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DISCO

NEWSLETTER #3

The past semester, the DISCO project has continued its work on **Policy Improvement**, bringing the project's knowledge and experiences one step closer to concrete policy change.

In this newsletter, all DISCO partners share an update on the policy improvements they are working towards in their regions. What has been achieved so far? What challenges remain? And when can we expect these policy improvements to be adopted? Together, the contributions offer a glimpse into how the DISCO project is supporting better policy instruments for sustainable heating and cooling across Europe.

The past semester also brought partners together in **Dublin, Ireland**, for a **Thematic Event** focusing on the technical aspects of district heating and cooling. Through knowledge exchange, good practices and a study visit to the Tallaght District Heating Network, partners explored how technical solutions and waste heat utilisation can contribute to the energy transition.

With another Thematic Event coming up in **Crete in October**, the DISCO partnership continues to connect policy, technology and regional experience – turning shared knowledge into action.

Read on to discover what is happening across the DISCO regions.

https://interregeurope.eu/disco

Linkedin: DISCO Project

Energikontor Norr

House of Energy

DOLNY ŚLĄSK

Botoșani Municipality

provincie Drenthe

Codema Dublin's Energy Agency

ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ REGION OF CRETE

IRENA

City of Zrenjanin

Aalborg Municipality, DK

Aalborg Municipality is using the DISCO project to support the development of its new **Business Strategy**, which serves as the municipality's overarching policy for business development, innovation, and sustainable economic growth. The new strategy will cover the period **2027–2030** and will continue to strengthen Aalborg's position as a Danish leader within green growth and industrial development. Within DISCO, our policy improvement focuses on reinforcing the strategy's ambition to accelerate the green transition by creating better framework conditions for the utilization of industrial waste heat and strengthening collaboration between businesses, utilities, knowledge institutions, and public authorities. The policy also aims to support the development of new business opportunities and industrial symbioses based on circular energy solutions.

The revision of Aalborg Municipality's Business Strategy is currently underway, and the DISCO project is providing valuable input to this process. Through interregional learning activities, peer reviews, study visits, and exchanges of good practices, Aalborg Municipality is identifying policy approaches and practical solutions that can be incorporated into the new strategy. At the same time, the municipality is engaging regional stakeholders, including businesses, utilities, and knowledge institutions, to ensure that the strategy reflects local opportunities and challenges.

The revised Business Strategy is expected to be **formally approved by the Aalborg Municipal Council no later than December 2026** and will enter into force in **January 2027**. Following its adoption, Aalborg Municipality will continue to implement and monitor the policy improvements throughout the remainder of the DISCO project, ensuring that the knowledge gained through interregional cooperation is translated into long-term local impact.

Botoșani Municipality, RO

Within the DISCO project, Botoșani Municipality is improving its **Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)**, with a particular focus on strengthening the policy framework for the **utilisation of waste heat in district heating and cooling.**

The policy improvement is currently in the **preparatory stage**. Based on the knowledge gained through DISCO Peer Reviews, Study Visits and Thematic Events, the Municipality has refined its approach towards a Type 2 policy improvement, focusing on changes in the management and implementation of the existing SECAP rather than on launching a new investment project alone.

The planned improvement will include a dedicated approach to waste heat utilisation, together with improved criteria and decision-making processes for future district heating projects. Lessons from DISCO partners on waste heat mapping, feasibility assessment, stakeholder cooperation, digital monitoring and financing will be considered in the revision.
The Municipality is now preparing the next steps together with its multidisciplinary SECAP team and relevant stakeholders, including **S.C. Modern Calor S.A.**, while selecting the most relevant DISCO good practices to be integrated into the revised policy.

Internal coordination with SECAP team for waste heat utilization chapter development, with ongoing lead partner support through semester 3-5 (18 months until April 2028 deadline).
The updated SECAP is planned to be **formally approved by the Botoșani Municipal Council by the end of April 2028**, providing a clear and lasting policy framework for the future integration of waste heat into the local energy system.

City of Zrenjanin, RS

Through the DISCO project, the City of Zrenjanin is working on improving its **Medium-Term Plan**, with a particular focus on the energy transition, sustainable heating and cooling, energy efficiency, and opportunities for the utilisation of waste heat and renewable energy sources. The Medium-Term Plan serves as an implementation instrument translating the City's strategic development priorities into concrete measures, activities and projects.

The policy improvement process is currently in the interregional learning, good practice analysis and stakeholder consultation phase.
Representatives of the City of Zrenjanin and local stakeholders have participated in thematic events, study visits and exchanges of experience with DISCO partners. At the same time, local needs and opportunities for applying relevant solutions in Zrenjanin are being considered. The knowledge gained and good practices identified through DISCO will provide a basis for defining concrete proposals to be incorporated into the Medium-Term Plan.

The results of this process are expected to contribute to the introduction of relevant measures and activities related to sustainable heating and cooling, waste heat utilisation and energy efficiency into the City's Medium-Term Plan. The policy improvement is planned to be **formalised by end of 2027**, following the required local procedure and formal adoption of the relevant amendments by the City Assembly of Zrenjanin.

CODEMA - Dublin's Energy Agency, IE

As part of the DISCO project, Dublin's Energy Agency Codema is supporting Kildare County Council in strengthening the county's approach to heat decarbonisation by contributing to the development of the next **Kildare Climate Action Plan**. The proposed policy improvement is to introduce a dedicated section on waste heat recovery, supported by a practical methodology for identifying, mapping and quantifying waste heat sources across the county.

During the first phase of the project, Codema developed a draft, county-wide heat source mapping methodology using publicly available data and standardised quantification methods, where available. This work provides the foundation for integrating waste heat considerations into local climate policy and supporting future district heating planning. The next stage is to determine how this information can be embedded most effectively within the Climate Action Plan to maximise its impact on future planning and decision-making.

Image: Theo Ho, Wikimedia Commons

The methodology has also highlighted several data gaps, particularly regarding access to operational information from key heat sources. Addressing these gaps is now a priority and will help refine the assessment and strengthen future policy recommendations.

To ensure that the policy improvement benefits from European good practices, Codema is preparing a study visit to Lower Silesia (Poland). The visit will focus on advanced heat source mapping methodologies, the integration of GIS-based heat cadastres into regional policy and the recovery of heat from wastewater treatment plants using heat pumps. Learning from partners who have already embedded these tools into their planning frameworks will directly inform the final policy recommendations for Kildare.

The Kildare Climate Action Plan is expected to be developed throughout 2026 and 2027, with **formal adoption anticipated in 2027**, allowing the outcomes of the DISCO project to be incorporated into the final policy.

IRENA - Istrian Regional Energy Agency, HR

IRENA is working to improve the management and implementation of the **Energy Efficiency Action Plan** of the Istrian Region. The current plan covers energy efficiency and renewable energy measures across the building, service, transport and industry sectors. Through the DISCO project, IRENA aims to strengthen the plan by giving greater attention to sustainable district heating and cooling, particularly the recovery and utilisation of currently underused waste heat sources.

The policy improvement is currently under development. Knowledge and good practices gathered through DISCO peer reviews and thematic events are being assessed for application in the Istrian context. Particular progress has been made through preliminary activities related to a conceptual design for a small-scale district heating and cooling system. Several potential locations are being considered as promising candidates. The project's findings will support improved governance, stronger stakeholder capacities and the future integration of small district heating systems into regional energy planning.

The proposed improvement is expected to be incorporated into the next preparation or revision cycle of the Energy Efficiency Action Plan. Following technical preparation and consultation with relevant regional stakeholders, the updated policy instrument is provisionally expected to be submitted for **formal approval during 2027.**

House of Energy e.V., DE

Since June 2021, the town of Hofgeismar has been a member of the 'Hessen aktiv: Die Klima-Kommunen' alliance and is working towards the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. By signing the charter, the town has committed itself to developing and updating a comprehensive **action plan for climate protection and climate adaptation**. This action plan serves as the policy instrument for the town of Hofgeismar, which is to be further developed through the impulses provided by the project.

The action plan forms the central basis for the city's climate protection strategy. Among other things, it includes an analysis of energy consumption in municipal properties and across the entire city, as well as an assessment of the municipality's greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, it sets out measures that have already been implemented, are currently underway, and are planned. Through continuous refinement, the action plan serves as a key steering tool on the path to becoming a climate-neutral municipality.

One key focus is on district heating. The city presented its municipal heating plan back in January 2026. Among other things, this includes an analysis of potential heat sources from renewable energy or waste heat. The heating plan offers a wide range of points of connection with the good practices of the partner countries identified as part of the DISCO project.

From the approximately 30 examples presented, nine approaches have so far been identified that offer promising potential for Hofgeismar. One or two of these examples are to be selected by the end of the year. These will be analysed in greater depth in 2027 so that concrete measures can be adapted for the town. In this way, Hofgeismar is drawing on the exchange of experiences with other local authorities to gain new impulses for the further development of its action plan. **This adaptation is scheduled for early 2028** at the latest.

Province of Drenthe, NL

In **the Dutch National Climate Agreement**, municipalities were assigned responsibility for implementing local heat transition solutions, including district heating networks. The Province of Drenthe supports municipalities by providing expertise, capacity, and financial contributions for feasibility studies and research into sustainable heating options. Together with the Province of Overijssel, our southern neighbour, we are exploring the achievability of a regional public district heating network to realise municipal heating projects.

Energy remains a prominent topic in the Netherland, with ongoing discussions on the deployment of solar and wind power, varying levels of implementations across different municipalities, the use of alternative fuels such as green gas and green hydrogen and growing impacts of grid congestion. At the same time, energy security and independence discussions are becoming more prevalent at national and regional levels.

Collective heating solutions are gaining momentum as municipalities prepare the mandatory heat programmes from the Climate Agreement. These must be **completed by the end of 2027**. District heating is becoming more recognised as a solution to grid congestion as it reduces pressures on the electricity grid while supporting the transition to sustainable heating. The collaboration for heating solutions is strong, research is being conducted, and (small-scale) district heating potential is becoming visible. Scaling-up lacks behind as investment security is insufficient, national funding is sparse, and individual heating solutions remain attractive. A breakthrough on district heating is necessary – improving the subsidy structure and a better distribution of the costs and benefits could energise the district heating system.

The Lower Silesian Voivodeship, PL

Within the DISCO project, Lower Silesia set out to improve the **European Funds for Lower Silesia 2021–2027 (FEDS)**programme by strengthening its support for the recovery and use of waste heat. The FEDS programme is the main regional instrument through which EU funding is allocated to projects supporting the economic, social and environmental development of Lower Silesia. Among its priorities is improving energy efficiency in enterprises and accelerating the region's transition towards a low-carbon economy.

As a direct result of interregional learning within DISCO, a new award criterion promoting the **use of waste heat** was introduced in the FEDS call for SMEs from the Wałbrzych subregion. The change was inspired particularly by the peer review and study visit in Assen, where representatives of the FEDS Managing Authority gained practical knowledge on waste heat recovery and mechanisms for supporting related investments, including through public funding programmes.

The criterion awards additional points to projects using waste heat generated in technological or operational processes—either within the enterprise itself or through more comprehensive solutions, such as supplying heat to other recipients or district heating and cooling networks. Its design was supported by consultations with DISCO partners, the Policy Helpdesk and regional stakeholders. The consultations focused particularly on defining "effective" and "comprehensive" waste heat utilisation and identifying appropriate indicators and thresholds for project assessment.

The new criterion was formally adopted by the FEDS Monitoring Committee under **Resolution No. 199/26 of 21 January 2026**. A dedicated mailing was sent to potential beneficiaries—owners of waste heat sources identified through the regional waste heat cadastre and through additional desk research. The call received 83 applications. The results of the substantive assessment and final project selection have not yet been published.
In parallel, the FEDS Investment Strategy for financial instruments was updated to include the possibility of launching a new loan instrument for energy-efficiency investments in SMEs, including waste heat recovery. This update was formally approved by the Board of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship under **Resolution No. 3761/VII/26 of 4 March 2026.**

North Sweden Energy Agency, SE

North Sweden Energy Agency is working with Pajala Municipality to improve the municipality's **Energy Plan.** The Energy Plan is a strategic document that sets out the municipality's overall direction for energy-related issues. It addresses areas such as the production, distribution and use of energy within the municipality and provides a framework for how the local energy system can develop in a sustainable, secure and efficient way.

During the DISCO project, relevant staff have participated in both in-person and online workshops to define the scope and framework for the improvement process. They have also gained inspiration and knowledge from other DISCO partners through study visits and written examples of good practices.

The work is currently ongoing. In the next phase, the municipality will further develop the identified improvements and integrate relevant lessons from the DISCO project into the Energy Plan. A particular focus will be on how the plan can better respond to the specific energy needs and conditions of a sparsely populated municipality with a cold climate, including the challenges associated with long distances, energy supply and local resilience.

The ambition is for the improved Energy Plan to be **formally adopted and approved by the Municipality before April 2028**.

Region of Crete, EL

The Smart Specialisation Strategy of Crete (RIS3CRETE), our policy instrument, is a key framework for supporting and strengthening innovation across the region. District heating and cooling represents a new and innovative technology for Crete. The exchange of experiences and study visits carried out through the DISCO project have demonstrated that developing such systems in our region can be both feasible and impactful, even when implemented on a smaller scale.

The insights gained through the project will inform the improvement of the policy instrument. This process will be supported by a strong evidence base, including active stakeholder engagement, support for the adoption of these technologies, and measures to strengthen the financial viability of related projects.

As part of this process, a pilot project will be designed to demonstrate the feasibility and potential impact of district heating and cooling in Crete. Subject to the necessary conditions and funding, the pilot will hopefully be implemented as a proof of concept, providing practical evidence to support the wider adoption and development of these innovative solutions in the region. It will also provide the competent authority responsible for RIS3CRETE with a valuable tool to ultimately proceed with the improvement of the policy instrument.

Currently, technical support is being provided to lay the foundations for a regional assessment that can effectively identify and assess regional and local needs.

Botoșani Municipality

City of Zrenjanin