

## “WE-NET: Working for ENvironmentally Educated Towns”

### *Promoting a CULTURE for sustainability*

*Thiene (Italy), 13-15 November 2015*

#### News



The first international event of the project **WE-NET: Working for Environmentally Educated Towns** took place in Thiene (Vicenza), Italy, on 13-15 November. The project, funded by the **Europe for Citizens Programme** and led by the Municipality of Thiene, aims to promote recycling and selective waste by establishing a network of municipalities and civil society associations from across Europe to exchange knowledge, experience and good practice on the topic.

The activity in Thiene officially kicked-off the two year project. The objective of the event was to provide the partners and all local and international participants with a general understanding of the **EU Environment Action Programme to 2020** and to build strategies to implement it at the local level, by putting particular emphasis on the role of local authorities and citizens.

The session “***The added value of the multistakeholder approach to reaching the objectives of the Environment Action Programme 2020***” was opened by Mr Fabrizio SPADA, Head of the Regional Representation of the European Commission in Milan, who stressed “*the role that citizens and government and municipalities*

*should have in order to raise awareness about the climate situation and to find right policies for preserve our environment. In this framework, the European Commission has to think globally but act locally. It is important to implement a strategy at local level and also to point out the role of LAs and civil society”.*



The concept of Circular Economy was then introduced by Ms Sirpa PIETIKÄINEN, MEP, Member of ENVI Commission. *“The linear thinking needs to be replaced by system thinking and backcasting methodologies”*, she stated. To do so, we need to ask the right question to ourselves: *“By 2050, either our economies are destroyed and our planet as well, or then our businesses need to be sustainable. And the sustainability means that we work under the limits of one planet. It also means that all non-renewables are included loops in our economies”*, she added. *“In synthesis, we need to develop prevention policies, with horizontal criteria as a basis for confrontation among all the countries and all the experiences”*, was her final statement.

The perspective of the local and regional authorities was brought in by Mr Marco DUS, Member of the ENVE Commission at the CoR. By showcasing *“CoR’s opinion on the role of local and regional authorities in advancing on the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme: focus on sustainable waste management”*, Mr Dus highlighted the need to promote a multi-level governance and implementation. Local and regional authorities have a central role and it is key to support effective networks among them as the project WE-NET aims to.

The panel was closed by Ms Françoise BONNET, Secretary General, Association of Cities and Regions for Recycling and sustainable resource management, who emphasized the multi-stakeholder approach as key to promote the integrated sustainable waste and resource management. *“Citizens do also play a fundamental role: they are not only producers, they are also consumers, so they should be addressed as both. Behavioural changes must occur and more awareness raising campaigns are needed”*.

The session **“What role for local authorities and civil society associations to promoting sustainable development? Examples of good practices throughout Europe”** brought in transferrable experiences provided by the City of Lisbon, the Municipality of Knjazevac (Serbia), the Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació (Spain), the City of Thiene (Italy) as well as from civil society associations from Slovenia and Poland.



The panelist had an opportunity to exchange and take questions from the audience on 5 main topics: what are the main environmental challenges in your communities? What are citizens' leading attitudes on environmental issues? What are the main factors to promote a culture of sustainability? How to best engage youngsters in promoting a culture of change? Why are there so many differences when it comes to tackle common challenges?

The main outcomes of the debate can be summarised as follows:

- ❑ the limit of resources at the local level and the necessity to cope with an issue requiring long term financial options represents a common challenge;
- ❑ It is important to empower civil society, by giving people resources and space to be active in designing solutions. Local authorities have to make people know what they can do on personal level;
- ❑ cooperation with hotels and touristic facilities is key since they produce most of the waste and consume a large share of energies;
- ❑ bringing environmental awareness to schools is key to have relevant impact;
- ❑ it is important to engage kids and youngsters through actions and competitions in order to raise awareness on individual and social level;

- working and being in contact with media is important to succeed. Both local authorities and civil society associations need to spread information among people and make them think about the positive impact that environmentally friendly solutions can have for the community;
- Regulations and fees on incorrect recycling for citizens are needed because when one behaves sustainably, it is also economically beneficial

### World Café session

The session brought together international and local participants to exchange, through a participatory methodology, on 5 key topics identified during the conference:

1. How to educate/engage citizens on recycling?
2. What is the link between recycling and local economic development?
3. How to promote environmental education at schools?
4. How to raise recycling issues in the political agenda of local authorities?
5. What are the common global challenges on recycling?

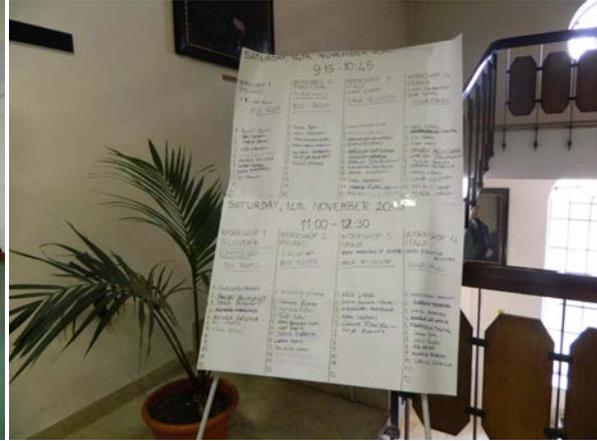


The outcomes of the session are available on the page: [http://www.ald-europe.eu/newSite/news\\_dett.php?id=1498](http://www.ald-europe.eu/newSite/news_dett.php?id=1498)

### Parallel workshops

Two series of four parallel workshops were held with the objective to further promote the exchange and to deeply focus on the analysis of the good practices brought in by each partner. Recycling experiences have been showcased from Italy (2 cases, both in the north and southern regions of the country), Portugal, Serbia, Poland (2 experiences), Slovenia and Spain.

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### **In-field visit at the Incinerator of Schio (Italy), near Thiene**

The in-field visit was a challenging session of the Thiene agenda as the incinerator in Schio is a delicate issue for the local community, with citizens that strongly oppose it and those that acknowledge its necessity for the management of non-recyclable waste in the territory. The international group had an opportunity to further analyse the concerns of the local community and to debate about the role of incinerators within the EU 2020 strategy on Environment. Particularly passionate was the debate between those who strongly supported the concept of zero waste and those who perceive this perspective as still far from being reached.

