



Just Transition Platform – Project fiche:

#BURGERENERGIE

This document is part of a series presenting information and lessons learned on policy approaches at national, regional or local level supporting a just transition to a climate-neutral economy. The Just Transition Platform (JTP) assists EU Member States and regions to unlock the support in this transition. Visit the JTP website: Visit the JTP website: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/just-transition-fund/just-transition-platform_en

Member State:

Belgium

Region:

Flanders

Sector:

Energy

Total project budget (€):

150 000

Financing conditions (co-financing rate):

Subscriptions from the 21 cooperatives

Sources of funding:

No EU funding

National funding:

€ 310 000 over two years

Regional funding:

€ 56 000 per year

Duration:

24 months

Responsible Managing Authority/Agency:

Flemish Ministry of Energy; Federal Energy Transition Fund

Summary

The project #Burgerenergie provides an online platform that informs citizens on how to participate in the energy transition via Renewable Energy Communities. In Flanders, Belgium, there are 21 citizen cooperatives for energy production and energy provision to their members. #Burgerenergie grants the interested public access to the citizen cooperatives and informs which possibilities exist to invest in renewable energy. The project is coordinated by REScoop Vlaanderen, the Flemish federation of citizen cooperatives for renewable energy.

The advantage of the approach of the cooperatives is that the shareholders of the energy production and the users are the same person, so the need to make a profit on the energy supply is limited. The main goal of #Burgerenergie, besides providing citizen with stable energy prices, is to raise awareness on the advantages of citizens ownership of energy supply.

Type of activities:

The platform www.burgerenergie.be is an independent contact point that puts the interests of citizens at the centre of the energy transition. On the website, there is an overview of all cooperatives that are members of the umbrella federation REScoop Vlaanderen, as well as their projects and services. The main goal of the platform is to raise awareness, provide stable energy prices and make sure that the consumer is stimulated for electric cars and heat pumps as they can trust to have a stable energy tariff. Closely related to the platform is the website of the organisation behind #burgerenergie. More information on the energy cooperatives can be found on this webpage: Rescoopv.be.

Goals and approach:

The website offers interested citizens the possibility to engage with the energy cooperatives united under the brand #burgerenergie. At the core of the initiative lies the idea that the participation with the energy cooperatives is simplified for the citizens by having a central platform that offers services and information on the different options. The 'brand' was deliberately created in order to facilitate the awareness-raising and the possibility for citizens to invest in renewable energy. Moreover, the 'ambassadors' were chosen to promote the cause of #burgerenergie in Flanders.

The citizen's engagement with the REScoops is straight-forward: By investing in the REScoops services, the citizen has ownership of the energy used, gets a dividend, and has one vote in the organisation (one vote per shareholder). The REScoops do not build new assets, e.g. wind turbines. In order to get access to the energy supply as such, close collaboration with energy suppliers is a pre-condition.

Important outputs, results or achievements:

So far, 100 000 members have become a part of one of the REScoops united under #Burgerenergie. An important building block has been the achievement of having a consistent communication campaign with the #Burgerenergie logo and brand.

Although the impact of the ambassadors was limited, the approach of having them was nonetheless an important factor that contributed to the unified communication.

Scalability¹ and transferability²:

The #Burgerenergie approach is transferable given that renewable energy cooperatives currently operate in other Member States/regions. Transferability is not determined by the number of cooperatives. However, they must be linked with each other, and provide concise information to the citizens. Moreover, it is crucial that the same terminology is used to achieve an independent brand. In that sense, it is also scalable to a larger level as the number of cooperatives does not limit the project. However, it should be noted that different languages might hamper the establishment of a consistent 'brand' (i.e. as it would be the case when scaling up Burgerenergie to the Belgian national level).

¹ Scalability entails that a policy approach can be adapted to a bigger scale than just the local context.

² Transferability entails that a policy approach can be applicable to a similar setting and replicated.

Key success factors and lessons learnt:

Sector specific information was adapted to inform the public about possible investment opportunities. This redirection of information was possible due to good organisation and lobbying.

Another success factor is that the project enables citizens, who perhaps could not afford to purchase renewable energy solutions, to be a part of energy transition.

Key challenges:

For the energy cooperatives in general, it remains challenging to obtain practical support from different governance levels (i.e. EU, federal, regional, municipal) to further stimulate Renewable Energy Communities.

Another challenge on the ground is the scope of the energy production: there is enough capital available coming from the cooperatives, but the production possibilities are limited.

A more general aspect is the debate on climate change, especially concerning energy transition, and what needs to be done. The focus is often not on informing the general public what they can concretely do to support the energy transition.



Tools or supporting economic diversification and reskilling/upskilling via projects:

- strengthening innovation financing and reduce barriers to investment;
- capitalising on unique regional strengths for innovation;
- enabling citizenship to be a part of energy transition.

Central framework conditions³:

In Belgium there are 41 REScoops, 21 of them are located in Flanders. Those energy cooperatives offer different services that range from energy production, energy supply, heat supply, but also to the sharing of electric cars and guidance for the purchase of solar panels. Moreover, the REScoops supports the renovation, social, just energy transition as well as energy monitoring & studies. Crucial to the set-up of the project in such a way is the access of the different RES to energy projects (on and offshore wind turbines) and supply.

³ Framework conditions encompass the institutional, informational and socio-economic factors that determine a given environment (contextual information), e.g. market conditions, access to finance, tax regulation, infrastructure and support.

Outlook:

The next step for the project is to increase the number of members: the organisers want to attract up to 500 000 members (currently around 100 000 members). To achieve this, it is planned to go further into the general public although this is a difficult audience to target (limited knowledge/awareness of energy communities).

Partners & contacts:

REScoop Vlaanderen

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Overview of all participating citizens' cooperatives:

<https://burgerenergie.be/over-ons/>

Website/Social media:

<https://burgerenergie.be/>

<https://www.instagram.com/burgerenergie/>

<https://www.facebook.com/burgerenergiebe-327557938617698>

<https://twitter.com/BurgerenergieBE>



Sources:

- REScoop Vlaanderen (2022): Burgercoöperaties, <https://burgerenergie.be/over-ons/>.
- REScoop Vlaanderen (2022): Burgerenergie, <https://burgerenergie.be/>.
- REScoop Vlaanderen (2022): Inspirerende Verhalen, <https://burgerenergie.be/nieuws/>.
- REScoop Vlaanderen (2022): Over REScoop Vlaanderen, <https://www.rescoopv.be/over-rescoop-vlaanderen-0>.
- Interview with representative of REScoop Vlaanderen, 1 August 2022.
- Survey input of representative of REScoop Vlaanderen, Summer 2022.