

## REPORT

# Renewable Energy Cooperatives Conference How to promote them especially on the Greek islands Sifnos, Greece - 6 September 2014

The conference “Renewable Energy Cooperatives” held in September on the island of Sifnos, organized by the Sifnos Island Energy Cooperative in cooperation with the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation Greece and the Sustainable Energy Youth Network (SEYN) was held in order to provide a platform for promoting energy cooperatives especially on the Greek islands. Practitioners from around Europe shared their experiences and a series of presentations on the opportunities of renewable energy, threat of climate change and potential for Mediterranean islands to lead the transition towards a low carbon economy served as a basis for the meeting. There is an appetite in Europe for communities to reclaim power and to produce energy from clean methods and this was the driver for bringing together renewable energy experts, enthusiasts and campaigners in Sifnos to identify ways forward.

The urgency of responding to climate change was a theme throughout the conference and was touched upon again by **Alkisti Florou** from the European Climate Foundation (Brussels) as she presented Greece’s and Southern Europe’s potential for a low carbon transition in energy production. The impacts of climatic change on Greece were outlined: an increase in extreme heat days in islands; ocean acidification; changing weather patterns; and climate change related costs running into hundreds of billions of Euros by the end of the century. Renewable energy was highlighted as a key driver in responding to climate change. This was presented in a European policy context with various EU targets for energy production, energy efficiency and carbon emissions reduction being shown.

Alkisti highlighted the need for a policy framework that will promote and not hinder renewable energy systems (RES). The case for stringent community consultation was also raised to build support and ensure community involvement from the inception of projects. This presentation showed renewable energy as a solution to environmental, economic and social issues facing countries like Greece.

**Dirk Knappen** (Belgium) working with REScoop gave an overview of the organisation and its aims to link renewable energy cooperatives and put energy production back in the hands of citizens. After outlining community empowerment and democratic action through energy cooperatives, Dirk went into a description of the energy models that are changing around the world and presented a detailed explanation of energy costs.

Dirk Knappen and Marina Petrović (Croatia), on behalf of **Robert Pasicko** from UNDP Croatia, shared the Croatian experience of energy cooperatives. The successes of initiatives to create energy coops through awareness raising, educational seminars on the issue and link up with RES were presented. The presenters discussed funding avenues for energy cooperatives and pointed to the success of initiatives in Croatia such as crowdfunding and the relative costs of PV energy in the market. Project CITIZENENERGY was used as a case study and example of good practice. This project used online platforms to link energy cooperatives and promote active citizen engagement.

**Marina Petrovic** and **Jamie Peters** (Scotland, UK) highlighted the importance of youth

engagement in energy revolution and gave examples of the Sustainable Energy Youth Network (SEYN) which they set up in 2013. SEYN was created in a youth gathering in Berlin at the end of 2013 organised by Heinrich Böll Foundation by participants which took part in a workshop on Europe and energy community in order to promote energy cooperatives in communities around Europe with the aims of engaging young people and sharing knowledge to boost participation in RES. Presenting SEYN in Sifnos was a further phase of SEYN as it grows and looks to centre its work on concrete projects around Europe, ultimately creating academies for young Europeans to take action. An emphasis on the need to change many aspects of our current systems and the structural violence that young people face in Europe was presented by SEYN. A call for a transformation of the electricity system to be at the heart of societal transformation and responses to climate change was outlined.

**Kostas Komninos** (Greece), an Energy expert presented his experiences from DAFNI Network (of Sustainable Aegean Islands). This outlined the benefits and potential for cross island collaboration in the energy transition we are working towards. The Dafni network, as Kostas explained, is a not for profit pact of Aegean islands that spans 2 regions and has 33 island members. The emphasis on ways to work together and pool knowledge that each island holds, was a key theme of Kostas' presentation. Cross island working allows space for emphasizing the intricacies and unique characters of each island. Kostas showed how this pact of islands with increased local planning can help spur local action.

Linking tourism, climate change and Greeks islands with renewables was a central aspect to the second half of the day. The potential for promoting places like Sifnos at the forefront of the renewable energy transformation was highlighted. The message was that there

is the chance for islands to work towards making the most of local characteristics to harness energy and in turn promoting places as sustainable, responsible and attractive places to visit and be in. **Nikos Chrysogelos**, ex green MEP and **Apostolos Dimopoulos**, President of the Energy Cooperative Sifnos spoke of the dangers that climate change will bring to Greece and future generations. Enabling communities to set up energy cooperatives along with other initiatives such as banning disposable plastic bags and promoting civic pride in islands were suggested as ways to create a brand of climate change friendly destinations.

A meeting of Sifnos Island Cooperative was held on the Sunday with some visiting presenters from the previous day also in attendance. Project ideas were generated that ranged from work in schools, PV installations for islanders, waste management proposals and possible restoration and work on an abandoned piece of land with the intention of turning it into a low environmental impact, high social impact campsite. Links were formed with SEYN and Sifnos Island Cooperative and the possibility of collaborating on a proposal based on vacant land on the island will be explored on in the coming months.

Jamie Peters  
Sustainable Energy Youth Network (SEYN)  
[jamie.peters@ukycc.org](mailto:jamie.peters@ukycc.org)

#### Imprint

Heinrich-Böll-Foundation Greece  
Aristotelous 3 54624 Thessaloniki Greece  
T +30 2310 28 28 29 F +30 2310 28 28 32  
E [info@gr.boell.org](mailto:info@gr.boell.org) | [www.gr.boell.org](http://www.gr.boell.org)