

Convention Citoyenne Pour Le Climat: The Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change, France.

The most striking feature about the French Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change is the enthusiasm and commitment of President Macron to the initiative and to the outcomes. The project was well-resourced by the French Government from the outset. The high level of consensus achieved by the Assembly's members for its proposals to deal with climate change is exceptional from such a randomly chosen and disparate group.

The Assembly's brief was "to define a series of measures to achieve a reduction of at least 40% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (from 1990 levels), in the spirit of social justice". The Assembly began its work in April 2019 and the final Report of 458 pages, including annexes, was produced in June 2020.

Many lessons can be learned from the Assembly's composition, structure and governance for similar national assemblies, and even for local interest groups and hubs hoping to positively affect national and local perspectives on climate change issues.

The Assembly's 150 citizens were chosen to be representative of the French population. Six selection criteria were used to achieve this representation: gender; six age groups; qualifications; socio-professional categories; conurbations plus their surrounding areas and rural towns and villages; geographical regions according to population size.

The following five key areas were adopted for discussion and debate:

- Transport
- Food production
- Consumption
- Work and Production
- Housing

Whilst all the measures adopted by the Assembly are worth looking at in detail the following examples provide a flavour of the wide-ranging areas that were discussed. Residents and workers in the United Kingdom will recognise many of the proposals put forward by the Assembly but will also acknowledge the ambitious nature of some of the proposals the members positively voted for.

Travel accounts for 30% of France's greenhouse gas emissions and measures to reduce this level of emission put forward by the Assembly are extensive as they are too for the other key areas of life. All the measures proposed in the food sector seek to ensure that there is a sustainable and accessible food system for all by 2030, an unarguable objective of social justice.

The ambitious nature of the Assembly members and one might say the determined nature is demonstrated in their aim to ensure that the reforms needed in the production and consumption of food extends beyond France to have a global reach

The range of proposals across all the areas includes:

- Introducing a crime of ecocide
- Better use of trains and inland waters for the transportation of goods
- A tax reduction on train tickets
- A significant tax on air fares
- Shorter food supply chains with an emphasis on local produce
- By 2040 50% of farms to be run on agroecological basis
- Grants for small organic catering services to support their transition to better practices
- Modernisation of the fishing fleet through green propulsion systems
- Regulated advertising to curtail the overconsumption of goods and services
- All goods and services to display the carbon impact of their production
- Negotiating the CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) at European level to incorporate the climate objectives of the Paris Agreement and a proposal to ask the WTO to take the Paris Agreement into consideration in trade negotiations.
- Manufacturing processes to increase the longevity of products and more and better repair facilities as well as improved recycling and waste management facilities
- 13 proposals to combat land degradation and urban sprawl with the intention of making life in towns and villages more attractive.

President Macron has given significant recognition to the need to put ecology at the heart of France's economic future. He promised to inject an additional 15 billion euros over two years for the ecological conversion of the economy

that would invest in clean transport, the renovation of buildings and the creation of new industries for the twenty first century.

The President also agreed that the term **Ecocide** should be a term enshrined in international law to ensure that leaders are accountable for the degradation of the environment. He promised that a group would be set up to consider how the term would be enshrined in French law.

Perhaps one of the most illuminating aspects of the President's response was his consideration to review **Article 1 of the Constitution** that, following a referendum, might introduce the concepts of biodiversity, the environment and the fight against global warming into the Constitution.

President Macron endorsed 146 of the 149 proposals with the intention of sending some immediately to the Government for a response, others to Parliament for debate and was considering the use of referenda for all the proposals. Members of the Assembly were told that further consultations would take place at many different levels and that they would be updated.

France certainly seems to be a nation ready to lead the fight against climate change. Writing in The Tablet 1 August 2020, 'Green Shoots in the French Church', Felicity Leng describes the work of individuals, or families or monasteries in France "who are answering Pope Francis' call to lead a simpler life and preserve creation", a theme taken up by the Convention Citoyenne. Her article is an inspiring read and clearly places Convention Citoyenne in the context of 'Laudatio Si' which seeks to offer an "ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith". Pope Francis also clearly states in 'Laudatio Si' that "The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion." The resolutions of the French Assembly on climate change and the dynamic conversions of heart and mind that will be needed to reach the 2030 ecological goals appear to be entirely in step with much of the Holy Father's hopes and aspirations for humanity and for our earth, our common home.

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