

REPORT

ENER'ONLINE



29th -30th of October 2020



List of participants

First name	LAST NAME	ENTITY - COUNTRY	29-nov-20	30-nov-20
Rogelio	BONILLA	Auvergne Rhône Alpes Energie Environnement - FR		X
Aline	BRACHET	APPIACAPACITY - FR / RURENER	X	X
Daniel	CONROTTE	Province of Luxembourg - BE	X	X
Philippe	CORTES	Granges solaires - FR / RURENER	X	X
Théo	DURAND	RURENER - FR	X	X
Philippe	GARNIER	Muniipality of Meys, CC Monts du Lyonnais - FR	X	
Kyriakos	GEORGIU	PESAP, Univ of Nicosia - CYP		X
Christos	GKOSLIOPOULOS	Nestorio municipality - GR	X	
Véronique	GUIRAUD	Macéo - FR	X	
Stephane	HARTMAN	Province of Luxembourg - BE	X	X
Evangelos	KARAGIANNIS	Prespes municipality - GR		X
Vassiliki	KAZANA	International Hellenic University - GR / RURENER	X	X
Alberto	LOPEZ	Diputacion de Avila - SP		X
Florian	LOUGNON	Syndicat Est Creuse - FR / RURENER	X	X
José	MARTINS	CIM do AVE - PT	X	X
Nathalie	MONFORT	Parc naturel de Gaume - BE	X	
Rui	PACHECO	AE do AVE - PT		X
Panagiotis	PASCHALIDIS	Prespes municipality - GR / RURENER	X	X
Michalis	PETRAKOS	Prespes municipality - GR / RURENER	X	X
Frédéric	PRAILLET	APERe - BE	X	
Konstantinos	RAPTOPOULOS	Nestorio municipality - GR	X	X
Bénédicte	ROLAND	Province of Luxembourg - BE		X
Charline	ROY	France Active - FR	X	
Céline	SEINCE	RURENER - FR	X	X
Eleftheria	TANTSOUKI	Prespes municipality - GR / RURENER	X	
Tiago	VALE	AE do AVE - PT		X



*Thursday 29th of October 2020 – 10h-11h30**

Moderation by Céline Seince, RURENER European Coordinator

10h – Opening of the session by Mr Panagiotis Paschalidis, RURENER President

10h15 – Virtual Round Table of participants

10h30 – Presentation of the municipality of Nestorio (new member) – by Christos Gkosliopoulos,
Mayor of Nestorio

10h40 – Presentation of the Activity Report

- Results of RURENER's monitoring indicators – by Théo Durand, RURENER project manager
- Overview of RURENER projects – by Vassiliki Kazana, RURENER Secretary
- RURENER in events & the Lands of Study initiative – by Philippe Cortès, RURENER vice-president

11h10 – Financial Report – by Aline Brachet, RURENER Treasurer

11h20 – Voting of resolutions

11h30 – Perspectives and closing of the event – by Panagiotis Paschalidis, RURENER President

*Friday 30th of October 2020 – 10h-11h30**

Moderation by Céline Seince, Aline Brachet, Théo Durand

10h – Opening of the session – by Panagiotis Paschalidis, RURENER President

10h10 – Goals of the session and timing – by Céline Seince, RURENER European Coordinator

10h15 – Workshops in smaller groups

- How can the energy transition be a source of attractiveness for rural territories?
- What opportunities does the energy transition bring for rural territories?

11h10 – Restitutions of the workshops

11h25 – Closing of the session – by Panagiotis Paschalidis, RURENER President

* Times are given Central European Time (CET)

** PPT presentations are available on the www.rurener.eu website or upon request



While 2020 has been quite an unusual year, this year's General Assembly focuses on 2019 which was a successful year for RURENER, with many exciting projects, activities and new members.

Introduction

Mr **Panagiotis Paschalidis**, President of RURENER, **opens the meeting** by thanking all the participants for taking part, even though he would have preferred to welcome everyone in Prespes. He highlights the **new challenges** that appeared this year, in particular with the COVID-19 crisis that showed that rural territories are very **resilient**, but also threatened by the lack of some fundamental services and the reliance, at least in Prespes, on external incomes from tourism which has been badly impacted. But the pandemic will end, and some of the changes that started will live on. Among them, new opportunities for rural territories arise such as less energy consumptions with the development of teleworking, **new opportunities** to find a way out of coal. The climate ambition has been reinforced at EU level and **rural territories have a crucial role to play**: they have space to develop renewable energies such as wind and solar. However, a caution must be made so as not to compete with farming in these areas and think about landscape integration. Other areas are undergoing changes, such as transport or carbon sinks. RURENER is in the best place to capitalize on all these projects at EU level. The new activities and ideas that emerge from the network are key to shape the energy transition in rural areas. **The Rural Energy Roadmap** developed by RURENER and all the members will become a tool for territories and guide the development of RURENER in the future. Mr President concludes that there is work ahead, and that we are going to do it together.

After this inspiring speech, we continue with a **virtual round table** of the participants for a better mutual knowledge, despite the virtual aspect of the meeting. Mr Christos Gkosliopoulos, the mayor of Nestorio - which is the latest member of the network - takes this opportunity for a short speech, thanking the network and its members for having them be part of the adventure.

RURENER indicators

After this introduction and short networking moment, Théo Durand (project manager) introduces the main elements from the 2019 Activity Report (summarized in a short [video](#) shared with the participants). He starts with the results of **RURENER's quantitative and qualitative indicators**, allowing us to measure the network's impact from one year to another. The main learnings are that **RURENER keeps growing steadily** from year to year and gets a **good approval rate** on the submitted projects. The **carbon footprint** of the network is highly connected to the General Assembly, generating a lot of emissions due to transport. On the qualitative side, the main elements that are important to the members continue to be the **spirit of the network** and the **feeling of being part of the EU**. Even though the **participation of more members would always be better!**

Overview of RURENER projects

We move on to an overview of the main **EU projects** that were **led, built or imagined by RURENER and its members in 2019**, leading to submission between 2019 and 2020, presented by Vassiliki Kazana (Secretary). Among these projects, the **"2017 Year of Innovation for Rural Energy"** project that ended in 2019 and allowed RURENER to strengthen its network and skills; the **COLEOPTER** project submitted and started in 2019 for a first large EU project led by RURENER (8 partners among 3 countries). Other projects were submitted for the **H2020 programme** (ENERGAGE), **Europe for Citizens** programme (SPIRE that became LINK-EU), national funding (Lands of Study). The details on the projects can be found in the [2019 Activity report](#) and on the [ppt presentation](#) of the General Assembly.



Events & Lands of Study

The next point to highlight on the Activity Report is the **participation of RURENER in many European and cooperation events** in 2019. Philippe Cortès (vice-President), who has taken part in some of these events, reports to us. He focuses on the events linked to the COLEOPTER project that placed **RURENER as a legitimate player in the field of EU projects**. Other important events were conducted, RURENER organized **field study tours** to promote the exchange of experiences and rural territories committed for the energy transition. The organization of field study tours is part of the **Lands of Study initiative** that aims at structuring field tours in pilot territories across Europe and to reference them in a catalogue to facilitate the exchange of experiences, relying on the local contexts and the type of projects developed. These study tours are also meant for local people willing to learn about the actions of their municipality for the energy transition. **More tours** are to be organized in **Les Monts du Lyonnais** (France) and **Pyhäjärviselä** (Finland) to enrich the offer. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 made traveling difficult, forcing us to postpone the structuring and inauguration of new tours to 2021.

Financial assessment

Aline Brachet (Treasurer) goes on with the description of the financial assessment for 2019, starting with the evolution of the network's finances since its autonomy in 2017. **Assets are rising** from one year to another. **Revenue decreased in 2019** even though **membership fees increased**. This is explained by the payment of the participation fee to the latest RURENER project mainly in 2018.

The **operating profit** is also **increasing**, which allowed RURENER to take on the COLEOPTER project as project leader starting in 2019. In addition, the **evolution of contracts** of RURENER employees shows a consolidation of the economic model. Initially there was one fixed-term contract that evolved in a **permanent contract** in 2019. An additional permanent contract was created at the end of 2019 for the conduct of the COLEOPTER project. Another point to highlight is the **time spent by volunteers**, in particular the members of the Executive Committee, to contribute to RURENER's activity. Starting in 2020, this time **will be translated into money** and included into the balance to **better reflect the activity of RURENER**.

Finally, the **COVID-19** crisis led to a delay in the conduct of activities and projects which may impact us in the years to come. Discussions to **delay the loans** will start in the coming months. On the bright side, the crisis will lower considerably our environmental impact as most activities were conducted online.

Vote of resolutions

There were 3 **resolutions** on the table, knowingly the **approval of the Activity Report**, the **approval of the financial report** (results 2019 and estimated 2020 budget) and the **moving of RURENER's headquarters** to the coworking place Coworkit in Clermont-Ferrand as the previous coworking place close-up. The resolutions were **approved unanimously**, approvals were collected through Framavox.

Closing and perspectives

The closing of the session was then in order. The municipality of Nestorio (Greece) gave a short presentation (ppt available) of their territory to introduce it to the other members. Following-up on this presentation, Mr Panagiotis Paschalidis thanked everybody for their participation and the quality of the meeting. Welcoming again the new members of the network and the work of Celine and Théo, he invites everyone to join the 2nd day of the meeting.

As for the perspectives, a short [teaser](#) presenting the interviews conducted by the team to share with all members is shown, following-up on the members suggestions during the online workshop in July.



The second webinar of the 2020 General Assembly was dedicated to the work in small groups on two subjects:

- How can the energy transition be a source of attractiveness for rural territories?
- What opportunities does circular economy bring to rural territories?

Two groups were made relying on the participants' interests. The main outcomes of each groups are presented below and illustrated in the following pages.

The energy transition and attractiveness

The energy transition is not just for environmentalists, addressing the transition from the stand point of attractiveness can be a way to gather around climate action. Presenting the transition as a way to boost local economies by relocating services and productions, but also as a way of attracting new investors and new inhabitants for the opportunities and the quality of life it offers, can be a good base for a **new narrative on the transition**. This would make it more appealing to many people, help them appropriate the challenges and, in the end, it would contribute to mainstream actions. **Energy is not a goal but a mean towards a goal.**

Promoting what your territory does for the energy transition is also a way to be more visible from the outside, to build-up the confidence of local people about what their territory can achieve. There are already examples of this effect, in territories who decided to make the shift a decade ago (Vorarlberg, Austria...) and that are now benefiting from a large popularity and presented as pioneers. The Lands of Study initiative developed by RURENER aims at offering field study tours in rural territories to promote their actions and facilitate the exchange of experiences. The goal is also to reach and motivate the local population, not always aware of what is done in their territory. The making of a catalogue of Lands of Study is one of the latest RURENER project, it will allow rural territories to get a glance at what is being done elsewhere and participate in field tours on a subject they want to develop.

Promoting the actions of all territories and not only the pioneers is crucial to motivate people, build a common spirit for the energy transition that is already existing in some territories (Province of Luxembourg, Belgium) but not so much in others (Est Creuse, France). Rural decision-makers decided to start for the energy transition for different reasons and at different times, leading to some territories with more innovative projects, others with a sharp strategy... Getting too much information at once can be overwhelming for a territory just getting started. To facilitate the sharing of experiences and what will come from it, visits in territories that are still learning is very important.

With the Recovery Plan and the EU Green Deal, **now is the moment to act**. The context offers a new opportunity for rural territories to act for the energy transition, with more funding than ever on climate action (rural areas have space and renewable resources). However, the funding and economic models of these actions also has to be better adapted, with less subsidies and more loans to encourage viable projects and think in terms of long-term investments (building refurbishment -> Building Renovation Passports, renewables). In addition, the costs of investment should be shared between consumers and producers and not only impacted on the price of energy for the consumers. Finally, the EU programmes must be made accessible to rural territories with a lower density and smaller projects.



Circular economy opportunities in rural territories

Circular economy is an area of interest for many rural territories. Universities are also interested in the subject. Vassiliki K. from the International Hellenic University presents a cooperation project in which she is involved, aiming at identifying levers and barriers but also opportunities of circular economy in rural and mountainous areas. The main barrier identified so far is the lack of knowledge from territories of the opportunities that offers circular economy and how to seize them. This is confirmed by the testimonies of many territories present at the workshop who lacks tools, information or resources to develop circular economy projects. The projects presented by the participants are mainly related to the production of local energy, the use of local wood, the recycling of waste (to produce energy or in other forms) and in agriculture for the promotion of local food products.

Technically, circular economy is something we used to do decades ago when traveling and imports where not so easy nor so cheap. Circular economy, in a way, is going **back to the future in smart way**, adapted to the current context and mobilizing innovations. A difficulty met by the territories is the need to work both on offer and demand in circular economy which is not how our societies have come to work since the 1990s. Circular economy could allow to create new value chains in rural territories, contributing to the transition from non-renewable resources.

From a social point of view, circular economy is a mind-set and people still have to get into that mind-set in order to create the demand. Promoting local opportunities and better inform the population could be an important lever to **motivate** people. Indeed, many still people do not question the way they consume (even though this is less and less true). Local economy is an opportunity to create new jobs in rural territories and added-value to local products. However, it requires to change habits, which can sometimes be perceived as a loss of comfort by the people.

Decision-makers, at the local to European levels are getting more and more interested in circular economy, grasping its economic and social interest, in addition to its environmental advantages. There are approaches to learn from all around Europe. But local decision-makers are not there yet, lacking knowledge on the opportunities at hand, or with a small investment capacity leading to more “business as usual”. Any project should be looked at from a circular economy point of view, meaning that their social, economic and environmental impacts on the territory should be measured. With this information, the choice between a circular economy project and a “classical” project is easy to make, even when it may require a larger investment in the beginning in some cases.

Finally, circular economy is necessary to achieve the transition, renewable energy projects are not enough. The COVID-19 crisis showed us how fragile our territories can be, and the need for us to be more resilient. Circular economy is a way towards more resilience, by betting on what’s local and renewable, what has a positive impact now and in the future for the territory. **Resilience** is at the heart of the fight against climate change, and it requires all sectors, all people to contribute and work together. It can also bring more sense to our societies, reinforce cooperation and social interactions.



