Handbook for local hubs
Creating and sustaining local hubs of European Alternatives

This handbook is a resource for you to learn more about local hubs of European Alternatives and how to get engaged locally to imagine, demand and enact alternatives for a viable future for Europe.
About European Alternatives

European Alternatives is a non-profit, non-state organisation working with the conviction that a transnational renovation of our political imaginations, institutions and actions needs to take place to adequately understand and address the crises Europe is facing. We need to act as individuals, as organisations and movements, and through political institutions. The inadequacy of our current political institutions to take account of the transnational dimension is a crucial element of the crisis pushing towards authoritarianism.

We believe that going beyond the nation-state is a condition for promoting a more democratic, equal and culturally open society, and Europe as an idea and political space offers a possibility for doing this.

Vision

Our vision of an alternative Europe would include and emerge from:

- creative cultures which question and go beyond boundaries
- critical awareness of Europe’s connections with the rest of the world, its global role and its colonial history
- informed and critical transnational publics that are engaged with systemic change
- practices of political, social and cultural activism which take account of the ways key-issues cross geographical borders and combat social injustice
- alternative economic models which are socially inclusive, decolonial and anti-oppressive, do not create inequalities, and promote solidarity, mutual care and responsibility
- transnational political institutions, political parties and forms of governance which are citizen-led, focused on the common good, and enable participation and expression of all parts of society
- a political European citizenship, respect of human rights, fundamental rights and civic space, genuine free movement, and a critical engagement with legal principles and norms and their suspension or infringement

Mission

European Alternatives works to promote democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation state and imagine, demand and enact alternatives for a viable future for Europe.

We are doing this through:

- Inspiring our members, partners and public to co-create an alternative European imaginary
- Building the capacity of our members for new forms of transnational activism, and creating the spaces, like this one, to support transnational collaborations
- Promoting the critical engagement and influence of civil society in transnational political institutions
Helping shape new forms of governance that directly connect the local to the transnational

Innovating with forms of media promoting connections between publics and a common progressive agenda

Expanding, sharing knowledge of and reacting on crucial transnational trends

Values

Our values guide how we work to create the conditions to reach our vision.

- **Transnational and local**: we believe local and regional initiatives benefit from going beyond national boundaries and interests
- **Transdisciplinary**: we believe alternatives are generated at the intersection of disciplines and are enriched by diverse expertise and perspectives
- **Creative and experimental**: we believe in the power of the arts and culture to unlock imaginaries and in the necessity of acting and learning through experimentation
- **Open, inclusive and feminist**: we believe in a culturally open society and in diversity as a precondition for sustainable alternatives to emerge
- **Empowering and participatory**: we provide the space for citizens to network and ensure our activities and events give space for co-creation and participation
- **Anti-eurocentric**: we believe involving other parts of the world in our reflections and activities is necessary to make new alternatives emerge

Participation

Every year, European Alternatives organises its Annual General Meeting (AGM), a dynamic and lively gathering inspiring members, board and staff to continue working towards democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation-state and chart the strategic orientation of European Alternatives for the year to come.

The participatory meeting is structured by consultative, strategic working groups during the AGM and preparatory input is gathered from members before the event. The proposals are then voted on and shape our goals or work program.

Members also get one vote to approve the accounts and to elect new members to the transnational board. From time to time, we are consulting members on positions to be taken by European Alternatives, through our new member platform to be launched in early February.

Members, as part of local hubs, can also propose their own activities, events and actions, in coordination with European Alternatives who can help in fundraising, communications and networking. There also possibilities to participate to trainings run by European Alternatives or partners.
Why local hubs of European Alternatives?

More and more Europeans have a surge for debating European issues and thinking and acting beyond the nation states, at a time when the rise of the far-right and nationalism is a reality and the response from institutions insufficient to tackle the issues people in Europe are faced with.

The demand for an alternative europe is also made stronger when it is multiplied across the continent by local actors. Local hubs play an essential part in building European democracy from the bottom-up and in disseminating the message that alternatives do exist.

European Alternatives can provide the space, the contacts and, at times, the financial and communications support to act on the local and transnational level, across disciplines. Examples of spaces where we reflect about Europe with activists are the Campus of European Alternatives or the Transeuropa Festival. Local hubs, however, are the decentralised spaces and networks organising events or reflecting on transnational issues locally. European Alternatives has a wide network of member and partner organisations that hubs can interact and work with on specific events or projects.

What is a hub?

An important focus of European Alternatives work is to link local initiatives to transnational level to promote democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation state. Local hubs serve as city based exchange and action networks gathering individuals desiring to debate about transnational politics or citizens' led alternatives for a viable future for Europe, e.g. economic, democratic, social and cultural alternatives, and enlarge local discussions and projects with other groups in Europe.

The hubs welcome diverse groups of people, from activists and active citizens to journalists and artists, professionals or not, who get involved depending of their time and interest.

Objectives

Four general objectives for Local Hubs have been laid out to help guide activities:

**Awareness raising**

Hub members typically organise events, film screenings, election parties and participatory events aiming at raising awareness of the general public or a specific target group on transnational politics and democracy. Those events are also the opportunity to gather people with different perspectives, who would otherwise not meet, and to get a sense of what Europe means in the hub local context.

**Networking locally and beyond borders**

Hub members are knowledge carriers for anyone who is interested in alternative European politics in the city you are living in. Networking events can be organised through open events to generate ideas for action or small campaigns. The online platform connect hub members
with a wider community of activists across the continent and helps create connections for potential cooperations, projects, and knowledge sharing.

Sharing
The hubs are an important source of information throughout European Alternatives for people wishing to know more on the current political and social issues in different parts of Europe. Citizens do not always know or have an understanding of what is happening beyond the national space, and sharing with people what the issues are, why they are important, who is involved in tackling them and what can be done to get informed and act. Sharing horizontally between groups is an important function of the hubs.

Content and understanding
Hub members may want to learn more about current hot political debates and events around Europe and have informal discussions or readings on a different topic each month. The discussions can be hosted by one hub member each month for the group to learn together and deepen a knowledge of a transnational issue (migrants and refugee rights, universal basic income, commons, etc.)

Campaigning
At times, hub members mobilise around a campaign of European Alternatives or its partners, when there is momentum to act, raise awareness of and influence decision makers, stop or prevent wrong policies to be implemented, or to show solidarity with other struggles around Europe.

Structure
Local hubs decide on the structure that is the best adapted to the group. Here is a possible structure of the group to consider where roles are shared heavenly and allow for flexibility depending on the amount of time you can engage in the hub.

- **Hub core team**: a core team is composed of at least 2 people willing to coordinate the hub and liaise with a contact at EA. They prepare and facilitate meetings, communicate about the actions of the hub, and make sure everybody can contribute.
- **Hub project teams**: once an activity is decided upon, a project team is led by at least 2 people who are willing to organise the activity (event, debate, networking, support to an EA activity, etc.) with the support of other hub members. Core team members can also be involved as long as they continue their role as coordinators.
- **Hub member**: a hub member plays a valuable role in getting involved in projects, in helping to initiate activities.

Of course, other structures can be explored depending on your group and do not hesitate to give feedback to the EA staff and community about other good practices that you have developed.
Starting a local hub

If you cannot join a local hub, it is possible to create one in your city. Starting a local hub is an opportunity for you to build a local network and platform of European Alternatives for people to network locally and organise actions on transnational issues locally.

7 easy steps to start a hub

1. **Check** if there is a group in your area

2. **Think** about what event you wish to organise, what action you would like to start or what connections do you already have and which ones could you make that fits into European Alternatives vision and thematics.

3. **Let us know** you want to establish a group by getting in touch with Martin, m.pairet@euroalter.com.

4. Once contact has been made, you will be asked to read European Alternatives’ vision, mission and values and join as a member (free of charge). We will also assist you to find new members by reaching out to our current contacts who are not part of a local hub.

5. If you do not have a group of people to meet with first, you may consider **organising your own event**, with our support (see Event organisation). As it will be a first event, talk to the people that came to the event to enquire if they would be interested to join a hub of European Alternatives.

6. Organise a first meeting (see “First Meeting”) of interested people to get to know each other, exchange on objectives and possible discussions, actions or events to organise. If possible at the first meeting, think of assigning roles to people. Not one person should be responsible for animating hub, rather 2 to 4 people can organise regular meetings to coordinate actions. Teams can be organised for developing actions according to their own interests (for example, one team to organise an election party, one team to network locally and transnationally, one team to organise debates and discussions, etc.). There can be thematic teams as well.

7. Get in touch with Martin to create a mailing list on the member platform of EA / Facebook page / Twitter account, for current and potential members to join the group and get organised.
First meeting

Organising a first meeting is not a daunting task and EA can support you in getting ideas for organising it may you wish to. Below you’ll find some tips on how to organise your first meeting.

Just remember that interested people for the hub may have different motives to become involved with European Alternatives. They might be:

- **Understanding seekers**: people who want to know more about European Alternatives and its activities, expand their knowledge of European politics and news, or exchange on specific topics (commons, universal basic income, refugee rights, etc.)
- **Activists**: people who want to live in a more progressive and open Europe and who need to act concretely with other Europeans to promote or think of alternatives for a viable future for Europe.
- **Influencers**: people who have influence in their city or in institutions and want to get more information from European Alternatives to include it in their analysis.
- **General public**: people who are generally interested and frustrated about the current state of the European politics, in a time where Europe is threatened to disintegrate, and want to get inspired to act.

Depending on how many people turn up, you may want to have an informal ice-breaker question or "check-in". You could ask people to discuss in group of 2-4 (depending on the number of people present). At the beginning, tell everyone that they don't have to answer the question if they don't want to. Or they can "pass" and come back to them at the end when they had more time think.

Some icebreaker questions:

- Tell us your name and how did you find about European Alternatives?
- Why do you want to join an hub?
- What kind of role do you see the local hub having in our city?
- What should the aims of the local hub be?

The hub will evolve through time but it’s worth sharing thoughts and ideas at the initial meeting so everyone feels their input is being heard and that they are part of establishing the hub. Ideally, a core group of 4 to 10 people is a good number to regularly run activities and grow.
Sustaining a local hub

Once the hub is set, you might find the following tips helpful to sustain it over the longer term. There is no particular model for a successful and each hub has its own way of operating depending on the local context and the members who are engaged.

When and where to meet

Regular meetings are important for people to get together and organise activities. Hubs typically meet once a month to coordinate actions and activities (see Structure, in this handbook). Make meetings relaxed, but productive moments, when you can decide what, when, who, and how to carry out activities. There might be local events you want to get involved with or organise your own.

Also, make sure to get together in spaces that allow you to talk and exchange. A private space (co-working space), where people can move around or capture ideas on a board or a flipchart, are good when brainstorming, strategic planning or organising are needed. Cafés and bars might work for debates and discussion groups. Unless these spaces are quiet, this might be quite difficult to set meetings in them.

Tips for meetings

Paying attention to how your meetings work is really important to avoid frustration. You can use your meetings for different things, not always planning actions, but also for discussions or by inviting someone external to the hub to exchange.

It is essential that everyone during meetings have the opportunity to say what they think and contribute to decisions. Everyone should feel listened to when they speak and everybody should feel comfortable with decision making processes.

Finally, once the group is set up and growing, make sure to have a process in place to make potential members of the hub feel welcome in the group. It is important, as there is a natural turnover, when people move away or have less time due to other activities. Also, new member bring news skills and ideas that can be helpful to induce a new dynamic in the group.

Some good resources are available on the Resources section of the members online platform (http://network.euroalter.com) and notably:
  - On active listening
  - On participatory decision making
  - On power and privilege
Agenda sample

Here’s a basic sample for an agenda of a regular meeting (about 1 to 2 hours) that you can adapt and experiment with to see what works best for the hub members:

**Introduction (10 min)**
- If first meeting, go round - get everyone to introduce themselves, why they’re interested in EA or Europe and what type of thing they like to do.
- If follow up meeting, welcome new members and shorter introduction round.
- Go through the meeting agenda (stick it up on the wall so everyone can see it or send it by e-mail in advance)
- Get someone to volunteer to take minutes or ‘action points’ of what is decided and who is going to do it.
- Play an icebreaker.

**Action points (5 min)**
- Go over action points from the last meeting (if any)
- Make a note of any that haven’t been done and ask around who can take up the role

**EA news review (5 min)**
- What is going in the EA network? Share news of EA
- Questions to ask EA

**Activities planning/review (30 min to 1 hour - depending)**
- If first meeting, you may deepen the expectations of the group, brainstorm on activities ideas, review the resources in the group, etc.
- If follow up meeting, review the progress of the last actions and learning, latest news in local area and opportunities to respond or to run an activity, have a topic or question for discussion, etc.
- Go through each action and set next action points

→ Plan some facilitation tools to use and assign roles or project teams for action points.

**Any other topics or concerns (5 min)**

**Bring meeting to close (5 min)**
- Go over responsibilities for Action Points.
- Decide the date of your next meeting.

**End of meeting and have drinks**
Concrete examples of activities for local hubs

The following are examples of typical activities for the local hubs:

1. **Participation to local event and debates:** especially at the beginning, the hub members may decide to participate and network in their city by participating to events organised by other groups or organisations, to expand their knowledge. It can indeed be a useful exercise to map out the places, groups and actors that are relevant for the hub, especially those promoting an alternative vision for Europe or simply local alternatives that are good practices for an open and equal society, which should be better known across the continent.

2. **Informal discussions and debates** on the current European news are the simplest form of activity for hubs. This is an interesting format to bring together new and old people together in a relaxed and informal setting, and provides a welcoming atmosphere if someone has just joined the hub, arrived in the city, or want to get to know what European Alternatives is about.

3. **Thematic/networking events** are typically public events such as a round table/film screening or a more open, participatory format (world café, assemblies) on a topic of transnational relevance such as democracy, European citizenship, migrants and refugee rights, new economy, the commons, the universal basic income, media pluralism, precarity, etc.

4. **Election "events" or "parties"** are events where people gather during the evening of one election happening in another country in Europe, which can include a short presentation giving key insights on the elections and the main points of debate, a quiz, and the screening of the results. In 2017, an election event could be organised at the occasion of the French election and of the German elections. The event can connect political debates from the country where the elections take place to larger transnational political challenges, such as nationalism and the future of democracy.

5. **Transeuropa Festival:** every second year, we organise a festival of European Alternatives, gathering activists, artists, journalists and political representatives (from the local to the transnational level) with a series of workshops, debates and performances around the idea of Europe. The next edition will take place in Madrid at the end of October 2017. Some activities might be possible around the festival idea, depending on resources.

6. **And many more:** do not hesitate to run any other activities you think are relevant in your local context. Keep us updated on your activities, or communicate your idea on the online member platform, as they may be relevant for other groups and replicated.
Event organisation

If your event is a public event, get in touch with Marta, m.cillero@euroalter.com and Martin, m.pairet@euroalter.com: we can help you communicating your event to make sure you reach the maximum number of people. To do so, we offer you our channels and networks to spread the event. You can look at the “Guide for event communications” under Resources on the member platform for detailed information.

Communications

Hub communication
In addition to the dedicated online member-platform (http://network.euroalter.com), where you can create a mailing list for your group and be visible among the European Alternatives community, you can have your own Facebook page and Twitter account to disseminate information about the group activities.

Also, you can use other tools that you think are relevant for the organising of your group, though we would recommend that all internal communications to the group remains on the online member platform, for everyone to be in the loop and have an history of past conversations of the hub.

You may also speak in the name or participate to an event in the name of your city’s European Alternatives hub (see Use of European Alternatives name, for more information).

Use of European Alternatives name
Hubs are asked to use the name “European Alternatives Hub [city]” e.g. European Alternatives Hub London) whenever you make any public statements. This applies to any correspondence, call for actions, press releases and events (either that hub members organise or participate to). Hub logos can be designed and send to you when the hub is created.

Fundraising

European Alternatives can, when resources are available, support your event with a modest financial contribution. If you would like apply for funds from foundations and institutions, whatever the amount, you are asked to get in touch with Martin, m.pairet@euroalter.com for support and to assess whether this is possible to do so, regardless of the amount.