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EMPOWERMENT TOOLKIT AND KNOWLEDGE REPOSITORY

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ENCI actors and difficulties in gaining power

Organisations, such as the ones exemplified above, face numerous challenges. The journey to individual and collective empowerment is progressive. Individuals gradually acquire greater autonomy and control over their lives and learn to experiment with their abilities in a context of interaction with other people. Along the way, they may face a variety of personal challenges and barriers.

In the section "[How do I translate my individual behaviours into participation in shaping the energy system?](#)" we asked you to write a list of your possibilities and resources, barriers and difficulties, to make changes in some of your behaviours in relation to the energy system. We will tackle this question a little further, reflecting on some possible barriers to the development of empowerment in contexts of collective action. For the moment, we would like you to complete this list of barriers so that afterwards, the set of resources with which we could try to face the obstacles that these barriers impose on the development of individual and collective empowerment can be sought.

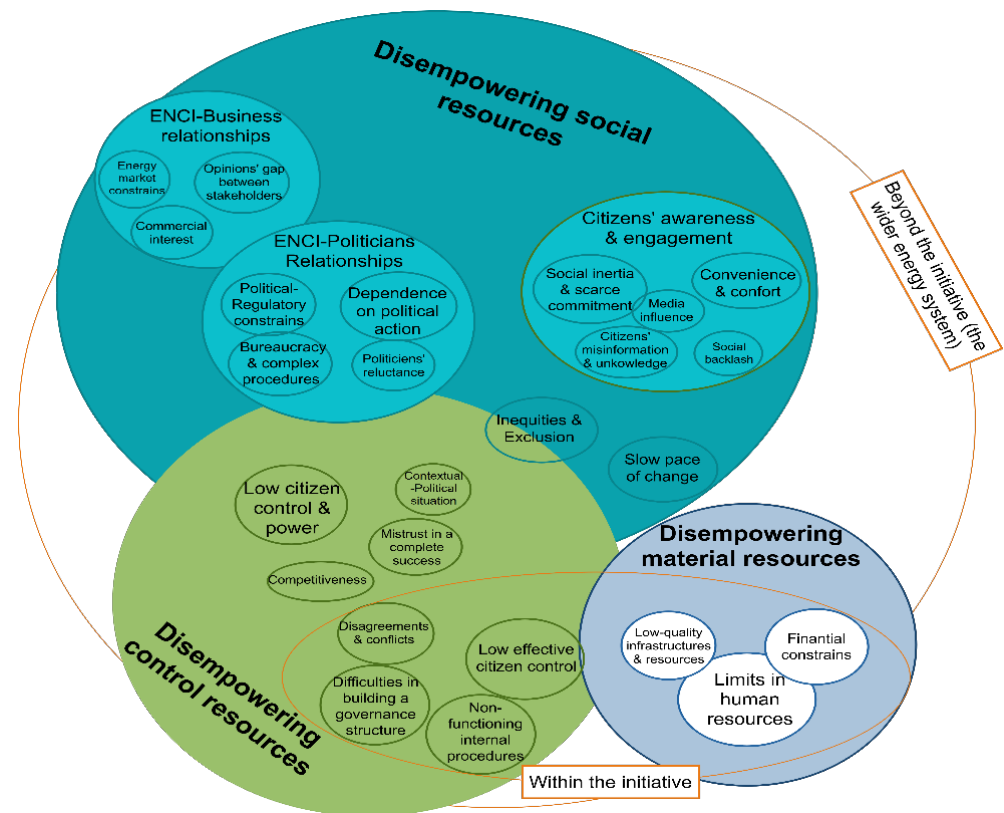
In the exercise proposed, the resources are graded into three generic categories:

- Individual
- Social
- Material,

We have also analysed the interviews with our respondents (see figure 9). We have already discussed some [difficulties that people face individually](#) and the means and resources of coping that they require, both in their actions as individual agents and collectively, in contact with other like-minded people.

[Please stop here for doing Activity 9].

Figure 9. (Dis)empowering resources





Activity N.º 9

Let's think and reflect on my barriers and constrains to gain power and to overcome disempowerment:

(Here are some examples of actions you can take as an energy citizen. Keep in mind that there are many experiences of energy citizenship, so here we only show some of them, giving you the opportunity to incorporate those that you consider appropriate, in addition).

	Individual-personal barriers	Collective-social barriers	Material barriers
Reduce my energy consumption at home/work (e.g. using more efficient devices, installing solar panels on the roof, avoiding the use of car...)			
Make changes in my consumption patterns (e.g. reduce hot water consumption and/or lower the temperature, turn off lights...)			
Encourage and support the creation of energy-sharing communities or neighborhoods			
Participate in assemblies, consultations and public decision-making debates on energy issues			
Being a minority shareholder in a project (e.g. a wind farm set up privately with public support)			
Being actively involved in the creation of an organization (e.g. energy community)			
Being actively and directly involved in an existing organization (e.g. an energy community)			
Contribute to the debate on alternative forms of mobility and energy production and consumption (e.g. solar farms)			
Participate in climate protest movements (e.g. Friday for Future, Extinction Rebellion)			
Please, fill in out with additional options if you wish:			



In this section, we introduce our respondents' views when they were asked about what can hinder their empowerment process or even generate disempowerment. We have already commented, when [defining empowerment](#), the relevance for individuals to have resources and capacity to mobilize them with a certain control over them. Yet what happens when people experience a shortfall in resources? What do the people who are part of the entities understand by resources necessary for empowerment? What are the most demanded resources for their empowerment? Is it possible to speak, in a general sense, of resources for energy citizens? Or are there certain latent limits that confront the just and equitable energy transition? As shown in Figure 9, there are many different barriers or resources that disempower our respondents:

Disempowering material resources

- **Availability of human resources.** Many of the initiatives have a large number of volunteers who, although they benefit in terms of possible commitment to the entity and motivation to act, may be limited due to the constraints of time and individual abilities: "it implies a permanent work of accompaniment, and therefore, my availability being limited, the speed of transformation it is reduced (Interview 1, Institutional Campaign).
- **Knowledge and level of professionalization.** Some initiatives lack professionals with a high level of knowledge and specialisation, which results in a low level of professionalisation. This professionalisation is demanded by some associations in view of their imminent growth:

the limits (...), I actually see there, it will become more and more professional and at some point you will reach the limits of the mission or the idea of the association. This means you can't grow beyond a certain size, because you have to professionalise more and at the same time with every project and the longer the association exists, the more volunteer supporters are found, because at some point the first, it can be seen how the initial enthusiasm, also in the general population begins to wane (Interview 49, Non-profit association).

- **Financial constrains.** Nor is it easy to find funding to pay the specialised personnel required for certain activities of the initiative: "Here, we have trouble recruiting an engineer, who has scant experience, to work on the

project because the salary is not attractive. This means, the person will eventually find a job somewhere else" (Interview 1, intuitional campaign).

- **Low-quality infrastructures and economic resources.** The difficulty in bearing the costs of their projects is, without a doubt, a pressing problem for many ENCI initiatives ["There is no money. We don't have a revenue source. We don't make profits that we can turn into a next project. It took us years to reach this point" (Interview 16, energy cooperative)]. Alongside the lack of economic resources is added the low quality of the infrastructures: "the real problem here is the on-grid issues. Those, we have rented properties, these are in need of change" (Interview 29, Energy cooperative) and how to strike a balance between the state they are in and the message they wish to convey to people. In more severe cases, difficulties in repaying the initial investment, or in improving existing infrastructure, through sources of financing or self-sufficiency may lead to the initiative having to close:

the project has cost us a lot of money and when I do the accounts, I feel faint. And the idea is that it remains so, that is, if the project is self-sustainable through a gift-based economy, it will continue, and if it is not self-sustainable it will cease to exist (Interview 35, co-housing).

- **External support.** National and municipal governments are called upon: "there are no huge hurdles to becoming proactive energy citizen, but it requires finances as well sometimes, so could be nice if there would be more financial support from the state or municipalities" (Interview 52, individual).

Disempowering social resources.

- **Energy market constrains.** Business and political relations impose obstacles to the development of ENCI. Several informants allude to the power of energy companies: "It is not the citizens who are responsible for energy, but the big energy companies, as it was for a long time" (Interview 46, non-profit association). These companies dictate the rules of the energy market with a clearly defined commercial interest and against which many of these initiatives fail to compete.
- **Opinions' gap between stakeholders.** Differences in interest between actors

in the energy market can also generate internal problems, even between actors operating in the same line: "there are sometimes misunderstandings or in any case ways of working which are different variants between the policies at the level, on a European Union wide level" (Interview 9, Mobility cooperative).

- **Regulatory and bureaucratic barriers.** It is referred as "Strict regulations" (Interview 10, Mobility cooperative). "It's more of a paper, bureaucratic process" (Interview 28, Energy cooperative)].
- **Lack of public support.** "Increasingly non-cooperative and reluctant to engage with civil society and non-governmental actors" (Interview 20, Mobility cooperative).
- **Inequities and exclusion.** Income level is important in an initial investment such as the installation of solar panels, as public subsidies are lacking: "Although there are government subsidies, for example, the installation of solar panels is not a cheap undertaking and is not available to all residents (Interview 52, individual energy citizen). Some people refer to this as a kind of vicious circle, in which all those people who do not have funds for the initial investment are excluded from the energy system, limiting the energy transition to the hands of a few:

I find big problems. They are not, let's say empowered or enable to participate in this energy transition. That's more of a thing and there are more schemes like this. Subsidy schemes for example, for your house. You first must make the investment. And then afterwards you can claim the subsidy. Which means you must collect the money up front. So then, if you have the money up front, you're able to make the investment. And only after you get some money back which is off course weird (Interview 29, Energy cooperative).

- **Social inertial and scarce commitment.** Citizen awareness and commitment are reduced by a matter of lack of interest: "The problem is that people don't react. They have their noses in the wall. And presently, this is not the case yet for one if there are people" (Interview 49, non-profit association).
- **Convenience and confort.** For some others, there is a matter of convenience

and confort

The main issue is in building a governance structure and adopting a set of rules, committee rules, cooperative rules that are mutually agreed upon. We have not really done that. We have adopted a set of principles from another organisation. We have not development a set of rules and procedures for us. We are a fledgeling organisation having picked a very difficult waters to navigate in terms of procedure and cooperation. (...) We have a lot of ideas, but the paperwork and procedures need refinement (Interview 12, Energy cooperative)

- **Citizens' misinformation and unknowledge.** There is great concern about the lack of knowledge and education of the population about climate change, environmental problems, and the need for a rapid and effective energy transition: "They are not educated regarding this. They are not aware of what needs to be done. They are not aware of how to make changes. We need to educate people make them aware of how and why" (Interview 11, public consultation project).
- **Slow pace of change.** Difficulties in obtaining information, in accessing quality information, in being educated on these issues and in acquiring a critical and deep awareness of environmental problems... are the main barriers that our informants consider regarding citizenship, and that results in a slowdown of change: "changes are happening for the better, but slowly" (Interview 52, Individual energy citizen).

Disempowering control resources

All the above have a direct impact on the possibilities, means and capacities of people to dispose of and make use of their control resources. We have referred here to two types of control resources (see figure 10):

- those that are internal to the initiative
- those that involve the broader energy system

Internally, the main difficulties encountered by our informants refer to:

- **Difficulties in building a governance structure.** Some organizations are built on a strong base of technical knowledge, with adequate financial resources and even support from various intermediaries. Nonetheless, they lack a deep knowledge of how to develop truly participatory, horizontal, and democratic projects.
- **Disagreements and conflicts.** Disagreements as to the objectives and purposes of the initiatives and the conflicts that result from it may be at the basis of the loss of control on the part of the members of an initiative:

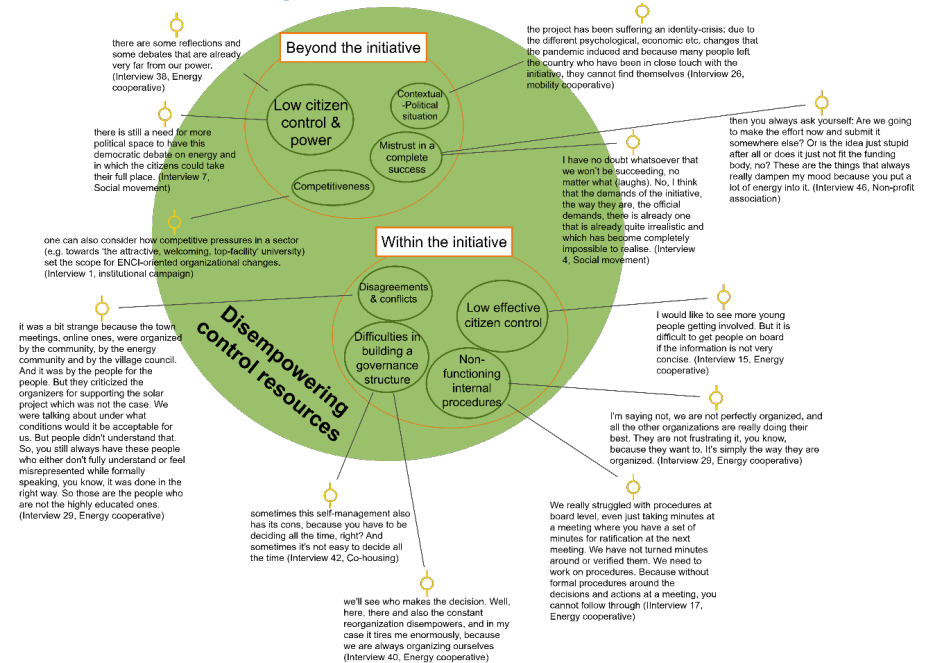
people who are new to it because they just can't have a say in everything yet. And, of course, you might not have such a good basis for decision-making. (...) we're just trying to be aware of that. Somehow it needs to be dealt with. And it probably can't really be prevented. Except to try to really take as much time as possible to pass on knowledge. And not to develop that in any way (Interview 44, non-profit association).

- **Low effective citizen control.** The lack of truly effective control within the institution may also be down to the fact that they question their ability to keep continuously updated on the dynamics of the institution due to the aforementioned lack of time: "any volunteer who combines the follow-up of the initiative with family life, work, follows the information through emails, but cannot get the documents, is not in the day-to-day, loses touch with the working people as they do not see them often" (Interview 39, Energy Cooperative).

In short, the significance of the above reveals that people who participate in ENCI

initiatives experience difficulties and barriers. We intend to stress the problems, while opening your eyes to how these people face them. In a synthetic way, it is evident that once again individual aspects such as time, skills and knowledge are at the basis of people's opportunities to develop autonomous behaviour within initiatives.

Figure 10. (Dis)empowering control resources within and beyond the initiative



What do you think? What are your resources to overcome Disempowerment