



REINVENTING EUROPE THROUGH LOCAL INITIATIVE

## Act One

“Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” – quite a challenging title for our conference on 19 - 20 February 2014!

- Faced with unprecedented change and a crisis that has left large sections of the population, especially young people, by the wayside;
- With a Europe bowing down to austerity policies, and with a growing indifference or even hostility among citizens towards the European project,

it was obviously a great risk to call this conference “Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative”!

But at the end of the day, it was a great success, as witnessed not only by the number and diversity of participants, but also by their appreciation of the opportunity to meet up and engage in high-quality and friendly discussions. There was also a notable

complementarity between the various contributions, and a general sense of “optimism”<sup>i</sup> about the potential of local initiative.

Several lessons can be learned from these two days:

- The testimonials of the 25 local initiatives allowed participants to gain a better insight into what is needed to reinvent Europe: voluntary action, energy, a rejection of fatalism and hopelessness, the search for alternatives, a territorial focus, innovative solutions (going “off the beaten track”), long-term strategic visions, projects that can mobilise people, sharing, proximity, network-building, openness to the world, cooperation, solidarity, social transformation. At the local level, this is all about the progressive invention of development models and strategies that are original, territory-specific, “smart, long-term and inclusive”, all at once.
2. The great need to exchange ideas and experiences, to come together, to test one's points of view, as characterised by:
- Exchanges on methods, tools and experience.
  - The positioning of individual measures in the context of the current changes, in the search for ways out of the crisis, for transition to / the invention of more collaborative ways of doing business, taking greater account of social and environmental problems.

3. These AEIDL meetings and conferences illustrate the value of dialogue:

- When it is focused less on procedures, which are often so cumbersome that they lead to the actual objectives being forgotten, and more on the wealth of experiences, how they are inter-related and what they lead to.
- When it allows different approaches to meet and merge, whether they are rural, urban or coastal, whether they involve economic development, social innovation, social inclusion, the fight against discrimination, the environment or energy transition. Each approach contributes in its own way to developing the territories we live in.
- When it is fuelled by “forward-looking” initiatives, in such fields as “short circuits” (bringing producers and consumers closer together), a “circular economy”, a collaborative economy, social entrepreneurship, or the quest for greater energy autonomy.
- When it is enriched by input from academics, researchers and think-tank members.
- And when it allows us to better position ourselves in this task of “reinventing Europe”.

“Reinventing Europe through Local Initiative” is obviously a long-term project, inviting us to move forward in at least three directions:

- Looking for ways to consolidate, sustain, disseminate and multiply these scattered and often fragile initiatives, helping them to turn



into a movement, a momentum, and to shift up a gear.

- Looking for ways to link up these local initiatives and actions with a business, financial and institutional environment that is increasingly disconnected from life in our territories.
- Looking for ways to nurture this movement of local initiatives as a springboard for “reinventing Europe”.

Here at AEIDL, we would like in the course of the coming years to play a significant role in this new project, working hand in hand with all those who, within our beautiful Europe, are working on promising initiatives helping to shape the future. Why not join us?

Yves Champetier  
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<sup>i</sup> “Pessimism is a mood; optimism is will », Alain (French philosopher, 1868-1951).