ECOLISE

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ACTIVITY REPORT 2018

EUROPEAN NETWORK
FOR COMMUNITY-LED
INITIATIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE
AND SUSTAINABILITY

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AT A GLANCE

Climate emergency: nurturing hope in a time of crisis

IN **2018, the world** continued on the pathway to climate catastrophe, and at a time when unity and collective action is desperately needed, we witnessed further manifestations of deep divisions that are polarising society.
The publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report in September 2018 provided compelling scientific evidence of the need for urgent action to keep the global temperature rise to below 1.5°C. This implies the need for deep emissions cuts over the next 12 years (45% below 2010 levels).

The report suggests that current efforts and commitments are severely inadequate, underlining instead the need for "*rapid and far-reaching transitions*" across all sectors of society. At the same time, it also emphasises the importance of social justice and equity to avoid negative trade-offs with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In this context, the role of community-led initiatives now seems more vital than ever. Indeed, the report acknowledges that "*community approaches can accelerate the wide-scale behaviour changes consistent with adapting to and limiting global warming to 1.5°C.*" Community-led transformational change provides an opportunity not only to avert climate catastrophe, but also to build a society that is inherently more sustainable and equitable.

TOWARDS A REGENERATIVE SOCIETY

During 2018, ECOLISE has sought to amplify this message through various activities. The publication of the **ECOLISE wiki** in October 2018 (and the follow-up Status Report in March 2019) is the culmination of the first phase of ongoing efforts to strengthen the evidence base, providing the first in-depth assessment of the state-of-play of community-led action on climate change and sustainability in Europe.

This is now an important source for ECOLISE advocacy efforts, but also for supporting knowledge sharing within and beyond the network. The launch in March 2018 of a collaborative project on transformative education further supports knowledge sharing by establishing a common platform, which will be developed during 2019.

Efforts to support other forms of collaboration among ECOLISE member organisations and partners were also strengthened, with a new **Open Series** of webinars providing a monthly opportunity to explore topics of shared interest. One topic explored during these meetings was the **Sustainable Communities Programme** (SCP) a new ECOLISE initiative that seeks to support collaboration for community-led transformative change within and across European regions.

The second **European Day of Sustainable Communities** (EDSC), and a new publication, ***Local, Community-led: a new Future Unfolding***

(September 2018), contributed to further raising awareness about the transformative potential of community initiatives. Communities in 24 Europe countries took part in this second EDSC, with some events, such as the *Fête de Possibles* (involving over 1500 communities in France and Belgium) and public open days at community gardens across London, reaching a wide audience.

The ECOLISE **EDSC conference in Brussels** (100 participants), co-hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee, and co-organised with Transition Network, brought the message of community-led action to EU policy makers, while in December, a six-person **ECOLISE delegation participated in COP24**, developing new partnerships and reinforcing ongoing advocacy work.

ECOLISE advocacy work in 2018 built on previous efforts to ensure greater recognition for community-led initiatives on climate and sustainability in the EU's new **Smart Villages** initiative. ECOLISE also contributed to ongoing discussions on climate and energy policy in the EU, including the EU's long-term climate strategy, due to be finalised in 2019.

ON THE HORIZON

In September 2018, ECOLISE launched a strategy review process, including a **survey of members**, to assess the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of the above activities, and also to review priorities in a very dynamic context. This review will be finalised at the ECOLISE General Assembly in 2019.

During 2018, ECOLISE also continued to place a strong emphasis on fundraising, resulting in two successful bids under the EU's Horizon 2020 programme, with both projects (UrbanA and COMETS) starting in 2019 and running for a three-year period. Smaller grants have also been secured to support the SCP and EDSC, and a number of other proposals are currently under assessment.

These successes provide evidence that new funding opportunities are emerging, and that ECOLISE is increasingly recognised as a desirable and credible project partner. The new strategy will ensure that project development and fundraising activities remain focused on clear priorities and on the ultimate goal of supporting a community-led societal transformation.

Pic: Ilonka Marselis, DRIFT, Dicte Frost, GEN Europe and Tine Bielen, a former ECOLISE intern, at the Brussels conference

LOOKING CLOSER

Harvesting and sharing knowledge

THE early part of 2018 saw an intensification of efforts to develop the ECOLISE knowledge commons, an ambitious and exciting project to gather and share knowledge and learning from across the network. The primary tool to support this process is the ECOLISE wiki, which also accommodates multiple contributors, thereby facilitating a co-creation process that involves an open network of authors and editors. This will help to ensure that the content develops and is also kept up-to-date.

The ECOLISE Status Report is the first attempt to capture and share the content of the Wiki in a publication format. The first version of the Status Report was published in March 2019 and further versions are foreseen annually, providing an essential state-of-the-art on community-led climate action in Europe.

To further support knowledge sharing and learning, the ECOLISE transformative education initiatives are helping to support collaboration among member organisations engaged in training and education. The current focus of this collaboration is on the development of a common platform that facilitates easy access to the wide range of transformative training and education opportunities currently available in Europe.

Pic: One of ECOLISE's many low-carbon, online meetings

Further collaboration opportunities are also being explored through a new monthly Open Meeting Series, which provides a creative online space for ECOLISE members and others to discuss and, where relevant, develop ideas for collaboration on topics of mutual interest. Topics attracting high levels of interest to date have included the mapping of initiatives and the SCP.

ENABLING A COMMUNITY-LED TRANSFORMATION

The Sustainable Communities Programme (SCP) is a new ECOLISE initiative that seeks to support collaboration for community-led transformative change within and across regions. The capacity of regional stakeholders to focus jointly on supporting transformative change has been identified as an effective way to simultaneously scale out support to citizens and communities, and strengthen advocacy for policy changes at all levels that put people and communities at the centre of a just transition. The SCP has three complementary objectives:

1. Establishing an **inter-regional Community of Practice** of system change facilitators exchanging and spreading breakthrough engagement practices;

2. **Building regional capacity** across eco-social movements and sectors to reach out to, inspire, support and multiply community-led sustainability initiatives that engage citizens in fundamental lifestyle shifts.

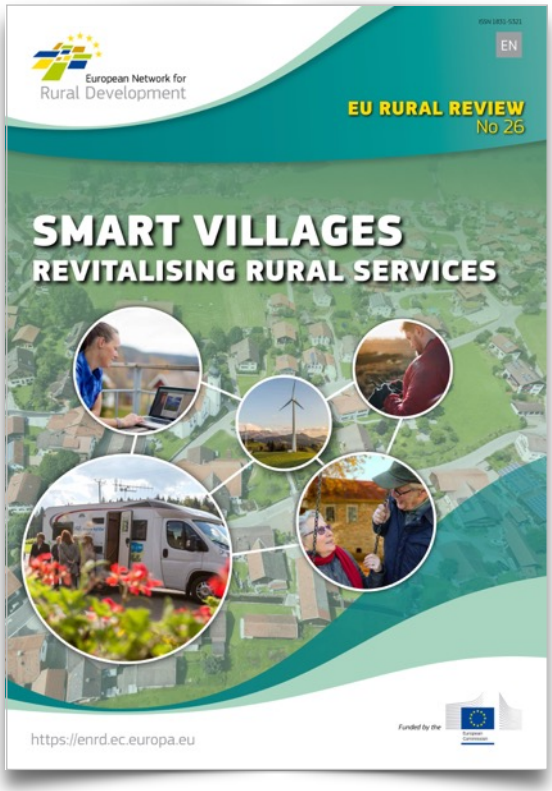
3. **Ensuring broad uptake of project results** by communities, regions, facilitators, researchers and policy-makers beyond those directly involved in the project.

The first stage of the SCP, the establishment of a community of practice of system change facilitators, is underway and is being supported by a FundAction grant, awarded in January 2019.

A training and capacity building event will be organised to coincide with the ECOLISE general assembly in April 2019.

The ECOLISE knowledge commons and SCP will also benefit from funding support recently secured for two projects under the EU's Horizon 2020 programme. These projects will focus on better understanding the drivers and support needs of community energy projects in Europe (COMETS), and on establishing a co-creative process to map, assess, distill and communicate innovative solutions for sustainable and inclusive cities. Several ECOLISE member organisations, including ICLEI, DRIFT and FCiências.ID are also partners in these projects.

SHAPING THE POLICIES THAT AFFECT US



Creating an enabling environment for community-led initiatives requires going beyond knowledge sharing and collaboration, to also actively feeding insights and lessons from this work into processes that help shape future laws and policies.

Achieving this requires an ongoing dialogue with policy makers, aimed at building awareness and understanding of the contribution of community-led initiatives. Since its incorporation in May 2014, ECOLISE has been working to develop this dialogue and also to develop its reputation as a trusted policy partner. This work is now beginning to bear fruit.

ECOLISE has been working closely with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) for several years now and in 2018 it was invited to be a full partner in the EESC-coordinated International Climate Governance Coalition (ICGC), a platform to facilitate the input of non-State actors to implementation of the Paris Agreement. ECOLISE was also invited by the EESC to contribute to policy papers (Opinions) on a number of topics, including Climate Financing and the EU's long term climate strategy.

For over two years now, ECOLISE has also been working closely with the European Network for

Rural Development (ENRD) on the design of a new EU Smart Villages initiative. This work intensified in 2018 with ECOLISE actively contributing to a Smart Villages conference and several workshops, all of which has helped to ensure that climate action and sustainability are now a key component of the proposals for this new EU initiative (see pages 23 to 31 of the **EU Smart Villages publication**), which will be launched in 2021.

In December 2018, an **ECOLISE delegation participated in COP24,** organising an exhibition and a side event, and also contributing to many other events and discussions. During COP24, new alliances were forged with organisations from within and beyond Europe, and a number of speaking engagements provided an opportunity to reinforce advocacy messages and promote the EDSC. In the lead up to COP24, ECOLISE facilitated an internal discussion on the climate crisis and submitted a **response to the UN's Talanoa Dialogue**. It also issued a statement calling for a **Global Climate Emergency**.

Pic: Robert Hall, ECOLISE President, and Meera Ghani, ECOLISE Policy Co-ordinator, at COP24

ECOLISE contributions at COP24 and in the EU policy arena are supported by its membership of CAN-Europe, Europe's leading NGO coalition in the area of climate advocacy. ECOLISE also works closely with other partners, including the EU-funded Social Innovation Community (SIC), in which ECOLISE coordinated the **Climate Innovation Network** and collaborated in drafting the **Lisbon Declaration on Social Innovation**, of which ECOLISE is now a signatory.

Looking to 2019 and beyond, it seems important that ECOLISE continued its work at EU level, but that we begin also to build capacity among our membership in order to mobilise at local, regional and national level. Such coordinated action will not only strengthen our collective influence but is also essential to ensuring coherent policy responses at all levels

HIGHLIGHTING THE POTENTIAL

ECOLISE communications activities continue to focus on raising awareness of existing initiatives and highlighting the wider potential of community-led action.

A flagship initiative to support this is the European Day of Sustainable Communities, and in 2018, the second year of the EDSC, momentum continued to build, with 105 events (up from 48 in 2017) taking place in 24 countries (up from 15 in 2017). This also included a number of distributed events, such as public open days at community gardens across London, and over 1500 events as part of the *Fête de Possibles* in France/Belgium).

There were also many ecovillage open days, Transition conferences and permaculture events, including two national gatherings, all contributing to raising awareness among the general public and

policymakers of the contribution and potential of community-led action.

Some examples of EDSC events are:

A food forest digging party, Brandenburg, Germany

As part of an agroforestry campaign focused on bringing trees back to agriculture, **zukunftsFähig e.V. and agroforstkampagne** organised a unique art performance - preparing holes for planting different trees and shrubs in a very degraded plot.

PeR renewable energy park open day, Umbria, Italy

Italy's largest independent, off-grid sustainability research centre on ethical resource management, permaculture and self–sufficiency hosted a free guided morning tour focussed on energy solutions.

Digital design jam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

This was one of a Global Goals Jam in which local innovators and creatives joined teams around the world (in 65 locations) in designing actionable interventions towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Berlin organisers also registered their event as part of the EDSC.

A short video of the day captures the diversity and extent of events.

In 2018, ECOLISE also launched a new **EDSC website** and experimented for the first time with country/regional contact points, which helped promote the EDSC at national/regional level. This decentralised approach greatly improve visibility and participation and will be further developed in 2019.

To coincide with the EDSC, ECOLISE and Transition Network co-organised the **Citizens and Municipalities** event in Brussels, which was hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR). This event, which attracted over 100 participants in person, and a further 38 online, assessed impacts and mechanisms of collaboration between municipal authorities and communities, and opened the way for greater dialogue with policymakers on this topic in the future.

The Brussels event also provided the opportunity to launch a new booklet, ***Local, Community-led: A new Future Unfolding***, which provided a first

syntheses of results emerging from the ECOLISE knowledge commons.

To extend its reach and engage with new audiences ECOLISE continued to build its web and social media presence in 2018. The ECOLISE website is continually being developed and updated and is currently attracting on average 95 visitors per day. ECOLISE Twitter and Facebook usage is also on the increase, with 1165 Twitter followers and almost 3000 Facebook followers. In recent months, a **LinkedIn account** has also been opened and now has 143 followers.

BUILDING THE NETWORK

Strengthening and building the alliance of members and reaching out to new partners and

collaborators is an essential part of ECOLISE's work. In 2018, ECOLISE Council and team members contributed to a number of different events across Europe, including the Social Innovation Community conference in Seville (Spain), Degrowth conferences in Brussels and Malmo (Sweden), several partner events at COP24, a Smart Village conference and workshops in Brussels (Belgium), an EESC hearing on Climate Finance (Brussels), an international sustainability conference in Navarre (Spain), an EU LEADER rural development conference in Évora (Portugal), and the CAN-Europe General assembly in Brussels.

ECOLISE also received several new membership applications during 2019 and continued to support collaboration within and beyond the network.

New partnership opportunities were also explored, notably with organisations such as Climate-KIC, the **C40 network**, Rurener, RESCoop, Slow Food and others.

Finally, in 2018 ECOLISE launched a **new platform policy** and process that enables and supports the balancing of individual agency and collective intelligence within the network. This provides a mechanism for a representative(s) of a member organisation, or a group of representatives of member organisations, to propose a new activity within ECOLISE or that ECOLISE become a host organisation for a new activity. A first experiment with this approach is Remote-ready.eu, a virtual collaboration service run by Nenad Maljković and Davie Philip.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Over the course of 2018, the **ECOLISE Council** and **team** continued to refine and adjust governance and organisational aspects in order to better serve the evolving needs of the network. Notable changes during this period have been a refocussing of the work of the Council, to prioritise strategic issues, while delegating greater responsibility for operational aspects to the Executive Board.

The Council has also been experimenting with sociocracy and assessing its wider potential to improve consensus building and decision making.

There have also been attempts to strengthen cohesion between the different poles of activity, with a monthly *synergy meeting* now providing a space for team and Council members to explore potential for improving synergies between initiatives.

Since September 2018, Council and team members have also been activity contributing to the Strategy Review process, which is due to be concluded at the ECOLISE General Assembly in April 2019. This strategy review takes account of the increasing urgency around climate action and will seek to identify ways in which ECOLISE and member organisations can work collectively to enhance impact.

TEAM CHANGES

During 2018, Katy Fox resigned from the ECOLISE Council, and Tom Henfrey, previously an occasional contributor to the ECOLISE team, joined the team on a permanent basis, taking up the role of Research Coordinator. The team now includes five members, Eamon O'Hara, Executive Director; Iva Pocock, Communications Coordinator; Markus Molz, Knowledge and Learning Coordinator; Meera Ghani, Policy Coordinator; and Tom Henfrey, Research Coordinator. An additional post of Network and Outreach Coordinator will also be created in 2019.