

## ECOLISE building momentum

**ECOLISE**, the new European network to support community-led action on climate change and sustainability, recently marked another important milestone, with its official registration as an international association (AISBL) under Belgian law.

On May 9, which coincidentally was also Europe day, twenty-five organisations, representing several thousand community-led initiatives, signed up as founding members, committing to work together to create the conditions for the deepening and further replication of such approaches across Europe.

A recent explosion in the number of local, community-based initiatives on climate change and sustainability prompted the establishment of the network, which aims to support exchange and cooperation between these initiatives, and to promote a more supportive environment for the emergence of new initiatives.

A [study](#) carried out by the European Association for Information on Local development (AEIDL) in 2013 identified in excess of 2,000 community-based initiatives on climate change and sustainability in 13 EU Member States, a number which was growing rapidly.

“This is a really significant development,” says Eamon O’Hara, the coordinator of the study and a co-founder and current Acting President of ECOLISE. “There are clearly many people who have a real desire to engage on these big global issues by taking action locally, which is a hugely important part of the response we need to climate change and to the goal of creating a more sustainable society. Top-down policies will not work without this local engagement and this is why it is so important that we encourage and support these initiatives.”

The ECOLISE network brings together a range of partners from across Europe, including the Transition Network and many national Transition hubs, the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN-Europe), Permaculture UK, GAIA Education, ICLEI (local governments for sustainability), Lisbon University and others.

“The mission of ECOLISE is to be *a shared platform for learning, action and advocacy of community-based initiatives on climate change and sustainability in Europe*,” Eamon explains.

“This mission has three important components: firstly, we want to better understand what’s happening currently, to understand what works and what doesn’t and to share this knowledge throughout the network; secondly, we want to support the work currently being undertaken, to establish tools and activities to support existing community-based initiatives, such as a multilingual Europe-wide web platform, for example; and thirdly, we want to raise the profile of community-based action on climate change and sustainability in Europe and promote a wider uptake of the ideas and experiences emerging from the network.”

Promoting this sharing of ideas and experiences is a key part of what ECOLISE is about and has been a strong driver for participation in the network.

“We all know of the need for urgent action on climate change and sustainability. Time is a key issue in terms of reducing carbon emissions, stopping the loss of biodiversity or protecting other finite resources. This is why we want to help and encourage more local communities to take action. In this regard, we want to push for a more supportive policy environment, to encourage policymakers, especially at the European and national levels, to bring forward policies and programmes that support community-based action. We already know there are politicians and bureaucrats that support our efforts but we need to have a more structured engagement in order to bring about real change.”

With the right support from governments, and with a Europe-wide platform to facilitate the sharing of ideas and experience, the members of ECOLISE believe that community-based initiatives on climate change and sustainability can make a significant contribution to bringing about the kind of societal transition that is now needed.

“Governments can’t do it alone and communities can’t do it alone,” Eamon argues. “We need to work together, recognizing the important contribution that each level has to make. ECOLISE is an attempt to bridge this gap and create this kind of joined-up approach that has been missing to date.”