



Addressing climate change and biodiversity: a social enterprise opportunity



OVERVIEW

This interactive session explored the role that social enterprises and communities play in supporting biodiversity through circular economy actions. Discussions focused on the opportunities and practical experiences from social enterprise case studies to illustrate value and impact of social economy.

The moderators (Sarah Miller & Claire Downey from Rediscovery Centre), the EESC (Vice-President Cillian Lohan), representatives of social economy enterprises (Mick Kelly from Grow it Yourself & Ville Heinilä from the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre) as well as experts (Edoardo Bodo from RREUSE Network Executive) discussed topics such as the positive impact of social enterprise activities on biodiversity, the role of circular and social economy in deconstructing the economic system, access to funding, public procurement and the lifecycle of products.

CHALLENGES

- More of 90% of biodiversity loss is due to the extraction of resources.
- Terms are still confusing to people: biodiversity, circular, social economy. Important for policy makers and stakeholders to realize that.
- Access to funding: simply accessing bank credit remains difficult for many social economy entities
- Public procurement: through the commitment to integrating minimum Green Public Procurement criteria into public procurement, social entrepreneurship and the social economy would be promoted, with positive effects both for SMEs and for consumers in conjunction with the organisations concerned.
- Administrations must ensure that the imposition of environmental criteria does not lead to a significant increase in the administrative burden.

- Need for a sustainable consumption strategy: importance of a comprehensive European policy for sustainable consumption, covering for example nutrition, mobility, housing and lifestyles, as part of the European Green Deal and as a complement to the circular economy package.
- The food system is one of the biggest contributors to climate change.
- Cotton is a crop that creates pressure on the land, it is also a chemically and water intensive crop.
- The issue of processing: there is an enormous water use.
- Only 1% of textiles is recycled.

KEY MESSAGES

- Social enterprise activities can have a great impact on biodiversity e.g. community gardens.
- Social economy enterprises often work embedded in communities.
- Circular economy and social economy can deconstruct the system and offer an alternative way of working: it is a fundamental shift in thinking.
- Interesting to see social economy enterprises involved in energy production and distribution in the future.
- We should be aiming for a balanced future: through all the means of measuring equality and fairness, we see that the linear system is not delivering.
- The Food empathy journey (grow your own vegetables): very immediate benefits, cost saving, financial benefits increase over time. 40/50 kg of vegetables/ per year.
- For reused products, the emissions are considered as avoided emissions and natural resources as saved.
- The role of social enterprises in textiles: prolonging the life of textiles through local re-use and second-hand sales.
- Innovations in textiles: social economy enterprises are upcycling clothes to create new trends e.g. the Refashion Week in the US.
- It would be a missed opportunity if the role of social economy enterprises is not taken into consideration in the upcoming EU legislation on textiles.
- Collaboration plays a key role for both understanding, measuring and scaling the activities. The partnership with public sector is key.