Introduction

In this presentation I would like to reflect on the theme of Populism Sustainability and Economics indirectly through the concept of 'convivial life together'. The concept of conviviality related to Christian social practice is rooted in the work of interdiac in Central and Eastern Europe. More recently, the understanding of conviviality has been further developed in an ongoing pan European project organised by Lutheran World Federation This project is developing the concept and practice of conviviality in relation to diakonia.

Conviviality is an important lens through which the theme of this session can be addressed because it aims to answer the question 'how can we live together' in diversity and what is the contribution of the churches to living together in peace with justice.

Furthermore, in relation to the economy, we can ask the question, which approach to economy and work supports convivial life together and indeed in the Lutheran project this became a central theme for the work and is the focus of a detailed report.

Concerning the question of the economy of peace and peace formation, a recent study concluded that the socio-economic aspects of peace formation and conflict prevention remain on the margins of the discussion. In fact, the well-known United Nations 'Agenda for Sustainable Development' does not discuss the intersection between decent work, reducing inequalities and poverty reduction with peace and justice! On the other hand, the Institute for Economics and Peace has developed some valuable macro level work analysing the link between the Sustainable Development Goals and Peace.

Furthermore, we cannot be involved in peace making without a concern for the economic relations between people and the operation of the formal and informal economy. It is important not to disregard the socio-economic aspects of peace and conflict prevention and to pay great attention to engaging with the everyday lives of people and communities, which may be drawn into conflict through nationalism or populism.

There is also a risk that the present developments in the global economy will result in conflict, even military conflict because nationalist sentiment creates a volatile atmosphere of mistrust and deep uncertainty. This risk is further exacerbated by the climate and environmental crises.

Creating a peace economy would imply the active reduction of social and economic inequalities and the addressing of grievances which may support conflicts between people and groups. This is a general point which also has relevance to post conflict situations, or situations of economic transition. Furthermore, the application of the general measures of austerity and privatisation along with deregulation when looked at from the perspective of marginalised people and communities are drivers of conflict and lend support to appeals from national populist leaders. To follow the thinking of Karl

Polanyi, the economy is embedded in social relations and in formal and informal institutions.

In this input we will open the discussion about conviviality as a heuristic concept and its application to the present context. After a brief retrospective look at the implications of the Versailles Treaty, we will turn to processes of Seeking Conviviality. This will focus on 4 themes:

- Economy and Work
- Environment and Technology
- Politics and Organising
- Actions and Processes

Following a short summary we will open the discussion on these issues in relation to the work of the churches for peace in Europe and beyond.

'Conviviality – the art and practice of living together'

We can discern four roots which help to shape our thinking about conviviality as a basis for reflection and action in present day Europe:

Firstly, the deep roots of the idea of conviviality lie in the period known as 'La convivencia', when for several hundred years in the history of the Iberian Peninsula, Jews, Christians and Moslems lived together in relative peace.

Secondly, the word 'conviviality' was also used in the early 19th century in Paris, to mean the free, unconstrained conversation between people in the context of sharing a meal and maybe a glass or two of wine. Nothing was ruled out and there was no domination, but maybe the conversation could lead to the evolution of shared ideas.

Thirdly, in the mid 20th century, Ivan Illich used the word to characterise the relations between people, people and the environment and people and technology. He was very critical of the way in which technology dehumanised people and productive relationships. In fact, he coined the phrase 'hidden work' to describe the extra unpaid work, which the new systems demanded. He was also critical of health and education systems which instrumentalise people and knowledge.

More recently, a black British writer Paul Gilroy has written about (British) post-colonial melancholia among the white population of the UK, who have not overcome the loss of Empire and the position of Britain as a great power. He has contrasted this with the lively interaction of people in everyday conviviality – especially, but not only, people from black and minority communities... Thus, everyday conviviality emerges as a basis for developing new organisation and action.

Conviviality – *Critique, Vision, Policy and Practice*

Seeking Conviviality integrates three dimensions which are important for practice:

First of all, convivial life together in these various dimensions offers a **critique** of the present structures which obstruct convivial life together. In fact, present structures and policies often even negate conviviality.

Secondly, Convivial life together offers a **vision** which presents an alternative to the present ways of organising work, economy and society. This vision is not a blueprint and is not meant to dominate but to offer a positive relationship-based vision. It could be seen as an active utopia

Thirdly, seeking conviviality informs **practice**. It starts with everyday life and relationships, not only with professional or other interventions. Convivial life together is 'everyday practice' which recognises that conviviality cannot simply be planned. Convivial life together depends on relationships, co-planning and simply put, on trustful transparent relationships. However, on this basis we can develop guidelines for practice by those who work for social and economic change. Approaches and methods which do not build up convivial life together should not be supported! Approaches which are 'linear' and result focussed often do not allow for the creativity which convivial life together nourishes. Convivial approaches support the 'art and practice of everyday life'.

Fear Undermines Conviviality

The reasons for fear are not hard to find or to understand. The most important, in my opinion is the insecurity which has arisen because the economy is driven now mainly by finance and proceeds by colonising more and more of life according to the idea of marketisation. This has an impact directly on work and welfare and has undermined previous narratives of progress. People are expected to seek their individual pathways in life and to see themselves as 'entrepreneurs of the self'. They are responsible individually for their income, health and welfare. Systemic risks are place on the shoulders of individuals which creates a 'fear of falling'. Furthermore, the groups and movements, such as political parties on the left, that underpinned this progress narrative are increasingly disconnected from the life-world of marginalised people.

This economically driven 'acceleration' requires more and more resources, which has created a series of linked environmental and resource crises. The financial system demands increasing value extraction and a rising rate of profit and this has led to the dehumanising use of technology and digital systems.

On top of this, the increasing mobility of people and the growing diversity in society, which is linked to this and to the increasing recognition of other diversities, has created a more complex situation which requires a different approach to planning and decision making.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that right wing populism has gained traction, but as we all know this could lead to a very brutal, dangerous and dehumanised future – a

dystopia in fact - if it is not countered. To counter it a new narrative is needed which is inviting and which leads to transformative change.

The Versailles Treaty & Conviviality

The Versailles Treaty, in confronting the future of Europe was concerned with the implementation of punishing reparations and preventing war by dividing peoples and especially resources. There was little concern with the ways economic organisation and national governance might strengthening life together and encourage future cooperation between former adversaries. Shortly put, we could say that there was little concern with conviviality in Europe and which policies might support it.

This was very clear to one of the most perceptive commentators on the Treaty, John Maynard Keynes, and we all know the accuracy of his predictions. The League of Nations was an ill-fated tool for strengthening international relations. It was not up to the constructive task of creating a new peaceable international order based on just economic relations. Its main focus was on attempting to stop conflict in the first place or to mediate. It had some successes and in the economic sphere had involvement in some of the key regions which were problematic and vital after the war, for example the coal-rich Saar region which was governed by the allies and the coal resources were diverted to France.

In terms of work and economy, however, the Treaty did lead to the formation of the International Labour Office (ILO) which remains one of the few functioning tri-partite bodies dealing with work and welfare. It takes a rights-based approach and is concerned with the support of decent work, research and learning as well as the support of development work and economic development. It has suffered from the limitation caused by the fact that it did not and does not have the competence to deal with questions of economic justice and inequality. It enshrines in its charter the progressive idea that work, and workers are not commodities, meaning factors of production that can be bought and sold at the cheapest feasible price. But it was prevented in reality from tackling social justice and economic inequality which shape the working context and the distribution of the fruits of employment and work. Furthermore, with the rise of the platform economy and the persistence of modern slavery, the commodification of labour is a growing serious issue.

Conviviality can be undermined by economically and socially unjust policies and practices. This was a key lesson for the period after 1918 and it holds good for today. The decisions made after 1945 recognised this to a greater extent. For example, the Marshall Plan and the launch of the European Coal and Steel Community, the development of the welfare state and the support for social partnership all assisted in creating an environment where people could experience the security which is the basis for peaceful relations. Of course, this is a western European perspective and the new fears mentioned earlier are again posing a threat to conviviality across the whole of Europe and beyond.

Seeking Conviviality
Relationships and Structures – Economy & Work

Seeking Conviviality implies a shift in the economic model on several levels. It requires a focus on local solutions, stronger nation states and a reformed European Union and international system.

First of all, the gross inequality that exists within societies and even between societies needs to be addressed so that there can be a fulfilling life for all. One approach would be to place a ceiling on maximum earnings and implement controls on the accumulation of capital. Another would be to develop a fair international taxation system so that companies and very high earners could not escape taxation.

Secondly, it implies supporting the development of an economic framework which is supports 'the commons', meaning the shared common property, both intellectual and physical as well as the so called 'common pool resources'. The capitalist economy is based on 'colonising' more and more of the environmental 'commons' and the relational, creative 'commons' and this process needs to be reversed.

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Thirdly, convivial life together implies challenging of the work ethic whereby more and more 'work' and 'activity' are commodified and where on the other hand more and more of life is colonised by the market sphere. The balance between work, employment and activity is the result of the prevailing political framework and related values. We are in the paradoxical situation where people are being forced to work contractually and informally for longer hours when it is possible to reduce hours and improve working conditions. This is one way in which the previous vision of social progress has been undermined.

In these three ways, the state will have to have an enhanced role in creating a sustainable and positive economy for peace.

Seeking Conviviality
Relationships and Structures – Environment & Technology

Following more directly from the work of Ivan Illich, conviviality asks challenging questions about relationships between people and the environment and people and technology.

A convivial perspective is linked not only to the idea of developing the commons and protecting existing commons, it also naturally links to proposals to build an economy which is not based on the growth of consumption. The present economy depends on the idea that happiness is achieved through satisfying ever more desires through the

consumer market. In a sense consumption is the motivating factor in increasing income and we are aware that even when incomes are in relative decline people use debt to maintain consumption.

Conviviality in relation to technology would foster the creation of products and services by co-design and co-production, wherever possible by the production of durable, repairable, resource conserving products.

To produce change in this direction needs the involvement of local communities, national governments and international organisations.

Seeking Conviviality
Relationships and Structures – Politics & Organising

When looking at the context for convivial life together, we have to take three perspectives seriously. First of all, many of the threats which people and communities face can be solved on a national level. The question of national frameworks has been neglected and the role of national states has been eroded in terms of their capacity to support social, economic and environmental well-being. Fear is one of the consequences of this withdrawal and nationalism is its alter ego.

Secondly, there is also a need to reform company law so that companies are answerable to all stakeholders and not just shareholders. The mantra of maximising shareholder value has to be overcome. Many business insiders are advocating this albeit without any statutory framework.

The third issue is related to the rise of nationalism, which can be seen, in part as a response to neo-liberal globalisation. But this is to ignore the fact that many of the challenges faced depend on international cooperation to find solutions. It is a paradox that just at the moment when international action is needed, the structures for international cooperation are being undermined.

The fourth perspective we have to take is the support of local action. Conviviality privileges the development of self-organised groups which are inclusive of diversity and which are productive of change, rather than the creation of enclosed, defensive groups. Learning by difference and not glossing over conflicting viewpoints leads to more secure decision making and the ownership of processes.

Convivial life together requires structures for decision making and the creation of stable frameworks, but these should be based on planning and self-organisation, not only on planning from the 'centre' to the periphery'. On the other hand, convivial life together requires as political framework which is anchored nationally and internationally.

Seeking Conviviality
Relationships and Structures – Action & Processes

Seeking Conviviality is based on a relational view of the person – we become who we are (or: we are becoming who we will be) through relationships with others through our spirituality, through relationships with the environment we are in and the structures

within which we live. We are also shaped by the real or imagined history which also influences our identity. We could also call this an ecological view of personhood. It is on this basis that we also communicate with the diverse 'others' we meet.

In everyday life we mirror positively or negatively the 'other(s)' and the 'structure(s)' which we encounter and through this historical process we build our personal narrative or identity. Behind 'seeking conviviality' is the view of the 'person' as formed through relationships.

Change implies changes in the person's relational context and this impacts on the 'story' they tell about themselves (biography). Through processes of seeking conviviality, by the exchange of story, meaning and hopes and through the experience of effective work for change, people can experience a retelling of the personal story and group narrative. This new story and narrative signals a change towards an expression of 'agency' or 'voice' and this signals the change of identity which we sometimes call empowerment or transformation.

Working for convivial life together is not just about face to face work at the local level! Structures shape our everyday behaviour and our identity as we mirror their expectations or resist them. Furthermore, action and structures are related, and conviviality needs appropriate structures which enable and support life together. As I mentioned previously, present political, economic or cultural structures often impede or block convivial life together. Examples abound and I could just mention the UK government's creation of a 'hostile environment' for immigrants or the imposition of harsh conditionalities for the receipt of social support.

Seeking Conviviality....

In summary, seeking conviviality....

....brings together practices which are related to different aspects of life together, respecting diversity of identity and contribution

....overcomes isolation and powerlessness and provides a more attractive model for life together than consumerism under the pressure of austerity, growing inequality and declining quality of employment

....gives value to the idea that human life is relational, and we live in mutual dependency, including on finite environmental resources

....stimulates imagination and encompasses the diversity of action and structure needed to create new ways of resourcing human life and living together

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Some Questions

- What are the present economic blocks to convivial life together in Europe and beyond?
- What proposals would create an enabling space for convivial life together?
- How do we develop political processes in 'public space', which are more participative and support conviviality?
- What is the contribution of churches and faith communities to convivial life together, locally, nationally and internationally, including at a European (not just E.U.) level?

Please Note: This is a spoken text, as it was presented at the conference and it should be referenced as such, in case of quotation. An expanded version is foreseen for publication later. Key texts and sources are in the bibliography below.
Tony Addy, September 2019

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