the UK, Europe, and further East, as well as several transatlantic convenings hosted by the European Commission in Brussels, and Das Progressive Zentrum in Berlin along the way, we gathered additional insights about the challenges and community responses to help the regions and their residents navigate through economic change to a brighter tomorrow.

These virtual "travels" took us to Macomb County Michigan, part of the automobile capital that is Detroit; Newcastle and North of Tyne, England; Midland, Michigan, a chemical town; the rural Loire Valley of France; Fort Wayne, Indiana, nestled at the cross-roads of the Midwest; Saarbrücken and Saxony in Germany; Wausau, Wisconsin; Washington, Pennsylvania; and many other smaller industrial places within these regions.

In all, we saw and learned about very different—but effective—strategies for community regeneration at work in very similar older industrial regions:

In *Charleroi*, whose massive steel complexes are largely shuttered, we toured the region's crown-jewel of economic

regeneration: the massive greenfield BioPark Complex, our visit [covered by Belgian TV](#). Leveraging university, technical institute, and existing corporate medical testing, imaging, and bioscience expertise, the BioPark has incubated and attracted over 100 high-tech biomedical startups eager to get a foothold in Europe. Speaking at the event, Wallonia State Secretary Thomas Dermine made the direct link between creating these new economic opportunities and strengthening democracy. *"It is essential to redevelop regions that have suffered much, to provide residents hope for the future, or they will lose faith in democracy, and our national and international institutions."* The BioPark is succeeding—employing tens of thousands of people and spurring community growth—but employees are better-educated people from nearby Brussels region, versus the working-class residents of Charleroi next door. Local leaders acknowledged, and our touring of Charleroi's battered downtown confirmed, there was a lot of work to do to stitch Charleroi's existing residents and community into the emerging high-tech regional reality.

In the [Saarland](#) we saw a different story. Here, leaders in the historic steelmaking valley connecting France and Germany were leaning into the region's industrial identity as one of Europe's largest steelmaking and auto parts suppliers. We were awed by our tour of the massive Saarstahl complex, but more impressed by our meeting with Stephan Ahr and the rest of the workers' council at the facility. We marvelled at the optimism and determination of Saarstahl workers to lead the green transformation. Stephan laid out the workers' aggressive efforts to lobby their own government—and the European Commission—to secure the more than €3 billion necessary to move completely from high carbon to zero-emission green steel production in some of the biggest steelmaking complexes in Europe.

When asked how he felt about having to make such a monumental and risky change in his industry, he told us: *"We have to do this! The change is necessary, and when we do make the green transition, we will show the nation and we will show the world that the Saarland can secure the future of the industry. We will show the way."* These were workers whose

jobs were immediately at risk due to fast-breaking changes in the auto industry (the steel works' major customer, carmakers, were now demanding carbon-neutral steel), and the much more aggressive goals for carbon-neutrality set by the European Union.

Their optimism and embrace of change stood in sharp contrast to the steelmakers and workers back home in the US. Former [Pittsburgh](#) Mayor Bill Peduto recalls when he pushed his local steelmakers to embrace similarly ambitious climate goals. *"They claimed it could not be done. They claimed they could not even come close."* Mayor Peduto also recounted [in a Washington Monthly article](#) published after his trip that, absent the kind of embrace of the future witnessed by workers in the Saarland, angry and alienated union workers embrace the toxic "Trumpism." *"Back home I had watched with growing dismay the movement of disgruntled and disaffected union steelworkers—frustrated with diminished prospects for work and visible deterioration of our steel town communities—move from Democratic stalwarts to an ever-closer embrace of Donald Trump and his anger- and resentment-driven politics. I had seen among my own constituents, and among the residents of neighboring communities in Western Pennsylvania that had not seen the economic rebound we have in the city of Pittsburgh, the damage done by leaders like Trump, who promise to bring back the past, deny the need for change, but deliver nothing."*

Later in [Leipzig](#), center of former East Germany's [Saxony](#) region, we heard yet a different story of heartland region regeneration. While Leipzig itself has continuously thrived as a home to the region's wealth (money initially made as the center of an 800-year-old rich mining region), and a university, arts, and cultural hub, the surrounds of Saxony were the centers of East Germany's heavy industry in autos, chemicals, manufacturing—all of which took a dramatic nosedive upon reunification. When industries were rebooted and rationalized, many blue-collar jobs were lost for good, the population aged as young people moved away, leaving remaining residents disoriented and angry.

While massive investment from the former West and relocation of some industry, such as Opel and Audi car making and Siemens electronics, helped lift up the region, State Secretary Thomas Kralinski detailed the current strategy: leverage and build out the nascent microelectronics industry—first nurtured by former East Germany, into a network of startup firms and a “Silicon Saxony.” Expand “Future Sax”—a platform to connect university R&D to update technologies of the region’s SME network. Link current growth centers in Dresden and Leipzig with the numerous “middle cities”—the small- to medium-sized former factory towns dotting the landscape—through better transport and connectivity.

At our hybrid event *Treating the Geography of Discontent*, hosted by the European Commission Directorate of Regional and Urban Policy in Brussels, Bill Peduto, former Mayor of **Pittsburgh** narrated that cities rise, fall, and rise again. Pittsburgh and its steel, glass, and aluminum was the city that built America. During World War II, Pittsburgh produced more steel than Germany and Japan combined. Steel employed hundreds of thousands of people, but the pollution and grime earned the city the moniker “hell with the lid off.” Mid-20th century Pittsburgh’s corporate leaders realized no one would want to live in Pittsburgh any more if they did not do something to literally change the atmosphere. Organizing one of the nation’s first regional business CEO leadership organizations dedicated to economic development—the *Allegheny Conference*—before the first US national clean air and water acts, Pittsburgh made their own. Cleaning up the community and redeveloping their “Three Rivers” waterfront

downtown, Pittsburgh thrived anew as a corporate destination and headquarters center.

But as narrated by Mayor Peduto: *“In the 1970s and 80’s steel collapsed, unemployment rates exceeded those of the Great Depression, and the heart went out of the city. But Pittsburghers did what we do—rolled up our sleeves and went to work. We realized that the economic engine of our community—our ‘factories’—weren’t gone, they had just moved. We built out the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), Carnegie Mellon University, and Allegheny Health Care. We supported the growth of our ‘eds, meds and tech.’ Now looking at the UPMC Tower downtown, I see an institution that employs more than 100,000 people—more than US Steel in its heyday.”* Winning some national innovation research centers in information technology and manufacturing, Pittsburgh has built on these assets to become home to new tech startups leader in computer science, robotics, and AI.

But while Pittsburgh was reborn, the region around it was dying. Mayor Peduto again: *“Pittsburgh came back but all the steel towns around withered and died. We need to find*



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— Bill Peduto

the strategy that saved the city and apply it to save the region. Steel town workers don't want to be turned into 'coders.' They want to be challenged based on who they are. Let's go back to the regions that built the world once, and let's give them the challenge to do it again—to lead the clean steel revolution, to lead the future as we saw in the Saarland."

From **North-of Tyne, UK**, Mayor Jamie Driscoll told a similar tale of economic collapse and nascent rebirth. His Northeast England region went from being one of the richest parts of the country to one that produces only 73% of the national average GDP (in 1981 it was 92%). Average age expectancy in his region has dropped to only 53 years. The 2008 economic crisis and waves of national austerity programs hit the region hard. Brexit was one consequence—the feeling among great parts of the population that they are neglected, that nobody listens to them. Mayor Driscoll: *"I remember talking to dozens of constituents in the run-up to Brexit. Not once did I hear about the European Union. What I heard was: 'No one listens to us. No one represents us.'"*

Mayor Driscoll described a dysfunctional UK governance and financing model, with virtually no local decision-making powers, a national government incapable of delivering on major projects, (as evidenced by the recent national government abandonment of high-speed rail line extension to the North of England), all compounded by disinvestment. In the overly centralized British government system, the budget of his region had to endure a 60% budget cut and since—post Brexit—EU funding has dried up, there is no capacity to deliver on public services in the desired way.

"The only way of moving things forward in our community is by 'getting things out of Whitehall,'" says Driscoll, which the Mayor has been creatively pursuing. A major focus has been to boost education, to make people fit for new industries. With creative use of his own budget, he managed to increase the number of students in vocational schools from 22,000 to 35,000 within a few years. He's working to bring public transport back into local ownership, negotiating a devolution of transport decision-making to fix a system where

buses were stopping at 6:00 p.m. and little transport existed to connect citizens in smaller communities to where the jobs were in larger ones. In addition, investing in innovation, the region has created its own venture capital fund. To spur new green industry, the mayor is leading efforts to set and meet a goal for a "net Zero" Northeast, and advocating for changes in tax policy, so that as these efforts pay off in the form of greater economic growth and increased tax revenue, dollars are returned to the local level where they can be better plowed back into productive investments.

Meanwhile, back across the Atlantic, another older industrial community painted its own picture of rebirth. From **Fort Wayne, Indiana**, State Representative Phil GiaQuinta described the deliberate strategy whereby his industrial city rebuilt economic and community vitality over recent decades, creating new revenue sources to finance the investments and developments organized to improve quality of life. First the city and county passed movements allowing the city of Fort Wayne to annex the newer suburbs and keep a unified tax base. This helped subsidize new sports arenas, commercial development infrastructure, and new housing downtown. An expanded food and beverage tax went as well to support investments in place and in the downtown, such as new curbs, streets, green space, and sidewalks. A redeveloped former industrial riverfront now provides new recreational access and amenities such as restaurants, walking and biking trails, and residences. An old General Electric factory complex, once one of Fort Wayne's dominant employers, was repurposed for multi-use. *"Taken together all these investments are making downtown Fort Wayne the best place to live, work, and play,"* GiaQuinta shared at the Brussels forum.

Midland, Michigan was a company town, the birthplace of Dow Chemical. Today they are also animating a robust economic development strategy focused on quality of life—as they seek to diversify from reliance on a diminished Dow. County Administrator Bridgette Gransden told the story in Brussels of the Midland community animating a broader vision of quality of life and place strategies—one that also attends to the emotional health of residents, many unner-

ved by shifting employment opportunities and disoriented changes in their once predictable “company town.” Adding to Midland’s impressive historic investments in community services and amenities—good schools, parks, arts, and an attractive downtown—Midland Wellbeing Coalition puts the notion of individual and community well-being at the center of the county’s efforts. *“You can’t underestimate how important belonging is to people, to businesses, to community organizations. To feel that you are part of a community, a community that includes you, values you, to which you belong,”* Gransden told the hybrid audience in Brussels.

The county’s strategy is animated through a county-sponsored well-being coalition that meets and plans new strategies including the appointment of well-being ambassadors to engage institutions, organizations, and businesses in the efforts. The county sponsors free giveaways of the Calm app, a digital stress relief application, and looks at how and when people need it and use it. The pandemic and the isolation it nurtured reinforced the imperative—being realized in Midland County—of ensuring broadband access for all. Administrator Gransden: “It is essential that we connect people. We view broadband today as an essential utility, leveling the playing field for inclusion.”

Similar strategies were shared and are being mirrored among smaller cities such as **Washington, Pennsylvania**, in the Pittsburgh hinterland region, with the help of Kenneth Thompson of the Virtual Hands Collaborative. Thompson pointed out in Brussels, via Zoom, that whole regions

and cities—in the Midwest, UK, and elsewhere—are in a psychiatric crisis. Phenomena such as obesity, suicide, and violence are often signs of despair, results of entire towns being depressed. *“We are working in communities where nobody feels they have a future to imagine. The first step to overcome this is to shift the approach from providing services to individuals, to approaching the community’s challenge as a social and political one. To create new support structures and processes that reconnect people to each other and the community,”* Thompson told the audience. Thompson’s organization is trying to do just that, locating experts onsite in the community, facilitating community networking and conversations, and working to get local political leaders, health authorities, and providers to recognize the mental health crisis as the foundation of the societal crisis.

Quentin Legouy, a local municipal official from the **Loire Valley in France**, and Ph.D. candidate at the University Pa-



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— Bridgette Gransden

ris-Nanterre, described a different type of community isolation—the isolation and lack of connection to the broader country and continent among residents, and particularly young people, in his and similar rural regions of France. It's a disconnection that leads to support for right-wing populists. Legouy told us, *"In rural France they are all voting for the right, for Le Pen. We need more Europe in the Loire valley. Young people need more social activity, need more theater, need more transportation, need more local activities, and chances to get elsewhere. We need more universities not just located in the big cities. And we need a more bottom-up approach with young people integrated into decision-making."* Legouy pointed to the **EU Young Political Leaders Program** as one effective response to this lack of connection. The program strives to support young people to become local leaders of change by activating the young population who are eager to embrace change.

From **Wausau, Wisconsin**, Mayor Katie Rosenberg echoed aspects of Legouy's recipe for forward community movement in her own work as a progressive mayor in an otherwise very conservative region. *"Get the young people mobilized and lift up their voices. Organize the young people and give them a voice in decision-making. Young people are invested in 'we,' not 'me.'"* Another element of community regeneration was identifying and doing tangible things—things that the community could see and relate to—whatever the source of available funds. In her case, the City of Wausau took advantage of the new US infrastructure funding and focused on the job of modernizing the water system and protecting public health by replacing lead pipes. Organizing an innovative public-private partnership (PPP), the community was able to fast-track the work. In so doing, she also managed to tap into and help reanimate the community pride. The city teamed up with the local plumbers' union as part of the PPP. As the Mayor reported, *"The plumbers showed up saying, 'we are ready to teach people the trade.' The public health people showed up, ready to train others in doing monitoring work. The feeling was the community was working again."*

Saarbrücken, Germany offered an illustration of another innovative mechanism to pull the community together—in this case a community that had been tossed over time between governance by Germany and France, scarred by the German Nazi legacy, and a history of ideological cleavage. Local leaders in Saarbrücken told the story of pulling together interest groups and parties from differing political interests and perspective to pool resources and engage in an effort to ensure a shared, common information source, and constructive civic dialogues. **The Foundation Democracy Saarland** was created when the local newspaper, Saarbrücken Zeitung, was privatized after World War II, having previously belonged to the French occupying forces, and afterwards to the local government. With the proceeds of the newspaper holding, the foundation organizes a variety of projects and events to facilitate civic education, foster free discussions, and provide non-ideologically driven information exchanges—all in support of liberal democracy.

Wisconsin's director of Economic Development, Missy Hughes, in the context of a similarly polarized political environment today in Wisconsin, shared a different tack to build community cohesion—leaning into Wisconsin's international entanglements during times of social and economic upheaval. These efforts include engaging Wisconsin business and civic leaders in exchange experiences with European counterparts in how to make progress towards a green economy and to mitigate climate change. In the case of Wisconsin this means capitalizing on the existing partnership of Wisconsin with the German State of **Hessen**, both states share a manufacturing identity: *"We make things."* This experience of being important partners in ameliorating climate change, and as part of critical global supply chain and industry, helps bind people together—versus push people apart—according to Hughes.

In **Berlin**, once an industrial powerhouse alongside its role as Germany's historic capitol, we met in a giant former AEG (German Electric) industrial complex, repurposed as event, entertainment, retail and office spaces—with a group tomorrow's youthful leaders and economic change makers. Young

leaders in their 20s and 30s *selected as Fellows* in the Das Progressive Zentrum-sponsored *Transatlantic Dialogue on Industrial Heartlands*. Hailing from places such as Erie (Pennsylvania), Detroit, and Saline (Michigan) in the US Midwest, Leipzig, the Ruhr Valley, and Berlin in Germany, the Fellows shared *their initial reflections* on the challenges and opportunities facing industrial heartland regions and what they would like to investigate further as part of the initiative.

Back in Brussels, **the European Commission's Committee of the Region's**—the organization that represents elected Mayors and other regional and local authorities across Europe—Director for Legislative Works Thomas Wobben shared his constituents' interests, concerns, and insights from long service in making community change: *"We need to give more trust to mayors and other local leaders. We don't trust them enough, and we don't give them the tools with which to do the job."* His own experience from the Saxony-Anhalt chemical region showed him that local leaders can bring the population along in making change if they are properly included in the decision-making processes. Wobben appealed to national leaders in implementing big changes, such as the clean energy transformation, to have patience: *"They can't just press a button. If it is key to help the communities get on board a change process, we have to appreciate that it takes time—even for good leaders. We don't know whether transformation will work everywhere and there will be no quick solutions. In making structural change and investment decisions we should condition the outside funding on community engagement—but community engagement takes time; nations can't just snap their fingers and expect change."* He also promoted the concept of organizing networks of regions working on similar challenges—such as automotive regions navigating the change to electric vehicles—in order to develop a joint approach to transformation.

Peter Berkowitz, Director at **the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy**, and host of the Brussels transatlantic hybrid convening also shared lessons from the experience of working on place-based

policies and following policy debates over the years. *"The communities that had known economic and industrial dynamism in the past, but that are today 'stuck' in relative decline, show the strongest manifestation of discontent with the system. The only way to address this is through better place-based policies. Policies that take a further step—that help communities unlock their own resources. We need to focus more on the specific conditions and challenges in places and lean on local knowledge. Help communities find their future themselves."*



Get the young people mobilized and lift up their voices. Organize the young people and give them a voice in decision-making. Young people are invested in 'we,' not 'me.'
— Mayor Katie Rosenberg

LESSONS FROM THE “DOING”— IMPLICATIONS FOR HEARTLAND TRANSFORMATION

The study tour for Midwest leaders—with the various encounters, the formal and informal dialogues along the way—offered rich lessons for the important work of “the doing.” The practical day-to-day work of policy and program shaping and community engagement and empowerment that can result in effective regional regeneration—adding to insights we’ve been gleaning and sharing in similar study tours and structured transatlantic discussions.

Build on Who You Are—Take It Into the Future. US Midwest study tour participants met peers and fellow travelers all facing the similar challenge of helping their constituents feel part of and navigate change on their own terms. From Pittsburgh to Saxony, proud residents of industrial regions don’t like being “done to” or told they must change. Where communities find new success there aren’t demands for a new identity, but support to take their historic identity, whether as scientists, steel, or auto parts makers and take it into the future. As former German Consul General Wolfgang Mössinger told the group: *“Transformation has to be embedded in local identity and create ownership and participation. This is all the more necessary as it is the only way to counter the narrative of the right-wing populists that policies are put upon the population. The current trend of ‘green backlash’ [resentment and resistance to new clean energy policies coming from the EU and national governments on both sides of the Atlantic] is testament to this.”*

Tap the Pride. Plumbers in Wausau, Wisconsin, proudly stepping up to train others in the trade as the community repaired its aging infrastructure. Steelworkers in Saarland demanding the help from politicians they need to show the world how to make “green” steel; the plea from steelworkers in Pittsburgh’s hinterlands to challenge them again to “build the future.” The pride and historic sense of community identity can be tapped to help residents lead in a new era of economic change.

Get the Governance Right. National leaders and others who seek to support local and regional regeneration can

help, but they need to provide the resources and build capacity—accompanied by trust. “It is possible even in the UK to do wonderful things if we get the governance right.” (Mayor Driscoll) *“Trust the mayors, but give them the tools.”* (EU’s Thomas Wobben) These were some of the admonitions heard from the “doers” around what can make for effective community regeneration.

Center Decision-making in the Region. Successful transformation depends on local leadership and the local capacity to deliver. As Peter Berkowitz reflected on the European Commission’s long history trying to make effective place-based policy. *“The key lesson is that we have to take a step further to help places to unlock their own resources and focus more on the particular conditions in each community, building on their experience and strengths.”*

Focus on the “Cities Further Down.” Older industrial regions today are not economic monoliths. Whether in the US’ former “rust belt,” the Ruhr, or in Saxony, Germany, or England’s North, there are many communities that have turned an economic corner (often through their own smart, home-grown strategy) while others nearby languish. Pittsburgh is reborn while steel cities in its vicinity are hollowed out. Leipzig and Dresden in Saxony, Germany’s former East, thrive in a new tech economy, while other communities nearby (what Saxony State Secretary Thomas Kralinski called “middle cities”), having lost their anchors, flounder. National, regional, and community regeneration efforts that focus on where the economic transition is incomplete, spotty, or totally absent—also attend to the people and geographies most adrift in a world of change and most responsive to polarizing political messages and movements.

Broaden Quality of Life and Place. In a world of mobile talent and instantaneous global communications, building a rich quality of life and place matters as never before in economic development strategy. Rigorous economic analysis demonstrates that investments in good public services, transportation options, arts and culture, parks and recrea-

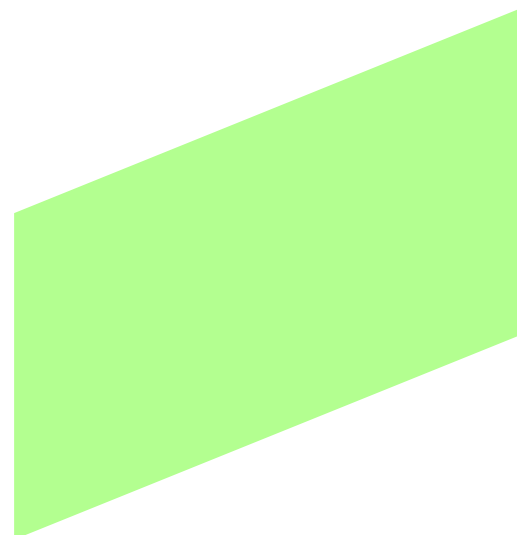
tion, and a broad array of community amenities is more correlated with good job and population growth than traditional “business friendliness” measures such as lower taxes and lax regulation. But the study tour discussions demonstrated that particularly for people in regions disoriented by change, a broader conception of quality of life is needed, encompassing connection, well-being, inclusion, and pride in place.

Transatlantic Experimentation—Lean Into and Learn from Differences. With so much in common and so many issues to address in the work of bringing renewed life to industrial heartland regions, a central takeaway was the payoff from active, continual learning from each other. Much experimentation in place-based policy is underway and much more is needed. And the challenges are similar in many industrial countries with liberal democratic systems. Expanded collective attention at transatlantic learning through the OECD, the EU, and other international organizations and structures can broaden participation, widen the scope, and pull in more countries. Transatlantic dialogues on transformation will foster new relationships and a shared stake in the work, as it will involve active parts of the decision makers on a sub-national level.

Shared Experience and Stake in the Future. One of the overarching lessons the study tour brought into view from a transatlantic perspective, is the commonality of experience across the U.S., the UK, and Germany — including a deep history of industrial development and navigating through economic changes in a democratic fashion. Our countries navigated the first and second industrial revolutions —Manchester’s birth of textile industry, steam engines, railways, coal, then heavy industries. While some countries fell under the sway of Marx and Engels, (and Germany had its disastrous decade of fascism), our countries to date have largely managed the social consequences of these rapid developments in a democratic manner.

The study tour also shows nicely how despite all the cultural differences and distance between workers, communities, and decision-makers: we share the same problems (climate

crisis, geo-economic shifts, populists, etc.), and we develop the same solutions (place-based economic change) and believe in a better future (hope rather than anger). Yet our countries still have much work to do to sustain our polities, and must continue to work together in order to stand stronger as both economies and democracies.



AUTHOR



John Austin directs the *Michigan Economic Center*, a center for ideas and network-building to advance Michigan's economic transformation. He also serves as a Non-Resident Senior Fellow with the *Brookings Institution* and is a Research Fellow with the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, where he leads these organizations' efforts to support economic transformation in the American Midwest and in the industrial heartlands of Western democracies. In these roles he has been the author of some of *the most influential analysis of the politics and economics of industrial heartlands*,

as well as *tangible guides and guidance* for policymakers around constructive actions and change. Mr. Austin is also affiliated faculty with the University of Michigan's Marsal Family School of Education, and the William Davidson Institute within the university's Ross School of Business. Previously, he served 16 years in elected service on the Michigan State Board of Education. Mr. Austin received a master's degree from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, and a bachelor's degree in Economics & Political Science from Swarthmore College, with High Honors and Phi Beta Kappa.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The *Transforming Industrial Heartlands Initiative* is a transatlantic collaborative partnership coordinated by John Austin. The initiative, its learning exchanges, convenings, events, study tours, presentations, publications, and other learning products, are conducted with partners including the Brookings Institution; the Georgetown University BMW Center for German and European Studies; the Jefferson Education Society; the Ruhrkonferenz of North-Rhine Westphalia; Policy Manchester at the University of Manchester, UK; the

University Allianz Ruhr; the German Consulate General in Chicago; the European Commission Directorate of Regional and Urban Policy; and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, among others.

To learn more about the initiative, receive the initiative's newsletter, and participate in events and learning exchanges, **contact John Austin at the University of Michigan: jcaustin@umich.edu**



INDUSTRIAL HEARTLANDS AND DEMOCRACY STUDY TOUR

November 11 to 18, 2023

Participants:

Phil GiaQuinta,

State representative for Fort Wayne, Indiana, Leader of the Democrats in the Indiana House of Representatives

Bridgette Gransden,

County Administrator, Midland County, Michigan

Melissa Hughes,

CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Agency

Andy Levin,

Former Congressman for Michigan, accompanied by Mary Freeman, entrepreneur

William Peduto,

Former Mayor of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Katie Rosenberg,

Mayor of Wausau, Wisconsin

Accompanied by

Axel Ruppert,

Das Progressive Zentrum, Berlin

Sandra Rath,

Das Progressive Zentrum, Berlin

John Austin,

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Wolfgang Mössinger,

Former German Consul General in Chicago

Itinerary:

November 11 Arrival in Brussels

November 12 Visit of Biopark in Gosselies, Charleroi; evening: guided tour through St. Gilles district of Brussels

November 13 Transatlantic Conference to Address the „Geographies of Discontent“, organized by the EU Commission, DG Regio; evening: train journey to Saarbrücken

November 14 Meeting with Workers' Council of Saarstahl; with Dr. Frank Nägele, Commissioner for Structural Change of the Saarland State Government; with Jakob von Weizsäcker, Minister of Finance of the Saarland

November 15 Travel to Leipzig

November 16 Meeting with the German American Institute Leipzig, with Sebastian Striegel, MP in the Saxony-Anhalt regional Parliament; with Thomas Kralinski, State Secretary of the State Ministry of Economics, Labor and Transport of the State Government of Saxony; evening: travel to Berlin

November 17 Meeting with Philipp Steinberg and Florian Knobloch, Directorate General for Economic Stabilization and Energy Security in the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action; with Ana Dujic, Head of the Think Tank Digital Labor

Society Department at the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; evening: public workshop at the Innocracy Conference organized by Das Progressive Zentrum and meeting with representatives of the Atlantik Brücke



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