



D3.3 Medium blog articles x4

30/04/2024

Southern Regional Assembly

Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Funded by the
European Union

Deliverable administration			
No & name	D3.3 Medium blog articles x 4		
Status	Submitted	Due	M14
Author(s)	SRA		
Description of the related task and the deliverable. Extract from DoA & GA	<p>T3.3 Knowledge generation and promotion of successful initiatives (Leader: BAB, Duration: M3-M16, Contributors: all)</p> <p>As an extension to T3.1 and T3.2, T3.3 will generate easy-accessible formats for transferring key knowledge and awareness of successful initiatives on a higher level, targeting a larger volume of SMCs across the regions. Here, podcast episodes and Medium blog articles will be prepared to exploit simpler, more agile ways of knowledge generation and promotion, both locally and across regions. These activities (either articles, podcasts or both) will be presented to the ecosystems at least every second month, will involve both SMEs and SMCs as part of the content and will be distributed through both internal project channels, e.g. the project newsletter (see WP6) as well as through external partnerships, e.g. through the Smart Cities Marketplace Forum, to ensure maximum dissemination and impact.</p>		
Participants	All partners		
Comments			
V	Date	Authors	Description
1	22/04/2024	SRA	Working document ready for internal review
2	30/04/2024	PC	The coordinator submits the deliverable to the EU

Dissemination level		
PU	Public	x
SEN	Sensitive	

Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Copyright

© Copyright SMCNetZero Consortium consisting of:

- 1 BABLE GmbH
- 2 ODRAZ – Održivi razvoj zajednice
- 3 ASOCIACIÓN EMPRESARIAL MULTISECTORIAL INNOVADORA PARA LAS CIUDADES INTELIGENTES (SMART CITY CLUSTER)
- 4 Southern Regional Assembly
- 5 Foreningen BLOXHUB
- 6 WE BUILD DENMARK
- 7 UrbanDNA Solutions LLP

This document may not be copied, reproduced, or modified in whole or in part for any purpose without written permission from the **SMCNetZero** Consortium. In addition to such written permission to copy, reproduce, or modify this document in whole or part, an acknowledgement of the authors of the document and all applicable portions of the copyright notice must be clearly referenced. All rights reserved.

About SMCNetZero

SMCNetZero brings together six successful urban innovation initiatives in Europe with seven (7) regional and Pan European networks and their partners to create a **Satellite Network of innovation actors** to support public sector representatives from Small and Medium-sized cities (SMCs), SMEs, academia, NGOs, and investors across Europe to **facilitate decarbonisation in SMCs**.

The SMCNetZero consortium is composed of:

- BABLE Smart Cities**, Germany (BAB)
- ODRAZ - Održivi razvoj zajednice**, Croatia (ODZ)
- Smart City Cluster**, Spain (SCC)
- Southern Regional Assembly**, Ireland (SRA)
- BLOXHUB**, Denmark (BXH)
- WE BUILD DENMARK**, Denmark (WBD)
- UrbanDNA**, United Kingdom (UDNA)

This project is unique in that its diverse consortium partners and broad commitment from target stakeholders in the Satellite Network ensure **focus in regions with less innovation capacity**, with written confirmed commitment from nearly 100 innovation actors at the proposal stage, to participate in the activities- including an emphasis on largely underrepresented regions and stakeholders.

The project will leverage its diverse Satellite Network to:

- Gain an in-depth understanding of SMC needs and barriers towards achieving Net Zero emissions.
- Raise awareness and simplify access to existing successful initiatives supporting decarbonisation.
- Support matchmaking between supply and demand sides by linking SMEs, researchers, and investors with SMCs.
- Help identify and open access to funding for enabling innovation deployment in SMCs currently underrepresented in the European innovation ecosystem.

SMCNetZero's vision is to **create and strengthen local innovation ecosystems' interrelations in SMCNetZero regions** through brokerage and knowledge-building activities as well as digital resources to increase capacity **for planning, deploying, and**

scaling up of decarbonisation solutions, overall focusing on increasing the inclusivity of these innovation ecosystems and minimizing existing innovation divides.

To achieve this vision, SMCNetZero has the following primary strategic objectives:

- Open up opportunities and stimulate the dissemination of information and exchange of knowledge on best practices on decarbonization for SMCs (and as a result, SMEs).
- Increase implementation prospects between providers of zero-emission solutions and public authorities from SMCs by designing, developing and providing a digital space and accompanying toolkit for collaborating, learning and networking.
- Identify and engage innovation leaders from the public and private sectors from “strong” innovator regions and “moderate” to “modest” innovator regions within the project’s focus countries.
- Design and deploy engagement and knowledge-building activities for ensuring wide participation for SMCNetZero and maximum impact.
- Facilitate the understanding and implications of the implementation and scale-up of innovation projects in SMCs.

Contents

- Disclaimer 3
- Copyright..... 3
- About SMCNetZero 4
- Contents..... 6
- Introduction 7
- Medium Blog Article #1 – Empowering Small and Medium-Sized Cities: Achieving Net-Zero Through Innovation 7
- Medium Blog Article #2 – Illuminating the Path to Energy Efficiency 10
- Medium Blog Article #3 – Tools & Tactics for Sustainable Mobility 14
- Medium Blog Article #4 – Raising the Bar on Environmental Sustainability 17

Introduction

Work Package 3, T3.3 was designed to generate four blog articles on key thematic topics relating to Project Capacity Building. The responsibility for researching, writing and disseminating the articles was assigned to SRA as per the contract agreement, with the last article to be submitted by Month 14 of the Project lifespan. The format was designed to be easily accessible with the purpose of transferring key knowledge and awareness of successful initiatives on a higher level, in order to target a larger volume of SMCs across the regions. The article contents were prepared to exploit simpler, more agile ways of knowledge generation and promotion, both locally and across regions.

The topics chosen for the articles represent this objective, and the style and language used pitched accordingly. The four articles written covered: (i) Introduction to SMCNetZero Project; (ii) Energy Efficiency; (iii) Sustainable Mobility; (iv) Environmental Sustainability.

Medium Blog Article #1 – Empowering Small and Medium-Sized Cities: Achieving Net-Zero Through Innovation

Empowering Small and Medium-Sized Cities: Achieving Net-Zero Through Innovation

In the global pursuit of a sustainable future, small and medium-sized cities (SMCs) are stepping into the spotlight as key players in achieving net-zero emissions. The Horizon Europe funded SMCNetZero project aims to use innovation, collaboration, and empowerment to harness the potential of these cities to lead the charge towards a greener future. This article sheds light on our project's vision, its completed actions, and breaks down each crucial activity that supports these cities on their journey towards carbon neutrality.

The SMCNetZero project is a visionary 18-month endeavor assisting small and medium-sized cities on their road to net zero emissions. We aim to establish a network of innovation actors, uniting representatives from small and medium sized cities (SMCs), small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), academia, NGOs, and investors across Europe. By pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise, we seek to amplify the capacity for planning, deploying, and scaling-up decarbonization solutions.

Partnership for Progress

Our project is made possible through collaborative partnerships with organizations committed to empower small and medium-sized cities on their net-zero journey, including BABLE, BLOXHUB, ODRAZ, SMART CITY CLUSTER, SOUTHERN REGIONAL ASSEMBLY, URBAN DNA and WE BUILD DENMARK. These partnerships bring together expertise from various sectors, enriching the project's impact.

How we plan to empower SMCs

Small and medium-sized cities often remain overlooked when discussing decarbonization, yet they harbor immense potential for driving meaningful change. With this in mind, this project converges to address the following objectives:

1. **Access and acceleration to relevant knowledge:** Encouraging the spread of knowledge about decarbonization solutions, funding opportunities, and market players to facilitate the adoption of innovative zero-emission solutions.
2. **Collaboration and Connections:** Create a digital space and toolkit that fosters collaboration between zero-emission solution providers, investors and public authorities from SMCs, enabling knowledge sharing and networking opportunities.
3. **Thought Leadership:** Identifying and engaging innovation leaders from public and private sectors across different regions to ensure high-value participation in the project's activities.
4. **Inclusivity:** Ensuring widespread participation and maximum impact by engaging underrepresented groups and organizations through knowledge-building activities.
5. **Facilitating Implementation:** Develop core common solutions and promote demand aggregation to facilitate the implementation and scaling up of innovation projects in SMCs, enhancing market attractiveness for SMEs.

Helping you to pave your way to Net Zero

The first activity we completed was to lay the groundwork for the next steps of the project. In order for SMCNetZero activities to bring participants added value in their innovation journeys, a clear picture of the existing gaps facing both SMCs and SMEs was required. To understand the needs and challenges that many European small and medium sized cities are dealing with in their Net Zero journey, the project partners identified and mapped relevant innovation actors, initiatives, tools etc. But most importantly we interviewed 50+ SMCs and SMEs to understand how we can support them best.

This first stage is now complete and has unveiled barriers faced by SMCs and SMEs, while also identifying opportunities, key innovation actors and thematic areas for focus as the project continues. Now that these challenges have been identified, the following activities will focus on connecting SMCs to experts and relevant SMEs to find solutions to help reach their net zero

goals. Through collaboration, matchmaking and workshops, knowledge will be shared, and solutions scaled, creating cross-regional partnerships. SMCs will also be supported with contacts to regional and national funding and opportunities for testbeds.

To wrap up our first activity, we held online Webinars where SMCs and SMEs had the opportunity to share best practices and experiences with their peers, ask questions and take part in interactive exercises, all established to share knowledge and enhance engagement.

Another milestone of our project is the launch of the [SMCNetZero Digital Platform](#). Housed within the BABLE Smart Cities platform, this virtual 'one stop shop' simplifies the sharing of knowledge and best practices, enables networking amongst cities and improves accessibility to innovation for all stakeholders. A catalogue of use cases and a buyer's guide of solutions can be found on the digital platform, which can inspire, support and create opportunities for cities to adopt similar solutions.

To simplify access to relevant tools from other EU projects supporting cities on their decarbonization journey, these tools will also be made available within the Digital Forum to further support SMCs and their efforts toward reaching net zero.

STAY TUNED: Project Partner BABLE is currently in the process of creating a Funding Finder tool to further support SMCs in finding the right financial support for their net zero initiatives.

The next achievement of the project so far is the release of our first podcast episode: [Smart in the City, The Bable Podcast – SMCNetZero Project](#). Hosted by Tamlyn Shimizu, this episode hears from our very own Nikita Shetty, Graham Colclough and Rebecca Walsh. As well as diving into the project's motivations and intentions, the podcast gives further insights into the burning challenges faced by our SMCs and how the project can help tackle these. Through these podcasts and articles, successful initiatives will be promoted to transfer key knowledge to SMCs and SMEs.

Engage in our upcoming activities

Coming up next, the project plans to motivate SMCs with real life experiences of urban innovation through site visits conducted in DOLL Living Lab, a leading facility of its kind in Europe. SMEs will also take part in these visits in order to facilitate matchmaking amongst the project's stakeholders. In line with these site visits, a series of innovation training will be conducted to offer in-depth and targeted key learnings to SMCs. These focus areas have been selected directly from collaboration with SMCs and SMEs and these trainings will be customized to their requirements.

The last stage of the project is action! Through collaboration with the Smart Cities Marketplace and the "Small Giants" network, actions will be launched in order to target specific solution areas. SMCs, SMEs, and investors will be supported in exploring business models and

procurement processes that speed progress to scale implementation. Stay with us while we provide your Roadmap to Impact, designed specifically by and for smaller cities.

The SMCNetZero project is not just a vision, but a tangible journey toward net-zero emissions, rooted in collaboration, innovation, and empowerment. By harnessing the potential of small and medium-sized cities and creating a network of innovation actors, the project is paving the way for a greener, more sustainable future. As SMCNetZero continues to unfold, it hopes to illustrate how collective efforts can drive meaningful change and accelerate progress towards our net zero goals.

BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY TO NET ZERO TODAY - [Sign up](#) to our newsletter now!

Medium Blog Article #2 – Illuminating the Path to Energy Efficiency

Welcome back to the second edition of our SMCNetZero blog, where we continue our journey toward a sustainable and carbon-neutral future. In this edition, our spotlight is firmly fixed on the pivotal realm of energy efficiency—an indispensable cornerstone in our quest for a net-zero world.

Energy efficiency isn't just a buzzword; it's a powerful catalyst for change. As we navigate the complex landscape of sustainable practices, it becomes increasingly evident that optimizing our energy consumption is key to mitigating climate change. The less energy we use, the fewer greenhouse gas emissions we produce, and the lighter our ecological footprint becomes.

Nethe Veje Laursen, Program Director at [Concito](#), a philanthropically funded green think tank, addressed our project recently, emphasizing the pivotal role of energy efficiency in reducing the demand for expanding electricity infrastructure. Laursen highlighted the various benefits of energy efficiency, including significant cost savings, low policy and technology risks, with a short payback period.

With empowerment and knowledge sharing of best practice at the heart of our mission, dive into the pages of this edition to find actionable insights and concrete steps to overcome barriers and incorporate energy efficiency into your journey to net zero.

Unveiling Strategies to Overcome Blocking Challenges

The SMCNetZero project has recently identified some significant roadblocks on the path to achieving net-zero in SMCs. When it comes to energy efficiency in small and medium sized cities, there is a significant need to break down silo thinking, overcome procurement hurdles, and master data management.

Overcoming silo thinking

The need to expand and empower climate teams for effective collaboration echoes strongly throughout our project's findings and our journey forward. Acknowledging the crucial role of skilled and motivated teams, leaders emphasized the need for targeted training programs to enhance not only climate teams' capabilities, but teams across all departments. Take your first steps to net zero by fostering a culture of collaboration across departments, breaking down silos that can hinder your progress.

Ewan Prentice, Strategic Energy Coordinator at Stirling Council joined us on our journey to net zero and emphasizes the crucial role of local authorities in setting an example for Net Zero initiatives. He also stressed the importance of shared goals across departments, a unified direction from the council, and a long-term delivery plan for sustained progress.

Building a network of partners with aligned motives is a sure-fire way to break down silos for successful energy efficiency projects. Creating a structured blueprint for cross-organizational collaboration emphasizes the need for a standardized approach. Workshops and multi-departmental project teams can help foster effective partnerships among municipal departments. We also see the need to strike a balance between positive incentives and regulations, creating a framework that motivates stakeholders while adhering to essential guidelines.

Regarding silo thinking, Prentice highlights the importance of leveraging knowledge and funding through overlapping thematic initiatives. Collaboration with neighboring local authorities and joint ventures is recommended to share knowledge, risks, financial burdens, and benefits. Prentice emphasizes that achieving Net Zero requires collaboration not only at local level but also at national and international levels.

The importance of recognizing and rewarding initiatives contributing to net-zero goals is another notable step. To further incentivize collaboration, we propose incorporating environmental and social costs into economic planning. This holistic approach would ensure that long-term benefits, including biodiversity, climate resilience, and social impacts, are factored into decision-making.

Check out the [EU City Calculator Tool](#), designed to help cities in their decision-making and implementation of their climate strategy. It enables city administrations and other stakeholders to assess the implications and trade-offs related to the implementation of mitigation measures. For example, how much GHG emissions can be saved in the building sector via improvements in energy retrofitting versus renewable energy expansion.

Data management as a foundation to support decision making

A guiding principle for optimal results in energy efficiency projects is data-driven decision-making based on verifiable evidence. Ensuring this data accurately informs key performance indicators (KPIs) is also considered paramount. Implementing a simplified dashboard as a central hub for project tracking to streamline data visualization would ensure that all teams have real-time insights into project gains.

To enhance project effectiveness, transparency in both reporting and documentation is crucial for tracking progress and measuring the impact of energy efficiency initiatives. Establishing standardized approaches and methods is crucial to streamline project implementation and evaluation. Incorporating benchmarking practices, transparent use of tools and resources, and addressing financial aspects are identified as key components for success.

[Seneco](#), a company focused on intelligent street light control is part of SMCNetZero and presents best practice cases with Danish municipalities of Viborg, Bornholm and Esbjerg. Seneco's street lighting control and platform ensure that there is light when needed. At night, light is dimmed to a minimum and only activates when motion triggers a sensor. These intelligent measures documents energy savings of between 56-64% - demonstrating a successful SME and SMC partnership achieving energy efficiency.

Applying industry best practices like this, while also demonstrating adaptability to refine and optimize your energy efficiency projects through data-driven insights will ensure you stay at the forefront of advancements. Small and medium-sized cities have the unique agility to trial concepts with pilot projects, creating scalable and replicable blueprints.

In terms of data management, Ewan Prentice proposes the use of a platform to track progress in all themed areas. This platform would not only enable public engagement but also ensure transparent progress reporting. Additionally, it would facilitate project evaluation based on its impact, highlighting areas where resources may need to be focused. Prentice encourages others to learn-by-doing and emphasizes the importance of sharing experiences with others. He recommends prioritizing "profitable" projects initially to gain momentum and generate income for aspects lacking an identified funding stream.

Embarking on a digital transformation in public administration will have an undeniable impact on the way energy efficiency projects are delivered and how these initiatives and their results are communicated to the public.

Public procurement processes – allocating effort and time

One of the greatest challenges faced by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) is public procurement processes. SMEs experience difficulties allocating sufficient time and resources to lengthy procurement procedures. Additionally, Net Zero considerations may not hold enough

weight in the evaluation criteria, leading risk-averse cities to opt for low-risk options and short-term gains.

Potential strategies to streamline public procurement and support energy efficiency goals range from national-level government requirements to embedding Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and Net Zero Carbon (NZC) principles in public tenders.

Challenging short-term financial thinking in SMCs and developing innovative models to support energy efficiency projects are necessary. Long-term delivery plans can guide and motivate not only the procurement teams and potential suppliers but also foster more coherent project development and cross-disciplinary project teams. Feasibility studies and comprehensive five-stage business cases also ensure project success, whilst simultaneous progress of multiple projects also leads to more efficient procurement processes.

Public procurement of goods, services, and works provides municipalities with an important lever to improve and promote sustainability at local level. In addition, better governance of public procurement and the implementation of effective metrics systems for public spending and its impact also makes an important contribution.

Our project has uncovered a European-wide network called [Eurotowns](#) that supports Innovative Public Procurement for towns and cities.

City networking is an important practice for reinforcing European Cohesion and sharing of best practice. In addition to being an area of cooperation between communities, participation in such networks enables representation of local government in Europe. It also provides a privilege framework for promoting innovation and exchanging experiences at a transnational level.

Eurotowns supports medium-sized cities in Europe to strengthen their role as attractive, inclusive and sustainable places. Furthermore, Eurotowns provides a valuable mechanism for building reliable partnerships, developing innovative and sustainable projects, and effective collaboration on European Union funding applications.

Concrete steps to empowering SMCs for a Net-Zero Future

The collective knowledge shared, and strategies unveiled through our SMCNetZero Project so far signify a pivotal step forward in the journey toward a sustainable and net-zero future. As we strive for net-zero emissions, SMCNetZero remains committed to providing you with the latest insights, expert interviews, and success stories in the realm of sustainability.

Our journey is just beginning, and with each edition, we move closer to a future where our energy is clean, efficient, and sustainable. Remember, the impact of our individual and collective

actions is profound. What might seem like a small step can create a ripple effect, contributing to a wave of positive change across cities and industries.

Thank you for joining us on this transformative journey. Together, we are shaping a world where net-zero is not just a target but a reality.

Interested in reading more about best practices from across Europe? Or want to showcase your own successful partnership? Join our [Digital Forum](#) now by following these simple steps [here](#).

Medium Blog Article #3 – Tools & Tactics for Sustainable Mobility

Urban landscapes, especially in Small and Medium-sized Cities (SMCs), demand urgent strides toward sustainable mobility. Interviews conducted in the frame of the SMCNetZero project show that the top priority area for SMCs is their mobility and transport transition. This exploration delves into the evolution of mobility in SMCs, obstacles hindering the transition, strategies for collaboration, and the envisioned outcomes for these transformative efforts. We will also spotlight the forward-thinking "Mobility Islands" concept, highlighting its potential impact on urban transportation.

Shaping the Future of Urban Mobility

Overcoming the challenges of achieving sustainable urban mobility requires focused efforts from Small and Medium-Sized Cities (SMCs) across critical areas. At the forefront of this endeavor is the need to shape municipal policies that not only promote environmentally friendly initiatives but also discourage the use of high-emission vehicles. Collaborative decision-making processes involving local councils and planning authorities are pivotal, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to sustainable mobility planning.

Efficiency in sustainable mobility projects for SMCs can be achieved through standardized approaches, which help reduce unit costs for municipalities. Success hinges on securing high-level internal buy-in and commitment to the vision, emphasizing the importance of partnerships. Clearly defined roles and structured project management approaches are crucial, fostering a sense of ownership among stakeholders and encouraging a shift in mentality towards sustainable transportation practices.

Addressing political and legal frameworks is also a critical aspect of advancing sustainable urban mobility. Regular evaluation and revision of these frameworks create an environment favorable to the adoption of green initiatives. Ongoing engagement with municipal stakeholders is essential to ensuring continuous alignment with sustainability goals. Establishing effective communication channels, both internally and externally, further promotes transparency and collaboration, creating a supportive environment for sustainable transportation policies.

Check out the Civitas Urban Mobility Tool Inventory, an online database of over 200 tools and methods that help local authorities make informed decisions on the right tools to use in their local context. It features a broad range of tools and methods that are useful for all steps of the urban mobility planning process, from scenario building and measure selection to implementation and evaluation.

Empowering Communities for Sustainable Mobility Adoption

Community involvement is crucial for the success of sustainable transportation initiatives. Ensuring accessibility to eco-friendly transportation modes aligns with the goal of engaging diverse users across various mobility options. Leveraging social platforms using citizen-friendly language for transparent and inclusive communication broadens outreach efforts and can promote a culture of sustainable transportation.

Continuous user engagement and feedback at every stage is essential. Conducting surveys and feedback sessions with potential users of different mobility modes helps gauge preferences and needs. This approach creates a culture that embraces sustainable transportation options, leading to widespread adoption and support within the community.

Bring your stakeholders along on your journey - The myclimate Climate Footprint Calculator is an online tool that helps businesses and individuals calculate their individual carbon footprint. It assists in determining an individual's contribution to CO2 emissions and helps identify areas with high savings potential. It promotes awareness of one's carbon footprint and enables the development of emission reduction measures.

Shared Strides Toward Sustainability

Partnerships form the backbone of progress, requiring seamless collaboration between government authorities, non-profit organizations (NGOs) and private sector entities. Engaging with businesses to promote sustainable practices and collaborating with diverse stakeholders contribute to building critical mass and impact.

One avenue for collaboration is optimizing delivery and freight logistics with businesses to reduce emissions and champion sustainable practices. In addition, education initiatives benefit from the involvement of NGOs, universities, local businesses, schools, and local government. Workshops and forums organized with these stakeholders can facilitate knowledge sharing.

Including universities in research and education efforts broadens the knowledge base and potential solutions while fostering collaborations with NGOs aids in advocacy and implementation strategies. This collaborative approach, which includes a broad range of stakeholders, enhances the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

Need a partner to help implement your mobility initiatives? Why not try BABLE's Market Consultation Tool that allows you to consult the market in a quick and easy way. Publishing a market consultation on BABLE will automatically inform hundreds of relevant and innovative Smart City companies in our community of your intention of procurement, resulting in higher response rates to help turn your innovative idea into action.

Transformative Mobility Solutions

The Mobility Islands concept heralds a transformative approach to urban mobility by envisioning interconnected nodes of sustainable transportation options. These islands serve as hubs that prioritize and integrate eco-friendly modes like cycling, walking, and ferry systems. Rather than isolated initiatives, Mobility Islands create a networked ecosystem, fostering seamless connections within cities while prioritizing low-carbon transport.

Speaking to our project, Hamid Yazdani, Urban Planner, Transportation Planner, and GIS Specialist from İzmir, Turkey introduced the city of İzmir, focusing on the concept of Mobility Islands. He echoed the need for Mobility Islands to form a network rather than a point-based system.

Yazdani also introduced the "No regret site selection" concept, where locations like University Campuses, shopping malls and Park, Culture & Tourist destinations will likely be ideal sites for Mobility Islands. For İzmir, they have begun temporarily repurposed parking areas for alternative uses, contributing to the reconciliation of city spaces.

By redefining urban spaces to prioritize pedestrian-friendly zones and dedicated cycling lanes, Mobility Islands not only offer practical transportation alternatives but also reimagine cities as vibrant, interconnected, and sustainable hubs where residents can navigate conveniently while reducing their carbon footprint.

This concept encourages a shift from individualized, carbon-intensive transportation modes to a holistic, interconnected system that promotes environmental sustainability and enhances the overall quality of urban life. This transformative approach has the potential to revolutionize urban mobility.

Cities across the globe struggle with these similar challenges in their quest for sustainable mobility. The journey involves collaboration, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to transform urban transportation paradigms. Understanding these challenges, leveraging

partnerships, and fostering community engagement form the bedrock of this transformative journey towards a greener, more sustainable urban future.

Want to deep dive into more mobility tactics? Why not join our exclusive series of capacity-building modules designed to equip your city with the knowledge, skills, and tools to embark or continue your Net Zero transition. As well as our Mobility Module, you will also receive tailored learning on Energy Efficiency, Digital Transformation and immerse yourself in Europe's leading living lab for smart and sustainable city solutions in DOLL, Copenhagen.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and register [HERE](#)!

Medium Blog Article #4 – Raising the Bar on Environmental Sustainability

Welcome to the fourth blog article in our series dealing with how small and medium cities (SMCs), by virtue of their size and agility, are leading the way in their efforts to meet their decarbonisation targets. We have looked at how, in collaboration with the SMCNetZero Project, such cities have benefited from the solutions-based knowledge that our expert partners can offer to them through our connectivity with small and medium enterprises in this space.

In addition to making the right connections for their cities' needs, the Project is actively assisting SMCs with the implementation of common solutions as we have seen in previous blog articles, where we looked at various initiatives in the areas of energy efficiency and transport and mobility. On this occasion, we turn our attention to the topic of environmental sustainability. We will examine some best practice case studies that are employing innovative solutions to meet the needs of their cities, and to successfully recognise and overcome barriers to success.

Capacity-building and collaborative models

In this context, we will also look behind the case studies to share with you some insights into the capacity-building training programme in which the Project has been engaged in recent months with partner cities. The training programme sees cities, SMEs and business development bodies, working together and fostering a collaborative approach to sharing expertise, experiences and resources to assist cities to build a roadmap to decarbonisation no matter at what stage they are at on their net zero journey. The success of this approach is that the emphasis is on developing models that can be applied and replicated based on what the cities have in common functionally over and above what differentiates them physically.

One road to sustainability

One such project that successfully implements the principles of collaboration and replicability to guide their low carbon economy and sustainable waste treatment project is the city of

Alhendin (Granada province, Spain). They have been able to successfully demonstrate via the [Life4film](#) Project how the incineration at landfill of Polyethylene (LDPE) film can be avoided through innovative recycling technologies. The Project aims to achieve an 80% increase in the recycling of plastic film waste for use in new products such as innovative porous asphalt and low noise surfaces in the development of sustainable road construction.

The pilot recycling plant in Alhendin in Granada is capable of producing 4,000 tonnes of recycled recovered plastic film material annually, reducing waste to landfill by 11,000 tonnes per year, reducing emissions associated with incineration, contributing to the circular economy by revaluing the waste and creating employment in the region.

Digitalisation and environmental sustainability

Small and medium sized cities encounter a wide variety of challenges and opportunities in achieving the often competing aims of serving the needs of its citizens while influencing their habits in terms of resource consumption. This can be a delicate balance to strike.

The city of **Kranj in Slovenia** has achieved much to strike this balance through the introduction of its '[CeKR city card](#)'. CeKR is a citizen reward card that was developed with banking and payment systems companies in Slovenia and can be used as a regular credit card. However, it is primarily aimed at developing digital and sustainable solutions to Kranj becoming an innovative, smart and climate-neutral city. It achieves this by measuring data concerning how citizens move around and use resources in the city, and then rewards them for choosing more environmentally sustainable consumer options. Furthermore, the card allows local businesses in Kranj to exploit the opportunities presented by the card in terms of consumer promotions etc, thus driving trade in shops and districts of the city.

Unique in Europe, the card is both a payment system and an information tool for the municipality. So, while it rewards citizens for making more responsible consumer choices in terms of, for example, using public transport, and gives them information on transport timetables, availability of public bicycles etc, the card also allows the municipality to measure and aggregate data regarding the use of transport mobility hubs and thereby plan the city's functions and operations more effectively. This is a significant blueprint for how environmental sustainability can be achieved in other municipalities.

The card was developed in conjunction with private providers and stands as an exemplar of how a mix of public funding and private financing can be leveraged in the development of environmentally sustainable solutions for small cities. The exploration of different business models and financing options in city's finding solutions towards decarbonisation is an important pillar of the SMCNetZero Project and a concept with which participating cities are encouraged to explore.

Civic participation and community consultation

The Life4Film project in Granada has been successful in no small part due to the Project partners' commitment to adherence to the principles of civic participation and community engagement. By demonstrating how the Project is economically viable, sustainable long term, and replicable on a regional basis, with decision-making brought closer to the citizens of the region through meaningful consultation, the Project has achieved the buy-in necessary to future proof cross-sectoral support and help to ensure its success.

Likewise, the City of Kranj in Slovenia has attributed the achievement of its CeKR city card to its methodical and meaningful dialogue with the citizens of Kranj to ascertain what initiatives they would welcome in order to engage collaboratively with the city and work towards achieving decarbonisation.

It is generally accepted that working to address climate change will result in sacrifices on all our parts, but the municipality of Kranj has identified and embraced the concept of bringing the people along with them on the journey and so encourages and rewards the behavioural change that is needed. In so doing, greater compliance with behavioural change is achieved. The municipality benefits from the wealth of real time data that is generated through use of the card - in terms of footfall, use of amenities and infrastructure – all of which signposts to the city where and how it should target resources to meet its decarbonisation targets.

Alhendin and Kranj are examples of two cities which, although physically quite different in composition, have the commonality of recognising that their need to progress on their decarbonisation journey can best be met by recognising the centrality of mobilising their communities and citizens through consultation to help them to achieve their goals.

The SMCNetZero Project from our research regards the dynamism and agility of small and medium cities as crucial to their success in achieving net zero. Such cities by their nature, population size, political considerations etc are closer to their populations and so are much more favourable test beds for the kind of innovations that we have looked at here. Community engagement when carried out meaningfully and collaboratively opens the door to greater cooperation between municipalities and communities, which in turn influences the behavioural change that we need to work together to achieve.

Next steps on the journey to Net Zero

SMCNetZero Project participants and stakeholders have now completed the training stages of their capacity building programme, which brought together a wide variety of cities at different stages of their own decarbonisation journeys to re-focus and plan, network, share knowledge, experiences and expertise with other cities.

SMCNetZero Project looks forward to continuing to facilitate and encourage these exchanges, and to intervene to assist with local implementation, in the firm belief that our small and medium cities are very well positioned and sufficiently agile to take on board and implement at the local level the learnings thus far from the Project.

Don't forget to visit and join our [SMCNetZero Digital Forum](#) where you can read about further case studies in the area of environmental sustainability, as well as gain access to a vast array of tools and resources to help you to define and refine your city's roadmap to net zero.