

The NEWCOMERS project explores the following aspects of new clean energy communities' operations:



NEWCOMERS - opening the dialogue



Dr. Julia Blasch,
project coordinator,
Vrije Universiteit
Amsterdam

VIDEO →

The NEWCOMERS project studies new clean energy communities, which we define as associations of actors engaged in energy system transformation through collective, participatory and engaging processes, seeking collective outcomes. This definition of new clean energy communities includes the whole spectrum from local and citizen-led initiatives to virtual communities and municipal or commercially-driven initiatives.

I am glad to share with you the project's first digital newsletter. The NEWCOMERS team explores which types of communities within this spectrum have the greatest potential to stimulate a rapid decarbonisation while creating new values for community members and society.

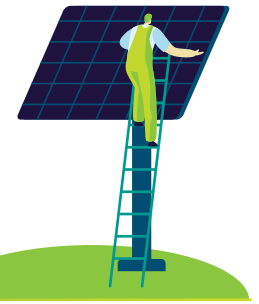
Our team includes scholars from various disciplines looking at new clean energy communities from different viewpoints. This diversity of angles allows us to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the role the new clean energy communities play in the energy transitions in Europe.

Learning is a central theme in our research and also an important project goal. We aim to stimulate knowledge sharing, by involving more than 10 energy communities and a variety of stakeholders from 6 EU countries in our research.

In this first newsletter, we open the dialogue: with our participating energy communities, our stakeholders, with you and everyone who is interested in exploring new clean energy communities with us.



The NEWCOMERS mission and objectives



The mission of our project is to deliver practical recommendations in terms of how the European Union as well as national and local governments can support new clean energy communities (**'newcomers'**) to help them flourish and unfold their potential benefits for citizens and the Energy Union. We fulfil this mission using an interdisciplinary approach and by actively involving research participants in the design and implementation of the research.

As part of our project activities, we aim to:

- provide **a novel theoretical framework based on polycentric governance theory, socio-technical systems theory** and social practice theory, through which the emergence and diffusion of 'newcomers' can be analysed and opportunities for learning in polycentric settings can be explored;
- develop **a typology of new clean energy community business models** which allows to assess the different types of value created by 'newcomers' on the basis of the three pillars of business model design - value proposition, value creation and delivery, and value capture;
- identify the **types of clean energy communities that perform best along a variety of dimensions**, such as citizen engagement, value creation, and learning, and their potential to address energy poverty, while being based on sustainable business models;
- investigate the **regulatory, institutional and social conditions**, at the national and local level which are favourable for the emergence, operation and further diffusion of new clean energy communities;
- explore **how new clean energy communities are designed in line with their members' (i.e. citizens' and consumers') needs**;
- offer citizens and members of new clean energy communities a **new online platform 'Our-energy.eu'** on which interested citizens and communities can connect and share best practices.

Three deliverables available that prepared the ground for our ongoing research

The original files are available on our webpage www.newcomersH2020.eu



VIDEO →

PDF →

*Nicolien van der Grijp, Daniel Petrovics,
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*



VIDEO →

PDF →

*Maša Mlinarič,
GEN-I*



VIDEO →

*Mojca Drevenšek,
Consensus Communications*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOCUSING ON LEARNING IN POLYCENTRIC SETTINGS

- provides the theoretical underpinning of the NEWCOMERS project, including the key concepts and definitions as well as the formulation of research propositions;
- it develops a novel theoretical framework based on polycentric governance theory, combined with elements from socio-technical systems theory, social innovation theory, and value theory.

TYPOLGY OF NEW CLEAN ENERGY COMMUNITIES

- provides an overview of new types of clean energy communities for the consideration of project colleagues, policymakers and practitioners;
- it covers the main energy services and gives examples of five main types of emerging innovative energy community business models, and at the same time, tries to assess the potential for wider impact as well as future learning potential.

OUR-ENERGY.EU DIGITAL PLATFORM

- reports on the implementation of the 1st phase of the Our-Energy.eu digital platform, i.e. the NEWCOMERS project website www.newcomersH2020.eu;
- the goals and key educational, awareness-raising and networking functionalities of the 2nd phase of the project are described.

NEWCOMERS Scientific Advisory Board

The NEWCOMERS project is proud to present its external **Scientific Advisory Board (SAB)** that provides expert advice on the project as a whole and on individual tasks. The SAB consists of three members with expert knowledge on energy communities, and prominent roles with respect to national and international policy making in this field.

Among them is **Dr. Andrej Gubina**, Head of the Laboratory of Energy Policy and Associated Professor at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Electrical Engineering.

In this interview, he offers his insights into the importance of energy communities for the achievement of energy transitions in Europe.



INTERVIEW WITH
Dr. Andrej Gubina

Consumer motivation is key

VIDEO →



■ ■ ■ The NEWCOMERS project explores various aspects of new clean energy communities' operations. How do you see the status quo of energy communities in Europe?

The position of energy communities has been strengthened with the Clean Energy for All Europeans package, which was passed in May 2019. In the two years allotted to the Member States for the transposition of the directives into the national legislation, we can already observe some early developments, with some states like Belgium, Greece and Slovenia introducing laws supporting the establishment of energy communities, while in others such as Austria, France, and Germany the legislative process has started.

■ ■ ■ What do you see as the potential role of energy communities for the achievement of Europe's energy transition?

Energy communities were designed in the EU to accelerate the deployment of decentralized renewable energy sources but are also associated with an important notion of democratisation of energy

supply. Consumers were rightly designated as 'the final frontier' in the quest for an increased flexible operation of the power system and its operation closer to the limits without the sacrifice of the security of energy supply, so their motivation is key.

With the falling costs of local electricity generation and storage technology in the developed countries we can observe a new trend. Consumers who turned into prosumers do not invest in these technologies for economic reasons only but also choose to cooperate with their neighbours to build more resilient communities and to improve the quality of life for their families.

■ ■ ■ What do you think are the key opportunities and obstacles for the flourishing of European energy communities?

The Clean Energy legislative package defines the terms 'renewable energy communities - REC' and 'citizen ener-

Prosumers choose to cooperate with their neighbours to build more resilient communities and to improve the quality of life for their families.

gy communities - CEC' permitting citizens to become part of the energy system. While RECs focus on the expansion of renewables, CECs are an organisational concept enabling legal entities to engage in a myriad of activities typically covered by many other actors, e.g.

generation, distribution, supply, consumption, aggregation, energy storage, energy efficiency services or charging services for electric vehicles.

Their key role is the provision of various energy services to their members or shareholders to bring about environmental, economic or social community benefits rather than financial profits. They are considered a non-commercial market player, so it is very important that Member States design a framework under which energy communities can be run without discrimination.

■ ■ ■ The NEWCOMERS project focuses on multiple dimensions of energy communities such as technologies used,




We are honoured to have three outstanding scholars on our NEWCOMERS Scientific Advisory Board:

- **Prof. Lucia Reisch**
[Copenhagen Business School](#).
- **Prof. Patrick Devine-Wright**
[University of Exeter](#)
and
- **Prof. Andrej Gubina**
[University of Ljubljana](#).

You can find more information about their respective expertise on the NEWCOMERS website <https://www.newcomersh2020.eu/project-organisation#scientific-advisory-board>

business models applied, enabling regulatory contexts, and social interactions. Which dimensions are most important / innovative in your view?

As electrical engineers, we are trained to design technical systems, optimize them and run them efficiently. But only later we learn that in addition to technical details, economics and regulatory aspects are just as important. Social aspects, on the other hand, remain elusive – but this is the gist of community building and the key to reaping the benefits beyond what is possible through purely technical and economic measures. The NEWCOMERS project has set its sights on this social dimension and provides a much-needed cooperation space for sociologists, economists and engineers to work together on community-building issues.

 The main aim of the EU H2020 COMPILE project you are coordinating is to show the opportunities of energy islands for the decarbonisation of energy supply, community building and the creation of environmental and so-

cioeconomic benefits. How do you see the potential synergies between the COMPILE and NEWCOMERS projects? COMPILE is a demonstration project in which energy community building and operation tools are designed, deployed and used in order to build renewable energy communities. It is focusing on energy islands – the areas of the power system with low security of energy supply – yet the key innovation is in the social dimension.

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The energy communities built in COMPILE range from nascent to mature, from a single multi-owner dwelling to a whole town, and are being fostered by a grid operator, a commercial actor or are set up as a cooperative.

What these different constellations/groupings of actors have in common is that energy communities need a strong social network to operate and prosper. As a consequence, both the COMPILE and NEWCOMERS teams will have the opportunity to share ideas, experiences and learn from each other. Therefore, I am very happy to be able to serve as a member of the Scientific Advisory Board in NEWCOMERS.

The **NEWCOMERS Stakeholder Advisory Board** so far consists of 10 experts and practitioners working in the energy community sector.

The StAB's mission is to ensure the relevance of our research throughout the project and to contribute to the innovation management activities.

NEWCOMERS Stakeholder Advisory Board

consists of, amongst others:

Representatives or members of the case study communities, amongst which

- **Ms. Simone de Jong**, Netherlands
- **Dr. Mary Gillie**, UK
- **Mr. Roman Höller**, Germany
- **Mr. Marcus Larsson**, Sweden
- **Mr. Santino Smedile**, Italy

An energy and climate policy-science expert

- **Dr. Danijel Crnčec**, Slovenia

An expert for group facilitation processes and participatory leadership

- **Ms. Natalija Vrhunc**, Slovenia

An energy market and policies expert

- **Ms. Chiara Ferracioli**

We expect that the StAB will welcome additional members in the next few months.

How NEWCOMERS engages with energy communities



PROJECT TIMELINE - key milestones in engaging with energy communities

1.



March and April 2020:

Introductory virtual meetings with energy communities.

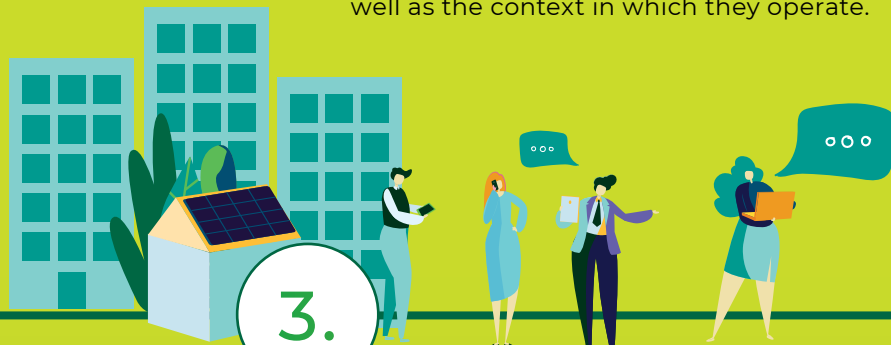
2.



Postponed:

Dialogue sessions to collectively deconstruct the purpose and activities of energy communities as well as the context in which they operate.

3.



April to Autumn 2020:

Interviews with diverse community participants, to gather insights into their business models, ways of working and knowledge and skills, as well as enabling and disabling conditions and gender equality issues within communities.

4.



Planned from Summer to Autumn 2020:

Survey and interviews with members of energy communities, to get a deeper understanding of member roles, relationships, skills, practices.

5.



Winter 2021:

2nd round of dialogue sessions, to bring together practitioners, members, and interested partners to share project outcomes and assess the potential to scale-up. Reflect on the findings from the previous steps, to the benefit of the communities themselves.



Researching during a pandemic



Dr. Jake Barnes,
Environmental
Change Institute,
University of Oxford

VIDEO →

As I write this the epicentre of the global pandemic appears to be moving from Europe to the USA. Nearly all European governments have implemented social distancing measures, fundamentally altering the way we live and work. As academics, we are relatively fortunate in our work. Much of our research is carried out behind a desk and just as readily undertaken from home as the office. Yet, there are clearly limits to what can be achieved in this way.

The truth - and possibly less vocalised 'secret' - of impactful research is that we draw much of our strength not from chin scratching or number crunching in isolation but through engaging with others, be they policy-makers, businesses, NGOs, charities, citizens, users and communities. Only through working with, listening and responding to diverse groups can relevant, timely insights be developed and shared. In the NEWCOMERS project, this co-creative spirit sits centre stage. How we achieve it whilst maintaining social distancing presents a new challenge.

In January 2020 we began planning our engagement with energy communities across Europe. Multiple conversations were underway, with diverse potential communities from each of our six partner countries. Seventeen communities saw value in our proposed research, suggested further avenues to explore and, crucially, agreed to join us in our research endeavour. Early discussions suggested formally kicking off these multiple collaborations with open, participatory dialogues. Interviews, focus groups and surveys of community members would then follow and further participatory dialogues were to round off our collaboration, sharing lessons learned, generating further insights and forming policy recommendations. But so much for planning. Congregations of any size are out of the question. So, what now?

Thankfully, we are at the beginning of our collaboration. We have time to revise and explore. For the time being just talking with one another is important, as is understanding how community lives and activity might have been impacted by covid-19 and government responses to it. Digital platforms are a second key element. They allow us to start productive dialogues, if not with the same number and breadth of participants as we might have hoped for with physical workshops.

During April we are holding virtual workshops with all our community collaborators. They have got off to a good start and have helped solidify working relationships. It cannot be emphasised how important this is. Without a strong, reciprocal foundation, based on trust and shared ambitions, it is hard to understand the innovative nature of community activity, nor the challenging conditions they face, let alone develop insights that might facilitate scaling up activity or challenging policy. We hope to begin conducting interviews remotely in the coming weeks (April and May), where community participants have the time and space.

Moving forwards, we hope to continue this flexible, open and collaborative approach whilst being mindful of changing circumstances and the abilities and pressures of community participants.

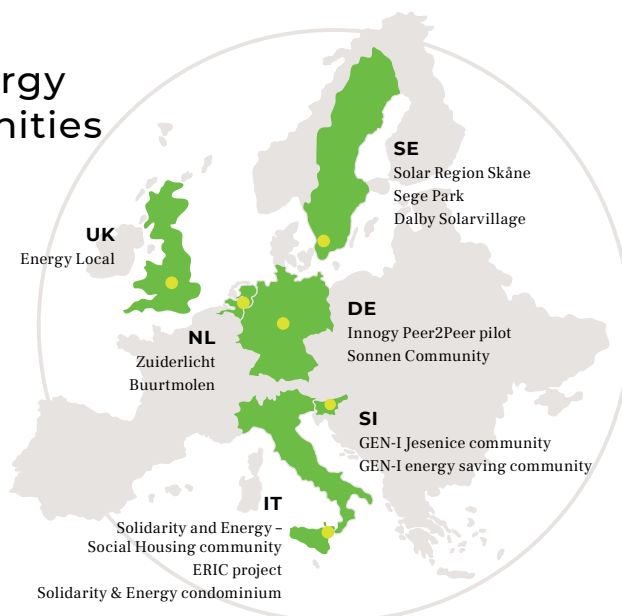
In these extraordinary times, I am reminded of how important collaboration is and I remain extremely grateful for the willingness, intrigue and passion of diverse communities to get involved. Thanks.

Written: 7 April 2020



Virtual meeting with the Slovenian energy community GEN-I Jesenice.

Our energy communities





PROSEU-Workshop: Mainstreaming prosumer business models

Daniel Petrovics & Dr. Jake Barnes

How can the active participation of citizens in energy transitions be mainstreamed? What is the future of prosumer business models? These questions set the tone during the first in a series of online workshops, held on the 25th of March 2020. Organized by the PROSEU (Prosumers for the Energy Union) project, the aim of the series is to build a roadmap for mainstreaming prosumerism in the European energy system until 2050. Dan Petrovics and Jacob Barnes joined the workshop on behalf of the NEWCOMERS project.

The workshop was kicked off by Donal Brown, University of Leeds, who introduced the diversity of prosumer business models the PROSEU project has identified and discussed how the needs of communities and the energy grid can be balanced in the future. Jeffrey Hardy set out some of the challenges in store for prosumer business models and for innovation within energy systems. He argued that although many businesses have high ambitions and display innovative intent, once they pass through the complex and often contradictory regulatory framework of energy markets, most business models come out looking the same, because this is the only viable model under the current arrangements. Changing energy policy and regulations is the only way of unblocking this situation. Directly confronting this challenge, Kristian Petrick, eco-union, introduced the updated renewable energy directive (RED II) of the EU and provided guidance on how it can be translated into national legislation whilst retaining its transformative potential.

Each of these talks have clear links to the NEWCOMERS project: the identification of existing and future collective prosumer business models provide a solid grounding for our exploration of the emerging business models of energy communities. Discussing business model innovation and the institutional conditions inhibiting experimentation might inform our cross country comparative review. In addition, exploring implementation challenges for the EU's Clean Energy Package provide insights into how context conditions might change. More broadly, these talks confirmed what we are already observing in our work, namely a broadening base of the

types of business models with digitalization being a recurring aspect, and a growing complexity on the regulatory side.

In later breakout sessions we helped sketch pathways towards the future of prosumer business models. This road mapping exercise focused on four scenarios on the road to 2050: prosumerism as a local activity, a community opportunity, a social enterprise opportunity, and a commercial opportunity. These pathways connect well with our work on identifying what poly-centric settings and arrangements work the best for the furthering of new clean energy communities. We identified risks related to focusing exclusively on commercial opportunities, particularly in terms of what this means for social value creation.

The second of this international workshop series, originally planned to take place in-person, discussed "Inclusive energy futures" and took place on-line on 29 April 2020. The third e-workshop will discuss system configuration and will be held on 24 June 2020.



PROSEU is an EU-funded research project, bringing together eleven project partners from seven European countries. It aims to enable the mainstreaming of the renewable energy Prosumer phenomenon into the European Energy Union. Prosumers are active energy users who both produce and consume energy from renewable sources. Find out more on: <https://proseu.eu/>

Social Sciences and Humanities at the very core of H2020

The aim of the ASSET Project (A Holistic and Scalable Solution for Research, Innovation and Education targeting Energy Transition) is to provide the tools to create and share the knowledge and skills needed for the energy transition.

A complex SSH study on the Energy Transition process has been planned and is actually in progress. The SSH involvement in such a technical field is relevant because it aims at extending and translating the Energy Transition discourse more into the civil engagement. Energy transition at local and national levels must cope with several societal challenges, such as conflict of interest, social costs of transition, political mediation etc.

A second strand of activities concern the preparation of a specific educational offer in order to widen student preparation in the energy sector with an interdisciplinary approach. In May the ASSET MOOC offer will be launched on the EMMA platform including three MOOCs from the SSH, so crosscutting disciplinary barriers: **Green professionalization and ethics** will explore the role of professionals in promoting a fair and sustainable energy transition. **Corporate Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility** will

provide essential information on what corporate social responsibility means when faced with environmental sustainability. Finally, **A holistic approach for Energy Transition: territory, networks and sustainability** focuses on the socio-territorial and environmental perspective in order to understand Energy Transition as a social construction process.



Targeting the Strategic Energy Technology Plan



The Energy-SHIFTS project (Energy Social sciences & Humanities Innovation Forum Targeting the SET-Plan) is contributing to a European Energy Union that places societal needs centrally by further developing Europe's leadership in using and applying energy-related Social Sciences and Humanities.

During a full year of project implementation, Energy-SHIFTS has contributed to achieving its main objectives by providing Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) based insights and recommendations to reach the EU energy policy 'front line'. This evidence has been produced through several activities including a series of workshops to identify energy - SSH priority themes; an Early-Stage Researcher programme; a Policy Fellowship scheme aimed at connecting leading energy - SSH researchers with energy policymakers; and a series of masterclasses and publications; among others.

Energy-SHIFTS has also worked to improve connections between energy - SSH experts and existing energy policy frameworks and actors at the European level, including the Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan) and the European Technology and Innovation Platforms (ETIPs). We highlight two specific publications/guides (with accompanying videos) that detail these two EU-level initiatives. The first guide describes the EU SET-Plan and the second guide explains the ETIPs.

Building a platform to support professionals in the energy sector



SocialRES is a research and innovation project that aims to foster energy democracy through social innovation and the active collaboration between co-operatives, aggregators of renewable energy and crowdfunding platforms.

SocialRES aims at closing non-technological research gaps that impede the widespread uptake of social innovation business and service models in the European energy sector. Through our research, we will set the basis for a better understanding of the socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-political and gender factors that influence the behaviour of consumers in the energy system. What's more, we will foster the development of new cooperation patterns among the key enabling actors for energy democracy: cooperatives, energy aggregators and crowdfunding platforms.

At this point, the SocialRES project is building a platform to support professionals in the energy sector with knowledge, networking opportunities, and tools, specifically related to social innovation and citizen engagement.

An ongoing survey will contribute to developing a quantitative picture of audience needs and preferences, to inform the design of the platform and its development. It takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your opinion is important, please **TAKE THE SURVEY**

New typology helps understand and support social innovations in energy



The Horizon 2020 project SONNET (Social Innovation in Energy Transitions) investigates how social innovation can bring about a more sustainable energy sector in Europe.

What innovations exist in Europe today, who creates them and how do they work? As a first step towards answering these questions, SONNET analysed 500 examples of social innovations in energy (SIEs) across Europe. A new **typology** emerged in which cases were organised along two axes - whether they involve new ways of doing, thinking or organising, and whether those involved are cooperating, exchanging, competing or in conflict.

A researcher with one of the project partners expanded on how the typology was developed at the kick-off webinar of the SONNET webinar series "Explored: Social Innovation in Energy Transitions". This shed light on SIEs including, for example, highlighting that SIEs do not only originate from bottom-up initiatives or civic engagement, but also emerge from public and private entities.

The City of Antwerp, for example, is using their "Stadslab 2050" as an 'experimentation space' for innovative and sustainable solutions. The lab is a new organisational structure to incubate innovative ideas through participant cooperation, and thus represents cooperating/organising in the typology. There are also social innovations being applied across typology categories. One example is "prosumerism", whereby an individual both produces and consumes energy. Prosumers can, for example, lead energy education (exchange/thinking) or collaborate on energy generation and consumption (cooperation/doing).

The webinar series will continue in May, bringing diverse groups together to discuss how SIEs can contribute to more sustainable energy systems in Europe.



Project partners:

Univerza v Ljubljani



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For more information:

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