



Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative

A conference and 25 promising initiatives
to celebrate the 25th anniversary of AEIDL



Contents

25 years of local development	3
Rethinking the European project from the perspective of citizens and local communities	5
25 promising initiatives	16
A great success	68
ALL Europe Shall Live!	72
“Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” – Act One	87

Contributors:

Chris Brooks, Yves Champetier, Michael Dower, Marjorie Jouen, Márta Márczis, François Saint-Ouen

AEIDL would like to thank the Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the initiatives, speakers, stakeholders and other participants who contributed to the success of the conference and the production of this publication.

Journalism: Jean-Luc Janot

Editing: Yves Champetier, Jon Eldrige, Jean-Luc Janot, Wendy Jones, Eamon O’Hara

Layout: Kaligram

Photos (pages): AEIDL (3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 79, 80, 83, 84, 87, 88), initiatives (8, 12, 15, 18-67, 75, 77, 78, 82, 85).

Cette publication est également disponible en français.

25 years of local development

AEIDL was born at an important moment in recent European history. Significant changes were occurring in 1988.

In June 1988, the Commission of Jacques Delors gave a new momentum to the process of the European integration by finalising the conditions for the internal market, also laying the foundations for the single European currency.

In the same year, the European Commission Communication on *“The Future of Rural Society”* was published, presenting the first strong statement on the need for a European rural development policy. This led to the setting up of the LEADER Programme, which was the first time the ‘bottom-up’ approach was used in EU policy and practice, strengthening local citizen initiatives across Europe. AEIDL would later play an important role in LEADER, raising its profile across much of rural Europe.



Márta Márczis

Also in 1988, in a very different context, President Gorbachev introduced his policy of perestroika. It was the time of the Second Solidarity in Poland, when Lech Wałęsa scored a public-relations victory, and the year when civil society found its voice again in Central and Eastern Europe, leading to political change in the communist countries.





On a warm summer evening in 1988, Bruce Springsteen was on stage in East Berlin playing in front of 300 000 East Germans. He stepped up to the microphone and told the crowd why he had come to the city: *“I’m not here for or against any government,”* he said. *“I’ve come to play rock n roll for you in the hope that one day all the barriers will be torn down.”* The following year the Berlin wall was torn down.

After 25 years, we feel that the time has come again to tear down some symbolic walls and reinvent the Europe that we love, a Europe which is, in the proper use of these adjectives, ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive’. The “Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” conference that we organised on 19-20 February in Brussels, and the 25 “promising initiatives” that it showcased, are an important first milestone towards achieving this ambition.

Márta Márczis
President of AEIDL



A contribution by AEIDL

Rethinking the European project from the perspective of citizens and local communities

The European project is in need of renewal. A growing disconnect between the EU and its citizens threatens the democratic legitimacy of the EU.



▲ Conference participants in front of the European Parliament (19 February 2014).

AEIDL, the European Association for Information on Local Development, was founded in 1988 by like-minded individuals who believed that European integration could make a positive contribution to citizenship and to the sustainable development of local communities. Its objective was to contribute to bringing Europe closer to its citizens and to promote

interaction at local level, between all those who wanted to open up new development opportunities.

Over the last 25 years, AEIDL has seen significant changes in Europe, marked by the search for that elusive equilibrium that Jacques Delors defined as, *“competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens and solidarity that unites.”*

Since its creation, AEIDL has been an active stakeholder in various policies introduced by Europe. Policies that targeted local initiatives, promoting communication and exchange at European level, identifying good practices, strengthening local capacities, empowering local actors, supporting cooperation, exploiting and disseminating knowledge, and evaluating results.

Among the initiatives we have been involved in over the years are: the Local Development and Employment Initiatives (LDEIs), the Rural Carrefours, the Territorial Employment Pacts, rural development policies including the LEADER Community Initiative and its equivalent programme for fisheries areas (FARNET), the EQUAL Community Initiative, numerous cooperation programmes, urban development initiatives (URBAN, URBACT), the EU's main environment programme, LIFE, the local development aspects of the EU Cohesion policy, and ESF initiatives focusing on social enterprise and the social economy.

These different initiatives have contributed to building an open, inclusive and imaginative Europe – a proud achievement for countless local actors and project promoters who have received EU support for their projects. These people are proud to be involved in the construction of a community unique in the world, rich in diversity and multiculturalism.

Economic, social and territorial cohesion

The Single European Act, signed in 1986 in response to growing euroscepticism in the face of the oil crisis and the massive restructuring of whole sectors – coalmining, steelmaking, shipbuilding, textiles, gave the EU a new competence, that of “economic and social cohesion”. In concrete terms, this involved a doubling of the Structural Funds in 1988 and their concentration on the most underdeveloped regions.

In 2007, the territorial dimension, which is at the heart of all AEIDL's actions, gained stronger recognition. Complementing the principle of economic and social cohesion, the Lisbon Treaty added “territorial cohesion”, the aim of which was to build on the strengths of each Member State of the EU, enabling them to make the greatest possible contribution to sustainable development and European integration.

Despite the difficulties encountered, the results are there for all to see: an unprecedented transformation in Member States, high-quality infrastructure in all regions, including those at the very periphery of the EU, a major reduction in disparities between countries, a significant drop in unemployment rates, and a European social model serving as an example for the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, over this 25 year period there has also been tensions and crises, in Europe and elsewhere in the world, highlighting the weaknesses of our economic system. Globalisation has gone hand-in-hand with massive deregulation, bowing to the myth that “the market”¹ could solve the problems of global development.

Nevertheless, growth continued in our Western societies, helping us to forget that it was nurtured to a large extent by the dysfunctionality it gave rise to: by social inequalities, and by unlimited exploitation of natural resources, with an unsuspected impact on climate change. But it cannot be said that we were not forewarned. We only need to recall the warning of Club of Rome in the early 1970’s or, more recently, of Al Gore, the 2007 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his fight against global warming.

¹ *From the 1980’s onwards, the “Washington Consensus” has served as a basis for interventions of major international organisations, advocating the liberalisation of trade and financial markets, the privatisation of state enterprises and deregulation.*

Unchecked globalisation and weaknesses in the European construction

The subprime crisis sparked by the failure of Lehman Brothers in 2008 and the subsequent sovereign debt crisis sparked a meltdown of the system. A third crisis – and one with the potential to have a much more ground impact, is the ecological crisis. Yet responses to this crisis, and proposals for transitional policies, remain sadly lacking in the face of recession, national egoism and conservatism.

Unchecked globalisation, an increasingly inequitable distribution of wealth, a financial system without proper controls, and property speculation leading to unsustainable growth – all these have produced a situation that is unprecedented since the 1930s.

This situation has been exacerbated by the fragility of the European project, and the difficulty in choosing between deepening and enlarging, and between the “open market” and truly common policies. Ambitious initiatives such as the single currency were undertaken, though without – at least at that time – adequate governance instruments.



“We need to think about how to influence the mutation and how to create structures and rules which mitigate the perversities of the system and which encourage behaviours by individuals, companies and communities which innovate behaviourally to respond to the problems of the future. In this sense local initiatives are very important. They represent a large pool of innovation and experimentation which will be invaluable in meeting the challenges of the future.”

*Chris Brooks,
Expert in international economic cooperation*



▲ Schoolchildren in a windmill in Samsø, Denmark.

In general, Europe is suffering from decision-making mechanisms that are difficult to understand for the majority of citizens. Even if major progress has been made, especially in boosting the role of the European Parliament, the EU is still seen as distant by European citizens, and in many countries there is a great temptation to blame “Brussels” for everything that goes wrong!

The Europe to which we aspire is in great danger – unemployment is exploding, jobs are becoming increasingly insecure, social and environmental dumping is commonplace, populism and protectionism are gaining ground, and citizens are losing confidence in their leaders, both at national and European level.



*“Initiative implies the desire to transgress.
Innovation is a successful disobedience.”*

*Michel Dupoirieux, Union régionale des Sociétés
coopératives et participatives (SCOP)
de Languedoc-Roussillon, France*



"I do not know if we will have 'smart, sustainable and inclusive' growth, but our common aspiration could be to build a 'smart, sustainable and inclusive' European Union and of course, because both are closely related, contribute to a 'smart, sustainable and inclusive' world."

Yves Champetier, AEIDL

Unprecedented changes

The world has changed radically over the last decade and new ways of doing things are needed. As Albert Einstein said, *"We cannot solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions."*

Europe is going through a fundamental change, associated with the globalisation of trade and information, the emergence of new world power structures and unprecedented environmental challenges, notably major climate change and a sharp decline in biodiversity.

In March 2010, the European Commission presented its new 10-year strategy for getting the European economy back on track.

Entitled "Europe 2020", its aim is to promote "smart, sustainable and inclusive" growth.

Given the slump that now seems to be gripping most of the continent, these objectives appear extremely ambitious and represent a formidable challenge:

- › when entire sectors of the European economy are devastated and when many areas have lost all their economic activities;
- › when the transition to a green economy and combating climate change receive such little attention, and when biodiversity is in serious decline;
- › when unemployment is hitting more than 11% of Europe's working population, and more than 50% of under-25s in Spain and more than 60% in Greece are out of work. According to Eurostat figures for 2011, 27% of children under the age of 18 were exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusion, with the proportion rising to 52% in Bulgaria, 49% in Romania and even 38% in Ireland. In 2012, more than 114 million people (25% of the EU population) were threatened by poverty or social exclusion;
- › when the expected growth is continually postponed.



"I hope that we, as gypsy entrepreneurs, will also get opportunities in our country, and we will be allowed to do more than pass in front of the police and bow as they expect us to do. Instead of this we would like to work without prejudice."

*Imre "Zorro" Mata,
Kegyetlen social cooperative, Hungary*

Has the time come to use "smartness, sustainability and inclusion" to look for new ways forward?

In the absence of any clear timelines for sustainable growth, has the time not come to leverage "smartness, sustainability and inclusion" in the search for new ways of doing things?

New thoughts abound in this area, but unfortunately they are all too often obscured by the dominant thinking – even though "yesterday's solutions" are indisputably insufficient to overcome the challenges we are faced with.

In the 1970's, Ignacy Sachs came up with the concept of "eco-development", the book, *"The Limits to Growth"*, was published at the request of the Club of Rome, and Paul Schumacher popularised the concept, *"Small is beautiful"*.

In 1995, Jeremy Rifkin wrote in his book, *"The End of Work"*, that we need to announce the transition to a post-market economy, to define new forms of business and new ways of distributing income. This requires strong action in two areas: reducing working time and developing the 'third sector', in which people organise themselves in communities providing a growing proportion of the services they need.

New concepts are now appearing, such as "prosperity without growth", "simple living", or "transition initiatives".

Joseph E. Stiglitz regularly alerts Europeans to the damage caused by excessive liberalisation and growing income inequality, pointing to the ineffectiveness of austerity policies increasingly becoming the "suicide of Europe", and the need to look for alternatives.

"There is a serious danger of a rise in poverty, unemployment and xenophobic discourse without anything being done about it", said Michael D. Higgins, President of the Republic of Ireland.

And is it possible to ignore the conclusions of the World Social Forum (“Another world is possible”) held on 26 – 30 March 2013 in Tunis, even if everything discussed there seems a little utopic?

“The Assembly hopes that civil society actors will coordinate their actions in the best possible way, enabling all inhabitants of our planet to regain their rights and replace an economic system based on individual selfishness, the plundering of natural resources, competition, male domination and war, by one based on fraternity, resource conservation, cooperation and peace among all people.”²

Put in a nutshell, what we really need are practical ways to give hope to young people in the 18 – 30 age range, those hit most by the economic downturn and the rise of ostracism and cynical selfishness.

² http://miramap.org/IMG/pdf/Declaration_Ass_Conv_ESS-FSM-2013.pdf

Citizens’ initiatives, bearers of hope

In the face of the crisis, and in the face of failed economic models and disenchantment with the lack of change, fragile local initiatives are emerging, showing that there is hope:

- › “short circuits” are becoming increasingly common, with farmers and fishermen selling directly to local customers;
- › local trading systems, bartering, local currencies, and time-banking are emerging;
- › networks of entrepreneurs are being developed, giving priority to inter-relations, promoting local trade and constituting critical masses to tackle new markets;
- › in the context of voluntary “social and environmental responsibility” policies, companies are increasingly taking action against exclusion and becoming involved in finding solutions to environmental problems;



“We are now in a different era, which some have called post-modern, but which in the view of global environmental issues, I prefer to call the anthropocene. The perfect response to challenges of this era is the man or woman who participates in local development, which could be called the cooperative homo localicus. Getting involved in a strategy to promote the cooperative homo localicus, rather than the individualistic homo economicus, contributing to Ulysses victory over Polyphemus, the Cyclops... This would be a great ambition for the next 25 years!”

*Marjorie Jouen,
Special Adviser at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*



“Raval is a socially responsible territory. We enforce values like: tolerance, acknowledgment and respect towards others, solidarity, shared responsibility, commitment, participation, feeling of belonging, sustainability and civility.”

Elisa Covelo O'Neill, Fundació Tot Raval, Spain

- › through social networks, new forms of trade, solidarity and mobilisation are appearing;
- › new forms of entrepreneurship are emerging and developing: social enterprises, citizen enterprises, cooperatives and network enterprises. The European Commission, in particular via its Social Business Initiative, wants to help create an environment that favours the development of a solidarity-based social economy in Europe;
- › social innovations are to be found in many fields, promoted at the local level, but in the context of support programmes at European, national or regional levels;

▼ *Intercultural neighbourhood meeting organised by Tot Raval, Barcelona.*



- › citizens are mobilising in support of these initiatives: on the financial side for instance, we are seeing a range of new initiatives, from tontine systems, to “crowd funding” and “business angels”;
- › local authorities, local associations, networks (“slow cities”, “cool cities”) are working to promote “cities or territories in transition” through local climate protection programmes, energy initiatives, eco-villages, eco-districts and the “re-localisation” of business.

Focusing on such aspects as proximity, energy transition and new forms of governance, these initiatives are driven by groups of citizens in search of alternatives, often without the help of institutions, whether local, regional, national or European. Once started, a large number of them are seeing their further development backed by government policies, often at a European level.

Helping to identify and propagate new initiatives

Radical changes or forms of transition or policy adjustment, generated by the necessary energy transformation, the urgent need for action to combat climate change, the duty to safeguard future generations, the need to find new ways of sharing work, “social and environmental responsibility” for everyone, and the evolution of new local development models focused on “voluntary simple living”, all offer a wide range of possibilities for citizen initiatives.

Aware of these challenges and opportunities, it is AEIDL’s ambition to identify new initiatives emerging at the local level and within civil society, to decode early signs of social innovation, to distinguish between legitimate indignation, desperate anger (all too often exploited by extremists of all colours), and everyday inventions of new collective values.

By bringing people together, whether physically or virtually, whether within or between territories, whether at regional, national, European or international level, AEIDL aims to support the citizen-based co-construction of new practices, new



“The top-down process can surely create the institutional framework, the shape, but not the content of a European citizenship. This can be done only bottom-up, not from Brussels, by a myriad of civic initiatives which will create – or re-create – basic communities.”

*François Saint-Ouen,
François Saint-Ouen, Secretary General
of CEC (Centre Européen de la Culture)*

public policies and new tools, which can be made available to those who understand that change does not merely involve revamping Einstein's "yesterday's solutions", but requires innovative solutions from conceptual, ideological and political ideas still to be invented.

We need to keep our ears and eyes open for these faint yet hopeful signals from all those people on the working, often under difficult circumstances, to develop new responses to our needs.

We see it as our job to identify these initiatives that are still untested, sometimes perceived as being a bit radical or far fetched, to make them known, to help them to network, to identify the lessons and to establish a virtuous circle of solutions and hope.

We also want to help implement resource-centred networks, allowing us to identify, document and disseminate the new know-how needed to make this seismic transformation of our society a success.

A grassroots overhaul of the European project, based on cooperation between actors and between territories

We are convinced that local initiatives, citizen involvement, social innovation and experimentation, the identification of and respect for shared assets, solidarity between regions here and elsewhere, and the invention of new forms of multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, can all contribute to building the Europe we aspire to – a Europe rich in the diversity of its landscapes, its communities and its cultures, open to the world, and striving for a new economic and social equilibrium.

Twenty-five years of experience in local development have taught us a lot about the inventiveness of local communities when public and private and community actors get together and start listening to what is happening in their areas, and, jointly, trying to find solutions to the problems posed, with a view to constructing – on a local level – a better society.

In the face of unprecedented change and the need to reinvent the future ("tomorrow's solutions"), what is now needed more than anything is to restore hope and the capacity to act, to listen to the disaffected, to those

"We have been given the unique opportunity to live in an extraordinary place. Our responsibility, which is also a pleasure, is to take care of it – the plants, birds, animals. It is our heritage and our gift to the next generations. We know that we all have to work hard to care for nature but also for people – society, the economy. This is true development."

Marta Kamińska,

Partnership for the Barycz Valley, Poland





▲ “Green way” in the “Valley of the Carp”, Poland.

whose lack of hope makes them silent, to support initiatives, and to bring together all those wishing to innovate.

The challenge now is to promote citizen involvement, to support and encourage all those who – whether in the public, private, or community and voluntary sector – are helping to open up new perspectives at local level: regional projects, business and social entrepreneurship projects based on solidarity, alternative development projects using local resources, local trading systems, local climate action plans, etc.

This requires that we contribute to a renewal of local democracy and to empower local communities to take their future into their own hands.

That we support all policies and programmes likely to promote citizen and territorial creativity, with a special focus on “community-led local development”, the term now commonly used by the European institutions.

That we encourage and facilitate synergies and cooperation between actors at local, regional, national, European and international level, with a view to enriching the collective discourse and progressively constructing the tools needed for ecological and socio-economic transition and the construction of new forms of solidarity.

That we experiment with the implementation of these innovative approaches in all territories, whether rural, coastal, urban or suburban, where groups of citizens, public and private stakeholders are willing to act and innovate.

That we have confidence in our culture, and in the intelligence of communities and territories and in their capacity to address the economic, environmental and societal challenges we face, and help rebuild the European project. ■



25 promising initiatives

The following 25 initiatives were presented at the AEIDL conference, “Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” (Brussels, 19-20 February 2014).

Social cohesion

- ① ‘Sustainable Neighbourhoods’ (Brussels, Belgium) 18
- ② Tot Raval promoting social cohesion (Barcelona, Spain) 20
- ③ ‘Le Zeybu’, a fair trade market (Eybens, France) 22
- ④ Open City Museum (Bolzano, Italy) 24
- ⑤ Gardening for good (Porto, Portugal) 26

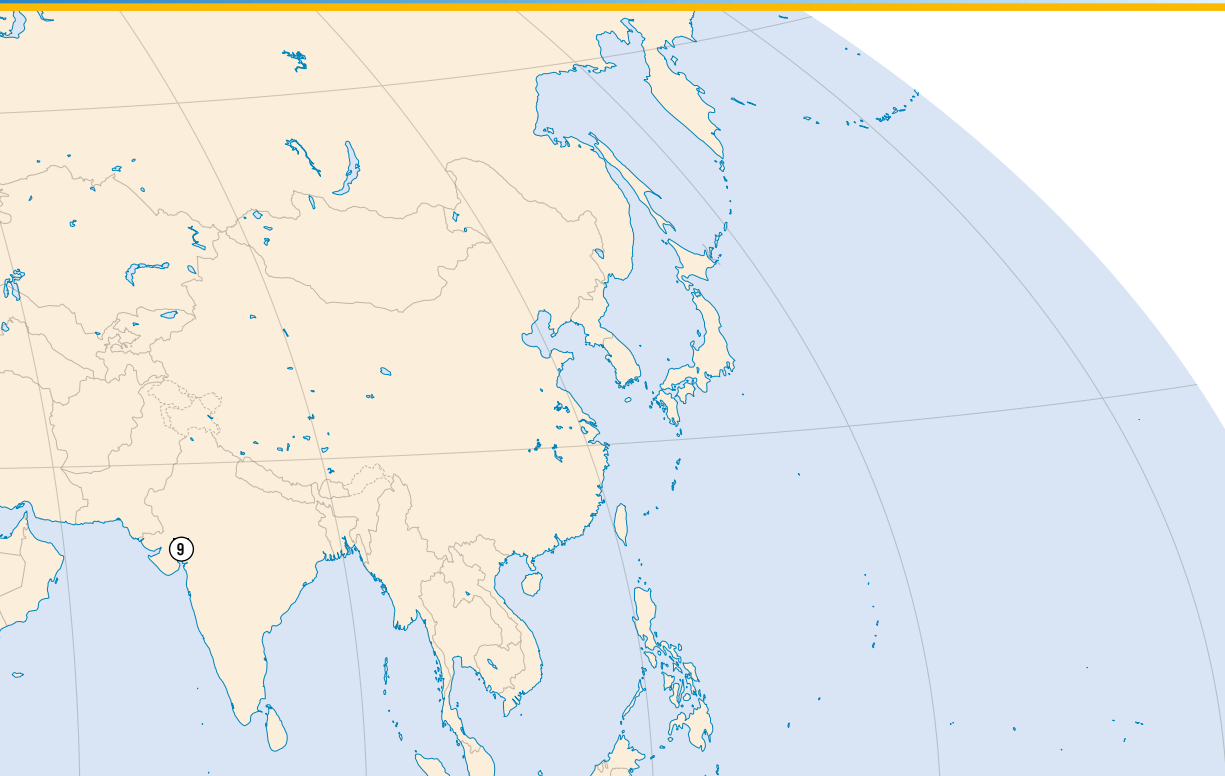
Inclusion of disadvantaged groups

- ⑥ Solidarity with evicted Roma families (Cluj-Napoca, Romania) 28
- ⑦ Together for each other (Fulókércs, Hungary) 30
- ⑧ Social agriculture for young people (Roccastrada, Italy) 32

- ⑨ SEWA, for self-employed women (Gujarat, India) 34
- ⑩ Empowering rural women in Kavar (Bitlis, Turkey) 36

Social economy

- ⑪ Community-led ‘Locality’ development (United Kingdom) 38
- ⑫ A cooperative business centre (Dortmund, Germany) 40
- ⑬ REALIS – A network for social innovation (Languedoc-Roussillon, France) 42
- ⑭ Social Innovation Torino (Turin, Italy) 44
- ⑮ Cooperation, key to Southill regeneration (Limerick, Ireland) 46
- ⑯ Job opportunities for all (Karditsa, Greece) 48



Environment and transition

- ⑰ Europe's Renewable Energy Isle (Samsø, Denmark) 50
- ⑱ ECOLISE, the European Network for Community-Led initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability 52
- ⑲ Transition Town Totnes (Totnes, United Kingdom) 54
- ⑳ A landfill transformed into a park (Belgrade, Serbia) 56

Area-based development

- ㉑ The Valley of the Carp (Lower-Silesia, Poland) 58
- ㉒ Local development in Lapland (Sodankylä, Finland) 60
- ㉓ Building bridges in rural Röstånga (Scania, Sweden) 62
- ㉔ Regional brand boosts rural development (Nitra, Slovakia) 64
- ㉕ Latvia's Rural Communities Parliament (Latvia) 66

Promoting Sustainable Neighbourhoods in Brussels



Residents and users of more than 40 separate districts in Brussels (Belgium) have embraced a sustainable, citizen-led initiative, '*Quartiers durables citoyens*', aimed at improving their neighbourhoods.



The initiative is being run by the Capital region administrative authority for the environment, Bruxelles Environnement. Since 2008 it has launched annual calls for a diversity of local community projects. The idea is to encourage those living or working in Brussels' districts to become collectively involved in projects promoting various environmental or urban improvements. Among others, these issues cover energy conservation, waste reduction, air quality, more efficient use of spaces, greener areas and strengthening social cohesion.

Greener and more friendly

To date, around 40 Brussels' districts have signed-up to the process, which is open to all citizens of a particular neighbourhood, as well as representatives of the public and private sectors locally. There are various types of support for the projects. Neighbourhoods can, for instance, benefit from the services of a professional coach to help them develop a collective approach or to establish an action plan. Communication tools and financial support and/or expertise are also available.

Neighbourhoods are supported in different ways, depending on their needs, over a period of approximately 24 months. Examples of actions include a neighbourhood trading and recycling centre, a shared facility for bread-making as well as a variety of schemes to encourage 'urban walking' and the shared discovery and exploration of local areas. Elsewhere, there have been projects to develop greener spaces through, for example greening of roof areas, meeting areas or various improvements to social housing – saving energy, or transforming a into a vegetable garden promoting organic produce.

Collective action

The neighbourhood projects are typically managed by a group of five to 10 highly motivated local residents. This core team is then usually extended by a further 20-50 people who are regularly involved at different stages (e.g. the call for tenders for projects, mobilisation phase, project development etc). Collaboration is actively encouraged e.g. developing projects with public partners, local associations, cultural centres local shopkeepers etc.

Such partnerships are a key element of the call for proposals for projects. Moreover, the shared involvement of as many stakeholders as possible will help to assure the sustainability and stability of actions and to generate innovate and creative ideas.

Finally, in order to ensure support for the maximum number of initiatives within the limits of available resources, a participatory budgetary system has recently been introduced for the exploration and allocation of available financial resources and other aid to the districts. Every year this process is enriched by the sharing of experiences and best practices of previous projects.

Quartiers durables citoyens

(Brussels, Belgium)

Contact: Louison Hellebaut

Email:

lhellebaut@environnement.irisnet.be

Website:

www.quartiersdurablescitoyens.be
and www.bruxellesenvironnement.be/quartiersdurables



Tot Raval promoting social cohesion in a district of Barcelona



Tot Raval is a community-based foundation working on numerous projects to improve the quality-of-life and social cohesion among the inhabitants of Raval, one of Barcelona's most disadvantaged districts.



The Raval district of Barcelona is one of the neighbourhoods with the highest population density in Europe: 50 000 people live in an area of just over one square kilometre almost half of whom are of foreign origin. The socio-economic situation of the population is among the lowest of the city.

On the other hand, the community has a vast network of services, associations and collectives that for a number of years, have invested and worked to improve the area and adapt to its constant evolution and diversity.

Its model of evolution serves as a demonstration for other territories and European cities that share similar challenges.

Mutual respect

The Tot Raval foundation's main activities are focused on the development of community work in various areas including social, educational, cultural, occupational, economic and commercial. Key priorities are to promote mutual respect among the different communities living or working in the community and, importantly, to fight against any perceived xenophobia.

Tot Raval pursues its shared community work (e.g. in 2012 it ran 25 projects and sponsored 55 others) with innovative strategies to contribute to the local development and generation of a social economy through the involvement of everyone in the neighbourhood. For example, in one year alone (2012) more than 300 organisations and over 5 000 people were directly involved in its projects. An estimated 39 000 people benefited from these activities.



Quality-of-life

Among various actions, a priority objective is the improvement of the quality-of-life of Raval's children and teenagers, and in particular, fighting educational failure. This is an activity that brings together more than 30 groups working jointly in areas such as improving reading and supporting schools.

Enhancing job opportunities is another focus. Here a work network, "Xarxa Laboral del Raval" has been established involving over 50 businesses and/or potential employers. The aim is to encourage job placements and mentoring etc.

Among others, the foundation places great emphasis in steering the dynamics and social cohesion of the community

through participation in the design and execution of various cultural activities. A notably success is the Raval culture festival "*Festival de cultura*".

The foundation also places a high priority on inter-cultural work through work groups and, for instance, the shared celebration of different religious festivals.

Finally, another important focus is on improving healthcare in the community. Here, the foundation is working on the development of an action plan promoting healthcare for Raval's residents. More than 350 healthcare professionals are involved in this initiative.



Tot Raval Foundation

(Barcelona, Spain)

Contact: Elisa Covelo O'Neill

Email: ecovelo@totraval.org

Website: www.totraval.org

‘Le Zeybu solidaire’, a fair trade market for Eybens



To combat the closure of their food stores, residents of a district in the town of Eybens (France) have launched a cooperative, fair trade market for local farm produce. The project was a winner of the 2013 REVES European Excellence Award.



Eybens is a town of some 9,000 inhabitants, near Grenoble, in the department of Isère in south-eastern France. Faced with the closure of many of their local food shops, residents of the Maisons Neuves district started the community-led co-operative project, “Les Amis du Zeybu”.

Launched in 2009, the concept is simple: namely it aims to meet a demand locally, for quality food produce at reasonable prices. Additional goals are to ensure ‘fair trade’ for both producers and purchasers and to be

environmentally sustainable e.g. by keeping transport costs to a minimum and ensuring the good management of any waste.

Solidarity

Held on two Tuesdays per month the Zeybu market sells certified locally-produced farm food. Distribution is organised by member volunteers. Meanwhile, customers who are all Zeybu members, collect their pre-ordered goods (selected in advance via the Internet). They use a special credit card and ‘currency exchange’ system.



An innovative social aspect is that as well as supplying the ordered goods, producers can, if they wish, also donate an additional 10% of their products free of charge. If requested, this can be added to a customer's original order and paid for at the market with the card. Any money raised is then donated to a local association that credits the accounts of local people in difficulty. This means they too can collect pre-ordered items on market day using the card just like any other member. Importantly, there is no stigma attached as they are not identified.

Widening social links

Various other social activities have been developed around the Zeybu fair trade market. These include workshops focused on bread making (the Zeybu bakery), events such as a Christmas market and music festival and training courses to teach children about environmental issues.

Finally, the project has attracted widespread interest and support regionally, nationally and internationally. It was a winner of the 2013 REVES European Excellence Award, organised by the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy. It was also recognised as a 'Social Innovation Village' at the Social and solidarity economy (ESS in French) convention held in Paris, in June 2011.

'Les Amis du Zeybu'

(Eybens, Rhône-Alpes, France)

Contact: Jean-Jacques Pierre,
President

Email: lesamisduzeybu@gmail.com

Website: www.lesamisduzeybu.fr/

OCM broadens 'museum' concept for Alto Adige citizens



Open City Museum (OCM) is a participatory and community-led initiative to promote the arts and a mutual understanding of the diversity of cultures of the people of the autonomous province of South Tyrol in northern Italy.



Arts for social cohesion

South Tyrol, also known by its Italian name *Alto Adige*, is an autonomous province in northern Italy. The province covers an area of 7 400 square kilometres and has a population of around 500 000 inhabitants. The majority are of Austro-Bavarian heritage and speak German. Around a quarter speak Italian as their first language (mainly

concentrated on the two largest cities Bolzano and Merano) and a small minority have Ladin as their mother language.

The percentage of people whose families have migrated to the region is around 9%, suggesting that the already diverse population has further diversified in recent years. The role of diversity thus has a strong influence in all aspects of everyday life and an important influence on youth and cultural policies.

OCM uses the arts as a key instrument to promote social cohesion in the province. It also broadens an understanding of the term 'museum' to include public spaces promoting active citizenship. It is mainly being promoted in the province's capital, Bolzano, and in the municipalities of Bressanone and Chiusa. It aims to involve all citizens, but particularly young people and those whose families have migrated to the region, and to promote mutual understanding through the arts.

Cultural diversities

Funded by the municipalities, the University of Bolzano, particularly the Department of Education, and the private sector, the OCM activities include events promoting inter-cultural education, participatory art, public art initiatives, workshops, exhibitions and talks. To reach as wide an audience as possible, these take place not only in traditional venues such as the local museums or art galleries, but also on the streets and in other private and/or unused spaces.

OCM started in 2011 with a community-led art project 'Cultural diversities in Chiusa'. This was a photo-exhibition featuring people who have migrated to the city. It included tours given by young migrants in their mother languages, as well as a Henna painting workshop and a family photo-session on a public piazza.

In 2013 in Bolzano, OCM organised an arts-based community development project, which concluded with an open-air photo exhibition, in collaboration with the Oltrisarco civic centre. The exhibition combined portraits of unknown people from the archives of a local photographer with portraits of 'new' residents with a migrant background.

Finally, this year (i.e. 2014), OCM is launching a platform to encourage creativity, especially among young people: 'Young Futuremakers' will promote and celebrate diverse forms of active citizenship. For example, there will be a series of artistic outdoor events, organised by young people, in Bressanone.

Open City Museum (OCM)

(Alto Adige / Südtirol, Italy)

Contact: Martha Jimenez Rosano

Email: martha.jimenez@cuartel.de

Website: www.cuartel.de



Gardening for good in Porto



Residents and local communities have joined an innovative and practical scheme to help create numerous new kitchen gardens in the suburbs of the region of Porto (Portugal).



The 'Horta à Porta' collective gardening project for the growing of organic vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs etc is the brainchild of LIPOR – a waste treatment organisation for eight of the region's 11 municipalities. The idea is through gardening to encourage people to return to their roots (i.e. to traditional values and cultures of the land) to build active involvement and to mobilise and engage local communities.

Launched in 2004, the new community gardens are found mainly in the northern suburbs of the metropolitan region of Porto (population c. 2 million) in *Porto, Matosinhos, Maia, Povoia de Varzim* and *Vila do Conde*.

Waiting list

With a total budget of around €240 000, the project is co-financed by the EU's LIFE+ programme and Cohesion Fund and by LIPOR. To date, there are 23 gardens covering a total of four hectares – with a large-scale increase forecast in the near future as more and more local residents and communities express an interest in becoming involved. According to LIPOR, there are more than 1 000 people on a waiting list to become involved in one or other of the green areas.

The project works on the basis of an expression of interest from local individuals, communities or associations to form a new 'Horta à Porta' garden within the network. Once accepted onto the scheme, each garden is then run as a separate entity i.e. with its own specific objectives and spatial context. Importantly, however, strategies are developed in partnership with the other gardens and with technical guidance, support and training from LIPOR. For example, professional gardening and composting experts are available, as well as recycling training and assistance in decision-making.



Community dynamic

There is a strong community dynamic throughout the network of gardens. While the production and management of each individual plot are individual responsibilities, overall responsibilities are collective and, in some cases, virtually self-managing. Exchange of produce between growers is also encouraged, rather than their sale – helping to promote mutual recognition and an overall enhancement of gardening.

Finally, the gardens have been very well-received by the public and by local communities. Residents in the district of Maia (on the edge of Porto), for instance, were interviewed about their user satisfaction.

Many families emphasised their importance to the community. Moreover, one interviewee reported that she had become increasingly estranged from her daughter over a period of 25 years. The garden, however, has changed this and brought them back together in a new context.

Horta à Porta

(Porto, Portugal)

Contact: Ana Lopes

Email: ana.lopes@lipor.pt

Website: www.lipor.pt/pt/educacao-ambiental/horta-da-formiga/horta-a-porta/

Solidarity with evicted Roma families leads to local development initiatives



Following the eviction of 73 Roma families in Cluj-Napoca, northwest Romania, a set of coordinated interventions were developed. These were initiated in cooperation with a wide range of local development actors, including, most importantly, the communities concerned.



Pata-Rât is a spatially segregated, informal, urban settlement near the landfill on the outskirts of Cluj-Napoca (population: 300 000) where currently around 300 families are living. It is composed of four separate parts that were formed during the last 20 years through repeated evictions of poor, mainly Roma families, from central areas of the city. Some of these families were originally from rural areas, but migrated to the city for work. For more than half of them, working in selective waste collection on the landfill provides their main means of subsistence.

Combating ghettoisation

On the 17 December 2010, almost overnight, 73 Roma families were evicted from the city centre and relocated in Pata-Rât, and their old homes demolished. A strong civil movement was catalysed around the Foundation Desire and the Association Amare Phrala in opposition to such 'Roma ghettoisation' in the city and demanding social justice. With the support of activists and academics, this movement led to the creation of the Working Group of Civil Society Organisations (www.gloc.ro) in January 2011. The following year a set of coordinated interventions were launched under the coordination of the Municipality of Cluj and a local team from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

A strong grassroots initiative formed in response to the most urgent needs, namely to offer support and safety to the children living near the landfill. A volunteer group made up of students and experts organised the first Children's Tent on the landfill in 2012 and offered regular educational and leisure activities to the most vulnerable



children in the area. The initiative was supported by the Social and Medical Services Directorate of the Municipality.

Education and community-centred activities

In the summer of 2013, Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Popoarelor launched a project for the children from the landfill and the two teams merged. Currently, they offer educational and childcare activities in a mobile day care centre run by the municipality near the landfill.

Moreover, in 2012 the community evicted from the city centre established an NGO, the Community Association of Roma from Coastei, with the support of activists and human rights organisations, and took

concrete steps to improve their living conditions. Among other successes, the NGO constructed a community centre in only three weeks, using their own resources, manpower and mostly local donations.

UNDP Project for Area-based Roma Inclusion in Cluj (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)

Contact:

Gabriella Tonk or Enikő Vincze

Email: gszabo2002@yahoo.com

Website: www.gloc.ro

Together for each other



Imre 'Zorró' Mata is leading a community-based local initiative that has established a social cooperative in the heart of Cserehát, one of Hungary's poorest regions. The project aims to improve the standard of living of the local people, mainly Roma, by carrying out community activities, providing educational opportunities and creating jobs.



In 1995 Zorro and his wife Katalin started to cooperate with a foundation of Dutch origin that supports local development in the region. The Dutch foundation gave potatoes to Zorro for the Roma population to grow on his land. Three years later, however, the husband-and-wife team both lost their jobs. Their best option now was to focus on those activities, such as agriculture and forestry, which were formerly secondary occupations. Successful cooperation over the next two years led to the establishment of their own foundation, 'More Together For Each Other', which has served as the parent organisation for all their initiatives since this time.

School for Roma children

One of the foundation's first tasks was to clear away the 'worthless' wood from the forested areas, ahead of distributing the wood among the families of the workers. The foundation also started a Saturday school for Roma children and offered scholarships for Roma and non-Roma young people. It also launched several programmes, including a 'Milk for the child' initiative, classes for women on household skills and weaving, and a community donation scheme (potatoes, beans, shoes, etc.).

In 2005, the foundation became involved in the UNDP-Cserehát programme. Under this programme and in cooperation with the UNDP resource centre and the community coaches, the foundation was able to develop the skills and capacity of local actors in the area and draw up strategic goals for the future in line with market demands.

Social cooperative

In 2010, following decade of hard work, it became necessary to establish a social cooperative and the team applied successfully for a European Social Fund (ESF) grant. With the help of the EU-financed programme they were able to renew the headquarters of the social cooperative, give the required instruction to workers, purchase new equipment for large work orders, and employ 10 people for a year.

Last year, under another ESF supported programme, the alternate-evening school managed by Zorro's foundation took a major step forward. The school for Roma children became available every day. Today, the social cooperative accounts for 8-31 (depending on the season) jobs in the local community and the alternate-evening school is attended by 45 children.



The social cooperative has also successfully applied for an EAFRD-LEADER grant, which is currently being implemented.

The cooperative will use the grant to buy a new tractor, a trailer and a machine for chopping wood. The next step would be to install a small factory for producing briquettes for the inhabitants of the Cserehát. The main goal is to be able to employ 30 people throughout the year.



Együtt Egymásért Kegyetlen Térségi Szociális Szövetkezet /

**Together For Each Other
In The Kegyetlen Regional
Social Cooperative**

(Fulókercs, Cserehát, Hungary)

Contact: Imre Mata

Email: teeromaa@freemail.hu

Website: www.szocszovfulokercs.hu

‘Spazio Ragazzi’: Social agriculture for young people



The Italian ‘social agriculture’ model was introduced in the province of Grosseto, Tuscany, in 2009. One of the model’s initiatives focuses on children and young people.



In Italy, social agriculture refers to a range of services available to people in rural and peri-urban areas including: rehabilitation/therapy for those with disabilities; training and job placement; and training and education for underprivileged groups (youngsters, migrants, etc.). Social agriculture relies on the government support and on the participation of the private sector and individuals. Social agriculture is very innovative: it is linked to the management of crops and animals, food production and the provision of services to people and communities.



The ‘Amiata Responsabile’ programme was launched in 2009 in several municipalities located at the foot of Mount Amiata to implement several social agriculture initiatives.

Space for youngsters

One of these initiatives is ‘Spazio Ragazzi’ (Space for Youngsters) which has a budget of €295 323. It is being implemented by the Leader local action group, Fabbrica Ambiente Rurale Maremma, and helped set up a rural community centre for youngsters aged 6-14 in the Municipality of Roccastrada.

The centre, which is now a hub and connecting point for the two involved farms, organises recreational activities for discovering rural life and production cycles. An 'educational' farm explains the productions of vegetables and other agricultural products. The centre also focuses on promoting ways to enhance the landscape, environmental protection, the conservation of biodiversity and the production of electricity from solar energy.

The project also offers summer activities, such as rural camps, and opportunities for children and youngsters to experience first hand the relationship between agriculture and nature during holiday periods. 'Rural laboratories' or workshops teach up to 65 young people about the cycle of plants and animals, gardening and beekeeping.

Bottom-up

Spazio Ragazzi is a bottom-up initiative, having its roots in the local community (families and associations). Public bodies, the FAR Maremma local action group and the University of Pisa are also involved, along with the two farms ('Pietratonda'

and 'Panierino') and the social cooperative that manages the rural centre. Several agricultural organisations and associations have also been involved in the project. The structure itself is owned by the Municipality of Roccastrada and it will be managed by Coeso, a consortium made up of public and private bodies, together with the private social cooperatives.

Social agriculture has led to the diversification of farm activities and the engagement of young people in areas of life that they might not come across otherwise. Moreover, the model can be transferred to other rural areas.

'Spazio Ragazzi'

(Roccastrada, Tuscany, Italy)

Contact: Catia Segnini

Email: info@farmaremma.it

Website: www.farmaremma.it



SEWA: Serving the needs of self-employed women



SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association, has drawn inspiration from the values promoted by Gandhi – such as community mobilisation and self-help – to promote the empowerment of disadvantaged women in all spheres of life, both private and public.



The association was established in 1972, as a trade union to represent the rights of women who are working, but without any formal contract. These workers tend to have irregular low-paid work and no social security provisions. One of SEWA's main objectives is to help them improve their working conditions and to negotiate better rates of pay.

Based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, the independent association has over 350 000 members in this, and other Indian states. It has also provided expertise to

set-up similar schemes in other countries such as Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Apart from organising workers, it works to help members improve their living conditions, and especially to alleviate the extreme poverty that many suffer. Thus SEWA has developed other activities (banking, micro-finances and pensions, literacy training, fair-trade marketing of handicrafts) based on the needs of their members, throughout their lives.

Co-operative bank for women

This 'life-cycle approach' includes, for example, a women-only banking service developed because the traditional banks did not want to cater to the demands of women who needed, for example, small loans to buy raw materials/goods to sell. Moreover, many of the women felt that the banks treated them with contempt because they were poor. The service provides products and services for specific requirements such as capital needed to buy stock to resell, births, weddings, training for a job, buying a house, funerals, etc.

To ensure financial autonomy from money lenders, SEWA encourages its members to save for the long-term as a condition for granting of micro-finance loans. The bank also has a fixed term deposit account that gives compounded interest. Since many members are illiterate, videos are used to teach women how to calculate interest rates.

In 2010, the SEWA bank had 330 000 clients who saved together over 1 billion Rupees (around €20 million). Its success has also inspired the Indian government to look into the establishment of a women-only bank (for all sectors).



SEWA resource centres

Outside of Ahmedabad, SEWA is looking to provide various services for women in deprived areas: A community centre in the rural area of Pij, for example, provides support for the organisation of those working in the tobacco sector. Training is offered in using computers and a workshop has been set up for the processing of local products such as spices and pulses. Similar centres are established throughout Gujarat, sharing resources provided locally, but also by SEWA's regional centres.



SEWA – the Self-Employed Women's Association

(Gujarat, India)

Contact: Jyostna Patel

Email: jyotna.patel@aeidl.eu

Website: www.sewa.org/

Empowering rural women in Kavar



In one of Turkey's poorest regions, the Kavar Basin Rural Development Project has enabled hundreds of women to not only earn an income but take an active role in the designing and management of local initiatives themselves.



In Turkey, 39% of the population in rural areas live in poverty (less than €3 a day). The Husnu M. Özyeğin Foundation set out to address this issue and demonstrate a viable model of creating sustainable rural living through an integrated, multi-sectoral and multi stakeholder approach.

The Kavar Basin Rural Development Project was launched in the autumn of 2008 in six villages and five hamlets of the province of Bitlis in south-eastern Turkey. The area is one of the poorest in the country. Half of the population is under 15.

The region was evacuated in the 90s during the armed conflict between Kurdish militants and the Turkish army.

Integrated local development

The specific objectives of the project were to build economic capacity, improve social welfare, empower women, increase sustainable use of natural resources, build multi stakeholder partnerships and change rural policies through a participatory model.

Under the project, a range of initiatives were carried out, including:

- The provision of bee-keeping training and equipment for 40 women in Kavar (In 2013 the women produced 4.5 tonnes of honey).
- The founding of a cooperative which has organised the daily collection of the milk and its sale to a dairy farm in Van.
- The establishment of walnut and cherry orchards for 124 families. All the farmers received training on managing orchards, pruning and tree inoculation.
- Improvements to sanitary conditions of the animal barns.
- The creation of 5 village rooms in Kavar. A community centre was also built as well as 2 communal bread ovens to decrease the workload of women.
- The construction of a primary school to increase the levels of school enrolment. Two kindergartens, children's playgrounds and a teachers' dormitory were also built.
- The provision of scholarships for university students as well as computer training and university preparation courses for young people.
- The setting up of a children's choir and the organisation of summer festivals.
- The offer of literacy classes and women's support trainings.

Sustainability

Through its 'economic' activities, the project has enabled hundreds of women to not only earn an income but take an active role in the designing and management of these initiatives themselves.



Finally, the project helped construct water ducts in grazing lands and trained shepherds in pastureland protection and reformation. Moreover, through the workshops tree planting and seed festivals, it is hoped that the raised environmental awareness of young people will ensure that know how is transferred to future generations.

Kavar Basin Rural Development Project

(Bitlis, Turkey)

Contact: Murat Bayramoglu

Email: bayramoglu_murat@yahoo.com

Website: www.husnuozyeginvakfi.org.tr/en/

Community-led 'Locality' development



Responding to the needs of local communities in England, Locality is a leading UK network of community development trusts, social action centres and community enterprises.



The member-led organisation was created in 2012, through the merger of two long established membership organisations, the Development Trusts Association and the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres. It has over 480 members who jointly share a combined annual income of some €389 million (over two thirds of which is generated through trading activities) and total assets worth over €784 million.

Locality considers communities as places of many possibilities – from the provision of services, shops, housing, parks etc to places of empowerment, wealth generation or social justice. Its overall aim is to build a movement that is based on the values of social justice and community self-determination.

Spirit of innovation

The organisation believes in fostering a new spirit of innovation and enterprise to build resilient communities where people are proud to live and work.

Its membership varies considerably in terms of the scope and scale of their activities. Responding to local needs, these typically include initiatives for recycling, environmental improvements, the management of public spaces, micro credit and advice and debt counselling. Other areas of interest include: family support, child care services, festival and arts events, community grants schemes, affordable housing, volunteering and job training.

Driven by a social justice agenda, the members also largely operate in areas of market failure, where the state and the private sector have struggled. Importantly, members believe that the starting point for overcoming many of the entrenched problems faced by our society is at the neighbourhood level.

Case studies

Examples of member case studies are:

- **Coin Street Community Builders:** based at London's South Bank, the enterprise has a turnover of some €9.7m and assets of over €36 m. It runs a neighbourhood centre, a children's centre, 320 housing units, a large retail and office complex (including the iconic landmark Oxo Tower) and arts and cultural events. www.coinstreet.org
- **Goodwin Development Trust:** based in Hull, in the north-east, the trust owns and manages 14 buildings. Employing over 300 people, it is the largest non-public sector employer in the city. Managed entirely by residents of a large social housing estate, it runs a wide range of services including children's centres, training & enterprise programmes and health & well-being projects. www.goodwintrust.org/

- **Glendale Gateway:** based in rural north England, Glendale manages a community centre, a library, youth hostel, nine housing units and several shops. It also runs business support services, the local tourist information centre, a community website and various leisure projects. www.wooler.org.uk/glendale-gateway-trust.

Locality

(England, United Kingdom)

Contact: Steve Clare,
Deputy Chief Executive

Email: steve.clare@locality.org.uk

Website: <http://locality.org.uk/>



‘Union Gewerbehof’ – A cooperative business centre



A group of unemployed people in Dortmund (Germany) have come together to create their own jobs by converting derelict industrial buildings into a successful cooperative business centre.



Since the middle of the 1980s, “Union”, the western suburb of the Dortmund inner city district suffered from the gradual closure of a steel factory and breweries. Many people left the suburb, blaming poor housing conditions; and of those who remain, a high proportion (38%) is on social welfare while more than 50% belong to ethnic minorities, or non-German nationalities.

The Union Gewerbehof was started in 1986 by a group of 13 unemployed people, many of whom had previously taken part together in an earlier job creation scheme (ABM, or *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme*). Building on their experiences, the group decided to create jobs for themselves – firstly by renovating an abandoned industrial building and secondly by converting the premises into shared (low-rent) business units for local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Another goal was to incorporate, where possible, environmental aspects into the project through for example, the use of greener building materials and low energy heating systems.

Power of self-help

In a remarkable demonstration of the power of self-help, almost all the start-up capital for the initiative came from the members themselves – who between them raised a total of €51 000 via 67 shares of €767 each. A further €10000 was invested by a trade union.

To cover the costs of the renovation of the building, which was completed in 1992, the project also received a regional grant of €2 million. In addition, it received minor assistance from the city's economic development department.

Today, the centre houses 90 businesses employing a total of 270 people. Although it includes some larger companies, the majority of tenants are micro-enterprises or single self-employed people, many of them in sectors such as creative industries, training and consultancy.

Simple model

The Union Gewerbehof has a very simple operating model. It does not need to advertise for tenants, and despite a higher than average turnover of tenants, space rarely stays empty for longer than a month or two. The only services formally on offer, apart from space and utilities, are meeting rooms, toilets, photocopier and coffee machine. There is also a vegetarian canteen and a coffee shop, but that is run as separate self-supporting business.

And this is a model that works: With an annual income of around €500 000, the Gewerbehof supports itself financially. Rent averages €5 (plus approximately €2,4 for charges) per month and square metre. Crucially, tenants do not need to put up a guarantee to secure a space, making the centre accessible to all entrepreneurs.

Union Gewerbehof

(Dortmund, Germany)

Contact: Hans-Gerd Nottenbohm

Email:

hans-gerd@union-gewerbehof.de

Website: www.union-gewerbehof.de



REALIS, a support network for social innovation



In 2006, the union of production cooperatives in Languedoc-Roussillon (SCOP) began putting together a set of complementary measures, which now provide a framework to support social innovation and the development of the social economy in the region.

Languedoc-Roussillon, in the south of France, has two distinguishing characteristics: a rapidly growing population, with many people attracted by the region's climate and quality of life; and a high rate of unemployment, about 14.5% of the workforce.

Non-traditional activities

In 2006, activists in the social economy identified a significant cohort that had the desire to create new activities, but without wanting or being able to create traditional businesses. Recognising that the appropriate tools did not exist to support these activities, which demonstrated considerable potential for job creation and for addressing unmet social needs, this "cooperative activists" group decided to work together to build a new set of tools and services.

A supportive environment

Seven years later, and with the benefit of EU and regional support, the following instruments have been established:

ALTER'INCUB, a social economy project incubator, which supports about a dozen new projects every year. Since its inception, ALTER'INCUB has facilitated the creation of around 30 social enterprises, operating mainly in the environment, ICT, health and culture sectors.

<http://www.alterincub-lr.coop/>

- REPLIC, a cooperative with public and private members that creates social and environmental businesses in response to identified needs in the area. It has so far established eight cooperatives, operating in the areas of recycling, transport, eco-mobility and hospitality. Together they employ 70 people, including 35 who are in professional insertion.

<http://www.replic.fr/>

- COEPTIS, a school of cooperative management, which seeks to strengthen the managerial and governance practices of companies in the social economy. With its ten permanent and 45 consultant teachers, COEPTIS offers three curriculums and accepts 200 trainees per year <http://www.coeptis.coop/index.php>



- COVENTIS is an annual business convention for businesses operating in the social and solidarity economy. Targeting both professionals and the general public, it brings together more than 130 exhibitors to present their actions, services and solutions.
<http://www.coventis.org/>
- The REALIS Business Hotel was opened in December 2013 at a cost of around €10 million, which was financed by the Region and the EU. It can accommodate 30 to 50 social economy enterprises and is also the main meeting point for social economy stakeholders in the region.

To complement these tools, specific funding has also been put in place to support the creation and development of social economy enterprises. REALIS was one of five projects selected by the REVES Excellence Award. REVES is the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social and Solidarity Economy. It has also inspired social economy policy in several other French regions.

REALIS

(Languedoc Roussillon, France)

Email: fbellaredj@scop.coop

Website: www.laregion-realis.fr/



TSI promotes social innovation among Turin's young entrepreneurs



Twenty-six partner organisations have joined a new initiative that supports fledgling social innovation businesses in Turin (Italy) run by young entrepreneurs. More than 30 SMEs look set to benefit.



Cities face new challenges due to economic, environmental and demographic changes. However, they also have enormous potential as centres of innovation due to their concentrations of diverse skills, highly-educated people, resources and networks. In order to support sustainable, intelligent and inclusive growth, cities need to develop new models.

One such model is being promoted by the municipality of Turin in northern Italy (population c. 900 000): “Torino Social Innovation” (TSI) is a set of strategies

and instruments to support new young enterprises addressing social needs (e.g. education, employment, mobility, health) as well as representing economic and social value.

Its main objectives are to:

- Foster a culture and awareness of social innovation;
- Attract young innovators through the development of creative communities; and
- Sustain new forms of collaborative economy.

The TSI programme, supported by Italy and the European Union (i.e. it is a part of the EU's URBACT programme), brings together a multi-stakeholder platform of more than 26 partners – representing the city, region and province, other public and private sector organisations and the University of Turin.

Partner expertise

Each partner has agreed to help promote 'social innovation' in its particular area of expertise. Together, the partners provide a wide range of services covering six areas:

1. Space – including office space for co-working, but also providing social housing to accommodate young workers coming from outside the municipality;
2. Information – training, including social innovation workshops, courses and special events;
3. Technical support – integrating testing procedures, prototyping support;
4. Mentoring – covering legal and economic, financial consultancy, market analysis;
5. Financial resources – public grants, private loans, public guarantee funds, new innovative financial instruments as social equity); and
6. Monitoring and evaluation – examining the social impacts of measures.

The first action of the TSI programme is "*FaciliTo Giovani*" an initiative, which runs until end of 2015, aiming to sustain social innovation businesses. The beneficiaries are all young people between aged 18- 40 years, aspiring entrepreneurs or perhaps running spin-off enterprises launched in the past four years (with the proviso that the majority of shareholders and/ or legal representatives are young people).

Identifying good business plans

Among other benefits, the initiative provides a mentoring service in order to help develop the ideas contained in good business plans and to provide grants for social and innovative businesses. The mentoring is provided by four partners (the city's polytechnic and university, the municipality and the province of Turin).

The total public budget allocated for this is €1.65 million, of which €200 000 covers services, €650 000 is available for grants (providing up to 20% of eligible costs per project) and €800 000 is available to guarantee up to 80% low-interest private-sector loans.

Torino Social Innovation (TSI)

(Turin, Italy)

Contact: Fabrizio Barbiero

Email:

fabrizio.barbiero@comune.torino.it

Website:

www.torinosocialinnovation.it/



Cooperation, key to Limerick's Southill regeneration



Southill Development Co-operative (SDC), recently renamed as 'Tait House', is a community-owned organisation supporting economic, social and community development in one of Limerick city's most disadvantaged estates.



299 shareholders

Southill in the south of Limerick was developed in the 1960's and 1970's to provide social housing for families and an industrial workforce needed for the new jobs emerging at that time in the city. Jobs were created as a result of a successful strategy to attract foreign direct investment and manufacturing

enterprises. But, as the industries closed from the 1980's and 1990's, this impacted on the local population resulting in very high unemployment. While the situation improved slightly in the years of economic growth – 2000-2006 – it deteriorated greatly from 2008-09 with the economic recession. In 2011, Southill's unemployment rate was 47%.

Against a backdrop of high unemployment, SDC was set up in 1984 as a community-owned co-operative, with 299 shareholders. From 1986, its offices were based in Tait House, a listed historic building owned by the local authority that was in a state of disrepair. Over the years, the site has been transformed with the support of public agencies and the private sector.

Social enterprises

Over the last year or so, the organisation's strategy is in a process of change linked to new challenges presented by difficult economic conditions and the need to adapt its financial structure to rely much less on grants from public funding sources and more on income generation. As part of this process, it changed its name to Tait House.

The main services it provides are centred on information to citizens on rights, entitlements and legal issues, information and community development services, training for the unemployed and business development, with a strong focus on social enterprise and access to educational opportunities. This includes outreach, further education and training targeting the development of job opportunities for young people (e.g. car maintenance apprenticeships and a community garage operating as a social enterprise).

More recently its active employment schemes for the long-term unemployed have been expanded. Currently, it has 103 staff of which 50 work places are on active employment schemes. In 2012, it generated an income of some €1.5 million from a mix of grants to implement specific programmes (20%) and from income from its activities (80%).



Focusing on social enterprises, it generates a surplus that is reinvested into its operations including a children's nursery, home insulation and retrofitting services for households in the city and surrounding counties, and estate management (e.g. landscaping, grass-cutting and home repairs).

Southill Development Co-operative (SDC)

(Limerick, Ireland)

Contact: Tracey Lynch, C.E.O,
Tait House Community Enterprise

Email: tlynch@taithouse.ie

Website: www.taithouse.ie

Job opportunities for all



An inspiring project located in the Thessaly region of mainland Greece has established a new social co-operative enterprise and in the process aims to create up to 90 jobs for local unemployed people.



'Employment opportunities for all' is a 2012-14 joint Greek and EU initiative being run by the Development Agency of Karditsa – one of three participating municipalities located in the administrative region of Thessaly. The other two municipalities are Mouzaki and Plastiras Lake. According to a study [Source: "Analysis of the local market", 2011], carried out before the project started in September 2012, these areas have a combined population of around 91 000. Although there is no specific data covering these areas, latest (2013) data for the region puts the unemployment rate at 25.6%.

Recycling discarded products

With an overall budget of €480 000, the project is co-financed by the EU's European Social Fund (80%) and the Greek Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare. Its main objectives are to find jobs for up to 90 long-term unemployed people; and to create a social co-operative enterprise (SCE) – for the collection and management of old clothes and other discarded textiles that can be recycled.

There are two main actions for the project beneficiaries – all long-term unemployed people selected according to specific criteria (economic and social, length of unemployment, work experience) and through interviews and evaluations. These cover 'mentoring' – including individual sessions with a social worker and psychologist at the start; and 'training' – on the reuse and recycling of clothing and on the management of the materials.

Rags to rugs

Concerning the SCE, called 'I Change', the main objectives were to create a viable social business that would not only provide a collection service to meet the needs of the local market i.e. the collections and recycling of clothing and used textiles that are currently discarded, but would also produce products from the recycled textiles (carpets and rugs, bags, toys, pillows,



patchwork quilts etc) and organise their sale, for example at local festivals and a Christmas market.

Although it is only at an early stage, the initiative has already had a positive influence on the people involved and it beginning to be known about and supported locally. There are currently 16 people actively involved (four men and 12 women, aged from 29 to 62 years). They've all worked in the past, but lost their jobs because of the economic crisis.

As the activity of the social co-operative is growing, new jobs will be created in order to covers its needs, contributing to the reduction of unemployment.

Moreover, 'I Change' can serve as a model for other regions or Member States, using the same, or different materials, but based on the same concept i.e. the recycling/ reuse of discarded products.

'Employment opportunities for all'

(Karditsa, Greece)

Contact: Chrysavgi Sengi

Email: segi@anka.gr

Website: www.anka.gr or
www.topeko-entos.gr

Samsø: Europe's Renewable Energy Isle



Citizens of the central Denmark island of Samsø have fulfilled their goals of becoming energy self-sufficient: All of their electricity comes from wind turbines; while more than 70% of their heating needs are met using renewable technologies.



In 1997, the island, whose population numbers just over 3,000 inhabitants, was named Denmark's 'renewable energy island', based on ambitious goals to become energy self-sufficient by 2008. Two years earlier than envisaged, i.e. in 2006, using 11 onshore wind turbines this target had already been reached. The network of turbines generate enough clean energy annually to meet the Samsø community's entire electricity requirements:

On still-wind days, when the turbines can't generate enough electricity, energy flows from Denmark's main energy grid to the island's network.

Net electricity balance

In turn, on windy days Samsø exports wind-generated energy to the national main system. Indeed, the island has a positive annual net electricity balance, as it exports far more energy to the mainland than it receives. (Each turbine produces enough electricity to power 2,000 homes per year.)

Meanwhile, homes and businesses in the larger towns draw their heat and hot water from renewably-fuelled district heating systems. On the northern end of the island, between the villages of Nordby and Maarup, a system of 2,500 m² of solar panels heats water that in turns warms the villages' homes. A woodchip burner that uses waste wood from Samsø's Brattingsborg Forest backs up the solar heating system. On the southern side of the island, the towns of Tranbjerg, Onsbjerg, Brundby and Ballen are heated by district heating plants.



Moreover, a number of private homeowners have replaced their oil burners with solar panels, ground-source heating and woodchip and pellet stoves. Altogether, these efforts have replaced more than 70% of heat generation with renewable technologies.

Energy Academy

The innovative islanders also have their own Energy Academy and energy office which provide them and visitors with information on renewable energy technologies and energy savings. Samsø has received several awards for its achievements in switching to renewable energy. Currently, a trial project is underway at the academy investigating the use of rapeseed and elephant grass for heating purposes.

The growing trend towards more sustainable solutions doesn't just concern renewable energy, as the academy is also investigating greener technologies for the transport sector, including powering motor vehicles with rapeseed oil and hydrogen fuel. Some foresee a future where cars and trucks will be powered by hydrogen generated by wind turbines. In the meantime, the majority of island vehicles consume traditional petroleum-based fuels, but these emissions are offset by the offshore turbines, including for the three ferries that connect the island to the country's mainland.

Renewable Energy Island

(Samsø, Denmark)

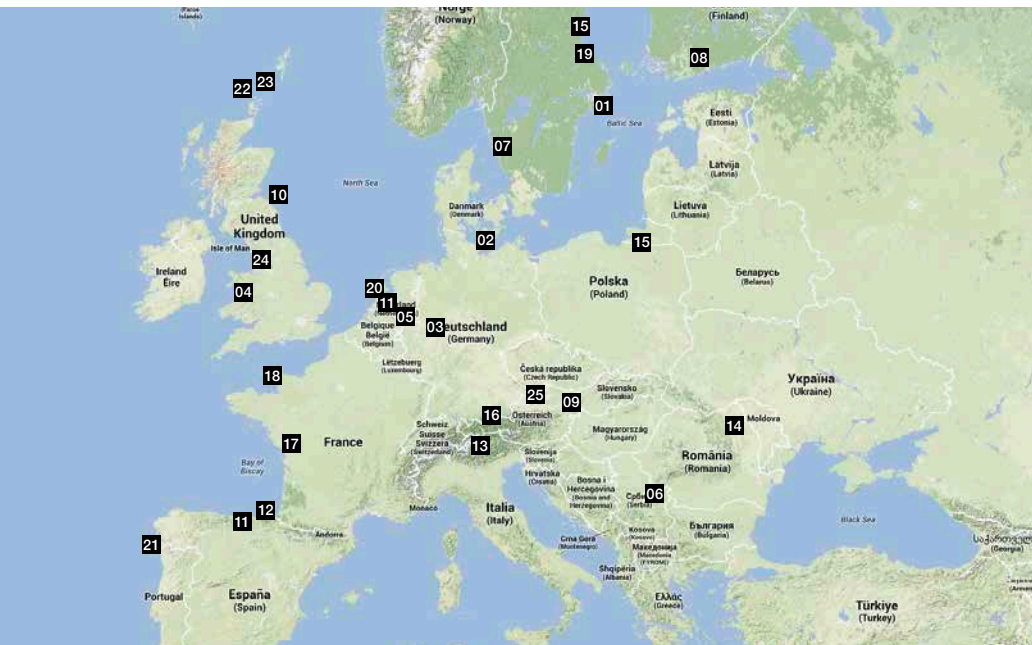
Contact: Søren Hermansen

Website: www.energiakademiet.dk

ECOLISE: Local communities leading the way to a low carbon society

ECOLISE 

ECOLISE, the European Network for Community-Led initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability, is a coalition of organisations engaged in promoting and supporting local communities across Europe in their efforts to build pathways to a sustainable future.



The members of ECOLISE include international, national and sometimes regional networks of community-based initiatives, as well as other bodies engaged in European-level research, training, communications or other activities to support

community-based action on climate change and sustainability. By bringing these organisations together, ECOLISE seeks to establish a common Europe-wide agenda and a platform for collective action.

Working towards a Europe of dynamic, resilient communities with a net zero carbon footprint

The ECOLISE vision is of a Europe where the members of every local community play a lead role in ensuring local economic, social and environmental sustainability. Through their actions, they have helped their communities to achieve a net zero carbon footprint and in so doing have made a major contribution to the establishment of a post-carbon, ecological society in Europe.

To support its member organisations in achieving this vision, the mission of ECOLISE *is to be a shared platform for learning, action and advocacy of community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability in Europe.*

ECOLISE member organisations/groups

01. Baltic Ecovillage Network (Sweden)
02. Global Ecovillage Network – Europe (Germany)
03. ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability
04. Transition Network
05. Centre for Ecological Learning Luxembourg, CELL (Luxembourg)
06. Community Development Institute (Macedonia)
07. Danish Ecovillage Network (Denmark)
08. Estonian Ecovillage Network MTU (Estonia)
09. Green Network of Activist Groups – ZMAG (Croatia)
10. Permaculture Association UK (England)
11. Red de Transición España (Spain)
12. Red Iberica de Ecoaldeas (Spain)
13. Rete Italiana villaggi ecologici (Italy)
14. Romania in tranzitie (Romania)
15. Stödföreningen för omställningsinitiativ (Sweden)
16. Transition Italia (Italy)
17. Salies en Transition (France)
18. Ria d'Etel en Transition – Les Lucioles (France)
19. Omställning Järna (Sweden)
20. European Association for Information on Local Development, AEIDL (Belgium)
21. Fundação da Faculdade de Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa (Portugal)
22. Gaia Education (Scotland)
23. Global Ecovillage Network (Scotland)
24. Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Systems (England)
25. Sustainability Park Istra Institute (Slovenia)

Through its activities, ECOLISE seeks to raise the profile of community-based action on climate change and sustainability in Europe, to facilitate exchange, cooperation and knowledge development and sharing among stakeholders across Europe, and to strengthen the collective influence of its members in EU, national and local policy making. ECOLISE draws on experiences from other parts of the world and, where possible, seeks to be a source of inspiration and support for similar initiatives outside of Europe.

ECOLISE emerged from a study undertaken by AEIDL in 2012/2013, which sought to assess the status of community-led action on climate change and sustainability in Europe. The study identified in excess of 2,000 local, community-led initiatives directly engaged in activities in this area. It also brought together the key stakeholders from across Europe for a discussion on the establishment of a European network to support cooperation and exchange between these initiatives. A first meeting of stakeholder representatives took place in Brussels on the 13-14 June 2012.

ECOLISE

(European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability)

Contact: Eamon O'Hara

Email: [Info\(at\)ecolise.eu](mailto:Info(at)ecolise.eu)

Website: www.ecolise.eu

Transition Town Totnes – a world first



Based in Totnes (population c. 7 700) in Devon, England, Transition Town Totnes (TTT) was the world's first Transition initiative. It began in 2006 when local people came together to tackle the combined threats of diminishing oil reserves, climate change and economic uncertainty.



TTT is a community-driven process of creating a new infrastructure of businesses and initiatives that are more suited to a lower-carbon, more resilient world. It integrates the creation of a new physical infrastructure (energy, food production, construction), economic structures that enable a community to spend money locally and strengthen its local economy, and social systems, designed to ensure social justice and fairness.

Ownership

In practice, this works by inviting people to take ownership of the process, encouraging creativity and by building networks. The last eight years has seen an empowering community-building process, engaging a significant proportion of the community, generating a diversity of projects – in the fields of food, building and housing, energy and the economy – which have yielded some extraordinary results for the mainly volunteer-led organisation.

TTT does not receive any funds from the state; rather it has a diverse funding base (private donations, a range of trusts, events and workshops etc) which enables it to be financially independent and sustainable.

SME Blueprint

Among several very successful initiatives, TTT carried out a study into the potential of what the food, renewable energy and retrofitting sectors could be worth to the local SME economy, if more demand was developed for local products and services, delivered by local, independent businesses. Its result indicated that developing just 10% of this opportunity could be worth over £5m over the next 1-2 years – and could be even higher with the local multiplier.



This work led to networking and information events for each of the sectors to show the potential to existing and fledgling SME businesses.

Another noteworthy example is the Totnes Food-Link project that is working to strengthen the links between local food producers and its retailers and restaurants. Since its inception in 2011, trade links have grown, new producers have emerged and new plans to develop the local food economy are in under way. Some 400 businesses are on the mailing list and producers report an average 30% increase in their supplies to local retailers/restaurateurs. Moreover, all of the town's seven restaurants have one or more locally sourced 'specials' on their menus.

And on a more practical level, Transition Streets is a scheme whereby groups of friends and neighbours meet every few weeks with a practical workbook to make simple changes in how they use energy, water, food, packaging and transport. So far, 63 groups involving over 550 households have participated with each household saving on average £570 pa off their household bills and 1.2 tonnes of carbon overall.

Transition Town Totnes

(Totnes, England, United Kingdom)

Contact: Frances Northrop

Email:

frances@transitiontowntotnes.org

Website:

www.transitiontowntotnes.org/

Supernatural transforms a landfill into a park



A sustainable community project run by a Serbian environmental NGO and supported by public and private funds has restored a degraded former river Danube beauty spot, close to Belgrade. There are significant environmental and social benefits.



Ada Huja, once an island on the river Danube – situated just four kilometres from the centre of Belgrade – used to be known for its lush vegetation and as an important site for wild birds. However, in the 1960s the site began to be used as a landfill tip.

Industrial waste

As a result, the free flow of fresh water from the Danube was blocked from entering this section of the river branch. For many decades, communal and industrial waste waters were being dumped on the other

side of the river, turning it into an ecological and health hazard for the local population. Additionally, the tip of the newly formed peninsula served as an illegal depot for industrial rubble, thus, completely devastating the delicately balanced ecosystem of Ada Huja.

In October 2011, on behalf of the municipality most concerned (i.e. Palilula) the Serbian environmental non governmental organisation (NGO), Supernatural, began the project to clean-up the section of the Ada Huja; and to establish the ‘Supernatural Park’.

The main objective was to restore the Ada Huja ecosystem, one of the most polluted water areas around Belgrade. This would be achieved by ending the dumping of illegal waste; carrying out hydrological works to clear the toxic sludge from the site; and by restoring the natural flow of water back into the original river branch. Another objective was to create an environmental centre.

Think tank

At the same time, a 'Think Tank' was created to oversee the works, comprising of representatives from national and regional authorities, water and environmental protection agencies and other experts. Funding for the project has been raised primarily from the private sector, including support from multinational companies, as well as public sector grants, including EU-Youth in action.

By April 2012 some 2,000 cubic metres of waste have been cleared from the site. Following on from this during 2012-13 an area once inaccessible to the public, has been transformed into the Supernatural Park, with the creation of five direct jobs and a further 10 created indirectly. Over 3,000 square metres of gardens has been created, including a kids play area. In addition, a green classroom – to educate young people about environmental protection, and a green house – for the experimental cultivation and exhibition of plants have been created.

To date, more than 20,000 people have visited the park.

Supernatural Park

(Belgrade region, Serbia)

Contact: Srdjan Stankovic

Email: srdjan@supernaturalfest.com

Website: www.supernatural.rs/



The Valley of the Carp



The 'Partnership for the Barycz Valley' is an association that implements strategies favouring local development in this region of Poland, notably in support of traditional farming of carp.



Traditional farming of carp fish, dating back to the Medieval Ages, is one of the main strengths of the Barycz river valley in south-western Poland. This centuries-long tradition of farming carp in the sizeable and numerous ponds, extended over the whole region, shaped the characteristic landscape and ecosystems. Today, the region's landscape, including ponds, meadows and wetlands, supports natural values of worldwide importance. Agri-tourism tourism is also a growing sector.

The partnership was started in 2008 by non governmental organisations and local individuals. It covers an area of more than 1 600 square kilometres over eight communes (with a total population of almost 100 000). The association currently has over 120 members representing the community, private and public sectors and is a Leader LAG (Local Action Group) and FLAG. (Fisheries Local Action Group).

Eco-friendly tourism

With private, EU and national funds [e.g. the total budget for 2009-2012 was 60 million zloties (15 million euros)] the association and its members and partners implements strategies and selects projects that contribute to the sustainable development of the region. This includes supporting the traditional architecture of the Barycz Valley, developing environmentally friendly tourism and businesses based on traditional products and services, including in the fisheries sector.

The partnership also carries out activities to support local communities. One example is a competition for the 'most active village', whereby rural communities receive support for developing their village thematic offer through craft workshops, training, study tours, learning skills to promote their activities online etc.

Another popular initiative is the 'Barycz Valley Recommends', a project supporting small family-run businesses that produce or promote local products and services.

Carp Days

In addition, the partnership supports a comprehensive promotion programme for the whole region, which comprises the creation of new tourism trails and offers, and, since 2006, hosts 'Carp Days' – an annual series of events, held in September and October, (the traditional carp fish harvesting period) promoting the Barycz Valley' cultural and culinary heritage (fish cuisine), products and services.

Finally, it is hoped – with their growing popularity, the involvement of the private, public and community groups, and increased numbers of tourists and of profits raised – these activities will continue to be supported. Importantly, with the necessary infrastructure now in place, together with lasting partnerships, it is also expected that some of the promising initiatives will increasingly be self-financing.

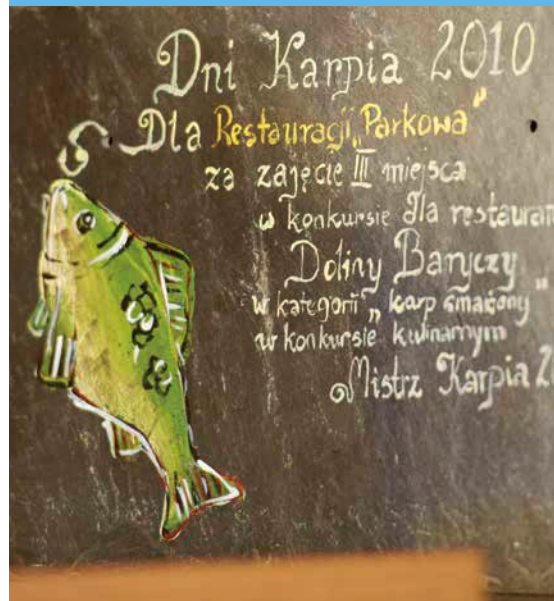
Partnership for the Barycz Valley

(Lower-Silesia, Poland)

Contact: Marta Kamińska

Email: partnerstwo@nasza.barycz.pl

Website: www.nasza.barycz.pl



Local development in Finnish Lapland



LAG Northernmost Lapland faces some highly specific challenges when organising local development work. Nevertheless, it is carrying out exemplary works in a very sparsely populated region.



Welfare services

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are the mainstay of the implementation of the Leader approach: LAG Northernmost Lapland, comprising six municipalities, is the largest LAG in the European Union when measured by surface area (53 290 km²). The area is extremely sparsely populated (as low as 0.17 individuals per sq km in some municipalities).

Considering also the great distances, this makes it a very challenging area in which to organise services and also for carrying out local development work.

Traditional trades are reindeer husbandry, agriculture, forestry and inland fisheries that are all still important livelihoods. Nowadays, tourism is also an important sector in rural areas. Finland, alongside the rest of Europe, is also hoping to benefit from new business opportunities offered by the exploitation of the North's oil and mineral deposits. In addition, there are growing expectations of new jobs (e.g. subcontracting for mining) offered by the growing economy of neighbouring Russia.

The local development work carried out by LAG Northernmost Lapland is very diverse. Concerning welfare services, it has created a model, in which people are employed in their home villages for providing services for senior citizens, or families with small children. This activity is organised in the form of a cooperative, which was founded by developers of rural areas, professionals of social and health sector and the municipality of Sodankylä. It is very cost-effective, as the municipality does not need to hire new personnel, or pay the travel costs for reaching remote villages.



Midnight rowing

LAG has also inspired various associations to start developing tourism and events. One example is the 'Midnight Sun Rowing Event'. This annual event attracts over one hundred participants, who row with large boats or paddle with kayaks 110 km along the River Kemijoki. Rather than a race, the aim is to enjoy a typical Lappish summer. The LAG is now funding a new project to develop this local event into an international tourism attraction.

Finally, to ensure that local towns and villages also benefit from the burgeoning mining sector, LAG has funded projects in which villages are marketed as homesteads for the mine workers who migrate to the area. The multiplier effect of mining is also supporting local enterprises. Subcontracting for mines, services needed by new inhabitants and increased purchasing power can already be seen in the number of new enterprises and increased turnovers of all businesses.



LAG Northernmost Lapland (Lapland, Finland)

Contact: Hanna-Leena Talvensaari

Email:

hanna-leena.talvensaari@pll.fi

Website:

<http://www.pll.fi/in-english.php>

Building bridges in rural Röstånga



Röstånga development company (RUAB) is a community-owned social enterprise responsible for several local initiatives that are at the heart of Röstånga a village in rural southern Sweden.



Röstånga is a small village, of 850 inhabitants, located on the slopes of the ridge of Söderåsen in the National park – an area famed for its natural landscape and popular for trekking and other outdoor activities. Because of its setting, there are good opportunities for tourism and other businesses. Nevertheless, the village was recently experiencing specific problems linked with a loss of vital services due to de-population (empty houses, vacant shops etc). In common with other rural areas, a growing vacuum had been created by the withdrawal of vital public sector services (schools, youth clubs, care services

etc) and of the private sector with little prospects of investment due to limited revenue expectations and the low values of properties.

Grass root members

To overcome this, the people of Röstånga recognised that they needed to reorganise themselves and re-consider both their role in the community and their capacity to run certain services. As a result, the RUAB development company was founded by its largely grass root membership.

It is a social enterprise run by its locally-based members as a co-operative and non profit-making business (i.e. any revenues are reinvested into the company).

With over 400 shareholders, RUAB is responsible for the creation of several important businesses/ services for the community. One example, is the Old Train Station Restaurant. The former station building, which had been empty for many years, was bought by the community in 2012. After raising more than €45000 of local private capital, it was renovated and sub-let to a local family who have been running it as a successful restaurant since April 2013. After its first season, the rental income has brought a revenue of €12000 for the development company and the restaurant business has meant three new full-time jobs in the community.

Success stories

Another success story is Röstånga's Museum of Modern Art. This once run down building, adjacent to the village millpond, was bought and renovated in 2010.

It now houses one of the country's smallest museums of modern art which, when necessary, also acts as an exhibition hall.

Another plus is a new community bus (owned by the RUAB) – whose benefits are twofold: Firstly, its use allows energy savings by avoiding the need for individual cars for transport to sports and cultural events; and secondly, there's a social aspect as the bus brings people together – acting as a 'meeting place on wheels'.

Finally, two other services are being developed in 2014 – a local home-care service and a service for the elderly organising social and other events in the local municipality. The idea is to employ local people to take care of the elderly people, thus also helping to bridge any age/ social barriers in the community.

Röstånga Utvecklings AB (RUAB)

(Scania, Sweden)

Contact: Nils Phillips

Email: info@ruab.org

Website: www.ruab.org



Regional brand boosts rural development



The Nitra-Self Governing Region is the first region in Slovakia to have established its own financial instruments to support the implementation of LEADER-type integrated strategies on rural development. A good example of the success of these initiatives was the creation of a regional brand.



The Nitra Region in southwest Slovakia contains 354 villages and has a population of 700 000. The region has the mildest climate and the most productive agricultural centres in the country. In 2006 to 2008, the regional authorities created the conditions for the implementation of integrated strategies of territorial development in rural micro-regions. In particular, they provided training, increased professional capacities to mobilise local potential, and prepared for the implementation of LEADER-type strategies. Five LEADER local action groups (LAGs) were approved but the regional authorities decided to launch an

additional programme to finance 15 other public-private partnerships operating outside of the LEADER areas. In 2013, up to 116 projects were implemented in the areas concerned.

Regional brand

This specific regional programme has supported a regional branding project that aims to promote the area, build capacities and introduce regional branding of products in villages. One positive outcome was the brand, 'Regionálny produkt PONITRIE®' (www.produktponitrie.sk), which was set up to denote quality, respect for local culture and traditions and green

values. A network of local producers and service providers are involved in the brand's production. The project concerns three LEADER groups and three other public-private partnerships.

Adopting a 'bottom-up' approach, the regional authorities worked with representatives of craftsmen and producers from the area, whose knowledge and experience were reflected not only in the brand's design, but also in the devised criteria for evaluating the quality of products and granting certificates. Such cooperation also ensured the successful marketing of the brand and the distribution of products.

Partnerships were forged in a wide range of areas: painting on canvas, silk and glass; production of high quality replicas of contemporary weapons; production of utility and decorative ceramics; creation of miniature folklore costumes; wood-carving, macramé, engraving and Easter egg decorating; ornamented honey-cakes; grape cultivation and wine production; bee-keeping and bee products (e.g. candles from beeswax); production and sale of mead wine; animal husbandry and horse breeding; operation of

a teahouse; agri-tourism accommodations; boarding and conference services and summer camps.

Certificates

In December 2013, certificates were delivered to the first users of regional brand. These included a tourism operator, food producers (pumpkin seed, beeswax, mead wine, goat's milk and cow's milk), traditional crafts producers (boxwood, decorative ceramic subjects, wooden statue and reliefs, dolls in folklore costume, landscape oil paintings), and accommodation and boarding providers.

In short, the brand is adding real value to the local products of the region, boosting local sources, creating new job positions and connecting individuals and groups.

Regionálny produkt PONITRIE®

(Nitra, Slovakia)

Contact: Martin Čaja

Email: martin.caja@unsk.sk

Website: www.produktponitrie.sk



Latvia's first Rural Communities Parliament gets underway



Latvia's national platform of rural NGOs has started work on the introduction of a new participatory democratic process for rural areas – the 'Rural Communities Parliament'.



Over the past two decades or so, since the Latvian Republic regained its independence from the Soviet Union, its population of just over 2 million inhabitants has begun to benefit from a developing and more democratic society. Unfortunately, most of the positive signs of development have been experienced in the capital Riga and surrounding region, leaving behind the rest of the country.

Home to around half of the population, Riga and surrounding area has received most of the investment for socio-economic development. Reflecting this unequal society, Latvia has the highest Gini index

(list of countries by income equality) in the European Union (35.9% in 2012). Moreover, it is among the top five EU Member States with the highest regional development disparities.

Participation

To address such inequalities, the Latvian Rural Forum (LRF) has been looking at ways to increase activity and participation of rural communities in decision making and in policy development. In 2012, it decided to transform itself from a network of local action groups (LAGs) and rural non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the platform of rural civil society that promotes dialogue between rural communities and decision-makers.

Inspired by similar experiences in the Scandinavian countries and in Estonia, the LRF therefore organised the 1st Latvian Rural Communities Parliament on 6-8 June 2013. The event was held in Latgale – the country's most depressed region. During working groups and through shared experiences, participants devised an Action Plan for rural areas with 57 actions to be carried out by communities, municipalities and ministries over the next two years.



57 actions

The initiative receives financial support from national and regional associations, the local municipalities, the European Social Fund and the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism. Importantly, it is also supported by the many volunteers who will carry out the planned activities.

The Action Plan includes a resolution to conclude legislation promoting volunteering, exploring the idea of credit unions in rural areas, the training of community leaders in rural areas, raising awareness about benefits of local products, and promoting 'life-long learning' geared at people living in rural areas. The meeting of the Council of the new parliament also agreed there will be a second meeting in 2015.

Although the process is still being developed, it has already resulted in several positive results for rural communities. These include more visibility and acceptance by ministries, even those not directly concerned with rural affairs or regional development issues. The process has also promoted an exchange of ideas and experiences between the rural communities throughout the country.

Rural Communities Parliament
(Latvian Rural Forum)

Contact: Valdis Kudiņš

Email: laukuforums@gmail.com

A great success

More than 150 people participated in the conference, ‘Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative’, in Brussels on 19-20 February by the European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL) on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. Presentations, discussions and networking focused on 25 ‘promising initiatives’, which have shown that local, citizen-led and participative initiatives for sustainable development are needed more than ever.



▲ Plenary session of the conference in the European Parliament (19 February 2014).

With the European Parliament as the venue for the first day of the event and to the music of Bruce Springsteen, AEIDL president Márta Márczis looked back on how Europe has developed over the past quarter of a century since the establishment of AEIDL in 1988. That was the year of the memorable “Boss” [concert in East Berlin](#), at the foot of the “Wall of Shame” which was to come down the coming year. At that time Europe was still divided, with the two sides unable to come together – on

the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, there were Europeans thirsting for freedom, while on the western side European construction (still) had the wind in its sails. The Single European Act, the abolition of border controls and the launch of the first “local development initiatives”, including ELISE (*European Local Initiatives System of Exchanges*) which was to lead to the creation of AEIDL and its subsequent surge, riding the LEADER (rural development) wave from 1992 onwards.

The Europe we cherish

More than 150 people came together in one of the Parliament's amphitheatres: local development practitioners, MEPs, academics, representatives from local development organisations and networks, or simply citizens interested in local development and its concrete implementation in different regions.

Yves Champetier, board member of AEIDL, recalled the values and ideas promoted by the association. These are summarised in a **statement** produced for the event: *"We are convinced that local initiatives, citizen involvement, social innovation and experimentation, the identification of and respect for shared assets, solidarity between regions here and elsewhere, and the invention of new forms of multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, can all contribute to building the Europe we aspire to – a Europe rich in the diversity of its landscapes, its communities and its cultures, open to the world, and striving for a new economic and social equilibrium."*³

His speech was followed by one from Chris Brooks, professor at the Paris Science Po, who pleaded for local development to become a spearhead of change, though dependent on a deep-going reform of the context in which it takes place (in particular the banking system and a rebalanced labour-capital relationship).

Marjorie Jouen, special counsellor for the Notre Europe-Jacques Delors Institute think-tank, went on to recall the origins, current challenges and the more than ever indispensable importance of local development for *"moving from today's*



▲ The official opening of AEIDL's newly renovated office space.

'individualistic homo economicus' to tomorrow's 'cooperative homo localicus'."

The local cooperative approach upheld by AEIDL was illustrated by presentations of five concrete projects from throughout Europe: The Tot Raval initiative strengthening social cohesion in a deprived neighbourhood in the centre of Barcelona; the "Együtt Egymásért" (All Together for Each Other) social cooperative established for and by the inhabitants (mainly Roma) of a small village in Hungary; REALIS, a social innovation ecosystem set up in Languedoc-Roussillon (France); the development strategy and projects implemented in the Barycz valley (Poland) centred on exploiting its flagship product, carp; and last but not least, ECOLISE, the new European network of local groups engaged in the transition to green energy and in the fight against climate change, which is currently in its start-up phase facilitated by AEIDL.

3. See full text, pages 6-16.

MEPs Kinga Gönsz and Eric Andrieu (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) and Hannes Lorenzen (advisor to The Greens/European Free Alliance) then presented their vision of the policy perspectives awaiting Europe and local development in the years to come, underlining the need to *“move from an economy based on competition to one based on collaboration”*.

Two aspects were highlighted in the debates following these speeches: the ingredients (the “magic powder” in the words of facilitator Peter Woodward) necessary for the success of a local development approach, and the messages needing to be conveyed to policymakers. Looking first at the ingredients, these included the quality of the human factor (underlining voluntarism and a collective approach according to Eamon O’Hara from ECOLISE), the aspiration to happiness, and the resources needed to achieve it (Imre “Zorro” Mata from Együtt Egymásért) and also the *“desire to transgress”* (Michel Dupoirieux from REALIS). As to the messages to be conveyed to policymakers, these included: the urgent need for a truly social Europe, the empowerment of local actors, and the need for government institutions to take better account of local action.

25 promising initiatives

The second day (20 February) saw the conference decamping to the very friendly setting of Bouche-à-Oreille, a café-theatre located close to AEIDL. The focus of this second part of the event was a series of workshops enabling participants to exchange experience on **25 promising initiatives** within the EU and elsewhere, presented by their representatives.

The morning session was introduced by François Saint-Ouen, lecturer at the University of Geneva’s Global Institute and Secretary-General of CEC (Centre Européen de la Culture). In his speech entitled *“The Europe beneath Europe”*, he recalled that the birth of the European Community had occurred without its citizens, and that it had been local development which had brought citizens closer to Europe, but that today’s Europe again seemed to have distanced itself from its citizens and their concerns. It is therefore urgent, he concluded, to re-invent Europe hand in hand with its citizens, and not merely on their behalf.

Based on the diversity of the concrete project presented, the subsequent six parallel workshops were an opportunity to discuss all present and future aspects of local development: cohesion and inclusion, a social and solidarity-based economy, territorial development and short distribution channels, quality of life, the transition to renewables and climate change, etc.

The quality of the debates and exchanges at the conference was summarised by University of Gloucester professor, **Michael Dower**, a long-time militant in the field of local development. Going through the buzzwords of the European Commission's Europe 2020 Strategy ("*smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*") one by one, like Yves Champetier had done it to introduce the conference, he showed that the growth currently seen in Europe was neither "smart" (the poor use of technology, etc.), "sustainable" (waste of resources), nor "inclusive" (massive youth unemployment). He went on to insist on the need to give priority to participative action and democracy, to support SMEs in standing up to the global giants, and to make much more sensible use of resources, whether human or material. He underlined the crucial role of animation, of mobilising stakeholders, and of local development bottom-up approaches, reminding everyone that local development was not an alternative to a macroeconomic and institutionalism approach but instead an essential complement thereof.

"A 'quiet revolution' has been going on for 25 years and this revolution needs networks," he said. "ARC2020, other networks and those such as ECOLISE or FARNET that AEIDL is highlighting, fit perfectly into this philosophy which will ultimately ensure that – paraphrasing the movement launched in Sweden two decades ago, 'all Europe shall live'."



▲ Georgia Efremova (AEIDL) accompanied by musicians from the Kopanica association.

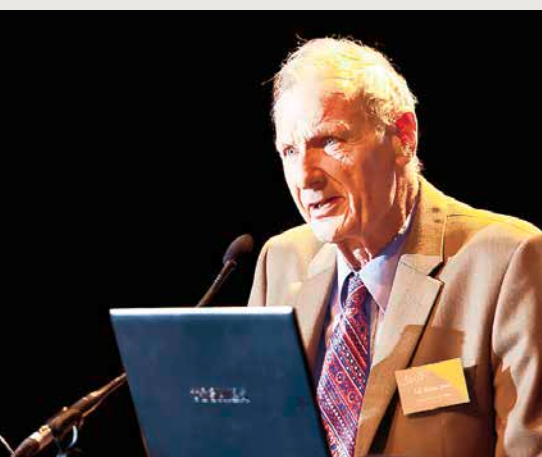
All in all, it is fair to say that this AEIDL conference was a complete success, both in the quality of exchanges it inspired and in the intense networking it facilitated, often among participants who were meeting for the first time.

The evening reception held on 19 February in the freshly renovated AEIDL building proved to be a further way of boosting and enriching contacts between "local development actors" in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Re-inventing Europe through local initiative has obviously got off to a good start! ■

ALL Europe Shall Live!

Michael Dower, from the University of Gloucestershire (England, UK), summarised the richness of the debates that permeated the conference, “Reinventing Europe through local initiative.”



Held in Brussels, with plenary sessions at the European Parliament, the conference to mark the 25th anniversary of AEIDL attracted 155 participants from 27 countries. It was enlivened by presentations of 25 highly varied local initiatives, drawn from 17 countries and covering a full geographic range from metropolitan centres to the most peripheral rural regions. Keynote speakers provoked debate about the political perspectives for Europe and for local development, and the counterpoint between local initiatives and the prevailing governmental and commercial systems.

The buzz of conversation, and the intense discussions, at this [conference](#) revealed a strong commitment to the European project. The participants deeply appreciate what this international endeavour has achieved – almost 70 years of peace; the great boon of freedom which continues to attract so many migrants into the European Union; and the free movement of people and goods within Europe. We celebrated together, during the conference, Europe’s wonderful diversity of landforms, climate, ecosystems, wildlife, human history, culture, language, customs, costumes, food, drink, music and so much else. We recognised the contribution which the European Union has made – through LEADER, URBAN, EQUAL and other programmes – towards the encouragement of local initiatives.

A tragic disconnection

However, many speakers referred to a tragic disconnection between (on the one hand) the aspirations of millions of European citizens and (on the other hand) the reality of life for many people.



How may we encapsulate this disconnection? The [introductory paper](#) from AEIDL offers a vision of the Europe that is desired by its citizens...

“A Europe rich in the diversity of its landscapes, its communities and its culture, open to the world, striving for a new economic, social and environmental equilibrium”.

The conference reminded us just how far we are from having “economic, social and environmental equilibrium”, as shown by the tens of millions of people unemployed, an army of young people who have never had a paid job, millions of people living below the poverty line, people forced by poverty to move from the countryside into the cities or from one country to another, discrimination and social exclusion of many minorities, increasingly gross disparities between the rich and the poor, and growing popular concern about the impacts of climate change and ecological degradation.

In the face of this dis-equilibrium, the European Union has adopted the EU 2020 goal of “**smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**”. It is promoting policies of social, economic and territorial cohesion, and striving to strengthen the competitiveness of European enterprises in the world market. But these words sound painfully hollow to those who are indeed ‘striving for a new economic, social and environmental equilibrium’. They perceive that:

- › It is not **smart** to let a large part of Europe’s labour force stand idle; or to depend upon millions of hectares of land outside Europe to produce soya to feed cattle which could eat our own European grass or maize.

- › It is not **sustainable** to tolerate a continuing heavy loss of biodiversity in Europe; to draw down aquifers below safety level; to mis-manage our river catchments and so contribute to devastating floods; or to burn fossil fuels on a gigantic scale, causing carbon emissions which accelerate climate change.
- › It is not **inclusive** to tolerate, indeed to allow governments and companies to cause high levels of unemployment, under-employment and poverty; or to permit social exclusion of the kind suffered by millions of people in the cities and countryside.
- › The focus on **growth** is a cruel joke for the millions who live below the poverty line, for whom the only thing that grows is the cost and difficulty of living, and who see with growing anger the disparity between themselves and the super-rich.
- › As for **competitiveness**, in the sense used by the European Commission for companies which may trade on the world market, it is a meaningless term for the hundreds of thousands of small and

medium-sized enterprises which form the main part of local and sub-regional economies throughout Europe. What they seek is viability in the markets and at the levels where they operate.

This disconnection between the aspirations of people and the social and political realities they experience serves to explain the other crucial failure emphasized by **François Saint-Ouen** and others, namely the **democratic deficit** in Europe. **Marjorie Jouen** described how the founders of the European Union paid no attention to local communities and local development. *“Citizens did not truly enter the European sphere until the election of the European Parliament through direct universal voting in 1979”*. Changes in the 1980s, including the collapse of the Soviet Union, prompted increasing contact between governments and citizens. This led in the 1990s to policies which encouraged local initiative, notably LEADER, URBAN, EQUAL and other initiatives or programmes.



“On many issues, such as climate change, people and communities are often ahead of policymakers, developing and testing local responses. The true impact of this activity will only be realised, however, when the two work in tandem, and policymakers at all levels recognize, support and enable this local initiative, without destroying its essential bottom-up character.”

Eamon O'Hara, AEIDL / ECOLISE



▲ Summer festival at Union Gewerbehof, Dortmund, Germany.

But the democratic deficit is still highly visible. Citizens are less and less willing to vote in European elections. In 1979, the turnout was 62%: it fell at each election to reach the low level of 42% in 2009. There is increasing scepticism about the usefulness, and even the honesty, of politicians. Belief in the ability of governments, and of the European Union, to solve our collective problems is decreasing. In the last 'Eurobarometer' survey by the European Commission, only 29% of the people considered that their voice counts in the EU.

The impetus towards local initiative

The title of the Conference, 'Reinventing Europe through local initiative', poses the question of whether, and how, local action can heal this disconnection, and redeem this democratic deficit... For most people, the impulse to take action does not come from their vision of Europe, but rather from their family, their home, their neighbourhood, their locality. It comes from the heart. If the world does not give them a good life, they seek to take their life into their own hands.

We can be greatly encouraged by the explosion of local initiatives in the last 20 years, as exemplified by the [25 case studies](#) received at this conference. Generalising from this rich set of examples, we can see the impetus towards action as driven by three main types of motive – social, economic and environmental.



“What may appear in theory as conflictual issues or challenges are resolved on a daily basis by local initiatives, working in a pragmatic way.”

*Marjorie Jouen,
Special Adviser at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

Social impetus. Many initiatives spring from the desire among communities to help themselves out of poverty, exclusion, unemployment or other disadvantage. A moving example is offered by the project “Together for each other” launched by the Roma community in Cserehat, breaking out of poverty by intelligent use of their own resources of farm and forest. Similar motives drive the projects in the Kavar Basin in Turkey and in Raval, one of Barcelona’s most disadvantaged districts. These examples, and many others, show that local initiative can tackle disadvantage across the whole span from the inner parts of metropolitan areas to outer parts of cities, large and small towns, peri-urban areas, rural regions and sparsely populated or peripheral territories of Europe such as Lapland.

The need for local initiatives of these social kinds may depend not only on the degree of disadvantage but also on the structure of public authorities. Where local authorities are truly local, they may give leadership in local initiatives.

For example, some years ago, the village school in La Porcherie, a small village in the south of France, was threatened by the lack of children. The village Mayor took direct action to solve this problem. The head-teacher’s house was vacant. The Mayor advertised in the national Press for a large family to move into that house. 70 families applied. The Mayor chose an unemployed lorry-driver from Lille, who moved in with his 10 children. The school was saved, and the driver became the village carpenter. This is *elective* democracy at work.

By contrast, a municipality in northern Sweden may be so large that the Mayor is 200 kilometres from a typical village. Small village communities, remote from other settlements, coping with hard winters, are forced to be personally and communally self-reliant. That is why Sweden has over 5000 village-level action groups, focused on sustaining or creating communal services and enterprises upon which they depend.

This is *participative* democracy at work. Much of the local action that we have discussed springs from this desire to sustain and improve the quality of local services and people's lives, or from a commitment to social inclusion, for example among the Roma people and their children in Cserehat, the Roma in Cluj-Napoca, the unemployed in Greece or Limerick or Barcelona, youth in Grosseto, women in the Indian initiative. The Sustainable Citizen Neighbourhoods initiative in Brussels, the Tot Raval foundation in Barcelona, the Southill Development Cooperative in Limerick and the Open City Museum in South Tyrol provide examples of comprehensive action to improve the quality of life and social cohesion for the local population. Many of these initiatives have found "win-win" solutions which bring both social and economic benefits – a point vividly illustrated by the local action group in Lapland, which enables people to find work in their own villages by providing services for senior citizens or families with small children.

Economic impetus. Many of the local initiatives presented at the conference have their starting-point in the frustrations felt by small farmers or other small enterprises, because they are low in the pecking order of Europe's capitalist system. In that system, most of the bargaining power rests with the multinational corporations, the great processing or trading companies, or the large farms, often linked in horizontal or vertical chains. They have a massive combined influence on European markets, and on governments and politicians. They are the main beneficiaries of growth and competitiveness: they provide no guarantee of either sustainability or inclusiveness.

The scenario within which these powerful players move is summed up in the concept of Europe as a single market. But in reality Europe is also a multiplicity of local markets, none of which are 'islands' divorced from other economies, but each of which may have a high degree of internal trade. Within these local markets, the economic structure is one of hundreds of thousands of small and medium-sized

▼ Growing vegetable in greenhouses is just one of the initiatives launched in Kavar, Turkey.



enterprises, for whom competition in the European or world market is not relevant. For them, the key issue is viability, to be able to make a living by providing goods and services for residents of, and visitors to, their own region. Their businesses are generally built upon the skills and resources of their own region; their products form part of the traditions, the culture and the character of the region; and they add to that culture by innovating and adapting their activity to the needs of today.

These local markets provide the context for local economic initiatives of the kinds described during this conference. The Polish initiative “The Valley of the Carp”, builds on the centuries-old practice of carp harvesting through innovative activity and cooperation between many rural actors, attracting up to 500 000 people each autumn and greatly strengthening the local economy. Many other local initiatives show how local traditions, food, drink, heritage, wildlife and other resources can be put to new and imaginative use in order to create jobs and enhance incomes in rural or urban areas.

New or updated forms of social or cooperative economy are emerging, for example the cooperative business centre in Dortmund created by Union Gewerbehof, or the enterprises supported by REALIS, the support network for social innovation in Languedoc-Roussillon.

Environmental impetus. The third driver of many local initiatives is a strong sense among millions of European citizens that we should be taking better care of our planet. Thinking globally, they increasingly want to act locally, as shown by the organisations within the new ECOLISE network initiated by AEIDL. They sense that national governments and the European Union are not truly grasping the severity of the environmental challenge, the reality of climate change, the link between human activity (notably the gigantic use of fossil fuels) and potentially disastrous heating of the Earth’s atmosphere, and the continuing heavy loss of biodiversity.

▼ *Development of a park in the region of Nitra, Slovakia.*





“Regional policy and rural policy should work together and transcend traditional sectoral approaches to become more area-based. To achieve this, we must first rethink our approach to territorial governance: local communities must be mobilized through joint actions with all stakeholders. Be they public, private, local, national or European, all actors are concerned! The European Commission, Member States and regional authorities should promote these forms of participatory governance.”

*Éric Andrieu, Member of the European Parliament,
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats*

So, many local initiatives are driven by the conviction that citizens should act where governments cannot, or do not, act. That conviction drives the widening network of Transition Towns; local energy initiatives such as that at Samsø, Denmark; and practical initiatives such as the community gardens in Porto. It underpins projects to look after the natural environment; to redeem derelict land, such as that near Belgrade; and to renew urban neighbourhoods, as in Dortmund.

The elements of action

This variety of starting points – social, economic and environmental – explains the wide variety of local initiatives described or represented at this conference. But speakers on the first day, and workshops during the second day, enabled us to articulate the essential character of local initiatives, and to identify the elements of action which link many different projects.

Characteristics of local initiative. Yves Champetier focused on many common traits of local initiative – a high level of energy, a search for alternatives, creation of new partnerships and methods of working, a focus on the potentialities of each place, a willingness to innovate and to exchange ideas, the creation of links between different interests and sectors, openness to the world, and solidarity. When the conference chairman invited participants to define “innovative action”, they offered ideas similar to Yves’ list, and added “*long-term strategic vision, a good action plan, evaluation and willingness to learn, care for the environment, a willingness to experiment and to think ‘outside the box’.*”

Elements of action. The local initiatives described during the conference offered many different elements of action, sometimes innovative and unconventional, which together may form both an inspiration and a toolbox for those who wish to launch or pursue local development. Notable among these elements are the role of animators; the role of catalyst organisations; and the innovative techniques which are being applied.



“Civic initiatives cannot create civic communities if they remain isolated. Such communities will be created only by the relations that will develop between each other. In other words, networks and networking processes are an absolute necessity. Now, the new information and communication technologies multiply the possibilities of horizontal networks organizing the society without the necessity of a centre and a vertical power.”

*François Saint-Ouen,
Secretary General of CEC (Centre Européen de la Culture)*

Animators. The conference recognized the crucial role of individuals who take the lead, who provide the spark which lights a local initiative. In Sweden, they are called ‘fiery spirits’. When provoked by the conference facilitator to say what qualities such people should have, participants offered a range of attributes – *“enthusiasm and confidence in other people, courage, a bit of madness, a sense of urgency, care for others, generosity, the ability to explain complicated ideas with simple words, links to local networks, profound knowledge of the territory, organisational ability and perseverance”*. The animator must be *“cooperative, optimistic and responsible, open in spirit, visionary, empathetic, passionate, disobedient but open to social needs, impatient but enduring”*. He or she must be able *“to promote the general interest, to build the capacity of people to participate, to create new things alongside those which already exist there”*... must be *“a dreamer with feet on the ground”*.

Catalysts. A local initiative may indeed be launched by one ‘fiery spirit’: but it will rapidly fail if it depends only on one person. Local action succeeds when it is truly ‘owned’ by the local community, when the people are involved, when it becomes a venture in participative democracy. François Saint-Ouen captured this point neatly.

To provoke, and then to sustain, these relations and this communal participation is the role of catalyst groups or organisations. Neat examples are provided by Tot Raval, the community-based foundation which is at the centre of the stream of projects to improve the quality of life and social cohesion among the people of the Raval district in Barcelona; the Social Innovation Centre in Turin; and REALIS in Languedoc-Roussillon have a similar role of catalyst.

Innovations. The local initiatives presented to the conference illustrate vividly the wide range of innovations which have been developed by local actors in order to make good things happen from the bottom up.

They include new forms of cooperatives, local food chains, local energy groups, eco-villages, transition towns, slow cities. Financial mechanisms have been created, in order to retain money in the local economies or to apply local capital to the meeting of local needs: they include local currencies, local banks, time-banking, crowd funding, equity capital and regional branding, of kinds that are illustrated by the local initiatives RUAB, Samsø, Nitra, Torino and *le Zeybu Solidaire*.

Local and global

Two of the keynote speakers at the conference – Chris Brooks and François Saint-Ouen – focused on the relationship between the burgeoning array of local initiatives around Europe and the global systems of capitalism and of government. Their key point was this – local initiatives, however widespread they may become, should not seek to compete with the global systems. Rather, they should seek to complement, to influence, and to humanise those systems.

Chris Brooks urged us to strengthen and professionalise our local initiatives, and the networks of these initiatives. We could then use the collective strength of this movement, and of the widening array of people involved in and affected by it, to influence the practices of the major players in the capitalist system. The citizens of Europe can exercise that influence by their action as consumers, as shareholders, as voters, as members of cooperatives or social enterprises.

Some supermarket chains, for example, are increasingly offering locally grown, or organic, or fair-trade, products in response to consumer demand.

François Saint-Ouen emphasised that the collective of local action is not a substitute for government at all levels. Rather, this movement – this ‘participative democracy’ – should be seen as a complement, a stimulus and a partner to elective government. The great ongoing process of action, of development in urban and rural areas, should be based on effective partnership between government and people: it should be both “bottom-up” and “top-down”.

Looking ahead

Building on this message from our keynote speakers, we can say that the rising tide of local initiatives throughout Europe is indeed a quiet revolution. But it is a movement that will only gain its true revolutionary impact if it becomes collectively less quiet, more assertive, and more visible.

Networking. To achieve that greater visibility, local initiatives must find a collective voice. That implies the need for more networking; the creation of what François Saint-Ouen called a ‘dense and solid network’. We already have the beginnings of such a network, with organs at regional or national level, such as Locality in England and the Latvian Rural Forum, or at European or wider level such as Transition Towns and Ecovillages. The ECOLISE initiative, launched by AEIDL, will contribute to this networking ideal by bringing together groups and networks with a focus on local, community-based action on climate change and sustainability, to strengthen collaboration and the link

with “the top”. It was suggested that AEIDL might take some broader lead in the networking process. Other actors, such as ARC 2020, which is a platform of over 150 rural and environmental NGOs, may play a part. A particular challenge, illuminated by the wide geographic range of the projects presented at the conference, is to link the local initiatives in both the urban and the rural regions of Europe.

Stronger initiatives. But networking alone is not enough. We need to secure also the strengthening of the number and the capacity of local initiatives. Perhaps we should use, and play back to them in different forms, the words used by the leaders of the European Union – “smart, sustainable and inclusive”. Local initiatives, and their networks, should seek to become:

- › more smart i.e. more skilful as animators and catalysts, more expert in use of organisational and financial techniques, more imaginative and humane in the use of information technology, more creative in the use of local resources
- › more sustainable, in respecting the environment and the heritage, in finding ways to save or create energy without use of fossil fuels, in securing continuity of local initiatives over time
- › more inclusive, by ensuring that initiatives bring benefit to every citizen in the area; by encouraging the active involvement of people who are now socially excluded; and by ensuring that participative democracy is genuinely democratic, which will give long-term legitimacy to the local movements and contribute to the building of a more democratic Europe.

▼ *The REconomy Centre in Totnes, England, hosts many initiatives.*



“We have to move from the competitive economy based on fear to the cooperative economy. That is what local initiative is all about.”

*Hannes Lorenzen, Advisor for
agriculture and rural development,
The Greens / European Free Alliance*



Localness. The strength of local initiatives lies, above all, in their localness. We should continue to cherish localness in all things – the sense of a place, its history, its people, its customs, its resources, its community, its economy, its environment. This is not to advocate an introverted approach: communities will gain by being open to the world. But we should have pride and confidence in the ability of local people to take their own lives into their own hands. This ability, this resourcefulness, is the true starting-point of local development. Inputs of policy or of money from government at any level are secondary to this prime local resource. A crucial principle for local development should be “Fund your programme: do not programme other people’s funds”. This means that you should decide first what action your community needs, then consider what help you may need from government or elsewhere. Do not start by looking for government help, and distorting your own action to attract that. This point is well illustrated by three projects which came together in a single workshop at the conference – the Roma

project from Cserehat in Hungary; the Kavar initiative from Turkey; the SEWA project from India. In each case, a local animator appeared; then, a catalyst from outside the area (UNDP in Hungary, the Hüsnu M. Özeygin Foundation in Turkey, World Bank in India) offered ideas for the process of action; then, the local community developed its own action plan; and, on the basis of that plan, public funding was sought. Moreover, in each of these three cases, the local community then developed its own enterprises as a source of longer-term funding and self-reliance.

So, we should have pride and confidence in locally-based action. We should strengthen the number and the capacity of local initiatives. We should develop strong and dense networks of these initiatives. We should be assertive and visible. But how do we build the partnership between government and people which is so crucial within the great ongoing process of development in urban and rural areas? How do we ensure that this development is both “bottom-up” and “top-down”?



“The development of local societies, support to local community initiatives, and the establishment of civil structures may offer an important field for cooperation between the State and civil society organisations, especially in rural regions, where various social problems tend to manifest in complex and multiple ways.”

Kinga Göncz, Member of the European Parliament and former Secretary of State, Ministry of Health, Social & Family Affairs, Hungary

Partnership based on mutual respect.

The “new economic, social and environmental equilibrium” that we desire in Europe cannot be achieved by local initiatives alone, however smart, sustainable, inclusive and networked they may become. Nor can it be achieved by governments working alone, without the full and collective involvement of citizens. The need is for effective partnership between government and people, and that partnership must be based on mutual respect.

Those who are acting at local level must recognise that the broad governmental and commercial systems are here to stay, indeed are likely to become progressively more global in their nature. They should acknowledge the benefits which these systems can bring, and seek to work with, rather than against those, systems in striving for the new equilibrium. They should accept the legitimacy of national and international development programmes, and seek to contribute positively to the shaping of those programmes, from the perspective of the communities that they represent.

They should acknowledge, in particular, the efforts of public bodies at all levels to provide support for local development programmes and to achieve social, economic or territorial cohesion. At this crucial moment of transition within the European Union, from one programme period to the next, they should grasp the opportunity offered by the European Commission’s focus on the Common Strategic Framework between major funds and upon the widening concept of Community-Led Local Development.

Local actors may then fairly ask the governments of Europe and the European Union itself to recognise the value of locally-based initiatives, which can breathe reality and relevance into processes of development. We can ask them to accept that local people can have the most accurate insight into their own needs and problems; that local resources, both human and material, offer a prime starting-point for development; and that their own institutional resources should be used to complement and support local initiative. We can ask them to honour the individual and collective rights of Europe’s citizens to adequate housing, jobs, services, household income, quality of life and social inclusion.

This mutual respect may then nurture a willingness to humanise the complex processes of development in which we are all involved. Local actors will accept that institutional resources – which are crucial in order to achieve true social, economic or territorial cohesion – must be used with proper accountability and fairness. Governments will accept that administrative processes can be so flexed and humanised as to encourage, rather than to block, local initiatives and to provide a user-friendly climate for innovation, which (in words used at the conference) ‘cannot bloom in a desert’. They will perceive the value of linkage, harmony, and a sensible degree of subsidiarity, between the policies and actions at different levels of government. They will recognise that the best guarantee of long-term well-being is the emergence of active and self-reliant communities.

A step-change in relationships. To realise this vision demands a step-change in the relationship between governments and local actors, between elective and participatory democracy. We need to enhance the existing, and develop new, mechanisms for linking top-down government and bottom-up initiatives. The LEADER Initiative, launched by the European Commission in 1991, has been widely used as one such mechanism: the case studies from Ireland, Slovakia and Finnish Lapland illustrate how LEADER support and funding have helped local initiatives.



▼ Sowing a seed in the “Supernatural Park”, near Belgrade, Serbia.

In the new EU programme period, governments and peoples together should grasp the opportunity to apply LEADER principles and the formalised concept of Community-Led Local Development to the support of local action in both urban and rural areas throughout the European Union and in accession and neighbouring countries. We should all seek to make resourceful use of all relevant programmes and funds to support and nurture local initiative, and to encourage and facilitate the networking between local initiatives which can speed up and strengthen the whole creative force of local action.

Reinventing EUROPE through local initiative

In these ways, we may in coming years be able to realise the full force of the 'quiet revolution' which was explored in the conference. The emergence of active and self-reliant communities, energised by local initiatives, and the acceptance by governments that such communities are the best guarantee of long-term well-being, can indeed lead to a reinvention of Europe and a rising commitment by its citizens to the European project. We may thus be able to grasp the vision of a Europe "*rich in the diversity of its landscapes,*

its communities and its culture, open to the world, striving for a new economic, social and environmental equilibrium"... a Europe which is indeed (in the proper use of these adjectives) "smart, sustainable and inclusive".

The powerful movement in Sweden which supports, and speaks for, over 5000 village action groups, is called '*Hela Sverige Ska Leva*' – ALL Sweden Shall Live. If we can realise the ambition of the growing movement of local initiatives throughout this diverse continent, then indeed we may be able to say "**ALL Europe Shall Live**". ■

More information on the conference can be found on the AEIDL website:

<http://www.aeidl.eu/en/projects/aeidl-conference-2014.html>

Join the 'Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative' discussion group on LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=7480159&trk=my_groups-b-grp-v

“Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” – Act One

“Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” – quite a challenging title for our conference on 19 – 20 February 2014!

- › Faced with unprecedented change and a crisis that has left large sections of the population, especially young people, by the wayside;
- › With a Europe bowing down to austerity policies, and with a growing indifference or even hostility among citizens towards the European project,

it was obviously a great risk to call this conference “Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative”!

But at the end of the day, it was a great success, as witnessed not only by the number and diversity of participants, but also by their appreciation of the opportunity to meet up and engage in high-quality and friendly discussions. There was also a notable complementarity between the various contributions, and a general sense of “optimism”¹ about the potential of local initiative.



Several lessons can be learned from these two days:

1. The testimonials of the 25 local initiatives allowed participants to gain a better insight into what is needed to reinvent Europe: voluntary action, energy, a rejection of fatalism and hopelessness, the search for alternatives, a territorial focus, innovative solutions (going “off the beaten track”), long-term strategic visions, projects that can mobilise people, sharing, proximity, network-building, openness to the world, cooperation, solidarity, social transformation. At the local level, this is all about the progressive invention of development models and strategies that are original, territory-specific, “smart, long-term and inclusive”, all at once.
2. The great need to exchange ideas and experiences, to come together, to test one’s points of view, as characterised by:
 - Exchanges on methods, tools and experience.
 - The positioning of individual measures in the context of the current changes, in the search for ways out of the crisis, for transition to / the invention of more collaborative ways of doing business, taking greater account of social and environmental problems.



3. These AEIDL meetings and conferences illustrate the value of dialogue:

- When it is focused less on procedures, which are often so cumbersome that they lead to the actual objectives being forgotten, and more on the wealth of experiences, how they are inter-related and what they lead to.
- When it allows different approaches to meet and merge, whether they are rural, urban or coastal, whether they involve economic development, social innovation, social inclusion, the fight against discrimination, the environment or energy transition. Each approach contributes in its own way to developing the territories we live in.

- When it is fuelled by “forward-looking” initiatives, in such fields as “short circuits” (bringing producers and consumers closer together), a “circular economy”, a collaborative economy, social entrepreneurship, or the quest for greater energy autonomy.
- When it is enriched by input from academics, researchers and think-tank members.
- And when it allows us to better position ourselves in this task of “reinventing Europe”.

“Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” is obviously a long-term project, inviting us to move forward in at least three directions:

- › Looking for ways to consolidate, sustain, disseminate and multiply these scattered and often fragile initiatives, helping them to turn into a movement, a momentum, and to shift up a gear.
- › Looking for ways to link up these local initiatives and actions with a business, financial and institutional environment that is increasingly disconnected from life in our territories.
- › Looking for ways to nurture this movement of local initiatives as a springboard for “reinventing Europe”.

Here at AEIDL, we would like in the course of the coming years to play a significant role in this new project, working hand in hand with all those who, within our beautiful Europe, are working on promising initiatives helping to shape the future.

Why not join us? ■

Profile

Name: AEIDL (Association Européenne pour l'Information sur le Développement Local / European Association for Information on Local Development)

Legal status: asbl (non-profit organization)

Founded: 1988

Purpose: To contribute to a Europe based on solidarity and citizen involvement, founded on sustainable development and equal opportunities, by offering a wide range of services to local development and civil society stakeholders, as well as various institutions, including the European Commission.

Services: Managing networks and technical assistance; evaluation and advice; information, communications and publishing; training.

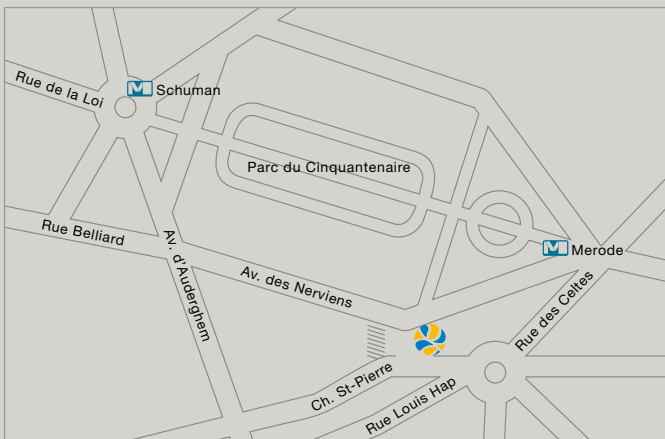
Fields of activity: Territorial development (local, regional, rural, urban); the environment and sustainable development; employment and social development; citizenship.

Partner institutions: European institutions; local, regional, national and European authorities, decision-makers and “developers”; development agencies; citizen groups; professional organisations; non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Contact: AEIDL, Chaussée St-Pierre 260, B-1040 Brussels

T. +32 2 736 49 60 – F. +32 2 736 04 34

info@aeidl.eu | www.aeidl.eu



Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative

This was the theme of a conference organised by the European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL), on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. The conference took place in Brussels on the 19th and 20th February 2014.

The first day, which was held in the European Parliament, drew more than 150 participants from 27 countries.

The contributions and debates focused on the need to renew the European Project, taking into account the initiatives of citizens and territories, in order to meet current economic, environmental and social challenges.

These contributions and debates were brought to life by presentations of 25 different local initiatives, drawn from 17 countries and covering a full geographic range from metropolitan centres to the most peripheral rural areas.

This publication highlights the main points from the contributions, debates, and the presentation of the 25 promising initiatives.



ISBN 978-2-930818-01-6

