

## 2024 independent panel statement of the ewz Sustainability Board

### Introductory remarks

ewz established the ewz Sustainability Board in 2023 as an independent corporate body with recurring panels and interactions. With the council, ewz aims to enable tracking of its progress over the years as it puts its sustainability strategy into action. Challenges are meant to be openly discussed and recommendations for potential improvements put forward. Besides the panel, the Sustainability Board met with the Management Board three times in 2024. The panel in November was a half-day event dedicated to a focal topic.

### CoolCity as focal topic

In 2023 the Sustainability Board recommended that the panels focus on a holistic and systematic view of active involvement in future visions of the City of Zurich. It also suggested that a specific topic or project be discussed. For the 2024 panel, ewz chose the CoolCity project, which will enable sustainable energy supply in the city centre from 2031 onwards. The aim of this long-term project is to meet the high heating and cooling demand of the numerous office and retail spaces with a connected grid fed with renewable energy from Lake Zurich. With a heating requirement of around 100 GWh/year and a cooling requirement of over 34 GWh/year, CoolCity will be one of Switzerland's largest lake heat network.

The discussion provided insights into four subject areas: the positioning of the project, the role of ewz, the system's environmental criteria and the involvement of the population.

### CoolCity: a flagship project for climate protection and heat reduction

The CoolCity project will play a key role as the City of Zurich advances toward its target of net-zero emissions. As one of Switzerland's largest lake heat networks, the project is of national significance. Additionally, with the construction of the energy centre in the former ewz substation in Selnau, right in the centre of the city, there are numerous touchpoints with various stakeholders. CoolCity is therefore a flagship project which is at the heart of the latest developments in the city of Zurich. As such, the Sustainability Board emphasised the importance of a transparent communication approach. Strategic alliances with property owners and proactive communication about existing participants help to boost support and interest among the population.

The Sustainability Board also stressed that, while CoolCity makes a key contribution by reducing carbon emissions, its positioning should go beyond this approach. CoolCity will play a significant role in mitigating heat in the city, increasing well-being and productivity, and reducing mortality during heat waves. The board sees this as critical to the population's emotional response to the project.

### **Perception of its role in the overall system**

Although the lake water is only used and processed locally, the Sustainability Board points out that the role of CoolCity should be considered in a larger context, including the management and use of the water. By using lake water and returning it to the Limmat River, the project interacts with common resources, with potential consequences beyond the borders of the canton. The board recommends acting in accordance with this understanding of the system's function and engaging in dialogue with neighbouring municipalities and cantons.

### **Consideration of environmental criteria**

Climate protection with a net-zero target by 2040 is a focal point of the ewz strategy. Environmental and climate criteria are therefore integrated into the strategic approach, as the Sustainability Board welcomes. The discussion also addressed specific ways ewz can develop its analysis and communications on environmental issues. The board recommends targeted integration with ETH Zurich's city climate models, based on the case study of the city of Zurich. This will allow Swiss climate scenarios to be broken down to the local conditions of CoolCity with utmost precision, thus demonstrating the impact of the project.

ewz has already evaluated various system issues with regard to biodiversity. The water extraction and return to the Limmat is assessed as low impact due to the low volume. However, the lower temperature and higher nutrient input of the lake water should be taken into consideration in further steps and thus included in the monitoring. The Sustainability Board also recommends that ewz continue to involve proven experts in research for environmental issues, and to integrate their expertise into communications.

### **CoolCity for all**

As a project of national significance in the heart of the city of Zurich, CoolCity offers various opportunities for involving the population. This would facilitate the active involvement of various stakeholders in the process while also promoting understanding and acceptance of the project. As an example, the panel considered a culture initiative. The project could be made more accessible and tangible during the construction phase under an "percent for art" approach and collaboration with educational institutions. For communications during construction, information boards could be used on site to describe the project and set out the benefits for the city and population. Relevant information about the cooling power of CoolCity could also be provided at the lake water connection, for example, and along the Limmat.

*The panel statement was put together by the members of the Sustainability Board in January 2025 with the support of Stephan Lienin and Judith Bisig, Sustainserv GmbH, who moderated the panel in November 2024.*

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