



## Press release - eCentral final conference

Three and half years of prosperous collaboration among eCentral project´s consortium have come to an end with the **final conference** which took place on **23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021 virtually on Zoom**. The event was the opportunity to present the main project´s results, but also to spark debate on innovative financing methods in different European countries, particularly those involved in the project. The discussion was fostered also by external guests from different projects and a representative from the European Commission who contributed to make the event rather insightful.

The event was opened by the words of **Wolfram Sparber** (Head of Institute for Renewable Energy - Eurac Research), **Velimir Šegon** (REGEA) and **Viktorjia Dobravec** (Interreg Central Europe Joint Secretariat).

The opening session was followed by the first part of the conference “Road towards zero energy buildings”, which started with the presentation of **eCentral main results** by **Hrovje Maras** (REGEA), **Theresa Urbanz** (EASt) and **Zsofia Pej** (Energiaklub). Consistent with the Renovation Wave goals, the Interreg eCentral project aims at raising awareness and motivate public authorities to implement renovation of public buildings into nZEB through innovative financing models. Some of the main results of the project is indeed the development of innovative tools and guidelines for municipalities to support these projects. Among these, the project developed 5 tools: two Living Performance Energy Certificates managing tools (**EPC tool** and **Living Lab**), a step by step **decision-support tool** for nZEB renovation with innovative financing schemes, a **step by step tool** on how to turn public buildings to nZEBs, and a nZEB training curriculum. It also organized 12 training programmes for local/regional authorities in Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia, 4 strategies and action plans and 3 pilot studies to test the applicability of the financing models in Croatia (public-private partnership - PPP), Hungary (Energy Performance Contracting - EPC) and Slovenia (Crowdfunding). The project was eventually proud of sharing its success indicators:

- The pilot actions created **1,7 mil EUR** of direct investments
- Developed project documentation for investments in public buildings worth **19 mil EUR**
- **38** feasibility studies created a pipeline of energy renovation projects worth **20,5 mil EUR** with estimated primary energy savings of **9.843 MWh** and **1.477 t/a** of **avoided CO<sup>2</sup>** emissions.
- **15** strategic local and regional documents for sustainable energy planning

Following the presentation of eCentral results, it was time to give space to some external guests, such as **Fabio Remondino** from Fondazione Bruno Kessler. He gave an overview of the Interreg **TARGET-CE project** focusing on the **capitalization of Central Europe projects**. The aim of TARGET-CE is to support public authorities in reducing energy consumption of public buildings by offering new ICT tools, financial models and trainings. It will also capitalize the outcomes of 5 previously funded Interreg-CE projects.

Then, **Viktorjia Dobravec** (Interreg Central Europe Joint Secretariat) gave an outlook to the **Interreg CE Programme for 2021-2027** sharing the main themes and goals which will be developed in Central Europe, such as strengthening innovation capacities, developing specialized and entrepreneurial skills, supporting the energy transition to climate neutrality, developing circular economy, protecting the environment, greening the urban mobility, improving transport connections in rural areas, and strengthening governance for territorial development.



Some of these points were also discussed by the following guest, **Dimitrios Athanasiou** from DG ENER - European Commission, who presented the **Renovation Wave** initiative. He highlighted how there is an increasing focus on the renovation of existing buildings to respond to the “energy efficiency first” principle and to tackle energy poverty to reach the mandatory minimum energy performance requirements. He also mentioned how Covid-19 has redirected the focus on buildings and the importance on health and indoor comfort. Another focus area of the Renovation Wave is on public buildings, particularly schools, hospitals, and care facilities. Other focus areas include the decarbonisation of heating and cooling, integration of renewables, life cycle approach, green and digital transition.

The second part of the conference gave space to **two panel discussion sessions** about innovative financing. The first one focused on **PPP and EPC models** for energy renovation projects and was moderated by **Roberto Lollini** (Group Leader from the Institute for Renewable Energy - Eurac Research). Panelists present were: **BenignaBoza-Kiss** (International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis), **Antonio Zonta** (ex. Province of Treviso), **Boštjan Krajnc** (KSEENA), **Josip Čengija** (REGEA), and **Jakub Menin** (IPOPEMA). All panelists shared their perspectives and experiences on implementing PPP and EPC in different countries. The main points which came out from the discussion were the importance to have a clear understanding of the legal framework, good knowledge of buildings, the importance of monitoring by being flexible based on the type of climate and human behaviour, and the still present reluctance of public authorities to uptake innovative financing schemes.

The second panel discussion was about **crowdfunding** and was moderated by **Hrvoje Maras** (REGEA). Panelists present were: **Ana Kočar** (Municipality of Velenje), **Mauricio O’Brien** (European Crowdfunding Network), **Andreas Karner** (ConPlusUltra), and **Zoran Rajn** (International Crowdfunding Center/Croinvest.eu). The main point shared within the discussion was the lack of a dedicated legal framework. For example, concerning the pilot study in Slovenia of eCentral for the reconstruction of Life-Long Learning centre in accordance with nZEB standards, it was highlighted by Ana how Slovenia lacks proper legislation for crowdfunding. Therefore, the target amount of money could not be reached exclusively via crowdfunding, even though the reactions from citizens were very positive. It was also stressed how crowdfunding should be considered complementary to traditional methods, and not a substitute.

In conclusion, the event achieved good results in sparking debate among professionals in the field of innovative financing and renovation of public buildings and represented a good platform to share successful results from the eCentral project.

Further information on the projec’s deliverables can be found on [eCentral website](#).