

**Just Transition attitudes and perceptions
in the coal-impacted
Community of Lazarevac, Serbia**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**A WAKE-UP CALL
FOR US ALL**

June 2021

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A WAKE UP CALL FOR US ALL

Just Transition attitudes and perceptions in the coal-impacted Community of Lazarevac, Serbia

Abstract:

This study constitutes a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative report on the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac, Serbia, that aims to capture a bottom-up perspective, or “a view from below”, of the problems, needs and desires of Lazarevac’s residents regarding key issues of energy and just transition. The study investigates the residents’ awareness and attitudes towards the just transition issue and offers recommendations on how to improve the communication and information flow amongst various stakeholders at the local, national and international level, based on the data collected. The study aspires to become an essential source of information, providing guidelines for the design of a balanced and effective communication and advocacy strategy, to support the vital process of mitigating the risks of energy and just transition.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study constitutes a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative report on the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac, Serbia, that aims to capture a bottom-up perspective of the concerns, needs and desires of Lazarevac's residents regarding key issues of energy and just transition.

Bearing in mind that a successfully substantiated communications campaign relies on an accurate understanding of the target groups it is attempting to reach, this study investigates residents' awareness and attitudes towards the issue of just transition. It also offers recommendations, based on the data collected, on how to improve communication and information flow amongst various stakeholders at the local, national and international level in order to enable an informed grassroots debate on long-term just transition, between the members of the affected community itself.

The study posed the following research questions:

- How informed are the residents of Lazarevac about energy transition, and just transition in particular?
- To what extent are they included in decision-making processes?
- Who do they recognise as the leading stakeholders in planning the local development?
- Who are the current and potential agents of change in this particular coal-impacted community?
- How does the community of Lazarevac see its future without coal?

Focusing on its primary goal to listen closely to what the residents of Lazarevac have to say, the research was conducted using qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews (23 interviews, 27 interviewees), semi-structured and structured interviews and informal conversations, and participant and non-participant observation, during the period from August 2020 to February 2021. These are supported by the quantitative data obtained

through an online survey completed by 21 civil society organisations (CSOs) in Serbia, and a standardised questionnaire filled in by 118 residents of Lazarevac.

The study aspires to become an essential source of information, providing guidelines for the design of a balanced and effective communication and advocacy strategy, to support the vital process of mitigating the risks of energy and just transition, and promote a societal transformation towards sustainability.

Why study Lazarevac?

Lazarevac is home to Serbia's largest coal mining complex, RB Kolubara (*Rudarski Basen Kolubara*), the largest division of the state-owned power utility company, Electric Power Industry of Serbia (*Elektroprivreda Srbije - EPS*). RB Kolubara produces approximately 30 million tons of lignite annually. Most of the lignite is transported from the mines, via a 30 km long railroad, to the TE Nikola Tesla plant in Obrenovac (TENT). Combined, power plants within the Kolubara and Obrenovac thermal and mining complexes produce more than 50% of Serbia's electricity.

The Kolubara Mining Basin (RB Kolubara) provides around 75% of the lignite used for EPS' thermal generation. The headquarters of RB Kolubara is located in Lazarevac. According to EPS' official data, as of May 2019, RB Kolubara had 11,880 employees. Coal-lignite is, from an economic standpoint, the most important natural resource of the Lazarevac municipality. There are about 150 companies and about 400 sole proprietorships operating in the mining industry and related activities. The mining and quarrying industry dominates the labour market in Lazarevac – almost 40% of the workforce is employed in these industries, significantly higher than in the rest of Serbia and the Belgrade region. Lazarevac is among the most economically developed municipalities in Serbia, primarily due to its mining industry.

Lignite mining in the RB Kolubara has caused significant air, soil, and water pollution in the region, severely affecting human health. The coal power plants Nikola Tesla A and Nikola Tesla B in Obrenovac are recognised as the third

and the sixth-largest SO₂ pollutants in Europe, with 109,000 and 57,100 emitted tonnes, respectively. Nikola Tesla A is also the fourth pollutant in Europe by particulate matter (PM₁₀) emissions, whereas TE Kolubara in Veliki Crljeni, Lazarevac, occupies the third place with 3,255 emitted tonnes.

Environment: Dust and Rust

When it comes to how informed the residents are about environmental issues, some residents of Lazarevac are aware of the various impacts of environmental pollution on their local community. However, they complain about the lack of hard, statistical data concerning environmental pollution and protection, which would help raise public awareness. They have also not noticed any increase in residents' awareness about environmental problems in recent years. The majority of the responders believes that this important data is "covered in dust", as the state and the local authorities and institutions have not done enough to raise public awareness about their municipality's environmental problems.

Regarding how engaged they feel in the local community's life and decision-making processes, many believe that people's involvement has become "rusty", i.e. people feel demotivated, discouraged, or simply disinterested in getting involved more actively in the affairs of the local community. Activists and members of civil society organisations feel excluded (even purposely) from the local decision-making process, which frustrates the remaining dedicated residents and forces them to consider abandoning the effort.

Just Transition: Fear and Anger

When it comes to Lazarevac residents' awareness of energy and just transition, the majority of respondents does know what energy transition is, whereas, in their opinion, the level of their fellow residents' knowledge is low. Those who know what energy and just transition are, belong to a demographic of more urban, more educated, young and middle-aged people that have a good understanding of this topic and can be reached

through modern channels of communication, such as Internet portals and social media.

Another subset of Lazarevac's residents, involved in some of the local environmental movements and organisations, appears to be more informed about energy transition and less about just transition. None of them seem to be actively and continuously engaged in raising awareness about these issues. The majority of respondents from Lazarevac do understand the energy and just transition concepts, after they are explained to them. They mostly have a negative perception and choose to not respond when asked about their attitudes, perceptions and hopes for the future. Their reticence is caused by their concern about the reactions of their local self-government, employers, and State institutions.

Considering the question of who are the current and potential agents of change in this coal-impacted community and who could plan the local development, the research respondents express a high level of distrust towards all stakeholders involved in the energy transition process: their local self-government, trade unions, employers, and the State. Even though the State and the local government are recognised as the main actors responsible for the provision of information and the implementation of the energy and just transition, they are also perceived as being corrupt and unwilling to address these issues. Furthermore, many active members of the Lazarevac society also distrust their fellow residents, being convinced that they are not willing to get actively involved in the local community affairs, either because they are not informed in a timely and adequate manner, or because they have become indifferent and submissive because they feel left behind during the past decades. This is what makes Lazarevac angry.

Lazarevac Tomorrow: What home? Whose home?

In general, questions on energy transition seem to be a "taboo" topic in the local community of Lazarevac. Residents either think that they are powerless to raise collective awareness and to promptly initiate coal phase-out planning, or believe that closing down the Kolubara power

plant is out of the question and should not happen under any circumstances.

Lack of motivation and interest pervades all generations of respondents from Lazarevac. Older generations, which have been working in the mining industry, have provided for their families, secured jobs for their children, and are not motivated to participate in the process that could endanger their future (financial) prospects. Middle-aged generations have secure jobs, can provide basic necessities and secure a decent livelihood for their families, and often show loyalty towards their employers or the local government officials. Younger generations are satisfied with what constitutes a decent average salary for Serbia and allows for a worry-free lifestyle. Younger people, that are aware of the necessity of energy transition and see its benefits, feel misunderstood and undervalued by their local community, which has pushed many to emigrate to Belgrade or abroad.

Most research respondents have expressed scepticism when asked about potential alternatives for Lazarevac after the closure of the power plant. They predominantly believe that Lazarevac will become a "ghost town" if the mine closes, and many of them have already bought or are planning to buy apartments in Belgrade and continue their lives there.

These findings represent a wake-up call for all the stakeholders involved in the energy and just transition processes.

What needs be done?

Ensuring that the transition towards sustainability and a cleaner future is just, requires a multi-layered solution. Informed and participatory decision making requires a wide reaching communication strategy that should involve various stakeholders at the local, regional, national and EU level.

The residents of the municipality of Lazarevac should be the first to be involved in the

process. The goal of citizen-focused activities should be to raise awareness about energy and just transition and offer information on the processes, their benefits, and what residents can expect. In view of the high level of distrust towards all stakeholders at different levels, these activities should be performed by trustworthy agents of change. Ideally, taking into consideration the findings obtained in the field, the agents of change would be local or national-level independent experts or CSOs specializing in energy and just transition.

The young activist groups in Lazarevac could also be considered as potential local agents of change. However, they require improved capabilities in order to be able to provide accurate and timely information and organize awareness-raising activities in support of the local community at the local level.

The State-level institutions should provide to the general public more comprehensive information about energy and just transition, whereas the national-level CSOs and other stakeholders should increase the pressure on local and national authorities to assume a more active role in the energy and just transition processes. If the authorities were involved in the process and openly spoke about just transition in Lazarevac, the fear felt by some locals would be reduced, encouraging a more proactive approach.

The national (and, through them, the local) authorities need to feel actual pressure from international and EU institutions in order to commit to the issue in a substantial and strategic manner. EU and international institutions need to implement stricter control over the funding they provide to Serbia's energy sector and impose more severe sanctions in case of failure to utilize the funds for the intended purposes. On the other hand, they must encourage public institutions and bodies to assume a more active role in the processes, including them in international networks, programmes, projects and activities, making the funds for energy and just transition issues more readily available.

Image 1: Lazarevac, pedestrian area in the city centre, a view towards the city library



Image 2: Lazarevac, a view from the city library towards the main pedestrian area in the city centre



Image 3: Technical school "Kolubara", Lazarevac; a vocational high school offering specialized curricula in: 1) geology, mining and metallurgy, 2) mechanical engineering and metal processing, 3) electrical engineering, and 4) economics, law and administration



Image 4: Cultural Centre building (up, left), a monument to the Serbian peasant (up, right), a detail of the *Kamengrad* (Stoneville) park complex (down, left) and the Church of St. Demetrius (down, right)

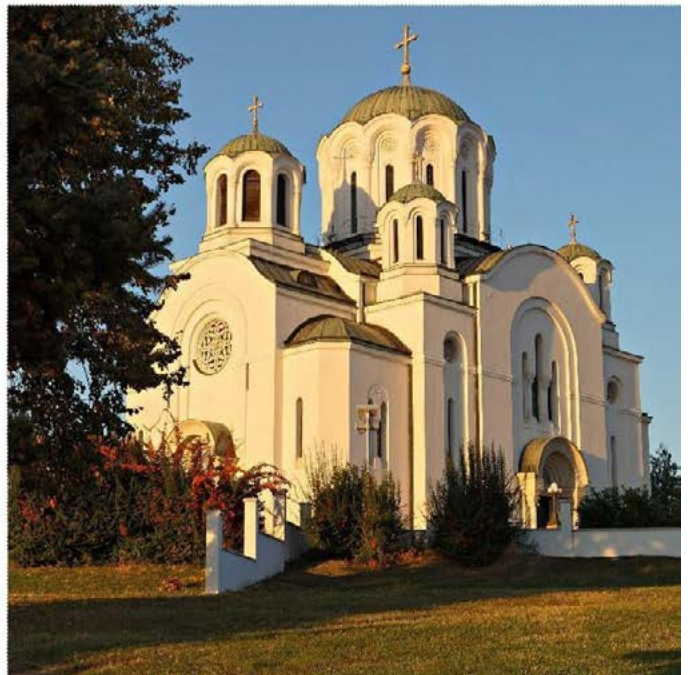


Image 5: Mining basin "Polje D" in Vreoci (up, left), TE Kolubara, Veliki Crljeni (up, right), "Kolubara Processes" building in Vreoci (down, left), and mining basin "Tamnava-Zapadno Polje" near Radljevo, Municipality of Ub (down, right)



Image 6: The chimneys of TE Kolubara as seen from the Ibar Highway



Image 7: Garbage dumps at the edges of the Kolubara mining basin, as spotted from viewpoints in the villages of Baroševac and Junkovac

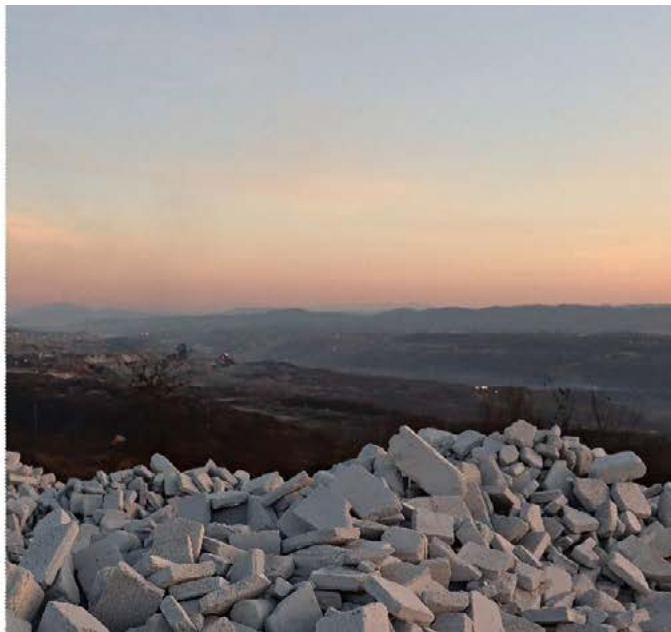


Image 8: Greenbelt between the local road (left) and mining basin (right), the village of Baroševac



Image 9: Garbage in the greenbelt, village of Baroševac



Image 10: Vreoci today



Image 11: Vreoci's "oasis in the desert."

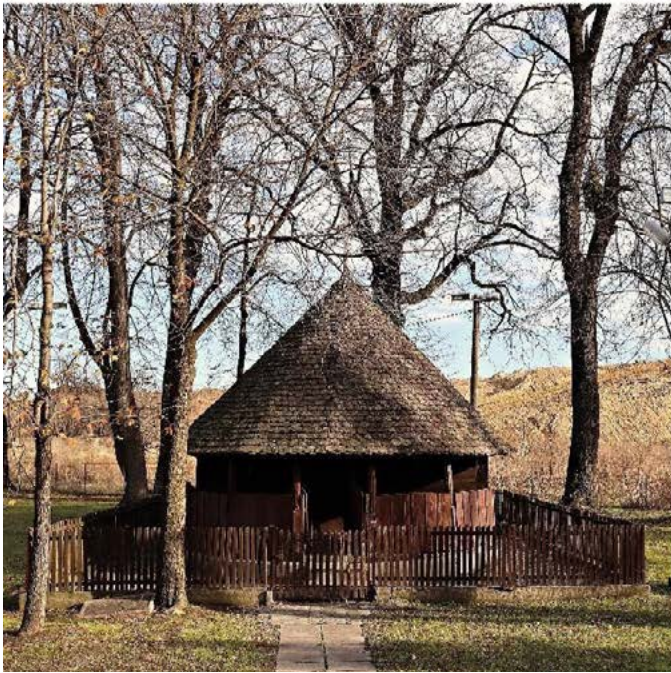


Image 12: A waste container, smoke and a stray dog in front of the *Xella Srbija doo* company building



Image 13: Smoke, dust and rust in the municipality of Lazarevac

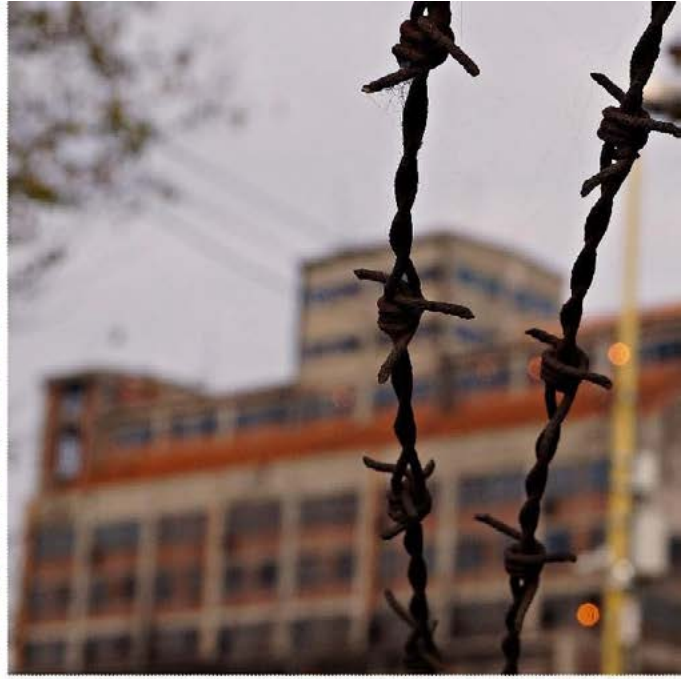


Image 14: Graffiti in *Kamengrad*, Lazarevac's main park, reading: "Here on business"



Image 15: A view of the expanding Tamnava open mining basin



Image 16: An old and rusty street sign nearby RB Kolubara, Lazarevac

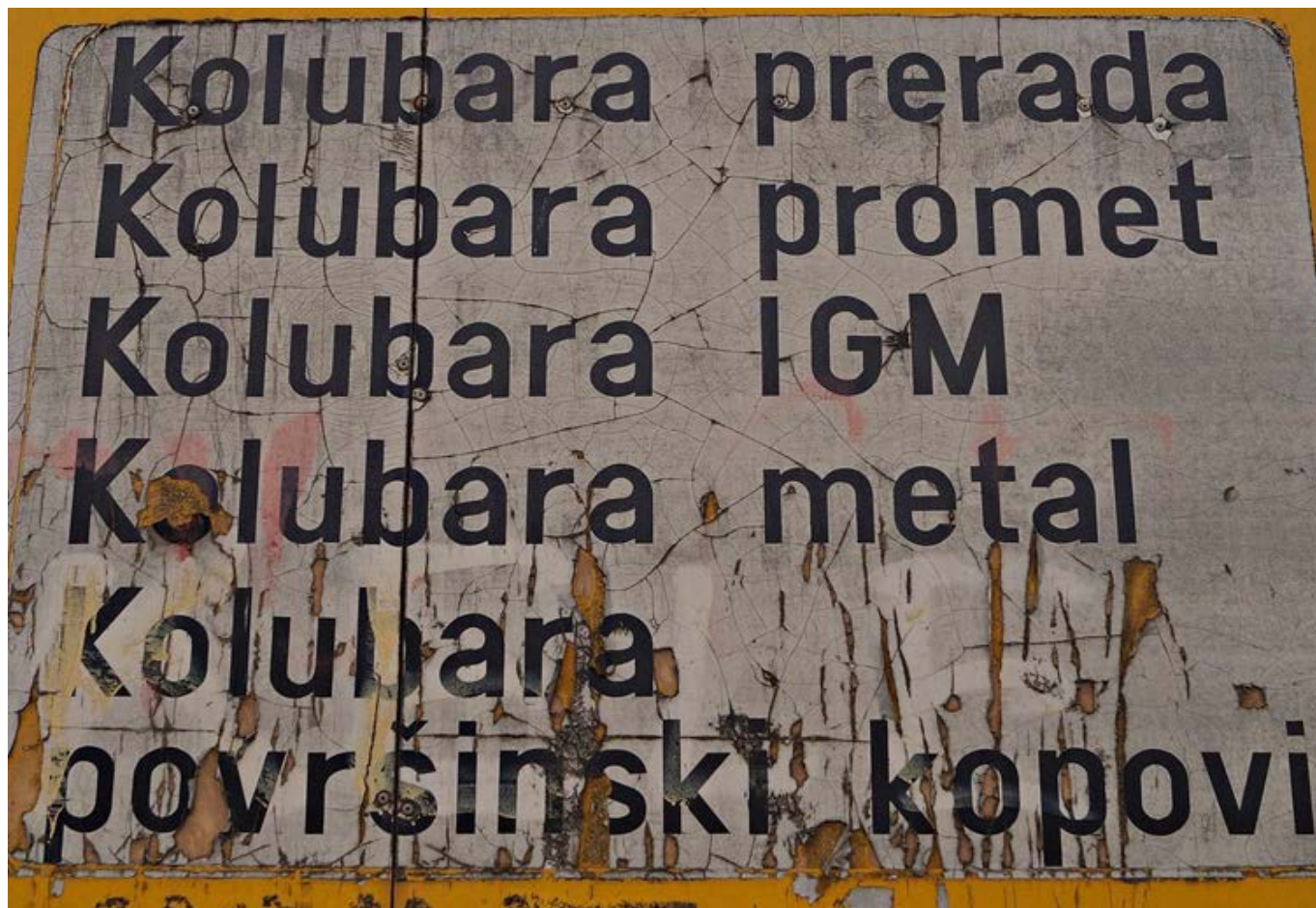


Image 17: The chimneys of the TE Kolubara in Veliki Crljeni



Image 18: The red traffic light in front of "Kolubara Processing", Vreoci



Image 19: Working on "Tamnava" coal mine expansion near Radljevo



Image 20: Working on coal mines in Vreoci



Image 21: The industrial railway connecting the Kolubara mining basins with the TENT in Obrenovac



CONCLUSIONS

WAKE UP!



7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Key findings

According to the research respondents' answers there is a substantial amount of apathy, passivity and inertia within the local community in Lazarevac with regards to environmental degradation and protection in general.

Economic topics are frequently spoken about, primarily when pointing out the benefits of living in an economically developed municipality where most residents work for or in cooperation with TE Kolubara, and have (on average) high and secure salaries. Today's population is well-aware of the benefits of living in Lazarevac. When asked to choose what are, in their opinion, the most significant advantages of living in the Lazarevac municipality, three out of five top answers involved economic prosperity – the municipality's economic standard, high earnings, and employment opportunities.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents acknowledged environmental issues, such as air, soil and water pollution, as the most significant disadvantage of living in Lazarevac.

How informed are the residents of Lazarevac about environmental issues?

Some residents of Lazarevac are aware of the impacts that environmental pollution has on the local community, including the negative impact on the natural ecosystem, quantity and quality of agricultural land, the quality of social life of the people that live in close proximity to the coal mines and TE Kolubara, as well as the impact on their and their family members' health. However, the respondents also mention the lack of hard, statistical data concerning environmental pollution and protection, which would help raise public awareness.

The respondents have not noticed any increase in residents' awareness about the environmental problems in recent years. According to their answers, the residents of Lazarevac believe that both the central and the local authorities and institutions have not done enough to raise

public awareness about their municipality's environmental problems.

All sides pollute Lazarevac: the stakeholders involved in coal-mining activities, and the residents of Lazarevac. When it comes to the latter, they contribute to this problem either by polluting the environment themselves or by remaining silent when it comes to naming and shaming those responsible for the status quo. According to this study's findings, the residents of Lazarevac believe that the majority of residents:

- are not informed in a timely and adequate manner regarding environmental protection and related issues;
- mainly care about conformism and materialism, not about the natural environment;
- are complacent and passive;
- are not aware of environmental issues due to their own fault, because they tend to follow the example of stakeholders that bear greater responsibility, such as the local self-government, various local businesses connected to the activities of RB Kolubara, their employer (RB Kolubara and EPS), or the State.

How much does Lazarevac know about energy and just transition?

Amongst the research respondents there is some level of understanding of the meaning of energy transition, whereas the percentage of those who understand the concept of just transition is much lower.

The minority of the respondents who understand the concepts of energy and just transition belongs to the following groups:

- urban, more educated, young and middle-aged people; who
- possess a good knowledge about this topic; and
- can be reached through some modern channels of communication, such as Internet portals and social media.

The residents that are engaged in some of the local environmental movements and organisations seem to be informed about energy transition, but a bit less about just transition. None of them seem to be actively engaged in raising awareness about these issues, focusing instead on more pressing and tangible local environmental problems. However, even these issues seem to be addressed in a manner that is not efficient, noticeable or impactful, mainly because these individuals and organisations lack resources, know-how and support from the relevant stakeholders.

The majority of the research respondents do understand energy and just transition concepts after these are explained to them. They mostly perceive them negatively and choose to remain silent when asked about their attitudes, perceptions and hopes for the future. When confronted about the silence, the researcher understands that it's caused by the fear to speak freely. The research respondents, and their fellow residents, are afraid of:

- losing their jobs and privileges in the RB Kolubara and related business entities;
- the reactions of both State and local authorities;
- the actions of their employer (RB Kolubara and EPS);
- being left behind by the international stakeholders, primarily the European Union.

How included the residents of Lazarevac are in the local decision-making process?

The research respondents from Lazarevac think that the local government is not sincerely dedicated and involved in solving the community's environmental problems. The residents of Lazarevac who believe that they should pay more attention and give more importance to the environmental problems in their municipality, also believe that they lack support from the local self-government to achieve these goals.

Moreover, the activists and members of the civil society organisations feel excluded (even purposely) from the local decision-

making process. Residents' activism regarding environmental questions is highly discouraged, by the local government and/or the management of TE Kolubara. This often has a domino effect on the remaining active citizens, discouraging them from continuing their efforts. Some activists complained about being suspended or fired from their jobs at RB Kolubara, while some were demoted to lower rank and lower paying positions, and others were followed and interrogated by the police.

Furthermore, this study has discovered that there is not enough collective consciousness to get the residents' voice heard in the local community's affairs because:

- most residents do not actively participate in solving their local community's problems, including the ones concerning environmental pollution;
- those residents who are reluctant to take more initiative believe that they should not act because they do not have enough support from their fellow citizens or because they believe they cannot achieve anything this way (on their own); while
- active citizens think that even when they do act, their activism could remain unnoticed by the wider local community.

All these points reveal a certain level of disengagement and disinterest within the community of Lazarevac regarding the severe consequences of local environmental pollution.

Who are recognised as the leading stakeholders in planning local development?

According to research respondents the residents of Lazarevac believe that:

- the Government of Serbia (Ministry of Mining and Energy and Ministry of Environmental Protection),
- EPS; and
- Lazarevac's local authorities and institutions,

should be the main stakeholders responsible to provide information about energy and just transition, and should assume the leading role in

implementing these policies and mechanisms. A notable percentage of the research respondents expects to receive information from local environmental organisations and associations, and educational institutions' activities.

Regarding the role of the European Union in this process, the coal-impacted community of Lazarevac believes that:

- The EU should be more involved in the just transition process in Serbia and Lazarevac in particular;
- The European Union is a legitimate partner whose guidance and know-how they are ready to accept;
- The European Union should not be the leader of the just transition implementation in their local community, but should remain involved to advise and control the process.

The residents of Lazarevac recognised biomass, solar and wind energy as the renewable energy sources with the most significant potential in their municipality. When it comes to different sectors of the economy, other than mining and related sectors, the residents of Lazarevac thought that their municipality's greatest potential lies in agriculture, fruit farming, and livestock farming.

When asked to name what do they consider to be the most significant challenges or problems for the implementation of just transition in Lazarevac, more than half of the respondents chose these issues as the most salient ones:

- non-compliance with existing regulation;
- corruption;
- lack of knowledge; and
- lack of political will.

Who are the prospective agents of change?

The research respondents feel that they do not have ownership over the just transition process in their local community. Moreover, the ownership does not belong to the local self-government either, remaining instead the privilege of the leading decision-makers in the country, within the central government.

The fear of being left behind is rooted in the fundamental distrust towards practically all of the stakeholders involved in the just transition process, including the local political authorities, the employer (RB Kolubara and EPS), the EPS union, the government of Serbia, the European Union, CSOs at the State and local level, as well as the majority of their fellow citizens in Lazarevac.

The distrust originates from the impression of omnipresent corruption characterizing all the stakeholders mentioned above. This explains why the issue of coal phase-out seems to be a taboo topic for this coal-impacted community in Serbia. Therefore, the stakeholders who are seen as the main agents of the just transition process in Lazarevac are, at the same time, considered to be disinterested and unwilling to work for the public good at the expense of their political or personal interests. This makes the residents of Lazarevac angry.

This study also concludes that environmental organisations in Serbia:

- consider residents in Serbia to be insufficiently informed about environmental issues and energy transition, and to some extent, more aware of the importance of the just transition process;
- share the opinion of the residents of Lazarevac that the most significant challenges to the just transition process in Serbia are high-level corruption, lack of political will, non-compliance with existing laws and regulations, lack of know-how and lack of capacities; and
- rely on the support of their fellow organisations in Serbia, as well as on local self-governments, to gain a better understanding and promote the just transition mechanism.

How does the community of Lazarevac see its future without coal?

In addition to the abovementioned problems, Lazarevac feels that there is not enough social cohesion and unity, a collective identity of this coal-impacted community of people, motivation

among the youth, or public consciousness about the issues of critical importance for the future well-being of this particular local society.

Passivity and disinterest pervades all generations in Lazarevac. Older generations have provided for their families, have secured jobs for their children, and are not motivated to participate in the process that could endanger their future (financial) prospects. Middle-aged generations have secure jobs, a simple life for their families, and often loyalty towards their employers or the State and the local government officials. Younger generations are satisfied with the good salaries, and the lifestyle these salaries provide. Younger people who are aware of the necessity of energy transition and see the benefits of it feel misunderstood and underappreciated by their local community and often decide to emigrate to Belgrade or abroad.

The residents of Lazarevac predominantly believe that their city will become a ghost town without coal exploitation, unless all the stakeholders involved in the just transition process decide to “wake up” by drastically addressing existing problems and working for the improvement of the conditions of this coal-impacted region and its inhabitants.

7.2. Recommendations

This study investigates the level of awareness and the attitudes of the residents of Lazarevac towards energy and just transition and offers recommendations on how to better communicate and inform all stakeholders about these issues. The overall objective is to contribute to the region’s long-term just-transition by providing a bottom-up perspective, in order to establish concrete action points.

The study shows that communication concerning just transition in the municipality of Lazarevac requires a multi-layered solution, that includes various stakeholders at the local, regional, national and EU level. The success of this process requires several steps:

1. providing all necessary information to stakeholders, at all levels;
2. enabling information exchange among stakeholders;

3. motivating stakeholders to act; leading to
4. enabling them to engage and assume an active role in the energy and just transition processes.

The residents of Lazarevac

Residents of Lazarevac municipality should be the core beneficiary/target group of the abovementioned activities, and the first ones to be included in the process. The goal of citizen-focused activities should be to raise awareness about energy and just transition and offer information on the processes, their benefits, and on what residents should expect.

Therefore, the following recommendations are put forward:

Separate communication goals and key messages have to be established and provided for different target groups:

- youth (18-29 years of age) have to be better informed about the current status quo and its impact on their lives. Communication needs to get their attention first, then convey simple yet impactful messages;
- middle-aged group (46-60) needs to be provided with more actionable information;
- the older population (older than 60 years of age) needs to be motivated to act, at least in raising public awareness;
- women have to be informed about social and economic benefits, focusing on the better employment opportunities they might have.

Public awareness-raising campaigns on just transition should be conducted at the local level. Information about just transition should be made available to residents of Lazarevac in Serbian language through the media they use the most (Internet portals, social media, and media with national coverage – TV, radio, press). Already existing information should be made more accessible.

The following activities are proposed:

- translation of selected existing information to the Serbian language;

- distribution of this information to relevant information hubs, primarily CSOs dealing with just transition, local and national media;
- creation of national energy and just transition communication network and hub, an online platform (consisting of a website, social media presence, and network communication channels) which would include all relevant stakeholders and become a nexus of information about just transition;
- awareness-raising activities about just and energy transition: videos/interviews with advocates of change, distributed through social media, national and local TV coverage, press releases and articles posted on online media/websites, press releases in local and national media outlets, distribution of information on positive case studies (articles, videos), outdoor advertising and posters on key points of interest of the local community, radio shows, talks and podcasts;
- round tables, discussions and panels should be held at the local level, involving national, regional and local stakeholders.

The civil society sector in Serbia

In view of the fact that there is a high level of distrust towards all stakeholders at the local level, these activities need to be carried out by trustworthy agents of change. Based on the data collected in the field, agents of change would ideally be local or national-level independent expert(s) or CSO(s) specializing in energy and just transition, whereby:

- communication has to be transparent, and information has to be fact-based;
- communication has to address the residents' concerns such as socio-economic consequences, long-term impact on nature, the mine reclamation process, etc.;
- messages should present captivating reasons for personal motivation;
- accent has to be put on the benefits of just transition for the local community, but also on what could be lost if the transition does not take place;

- messages should provide information about action – what individuals can actually do.

Planned activities should increase knowledge about energy and just transition among residents, the benefits of undertaking the transition, and the residents' possible roles in the processes. The tone of the messages should encourage participation and involvement, in order for the process to be inclusive and give residents ownership of the decision-making process. The messages need to convey a feeling of security and care so that residents are confident that they are not left behind.

The potential agents of change at the local level

A further subcategory of the local population needs to be identified and enabled to assist in the information process, most likely those who are active in CSOs and have engaged in local environmental protection activities. If properly engaged, this group of residents can act as a local agent of change, support the local community by providing accurate and timely information, and help organise awareness raising activities at the local level. However, in order to become agents of change, the capabilities of these residents need to be enhanced, from several aspects:

- human resource capabilities need to be improved – technical assistance (TA) needs to be provided to local CSOs. This TA needs to focus on core activities of CSOs (increasing their knowledge about energy and just transition, environmental protection) and on increasing the capability of CSOs to perform their activities better (project proposal preparation and management, networking, funding, and similar);
- financial capabilities of local activists need to be improved. Support needs to be provided to better communicate their case to local, regional, national, bilateral and international donors;
- networking – local activists need to be better connected and included in national and international energy and just transition and environmental protection networks.

- support to local activists needs to be provided by identified national-level agents of change, but also international networks of organisations, active in the sector (such as CAN Europe).

The state and local authorities

To prevent local residents, active or not, from feeling left behind or fear when talking about energy and just transition or the impact that coal mining has on their lives, they have to be provided with national-level support. This can be achieved by providing information about energy and just transition in Lazarevac to the general public and national-level CSOs and other stakeholders, motivating them to take part in the process of just transition in Lazarevac, and in Serbia as a whole.

These actions aim to put enough pressure on local and national authorities to assume a more active role in energy and just transition processes. If the authorities are involved in the process and speak openly about just transition in Lazarevac, the local population's fear would be reduced, contributing to their more proactive approach.

The role of the international actors

However, public pressure alone (if possible at all) is not enough to induce changes to the way things are run locally. It will take much more than that – national (and, through them, local authorities) need to feel actual pressure from international and EU institutions to address the issue with more consideration. EU and international institutions need to implement a stricter control over the funding they provide to Serbia's energy sector and more severe sanctions in case of failure to utilize the funds for the intended purposes. On the other hand, they need to support public institutions and bodies in assuming a more active role in the processes, including them in international networks, programmes, projects and activities, making the funds for energy and just transition issues more readily accessible.

International CSOs need to advocate for such actions from the EU and international institutions as the dust and rust from Lazarevac pollutes the entire continent, regardless of Serbia's EU membership status.