


# EFFECTIVITY AND LEGITIMACY ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION

## LEGITIVITY,

### PROPOSAL IN RESPONSE TO HORIZON 2020 CALL TOPIC

#### SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES (SSH) ASPECTS OF THE CLEAN-ENERGY TRANSITION

LC-SC3-CC-1-2018-2019-2020

 The consortium members are listed in part A of the proposal (administrative forms). A summary list should also be provided in the table below.

### List of participants

Participant				Country
No. *	organisation name	short name	type	
1	Delft University of Technology ( <i>Coordinator</i> )	TUD	univ.	NL
2	University Institute of Lisbon	ISC	univ.	PT
3	Adam Mickiewicz University	AMU	univ.	PL
4	Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich	ETH	univ.	CH
5	Cardiff University	CFU	univ.	UK
6	University of Leiden	ULN	univ.	NL
7	Society for Sustainable Development Design	DOOR	org.	CR

\* Please use the same participant numbering as that used in the administrative proposal forms.

## 1.1 Objectives

This proposal introduces a **comparative research** of how energy citizenship takes shape in different European countries. The aim is to establish a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, roles and capacities of energy citizens in order to inform legitimate and effective decisions regarding the clean-energy transition. It will do so by **showing the empirical and normative diversity of energy citizenship**, by which we respectively mean the different real-life manifestations of energy citizenship initiatives and the different moral principles that underlie the activities and motivations of these initiatives. With that, the project will provide **new ways to**

**conceptualise energy citizenship** that will help achieve a just and sustainable Energy Union. It will do so by the empirical operationalisation of concepts derived from political philosophy, so that these are adapted to real-life experiences and practical policy needs. As such, the project bridges gaps between different academic disciplines so to come with fine grained practical recommendations on how to make decisions about the clean-energy transition more responsive to societal demands.

Practitioners have expressed the need to understand how they can increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of their decisions regarding the clean-energy transition and their interactions with energy citizens. There are fundamental questions about how to decide which groups and persons are to be included (or excluded) in decision-making, this has to do with the presence of given different understandings of citizenship and democratic legitimacy. It also relates to the different territorial and governmental levels that decisions about the clean-energy transition pertain to. The project will directly respond to this need by **informing decision-makers how they can learn from energy citizenship initiatives** given the societal legitimacy and effectiveness of their decisions. Furthermore, the project allows decision-makers to navigate their decisions regarding the clean-energy transition while accounting for an empirical and normative diversity of conceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness of these decisions, with the project will allow for the **harnessing of empirical and normative diversity**.

### 1.3 Concept and methodology

In the new Green Deal of the European Union, it is emphasized that the transition towards a clean-energy economy must be just and inclusive. It must put people first, and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges. As the European Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simon, has recently claimed: *citizens have to take ownership over the transition*. But what is to be just and inclusive, if there are many different conceptions of what is legitimacy as well as there are various conceptions of who is to be seen as a citizen and who is not. Moreover how can citizens take ownership over systems that are technically and institutional complex as energy systems? What kind of decisions would be effective given the challenge that the clean-energy transition presents?

To set the stage for our project, we have approached parties that are involved in the energy transition as institutional or corporate actors and asked them about what research on energy citizenship should provide. In their answers these practitioners very much underlined the importance of these questions. They appear to be in need in finding out how to reach out to citizens in a meaningful way, so that collaborative goals can be set and committed to.

In this, institutional and corporate actors face two challenges that cannot be sufficiently coped with by social sciences and humanities (SSH) that are currently in use. The first of these challenges relates to the *heterogeneity of energy citizenship*.

- There may be *many roles* that members of the public-at-large can assume to act their role as energy citizens. Not only can they become active as early technology adopters or

environmental activists or remain passive as consumers or voters, they can also for instance start protest against policies, plans or projects, they can join participatory arrangements that relate to certain decisions about the clean-energy transition, or they can decide to contribute to the transition by changing their daily practices.

- Energy citizens may also forward a *diversity of assessments* regarding the desirability of the decisions that are taken to further the clean-energy transition. They may be supportive of, critical about, or opposed to specific decisions, they may have various ideas about the application of specific technological systems or about the institutional arrangements these systems are provided.
- The assessments that are forwarded by energy citizens are not fixed, instead they are usually *articulated as reactions to decisions* taken by institutional and corporate actors, such assessments may also change over time, as citizens acquire more knowledge and insight.

In other words, energy citizenship is a phenomenon that can be characterized by a huge amount of empirical and normative diversity, and there may be no straightforward way to harness these forms of diversity.

The second challenge is formed by the *different scales* that are at play in decisions about the clean-energy transition. Policies, plans and projects are usually interconnected and have temporal and spatial effects that cannot be dealt with in existing judicial settings. This makes it hard to target the right scale of communities or societies that can be considered stakeholders with regards to a certain decision. Another implication of the multi-scale impacts of such decisions is that it is not a straightforward issue to decide about the effectiveness of a certain decision. The effectiveness may concern the decision itself taken as a discrete entity, but it also may concern the contribution of this decision to the overall transition, which, in turn, can for instance be assessed in terms of specified targets or in terms of behavioural change. As such, the decision-making context can be said to mirror the empirical and normative diversity of energy citizenship.

This presence of diversity compels decision-makers to make trade-offs not only between competing goals, but also between different understandings of which decisions are considered legitimate and effective. In turn, understandings of what are legitimate decisions are based on understandings of what forms of citizenship are legitimate and effective. The interrelation between energy citizens and institutional and corporate actors proves to be reciprocal, with all kinds of dynamic and nested forms of interplay.

These characteristics of energy citizenship vis-à-vis institutional and corporate decision-makers make it hard to deploy conventional approaches developed within SSH research. As these approaches usually assume a static account of citizenship, for instance by expecting citizens to have fixed or stable preferences and values or by expecting communities to act as homogeneous bodies. Moreover, existing SSH approaches tend to single out specific groups of citizens, such as those citizens that join participatory settings or those citizens that are involved in social innovation.

Another point that needs to be raised is that in SSH on the role of society in the clean-energy transition, there is little uptake of insights from the humanities. There are fine-grained descriptions of the activities and roles of the actors involved in the clean-energy transition, but the normative and political principles that underlie these activities and roles are often dealt with in a somewhat

shallow manner. The notion of ‘energy citizenship’ has not been rooted in broader philosophical accounts of citizenship, which allows for the reproduction of rather crude classifications of which decisions and which forms of citizenship are considered to be legitimate or desirable. This prevents the development of normative frameworks that support institutional and corporate decision-makers in increasing the legitimacy and effectiveness of their decisions.

Thirdly, the literature on learning as developed in SSH research, mostly focuses on reaching singular outcomes, for instance by implementing consensus-seeking strategies. Such strategies fit the goal of collaborative goal setting and commitment, but they often do so by sacrificing the attention for normative and empirical diversity in order for direct results. Given the persistence of this diversity, this sacrifice will in all likelihood work counterproductively. Decisions need to be taken by acknowledging, instead of avoiding the plurality of manifestations of energy citizenship and the plurality of normative convictions that underlie such citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

This project will overcome these problems by delivering the following outcomes:

- First, the project will develop an *account of citizenship* that is rooted in political theory, but which will be enriched by empirical elaborations.
- Second, it will describe energy citizenship as a phenomenon that is *dynamic, heterogeneous and related to specific institutional contexts and decisions*.
- Third, the project will develop *insights and frameworks* that allow institutional and corporate actors to deal with the *normative and empirical diversity of energy citizenship*.
- Fourth, the project will come with *practical recommendations* about how to come to more legitimate and effective decisions regarding the clean-energy transition based on the learnings from the project.

These outcomes will be based on the following research activities:

- We will examine and identify how in different European States *specific patterns of energy citizenship* emerge as societal initiatives in reaction to (planned) energy policies and projects;
- We will identify which *conceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness* are maintained by energy citizens and by institutional and corporate actors.
- We will study how *collaborative goal setting and commitments* can be pursued *while accounting for the normative and empirical diversity* of energy citizenship.
- We will *generalise our findings*, so that these are applicable in a variety of institutional settings.

Below we will introduce our conceptual starting points. First, we will elaborate on our theoretical approach to *citizenship*, second, we will discuss our empirical domain which is that of *energy citizen initiatives*, and third we will describe the goal of the project which is to *facilitate learning* about which actions and decisions can be considered more legitimate and effective with regards to the clean-energy transition.

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<sup>1</sup> Some references need to be included here.

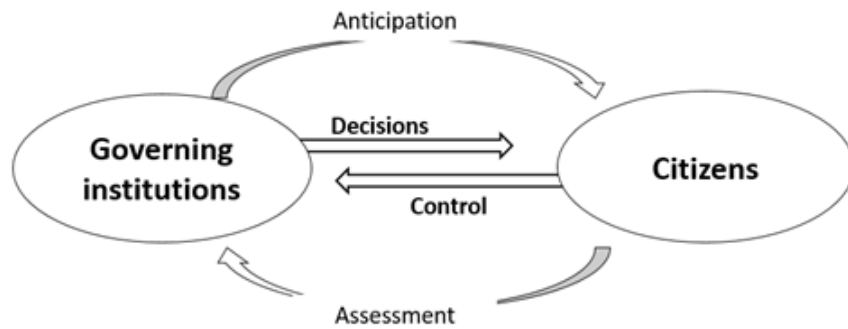
## Citizenship

The point of departure of the project is the classic Aristotelian account citizens are seen as those ‘who are able and willing to rule and be ruled’. In modern democracies, this conception of citizenship has been formed by implementing *a distribution of authority*. The actors that rule work for institutions that have the authority to impose decisions that affect society as a whole. These decisions have to follow the demands of those who are ruled, society itself has the authority to control the governing institutions. Such control is formalised in the capacity of citizens to vote during periodical elections, but this is far from the way in which citizens exert control over the authoritative institutions. They are also involved, for instance, in ongoing informal societal debates about the desirability and legitimacy of the actions and decisions of the authoritative institutions.

This depiction of citizenship stresses two aspects of the relation between citizens and governing institutions, namely that of *societal assessment* and that of *societal responsiveness*. With respect to assessment, it can be said that, besides elections and taking part in debates, there are many different ways in which citizens can articulate and forward such assessment. This explains the empirical diversity that is key to the proposed project, citizenship is not confined to one format in which citizens can express their assessment. This empirical diversity is matched, and partly explained, by the diversity of decision-making processes and arrangements. The authoritative institutions are not a fixed ruling class, but they are composed by governance structures that include both public and private organisations, as well as it may include a variety of jurisdictions at different levels. As such, the assessments of citizens target a plurality of overlapping decisions, which makes it hard to associate societal assessment with discrete decisions made by governing institutions. Instead, there is an unstable patchwork of decisions that trigger citizens to actively forward a certain assessment.

Similar to the fact that there is not one way in which energy citizens can organise their assessment, there is also no unequivocal expression of what societal demand is. There are many different ways to synthesise the demands of individual members of society into the demand of society as a whole, running from procedures like the majority rule to ambiguous conceptions of the public opinion. In fact, a public debate can be most basically seen as the confrontation of different assessments for which the spokesmen have the aspiration to turn it into the dominant societal assessment. Added to this is that it is no straightforward matter to draw the boundaries of society, especially in the case of the clean-energy transition which pertains to a patchwork of jurisdictions.

In order to comply with societal demand, decision-makers have to know what the public wants, a necessity that is fundamentally complicated by the empirical diversity of the way in which the assessments of citizens are organised, the normative diversity of their assessments and the fact that these assessments are usually formed after a decision has been made. As such, decision-makers can only *anticipate* the assessment of citizens, the perceived effectiveness of their decisions is very much based on the roles, responsibilities, and agency bestowed upon those people who will have to deal with the energy system, as consumers, users, citizens or otherwise.



### Energy citizenship initiatives

The forms in which citizens organise their assessment with regards to decisions about the clean-energy transition will be seen here as *energy citizen initiatives*, which are defined as those citizen groups that *involve a degree of collectively developing ways of actively participating in transitioning aspects of the energy system to a low-carbon model*.

From literature, an initial classification of such energy citizen initiatives can be derived.<sup>2</sup>

- First, there are those citizens ‘invited’ to speak out in participatory settings.<sup>3</sup> To a significant extent, such invited participation can be seen as the conventional approach to involve citizens in order to collect societal assessment. In this, the initiation and organisation usually lies with the institutional and corporate actors, still members of the public-at-large have to become active as citizens if they ‘accept’ their invitation.
- Second, there are activists and protestors who endorse or oppose certain energy policies.<sup>4</sup> Such citizenship can take shape as social movements, but societal controversies appear to be increasingly facilitated and structured by the workings of digital media.
- Third, there are citizens who have come to produce their own energy as communities or co-operations.<sup>5</sup> There are also many social innovation projects that can be seen as belonging to this type of energy citizen initiatives. Their main characteristic is that citizens organise themselves in order to change practices of consumption and production, contributing to the overall transition.
- Fourth, there are the day-to-day energy citizens, who pursue energy policy goals in everyday practices. This category of energy citizens may be harder to both characterise and identify, as it its very essence that it includes members of the public-at-large that aim to contribute to the clean-energy transition by changing their daily routines without making these changes explicit in broader public contexts. The assessment of these day-to-day energy citizens can be said to be tacit, but still it might be substantial.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Devine-Wright, 2012. Other systematic accounts are offered by Cass & Walker (2007) and Devine-Wright (2007)

<sup>3</sup> Wynne, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Cuppen, Brunsting, Pesch, & Feenstra, 2015; Cuppen, Pesch, Remmerswaal, & Taanman, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Bergman, Markusson, Connor, Middlemiss, & Ricci, 2010; Sekulova, Anguelovski, Argüelles, & Conill, 2017; Smith, Hargreaves, Hielscher, Martiskainen, & Seyfang, 2016.

There may be other manifestations of energy citizen initiatives that need to be accounted for. It will be part of the research to identify and categorise such initiatives.

The members of these energy citizen initiatives are considered to be motivated and informed by their experiences with energy systems, they have their *energy biographies* which are formed by the various roles, practices and relationships regarding the technical and institutional elements of the production, distribution and consumption of energy. The biographies shape expectations about the capacities and conditions that future energy systems need to fulfil.

It is important to note that such biographies not only pertain to the roles as users or consumers, but also pertains to the *interactions* that citizens have had with the organisations and institutions that are part of the energy system. Such interactions will constitute expectations about reliability and responsibility that are essential for the citizen's future orientations with regards to the clean-energy transition.

Next of being motivated by their energy biographies, members of energy citizen initiatives are also expected to be driven by their ideas about what legitimate decisions are within the field of energy. Their belief in how authoritative decisions can be legitimately decided upon, which actors have the right to make authoritative decisions, what is considered to be fair or just, what concerns and values are to be taken into account, and whose concerns and values are to be taken into account. One may consider that the core of societal legitimacy is represented by the community as a whole, or that it can be derived by aggregating individual preferences. One may think that governments are justified to pursue certain decisions, because they have the electoral mandate to do so or to prevent future ecological disasters. These claims about legitimacy are derived from conviction about what society is, what it ought to be, and which direction society should be steered at. As there is no empirical entity that can be identified as society, these convictions only exist as *imaginaries*. They are beliefs that are often unarticulated, but which motivate individual citizens to become active in forwarding their own viewpoints.

A third point to take into account here follows John Dewey's claims that 'publics' emerge as a reaction to certain socio-political issues.<sup>6</sup> When citizens consider themselves to be affected by a certain decision or development, they will get engaged, for instance by forming a protest group, starting a social movement or energy co-operative.<sup>7</sup> It needs to be emphasized that such collective mobilisation may take place at different territorial scales ranging from regional protests against wind farms, national debates on nuclear energy and international movements that address global climate change. Moreover, there may not always be a clear identifiable decision that creates an 'issue', it may also be the absence of a decision that motivates people to mobilise themselves or it may be events taking place elsewhere that 'spill over' and instigate new forms of citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

To some extent, it is in their reaction to a decision or event that, given the expectations that are motivated by energy biographies and convictions that are embedded in imaginaries, citizens become active in energy citizen initiatives. This shows that energy citizenship initiatives are not to

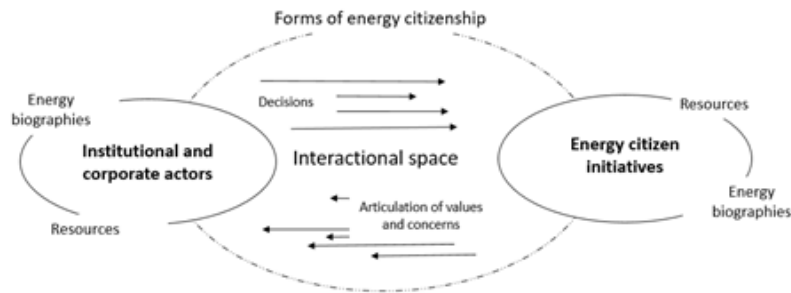
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<sup>6</sup> Dewey, 1927; Marres, 2007; Pesch, 2019

<sup>7</sup> De Bakker, Lagendijk, & Wiering, 2020

<sup>8</sup> Cuppen et al. 2020.

be seen as distinct from existing institutional contexts and decisions, but that they pertain directly to the interactions of citizens and decision-makers. Energy citizen initiatives can be said to further *shape the interactional space* in which institutional and corporate actors propose decisions intended to give shape to the future energy system, and citizens articulate the values and concerns that they consider should be accounted for in these decisions.



### Learning for legitimacy and effectiveness

Regarding the motivations and actions of institutional and corporate actors, we assume a *strong symmetry* with the action and motivations of energy citizen initiatives. Also decision-makers are guided in their anticipations by their own specific energy biographies and their imaginaries about what society is, ought to be, or ought to do. The energy biographies, institutional and corporate actors will not be solely formed by everyday experiences, but also by professional interest and expertise knowledge. Having said that, also their expectations about the capacities and restrictions of future energy systems will be derived from these experiences. The legitimacy and effectiveness of the energy system that needs to be developed in order to pursue a clean-energy transition is very much based on their biographies. Also here the energy biographies include the roles that are expected to be taken by citizens. In their anticipation to the citizens assessments, institutional and corporate actors will entertain imaginaries that involve convictions about which forms and which expressions of citizenship can be considered to be legitimate.

It seems that often the anticipations of institutional and corporate actors do not acknowledge the normative and empirical diversity of energy citizenship. This gives rise to decisions that are based on schematic and/or restricted conceptions of what society is and what it wants. To overcome these tendencies, this project aims to facilitate *learning that informs anticipation*. In this, institutional and corporate actors can learn from energy citizen initiatives what range of societal assessments is maintained and how these various societal assessments can be positioned against the background of wider empirical and normative diversity.

Learning for normative and empirical diversity is conceptualised as follows within this project. Energy citizen initiatives forward their values and concerns, following the decisions of institutional and corporate actors. These values and concerns are derived from conceptions about legitimate and effective decisions that are informed by their energy biographies that have been formed by concrete practices that take place within specific institutional settings on the one hand and by beliefs as well



as their convictions about what is a legitimate and effective decision and a legitimate and effective way to forward a societal assessment on the other hand.

Learning then takes place at different levels.

- Firstly, energy citizens and institutional/corporate actors may *create awareness* about plurality of conceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness as well as the heterogeneity in which these conceptions are forwarded by energy citizens. This allows these actors to understand their own assumptions vis-à-vis the assumptions of others, so that incorrect beliefs about the motivations and capacities of other actors can be overcome.
- Secondly, with this awareness actors may *engage in meaningful interaction*, which allows them to forward their own assumptions and convictions more clearly and effectively, to understand the assumptions and convictions of others and to discuss contrasts, differences and overlaps in a constructive manner.
- Thirdly, actors can develop *concrete interventions* that take account of the normative and empirical diversity. In this, not only new values and concerns by energy citizen initiatives widens the scope of considerations to be taken into account while making decisions, also the conceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness that underlie these values and concerns are taken into consideration. As such, the quality of decision-making can be improved as it is informed by a wider set of factual and moral considerations.<sup>9</sup>

The project will facilitate these forms of learning by setting up a series of workshops in which members of energy citizen initiatives and institutional/corporate actors are invited to engage in learning processes. To facilitate learning we will develop a *normative framework* for legitimacy and efficiency that helps to structure these workshops. This framework will be derived from our empirical studies into energy citizen initiatives and our retrieval of imaginaries of legitimacy and effectiveness.

The design of these workshops is firmly based on the symmetry of the actors involved, they should be facilitated to hold a meaningful dialogue. This prompts for a narrative (or hermeneutic) approach, in the sense that the dialogue can be connected to the energy biographies of the actors.

We will apply and develop methods that fit these design requirements. In this there will not be a singular method, as given the differences of institutional and cultural contexts, approaches that are adapted to these contexts need to be deployed.

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<sup>9</sup> Stirling (2008).

