

Engaging citizens for an energy sober Europe with the REScoops

The energy transition offers citizens and communities the choice of owning production, supply, and distribution of renewable energy in a fair and democratic way. More importantly, however, we need to ensure that we change the way we consume and use energy. A wide range of transition scenarios¹ highlight the need to transform our energy consumption habits in order to achieve an energy sober and renewables-based Europe. REScoops (Renewable Energy Source Cooperatives) are a key means to engaging citizens to adopt smarter and more efficient energy consumption. In doing so, we better ensure the transformation of our production of energy to 100% renewables, and the transition of our energy system as a whole.

The European Commission's proposal of its "Clean Energy for All Europeans" Package and its acknowledgment of renewable and local energy communities provides one more step towards empowering citizens to take more responsibility over their energy supply and their consumption. However, in order to promote energy efficiency first through energy communities, the package needs to better recognize the important role that REScoops play in encouraging and empowering behavioral change by citizens in how they use energy, including energy savings.

How energy savings contributes towards the vision of REScoops

For REScoops, energy efficiency means energy savings, energy sobriety and energy solidarity. The goal is to achieve an equilibrium between consumption and renewable production. We are looking to achieve energy autonomy and to carry the weight of our energy communities. Energy efficiency also means encouraging responsible investments by our members so that they can save money their energy bills (kilowatt/hours), particularly those that are most vulnerable. We believe that the cooperative engagement is an engagement for more energy efficient behavior, regardless of wealth.

Through a H2020-funded project called 'REScoop PLUS', we are currently taking steps to demonstrate that REScoop members are more energy efficient, and to highlight specific tools REScoops use to guide their members toward energy sobriety.

Quantifying the value of REScoops encouraging energy efficiency

The REScoop PLUS project aims to support REScoops trying to support the development of energy efficiency in more cooperatives around Europe. We are also studying the consumption of members from 7 REScoops in 6 different countries in order to quantify the added value in terms of energy efficiency for members of REScoops. With final results pending, what we see so far is that:

- For all REScoops that provided data, there is a correlation between REScoop engagement and a faster reduction of energy consumption by the members, compared with other consumers;

¹ Like the Negawatt scenario in France

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- In Denmark, reduction of energy consumption is 16% per year, and following the implementation of support mechanism by the REScoop, this reduction is 20%
- In Belgium, the reduction in energy consumption is 12.8% per year
- In Spain, the effect of the support mechanism is systematically bigger on cooperative members than non-cooperative clients

These energy savings are made possible through tools to engage and empower REScoop members which, if properly encouraged, can be replicated throughout Europe. The best practices that we are studying in our project are varied, but here are a couple examples:

The “Packages Deal” by Hvidovre Fjernvarme

In Copenhagen, Denmark, the Hvidovre Fjernvarme, a type of social housing cooperative provides for a fixed price for the installation of district heating in the area as long as more than 30% of the local citizens sign up. This allows to have a community self-organization and get citizens directly involved in the process of deployment. In the “package deal”, the price of this installation can also be paid by the citizens through their energy bill, in order not to burden them.

“Energie ID” by Ecopower

“Energie ID” is a service put in place for the members/customers of Ecopower, a REScoop supplier. Energie ID is an online tool that allows members to see and evaluate their consumption in real time, as well as the evolution of their consumption compared to a projected profile built on their historical data. It also allows Ecopower to profile energy efficiency counselling to the members via a social media platform.

Where do we want to go with energy savings?

The REScoop PLUS project will continue to compile a toolbox of best practices and experts that will empower more REScoops to focus on energy efficiency for their members. There are several other best practices and tools that will be studied and disseminated by the project like Tupperwatt from France, and BeeData from Spain. A guide of those measures will be published in the summer 2017. This best practice will then be deployed in two young REScoops so that they can better serve their members on the path to energy sobriety.

How can EU legislation support REScoops in driving energy savings?

By acknowledging local energy communities and proposing a supportive legal framework, the clean energy package can support REScoops in driving an energy efficiency first approach that will benefit both citizens and the energy transition. However, the clean energy package needs to better acknowledge and encourage the role of REScoops in driving energy savings by final consumers. Specifically. We need:

1. Encouragement of REScoops in implementing national energy efficiency obligation schemes, particularly where there is a social aim.
2. Better recognition of REScoops in addressing energy poverty.
3. Higher level visibility for REScoops and their contribution to achieving energy efficiency objectives in Member States’ national energy and climate plans