



Wednesday, November 28, 2018

**Transatlantic city exchange on energy democracy: citizens should not be in the background - We tell you everything!**

**The energy transition in a global economy can only be successful if individuals change. And individuals change when encouraged and the right incentives are provided through collective action. If city administrations are to reach climate and energy objectives they are well aware that they have to involve civil society. But this is easier said than done. How can we create a culture of trust, engagement and innovation in our cities?**

You never know the outcome when you assemble 14 people who don't know each other and who, in addition, are coming from very different professional backgrounds: city administrations, energy cooperatives, utilities or environmental justice organisations. To add to the complexity, these people come from four different cities, three different countries and two continents!

Indeed at the recently held Energy Allies learning lab from October 28 to October 31, 2018 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the diversity was rich. This led to fruitful exchanges and learnings that the participants brought back home after the three intense days organised by Energy Cities and the German Marshall Fund.

The aim of the meeting was to **intensify cooperation with cities and for them to improve their own strategy for energy system transformation through the transatlantic exchange of experience**. The most important topic was the involvement of civil society and cooperation with stakeholders in the local energy system transformation process. At a public symposium at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the evening of October 29th, the experiences of Heidelberg and Nantes were discussed with a wider audience.

*"Often we are very focused on our objectives and how to work to get others instead of thinking about what are their driving objectives and how can this inform our direction and align our*

actions" - **Seth Federspiel**, Net Zero Energy Planner at Cambridge Community Development Department

**No matter on which side of the Atlantic the civil servants stood, their cities are all committed to long-term targets**

- **Cambridge**, Massachusetts : carbon-neutrality by 2050
- **Charlotte** (North Carolina) : -2% CO2 emissions reductions by 2050 and reducing CO2 emissions per person to 2 tons by 2050 (with an intermediate goal of 7 tons by 2030)
- **Nantes**, France : 50% GHG emissions reductions by 2030
- **Heidelberg**, Germany : Reduction of CO2-emissions by 95 % by 2050



[See all pictures in the Flickr Album](#)

As Seth Federspiel, Energy manager at the host city of Cambridge stated : reaching those ambitious targets is not an option. "The guiding question is not "Can we get there ?" - but "How can we get there ?"".

The 'How' can take different shapes, but civil society plays a central role for all of the cities !

The American cities were impressed by **Nantes'** (France), sheer numbers. Over a seven month period from mid-September 2016 to March 2017, the [Great Debate](#) involved 53,000 participants, and 11,000 contributors from 270 different organizations. Their impressive work resulted in the creation of a citizens-only commission calling on the Metropolitan Council and local stakeholders to produce a joint roadmap.

They were also inspired by **Heidelberg's** (Germany) "[Bürgerdialog](#)" or dialog-based planning process which clearly outlines the process of where and how civil society is included in city planning processes.

*"Most of the people engaged are great technical people, but not good communicators. And this is real problem, since we are doing great stuff, but nobody knows about it."* - **Felix Schaefer**, Founder and CEO of Bürgerwerke eG, Heidelberg



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#gmfurban's Energy Allies held a public event on #energytransition strategies from @heidelberg\_de and @NantesMetropole sharing 🔑 lessons on local gov. and civil society partnership at @MIT Wong Auditorium @energycities @EUintheUS @jandev @atonofnews @geraldide @CambMA  
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The European cities were inspired by **Charlotte's** focus on equity. As stated by Taiwo Jaiyeoba, Director of planning, design, and development *"It is not about equality, but about equity. If this is missing, you might not necessarily get there"*

They were also eager to learn about the **'American' way of communicating** which was ever present in the presentations of all the American participants and in particular those of [ClimateNexus](#) and [Democracy Collaborative](#).

**The key lessons and conclusions for all the participants is that successful local government-civil society partnerships in the energy transition are based on shared trust, means (capacity) and everyone must be willing to act, act and act !**

**Further information:**

[Energy Allies](#)

[www.heidelberg.de/masterplan100](http://www.heidelberg.de/masterplan100)

<https://www.nantestransitionenergetique.fr/>

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Climate/NetZeroTaskForce>

<https://charlottenc.gov/CityCouncil/focus-areas/Pages/EnvironmentFocusArea.aspx>

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