

SMALLEST partners visit Güssing

In September 2010 SMALLEST partners visited the Güssing region in Austria to learn more about the project called 'Model Güssing'. We visited the biomass power plant in Güssing, the district heating plant combined with solar in Urbersdorf, the biogas plant in Strem, and also the Blue Chip Company specializing in the production of photovoltaic modules. We met experts from the [European Centre for Renewable Energy](#) in Güssing and also representatives of local communities – the Mayor of Güssing, Peter Vadasz, and the Mayor of Strem, Mr Bernhard Deutsch.

A little bit of history

Güssing is the capital of a district with approximately 27,000 inhabitants. This region used to be one of the poorest in Austria according to statistics. It had no industry, poor infrastructure, a high rate of unemployment and migration out of the area.

Everything started to change when in 1990 local experts developed a model for the region which aimed for complete abandonment of fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy from local resources. Thanks to this brave idea and hard work Güssing currently produces more energy (heat, fuels, and electric power) from renewable resources than it consumes on an annual basis. The current degree of self sufficiency when looking at private homes and public buildings is 100% and when we add industry it is 56%. A formerly underprivileged region has been transformed, winning honours such as 'most innovative town in Austria', 'environmentally most friendly town' or Japanese 'Global 100 Eco Tech Award'.

Since 1990 fifty new enterprises opened in the Güssing region offering more than 1,000 jobs to local people. Moreover, green energy tourism has become an important economic sector. Currently around 400 people come to Güssing each week to visit the numerous demonstration plants (biomass, biogas, solar and photovoltaic installations).

How it all became a success

SMALLEST partners benefited a lot from the meeting with the Mayor of Güssing Peter Vadasz and the Mayor of Strem Mr Bernhard Deutsch as they shared with us the stories of how the project had been implemented step by step from the perspective of local communities and municipalities.

The objective of the Güssing model was to supply the town of Güssing and consequently the whole district with energy from renewables. The aim was to use locally available resources like wood as forests constitute 45% of the land around the district of Güssing.

The first step was to assess the energy needs of the individual households and also to implement energy saving measures in Güssing. As a result of the insulation of all buildings in the town centre expenditure on energy was reduced by almost 50%.

The second step which was most challenging was to convince local mayors and communities of the idea of energy generation from renewable sources.

It was not easy but it was achievable. As local mayors saw the benefits of this technology and approved the idea they started to build small district heating plants in villages around Güssing. The process was supported by information sessions for local people. As small district heating plants were operating successfully local people began to realise that they could benefit from cheap, clean and locally sourced energy. The big step forward took place in 1996 when a district heating plant for Güssing town was built based on wood fuel. Energy self-sufficiency was finally achieved in 2001 when the biomass plant in Güssing was installed which relies on a newly developed biomass-steam gasification technology. After that another district heating plant combined with solar was built in Urbersdorf and also a biogas plant in Strem. The goal to become independent from fossil fuels has been accomplished.

SMALLEST partners saw a powerful example where small rural communities benefit from the renewable energy both directly and indirectly, attracting new businesses and eco/energy tourists. It was very inspirational to meet people who despite obstacles achieved their goal and can now inspire others.