The region as a signatory of the Climate City Contract

Region of Valencia, Spain

The Region of Valencia is one of Spain's 17 Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autonomas*), also known as self-governing regions. These regions enjoy considerable autonomy within the Spanish decentralised governance structure, granting them authority over various areas important to achieving climate neutrality. Additionally, they share competency in certain areas with the national level. Concurrently, municipal responsibilities vary according to their demographic size, although all municipalities have mandatory core competences. Given the large size of the City of Valencia, it assumes responsibility for a wide range of areas, many of which are important to the local climate work.

The Region of Valencia and the City of Valencia have a long history of multi-level collaboration across diverse fields, including agriculture and waste management. At the time when discussions on missions emerged at the EU level, both the city and the region demonstrated a shared political concern regarding climate change. Both administrations were already developing policies to tackle this pressing challenge, including the Law on Climate Change and Ecological Transition at the regional level and the València 2030 Urban Strategy at the local level.

The establishment of a local climate mission

In 2020, the City of Valencia adopted Missions València 2030 – a local mission-oriented governance framework aimed at addressing the city's major challenges by 2030. Prior to its adoption, the city undertook several preparatory activities. This included the establishment of a City Council Energy Commission, a collaborative initiative involving various city departments, and the creation of an Energy Transition Board, which engaged actors from the local ecosystem. Notably, the regional administration participated as one of the public stakeholders in this board, which served as an experimental governance space for developing transition management methodologies within the city's urban strategy and exploring innovative approaches to developing the local climate mission through the identification of specific demonstration projects. A series of workshops and dialogues were conducted with the local ecosystem to collectively identify the key focus areas for the new local missions.

The first local mission adopted by the city council was the València Climate-Neutral Mission, serving as a springboard for Valencia's participation in the EU Mission on 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 (Cities Mission). In 2022, both the city and regional administrations decided to join the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change (Mission Adaptation), resulting in an expansion of the local mission to encompass integrated adaptation and mitigation planning. Consequently, the local mission was renamed as 'València 2030 Climate Mission'. The local mission is linked to the València 2030 Urban Strategy, which merges the 2030 Urban Agenda with systemic mission-oriented innovation.

The close collaboration between the city and regional administrations regarding Valencia's climate neutrality efforts stemmed not only from shared objectives but also from a foundation of trust between the two administrations and the establishment of personal relationships through prior joint projects. Valencia was able to swiftly adopt innovative and transformative approaches to its climate neutrality work, thanks to the involvement of individuals with diverse backgrounds from different institutions beyond the two public administrations, who were accustomed to systemic innovation thinking and who brought these new ideas and approaches into the work.

The importance of regional participation in the Cities Mission work

Given the strong role of regions in Spain, the City of Valencia considered a Climate City Contract without the involvement of the regional government to be ineffective. Several mission priorities rely directly on the regional administration, as these issues extend beyond the city's borders. Furthermore, the region has competences in several fields relevant to the city's climate neutrality work, including metropolitan

This project has received funding from the H2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the grant agreement n°101036519.

and regional mobility, education, urban regeneration, urbanism, and energy efficiency of buildings. Additionally, the region plays an important role in effecting regulatory and policy changes essential for accelerating the climate transition.

The regional government endorsed Valencia's Climate City Contract, submitted in spring 2023 and awarded the Mission Label in autumn 2023. Through a set of commitments, the region signalled its dedication to assisting the city in achieving its climate neutrality objective by 2030. These commitments include scaling up of innovations with a metropolitan vision; promoting comprehensive actions that address climate change transversally, such as developing mechanisms for public procurement, regulation, and financing; and strengthening collaboration between city councils and universities.

Expanding the local climate mission, València 2030 Climate Mission, to incorporate climate adaptation fostered closer collaboration between the city and the region. Initially, the region was the sole signatory of the EU Mission Adaptation Charter, with the City of Valencia joining later. This enhanced collaboration facilitated the development of a unified climate narrative for stakeholders, many of whom are shared between the city and region. It also promoted increased cooperation on awareness-raising initiatives and the identification of mutual benefits and opportunities. Integrating mitigation and adaptation in the València 2030 Climate Mission delivered not only a unified action plan but also coherent and integrative governance arrangements.

Around the time of the launch of the Cities Mission, the Region of Valencia was in the process of developing its Law on Climate Change and Ecological Transition. In connection to this work, collaboration with the municipalities was deemed crucial, considering they represented the largest emitters of greenhouse gas emissions. Understanding their emission reduction activities and plans, and exploring ways the region could support these efforts, was integral to align priorities and plans.

The law, adopted in 2022, mandates all municipalities in the region to develop action plans for climate adaptation and mitigation, alongside conducting greenhouse gas inventories. To support the municipalities in this work, the region has provided them with guidelines, some drawing from the City of Valencia's experiences, and offered subsidies either for the development or the implementation of these action plans. One key challenge that remains is the absence of instruments to work in a mission-oriented approach at the metropolitan level, as the climate plans of the other municipalities currently do not align with this innovative approach. This poses challenges for collaboration between the City of Valencia and other municipalities within the metropolitan area, particularly considering that Valencia's greenhouse gas emissions are influenced by the activities of these other municipalities.

Funding the climate transition

In Spain, the regional level channels some funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) towards the local level, which in the City of Valencia have been utilised for projects in areas such as mobility, urban regeneration, and self-consumption. In the development of the València 2030 Urban Strategy and the València 2030 Climate Mission, the city tried to align these with the priorities set in the Recovery and Resilience Plan of Spain, knowing that this instrument would constitute an important source of direct funding.

The Climate City Contract, particularly the Action Plan and Investment Plan, has enabled Valencia to effectively utilise the RRF funds by providing a clear overview of the baseline, timelines for the identified actions, and necessary investments. This has allowed the city to more easily determine the optimal utilisation of the funds. However, the limited involvement of local and regional administrations in the development of Spain's Recovery and Resilience Plan has led to a misalignment between the priorities set out in the plan and the needs of cities and regions. Consequently, the city occasionally needs to adjust its planned actions to better align with the requirements of the calls for the RRF funds.

While the City of Valencia has been successful in utilising RRF funds for its climate initiatives, it holds the view that the actions outlined in the Climate City Contracts cannot be funded solely through projects. To ensure the successful funding of actions accelerating the transition towards climate neutrality, the city advocates for shifting from project-based funding to portfolio funding. This approach emphasises more comprehensive and long-term strategies, utilising flexible and adaptable funding mechanisms.

This project has received funding from the H2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the grant agreement n°101036519.

Lessons learnt

The Region of Valencia and the City of Valencia have gained valuable insights and lessons that can benefit other cities and regions seeking closer collaboration on the Cities Mission and broader climate action initiatives.

- The region should actively participate in advisory boards and other forums established at the city level to understand local climate plans and activities. This involvement will foster ownership, engagement, commitment, and a shared vision, ensuring alignment with regional climate initiatives.
- Utilise and expand existing initiatives and forums to foster closer alignment and collaboration, avoiding the need to reinvent the wheel.
- Integrate efforts on both the Cities Mission and Mission Adaptation to enhance collaboration between regional and city administrations. If the region focuses on Mission Adaptation and the city on the Cities Mission, facilitate joint initiatives to align and strengthen these efforts.
- Ensure that both administrations have personnel who understand the logic and value of a mission-oriented approach. Engage all relevant departments, such as mobility, energy, and environment, and try to facilitate seamless connections between them.

This case study has been developed in collaboration with Jordi Peris Blanes, Tenured Professor, Valencia Polytechnic University and Celsa Monrós Barahona, Climate Adaptation & Regional Innovation Designer & Producer, Climate-KIC Spain.

This project has received funding from the H2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the grant agreement n°101036519.