

# Cesena's Energy Savings Sprint: using the campaign to engage citizens in climate action



*Photo: The City of Cesena, Italy*

**From our series “Building on the Sprint”:** the Italian city of Cesena uses the Sprint to boost their climate communications and engage youth in their green transition.

In the wake of the energy crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the [Cities Energy Saving Sprint](#) emerged as a critical campaign to mobilise cities and empower them in their efforts to implement emergency energy-saving measures. The Italian city of [Cesena was an active participant of the Sprint](#) from the beginning. Not only did they respond to the immediate crisis, but they also took the opportunity to strengthen their

work with citizens and make them protagonists of the city's climate and energy actions.

We talked to Cesena's Councilor for Environmental Sustainability, Francesca Lucchi, to find out more about how the city took ownership of the Cities Energy Saving Sprint campaign and how it has contributed to their long-term energy and climate action plan.



*Photo: Francesca Lucchi, Councilor for Environmental Sustainability of the city of Cesena, Italy*

## **Of the measures that Cesena took in the context of the Energy Saving Sprint, which seem to have been the most impactful?**

First of all, the Sprint highlighted the importance of reducing the consumption of gas, starting from public buildings, but also brought this communication to all levels, thus including private buildings and households. All this was done with the aim of reducing bills (we started off with a contingent theme), but also to improve the quality of life of our citizens and protect the environment.

## **What results have you been able to observe from the Energy Saving Sprint?**

In part thanks to the Sprint, we have installed new systems in many public buildings: we have a maintenance and renovation project that goes on from year to year, and this year

it was repeated. In parallel, we launched communication campaigns. All this led to the **reduction of public consumption by 28%** over the course of the winter season. And I think it is an important, very concrete, and tangible result for us.

## **How did you engage citizens in the Energy Saving Sprint and get them to take ownership of the Sprint?**

We started in schools. We think that schools are an important communication hub and we involved several of the schools in our city and many students. At the same time, we activated communication campaigns that could be all encompassing, also with the aim of transferring knowledge and skills for the correct use of energy to all. The “Sportello per l’energia” (energy desk), set up by Energie per la Città, has this function for us: that of creating skills in the field of sustainable energy.

## **What was the general reaction to the Sprint from your citizens and from the youth and students in particular?**

We received a positive response and active involvement, especially in the classroom and among students. They produced videos, posters, images on climate change and the conscious use of energy. I think this is an important aspect and that the involvement of young people is crucial to create a positive communication in our city, as well as to give the correct knowledge to the citizens of tomorrow.

## **Could you give concrete examples of some of the projects organized in schools as part of the Sprint that you think are worth highlighting?**

We carried out workshops with the students, but also and above all with the teachers. I believe that this is what will give continuity to the campaigns: training and raising awareness with those who educate and with the community of educators in our city. It’s a sign of continuity and continuation of the projects. At the same time, we did various activities, including practical ones, to give the children the opportunity to experiment and think. We started with simple labs, for example building paper houses, to give them the opportunity to think about energy issues and energy consumption issues in private homes.



Photo: “La Città Sostenibile della Classe IVB », School projects around the Cities Energy Saving Sprint in Cesena.

## What advice would you give to other cities on the best ways to raise awareness / engage citizens around energy saving?

I think that the role of cities is key. Cities’ networks are born with the aim of creating a collective awareness and cities are always able to roll up their sleeves and start first, to then try to involve other levels of local and superordinate authorities. Transversal communication is certainly a key aspect, as is everything that concerns citizen involvement, from gamification to nagging – gentle nudges that stimulate people to consume less and get involved in active policies; also considering the economic impact that these sustainability policies have, which are not only linked only to environmental impact, but also can enhance the quality of life of citizens. I think this is another important appealing factor.

## What have you learned from the Energy Saving Sprint?

It certainly has been a moment of collective reflection that is pushing us to understand how important it is to go in this direction: to reduce energy consumption. I believe that every city must have the forward-looking goal of trying to be self-sufficient, supported by high-level national and European policies. I think the Sprint offered us a good occasion to start on this path, and to reflect on how appropriate and necessary it is for us to keep moving in this direction.

## What Sprint measures are you planning to keep in place for the following winter? What would you like to see embedded in long-term strategy to tackle climate change?

Next winter, we will continue to work significantly on behavioural change, starting with public buildings. Perhaps this year was the first year in which we really worked on behaviour: on giving ourselves directives on how to maintain the systems, to regulate temperatures... We will continue along this line because it is the only measure which, alongside the systems' upgrading, actually leads to an improvement in consumption. And I believe that this must be part of our active policies at 360°, making it clear that what is done in the public sector can also be done in the private sector, as well as in companies.

## How does the work you carried out in schools during the Sprint connect with your broader citizen engagement strategy around climate questions?

We have been part of the Covenant of Mayors for some time now: we have drawn up a SECAP and **we have the ambitious goal of reducing consumption by 30% between now and the next few years.** I believe that this is another fundamental element in achieving long-term objectives, starting with young people, children, schools ... and without forgetting that this is how we get more and more families involved. Pebble by pebble, it is always us, citizens, who, by moving around, producing energy, living in our homes, working, etc., produce a significant amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in a city. Piece by piece we must achieve ambitious goals that lead us to become a sustainable society as a whole.

## Building on the Cities Energy Saving Sprint

*From emergency energy saving to  
accelerated climate action in cities*

#EUCitiesSaveEnergy  
#FromSprint2Resilience  
#FromSprint2Sufficiency

**Building on the Sprint:** Europe got through last winter, but the energy crisis persists. Simultaneously, the escalating hazards linked to the climate crisis, such as heat waves, droughts, and floods, exert mounting pressure on local governments across the continent. The [Cities Energy Saving Sprint](#) conducted last winter demonstrated the inseparable link between both crises and the necessity of combating them together with common solutions. Cities, at the forefront of these challenges, have emerged as pioneers in adopting such measures. Draw inspiration from the Sprint's success stories to keep saving energy in your city, prepare for the upcoming winter, and accelerate progress towards climate neutrality.