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From healthcare buildings to a district energy system: the path to greener heating in Udine

Barriers to energy efficiency have been amply discussed in literature: even when incentives or savings remove some economic obstacles, a number of financial, organizational, socio-technical and human aspects often prevent green energy concepts from becoming reality.

It is therefore of interest to investigate and reflect on which barriers arose and how they have been overcome when such projects are successfully developed and put into practice.

This is the case of the new district heating system inaugurated in Udine in 2013, a unique example of energy systems integration in that an hospital energy station has become a waste heat source to feed a municipal district heating network, enabling approximately 12% primary energy savings, compared with the previous system configuration.

The path from the district heating concept to its current operation and future prospects is reviewed here, disclosing the actual and potential role of hospitals as large heat consumers, making energy efficiency and renewable energy investments mostly profitable, but also as project developers and energy innovators in a position to originate energy and environmental benefits for districts and whole regions, if a systemic approach is favoured.

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