

Deepening Civic dialogue: common ground, diversity and facilitation skills

(from the webinar held on February 10th, 2021: <https://forum-synergies.eu/article764.html>)

Deepening Civic Dialogue was about exploring how social dialogue can help us build more resilient communities, protect and restore ecosystems and take action on climate. Organised by Forum Synergies, Cultivate and Geysler, its objective was to start a conversation on the power of dialogue for community-led transitions with participants thanks to a key-note on **“the power of dialogue”** and inspiring stories from the field. Some of the questions we raised for this workshop were: What approaches to dialogue helps us build more thriving communities? How do we ensure meaningful participation and that marginal voices are heard? What approaches to dialogue enable local action, and especially climate action? What would it take to catalyse more and better dialogue?

Chris Chapman, an experienced facilitator of systemic dialogue, based in Ireland, referred to his own experience working both at a local community and national level to highlight what we still have to learn when we are talking about Civic dialogue. The workshop on **“How to engage people in climate change”** he participated in, revealed some lessons to work on: the need to acknowledge that **people are at different stages**, to link better **awareness and action**, or to make efforts **to involve everybody**, especially younger people just to mention a few ones.

The importance of a skilled facilitator was another point he raised, both with capacity to acknowledge his/her inner state –and how it influences the group– but also with flexibility to adapt tools and methods to the objectives of the process. He referred to the **“Iceberg model” from Donella Meadows** to remind the constant tensions we have to deal with between **going deeper and going wider during our participative processes**.

The 4 stories from the field illustrated examples of Neighbourhood, Territorial, Bioregional and Climate dialogue at different levels in Europe and beyond.

Swarnalakshmi Ravi (India) is actually Convenor of Global Youth Council (the PWCP Provisional World Children’s Parliament). As the former National Child Prime Minister of India, she advises the ERASMUS + Project ‘SONEC’ that is developing neighbourhood dialogue processes, influenced by Sociocracy and Neighbourhood Parliaments. **Neighbourhood Parliaments** were introduced in India in the 70’ and 80’ and there are over 400.000 in the world today. Their principle is to bring on a neighbourhood level representatives of each household –children, youngsters and adults– to discuss and solve concrete social issues. Based on the **sociocratic model**, each circle of 30 households of a Neighbourhood Parliament will be represented in an area Parliament etc. Swarnalakshmi stressed the importance of the model to **allow a meaningful participation of marginal voices**: “sitting in circles enables us to interact with everyone on an equal level and it allowed me to speak up for myself”, she said. In her opinion, Neighbourhood parliaments help developing “a sense of belonging and to consider someone’s problem as our own problem”.

We then moved to France, to discover an experience of Territorial dialogue. **Philippe Barret** (GEYSER / Ecole de dialogue territorial) shared his experience as an environmental mediator around Roselend dam and mountain pastures. He explained how the construction of a large hydroelectric dam in the French Alps in the 50’s left wounds in the agricultural world. At the end of 2010, the wish of the municipality and the electricity company to preserve the biodiversity of the mountain pastures hit a wall. His intervention as a mediator, **a neutral third party from outside the territory** - was an element of the process that ensured all the actors involved shared the same information on the situation, on the expectations, on the fears, on **the needs of the other stakeholders**. A turning point of the dialogue process was the **shift**

from a nature protection project to a territorial project which allowed taking into account all the actors' needs. Philippe insisted on this point claiming that "projects which focus on biodiversity protection too often interest only one sector of local actors. But if we widen the scope, we link nature protection and human activities." Among others, the improvement of the relationships between the local actors has been one of the results of the process of dialogue, which still goes on today.

From Spain came an example of **community activation and co-design** to strengthen the resilience of socio-ecosystems in the 'Valles de Omaña y Luna' and 'Ordesa-Viñamala' Biosphere Reserves. In a territory sparsely populated, participation was an issue as people were also tired of consultations without either feedback nor clear results. As Jorge explained, "the goal of this participatory process was to bring them together and start talking about a common future, beyond their personal interests" in order **to share a common vision**. Then through appreciative inquiry and applying the "Wayfinder" methodology, they developed an action plan to find local responses to the challenges posed by climate change in the bioregion. "We defined actions that were feasible for the community and would help strengthening community relationship to create community resilience" Jorge added.

Aine O'Gorman, the mobilisation coordinator of Stop Climate Chaos (Ireland) explained that **The One Future Campaign** grew out of conversations held between the stakeholders of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, and with other Irish civil society networks and grassroots climate activists. The initial ask was: "Would you like to join people in your local area to come together for one day in December 2020 to talk to your TD (Member of Parliament in Ireland) for Climate Action?" Through Whatsapp groups, a network of 28 local groups was formed across the country with the specific aim of connecting people with their national representatives. Not only did these people meet their TD but they **also connected with people with similar interests in their own constituency**. Aine mentioned that even traditional dairy farmers engaged in climate change and this is a positive point since the aim is to widen the scope and include voices from people with multiple backgrounds. The "One Future Campaign" is now working on a platform throughout the country to follow connecting those groups, **supporting local community involvement**, training and raising awareness to construct an on-going dialogue between citizens and their representatives for effective climate action.

All these testimonies were the basis for an exchange in groups on what people learnt from the stories. Through the "Mentimeter" tool, participants highlighted that what was interesting now for them were elements of dialogue (going deeper in dialogue, the need of **inclusion and diversity**), the need for skilled facilitators and training to create good conditions, the aspects of methods (appreciative enquiry, creating a common ground) among others. Some of these topics of interest might be the theme of a future event on Dialogue.

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