

The ACCENT on Climate Change

LOCAL CITIZENS DEBATES

ACCENT project



*do you commit to action
on climate change?*

I do

ACCENT PROJECT

LOCAL CITIZENS DEBATES REPORT

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The ACCENT project (*Action on Climate Change through Engagement, Networks and Tools*), supported by the European Commission within the Seventh Research Framework Program - "Science and Society" Sector, has involved 15 European and Israeli science centres, science museums and aquariums that have made a commitment to strengthen the efforts they made at the local level in a global European action, by gathering their practices in science communication and public engagement on climate change issues.

The main goal of the project has been to raise interest and to stimulate debates on climate change issues, risks and impacts both for the general public and for policymakers and other stakeholders: the understanding of citizens and their engagement in these issues must not be taken for granted.

NGO representatives, politicians, scientists, teachers, teenagers, parents, journalists, all citizens have found in science centres and museums a wide portfolio of offers and a unique set up where they can **debate, discuss, and analyse scientific and technological issues in a truly democratic way**. Science centres, aquariums and museums are natural venues for these activities, since they offer an opportunity for a wider exchange of ideas, providing information that is generally perceived to be reliable and **providing a neutral ground** for individuals to meet and voice their concerns.





The aim ACCENT wanted to achieve was **involving citizens in the debate, so that they can actively contribute to reducing climate change** through their actions, behaviours and attitudes.

LISTENING TO CITIZENS' VOICE

ACCENT CONSORTIUM PARTNERS:

Acquario di Genova, Italy;
Ahhaa Foundation, Estonia;
BSMJ - Bloomfield Science Museum Jerusalem, Israel;
ECSITE - Association Européenne des Expositions Scientifiques, Techniques et Industrielles, Belgium;
Experimentarium, Denmark;
Fondazione IDIS - Città della Scienza, Italy;
Heureka - Tedekeskussäätö, Finland;
MadaTech - The Israel National Museum of Science, Technology & Space, Israel;
Nausicaa - Societé d'Exploitation du Centre National de la Mer, France;
OBSERVA Science in Society, Italy;
Techniquet, UK;
Technopolis - The Flemish Science Center, Belgium;
Teknikens Hus, Sweden;
Universeum, Sweden;
University of Lapland - Artic Centre, Finland.



LCD in Techniquet, Wales, UK



LCD in Ahhaa, Estonia

“Do you commit to action on climate change? I do”
 (www.i-do-climate.eu) was the message of the ACCENT project, engaging the public inside and outside of science centres and museums across Europe with exhibitions, school labs, science demonstrations, participatory games, teacher training sessions, lectures and debates throughout 2010.

*do you commit to action
on climate change?*



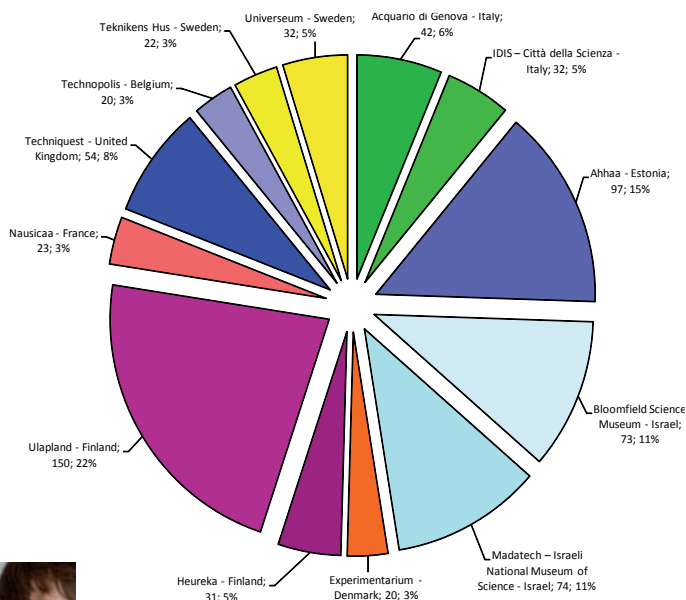


LOCAL CITIZENS DEBATES: SCIENCE CENTRES AS MEETING-POINTS

The ACCENT proposal has been to associate the communication actions with a **participative** approach in order to better engage citizens in the debate of climate change. To reach this goal the main instrument introduced has been the **Local Citizens Debate (LCD)**, a local meeting involving various actors: scientists from local research institutes, stakeholders, decision makers at the local level, civil society organisations and of course citizens. Citizens have had the possibility of dealing with the local dimension of climate change (at regional and local level) in relation with the global dimension, offering useful tools for European decision makers.

Two Local Citizens Debates were organised in each science centre partner in the project.

The LCD format entails five phases: Remote preparation, Warming-up, Discussion, Working group, Communication.



LCDs participants all over Europe and Israel (670 citizens and 105 experts)



LCD in Ahhaa, Tartu, Estonia

This format has the main advantage of putting citizens in a more powerful position thanks to the possibility, given by the Warming-up phase, to discuss issues among themselves without listening to and being influenced by the experts'/stakeholders'

perspective beforehand. During the Discussion phase **citizens** exchange views and make questions together with a **panel of experts** including variably scientists, stakeholders, journalists and institutional representatives. In the Working group phase citizens join together without experts/stakeholders to sum up in a single text their proposals, critical aspects and a **list of recommendations and observations at local, national or European level**.

The last phase is **Communication**; a spokesperson nominated by citizens read the text containing the recommendations in a public meeting, a kind of press conference with journalists, decision makers, representatives of the civil society, etc.

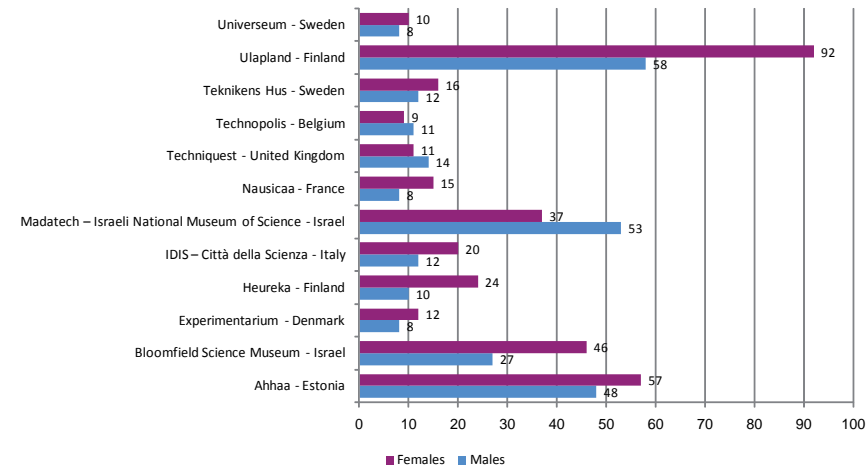
Twenty-five Local Citizens Debates took place across Europe and Israel and three focus groups composed of young people were organised in Italy (Le Castella, Naples and Padua) in 2010. Almost 700 people and more than 100 experts were involved in the LCDs.



LCD in Ahhaa, Tartu, Estonia



LCD in Techniquet, Cardiff, Wales, UK



LCDs participants by gender

Local Citizens Debates in figures:

- 670 people
- 105 experts
- 35 young people involved in focus groups in Italy
- 25 LCDs organised across Europe and Israel
- 9 Countries involved



IS IT SO FAR?

From Denmark: *"We would like more stories of what is affecting real people right now – more information on human consequences and what can be done to reduce those consequences".* - Experimentarium

From Finland: *"It is practical information about the consequences of concrete choices that is needed the most. The same act can have a global impact as well as an effect on one's immediate surroundings. A personal emission budget model could help to perceive the importance of one's own choices to the global situation. The basis for everything is a positive attitude".*
- Heureka

Climate change seemed to be a distant phenomenon according to most of the panellists; they are not very used to connecting climate change to local events. **Citizens request communication from the mass media and institutions** about the effects of climate change on everyday life. Climate change is usually associated with global warming and the melting of North Pole icecaps, without considering the consequences on the local environment and what everyone can do to avoid them. The mass media tend to present the climate change issue as a global problem instead of considering its repercussions on the local context.



Giancarlo Sartore, Italy, 2003

INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR: REINVENTING LIFESTYLES

From France - Recommendation for Companies: *"To communicate internally to encourage car pooling, paper economy, recto-verso printing, and turning down heating systems by employees".* - Nausicaa

Almost every citizen says that it is essential for everyone to play a part, even if it is difficult to translate the will to slow down climate change into practice. The public needs to be shown some good examples of what each citizen can do. **Institutions and the mass media are asked to give precise indications about virtuous or harmful behaviours** and their contribution to reducing or worsening climate change. For instance, it would be valuable for people to know more about how much their actions contribute to reducing CO² emissions. Institutions and the mass media must contribute towards helping people be more aware of how to be more environmentally friendly.

TRANSPORT

"How many unnecessary car journeys do we all make?". The Israeli panel suggested **encouraging car-pooling** to and from public offices by issuing only one parking permit per group of workers. This panel also advised allowing cyclists to transfer (with their bikes) between various forms of transport. A further suggestion was to provide bicycle parking at all destinations, e.g. shops, sports centres, schools etc.

FOOD

There is a general request to stimulate the consumption of products that do not implicate long-distance transport. *"Why are school lunches not made of locally produced food?"*, participants in the Swedish LCDs asked. They suggested demanding the sale of "zero-kilometre" food. *"And why don't we drink tap water? It is more carefully monitored than bottled water and we would avoid millions of tons of plastic waste"*.



Giancarlo Sartore, Italy, 2003

LIFESTYLES

It is generally agreed that there is a need to change lifestyle in order to consume in a more responsible manner. Styles of life should be (are) **non-accidental choices**, but very conscious ones, which should be especially true when looking at climate change. In future, it is hoped that people will be informed about **positive behaviours** that may be implemented without being considered penalising or tiring, focusing instead on the fact that they also represent a **more intelligent, useful and pleasant lifestyle**. *"How can we communicate the fact that climate change offers the opportunity to innovate?"*, the French asked. Too much negative information generates public guilt, and they

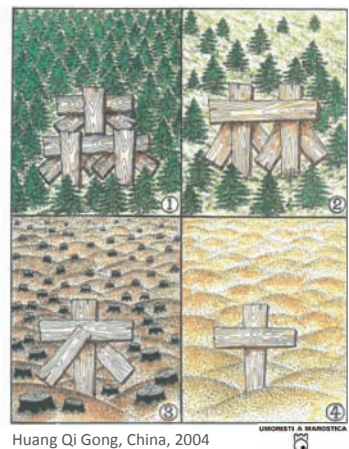


Focus group in Padua, Italy

From Finland: *"We need to focus more on the consumer behaviour of people. The consumer behaviour of Finns affects considerably the amount of energy consumed, not only the Finnish cold climate"*. - Ulapland

From Wales, UK: *"Reverse the 're-cycling' habit and promote reducing, reusing and THEN recycling"*. - Techniquest

From Finland: *"Need to change the structure of the society to facilitate for the reduction of energy consumption. The State also needs to make more holistic solutions regarding the issue"*. - Ulapland



Huang Qi Gong, China, 2004



LCD in Ahhaa, Tartu, Estonia

suggested communicating a “win-win” relationship in the short and long terms. That is, **protecting the Planet also brings about personal benefits** (economy, health, well-being,...). There is a need for some sort of **popular education on climate change**. Citizens demand more information and sensitisation campaigns through the media (TV, internet, SMS, radio, etc) to realise types of culture and behaviour that are less damaging to the environment. In the panellists’ opinion, the most important actions that can be taken are **discussion, reflection on daily life, and thinking through the smaller decisions made in everyday life**. We need to focus more on people’s consumption behaviour, promoting a lifestyle that reduces the use of finite resources.

INFORMATION: POSITIVE AND ACTIVE

From Italy:

“Media should make room for good practices, by indicating the cases of single individuals and institutions that may be an example for the others”.

- Genoa Aquarium

From France:

“To communicate more positively to encourage action, to give ideas of action to spectators. To develop participatory tools in order to facilitate exchange among citizens and forward their proposals to decision makers”.

- Nausicaa

From Finland:

“Global warming should be made fashionable with the help of (...) entertainment programs on television. What is the carbon footprint of your favourite celebrity”. - Heureka

There is no lack of information about climate change; the question is how it is presented. The information is intermittent, confused, alarmist and contradictory. As a consequence, there is a difficulty in understanding an issue and making decisions. People feel overpowered by conflicting fearful messages. *“We know a lot, but it’s difficult to translate knowledge into action”*, the Swedish panellists said, while the Welsh asked for **more positive, rather than scaremongering, promotion of climate change**. The Genoa panellists asked, instead, for information from the media that “sets off the alarm” without being alarmist. Similarly, the Danish claimed, *“it is also acceptable to scare us a little - if the scary scenarios are based on realistic facts”*.



Witold Myszyrowicz, Poland, 2004

Science appears to be divided, unable to give certain and definitive answers. The industrial society has turned into a “risk society” where uncertainty is an endemic feature and science is unable to make exact predictions because of its complexity, as the German sociologist Ulrich Beck claimed. In spite of this, in accordance with the theory of public understanding of science, people still trust science and its capacity to plug the information gap.

Journalists and scientists should cooperate in **improving information and avoiding confusion**. They should “have regular dialogue”, it was said during the LCD in Gothenburg (Sweden), so that the media representatives have up-to-date climate change information.

The public, especially young people, demonstrate good media competence; they are conscious of the mass media genres, practices and risks. The suggestion they make is to offer free performances of film, theatre, etc. on the theme of climate change for involving the young audience.

From Finland: *“The best way to encourage action were small tips, such as the local energy company’s “10 steps to saving energy”-event. Ideas that require no money or expertise cause the most action”.*
- Heureka

From Italy: *“Citizens should not take the information lying down but should do something (through e-mails and letters written to editorial offices) to ask newspapers to talk more about topics related to climate change; therefore information should not only start from institutions and media but also from citizens”.* - Genoa Aquarium

The **influence** of the mass media on the public’s perception of climate change is particularly evident in Italy. When the panellists were asked to speak freely about global warming they spontaneously mentioned waste separation as a problem. The centrality of this topic - and the sceptical positions about the usefulness of the waste separation - may be explained by the fact that the Italian mass media covered in depth the (still unresolved) rubbish problem in Naples. The images of piles of trash in the streets of Naples have gone around the world, communicating a message of environmental danger.

Not only the public, but also **journalists themselves speak about the low reliability of the mass media**. The media are clearly not neutral; they unintentionally distort information because of their practices – spectacularization – and they intentionally distort information for their own ends.

COMMUNICATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: MASS MEDIA INFLUENCE

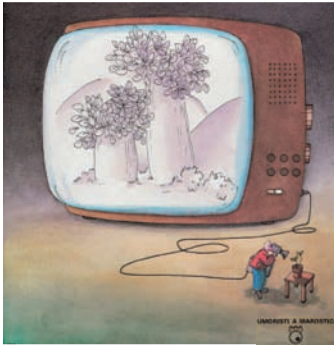
From France: *“To identify reliable websites: set up Top «10» or «20», to rank the websites in categories according to target public or type of information”.* - Nausicaa

From France: *“To create a cartoon mini-series about climate change. The cartoons are very effective and attract all types of audiences”.*
- Nausicaa



NEED OF “WATCHDOG” JOURNALISM

From Wales, UK: *“Recruit and train a network of climate change advocates to communicate messages such as that used in the workshop to wider local community groups”*. - Techniquest



Franco Chiavegato, Italy, 1984

From Sweden: *“Educate and support climate ambassadors nationwide who can keep the climate dialogue alive and reach the citizens in their living environment”*. - Universeum

From Wales, UK: *“Legislate that all new buildings are built with provision to use solar/wind energy and have rain water storage. Promote retro fit by offering one stop shops and financial schemes”*. - Techniquest

“Who do we believe?”. The question asked by the Welsh panel goes beyond the national borders and characterizes the history of media studies. Journalism seems to be far from being a “watchdog”. Mainstream media are not independent of economic and political interests and the public is aware of this. According to the Italian groups, the national mass media do not cover climate change well because politics is not very interested in this issue.

Eurobarometer surveys show that Europeans do not have a great trust in the mass media, and this trend is particularly evident in Italy.

According to the young focus group participants, nowadays the watchdog role seems to be played by the **Internet: people are able to evaluate climate change phenomenon from different points of view. The web is open to democracy;** if information is incorrect, anyone can respond and refute.

Local administrations, in particular, should raise public awareness and inform about themes linked to climate changes. For instance, the citizens said, *“it is important to receive from the media **information about European directives** adopted to contain climate change and the **sanctions** that may be inflicted on Italy if/when these are infringed”*. Even if implicitly, it is evident that the public wants ‘watchdog’ journalism, capable of investigating.



LCD in Madatech, Haifa, Israel



REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS


A need is expressed for some sort of popular “education” on climate change, as if **climate friendly behaviours can be induced**. In fact, the Finnish claimed that if electric power cost more, people would probably start thinking about how to consume less. The Swedish panel, instead, claimed *“the introduction of car rebates has resulted in more environmentally-friendly cars. Sweden also has a goal to eliminate electrically heated houses by the year 2020. To reach this goal, the government pays a rebate; “rebates” and “rewards” are the key words”*.

This attitude is clear across all panels. The Genoa panel said: *“it is necessary to provide benefits for those who behave in an eco-sustainable manner, in order to avoid demanding constant efforts without any reward”*. The Naples group asked for an increase in the communication of environmental incentives. Similarly, the Welsh pannellists support the idea of help for families to upgrade heating and insulation and of highlight their personal carbon footprint with **rewards for “good” behaviours**.

From Wales, UK: *“Reward and penalties for unnecessary packaging vs. cost of removal. (...) Rewards for recycling”*. - Techniquest

From Sweden: *“As citizens, we want to be rewarded if we change our habits. It may be with a higher quality of life instead of economic incentives”*. - Universeum

From Wales, UK: *“Personal carbon footprint accounts set up with rewards for “good” behaviour. Linked to EPC (European Payments Council) certificate for house, cars, etc.”*. - Techniquest



The Finns think *“increased knowledge in connection with the consumption of energy and natural resources motivates people to start acting on behalf of reducing climate change”*. People seem to believe that the more they know, the more they are likely to act. But it is not enough for people to know about climate change in order to be engaged. They also need to care about it, be **motivated and able to take action** (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, Whitmarsh, 2007). *“Does the information given lead to action?”*, the Welsh pannellists asked. People also underline the need for laws (i.e., to produce less packaging and reduce power and water consumption). Topics such as climate change and pro-environmental behaviour involve attitudes and values deeply rooted in personality. Long-term social change towards sustainability can be promoted gradually through an education that creates community values and **environmental citizenship**.

For this reason, policies and local/governmental decisions are in a central position.

FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION

From Italy: *“Media should spread information about the behaviours that may be adopted at an individual level in order to contain climate change, by indicating the value and the results that may be obtained having certain behaviours (e.g. how much CO² may be saved)”*. - Genoa Aquarium

From Finland: *“The northern conditions and the regional prerequisites need to be taken into consideration when deciding pricing strategies, taxation of energy and energy reduction politics”*. - Ulapland



POLICY IMPLICATIONS TO LIMIT CLIMATE CHANGE

From France: *“To promote business exchange, «green» business forums (with awards) in order to share good practices and encourage innovation”.*
- Nausicaa

From Wales, UK: *“CO² is fixed by plants. Therefore encourage planting and utilise new technology such as ‘grass bricks’ in urban areas”.*
- Techniquet

From Belgium: *“Politicians and governmental institutions should encourage people by implementing different kinds of actions such as more premiums, paying less taxes if the population uses green energy”.*
- Technopolis

It is considered very important to fund research, *“to do research and develop new technologies”*, as the Swedish panel said. It is recognized that research plays a fundamental role in the development of alternative energy sources and solutions limiting climate change. In the opinion of the Swedish panel, research should lead to improving the transport system, breaking away from petroleum and fossil fuel dependence. This is why they think that the government should **invest more in research**. A country's growth depends on research, which is considered synonymous of progress. Although the public's opinion of research is extremely positive, there also seems to be an awareness of the presence of some risk factors. *“What risks are there for climate research when oil companies invest a lot of money in this research?”*, the Swedes asked.



GREEN ENERGY PERCEPTION: IS IT WORTHWHILE?

From Israel: *“The first step is changing habits of energy waste in homes, workplaces, etc. Budgets for Green energy production”.*
- Madatech

The panellists' opinions about alternative energies are contrasting. On the one hand, people think that these sources represent the future; on the other they have some doubts in terms of cost/benefits. The Genoa panel highlighted some limitations which are due to the supply, which is not constant and not sufficient to satisfy global energy needs. The mass media tend to emphasize or minimize the potential of alternative energies, and this is probably the reason why the Welsh ask for information that is more honest. A crucial point is the definition released by the mass media of clean energy as zero impact, even if it is impossible to totally eliminate the environmental impact at the present moment. *“Are bio-fuels eco-sustainable?”*, the Naples panel asked, reminding that

the use of bio-fuel is increasing cultivations and this augments CO² emissions in the atmosphere. Some also asked for **laws that stimulate the use of green energy**. Climate change is, first of all, a problem of limited resources. For this reason, it is necessary to avoid waste, and, on the other hand, to increase research activities to **improve the efficiency of technology**. More efficiency is required for both traditional and alternative sources of energy. The European (and Kyoto) 20-20-20 targets for 2020 include a 20% increase in the share of 'renewables' in the energy mix. *"But what about the remaining 80%"*, a Genoa (Italy) panellist queried. The only solution seems to be to **improve efficacy and efficiency through research**.



LCD in Bloomfield Science Museum, Israel



LCD in Techniquist, Cardiff, Wales, UK

Almost all panellists agree that it is important to have personal and local involvement, as **everybody must play their part at different levels**, from the single citizen to large companies and state administrations. The EU is expected to give directions to the member states, while national governments should dictate the guidelines for enterprises, citizens and local institutions. The latter, in turn, are called to devise rules and good practises.

A fundamental role is attributed to schools. Young people are more likely to embrace change, as it is their future. This is why the Welsh panel asked for more education on climate change from pre-school upwards. It is important for new generations to think globally and to act locally, so it is essential to work on the new generations in order to develop the correct messages about climate change.

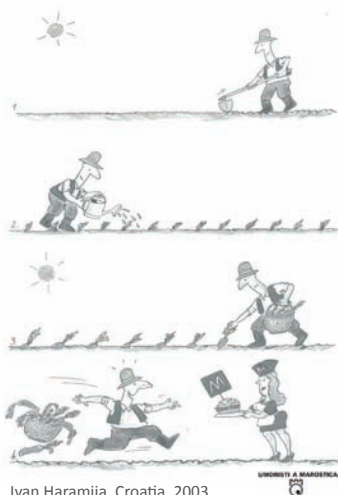
In citizens' opinion, **environmental education in schools** should be introduced by European law. Education must start in primary schools with children and families, in order to include new school programmes and **promote knowledge about the impact that everyone has on the planet**.

EDUCATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: A TOP-DOWN & BOTTOM-UP SYNERGY

From Italy: *"It is necessary to create information spreading places, vastly located on the territory, with the aim of allowing a structured approach to communication"*. - Genoa Aquarium

From Italy: *"To introduce environmental education in schools with European laws"*. - IDIS Città della Scienza

From France: *To integrate the ecological approach as a new discipline in the school curricula, where pupils would learn to consume responsibly and "smarter"*. - Nausicaa



Ivan Haramija, Croatia, 2003

These new programmes should include global warming topics with not only scientific aspects (for instance explaining easy ways to minimize greenhouse gasses) but also economic and political aspects – that is, a 360-degree education.

The panellists highlighted the importance of forming a network that unites the forces and goals of the different interest groups. Universities could cooperate more with municipalities, while scientists and the mass media should have regular meetings. Furthermore, researchers are asked to use more simple language. **Associations, NGOs and science centres are considered very important in promoting new models of behaviour, as is the single person.** Citizens should not take the information passively, but should send e-mails and letters to editorial offices to ask newspapers to talk more about topics related to climate change and make suggestions for improvement to city councils.

Institutions and the mass media are called to give feedback on how well we are doing and whether we are meeting local goals. In order to do that, they might use the social media more.

ECONOMIC REASONS: HIGHLIGHTING POSITIVE INITIATIVES

From Finland: *“A more transparent system regarding the pricing of energy must be established to prevent the loss of legitimization toward increasing prices of energy”.*
- Ulapland

From Sweden: *“There is no lack of information, the question is how it is presented. There is a need for more concrete examples and positive role models. Different people are affected in different ways!”.* - Teknikens Hus

Panelists asked for pressure to be put on large industries to reduce carbon emissions and for the imposition of a time limit for companies of all sizes to reduce carbon emission, with penalties for those who fail. The goal is to stimulate an economy that respects the environment and to turn consumer marketing into **environmental marketing**.

Industries are asked to create quality trademarks for their products that take into account environmental impact. They should communicate internally with their employees to encourage car-pooling, paper economy, recto-verso printing, and turning down heating systems.

Highlighting positive initiatives may encourage other companies and people to take them up.

In any case, many people feel that the big corporations have an obligation to report on their “sustainable development”, to quantify and make public the environmental impact of the company.

Generally, people are more interested in the political and economic aspects of climate change than the scientific aspects. This is probably due to the fact that science is still perceived as something distant. Sometimes the scarcity of “technical” information is not casual; *“inadequate knowledge of the Kyoto agreement amongst citizens prevents politicians from being held to account”*, the Welsh said. **People want to be informed either at a local or global level.** The first step is to recognize localised schemes that work, and are seen to work, and then to extend them. At the same time, **stopping climate change is a global challenge and efforts must be coordinated.** Policy makers should work effectively with other countries on climate actions to tackle this issue.

If, on the one hand, citizens acknowledge the necessity of a more sustainable development, on the other hand they rely on progress and hope that science and technology may solve some actual problems without upsetting lifestyles. Society changes very fast and the challenge is more than ever open.

From Sweden:

“Give feedback to citizens taking action in a desirable way. The public wants to know if and how their actions matter e.g. if you separate your waste”.

“Highlight role models (individuals, organizations, companies) who in one way or another are contributing to positive change. Highlight positive news. Cooperate with the authorities to give positive feedback to citizens who struggle to reduce emissions”.

- Universeum



