

ENERGY POVERTY: From Household Problems to Climate Crisis

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP

25-26. November 2019, Budapest

REPORT

The two-day event was co-organized by the ENGAGER network, Habitat for Humanity Hungary - as part of the Elosztó/rEdistributor Project - and the Centre of Social Sciences (TK SZI). Day 1 was an international conference with over 80 participants and Day 2 a workshop with 45 attendees and 2 facilitators. 16 ENGAGER members joined us from 15 different countries. This was most probably the biggest event so far in Hungary on the topic of energy poverty. The Hungarian participants came from a vast variety of backgrounds and institutions, including government related agencies (e.g.: Hungarian Energy & Utilities Regulatory Agency) and journalists.

The original aim was to bring a small number of international energy poverty experts from the ENGAGER network and during a focused workshop, work on developing a definition and set of indicators that fit the Hungarian context. However as organization began, the event started to evolve into something bigger and broader, less focused on the specificities of quantifying energy poverty.

ORGANIZING TEAM

Nora Feldmar (Habitat/rEdistributor, ENGAGER)

Lea Kőszeghy (TK SZI)

Ákos Gosztonyi (Habitat/rEdistributor)

Sergio Tirado (UAB, ENGAGER)

Ana Stojilovska (CEU, ENGAGER)

Ágnes Fernengel (School of Public Life) – workshop
methodology, facilitation

Kata Páli (Habitat) – logistics

Tamás Kovács (rEdistributor) – communications

The reasons for this shift was that only a small number of practitioners and researchers work explicitly on EP in Hungary, while many experts and NGOs work on topics very much related to one or more of its aspects. We thought there can be a great value in exposing the Hungarian stakeholders to each other's work, as well as in becoming familiar with the conceptual frameworks of EP and the situation and advances in other countries.

DAY 1 - CONFERENCE

The title of the event and the keynote speech of Diana Ürge-Vorsatz (CEU, IPCC member), were intended to emphasise the interconnectedness of EP to climate change, and to amplify the message that sustainable technologies have to be made accessible to the most vulnerable.

The first session of the conference continued with Michael LaBelle (CEU) framing EP through the lens of energy justice with a focus on the CEE region. This was followed by the presentation of Sergio Tirado (UAB, Spain) on the evolution of EP from its recognition through to a national EP strategy in Spain.

With the international presenters (and participant selection), we aimed to keep a focus on Central Eastern Europe and dedicated the second session to the region. Anca Sinea (UBB, Romania) gave an overview of EP in the region by introducing the book she is editing with colleagues from ENGAGER as well as summarising the EP situation in Romania. The second presentation by Jakub Sokolowski (IBS) focused on the Polish definition and measurement work at the Institute for Structural Research. This was followed by Ana Stojilovska's (CEU) presentation on the Macedonian case of solid fuel heating, including rich insight from qualitative surveys. The last of the session was the presentation by György Sümeghy and Zita Kakalejckova from Habitat for Humanity International, introducing their work on the RELIH project, which works with municipalities in four Balkan countries to renovate multi-apartment blocks.

ECO-LOGISTICS

We aimed to be consistent with the “green” message in the way we organized the event, even though this meant a certain amount of extra work (and money) at a venue that is not much used to such considerations.

All catering was vegetarian, supplied by a local cooperative who only uses seasonal, small producers', organic produce – all arrived CO₂-free by a cargo bike alongside the non-disposable tableware.

CHOICE OF LANGUAGE FOR INCLUSION

It was a conscious choice to have Hungarian as the primary language of the 2-day event. We wanted to keep it as openly assessable as possible, also to people that are not used to being in international, English-speaking environments.

This in turn posed a challenge for keeping the international participants engaged, especially during the workshop. The feedback we got suggests that we succeeded in this – by carefully choosing experienced interpreters and designing the exercises – and that the non-Hungarian speakers appreciated our choice.

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to Hungary. Lea Kőszeghy presented the current state of conceptualization and measurement of EP in Hungary. The second presentation by Zsuzsanna F. Nagy introduced the topic of air pollution and household lignite use, and the specific case of a highly affected region in the north of the country that is also one of the poorest. She showed the results of the lignite quality lab tests done on fuel that is available on the market for households (conducted within the Elosztó/rEdistributor project). The last two presentations in the session – first by Fanni Sáfián from the Hungarian Energy Efficiency Institute (MEHI) and the second by Balázs Nagy from the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME) – focused on

the highly neglected building stock and their energy use (including appliances'). The most common mistakes in renovation were also highlighted as well as home-owners attitude towards energy-efficiency investments.

The last session focused on the local, municipal level and on field work. Szilárd Lantos from the Maltese Charity Service – which is the largest organization working with marginalized communities, now with significant government support – presented their philosophy and some of their programmes related to EP. Aranka Rostás and Károly Búza are managing a project – “Light Bringers” – that supplies simple PV solar systems to households disconnected from the electricity grid. They gave a first-hand account (personal as well as from the communities they work/live in) on the poverty cycle and trap experienced by hundreds of thousands of Roma people in Hungary. István Ferenczi, a representative from District 9 of Budapest and one of the initiators of their Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP), talked about the opportunities and barriers of implementing energy efficiency and EP measures. To conclude Zoltán Kmetty presented the Horizon 2020 STEP-IN project his company (Ariosz) is managing as the Hungarian partner focusing on the field research they are conducting in a rural area.

Each of the sessions was followed by a 15-20 minute lively discussion where the audience could address the panellists.

FACILITATION AND METHODOLOGY

To ensure a truly interactive and participatory workshop professional facilitation is key.

We invited two trainers from the School of Public Life, an NGO that focuses on non-formal education for civic engagement and activism of oppressed groups.

The methodology of the exercises was carefully designed to match the goal of each session in collaboration with the trainers and the organising team.

DAY 2 - WORKSHOP

The second day was an interactive all-day workshop where we limited the number of participants to 45. The first morning session - after a short introduction and a ‘human bingo’ was a feedback round on the previous day; participants choose two memorable takeaways from the conference (on post-its that went up on a drawn-out programme) and optionally could share it with the others. It was remarkable to hear the variety of reactions; practically each presentation was mentioned by a participant.

The second session was a problem tree building exercise in three large groups (an English one, a Hungarian one with interpretation and a Hungarian one without). Each group had a facilitator whose role was to guide the process and structure each item into a complex web of causes and impacts of EP within the Hungarian context.

In the first afternoon session we focused on five case studies; three national policies/programs related to EP and two localities (District 9 Budapest and Ág, a small poor village in the south). Each of the groups had a facilitator (additional facilitators came from the organizing team) and an expert presenting the case (in 5 minutes). The participants could ask clarifying questions

(10 minutes) and then the participants (without intervention from the expert) could give suggestions on how the given case could be improved (10 minutes). Each case was repeated so participants could discuss two cases each (each in Hungarian or English).

The last session was kicked off by a short presentation by Sergio Tirado on the use of EP indicators. This was followed by an exercise where small groups of participants (2-4) could choose an A4 paper with one of three indicators (LHC, 2M, M/2) and with different colour marker pens made remarks about which 1) aspects they found appropriate, 2) less suitable and 3) what they were missing. These were collected for the organizing team to be summarized later.

The workshop was concluded with a round of reflections from each participant. We heard an array of inspired remarks signifying that our goals have been met.

OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

The event had an overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants from both days. It was clear that the variety of speakers and participants – in terms of both geography and professional/institutional affiliations – came across as a great value and provided considerable insight both to experts that have been working with EP for years and to participants that might have never explicitly worked on the topic.

The outcomes of the two days will be synthesized into a 2-page manifesto of the state of EP in Hungary with suggestions for future work on the topic. This will be circulated among workshop participants for comments before publishing it.

A number of possible future collaborations are likely to emerge from the encounters at the event. An example is an exchange and interview that already took place two days after the event between Sergio Tirado and the “Light Bringers” project (with other Roma activists from the country) on the drawbacks and advantages of pre-paid meters.

Two media articles were published about the conference; one by one of the oldest left-wing daily newspapers [Népszava](#) (online platform) and a large analytical piece by [444.hu](#) (one of the most-read online news platforms in Hungary) featuring a number of embedded infographics by the rEistributor project. The latter was shared over 1100 times on Facebook from 444.hu.

We plan to organize a follow up event in 2020 February, which will go back to the original concept of the co-creation of Hungarian EP definition and indicators with local stakeholders and ENGAGER experts. Now with the input from these two rich days.

LINKS

- [Programme](#) of the 2-days event
- Photos by Mariann Kovács on [Flickr](#)
- Conference sound recording and presentations on Elosztó/rEistributor [website](#)
- Post and photo album on Elosztó/rEistributor [Fb page](#)