

NECPlatform

Achieving Climate and Energy Targets at local level

Analysis of obstacles, challenges, and
drivers for local authorities



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Deliverable 2.2 Achieving climate and energy targets at local level: analysis of obstacles, challenges, and drivers for local authorities

Part 1: Analysis of local-level participation and role in national climate and energy policy-making processes and particularly the National Energy and Climate Plans

Part 2: Assessment of city obstacles in the implementation of their local energy and climate policies

Prepared by Mélanie BOURGEOIS, Thibaut MARAQUIN & Valentine Crosse, Energy Cities
Reviewed by OER
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Project coordinator: Thibaut MARAQUIN, Energy Cities

Email: thibaut.maraquin@energy-cities.eu

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Introduction

About the Project

Local and regional authorities have the potential of becoming a real driving force in the energy transition, helping Europe achieve its goals of climate neutrality and energy independence. What's more, the EU has designated cities and regions as leaders of Europe's energy transition, through EU urban initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors and the Mission 100 climate-neutral and smart cities.

However, **this is not so clearly reflected on the national level**. Not only do national climate and energy policies rarely tap into this potential, but they also offer little support to these transition efforts at the local level.

These shortcomings have shown through in the first versions of EU Member States' **National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs)**, submitted in 2020 as part of the Energy Union governance process. The European Commission pointed out this discrepancy in the first assessment of the plans. They signalled that the NECPs had not involved local and regional authorities and stakeholders as they should have.

Article 11 of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action mandates the Member States to set up proper multilevel climate and energy dialogues. For the next version of the NECPs, which is due to be updated, the EU insists that Member States properly implement Article 11. In the latest Guidance to Member States for the updates of their NECPs, published in December 2022, the European Commission emphasizes the need to provide a platform *"to discuss with stakeholders the different scenarios envisaged for energy and climate policies and achieving the EU's climate-neutrality objective set out in the Climate Law"*¹, mentioning the NECPlatform Project.

The updated NECPs are currently underway: the first draft is due no later than June 2023 and the final one year later, in June 2024. Over this period, **the NECPlatform project will contribute to ensuring that EU Member States bridge the gap** highlighted by the EU Commission's first assessment of the Plans.

How so? **The NECPlatform project will support six EU Member States** (Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, and Romania) **in setting up and managing permanent multi-level Climate and Energy Dialogue (CED) Platforms**, as mandated by Article 11 of the Climate and Energy Governance Regulation. These dialogues will help foster vertical and horizontal integration of energy and climate policies.

The Consortium behind NECPlatform

¹ Commission Notice: Guidance to Member States for the update of the 2021-2030 national energy and climate plans, December 15th, 2022, page 21.

The project is led and coordinated by **Energy Cities**, working closely with **IEECP**. The platforms are then to be implemented and managed on a national level by organisations in each country: **EnEffect** (Bulgaria), **REGEA** (Croatia) **Agenda Coordinamento 21** (Italy), **Energy Cities** (France), **OER** (Romania), **Zero** (Portugal).



PART 1: SWOT Analysis of local government participation and role in the national climate and energy decision-making process, in particular, the National Energy and Climate Plans

Introduction and Methodology

The first part of this report aims at providing a SWOT analysis of the active participation of the local level in the process of drafting national climate and energy plans in Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, and Romania.

A SWOT analysis collects strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats into an organized list and is usually presented in a simple two-by-two grid. This analysis aims to provide a picture of the current landscape of multilevel discussions in the national context and reflect on what arguments can be used to convince the different stakeholders to participate in the national roundtables the project partners will organise and take ownership of.

Each national partner has drafted the SWOT for its context using national resources. The table below was provided to the national partners as guidance. Energy Cities has drafted a cross-country analysis to reveal the common patterns across the 6 countries.

What are local-level representatives' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks regarding its active participation at the national level on climate and energy issues?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p><i>What can local authorities bring as added value to the national level?</i></p> <p><i>Why must local authorities speak out and get involved in national policy-making processes?</i></p>	<p><i>Which barriers currently blocking engagement of local authorities (representatives) at national level are inherent to local authorities?</i></p> <p><i>Why have national governments until today involved the local level so little?</i></p>

<p><i>What will the participation of local authorities (representatives) change in the NECP drafting process or implementation?</i></p> <p><i>What are local authorities implementing today that could favour this discussion?</i></p>	<p><i>What could the local level improve to be more involved in national discussions?</i></p> <p><i>What resources do local authorities lack?</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p><i>Is the current context more favourable to the inclusion of the local level in national discussions (energy crisis, current political context...)?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any new schemes since the last NECP to bring local authorities' perspective together with the one of national authorities?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any factors that favour highlighting/including local authorities at national level/in national policymaking?</i></p> <p><i>Who could be local authorities' allies?</i></p> <p><i>How can the 'strengths' listed above be promoted?</i></p> <p><i>Do you know another type of stakeholders that is being heard at the national level? If so, why? What are their strategies and arguments?</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p> <p><i>Which barriers currently blocking engagement of the local level at the national level are independent of local authorities' will?</i></p> <p><i>What independent factor(s) can undermine efforts to include local perspectives in national energy and climate policies?</i></p> <p><i>Are there other actors overshadowing local authorities' role? Are there other stakeholders being heard more by the national government?</i></p>

BULGARIA

Methodology: Two main resources were used to develop the SWOT analysis. EnEffect prepared a draft using its expertise complemented by desk research on the national legislation and previous practice of national energy and climate planning. The draft document was then presented to the Secretariat of the Municipal Energy Efficiency Network (EcoEnergy) and feedback was collected and integrated into the final version.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Most of the measures in the national energy policies are implemented in cities, which makes them key partners in the process. From their experience implementing measures and policies developed at the national level, municipalities can directly contribute to the development of more effective national policies and instruments. In addition, municipalities control the implementation of the measures on their territory and can therefore mobilize and involve the local community, citizens, and businesses to implement activities that complement the national energy policies, bringing an added value to the national level.</p> <p>Local authorities are more aware than any other authority of the problems and opportunities at the local level. Therefore, during the national policy-making process, municipalities can help identify and evaluate suitable measures to optimally unlock local potential.</p> <p>The participation of local authorities in the NECP drafting process, first, will change the long-standing practice the country has of developing political documents "top-down" by the national authorities without consulting the interested parties. It will possibly enable a reversal, applying a "bottom-up" planning approach. This will make the plan more feasible and could allow us to expand</p>	<p>The main barrier to the engagement of local authorities at the national level is the lack of capacity in local administration both in terms of the people who should be dedicated to this type of task, and in terms of their expertise. It is especially the case for smaller municipalities, and some of the biggest cities are an exception.</p> <p>Traditionally, national policies have been discussed and developed at a high level. The process follows the hierarchical structure in which local authorities rank after the national level. For example, it is common practice for national policies to be subject to discussion and agreement between different ministries, but external stakeholders are rarely involved in the process. It can be the case only during the formal public consultations after the draft document is issued.</p> <p>Municipalities are more reactive than proactive regarding energy and climate policies. Municipalities are highly dependent on the state for their budgets and are traditionally oriented towards receiving and carrying out orders from above, rather than expressing an active position in policy development.</p> <p>Municipalities are not aware of the benefits of having a good local energy plan to be credible and bring expertise into the national policy discussions. This is caused by the point below.</p> <p>Local authorities, especially the small ones, lack many different resources to develop</p>

<p>the list of measures and pursue higher objectives.</p> <p>The National Program for Energy Efficiency at Multifamily Residential Buildings was implemented in Bulgaria in the last five years. The local authorities had the most important role as an intermediary between the citizens and governing institutions. Municipalities succeeded in raising great interest among citizens to participate (even without a clear communication strategy from the government) and managed to identify and overcome many challenges in the implementation process. Their experience could favour the discussions to include the building renovation policy in the updated NECP which was not covered in its first version.</p>	<p>good energy and climate plans, which weakens their opportunities of proposing and evaluating measures for the national plan through a "bottom-up" approach. Essentially, all municipalities – including the biggest ones – have limited staff resources (in number of people), as well as lack the knowledge and skills to carry out quality energy planning at the local level, especially in regard to sites that are not managed by municipalities. In addition, local authorities do not have systematized databases and procedures for the collection, recording and analysis of energy and technical data, even for municipal assets.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p>
<p>The platform that the NECPlatform project offers is an opportunity to foster a dialogue between local authorities and the national government at a low effort for the national authorities.</p> <p>The new schemes for energy renovation of residential buildings and implementation of renewable energy installations in residential buildings, under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, require the involvement of the municipalities who will act as an intermediary between the national authorities and the beneficiaries.</p> <p>The Long-Term Building Renovation Strategy envisages the renovation of a big share of the existing residential building stock which cannot happen without the active involvement of citizens and the active support of local authorities working with these citizens at local level.</p>	<p>The current political context and the lack of a steady government are likely to cause a delay in the process of updating the NECP. This does not foster better conditions for involving local authorities in national dialogues.</p> <p>The process of drafting the new NECP has not yet started. Therefore, it seems that very little time could be dedicated to dialogue with stakeholders including local authorities before the deadlines.</p> <p>The lack of stable government and the delay in meeting the European Commission's deadlines may lead national authorities to resort once again to the approach of working in closed groups when drafting the NECP, to save time. But this would not lead to an improved version of the plan.</p> <p>There is the risk that the government does not change its working habits (limiting the</p>

The local authorities could ally with **NGOs** and **energy agencies** to get involved in the national dialogue for the next NECP.

The list of "strengths" of the local authorities can be **promoted on a different forum organised by NGOs, energy agencies and municipalities**, on their site and social media channels, as well as by articles in the media, participation in radio and TV broadcasts.

participation of external actors in the process) regardless of the proposals, and the different contexts and factors.

CROATIA

Methodology: A qualitative research approach has been implemented, mainly focusing on assessing the Croatian NECP and the European Commission's evaluation and feedback. Additionally, publicly available literature and internal expert knowledge of REGEA and insights gained from an interview with a Croatian Association of Cities representative on NECP development in Croatia have been integrated to provide an additional point of view.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Local authorities bring valuable knowledge and experience from the ground level. They provide valuable feedback on the implementation of policies and strategies, outlining the shortcomings, and facilitating space for improvement.</p> <p>Participation of local authorities in the NECP drafting process provides real-life input, especially for the implementation phase, as they can ensure that local needs and dimensions are adequately addressed.</p> <p>Participation of local authorities when drafting NECP facilitates the exchange of information between different levels of authorities.</p> <p>Local authorities promote citizen engagement and involvement. For example, they hold frequent public consultations with citizens for them to provide feedback on current strategic documents. Certain institutions also have an open approach for citizens, and some prepare reports based on feedback provided by the citizen. This is a practice carried out by local authorities from which national authorities can learn.</p>	<p>The primary barrier to the engagement of local authorities in discussions at the national level is a lack of capacity both in terms of the number of staff and time availability on both sides (local and national).</p> <p>Limited communication channels and opportunities for multilevel communication. The channels and dialogue opportunities that do exist are underutilised.</p> <p>Challenges in communication due to the silence approach - important knowledge is not shared.</p> <p>Local authorities are not involved enough in monitoring and participation in government initiatives and national discussions.</p> <p>Cross-sectorial connections, which happen on the level of local and regional governance, are not recognized.</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>The current context of the energy crisis has supported more efficient communication</p>	<p>Inability to hire additional staff due to strict hiring rules in terms of procedures, limits on staff numbers and salaries.</p>

and cooperation between the local and national authorities in Croatia.

The current context of the energy crisis has **put more focus on the local level**, which is now more supported in making an impact.

The current context of the energy crisis has put more focus on the local level, which can be **more financially supported with European initiatives** such as EUCEF, European island facility, a variety of LIFE and Horizon Europe calls, EC Mission for Climate-neutral and smart cities, and European structural and investment funds.

Public consultations were held on the draft versions of Croatia's NECP; however, **additional efforts can be put into regional cooperation** to intensify exchanges and initiatives for improvement.

Establishing multilevel climate and energy dialogues can **better engage diverse stakeholders** and **address scenarios envisioned in the energy and climate policies**.

As each local authority is different in size and development, including their **know-how and knowledge** in the overall process, can bring additional strengths when tailoring national policy-making processes.

Local authorities can find allies by developing **community/stakeholder mapping** and connecting them with their goals. This can include strengthening their relationship with **energy agencies, development agencies** and **citizen associations**.

Associations of cities, communities of counties as well as **energy agencies**, can become potential actors for connecting the national and local levels.

It is necessary to raise awareness on the importance of **communication between the national and local levels** and to make the results of established dialogues more

Lack of trust and willingness to cooperate between local authorities due to different governing parties; **lack of engagement** by some local authorities; **lack of training** on energy and climate topics; and **lack of knowledge** sharing.

Independent factors that can undermine efforts to include local authorities in national policies are **changes in the political climate, legislation**, and **insufficient amount of highly educated professional staff** in the region.

Possible influence of **strong lobbying forces of certain sectors** that have easier and more direct access to decision-makers.

visible to **develop a sense of contribution and community.**

External private consultants and experts are engaged in developing specific strategic documents at the national level due to their references, proven methodology, and strong marketing. **Local authorities should also focus on the expansion, development, and continuous education of professional staff** for the specific challenges related to energy and climate.

FRANCE

Methodology: To carry out this SWOT, Energy Cities first used existing literature on the subject, mainly scientific and journalistic publications, as well as deliverables from other European projects. A list of resources used is available below. This analysis was completed by informal interviews with French organizations, including Réseau Action Climat, France Urbaine, CEREMA, AFCCRE, Régions de France, Comité 21 and CLER. These interviews enabled us to confirm or invalidate the originally advanced theoretical assumptions, and to clarify the national context. Finally, Energy Cities used its own experience and one of its French members to complete the analysis.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Key competencies of French regions, municipalities, and inter-municipalities in terms of energy and climate transitions (e.g., housing policies, transport, development of heating networks, energy efficiency measures, waste management, territorial coordination etc.).</p> <p>Experience in climate and energy planning for municipalities, inter-municipalities, and regions (energy climate plan at local [PCAET] and regional [SRADET] level)</p> <p>Regulatory tools in the hands of local authorities to lead the transition (e.g., local urban plan (PLU), SCoT Territorial coherence scheme etc.).</p> <p>Capacity of local authorities to assess the feasibility of plans drawn up at the national level (ground realities, local needs, and contexts etc.).</p> <p>Knowledge of local authorities to organize consultations and discussions, inform and coordinate stakeholders (companies, associations etc.) and citizens in a territory. These aspects of communication and coordination are essential to the success of the energy and climate plans implementation.</p> <p>Capacity of local authorities to disseminate good practices and lead by example at a local level, close to citizens.</p>	<p>Limited staff resources within local authorities and representative associations to participate in the multi-level governance and all the initiatives, discussions and consultation proposed by the central government. Involvement is therefore unequal depending on the territory and organization.</p> <p>Great disparity between territories in the level of ambition of their transition plans at the local or regional level. This fosters the point below.</p> <p>Lack of trust from the State in regional and local levels to territorialise their national plans and objectives.</p> <p>Lack of monitoring of achievements of local objectives in terms of climate and energy by central government services, which does not promote implementation and therefore trust in the territories.</p> <p>Scepticism from local authorities and representative associations around the usefulness of these processes and the capacity of the State to take into account their remarks and requests.</p> <p>Confusion of local authorities and representative associations faced with proliferation of initiatives and consultations proposed by the central government in 2022-2023, e.g.: France Nation Verte, National Refoundation Council,</p>

<p>Local authorities have significant assets to decarbonize and are key players in achieving the agreed climate objectives.</p> <p>Local authorities can be laboratories for the profound sociological and political changes necessary for the transition.</p> <p>The local and regional levels play an important role in economic policies and particular in employment policies connected with transitions (deindustrialization, reindustrialization...). Coordination within a region and between regions is essential.</p> <p>Citizens' trust in the municipal level (the legitimacy of strengthening the role of the local level).</p>	<p>numerous working groups on specific themes of the SNBC or SFEC, Regional Committees for energy, a regional tour of France, ADEME workshops on the method of territorialization etc.</p> <p>Lack of cooperation between local authorities, regions and the many associations and representatives to ensure regular participation in multi-level governance mechanisms and a clear common position. There is a dispersion of human resources.</p> <p>The existing multi-level discussions are organized by the State which, by imposing the rules of the game, leaves less room for the active participation of other stakeholders and for co-creation processes. All the consultations organized so far have had an informative aim rather than one of co-creation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p>
<p>A national trend over the past 15 years of strengthening the commitment and involvement of territories on energy and climate issues, first with the creation of territorial and regional energy climate plans (Grenelles laws 2009 and 2010), and then with the energy transition law for green growth (LTECV) of 2015 reinforcing the regional plans (SRADET) and the role of inter-municipalities (PCAET). Mainly, we observe a strengthening of the role of the regions with the 2015 law on the new territorial organization of the Republic (NOTRe). As a result, regions are now in charge of climate, energy, regional planning, biodiversity, air quality policies, the territorialization of national objectives and the coordination of local authorities in this area.</p> <p>The declared will of the French National government since 2022 to change the method of territorialization of climate and energy plans with increased consultation (reflexion workshop of the ADEME on the method of territorialization, new general</p>	<p>The multitude of parallel processes, making it difficult to hear and involve the local level in the discussions.</p> <p>A sense of urgency to act, which can lead the central government not to take the time to consult and co-create with the local and regional levels.</p> <p>Despite progress, France remains a country with a tradition of highly centralized organization and limited room to manoeuvre for local authorities.</p> <p>Energy is currently a particularly centralized policy, due to public and/or private actors in France concentrating a large part of energy production. The open market works against effective multi-level governance here because local authorities very rarely have control over production.</p> <p>The energy and climate issues are very political, and the proper functioning of multi-</p>

secretariat for planning with France Nation Verte, creation of regional energy committees etc.).

A need for consistency in climate/energy plans and existing aid identified by both local and national actors.

The round tables of the NECPlatform project will offer a **new, more neutral framework for discussion where the rules of dialogue will not be defined either by the State or by the local authorities**. This “neutral” moderation by a European project can facilitate discussion. The project can participate in feeding the need for a new relationship of trust and help escape the logic of mistrust between stakeholders.

Some NGOs such as Réseau Action Climat are allies of local authorities in these discussions because they push for local contexts to be taken into account in the development of climate and energy plans.

The current energy and geopolitical crises increase energy security debates in France and therefore the importance of a resilient system and local energy production. **Local authorities are on the frontline of this crisis** and called upon by the French State, in particular, to reduce energy consumption.

level governance is constrained to the goodwill of the actors.

Despite a clear decentralization, **many policies and powers fall into the hands of State services in territories** (prefectures).

ITALY

Methodology: The SWOT analysis was drawn up thanks to discussions with local authorities / members of the Coordinamento Agende 21 Locali and some stakeholders at the national level during an online meeting held on 16th February 2023. A qualitative research approach has been adopted, focusing mainly on the evaluation of the dynamics of approval of national legislation and on the need to identify ways of interaction and construction of the point of view of local authorities. Documents produced by local authorities in the context of European projects and other materials produced by associations and experts were considered.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Local authorities bring knowledge and experience. They indicate problems in the implementation of energy policies and in national and local strategies. They can provide directions on how to improve the national and regional regulations, adapting them to the needs of the territorial context.</p> <p>The participation of local authorities in the revision of the Italian NECP will enable them to share their vision, as implementers of national policies through their activities.</p> <p>Local authorities can act on energy and climate issues with local regulatory tools such as: Urban Planning, Green Plans, Building Regulations, Climate Change Adaptation Plans (Piano Urbanistico (Piano degli Interventi), Piano del verde, Regolamento Edilizio, Piano d'azione per l'energia sostenibile ed il clima), directly influencing local policies, making a major contribution to the achievement of national targets.</p> <p>Technical and planning skills at the local level that can contribute to national regulations.</p> <p>Local authorities have experience in participatory processes, debates and sharing local plans with local stakeholders (enterprises, associations, professional associations, citizens). They could bring this expertise to the national level and make</p>	<p>Lack of interaction and dialogue between the central government and territories/cities. Although there are National Associations of Municipalities, it is difficult to bring the local experience and technical solutions to the attention of the central level. There is a lack of opportunities for discussion and dialogue between national and local levels.</p> <p>There is a considerable disparity in the implementation of the climate and energy objectives among the different regions and, depending on the size of municipalities, throughout the country.</p> <p>The current international energy crisis has aggravated the burden of local authorities to bear the costs related to the consumption of energy. These costs are not supported by the central level.</p> <p>Lack of staff and skills in municipalities for participating in national discussions.</p> <p>The time required for dialogue before the approval of the NECP is very tight.</p>

<p>fundamental contributions to the drafting and implementation of national plans.</p> <p>Local authorities are laboratories for energy transition projects and can share the feedback of their experiences with the national level.</p> <p>Local authorities can make the analyses they have conducted for the drafting of their SECAPs available to higher levels of government for planning purposes.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THREATS</p>
<p>The contribution of Local Authorities to the update of the NECP can facilitate the achievement of the targets for reducing greenhouse gases at the national level. Cities can achieve important results by implementing mitigation and adaptation measures related to buildings, transport, industries etc.</p> <p>There is an area of institutional dialogue that is the State – Regions Table where the dialogue on national legislative proposals takes place. Here the State and the Regions discuss policies of national importance. This could be replicated involving local authorities.</p> <p>The current energy crisis fosters the increase of awareness campaigns and debates on energy saving, and it is therefore a good momentum to have an ambitious NECP embarking all geographical levels and stakeholders.</p> <p>The existing relations between local authorities and other stakeholders at the local and national levels (universities, research institutes, companies, and associations) can encourage dialogue and discussion on the NECP and on energy policies as well as at the central level.</p>	<p>Difficulties in establishing relations with the central government due to the political fragmentation of local authorities.</p> <p>Frequent government changes that do not facilitate exchange of information and changes occurring in different departments.</p> <p>The influence of business organisations in the construction and energy sectors which have easier access to policymakers.</p> <p>Legal limitations on staff recruitment by local authorities, who, as a result, suffer from major shortages and an almost total lack of subject-specific expertise.</p> <p>The urgency to approve a revised NECP this year, which could foster an acceleration process from the central government who would then dedicate little time to the dialogue and discussion with the local authorities.</p>

The opportunity offered by the NECPlatform project to create relations between the central government and local authorities, in addition to other national experts, will facilitate national and European dialogue.

Small municipalities, which constitute a vast majority in Italy, have a **database of experiences that can be used to obtain a coherent and integrated picture** of local activities.

Capitalization on the experiences gained by European cities in the context of **“100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030”**.

PORTUGAL

Methodology: To produce this SWOT analysis, Zero Portugal sent an online questionnaire to municipalities and associations of municipalities and received answers from the following municipalities: Cascais, Viana do Castelo, Amarante, Figueira da Foz, Mafra and Torres Vedras. Zero Portugal also organized a workshop with municipalities of the greater Lisbon / Lisbon metropolitan area on the 13th of February 2023 to have more inputs and enrich the analysis. 13 municipalities attended the workshop where Zero Portugal was able to present the NECPlatform project and do a practical SWOT exercise.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Local authorities play a crucial role in climate and energy policy implementation.</p> <p>Local authorities have the knowledge on the feasibility and the resources required for the climate and energy policy implementation.</p> <p>The local scale of intervention is more effective.</p> <p>Local authorities are closer to the population and therefore are more aware of the problems faced locally.</p> <p>Local authorities have a good knowledge of the territory and its special resources and needs.</p> <p>Some local authorities are aware of climate and energy issues and have good access to related information (climate statistics).</p> <p>Strong political commitment from local leaders.</p> <p>High motivation of municipal technical teams to drive the ecological transition.</p> <p>The success of multilevel dialogue could lead to economies of scale and will enable financing quicker and better the transition at the local level.</p> <p>Involving local authorities in the NECP drafting via dialogues will ensure that the</p>	<p>Lack of internal specialized human resources in local authorities' administrations to drive climate and energy transitions and participate in potential multilevel dialogue.</p> <p>Lack of technical knowledge and training of the current municipal staff.</p> <p>Lack of financial resources in local authorities to draft plans and implement the measures.</p> <p>Lack of communication among municipalities about common climate and energy issues and ways to tackle them.</p> <p>Lack of a platform for municipalities to discuss among themselves and with the central government, and present common recommendations and ideas to the central government.</p> <p>Incompatibility of the different platforms in which municipalities can insert data and information about climate and energy targets depending to whom they are reporting. This weakens the credibility of the municipalities and their plan in consulting with the government.</p> <p>Political commitment changes according to political cycles at both local and national levels.</p>

<p>climate and energy measures meet local reality.</p>	<p>The poor image that some institutions and citizens have of the municipalities which are seen as not sufficiently committed to their work. This lack of trust undermines the potential dialogues.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<p>THREATS</p>
<p>Decentralisation of some competencies on climate and energy since 2022.</p> <p>National Climate Law requires municipalities to have a municipal climate action plan which will ensure municipalities can bring content the discussions with the national government.</p> <p>The national government is increasing citizens' participation in key policies which could be seen as a sign of openness to collaboration.</p> <p>Reinforcement of teams, cooperation, and commitment makes municipalities better equipped to participate in the national dialogue.</p> <p>Leadership innovation to come up with new ways to improve participation in the national dialogue.</p> <p>The increasing cooperation and communication between municipalities can strengthen local authorities' voices in the discussion with the national government.</p> <p>Citizens have more information and demand more action from local and national governments.</p> <p>Financing opportunities through various schemes are available for local authorities.</p>	<p>Lack of involvement from the central government in the discussions.</p> <p>Decisions could be made without the involvement of local authorities.</p> <p>Gap between policymaking and the conditions/funding for action.</p> <p>Other actors are more dynamic and could make their voices heard better during the NECP drafting process. They have a greater influence on government decisions.</p> <p>Potential lack of citizens' involvement.</p> <p>The great disparity of geographical context of municipalities might weaken the understanding among municipalities that do not face the same issues.</p> <p>The difference in size of municipalities (population/area) might create power imbalances within discussions among municipalities.</p> <p>Failure from municipalities to meet deadlines imposed by the central government.</p> <p>The economic context brings instability and prevents actors from being ambitious and implementing measures.</p>

ROMANIA

Methodology:

To produce the SWOT analysis, the OER team used the following inputs:

- Team discussions & share of knowledge and experience.
- Desk research of relevant national/ local existing policy documents and EU recommendations/ charts/ other documents.
- Desk research of existing information regarding the cooperation/ consultation between national and local.
- Research of available statistical data where relevant (e.g., energy poverty)
- Existing info from OER meetings with Municipalities related to the topic.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>200 local administrations are signatories of the Covenant of Mayors with the assumption of ambitious targets and taking concrete steps towards their achievement.</p> <p>Local financial resources (existing or being attracted) to achieve Energy and Climate targets.</p> <p>Demonstrated/ practical experience in implementing projects in the field of renewable energy and climate.</p> <p>Active and transparent local public authorities involving citizens and relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process can bring added value with their practical experience in consultations.</p> <p>Local authorities are the ones implementing the policies at the local level. They need to have their voice heard from the beginning of the national policy-making processes for these policies to be realistic and increase the chance of being implemented.</p> <p>Local authorities know better what the local reality is, what works and what does not at the local level.</p>	<p>Consultations are mere discussions, with a limited and formalistic character not suited to a substantial consultation process.</p> <p>Central authorities still do not see local governments as equal partners and are not motivated to consult with them.</p> <p>Lack of adequate consultation and collaboration mechanisms between central and local public authorities.</p> <p>Lack of a legislative framework for appointing a representative of the local authority in relation to the Government (given that the Prefect is the representative of the Government in the territory, but the reverse model does not exist).</p> <p>There are major shortcomings in the reporting of data collected from the field at the level of municipalities and their centralisation by a state authority.</p> <p>Lack of digitalisation in centralising data/ data management.</p> <p>Lack of or limited cooperation/ discussions/ debates/ consultation with the county level (e.g., County Council, Prefect). The County Council / Prefect can be the one caring for smaller voices.</p> <p>Lack of cooperation between political parties for the general benefit.</p>

	<p>Lack of/poor coalition of local authorities on areas of interest, or through representative associations.</p> <p>Lack of/ limited experts and manpower in the public administration that can attend consultations.</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Increasing public involvement in community life and holding elected officials accountable.</p> <p>Openness of the administration and citizens in general to the subject of energy efficiency and climate change</p> <p>Local public authorities' right to be consulted by the government on matters of direct concern to them, a central principle of local democracy, stated in the European Charter of Local Self-Government.</p> <p>Input from local authorities, derived from the situations they face (legal aspects, implementation bottlenecks etc.) that could support the improvement of the national legal framework (e.g., energy communities, power purchase agreement, prosumer status)</p> <p>Through the NECPlatform project, the Communication Platform will be developed as an official NECP Working Group formed of the relevant National Authorities and Associations of Municipalities, Towns and Communes.</p> <p>According to the National Integrated Energy Plan and Climate Change, Romania will develop a series of policies and measures aimed at both reducing energy consumption and encouraging the use of RES sources in the relevant sectors, maximising synergies between the different actions is envisaged and this is an opportunity to be proactive.</p> <p>Energy poverty is an opportunity to address the problem in an integrated way at the national level, and to promote the use of renewable energy sources to</p>	<p>Lack of political will.</p> <p>Central authorities still do not see local governments as an equal partners, and are not motivated to consult with them.</p> <p>Lack of adequate consultation and collaboration mechanisms between central and local public authorities.</p> <p>Poor history of participation in decision-making (on the one hand, consultation is only done as a legal obligation, on the other hand, disinterest in participation/ lack of education and exercise).</p> <p>Business/ corporations, interest groups lobbying nationally that are opposed to the public interest.</p>

solve the problem etc. Quantifying and combating energy poverty requires a continuous dialogue between central and local government.

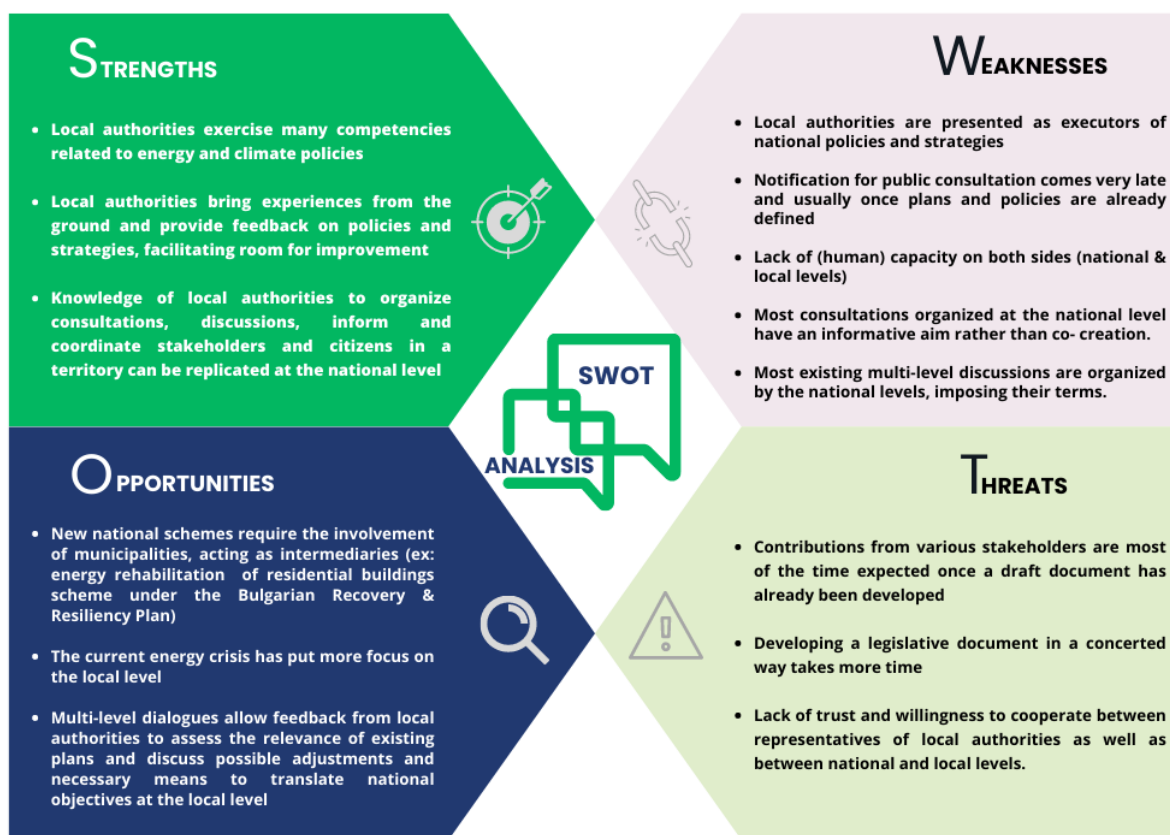
Art. 11 of the Energy Union Governance Regulation.

Potential allies to be used in support of local authorities to be brought to the table with the Ministry - EU Parliament Members: Business environment; Universities/ research institutes; Experts; Energy management agencies, energy specialists; Associations of cities/ municipalities; Civil society and citizens, society of Energy Auditors and Managers of Romania and society of Energy Engineers of Romania.

CONCLUSION OF PART ONE

These 6 SWOT analyses for Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, and Romania present differences related to political contexts, cultural heritage, and administrative national structures. Nevertheless, some similarities and common patterns emerged. These common points are those that can be activated at a European level by questioning the conditions of their existence and the measures that can be taken to facilitate multi-level dialogues within each Member State.

The infographic below summarises the similarities observed in the six focus Member States.



The first part of this report has therefore made it possible to highlight the strengths and opportunities on which local authorities can rely to reinforce their participation in national energy and climate policy-making processes. At the same time, local governments must be aware of certain threats, often beyond their control, and mitigate their weaknesses.

The arguments to reinforce the role of local authorities in NECPs are different from one country to another. In some countries, highlighting that local authorities are legitimate and have field expertise to share in national climate and energy law-making processes is key. In others, it is about convincing that local governments are willing to implement national measures and lead the transition on the ground. One common point that emerged from the various analysis is the lack of trust and transparency between the various stakeholders involved in the discussion.

Nevertheless, local governments are facing several barriers preventing them from carrying out their energy and climate transition and threatening their position in these discussions. The second part of this report will therefore look at these barriers to ensure that these reflections can feed national discussions and reassure national authorities about the intention of local authorities.

In each of the focus countries, one city obstacle will be explored. Each national partner look specifically at one barrier faced by local authorities in the implementation of their local energy and climate policies. The main objective is to explore the **obstacles/barriers faced by local authorities for the deployment of their energy and climate actions/policies and understand the root causes and the limiting/restrictive forces.**

PART 2: Assessment of city obstacles in the implementation of their local energy and climate policies

Introduction to the second part of the report

In this second part, each national partner explored a barrier that local authorities encounter in implementing the energy transition locally and thus asserting themselves and gaining credibility in multi-level discussions on the subject.

Each partner therefore defined and then explored the chosen barrier based on discussions with the local authorities of the country in question as part of this project, as well as through additional interviews and literature on the subject.

The barriers chosen by national partners can be distributed into three categories:

- barriers linked to **the lack of staff in local administrations** (Portugal, and Croatia) **and expertise** to make qualitative local energy plans (Bulgaria)
- barriers linked to **the difficulties of accessing the data** (Italy and Romania)
- barriers related **to the lack or complexity of funding opportunities** (Croatia and France)

The exploration of this barrier by the partners as well as the proposal of solutions makes it possible to prepare proposals and possible solutions during the dialogues organized by the NECPlatform project in each of the six countries. Indeed, these barriers were chosen by the partners because of their importance in the national context and are therefore mentioned in the dialogues organized between the national level and the regional and local level.

Bulgaria: the lack of capacity for qualitative local energy planning

Introduction

It has been a long-standing practice in Bulgaria for local authorities, as well as other stakeholders outside the state authorities, not to participate in the planning process at the national level, including on the topics of energy and climate. The planning process has always taken place in closed interdepartmental working groups, in which only representatives of the ministries participate, as well as state agencies and other state institutions subordinate to them.

Purely formally, and to respect the legal obligation, the plans, as well as any other kind of national strategic documents, are published for public consultations when they are fully drafted. Moreover, the public is usually given the shortest legal time limit allowed to submit their comments. It is a common practice to publish these consultations on Fridays or before holidays, so that interested parties have even less time to react. This was the case regarding the National Energy and Climate Plan public consultations. In this case, the plan was first sent for review to the European Commission and only after was published for public consultation. This goes against the idea that the views expressed by the various stakeholders may require substantial changes to the document.

The application of a fully "top-down" oriented planning approach and the exclusion of local authorities in the planning process limits the possibility to evaluate precisely and make optimal use of the energy saving potential at the local level. Perhaps there are various reasons why public authorities prefer such a planning approach and do not reach out to external stakeholders in the planning process. Along with the constraints set by the state, the local authorities also have a number of deficiencies that can make them appear as unreliable partners in the process of development of the *National Energy and Climate Plan*. One of these deficiencies that will be the focus of the analysis is the **lack of capacity to develop good quality local energy plans**. Indeed, given that municipalities are not able to draw up quality energy plans for their own territories, they are unlikely to be able to make a significant contribution to a potential application of a "bottom-up" approach for the energy and climate planning at national level.

Barrier description

Several studies emphasise the importance of local authorities' knowledge in the energy planning (Allman, Fleming, & Wallace, 2004; Fudge, Peters, & Woodman, 2016; Lund, Sperling, Mathiesen, & Connolly, 2013). Local energy planning is important because energy is no longer a service provided from central production units, located away from consumers. This makes, local authorities, important actors in energy planning, since the local implementation requires local knowledge of not only geographical conditions but also of how the local communities function in order to involve private consumers in a suitable way. Conducting energy planning at a local level makes it easier to meet local needs. Furthermore, is it easier for citizens to interact and communicate with the municipalities than authorities located at a national level (Busche, 2010).

The low quality of local energy plans is typical for the majority of Bulgarian municipalities, regardless of their size, financial capabilities and available human resources. Municipalities with

higher financial resources often use external consultants to develop their plans, but this does not always mean that the final result will be good.

In the field of energy and climate, the municipalities in Bulgaria have a legal obligation to develop, implement and report on short and long-term programs to promote the use of energy from renewable sources and biofuels and long-term energy efficiency programs. Unfortunately, the municipalities look at these plans quite formally and develop them with the main motive to meet their legal obligations (Manolova, 2021²). The national controlling body – the Agency for Sustainable Energy Development (SEDA) – has a limited capacity of human resources and does not carry out thorough quality control, but mainly monitors whether the municipalities have submitted the required documents or not.

Usually, when developing their energy plans, the municipalities follow the content of the guidelines of SEDA, but without deeply understanding the essence of the recommendations. The plans usually contain an unnecessarily long description of the territorial characteristics of the municipality, while at the same time a limited description and analysis of energy consumption and a lack of prioritization of projects based on their energy saving potential. Targets are usually set in a very general manner without introducing quantitative performance indicators. In general, there is a huge lack of a structured database on the state of municipal assets (energy consumption, energy costs, details of projects implemented in previous periods). The larger the municipality is, the more difficult and lengthier the data collection process is and the more incomplete the collected data set is.

Furthermore, many of the municipal plans do not specify a financial framework. The municipalities mainly expect to finance the selected measures with grants from the programs expected to be open. They do not consider other possible sources of financing, such as loans, ESCOs, etc.

It is therefore clear that the overall quality of the municipal energy plans is low. They do not contribute to the establishment and utilization of the local energy saving potential and to the application of renewable energy technologies. Hence, it can be concluded that most of the municipalities are insufficiently prepared to feed the *National Energy and Climate Plan* with a bottom-up approach.

Underlying reasons causing the barrier

² Manolova, Maria (2021). The role of energy efficiency plans and their contribution to climate change mitigation policies. Climateka - <https://www.climateka.bg/planove-energiyna-efektivnost-prinos-klimaticni-promeni/>

In her specialized study on "The role of energy efficiency plans and their contribution to climate change mitigation policies", Dr. Maria Manolova has studied in detail the energy efficiency programs of all 265 Bulgarian municipalities. The main highlights of the review, which she summarizes in her publication, are as follows:

- *31% of the Bulgarian municipality have expired energy efficiency programs;*
- *Only 1/5 of the Bulgarian municipalities have set quantitative energy saving targets for the period of validity of their plan/program;*
- *Only in 30% of the regular plans of the municipalities there is a financial framework or financial valuation of the activities necessary for the implementation of the plan;*
- *The majority of municipal administrations rely on the instructions of the Sustainable Energy Development Agency (109 of the regular plans) for the preparation of energy efficiency plans and very few of them recognize other energy planning methodologies.*

** <https://www.climateka.bg/planove-energiyna-efektivnost-prinos-klimatichni-promeni/>*

The roots of the reasons causing this barrier can be traced back over the years when energy efficiency obligations of local authorities were first introduced in Bulgaria in the period 2011-2016. Out of 265 municipalities, less than 10 managed to meet their individual energy savings targets, with no consequences for the others. Since all funding programs have so far been implemented on a campaign basis and provided municipalities with a high grant, often 100%, for implementation of low-ambition projects without high energy efficiency targets, most municipalities did not develop internal capacity for quality energy planning and project development.

However, some municipalities are trying harder, and this is particularly evident in their annual reports, in the commitments made and implemented in various international initiatives, such as the Covenant of Mayors, as well as in bold decisions to address local challenges in the fields of climate and energy. However, even these active municipalities face difficulties in finding and retaining experts to be part of the administration.

In most municipalities, there is no dedicated unit for energy planning which is treated as an additional task by agents. It is therefore difficult to conduct trainings, as the experts coordinate several activities and can hardly devote time to developing their capacity in the field of energy planning. The work overload of the experts also explains the collection and systematization of data on energy consumption and the condition of buildings and facilities, which is very time consuming. This, in turn, hinders the process of proper planning and prioritization, as it is not possible to make a proper assessment of the situation and set adequate goals without available data.

On the other hand, in some municipalities, there is a lack of in-depth insight into European and, accordingly, national policies in the field of Energy Efficiency, which further complicates cross-sectoral coordination and planning at the local level.

In summary, we can say that the key components for the improvement of the local energy planning are the development of skilled workforce for municipal administration, a stronger political will, an emphasis on data-driven decision making and communication both within municipalities and with representatives of national authorities.

Dr. Ivelina Getsova – Mayor of Lyaskovets:

“The main difficulty with us comes from the fact that we are a small municipality with a small administration and a lack of opportunity for the administrative capacity to cover the necessary specialized knowledge. I would say that there are two directions in which we need support. First of all, it is the financial resources that are needed to implement these policies. Secondly, we need administrative capacity. In the process of preparing our projects, we need specialized consultation, the knowledge of specialists in this field, because in a small administration, such as ours, we do not have the opportunity to maintain such specialists, and therefore we greatly appreciate our joint work with consulting companies. This gives us confidence that the projects we create and want to implement are of high quality and with them we will achieve the set goals.”

Ivanka Petrova – Mayor of Smyadovo:

“There are many difficulties... (in terms of energy planning and implementation of plans). Financial ones we put them aside, anyway somehow trying to get better. In order to start doing something, there must be a technical project. Here the capacity I think is very small and we are encountering a lot of difficulties. I think it would be good to have centralized funding, for example for energy audits. Starting to do something we need the technical project, we need the energy audit (...). But things cost a lot of money in terms of technical projects - let's not forget that we are a small Municipality, let's not forget the capacity we have. Indeed, no matter how knowledgeable we are, although we have a wonderful team that prepares and implements the projects, the human factor still matters.”

Tanya Hristova – Mayor of Gabrovo:

“Although we have been working for more than a decade in this direction and have certain successes, the recruitment and retention of experts in the municipal administration who have the right qualifications and skills in the field of energy planning and policy implementation continues to be one of the biggest problems. We need to look for alternative solutions. For this reason, we are extremely active in participating in international projects and are looking for constant cooperation with Bulgarian expert organizations such as EnEffect – this helps us to cope in difficult times. But this area is developing extremely fast and good experts are increasingly difficult to access, and there is still no national policy for staff training.”

Potential levers for removing the barrier

The active participation of local authorities in the development of national strategic documents (including the National Energy and Climate Plan) depends not only on their willingness to engage in the process and on the willingness of national authorities to invite them, but also on their capacity to contribute actively to national policy making processes and be recognized as valuable partners. Here are some concrete recommendations:

1. Independent quality control of municipal energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes and plans.

It is necessary to strengthen the control of the municipal plans and to allocate resources to ensure the quality of the control. At present, the Sustainable Energy Development Agency (SEDA) is the national body responsible for collecting and processing information from municipalities' plans and programs, but it does not have the necessary resources to verify the data, analyse the documents in detail, and give concrete recommendations to municipalities on how to improve them.

A good example is the European Energy Award initiative, which is just taking off in Bulgaria through the Horizon 2020-funded EXCITE³ project. Unlike in other countries where the initiative is financially supported at national level, in Bulgaria it is not yet clear how it could be funded. Resources for this activity should be taken from the *Recovery and Resilience Plan* or the *National Decarbonisation Fund* that is currently under development in Bulgaria, and the reform can be implemented within a maximum of one year.

2. Prioritization of municipalities that manage their energy in the allocation of resources under the different programs for financing Energy Efficiency (EE) and Renewable Energy Sources (RES) projects.

Most of the funds that municipalities use to implement their energy efficiency and RES projects come in the form of grants from various programs. The eligibility conditions and evaluation criteria determine which projects will be approved and receive funding. The criteria and the monitoring requirements of these calls for projects should encourage municipalities to prepare more ambitious plans and programs (higher weight in the evaluation, higher percentage of the grant). One example of this is the new program “Energy Efficiency of Municipal Schools and Kindergartens”⁴ of the Bulgarian National Trust Ecological Fund (NTEF), which obliges beneficiaries to use a specific energy planning and monitoring tool to certify emission reductions resulting from projects implementation.

The implementation of this recommendation does not require additional financial resources and can happen within a few months by taking a more careful approach to the design of EE and RES project financing programs.

3. Provide appropriate energy planning and energy management tools.

The systematic effort to optimise energy efficiency in order to meet specific political, economic and environmental objectives through the application of engineering and management techniques is called energy management (Khalil, 2019⁵).

Energy planning is based on complete, reliable, and well-structured information about the existing situation. The planning process relies on a proper energy management system. The collection and processing of this information usually requires significant time and financial resources. However, the process can be greatly facilitated by using appropriate tools through which municipal experts can easily and quickly input large amounts of information and get the necessary operational and statistical data processed in an appropriate form. Such a tool (online platform)⁶ already exists in Bulgaria and is used by several municipalities. It was developed by the Municipal Energy Efficiency Network EcoEnergy⁷ and municipalities can benefit from it free of charge. It is this tool that is intended to be used to verify the results of the projects funded under the aforementioned NTEF programme.

At this stage no additional resources are required, and any municipality can register and support the energy planning process after brief explanations from the developers of the platform.

4. Ongoing training of municipal professionals

Attention should be paid to the capacity building of all involved stakeholders on municipal level. On one hand these are the experts responsible for the energy planning process, but on the other

³ <http://www.excite-project.eu/>

⁴ <https://ecofund-bg.org/en/programs/energy-efficiency-municipal-schools-kindergartens/>

⁵ Elahee, Mohammad Khalil (2019). “Brief History of Energy Management ...” *Energy Management Research Journal*. 2 (1): 39–49.

⁶ <https://municipalenergy.net/>

⁷ <http://www.ecoenergy-bg.net/>

hand it is strongly recommendable to train also the municipal government (the decision makers) who should ensure that all the human and financial resources needed are available. Of course, experts need much more detailed training on all stages of the planning process, while for municipal managers it should focus more on the benefits of energy management and the requirements of European and national legislation. Such trainings have been repeatedly held in Bulgaria, both by SEDA and by various NGOs, including EnEffect, as the author of one of Europe's well recognized methodologies for municipal energy planning⁸. Unfortunately, however, without the implementation of the above three recommendations in a grant-oriented market without specific requirements for better energy management at municipal level, the impact of the trainings and the municipalities' interest in them will be limited.

Conclusion

Local authorities have their important place in the whole structure when it comes to setting energy and climate targets, as a significant part of the measures will be implemented at the local level. It is also important to mention the role of regional administrations, which are much less represented compared to the functions assigned to them by law. They should create expert councils to support the activities of regional governors and mayors in managing energy efficiency in buildings.

Improving local administrative capacity in this area will not only help to achieve substantial savings but will also restore the confidence of citizens to participate in local projects and pave an easier path towards energy transformation. For example, the small detail of verifying the preparation of energy audits of buildings should be carried out by a competent person in the municipality, as these audits are the basic document that shows the way to achieve future savings in buildings. In the most Bulgarian municipalities such specialists are lacking.

The commitment of the municipalities can be severely compromised if a given municipality is short of certain professional capacities. This is the case with the renovation of 5% of the building stock per year, as adopted by Bulgaria under the NECP⁹. Another major challenge, and an important determinant of progress for local authorities and beyond, is the organisation and structuring of the database related to sustainable energy management through monitoring systems, which are very often lacking. Such systems provide much more specific details and data on a yearly basis (a practice that is seriously lacking in Bulgaria) which helps to develop measurable targets for sustainable energy and climate.

The setting of targets, whether national or local, should be based on an individual approach and a bottom-up assessment of the situation. In this way, the potential for energy savings and the associated benefits can be maximised. And this is part of a continuous process of updating and accumulating knowledge and skills to support the work of local administrations. In this way, they will increasingly be able to help their citizens in the preparation of projects related to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, the creation of local energy cooperatives and the achievement of real results on the ground.

Methodology

This material was prepared on the basis of literature research, interviews with representatives of local authorities and the authors' own expertise.

⁸ https://www.eneffect.bg/images/upload/Temi/mep_guide_bg.pdf

⁹ https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-06/bg_final_necp_main_en_0.pdf

Croatia: lack of resources for the local energy transition

Introduction

Local authorities are essential in ensuring better living conditions for their citizens and the socio-economic development within their territory. However, they face many challenges, from the slow decision-making processes, slow digitalization, low tax incomes due to the centralized nature of the process in the country, and many others.

Barrier description

In Croatia, the need for more resources in terms of staff and finances is a significant barrier that local authorities face.

When it comes to staff, one of the most significant challenges that Croatian local administrations face is finding and retaining a highly competent and motivated workforce, as each employee's knowledge, skills, and motivation significantly impact the productivity and quality of local operations. There is also a huge competition from the private sector. To attract top talent, they need more finances to offer competitive salaries.

In addition, Croatian local authorities need more finances to improve their processes and speed up digitalization. Adequate financial resources are crucial for the effectiveness of local authorities. In Croatia the budget of local authorities primarily depends on tax income from the citizens, which varies accordingly to their size and the number of inhabitants, and even more so on the budgets allocated at national level to local authorities. Local authorities do play a significant role in implementing national policy, but they remain limited in their action, regarding the realisation of large projects and investments, by the budget allocated at national level.

This lack of resources, both financial and staff capacity, takes a toll on efficiency of local climate action and undermines local economic activity, creating a vicious cycle of budgetary shortfalls and economic stagnation. Addressing these barriers requires additional funding, improvements in human resources management, and digitalization. Such solutions can enhance the efficiency of local authorities, ultimately improving the lives of citizens in Croatia.

Underlying reasons for the barrier

Since the beginning of the establishment of the Republic of Croatia, challenges such as complexity, and inefficiency have been observed among the local authority's administrations¹⁰. In addition to the challenges resulting from a high number of local authorities, there is also the issue of size imbalance among municipalities and cities. There is an evident imbalance between Croatian cities regarding population. For example, the capital of Croatia, the City of Zagreb, has 767.131 inhabitants, while the second largest city, the City of Split, has 162.873 inhabitants. The imbalance is visible even more when compared to the smaller cities or islands, as the City of Krk on the island Krk has only around 4,000 inhabitants. This fact contributes to the widening gap in development, leading to the abandonment of rural areas and the migration to urban cities. Furthermore, this shift of citizens greatly influences the budget income of local authorities which partly comes from

¹⁰ Prof. dr. sc. Duško Lozina i Josipa Jagnjić, bacc. admin. publ.: Razvoj lokalne samouprave u Republici... Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Splitu, god. 58, 2/2021, str. 555-585 <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/374059>

a local tax that varies according to the number of residents. This leaves smaller local governments without sufficient financial resources¹¹.

The Law on Financing Units of Local Government and Administration establishes the sources of funding for the activities within the jurisdiction of counties, cities, and municipalities. Local government units acquire budgetary funds from their own sources, shared revenues, as well as support from the state and county budgets in accordance with established criteria. However, as stated above, the revenue-raising capacity of local authorities is often limited, leading to a reliance on financial transfers from the central government. If the financial transfers are insufficient or delayed, it can result in financial difficulties for the local and regional authorities. Long term, relying on central government is also unsuitable as it puts too much pressure on the national level. Budget differences between different local authorities in Croatia only amplify these challenges.

Today, local authorities have multiple duties and responsibilities with political, administrative, social, economic, financial, and environmental aspects. However, financial, and human resources are the main problem of Croatian local authorities to fulfil their tasks. For most small and medium-sized governments, financial resources are low due to their weak economic activity, primarily based on traditional industries, which prevents them from generating sufficient revenues. Without sufficient financial resources, they cannot trigger development, nor can they offer or attract employment opportunities to ensure demographic preservation¹².

Moreover, human resources remain one of the fundamental challenges for small municipalities. It is difficult to put a full figure on the lack of staff available to Croatian local authorities to carry out the energy transition and climate action in their towns and cities. To the authors' knowledge, there is no Croatian study on this subject. However, a European study conducted by Energy Cities¹³ has put a figure on the need for municipal staff between 2022 and 2030 for the building sector alone. This study estimates that 2,645 jobs will need to be created in Croatian municipalities between 2021 and 2030 for the building sector alone. This would be equivalent to a budget of 74M€ per year for Croatian local authorities. These figures, which come from a study based on Dutch figures and adapted to the whole of Europe, should be treated with caution, but they do give an idea of the situation, bearing in mind that the need is even greater because other transition sectors are also in the hands of local authorities and require more human capacity.

The challenge of human resources is not just the lack of candidates with appropriate education and skills but also the legal framework that demotivates available candidates to work in public services¹⁴. Indeed, even when a municipality has the budget to open a post and the skills are within its territory, there is little interest in the post from candidates. There are a few reasons we could list behind this:

- Local authorities usually cannot offer competitive salaries. The Law on Salaries in Local and Regional Self-Governments strictly regulates the salaries in local and regional governments, which according to it, must not amount to more than 18% of the revenue of the unit's operations realized in the year before the adoption of the budget¹⁵.

¹¹ Ivan Koprić: Karakteristike sustava lokalne samouprave u Hrvatskoj HRVATSKA JAVNA UPRAVA, god. 10. (2010.), br. 2., str. 371–386 <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/199811>

¹² Ibid. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/199811>

¹³ Energy Cities, human capacity in local governments: the bottleneck of the building stock transitino, 2021 <https://www.localstaff4climate.eu/the-study/>

¹⁴ Ibid <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/199811>

¹⁵ Zakon o plaćama u lokalnoj i područnoj (regionalnoj) samoupravi, 2023. <https://www.zakon.hr/z/290/Zakon-o-plaćama-u-lokalnoj-i-područnoj-%28regionalnoj%29-samoupravi>

- Highly qualified and educated workforce usually tends to leave small communities and seeks employment opportunities in larger urban centres. The low salaries on offer do not allow local authorities to retain potential candidates on their territory.
- The perception of local public administrations is generally poor. Local authorities are often perceived as slow and technologically outdated. This poor reputation does not attract young people at the start of their careers.
- Croatian public institutions generally suffer from a reputation linked to corruption, which can also be a factor for the potential workforce¹⁶ to seek opportunities elsewhere.
- There is a competition from the private sector regarding work force and a brain drain to other countries.

Faced with the lack of financial resources available in Croatia for local authorities, many of them turn to EU funds to support their projects and investments. However, they are again faced with a lack of expertise in EU funding and project management to apply for these fundings and ensure the project's success. Due to the reasons mentioned earlier, it is unlikely that small municipalities can solve the problem of a lack of staff on their own through additional education or new employment. As a result, Croatian local authorities often rely on external consultants from energy and development agencies, companies, or associations to design and implement their transition plans and projects.

Potential solutions

Even though the challenges mentioned above run deep and will require some significant shifts and initiatives on both national and local level, below is a list of *Potential solutions* to the analysed barrier.

- 1) **Reorganization and redefinition of goals:** Local authorities should redefine their priorities and allocate the existing workforce to identified priorities according to their skills and knowledge.
- 2) **Continuous education and specialization:** Local authorities should invest in comprehensive education and certification of the existing workforce to improve the knowledge within the unit.
- 3) **Partnering with universities** and other educational institutions: Establishing relationships with educational institutions can lead to internships and other programs that attract young talent to local government.
- 4) **Sharing resources and staff members** among nearby municipalities and cities: Smaller municipalities and cities can benefit from establishing a sharing synergy; this can improve efficiency and reduce costs.
- 5) **Partnering with private sector companies and local organizations:** Establishing an ongoing relationship with the private sector and, for example, IT companies can improve the perceptions of local authorities and highlight the advantages of working in local government to attract qualified candidates.
- 6) **Reducing the bureaucratic processes:** Local authorities are perceived as relatively slow; therefore, establishing a better and more digitized process could reduce unnecessary work and workload of existing employees.

¹⁶ UNODC, Korupcija u Hrvatskoj: stvarna korupcijska iskustva građana, 2011
https://www.eizg.hr/userdocsimages/projekti/završeni/Corruption_report_hrv.pdf

- 7) **Supporting remote work arrangements:** Allowing staff members to work from home or other locations outside of the office could make recruiting candidates who may not live in the immediate area easier.
- 8) **Apply for grants and funding:** Local authorities should work with energy and development agencies in their area to explore all possible funding opportunities and prepare project documentation. Also, local authorities should invest in educating some staff members to work on the absorption of EU funds and projects.
- 9) **Encouraging private investment:** Local authorities can encourage private investment in their communities by offering tax incentives and other benefits to businesses that invest in their area.
- 10) **Promoting tourism:** Local authorities should promote themselves more as tourist destinations if possible and work to attract new businesses to their area to increase economic activity and generate more revenue.
- 11) **Improving local infrastructure and quality of life for the citizens.** Local authorities should improve citizens' quality of life, including ensuring enough infrastructure such as kindergartens, schools, public transport, and community infrastructure.
- 12) **Capacity Building and Technical Assistance:** The national government can provide capacity-building programs and technical assistance to enhance the financial management and administrative capabilities of local authorities. This can involve offering training programs, workshops, and guidance on financial planning, budgeting, and revenue generation strategies.
- 13) **Streamlined EU Funding Processes:** Simplifying and expediting the procedures for accessing and utilising EU funds can support local authorities in Croatia. The national government can work towards reducing administrative burdens, providing clear guidelines, and offering support services to assist local governments in effectively accessing and managing EU funds.
- 14) **Promoting Economic Development:** Supporting local economic development initiatives can boost the revenue-generating capacity of local authorities. The national government can introduce policies and programs aimed at attracting investments, fostering entrepreneurship, and diversifying local economies, particularly in regions heavily reliant on tourism.
- 15) **Information Sharing and Best Practices:** Facilitate platforms for knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices among local authorities. The national government can create networks, forums, or online platforms where local authorities can learn from each other's successes and challenges. Encourage the dissemination of case studies, success stories, and lessons learned to inspire and guide other local authorities in their energy and climate efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Croatian local authorities face several challenges, but this report focused on the analysis of the lack of financial and human resources. The lack of financial resources leads to slow economic development while the lack of human resources results in an overall shortage staff available to work on solving the issues which the cities or municipalities are facing. Some of the underlying reasons behind these barriers are the issue of population imbalance among Croatian municipalities and cities, the workforce reallocation towards bigger cities for better opportunities, and a somewhat negative perception towards government authorities. Reorganization of local authorities, collaboration among neighbouring cities/municipalities, partnerships with the private

sector, and investment in education and training are just some of the measures that can help to overcome these challenges. Furthermore, improving digitalization and exploring additional funding streams can enhance local authorities' efficiency, ultimately improving the quality of services provided to citizens. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure local authorities' sustainability and balanced development in Croatia.

Methodology

To analyse this barrier, a literature review was first carried out and concluded that the lack of resources was the main barrier for Croatian local authorities.

To learn more about the analysis, a qualitative method was used. The methodology involved gathering information from the relevant websites and studies, which provided insight into the scope of local authorities work and their challenges. Furthermore, internal knowledge of REGEA obtained by working daily with Croatian cities and municipalities, understanding their needs and challenges was taken into account for the analysis. Also, the above identified barriers were also discussed upon during an interview with the Croatian national Association of Cities, conducted for the SWOT analysis. Results from this approach are presented in the previous section.

France: the difficulties to access financing for the local ecological transition

Introduction

According to the recent study of the think tank I4CE, French local governments would need to invest at least 12 billion euros per year, each year between 2021 and 2030 to achieve the objective of the National climate and energy plan¹⁷. French local governments are spending today about 5,5 billion euros per year. They would therefore need to more than double their investments.

There is therefore a very large gap between the actual budget dedicated to the energy transition and the fight against climate change, and what should be invested. This will require a major effort from local authorities, which must be made quickly if they are to meet the targets set and not incur additional costs through inaction.

However, local authorities are currently finding it difficult to mobilize the necessary investments.

Barrier description

The goal of this short report is to (1) explore the types of funding currently used by local authorities, (2) to understand why local authorities are not able to increase their level of funding and (3) to propose possible solutions that will be discussed in the multi-level dialogues organized in France, as part of the NECPlatform project.

How is the transition financed by French local governments?

Local authorities have three ways to finance the transition to climate neutrality:

- **Self-financing.** That is to say, the surplus of its revenues after having financed its operations (salary costs, operating subsidies, aid for local programme). The revenues of a local authority come from local taxes and other tariffs paid by the inhabitants.
- **Grants and subsidies received.** A local authority receives external funding, notably from the State or the region or from third party organizations.
- **Loans.** A community can take out a loan to finance its transition. This lever is however highly regulated by budgetary rules.

According to the study of the think tank I4CE, self-financing represents the main source of financing for local governments (all kinds of financing) with 59% in 2021, while grants and subsidies represented 37% and loans 4%¹⁸.

¹⁷ Aurore Colin, Axel Erba, Morgane Nicol (I4CE), et Claire Abbamonte (SFIL), & I4CE. Collectivités : les besoins d'investissements et d'ingénierie dans la neutralité carbone. I4CE <https://www.i4ce.org/publication/collectivites-investissements-ingenierie-neutralite-carbone-climat/> (2022)

¹⁸ François Thomazeau | Marion Fetet | Morgane Nicol (I4CE), Climat : comment les collectivités territoriales financent leurs investissements, I4CE, https://www.i4ce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Rapport-Climat-comment-financer-les-investissements-des-collectivites_au05-12-22.pdf (2022)

Une part limitée des budgets communaux consacrée à la transition écologique

85% des petites villes dépensent moins de 20% de leur budget en lien avec la transition écologique.

La part des budgets communaux allouée à la transition écologique semble largement corrélée

à la taille de la collectivité. Source : APVF & AFL, 2021



Difficult access to financing: exploring the underlying barriers

It is not so much the lack of financings available that is the problem, but rather the difficulty to access these financings. Despite the proliferation of schemes and sources of funding, municipalities still fall short when it comes to mobilize enough financial means. At local level, the share of expenditure related to climate and energy remains too low and most of the dedicated funding come from calls for proposals. The difficulty to mobilize enough financial resources is also followed by a lack of prevision and visibility for local authorities when it comes to plan their budget.

1. Fiscal autonomy decrease

Local authorities benefit, for decades, from State subsidies to ensure their public service mission. The allocation of subsidies is explained by different reasons: additional financial means following transfers of responsibilities or equalization mechanism. However, the role of the State in determining local authorities' operating revenues, has increased in the last years, particularly with the 2021 Finance Law.

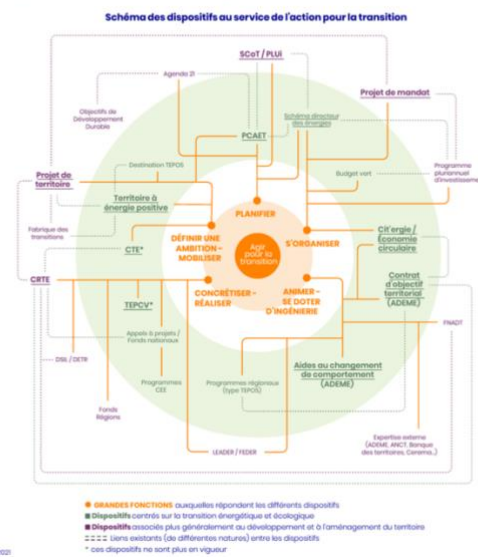
The State questioned the fiscal autonomy of local authorities through various reforms, modifying and deleting some local taxes, replaced by national donations and shared national taxes. Even if the compensation is guaranteed by the State and preserve local authorities' financial resources on a short term, this questions their fiscal autonomy. The source of the funding is important, but their predictability and stability over time is much more important for local authorities.

However, everything is not black and white. A stronger fiscal autonomy for local authorities has also some shortcomings. The property tax's transfer on built properties from departments to municipalities (communes) could be driving municipalities to use and develop their land to get additional revenues, even while vacant properties increased in the last years and municipalities are urged to minimize their impacts on soils.

2. Proliferation of calls for projects translating into a lack of financial stability and predictability

« Each Ministry, each agency, has its own program or call for project for the transition, each with its own procedure, each with its own governance involving the same local actors, without concern for coherence among all these initiatives. The result is clear: lack of clarity, complexity in putting together applications, lack of long-term financial commitment weakening the projects, scarce funding for operation and management, deadlines for evaluation and funding commitments that are incompatible with the project timeline, a thematic approach that is unfavourable to the needs of cross-cutting projects." This is the assessment made by the think tank The Shift Project.

Se repérer dans les schémas, dispositifs et financements de la transition



In the study "How to finance the ecological transition in local communities?" by AFL and INET, the authors highlight two major constraints regarding the logic of project calls:

- Project calls that are "regularly renewed and modified" from various organizations, which push local authorities to constantly adapt and identify financial opportunities, at the expense of the time they could spend on producing ecological transition projects.
- Additionally, reporting time (such as producing reports) also requires a significant amount of time, and the reporting requirements often differ from one financial organization to another.

The study also points out other limitations, such as short deadlines for responding to project calls, subsidies rarely exceeding 3 years, whereas some deep transformation projects require a longer-term vision. Lastly, the nature of project calls refers to "an additional vision of actions already carried out, whereas it should permeate all policies implemented."

3. Constrained budgets affecting the availability of human resources

For many local authorities, expenses related to climate and energy issues primarily fall under investments, rather than operational costs. This problem can be viewed in the context of the constraints faced by local authorities regarding the Cahors Pact. As highlighted in the 2020 annual report of the High Council for Climate, certain expenses categorized as operational cannot be increased (due to the Cahors Pact, which sets targets for the evolution of operational expenses between +0.75% and +1.65% for 322 local authorities with operational budgets exceeding €60 million) or be financed through borrowing. Even though operational expenses are and will likely be lower than investment expenses, the latter will not materialize if local authorities do not invest in human resources to plan, develop projects, and organize the transition.

4. Political decisions not always up to the level of ambitions posted or encountering stronger priorities

The difficulty in financing the ecological transition at the local level finally faces a point that is rarely mentioned or perhaps taboo. Despite strong commitments made by many local authorities regarding energy-climate policies, these commitments do not always translate into political and

financial trade-offs. As the study "How to finance the ecological transition in local authorities?" by AFL and INET emphasizes once again, many municipalities today have political priorities that do not always include ecological transition or are overshadowed by stronger priorities, such as attractiveness or economic development policies, especially in the case of large cities.

Potential solutions & conclusion

- **Ensuring clear, adapted, and sustainable resources**

At the end of 2020, the State launched the Contract for Recovery and Ecological Transition (CRTE) as a simplification for local projects. Many on the ground fear that it adds another layer that does not reduce the need to multiply applications and responses to multiple projects calls in order to mobilize funding. Others, on the contrary, welcome it. They appreciate the desire to unify contracts between the State and territories (Rural Contract, Ecological Transition Contract, City Contracts...), the search for appropriate levels of project territories, tending towards relevant living or activity basins, and the declared intention to involve the entire ecosystem of territorial actors, including citizens, businesses, and civil society, and not just local authorities.

With the Contract for Recovery and Ecological Transition (CRTE), the territorial project becomes the reference document for the contractual relationship between the territory and the State. However, there is no dedicated funding provided. Additionally, the State currently does not demand any specific ambition or policy coherence regarding ecological transition.

Despite the establishment of CRTE, the logic of project calls remains. The CRTE lacks synergy between different ministries, which was promised but has been scarcely considered so far. The CRTE is not a true contract since there are no multi-year commitments on funding. Except for exceptional credits from France Relance, the CRTE only covers common grants: the Local Investment Support Grant (DSIL) and the Equipment Grant for Rural Territories (DETR).

It is necessary to reevaluate financial mechanisms, and massive resources need to be mobilized. The implementation of these policies is a long-term task, supported by a clear strategy and transparent, adapted, and sustainable means. To initiate the necessary investments, local authorities need reassurance. Multi-year contracting should provide visibility on funding resources.

- **Improving human financing engineering in local authorities**

In addition to providing clear and sustainable financial resources to local authorities, it is also key, for local authorities, to reinforce their internal human engineering in order to mobilize new instruments. According to a study conducted for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Regional Council and the European Investment Bank, the main challenge to diversify funding sources lies in the difficult convergence of different cultures between public and private partners. Moving from a subsidy-based logic to a co-financing logic represents a significant shift for public partners, who must consider the return on investment of projects. This lack of financial engineering is particularly true in medium and small municipalities. To address this lack of engineering, there are several options, including support for smaller municipalities and strengthening territorial cooperation. Regarding the support for local authorities with fewer engineering resources, the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT), established in 2020, is called upon to play a particular role. Its program 'small towns of tomorrow,' for example, proposes to finance 75% of a project manager position for the smallest communities. The challenge for the ANCT is to make its program visible and ensure

that local authorities take advantage of it. The strengthening of territorial cooperation is another way to overcome the lack of engineering in certain local authorities.

To further enhance inter-territorial coordination of engineering, other avenues can be explored. In a publication by France Stratégie, the example of the Brest metropolis is presented to illustrate the potential of rural areas and the complementarities that can be found between municipalities. For instance, while the metropolis has the necessary engineering for the development of renewable energy projects, the space required for implementing such projects is more readily available in the rural areas surrounding the metropolis. Cooperation is therefore beneficial for both the metropolis, which gains access to land, and the surrounding communities, which can benefit from the metropolitan engineering expertise.

- **Going beyond the calls for projects: Commons call by ADEME**

In March 2021, ADEME (French Ecological Transition Agency) launched a different type of call, the Resilience of Territories Commons call, with the aim of bringing together all voluntary actors of territorial resilience to produce open resources – commons. The Commons call is a new type of project call that seeks to provide support for ecological transition projects. This approach emphasizes communities and open licenses to promote network effects, which are crucial for the success of projects. The participation rules are simple: a commons project is eligible if it is developed in open source, involves a community of users and contributors, addresses at least one of the 9 challenges identified by the territorial resilience community, and is publicly described on the Resilience of Territories Wiki. For the 2nd edition of the call, ADEME is teaming up with two other national public agencies: the National Institute of Geographic and Forest Information (IGN) and the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion allowing new opportunities for project promoters. The feedback from the first call for commons highlighted a number of strengths: it meets the shared needs of a diverse community of actors, it is suitable for addressing systemic issues, knowledge is accessible to everyone, and it ensures the redistribution of resources in a logic of common good through new project selection criteria.

Methodology

Energy Cities has explored this barrier through the abundant literature on the subject, through the discussions in the first dialogue of the project organized in Paris in May 2023, as well as through its network and its members, in particular interviews with cities and representatives of French cities.

Italy: difficult State-local dialogue holding back urban transition

Barrier description

One of the main obstacles analysed by the Italian NECPlatform project partner **is the difficulty of establishing a smooth and interconnected dialogue and relations between central and local authorities** on energy and climate issues, as well as strong internal governance.

In this respect, cities with more advanced experience (Milan, Padua, Rome, Bologna, etc.) are identifying a transversal structure to which representatives of all city's departments belong to coordinate actions on energy and climate issues. This is an internal organisation that is gaining much consensus and that other Italian cities are including in their organisation charts. This structure guarantees the management of internal and external issues, the respect of climate and energy objectives (implementation of SECAP actions, reduction of climate-changing emissions, etc.), the continuous relationship with local stakeholders whose involvement in climate and energy actions is fundamental to achieve the set objectives.

This approach is due to the **shortage of staff** for climate policies and also to the **lack of specific training** of staff. With regards to these needs the more experienced local authorities are training their staff and providing for the recruitment of staff with specific skills, but this problem is not solved nationwide. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan provided the opportunity to hire staff, but only on a temporary basis until the targets set with the European Commission - until 2026 - are reached. What is lacking is a long-term recruitment programme that comes out of the emergency and stabilises the staff and promotes the realisation of climate objectives.

In addition, **punctual projects are often implemented, and they are not designed with clear energy and climate saving objectives**, thus dispersing personnel (working time) and economic resources that could yield greater results if properly coordinated. In addition, these are projects implemented by other bodies with competences in water management or public housing management, for example, which receive a lot of state and regional funding and have little relationship with the local authorities that manage the territory. The current coordination actions of the municipalities are yielding results in this area as well, but they are not yet complete and satisfactory. These experiences are scattered throughout the country.

The municipalities also have **difficulty in relating to central bodies** (regions and ministries as well as the government). This is due to the state organisation that has national tables where municipalities are not directly represented. On the approval process of national laws, then, there is no direct opinion of the municipalities but only of the regions. The municipalities are represented by a national association (ANCI – National Association of Italian Municipalities) in which only the political bodies and not the technicians participate.

Another reason for this lack of involvement is often due to a **lack of time** (and probably lack of interest by the national government), as in the case of the recent NECP review, where only a few weeks were devoted to stakeholder consultation through the publication of an online questionnaire on the website of the National Energy Services Operator and a few meetings with privileged stakeholders.

Moreover, **the state often approves national framework laws and then defers to the subsequent approval of implementation decrees**, which are the rules that should fully implement the programmes. Unfortunately, however, these decrees take a long time to arrive and often refer for some parts to subsequent legislation. For example, the Italian government

approved the National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change in 2014, which referred to a National Adaptation Plan, this plan has remained several years unfulfilled and only recently (in December 2022) was published but not yet adopted. It is clear that such delays lead to uncertainty and lack of funding from the laws.

Implementing decrees would allow shared policies to be concretely implemented at local level, but the delay in their adoption often leaves local administrations alone in implementing energy and climate policies and projects, which therefore have reduced effectiveness and are difficult to sustain, including economically.

On the whole, the obstacles to be tackled concern both regulatory and organisational aspects stemming from national and/or regional laws: only the state and regions have specific competences in energy and climate matters and can therefore define rules, plans and funding. However, these legislative acts are often inadequate because they do not take into account local needs concerning the implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation policies and projects. Cities need methodological, financial, and regulatory support to facilitate the implementation of local energy and climate policies. Generally, these aspects are not considered within the legislation passed at state and regional level, where broad (national) targets are defined and thus do not address the aspect of implementation at local level to support local actions.

Despite this, some local authorities, including some Italian ones, signatories of the Covenant of Mayors - Europe and therefore in charge of designing and implementing Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs), are achieving important results in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by involving local stakeholders, businesses, and the financial world in the implementation of actions. These local authorities are achieving important spillovers on the territory, are networking and exchanging experiences often also through funding from European projects.

Potential solutions & conclusion

Possible solutions to overcome these obstacles are:

- **Increase the exchange between local authorities and the national and regional level by widening the areas of comparison:** The State/Regions Table could be enlarged to include representatives of municipalities. The purpose of this comparison would ensure a real connection between those who already implement policies on the ground and those who must guarantee national funding and choices on how to address energy and climate policies;
- **Connect with identified key cities:** 9 Italian cities and 100 European cities have been selected to achieve neutrality by 2030. The experience and collaboration of the 9 cities and other Italian cities could help to make plans concrete that might otherwise remain unrealised or unachievable;
- **Connect local authorities and central administration.** The exchange of experiences between local authorities and central administrations is fundamental in order to understand the criticalities of the transition process and to share the solutions to be adopted or that have been adopted and have allowed results to be achieved;
- **Create a network with key cities:** the network made up of the 9 Italian cities involved in the European Mission Cities could expand to other cities that are implementing similar policies and become an interface with the State and the Regions.

Methodology

This analysis derives from the experience of the local authorities and other realities that took part in the NECPlatform project meetings, but also from the members of the Local Agenda 21

Coordination, who were asked to respond to a short questionnaire in which they were asked to indicate the obstacles they encountered in the implementation of their own projects/territorial policies.

Obviously, the identification of obstacles and possible solutions to be implemented within the NECPlatform project also stems from the experience of the Local Agenda 21 Coordination Body, which has been working on energy and climate issues for many years through national and European projects, the comparison between members and with national and European bodies and associations.

Some of these themes have also emerged from the materials produced by Italian cities and regions in the framework of some European projects such as: Life Master Adapt and Life Veneto Adapt.

Finally, the network of the 9 Italian cities participating in the Net Zero Cities project is a national reference point on these issues and 4 cities (Rome, Milan, Padua and Bologna) are members of the Agende 21 Coordination and are part of the Association's Executive.

Portugal: the lack of specialized human resources

Introduction

The energy and climate transition are a necessity for the planet's sustainability and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Municipalities have a key role in energy and climate policies, as they are responsible for several services and infrastructures that consume large amounts of energy, such as public lighting, municipal buildings, public transport, and waste management. In addition, municipalities have the potential to be leaders in innovation and technology.

However, municipalities face several challenges in implementing these policies, including lack of financial resources, limited technical capacity and difficulty in attracting qualified professionals to work in smaller municipalities. Burch (2010) noted that “One critical set of ingredients to climate change action that has garnered significant attention in recent years is that of capacity. In particular, adaptive and mitigative capacities have been argued to consist of resources such as the technological options available, financial resources, human capital, and the structure of critical institutions”. These challenges can limit the ability of municipalities to implement projects and achieve ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Implementing climate and energy policies involves advanced technologies and requires technical expertise in several areas, including engineering, architecture, and energy management. Many municipalities may not have qualified personnel to implement renewable energy projects or energy efficiency improvements. They might also not have qualified personnel to elaborate and implement plans for mitigation or adaptation to climate change, which often require technical knowledge and the elaboration of studies regarding the reality of the municipality.

Exploration of obstacle

In Portugal, technical capacity of human resources is one of the main challenges faced by municipalities in the energy and climate transition and this can include the issues such as the “availability of staff, time to become informed, managerial support, skillful and qualified individuals” (Biesbroek, 2011). In its EU-wide study, Energy Cities put a figure on the need for municipal staff between 2022 and 2030 for the building sector alone. This study estimates that 2780 jobs will need to be created in Portuguese municipalities between 2021 and 2030 for the building sector alone. This would be equivalent to a budget of 115M€ per year for Portuguese local authorities. These figures, which come from a study based on Dutch figures and adapted to the whole of Europe, should be treated with caution, but they do give an idea of the situation, bearing in mind that the need is even greater because other transition sectors are also in the hands of local authorities and require more human capacity.

The lack of qualified personnel can make it difficult to design, install, operate, and maintain clean and efficient energy systems and climate projects. In addition, the implementation of projects may involve advanced technologies and complex processes that require specialized knowledge.

Portuguese municipalities might also not have qualified personnel to elaborate and implement plans for mitigation or adaptation to climate change, which often require technical knowledge and the elaboration of studies regarding the reality of the municipality. This is particularly happening in Portugal where many municipalities are hiring consultant companies to develop their local climate action plans.

Pitt (2010) concluded that the presence of dedicated staff can strongly influence the adoption of climate and energy policies. One staff member interviewed stated that “Since climate action is a subject that is widely discussed in the public debate, almost common sense, we run the risk of underestimating the need for specialized training in the area.” Therefore, while climate action has gained significant attention and is widely discussed in the public debate, there is a risk of underestimating the need for specialized training in the field. This is because the complexity and multidisciplinary nature of climate change require a deep understanding of scientific, technical, policy, and implementation aspects. By recognizing the need for specialized training in climate action, we can ensure that professionals have the necessary expertise to address the complex challenges associated with climate change. This includes developing effective strategies, implementing impactful initiatives, and overcoming barriers to achieve sustainability goals. While climate change may be widely discussed, specialized training remains a crucial component for translating knowledge into action and achieving meaningful outcomes in the fight against climate change.

In addition, Aylett (2015) noted that most local government does not have a big team to work on these issues, with the majority having a small team or even only one dedicated staff member. This is especially true for smaller municipalities: “Not only is the total number of staff lower than in larger cities, SMM departments are usually also fewer and therefore each unit has to deal with a broader range of tasks” (Fünfgeld et al, 2023).

This trend also occurs in Portugal where smaller municipalities tend to have few human resources when compared to large ones, which can hinder the adoption of climate and energy policies (Nogueira & Ramos, 2014).

The lack of technical capacity in municipalities can have several causes, such as:

- **Lack of financial resources**: Municipalities rely mainly on their own financial capacity to manage human resources and may not have sufficient budget to hire and train qualified staff (Aylett, 2015). This issue also relates to the fact that in many municipalities’ staff needs to multiply their efforts across different areas of work which can lead them “feeling overworked and overloaded and, in turn, to decreased morale” (Jacobson & Sowa, 2016). This is a well-known issue by the public in Portugal and can lead to a lack of attractiveness for jobs in municipalities.
- **Lack of expertise in technical areas**: The lack of qualified professionals in technical areas can be an obstacle to the implementation of projects in these areas. This lack of expertise can be caused by a lack of investment in education and training in these areas or by the difficulty in attracting qualified professionals to work in smaller municipalities or remote regions. To become a public agent in a Portuguese municipality, individuals generally need to go through a competitive process called a “concurso público” (public competition). The duration of the process can vary depending on factors such as the number of applicants, the complexity of the position, and the specific procedures followed by the municipality. It may take several weeks or months from the announcement of the job opening to the final selection of a candidate. This long process can demotivate some candidates to apply to positions in municipalities.
- **Competition between different areas of work**: As noted by Aylett (2015), one of the issues faced by municipalities regarding human resources is “the competition between the climate portfolio and the multiple other priorities that compete for scarce human and financial resources”, which can lead to a lack of specialization by staff.

This issue of attracting qualified professionals was one of the problems identified during the workshop we organized on 13th February 2023. The difficulty in attracting qualified professionals to work in municipalities can be a challenge. This is because many skilled professionals, such as engineers, architects, and energy management specialists, often prefer to work in large cities where there are more job opportunities and a better quality of life.

Smaller municipalities or those located in more remote areas may find it difficult to attract these professionals, especially if they do not offer competitive salaries or attractive benefits. One staff member interviewed stated that “The slowness of recruitment processes and the salaries (in addition to the slow career progression) immediately alienates the most qualified professionals.” In addition, many qualified professionals may not be familiar with the job opportunities and projects in smaller municipalities.

The study by Campos et al (2017) notes that most municipalities in Portugal do not have a specific department that deals with climate change, which could also be a cause for the lack of specialized human resources in local government. Nogueira & Ramos (2014) also found in their study that in Portugal “approximately 68% of the local authorities surveyed state that they do not have any type of employee training courses on environmental management practices in the organization”. This finding suggests a significant gap in environmental training and awareness among staff members in these local authorities. Without proper training, employees may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address environmental issues.

Solution to overcome the barrier

To overcome this difficulty, municipalities can **invest in technical training programs** for their staff and local workers. These programs can include professional training courses, specific trainings, workshops, and other types of capacity building programs. Nogueira & Ramos (2014) conclude that it is crucial for the local authorities in Portugal to prioritize environmental training, education, and raising awareness among their staff, particularly those in operational roles. Training serves as a pivotal measure towards enhancing an organization's environmental performance.

Municipalities can also collaborate with local educational institutions, universities, technical schools, and research organizations to develop technical capacity building programs.

Another option is to hire consultants or companies specialized in clean energy technologies and energy efficiency to help implement local projects. Municipalities can also establish partnerships with other local or regional entities, such as renewable energy cooperatives or public utility companies, to share knowledge and experiences.

To attract qualified professionals to work in municipalities, it is important to **offer professional development opportunities**, an attractive working environment and competitive remuneration. Municipalities can also collaborate with universities and technical schools to identify and attract young talents who might be interested in working in municipalities. Hahn et al (2020) also noted in their study that “partnering with the university helped overcome the issue of lack of municipal staff capacity to initiate a large multi-stakeholder planning process”.

In addition, it is important that municipalities have a clear communication and marketing strategy to publicize their projects and job opportunities for qualified professionals. Social media, events and conferences can be used to reach a wider audience and increase the visibility of the projects and job opportunities in the municipalities.

The government can also help municipalities overcome these challenges by **providing funding, technical training programs and tax incentives**. As noted in Fünfgeld et al (2023) “Relatively low financial capacities mostly result from a small tax base and a less diversified economy and thus lead to a greater dependency on external funding and investments”.

In addition to funding, the government can also **help build the capacity of municipal technicians and professionals**. Technical capacity building programs can be developed to train government officials, engineers, technicians, and other professionals working on projects related to the energy and climate transition. These programs can include training in project planning and management, renewable energy engineering and energy efficiency, and advanced technologies.

Conclusion

In summary, building strong technical capacity plays a pivotal role in the effectiveness of energy and climate policies within Portuguese municipalities. Insufficient capacity in this regard can impede the implementation of appropriate measures. To overcome this challenge, it is crucial to invest in capacity building programs specifically tailored for local staff and workers. Additionally, establishing partnerships and collaborations with other local entities and seeking guidance from specialized companies can ensure the successful design, implementation, operation, and maintenance of projects in these domains. By addressing these concerns, Portuguese municipalities can mitigate the impact of limited human resources when it comes to implementing climate and energy policies.

In addition, the lack of specialized human resources in municipalities could also lead to them responding “reactively to climate-related disasters rather than developing measures proactively” (Fünfgeld et al, 2023), while “dedicating staff time to these efforts can increase a municipality’s adoption of climate mitigation plans and policies” (Pitt, 2010). It is also noted that individuals with knowledge on climate and energy issues can play a crucial role in a municipality by championing this agenda and influencing leadership in adopting ambitious projects and measures.

However, Fünfgeld et al (2023) also note that “even where additional resources are made available for dedicated staff capacity, policy measures are necessary to support the development of institutional capacity”. Therefore, it takes more than specialized human resources to actually implement sound climate and energy projects.

Methodology

One of the first activities for the NECPlatform project we had to elaborate a SWOT analysis on local government participation and the role in the national climate and energy decision-making process. To produce this SWOT analysis, we sent an online questionnaire to municipalities and associations of municipalities. We received six answers to this questionnaire from the following municipalities: Cascais, Viana do Castelo, Amarante, Figueira da Foz, Mafra, Torres Vedras. Some of the answers collected pointed to the identified barrier and we then sent follow-up emails to learn more about this issue.

We also organized a workshop with municipalities of the greater Lisbon / Lisbon metropolitan area on the 13th of February 2023 to have more inputs and enrich the SWOT analysis. Thirteen municipalities attended this workshop where we were able to present the NECPlatform project and do a practical SWOT exercise. Some of the attendees identified the selected barrier and at the end of the session we held a discussion around it.

We also conducted research on this topic and found some very interesting publications that are referenced at the end. However, there are almost no studies about the reality in Portuguese municipalities. We contacted Portuguese researchers about these topics, but they did not have more information to provide.

Romania: a flawed data reporting system that fails to highlight local transition's actions

Introduction

There are major deficiencies in the reporting of data collected from the field at the level of local authorities and their centralization by a state authority to aggregate them and make them available to institutional actors involved in the development of public policies.

In Romania, due to the important role of local communities in the implementation of the national energy efficiency policy, specific obligations regarding the implementation of energy efficiency programs were introduced in the legislation. Local public administrations with over 5.000 inhabitants are obliged to develop an Energy Efficiency Improvement Programme (EEIP) and report their progress annually, according to the legislation (Law 121/2014 on Energy Efficiency, with subsequent additions and amendments).

Exploration of obstacle

The EEIP is an important tool in developing a vision for the short and long term to define the future evolution of the way energy is produced and consumed, including from renewable sources at the local level. However, based on the statements of the national authority in charge, namely the Ministry of Energy, very few local authorities do have this program and monitor it yearly.

One of the main problems that local authorities face is the lack of guidelines for developing these plans, not having specialized personnel, or not understanding of energy indicators and concepts. Consumption reporting is a difficult process that involves a macro-scale analysis of all buildings and consumers (lighting, transport etc.) within the administration. The correlation of the data with the information requested by the specialized authority (Ministry of Energy) is often done superficially.

The quality of the EEIP needs to increase. It is very important to avoid using the wrong/ incomplete data in the EEIPs. Missing data or low-quality data leads to a high degree of error (mishandling of data), which leads to blocked or inefficient funding. There is also a need of predictability in EEIPs.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Energy requests the information in physical format, which is unacceptable in an age of digitization. For this reason, the requested information is not outlined in a pertinent analysis at the national level. The requested information remains at the legislative requirement level and is not used to define local energy trends.

How to overcome this barrier?

Challenge	Approach
Lack of guidelines for developing an Energy Efficiency Improvement Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More comprehensive guidelines could be developed by the Ministry of Energy, in accordance with the legislation and also with the Covenant of Mayors Guide for Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (a complex and very useful document, with EU indicators); • The dissemination of the <u>guidelines</u> could be done by OER and other local authorities networks; • Webinars/training provided by the Ministry of Energy or other partners (OER).
Poor quality of Energy Efficiency Improvement Programs (EEIPs) or superficially done	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As far as funding is concerned: a higher score could be awarded to the local authorities who have completed an Energy Efficiency Improvement Program earlier, not just to tick the funding criterion; • The Energy Efficiency Improvement Programs should generate funding and lead to updating existing policies; • Incentives/benefits should not be given if the EEIP is not supported by data and if data is not provided.
Few local authorities do have this program and monitor it yearly	At the local level, OER could gather (via surveys) the main bottlenecks hindering local authorities to develop and monitor the Energy Efficiency Improvement Program, as well as provide them with the Covenant of Mayors Guide for Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (a complex and very useful document, with EU indicators).
Ministry of Energy requests the information in a physical format / Lack of digitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the national level, OER could support the Ministry of Energy to better understand the issues faced by local authorities and the importance of having a digital platform showing the status of all Energy Efficiency Improvement Programs in Romania alongside national performance indicators showing local authorities where they stand. • Within the OER (Energy Cities Romania) Association, there is access to a database with 31 local actors who can provide real feedback on the process, through surveys. Besides that, we have an open collaboration with the relevant Ministries who accept to attend our events through which we bring together the local and national levels to the table. • A possible solution for the digitisation of EEIPs and data access: adaptation of the Covenant of Mayors template/table. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Step 1: OER makes available the Covenant of Mayors table; - Step 2: the Ministry's data need is identified; - Step 3: the Covenant of Mayors table is populated with columns required to cover the Ministry's data needs. <p>The Ministry could make funds available for the application/database. Estimated value minimum 17,000 euros. Data could be stored on the server of the State Security Service.</p>

Methodology

This analysis was developed from the contents of the dialogue preparation discussions with the associations representing the Romanian municipalities for the NECPlatform project in 2023 as well as from the experience of the OER network in Romania.

Conclusion of the second part

The analysis of the selected barriers in each of NECPlatform focus countries reveals common features, although the barriers chosen are country specific. In particular, the lack of skills and qualified human resources exist in all the countries of the project and is often an underlying reason of all barriers (credibility of local planning, access to financing, access to data). Without human resources capable to implement projects on the ground, action plans are useless. Same goes for training opportunities. The focus should be on unlocking investments to hire new people in city administrations.

In addition, the acceleration of the ecological transition at local level faces not only external obstacles (such as the lack of financing or human resources). The analysis clearly shows a point that is rarely mentioned or perhaps taboo. Despite strong commitments made by many local authorities regarding energy-climate policies, these commitments do not always translate into political and financial trade-offs. Many municipalities today have political priorities that do not always include ecological transition or are overshadowed by stronger priorities, such as attractiveness or economic development policies, especially in the case of large cities.

Yet, it is key to provide the conditions for local authorities to overcome these barriers in order to guarantee that the ecological transition is faster. High-quality local planning, and sound implementation can then inform the national level to achieve adequate and ambitious planning at national level. It is therefore essential to give local authorities the means for their climate actions and to organize a quality dialogue to ensure that these actors can be reliable partners of the central State for the implementation of the objectives on the ground.

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About the Project

NECPlatform is a LIFE funded project aiming to support 6 EU Member States set up multi-level dialogue platforms, to raise the voices of local and regional decision-makers and relevant stakeholders in national energy and climate policies.

www.energy-cities.eu/project/life-necplatform set up multi-level dialogue platforms, to raise the voices of local and regional decision-makers and