

Bioenergy in the Upper Rhine Area – There Still Is Potential for Improvement

KIT-coordinated Interreg Project for the Sustainable Use of Biomass in the Upper Rhine Region Presents Research Results and Guidelines – Trinational Conference on June 26 in Karlsruhe



After three years of cross-border research, the OUI Biomasse project presents its results in Karlsruhe. (Photo: KIT)

The trinational, KIT-coordinated research project “OUI Biomasse” has analyzed the potentials of sustainable use of biomass on the Upper Rhine and will present its results and guidelines for future development on June 26 at the Akademiehôtel Karlsruhe. The conclusion drawn by the researchers: Further increase in biomass production is limited, as this would require more area. However, a big potential still lies in increasing the efficiency. Their recommendation for the Upper Rhine region: Development of more efficient technologies, enhanced multiple use of biomass, and transnational exchange of knowledge.

The Alsace in France, Northwest Switzerland with five cantons, large parts of Baden, and the Southern Palatinate – they all make up the Upper Rhine region. It is here, where the borders of three countries meet, where nearly six million French, Swiss, and Germans live in a mild climate, and where extended forests and intensively used farmland, fields, and pastures are grown. The Upper Rhine region, hence, offers excellent conditions for the production of biomass, e.g. rapeseed, corn or wood. By means of combustion or fermentation,

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this biomass can be used to produce bioenergy, i.e. electricity and heat, which is renewable and hardly emits more carbon than the amount bound during the growth of the plants. However, biomass production competes with the cultivation of food and feedstuff and, hence, is viewed critically.

In the Upper Rhine region, biomass is being used for energy production already, but regional differences exist. While the German part mainly focuses on energy plants in the form of wood and corn, Switzerland prefers bioenergy production from organic waste. In Alsace, the share of bioenergy is smaller than in Switzerland and Germany, as France continues to rely on nuclear power.

In spite of the common geography, there has been neither a cross-border strategy for sustainable biomass use, nor an established network for environmental research covering the entire region. The KIT-coordinated trinational INTERREG project "Innovationen für eine nachhaltige Biomassenutzung in der Oberrheinregion (Innovations for Sustainable Use of Biomass in the Upper Rhine Region), briefly called OUI Biomasse, was aimed at filling this gap. The researchers of 19 partner institutions from all three countries focused on the question of how the production of bioenergy on the Upper Rhine can be further developed in a sustainable and environmentally compatible manner.

The results and strategic guidelines with recommendations for a coordinated further development of bioenergy use until 2030 will be presented by the project partners at a final conference on June 26 at the Akademiehôtel Karlsruhe.

For a detailed program of the event, click [here](#).

A central result of research: Further extension of the areas needed for the production of biomass is hardly possible in the already intensively used Upper Rhine region. This would go at the expense of protected areas or areas used for food production and, hence, cannot be recommended.

However, the researchers see a big potential in increasing the efficiency of the biomass utilization paths. They recommend a strong emphasis on the development of new technologies and an improved multiple utilization of wastes. For example, humid household wastes collected in the organic waste bin should be used increasingly for biogas production before they are burned or composted. Moreover, biogas facilities frequently have the problem that the heat produced cannot be used due to lacking infrastructure or demand and, hence,

adversely affects the energy balance. Also here, the researchers see a big potential for increasing efficiency. In addition, they recommend an extensive exchange of knowledge and an “export” of successful models and state funding programs across borders. The German “bioenergy villages” or the Swiss “energy cities”, for instance, might also be tested in neighboring countries.

After the final conference and the presentation of the guidelines, the project partners will use the already established trilateral contacts for the Upper Rhine Cluster for Sustainability Research. The corresponding proposals for EU funding are being set up at the moment. In this way, continuation of research will be ensured and the strategy formulated in the guidelines will be further developed, transferred to actors in politics, industry, and the public, and eventually implemented.

The “OUI Biomasse” project of three years’ duration will expire at the end of June 2015. It was one of seven lighthouse projects of the “INTERREG IV Oberrhein” program to support cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine region.



Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is a public corporation pursuing the tasks of a Baden-Wuerttemberg state university and of a national research center of the Helmholtz Association. The KIT mission combines the three core tasks of research, higher education, and innovation. With about 9,400 employees and 24,500 students, KIT is one of the big institutions of research and higher education in natural sciences and engineering in Europe.

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