

START LOCAL

EUROPE TACKLES SUSTAINABILITY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

challenges, strengths and visions regarding managing sustainability locally. The lessons learned were used to develop a more complete IMS model that currently is rolling out across Europe to help strengthen environmental and sustainable practices on the local and regional level.

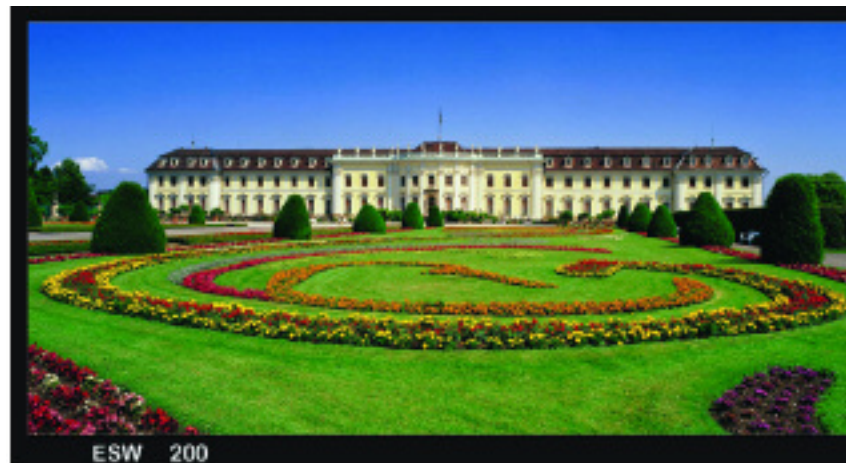
LONGTIME SPEAKER OF THE U.S. HOUSE of Representatives, Thomas “Tip” O’Neill, once quipped that “All politics is local.” True to that adage, cities and towns around the U.S. are working hard to do their part to address global environmental problems. Across the Atlantic, Europe is taking that approach one step further by developing an Integrated Management System, or IMS, model focused on local and regional sustainability.

During the past three years, 25 cities and regions from nine European countries have pilot-tested an integrated approach that helps municipalities incorporate sustainability practices into their day-to-day government practices. This groundbreaking initiative called Managing Urban Europe-25, or MUE-25, focused on the partners’

MUE-25

European cities, like those around the world, face a range of urban environmental challenges, such as poor air quality, high levels of traffic and congestion, urban sprawl, greenhouse-gas emissions, waste and wastewater, and more. Initiated in March 2005, MUE-25 is an IMS that enables cities to address the multiple dimensions of sustainability. For European cities, sustainability often is defined by the Aalborg Charter—named for the city in Denmark where the Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign was born in 1994 as an outcome of the famed Rio Earth Summit. The Aalborg Charter states that cities and towns are the key players in achieving global sustainability because local governments are closest to the source of environmental problems and closest to the people most affected by these problems. Signatories pledge to create action plans to achieve local sustainability. More than 2,500 European local governments have signed the broad Aalborg Charter; more than 500 cities and regions have since endorsed the 50 Aalborg Commitments, which moves sustainability from principles to strategic and coordinated action. Examples of such

actions include reducing primary energy consumption, increasing renewable-energy use and reducing necessities for private motorized transportation. MUE-25 served as a model or template for implementing the Aalborg Commitments.



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↓ RESOURCES

AALBORG COMMITMENTS
www.aalborgplus10.dk

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR CITIES AND REGIONS
www.localmanagement.eu

MANAGING URBAN EUROPE-25 PROGRAM www.mue25.net

According to its organizers, MUE-25 delivers a framework for better implementation of already-existing environmental-management systems, like the International Standards Organizations 14001 and ecoBUDGET, an environmental accounting system administered by ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability. MUE-25 provides a case-study-like approach for how cities can use IMS to help comply with the many European Union policies and strategies focused on sustainability. The system comprises five steps—baseline review, target setting, political commitment, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation and reporting—that are repeated in a three- to five-year cycle.

TACKLING SUSTAINABILITY

Cities play an important role in addressing global sustainability because seemingly small decisions at the local level have a cumulative effect. Decisions about how schools are heated, roadways are expanded or government purchasing policies are implemented affect the environment.

For the city of Kaunas, Lithuania, the biggest challenge in meeting the Aalborg Commitments was the multitude of city departments working on individual

components. While completing the baseline review as part of the MUE-25 pilot program, a cross-departmental working group was created. Each task-force member described areas of responsibility, guiding ordinances, stakeholder cooperation, work completed to date, and indicators used to measure progress. Collectively, this baseline review provided an overview of sustainability work by Kaunas and helped outline future sustainability priorities.

As in Kaunas' case, a baseline review helps identify the local role on a larger scale. Although cities are the closest institution to the people, and therefore best able to identify priorities, local residents are impacted by actions from other cities and regions. In Oslo, Norway, for example, greenhouse-gas emissions have increased by 19 percent since 1991. Much of this increase is caused by regional traffic congestion. Using the IMS model, the city of Oslo worked collaboratively with surrounding counties to develop a climate and energy action plan for the greater Oslo area. The plan aims to reduce carbon emissions by 50 percent by 2030. This local and regional action, in turn, is helping Norway meet its Kyoto Protocol commitments.

By using an IMS, cities and regions are able to improve compliance with existing legislation and better integrate and coordinate policies. The Vision Stockholm 2030 plan serves as a guiding document for the city of Stockholm, Sweden, across multiple categories, such as growth and services. It includes long-term programs and targets for all city departments, municipal districts and schools. Understandably, it's a daunting task to recognize how all these programs interrelate. In 2007, Stockholm expanded its existing budget-focused IMS to include sustainability targets from the Vision Stockholm 2030 plan. The Web-based tool now includes visions, indicators and targets, as well as supports ongoing monitoring with data collection occurring three times per year. Data, such as number of private cars per 100 inhabitants, dwellings reconstructed or number of playgrounds, help planners assess future needs. Expansion of Stockholm's existing IMS to include sustainability targets helps improve implementation and provision of city services.



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NEXT STEPS WITH MUE-25

As the pilot project draws to a close, the 25 partners now are sharing their experiences to help other cities and regions work toward municipal sustainability. In February, partners met in Berlin at the Forum Managing a Sustainable Future for Cities and Regions to discuss how to encourage more cities and regions to use an integrated approach.


“There are many potential cities and regions out there in Europe that can join the MUE-25 cities,” says Holger Robrecht, director of sustainability management at ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability, a program partner.

To help cities get involved, a manual titled *Integrated Management—Towards Local and Regional Sustainability* has launched in nine languages, and a program Web site, www.localmanagement.eu, provides in-depth guidance and case studies.

According to Björn Grönholm, head of the Secretariat for Environment and Sustainable Development within the Union of the Baltic Cities, “the model facilitates a holistic management and the integration of different sectors, which

are prerequisites for sustainable cities.” In the spirit of continual improvement, the next program meeting is already scheduled for 2012 in Leeds, U.K.

BETTER MANAGEMENT

The ultimate role of cities is to ensure a good quality of life for its citizens through provision of timely and cost-effective services. With limited resources and increasing legislative mandates from national governing bodies, local leaders are forced to become even better administrators without losing sight of the global consequences of their actions. U.S. cities may find value in exploring Europe’s IMS approach to local and regional sustainability. To overcome looming challenges, like climate change, city leaders will need to better manage the local to address the global. 

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↓ CITIES AND REGIONS PARTICIPATING IN MUE-25

- Ancona, Italy, municipality
 - Balatonfüred, Hungary, local government
 - Kaunas City, Lithuania, municipality
 - Lahti, Finland
 - Leeds, U.K., city council
 - Lewes, U.K., district council
 - Ludwigsburg, Germany
 - Oslo, Norway
 - Riga, Latvia
 - Siauliai, Lithuania, city municipality
 - Siena, Italy, province
 - Siófok, Hungary, local government
 - Stockholm, Sweden
 - Turku, Finland
 - Växjö, Sweden
 - Lake Balaton, Hungary, Development Coordination Agency
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- IN ADDITION, ICLEI AND BODENSEE-STIFTUNG COORDINATED A GERMAN MODULE, WHICH HAD THE SAME OBJECTIVES AS MUE-25. THE FOLLOWING GERMAN CITIES PARTICIPATED ▼
- Ascha
 - Berlin-Lichtenberg
 - Donaueschingen
 - Neu-Ulm
 - County of Nordhausen
 - Paderborn
 - Tübingen
 - Ludwigsburg
 - Würzburg
 - Wiesbaden