ECOLISE

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

www.ecolise.eu

ACTIVITY REPORT 2020

ECOLISE, Mundo-J, rue de l'Industrie 10,
1000 Brussels, Belgium

ACTIVITY REPORT 2020

Dealing with the Covid Pandemic

The year was dominated by the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Just before it hit, in January, the ECOLISE team had an in-person team retreat near Brussels.

Overcoming train strikes and storms in order to travel to Belgium, the team spent an intense but creative and productive few days together, planning for how best to serve ECOLISE members in 2020 and support #SustainableCommunities. Little did we know that it would be the last time we would be in each others' physical presence for who knows how long!

MUSTERING EFFORT FOR COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE

As the pandemic took hold, and countries responded with varying lockdowns, it became clearer than ever that strong local communities are vital in the face of crisis. We published two blogs on the response to COVID-19. The crisis spurred on the work of preparing to launch ECOLISE's new flagship action programme, Communities for Future, which aims to facilitate the widespread mainstreaming of regenerative and transformative community-led action on climate change and sustainability. Communities for Future was conceived by members in September 2019 during a gathering in Brussels that combined both a skillshare of facilitators of community-led change and a meeting in the European Parliament. It is inspired by the global climate protests and by citizens' action for real change in their local communities and it builds on the pioneering work of ECOLISE's members.

ECOLISE team retreat, January 2020

COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE

Communities for Future aims to inspire, empower, and enable local community-led responses to the climate and ecological emergency:

- Focussing on citizen engagement at the village or neighbourhood level
- Connecting communities and stakeholders locally, regionally, nationally and at European level
- Helping to build resilience and to revive local-to-regional economies
- Reimaging and redesign the systems and institutions on which we depend
- Inspiring, Enabling, Advocating and Learning, its four main domains of action
- Catalysing new conversations and connections
- Supporting and assisting communities to take the leap from awareness to action

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS FOR COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE

ECOLISE members responded gallantly to the call to host Communities for Future workshops in their home countries, with online events in Ireland, UK, Scotland, Portugal, Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany. Each workshop engaged community-led initiatives (CLIs), local authorities, stakeholders and civil society actors in conversation with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other EU representatives from the European Commission, and the European Economic and Social Committee. These workshops resulted in closer collaboration between all participants. Appointed CLI spokespersons then reported back from these workshops at the Communities for Future launch, held online on September 29th, 2020. These were Ana Armano Linta from the Croatian Permaculture Association; Thomas Meier for the Permakultur Institut in Germany; Floss Adams, of Transition Network Ireland; Mieke Elzenge for LiberTerra community in the Netherlands; Gil Penha-Lopes for FCUL and Habita Regen in Portugal; and Andy Goldring for the Permaculture Association Britain in the UK.

ECOLISE launched Communities for Future with an online event attended by two European Commissioners, MEPs, partners and of course ECOLISE members, some 150 people in total.

Speaking at the launch Dubravka Šuica, Vice-president, Commissioner for Democracy, Demography & the Future of Europe said: *"what you have is a vision . . . I am really amazed by it . . we must work at the local, regional, national & European level but always together"*. She said that she shared the Communities for Future objective of "*involving citizens and appealing to their potential to build and increase resilience and local cohesion*".

The MEPs who zoomed into the event were Seán Kelly (Ireland, EPP), Salima Yenbou (France, Greens/ European Free Alliance), Niklas Nienaß (Germany, Greens/European Free Alliance) and Irena Joveva (Slovenia, Renew Europe).

This video recaptures the event.

COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE WEBSITE

The Communities for Future website provides inspiration, resources, events, contacts and an online collaboration space. It is conceived as a one-stop shop on community-led action on climate change and sustainability. It also incorporates the previous website for the European Day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC), so that people can register their events for EDSC2021 via Communities for Future.

COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE SESSIONS

In March, ECOLISE hosted a talk 'How to up our skills to lobby the EU'. In October we launched a new series of monthly Communities for Future Sessions aimed at co-creating an open space for multilateral networking, learning and collaboration within and

beyond the ECOLISE membership. By year almost 300 people had joined the Sessions.

- **October 21st: Let's celebrate together the achievements of European community-led movements in 2020!** Dedicated to celebration in order to strengthen bonds and to focus on positive achievements in the midst of such a challenging time.
- **November 9th: Showcasing community-led movements, Permaculture, Transition and Ecovillages, and exploring the power of community-led action** An opportunity for newcomers to get to know the transition, permaculture and ecovillage movements better, as well as ECOLISE and Communities for Future
- **December 2nd: Communities of Practice, what they are and what can be their role in leveraging the impact of community-led initiatives** Although an introduction, this Session served to initiate a Communities of Practice ecosystem working group. It brings together diverse Communities of Practice for mutual learning, support and collaboration, in order to broaden their collective outreach and impact.

COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE KNOWLEDGE COMMONS

In 2020 ECOLISE continued to address the under-representation of Community-led action on climate change and sustainability in political and academic discourse, by further developing and rebranding our knowledge commons as the Communities for Future knowledge commons. It aims to create a broad, comprehensive knowledge base that adequately represents the scale and diversity of community-led action in Europe and beyond. Its main components are a wiki and a document library. The Learn team started holding regular induction webinars for contributors to the wiki, including co-editors of and other contributors to our second Status Report, which is being prepared for release during 2021.

COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE POLICY CIRCLE

The call to join the Communities for Future Policy Circle was launched in December to create policy solutions to shape EU policy and investment towards climate and social justice by supporting community-led action. The Policy Circle was joined by 64 people from diverse backgrounds, expertise, interests and fields, including member organisations. The Policy Circle was set up to organise the work around thematic areas under the 2021 Status Report (see above). Eight thematic working groups are being facilitated by the Policy team, meeting bi-weekly in smaller settings and coming together once a month as the Policy Circle to coordinate their work.

LIFE EMERGE AS A NEW WAY OF FUNDING CFF & MEMBERS

ECOLISE members came together to create an application for the EU Life programme as a way in which to fund Communities for Future and members' work. Part of the proposal was the creation of a Communities of Practice ecosystem, the theme of our third Communities for Future Session (see above). This was an intense learning experience composed of a series of working meetings which built the capacity of all involved to engage with European policy.

OPENING OF THE BRUSSELS OFFICE AND EXPANDING TEAM

In early summer 2020 ECOLISE opened a new office at Mundo-J, a co-working space in Brussels. In April Executive Board member and former Council member Robert Hall was appointed as Deputy Director, based at the new office. Céline Fabrequette was appointed as Policy Assistant, also based in Brussels. Our other new appointees were Pauliina Helle, (Network and Outreach Assistant), André Vizinho (COMETS project officer), Sara Silva (CRIC project officer), Maja Vrcon (Communications & Network Assistant) and Nara Petrovic (Research Assistant), based in Finland, Portugal, Italy and Slovenia respectively. In December Eamon O'Hara began a two month sabbatical and Robert Hall became the Acting Executive Director. Amelie Krug and Tim Boneder joined ECOLISE in Brussels as interns.

Ongoing projects

UrbanA

ECOLISE's engagement with the three year UrbanA - Urban Arenas for Just and Sustainable Cities continued in 2020. In April the UrbanA Community Conversations began, bringing together all those involved in the UrbanA Community of Practice, with a keynote presentation followed by discussion. The second UrbanA Arena, focussing on drivers of injustice, was held online 'in' Barcelona in June. A series of one minute videos were released to coincide with the Arena. These and all other UrbanA findings to date are captured in the UrbanA wiki, which is part of ECOLISE's commitment to building a knowledge commons. For more information and links to the many videos, podcasts, blogs and other resources see www.urban-arena.eu. The UrbanA Community of Practice was featured as a case study in the CoP facilitation guide developed by the BLAST consortium.

ECOVILLAGES IN TRANSITION MEETING

Participants in the Ecovillage Transition in Action project gathered in Schloss Tempelhof community in Germany in February to continue to develop a

methodology for upscaling ecovillage solutions. They included representatives of ECOLISE, along with the University of St. Andrews, Global Ecovillage Network, GEN Germany and Kilden Økosamfunn. Funded by ERASMUS+, the project's starting point is that sustainable community practices hold answers to many complex questions in current society where change is not easy. It aims specifically to create and test models of upscaling ecovillage solutions in order to help collaboration with municipalities and regional governments in finding adequate responses to climate challenges. The model will relate global strategies, reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals, to local solutions, interpreted through Dimensions of Sustainability.

PARTNERSHIP WITH EESC

ECOLISE's long standing partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) continued in 2020, with the committee's strong support and collaboration in launching Communities for Future in September.

ECOLISE members and team members participated in four EESC events in 2020. In June Meera Ghani, ECOLISE Policy Coordinator, contributed to an EESC webinar focussed on 'Shifting priorities in post-COVID recovery'. "Europe has a chance to build a more caring, just, and regenerative economy. An economy that meets the needs of all its communities and focuses on their wellbeing," she said.

COMETS

ECOLISE's role in the Horizon2020 project Collective Action Models for Energy Transition and Social Innovation (COMETS) continued in 2020. In April COMETS researchers' first academic publication, a book chapter entitled Collective Action Initiatives in the Energy Transition. Supporters of a strong sustainability paradigm? was published. It emphasises the need for 'strong sustainability', going beyond the purely physical and technical aspects of energy transition and highlighting the work community-led initiatives are already doing in this regard. ECOLISE has also built and launched a COMETS collaborative platform, which is part of the Communities for Future website; conducted a survey of energy transition initiatives in Spain, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Estonia and Poland; and facilitated a day-long training workshop for the other COMETS partners in the consortium benchmarking method. It is used to join a group of peer initiatives that want to improve, to identify joint questions, to look around at other similar initiatives and to get closer to observe, collect data, compare practices and learn.

BLAST - BLENDED ADULT LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

This ERASMUS+ project led by ECOLISE with 9 other partner organisations continued its work aimed at bringing about massive personal and community-led change by supporting people to engage actively in the socio-ecological transition. It does this by improving adult educators' competences in delivering blended transformative learning for civic engagement in community-led initiatives; increasing reach and improving the delivery of transformative adult education initiatives across Europe that are supporting the social ecological transition; and spreading social and educational innovations. The BLAST series of training and multiplier events, that are designed to generate deep and long lasting benefits for the Community of Practice, were delayed in 2020 due to the pandemic.

EUROPEAN DAY OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES (EDSC)

Given the pandemic the fourth edition of the EDSC was muted compared to our 2019 event in which 100s of communities in 27 countries joined in celebrating the day. Nevertheless the EDSC20 was marked in 16 countries, with many events taking place online.

TRANSFORMATIVE CITIES

ECOLISE continued to support the international Transformative Cities award, which applauds people who are taking action to transform their cities in areas of water, energy, food and housing. It is not a competition, but an exercise of "coopetition", popularising progressive initiatives and encouraging cooperation and solidarity. All the applicant initiatives are featured in the Atlas of Utopias.

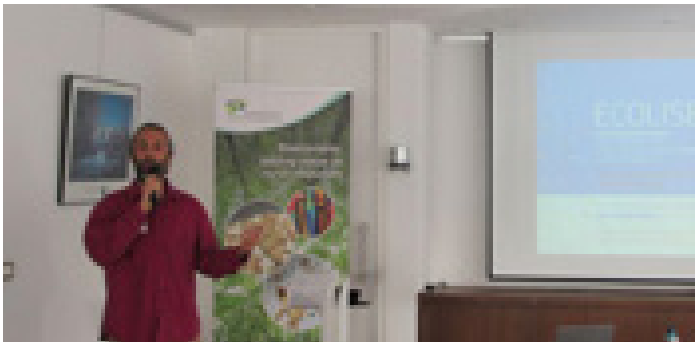
New projects, partnerships, engagements and statements

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND INCLUSIVE CITIES (CRIC)

In January ECOLISE representatives Juan Del Río, Network and Outreach coordinator, and Cristianno Bottone from Municipalities in Transition (MiT), travelled to Jakarta, Indonesia, for the launch of a project focussed on Asian cities' efforts to protect their citizens and cities from the impacts of climate change.

CRIC is a joint project of the European Union and the United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific initiative, with many partners including ECOLISE. ECOLISE will focus in particular on bringing the experience of MiT to show how communities and municipalities in Europe are working together to strengthen resilience and tackle the challenges of climate and ecological breakdown. CRIC aims to improve the institutional, financial and administrative capacities of cities and local authorities through peer-to-peer learning and exchange of knowledge, development of local action plans for climate resilient and inclusive cities, and organisation of communication and capacity building trainings.

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



In February ECOLISE's Tom Henfrey attended a Brussels European Network for Rural Development meeting exploring the challenges of monitoring community climate action. Building on examples from different parts of rural Europe, participants discussed possible ways of demonstrating rural activities' contribution to climate action and environmental sustainability. The meeting was addressed at National Rural Networks, RDP Managing Authorities, Local Action Groups and stakeholders involved in bioeconomy value chains or rural bioeconomy initiatives.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Before Ireland went into lockdown ECOLISE Communications Coordinator Iva Pocock attended a seminar entitled 'Towards Climate Justice, exploring community work and human rights perspectives on climate justice'. Organised by Community Work Ireland (CWI), which works for social change that will contribute to the creation of a just, sustainable and equal society, the event drew community workers from across Ireland. It built on the publication by CWI last October

of a briefing paper 'The Urgent Case for Justice', which includes a section on 'consciousness raising and education' and why community workers can play an important role by opening up space for dialogue about the climate crisis.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

In June, ECOLISE released a statement in solidarity with all people of colour in particular Black people and those experiencing racism and oppression. *"We at ECOLISE don't want to go back to normal. Normal wasn't working. The world that we imagine and want to bring forth doesn't rely on violence and murder to maintain peace. It is regenerative, nurturing, and just. ….As a network of communities that have come together around principles of equity, fairness, and care we know that there can be no climate justice without racial, gender, economic, and disability justice. Otherwise, we are going to keep failing those we express solidarity with."*
In calling for a just recovery from COVID-19 ECOLISE said: *"there can be no just recovery, without addressing the systemic extraction, harm, and violence towards Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities. The communities that have done the least to contribute to the climate crisis are hit hardest, precisely because they have been deliberately made vulnerable by white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism."*

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM OF TRANSFORMATIVE ECONOMIES

ECOLISE was involved in organising the World Social Forum of Transformative Economies which was due to be held in June in Barcelona and was postponed due to the pandemic. Engagement with the process of creating a post-pandemic agenda of transformative economies continues.

CLIMACT

After much delay this new four year project funded by the European Commission's Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme began in August. It involves 20 partners under the umbrella of Oxfam and Climate Action Network Europe, of which ECOLISE is a member. It aims to raise awareness, build capacity and support EU citizens, particularly young people, to build public support for ambitious climate change and development policies which have gender equality at their heart. ECOLISE's role centers on continuing to organise the European Day of Sustainable Communities in cooperation with our National Contact Points and partners, in addition to engaging with policy makers and building ECOLISE members' capacity to do so.

COMMUNITY CLIMATE COACHES

This new ERASMUS+ project which began in November aims to build a Climate Coach practitioner network and movement for enabling and catalysing action-oriented, dialogue-based processes and pathways to resilience and regeneration. It involves six ECOLISE members plus ECOLISE. It will work with both the mainstream and the margins, integrating 'inner' and 'outer' work, and identifying the conditions and levers for change. Once activated, the network aims to expand, deepen and accelerate Community Climate Action.

EU CLIMATE PACT AMBASSADORS

Women EU Climate Pact Ambassadors

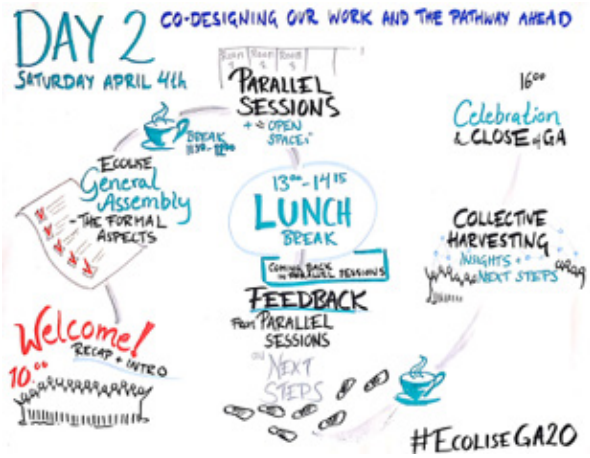
ECOLISE organised a workshop for members who were interested in applying to become ambassadors for the EU's Climate Pact. Of the 100 ambassadors chosen, two ECOLISE team members - Céline Fabrequette, Policy & Advocacy Assistant, (one of only two People of Colour of the 100 ambassadors) and Robert Hall, Acting Executive Director, were chosen. Matthew Bach of ECOLISE member, ICLEI Europe, and Céline Seince of RURENER, an ECOLISE partner, were also appointed ambassadors.

SMART VILLAGE 21 PARTNERSHIP

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNGt1VG3GqY&t=45s

ECOLISE began a partnership with Smart Rural 21, a two-and-a-half year project to promote and inspire villages to develop and implement smart village approaches and strategies across Europe, and to draw conclusions and support future policy interventions on smart villages. Drawing on our network we have started contributing case studies of innovative practices to the Smart Solutions Database.

Member engagement



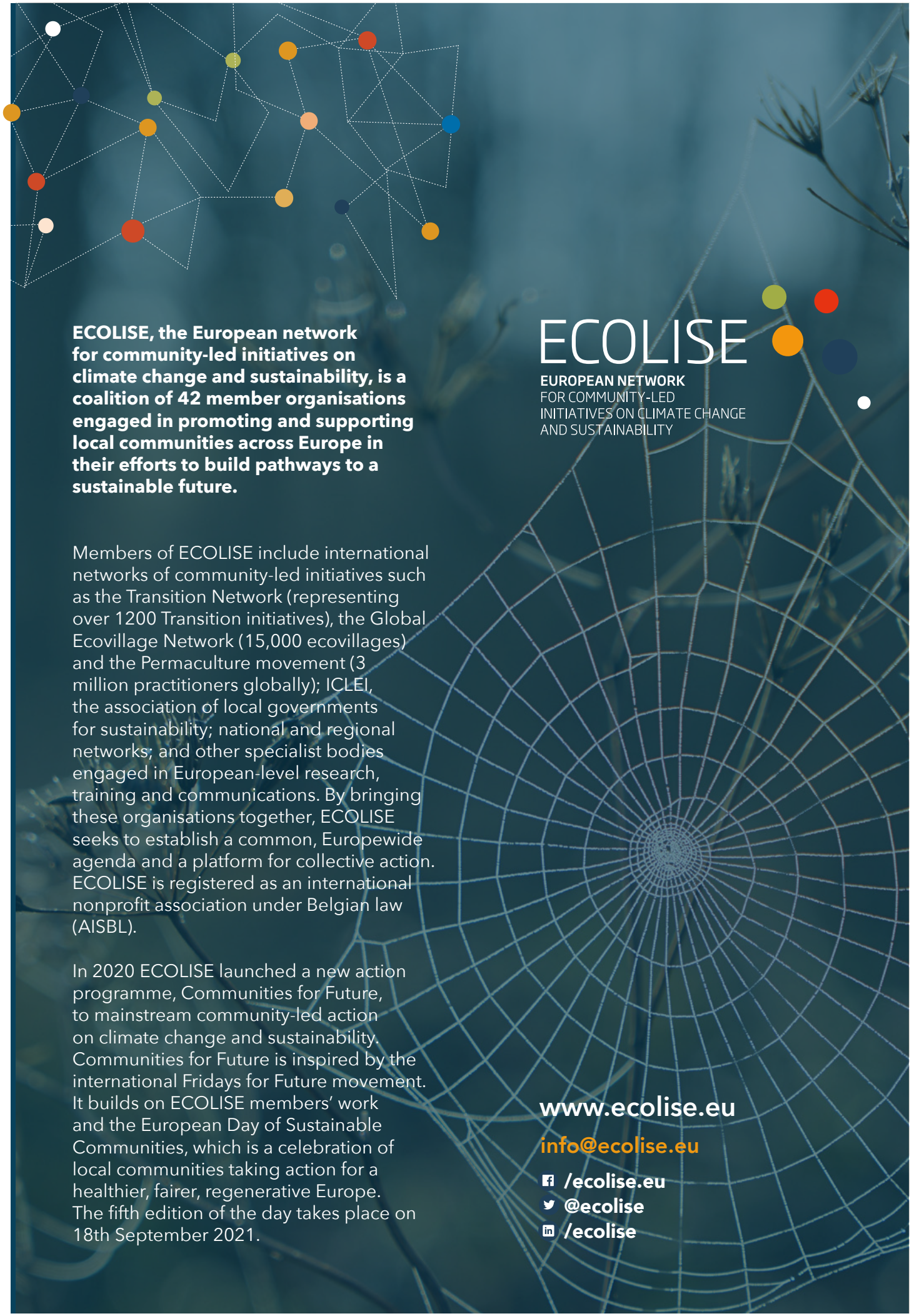
2020 GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA)

The 2020 GA was originally planned to take place in Jarna, Sweden. In March it was decided to hold the event completely online. Our previous experience in organising blended meetings really shone through with over 50 physically distanced but socially connected participants actively engaging during the GA. For the first time it was a bilingual event, with breakout spaces in both English and French. The full report of the two day event can be found in a beautiful illustrated harvest document.

NEW MEMBERS

The General Assembly 2020 approved three new members, the Irish Local Development Network (Ireland); the Finnish Village Movement (Finland); and Collectif pour une Transition Citoyenne (France). The membership of seven organisations lapsed: Green Network of Activist Groups - ZMAG, Croatia; Ria d'Etel en Transition - Les Lucioles, France; CESnet, Croatia, Italy, Slovenia; Université Populaire de Permaculture - UPP, France; and Transition Wallonia; Institute of Global Studies, Romania (which no longer exists) and Community Development Institute, Macedonia (whose focus and capacity changed). With these changes the total membership is 42 organisations with activities in all EU countries, as well as the UK and Switzerland.

After the GA2020 the co-presidents, Francesca Whitlock and Davie Philip, supported by the Council, initiated a process of deep reflection which began in September. This took the form of a collaborative proposal forming process aimed at resolving tensions that had been observed within the work of ECOLISE; clarifying and agreeing drivers; and ensuring all perspectives were heard as we evolve and further develop the ECOLISE meta-network.



ECOLISE

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

ECOLISE, the European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability, is a coalition of 42 member organisations engaged in promoting and supporting local communities across Europe in their efforts to build pathways to a sustainable future.

Members of ECOLISE include international networks of community-led initiatives such as the Transition Network (representing over 1200 Transition initiatives), the Global Ecovillage Network (15,000 ecovillages) and the Permaculture movement (3 million practitioners globally); ICLEI, the association of local governments for sustainability; national and regional networks; and other specialist bodies engaged in European-level research, training and communications. By bringing these organisations together, ECOLISE seeks to establish a common, Europewide agenda and a platform for collective action. ECOLISE is registered as an international nonprofit association under Belgian law (AISBL).

In 2020 ECOLISE launched a new action programme, Communities for Future, to mainstream community-led action on climate change and sustainability. Communities for Future is inspired by the international Fridays for Future movement. It builds on ECOLISE members' work and the European Day of Sustainable Communities, which is a celebration of local communities taking action for a healthier, fairer, regenerative Europe. The fifth edition of the day takes place on 18th September 2021.

www.ecolise.eu

info@ecolise.eu

/ecolise.eu
@ecolise
/ecolise

Design by: **www.spiritlab.co.uk**