



European networks of territories

The contribution of 'open' digital technologies

Since the promise of the network society¹, the digital transition has been in full swing at all levels of human organisation. In this dynamic, how can the development of 'open' digital solutions strengthen the place-based social innovation capacity and encourage the sharing of good practices and experiences between countries?

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In Europe, the maturity level of open data usage by Member States has been measured since 2015. In 2018, France was found to be the most advanced in this respect, ahead of Cyprus, Ireland, Spain and Italy.² Some pioneering European cities and countries are using these technologies to cooperate and come together in networks.

However, there are still significant differences in practices from one country and region to another. Whether located within an administrative entity, a suburban district or a mountain valley, the relationship established between the various stakeholders – residents, elected officials, public services, businesses – is based on a multitude of organisational behaviours and methods developed over time according to the cultural, geopolitical and institutional context of the region. In Sweden, for example, local citizenship is shaped by a culture developed over the centuries that favours relations between citizens and is based on a sense of collectiveness. In other parts of Europe, the trade union tradition encourages grassroots actions that shape the future of employment and mobility.

Improving the quality of local services

Digital tools rely on these local dynamics to strengthen public action: this is particularly the case for 'smart villages', which offer a range of digital services to their citizens. These 'project territories'³ have long received political and financial support from the European institutions, whether in cross-border, rural or urban areas. All these systems have budgets dedicated to technical assistance for the networking of beneficiaries and generate a multitude of data: multilingual publications, inventories of good practices, information sharing via social media, etc.⁴

¹ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996)

² https://www.europeandataportal.eu/sites/default/files/edp_landscaping_insight_report_n4_2018.pdf (p.98)

³ Raymond Lacombe, the founder of *Sol et Civilisation* (1994) used to say: "There is no territory without a future. There are only territories without a project."

⁴ See INTERREG (<https://www.interregeurope.eu/>), URBACT (<http://urbact.eu/>), Urban Innovative Actions (<https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en>), LEADER (https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en), FARNET (https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/eff/farnet_en)

For example, with the support of [URBACT](#), the City of Eindhoven in the Netherlands has developed a charter on the use of the Internet of Things in the city, entitled '[Smart Society Charter](#)'. The principles of this charter have been developed in a collaborative way with residents, elected officials, companies and researchers.

Also supported by URBACT, [Card4all](#) with its motto "Your city in your pocket" is a network for sharing innovative solutions through a citizen card, launched in Gijon (Spain) in 2002. Partner cities can collect information to improve their services and use it in participatory processes. The citizen card is used to promote social inclusion, local commerce, soft mobility and sustainable lifestyles.

Acting for the ecological transition

Other collective and 'open' approaches based on the capacity to spin off concrete actions can foster ecological transition. This movement is global⁵, with continental and national differences.

In Europe, the [ECOLISE](#) network strives to improve the visibility of local action in favour of sustainable development and climate change action by promoting exchanges, cooperation, improvement and sharing of knowledge between European citizens-actors.

In France, a portal brings together a series of citizen and solidarity initiatives in the ecological transition⁶. Among its members, [Énergie partagée](#) (Shared Energy) supports the emergence and development of renewable energy production projects supported and controlled by citizens and local authorities. In Normandy, the [Enerterre](#) (EnerEarth) association is involved in a European-scale solidarity project with the support of various funding sources, including the Erasmus+ programme. The aim is to promote and model accompanied and shared self-rehabilitation as a means of combating substandard housing in Europe.

Digital technologies create a high added value in the project cycle: they accelerate the sharing of ideas and proposals.

Digital transformation is building the Europe of tomorrow

The scope of digital transformation in local communities and their networks is exponential and accelerates further with the deployment of artificial intelligence, introducing breakthrough innovations such as the Internet of Things or Cloud Computing and social innovations such as the creation in France of the [Collectif des hébergeurs alternatifs, transparents, ouverts, neutres et solidaires](#) (Collective of Alternative, Transparent, Open, Neutral and Solidarity Hosters).

This digital transition generates a double opportunity for territories. The first is to be part of hybrid networks, in terms of access to the mixed infrastructure solutions advocated by operators, but also from an organisational and cultural point of view, with the evolution of businesses and their creative capital. On the other hand, engaging in the era of open networks by investing in new forms of cooperation and pooling makes it possible to develop more equitable access to public initiatives while securing their use.

More than a technological stance, this is a state of mind for building the open and diverse Europe of tomorrow.

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<https://fonda.asso.fr/ressources/reseaux-europeens-de-territoires-lapport-du-numerique-ouvert>

⁵ <http://transitionnetwork.org/>

⁶ <https://www.entransition.fr/>