

6th Conference on Sustainable Development in Municipalities

European Dialogue on the municipal implementation of the 2030 Agenda



Around 130 participants from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland as well as from twelve European countries took part in the 6th Conference on Sustainable Development in Municipalities on 23rd September 2019 in Düsseldorf. During the conference, international representatives from municipalities and civil society exchanged views on Sustainable Development issues. For the first time, the event of Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Agenda 21 NRW e.V. (LAG 21 NRW) was organised together with Regionale Netzstelle Nachhaltigkeitsstrategien West (RENN.west) and took a European perspective. In addition to municipal best-practice projects from Germany, the municipal forums also focused on examples from the Netherlands, Finland, Poland and Slovakia. Topics of the municipal forums were ‘Municipal sustainable development strategies’, ‘Strong municipalities, strong Europe’, ‘Biodiversity and agriculture’, ‘Energy transition and climate protection’ as well as ‘Mobility’. The accompanying program highlighted the role of municipalities in the localisation of the 2030 Agenda in Europe.

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Program

10:00 – 10:20 am **Welcome and introduction**

Dr. Klaus REUTER, *Managing director of Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft Agenda 21 NRW e.V. (LAG 21 NRW), consortium manager of RENN.west*

Keynote: Together for a sustainable transformation in Europe!

10:10 – 10:30 am Arnoldas ABRAMAVIČIUS, *Member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and member of the Zarasai District Municipal Council, Lithuania*

Panel discussion: Innovative solutions for localising the 2030 Agenda

10:30 – 11:25 am Arnoldas ABRAMAVIČIUS, *Member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and member of the Zarasai District Municipal Council, Lithuania*

Prof. Dr. Christa LIEDTKE, *Head of department 'sustainable production and consumption' at Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy and member of the steering committee of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Germany*

Allan MACLEOD, *SDG research and engagement associate at the Bristol City Council, the Bristol Green Capital Partnership and Bristol University, England*

Jyrki MYLLYVIRTA, *Member of the Sustainable Espoo Policy Group, Espoo, Finland, former mayor of Lahti (Finland), former member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)*

Simone RASKOB, *Deputy mayor of the city of Essen, Germany*

Moderator: Dr. Klaus REUTER, *LAG 21 NRW*

Presentation of the RENN.west campaign 'Goals need action'

11:25 – 11:45 am Reiner MATHAR, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Natur- und Umweltbildung (ANU) Hessen (working group for environmental education in Hesse, Germany), RENN.west*

11:45 – 12:45 am **Lunchtime snack and networking**

Municipal forums: municipalities as pioneers of Sustainable Development in Europe

1:30 – 3:15 pm Within the framework of the municipal forums, innovative municipal examples on five main topics will be presented.

- **Municipal sustainable development strategies**
 - **Strong municipalities, strong Europe**
 - **Biodiversity and agriculture**
 - **Energy transition and climate protection**
 - **Mobility**
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3:15 – 3:30 pm **Closing remarks**

Prof. Dr. Klaus HELLING, *Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, RENN.west*

3:30 – 4:00 pm **Coffee and networking**

Welcome and introduction



(Dr. Klaus Reuter, LAG 21 NRW)

At the beginning, **Dr. Klaus Reuter**, managing director of LAG 21 NRW and consortium manager of RENN.west, warmly welcomed the participants in Düsseldorf and stressed the importance of the European dialogue with regard to the necessary acceleration of the implementation of Sustainable Development. Encouraging and inspiring solutions from European municipalities would therefore be in the focus of the event. The exchange during the conference was a decisive first step towards initiating a long-term European dialogue on the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Keynote

Arnoldas Abramavičius, member of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and member of the Zarasai district municipal council, Lithuania, opened his keynote 'Together for a sustainable transformation in Europe!' by pointing out the EU's significant progress in implementing almost all SDGs over the past five years and referred to a recent Eurostat report (2019). However, there are also areas in which setbacks could be observed. The 2030 Agenda's objectives could therefore only be achieved as a cross-actor collaboration with a central role of municipalities and regions.



(Arnoldas Abramavičius, Member of the European Committee of the Regions and member of the Zarasai District Municipal Council)

This view is also reflected in the [CoR's recent opinion to the European Commission and the European Council](#), which calls inter alia for an overarching EU strategy to coordinate the implementation at all levels of government. EU cohesion policy would be considered as the main investment instrument of the EU to promote the implementation of SDGs in regions and cities. The CoR also welcomes the development of local indicators, intensive European dialogue and initiatives such as the '[Roadmap for localising the SDGs](#)' of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the planned '[SDG localising tool](#)' of the [ESPON EGTC](#) cooperation program to support local implementation of the SDGs. Finally, Abramavičius appealed to the participants to seize the opportunity offered by the SDGs for a sustainable transformation in Europe and to participate actively in their implementation.

Panel discussion



(From left to right: **Arnoldas Abramavičius**, European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and municipality of Zarasai (Lithuania); **Allan MacLeod**, City of Bristol/University of Bristol (England), **Dr. Klaus Reuter**, LAG 21 NRW, **Prof. Dr. Christa Liedtke**, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment, Energy and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Germany, **Simone Raskob**, City of Essen (Germany), **Jyrki Myllyvirta**, City of Espoo (Finland))

The panel discussion 'Innovative solutions for localising the 2030 Agenda' focused at first on the specific role of municipalities in the implementation of the SDGs. The panellists made clear that municipalities are central actors in the implementation of Sustainable Development and can be regarded as pioneers and 'engines' in many ways. As 'reality labs', it is the task of municipalities to involve citizens in the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda according to the principle 'leave no one behind' and to work in partnership with science.

Arnoldas Abramavičius pointed out that the decisive and driving factor for the implementation success of the 2030 Agenda could be civil society or bottom-up approaches. These had not existed in the same way in past sustainability processes. The development of comprehensible sustainability strategies at local, national and international level, the establishment and expansion of networks and cross-border cooperation were also helpful.

Prof. Dr. Christa Liedtke, head of sustainable production and consumption at the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy focused on the central role of science in a reliable fact-based discourse on sustainability. For the successful implementation of sustainability strategies at all political levels, she referred to the need to further develop national, regional and local indicators. Digitalisation offered many opportunities for the development of new and clever solutions for the local implementation of SDGs. She positively highlighted municipal bottom-up approaches such as the [Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#) or the [Climate Alliance](#). These should be accompanied by initiatives at EU level, e.g. a horizontal funding.

Allan MacLeod, SDG research and engagement associate at the Bristol City Council and Bristol University, England, emphasised the important role of cross-actor networks in regard to the localisation of the 2030 Agenda, especially in highly centralist political systems. The City of Bristol has developed the [Bristol One City Plan](#) with broad civil society participation, which contains sustainability targets up to the year 2050. In cooperation with the University of Bristol, the city was one of the first cities in the world to prepare a [Voluntary Local Review \(2019\)](#) on the implementation status of the SDGs. Intermunicipal exchange was also of great importance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda according to MacLeod. For this, among other things, the city had developed a [handbook on the use of SDGs at the local level](#).

Jyrki Myllyvirta, member of the Sustainable Espoo Policy Group, Finland, and former member of the CoR, explained that the city of Espoo was looking for innovative (digital) CO₂-neutral solutions in energy supply and mobility. Intermunicipal cooperation and the participation of all parts of urban society were of central importance, especially in order to curb political polarisation tendencies. Additionally, the change of thought patterns is indispensable for a sustainability transformation, in which kindergartens and schools played an important role for Myllyvirta.

Simone Raskob, deputy mayor of the city of Essen, reported that the city of Essen was currently working on the linkage of the SDGs to the goals of the Green Capital Year [\[‘Green Capital of Europe – Essen 2017’\]](#). The SDGs would have the potential to take on a bundling function for municipal administration work and thus to become general guidelines for municipal development. She attributed a key role to promoting sustainability processes amongst children and young people. For Raskob, they were important actors in exerting pressure on local politics and calling for a sustainable transformation.

Presentation of the *RENN.west* campaign ‘Goals need action’



(Reiner Mathar, Working group for environmental education (ANU) Hesse, Germany, *RENN.west*)

Afterwards **Reiner Mathar**, working group for environmental education in Hesse, Germany, presented the [RENN.west campaign ‘Goals need action’](#). Motivated by the 2030 Agenda and civil society developments like ‘Fridays for Future’, *RENN.west* launched the multimedia campaign to reach target groups that have had little or no contact with the SDGs so far. The campaign addresses people in everyday situations – in football stadiums, at train stations or on trains – and is intended to provide low-threshold information about the SDGs, encourage exchange and implementation and ensure that they are anchored in society at large. Faces of the campaign are current players of BVB Dortmund, boxing world champion Wladimir Klitschko and model Elena Carrière.

Municipal forums

In five different workshops, the participants learned about ten European best-practice examples for sustainable solutions at local level. Experts presented their projects with the help of posters, reported on hurdles and achievements and exchanged ideas with the workshop participants.

Municipal sustainable development strategies



- [‘Global Sustainable Municipality NRW’](#)
Ariane Bischoff, City of Solingen (Germany)
- [‘Rheden 4 Global Goals’](#)
Frank Landman, Municipality of Rheden (Netherlands)
- With a comment by Marko Filipović, deputy mayor of Rijeka (Croatia)

The exchange in the municipal forum ‘Municipal sustainable development strategies’ focused on the strategic anchoring of the SDGs in the work of municipal administrations: In Solingen, this was achieved through the development of an integrated sustainability strategy within the project ‘Global Sustainable Municipality NRW’. The introduction of a ‘sustainability assessment’ for all council proposals in May 2019 should support the implementation of the strategy throughout the administration. In Rheden, the anchoring of the 2030 Agenda in municipal action was combined with an administrative reform. The participation and approval of all relevant actors of the urban society was identified and discussed as a central challenge in the local implementation of the SDGs.

Strong municipalities, strong Europe



- [‘Grenzhoppers’](#)
Simon Böing-Messing, Aalten (Netherlands) / Bocholt (Germany)
- [‘Network of Progressive Cities’](#)
Dariusz Szwed, Słupsk (Poland)

The municipal forum 'Strong municipalities, strong Europe' focused on bottom-up approaches to cross-border and domestic cooperation between municipalities on ecological, social and economic issues. Different political framework conditions for such networking in Europe (referring to Germany and Poland as examples) were intensely discussed. Orientation towards the needs of citizens and their active involvement was identified as a central element in strengthening democracy in municipalities.

Biodiversity and agriculture



- [‘Strengthening biodiversity through cooperation with agriculture’](#)
Rolf Hussing, Wiesbaden (Germany)
- [‘Bratislava: European pioneer in fostering biodiversity’](#)
Andrej Kovarik, Bratislava (Slovakia)

In the municipal forum 'Biodiversity and agriculture' the important role of municipalities as mediators and supporters with regard to the biodiversity-promoting orientation of local farms was explained. In particular, the participants discussed strategies for the promotion of biodiversity in urban areas, such as concept development, changes to land use plans, support programs for organic farming, the active participation of citizens and measures such as tree planting or the creation of urban wild meadows were also discussed.

Energy transition and climate protection



- [‘Klima.DiskursNRW’](#)
Ingo Wagner, Düsseldorf (Germany)
- [‘CO₂-neutral through cooperation’](#)
Jyrki Myllyvirta, Espoo (Finland)
- With a comment by Alexander Khapatnyukovsky, chairman of Savran district council (Ukraine)

The municipal forum 'Energy transition and climate protection' focused on solutions and measures on the road to a CO₂-neutral future. To this end, Klima.DiskursNRW presented its work as a platform for the discursive exchange between a wide range of actors, including the resolution of conflicts of interest and controversial issues. Using the example of the city of Espoo, which is striving for CO₂-neutrality by 2030, investments in energy system transformation, structural changes in energy supply and cooperation between institutions and private companies came to the fore.

Mobility



- [‘Hydrogen-mobility NRW’](#)
Silke Wesselmann, county of Steinfurt (Germany)
- [‘Houten: Best bicycle city of the Netherlands 2018’](#)
André Botermans, Houten (Netherlands)

The municipal forum ‘Mobility’ focused on alternative forms and concepts of mobility. The participants discussed the potential of hydrogen using the example of the county of Steinfurt, which is one of three model regions for hydrogen mobility in NRW. Besides that, cycling concepts were discussed using the example of the municipality of Houten. Overall, it was made clear that the topic ‘mobility’ is related to a large number of SDGs including SDG 3 ‘Good health and well-being’, SDG 9 ‘Industries, innovation and infrastructure’ and SDG 11 ‘Sustainable cities and communities’.

Closing remarks

Following the municipal forums, **Prof. Dr. Klaus Helling**, Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, drew a conclusion on the 6th Conference on Sustainable Development in Municipalities. The conference had impressively demonstrated that municipalities play a decisive role in the implementation of the SDGs and had shown with examples from all over Europe how remaining deficits in implementation can be counterbalanced. The SDGs could act as a common language and promote cross-border exchange.



(Prof. Dr. Klaus Helling, *Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, RENN.west*)

Finally, **Dr. Klaus Reuter** thanked all actors and participants for their constructive contributions and was pleased with a successful start of a European dialogue on the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda.