



The full interview from ICLEI publication **Connections #38**, which focuses on the topic of adaptation.

Jos Delbeke, Director General DG Climate Action, European Commission and Chairman of the EU Adaptation Steering Group is in the hotseat.

What role do you think European cities play in climate adaptation?

They play a vital role. Apart from preparing for extreme weather events, which have huge impacts on densely populated cities, we need to start preparing for the more predictable medium and long term impacts of climate change. Take energy as an example: summers are getting warmer and the demand for energy from air-conditioning is increasing. This will make our mitigation policies of greenhouse gas emissions even more important. It will be up to city planners to look for alternatives, for city governments to invest in green technologies, to implement new building codes and to look for good practices to follow.

What are the key ingredients of a good local adaptation process?

The most important ingredient is planning. The first step is understanding what climate change means for you, then consider what your risks and vulnerabilities are. Then you can decide what the best adaptation measures are. There is no “one fits all” answer. The DG for Climate Action is developing an Adaptation Clearinghouse that will offer guidance and information to support the development of adaptation strategies. It will also link planners to the latest climate change impact information, and have a library of good practices and examples of adaptation measures.

As municipal budgets decrease, why should local governments adapt to climate change?

The key argument is the one made by the Stern Review - the benefits of strong, early action on climate change considerably outweigh the cost of waiting for the impacts of climate change to occur. This is why cities should see adaptation as an investment rather than a cost. In fact, adaptation is particularly valid during the financial crisis as it is about cost reduction in the medium term, while it can create new jobs in the short term.

What is Europe’s global responsibility to fight climate change?

It is the EU’s responsibility to cut our own emissions and to encourage others to do the same, offering leadership in the multilateral negotiations. That is why we have pledged to cut our green house gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020, and why we are willing to go even further if other major emitters do the same. We are looking for a legally binding global deal on climate change. We also have to help the most vulnerable countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and the EU is the leading donor to developing countries in this regard. Cities have to play their part through local activities. The climate and energy package sets strict national targets for greenhouse gas emissions that national governments will need to implement. To achieve these targets, many measures such as targets for cities to address their own emissions are vital.

As chair of the EU Adaptation Steering Group, what do you expect the group to offer?

The aim is to assist the EC in formulating its adaptation policies in view of the planned

Adaptation Strategy. The group should identify key challenges, exchange information on national adaptation strategies, exchange, on a voluntary basis, best practice examples and support the integration of climate change into the different EU policies. Local government networks like ICLEI can give an insight into the problems cities are facing, share experiences and best practice examples with other members of the group and discuss specific topics, which will then be integrated into the Strategy.

What do you expect the main climate change challenges in Europe's cities to be?

Generally speaking, over time, one can say that the south of Europe is likely to suffer from hotter, drier summers. Cities in these areas, for instance, are likely to see less rain and more heat waves. They will have to deal with this at the same time as demand for water from agriculture and citizens increases. These rising temperatures can intensify the heat island effect in densely urbanised areas, so cities will be affected by this. Northern Europe on the other hand is likely to face increasing precipitation leading to high chances of flooding, and an increase in weather extremes. Throughout Europe, cities will have to plan ahead to ensure that the adverse effects of climate change are minimised, otherwise the economic and social impacts could be more serious.

Which cities do you consider 'leaders' or 'good practice examples' in climate adaptation?

Cities across Europe are at different stages of preparing and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Because the threats facing all cities are different, it is difficult to compare these efforts. However, let me use this opportunity to mention "The European Green Capital Award" - an annual award given to cities that achieve high environmental standards. Although the award is not specifically focused on adaptation to climate change, achieving high environmental standards and improving sustainability are very much connected to mitigating and adapting to climate change. For example by improving the energy efficiency of homes and buildings and creating green spaces and improving public transport infrastructures. In my opinion the winners (Stockholm, Hamburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz and Nantes) should be seen as role models for others.

Did Cancun offer clearer framework conditions for cities in regard of the climate adaptation?

I think so, yes. Adaptation formed part of a set of decisions that will help get action on adaptation started, and this includes a considerable number of initiatives in relation to developing knowledge and sharing good practices. It is this type of information that will help cities to develop their own adaptation plans.

How does the European Commission currently support local governments to overcome the challenges addressed and performing a successful adaptation process? Can you sketch out the current European policy framework to address climate adaptation at the local level?

Aside from the Commission's priority of mainstreaming climate change into other policies, we are currently in the process of discussing and developing a comprehensive long-term strategy for adaptation to climate change, which we plan to adopt in 2013. The objective is to set out a strategy to enhance the EU, its Member States and regions, and the local level's capacity to respond to the impacts of climatic change. The Strategy will need to apply the right mix of policy instruments for each of its objectives.

One area we are looking into is national adaptation strategies. We are also developing guidance and knowledge support tools to help planners elaborate adaptation strategies. Of course, at the end of the day it is up to local governments to prepare for climate change as only they understand their specific vulnerabilities.

What is missing in its implementation?

There is no point in starting implementation without knowing what you are doing. That risks wasting money and resources. One of our biggest challenges is firstly to provide the right knowledge on impacts of climate change. Therefore the Commission is running a series of major projects in order to bridge this gap. In order for the results to be useful and to be shared as widely as possible, the Commission is launching the European Clearinghouse on Adaptation.

This mechanism will not only be an extensive library of the latest research and information on climate change impacts, it will also help users – for example mayors, local governments - in finding appropriate information and knowledge required to help answer questions on climate change, vulnerability and adaptation. It will also provide tools that can be used to help in the development of adaptation strategies.

You have kindly invited ICLEI to participate in the EU Adaptation Steering Group. What do you expect from us and other city networks in this regard and, generally speaking, for the EC's Adaptation activities?

The main expectation is to get an insight on problems cities are facing, to share experiences and best practice examples with other members of the group and of course to work and discuss together on specific topics, which will then be integrated in the Adaptation Strategy. Having the perspective of the local level is of the utmost importance to ensure the quality of our policy development.