



C1 Transport

Ecodrive - Energy that is not wasted

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Organisation : Environmental Department/Graz

Short description: Graz - second largest city of Austria with 250.000 people with special focus on combining economy and ecology by projects like "Ecoprofit" or "Ecodrive" that have become international bestsellers.

Executive Summary of your Abstract

Sometimes disaster can be the start of success. When motor-operated traffic has been spotted as the main cause of the dilemma, local authority usually can neither change circumstances by legislation nor can it pay for all the negative results. The right partners have to be found to create sustainable results - results that have to be plausible to the public and still need permanent observation and possibly modification.

Abstract

When Graz was hit by a particularly bad strike of smog in the winter of 1988/1989 it became obvious fairly soon that there had to be change. The geographical situation of the city in a basin shaped valley and the resulting phenomenon of very frequent inversions leading to an accumulation of air pollutants could not be changed. So change concerned general attitudes, clearly structured goals and the basic decision to work hard on a sustainable future. On the day, when Graz lived up to its reputation of being Austria's capital of smog the foundations were to be laid to become Austria's capital of ecology.

Since then circumstances have not changed - winter inversions are still threatening live quality in Graz and EU-legislation - as regards air pollutants like PM10, for example - are almost impossible to be met in the given situation.

So Graz - at least in winter - would still not qualify for a climatic spa, but it has nationwide and internationally gained itself the reputation of making the best of a given situation. A situation, that first of all had to be met by reducing emissions from domestic heating and motorised traffic. While district heating and ambitious municipal aid for sustainable energies considerably reduced emissions, the increasing numbers of registered motorised vehicles have eaten up all the technological progress that has been made to reduce pollutants. Graz can only symbolically resist international trends, but it has always been amongst those questioning given situations and finding alternative solutions like in its projects "Ecodrive" or "Ecoprofit":

"Ecodrive" started in 1992 as a project to support electric vehicles by providing the necessary infrastructure based on fast loading technology, which - on principle - was already available then, but could not be performed on a larger scale. In 1994 "Ecodrive" has switched over to biodiesel and to "greening" public transport in Graz: Starting with 2 busses and finally ending up with almost the entire bus fleet public transport in Graz has been running on biodiesel with a very special extra - "Schnitzelpower" (as named in an ICLEI brochure):

- Old cooking oil is being collected in private households or from restaurants.
- It is refined to bio-diesel near Graz with technology from Graz university and BDI.
- It can be used just like ordinary biodiesel.

And there are great advantages for the city:

- Long-term unemployed collectors find valuable jobs.
- Problematic waste becomes valuable raw material.
- There are fewer emissions and energy is renewable
- The old oil does not end up in the food chain or canalisation
- There is no need of burning somebody else's food.

Ecoprofit, a company program to reconcile economic interests with environmental needs of the city has also played a major role in improving the situation over the years: over 100 companies in Graz and well over 1000 all over the world have been acquainted with the idea that it pays to care. Between major achievements in all environmental fields Ecoprofit-companies have had outstanding results in reduction and modification of energy consumption, in mobility management and in greening vehicle fleets.

Resumé

Wolfgang Thiel, originally journalist, has escorted environmental programs and projects of the city of Graz over the past 20 years.

Recommended reading: www.oekostadt.graz.at