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Municipal Climate Change Strategies Project



The miracle of Pehcevo

House of Culture

The white façade of the communal House of culture in Pehcevo shines brightly in the early morning sun. Mayor Igor Popovski takes us to the other side, where workers are busy plastering the side building where the new heating system will be installed, fuelled by pellets instead of diesel. Wood pellets which will be produced from waste from the local wood industry, more energy efficient than diesel, in terms of green house gas emissions. Popovski hopes to celebrate new years' eve 2014 in a warm House of Culture, insulated and provided with energy efficient windows. A historic premise where in 1942 the

underground communist party met for the first time.

Water filter station

A bumpy country road uphill, leads from the centre of Pehcevo to the newly restored water filter station. Pehcevo get's its drinking water from local sources, close to the Bulgarian Border. Due to flooding the filter station was not functioning well and occasionally water from the taps turned brown from the mud. Now the station is restored, water supply is secured again. Observing the slopes of the nearby mountain in the sun I ask if there are ideas for a solar power plant. Popovski answers that there



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already is a plant of 150 square meters and they are planning a new one of 300m². Together with the available local hydro energy, in the future this can take care of the energy consumption in the region. I realize that with all the restoration and insulation of buildings, local power stations, water supply and bio mass production Pehcevo can be energy independent within a few years.

Popovski estimates the cost of all projects between 5 and 10 million Euro's. Of course, much of the money is brought in by foreign donors but nonetheless it is well spent. How is it possible that a community in a remote corner of the Western Balkans manages to achieve what so many other European towns and cities have as a goal for over decades?

Strategy

Independence on energy and water was not the intended outcome of strategies developed by the Pehcevo community but in fact it may be a result. In 2012 a local NGO Ambrosia, together with the local authorities submitted their proposal for a process of strategy development on Climate Change to Milieukontakt Macedonia. The Skopje based organization had just received a grant from USAID to support such local strategies in 4 communities in Macedonia. Next to Tearce, Krivogastani and Bogdanci, Pehcevo was one of the communities selected. The community entered a 15-month process of deliberation and plan development, working towards a local strategy on adaptation and mitigation on Climate Change. The process started from scratch: Participants were asked to define their values and how they related to (fighting) climate change.

To have an early and tangible result in the process in 2013 one 'urgent action' could be realized. In Pehcevo, out of 70 priorities, the choice was made for restoration of the Water filter station. The connection with Climate change was adaptation to flooding because of more extreme weather in the region. In 2014 the process of dialogue and working groups resulted in a strategic document, 'Municipal Climate Change Strategy'. Plans included restoration of communal buildings: The Town Hall, House of Culture, the old school, and replacing the streetlights with an energy efficient alternative. Measures that decline the towns green house gas emission with 20%. As we saw the measures were not only put on paper but in quite a short period realized.

Success

The success of the strategy and the process that lead to the results probably lies in the word ownership. The sense of ownership of the results of such a strategy with participants of the process is achieved through several elements included in the process:

1. The process starts from scratch without a pre-defined agenda gives the participants the chance to define the agenda themselves.
2. The Agenda is based on values instead of problems, which gives the process and its participants a positive drive.
3. The whole system is involved. It is not the government that is leading, they participate as citizens, interest groups and companies do.
4. Tangible results are shown during the process. Participants see direct result of their deliberative work. Therefore, the



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urgent actions at the start of the project are so important.

5. Measures benefit both the climate and the community. In all measures, there is a win-win situation. Energy efficiency goes together with comfort and restoration.
6. As mayor, Popovski plays a role as champions for the program.
7. The community financed a large part of the measures from its own resources. Another way to reassure ownership and commitment.
8. The program is accompanied by capacity development both on knowledge on climate change as on participatory methodologies.
9. Two ladies from the local NGO Ambrosia, Jasmina Pasaliska and Irena Krakutovska very actively supported and managed the program. Without personal attachment from locals these processes and their results are not sustainable.
10. Finally: the participation of around 70 and very active participation of 20 locals was crucial.

One step further

The Green Agenda process was initiated by a national NGO, Milieukontakt Macedonia, and financed for a large part by a foreign donor, USAID. Without them the project would not have taken place. As was the case in countries like Poland and Hungary, in time foreign donors will leave the country and financial support will dry out. Countries where this is the case often show a decline of NGO activity and participative processes. When I asked the Major in an earlier conversation about the future use of participative processes he was inclined to

start one independently from the Green Agenda program. This is promising but not a guarantee that it will last. Incorporating participative decision making into local politics is a long-time process. Doing it the right way is even harder. Without claiming to have the perfect recipe some suggestions:

1. Provide several local citizens with skills to moderate participatory meetings and dialogue. They can be the local participation coaches during town meetings.
2. Organize once in the two years an open town meeting with the question: What could be improved in our municipality?
3. Try to develop a system based on stimulation of the local economy. A solar power plant can be owned by shareholders from the community. Citizens who can participate with a small financial contribution.
4. Develop community enterprises: local initiatives with social impact that can take care of themselves financially.
5. Look for capacities within the community before hiring outsiders.

These are measures that need a mind shift rather than financial investments. They will both strengthen social cohesion and local economy. The green Agenda process has developed a strong basis for this. Now it is the turn of the community.