EUROPEAN CITIZEN ENERGY ACADEMY

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Inspiring community energy initiatives

European Climate Initiative EUKI

EUCENA

EUROPEAN CITIZEN ENERGY ACADEMY

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Inspiring community energy initiatives

Author: Dr. Antonia Proka (REScoop.eu). **Contributors:** MSc Chris Vretos (Electra Energy), MSc Dimitris Kitsikopoulos (Electra Energy), MSc Valbona Mazreku (Mileukontakt Albania).

This publication is prepared in the framework of the EUCENA Project. This project is part of the European Climate Initiative (EUKI) of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK). The opinions put forward in this study are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK).

RESCOOP.EU

WWW.RESCOOP.EU

REScoop.eu is the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives. We are a growing network of 1.900 cooperatives operating across Europe and jointly represent over 1,25 million citizens.

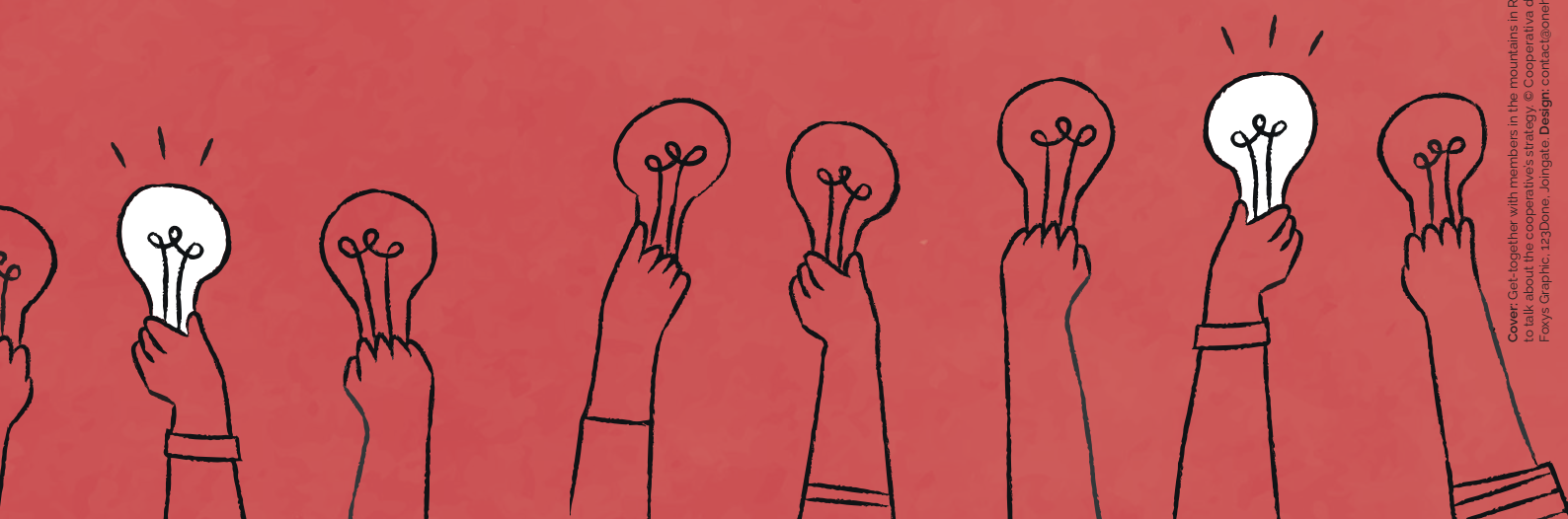
EUCENA european citizen energy academy

WWW.CITIZENENERGY.ACADEMY

Supported by:

Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action

European Climate Initiative EUKI



Cover: Get-together with members in the mountains in Romania to talk about the cooperative's strategy. © Cooperativa de energia. Foxys Graphic, 123Done, Joingate. **Design:** contact@onehemisphere.se

TABLE OF CONTENTS

© REScoop.eu

1

INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is written in a period of what is often referred to as the "global energy crisis". The energy prices have skyrocketed and the access to sufficient "natural", or better, fossil gas to fuel our addicted societies is ambiguous. This energy crisis, combined with the climate crisis, leaves millions of people globally without access to a safe, clean and sustainable source of energy.

There are solutions to these combined and interrelated crises, but we need to act now. In this guidebook, we have compiled examples of inspiring community energy initiatives where people take action to improve their conditions and the wellbeing of their communities.

Energy communities work towards the development of a decentralised, renewable, clean and efficient energy system with citizens at its core. It goes without saying that these communities can contribute to phasing-out fossil fuels, enhancing at the same time resilience against energy price spikes and import dependence, generating renewable energy and energy savings, all supporting local economic development.

The goal of this publication is to illustrate good practices of energy communities in the region, to inspire other citizens to launch their own citizen energy communities, following the steps of- and reaching out for support to the frontrunning initiatives.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENERGY?

"Community energy" or "community power" refers to people in a community cooperating on energy issues. Community energy is a broad concept, it can refer to campaigns for energy efficiency, collective investments in solar panels or wind turbines, but also the ownership of an energy supply company, or even a distribution network. Community energy brings people together to take democratic climate action by understanding, generating, owning, using, sharing, and saving energy.

Depending on the activity, community energy can take different forms. These forms include (but are not limited to) cooperatives, partnerships, foundations, non-profit organisations, trusts and associations.

As of 2019, two types of energy communities are legally defined at the EU level, signaling a strong shift in the role of citizens from passive consumers to active participants in the energy transition. The definitions of 'renewable energy communities' in the revised *Renewable Energy Directive* and 'citizen energy communities' in the *Internal Electricity Market Directive* provide a supportive legal framework for community energy ownership. They give a set of criteria that must be met for a collective to be considered an energy community, including ownership, governance principles, and non-commercial purpose.

In the Clean Energy Package there are two different legal definitions of community energy projects. Firstly, Renewable Energy Communities or RECs which are defined in the Renewables Directive and secondly Citizen Energy Communities or CECs which are defined in the Internal Energy Market Directive. These definitions are broadly similar but it came about that there are two definitions because two different departments were working on similar legislation at the same time. Both these definitions have the most important things in common, they both require energy communities to have a mission that is related to the environmental, social or local economic values rather than profit. They both require that control over the project is in the hands of "real persons" such as citizens, cooperatives or local authorities. There are some differences in the membership that is allowed and in theory only RECs are required to be purely about renewable energy. The main thing is not to allow different definitions confuse or distract you, they are useful legal definitions that recognize the value of community involvement in the energy transition.

Source: *Community Energy: A practical guide to reclaiming power*

Do you want to learn more? Check: *Energy Communities under the Clean Energy Package: Transposition Guidance*

Irrespective of the legal form, business model or technologies used, energy communities always take a collective approach. An energy community is an organisational model that allows local actors to collaborate and take action to implement sustainable energy projects in their respective communities. They are owned and controlled by their members.

At its core, an energy community is an organisational concept featuring:

- **Open membership:** They are open and a voluntary participation of anyone is guaranteed.
- **Democratic member control:** They are effectively controlled by their members which usually requires a democratic governance mechanism.
- **Specific members' nature:** Members can be natural persons (i.e. private consumers), municipalities and/or small (and often medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)).
- **Concern for the community:** Their primary purpose is to offer environmental, economic or social community benefits, rather than financial profits.

© grafikplusfoto - stock.adobe.com

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ENERGY INITIATIVES?

Community energy organisations are already at the forefront of the required energy system transformation. They have eased increased acceptance of renewable energy technologies, initiated behaviour change, accelerated the decentralisation of the energy system, reduced carbon emissions, as well as empowered and upskilled communities. Community energy build the consent, trust and active participation needed to ensure a just and solid energy transition. These aspects are further detailed below.

- **Energy project adapted to community needs**
  Energy communities promote renewable energy projects that are suitable and best adapted with their local contexts. They mobilise private credit and redirect money which is currently supporting the fossil fuel system. Furthermore, community energy projects can provide flexibility, and increase the reliability and resilience of the whole system.

- **Cultural change**
  By placing democratic control, active participation and fair cost/benefit distribution at the centre of every project development, energy communities create a foundation for the significant infrastructural and cultural change we need to reduce the impact of climate change and increase our energy security.

- **Local economic benefits**
  Community energy projects generate 2 to 8 times more local revenue than a project carried out by an external actor (as solar and wind power projects have shown).[1] They create jobs, and can help create local energy markets where consumers can buy energy at a stable and fair price. Creating local economic opportunities, they also help reduce demographic decline of rural areas.

- **Energy poverty**
  Many community-owned energy projects provide an allowance of electricity at low cost to the people involved, and often they take initiative to support vulnerable people in their community, thereby helping to tackle energy poverty.

- **Strengthening communities skills**
  Participation and action within energy communities also seems to strengthen a sense of identity, as well as social cohesion, as it enhances inter- and intra-community dialogue and collaboration. Community-driven renewable energy and energy efficiency projects empower citizens, as through their involvement, citizens acquire technical knowledge, skills and abilities that go beyond what a traditional investor would enable. What's more, an innovation "leakage" is often noticed, meaning that citizens that work together in a solar project, may later also collaborate for the development of e.g. an e-car sharing scheme.

- **Awareness raising**
  And, as despite increasing energy efficiency, energy demand at a global level keeps growing, some energy communities underline the need for energy sufficiency. Energy communities, raise awareness about a shift towards a future where everyone on our planet has affordable access to the energy services they need, respecting the social and environmental limits involved.All in all, energy communities offer multiple benefits and promote a systemic approach to a socially just, fair and environmentally sustainable energy transition that can ensure healthier and happier lifestyles for everyone.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Definition, benefits and potential of community energy*
- *Community Energy: A practical guide to reclaiming power*
- *Mapping the Social Impact of Energy Communities*

1 https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/news/ten-reasons-to-start-or-join-a-community-energy-project

2

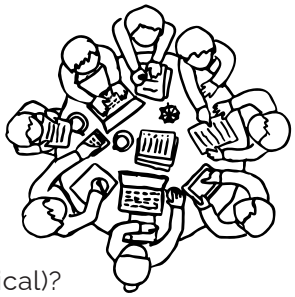
THE GOVERNANCE OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES

Building an energy community takes time. If you start the journey of materialising your vision, wishing to have a deep and lasting change in your community and the energy system, you soon realise that your group needs to be strong and united to continue working together. For this you need a clear organisational structure and transparent internal governance, that is, rules for how decisions that affect the energy community are made. Energy communities are democratic and autonomous organisations.

Often the organisational structure of an energy community comprises a core group of people who will share responsibility for the project over the long term. This can vary from 4 to 15 people, or more. The more people you have in the core team, the better. It's important to take the time to understand each other's motivations and what "makes you tick", this will help you better share tasks and responsibilities. You can also start with creating a vision board, where you can explore your ideas together to build your project.

FIRST STEPS

The first step in building an energy community will be to define your project more clearly while leaving some room for future adaptations. This brainstorming process should also take stock of the resources and challenges that you will be facing while delivering your objectives. The following questions can help in drafting your early project:



- Who are we?
- What do we want to do together? What is our project?
- What are our common objectives?
- How to constitute the early group of stakeholders?
- What resources do we have inside the group (technical/financial /social/political)?
- What are we missing and the barriers that we will be facing?

Think of those questions as a way to start building your statutes. Those answers will constitute the articles about the object of the organisation, its values, the goal of the energy community and its finality. Those refer to the foundational articles for a cooperative society: the objective of the organisation is the scope of activities, the values relate to how the community will deliver those activities. The goal is the actual value that the organisation will provide to the participants. The finality relates to the added value to the society at large. You realised that the goal and the finality for an Energy Community is often merged, but it is good to relate the finality to a larger purpose and goals to concrete added value.

Learn more: https://www.compile-project.eu/products/coolkit/stakeholder-engagement/

ENERGY COMMUNITY OF KARDITSA (ESEK)

GREECE | RURAL | REGIONAL

The Energy Community of Karditsa (ESEK) was established in 2010 as a 'for profit citizen energy cooperative' to fulfill the vision and reward the efforts of more than 350 members. The main purpose was to foster renewable energy in the region. In 2019, according to the provisions of the law 4513/2018 and following the unanimous decision of the General Assembly, the Energy Cooperative was converted into an Energy Community.

Foundation (year)
2010 energy cooperative – 2019 energy community

Renewable Energy Technologies
Solid biofuels (biomass) / PV (next short term goal)

Main motivation (for foundation)
ESEK operates in Thessaly, an area with a strong agricultural production. The continuous expansion of the local fossil fuel network threatens the uptake of renewable energy-based heating solutions such as biomass boilers. At the same time, the region has a great biomass supply chain potential through agriculture, forestry and wood processing industries that can easily support the uptake of bioenergy technologies.

Agiophgh, 43100, Greece,
Thessaly, Karditsa,

info@esek.gr,
+30 6945179170

www.esek.gr

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Members: SMEs: 5,2 %, Municipalities: 1,5 %, Citizen men: 74,7 %, Citizen women: 18,6 %.
Note: Men mark a majority because usually it is men who represent the entire household.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Biomass transporters, biomass suppliers (sawmills, forest cooperatives, farmers, municipality), consumables suppliers, technicians (plumbers, electricians, engineers) etc.

Activities

The main activity of the Energy Community is related to the management of a biomass plant for the production of solid biofuels to generate energy for heating (or cooling) purposes. The first phase of the investment project has accomplished an Energy Community with a solid biofuel plant which can set up the value chain for the local community. A manufacturing unit for processing and standardizing local biomass and converting it into a commercial form, such as pellets, has been created. The raw material for the pellet production consists of industrial residuals (sawmills) such as sawdust woodchips and logging residues from forest cooperatives such as branches, tops and stumps. Partnerships with local authorities allow the Energy Community to expand the supply chain with plant biomass coming from municipal waste (branches and tops of city trees). Next short-term goal is a solidarity solar project, a project that aims to cover the electricity needs of members by virtual net metering and net metering.

Q&A

Can you describe your organisational structure and ownership model?

There is a board of directors (9 persons) and a supervisory board (2 persons). There are 385 members of the community and everyone has one vote regardless of the number of shares they have in the energy community. All members are equal. Each year a general assembly is held. Every 2 years there are elections for the board of directors.

Any tips?

"All members should be equal"

© ESEK

Zelena Energetska Zadruga

ZEZ (GREEN ENERGY COOPERATIVE)

CROATIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

SOMETIMES REACHING OUT TO THE COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE AND EX-YUGOSLAVIAN COUNTRIES

Green Energy Cooperative has a background in the energy sector and an understanding of the complex interactions of energy, economy, society, and the environment. It offers active involvement of stakeholders, particularly policymakers and local communities, in the policy elaboration and implementation processes.

Foundation (year)
2013

Renewable Energy Technologies
Solar

Main motivation (for foundation)
Promoting energy cooperatives as a model for energy transition and renewable energy as a solution to the energy crisis and climate change.

Božidarevićeva 13, 4.floor,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

contact@zez.coop
+385 1 2095 552

www.zez.coop

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Men: 45%
3 decision makers
Women: 55%
1 decision maker

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Croatian cities (Križevci, Velika Gorica, Varaždin, Prelog, Poreč)

Solar companies (project designing companies and installers).

Activities

ZEZ's main fields of activity in renewable energy sources and energy efficiency are innovative business models and financing mechanisms for local energy initiatives, citizen participation and ownership, energy poverty and policy advocacy.

Today ZEZ is an umbrella organization for the energy cooperative sector in Croatia and the region. It is an associated partner of Climate KIC and part of Croatian Climate KIC hub and also Energy Cities partner for promoting the Covenant of Mayors initiative in Croatia and the Balkan region. ZEZ is also a member of REScoop.eu.
Education and consulting to the citizens on solar and connecting them to the project designers and installers is a main activity as well.

Q&A

Can you describe your organisational structure and ownership model?

ZEZ is organized as a cooperative with 14 employers and 20 cooperative members.

Which legal form have you chosen?

Non-profit energy cooperative.

"Promoting energy cooperatives as a model for energy transition and renewable energy as a solution to the energy crisis and climate change."

© ZEZ

3

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Naturally, energy communities need to reach out and engage the wider community in which they emerge and operate in order to achieve their ambition. It is important to consider your approach when reaching out to people. How do you better involve them?

Individuals often join energy communities to meet like-minded people. By joining they feel part of a growing community. By bringing people together, you can boost engagement, build community, and offer value to your members. So it is worth encouraging member networking and interaction.

Don't forget that being involved in a community project means becoming a very good listener. If you want to understand what makes people happy, worried, inspired or proud, you need to be skilled at the art of informal conversations that build empathy and trust. This will allow you to deeply understand the bigger issues that are affecting people's lives.


НЕ ЗА РУДНИЦИ
ДА ЗА ОДРЖЛИВ РАЗВОЈ
ZEZ misli ozbiljno
ENERGY IS COMMONS
ENERGÍA es PODER
ENERGY

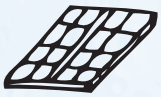
© REScoop.eu

MINOAN ENERGY

GREECE | RURAL | REGIONAL

Minoan Energy is the biggest energy community in Greece. It seeks to support local citizens, SMEs and regional authorities to actively participate in the renewable energy transition the island of Crete.

Foundation (year)
2019



Renewable Energy Technologies
Present: photovoltaics.
Future: pumped hydro storage, wind, biogas, batteries.

Main motivation (for foundation)
Democratise the energy transition in Crete and play an active and governing role in shaping regional energy politics.

El. Venizelou 183,
Arkalochori 703 00, Crete

info@minoanenergy.gr
+(30) 2891029010

www.minoanenergy.com

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Board of Directors (11 members, 2 of which are women) that is being overseen and consulted by a group of 10 people with research, scientific and technical background

General Assembly

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

3 Municipalities (Minoa Pediadas, Archanon Asterousion, Viannos) and the Regional Authority of Crete

Phaistos supermarket cooperative

Municipal services for water and wastewater management

Citizens

One agricultural cooperative

Energy poor households

Local church authority

Activities

Currently, the activities Minoan focuses on involve: Production, collective self-consumption, education, consulting (e.g., how members can install heat pumps). Furthermore, Minoan Energy explores the options for energy efficiency upgrades of municipal buildings.

In the coming future, Minoan wishes to look into services such as: electric mobility, district heating, demand-response, storage.

Q&A

How do you mobilise your members?

The mobilisation of members is done through emails, phone calls and social media.

How do you engage with the wider community around your initiative?

European-funded programs allow for open workshops with the general audience. Then, the wider community is reached via social media, as well as via interviews on radio/TV/newspapers and other media.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

A campaign that particularly stood out was linking the current energy crisis with the need for citizens to be producing their own energy. For example the President of the community appeared on Radio Crete for a 2 hour interview in the winter of 2021-2022, which gathered widespread interest from the audience.

Any tips?

The most important thing is to have a finished and viable (pilot) project to point towards. It's also important to emphasize the economic benefits, we see this is the primary motive of citizens joining energy communities (except for the social and environmental aspects).

© Minoan Energy Community

ELECTRA ENERGY

GREECE | RURAL / URBAN | NATIONAL / INTERNATIONAL

Electra Energy is a social enterprise that empowers citizens, small and medium sized businesses and municipalities, to actively participate in the energy transition. It has supported tens of energy communities across Greece, and now is expanding its operations to the other Balkan countries.

Foundation (year)
2016

Main motivation (for foundation)
Help to make the renewable energy transition inclusive and just.

7, Olympionikon Street, Ilioupolis, Attica, Greece

contact: Dimitris Kitsikopoulos
dimitris@electraenergy.coop /
info@electraenergy.coop
+30 6973957010

www.electraenergy.coop

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Board of Directors and General Assembly (only 4 members so these are the same). Gender composition: 1 woman, 3 men. As co-signatories of the Gender Power Ambition Statement of Rescoop.eu, Electra is working to enshrine gender parity in its BOD by 2023.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Regional Partners (P2P lab, Greenpeace Greece, various Universities and Municipalities)

National Partners and Networks (Greek Center for Renewable Energy Sources, Climate Alliance, Greek Network for the Social and Solidarity Economy)

International Networks (REScoop.eu, Energy Cities.

Activities

Consultancy, advocacy, education, research

Q&A

How do you mobilise your members?

How do you engage with the wider community around your initiative?

Electra engages with the wider audience through ongoing outreach, public events, (social) media, one-to-one communications. Before organising an open event, a dedicated stakeholder mapping process takes place. Through bilateral meetings Electra informs key stakeholders about its work and potential upcoming projects to garner their interest, but also to learn more about the local context.

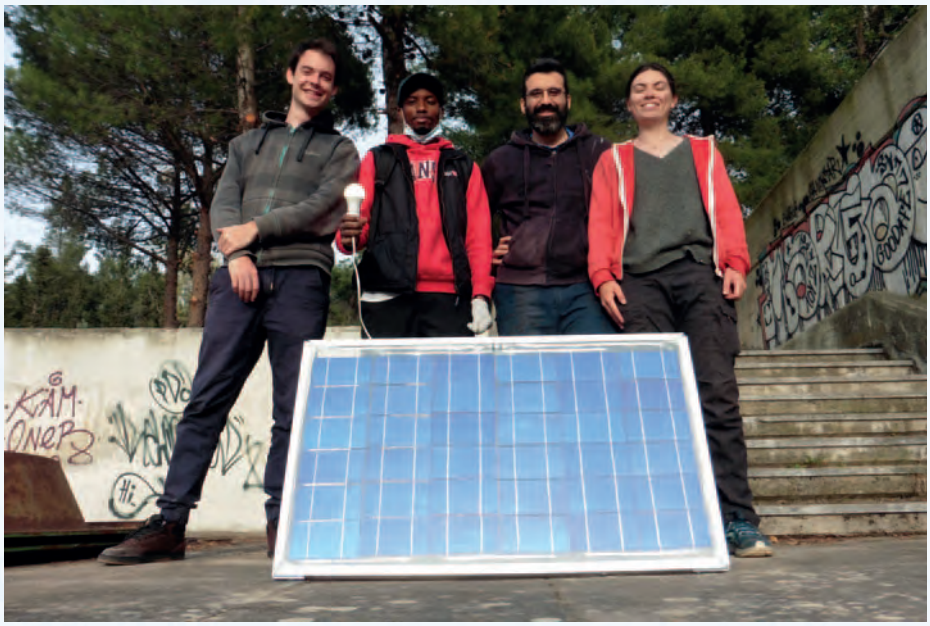
Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

Electra regularly organizes events and takes part in national, regional and international *fora* relating to energy communities. Two of the campaigns it has organized relate to: 1) a mapping of the social impact of Greek energy communities, 2) a mapping of all the existing energy communities in Greece, also looking at specific characteristics like governance, gender composition, etc.

Are there any tools or platforms, offline or online, that you use to promote participatory planning and engagement?

Any tips?

On platforms? *Slack* for internal communication. Sometimes we also use *Miro*, the online whiteboard, for online presentations. Currently experimenting with *Loomio* and are contributing to the development of an online governance platform for Greek energy communities.



© Electra Energy cooperative

WEnCoop
ENERGY COOPERATIVE

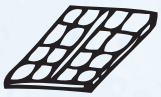
WENCOOP

GREECE | RURAL | NATIONAL

WEnCoop is the first all-female energy community in Greece founded by the Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

Foundation (year)
2021

Renewable Energy Technologies
Solar



Main motivation (for foundation)
WEnCoop was created to address the low number of women in existing energy communities in Greece, thus making the energy transition more inclusive.

Taking advantage of the existing network of the Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs and its members, WEnCoop aims to showcase how even members without an expertise on energy matters can get involved in the energy transition.

54626 Thessaloníki, Greece

contact: Alice Corovessi
info@wencoop.gr
+302310 224440

www.wencoop.gr

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Board of Directors, General Assembly and an Oversight Board

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Female entrepreneurs belonging to the Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs (to be a member of WEnCoop one needs to prove a link with female entrepreneurship and also be a member of the Association).

Activities

A 1 MWp solar park has been completed and a second solar park of 1MWp is currently in the planning phase. Both of these parks will be producing energy that will be sold to the grid. Sale was chosen over net metering to allow for national participation, as members of the Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs are spread across Greece.

Future activities: self-consumption

Q&A

How do you mobilise your members?

Frequent communication between the Board of Directors (BOD) and the members occurs at least once a month concerning activities, developments and all relevant news. Communication channels include: e-mail, newsletter, and a dedicated responsible secretary for WEnCoop available on call for questions and comments. The members have all the contact details of the BOD for direct communication if needed.

How do you engage with the wider community around your initiative?

Communication is very targeted to female entrepreneurs (in a non-discriminatory approach, any form of entrepreneurship is valid) across Greece. Regarding broader networking, WEnCoop is a member of REScoop.eu, in which it is participating in working groups (like gender power and advocacy). It's also part of the under-development Greek national cluster of energy communities, and it maintains one-to-one communications with many energy communities in Greece.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

The Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs frequently promotes and advertises WEnCoop through its activities and campaigns. Specifically in November 2021 the Association organized a regional conference on female entrepreneurship in Thessaloniki, Greece, where amongst other things, dedicated activities and presentations were focused on energy and citizen participation.

Any tips?

Commitment, hard work and perseverance despite obstacles that will inadvertently occur along the development stages of the project.

"WEnCoop was created to address the low number of women in existing energy communities in Greece, thus making the energy transition more inclusive."

© WENcoop

4

POLICY ADVOCACY

As we move towards an energy system based on decentralised, renewable energy, the policy landscape, legal and regulatory settings of the past must be updated. This is why it is important that energy communities join forces and advocate for policies that will enable them to emerge, grow and flourish.

Since the beginning of 2019, the European Union's set of directives and laws called the "Clean Energy Package for All Europeans" gives power to citizens to take ownership of energy transition projects through energy communities. This new European regulation acknowledges citizens as important actors in the energy market, and outlines governance principles and activities for energy communities. People, local authorities and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can set up legal entities that must be supported by their national governments. These directives are relevant for the non-EU countries in the Balkans too, as, being part of the "Energy Community", of the EU and neighbouring countries,[2] they follow these directives, nonetheless, without their transposition comprising a mandatory requirement.

Get active to make sure that your voice is heard, and that your opinion is well implemented. National, regional, and local governments need to go beyond simple consultations and genuinely involve citizens in their energy transition plans. Get together with peers from other countries and exchange showcases. Ensure that all relevant information, good and bad experiences are fed back to the EU to ensure a good monitoring and implementation of the entire transposition of all citizen energy provisions.

© REScoop.eu

© REScoop.eu

2 https://www.energy-community.org/aboutus/whoweare.html

MINOAN ENERGY

GREECE | RURAL | REGIONAL

Q&A

What is your involvement in policy advocacy?

Participation in the emerging *Greek national cluster of energy communities* which has drafted two letters to the Ministry of Energy and the Environment outlining the flaws and potential areas of improvement in the current Greek energy legislation on the topic of energy communities. Also, lobbying one to one with MPs, the regional authority of Crete and mayors, ministers and other key political figures.

What have you been advocating for and how?

Mainly the promotion of a fair and supportive legal enabling framework for energy communities - e.g., establish grants for communities involved in net metering activities, and remove undue expenses and bureaucratic procedures for energy communities, e.g., tendering processes.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

Advocacy letters jointly prepared with the Greek energy community cluster but also specific letters from the community to various political figures. Advocacy is embedded in all other workshops and actions towards the general audience.

Any tips?

Networking and coalitions are the best way to exert collective pressure and gather extra influence and power.

El. Venizelou 183,
Arkalochori 703 00, Crete

info@minoanenergy.gr
+(30) 2891029010

www.minoanenergy.com

ELECTRA ENERGY

GREECE | RURAL / URBAN | NATIONAL / INTERNATIONAL

Q&A

What is your involvement in policy advocacy?

Electra is active in policy advocacy and has an ongoing involvement through: 1) One-to-one meetings with political representatives and political parties, 2) Media and press briefings, 3) Open letters, 4) Educating the general public, 5) Networking to exert collective pressure

What have you been advocating for and how?

Electra has been advocating for a fair and supportive legal framework for Greek energy communities. It also works to prevent the co-optation of the law on energy communities by private, for-profit entities, and thus ensure that the legal framework remains steadfastly part of the social and solidarity economy.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

The creation of the first Greek energy communities cluster through which the members drafted a collective letter in February 2021 requesting specific changes to the legal framework for energy communities. An updated version of this letter, also responding to current affairs (such as the energy crisis and new State Aid guidelines by the EU for energy communities) was sent out in April 2022.

Any tips?

Advocacy is key to ensure that the law allows for citizens to participate in the energy transition. Effective advocacy can come through networking. By forming a coalition of community energy stakeholders, as well as other actors working in various social and environmental sectors, one can exert collective pressure and have their voice heard.

7, Olympionikon Street, Ilioupolis, Attica, Greece

contact: Dimitris Kitsikopoulos
dimitris@electraenergy.coop /
info@electraenergy.coop
+30 6973957010

www.electraenergy.coop

Zelena Energetska Zadruga

ZEZ (GREEN ENERGY COOPERATIVE)

CROATIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

Q&A

What is your involvement in policy advocacy?

In every upcoming law on the topic of energy, climate or energy communities ZEZ is active in the process of public consultation of the law. We held workshops with relevant stakeholders on the topic of energy communities.

What have you been advocating for and how?

The focus of ZEZ's policy advocacy is on renewable energy, in general, and energy communities, in particular.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

Two successful campaigns that ZEZ has organized are:

i) Good energy tour – promoting solar to the citizens;

ii) Policy lab – discussing energy communities and laws

Božidarevićeva 13, 4.floor,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

contact@zez.coop
+385 1 2095 552

www.zez.coop

ENERGY COOPERATIVE ELEKTROPIONIR

SERBIA | RURAL / URBAN | NATIONAL

Elektropionir is a Serbian energy community established in December 2019 by a group of enthusiasts involved in renewable energy production and innovative ways of civic organisation. They aim to empower citizens to actively participate in the energy transition in Serbia and demonstrate that it is possible to produce electricity in an environmentally and economically sustainable way under the cooperative principles.

Foundation (year)
2019.

Renewable Energy Technologies
Solar (so far).

Main motivation (for foundation)
Citizen-owned distributed electricity generation.

info@elektropionir.rs

www.elektropionir.rs

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Cooperative, democratic decision making - one member one vote. Female directors (founding and current), female chair of the assembly.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Stakeholders: Serbian Ministry of Mining and Energy, Serbian DSO. Allies: other energy cooperatives (in Serbia and in the region), The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, solar PV project developers, consumer protection organisations, informally organised prosumers, green NGOs.

Activities

Education, crowdfunding campaigns, advocacy, electricity generation (in progress).

Q&A

What is your involvement in policy advocacy?

Commenting and influencing drafts of the amendments to the Law on Energy and the new Law on the Use of Renewable Energy Sources and Law on Energy Efficiency and Rational Use of Energy (all 2021). Commenting and influencing drafts of the bylaws related to prosumers. Reacting to issues in the implementation of these bylaws.

What have you been advocating for and how?

We've been advocating for removing all the financial and administrative barriers to uptake of rooftop PV by future prosumers. We advocate via a network of allies within the government and industry. We plan to advocate for fair and sustainable implementation of RES Communities (transposed from REDII).

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised?

Commenting on legislative drafts, consultative meetings with allies and experts to develop policy proposals and comments, advocacy meetings with govt. officials, and participating in events with govt. and state-owned utility officials.

© Elektropionir

5

PARTNERSHIPS & NETWORKS

To flourish energy communities need to build partnerships with actors from their wider local or translocal communities. Municipalities are often the first allies, primary supporters and often members of energy communities. Municipalities are the first representation of local citizens but are often faced with little capabilities and limited tools for action to engage with their citizens. They often struggle to move from ideas to action. By joining forces citizen initiatives and municipalities can jointly advance the energy transition in their context.

Energy communities can also organise and develop national networks, or federations, which can help them not only in terms of policy advocacy, but also in terms of project development, financing, community building, communications, etc. Often national networks support their members with licensing or financing advice, among other issues, either for a low fee, or even for free, in case their project does not go through (like in the case of *Energie Samen* in the Netherlands).

Among others, energy communities also benefit from building partnerships with several like-minded actors from the NGO sector. Joining forces with experienced organisations in campaigning and policy advocacy can help them get their message across, reaching out and raising awareness of wider parts of society, while putting more pressure to policy makers at national, regional, and European level.

© Electra Energy Cooperative & REScoop.eu

THE COMMUNITY POWER COALITION

The Community Power Coalition brings together a diverse network of like-minded organisations who share a common goal of promoting the development of citizen and community ownership of energy in the urgent transformation towards a 100% renewable energy system. The Coalition includes associations representing energy cooperatives, networks of cities and local authorities, the renewable energy industry, legal experts and diverse environmental NGOs.

Our shared values

Europe's current energy system, which is dominated by a small number of large utilities, accounts for over 30% of Europe's overall greenhouse gas emissions. In order to address global challenges such as climate change and socio-economic inequities, Europe's future energy system must be sustainable, carbon-free, socially fair, publicly owned and controlled by local communities and people. We believe that a decentralised and 100% renewable energy system is both possible and necessary - while our energy demand must decrease. We demand an end to the control over our energy systems by a handful of large utilities, and we demand that EU citizens are put at the heart of our energy transformation.

The potential for people - individually and through their community, public entities and small enterprises - to actively engage in the energy transition is significant. By 2050, at least half of EU citizens could be producing their own renewable electricity, meeting at least 45% of the EU's electricity demand.

The Community Power Coalition believes in locally and publicly owned energy projects aimed to address local socio-economic needs, based on voluntary and open membership, democratic control, each member's economic participation, and fair and equitable benefit- sharing. Community ownership empowers citizens to make decisions about their energy future. Community ownership of renewable energy production maintains benefits from renewables locally by creating jobs, boosting local investment, providing services such as education, encouraging citizens to save energy, and fighting against energy poverty. By driving public acceptance of renewables, energy communities can bring people together to benefit both their societies and the energy system. The potential of energy communities lies not only with production and distribution of renewable energy but also encourages energy savings.

Market-based approaches alone are insufficient to drive a successful energy transition. Renewable energy sources are common goods, and all citizens must have a fair opportunity to take ownership and benefit from participating in the energy transition. Furthermore, the energy transition must be based on fairness and solidarity, where no one is left behind, including vulnerable and energy poor households.

Learn more: https://communitypowercoalition.eu/community_power_booklet_v5-screen.pdf

CHALKI ENERGY COMMUNITY

GREECE | RURAL (ISLAND) | REGIONAL (ISLAND)

Chalki has signed the Covenant of Mayors and an energy transition plan. In that context, they decided to form an energy community that will involve the local society broadly. It consists of more than 150 members with the ultimate goal of involving everyone in the island, including energy poor households for free.

Foundation (year)
2021.

Renewable Energy Technologies
Solar PV.

Currently preparing feasibility studies for the utilization of wave energy (a 1MW park).

Main motivation (for foundation)
The main motivation of Chalki Energy Community is to involve every local islander in the energy transition. The goal is to expedite and democratize the energy transition. Promote direct democratic practices over future energy planning.

contact: Vasilis Roussakis,
Vice Mayor of Chalki
vasillys@hotmail.com
+306944995011

www.chalkion.gr

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Board of Directors (5 members, all men) and General Assembly.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Local Municipality

Citizens

Energy Poor households

Local Small and Medium-sized businesses.

Activities

The main activity of Chalki Energy Community is collective self-consumption through a 1MW solar park. Also, the use of electric vehicles by local citizens and Municipality staff. Energy community members are also participating in educational activities addressed to the local high school.

Planning the commissioning of a public boat that will be powered by renewable energy.

Q&A

What partnerships have you built?

The Chalki Municipality has received informational and technical assistance from other island energy communities stakeholders. It has also received targeted help from Electra Energy Cooperative.

How is your collaboration with the municipality so far?

The Municipality is a central member of the community. It utilizes some of the produced solar energy to cover municipal electricity needs and thus lower electricity costs for local citizens (e.g., through the local desalination plant). The Municipality is also contributing with legal and political advice and advocacy.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised in partnership?

The energy community functions as a hub, organising multiple environmental and social activities, like a campaign to advocate for plastic reduction.

Any tips?

Keep advocating for the clean energy transition. By organizing as part of a community you are uplifting your voice and helping amplify the message.

© Chalki Energy Community

MINOAN ENERGY

GREECE | RURAL | REGIONAL

Q&A

How is your collaboration with the municipality so far?

The Municipalities have helped Minoan through the provision of (rental) land at relatively low prices. They've also been providing political support to the community.

The Regional Authority has been consistently supportive, as it is planning to fund certain outreach programs of the community, and may potentially fund the feasibility studies for a pumped hydro storage project.

How is your collaboration with other island/ national initiatives?

There is an ongoing collaboration with energy communities in the islands of Samos, Chalki, Sifnos, Kasos, Simi and Chios. This involves outreach, capacity building and technical support.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised in partnership?

The current PV park that is being planned with 1 MW of capacity will involve 60 underprivileged families for free. 50 of these will be subsidized by the Regional Authority and 10 from the other members of the community.

Any tips?

It's important to convince the local authorities of the social and environmental and economic benefits of the project and the potential it generates for synergies and local development. It's also key to form a strong founding team that has skills, knowledge, works transparently, and has a strong social standing and trust in the local community.

El. Venizelou 183,
Arkalochori 703 00, Crete

info@minoanenergy.gr
+(30) 2891029010

www.minoanenergy.com

Zelena Energetska Zadruga

ZEZ (GREEN ENERGY COOPERATIVE)

CROATIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

Q&A

What partnerships have you built? How is your collaboration with local authorities so far?

How is your collaboration with initiatives from neighbouring Balkan countries?

Today ZEZ is an umbrella organization for the energy cooperative sector in Croatia and the region, an associated partner of Climate KIC and part of Croatian Climate KIC hub and also Energy cities partner for promoting Covenant of Mayors initiative in Croatia and region. ZEZ is as well a member of REScoop.eu, the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives. We collaborate with Croatian cities on various projects.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised in partnership?

We have a few projects addressing energy communities in the Balkan area.

Božidarevićeva 13, 4.floor,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

contact@zez.coop
+385 1 2095 552

www.zez.coop

ENERGY COOPERATIVE ELEKTROPIONIR

SERBIA | RURAL / URBAN | NATIONAL

Q&A

What partnerships have you built?

We have developed partnerships with different stakeholders, such as the Serbian Ministry of Mining and Energy, the Serbian DSO, other energy cooperatives (in Serbia and in the region), the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, solar PV project developers, consumer protection organisations, informally organised prosumers, and green NGOs. Perhaps the most interesting partnership is with a consumer protection organisation that helps us resolve issues that prosumers have encountered, as well as with informally organized prosumers themselves.

How is your collaboration with initiatives from neighbouring Balkan countries?

We have an active link with Green Energy Cooperative (ZEZ) from Croatia.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised in partnership?

All our policy advocacy activities are done in partnership. At minimum with another energy cooperative, namely, the Sunčani krovovi Šabac.

info@elektropionir.rs

www.elektropionir.rs

ELECTRA ENERGY

GREECE | RURAL / URBAN | NATIONAL / INTERNATIONAL

7, Olympionikon Street, Ilioupolis, Attica, Greece

contact: Dimitris Kitsikopoulos
dimitris@electraenergy.coop /
info@electraenergy.coop
+30 6973957010

www.electraenergy.coop

What partnerships have you built?

Beyond the Greek national cluster of energy communities, which brings together most of the authentic energy communities of Greece, Electra has established itself as a central mediator of the Greek community energy ecosystem. It is working with SMEs, cultural organisations, municipalities, activist groups, individuals, and different types of cooperatives (e.g., pharmacies and agricultural). It is also increasingly expanding its reach into mainland Europe, as well as the Balkan region and South-East Europe (Cyprus, Turkey and Malta).

How is your collaboration with other island/ national initiatives?

Electra offers holistic support, involving technical, legal, financial and general consulting. It helps other communities access relevant resources, link with other stakeholders and take part in national and European networks.

What is the progress when it comes to building a national federation?

The progress with the national federation has been slow as it requires someone to actively take the lead to stir the initiatives, and there's no dedicated personnel or funding for it. However, Electra strongly believes that the federation has already achieved important awareness and advocacy actions.

How is your collaboration with initiatives from neighbouring Balkan countries?

Increasingly consolidating. The energy community ecosystem in the Balkans is only now emerging, and different business models are haphazard and sometimes hard to decipher. However, there is ample potential for the Balkans to jump straight from fossil fuels to decentralised renewable energy being driven by empowered prosumers.

Can you describe some activities / campaigns you organised in partnership?

At the end of June 2022 Electra co-organised a Community Energy Summer School in Thessaloniki, Greece. This brought together 150 stakeholders from every single country in the Balkans and South-East Europe. It was the beginning of a broader discussion towards establishing a Balkan Community Energy Network.

Electra has also held cooperation visits in North Macedonia and Albania working with NGOs and municipalities to help them establish community energy groups.

Any tips?

Balkan countries can learn from each other to leapfrog past mistakes and seize opportunities. For example, countries should fully transpose the Directives of the Clean Energy for all Europeans Package, so as to recognise energy communities in national law, but also setting stringent definition criteria to avoid hijacking by private interests. Working together can amplify one's voice through collective advocacy actions.

6

FINANCING

Financing is one of the biggest challenges that energy communities face. Overcoming financial barriers requires a mix of innovative approaches and existing instruments. Community energy projects are typically financed by citizens. Many energy communities engage in crowdfunding to raise money directly from their community. More advanced energy communities, sometimes also use bank loans. Access to financing through bank loans is not always easy, as they require guarantees.

CROWDFUNDING

Crowdfunding is a *way of raising money to finance projects and businesses.* It can be a great way to empower the larger community to actively participate in and support the causes it believes in. Crowdfunding enables fundraisers to collect money from a large number of people via online platforms. There are three types of crowdfunding returns: interest, equity and other rewards.

Any crowdfunding activity will benefit from good preparation. What is important is to choose a good online crowdfunding platform (or build your own), and to present a compelling and transparent story.

© Hyperion Energy Community

POSSIBILITIES LINKED TO THE CROWDFUNDING MODEL

There are several possibilities linked to the crowdfunding model:

- **Peer-to-peer lending (crowdlending)** – Multiple private investors lend money with the understanding that the money will be repaid with interest. It is very similar to traditional borrowing from a bank, except that you borrow from lots of investors.
- **Rewards-based crowdfunding** – Individuals donate to the project with the expectations of receiving in return a non-financial reward, such as goods or services, at a later stage in exchange for their contribution.
- **Donation-based crowdfunding** – Individuals donate small amounts to meet the larger funding aim while receiving no financial or material return.
- **Profit-sharing/revenue-sharing** – The community project can share future profits or revenues with the crowd in return for funding now.
- **Hybrid models** – Offer businesses the opportunity to combine elements of more than one crowdfunding type.

There are other forms of crowdfunding such as debt security and equity crowdfunding. Crowdfunding is relatively similar to share offering except for a couple of important points: first, it is often a lighter process. The administrative requirements (such as prospectus publishing) are usually nonexistent or mutualised by the platform. The second point is that crowdfunding allows you to also collect debt financing from private persons. This is referred to more exactly as crowdlending. It is important therefore to highlight the difference between share offering, which provides your member with membership rights and control, and crowdlending, which focuses on financial returns.

Crowdfunding funnels through an online platform in order to reach the maximum number of participants. There are multiple *platforms*. In order to find a suitable platform the criteria to consider are:

- **Platform specificities** – some platforms are specialized in types of projects.
- **Popularity at the scale needed** – it is important to find platforms that have the maximum number of users based on the geographical scope desired by the project (regional, national, European).
- **Fees and remuneration schemes** – always be aware and understanding of the fees of the platform (fixed or commission are the most common), and of the capital limits.
- **National rules and regulations** – be aware of the rules, many member states have implemented strict rules to protects private investors.
- **Headquarter** – is the money travelling and where is it stored by the platform are criteria to consider while choosing a safe platform.
- **Features** – consider the various features you will need to run a successful fundraising campaign.

Do not hesitate to interview a representative from several platforms in order to make sure that you have found the right partner, and that you have clearly identified the necessary steps to start your crowdfunding campaign (financial and legal documents, contacts and support teams of the platform).

Several cooperatives also created their own crowdfunding platforms. This is the case of Genervest in Greece, but also Coopernico (Portugal) and ZEZ (Croatia) from the COMPILE project. We present below some examples of practices of from those cooperatives.

Learn more: https://www.compile-project.eu/products/coolkit/financing/

HYPERION SOLAR COMMUNITY

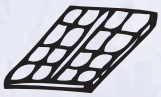
HYPERION

GREECE | URBAN | REGIONAL / NATIONAL

Hyperion is a not-for-profit energy community based in Athens, Greece.

Geographical scope (regional / national)
Regional, but replication activities and Peer-to-Peer capacity building occurs at the national level.

Foundation (year)
2019.



Renewable Energy Technologies
Solar.

Main motivation (for foundation)
Create a viable and replicable model of collective self-consumption. Hyperion aims to be a lighthouse project for energy democracy in Greece.

7, Olympionikon Street
PC 16342, Athens, Greece

contact: Chris Vrettos
chris@electraenergy.coop
+306948387911

www.electraenergy.coop/here-comes-the-sun-first-community-solar-farm-in-greece/

www.hyperioncommunity.com

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Hyperion has a Board of Directors and a General Assembly as its two executive branches. The temporary Board of Directors is composed of 3 members, all 3 of which are men. However, elections will be held within 2022 and since Hyperion is a co-signatory of the Gender Power Ambition Statement of Rescoop.eu, they pledge to have equal gender representation in their next BOD.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Citizens, energy poor households benefiting from the collective solar park.

Activities

Collective self-consumption through virtual net-metering. Also, educational and team-building activities. Future plans: energy efficiency, electric mobility, demand-response and storage.

Q&A

How did you finance your project?

Largely through member's equity participation. Also, some donations in the context of a very small crowdfunding to subsidize the membership costs of some energy poor households. Finally, Hyperion organized a crowdfunding campaign through the crowd-investment platform *Genervest* to provide low-interest micro-loans by some of the members.

How did you organise your crowdfunding action?

The crowdfunding campaign was organised in coordination with Genervest and Greenpeace Greece who helped with the media outreach. Members were thoroughly involved in the analysis of the benefits (and costs) of receiving a loan, and during the General Assembly they agreed to proceed with a positive vote.

Which platform have you used? Why?

Genervest.org - it allows for micro and medium sized investments in renewable energy projects that also have some sort of social impact, e.g. energy communities.

Any tips?

A successful crowdfunding campaign should build a narrative that responds to current events (e.g., the current energy crisis), and also addresses multiple other points (e.g., climate change and energy poverty) to engage and convince diverse audiences.

© Hyperion Energy Community

SOLAR IN KUTË

ALBANIA | RURAL | REGIONAL

Kutë community has been actively involved in the successful fight against the Poçem hydropower project on the Vjosa. Because of the village's location, it would be severely affected by the suspended water supply. But, together with EcoAlbania, the villagers have proven that a steady energy provision without hydropower is easily achievable. Kutë as the country's first solar village, has become a milestone project for sustainable development in Albania.

Foundation (year)
2020.

Renewable Energy Technologies
Installing a rooftop PV panels system on:
the school "Ismail Shehaj", the Cultural Centre, the Administrative Unit Offices, the Health Centre, the reservoir of water on the top of the hill and the pumping station and Streetlights and Bulb replacements,

Main motivation (for foundation)
Let's make KUTE Go Solar.
We don't need the dams, help us save Vjosa.

Rr. Sali Butka, Objekti TBM construction 2016, shpk, Ap. 24, kati 4, Tirana, Albania

contact@ecoalbania.org
+355 44 31 7720

www.ecoalbania.org

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

The coordinator of the project is a woman.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Municipality of Mallakastra

Kutë community

Chair of the village

School staff

Members from village council

Observer member from CSO

Administrative Unit of Kutë

Distribution System Operator - OSHEE.

Activities

Solar in Kutë engages in:

- Creating the first model and practice of 'energy communities or energy cooperatives' in Albania
- Raising awareness of rural community renewable energy solutions
- Pushing on further solar and sustainable energy projects
- Supporting the "Save the Blue Heart of Europe" campaign on fighting the construction of the hydropower dam in Pocem.

Q&A

How did you finance your project?

The project was financed with the financial support of the Swiss Embassy in Albania, Patagonia and donations (through crowdfunding) from citizens and was implemented by EcoAlbania, RiverWatch, Euronatur.

© Solar in Küte

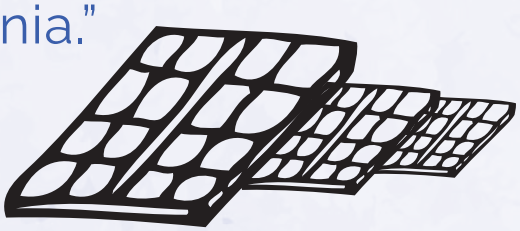
How did you organise your crowdfunding action?

During 2020, environmental organizations engaged in the protection of the Vjosa River launched the "Solar in Kutë" campaign to raise funds for the implementation of the project which helped the community of Kutë village, as one of the most affected communities by the Poçem hydropower plant. After a successful campaign it became possible to secure funding for the implementation of the first phase of the Solar project in Kutë. A more ambitious goal is to turn the entire village of Kutë into a solar village that produces the energy it needs through the installation of panels on the roofs of their homes.

Which platform have you used? Why?

We have used the *GoFundMe* platform which was boosted by Patagonia and Euronatur.

"Together with EcoAlbania, the villagers have proven that a steady energy provision without hydropower is easily achievable. Kutë as the country's first solar village, has become a milestone project for sustainable development in Albania."



Zelena Energetska Zadruga

ZEZ (GREEN ENERGY COOPERATIVE)

CROATIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

Q&A

How did you finance your project?

We are mainly funded by EU projects, followed by writing research papers for various companies, having partnerships with installers and project designers and actively working with cities and educating on solar and having solar workshops.

How did you organise your crowdfunding action?

Yes, we have supported various crowdfunding campaigns:

- energy independent school Kaštel Lukšić (donation-based crowdfunding)
- investing in two solar power plants in the city of Križevci (reward-based crowdfunding)
- solarna Pecka (donation-based crowdfunding

Which platform have you used? Why?

The crowdfunding has been organised through Indiegogo and ZEZinvest.

Božidarevićeva 13, 4.floor,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

contact@zez.coop
+385 1 2095 552

www.zez.coop

SELF-FINANCING & BANK LOAN

In addition to self-financing, some energy communities opt for bank loans. Bank loans, or debt financing, is a source of financing that requires guarantees and the payment of interests. Unfortunately, traditional banks tend to not finance citizen energy projects, as they see them as more complicated and smaller. Traditional banks also may require further due diligence to the project leaders, to check the guarantees and the ability to lead the project, which can add significant additional cost 20 to 30 000 €.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRADITIONAL BANK LOAN?

- Important amount: > 500 k€/1M €
- Interest rates: depending on the "market cost of money" – quite low in Europe at the moment – for example between 4 and 5 % on a length of 10/15 years
- Further due diligences can be required

Yet, it should be stressed that loans differ from bank to bank and they are always assessed case by case.

Specific tools needed to set up a traditional bank loan / What do you need to set up a traditional bank loan?

In order to have access to a traditional bank loan, it is needed to be at least in the construction phase of a project and to require an amount of at least 500 k€/1M €. Generally, project owners also need to bring at least 20% of self-financing for 80% of the loan and to pay for a due diligence process that checks the technical and economic viability of the project as well as the guarantees. It is also necessary for the cooperative to bring several type of guarantees:

- Guarantees on the building (or on the long term mortgage lease if you rent the building),
- Pledge on the production tools,
- Sometimes a bank account with 6 months of loan reimbursements blocked.

What type of return?

Return is normally paid out as share interest at the end of the financial year, depending on how well the business has traded and after members have voted on how the profits are to be distributed at the General Assembly. Bondholders are paid out interest according to the value of their bond. In other words, bonds function as loans provided by citizens.

Ethical bank is a bank whose mission is not to maximize the profit but to foster cultural, social and ecological projects: it does not invest in the financial markets and it makes loans exclusively to economically viable projects of the social economy: organic agriculture, social or cultural projects, energy saving, renewable energy production, etc.

It also organizes a transparent circulation of money; the list of the financed projects is published each year. Most of the time they are cooperative banks: savers and borrowers are also members of the cooperative and have a right to vote each year during the general assembly. More than the right to vote, ethical banks offer savers and borrowers the possibility to create links among them, which is a strong added value for cooperative project managers.

Learn more: https://www.compile-project.eu/products/coolkit/financing/

WEnCoop
ENERGY COOPERATIVE

54626 Thessaloníki, Greece

contact: Alice Corovessi
info@wencoop.gr
+302310 224440

www.wencoop.gr

WENCOOP

GREECE | RURAL | NATIONAL

Q&A

How did you finance your project?

Crowdfunding amongst the members [big part of this will be held to be reinvested in future projects, e.g., securing land, permitting, paying grid connection fees] - the big majority for the first project will come from a Bank loan.

How did you manage to get the bank loan?

It was not an easy process: we had established grid connection terms, a significant amount of capital in the energy community's bank from the members, and finally the tax forms of the members of the BOD were requested. Therefore to secure a bank loan one needs to demonstrate that the energy community has the actual willingness and capacity to follow through with the project.

Any tips?

Look very carefully in different banks and the different offers each proposes. There will be rejections, but eventually a solution will be found.

ACTIVITIES

Energy communities can focus on a great variety of activities. In their operation they can use a lot of different types of technologies to achieve their goals. What is crucial is to find the activity that better suits the needs and possibilities of your community.

PRODUCTION: SOLAR

Most of community energy projects in Europe are solar. In fact, solar is the perfect technology for community projects. It may produce less than wind, yet, it's a great place to start due to its cheaper price and simpler planning processes.

© Chalki Energy Community

CHALKI ENERGY COMMUNITY

GREECE | RURAL (ISLAND) | REGIONAL (ISLAND)

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on solar?

Solar was the most feasible model for the chosen region (Chalkidiki) due to various factors: availability of land plots, simpler and easier technology with not extensive permitting processes, and good solar generation potential.

Can you say a few words about your project?

It's a 1MW solar park which is co-owned by the 60+ members of the community. The electricity produced will be sold to the grid, generating revenue for the members.

Any tips?

Energy type should be chosen based on needs, availability, context and the members' profile. A thorough SWOT analysis should be conducted during the planning phases to compare different technologies.

contact: Vasilis Roussakis,
Vice Mayor of Chalki
vasillys@hotmail.com
+306944995011

www.chalkion.gr

SOLAR IN KUTË

ALBANIA | RURAL | REGIONAL

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on solar?

We want to prove that there is no need for hydropower if Albania's vast amounts of sunshine can be harnessed to produce energy and create income for every community. With the further provision of clean, reliable, and affordable solar power, we can direct the economic future of Albania towards sustainability.

Can you say a few words about your project?

The 'Solar in Kutë' campaign, an initiative of partner organizations EcoAlbania, EuroNatur and Riverwatch, was officially launched on May 26th and has brought to the attention of the public the history of Kutë community in protecting the Vjosa River and its capacity to produce solar energy on the buildings' roofs without the need to destroy the Vjosa river. The main objective of the pilot project is to bring a clean and sustainable energy source (solar energy) to the Kutë village and improve access to renewable energy, by creating the first Solar village in Albania.

Residents of Kutë village, Vice Head of Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, Vice Mayor of Mallkakstra, representatives of EcoAlbania and other participants during the inauguration event of the Solar in Kutë in fron of the Health Center of the village. © Christiane Schmidt

EcoAlbania

Rr. Sali Butka, Objekti TBM construction 2016, shpk, Ap. 24, kati 4, Tirana, Albania

contact@ecoalbania.org
+355 44 31 7720

www.ecoalbania.org

Zelena Energetska Zadruga

ZEZ (GREEN ENERGY COOPERATIVE)

CROATIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

Why have you chosen to focus on solar?

There was a need for professional advice on solar and education with an untapped solar market that is yet to bloom.

Can you say a few words about your project?

We have developed an "On sunny side" platform to connect people without solar with solar designers and installers offering high-quality advice and education.

Božidarevićeva 13, 4.floor,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

contact@zez.coop
+385 1 2095 552

www.zez.coop

PRODUCTION: BIOMASS

When it comes from forest residues, agricultural waste, food waste, forest or other wood residues, biomass can be considered as a renewable fuel. You may be emitting CO2 by burning wood, but this carbon will eventually be absorbed by new growth that replaces what is being burned. Yet, what is crucial, is that it is not always a given that this new growth will take place. This is why biomass is not suitable for large-scale deployment, but for some communities, it can be part of the solution, in particular when local resources are sustainably managed.

© ESEK

© ESEK

ENERGY COMMUNITY OF KARDITSA (ESEK)

GREECE | RURAL | REGIONAL

Agiophgh, 43100, Greece,
Thessaly, Karditsa,

info@esek.gr,
+30 6945179170

www.esek.gr

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on biomass?

Bioenergy is the leading technology in the EU renewable energy heating sector and holds the highest potential for replacing fossil fuelled heat. Thus, experts suggest that bioenergy can account for a significant amount of this market uptake potential and its expansion is crucial for meeting the above targets. The International Energy Association views bioenergy as the key resource for a less fossil-fuelled heating sector towards 2030, while the World Bioenergy Association considers the heating sector as "the single most important future development sector for biomass".

Biomass is the first renewable energy form that the community had chosen in order to create a value chain. In order to produce energy from biomass you need to engage many stakeholders such as Biomass transporters, biomass suppliers (sawmills, forest cooperatives, farmers, municipality), consumables suppliers, technicians (plumbers, electricians, engineers) etc. In this way communities can create a value chain and provide income to the community. The region has great biomass supply chain potential through agricultural, forestry and wood processing industries that can easily support the uptake of bioenergy technologies.

ESEK is currently facing two main challenges:

- Development and scale-up of the business cases for biomass boilers in municipal buildings: There is currently commitment from the municipalities participating in ESEK on contributing to the development of community biomass, nevertheless there is still planning work that needs to be done in order to clarify the business value for the end-users and the municipalities
- Development of community solar: there is currently interest from community members on co-financing and developing a solar community project but planning work needs to be conducted to develop the business model and business case for a solar farm.

Can you say a few words about your project?

Since November 2020, the Energy Community of Karditsa participates as a pilot in the Horizon 2020 European project BEcoop. The project aims to make community bioenergy projects more appealing to potential interested actors and to foster new links and partnerships among the international bioenergy community. The project investigates and specifies the community bioenergy market uptake facilitators and barriers and, building upon this information, further empowers policymakers to introduce enabling frameworks for community bioenergy.

© ESEK

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Energy efficiency is an area of activity for many energy communities. The underlying goal of these initiatives is often to achieve an equilibrium between consumption and RES production. This is done through outreach and encouragement of investments by members so that they can save money on their energy bills. This is a great way to start activities and gain expertise and trust in the community, especially in the beginning. While many energy efficiency initiatives carried out by energy communities are stand-alone activities, many are also linked to community renewables projects, which provide a revenue source for investments in renovations and energy savings technology.

© Shutterstock

HAS MUNICIPALITY & KLINE COMMUNE (LED LIGHTING)

ALBANIA & KOSOVO | URBAN | INTERNATIONAL

"GREEN CROSS – Towards Local Green Economies with Smart Investments", is a cross border project between Albania and Kosovo, financially supported by European Union.

Geographical scope (regional / national)
Has Municipality, Albania and Kline Commune, Kosovo.

Foundation (year)
2020.

Renewable Energy Technologies
LED Lamps with diming system (outdoor), indoor LED lamps and solar panels in public buildings

Main motivation (for foundation)
The project is focused to direct the municipalities toward the sustainable green economy development through investments, capacity building activities; and awareness raising activities.

EDEN center
eden@eden-al.org

www.eden-al.org

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

Decision making roles:
Project managers

Gender of core team:
50%Female, 50% Male;

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Has and Kline Municipality staff: energy regulatory offices; schools, kindergartens, health centres, local business, citizens etc;

Activities

The project's main activities involve:

- Capacity building for green development (trainings)
- Smart investments for LED outdoor and indoor lamps and Solar panels
- Study visits for best practices in energy efficiency
- Visibility actions

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on energy efficiency?

Energy efficiency is the optimal solution to reduce energy costs, to provide the same services even better, and to reduce the GHG emission in atmosphere.

Can you say a few words about your LED action?

The LED action with outdoor lamps (220 HPS lamps were changed with more efficient ones - LED) has brough energy savings, has reduced the bill of the municipality for the outdoor lighting expenditure making in this way savings in the municipality budget.

Any tips?

The communication with the citizens and the municipality itself for the benefits of LED investment is crucial to welcome these investments that bring innovation. It is important to understand that the final cost might be high, but long term benefits are expected.

© Eden Centre

VLORA (ENERGY POVERTY ACTION)

ALBANIA | SEMI-RURAL AREA | REGIONAL

Empowering women to take action against energy poverty in the Mediterranean (EmpowerMed). EmpowerMed aims to tackle energy poverty and help improve people's health in the coastal areas of the Mediterranean countries, with a particular focus on women. In the Mediterranean countries, coastal areas face several specific energy poverty challenges, notably related to the thermal comfort of housing. Buildings are barely insulated, often without heating systems at all, or very inefficient. An important element of energy poverty in these areas is also the cooling component. Energy poverty disproportionately affects women and women-led households. At the same time, women are an important player in the fight against energy poverty.

Foundation (year)
2019.

Renewable Energy Technologies
Solar panel installation on the roof of the professional public school in Vlora. Energy efficiency small devices to support families in energy poverty.

Milieukontakt Albania
office@milieukontakt.org

+355 42 256 528
+355 688048363

www.milieukontakt.org

Main motivation (for foundation)
The main motivation has been to promote RES, especially solar energy to tackle energy poverty and to help improve the health of people in the coastal area, with a particular focus on women.

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

The director of the organization is a woman, and one of the 2 local coordinators is a woman.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

Mileukontant Albania and the EmpowerMed partners.

LGU, local CSO, public health centre and the utility company.

The project targeted the following vulnerable groups: the elderly, mostly women; single parent families, mainly single mothers, ethnic communities (Roma, Egyptian); and unemployed and employed at risk of poverty, mainly women.

Activities

The Vlora energy poverty action wishes to:

- Mobilise and involve key local stakeholders
- Develop large partnerships (territorial action plan) to reach the most vulnerable groups
- Organise capacity building of actors and households Use peer-to-peer approach
- Support household's empowerment through DIY workshops
- Find the best solutions adapted to the real needs (social, economic, environmental)
- Hear, understand and stick to the households' aspirations
- Use a practical and adapted communication
- Act at the political level.

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on energy efficiency?

Energy efficiency saves money. It reduces monthly energy bills and makes energy more affordable for households. Some energy-efficient products cost more to buy than other options, but they typically save you money over the long term. Families experiencing energy insecurity can face the difficult choice between paying monthly energy bills or putting food on the table. Energy efficiency can help households financially and improve their health, comfort, and safety of families in their homes.

Milieukontakt Albania is the partner of the project implementing activities in Vlora municipality.

The first step of the project was to build networks of local actors in 6 pilot areas (Vlora – Albania, Barcelona - Spain, Marseille - France, Padua - Italy, Primorska - Slovenia, and Zadar - Croatia) and transfer the knowledge and experience crucial for capacity building of all actors involved in the implementation of practical measures. The core of the project is the implementation of practical measures to tackle energy poverty, such as community-based approaches, household visits, stand-alone approaches, small investment support and health workshops. The effectiveness and impacts of the actions implemented will be evaluated and analysed, and the results will help to formulate policy recommendations. These key players will advocate in promoting policies against energy poverty.

Can you say a few words about your energy poverty action?

The project donated to households some devices that serve to save electricity such as insulation for doors and windows, LED lamps, power extender, shower heads, etc. Installation was followed with advice from auditors on electric equipment maintenance, energy and water saving tips. By controlling their consumption, they will be able to control their electricity and water bills.

We have organized different awareness meetings in Vlora municipality, and we are in collaboration with the vocational school of Vlora. Our plan is to invest in solar panels on the roof of the school building with the aim to reduce the energy bill.

The model and tools that have been created in EmpowerMed can be replicated in other regions of Albania and wider, contributing to increased secure access to energy for all, but also energy savings and adequate consumption adapted to the climate and social circumstances we are living in.

Any tips?

A just energy transition is a key pillar of the EU Green Agenda for the Balkans. Data in energy poverty is mostly not disaggregated by gender and it is our role to change it including a gender lens.

© EmpowerMed Project

HYPERION
SOLAR COMMUNITY

HYPERION

GREECE | URBAN | REGIONAL / NATIONAL

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on energy efficiency?

Energy efficiency first is a principle that unites most environmentalists. By saving energy one can help 1) reduce energy poverty, 2) increase the relative integration of renewable energy into the grid, 3) generate income for citizens.

Can you say a few words about your project?

Hyperion is beginning a collaboration with the Greek Passive House Institute to offer its members (as well as members of other energy communities) services such as: 1) in-house visits, tips and consultation on how to reduce their energy use, 2) bulk-buying of energy efficient equipment, 3) housing renovations. This way, energy poverty is tackled at its root.

Any tips?

Partnerships, such as with organizations whose expertise is energy efficiency, are key.

7, Olympionikon Street
PC 16342, Athens, Greece

contact: Chris Vrettos
chris@electraenergy.coop
+306948387911

www.electraenergy.coop/here-comes-the-sun-first-community-solar-farm-in-greece/

www.hyperioncommunity.com

CONSULTANCY & ADVISORY SERVICES TO PEERS

There are a lot of energy communities that provide a range of services to support their peers, citizens and citizen organisations interested in establishing an energy community and start a community energy project, but also other organisations, such as local authorities, and/or local national policy makers that want to work on community energy.

© REScoop.eu

HYPERION

GREECE | URBAN | REGIONAL / NATIONAL

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on consultancy and P2P Advice?

Inter-cooperative solidarity and assistance is enshrined in the 7 cooperative principles. Networking, information and capacity exchange can foster the growth of new energy communities and help stabilize the operations of existing ones.

Can you say a few words about your initiative?

Hyperion has been actively involved in the creation of the first Greek national cluster of energy communities. Hyperion's members, most of which come from backgrounds in the environment and energy sectors, also regularly provide pro bono advice and guidance to other energy communities as well as to the general public.

7, Olympionikon Street
PC 16342, Athens, Greece

contact: Chris Vrettos
chris@electraenergy.coop
+306948387911

www.electraenergy.coop/here-comes-the-sun-first-community-solar-farm-in-greece/

www.hyperioncommunity.com

ZEZ (GREEN ENERGY COOPERATIVE)

CROATIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on consultancy and P2P Advice?

Renewable energy laws and technologies are still under development in Croatia, so there is a great need for consultancy and P2P advice.

Can you say a few words about your initiative?

We offer free advice and connect the citizens with solar designers and installers.

Božidarevićeva 13, 4.floor,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia

contact@zez.coop
+385 1 2095 552

www.zez.coop

ENERGY SUPPLY

More and more energy communities chose to operate as an energy supplier. There are different ways to do this: some initiatives produce their own electricity and sell it to their clients, and some buy and aggregate renewable energy from other producers for their members. The recent energy crisis has shown that it is important to own sufficient generation capacity for the energy that you wish to supply to your members and/or clients. Becoming a cooperative energy supplier comes with its own challenges, linked to regulations, the influence of established market actors, and financial limitations, among others. Don't despair if your community hits a hurdle. It's completely normal, and with the help of other cooperatives, you'll find a solution!

© Shutterstock

Cooperativa de Energie

COOPERATIVA DE ENERGIE

ROMANIA | URBAN | NATIONAL

The founding members consist of a group of entrepreneurs, specialists and analysts who, together have created Cooperativa de Energie, the first supplier and producer of green energy, using the cooperative framework, in Romania.

Foundation (year)
2019.

Main motivation (for foundation)
Produce and supply renewable electricity to the local community and improve the perspective of renewable energy in Romania and SEE.

verde@cooperativadeenergie.ro
+40740542824

www.cooperativadeenergie.ro

Decision making roles & gender of core team (percentage per position)

The Board is currently made out of 4 members, all male. Decisions are made based on democracy, through voting both in the board and in the members meeting.

Key actors and stakeholder involved (incl. key partnerships)

REScoop.eu, Som Energia, other cooperatives.

Activities

Renewable energy supply, education.

Q&A

Why have you chosen to focus on energy supply?

In Romania regular citizen had no way to get involved in the energy market, to learn and to act.

When we had the opportunity to focus on the renewable energy supply business, we decided it's a great way for clients to learn about energy and it's also easy to scale and have a larger impact. Next step is becoming a renewable energy producers as soon as possible.

Can you say a few words about your initiative?

Cooperativa de Energie is the first energy cooperative in Romania and our focus is to create a sustainable community (both from the environment stand-point and business) to help people understand more about renewable energy and make them actors in the market.

Any tips?

Stay strong :D

Our best advice is to always keep your communication clear and sincere with your community.

ROMANIA

© Cooperativa de Energie

8

COMMUNITY ENERGY FOR A…REVERSE "BALKANISATION"

The ongoing energy crisis has hit most countries in the Balkan region quite severely, underlining that the current energy model is not technically, economically, environmentally nor socially sustainable. In the majority of the countries in the region power production is based on the burning of fossil fuels, while the renewable energy mix mostly (if not exclusively) consists of traditional biomass and large hydropower.

While the thermal power sector faces problems in the operation or supply of the existing coal-fired or gas-fired power plants, citizens have started taking the issue into their own hands showing that another way to organise the energy sector is possible. They set up energy communities and develop citizen-driven renewable energy and energy efficiency projects in their neighbourhoods paving the way for an inclusive and just energy transition by the people for the people.

As illustrated in this guidebook, citizens in the Balkan region have started testing renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies and adapting the concept of community energy in their context, improving in this way their local environment and livelihoods.

In Greece, we started noticing the emergence and growth of a lot of energy communities following the introduction of an enabling framework for energy communities; nevertheless, we also noticed that other commercial actors try to highjack the concept.

Mature initiatives from Greece have started connecting and providing support to new energy initiatives in Albania, as well as in Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova, where good collaboration exists with local municipal authorities. Similarly, in Croatia while new initiatives emerge in the country, the existing mature initiatives have already been supporting initiatives in the wider region, like in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia where a first energy community is about to launch its first community energy project.

In the context of the European Citizen Energy Academy, many of the diverse citizen- and NGO organisations interested in community energy in the Balkan region have come together to exchange and learn from each other.

By joining forces within and across all the countries in the region, citizens can build a regional community energy network strengthening the European community energy wave and reversing what has come to be known as "balkanisation".

Energy communities can lead the energy sector's decentralization and democratization, improving at same time the social wellbeing and the environment.

Energy communities offer economic benefits to their members, while also strengthening the local economies by increasing employment and creating additional business opportunities. In addition, they may enhance social cohesion, supporting the achievement of common goals through democratic decision-making and resource pooling, and in fact, by making the right to renewable energy attainable, energy communities activate energy citizenship and realise energy democracy.[3]

3 https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/10/11/4106

To flourish and develop additional, more innovative, as well as bigger and more impactful projects, these initiatives need the support of the policy makers across the Balkans. It is became clear that local communities that can secure renewable energy production are able to shield themselves from the impacts of high wholesale electricity- and gas prices and volatility. A local ownership of renewable energy production should be acknowledged as an urgent matter of securing energy supply.

Particular importance should be attached to urban, spatial and energy planning for local renewables production and storage, along with grid infrastructure, as well as to policies and measures incentivizing energy generation for collective self-consumption. Furthermore, clearer rules and provision of support to local authorities are necessary so that they can use public procurement to collaborate with local citizen-led initiatives.[4]

Enabling the emergence and growth of citizen-driven energy communities is crucial to ensure that the transition to renewable energy sources will facilitate an environmentally sustainable and socially just and equitable future.

© REScoop.eu

4 https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/news/a-repowereu-for-energy-citizens-manifesto

THE ORGANISATIONS BEHIND THIS GUIDE

REScoop.eu is the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives, representing over 1900 cooperatives and their 1.25 million citizens. Founded in 2013 and building on several decades of experience with energy communities, we ensure that the voices of citizens are heard at the EU-level, and we support energy communities with technical expertise, capacity building, and communications

ELECTRA Energy is a certified social cooperative (registered under L4430/2016). It was founded in 2016 and is based in Athens, Greece. ELECTRA Energy is leading the transition to a decentralized, efficient, and sustainable energy system with citizens and local communities at its core. For that reason ELECTRA Energy is working very closely with citizens and local communities, municipalities, academic institutions and national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Milieukontakt Albania has vast experience working with civil society on environment, nature and sustainable development as well as with authorities dealing with these issues in Albania. Milieukontakt Albania has been active on the issues of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources since 2010 with environmental activities in school level, conducting audit reports on energy efficiency in schools, implementing measures for energy efficiency; analysing perception and knowledge of community on energy efficiency; preparing simple brochures on measures to be taken at home; preparing study on environmental impact of hydropower plants and last but not least advocating for changes on the law for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Acknowledgements: All three organisations wish to thank each and every citizen-driven energy initiative presented in this guide for their contributions and valuable insights!

Illustrations: © SomjaiJaithieng, AS.Makarova, Rawpixel.com, artplay.

DREAM BIG & ORGANISE TO ALLOW YOUR PROJECT TO GROW!

All community energy projects are a journey with a lot of twists and turns. Stay committed and listen to each other. With the help of each other you can go beyond any hurdle!

We have no time to waste.

The moment to fight climate change & accelerate the energy transition is NOW.

Organise & join the energy revolution!

© REScoop.eu

EUROPEAN CITIZEN ENERGY ACADEMY

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE FOR SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Inspiring community energy initiatives

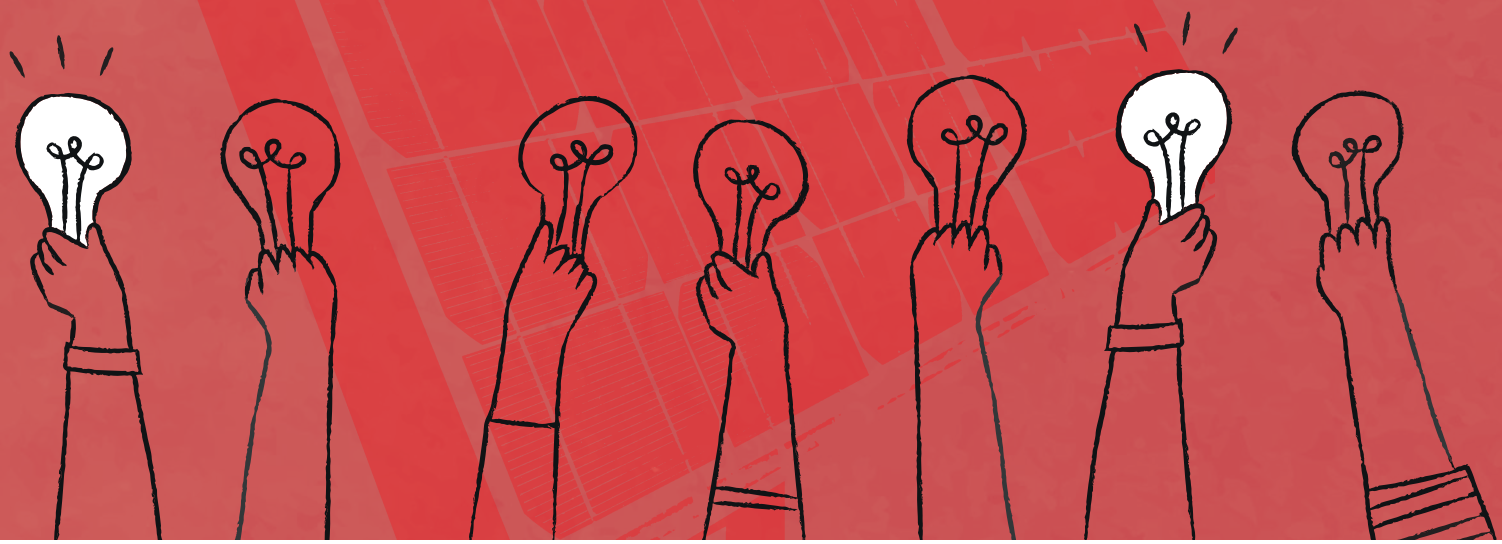
DREAM BIG & ORGANISE TO ALLOW YOUR PROJECT TO GROW!

All community energy projects are a journey with a lot of twists and turns. Stay committed and listen to each other. With the help of each other you can go beyond any hurdle!

We have no time to waste.

The moment to fight climate change & accelerate the energy transition is NOW.

Organise & join the energy revolution!



European Climate Initiative EUKI

EUCENA