

FOR LOW-TECH AND SOLIDARY METROPOLISES

A thematic study

Contrary to the idea of an infinite technological progress, able to overcome all challenges we are facing, the concept of low-tech questions our needs and investigates how to meet them in the most simple, agile, frugal, accessible, and appropriable way possible.

This approach, which resonates with the founding principles of social economy, invites us to invent new ways of living, moving, accessing everyday goods and services, producing, and working, in order to progress towards more frugality and the empowerment of the inhabitants.

Carried out by the Labo de l'ESS in partnership with 6 of France's largest urban areas – Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Paris, Poitiers, and Strasbourg – this study explains and provides tools for metropolises to transition towards low-tech, with the active contribution of social economy's local initiatives.

KEY FIGURES

9%

World's average annual growth of digital technologies' energy footprint (*The Shift Project, 2018*)

1 million

Tons of consumer goods reused in France (*ADEME, 2017*)

8%

Share of French working people declaring they walk or cycle to their office (*INSEE, 2021*)

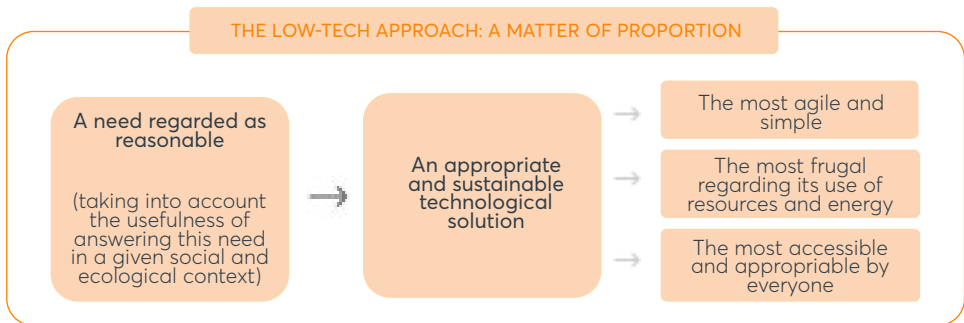
THE LOW-TECH APPROACH: A TOOL TOWARDS MORE RESILIENT METROPOLISES



While the "smart city" concept grows, the low-tech approach calls into question the current dominant narrative that promotes an ever-increasing use of technology, pointing at:

- Its **ecological unsustainability** (due to growing consumption of energy and resources, pollutions, etc.) and **the risk it entails in terms of resilience** (dependence to globalized value chains, risks of supply crises, etc.)
- Its **social, economic, and political consequences** (loss of individual and collective autonomy due to a growing dependance on technology and big tech companies, etc.)

Although the low-tech approach does not refuse the use of technology, it encourages **focusing on what is really useful to us** and recommends **using technology with better discernment**.



Systemic and multi-scalar by nature, **the low-tech approach is particularly relevant to metropolises** which gather a great share of the population and face an ever-greater urge for a transition towards more resilience while technology has never been so pervasive in the functioning of those territories.

SOCIAL ECONOMY, A CRUCIAL ALLY IN THE TRANSITION TOWARDS LOW-TECH METROPOLISES

While the transition towards low-tech metropolises requires the combined efforts of all local players, **social economy is a particularly crucial ally of cities wishing to move towards this new urban model**.

Sharing with the low-tech approach the aim to fulfil local needs by putting social benefits and value sharing at the heart of its action, **social economy develops numerous initiatives that effectively contribute to this transition**. Thanks to its experience of cooperation and solidarity, it helps making the low-tech approach an accessible tool for all.



IMPLEMENTING A LOW-TECH APPROACH AT A METROPOLITAN LEVEL WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

Focusing on four fundamental needs and analysing many local social economy initiatives, the Labo de l'ESS suggests some founding principles that could guide the implementation of a low-tech approach at the metropolitan level¹:

HOUSING

- Build less while densifying cities
- Build and equip better
- Adopt the low-tech approach in the urban public spaces planning

MOVING

- Favour non-motorised mobility for daily commute
- Support the development of urban logistics and economic activities that depend less on motorized vehicles
- Favour a more frugal use of motorised means of transportation when it cannot be avoided
- Support the transition of everyone towards a more low-tech mobility by considering the specificity of each situation

ACCESSING EVERYDAY GOODS AND SERVICES

- Become more frugal (reduce consumption, make objects last more)
- Favour and support a "do-it-yourself" approach
- Reinforce the transition towards a circular economy for everyday goods (repair, reuse, and, when those two options cannot be achieved, recycle)

PRODUCING AND WORKING

- Produce less, produce better
- Contribute to the reterritorialization of economy (through the relocation of activities, the development of local arts and crafts, and the support to initiatives encouraging local economic development, etc.)
- Encourage the pooling of resources (space, economic means, equipment, data, etc.) between local actors

Building on those principles of action, the Labo de l'ESS puts forward 4 measures that would enable the scaling-up of low-tech solutions, in order to put this approach at the heart of the "making-of" of the cities of tomorrow:

1. Co-develop a comprehensive and integrated action plan for a low-tech metropolis, building on a shared territorial diagnosis.
2. Raise awareness of the advantages of a low-tech approach and support everyone in realizing his/her transition towards this model.
3. Create places that contribute to the materialisation of the low-tech approach.
4. Develop local cooperation to build an ecosystem of initiatives committed to the transition towards a low-tech metropolis.

¹ For a more complete view of the teachings of this study, refer to its two publications (only available in French).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



Literature review



Additional discussions and collaborative workshops



6 learning expeditions in partner territories



1 task force (21 members) and 1 steering group (6 partner territories)



More than 70 initiatives met



FOR MORE INFORMATION
Find the complete publication:
<https://bit.ly/3yNkGBd>

Editorial direction: Marie VERNIER, Program officer: Florian LABOULAIS, Thematic referent : Philippe BIHOUIX | Graphic design: Joséphine LEFEBVRE | Photo credits: Pixabay | Impression : Wagram éditions

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Le Labo de l'ESS

5, rue Las Cases - 75007 Paris
+ 33 1 80 05 82 00
contact@lelabo-ess.org



lelabo-ess.org



@lelabo_ess



lelaboess



Le Labo de l'ESS

CONTACT

Florian LABOULAIS
Task officer
florian@lelabo-ess.org
Phone: +33 1 80 05 82 05

