ECOLISE

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

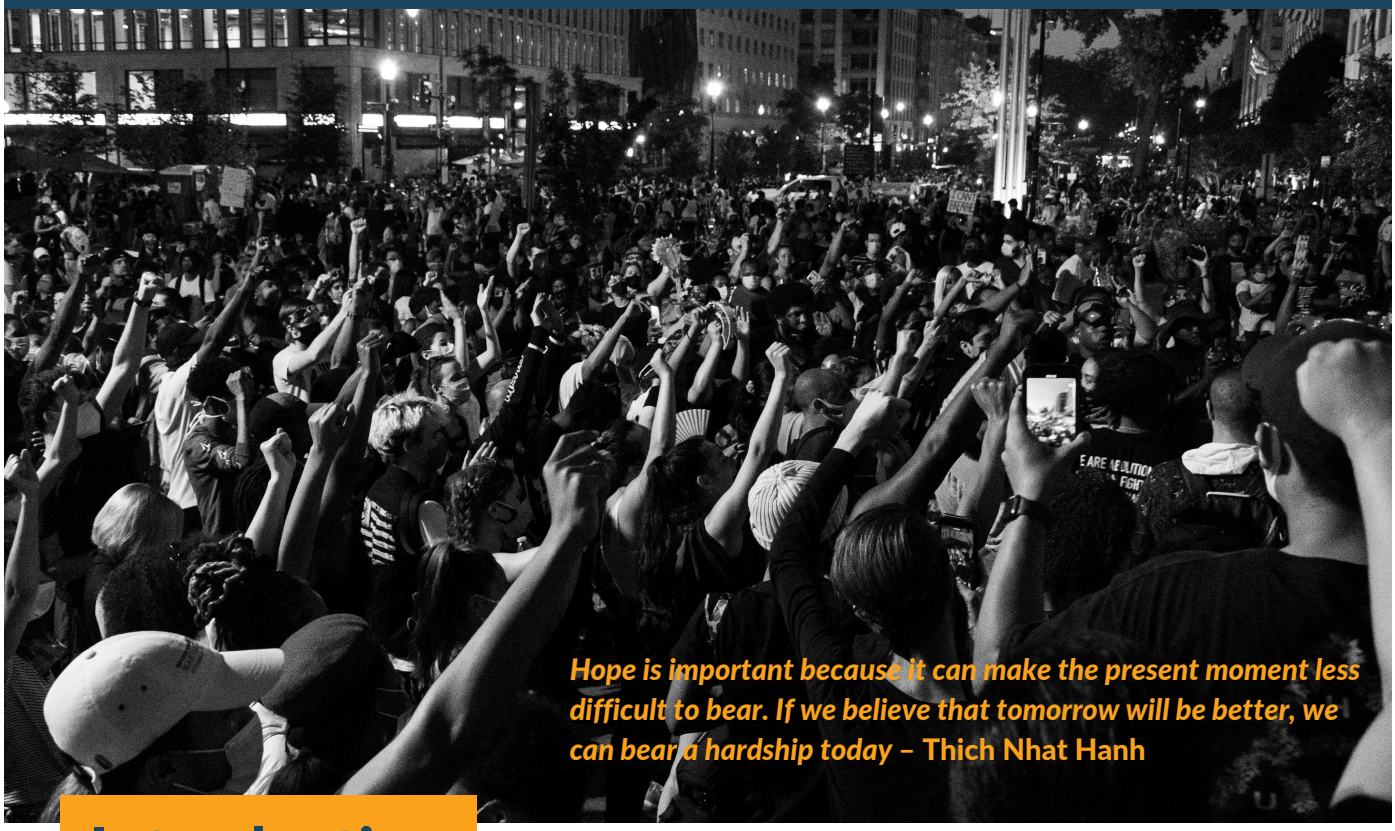
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ACTIVITY **REPORT** 2021

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Introduction

As we prepare this report, we find ourselves more than two years into a global pandemic, a threat that has ignited a renewed appreciation for the interconnectedness between human and natural systems. It has also shown the power of collective action in the face of crisis. During 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) delivered a stark warning about the impacts of climate change affecting every corner of the planet. The critical role of community-led initiatives in driving climate action and sustainability has never been clearer and the need for action has never been more urgent. We look ahead with conviction for the work that lies ahead and, in this report, we reflect on the progress, achievements and challenges of the past year.

2021 marked seven years since the establishment of ECOLISE. The number seven holds symbolic significance in religion, mythology and philosophy – the so-called seven-year cycle of development, a time for reinvention and transformation. During the first seven years of its existence, ECOLISE has come into being, establishing itself as a network of change-making networks, organisations, groups and individuals. This milestone year has not been an easy one for ECOLISE. Through a series of unfortunate events and internal dynamics, we have been called to slow down and turn inwards to reinvent ourselves. This moment of reckoning has brought an opportunity to check in with our core values and the values of the networks we represent, so that we can move forward and serve our members and wider community in the best way possible.

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Graphic recording from the closing session of the European Day of Sustainable Communities.

Communities for Future

Work continues on ECOLISE's flagship project, Communities for Future (CfF), on a mission to facilitate the widespread mainstreaming of regenerative and transformative community-led action on climate change and sustainability. Highlights from 2021 include the first CfF Policy Week, six virtual CfF Sessions and the fifth edition of the European Day of Sustainable Communities. You might like to watch the Communities for Future video with testimonials from people involved in community initiatives in Portugal, Ireland, Sweden, Italy and Romania.

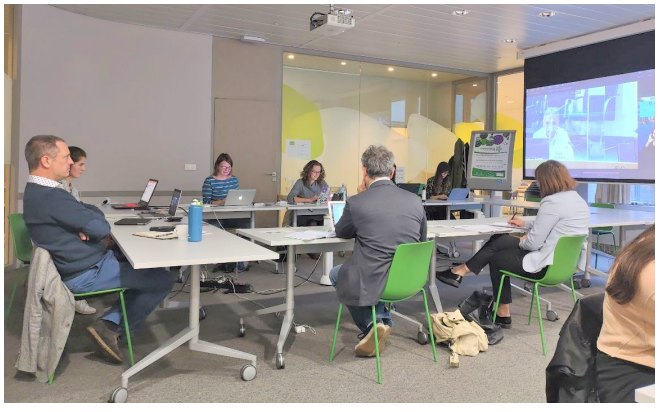


COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE POLICY WEEK

ECOLISE organised a Communities for Future (CfF) Policy Week from 20-28 September 2021, which included a number of events aimed at bringing together policymakers and representatives of community-led initiatives to explore the theme: *"the path to transformation is through localisation of policy and decision-making."*

The events included regional meetings across Europe organised by ECOLISE members and a final event in Brussels. The Brussels event was organised in partnership with the European Economic & Social Committee (EESC), the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and Rurener. It coincided with ECOLISE's 5th European Day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC) in 2021.





COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE SESSIONS

Throughout six Communities for Future Sessions, we explored themes on practical matters such as resource opportunities and building our knowledge commons, while also providing a space for connection through an evening of storytelling and listening. The recordings of the sessions are available on YouTube:

- Building our Knowledge Commons: Working together to create a shared resource
- Climate action through deep collaboration How you can engage with Communities for Future
- Sitting around the fire, an evening of storytelling and listening
- Let's Meet among Communities of Practice
- Blended Transformative Learning - exploring tools, assessments and frameworks for the social-ecological transition
- Resourcing community-led local climate resilience - Tapping into CLLD and Smart Villages EU-Programmes



COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE KNOWLEDGE COMMONS

ECOLISE continued to develop the Communities for Future knowledge commons (including the CfF Wiki and Document Library), a comprehensive, open-source knowledge hub on community-led action on climate change and sustainability in Europe. In early 2021, we shifted from the prototyping to piloting phase, with a clear and easy-to-follow content structure, improved user interface and written guidelines for users. This phase also included developing a new set of processes to induct and support contributors and convene a wider circle of content and site curators. During 2021, we have been working to establish the knowledge commons as a collectively managed resource through active engagement of users in a number of areas: working groups in other domains, project teams (BLAST, Community Climate Coaches, COMETs, UrbanA, CAMPAIGNers, Euro-Regen), key member networks (GEN, Transition Network, permaculture) and allies (RIPESS). The aim is to ensure its accessibility to critical knowledge co-creation processes in CfF like Communities of Practice and National Contact Points. Integration of our knowledge commons (as a platform and social process) into projects within H2020, Erasmus+ and other funding programmes is another developing mechanism to strengthen their alignment with CfF.

COMMUNITIES FOR FUTURE IN PRACTICE

Communities for Future in Practice is a result of ECOLISE's exploration of how to implement the Communities for Future (CfF) strategy efficiently, bringing together a wide range of citizens, community-led initiatives and related communities of practice (CoPs) around Europe. As part of this process, ECOLISE has been envisioning a collaborative ecosystem of practice on various themes and practice groups that work for climate resilience. This ecosystem, now entitled Communities for Future in Practice, would enable independent citizens, formal and informal groups of practice to collaborate, learn from each other and invite more citizens and civil society into their discussions.

The CfF in Practice group was formalised in January 2021 and has engaged throughout 2021 in monthly sessions, having co-organised the CfF session in June. In this session, the needs and offers of the participants and their communities of practice were mapped. A CfF in practice steering group was defined, to create an ongoing space for reflection and dialogue.

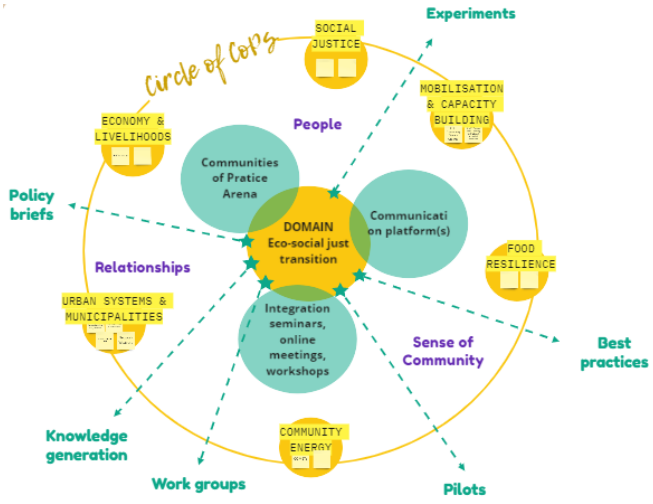
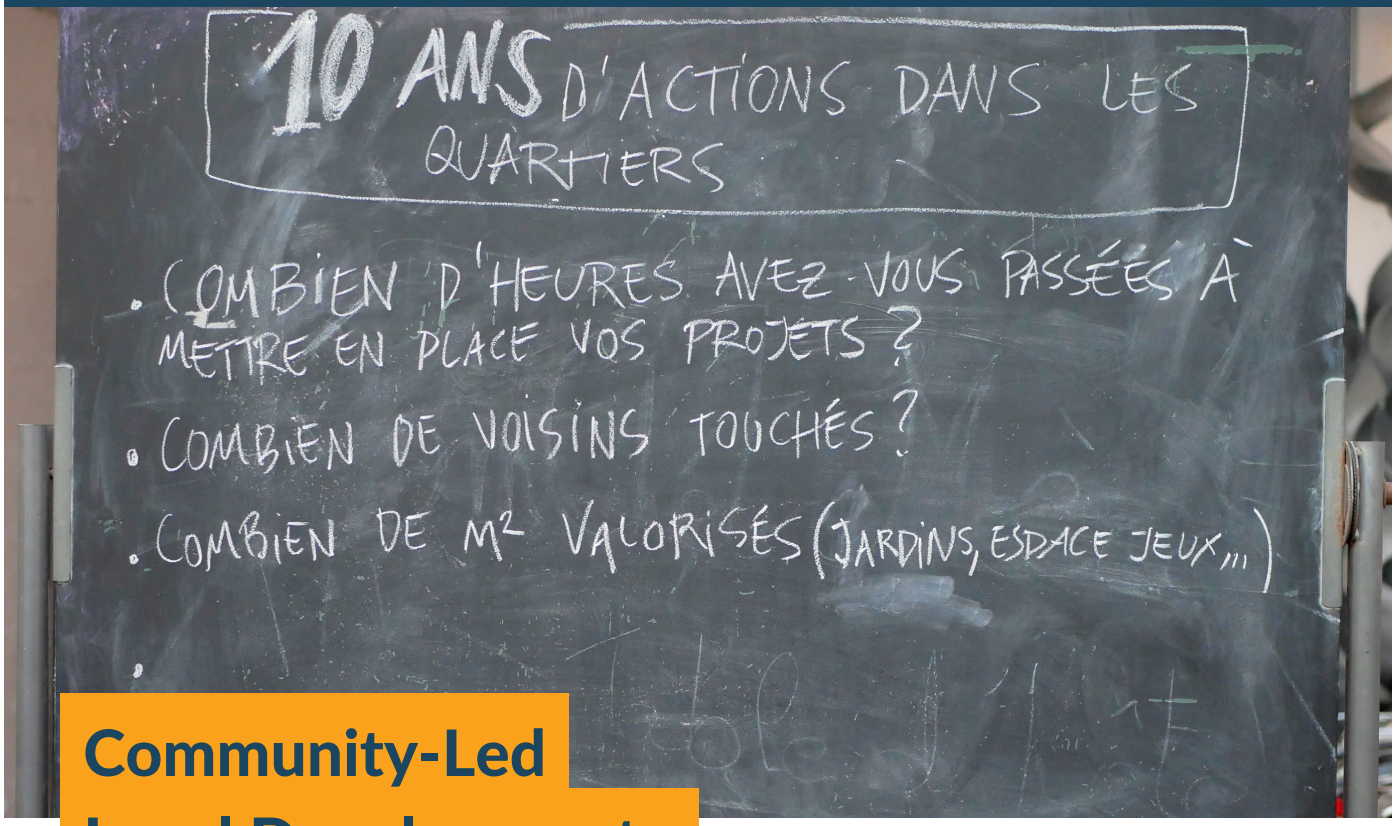


Diagram summarising the vision for the Communities of Practice Ecosystem

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Community-Led Local Development

ECOLISE has been advocating for extending the scope of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and Smart Villages to encompass effective support for community-led action on climate change and sustainability in all EU countries. ECOLISE contributed to the design of CLLD and Smart Village programmes for the post-2020 period, helping to ensure that these programmes are widely accessible to communities, in both urban and rural areas, wishing to undertake action on climate change and sustainability. Throughout 2021 ECOLISE has progressively shifted focus to the implementation stages of CLLD and Smart Villages, and to ensure uptake of the support available by communities across Europe.

Key actions have included:

- An online session on members and partners on "Resourcing community-led local climate resilience – tapping into CLLD and Smart Villages EU-Programmes", which attracted over 50 participants.
- ECOLISE has established a Community of Practice (CoP) in CLLD/Smart Villages, which brings together key stakeholders to explore how best to promote uptake of CLLD/Smart Village supports for community-led climate action, and what future policy changes are needed to further improve this. The draft terms of reference of the CLLD/SV CoP can be seen here.



Projects

UrbanA

The EU-funded UrbanA project came to a close in 2021, but lives on as the Urban Community for Sustainable Just Cities. Over three years of convening, researching, collaborating and curating, the project culminated with 17 keys to #SustainableJustCities. Read about the 17 keys to make cities more honest, caring, regenerative and informed. You can access all the UrbanA resources here. UrbanA was awarded Integral City Region of Year 2021, recognising the project's significant contribution to the Intelligences of a whole region of cities.



COMETS

Through COMETS, ECOLISE has been studying how energy Collective Action Initiatives have been faring in Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, Estonia, Poland and Spain. ECOLISE was responsible for the methodology around the Participatory Case Studies, where each national research team explored the topics most relevant to their context. The full outcomes (looking at dimensions that range from citizen engagement and governance to financing and scaling) can be found in the official report repository here. A more accessible version will be made available in the Communities for Future section for Energy Communities, which also boasts an updated map of all participating energy communities, as well as a crowdfunding guide for aspiring groups. This will mark the end of the project in May 2022.

CAMPAIGNers

The EU-funded CAMPAIGNers project aims to develop an app to support citizens in their challenge to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. ECOLISE has been supporting the development of the app, as well as examining the challenges and research framework with the perspective of promoting community-led approaches (e.g. joining a community garden or a bicycle club). The app and the research work will be launched later this year!

Community Climate Coaches (CCC)

The work to define what a Community Climate Coach is and how to best support them continued this year. Interviews were carried out with some of ECOLISE's members and a first webpage was published. The first training course will be delivered in September alongside the EDSC, so stay tuned if you are or want to be a Community Climate Coach!



CRIC (Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities)

Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities (CRIC) is a 5-year project that proposes a long-lasting and unique cooperation between cities and research centres in Europe, Indonesia and other countries from Southeast Asia. It aims to substantially contribute to sustainable integrated urban development, good governance, and climate adaptation/ mitigation. This is the only project in ECOLISE being implemented outside of Europe, which brings an opportunity to work closely with communities that are being severely impacted by climate change. The role of ECOLISE in the CRIC project is to bring knowledge and awareness to achieve better governance within communities through a systemic lens, work with pilot cities of Kupang and Gorontalo on the theme of water scarcity and sanitation and to deliver training on the energy transition in the 4th year of the project. Take a look at the policy briefs for Gorontalo city and Kupang city.

BLAST

ECOLISE's exploration of Blended Transformative Learning tools through BLAST has now come to a close, and all the outputs are easily accessed on our summary page here, which will continue to be updated as we develop further inputs related to the topic. We hope this provides a useful reference for anyone exploring the best way to deliver educational programs that intend to be transformational and are to be delivered both online and offline, with the best of both worlds.

ClimACT/SPARK

The ClimACT project, brand name SPARK, brings together a diverse consortium of 20 organisations under the umbrellas of Oxfam and the Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe). The project raises awareness, increases capacity, and supports EU citizens, particularly young people, to build public support for ambitious climate change and development policies which have gender equality at the core. As part of our role in the project, ECOLISE delivered street actions under the umbrella of the European Day of Sustainable Communities (see below), as well as the inaugural Communities for Future policy week, laying the foundations for a wider event this year.



European Day of Sustainable Communities #EDSC21

The fifth edition of the European Day of Sustainable Communities took place on 18 September 2021. Despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, over 128,000 people participated in hundreds of events in fifteen countries across Europe between 11 and 25 September. These included online and in-person events such as ecovillage open days, roundtable discussions, upcycling workshops, permaculture picnics, citizens' climate assemblies, shared meals and many more.

New partnerships

PORTICUS

In 2021 we welcomed a new partner, Porticus. The support provided by Porticus will further enable ECOLISE's core activities: driving mainstreaming community-led initiatives in Europe through the Communities for Future initiative; and supporting our internal organisational development and culture building activities.

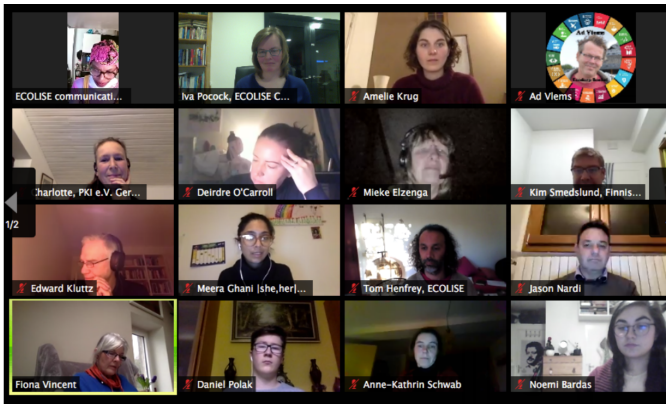
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Advocacy

Building bridges between communities and policy makers

ECOLISE established and facilitates a Policy Circle (with 8 thematic areas that link to the CfF Status Report) launched in December 2020, involving members and partners. It organises capacity building activities and provides additional resources to deepen this activity. In 2021, the policy circle produced 6 policy papers that were shared during the CfF Policy Week.



Climate and environmental policy

ECOLISE, working with partners, also contributed to discussions on the EU's Long Term Climate Strategy, thematic priorities around the Green Deal, the Climate Law, and in particular the Climate Pact where ECOLISE staff and members joined as Climate Pact Ambassadors.

ECOLISE was active in events surrounding COP26 in Glasgow, including:
COP26: The power of localising climate action with partners of the Coalition on Multi-level and Multi-stakeholder Climate Governance (Comité21, Committee of the Regions, ECOLISE, EESC, ICLEI, OECD)

Beyond COP26: Identifying Transformative Pathways: discussion focusing on the outcomes of the Glasgow climate summit and what it means for local communities and projects modelling the transition to a sustainable and biodiverse future.

#30yearsLEADER

Former Council member and policy intern, Amelie Krug, represented ECOLISE at the #30yearsLEADER Celebration & Conference, marking 30 years of the EU LEADER programme. An opportunity to promote our vision for societal engagement in the context of rural and regional development within the EU, Amelie spoke on the 'Future Leaders' panel.

Community-Led Local Development

ECOLISE also contributed to updating other strategic initiatives in the fields of the environment, cohesion policy, energy, transport and food. It provided input into discussions on EU programming, focusing in particular on the provisions for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and the new Smart Villages initiative.

Meet & Greet policy makers

ECOLISE launched a series of Meet & Greet events throughout 2021 where people from the community-led movement had an opportunity to meet policy makers. Find out more and watch the video testimonials here.



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ECOLISE Updates

ECOLISE Team Updates

Ricardo Silva joined the team as Project Manager and Evan Welkin as Social Media Manager in April 2021. Zsófia Vidak joined as Administrative Officer in May 2021.

In 2021, we saw the departure of eleven team members: Iva Pocock, Tom Henfrey, Meera Ghani, Robert Hall, Celine Fabrequette, Nara Petrovic, André Vizinho, Katy Momo Fox, Evan Welkin, Hannah Twomey and Jesper Conrad.

They all made a significant and valuable contribution, which is greatly appreciated. Several of these people left due to changes in personal life or project commitments that came to an end, but most of them unfortunately decided to go because of such a highly demanding period in the evolution of the organisation.

Three new team members joined in March 2022: Laura Kaestele (Network Weaver), Jane Feeney (Communications and Campaigns Lead) and Nina Klein (Policy Lead). Pauliina Helle and Juan del Río were selected as Co-Directors through an internal sociocratic selection process and started in December 2021. Eamon O'Hara stepped down from his long standing director position but continues with ECOLISE in an advisory role.

Transformation

After its first cycle of 7 years of existence (2014 - 2021) there were many signs that ECOLISE was called to substantially transform its way of being. Tensions were felt in a number of areas, including issues around internal communication, proposal forming, decision-making processes and governance, as well as the inclusion of diversity and minorities. Hence, in 2021 ECOLISE embarked on an intense process of developing its organisational culture and governance.

At the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, a participatory proposal forming process was conducted, collecting input across the team, Council and membership on drivers for change. Besides several collaborative online sessions, this organisational review process included a Deep Listening workshop facilitated by Forum for the Future. A small group of volunteers processed the collected input, concluding with 7 identified and agreed on drivers on topics of sustainable pace, governance, communication and equality, diversity, inclusion and fairness, and a number of potential approaches and solutions for addressing those drivers. The collected input did not question the strategy which had been agreed upon at the GA 2019, while it showed that there were deep structural and paradigmatic tensions underlying the question of how to implement the strategy.

The working group produced a report called "ECOLISE Transforming 2021: Caterpillar to Butterfly", which was handed over at the General Assembly 2021 in April. The main suggestion of the working group was to go for a period of cocooning, processing the deep tensions in integrative ways, in order to 'transform from a caterpillar into a butterfly'. The new Council was mandated to process the collected considerations further, turn them into a proposal for organisational transformation consulted with all stakeholders and to bring this proposal to an extraordinary GA for decision.



Unfortunately, due to an escalation of internal tensions, the attention needed to shift to conflict resolution, reconciliation and finally, rebuilding the team after several people left the organisation. Moreover, since the April General Assembly, the 2019-21 Council distanced themselves from ECOLISE, except for reelected Alisa Sidorenko, as well as the contributors to the above-mentioned process and report. This has brought a strong challenge of having a break of continuity from key actors of our network. Instead of a clear proposal for organisational change, an extraordinary GA was held in June 2021 to present a transformation roadmap, roughly outlining a process towards the expected proposal on organisational change. After some months, funding for the internal developments was secured and three working groups were established, on **governance transformation**, **culture building** and **money and value flows**.

Transformation (continued)

A first focus on the path of transformation became to rebuild trust and healthy organisational culture and to work on internal safeguarding policies and agreements. A series of internal interviews was conducted at the end of 2021, to hear everyone in the team and Council and collect fresh ideas for drivers of change and proposals for action. Francesca Stuer, a safeguarding expert, conducted an audit of the internal policies of ECOLISE (such as the Code of Conduct, Misconduct Procedure, and others). She was contracted to lead us through a six-month process of strengthening our safeguarding policies. Moreover, support for the work on diversity, equity and inclusion was received from three Belgium public agencies: Actiris, the Brussels Regional Office for Employment; UNIA (Belgium Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism) and IGVM (The institute for the equality of women and men).

At the same time, ECOLISE also embarked on the first steps of governance transformation. This included for example the implementation of Sociocracy 3.0 patterns, such as consent decision making; establishing tighter collaboration between Council and paid team through strengthened asynchronous working practices and by having Council representatives working more closely with paid team members, on their areas of interest and expertise. ECOLISE also conducted a fee equity review and revised the salary structure within the organisation. In November 2021, two Co-Directors (female/male) were selected to replace the single Executive Director role. This was framed as a governance experiment, with a restricted time frame and regular evaluation cycles. The direction was taken to 'lead the internal transformation in a step-by-step manner, through small, iterative experiments and by bringing focus to constant evaluation and learning. Next steps planned were to facilitate a shift to non-hierarchical organisational structures, clarifying decision making processes and accountabilities.

This process of change has been challenging for many reasons, and we acknowledge that such processes are never easy - nor are they ever really finished. Despite the difficulties it has been highly necessary for ECOLISE to grow into its true potential and find a satisfying way to implement its strategy - and we are only getting started. The active process of organisational transformation will continue at least over the next two years, supported by external consultants.

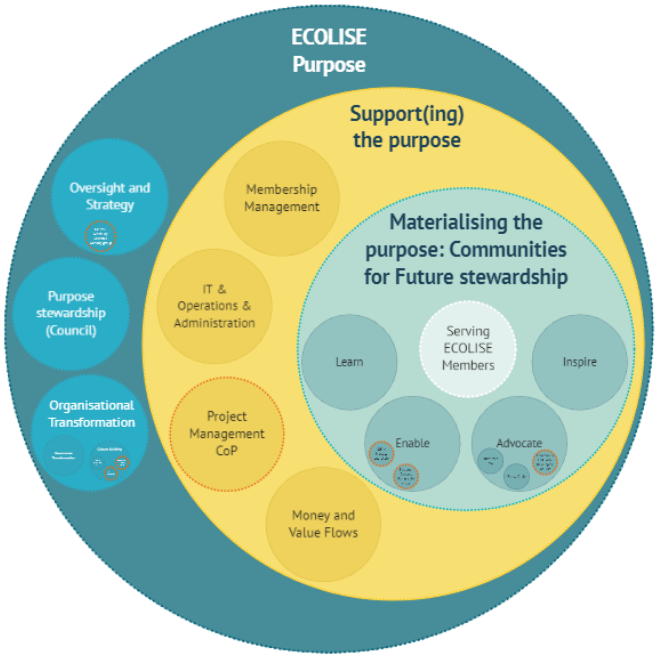


Diagram summarising one of the governance diagrams: Purpose-flow and domains structure in ECOLISE. Access to the full version here.

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Members & Events

ECOLISE Member Highlights

Over the past year, ECOLISE has supported and participated in a diverse range of events together with our membership. Below are a few **highlights from 2021**:

- The 2021 General Assembly took place virtually from 16th-18th April 2021. Seventy people attended and a new Council was elected. We welcomed new ECOLISE members Arkbound Foundation, Scotland; HabitaRegen, Portugal and Green Age, Serbia.

- An Extraordinary General Assembly was held on 30th June 2021. We welcomed new ECOLISE members Ecodorp Boekel, the Netherlands; PVN Albania, Albania and Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), Wales.

- ECOLISE participated in the TNOC (Translocal adventures in developing an Urban Systems Community of Practice) Festival 2021. TNOC Festival pushes boundaries to radically imagine our cities for the future. ECOLISE and UrbanA ran the event Translocal adventures in developing an Urban Systems Community of Practice.

- In May we held a workshop on Thriving Networks - you can watch the recording here.

- In November a Member's Hour on policy advocacy engagement gave members the opportunity to learn about policy, advocacy and politics.

- The event Fridays for Future to Communities for Future. Community-led initiatives and system change took place as part of the "Transition Talks" for the "Cities for Change" summit. ECOLISE invited 8 communities to respond to 4 specific questions about Regeneration; Social, Cultural, Ecology, Economy.

- ECOLISE supported and participated with our Spanish members in the Nesting Climate Governance: Pre Citizens' Assemblies in the Bioregions of Spain.

- Catalysing Local Action for Climate Emergency, as part of the Municipalities in Transition project.

ECOLISE Council 2021

ECOLISE Council members elected in 2019 until the 2021 General Assembly:

- Francesca Whitlock, Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) Europe (Co-president) (Spain/UK);
- Davie Philip, Cultivate (Ireland) (Co-president);
- Alisa Dendro, Baltic Ecovillage Network (Sweden);
- Alexandru Tudose, Permaculture Research Institute (Romania);
- Amelie Krug, Baltic Ecovillage Network (Germany);
- Ellen Bermann, Transition Network,
- Genny Carraro, RIVE, GEN-EU (Italy);
- Gil Penha-Lopes, FFCUL (Portugal);
- Nara Petrovič, Sunny Hill (Slovenia);
- Riccardo De Amici, RIVE, GEN-EU (Italy);
- Robert Hall, GEN-EU (Sweden) who from May 2020 joined the ECOLISE team as Deputy Director.

Eleven members were elected to the ECOLISE Council at the General Assembly, April 2021:

- Leonor Afonso, GEN Europe;
- Johnny Azpilicueta, Iberian Ecovillage Network (Spain);
- Suzie Cahn, Carraig Dúlra (Ireland);
- Duncan Crowley, FCUL (Portugal);
- Lucia Di Paola, ICLEI;
- Nenad Maljkovic, Croatian Permaculture; Pedro Pedrosa, Gaia Education;
- Nonty Sabic, GEN;
- Alisa Sidorenko, Baltic Ecovillage Network; Giorgia Silvestri, DRIFT (Netherlands);
- Manja Vrenko, GEN Europe.

Nonty Sabic and Duncan Crowley were chosen as interim Co-Presidents until July 2021.

After the Extraordinary General Assembly of June 30th, 2021, Alisa Sidorenko and Duncan Crowley were confirmed as Co-Presidents.

Suzie Cahn and Nonty Sabic stepped down from the Council on June 15th, 2021. Giorgia Silvestri and Johnny Azpilicueta stepped down at the end of 2021.

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

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