

ANNUAL FORUM



WITH THE SUPPORT OF



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. ANNUAL FORUM	4
3. PROGRAMME	6
3.1 Citizen Engagement	7
3.2 Renewable Energy Deployment	8
3.3 Sufficiency	10
3.4 Local Food Production	11
3.5 Climate Adaptation	12
3.6 Mayor's Club Sessions	14
4. CONCLUSION	15

INTRODUCTION

A NETWORK OF CITIES

We gather stakeholders, city officials and technical experts working on the climate and energy transition.

SINCE **1990**

we have been building strong bonds amongst our members to work towards a climate neutral future together.

35 YEARS

building a learning community to help our members

200

LOCAL AUTHORITY
REPRESENTATIVES
FROM

30

COUNTRIES

We support cities in creating partnerships and help them access funding to ensure the implementation of successful energy and climate policies. We foster an atmosphere of mutual trust in the dialogue between citizens, local leaders, EU and national institutions to accelerate the transformation towards a climate-neutral Europe. **After 35 years, we have built a learning community** to help each of our members feel more confident in their own transition journeys and test new solutions alongside other cities.

ADEME has supported Energy Cities since its creation, enabling French local authorities to get inspired by European counterparts and increase presence at European level.

"ENERGY CITIES IS A KEY
LEARNING NETWORK FOR
IDEAS ON THE CLIMATE
AND DECARBONISATION FOR
EUROPEAN CITIES."

Ciaran Murphy, Executive Manager,
Research, Development and
Innovation at CODEMA, Dublin's
Energy Agency

ANNUAL FORUM

Our Annual Forum is our flagship event – named ‘Grafting Cities’ since 2023 – aiming to unveil the remarkable actions our members have undertaken to “graft” their cities and accelerate their transition. The art of grafting shows how a place can flourish by building on its assets and ‘twisting them’. Grafting a city is also a movement to transform street by street, house by house, place by place – increasing diversity and thus resilience.

THE FORUM IS THE PLACE WHERE MUNICIPALITIES, ORGANISATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS CAN COME TOGETHER, NETWORK, SHARE EXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES, AND FORGE CONNECTIONS TO KEEP ADVANCING IN THE TRANSITION TOWARDS CLIMATE NEUTRALITY.

IT IS OUR RAISON D’ÊTRE.



Every year it is hosted by a different city, a member of our network, and it gathers 250+ participants from more than 20 countries in Europe and beyond. It serves as a platform to showcase their projects and commitments to the green transition. It is the opportunity to gain visibility at EU level, connect with other cities and stakeholders in the climate and energy sphere, as well as discover other networks, projects and initiatives.

"IT IS VERY VALUABLE TALKING TO PEOPLE IN PERSON AND HEARING ABOUT THEIR CHALLENGES AND THEIR PROJECT IDEAS AS WELL AS EXCHANGE OURS AND THE PROJECTS WE ARE WORKING ON."

– Ivana Dubravec, Energy Efficiency, Environmental Protection, and Spatial Planning Advisor at the city of Križevci

Besançon, Energy Cities' birthplace, hosted the 2025 edition, under the theme "Weaving connections". The city is a pioneer in the energy transition in France, as it has shown in its commitment to becoming a more sustainable and resilient city which takes care of the environment and wellbeing of its citizens.

It thus offered the perfect setting to **celebrate 35 years of passion, weaving connections amongst cities and municipalities to advance in the green transition and achieve climate neutrality.**

PROGRAMME

The forum offers an innovative programme which includes a variety of formats

PLENARY SESSIONS

a panel of experts and city representatives who discuss and share their views on specific topics.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE WORKSHOPS

sessions where participants work in small groups and share their knowledge and best practices.

MAYOR'S CLUB SESSIONS

close doors gatherings with local elected representatives to discuss specific topics.

PARALLEL SESSIONS

smaller sessions that host roundtables to discuss selected topics.

STUDY AND SITE VISITS

tours for participants to discover projects on the ground and hear the views from the experts who work on them.

INNOVATIVE FORMATS

activities and sessions for members and non-members to discover our work, learn about the latest EU policy developments and find inspiration to develop new projects.

INSPIRATIONAL WORKSHOPS

platforms for municipalities to present their projects and initiatives.

MATCHMAKING SESSIONS

exchanges for our members to find partners to develop projects and find new sources of funding.

Every year, the programme is developed to showcase the latest advancements in energy and climate policies in Europe and highlight the actions of the host city. The 2025 programme was designed to focus on five major topics: citizen engagement, renewable energy deployment, sufficiency, local food policy and climate adaptation.





CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Involving citizens in decision-making processes and cooperating with local stakeholders is the way to ensure that local government action is effective and serves people's needs. Energy Cities started developing projects on citizen participation very early on and we have witnessed the change that legislation has endured.

Cities are in constant evolution and looking for new ways of making governance methods more inclusive and adapted to citizens' needs such as surveys, one-stop-shops in different neighbourhoods, or citizens' assemblies. The most challenging aspect in setting them up is ensuring real inclusivity. It is crucial to focus on making information accessible, workshops adapted to people's realities, and topics relevant for everyone.

New technology tools, such as AI, can make this process easier for cities, but they come with both opportunities and risks for energy democracy. They should be used to enhance, not replace, human interaction. Technologies must ensure inclusivity rather than creating new

barriers because not everyone has equal access to digital tools, and in-person engagement remains crucial.

These participatory methods should help better understand the needs of local stakeholders and how they can align with cities priorities. Municipalities should have more staff involved in these activities to discuss with people from early phases, to understand what they need and, ultimately, to shape good solutions with and for them.

The city of Besançon is a good example as, over the past five years, different departments have organised 45 citizen consultations involving more than 10,000 residents. The Grette Brulard development project exemplifies it as the residents have been actively contributing to the planning phase through an advanced participation method.

"WE'VE MADE THE CHOICE TO ACCEPT POTENTIAL CONFLICTS AS WE WANT TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS."

— Kevin Bertagnoli, Deputy Mayor for Democratic Participation at the city of Besançon



RENEWABLE ENERGY DEPLOYMENT

The European Union aims at becoming climate neutral by 2050 and cities play a central role in reimagining and implementing local energy systems. **The transition to renewable energy in cities is not only essential for achieving climate neutrality but also for improving air quality, strengthening local economies, and enhancing residents' wellbeing.**

Planning the large-scale deployment of renewable energies in urban environments, especially for heat and electricity, requires close collaboration between municipalities, local stakeholders, national authorities and citizens to ensure a fair and inclusive energy transition that benefits everyone. Cities and towns across Europe are phasing out fossil fuels from their heating and cooling systems by adopting clean and renewable energy solutions as part of their climate neutrality plans.

To support renewable energy projects, it's essential to create partnerships, develop policy measures, roll out financing initiatives, and boost key stakeholder engagement. Authorities need strong technical and regulatory support from national and regional levels to accelerate the transition and ensure projects are bankable, scalable and socially accepted.



The city of Besançon aims at having 100% of its energy renewable sourced by 2050. It plans to achieve this through various installations such as the Planoise wood-fired boiler plant – a key facility in the city's heating network supplying around 14,850 households, with over 80% of its energy coming from renewable sources. The Port Douvot wastewater treatment plant is also a good example which has maintained a positive energy balance since 2022 thanks to a mix of photovoltaic electricity, geothermal energy and biomethane production.

"WE WOULD LIKE TO BE 100% POWERED BY RENEWABLE ENERGY IN BESANÇON BY 2050."

— Lorine Gagliolo, Vice President for Environment, Energy and Sustainable Development at Grand Besançon Métropole





SUFFICIENCY

The European Union is gradually adopting new ways of using its resources wisely while ensuring people's wellbeing. To achieve this, **strong political action is essential to strengthening strategic autonomy, resilience and competitiveness**. A more sober approach will be essential for social justice, the EU's resilience, and the climate transition.

Municipalities can develop different kinds of actions, on both a small and big scale, to use resources more wisely while providing citizens with the services and tools they need. Sufficiency measures offer this possibility, pushing cities to be creative and think of new business models and systems – even if it may be challenging at the beginning.

One of the measures to improve the use of existing resources is implementing a circular economy approach instead of focusing solely on recycling methods. Cities must work not only on improving waste management, but also on reducing the amount of waste produced and reusing the materials that are already available. To make cities more sufficient and sustainable, it's essential to repurpose what already exists and offer opportunities to local stakeholders and citizens to present projects and access funding.

The Arsenal site in Besançon is a good example as it is the first circular economy and reuse school project launched by the French government. It was a military site of 7,000 m² which is now being renovated and turned into a vibrant learning and creative hub including a residential area, new university faculties and offices. The city is focusing on using the existing resources to avoid spending money that could be invested in other projects ensuring citizens' wellbeing.

"WE PREFER TO INVEST IN PEOPLE RATHER THAN IN MATERIALS."

– Sylvain Dousse, Building Engineer at the University of Franche-Comté

LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

Land conversion to artificial surfaces in Europe – primarily occurring in urban and commuting zones – disrupts ecological functions and reduces ecosystem resilience. Cities in Europe are recognising that food is not solely a national and supra-national concern but a deeply interconnected urban-rural issue at the regional level. **There is a huge need in urban areas to develop green belts to boost local production and avoid unnecessary energy consumption to preserve soils and ensure the protection of ecosystems.**

Municipalities are designing local food production plans which focus on sustainability to ensure food safety, preserve soils and reduce pollution. They are also developing awareness campaigns to inform citizens about the importance of having short circuits and the health benefits of eating sustainably produced fresh food.

"WE WANT TO HAVE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY – THAT'S THE GOAL."

— Prisca Van Paassen, Project Manager at ADEME Bourgogne Franche-Comté

To achieve food sovereignty and ensure sustainable land management, cities need to collect more data on food production, transportation, consumption and external factors that influence consumer choices, in order to better understand eating habits. Improve food systems means investing in projects that boost local and sustainable food production and consumption, as well as inform citizens about the benefits.

The Territorial Food Project of the city of Besançon is a good example as it acknowledges that agriculture is one of the first economic sectors affected by climate change. It also focuses on food safety and sovereignty, as well as tackling health issues due to the consumption of ultra-processed food. One of the great initiatives developed by Grand Besançon Métropole is the Graines de maraîchers nursery, an organic market-gardening production site, which offers market gardeners the chance to try out their farming activity on a real scale. It also produces vegetables that citizens can purchase on-site and have specific schemes for low-income families.





CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and intense, placing local governments all over Europe on the frontline and shaping their policy agendas towards concrete actions. **There is a growing need to understand how climate adaptation intersects with urban planning, optimised resource use, efficient building design and insulation, as well as citizen participation in climate action.**

Heatwaves are amongst these events that are increasingly common in cities, posing a threat to citizens' wellbeing by putting lives at risk, deepening social inequalities and isolating vulnerable populations. Municipalities are looking for low-tech, community-led solutions to extreme heat, from adapting public spaces and renovating buildings to creating cool spaces for everyone to benefit from.

"ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE IS ONE OF THE TOP PRIORITIES IN ATHENS AND ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING AS A CITY. WE ARE DEALING WITH A RISK THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED HOLISTICALLY. ENERGY CITIES IS THE BEST PLATFORM TO FIND ANSWERS AND COLLABORATE WITH CITIES AROUND EUROPE THAT ARE DEALING WITH THE SAME CHALLENGE."

— Giorgos Stefanis, Head of EU projects department at Develop Athens S.A



Citizen participation is key to ensuring the adaptation meets people's needs. Understanding the social context and identifying at-risk population and the spaces that would be more dangerous during heatwaves is very important to start developing action plans.

"IF WE DON'T PUT PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE OF OUR PLANNING, WE WILL FACE BACKLASH."

—Anne-Laure Stanislas, Deputy Mayor of Clermont-Ferrand

The city of Besançon started its adaptation journey years ago. One of their first actions was to create the heat map of the city, which revealed a 30-degree difference in ground temperatures between shaded green zones and paved, asphalt-heavy areas. This map acted as a turning point in Besançon's adaptation and water planning. The adaptation plans included citizen participation methods, which were crucial to create spaces adapted to their needs.

The city has transformed areas in the centre, such as the Place de la Révolution, which was identified as one of the main heat islands in the area. It has also designed a 'Schools plan', which aims to make schools not only more resilient, but also more energy efficient and carbon-neutral.



MAYOR'S CLUB SESSIONS

Energy Cities has been closely working with mayors and elected representatives for 35 years to understand their cities' contexts and needs, and to help amplify their voices. 'Mayors Voice' offers a space for local elected representatives to come together and discuss amongst peers, explore solutions to similar challenges, share success stories, and together chart a way forward.

One of the activities is the Mayor's Clubs, which is bringing together small groups of like-minded mayors, deputy mayors and local councillors to deep dive into specific topics. These gatherings, held both in-person and online, aim to create a safe space for local elected representatives to have sincere, open exchanges on their experiences and the challenges they face in different areas. They also allow them to connect with EU policymakers and media to make their voices heard. Each club is hosted by a mayor from the Energy Cities network. During the 2025 annual forum, three clubs took place focusing on inclusive renewable energy solutions, engaging local communities in clean heating, and resource-wise urban planning.

Mayors discussed strategies to promote citizen-based renewable energy and overcome citizen-engagement challenges. They also spoke about effective ways to communicate about the transition to clean heating, and they shared measures to re-use and adapt vacant buildings to respond to housing needs and create more liveable spaces overall.

All of them led to enriching conversations where local representatives could present their context, express their concerns and share ideas. They were inspiring exchanges that allowed them to understand the situation of their peers all over Europe and go back to their cities with tools and information to keep developing their climate actions.

CONCLUSION

Energy Cities' Annual Forum is a space for exchange that gathers once per year local representatives and stakeholders paving the way towards a more resilient and climate-neutral Europe. The support of ADEME has been crucial to develop new activities and offer tailored support to municipalities in France, such as Besançon, full of innovative projects that can inspire other cities all across Europe.

The diversity of sessions and topics offer a real possibility to learn and share knowledge. It is also an ideal place to build partnerships leading to new projects that will contribute to transforming European cities into sustainable and resilient spaces that put citizens at the core of their actions.

"THE MOST MEANINGFUL OF ENERGY CITIES' ANNUAL FORUM IS ALL THE MOMENTS TO CREATE CONNECTIONS WITH THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS."

— Chloé Verlinden, Project Manager at REScoop.eu

"WHAT THIS FORUM BRINGS TO THE TABLE ARE NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR ALL THE CITIES AND THIS WILL CREATE OPEN-MINDED SOLUTIONS FOR ALL OF THEM."

— Giorgos Stefas, Head of EU projects department at Develop Athens S.A





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