

11th Annual Conference of Energie-Cités - Delft-Zoetermeer
Launching of the BELIEF Project

New perspectives for Energie-Cités and its partners

For more than 15 years, Energie-Cités (www.energie-cites.org) has been promoting local sustainable energy policies through a series of activities: exchanges of experience, good practices, joint municipal projects, campaigns, provision of advice, actions concerning community legislation and guidelines, etc. Around 500 European municipalities have been involved in our activities.

Last 23 and 24 of March, in Delft-Zoetermeer, 250 participants from 25 countries exchanged ideas on how to make “local actors work together more effectively”. They demonstrated (will demonstrate) that successful local policies involve close collaboration between the local authority and city players, whether they be public, private or community players. Why? Not because partnerships are fashionable, but because they provide the only way of transforming good ideas into practical initiatives and of making new ideas, of which we are badly in need, spring to life.

From local sustainable energy communities...

We all understand that improving energy efficiency significantly and increasing the use of renewable energy sources involves associating companies, artisans, banks, users' associations, NGOs, schools and universities, as well as promoting constructive cooperation not only between public authorities but also amongst all citizens, that is every one of us in our everyday lives as pedestrians, cyclists, car drivers, public transport users, inhabitants, wage owners, and consumers of goods, services and leisure activities. We insisted on the importance of the “human factor” in the debate on the Green Paper and in our proposal for a European Action Plan on energy efficiency. We now want to take action in line with our proposals.

In this field, energy “specialists” are useless if we fail to **involve society at large**. Only the construction of an interest community, that is a *sustainable energy community*, can create suitable conditions for action that are commensurate with the nature and intensity of the challenges to be met.

This is why this Conference is the launching event of the European project “BELIEF - Building in Europe Local Intelligent Energy Forums ¹” (www.belief-europe.org). This project involves 22 towns and cities from 11 countries, including Delft and Zoetermeer, around Energie-cités, as well as dozens of local partners.

...to a European sustainable energy Community

Energie-Cités has so much faith in “BELIEF” that we suggested setting up a “*European Local Intelligent Energy Forum ELIEF*” to a first group of European partners, these representing the same actors as at local level. The following partners were united at a Round Table:

- town planners (European Council of Town Planners),
- national associations of European local authorities represented by CEMR,
- an environmental NGO (WWF),
- manufacturers of insulation materials (EURIMA),
- lamp companies (ELC),
- national energy agencies, represented by SenterNovem,
- the European Parliament, notably the “Urban and Housing” Intergroup.

This panel, whose numbers had to be limited due to Round Table requirements, gives a fair idea of what we want to build at European level.

Far from being just a Round Table whose existence would be limited to a few lines in the Conference programme, this panel prefigures what we plan to build in the long term on a much wider scale with a **maximum of motivated partners**.

¹ BELIEF is supported by the European Commission under the “Intelligent Energy for Europe” programme

...in order to better prepare European towns and cities to face up to their climate and energy future.

Why should we unite these players and, more importantly, what for?

Common projects, shared reflections, joint proposals.... there is a wealth of possibilities. We would like, however, to propose a more specific project, the launch of a foresight activity at European level, which will aim to reduce the energy and climatic vulnerability of local territories...

In effect,

- Issues relating to **climate change and energy resources** are closely linked and will in future take on dimensions which are completely unpredictable today.
- Our current development model **is not viable** and the parts of the world which have been excluded from it now also want their share.
- We, the so-called industrialised countries, will have to **reduce our greenhouse gas emissions a factor 4 by 2050**, which involves reducing our energy consumption by at least half.
- This will only be possible if somewhat fundamental changes are implemented. It will also require the **widespread implementation of existing solutions**, even when these are today at a stage of development that is still marginal.

We need to **invent a future energy model** that is compatible with what the planet can cope with and reduce the **energy vulnerability** of the territories and their inhabitants.

The type of society we will be living in tomorrow will be strongly influenced by the energy model we are responsible for building on our territories. Any future to be invented will depend more on:

- **energy consumption** rather than energy production (if we know how to use 3 to 4 times less energy to provide the same service, then production will become a much less important issue),
- **decentralised production of locally generated energy**, including energy from renewable energy sources, rather than on conventional centralised production,
- the **involvement of the whole of society** rather than on the expertise of energy specialists, since the latter have no impact on consumption.

We are not starting from scratch: **ground-breaking practices developed in European territories** have paved the way. This is essentially a **question of culture rather than a technical issue**. Sociologists, philosophers, artists and many others will be invited to join us.

This project will be known as **"IMAGINE energy for the future of European cities²"**.

As early as 2006, this will involve:

- An exhibition of photographs complete with captions on exemplary territorial practices, accessible from a virtual location and reproducible across Europe.
- A first Prospective Seminar, limited to 30-40 people, to be held in France, in a symbolic venue, the former Royal Salt Works (<http://www.salineroyale.com/>), whose beginnings were linked to energy (availability of wood) and whose demise in the late 18th century was precipitated due to an inability to adapt to a new energy context (coal).

Energie-Cités calls all interested public, private and community organisations to embark on this partnership venture!

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² The project has already received the support of local, regional (Département du Doubs-FR, Conseil Régional de Franche-Comté-FR) and national (ADEME) authorities, as well as of some companies. It could also be the subject of an INTERREG proposal.