

## Snails over Teslas: how energy citizenship and energy communities can push for a degrowth energy transition



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### ENERGIZER / ICE BREAKER

- Large, for-profit, private renewable energy projects have a role to play in a sustainable energy future
- Energy communities can transform the energy system in an inclusive and green way
- Active energy citizenship, as a movement, has the power to displace for profit market actors
- Vulnerable people can become active citizen participants in the energy transition

## Structure of this session

- Three presentations by Edina, Chris and Lidija (each 10 min)
- Q&A session (15 min)
- Breakout session with groups discussion different issues (30 min)
- Presentation of 3 main discussion points by each group (10 min)
- Wrap-up



## Energy Citizenship in Europe: Supporting a move towards degrowth?

Edina Vadovics, Anita Szóllóssy

Greendependent Institute



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101022492.

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## BACKGROUND/CONTEXT:

### ENERGYPROSPECTS, A EUROPEAN PROJECT INVESTIGATING ENERGY CITIZENSHIP



- Main objective of the project:  
Develop a comprehensive understanding of the conditions conducive to active energy citizenship
- Task and outcomes towards this end:
  - **Collection of cases of energy citizenship in Europe**
  - **Database of 596 cases** (now available online!)
  - **Country reports** and **Factsheets** on energy citizenship available

[energyprospects.eu](http://energyprospects.eu)

3 years €  
3m  
H2020  
project with  
9 European  
partners:

Ireland,  
Belgium,  
Bulgaria, France,  
Germany,  
Hungary, Latvia,  
Spain, the  
Netherlands



## What is Energy Citizenship?

Energy citizenship refers to **forms of civic involvement** that pertain to the development of a **more sustainable and democratic energy system**.

Beyond its **manifest forms**, 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.”

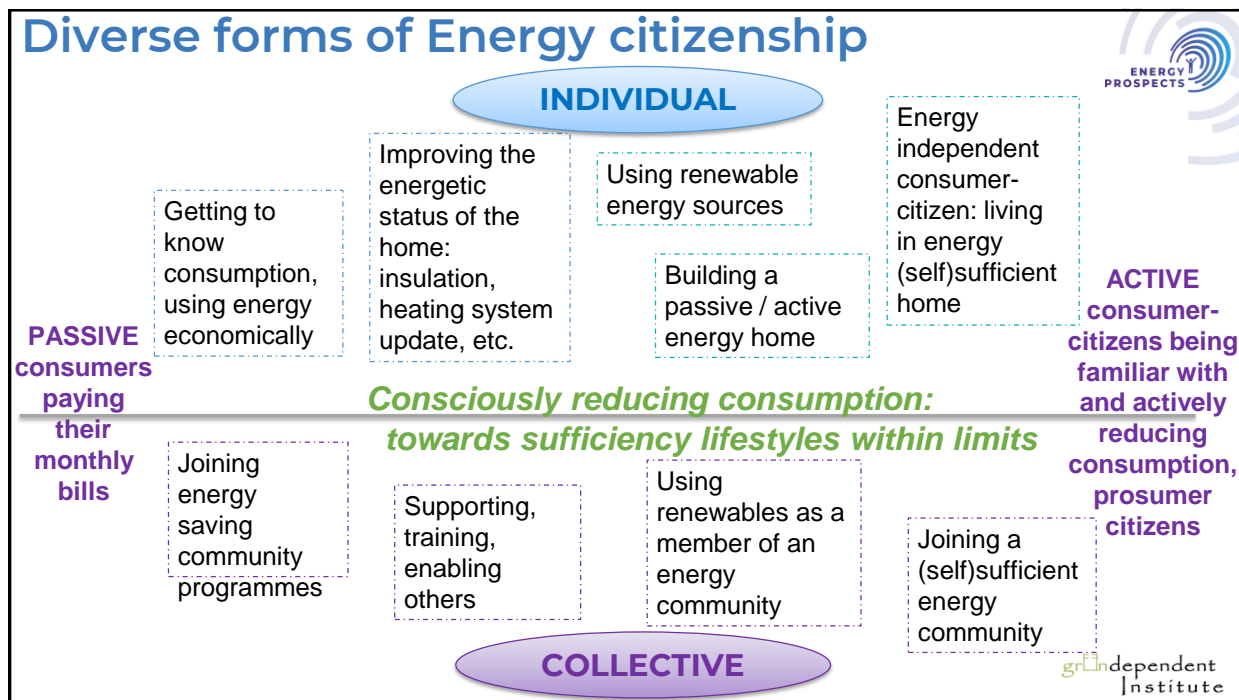
(Pel et al. 2021: 64)

ENCI: a label, a social construction



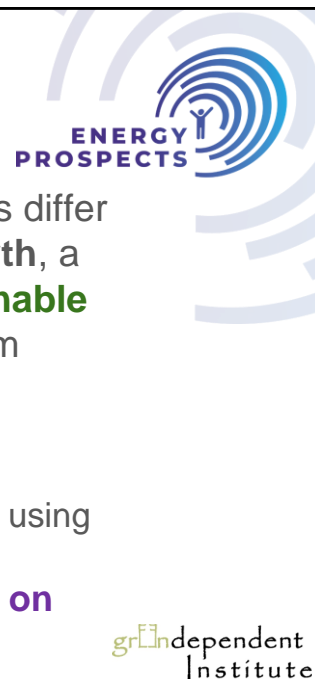
ENCI: an empirical phenomenon





## Focus in this presentation

- Do the cases focusing on disadvantaged groups differ in **how they support a move towards degrowth**, a **more just, inclusive**, and **ecologically sustainable (i.e. within carbon budget)** energy system from “other” cases?
- Answer based on database analysis
  - Specific data breakdown created to examine this, using statistical methods
  - From among all the cases (n=596), **20% focus on disadvantaged groups(119 cases)**



## Aspect of energy citizenship important for challenging the current system and moving towards degrowth



- Equity/justice
- Citizen power/control

- Environmental sustainability
- Recognition of the carbon limit

Case researchers evaluated these aspects using the following case:

- The case does not consider this aspect
- Low
- Medium
- High
- This aspect is not relevant
- There is not enough information

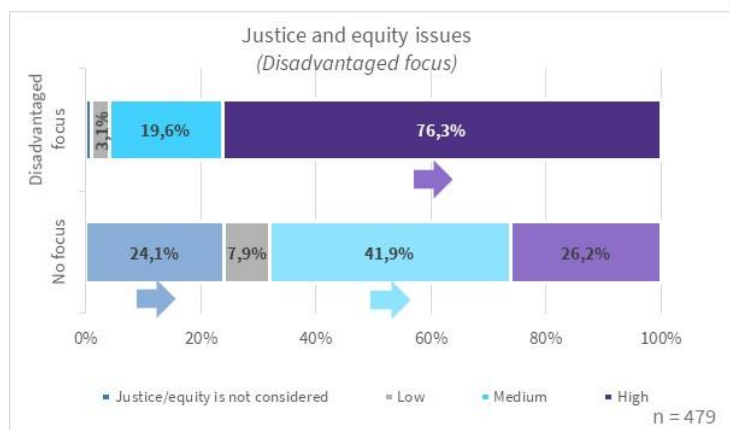
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## Some interesting differences regarding cases with a focus on disadvantaged groups

### 1. Justice and equity issues



- Justice and equity issues are **significantly more important** for cases with a disadvantaged focus

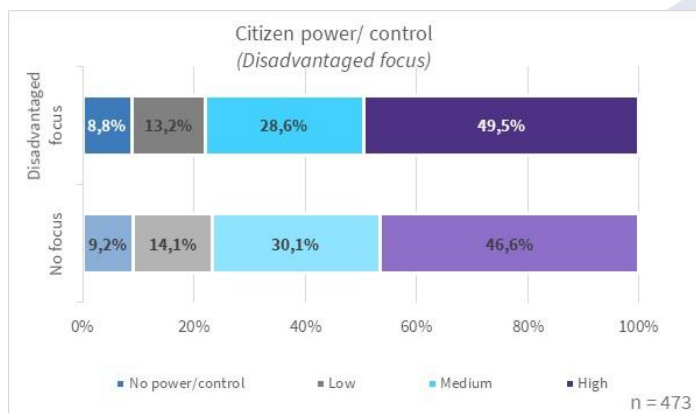


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## 2. Citizen power/control



- In terms of citizen power/control, there is **no significant difference** between cases with a disadvantaged groups focus and cases with no such focus

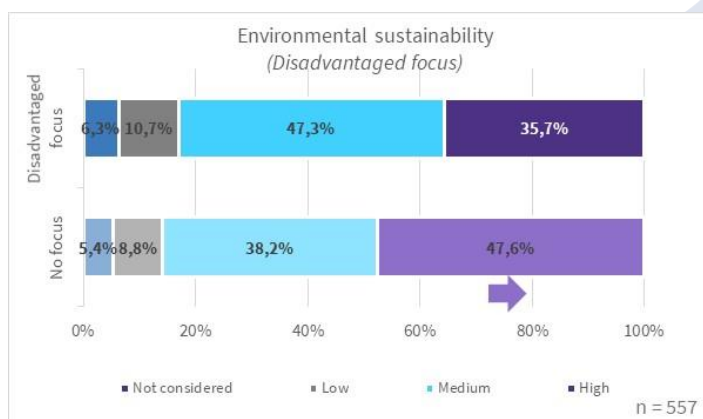


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## 3. Environmental sustainability



- Cases focusing on disadvantaged groups are **significantly less often** evaluated as „high” for environmental sustainability

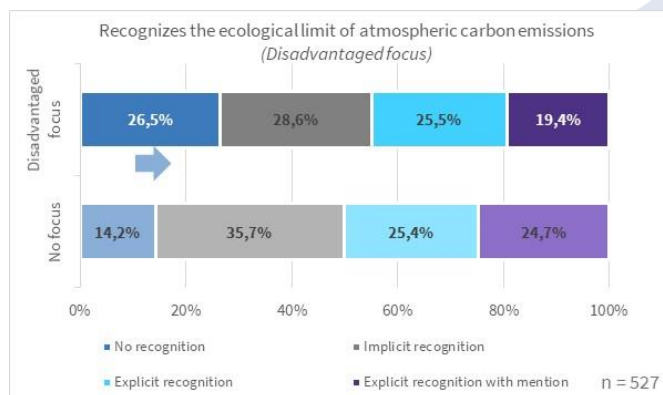


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## 4. Recognition of the carbon limit



- Cases focusing on disadvantaged groups are *less likely to recognise the carbon limit in general*, and **significantly more of them do not recognise it at all**



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## Move towards degrowth: Combined recognition of all 4 aspects



- Do cases do that?
  - In our database of ~600 cases, only 18 recognise all 4 aspects fully
- Which ones and how?
  - Often, social movements (e.g. Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future)
- What about cases focusing on disadvantaged groups?
  - Let's see some examples
    - where we dug deeper through detailed case study research:

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## Some good examples from cases that have a focus on disadvantaged groups



SoLocal

Biobriquettes  
for the  
energy  
poor

LaVidaVerde

## Learnings so far



- Social and environmental sustainability are not necessarily connected in cases
  - Is this an issue that works against 'degrowth'?
- Cases of energy citizenship focusing on disadvantaged groups often do not recognize and prioritise environmental issues, including respecting the carbon limit, to the same extent
  - Again, is this an issue that works against 'degrowth'?
  - Indicates need for more explicit integration of social and environmental sustainability objectives
- We need to learn from cases that explicitly attempt to connect the two, while also focusing on disadvantaged groups





ELECTRA ENERGY.

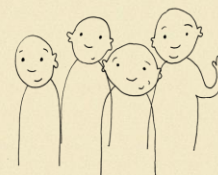
# No Titles, No Masters, just Degrowth

Chris Vrettos, REScoop.eu | Electra Energy

Cooperative

Zagreb Degrowth Conference 08/2023

*Working Towards Energy Democracy*



## A degrowth energy sector is *and isn't*:



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Striving for meeting local energy demand, tackling energy poverty, sufficiency	Huge industrial, privately owned projects with no local benefits
Technologies are sourced sustainably, information is open access (cosmolocalism)	"Going back to the caves" / zero innovation
Investing heavily in deep housing renovations, prioritizing vulnerable households	Tesla home batteries and PVs for super rich mega villas
Ensuring everyone has access to (clean) energy - microgrids, rooftop-PV	Energy as a commodity, privatized grids, blackouts
Locally determined 'limits' on what types of energy consumption are socially useful / achieving local self sufficiency	Top-down, undemocratic, unplanned


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


## Energy Communities as catalysts for (degrowth) energy transformations

ELECTRA ENERGY

- REScoop today represents more than 2000 cooperatives (2 million + EU citizens)
- 75% of district heating in DK owned by cooperatives
- Belgian citizen initiatives contribute about 5% of national renewable capacities
- Explosion in self-consumption/EC solutions as a result of the energy crisis (seize the narrative opportunity!)




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## A framework to assess degrowth transformative capacity

RGY.

**5 key elements:**

- Education
- Skill building and Empowerment
- Transformation of Resource Flows
- Democratic Control and Governance
- Strategic Networking



**CREATION OF SHARED VISIONS AND MEANING**

- Cultivating an Integrated Socio-technical and Ecological Understanding
- Sense Making and Knowledge Sharing
- Goals
- Post-growth Vision

**ACTOR EMPOWERMENT AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING**

- Capacity Building and Self-Sufficiency
- Politically Motivated Empowerment
- Experimenting and Dynamic Social Learning

**TRANSFORMATION OF RESOURCES FLOWS**



- Surplus/Savings Management
- Financing
- Material and Energy Throughput
- Navigating the Impacts of Technological Systems
- Transforming Employment Relations

**DEMOCRATIC CONTROL AND GOVERNANCE**

- Plurality in Decision Making and Governance


**TRANSFORMATIVE COALITION BUILDING**

- Strategic/Politically-Motivated Networking
- Bridging Knowledge and Resource Gaps

## Educating and Empowering People and Communities

- Education: Hyperion Energy Cafés
- Adopting an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to sustainability (e.g., zero waste practices)
- Space to challenge dominant narratives and form new shared visions (e.g., of energy as a 'collective good not a commodity')




Διακήρυξη για την Υποστήριξη της Έμφυλης Ισότητας στην ενέργεια  
Ομάδα Εργασίας Έμφυλης Ισότητας στην ενέργεια

Η Ευρωπαϊκή Ομοσπονδία Ενέργειακών Συνεταιρισμών REScoop.eu:

- ♦ αναγνωρίζει πως η κλιματική κρίση απειλεί τη συλλογική ευημερία ή ακόμη και τη γενικότερη επίβιωση της ανθρωπότητας.
- ♦ στηρίζει την μετάβαση σε ένα καθορισμό 100% ΑΠΕ υπό δημοκρατικό έλεγχο για την επίτευξη της κοινωνικής ευημερίας.

*Gender Power Working Group Ambition Statement, Greek Translation*

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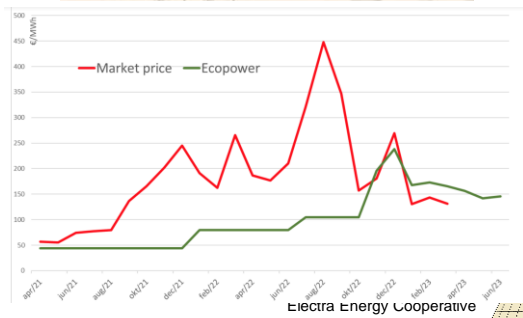
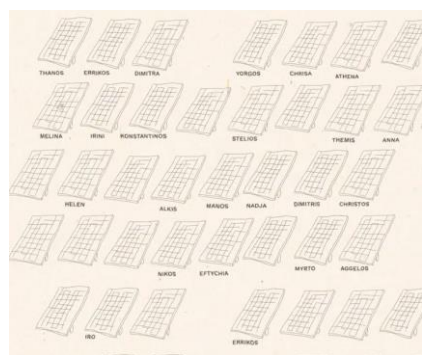

## Pursuing social & ecological goals - not profit

- Greek example -> various energy communities are implementing collective self consumption projects, **including energy poor households**
- Co-Energy project -> develop a replicable, simple toolkit

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# Transforming how we use energy (and other resources)

- Decommodifying energy: moving from profit orientation to self-sufficiency
  - Across the EU, energy cooperatives own projects of 7.2–9.9 GW capacity, i.e., able to cover the needs of their 2+ million members
- Reinvesting profits into their local communities
- Other types of energy & resource reduction (e.g., Partago -> electric vehicle sharing)
- Up to 10% reduction in energy use



[Map](#)

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## Connecting resources and assets with Energy Communities

filters

**TYPE**

- roof
- urban void
- field
- watermill

**SIZE (sqm)**

0 — 10K

**LEGAL CONDITION**

- municipal
- state
- private

**Roof at waste collection plant**

TYPE: Roof

SIZE (sqm): 4.000


OWNER: Municipality of Ioannina

[learn more](#)


view as:

platform developed in terms of


in collaboration with




## How to use the Match-making Tool?




**First Contact Point  
bt Energy Communities,  
Citizen-led initiatives,  
and Municipalities**




**Land and Roof  
Sharing or Renting**



**Sharing Equipment  
and HR,  
Technical Support,  
know-how**




**Finding New Members,  
Promotion,  
Green Public Procurement**




This project has received funding from the European Union's LIFE programme under grant agreement No 101077085

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## Democratic governance




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- In many EU countries energy communities function under a 1 member = 1 vote system.
- Transparency checks and balances (GA, BOD, Oversight Board)
- Gender Equality & Inclusion Action Plans (Goienier is a good example!) /
  - REScoop working to make this a statutory commitment



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## Strategic Networking



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- Energy communities network to pool resources and capacities
  - Bottom-up crowdfunding platforms (E.g. Hyperion & Copernico)
- Czech Republic, Greece -> collective advocacy
- REScoop.eu
- Energy communities and Municipalities



Building the national Greek cluster of energy communities

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## In summary




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- Green growth is powering your private jet with solar panels. Degrowth is banning private jets and ensuring everyone at the local community has access to sustainable mobility.
- Energy communities can build the local trust & buy-in for deep, politically-motivated, sustainability transformations




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# Engaging vulnerable people in energy communities

DEGROWTH ZAGREB 2023  
1 September 2023  
Dr. Lidija Živčič  
lidija@focus.si





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## Content

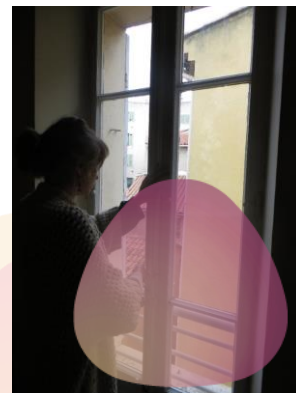
- Quick glimpse into energy poverty
- Engaging vulnerable people in energy communities
- Examples of good practices



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## What is energy poverty?

- Energy poverty can be seen as situation in which a household lacks a socially and materially necessitated level of energy services in the home.
- People affected by energy poverty experience inadequate levels of essential energy services, due to a combination of high energy expenditure, low household incomes, inefficient buildings and appliances, and specific household energy needs.



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## Extent of energy poverty in Europe

Estimates show that in Europe

- 57 million people cannot keep their homes warm during winter,
- 104 million people cannot keep their homes comfortable during summer, and
- 52 million people face delays in paying their energy bills.



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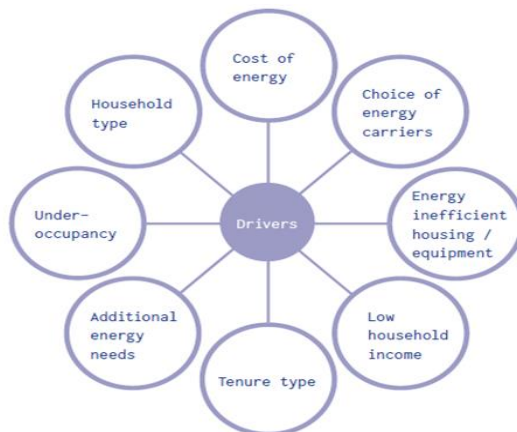


# Causes of energy poverty I

Key factors, which are often closely related with each other:

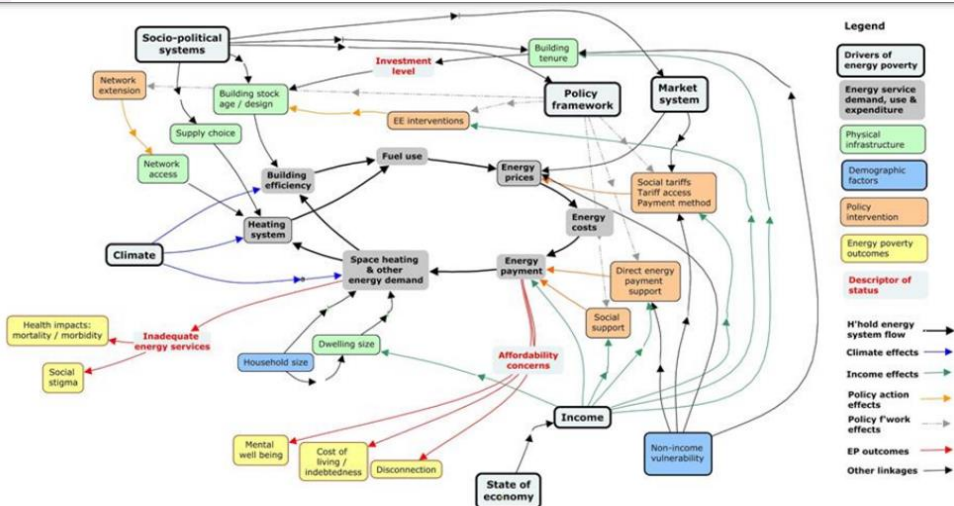
- Low income, which is often linked to general poverty
- High energy prices, including the use of relatively expensive fuel sources (depending on the country energy structure it can be electricity domestic fuel...)
- Poor energy efficiency of a home, e.g. through low levels of insulation and old or inefficient heating systems or appliances

Source: Thomson and Snell, 2016



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# Causes of energy poverty II



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## Consequences of energy poverty

Impacts can often reinforce each other, leading to vicious circles for generations:

- Poor dwelling condition
- Indebtedness and financial issues
- Cut offs and evictions
- Deteriorating physical health
- Deteriorating psychological health and mental wellbeing
- Social marginalisation and isolation
- Other relevant impacts: poor educational achievements of children, poor emotional well-being and resilience; unemployment; social and economic costs

Source: Thomson and Snell, 2016



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## Testimony: Anila from Vlora

Anila has 6 children and lives on an income of only €70 from social assistance. Her husband is one of the many informal waste-pickers.

Their house is in very bad condition, humidity is high and it is lacking in insulation. She uses a wooden stove in winter and a gas stove in summer for cooking. Her family doesn't have a boiler, so she heats it on the stove. She has been disconnected from the grid for a few years, and she is now paying off the debt amounting to €35 per month, which is 50% of her social assistance benefit.



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## Testimony: Kerly from Barcelona

Kerly is from Barcelona. The energy company Endesa called her to tell her that she will be taken to court for a debt she has with the company. Harassment by phone and by letter of the people affected by energy poverty has impacts on their physical and mental health and generates situations of anxiety, depression, as well as shakes the prioritization of essential household expenses, prioritizing debt payment over coverage of needs such as food or medicines.



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## Engaging in energy communities: reality vs. interest

- Vulnerable people are still under-represented in community energy projects. Research of 113 energy communities in Germany showed that only 11% of them address people, affected by energy poverty (Hanke and Guyet, 2023).
- There is interest, however: the CEES project (Schockaert, 2022) found that 1/3 of respondents working on community energy consider reducing energy poverty a high priority and that 8/10 initiatives want to do more on energy poverty.
- Reasons for not approaching underrepresented groups (Hanke and Guyet, 2023):
  - difficulties when trying to reach out—they often simply do not manage to reach vulnerable households
  - when having reached them, energy communities struggle to bring across their offer
  - finding the right words (understandable language) to explain their offer and vulnerable households' financial restrictions and living situation.



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## Engaging in energy communities: why is it important? (I)

- The added value of involving citizens, especially vulnerable ones, in energy communities is manifold:
  - sense of ownership that is conveyed through participation in energy communities,
  - engagement is also the key to energy efficient behaviour, which is key to achieving energy and climate goals
  - inclusion in the activities of transition and hence inclusion in societal actions
  - the energy system needs citizens and communities to work together to break down dependency and vulnerability and turn it into ownership and resilience



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## Engaging in energy communities: why is it important? (II)

- The energy transition is an opportunity to promote a model based on democratic citizen participation, de-growth, clean energy production; in short, a model in which energy poverty has no place
- Energy communities can move away from social protection measures which, on the one hand, merely reproduce the mercantilist features of the current energy model and, on the other, stigmatise people
- If participation in a community energy project involves only those social groups that have certain purchasing power, technical know-how and time, we will widen the gap – hence we need to reach and include families living in energy poverty and ensure their participation
- Equal participation must be established from the outset, we may not create a sense that these are 'exceptions' – this could lead to stigmatisation and a poor experience for families in this situation
- Energy communities must be able to break the link between energy and ability to pay and avoid emphasising, differentiating or demanding explanations from families in energy poverty, thus avoiding the reproduction of guilt



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## Enabling environment at the EU level

- Renewable Energy Directive commits European Member States to facilitate the participation of vulnerable consumers and support their inclusion in the energy transition
- Countries must ensure that renewable energy communities are accessible to all consumers, including those from low-income or vulnerable households
- Countries must ensure that tools to facilitate access to finance and information are made available to low-income and vulnerable households
- When Member States implement measures to increase the share of renewable energy sources in heating and cooling, they must ensure that they are accessible to all consumers, in particular those from low-income or vulnerable households
- When Member States adopt and implement measures to promote the use of renewable energy sources, they should ensure that they are accessible to all consumers, in particular those in low-income or vulnerable households who would otherwise not have sufficient initial capital to take advantage of them



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## Situation in Slovenia

- Official definition of energy poverty and energy communities adopted
- Currently, an action plan for energy poverty is in public consultation, where one of the measures is 5 million EUR dedicated to participation of people, affected by energy poverty, in renewable energy communities
- One of the first community power projects: Green Hrastnik
  - Members: municipality and citizens
  - Project of 300 kWp PV power plant on the primary school in Hrastnik – cca 270.000 EUR cost (16.3% from shares of members, 20% governmental subsidy for renewables and 63.7% bank loan); cca 150 EUR / 1 kWp, typical household needs 5 kWp (5MWh/year)
  - Just above 2000 EUR from Focus for vulnerable participants, but...



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## Practices in solidary financing

- Coopérnico, Portugal: Scheme that harnesses solar energy to create social value for its local community. The cooperative rents the roofs of socially oriented institutions for their PV installations, providing them with additional income, lowering their energy costs and giving them free PV installation at the end of the rental period.
- Énergie Solidaire, France: Enercoop, a cooperative clean energy supplier with more than 100,000 customers, set up Energie Solidaire as a non-profit organisation. Energie Solidaire collects micro-donations on Enercoop customers' monthly energy bills and donations of surplus energy from renewable energy installations owned by public authorities. The money raised is used to support local organisations and programmes tackling energy poverty across France.
- Som Energia, Spain: The cooperative Som Energía uses a collective purchasing model to implement PV plants for the self-consumption of the cooperative's members. The model is such that for every 50 PV modules purchased, 1 module is donated to a non-profit organisation.
- Barrio Solar, Spain: 10% of the energy generated by the PV systems on public buildings is allocated to families facing energy poverty and is financially covered by monthly contributions from the remaining neighbours. Vulnerable families will use this solar energy without having to pay a monthly fee, as they will benefit from the bill savings generated by solar self-sufficiency.
- Sun4all, various countries: Testing a support programme for financial and non-financial support. Financial support will be provided by making participants co-owners of local PV installations free of charge. The solar energy generated by the PV installations will be credited evenly to the participants' energy bills, reducing their actual energy costs.



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## Practices in cooperation between citizens and local authorities

- Eeklo, Belgium: Eeklo has reduced barriers to citizens' participation in renewable energy schemes by working closely with Ecopower, an energy cooperative with almost 60,000 members that supplies more than 50,000 homes with 100% renewable energy. The city provided 750 vulnerable citizens with one pre-funded Ecopower share. This has enabled these citizens to gain all the benefits of full Ecopower membership, such as lower electricity bills. The co-operative also allows members to save the cost of buying a pre-funded share by saving on their energy bills, providing solutions to the high upfront cost of buying a share.
- Porto Torres, Italy: Porto Torres has launched a 'revolving fund', which allocates funds to vulnerable citizens. The fund (€ 8 000) was used to purchase small solar plants (<20 kW installed capacity) for selected families, and the municipality replenishes the fund by selling the surplus electricity generated to the grid. The first measure is the allocation of public grants for the installation of PV plants in the most vulnerable households. Families can then start a self-generation activity, while the energy that is not consumed is sold directly to the public grid and the proceeds are paid into a revolving fund.



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## EmpowerMed objectives

Overall objective of EmpowerMed is to contribute to energy poverty alleviation and health improvement of people affected by energy poverty in the coastal areas of Mediterranean countries, with a particular focus on women, through

- implementing practical solutions, tailored to empower over 4,200 households affected by energy poverty to manage their energy consumption and improve their access to appropriate energy resources,
- assessing the efficiency and impacts of various practical energy poverty alleviation measures to formulate local, national and EU policy recommendations and
- promoting the policy solutions for tackling energy poverty at local, national and EU level among 220 decision-makers, 560 social actors, 100 utilities, 180 health experts and 100 energy poverty experts.



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## Activities

Mobilisation  
of key local  
actors

Capacity  
building of  
key actors  
and partners

Household  
energy visits

Collective  
assemblies

Analysis and design  
of  
recommendations  
for tackling energy  
poverty

Advocacy of  
gender-just  
energy poverty  
policy solutions

«Do It  
Yourself»  
workshops

Health  
workshops



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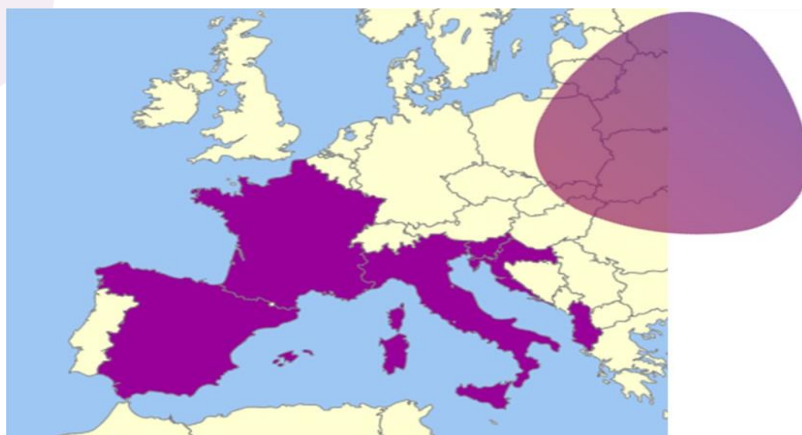
## Main expected impacts of the project

- 10,200 people empowered to tackle energy poverty
- 6 pilot areas
- Primary energy savings: 6.5 GWh/year
- Reduction of CO2 emissions: 1.600 tCO2/year
- 160.000 € of investments in sustainable energy
- 780.000 € of economic savings
- 50 people free of debt or disconnection
- Engaging over 1000 key actors
- At least 60% of female participants
- Contributions to policy: 8 policies/measures recommended



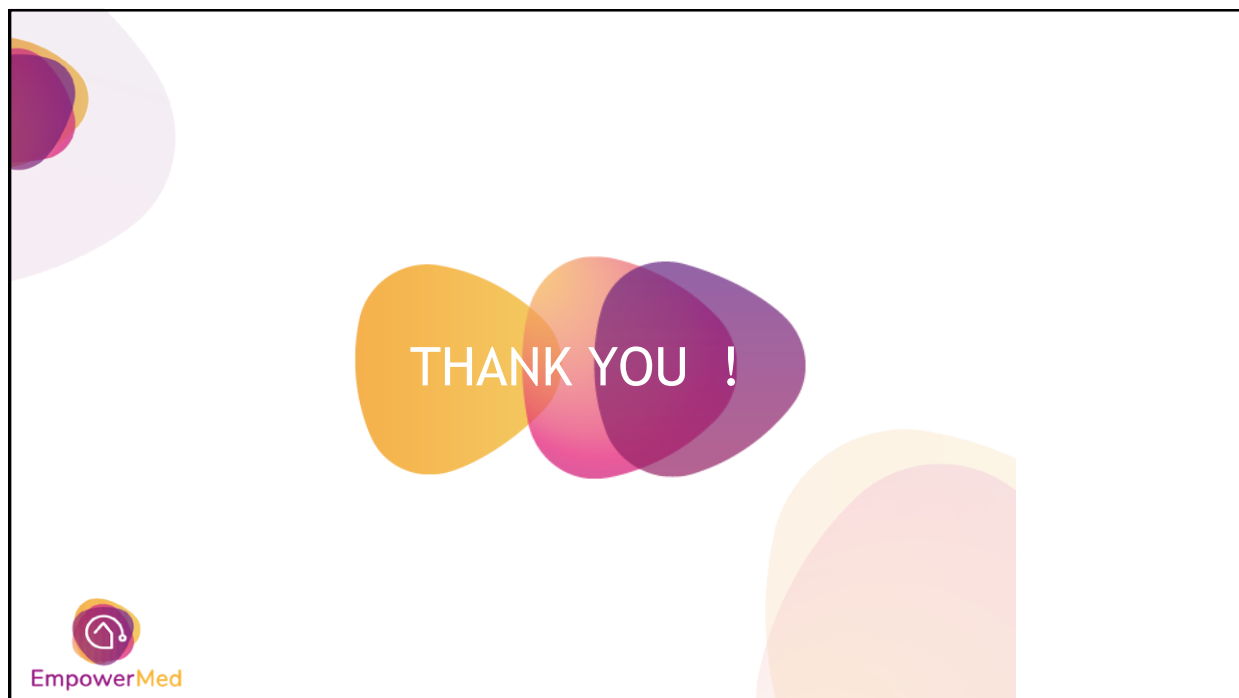
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## Coverage



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[www.empowermed.eu](http://www.empowermed.eu)

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**Partners :**



Any questions?

## Energy Communities & Degrowth / A Degrowth Energy System

- 3 or 4 groups
- Each group discusses a different topic (then moves to others based on group choice)
- Each group selects a note-taker and presenter
  - the aim is to **present 3 main discussion points** at the end

## Breakout Questions

- How to ensure that ENCI, including community energy, contribute to degrowth?
- How to stimulate the widening of ENCI practices without being caught into the traps of growth?
- How are energy communities shielding citizens from prices shocks and market fluctuations?
- Can women's role be made more visible in the just and inclusive energy transition?

## Fill in our survey!

Electra Energy Cooperative, together with CommonEnergy (a local energy community in the north of Greece, are conducting a survey on energy communities and degrowth

- If you are an EC or a supportive organisation, please take 6 minutes to fill it in!
- <https://forms.gle/FxgUasPD1hQZfnEe6>

## Final abstract:

Community energy, a specific form of energy citizenship (ENCI), represents one of the ways for a just and inclusive energy transition towards degrowth. At a time when the moral bankruptcy of energy companies has been laid bare by their profit-making in an energy crisis, different models for energy production and consumption are more relevant than ever. This session will first look at how different forms of ENCI, including energy communities, contribute towards the active and participative empowerment of people. Then, it will zoom in on energy communities and how they are formed in practice, how they engage people, appropriate the energy sector and democratize it. Finally, building on a database of ENCI initiatives, the session will provide solutions on how to include vulnerable people in the just and inclusive energy transition, make them part of energy communities and other ENCI initiatives, and enable them to become active energy citizens, hence tackling their energy poverty situations. The session will be introduced through three short presentations (10-12 minutes each), followed by a short Q&A session (15-20 minutes). After this, a facilitated breakout session will follow (30 minutes), in which we will tackle questions, such as How to ensure that ENCI, including community energy, contribute to degrowth?; How to stimulate the widening of ENCI practices without being caught into the traps of growth?; How are energy communities shielding citizens from prices shocks and market fluctuations?; Can women's role be made more visible in the just and inclusive energy transition?