

EU PROJECT TARGETS CARBON REDUCTION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SET TO INTENSIFY



Cork City Council is one of the project partners in the Interreg Europe INTENSIFY project, which aims to achieve greater carbon reduction and to lower greenhouse gas emissions through intense community engagement, writes project manager Brian Cassidy.

Cork City Council is preparing its Regional Action Plan, focusing on the reduction of carbon emissions through intense community engagement as part of the Interreg Europe INTENSIFY project. The project is addressing the key challenge of how to empower citizens and communities to achieve more carbon reduction, which is both great and urgent.

In finalising its Regional Action Plan, the council is drawing inspirations from the best practices from other European regions after working closely with the project partners since 2018.

The EU regions are committed by international treaty to achieve ambitious carbon reduction targets, but public authorities cannot do this alone for the following four main reasons:

- Local authorities directly control only a small percentage of emissions.

- The EU targets are so ambitious that they require citizens to choose to make significant behaviour change that cannot be imposed on people.
- Policies are created by politicians incorporating the will of the people. The pressure to make changes is citizen-led.
- Co-ordinated action can provide opportunities for innovative financing and building consensus can create major changes.

Community engagement plays an integral role in the successful implementation of climate action projects to empower citizens, build public trust and secure community support. Through the INTENSIFY project Cork City Council is working to empower citizens through knowledge sharing and developing mechanisms, which promote co-action, co-creation, and co-delivery.

CLIMATE ACTION HANDBOOK

The Regional Action Plan aims to improve the policy instrument of the Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programme Thematic Objective No. 4 – Low Carbon Economy, “a shift towards a low-carbon economy, especially energy efficiency in housing, and promoting low-carbon strategies for urban areas”.

The Regional Action Plan includes two actions: (1) To develop a low-carbon handbook for social housing tenants; (2) To establish a digital one-stop-shop (OSS) platform to facilitate the growth of energy communities.

In the first action, Cork City Council will work closely with the South West Climate Action Regional Office to develop a



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municipality in Croatia and their FIESTA good practice.

During a virtual Import Workshop, a learning exchange between project partners, Cork City Council learned about the Families Intelligent Energy Saving Targeted Action (FIESTA) project. This project aims to lead families with children to save energy at home, acting both on their energy consumption behaviour and on their purchasing decisions.

The FIESTA project leader shared with us the FIESTA Energy Efficiency Guide for Families that helps families get started on energy savings and feel more comfortable at home.

The FIESTA Guide will be used to help the team design the low-carbon handbook for social tenants and how they can improve their well-being and comfort at home.

IMPLEMENTATION CHAMPIONS

In the second action, the digital OSS (One-Stop-Shop) platform is a citizen engagement and energy collective action that will develop a standard framework for the growth of energy communities in Cork and in other regions. The OSS harnesses

the power of technology and the power of community action to accelerate the energy transition process.

The OSS standard framework will not only offer technology advice for local energy communities but also innovative collective business models and recommendations to address policy and regulatory challenges. Users of the OSS platform will be able to get one-on-one advice about deep energy retrofitting, energy efficiency, energy sustainability, and the use of solar and renewable energy.

The project will train Implementation Champions on key topics including behaviour change, prosumerism, collective actions and their benefit to consumers, and what it means to become an energy citizen in a sustainable energy community. These champions will act as local energy experts closely working with local authorities and providing advice to local citizens and communities.

The action draws inspiration from the Study Visit to our partner Milton Keynes Council in the UK. During the Study Visit, Cork City Council representatives visited the Milton Keynes Electric Vehicle Experience Centre, which provides

Climate Action Handbook for social housing tenants who are more likely to be impacted by fuel poverty arising from low income, high energy prices, and poor energy efficiency in the home.

With the development the handbook, tenants are encouraged to actively participate in the reduction of carbon emissions at home. The improvement of the energy efficiency of the household can also help to reduce the amount that is spent on energy. As a result, it can have an added benefit of improving the health and wellbeing of occupants and reducing poverty in at-risk households.

HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY GUIDES

The Climate Action Regional Office plays an important role in co-ordinating climate action at local government level in Ireland and will lead in the preparation and dissemination of the handbook to the local authorities in the southern and eastern region and beyond.

The action draws inspiration from our project partner in the City of Zadar, a local



Members of the INTENSIFY Team at the inaugural project team meeting in 2018 (l-r): Uberto Di Remigio (Treviso), Thomas Rogers (Cork), Lina Gelaziene (ECAT), Antonio Zonta (Treviso), Matus Skvarka and Erika Balazova (Trnava), Roberto González Argote, Vaiva Ramanauskiene (ECAT), Aitor Albaina Vivanco, Brian Cassidy (Cork), Jeremy Draper and Neil Allen (Milton Keynes), Paolo Barnaba (Treviso), Thies Schroeder, Lucia Kolega, Jim McGeever (ECAT), Joao Cleto (Ageneal), and Mariogiovanna Laudani (Project Secretariat)

independent advice and test drive opportunities to help citizens choose an electric vehicle.

INVESTMENT IN ELECTRIC VEHICLES

We observed first-hand how people could be targeted to learn more about electric vehicles and as a result be motivated to invest in electric vehicles in preference to other forms of transport. We also observed that the staff are well-trained in the subject area and are advising members of the public on the advantages of electric vehicles.

This approach builds trust from the public in e-vehicles and helps citizens make informed choices. The learning outcome from the Study Visit will influence the training programme for the Implementation Champions, the OSS energy advisors.

Finally, Cork City Council, along with its regional stakeholders for the INTENSIFY project has organised Study Visits to share good practices, knowledge, and experiences with our partners. In 2019, a Study Visit was hosted at the Nano Nagle Place attended by representatives from the city of Trnava, the city of Zadar, Cork City Council and our regional stakeholder groups.

The two-day event commenced with an introduction from the Lord Mayor of Cork Cllr John Sheehan and the nation's Climate Action Plan. Stakeholders shared their knowledge and expertise, including University College Cork which presented its Green Campus programme. This seven-step programme and a cycle of continual improvement aims to make every student aware of sustainable development through both formal and informal learning.

COMMUNITY ENERGY SUPPORTS

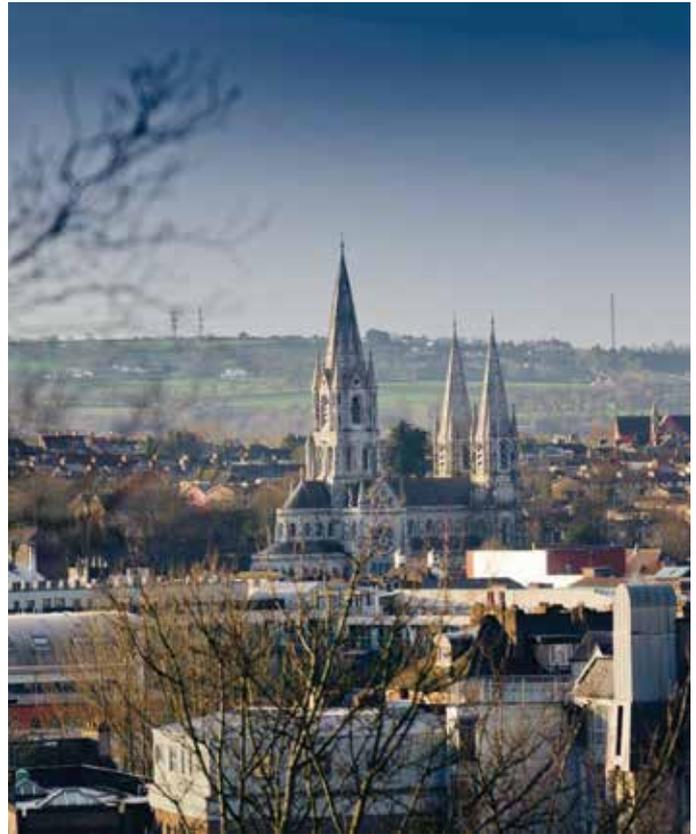
The Northside Community Enterprise (NCE) Energy-Hub presented their community energy support initiative, which seeks to motivate people in communities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging them to invest in Deep Energy Efficiency Retrofitting of their houses by seeking low-cost finance.

The Cork Environmental Forum has long been a local champion for the environment since their establishment in 1995 and shared their knowledge in fostering, promoting, and implementing sustainable development at a local level in the Cork region.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) presented their sustainable energy community programme, which helps communities to change the way they think about energy and helps them to develop energy management skills and knowledge.

Other active regional stakeholders include the Cork Smart Gateway, the Southern Regional Assembly, Engineers Ireland, Energy Cork, Ervia, the City of Dublin Energy Management Agency (CODEMA) and RetroKit.

European partners include AGENEAL, the Local Energy Management Agency of Almada (Portugal), Environmental Studies Centre of Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council (Spain), Milton Keynes Council (UK), Province of Treviso (Italy), EnergieavantgardeAnhalt e.V. (Germany), City of Zadar (Croatia),



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Environmental Centre for Administration and Technology (ECAT) (Lithuania) and Energap, the Energy Agency for the Podravje region of Slovenia.

ABOUT THE INTENSIFY PROJECT

INTENSIFY is part-funded by the Interreg Europe programme through the European Regional Development Fund. Interreg Europe is an interregional learning programme for public authorities to promote policy learning and to exchange the experience with others in Europe facing similar challenges in order to improve their practices.



For further information contact Cork City Council's Project Manager brian_cassidy@corkcity.ie or visit www.interregeurope.eu/intensify/