

## DELIVERING EUROPE'S URBAN CLIMATE TRANSITION

### Editorial

by **Patrick Child**, Deputy-Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) and EU Mission Manager for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission

Dear guests,

How lucky we are to assemble in the city of Torino and to draw inspiration from its journey.

From industrial hub to sustainability champion, green spaces now cover over one-third of the city. Its digital transformation was recognised in becoming the 2025 European Capital of Smart Tourism and the Officine Grandi Riparazioni (OGR), a conference partner this week, plays an important role as a cultural centre and space for tech innovation and learning.

At the end of the EU Cities Mission conference in Vilnius a year ago, it was clear that these events are vital opportunities to work together and to exchange experience.

A space for meaningful interaction and conversations that otherwise wouldn't have happened. Creating connections and working towards a shared future. This is the reason we are here in beautiful Torino this week.



ph Michele D'Ottavio

During this time, we will discuss many of the things that concern our cities and their climate ambitions: bringing more private sector finance to support city objectives; stronger partnerships between all levels of government: local, national, and European; accelerating the transition to renewable energy and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels; uncovering the lessons of the Mission and accelerating their impact, and much more.

But these themes are not problems in themselves, and problems rarely concern just one theme.

What matters is the interaction, the conversation, and exploring integrated and inclusive solutions together.

The political context is constantly changing, but for ambitious European cities, many of whom we will hear from this week, the destination remains the same. Sustainability is not a hurdle to overcome, but an opportunity to grasp – for competitiveness, security, and citizens' health and wellbeing.

So, I wish you a productive and inspiring conference experience and look forward to speaking with many of you as we continue our journey together.

## Q&A WITH STEFANO LO RUSSO, MAYOR OF TORINO



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Stefano Lo Russo, Mayor of Torino

### ***What motivated the city of Torino to host the 2026 EU Cities Mission conference?***

Torino is deeply committed to the transition towards climate neutrality and hosting the Cities Mission Conference 2026 represents for us a unique opportunity to strengthen the dialogue between European cities that share the same vision. Being one of the Mission cities is an important recognition, but also a responsibility: this is why we want Torino to be a place of concrete discussion, to exchange good practices and build strategic alliances. We firmly believe that only through collaboration between cities and the support of the European Union we can achieve ambitious and, today more than ever, necessary common goals.

### ***What should people know about Torino and about its work to reach its ambitious climate goals?***

Torino is a city that has been able to transform itself and is experiencing a path of profound change, maintaining its vocation to be a laboratory of urban innovation and sustainability. We are experimenting with concrete solutions in key sectors such as sustainable mobility, energy efficiency of buildings and renewable energy production and I am particularly proud of the active involvement of our citizens, universities and businesses. Our path is a collective and open effort, which we want to bring as an example at the European level.

### ***What would a successful event in 2026 look like to you?***

We hope that participants will return home with practical ideas, new connections and the feeling that together we can truly transform our cities and our Europe. But above all, we hope that they will experience Torino as a lively, welcoming and committed city, capable of combining innovation, history and vision for the future. A place where the process of transformation and change has already started.



CITTA' DI TORINO

## Path to Zero City Stories

What does it take to get citizens and businesses behind local climate action? And how can cities learn from each other's successes?

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Path to Zero: City Stories is a new podcast by NetZeroCities that speaks to cities, not only about their climate goals, but how their climate actions will improve people's lives and reshape the places they call home.

Available now on the NetZeroCities website, Spotify and Apple podcasts

Have an idea for a podcast topic or guest? Write to us: [hello@netzerocities.eu](mailto:hello@netzerocities.eu)



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**Systemic innovation in Umeå requires creative energy and a black belt in bureaucracy**

Through case prototypes like grey water heat recovery, new in-house innovation roles, and a shared learning platform with local stakeholders, Umeå is reshaping how the municipality works. Building on progress in renewable heating and electric buses, the city is tackling deeper barriers such as organisational lock-in, behavioural change and sub optimisation with its 'North Star' project, testing how systemic innovation can speed the climate transition.

**"The PCP project made a huge difference for us. It now allows us to work far more strategically in-house and strengthen our innovation work,"** says Lucas Röhlinger, Strategic Development Officer at Umeå municipality. The project has sparked new conversations, collaborations and ways of working that aim to make city-wide climate transformation more strategic, inclusive and effective over time.



**In Espoo, climate neutrality is a shared assignment**

Through the COMET project, Espoo has deepened its collaboration with companies, research institutions, education organisations and civil society, while engaging 1,255 residents through practical activities linked to nature, repair culture, mobility and climate literacy. Espoo is turning climate action into a city-wide effort.

**"The spirit of collaboration with local partners has been part of our culture,"** says the city's climate specialist, Mia Johansson. **"Now it has been fully integrated into climate action as well."**

At the same time, the city has developed a Climate Investment Framework with the Climate Leadership Coalition to help attract and accelerate green investment. The work is now feeding into the next phase of Espoo's Climate Neutrality Roadmap, showing how partnership, citizen engagement and investment planning can reinforce one another.

**Porto's civic spirit sparks a new, eco-urban identity**

Through the Pilot Cities Programme, Porto is rolling out a mobile app that helps residents understand the impact of their habits across water, energy, waste, mobility and consumption. Co-created with municipal partners and residents, the WAKE UP! app combines data, personalised insights and rewards to encourage lasting behavioural change.

**"Climate neutrality cannot be achieved by the municipality alone,"** says Vice Mayor Catarina Araújo. By linking personal action to city-wide goals, Porto is building climate neutrality around citizens' everyday choices and testing how digital tools can turn climate responsibility into a shared urban effort.



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## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

### *Citizens drive Europe's climate-neutral cities*

As European cities race towards 2030 climate neutrality goals, one lesson from the Pilot Cities Programme is becoming clear. The cities that move fastest tend to be those that treat citizens as partners in the transition, rather than relying only on big budgets or smart technology.

Across the first cohort of 52 Pilot cities, more than 184,000 people took part in activities that ranged from citizen assemblies and neighbourhood workshops to digital apps and citizen hackathons.



### *Shifting mindsets*

Where scorching summers are becoming the new norm, Cyprus's second largest city, Limassol, is being confronted with rising temperatures. To limit the negative side-effects, Limassol's Pilot Cities activity, the LC<sup>3</sup> project, combines nature-based solutions with renewable energy production, underpinned by citizen participation.



Key strategies include implementing green infrastructure, incorporating water elements into urban design, applying cool materials for roofs and pavements, installing smart cooling systems, among others. But what sets Limassol's approach apart is its focus on citizen engagement and attitude change. A core part is their 'co-design solution workshops', which provide space for deep consideration on who decides what happens in the city and how decisions are made.

### *Co-creation and citizens' assemblies*

Aarhus's CO-SHAPE Pilot Cities activity is transforming a 1000-hectare area into a circular energy park, but perhaps the most innovative element is how the project reimagines governance.

By involving citizens, energy developers and other stakeholders in a participatory planning process, the city is reshaping how people engage with these kinds of initiatives.

In practice, co-creation in Aarhus is taking place in 'solution rooms' where city staff, citizens, landowners, and developers work through the messy realities of large-scale infrastructure projects. Co-shaping the landscape with local citizens who will have to live near the plant is essential for their support.



## SYSTEMIC APPROACH

### Lund climbs higher for a fresh take on multilevel governance

Lund, one of Sweden's leading innovation cities, is rethinking how climate action is governed by connecting projects, people and institutions into one shared system. Through NetZeroCities' Pilot Cities Programme, the city is using a portfolio approach to bring together dozens of climate initiatives to guide politicians and external actors in charting a collective course towards climate neutrality.



With emissions already reduced by 45% compared to 2010, Lund now faces the challenge of doubling the pace of reductions to meet its 2030 targets. Instead of launching entirely new projects, the city is focusing on linking existing efforts more effectively across departments, organisations and sectors.

Here are six elements of Lund's portfolio approach that strengthen climate governance:

- **Climate City Contract:** Serves as the backbone of strategic alignment.
- **Climate portfolio model:** Maps 37 climate measures across the city's six main emissions domains to identify and link actions, actors and assets (like funding, data and policy).
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Bringing people across departments and sectors into a shared process built citywide ownership of climate action.
- **Data-driven decision-making:** Combining climate investment and municipal data into visual tools support investment planning.
- **Breaking silos:** Creates stronger cooperation between departments and municipal companies through transition teams and shared learning.
- **Continuous learning culture:** Running regular workshops, feedback loops and annual learning seminars scale successful solutions faster.



By bringing projects into a shared system rather than isolated initiatives, Lund is building a governance model designed to remain adaptive, collaborative and scalable over time. Much like viewing the city from a hot air balloon, this wider perspective helps actors zoom out, connect the dots and navigate a more unified path towards climate neutrality.



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## **NetZeroCities partner Q&A: Khadija Mernissi, City Finance Specialist**

### **What does a City Finance Specialist do?**

My role is to help cities identify if a climate project is a realistic candidate for private investment, support making this project bankable, and connect the cities to the right funding sources, whether private investors, philanthropic capital, or public grants.

A big part of the job is to act as a translator. Transition teams are led by environmental experts and when it comes to financing, cities can find it challenging to speak the language of investors. Bridging that gap is one of our missions.



*Khadija Mernissi, City Finance Specialist*

### **What is it that cities need that this role supports them with?**

Some cities come with defined projects and just need a connector. Others need to start from scratch on project preparation. The role adapts accordingly.

But across all of them, there is a common need: exposure to financing mechanisms they have never used before, and someone to walk them through implementation, step by step.

### **What is your advice to cities who have just started thinking about how to find finance and investment for their climate ambitions?**

First, start with the project, not the funding. Investor-readiness is not a given, it requires clear revenue models, defined risk allocation, and realistic timelines.

Second, don't underestimate the internal coordination required. The cities that move fastest are not necessarily the ones with the most resources, but where the finance and climate teams are genuinely working together.

Third: don't reinvent the wheel. Many of the tools cities need already exist, what they often need is support to adapt them, scale them, and make them work in their own context. Seek out those peers.

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## How much does it cost to reach climate neutrality?

Experts from NetZeroCities' partner Bankers without Boundaries have crunched the numbers and they reveal the true scale of what lies ahead.

We must fully grasp the magnitude of the investment required for cities to deliver their climate neutrality plans because without that clarity, they risk falling short. The estimated €307bn (or €5,486 per person) needed across 100 Mission Cities isn't just a big number – it's a signal of the scale of transformation ahead.



The financial challenge is not a matter of scarce capital. Public, private, and philanthropic funding is available. What cities lack is the ability to absorb that capital: to make the most of it, they will need technical expertise and the capacity to prepare viable projects that are ready for investment.

**"Mission Cities are already ahead of the curve,"** says Delphine Queniart, Director of Climate City Capital Hub. **"Through the Capital Hub and support from European institutions, they're getting tailored financial advice and access to tools that can turn ambitious climate plans into investable projects. That gives them an edge."**

**"The need is urgent – but the capacity is growing, and exciting, impactful initiatives lie ahead."**

## 'We are one city'

Gothenburg, the Swedish port city, sees its numerous departments and companies guided by a multi-year environment and climate programme. With the help of NetZeroCities' Capital Hub, steps towards green finance are opening up new conversations.

Michelle Coldrey from Gothenburg has been speaking to other Swedish cities about her city's work with finance specialists from NetZeroCities.

"Why not? Give it a go," she tells them.

Coldrey, who works on Gothenburg's environment and climate programme, recognises that city staff can be hesitant about conversations that touch on finance, especially with external actors,

if it isn't their specific role or area of expertise. Patience and perseverance, on all sides, is a must for understanding partners' needs and what is possible.

And Gothenburg has significant experience to speak from. Through the Capital Hub – a service financed by the EU Cities Mission that helps cities go beyond municipal budgets and attract private investment for their climate plans – projects with two local partners are being supported. One with Renova, the city's waste-to energy (WtE) facility, and GHAB, the port of Gothenburg, the largest freight hub in Scandinavia.

Notably, both companies are city-owned, but this isn't a guarantee of easier coordination – even within small departments there can be silos that restrict communication. And between large organisations, a common working language needs created.

**"That's what we hoped that the Capital Hub would help us with, to try and break those silos and initiate dialogues. And it has helped,"** she says.

Ultimately, the access to finance specialists and expertise made other conversations possible, adding some effective capacity to think differently.

**"We were able to use the NetZeroCities network concretely [and] start a dialogue, which enabled us to get a better idea of Renova and the port and what kind of priorities they have in their climate work,"** says Coldrey.

**"We need to just keep reinforcing that we are one city. And as part of this Mission work, we're able to do that."**

## **How Bratislava is turning business into a partner for change**

Through the Bratislava Mayor's Climate Challenge, the city is showing that real progress on emissions requires shared responsibility, trust and transparency.

Ten companies joined the programme after consulting with the city to ensure their actions are achievable and aligned with its wider climate plan. Their commitments are expected to save more than 3 GWh of energy in the first year, and they also plan to install more than 3,000 kilowatts of photovoltaic capacity – about 15 percent of the city's 2030 renewables target for the tertiary sector.



## **Helsingborg's bold Experiment to Build a climate-neutral future**

Helsingborg is cutting emissions from the construction sector and transforming its Oceanhamnen district into a living laboratory where new ways of designing, building and managing materials are tested in real time through their Pilot cities activity 'Co-Build'.

The city is bringing in local developers, businesses and universities to map and reduce risk and uncertainty for businesses, develop common standards, and test climate-neutral procurement

practices, aiming to turn climate-neutral construction from an exception into the standard practice.



## **Co-creating a climate-positive future in Stockholm with local communities**

Stockholm launched a bold experiment, creating "transition arenas" for climate and health in five city districts through its 'Scale Stockholm' Pilot cities activity.



These arenas bring together civil society, small businesses, and residents not just to brainstorm, but to run their own pilots – 27 so far – testing together how everyday habits, local economies, and urban spaces can be reshaped for a just, inclusive, and healthy climate transition.

This new kind of partnership is bottom-up by design and has already led to a cultural shift within Stockholm's administration. Departments once siloed now find themselves collaborating not just with each other but with citizens, associations, and local companies.

## **'Coffee is a human ritual': one of the world's biggest coffee brands is backing local climate action in its hometown**



With six signatories, 16 main partners, 60 supporters, nine members and eight other partners, Lavazza was one of the first companies to sign Torino's Climate City Contract (CCC).

**"Lavazza's role in implementing the CCC is crucial for generating the 'emulation effect.'**

**Being at the top of a complex supply chain, Lavazza is able to indirectly incentivise local SMEs to adopt higher sustainability standards to remain competitive and aligned with the CCC parameters,"** says Chiara Foglietta, the city's deputy mayor in charge of ecological transition.

## What carbon capture is teaching Trondheim about climate transformation

Around a quarter of Trondheim's current greenhouse gas emissions come from the city's waste-to-energy facility, which handles unsortable waste and provides district heating to buildings across the municipality, but carbon capture and storage (CCS) could cut those emissions by 220,000 tonnes per year by preventing it from entering the atmosphere and storing it underground.

The city doesn't own the waste facility and can't make investment decisions directly, but the lack of ownership has placed the city in a role of orchestration and matchmaking. To do this job effectively, Trondheim Municipality is embedding itself in the decision-making logic of the plant owner and, through its Pilot cities activity, trying to understand what a viable business case for CCS would look like – positioning itself to work more efficiently with companies and increase the number of such partnerships in future.



## Why cities need business to hit net zero

Climate neutrality is no longer framed as something city halls impose on businesses and citizens, but as something that they work on together. So, the work now starts with a different question: which businesses, utilities, investors and employers have to be in the room if any of this is going to happen in the real world?

**Espoo** convened their climate network of investors from energy, grids, construction, retail and technology to ask what they need from the city before they would commit capital. The result is a climate investment framework where, instead of pitching one-off projects, Espoo is trying to offer a clear value proposition to businesses.

**Oslo's** climate agency works with research institutes, energy utilities and equipment suppliers to electrify excavators and cranes and manage power demand. A new Zero-Emission Construction Forum brings together contractors, grid operators and ministries, and Oslo is already proposing local rules that would force large construction sites, public and private, to use mostly zero-emission energy by 2030.

**Liberec** is setting up a new legal entity with relevant partners to attract private capital and citizen investment to tackle the problem of how to build a community energy scheme in a system dominated by a national for-profit monopoly.

**Vilnius** is borrowing tactics from charities: a call-centre campaign asks small and medium-sized enterprises to donate to citizen climate projects, while a face-to-face fundraising drive targets larger firms.

In **Guimarães**, more than 130 organisations, many from business and civil society, have joined a Climate Pact that now acts as a governance tool for the city's transition.

## JET Cities – Boosting green workforce in cities

JET Cities is a French initiative bringing together five cities (Marseille, Paris, Lyon, Dijon, and Grenoble) to address the employment risks and opportunities of the ecological transition by developing inclusive pathways to green jobs. As part of the NetZeroCities Enabling City Transformation programme, the project builds on Climate City Contracts (CCCs) and national strategies to territorialise ecological planning and make climate action a shared concern across departments.

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# The Cities Mission Times

## ***From cooperation to institutional climate governance: the climate platform of Pécs***

For years, Pécs had cultivated a strong tradition of cooperation with organisations and institutions within the city – a collaborative culture that became the backbone of its Climate City Contract.

In May 2025, the city's General Assembly took a decision that marked a new chapter in its climate journey. It understood something essential: achieving climate neutrality is about how a city organises itself to make decisions, mobilise partners, and sustain action over decades.



The result was a local 'Climate Platform' – a structured governance system designed to ensure the climate transition is managed transparently, collaboratively, and consistently over the long term.

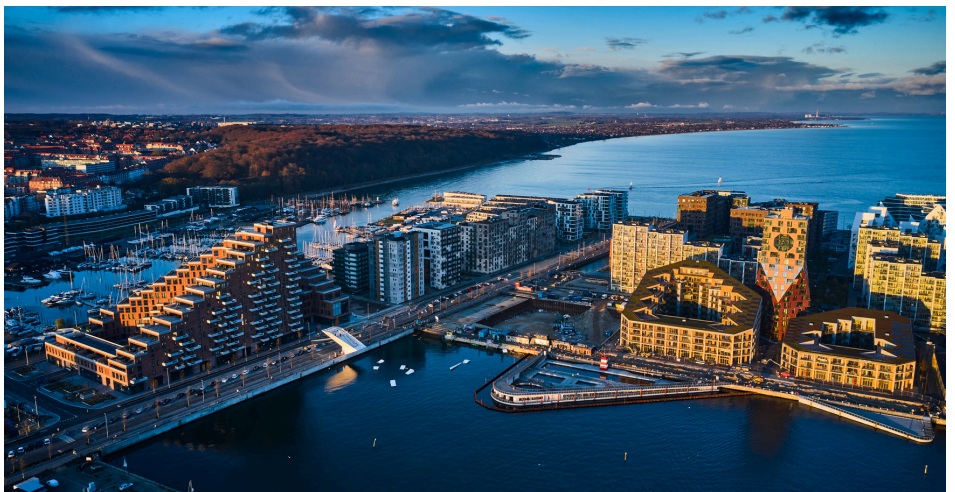
The platform transforms earlier collaboration into an institutional system with clearly-defined roles. A Climate Steering Committee is responsible for city-wide climate policy and prepares strategic proposals for the city's decision-makers. The Mayor's Climate Advisory Group provides professional guidance for implementing the city's climate commitments, translating scientific expertise into actionable strategies.

Yet perhaps the most distinctive element of the system is the Climate Platform itself, which provides opportunities for dialogue and shared problem-solving, ensuring climate action is not developed behind closed doors but shaped through open engagement.

## ***Danish municipalities unite for systemic climate action***

Uniting municipalities across Denmark under a single climate framework, the LIFE ACT initiative is connecting actors in new ways for innovative systemic action.

Coordinated by the City of Aarhus and Southern Denmark University (SDU), municipalities collaborate with interdisciplinary researchers in the SDU Climate Cluster, utility and transport companies, EU offices, and the national environmental protection agency's Center for Climate Adaptation, to develop collective rather than isolated or sector-specific solutions.



With these partnerships, LIFE ACT (Action for Climate Transition) strengthens municipal capacity, collaboration, and governance to translate climate goals into real action in Denmark.

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## Bringing networks to life: why context matters as much as contacts

**Working in networks is widely promoted in public policy, urban innovation, and climate action – but too often, they create more meetings than results and more expectations than impact. NetZeroCities’ partners at the Technical University of Madrid offer a method to rethink how to get the most from networks.**

In collaborative work, we often overestimate the importance of nodes, under-analyse relationships and overlook context altogether. Designing a network is, to a large extent, about designing those contexts for interaction.

So, the challenge is not to create “one more space”, but to add value to the existing ones without duplicating efforts. That is exactly where network thinking becomes practical.

Working in networks is often presented as a clear win. It helps tackle systemic problems, align fragmented agendas and mobilise resources that no single actor could activate alone. But anyone who has worked in a real network knows that the moment collaboration begins, things also get more complex and less predictable.

Developing a network is a strategic design exercise that requires moving from control to influence, and from simply gathering actors to creating shared value.

## A problem shared is a problem halved: strengthening French local authorities through cooperation on climate

**Collaboration promises to pool resources and spread expertise – but first everyone has to be put in the same room. The EU Cities Mission is doing just that and bringing cities, national governments and other important sectors together in a regular forum.**

National 'ecosystems' are one new and structured way cities are coming together with the Mission's support to connect cities with national governments, key stakeholders, and each other to coordinate climate action.

In France, this group of Mission cities (the National Mirror Group) met for critical discussions, including a session on green bonds – a possible low-cost and long-term source of financial

support for sustainability projects.

This offered critical insight from city representatives and finance experts, and Delphine Queniart, director of the Climate City Capital Hub, highlighted the hub's role in helping cities navigate the complexity of financing transformative projects on the ground.

“The Cities Mission doesn't just fund projects – through the Capital Hub, it transforms the financial culture of cities, building the structured, credible, and strategic capital needed to support European climate transition.”

Participants also explored additional financing tools, like multi-stakeholder cooperatives (SCIC) and mixed public-private companies (SEM), which provide flexible governance and long-term

investment capacity for local transition projects.

Concrete examples illustrated their potential. Dijon Métropole has partnered with investment firm Meridiam through an SEM dedicated to energy, meanwhile, in Courcy, an SCIC is leading the Microville 112 project, bringing together diverse stakeholders, including citizens, to redevelop a former military landfill site and turn it into a new hub for sustainable innovation.

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## **Heat transition compass in Leipzig**

As cities work to decarbonise buildings and meet climate targets, supporting property owners through the heat transition is becoming increasingly important. Leipzig's Heat Transition Compass shows how digital tools and local guidance can empower citizens to make informed decisions.

The platform helps property owners explore climate-friendly heating options, understand potential costs and savings, access subsidies, and connect with local energy advisors and craft enterprises. Through personalised digital checks and clear, step-by-step guidance, complex renovation choices become more accessible and actionable.

Developed through a participatory process involving municipal experts, researchers, and target groups, the Heat Transition Compass demonstrates how cities can combine digital innovation and citizen-centred design to turn climate objectives into practical support on the ground.



## **Polish cities join forces to transform buildings for climate neutrality**

As buildings remains one of the biggest sources of urban emissions, five Polish cities (Kraków, Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław and Rzeszów) worked together to accelerate large-scale renovation. Through the NEEST pilot project, they developed a shared digital tool to support their Climate City Contracts and enable a more just, inclusive transition.

By modelling typical building types and neighbourhoods through a reusable digital twin platform, the cities were able to test renovation scenarios, estimate costs and emissions reductions, and plan integrated solutions beyond single buildings. NEEST demonstrates how collaboration, data-driven tools, and citizen engagement helped cities move from isolated upgrades to systemic urban transformation.

## **How cities are using public sensors to support climate action — responsibly**

As European cities stepped up efforts to address climate and environmental challenges, many increasingly relied on public sensors to monitor air quality, manage resources, and improve urban services. Across cities, a growing emphasis emerged on ensuring these technologies support climate goals while maintaining public trust.

From measuring air and water quality to optimising traffic flows and public lighting, cities such as Eindhoven, Leipzig, Lisbon and Porto are using sensors to better understand environmental impacts and inform climate-related decisions. By embedding ethics, transparency and clear governance into sensor deployment, they are ensuring that climate-relevant data is collected responsibly and used to strengthen urban resilience and sustainability.

The experience highlights how digital tools, when guided by strong public values, can help cities turn environmental data into climate-smart action — while keeping citizens informed, involved and protected.



## Lappeenranta pioneers digital innovation in heating

The Finnish city of Lappeenranta is demonstrating how digital tools can transform urban heating systems. Through its participation in the Pilot Cities Programme, the city is using real-time data, building sensors, and electricity market forecasting to optimise when and how buildings are heated. By shifting energy use to times when electricity is cheaper and cleaner, Lappeenranta is reducing both emissions and reliance on fossil fuels during peak demand.

A key innovation is the creation of “virtual power plants”, where connected buildings feed data into an optimisation system that automatically adjusts heating. Early results are promising, with energy savings reaching up to 27% when combining demand response with weather forecasting. As the city works toward fossil-free district heating, this approach offers a scalable model for how digital solutions can support climate-neutral goals across Europe.



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## Copenhagen advances digital heat flexibility

Copenhagen is turning its attention to one of the least visible but most critical parts of the energy system: heating. Through the Flexumers4Future project, the city is using digital tools to transform buildings into “flexumers” capable of adjusting their heat demand in response to system needs. By introducing smart controls and real-time communication, buildings can shift heating to more efficient times, helping reduce emissions, lower costs, and ease pressure on the district heating network.

This approach is not just technical but systemic. By coordinating buildings, energy providers, and city stakeholders, Copenhagen is testing how heat flexibility can work at scale. Early insights show that even basic digitalisation can deliver energy savings, with further gains possible through predictive controls. As the city works toward its ambition of becoming climate-positive by 2035, this model highlights how digital innovation and collaboration can unlock more resilient and efficient urban energy systems.



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## ENERGY

### ***Sønderborg: turning the energy system carbon neutral***

ProjectZero is Sønderborg's long-term initiative to make the municipality's entire energy system carbon-neutral by 2029. Launched as a public-private partnership, the project focuses first on reducing energy demand, then on replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy, electrification, and integrated energy systems. District heating plays a central role, combining renewable sources and excess heat from industry with energy efficiency measures across housing, public buildings and businesses.



Rather than waiting for future technologies, ProjectZero is based on solutions that already exist and can be applied at scale. This approach has delivered strong results: by 2023, energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions had fallen by more than half compared to 2007 levels. By linking local action, industry expertise and long-term planning, ProjectZero shows how cities can deliver rapid, cost-effective progress in the energy transition.



### ***110 MW geothermal energy powering Aarhus's district heating transition***

Aarhus is transforming its district heating system through the large-scale deployment of geothermal energy, with up to 110 MW planned to replace fossil fuels and significantly reduce reliance on biomass, including the phase-out of wood pellets. The first geothermal facilities are already operating, delivering 17–18 MW of stable, fossil-free heat to the city.

The project is driven by close cooperation between the municipality, energy company Innargi and the municipal utility Kredsløb, with clear risk-sharing and strong public oversight. Scientific assessments and careful management of groundwater and environmental impacts have been central to the project's success. Innovations such as low-temperature district heating and optimised heat pumps have improved efficiency and reliability.

By combining existing drilling expertise with new geothermal applications, Aarhus is restoring confidence in geothermal energy and demonstrating how cities can deploy it at scale as a reliable cornerstone of the energy transition.



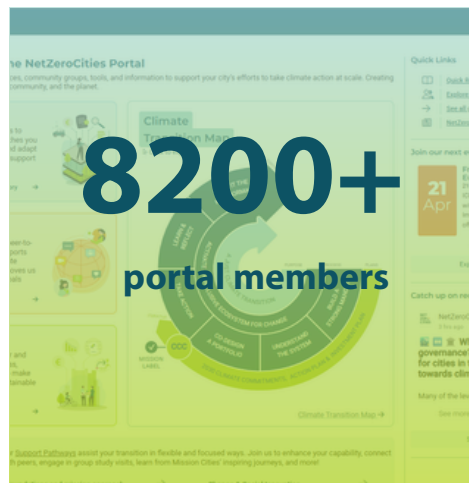
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## NETZEROCITIES IN NUMBERS



A snapshot of what the EU Cities Mission Platform has achieved so far and the community that makes it possible.



**Cities don't reach climate neutrality alone. Through twinning, exchange visits, and shared expertise, the Cities Mission is building a network where progress is replicated and scaled across Europe.**

## Twinning Learning Programme



*Twinning Learning Programme visit:  
Torino-Cascais-Alytus (Cohort 4)*

The Twinning Learning Programme has evolved and scaled up this year. After three editions pairing Pilot cities with cities outside the Mission that share its climate ambition, new cohorts are now joining the peer-learning adventure. This time with a sharper focus on replicating good practices from Mission cities' climate action plans, across themes such as mobility, citizen engagement and finance.

Launched in September 2025, the 12-month programme has already begun its first city visits, contributing to the Mission's second objective – ensuring that Mission cities act as hubs of experimentation and innovation, enabling all European cities to become climate neutral by 2050. More than 200 cities have now joined the Programme. A new cohort is also forming between cities in partner projects and Mission cities, with a reverse matchmaking session at the Cities Mission Conference 2026 in Torino.

Cities all around Europe, beyond the Cities Mission, are joining forces to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Want to dive deeper into the learnings from city pairings? Get inspired by reading the Twinning Replication Booklet.

**Scan the QR code to read the Twinning Replication Booklet and Group Study Visits Action plans!**



## Group Study visits

Mission cities are inspiring pairs all across Europe. After participating in thematic Online Discussion Groups, some cities got to experience change on the ground, joining exchange visits and sharing their own practices in return. It is a genuine two-way exchange: Mission cities gain practical, transferable insights while also contributing their own expertise.

Being part of the Cities Mission community means access to a rich range of peer-learning opportunities. The Online Discussion Groups connect cities with Mission cities' practical experience across key decarbonisation themes, from financing to citizen engagement.

Another opportunity is the Online Planning Lab, a free, six-module course empowering city representatives to design effective climate action strategies, at their own pace and in multiple EU languages.



*Group Study visit: Mannheim*



Twinning Learning Programme visit: Padova-Ploiesti (Cohort 4)



Twinning Learning Programme visit: Ioannina-Cesena (cohort 4) and Ioannina-Tønder (Cohort 2)



Group Study visit: Guimarães



Group Study visit: Bucharest



Twinning Learning Programme visit: Umea-Prague (Cohort 4)

## Scale and momentum

In 2025, the peer-learning offer extended its reach well beyond the 112 Mission cities, connecting hundreds of city representatives across Europe and beyond.

- **170+** City officers trained through the Online Planning Lab
- **170+** City representatives engaged in the Online Discussion Groups
- **30** City delegates joined Group Study Visits across three Mission cities
- **180+** Cities connected through the Twinning Learning Programme
- **100+** Mission-minded cities supported by the Helpdesk
- **200+** Mission-minded cities engaged at national level across 30+ countries

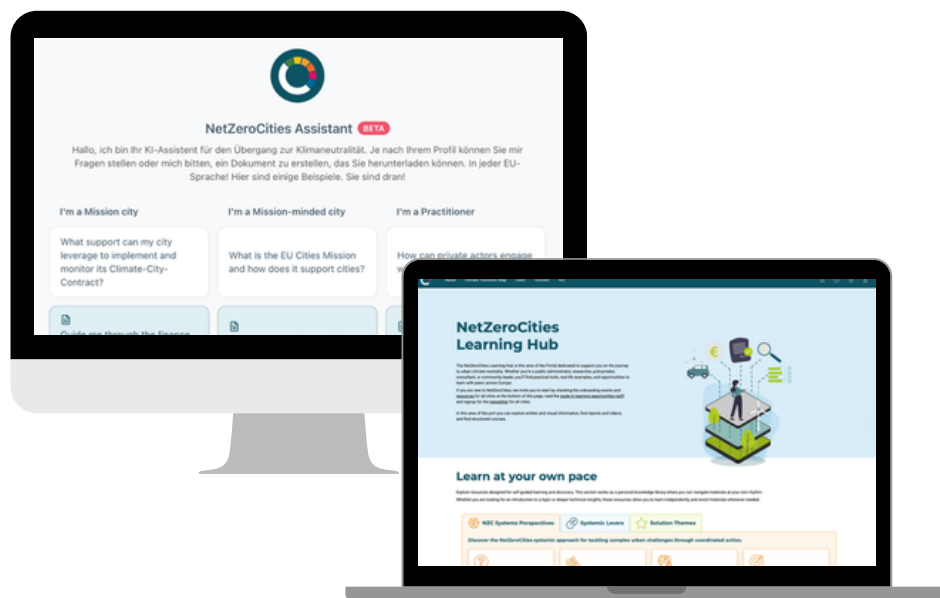
Want to know more? Scan to discover peer-learning outcomes, city stories, and what is coming next.



# The Cities Mission Times

## DIGITAL

### A Smarter, More Connected Portal for Cities



As the Portal continues to be refined and grow for Mission cities, we also look to expand relevance and offerings for Mission-minded cities. This year marks an important step forward. New features are making it easier for cities to connect, learn, and take action together.

At the heart of this evolution are **enhanced city profiles**. These go beyond static information, offering a richer, more searchable view of each city's priorities, projects, and expertise. Whether you are looking for partners, inspiration, or proven approaches, finding the right city and understanding its journey is becoming faster and more intuitive.

To continue to improve support around accessing the most relevant resources, NetZeroCities is developing a new AI-enabled chatbot, soon to be introduced.

Designed to work across all European languages, it allows users to search, explore, and navigate our rich set of resources in the knowledge repository in a more natural way. Instead of browsing through pages, users can simply ask questions and receive tailored guidance, citing specific resources, helping them quickly access relevant cities, guidance, and insights.

This shift reflects a broader goal. Making the platform accessible and useful to all users, regardless of language or technical familiarity.

Another major development is the upcoming **Learning Hub**. This will provide a central space for knowledge, training, and practical tools. From step-by-step guidance to shared experiences across cities, the Learning Hub is designed to support capacity building at every stage of the journey.

It represents a significant step forward. Moving from information sharing to structured learning and real-world application.

Looking ahead, **National Ecosystem Pages** further strengthen the platform and how cities better leverage their national connections. These pages bring together key actors, initiatives, and resources at the national level, helping users better understand how local and national efforts connect. This added layer will make it easier to navigate the broader landscape and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Together, these updates are part of a wider transformation. The NetZeroCities Portal is evolving into a dynamic, interactive space where cities can connect, learn, and act more effectively.

Explore the new portal features, connect with peers, and be part of what comes next.



## OUR NETWORK

**NetZeroCities is forging alliances with key projects, initiatives, and networks to scale and speed up the impact of the EU Cities Mission.**

NetZeroCities is actively **signing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)** to establish new partnerships and significantly enhance existing synergies with related projects, initiatives, and networks. These collaborations are essential in fostering **knowledge exchange, driving innovation, and amplifying our collective impact** towards climate neutrality in European cities.



LEARN MORE

# The Cities Mission Times

## NetZeroCities out & about

From panel stages to workshop sessions, our community has been making appearances across the circuit. We kept our eyes open and here are some who we caught out & about.



*The NZC-SGA3 KoM Team in Leuven, Belgium, April 2026.*



*Marmara Urban Forum 2026, Istanbul Türkiye, October 2026*



*Better Funding Dialogues, Guimarães, Portugal, May 2026*



*7th NetZeroCities Seasonal School in Athens, Greece, February 2026*



*European Urban Initiative Event, Marseille, France, October 2025*



*Climate Neutral Blue Cities, Limassol, Cyprus, March 2026*



*French national Mission ecosystem meeting, Île de France, March 2026*



*The European Climate Pact Annual Event 2026: Together in Action, Brussels, Belgium, March 2026*



*European Urban Forum - The Future of EU Cities, Brussels, Belgium, February 2026*

*Cities and Municipalities for the Energy and Climate Transition hosted by ANCI, Rome, Italy, February 2026*



*Finnish Mission Cities Meeting, Helsinki, Finland, December 2025*



*NetZeroCities team meets the elected vice-mayor of Câmara Municipal do Porto, Catarina Araújo, Porto, Portugal*



*Mission Cities Business Lunch, Differdange, Luxembourg, May 2026*



*Urban Future, Ljubljana, Slovenia, March 2026*

## CITIES' COMMUNICATION

### ***Valladolid: an exciting campaign to raise public awareness***

Valladolid launched a campaign to raise public awareness that achieving zero-emission cities is everyone's responsibility. How did we do it? With Valladolid Mission Festival of Humour and Magic. Communicating the city's commitment to sustainability through emotion, humour and magic. That was the approach taken to reach audiences of all ages. We raised awareness of the climate mission in venues such as the city's civic centres and the Calderón Theatre with 10 entertaining shows featuring famous Spanish comedians and magicians.



Laughter and magic were shared with more than 4,000 people took part and over 1,000 told us what they are going to do in their daily lives to achieve a healthier city.

It is the Mission Challenge that is achieved by each and every one of us, because every gesture counts. In addition, this citizen mission challenge was publicised in the local print and digital press and on our own channels -www.ideva.es-, such as Instagram, reaching 220,000 followers, thanks to the popularity of the show's stars.

Solidarity was also part of the festival, as some of the proceeds were donated to the Spanish Cancer Association. Will you join the Mission? What would you do for a city free of emissions?

### ***Kalamata makes street-art history: culture as climate communication***

Kalamata's award-winning Maria Callas mural shows how culture in public space can become a powerful tool for climate communication and community engagement. Voted Best Mural of 2025, the artwork goes beyond artistic recognition. It uses shared space, local identity and symbolism to spark collective pride and connection.

Rather than delivering climate messages through technical language or campaigns, the mural communicates values visually and emotionally. Roots, nature and landscape elements link past and present, reminding residents of their relationship with place, culture and environment.



The strong public response transformed the mural into a shared reference point in everyday urban life.

For Kalamata, a coastal city balancing development, nature and resilience, this initiative shows how storytelling, creativity and meaning can support long-term climate transition. It highlights that successful climate action also depends on trust, belonging and shared narratives, and not only infrastructure or technology.

**Want to read more about these stories? Scan the QR code!**



## SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL



### *Insights into the adventurous journey of NetZeroCities' Sustainable Travel Ambassadors*

One of the compelling advantages of hosting the Cities Mission Conference in Torino is its accessibility by low carbon transport. Around 30% of Mission cities can reach the Italian city overland within a day – a fact that inspired the Mission Platform to take meaningful action this year by offering sustainable travel bursaries to several Mission city representatives, for instance from The Hague, Aarhus, Bristol and Antwerp.

Among the most remarkable journeys was that of the Aarhus delegation, who travelled from Denmark with a first stopover in Freiburg to connect with the EU Cities Mission Ecosystem, before boarding a train to Basel for the final leg into Torino - a route that turned the journey itself into a statement.

Sustainable Travel Ambassadors Emily Thompson and Mads Nansen Paulson reflected on their motivations: **"Our primary ambition is to travel as sustainably as possible. As a Mission city, Aarhus has set ambitious goals - including how it conducts itself as an organisation and employer. We want to showcase what is possible when it comes to sustainable work-related travel."**

Their journey is a reminder that the transition to net zero is not only about the destination, but how we choose to get there.



### *Cycling as a powerful statement for climate action*

Ahead of COP30 in Belém, Brazil, hundreds of riders joined the COP Bike Ride, completing a six-month relay across four continents - the longest of its kind. More than 1,000 cyclists took part along the 30,000-kilometre route, gathering commitments from local governments on cycling policies for 2030 to deliver to the COP presidency.

Along the way, riders engaged communities, raising awareness, sharing stories and linking local challenges to global climate goals. The European leg began in Baku, Azerbaijan, passing through 19 Mission cities while promoting the European Declaration on Cycling, a joint political commitment adopted in April 2024.

The declaration outlines 36 principles to boost cycling by expanding infrastructure, increasing investment, supporting cycle tourism and improving data collection - positioning cycling as a sustainable, inclusive and health-enhancing mode of transport.



### *Inside the journey of NetZeroCities' most famous cycling advocate*

Thomas Haddock, NetZeroCities head of operations (Climate-KIC), often takes to two wheels to highlight sustainable mobility as a lever for more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful urban spaces. His latest ride, a 330km journey from Sanremo to Parma, culminated at the CIVITAS Forum, where a partnership was sealed to support cities in building cleaner, more accessible transport systems.

Reflecting on the experience, Thomas describes how safe, people-centred streets can transform cities.

**Want to read more about these stories? Scan the QR code!**



**Which city are you?** Browse the 12 city signs below and find the one that best reflects your climate journey. Then compare notes with fellow cities: you might just find your perfect match. Look out for your city twin sign too and make connections.

 **Aries: The Front-Runner**

Your Climate City Contract was signed before the ink was dry. You move fast, you're bold, and your instinct for decisive action means rapid progress, just don't forget to bring your residents along.

 **City twin:** Libra

 **Taurus: The Steady Deliverer**

While others are still talking, you've retrofitted 200 buildings and decarbonised your district heating. But the Steady Deliverer can't coast on a 2020 roadmap forever. It's time for a change!

 **City twin:** Virgo

 **Gemini: The Experimenter**

You've got multiple pilots in motion, always testing what's possible. Your innovation cycle keeps evolving every time someone tries to write it down, a true reflection of your lab mindset.

 **City twin:** Aquarius

 **Cancer: The Community Builder**

Your citizen assemblies are standing room only. Your participatory budgeting process has a waiting list. You've mastered the art of bringing everyone to the table, now try leaving it with a decision.

 **City twin:** Capricorn

 **Leo: The Climate Ambassador**

You have a flagship solar district, a TED talk, and a mayor who posts about it after every council meeting. The sun is your ruler, and it promises excellent visibility at the annual event this year.

 **City twin:** Sagittarius

 **Virgo: The Data City**

Your GHG inventory is updated quarterly, your monitoring dashboard has 14 layers of filters. Mercury rewards your rigour, the stars would love to see that methodology on the Mission Platform someday.

 **City twin:** Taurus

 **Libra: The Consensus Seeker**

Your multilevel governance process is a masterpiece of inclusion, every directorate consulted, every stakeholder heard. The cosmos is rooting for you, everything crossed that the stars align for a signature very soon.

 **City twin:** Aries

 **Scorpio: The Finance Pioneer**

You issued a green bond before most cities knew what one was. Your blended finance structure is impressive and your team speaks fluent EU taxonomy. One earthly challenge remains: explaining the financial model to the council in 10 minutes.

 **City twin:** Pisces

**NETZERO GRID**

Fill in the empty squares so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains each of the following nine characters exactly once: **G, R, E, A, T, J, O, B, I**!

	E		B		G	J		T
		A	O	R				
G		B			A			
			T		I	O		G
			G	B	J			
A		J	R		O			
			A			B		J
				O	E	R		
J		O	I		B			G

**SUSTAINABLY SHUFFLED**

Rearrange the scrambled letters below to reveal the hidden words:

- TUIALCYENTIMRETAL
- MITRESASTIC
- HNRPARETIPS

 **Sagittarius: The Networked City**

You have twinned with five cities and attended every peer-learning session the Mission has ever organised. Jupiter brings a particularly enriching exchange this year, you might just learn something that surprises you.

 **City twin:** Leo

 **Capricorn: The Long-Game City**

Your 2050 masterplan is a thing of beauty. Saturn rewards your long-term thinking, but 2030 is not the long game. The stars suggest accelerating phase one just a little.

 **City twin:** Cancer

 **Aquarius: The Deep Transformer**

You're not just decarbonising, you're rethinking the entire city model. Uranus electrifies your systemic thinking this year. One grounding note: your residents still need the bins collected on time.

 **City twin:** Gemini

 **Pisces: The Just City**

Every climate decision you are making is filtered through equity, inclusion, and the question of who bears the cost. Your just transition plan is the most thoughtful document in the Mission. A recognition you deserve is coming.

 **City twin:** Scorpio