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DISCO

# NEWSLETTER #2

The past semester, the DISCO project arranged two **Peer Review** meetings that brought partners and stakeholders together to exchange experience and deepen our joint learning.

In May 2025, the DISCO partners met in **Aalborg, Denmark**, with a focus on regulatory frameworks and how policies can better support the use of waste heat in district heating and cooling systems. In addition to the workshop sessions, participants took part in two study visits: one to **Aalborg Utility and the Nordjyllandsværket power plant**, and one to **Aalborg Portland Cement Factory**, where surplus heat and innovative cooling solutions are integrated into the local energy system.

Building on this, the Peer Review in **Assen, the Netherlands** (December 2025) focused on the economic aspects and financing conditions for district heating and cooling. The programme also included a study visit to **Attero – The Circular Company**, providing insights into how waste processing, energy recovery and district heating can be linked within a circular economy approach.

Together, the two Peer Reviews reinforced the value of interregional cooperation. By openly sharing challenges, experiences and solutions, the DISCO partnership continues to strengthen its work on improving regional policy instruments and accelerating the transition to sustainable heating and cooling.

In this e-newsletter, you can read reflections and key takeaways from all DISCO partners, sharing their regional perspectives, experiences and insights gained from the Peer Review meetings.



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Botoșani Municipality



City of Zrenjanin

## Aalborg Municipality, DK

The peer review meetings in Aalborg and Assen confirmed that Denmark, in many respects, has been on a strong and consistent path in developing district heating and cooling (DHC) systems over several decades. This long-term approach has resulted in mature technologies, stable financing models, and well-integrated systems.



In Denmark, financing mechanisms for district heating are relatively well established, but regulatory adjustments are needed to better integrate SMEs and low-temperature waste heat sources. The peer reviews highlighted that enabling regulation must be supported by strong planning tools and data-driven decision-making. This was clearly illustrated by the Waste Heat Cadastre from Lower Silesia, which digitally maps the location and potential of waste heat sources to support energy-efficient planning and investment decisions. Beyond planning and regulation, the peer reviews also emphasized the importance of social acceptance for successful implementation.

Going forward, strengthening SME engagement and deepening collaboration with Aalborg Utility – including exploring the potential for a test site – will be key focus areas for Aalborg Municipality within the DISCO project.

## Botoșani Municipality, RO

Participation in Peer Review 1 offered Botoșani Municipality valuable insights into best practices and revealed several lessons applicable to the Romanian context:

- **Municipal Empowerment:** The Danish model underlined the advantages of empowering local authorities with the legal tools and operational control needed to manage and invest in DHC infrastructure. In contrast, Romanian municipalities often face regulatory limitations that prevent them from fully engaging in energy system planning.
- **Industrial Partnerships:** The Aalborg Portland case emphasized the importance of identifying and collaborating with local industries as potential sources of waste heat—an opportunity largely untapped in Botoșani. Mapping such sources and initiating feasibility studies could be a key first step.
- **Digitalization:** The integration of real-time monitoring and smart technologies in Aalborg's heating system demonstrated tangible benefits in terms of performance, transparency, and energy efficiency. Botoșani recognizes the need to explore similar tools to improve its own district heating services.



These reflections will inform the ongoing development of local policy recommendations and contribute to the regional action plan under the DISCO project.

## City of Zrenjanin, RS

The peer review meetings in Aalborg and Assen provided valuable opportunities to exchange experiences with other European regions and to gain insights into how policy frameworks, economic conditions and financing mechanisms affect the development of district heating and cooling systems. Discussions highlighted the importance of long-term strategic planning, stable regulatory environments and concrete financing models in addressing barriers such as high initial investment costs and fragmented funding schemes. Particularly relevant for Zrenjanin were examples from Poland and Romania on the use of waste heat from engines and wastewater treatment and sewage facilities.



From the perspective of Zrenjanin, the peer reviews were relevant to ongoing work on strengthening local policy instruments related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and the use of waste heat. The exchange of examples showed that successful implementation requires not only technical solutions, but also cooperation between municipalities, utilities, energy agencies and other stakeholders.

In the next phase of the project, the main objective is to identify and map waste heat potential in the City of Zrenjanin. Experiences shared by partners, including a similar initiative presented by Poland and a regional energy strategy from the Drenthe region, will support this work and its alignment with the National Energy Strategy.

## Codema - Dublin's Energy Agency, IE

During the DISCO Peer Review meeting in Aalborg, Codema participated both as a contributor and as a panellist. As part of the panel discussion, Codema shared experience from the Tallaght District Heating System in South Dublin County, an innovative Irish project that harnesses waste heat from a data centre to provide low-carbon heat to public and residential buildings.

This exchange also provided a valuable opportunity to receive feedback and insights from other project partners. Representatives from Kildare County Council attended the meeting as regional stakeholders, enabling constructive dialogue and knowledge exchange with European peers.

A key takeaway from the Aalborg Peer Review was the importance of structured, data-driven heat planning at local and regional level.





The Danish experience highlighted how systematic heat mapping, strong governance and early stakeholder engagement can de-risk district heating projects and support strategic decision-making. The peer review discussions also underlined the value of clear institutional roles and long-term planning frameworks to enable investment in heating infrastructure.

These insights strongly resonate with challenges currently faced by Irish local authorities, where guidance on heating and cooling planning is still emerging.

The peer review also reinforced the importance of cross-sector collaboration. As a result, Codema has strengthened engagement with key infrastructure stakeholders, including Irish Water, to support data sharing and improve the evidence base for future heating and cooling plans in Ireland.

## IRENA - Istrian Regional Energy Agency, HR

Participation in the DISCO peer review meetings in Aalborg and Assen provided valuable insights into both strategic and practical aspects of developing district heating and cooling systems, with a particular focus on waste heat utilisation.

The second peer review was especially relevant for our region, as it addressed financing opportunities for district heating and cooling projects. Through structured peer exchange and open dialogue among partners and stakeholders, we gained a clearer understanding of different funding models, governance approaches and the role of public-private cooperation in enabling such investments. The sharing of concrete examples from other European regions helped translate policy concepts into real, implementable solutions.



A particularly strong impression was made during the study visit on the second day, where the synergy between circular economy principles and the use of waste streams for thermal energy production was demonstrated in practice. Seeing how waste is effectively integrated into local energy systems highlighted the tangible benefits of cross-sectoral cooperation and long-term strategic planning. This experience served as a strong source of inspiration and reinforced the importance of viewing waste not as a burden, but as a valuable energy resource.

For our region, these peer reviews confirmed the relevance of strengthening links between energy planning, waste management and financing mechanisms. The insights gained will support ongoing discussions with local and regional stakeholders and encourage the exploration of similar integrated solutions adapted to local conditions. Overall, the peer review process proved to be an important learning opportunity, providing both strategic direction and practical inspiration for future actions within the DISCO project framework.

## House of Energy e.V., DE

The combination of discussions and practical examples is what makes these project meetings so valuable. They are crucial for gaining inspiration and further developing our own policy instruments in a targeted manner.



The workshops in particular highlighted how diverse the perspectives are—and how much we can learn from each other.

At the second meeting in Assen, it became clear that regardless of whether we are talking about Sweden, Romania, or Germany, the issue of financing is crucial everywhere. Without viable models, we will not make any progress on the heat transition.

## Province of Drenthe, NL

Hosting a Peer Review meeting enabled us to dive deeper into the DISCO project. With a strong focus on the economic aspects and financing options for district heating and cooling systems, the meeting offered ample opportunities for further development. One striking example was an engaging presentation on EU funds related to the development of district heating. The presenters elaborated on the availability and eligibility of existing subsidies across the different stages of district heating development. Gabriele Pesce, Director of Innovation & Sustainable Finance at Euroheat & Power, explained the opportunities and conditions associated with these EU funds. This input was highly valuable for us at the Province of Drenthe, as gaining a deeper understanding of these mechanisms enables closer cooperation with our local partners.

Subsidies provide us with an important tool to engage these partners, as the information shared during the presentation directly relates to one of our remaining challenges: ensuring that all parties are sufficiently involved and willing to provide the necessary pre-financing for the various stages of the DISCO project. By sharing the insights gained during the Peer Review meeting with these stakeholders, we can offer them additional options and concrete opportunities to achieve a positive outcome aligned with the objectives of DISCO. Pre-financing is a prerequisite for applying for these subsidies and therefore a crucial step towards securing funding. Clearly explaining the benefits of pre-financing will encourage partners to take the required action.



For the Province of Drenthe, this is the first time such a large district heating network is being developed under the new heat law in the Netherlands. We are therefore both pleased and enthusiastic to gain valuable experience from other partners within the Interreg DISCO project.

## The Lower Silesian Voivodeship, PL

Poland has one of the largest district heating networks in Europe; however, its transformation remains a major challenge due to a high reliance on coal, high emissions, and significant heat transmission losses. In this context, Lower Silesia draws on the experience of DISCO project partners and stakeholders, gained inter alia through international peer reviews, and seeks to take these experiences into account in the implementation of the regional programme FEDS 2021–2027, in particular with regard to support for SMEs.

Participation in the peer reviews in Aalborg and Assen made it possible to identify both inspiring solutions related to local district heating systems and waste heat utilisation, as well as barriers that hinder the implementation of investments. Key challenges discussed included concerns about investment profitability, regulatory uncertainty, and the need to better inform companies about available technologies and financing opportunities. The involvement of experts helped to deepen knowledge about solutions applied in other regions and about financing options at different stages of the investment process. The discussions also confirmed the value of smaller, coordinated projects and investments based on local resources, as well as the importance of information and educational activities addressed to local communities and the active involvement of stakeholders.



At the same time, more in-depth cooperation on the mutual use of good practices has been initiated. Within the consortium, areas of particular interest have begun to emerge among several DISCO partners, around which further initiatives and projects may develop in the next stages of the project through continued exchange of experience.

## North Sweden Energy Agency, SE

North Sweden Energy Agency participated in the two peer review meetings in Aalborg and Assen together with local stakeholders from Norrbotten, gaining valuable insights for the regional development of district heating and cooling systems.



The peer review in Aalborg, attended together with Arvidsjaur Energi AB, provided relevant input on how regulations can enable or hinder the use of waste heat in smaller and more remote municipalities. In Assen, Pajala municipality took part in discussions on financing DHC systems. For small municipalities such as Pajala, long-term economic sustainability is essential when planning DHC solutions.

The exchanges confirmed that Norrbotten shares many challenges with other European regions. At the same time, concrete examples from other regions showed how cooperation between municipalities, energy agencies and industry can help turn waste heat into a resource.



## Region of Crete, EL

As a partner in the DISCO project, the Region of Crete is engaging with an innovative approach that introduces new perspectives and solutions, addressing a previously unexplored dimension of the island's energy transition. During the meetings held in Aalborg and Assen, the Region of Crete gained valuable insights into a systemic approach to district heating, which can serve as a reference model for the island. These exchanges highlighted the potential for developing a sustainable energy ecosystem tailored to Crete's specific characteristics and needs, as well as the importance of an integrated regional strategy to support the island's sustainable energy transition.

The establishment of a clear and coherent framework can facilitate the effective introduction of innovative technologies while also enabling a constructive and structured dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. Through experience sharing, knowledge exchange, and the presentation of successful examples by project partners, the Region of Crete aims to lay a solid foundation for a regional energy strategy that addresses regional energy needs and identifies appropriate financial instruments to significantly strengthen future initiatives.



Botoşani Municipality



City of Zrenjanin