

Belgrade solar energy research and development

Sites for building solar power plants should be selected in line with sustainable development principles, according to experts working on the project Smart-from-the start planning for sustainable development
– Mapping solar potentials

The Nature Conservancy, a global environmental non-profit organization, held a presentation of the methodology in Belgrade for state institutions, power utilities, investors and other stakeholders. The methodology was developed by local experts building on the know-how and experience of The Nature Conservancy, which conducts projects and research in more than 70 countries and territories around the world.

The methodology set out at the roundtable is still being determined and will be further improved by incorporating available data. The project's ultimate goal is to create a publicly available map and tools that should help speed up the development of solar power plants with maximum economic and technical performance and minimal conflict with environmental and social criteria.

"Even though solar power plants produce "green" electricity, and we are inclined to support them unconditionally because of their key role in decarbonization and climate action, that support should by no means be unconditional, but rather in keeping with sustainable development principles," said Branislava Jovi?i?, Editor-in-Chief of Balkan Green Energy News and stakeholder relations expert on the project.

As the methodology was being developed, the project team established communication with the institutions expected to support further work on the project and help improve the methodology and the map of sustainable sites.

The Nature Conservancy has signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation with the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia, and the Land Institute, with plans to sign a similar document with the Ministry of Mining and Energy and to include Serbian power utility, transmission and distribution companies in the project.

The representatives of stakeholder who took part in the roundtable showed keen interest in the methodology and its results to date, and they voiced their willingness to take an active role in furthering the project and mapping Serbia's solar potentials.

Recalling that the project is part of The Nature Conservancy's regional initiative to support a sustainable renewables development, Igor Vejnovi?, Director of Strategic Initiatives of the South East Europe Program at The Nature Conservancy, said:

"The mapping project and preliminary maps are a good way to inform decision-making and speed up permitting on predefined "green" or "go-to" areas for the development and construction of solar power plants, but also to identify the possible course of the further development of solar energy in Serbia. Go-to areas are included in the measures applied by the European Union (EU) to tackle the energy crisis, and Serbia might consider introducing the concept even before such a standard becomes part of the EU accession process or an obligation under the Energy Community Treaty.

The underlying objective of the project is to accelerate the solar power development in Serbia, but in a sustainable way, support the country's energy transition process and energy security, but also to help address the current energy crisis.

The chief experts on the project – Dr. Ilija Batas, a research associate at the Institute of Technical Sciences of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) and Dejan Doljak, a research associate at SANU's Geographical Institute Jovan Cviji? - presented the findings of the project to date:

"To be designated as sustainable, a site must meet certain criteria. During the solar plants spatial planning, it is needed to evaluate the location as a resource, its limitations and values. The proposed site should not be located on agricultural land so as not to endanger food production," said Doljak, adding that "the site must be aligned with biodiversity values as well as the visual identity of the area."

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