



ECOLISE annual gathering marks beginning of a new phase

By Iva Pocock

Over 30 people from throughout Europe gathered this month – in person and online – at ECOLISE’s third annual general assembly, in the Basque country.



The two-day meeting, which was generously hosted by the Amalurra community in their exquisite circular communal building, took stock of 2016, celebrated ECOLISE’s achievements, planned for 2017 and elected a new council.

From start to finish the gathering was a showcase of the creative facilitation processes that are a hallmark of ECOLISE member organisations.

Thanks to a multi-directional microphone, two webcams, two computers, loudspeakers, a projector, careful pre-planning and dedicated virtual hosts, it was also a highly successful so-called blended meeting – a third of participants were able to fully partake in the discussions from their home offices in Croatia, Germany, Romania, Slovenia, the UK and Mexico.

The 2016 activity report, presented by Eamon O'Hara, ECOLISE executive director, painted a positive picture of the health of the network.

During the year ECOLISE continued to build its resource base, securing core funding to pay part-time policy, communications, and knowledge and learning coordinators.

'This was an important milestone, giving a significant boost to our capacity for 2017,' said Eamon. 'It marks the beginning of a new phase in ECOLISE's development.'

The three new coordinators – Ingeborg Niestroy on policy, Markus Molz on knowledge and learning, and Iva Pocock on communications – introduced themselves and led the table discussions on how the network would best organise around these main themes, and identified priorities, during 2017. Their work, supported by members, will build on ECOLISE's achievements in 2016.

These include the launch of the European day of sustainable communities; a new ECOLISE website; an EU policy training event in Brussels; participation in COP22 in Marrakech; the network's representation at 18 different international events; and the launch of a new book, *Permaculture and climate change adaptation: inspiring ecological social, economic and cultural responses for resilience and transformation*.

Important challenges remain despite the good progress made in 2016, said Eamon.

'We are on the right track. We need to keep building momentum and establishing our credentials as a trusted platform.'

Three new member organisations – the transitions research Institute, DRIFT, based in the Netherlands; the Sunny Hill association from Slovenia; and CESnet in Italy – were welcomed to ECOLISE, thereby increasing the network to 38 member organisations.

A 2016 survey – to which some 40% of member organisations responded – was presented by Andy Goldring, of the UK Permaculture Association.

'The members' main interests are all about networking and collaboration,' said Andy. 'The needs identified are very aligned with ECOLISE's aims.'

Linking grassroots and national organisations to the European level, bottom-up and top-down, was a key expectation, as well as the desire for ECOLISE to be an unusual, exciting organisation!

The survey also showed that members bring a huge range of ideas and skills, something that was clearly manifest throughout the general assembly.

The gathered members spent some time focusing on the first European day of sustainable communities, planned for 23rd September this year. Davie Philip, of Cultivate in Ireland, urged members to organise, promote amongst their networks, and register events on the ecolise.eu website.

There was also discussion about a planned publication on European community-led initiatives, led by Gil Penha-Lopes, of the University of Lisbon, to be available for the big day in autumn.

The final morning saw those gathered thinking big, presenting up-and-running projects and suggesting others.

These included:

- the Next Big Step, international permaculture collaboration
- Transition Spain's pioneering work with local administrations
- the Emergence project, building a global movement of one million local communities to tackling climate change
- Grow, the citizen science project to monitor and protect soil fertility.

The last business of the meeting was to finalise the election of ECOLISE's council, president and vice-president, following a process based on sociocracy, the collaborative model of governance that uses consent decision-making.

Eleven people were unanimously elected to the 2017 council. Robert Hall of Global Ecovillage Network Europe, who is based in Sweden, was elected president and Ana Huertas, Transition Spain, was elected vice-president, providing a good balance in terms of geography, gender, age and member representation.

'There's a synergy between the movements here,' said Robert. 'It's what society needs, this beautiful blend that's coming out of ECOLISE.'

The other 2017 council members are:

- Andy Goldring, Permaculture Association, UK
- Davie Philip, Cultivate Learning, Ireland
- Emilia Rekestad, Permaculture Sweden
- Genny Carraro, Italian Ecovillage Network
- Katy Fox, Centre for Ecological Learning, Luxembourg
- Nara Petrovič, Sustainability Park Istra/ Sunny Hill, Slovenia
- Tim Clark, GEN International
- Nenad Maljković, Permaculture Association/ Transition Hub, Croatia
- Sarah McAdam, Transition Network, UK

In closing the meeting there was general agreement that it was an energising, positive gathering that bodes well for ECOLISE's work in the coming year.

A full report of the meeting can be found [here](#)