Executive Summary of ECOLISE policy papers, Sept 2021

These papers were drafted by mini working groups of the Communities for Future Policy Circle through a collaborative process which began in January 2021.

1. Territorial/Bioregional Partnerships

*This policy paper calls for **Bioregional Partnerships**, as distinct forms of territorial partnerships, characterized by their explicit re-alignment with nature's principles, well-being for all and global solidarity.*

A continuous concentration of financial resources, technology, economic activities, land, infrastructure and services is leading to increasing disparities between people and places. Nation states are to a significant degree responsible for these conditions. Their policies promote an energy- and resource-intensive, industrialized, globalized, growth-based and profit-driven economy and therefore facilitate the centralization of power and resources. The hierarchical structures within nation states and the economy are prone to the abuse of power and corruption, with political decisions based on self- or special interests, leading to both internal and external domination of people and the planet.

In order to address these issues, a renewal of our political and economic system is urgently required. This policy paper therefore calls for a decentralization of economic activity and political power. In line with the Territorial Agenda 2030 it promotes a place-based circular economy and a place-based approach to policy making, with vertical coordination taking place amongst the local communities and their citizens, civil society, businesses and research institutions and supported by multi-level governance.

Within the EU's policy landscape, the existing Community-led Local Development (CLLD) approach offers a framework under which some of these aims are already being addressed. In this context, Local Action Groups (LAGs) form territorial partnerships, which develop integrated and multi-sectoral area-based local development strategies, seeking to be coherent with the EU's priorities. However, implementation which allows for the consequent realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is yet to be achieved.

This policy paper therefore calls for **Bioregional Partnerships**, as distinct forms of territorial partnerships, characterized by their explicit re-alignment with nature's principles, well-being for all and global solidarity. At the heart of these partnerships are pioneering community-led initiatives

(CLIs) proven to reap benefits within all dimensions of sustainability by increasing social capital, civic participation and inclusion, creating employment and a range of more general benefits to local economies, while significantly lowering the ecological footprint of engaged citizens. In order to scale the innovations brought forward by CLIs these values-based partnerships should be implemented as learning and decision-making frameworks.

To promote bioregional partnerships through existing EU policy, LAGs should replicate successful models of CLIs across Europe. This would be 'scaling out'. Moreover, the knowledge of CLIs should be utilized for the development of models of well-being and circular economies at the regional scale, so-called 'scaling up'. To support these aims, existing policy should be adapted to reflect a variety of principles and practices, including knowledge and innovation transfer, the involvement of local actors, horizontal, integrated and green thinking, inclusiveness and social equity, democratic and evidence-based policy making, transparency and effective communication. Moreover, the EU should establish new programmes and partnerships, such as the European Innovation Partnership for Climate and Communities (EPIC) under which pilot projects specifically targeted at incorporating these aspects should be implemented.

Authors:

Darien Castro - Wings for Amazon
Mieke Elzenga - Stichting Liberata Care
Amelie Krug - ECOLISE
Deirdre O'Caroll
Kim Smedslund - Finnish Village Movement Association

The full paper is here.

2. Economic Diversity

This paper calls for support and action to slash barriers against, and to facilitate the social & solidarity economy, participatory democracy, decolonization, circular financing for social housing, cooperative platforms and open information technology to power citizen-led change, Transition Income in combination with regional complementary currency, and an EU Sustainable Innovation Directive.

Community-led initiatives (CLIs) are important change entities to help achieve the goals of the EU Green Deal with regard to post-covid recovery, climate adaptation, Just Transition, and regional development. CLIs have deep expertise, strong networks and unique capabilities to help bring about those changes in an efficient and socially transformative way. Specifically, this policy paper calls for the empowerment of community-led initiatives through:
- breaking down barriers and facilitating the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)
- using information technology to power citizen-led change
- implementing a transition income in combination with regional complementary currency and
- adopting an EU Sustainable Innovation Directive.

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) offers a sustainable and inclusive alternative economic development model and comprises social enterprises; self-managed, informal groups; participatory democratic governance; and fair distribution of profits among owners and workers, and their reinvestment in the community. However, SSE faces several legal challenges, which should be addressed through EU programmes and budgets. Specifically, policy changes could aim at support of networking and exchange among SSE researchers; funding research to measure impacts achieved and disseminate good practices; investing in SSE education and upskilling; making public procurement more accessible; involving SSE networks in the design of EU programmes and investing in circular financing projects for social housing.

Peer-to-peer grassroots knowledge sharing amongst private citizens has the potential to be an important tool for the mainstreaming of CLIs, if it were to emerge from its currently weak state in Europe. A multilingual, cross-cultural, inclusive and engaging IT platform could be the solution to enable and accelerate those learning processes. EU policies should fund existing platforms such as the Global Goals Community Website, to bring them up to a professional management level, and support the validation and dissemination of their content.

While evidence-based, high impact projects for the transition of the economy and society towards more sustainability, resilience and equity are urgently required, fiscal policy remains a huge barrier in this endeavor. Rising wealth concentration diverts capital into stock market speculation and tax havens and thus away from an economy that improves quality of life, which can be brought about through transition pioneers, currently insufficiently supported through finance. A Transition Income (TI), which delivers a periodic cash payment conditionally to groups of selected citizens, partially using Regional complementary currency and without a means-test but with the requirement to perform transition-related work would help to address this problem.

Lastly, legislation that supports investment, research and development, experimentation, implementation, dissemination and, thus, mainstreaming of innovations for sustainability and resilience in the crucial decades ahead is required. In order to overcome barriers stemming from conventional legislation, which regulates specific behavior, processes, designs and materials, a new EU Sustainable Innovation Directive should be developed and adopted.

Authors:
Ronald Hazelzet, Boekel Ecovillage
Ad Vlems, Boekel Ecovillage and GEN Netherlands
Contributions by Georgia Karavangeli, ACCP/MedTOWN-READ Red de Redes; Jason Nardi, RIPESSEU-RIES
Review by Sakina Sarjan

The full paper is available here

3. Regenerative Cultures

A regenerative culture, rooted in an understanding of place with its history and its uniqueness, can engage its people into a sense of belonging which ultimately furthers caring. Regenerative development works with whole systems, nested within each other. It

develops the capabilities of local groups on an economic, social, cultural and environmental level. In order to make policy making sustainable and regenerative there must be a shift in process such that the voices of the many communities of practice are heard.

Authors:

Fiona Hayes

Edward Kluttz

The full paper is available here.

About ECOLISE: The European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability (ECOLISE) is a network of organisations engaged in promoting and supporting local communities across Europe in their efforts to build pathways to a sustainable future.

Members include international networks of community-based initiatives such as the Transition Network (representing over 1200 Transition initiatives), the Global Ecovillage Network (15,000 ecovillages), the Permaculture movement (3 million practitioners globally) and ICLEI, as well as other national and regional networks and specialist bodies engaged in European-level research, training and communications to support community-led action on climate change and sustainability.

By bringing these organisations together, ECOLISE seeks to establish a common, Europe-wide agenda and a platform for collective action. It has 47 member organisations in 17 different EU member states, and in Albania, Serbia, Switzerland and the UK. In 2020 ECOLISE spearheaded Communities For Future.