

Seven steps to climate-neutral community

Source: "Leitfaden Sieben Schritte auf dem Weg zur klimaneutralen Kommune", Kompetenznetzwerk Dezentrale Energietechnologien e. V. (deENet)

There are many ways in which communities can face the future climate and climate neutrality. In any case, it is important to respect the regional conditions: in the rural areas for example, there is a higher biomass and wind energy potential and there are other communicative and municipal structures than in urban areas. However, municipalities should note the following compiled "seven steps to climate-neutral community". This approach is similar to other major urban planning projects, such as the development of large construction and industrial areas with extensive public participation.

1. Raising a climate change awareness in all sectors of society

Preconditions for a change of action are always gained awareness and knowledge. Awareness for climate change in all sectors of society is the basis on which further action can be taken with wide acceptance in the community. An indicator for climate change awareness can be, for example, the feedback on already implemented climate change projects.

In case of low acceptance, smaller projects should be planned which introduce into the topic. First the focus should be on motives, which describe concrete approaches for community action in addition to the commitment against the global climate change: economic opportunities through increased regional added value, image building and model function of the municipality, competitive advantage over neighboring communities, identifying specific savings in public and private sectors, reduced dependency on imports of energy.

In addition, everyone's concern by climatic changes, but also the benefits of tackling climate change should be communicated clearly. Building up climate change awareness takes time. It can be supported by continuous information and communication with the different social groups and by involvement of schools and other educational institutions.

2. The political decision on the objective of a municipal climate neutrality

The wide acceptance of a local climate change commitment can be expressed in a political decision by the municipality to achieve climate neutrality. On the other hand, a political decision as a sign of readiness can have positive impacts on the public acceptance regarding climate protection measures. Such a decision should already include a mission statement and the key climate policy goals of the municipality.

The objectives should be further clarified during the process and be differentiated into various topics, such as construction, mobility, consumption etc. Education and effective communication at all levels should be considered as implementation strategies in the political decision making. Climate protection needs a long breath. Climate neutrality is a long term goal. This course can be set today by the municipalities.

3. Involvement of local stakeholders

The successful implementation of community goals and projects depends substantially from the successful integration and cooperation of the different actors. It is important that local stakeholders will be informed and involved at an early stage. Actors are representatives from the municipal administration, from the civil society (interest groups, clubs, associations etc.), industry and crafts, as well as concerned citizens and general public. Different groups of actors are addressed in different ways, with different intensity of participation and different information. That requires a participation concept and participation management, and professional public relations.

It is recommended to set up groups following the process for a regular exchange and to offer information events and if necessary site visits, actions or consultations. In addition you may use experiences and recommendations from other local participatory processes, for example from the spatial planning. Even a regular experience sharing between different municipalities on activities on climate change is helpful. Participatory processes are learning processes for all involved: to transport information, illustrate different perspectives and promote conflict resolution. They are an essential component of the above education and communication strategy.

4. Creation of an integrated climate protection concept and action plan

For the development of concerted action, a climate change concept should be developed, which defines the concrete objectives resulting from the political decision and builds the bridge to implementation. The preparation should take place as participatory process with early involvement of all relevant municipal actors. Basic elements of the climate protection concept are an analysis of

the current CO₂ and energy balance, the analysis of potentials for energy efficiency and for the use of renewable energy, and an action plan. The action plan includes the description of the measures to be implemented with details concerning costs, CO₂ savings, actors and target groups as well as the process steps and time frame.

5. Financing of the local climate

The local authority should in any case check the use of existing funding programmes for local climate protection.

However, it can often be very difficult to estimate, how these programs develop in the future. Furthermore, certain programs are tied to strict conditions and temporary. Thus, the question of a long-term and also secure financing with little or no fluctuations arises. Often, the municipal "climate-protection- fund" is mentioned. Municipal investments in the climate, like in the building renovation, save energy costs and in many cases are reasonable in economic terms, after several years. Part of this saved energy costs can be included in the climate-protection- fund. Further on, concession fees, profits of public utilities, donations from enterprises, so-called climate change pennies on tickets, etc. can be used.

Ideally, this climate-protection- fund will only pay for investments to protect the climate. Such a fund should be accompanied, if possible, by a municipal budget title for energy and climate.

The expansion of renewable energies can be financed by models of civil participation for local wind farms, photovoltaic systems, etc. There maybe special funding programs available.

6. Selection, implementation and sustainability of measures

Starting from the external environment such as energy prices, local budget or current legislation is the selection of measures to be implemented. In integrated concepts, the political decisions should be amended by economic decisions. It is also important to establish a timetable, if it was not already determined by the climate protection concept. Then the measures can be implemented with secure funding.

Depending on the potential in the fields of savings (of energy) and replacing (of fossil energy by renewable energy)" complete, mathematical, climate neutrality will only be possible by additional compensation of emissions elsewhere. An approach could come from regional energy producers, for example, to compensate for greenhouse gases from the combustion of natural gas or the carbon-neutral use of railways and the climate offsetting of air travel. Ideally, the implementation and continuation of the measures will be done by a municipal climate protection officer, also to ensure the sustainability of the climate change process.

7. Evaluation and feedback processes

The success of the implementation of the neutrality objective will be encouraged by supporting evaluation. The observation and evaluation of policies and the process helps, "to keep the ship on course" or to make any necessary adjustments. Any feedback and changing circumstances can be identified, such as law or behavior changes or technical progress. To support the evaluation the use of a management system is recommended. It helps to reveal the relevant data for evaluation. It is also necessary, to update the CO₂ balance in regular intervals and to review the climate protection concept, including action plan. The update requires the continuous debate on climate change in the community. This supports and strengthens the long-term task for the future the local climate neutrality.