



# Transatlantic Sister City and Media Dialogue: Local Initiatives in Climate Protection and Renewable Energies in Germany and the US

## Event

[Visitors Program](#)

## Date

29 November - 2 December 2011

## Location

Chattanooga, United States

Four German-American pairs of sister cities met in Chattanooga, TN (USA) from 29 November to 2 December 2011 in order to compare local efforts on climate protection and explore best practices in renewable energies. The Dialogue that also included German and American journalists was organized by the Ecologic Institute in cooperation with the German Embassy in Washington DC.

Please see links to [reports and articles](#) about this Dialogue by participating journalists at the end of this webstory.

The aim of the Transatlantic Sister City and Media Dialogue was to spur a lasting German-American dialogue at the grassroots level which compares and develops local answers to global questions and helps building networks and ties between the participating sister cities. Participants included representatives, journalists and stakeholders from Los Angeles, CA, and Berlin; Chicago, IL and Hamburg; Columbus, OH and Dresden; and Chattanooga, TN and Hamm.

Ron Littlefield, Mayor of Chattanooga, addressed the participants at the beginning of the event, providing an overview of the remarkable transformation that Chattanooga has undergone in the last four decades, as well as the obstacles it had to face along the way. Known in the late 1960s as the city with the poorest air quality in the United States, Chattanooga has become a clean, attractive and innovative place for people and companies to settle. By reviving its downtown area, creating green spaces, reinventing its waterfront, and introducing a multi-modal transportation system, Chattanooga has successfully reinvented itself and 'made intangibles tangible'.

Further input was provided from several speakers from the [Chattanooga Sustainability Office](#), the [Greater Chattanooga Hospitality Association's Green Committee](#), the University of Tennessee, [Volkswagen Group of North America, Inc.](#), and [Wacker Chemie AG](#), among others. On a number of field trips in and around Chattanooga, such as visits to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certification Ceremony of the Volkswagen assembly plant and the offices of [Green Spaces](#), a local green building initiative, the roughly 40 participants were able to view and experience best practices that demonstrate successful engagement on these topics. An inaugural pilot test ride of the Chattanooga bike sharing system [Bike Chattanooga](#) (to be launched in spring 2012)

provided the opportunity to experience the latest addition to the Chattanooga transport system first-hand.

During the three-day dialogue, participants engaged in active discussions related to energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, green jobs, and climate partnerships and networks, while also identifying lessons from local initiatives implemented in their cities.

Highlights among the local initiatives and practices presented at the dialogue included:

- The collection and recycling of surplus hotel soap in Tennessee
- The LED street lighting pilot project at the Chattanooga North Shore
- The electric shuttle system in place in Chattanooga since 1992
- The soon-to-be-launched [Bike Chattanooga](#) bike sharing system
- Chattanooga's revitalized downtown area
- Green Spaces and the LEED Certification of buildings
- The [Hamm wedding forest](#)
- The Hamm One-Year-without-a-Car project
- Dresden's public utilities (solar panels on Dresden's public roofs such as schools and kindergartens) and related public education and outreach efforts
- Replacement of showerheads and aerators in Chicago (Chicago Housing Authority)

During the discussions, a number of differences between the US and Germany were identified. The German participants, who are used to long planning processes in their home towns, were particularly fascinated by the 'just-do-it' approach of their American counterparts and by the level of engagement seen among citizens, NGOs and philanthropic foundations.

Overall, participants considered a number of issues to be central lessons from the dialogue:

- The importance of strong civil society involvement in planning and implementation processes
- The value of communication and public outreach ("telling the story"), suitable choice of words and creating a fun and personal message (as seen e.g. in Chattanooga)
- Third party certification as a helpful instrument for improving sustainability (e.g. LEED and less costly local programs such as the Tennessee Green Hospitality Program)
- Growing importance of sustainability for both US and German industry and commerce
- The usefulness of measuring, benchmarking and monitoring with suitable metrics
- The power of foreign direct investment to promote cross-national policy change, adding to and often following already existing progress at the local level (e.g. Volkswagen, Alstom and Wacker in Chattanooga)
- The value of networks as a helpful way to connect departments and to create competition between cities regarding their climate and energy work (e.g. [C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group](#), Next 10, [Association of German cities](#), the [EU Covenant of Mayors](#), [Metropolis Network](#), Mayors' Climate Leadership Initiative, [ICLEI](#))
- The importance of problem-focused, goal-oriented and geographically specific transfers of lessons between countries

Participants expressed their hope that the working relationship created among a small group of sister cities during the dialogue can be maintained and expanded going forward, resulting in inspiration for or implementation of common projects in climate protection and sustainable energy.

## Articles and programmes of journalists involved

- [Deutsche und US-Städte wollen beim Klimaschutz voneinander lernen](#) [pdf, 97 kB, Deutsch] (Sibylle Raudies, Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, on different days in different cities, starting on 21 December 2011 / Neue Rhein-Ruhr-Zeitung, 19 December 2011/ Westfalenpost, 16 December 2011 / Westfälische Rundschau 15 December 2011)
- [Öko-Tipps von den Amis](#) [pdf, 330 kB, Deutsch] (Georg Moeritz, Sächsische Zeitung, 20 December 2011, page 19)
- [Transatlantic Sister Cities Dialogue](#) (Rabbit Zielke, WUTC/Chattanooga's Public Radio, 12 December 2011, Englisch)
- [Caddies zum Leihen](#) [pdf, 116 kB, German] (Saskia Wolf, Stadtanzeiger Hamm, 7 Dezember 2011)
- [Cities share energy-efficiency policies](#) (Pam Sohn, Times Free Press, 4 December 2011)
- [Transatlantische Patenschaft](#) [pdf, 451 kB, German] (2 Dezember 2011)
- [Lighting system could save Chattanooga \\$1.5 million](#) (Pam Sohn, Times Free Press, 1 December 2011)
- [Mit Los Angeles und Berlin an einem Tisch](#) [pdf, 488 kB, German] (Hamm Magazin, December 2011)
- [Local Initiatives in Climate Protection and Renewable Energies in Germany and US](#) (Rabbit Zielke, WUTC/Chattanooga's Public Radio, December 2011)
- [The Wedding Forest of Hamm Germany](#) (Rabbit Zielke, WUTC/Chattanooga's Public Radio, December 2011)
- [Der Mann aus dem "Wedding Forest"](#) [pdf, 587 kB, German] (Saskia Wolf, Stadtanzeiger Hamm, 27 November 2011)
- [Fürs Klima nach Chattanooga](#) [pdf, 624 kB, German] (Stadtanzeiger Hamm, 20 November 2011)
- [Energy and Climate Policy in Germany and the U.S. - Best Practice Examples o a Local Level Summit from Chattanooga TN](#) (Nancy Pearlman/Environmental Directions, KBPK FM)

## Funding

[Federal Foreign Office](#) (AA), Germany

## Organizer

[Ecologic Institute](#), Germany

## Partner

[Ecologic Institute US](#) (EIUS), United States

## Team

[Sören Haffer](#)

Katharina Umpfenbach

Jana Siemonsmeier

[Meike Lorenz](#)

Josephine Lenk

[Prof. Dr. Michael Mehling, LL.M.](#)

Elena von Sperber

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