

# European Local Innovation Forum: Launch webinar

## Event Information

Date: 24 november 2022

Location: Online

Organisers: European Association of Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)

Participants: 126

Outcomes: The European Local Innovation Forum (ELIF) to revitalise community-led innovation across Europe.

Web page: [www.aeidl.eu/events/elif-revitalising-community-led-innovation-in-europe/](http://www.aeidl.eu/events/elif-revitalising-community-led-innovation-in-europe/)

On 24 November 2022, AEIDL launched the European Local Innovation Forum (ELIF) to help drive a pan-European conversation about local innovation, enhance action on the ground, and put them on the EU policy agenda. Bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, this online event was the opportunity to boost exchanges about the importance of community-led innovation to respond to modern societal challenges and opportunities in Europe. Built around a rich programme, the event was an opportunity to hear from inspiring innovative local initiatives but also to discuss with policymakers how community-led innovation is being supported in Europe. In addition, the webinar aimed to raise awareness and build a common understanding of ELIF and its added value for local actors, as well as to share common interests and co-design the purpose of the ELIF thematic communities.

## Welcoming of participants and introduction



**Marta Marczis**, president of AEIDL, welcomed participants and opened the event by expressing her enthusiasm that AEIDL is launching this forum which is rooted in the organic past of the association working on local development, social inclusion and territorial innovation since its creation.

**Isabel Carvalhais**, Member of the European Parliament, emphasised that innovation is key to addressing unmet economic, social and environmental challenges. Innovation, she reminds us, is not only about technological progress, but also about adopting a new way of thinking and solving the problem, preventing any risks or reproducing new inequalities. She believes that an initiative like ELIF has the potential to provide an innovative tool to stimulate joint efforts to drive positive change through community empowerment.





**Enrique Nieto**, Head of AEIDL's Policy Unit, followed Isabel Carvalhais' statement, stressing that the recognition of community-led local innovation (CLLI) as a driver for building more prosperous and resilient societies is what has motivated the creation of this forum. Capitalising on the opportunity offered by the growing policy frameworks working on this agenda at European level, he emphasises that strengthening local dialogues has the power to contribute to the design of more accurate policies to accompany the desired transformative changes.

*"In AEIDL, we understand CLLI as new and creative process, service or product that emerges in a local territory as a result of a participatory process involving local communities and actors in order to seize new opportunities or address local challenges which result in positive economic, environmental and social impacts to and in the territory. It's about empowering local communities, using and supporting local capacities & assets, encouraging local collaboration, and it is about working with others!"*

## Local voice: Experiences from innovative community-led initiatives

In this session, **Jan Braat** (Senior policy-advisor migration and inclusion, Municipality of Utrecht), **Marcos Garcia** (Cultural manager working on the field of Citizen Laboratories) and **Gabriel O'Connel** (CEO of [Monaghan Integrated Development](#)) shared experiences of CLLI initiatives implemented across Europe in various thematic areas.



**Jan Braat** presented [the Einstein Plan](#), a project that was launched in 2016 to find new solutions to overcome the polarisation on migration and create an organic ecosystem between neighbourhoods and asylum seekers. Starting from the challenge of the social inclusion of new migrants in deprived neighbourhoods - where the residents themselves already face problems of high unemployment and low education - the approach taken was to find a common denominator for activities in which residents of the Utrecht Asylum Seekers Centre, local residents and other Utrecht residents are willing to participate, thus promoting social cohesion. The Einstein Plan, initially funded by the European Commission, was upscaled at the national level.

**Marcos Garcia** argues that in order to have a more just, free and liveable society, we need to increase the levels of experimentation and social cooperation. [MediaLab Matadero](#), a citizen's laboratory that has been promoting community innovation for 15 years, aims to provide a space where people can meet, share ideas and find collaborators or get involved in the process of turning these ideas into reality. This effective model of community innovation has proved successful in various projects such as the creation of prosthetic hands using a 3D printer through an open participatory approach, involving ideas from a wide range of different people.



**Gabriel O'Connel** introduced [Innovating Communities](#), a LEADER-funded cooperation project led by [Monaghan Integrated Development](#), involving partners in 6 Irish counties. The project provides free training, capacity building and mentoring, in order to strengthen local resilience, local development and community-led approach. The use of a "design thinking" approach, appears as an innovative tool for finding new solutions that simultaneously meet a social need and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and better use of assets and resources.

## High-level policy panel discussion: policy support to community-led innovation

In this session, **Radim Sršeň** (Deputy Minister of Regional Development, Czech Republic), **Antonella Noya** (Head of the Social Economy and Innovation Unit, OECD) and **Wallis Goelen Vandebroek** (Senior Expert attached to the DG REGIO, European Commission) discussed how community innovation is supported in Europe and identified the challenges faced by policy makers and communities.



**Wallis Goelen Vandebroek** underlined the EU's recognition of innovation, as evidenced by the allocation of 30% of total cohesion policy funds to innovation. In particular, she referred to the EU's "[smart specialisation strategy](#)" as a key instrument for mobilising the innovation potential of all EU regions and territories. She stressed the importance of linking investment in innovation and research to the socio-economic context of the corresponding territories, and of building on the capacities of these territories in order to fully unlock the potential of innovation. Furthermore, she stressed that special attention should be paid to supporting the development of skills related to smart specialisation strategies and areas, as this is often a bottleneck and, at the same time, a key factor in triggering innovation-driven development at local level.

According to **Antonella Noya**, social innovation is not the monopoly of a single actor in the economy, but rather the result of collective intelligence. She emphasised the importance of bringing together all stakeholders in localities and taking advantage of local routes and contexts to achieve common results. The OECD has created a matrix<sup>1</sup> to support local social innovation through two different entry points. The first is to take advantage of demand-side measures that can increase the appetite for social innovation. This can include elements such as public procurement, subsidies, specific regulations and awareness raising campaigns. On the supply side, the focus is on increasing the number and quality of social examples, such as financial support for mechanisms and infrastructure development. The OECD has also recently adopted a high-level recommendation<sup>2</sup> that reaffirms the importance of the local dimension in social innovation and solidarity.



**Radim Sršeň**, stresses the need for creating synergies, building a common framework and adopting a holistic approach to rural and regional development, which currently suffers from too much fragmentation of policy instruments. He suggests interconnecting regional, rural and urban development, as was the initiative of the Czech Republic which brought them together under one ministry. In terms of funding, he stressed the need to consider diversifying funding sources such as agricultural funds and new generation EU funds. He also underlined the importance of enhancing existing innovating community-led initiatives such as those reinforcing the attractiveness of rural areas such as rural prides that set up festivals valuing rural lifestyles, or the example of the holistic approach proposed by the energy communities created by the LAGs but also mainstreaming tools such as "from farm to fork".

## ELIF Thematic Community on Territorial development



**Serafin Pazos-Vidal**, Senior expert in Rural and Territorial development at AEIDL, opened the discussion by clarifying AEIDL's understanding of community-led innovation as referring to a process that draws on local people, resources and knowledge to solve emerging challenges and seize opportunities for their territories. It is therefore a place-based approach to achieving progressive innovation and a key means of strengthening democracy at the local level.

With an array of official instruments and funding sources at our disposal, Serafin points out that the real challenge lies in overcoming the barriers to implementation. In particular, local communities often have insufficient awareness of the various policy tools that exist, and have limited capacity to even attempt to engage in all the available policy and funding frameworks. These are often simple and practical forms of innovation that can be transferable and replicable, and which provide local solutions that can positively transform local areas. These communities require and benefit from peer learning and exchanges across Europe to get inspired, get new ideas, connect with others or simply to realise they are not alone. To that end, AEIDL suggests the creation of an informal, online, and pan-European network like ELIF, which would be a valuable tool for sharing and transferring knowledge on community-led territorial development and innovation.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2021), "[Building local ecosystems for social innovation: A methodological framework](#)", OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers, No. 2021/06, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bef867cd-en>.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2022), "[Recommendation of the Council on the Social and Solidarity Economy and Social Innovation](#)", OECD/LEGAL/0472. Adopted on 10/06/2022.

After this state of play, the session continued with a more interactive debate during which participants exchanged their views on the main challenges and factors favourable to local innovation with or without European funds and, more broadly, on their personal opinion as to whether ELIF could contribute to the sharing and transfer of knowledge on innovation and community-led territorial development.

## ELIF Thematic Community on Community-led social innovation

The aim of the Thematic Community on Community Led Social Innovation (TC CLSI) breakout session was to establish a common understanding of social innovation and more specifically community led social innovation.



Firstly, **Armelle Ledan**, Social Innovation Project Coordinator at AEIDL, defined social innovation as a form of collaborative process that provides innovative solutions to unmet social needs, with the ultimate goal of achieving positive social change. When it comes to community-led social innovation, the particularity is that social innovation is initiated and led by a community for the benefit of that specific community, and based on their social needs identified by the community itself. The aim is to ensure that the innovative solutions fit the real context and solve the real social problems and needs of the community.

Secondly, two projects were presented to the participants to illustrate the practical application of CLSI. **Paolo Montemurro** introduced the [DROP project](#), a recent initiative that aims to explore and develop socially innovative solutions for social housing in neighbourhoods in the cities of Ermua (Spain), Matera (Italy) and Elva (Portugal). The project specifically addresses the challenges of high housing prices and gentrification, the ageing population in social housing and the lack of innovative solutions for good living. The design of a community-led social innovation model is driven by both community members and cultural and creative industry professionals



**Selma Kadi**, shared with the audience the example of the [InCARE project](#) which aims to improve the care of older people living in communities in Spain, Austria and Northern Macedonia. The project focuses on the different local needs in each country and applies the theory of change approach, involving a diverse group of people such as older people, informal carers, representatives, policy makers, providers and advice centres in the project design.

Finally, the session ended with an interactive exercise, in which participants shared how the CLSI TC can support their work and what kind of activities they would like to see developed in this forum. What emerged from this survey was that the community-led social innovation thematic community can support their work by connecting members, sharing resources, collaborating and advocating for social innovation at European level. It can also provide a platform for learning, discovering successful projects, and sharing experiences. It can empower members to address community challenges in a collaborative way by identifying pressing issues and targeted sustainable innovative solutions.



The **European Local Innovation Forum** is a space for experts and organisations operating and connected at local level in both urban and rural settings, to facilitate the exchange of ideas, learn from experiences and draw lessons to boost innovation in local communities from across Europe.

In AEIDL, we believe that innovation driven and implemented by local communities is essential to boost the transformative changes needed in Europe. We understand local innovation as any new and creative process, service or product that emerges in a local territory as a result of engaging with local communities and actors in order to seize new opportunities or address local challenges. Local innovation offers opportunities to encourage positive change and generate local socio-economic and environmental welfare.

The ambition of our Local Innovation Forum is to maximise the power of gathering like-minded people and community-oriented organisations to help improving local living and ultimately generate more cohesion in Europe.

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