

Regional perspectives on energy citizenship and citizen participation in the energy transition

European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

Regional Workshops: 'Translating Energy Citizenship'

ENERGY
PROSPECTS



Synthesis brief 3

May 2022

Author: Karin Thalberg

In light of the ongoing energy crisis, further aggravated by Vladimir Putin's atrocious invasion of Ukraine, growing attention is brought to the consequences of our fossil fuel dependence as well as to potential solutions. While energy independence, diversification of energy supply, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and increasingly energy sufficiency is being discussed at the highest political level in the European Union¹, questions on what roles citizens play and could play remain largely unanswered. The concept of energy citizenship and the work undertaken in EnergyPROSPECTS serve as an important complement to the current political discourses. It brings attention to the diverse ways in which citizens are or could be participating in the energy transition across the EU.

In the previous two synthesis briefs, our conceptual framework² and ten tentative types of energy citizenship³ were introduced. Yet, we know that policy concepts need to be locally adapted to be relevant across the EU. Additionally, sensitivity to local translation is becoming an acute concern as the European energy transition is at risk of creating a politically, economically, technologically, and socially divided Europe. In this third brief, we therefore present insights from four regional/national workshops held in Wallonia - Belgium, Galicia - Spain, Germany and Hungary between December 2021 and February 2022. The former two had a regional focus, whereas the latter two had a national reach. During the workshops, local experts and practitioners were invited to discuss the concept of energy citizenship, its local translations, our ten tentative types, and also to draw comparisons and explore local conditions. In this brief we will present main takeaways from the workshops.

To learn more about each workshop, please read our blogposts on **Wallonia, Galicia, Germany and Hungary**.

¹ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure, and sustainable energy, 8 March 2022, COM(2022) 108 final.

² Pel, Bonno and Thalberg, Karin. 2022. Synthesis Brief 1: Setting the scene for a critical exploration of the roles of citizens in the European energy transition. European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

³ Debourdeau, Ariane; Schäfer, Martina; and Thalberg, Karin. 2022. Synthesis Brief 2: What do we mean when we talk about energy citizenship? Ten tentative types of citizen involvement in the energy transition. European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

Energy citizenship - towards more inclusive and context-sensitive language

Beyond limited English-speaking academic and policy circles, the term energy citizenship is not widely used. Although the concept was translated into the local language during the workshops, it became clear that the concept is neither obvious nor neutral. A majority of the local experts and practitioners did not use it, and in some cases did not know of its existence. Energy citizenship was largely understood as informed, empowered, and initiative-taking citizens and organisations, thus excluding a large part of the population and, importantly, failing to consider the wider context of barriers that hinder citizens to engage in the transition. One such example, primarily discussed in the Walloon and Hungarian workshops, were socio-economic inequalities and energy poverty. During the Walloon workshop it was noted that while the development of energy cooperatives and prosumerism could bring about a certain degree of democratisation of the energy system, they could also increase the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

This reflection calls for more context sensitive language, which could also serve to apply the democratic and justice-related dimensions of energy citizenship and help empower practitioners in their work. Additionally, it highlights the fact that mechanisms of social justice, burden sharing, redistribution, and solidarity have important roles to play in the energy citizenship landscape.

Local translations of energy citizenship

Wallonia, Belgium -

citoyenneté énergétique

Germany - energiebürgerschaft

Hungary - energia állampolgárság

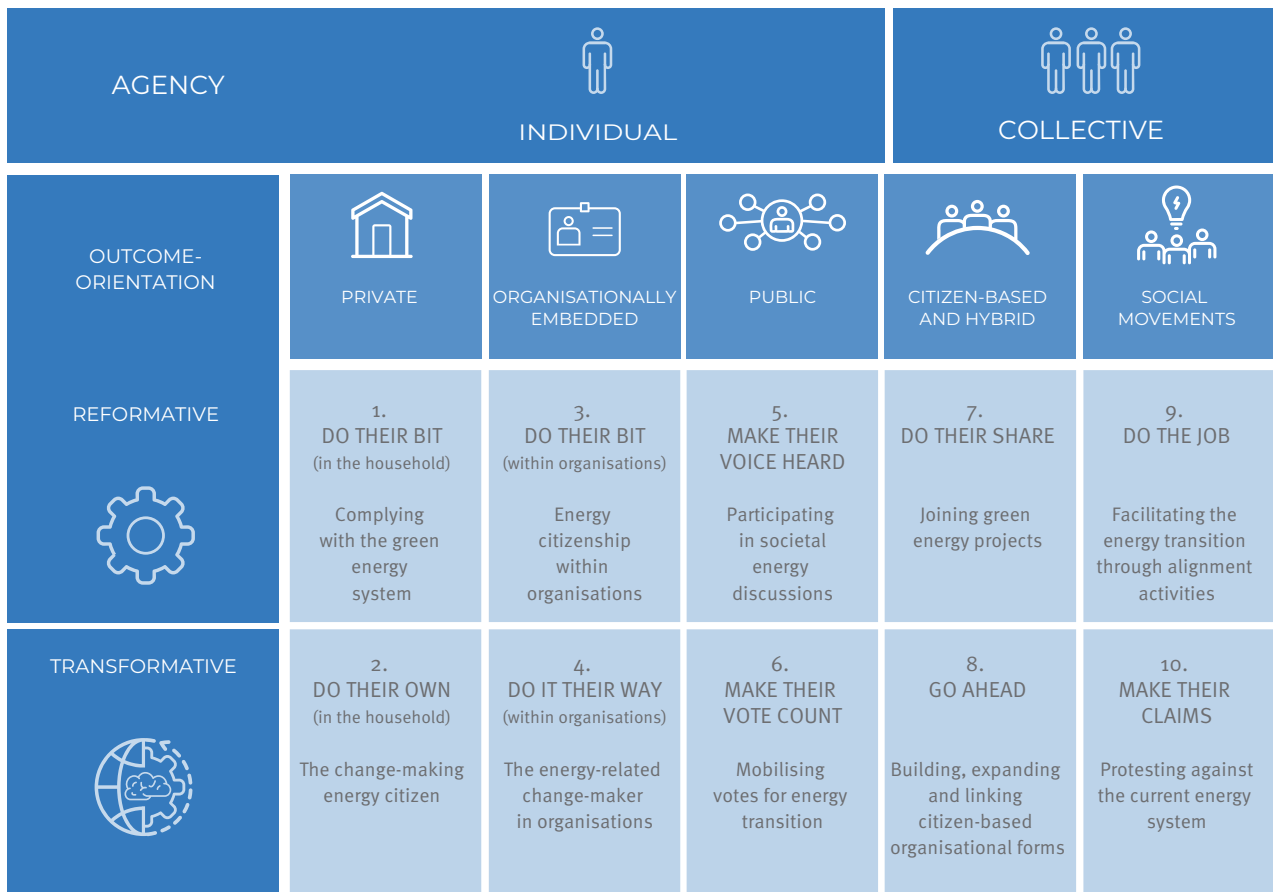
Galicia, Spain -

ciudadania energetica

Energy citizenship in the light of local and national contexts in the energy transition

The four regions and countries explored during the workshops display important differences that impact the development of energy citizenship. As previously mentioned, levels of energy poverty and socio-economic inequalities differ across European contexts, and so do characteristics such as the regional/national energy mix, urbanisation (including the age and spread of housing stock), demography, modes of governance, and civic culture (such as the prominence of cooperatives). Furthermore, Wallonia, Galicia, Hungary, and Germany find themselves in different stages of the energy transition and the prevalence of different types of energy citizenship varies accordingly, both in numbers and in types. While the energy transition in Germany has become quite normalised and accepted, in Galicia and Hungary, for example, workshop participants still considered their regions to be in early phases.

Main takeaways



- Even if the occurrence of different forms of energy citizenship varied between the regions and countries, the workshops showed that the typology (see figure above) provides a set of recognisable and evocative types of citizen involvement in the transition. In the current debate on solutions to decrease European fossil fuel dependence, the types can inform debates on how to support and increase citizen involvement.
- Discussions emerged on the potential hierarchy between transformative and reformative outcomes (see outcome-orientation in the figure above). Transformative outcomes were often interpreted as more “desirable”. This is something to keep in mind in order to avoid any perceived classification of energy citizenship practices. What is considered as reformative or transformative can moreover differ according to the phase in the energy transition that the region finds itself in. The workshops also highlighted that everyone may not have the time, financial resources, awareness, skills, or network to be able to participate in more transformative initiatives, or even in reformative ones. At an aggregated level, however, reformative actions, such as the self-production of renewable energy in the household, can indeed have a transformative impact.
- Another recurring theme was the idea that energy citizenship can refer to both intentions, attitudes, actions, and the effects or outcomes of a certain practice, such as, reduced energy use, energy production, or mobilisation of the public. In the German workshop, it was observed that, while the energy transition generally is widely accepted among the population, only a small minority of the population is actively engaged. This leaves a large space for the emergence of new forms of involvement, which further underlines the potential of our forthcoming context-sensitive analyses of what factors could facilitate the move from attitudes to action in the energy transition.

Coming up from EnergyPROSPECTS

- An international experts' workshop
- A database of 500+ cases of energy citizenship
- 40 in-depth case studies
- An empowerment toolkit for citizens and practitioners
- An exploration of the roles of ICT, business, and social innovation models
- An analysis of political, economic, social, technological, ecological, and legal conditions that enable or hinder energy citizenship at the local, national and EU-level
- Policy recommendations aimed at the local, national and EU-level

Deliverable 2.3 – Regional Workshops: 'Translating Energy Citizenship'

Pel, Bonno; Fransolet, Aurore; Debourdeau, Ariane; Losada Puente, Luisa; Vadovics, Edina; Schäfer, Martina; Vadovics, Kristóf; Farady, Anna; Dumitru, Adina; and Rebollo Quintela, Nuria. 2022. Regional Workshops: 'Translating Energy Citizenship'. EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 2.3, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



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



@EnergyPROSPECTS

www.energyprospects.eu