



# **TIME FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION MANIFESTO**

**Community-led initiatives & the European Green Deal**

A group of people, including men, women, and children, are sitting on a grassy hillside. They are dressed in traditional Indian attire. The background shows a dense forest of trees under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

**“Having the right policies, infrastructure and technology in place to enable changes to our lifestyles and behaviour can result in a 40-70% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This offers significant untapped potential... The evidence also shows that these lifestyle changes can improve our health and wellbeing.”**

**IPCC Working Group III Co-Chair Priyadarshi Shukla 2022**

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”**

**Margaret Mead**

# Time for Collective Action Manifesto

## Community-led initiatives & the European Green Deal

The accelerating planetary crisis –climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution-impacts everyone, but not equally. Even with drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, global warming will likely exceed 1.5°C this century. Vulnerable people, communities, countries and regions are disproportionately affected by the consequences of the crisis and the costs of a green transition.

Inequalities and consumption practices are deeply intertwined with the ecological footprint people leave on earth. The world's richest 10% produces about half of all greenhouse gas emissions. Accountability and rapid action by the rich are essential to meet climate targets [1].

At the same time, individuals' ability to respond to the multiple crises through migration, mitigation or adaptation depends on systemic factors, and is particularly challenging for vulnerable individuals.

All pathways to achieve the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity and the Paris Agreement require urgent and concerted efforts that foster transformative change [2]. With the right policies, infrastructures and technology to enable fundamental lifestyle and behaviour change, up to 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced by 2050 [3].

**Transformative change requires both individual and collective action accompanied by systemic change. We need to support people to become active changemakers as citizens, as active consumers, in their communities, and in their working lives.**

Policies need to harness the power of people who want change. The European Green Deal can unlock the potential of local levels and grassroots initiatives to create a more sustainable society.

The challenge is immense. To tackle it, we propose a change of narrative [4,5]:

**We have the opportunity to work together, in community and solidarity, towards a good life for all within planetary boundaries [6]. We have the opportunity to fix a broken system based on infinite economic growth, hyper-individualisation and over-consumption. We have the opportunity to take action for a more meaningful and just life [7].**

This manifesto outlines key ideas and policy demands for transformative change aimed at EU policy makers, as well as non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and community-led initiatives.

### Who are we?

The “we” of this manifesto is a collection of organisations, communities and individuals working for a more sustainable Europe –the ECOLISE network of community-led initiatives, partner organisations and friends. We are signatories of this manifesto because we are convinced of the power of local, community-led action for sustainability and the need for a strong European Green Deal.

This manifesto is the outcome of a year-long and ongoing consultation process initiated by ECOLISE, which positions community-led initiatives towards the European Green Deal, contributing to 10 theses towards transformative community-led local development policies. These theses provide a framework for conversations about the role of communities in achieving transformative systemic change and their connection with EU policies. Over 400 people from 130+ European organisations, including 30+ process partners, have contributed so far.

We aim to trigger deep conversations and reach out to changemakers on all levels, building a solid alliance of partners for a strong European Green Deal. We invite you to [join the conversation](#).

# **Community-led initiatives are...**

**...self-organised initiatives of people working together on an ongoing basis towards some defined set of environmental and/or social goals, usually within defined localities or communities of place<sup>8</sup>. Examples of community-led initiatives include transition movements, permaculture projects, ecovillages, energy communities, community-supported agriculture, and local sharing economies<sup>9</sup>.**

**Many of these initiatives appreciate that sustainability is an ethical obligation and aspire to values such as cooperation, diversity, inclusion, resilience, equity and justice.**

# 1 Support community-led initiatives as laboratories for transformative social innovation.

Collective action by citizens can help inspire the cultural change in mindsets, norms and values needed for fundamental lifestyle changes towards sufficiency to become widespread [10]. Community-led initiatives are –at their best– laboratories of transformative social innovation [11,12], inspiring new social practices and turning sustainable lifestyles into a good habit.

Many community-led initiatives on biodiversity, energy, food and mobility go even further: They show that it is possible to have a positive socio-ecological impact [13,14] by caring for people and nature as the basis of all life. Diverse grassroots responses can create virtuous cycles, improving the resilience, health and wellbeing of communities and the natural places they live in [15, 16].

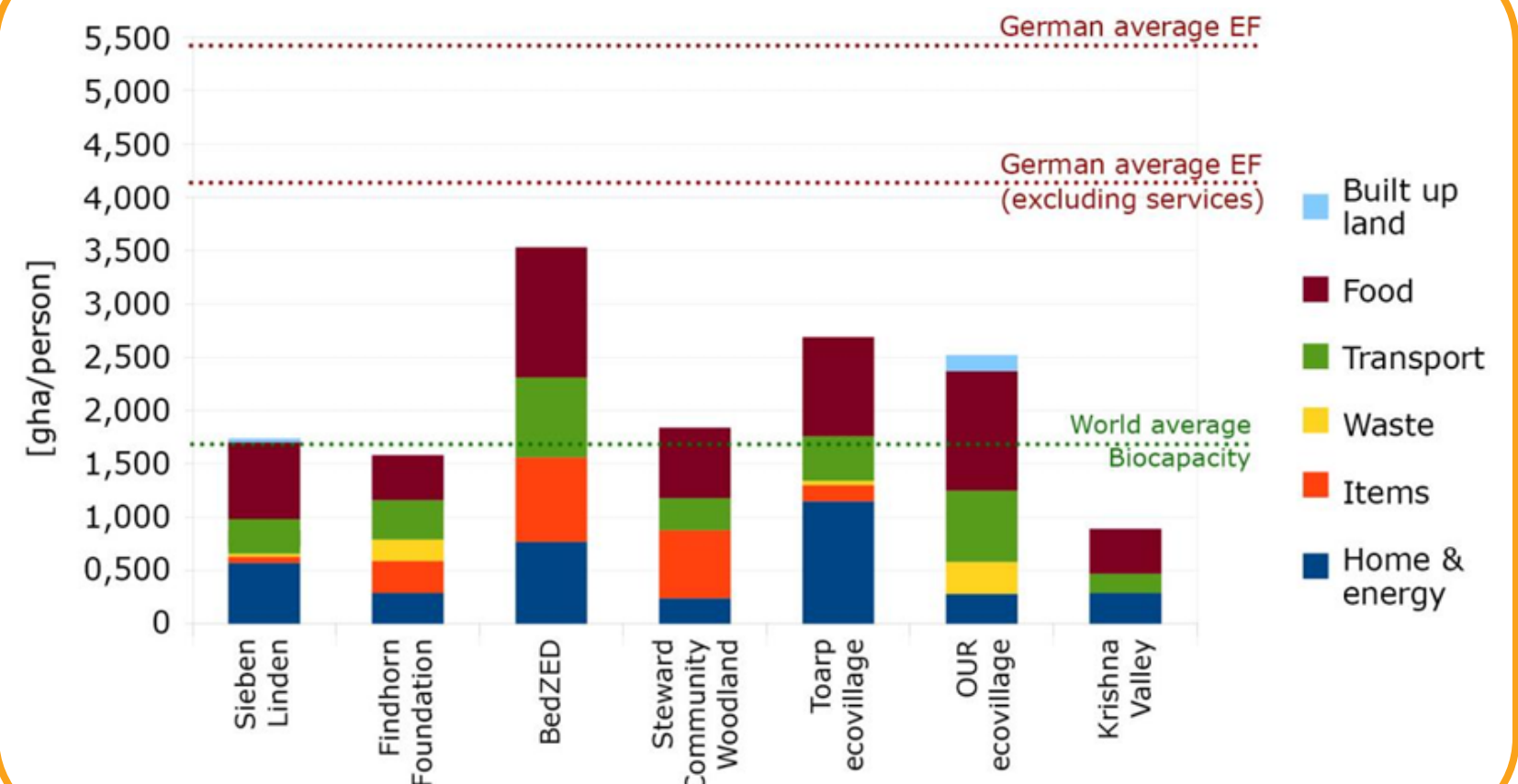
Cultural changes are connected to new ways of knowing, doing, organising and framing [17]. Practices of community-led initiatives are often based on whole-systems thinking, as in permaculture and sociocracy. Community-supported agriculture, energy communities, transformative learning [18] and sharing economies (such as in transport, or time-sharing) are other examples. The social innovation that such initiatives can bring to wider society needs to be supported by policy.

**Figure 1:** Comparison between the ecological footprint of different ecovillages in Europe and average German ecological footprints. Source: Bocco, Andrea et al: [The ecological footprint of Siebenlinden](#), 2018, p. 27

## POLICY DEMAND

We ask EU policy makers to support social innovation and acknowledge the crucial role of community-led initiatives by mainstreaming social innovation in all EU funding programmes, and by creating tailor-made funding programmes on social change, demand-side mitigation, localisation and sufficiency.

We ask the European Commission to publish a communication on the relevance of community-led initiatives for climate and environmental action and for implementing the European Green Deal.



# 2

## Support the right to have a choice to live sustainably.

Everyone on the planet has the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment [19]. The freedom to live sustainably means the freedom to do all one can to guarantee a healthy biosphere as a precondition for a good life.

However, right now, the choice to live well within planetary boundaries is out of reach for most people in Europe for systemic reasons. We must mainstream diverse, sustainable lifestyles and create the conditions so that everyone, especially marginalised groups, can have the choice to live, work and act within planetary boundaries.

Community-led initiatives can inspire lifestyle changes beyond material wealth and consumption, yet systemic changes are needed to make diverse ways of sustainable living accessible to all.

### **POLICY DEMAND**

**We ask EU politicians to create the systemic conditions for mainstreaming diverse, sustainable lifestyles by changing the economic system towards care for people and the planet so that everyone can choose to live well within planetary boundaries.**

### **GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE**

## **Meet Jalotus Circular Economy Center**

### **Finland**

Jalotus was established as a project of the city of Kerava, Finland, as part of a nationally active transition movement for sustainable living. Their mission is to support the transformation from passive consumers to active citizens, reducing their environmental impact.

[www.jalotus.fi](http://www.jalotus.fi)



## Harnessing the power of community for a strong localised Green Deal.

The European Green Deal has the potential to guide national, regional and local policies and action towards transformative change. Citizens and communities need strong environmental and social protection to thrive. Its implementation depends on citizens and local stakeholders [21].

But there is no binding mechanism in place for local-level implementation of the European Green Deal across Member States and no dedicated resourcing (funding, capacity building) for community-led sustainability action [22]. Existing funding programmes are generally quite limited for local stakeholders [22], such as citizens' initiatives or local governments, leaving the potential of grassroots sustainability action largely untapped.

To achieve the goals of the European Green Deal, we need to adapt it to the local context. We want to see local and regional Green Deals that connect citizens with governments and the natural habitats they live in. These place-based Green Deals would include binding plans in line with European Green Deal targets and timelines and a holistic approach to the planetary crisis, addressing climate, biodiversity and pollution together. They would involve citizens and community-led initiatives in mitigation and adaptation, aiming to create virtuous cycles and build the resilience and wellbeing of communities.

### POLICY DEMAND

**We call on local, national and EU policy makers to promote lifestyle and societal changes and widen the scope for collective action for sustainability –hand in hand with the systemic change needed.**

**We ask EU policy makers to:**

- **Support a strong and ambitious European Green Deal by reinforcing laws with binding targets for all Member States and governance levels in line with the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.**
- **Prioritise the goals of the European Green Deal and mainstream these throughout all EU funding and policy frameworks, making it the guiding light for territorial development and support this with dedicated funding via Integrated Territorial Investments and Community-Led Local Development [23].**
- **Support local or regional Green Deals through EU funding, regulations, strategies and frameworks. This entails binding plans with targets and timelines aligned with the European Green Deal and direct access to climate and environmental funding for municipal, local and regional authorities and community-led initiatives. Creating synergies and coherence between existing structures and initiatives such as Local Action Groups (LEADER/Community-Led Local Development), the Covenant of Mayors, the EU Climate Pact, the Rural Pact, and Smart Villages is crucial.**

# 4

## Meaningful public participation and lively democracies.

The science is clear: we need transformative change to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis [2,3]. But the political will is lacking. Continuing political disregard for the potential for citizens and community-led initiatives to respond to the planetary crisis increases the risk of social unrest, political apathy, disillusion and polarisation.

We believe that a democratic system that offers meaningful public participation has the potential to drive practical action and higher ambition in sufficiency-oriented policy making under the European Green Deal. Many community-led initiatives apply innovative forms of governance and participatory democracy that support responsible, self-empowered action.

### POLICY DEMAND

We call on EU policy makers to:

- **Develop mechanisms for direct links and structured dialogues between grassroots initiatives and local, regional, national and EU levels of governance.**
- **Adopt strong direct democracy approaches, such as participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies.**
- **Support organised, publicly-financed connecting spaces and intermediaries such as associations, whose role is to interact between citizens and governments and which possess the resources, competencies and skills needed to nourish deliberative public participation.**

### 4.1 Participation in the national energy and climate plans and long-term strategies

EU Member States are required to submit 10-year national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and long-term strategies (LTS) outlining how they intend to meet their energy and climate commitments. The current draft NECPs are greatly insufficient [25]. They fail to align with EU 2030 climate targets and lack the meaningful participation of, and consultation with, local governments and communities. Community-led initiatives need to be part of a structured stakeholder dialogue, including citizen assemblies to inform the drafting and implementation of NECPs and LTS and align with local and regional Green Deals.

### POLICY DEMAND

**We call on EU policy makers to strengthen and improve the monitoring of national obligations associated with NECPs and LTS, in line with demands by Climate Action Network Europe (CAN-E) [25] and the European Committee of the Regions [26].**

Specifically, we call for:

- **The establishment of permanent multi-level energy and climate dialogues, including on regional, local and municipal levels, to ensure that climate policies are designed using a bottom-up approach that involves and empowers local communities. Community-led initiatives need to be involved in these structures as part of larger citizen assemblies [27].**
- **Include localisation and strengthened multi-level governance as binding criteria of NECPs, with municipal, local and regional governments and community-led initiatives at the heart of localisation. This includes linking NECPs to existing frameworks for Local Green Deals and governance methods such as Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans [28].**



# 5 Financing and resourcing community-led solutions.

Healthy communities connected to nature form the basis for socio-ecological innovation and sustainability action. Community-led initiatives that care for people and the planet are essential, yet their activities are not adequately valued by the market or the public sector.

We advocate to change public resourcing to support care for people and the planet. Communities undertaking this care work need core funding for their activities that is not project-bound, guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of CLIs. They also need sufficient and appropriate resourcing of the infrastructures, institutions, organisations and activities necessary for communities to take care of their social and ecological habitats [29].

## POLICY DEMAND

**We call on the European Commission to adequately resource people and communities for the green transition with specific attention to providing core funding for community-led initiatives. Social innovation and community-building need to be earmarked in all EU funding programmes.**

**Policies must empower communities to respond to the planetary crisis and take action. This includes ensuring that people have enough time, adequate skills and competencies, as well as the social, cultural and financial resources to tackle this challenge.**

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

### Meet Tamera Ecovillage Portugal

Started in 1978 with a small group, Tamera is an experimental peace research village of around 200 inhabitants (including children) located in southwest Portugal, with a mission of empowering people around the world to build a regenerative, nonviolent culture.

[www.tamera.org](http://www.tamera.org)



## Imagine the possibilities: from “what is” to “what if?”

A different way of life in Europe, combined with systemic change, could change the course of the planetary crisis. Yet most people, politicians included, seem to be caught up in a crisis of imagination, convinced that “there is no alternative” to the current European way of life and the socio-economic systems framing it.

The challenge is for European society to be creative and imagine what a good life within planetary boundaries could look like. That means taking the leap from “what is” to “what if”, in the words of Rob Hopkins, co-founder of Transition Network [30]. Community-led initiatives across Europe provide practical examples and inspiration of what can be achieved.

### **POLICY DEMAND**

**We ask EU policy makers to encourage a social imagination and support discourses towards diverse political visions of a good life within planetary boundaries. We ask them to provide the spaces for citizens and decision makers to imagine and discuss creative solutions.**

### **GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE**

## **Resourcing community-building with the support of LEADER/Community-Led Local Development:**

Community Climate Coaching aims to establish a new vocation that empowers citizens to respond to the planetary crisis through a form of community-led regenerative local development. In 2023, following the successful completion of the Community Climate Coaches ERASMUS+ project, a pilot programme was launched in County Tipperary in Ireland with an objective to scale it nationally.

The pilot is a partnership between Cultivate, the Sustainable Ireland Cooperative, the Public Participation Network and two local development companies, South Tipperary Development Company and North Tipperary Development Company. The initiative is funded by the Irish Governments Community Climate Action Programme. See [www.sustainable.ie](http://www.sustainable.ie).

EU funding from LEADER/Community-Led Local Development is crucial for supporting grassroots initiatives like this. Community-building needs to be a dedicated goal of EU-funding programmes overall.



## From extraction and infinite growth towards care and wellbeing.

We are living in a system built on an extractive, growth-based economy. This economic system represents a root cause of the planetary crisis as it ignores the basis of all human activities and life—a healthy biosphere. It ignores the limits to resources and assumes that endless economic growth is possible and desirable, despite scientific evidence that economic growth is the relevant driver of ecological destruction [31,32]. This has led to the exploitation and domination of nature and humans alike, creating economic and ecological monocultures, creating instability and rising inequality.

Policies need to recognise the value of and support diversity in nature and in society, including the economy, for building resilience. People need diverse economies [33] that recognise nature as the basis for human health and prosperity.



### POLICY DEMAND

**Policy demand: We call for a reorientation of economic goals towards resilience, cooperation and care for people and the planet. In particular, we ask EU policy makers to:**

- **Prioritise planetary health as the basis and goal of all economic activity, with alternative economic indicators to replace GDP.**
- **Mainstream sufficiency principles for production and consumption & include this in monitoring and reporting.**
- **Support diverse localised and decentralised economies [34], especially in food, energy and mobility systems, based on the shared governance of commons, following existing practices and principles (e.g. wellbeing economy [35], social solidarity economy [36], economy of the common good, sharing economy).**
- **Mainstream binding circular economy principles & integrate binding targets on primary resource use.**
- **Address the role of over-consumption when it comes to the ecological footprint and introduce adequate political measures, such as taxation for harmful consumption levels.**

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