

Ripe fruits sometimes hang low

Saxony-Anhalt's State Energy Agency wants to dispel fears of the unknown - efficiency and the protection of resources are not the devil's work

Marko Mühlstein likes illustrative comparisons. The manager of the Saxony-Anhalt State Energy Agency (LENA) likes to talk about a toolbox he and his employees open up to support companies, the public sector and the average consumer. There are not any magic formulas in it but lots of possibilities for building bridges to save energy, which is essential for an area with low population density like Saxony-Anhalt, he says. LENA has been dealing with efficiency, sustainability and the protection of resources since it was founded two years ago.

There is not a lack of successful examples during this short time. Mühlstein shows computer images of a building. The Evangelical Secondary School Haldensleben is just undergoing an extensive facelift, where the classic polytechnic secondary school type building from GDR times are whipped into shape in terms of energy, among other things. Solar panels and other measures help save energy costs and create a modern zero-energy building. 36 ventilation units with heat recovery that regulate the room air are installed. Other details, including a rooftop terrace where astronomy lessons are possible as well as a dining hall and library with reading room, make the building a real showpiece. Roughly EUR 4.7 million are invested in this renovation. Just under a third is provided by the Johannes-Schulstiftung foundation as sponsor. 70 percent of the money comes from the EU funded STARK III programme, which has become a successful project in Saxony-Anhalt. Since 2012, viable day-care centres and schools in Saxony-Anhalt have been in the process of being renovated in general and energy terms. "Efficiency and the protection of resources are not the devil's work but do require clear strategies," says Mühlstein. The STARK III package, which amounts to roughly EUR 600 million, is being continued until 2020. LENA is providing advice in the process, contributing with its expertise, knowledge and networking opportunities.

The state sector knows all about the need for action. Programmes like STARK III allow for long overdue investment in the energy efficiency of municipal buildings. They also act as an incentive and door-opener for regional added value, as orders are generated in regional and local SMEs with the many millions of euros. Municipalities recognise that energy costs are exploding and straining budgets which are tight anyway. Whether it be town halls, libraries or swimming pools, it is becoming increasingly important to renovate buildings in terms of energy. "LENA supports and accompanies projects on behalf of the state," affirms Marko Mühlstein. It identifies gaps in supply and shortfall on the market for energy services, assists stakeholders in closing these gaps and prompting an economic boost. He mentions the training of municipal energy officers as an example. There are plenty of reserves, he says and refers to street lighting. Dimmable lights and LED lights are increasingly gaining acceptance. Thanks to these modern options, the regional capital has put its "urban motorway" in a favourable light once again, after this route had lain in darkness for many years for cost reasons.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) between Arendsee and Zeitz need support and assistance, reckons Mühlstein. "They often don't have the professional competence on their staff to act. The potential is there, it just has to be discovered." Simple measures can often be taken very quickly, as "ripe fruits sometimes hang low". This starts with the correct sealing of cold storage, extends to the insulation of heating pipes and ends with appropriate lighting for factory workshops. A separate department at LENA imparts knowledge about energy management and audits, makes valuable suggestions for instruments such as certification and provides additional support services, for example an energy management manual or benchmark analysis.

The State Energy Agency's partners include The German Association for Small and Medium-sized Businesses (BVMW). "Our member companies need this support," says Peter Martini, Head of the Northern Economic Region. Joint information events help them to knowledgeably deal with improving their spending on energy and arouse interest in taking a close look at energy efficiency and processes to reveal reserves. "It's all about dispelling the fear of the unknown," adds Mühlstein.

LENA provides access to examples from practice and establishes contacts between the business and science sectors. One example of how successful this can be is the municipal waste water company in Aschersleben. It cooperates with the Institut für Automation und Kommunikation (ifak) in Magdeburg, which has the necessary experience for process analysis. Using simulations, its experts can carefully examine the processes at the local sewage treatment plant, identify the weaknesses and ultimately exploit the existing energy efficiency potential. Process technology can be optimised and considerably improved in terms of energy using the findings from these kinds of projects.

The ifak experts' suggestions include replacing excessive energy consumers such as fans.

A rethink is important if the turnaround in energy policy is to succeed. Marko Mühlstein is confident that there is a great deal to be achieved even with small steps. As evidence, he places a small square book with colourful illustrations on the table. 30,000 copies of "Lena the Energy Detective" were printed, 250 schools have ordered it and as a result it is almost out of print. "Energie.Kennen.Lernen" ("Know and learn about energy") is the main theme in education, which is initially playing a part in ten pilot schools. LENA's manager Mühlstein is confident that schools will pick up on the subject of energy across the board in the near future; teacher training is already being offered now to get educators up to speed in this field. The toolbox mentioned at the start also proves its strength due to the variety it offers.

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