

Quelle:  
LA Times  
am 20. August 2009

Los Angeles Times

GERMANY

## **Freiburg: A very eco-friendly German city**

**Green-ness permeates Freiburg. The old-town center is car-free; it's one extensive pedestrian zone of streets, squares and lanes.**

By Terry Gardner, Reporting from Freiburg, Germany  
10:38 AM PDT, August 20, 2009

It's bath time in Freiburg, and that means more work for Walter Schneider's cows.

After his cows are milked, a heat exchanger cools the milk, and the energy is sent to his water heater. In the end, his milk cows provide him with both sustenance and a hot bath.

Schneider is an "energy farmer," the local term for clean-energy implementers. He is in good company in this region. Other farmers turn cow dung into biodiesel, and they harvest waste wood that's burned for heat. These eco-activists have made Freiburg (population: 220,000), one of the greenest cities in one of the greenest countries in Europe.

And it might never have happened but for nuclear protest. In 1975, the German government planned to build nuclear power plants along the Rhine River, so protesters decided the best way to stop nuclear development was to create clean alternatives using sun, wind and water.

I wanted to see the result, so last summer, I spent two rainy days in Germany's sunniest region exploring Freiburg, a university town. I felt as though I had awakened from a petroleum coma. I had no idea how much was already possible.

I took the DB Bahn Inter-City Express, or ICE, train from Frankfurt to this solar city at the western edge of the Black Forest in the southwestern part of the country.

Freiburg and the national government have instituted energy policies to encourage investment in renewable energy, said Thomas Dresel, project executive for SolarRegion Freiburg, where about 2% of the electricity is solar-generated.

Residents who generate electricity from renewable resources get paid for feeding power into the electrical grid, Dresel said -- about 45 cents for each kilowatt hour they generate. In turn, the residents pay 20 cents for each kilowatt.

"You would be rather stupid to not feed the power into the grid," he said.

Freiburg urges builders to incorporate green energy technology in construction projects. Builders who don't fully embrace "being green" may not get permits as quickly, Dresel said.

That sense of green-ness permeates Freiburg. The old-town center is car-free; it's one extensive pedestrian zone of streets, squares and lanes. Outside the zone, I saw cars that waited for bicycles to go first when the light turned green, a good feeling in a city that boasts more than 380 miles of bike lanes.

A mix of regional and federal rail, linked to bus lines, encourages public transportation. Passengers can buy one ticket that's valid for all the private and public rail and bus operators. Today, for instance, 6.5 million passengers ride the Breisgau S-Bahn metro rail line, an increase of 5 million since 1999.

Even the casual visitor to Freiburg will notice a variety of clean ways to power homes, offices and farms. On my visit in June of last year, I stopped at three sites in Freiamt, a neighboring village that generates 17% more renewable energy than it uses.

If you're lucky enough to watch a professional soccer match in Freiburg, you'll be seated in the Badenova Solar Soccer Stadium (formerly, Dreisam Stadium, a 55-year-old facility). In 1995, 158 soccer fans paid for the first solar installation on the south roof and were rewarded with one year of season tickets. By 2003, every grandstand roof had solar photovoltaic panels.

The stadium operates using some clean energy methods, but it primarily uses solar for hot water in its showers and Jacuzzi. Most of its solar energy is fed into the main power grid to generate revenue.

As if to prove you can teach an old dog new tricks, my hotel, the Best Western Premier Hotel Victoria, built in 1875, was even part of the green movement, billing itself as a "zero emissions" hotel. It uses no more power than it generates, thanks to its solar roof, an investment in a windmill and an eco-power supplier.

In 1985, its managers and owners, Bertram and Astrid Spaeth, began with one small step: switching to non-phosphate cleaners. Next, prepackaged goods were eliminated from the breakfast buffet (now the only meal served during the day so as to prevent further waste).

Even the air conditioning is eco friendly. It uses well water to cool the premises.

The process continues, Spaeth said; this year, the hotel is adding insulation on a new roof to make it even more energy efficient.

"All our eco measures are made in the background, so our guests do not have any inconvenience," Spaeth said.

I certainly didn't notice it at breakfast, a feast of locally produced products from the butcher, baker and organic farmers that made me regret staying only one night. I tickled my taste buds with a bit of everything, from homemade yogurt and fresh berries to Vanille Quark ("curd") with Rote Grutze (fresh jelled fruits) and homemade muesli. I even savored scrambled eggs, bacon and sausage before waddling away.

My 150-square-foot room was Spartan but cheerful. It looked like an ordinary hotel room with a twin bed, desk, chair, air-conditioning and TV. My toilet was a typical European water-saver with a two button flush (for heavy or lighter duty). My shower had a water-restricter combined with air pressure, so I would use less water without noticing it.

I was so enamored of the green efforts that I never made it to a wine tasting. The Baden area is internationally known for Pinots, so you could, in theory, come for the solar and stay for the grapes.

But just seeing how much can be done to save the planet lit me up quite enough.

travel@latimes.com