

02.3. - Piloting the operation of Green Energy Knowledge, Operation and Service Hubs (GEKOS) and their networks



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1. Summary

Output 2.3 focused on piloting the **GEKOS Hubs** (Green Energy Knowledge, Operation and Service Hubs). The partners tested various service models ranging from "**One-Stop-Shop**" (**OSS**) advisory centers and digital crash courses to physical networking events like **business breakfasts** and **study visits**. The pilot demonstrated that while the **service concept** (connecting SMEs to experts and funding) is highly valued, the **business model** remains challenging without public funding. Most partners rated the sustainability of the business model between 1 and 3, citing that SMEs are generally unwilling to pay for these services directly. However, integration with existing institutional frameworks (like RARS or Chambers of Commerce) proved to be a viable path for scalability.

2. Piloted Services

Name of the specific service and main concrete pilot activities.

PP1 (LEASP):

Service: "GEKOS Hubs - all in one" / "Business breakfast".

Activity: A "business breakfast" was organized in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, where companies received practical advice on energy-saving practices and financing options. The pilot made use of the SMEnergy platform to support communication and coordination throughout the mentoring process.

PP3 (FIB):

Service: "Tailored SME energy transition support building on established advisory ecosystem"

Activity: Individualized advisory and mentoring services, including structured interviews, energy use analysis, and the development of energy transition roadmaps. These were complemented by targeted expert guidance similar to GEKOS services but embedded in existing Austrian support structures.

PP5 (DEX IC):

Service: "GEKOS Advisory and Expert Support Hub for High-Energy SMEs".

Activity: Providing a single place for all essential knowledge that a high-energy-intensive SME needs when transitioning toward more sustainable energy solutions. In addition, offering consultations based on this information and connecting SMEs with relevant experts for further guidance.

PP4 (PC-Trend):

Service: "Company visits to showcase SMEs' transition to green energy".

Activity: Show SMEs and energy suppliers how energy-intensive SMEs have switched to green energy, providing them with methodology, approach, and inspiration.

PP6 (SBA):

Service: "GEKOS digital crash course within SBA for SMEs in energy transition."

Activity: One stop shop for all necessary and accessible knowledge aggregated under one specialized crash course.

PP7 (RARS):

Service (Pilot 1): "GEKOS digital mentoring and facilitation service within RARS for SMEs in energy transition."

Service (Pilot 2): "Study visit to company with good practices".

Activity: Mentoring and advisory sessions coordinated through RARS via the GEKOS digital platform, aligned with the EENergy program. Organization of a one-day study visit to a local company applying advanced RES & EE solutions.

PP8 (BSC SME Ruse):

Service: "One stop shop SME green transition awareness raising, information, consultancy and support for access to finance".

Activity: Providing information on existing funding opportunities for RES; Signposting SMEs to relevant energy experts and consultants; Organising trainings and seminars on RES topics; Posting publications, newsletters, promotional materials on RES topics.

PP11 (Energiaklub):

Service: "Testing the engagement capacity of a future OSS through tailored energy consultancy for SMEs with external experts".

Activity: Providing subsidized advisory services to selected SMEs, including energy loss audit, PV system sizing, renewable capacity, etc.

3. Reach and Operations

How many SMEs were served and what were the biggest operational challenges?

PP1 (LEASP):

Reach: 5 (Hub service), 4 (Hub operation).

Challenges: The main challenge remains the motivation and capacity of SMEs. Connecting SMEs, involve them.

PP3 (FIB):

Reach: 3 SMEs can be considered as potential service users.

Challenges: The biggest operational challenges were limited SME time availability, the high complexity of energy systems in practice, and uncertainty around funding and regulation. Additionally, the fact that similar advisory structures already exist in Austria made an additional GEKOS layer less clearly differentiated.

PP5 (DEX IC):

Reach: 4

Challenges: Motivating the SMEs to engage in the testing phase. It was necessary to identify companies that fit our target profile and then convince them to dedicate a considerable amount of time to the testing process.

PP4 (PC-Trend):

Reach: 25.

Challenges: Clearly recruitment - even though the event was free, companies were very reluctant to attend.

PP6 (SBA):

Reach: 16 (Service), 4 (Hub operation).

Challenges: Motivation of stakeholders to withstand attention and focus during the whole crash course duration, weakened engagement during the process of piloting, cherry picking of particular topics only, mostly online presence missing the initial point of a hybrid workshop.

PP7 (RARS):

Reach: 9 SMEs supported , 20 SMEs participated .

Challenges: Wide territorial coverage required stronger local mentoring presence. Limited local technical capacity and need for ongoing outreach and promotion to SMEs.

PP8 (BSC SME Ruse):

Reach: >150 (Service), >150/4 (Hub operation).

Challenges: The outsourcing of external expertise in the energy field.

PP11 (Energiaklub):

Reach: 6-8 SMEs directly involved in the pilot

Challenges: Reaching and engaging suitable SMEs required significant time and communication effort. Expert mobilisation and offer collection also caused delays.

4. Value Proposition & Support

How does GEKOS/the service support SMEs throughout their energy transition journey?

PP1 (LEASP):

A single event for a wider range of SMEs to connect, providing them the opportunity to learn from each other about what works in energy savings, and to offer support and guidance on the available financial mechanisms. With the advisory support/advice and connecting the SMEs with the available national fundings as well as EU funding opportunities.

PP3 (FIB):

The service supports SMEs by raising awareness, identifying key energy cost drivers, and outlining feasible energy efficiency and renewable energy measures. It helps SMEs structure their transition path from initial assessment to potential implementation and funding considerations.

PP5 (DEX IC):

It helps SMEs assess their current energy status, understand their main loss areas, and receive tailored guidance for practical improvement measures. Through consultations and expert connections, the service provides clarity on PV feasibility, potential investments and next steps.

PP4 (PC-Trend):

It gave them good examples, technologies, different ways of thinking, and supplier tips, all while having a good conversation.

PP6 (SBA):

It helps find experts, publishes case studies, shares technological solutions, examples of successful implementation of measures, allows you to evaluate the current energy efficiency of your company, and offers recommendations for improvement.

PP7 (RARS):

Provides one-stop advisory and continuous mentoring - from identifying energy opportunities at advisory level to prepare applications and monitoring funded measures. Demonstrates real-life implementation of measures; encourages replication through peer learning.

PP8 (BSC SME Ruse):

It assists SMEs in the whole process - from identifying potential opportunities for improvement in their energy consumption/costs to finding open application calls for funding. As a one stop shop GEKOS provides the full range of services to SMEs.

PP11 (Energiaklub):

It helps SMEs assess their current energy status, identify losses, and receive tailored guidance for potential investments and decarbonisation steps. GEKOS acts as an emerging framework for SME support by offering access to advisory services, a structured supplier database, practical good practice examples, and opportunities to connect with experts via webinars and site visits.

5. Business Model and Sustainability

Scalability (1-5), Sustainability of Business Model (1-5), and overall costs.

PP1 (LEASP):

Sustainability Score: 3 (Service), 2 (Model). ,

Costs: Internal costs were used, as our internal staff (experts) provided the given support.

PP3 (FIB):

Sustainability Score: 2 (Service).

Scalability Score: 3.

Comment: For Austria, the pilot confirmed that personalized advisory and roadmap-based support delivers the highest value for SMEs. GEKOS-style services are most effective when embedded into established national or regional support systems, avoiding duplication and increasing trust, efficiency, and uptake.

PP5 (DEX IC):

Sustainability Score: 3 (Service), 3 (Model).

Costs: Internal staff cost.

Comment: The model could be scalable if there were enough funds for expert teams.

PP4 (PC-Trend):

Sustainability Score: 2 (Service).

Comment: Services of this nature should only be organized through trusted partners, with the program planned a year in advance... Ad hoc initiatives do not work; only systematic ones do.

PP6 (SBA):

Sustainability Score: 5 (Service), 3 (Model).

Costs: Team of internal staff + in-house service (staff costs/admin costs) and external experts.

PP7 (RARS):

Sustainability Score: 4 (Service), 4 (Model). ,

Costs: Mainly staff time of RARS employees involved in SMEnergy piloting and expert inputs for mentoring and advisory work.

PP8 (BSC SME Ruse):

Sustainability Score: 4 (Service), 4 (Model). ,

Costs: Difficult to be calculated, mainly staff and external expertise.

PP11 (Energiaklub):

Sustainability Score: 2 (Service) - currently only viable with external or public funding. 1 (Model) - the model is not financially self-sustaining under current conditions. ,

Costs: A realistic estimate for future OSS operation suggests the following setup: a team of 5 expert advisors, 1 assistant and coordinator could manage the monthly distribution of 20-30 SME projects.

Comment: SMEs are generally unwilling to pay for consultancy services. For such a model to function, public funding or cross subsidization is needed in the long term.