

Review of week one at the COP 15 – a focus on European cities and networks

Copenhagen, Saturday, December 12, 2009 – The challenges in obtaining a fair, comprehensive and ambitious agreement remain headlines in the international news, but no real movement can as yet be seen at the negotiation tables. Considering recent scientific updates pointing to the need for far more ambitious targets than those under discussion, the role of cities and local governments is exponentially gaining importance. There is a growing appreciation of their responsibility to engage as key actors tackling climate change. Yet, national governments are now, more than ever, needed to improve enabling framework conditions and empower cities to act.

Considering the daunting findings of *The Copenhagen Diagnosis - Updating the World on the Latest Climate Science* (<http://www.copenhagendiagnosis.org>), which synthesizes the most policy-relevant climate science published since the close-off of material for the last IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report, the need for fast and effective action remains a central issue. The fundamental message is that the annual per capita emissions need to shrink to well under one metric ton carbon dioxide (CO₂) by 2050. This means 80-95% below the per-capita emissions in developed nations in 2000 – also in Europe. As half the world's population now lives in cities, this is where emissions need to be drastically reduced – by saving energy, using energy more efficiently and switching to renewables.

On 7 December 2009, the first day of the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, a morning briefing was held for local government representatives in the Local Government Climate LOUNGE (www.iclei.org/cop15/lounge), starting the intensive COP 15 city programme. During this daily briefing relevant developments are shared, pointing participants to city-relevant side-events throughout the COP 15. An outstanding programme was sustained throughout the 1st week of the Local Government Climate LOUNGE, where many inspiring city and network activities from around the globe were presented, with a few European highlights shared below.

A group of 15 mayors, deputy mayors and senior local government network representatives from Central and Eastern Europe joined the LG Action project (www.lg-acton.eu) session in the LOUNGE and shared how their cities are engaging in sustainable energy activities. They had a unique opportunity to also present their views on challenges and needs regarding the more extensive roll-out of sustainable energy solutions in their communities. Their key messages highlighted the need for enabling framework conditions at EU and national level, which includes up-to-date information, enhanced staff capacity, easier access to finances and practical technical assistance. Most of the representatives were part of the Major Group of Local Governments and Municipal Local Authorities (LGMA) Constituency (a few were also in their national delegations), and their participation at the COP 15 was made possible by the LG Action project, co-funded by the Intelligent Energy Europe programme of the European Commission.

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) presented their new financial mechanism for local action, focusing on an integrated approach with planning and financing. The City of Copenhagen's famous bicycle programme was presented on 11 December, and the Italian Local Agenda 21 Coordination focused on Italian communities in action, also highlighting the Charter feeding into the Local Government Climate Roadmap. Several local-national delegation meetings were also held in the LOUNGE, bringing together cities and their nation's chief climate negotiator or responsible minister. Here strong support was generally shown for local governments, in particular by the European, Swedish and

Norwegian delegations but also many other nations. The latest developments regarding the proposed inclusion of text referring to local governments and sub-national levels of government look more positive than a week ago. However, next week only there will be clarity on this, with the world waiting with bated breath for the release of the expected Copenhagen Outcome document (<http://en.cop15.dk>).

Cities and networks have been active in many COP 15 side events, showing how they already engaging in local climate action. The example of the Province of Rome, working with numerous municipalities, shared by Nicola Zingaretti, President of the Province of Rome during the Climate Alliance side event on 11 December, was one such an inspiring example illustrating how other levels of government are actively engaging to help smaller communities. Different tools have been presented, such as The City Climate Catalogue, showing nearly 3,000 communities committed to local climate action (www.climate-catalogue.org) – aimed at inspiring national leaders and negotiators to follow suit.

With the impact of the current financial crises becoming visible at local level, due to reduced revenues from taxes, there is growing concern among municipalities on how to deliver mandatory services, let alone additional voluntary activities such as climate protection. However, there is also recognition that improved efficiency can be a good starting point. There is a huge interest in effective, immediately available financial support mechanisms to support the roll-out of mitigation actions, as well as tools such as greenhouse gas inventories, sustainable energy action plan templates and monitoring processes. “The interest is there, but the practical support tools are in many cases still lacking. Capacity development is urgently needed to provide motivation, develop knowledge and augment skills”, says Maryke van Staden, coordinator of the LG Action project and ICLEI’s Cities for Climate Protection Campaign in Europe. “Furthermore, people, technology and policy must be properly directed to optimise local climate action, supported by concise up-to-date information that will allow informed decisions to be taken. Without such an enabling framework condition, action will be effectively blocked.”

A number of study tours to interesting and thought-provoking city climate actions in Copenhagen, Växjö and Malmö have helped to motivate politicians and inspire technical staff. They are going home with the message “yes, we can” and, even more appropriate, “yes, we will” with a call on their national governments to support them with their new vision. Knowing that there are many experienced cities – small, medium and large – already engaged, and prepared to share and motivate them, those local governments starting up with climate protection are increasingly eager to join the global movement of climate active cities and take on their responsibility towards their communities. Together with the city associations and networks that actively support their members, this powerful combination will help to pick up the pace in rolling out local climate and sustainable energy action across Europe and the globe.

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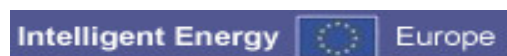
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