ECOLISE

Activity Report 2023

“Climate change isn’t an ‘issue’ to add to the list of things to worry about, next to health care and taxes. It is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message—spoken in the language of fires, floods, droughts, and extinctions—telling us that we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet. Telling us that we need to evolve.”

Naomi Klein

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Introduction

Reflecting on the year gone by, 2023 has been truly significant for ECOLISE, marking a pivotal moment in its journey. Against the backdrop of it being the hottest year in modern history with global temperatures shattering records, amidst the challenges posed by external factors such as a growing sense of uncertainty, societal tension due to war and conflicts, or the global recession of democracy, the efforts gain added urgency and significance as the organisation navigate towards a fair and sustainable future. This annual report encapsulates the achievements, challenges, and milestones that have shaped the organisation's trajectory over the past year.

In the pursuit of advancing transformative community-led local development policies, ECOLISE continued the collaborative journey started in 2022 with process partners to develop the foundational 10 theses towards transformative community-led local development policies. This endeavour culminated in the launch of the *Time for Collective Action Manifesto*, a seminal output that emerged from fertile soil cultivated through collective effort. The presentation of this manifesto at the Economic and Social Committee in Brussels in November gathered around 500 European policy makers, community-led initiatives, scientists and civil society organisations to take part in ECOLISE's annual policy event. Leading into the next European Parliament elections, ECOLISE made a strong call to translate the Green Deal into local action through enabling policies that will both contribute to increasing its ambition, while empowering citizens to act collectively for sustainability. Moreover, the launch of a Europe-wide advocacy campaign in 2024 was announced, leading up to the European elections.

In addition to the policy and advocacy efforts, ECOLISE was also successful in winning important new contracts and projects that will allow a considerable step-up in strategic action from 2024. Principle among these are the Communities for Climate initiative, a €1.5 million initiative by the EU to support 50 communities across 11 countries, and Funding Fairer Futures, which will allow ECOLISE to establish a €1.6 million Regenerative Communities Fund for regranting to partners and communities.
These, and other new projects and private funding underscores the organisation's expanding footprint and increasing relevance in the field. These projects not only provide essential funding for the endeavours in the years ahead, but also afford the opportunity to hire new team members and enhance professional capabilities.

The expanding footprint also brings new challenges, however. In 2023, ECOLISE continued to address capacity and skills gaps, while also seeking to improve the conditions of team members, who work remotely across Europe. This work will continue in 2024 as will efforts to improve organisational culture and cohesion.

While delving deeper into this report, ECOLISE invites you to journey through the activities carried out in 2023, celebrating the triumphs, acknowledging the challenges, and charting a course forward towards a more sustainable and equitable future.

Communities for Future

Time For Collective Action Manifesto

The *Time for Collective Action Manifesto* is the outcome of a two-year process, involving over 900 people and 140 organisations. ECOLISE launched the manifesto at its main policy event in November 2023: "Making the European Green Deal strong and real: Harnessing the power of community-led initiatives and local governments", with around 500 attendees, including 100 people who attended in person at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels, and around 400 virtual attendees. The event was co-organised by Local Governments for Sustainability, the EESC, and ECOLISE. European Parliament Members Philippe Lamberts and Francisco Guerreiro (European Greens/ EFA) were present and overall welcomed the manifesto, particularly key message #2, which advocates for the "right to have a choice to live sustainably" for everyone.

The event and the launch of the manifesto were the highlight of a long consultation process of positioning community-led initiatives towards the European Green Deal. This has been an ongoing initiative within ECOLISE since 2022. The aim was - and still is - to trigger deep conversations around the way we want to live in community and solidarity, to explore collaboratively what the best framework conditions are for community-led initiatives to thrive, and to build strong alliances, both within ECOLISE and with like-minded partners.

The process involved capacity building, consultation, and consensus-building activities, involving 37 process partners, including both ECOLISE members and external partners such as Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E) (BE) and Climate Chance (FR).

The process started in early 2023, building on the collaborative work done in the framework of the *10 theses towards transformative community-led local development policies* in 2022, involving members and partners. To take this work forward, ECOLISE's advocacy team organised a consultation phase with members and partners in 2023 to extract key policy demands directed towards EU policy makers from the text, laying the foundation for the manifesto.

This consultation phase kicked off in March 2023 with an "Advocacy capacity building" training program held at Koningsteen (BE), with over 40 participants. Supported by ECOLISE's partner, The Good Lobby, an expert training organisation from Brussels (BE), this event fostered collaborative exploration.

A "deepening phase" took place from June to September, during which more than 120 people joined online sessions to discuss key topics such as democracy and the need for a new governance, resourcing and the need for a changed economy, and key narratives for impactful political demands.

A science-policy board, coordinated by Amelie Krug and Tom Henfrey, nourished this process with scientific evidence and facilitated connections with interested scientists. An editorial board, consisting of nine ECOLISE members, refined and validated key narratives and messages throughout this process.

The outcome - the *Time for Collective Action Manifesto* - serves as a policy positioning of community-led initiatives towards the European Green Deal, making it accessible to everyone and aiming to trigger deeper conversations. Examples of how ECOLISE accomplished this in 2023 includes the participation in the highly successful "Beyond Growth" conference in Brussels in May (organised by 20 Members of the European Parliament from five political groups, supported by ECOLISE, with over 7000 attendees) and the follow-up events organised by the office of Philippe Lamberts (European Greens) on 7th and 8th December, where ECOLISE presented the manifesto

and called for partners, or the Degrowth Conference in Zagreb. A highlight was the cooperation with Gaia Education in organising the "Catalysing Communities" event on 19th September in Brussels at the European Parliament.

The manifesto also nourishes ECOLISE's ongoing work in influencing EU policy in consultations - e.g. with major meta networks such as the strategy of Climate Action Network Europe, which now comprises grassroots initiatives and the need for a changed economy - and campaigns such as #RestoreNature, which advocates for strong environmental laws on EU levels, based on community-led initiatives.

The *Time for Collective Action Manifesto* also forms the core of an advocacy campaign, which ECOLISE launched at its main policy event in November 2023, targeting the European elections (6th-9th June 2024). The aim of the campaign is, once again, to trigger deep conversations around the right political framework conditions that community-led initiatives need in order to thrive, to influence policies, mobilise citizens to go vote for strong environmental and social policies, and to build strong alliances within ECOLISE and with external partners. ECOLISE invited its members to become partners of the campaign - more than 30 partners are already supporting it!

Communities for Future Sessions

ECOLISE hosted eight Communities for Future sessions in 2023, which are public webinars aimed at serving the capacity-building and networking needs of the broader network. A diverse range of guest speakers from the network covered topics such as cooperation with local councils, policy positioning of communities towards the EU Green Deal, sustainable building of tiny houses, digital marketing, biodiversity science and policy, regional climate action hubs, Community Climate Coaching, advocacy campaigning, and collaboration with local governments. The recordings of the sessions are available on the CfF website (www.communitiesforfuture.org).

European Day of Sustainable Communities

On September 23rd, ECOLISE celebrated the 7th edition of the European Day of Sustainable Communities (EDSC), an initiative initiated in 2017 to celebrate and showcase the social and ecological innovation within community-led initiatives.

This year, we collaborated with Felicidad Collective, a Spanish creative agency who supported us, along with ECOLISE National Contact Points, in creating a campaign video to call for participation. We launched the hashtag #JoinTheBigTable and communities were invited to share pictures of their celebrations around a table, allowing all communities to sit digitally together. Around 150 pictures from 40 different communities were received.

Communities work tirelessly throughout the year, and it is essential to take the time to celebrate their efforts. Furthermore, it's crucial to recognize the immense value of community-led initiatives in the fight against climate change. These grassroots efforts are often at the forefront of sustainable practices and environmental awareness, serving as inspiring examples of what can be achieved when people come together to build a brighter future for all.

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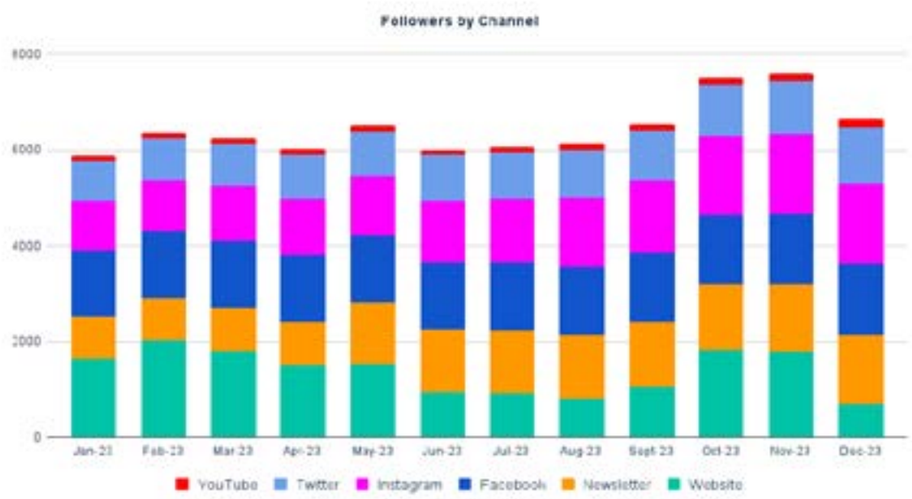
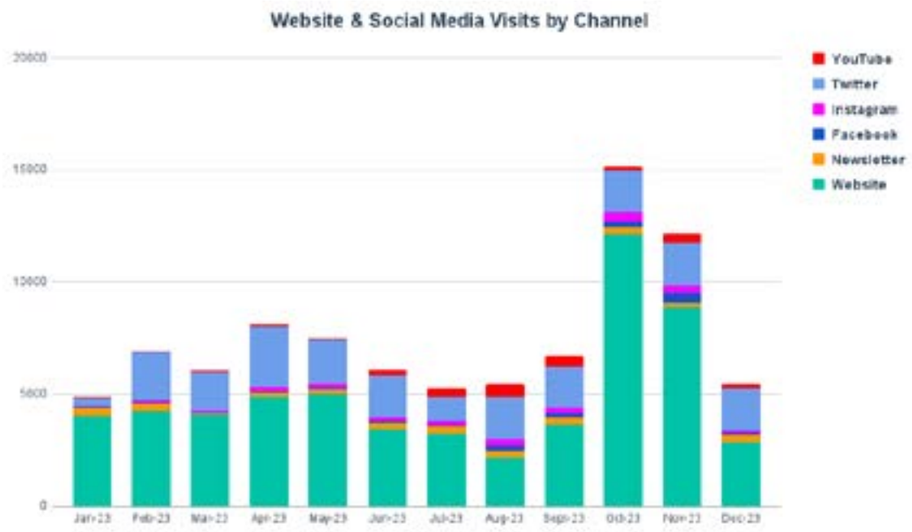
Outreach Statistics

The charts illustrate all the statistics collected throughout the year, providing an overview of the growth in the organisation's social media channels and website visits. Overall, our most notable periods of activity were in October and November, primarily due to the policy event in Brussels, during which the organisation experienced significant growth in followers on Twitter and Instagram. However, YouTube and the Communities for Future website saw comparatively slower growth, while social media users kept rising, albeit slowly and steadily.





Projects

CAMPAIGNers

This year the EU-funded CAMPAIGNers project, an Horizon programme, launched the *Guidebook: Incorporating lifestyle-related pathways and actions into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term strategies*. The project aims to understand the potential consequences deriving from the inclusion of carbon-neutral lifestyle advice in NDCs and national climate strategies, and to operationally implement practical examples to include behavioural aspects of the carbon-neutral lifestyle in the investigated sectors.

Additionally, this guidebook intends to support policy makers and governments in reframing and redirecting their national policies and inform society, which constitutes the final stakeholder of the implemented policies. ECOLISE has been supporting all facets of development, particularly the Amplifier Cities initiative, which gathers a community of practice of cities promoting sustainable behaviour change.

Community Climate Coaches

Community Climate Coaches (CCCs), an Erasmus+ programme, is an approach to train, support and enable community facilitators and catalysts across Europe to coach communities in local resilience in the face of the multiple social and ecological crises, and to seize the opportunities this creates for change. The efforts to promote CCCs continued this year. Physical training sessions took place in January 2023 (Resilience Earth, Catalunya) and March (Cloughjordan, Ireland), with the final resources becoming available in May 2023 on the project's website, including the open-source, wiki-based digital resource called the Regenerative Knowledge Commons.

Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities

The Climate Resilient and Inclusive Cities project (CRIC), an EuropeAid programme, aims to promote climate change awareness and capacity building on mitigation and adaptation plans for 10 Indonesian pilot cities.

ECOLISE's role in the CRIC project is to provide training materials and deliver a training on Bioregional Governance in the Autumn of 2024, addressing the issue of Water Management and Sanitation in the cities of Kupang and

Gorontalo. In early 2023, CRIC's project manager Sara Silva visited both cities to conduct a proper evaluation of the issues, meet with local stakeholders (city agencies, universities and NGOs) and provide initial insights on Nature-based solutions that could be adopted by city planners. The article "Indonesian cities as creative ecosystems?" was published in the Communities for Future website.

Throughout the second half of 2023, ECOLISE has had the privilege to begin working with three network members as its experts in delivering two main outputs for the project. GENOA and Resilience Earth are collaborating in developing and delivering a training on Bioregional Governance in Bali in September 2024, through the expertise of Sarah Queblatin, Erika Zárate and Oscar Gussinyer. ICLEI Indonesia and ReservoAir will be developing a tool in Water and Sanitation focused on Nature-based solutions through the expertise of Sabrina Farah and Medhiansyah Putra.

Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

The Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas project (FLIARA), an Horizon programme, started in January 2023 with a meeting in Brussels, where all consortium members got to know each other for a smooth collaboration and co-creation for the three-year duration of the project. FLIARA aims to create a European-wide rural innovation ecosystem that supports women-led innovative practices in farming and rural areas (based on establishing a Community of Practice, with 20 women innovators as ambassadors at its core). This initiative seeks to elevate the visibility and awareness of existing female-led innovations, emphasising their pivotal role in advancing EU environmental and inclusion policies.

Through FLIARA, the innovative capabilities of women in agriculture and rural settings will be showcased (Visibility Campaign), with a specific emphasis on promoting sustainability across all dimensions - environmental, economic, social, and cultural - as a condition for sustainable rural futures.

Spanning across 10 European countries within four macro-regions, the project encompasses Germany, Ireland, and The Netherlands in the Atlantic region; Romania, Czech Republic, and Slovenia in the Central/ Eastern region; Finland and Sweden in the Nordic/Baltic region; and Italy and Spain in the Mediterranean region.

During the first year, the consortium came together to identify and co-create the conceptual framework of the project. There are two main research contexts delineated: women in agriculture, and women in rural areas, with various relevant concepts identified.FLIARA was presented at the 2023 Global Ecovillage Network Europe Annual Gathering and the topic of rural women innovating sustainability-wise sparked considerable interest.

Regen4All

The purpose of the ReGEN4All project, an Erasmus+ programme, is to serve researchers, practitioners, and adult educators from ecovillages and academia, as well as policy makers at all levels. ReGEN4All aims to make the knowledge gained within and through ecovillages more accessible both for academic research and to inform policy decisions on sustainable lifestyle and regenerative practices.

The project launched the E-Community platform, which includes a matching system between ecovillage researchers and ecovillages, a database that contains a collection of literature about ecovillage research and a code of conduct on how to approach ecovillages as a researcher, as well as guidelines for ecovillages on how to handle researchers conducting research in their communities.

Additionally, the project developed the European Community of Practice, which increased interactions between ecovillagers and ECOLISE policy work, as well as a Communities for Future session in December.

SPARK

The SPARK project, a DEAR programme, brings together a consortium of 20 organisations under the umbrellas of Oxfam and Climate Action Network Europe.

The project aims to raise awareness, increase capacity, and support EU citizens, particularly young people, to build public support for ambitious climate change and development policies which have gender equality at the core. This ensures that everyone enjoys their equal rights and can thrive in harmony with the natural world.

In 2023, ECOLISE delivered five grants to different organisations to deliver climate outreach trainings, conducted

a digital campaign for the European Day of Sustainable Communities, and continued with the 10 theses process, culminating in the launch of the *Time for Collective Action Manifesto* and the outlining of the Advocacy Campaign. ECOLISE also participated in the Ticket to the Future Activity and in the Fixing the Future Festival in Barcelona in October.

The consortium's joint actions have already raised awareness among 30 million people about climate change, development and gender equality.

Tale

In the Transformative Adult Learning for Green Transition (Tale), an Erasmus+ programme, adult education organisations in six EU countries cooperate with green grassroots initiatives in so-called "innovation groups" to co-create learning experiences using transformative methods and contributing to a green transition.

The goal is to explore how we can learn from each other to further green transition in organisations, with learners and in our local communities and neighbourhoods. In this first year, the innovation groups have provided participatory, immersive learning experiences and reflective dialogues about sustainable topics including urban forests, seed diversity, gardening, food preservation, craft-ivism and circular economy.

ECOLISE has contributed to the definition of green transition, grassroots initiatives and transformative learning, made network connections to and brought examples of sustainable community-led initiatives, and ran a workshop with transformative learning and participatory facilitation methods.
Moreover, we have supported and coached the innovation groups with practical and methodological knowledge.

Inclusive Image Bank

ECOLISE kick-started an inclusive image bank funded by Actiris, with the goal of portraying community-led initiatives and their diversity as accurately as possible.

For this purpose, Spanish photographer Eva San Juan was hired to visit ecovillages in Spain and Portugal (Tamera, El Molino de Guadalmesí, Arterra and Sunseed Desert Technology). She described her journey in this blog post, published in the Communities for Future website. ECOLISE wishes to continue developing the image bank in the upcoming years.

Fundraising

The main objectives of the Fundraising domain were to improve financial resilience and fundraising capacity and processes, improving all of them.

We secured a new first funding from the Open Society Foundation, paving the way for the next four years. With this financial boost, ECOLISE was ready to expand its core operations, opening up new opportunities for growth. Meanwhile, the partnership with Porticus flourished, strengthened by a renewed commitment and significant funding. They also worked hand by hand with them to approach new donors.

ECOLISE embarked on the conceptualisation of a groundbreaking initiative – the Regenerative Communities Fund. This ambitious project, set to launch in 2024, aimed to drive positive change on a grand scale, reflecting ECOLISE's commitment to sustainability and community regeneration.

We also developed our first fundraising strategy, emphasising efficiency and transparency, along with a proposal for a fundraising process flow, shared with the team, to ensure more efficiency and transparency in funding application. Based on the strategy, we created a new presentation for donors, which introduces the work of the ECOLISE network to the outside world, and contributed to capacity-building sessions, empowering the ECOLISE team and members with the tools needed to navigate the landscape of fundraising.

The team also embarked on a journey to collect stories of transformation, each narrative a testament to the influence of their work, which we're still working on.

We have been very active applying to EU projects, and were invited to several consortiums: We successfully contributed to the application and co-creation of Communities 4 Climate and Funding Fairer Futures projects. Both of them are directly aligned with our strategy and will start in 2024. ECOLISE was invited to contribute to several Horizon project proposals and two were submitted in 2023. In addition, we also co-led writing the proposal for a CERV call, which was successful.

Network Development

The purpose of ECOLISE as a network is to be a collaborative network for joint action, advocacy and learning to empower and scale up sustainable, transformative, local community-led initiatives all across Europe. The network's mission is to facilitate connections, collaboration, exchange, and capacity building for and with network members, partners and allies to bring value, co-create and cultivate a thriving, impactful network. At its core lies nurturing trusting relationships, value exchanges, enabling communication and building network structures. Highlights of engagement and member collaboration have been working side-by-side with 14 members across three funded projects, eight members participating in the 10 theses policy consultation process as an editorial board, and 13 members contributing as process partners and many members joining as speakers and contributors to various online and in-person events.

Key network initiatives have included:

- Membership Development: ECOLISE has updated membership policies and guidelines, set up an onboarding as well as membership engagement tracking system. The network also celebrated the addition of four new members: ECON, European network of community organising; RIPESS Europe the social solidarity economy network; Jalotus, a transition hub and circular economy centre in Finland; and CEI-Iscte, the Centre of International Studies at the Lisbon University Institute.

- Member's Hours: Besides regular communication via member's updates, ECOLISE has hosted 11 sessions for members to share information, facilitate dialogues, co-develop ideas and answer to arising questions and needs. The most successful formats were project building sessions and policy member's hours, other topics ranged from fundraising to people care, restorative dialogue and the network map.

- Network Mapping: With input from an early adopter group, ECOLISE has developed an interactive network map, encouraging all members to join and make use of. It functions as a database to access member profile information, connections and value flows as well as a visual tool to support network weaving,

development, self-organisation and collaboration. In a practical way, the map can be used to find collaborators for a project, joint advocacy, or to speak at an event, get skilled support, and make connections based on geographic, shared interests, work or policy areas.

- Network Governance: In spring, ECOLISE hosted another online General Assembly with 52 member representatives present to discuss, approve and get consent for the activity report, finances, work plans, budget, new members and election of a Council. For the first time, asynchronous voting was possible. As part of the event, the inspiring documentary Alter Nativas was presented, sharing stories of transition in Spain.

- Network Evaluation: Annually, members are invited to provide feedback about their experiences, value and improvement suggestions for the network through a survey. This is an evaluation tool to assess network health and development (over time) making a quantitative and qualitative assessment of seven areas of network health. Both participation and results have slightly increased compared to last year and we continue learning and cultivating an impact network.

«The network's mission is to facilitate connections, collaboration, exchange, and capacity building for and with network members, partners and allies (...)»

Main events

Advocacy Capacity Building

In March 2023, 30 people, including members of ECOLISE Council and team, member organisations, and local civil society organisation's staff met in Koningsteen, Belgium to attend an Advocacy training co-created with The Good Lobby.

The trainers Giulia Neri and Kelsey Beltz, brought their expertise and provided context of how EU policy making works, gave insights into the European Green Deal and into the way European level politics interact with local levels, and presented the European Green Deal as the EU's flagship policy project and as a potential window of opportunity for transformative change.

Amelie Krug skillfully harvested the Advocacy training, capturing the essence of the workshops, discussions and outcomes and providing the material covered on effective advocacy tools for Community-Led Initiatives (CLIs).

A voice from the training:

"The advocacy training was a wonderful way to reconnect with ECOLISE. Being together with representatives from so many other movements made our work feel so much more tangible and worthwhile! (...) I came away feeling much more clear about the political context we're working in, the opportunities presented by the Green Deal, the way ECOLISE is taking advantage of the current window of opportunity and how GEN Europe can get involved as an ECOLISE member. Thanks to all involved in the training!" – Francesca Whitlock – GEN Europe.

Making the European Green Deal strong and real

ECOLISE's main policy event *Making the European Green Deal strong and real: Harnessing the power of community-led initiatives and local governments* took place on 7 November 2023 at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels. During the event, ECOLISE called on EU policy makers to support a swift localisation of a strong and ambitious European Green Deal, harnessing the power of grassroots initiatives.

ECOLISE also urged policy makers to ensure that citizens have a choice to live sustainably, which is a human right. These are two of seven key policy demands in ECOLISE's *Time for Collective Action Manifesto*, launched at the event.

With half a year remaining before the next European Parliament elections, ECOLISE made a strong call to translate the Green Deal into local action through enabling policies that will both contribute to increasing its ambition while empowering citizens to act collectively for sustainability. Furthermore, ECOLISE announced the launch of a Europe-wide advocacy campaign in 2024, leading up to the European elections.

"Having the right policies, infrastructure and technology in place to enable changes of lifestyles and behaviour can result in a 40-70% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050"

Felix Creutzig
Coordinating Lead Author of the IPCC's 6th Assessment Report, Chapter 5

ECOLISE Core Meeting

Directly after the main policy event in Brussels, ECOLISE had an intense and very rewarding few days at the beautiful community of L'Arbre qui Pousse in rural Belgium with the team, including interns, and Council.

The gathering brought together 20 diverse people from all over Europe to build a more cohesive team, more decentralised governance, perform a first assessment of gender equality in the organisation and work towards a more aligned strategy.

Following many months of internal experiments and reflection on its structures and value systems, this event allowed ECOLISE to move into a grounded phase. Trust is slowly being built to allow the organisation to flow even further.

Organisational Development & Updates

Team Appreciation & Updates

At the beginning of 2023 there were 13 people in the ECOLISE team:
Abdul Otman (Operations manager), Amelie Krug (Policy officer), Duncan Crowley (Community Engagement Officer), Eamon O'Hara (Co-Director), Juan Del Río (Co-Director), Laura Kaestele (Network Weaver), María Sánchez (Strategic Communications & Campaigns), Nina Klein (Policy Lead), Pauliina Helle (CoDirector), Ricardo Silva (Project Manager), Sara Silva (Project Manager and Communications officer), Tim Strasser (Monitoring & Evaluation) and Zsófia Vidak (Administrative Officer).

In January, Anastasia Oprea joined as project manager for the FLIARA project. In May, Ricardo Silva left the team. Ricardo worked between 2021 and 2023, with main responsibilities in project management for the BLAST and CCC projects, and in fundraising support.

ECOLISE continued the process of organisational evolution, notably through the finalisation of the co-director experiment as it was previously defined. At the end of 2023, Pauliina Helle was appointed as director of ECOLISE by the Council, with Eamon O'Hara continuing as co-director to provide additional support.

This strategic decision ensures continuity in the endeavours initiated by them, along with Juan del Río, who served as a co-director throughout 2023. Juan will now transition into the role of project manager for Funding Fairer Futures, ECOLISE's key strategic initiative for 2024-2028.

Some other key contributors were Alicia Stewart-Colvin (temporary People care officer) who curated our new People Care Manual (internal policies); Gisella Reina (Fundraising advisor), who supported our fundraising developments, Jane Feeney (project manager), who supported our work on the EU Smart Villages initiative and edited the final version of the Time For Collective Action Manifesto, as well as Tom Henfrey (co-coordinator of a science-policy board) who contributed to the scientific review of the manifesto.

In 2023, ECOLISE hosted four interns:

- Inés Elvira Pérez (University of Padua): policy intern supporting the 10 theses

policy positioning process and communications tasks
- Andriano Charalambous (Young Entrepreneur funded by the Erasmus program): supporting the EDSC campaign and starting a media contact list.
- Katerina-Shelagh Boucoyannis (European Network Forum Synergies): policy intern supporting events
- Sara Sousa (AICEP Portugal Global): supporting fundraising, policy and communications work.

Appreciation to Inés Elvira, Sara de Sousa and Katerina-Shelagh Boucoyannis without whom ECOLISE's policy work would not have been possible. Special thanks are reserved for Amelie Krug, who joined the policy team in mid 2022, and who passionately supported the policy work, taking leave at the end of 2023 in order to pursue her academic career.

Culture building

In 2023, ECOLISE focused on two key aspects of culture building: the refinement of internal policies and initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion.

One significant endeavour was the implementation of a Diversity Plan, which was co-created and co-financed with the Diversity Department of Actiris,the Brussels Regional Office for Employment. This plan outlines 11 actions during a two-year period to foster diversity and inclusion within ECOLISE.

Throughout 2023, notable actions included:

- Further development of the recruitment procedure, with an emphasis on inclusion
- Collaboration with external experts within the framework of restorative justice - particularly around a series of restorative dialogues. These sessions were offered to network members as well as former team and Council members, who were involved with ECOLISE during a time of internal turmoil in 2021. Over 30 people participated in these sessions.
- Initiation of the creation of an inclusive image bank, utilising photographs sourced from within the network. The aim is to ensure a more accurate representation of the network, portraying real, relatable people. Clear guidelines were established to consistently prioritise diversity and inclusion when using pictures and images in our communication.

Additionally, ECOLISE undertook actions focused on diversity, including the development of an inclusive communication policy and a diversity and inclusion policy. These initiatives were part of a larger project of an ECOLISE People Care Manual, which was published in May. This manual serves as a revised set of internal policies that are customised to the ECOLISE context. With these policies we aimed at centering our organisational values, promoting care and human centeredness and using language that is inclusive and approachable. The current version of the manual includes the following internal policies:

- Code of Conduct
- Wellbeing Policy
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Conflict Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Inclusive Communications Policy

Governance Transformation

The ECOLISE Governance Transformation circle was tasked to lead the ongoing evaluation and development of appropriate governance structures and organisational

practices. Some of the key aims were to facilitate a shift to non-hierarchical organisational structures, and clarifying decision-making processes and accountabilities. The approach to change has been through small, iterative experiments and by bringing focus to constant evaluation and learning. External coaches, Natalia Lombardo and Sean Andrew from the Hum, provided invaluable guidance during this task.

One of the key experiments in 2023 was to move from annual planning to tri-annual cycle plans. Considerable reflection centred on the accountabilities of different domains and governance bodies, such as the Co-directors, the Council and the roles of domain Leads. Within the Inspire team (communications), experimentation occurred with a flat domain structure. Moreover, a governance vision survey was conducted with the intention to set a common horizon for governance developments.

While there is a shared interest in promoting autonomy, participation and distributed leadership, there are still diverse views on how this should look like in practice. The work is ongoing.

A notable accomplishment in 2023 was the successful elevation of the general level of fees in the team, ensuring everyone's contracts for the next year and even growing further in team size and activity level.

Monitoring & Evaluation

During 2023, ECOLISE has been working on developing a more structured monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system that aligns with the high-level strategy and clarifies what quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to measure progress towards intended outcomes, as well as serve to reflect, learn and thereby improve strategies, so as to make work more impactful. The development of this MEL system was delayed due to the longer than expected process for reviewing and clarifying the high-level strategy (see the following section), which is a prerequisite for defining monitoring indicators and methods.

An evaluation focusing specifically on the European Day of Sustainable Communities was conducted, which generated important insights and recommendations, such as the need to develop more systematic theories of change for ECOLISE's strategic initiatives, as a basis for reflecting and evaluating if and how the resources invested actually lead to outcomes that make those investments worthwhile, and how to improve or adapt strategic decision-making processes.

The work on MEL also had a focus on wider societal impacts. The nature of ECOLISE activities in the framework of Communities for Future is to mobilise members and partners around the common goal of mainstreaming community-led action on climate change and sustainability. This encompasses the activities of a much broader set of stakeholders and requires a different approach to MEL (than only focusing on ECOLISE's activities in isolation), involving collaboration across the stakeholders concerned.

Additionally, a review of emerging academic and non-academic evidence of the (potential) impacts of community-led initiatives (CLIs) were collected and organised under a range of 'narratives', or framings of the different kinds of impacts CLIs can have. However, after a few online sessions with members, as well as a session on CLIs impacts at the Transformations Conference, these efforts were put on hold, given the need to focus limited MEL capacity first and foremost on the ECOLISE internal MEL system. The Scale 3D model developed by Tim Strasser, ECOLISE' Monitoring and Evaluation expert, helped to structure the review of impact narratives, by outlining how CLIs and the networks supporting them can contribute to wider, deeper, and longer-lasting impacts.

«The nature of ECOLISE activities in the framework of Communities for Future is to mobilise members and partners around the common goal of mainstreaming community-led action on climate change and sustainability.»

Strategy review

Throughout 2023, the ECOLISE team continued a reflection started in 2022 on operational objectives and priorities, guided by the 2019 strategy. This process helped to support the annual planning and budgeting exercise but it also highlighted different views and interpretations of the ECOLISE mission and strategic goals, which can only be resolved through a deeper reflection and updating of the strategy. This challenge has been taken up by the Council, which in early 2024 set up a working group involving Council and team members to lead a process to undertake a more fundamental review of the 2019 strategy.

ECOLISE Council

In the General Assembly in May 2023, ECOLISE conducted its formal voting session for the Council election. Four current members retained their positions, while three candidates vied for 1-3 available positions.
All candidates were approved and brought in a stronger feminine leadership:

- Kate Munro from Scottish Communities Climate Action Network - newly elected
- Merushe Zeneli from PVN Albania - also newly elected
- Leonor Afonso from GEN Europe - re-elected for a second term

The following Council members continued in their role:

- Mieke Elzenga, co-president, from GEN Europe and Liberta Care Foundation
- Claudian Dobos, co-president, from Romania in Transition
- Justin Stevens from Arkbound Foundation
- Lina Cirvinskiene from Baltic Ecovillage Network

The Council met at least every month, for multi-hour sessions, to discuss and review organisational operations.
In addition to this, Council members partook in various working groups, helping the ECOLISE team in operations and general oversight.
The Council was called upon to review various high level processes, including with respect to co-director experiment and nomination, and also helped support employment selections for new team members.

Council engagement on our collaborative platform - Slack - was high, with regular contributions, together with consistent weekly involvement with team meetings.

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