



## Igniting the spirit of change

**The year 2018 generated impetus for change in the European Association for Information on Local Development. AEIDL worked out its new, long-term strategy that we all believe to be innovative and inspiring. The strategy document was approved by the General Assembly of the association in December 2018.**

The impulse to contribute to the 'common future' and develop a participatory strategy is rooted in the co-operative nature of AEIDL. Participation ensured the dynamic of the strategy process by encouraging the director and staff, board and general assembly members to contribute to their full potential and to develop the association's social capital by working together.

The production of the new Strategic Plan is the result of a collaborative process launched in 2017. It provided an opportunity to reflect on the organisation's past, to acknowledge its present experience and expertise, and to initiate a creative thinking process on its future position in the face of a changing European context. Two internal coaches worked with the AEIDL community to ignite this spirit of change – identifying common values, agreeing on vision and defining strategic directions. After approval, the Management Team started to consider the finer details of how to carry out the plan. Change was born!

Over the past 30 years, AEIDL has provided networking opportunities, analysis, evaluation, communications and information, building a wealth of expertise and knowledge on sustainable and local development. Initially focused on local employment initiatives, AEIDL has gradually broadened its scope to areas including rural, urban and coastal development, fisheries, environmental protection, transition and climate action, social and cultural innovation, employment, social affairs, social inclusion and social entrepreneurship.

The adopted new strategy echoes and amplifies AEIDL's previous observatory role on local and sustainable initiatives, which foresees the organisation evolving over the coming period into a resourceful 'knowledge hub'. The envisioned knowledge hub will advocate policies that support local initiatives, sustainable development and territorial cohesion in order to connect citizens within a more cohesive and democratic Europe. It will also help to communicate the added value of the EU project in this context and be open to all AEIDL internal and external stakeholders.

AEIDL is also determined to raise its voice more prominently in the EU arena, advocating practices and policies that bring innovative and sustainable solutions to address the economic, environmental and societal challenges faced by Europeans. By promoting citizens' and territorial creativity, AEIDL is committed to help rebuild the European project.

The most important internal source of delivering this ambitious plan is the commitment, and the collaborative and cross-pollinating approach that launched AEIDL's new Strategic Plan. Another internal asset is that AEIDL, as a socially and environmentally responsible organisation, has been built on the values of sustainability, respect for diversity in the broadest sense and standing up integrity and transparency.

AEIDL's shared strategic values rely on the belief that respect for solidarity between regions and the invention of new forms of multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance can help Europe to open up to the rest of the world and strive for a new economic and social equilibrium. The challenge is to encourage and strengthen citizens' involvement, to support them, whether they are engaged in public, private, community or voluntary sector, to shape new opportunities at local level.

Since its creation in 1988, AEIDL has strived to promote a Europe "*rich in the diversity of its landscapes, its communities and its culture, open to the world, striving for a new economic, social and environmental equilibrium... a Europe, which is indeed, in the proper use of these adjectives, smart, sustainable and inclusive*". AEIDL is convinced that cutting-edge solutions at both local and European level are needed to meet the current challenges of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, social and territorial inequalities and threats to democratic governance and human rights. Our vision is a sustainable, democratically-driven and cohesive Europe, revitalised by policies and practices that support and are inspired by local and citizens-led initiatives.

The current European context appears far from reflecting this vision. Europe is facing today a certain disenchantment with the EU project and a democratic deficit, rising Euroscepticism leading to choices such as Brexit, and the erosion of democratic principles and institutions in many EU member states. Challenges include growing social inequality and how to bridge gaps between the aspirations of European citizens and their opportunities. We are seeing that the spirit of unification, born out of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, has been replaced by demands for building new fences.

Aware of this context, AEIDL positions itself more than ever as an actor, not an observer, challenging negative trends, promoting empowering approaches and unlocking new opportunities with the strong intention to contribute to a "Europe made by the citizens for the citizens".

**Márta Márczis**

*President, AEIDL*

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*'Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we  
are.  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.'*

**Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"**