



INTENSIFY

Interreg Europe



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Targeting, Motivating, Incentivising, Digital Communications

Key themes when intensifying community engagement to reduce GHG production

It is almost one year since Interreg Europe gave the green light for the INTENSIFY project to proceed. The project is valued at €2,092,000 of which Cork City will receive €283,125. The project is designed to build upon the demonstration projects that Cork City Council has undertaken to improve the energy efficiency of its social housing stock. Thus far one hundred and twenty nine apartments and over two hundred houses have benefitted from the scheme with an expenditure of over €7m. This year an additional €5,000,000 will be added to that sum to deep energy retrofit 84 apartment and 50 houses. The benefits can be seen in reduced carbon emissions, lower heating bills and better quality living for the residents of improved housing stock.

However it is crucial that these improvements become embedded in the community, the city and the region; so that people will set about improving the energy efficiency of their homes with the same mind-set they would set about improving any other aspect of their home. It is not about the savings, though that can help it is about reducing carbon footprint, improving the quality of the home and improving habitability.

INTENSIFY seeks to engage with communities in the Southern Region of Ireland to improve their awareness of the need for and benefits of reducing their carbon footprint. The project is designed around four themes (1) Targetting communities (2) Motivating the targeted communities (3) utilising financial instruments to fund the carbon footprint reducing measures and (4) utilising digital social platforms to get the message across.

Four workshops have been held to enhance the project participants understanding of these themes. The first was held in Milton Keynes by Milton Keynes Council. Brian Matthews from the Milton Keynes Sustainable Transport Section demonstrated how the cities electric vehicle experience centre was targeting citizens to encourage them to switch to electric cars (<https://www.evexperiencecentre.co.uk>). The experience centre has played a substantial part in ensuring that ownership in Milton Keynes at 5% of the population is twice the UK average.

The second Workshop in Treviso, Italy focused on motivating communities. Davide Tochetto of the Treviso school of agriculture demonstrated how the school authorities set about motivating the students to change their habits when consuming energy whether it be in the transport, buildings or agricultural sector. Davide emphasised that it was important to ensure that students were taught best practise techniques in order to reduce their energy consumption/carbon footprint. Catherine Sheridan, Communications manager with Irish utility company ERVIA gave an example of successful community engagement by that company when installing a new sewer network. Catherine stated that for communities to be motivated their interests and ERVIAs interests had to be aligned. They needed common goals in order to succeed.

The third workshop in Dessau-Roßlau, Germany focused on the use of financial instruments. Dan Creupland of the European Renewable Energy Cooperative umbrella body RESCoop and Rita Marauco of the Portuguese renewable energy cooperative Coopérnico both highlighted the challenges faced by and the opportunities open to people who set up renewable energy cooperatives. Such projects are capital intensive, sporadic in nature and have the bulk of the expenditure frontloaded. They have a narrow time frame in which to seek crowd funding and many times the projects are, in most cases over subscribed. To maximise their return on investment, many European countries will have to review their regulations surrounding exporting electricity to the grid.

The fourth and final workshop to be held in Vitoria- Gasteiz will focus on digital social platforms. There are many such online platforms e.g. Facebook, Linked In, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Websites etc. Websites are very useful information repositories. Many others facilitate communications with an external audience. WhatsApp and Instagram are very useful for internal communications. On completion of this workshop project participants will have enhanced knowledge on how to maximise the use of the internet to engage with communities

With the thematic workshops now complete, the focus of the project partners must turn towards compiling a list of good practices in each partners region on the subjects of intensifying community engagement to Green House Gases. These good practices will inform the next phase of learning for the project partners – The import workshops (IW). Cork City and the Southern Irish Region have a number of excellent good practices in this area which they will share with the project partners.

In Tandem with the collection of good practices each partner region will over the summer carry out a baseline survey to establish the level of awareness amongst the general population in each partner region of the actions they can take to reduce their GHG emissions.