

☐☐ Sustainable communities



The communities and regions that we live in, whether urban or rural, are the environments that have the most direct influence on our lives. We all want our local area to be as prosperous and as clean as possible.

Climate change is a worldwide issue, but each individual will experience the impacts at a local level. And a large part of the solutions will come from boosting the sustainability of local communities. Ecologically sensitive areas, such as wetlands, islands or mountains are the most affected by environmental changes, so they have an even bigger incentive to become more sustainable.

The need to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and produce cleaner energy can be an opportunity for remote regions with limited access to conventional energy supplies. Developing more renewable energy will help these communities become more self-sufficient. Installations, such as windmills or thermal solar plants, will also help to create jobs at the local level.

Urban areas, especially inner cities, also have an incentive to become greener as they suffer directly from problems, such as traffic jams, noise and air pollution. Efficient public transport can make big improvements and cut overall energy use.



:: What is the EU doing?

Policies

- The recent adoption by the European Commission of the **climate change package on 23 January 2008**. This far-reaching package of proposals will help achieve the European Council's commitments to fight climate change and promote renewable energy. The proposals demonstrate that the targets agreed in March 2007 by Member States when adopting the **'Energy for a changing world package'**, are technologically and economically feasible and provide a unique business opportunity for thousands of European companies. These measures will dramatically increase the use of renewable energy in each country and set legally enforceable targets.
- The EU's **action plan for energy efficiency** prioritises the creation of a 'Covenant of Mayors'. The agreement will create a network of Europe's most pioneering cities, exchanging and applying best practices in energy efficiency.
- The **Green Paper on urban mobility** (Sept 2007) looks at free-flowing and greener towns and cities; smarter urban mobility; accessibility and safety.

Funding

- The **Intelligent Energy Europe programme (2007-2013)** supports sustainable community projects. Since 2004, more than 200 communities have committed to improving their energy performances and their share of renewable energy sources.

For instance, the ASPIRE project aims to develop a replicable model for 'Sustainable Energy Communities' in peripheral areas of the EU. See www.aspire-project.eu
- Energy efficiency is a priority of the EU's **structural funds** for 2007 to 2013. **JESSICA** is a joint initiative of the European Commission and the European Investment bank (EIB) to help local authorities across the EU use investment mechanisms to promote sustainable urban development.

Initiatives

- **CIVITAS** helps cities implement technologies and policies for energy-efficient transport systems.
<http://www.civitas-initiative.org/main.phtml?lan=en>
- **ELTIS** supports the transfer of knowledge and exchange of experience in urban and regional transport.
<http://www.eltis.org>.
- **CONCERTO** helps local communities become more self-sufficient and efficient in their energy use.

:: Sustainable energy for local development

Energy sustainability affects local policies and strategies in a number of areas, such as local development, urban planning, local transport or education. Energy diagnosis of local communities can be done in order to evaluate the areas for action with the biggest potential – whether it is in infrastructure, local companies or households.

Renewable energies can create jobs and diversify local economies, especially in rural areas. The production of biomass and biofuels can provide opportunities for farms to diversify. However, the EU sets out stringent environmental sustainability criteria to ensure that the development of biofuels is sustainable and does not conflict with our overall environmental and agricultural goals. Wind energy, solar thermal plants or photovoltaic installations all need manpower to operate them. For outlying areas such as islands, sustainable energy – especially renewable energy – can help overcome geographical isolation and secure energy supplies.

In urban areas, policies for planning, social housing, mobility and transport all have implications for energy use. There is a huge energy saving potential through more energy-efficient street lighting or green public procurement. And increasing sustainability can go hand in hand with social and economic sustainability. For instance, refurbishing run-down buildings to energy efficient criteria can regenerate whole districts and attract new people and businesses to the area.

:: Good practice

Green Light Graz – Modernisation and saving energy at street lighting in the city of Graz (Austria) – Graz Energy Agency

In 2005, the modernisation of street lighting started along the town's main streets. The costs of the investment in new technology were offset against the savings that would be made in the future. A 15-year financing arrangement was agreed that meant no upfront funds were needed from the local authorities, yet it still retained a share of the costs savings.

The first year saw 718 lamps renewed and provided with state-of-the-art control engineering. The total saving in energy costs was around €67 000, of which the city received around €30 000 once the investment costs were subtracted. More of the city's 15 000 lights will be converted in the following years, with potential for even greater savings.

http://www.managenergy.net/download/local_energy_action_2007.pdf

:: The Covenant of Mayors

The Covenant is to become a network of mayors of European cities working with the European Commission to exchange experience and know-how on sustainability measures in the most pioneering towns and cities. Almost 100 cities throughout Europe, including 15 capitals, have expressed willingness to join.

Mayors signing the Covenant pledge to go beyond the EU target to cut CO₂ emissions by 20% by 2020. Within a year of signing the covenant they must produce a Sustainable Energy Action Plan, which details the specific actions they will take to achieve their aim. Mayors will commit themselves to mobilising local civil society to help prepare the plan.

The Commission's role is to ensure that towns and cities participating in the Covenant are widely recognized and their efforts gain public visibility.



:: Public involvement

Public authorities should be the drivers for greater sustainability for their local communities. They can organise awareness-raising activities and can use their purchasing power to create sustainability through green public procurement. They can set an example and gain from practical energy savings in the sustainable building, design and renovation of public buildings, getting these buildings EMAS certified, or using energy-efficient vehicles in their public fleets.

Sustainable energy activities should involve individual people, local businesses, schools and NGOs. Greater awareness among citizens and companies means they will be able to act in a more sustainable way in their daily life and businesses. The public should be informed about local activities promoting more intelligent use of energy and they should be able to get in direct contact with the authorities for more information. Communication campaigns can focus on efforts in particular areas, such as climate change or urban mobility and raising awareness of the economic and environmental impacts of sustainable energy policies.

Partnerships, both at the local and European levels, can ensure effective implementation of sustainable energy strategies. This means local councils, energy agencies, chambers of commerce, energy professionals and renewable technology suppliers working together to secure funding and sharing best practice.

:: Good practice

Cornwall sustainable energy partnership, UK

The county of Cornwall in south west England developed a sustainable energy and action plan in 2004, one of the first sub-regions to take action. It sets a future strategy for this rural area to boost both its sustainability.

There are specific actions foreseen to increase energy efficiency and renewable energies. These should help deal with social problems (i.e. poverty), economic issues (electricity distribution), and the environment (climate change) through a number of concrete actions. A target is to raise the proportion of the region's electricity derived from renewable sources from around 6% when the plan was made to between 11 and 15% by 2010

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:: What is ManagEnergy?

ManagEnergy is an initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy and Transport, which is funded by the Intelligent Energy Europe programme. It aims to support local and regional actions on energy efficiency and renewable energies through training workshops and on-line events. In addition, information is provided on case studies, good practice, European legislation and programmes.

ManagEnergy is also a European network of local and regional energy agencies (LEAs). These agencies promote the introduction of good energy management practices, support sustainability, provide information and guidance, and offer other services depending on local needs. www.managenergy.net

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