

Clean energy for EU islands



#CE4EUislands – Workshop: Spatial planning in support of islands' decarbonisation

28 JANUARY 2025 | 9:00-17:00| BRUSSELS, BELGIUM


ABSTRACT

Recently, the European Green Deal, REPowerEU, and the goal of a climate-neutral continent in 2050 have introduced an unprecedented urgency for the clean energy transition. The pressure on local authorities to deliver their share is mounting, and in some countries, climate goals for municipalities have become compulsory. Member states should multiply the existing onshore wind and solar generation capacity to achieve those goals.

Citizens feel generally disconnected from the level and scale of change required by the clean energy transition and climate ambition. Yet, this is more relevant to citizens than ever. Where will all this additional capacity be installed? It cannot all be installed offshore. Where is space available? Where will the local societies accept it?

Spatial planning has always been valuable for defining local, regional and national land uses. Usually, such plans are topic- or sector-specific, such as for nature protection areas, industrial zones, touristic zones, agricultural land, renewable energy development, landscape protection, etc. In many cases, they overlap, and it is not always clear which plan prevails. They also do not get regularly revised to include new developments. In other cases, they do not exist at all, as island communities or even island municipalities do not have the capacity or do not have a mandate to carry them out in the first place.

All in all, there are many reasons why there is rarely an overall plan discussed and agreed upon at the island level. A plan that connects the various goals and intentions that derive from different starting points must be considered for the future planning of a municipality or an island as a living place.



As a result, individual land uses, interests, and traditions of how things are done often create local conflicts and result in zero-sum games. A recent example of conflict in land use experienced throughout the EU has been about farmland, following the EU's Climate Law requirement to take part of cultivated land out from production to reduce emissions from agriculture, one of the reasons behind the recent protests by farmers.

A forward-looking overall plan should bring all the local ambitions together. It can include, for instance, siting for expansion of settlements and new housing, agriculture, tourism accommodation, other business uses, existing forests and afforestation, wetlands, drylands, renewable energy, nature protection and restoration areas, roads, other infrastructure, etc. All are high priorities for island communities.

At the local level and even more at the island level, there is an opportunity to work on and showcase such overall plans as a way forward to achieve an island's various intentions while carrying the society along.

Smaller or bigger islands have clear boundaries and quite strong identities. They are rural areas, where agriculture is often an important sector, and are popular tourist destinations. They frequently have rich biodiversity and have always protected the landscape due to their coastline. At the same time, the islands have the motivation, expressed via more than a decade of dedicated efforts, to be pioneers in the clean energy transition.

The dedicated Clean energy for EU islands initiative creates an excellent framework to introduce the topic of spatial planning and eventually create discussion locally on the 30 selected islands and island groups, as well as to the many follower islands.

Workshop intention

The workshop aims to inspire and share knowledge and tools to encourage the political focus on climate in local planning work and the discussion among regional stakeholders and citizens on the contribution of an overall spatial plan in meeting local climate objectives in the clean energy transition.

Desired outcomes

- Insight into planning strategies, local plans, transparent procedures, and an overall holistic approach for spatial planning to deal with competing land uses in support of the islands' various intentions.
- Inspiration and capacity to strengthen stakeholders' roles, enabling citizens to participate in discussions in island communities supporting their climate action plans.
- Understanding of and insight into governance and responsibilities regarding nature protection restrictions.
- Exchange of best practices.