Local Governments and Climate Protection Plans: Increasing urban resilience within European planning systems

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Since 1993 local climate protection has become a subject of a growing interest both in Europe and internationally, with a strong focus on climate change mitigation. This was also the year ICLEI’s Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) Campaign was launched. Since then there has been an emerging movement of local governments implementing pioneering actions in various fields to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. More recently the need to adapt to a new climate scenario and to increase resilience of urban systems have been recognised as essential elements in local responses, to address the impact of climate change and improve community resilience to inevitable changes.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations are now at their highest level for 3 million years, and global temperatures have increased by about 0.6°C in the last 150 years. However, by reducing emissions this only addresses a part of the matter. Even if the global emissions are reduced to zero over the next decade (not a realistic scenario in any case) the impact on towns, cities and urban systems will remain for decades: higher temperatures, increased flooding and/or droughts, more extreme weather events, and a limitation on resources.

It is now widely acknowledged that an intensification of action and an increased tempo is required to reduce our impact on the climate and to adapt to inevitable climate change, following the 2007 reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Stern Review, among others. According with the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC, scientific comprehension of the phenomena has significantly improved in recent years and reaching a lower CO₂ emissions global scenario is realistic over the medium term. However, to stabilise the emissions, it is necessary to act categorically and effectively over the next ten to twelve years.

In Europe, where 80% of the population already lives in cities and where up of the 80% of the energy is consumed, it is clear that the community level is ideally suited to both climate change mitigation and adaptation. This is also the level where the impact of climate change is most visible and urban resilience have to be increased rapidly.

The main purpose of this paper is to focus on the roles of local governments in this process of climate change mitigation and adaptation, to communicate the essential role they play to support the realisation of national and international climate targets, and to illustrate the impact they can have – at multiple levels – through exemplary case studies that capture responses of communities according three streams of action:

• shaping and implementing policy and regulations;
• applying relevant technology and measures;
• involving community stakeholders in sustainable energy solutions (energy savings, energy efficiency, renewable energy).

Planning systems in different part of the world are trying to address climate change effects introduction in planning regulatory schemes different indicators related both with energy consumes and to land exploitation, to figure out from one side possible impacts in terms of mitigation procedures, from the other evaluating the decrease of resilience of built environment.

The paper will reconstruct the European situation in relationships with of Climate Protection Plans.
The nature of state and local CCP's varies greatly. In fact some documents are briefs and general, simply outlining goals, existing actions, or the elements of more detailed planning processes to follow. Others are several pages with long and recommend specific policies in a wide range or areas, with the indications of emissions savings and indicative costs of the different measures quantified. Some materials are very draft and simple, others are very well designed and supported by a number of illustrations and data. In some cases local governments have incorporated climate change strategies into general plans, other governments have included climate change policies in a more strategic national documents as Spain made with Plan national de adaptación al cambio climático. The paper will also report the results of an extensive survey made at University IUAV of Venice through European public bodies and authorities engaged in "Climate Protection Planning". The survey will point out the heterogeneous panorama of climate plans with a support of a checklist of main issues such as: emissions targets and inventories, adaptation/mitigations measures, building codes indications, planning actions and categories.