

Trust and Energy Citizenship – The role of (digital) community knowledge for a sustainable energy transition



Citizens play a crucial role in a successful EU's climate and energy transition. Empowering people to play an active role in shaping and implementing policies can boost policy acceptance and enhance trust in policy processes and political decisions. To enhance the participation of active energy citizens in the energy transition, it is essential to recognize their knowledge and give them a (stronger) voice – not only within their communities but also as experts for regional, national, and EU policymaking. Acknowledging energy citizens' contributions and their needs in active talks and discussions can enhance trust in policymakers.

Different types of energy citizens have different needs: for instance, digital energy communities prefer and require digital solutions. Thus, providing a diverse range of communication formats for regular dialogues is essential to facilitate mutual learning between citizens and policymakers. This diversity is crucial for achieving a successful and trustworthy transformation of the energy system.

During times of change and crises, a significant majority of citizens recognize the importance of engagement in the energy transition (refer to FIGURE 1). However, active energy citizens (as defined in POLICY BRIEF #1) aspire to be recognized as experts by policymakers. They seek to convey their insights and needs concerning the implementation of energy solutions and to share their needs and knowledge regarding the implementation of energy solutions. Active energy citizens prioritize hands-on involvement, such as participating in citizen assemblies or local projects, and advocate for municipal support in their initiatives. Consequently, they frequently express their willingness to engage in dialogues with policymakers. This serves the dual purpose of raising awareness about their valuable local and community knowledge

while also gaining insights into the challenges faced by policymakers.

OFFER AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN A VARIETY OF DIALOGUE FORMATS

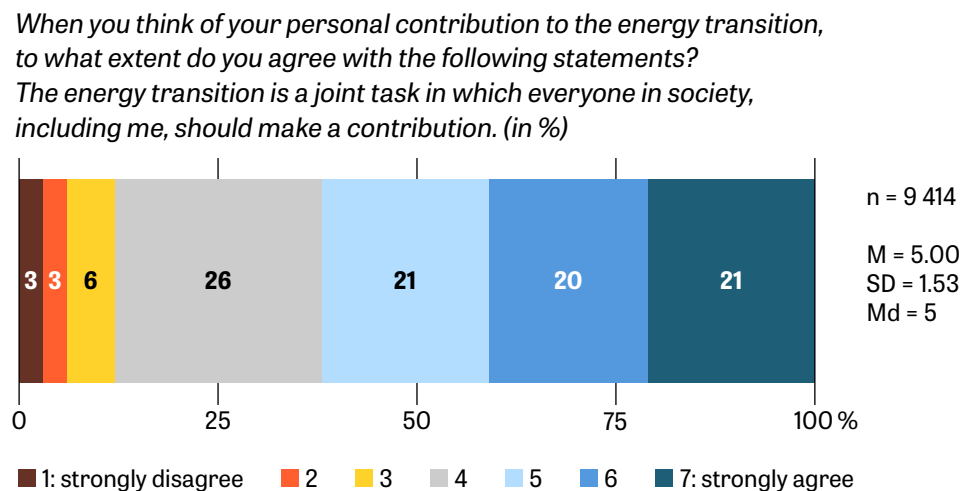
Regular direct exchanges between energy citizens and policymakers on local, regional, and national levels can contribute significantly to energy citizens feeling recognized. Ensuring that formats for exchange and dialogues are appealing and easily accessible to various types of energy citizens is crucial (e.g., including digitally savvy younger generations). Employing a variety of dialogue formats, such as local in-person meetings, phone discussions, and fully digital interactions, corresponds to the diverse

RECOMMENDATION 1

Offer and actively participate in a variety of dialogue formats with diverse energy citizens to acknowledge citizens' contributions to the energy transition regularly and allow for mutual learning between energy citizens and policymakers.

FIGURE 1

A majority of European citizens (62%) wants to be actively engaged in the energy transition because they perceive climate change as a common challenge that everyone should contribute to.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Establish funding programs for digital solutions and platforms that enhance knowledge exchange within digital energy communities and present easily accessible dialogue formats between diverse energy citizens and other actors including policymakers.

preferences of energy citizens. When energy citizens perceive that their needs and concerns are genuinely heard, this can solidify trust in the political system and policymakers, further enhancing their engagement in the energy transition.

Engaging actively in dialogue formats facilitates a deeper understanding of transition challenges for all involved parties and fosters mutual learning between energy citizens and policymakers. Thus, both policymakers and energy citizens gain valuable insights through diverse dialogue formats, enriching their knowledge with up-to-date information from one another. Moreover, this information can be disseminated within the energy community and shared with policymakers at the local, regional, national, and EU governance levels, amplifying its impact.

ESTABLISH FUNDING PROGRAMS FOR DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Recognizing and addressing diversity and the unique needs of different communities is essential for achieving a just transition. Energy communities exhibit a wide range of diversity, encompassing various formats and types, such as digital energy communities. Therefore, it is crucial to take into account this diversity when providing support to energy communities or when devising methods for information exchange (see also **POLICY BRIEF #6**).

Digital energy communities place a special emphasis on engaging younger citizens in the energy transition. To facilitate this, supporting third-party actors

with EU and national funding programs to develop digital exchange platforms, such as mobile apps or interactive websites customized to a variety of needs, fosters dialogue among and with digitally-inclined energy citizens. Digital solutions for engaging energy citizens can cater to a diverse range of needs and preferences. These solutions are valuable not only for citizens who face constraints on their time and resources, preventing them from participating in some in-person exchanges, but also for those who want to maintain their engagement and connection with a specific community even after relocating to different cities. Furthermore, investing in local energy communities and associated digital solutions can ultimately enhance trust in policymakers at various governance levels, as this funding becomes directly visible to energy citizens.





CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

Earnest app – a digital energy community in Germany

The case study explored how the regular use of a sustainability app, i.e. the Earnest app, can foster energy citizenship activities in everyday life among members of a virtual community, which consisted of mostly young students living in and around the city of Darmstadt, Germany.

The findings underscored the significance of digital solutions in citizen engagement within the energy transition as members of the digital community expressed a desire for ongoing,

virtual interaction opportunities with local, regional, and national policymakers to facilitate mutual learning. The discussions revolved around the development of an app for sharing and disseminating their knowledge, tailored to the specific needs of young students. By funding digital solutions for knowledge exchange, policy can empower citizens - especially younger generations and digital natives - to actively participate in the energy transition.

ABOUT THE PROJECT GRETA

GRETA aims to foster energy citizenship emergence by enhancing awareness and removing policy barriers within the European Union. Its primary objective is to comprehensively investigate the conditions and challenges associated with energy citizenship to derive policy recommendations and policy tools to implement a just and green energy transition, ensuring inclusivity for all. The project focuses on the relationship between energy citizenship behavior and the socio-political context, in which people engage in Green Energy Transition Actions. GRETA particularly highlights the crucial role of policies in facilitating and empowering these activities.

Based on empirical research, the project offers various policy recommendations in a set of six policy briefs to facilitate the engagement of citizens in current energy transition efforts. The empirical research draws on data from a multinational survey with approximately 10,000 participants across 16 EU countries, as well as six case studies conducted in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and the Netherlands.

FURTHER INFORMATION
projectgreta.eu

