

Preface

This book is for everyone who lives, works, studies – and yes, who loves – cities and towns. Most of us live in urban areas, and enjoy the many comforts offered by urban living. We invite you to gain an insight into relevant developments for local governments from an energy and climate protection perspective.

Why are we looking at communities and climate change? And why are we in particular looking at smaller sized communities?

We are now standing at a cusp point. This is a time when decisions are being made that will shape our future, and that of the world. The cusp point is linked to two prominent facts, namely that the climate is changing and that global natural resources are dwindling. Humans are consuming global resources at an unprecedented tempo, and directly contributing to the acceleration of climate change through the way we generate energy and use resources. These are two key aspects which require a rethink – what has to change to influence the direction at this cusp point.

Humans must change their lifestyle in order to survive in a ‘whole’ environment and to enjoy a reasonable ‘quality of life’. This means taking on responsibility for our actions and our choices, as well as looking at the impact these have beyond today. Despite the obvious (and not so obvious) threats, there are also opportunities at this time, in this changing climate. We can approach this situation from a financial perspective, a technological perspective, and a solutions perspective. Yet what we need is a systems change, and a coherent sustainable and suitable response. We also need to consider the scale of the climate challenge, which has a huge dimension probably not yet fully understood by most people.

The focus of this publication is on how small and medium-sized communities have effectively responded to climate change, both in the areas of mitigation and adaptation. There is a particular concentration on the use of different approaches towards sustainable energy planning and implementation by the cases selected. These responses were the result of different (and often combined) motivations – some taking on their responsibility to protect the environment, others to specifically reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and so mitigate their communities’ impact on climate change, some to improve urban air quality, others to improve the resilience of their communities, and most of them keen to make use of opportunities for sustainable local development.

This book, although not a conference proceedings per se, is one of the main outcomes of the European Rovigo Climate Conference 2008 that addressed “Climate protection and renewable energy: medium and small communities facing the challenge”.¹ The event was jointly organised by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability and the Province of Rovigo, Italy, in April 2008, to highlight that effective climate protection action can, and is addressed by smaller cities and towns, sometimes also working in cooperation clusters. Some of the excellent examples presented in Rovigo are included in this publication, together with other good practice cases that illustrate the wide variety of approaches used. There are of course many other options available – and communities need to select those that will work for them.

We will share with you the reasoning and potential to change at a community level, giving you an insight into recent fascinating developments that are shaping the future of our communities. Local governments around the globe, and particularly in Europe, have taken on the role to lead and drive change in their communities. In addition to briefly looking at the history of community climate protection, in particular through ICLEI’s international Cities for Climate Protection™ (CCP) Campaign, important recent developments relevant to climate change mitigation and adaptation at a community level are also presented. These include the international Local Government Climate Roadmap – a process started in Bali in December 2007 at the United Nations Climate Conference to draw attention to the crucial role of local governments (LGs) in climate protection. The City Climate Catalogue is another global tool used to highlight the vital role communities are playing in climate protection, and to focus on collective achievements. This is part of an ongoing process that will culminate in calling for improved support and framework conditions from national governments and international actors, in the post-2012 phase. Other developments such as the European Covenant of Mayors play an important role at a regional level, and some of these developments are also presented.

Kindly note that some issues are not explicitly addressed, yet provide a context for this book. These include: the global population explosion, the migration of people towards urban centers, the exponential growth in resource consumption and consumerism, the uncertainty about future availability of resources, and anticipated aggression regarding resource ownership.

Although the above mentioned issues seem to be global problems these are also relevant to urban areas. Consider from an energy perspective: Is the energy infrastructure robust enough if there is a change in the population (e.g. incoming masses of seasonal tourists)? How can a local government effectively plan for inevitable fuel price rises, if it remains dependent on imported fossil fuels? Is it perhaps more financially sound, more efficient and safer to become independent from energy ‘imports’? What will the impact of climate change be on the community, the

¹ www.iclei-europe.org/rovigo2008

infrastructure, the local environment over the next 10, 20, 50 years? Is the local government planning for this? How can the local government plan for the increasing variability in climate and increasing violence of natural phenomena (precipitation, storms, droughts)? All of these questions should be considered in local strategies, urban planning, energy planning and other areas potentially impacted.

Nobody (as of yet) is using words such as ‘crisis’ or ‘emergency’ when looking at climate change and resource depletion. Yet this is essentially the status we have to face. Certainly it is a challenge to respond appropriately and promptly. It is time to take on our responsibilities. At community level, where the impacts of climate change are already visible and will continue to manifest, there is increasing recognition that action is required and there is a vast potential for local climate action – by every individual, by local leaders, by businesses and industry – in many different areas. Here local governments can literally move the world – with ICLEI’s motto ‘Local action moves the world’ a pointer to today’s realities.

Through this publication we wish to provide some ideas on how to reach a sustainable energy future, sharing examples from smaller communities that have started on the road of transition and have achieved measures of success. Our premise is that it is possible to reach and maintain a level of quality of life that all can enjoy, using resources in a sustainable manner and limiting our impact on the environment. We hope our leaders will use the current international post-Kyoto climate negotiations to provide clear direction and a support framework for action. Yet, we will in any case take up our own responsibility, even show them the way this can look at a local level.

We invite you to read on, gain ideas for your own community, and join us in this process of energy transition towards a sustainable future, aiming to stay beyond the climate change tipping point if this is still possible.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4020-9530-6>

Local Governments and Climate Change
Sustainable Energy Planning and Implementation in
Small and Medium Sized Communities

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2010, XXII, 434 p. 50 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-9530-6