

The role of NGOs in the mitigation of Climate Change

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Abstract

Environmental non-governmental organisations (NGO) play a key role in defining and applying policies for reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. At the policy level, most of the action takes places both at National level and at European level, trying to influence all the decision makers in order to achieve higher ambition targets, consistent with science, transparency, and integrity. At the same time, it is crucial to implement solutions at the national level that people can implement easily, from small changes at home, to broader and more structural life style changes. At the European level, the role and policies of an NGO European based federation Climate Action Network Europe / CAN-Europe are presented. At the national level, the mitigation policies that Quercus consider should be applied are also considered. Afterwards, several initiatives more related with environmental education practices are presented, from a daily TV show “The Green Minute” to energy efficiency related projects including benchmark home appliances, vehicles, and other consumer key products. Overall, the “Ecohome” project from Quercus, with an integrated view of sustainability where climate change mitigation is an important component is explained in detail.

A brief description of Quercus

Quercus - Associação Nacional de Conservação da Natureza (National Association for Nature Conservation) (www.quercus.pt) is a private, non-profit, non-government environmental organization, founded in 1985. Quercus' missions are to increase public participation, promote environmental education activities, raise awareness and support citizens on technical, scientific and legal information about environmental issues. Quercus has its headquarters in Lisbon, and 20 local groups, geographically spread from North to South of Portugal that allows a decentralized work approach and intervention. At present, Quercus has more than 13.200 registered members. Quercus has been extremely active in the areas of energy efficiency and climate change, from public awareness to political lobby. At policy level, some of the national policies in force resulted from Quercus direct proposals.

Quercus has developed several projects to help increase energy efficiency in buildings and changing consumers' behaviour. These projects are oriented to the services sector (enterprises and schools) and residential sector (households) and they involve the analysis of energy consumption and suggestion of measures to achieve the calculated potential reduction. In 2004,

Quercus began the EcoCasa program with the purpose of reducing households' energy consumption. Throughout this program, various tools were developed to help citizens making the best energy choices. These tools included a website (www.ecocasa.pt) and other projects were developed to help the implementation of efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption. Examples of these are "Ecofamilies", "EcoIPSS" and "EcoSave" projects.

Besides national projects, Quercus had participated in several IEE-funded projects regarding product's energy efficiency, energy labelling and market surveillance, such as Euro-Topten (national partner of the Euro-Topten Max project in Portugal, www.topten.pt), Come On Labels (national partner, co-financed by ADENE, <http://www.come-on-labels.eu/o-projecto-pt/bem-vindo-pt>), and MarketWatch (national partner, www.market-watch.org.pt). At the policy level, some of the national policies being in force resulted from Quercus direct proposals or lobby influence. Internet and Facebook pages of Quercus and EcoCasa project, a one-minute weekday show on the national wide public RTP TV channel ("Minuto Verde" – Green Minute) and a one-minute weekly programme on the main public radio station Antena 1 ("Um Minuto pela Terra" – One Minute for the Earth), all promoted by Quercus, are used for public awareness purposes, and also interviews and press articles, schools sessions and debates. The organization has been participating in all United Nations conventions for climate change and is also a member of Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe), Transport & Environment (T&E), European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and European Environmental Citizens for Standardization (ECOS) networks and coalition building.

Climate Change – from national to European action

Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's largest coalition working on climate and energy issues. With over 120 member organisations in 30 European countries, CAN Europe works to prevent dangerous climate change and promote sustainable climate and energy policy in Europe.

The Climate Action Network (CAN) is a worldwide network of more than 700 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working to promote government, private sector and individual action to limit human-induced climate change to ecologically sustainable levels. CAN is based on trust, openness and democracy.

The vision of CAN is a world striving actively towards and achieving the protection of the global climate in a manner that promotes equity and social justice between peoples, sustainable development of all communities, and protection of the global environment. CAN unites to work towards this vision. CAN's mission is to support and empower civil society organisations to influence the design and development of an effective global strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure its implementation at international, national and local levels in the promotion of equity and sustainable development.

“Ecohome” – an anchor project supporting other actions

Reducing energy consumption is the most immediate and cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to ensure security of energy supply, thereby reducing import dependency. Finding ways to save energy also has great potential to enhance industrial competitiveness, to create millions of jobs, reduce energy poverty and increase comfort levels. The “Ecohome” project (Figure 1), integrates several environmental areas with key information for understanding and taking action in an integrated manner, prioritising energy related issues (at home, from building to daily management, and mobility), but including also water, waste, and sustainable consumption.

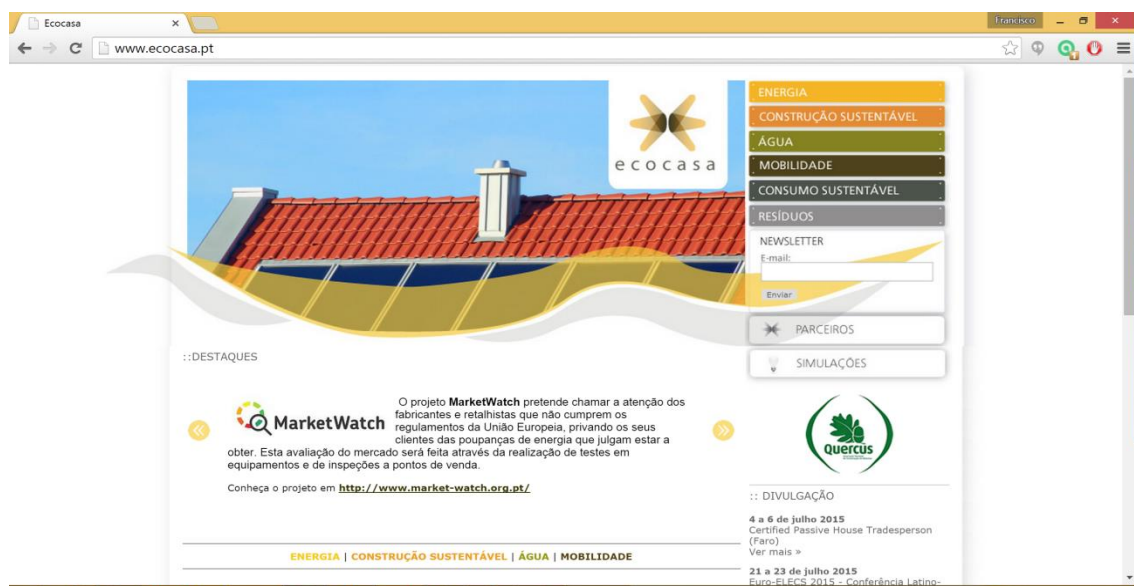


Figure 1. “Ecohome” homepage

Meeting the EU's decarbonisation goals will much depend upon lowering our energy use. So too will increasing the share of final energy demand met by renewable energy sources. The higher the energy demand is, the more challenging the effort becomes. Reversing the trend of increasing energy demand will also provide us with the time needed to develop new renewable sources to maturity, avoiding lock-in to unsustainable energy sources like coal and nuclear.

Energy use can be lowered by both increasing technological efficiency, for example of buildings and appliances, and by structural and behavioural changes. Quercus and CAN Europe focuses on underlining the primary position energy savings hold within the climate and energy political agenda for 2020 and beyond. We seek to ensure the development and implementation of ambitious policies and measures that can deliver those savings.

Renewable energy-based technologies provide the only energy source that can bring greenhouse gas emissions from the power and heating sectors close to zero, and can do so in a relatively short timescale. Besides their carbon dioxide

(CO₂) abatement potential, renewable energy presents innumerable and unquantifiable benefits such as: water, soil and air pollution reduction, energy independency, and reduction of fossil fuels imports. Furthermore, renewables provide a unique opportunity to the European economy to recover faster from the economic crisis with the creation of local and highly-skilled jobs, bringing economic growth to rural areas, and providing a framework for industry to become leaders in an increasingly important global market that will trigger massive investments in the coming years.

Another important project promoted by Quercus is “TopTen” (Figure 2), where the ten best items, from light bulbs, to electric and electronic home appliances, and cars, are presented according to environmental criteria such as energy and water consumption, waste production, and noise.

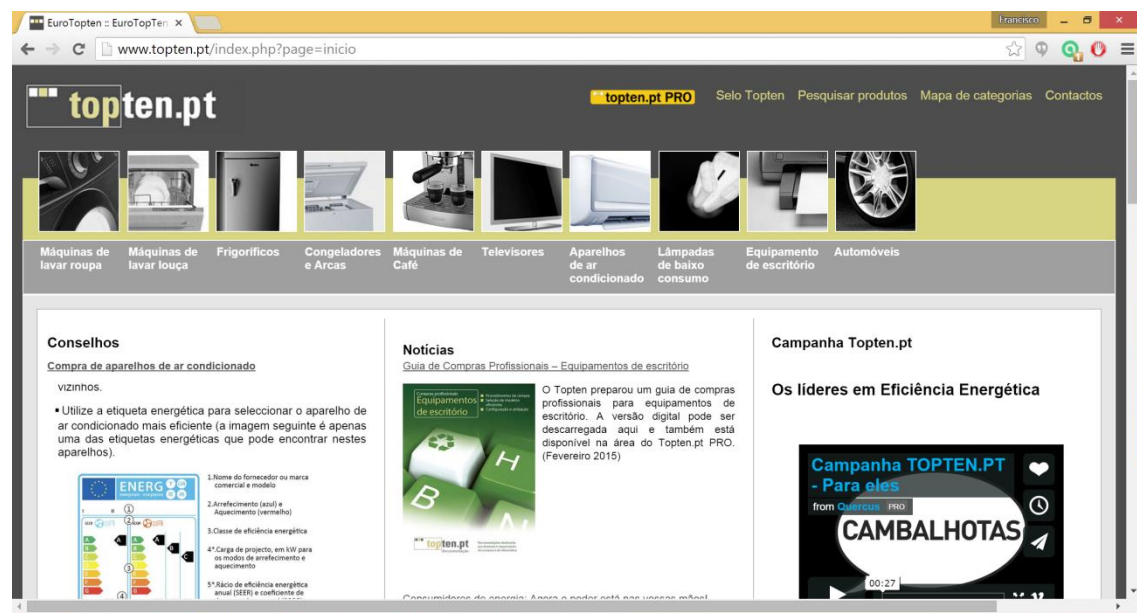


Figure 2. “Topten” site

Two other European projects where Quercus is involved are deeply related with energy information related with the consumer and therefore a direct relation with energy consumption and therefore greenhouse gases reduction policies. The “ComeOn Labels” (Figure 3) project relates to all appliance types which bear the energy label (from refrigerating appliances, dishwashers, washing machines, and televisions, to ovens, light sources, air-conditioners, and dryers, while “MarketWatch” (Figure 4) is more related with the way the market informs the public about energy appliances use. If one is interested in learning more about how energy labelling of household appliances works in the EU and selected individual countries, this is the website to visit. Here you can find an overview of the European and selected national legislation related to appliance labelling, a description of the system of product testing for ensuring the device features’ compliance with the information on the label, information about known appliance tests undertaken during the duration of the project, an overview of how the proper presence of energy labels should be controlled in shops.

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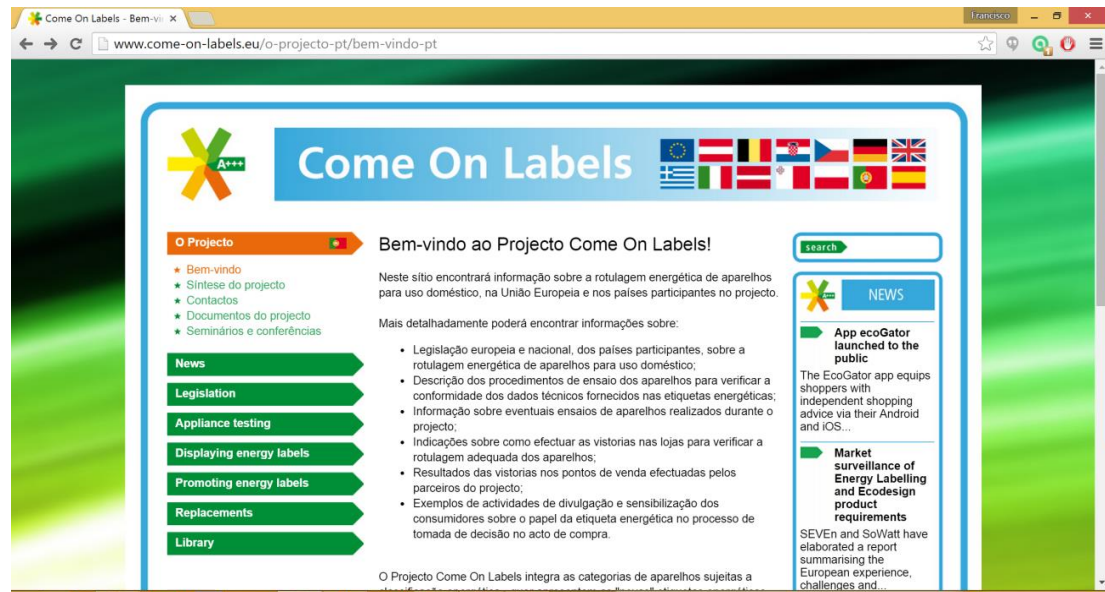


Figure 3. "ComeOn Labels" Project website

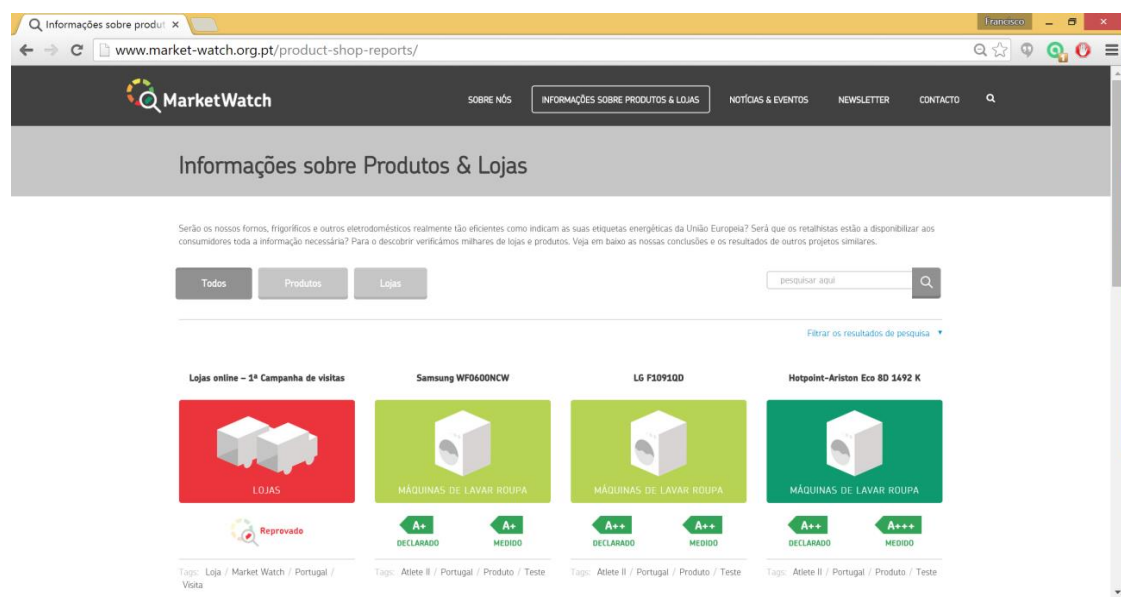


Figure 4. "MarketWatch" Project website

Outreaching the Portuguese population on energy and climate

Since 2006, the 'Green Minute' (Figure 5) is produced and presented by Quercus, shown every working day in the news program of the national public TV channel one (RTP1), "Good Morning Portugal", with three repetitions each day. In 60 seconds episodes previously recorded, the topic is presented in a direct and informal language, from simple environmental advices of practical application to places of great ecological significance, and also with initiatives that illustrate environmental sustainability concerns by businesses, municipalities, and other institutions. The practices related to the reduction of energy consumption, energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, and climate change are noteworthy. The presentation is made on a rotating basis by Francisco Ferreira, Sara Fields and Susana Fonseca, in a scenario always allusive to the topic at hand.

The show had more than 2300 episodes issued in nine years of existence, having won a remarkable recognition by the public and society in general. It has an estimated audience of five hundred thousand viewers in Portugal only, a number that is substantially exceeded considering that the show is also watched in several countries by the RTP International and RTP Africa.



Figure 5. "Green Minute" on national public TV.

NGOs influencing climate change policy at both national and international levels

Quercus has been participating actively at both national and international level (within the CAN-Europe framework) on climate change policy. At the national

level, with direct contacts with the administration and the political level, issuing press releases and promoting events, both specialized and demonstrations, Quercus has followed important national plans in several areas directly or indirectly related with climate change (such as renewable energy or energy efficiency targets definition). At the same time, we have been helping strategizing the Portuguese position at the international level by participating in all the annual Conferences of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Quercus is committed to supporting and promoting renewables as the main source of energy for European society. Quercus has been calling for a phase out of nuclear energy and elimination of polluting fossil fuels that make Europe more energy dependent and do not offer any help in the fight against climate change.

Unfortunately, the climate and energy targets adopted by EU for 2030 fails to deliver on its fair share of the global effort to keep temperature rise below 2 degrees. Quercus / CAN Europe called for binding targets of at least 55% greenhouse gases reductions, 45% renewables and 40% energy savings by 2030, while the targets approved were quite lower (40%, 27% and 27%, respectively).

A group of goals have been considered relevant for the future possible agreement to take place in COP21 in Paris in December, 2015:

- Long term global goals of phasing out all fossil fuel emissions and to phase in a 100% renewable energy future with sustainable energy access for all, as early as possible, but not later than 2050.
- A collective commitment to shift public support (finance and policy) away from fossil fuels towards climate resilience and universal and fair access to sustainable energy.
- Establishment of global goals for public finance.
- An agreement to consider and establish/deploy new instruments and channels to mobilise additional international climate finance from new sources.
- An agreement to adopt a robust and honest Measuring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system for climate finance.
- A decision to have an ambitious global adaptation goal within the 2015 agreement.
- Adopt a strong 2-year work plan for the Loss and Damage mechanism.
- A decision to establish a Capacity Building Coordinating Body (CBCB);
- An enhanced role for civil society within all mechanisms established under the convention and in the agreements' implementation and enforcement. Local civil society and other stakeholders should be able to participate actively in compliance and MRV processes within the new agreement.

- In the area of technology, prioritise providing advice, support and capacity building to developing country, conducting assessments of new and emerging technologies.

Expectations for a Global Agreement in Paris, December 2015

With a very limited Kyoto Protocol with the absence of ratification by the United States of America, the exit of Canada, and the refusal to accept targets for 2020 by Japan and the Russian Federation, the most important instrument to reduce greenhouse gases emissions by developed countries is failing its main objective. The need for a new agreement is therefore very urgent, in line with the needs emphasized by 5Th Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). After the negotiations failure in Copenhagen in 2009, building a new environment for obligations involving all the Parties is crucial, but also particularly difficult. The outcome of COP21 in Paris will be relevant to contradict the tendency of continuous increase of emissions, promoting support for less developed and prepared countries, and strengthening the planetary efforts against the most important environmental problem of this century.

During these months of preparation, all the efforts are concentrated in the mitigation commitments (and also adaptation efforts) to be reported as Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC). However, the broader preparation should be much larger, including the discussion about the adequacy of the increased temperature scenario from the pre-industrial revolution period (2°C, or preferably, 1.5°C). Also, need to congregate financing for the periods pre- and post-2020 (within the Green Climate Fund) is very delayed. A long discussion has still to take part about the legal form, transparency, and compliance of the future agreement, the existence of a long term goal and the periodic review of commitments, and in particular how the issue of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDRRC) will be overtaken.

Outside the negotiating world of the Convention, the preparatory work for Paris has had less attention than during the Copenhagen Conference preparation in 2009. A need for expectations management in order to overcome a poor outcome from Paris is one of critical aspects taken by both governments and civil society. However, major ideas involving the need to divest from fossil fuels, the strong business case for energy efficiency and renewables enable some optimistic views for the future, Even though the science is clearer, and the public is more and more aware of the situation and the impacts of slower action, there is no sense of urgency and there is still small mobilization and action.

Table 1. Possible outcomes for COP21 / Paris eventual agreement

Scenario	Outcome details
Optimistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internationally legally binding

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • INDCs are renegotiated and improved in Paris; • Quantified acknowledgment of the 2020 and 2030 gigatonne gap; • Finance mobilized • 5-year commitment period and strong mandate for revision; • A shorter term decarbonisation target; • Finance: roadmap to 2020 established, but for post-2020 new sources still need to be found
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not very binding outcome that applies to all • Inadequate multiple-kind near term targets, (original INDCs); • Commitments to be revised periodically • A really long term decarbonisation target; • Finance: roadmap to 2020 established, but for post-2020 new sources still need to be found
Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heading towards a cosmetic outcome • CBDRRC issues remain • Civil society decides to walk out • A group of countries walks out

Conclusions

Climate change is the most important environmental problem at global scale for this century. The policies taken both at national and international level are crucial to minimize the impacts of increasing emissions of greenhouse gases worldwide. The actions taken by Quercus, a Portuguese Environmental Non-governmental Organisation, related with public awareness, particularly in the field of energy, and policy lobby, assume great importance. The views are articulated within the framework of Climate Action Network Europe, where a long term goal of 100% renewable energy use is a key point. In preparation for the COP21 Paris Conference, several issues have to be discussed to promote the best outcome, from the legal nature of the agreement to be signed, preferably legally binding, to the urgency of finance to support action in the mess developed countries. The need for an integrated view, and the building of a society where both technology and behavioural items are decisive for a sustainable future were discussed, with several projects shown has relevant examples that can be implemented as a contribution for mitigating climate change.

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Bionote

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