

Social economy: a driving force towards a green transition

This contribution is the result of a collaborative work within different European and French networks specialised on ecological transition and all belonging to social and solidarity economy. It has been completed with all the exchanges that were possible within ten different conferences dealing with social economy and green transition on the European summit of social economy organised in Strasbourg on May, 2022.

The contribution compiles several concrete proposals aiming to orientate European policies in favour of social and solidarity economy initiatives working towards the ecological transition.

Proposal 6: Generalising eco-building solutions by spreading skills and adapting education and training

Eco-building solutions mean:

- autonomous and creative workers;
- healthy, low carbon/energy/petrol, renewable & reusable building materials;
- a holistic place-based approach and sober, bioclimatic design, including renovation works;
- buildings encouraging multi-purpose and their potential reuse or recycling;
- professional cooperation processes based on permaculture, cross-sector networks, dialogue between craftspeople and responsible users;
- local production, reuse, manufacturing and jobs;
- modifying the value chain to rebalance value distribution between actors from site workers to sales.

None of these topics are central or even part of mainstream education and training for construction professionals in Europe. All of them are the heart of the work of a few hundreds of training centres focussing on eco-building throughout Europe. A majority of these training centres are grass-roots NGOs, non-profit and small scale that have been continuously expanding, institutionalising and professionalizing their training offer. They deliver continuous training for all levels, from homeowners to architects, from construction site workers to engineers. They build on a continuous transnational flow of knowledge and skills: since the beginning through the mobility of outstanding passionate professionals, and since 2002 through institutionally funded international cooperation (i.e. EU Leonardo da Vinci & Erasmus grants).

Since 2007, a coherent set of units of learning outcomes for earth and straw bale building techniques has been developed in transnational cooperation. These open resources are a basis for high quality course contents, curricula and assessment, for workers, site managers and designers. In 2017, Fédération Ecoconstruire has started transnational cooperation to develop training for trainers, together with a european consortium gathering the ASBN (Austrian Strawbal building network), BiWeNa (German ecobuilding training center), ArTUR (Slovakian ecobuilding training center), Ebuki (UK and Ireland earth building network), Asterre (French earth building network), RFCP (French strawbal building network) and Tillitsverket (Swedish educational association). After the often isolated yet consistent initiatives of certain universities, now public vocational schools are reaching out to train their trainers in eco-building techniques.

Despite the positive and encouraging outcomes of long term, cross-border collaborations, the social economy specialised in eco-building and training is struggling to ensure continued existence of organisations and training offers. Fluctuating and rival funding policies for continuous adult training prevent them to reach the next level of development attuned to the gigantic needs of energy efficiency of buildings and navigate the construction industry towards and through a profound ecological transition.

Building materials techniques respecting human health, the environment and our planet's carrying capacity exist, have been tested and are well documented. Social economy organisations are ready to support the conversion of the conventional construction and training sector towards eco-building solutions. The scope is high and so is the motivation and commitment of the eco-builders to transfer their skills, knowledge and competence gained over the last 40 years at the margin of a consumerist, polluting and extractive society.

What we are calling for:

21 · Fund training:

a. for trainers so that they can integrate bioclimatism, low carbon and reused materials, as well as multi-purpose and the building's itself recycling potential into any building vocational and higher education, initial or continuous, for any level and target. A broader audience needs to be introduced to eco-responsible approach that involves all site activities: location, supply, workstation organisation, implementation, waste management and reuse.

b. of self-help building techniques increasing individual autonomy for a transition towards more resilience.

22 · Contribute to the recognition of eco-building training courses. At the local and regional level: support communication with a broader audience. At national level: recognize certifications and acknowledge vocational training centres. At the European level: allow translation of the resources. Eco-building and heritage restoration are specialities that must be recognized by training funds, certifying bodies and insurers. Our multidisciplinary training courses are adapted to the market: builders acquire skills to run small projects addressing the complexity of thermal renovation projects but reducing the costs. In this approach, the customer may also be required to participate, making the projects affordable for as many people as possible.

23 · Secure eco-building vocational training sector and resettle a predictive management of jobs and territorial skills on current and future professional needs in building sector. We need to implement diagnosis by social economy organisations working with and for the building sector to set shared objectives for both building and training sectors. When necessary, certification engineering must be funded to create diplomas that contribute to widely integrate professional know-how and good practices into initial training. It is also the first step to promote the emergence of new training offers in territories where no offer exists in our areas of expertise.

24 · Contribute to research and development in eco-building, based on local social economy organisations and towards non-industrial materials. Initiatives that allow and facilitate reuse of materials at the end of life, those that promote biodiversity and reduce digital impacts will be a new way of improvement. We are calling to undertake research on the thermal renovation of existing buildings and the relevance of bio-based materials in these areas to allow the evolution of thermal regulations and develop innovative construction techniques.

25 · Support and foster individuals' implication within the transition towards a green economy through vocational training. In addition to technical learnings, we support direct experience, free games, practice, craft and artistic or creative value, freedom, autonomy, connexion to nature, etc. Public policies that foster eco-building training need to provide means of support and generalise practices such as pre-qualification and immersion to attract, motivate, test and experiment. We need time in trainings for those experiences that support inclusion of trainees in local professional field, or the creation of companies strongly involved in local economy.