

## ‘Cough27’ : Pollution back to normal

On the day the UN's COP27 climate summit opened in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Kaohsiung experienced a new episode of air pollution that felt like the beginning of a recurrent long period of extremely high atmospheric pollution in the city and its surroundings. After a perceptible decrease in air pollution in the city due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on economic activities, are we back to “normal”?

As usual, local newspapers published reports about the very high air pollution levels in southern Taiwan, showing the 85 Sky Tower in Kaohsiung shrouded in a gray fog, making a list of the dangerous pollutants that local residents were breathing, explaining that the main reason for the pollution was low wind speeds and advising people not to exercise outdoors when pollution levels reach a worrying orange color on the air quality index.

However, what is perhaps much more worrying is that during the long election campaign, candidates running for positions in Kaohsiung barely mentioned the pollution issue, when it should have been the priority in the city's development.

Does it make sense to encourage young couples to live and work in Kaohsiung when these potential parents know their children would grow up in a suffocating environment where pollution is high? Similarly, does it make sense to offer the convenience of a citywide YouBike system when cyclists cannot breathe fresh air, and go home with red eyes and a recurring cough?

Significant efforts, creativity and resources have been mobilized to protect Kaohsiung residents against COVID-19. Why not channel the same level of mobilization to address another major public health emergency in the city, which accounts for about one-fifth of Taiwan's greenhouse gas emissions?

In line with the National Development Council's announcement in March of “Taiwan's 2050 Net Zero Emissions Pathway,” Kaohsiung proposed a “Zero City Management Ordinance” aimed at addressing the air pollution problem through different measures. It is time to accelerate implementation in Kaohsiung if Taiwan aims to contribute to a net zero world as the government claimed at the beginning of COP27.

As the Taiwanese environmental non-governmental organization Citizens of the Earth has said, several priorities should be taken into account to review Kaohsiung's net zero policy:

- First, elaboration on an achievable urban policy in which specific and measurable zero actions — reducing plastic and other types of waste, recycling and cutting traffic, etc — should be listed to provide clear guidelines and objectives for urban units and residents to implement.
- Second, conducting a long-awaited study on Kaohsiung's carbon emissions and reduction potential to provide the city government with updated data and information to set accurate targets to address carbon emissions, especially in the industrial sector, which accounts for 80 percent of the city's greenhouse gas emissions.
- Finally, as Kaohsiung's net zero transformation is not only the responsibility of the city government, nor just a matter of technical innovations, but is also related to the urban community's engagement, further interaction between the local government and residents is needed to discuss in-depth the city's net zero policy and its implementation.

# 文藻外語大學公共關係室剪報表格

資料來源： TAIPEI TIMES(2)

日期： 111年11月25日

This would help identify to what extent the city could provide resources to support civic net zero initiatives and to discuss the potential impact of Kaohsiung's net zero transformation on the jobs, rights and lives of workers in traditional high-carbon industries.

Other specific measures could also be taken to accelerate the pace of the city's net zero policy and protect residents from grave health risks. These include promoting the numerous health benefits of using public (green) transportation, especially for students (such as introducing semester tickets like in some European countries); engaging the whole city in reducing power consumption at home and at work (by providing concrete information on where to save most or sponsoring competitions between residential building blocks on who can save most), as well as in public spaces (such as dimming lights at night).

Other options include drastically limiting the issuance of construction permits for parking lots to counter soil sealing and the heat island effect; closely monitoring incense burning practices during public events; banning gasoline-powered gardening tools such as leaf blowers and chainsaws used by municipal agents to clean the streets and parks; and supporting sports teachers in the development of alternative physical education classes in a context of recurring air pollution.

If Taiwan is serious about helping the world to achieve net zero emissions, the implementation of Kaohsiung's net zero policy is crucial, as it would provide other industrial cities worldwide, which are also struggling with air pollution, an inspiring illustration of what could be achieved to address such a major public health emergency.

Vincent Rollet and Armin Ibitz are associate professors and co-coordinators of a Jean Monnet module on EU and environmental health at **Wenzao** Ursuline University's Graduate Institute of European Studies.