



# EUROPEAN RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE MECHANISMS - CHALLENGES IN SYSTEMIC APPROACHES IN SD

Eric Mulholland

Conference 2021  
Report

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**AUTHOR: ERIC MULHOLLAND, ESDN OFFICE**

*CONTACT:* **ESDN OFFICE**

Institute for Managing Sustainability  
Vienna University of Economics and Business  
Welthandelsplatz 1, A-1020 Vienna, Austria  
office@esdn.eu  
+43-1-31336-6044

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## Introduction

The ESDN Conference 2021 took place virtually on 30 November - 01 December 2021. It was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia and the SLOGA Platform and took place during Slovenia's EU Presidency and was an official EU Presidency event. The Conference brought together sustainable development policymakers and experts from different stakeholder groups from all over Europe. **In total, there were over 120 participants from 22 European countries.**

The title of the Conference was **“European Recovery and Resilience Mechanisms - Challenges in systemic approaches in SD”** and focused on many topics relating to recovery and resilience, such as social, environmental, economic, financial and policy resilience, as well as themes important for sustainable development. The Conference saw keynote presentations from the European level and national level, as well as inputs from Youth Representatives, who presented their Youth Manifesto from the ESDN Youth Workshop. The Conference also featured 9 Exchange Spaces, which allowed Conference participants to hear a myriad of topics from climate adaptation, to technology, to governance and policy coherence, to name a few. The interaction during the Conference took place in these 9 Exchange Spaces, in which participants were able to listen in and discuss on three of the nine topics.

This Conference Report seeks to capture the main ideas of presentations and discussions from the two days. Many keynote presenters made use of PowerPoint presentations, which have been converted to PDFs and uploaded on the ESDN website and can be found [here](#) under keynote presentations. Keynoters who did not make use of PowerPoints in their presentations will be summarized more in depth in this Report. Those with PowerPoint presentations will be noted.

The Report is structured into several sections that reflect the opening and welcomes for both days, the four separate sessions and the closings of both days.

## Welcome and Opening

The welcome and opening of the ESDN Conference 2021 was given by the Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia, Andrej Vizjak and by ESDN President, Annika Lindblom. The session was rounded out by the Conference moderator, Gerald Berger.

### Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – Welcoming Address

In a video address to the Conference participants, **Andrej Vizjak**, Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia, welcomed participants to the ESDN Conference 2021.

In this video message, the minister touched on the importance of the Conference topic and of addressing the SDGs and sustainable development, as although Europe is one of the world regions that is more advanced in terms of sustainable development, it is not on track to reach some of the SDGs.

The pressure put on Europe regarding sustainable development from the adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement and of the 2030 Agenda six years ago was reflected again at the recently concluded COP26 meeting in Glasgow. The 2030 Agenda needs to be better supported at all levels of government, as individual actions alone will not be enough to reach the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda. The challenges Europe faces are global and systemic.

The European Green Deal is also a tool that will help Europe get on a more sustainable path that is more just. When making this transition, Europe needs to think about the social aspects and what that means for the people of Europe. The just transition for sustainable development will reach across many sectors.

### Introduction to the Topics and Goals of the ESDN Conference 2021

The ESDN President, **Annika Lindblom**, welcomed participants on behalf of the ESDN. While it was unfortunate that another ESDN Conference had to be convened virtually due to Covid-19, the situation has its silver-lining. The Conference has been able to attract more participants than it would otherwise and also in a more sustainable manner.

The Conference will focus on two very topical issues: recovery and resilience. To achieve the SDGs, fundamental transitions of societal systems, including energy, transport, food, or material use, which are the root causes of environmental pressures are urgently needed. This can be done through changes in the current social and political structures, practices, technologies, policies, lifestyles and thinking.

The sessions of the Conference seek to address different viewpoints and themes that are relevant to recovery and resilience, as well as to sustainable development.

In other news, the ESDN has now existed as a registered association for 2 years, after almost 20 years of being an informal network. The countries supporting the ESDN are Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain and Switzerland. The ESDN has over 100 members, coming from national and sub-national governments to experts in sustainable development, as well as over 400 partners.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic may have hampered the ESDN from meeting and hampered work on sustainable development, in general, it has not prevented the ESDN from acting and influencing


sustainable development. This Conference is proof of that. It offers the ESDN a chance to strengthen itself and its messages for sustainable development.

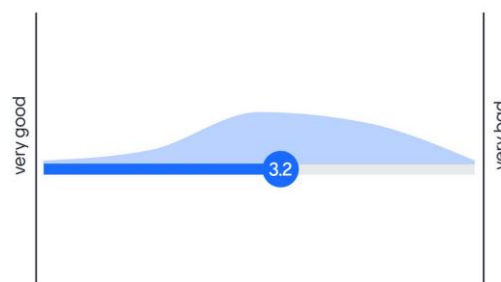
Europe has a unique window of opportunity to lead the global response to sustainability challenges. By embracing transitions, demonstrating solutions, and seizing related opportunities, Europe can lead the global effort for change.

## Welcome, Orientation and Overview of Conference Day 1

In preparing participants for the Conference, and to close the welcome and opening session, the Conference moderator, Gerald Berger, asked participants to use the Mentimeter link that was posted in the Conference chat to answer two questions.

The first question: “On a scale from 1-5, how would you rate our current state of resilience on SD in Europe?” The results, provided by 41 participants can be see below. Please keep in mind that 1 on the scale was very good, whereas 5 on the scale was very bad.

1. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate our current state of resilience on SD in Europe? 



The second question: “In 1-2 words, what do you think is the major challenge for achieving a systemic approach in SD?” generated a word cloud. Participants were able to type in 2-3 answers. The results can be seen below and reflect that political will, policy coherence, silos, and governance were thought to be the major challenges for achieving a systemic approach in SD.

2. In one-two words, what do you think is the major challenge for achieving a systemic approach in SD?

 Mentimeter



## Session 1: Resilience and Building Forward Better – The European Perspective

Session 1 focused on the European level when with respect to resilience and recovery, with representatives from the European Commission, the Slovenian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the European Environment Agency and the OECD.

### EU Resilience and Recovery / Building Forward Better Mechanisms for Sustainable Development

**Magdalena Morgese Borys** from the European Commission's Secretariat General opened this session. She had a PowerPoint presentation, which can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

Ms. Morgese Borys presented on the Autumn Report on the European Economic Forecast and focused on the Economic and Employment Policy Coordination, which touched on four main points:

#### ❖ Annual Sustainable Growth Survey

- As the EU economy moves from recovery to expansion, shift of focus from crisis management towards transformational and inclusive recovery in the medium-term.
- Policy priorities remain structured around the four dimensions of competitive sustainability and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Recovery and Resilience Facility will be the key tool to implement the policy agenda in the months and years ahead.
- The 2022 European Semester cycle will closely integrate the Recovery and Resilience Facility and pursue its transition to a 'new normal', resuming issuance of country reports and country-specific recommendations.

#### ❖ Alert Mechanism Report

- Purpose: to identify those Member States for which in-depth reviews (IDRs) should be undertaken, to assess whether they are affected by imbalances in need of policy action.
- How: economic reading of a scoreboard of selected indicators + reinforced forward-looking assessment of risks
- Next steps: Commission services will complete in-depth reviews as part of Spring Semester Package

#### ❖ Recommendation for the euro area

- Addresses fiscal, financial, structural issues and institutional aspects of the euro area in 2022 and 2023:
  - Individually, including through their Recovery and Resilience Plans
  - Collectively, by coordinating within the Eurogroup
- Particular focus this year on:
  - shifting the policy stance from emergency support to recovery,
  - limiting the risk of long-term divergences,
  - promoting investment and reforms in line with the twin transitions and
  - ensuring effective active labour market policies.



## ❖ Proposal for a Joint Employment Report

- Mandated by Art. 148 TFEU as joint report of the Council and the Commission to monitor the implementation of the Employment Guidelines.
  - Key employment and social developments in the EU and in MSs
  - Priority areas for employment, skills and social policy action
- Novelties of the 2022 edition:
  - Reinforced monitoring of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, notably via thematic boxes on topical challenges
  - Integration of the revised Social Scoreboard
  - Integration of the EU headline targets on jobs, skills and poverty reduction by 2030

## Resilience in the process of the Conference on the Future of Europe

**Jure Vršnak**, Deputy Director-General, Directorate for EU Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided the next keynote speech on behalf of Slovenia and outlined three priorities of Slovenia's EU Council Presidency: 1) Conference on the Future of Europe; 2) resilience; and 3) recovery.

Covid-19 has influenced the conversation on the future of the EU. While the Conference on the Future of Europe was delayed due to the pandemic, it is since up and running. The Conference is an experiment, bottom-up exercise. The idea is to have citizens debating the main topics on the future of Europe. We already have the European citizen's panels, which is a forum for citizens to discuss topics, like the EU's role in the world, economics, the environment, etc. These discussions will then feed into the plenaries to have reports and conclusions in the first semester of next year, under France's EU Council Presidency.

Additionally, in the day-to-day work of the EU institutions, they are dealing with dossiers that will influence the future of the EU, such as the dossier on the Climate and Energy Package (fit for 55). This references already questions, such as will coal still be an important source of energy as it is today.

One of the main topics Slovenia wants to address is its own resilience, meaning moving away from an ad-hoc approach in its responses to crises to a more structured approach, such as knowing in advance who does what, as well as operating procedures in place. This type of learning can also be extended beyond the Covid-19 pandemic to address other challenges that might arise, such as cyber security or climate change.

During the Slovenian EU Presidency, it has been able to push through 22 National Recovery Plans in the Council based on the Commission's assessment. 17 EU Member States already have access to pre-financing, which is more than €52 billion. The climate and environment have also become more mainstream when it comes to recovery. 10-15 years, there was no discussion on the phasing out of coal. Some Member States are now talking about it and have set targets.

## Putting the European Green Deal to work: the governance challenge in systemic transitions

**Hans Bruyninckx**, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency, presented on the European Green Deal. He made use of a PowerPoint presentation, which can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

The European Green Deal presents a paradigm shift in politics and policy. The EGD sees Europe as the first climate-neutral continent that tackles several primary areas with strategies and action plans:

Biodiversity Strategy 2030, New Circular Economy Action Plan, Zero pollution strategy, Farm to fork strategy, Just transition, a Sustainable European Investment Plan, and a Future ready economy –new industrial strategy. As can be seen, the EGD targets the political, economic and investment side of the spectrum and is a priority for Europe. The EGD also has a strong systemic transitions logic behind it that is linked by sectoral policies. It also thinks on longer time horizon that also takes into account the social dimension, as sustainability is a process of societal transitions.

What needs to be done now is to catalyze systemic change by:

- Recognising fundamental drivers and system interlinkages
- Adopting transformative policy frameworks
- Filling crucial policy gaps:
  - Food
  - Land and soil
  - Chemicals
  - Social dimension
- Leveraging the power of cities, businesses and communities for society-wide action

He also addressed the concept of wicked problems and super wicked problems, which are characterized by additional constraints, such as time running out, policies that discount the future, those seeking to solve the problem being a part of the problem, and no central authority.

However, there are mechanisms that can speed up the transition:

- Race-to-the-top logic
- From a 'cost' to an 'investment' logic
- Institutional set-up fit for purpose to stimulate speeding up?
- Phasing-out of non-sustainable practices
- The role of investments and capital: sustainable finance
- Digital society
- Urban setting
- Understanding the cost of the 'new normal'

## Enhancing Resilience and Building a Coherent Response for a Sustainable Post-Covid-19 Recovery in Europe from a Global Perspective

**Žiga Žarnič**, from the OECD, provided a more data-driven look at the post Covid-19 recovery in Europe. He made use of PowerPoint in his presentation, which can be viewed or downloaded [here](#).

He presented on the OECD's Covid-19 Recovery Dashboard, which can be found [here](#), and which covers four dimensions simultaneously: strong, inclusive, resilient, and green the recovery is. The 20 recovery indicators are then mapped along the SDGs.

The Dashboard also covers such topics as Covid-19 vaccination rates, decoupling greenhouse gas emissions, reducing financial insecurity, and tackling income inequality, where many inequalities have been exposed in well-being indicators.

## Session 2: Aspects of Resilience for Sustainable Development in practice

Session 2 featured different aspects that are important for resilience and sustainable development. This session saw presentations about policy coherence for sustainable development, national implementation strategies for recovery plans and the voices of Youth.

### Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development – Practices in some Member States

**Leida Rijnhout**, a consultant for SLOGA provided the next presentation on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD). There was also a short intervention from **Louis Meuleman** from Public Strategy for Sustainable Development. The PowerPoint presentation that was used can be viewed or downloaded [here](#).

She began by outlining the objectives of PCSD to: 1) foster synergies across environmental, economic and social policy areas; 2) identify trade-offs and reconcile domestic policy objectives with internationally agreed objectives; and 3) address the spillovers of domestic policies.

She also explained why PCSD is key for good governance, as currently, PCSD is an underestimated or even ignored, but very crucial part, of achieving the 2030 Agenda worldwide. This is due to the fact that actions on one objective can cause negative or positive impacts on other environmental and/or social challenges. Not keeping PCSD in mind will undermine all policies.

Looking at policy-making through the lens of sustainable development demands a new way of governance, dealing with the root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental degradation and focusing on a long term vision and overall system change –no linear process.

She also made mention of a report from CONCORD, which is yet to be published, in which she referenced the general outcomes of the report, as well as recommendations. The general outcomes were as follows:

- PCSD is not taken seriously enough
- Often seen as ticking a box –without Consequences (political commitment -> clear strategy with targets?-> resources ? -> review mechanism?)
- No mandate to adjust policies in case of incoherencies –too voluntary
- No real indicators for measuring externalities, especially not for the Global South –how to measure progress?
- Sustainable Development is not overarching – so often the undermined strategy as the “jobs & growth” strategy is still the most important one

The recommendations made to address these gaps were as follows:

1. MS should have their commitment to achieve PCSD as a core policy objective and the instruments to achieve that should be embedded in a national governance structure that is also responsible for the implementation of Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).
2. PCSD is to be implemented by the whole government, with all ministries involved.
3. MS should have the implementation of Sustainable Development as the highest and overall ambition, without being undermined by other more economic growth focussed plans, and

PCSD as key element. The recently required National Recovery and Resilience Plans must be totally in line with the 2030 Agenda objectives too.

4. Implementing the 2030 Agenda should be planned in an overall strategy for Sustainable Development, including an action plan, targets, timetables and division of tasks. Including clear PCSD targets.
5. Having a clear coordination between all governance levels is necessary, as well as a mandate to adjust policies on (sub)national levels in case of incoherencies. To do so, a special multi-sectoral institution within the government should be established and given the mandate to lead in policy arbitration processes.
6. Effective, inclusive and meaningful civil society participation is an absolute condition for creating ownership and better implementation of PCSD, including partners from the Global South.
7. MS should not put a burden on third countries/Global South when achieving their own Sustainable Development, therefore impact assessments of all domestic policies should be measured to minimize negative impacts. Where impact studies of transboundary effects of national policies on the Global South are unavailable (such as climate, gender equality, tax policies and migration), earmark funds from applied research agencies should be reserved to bring facts and figures on the existing trade-offs and potential win-wins.
8. Much more research and data are needed to measure spill-overs of domestic policies. Quantitative and qualitative indicators should be developed and used in PCSD reporting.
9. A mandatory monitoring scheme for measuring progress on the implementation of the (sub)national 2030 Agenda, including reporting on PCSD (SDG 17.14) should be put in place.
10. A cost for establishing the necessary mechanisms for achieving PCSD should be part of the national budget.

**Louis Meuleman** added to this and gave a preview of results from EC/DG Reform study, which generally supports the results from the CONCORD study mentioned above. It also supports the start of collecting data on PCSD, where the indicator can become statistically more relevant in the future, and where a joint process of countries & EU Commission can be done. Data from self-assessments are a good basis for Peer 2 Peer exchanges on PCSD performance. Finally, the European Commission could develop a PCSD action plan and dashboard for its own services.

## Integrating the SDGs into National Recovery and Resilience Plans

Mayor of Braga, Portugal, **Ricardo Rio**, presented on national recovery and resilience plan that are being drafted and accepted at the national level and how important it is to integrate the SDGs. Mayor Rio did not have a PowerPoint presentation.

“Although we are facing a new wave of Covid-19 infections and our attention has inevitably and understandably been focused on this, we must not lose sight of the next phase, the recovery phase. It is a critical juncture and we need to ask ourselves that what we are looking for when we talk about recovery. If by recovering from the pandemic we intend to go back to the path that is leading our planet and ecosystems to collapse, we can carry on as before; we were already succeeding in doing that.

The reason we are here today is to consider how this pandemic can become an opportunity to change and to adapt our societies and our economies and build resilience for the challenges of tomorrow. If we look at the future, we have less than nine years before 2030, which is the deadline to deliver on our own international commitments to implement the sustainable development goals. Even before the pandemic, the world was not on track to meet this deadline. Now, for the first time in 20 years, the global extreme poverty rate increased and two decades of progresses in the field of education were wiped out. In the meantime, the climate crisis continued to unfold. The global average

temperature rose 1.2 degrees above the pre-industrial baseline and the oceans' ecosystems and biodiversity remain in grave danger. The opportunity I was talking about is one we cannot afford to miss.

Recovery will only be successful if it takes us on the path of sustainable development. Now, I think the question is how we can do it. The European Union has pledged an unprecedented economic firepower of 750 billion Euros and their next generation EU. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) represents the biggest part of this budget, totaling 672.5 billion Euros, which is to be spent between 2021 and 2023.

Each Member State has presented a national recovery and resilience plan that outlines investments and reforms based on six priority areas ranging from the green and digital transition to social, economic, and territorial cohesion and resilience. These plans are meant to build resilience ahead of future shocks. In practice, resilience and sustainability are two sides of the same coin. Resilience is the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges, but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair, and democratic manner. Thus, putting the economic firepower of the RRF to the service of the SDGs is the perfect solution.

The European Commission itself has stated that the scope of this fund is to build a more sustainable, resilient, and fairer Europe for the next generation in line with SDGs. Unfortunately, the evidence from a preliminary assessment of eight national recovery and resilience plans commissioned by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) reveals a different picture. In drafting the plans, Member States missed the opportunity to use the SDGs as a guiding framework for investments and reforms. Even when the plans contain investments that are coherent with the SDGs, a clear and transparent link is missing. On top of that, when explicitly mentioned, economic SDGs are much more prominent than social and environmental ones, which has a number of consequences that need to be addressed.

First, the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda does not lie in pursuing single goals or targets, but rather in a systemic approach. Cherry picking single SDGs reduces their potential benefits as an overarching strategy for sustainable recovery and betrays their integrated and comprehensive nature.

Second, integrating the SDGs in a consistent manner across all countries and levels of government will facilitate measurements of progresses and improve the comparability of the plans. The SDGs could become the common language of recovery.

Third, potential conflicts may arise among different social, economic, and environmental priorities. The best way to solve these conflicts is to address them at the early stage of planning. The SDGs can help break this silo approach and enhance policy and the policy coherence of the plans. I am confident that such imbalances could have been mitigated if local and regional authorities had been more involved, more consistently, and effectively in the drafting phase of the plans.

At the EU level, the implementation of the plans will now be monitored within the European Semester cycle of economic governance. The CoR has been advocating for the full integration of the SDGs in this mechanism, in particular. I am the rapporteur of a recent CoR opinion on delivering on the SDGs by 2030, and this opinion recommends explicitly to map the integration of the SDGs in the national plans, in order to have a solid knowledge based on the state of play of the SDGs in Member States. Moreover, this opinion suggests that the annual SDG monitoring report should gain in robustness by including levels of achievement of the SDGs that can be easily quantified.

I am particularly pleased that recently, the European Commission has taken a step in this direction. This year, the European Semester will include an updated, and consistent, SDG reporting across all Member States and will monitor their performance and progresses in each SDG area. However, despite

this, the governance of the Semester, and of the national plans for recovery, remains very centralized and inaccessible for local and regional authorities and other stakeholders. As a mayor, I am personally and politically invested in the implementation of the SDGs in my city, Braga, as a member of the CoR and many other international networks, such as the Covenant of Mayors, Eurocities, and Global Parliament of Mayors.

I see the growing commitment of local and regional governments to the localization of the SDGs in cities, regions, and villages around Europe. In the spirit of partnership and collaboration of SDG 17, more and more of my fellow representatives strive to integrate the SDGs in their local budgets and policy frameworks to introduce innovative solutions to involve local stakeholders and citizens in the transformation to produce voluntary local reviews and to live up to their commitments to climate neutrality.

We embark in these efforts because ultimately implementing the SDGs is an exercise of responsibility towards better policy-making. However, this does not come without its challenges. This year, the CoR, in collaboration with the OECD, conducted a survey to identify the critical issues faced by local and regional governments during the pandemic and to understand how the SDGs can support them in the efforts for recovery. Local and regional authorities have been at the forefront of the pandemic response, struggling to provide assistance to their citizens and ease the burden of the economic crisis. However, this did not discourage them, but on the contrary, 60 percent of respondents are convinced that the pandemic has led to more conviction that the SDGs can help framing a moralistic approach to recovery and almost 70 percent of them are shaping their plans for recovery based on the SDGs or adapting existing plans accordingly. Findings show that the most important factor contributing to the success of SDG implementation is political leadership at local level, followed by support from higher levels of government and citizens engagements.

I believe this evidence speaks out loud and clear about political willingness and commitment of local and regional representatives to embrace their responsibility towards their constituency and towards future generations. If there is a lesson that can be drawn from SDG localization, it is that we do not need new organizations or to adapt structures for the implementation of the SDGs, but just a thorough assessment of the existing governance structures and the potential synergies that can be leveraged to maximize a positive impact. This is linked to a strong political leadership and an effective coordination across, and within, levels of government can really make the difference for the achievement of the SDGs and the success of the recovery strategy.”

## ESDN Youth Workshop Manifesto

At the [ESDN Youth Workshop](#), 17 young delegates from all over Europe met to discuss, exchange experiences and together develop a manifesto with demands to the ESDN and European policy-makers. They are United Nations Youth Delegates selected by their government to represent their country's youth to the UN, as well as representatives of national youth councils or other youth organisations.

At the ESDN Youth Workshop, the participants decided to work on three topics: climate justice, responsible consumption and production, and youth involvement in sustainable development. On the topic of climate justice, the manifesto discusses the responsibility of rich polluting countries towards more vulnerable countries and communities. It also promotes the World Youth for Climate Action Campaign, which seeks an Advisory Opinion on Climate Justice from the International Court of Justice. Regarding Responsible Consumption and Production the manifesto criticizes the current economic system, which is unsustainable for people and planet. It tackles questions of responsible consumerism and a sustainable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Thirdly, the manifesto clearly states that it is crucial to involve young people more effectively into decision-making processes that will affect their

future. This includes not only listening to youth but to take their considerations into account and to create institutional frameworks that guarantee youth a seat at the table.

**Lara Schummer**, a UN Youth Delegate for Luxembourg and **Daniel Samuelsson**, a UN Youth Delegate for the High Level Political Forum from Sweden, expounded upon the Youth Workshop and the [Manifesto](#) that was devised by the Youth Representatives. Their PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

As has already been stated above in the background of the Youth Workshop, the Youth Representatives discussed 3 main themes: 1) Climate Justice; 2) Sustainable Consumption and Production; and 3) Youth Participation in Policy-Making. The offer recommendations for addressing each of these issues.

#### **Climate Justice:**

- ❖ The ESDN & member states should promote the WYCI initiative;
- ❖ Support the WYCI campaign at the upcoming UNGA to obtain an advisory opinion by the ICJ; and
- ❖ The human right to a clean, sustainable and healthy environment as a central role within the work of the ESDN & its member states.

#### **Sustainable Consumption and Production:**

- ❖ Promote sustainability mind-set through education;
- ❖ Circular Economy;
- ❖ Improve EU-wide railway system; and
- ❖ Introduce eco labels on all products sold in the EU.

#### **Youth Participation in Policy-Making:**

- ❖ Meaningful inclusion and avoid youth tokenism;
- ❖ Systematically include youth from diverse backgrounds;
- ❖ Decision-makers need to listen, value and take into account the views from young people; and
- ❖ Promote youth delegate programs in ESDN member states and other countries.

## Session 3: Panel Discussion on Fostering Resilience in Sustainable Development Policy-Making - Integrating Perspectives

Session 3 saw a more interactive format with a panel discussion on different resilience themes, which sought to take a look into particular focus areas and then relate them back to the bigger, more holistic picture of resilience. Each panellist was given five minutes to introduce their particular resilience theme.

### Environmental and Ecological Resilience

**Marie-Luise Abshagen** from the German NGO Forum on Environment and Sustainable Development began by stating that what we need to talk about are the environment and the economy. Our current system destroys the environment. Herein lies the issues in the recovery, or in any policies. This is a historic time to make change. The Covid-19 pandemic saw such a large influx of funds, and we need this for the environment, for a true circular economy, and for a just transition that includes phasing out fossil fuels. We will need to see if the European Green Deal can deliver on this.

We also do not just need resilience in the EU, we need it everywhere, and we need to keep the global perspective in mind when it comes to environmental resilience and a better life for humans, as we cannot look at it as detached. We cannot exploit the environment within and outside of Europe. We need to redefine wealth, have tax justice, and tax the wealthy. We need to talk about a shift in our economies.

**Gerald Berger** asked Marie-Luise Abshagen a few follow-up questions, referring to wicked problems and the political power struggles. How hopeful are you that this will be achieved? What advice would you give to the ESDN.

**Marie-Luise Abshagen** answered that, in a way, it is not a question of hope and of future generations, it is a question of survival and of global justice. Policymakers should question the policies coming out of their ministries and analyze whether they are adhering to sustainable development. Sustainable development is an investment and not a cost, when you think about policies and resilience.

### Societal Resilience

**Heather Grabbe** from the Open Society Foundations framed societal resilience as: How to sustain political and democratic support for sustainability. It will take a couple of decades to get to a sustainable economy. We are at the beginning. The concrete measures have not landed in people's lives. We have seen the reaction to gas price rises this autumn and of the '*jillet jaune*'.

Three political dimensions need attention. We need to start preparing for the measures and for what is about to happen. People do not want to see the burden of transitioning to be put on them.

The first issue is changing people's mentalities. We have done a lot of research at OSEPI in this respect and what people think about the climate transition. Most people in most parts of Europe do not know what is ahead regarding the transition. Many think it is about recycling and not about flights and cars. However, it should be about changing mobility itself and they do not know about the benefits of switching to a plant-based diet and why these changes are necessary. The changes are simply not



understood. If people are not expecting major changes and they come anyway, then there could be adverse effects. It is hard for people to prepare for these issues.

The second issue is providing a vision, as people do not know what it would be like to live in a sustainable economy. There is no good functioning, low-carbon economy in existence. Radical right policymakers will use this as a wedge issue. How do we avoid the political landscape turning so toxic that nothing is possible anymore? Look at the EGD and see how it can be spread equitably. The redistribution should be well-communicated.

If we look at the fit for 55 package, which were well-implemented, then we could have more energy resilience in Europe, for example. The renovation wave needs to be explained and a lower dependence on foreign fossil fuels. How a climate-neutral society is a fairer one in the long-run. The cost of inaction is enormous. Democratic systems were not designed for this. As the transition is going to take decades, one needs continuity across governments. We should use the optimism in the EU that we are seeing (highest since 2009). Trust in national governments has also risen due to Covid. We are moving toward pricing nature, and then price higher the things that destroy the good, so that people can see the true costs. This then helps people to begin to understand the impacts of consumption.

The ESDN is key in preparing, not only policies, but also the communication.

Gerald Berger asked Heather Grabbe some follow-up questions: Do we need change agents? Do we need change projects?

She answered that examples and their effects are important, especially when people are facing uncertainty. I think here this is where the subnational level is important. Cities are taking measure, like mobility and energy. City-level action by mayors help to build small scale projects that work, and this is how you do it, such as solar panels in parking lots.

It is critical to see that the money being used is being spent and monitored. Keep up monitoring and pressure on this topic is very important.

## Economic Resilience

**Sami Pirkkala** from the Prime Minister's Office of Finland and ESDN Vice President brought in the economic aspect to resilience.

The capacity to continue to function in times of crisis; I think resilience has a lot to do with sustainable development. Sustainable development is about long-term resilience. So, as we speak of economic resilience, I would not focus on the ability of an economy to bounce back. We know the current economic model exists on the exploitation of resources and this exploitation is not really internalized.

Finland is preparing a Roadmap for the 2030 Agenda on six areas. One area is sustainable economy. We in Finland identified circular economy. It is essential in reducing the use of natural resources, then we discussed the well-being economy: Positive interaction between the economy and people and increasing their well-being. The economy serves the well-being of the people.

Something was missing. In one workshop, it was pointed out that the focus was on economic flows, it would be like focusing just on metabolism for humans. We should think of circular economy and well-being as the metabolism of society. The end is to maintain and restore the resources that make our economies better (human capital). The goal should be to increase human and natural capital (inclusive wealth).

The key problem is that the governments are not following natural and human capital. What should be done is this: Firstly, further develop existing ways to evaluate and aggregate natural capital in our societies, how our economy contributes to these value, and integrate these approaches into the decision-making processing our government.

**Gerald Berger** asked a follow-up questions regarding Finland's "Society's Commitments to Sustainable Development" and what it brings to the table.

Sami Pirkkala answered that "Society's Commitments" has functioned well. There are many good examples. The city of Espoo and the city council made its own commitment three years ago and how they would change the city administration in a more sustainable way. They had the entire administration make their own commitments and become more sustainable. Espoo City has many commitments and has become more sustainability-oriented.

## Financial Resilience

**Simon Savsek** from the European Investment Bank began by saying that when we were looking at the pandemic, we thought it would be really bad. However, that generally did not happen because of the policy support that was in place. We are quite resilient and this pandemic proved it. However, if you look at it more broadly, and incorporating ESG, it is not so clear. We are asking across the EU, US and China and what the biggest challenges are for people. We get quite a lot of feedback. One issue that is relevant is the disconnect between the long-term and the short-term. 2/3 of people will say climate change is concerning, but if you look at the short-term, then no, they are not concerned, but are rather concerned about pandemic, inflation, the economy, etc.

If you look at ESG indicators, you would see a lot of info is missing. It is a not so defined concept.

Good practices will mean a lot. The EIB was the first issuer of green bonds in 2007. We did not know it would attract so much attention nowadays. We wanted to engage with this climate area. The market is rapidly increasing. The debt increased during the pandemic. Climate and digital inclusive infrastructure is paramount. People think differently about resilience overall.

He also respond to Marie-Luise Abshagen: it is important to put forward the good practices. The EIB committed itself to supporting €1 trillion of investment for climate and the environment by 2030 and increase climate financing to above 50% of the total portfolio by 2025, while completely phasing-out fossil fuel financing. However, engaging the private sector will paramount. In advanced economies, a relatively small part of investment is from the public sector (ca. 15%), and therefore stimulating the private sector will be equally important. In fact, many MDBs and IFIs are already doing it, also via counterparty agreements.

He also provided links to some EIB documents:

- ❖ [EIB climate survey](#)
- ❖ [EIBIS survey of companies](#)
- ❖ [And on the municipalities](#)

## Policy Resilience

**László Borbély** from the Prime Minister's Office - Department of Sustainable Development in Romania mentioned began by stressing the importance of having a holistic approach to sustainable development and to the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda is like a menu.

He shared that 2-3 years after adopting the 2030 Agenda, the Government of Romania reinvented its sustainable development strategy. This then needed an action plan. Since the coordination for sustainable development is within the Prime Minister's Office, it allows them to ask different ministries how they are addressing sustainable development and help provide this holistic approach.

Romania has also been training its civil servants in sustainable development, who will then become experts.

It is also important from the policy perspective and resilience to have partnerships that include many stakeholders. It is important to have all the pieces together. It is important for the public sector to have credibility and to involve people.

## Main Messages from the Panel Discussions

**Gerald Berger** asked all panellists to provide their main messages from the discussions.

**Marie-Luise Abshagen's** main message was to always ask if policies are actually working and are the supporting the SDGs. Actions also need to be reality-proven.

**Heather Grabbe's** main message was that it is key for the EU MS to share with one another examples of the climate transition. See what the climate transition means for them and do not talk about costs or sacrifices. Espoo, for example, needs to be known across the EU and these case studies need to be written about. NGO networks can use them and move the debate from big level COP to everyday lives.

**Sami Pirkkala's** main message was the disconnection between short-term and long-term problems, and we know the long-term problems, yet we focus on the short-term. We should try and make people ready for what is ahead of us.

**Simon Savsek's** main message was about increasing transparency in our statements and make sure we are doing what we say. Sustainable resilience should also be in education and we should make it central to the curriculum.

**László Borbély's** main message was that we need a movement on the level of society and reach a critical mass of people who believe there is another way forward for a different type of society. Education is also an important key element in ensuring that happens.

## Closing of Day 1

### Lessons Learned and Main Takeaway Messages

**Elisabeth Freytag-Rigler** from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action and ESDN Vice President delivered the closing address, the lessons learned, and takeaway messages from Day 1 of the Conference.

She mentioned that she was looking forward to Day 2 and the more interactive Exchange Spaces, where many issues that were mentioned on Day 1 could be discussed in more detail and in smaller groups.

She reflected that most of us working on sustainable development issues are always asking ourselves how we can make the best out of our situations. The economy, in a narrow sense, is resilient. A lot is also happening in the sense that we want it to happen, such as no more money for fossil fuels. Some things are developing in the right direction and in a direction that we all want for sustainable development.

It is still very clear that we need action on all the governance levels. All of us have to participate in a transition. We could do what the ESDN is doing and learn from one another and work together with scientists and other stakeholders. We have the EU Green Deal and it is a paradigm shift for the transition and we need to use it.

We talk a lot about the environment and climate and the green transition. We should not forget the people and the social aspects: What does climate change mean for them and the transition?

## Setting the Stage for the Topics of Day 2

**Sami Pirkkala** from the Prime Minister's Office of Finland and ESDN Vice President opened up Day 2 of the Conference.

He began by talking about 'circles of concerns' and 'circles of influence'. The 'circles of concern' include everything with which a person is concerned, such as climate change, the state budget, all the way to the diet of one's dog.

Within this 'circle of concern' there is the 'circle of influence', which includes things a person can influence in practice; you can influence what you feed your dog, but you cannot really influence the state budget unless one happens to be in the government. He thought it was important to reflect on these concepts in our own case, and then focus on issues one can influence.

As civil servants, there are many things that they can influence. One of these things is governance structures, as decision-making takes place in certain structures. Even though it is the politicians and the ministers who end up making the decisions, those decisions are made in a certain structure.

Policy coherence is an issue in which civil servants can set up structures to make incoherencies visible and allow political decision-makers to make more coherent decisions. However, whether the political decision-makers end up making coherent decisions for sustainable development, is ultimately outside of a civil servant's influence.

Another important things to remember is that the circles of concern and influence are not rigid and they change, and can be changed, over time.

## Session 4: Exchange Spaces on Resilience and National Level Good Practices on Recovery

Session 4 was the main interactive portion of the ESDN Conference 2021. Before the Conference, participants were asked to select three topics they wished to join, as Session 4 occurred over three separate rounds. Each round lasted for 50 minutes, with topic moderators providing a 10-15 minute long presentation and then opening the floor for questions and discussions. Each topic in each round had between 4 and 10 participants, which fostered more in-depth discussions.

After the three rounds, the topic moderators were asked to summarize the main highlights they gathered from the discussions and present that in plenary. These are included below under the main collective learnings.

Additionally, any PowerPoint presentations that were used in this session can be found on the ESDN website and will be mentioned and linked below for each individual topic. Descriptions for several of the topics that were submitted for the [Conference Discussion Paper](#) are also included.

### Climate Adaptation

**Angelika Tamášová** from the European Environment Agency covered the topic of climate adaptation. A brief description of the topic can be found below.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how vulnerable our society is to unexpected risks. But the short- and medium-term consequences of the pandemic are not the only ones, which need to be addressed. Climate change is real and its adverse effects already impact our economy, society and environment. Therefore, systemic approaches are needed to achieve sustainability and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals. The transition to a climate-neutral and climate-resilient society is essential. It is both an urgent challenge and an opportunity to build a better future. Now, that we enter the phase of recovery, the European Union and its Member States have a tremendous opportunity to 'build back better' and make their Recovery and Resilience Plans as green and sustainable as possible. This includes both measures to increase climate action to reduce GHG emissions, as well as measures to increase the resilience towards climate change impacts.

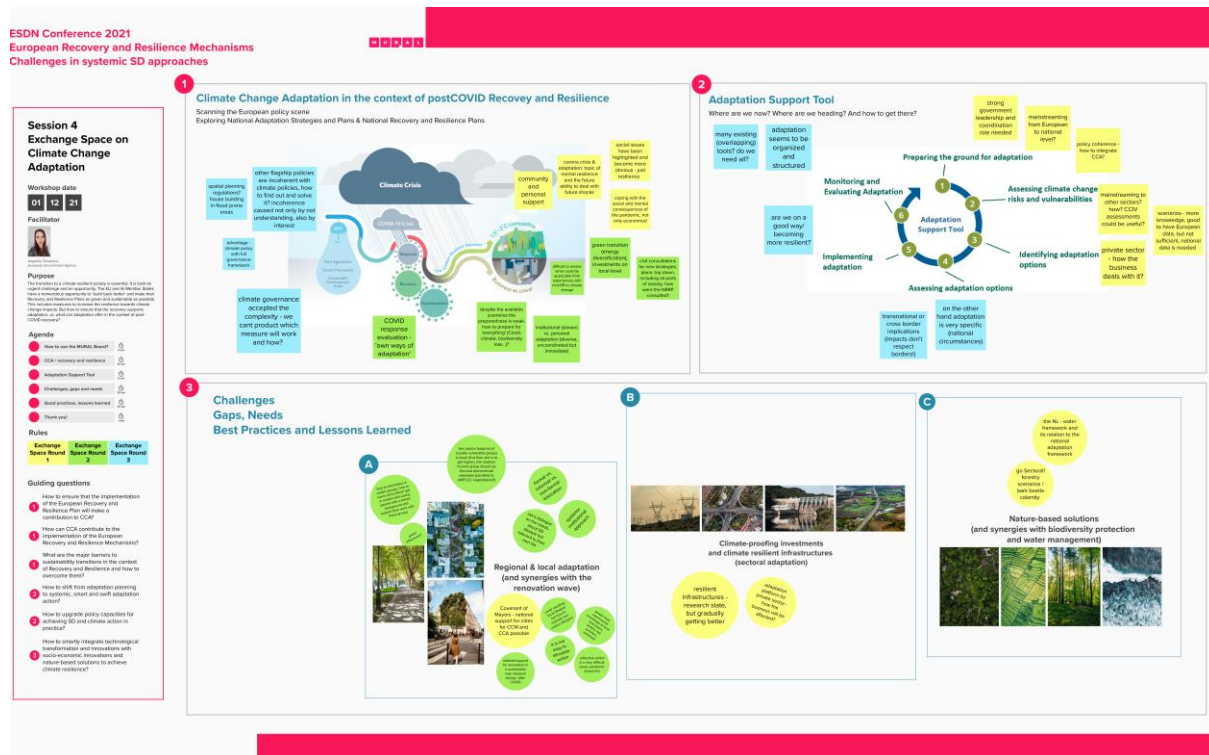
The session on Climate Change Adaptation will particularly focus on the EU and national context by exploring the relevant EU policies (European Climate Law, European Adaptation Strategy, EU Recovery and Resilience Facility) and their mainstreaming to national policies (national adaptation strategies and action plans, national recovery, and resilience plans). The adaptation support tool, assisting policymakers on the national level in developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating climate change adaptation strategies and plans will be presented. In our discussion we will focus on several areas with a significant potential in the post-COVID Recovery and Resilience:

- climate-proofing investments and climate resilient infrastructures,
- regional and local adaptation, and the synergies with the renovation wave,
- social and health aspects of adaptation, just resilience,
- nature-based solutions.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

### Main Collective Learnings

Angelika Tamášová used Mural in her Exchange Space and the results can be seen in the figure below.



## R&I for a Green Recovery

**Ionuț Purică** from the Romanian Prime Minister's Office - Department of Sustainable Development covered the topic of R&I for a Green Recovery.

Sustainable development underlines the preservation of resources for the future generations without jeopardizing present development. In order to achieve this goal, efficient technologies must be found, developed, and implemented in the world's economies. The EU is at the forefront of new technologies implementation wherein research and innovation is paramount.

The presentation is focusing on selected examples of technologies that are contributing to improving the overall energy impact on climate change and on shifting the use of present resources to more efficient and to new ones such that to aim at a medium-term goal of zero emissions and maintaining the development trend.

The following topics are presented through examples of technologies: i) equipment – SMR's; ii) system support technologies for energy storage; iii) big data evaluation of climate change risks with a view to an insurance policy, circular economy and smart cities and aggregated indicators for development; iv) models for energy systems evolution including emissions and waste fuel treatment.

The technologies presented represent just examples of the increasing importance of research and innovation as acknowledged in the EU Commission's specific strategy as well as in the UN strategy for Sustainable Development.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

## Main Collective Learnings

We are exposed to a large spectrum of innovative technologies. It would be helpful for people, media and decision-makers to understand new technologies if there would be more education on these innovating technologies. This would help them to better understand the risks and benefits of pursuing the use of the technologies. Technology has the potential to open up more diverse applications in helping to solve issues in sustainable development, resilience and shock resistance.

## Digitalization Supporting Transformations

**Wolfgang Ebner** from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Digitalization and Economic Affairs covered the topic of Digitalization Supporting Transformations.

There was no PowerPoint presentation for this topic.

## Main Collective Learnings

The main collective learnings from the topic on Digitalization was presented by **Serafin Gröbner** from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, who acted as rapporteur for the three rounds of Exchange Spaces. The summary below is a subjective summary and does not represent any particular views of the participants who took part in the groups.

Some of the main points that crystallized over the three rounds were the following:

- Digitalization as it is will worsen the multiple crisis (climate, health, biodiversity etc.) we are facing. Digitalization needs direction and good governance.
- It needs to contribute to and improve social inclusion and cohesion. Leave no one behind as a principle applies here – it is important to strengthen digital skills but with regard to individual capabilities. Governments need to keep the Digital Divide in check.
- Digitalization is no silver bullet in and by itself. Digitalization will solve some problems, but negative externalities (i.e. societal polarization, use of rare earths) will arise, therefore it is necessary to safeguard positive developments with i.e. education for sustainable development, and digital literacy
- Efficiency gains in production due to digitalization are not enough. The discussion needs to also turn its attention to making sufficiency a leading principle, if we want to achieve our climate goals.
- E-Governance: if it is well done, it has the potential to restore trust through efficiency and thereby contribute to the transformation needed
- Big-Data: as a big chance for governments to aid sustainability but issues such as proper utilization, finding skilled experts and security may lessen effectiveness.
- Social Media: as a tool, which could help, but also undermine many of our efforts in terms of sustainability

## Circular Economy

**Marjana Dermelj** from the Slovenian Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy covered the topic of Circular Economy.

Current production and consumption processes are still wasteful, predominantly based on linear business models. If we are to achieve the decoupling of the environmental impacts from generating well-being in the societies, we need to utilise fully the potential offered by the circular economy.



Namely, there will be no climate neutrality without circularity since the decarbonisation itself requires ample resources. Additionally, the pandemic showed the vulnerability of various global supply chains and the recent energy and construction materials prices surge, etc. are providing clear signals that post covid-19 recovery strategies need to integrate circularity principles into their core. Since both, the decarbonisation and transition to circularity are complex challenges and since we do not have much time left for serious action, we need to start addressing them at the systemic level.

During the session we will be giving an overview on how Slovenia intends to address this challenge by implementing the Deep Demonstration Project of a Circular, Regenerative and Low-Carbon Economy. The project consists of 17 intrinsically linked programmes designed in a way that enables systemic innovation. With it we intend to tackle material production and waste flows across key economic systems and value chains; work on training, education and capacity-building to create change agents and foster life-long learning as well as widely disseminate insights and good practices, while policy initiatives and experiments will ensure enabling conditions. Ongoing monitoring, learning and evaluation as well as sense-making is underpinning the entire approach and a core element of all programmes.

Participants of the session will have opportunity to share their insights and knowledge on how their respective countries are addressing the systemic challenge of transition to low carbon, circular economy and how this approach and principles are integrated in their recovery and resilience plans and/or strategies.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

### Main Collective Learnings

One of the main conclusions to come out of the three rounds is that we are running a marathon and not a short distances, which can be problematic when dealing with policies, especially at the technological level, but even more so at the systemic level regarding barriers. These need to be addressed if we are to move ahead.

It was also discussed if the business sector was really willing to step on board and how to incentivize them to step on board. To some extent, a shortage of resources are incentivizing some businesses to address these issues of circularity and of supply chain resilience.

It is also important to discuss the behaviour change and that we need to start debating the paradigm shift on economics and creating value in terms of wellbeing instead of on GDP. Civil servants are instrumental in this change and need to have adequate capacities if we are to move ahead. Green public procurement can be important, but it alone cannot solve the issue.

A platform could also be established, where the views from the public and private sector could be shared and discussed. This could also be used to bring a more cooperative nature to discussions between the two stakeholders.

### Governance for Sustainable Development

ESDN President **Annika Lindblom** from the Finnish Ministry of the Environment covered the topic of governance for sustainable development.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

## Main Collective Learnings

### Round 1

- Unbalance between the policies and governance
- We cannot deliver integrated and systemic responses with silo governance and tools
- Governance is a strategic policy area of itself, but many times neglected
- You need mechanisms but you also need to impact people
- PCSD is a good proxy and can serve as the SD strategy in the absence of the real strategy
- Whole-of Government approach to get policy coherence in place
- New SDG approach to the European Semester, promising
- Indicators, how do you measure governance quality? PCSD indicator is not yet acceptable for Eurostat
- Political acceptance – governance – citizens
- Bureaucratic political environment, but very little attention to mechanisms/governance; reference to pandemic solving: governance structures are underdeveloped; analogy to sustainable development implementation
- Political commitment in the government programme to systemic change
- EU: climate and energy, there is a strong Governance, but otherwise not so much
- Top-down and/or bottom-up, both are needed but depends on the political culture which one is stronger
- Hesitation to organize science-based decision-making processes, lack of investing in science-policy mechanism

### Round 2

- Governance is an overlapping area to all other areas
- PCSD as proxy if there is no strategy, yes, but only part of; PCSD strategy would not set targets, we need to have impact on others
- ESDN network collaboration with Commission, yes, we should address this
- Participation mechanisms, yes, but also nucleus of communities are important, hubs in communities, beyond participation and more empowering people, for instance a village or a department to a city
- Sustainability governance: a lot of interest in wellbeing economy and circular economy, but how to connect it with SD and A2030 and ensure that there will be not competing governance structures
- Wellbeing economy and circular economy vis-a-vis sustainable development
- All stakeholders on board, Council/Commission the best way of organizing this?
- Pandemic: urgency – sustainable development: long-term
- SD is more a growth agenda, wellbeing economy is more qualitative
- Councils importance governance mechanism to support the government

### Round 3

- Strengthened cooperation rather than competing, example forests and their importance to economy and biodiversity >> holistic approach to sustainable development
- Empowerment of people and trust very important, people have to live sustainability, address people in sports
- Importance of the society; Society's Commitment important

- Strategy includes the aim and structure to the institutions and procedures. SD needs to be in the center of government, we need institutions; we need not only institutions but also procedures like impact assessments
- What kind of impact assessments there are? Technical solutions from the OECD
- German model for impact assessment SDG-by-SDG, mandatory in Germany
- Political leadership; CEOs for sustainability in Austria
- Regional level is very important
- Pandemic; we are not trained to discuss and find solutions together

## Transformative Education for Sustainable Development

**Natalia Kouhartsiouk** from the Bridge 47 Network and Slovenian Global Action (SLOGA) covered the topic on transformative education for sustainable development.

The session will include a brief presentation of the lessons learned and practices from implementation of the [Bridge 47](#) project, created to bring people together to share and learn from each other and to mobilise civil society around the world to contribute to a transformation towards a fairer and more sustainable world through Global Citizenship Education. The presentation will offer insights into how Bridge 47 coordinated efforts in responding to the challenges and opportunities of Agenda 2030, and more specifically to Target 4.7, which seeks to ensure that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality and Global Citizenship.

The session will provide the space for conversation around the relevance of lifelong, systemic, transformative learning to achieve sustainable development objectives, offering perhaps a new knowledge base and the key to responding to the disconnection between policymaking, research and practice.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

### Main Collective Learnings

## Key Outtakes Round 1

- Informal movements and citizens' initiatives (eg. Fridays for Future) are important processes of learning and engagement – do they have agency for change? how can they be involved?
- Cross-sectoral cooperation and cooperation of institutions is highly important to achieve a sustainable future (SDG 17 – global partnership) – We need to work on that (but good examples exist as shared by participants: cooperation with academia, cross-ministerial coop)
- Policy-making institutions (eg. Ministries) established structures with no inter-disciplinary approaches
- “Knowledge of what we need to do for the future is there, but the structures that are there to help us are outdated” – hindering cooperation

## Key Outtakes Round 2

- Role of education should be to help us envision recovery and the future
- Transformative education supports learning that is interconnecting and fosters active citizenship
- Lack of holistic approach to SDGs and lack of visibility & awareness (even if a lot more people know about Agenda 2030)
- We need education to support fact-checking and critical awareness of information we receive
- Education should not be a goal / solution (tool) but a process to support change
- Agenda 2030 treated by policymakers as an add-on, something to essentially report on (tick boxes)
- We need to mainstream ESD in education in all levels
- Intergenerational and cross-sectoral element is missing when working on Agenda 2030
- Worry of recovering back to old practices and processes – missing the opportunity to learn from the past

## Key Outtakes Round 3

- It is not about education in the classroom, it is about a more holistic approach
- Skills for green transition are important but skills and competencies for achieving change are also important
- It is a challenge to look at global challenges and how to solve them when people are focusing on local perspectives – still strong perceptions that states are responsible for global change and not communities / citizens
- Educational reform is slow – educational systems (Slovenia) hard to change – they can be past-dependant, administratively organised
- Different examples of cross sectoral initiatives shared from various counties and institutions

## Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: Lessons learned

**Leida Rijnhout** who is a consultant for SLOGA and **Albin Keuc** from SLOGA covered the topic of policy coherence for sustainable development.

PCSD is an underestimated or even ignored, but very crucial part, of achieving the 2030 Agenda worldwide. The 2030 Agenda is interlinked and integrated by nature, where the objectives cannot be achieved in an isolated manner. Actions on one objective can cause negative or positive impacts on other environmental and/or social challenges. There are many examples where domestic policies have negative impacts on the Global South, thus undermining their efforts to achieve the SDGs. With strong PCSD mechanisms and a mandate to adjust incoherent policies an effective decision making will be much more aligned with Sustainable Development. The role for civil society organizations is key, as they have much more knowledge on what is happening in the field, both in Europe as abroad. The

session on PCSD will inform you about current practices on PCSD, based on research recently done, and give concrete recommendations for MS.

There was no PowerPoint presentation for this topic.

### **Main Collective Learnings**

One of the main things discussed during the different rounds was the need for continuity in everything, including the SDGs, because without it, there is no coherence.

Many countries wanted to discuss on how to use the Court of Auditors and budgeting for the SDGs to see the areas that are coherent and those that are incoherent. It was interesting to note that when incoherencies are identified, they typically go right to the political level, as this forces a decision or prioritization to be made. Therefore, it is important to have the involvement of the political level.

There is a lot of capacity building that is still needed for PCSD and what it actually entails.

It would also be important for the ESDN to follow-up on this topic, as it is vital for so much of its work on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Perhaps the ESDN could also organize a joint workshop with the Court of Auditors on policy coherence and SDG budgeting.

### **Wellbeing Economy/ Economy within Planetary boundaries**

**Mike Asquith** and **Pantelis Marinakis** from the European Environment Agency covered the topic of the wellbeing economy.

The idea that European economies and societies need to develop within environmental limits is at the heart of EU policy. The EU's flagship strategic roadmap, the European Green Deal, sets out an ambitious agenda for transforming Europe's systems of production and consumption so that they can deliver continued economic growth while protecting ecosystems.

The European Green Deal's focus on promoting economic growth is easy to understand. Societies rely on growth to sustain employment levels, increase living standards and generate the tax revenues to finance the welfare state, public debt and the investments needed to achieve sustainability transitions. Nevertheless, there are doubts about whether unending economic growth is possible, given nature's finite capacity to provide resources and absorb pollution. Globally, economic activities are already causing extensive environmental damage, necessitating an unprecedented decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures. Whether decoupling at this scale is achievable is not certain. In addition, Europe faces other downward pressures on economic growth in coming decades, ranging from population ageing to growing risks of pandemics and climate change impacts.

These uncertainties do not mean that Europe should abandon its green growth approach. The European Green Deal's transformative agenda is essential, and it is important to make it the greatest possible success. But in building on the European Green Deal and promoting resilience, Europe should also seek to transform its economy in ways that enable it to secure society's well-being even if GDP is contracting.

Necessary actions include changes to fiscal systems, as well as more far-reaching measures to reorient economic activity at all scales, from local innovators up to multinational corporations. Rewiring of financial flows will be essential, as well as new knowledge systems that enable thinking and action at the pace and scale needed. The seeds for this transformation are already emerging in policy and

practice, for example in the EU's sustainable finance agenda. Europe needs to build on these foundations and take them much further and faster.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed or downloaded [here](#).

## Main Collective Learnings

We face a difficult and uncertain future, as it is hard to sustain economic growth within environmental limits and other pressing issues. However, we currently need growth to continue to support our socio-economic system. How then, can we make the system more resilient in this context?

Through the discussions, it became apparent that the issues with our current economic system and its viability are coming more into question in research and in civil society. There have been some indications from the discussion that this issue has begun to enter into the political debate and policy discourses in some places. There are also many preconceptions tied to this issue, as well as emotions.

However, is it helpful to center so much attention on this macro-level question on the viability of growth, post-growth, de-growth, etc.? Does it already pit us into having unhelpful exchanges? It seems to encourage people to fall into some very entrenched positions.

There is also a need for a mechanism to share best practices.

## Technological Innovations for the Sustainability Transitions from COP26 Perspective

**Darja Piciga**, who is an independent expert for sustainable development, and **Jernej Stritih** from Stritih Sustainable Development covered the topic of technological innovations for sustainability transitions through the lens of COP26.

New technologies have long been at the centre of discussion about the transition to low carbon economy and sustainable development in general and were also a highlighted topic at the climate summit COP26 (including side-events) in Glasgow. Systematic transformations towards SD require a transdisciplinary and trans-sectoral approach, smart integration of these technologies not only with technologies for transition to circular, bio- and blue-economy, including nature-based solutions but also with socio-economic dimension and innovations. Policymakers for sustainability transitions need to follow the development of promising emerging technologies (e.g., for the 2050 goal of net-zero GHG emissions), such as hydrogen technologies, and support processes for new potentially breakthrough innovations. On the other hand, we have to deal with the complex governance processes of supporting technologies that have already become commercially competitive and represent the main opportunity to reduce carbon emissions in the coming decade or two.

Materials and products for energy efficiency in buildings have already played a role in halving the carbon footprint of the housing sector in Slovenia since the year 2000. In the last decade, we have seen a breakthrough also in electric mobility and solar power generation. Electric cars are rapidly increasing the energy efficiency of transport and solar power is both enabling and driving the phase-out of coal in Europe. The rate of emission reduction by 2030 will largely depend on the enabling regulatory framework and infrastructure for these technologies. This includes clear medium to long term approach to regulation of solar power and electric cars, also in terms of mitigating possible negative side effects such as the expected increase in personal traffic due to lower cost of kilometre driven by electric car compared to fossil fuel car, or the ability of the electricity transmission networks do support the distributed generation. This will require novel and innovative solutions, such as closely linking the

charging of car batteries with solar panels during the day in parking lots and at commercial buildings, and enabling active management of car batteries by the network operators to make best use of the increasing storage capacity in cars. Such regulations may speed up the uptake and effects of the new technologies. However, it requires proactive approach by the governments and policy coordination within the EU as a whole.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

### **Main Collective Learnings**

The discussions focused on the distinction between technologies that offer incremental changes versus those that offer transformational changes. We have seen some transformational technologies already entering the market, but we are still struggling with incremental technologies, for example in Slovenia with efficient coal, as well as nuclear power on the European level, which is being talked about as a technology for the future, but at the same time has a lot of different opinions regarding the technology.

To be able to implement a new technology, one does not only need the technological success, but also the social license to operate. Leadership is also needed to inspire change and show the benefits from the technical improvements, such as quality of life.

Engineered solutions and nature-based solutions to climate change were also discussed. However, if we want to use nature-based solutions, then nature also needs to be helped to adapt and that may require financial resources to make forests, for example, more resilient, so that there are fewer negative effects.



# Closing of the ESDN Conference 2021

## Host Perspective from the Last 2 Days

**Jasmina Karba** from the Slovenian Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning provided the host perspective at the closing of the Conference.

The combination of sustainable development, recovery mechanisms, and systemic approaches was good. It allowed for a broad variety of high quality inputs from many different fields and sectors. This also allowed for many different breakout groups for the Exchange Spaces.

The main takeaway was the connection to the social dimension of sustainable development, as there is still a lot left to be done in this area.

## ESDN Honorary Membership Awards

ESDN President **Annika Lindblom** from the Finnish Ministry for the Environment presented the first ESDN Honorary Membership awards to three distinguished ESDN members for their services to the ESDN over the last 20 years. She presented the awards to **Sauli Rouhinen** from Finland, **Daniel Wachter** from Switzerland, and former ESDN Co-Chair **Wolfram Tertschnig** from Austria. They were nominated by the ESDN Regular Members. Not only have they been important in the ESDN, but also for sustainable development on the European stage.

Annika Lindblom then invited the three recipients to say a few words upon accepting the award of honorary membership.

## ESDN 2022 and Beyond

ESDN Vice President **Daniel Dubas**, who is the Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda in Switzerland provided the closing remarks of the ESDN Conference 2021, as well as what to look forward to in 2022.

Daniel Dubas shared that during the ESDN General Assembly, which took place on 30 November 2021, that he was appointed as ESDN President for 2022. There will be a new team serving in the ESDN Executive Committee. Annika Lindblom will step down as president, but will continue to serve in the Executive Committee as one of the Vice Presidents. László Borbély from Romania will also become a Vice President. Marguy Kohnen from Luxembourg will also serve as a Vice President.

Elisabeth Freytag-Rigler from Austria and Sami Pirkkala from Finland will step down from their roles as Vice Presidents and step out of the Executive Committee, but will re-join the ESDN Advisory Board.

The ESDN also had an Advisory Board meeting on 30 November, in which the ESDN Strategy 2025 was decided. The Strategy focuses on four main priorities and will seek to strengthen those over the next four years. The four priorities will be:

1. Strengthen the ESDN's role as a **networking platform** not only between members, but also other organizations working in sustainable development, such as the EEAC, EESC and SDSN. The ESDN also wants to strengthen its networking with Youth Representatives.
2. Strengthen the ESDN as a **peer learning platform** and go into more depth on thematic issues specifically designed for the peer learning mechanism.



3. Strengthen the ESDN as a **knowledge platform** when it comes to helping other countries in sustainable development, such as through the VNR process.
4. Strengthen the ESDN as an **advocacy platform** and be the 2030 Agenda advocates on policy. The ESDN, together with the EEAC, have already planned to have an exchange among the three upcoming EU Council presidencies.

The ESDN hopes that the next ESDN Conference will take place physically, as well as the next Peer Learning Platform. The ESDN Workshop is already planned to be virtual.

