



INHERIT

EU GREEN WEEK POLICY ROUNDTABLE

“How can latest research findings contribute to addressing inter-connected societal challenges?”

Meeting Report



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Background

On Thursday 16 May 2019, EU decision makers from across different sectors gathered to discuss how to bring about a more inter-sectoral approach to addressing inter-connected challenges. The meeting took place in the context of the Horizon 2020 [INHERIT](#) research project, which aims to contribute evidence and learnings on how to identify, implement and scale local policies and practices that simultaneously improve the environment and promote health and health equity (a “triple-win”), thereby contributing to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The discussion was hosted by the project’s coordinator, [EuroHealthNet](#).

In total, the roundtable brought together 16 participants from across the European Commission (EC) services (DG ECFIN, DG ENER, DG ENVI, DG MOVE, DG SANTE, and the Secretariat General), from the cabinets of the Commissioner for Social Affairs Marianne Thyssen and of the Commissioner for the Environment and Maritime Affairs Karmenu Vella, and from the think tanks of the European Commission and European Parliament. They were joined by the INHERIT team and a representative from INHERIT’s sister project [BlueHealth](#).

This report begins by providing a summary of the key points that were addressed during the policy roundtable, before including a more detailed account of the discussion. As the debate was held under Chatham House rules, the comments are not attributed to particular speakers. It is also important to note that the individual points reported do not represent the perspective of the participants or of the European Commission as a whole.

Debate summary and key points

Ahead of the meeting, participants were asked to consider questions concerning the current processes of intersectoral collaboration across the EC services and the extent to which environmental, health and social impacts are considered across policies. They were asked to reflect on what works and what they consider could be strengthened, and what is needed to achieve more “triple-win” approaches in the context of their work and across the EU. To kick-off the roundtable itself, presentations from INHERIT and BlueHealth provided the research background, with participants asked to consider how they could apply the projects’ learnings in their work.

During the debate, participants reflected that intersectoral integration across the EC and the EU could be pushed further, to better address the environmental crisis and the challenges that Europe faces. In addition, although the EC is considered a global front-runner when it comes to “better regulation”, existing approaches could be improved here too. Participants stressed that it is essential to avoid widening social inequities and taking measures towards sustainability that serve only “the elite”.

Policymakers chose to zoom in on the role of cities as drivers of sustainable change, as well as the necessity but also the challenge of involving the private sector, and spent time focusing on a few policies in particular, such as urban mobility, investments, and the energy transition.



Looking to the future, Commission officials argued that bold leadership is needed for more systemic, faster change, and conveyed the hope that the new Commission will base its overarching policy priorities on the UN SDGs and integrate these into the European Semester processes.

The following report provides more details on the discussion. It will feed into INHERIT's overall recommendations to policymakers, which will be disseminated widely to inform the priorities of the new European Commission and Parliament, as well as at national and local level.

Detailed account of the discussion

The below provides an overview of policymakers' contributions to the debate, organised as follows:

- I. The Need For Systemic Change and a Long-Term Interconnected Vision and Strategy
- II. The Importance and Challenge of Engaging Citizens
- III. What Can the EU Do (Better)?
- IV. The Need to Engage Local Actors and the Private Sector
- V. Zoom in on Specific Policies: Transport, Energy, Finance



I. THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE AND A LONG-TERM INTERCONNECTED VISION AND STRATEGY

- Not just at EC level but more generally, it was pointed out that the system will need to be drastically changed, and a new one designed, taking into account the necessary social foundations and not overstepping planetary boundaries (the [“Doughnut Economy”](#) model was set out as an interesting example). It is vital to have long-term targets, anticipation, cross- sector coordination, and a systemic approach.
- Getting out of current systems that lock citizens into unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and consequently into unsustainable lifestyles will require a lot of innovation – it will be necessary to understand the drivers influencing the system and how they can be pushed in the right direction.
- There are no magic solutions to breaking silos – all governments at all levels are currently thinking about how to do this. It is important to not be afraid of failing.
- It is necessary to have a common overarching narrative, that speaks clearly to everyone, such as the European strategic long-term vision on a competitive and climate-neutral economy, a [“Clean Planet for All”](#) (2018).



II. THE IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGE OF ENGAGING CITIZENS

Involving citizens in the move to greater sustainability is challenging:

- The biggest hurdle is how to convince individuals about the need to become more sustainable: even when there is plenty of evidence (e.g. from the WHO and European Environment Agency), not everybody believes the facts. It is important to work out how to best communicate in an age of information overload, to be imaginative and to link policy and emotion (e.g. plastic straws).
- People are afraid of change – even if they know what is “good” for them, barriers remain (not least financial, as detailed below).
- It is important to try and find solutions which are just and easy to adopt, and to work inter- sectorally to take into account different issues (e.g. social and environmental – as demonstrated in the “gilets jaunes” movement, which linked the two). The EC has attempted to do this but so far it has been a slightly artificial packaging exercise, not focusing on what really matters to people.

And it is particular challenging to ensure that everybody is on board:

- Distribution issues should be key to discussions on sustainability. Sustainability is often seen as a pet project of the elite.
- Many actions can have negative distribution effects on the middle class (this is a “grey zone” which must be considered), and on people not living in urban centres (e.g. OECD Report [“Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class”](#)).
- It will be important to build coalitions and enable everybody to be part of the change (e.g. making transports “green” but ensuring they are affordable too). Those who are underprivileged are the least responsible but most affected (e.g. by air pollution), and are also likely to be more stressed by change.
- The focus on inequality is coming to the fore, linked with the prevalent lack of trust and misinformation.

So how can greater citizen involvement be ensured?

- People should not be forced to change, but encouraged to do so through a wide range of tools (e.g. pricing, positive nudging, information and education, including at business-school level).
- Building on consumer interest is also key to sustainable food systems: people want to know where their food is coming from (not just from a safety perspective).
- Motivation is a key factor in behaviour change – many young people want a job in which they can make a difference and have a positive impact on the world. The idea of “green” or “sustainability” skills that every European should know regardless of age could be promoted. (e.g. in the same way as many people are now developing “digital skills”).
- A good way to support a bottom-up approach is to involve citizens through citizen science and research (e.g. CurieuzeNeuzen in Flanders).
- Bringing in the health perspective, and focusing on how environmental (and agricultural/food) issues affect people’s health can be very useful,
- Another example is the European Mobility Week, an increasingly successful EU awareness-raising campaign (2800 participating cities in 2018 from



- 54 countries), focusing on proposing and testing urban mobility solutions (such as closing down some streets to car traffic) for and with citizens, demonstrating for instance that mobility in cities can look different.
- Civil society can help by working with different Commission DGs, promoting good practices and local policies, bearing in mind the overarching policy narrative and fitting into one clear story.
- Societal movements to defend the common good must be created, and represented in decision making (e.g. single use plastics).

III. WHAT CAN THE EU DO (BETTER)?

A number of suggestions were made on how to go forwards at EC level:

- Several participants called on the next EC to be much bolder, as evidence points to the fact that there is a need of radical change (e.g. reports from the IPCC, on biodiversity, etc.).
- Several also put forward the idea of an overarching umbrella SDG strategy to help bridge the current siloed approach. An EC Vice-President for SDGs could be appointed to coordinate across policy portfolios. It was also suggested that the SDGs should be brought into the European Semester process (after prioritising those of most importance for the EU) – this would help to reinforce them on a global scale.
- The Juncker Commission’s “big on big things and small on small things” could be repeated in the new EC, with 10 top policy priorities.
- More generally, it would be important to build in different sustainability dimensions from the very beginning of the policymaking process. Services across DGs could thus work together from early in the policy cycle (without getting too caught up in details from the start). Several participants mentioned that working in “project teams” is a good holistic approach to find outcomes that are better for everyone (including businesses). It can be used to help strategic policy development (e.g. “[Clean Planet for All](#)”) but also in very concrete areas (e.g. the [Battery Alliance](#)). This type of approach should also be used within the Parliament and Council, if not policies that are developed broadly in the EC will be split up again when they go through the legislative process.
- Horizon Europe was mentioned a few times as an interesting example, due to its mission-oriented approach (although it is important that the missions are concrete and measurable), and the fact that it is based on co-creation between different DGs, ensuring that research projects are good not just for universities but also for markets.
- It is important to anticipate better and to support potentially disruptive technologies and innovations (e.g. electric mobility) but also to take into account social realities and work towards long term objectives (e.g. giving 20 instead of 5 years to close a factory, allowing time to find alternatives).
- It would also be important to better link policy and practice. On the one hand, concrete initiatives must be put into practice, and barriers and incentives to them should be identified directly in the field. In parallel, it is also important to broadcast and feed these practical learnings into the policy-making process, defining the challenges in a way that ensures they are dealt with inclusively from the beginning and ensuring a holistic collaborative approach.
- It might also be worth rethinking the subsidiarity principle (given that social and health issues are so strongly influenced by factors happening beyond the realm of their national borders).
- “Better Regulation” needs to remain at the heart of EU policymaking, as the EC system is one of the best in the world when it comes to stakeholder consultations and impact assessments, and helps adopt an integrated approach to policy analysis.



This has been the case in the current EC, with a visible impact across policy departments and strong support (see Communication on [Better Regulation](#), 15 April 2019). However, this cultural change is not yet irreversible, and there is still room for improvement (there is currently little integration between different fields, need to better consult stakeholders, better integrate evaluations and impact assessments, better communicate about the simplification of legislation, etc.). Overall, there needs to be a balance between depths of analysis and benefits obtained, as the exercise is very burdensome. Better Regulation

should also be more of a shared effort, with the Council and Parliament becoming more involved – ultimately, although impact assessments are a very good tool, they only support decision-making by politicians who may choose to overrule the well-informed evidence.

- Public consultations could be rethought to involve stakeholders throughout the policy cycle rather than just at the beginning of the process, and to involve new kinds of stakeholders (including citizens).

IV. THE NEED TO ENGAGE LOCAL ACTORS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Local governance and cities have an increasingly important role:

- Cities are becoming increasingly important actors, and should be better linked with the EU level (creative bodies such as the [Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#) and [Local Governments for Sustainability \(ICLEI\)](#) are good instruments for doing so). It is also important that there is not a disconnect between national and local levels: Territorial Impact Assessments are very relevant.
- Cities show that there are other ways of getting things done – again the Covenant of Mayors on Climate and Energy for instance is bottom-up and faster moving than Member States, who tend to water down EC proposals.
- There is a lot more trust at local level, but this approach has limits – sometimes national legislative frameworks prevent cities from going forward (e.g. in Poland: stringent legislation which de facto makes introducing low emission zones for cars practically impossible).
- Sharing best practices and role models and promoting change is important – e.g. selecting Essen as a Green Capital despite structural problems, which fostered a change from grey to green.
- On the other hand, there is maybe too much focus on cities, which could exacerbate the rural/urban divide – the right-wing protest vote is strongly linked to economically struggling rural areas and the lack of social cohesion.
- On a more regional level, the EC is increasingly aware that it needs tailor-made approaches in line with longer term societal objectives – e.g. smart specialisation, to help regions identify their strengths and develop new economic opportunities, supporting them in this process and linking them with other regions that have similar strengths.

The private sector is also an important actor, but its vested interests can be a hindrance:

- The private sector must be brought into the sustainability debate and engaged with – for example, how can business models that make car manufacturing sustainable be promoted? It was suggested that new business models are needed, as even with all the available evidence the current ones do not want to change.
- In addition, vested interests remain problematic (not just of businesses but also of Member States). It is important to identify where the resistance is – in many sectors there are new ideas but they are not being effectively upscaled, as actors want to maintain the status-quo and continue making profits.



V. ZOOM IN ON SPECIFIC POLICIES: TRANSPORT, ENERGY, FINANCE

Sustainable urban mobility is already taking an integrated approach, although it can go further:

- Many INHERIT elements are already in practice in urban mobility. The EC is encouraging cities to develop Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) that take an integrated approach (including health aspects). The guidelines for SUMP are currently being updated, with the introduction of topical ones on energy, health, etc. (although they remain non-binding). There is a discussion on social aspects and accessibility, and more equity- and social related elements may be integrated into further updates of the guidelines. INHERIT results could feed into these guidelines (they aim to translate good deliverables of EU funded projects that can be scaled up and used in different cities).
- There are tools to monetise the health impact of transport or mobility investments – e.g. the WHO Health Economic Assessment Tool ([HEAT](#)).
- The whole transport area should take a citizen-approach and an integrated approach (with every investment analysed in terms of health and CBA). The EC will soon adopt a Communication on the issue of an integrated approach in transport – Member States cannot legislate on this for the moment as there are too many problems, but it is on the radar.

The fostering of clean energy is ongoing:

- DG ENER works a lot with DG CLIMA as well as with DG ENVI and DG MOVE, and is very interested in health issues.
- There are many interesting new pieces of legislation (e.g. [Clean Energy for all Europeans Package](#)), and it is important to note that citizens are at the centre of the debate. It is necessary to look at the consumption and not just production side of the energy debate (very complex), and to take into account the social dimension and involve everyone. This is where the energy poverty debate comes in – how can good ideas be translated from paper into practice? Need to look at city level and different structures of governance.
- Private investments are important for the energy transition.

Finances and investments are key to understanding the bigger picture:

- The IMF recently published a report trying to quantify the impact of climate change on the economy and public finances (possible policy responses included carbon taxing, ETS, etc.). The EC is planning to start a pilot project with the IMF aiming to estimate the impact of public finances on adaptation and mitigation policies for climate change. There are important framework constraints at EU level on which they have been working (e.g. deepening the Monetary Union), but that still need to be pushed further (to stabilise the eurozone).
- Public and private investments are very important. There are many interesting projects and available funds, which need to be better connected (this is also a cohesion issue – rural areas are often less advanced).
- different policies (social pillar, taxation). This is a major element for the next EC.
- The European Semester has gone a long way towards a holistic approach, as it comprises many



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