

## Buerger Energie Berlin interview

During our visit to Berlin we watched a very interesting presentation by Luise Neumann-Cosel, member of BuergerEnergie Berlin, organized by Respect for Greece eV . The presentation was held on the environmental school of the Botanic Garden of Berlin, a unique garden that hosts plants from different climate zones and provides proper conditions for them.

BuergerEnergie Berlin eG is a registered cooperation that is planning to buy the Berlin Electricity Grid. As off 2015, a new concessional contract for Berlin's electricity distribution grid will be deciding on who answers for sustainable grid operations in Germany's capital over the next decades. So, there is a unique opportunity for Berliners: citizens join to buy the grid, use profits wisely and shape the future of Berlins' energy system. There are 3 different ways of participation in the cooperation: member, supporter and trustor which is a very interesting form for people that don't want right now to take any risk. How it works? As a trustor, your money is safely stored in a trust account. If a concessional contract is signed, your money turns into shares of the cooperative. If not, your money is returned. Moreover BuergerEnergie seek to support the grid integration of renewable energies and invest part of the grid earnings in projects of a sustainable energy system.

We found this idea very interesting in terms of social and green innovation: Establishment of an energy system shaped by people. We hope that same cooperations and ideas will also emerge in Greece and give community the opportunity to work and benefit from the energy transition that should be done according to national and European objectives regarding the protection of the environment and climate change. Energy transition should not only be done for citizens but also by citizens, in order to have the characteristics and priorities they want.

For more information you can read the following interview that Boris Gotchev and Christian Wernitz from BuergerEnergie answered for us.

### **1. How you begun? How many members were running this idea at the beginning? Is there any connection between members (such as neighborhood, colleagues etc)?**

We started initially in 2011 with 3 people that knew each other already. Then, we quickly set up a first meeting were we invited about 20 people, most of whom at least one of us already knew. Our founding group worked for about half a year with about 10 people until we actually founded the cooperative. As soon as we made our idea public, our team grew rapidly.

### **2.How many members you have now? Which form do most people choose? Member, trustor or supporter?**

Our cooperative "BürgerEnergy Berlin" consists of approximately 1000 members, more than 2000 trustors and a supporting team of about 30

people.

### **3. Energy grids provide high investment opportunities? How? And how citizens will benefit directly from the earnings? Is there a plan?**

Yes, electric distribution grid provides 6 – 9 % financial yield which is controlled by the “Bundesnetzagentur” (Federal Network Agency). But as we don't operate Berlins electrical distribution grid yet, our cooperative is currently not generating profits but running fully on donations. This is why at the moment we don't return any profits to our members.

Our idea is to become partner in the future distribution grid management. One of our partners then will probably be “Berlin Energie”, a political public enterprise in Berlin.

In the concessions procedure we hopefully will win. So then in the general assembly all coop members will decide for different issues e.g. profit distribution and investments in installation of smart grid facility. In our general assembly, every member has one vote irrespectively of the number of shares he or she has bought.

### **4. We would like to know how you made your economical analysis. Which method do you use?**

Our economical assumptions and calculations concerning the grid were based on the support coming from our partners: The “Elektrizitätswerke Schönau”, a citizen-owned cooperative that was able to buy the local grid in a small town in southern Germany, provided much support in terms of knowledge on grid operation.

### **5. Does the legal framework in Berlin support green investments and RES Coops? In which ways?**

Green investments and RES Coops depend as much on local conditions and the citizens' commitment as they do on the national legal framework here in Germany. This used to be very favorable for comparably small and new groups that were given the guaranteed tariffs for electricity feed-in for 20 years. However, with several reforms since 2012 green investments have become more risky, making more difficult for RES Coops. The tariffs are considerably lower by now and whoever wants to invest e.g. in wind power has to go through a complex bidding procedure. Big companies have a competitive advantage over small citizen-owned coops here.

Our case is a bit different: We are trying to get involved in the operation of Berlin's distribution grid. The City Council decides who will be awarded a concession contract that allows operating the grid over the next 20 years. We are among the three remaining competitors. The new government in Berlin, which is in power since fall 2016, has made a clear political statement that supports cooperative ownership of the grid. However, this has only limited impact on the decision who gets to operate the grid, because this decision is based on an administrative procedure and national legislation. We expect from City Council to stand to its agreement and truly support a cooperative

solution for the citizens of Berlin.

**6. As we know in Berlin there are not many producers of green energy. Do you plan to empower the production of green energy in households and small-medium enterprises in the city, and how?**

We keep on working on the energy transition in Berlin! We have just started a new campaign to make Berlin coal-power free. An important part of the campaign is to keep up the distribution grid process. But we also plan to offer our members green electricity and realize solar projects with housing cooperatives. We want to set up collaborations with other local stakeholders and are thinking about supporting energy efficiency measures. The space for energy production from renewable energy sources is limited in Berlin, so the consumption side becomes really important. But we see our campaign as both political and entrepreneurial mission to bring the energy transition to Berlin and the citizens.

Berlin, 17-06-11