



Shared Green Societies Forum: Launch Report

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Suggested citation

Fantini, V., Picchi, V., 2026. Shared Green Societies Forum: Launch Report, Cambridge: SHARED GREEN DEAL.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19350515>



Executive summary

The Shared Green Societies Forum was launched on 28 January 2026 in Brussels in response to the growing need to strengthen connections between Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research, practice and policymaking in the context of the European green transition. Bringing together over 150 participants from across Europe - including SSH researchers, local practitioners, civil society organisations and policymakers - the Forum aims to bridge the gap between SSH research, grass-roots experience and policy, transforming social research into community-driven innovation for an inclusive, just and green transition.

Shared Green Societies is a new European forum aimed at connecting civil society, local and regional actors, and SSH researchers to transform social research into community innovations for an inclusive, just, and green transition. Its added value lies in bridging the gap between evidence, practice, and policy, by creating a space in which all these actors can have synergy and dialogue. On one hand local actors will be able to access findings and tools from SSH research while at the same time researchers can connect with the lived experiences of practitioners, on the other.

This report summarises the key highlights of the Forum launch, including a keynote discussion with Astrid Ladefoged, Deputy to the Director and Head of the Green Transitions Unit at DG Research and Innovation, as well as contributions from the first Forum Champions discussing their local actions, the participatory advocacy session focused on building a shared voice for just and community-based public policies, and the Collaboration Hub, which brought together projects, initiatives and tools supporting knowledge exchange and collaboration.

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1. Introduction

There is an increasing need for spaces that bridge the gap between research, practice, and policy-making, while creating synergies and collaboration across sectors and disciplines. This is particularly relevant when discussing an inclusive and just green transition, which requires a stronger collaboration among Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research, local practice, and policy processes.

With this premise, and in response to that need, the Shared Green Societies Forum was officially launched on **Wednesday 28 January 2026** during a full-day event in Brussels. The event brought together more than 150 participants, including SSH researchers, local practitioners, civil society organisations, and policymakers at both EU and local levels.

The event, organised by ALDA with the support of ARU and the Forum Board, aimed to celebrate the launch of this new European Forum, which connects different actors on green transition by translating SSH research into action, turning lived experiences into knowledge, and aligning grass-roots innovation with policy transformation.

The Forum launch was characterised by its attention to key synergies and collaboration. This included collaboration with the SSH CENTRE project, which followed the event with an evening policy panel debate led by Friends of Europe reflecting on how social sciences and humanities (SSH) can play a central role alongside science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in the shaping of the next European research and innovation framework programme (Horizon Europe 2028–2034).

The structure of the launch event was based on the insights of the stakeholder's co-creation workshop that was held in May 2025. This is particularly significant to make sure that stakeholders and future members/champions have ownership of results and feel engaged in the network, in a meaningful and effective way. The success of this approach was evident in the active engagement of the audience during the event, where attendees were not simply spectators but active contributors to discussions, reflections and collaborative sessions.

The Forum is founded within the context of the EU-funded Horizon 2020 SHARED GREEN DEAL project, which aims to foster a just green transition in Europe that works for and with people, providing SSH tools and knowledge to support the implementation of eight EU Green Deal policy areas and deliver behavioural change.



Shared Green Societies Forum launch.



Presenting Shared Green Societies.

2. Connecting practice, policy and SSH research: key highlights

Following the opening remarks by Professor Rosie Robison (Anglia Ruskin University) and Valeria Fantini (ALDA), the event continued with three sessions designed around the Forum's key objectives, that are connected to supporting citizen and/or professional participation, promoting mutual knowledge flows and advocating for inclusive public policies. In this section 2, we now briefly detail the discussion and outcomes from each of the three sessions.

2.1. A Keynote conversation with Astrid Ladefoged

How can policy practice and SSH research come together for the good of the European green transition? This was the starting point of this conversation, in which **Professor Chris Foulds (Anglia Ruskin University)** and **Astrid Ladefoged, Deputy to the Director and Head of Green Transitions Unit at DG Research and Innovation**, discussed the need of connection in these times of geopolitical turmoil.

This question unveils a sense of urgency as the effects of climate change are becoming more prominent and visible, technology is impacting the way people live and do things, and Artificial Intelligence is taking up space also in the debate on green transition. Additionally, there is a rise of disinformation and misinformation that is especially evident when talking about environment and climate change. Because of this, Europe must position itself as a strong defender of science-based knowledge and policymaking. On the other hand, vertical science-based knowledge needs to have a "human connection", meaning that it needs to be accessible to those who work in practice, finding the right way to apply that information at every level.

These first insights show the relevance of the Forum in this geopolitical context, as it aims to do exactly that, by preventing that SSH knowledge, local green practice and policy making work in echo chambers.

The conversation was enriched by three reflections from the audience from three *discussants*:

- **Meline Gonzales** from **Eurocities** – representing policy.
- **Lina Bubulyte** from **Amiestates (Vilnius municipality's one-stop-shop for energy efficient renovations)** – representing practice.
- **Julia Leventon** from **Czech Globe** at the Czech Academy of science in Prague – representing research.

Their reflections offered some important insights, as cities and citizens were identified as key actors to be kept at the core of green transition. Additionally, it was noted that 80% of climate policies are implemented at local level, and how cities and mayors see climate as a top priority. Therefore, it is fundamental to translate local policies and local evidence-based actions into EU-level policy. The urgency to act was also recognised, but at the same time there is a need in

European research Funding Programmes, such as Horizons, to rethink how problems are defined, especially in relation to sustainability challenges and SSH research and innovation.

The session concluded by highlighting the importance of sharing best practices across different green transition areas, an approach that was described by Astrid Ladefoged as “place-based innovation.”



Shared Green Societies Launch - A conversation with Astrid Ladefoged.

2.2. Stories of change. Celebrating local action in 'Shared Green Societies'

The second session, that was moderated by **Kinga Kovacs** from Energy Cities, celebrated local 'Champions' of Shared Green Societies, starting from their experience in the SHARED GREEN deal project. They shared their experiences of working with local communities to support the implementation of the European Green Deal, illustrating how SSH methods contributed to community learning, co-creation and trust-building.



Celebrating local champions of Shared Green Societies.

Speakers highlighted how change often starts with people, not only with those who drove the activity but also with the civil society that took part in the initiatives. While many transition support systems rely on top-down technical solutions, these initiatives showed that transitions are mostly social processes.

The session started by showing that local actors trying to drive change face very similar obstacles, no matter their country, their geographical and socio-economic situation.

- Fragile trust between communities and public authorities, which are often perceived as regulators and controllers rather than supporters, requiring time and effort to build trust.
- Political constraints and changing mandates.
- Limited capacity of small or emerging organisations.
- Difficulty transforming existing organisations from within.
- Fragmentation and isolation between actors, with many silos and local actors often not knowing each other, making it important to create opportunities for them to meet and collaborate.
- Time-limited projects, short-term funding, lack of continuity versus long-term change, raising questions about how to ensure continuity once projects come to an end.

- Transitions are mostly social, but support systems remain technical, this is particularly relevant when spaces, networks and dialogues are mostly informal.
- Fear, resistance within communities about change.
- Limited ability to influence decisions beyond the local level.

Despite these challenges, the local actions produced inspiring stories of local change, that were celebrated and that showed not only what communities achieved, but also what is needed to support local transitions in a more structured, connected and fair way.

The local champions who presented their activities were:

- Pelle Bengtsberg ([Reformaten](#)) - *Food systems*
- This initiative brought together farmers, citizens, youth, businesses and policymakers, creating spaces for dialogue, storytelling and co-creation to transform local food environments and to define what a sustainable food system meant for them. This resulted in visions and concrete policy recommendations rooted in lived reality.
- Rhiannon Laubach ([Ballyhoura Development](#)) - *Biodiversity*
- This initiative brought people together to learn about nature, biodiversity loss, local ecosystems, seeing biodiversity through emotional lenses and attachment to place. It managed to combine scientific knowledge with local experience and cultural values.
- Jean-Paul Grange ([Val-de-Marne en Transition](#)) - *Circular Economy*
- This initiative brought together designers, repairers, businesses, local authorities and citizens, creating spaces for experimentation, prototyping ideas and mutual learning. Circularity is often framed around innovation and business, but the initiative highlighted its social relevance.
- Filipa Corais ([Braga Municipality](#)) - *Sustainable Mobility*
- This initiative brought together children, parents, teachers and city officials to imagine and define mobility futures. Through games and street experiments, it opened new ways of thinking about mobility policy.

Researchers also reflected on the lessons emerging from the experiments. Haris Paliogiannis (MIO-ECSDE) and Frances Fahy (University of Galway) highlighted the value of collaboration between local practitioners and SSH research. They highlighted the value of co-creation processes between researchers and local communities, where researchers often took a step back and supported the process rather than leading it. They also noted the relevance of having trusted safe spaces for local communities and to drive change.

2.3. Building a shared voice on policy: Advocating for just and community-based public policies



Building a shared voice on policy: Advocating for just and community-based public policies.

Participants then joined an interactive third session, “Building a shared voice on policy: Advocating for just and community-based public policies”, focused on developing a collective advocacy agenda and defining shared priorities for joint lobbying, research and funding collaboration.

The session was co-created and led by Pia Wieser (Women Engaged For A Common Future - WECF), PJ Beers (Dutch Research Institute for Transitions - DRIFT), and Leida Rijnhout (Ecolise), who stressed the importance of local communities and a bottom-up approach to delivering systemic change (as shown by ECOLISE’s Colibri approach to advocacy).

Participants were invited to reflect on what could be the priorities of the Forum in terms of advocacy and what would be the key themes and demands. They were divided in small groups and then invited to share with everyone the outcome of their conversation.

The key points that emerged are:

- Make people aware, powerful and active in policy processes – this means that democratic and civic participation should be treated as a baseline principle of democratic governance and policy design, rather than an innovative add-on. Participants stressed the relevance of involving and engaging citizens and local communities at every stage of the policy process: agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring.
- Make sure that no voices are omitted in the discussion – this means that the discourse on just transition should centre more social justice, equity, and wellbeing rather than solely focusing on technological solutions. What emerged is that the transition should ensure a **fair distribution of benefits and burdens**, considering aspects related to justice, equality, intersectionality and also class perspectives.
- Knowledge sharing, collaboration, and communication – enable exchange between scientists and citizens towards concrete objectives (e.g. concrete co-creation with tangible outcomes). Bringing generations together for the re/production of knowledge (ecological, political / identity, technologies).

2.4. Collaboration Hub

The day concluded with a Collaboration Hub, where 11 initiatives showcased their work, tools and insight from their experience related to topics and goals connected to the Shared Green Societies Forum.

This session featured various stands:

- **SSH CENTRE: reflections on interdisciplinary work** – which provided a comprehensive overview of challenges to Social Sciences and Humanities for successful inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration.
- **Real Deal, PHOENIX, ACCTING: Citizen and professional participation: lessons from EU Green Deal projects** – which shared resources and experiences of the three projects, involving also the Green Deal Support Office.
- **YOU(th) CARE** – which shared experiences on how to empower young people to actively engage in climate action, social responsibility, and sustainable development.
- **The European Local Innovation Forum (ELIF) by AEIDL: Connecting innovative local action across Europe** – which shared the platform aimed at bringing together a wide range of stakeholders working on local innovation and community-led development across Europe.
- **The Environment & Climate Hub of ALDA: Engaging Citizens in climate action** – which showcased practices of civic engagement related to climate.
- **Local Green Deals by ICLEI** – which provided an overview of a governance and action orientated approach to accelerate and scale-up a city's sustainable transformation.
- **GreenDeal-NET by Vrije Universiteit Brussel** – which shared a pan-European academic initiative connecting research, public debate and policymaking on EU climate and sustainability governance.
- **The EU Cities Mission Platform by NetZeroCities presented by Eurocities: from peer learning to evidenced-based policy shaping** – which showcased peer-learning open opportunities for Mission-Minded Cities.
- **Monitoring green policy ambition: new toolkits led by IEEP and GEC** – which presented tools such as [Green Deal Barometer](#) and the [Green Economy Tracker](#).
- **The Shared Green Societies Forum** – which shared upcoming opportunities and connected with the first members of the Forum.

This was also a relevant occasion to present the winners of the Shared Green Societies Forum annual SSH Awards for impactful research conducted by PhD or early-career researchers:

- Anna Melnyk
- Kelli Kennedy
- Lluís Martínez Ramírez

The Collaboration Hub was followed by a final plenary, moderated by Valeria Fantini (ALDA) outlining the Forum's next steps and officially opening registrations to become part of the Forum.



Pictures from Shared Green Societies collaboration hub.

3. A Forum for the 2020s – next steps



Celebrating SSH Awards winners.

The launch event showed the relevance of the Forum both at local and European level. The Shared Green Societies Forum's strength lies in working in an in-between space (the so called *meso space*), where people, local practitioners, SSH researchers and institutions work together to respond to the needs and ambitions of the European transition.

Building on the SHARED GREEN Deal project (and with the seed funding it provides), but with the aim of continuing its work beyond it, the Forum will continue actively engaging its members including them, where possible, in the co-creation of its activities. It is important to develop a sense of shared ownership. At the same time, efforts will be made to include individuals and organisations who are currently underrepresented in political decision making on the green transition.

The presence of a wide range of stakeholders during the Forum launch event - from Cities to NGOs, SSH researchers and policymakers - shows how the Forum has significant potential to connect scientific academic evidence with grassroots experience and needs.

We already have plans and commitment to keep the Forum going until at least 2030. But to start with, during 2026, we have activities in place relating to, for example, policy roundtables, writing policy briefs, researcher awards, and preparations for a large-scale in-person January 2027 event. The best way for colleagues to stay up-to-date on these plans is to follow the Forum on LinkedIn and to look at our [Forum website](#).

4. Acknowledgments

This event was supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101036640. Social sciences & Humanities for Achieving a Responsible, Equitable and Desirable GREEN DEAL (SHARED GREEN DEAL) is a €5m EU investment, coordinated by Anglia Ruskin University (UK).

We would like to thank all participants of our Event, in particular the speakers and contributors, including Astrid Ladefoged (DG Research and Innovation), Professor Chris Foulds and Professor Rosie Robison (Anglia Ruskin University), Valeria Fantini (ALDA), Meline Gonzales (Eurocities), Lina Bubulyte (Amiestates), Julia Leviton (CzechGlobe, Czech Academy of Sciences), Kinga Kovacs (Energy Cities), Pia Wieser (WECF – Women Engage for a Common Future), PJ Beers (DRIFT), Leida Rijnhout (ECOLISE), Pelle Bengtsberg (Reformaten), Rhiannon Laubach (Ballyhoura Development), Jean-Paul Grange (Val-de-Marne en Transition), Filipa Corais (Braga Municipality), Haris Paliogiannis (MIO-ECSDE), and Frances Fahy (University of Galway).

We would also like to thank the projects and initiatives that contributed to the success of the event, particularly the SSH CENTRE project and Friends of Europe for organising the evening policy panel. We are equally grateful to the projects, organisations and initiatives featured in the Collaboration Hub, including SSH CENTRE, REAL DEAL, PHOENIX, ACCTING, and YOU(th) CARE, the European Local Innovation Forum (ELIF) by AEIDL, the Environment & Climate Hub of ALDA, Local Green Deals by ICLEI, GreenDeal-NET by Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and the EU Cities Mission Platform by NetZeroCities, presented by Eurocities, as well as the teams behind the Green Deal Barometer and the Green Economy Tracker, for enriching the event through their contributions and exchange of knowledge and practice.

We are grateful for colleagues from Shared Green Societies Forum Board, for their support in co-creating this activity. Colleagues are based at: ALDA - European Association for Local Democracy; ARU - Anglia Ruskin University; IIED - International Institute For Environment And Development (GEC - Green Economy Coalition); ECIT - Energy Cities/Energie-Cites Association; ICLEI (European Secretariat); IEEP - Institute For European Environmental Policy; ISI - Fraunhofer Gesellschaft Zur Foerderung Der Angewandten Forschung; ICS - Instituto De Ciencias Sociais; WECF - Women Engage For A Common Future; SFYN - Slow Food Youth Network; MIO - Mediterranean Information Office For Environment, Culture And Sustainable Development Association; BWN - CEE Bankwatch Network; DRIFT - Dutch Research Institute For Transitions; CERC - MIB Developpement Ecole Des Ponts Business School; ACC - Acento Comunicación.

Shared Green Societies



A European Forum connecting practice, policy and research

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The Shared Green Societies Forum is launched with seed-funding from the European Union through the SHARED GREEN DEAL Project coordinated by Anglia Ruskin University. The sole responsibility lies with the SHARED GREEN DEAL project and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.

