



SOCIALRES

Report on new business cases for a better engagement of citizens in the energy market of today

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Introduction

SocialRES is a research and innovation project funded by the European Union with the aim of fostering energy democracy through social innovation and the active collaboration between cooperatives, aggregators of renewable energy and crowdfunding platforms.

Lake Constance Foundation is in charge of the mutual learning between nine different case studies from seven different countries. Among them energy cooperatives, crowdfunding platforms and aggregators. These organizations form the backbone of a citizen driven energy transition. Cooperation and collaboration among them shall prepare them for the challenges of the future and foster energy democracy throughout Europe.

This report should elaborate on new business cases for a better engagement of citizens in the energy market of today, based on the findings of seven multi-day study visits with case study representatives. The study visits and the included workshops were meant to give an insight into the opportunities of new business models in citizen energy as well as the direct cooperation potential of the participating case studies, consisting of energy cooperatives, crowdfunding platforms and aggregators.

In the previous deliverable 4.1 we described the case studies and showed the results of their SWOT analyses, which formed the base for matching them in groups of three and to organize the study visits on common interests and challenges. COVID-19 made it impossible to follow the original plan and we had to change the style and focus of the mutual learning activities.

Therefore, the present report can be seen as an elaborate description of the mutual learning experiences and an evaluation of the adapted methodology to an online format. It describes the methodology as well as the outcomes of five online study visits (workshops) in order to get an insight on cooperation potential and the benefits of mutual learning.

We did our best to cope with the pandemic restrictions and hope to be able to intensify our exchange in real-life study visits and a hackathon in the coming year. Resulting finally in socially innovative business ideas



Methodology

The COVID crisis and the travel restrictions in place, made it necessary to restructure the activities foreseen for the process of mutual learning. In joint coordination, ways were found to deal with the new situation. The originally planned real-live study visits were to be replaced by online workshops.

The workshop topics had been identified by the partners within a separate workshop, covering areas considered relevant for the case study work. From the original seven topics, the partners selected five particularly interesting topics to be discussed in online study visits on mutually agreed dates between October 2020 and April 2021:

1. How professional communication creates awareness and profit
2. How to develop mobility services as a new business
3. How to cooperate with municipalities to support the development of community energy projects
4. How public funding can support professionalization
5. How internal communication can increase member engagement

The following two topics did not make it into the shortlist:

6. How members and the organisations can benefit from autoconsumption models and power supply
7. How to find new target groups through crowdfunding

Original format: On-site Study Visits

According to the project proposal and the original planning, it was foreseen, that always three case studies will meet and work on the above-mentioned topics. LCF was to organize those events, to structure and moderate the discussions and to evaluate the outcome. Each case study was expected to participate in three study visits, in one as host and in two as guest.

The study visits were planned as two- or three-day events, with excursion, social gathering and workshop. This structure would have allowed the participants to get to know each other and to form a basis for trust, being a prerequisite for collaboration and mutual learning in the workshop and beyond.

The groups were formed according to the experiences and interest of the case studies. This information was gathered and evaluated by LCF using the SWOT analyses and performing a matchmaking (further details in Deliverable 4.1).

This ideal process could not be executed due to the above mentioned COVID restrictions and an alternative concept for the mutual learning had to be developed.

New format: Online Workshops

Inspired by online workshops and trainings we attended ourselves, we adapted the planned real-live study visits to online formats. The multi-day on-site events became 3-hour online



workshops. There was no claim that the online workshops could replace the idea of the real-live Study Visits 1:1. Rather, this format was an attempt to make the best of the changed framework conditions. The goal was to stimulate an intensive exchange and to involve the participants as much as possible. Table 1 compares the design of the formats and Table 2 the advantages and disadvantages of both formats.

Table 1 From Real-Live Study Visits to Online Event: Workshop Format

Real-Live Study Visit	Online Workshop
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-day on-site event • Agenda items: Field trips to "host" partner's projects, guided discussion sessions, short inputs from partners. • Informal and intercultural exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half-day event (3 hours) • Methods to encourage interaction: surveys, guided discussion sessions, short inputs from partners • Appropriate breaks

Table 2 From Real-Live Study Visits to Online Workshops: Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-threshold participation due to less time required and lower costs > Unlimited number of participants and new participant constellations possible • Reaction to changing priorities of individual organizations possible > Change of topics for organizations possible (match-making less relevant) • Workshop methods less time-consuming in preparation and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excursions cannot take place > no "real" impressions and inspiration • Travel experience is omitted > motivation, memory value is omitted • Little room for social interaction and getting to know each other • Workshop methods less interactive and less intensive • Participation of volunteers was reduced due to the limited attractiveness

Evaluation

In order to improve the workshops as well as to elaborate the content output, the evaluation of the online study visits was essential. For this purpose, we solicited feedback from participants at various points in time. In addition to feedback during the individual workshops, an overall impression survey was sent out after the completion of the five dates. We distinguished between lessons learned (methodological feedback on the design of the workshops) and findings (substantive feedback on the outcomes for participants).

Lessons learned

At the end of each workshop, we solicited feedback from the participants in order to continuously improve the workshops. Since in some cases only little feedback was given in the open feedback round, we later supplemented this with virtual constellations or voting on specific questions. This gave us a better overall impression and lowered the barriers to participate.



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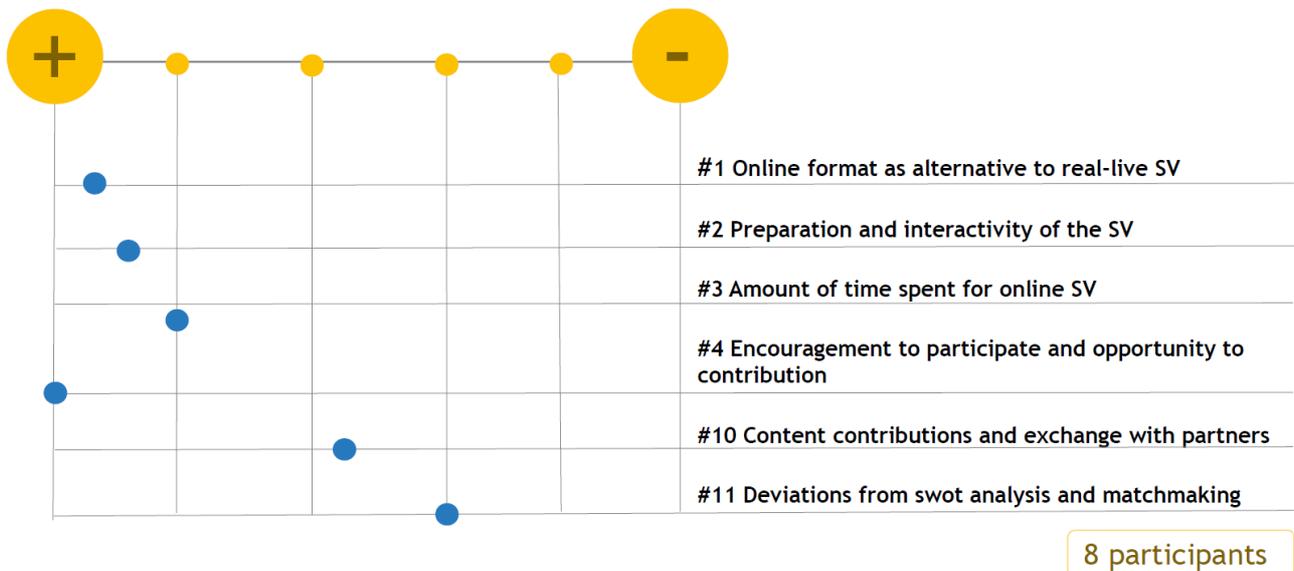


We also sought methodological and organizational feedback in the survey after the online events were completed (see questionnaire Template feedback survey in the appendix). Figure 1 shows the results. Only questions related to methodological feedback were selected for this illustration (therefore the numbers are not consecutive), question #7 was not answered by any participant.

Figure 1 Results of the feedback survey (methodological feedback questions selected)

Feedback survey online Study Visits

Methodological and organizational feedback



Findings

Outcomes for the participants were primarily collected in the survey (see questionnaire Template feedback survey in the appendix). The results are discussed in the Findings and conclusions chapter.



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Workshop implementation

The five study visits selected by the project partners were conducted online between October 2020 and April 2021. Table 3 gives an overview of the topics and participating organizations.

Table 3 Overview of the online study visits 2020/21

Time	Titel	Participating organizations
October 22nd & October 23rd 2020	How professional communication creates awareness and profit	Abundance, Energética, REGEA + ZEZ
January 29th 2021	How to develop mobility services as a new business	GoParity, I-Ener, Citizen energy cooperative Biederbach
March 11th 2021	How to cooperate with municipalities to support the development of community energy projects	Abundance, Adelphi, Regea + ZEZ, Tractebel
April 20th 2021	How public funding can support professionalization	I-Ener, Citizen energy cooperative Biederbach, Tractebel
April 28th 2021	How internal communication can increase member engagement	I-Ener, Energética, Regea

Workshop 1: How professional communication creates awareness and profit

This workshop was about how to present a socially innovative business of the energy sector in the general public. External communication is especially important for cooperatives, crowdfunding platforms and aggregators to draw attention to the organization's work and to create awareness for the need for climate protection and renewable energy. Specifically, external communication can aim to inform the public about energy and climate issues and highlight the need for action, present own projects and solicit new members or funding, and make the own organization known in the media and politics. In addition to the goals of external communication, the workshop focused on the question of suitable communication channels: What distinguishes the various channels, and which are particularly suitable for specific occasions? In this context, the human and financial resources for communication also play an important role.

Four organizations were represented in the two half-days event with one participant each, including two energy cooperatives (Green Energy Cooperative, Croatia and Energética, Spain) and one crowdfunding platform (Abundance, UK) and a regional Energy Agency (Regea, Croatia). At the beginning, the participants had the opportunity to present their organizations and activities in the context of external communication. REGEA, as a case study provider and energy agency has given its own insight on the topic. In the further course of a co-creation workshop, the participants worked out specific possibilities for improving external communication for each organization and then elaborated an action plan for selected proposals.



Table 4 Agenda Study visit “How professional communication creates awareness and profit”

Day 1 (22nd October 2020)

Time	Activity
09:00	Welcoming and Introduction to the Workshop by LCF
09:15	Presentations of Case Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REGEA / Green Energy Cooperative • Abundance • EnergÉtica
10:15	Coffee Break
10:30	Co-Creation Workshop > <i>Case study: Green Energy Cooperative</i>
11:00	Elaboration of business models and innovative solutions > <i>Case study: Green Energy Cooperative</i>
11:50	End of meeting

Day 2 (23rd October 2020)

Time	Activity
9:00	Welcome
9:05	Co-Creation Workshop + Elaboration of business models and innovative solutions > <i>Case study: Abundance</i>
10:20	Coffee break
10:35	Co-Creation Workshop + Elaboration of business models and innovative solutions > <i>Case study: EnergÉtica</i>
11:50	Feedback from participants
12:00	End of meeting

Introduction

An introduction round was followed by presentations from the individual organizations, sharing their experiences in the field of external communications with the other participants. None of the organizations present described themselves as "experts" in the field, but there were differences in know-how.

Discussion

Co-creation workshops were conducted for each of the three organizations and selected innovative solutions were evaluated.

Co-Creation Workshops

In the course of the Co-Creation Workshops, the partners took a closer look at each cooperative and brainstormed how it could improve its external communication in order to create more awareness and profit. Both inspiration from the other case studies and completely new ideas were welcome.



Workshop procedure

- Repetition of the main goals the organization is striving to reach by external communication
- Brainstorming: The participants find ideas how to improve the external communication, regarding
 1. The organization's goals
 2. The creation of more awareness and profit
 3. The involvement of young people and women

Participants are welcome to take inspiration from other case studies and create new ideas

- Method: Participants collect various ideas on a virtual whiteboard and describe them very shortly (no judging or reality-check here). End-product is a collection of keywords, which is basis for the next part of the workshop (elaboration of business models), see Table 5.

Table 5 Results of the Co-Creation workshop

Green Energy Cooperative ZEZ

Goals	Promote the organization and its services, communicate its values, create profit and impact, community activation
Creation of profit and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new energy coop business models based on community participation • Create new local jobs based on new technologies and energy initiatives • Create more awareness and profit • Evaluating the value of the big effort
Community activation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower citizens • Involve a wider audience • Involve young people and women
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community benefit pots • Friend get friend schemes • Viral donation schemes for building awareness
Promotion and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ambassadors to promote • Endorsements from celebs/ leaders • Use communication to find more investment opportunities • Education material/ webinars



Abundance (crowdfunder)

Goal	On future West Berks bonds; how do we move from 10% of investors from within region to 100% of investors coming from the region?
Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner up with community energy in the area • Find local promoters and partners even outside the municipality
Incentives and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to limit size of the investments for outsiders • Promote micro/nano investments • Give higher interest rates to local community and try to create a call for interest first to locals
Promotion and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link the benefits on the investment to local development • Shift target from wealthy minority to more humble but aware public • Stay in the background and provide only the structure - give a local face • Exploit friendly competition between different subareas • Planning campaigns which underline the benefits of regional, green and save investment • Short video clips in local cinemas, in the underground etc. • Inform in front of “classic” locations like churches, banks, schools (personal and/or as poster, advert)

Energética (energy cooperative)

Goal	Better recommendation and publicity for Energética
Challenge	Not a well-known alternative to conventional companies
Promotion and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be present on fairs, markets, in the university... • Classical advertisement: out of home • Involve more public figures to give credibility to your goals • Be visible by doing workshops • Get involved in educational activities - kids bring the message home • Webinars and educational content • Open house days • Apply for a prize to have the chance to attract media • Be active on social media • Use YouTube videos with local ambassadors • Short movies in cinemas and on social media
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discount on energy for members who bring on new members • Partnerships with likeminded business/ charities who promote to their members/clients
Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make members active part of some kind of decision making

Evaluation of business models and innovative solutions

Work instructions: Each organization chooses one of the suggestions from the Co-Creation Workshop and, together with the other participants, elaborates further on it as ongoing process of mutual learning. The goal is to define a tangible action plan how to implement the new ideas. This involves concrete measures, personnel and financial requirements.



Ideally, in the end of the day there will be a ready solution how to tackle these issues. For each selected idea, the following aspects were discussed:

- Desired effects and results
- What is needed for realization (Know-how, human und financial resources, relevant regulations)?
- Difficulties
- Concrete work steps

Table 6 Results of the Elaboration of business models and innovative solutions

Green Energy Cooperative ZEZ

Idea 1	Create new energy coop business models based on community participation
Desired effects and results	Motivate citizens to invest; 10% of pop. participation;
What is needed for a realization?	Identification of the project with big outreach;
<i>Know-how</i>	Raise awareness; planning capacities; communicating between the community and the citizens;
<i>human resources</i>	
<i>financial resources</i>	Using EU funded projects to boost the development of projects, cities support financially (venue, catering), extra money for out of home advertising
<i>partners</i>	Municipality; building owners, development agencies;
<i>relevant regulations</i>	
Difficulties	Corruption issues in municipalities;
Concrete work steps	
	1. Contacting municipalities and convincing them
	2. Defining the project
	3. Getting other partners on board
	4. Opening the investment of other people (not local)

Abundance (crowdfunder)

Idea 1	Intrust rate - higher intrust rate for local people
Desired effects and results	Getting more momentum in the region; getting more investors from the region
What is needed for a realization?	
<i>Know-how</i>	
<i>human resources</i>	
<i>financial resources</i>	
<i>partners</i>	
<i>relevant regulations</i>	
Difficulties	Is there a negative impact on external investors? Main interest is to raise the whole money quickly
Concrete work steps	
	1. Research on possible negative impacts on other investors
	2. Offer possibility to donate money rather than investing

Idea 2

Staying in the background - giving it a local face



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Desired effects and results	Getting more regional investors, giving the feeling of ownership to the local/regional people
What is needed for a realization?	
	<i>Know-how</i>
	<i>human resources</i>
	<i>financial resources</i>
	<i>partners</i>
	<i>relevant regulations</i>
Difficulties	Having Abundance officially involved gives also trust into the viability of the investment
Concrete work steps	
	1. Researching the pros and cons
	2. Creating a micro site for the local investment

Energética (energy cooperative)

Idea 1	Involve more classic figures/use ambassadors
Desired effects and results	To have a wider outreach; getting more members/customers;
What is needed for a realization?	
	<i>Know-how</i> Connections and incentives; do a research on your target persons and contact them accordingly;
	<i>human resources</i> Influencer qualities; using interns for the research;
	<i>financial resources</i> Little money for the interns; the more famous the more money is needed (maybe)
	<i>partners</i> You need direct connections or have partners with direct connections; connecting with journalists
	<i>relevant regulations</i>
Difficulties	You need luck; need patience
Concrete work steps	
	1. Finding your celebrity/journalist/influencer or using "normal" people
	2. Do research on those people
	3. Share your views with them and "streamline" those
	4. Using them as speakers for your campaigns; let them know what you need (pictures, LinkedIn posts, videos...)

Idea 2	doing webinars and workshops
Desired effects and results	More targeted for the audience that knows you already; create credibility and appear more robust; potential for wider outreach
What is needed for a realization?	
	<i>Know-how</i>
	<i>human resources</i>
	<i>financial resources</i>
	<i>partners</i>
	<i>relevant regulations</i>
Difficulties	
Concrete work steps	
	1. Ask the public on their interests for webinars
	2. Asking partner organizations on their interests



Idea 3	Allow people outside the COOP to participate in some decisions
Desired effects and results	Getting known to the public, increasing the outreach, serves to differentiate the Coop from other energy enterprises
What is needed for a realization?	
	<i>Know-how</i>
	<i>human resources</i>
	<i>financial resources</i>
	<i>partners</i>
	<i>relevant regulations</i>
Difficulties	
Concrete work steps	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finding the options where to participate/devide: voting on webinar topics; deciding about the name of the next campaign; organizing painting competitions and let the public decide on the winners;
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Funding/supporting little project/institutions and let the people decide on the recipient
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Therefore, find strategic partners or sponsors so you do not need own funds

Closing

For the feedback, we asked two voting questions, one regarding the time frame, one regarding the fulfilment of expectations. The votes were supplemented by voluntary requests to speak. Regarding the time frame it was clearly expressed that two days online workshop was too long for the participants and not comparable to real live study visits. The general feedback was positive; the participants showed interest in the topic and benefited from their different experiences, thus they could learn a lot from each other.

Conclusion

Together with the participants we concluded, that for future online workshops we will restrict ourselves on half day events. We decided to implement better structured methods for brainstorming and to open the number of participants to foster the discussion process.

Ideally more than one person per organization should attend the workshop, as some information for the action plan lies within other responsibilities. In general, the exchange could be considered as good, even though some partners acted reserved in the online meetings.

Even though the organizations were quite different in structure, size and background, the mutual learning exercise worked on the topic of external communication due to similar problems and challenges. The different organizations had very different experiences and levels of expertise in the field, which was also beneficial for the exchange.

Workshop 2: How to develop mobility services as a new business

A comprehensive and timely traffic turnaround is essential for effective climate and nature protection. Diverse solutions and bold pioneering projects for new mobility in cities and rural areas are needed. The workshop therefore dealt with the development of new, sustainable mobility concepts, showing alternatives to conventional individual transport



and illuminating possible business models for cooperatives and crowdfunding platforms. These approaches include for example car sharing, charging points for electric cars and the usage of mobile applications. Based on the presentation of exemplary projects, the workshop focused on mutual exchange of ideas and inspiration to develop new business models within the field of sustainable mobility.

Four people from three organizations participated in the workshop, including two energy cooperatives (I-Ener, France and Citizen energy cooperative Biederbach, Germany) and one crowdfunding platform (GoParity, Portugal). Since the participating organizations did not consider themselves experts in the field of sustainable mobility and wanted additional input on the topic, the workshop began with an introduction of the content and the presentation of different cooperative-based mobility concepts by LCF. This was followed by presentations of the three organizations in which, in addition to their own activities, the local background, character of mobility in the region, potentials and challenges for sustainable mobility solutions were presented. Afterwards, the participants discussed selected mobility concepts in more detail against the backgrounds of the individual organizations.

Table 7 Agenda Study Visit “How to develop mobility solutions as a new business”

Time	Activity	Duration
14:00	Welcoming and Introduction to the Workshop	10 min
14:10	Presentation of mobility concepts (LCF): Introduction into the topic of sustainable mobility and presentation of cooperative-based mobility concepts	20 min
14:30	Presentations of Case Studies: Presentation of the cooperative’s design, own activities, experiences and activities in the context of mobility, local background, character of mobility in the region, potentials and challenges for sustainable mobility solutions	10 min each
15:10	Coffee Break	15 min
15:25	Exchange on sustainable mobility options as new business models for the Case Studies Discussing potentials, advantages and challenges of the different mobility options in the light of the individual Case Studies > Selection of mobility measures, for which concepts will be developed in the second part of the workshop	60 min
16:25	Closure of meeting	5 min
16:30	End of meeting	

Introduction



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A presentation of various cooperative-based mobility concepts by the Lake Constance Foundation provided the introduction to the content. By means of examples, the following approaches were presented:

- E-Carsharing
- Charging infrastructure
- Parking photovoltaics
- Cargo bike initiatives
- E-bike rental
- Car-pooling and ride sharing
- Citizen buses
- Coupling of local transport and other transport options
- Offer of mobile applications and support for mobility solutions

Energy Cooperatives & Mobility solutions

Why take action?



Current mobility model is in a crisis

- Private vehicles and vehicles with combustion engine are outdated
- Climate change, limited public space in cities, congestion, atmospheric and acoustic contamination



Future mobility

- More environmentally friendly and efficient
- Promotion of walking, cycling, public transport
- For few necessary trips shared electric vehicles





Figure 2 Excerpts from the presentation on sustainable and cooperative-based mobility concepts

Presentations of the three organizations followed, in which the participants presented their own activities as well as the local background, character of mobility in the region, potentials and challenges for sustainable mobility solutions.

After the introduction of the content, the participants were asked to vote on which of the presented mobility concepts they wanted to discuss in more detail in the second part of the workshop (see survey). Parking photovoltaics and e-bike/cargo-bike rental received the most votes.



Umfragen

Umfrage 1: Ranking Discussion Bearbeiten

1. Which of the mobility measures presented do you want to discuss in more detail? (Mehrfachauswahl)

- E-Carsharing
- Charging infrastructure for E-Cars
- Parking Photovoltaiks
- Charging infrastructure for E-Bikes
- Cargo bike and E-Bike rental
- Car-pooling and ride-sharing
- Citizen buses
- Coupling of transport options
- Offer of support for mobility solutions
- Methanization - Gas for vehicles

[Starten Sie die Umfrage](#)

Figure 3 Query discussion options

Discussion

In the second part of the workshop, the participants - in the context of the individual organizations - exchanged views on advantages, potentials and challenges of the two selected sustainable mobility options as new business models.



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Table 8 Mobility solution: Parking photovoltaics

Advantages	Potentials	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double use of the surface • Comparable technology already used on roofs • New areas to install PV plants • Decreased expenses and decreased use of traditional electricity • No problems of infiltrations • Protection of parked cars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation options with companies • Big parkings in a few collectives, a lot of in commercial centres • Companies can also use the electricity right away in their premises • Combination with charging infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding partners • Involvement of government entities • Statics are more complex than roof PV • The investment is bigger than for roofs • Choose between selling the energy to a supplier or auto-consumption

Table 9 Mobility solution: E-Bike/ Cargo-bike rental

Advantages	Potentials	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace cars by bikes • Offer to people with less money • Physical activity • Transport option without car • Cargo bikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the cars in the cities (mainly) • Sharing not buying • Tourism attraction/offer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs lots of consumers • How to earn enough money with that? • Difficult to adapt in rural areas • Before the project, survey to know how much persons will use it

Closing

The feedback to the workshop was average, which can be attributed to the topic and the composition of the group. There were no experts in this subject area among the participants, which limited the exchange. Although the input prepared by LCF was evaluated positively it did not replace the usual exchange of experiences. Furthermore, the business models in the field of sustainable mobility did not promise a large return and therefore were not considered as particularly promising for the cooperatives.

Conclusion

Mobility concepts proved to be less suitable for an exchange and mutual learning in the group. Especially the lack of individual experience, but also the reduced business opportunities resulted in a limited outcome of the workshop. Even though all participants and organizations considered mobility an important topic and future challenge, the current framework conditions limited the prospects and therefore the discussion and interest.



The main obstacle was the lack of experience in the field by all of the organizations, as questions could not be answered, and the input was not so authentic.

Workshop 3: How to cooperate with municipalities to support the development of community energy projects

The Workshop was about cooperating with municipalities in terms of renewable energy project development and financing. Whether on the financial, organizational or planning level, support from and cooperation with municipalities is often essential in the implementation of renewable energy projects. This is why the topic can be interesting for energy cooperatives as well as aggregators and crowdfunding platforms. Questions that may be relevant in this context and that were addressed in the workshop are: What opportunities are there for cooperation? How to raise interest in municipalities and what do they need for a successful collaboration? Which hurdles can arise and what solutions are available?

The workshop was attended by four participants from three case study organizations - an energy cooperative (Green energy Cooperative ZEZ, Croatia), an aggregator (TRACTEBEL, Romania) and a crowdfunding platform (abundance, UK) - as well as a "scientific guest" (adelphi, Germany). REGEA, as a case study provider and energy agency has given another insight on the topic. It focused on an introductory presentation of the individual organizations' own experiences on the topic of cooperation with municipalities and an exchange on obstacles, success factors and development of solution approaches for the cooperation with municipalities (see agenda).

Table 10 Agenda Study Visit "How to cooperate with municipalities to support the development of community energy projects"

Time	Activity	Duration
10:00	Welcoming and Introduction to the Workshop	10 min
10:10	Presentations of Case Studies Short presentation of the organizations and their experiences to date in the cooperation with municipalities	10 min each
10:50	Collecting possibilities of cooperation with municipalities	20 min
11:10	<i>Coffee Break</i>	10 min
11:20	Exchange on obstacles, success factors and development of solution approaches for the cooperation with municipalities Discussion about how to increase the interest of municipalities, their needs for successful cooperation and the handling of these requirements	60 min
12:20	Feedback and closure of meeting	15 min
12:30	End of meeting	



Introduction

As an introduction, we asked the participants about their experiences with the topic "Cooperation with municipalities" by means of virtual constellations. It was noticeable that the participants had a very different wealth of experience; two participating organization took on the role of experts in the workshop, while another organization had had little contact to date.

Discussion

At the beginning we collected different types of cooperation with municipalities and discussed the different approaches:

Possibilities and types of cooperation with municipalities to support the development of community energy projects

- Situation: Lack of resources in municipalities > partnering in development and planning > the community takes ownership
- Pure consultancy and services
- Helping in the development of strategic plans
- Advisory services
- Provide different funding opportunities (community bonds)
- Becoming partners to develop and implement concrete projects (shares responsibilities)
- Supervision of projects during implementation
- Getting funding together and form cooperation

- Helping to raise money
- Helping to develop projects
- Doing the concrete implementation/construction...
- Partnership on all levels

This was followed by an intensive exchange about obstacles, success factors and possible solution approaches for the cooperation with municipalities. The discussion was held against the background of three questions: How to increase

- the interest of municipalities?
- their needs for successful cooperation?
- the handling of these requirements?

Before the discussion of each question began, participants were given a few minutes to reflect and make their own notes. The results are recorded below:



Exchange on obstacles, success factors and solution approaches for the cooperation with municipalities

Table 11 How to increase the interest of municipalities for cooperation?

Guiding questions: What do the municipalities want to achieve? What interests do municipalities have in cooperation? What are strong arguments for cooperation?

<p>General ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get more expertise (filling their gaps) • Getting help and expertise in funding • Reducing their (financial) risk • Wants to have happy citizens • Becoming independent from big energy companies • Increase the general commitment of citizens towards RES • Mayors like RES projects to become popular 	<p>Obstacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement process is complex • Bureaucratic processes make it difficult and slow to cooperate • They are conservative • Innovative ideas are not popular • Lack of capacities • Lack of interest • Political issues are always present
<p>Success factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the social factor • Cooperating with community energy • Using best practice examples • Raise interest and awareness in the municipalities • Inform on innovative solutions 	<p>Solution approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure out the procurement procedures in the beginning • Using different approaches for companies and cooperatives • Preparing the ground by awareness raising events • Include the municipalities well before • Finding the “one” engaged and active person (frontrunner) • Replicate best practice examples • Social inclusion (involve citizens)

Table 12 What are the municipalities’ needs for successful cooperation?

Guiding question: How to handle these requirements?

<p>General ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They need to show, that they are taking action • Local actors to cooperate with • Municipalities are trustworthy partners • Good overview on existing services and knowhow • Solid solutions (low risk) 	<p>Obstacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to funds • Lack of methodology on how to manage risks for innovative procurements
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solution for limited human resources • Necessity to break down complex information for decision makers 	
<p>Success factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities are trustworthy partners • Offering low-risk investment to municipalities 	<p>Solution approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extinction rebellion pushed the politicians • cocreation of new solutions • public-private cooperation → task force • create one-pager

Table 13 How to approach the municipalities well?

Guiding question: What must be considered? Is a contract needed?

<p>General ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness • Focus on the benefits • Use best practice examples • Provide promotion and visibility • Contact to decision makers if possible (smaller cities) • Use individual approach for each municipality 	<p>Obstacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often only contact to management level - not decision makers
<p>Success factors</p>	<p>Solution approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use trusted third parties to inform about the ideas • One-pager for each project/product • Frequent meetings on more general topics (annual work programme) • Offering good media coverage

Closing

A feedback round concluded the workshop. The participants reported that it was interesting to see the different perspectives and challenges of the individual organizations. The exchange between the different countries was rated particularly positive, problems and solutions were similar in the different countries. It was striking that similar answers were found to the different issues discussed. As a result, there is now a set of approaches that could be used to create new cooperation with municipalities. In retrospect, one participant felt that it would have been useful to have a municipal representative in the group or to obtain feedback from such a person afterwards. The format and time frame were rated as good.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 837758.



Conclusion

The very diverse group worked well together on this specific topic and the participants were able to learn from the different experiences and views of the others. The increased group size was beneficial for the discussion process and it was very positive, that all participants had personal experience in the field. The cooperation with municipalities seems to be a topic for all kind of organizations and the different approaches of crowdfunders, aggregators and cooperatives form a good basis for mutual learning and future cooperation in the field.

Workshop 4: How public funding can support professionalization

The Workshop tackled challenges and solutions in terms of financing permanent staff of socially innovative businesses in the energy sector. This topic is particularly interesting for energy cooperatives, since a lack of personnel capacities often poses challenges. Overload of (individual) volunteers, a low number of realized projects, lack of internal and external communication and resulting frustration among members and active people. Funding from EU-projects or governmental institutions can support the professionalization and offer an opportunity to co-finance employees.

The workshop was attended by participants from three organizations; two energy cooperatives (I-Ener, France and citizen energy cooperative Biederbach, Germany) and one aggregator (Tractebel, Romania). Tractebel with a lot of previous experience in external/public funding, functions currently also as a consultant and therefore participated as an expert in the workshop. The workshop focused on different forms of (public) funding, advantages and disadvantages of funding and ways to generate funding.

Table 14 Agenda Study Visit “How public funding can support professionalization”

Time	Activity	Duration
9:00	Welcoming and introduction to the Workshop	10 min
9:10	Presentations of Case Studies Short presentation of the organizations and their experiences with public funding and paid staff	10 min each
10:00	Brainstorming sources of (public) funding	10 min
10:10	<i>Coffee Break</i>	10 min
10:20	Exchange <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages and disadvantages of public funding • Successful coordination of own project work and those for third-party funded projects • Ways and means how to get public funding 	max. 90 min
11:50	Feedback and closure of meeting	10 min
12:00	End of meeting	



Introduction

At the beginning of the workshop we clarified that in this workshop the term "public funding" means institutional funding and participation in publicly funded projects (EU, national, regional). Later we looked at further options of public funding.

In an introductory Mentimeter survey, we asked participants about their experiences with public funding (see Figure 4). Two of the three participating organizations already work in funded projects, partly financing their staff through it. Of the majority, receiving funding is viewed as positive; about one-third of participants face additional work or problems as a result of participating in funded projects. The following presentations of the individual organizations already showed possibilities in which different ways funding can be used and illustrated some advantages and disadvantages of participation (and non-participation) in funded projects.

What is your experience with public funding?

Mentimeter

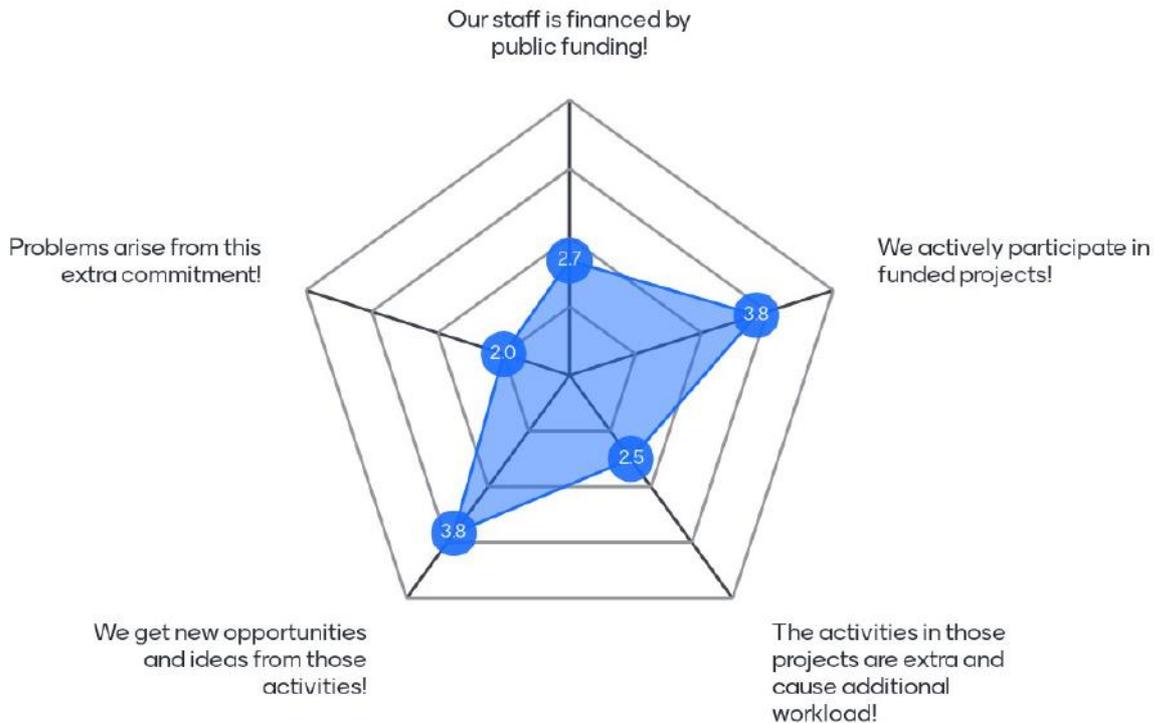


Figure 4 Query experience with public funding



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Discussion

The discussion started with a brainstorming of different sources and types of public funding (see wordcloud in Figure 6). The individual answers can be roughly clustered into three areas:

- administrative levels at which funding is provided (local, regional, national, EU)
- ways of obtaining funding (project funding, local public, membership shares, competitions, subsidies)
- objectives of funding (direct funding for staff, funding for infrastructure, motor of the energy transition)

Brainstorming on sources and types of (public) funding

Mentimeter



12

Figure 5 Sources and types of public funding

Workshop participants then discussed the advantages and disadvantages of public funding (see Table 13). Despite the disadvantages mentioned, there was an agreement that obtaining public funding is fundamentally beneficial for the organizations. Furthermore, the participants exchanged views on the successful coordination of their own project work and that for third-party funded projects (Table 14). In those organizations that handle both their own and funded projects, the combination of both activities was not perceived as disadvantageous or competing but rather as enriching. The discussion block was devoted to collecting ways and means to obtain public funding (see Table 15). The following approach to finding funds was considered particularly useful: the organization should first define its goals for the future and draw up plans on how to achieve these goals. Afterwards, specific funding can be sought; a list of possible funding pots will help in this. It is also helpful to exchange ideas with other organizations and to make use of networks.

Table 15 Advantages and disadvantages of public funding



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Guiding question: To what extent can public funding help or not help in your work?

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility to hire employees • Raise of sustainability, efficiency and social innovation through public projects • Opportunity to realize more projects • Possibility to enter into new topics, broaden the horizon • Publicity and awareness of the organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy • It takes longer to realize projects • Effort to write applications and receive funding - additional workload

Table 16 Successful coordination of own project work and those for third-party funded projects

Guiding questions: How do you ensure that the staff is not too tied to the work for the externally funded project? How can we succeed in integrating our own project development and implementation into the funded projects?

- Not to be seen as concurrence but as inspiration/complement
- Offer an internship, option to hire the person when funding is available
- Careful consideration of topics and funding programs

Table 17 Ways and means how to get public funding

Guiding question: How can your organization get public funding? What pots, contact points, advice and support are there?

<p>General ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set goals for the future, plan how to reach them and search for specific funding • Make a list of possible funds • Use your network of organizations - others might have links and tips for opportunities and ideas for projects 	<p>Funding pots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU • National • Regional • Local
<p>Contact points</p>	<p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange with other organizations on how to get funding • Use your network • Present yourself on project partner platforms of the EU



Closing

The workshop concluded with a short feedback session. Overall, the exchange was rated as interesting and helpful by the participants, especially by those whose organizations have not yet received public funding.

Conclusion

The topic proved to be universal and interesting for all types of organizations. It was beneficial to have different degrees of expertise in the group, as those participants with little or no experience could greatly benefit from the experts. The possibility to fund own personnel became obvious and it was generally agreed that it is beneficial for the own work, rather than being time consuming.

Using public funding can be an interesting way to professionalize the cooperatives and to help them developing new business ideas.

Workshop 5: How internal communication can increase member engagement

This Workshop focussed on the values of professional internal communication and dealt with the question how businesses can benefit from (voluntary) engagement of their members. This topic is particularly relevant for energy cooperatives; there are manifold reasons for good communication with cooperative members: Creation and strengthening of the regional network and the identification with the cooperative, the potential of turning members into ambassadors and build on their special talents and connections - to name just a few. Workshop topics were the usage of suitable communication channels, the creation of a communication plan and the definition of low-threshold tasks for active members. A special focus was put on how to cause enthusiasm in young people and women.

A total of three participants from three energy cooperatives (Energética, Spain; I-Ener, France; Regea [as regional Energy Agency and Case study provider], Croatia) from different countries took part in the workshop. No one called himself an expert in the field of internal communication, yet the experiences were very different. The agenda shows the course of the study visit, the main part was formed by two discussion blocks on the relevance of good internal communication and suitable communication channels.



Table 18 Agenda Study Visit “How internal communication can increase member engagement”

Time	Activity	Duration
10:00	Welcoming and introduction to the Workshop	10 min
10:10	Presentations of Case Studies Short presentation of the organizations and their experiences with internal communication	10 min each
10:45	Why do we need internal communication for successful cooperative work? Closer look and exchange on goals and target groups	30 min
11:15	<i>Coffee Break</i>	10 min
11:25	How to choose the right way of internal communication? Collection and evaluation of communication channels, tools and frequency	70 min max.
12:40	Implementation with the help of a communication plan Proposals for an internal communication plan	10 min
12:50	Feedback and closure of meeting	10 min
13:00	End of meeting	

Introduction

To obtain an overall picture, we began by asking the individual participants about their experiences to date with internal communication in the individual organizations (see Figure 7). It is striking that communication with the members is considered very important, but that the implementation and involvement of the members is not very satisfactory. The organization's own know-how on the subject is rated in the middle. Each participant was then given the opportunity to present their organization and go into more detail about internal communication structures and channels, goals, target groups and results.



Experiences

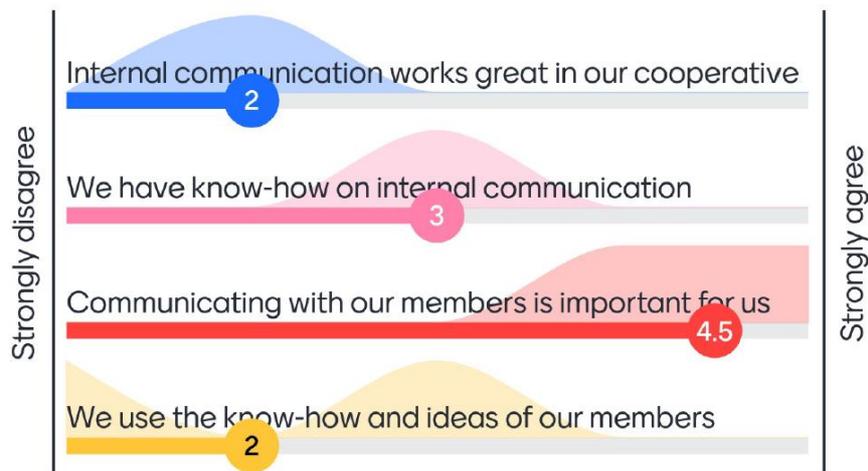


Figure 6 Survey Experiences internal communication

Discussion

The workshop's focus was on the exchange on the relevance of good internal communication and suitable communication channels. In this regard, the participants discussed two questions, beginning with:

Why do we need internal communication for successful cooperative work?

Here goals and target groups were to be examined in more detail.

Figure 7 served as orientation. As a result, internal communication was considered important, especially to inform and involve members, to work more effectively and to strengthen the own identity as well as to promote the exchange with other organizations (in connection with external communication).

In summary, the following responses can be noted:

- Engagement and motivation of (passive) members
- Information and sensibilization
- Members are part of the governance > need/duty of good information
- Make members to ambassadors to recruit new members
- Soliciting and disseminating new ideas for projects and engagement
- Make own services and non-productive activities known
- Reduction of redundancies when projects overlap
- Influence on external communication > speaking with one voice
- Chance to use regional network
- Inform about activities of related organizations
- Strengthening the identity of the organization



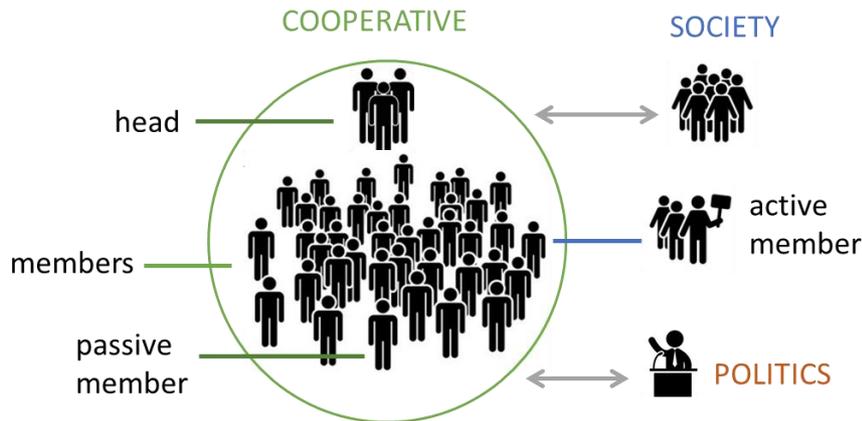


Figure 7 Membership structures and interactions of energy cooperatives

How to choose the right way of internal communication?

This was the title of the second discussion block, devoting to various communication channels. The following guiding questions provided orientation: "How could you succeed in reaching your goals and target groups? What/whom do you need for this? Which experiences have you had?". For each communication channel, the function and frequency, advantages and disadvantages were discussed. Table 17 shows a summary of the most important points:

Table 19 Communication Channels

Function and frequency	Advantages	Disadvantages
Decision making platform		
Experiences of user organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrates work of working groups, frequency twice a year - Website: Voting, raise of proposals - Use for assemblies and online conferences - Suitable especially for larger groups. For smaller groups: Clouds, MS Teams - Participation level is, more or less, the same number of participants than physical meetings - Future: combination of physical and virtual meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hold meetings online, geographically disperse members > makes participation in assemblies possible - Free software, protected data, accessible only for cooperative members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Only" digital, not enough knowledge about digital platforms, no physical contact (one important reason for participating in a cooperative) - Less attractive for older members



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Now only used for assemblies, platform is open for some time before and after the event. In future, probably integration of tasks from the working groups 		
<h3>Mailing list</h3>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletter: new projects, SocialRES, other projects... - Mail addresses from all members needed - Target group: either cooperative members and clients or externals, like municipalities, companies - Frequency: once in two months, once/twice per month, once a month or once in three weeks - Responsible: communication manager or project manager - Newsletter has to be promoted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily reach all shareholders - Successful communication channel opened by 50% of members - Possible to reach separate groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not all members have mail addresses - Active subscription is necessary due to data protection - Readers often do not follow the links, only receive the mail - Frequency must be kept > time consuming to write
<h3>MS Teams/ zoom/ jitsi...</h3>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication with working groups or directors - Thematical reunions, specified meetings - No frequency - Well-scheduled meetings - Idea: "open morning" for additional questions/ general info 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange in Covid-times possible - Win of time, no travels - No geographical distances, easier to reach experts/ other people to participate - Suitable for larger organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better social interaction in physical meetings (lunch etc.) - Too strong focus on work-related topics - Informal exchange is lacking
<h3>Social networks</h3>		
<p>Channel and frequency</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facebook, 1 or 2 posts per day 2. twitter, 3. Instagram (limited suitable), 2-3 posts per week 4. LinkedIn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best solution for general public and private companies > reach different kind of people - Snowball-technique, links to other projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipalities are not reached - How to engage citizens to reaction? > followers but not many reactions/comments/likes - Reduced information amount



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible: communication manager, info is sent by project managers - Frequency lower at coops, Not used for internal communication, but chance for networking - Telegram - All use Facebook and Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen network - Telegram channel: more direct interaction - SM is a chance for internal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-consuming - Content in SM should be funny, sexy... > usually not the topic of renewable energy
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Closing

Finally, we presented the structure of a communication plan, which can offer proposals for implementing internal communication strategies:

Communication plan

1. Define responsibilities of internal communication
2. Assess the current situation and define communication goals
3. Define target group
4. Define channels and tools
5. Compile communication calendar
6. Interact with group (respond to ideas and feedback)
7. Measure results



The feedback was then obtained by means of a poll (see Figure Z) and supplemented by voluntary verbatim reports.

Feedback

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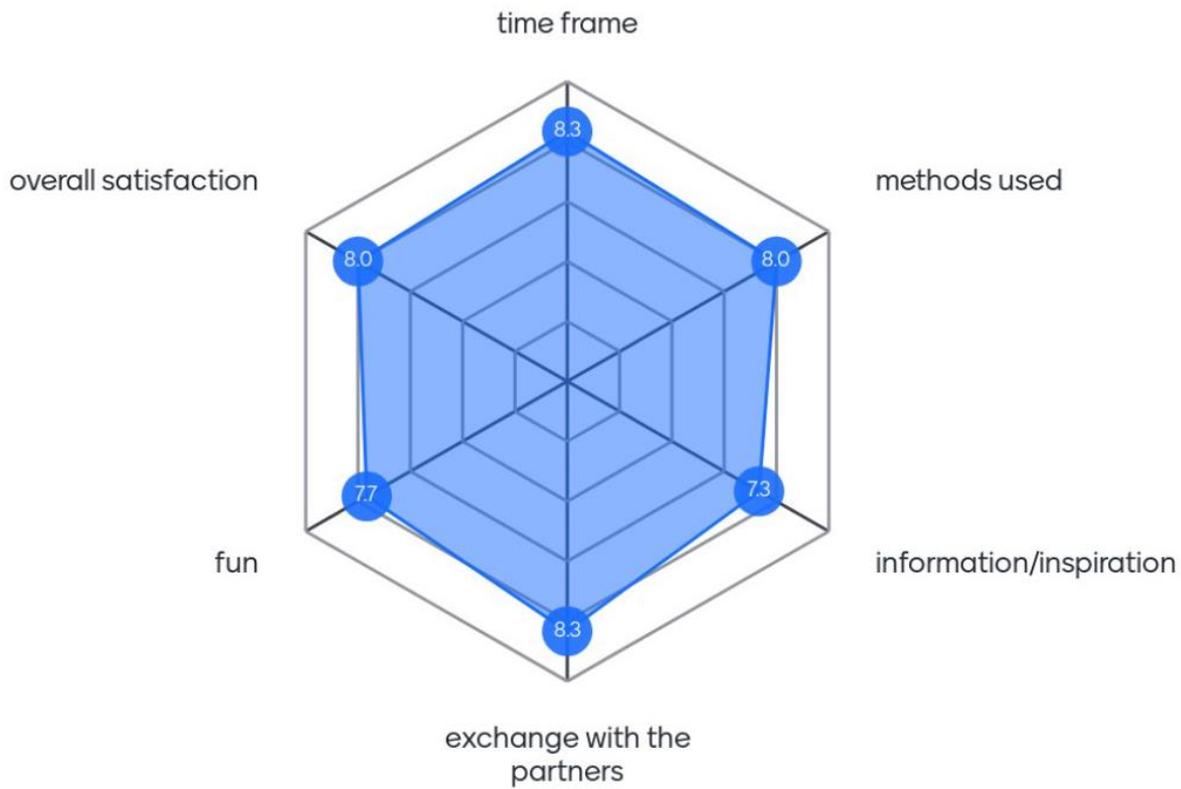


Figure 8 Feedback survey study visit “How internal communication can increase member engagement”

Conclusion

Internal communication is an important topic in any kind of organization. In cooperatives it becomes an even more crucial role, as the members can be considered their biggest asset, yet are not strongly involved and integrated in the processes in most cases. As the participating organizations have no experts on communication, it proofed hard to separate internal and external communication in the discussions. The topic is also linked directly to personnel capacities, as communication is work intensive and requires quite an amount of time.

The different organizations worked well together and benefited from their different experiences and backgrounds → the exchange on internal communication works well between cooperatives from different countries, as external circumstances and rules are not very relevant.



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Findings and conclusions

The method of having online study visits with people from case studies all over Europe worked in general. The technical barriers were not very high, and the general openness of the participants was beneficial for the discussions. Nevertheless, it was hard to overcome the personal barriers between people, that did not know each other personally. Working jointly with others on business development and optimizations of your own organization, requires a certain degree of trust and maybe familiarity. This could not be obtained by mere online meetings. The social aspect of joint dinners and excursions can be considered very important and the lack of it can be considered as unfavourable for the mutual learning process.

The number of participants was fairly poor, as in most cases only one representative per organization attended the meeting. The low threshold for participating in the meeting (no travel time, reduced costs...) did not result in higher participant numbers. This could be due to the lower attractiveness of the meetings compared to multi-day events in a foreign country and is another point to be considered in weighing up online versus real-life study visits. The online events attracted mainly the paid staff of the organizations - real-life study visits might be more attractive for members and volunteers.

The different topics were mostly suitable for an international exchange between different types of organizations. Even though, not in all cases could the participants gain lots of helpful insights from the fellow participants. This might be due to the selection of organizations, the individuals or the topics themselves, that are linked to national or organizational framework conditions. A final evaluation is not possible at this point and would require additional research.

The participants benefited from different experiences and levels of expertise and sometimes obtained inspirations for their own organizations. Those inspirations might result in new business developments in the near future but will probably take some time for the implementation.

For a development of joint business ideas or direct cooperation between the different organizations, the framework of online meetings was not suitable, and the time spent together was not sufficient. We therefore consider additional real-life study visits in the coming year an essential part of the mutual learning process. We can build up on the results of the five online workshops and use the experiences on common interest and challenges for intense working sessions.



Feedback survey online Study Visits

Outcomes for the participants

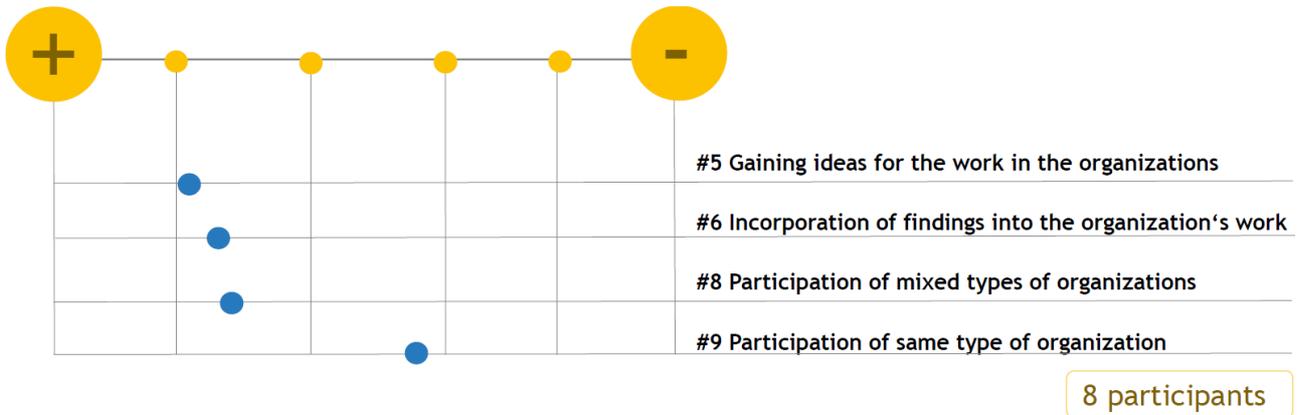


Figure 9 Results of the feedback survey (methodological feedback questions selected)



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Annex

Template feedback survey

1. Due to the pandemic, online workshops replaced the on-site study visits. This was a good alternative and met my expectations for mutual learning.
1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree
2. The online Study Visits were well prepared and interactive within the scope of possibilities
1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree
3. The amount of time (preparation and participation) for the online study visits I found...
1 ... too low 5 ...too high
4. Each participant was encouraged to participate and had the opportunity to contribute
1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree
5. I got ideas for the work in my organization.
1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree
6. I will incorporate findings from the workshops into the work of the organization.
1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree
7. Answer only if applicable: my organization was not able to participate or rarely participated in the workshops, reasons for this were _____
8. Some workshops were attended by very mixed groups of organizations, both cooperatives, crowdfunding platforms and aggregators. I found this...
1 ... too heterogeneous 5 ... a good match.
9. The exchange with the same types of organizations from different European countries...
*1 ...did not help me much due to different backgrounds and regulatory frameworks
5 ...provided me new perspectives and inspiration*
10. Regarding the content dimension of the workshop topic, I found the thematic introduction and the exchange with the partners to be
1 ...insufficient, I would have preferred additional expert input 5 ...good and sufficient
11. The constellation of participating organizations partly deviated from the originally planned constellation of SWOT workshops and matchmaking. I found this to be a deficit.
1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree
12. Answer only if applicable: In addition to the study visits that have already taken place, I would like more in-depth content on individual topics in the form of follow-up workshops, webinars, or at an on-site study visit on the following topics_____
13. Two workshop topics that have not yet been covered in the online study visits are: “How members and the organisations can benefit from autoconsumption models and power supply” and “How to find new target groups through crowdfunding”. If on-site study visits can take place in future, I would like to cover the following topics (new ideas welcome):

14. Special requests and suggestions for the on-site study visits _____
15. Further suggestions and comments _____



Results feedback survey

# in survey	Question	Scale	Average/ answer
M001_01	Due to the pandemic, online workshops replaced the on-site study visits. This was a good alternative and met my expectations for mutual learning.	1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree	5,7
M002_01	The online Study Visits were well prepared and interactive within the scope of possibilities	1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree	5,4
M003_01	The amount of time (preparation and participation) for the online study visits I found...	1 ... too low - 5 ...too high	3,4
M004_01	Each participant was encouraged to participate and had the opportunity to contribute	1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree	6,0
M005_01	I got ideas for the work in my organization.	1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree	4,9
M006_01	I will incorporate findings from the workshops into the work of the organization.	1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree	4,7
M007_01	Answer only if applicable: my organization was not able to participate or rarely participated in the workshops, reasons for this were...		
M008_01	Some workshops were attended by very mixed groups of organizations, both cooperatives, crowdfunding platforms and aggregators. I found this...	1: too heterogeneous 5 a good match	4,6
M009_01	The exchange with the same types of organizations from different European countries	1: ...did not help me much due to different backgrounds and regulatory frameworks - 5: ...provided me new perspectives and inspiration	3,9
M010_01	Regarding the content dimension of the workshop topic, I found the thematic introduction and the exchange with the partners to be	1: ...insufficient, I would have preferred additional expert input 5: ...good and sufficient	4,6
M011_01	The constellation of participating organizations partly deviated from the originally planned constellation of SWOT workshops and matchmaking. I found this to be a deficit.	1 Do not agree at all 6 Do fully agree	3,0
M012_01	Answer only if applicable: In addition to the study visits that have already taken place, I would like more in-depth content on individual topics in the form of follow-up workshops, webinars, or at an on-site study visit on the following topics	Open response	



M013 _01	Two workshop topics that have not yet been covered in the online study visits are: “How members and the organisations can benefit from autoconsumption models and power supply” and “How to find new target groups through crowdfunding”. If on-site study visits can take place in future, I would like to cover the following topics (new ideas welcome):	Open response	1) The second one is interesting for me, 2) We are interested by this subjects, mainly by the subject about autoconsumption. About new topics, I don't have idea now but if I have a new idea I will tell you, 3) Ideas on how to create awareness of your project, visibility and membership growth, 4) How members and the organisations can benefit from autoconsumption models and power supply
M014 _01	Special requests and suggestions for the on-site study visits	Open response	I just think that is a good idea to do the last study visits on site and not online for the last ones.
M015 _01	Further suggestions and comments	Open response	Thanks for your work!

