Your energy, your power

Clean Energy for a Clean Future

- Title: Promoting Green Policies in Croatia, Serbia, and North Macedonia
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Analysis of the Current Situation

Southeast Europe possesses significant solar potential, particularly Croatia, Serbia, and North Macedonia. Croatia benefits from abundant sunlight and has made strides in renewable energy technologies as part of its commitment to the European Green Deal. The country has a comprehensive legal framework for energy communities through its Energy Act, allowing local entities to engage actively in energy generation and consumption. However, challenges persist, including integrating renewable energy into the national grid, reliance on external sources, and bureaucratic inefficiencies that hinder project realization.

Serbia also has considerable solar and wind energy potential but heavily depends on coal and outdated practices. The Serbian government has initiated a €7 billion investment plan and introduced a new Law on Renewable Energy Sources in 2021, to enhance renewable capacity and energy security. While provisions for renewable energy communities have been established, environmental challenges, such as severe air pollution remain significant burdens. Bureaucratic limitations and a lack of financial incentives deter citizen participation in renewable initiatives.

North Macedonia holds substantial solar potential, yet its energy mix relies heavily on fossil fuels, with renewables comprising only 7.8%. Although the legal framework aligns with the European standards, bureaucratic hurdles, and outdated infrastructure obstruct the expansion of solar projects. The lack of clear regulations creates uncertainty for potential investors, limiting opportunities for community participation in energy generation.

Despite these challenges, each country has unique opportunities. Croatia's robust legal framework can drive innovation in community-driven renewable projects, leveraging its geographic advantages. Serbia can capitalize on international funding and partnerships with NGOs and local businesses to foster investments in renewable energy. North Macedonia can utilize its strategic position and natural resources, particularly solar and hydropower, to develop community-based initiatives.

Addressing regulatory gaps, enhancing public awareness, and promoting regional cooperation can maximize the potential for sustainable energy development in the region, contributing to a resilient energy future.

Proposal of Strategy and Policy Measures

Objectives

This Clean Energy Policy Proposal aims to establish Energy Cooperatives as a community-driven model for promoting renewable energy in North Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia. These cooperatives will empower local communities to generate, manage, and distribute renewable energy, thereby reducing reliance on centralized systems and fossil fuels. The initiative seeks to lower carbon emissions, decrease energy costs, and foster a sustainable energy framework.

Key objectives include increasing community ownership of renewable energy by transitioning from a centralized production model to a locally controlled system involving citizens in decision-making. The proposal also aims to contribute to national climate goals by supporting cooperatives that produce renewable energy and fostering cleaner environments. Additionally, it seeks to lower energy costs for members in regions with high or unstable prices, providing financial relief and enhancing energy security.

Public engagement will be prioritized through educational campaigns, social media outreach, and community events to raise awareness and encourage participation, ensuring an inclusive transition to renewable energy.

Desired Changes in the Approach to Policy
The proposal advocates a shift from centralized energy systems to decentralized, community-controlled models. A supportive regulatory framework is essential, including tax incentives, government subsidies, and simplified licensing procedures to lower barriers to forming energy cooperatives.

Effects of These Changes
Implementing these changes is expected to significantly reduce carbon emissions, aiding in meeting national and international climate commitments. Energy cooperatives will decrease reliance on fossil fuels, promote cleaner environments, lower energy costs, and stimulate local economies through job creation and community reinvestment.

Measurable Indicators
To effectively establish Energy Cooperatives in North Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia, a comprehensive approach involving collaboration with the business sector is necessary. The following policy measures detail the actions required to create a supportive environment for these cooperatives.

Strategy

The strategic approach to establishing Energy Cooperatives in North Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia focuses on empowering local communities to enhance renewable energy adoption. By launching educational campaigns and fostering public-private partnerships, the initiative aims to create a supportive regulatory framework with tax incentives and streamlined licensing. This will promote community ownership and reduce reliance on centralized energy systems, lowering carbon emissions and energy costs. The approach emphasizes social inclusion through capacity building and engagement, ensuring that the transition to renewable energy is accessible to all.

A key component of this strategy is a comprehensive public outreach campaign designed to inform citizens about the benefits and possibilities of joining energy communities. This campaign will focus on raising awareness about how individuals can actively participate in these cooperatives, offering them the knowledge and tools to transition to renewable energy sources in their homes and businesses. By highlighting success stories and providing accessible information, the campaign seeks to demystify the process and encourage widespread community involvement. It aims to empower citizens with clear guidance on available financial incentives and the regulatory steps needed to join these initiatives, ensuring that the adoption of renewable energy is not only encouraged but made feasible for everyone.

Ultimately, these interventions aim to stimulate local economies, enhance energy security, and align with national climate goals by promoting sustainable energy practices at the community level.

Policy Measures

Social and Cultural Measures
Nationwide awareness campaigns should educate communities about the benefits of energy cooperatives and renewable energy. These campaigns can showcase successful collaborations between businesses and communities, providing practical examples to inspire participation. Additionally, community workshops and training sessions can involve local businesses as trainers, equipping community members with essential knowledge on renewable energy technologies, cooperative governance, and business management.

Fostering partnerships with local NGOs and businesses will promote grassroots initiatives, building community trust in energy cooperatives. Networking platforms can facilitate resource sharing and best practice exchanges among energy cooperatives and local businesses.

Economic / Fiscal Measures
Offering incentives for businesses that partner with energy cooperatives, such as tax breaks or grants, will encourage corporate social responsibility. Additionally, subsidies for community projects focused on renewable energy generation can be introduced. Corporate sponsorships may also be promoted to strengthen ties between cooperatives and the business sector.

Legal Measures
Legislation should encourage public-private partnerships in energy cooperatives, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of businesses involved in cooperative projects. Simplifying the regulatory process will facilitate collaboration and innovation.

Institutional Measure
Establishing a dedicated regulatory body to oversee partnerships between energy cooperatives and businesses will provide guidance and support. Funding research initiatives focused on optimizing cooperative models will enhance the overall effectiveness of energy cooperatives in the region.

Implementation

Timeline
Over the next five years, the implementation will commence with planning and awareness campaigns in Year 1, followed by the enactment of supportive legislation and the establishment of regulatory bodies in Year 2. Year 3 will focus on capacity building through workshops and expanding community engagement. By Year 4, successful pilot projects will be scaled up, and partnerships with local governments and businesses will be strengthened. The final year will include comprehensive evaluations and the development of long-term sustainability plans.

Monitoring and Evaluation
Progress will be monitored through regular reports from cooperatives and specific performance indicators. Annual evaluations will assess the impact on carbon emissions, energy costs, and local economies. Stakeholder feedback will be collected through surveys and meetings, fostering collaborative reviews to enhance cooperative performance and ensure successful policy implementation.

Advocacy plan

Analysis of Stakeholders

Local Governments

They play a crucial role in establishing legal and regulatory frameworks for energy cooperatives. Local governments facilitate partnerships, provide necessary permits, and ensure compliance with national policies. Their involvement is essential for community engagement and trust-building.

Regulatory Bodies

These entities ensure that energy cooperatives operate within the legal framework and meet compliance standards. Their oversight is critical for maintaining accountability and facilitating the development of supportive policies that encourage cooperative initiatives.

Community Members

Residents are the backbone of energy cooperatives, as their participation in decision-making and investment is vital. Engaging community members helps foster ownership of renewable energy projects and encourages collective action. Education and awareness initiatives can empower them to take active roles in energy management.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs are key partners in promoting awareness and providing training on renewable energy technologies and cooperative governance. They can facilitate workshops, provide resources, and advocate for community interests, ensuring that initiatives align with local needs and sustainability goals.

Businesses

Local and regional businesses can invest in energy cooperatives, providing funding and resources. Their involvement not only supports community initiatives but also enhances their corporate social responsibility profiles. Collaborating with cooperatives can lead to innovative solutions and strengthen local economies.

Advocacy Strategies

1. Public awareness campaigns

- Educational campaigns: Organize events, workshops, and lectures to inform the community about the benefits of green cooperatives, including lower energy costs, reduction of CO_2 emissions, and energy independence.

- Online campaigns and social networks: Use social platforms to spread information, videos, and infographics and create hashtags (#ZeleneZadruge, #RenewableEnergija) that attract attention and stimulate discussion.

- Cooperation with the media: Encourage the media to cover topics related to green cooperatives through articles, interviews, and documentary shows.

2. Lobbying

- Direct meetings with politicians: Organize meetings with local and national representatives to inform them about the benefits and needs of establishing a legislative framework to support energy cooperatives.

- Preparation of political proposals: Develop specific proposals for laws and initiatives that would be submitted to the government or parliament. An example would be a bill on incentives for communities investing in renewable energy sources.

- Building alliances with other associations: Teaming up with environmental organizations, NGOs, and energy experts to strengthen the voice to promote such initiatives.

3. Cooperation with local communities

- Pilot projects: Launching pilot projects within smaller communities or local municipalities that serve as a proof of concept and show how green cooperatives can work in practice.

- Partnerships with businesses and schools: Collaborate with schools, colleges, and local entrepreneurs to explore renewable energy investment opportunities and share knowledge and resources.

4. Political pressure through elections

- Representation in local elections: Support candidates or parties that are willing to include green cooperatives and renewable energy sources in their political programs.

Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Preparation

- Market research and stakeholder analysis: Analyze the current state of the energy market, and legal regulations and define key stakeholders (local community, potential investors, politicians, NGOs). Create a SWOT analysis to identify opportunities and threats. To further enhance the implementation process, holding focus groups and conducting online surveys with a representative number of people (300 - 500 for local communities) will provide valuable insights into community needs and expectations, ensuring more inclusive and effective policy development.

Phase 2: Launching the pilot project

- Location selection: Select a community for the pilot project (preferably an area with high exposure to the sun or model).
- Evaluation of the pilot project: Collect data on energy savings and cost reduction for households, and present the results to the public.

Phase 3: Expansion of the model

- Evaluation of the pilot project: Collect data on energy savings and cost reduction for households, and present the results to the public.
- Replication to new communities: Expand the project to other regions with the help of local authorities and additional partners.

Communication strategy

- Raising awareness of the benefits of green energy and energy independence through cooperatives.
- Increasing household participation in projects through direct education and engagement.
- Households and citizens: Especially those in rural and semi-urban areas who can be direct beneficiaries of the cooperative.
- Politicians and decision-makers: Local authorities, ministries of energy and environment

Main messages, visuals and slogans

For households:

- "Become energy independent and reduce your electricity bills!"
- "Invest in the future of the community through renewable energy sources."
- "Your energy, your community!"

For the business sector:

- "Invest in green energy - a profitable and sustainable solution for the future!"
- "Partnerships in energy cooperatives bring long-term benefits for the community and the environment."

Logo: A simple and recognizable symbol that reflects community, nature, and technology (eg stylized sun and leaves as symbols of sustainability).

Slogan: "Your energy, your power!"

Direct resources:

National sources of funding, State subsidies and incentives, Consultations and financial support, European funds, International development banks, Crowdfunding and social financing, Green investors, Bank loans, Community investment, Non-profit organizations, and foundations

Identification of key stakeholders:

- Identify key players in government, industry, local communities, and civil society organizations.

Preparation of educational materials:

- Create technical guides, guidelines, infographics, videos, and policy briefings.

Phase 2: Implementation (3-12 months)

Objectives:

- Launch campaigns and activities aimed at different target groups.
- Organize educational workshops for participants in the implementation of green policies.

Key tasks:

1. Public outreach:
2. Launching information campaigns on TV, radio, internet, and social networks.
3. Organization of public events (protests, bicycle races, tree planting).

Phase 3: Evaluation and adaptation (12-18 months)

Objectives:

- Evaluate the success of all activities.
- Adjust approaches based on collected data and feedback.

Key tasks:

1. Evaluation of public campaigns:
2. Performance measurement through surveys and analysis of media reach.
3. Evaluation of cooperation with participants:
4. Monitoring the progress of industrial sectors, local authorities, and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of measures.
5. Analysis of the implementation and impact of green policies at the regional and national level.

Phase 4: Long-term strategy (18 months +)

Objectives:

- Develop long-term plans and goals for the maintenance and further implementation of green policies.
- Ensure permanent cooperation between the public sector, industry, and citizens.
- Encourage innovation and investment in green technologies.

Key tasks:

1. Setting long-term goals:
2. Define targets for reducing emissions by 2030 and 2050.
3. Develop plans to achieve climate neutrality.
4. Maintaining continuous campaigns:
5. Regularly updated information campaigns on environmental topics.

   Responsibilities: Assign roles and responsibilities to team members or partners involved in advocacy efforts.

- Evaluation: Establish metrics for measuring the success of the advocacy plan and monitoring progress.

Conclusion

For the successful implementation of the policy of developing green cooperatives and the use of renewable energy, it is crucial to clearly define the objectives and identify key stakeholders, such as households, politicians, and local authorities. Through education and public campaigns, it is necessary to raise awareness of the advantages of these cooperatives and carry out lobbying to ensure political support and a favorable legislative framework. Funding should be secured through a combination of national incentives, European funds, and private investments, while the communication strategy will use clear messages and attractive visuals to engage target groups. Pilot projects will demonstrate the success of the model, which can then be expanded to other communities.

Stakeholders should be invited to react through clear communication that highlights the benefits of participating in green cooperatives. Energy independence and savings should be emphasized to households, while economic and environmental benefits should be presented to politicians as an opportunity to improve local communities. The business sector should be motivated by investing in sustainable projects that bring long-term returns. Through media campaigns, lobbying, and direct meetings, stakeholders should understand how they can concretely contribute and use the opportunity to actively support green cooperatives.

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