

Energy transition Ljubljana

Stories from Pilot Cities: the Slovenian cities of Ljubljana, Kranj and Velenje are part of the 112 cities participating in the EU Mission to deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities and the Pilot Cities Programme - a component of the Mission that focuses on exploring and testing pathways to rapid decarbonisation over a two-year period.

Ljubljana, Kranj and Velenje are gearing up to pave the way to climate neutrality through innovative, systemic approaches. The three ambitious Slovenian cities have partnered under the Pilot Cities Programme to develop and test new solutions to their most pressing environmental challenges. They are already in the middle of their journey, ready to share developments and reflections on their work to date and collaborative spirit. To learn more, we have met with Milan Dinevski, a member of Ljubljana's transition team and the Pilot Cities Project "UP-SCALE" manager.

Slovenia, a small yet vibrant gem nestled between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea, is a country where nature's beauty and human ingenuity coexist harmoniously. Known for its lush forests, picturesque lakes and medieval towns, Slovenia is also a nation with a deep-rooted respect for the environment. Here, the drive to combat climate change is an integral part of the national identity.

"Being part of a platform of like-minded cities that are aware and ambitious enough to tackle the challenges of climate change through innovative and coordinated efforts is of immense value to Ljubljana. It showed us that there are other cities with similar challenges and that we can exchange experiences to improve our actions," says Milan Dinevski, an associate in the city's Department of Environmental Protection.

"In Slovenia, we have realised that we are all connected, and instead of tackling one problem at a time, the path to success lies in taking a more systemic approach and dealing with a range of interconnected challenges collaboratively. Together, with a joint effort to complement each other in our challenges and with the support of the EU, we can have a greater impact on decision-making at the national level and, at the same time, be a good example for other cities in the region," says Dinevski.

The three cities have identified the critical areas that require immediate attention: energy retrofitting, sustainable mobility and renewable energy sources. Each city has taken the lead in one of these areas, creating a dynamic partnership that not only addresses local challenges but also aims to share solutions with others.

Kranj is pioneering sustainable mobility by developing a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) application to reduce car dependency. Velenje is focussing on energy retrofitting and replacing coal as an energy source with renewable energy, while Ljubljana is working on using excess (waste) energy potential and its possible use in the city's district heating system. The capital city is also preparing for the connection of renewable energy sources in the coming years.

"We all work together on solutions in three different areas. That way, we can learn from each other's work and prepare to replicate it when it's our city's turn to improve in the other areas. The common denominator is the one-stop shops, where the involvement of different stakeholders is our priority and centre of attention. By working together, we can complement each other's work and set a strong example for other cities in the region," - explains Dinevski.

The cities also focus on collaboration by involving key stakeholders and citizens in the transition. But all three are taking different approaches to engagement. Kranj is developing a digital platform to reach and interact with its citizens, Velenje is setting up a Climate Energy Office to consult its citizens on the just energy transition, and Ljubljana has a fully operational Innovation Hub to raise awareness, engage citizens and explore the research & innovation potential of all stakeholders in the city.

Ljubljana's participation in the Pilot Cities Programme has provided a unique platform to amplify efforts. This supports the city's dual strategy, monitoring greenhouse gas emissions on the one hand, and engaging the public through the Innovation Hub on the other hand.

Regarding the technical approach, Ljubljana, together with the consultancy Enviroduel d.o.o. is developing a digital tool to automatically monitor and report greenhouse gas emissions. This data will be added annually to the Energy Climate Atlas platform (a comprehensive national energy database at a local level), supported by the aforementioned study on excess or waste heat potential.

"Networks of district heating systems (DHS) represent one of the most important infrastructures that enable decarbonisation through the integration of smart tools, as they allow the efficient integration of a wide range of renewable energy sources. As part of the Ljubljana pilot project, we are quite straightforward and focused on exploring these potentials," says Dinevski.

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