

2022 IMPACT REPORT

Stories of change



ENERGY **CITIES**

The European learning community
for future-proof cities





WHAT YOU
WILL FIND
IN THIS
REPORT

HOW MUCH
FURTHER
WE WOULD LIKE
TO GO

THE
TRANSFORMATION
WE HAVE
UNDERGONE

THE
VICTORIES
WE HAVE
SECURED

THE
MILESTONES
LEFT TO GET
THERE



FOREWORD

Just as we finally experienced some respite from the havoc wreaked by the global pandemic and began to return to normalcy, 2022 brought another string of devastating climate events. Record heats were reached throughout Europe, even here in Brussels, a rain-prone city suddenly taken by surprise by a draught. Tragically, 2022 was also the year when the long-forgotten reality of war once again knocked at Europe's doors.

Staying on course for our mission amidst so much turmoil requires a great deal of agility and humility, as we need to constantly recalibrate the tools, rule book and narratives needed to get cities firmly on track to secure just and climate neutral societies.

This is why we retooled our website in 2022, introducing our 'hubs', a series of five big thematic pillars that constitute the backbone of our mission, and the strategic activities we intend to implement.

Energy Cities Hubs are the community spaces, dedicated to our members, that will help us achieve our target impacts and goals by:

Enabling local leaders to deliver living spaces that are accessible to everyone,

Empowering local communities to decide on their own future inspiring a learning community of cities engaged in future-proofing their economies.



CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Keeping abreast with climate and energy developments in such a volatile world can easily make anyone feel dizzy. An interesting illustration of this is the change of rhetoric, catchwords and headlines that have dominated the policy discourse as the world moved from the health crisis to the energy crisis in early 2022. EU policy-makers and influencers shifted from wording like 'resilience' and 'European strategic autonomy' during the COVID outbreak, to more wartime-oriented jargon such as 'climate defence' and 'energy rationing', putting the notion of energy security firmly back onto the European agenda.

While policy discourse evolved to reflect the new reality of each crisis, what they have in common is that they both have laid bare the fragility of a system where life-supporting services such as food, energy and medical equipment are outsourced to remote places, completely disconnected from the 'soil' where people live. While the European Commission is keen to address the Just Transition, it fails to understand that the persistent failure of national and EU governments to 're-root' our economies is one of the main drivers of inequality in Europe, where only the most well-off are able to shoulder the increasing costs of vulnerable supply chains.



Energy Cities
@energycities



The 1st day of our study tour in Amsterdam:
[@SalomeGaljaard](#) said: "We would like all stakeholders to work with the [#DoughnutEconomy](#) model"
Anne Stijkel explained: "You can't make [#EnergyTransition](#) without starting with a social & [#DemocraticTransition](#)"
[#SocialInnovationInAmsterdam](#)

Traduire le Tweet



ADEME et 9 autres personnes



Equally important to the need to ground our economies on local resources is the urgency to question what we really need in the first place, and to finally dare to completely rethink our current economic model, both in terms of consumption and production practises and in terms of societal design and organisation. This is what is sometimes referred to as energy 'sufficiency' or sobriety, a school of thought that has been mostly conceptualised in France and is slowly permeating the EU landscape. According to the IPCC definition, sufficiency refers to measures and daily practices that avoid demand for energy, materials, land and water while delivering human wellbeing for all within planetary boundaries.

Interestingly, 2022 was a landmark year to echo all these concepts given that it marked the 50th anniversary since the publication of the famous 'Limits to Growth' report commissioned in 1972 by the Club of Rome. At the local level, 2022 saw many examples reflecting the still very relevant findings of this report, as more and more cities are questioning the current economic doctrine and seeking sustainable alternatives in partnership with their citizens. In May 2022, this is what led us to organise a study tour in Amsterdam with dozens of representatives from French and Swiss local governments to learn how the city implemented the concept of 'doughnut economics'.

TRAILBLAZING PROJECTS

Generally speaking, all the new projects we decide to onboard have some degree of influence on changing the status quo and disrupting mainstream political discourse.

Precisely on the issue of changing narratives, we are identifying fund-raising options for a campaign that would seek to mainstream the notion of sufficiency among EU stakeholders but also help local governments gain a better understanding of the sufficiency and design successful communications campaigns surrounding it.



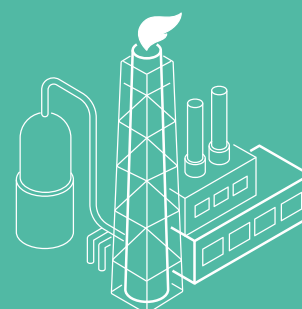
THE POLICY LINES THAT MOVED

The Cities Energy Savings Sprint

Under the umbrella of the Covenant of Mayors, Energy Cities co-organised a '[Cities Energy Savings Sprint](#)' as part of the EU coordinated response to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing geopolitical energy crisis. Given that the campaign itself and the toolkit developed around it were primarily aimed at helping cities address the emergency situation, it did not go far enough to bring about transformative changes. However, it opened up in-depth conversations with a large number of local leaders across Europe in order to understand the difficulties they face in translating the notion of sufficiency into a new paradigm for everyday city life.

The war context in particular has taken a toll on the rationale for energy sufficiency, causing it to be closely associated with imposed austerity rather than chosen sufficiency, which risks further alienating marginalised communities.

All things considered, with an EU narrative still very centred on diversifying gas suppliers and boosting the energy market interconnection capacity, we consider it a victory that this local campaign featured prominently as part of Europe's official response to the crisis.





An informal EU coalition on (Energy) Sufficiency

After a great deal of internal brainstorming on how to bring the topic of energy sufficiency to the attention of policy-makers, 2022 was a milestone year in our advocacy activities, as we managed to launch a very diverse task force of committed policy influencers from national and EU think tanks, NGOs, academic institutions and philanthropies, including representatives of the European Parliament. Following two kick-off meetings, the task force approved a preliminary work programme to raise the profile of energy sufficiency in the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections.

THE MAYORS' VOICES THAT SET THE TONE

During our annual conference in April, we invited a series of visionary thought leaders to share inspiration with mayors on new societal concepts and theories and to brainstorm together on the world and ideas of tomorrow.

With keynote speeches from IPCC lead authors Yamina Saheb and François Gemenne, both known for their outspokenness and very disruptive ideas, we held very fruitful discussions on topics including the 'geostrategics of energy' or the ability to 'rethink the city within the limits of scarcity'.

EXPANDING THE TOOLBOX

Over the past decade or so, local, urban action has become ever more relevant in the EU political agenda. Cities have been cutting the ribbon on countless new initiatives, so much so that this often led to the confusion of local governments.

On the pure policy and regulatory front, local authorities are being faced with many new mandates, not least of which the Fit for 55 package proposal, where the European Commission has proposed new obligations to conduct local heat mapping and planning, as well as requiring solar panels for new and renovated buildings, including those managed by local governments. Additionally, the EU's proposed solar energy strategy will also require that all municipalities of over 10,000 inhabitants have at least one renewable energy community operating in their territory.

While all these new initiatives and obligations are a step in the right direction, the mandates need to go hand in hand with the means. Local governments across Europe are currently completely ill-equipped to face these challenges.



TRAILBLAZING PROJECTS

In one of our 2022 reports extrapolating on the result of a Dutch study on staff needs for the decarbonisation of buildings, we found that on average, local authorities would need to recruit 2.5 of new full-time equivalents each year until 2030 in order to bridge the local staff and skills gap. The findings of our study were then echoed in a dedicated '[local staff for climate](#)' campaign, which was met with tremendous success, from top to bottom.

CALL FOR MORE LOCAL STAFF for the climate

**Give cities the staffing
means for their climate ambitions**

SIGN THE MANIFESTO



THE POLICY LINES THAT MOVED

European Commission's DG Regio plans support programme for energy and climate agencies

As a result of our advocacy efforts, the European Commission announced it will design a new programme to grant technical assistance funding to local and regional energy agencies. In October 2022, Head of Unit Catherine Wendt from the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy discussed the possible contours of this new programme with our Board of Directors. As a follow-up of the political discussion, we then shared a position paper with the European Commission's unit based on 5 main asks for the future of energy and climate agencies:

- 1 The focus of the energy and climate agencies should be on 'partnership and territorial engineering'
- 2 They should play a key role in creating a market for local and fair energy
- 3 They should support the mapping of local potential and assessment of energy scenarios
- 4 They should be entrusted with the mission to act as 'energy sufficiency laboratories'
- 5 One-stop-shops should be the operational arms of energy agencies



URBACT programme likely to include Energy Cities' priorities on their 2023 work programme

In September 2022, we held a meeting with the secretariat of URBACT, a European exchange programme on sustainable urban development financed by Interreg, notably to present the results of our 'Local staff for climate' campaign. The outcome was very favourable, as about a month later, the secretariat informed us that they wished to include the issue of staff shortage in their 2023 work programme and organise specific national policy labs on this issue, calling on our support to better define the angle of the work and recommendations to be shared at national level.



Big coalition mobilised on the need to get solar mandate right with adequate support

In October, we [joined 17 other EU organisations](#), including trade associations, NGOs and interest groups, in calling for a strong EU solar mandate to accelerate the deployment of solar panels on all kinds of buildings and to reduce our fossil fuel dependency by the same token. Our staff shortage study was prominently mentioned in the letter, where we explicitly urged EU decision makers to properly equip local and regional governments to fully tap into Europe' solar deployment potential.



THE MAYORS' VOICES THAT SET THE TONE

In December, we had the best possible end-of-year closing of our local staff campaign – European Commissioner for Jobs & Social Rights Nicolas Schmit enthusiastically accepted an invitation to discuss the issue with our Board of Directors in Brussels, with a formal hand-over of the signed manifesto of the campaign.

As the European Commission has decided to label 2023 as the 'Year of Skills', we made sure the needs of local administrations feature prominently as part of this new flagship plan.



REVISING THE RULE BOOK

“ THIS NECPLATFORM PROJECT CAN TRULY CHANGE THINGS AND SET UP ANOTHER KIND OF DIALOGUE: EU, LOCAL LEVEL AND NATIONAL LEVELS, SO THAT WE, PEOPLE FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL, FEEL THAT OUR WORK IS RESPECTED AND TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. ”

Joško KLISOVIĆ, *President of the City Assembly of the city of Zagreb & member of the Committee of the Regions*

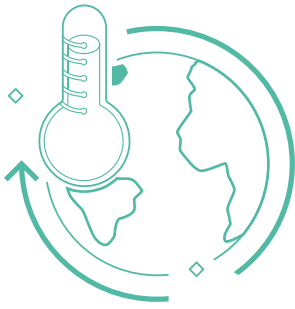
Cities are often seen as ‘delivery agents’ of EU policies. Given their mobilising power and knowledge of the local context, challenges and opportunities, we believe it is clear that local leaders should become climate and energy co-legislators, rather than merely implementing strategies decided higher up.

Throughout 2022, we have continued to advocate for cities to get their legitimate seat at the EU decision-making table, and have sought to influence the ‘rule book’ according to which they operate, pushing for ever more competencies to be entrusted to local and regional authorities.

TRAILBLAZING EU PROJECTS

October saw the political launch of the NECPlatform project, which seeks to establish the much-needed dialogue and coordination that still lacks between national and local governments when designing long-term energy and climate plans. At the occasion of this high-profile event, with the participation of top-level European Commission officials, Mayors expressed their frustration at not having been sufficiently involved in the first versions (drafted in 2019–2020) of national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and unambiguously called on the EU and national governments to ensure the strong involvement of local decision makers in the next batch of revised NECPs due in 2024. Thanks to the NECPlatform project, robust climate and energy dialogue platforms will be set up in 6 EU member states to foster increased collaboration across government levels and with civil society.





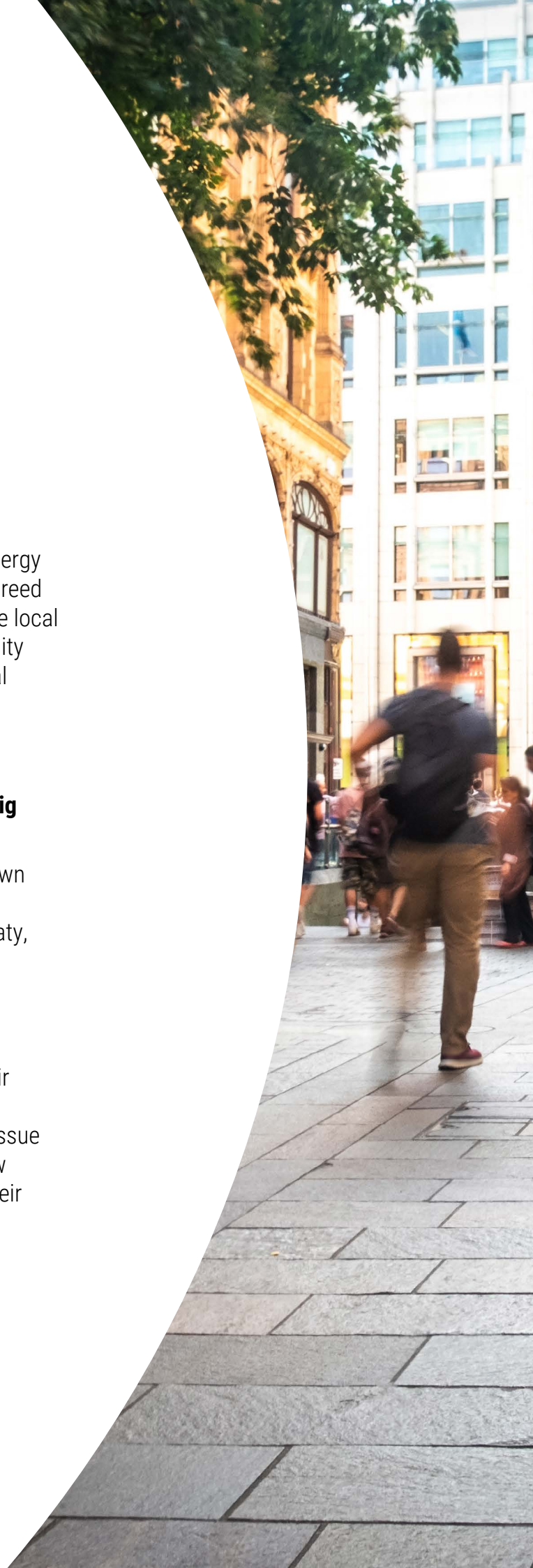
THE POLICY LINES THAT MOVED

EU institutions agree to give new 'heat planning' responsibilities to local authorities

As part of the trilogue negotiations on the revised Energy Efficiency Directive, the three EU institutions have agreed to a common position on Article 23, which would give local authorities of over 45,000 inhabitants the responsibility to map and plan their heat transition, with substantial technical and financial support from their national governments.

National governments, activists and Mayors deal big blow to Energy Charter Treaty

In 2022, the list of EU member states having withdrawn from the Energy Charter Treaty increased to eight, representing over 70% of the EU population. This treaty, which is [yet another vestige of the old energy world](#), was originally designed to protect European energy security, but ended up becoming a trade weapon giving disproportionate rights to any kind of energy investor, at the expense of public authorities and their constituencies. In November, we successfully rallied political representatives of the EU Cities Mission to issue an [open letter](#) urging the European Union to withdraw altogether from the treaty, thereby also protecting their crucial climate commitments.





Covenant of Mayors
for Climate & Energy
EUROPE

THE MAYORS' VOICES THAT SET THE TONE

In June 2022, the [European Board of the Covenant of Mayors](#) met Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, and the European Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, to position cities as key contributors to the EU REPowerEU Plan as well as crucial allies in order to deliver on the high-level objectives of the European Green Deal.





ENERGY CITIES

The European learning community
for future-proof cities

Energy Cities' mission is to empower cities and citizens
to shape and transition to futureproof cities.

We showcase concrete alternatives deployed by cities,
we advocate to change politic and economic governance
at all levels and we foster a wide cultural change leading
to a futureproofed society.

Energy Cities community is made up of local leaders of
thousands of cities in 30 European countries.

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