

## Meeting energy and climate challenges is a task for local authorities



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**N**o one disputes the fact that any energy strategy needs to rely, in particular, on technology, as most of the articles in this publication show. Forty years after the first oil crisis that marked the beginning of the end of strong growth in Europe, almost everything has changed: we know how to build and retrofit buildings with low heating requirements; we can produce electricity from the sun, the wind and geothermal energy; it is possible to harness solid or liquid biomass to generate heat and power; we have the resources to regulate complex systems; our production systems can rely on high-performance processes. We also now have European legislation. Yet, we struggle to make use of all the above with the intensity required to meet the energy and climate challenges of our century, even though we know this is crucial to preserve global balances. Why is this so? Is it because we tend to overestimate what technology by itself can do and neglect citizenship and governance issues?

In Heidelberg, Germany, we are building the largest “passive standard” neighbourhood in Europe on 116 hectares right in the city centre, including over 3,000 housing units, office space, a university, schools, kindergartens and shops. All buildings are designed to use less than 15 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year for heating. The neighbourhood will be connected to a 100% renewable district heating system using biomass and sun power. The project also includes cycling and pedestrian lanes, a public transport system, a rainwater collection system and green roofs on two-thirds of the buildings.

Bo Frank, my colleague and Mayor of Växjö (Sweden), is close to supplying his city of 90,000

inhabitants with 100% biomass-derived energy, both for heating and electricity. He is making huge progress with biogas and is building zero-energy buildings.

Evelyne Huytebroeck, Brussels-Capital Minister, is radically changing construction and renovation in her region in collaboration with the whole building industry and the training institutions.

The same applies to my colleagues from Dijon, Pamplona, Bielsko Biala, Leicester, Helsinki, Riga, Delft and Bornova-Izmir, who are also on the *Energy Cities* Board. And to the over 5,500 local authorities engaged in the *Covenant of Mayors*<sup>1</sup> and voluntarily committed to achieving the EU’s 3x20 objectives. They are backed-up by hundreds of public, private and associative supporters as well as thousands of committed citizens. An unprecedented movement in Europe!

*Energy Cities* has published a series of *Proposals for the energy transition of cities and towns*<sup>2</sup> based on hundreds of practical examples throughout Europe. These proposals constitute a source of inspiration to think and act differently. They encourage local authorities to develop

their capacities, to become aware and make use of their territories’ resources. The range of initiatives proves that it is possible to revitalise local economies which desperately need regenerating.

Who other than local authorities can devise, design and implement the best techniques, methods and practices in their disparate territories in close collaboration with local stakeholders and citizens? No one! No successful energy transition towards a post-carbon society is possible without involving local stakeholders who make it their daily task to transform and regenerate cities, who listen to local people, take the political risks inherent to innovation and encourage the private sector.

What is at stake is the following question: why are local and regional authorities not mentioned in the European Commission’s strategic energy documents<sup>3</sup> whereas 70% of energy is used in cities and most of the necessary measures have to be taken locally? Not a word in the *Green Paper* on the 2030 energy and climate strategy published in March 2013! And barely a mention in the January 2014 *White Paper*! It was so blatant that *Energy Cities* took the initiative of publishing a proposal for a *Communication* by the

1 [www.eumayors.eu](http://www.eumayors.eu)

2 [www.energy-cities.eu/30proposals](http://www.energy-cities.eu/30proposals), available in 8 languages

3 Not to mention support programmes as part of the Cohesion and Research policies.



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European Commission in October 2013 entitled “Empowering local and regional authorities to deliver the EU climate and energy ambitions”<sup>4</sup>. A public consultation revealed a consensus among many economic, social and environmental partners. Strengthened by this support, *Energy Cities* convinced the Parliament of the merits of this request, shared by the Committee of the Regions in February 2014.

Only challenges that are sufficiently ambitious to mobilise people can be met with success. This implies a sort of chemistry in which a variety of stakeholders from all walks of life have their part to play. The EU must once again become attractive. Its institutions must rekindle the desire

for Europe. The Parliament and the Commission are about to be renewed, presenting a unique opportunity for citizens and their local and regional representatives to play an active part in European policies. As a universal issue of concern to us all, in all aspects of our lives, energy provides an excellent springboard for a multilevel and multi-player movement. Collectively, we cannot afford to miss this opportunity.

To increase the chances of an agreement being reached in Paris in 2015, Mr Ban Ki Moon has recently appointed former New York Mayor Mike Bloomberg to serve as UN special envoy for cities to the climate negotiations.

Truly a good idea.

4 [www.energy-cities.eu/IMG/pdf/comm\\_2030\\_web.pdf](http://www.energy-cities.eu/IMG/pdf/comm_2030_web.pdf)



European Mayors « demonstrating » for energy transition at Energy Cities' annual Rendezvous in Växjö, 2013