

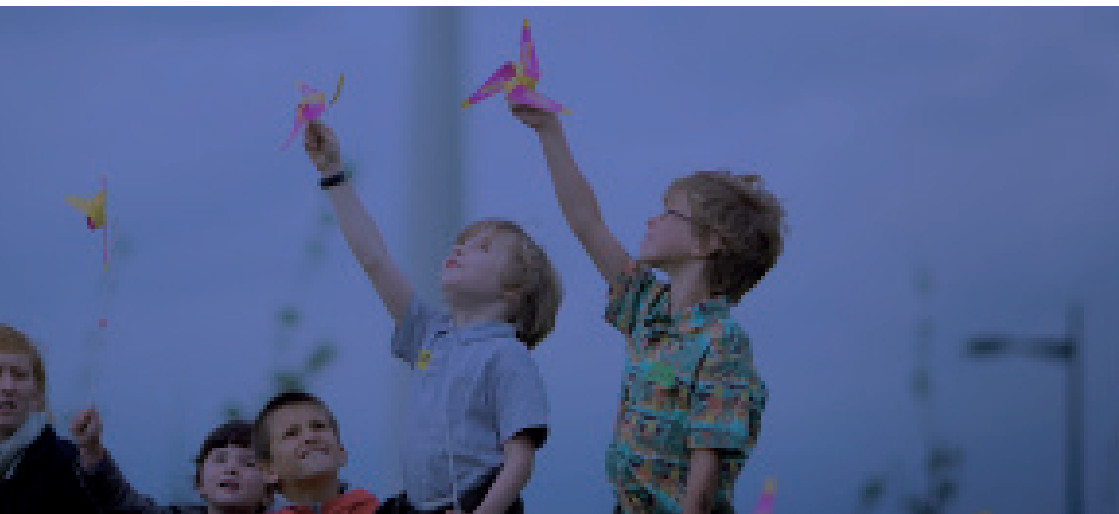
Interreg
North Sea Region
EMPOWER 2.0

European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION

THE POWER OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES



EMPOWER2.0 is an Interreg North Sea Region funded project with 15 partners.

Lead Partner: Gemeente Zaanstad (NL)

Project Lead: Keijen van Eijk, k.eijk@zaanstad.nl



Gemeente Zaanstad (NL), Provincie West-Vlaanderen (BE), Essex County Council (UK), Southend on Sea Borough Council (UK), Middelfart Kommune (DK), Gemeente Haarlem (NL), Intercommunale Leiedal (BE), Hogeschool

van Amsterdam (NL), University of Southern Denmark (DK), Ghent University (BE), Graham Oakes Ltd (UK), WeSpark Zaanstreek (NL), Stadsgarage (NL), Coöperatie Kennemer Energie (NL).

EMPOWERING IN PRACTICE

The Interreg NSR project Empower 2.0 has a great ambition: to change the European energy landscape by empowering local citizens enabling them to take the energy transition in their own hands. Citizens are at the heart of the current transition towards a renewable energy system. They are more than just consumers, whether they are seasoned frontrunners, with their own solar panels or sustainable renovation plans for their homes, or just starting their journey to benefit from this transition. Citizens can be part of the solution when they organise themselves in clever ways like communities of producers, co-operatives, or as facilitators for innovative sustainable techniques, market models or collaboration structures.

Over the past years Empower 2.0 has set up seven different living labs in The Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and Denmark. Through these pilots in diverse local contexts the project was able to explore how community energy systems can be developed, how academic knowledge and expertise can be applied, how communication can play a reinforcing role and how citizens can learn from each other.

This has resulted in seven areas where different target groups are highly empowered to access the energy market. On top of this, the partners developed transnationally aggregated recommendations for likeminded organised civilians and for local authorities wanting to support this dynamic. It has also led to the development of a toolbox for who searches for advice and examples.

For me as Deputy Mayor of Zaanstad, Netherlands, it is highly important that all residents can benefit from the energy transition, especially the ones suffering from energy poverty. This journey has given us useful data that we can use to work towards our aim of an inclusive energy transition. The city of Zaanstad is proud for having been the lead partner of this journey.

*Annete Baerveldt, Deputy Mayor for Sustainability,
Energy Transition and Circular Economy, Zaanstad*



SEVEN CASES



1

Zaanstad exploring communication to empower people in energy poverty.

2

Wespark sharing local energy in a cooperative setting in Zaanstad.

3

Kennemer Kracht and Stadsgarage sharing roofs for solar panels in Haarlem

4

Transfo Zwevegem sharing expertise and developing communication while setting up a microgrid.

5

Leiedal empowering citizens towards collective renovation.

6

Supporting the community heating system in the small village of Føns with technical expertise.

7

Essex demonstrating the power of communities setting up energy systems on the roofs of public buildings.

Zaanstad lessons

The city of Zaanstad wants everyone to be able to benefit from the energy transition and mitigate energy poverty. A lot of residents do not have the means to make their homes sustainable. The key question we wanted to answer in the pilot is: “how can we best reach this group of residents?” In order to do so we linked up with existing social organisations and structures and organised meetings with housing associations and residents’ committees.

In addition, we have set up a so-called FIXbrigade: a team of handymen who carry out energy-saving jobs in the neighbourhood free of charge for residents. With this pilot we were able to increase our outreach as well as the effectiveness of our approach.

Location: Zaanstad is a city of about 157,000 inhabitants, Amsterdam Metropolitan Area, the Netherlands

Contact: Robert van der Sijde, Wespark chairman, robert.vandersijde@wespark.nl - Keijen van Eijk, k.eijk@zaanstad.nl

Wespark lessons

The case aimed at creating an energy community whilst using a smart monitoring device called the ‘EARN-E’ that is plugged into the smart meters of the participants. Although covid prevented live meetings still a nice group of participants could be gathered. They learned about energy use and savings in real world conditions, and could compare with the outcome of non empowered residents. Participants loved to learn from tips and tricks and from each other. It created awareness and positive energy while working with tangible renewable energy programs.



Wespark monitoring device on a smart meter

Haarlem lessons

Stichting Stadsgarage and co-operative Kennemer Kracht sought in this case direct support for energy cooperatives to realise collective solar power roofs and to establish a joint long term campaign. They learned that also for committed citizens working together can be complex. The best way forward for projects is to simply deal with this by listening, mediating and in being able to bring people together and apply the art of co-creation. Local communities are generally very positive about sustainable energy systems, and are willing to make a personal investment to enable progress.



Together for collective solar power roofs in Haarlem (NL)

Location: Haarlem is a city west of Amsterdam of about 163,000 residents

Contact: Sam de Guchteneire, municipality of Haarlem
s.deguchteneire@haarlem.nl

Transfo lessons

Transfo in Zwevegem inspired people to take steps forward in the energy transition, by providing information and work with students in a living lab setting. By doing this, Transfo learned to navigate in a quickly changing world. The main lessons learned were: “Be emphatic, take enough time to support students, ask help to people with relevant expertise and just keep going”. Success is guaranteed with a diverse and multi-talented team.



Transfo site in Zwevegem (B), setting of a living lab

Location: : Zwevegem is a municipality of about 24,000 inhabitants in South West Flanders, Belgium

Contact: stijn.vandamme@west-vlaanderen.be &
tine.ketelaars@west-vlaanderen.be

Leiedal lessons

Leiedal empowered homeowners for energy savings through collective renovations. The biggest potential for collective renovations with private homeowners is in multi-apartments buildings, where residents are more dependent on each other in the renovation process than in a neighbourhood with individual houses. For collective renovations with individual houses to be successful, engaged neighbourhood ambassadors proved to be key drivers, as well as consistent long-term planning and available expertise via renovation coaches.



bijscript?

Location: Kortrijk is a city in South West Flanders of about 70,000 residents
Contact: Dominiek Vandewiele, dominiek.vandewiele@leiedal.be

Middelfart lessons

The project in the small village of Føns started from the dream of the villagers to get rid of their costly and polluting individual fuel oil boilers, to replace it by a sustainable collective solution, with wood pellets and with geothermal energy. Empowering people's dreams make them come true. The case struggled with some delays due to covid-19 and a rather big hassle with bureaucracy but succeeded. The villagers would like to share the following message to the world: "Make it easy for citizens (i.e. / amateurs) to join the green transition and link carbon emissions directly to taxes and tariffs".



Citizens presenting their sustainable collective heating system in the village of Føns (DK)

Location: Middelfart is a town in central Denmark with 16,000 residents
Contact: Morten M. Westergaard, municipality of Middelfart
Morten.Westergaard@Middelfart.dk

Essex lessons

Essex County Council offered local communities the right support to overcome barriers to the development of local energy initiatives. The Empower pilot created local energy communities via existing civil society structures, specifically working with educational centres like schools and outdoor education centres. This work has led to three further community-led energy groups being set up across the County. Interested residents need help to get a group together, establishing their groups legally and accessing funding. Once initial funding and tailored support is provided, groups are able to develop and sustain themselves. And these groups act as catalysts for further energy initiatives in local communities.



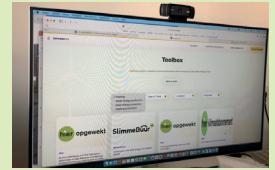
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Location: Essex County is in South East England and counts about 1,5 million residents

Contact: Luciana de Almeida, luciana.almeida@essex.gov.uk

Toolbox for empowering

The Empower 2.0 toolbox offers citizens, local authorities and energy communities a guided experience to find the most pertinent tools to assist them on their journeys to produce their own green energy.



Empower 2.0 toolbox

Get inspired

You can find a range of tools by filtering by themes, by sharing information over your journey to get more personalised results of tools, by checking other initiatives near you or by learning with the results of our energy communities' pilots.

Learn with our pilots

In a series of four videos we share learning from our pilots over topics such as engaging different types of prosumers, implementing top-down and bottom-up strategies for energy communities and the roles of energy cooperatives.

Find energy communities

Read about the pilots' results and find energy communities all over Europe on the Energy Map. It is open to add one's own energy community to the map.

Policy recommendations for local authorities

Local authorities can empower citizens in the energy transition and strengthen local communities.

Reach out to communities:

1. Facilitate technical and legal knowledge exchange for local energy communities.
2. Facilitate events and meetings where people can meet, use targeted

- communication via social media, enable online events
- 3. Reach out from different points of view, geographically, thematically, adapted to the need of the neighbourhood.
- 4. Establish supporting structures in people's spare time.

Actively remove existing barriers:

- 5. Provide a first nudge with start-up capital or small funding
- 6. Simplify legal paperwork
- 7. Eliminate regulatory barriers for permits for small-scale initiatives. Streamline procedures.
- 8. Integrate citizen empowerment in spatial planning, building permits, designing, developing new and renewing existing areas, as well as regional scale energy and infrastructure planning. Enable citizen ownership in making municipal or community buildings more sustainable.

Actively involve citizens and community representatives in the process of decision making on energy policy.

Recommendations to start a local energy initiative

Starting a local energy initiative is great! Based on experiences of many energy community builders that went ahead of you, EMPOWER 2.0 have collected some recommendations to take with you along your journey.

- 1. Get the right people on board. Establish a small, motivated, and committed team with a diverse skillset and knowledge. Collaborate with knowledge institutions or universities where needed and be active in building and maintaining a network.
- 2. Choose a proven solution. Keep it simple. Look around for inspiring examples in similar neighbourhoods.
- 3. Improve your pitch and keep it simple. Tell a simple story, even if it is quite complicated.

4. Keep a clear eye on your goal. Match the local needs in a way that suits your and your team's expertise and check now and then if you still are on the right track.
5. Involve your local authority. Many municipalities have civil servants working on facilitating and stimulating active citizen participation.
6. Build a professional organisation and agree on a clear separation of tasks and responsibilities. Consider setting up an "Energy Community" according to new EU legislation, as a legal entity that organises collective and citizen-driven energy actions.
7. Keep engaging your local community, with constant and clear communication. Say what you do and do what you say, thus creating trust and reliability.

The Empower Declaration

In Essex, Middelfart, the province of West-Flanders, Zwevegem, Haarlem and Zaanstad policy makers looked with great interest on how the EMPOWER 2.0 cases succeeded in empowering citizens. In each of these cities and regions local government took up the engagement to include policy recommendations for local authorities in their policy work.



Johannes Lundsryd, mayor of Middelfart (DK) signing the Empower declaration

EMPOWER TV presents in a series of four episodes all about the project.

In episode three all officials solemnly sign the empower declaration.

Signed by

- Anette Baerveldt, alderman Zaanstad
- Johannes Lundsryd Jensen, mayor Middelfart
- Jurgen Vanlerberghe, deputy province West-Flanders
- Marc Doutreluingne, mayor Zwevegem
- Peter Schwier, councillor Essex County Council
- Robbert Berkhout, alderman Haarlem

References:

Empower 2.0 website: www.northsearegion.eu/empower-20/

Empower 2.0 toolkit: www.toolbox.energy/home

Empower 2.0 TV: www.northsearegion.eu/empower-20/empower-tv/