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Title: PROactive Strategies and Policies for Energy Citizenship Transformation

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Deliverable 2.6

Publication EnergyPROSPECTS perspective

Description: This deliverable presents a synthesis of the conceptual framework in the form of a working paper to be submitted (after minor refinements) to a high-ranked scientific journal

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Coordinator: Bonno Pel (ULB)

Authors: Bonno Pel (ULB), René Kemp (UM), Ariane Debourdeau (TUB), Benjamin Schmid (GAL), Marianna Markantoni (UM), Edina Vadovics (GDI), Marko Hajdinjak (ARCFund), Adina Dumitru (UDC), Frances Fahy (GAL), Martina Schäfer (TUB), Karin Thalberg (JDI), Luisa Losada Puente (UDC).

Reviewers: Frances Fahy (GAL), Michael Lydon (GAL), Rebecca Corless (GAL)

EnergyPROSPECTS partners:

University of Galway (GAL),
University Road, H91 TK33, Galway, Ireland

Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB),
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt 50-1050, Bruxelles,
Belgium

GreenDependent Institute (GDI),

2100 Gödöllő, Éva u. 4., Hungary

Universiteit Maastricht (UM),

Minderbroedersberg 4-6, 6200 MD, Maastricht, Netherlands

Applied Research and Communications Fund (ARC Fund), Alexander Zhendov Street 5, 1113, Sofia,
Bulgaria

Notre Europe – Institut Jacques Delors (JDI),

18, rue de Londres 75009, Paris, France

University of Latvia (UL),

Raiņa bulvāris 19, LV-1586, Riga, Latvia

Technische Universität Berlin (TUB),

Straße des 17. Juni 135, 10623, Berlin, Germany

Universidade da Coruña
(UDC), Rúa da Maestranza
9, 15001 A Coruña, Spain

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Summary

EnergyPROSPECTS deliverable – D2.6 "Publication of EnergyPROSPECTS Perspective" is the last deliverable of WP2. It consists of an extended abstract of a paper that is about to be submitted to an academic journal[1], after earlier versions were presented at conferences[2]. Next to this extended abstract, a brief introduction is included that recapitulates the underlying considerations, the preceding work and the positioning in energy citizenship scholarship.

[1] Journal submitted to will be, as also foreseen in the description of work, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/environmental-innovation-and-societal-transitions

[2] ESR2 Workshop - What social and economic models for the Anthropocene? 3-4 OCTOBER 2023, LIRIS, Université Rennes II, Rennes (FRA); ECPR Joint Sessions workshop 'Good citizenship' March 25th-27th 2024, Lüneburg (GER) + ONLINE, accepted for presentation at EU-SPRI conference, June 4-7 2024, Enschede (NL)

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Introduction

This work package has developed an innovative conceptual framework for the understanding of energy citizenship. After developing an initial conceptual framework (D2.1) and a conceptual typology (D2.2), the conceptualisation of energy citizenship has proceeded through four local language 'regional translation' workshops in Spain, Germany, Hungary and francophone Belgium (D2.3). An international expert workshop has served to question key assumptions and to gather new perspectives (D 2.4).

The major synthesis has been provided in deliverable D2.5. Based on external feedback, conceptual advances and the empirical insights developed in WP3, WP4 and WP5, this deliverable provided empirically informed and conceptually refined insights into 'active' energy citizenship, the associated broader range of citizenship, and the relevant empowerment processes and supportive conditions that shape it.

The extended abstract summarises how deliverable D2.6 communicates these findings in the form of an academic paper. Also based on review of the emerging energy citizenship literature, the key considerations behind the paper are that energy citizenship needs to be conceptualized through an approach that is **1) systemic** (considering energy citizens in the context of broader institutional changes and indeed of evolving citizen*ship*), **2) critical** (articulating the more and less empowering contexts in which it emerges), and **3) attentive to transition dynamics** (identifying the kinds innovations, actors and transformation processes through which energy citizenship practices may contribute to system transitions or system reproduction).

The paper is situated in recent discussions on the potentials of social innovations to contribute to sustainable (energy) system transitions. The Multi-Level Perspective on Transitions (MLP) has been used as an integrative framework. The paper comprises 5 key transition dynamics that have been developed through conceptual and empirical insights in work packages 3-6: 1) Niche-regime dynamics; 2) ecosystems and intermediation; 3) frontrunners, laggards and intermediation, 4) 'landscape' developments and context factors and 5) scaling and backlash.

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Extended abstract

Energy Citizenship: Social-institutional Dynamics of Next-Phase Energy Transition

Pel, B., Kemp, R., Debourdeau, A., Schmid, B., Markantoni, M., Vadovics, E., Hajdinjak, M., Dumitru, A., Fahy, F., Schäfer, M., Thalberg, K., Losada Puente, L.

As the energy transition goes into its next phase (Markard 2018) it becomes more evident how it involves not only technological innovations but also various social innovations: Innovations in social relations, organisational forms, business models, institutions and governance arrangements. An increasingly used concept that gives expression to this is energy citizenship (ENCI). In its basic definition, ENCI indicates a shift from energy consumerism towards more active, politically engaged, ways of acting in the energy system (Devine-Wright 2007). ENCI refers to "forms of civic involvement that pertain to the development of a more sustainable and democratic energy system. Beyond its manifest forms, energy citizenship [ENCI] also comprises various latent forms: it is an ideal that can be lived up to and realised to varying degrees, according to different framework conditions and states of empowerment" (Pel et al. 2021:64).

ENCI is a complex phenomenon. It may be associated with good civic action, and a better world. It is a social construct, however, and not a directly observable phenomenon. It is a new imaginary of civic agency in the energy system, a new governmentality that circumscribes desired roles of citizens, governments and organisations. It is, just as citizenship more generally, a phenomenon that is communicatively performed (Fairclough et al. 2013). This calls for critical, reflexive analysis that accounts for these processes of social construction (Silvast & Valkenburg 2023).

This paper takes up the challenge to articulate the systemic, transformative significance of ENCI. Whilst it is often assumed that ENCI contributes to the energy transition (Wahlund & Palm 2022; Schlindwein & Montalvo 2023) or that it tends towards system reproduction instead (Lennon & Dunphy 2023), there is much is left to clarify about the transition dynamics involved. Which transition? Which framework conditions? Which processes of (social) innovation? And, if ENCI is marking a next-phase in transition, in which energy transition has become everybody's business? Therefore, the challenge is to think through 'ENCI transition' systemically, along the lines of sustainability transitions research – whilst making good use of the longstanding scholarly traditions that have dealt with citizenship and its complexities (Dobson & Valencia 2013; Ekman & Amnå 2012; Swyngedouw 2005).

Our explorative research question is therefore: What is the significance of energy citizenship for the energy transition? Combining transitions-theoretical insights with scholarship on citizenship and building on empirical data gathered in Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, France and Belgium. Our analysis elicits five key transition dynamics: 1) the kinds of innovation at issue, and their significance in terms of

'niche' innovation and 'regime' reproduction; 2) the kinds of actor constellations, innovation

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ecosystems and intermediaries through which ENCI is enacted; 3) the significance of ENCI in terms of transition 'frontrunners' and 'laggards', and the crucial importance of collective empowerment processes; 4) the context factors through which ENCI develops in the various aforementioned countries, i.e. the so-called 'landscape' factors; and 5) the dynamics through which ENCI either scales and institutionalises, or runs into adverse dynamics of 'backlash'. Substantiating the importance of social-institutional dynamics in sustainability transitions (Loorbach et al. 2017), our analysis of ENCI calls specific attention to the irreducible ambivalences involved.

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