LEADING THE WAY

LESSONS FOR LABOUR FROM EUROPE

EDITED BY:
IGGY WOOD AND ANIA SKRZYPEK

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FABIAN SOCIETY

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Introduction

by Andrew Harrop and Iggy Wood

The Conservative party's grip on power has been fatally undermined by economic mismanagement, personal impropriety and a political lurch to the right. And with the 2024 election slowly creeping into view, a revitalised Labour party under Keir Starmer looks set to register its first victory in nearly two decades.

There is no room for complacency. But the deep gulf opening up between the public and the Tory party offers Labour not only the chance of victory in 2024, but the tantalising prospect of more than one term of office. To seize this opportunity, Starmer's team need to think concretely about how they plan to improve people's lives over five, 10, and 15 years.

The last Labour victory was won under the leadership of Tony Blair. After leaving office, he summed up his experience of government: "You start at your most popular and least capable, and you end at your most capable and least popular."

To avoid falling into this trap, incoming Labour ministers would be wise to look beyond the UK for examples of progressive policy that have already worked. Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, has promised to emulate the successes of the Biden administration in the US. But we should also look to our more immediate neighbours: in many places across Europe, socialists and social democrats never stopped winning, and have been exploring innovative solutions to the challenges a Labour government will need to address from Westminster.

The Fabian Society and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) asked politicians and activists from across Europe for words of advice for UK Labour. The responses bring together insights from as far afield as Galați in eastern Romania and as close to home as the Labour government in Wales. Much of what Labour can learn aligns with its current policy priorities, including devolution, environmental sustainability and social housebuilding.

The policy programmes described are frequently world-leading. Take, for example, Michaela Kauer's explanation of the housing policy of Vienna. There, a rights-based approach to housing combines a century-long tradition of municipal homes, robust tenant protections and financing for new development and low carbon renovation.

A number of contributions focus on investing in young people and future generations. The former Welsh minister Jane Davidson tells the story of the pioneering Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the difference it has made to decision-making in Wales. Jernej Pikalo, former deputy prime minister of Slovenia, makes an inspiring call for European societies to reimagine education as a tool to close inequalities and bring national societies together. Emma Fastesson Lindgren presents two of Sweden's most effective and enduring interventions in children's lives – its world-leading parental leave policies and universal free school meals.

There are also reminders that EU social policy has not stood still since the UK's decision to leave. Anne van Lanker explains how the EU's 'social pillar' is coming to life to support member states to deliver stronger, deeper social protection. Important EU directives after the Brexit vote have created frameworks for improving gig economy jobs, raising minimum wages and extending the scope of collective bargaining. The Portuguese MEP Isabel Carvalhais describes how the EU has worked with national governments to apply a 'rural lens' to all policies and programmes, an important message for a Labour party seeking to reach out to the British countryside.

Rebuilding the UK economy after more than a decade of stagnation will not be possible without fixing our national infrastructure. Jens Zimmermann, a German MP, explains how the SPD-led federal government is harnessing the power of digital technology to better serve the needs of its citizens. Lucian Andrei from Romania makes the case for investing in high-quality public transport and explores the link between green investment, social equity and workers' rights.

Finally, there is a call to do politics differently. Beata Moskal-Słaniewska from Poland shows how city mayors can be open, accessible and accountable to citizens in the digital age. Nina Abrahamczik describes how Vienna has invested in participative democracy to make decisions with citizens, including by working with young people and migrants without the right to vote.

Sadly, Labour in Westminster has little recent experience of government. Understanding how progressive policies have played out on the ground in comparable countries can serve as a cheat-sheet to help prepare for power. International examples can help Keir Starmer and his team strive for radical change from day one of a Labour government. But equally they can help us remember what all the hard work is for: when they are in power, left-wing governments and sub-national administrations can set societies on course for a fairer, more democratic, and more resilient future.

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Michaela Kauer

Be bold on housing

More than 100 years after the name 'Rote Wien' – Red Vienna – was first applied to the Austrian capital, the city is still leading the way on social housing policy. Michaela Kauer explains what it does differently, and points to signs that the rest of Europe might be catching up.

Across Europe, the 'rationale' of housing markets is now, in fact, highly irrational, from a societal, environmental and economic perspective. This development did not fall from the sky; it is the result of leaving housing provision at the mercy of pure market interests for too long.

Whenever politicians decide to let market forces do the job of supplying housing to their citizens, they realise at some point that it does not work for far too many people. However, their remedies are often weak. They go to great lengths to avoid being seen to attack or undermine market forces, they maintain tax giveaways for investors, and they undertake no serious measures against gentrification or financialisation. Equally, international, European and national regulations against money laundering remain toothless.

People in housing need are treated as a socially disadvantaged group for whom there must be dedicated, yet strictly controlled, programmes. In many countries, this has led to the stigmatisation of citizens living in or applying for social housing. It has also led to a perception of social housing as an inconvenient necessity or act of charity. As is often the case with welfare provision, this way of thinking means that questions are then asked as to whether a person has really done all they can to help themselves – or whether they might not be lying about their living situation or income. Welfare recipients are treated as potential social fraudsters; those who are "really and truly" poor, and who behave well, are then graciously allowed to benefit from assistance. When they arrive

in the support system, they have to prove repeatedly that they are worthy of help. This is a disgrace, and completely at odds with any social policy based on rights and the empowerment and emancipation of people.

The price of ideology

The effects of weak governance in the housing sector are catastrophic. When social housing is scarce, the weakest and most vulnerable groups end up in competition: the homeless, migrants, refugees, young adults still living with their parents, old widows who can only heat one room in their flat, single mothers who must decide between a warm meal or a warm bedroom for their children. This is the social crisis that rightwingers generate when they pit different parts of the population against each other.

But the housing crisis does not just affect the poorest. Gentrification, touristification and financialisation are destroying entire communities through uncontrolled increases in rents and mortgages, the transfer of costs for renovations to tenants and homeowners, and forced evictions after renovations. Many people who have lived in their neighbourhood for generations, running small local businesses and caring for each other, are forced to leave. And for what? Cities where entire blocks of flats stand empty for speculative purposes and where land prices skyrocket. People including teachers, nurses and bus drivers – all those we lauded as essential during the pandemic – can no longer afford to live where they work.

What is going on here? Students of economic theory learn that the market functions in such a way as to provide for needs – this is the basic principle of supply and demand. With a housing crisis of such enormous scale, aggravated by the rising cost of living, inflation, and the energy crisis, more people than ever are in need of decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing. Yet the market response continues to be totally inadequate in most countries, and most of the newly built owner-occupied projects that do exist are putting families in debt for a lifetime. Rental markets are characterised by tenant insecurity, fantastical prices and threadbare renters' rights.

The financial gazettes often report with great concern that the real estate market is under threat. I have always felt this to be rather good news. The

market does not generate enough supply to meet demand, and thus it is a failure. But we cannot necessarily count on a market correction: even with the costs of land, construction materials, labour and financing rising, there is still enough profit for real estate investment trusts (REITs) and their ever-growing appetite.

Positive signs

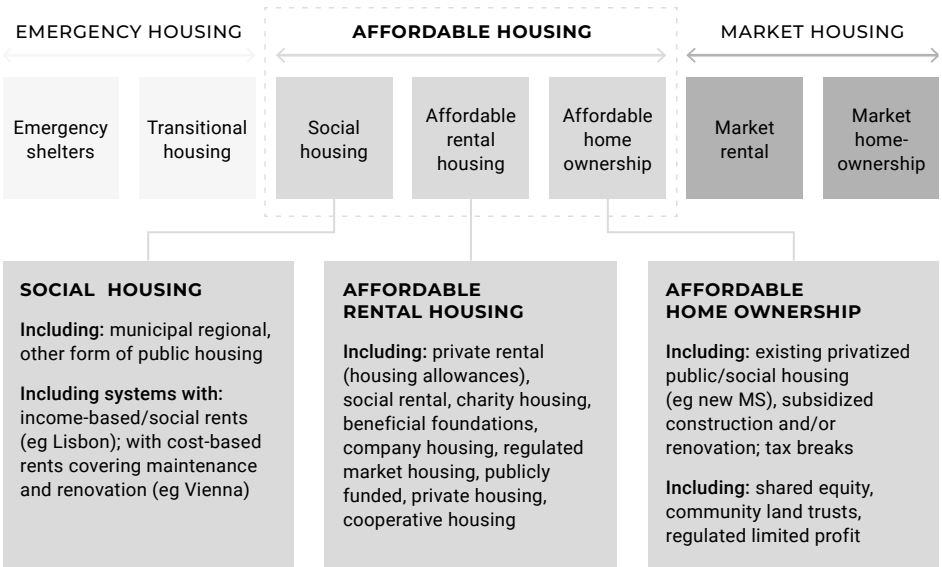
Policymakers show great reluctance to intervene in even those markets which are clearly dysfunctional. To make matters worse, the real estate sector seems to be influential enough to curtail the development of a sound and resilient governance model for housing policy. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel, with important recommendations from the global community outlining a vision of a rights-based concept of good housing for all. For example, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals address housing as part of their strategy to make human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Or consider the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, which aims to support member states to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all. What we can take from these strategies is a holistic vision, where environmental protection, economic effectiveness, social inclusion, participation, and cultural adequacy all go hand in hand.

The state of play

In the past decade, we have already seen some progress at a European level, with important policy proposals coming from the affordable housing community. Cities and tenants' organisations, social, cooperative and affordable housing providers, experts and thinktanks, citizens´ initiatives at the local and European levels, and, last but not least, public investment institutions, have all highlighted the need for a shift in how we approach housing at both the EU and state levels. Their efforts have not gone unheard; the first meeting of EU housing ministers was held again in March 2022 after a gap of 10 years. Even the European Commission has acknowledged the need to address the housing crisis, after pledges by the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, all of which form part of a growing consensus in favour of a holistic approach to housing.

Providing for a broad variety of social, public, cooperative and affordable housing is one of the key recommendations delivered by the Housing Partnership of the Urban Agenda for the European Union. The partnership defines 'affordable housing' as a part of a housing continuum that receives different forms of support (see Figure 1). The term 'affordable housing' is interpreted variously in the housing literature and international policy; in the work of the partnership, it encompasses a broad diversity of housing systems and traditions in Europe. The bigger the share of affordable housing in a system, the more it becomes resilient and crisis-proof.

Figure 1: The housing continuum, adapted from the EU Urban Agenda Housing Partnership Action Plan 2018



The European Commission took up several of these proposals, which drew upon the European Pillar of Social Rights principles and academic research. The European Platform to Combat Homelessness, the Affordable Housing Initiative and the New European Bauhaus have all been put in place.

There are problems, however. While the management and responsibility for social and affordable housing solutions is often held at a local level, European funding and financing are not easy to access for cities and regions. One reason is that member states have been reluctant to share the design and management of EU funding, including the Recovery and

Resilience Fund, with their cities and regions, which has led to many good housing projects not being realised. Another longstanding obstacle is still enshrined within the rules of European economic governance: in the Stability and Growth Pact, long-term public investment is limited by definition as it is put on the debt side of the balance sheet of national budgets. This is something that a 'golden rule' allowing for investment in public infrastructure could solve.

Finally, EU competition rules, which apply a problematic 'target group' criteria to permitted state aid for social housing, meaning social housing is only exempt from strict state aid rules when it is for "the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups", have led to great legal uncertainty with regard to public investments in social and affordable housing. More than 30 cases were reported in the past decade where affordable housing projects of different scales and in different countries could not be realised. But even more alarming is the fact that this regulation has allowed institutional investors to disrupt the overall governance of national housing policies on the ground of EU state aid rules by forcing member states to loosen tenants´ rights or adapt income thresholds. All of which has only led to increased profits for the market while public budgets have had to make up the shortfall. Before the 2008 crisis, close to three-quarters of public housing budgets were dedicated to the construction of new homes and the renovation of existing ones. But that has changed radically. Even before the pandemic, more than half of that money went to help citizens to pay their rents or energy bills, leaving little room for cities to enlarge their social and affordable housing stock.

As such, it is not just the UK which could benefit from an example of best practice when it comes to housing policy, but decision-makers all over Europe.

A blueprint for success

One city stands out whenever social and affordable housing is discussed: Vienna, which has continued to lead the way in housing policy throughout successive crises. The city continued to invest and build new housing throughout the years after the financial crash, which, together with initiatives such as free childcare for all kids until primary school, generated huge benefits for families and simultaneously helped the economy. The city even started to build a new municipal housing

complex especially dedicated to single mothers in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. A growing city of close to two million inhabitants, its government is committed to achieving its climate targets by 2040, and has therefore accelerated the renovation of its building stock to make it more energy efficient and independent of gas as primary source for heating.

Two out of three Viennese residents live in municipal, cooperative or subsidised housing, and the Austrian capital has repeatedly been the winner in terms of quality of life in global rankings. Not only the sheer quantity but also the diversity of the social and affordable housing supply create beneficial dampening effects on the market.

What Vienna has done during its more than 100 years of commitment to social and affordable housing is not rocket science. The idea is to spoil the appetite of institutional investors, speculators and exploitative landlords by limiting their freedom to write their own rulebook. Vienna ensures its local housing policy is embedded in a sound urban development scheme, and encompasses quality criteria for new housing or the renovation of existing housing, a strict control of land use and the protection and empowerment of tenants. Clearly, this goes hand in hand with a strong protective framework to ensure, for example, that people can stay in their homes after any refurbishment work.

This successful and much-lauded model is built upon the three nationwide pillars of sound governance, stable financing and a strong institutional framework. The Austrian Act for Housing for the Common Good (often translated as the limited-profit housing act) provides for a reliable legal framework to define, steer, finance and manage social, cooperative and affordable housing schemes across all regions. The Austrian Tenancy Act guarantees a high level of tenure security, with indefinite contracts as the default option and regulated rents for different categories of apartments. Finally, the financial basis for the system is stable, with a housing promotion tax paid by both employers and employees that feeds into the housing budgets of all nine Austrian provinces, one of them being Vienna.

Municipal housing companies (the largest being Wiener Wohnen, with more than 220,000 units for 500,000 inhabitants), housing cooperatives, and limited-profit housing associations provide a large proportion of all housing options in Austria. Their business model is very effective – and

good for public budgets – because they are based on revolving funds, with an obligation to reinvest any profit (which in any case is limited by law) into the purchase of land, renovations or new construction. Any activities other than those related to their raison d'être are strictly forbidden, with a system of clear and transparent auditing rules in place. In return, they are exempt from corporation tax. With all these elements, the Austrian housing model is recommended by the OECD to other countries as a blueprint for a stable housing market.

Central to the Vienna model of social and affordable housing is the deep conviction that housing is a human right. This rights-based approach compels the government to protect people. A progressive vision for housing must follow this logic not only when drawing up housing policies, but also when addressing the different dimensions that enable their realisation.

Rent regulation and rent control are at the heart of a stable housing system. In Vienna, rents in the municipal (roughly €6.15/sqm) and cooperative (€6.56/sqm) sectors are cost-based, not publicly subsidised. Control of land can take many forms, including building land reserves through public agencies and using zoning regulations to ensure that two-thirds of any new development are dedicated to subsidised housing or long-term lease contracts instead of selling the ground to developers. Equal quality criteria for all housing projects as a precondition to any project, taking into account social and environmental sustainability costs and architectural criteria, can also bring real progress, leaving no visible difference between a private and a public or cooperative project aside from the tenancy form. When it comes to public funding, there is nothing inappropriate about binding conditions for private investors to care for community services and contribute to general infrastructure costs. Protection of tenants against speculation and gentrification, creating liveable neighbourhoods, and a will to maintain a social mix all over the city´s territory are decisive elements of Vienna´s success. All of this combines into a unique living lab of housing for the common good, which can and should be scaled up across Europe.

Anne Van Lancker

Rebuild the social safety net

More than a decade after the great recession triggered austerity across Europe, the EU is beginning to recognise the true value of the welfare state. Anne Van Lancker argues that effective welfare policies are an essential prerequisite for addressing some of the most important issues facing policymakers today.

In February, the EU's high-level group on the future of social protection and the welfare state, composed of 12 experts and chaired by former European Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou, published its report.[1] It analyses a variety of contemporary trends – demographic change, the changing world of work, digitalisation and technological change, climate change and green transition – and their impact on social protection systems and welfare policies. It then formulates recommendations to ensure well-performing social protection systems for the future. In Europe, some of these recommendations are already becoming a reality, providing a partial blueprint for a future Labour government in the UK.

The role of welfare systems in crises

Well-equipped welfare states are able to react quickly to economic shocks, including through temporary support measures. Social protection and welfare systems in the EU proved crucial in mitigating the negative socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and are proving their worth again in responding to the crisis caused by Russia's war against Ukraine.

Several reports[2] show that job retention schemes, such as short-time working schemes for workers and income support for self-employed people, helped to avert a social crisis and allowed families to maintain at least part of their income throughout the pandemic. They also contributed to a quick economic recovery after the crisis.

During the pandemic, the EU took unprecedented steps to support national welfare states. In the case of unemployment and short-time working schemes, the EU provided important financial support to national programmes through the 'support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency' (SURE) reinsurance system, issuing bonds to support member states that had to spend unprecedented sums to keep people in work during the pandemic. Evaluation of the lessons learned from the temporary SURE programme shows the need for a permanent European unemployment reinsurance scheme, as laid out in the 2019 European Commission communication on just transition.

After the pandemic, the EU provided grants and loans in support of national recovery strategies, including through the creation of the NextGenerationEU, which gets its funding from borrowing in financial markets and seeks to transform European economies and create new opportunities for a sustainable future.

Such actions represent a major shift in the EU's position. Consider, in contrast, its response to the great recession of 2007–2009, when austerity and cuts to social protection were the main message the EU sent to member states. Decision-makers around the world, including in the UK, should reflect on the EU's new approach.

Social protection for non-standard workers

Social protection should be a common good available to all those who need it. Evaluations of the measures taken during the Covid crisis highlighted the weaknesses and gaps in social protection – for example, many people working under non-standard contracts were left without assistance under the pre-pandemic support systems. The temporary extension of social protection to these workers has proved to be effective. Through the 2019 European Council recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, EU countries committed to ensuring that all workers have access to basic social protection as a minimum, including non-standard workers and the self-employed. This is an important commitment, since, as of 2021, 40 per cent of workers are in non-standard work, such as temporary employment or part-time work, or are self-employed. On top of this, more than 28 million (especially young) people are employed as 'platform' workers by companies such as Deliveroo and Uber. An estimated 5.5 million of these are nominally

self-employed, often lacking adequate social protection. For this group, a directive on improving working conditions in platform work, currently being considered by the ministers for employment and social affairs, would introduce greater protection of worker's rights and fair working conditions, as well as respect for collective rights, by ensuring correct determination of employment status.

A union of welfare states

The EU is a union of welfare states with different legacies and institutions, each of which is responsible for organising and financing its own social protection systems. But the social challenges nations face are mostly common across the EU. Within this context, the European Pillar of Social Rights,[3] agreed by the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission at the 2017 Göteborg summit, represents an important step towards a European Social Union that supports national welfare states across the EU. It is based on the key principles of mutual insurance, solidarity and convergence, establishing 20 principles that point the EU towards a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and offers opportunities for all. Half of the social principles are dedicated to social protection and social inclusion, including on pensions, unemployment benefits, minimum income, healthcare, long-term care, inclusion of people with disabilities, childcare and support to children, housing and access to essential services. The European Social Pillar action plan[4] that the three European institutions approved at the Porto Social Summit in 2021 adds three important headline targets to guide its implementation: by 2023, in all EU countries, at least 78 per cent of people aged 20 to 64 should be in employment, 60 per cent of adults should be in training every year, and the number of people living at risk of poverty should be reduced by at least 15 million, including five million fewer children.

A reinvigorated EU social agenda

The adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights lays the groundwork for EU institutions to further support the strengthening of national welfare states, including income and social protection. This is an area where, not so long ago, the EU did not dare to interfere with national governments. Step by step, measures are being introduced that make the 20 principles

of the pillar more concrete and enforceable, building a European floor of social rights, including in the field of social protection.

Nearly 18 million children suffer from poverty or social exclusion in the EU. In June 2022, the council adopted a recommendation establishing a European child guarantee,[5] aiming to address disadvantage and exclusion in childhood, which, in turn, often lead to disadvantage in adult life. The purpose of the recommendation is to guarantee access to key services, such as early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, nutrition, and housing, which should be free or affordable for children in need. The recommendation aims to uphold the rights of the child by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities. With the nomination of child guarantee coordinators in every country, national action plans and regular review by the Commission, the child guarantee recommendation is expected to make a substantial contribution towards reducing child poverty by five million by 2020.

A further example of the EU-wide social agenda is the 2022 directive on adequate minimum wages, which creates a framework to improve the adequacy of minimum wages in EU countries. Today, 22 member states have statutory minimum wages; six others have minimum wages determined by collective bargaining. The share of workers paid the minimum wage varies from 5 per cent (Belgium and Malta) to 20 per cent (Portugal and Romania). The level of minimum wages also varies significantly, from 80 per cent of median wages in Denmark and Italy to only 40 per cent in Spain, Estonia, and the Czech Republic.[6] The directive sets the standard for adequacy at 60 per cent of the national median wage or 50 of the national average wage. It also aims to promote collective bargaining on wage setting with a coverage rate of at least 80 per cent, as well as better enforcement in all member states.

To combat poverty and social exclusion, in January 2023 the European Council approved a recommendation on income support,[7] with the aim of guaranteeing adequate support by means of a minimum level of benefits; effective access to essential services for persons lacking sufficient resources; and fostering labour market integration of those who can work. In 2021, 95 million Europeans lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Although all member states have social safety nets in place, progress in making them accessible and adequate has been uneven. In 22 member states, benefits are below 80 per cent of the poverty threshold. Only in the

Netherlands, Ireland and Italy is income support close to the poverty line; in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary income support is around 20 per cent of median income.

The Council's recommendation builds on three pillars. First, the member states should ensure adequate income support, including through a minimum income of last resort paid by the state. The benchmark for adequacy should be the national poverty threshold at 60 per cent of median income, or else an amount calculated using a reference budget methodology that reflects the price of goods and services people need to live in dignity. Second, member states must ensure effective take-up of the benefits and avoid discrimination or unreasonable means-testing. Third, member states must improve people's access to inclusive labour markets by introducing personalised trajectories for training and work in an individual inclusion plan and ensure access to enabling social services (principle 14).[8]

Towards a sustainable social and economic union?

Allowing the EU to play a positive role in support of national welfare states requires a paradigm shift, away from the old austerity policies based on fiscal sustainability and towards integrated policies for sustainable development, where social protection, social investment and strong welfare states play an important role in stabilising economies and societies. Progress on implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is made through the European Semester process, Europe's most important governance system.

Now that the EU economic governance system is being reformed, it is time to draw lessons from the crises of past years. An interesting proposal on the table of the European institutions is the introduction of a social imbalance procedure, which would trigger an alert mechanism in the event of persisting social imbalances in countries.[9] European financial support to member states' efforts should not only include the use of European Structural Funds in support of welfare states, but also make use of fiscal stabilisation instruments. The EU's common borrowing capacity, which is currently temporary, should become a permanent financial instrument in support of common social and ecological objectives.

The coming months, especially under the Spanish and Belgian presidencies of the Council, will show whether the revival of social initiatives was merely a temporary phenomenon, or the start of a new era in the EU. But the union has already taken steps that would have been unthinkable even five years ago – that it has done so reflects a new understanding of the welfare state as an essential prerequisite for some of its most important policy goals.

Isabel Carvalhais MEP

Adopt a rural lens

Rural areas are frequently neglected when progressive political parties draw up their agendas. In part, this is because politicians of all stripes tend to treat 'rural policy' as if it were somehow separate from everything else. Here, Isabel Carvalhais MEP explains how all policy must be viewed through a rural lens, and calls for a renewed focus on justice, equality and adaptability.

The importance of rural areas cannot be overstated. Home to about 30 per cent of ~~Europe's~~ population and covering more than 80 per cent of its territory, they are key to ensuring our food autonomy and to safeguarding our natural resources, landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage. But they have also a central role in responding to today's major societal challenges, with our natural environment helping to mitigate climate change and environmental deterioration, promote sustainable food production and contribute to a fair and green transition.

Despite their crucial importance, rural areas, particularly those which are remote and less developed, face significant challenges and still wait for adequate public policies to address them. Demographic decline and ageing, fewer and lower quality job opportunities, a lack of access to high quality services, climate and environmental pressures, lower connectivity and access to innovation are all acutely felt by most rural communities in Europe. As a result, there is growing discontent among rural populations, who feel their voices are neither being heard nor effectively integrated in political decision-making. This, of course, generates fertile ground for civic and political disengagement.

In the EU, we have agreed a European Green Deal, which will create new opportunities in rural areas as part of a more resilient future. This will make it possible for rural communities to diversify their economies (e.g. via rural tourism, local market and digital market sales, or agroforestry) and to benefit from the digital transition and access to new technologies. But

how do we guarantee that these opportunities are made available to all rural citizens, leaving no one behind, while simultaneously addressing the sentiment of many that they have been excluded from political decisions? This is the big question that European countries must answer.

The solutions to rural areas' obstacles are frequently complex, requiring careful analysis and demanding some level of innovation and creativity. On many occasions, though, there is no need to reinvent the wheel; what is required is to fully explore the potential of already existing instruments and policies. That, in itself, can be innovative. One area where we would benefit from this kind of approach is governance: we must demand better governance through better communication. While theoretically we all know how important communication and bureaucratic simplification are, in practice, politics still happens otherwise.

A second priority is to take an integrated policy approach. Indeed, the development of rural areas is not possible without a multidisciplinary approach incorporating transport and mobility, energy, renewables, health, education, social services, culture and leisure, justice, gender equality, biodiversity protection, agriculture, and much more. It is therefore important to see beyond the so-called traditional policies of rural and regional development and start 'thinking rural' in a more comprehensive and horizontal way, starting by having better tracking of the public investment that is directed to rural areas.

'Thinking rural' has recently gained political momentum in the EU thanks to the European Commission's 2021 communication on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas for 2040. Aimed at making rural areas stronger, better connected, resilient and prosperous, the communication appeared when all the main EU budgets had already been allocated. Still, it has the merit of being the first time ever that the Commission has sought to bring a much-needed holistic approach to action in rural areas. Recognising the importance of this instrument, the European Parliament has also approved a resolution aiming to contribute actively to the construction of policies that meet the needs and aspirations of rural communities.

The communication foresees a series of interesting initiatives, notably the implementation of a 'rural-proofing' mechanism at EU level. This is not a new concept; it was already part of the recommendations of the Cork 2.0 Declaration, A Better Life in Rural Areas, and has been implemented,

with varying results, in several member states and around the world. It is a mechanism that uses a 'rural lens' in the design of policies in order to test their effect, negative or positive, with a special focus on rural areas and their characteristics.

This rural-proofing mechanism will be a way to ensure coherence, consistency and complementarity between policies and to encourage a political commitment to incorporate, on a regular basis, the rural dimension in all planning.

Rural-proofing is not a quick fix, however. It is complex, difficult to design and requires very detailed knowledge of local realities. Diversity is at the very heart of our rural areas, which vary from country to country and within each country. For instance, challenges faced by rural areas near urban areas are very different from those faced by remote rural areas (think about mobility or proximity to health and education facilities). Thus, general solutions may not be the best option. This is why rural-proofing must also be implemented at national, regional and local levels.

The development of rural areas requires solutions centred on the specific needs of each rural community. The involvement of local actors, authorities, and civil society and a multi-level governance approach are key elements of this adaptability. Residents of rural areas tend to trust more in levels of administration and decision-making closer to them, not least because these institutions have a more in-depth knowledge of the local dynamics. For this reason, both local authorities and local civil society must play an active role in the consultation and design phases as well as in decision-making and the implementation of policies at the local level. This is a decisive step towards greater social cohesion and sense of belonging.

The partnership principle and multi-level governance are key concepts in the planning and implementation of cohesion policy and rural development. When properly applied, both can help programs to focus and coordinate funding opportunities in a better way. However, some member states still resist their application, with a lack of effective participation of the relevant stakeholders at all stages of policy hampering the full potential of these instruments.

In this context, the EU has promoted the community-led local development (CLLD), an approach that truly embodies the potential effectiveness of incorporating the local dimension, local actors and bottom-up policy design. Under the CLLD model, local people are encouraged to form a local action group to plan and implement development policy in their area. This approach has fostered a wide assortment of projects of varying size; in Portugal alone, CLLD projects have ranged from €26,000 for a small mushroom production unit promoting agricultural diversification to €155,000 for the restoration of a local farmer's market in the village of Chaves, promoting local production and short supply chains. Until recently, communities in Britain also benefitted from EU-funded CLLD projects, including one in the East Riding of Yorkshire that supported vulnerable people through the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ability of such local developments to address economic and social challenges and to unleash opportunities at a local level has long been acknowledged, and was recently highlighted in the conclusions of a European Commission study on the implementation of the LEADER approach (a predecessor of the CLLD policy that focused on rural areas exclusively). The ring-fencing of the LEADER initiative was key to the promotion of this approach to rural development, and it should be replicated for CLLD.

The depopulation of rural areas and the increasing average age of farmers – which are both linked to the difficulties faced by rural citizens in achieving their professional, social and personal goals, forcing people to leave – are putting the future of our rural areas at serious risk. Below a certain population level, the loss of human capital becomes terminal, leaving communities without the capacity to adapt, to innovate, to produce and to resist. We cannot let this happen.

That is why policymakers in both the UK and Europe need to produce a true rural strategy – one that brings all different policies on board, is fully integrated with funding and legislative instruments, and is supported by national and regional rural strategies. Such a strategy should be a key priority for the EU and for the world if we are all truly committed to securing a resilient, sustainable and vibrant future for our rural areas.

Jane Davidson

Act for future generations

Keir Starmer is on course to form the UK's first Labour government for over a decade. But Labour has, in fact, been in power in Britain continuously since 1999 – in the devolved government of Wales. Jane Davidson, a former minister in the Welsh Government, explains the country's groundbreaking approach to weighing the interests of future generations in policymaking.

Of all the projects of Clement Attlee's postwar government, perhaps the most fundamental was to create a vision of opportunity for the next generation and beyond. Picking up the pieces after six long years of war, voters wanted more than an end to wartime austerity. The country might have been broken, but they wanted hope. And they voted in their millions for a collective vision for a fairer future where no-one was left behind.

It is interesting to reflect on the value system that drove those votes. The war generation wanted their children to succeed to make up for their ultimate sacrifice; to have lives without war, without want, and with opportunity, with employment and with decent housing. For much of my life, our society did become richer, more equal and more progressive. Most recently, under the Labour government between 1997 and 2010, our life expectancy grew, child poverty decreased, education improved and our horizons expanded, particularly with the freedom to live and work in Europe and the emergence of a new politics of social cohesion. And we had arguably the best health service in the world, the NHS, beloved by the people – and created by a Welshman, Nye Bevan.

Yet in recent years, I have increasingly come to feel that my generation has turned out to be a bad ancestor. We should have been the standard-bearers for hope, fairness, stability and opportunity – our postwar European inheritance. Instead we presided over an erosion of that vision, and young people, who are poorer and less likely to be homeowners or to have pensions than my generation, are paying the price.

If you are 35 or younger in the UK today, you have probably acquired thousands of pounds of student debt, had your wages held down by austerity and seen both public services and opportunities shrink. You and your friends were probably furloughed during the pandemic, or had your education put on hold, and you might well have been living in poor accommodation. And now you probably spend much of your time worrying about the cost of food and energy. More of you are seeking mental health support than ever before. More of you are disillusioned with politics than ever before, not least for its failure to tackle the existential issues of the day – the twin climate and nature crises. Fewer of you trust the UK media, let alone politicians. Consequently, fewer of you vote. The result is that democracy itself in the UK is under threat as never before.

Now is the time to press a reset button in the UK to ensure that future generations do not continue to pay the price for the inability of my generation to think long term. We should remember the advice of John Rawls, whose theory of justice includes the idea that we should: "Do unto future generations what you would have had past generations do unto you."

In 2015, our government in Wales passed into law the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. This act is the first legislation in the world to enshrine the rights of future generations alongside current ones, and requires the Welsh Government and the organisations it oversees to embed this commitment in everything they do.

When it received royal assent in 2015, the Welsh Government summarised the Act as follows:

> "By passing the Well-being of Future Generations Act, we have formally placed sustainable development at the heart of our public services and legislated for a set of goals – linked to the UN's Global Goals – that set a clear path to a sustainable future."

The creation of the Act was a bold step by the Welsh Government, and a vote of confidence from the Welsh parliament for a different, more sustainable future for Wales. The Act requires the effect of decisions on the needs of future generations to be factored into the decision-making process, and gives guidance on how to do so. It provides permission to think sustainably in an unsustainable world. It is revolutionary because it enshrines into law the idea that the wellbeing of the current and future people of Wales is explicitly the core purpose of the government of

Wales – the principle at the heart of government. The legal obligations extend across all key Welsh Government responsibilities: health, education, economy, climate change, environment, energy, agriculture, culture, heritage, communities, equality and its global presence.

In a democracy, good governance and decision-making foster trust. The journey to the Act in Wales was a long and bumpy one from the beginning of devolution in 1999, but its ambition has given Wales a new 'soft power' on the world stage.

By enshrining intergenerational justice into law, current and future governments are required to deliver on the Act's obligations. Importantly, the Welsh Government does not mark its own homework: there is an independent Future Generations' Commissioner and Auditor General, both of which can provide external accountability, as, ultimately, can the courts.

Such a radical mission is revolutionary in its own right, but the Act goes further: it not only enshrines the intention, but also sets out how to get there, creating a framework for collective action. Specifically, it creates seven goals linked to health, prosperity, resilience, communities, language and heritage, equality and Wales's role in the world, all reflecting the UN Global Goals and the concept of living within our environmental limits.

In terms of compliance, the Act prescribes five ways of working for an organisation to reach decisions: prevention, longtermism, collaboration, participation and integration. The seven goals are the 'what'; the five ways of working are the 'how'. This is a moral agenda, predicated on what is right – not in the short term, nor for individual benefit, but what is right for the wellbeing of our communities, countries and our very existence as humans in nature.

A question I'm often asked is: how can you tell that Wales is governed differently because of the Act? There are now many policy examples which set Wales apart from England: banning physical punishment of children; the Universal Basic Income pilot for care-leavers; 16 year olds being able to vote in Senedd elections and the creation of the elected Wales Youth Parliament for 11–18 year olds; accelerating action on climate change through the Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group and nature-positive action; a focus on social enterprises including Wales's

main water company, Dwr Cymru; the new schools curriculum from the age of three to 18 which moves away from subjects to areas of learning and aims to create "ethical informed citizens of Wales and the world"; and 20mph speed limits to keep communities safe. These examples show that Wales is already beginning to be governed differently because of the Act. The nature of civic discussion has changed, too, and more fundamentally, we are seeing a broader change in our culture. The more prevalent the Act becomes in the public sphere, the more the government and public services will be held to account by the people of Wales. The Act enables a new approach to governance: less top-down and more collaborative and participatory – government for the people with the people.

Wales may still be the only country in the world with a law to protect current and future generations alongside each other, but we have sown the seeds of change worldwide. Scotland and Ireland are considering similar legislation and have joined Wales, New Zealand, Iceland and Canada in the group of WEGo governments committed to a wellbeing-led economy. Earlier this year, the UN set up a new Envoy for Future Generations, and the UN General Assembly has just adopted a set of Common Principles for Future Generations, defining future generations as "all those generations that do not yet exist, are yet to come and who will eventually inherit this planet." This commitment now ensures that all decisions taken by UN agencies and its workforce of 100,000 will need to apply a future generations mindset.

Long-term approaches are gaining traction in the rest of the UK, too. Having participated in the launch of Labour for the Long Term at the 2022 Labour party conference, I was delighted to meet a group of passionate, committed young people who are creating, in their own words, "evidence-based guidance aimed at helping decision-makers take immediate action with a long term impact," and who have pledged to help Labour develop policies that ensure a fairer and safer future. I hope that this is the beginning of a systematic approach recognising the value of such interventions for current and future generations.

Of course, even in Wales, we are still at the start of a long road. The real test will be when the Act threatens a government's other political priorities. The proposed M4 relief road was probably the closest we have come to seeing such a conflict. In the end, the government rejected the plan, attributing its decision to environmental concerns. A similar test may

well be provided by the Welsh Government's ownership and management of Cardiff airport – the same government that was the first in the UK to declare a climate emergency. Could Cardiff airport, a government-owned and thus democratically accountable airport, lead on the development of alternative aviation fuel sources arising out of byproducts from the steel industry? If others follow Wales's example in legislating for future generations, there will be more opportunities for the collaborative airing of such issues and learning how to tackle such problems in the future.

The fundamental test of the Act is whether it changes Wales's footprint on this single planet of ours. But this project must be a collective journey with the people of Wales that takes the opportunity to improve the quality of their lives along the way. Less developed (poorer) countries have both smaller footprints and greater poverty; that is not a desirable outcome. Making Wales safer, healthier, kinder, more tolerant, more equal, and more prosperous, on the other hand, is. The opportunity is ours to take and we should take it with gusto, holding our heads high in the knowledge that we are delivering on our obligations to future generations. This should be a fundamental source of national pride and ambition, not a wrangle between bodies about how little action they can get away with.

In 2015, the UN said: "What Wales does today, the world will do tomorrow." But passing legislation does not in and of itself generate change. The responsibility now lies with current and future governments and the people of Wales to demonstrate that decision-making in Wales has been fundamentally altered by the Act. We must make sure that future historians will see action commensurate with the Act's ambition, especially on climate change. I hope the Welsh wellbeing journey will continue to inspire others to adopt their own models in ways that reflect their cultures, society, environment and economy and enable us all to hold our heads up and say that we did our best to become good ancestors.

Jernej Pikalo

Prioritise education

In the modern era, education is often viewed purely instrumentally: as the means to train the next generation of workers. Dr Jernej Pikalo, former deputy prime minister of Slovenia, attacks this position from two angles, arguing that education is valuable as an end in itself, and that preparing children for the jobs of today is likely to be pointless given how fast our economy is changing. He calls for a new kind of education system, rooted in our fundamental values and reflective of our dynamic societies.

Some time ago, between my two terms as education minister, I was asked what I would change if I were prime minister. Without a moment's hesitation, my answer was: invest as much money as possible into education.

I said this for two reasons. First, education systems almost always lack financing, and second, there is no greater force for the good of societies and individuals than education, which not only equips individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in life but also plays an essential role in the functioning and governance of societies. Good education promotes societal values, provides a skilled workforce, socially integrates societies, generates economic development, makes societies more peaceful and politically stable, and increases our understanding of other people.

The results of investment in education are indisputable, but unfortunately, they are not always easily visible. Modern governments, conscious of the time constraints of their terms in office and demands from the electorate for quick fixes, are often reluctant to invest in education. Instead, they opt for high visibility projects and programmes which may please voters but have none of the long-term beneficial societal effects of education. For finance ministers, education tends to be seen as day-to-day spending rather than the investment it undoubtedly is. As a result, book-balancing exercises often start with cuts to education funding – the justification

being that the cuts will not cause too much harm if they are limited to a few years. What we know from our experience of post-2008 austerity is that education spending cuts tend to stay, in many instances for decades. But even if they could be limited to just a few years, what right do we have to take away proper education from a generation of young people – to prevent a whole age group from reaching their full potential? Education cannot be a luxury of the good times. Each individual's development, if compromised, is very hard to make up later in life. As such, if they are failed early on by society, a person will often pay the price for the rest of their life.

The neoliberal revolution in Western societies shifted responsibility for education from the public to the private domain. Individuals have now become responsible for their education to a far greater extent than in the post-second world war period. One of the pillars of mid-century strong states was universal education for all, which used 'comprehensive' schools to neutralise the differences in social and economic statuses of households. With universal education came radical improvements in a variety of areas, from better hygiene and less disease to gender equality, human rights, improved attitudes towards the environment and economic development.

Universal education also generated unprecedented social mobility: people who used their education to develop their talents to their full potential became those who earned more money and had higher social status. This not only benefitted those able to improve their material position but aided society at large by facilitating meritocracy.

But schools today are no longer neutralising socioeconomic differences – in fact, they are accentuating them. Educational inequality is on the rise and deprivation is widespread. Research clearly shows that individual success in education is highly correlated to socioeconomic status. Individual success has become the driving principle of education policies. As a result, our societies now systemically and invisibly leave people behind. Despite all our efforts and proclamations to the contrary, education is no longer a vehicle for social justice.

This is, at least in part, because since the early 2000s education policy in European countries has become increasingly linked to the needs of labour markets and the global competitiveness of our economies. Neoliberal

education policies have obscured the humanistic purpose of education and its potential for fostering social integration and instead emphasise its role in the market economy.

Building back better

We are still suffering from the economic impact of Covid-19. The current recovery phase requires innovative collective societal resilience structures – in popular terminology, we need to 'build back better'. Even before the pandemic, parts of Europe had been confronted with a political populism that rejected the fundamental values and norms of our political systems. Political values and fundamental rights, long associated with liberal democratic political systems, were and are under threat. The pandemic, followed by an economic crisis, also revealed social inequalities and exacerbated differences that exist in education systems due to unequal access to digital learning. All of this, and a worldwide tendency towards deglobalisation, add to the need to rethink our education policies.

Progressive education policies should be seen in the context of wider current societal challenges: tackling educational inequality and future life opportunities; standardisation to achieve the highest quality education; addressing the disparities between elites and the general population; and regarding education as an essential tool of social protection and the fight against populism. Our political and social aim should be to support common values across society, to boost social integration, and to underpin our competitiveness through new technologies in the global division of labour.

Education should primarily not be regarded in a utilitarian sense – as a means to an end. It should rather be an end in itself. We should not only strive for growth, but also for social justice. Our aim should be twofold: first, to equally equip all our citizens with the same quality of education, to give them, as far as possible, equal opportunities in their life chances. And second, to create educational systems that are, in addition to being of the highest quality in the world, also socially just. Every state has a different mechanism for the compensation of imbalances, because every state is faced with different challenges regarding social integration. But we all share a common goal: to achieve the best social integration we can, with as few inequalities as possible. Inequalities provide a breeding

ground for populism, the spread of disinformation, negative attitudes towards our democracies and violence in societies. We should be aiming at a shared sense of belonging at a national and an international level. And developing global awareness, for instance around the environment, should be one of the common goals of our education systems.

Preparing for the future

Of course, education must still track developments in the economy. We are currently in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. Digitalisation and AI are no longer science fiction but part of our daily lives. The technological changes we are witnessing will have further profound effects on the nature of human relations and have the potential to completely reshape societal processes. We must therefore ask how to equip and prepare future generations for these changes. Children entering education this year will take on societal responsibilities in about fifteen to twenty years. Before then we will witness unprecedented change that will shape and reshape our and their lives on a scale that we cannot imagine today. There will be many new occupations, but the loss of many old ones, too. A lot of jobs will be moved to other parts of the world; others will hopefully return here via reindustrialisation. Globalisation, deglobalisation and reglobalisation will shape our economic fortunes. Only those societies with high quality schools for all can expect to prepare future generations for the challenges ahead.

Preparing education policies requires long-term thinking. Educational change is never just the rethinking of educational policies – it is rather the rethink of our societies. We must look 20 to 30 years into the future, analyse societal trends and envisage possible scenarios, then correct current failures and plan possible upgrades. The educational system, like many other systems, requires a lot of analysis, planning, and coordination with other subsystems, but above all, ambition and boldness in predicting change.

Politicians tend to favour 'reforming' and 'revolutionising' educational systems in every government. The profound change that we are witnessing, though, goes far beyond one or two governments – it is about finding national consensus on what the future holds. Educational systems are highly sensitive to change, so instead of media soundbites and constant 'reform', we should strive for steady, constant adaptation

and changes with a long-term vision. The aim is a high-quality education system for all citizens; a handful of highly educated individuals will not suffice to successfully bring our societies into a new era. Every talent is precious and should be developed to its fullest potential. In terms of specific policies, developing and investing in high-quality early years education (rather than only childcare) could make a significant difference for the better. It would not only provide the youngest in our societies with essential early childhood skills but would also enable parents to join the workforce sooner should they want to, improving household incomes and decreasing inequalities. Second, trained, professional teachers, willing to do lifelong learning and re-skilling, are the best way to make sure that education is up to date and remains so. Toxic teacher oversight by the authorities should be replaced by wider teacher autonomy, freeing educators to deploy creative ways of achieving educational goals. Third, the refreshing of syllabuses, teaching techniques and organisational approaches should be an organised, continuous, and system-wide process, thereby reducing the need for constant reform.

We progressives have always seen further than others, and we have always been at the forefront of the systemic transformations which are needed if people are to lead better lives. Particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery, we know that the strategic redesign of educational policies is essential for the future of Western democracies. We know that we urgently need to address systemic inequalities that lead to unfairness among citizens and foster collective fragility. We know that knowledge-based economies in a deglobalised world require transnational education and research of the highest quality. And we know that digital transformation and artificial intelligence are leading to a profound societal change that our citizens must be prepared to embrace and take advantage of. It is high time for all progressive forces in Europe to come together, assess the new realities and prepare a bold plan for our (common) education policies.

Emma Fastesson Lindgren

Invest in young people

The future is bleak for young people across Europe, but particularly in the UK. After 13 years of regressive policy under the Tories, Labour must be ambitious if Britain is to become a good country to grow up in. Emma Fastesson-Lindgren, president of Social Democratic Students of Sweden, makes the case for the Swedish policies of generous parental leave and universal free school meals.

When we talk about the issues facing young people today, the climate crisis looms above the rest. Some might argue that there are more pressing issues facing our youth. But there will be no young people on a dead planet; no education system, no housing shortage, no inflation or products to consume. In short, the most pressing matter for a new Labour government should be to reduce emissions and save the planet.

It is hardly rocket science to come up with effective policies, either: ban private jets, massively invest in fossil fuel-free energy and make public transport free for everyone. Since 2015, the UK government has supported fossil fuel companies with close to £80bn. This must end. Fossil fuels have no future in our world.

In some ways, I am tempted to stop there, such is the gravity of the climate crisis we face. But there are other policy areas that an incoming Labour government will need to get right – not least because effective social policy will be needed to soften the blow of the sacrifices required to cut emissions.

Sweden's social democracy

From an outside perspective, Sweden might look like a progressive, egalitarian idyll. However, this is only partly true. The last big social reform was subsidised childcare, implemented at the beginning of this century. Since then, Sweden has seen massive tax cuts and ever more privatisation of the welfare state.

In fact, Sweden is in need of progressive reforms as much as any country. Unfortunately, the political situation makes this difficult: we have had a right-wing majority in parliament since 2006. The Swedish Social Democratic party has held the premiership for some of these years, but innovative reforms like those implemented in neighbouring countries – such as Germany's Deutschland-Ticket, Norway's salmon tax and Denmark's Arne early pension scheme – have not seen the light of day in Sweden.

As a result, this chapter will focus on two of Sweden's 'greatest hits' when it comes to progressive reforms: a generous parental scheme and free nutritious school lunches for all pupils.

Swedish parental leave – a policy for both parents to connect with the child

One of the legacies of Sweden's rich history of social democracy is its parental leave scheme. When a child is born or adopted, Swedish parents are entitled to 480 days – nearly 70 weeks – of parental leave. On 390 of those days, the government will pay the parents (or parent) approximately 80 per cent of their normal income. On the remaining 90 days, the government will provide 180 krona, about £14, per day. If there are two parents, they are entitled to 240 days each, with 45 of those on the lower compensation level. A parent can transfer some of their own days to their co-parent, although 90 days are reserved for each partner and cannot be swapped. A single parent is entitled to the full 480 days.

When the reform was implemented in 1974, it was seen as both a way of promoting gender equality and a labour market reform. The system replaced the maternity leave scheme, and, from that day onward, fathers and mothers had the same rights to parental leave. The government's

view was that it was important for both parents to take responsibility for their children. The equalisation also helped to ensure that working women would have a stable job to go back to after childbirth.

It also gave children a better chance to connect with both parents. Research shows that young infants can bond with both parents and that it is good for a child's development to do so. Research also finds that parents' attention and care is crucial in shaping the child's view of life. These benefits of the split parental leave scheme accrue directly to Swedish children.

The scheme is now used by almost every family in Sweden. Still, there are issues. For one, the available leave days tend not to be equally divided by heterosexual couples: fathers in such couples only take around 30 per cent of the days available to the pair. A consequence of this unequal share is that women are often away from work for a longer period than men. As a result, women's pay rises and promotions are more likely to be halted. To make the parental scheme more equal, many stakeholders in Sweden want it to become more individually focused by increasing the number of leave days which cannot be traded. Promisingly, though, the number of couples who are sharing equally is already increasing in Sweden, and gay couples already tend to divide up leave more evenly.

So would this scheme work in the UK? If implemented correctly, it could deliver huge positive change. The current British system is complex: there are a wide range of maternity and paternity schemes, and depending on individual circumstances including employer and gender, a parent is entitled to both paid and unpaid leave from their employer or the government. Mothers are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave, but the income support provided varies greatly throughout the period of leave. UK paternity leave is scanter still, offering new fathers just two weeks. Self-employed fathers cannot take parental leave, while mothers in the same situation can.

Since 2015 it has been possible to share parental leave. Fifty weeks are offered, with 39 weeks of shared parental pay and 13 weeks of unpaid leave. Criticism has been raised that the support is inadequate and that some families can't afford the scheme. A Swedish-style parental leave scheme in the UK could make it affordable for new parents to share days more equally, helping to make the UK a more progressive and equal country.

As stated earlier, having a strong bond with parents has a big effect on a child's view of life. But to have a good life, support must be given at all stages of youth.

Free school meals equals better results and taller Britons

When learning about the UK education system, I found one feature particularly striking – the lack of free nutritious school lunches for everyone.

In the 1940s, the Swedish government became concerned about the population's eating habits. Government investigations showed that children were eating white bread with coffee, tea or hot chocolate for breakfast, and if they had a long journey to school, cold sandwiches for lunch. To tackle malnutrition, the government decided that all school lunches should be free, warm and nutritious, and so in 1946, they started to finance free school lunches for all pupils. From 1970, all municipalities have offered free school lunches. Since 1997, it has been compulsory by law.

Researchers from Lund University compared Swedes who were provided for in the early days of the government scheme with those who were not. The results are staggering.

Swedes who were given a free nutritious school lunch are on average one centimetre taller than those who were not. The free lunch group also studied more, and more of them went to university. Remarkably, their lifetime income was found to be three per cent higher than the group that did not receive free lunches. Overall, the researchers found that one krona invested in the lunch scheme produced four krona's worth of gains for society. On an individual level, the scheme had a greater positive effect on children from poorer households, but it also had a positive effect on those from wealthier families.

The researchers argue that the positive data is a result of pupils being more equipped to take in knowledge due to having nutritious lunches. In Sweden today there are discussions about expanding provision further: many organisations are now proposing free breakfasts at school too. Some municipalities and schools are already providing them, with 97 per cent of headmasters saying that free breakfasts have improved

their pupils' ability to concentrate. Likewise, Chinese researchers have shown that a healthy breakfast improves children's cognitive functions.[10]

In the UK, there is a discussion about universal free school lunches,[11] and some communities already offer them. Both Wales and Scotland are planning to implement free school lunches for all in the coming years, and London mayor Sadiq Khan has announced that the capital will offer universal free lunches for a year to tackle the cost of living crisis from September onwards. This is a good start, but a future Labour government should not look at free nutritious school breakfasts and lunches as simply a crisis response. Healthy meals lead to better school results and, as such, should be seen as an investment in society. A comprehensive free meal programme would reduce inequality as well as unleash the academic potential of kids across the UK.

Costing and funding

But what of the cost? Should expensive progressive reforms be prioritised in a time of economic crisis?

The simple answer is: yes. In the case of the free school lunch scheme, it is a policy that is especially necessary in times of hardship, helping families cope with the economic crisis and at the same time improving educational outcomes. As already mentioned, in Sweden, one krona of investment produced four kronas' worth of societal benefits. This is an excellent return on investment.

When it comes to financing, for me – a progressive social democrat – the solution is easy: tax the rich. For far too long, the wealthiest in our society have been steadily accruing an outsized portion of the world's wealth, all the while neglecting to pay their fair share towards our common interests. By having fair taxes on the wealthiest we can raise enough money to provide a more human and equal parental leave scheme and ensure that all school pupils can eat nutritious food.

However, I feel I must reiterate: all this is moot if we do not get a handle on our greenhouse gas emissions. If climate change isn't stopped in its tracks, there won't be any children to look after and feed.

Jens Zimmermann MdB

Build a digital state

While the UK government has embraced digitalisation in recent years, progress is uneven across different institutions. Jens Zimmermann, SPD member of the Bundestag for Hesse, explains how the German state has been embracing the opportunities modern technology provides.

During the 2021 Bundestag election campaign, now-chancellor Olaf Scholz gave his explanation for the rise of Western populism: "Why did Britain vote for Brexit if it was against its own interest? Why did America vote for Trump? I believe it is because people are experiencing deep social insecurities and lack appreciation for what they do."

Such insecurities are, at least in part, a consequence of the technological innovations of the digital era. But the digital revolution has the potential to bring us together rather than drive us apart.

Based on this understanding, the SPD named digital sovereignty in Germany and Europe as one of its missions in its Future Programme.[12] Digitalised processes are not only a sign of state modernity. They are a key element in creating comparatively low-barrier and widespread access to infrastructure services, communication channels and support services. In this chapter, I would like to share some of our experiences of state digitalisation in Germany.

Access to social security and social assistance

Social security and social assistance are fundamental rights that should be accessible to everyone.

From the point of view of the SPD, digital access to social security and social assistance can help increase awareness of existing support services and contribute to more people taking advantage of them. The use

of digital technology within social security systems can also contribute significantly to increased transparency and efficiency.

Our analysis has shown that many citizens still lack knowledge about what support services they are entitled to – or are too ashamed to ask for them. We maintain that digital technologies should involve a "push approach". This means that citizens who are entitled to certain benefits should be automatically and digitally informed about them. Benefits should also be designed in such a way that barriers are removed, minimising the impact of feelings of shame. For example, the new entitlement to a basic pension, which extends to anyone who has paid into the pension system over 35 years, is automatically compared with the actual pension. If the actual pension is less than the basic pension, a supplement is automatically granted, with no application required.

Such policies make digital access a powerful tool to ensure that citizens are aware of their entitlements to social assistance and are able to access them.

Policy idea: Evaluation of all social security processes, followed by the creation of a more citizen-centric approach to increase access.

Reach those citizens who actually need support

Because of the energy crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, the German federal government has faced significant challenges in offering financial support to its citizens. As a result of the economic downturn and rising unemployment, more people than ever before need financial support. The old system of distributing payments has proven to be slow and inefficient, making it complex and complicated for citizens to apply for and receive the support they need.

One of the biggest challenges the federal government has faced in this regard is the manual and paper-based system of support payments. This system is not only slow, but also prone to errors, which can lead to delays and inaccuracies in payments. The pandemic further reinforced the need for contactless and remote payment to ensure the safety of citizens. Plans are in place to end this analogue system, but in order to effectively address these challenges, further digital capabilities need

to be developed to facilitate payments by the state to its citizens. With the introduction of an overarching digital payment system, the federal government can ensure that payments are made quickly and correctly. This will not only make it easier for citizens to access the support they need, but also reduce the burden on administrative staff.

One of the big problems besides payment processing has been identifying which citizens need support. For example, during the recent energy crisis, virtually every citizen received €300 towards energy costs regardless of their personal financial situation. This helicopter money approach was neither efficient nor effective. Households with a high income received money they didn't really need, while other families struggling with the cost-of-living increase were not helped enough.

One of the main reasons behind this approach was that the government was not able to connect socioeconomic data with income tax statements and bank information. In an ideal world, it would have been possible to be much more precise in targeting those people in need.

The underlying problem is that the storage of citizens' data is heavily decentralised. This means that no German agency or ministry has a full picture of a citizen: the information is spread around dozens of separate databases. On the one hand, this constitutes a safety barrier against the creation of a surveillance state, but on the other hand, it is a huge obstacle in the way of creating seamless processes for citizens. Aiming to balance these interests is one of the largest digital projects within the German public administration: the so-called "Registermodernisierung", which will create a kind of middleware for connecting the different databases. (Simply putting all information into one database would be perceived as unconstitutional under German law).

Policy idea: Create a safe digital infrastructure that can utilise citizens' information to serve people according to their actual needs and prevent extra spending for citizens not in need.

Digital and secure infrastructure is the key

The German federal government has recognised how central it is to invest in digital infrastructure to ensure equal opportunities in all parts of the country. State-of-the-art digital infrastructure, including broadband, mobile and cloud infrastructure, is essential to foster innovation, create jobs and boost economic growth. It is equally important that this infrastructure is considered secure and thus trusted by its users.

In this context, the federal government's own investments in digital infrastructure are of critical importance; it is not sufficient to rely exclusively on private sector investment. Doing so tends to favour highly populated areas with high profit prospects, while other regions, including low-income areas, are left behind. As a result, the risk is that without government intervention, many communities would be left behind in terms of expansion and access. This would deepen the digital divide in society and exacerbate social and economic inequality.

Investment in broadband infrastructure is of particular importance, as access to high-speed internet has become essential for daily life. Here, too, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted an urgent need: suddenly, a large number of people were forced to work or study from home at the same time, and there was insufficient broadband capacity to ensure good connectivity for all. The need for increased capacity compared to the pre-pandemic period persists due to the greater availability of mobile working. The German federal government has recognised this need, and has committed to investing over €12bn in expanding and upgrading the country's broadband infrastructure by 2025.

Mobile infrastructure is also essential for equal opportunities, ensuring that citizens in remote areas have access to mobile networks and so can stay connected to the digital world. The federal government has set itself the goal of providing mobile phone networks to all households in Germany by 2025. This is an essential contribution to ensuring that all citizens have equal access to digital services.

Cloud infrastructure is also critical to fostering innovation and growth by providing the computing power businesses need to scale up and compete in a global marketplace. Aware of this, the federal government is committed to investing in cloud infrastructure, including the development of a European cloud platform.

Policy idea: Review state and private infrastructure development, especially with regard to inclusion, coverage and security.

Protection of the digital infrastructure in times of cyberwar and cybertheft

Germany is acutely aware of the need to protect its digital infrastructure in times of cyberwarfare, especially from cybercriminals and hacker attacks. To this end our federal government has created a comprehensive framework to protect citizens and critical infrastructure from cyberthreats. This framework is supported by the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI) and includes legislation such as the IT Security Act.

The BSI is responsible for monitoring the security of the digital infrastructure in Germany, including critical infrastructure such as energy, transport and health systems. To ensure that the IT Security Act is complied with, there is close cooperation with private companies. The law requires, for example, that appropriate measures are taken to protect a company's own networks and systems against cyberthreats. This is to be done in accordance with security standards that must be adhered to and by reporting incidents to the BSI. This ensures that attacks on critical infrastructures can be detected and responded to quickly, which is the only viable way to reduce the risk of disruption to critical services.

In addition, the federal government has launched several initiatives aimed at improving the ability of its citizens and businesses to deal with cybersecurity. This is done through training programmes for small businesses and awareness-raising campaigns targeted at citizens to help them perceive and effectively combat cyberthreats.

Finally, accompanying the above measures, the federal government has also introduced new laws to combat cyberthreats. The NetzDG, for example, obliges social media platforms to remove criminal content, including hate speech and fake news, within 24 hours. This helps to curb the spread of criminal content on the internet and prevent an escalation of cyberthreats.

Policy idea: Review and supplement security laws as needed in order to protect infrastructure in the light of increased cyberattacks.

Digital sovereignty

We need Europe-based development and production of key technical components to prevent problematic dependence on foreign powers. The network security of digital infrastructures must be in our own hands. Therefore, social democrats are calling for a strategic, long-term and pan-European effort to build development and production infrastructure for components.

We advocate the targeted and coordinated promotion of the German and European digital economies, from semiconductor manufacturing and quantum technology to the cloud and artificial intelligence, and from edge computing, online security, secure and trustworthy hardware and software to network technology and data-based business models.

Policy idea: Assess dependence on external supplies of technical components and use cooperation with trusted allies to increase digital sovereignty.

Regulation of big tech and new technologies

Business innovation and new technical developments are to be welcomed in principle. At the same time, elected representatives must keep a careful eye on business activities; the protection of citizens and their rights must always come first. If the market power of individual companies is problematic, it must be limited, and new technologies must also

meet central security and data protection standards. Where politicians identify risks, the regulation of big tech and, if necessary, individual digital services must be examined. Currently, Germany is dealing with the new EU digital rules from 2022, namely the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Market Act (DMA).

Policy idea: Evaluate the need for regulation of so-called 'big techs' and emergent technologies to protect citizens and their rights.

Making laws and regulation fit for contact with the digital world

New laws are being written constantly, and the various government agencies are also constantly introducing new rules and regulations for processes. But for all this, there is still a lack of uniform digital processes. Physical signatures and printed documents are still often indispensable, while the implementation of fully digital processes is lacking. To this end, a mandatory 'digital check' will be carried out in advance by all departments of the federal government. This includes checking the actual text before it is sent through parliament. With the help of an interdisciplinary digital check, laws should be made digitally suitable and thus more practicable and user-friendly.

In future, civil servants working on drafting legislation will also be trained to think and design the processes digitally from the beginning.

Policy idea: Analogue legal and administrative processes should not be digitally adapted – instead, they should be designed according to digital logic.

Creating a 21st century school infrastructure

In order to strengthen digital school applications and thus make schools fit for the future, the Digital Pact for Schools finances innovative infrastructure projects across the federal states. This includes infrastructure for the use of digital educational media, performance assessments, qualification of teachers and the improvement of

interoperability (allowing different systems to work together). The goal is an interoperable digital teaching and learning infrastructure.

Policy idea: Empower schools with digital, interoperable infrastructure and expand digital learning opportunities.

Encouraging the use of public transport by introducing a national digital ticket

After the success of the temporary €9 ticket scheme in the summer of 2022, the government introduced the new Deutschlandticket this spring. The policy means you can buy a single ticket on your smartphone that allows you to use all local public transport across Germany for a whole month for €49. Of course, using your smartphone for public transport tickets is nothing new, especially for travellers who use London's public transport system. But the unification of the fare across the country is a promising digital development.

Policy idea: Implementation of a ticket for local public transport that is offered digitally and nationwide at a fixed price and can be cancelled monthly.

Digital modern state: potentials of digitalisation to strengthen democracy

Digital state processes and services are not only the hallmark of a modern state. Through them, the state can create a multitude of often novel opportunities for its citizens, including in everyday life, in communication between the state and its citizens, in participation in democratic processes and the in use of state support. In this context, state actors signal through their engagement with digital topics and services that they acknowledge their citizens and take them seriously. Through this form of respect, the state shows its citizens that it protects and supports them – and ultimately, our democracy is the beneficiary.

Lucian Andrei

Promote a just transport transition

The UK's efforts to improve sustainability outside of the largest cities are still at a relatively early stage. Lucian Andrei, deputy mayor of Galați, explains how his city is combining social justice and green transport.

The environmental and social challenges posed by conventional modes of transport, such as cars and planes, have made the development of sustainable transport a top priority for policymakers around the globe. As we grapple with issues like climate change, air pollution and congestion, more sustainable methods of getting around offer a promising pathway to a greener future.

To be truly sustainable, we must offer efficient, affordable, and environmentally friendly transport, addressing the needs of communities while safeguarding the planet. Our policies in this area should be designed to create an inclusive, sustainable, and accessible transport system that prioritises social equity, environmental protection, and public welfare.

This chapter explores strategies for the successful implementation of sustainable transport, focusing on the role of policy interventions, green energy sources, infrastructure development and green logistics in driving the transition to a greener future. It is based on the experiences of policymakers in Galați, Romania. With a population of around 250,000, Galați is comparable to mid-sized British cities like Southampton, Wakefield and Wolverhampton, providing a template for sustainable transport outside of the largest conurbations.

In order to develop sustainability for transport systems, the following issues must be addressed: social equity and accessibility, environmental sustainability, workers' rights and fair labour practices in the transport industry.

Social equity and accessibility

Transport policymakers should strive for social equity and accessibility policies that respond to the needs of all individuals, particularly marginalised and vulnerable communities.

In order to achieve this, the following issues must be addressed:

1. **Affordability:** we must prioritise affordable and accessible public transport options to ensure that transport services are within reach for all socioeconomic groups. This might involve subsidising fares, implementing income-based ticketing systems and expanding public transit networks to underserved areas. In Galați, we have established a system to promote fair access to public transport for different categories of people, such as students, seniors and people with disabilities, through reduced fares or even free travel.

2. **Connectivity of rural and semi-urban areas:** the crucial task of connecting rural and semi-urban areas to urban centres through reliable and affordable transport services should be achieved through enhanced bus routes, shared mobility initiatives, and community-based transport solutions, ensuring access to employment, education, and healthcare facilities.

3. **Non-discriminatory transport:** we must eliminate discrimination and enhance accessibility for marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities, older people, and the LGBTQ+ community. This involves improving infrastructure for people with disabilities, implementing anti-discrimination measures, and providing training to transport staff to ensure respectful treatment for all passengers. In line with this, Galați is investing in terminals, vehicles and equipment which serve the needs of people with disabilities. Transport drivers are also now required to assist people with disabilities when they embark and disembark.

Environmental sustainability

Transport policy should prioritise sustainability and aim to reduce pollution, combat climate change, and protect the environment. Key elements include:

1. **Promotion of public transport:** governments should actively encourage the use of public transport to reduce individual car ownership and dependence on fossil fuels. This includes investment in public transit infrastructure, expanding networks, and improving the reliability and affordability of services. The municipality of Galați has invested in infrastructure development and repairs, with the main traffic arteries now fully modernised or repaired, and in a greener fleet, with the public transport company operating three types of transport – buses, trolleybuses and tramways. We have developed more than 16km of streets with multiple lanes, additional pavements and bike lanes and commissioned 20 electric buses, 20 hybrid buses, 17 trolley-buses, and eight new tramways.

2. **Support for active transport:** this involves the development of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, creating safe and accessible spaces for active modes of transport. Active transport promotes physical activity, reduces traffic congestion, and decreases carbon emissions. In Galați, all modernised roads have additional cycle lanes.

3. **Reducing car dependency:** especially in urban and semi-urban areas, governments should strive to reduce car dependency by promoting alternatives such as public transport and shared mobility services. Carpooling and ridesharing are short-term solutions. Reducing car dependency improves traffic congestion, decreases pollution levels, and maximises the efficient use of resources.

4. **A transition to green technologies:** Some level of private car use will remain, and so our choice of energy source is becoming increasingly important. The gains we will make in transitioning away from fossil fuel-powered vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs) and other sustainable alternatives should provide all the incentive we need to expand charging infrastructure and investing in renewable energy sources to power transport. Governments and private stakeholders must invest in infrastructure development including charging stations for EVs,

hydrogen refuelling stations, and production facilities for biofuels. Affordability remains a significant barrier to the mass adoption of green propulsion technologies. High upfront costs for electric vehicles, hydrogen fuel cells, and infrastructure development need to be addressed through incentives, subsidies, and economies of scale. And continued research and development efforts are essential to advance green propulsion technologies. These efforts should include research into improvements in battery technology, hydrogen production and storage methods, biofuel feedstock efficiency, and sustainable aviation fuel production techniques.

Workers' rights and fair labour practices

We should prioritise fair wages and dignified working conditions within the transport sector. Key aspects include:

1. **Unionisation and collective bargaining:** we should support the right of transport workers to unionise and engage in collective bargaining. This ensures fair wages, job security, and improved working conditions, with the accompanying benefit of a more motivated and efficient workforce. The employees of the city of Galați public transport company, Transurb SA, are unionised, and are represented in all work-related issues regarding the defence of their collective and individual rights according to Romanian law.

2. **Protection against exploitation:** we should protect workers from exploitation by ensuring compliance with labour laws, providing adequate rest periods, and safeguarding against unfair treatment or discrimination.

3. **Training and skill development:** we should promote investment in training programmes and skill development initiatives for transport workers. This enhances their capabilities, promotes career growth and increases the overall quality of service provision.

In order to achieve these goals, public ownership and democratic control of transport systems is frequently advocated so as to prioritise public welfare over profit. But full nationalisation may not be necessary.

Critical transport infrastructure, such as railways and key road networks, would benefit from nationalisation to ensure that decision-making is in the public interest rather than for private profit. But in any case, community participation in decision-making processes regarding transport infrastructure, services, and policies should be considered. Such participation increases the opportunity for public input and might involve establishing community-led transport initiatives and fostering partnerships between local authorities and civil society organisations.

Transparent and democratic governance structures within transport systems should promote accountability through oversight mechanisms, and prioritise the public interest in transport planning and investment.

Logistics of green freight transport: building sustainable supply chains

The logistics of green transport play a pivotal role in building sustainable supply chains. With the increasing focus on environmental conservation and reducing carbon emissions, businesses are recognising the need to adopt eco-friendly transport methods to meet consumer demands and regulatory requirements. In response, they are exploring the logistics aspects of green transport, including sustainable logistics practices and green supply chain management.

Sustainable logistics practices should address route optimisation, modal shifting, last-mile delivery solutions, sustainable procurement, efficient storage systems, recycling initiatives and energy-efficient lighting, sustainable disposal, reuse and recycling and the circular economy.

The logistics of green transport are crucial in building sustainable supply chains. However, challenges such as infrastructure limitations, cost considerations, and regulatory compliance must be addressed if we are to achieve the widespread adoption of green transport logistics. By embracing sustainable practices, collaborating with stakeholders, and leveraging technological advancements, businesses can create a greener and more resilient logistics industry.

Conclusion

Sustainable transport must involve a holistic approach that seeks to create equitable, sustainable, and accessible transport systems. By prioritising social equity, environmental sustainability, workers' rights, and public ownership, we can build a transport infrastructure that benefits all members of society while protecting the environment and fostering social cohesion. Implementing these policies requires collaboration between governments, civil society, and transport stakeholders to foster a more just and sustainable future.

Beata Moskal-Słaniewska

Learn from the people

Devolution is all well and good, but there is little point if local politicians are just as separated from their constituents as those in central government. Building on her experience as mayor of Świdnica, Beata Moskal-Słaniewska explains how politicians can channel the voice of those they represent.

No local politician – whether a council leader, metro mayor, head of a commune, or the leader of a city council – should ever lose sight of their core task. Their job is not to fulfil whatever personal ambitions they might have, or even to build prestige for their constituency, but to meet the needs of residents. This central aim – improving living conditions, addressing the problems of residents, improving the quality of the space in which people live, and improving health conditions – must be the driving force behind any decision.

But on its own, this is not enough. We must also ensure that residents can be actively involved in the decision-making process. Our experience in Świdnica points to a handful of crucial principles. First, local government must ensure high quality, two-way communication. In today's world, such communication is made simpler by modern technology, but it still requires regularity and reliability and must demonstrate to residents their agency.

In many cases, policies suggested by residents can be implemented with only minor tweaks. This in turn shows people that it is worth getting involved in local politics. And this dialogue is not only with adults – all undertakings concerning, for example, sports infrastructure or the organisation of events are discussed with young people. Even at 13 years old, we have found that children can express their opinions and justify them factually.

A second good habit: ask! This is particularly important when it comes to large investments that require significant financial outlays. A new swimming pool? But what kind, and what do you expect from it? Road repair? But do you like its current course? Maybe we should provide more parking spaces instead? These are just two concrete examples taken from our daily practice.

The communication channel for citizen involvement can be a specially dedicated email address, or a Facebook page run solely for citizen interaction. You should not forget, though, about more traditional methods – a written application, a letter to the mayor or a meeting with residents. In Świdnica, we have made several key decisions after traditional consultations conducted in the form of surveys. An interviewer can also visit residents at home to ask about policies regarding a specific district or street.

Involving citizens in decision-making creates a virtuous cycle of engagement. It is not only an opportunity to learn about their needs and expectations, but also an opportunity to explain difficult, sometimes controversial decisions or inform them about planned changes.

As the mayor of a medium-sized city, I have learnt to conduct a constant dialogue. My Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram inboxes are always open. The only caveat is that superficial engagement can be worse than none at all: it is imperative to treat residents seriously and to respond to difficult comments using factual arguments. I receive hundreds of messages, questions, comments and suggestions – which, undeniably, take up a lot of my time. But if you are not going above and beyond, why are you in local government?

Nina Abrahamczik

Think beyond elections

Labour has made clear that it wants to include more people in the democratic process; current proposals include an extension of the franchise to some EU citizens and 16 and 17-year-olds. But the Vienna model of participatory democracy shows us that elections aren't the only way to include people in the democratic process. Nina Abrahamczik, of Austria's Social Democratic party, explores.

Democracy should never be taken for granted. It is something people have to learn and to live. It is all too common for people to lose faith in democratic processes and in politicians because they feel that they are being ignored.

So it is important for people to see first-hand that their opinions matter by having the chance to be involved in decision-making. This is especially true for groups historically excluded from political power, such as women, young people and migrants.

Crucially, living in a democracy must mean more than getting a chance to vote every few years – not least because there are quite a lot of people who are part of our societies but are not allowed to vote. So how can we include people beyond holding elections? How do we create spaces where they can voice their needs and expectations? How will such forums work for those without voting rights – which might be the case because they do not have citizenship, but also could be because they are still too young to vote?

We must ask ourselves these questions because strengthening democratic participation is a central political mission of social democracy. If we want to focus on democratisation, so that democracy can be everywhere, we have to direct our gaze to where it is missing – and look at what we can do to change that.

Vienna and democracy

I will describe three examples of how we in the city of Vienna have tried to include people in democratic processes. But before I do, let me first provide some background about politics in Vienna. Vienna is the capital of Austria and one of its nine provinces; this is important, because being one of the provinces has effects on voting rights at the local level. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights says that every citizen of the union has the right to vote and to stand as a candidate at municipal elections in the EU country in which he or she resides under the same conditions as nationals of that country. But since in Vienna the municipal election is simultaneously the election of the provincial parliament, EU citizens are only allowed to participate in elections in their district, not at the city level as in every other province of Austria. This is federal law, so unfortunately we as a city cannot change it.

Vienna has a population of over 1.9 million and counting – in the last 10 years, Vienna's population has grown by 12.5 per cent. As of 2022, the city was home to people from 179 nationalities. Fourteen per cent of the population are from other EU countries and so have only limited voting rights; 18 per cent are from other countries and so have no voting rights in Austria at all. In some Viennese districts, up to 40 per cent of the population have no or limited voting rights. Because Austria has some of the strictest citizenship laws in Europe, many people have been living here for many years, some even decades, or might have been born in Austria, but still find there are too many obstacles to obtain citizenship. This is a significant barrier to participation. Imagine living somewhere, working, paying your taxes, sending your children to school; you are a part of society – but are you really? Do you get a chance to shape the country, the city, the district you live in?

Vienna is also the youngest province in Austria, with around 280,000 people up to the age of 14. This means that there are comparatively more people who cannot vote yet because they are too young (the voting age in Austria is 16).

Since the founding of the Austrian republic in 1918 and the advent of universal suffrage in 1919, the Social Democratic party has been the strongest party in every democratic election in Vienna. Democratisation has always been an important part of our political work as a social

democratic party, but it is especially important today. We live in a time of crises – overlapping environmental crises, the pandemic, inflation, growing inequality, etc. Fear of social decline is spreading rapidly, and authoritarian forces, growing in number, are exploiting such fears to advance their antidemocratic agenda. So, as social democrats, we must work harder than ever to ensure that people can rely on and trust in democratic processes.

In response to these trends, the Social Democratic party of Vienna instituted a charter of democracy in 2022. It recognises that democracy does not end with elections, exploring new participation formats and co-determination in Vienna's districts, in the working world and in urban planning processes.

I will illustrate what this vision entails using three concrete examples.

Werkstadt Junges Wien – Vienna's participation project for children and young people

More than 360,000 children and young people up to 19 years of age currently live in Vienna. The goal of this large-scale participation project was to give them an active saying in shaping the city and their own future in the belief that they are experts on their own needs and interests. The main questions were: What do they like and dislike about Vienna? Where would they suggest changes? How do they envisage their future?

From February to April 2019, more than 1,300 workshops were held throughout the city at places where children and young people spend their time: kindergartens, schools and after-school care facilities, youth centres, parks, associations, and many more. In dialogue with education experts, youth and social workers, as well as voluntary project participants, more than 22,000 young Viennese participated.

The insights of this consultation continue to help decision-makers to better understand the needs and wants of children and young people living in Vienna. To ensure that these young voices are heard and that their opinion is taken into account, the results of the project were the basis for the Vienna children and youth strategy 2020, with 193 specific

measures to be implemented, among them a citywide children and young people's parliament and a participatory budget of €1m per year.

Wien, wie sie will – Vienna's women survey

During the Covid pandemic there were alarming signs that regressive gender roles were on the rise again. Our administration decided to prioritise speaking with women instead of only speaking about them. The goal of the project was to get in touch with 5,000 women living in Vienna. In the end, more than 15,000 women participated.

There were two components of the process. First, a representative survey by means of a structured questionnaire, with more than 3,000 women who in their demographic composition (eg by age, education, district) corresponded to the population of all Viennese women. The second part was a participatory process with open-ended questions, so women were given the opportunity to express their perceptions and wishes in their own words.

In both methods there was an emphasis on a low-threshold and egalitarian approach. Different survey methods were used, including via telephone, online, and in person – in the case of the latter, teams were sent into underrepresented districts to ask women directly to participate in the survey. Both components allowed women to take part in eight different languages. Many institutions and organisations as well as district administrations were used as hubs to promote the survey.

The report of the survey has been published and can be accessed on the city's website. There is also a map of the city with statistical data on women broken down by districts.

The results are as varied as the Viennese women themselves and are the basis for numerous measures and projects that we as the City of Vienna will work on in the coming months and years.

Klimateam – Vienna Climate Team

Vienna's goal is to be climate neutral by 2040. To achieve this goal, the city council adopted the Vienna Climate Guide in 2022, which shows the way to climate neutrality in different sectors, regarding climate protection but also climate adaption. One of the most important underlying principles of the climate guide is social climate policy for all, which means that we have to involve the citizens of Vienna in the transformation of the city.

With the Vienna climate teams, we are taking a new, innovative path to a more sustainable city. Together with the citizens, the administration develops ideas for innovative projects that have a positive impact on the climate. A citizens' jury decides which ones will be implemented.

The Vienna Climate Team started its first round of consultations in 2022 in three of the 23 Viennese districts, resulting in 1,100 ideas, 102 project outlines and 19 projects that have been selected to be implemented. In 2023, the next three districts will follow.

People are experts on their district: they know what their neighbourhood needs. Everyone who lives in Vienna and has an idea for a climate-friendly future can participate.

In April and May, people submit ideas alone or as a group, online, via postcard or at events in the three districts. The project looks for ideas comprising four broad topics: climate-friendly mobility, using renewable energy, designing a climate-resilient city and everyday sustainability. In June and July, the ideas are evaluated by experts. They assess whether the ideas would be effective and how they could be implemented.

From August to October, those who submitted the ideas and anyone who is interested are invited to co-creation and neighbourhood workshops. Together with employees of the City of Vienna and other experts, they develop their ideas into project outlines.

In November, in each of the three districts, a randomly drawn representative group of residents will decide which projects should be implemented with the financial means available. Finally, in December, the city starts working on realising the citizens' projects.

Lessons from Vienna

So what is important if you want to create projects and processes that include people in decision-making? What works and why?

First of all: when it comes to encouraging participation, there is no "one size fits all". To make sure you do not only reach the "usual suspects" you must consider aspects like age, language, mobility, and timing. Using a variety of methods can help to reach more people, but consider that, in participation projects, it is not only about quantity; quality is important as well. Be flexible throughout the process; you might realise that whole groups are missing from the conversation. If so, find out why, and try to find ways to include them.

Established organisations like youth centres and associations are important allies. Get in contact with them and ask them to not only promote the participation projects but also be part of them. Using those places people already know and are used to visiting can help them to take the opportunity to get involved.

Evaluation, adaptation and sharing best practice is crucial. In Vienna, the organisation teams of Werkstadt Junges Wien and the Vienna Climate Team have been in dialogue with each other, drawing upon their experiences to get even better at setting up the next participation processes.

Let people know about what to expect, what will happen with the results, and where to find further information. They give their time, effort and enthusiasm; respect them. Showing those who are disenfranchised or who have had little contact with participatory projects that they do matter is one of if not the most central outcome of such projects.

Inclusion and participation speak to basic questions of justice, human need and democracy. People who are empowered learn more about the needs of others and develop solutions that benefit everyone. It must be the central aim of every modern state and city to fulfil this basic need. We on the left must promote opportunities for participation and empower people – especially those who are most oppressed by existing conditions.

Afterword

by Ania Skrzypek

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group in the European Parliament, celebrated this spring, a very dear colleague approached me. As a British citizen, he has – as have so many in Brussels – taken Brexit very hard. He asked me how I could persevere in the hopefulness that characterises my writing whilst seeing how dire times have become. My reply was straighforward: negativity is not a good enough excuse to shirk our responsibility to make this world a better place.

If you look carefully, you will find that, against all the odds, social democrats continue to deliver at the local, national, and European levels. In that sense, my optimism is substantiated. While the polycrisis of climate change, Covid-19 and the Russian war on Ukraine command the attention of politicians of all stripes across the globe, progressive forces seem to approach these challenges differently. Our strategies are not just about recovery, but about establishing a new global order; putting in place a fairer socioeconomic model; and providing both safety and opportunities for all of our citizens in times of transition.

This progressive approach translates into many important political initiatives, several of which are well-illustrated in this collection. To begin with, the processes of digitalisation, climate change, and demographic change require a different way of thinking about the role of the state, the provision of public goods and ways to organise the labour market. The pieces that discuss, respectively, the European Social Model, the digital modern state, and organisation of public services (such as transport) all show how social democrats can turn challenges into opportunities. What unites them is a focus on putting people first, empowering them, and ensuring respect for their rights to decent lives and decent work. They show how our principles, born of the social democratic tradition, can be applied to the problems of today and those that will emerge in the near future.

Authors in this collection also take a critical look at areas where more needs to be done. Two specific challenges come to mind here: how to equip citizens with equal opportunities, knowledge, and skills so that they can thrive in the new reality, and how to foster equitable policies of social investment that boost cohesion and provide security, especially for those most vulnerable. There are three policy domains in particular that social democrats must continue striving for, namely housing, education, and youth policies. Chapters in this collection offer examples of policies that have already been implemented, the results that they have brought, and the things the movement needs to do better. The underlying thesis is that a new way of thinking is needed that will prevent the return of neoliberal doctrine.

As well as providing examples of the proud legacy of social democrats in recent years - and encouraging us to do better - this volume also serves as a reminder. A reminder that, while it is important to be bold and to have confidence in one's own ability to provide solutions, any and every mission can be undertaken only with the democratic backing of our citizens. This turns every exercise of participatory and deliberative democracy, every little conversation and every small exchange into a meaningful action that strengthens our communities. Populist right-wing radicals have grown in strength in many places. We cannot be casual about that. We must push back. And the way to do so is to become a movement where diverse voices come together in the name of a better, more prosperous, and fairer future for all.

FEPS and the Fabian Society are proud to present this volume, the idea for which came after the 2023 New Year conference. Our opponents would like us to believe that the centre-left is in decline. But at that conference, there was real optimism for change in the UK after so many – far too many – years of Conservative rule. The editors and authors hope that, as an inventory of best practice, this collection can be used as an inspiration and anchoring point for many more exciting exchanges between the Labour party and colleagues across the continent.

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Contributors

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Michaela Kauer has served the City of Vienna in several different roles. Starting in 1992 in the executive policy group on housing and urban renewal, she later spent ten years working in the policy group for women´s rights, integration and consumer protection. She was appointed director of the Brussels Liaison Office of Vienna in 2009. She also represents Vienna on the executive committee of EUROCITIES, and served as coordinator of the EU Urban Partnership on Affordable Housing from 2015–2021.

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Jane Davidson is chair of Wales Net Zero 2035, which is charged with examining potential pathways to accelerate climate action in Wales in a just and nature-positive way according to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. She is the author of #futuregen: Lessons from a Small Country (2020) and its update #futuregen: Gwersi o Wlad Fechan (2022). She lives on a smallholding in west Wales.

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Dr Jens Zimmermann has been a member of the German Bundestag since 2013 and serves as speaker of the SPD-Group on the digital committee. He is also a member of the finance committee and chairman of the German-British parliamentary group as well as a member of the board of directors of the federal financial supervisory authority. He studied at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt and Regent's College London from 2002 to 2007.

LUCIAN ANDREI

Lucian Andrei has been the deputy mayor of Galați since April 2021. He was previously a city councillor. He is the secretary for the Public Services Commission in the city council. He has a technical background, having held positions in the railway sector including station master, safety inspector or shift manager. He is a transport engineer and a PhD candidate in transport engineering at Politehnica University Bucharest.

BEATA MOSKAL-SŁANIEWSKA

Beata Moskal-Słaniewska has been mayor of Świdnica since 2014. A graduate of the University of Warsaw, from 2019, Beata was a member of the management board of the Association of Polish Cities and deputy representative of the Union of Polish Cities in the Committee of Regions of the Council of Europe. She is a member of the National Council of the New Left.

NINA ABRAHAMCZIK

Nina Abrahamczik has been a member of the Viennese city council and provincial parliament since 2015. Since 2020 she has chaired the committee for climate, environment, democracy and personnel. In 2023 she was elected chair of the SPÖ (Austrian Social Democratic party) in Vienna's 7th district.

Leading the way

Lessons for Labour from Europe

With the 2024 election slowly creeping into view, a revitalised Labour party under Keir Starmer looks set to register its first victory in nearly two decades. But having spent such a long time out of power – at least in Westminster – how can Labour ensure that it brings about change as effectively and efficiently as possible?

Earlier this year, the Fabian Society and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) asked politicians and activists from across Europe for words of advice for UK Labour. The responses bring together insights from as far afield as Galați in eastern Romania and as close to home as the Labour government in Wales.

The policies expounded in this collection can serve not only as a blueprint for a future Labour government, but as an inspiration to all of us – reminding us that, when progressives are in power, they can reshape society for the better.

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