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## CLIMATE ACTION ZLATIBOR



# Closing and Continuing of the Climate Action Zlatibor Project

The Climate Action Zlatibor project, which was conducted in two countries – Croatia and Serbia, resulted with successful establishment and implementation of Competence Center for Energy Transition and Climate Change of the Zlatibor region in Serbia. Although the project has ended, the work of the Competence Center continues by providing support in the field of energy transition and climate change challenges for this region with 330,000 inhabitants.

*by Denis Premec, Regional Energy Agency North*

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## The project outcome in short

The project started in October 2020 and lasted 28 months. The realized budget was 392.604,15 EUR total, with EUKI funding in the amount of 365.844,84 EUR. The project implementer, [Regional Energy Agency North](#) from Croatia, had the task of transferring the knowledge and best practice of an experienced energy agency to the implementing partner [Regional Development Agency Zlatibor](#) in Serbia, which established a new organizational department for this purpose - the Competence Center for Energy Transition and Climate Change. The main goal of the Competence Center is to secure long-term conditions for development and strengthening of local government capacities in the region. By the end of the project the Competence Center imposed itself as an important partner in energy transition and climate change mitigation planning for citizens, public administration and institutions, and market operators. One of the Center's important roles, even now after the project has ended, is to assist surrounding municipalities and other stakeholders in the region to build sustainable capacities related to energy transition and identify opportunities for increasing the energy efficiency and implementing the renewable sources, since most of them are small and lack expert resources and capacities. Both partners have strengthened local governments' and stakeholders' capacities by achieving a substantial change in awareness and interest in energy and climate changes.

## Project outputs and achievements

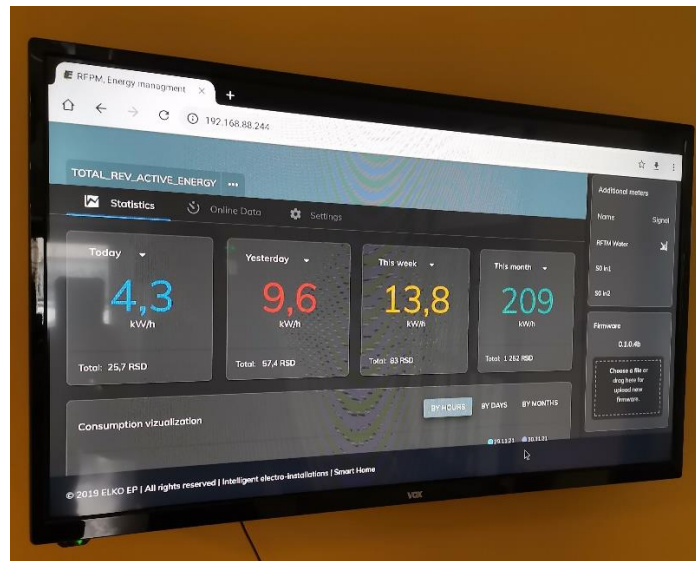
At the very beginning of the project the team of five experts were assigned to, and employed in the newly established Competence Center. The Center operates in a separate physical location which also serves as a public showcase demonstration center for the Building Energy Management System developed within the scope of the project, and also as a public test spot for procured energy management technological equipment such as thermographic camera.

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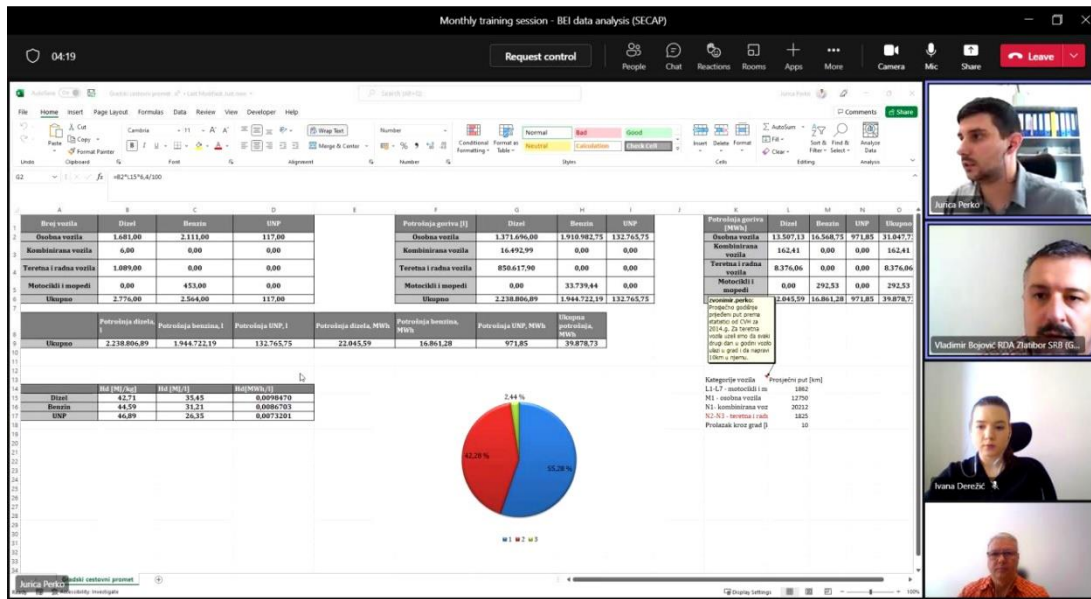
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*Building Energy Management System demonstration center, Photo: ©RDA Zlatibor*

The first stage of the project was focused on knowledge and experience transfer from REA North to the Competence Center team in the field of energy consumption analyses and energy planning. This was done through the first extensive master class workshop, and later continued with a total of 25 online training and ad-hoc support sessions. REA North also delivered two more master classes for the team, one covering the topics of climate change mitigation planning, and one covering the modelling of photovoltaic (solar) powerplants.

The next step for both partners was to ensure the political interest and commitment of total of 16 urban and rural municipalities in Serbia and Croatia and enrol them in the [Covenant of Mayors](#) initiative, a respectful EU climate action community. This enabled us to start working on two flagship studies – Joint Sustainable Energy and Climate Actions Plans (jSECAP), the long-term task of almost one and a half years. The process of collecting energy and climate data for the studies took a significant effort due to many repetitive tasks, and all this data had to be transferred in a readable form, then analysed and processed. These two [studies](#) contain elaborated energy efficiency and climate mitigation measures for local communities and now represent a formal obligation for project partners because they need to be officially updated every few years. The work on these studies resulted with deep insight into the energy performance and climate of all 16 urban and rural municipalities in Serbia and Croatia, a necessary predisposition for further support to local stakeholders.



Online master class for energy and climate planning, Photo: ©REA North

In the second half of the project the Competence Center started with activities to achieve better visibility and impose the Center as a trustworthy partner. It all started with the series of seminars and workshops in the Zlatibor region for local authorities, public institutions, citizens, civil society, and SMEs. These events continued until the end of the project, with the common goal of increasing capacities of stakeholders on local, regional and national level to stimulate new projects and highlight opportunities of available local and national funding. In total more than three hundred participants attended these events. The interest of the civil society, private and public stakeholders in the topics of energy renovation, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources was much higher than planned. Reasons for increased interest were, among others, changed circumstances on the energy market in the last two years with main influential factor being disrupted supply chains due to pandemics, and especially the year 2022 due to the war in Ukraine and resulting energy crisis.



*Capacity building public seminar for local authorities, Photo: ©RDA Zlatibor*

These visibility and capacity building activities resulted with first close cooperations between the Competence Center and local authorities. The Center helped the city heating plant of Municipality of Kosjeric with the preparation of technical documentation for the replacement of fuel oil boilers with gas boilers, and also helped the technical school in Municipality of Požega with replacement of an old boiler with a biomass boiler. The Center also helped other municipalities – Arilje, Bajina Bašta, Čajetina, Nova Varoš and Prijepolje to draft project proposals for energy refurbishment funding for their kindergartens and school facilities. These activities were not strictly planned within the scope of this project but are closely connected with the Competence Center mission, and they proved that the region needs such a Center, as municipalities have gladly accepted its help.

The cooperation of the Competence Center with local authorities later resulted with five kicked project pilots from the field of energy refurbishment of buildings. In agreement with financing party the City of Užice (the capital of the region), the Center assisted with these energy renovation projects. The main role of the Center was energy efficiency advisory prior to beginning of works of these pilot projects, both in conceptualizing energy efficiency measures and consulting in the process of procurement preparation for energy refurbishment works. This is how the Competence Center used the transferred knowledge and experience from REA North and made its contribution to the local community. The final result was that five buildings were renovated in the best possible and controllable manner – three elementary schools (and one affiliate), one community health center and one kindergarten.

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*Pilot energy refurbishment of elementary school in Užice, Serbia, Photo: ©RDA Zlatibor*

An important task of the Competence Center was to select appropriate buildings and prepare the Analysis of Solar Potential of Public Buildings in the region. For this task the (planned) external consultant was hired and they jointly prepared the Analysis. This comprehensive analysis pointed out the possibilities for the production of electricity on buildings' roofs such as communal service building, indoor swimming pool, municipal building of City of Priboj, and also on the building of Regional Innovation Startup Center – the physical location of the Competence Center. Solar power plants on roofs are probably the most efficient way to utilize otherwise unusable surfaces, reduce reliance on traditional energy sources, and provide a sustainable and cost-effective solution for generating electricity.

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*Visiting the solar potential in the City of Križevci, Croatia, Photo: ©REA North*

During the course of the project, we also conducted two study tours and three workshops with experience transfer from local communities and agencies in Croatia and Slovenia to the Competence Center and its local stakeholders. We have visited the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien (Austria), where we learned about the cooperation with the private and public sector in the field of photovoltaic and plus-energy districts. The study tour in Brussels resulted with established connection between the [FEDARENE](#) (European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and Environment), RDA Zlatibor and its stakeholders. The tour was focused on the topic of energy agencies as key facilitators of sustainable economic development and was carried out because of the planned ambition for the Competence Center to grow into a local energy agency when the conditions are met.

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*Project partners in Brussels, Belgium, Photo: @RDA Zlatibor*

REA North carried out all three planned workshops with experience transferring from local authorities in the field of sustainable energy development, intended for Competence Center team members and its stakeholders. The result was an established link with the City of Koprivnica and City of Križevci in Croatia, which are advanced in energy management, and the ENERGAP (Energy and Climate Agency of Podravje) in Republic of Slovenia.

With all these conducted activities the Competence Center for Energy Transition and Climate Change of the Zlatibor region opened many doors and opportunities for its professional growth in the future.