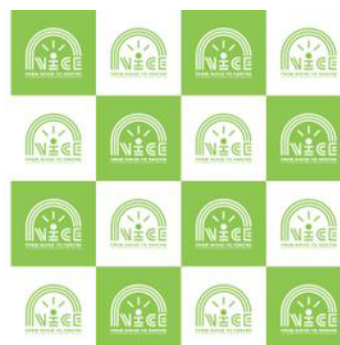




Linking Learning Spaces with Sustainable Consumption Initiatives to Promote Circular Lifestyles in Urban Areas

An Action Plan for Dessau-Roßlau





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1 INTRODUCTION: WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE

Within the framework of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE project "NiCE – from niche to centre"¹, the city of Dessau-Roßlau, represented by the Municipal Education Office, in collaboration with the German Environment Agency (UBA), has developed the following Action Plan: "Linking Learning Spaces with Sustainable Consumption Initiatives to Promote Circular Lifestyles in Urban Areas."

The foundation and structure for all NiCE action plans was provided by a model action plan, drafted by UBA and further developed jointly with all project partners during partner meetings and via the project exchange platform. All project partners were involved in identifying potential cities for the development of local action plans. As a result, a joint decision was made to prioritize the action plans in the three selected cities, among them Dessau-Roßlau. During the partner meeting in Brzeg Dolny (October 2025), where a Dessau-Roßlau representative was also present, the three action plans were worked on collaboratively in groups on site. Findings and learnings from the various NiCE pilot projects and tandem cooperations were incorporated into all action plans.

Dessau-Roßlau is home to numerous initiatives and projects focused on sustainable consumption, circular lifestyles, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). From 2022 to 2025, the city was also one of 48 ESD Model Municipalities in Germany.

At the same time, Dessau-Roßlau has a variety of formal and non-formal learning spaces interested in these topics. However, these learning spaces often lack the capacity, experience, or knowledge to address these issues adequately or at all. Additionally, ESD has not been a high priority in the city in recent years. The project "Dessau-Roßlau as an ESD Model Municipality", supported by the Municipal Education Office, provided additional resources (e.g., process facilitation, event moderation) but concluded in 2025. This has resulted in insufficient structural support to strategically advance these topics within the city's society.

This Action Plan for Dessau-Roßlau aims to provide impulses on how to:

¹ More information to the project „NiCE – from niche to centre“ at: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/nice/>; NiCE is supported by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme with co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund.



UBA can provide personnel resources (staff, expertise) to support implementation until 30 September 2026. After this date, the NiCE project will conclude, and the availability of further personnel resources remains uncertain. UBA can also supply educational materials, experiences and solutions from the NiCE project (and other projects), and scientific information to help prepare educational offerings. Furthermore, UBA will participate in joint events and contribute to shared communication efforts. Finally, UBA can offer free venues for meetings, evening events, or exhibitions (particularly when acting as the organiser itself). The involvement of UBA's internal working group "Collaboration with Dessau-Roßlau" is planned.

Planning, steering committee, and networking meetings can take place online (UBA will provide an online tool) or in cost-neutral venues (UBA, City of Dessau-Roßlau, or facilities of learning spaces and initiatives). The actual implementation of future educational and cooperation offerings will occur at the learning spaces or the premises of the respective initiatives.

3 SHORT-TERM IMPLEMENTATION

Below are activities that can be implemented and initiated jointly by the City of Dessau-Roßlau and UBA in the short-term (within the next 6 months). These activities serve as a catalyst and inspiration for further efforts that may be implemented beyond this period.

From a long-term perspective, the Federal Horticultural Show (BUGA) 2035 could already be considered: The work carried out and the experiences gathered here could be documented and networked in such a way that they can be integrated into the BUGA concept, particularly to help prepare future offerings for younger target groups.

3.1 Status-quo analysis of Dessau-Roßlau

A situational analysis of the city helps create a structured overview of its key characteristics: location, demographics, political landscape, existing strategies, challenges, and stakeholders. It may also include a SWOT analysis to assess the city's position regarding circular lifestyles, sustainable consumption, and education. This foundational work ensures that the Action Plan and its associated activities are relevant, targeted, and tailored to local conditions.

Implementation can be carried out in collaboration between the Municipal Education Office and UBA. The analysis may cover the following aspects:



- **Dessau-Roßlau's unique character**, e.g., Bauhaus, Garden Kingdom (UNESCO), UBA, rivers (Elbe, Mulde)
- **Existing foundations** to build upon (strategies, programmes, climate protection), e.g., ESD Model Municipality & ESD Working Group/Network, Zukunftsreise Dessau-Roßlau, Stadtlabor Dessau-Roßlau, ZIZ activities, UBA educational materials, existing contacts with initiatives and learning spaces, BUGA 2035
- **Overview/mapping of learning spaces and initiatives in Dessau-Roßlau:** Key actors among our target groups (institutions, networks, and communities) who can drive or benefit from our future ideas, e.g., ESD Working Group, Stadtlabor Dessau-Roßlau team, UBA Dessau Working Group, Vor Ort Haus, Werkstattcafé, Anhalt University of Applied Sciences, Library of Things, Urban Farm, Adult Education Centre
- **SWOT analysis** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) regarding circular lifestyles and sustainable consumption in the city
- **Needs and interests of target groups**, e.g.,
 - **For initiatives:** What is needed for regular participation in the network? What is required to offer (regular) educational programmes to learning spaces? Are there already connections to learning spaces?
 - **For learning spaces:** What knowledge and capacities are available? Why are sustainable consumption and ESD not more strongly integrated? Is there a genuine need for stronger networking with initiatives? What networks already exist? What event formats are used?
 - **For citizens:** Is there a demand/desire to strengthen sustainable consumption and ESD in learning spaces?

3.2 Kick-off meeting of the network

A first networking meeting to the topic “Initiatives and Learning Spaces for Sustainable Consumption” with stakeholders from the education sector and sustainable consumption initiatives will mark the "official" launch of the implementation phase. This meeting will bring together all interested parties for the first time, generating momentum, raising awareness of the topic, and strengthening community engagement through direct exchange. Planning will be supported by tools and solutions from the NiCE project (e.g., the Solution Guide on Stakeholder Engagement).



Key considerations for the kick-off meeting include:

- **Participants:** Attendees may include members of the local ESD Working Group (AG BNE) as well as contacts identified in the status quo analysis.
- **Topic Collection:** For example, which topics are relevant and appropriate for different learning spaces? What implementation ideas already exist? The focus should be on building on existing foundations.
- **Matchmaking and Coordination:** For example, which initiatives could collaborate with which learning spaces? Who would be available for a first pilot implementation? This includes scheduling, content preparation, and advisory support.
- **Framework:** For example, who will welcome the participants? Will there be a supporting programme? What are the responsibilities?

3.3 Pilot implementation of concrete activities

Beyond financial and legal frameworks, experimental approaches and pilot implementations can also foster sustainable structures. This requires courage to try new things and inevitably, the determination to persistently and optimistically tackle a range of challenges, both large and small. A culture of experimentation is needed at all levels and among all stakeholders, and this must be recognized and supported, not least within municipal administrations. Real-world experiments and pilot projects also inspire confidence for upcoming changes. These formats unlock their full potential for the necessary sustainability transformation when they connect people, consider their interests, and are designed participatively. In this way, learning environments are created where all participants can actively shape change processes, experience self-efficacy, and develop sustainable practices.

For the short-term implementation of pilot activities, the following ideas could be considered:

- **ESD City Tour of Dessau-Roßlau:** For example, during the NiCE Conference in March 2026, in cooperation between UBA, the Municipal Education Office, and other local initiatives. By involving the city's tourism office, the possibility of permanently integrating the tour into the city's guided tour offerings could also be explored.
- **Implementation of a Cooperative Educational Offering:** For instance, during the network's kick-off meeting, it could already be assessed whether there are learning spaces and initiatives willing to participate in a pilot project within the first six months.



This would provide valuable experience for future implementations and collaborations. The pilot could be supported by tools and solutions from the NiCE project.

4 LONG-TERM APPROACHES

Below are ideas and opportunities that can support the long-term institutionalization of the topic "Linking Learning Spaces with Sustainable Consumption Initiatives to Promote Circular Lifestyles in Urban Areas" in Dessau-Roßlau. These options could be pursued by the City of Dessau-Roßlau itself or by the involved initiatives. The approaches described could also serve as a foundation for future project proposals, helping to secure additional resources.

4.1 Vision and strategy

To pursue long-term goals, a vision and a strategy are essential. The vision should describe the desired long-term transformation. Based on this vision, the main objectives of the strategy should be outlined to guide your action plan. These objectives should highlight the key areas of change you aim to achieve and provide a framework for future decisions and actions. Detailed steps, measures, and activities for implementing these objectives are described in the subsequent sections of the action plan.

- A vision for the topic of "Linking Learning Spaces with Sustainable Consumption Initiatives" in Dessau-Roßlau could also be developed collaboratively with the initiatives during the first networking meeting. An example of a vision could be: *"The numerous offerings and initiatives focused on sustainable consumption, circular lifestyles, and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are connected through regular exchange with local learning spaces. Initiatives and learning spaces regularly conduct joint activities. Knowledge and practices related to sustainable consumption and ESD are thus sustainably promoted within the urban community, strengthening ESD as an action-oriented approach."*

4.2 Long-term activities

Based on the vision and strategy, concrete activities can now be developed. The goal is to define what will be done, where, when, by whom, and with what resources to achieve the previously established strategic and operational objectives. The following areas and questions should be considered in particular:



- **Activities and Implementation:** What specific activities will be implemented? How do these activities contribute to the strategic goals? What potential negative impacts should be avoided? For large or long-term projects, it can be helpful to define key phases with deadlines and milestones to keep the project on track. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can also help evaluate progress. Examples of concrete activities for a longer-term implementation period include:
 - A public kick-off event for citizens
 - Implementation of educational offerings
 - Further networking meetings
 - Joint actions and events by learning spaces and initiatives
 - Joint communication by learning spaces and initiatives
 - Funding applications based on the action plan
- **Resources and Capacity:** What resources and capacities are required to implement the activities? How can these be secured? What funding opportunities are available?
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Which organization or person has which role and responsibilities in implementing the activities? Who leads, supports, and executes the activities? Local initiatives can also take on the role of implementation partners. For multi-year projects, it is advisable to establish a local advisory board or steering committee to support the activities. For this topic, the following parties could be involved: Municipal Education Office, UBA III 1.1, UBA Dessau Working Group, 2-3 selected initiatives and learning spaces that are particularly active in planning; The steering committee could meet regularly (e.g., every 3 months, depending on the planned duration of the project) to coordinate activities, adjust needs, or delegate tasks.

4.3 How to measure success

To ensure good results, adjustments and ongoing support and evaluation may be necessary. Below are tools, instruments, and/or criteria sets that can help measure the success of activities. This not only allows for short-term adjustments if the project is not progressing as intended but also documents long-term changes. The following aspects can be included in monitoring:



- **Evaluation and Assessment Framework:** A structured evaluation and assessment framework should be chosen to help organize monitoring, align goals, and systematically measure progress. For example, the NiCE project used the NiCE CC-PEM² tool, and experiences with this tool can be shared by UBA. Success could be measured using indicators such as: Number of actively participating initiatives and learning spaces, Number of educational offerings implemented by initiatives in or with learning spaces, Number of joint events and their participants.
- **Monitoring Schedule:** A timeline for monitoring and evaluation activities should be established to ensure they are conducted regularly and consistently. It should be planned who, when, and how relevant data will be collected to ensure the monitoring process is realistic, continuous, and well-documented.
- **Identifying Gaps and Challenges:** Regular evaluation helps highlight gaps or unexpected challenges. If such issues arise, plans and activities can be adjusted to stay on track and improve outcomes.
- **Impact on Sustainability Goals:** Consideration should also be given to how the activities impact Dessau-Roßlau's sustainability goals. This involves analyzing how the activities contribute to the city's overall progress and sustainable urban development. The results of monitoring and evaluation can also be used to further develop existing activities and strategies in Dessau-Roßlau. Both aspects can strengthen long-term support for the activities.

4.4 Risk-management

Effective risk management anticipates challenges that could impact the project and prepares strategies to address them. Risks can manifest as threats (negative impacts) or opportunities (positive outcomes). By identifying risks early, assessing their likelihood and significance, and preparing both preventive and adaptive measures, activities and the project itself become more resilient. The following approaches can help in planning risk management:

- **Risk Analysis:** What uncertainties exist? Consider financial, organizational, political, social, and environmental risks. What is the likelihood of these risks occurring? What impact would they have on the activities? After answering these questions, preventive measures can be developed, and buffers (financial, time-based, or resource-based)

² The “Circular Cities Project Excellence Framework” (CC-PEM) has been developed in the framework of the NiCE project and served as monitoring- and evaluationframework for the NiCE pilot activities.



can be planned. For activities focused on "Linking Learning Spaces with Sustainable Consumption Initiatives," potential risks might include: Unclear personnel capacities in (volunteer) initiatives to participate in the process, Lack of financial support for long-term implementation, Political changes following the 2026 state elections in Saxony-Anhalt.

- **Identifying Opportunities:** Some risks may present unexpected opportunities, such as: New funding sources, Political shifts that align with project goals, Changes in citizen behavior that support sustainability. These opportunities should be proactively identified, and strategies should be developed to leverage them for the planned activities.
- **Worst-Case Scenario Planning:** Despite thorough preparation, a worst-case scenario may still occur. To prepare: Visualize the worst-case scenario for the described activities. Sometimes, it helps to work backward from the vision to identify potential pitfalls.
- **Continuous Risk Monitoring:** Risks should not only be analyzed but also continuously monitored to support timely decision-making and prevent small issues from becoming major obstacles. Key questions include: Who is responsible for risk monitoring? How will monitoring be conducted? (e.g., review meetings, progress reports, risk registers, internal evaluation processes, stakeholder feedback) What is the monitoring schedule?

By addressing these aspects, the project can minimize threats, capitalize on opportunities, and maintain resilience throughout its implementation.

4.5 Approaches to sustain activities long-term

The goal is not only to deliver results within a medium-term project timeline but also to create lasting momentum that benefits the city and its citizens in the long run. Through forward-thinking planning focused on continuity, scalability, and institutional integration, the impact of these activities can extend far beyond their initial scope. The following aspects can help achieve this:

- **Collaboration with Municipal and Local Partners:** Engaging with additional municipal institutions, local organizations, and networks helps secure long-term support and embeds activities into existing urban structures, strategies, and



measures. Of particular note is the BUGA 2035 (Federal Horticultural Show) in Dessau-Roßlau. All activities and experiences gathered should be documented and networked in a way that allows them to be integrated into the BUGA concept, especially to prepare future offerings for younger target groups.

- **Long-Term Funding Strategies:** Sustainable financing is often a critical lever for continuity. A combination of municipal budgets, regional/national funding programs, private partnerships, and self-financing models can help ensure the initiative's longevity beyond the planned duration.
- **Continuous and Meaningful Communication:** For acceptance within the administration and the urban community, communication must go beyond mere information exchange. It should actively foster engagement, transparency, and trust among partners, users, and the broader public. Communication efforts should aim to: Strengthen a sense of belonging, shared responsibility, and long-term commitment. Integrate the initiative into daily and professional routines through regular updates, engagement, and appreciation of stakeholders. This approach increases the likelihood that results will be sustained and further developed over time.