

Some examples in Europe show that cities running their own energy company can lower the energy bill for citizens

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Credit: Youris.com

Across Europe, town and city councils are becoming increasingly interested in energy decentralisation, i.e. in producing power closer to where it is consumed.

Those municipalities that have already experienced this say the model is one of the best ways of fighting pollution and reducing energy costs for citizens. Heidelberg is one such [city](#) in Germany, with its long-running energy company.

The city-owned company is responsible for managing gas, heating, and the water and sewage systems. "The most important issue was that we started our action plan with all the population behind us", states mayor Eckart Würzner. "We have a general strategy to be a city free of fossil fuels by 2050. This is extremely challenging since we are a growing city and therefore we have to switch to renewables in very little time," he points out.

The Municipality has developed a new urban area, [Bahnstadt](#), that is 100 % CO₂ free. "The buildings are very energy efficient and the resources used to serve this area are 100 % renewable. We have noticed that the energy demand of the flats' owners has fallen dramatically," adds the mayor of Heidelberg. All the buildings in Bahnstadt are constructed to 'passive house' standards. This construction concept allows the inhabitants to cut their energy consumption for heating by 80% compared to normal houses.

Energy is generally inexpensive in Sweden since there is a long tradition of cities supplying citizens with affordable home-grown power. In addition, prices are kept low by the large choice of energy companies – around 300 – on the market today.

Växjö is no exception and governs its energy policy and resources independently. "We own our biomass plant, where we produce

electricity, heating and cooling, and for 20 years we have been using only bio-energy. Actually the entire city is heated with bio-energy", says mayor Bo Frank.

He adds that the city also owns facilities for biogas production. "Each citizen is more or less required to put all [organic waste](#) in a separate container. We use that organic waste to produce biogas for all public transport", explains Frank. The city promotes public transport to limit the number of cars in the city centre. "We encourage people and companies to buy electric cars. All cars owned by the Municipality are environmentally-friendly", states Frank.

In France, the city of Grenoble has been able to gain the trust of its citizens thanks to its 100 year-old energy company. Private businesses sell electricity to under 20% of the population.

"Private stakeholders are only interested in the financial aspect, whereas local energy suppliers also take into account the social, environmental and spatial dimensions of cities", says deputy mayor Vincent Fristot. He adds that the Municipality can offer specific support to people who are unable to pay their electricity bills. It involves allowing citizens to pay in instalments or to fit home devices with low-power consumption.

Besides the social benefits granted to citizens, the local energy supplier in Grenoble has invested in renewable facilities, such as wind turbines and photovoltaic panels. "It was very important for us to be able to supply green energy at the best possible price, which can compete with private energy companies", emphasises Fristot.

Cat Hobbs, director of [We Own It](#), a British campaigning organisation, located in Oxford, agree on this approach: "It is difficult to have control over [energy policy](#) when the company is private. They do what they like; therefore, for those who want to produce renewable energy, it would be

much easier to set up new companies, with public ownership".

More and more communities in Europe are pondering a return to public management of power and of other important assets such as water. The new trend is known as remunicipalisation.

In other words, [energy](#) back in local hands.

Provided by Youris.com

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