

**Cover:**

## **Seeking a Convivial Economy**

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## 1. Introduction

### **Conviviality is:**

*...the art and practice of living together.  
Diakonia seeks to promote conviviality*

The realities of life in Europe are changing rapidly with many negative impacts on people and communities. The European Solidarity Group, which brings together people active in local diakonia from across the region is exploring and analyzing the changes. On the basis of their own experience they have begun to reformulate an understanding of Diakonia, which creates new perspectives on the context and reflections on experience.

The first phase of the work of the Group pinpointed the concept of Conviviality as a creative new focus for understanding Diakonia. This was elaborated in the first report of the group, which was launched in Nuremberg in 2014.<sup>1</sup> The group understands the term 'Conviviality' to mean 'the art and practice of living together' in solidarity. The meaning is derived from the Spanish word 'convivencia' and has been taken up by the Group because it relates to the time of peaceful living together of people with Christian, Jewish and Moslem faith. It resonates with the fact that in rapidly changing times, the way we live together (*con-vivere*) is a challenge to us in every context. One aspect of the challenge comes from the growing diversity and plurality of different communities due to migration, the growing numbers of refugees and to cultural diversification. A big challenge is also faced in countries where there are disputes over national borders or where national minorities are discriminated against. Furthermore, economic changes, unemployment and growing inequality as well as changes affecting the involvement of the state in welfare bring challenges to diakonia.

In the European context, the concept of conviviality points towards the fact that we should not withdraw into – remain within our own cultural and even faith based circles. This may be comfortable but there is a need to go beyond the 'passive toleration' of difference to active engagement. Diakonia implies sharing everyday life with people, based on an approach of mutual respect and mutual learning. It is an active and relational concept, which challenges all kinds of exclusivism and segregation.

To put it theologically, if in all our diversity, we are created in God's image, then the process of seeking conviviality is a process of entering into the fullness of what God creatively offers in all humankind. By having an open, curious and receptive attitude we are all enriched. By working with people, sharing and learning together in common actions, borders are gradually broken down. This may start small scale and face-to-face, but these ideas also influence the way we organize our life together and create or renew organizations and structures.

### **Conviviality is:**

*A relational concept with three main components:*

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<sup>1</sup> 'Seeking Conviviality – Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe', Addy, Tony, (ed.) 2013, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva Available in several languages from: [www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-seeking-conviviality](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-seeking-conviviality)

- ✓ *Vocation*
- ✓ *Justice*
- ✓ *Dignity*

The European Group used the word 'Solidarity' to identify the fact that through sharing our own motivation and engagement in all its richness and diversity we were able to learn from each other. Some stereotypical views were broken down. Some ideas had to be given up and new ideas shared. This is true also of local Diakonia. Seeking conviviality is an interactive process by which we - and those we work with - are enabled to go beyond our borders and differences. With empathy, we begin to transcend the 'helper-helped' dichotomy and find the basis for common action.

The Solidarity Group then began to search for the components of a positive frame for our work and for the future development of European societies. Three overarching concepts were identified, to guide our thinking about our work in context. They are all linked to and are vital for conviviality. From sharing our diverse life stories, we came to the concepts of vocation, justice and dignity. These concepts inform both the churches and their diaconal work and our understanding of the needs of the wider context.

When the Solidarity Group reviewed its work in 2014 it came to the conclusion that the concept of conviviality, linked to vocation, justice and dignity also formed a key to thinking and acting in the area of economy and work. These had emerged as central



issues in the production of the first report and it was agreed to develop a workshop to explore the meaning and practice of 'Convivial Economy'.

In every context, we could see that the concrete developments of work and economy are creating growing inequality and injustice. These changes, in conjunction with other changes, negate the dignity of the person, especially those on the margins or who are unable to integrate into the formal labor market. Indeed the structure of the formal labor market was seen to be becoming more unjust and work conditions often do not recognize the dignity of the person. Actually, we also began to see 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 working life becomes 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!

A 'Convivial Economy' would be based on the key concepts of Vocation, Justice and Dignity. These concepts could provide the foundation stones for a positive economic paradigm to guide diaconal and social practice. According to the first report of the Solidarity Group, the present economic paradigm (neo-liberalism) as it affects work, welfare, health and education actually undermines conviviality

### Seeking a Convivial Economy

From the perspective of diaconal practice, a number of issues were identified where blocks to the development of a Convivial Economy were experienced. These were:

- Work and Welfare
- Debt
- Migration
- Corruption and Transparency
- Creation and the Environment

The present economic and policy framework is shaped by neoliberal ideas about 'economy' and related understandings of the person. This was explored in the first phase of the work of the Solidarity Group. The aim of the Manchester workshop was to go more deeply into the pressing issues, which must be addressed if we want to aim for a more Convivial Economy. Basically it was seen that the neoliberal paradigm has negative consequences for many people and communities. As well as dealing with these consequences, Diakonia must struggle for a political and economic paradigm that does not have these negative effects. We expressed this in a diagram:



The Solidarity Group divided into five working groups, each of which explored one theme and prepared the Manchester workshop. This report covers the main lines of the overview shared in Manchester and the outcomes of the working groups as they point toward the actions needed to support a convivial economy.

## 2. Conviviality & Economy

### Vocation

#### A convivial economy would be based on vocation

In the first phase of the work of the Solidarity Group we focused on the diaconal vocation of the church and of Christians in everyday life. In our thinking and reflecting on convivial economy we broaden the concept of vocation. It stands for the calling of all Christians to work for the common good and the wellbeing of all people. In Christian thinking the concept has tended to be narrowed in two ways. First, traditionally vocation was often seen as a calling to be a pastor or priest or to be a deacon. The second use of the word has been to indicate the particular (secular) calling of a person, especially to a profession or career. But in fact, the idea of vocation relates to the understanding that each person has gifts and talents with which to express love for the other and for creation.

If we are seeking a convivial economy, we need many different contributions and we can analyze 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. As we discovered, 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. 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.

There still remains a lot of socially useful activity, which may lead to personal development or fulfillment and to a better quality of life together. It may be making music or organizing 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, 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 industrialization 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 others which are predominantly rural. At the same time the introduction of new digital systems has changed the structure of employment and is set to reduce it even further than previous rounds of 'automation'. As a result of these structural changes and the consequences of the financial crash of 2008, the level of unemployment is stubbornly high, yet the pressure is on 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 organizations such as universities and colleges increasingly use heavy control systems on their workers. All these changes creates stress and increases social and health costs.

Other related impacts include a reshaping of educational priorities by linking education narrowly to instrumental goals. For example, by 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 also makes 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.

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 which 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 privatization 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 as private company profits increase.

These effects are well documented for Europe and the major industrial economies in a wide range of studies that have recently been brought together by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in a major report, *'In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All'* (OECD, 2015). The report points out that the growth of precarious non-standard work contracts and labor market polarization as well as persisting gaps between women and men and high and ever increasing wealth concentration have the effect not only of reducing living standards and plunging people and families into poverty, but also have 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.

If we look at the wider context, whilst many reports have signaled the growing percentage of the world not living in extreme poverty, the measure for this is based on a rather hypothetical criteria of an income of \$1.25 dollars a day which hardly puts a person into the 'money economy' (UN, 2015). The newly launched sustainable development goals continue to have the eradication of poverty (this time by 2030) as a key goal (UN, 2016). This, however has to be seen in the context of a world wide growth in inequality, to the obscene level where in 2015, just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people – the bottom half of humanity and the wealth of the richest 62 people has risen by 45% in the five years since 2010, which is an increase of more than half a trillion dollars (\$542bn), to \$1.76 trillion. Over the same period, the wealth of the bottom half fell by just over a trillion dollars in the same period – a drop of 38% (Oxfam, 2016).

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 to the power of institutions and the lack of action by governments singly or together. Economic organizations are embedded in politically determined structures that regulate their activities. Much public discourse after the various 'crises' and around financial mismanagement has focused on personal 'greed' or personal 'morality' but we also recognize that the frameworks for business, including taxation and regulation have been systematically liberalized and the possibility for organising income (personal and

corporate) so it is not taxed or is minimally taxed is also a contribution to growing inequality and poverty as well as to reductions in health, education and welfare budgets. This trend contributes to the growing incidence of corruption – a theme which we highlighted in the Solidarity Group.

### 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 marginalization 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.

- ✓ Combatting all kinds of exclusion and marginalization
- ✓ Creating sustainable food production and halting the destruction of the environment
- ✓ Stopping forced economic migration
- ✓ Supporting 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 the operation of the finance markets affects everyday work and living conditions directly in ways that can undermine human dignity and in some cases destroy the basic sustainability of people and communities.

The first point to emphasize is that decisions about economic investment or disinvestment are made on the basis of financial rate of return often in the short run, unless large scale fixed investment is needed. The rate of return governs the conventional viability of an economic asset. 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 led to the financial crisis from which we 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 (Schumpeter 1987). This leads to whole communities becoming part of the 'waste' of a globalizing economy (Bauman 2004).

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 of former state financed or provided services such as university education. The link between debt and dignity has been explored in the first report, 'Seeking Conviviality' and in the Bible studies included in the publication, 'Convivial Life Together' (LWF, 2015)



The second effect of the economic and political transformations of recent years has been the privatization of many public services and the breakdown of the social security systems, which guaranteed the basic economic security 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' and the privatized suppliers are seeking 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, sick or disabled people. 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 restructured and the recipients are subject to specific disciplines and targets for their behavior. The criteria for receiving benefits are tightened and private agencies are 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 such support under this 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 on people and households, there is the indignity of the process of testing by people who are incentivized to get people off benefits and who may have no qualification or experience to carry out assessments. This stigmatizing of benefit recipients translates into everyday life experience of people seen to be claimants. 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 change (privatization, relocation, results of the banking crisis) on levels of income, conditions of work and job security. The economization 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 social care, workers in some contexts are allowed 15 minutes to support an elderly person in getting washed, dressed and fed in the morning or in social work, workers are only allowed a set time per client regardless of how complex or needy the situation is. 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. This also means pressure on the workers to complete tasks in ever-shorter time and potentially there is a loss of quality and job satisfaction. Even more prevalent is the reduction of wages and conditions for routine workers in the wider economy, who because of low pay are forced to work excessive hours –

having two or three jobs, to enable their families to survive.

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 witness a hierarchical splitting of the experience of employment. Underneath the formal labor market there is a growth of casual and informal work, often carried out by migrant and immigrant labor under conditions of near 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. One advantage is that it gives everybody a floor that prevents pauperization 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 organizations, 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 and complementing it with other support in special cases such as severe disability.

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 a more balanced development less geared to consumption. The focus in education is increasingly narrowed to skills for employment, especially as education is privatized. Higher education is becoming a product to be consumed, which leads to a focus on a narrowing range of subjects and programmes. The fact that students usually have to go into debt to fund their education further narrows the scope education and learning which is not geared to economic priorities.

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.

### **Two underlying questions**

In a capitalist system the process of development is based on the **increasing monetization of time** as more and more areas of life are transformed by the production and consumption of marketable goods and services. When time is 'monetized' it diminishes the possibility for building human relationships, especially for people who have to work long hours for survival. Convivial life together is supported if people have time for creativity and participation. The deepening of the connection between time and money on the other hand is a cause of stress and ill health and even of social conflict. It would be important for Christians to reflect on the way in which giving time and space for non-economic activities is one contribution the churches make to well being. Empirical research and studies of subjective well being show that active Christians score higher than similar groups who are non-religious. (Myers, 2008)

It may be conventional wisdom to link money and hence consumption to happiness, but empirical studies show that beyond a certain point, you need very large increases in income and/or wealth to get a significant increase in happiness. **The correlation between money and happiness is not direct.** This is not to argue the virtues of poverty but rather to investigate why this is so! Our economy is based on producing instant pleasure, through the consumption of goods and services. If pleasure is based in the pursuit of the 'repetitive consumption of pleasurable experiences' we find ourselves in an insatiable spiral!! The items consumed have to become ever more grandiose and the experience ever more 'exotic' yet the happiness hardly increases. (Bauman, 2007) This should cause us to reflect on the link between time and money and on the link between pleasurable experiences consumed and happiness. Do we have in our tradition other understandings of happiness? May this not be linked to the question of well-being? Is there a way in which we can bring these underlying issues into the public sphere?

### 3. Five Key Themes

The Solidarity Group members identified five key issues that were seen to be arenas through which we could share experience and develop analysis of the present economy. The members of the workshop prepared papers on the five themes and these were shared in working groups. Local visits to Manchester neighborhoods; congregations and projects provided a common mirror for deeper reflection in the groups. For two days members of the group were 'on the way'. Walking through the streets, looking with people and sharing their life. We saw sorrows and needs, injustice and inequality, which interrupted the usual way of life. They saw the wounded earth and met people burdened by injustice and exclusion. But we also discovered the lives of people and communities committed to change, which was deeply impressive. Some of these experiences were brought into our morning worship and each section of this chapter starts with a prayer rooted in this experience. Then we would like to share some of the insights and experiences related to the specific themes.

#### Work and welfare

##### We saw:

- the impact on everyday life of growing poverty and inequality and the lack of resources for social action with marginalized people
- loss of dignity because of the commodifying of welfare
- the gap between donors and beneficiaries, which creates degrading hierarchies

*Kyrie Eleison*

##### Introduction

Work and welfare are at the core of any thinking about a convivial economy and especially since the introduction of neo-liberal thinking to the field and the collapse of the formerly centrally planned economies, the situation has become increasingly difficult for families and communities that are in economically weak areas. The 2008 financial crisis gave a further negative impetus towards increasing poverty and marginalization. Whilst diakonia has a concern for the most marginalized, we can see that the present tendency affects many people who are in work and those who are in low paid employment. The term 'precariat' typifies this development. People are living on the margins and are vulnerable to quite small changes in circumstances. (Standing, 2014)

The group visited Church Action on Poverty, a UK ecumenical organization based in Manchester (CAP). CAP has taken a critical stand on the rise of unemployment and precarious work and is part of a campaign to pressure all employers (including the churches) to pay a living wage. They are also campaigning against precarious working conditions, such as zero hours contracts that imply that people have a work contract but they have no security concerning the hours they will work in any week! This is impossible basis for supporting a family. CAP has also campaigned on issues of fuel poverty and for a sustainable food supply for everyone. (Church Action on Poverty, 2016)

The methods that CAP uses include community organizing and training community

leaders, building campaigns on key issues and supporting so-called 'Poverty Truth Commissions', which organize hearings about the life situation of people on the margins and use the results in lobbying and campaigning. CAP also produces educational material and suggestions for worship and spirituality related to the issue of poverty and inequality. The visit with CAP enabled group members to reflect on the own context in the light of the specific experience of the group.

### Context

In the working group the main focus was on the impact of the changes in the overall situation of social welfare on the very different contexts of the group members. There are some common trends but it makes a large difference which country you come from. In Germany, for example the welfare system is undergoing processes of 'reform and innovation', which means decreasing state expenditure, and the increase of private provision as well as of private responsibility for welfare. This can be contrasted with Ukraine where there is still a process of building up a welfare system but this is interrupted by the conflict on the border regions and the annexation of Crimea. This has created new and unprecedented challenges for welfare services and for diakonia. Nevertheless a number of key common issues were raised amongst which we mention three challenges:

#### *The demographic challenge*

In most contexts, people are living longer and the numbers of people surviving into their 90's is expected to rise to five times the present level in the next twenty years. This will put big pressure on health and welfare services, which are already under strain. The classic approach to funding income maintenance and services for the elderly are reaching a limit, especially in the time of austerity, which is an ideologically driven response to the banking crisis. (Blyth, M., 2015) This situation is one in which the church and other non-profit organizations are called on to make up the care deficit. But the scale of need is such that this response is not enough! There is a need to redesign income support and to ensure adequate and effective social and health care.

#### *The generational challenge*

Looking at the European context we see that the impact of economic pressure on people is felt most keenly by the under 30 generation. In many countries more than a quarter of all young people are unemployed and many that have jobs are in insecure and low paid, with little prospect for a career. The fact is that this generation is the first to face a future with lower income and fewer prospects than the parents' generation at least in the last half century in western Europe. On top of this, the restructuring of health, education and welfare on neo liberal lines has drastically reduced the support for students and those who wish to carry on in education post 16 or 18 years old. This means that a growing number of students enter a precarious labor market with a 'debt hangover' even if student loans are offered in a special structure. Coupled with changes in the housing market, it also means that young people are less able to establish their own home or family for financial reasons.

#### *The regional challenge*

In the Solidarity Group we were able to explore the ways in which different countries and regions have been affected by the banking crisis and responses to it and to other kinds of regional crisis.

Firstly, the countries which are part of or are closely linked to the Euro zone have suffered particular problems because they are linked to the German economy which, at least in terms of production of manufactured goods, very successful. Of course, there has been a price to pay for this success that has been gained on the back of a depression in wages and life-quality for many average workers and their families. But because of the common currency (Euro) and the lack of any balancing mechanism, the largest cost has been faced by the weakest economies. This is a very well known feature of currency unions and one significant factor is that a country that gets into economic difficulty cannot devalue its currency. Moreover, in the case of the Euro zone countries have to follow strict rules that are inappropriate to the situation. (Blyth, 2013; Varoufakis, 2016) There are other regional factors that also affect work life and welfare in different regions. Notable are the different disputed borders that in some cases have led to the destruction of infrastructure, so paralyzing the economy on top of the human suffering and the displacement of people and communities. Other regions have been affected by growing numbers of refugees fleeing from war and civil conflict.

### Reflection and Response

Then the group explored the ways in which the different diaconal organizations have been responding to these crises. Here we can identify three main types of response, which are related to the transformation of the social state:

#### *Social Enterprise*

Several members of the group have been involved in creating social enterprises as a novel form of diaconal response to the worsening funding situation. Social enterprises are a form of business that combines social and economic objectives. They may take the traditional form of 'sheltered workshops' where people with (for example) learning difficulties do some basic work as a sub-contracted part of a normal business. The 'social' part is to offer a job to people who cannot access the first labor market and to support them in their work. The second form is to create an enterprise that provides goods and services directly on the open market and the most typical kind of business is catering. Jobs are created and a service provided for which people pay. The third stream is to establish social or educational services that are open to people in a locality, low threshold or for those who are in need of a specific service. In this case different elements can be combined – services, employment of people who could not find a job in the first labor market and also space for social and developmental activities. In some countries, notably Germany, there is significant state support and this has generated new activity, sometimes co-designed and co-produced by and with service users who would be the intended beneficiaries. The question is whether support is adequate, because members of the Solidarity Group had doubts on the basis of other national experiences. The second question is how to ensure coverage of such service for all people who may need it. A further question related to the 'reform' of welfare services through privatization is the impact of competition with other service providers in the private, profit-making sector. For church related or based organizations there may also be funding or other difficulties because of the continuing attitudes, taken over from previous governments which may have been hostile to the church and religious groups in general and the attitudes may still affect decisions whether or not to support diaconal efforts or restrictions on support and cooperation to particular churches with a national identity.

### *Community Based Initiatives*

Whilst social enterprises represent one contextual innovation, the church in many places has built up its engagement on the basis of local congregations and communities. These may include an element of 'social enterprise' or initiatives that have the structure of a non-profit/non-governmental organization. In the solidarity group we very significant examples of local diaconal action are represented. For example, to create a specific diaconal congregation which does not see itself as an 'agency' offering social services but as a congregation sharing in the local community life and creating actions together. This means that the congregation itself is to a greater or lesser extent made up of people who are normally the recipients of diaconal services or who may receive some financial support from diaconia. This approach was described in the first report of the Solidarity Group. (LWF, 2013) The advantage of this approach is that it starts near to everyday life and does not divide people into different categories of need as the way to access diaconal work. People may be 'givers and receivers' and there is built in reciprocity. Such local diaconal initiatives can often combine working with people but also entering into common projects with social movements, non-profit organizations and local government. Political action with and on behalf of different groups can also be integrated into a community-based initiative especially if it is part of a wider network (such as a campaign against cuts in benefits or services).

### *Large Scale Service Providers*

Whilst these are not present in every context, in many places the churches run large welfare organizations and they also face some special challenges at the moment. The funding situations in each country and region may be different. In some cases church health and welfare services are part of a national or regional pattern of provision and it may be that the service is no longer simply financed directly but that, following, for instance, the European Union rules on procurement, the church finds itself in competition with private providers. This transforms the economic base and puts a premium on unit costs. In other cases the church has large non-profit organizations and they have been funded continually also, even if not a part of the state services and they are now also being put into a 'competitive market place'. In some countries, church diaconal organizations are in receipt of grants where the conditions of funding restrict, over time, the level and quality of service. The transformation of welfare states also has an impact in countries where the church has not normally run large welfare institutions and now it is 'invited' to bid to take over sometimes quite large welfare organizations. The question is, whether this is an appropriate role for local churches or whether they end up being compromised as the annual budgets are tightened and reduced.

## Steps Towards a Convivial Economy

### 1. Work and Welfare

#### Working Life

- Reduce the average working week and ensure a living wage and/or create a citizen's income at a realistic level
- Create work contracts which guarantee the wages and conditions if workers
- Treat workers as people and stop the endless competition of one with another

#### Social and Health Care

- Provide access to services as of right and not according to the ability to pay
- Change the rules of procurement to ensure long term quality service in local communities
- Support local people in designing and producing their own services
- Seek cooperation not competition between different social and health care providers

#### Advocacy and Campaigning

- Critique of the role of the state and the way it carries out its duties and responsibilities
- Work with others to make sure the state lives up to its obligations for the common good of all
- Advocate for the state to support church involvement in social work and social action where it doesn't occur

#### Voluntary & Community Action

- Support voluntary action but not as a substitute for quality services (so avoiding so-called 'social dumping')
- Avoid parallelism and duplication of work, e.g. by different NGO's or by church and municipality; Break down barriers between different confessions and faith communities.
- Support innovation based on a long term commitment to people and communities

#### Diakonia

- Work for a change of 'service model' towards an approach which works with people and starts from their strengths and expertise
- Promote diakonia as partner in local communities which is not based (only) on being a service provider but involved in everyday life

## Debt

### We saw:

- how debt changes the life of families, when they may lose everything
- people oppressed by the demand to repay the money they cannot pay back
- the result coming out of the debt crisis: the hunger and suffering of people, the restriction of social work by financial reductions and whole countries led deeper into crisis

*Kyrie Eleison*

### Introduction

Indebtedness has become a central issue in national, European and even global policy. It is one of the main consequences of the financial crisis that started in the United States in 2008, with the collapse of a number of financial institutions. Developments since then have shown how the international financial economy reaches deep into the



everyday life of people and communities. So, in this way the financial crisis has become a social crisis and even a political crisis – a crisis of democracy. Our starting point is at the level of people, families and communities and sharing experience in the Solidarity Group. The visit of the Group in Manchester showed the actual impact of debt in everyday life.

### Context

Families on the margins who have a very insecure and low income may need to borrow money to deal with a life crisis or, for example to replace an oven, which is worn out. It might just be to be some new clothes for children. They may need to borrow money simply because the social security system did not work effectively and in time to give them the resources for everyday life such as food and energy. Food banks have mushroomed in the UK, which is the world's sixth largest economy and churches are at the forefront of this movement. In one network alone there are 500 food banks in England whereas a few years ago they were almost non-existent. (see: [www.trusselltrust.org](http://www.trusselltrust.org)) The Trust reports that the main reasons people have to use a food bank are problems with the benefit payments, low pay and debt, which actually are often inter-related.

For households facing this situation it is very difficult to get an unsecured loan at a reasonable rate of interest. Banks do not find it interesting to lend to people on the margins and therefore the poorest people are forced to buy on credit at very high rates of interest or to borrow from lenders who specialize in small, unsecured loans. Usually the interest rates in these cases are extremely high, some short-term lenders have been known to charge 4,000% interest.

The group visited a neighborhood of Manchester where many who are in debt are living and they could get a small glimpse of everyday life. They visited the local shopping center and could see what was on offer there and how shops were geared to providing items on high cost credit for poor families. The combination of this situation with the fact that poor families have to pay more for their energy (being forced to use pre-payment meters which have a higher tariff) drives people into debt. This extra charge for people living in poverty is called 'the poverty premium'. It is a paradox that the poorer the household, the more they have to pay for the same service than more affluent households.

### Meeting the Challenge

#### *Local Financial Initiatives*

The group met with one of the pioneers of the Manchester Credit Union, which aims to tackle this situation in a practical way through a well-structured local savings and loan organization. Members save small amounts, which earn interest and can then borrow at a reasonable rate of interest. The idea is also to use this as a way to build up trustworthy relationships between people. The credit union has grown from small neighborhood beginnings into an organization active across the region. (See: [www.manchestercreditunion.co.uk](http://www.manchestercreditunion.co.uk)) Local groups, churches and faith communities started the credit union, as they wanted to tackle this problem in a practical way that would also strengthen their local community.

#### *Campaigning*

This is not enough and the second action was to tackle the problem of organised firms who exploited the situation by charging exorbitant interest rates on small loans. This includes so called 'pay-day lenders' who lend small amounts to help people to the next pay day or benefit check and the high interest rates charged by those who provide appliances on rental purchase using slot meters. A double strategy of directly meeting and challenging the owners and managers of the companies and also pressing for new legislation was adopted and this has achieved some successes. For the informal lenders, however, there is no real regulation and quite often violence is involved in debt collecting by these operators. Indebted people often find themselves in a personal debt crisis – they are paying money back but the amount owed goes up every week and this also needs emergency financial support to break the spiral. (Church Action on Poverty, 2013) The campaign achieved some success in persuading companies to change their policies and also for a change in the national regulations governing unsecured loans, which was achieved in 2014. ([www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk)) On top of this there was a commitment by some of the national churches to support the work of credit unions and encourage congregations and parishes to get involved. There are now many credit unions attached to congregations and as a result of the national campaign a national credit union was launched. (see: [www.cmcu.org.uk](http://www.cmcu.org.uk))

### Reflection

On the basis of this visit and the experience of the group members, we could summarize the interlinked nature of debt:

- on the level of people and families in poverty, personal debt traps and a vicious circle of indebtedness, which may result in homelessness
- on the level of the village, community or city where indebtedness of the local government may lead to failing services or collapsing infrastructure
- on the level of the nation, where indebtedness may lead to austerity policies which make the first two issues even more intractable

The context of the visit was a local economy which had collapsed and which was set in a relatively thriving city. It showed how the economic activity in the city had not resulted in the regeneration of the community and many people remained trapped in unemployment or low paid, precarious or casual employment. Meanwhile they are living in a consumer society, which is generating ever more 'desires', which also lead people into debt. In fact because of falling incomes, many people who previously could live without indebtedness now develop debt problems that are exacerbated by the pressure of consumerism and the availability of credit. This growing debt burden amongst people in work – even those in relatively middle class jobs – is a function of the pressure on labor markets driven by the financialisation of the economy.

On the national level – and even the international level – the banking crisis has led to restrictions on social spending and also on social security and income maintenance. More conditions are introduced and there is an increasingly punitive attitude to people in poverty. The reductions in state expenditure aim to reduce state indebtedness and these policies are often accompanied by the privatization of state assets. This produces a short-term gain and on the other hand cuts off a future revenue stream. In the UK, assets that in some cases took over 150 years to build up were sold off at a low price leading to huge gains for the investors.

It is important to recognize that a market economy actually depends on the ability to obtain credit, the opposite of which is debt of course! Debt can be a tool in development for the business sector but it may also have a role in developing the ways out of a vicious circle for a national economy. The present policy of attempting to reduce debt by cutting public investment, social security and taxation for the relatively rich all at the same time has the perverse effect of creating greater poverty, rising inequality and does in most cases not reduce the debt. (Blyth, M., 2015)

In this discussion it is not only important to see the link between indebtedness on different levels but also to notice that debt is not 'one thing'! If a person or household is in debt it may be for the purpose of buying goods or services that eventually lose their value (for example a car) – in the case of a house it may result in asset appreciation and in the case of education perhaps a higher income later on. But when the state goes into debt it buys goods and services which increases economic activity and may lead to more income in the future (in case we think economic growth is a positive achievement!). Simply put, our economic system will not function on the present model, without indebtedness.

### **Steps Towards a Convivial Economy**

#### **2. Debt**

##### **Local Action**

- Support people and communities in situations of marginalization by such actions as debt counseling and organizing systems to prevent eviction of people from their flat or house. (advocacy and campaigning as well as immediate support)
- Support credit unions or other types of self-organised financial structures or ethical banks with low interest, transparency and accessibility

##### **New Local Initiatives**

- Support the creation of local exchange or trading systems and time banks which build up a reciprocal non-financial or mixed economy
- Support local community enterprises which keep money in the local economy as well as such initiatives as local sustainable food production

##### **Work for Political Change**

- Campaign for the more effective regulation of personal savings and loan institutions
- Regulation the banking system so that the banks are a service to local people, communities and enterprises and the speculative activities are restricted; support legislation which creates a just framework for personal saving and loan institutions
- Create a new code for national borrowing which focuses on the needs of local communities and not on either glamour projects or projects developed mainly in the interests of political decision makers
- Campaign for the tighter regulation of the international and speculative activities of banks and financial institutions such as hedge funds

### **Migration**

#### **We saw:**

- radicalism acting against the presence of asylum seekers
- the exclusion of black and minority ethnic minority groups
- prejudice in ourselves, as we looked to the 'foreigner'

### **Introduction**

The issue of migration is not new to Europe, neither is the experience of groups with different backgrounds living together in the same cities and regions. What has changed the situation is the different context of migration in the light of globalisation. Furthermore, the different conflicts in Europe and other world regions and the environmental challenges have put great pressure on people to move as migrants or forcing them to move as refugees.

Another aspect is the fact that within Europe the possibility for visa free travel and the mobility of people seeking work has meant that more people are on the move. This is especially so concerning the citizens of countries that were formally centrally planned economies. People are on the move for many different reasons, positive and negative and this theme is very important for all European countries and institutions. The mobility of people who are EU citizens within the EU is a right established in law, just as is the right for the free market in goods, services and the mobility of finance is guaranteed. As well as that, anyone with the right to enter one of the countries that is part of the so-called Schengen Treaty can also freely move to another member country.

These various dimensions of migration, mobility and being an asylum seeker or refugee have meant that local communities, towns and cities are becoming more diverse. Members of the solidarity group with experience of working in communities with very diverse populations brought together their direct experience and different church positions on this.

Whilst in Manchester the group visited the Boaz Trust, which is a Christian organization dedicated to working with asylum seekers in Greater Manchester. The Trust provides accommodation, as well as food and other essentials, to those who are unable to access support from anywhere else. It also provides advocacy and pastoral support, and campaigns on a local and national level for justice in asylum legislation. Their most challenging work is with people whose claim for refugee status has been refused. In a year they can deal with up to 100 new people who maybe need basic supplies for everyday life, accommodation, some social activity and most often support with continuing the claim for asylum in the country. Boaz is a small organization but is embedded in a network of active volunteers, churches and other supportive organizations. Boaz was founded by one person, who realized the Christian imperative is to support marginalized people, especially those who arrive in the country as refugees and have little support. Organizations like Boaz are especially important for those who have few immediate possibilities, especially if their claim for refugee status has been rejected.

### Context

From the experience of local work and indeed from their own life experience, members of the group shared the burning issues, which need to be addressed.

First, of course is the need to understand **the complexity of migration** background and the different legislative frameworks that govern the process. For countries that are members of the European Union, their citizens have right to free movement and this has gradually given people from the so-called new member states the right to move and to live and work in any other member state. This may seem to be uncontroversial but has led to very diverse outcomes. The most obvious one is that younger people or

highly skilled people move to the northern and western countries in search of work or work and education. Another group are recruited or freely move to take up jobs in mid-life, which are open to them. For example a bus company in the UK recruits drivers from Poland and has even established a drivers' school there. On the other hand there are many who come to the western countries organised by so-called gang masters to do very low paid or seasonal jobs and often the living and working conditions are extremely exploitative. We should, however, also take into account the fact that when large numbers of adults move and their families are left behind there may be serious problems for the communities of the 'left behind'. This can lead, for example to the grandparent generation being responsible for day to day care for the children, to a lack of qualified people on the spot to do work which is available and also to a disruption of normal family roles. For example Serbia, which is not yet a member of the European Union, already experiences a loss of 35,000 people per year to migration and 20% of this number are highly educated workers. There is a consequent 'brain drain' effect as well as the previously mentioned splitting of families. This situation is compounded by two further problems: migrants are often returned to Serbia when their right to work permit ends and the total number could reach 100,000 in the next ten years. On top of that, Serbia is a transit country for refugees fleeing from the Middle East and as they transit the country they are placed in emergency camps, which are now in place. Looking at the issue from another viewpoint, Northern European countries are demographically aging and immigration is important to replace the older labor force, which is retiring. Finland, for example takes more than 30,000 new workers per year to fill this gap! (The net figure is lower because of course some Finns emigrate as well – see: [www.finland.fi/facts-stats-and-info/how-about-getting-a-job-in-finland/](http://www.finland.fi/facts-stats-and-info/how-about-getting-a-job-in-finland/))

A further dimension of migration and mobility is the possibility for Roma people to migrate and this has led to a growing Roma diaspora in Europe and the need to work with people on the move who are outside the regular labor market.

### Reception and Integration

The experiences of migrant labor and of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe are therefore very diverse and diakonia has to be aware of the various nuances. For example diakonia in one Swedish parish, represented in the Solidarity Group, has been focused on the issue of work with refugees and immigrants for over 20 years. Over these years the groups arriving have been from different backgrounds arriving for diverse reasons. For example, refugees from Somalia, later from Afghanistan, later still Iraq and Syria but also people migrating to find work from inside the European Union or from third countries. Very often social and diaconal workers get into difficulties because they do not differentiate between the needs and priorities of these different groups. Furthermore, in the Solidarity Group there is a growing experience that immigrant/migrant and refugee groups are forming their own self organised or informal groups, or groups related to a specific religious community. This may provide some security and a feeling of being at home in an environment that may be hostile. The so-called host community is also challenged because if we speak about integration it means change for them too! In the solidarity group we have distinguished between integration and assimilation – the latter assuming the immigrants and refugees should assimilate themselves to local culture, which is a more or less impossible goal. Integration is therefore a challenge and the working concept of conviviality provides a positive vision for creating contexts where people can live together without becoming

separated or even segregated. In some situations where there is segregation, the host community can form hate pictures, which motivate anger and even violence against immigrants and refugees. On the other hand some younger generation immigrants are becoming radicalized especially, but not only, as a result of the severe conflicts and wars in the Middle East.

Putting together the experience of the group and of the Boaz Trust in Manchester, we notice that for refugees and asylum seekers there are particular problems related to the various legislative frameworks that govern their lives. This is even more acute for people who have been refused refugee status and are awaiting appeal outcomes or whose route for appeal is closed. The kinds of services and support needed have to be appropriate to their situation. As well as marginalization and unemployment (they may be prevented from working by law), they often have to deal with the results of traumatic experiences of war or during their flight. There are inadequate services for this escalating situation and it presents new challenges for the churches to collaborate in providing health and social services as well as support groups for people who basically are sometimes living 'outside the law'. Nevertheless, it has to be remembered that concerning the present refugee situation in northern Europe, conditions are good compared to the situation facing displaced people in the Middle East or Africa.

### Reflection

Honest reflection in the group revealed how difficult it is to deal with prejudices and racism. There is good will to work to build relationships and a sense of belonging and to cross the boundaries. Some members had their own experience of migration, being forced to move or of being in exile but in every case, even among those whose everyday work is in this field, there is a recognition that the 'borders run through everybody'. This understanding demands a constant fight with the feelings inherited from the majority community – the feeling of call to engagement and the desire to show respect require a daily struggle with prejudice and weakness. This was picked up in the discussion about strategies, but is mentioned here as a witness to the complexity of the situation where the worker and sometimes the church or congregation is between different worlds.

## Steps Towards a Convivial Economy

### 3. Migration

#### Church & Diakonia

- Create meeting places and open spaces where relationships can develop; it is important that the places are secure and trust can be built. Discretion and confidentiality are very important
- Cooperate with migrant/immigrant led churches and faith communities
- Do not assume that the church or congregation can always be the 'center' of the action! It may be important to go into 'another space' or a public space like a café or restaurant.

#### Practice

- From the perspective of conviviality diversity is a treasure not a threat, an opportunity to
  - Learn from each other
  - Fight exclusion promote inclusion
  - Overcome boundaries, stigma & prejudice
- Don't take the easy route of telling others how they should behave! Be a role model yourself.
- Support volunteers and activists working with immigrants and refugees as well as those without papers and emphasize the positive
- Provide very practical support including food, clothing, accommodation, language training and support for finding employment in a non-patronizing and reciprocal atmosphere.

#### Organization

- Work with and support self-organizations of migrants and refugees
- Mobilize professionals to work pro bono (lawyers, health care professionals etc.)
- Support 'acts of citizenship' whereby those who are not citizens act as if they were citizens, so expanding the scope of their rights. (Isin, 2013, Addy, 2016)

#### Advocacy and Campaigning

- Campaign to lower the barriers for asylum seekers and migrants so that they have easier entrance and full human rights, including employment and social rights
- Campaign for family rights and reunification

#### Countries of 'Origin'

- Have practical concern for the children and families left behind at home and the communities where many have already left

## Corruption and Transparency

### We saw:

- victims whose lives are so involved in the 'corruption system' that they cannot step out.
- that corruption leads to threatening life itself, for example by blocking medical care to needy people
- corruption of decision makers is eating up financial resources that are needed to build good lives and convivial communities

## Introduction

When the Solidarity Group was deciding on the key themes for the work we wanted to do on the economy, it was very clear that an important priority to focus on is corruption. In some contexts it is a part of everyday life and affects both public and private organizations. This is linked in practice to the question of the 'transparency' of political decision-making and accountability. The reason for the connection is clear – in a corrupt situation, political decision makers may be manipulated and financed by part of what we could call the 'corruption system'. The questions of small-scale local corruption and wider systemic corruption are interlinked. If low-level officials engage individually or in small groups in small-scale corruption, it very often operates in contexts where there is major or systemic corruption, which forms a tacit normative environment (everybody does it). In the work of the group, adequate testimony was given to the concrete impacts of corruption in local communities. It was pointed out that even local churches might become part of a chain of corruption, where resources meant for the public good or the good of the church community are diverted to individual gain. These are the fields that the group working on corruption and transparency explored. The evidence points to the fact that corruption also is a major factor in creating a lack of trust in society and in the economy. This not only imposes extra (hidden) costs on transactions it not only produces a society that is less equal and less healthy, it is a block on conviviality.

Normally discussions about corruption divide into two main streams: the one that focuses on the individual agent and the other that focuses on the fact the whole structure or system is corrupt and tacitly supports corrupt behavior. In fact corruption is also both structural (it may be embedded) and relational – depending on differential power. It is very important to focus on this important issue, which by destroying trust, also prevents the emergence of conviviality and a convivial economy! By linking it to the reformation anniversary, we remember that it was an issue that was very much in Martin Luther's mind, concerning the operation of church and business, especially finance – and even in organizing support for poor people in his day! (Szynka, 2016)

## Context

The first context to consider is that of the members of the Solidarity Group who were exploring this issue. The majority was from Russia and the formerly centrally planned economies. In many of these countries corruption is endemic and it affects many aspects of everyday life. If you want to get health care, maybe you have to pay a premium directly to the doctor or if you need documentation to buy a house maybe the local government officer 'needs' an extra payment. These kinds of situation occur in many situations and it means vital services are only available for those who can, or those who are willing, to pay. But it is important to notice that corruption can be an issue in any context and not to relate it just to one specific group of countries. What is more accurate to focus on, is the fact that corruption tends to be more of an issue in countries with a large and growing gap between rich and poor (in terms of both income and wealth). It is also an issue where one party has more or less monopoly power and especially if civil society is not well developed to perform a 'watchdog' role. Furthermore, one of the most important correlations is between the level of trust in a society and the prevalence of corruption. This can be determined from the annual corruption perception index produced by Transparency International (See: [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org))



This should not blind us to the fact that in almost every context, corruption is an issue. The connections between the worlds of business & finance and government at local, regional and national levels can facilitate deals that are organised so that specific business interests or individual enterprises benefit. It can be via a change in policy or the law to benefit an interest where considerations discussed in private, or through lobbying, privilege private interests over the common good. There are also instances of corruption in contracts even in countries with relatively high standing in the Transparency International index. On the local level, individuals and groups can benefit from such corrupt decisions, for instance by finding work, even though the larger benefits from a contract accrue to decision makers and related entrepreneurs. Furthermore, corruption causes extra costs for the whole system, which affects everyone, so whilst single enterprises or persons may gain the common good suffers and especially poor and marginalized people and communities are the 'losers'.

The group in the Manchester workshop visited Salford, the adjoining city, which has areas of deep and long standing poverty and social exclusion. Historically the city council has had an overwhelming majority of representatives from one party and this led to local level instances of corruption and a lack of transparency. After a long process of campaigning, the city council culture was changed and a new understanding of the need for participation has developed. The key to this is an active civil society and the project the group visited is specifically geared to enabling local residents to have the tools to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and to organize their own activities in their own interests. One of the main initiatives has been to develop 'schools of participation' for particular groups who are normally excluded from decision-making, including those with long-term mental health problems, people with disabilities and ex-offenders. The last group is now established as the project 'Positive Changes'. The project also works with local residents' groups, enabling people to make a difference and to press for change. Another related project is 'The Salford Apprentice' which supports local community members who are leaders, or want to be leaders of community organizations. The latest initiative is a so-called the 'Salford poverty truth commission' that is supported by the churches and the city council and it aims to give voice to people living in poverty in an affluent city and society. (See: [www.salfordpovertytruth.wordpress.com](http://www.salfordpovertytruth.wordpress.com)) CAP has been involved in several previous poverty truth commissions and this is a way in which churches and faith communities, with civil society can influence local and national policy and call for transparency in decision-making.

### Reflection

Corruption is a factor in personal life and in the life of organizations – even of the churches. When we reflected on it we realized that in the Biblical witness there is evidence of corruption which seen as a sign of rebellion against God. The Hebrew Bible contains many warnings against corruption in all the three main traditions (priestly, prophetic and wisdom). The most frequent attacks and commentaries are to be found in the prophetic tradition and in the wisdom literature. (Tamez, 2014) One of the central issues that is confronted in the prophetic literature is the corruption amongst the rulers and the rich people of the day. The corruption even spread into the prophetic

movement, in so far as some prophets were paid by the rich. The main argument of the prophets was that the leaders, those with power or influence pursued their own interests and broke the laws in order to obtain benefits for themselves. The desire for

The leaders give verdicts for presents, the priests take a fee for their rulings, the prophets divine for money and yet they rely on the Lord! 'Isn't the Lord among us?' they say, 'No disaster will overtake us'. Micah Ch3 v11

money often is seen to lead to corruption and the people who suffer are those living in poverty. The rebuke is very

sharp and includes lying, deception, bribery and a lack of integrity. In every day life the scales are fixed and in legal processes the judges accept bribes. In fact there is a corrupt network, which supports this behavior. The prophets claim this not only to be unjust and illegal but also to be against the cause of people in poverty and to call forth the judgment of God.

The prophets, in their context expected a change in the situation – repentance and renewal – and they presented the challenge in very graphic terms, anticipating the fall of the nation if there was no change among the leaders. In another context, that of the wisdom literature, there was no expectation of an immediate change but the writer of

If in a province the poor are oppressed, fair judgement and justice are violated, do not be surprised, because over every official there watches a higher official, and over these, higher officials still....The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity. Eccl. 5, 8&10

Ecclesiastes recognised the absurdity of a world where values had been turned upside down. In this situation of 'work and wait'

there was still a sharp understanding of the network of corruption that causes oppression. The writer of Ecclesiastes pleads for caution and recognizes that the powerful have 'spies everywhere'. He advises that people should not work in isolation to confront this as it is dangerous. Conversely, he advises that even in the present tough situation life should also have moments of enjoyment! The situation depicted is that of an unknown future and a context where it is not a good idea to plead for the return to some past golden age. It sounds rather prudent, conservative even, but it is not quiescent and the writers look to a better future. They have a sharp eye to the web of corruption, which has been constructed around them and its consequences, and look for a time when, thanks to the grace of God there will be change.

On the basis of these reflections we can return to the analysis of corruption in the present situation and recognize that very often we are invited to think of it just as the unjust or non-transparent behavior of one person. What both the prophetic literature and the wisdom literature point out is that although there may be corrupt individuals, usually they are embedded in a system or web of corruption, which supports and legitimizes corrupt behavior as in everyone's interest. Nevertheless the prophets were seeking for changes in personal behavior, but especially among the leaders of their day.

In the New Testament, Paul points out that the problem is even deeper, calling this systemic power 'sin' which encourages human greed. (Tamez, 2014) Paul gives a whole catalogue of the greed and rotten behavior, which he characterizes as sin. It is clear that sin is pervasive; it is not just a question of an individual wrongdoing. The 'law' makes the reality of sin visible and is a bulwark against sin. But it is not enough! The reason is linked to motivation – simply following the law does not depend on our own decision except to try to follow the law and it does not necessarily change consciousness. More than the fact that people try to evade the law, there is the fact that people so often don't

do what they want to do but what they theoretically hate. Hence Paul insists on the primacy of grace – the grace of God and living by common grace. This points to the need to change from the following of law to the letter to living according to a different logic, which actually transforms the law in the service of life. It points to the fact that without this change, the propensity to greed and injustice is ever present in the logic of the human condition.

If we look at this situation through the lens of the Reformation Anniversary, we can see that Martin Luther and the reformers were living at a time when the logic of the

First – The merchants have among themselves one common rule, which is their chief maxim and the basis of all their sharp practices. They say: I may sell my goods as dear as I can. This they think their right. Lo, that is giving place to avarice and opening every door and window to hell. What does it mean? Only this: 'I care nothing about my neighbor; so long as I have my profit and satisfy my greed, what affair is it of mine if it does my neighbor ten injuries at once?' There you see how shamelessly this maxim flies squarely in the face not only of Christian love, but of natural law.  
Martin Luther, 'On Trading and Usury' 1524

developing market was leading to corruption on a grand scale. Luther identified the corruption of merchants in price fixing, in trading in futures and the growth of

debt. He also challenged the way in which the church had become part of the market system, selling of the forgiveness of sins (indulgences) and through other economic practices. In this context he advises sharing and lending and for buying and selling a market in cash or kind. He is very suspicious of the financial system and indebtedness, critical of financial speculation and trade and also of international trade. Luther can be criticized from the perspective of living in a pre-capitalist economy and working within a mercantilist framework. Nevertheless he points us to the dangers inherent in such a system, which are magnified in the present globalized and financially driven global economy, where the scope for corruption is even greater. Indeed the logic of the present system produces limitless greed and a situation where corruption permeates our institutional life, everyday life and even personal relationships.

## Steps Towards a Convivial Economy

### 4. Corruption and Transparency

#### Awareness Raising

- The first step in working in this issue is to recognize the presence of corruption in every context and to evaluate and name our involvement collectively and personally in corrupt systems
- The second step is Biblical and theological reflection on the pervasiveness of corruption and what is required of Christians because corruption destroys trust and prevents conviviality

#### Support and Diaconal Practice

- Counseling and support of people who are victims of corruption or who want to resist it
- To name and resist authorities who abuse their power for their own benefit and against the common good
- Working with civil society to press for transparent decision-making and the participation of people in the decisions that affect their life and their community/locality
- To provide training and support for people who want to challenge closed decision making and to press for participatory structures and processes

#### Campaigning

- To find partners and work against corrupt systems and for transparency and participation in decision making

## Creation and the Environment

### We saw:

- the increasing pollution, which destroys the quality of life and the fruitfulness of the earth
- the slow development of the awareness of the integrity of creation
- how easily we forget that we are included in Gods creation

### Introduction

The link between ecology and economy is clear, because economic activity usually involves the use and transformation of natural resources starting with the food we eat. It is also clear that the environment is a key factor affecting the quality of life in cities and villages. On top of this, many people are affected by the changes in their working environment, due to changes in technology and the use of more hazardous substances. Members of the solidarity group brought diverse experiences to the topic ranging from personal engagement in ecological gardening and the production of food in local communities to a commitment to political action for climate justice. The group was enriched by having one young person from India, involved in the LWF young reformers' network commitment to climate justice. Another participant was a pastor working in a regional context where there are many ecological problems stemming from the former centrally planned economy and the transformation processes. These personal commitments formed the background to the work of the group.

### Context

The Solidarity Group met in Manchester, which was one of the first cities in the world to be industrialized. In fact it was the heart of the global textile industry in the nineteenth century and therefore has experienced all the environmentally damaging affects of the industrial system. The Manchester region was rich in coal and the power for the factory system and the domestic heating and power was largely derived from coal burning. On top if this, there was a large metal producing and chemical industry all of which produced toxic effects in the atmosphere and on the ground. Since the rapid deindustrialization of the city, millions of pounds has been spent on cleaning up the environment, but the impact on life and health over generations cannot be undone.

Walking through one of the former industrial areas that were constructed in the nineteenth century, the members of the Solidarity Group saw how housing was built around the factories and to see the dereliction caused by deindustrialization was an experience that left many impressions. The poor quality of the housing, including even some of the newer housing was tangible. The general neglect of the common open spaces led to people having no respect for the area in which they live. On the other hand, visiting the People's History Museum revealed the rich history of associational life, by which people aimed to improve the quality of life and create a better environment. The pride that formed the culture of these movements has somehow been lost. On the other hand the state has invested a large amount of money in infrastructure and also in new housing. The infrastructure spending supports sport (a new stadium and a velodrome), leisure and shopping and the costs of using these facilities are beyond people on low income. Much of the housing is also priced at levels out of reach of the lower income community members. To some it looked like a kind of

re-colonization of the city. On the other hand the investment in public transport was seen as a positive aspect. Manchester is a city that has generated great wealth but the population of the 'left behind' are not benefitting from this.

One point that is clear is that the industrial economy in Europe, under different government regimes, created huge environmental problems that are still being worked on at different speeds. We can see that the immediate impacts of industrial society have disappeared in many ways but of course, production still goes on in other parts of the world, where local workers and populations pay the price once more. It is even more dangerous now because as a consumer you are far away from the hazards of production.

The ubiquitous electronics and communication systems rely on minerals, which are hazardous to mine and on production systems, which are dangerous for health. On the other hand new damaging environmental problems are becoming more serious such as exhaust emissions from cars and the emissions from power stations depending on carbon fuels. The air may look cleaner – there is no longer industrial smog – but it contains dangerous particles and carries a growing threat from the changing balance of gases, such as the growing concentration of carbon emissions. This is linked to long-term effects such as climate change, which has an impact on many communities, on food production and on survival.

### **Reflection**

In reflecting on the experiences of Manchester and the background experiences of members of the Solidarity Group, we decided look at the issues through a consideration of the difference a 'convivial economy' would make to the environment, on the basis of group member's experience. Another starting point was the assertion of the process towards the Reformation anniversary, 'Creation is not for Sale', which focuses on creation care and the understanding that human beings should not plunder the earth and that its rich resources should not be exploited for profit, especially when they are the basis of well-being (for example water). (Burghardt, ed., 2015). These perspectives encouraged reflection and analysis to evaluate how far the present economy supports conviviality and how far it undermines our ability to live together without destroying nature, in peace and with justice.

In the visit to Manchester and in discussions among participants, the question of environmental degradation, the over-exploitation of nature and the impact of industrial society, with growing inequality and food poverty have on life together and on human dignity was an important theme. The treatment of creation is reflected in the way people treat each other. The trends are not auspicious and when we factor in the larger scale changes – for example climate change. The use of invasive techniques to extract ever more oil and gas demands a profound change. Some resources should be 'left in the ground' as a means to slow down the growth of the carbon economy! Peaceful and equitable co-existence is being threatened already by climate change, which leads to drought or flooding and is behind regional wars and the displacement of whole communities.

The driver of this accelerating process is the dominant finance driven, globalized economy, which feeds off the increasing consumer desires of people, especially in the global north. In our group we could examine the consequences in different contexts and we could see that

there is still scope for the European nations to set different frameworks which constrain the economy and which support the change away from a carbon economy, to take one key issue. Therefore we should not be totally pessimistic, but the overall context demands a fundamental change. The dominant paradigm is built on belief in the beneficial effects of economic growth (usually measured by GDP growth) and therefore on growing consumer markets and private provision of services. Yet growth is leading us further into the spiral of irreversible environmental change due to pollution, the exhaustion of natural resources and climate change.

From the point of view of the Solidarity Group, we have to think out a new approach to economy and create a positive vision of the 'good life for all' to supplant the present vision of good life through consumption. Or to put it another way, to restore the primacy of being over having. (Illich, 1973) We should foster the re-examination of our relationship to each other and to nature and this is exactly what the concept of conviviality invites us to do. Moreover it gives a direction to the way we should do it. The working group extended the concept of conviviality from 'the art and practice of living together' to include the way we live with creation. This means we can start locally with a dialogical process and innovation, but also that we cannot neglect the political framework and the need for political action.

In seeking conviviality, we are in the process of developing new forms of practical, peaceful and political interaction with people across diverse boundaries. One of the central contributions the Christian faith and the churches can make is to be peacemakers on the micro level and beyond. In the Solidarity Group but also discussed whether we could envisage making 'peace with nature'. In the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament it is surprising how often the well being of people is linked to the fruitfulness of the land. If the exploitation of people and the over exploitation of the land is prevented, people and nature flourish. The vision of the future realm of God is moreover, imagined as a city – a New Jerusalem, a city of peace with justice. So we are not just thinking of rural contexts but also of life in the city.

If we start with this understanding of conviviality, it is clear that we have to think about how to work on our self understanding as well as the concrete issues and challenges from the bottom up, from our own context. There is no ready-made blueprint - and the history of ready-made blueprints in Europe, in any case causes some skepticism. But we do need a vision or what we could call a 'utopia', which acts as a provisional guide to a process of change. On the local level church communities have the possibility of becoming directly involved with many other religious communities and secular associations in building up a web of concrete local initiatives and at the same time joining and promoting a societal debate about the basic economic paradigm. There are many signs of such possibilities and initiatives in which churches are often involved, so this does not mean starting from a 'blank sheet'. The process we are envisaging will also deal with the change of self-understanding, which the gospel implies, of implementing an economy based on grace rather than merit and on convivial relationships rather than competition.

The economy based on growth and accumulation, therefore of growing inequality seems to be reaching its environmental limits but people have put their hopes in continued growth – hoping for a 'better' future in material terms. This has become a proxy for a fulfilled life. We now can see the beginnings of what happens when limits are reached and when high growth rates also seem to elude the so-called advanced economies. As wages stagnate or reduce, so that basic needs are not covered and unemployment especially among young people is at

record high levels, there is a space to ask, what constitutes the good life and to see the value of conviviality as an end in itself. The alternative seems to be growing conflict in society and the tendency to blame 'others' for the problems, so fuelling racism and xenophobia.

So much of the construction of our societies especially in Europe and the global north depends on the existing culture of accumulation and growth that we need to change our understanding of the place of work and employment as well as of how to organize social security and income. Above all we have to question our basic ideas of a fulfilled life based on consumer desires. Furthermore, a limit on the ability to amass limitless income and wealth coupled with a minimum income would also create a society which would foster coexistence through resource sharing rather than producing marginalization and poverty amidst affluence. For example the much discussed idea of reducing working time and introducing a citizen's income would, as already mentioned, free more time for associational life (civil society) and for social innovation whilst being less resource intensive. This would be a contribution to conviviality and to the renewal of democracy. (Bregman, 2016, Diefenbacher et.al., 2016)

According to the members of the Solidarity Group, the churches and diakonia have a real possibility to contribute to the development of local practices that will be an essential part of making the transition to a different, low carbon economy and to a more responsible use of limited natural resources. Whilst money is still being invested in large amounts in non-conventional oil and gas exploration and so sustaining the power generating and distribution complex in profit, the power of community based energy projects and multiple personal decisions is already leading to a growth in locally distributed energy systems. These range from rural bio-energy projects to solar projects using accessible technology. The locally grounded movement of Transition Towns, which now networks more than 1000 projects across the continents from a small base in rural southwest England, is one such movement, which has grown rapidly in a few years. (see: [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org) and Hopkins, 2011) It would be easy to imagine a development of such initiatives from congregations and local diakonia. Already there is experience of the eco-congregation movement and there has been a lot of work done on linking local economic development and indicators of well-being by church based researchers. (see: [www.fest-heidelberg.de](http://www.fest-heidelberg.de) & Diefenbacher & Zieschank, 2011) Seeking a Convivial Economy would build on such initiatives with initiatives based on dialogue and conversation across the many local interest and identity groups in localities. To work to create strong local economies would also create neighborhoods and villages where people were no longer strangers to each other, but would be interrelated and build trust and interdependence. (Northcott, M. S., 2014)

## **Steps Towards a Convivial Economy**

### **5. Creation and the Environment**

#### **Personal Challenge**

- Recognizing that change is needed but that there is a cost personally! If we want to change something we have to be prepared to lose something! We cannot say we want to fight consumerism and go on with mainstream consumer habits. A core change is needed to support living together without acquisitiveness
- Develop reflection and analysis of the dominant paradigm based on continuous economic growth, rising inequality, growing exclusion and the over exploitation of nature and natural resources. From a reflected Christian perspective, share with others who are critical of the growth based paradigm to develop new visions of the future sustainable economy

#### **Concrete Local Actions for Diaconia**

- Supporting local sustainable food production
- Creating Local financial institutions (banking, currency, skill exchange...)
- Work with all churches and faith communities as well as civil society for local sustainable economies on the model of (for example) Transition Towns.
- Work with civil society on creating local indicators for well being and using them as a tool for policy change

#### **Political and Structural Change**

- Reverse the privatization of 'the commons' – water, energy etc.
- Work to change the paradigm of development towards a model of convivial development
- Campaign and advocate for a reduction of inequality by creating a minimum floor and a maximum limit for income



## 4. Resources for Change

We often are concerned about the resources we need to address the situations of marginalization and injustice, both in terms of direct working with people affected and also in lobbying, advocacy and campaigning for change. Facing this we noticed in our sharing that the most important resource we have is ourselves and the colleagues and congregations we work with. On the other hand we also want to affirm our understanding that the people themselves (who are often termed 'beneficiaries' – a word which tends to keep them in their place!) also possess resources and are a resource for change. In this section we want to summarize and present some resources that we found in our group. We have no doubt they can be found more widely and can be encouraged and built up.

From the diaconal perspective, we see people and communities suffering and we are motivated by their presence and by our faith to act with them. Very often we find that others also share this motivation. Sometimes we can identify that, as diaconal workers, we have more resources of time or more training which is an important contribution. But we should not allow this to mask the fact that people who may have few material resources and whose time is consumed with survival also have their own motivation and even their own faith as well as other assets. One key aim of diakonia should be to build up the strengths of people who are marginalized and to see them as key actors for care and sustainable change.

From our faith perspective, we understand that persons are 'relational' and not formed as isolated self-sufficient individuals. Whilst each person has their own identity and dignity as created in the image of God, they develop this personhood in relation to other people and their environment. Similarly we see the people with whom we work diaconally as also shaped by their relationships and their environment. They also have their own inherent dignity, experience and capacity to act as subjects in their own life. The implication of this insight is that the view of the person as an individualized consumer and isolated decision maker does not correspond to reality and should be replaced in our practice with a view of the person as relational. This provides one key assumption in our work for seeking conviviality. In our work with people and in the development of diaconal action, reflection on experience gives us, and those with whom we work, a valuable resource for future praxis. Furthermore, as members of local Christian communities, we have a sense of belonging, which leads us to be critical of the divided and divisive economic and politics of neo-liberalism. This leads to practical and political action based on a concern for the wider community and a searching for the realm of God.

As we see the situation in the local contexts across Europe, where members of the Solidarity Group are serving we see that people are searching for recognition, for conviviality, which we express as the art and practice of living together. We see the link between the concept of conviviality and the more traditional concept of Shalom, the combination of our understanding of peace with justice. We see conviviality in part as a gift and in part as a vision that guides the work of diakonia, especially local diakonia. It is a concept that has relevance for personal life and service, for the church and for schools, workplaces and municipalities. There is work to be done to transfer the learning about this concept in practice to government and other organizations, even

including the churches.

Conviviality begins with presence and trust, transparency and participation. Diakonia based on conviviality supports a service model based in a dialogical approach to change, which opens us all to change! An open space where trust is developed enables the sharing of biography, not simply as a strategy to gain resources (which is often a characteristic of conversations in diaconal organizations) but as an entry point to sharing visions, hopes and capabilities which can be part of working for change. Instead of working with or for people as recipients, diakonia based on conviviality sees people as resources in a change process. It leads to the question of 'vocation', which is a challenge for everyone, diaconal worker or the person normally seen as a client or beneficiary. In fact it starts a process of personal and group change, which also often leads to social action and political change locally or in wider society. (Addy, 2011)

On the neighborhood level it has everyday practical implications. If there are tensions between groups, for example older residents and young people or groups with a different identity or culture, the convivial approach invites the people to dialogue, which is different from the conventional distancing approach of referring problems to the Police or other outside agencies. The convivial approach is a way of relating to people across the different diversities and borders we find in localities nowadays.

This approach demands a new attitude from professional diaconal workers and a reconfiguration of the space of diakonia. As one participant put it 'we should create spaces for healing for those who feel unrecognized, for those involved in conflicts – we should be welcoming without conditions but without idealization. Diakonia should deal with the real issues in personal and community life with open communication. This approach can be valuable in all situations including situations of violence and open conflict.

These basic ideas and the resources they embody are critical to developing diaconal action in support of a convivial economy, but finally we should also remember that there are obstacles to such an agenda for change. The obstacles are not only in the dominant ideology and in the media and propaganda which supports the present globalizing economy, blames people for their poverty and promotes nationalism and xenophobia. The obstacles are in all of us insofar as we are affected by the predominant individualistic acquisitive culture. Therefore the search for conviviality and the search for a convivial economy will involve all of us in changes and open us to new challenges to our way of life and the ways we have become accustomed to in being church and diakonia.

## **ANNEX**

### **1. LWF Process**

Creation, People, Salvation are not for sale!

European Process

The European Solidarity Group – Seeking Conviviality (members list)

### **2. The Manchester Consultation**

Introduction, Themes, Process (one page)

Follow Up

At the end of the Manchester consultation the members discussed the possible follow up actions, relevant to different regions of Europe and to thematic interests. Here we present a check-list of ideas and proposals:

Advocacy and the Promotion of Conviviality

Create 3 booklets:

Conviviality

Convivial Economy

Convivial Theology

Small leaflet on the whole concept and process

Take action on the national level in each country to share ideas

Diffusion of the documents Seeking Conviviality and Seeking a Convivial Economy

Translation of Conviviality into Practice

Develop tools and training approaches, which embody conviviality (interdiac)

Study Programmes and seminars, locally, nationally and in nearby countries

Workshops on Conviviality and Convivial Economy for diaconal workers

Networking and Exchanges

International Collaboration

Influence discussions of diakonia and the role of the church in society

Development of the Vision

Continue the process of developing the implications of conviviality

Solidarity

Support each other – especially those in difficult situations like Ukraine

etc



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