



Policy recommendations for local authorities

Together we seize the potential of community energy in the North Sea region

By enabling citizens to benefit from local clean energy, to make their homes more sustainable and to set up their own sustainable electricity or heat projects in their neighbourhood, local authorities can empower citizens in the energy transition and strengthen local communities.

However, the advancement of local clean energy and empowered citizens in the green transition are still held back by various barriers. Local and regional authorities are not in the position to overcome all these barriers by themselves, but it is good to be aware that a difference can be made at a local level. In this leaflet we focus on what you can do!

Reach out to communities!

Secure and facilitate knowledge exchange for local energy communities

Citizens may have limited knowledge about clean energy policy and its possibilities. Moreover, they often lack the required skills in the fields of energy technology, financing, and legislative procedures to take action themselves. It is important to build and provide access to a substantial knowledgebase and discuss how each neighbourhood, apartment building, community or individual household can contribute to local climate action. Continuously sharing successful examples, facilitating relevant connections and collaborations, and providing clear action perspective can support these efforts.

A municipality or region could provide an independent overview of reliable and up-to-date information with concrete possibilities and perspectives for citizen driven energy action on different levels of scale. This overview should include clear and easily accessible information on technical systems and links to relevant policy measures such as possible subsidy or funding schemes and collective buying campaigns.

Use multiple channels to inform and engage large and different community groups

Just like reaching out via social institutions such as schools, libraries, community centres, etc. public authorities should facilitate events and meetings where people can meet, develop, and pool efforts to set up citizen driven energy projects. And do not forget you can also use targeted communication via social media and facilitate events online in addition to physical meetings.

Reach out from different points of view

Campaigns can be targeted geographically (neighbourhoods) as well as thematically (e.g., Solar PV or heat pump group purchases). Consider the specific characteristics (e.g., types of housing, year of construction, demographic composition) and needs of the neighbourhood and fit well with overarching spatial and energy-infrastructure plans. Different approaches and forms of communication will attract other participants.

Establish supporting structures in people time

Consider alternative working methods that match the way citizen-driven energy initiatives are often organised: renewable energy communities and co-operatives operate differently from professional businesses. The structures to support citizens in their endeavours should reflect this. For instance: citizens often start their energy journey in their spare time, so they should have access to support in these hours.

Actively remove existing barriers!

Provide a first nudge with start-up capital or small funding

Quite some of the current financial mechanisms are tailored to serve larger-scale projects and institutions rather than small scale local citizen led energy communities. Establishing citizen projects often requires equity or debt capital in the form of loans. Local initiatives - especially newly founded ones - usually do not have the capacity or possess the track record

that gives them access to capital. Moreover, initiatives are often asked to provide extensive feasibility studies in order to get access to capital.

Co-operatives - let alone individual citizens - do not have funds to pay for these studies or are reluctant to take the risk to pay for a “piece of paper” that may or may not give access to a loan. Therefore, funding for studies should be easily accessible and could be established on no-cure-no pay principles. And once this hurdle has been taken and the project appears feasible, local authorities can consider supporting these initiatives through conditional financial guarantees for (part of) the debt capital required for project realisation.

Simplify legal paperwork

Even very small entities with few citizens are often scrutinized and demanded paperwork of the same dimensions as large companies. These procedures should be proportional and streamlined to not have a dissuasive effect. Procedures should be stripped of superfluous trivialities to meet the needs of small-scale initiatives, ensuring support and free help, for establishing small community or prosumer projects.

Eliminate regulatory barriers

Local authorities can remove regulatory barriers for permits for small-scale initiatives. Permit and grid connection procedures can be streamlined, for instance by establishing a one-stop shop for permitting projects and committing to targets on reducing and limiting processing times of permit and project applications.

And finally: adopt an integrated approach on climate and empowering citizens!

Make sure that municipal climate targets and the way citizen-driven energy action can contribute to these targets are an integral part of the broader range of municipal policies. Spatial planning, building permits, designing, and developing new and renewing existing areas, as well as regional scale energy and infrastructure planning are all obvious processes where empowering citizens, and their initiatives can be integrated. Another example is to enable citizen ownership in making municipal or community buildings more sustainable, for instance by making the roofs available for collectively owned solar PV via a local co-operative. All of this can be further strengthened by structurally including (a target for) community ownership in long-term climate and energy strategies.

Moreover, actively involve citizens and community representatives in the process of decision making on energy policy. When having public meetings and hearings it is simple asking questions in neighbourhoods like “how could, and would, you like to contribute to achieving goals of Paris Agreement, energy independence, ?” hereby inviting people to suggest what they are keen on in their residential area, hence ideally facilitating a YIMBY solution (Yes In My Backyard). Basically, this is building empowering platforms in existing process in a holistic way.

This is, of course, not an exhaustive list of recommendations, but hopefully it will inspire you to take action or reinforce the idea you are on the right track. There is a growing number of inspiring and innovative examples of good policy practice out there in the North Sea region. Be sure to take a look at our website:

<https://northsearegion.eu/empower-20/>

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Interreg North Sea Region programme

Interreg North Sea Region is a European Territorial Cooperation Programme facilitating transnational cooperation between 49 regions in seven countries (UK, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark) by the North Sea. The Programme is part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The overall objective is to support development and foster sustained economic growth across the North Sea region. In order to realize this, projects that directly contribute to one of the specific objectives (such as Stimulating the green economy) can be part-financed for up to 60 % of their total project budget.

More information?

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