



The People's Transition:

Community-led Development for Climate Justice



Policy Brief



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What is the People's Transition?

The People's Transition is a proposed decision-making model that views climate action as an enabler of local development, gives people and communities ownership of the transition to zero carbon societies and enhances public support for a Just Transition by tackling inequality and raising standards of living through the delivery of climate solutions.

It aims to inform the development of the Climate Pact, the bottom-up component of the European Green Deal which seeks to give everyone a voice and a space in which to design new climate actions, share information, launch grassroots activities and showcase solutions that others can follow.

Why is the People's Transition significant?

Climate action intersects with people's lives and can change the way communities' function. This comes with both opportunities and risks. To advance climate justice, it is necessary to share the benefits and the burdens of the resolution of the climate crisis equitably and fairly. Including people and communities in the design, planning and implementation of the transition to zero carbon societies is not simply the fairest approach, it will also be the fastest. Climate change response measures that are unfair pose risks, both for the delivery of enduring climate action that succeeds in averting the worst impacts of climate change, and in terms of ensuring that the stability of democratic societies remains robust for the duration of the transition. Fast and effective action will be delivered when people see tangible improvements in their standards of living and, as a result, demand, rather than resist, the radical transformation that is required to avoid catastrophic climate change.

The People's Transition proposes an approach to climate action that puts communities and local development at the heart of Europe's Just Transition. A broad transition is required to wean our societies off fossil fuels, one which is embedded in all communities across the European Union, that listens to the hopes and aspirations of people, responds to the cultural fabric of society, and develops climate action rooted in local development that simultaneously tackles inequality and expands the capabilities of all people.

Therefore a Capabilities Approach is proposed that seeks to engage communities on their terms, that will distil their local needs and priorities and address them with solutions that will both enhance community well-being and drive down emissions or build adaptive capacity.

Three key factors underpinning the model:

1. To succeed in averting catastrophic climate breakdown, European and national governments will need to take transformative climate action in the absence of significant public support.

In recent years, thanks to the efforts of campaigners and activists, awareness of climate change has increased. However, other social and economic concerns that are perceived as more immediate are given priority by the public. The socio-economic situation that a person finds themselves in is likely to be a primary determinant as to whether climate change is of immediate concern, with individuals who have achieved a certain standard of living more readily disposed to engage with concerns of a less immediate nature.

Climate change has not become the key priority of electorates in time to secure political cover for the measures necessary to avoid dangerous climate change. Decision makers will now have to take the necessary decisions to combat climate breakdown without the assurance of a supportive electorate. Given the scale of the transformation required, these challenges come with enormous risks, both in terms of delivering enduring climate action that succeeds in averting the worst impacts of climate change but also in terms of ensuring the stability of democratic societies remains for the duration of the transformation.

2. Successful climate action, in the absence of public support, requires reducing emissions and building adaptive capacity while at the same time enhancing standards of living and ensuring equal access to opportunity

As the climate crisis accelerates, there remains a reluctance on the part of decision makers to undertake the deep and transformative policies necessary to avert catastrophe and enable communities to adapt. Elected representatives remain wary of interventions on the scale that, according to science, is necessary as the public propensity for supporting transformative change remains low.

Transformative decision-making would require systematically tackling how environmentally problematic ways of life are sustained and recreated. Undertaking such decisions would require a change of perspective — to view people as agents of change and implementing partners in climate action. Furthermore, it would require deep consideration of inequity and the risks it poses to the effective implementation of climate action.

To build public support while undertaking climate action, climate policy needs to be people-centred and to address inequalities. In practical terms, this is achieved by tailoring climate action to address local community needs or to deliver tangible community benefits. In essence, climate action must in itself deliver sustainable local development outcomes.

3. People care more about local development than climate action. In developing climate action that builds social approval, the onus is on decision makers to match appropriate climate strategies to the needs and priorities of the whole community.

In order not to misalign objectives when engaging communities in climate action, engagement with people around climate change cannot be separated from

broader community development and well-being initiatives, and needs to be understood as a longer term process, rather than as one-off project consultations.

To achieve this, it is necessary to engage communities on their terms, in a representative manner, to distil out their priorities and address them with solutions that both enhance community well-being and act to drive down emissions and build adaptive capacity. Communities should not be expected to process the multifaceted challenges of understanding climate solutions that both reduce emissions and tackle inequality. **However, they should be confident in having their voices heard and be able to trust in a bottom-up approach to policymaking that will respond to their needs in such a way that the systematic challenges presented by climate change are addressed.**

What does the People's Transition do?

By adopting a **Capabilities Approach**, this ensures that actions for the benefit of the climate are developed on a foundation of equity. By allowing for the consideration of multi-faceted structural disadvantage that needs to be overcome in order to reach the furthest behind first and to ensure meaningful participation for all in the transition, the People's Transition can ensure that workers and communities in transition are given the opportunity to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value. Further to this, the model then seeks to develop foundational elements of community-led climate action by building local capacity, valuing local knowledge and fostering trust.

Addresses Inequity

If the needs and priorities of the whole community, including poor or marginalised members, are to be represented in the design and implementation of climate action, then the approach to engage communities must proactively work to earn the trust of community members.

When economic inequality and exclusion are high, it is not uncommon for marginalised citizens and communities to withdraw from political engagement altogether. On the other hand, by addressing inequity and enabling participation, community-led processes can enhance their credibility and allow the public to feel an ownership over the direction of local development while also building trust in the process.

Values local knowledge and expertise

Valuing local knowledge and expertise is central to climate justice. Integrating local knowledge into decision making through participative approaches complements scientific expertise and there is a growing evidence base that such approaches foster better outcomes. Achieving meaningful and reciprocal dialogue between experts, community groups and decision makers should be the objective of any initiative seeking to encourage meaningful participation.

Builds local capacity

Awareness raising and knowledge building about the expected impacts of a changing climate and the need to change behaviours or adapt are normally the starting points of capacity building efforts. However, it is possible to describe a community educational process that would seek to move beyond teaching the public about climate change, its impacts and its solutions. In order to realise the transformation necessary to avoid catastrophic climate breakdown, it will be

necessary to move towards local capacity building approaches based on dialogue that values social interaction, collaboration, authentic democracy, and self-actualisation towards making fundamental changes both individually and collectively.

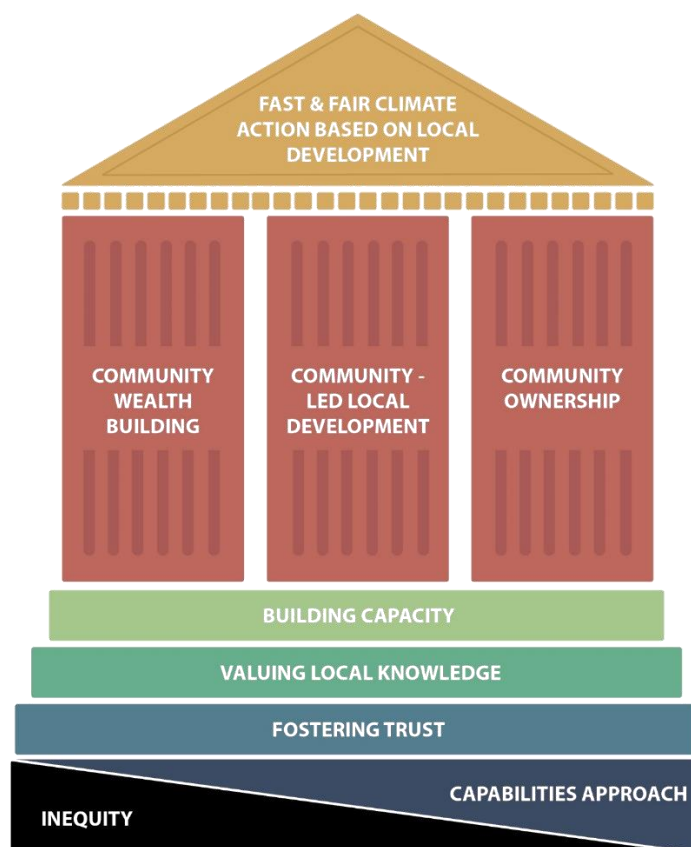
Builds trust

As the purpose of the People's Transition is to co-create, with communities living in a locality, projects and programmes that meet the dual aim of achieving community priorities and furthering climate action, there is clearly a symbiotic relationship between the delivery of successful initiatives and the extent of trust that those communities have in the process to achieve those aims.

The model is designed to deliver on community needs and priorities quickly and effectively, thus garnering affect-based trust within the communities where they are active and creating a demand through driving the creation of cognition-based trust in other communities.

The priority of the People's Transition is to ensure that climate action catalyses local development and that the public spend on climate action, where possible, is channelled into communities through the creation of jobs, community businesses and local production opportunities. *The People's Transition model seeks to deliver this by combining the strengths of community-led local development, community wealth building and other community business and participatory decision-making approaches.*

Figure 1: The People's Transition model is built on a capabilities approach foundation to level out underlying issues of inequity. It recognises that building local capacity, valuing local knowledge and fostering trust should be foundational elements of climate action upon which community approaches can be developed.

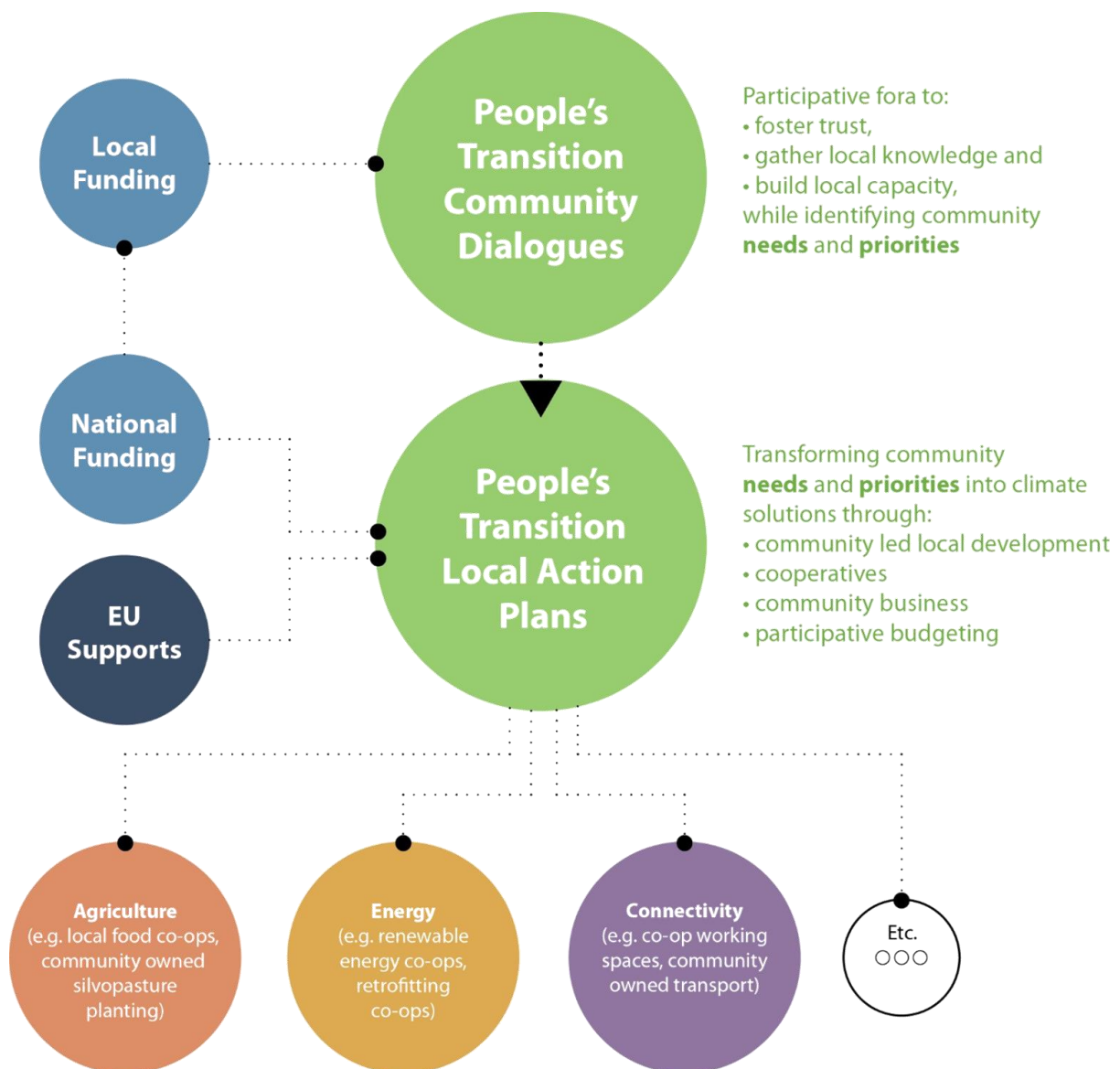


How does the People's Transition work?

The model, detailed in figure 2, is comprised of localised dialogue approaches, **The People's Transition Dialogues**, to develop community strategies, **People's Transition Local Action Plans**, designed to allow communities to co-create, and importantly, cooperatively own, the solutions to the climate crisis. Through engagement with decision makers and relevant experts, the process allows for the consideration of local development solutions that both reduce emissions and tackle inequality by viewing climate action as an engine of development – a temporary “anchor institution”.

Significant emphasis is placed on the promotion of trust between communities and decision makers; the importance of community capacity building; and the valuing, and incorporation, of local knowledge and expertise into climate solutions. The objective is that communities are assured of having their voices heard and learn to have faith in a bottom-up approach to policy making, confident that climate action will respond to their needs, rather than make their lives more difficult.

Figure 2: The People's Transition Mode



Funding community-led initiatives

One way to implement a People's Transition at the EU level would be to make new and additional Just Transition Fund resources accessible to climate-based community-led local development initiatives via the ESIF for the 2021 – 2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. Similarly, the EC could conduct a review of procurement directives to explore how community wealth building in member states could be encouraged, particularly as it pertains to climate action.

At the national level, it is essential to allocate sufficient funding for the training of community facilitators, context appropriate education initiatives and hosting of People's Transition Community Dialogues. Innovative financial supports, such as the development of a community business catalyst fund, could provide start-up grants to community-led businesses and cooperative climate action initiatives.

Nevertheless, unprecedented levels of support for participatory approaches and local climate action will be required to realise a successful transition to a zero-emissions future. Ensuring ample resources are available for community-led approaches will be central to realising the potential of bottom up approaches. This will necessitate adequate provision at both the EU and national level.

The workings of the People's Transition Dialogue

At the heart of the People's Transition model is the People's Transition Community Dialogue. These dialogues would be an integrated programme, running over three to four months in a given community, that would seek to mobilise that community behind climate action by seeking to distil out community priorities and engaging the necessary expertise in order to identify opportunities to address these priorities using cooperative approaches that respond to the demands of climate action. In terms of structure, the dialogue format will borrow from aspects proven in the citizens' assembly and other methods of deliberative fora, to provide a catalyst for community wealth building approaches. A schematic of the process can be found overleaf. [For a more expansive consideration of the operation of the dialogues, please consult the full report, available here.](#)

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Figure 3: Schematic diagram of the processes surrounding a People's Transition Community Dialogue

