

*Cardijn* VEREIN

Conviviality...

... the art and practice  
of living together

Implications for Work and Economy

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# Vorwort

Der Austausch, die Vernetzung das voneinander Lernen von sozial engagierten Christ\*innen aus verschiedenen Ländern Europas ist ein Kernanliegen des Cardijn-Vereins.<sup>1</sup> Unser lieber Kollege im Vorstand, Tony Addy, steht dafür im besonderen Maß.

In regelmäßigen europäischen Seminaren und Trainings beschäftigen wir uns mit den Fragen „Wie ist gutes Leben für alle möglich?“ und „Welche gesellschaftliche Rolle können Kirchen, Glaubensgemeinschaften dabei spielen?“ jeweils in europäischer Perspektive.

Diese Fragen bearbeiten wir mit regionalen und europäischen Partner\*innen auf zwei Ebenen: Durch die Weiterentwicklung einer befreienden und gesellschaftsverändernden Theologie in Europa. Ebenso wie durch Weiterbildung und Austauschmöglichkeiten für Menschen, die sich für Verbesserung von Arbeits- und Lebensbedingungen engagieren.

Die Idee der Konvivialität, der Kunst und Praxis des gelungenen zusammen Lebens, die Tony Addy in diesem Text mit Blick auf die christlichen Kirchen aufbereitet, sehe ich als wichtigen aktuellen Impuls für diese unsere Arbeit.

Blicken wir – wie in unseren befreiungstheologischen europäischen Seminaren - auf die aktuellen gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen, sehen wir zunehmend, wie ein marktradikales politisches Denken und Handeln vielerorts in Europa die Lebensbedingungen breiter Bevölkerungsschichten unter Druck bringt: Durch verschärfte Spaltungen zwischen arm und reich, Kürzung von sozialen Leistungen, hohe (Jugend-) Arbeitslosigkeit und Druck auf Arbeitnehmer\*innenrechte, um nur einige zu nennen.

Es profitieren europaweit rechtspopulistische und -extreme Politiker\*innen, die es verstehen, gesellschaftliche Spannungen auf die Schwächsten, Fremde und Schutzbedürftige, abzuleiten.

Der Ansatz von „Suche nach Konvivialität“ - als Kunst und Praxis eines gelungenen zusammen Lebens – bietet einen stabilen Ausgangspunkt für eine Kritik dieser Entwicklungen.

Marktradikale Politiken geben den Interessen der „großen Wirtschaft“ den Vorrang und vertreten dabei ein äußerst einseitiges Bild vom Menschen: als voneinander getrennte, konkurrierende, den persönlichen Vorteil suchende Manager\*innen ihrer selbst.

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<sup>1</sup> Im vollen Wortlaut: „Verein zur Förderung der Arbeitnehmer\*innenbildung im Sinne Josef Cardins“. Mit unserem Namen beziehen wir uns auf den katholischen belgischen Arbeiter\*innenpriester, Gründer der Christlichen Arbeiter\*innenjugend und späteren Kardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967).

Dagegen stellt die Suche nach Konvivialität das gute zusammen Leben aller als konkrete Utopie und Meßlatte für politische Maßnahmen in den Mittelpunkt. Durch die Brille der Konvivialität werden Menschen als soziale Wesen sichtbar, deren größter Reichtum in ihren Beziehungen zueinander besteht. In unseren Gemeinschaften, Gemeinden, Gesellschaften an der Qualität dieser sozialen Beziehungen zu arbeiten wird damit als zentrale Aufgabe erkennbar.

In unserer Zusammenarbeit als Cardijn-Verein mit Partner\*innen in lebendigen europäischen Netzwerken erleben wir eine Fülle an konkreten diakonischen und sozialen Initiativen, Begegnungsräumen, partizipatorischen Sozialprojekten,... die sich der Verbesserung von sozialen Beziehungen und konkreten Lebensbedingungen vor Ort widmen.

Konvivialität als Kernkonzept diakonischer Arbeit ermöglicht es, die einzelnen Aktivitäten als Beiträge zu einer umfassenderen Suche nach Konvivialität zu verstehen. Als praktische Modelle konvivialen Zusammenlebens vor Ort und Arbeit an der Ausgestaltung einer konkreten Utopie einer konvivialen Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft.

Über die Fragen des menschlichen Zusammenlebens hinaus nimmt der Begriff der Konvivialität auch die Qualität unserer Beziehungen zur Natur, also die Ökologie, in den Blick.

Damit bietet es eine Fülle von Möglichkeiten, sowohl in der weiteren Ausformulierung einer befreienden Theologie als auch im konkreten zivilgesellschaftlichen Engagement, Brücken zwischen den drängenden sozialen und den drängenden ökologischen Fragen unserer Zeit zu schlagen.

Ich bin dankbar für die intensive Auseinandersetzung, zu der mich dieser Text angestoßen hat und hoffe darauf, dass dieser Impuls viele christlich und sozial engagierten Menschen erreichen kann.

Rainer Rathmayr  
Obmann des Cardijn-Vereins  
Linz, Österreich  
Dezember 2017

# Preface

Exchange, networking and learning from each other among socially committed and engaged Christians from different European countries is a core concern of the Cardijn Association.<sup>2</sup> Our dear colleague on the Cardijn Association Board, Tony Addy, is in a special position for this.

In regular European seminars and training, we deal with questions such as: “How is good life for all possible?” And “What social role can churches and faith communities play in this?” Each time we take a European perspective. We work on these questions with regional and European partners on two levels: through the further development of a liberating and socially changing theology in Europe, as well as through training and exchange opportunities for people who are committed to improving working and living conditions.

The idea of conviviality, as the art and practice of successful life together, which Tony Addy develops in this text, with a view to the Christian churches engagement with work and economy, I see as an important current impulse for our work.

If we look at current social developments, as in our liberation-theological European seminars, we see increasingly how market-radical political thinking and action in many places in Europe puts pressure on the living conditions of broad sections of the population: through sharper divisions between rich and poor, cuts in social benefits, high (youth) unemployment and pressure on workers’ rights, just to name a few.

Throughout Europe those right-wing populist and extremist politicians benefit, who know how to exploit social tensions by focussing on the weakest, foreigners and those in need of protection.

The approach of “seeking conviviality” - as the art and practice of a successful living together - provides a stable starting point for a critique of these developments. Market-radical policies give precedence to the interests of the “big economy” and represent an extremely one-sided image of the human being: as separate, competing, personal advantage-seeking managers of themselves.

On the other hand, the search for conviviality focuses on the good life of all as a concrete utopia and yardstick for political measures. Through the glasses of conviviality, people become visible as social beings whose greatest wealth is their relationship to each other. In our congregations, communities, and societies, to work on the quality of these social relationships is thus recognizable as a central task.

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<sup>2</sup> The full name of the Association is: ‘The Josef Cardin Association for the Promotion of Workers’ Education’. With our name we refer to the Catholic Belgian worker-priest who was founder of Young Christian Workers and who later became Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967).

In our cooperation as the Cardijn Association, with partners in living European networks, we experience a wealth of concrete diaconal and social initiatives, spaces for encounter, participatory social projects... dedicated to improving social relations and concrete local living conditions.

Conviviality as a core concept of diaconal work makes it possible to understand the individual activities as contributions to a more comprehensive search for conviviality. They are practical models of convivial coexistence in living worlds and are a contribution to working on the design of the concrete utopia of a convivial society and economy.

Beyond the questions of human coexistence, the concept of conviviality also focuses on the quality of our relationships with nature, that is, ecology. Thus, it offers a wealth of possibilities, both in the further formulation of a liberating theology as well as in concrete civic engagement to build bridges between the pressing social and the ecological issues of our time.

I am grateful for the intense debate that this text has inspired me and I hope that this impulse can reach many Christian and socially engaged people.

Rainer Rathmayr  
Chairman of the Cardijn Association  
Linz, Austria  
December 2017

# Part One - A Diagnosis

Why should we start thinking about conviviality? A number of **critical** issues converge in their impact on people and localities, which require a new vision and approach to church and society work and diaconia. In this introduction I will not aim to cover every issue that could be mentioned but I will highlight five key developments in this convergence:

-  The problematic developments, in society, related to **the generalised feeling that people have of being under threat. One symbol of the alarm this causes is the growth of a concern with border control and the restrictions on the free movement of people**, not to mention the correlated hostility to uprooted people. Furthermore, new questions of identity are raised by rapid cultural changes and growing diversity.
- 2. Mainstream politics has lost much of its capacity to engage with people's everyday problems.** The rise of a new generation of leaders in 'traditional' political parties and other representative organisations such as trade unions seem unable to connect with the life world of people most negatively affected by growing poverty, inequality and the other perceived threats. This opens the way to populism.
- 3. Politicians, whilst on the one hand extolling the virtues of liberalism and rightly addressing political issues of identity – of recognising the 'subject' (for example related to gender and sexual identity) have at the same time been reversing re-distributional gains that marked the post-war settlement in Europe.**
- 4. In many European countries, there has been a growth in the detailed controls of the everyday life of people who live on the margins of the economy or receive social benefits.** This partly explains the 'disconnect' of many people from what is broadly called 'politics' and the corresponding feeling of distance from 'elites'.
- 5. The accelerating environmental catastrophes and the increasing risk of industrialised systems to, for example the sustainable production of healthy food – not to mention the rising volume of food waste at a time when people are going hungry.**



These five phenomena lie behind the **rapid rise of populist politics**, which plays into people's anxiety and fears, but at the same time increases them. This development pushes those of us who are concerned for the future of society and for a sustainable economy, which is embedded in society to **reflect not only on relevant analysis but also on relevant strategies. There is a need for approaches which do not exacerbate the marginalisation of people already under threat, but which rather actively connect with peoples' diverse life worlds and support an alternative political approach.**

As I understand it, **the traditional vocabularies that we have used, for example multiculturalism and the traditional political strategies which have been deployed need a fundamental rethink.** We only have to look at the general decline of so called mainstream parties, including parties of the left, who should be flourishing in this divisive context, to recognise that such a fundamental rethink is necessary.

Some years ago, the well-known social critics, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri produced three rather large and stimulating volumes diagnosing the contemporary malaise especially of northern countries. Their interesting conclusion, which I summarise and simplify here, was that **what is needed is a rebirth of the 'loving subject'**. They believe that love is an essential concept for politics, which it is unwise to leave to 'poets, psychoanalysts and priests'.

This led me to think that a deeper strand of thinking is needed, which links to the present malaise. I understand that **empathy is a critical factor in creating common human relationships, especially across various diversities. Through empathic love, we form relationships and increase our power to act and think. However, in our time especially, this is very often corrupted into love of the same or of persons with the same perceived identity – the same nation, the same race, the same religion.** There is a pressure to love the ones who are most like you, which leads to the exclusion of those who are different. Populism, nationalism, fascism and religious fundamentalism may also be based on love, but love of the same, which is a corruption. I would also like to add that even 'good willing people like us' tend more often to love the 'same' rather than the 'different other'

Secondly, and from a different perspective, nearly 20 years ago, the French social theorist Alan Touraine, asked the question, **'Can we live together?'** His book emphasised the need for a new focus on the 'subject' and for a different form of politics. He argued for the need to protect and enhance universal rights whilst working for the defence of diverse social and cultural rights. This combination is essential to guarantee the basis of equality whilst at the same time expanding the rights of diverse and minority communities and groups.

Thirdly, at the moment we experience the reality that **societies that are shaken** and in some cases their economies are even destroyed by globalisation. This implies **that one central conflict is between non-social forces – the financial economy and market dynamics that are dis-embedded from any specific social or cultural context, which face the person and the human subject who is deprived of the support of social or collective values of solidarity that have been all but destroyed.** The intensive government of the everyday life of the marginalised person or the marginalised group, as mentioned above, reinforces this tendency. In contexts also marked by **actual or potential disasters, civil conflicts and wars** this isolation of the subject reaches an extreme.

The present malaise is exacerbated by the **utilitarian, self-interested worldview which underpins the consumer led economy** and the drive towards increasing inequality and the impoverishment of 'the commons'. This is further reflected in a second belief, which is that economic growth measured by GDP is a way to promote happiness and life satisfaction. The model of modernisation, which we are in the grip of, polarises society by concentrating resources of all kinds in the hands of elites. This **growth of inequality**, which at the extremes is obscene, succeeds in developing and supporting widely held negative definitions of the characteristics of the people at the margins, so much so that they must be controlled and policed at every turn. **The life world of marginalised people is regulated in a society, which is always calling for deregulation.** In the past this tendency was attenuated by traditional social movements, such as trade unions and further by social movements linked to gender and race for example.

Right now we are in a situation where both the traditional social movements and to some extent the new social movements have lost much of their power, particularly to connect with the more marginalised people and groups. There is a need to create a vision, which will connect with diverse life-world experiences and create new objectives and new forms of organising for social and economic as well as cultural life together. **Such a vision, related to work on the local level, is the necessary starting point for rebalancing economy, work and society.**

## Part Two

### - Conviviality as a Heuristic Concept

In the context of such wide-ranging discussions I began to use the word ‘conviviality’. For several different groups, it seemed to summarise what people are searching for. This process of discovery, which started in interdiac circles<sup>3</sup> was taken up by the on-going Lutheran World Federation European regional process on the re-formation of community diaconia, related to the Reformation Anniversary.

The main questions seem to be,

- ‘How can we live together?’ (‘con vivere’),
- ‘What kind of economic and social policy supports living together?’
- ‘How can social action and diaconia contribute to people living a good life together?’

**Conviviality is a concept which is inherently relational and which emphasises being over having.**

The word ‘conviviality’ derives from the Spanish word ‘convivencia’ and relates to the historical experience when Moslems, Catholics and Jews lived together in relative peace on the Iberian Peninsula.

The more recent use of the word was by Ivan Illich in an oft-quoted book, ‘Tools for Conviviality’. Illich was a Croatian-Austrian with Jewish and Catholic parents, who became priest of an immigrant parish in New York. Eventually he moved to Puerto Rico where he founded a training and research institute. The aim was to train people who were going from the USA going to work in projects in Latin America, so that they would not to impose their values but to work with sympathy. He used the word conviviality to mean **the autonomous and creative relationship between people, people and their environment and with technology**. He considered conviviality to be freedom realised in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.

In interdiac, where I am nowadays mainly engaged, we decided to use this word as a heuristic concept. We created the phrase:

‘Seeking Conviviality – the art and practice of living together’

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<sup>3</sup> interdiac is the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe ([www.interdiac.eu](http://www.interdiac.eu))

## The phrase focuses on ‘practice’. It provokes the questions:

**‘What are the everyday actions and behaviours and the related values and attitudes which support conviviality?’**

and

**‘Where do we find these practices in our local context?’**

It invites us to reflect on our everyday life in terms of openness and relatedness. But it also invites a reflection on professional practice and the ways in which professionals be they social workers, pastoral workers or others working in relation to people to reflect how their own ‘service model’ and their own organisation or church is also seeking conviviality. It also has implications for structures of the economy and society and for politicians and those involved in organising work and economy.

**Using the word ‘art’ emphasises that conviviality is built on creativity and imagination** - and like any art, seeking conviviality or living in conviviality is based on and may reinforce personal values, vocation and the development of skills through informal and formal learning. It puts emphasis on the creative and intuitive capacity among ‘ordinary people’ and recognises their primary contribution to convivial living together.

In summary, there are several advantages to using this word and the related phrase:

- **First, it relates primarily to everyday life and to concrete relationships** and this is a primarily hopeful perspective amidst many disturbing realities. Seeking conviviality is not first and foremost a professional activity nor is it restricted to the work of pastoral workers, social workers or other professionals. It relates to everyday living. Furthermore, by emphasising the ‘life world’ - or rather the ‘life worlds’ of people it points to those **everyday practices that support living together.**

**Seeking Conviviality can be related to professional practice** where the form of professional practice is informed by closeness to the various ‘life worlds’ present in any context. From a diaconal perspective, of course we prioritise the people and groups who are vulnerable, excluded or marginalised.

- **Secondly it does not enter the discussion of difference through the problematic words multiculturalism and integration.**
- **Thirdly it encourages a reflection on and response to changes in the present economic and political priorities in terms of an examination of what supports convivial life together and what obstructs living together** or provokes and supports divisive behaviour amongst people in different local contexts.

- **Fourthly, especially from the East European perspective it encourages reflection on the impact of the previous experience of forced living together and even forced displacement, on the art and practice of living together.**
- **Finally, it provokes a reflection on the ways in which the church and faith communities relate to the wider society in which they are set.**

Seeking conviviality is the shorthand for the search for a new way of living together that address:

- **The challenge of growing diversity** in local communities and cities. How can people live together without conformity and without brutalising each other?
- **The need to support the creation of new forms of economic life and work which are not simply based on GDP growth** and to underpin this with a different relation to creation (or the environment and natural resources to be more prosaic about it). This requires some severe controls over minimum and maximum income and over the ability to amass unimaginable wealth, often at the expense of the 'commons'.
- **The need to create a new political culture**, which will embody many aspects of present and past social democracy/socialism and also various streams of green political thinking. This form of politics will engage people as subjects rather than as consumers of political party programmes or worse, as cheerleaders for populist leaders.

It is important **to recognise the interlinking of these themes and the ways in which work on each supports the others**. Through sharing our own motivation and engagement in all its richness and diversity we are able to learn from each other. Some stereotypical views are broken down. Some ideas are given up and new ideas shared. Seeking conviviality is an interactive process by which we are enabled to go beyond our borders and differences. With empathy, we begin to find the basis for common action. In this way it is closely linked to the pedagogical approach of the CABLE learning processes.

## **Part Three**

### **– Concepts of Work and Economy Related to Conviviality**

**Three overarching concepts can be identified, to guide thinking and working - vocation, justice and dignity.** These concepts inform both the churches and their diaconal work and our understanding of the needs of the wider context. The concept of conviviality, linked to vocation, justice and dignity also forms a key to thinking and acting in the area of economy and work.



In every context, we can see that the concrete developments of work and economy are creating growing inequality and injustice. These changes, in conjunction with other societal and political changes, negate the dignity of the person, especially those on the margins or who are unable to integrate into the formal labour market. Indeed, the structure of the formal labour market seems to be becoming more unjust and often work conditions do not recognise the dignity of the person. Actually, we can also notice that **workplace conditions are now becoming a main source of mental ill health. The former idea that work is a step to social integration becomes less and less of a reality as the content of working life becomes over regulated and fragmented.** On top of that, more and more people earn their poverty and cannot survive unless they work excessive hours or have two or more jobs! The present economic paradigm (neo-liberalism) as it affects work, welfare, health and education actually undermines conviviality.

A 'Convivial Economy' based on the key concepts of Vocation, Justice and Dignity could provide the foundation stones for a positive economic paradigm and for our practice.

## Vocation

A convivial economy would be based on vocation.

In Christian terms, vocation stands for the calling of all Christians to work for the common good and the wellbeing of all people. It relates to the understanding that each person has gifts and talents with which to express love for the other and for creation.

## Paid Work

If we are seeking a convivial economy, we need many different contributions and we can analyse these under three different headings, When we think about vocation, as already mentioned, we usually focus on paid work which means employment or self employment. However, more and more people are also doing paid work without a formal employment contract in the European context and many people are in insecure and badly remunerated self-employment. Furthermore, there is a growth of precarious work, for example, so-called 'zero hours contracts', where a person has a job but does not know from one day to the next how many hours they will work, or if they will work at all. This is an extreme form of flexible work contract.

## Work for the Common Life Together

Furthermore, in reality a great deal of work is done other than in an employment relationship. Think about the enormous amount of household work on which our common life – and our economy – depends. There is

also a huge amount of work done by volunteers and in associations. Much of this is essential to well being and security. It ranges from caring to fire fighting. This work is not counted in the formal economy.

## Fulfilling Activity

There still remains a lot of socially useful activity, which may lead to personal development or fulfilment and to a better quality of life together. It may be making music or organising a meal together or following a hobby or sport. Normally such activities, whilst being useful and creative, are not remunerated.

From this analysis we can see **the field which we call 'work' can be divided into three sub categories:**

- **Employment** (with or without an employment contract, or as self-employed)
- **Work** (needed for our common life but not paid for)
- **Activity** (contributing to personal and social life but not essential for survival needs, such as leisure pursuits)

In the present context, **the aim of public policy is that as much work as possible should become employment**, preferably in the private sector. Yet we are faced with a big challenge of unemployment and under-employment with a variety of causes. This is devastating for many people and communities and it is especially affecting young people, who for the first time in generations also face worse employment prospects and often worse working conditions than their parents.

The process of industrialisation meant that **more and more of the products and services we needed were provided through paid employment**. This process has been dramatically extended through the development of a consumer driven service economy. More people in total than ever are employed world wide in the primary sectors such as mining and farming and the secondary sector of manufacturing, but as is well known, the location of production has changed dramatically with more and more goods and services being produced outside Europe. Nevertheless within this overall pattern there are also big differences in Europe, with some countries still having a relatively large manufacturing sector and some evidence that digital systems may lead to 'reshoring'. Adidas has already announced that its next production facility will be in Europe. This is a small example of the reality that the introduction of new digital systems is changing the structure of employment and is set to reduce it even further than previous rounds of 'automation'. As a result of both these structural changes and the consequences of the financial crash of 2008, the level of unemployment remains stubbornly high, yet the pressure is put on to unemployed people to find employment at all costs.



On top of this, **the financialisation of the economy and the pressure for an increasing return on capital by investors is having an impact of the quality of work and the management of work life.** The increasing stress is not restricted to the private sector because public employers and expert organisations such as universities and colleges increasingly impose heavy control systems on their workers. All these changes create stress and increase social and health costs. Other related impacts include a reshaping of educational priorities by, for example, linking education to narrow instrumental goals.

By increasingly forcing students to pay for education and cutting maintenance grants, a debt burden is created and this forces students to think about the earning potential of a degree. The effect on the longer term is for many courses to be closed, if they do not have a link to a higher earning job. This system may also make higher education less attractive to students from lower income families, who are likely to end up with higher debts than those from higher earning families or to those who may like to study health or social work.

**A convivial economy would focus work and employment on activities that contribute to the well-being and welfare of people and communities as well as the protection of the environment.**

**In a convivial economy:**

- ✓ Work would be recognised as important for the health of society and the pressure to turn work into employment would be diminished
- ✓ Employment would be organised within a framework that ensured a living wage (or would supplement an already adequate basic income). No one have to work excessive hours or under bad conditions simply to survive
- ✓ Activity would be enhanced because time would be released for reciprocal activities, culture and work, on which a convivial society could be based

## Justice

A convivial economy would be based on justice.

One of the incontrovertible facts of economic development is that income and wealth has become ever more concentrated in fewer hands. The inequality within and between countries has continued to increase and the gap has arguably become much wider as a result of competitive globalisation, the financialisation of the economy and as a result of austerity policies following the bail out of banks and financial institutions after the 2008/9 financial crash. On top of this the privatisation of services of general interest from water to

education and health care to transport is making access to services more unequal and reducing the value of the social wage even as private company profits increase.

These effects are well documented for Europe and the major industrial economies. A wide range of studies that have recently been brought together by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in a major report, *'In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All'*. **The report points out that the growth of precarious non-standard work contracts and labour market polarisation as well as persisting gaps between women and men and high and ever increasing wealth concentration have an effect not only of reducing living standards and plunging people and families into poverty but it also has a negative impact on the economy as a whole. As disturbing is the effect on social cohesion and on overall welfare.** Whilst we have a primary concern for people in poverty or on the margins, the report shows how average and slightly below average income households have also suffered because of this growing inequality. The OECD recommends a range of different policy changes and sees an important role for stronger measures to redistribute income and wealth. More recently this has been followed up with similar recommendations in the *IMF Fiscal Report: Tackling Inequality* in October 2017. This report represents a remarkable change of approach for this institution as it advocates redistributive measures because 'excessive inequality can erode social cohesion, lead to political polarization, and ultimately lower economic growth'.

Whilst we are focusing on individuals and the growth of personal fortunes and extremely high incomes, we should not forget that this disturbing trend is related both to the power of institutions and to the support or the lack of action by governments singly or together, Economic organisations are embedded in politically determined structures which regulate their activities. Much public discourse after the various 'crises' and around financial mismanagement has focused on personal 'greed' or personal 'morality' but it is as important to recognise that the frameworks for business, including taxation and regulation have been systematically liberalised. The possibility for 'hiding' income (personal and corporate) so that it is not taxed or is minimally taxed is also a contribution to growing inequality and poverty as well as to the reductions in health, education and welfare budgets.

## In a convivial economy...

... a just and equitable distribution of income and wealth would provide a basis for building trust and security in relationships at every level. This would create a basis for action to combat all kinds of exclusion and marginalisation by removing the threat of poverty and immiseration. It would also have the effect of stopping forced economic migration and allow free movement based on choice. At the moment people and households in poverty are 'forced to move or forced to stay'! In terms of everyday life, such economic security would also support people's participation and give the 'space' for associational life.

## A convivial economy would:

- ✓ Combat all kinds of exclusion and marginalisation
- ✓ Create sustainable food production and halting the destruction of the environment
- ✓ Stop forced economic migration
- ✓ Support democratic participation and associational life

## Dignity

A convivial economy would support human dignity.

The relationship between the economic order and human dignity is complex and not immediately apparent. However, as already mentioned, the operation of the finance markets affects everyday work and living conditions directly in ways that can undermine human dignity and in some cases the basic sustainability of people and communities.

The first point to emphasise is that **decisions about economic investment or disinvestment are made on the basis of financial rate of return, most often in the short run, unless large scale fixed investment is needed.** The rate of return governs the conventional viability of an economic asset and over the past twenty years **investors have demanded an ever-higher rate of return and consequently a higher percentage of the profit from any given asset** compared to that taken by wage earners, allocated to research and development and to taxation. This pressure has resulted in a financially driven economy and it in part led to the financial crisis from which European countries are still suffering. The well known concept of ‘creative destruction’ through which older systems of production and indeed older product lines are destroyed and new ones created, usually in new places has inexorably speeded up. **This leads to whole communities becoming part of the ‘waste’ of a globalising economy.**

On top of this, as **wages are being reduced in real terms for many people in Europe and other industrial economies and as prices for goods and services rise, household debt is increased,** exacerbated by the rising cost or charging fees for former state financed or provided services such as university education.

The second effect of the economic and political transformations of recent years has been the **privatisation of many public services and the breakdown of the social security systems, which guaranteed the basic social and economic security and life quality of people, families and communities.** There are at least two consequences of this which impact on human dignity. The terminology which surrounds our use of public services in Europe is now more related to ‘markets’ than to ‘citizenship’. Users of services of general

interest are now referred to as 'customers'. The privatized suppliers of such services seek to segment the market and make profits, whilst gaining state subsidies. This creates a situation where the quality of the services for poorer people tends to deteriorate, a situation that particularly affects housing, care services, health and education.

The third effect is the **restructuring (often called 'reform') of income maintenance systems such as support for unemployed or sick people or for people living with disabilities.** The concept of social insurance, which protects a person against risks for which they cannot be personally held responsible, provided, amongst other things, a guaranteed income as of right for people who had an employment record and who became unemployed because of the closure or downsizing of a workplace. Gradually such benefits are being restructured and the recipients are subject to specific disciplines and targets for their behaviour. The criteria for receiving benefits are tightened and private agencies are increasingly tasked with assessing people's eligibility for benefits – for example in the case of longer-term sickness or disability.

**Life experience is very different for people in receipt of income support under the new regime of authoritarian liberalism than it was under the previous social insurance concept of financial support.** In addition to the financial pressure such policies impose and people and households, there is the indignity of the process of 'testing' by people who are incentivised to get people off benefits and who may have no qualification or experience to carry out assessments. This stigmatising of benefit recipients translates into everyday life experience where for example, people with disabilities increasingly face verbal and even physical abuse on the street. These changes have a direct impact on the dignity and self worth of people subjected to such disciplinary measures.

The fourth impact on everyday life stems from **the impact of a combination of large-scale structural economic changes (privatisation, relocation, results of the banking crisis) on levels of income, conditions of work and job security.** The economisation of work has extended from shop floor manual and routine service workers to professional workers including teachers, lecturers and social workers as well as workers in the health services. Workers who were previously regarded as having a measure of professional autonomy now have to quantify their engagement in systems that specify how much time may be spent on each activity. For example in one case, care workers are allocated 15 minutes to support an elderly person in getting washed, dressed and fed in the morning or in social work where a worker is only allowed a set time per client regardless of how complex or needy the situation is. Even more prevalent is the reduction of wages and conditions for routine workers who, because of low pay are forced to work excessive hours.

These are just snapshots of a world of work where stress leads to illness (mental and physical) and where management exerts ever tighter control. It is a far cry from conditions experienced at higher levels of the economy. **We are witnessing a hierarchical splitting of the experience of employment.** Underneath

the formal labour market there is a growth of casual and informal work, often carried out by migrant and immigrant labour under conditions of near or actual (modern) slavery and with very poor pay and oppressive management. This is prevalent in the food industry and agriculture but also in construction and other branches.

In all these cases human dignity, which is an essential attribute of each person is denied and undermined and the attitudes in society become harsher to those on the margins. With the growth in working hours and flexible working times and conditions, there are also many hidden effects. **Family life is harder to maintain as each person has a different time schedule and guarantees of a work free weekend or Sunday are eroded. It also means that many voluntary activities including such things as voluntary community engagement and working for volunteer fire brigades in rural areas become more difficult.**

## A convivial economy would...

... change the structures of income and employment to ensure that **no one in a society would have a lack of resources for basic needs or be so over-worked in order to support a family that they had no time or possibility for family activity, let alone community based activity.** One possibility for achieving this would be for all to have the right to a basic 'citizen income' or maybe better a **citizen/denizen income** which people could then build upon through employment, cooperative working or engagement in a social enterprise. Over the past 25 years this concept has been developed and it has the support of several church groups. It is being piloted at the moment in several contexts. One advantage is that it gives everybody a floor that prevents pauperisation and supports human dignity. An originally European network has been developing these ideas with a global perspective (Basic Income Earth Network). The research done by people, including many from church related organisations, has shown the feasibility of such a system and that it would even save the money spent on administering several welfare systems at the moment. What is more, it would release people and families from stress and create an incentive for new economic activity. Of course the critical question is at what level the basic allowance is set and what are the mechanisms for uprating it.

Such a development if it was allied to a **quality education system that was geared to 'learning for the whole of life' would have the potential to lead to innovation and more balanced development, less geared to consumption.** As previously mentioned, the focus in education is increasingly narrowed to skills for employment, especially as education is privatised. Higher education is becoming a product to be consumed, which leads to a focus on a narrowing range of subjects and programmes.

Following the same line of reasoning, the **re-orientating of health and welfare services on the whole person and the return to services being provided as a right and not on a market based system** would

lead to more equitable access to services and eradicate one of the major challenges to the dignity of people who are ill or who are living with a disability.

All these changes would lead to the possibility for people to become more involved in the whole life of the place where they live and to build up new forms of social action. It would also release more time for involvement in the decisions that affect life together and so would strengthen democratic participation and civil society. Finally, diaconal services, where they use financial resources from governments also have to meet conditions of financial viability in competition with private profit seeking companies in the fields of health, education and welfare.

## **In a convivial economy...**

- ✓ The structures of paid work would ensure that employment supports human dignity, in terms of what is produced, how it is produced and the resource implications of production
- ✓ Everyone would have a wages or income that is sustainable and allows a life in dignity
- ✓ All denizens would have the right to good quality health, education and welfare

# Part Four

## - Steps towards a Convivial Economy

### Introduction

In the first three parts of this presentation I focused on the implications of taking the concept of conviviality seriously as the basis for examining what is happening to work and economic life. There are many negative developments, which combine together to produce societies marked by poverty and where people and whole communities feel 'forgotten'. Now I would like to share some positive reflections about the possible steps we could take towards a convivial economy. This demands **intensified networking and collaboration across different boundaries, social movements, civic associations and faith communities and where possible with public authorities**. The people who are suffering most from the negative effects of the present context should be the most important partners in working for transformation.

When we think about steps and strategies **I would emphasise the need to start with local places and people because our concern is to work the direction of conviviality**. We do this, whilst being very aware of the need for structural change, including changes in policies of governments and of international political structures. In Europe, this has to include the policies of the European Union, which have such a shaping force on most countries, whether or not they are members. We are also aware that the pressures to consume increasingly mould people's lives and expectations and that this not only affects political decisions, it drives economic growth.



**The development of the consumer and finance driven economy has strongly negative effects on community and society, especially on marginalised people and groups. However the impact of the changes in the economy are being experienced even in more affluent contexts, where we are witnessing rising rates of anxiety and clinical depression, increases of substance abuse and heavy drinking and a decline in morale in working life.** This is also linked to a loss of trust in society, social isolation and loneliness as well as a lack of participation in politics. The growing inequality and the privatisation of public services as well as the reduction in earned incomes especially at the lower end of the labour market all have an impact on this.

Even rich societies do not seem to optimise human flourishing. The implications of these issues, which affect whole societies, form a link to the concept of conviviality and underpin its importance. A convivial economy would not only be of benefit to marginalised people and communities, but to the whole society, working life and the environment. We can already find many positive examples of local initiatives that point us in a different direction.

Christianity is an incarnational religion and Christians are called to be with marginalised people and communities in a struggle to overcome injustice, support participation and work for peace. Christian values function as a kind of utopia, which is in sharp contradiction to the core values expressed through the present economy. This stands in contrast to neo-liberalism which also offers a utopic narrative for our times, however with dystopian consequences. Values related to conviviality help to shape a guiding vision and a lodestar for action.

## Starting points

We have three different starting points for developing perspectives for action:

- i. The first and most urgent priority for many people is **the sheer fact of economic survival** in hard-pressed urban and rural communities. The fact that is that many people are unable to meet their basic daily needs for food, warmth, energy or housing and also to access the essential services such as health care and this is a strong imperative for action.
- ii. The second starting point is also related to the context and this has two dimensions. First, we face the **global environmental challenges** resulting from highly developed consumer markets that demand more and more production and yet reduced cost of the basics for everyday life. There is no need for further elaboration of this point, which results in rapid resource depletion and also intolerable working conditions in many producer countries. In terms of **food security and sustainability**, the global production systems are a challenge because they create food insecurity in many areas. Agriculture in the



global south is increasingly orientated on supplying food – even luxury food – to high-income countries. Land previously used for local food production is turned over to intensive production for export and the earning of hard currency.

- iii. The third starting point is related to the fact that the consumer market and the competitive labour market conspire to create shaping conditions for **values and goals that are damaging for personal, family and social life.**

The understanding of conviviality, as a core concept is a challenge to everyday practice grounded local community life. Therefore we will begin with the ways in which we can develop this approach to create a fruitful context for working on economic and social issues (Seeking Conviviality).

Then we will explore the local possibilities for concrete action towards a convivial local economy (Seeking a Convivial Local Economy).

Finally we will look at the necessary changes in terms of national and international contexts (Seeking a Convivial Economy).

## (a) Seeking Conviviality

If we go to the roots of our thinking about conviviality as the ‘art and practice of living together’ we can find pointers to some very practical approaches to engaging with the issue of work life and the economy. We are concerned with local practice and before we even begin to engage in developing practical action and working for change, we have to reflect on two aspects:

**First of all, in our associations, faith communities and diaconal organisations, how can we model different ways of relating to each other as well as to those in our local context?** How can we create processes and structures that are more inclusive than in the mainstream economy?

**Secondly, from a Christian point of view, how can we use our Biblical and theological resources to reflect on the way in which our life perspective and even our deepest motivating desires are formed and re-formed by expensive and intrusive advertising?** The media saturated context in which we live is constantly shaping and reshaping our desires so that they reflect the offerings to consume in different market places. Through this process, many of our desires are formed by consumer priorities, yet we know from faith and experience that increasing consumption does not itself bring happiness and fulfilment. In fact consumption transforms the idea of happiness into the transient pleasure of consuming, whether it be the things we need for everyday life, survival, housing or, for example holidays.

The implicit offer is that if we have more financial resources we can consume more and have more pleasurable moments that will add up to happiness. This is a 'false prospectus' because according to the Christian tradition, happiness and fulfilment are to be found elsewhere. **Consumer led desire is restless and endless, as well as being costly to the environment.** This is one of the root issues in our culture and it means that as well as working on projects and for change in the direction of justice and inclusion, we need to work on our core beliefs and values as well as visions for the future. In our actions we should seek to embody this perspective.

**This process of reflection on everyday life is therefore not an 'add-on' to practical engagement, it is an important foundation for it! In our learning processes from work with children and young people through to adults we can prioritise what we might call the 'education of desire'.** We could imagine a curriculum that begins to address this issue from childhood through to adulthood and continuing. For example, on a very basic level we often ask children to imagine themselves when they are 'grown up'. This can be in terms of relationships and work as well as social, family and community life. In the churches' adult education and worship activities, the concrete and shaping realities of work and economy are not usual topics for reflection. In these educational processes, we very often unconsciously mirror the standard expectations of the wider society, which actually cause exclusion. Economic inclusion in European societies depends on meritocracy and performance and this leads to inevitable exclusion for those who for whatever reason cannot 'perform' or who face barriers of different kinds. The more we engage in real communication with the diversity of society, we come to see how limited and limiting consuming desires may be.

**We are also constantly engaging in telling and retelling the story of our life, who we were, who we are and who we might become. Empathy is built on this ability to see ourselves and others in a different way!** Our story is constantly under revision and this is true for everyone else. But the reflection on this is missing, especially in terms of work and economy. Furthermore it is a very difficult process for marginalised groups, who are under daily pressure to survive. Rooting our work in conviviality gives us an approach to deal with this issue. Is it possible to work with people to envision an alternative set of desires and satisfactions? This can lead to practical action and will certainly support it.

These actions can be described as educational, pastoral or diaconal work. **The process of imagining our future selves and communities as otherwise than they are is an essential foundation for transforming local communities and economies.** However, in the context of continuous and disruptive imposed change and uncertainty, it is very difficult for people and communities to build up a positive developmental story. Continuous disruption and seemingly arbitrary and imposed change as well as the lack of political engagement with marginalised communities are some of the mainsprings of the switch to the support of authoritarian leadership in politics. People expect that a 'strong father figure' as a political leader will create a stable 'national family' and a coherent framework for life. We are dealing here with the intersection between

local stories and relationships and the wider forces of economic and political change. We have tools to address this, rooted in the Christian tradition, but these can also be enriched by diverse contributions from other traditions. The support and enhancement of a different discourse along with experience of positive change is a most urgent task if we are to avoid resurgent nationalism and xenophobia in Europe. Moralising is not an effective strategy for change in this context!

**Convivial communities create a space where these kinds of reflections and the consequent practices can take root and people can flourish.** In a convivial community people do not treat others as objects or as means to an end. The ability to develop conviviality requires openness and vulnerability rather than certitude and fixed viewpoint. In a context where individuals are valued mainly – or even only – in terms of their contribution to economic life, conviviality seeks the contribution of all to social organisation. **Grace is a key concept – all have something to give and the gift is unearned and often unexpected.** The relations between people are based not on the idea that we are all ‘the same’ but that there are differences, which are not always easily bridged, and contributions that may not immediately be recognised. **Conviviality as a basic concept for diaconia and mission engages with this diversity with a vision for the future founded on dignity and human equality. It implies continually reaching out from who and what we are, to what we might become and it requires the development of a capacity for critical analysis and creative action.**

In summary, in order to create change, even to create local alternative economic initiatives, we have to work care-fully on change ourselves and with those with whom we work, so that we become ‘subjects’ who in turn can create and support change. We often encounter what we call ‘apathy’ and try to deal with it by moralising, but this is counter-productive especially if people have no experience that they can make a difference (or even do not reflect that they in fact *do* make a difference). Without experience and reflection, it is very difficult to create and sustain motivation. Such changes rarely happen quickly and involve thinking about how to remake our situation and how to transform the everyday ‘realism’ of those around us.

## **(b) Seeking a Convivial Local Economy**

If we take conviviality as the ‘art and practice of living together’, as a way of implementing love of neighbour, then our approach to the local economy will be first of all relational. **A relational approach does not start with goals and action plans but with the complexity of the local situations and the different perspectives and interests of diverse groups. This is quite a challenge to the model of local projects which are based on a church or agency defining needs and establishing a service to meet those needs** (even if it is ‘voluntary service’). With an orientation on the different ‘life worlds’ present in a locality, where the congregation may also be made up of different groups, it is important to have a starting point which respects this diversity and works with it rather than round it!

Linked to this is **the tendency to start with a so-called ‘deficit model’** which focuses on the needs and deficiencies in the locality (and often by implication of ‘other’ people and communities). This is hardly a motivating basis for action. Therefore local economic action should focus on methods that start with the knowledge, skills and competences that people already have. These may be formally recognised or be the result of practice and experience. Furthermore it is important to recognise the different routes to expertise in a group. Some people are ‘experts by experience’ – for example a long-term homeless person or a refugee may have valuable expertise about their situation and how to handle it, which will incorporate differences compared to the expertise of a professional worker. To find a relational approach which recognises and affirms this is very important for empowerment.

The approach may be called ‘starting from strengths’ or ‘use your talents’ and links to further steps in analysing and defining the needs and issues which should be addressed. Integrated with this approach are processes of local analysis and vision building. Then small concrete steps can be designed with people to create new economic initiatives, starting close to people’s felt needs and without coercion. This approach embodies an understanding of human dignity and is inherently trust building and transparent. In this kind of process the gospel can emerge as a surprise, as a gift from the work with people, rather than as a message that is delivered. With this diaconal approach the church organisation can, with others build up a platform for sustainable local economic projects.

Coupled with this approach, rooted in everyday life, it is also important **to discover the strengths and resources of local informal organisations, voluntary organizations and also municipal and other organisations that hold resources.** Actions may involve using these resources or working for changes in policy, practice and resource allocation to support local development. From a conviviality perspective, the most important resources in a locality are the people and then come environmental resources and organisational resources, finally financial resources. We can identify concrete actions that may emerge from such an approach:

- **Money and currency:** It is important to understand the nature of money and its importance to community well-being. All localities have an income and there is a possibility to foster economic development by ensuring that as much money as possible that comes into a locality circulates in the locality and adds value, so creating jobs. This has implications for the organisation of consumption. For example, if people pay for using local produced goods and services, rather than buying in products from large companies based externally, it will in most cases have more local impact than if money leaks out! In terms of finance, a local savings and loan organisation can help households survive. A further development of these ideas is the creation of local currencies, which circulate within one area. As people trade with the local currency, the value remains local and fosters relationships and well-being. Another variant is to create local time banks through which people can trade their different skills. In these systems, either

the local currency or the time can be combined with transferrable currency, for example the Euro or a national currency.

- **Energy and Water:** Locally controlled development also has implications for the environment, for example a locally owned decentralised heating system or other energy production can be both more sustainable and contribute to the local economy. The retro-fitting of buildings to be more ecological and the production of new passive buildings can also make a contribution.
- **Food:** In some areas it is possible to increase the production and sale of food and to bring disused land back into use. Another important development is to link up groups in urban areas with local small farmers to create new local distribution systems or to create farm shops/markets in the town.
- **Education and Welfare:** In localities where there is a lack of facilities church related organisations and churches can pioneer new services, for example in working with children, young people and families.
- **Services:** Local economic development can provide new services and prevent the loss of existing services, for example providing a post office, general store or transport.
- **New enterprises:** Building on the talents of people in the locality, new enterprises can be developed.
- **Property and land:** In many places there is unused property and vacant land, including church owned property and land, which could be used for new initiatives and the production of food. In some countries it is possible for land and property to be acquired by local economic development groups and this also creates new locally controlled tangible assets.
- **New forms of ownership:** Community enterprises can develop under new democratic structures, such as community enterprises, community development trusts or co-operatives.

**As well as these kinds of concrete economic, social and cultural initiatives working towards a convivial economy can include opening up local municipal decision making**, for example on the model of participatory budgeting, so local people can make a direct input to decision making and the decisions made by municipalities are open to scrutiny. The possibilities for developing democratic decision making extend beyond normal representative political structures and the development of more participatory forms will revitalise local democracy.

**Local actions can pioneer new solutions to economic issues and develop new ways of relating income, work and time as well as developing more environmentally sustainable communities. Linked together these initiatives support change processes on the national and international level.**

## (c) Seeking a Convivial Economy

Localities are embedded in national and international structures. Thus, whilst there is scope for many local economic initiatives, **the shaping conditions can enable or undermine convivial local economies.** Local efforts to create convivial economies, when linked together, can be mobilised to change the external conditions and lead to a convivial economy on a wider scale. We cannot touch on all aspects of policy but here we want to give some main lines for further reflection and action. The churches represent an important space for the development of new thinking, which is based on lived experience of the impact of the present economic and political policies and priorities. If we want to support moves towards a convivial economy the present practices and policies in five key areas will need to change.

### Employment Time and Income

First of all, **we need a new relationship between employment, time and income.** There is a rapid change in the labour markets in Europe and with the technological change more jobs will disappear in their present form. On the other hand in many countries people are working excessively long hours with very precarious working conditions, including time flexibility. This all has a large negative impact on family and community life as well as on health, happiness and well-being. Unemployment on the other hand is becoming increasingly precarious because in some cases there is no financial support and in others the conditions surrounding receipt of the low level of support is very coercive. If we also factor in environmental questions we can see that the present drive for growth and consumption coupled with labour market stress do not create a sustainable economy or support human flourishing.

In local economies, we can see at least some seeds of a more meaningful economy that contributes to a greater sense of well-being and fulfilment for both the producers and consumers. **In such community based or social enterprises, local energy projects, food co-operatives and so on as well as in a wealth of mutual aid organisations people learn new skills and inter-relatedness is supported.** They are already standing in contradiction to the time-poor, materialistic economy in which most of us spend most of our lives.

On top of this there is a **growing need in European societies for in-person services in the personal and social services, social care and health fields.** This sector represents work which is both needed and which with the right conditions provides fulfilling work for people. Furthermore, it does not make heavy demands on the environment. Yet such work, if it is not in the profit making market, is regarded as

‘worthless’ because it does not add value and the productivity level is not growing. The search for cost reduction and productivity in this field produces work, which is low paid, stressful and does not achieve the social care objectives in a dignified way. These services depend on human interaction and the diminution of this undermines the quality of the output. The expansion and quality improvement of these services would support human flourishing by creating satisfying work and quality services. Such services are not normally internationally traded and therefore for the conventional pressure for increased productivity to maintain competitiveness does not apply.

Looking at employment in other sectors, we have seen that **productivity gains lead to structural unemployment and with the increasing use of new technologies more jobs will be destroyed. The total hours required in the national economy will gradually (maybe suddenly) fall** and the result is usually unemployment. Paradoxically, at the moment working hours in many contexts have been increasing but labour productivity in Europe has not been rising as fast as previously. The introduction of more self operating systems will increase the pressure. This presents an opportunity to reduce once again the working hours, improve working conditions and maintain a stable income, especially if we are not focused on economic growth as a main goal. Research shows that with a shorter working week, workers are in fact more and more satisfied with their work, take less time off due to illness and maintain better health.

**These changes work best in economies where the inequality is not so great and where the education and training system can ensure a ready supply of suitably qualified workers. This implies the need for a more strongly redistributive tax and social security system, or the establishment of such a system where it does not exist.** A logical extension of this approach would, as already mentioned, be to implement a basic or citizen’s/denizen’s income, which would accrue to each citizen or denizen of a particular country. Such a basic income approach may be a less punitive and coercive way of handling the rapid labour market changes we are experiencing in Europe.

**Changing the relationship between employment-based work, income and time would lead to less stress, less resource consumption and would enable social relations and associational life to flourish.** More inclusive and convivial relationships can be enabled by providing income security, a more egalitarian framework and re-evaluation of the place of care in the widest sense and education in its inclusive (less instrumental) sense. Time and economic security would provide the basis for the re-creation of a vibrant civil society – the creation of a context that is beyond the intimate family and not part of a market relationship. We catch a glimpse of this in the choices some young professionals already make to forego income and spend time working in the local community and with their family. Another glimpse is in the lives of people who already have an income more or less guaranteed through their pension and who work in local food systems, provide support for refugees and asylum seekers and do other valuable social tasks. Some of these tasks such as working in food banks would not be needed if the system of basic income was introduced and time

would be released for other forms of associational life. All manner of such initiatives already exist and are well documented, if not exactly headline news! Furthermore, in the Judeo- Christian tradition there is an emphasis on the need for human and creational rest. This gives us a basis to reflect on the contemporary meaning of Sabbath. Time is a social construct and maybe Sabbath can be seen an act of defiance against the dominant culture and its relentless productivity.

## Financial Institutions

**Debt is a major problem at the personal and community level as well as in many cases at the state level. This is an issue with profound Biblical and theological roots. A very important structural change would be to re-regulate the banking system so that debt would be controlled and created in the interests of the common good rather than creating debt as means of making money from money.** This would entail a splitting of domestic private banking from investment banking and controlling the creation of debt by both domestic and investment banks. A mixture of legislation and taxation could be applied to implement controls on the financial sector. This would be a ‘top-down’ change, which would bring a more ethical perspective into banking and finance.

A financial system with a convertible currency is needed to deal with international transactions, but this should be complemented with local financial institutions and even local currencies, which balance the dependency on national currency denominated transactions. Such a policy shift could be complemented by creating a more supportive frame for local financial institutions such as ethical banks and credit unions, enabling them also to support local social and economic initiatives as well as providing a savings and loan facility which would be of great benefit for the people with lower incomes.

## Recreating ‘the Commons’

Coupled with these changes in the financial system, there is also a need to reflect further on what has been called ‘the commons’. The allusion here is to the pre-industrial society where there was a measure of common land and common equipment, which all people could use. The most typical example is common land, which still exists in some places. This land was available for all people to enable food for everyday life to be supplied. The industrial system was built on the fact that the enclosure and privatisation of the common land forced people to work in the emerging factory system or to emigrate. **The ‘modern commons’ are the services on which we depend for everyday life including transport, energy and water for example. The assets these services are built on were very often publicly provided through local government or by subscription. In recent years the privatisation of these assets has, in many cases, allowed quasi monopolies to be built up which, by using accepted market models, remove services from**



**non-profitable areas (such as rural transport) and deny services to many on marginal incomes.** On top of that privatised service providers may claim state subsidies to maintain services of general interest such as transport and postal services. In this way the former public service systems now operate as private profitable businesses with public support from the state. The gaps are filled, if at all, by associational and co-operative ventures such as community transport. Rather than continuing with this discriminatory model, services of general interest ('the modern commons') should operate in the interest of the common good and should be returned to some form of public ownership, which recognizes their basic nature. In this way they could also dovetail with locally provided services in the same field. There are examples of this in energy supply where the major provider is a municipal company (with the goal of reducing dependence on fossil fuels) complemented by small local providers of heat and power, for example in rural areas and urban neighbourhoods. In this way the strengths of decentralised systems and an overall network could be maintained for the common good of all.

In other areas we can see the emergence of **new common goods** – for example in publishing, the Creative Commons initiative enables the publishing and issue of material which has a copyright assigned to it and which enables the free use of the content according to specified rules. This is a different approach to that of conventional publishing, which uses copyright rules to prevent access and sharing and to allow access by charging. In other fields such as computing a similar development is taking place through the promotion of open source software of which Linux is the best-known example.

## Renewing and Extending Democracy

A more sustainable and transparent economy would also need **new forms of governance and political participation.** At present, political decision makers shape and are shaped by the dominant economic ideas. The deregulation of the finance system which privileges financial transactions that enable financial institutions to make money from money rather than investing for the common good is one case in point. Governments, acting in the interests of private investors, have promoted the privatisation of the commons (water, energy etc.) Taxation systems have been increasingly skewed away from redistribution towards a reduction of taxes on corporate income, higher earners and those with large amounts of unearned income and wealth. This has been enabled by the decisions of formally elected democratic governments, which are closely tied to the interests of large enterprises and major investors. There is a kind of revolving door between political and economic elites and the power of economic lobbies combined with the exchange of elites facilitates a consensus that has increasingly ignored the common good of all. Powerful media are linked to this system and promote the same ideas.

Another aspect of the present context is the **corruption of political decision making on a high level** but also in some cases of local communities. This points us in the direction of the need for a change in

democratic structures and processes. This is needed both for transparent and open decision making and for the redirecting of economic decisions so that they support equity rather than exacerbating divisions and that they underpin sustainable local economic development rather than benefitting disruptive placeless capital.

**One small shift in the decision making process can be through participatory budgeting. Such instruments are a school for economic management.** Other small initiatives include the emerging practice of local governments making public the concrete decisions about local economies (including the terms of contracts for goods and services) so that they can be scrutinised. However, the present democratic system is, through the electoral process, designed rather to limit democratic participation. In general terms the participation in political parties in Europe has declined dramatically, with few exceptions and therefore new practices to engage local communities are urgently needed.

**The paradox is that, as a result of disillusion and insecurity, the tendency has rather been in the direction of protest led by apparently strong populist and authoritarian leaders. On the other hand there are a huge number of local initiatives seeking to create new forms of social, cultural and economic action which also have a political goal, but which only episodically achieve public attention.**

These findings should lead us to question the limitations of the present democratic structures and processes and to think through the meaning of basing democracy on conviviality. This would not totally supplant classical democracy but would envisage a more open participatory form of decision-making that could be allied with an elaborated form of direct democracy such as exists in some European countries, regions and localities. Such a process could be complemented by a more democratic structure for the management of enterprises so that all stakeholders could be represented.

## Economy for Sustainability

Finally, I would like to address the issue of **sustainability**, which is embedded in the discussions about work, income and time as well as the financial system and democratic participation. We participate in the life of society through employment, work and activity, which contribute to human flourishing and community development. **Through our engagement we create and recreate the social world and find our place in it but we recognise that there are ecological limits, which should be placed on human activity.** These have to be informed by what we have learnt about the ecology of the planet and various threats caused by human activity and sheer population growth.

Limits should be embedded in all the working principles of the economy and included in legislative frameworks at appropriate levels of governance. The production of goods and services should make

a contribution to human flourishing and conviviality and should have a low material and energy consumption and throughput. It goes without saying that people and households should have a decent livelihood and access to quality services of general interest.

It is not only the question of what is produced and the sustainable use of resources - it also concerns the form of work organisation. **Human interaction or conviviality is at the heart of enterprises whether they are socially and cooperatively owned or privately owned and operated. Local community economies will become more important but industrial activities such as construction, manufacturing and food production will also continue but under criteria linked to environmental and social sustainability.**

Financial intermediation is necessary but it should be organised in a more stable, long-term framework less dependent on monetary expansion. Investment should be geared to increasing energy efficiency and the reduction of the use of natural resources, increasing use of low carbon technology and the creation and support of public assets and local organised services (a renewed commons). This would be a significant shift in financial strategy away from ever increasing short-term returns on capital deployed towards longer-term commitments to a sustainable economy. Crucial transformations would be in investment in activities that are ecologically sustainable and more locally rooted service-based activity, which is more labour intensive.

Conviviality can be a lens through which we can both see more clearly the consequences of the financialised economy and politics of everyday life but it also provides a guiding vision for a future where we can live together with social, cultural and economic sustainability.

## **Key Points for a Framework for a Convivial Economy**

- ✓ Support a new division of work (employment), time and income so that work conditions support conviviality and all have a livable income
- ✓ Create a supportive legislative framework for new forms of local economic, social and financial initiatives
- ✓ Work to change the framework of financial institutions in the direction of long term support for local and wider sustainable initiatives and away from disruptive speculation
- ✓ Reclaim 'the commons' so that services such as energy and transport on which a convivial life depends are provided on the basis of need and access and that quality is maintained and controlled
- ✓ Renew and extend democratic processes and structures on local regional and national levels and ensure the democratic development of international structures which shape economic conditions
- ✓ Test all policies in the fields of economy, land use and work for their environmental and social impact and press for the orientation of financial, planning and taxation policy to support sustainability and protect the environment.

# Appendix:

## Related Resources

### Lutheran World Federation

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The concept of conviviality – the art and practice of living together when linked to vocation, dignity and justice forms a key to thought and practice in the area of economy and work.

*‘The search for conviviality focuses on the good life of all as a concrete utopia and yardstick for political measures. Through the glasses of conviviality, people become visible as social beings whose greatest wealth is their relationship to each other. In our congregations, communities, and societies, to work on the quality of these social relationships is thus recognizable as a central task.’*

Cardijn  
VEREIN