EUROPE IN TRANSITION

LOCAL COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY TO A LOW-CARBON SOCIETY

THE SILENT REVOLUTION

OVER 2,000 GROUPS AND GROWING!

COUNTRY FOCUS

aeidl

EUROPE IN TRANSITION

Author:
Eamon O'Hara, *specialist in climate change and European networking of community-based initiatives.*

Contributors:
Cristiano Bottone, *Transition Italy.*

Theresa Carter, *Transition Ireland and Northern Ireland.*

Chris Church, *Low Carbon Communities Network, UK.*

Kitty De Bruin, *Transition France.*

Fransje de Waard, *Permaculture Association, The Netherlands.*

Alejo Etchart, *Transition Economist and member of the Spanish Hub for Transition Network, Spain.*

Paul Hendriksen, *Transition Towns, The Netherlands.*

Dr. Tom Henfrey, *Schumacher Institute for Sustainable Systems, Bristol, UK.*

Kosha Anja Joubert, *President of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and Managing Director of GEN-Europe.*

Christine Kotarakos, *AEIDL – European Association for Information on Local Development.*

Gesa Maschkowski, *Transition Network for Germany, Austria, Switzerland.*

Gil Penha-Lopes, *Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon, Portugal.*

Davie Phillips, *Cultivate Living & Learning, Cloughjordan Ecovillage, Ireland.*

Dr Wojciech Szymalski, *Institute of Sustainable Development, Poland.*

Job van den Assem, *Friends of the Earth (Milieudefensie), The Netherlands.*

Production coordination: **Jean-Luc Janot**

Layout: **Kaligram**

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THE SILENT REVOLUTION

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Across Europe, a new frontline on climate change is emerging. Inspired by the tradition of community activism in other spheres, and building on the experiences of other initiatives for sustainable local development, small groups of citizens are quietly coming together to take action in their own communities.

These small, local groups are emerging in cities, towns, villages and rural areas right across the EU, and the numbers are increasing at an impressive rate (see Fig. 2 page 5). Meeting in living rooms, in local cafés, community centres and other public places, the focus is predominantly on practical initiatives that can be taken locally to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the dependence on fossil fuels, and to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of local communities.

Many of these initiatives involve the testing of new ideas, technologies and approaches in order to find the most sustainable and cost effective solutions. In this way, they act as important local laboratories, piloting and demonstrating how citizens and communities can live more sustainably.

A defining feature of this silent revolution is that it is entirely citizen-driven, or bottom-up. Those involved are not responding to top-down policy or regulatory decisions, but to their own desire to make a difference, to be part of the solution rather than the problem. In many instances, links and collaborative initiatives are being developed upwards, with local authorities and other local or regional bodies, which are responding positively to the leadership shown by local citizens.

This gives this community-based movement a strong legitimacy and credibility which, combined with its widespread and growing popularity across the EU, makes it a potentially powerful driver of pro-environmental behavioural change. This type of societal change is not just a pre-requisite to meeting future emissions targets, but also to bringing about the transition to a resource efficient, low-carbon economy, which is now a central goal of European policy.

For this potential to be realised, however, the role of this local, community-based action must be better recognised by policymakers at all levels. Voluntary, citizen-based initiatives cannot be sustained indefinitely without external support and assistance. The challenge for policymakers, therefore, is to provide this support in a way that encourages and facilitates community-based action, without undermining its local, bottom-up dimension, or stifling the energy and creativity that this unleashes.

Local, community-based initiatives are, by their nature, fragmented, and often have little contact with or support from outside. There have been some efforts to address this, especially at local, regional and national level, but the effectiveness of these efforts has been limited.

A key requirement, therefore, is to nurture and support this local dimension, while also facilitating greater inter-connectedness and networking between groups, and with other organisations. There is a clear need to create a strong platform that promotes the exchange of ideas, information and good practices, and also facilitates the development and implementation of cooperative or shared initiatives.

The establishment of this kind of a platform would provide existing groups with improved access to the information and resources they need to develop their projects and activities. Importantly, however, it would also be a valuable source of inspiration and guidance for other groups and communities, providing a tool to promote a much wider dissemination and uptake of community-based approaches.

BEHIND THE SCENES

A critical first step in establishing a support framework for local, community-based action on climate change is to better understand the existing situation in the EU, and to build links with the key stakeholders involved. It was for this reason that between December 2012 and March 2013, the **European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL)** undertook a preliminary investigation, which led to the gathering of information on community-based action on climate change in 13 EU countries.

This study built on previous information and contacts developed by AEIDL experts over a three year period, which helped to identify countries where community-based initiatives were known to exist.

This publication presents the results of this research and seeks to quantify the scale of activities (the number of active groups) in the countries concerned, their rate of development, the kinds of actions being undertaken, the key actors or organisation concerned and, where they exist, the structures that have evolved to assist and support local efforts.

OVER 2,000 GROUPS AND GROWING!

In the 13 EU countries reviewed, there are currently in excess of 2,000 local, community-based groups directly engaged in activities to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development (see Fig 1).

This number could be considered to be conservative, however, as it is difficult to get information on all existing initiatives, some of which have a low public profile and are poorly documented. There are also many other groups that are engaged in activities with an indirect impact on climate change and sustainable development, which was outside the scope of this study.

By way of example, research carried out for the Carnegie Trust in 2008 found that in the UK alone there were between 2,000 and 4,000 groups engaged in local, community-based action on climate change, which suggests that the number for the 13 countries studied is in fact considerably higher that the available data suggests.

Significantly, however, the number of these groups and the number of people engaged in their associated activities is growing rapidly (see Fig. 2), unleashing a heretofore latent resource that is making an increasingly valuable contribution to wider efforts to combat climate change.

The common characteristic of these initiatives is that they are established and driven by local people (*bottom-up*), acting on their own initiative and guided by the desire to take action within their own communities to

Country	Transition Initiatives	Ecovillage projects or networks	Other
Belgium	10	3	10
Denmark	30	10	50
Finland	-	7	50
France	130	13	4
Germany	60	20	50
Ireland	20	2	10
Italy	80	18	150
Netherlands	80	8	100
Poland	-	4	80
Portugal	14	7	20
Spain	30	17	9
Sweden	20	7	9
UK	367	1	500
Total	**841**	**116**	**1042**

Fig. 1: Estimated number of local, community-based groups focusing on climate action in 13 EU countries.

respond to the threat of climate change and ecological degradation.

The focus is on promoting a shift to a post carbon, post-consumerist society: one that gives priority to economic and social practices that value, protect and enhance natural and social capital, thereby helping to strengthen resilience and overcome existing environmental, economic and social problems.

These local groups are action oriented (see Box), with a clear focus on bringing about positive change within their own geographical areas. Most groups begin with softer actions (awareness raising, community engagement), but as they mature and become more experienced, the tendency is to engage in more concrete projects with a direct impact on local GHG emissions and sustainability. Examples include projects focusing on renewable energy production, energy efficiency, local food production and sustainable transport.

Some groups, or networks of groups, also engage in some level of lobbying or advocacy. However, for the moment at least, this remains a relatively minor part of their activities and the focus is more on local rather than higher level decision making.

Through their actions, these groups are also creating a platform for wider behavioural change within their communities, challenging existing beliefs and practices and establishing a supportive environment for new norms to emerge and develop. They also have an important catalytic effect, helping to inspire action in other communities by acting as role models and a source of ideas, expertise and good practices.

Transition Initiatives 2006-2012

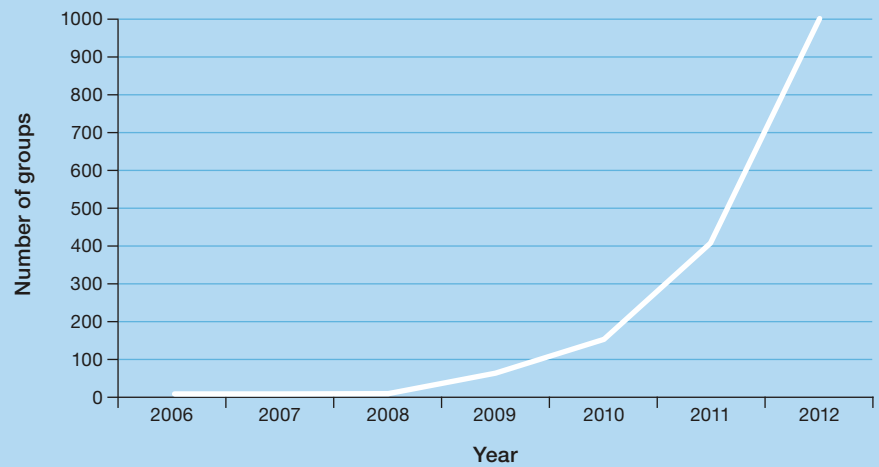

Fig. 2: The number of Transition initiatives in Europe has grown exponentially since the movement's inception in 2006.

COMMUNITY-LED ACTION IN LEICESTER (UK)

Transition Leicester is a network of volunteers living in the Leicester area (UK) that aims "to inspire action to make Leicester a thriving, low-carbon and resilient city." The main focus is on developing practical, local solutions to some of the big challenges facing the community of Leicester, such as climate change, the economic crisis and dwindling supplies of fossil fuel energy. The group is established as an unincorporated association, at the core of which is a seven-member steering group, working with a wider group of volunteers that organise events and projects.

Transition Leicester has developed several long-term projects, covering issues such as local food, energy and education: Examples include the establishment of a co-operatively owned apple press, a local sustainable food producers group, an advisory initiative to help households reduce their carbon footprint, a co-operative promoting investment in sustainable and affordable energy, an annual festival to promote and celebrate sustainable living in Leicester, and an annual course covering the basics of Permaculture design, for creating productive and sustainable gardens and homes.
http://transitionleicester.org.uk/

THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION

A number of different studies have looked at the benefits of community-based approaches to addressing climate change. One of the more recent is a review of the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) in Scotland[1], which was set up to help communities address climate change by reducing their carbon emissions. This review suggests that community-based approaches are particularly well-placed to deliver pro-environmental behaviour change, for a number of reasons:

1. Community projects are **tailored** to local needs, conditions and capabilities;
2. Local, community-based projects tend to be **trusted** by local residents, who perceive them to have the community's interests at heart;
3. Community projects are more **successful at engaging and activating** local residents, in particular the sizeable proportion of the population that are only 'moderately interested' in the environment;
4. Action on climate change at the community level is on a **meaningful scale** to people (i.e. large enough for the overall impact to be considered worthwhile, but small enough for individuals to feel that they have a valuable contribution to make).

The review found that the carbon savings from community projects in the study area was "significant" and, crucially, additional to what would have occurred in the absence of these projects. Also of note was the fact that some projects were found to be contributing to longer-term change, "with the potential to begin changing social norms."

This potential to promote wider behavioural change is a distinguishing feature of community-based initiatives and one that gives them an important added-value in facilitating the transition to a post-carbon society. To meet future targets for the reduction of GHG emissions, profound lifestyle changes are required and the Scottish review suggests that community projects are well-suited "to deliver the personalised, intensive interventions" that can help to bring about these changes.

It also highlights the importance of avoiding an over-emphasis on "quick carbon savings" at the expense of engaging people on sustainable living more broadly, which is a particular strength of community-based approaches, which generally encompass carbon savings, sustainable lifestyles and capacity building for climate action.

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Other studies also underline this pivotal role of community-based initiatives in promoting behavioural change, including a recent study of the Transition initiatives in the Netherlands and in Freiburg, Germany[2]. This study also underlines the importance of close collaboration with local government and the business sector and of broadening the scope of community-based initiatives in order to appeal to a wider reference group. In this regard, it suggests that groups and projects that seek benefits beyond the purely environmental, such as economic and social, also tend to be more successful and attract a broader membership with a wider range of competencies.

1 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

2 How to Involve Citizens in Sustainable Development: An Exploratory Study of the Transition Towns Network in the Netherlands and Freiburg, Germany, Wieke Rusman (2012).

THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS

© Slowfood Italy

The review of local, community-based initiatives on climate change in the countries covered by the AEIDL survey shows two predominant networks with international reach: the Transition initiative and the Ecovillage Network, which together account for just over half of the groups identified (see Fig. 1 page 4). These networks and their members also have close links with the Permaculture movement, which is an important source of ideas, inspiration and guidance for local, community-based activity.

At national level, there are also some important networks, such as the Low Carbon Communities Network in the UK, which includes over 400 groups, as well as many smaller local or regional networks and stand-alone groups.

TRANSITION

The Transition movement is a bottom-up network of active citizens who are trying to find practical solutions on a local level to the global problems of climate change and peak oil. The first Transition group started in Totnes (UK) in 2006 (see Box) and since then Transition initiatives have sprung up in communities across 30 different countries, including 11 in the EU: the UK, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Germany, France, Denmark and Belgium.

There are currently in excess of 1000 groups officially registered as Transition initiatives, located in cities, towns, villages and rural areas, and the number is growing all the time.

It is estimated that there is also a similar number of unregistered groups, also pursuing the Transition approach.

In the 13 countries surveyed, there were an estimated 898 groups officially or unofficially pursuing the Transition approach at the beginning of 2013 (see Fig. 1 page 4). These groups all share a concern with regard to dwindling supplies of fossil fuels (peak oil),

© Transition Town Totnes

TRANSITION TOWN TOTNES – STREETS AHEAD!

Established in 2006, Transition Town Totnes (TTT) is a dynamic, community-led charity, which acts as an umbrella for different thematic groups developing projects in and around Totnes, in areas such as sustainable construction, food production, business and livelihoods. There are currently around 20 ongoing projects, all of which have been developed by interested members of the community, with the support of the TTT office.

One award winning TTT project, which ran from January 2010 to July 2011, was Transition Streets, which aimed to engage the wider community in Totnes in living more sustainably. Nearly 500 households participated in the project. These were organised into 56 different groups of neighbours. The projects saw households save an average of £570 and 1.3 tonnes of CO_2 per annum. New social ties were also created and the vast majority of groups vowed to continue their activities beyond the life of the project.

TTT activities are mainly carried out by volunteers, but it also has a full-time manager and a part-time office coordinator.
http: //www.transitiontowntotnes.org/

climate change and, increasingly, the economic downturn, and all have adopted a community-led approach to addressing these issues within their own local areas.

A common thread between these groups is the focus on practical, action-oriented projects, which cover a wide range of activities, from community gardens, to energy saving clubs, shared transport and recycling and repair schemes, to more investment intensive projects in areas such as community supported agriculture and community energy production. Most groups start small, but through their engagement in projects they gradually draw in more and more people from within their catchment areas.

Many Transition groups benefit from training and from other support and assistance provided by Transition Network, a platform established at the end of 2006 in order "to inspire, encourage, connect, support and train communities as they adopt and adapt the transition model."

Transition Network is run from Totnes and has a small core staff that helps to deliver its support services, which includes maintaining a network website. In addition to providing access to various guides and other resources, the website also hosts a database of registered groups and a project directory that describes over 300 projects.

This networking service is attempting to meet an identified need for information, knowledge and exchange among Transition groups, but due to the limited resources available, and to a lack of prior experience in the management of international networks, this service remains largely underdeveloped.

There is, for example, very limited translation of material into languages other than English, there are no methodologies for identifying, assessing and disseminating good practices (currently done through a monthly newsletter and annual meetings), and there is very limited organisation or thematic specialisation within the network. The development of the networking service also seems to be hampered by issues surrounding its organisational structure, which is struggling to adapt to the evolving needs of the network.

ECOVILLAGES

The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) was set up in 1995 to support human communities that sustain and regenerate their social and natural environments. Ecovillages are rural or urban, intentional or traditional communities with vibrant social structures. They are vastly diverse, yet united in their actions towards low-impact, high-quality lifestyles.

Ecovillages are consciously designed through local participatory processes, integrating the four dimensions of sustainability: ecology, economy, society and culture.

Today, GEN is made up of an alliance between intentional communities (new villages developed in accordance with the Ecovillage model, see Box) and traditional villages that have decided to design their own pathway into the future, merging the best of sustainable traditions with innovative solutions. Its members have some of the lowest per capita carbon footprints in the industrialised world[3].

GEN-International works through five broad regional organisations: the Ecovillage Networks of Northern America (ENNA), GEN Oceania and Asia (GENOA), the networks of Latin America (CASA), GEN-Europe and GEN-Africa. The European branch of GEN (GEN-Europe) is currently assisting in the emergence of GEN-Middle East as an independent branch of the global network.

The Newsletter of GEN International currently goes out to around 12 000 individuals and 1000 organisations worldwide.

IRELAND'S MODEL ECOVILLAGE

The ecovillage at Cloughjordan, in Ireland, is located on a 67 acre site in County Tipperary. It was set up by a group of people who formed an educational charity, Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd, in 1999. The premise was to create, "a supportive social community living in a low-impact way, and to create a fresh blueprint for modern sustainable living". A key objective for the project is to ensure that the development integrates into the existing village of Cloughjordan, and plays a part in the regeneration of the whole community.

Today, the site has 50 newly constructed low-energy homes and work units, a community farm, and virgin woodland of 17,000 mixed native trees. It also has planning permission for a further 82 low-energy homes and work units.

The ecovillage also includes:

> A solar- and wood-powered community heating system;
> A green enterprise centre and hi-speed broadband;
> An eco-hostel for visitors;
> A nearby train station.

Many of the new houses in Cloughjordan have rainwater harvesting systems in place and their energy performance is well above the national average. Cloughjordan was at the hub of a region within the county that was selected to become a leading example at a European level of how local communities can become sustainable in terms of their energy supply and use. The SERVE Sustainable Energy in Rural Village Environments project demonstrates sustainable energy use in rural communities (see: http://servecommunity.ie).

3 Simon, Karl-Heinz (2006): Gemeinschaftlich nachhaltig. Welche Vorteile bietet das Leben in Gemeinschaft für die Umsetzung ökologischer Lebenspraktiken? In: Grundmann, Matthias, Dierschke, Thomas, Drucks, Stephan u. Kunze, Iris (Ed.): Soziale Gemeinschaften. Experimentierfelder für kollektive Lebensformen. In der Reihe: "Individuum und Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Sozialisations- und Gemeinschaftsforschung". Münster. 155-170.

GEN-Europe has more than 159 ecovillages and national ecovillage networks enrolled on its interactive maps, spread across 27 EU countries (see Fig. 3). Some of the national ecovillage networks in turn represent a number of projects: the Swedish Ecovillage Network, for example, consists of at least 80 ecovillage projects. Similarly, the UK network includes at least 20 ecovillages.

From initially concentrating on the establishment of model ecovillages, the focus of GEN has now shifted to the sharing of best practice or aspects of ecovillages that have proven to be successful. The thinking now is that "every village must become an ecovillage and every city must become a green city."

The network's longer term strategy is guided by the belief that all of society needs to transition to low-impact, resilient lifestyles. GEN-Europe has been working on educational programmes (see Gaia Education) to mainstream the experience of its existing network and to support this transition.

Kosha Joubert, the President of GEN-International and the Executive Secretary of GEN-Europe, sums up this approach as follows: "One of the most powerful resources available to humanity is the longing of citizens to become part of the solution instead of feeling that they are contributing to the problem. GEN helps unleash this potential by showcasing pathways, solutions and best-practice examples."

© Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd

The Cloughjordan Community Farm was set up in August 2008 and is spread over 40 acres. The Farm is based on a model of farming called Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and is the first and largest of this type of farm in Ireland. CSA is where a direct relationship is created between farmers and farm members, who pay a weekly amount which guarantees the farmers a wage and the members a supply of local, fresh produce. See www.cloughjordancommunityfarm.ie

Further details on the Cloughjordan ecovillage can be found at: http://www.thevillage.ie

Country	Ecovillages or national networks
Austria	5
Belgium	3
Bulgaria	1
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	1
Denmark	10
Estonia	2
Finland	7
France	13
Germany	20
Greece	7
Hungary	5
Ireland	2
Italy	18
Latvia	5
Lithuania	4
Luxembourg	0
Malta	0
Netherlands	8
Poland	4
Portugal	7
Romania	6
Slovakia	2
Slovenia	3
Spain	17
Sweden	7
United Kingdom	1
Total	159

Fig. 3 Ecovillages and ecovillage networks in the EU27.
Source: http://gen.ecovillage.org/ecovillages/find-an-ecovillage.html

PERMACULTURE – A GUIDING PHILOSOPHY


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PRINCIPLES OF PERMACULTURE

1. Observe and Interact
2. Catch and Store Energy
3. Obtain a Yield
4. Apply Self-regulation and Accept Feedback
5. Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services
6. Produce no Waste
7. Design from Patterns to Details
8. Integrate rather than Segregate
9. Use Small and Slow Solutions
10. Use and Value Diversity
11. Use Edges and Value the Marginal
12. Creatively Use and Respond to Change

Many local, community-based groups that are engaged in activities related to climate change and sustainable development are influenced by, and sometimes work closely with, the Permaculture movement. In fact, the original idea for Transition emerged from a permaculture training course in Kinsale, Ireland, in 2005, and there continues to be considerable overlap between the two movements, in terms of both people and ideas.

Permaculture was developed in the 1970s and was originally seen as a contraction of the words permanent (or sustainable) and agriculture. Nowadays, it is more commonly understood as a contraction of 'permanent culture', reflecting a broadening of its scope from agriculture to a wide range of social as well as ecological endeavours.

The basic principles of permaculture (see Box) provide a set of universally applicable guidelines that can be used in designing sustainable systems. These principles have been derived from the observation of nature and from the earlier work of ecologists, landscape designers and environmental scientists. The focus is on working with the forces of nature rather than trying to reshape them.

Individuals, communities and organisations can, and have been successfully applying these principles and ethics to many different challenges, from the creation of community gardens, to the rehabilitation of farms, the recreation of rainforests, the replanting of arid lands, the building of sustainable communities and ecovillages, the development of new credit systems and productive businesses, and even to post-conflict reconciliation and emergency disaster relief.

Permaculture has developed a sizeable international following and now has national associations in 120 countries, which have collectively produced over 5000 graduates of permaculture training programmes.

This "permaculture community" continues to expand on the original ideas of the movement's founders, working through a network of publications, permaculture gardens, intentional communities, training programmes, and internet forums. This evolution of ideas and practices is driven by project experience, as well as research, which has become an important part of the permaculture movement.

In the UK, for example, the Permaculture Association has a research strategy in place, and as part of this it has assembled a Research Advisory Board whose members include many university-based researchers, along with independent professional researchers and permaculture practitioners involved in onsite research.


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GREENING THE DESERT

An iconic permaculture project, and one that perfectly demonstrates the enormous potential of this approach in tackling issues related to climate change, is the Greening the Desert project in Jordan.

For centuries, the Jordan Valley was renowned for being one of the most lush and productive lands in the world, but years of over-grazing and drought left it arid and with high salinity levels. To reverse this decline, in 2000, Australian permaculture expert Geoff Lawton embarked on an ambitious project that he called 'Greening the Desert'. He designed a system that harvested available water by effectively using and manipulating the natural landscape.

Using agricultural mulch and special irrigation canals, he managed to restore the fertility of a 10 acre demonstration site, turning the Jordanian desert into an oasis. Today, with limited funding and minimal maintenance, the original site is self-sufficient, producing impressive yields of fruit and vegetables, and becoming increasingly fertile. A new sustainable building on site also acts as a training centre, helping to share the lessons with other communities throughout the region.

COUNTRY FOCUS

In addition to international networks and movements with links to community-based action on climate change and sustainable development, there are also national networks in some countries, some with a focus on promoting cooperation and exchange between broad-based community initiatives, while others have a specific sectoral or thematic focus.

THE UK – A HOTBED OF COMMUNITY-BASED ACTIVITY

In the UK, for example, a number of national and regional networks have been established to support community-based action on climate change. In 2010, several of these came together to form an informal grouping of representatives from networks, called the Communities and Climate Action Alliance (CCAA). This 'network of networks' includes representatives of:

> The Low Carbon Communities Network, which supports groups engaged in activities to promote low carbon and zero carbon technologies and lifestyles at a community level (see below);

> Transition Network (representing Transition groups in the UK);

> Local United, a membership association which aims to inspire, enable and promote social ventures to move communities more rapidly towards a low-carbon future;

> Community Energy Wales (Sustain Wales), a network which aims to promote sustainable development in Wales, including by supporting local, community based initiatives;

> Keep Scotland Beautiful, which administers and supports the Climate Challenge Fund in Scotland (see Section 3.0 above);

Launch of the Low Carbon Hub in Oxford Town Hall, with over 250 representatives from low carbon community groups across Oxfordshire.

> Green Communities, a progamme run by the Energy Saving Trust, a government body that promotes the saving of energy, water and carbon emissions by UK households and communities;

> The Community Energy Practitioners Forum, which brings together know-how, creativity and support for communities striving to put in place large energy and carbon reduction projects.

CCAA members share the belief that "*communities have a unique and critical role to play in helping the UK meet its national carbon reduction targets, but that the communities' role is currently poorly understood.*"

It argues that national and local policy makers risk making policy decisions that are not as effective in the long term as they could be, because communities and community carbon reduction delivery models – such as social enterprise – are not an effective part of the strategic discussion. Its main purpose, therefore, is to:

> Demonstrate to government and other partners the unique and critical role of communities in helping to deliver climate change targets;

> Build a sense of shared purpose and collective action amongst its members and across a range of key private and public sector partners, aimed at lowering the barriers to community-based action on climate change;

> Develop, in collaboration with key partners, a UK wide plan which plays to partner strengths and which actively enables the potential for community-based action on climate change.

LOW CARBON COMMUNITIES

A founding member of the CCAA, the Low Carbon Communities Network (LCCN) aims to encourage the adoption of low carbon and zero carbon technologies and lifestyles at a community level, and to enable its members engaged in such activities to be as effective and efficient as possible. Membership of the LCCN includes over 400 community groups, coming from all parts of the UK, as well as a further 400 supporting members (which include a wide range of organisations including local authority climate teams)[4].

The LCCN members vary in size and nature, with around 60% being run on a purely voluntary basis, while about 40% employ one or more staff. Most groups have a legal basis and over half (51.3%) have been running for more than five years. There is an even split between urban and rural groups, and in terms of financing, just over 23% of groups have an annual turnover/budget of more than £50,000 (approx.. €60,000).

Group activities broadly cover local engagement, project work and lobbying. Almost all of the LCCN groups have developed practical projects, mostly related to energy (91% of groups), followed by food (62%), waste (54%), transport (46%), green space and biodiversity (36%), water (19%) and flooding and resilience (9%). The most popular types of energy projects focus on energy efficiency improvements, energy advice to local people, domestic renewables, community scale renewables, and community scale energy saving.

Engagement in policy work is also increasing, with over half of groups already having been involved in some kind of lobbying activity. Groups are also increasingly engaging with their local authorities: in 2012, 79% of groups were in contact with their local council on climate issues (up from 52% in 2011). Almost all of these groups report that they have good relations with their council's climate change staff.

LCCN sees this engagement with public bodies as an increasingly important aspect of its work, and its future priorities include training on lobbying, practical skills and public speaking, as well as continuing to provide information on new developments and mentoring support on group organisation and fundraising.

LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT

Another interesting initiative to emerge recently in the UK is Low Impact Development (LID).LID is an innovative approach to creating sustainable homes and livelihoods, which fosters social, economic and environmental renewal. This is a grass roots movement, and as such its actual definition has continued to evolve. However, in general, it concerns practical projects that draw on elements of permaculture, traditional knowledge, and appropriate 'low carbon' technology to create low impact settlements.

One study listed over 20 such settlements in the UK, and it has been estimated that a total of around 10,000 people live in Low Impact Developments nationwide[5]. At the heart of LID are the interrelated challenges of climate change and peak oil, and, in general, projects aim to inspire action beyond the boundaries of their own developments by providing practical examples which others can follow. However, to date, many LID projects have been forced to operate in a low key manner, as UK planning policy does not provide for their legal establishment: a good example of how legislation can act as a barrier to community-based action on climate change.

COMMUNITY ENERGY

Community energy is another area that has seen significant growth in the UK in recent years. Scotland, in particular, has a strong tradition in the development of community renewable energy projects. Since 2003, community energy ownership in Scotland has been supported through tailored schemes, resulting in over 800 projects.

In 2011, the Scottish Government introduced additional measures to help communities to benefit from developments in renewables and set a target of 500 MW from community and locally-owned renewable energy schemes by 2020. Community Energy Scotland is a registered charity that provides practical help for communities in developing green energy projects.

Elsewhere in the UK, Energy4All is a limited company established in 2002 by the Baywind Energy Co-op, the UK's first community-owned wind farm, to develop green energy schemes that are owned and operated by local communities. Energy4All is owned by the various wind cooperatives around the UK, including Baywind, Westmill, Boyndie, Fenland, Isle of Skye, Kilbraur and Great Glen.

Other pioneers in the area of community energy in the UK include the Meadows Partnership and West Oxford Community Renewables. Several new initiatives to enable investment in community energy projects have also emerged in recent years, including Abundance, Triodos Bank and MicroGenius, all of which enable small-scale investors to buy shares in local energy projects.

The UK government has supported a number of community energy schemes and there is clear evidence that community-backed projects enjoy a higher level of public support and encounter less planning problems, which is a key factor in reaching future targets for energy from renewables. In this context, the UK government is currently working on a community energy strategy, which it plans to publish in the autumn of 2013.

4 Low Carbon Communities Network: Annual Survey Results 2012

5 Pickerill, J. & L. Maxey, 2009. Geographies of sustainability: Low Impact Developments and radical spaces of innovation. Geography Compass 3(4): 1515-1539

Wind turbines in Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

FRANCE – COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES BREAKING NEW GROUND

In France, a country that does not have a strong tradition of community-based activity, new initiatives have emerged across the country in recent years. A supportive framework for this community engagement has now also been established, with the requirement for French municipalities to develop local strategies to combat climate change, and to involve local communities in their development and implementation (see Box).

While many of the community-led initiatives that have emerged so far are affiliated to the Transition network (around 130 groups already registered with Transition Network) and GEN (13 ecovillages) a number of other important initiatives have also emerged in France.

LOCAL CLIMATE-ENERGY PLANS

Since July 2010, all French municipalities with a population of more than 50,000 are required to introduce a Local Climate-Energy Plan (PCET), which should be developed by all local interests (communities, companies, associations, citizens, etc.).

French municipalities had until the end of 2012 to prepare a PCET, with a priority focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from municipal activities and other activities that are managed as a result of their regulatory responsibilities. The expectation, however, is that PCETs will go beyond this and experience to date suggests that the most successful initiatives are those that also engage with local citizens and the business sector.

"By taking action solely within the sphere of its direct responsibilities, a municipality can look at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 10 to 20%", explained Éric Prud'homme, head of the French environment agency's territorial coordination unit. *"But by working with its economic and social partners, it can reduce them by more than 70%."*
Further details at: www.pcet-ademe.fr

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

One of these is AMAP, the Association for the Preservation of Peasant Farming, which aims to support the viability and continuity of local farms committed to sustainable agriculture. Established in 2001, AMAP is a citizens association, involving a partnership between local consumers and local organic farmers, whereby the consumers (or Amapiens) enter into a contract with the famers at the beginning of each season to buy a certain amount of their production (fruit, vegetables, meat, cheese, eggs, honey, nuts,…) at an agreed price.

For their part, the farmers agree to supply good quality products, in accordance with a special AMAP charter. This arrangement gives the consumer access to good quality, locally produced food at a fair price, while the farmer has the security of a guaranteed market and income. The produce varies according to the season and is delivered at regular intervals, in small or large boxes, to a designated pick-up point.

The first AMAP groups started in 2001 and there are now an estimated 1,600 groups, with regular deliveries of 66,000 boxes to some 270,000 consumers.

AMAP was inspired by Community Supported Agriculture initiatives in Japan and the US and it also works closely with other organisations in France, such as the Slow Food movement, which has about 3,000 member, and the association, Terre de Liens (see Box below).

THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Virages Énergie is a network of citizen's initiatives, which aim to facilitate the exit from nuclear energy and fossil fuels, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions, through a gradual transformation of the French economy and society. To date there are five known groups in this network:

> Virage Énergie Aquitaine
> Virage Énergie Nord-Pas-de-Calais
> Virage Énergie-Climat Pays-de-la-Loire
> Virage Énergie-Ile-de-France
> Virage-Énergie Centre-Val-de-Loire

The focus of these groups is primarily on influencing public opinion and public policy. The initiative was founded in 2006, with the establishment of Virage Énergie Nord-Pas-de-Calais, which brings together individuals and organizations interested in building a more secure energy future through energy savings, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

SUSTAINABLE FARMING

Established in 2003, **Terre de Liens** (land links) aims to acquire land and support alternative and more sustainable models of land ownership and use. It also provides practical help to aspiring organic, biodynamic and peasant farmers. By mid-2012, the organisation had supported 115 farms and 200 farmers. The success of this initiative has led to the establishment of an informal network with similar initiatives in Belgium, England, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Spain.

© T. Schamasch

Members of the 'Collectif de la Mijote', a Terre de Liens group supporting sustainable agriculture in Savoie.

© Terre de Liens

By providing expert analysis and technically feasible proposals, the association aims to enlighten, guide and convince decision makers and citizens in the region to take action. In 2008, it won the European Solar Prize for a study that led to a roadmap on how to meet 100% of the regions energy requirement from renewable sources.

The association, "Virage Énergie-Climat Pays-de-la-Loire", was established in 2009 and has over 100 members, including energy, agriculture and environment experts, as well as citizens. On 3 April 2013, it published a citizen-focused climate-energy scenario, which proposes technological solutions aimed at:

> Reducing regional GHG emissions in line with the recommendations of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (referenced to 1990): -40% in 2020 and -85% in 2050;

> Ensuring a sustainable energy supply in the region, reducing energy consumption and developing renewable energies;

> Responding to the climate emergency in the interest of social justice.

Established in 2011, Virage Énergie Aquitaine is also in the process of developing a regional energy-climate scenario, while the more recently formed Virage Énergie Centre Val de Loire and Virage Énergie Ile-de-France are pursuing similar initiatives in their respective regions.

Recognising the important role of local citizens in contributing to the energy transition, the French government recently launched a public consultation called Transition énergétique. This initiative is being implemented with the support of regional authorities and seeks to engage with citizens in charting a new energy future. The consultation continues until July 2013 and will lead to the adoption of a legal initiative in the autumn of 2013.

The regional authority for the Nord-Pas de Calais region was the first to launch the consultation process. In October 2012, it held a conference in Lille, where over 400 invited guests participated in a first discussion on the ecological and social transformation of the region.

© Éoliennes en Pays de Vilaine

Citizens involvement in the Béganne wind farm.

FRANCE'S FIRST COMMUNITY-OWNED WIND FARM

In 2002, a small group of local people came up with the idea of establishing a citizens' wind farm at Béganne, in Brittany. Eleven years later, more than 600 households (via local investment clubs or through the social investment association, Énergie Partagée), social economy activists, as well as the Region of Brittany have come together in a local enterprise that will build four turbines and produce enough electricity to supply 8,000 households.

The involvement of significant numbers of local people in the project has given it a strong educational dimension, sensitizing residents to the potential of local renewable energy and energy savings. This initiative is also helping to establish other citizen-run wind energy cooperatives in Brittany and elsewhere.
More details at: http://www.eolien-citoyen.fr/

ITALY – COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES TAKE THE LEAD

In Italy, there are around 80 Transition groups (see Box), 18 ecovillages, which make up the Italian network of ecological villages (Rive), as well as a number of other bottom-up initiatives, such as Rete Gas, which promotes ethical purchasing.

ETHICAL PURCHASING

Ethical purchasing groups are purchasing groups that do not have price as their first priority, but instead chooses products and producers on the basis of defined environmental criteria and a shared ethos between the members of the group, the traders, and the producers.

This leads to a preference for local products (in order to minimize the environmental impact of transport), fair-trade goods (in order to respect disadvantaged producers by promoting their human rights) and reusable or eco-compatible goods (to promote a sustainable lifestyle).

A very demanding task for ethical purchasing groups is the continuous search for producers and products that satisfy these stringent criteria, which is why in Italy, these groups came together to form the network, Rete Gas, which allows for the sharing of information and tasks between different groups. It includes around 948 registered group members in Italy, as well as many non-registered groups. Its activities focus primarily on energy and food.

© Daniele Cavallotti

© Daniele Cavallotti

Delivery of commonly purchased food in Gottolengo.

CONSUMING LESS, LIVING BETTER

There are also a number of other networks in Italy that focus on promoting the shift to a society that consumes less and puts greater value on non-materialistic assets. Examples include:

> Archipelago Scec, a network of associations with a focus on sustainable local development, and in particular the development of local renewable energy resources, as well as promoting awareness about climate change and global warming;

> Descrescitae Felice (decreasing happily), a network of around 40 clubs, spread across Italy, which promote prosperity without economic growth. These clubs have a strong focus on sustainability and on projects and actions that contribute to climate change mitigation;

> Slow Food, a global, grassroots organisation with a network of around 2,000 communities across 150 countries that engage in small-scale food production, focusing on quality and sustainability. The Slow Food movement was founded in Italy in 1986 and there are currently around 280 active slow food communities in Italy.

> CESnet, a cross-border eco-sustainable network between Italy and Slovenia. Established in 2009, the network promotes local seed saving, sustainable production, ecological learning and sharing between groups and individuals.

TRANSITION MAINSTREAMED BY ITALIAN MUNICIPALITY

MONTEVEGLIO
CITTÀ DI TRANSIZIONE

In the commune of Monteveglio, the efforts of the local Transition group led to the local authority adopting an Energy Decent Plan in 2009, aimed at transforming Monteveglio into a "post carbon" commune. The local authority developed a strategic partnership with the Association Monteveglio Città di Transizione (Transition Town Monteveglio), with both organisations having a common assessment on the depletion of fossil energy resources and the need to limit economic development, on the need to make the local community more resilient and better prepared for a low energy future, on the importance of a bottom-up, participatory process, and on the need to maintain an optimistic outlook (important challenges lie ahead, but this will also bring great opportunities to improve quality of life).

On foot of this, the local authority committed itself to promoting Monteveglio as a Transition Town, with the direct participation of the whole community. Concrete actions proposed include: defining CO2 emission measurement tools and containment policies; the designation of an Energy Manager to promote renewable energy development projects and energy efficiency; and promoting sustainable lifestyles and reforestation actions.

Further details at: http://transitionculture.org/2009/12/04/what-it-looks-like-when-a-local-authority-really-gets-transition-the-monteveglio-story/

© Hela Norden ska leva

SWEDEN – 5,000 VILLAGES READY FOR TRANSITION

In Sweden, there are around 20 Transition groups, which have come together with a larger network, called Hela Sverige ska leva (All Sweden shall live), to create a new network called Converting Sweden. Converting Sweden draws on the experiences of both organisations and aims to create strong and sustainable communities across Sweden.

Hela Sverige ska leva is a national association consisting of around 5,000 village action groups. It also has 24 sub-networks, working with information and advisory services on a county level. Its mission is "to support local development towards a sustainable society", which it does by providing advice and support to local groups, facilitating cooperation and by giving access to tools and methodologies that help groups to succeed in their work. It also seeks to influence public opinion and public policies.

It is estimated that roughly 100,000 individuals are involved directly in village action groups and that their work affects over three million people – a third of the Swedish population. Groups are spread all over Sweden and engage in all kinds of activities, from running shops, organising childcare, to setting up renewable energy plants and improving local transport infrastructure.

Sustainable development is a key guiding principle of the village action movement and many projects focus specifically on this issue. Since 2003, for example, Hela Sverige ska leva has worked on a project called Sustainable Districts, in which 25 pilot villages developed sustainable solutions to lessen their dependency on oil.

This project has now been completed, but its activities are being continued in collaboration with the Swedish Transition network, within the framework of Converting Sweden. The aims is to promote a wider uptake of the piloted actions.

Hela Norden ska leva

By working with Hela Sverige ska leva, the Transition movement in Sweden has access to considerable resources and networks to facilitate the process of sharing experiences and inspiring other communities to engage in the transition process. Locally, there are now county or municipal committees across the entire country to support this activity.

Hela Sverige ska leva also cooperates actively with similar organisations in other countries. It is, for example, one of the driving forces in **Hela Norden ska leva** (All North shall live), which also includes similar networks from other nordic countries, and is an active participant in the Village Action Movement in Europe.

© Astrid den Haan

Demonstration of an electric car.

THE NETHERLANDS – COMMUNITIES WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER LOCAL ACTORS

A specific feature of community-based initiatives on climate change in the Netherlands is the close working relationships with municipalities (see Box) and other local organisations. As of January 2013, there were about 80 local Transition initiatives in the Netherlands, about half of which had a regular programme of activities, including local food production, permaculture courses, sustainable construction and recycling initiatives.

In addition to Transition groups, there are also an estimated 100 other local, community-based groups with a focus on climate change and sustainability, including 65 local groups that are affiliated to the Dutch branch of Friends of the Earth (*Milieudefensie*). Milieudefensie has a long tradition of working with local groups across the Netherlands and many of these are now engaged in climate action. Improving energy efficiency is a particular area of focus, but some groups are also working on a wider range of projects aimed at promoting sustainable local development.

There are at least another 35 stand-alone, community-based groups in the Netherlands focusing on climate action. Examples include Make Gouda Sustainable, a local partnership of citizens and public bodies, and NMCH, an independent foundation working with residents, businesses, public bodies and education centres to promote sustainable development in the municipality of Haarlemmermeer.

CLIMATE ALLIANCE

Established in 1991, the Climate Alliance (*Klimaatverbond*), is a dynamic network of 150 municipalities, 10 provinces and two water boards, working on projects, knowledge exchanges and other initiatives aimed at promoting local action on climate change. Climate Alliance projects include climate awareness campaigns, energy saving and renewable energy initiatives, as well as projects to inform, educate and inspire action among individuals and local communities.

A good example of the latter is the SOS project, which developed a web portal that publishes practical and inspiring examples of how citizens, citizen groups and municipalities can work together to address climate change. The aim is to showcase what is already being done in order to inspire others to develop similar actions. The emphasis is on actions that are easy to replicate.

© Astrid den Haan

Conference at the 'Maak Gouda Duurzaam' (Make Gouda Sustainable) Symposium in 2012.

In the Rozendaal Park area of Leusden, for example, residents saved an average of €1,000 each by jointly purchasing double glazed windows. By acting together, they were also able to negotiate a 15% discount on the purchase of insulation.

PORTUGAL – MAPPING AND LINKING COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES

In Portugal, the recently formed Converge Network is seeking to map the growing number of local, community-based climate change initiatives, and to inform and attract new participants that are interested in getting involved in concrete projects and initiatives in their own localities. Through its activities, the network also aims to inform people already involved in these initiatives and to encourage and support cooperation and new synergies.

To date, around 80 different organisations have registered with the network, including: 15 Transition groups (there are 20 registered groups in Portugal), 14 Permaculture projects, seven ecovillages (two of which are members of the Iberian Ecovillage Network), and a number of other organisations promoting sustainable living, either through training, or through specific projects in areas such as sustainable food or energy production. The members of the network are located right across the country, with the biggest concentrations around Lisbon and Porto.

Also in Portugal, Lisbon University is participating in a project called BASE (Bottom-Up Climate Adaptation Strategies for a Sustainable Europe), which is attempting to map local, community-based initiatives on climate change in nine European countries. The project is being funded by the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research (FP7).

The focus is on the local level (cities/rural areas) and on examining issues such as methods of participation and the empowerment of stakeholders and citizens, socio-technical transitions to sustainability, and the socio-ecological resilience of communities. The project is also trying to identify bridges between sectors, spatial scales, bottom-up and top-down initiatives, and to address existing gaps in processes of adaptation policy design and implementation.

A BASE project publication, the CIRCLE-2 Adaptation Inspiration Book, provides an overview of practical and early examples of adaptive actions already taking place across Europe.

Another recently submitted FP7 research project, also coordinated by Lisbon University, but involving partners from another five countries, is *"Transition – Reporting, Evaluation and Engagement: Innovative Approaches to Support the Shift to a Sustainable, Low Carbon Society"* (TREE). This project aims to build a 'Transition knowledge base' in order to characterise bottom-up sustainability movements and communities and better understand the current impacts of these movements and communities and how they interact with and implement existing policies.

The project will compile and integrate existing scientific studies on various aspects of transition, map existing bottom-up initiatives in Europe and review their characteristics and knowledge on transformations in order to identify the main drivers, the key stakeholders and their roles, and the processes that sustain transformation (including challenges).

An important feature of the TREE project is that it includes practitioner organisations (Transition Network, Global Ecovillage Network and Gaia Education) as full partners, alongside recognised research organisations, and takes an action research approach that allows practitioners a full and active role in shaping and carrying out the research.

SHOWCASING SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Located in the Algarve, the **Permaculture Institute of Vale da Lama** is an educational institute, a working farm, and a demonstration site for sustainable and self-reliant living. Situated on the banks of the Ria de Alvor tidal estuary, the site encompasses a 42 ha farm, which is now being cultivated according to the principles of permaculture. There is also an eco-villa that accommodates up to 20 guests, a children's summer camp and environmental education centre, and a pedagogical garden that provides food for the centre and teaches students and guests about sustainable food production.
More details at: www.valedalama.net

GERMANY – BUILDING KNOWLEDGE ON COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION

In Germany, there are currently around 60 Transition groups and 20 ecovillages. There is also an active permaculture movement, led by the German Permaculture Institute (founded in 1984), in collaboration with the Permaculture Academy, which offers permaculture design courses.
There are currently around 50 permaculture projects listed on the Institute's website.

Other important activities in Germany include community-based energy initiatives (see below) and community supported agriculture (CSA). The German CSA-network was founded in 2011 and there are currently 32 participating farms and 41 Initiatives.

Responding to these different developments, a new research community has also emerged in Germany, with the specific goal of developing knowledge about local, community-based approaches to addressing climate change and promoting sustainable living.

RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY

Established in 2008, Research in Community (RIC) is "a network for research and support linked to the culture of sustainability". RIC focuses specifically on the study of projects that seek to enhance or develop the diverse sustainability aspects of local communities – ecovillages, Transition towns and other forms of socio-ecological cooperation, areas that still have a very limited research base. The aim is to investigate the experiments and experiences of these projects, and critically analyse their potential for transfer to other contexts.

The first common research project was carried out in cooperation with the Ecovillage of Sieben Linden (see Box) in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. The most recent was conducted with an EU-funded learning partnership of five European Ecovillages ('The Transition Journey'). RIC also organises workshops, participates in conferences and provides an advisory service.

In 2009, RIC received the 'Futurist' project award and was nominated for the 'Ideen Initiative Zukunft' 2010-11. The network was also an official project of the 'UN-Decade for Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014' in the years 2010-11. At the beginning of 2011, it was formally inaugurated as an association, which now receives funding from the MRF Trust. Future plans include the formation of a research institute.

LOCAL ENERGY COOPERATIVES

Germany is also a leader in the field of community energy, with 65% of its renewable energy capacity community-owned. There are over 600 energy cooperatives, the number having increased tenfold in the period from 2000-2010, following a major restructuring of Germany's Feed-in Law.

TESTING NEW RESPONSES TO PRESSING CHALLENGES

The idea for the **Ecovillage of Sieben Linden** was first tabled in 1989, and in 1997 a 77 hectare site was purchased, which is now home to a living community of 100 adults and 40 children. The broad goal of this ecovillage is "to develop and test answers to pressing challenges such as climate change, economic crisis, unsustainable resource use and social inequality."

A specific objective is to reduce the ecological footprint of the community, which has so far been cut to 2,500 kg CO2 equivalents per head, or about one-third of the average ecological footprint in Germany. This has been achieved by focusing on the use of closed energy and resource cycles, including the use of solar energy, building with natural and local resources (straw, clay, timber), and cultivating organic food on-site. The populated area and its ecosystems are also enhanced by preserving and creating diverse habitats for flora and fauna.

The project is structured as a registered cooperative, with land and infrastructure belonging to the inhabitants, all of whom are shareholders. Domestic budgets are the personal responsibility of the inhabitants. The experience and knowledge developed at Sieben Linden is offered through seminars and participatory workshops to people from all over the world.
Further details: http: //www.siebenlinden.de

Working together in the Ecovillage of Sieben Linden.

During this ten-year period, Germany increased its total share of electricity from renewables from 3% to 25%, with energy production from renewables increasing from 5,000 MW in 1990 to 55,700 MW in 2010.

The vast majority of the investments were made by cooperatives and small, community-owned businesses. An estimated 60% of the financial investment to replace fossil fuels and nuclear power came from private households, which now own 39% of all renewable energy plants in Germany.


© EWS

Ursula Sladek of EWS received by President Obama at the White House in 2011.

SCHÖNAU'S LOCAL ENERGY COOPERATIVE

Schönau is a town of 2,500 people, situated in the Black Forest, near the city of Freiburg. In the early 1990s, the local community of Schönau set up the energy cooperative, **EWS**, and bought the local electricity grid when the license came up for renewal. To raise the necessary funds, EWS launched a nation-wide campaign, raising more than six million Deutschmarks (3 million Euros).

EWS Schönau currently has one thousand owners, all of whom are paid small yearly dividends. It provides clean electricity to around 120,000 households and industrial clients, which it buys from suppliers around Germany and generates itself in and around Schönau. The main focus is on wind energy, bioenergy, solar energy and hydroelectric power.

© Cooperativa Integral Aragonesa (CIAR)

SPAIN – WHERE COOPERATION REPLACES COMPETITION

In Spain, at the beginning of 2013 there were an estimated 30 Transition groups, with another 14 groups in the early stages of development. The members of these initiatives were also in the process of establishing a Spanish Hub to support networking and cooperation at national level.

There were also 17 ecovillages in Spain, all members of the Iberian Ecovillages Network, and a network of around nine integral cooperatives, local citizen-led initiatives that aim to progressively network all the basic elements of an economy (production, consumption, finance and social capital) and integrate all sectors needed to live outside the traditional capitalist system.

The aim of these cooperatives is to promote a new way of life based around self-managed communities, where cooperation replaces competition as the basic guide for human co-existence.

Spain also has many stand alone local initiatives with a focus climate change, such as the cooperative Trigaza in Artesa de Villasur (Burgos), Otxandio (Bizkaia), Tramallol (Sevilla), Zemos98 (Sevilla), Amayuelas (Palencia), Quintanilla Montecabezas (Burgos).

Many of these initiatives focus initially on ecological agriculture or other issues related to local food production, but as they develop, the scope of their activities widen to include projects such as time banks and local currencies, distributed energy, composting, recycling and recovery, and asset sharing.

POLAND – BUILDING LOCAL AWARENESS AND CAPACITY

In Poland, there are no known Transition groups, Ecovillages or Permaculture associations, and no other community-based initiatives with a specific focus on climate change have been identified. However, there are other initiatives focusing on climate change that have a distinct local dimension and are seeking to increasingly involve local communities in their activities.

One such initiative is the DOKLIP (good climate for counties) project, which is part-funded by the EU LIFE programme and coordinated by the Polish Institute for Sustainable Development, an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation.

The main goal of DOKLIP is to raise awareness about climate change among civic leaders at county level, and to stimulate initiatives in support of practical local measures to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change. Specifically, the project aims to stimulate cooperation between stakeholders at local level and to increase awareness about the importance of integrating measures for climate mitigation and adaptation into local development policy.

A network of around 80 local leaders has already been established and training is being provided for another 1,400, covering around 115 or one-third of all Polish counties. It is expected that other, non-participating counties will also be encouraged to get involved and to make better use of EU funds to address climate change issues.

© Tomaszów Mazowiecki Archives

DOKLIP opening session in Tomaszów Mazowiecki.

A MODEL COUNTY FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

The county of Kisielice in Iława recently carried out a project that was aimed at creating an "energy self-sufficient municipality". The project engaged with all sections of the local community in promoting the development of renewable energy sources (RES) and now serves as an example of a successful RES initiative in Poland.

EU funding for the DOKLIP project continues until 2015. Beyond that, the intention is to continue the network of local leaders and of counties through self-financing mechanisms, which are now being put in place.

In addition to DOKLIP, which currently operates at county-level, many Polish municipalities are members of the Polish branch of the EU-wide Energy Cities initiative, and some are also members of the Covenant of Mayors initiative.

Another Polish iniative is the Climate Coalition, an association of mainly environment NGOs that are engaged in climate protection activities. Established in June 2002, during the conference, 'Stop global warming' in Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, the coalition aims to promote a more proactive climate policy in Poland, and to monitor its implementation.

© Samsø Energy Academy

A 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMUNITY IN 10 YEARS

The island of **Samsø** was selected by the Danish Government in 1998 as a demonstration site for a community that would meet all its energy needs using renewable sources.

The local community, with government support, implemented a range of initiatives, such as a district heating systems based on biomass, combined heat and power (CHP) schemes, wind turbines and solar heating projects, and a sustainable transport initiative. Many of these projects were organised through cooperatives and financing schemes that ensured a strong involvement of local inhabitants.

Ten years after the project started, the island of around 4,000 inhabitants was not just 100% self-sufficient in renewable energy, but was also exporting surplus energy to the Danish mainland.

DENMARK – A EUROPEAN LEADER IN COMMUNITY ENERGY

In Denmark there are a number of local, community-based initiatives working either directly or indirectly on climate change issues. These include Transition initiatives, ecovillages, as well as community gardening and ethical food production and distribution projects.

Denmark also has a strong tradition of community renewable energy generation (see Box). While many other countries are still struggling with local opposition to wind or other green energy projects, and with the integration of fluctuating energy from wind and solar, Denmark has largely overcome these problem by giving local communities a financial stake in local energy projects, and by combining heat and power and implementing district heating infrastructure across the country.

Electricity and heat are by law non-profitable goods in Denmark, which has enabled local community-based cooperatives to take the lead in the implementation of the energy transition. The price per kilowatt-hour for electricity from community-owned wind parks is now not only competitive with conventional power production, but is actually half the price of electricity from off-shore wind parks.

Denmark is clearly on its way to achieving its 100% renewable energy target for the electricity, heat and transport sectors by 2050. However, in order to see developments elsewhere in Europe similar to those in Denmark, there is a need for national political frameworks that enable citizens and municipalities to profit from this transition.

EU SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

There are a number of EU and national programmes and initiatives that provide support for community-based action on climate change. Some of these have been mentioned above but perhaps the most important at European level are the Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) programme and the LIFE+ programme.

From 2014, the LIFE+ programme will include a specific sub-programme on Climate Action, which will provide support for pilot and demonstration projects, including those carried out by community-based groups or networks of such groups. The IEE has a more specific focus on promoting market uptake of renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures.

In addition, there are also certain EU programmes, such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the Structural Funds programmes that are implemented through national, regional or local intermediaries. Community-led local development has been a feature of these programmes for many years now, implemented through local intermediaries such as LEADER local action groups (LAGs) in the case of the EAFRD, Fisheries local action groups (FLAGs) in the case of the EFF, and other local partnerships in the case of the Structural Funds.

From 2014, these local intermediaries will have the possibility to simultaneously access funding from several different EU programmes, giving them the opportunity to broaden the scope of their local development strategies and, therefore, the range of projects and initiatives they can support.

LIFE SUPPORT FOR LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION IN FINLAND

The Finnish LIFE project, Climate Change Community Response Portal, successfully created an extensive web portal that brings together in one place, relevant and reliable information on climate change relating to Finland. The site, which is structured to help local decision makers to integrate climate change information into their planning and decision making processes, is structured around three sections: 1. A 'Climate change explained' section, which provides research-based information on physical climate science, as well as impacts, mitigation and adaptation measures; 2. A 'Maps, graphs and data' section, which provides users with observed and anticipated data on climate change and its impacts, including future scenarios; and 3. A 'Community Response Wizard', which offers support, as well as options, for adaptation and mitigation for local-scale planning and decision-making.

© European Commission

This could lead to the improved availability of local funding for community-based action on climate change, but this will require a considerable effort by all interested stakeholders, at all levels, to ensure climate action is recognised as a priority in local development strategies.

In addition to the funding available from these different EU programmes, the substantial body of projects already supported is also a valuable source of information and good practices. All of these programmes have web portals, which act as gateways to project databases, publications and other material and documentation that provide information on the results, lessons and experiences of thousands of projects, including many related to local action on climate change.

€1.0 MILLION FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ENERGY IN OXFORD

In the UK, Oxford City Council, in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, was approved for a grant of €1.1 million from the IEE in 2012, as part of their £1.24 million OxFutures programme to develop community renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. The project is being spearheaded by a social enterprise called the Low Carbon Hub, which is working with an active network of community-based groups to develop energy projects. The EU funding will help to broaden and accelerate this work, focusing mainly on investments in hydro-power and solar projects in the Oxford area.

© Low Carbon Hub

TIME TO GO MAIN

This preliminary investigation confirms the existence of an active and rapidly growing network of local, community-based groups engaged in projects and initiatives on climate change and sustainable development in Europe.

These projects and initiatives cover a wide range of activities, from information and awareness raising, to training, to investment in capital and infrastructure, and also a wide range of thematic issues, from community supported agriculture, to recycling, sustainable construction and renewable energy production.

There is also considerable diversity between EU countries, in terms of both experience in applying community-based approaches, and also in relation to the areas of focus. Some countries, such as the UK, for example, have a long tradition of community-based activity and have been successfully applying this to climate change issues for a number of years now, while others, such as Poland, are only beginning to explore the potential of this approach.

In terms of thematic focus, there are also notable differences, with counties like France and Italy, for example, having considerable experience and knowledge in the area of local food production and community supported agriculture, while countries like Denmark, Austria and Scotland have developed quite a wealth of experience in the area of community-based renewable energy production.

An interesting aspect of the work of groups in all countries, however, is that most have taken a lead role in their communities in terms of testing and demonstrating different tools, technologies, models and approaches that can help society to make the transition to a more sustainable and low carbon future.

In a wide range of areas, including transport, food and energy production, construction and waste management, these groups are drawing on available knowledge, skills, technologies and creativity to find new ways of living and working that not just reduce carbon emissions, but also help to spawn new businesses and economic activities and ensure a greater respect for social justice and social equity.

In doing this, they have achieved some dramatic results: demonstrating that communities can be 100% self-sufficient in renewable energy, that our ecological footprint can be significantly reduced, that group purchasing can make new technologies more affordable, that communities can build wind farms, that local food production can deliver food that is healthier and more sustainable, and that people can consume less and still be happy and fulfilled.

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The challenge and the opportunity now is to make this experience and knowledge more widely available in order to accelerate the transition that is now needed in society. The perils of climate change, the loss of biodiversity and others consequences of an inherently unsustainable socio-economic model are well documented and the need for urgent action is widely recognised.

Community-based initiatives have an important role to play. These initiatives have been shown to be effective in bringing about behavioural change and in helping to establish new norms in society. The wider application of these approaches must, therefore, be seen as an essential element of any broader strategy on climate change.

STREAM

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF COMMUNITIES

Community-based approaches should not be seen in isolation. Their role must be seen in the context of wider action and an appropriate support framework must be established in order to assist the further develop and replication of these approaches, without losing their essential local, bottom-up ethos.

At present, there is no overarching structure to support this kind of activity in the EU, and while the more developed movements have established international coordinating bodies (Transition Network and the Global Ecovillage Network), the scope of the networking activities carried out is limited and focused mainly on the existing members of these networks.

There is, for example, very little analysis of what constitutes good practice and what and how this can be transferred and replicated in other areas, and while some good links have been developed with researchers and universities, the dissemination of research results and effective communication with the wider community of practioners, potential practioners and policy makers remains a challenge. Existing networking activities at international level also tend to be passive in nature, focusing primarily on making information and knowledge available via web portals.

There is, however, a recognised need among stakeholders for a more proactive approach, with more attention given to identification and analysis of good practice, the establishment and animation of thematic groupings, the production and dissemination of user-friendly guides, methodologies and information material, and the facilitation of contact, collaboration and cooperation between groups and between networks. To facilitate true international networking, there is also a need for a networking service that is multilingual and multi-cultural, with the capacity to facilitate European-wide participation.

All of this would also contribute to addressing another identified need, that of fostering a “community of communities”, a one-stop shop for community action on climate change in Europe, a single voice at the policy making table in Brussels and a focal point or flag bearer for communities across Europe that are committing their time, energy and ideas to combating climate change and, to the creation of a new, low-carbon society.

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

As a follow up to this publication, AEIDL is currently facilitating a discussion with partners from across Europe on the establishment of a European network to support local, community-based action on climate change.

Those interested in contributing to this initiative are invited to contact AEIDL at the following address: **enlacc@aeidl.eu**

Supported by AEIDL

AEIDL (*Association Européenne pour l'Information sur le Développement Local*) is a not-for-profit association with a focus on promoting and supporting sustainable local development in Europe. AEIDL has particular expertise in the coordination of European networks, communications, publishing, event management and web design, especially in the areas of local development (rural, urban), the environment, employment and social affairs, and citizenship.

Further details at: **www.aeidl.eu**