

ENERGISE

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR RESEARCH, GOOD PRACTICE
AND INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

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POLICY BRIEFING 3: ENERGISE FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS



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KEY MESSAGES

- Sustainable energy consumption initiatives need to be based more on sufficiency and practices and cultures of energy use
- The creative and policy learning potential of context-sensitive initiatives, such as energy living labs, is high and warrants further investigation and development
- New problem framings and imaginaries can enhance the design and implementation of effective sustainable energy consumption initiatives in the EU. These need support from policy-makers and funders for their further development and application
- Findings inform Clean Energy for All Europeans package in relation to implementing the citizens and communities engagement aspect of the EU Energy Union strategy

Context

BACKGROUND

The ENERGISE project was inspired by three core concerns:

- a) that continued attention to behaviour change, energy efficiency programmes and technical solutions neglects the need to change consumption practices in order to reduce household energy use across Europe and related CO₂ emissions;
- b) a concern for what kinds of social science and humanities energy research could produce new insights of relevance to EU and national energy policy-making; and
- c) the need for policy-makers to engage with citizens around energy and climate change issues and the emergence of 'living lab' methodologies which appear to have the potential for facilitating this.

Analysis

APPROACH AND ANALYSIS

The project created a database of 1067 sustainable energy consumption initiatives (SECIs). About 75% of SECIs adopted a problem framing of energy demand reduction as a matter of efficiency, technological innovation or individual behaviour change (Jensen et al, 2017). A focus on consumption practices – either singly or in interaction across energy consuming activities – is lacking.

The project designed and implemented two types of energy living labs (ELLS), one based on individual households and the other on

collective households (Heiskanen, et al, 2018). The two types of energy living lab were implemented in 8 European countries. Households were supported to take on challenges to reduce the temperature settings for heating their homes and reduce the number of laundry cycles they did. The project analysed data on household consumption practices before, during and post-challenge. It also compared findings within and across countries and types of living lab approach.

FINDINGS

The key findings of the ENERGISE project are summarised below:

- Addressing everyday practices and related ideas about ‘normality’ can make a valuable contribution to reducing household energy use.
- Households can reduce indoor temperature settings in colder months by 1°C without experiencing a reduction in thermal comfort.
- Households can do one less cycle of laundry without being inconvenienced.
- Challenges to conventional ways of keeping warm at home or keeping clothes clean provide ruptures that stimulate reflection on the part of householders about how they use energy.
- Experimenting with other ways of keeping warm and keeping clothes clean provides new strategies for, and ideas about, keeping clean and comfortable.
- Ruptures can provoke discussion within and beyond the home about energy use practices. Discussions around, for example sustainable lifestyles, are not limited to the particular energy domains of central interest to an initiative or project.
- Diverse policy, research and civil society actors can together generate and draw upon insights from energy consumption projects. This requires methodologies predicated upon unconventional ‘imaginaries’ of social science energy research (Genus et al, 2018; Jasanoff and Kim, 2009).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Measures required

The project makes the following recommendations to EU energy policy-makers in relation to advancing the Clean Energy for All package/EU Energy Union; they may also be applicable nationally:

- Establish and fund initiatives based upon the performance of daily practices, habits and routines: policy-makers should employ a new perspective of energy policy design based on good understanding and appreciation of practices, habits and routines and their influence on household energy use;
- Invoke the concept of sufficiency in relation to energy consumption; it brings to the fore more fundamental understanding of people's real needs as well as challenges otherwise black boxed ideas about 'normalities';
- 'Upscale' practice-focused sustainable energy consumption initiatives and develop new insights into what constitutes upscaling (e.g. in relation to social media) and how it can be achieved;
- Employ complementary energy efficiency measures – such as building smaller dwellings and improving product labelling and standards – within practice-focused initiatives;
- Employ IT as a *complementary* element within the package of measures designed to assist users as *they* attempt to challenge themselves to change practices of energy use;
- Engage different socio-economic groups, types of household and local actors in setting up and implementing initiatives;
- Engage businesses, energy providers and NGOs in initiatives, though the precise nature of their involvement will depend on local conditions and requirements;
- Recognise that both individualised and collective energy living lab approaches may be effective, where both types are well supported, as occurred in ENERGISE. This support may be cost-effective compared with other measures (e.g. smart meter roll-out in the UK).

National policy recommendations for each living lab country can be obtained from the relevant project partner via the project website at: <http://www.energise-project.eu/partners/consortium-partners>

References

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WHO WE ARE

The ENERGISE consortium includes ten research partners (universities, research institutes, enterprises and NGOs) from Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.



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