Iceland solar energy for the environment

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In the race to reach net zero emissions and restore depleted ecosystems, any nation"s win is a victory for us all. But looking to the most positive examples on the continent can help inspire and pressure our own politicians to follow suit.

Of course it"s not an even playing field. From the windy coastlines of Sweden to Albania"s wild rivers, each country has its unique natural resources. As well as its particular political and economic context that could be helping or hindering climate action.

Last month we looked at how Denmark"s green leadership is inspiring other European nations.

This month, we"re celebrating Iceland"s unique approach to keeping carbon emissions down as it heats more than 130,000 households.

Iceland generates more than 86 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources according to Eurostat and around 66 per cent of this comes from its geothermal resources.

The country lies on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. This is a very active geothermal zone providing a great source of heat for Iceland"s homes.

The capital city, Reykjavik, has one of the largest district heating systems in the world, pumping millions of cubic metres of water heated by geothermal sources to its some 200,000 inhabitants.

Not only does this hot water power homes, but it also supplies some of Iceland"s most popular tourist attractions including the famous Blue Lagoon. Created by the neighbouring Svartsengi geothermal power plant, the site allows tourists to learn about the country"s energy landscape.

Heat and light from geothermal sources also help Iceland feed its citizens. Greenhouses, kept warm and bright by this renewable source, grow crops like tomatoes and cucumbers year-round.

Much of the rest of its renewable energy comes from hydropower from rivers fed by glaciers that cover 11 per cent of Iceland"s land mass. Investment in wind power is also growing, contributing to the country"s ever-increasing share of clean energy in its generation landscape.

Following the 1973 oil crisis, Iceland struggled to keep up with fluctuating prices. The government switched its focus to hydropower and geothermal heat instead. Money was put into building new infrastructure for green energy.

Unfortunately, just like everywhere else in Europe, climate change and overconsumption are still a problem. A lack of rainfall and increased demand have left Iceland"s hot water supply nearing its limit, local news outlet Visir reported in 2022.

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Web: https://www.kary.com.pl/contact-us/
Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com
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