

Project proposal for Horizon 2020 call topic CC-1-2020, Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) aspects of the Clean-Energy Transition

Making Sense of Energy Citizenship : Anticipating and Learning for legitimacy

Decision makers in the clean-energy transition are confronted by a dilemma. On the one hand, they recognize the need to make decisions that are *societally legitimate*, i.e., to align with demands of democracy and effectiveness. On the other hand, they never know what retrieve societal legitimacy precisely is, instead decision-makers can only measure *public acceptance*.

Measuring public acceptance is done by looking at the behaviour of active citizens. One may think here of the resistance of societal groups or of the outcomes of participatory methods. However, such assessments are only a static and partial expressions of societal legitimacy. In other words, the dilemma between legitimacy and acceptance comes down to a difference between 'what society wants' and 'what certain members of society say is acceptable'. You want to know the first, but you can only the second.

The dilemma between legitimacy and acceptance can be approached more effectively if decision-makers *anticipate* the responses of citizens and allow themselves to *learn* from these responses. The project will develop new methods, frameworks and insights that allow for anticipation and learning.

We will provide tools that help decision-makers to understand societal legitimacy, meaning that they are better equipped to deal with the following questions:

- Why do citizens mobilize themselves?
- What patterns of active citizenship can be identified?
- How do such active citizen groups relate to proposed policies and projects and to society at large?
- How can interactions with citizens be organized in a societal legitimate way?
- What kind of responses to active citizens are likely to be considered as legitimate?

Understanding these questions have major practical implications. They allow for: 1) energy policies and projects that are better informed by societal assessments; 2) more effective organization of interactions with citizens; 3) a transition that is more societally responsive.

To sharpen the focus of our proposal, it would be very helpful if you could share practical insights that are based on your own experience. Hence, we would be interested in your responses to the following questions.

- Which methods do you currently use to know 'what society wants' or 'what a section of society accepts' with regards to proposed energy policies and projects?
- What are the benefits and shortcomings of these methods?
- What would help to overcome the shortcomings?