



LINKS TO NATIONAL POLICIES



The project North Sea-SEP deals with the promotion of sustainable energy planning, using a holistic approach including energy production, energy saving, innovation through energy, value chains and a reduction of energy imports. It aims at working in cross-sectoral networks, to exchange knowhow and to develop strategy on regional energy planning.

As regions are not located in autonomous areas, it is necessary to take national policies into account when implementing a trans-regional project like North Sea-SEP, because they do have an impact on the regional and local levels.

For the further implementation of North Sea-SEP, this document will analyze the national energy related policies in the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, their impact on the implementation of the project and the latter's possible impacts on national policies.

European frame for national policies

The objectives of energy related national policies are largely predetermined by EU legislation and deal with the use of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and energy saving. The overall objective is – facing the climate change – to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, on the other hand, to reduce the dependency on fossil fuels.

Supranational policies build the frame for the national level and set targets for all Member States, such that the EU will reach a 20% share of energy from renewable sources by 2020 and a 10% share of renewable energy specifically in the transport sector. National policies and action plans establish pathways for the development of renewable energy sources. Thus, the concrete organization of national policies regarding the different measures and instruments to reach these goals varies from country to country.

Besides national policies, some of our partners have to deal with regional policies (e.g. Belgium: federal and Flemish policies). The UK Renewable Energy strategy is published by the UK Government and the policies to meet the targets will be taken forward on a UK-wide basis as appropriate and in accordance with each devolution arrangement. The Devolved Administrations set their policies within their areas of responsibility, e.g. Scotland introduced higher support levels for wave and tidal power in its Renewables Action Plan.

Financial stimuli are used in almost every country to promote the use of renewable energy in housing (e.g. the Renewable Energies Heat Act in Germany, Home Insulation Scheme in Scotland), in transport (e.g. tax-freedom of hydrogen powered cars in Denmark), or as a means to promote the use of electricity from renewable energy sources (Electricity certificate in Sweden). Research and Innovation on renewable energies and energy saving are promoted e.g. by the Netherlands (Transition to a sustainable energy supply in 2050) and Denmark (Energy policy 2008-2011).

The Dutch “National Policy Plan Spatial Planning” encourages an interaction between market actors and public authorities in order to improve environmental performance. Generally, joint work between municipalities/regions, but also between the national and lower levels is promoted (e.g. Voluntary energy efficiency agreements with the Swedish Energy Agency are possible for Swedish municipalities).

In this context, North Sea-SEP represents a transnational project which is in-line with the national policies and efforts regarding energy-related topics. It follows the general aims of energy saving, energy efficiency and renewable energy use. Beyond that, it cooperates with a range of actors, which is – directly or indirectly – an aim of national governments. Sustainability is the overall objective of the project, which goes hand in hand not only with national, but also with supranational policies.

National policies on regional and local level

National policies have an impact on the regional level. Due to different governmental structures in our partner regions, these impacts are diverse: While some national governments tend to regulate less and give more freedom to regional and local authorities (The Netherlands), others are –still-structured in a more centralistic way and national policies have to be implemented on the local level more or less without own incentives (partly The UK).

In general, the local level is the level of policy implementation and policy action: national policies are characterized by a top-down structure. Local and regional planning generally has to follow national policies. Local levels mostly do not have an influence on the development of energy policies but it is possible for them to create – in-line with the given policy frame – measures, which are applicable for themselves.

For example, the Netherlands are characterized by a national policy which aims at giving the regional and local authorities more responsibilities. Climate covenants between different policy levels, which results are controlled by the national government, give the lower levels more responsibilities, the possibility to create tailor-made measures, but also a bigger workload. The UK, as a second example, is characterized by the principle of ultra vires, which means that local authorities cannot do anything which has not been explicitly permitted in statute.

Due to ambitious goals of the energy related policies, municipalities will need more tools, strategies etc. for sustainable energy planning. It is necessary to take the different ecologic, economic, and social situations given in the partner regions into account. In this context, North Sea-SEP will help the partners in the diverse regions of Europe to implement the national policies on a local level and to develop specific energy planning tools for the particular regions.

Project impacts on national policies

North Sea-SEP may have impacts on national policies. It is impossible to predict these impacts, but the project partners mostly agreed about how to facilitate an influence on their respective national government.

It is important to work cross-sectoral and to involve different actors and stakeholders in all phases of the project implementation. These actors may be policy-making bodies from all levels, but also other stakeholders from the public or private sector. This involvement may be carried out by

lobbying the project, its ideas and outcomes, reporting its activities to higher political institutions or promotion to the interested public.

Taking regional – environmental, social, and economic – characteristics into account, the project will develop actual sustainable measures. Bottom-up processes might be initiated, in which the results of the project can be taken as best practice examples for other regions – or even at national level.

Interdisciplinary and transnational work, networking, promotion and develop best practices are possibilities to create a sustainable environment in which influencing higher policy levels becomes possible. This is the case for all partner regions and their national governments.

Due to the fact that the project North Sea-SEP is relatively at the beginning of project implementation, it is important to consider aspects of a possible influence on national – or regional – policies regarding energy and planning in the further work of all partners.

The Think Tank, designed and established to support the project with advices concerning future developments in sustainable energies and techniques as well as guidance to the whole North Sea – SEP project and its development, is a space to discuss actual political developments, possible outcomes and their impacts on the project's work. The Think Tank structure is interdisciplinary: members should be politicians (from local, national, European level) but also energy experts/scientists from research institutions, NGOs and the industry. It is possible to invite special guests to the TT-meetings when specific subjects shall be addressed and discussed. This structure serves a fruitful discussion with various (political) actors and stakeholders about what is necessary and possible regarding potential initiatives towards influences on higher political levels.

Communication and dissemination of the project idea is one part of the project which is to be carried out by every single partner. These communications efforts need to include political actors in order to establish and maintain a network of interested persons, institutions and public authorities which are able and willing to further disseminate the project's ideas and outcomes. This small additional task for each project partner might be very fruitful, because the partners know the political structures in their particular regions and countries.

A North Sea-SEP meeting will be held in October. One module of this meeting will be "The political view on climate and sustainable energy". Various actors from different political levels will be invited to lecture about various, energy related topics. This will offer an opportunity to discuss directly with decision making actors about the project and lobbying for it. New ideas to influence higher political levels may arise.