

0.2.5 - Validated General SMEnergy Model and GEKOS Operation Guideline



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1. Summary

Output 2.5 consolidates the eight national operational guidelines prepared in Output 2.4 by the project partners into a single, validated transnational guideline. Its purpose is to explain, in a transferable way, how to operate a Green Energy Knowledge, Operation and Service Hub (GEKOS) in the Danube Region, and what the network among these hubs is good for and how it is used.

It packages the extensive evidence generated during the pilot phase (Outputs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) and the partner-level Action Plans (SO3) into a coherent operational model. Across different national contexts, the pilots converged on a strikingly consistent set of findings.

First, GEKOS works best as a flexible, cooperation-based service model embedded in an existing, trusted organisation - an innovation centre, energy agency, business-support organisation or national SME agency - rather than as a new standalone institution. Second, the most valued service is a hybrid one: digital self-assessment and a verified supplier database combined with personalised expert mentoring and, above all, guidance on financing. Third, no hub proved financially self-sustaining on a fee-for-service basis, because SMEs are generally unwilling to pay directly; sustainability depends on blended public, project-based and institutional funding. Fourth, the transnational network linking the hubs is the project's distinctive added value: it enables cross-border visibility of suppliers and experts, peer learning between hubs, a shared methodology and digital platform, and joint development of follow-up projects and funding.

Together, these findings confirm that the validated SMEnergy model is realistic, transferable and scalable, and that the GEKOS network provides a durable framework for supporting SME energy transition across the Danube Region beyond the project lifetime.

2. Introduction and Purpose

2.1. The Energy-Transition Challenge for SMEs in the Danube Region

Despite very different national starting points, SMEs across the participating countries face a common set of barriers: high and volatile energy prices, a fragmented and frequently changing support landscape, limited internal time and expertise, incomplete energy-consumption data, difficulty distinguishing trustworthy suppliers in an overcrowded market, and uncertainty about financing. A recurring behavioural pattern was also observed everywhere: SMEs respond primarily to clear financial benefits rather than to environmental arguments, and they tend to jump to large technology investments before basic data collection, monitoring and low-cost efficiency measures have been addressed.

These shared barriers explain why a common solution - adapted to national realities - is both possible and valuable, and why the SMEnergy model emphasises structured orientation, trusted intermediaries and a logical sequence of steps.

2.2. Methodological Basis and Contributing Partners

This guideline is grounded in the validated national submissions of eight partner organisations, each reporting the practical results of its pilot:

- Czech Republic - DEX Innovation Centre (PP5): a GEKOS advisory and expert-support hub embedded in an innovation centre, anchored in the “Net Zero Liberec” climate framework.
- Germany - Technology Centre for Energy, Landshut University of Applied Sciences (PP10): a knowledge-transfer and networking model, shaped by the legal requirement for certified energy consultants.
- Slovenia - Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP): a light regional coordination model embedded in an energy agency, complementing the existing national One-Stop-Shop.
- Bulgaria - Business Support Centre for SMEs, Ruse: an open-source one-stop-shop embedded in a business-support organisation and Enterprise Europe Network node, with the RES Cluster.



- Hungary - Energiaklub Climate Policy Institute and PC-Trend Ltd.: a cooperation-based model coordinated jointly by two organisations with external experts.
- Slovakia - Slovak Business Agency (SBA): a national, network-based ecosystem featuring the GEKOS Digital Crash Course.
- Austria - Forschung Burgenland GmbH (FB): an integrated service model embedded within existing regional advisory structures, combining digital tools with highly personalized expert guidance.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska) - Development Agency of Republic of Srpska (RARS): a human-centric, integrated public support function emphasizing face-to-face field mentoring to overcome digital engagement barriers.

3. The Validated SMEnergy Model: Methodological Background

The pilots validated a shared methodological logic that underpins the whole model and should be preserved in any future GEKOS deployment.

3.1. Energy Transition as a Process, Not a Single Decision

The single most consistent finding across all eight partner countries is that SME energy transition is a process rather than a one-off investment. Successful transition follows a correct order of actions: awareness, data collection, energy efficiency and operational optimisation, properly sized technology, financeable implementation and continuous monitoring. Helping SMEs follow this sequence - and resisting the temptation to start with the largest CAPEX item - is itself a core part of the service, and was repeatedly cited as significant added value even before any investment was made.

3.2. A Hybrid Model: Digital Tools Plus Personal Expertise

Every partner independently concluded that digital tools alone do not create SME engagement. The validated model is explicitly hybrid: digital self-assessment questionnaires and a verified supplier database provide orientation and an initial diagnostic, but they only deliver value when combined with trusted, personalised expert guidance and stakeholder interaction. This hybrid logic is the backbone of both core services and of the SME journey described below.

3.3. A Multi-Level Roadmap Logic

The pilots in several countries (notably Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia) converged on a multi-level roadmap structure that the transnational model adopts as standard:

- Level 1 - General orientation: the project's general "Energy Transition Roadmap for SMEs" and knowledge materials, which set out the logical sequence of steps.
- Level 2 - Self-assessment: the platform questionnaires, which raise awareness, highlight typical loss points and quick wins, and provide simple feedback.
- Level 3 - Company-specific in-depth roadmap: developed with qualified experts on the basis of consumption data, technological processes, site constraints and investment options.

This layered approach lets a hub serve many SMEs cheaply at the orientation level while reserving scarce expert time for companies ready to act.

4. How to Operate a GEKOS in the Danube Region

This chapter is the general operational guideline. It describes the validated choices for anchoring, governing, funding and running a GEKOS hub, illustrated by how the partners implemented each element.

4.1. Institutional Anchoring: Embed, Do Not Reinvent

The clearest transnational lesson is that GEKOS should be embedded in an existing, trusted organisation rather than established as a new legal entity. Embedding provides immediate credibility, access to established SME networks and outreach channels, low overheads, and continuity beyond the project. The appropriate host varies by country, and the model is deliberately flexible: it can be embedded in a single organisation or operated as a cooperation-based network of organisations.

Partner / Country	Anchor Institution	Validated Model Type
DEX IC - Czech Republic	Innovation centre	Embedded advisory & expert-support hub within an innovation centre; anchored in a city climate framework
LEASP - Slovenia	Regional energy agency	Light regional coordination model embedded in an energy agency; complements the existing national OSS
BSC SME - Bulgaria	Business-support organisation / EEN node	Open-source one-stop-shop embedded in a BSO, with a RES cluster and university training centre
SBA - Slovakia	National SME agency	Network-based ecosystem coordinated nationally; education-led (GEKOS Digital Crash Course)
Energiaklub + PC-Trend - Hungary	Two cooperating organisations	Cooperation-based model with no single institution; partners share coordination and expert roles
TZE - Germany (Bavaria)	University research & transfer centre	Knowledge-transfer and networking model; a full service

		hub is constrained by certified-consultant law
FB - Austria	Regional applied research and innovation organisation	Integrated service model embedded within existing advisory structures
RARS - Bosnia and Herzegovina	Public development agency	Human-centric, integrated public support function with intensive field mentoring

The German case is instructive: because German law reserves subsidised energy consulting to certified experts on official lists, a GEKOS service hub as originally envisaged cannot be operated directly. TZE therefore validated an adapted role focused on knowledge transfer, regional and transnational networking, and helping SMEs navigate funding and reach certified consultants. This confirms that the model must accommodate national regulatory realities - the function is what matters, not a fixed institutional form.

4.2. Governance and Team Structure

Across countries, the validated governance structure is a lean, three-layer model. It keeps a small internal coordination team while drawing specialised capacity from outside, which proved both flexible and cost-efficient.

Coordination layer

A small in-house team (a hub manager/coordinator and one or more advisors) responsible for SME outreach and intake, first-line advisory, qualification of needs, platform management, stakeholder coordination and monitoring. This is the single, trusted point of entry for SMEs.

Expert layer

A pool of external technical experts - energy auditors, PV and storage specialists, engineers, funding consultants - mobilised on a project basis for in-depth diagnostics and company-specific roadmaps. Hungary involved four external experts, Bulgaria drew on certified consultants via its RES cluster and university, and Slovakia relied on a SIEA-linked expert network.

Stakeholder layer

Partner organisations that extend reach and credibility: chambers of commerce, municipalities, regional development agencies, clusters, Enterprise Europe Network nodes, national energy agencies and financial institutions. Involvement is typically formalised through Letters of Intent, cooperation agreements or existing memberships.

4.3. Operational Funding and Sustainability

The SMEnergy pilot activities demonstrated that GEKOS should not be understood as a commercially self-sustaining service operating solely on a fee-for-service basis. Across partner countries, SMEs consistently valued expert advice, Energy Transition Roadmaps and financing guidance, but showed limited willingness or ability to pay directly for comprehensive advisory services. Consequently, long-term sustainability depends on embedding GEKOS functions within existing organisations and combining multiple funding sources.

The recommended operational model is therefore based on institutional anchoring rather than institutional creation. GEKOS functions can be integrated into regional energy agencies, development agencies, innovation centres, chambers of commerce, business support organisations or similar trusted institutions, where they complement existing advisory activities and benefit from established stakeholder networks and operational capacities.

Financial sustainability is expected to rely on a blended funding approach, combining institutional resources, public funding, regional or national programmes, European projects, targeted service contracts and strategic partnerships with public authorities and relevant stakeholders. This flexible approach enables partners to maintain core GEKOS services while adapting to changing policy priorities and funding opportunities.

Equally important is the continuation of the transnational GEKOS network, which allows partners to share methodologies, exchange good practices, maintain and promote common digital tools, and jointly develop future initiatives. Rather than operating as isolated hubs, participating organisations benefit from coordinated cooperation, peer learning and shared visibility, strengthening the long-term value of the SMEnergy model across the Danube Region.

The sustainability of GEKOS is therefore not measured by the creation of new permanent structures, but by the successful integration of its core functions (e.g., SME

outreach, digital self-assessment, Energy Transition Roadmaps, mentoring, financing orientation and referral mechanisms) into existing support ecosystems. The commitments expressed through partner Action Plans, stakeholder cooperation agreements and Letters of Intent further reinforce this long-term approach, ensuring that the knowledge, tools and partnerships established through SMEnergy continue to support SME energy transition beyond the project lifetime.

4.4. Core Service 1 - Energy Transition Roadmaps

Methodology

The validated roadmap methodology is a light-touch, modular and adaptive process - not a uniform audit package applied identically to every company. Its depth is adjusted to the SME's energy profile, sector, data availability and investment readiness. Consolidating the national workflows (which ranged from three to seven steps), the common procedure is: initial contact and collection of basic information; identification of the main energy-related challenges; involvement of relevant experts; a light review of energy consumption and technological processes; identification of efficiency and renewable-energy opportunities; definition of prioritised next steps with indicative savings, investment needs and funding options; and delivery of a simple, usable roadmap with follow-up. The output is a practical action plan, not a theoretical report.

Tools used

The SMEnergy platform is integrated throughout. Sector-specific self-assessment questionnaires (covering, for example, compressed air, heat-transfer, cooling, building systems, renewables and behavioural savings) provide an initial diagnostic and raise awareness; the platform's knowledge and insight pages supply supporting information; and the Green Energy Database connects the SME to verified suppliers and experts able to implement the measures. The tools support, but do not replace, expert judgement.

Prioritisation

Prioritisation is driven by financial return, feasibility and the SME's implementation capacity. The validated sequence is to begin with awareness and data collection, then low-cost operational and soft measures (typically around 5% savings), and only then larger, subsidy-dependent investments such as PV or process upgrades, which can

deliver substantially greater savings - in some cases, with available subsidies, energy-bill reductions of up to 70%. These figures are indicative and company-specific. Linking every recommended measure to a funding pathway keeps the roadmap bankable rather than aspirational.

4.5. Core Service 2 - Green Energy Database and Marketplace

Supply side: building a credible base

The database is populated by identifying and onboarding reputable suppliers and experts - technology providers, energy auditors, and financing/advisory actors - with basic administrative checks based on publicly available information. The decisive lesson, shared by every partner, is to balance openness with credibility: the platform must be easy to join, but quality must be safeguarded through verification and continuous moderation. Two structural challenges recurred everywhere: suppliers are reluctant to register on a platform that has not yet reached critical mass, and value depends on active, ongoing curation rather than one-off registration.

Demand side: guided matchmaking

On the demand side, the platform functions as an information and orientation tool rather than an automated brokerage. Matchmaking is embedded in the advisory process: once a roadmap identifies a concrete need, the advisor shortlists relevant suppliers and experts from the database, explains the differences and supports the first contact. SMEs consistently valued trusted, verified and easy-to-compare information more than the sheer number of listings, and the database was most effective when combined with personal advisory support, sector-specific examples and clear funding guidance.

4.6. The Operational Workflow - the Five-Phase SME Journey

The pilots validated a common five-phase SME journey, which provides the standard operational workflow for any GEKOS hub.

Phase 1 - Outreach & Onboarding

The most effective channels are trusted intermediaries and personal contact: direct outreach by the host organisation and its partners, chamber and EEN networks, regional events, and referrals from trusted experts. Messaging must be problem- and cost-driven (for example, "how to reduce your energy bill") rather than policy-led, and

sessions should be short and practical. SMEs are selected on energy intensity and savings potential, willingness to cooperate and share basic data, and realistic capacity to implement measures.

Phase 2 - Diagnostics

A light initial assessment - not a full audit - combines the self-assessment tools with a structured interview and basic consumption data to identify the company's energy status, main loss points and most promising opportunities, including PV feasibility where relevant. Because many SMEs lack detailed or standardised data, the process stays proportionate and often recommends better data collection as an early step.

Phase 3 - Roadmap Development

Diagnostic findings are translated, collaboratively with management, into a concrete action plan that sequences measures from quick wins to larger investments, with indicative savings, implementation steps and funding links. Agreeing the plan jointly ensures ownership and a realistic path to implementation.

Phase 4 - Funding Linkage

Funding linkage emerged as the single most valued service across all countries. The hub signposts relevant national and EU instruments (grants, loans, guarantees, cascade funding and programmes such as those administered by national agencies, the Modernisation Fund, ERDF, LIFE, the Innovation Fund and ELENA), explains grant-versus-loan options and eligibility, and where needed connects SMEs with funding consultants. The hub does not have to act as a full grant-writing service; its validated role is to increase SME readiness to access finance.

Phase 5 - Monitoring & Follow-up

Progress is tracked proportionately through internal logs, follow-up contact and platform analytics, against shared KPIs (SMEs supported, registered users, advisory sessions, cooperation agreements). Partners noted the difficulty of measuring long-term investment outcomes within the short pilot period, and recommended that future monitoring capture implemented measures, energy savings and investment mobilised, not only participation metrics.

5. The Transnational GEKOS Network

Beyond the operation of individual hubs, the defining feature of the SMEnergy solution is the network among the hubs. This chapter sets out why the hubs are networked, what the network is good for, and how it is used - the questions the Output 2.5 description places at the centre of the deliverable.

5.1. Why Network the Hubs

Individually, each national hub is constrained by the size of its market, the depth of its expert pool and the maturity of its local supplier base. The pilots showed that several of the hardest problems - reaching critical mass on the marketplace, accessing specialised expertise, and avoiding duplication of effort - are far easier to solve collectively. DEX IC explicitly identified cross-border connection of suppliers as the marketplace's strongest competitive advantage over purely national tools, and TZE's adapted model is built around participation in the Danube-region network. Networking the hubs turns eight local services into one transnational solution.

5.2. What the Network Is Good For - Core Functions

A shared, cross-border database and marketplace

A common supplier and expert database lets each hub offer its SMEs access to verified providers from across the Danube Region, not only its own country. This directly addresses the critical-mass problem that every partner reported: a transnational pool reaches viable scale far faster than any single national list, and cross-border visibility is itself a strong incentive for suppliers to register and maintain quality entries.

Peer learning and transfer of good practice between hubs

The hubs operate in different regulatory and market contexts and have each validated distinctive practices - the Czech climate-framework anchoring, the Slovak education-led crash course, the Bulgarian EEN-and-cluster integration, the Hungarian sector-specific self-assessment questionnaires, the Slovenian business-breakfast format, and the German knowledge-transfer approach. The network is the mechanism through which these practices are compared, transferred and adapted, so that a successful innovation in one country can be re-used in another without reinventing it.

A common methodology, platform and knowledge base

The network maintains the shared assets that make the model coherent and transferable: the common roadmap methodology, the multi-level roadmap logic, the SMEnergy digital platform and self-assessment questionnaires, and a joint repository of templates, case studies and knowledge materials. Standardising these while allowing national adaptation is what makes the GEKOS model replicable across the region.

Joint project development and funding

The network provides a ready-made consortium for follow-up projects and joint funding applications - a core next step identified in several Action Plans, and the principal sustainability route for the German partner. Acting together, the hubs can pursue transnational calls, share the cost of platform maintenance and moderation, and attract resources that no single hub could secure alone.

5.3. How the Network Is Used in Practice

In day-to-day operation, an advisor in any hub draws on the shared database to match an SME with suitable suppliers or experts, including from other countries; uses the common questionnaires and roadmap templates so that outputs are comparable across borders; and channels difficult or specialised questions to the wider expert pool. At the programme level, the hubs exchange results and lessons, jointly moderate and grow the marketplace, co-organise knowledge-sharing events and webinars, and coordinate on funding opportunities. The transnational consortium also acts as the validation and methodology-development body, feeding national experience back into the common model - which is precisely the process that produced this guideline.

5.4. Governance of the Network

The validated network governance mirrors the hub-level model at a higher level: each national hub remains autonomous and embedded in its own institution, while a light transnational coordination function maintains the shared methodology and platform, curates the common database, and organises peer exchange. Participation is based on cooperation rather than hierarchy, which keeps the network flexible and allows each country to adapt the model to its regulatory environment while preserving the common objectives and shared assets.

6. Cross-Country Validation and Comparative Analysis

6.1. Pilot Evidence at a Glance

Across the consortium, Output 2.1 alone engaged 52 SMEs in deep activities such as mentoring, audits and consultations, alongside extensive wider outreach. The table below summarises the validated pilot evidence by partner.

Partner / Country	SMEs (deep engagement)	Suppliers / experts	Distinctive validated feature
DEX IC - Czech Republic	4 advisory roadmaps	9 experts/suppliers	Roadmaps anchored in the "Net Zero Liberec" climate framework
LEASP - Slovenia	5 hub service / 4 operation	2 suppliers + 3 experts	Business breakfast with the Chamber; complements the national OSS
BSC SME - Bulgaria	30 consulted (4 full advisory); 153 contacted	18 suppliers engaged	EEN + RES cluster; university training centre (200+ PV installers/yr)
Energiaklub + PC-Trend - Hungary	7 advisory	4 external experts	Sector-specific self-assessment questionnaires; multi-level roadmap
SBA - Slovakia	16 (educational pilot)	SIEA network + auditors	GEKOS Digital Crash Course (4 modules, 8 lectures)
TZE - Germany (Bavaria)	6 (good-practice review)	Green Database entries	Knowledge transfer & Danube networking under a certified-consultant regime
FB - Austria	Direct engagement in tailored roadmaps and advisory support	Integrated into Green Energy Database	Integrated into existing advisory structures; emphasis on one-to-one advisory over purely digital tools

RARS - Bosnia and Herzegovina	9 advisory roadmaps (20 engaged in info-sessions)	3 suppliers, 2 consultants, 2 SME users	Human-centric trust model; intensive face-to-face field mentoring
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6.2. Common Success Factors

Despite different formats, the partners identified a consistent set of success factors:

- Anchoring in trusted, recognised intermediaries (innovation centres, energy and SME agencies, chambers, EEN, climate initiatives), which build credibility and reach.
- Practical, business-oriented communication focused on cost savings, ROI and funding rather than abstract environmental goals.
- Personalised expert mentoring combined with digital tools - the hybrid approach - and structured orientation that helps SMEs sequence their actions.
- Integrated funding guidance, repeatedly cited as the most valued service.
- A lean internal team complemented by an external expert pool, supported by reusable templates and materials.

6.3. Common Challenges and Barriers

The barriers were equally consistent across countries:

- Recruiting and motivating SMEs is time-intensive; companies have limited time and internal capacity.
- Energy-consumption data are often incomplete or non-standardised.
- Investment decisions depend heavily on the availability and predictability of subsidies.
- SMEs are unwilling to pay directly for advisory services, undermining purely commercial models.
- The marketplace requires critical mass, continuous moderation and verification to be credible; suppliers hesitate to join early.
- Where strong support structures already exist (Slovenia, Germany), the hub must demonstrate complementary added value rather than duplicate them.

6.4. National Adaptations

The shared model required country-specific adaptation. Germany adapted GEKOS into a knowledge-transfer and networking role because national law reserves subsidised consulting to certified experts. Slovenia positioned GEKOS as a light coordination layer complementing its existing One-Stop-Shop. Hungary and Slovakia validated explicitly cooperation- and network-based models rather than single institutions, with Slovakia adding an education-first crash course. The Czech Republic and Bulgaria embedded GEKOS in an innovation centre and a business-support/EEN organisation respectively. Austria adapted its approach by embedding GEKOS fully into existing advisory and support structures rather than creating a dedicated standalone hub, placing greater emphasis on personalised one-to-one advisory support instead of relying solely on digital tools. In the Republic of Srpska, RARS adapted to the regional market reality by substituting automated digital data entry with intensive, face-to-face field mentoring and localized support materials. This human-centric approach successfully accommodated the traditional manufacturing SMEs' hesitation toward unassisted software platforms. In every case the underlying functions were preserved while the institutional form was adapted - the core principle behind a flexible transnational model.

7. Transferable Practices and Strategic Recommendations

Synthesising the transnational recommendations submitted by all partners, the following practices should be incorporated into the final transnational SMEnergy model and guide any future GEKOS deployment in the Danube Region.

1. Embed, do not reinvent

Establish GEKOS within an existing, trusted organisation - innovation centre, energy or SME agency, business-support organisation, chamber or EEN node - rather than as a new standalone entity. This secures credibility, outreach and continuity, and avoids duplicating existing structures.

2. Keep the model flexible and adapt it to national realities

Design GEKOS as a flexible, multi-actor network that each country can adapt to its regulatory, financing and stakeholder environment, including cooperation-based models with no single institution where that is more realistic.

3. Combine digital tools with personal expertise and funding guidance

Adopt the hybrid pathway as standard: digital self-assessment and a verified database for orientation, expert mentoring for interpretation and prioritisation, and funding linkage as a central, integrated service.

4. Prioritise structured orientation and the correct sequence of steps

Emphasise awareness, data collection, monitoring and low-cost efficiency measures before large investments. A structured overview and proper prioritisation are themselves high-value services for SMEs.

5. Build the marketplace as a shared, moderated, cross-border asset

Prioritise a transnational supplier and expert base with clear quality assurance, multilingual support and continuous moderation. Cross-border connection is the marketplace's strongest advantage and the fastest route to critical mass.

6. Plan for blended, public-interest sustainability

Do not rely on direct SME payments. Combine integration into host-organisation activities, public and EU funding, partially subsidised expert support and institutional partnerships (LoIs/MoUs), and use the network to develop joint follow-up projects.

8. Sustainability and Outlook

Output 2.5 directly contributes to Result 4 – solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations. The pilot activities have demonstrated that the conditions for long-term uptake are already in place: partners have identified suitable host organisations, validated GEKOS implementation models adapted to their national and regional contexts, and committed to concrete continuation measures through partner-level Action Plans and stakeholder commitments, including Letters of Intent and cooperation agreements.

The sustainability of the SMEnergy model is based on institutional embedding rather than institutional creation. Instead of establishing new standalone entities, GEKOS functions are designed to be integrated into existing energy agencies, development organisations, innovation centres, chambers of commerce and business support structures, ensuring continuity through trusted regional ecosystems and established stakeholder networks.

Looking ahead, implementation will build on three complementary pathways. At the regional and national level, partners will continue integrating Energy Transition Roadmaps, Green Energy Database (i.e., the SMEnergy platform, self-assessment tool, etc.) and financing guidance into their regular advisory services and SME support activities. At the transnational level, the GEKOS network will provide an ongoing framework for coordination, knowledge exchange, peer learning and the harmonised use of SMEnergy methodologies and digital tools, while supporting future joint initiatives and collaboration opportunities. At the strategic level, the validated SMEnergy model offers a flexible and transferable framework that can be adapted by organisations and public authorities across the Danube Region according to their institutional capacities and policy environments.

The principal challenge identified during the pilot phase i.e., long-term financial sustainability can be addressed through a blended funding approach that combines institutional resources, public programmes, project funding and strategic partnerships rather than relying on fee-for-service income alone. Supported by the commitments set out in the partner Action Plans and the SMEnergy Transnational GEKOS Coordination & Sustainability Action Plan, the GEKOS model and its transnational network provide a

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realistic, scalable and durable foundation for supporting SME energy transition well beyond the lifetime of the SMeEnergy project.

9. Conclusion

The eight national pilots, conducted in markedly different contexts, validated a single coherent solution. A GEKOS hub is best operated as a flexible service embedded in a trusted host organisation, governed by a lean coordination team drawing on an external expert pool and a wider stakeholder layer, funded through a blended public-interest model, and delivering two core services - Energy Transition Roadmaps and a verified Green Energy Database - along a common five-phase SME journey in which funding linkage is decisive.

The network among the hubs is what elevates these national services into a transnational solution: it provides a shared cross-border marketplace, peer learning and transfer of good practice, a common methodology and platform, and a vehicle for joint projects and funding. Together, the validated general model and the GEKOS network constitute the jointly developed Solution of Output 2.5, ready to be taken up and up-scaled across the Danube Region.