

# ELIF Thematic Community (TC) - Community-led social innovation

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**“Social innovation”** means an activity, that is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services, practices and models, that **simultaneously** meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations, thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act” (Article 2.1. (8) of the ESF+ regulation).

**CLLD** is a method for involving partners at local level including the civil society and local economic actors in designing and implementing local integrated strategies that help their areas make a transition to a more sustainable future.

## Rationale: why focusing on community-led social innovation?

We live in a rapidly changing world, with multiple overlapping crises with new challenges or opportunities impacting our living and working conditions, us as individuals, groups, organisations and society at large. We need to find innovative ways to tackle our contemporary societal challenges, such as the transition to a low carbon and more digital economy, demographic changes, social and economic inequalities and poverty, the COVID-19 crisis and migration issues. And that’s what Social innovation and social experimentations are all about. **Social innovations have proven to be valuable in identifying, designing and implementing new solutions to social and environmental problems.** But social innovation is not only about solving problems ; it is also transformative, with **the capacity to unlock existing potentialities and to produce sustainable and systemic positive changes,** based on its essential aim of creating social value for all.

Similar to traditional innovations, social innovations follow a non-linear process, they are experimental in nature. However, social innovation is characterised by a clear intended primary goal: to **create positive social change (social value)** which is distinct from other forms of innovation with different primary aims (productivity, economic growth, profit) even if incidentally also delivering positive social outcomes. But it can of course benefit from digitalisation and technological developments (smart villages for example).

Social innovation starts with an explicit goal of addressing a social (and, increasingly environmental) challenge, with social needs badly or not satisfied that require new solutions. These **unsatisfied needs must be very precisely identified and assessed.**

It is **inherently collaborative**, bringing together a wide range of actors including civil society, the public and private sectors as well as local networks. It also applies a **user-centred and participatory approach**, involving

beneficiaries or users throughout the whole process, from needs identification to the design and implementation of the innovation solution. CLLD can be a useful tool for empowering local communities, including disadvantaged groups, for improving institutional capacity of local stakeholders and particularly NGOs and for triggering social innovation at local level.

The notion of ‘from community (initiated/led) – for community (benefiting)’ is important to help understand the nature of authentically grounded community-led social innovation.

While some social innovations are national or even European in scope, due to the level of the social needs addressed (national policy reforms in relation to long term care or migration, or new european system related to mobile workers pension), the majority **tend to originate locally** with significant knowledge sharing and participation from a diverse range of actors. One of the CLLD principles is innovation at large, covering all its forms, including social innovation. There is therefore a vast field of inspiring local social innovations to harvest and better understand.

The innovative solutions are very specific to their local ecosystems of course, but when successful, many have the **potential to be upscaled or transferred to other territories, with some adaptations**. More territories, organisations and citizens could thus benefit from these new services, products or practices and gain time by using existing practices already successfully tested in other contexts, saving essential and rare resources (time, budget etc).





The **Policy Unit** of AEIDL gathers experts who foster communityled innovation by facilitating peer learning, co-creating and transferring of knowledge. The Unit also provides analysis and evaluation of relevant EU policies and advocates for an enhanced support to community local action. It acts as a knowledge hub to inspire and connect local and EU stakeholders.

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