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CITIES



Helsinki pilots climate-smart streets

Low-carbon testbeds activate citizens

Helsinki's goal of being carbon neutral by 2050 is challenging the city to turn the historic centre into a smart, energy efficient district. Climate Street is playing its part by involving residents and businesses in turning novel ideas into practical, replicable, scalable actions.

To become carbon neutral and climate resilient as rapidly as demanded by its Climate Roadmap, Helsinki had to accelerate the development of innovative solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy use. While awareness of environmental issues was high, motivating people and organisations to take action remained an issue. To address this the city realised it needed to take a cooperative approach, to open up the conversation, mobilise stakeholders and stimulate climate-friendly choices.

Learning from climate-smart initiatives in Amsterdam and Cologne, which proved the value of piloting small-scale solutions in specially-chosen streets, the municipality developed its own Climate Street project. Brought about by the city of Helsinki with Vantaa and Helsinki Environment Centres, the Green Building Council, Helsinki Region Environmental Services and Aalto University, the project received funding of €820,000 came from the ERDF and €100,000 from the Helsinki City Innovation Fund.

Streets ahead

Two streets were chosen as climate-smart frontrunners - testbeds for resource-efficient, low-carbon services and products: Iso Roobertinkatu (Iso Roba), one of Helsinki's central shopping and restaurant streets, and Tikkurila in neighbouring Vantaa. The Climate Street team then set about working with local residents, property owners, housing associations, businesses, solution providers and NGOs to co-create and share new knowledge of smart and clean solutions and implementations.

Iso Roba was a wise choice for a number of reasons. Its mix of traditional jewellery and florist shops and 'hip' restaurants and boutiques provide opportunities for diverse practical applications. It is also home to a growing community of climate-aware professionals keen to make a difference. The street was also about to be renovated, which meant Climate Street could access some of the €1,300,000 allocated for improvements. Solutions co-created with the community for future implementation include planting climate-resilient trees, creating underground storm water retention tanks and installing LED lighting.



We look for progressive ideas that go beyond what already exists and will make people's lives easier every day. Once a simple solution that everyone can use or apply is visible on the street, the word gets around and it catches on.

Mikko Martikka, project coordinator - climate Street, City of Helsinki



cities in action

November 2016

where: Helsinki, Finland
what: Cooperation
when: 2015 - 2017



Home front

Climate Street has also encouraged local residents to look at how their homes could contribute to its goals, through workshops and events. 'Happy Houses' workshops, run by environmental organisation Dodo, for example, have brought several housing associations and numerous residents together to share their thoughts and worries and explore opportunities and costs. Many have signed up for energy audits, others for advice on reducing their CO2 footprint and more to understand their home's solar energy potential.

The solar power campaign has been one of the most effective to date. Not only have many residents received detailed practical guidance on installing solar panels on their roofs. The city also now has its first apartment building solar power plant in the historic downtown area. This was built in close collaboration with Climate Street, which provided technical, practical and personal support to the residents involved. A similar process has been used to stimulate the transformation of the inner courtyards of housing association properties into attractive climate-adapted green urban spaces.

Sustainable future

At its halfway point, Climate Street has already met many of its initial targets. Its impact owes much to the way the views of all the different parties were sought from the start and how trust and engagement were gradually and carefully established. The project has also set itself up for a self-sustaining future. Residents are educated and engaged. The strong business community to emerge from the networking bootcamps will go on sharing and partnering for progress. And the next generation have been inspired through events such as Earth Hour, which saw 1500 school children gather on Iso Roba to learn about climate protection.

Climate Street has been sharing its learnings and solutions nationally, through the active climate network of Finland's six largest cities, and across Europe via ClimateKIC, the Covenant of Mayors and the Smart Cities Network. Cities in neighbouring Nordic countries and Italy have already shown interest in Helsinki's ideas-to-action model, which is transferable to any urban environment irrespective of infrastructure and building age.

Resource efficient

The agile piloting programme at the heart of Climate Street adds great value by enabling experimentation with novel prototypes in real life conditions with real users. The municipality runs open competitions for proposals and acts as a matchmaker, bringing together local people, specialists, start-ups and SMEs to turn ideas into reality. Ideas such as a new kind of restaurant terrace with eco-friendly lighting for the darkening autumn evenings. Simple, straightforward guidelines are produced for each pilot project to make it as easy as possible for other streets and other cities to replicate them.

The issue of food waste has prompted four agile pilots as well as crowd-sourced solutions. From Waste to Taste, for example, uses ingredients that would otherwise be wasted for the snacks it offers from its ingenious solar-powered rickshaw. A local NGO, meanwhile, has partnered with a supermarket on Iso Roba to reduce food waste through the use of its location-based social web service, which was specifically designed to release unused resources of all kinds for the common good.

Climate Street is a modern, new way of thinking: innovative, brave and open to new ideas, even crazy ones! It is a great idea to start with one street to test ideas and then spread the good ones wider.

**Johanna Kohvakka, project manager,
from waste to taste**

