



Energy efficiency mission ULB



Summary

The energy efficiency mission ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles) has a short history of about four years. The specific energy efficiency mission started in 2019 to spur activities related to energy management, real-estate planning, technical services, and the overall organisation of the university, which all existed well before this.

This mission is associated with significant legacy issues: this is particularly clear in the building stock, which was developed when energy efficiency was not technically advanced – and when it was considered relatively unimportant.

Why is it a case of energy citizenship?

One of the three main achievements of the case is the specific focus on democratisation and the development of collective responsibility for the energy efficiency of the university.



DIRECT ENERGY PRODUCTION / CONSUMPTION



INDIVIDUAL



URBAN



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101022492.

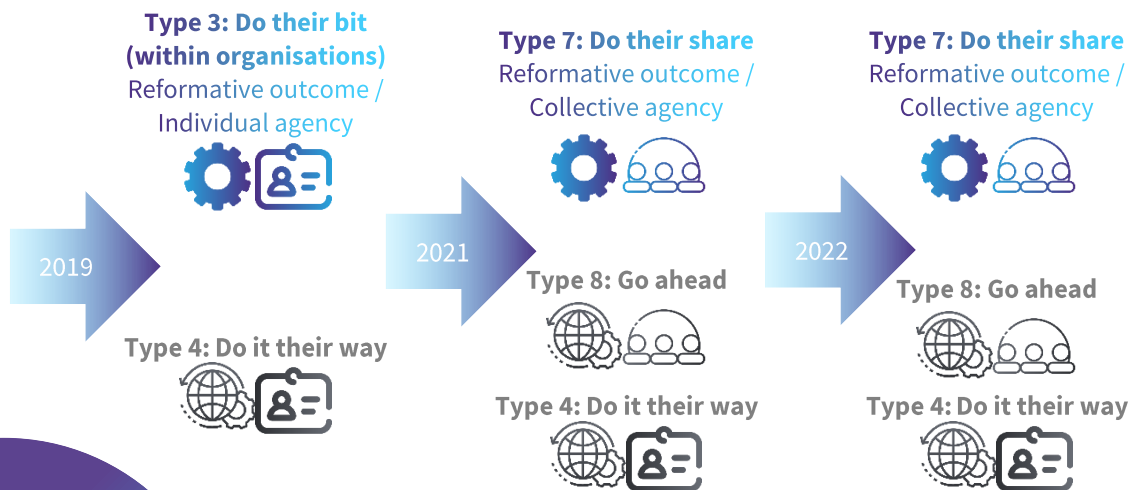


Goals

1. Reducing the environmental impact of energy consumption and production beyond climate goals to incorporate other resource and ecological-limit considerations.
2. Professionalising university activities in the field of environmental management, specifically energy management (e.g., making energy efficiency an integral part of building/real estate planning decisions).
3. Achieving more democratic energy decision-making at the university and promoting greater community ownership of a decentralised energy system.

The story and the typology

The motivation for this case is based on the individual energy citizenship activities of the current coordinator. The case was initiated at the university under his management. Thus, it started as an individual, organisationally embedded case. Afterwards, more and more people became involved, and the case gradually transformed into a collective, citizen-based energy citizenship type. The case is transformative in its aims, but for the time being, its actions tend to be of a reformatory type, thus not explicitly system-contesting.



Case history summary

For the summary methodology, click [HERE!](#)



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Phase 1: Workplace activism, 2019-2021

The coordinator of ULB's organisational mission was for many years an activist and an energy-conscious household member in parallel with his work. He had a transformative mindset whilst pursuing a rather pragmatic, step-by-step approach.

He engaged in activism within his workplace more widely and was not alone in this as others were also active – e.g., student organisations, activists and engaged researchers. Additionally, the university itself was developing a Climate Plan and initiated organisation-wide sustainability action. However, especially at the organisational level, official moves to promote sustainability action and energy citizenship were relatively reformatory and system-confirming in nature.

Phase 2: Institutional mission, 2021-2022

In 2021, the position of the coordinator became formalised into a paid one and expanded to incorporate another position. This organisationally embedded individual action generated a mandate and an explicitly collective mission (as indicated in the secondary individual type).

Throughout the evolution from individual to collective energy citizenship agency, the mission can be characterised as transformative, but it may appear reformatory from the outside. This is because even though the mission involves a conscious decision to deepen and broaden energy management activities at ULB from mere quick fixes and technical maintenance to a more ambitious form of energy management, in practice,

As this case involves organisational transformation, the energy citizenship ideal type is organisationally embedded. Although it is mainly reformatory in nature (Type 3), there are also transformative elements (Type 4), notably regarding the aim of making profound (if incremental) changes in organisational culture.

	Individual			Collective	
					
 Reformatory	1. Do their bit (in the household)	3. Do their bit (within organizations)	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
 Transformative	2. Do their own (in the household)	4. Do it their way (within organizations)	6. Make their vote count	8. Go ahead	10. Make their claims

Main type: Do their bit (within organizations)

Reformatory outcome / Organisationally embedded agency

Secondary type: Do it their way (within organizations)

Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency

implementation remains a matter of incremental organisational and institutional changes.

	Individual			Collective	
					
 Reformatory	1. Do their bit (in the household)	3. Do their bit (within organizations)	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
 Transformative	2. Do their own (in the household)	4. Do it their way (within organizations)	6. Make their vote count	8. Go ahead	10. Make their claims

Main type: Do their share"

Reformatory outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary types:

Go ahead

Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Do it their way (within organizations)

Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency



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Phase 3: Current state, 2022-

Now, the energy efficiency mission has become institutionalised in the organisation of ULB and, as such, extends to interactions with other organisations linked to the university (e.g., subcontractors who manage the real estate). It has taken some first, cautious steps towards implementing a somewhat more radical, fundamental strategy, i.e., activating ‘users’.

The coordinator of the case anticipates progressive shifts in organisational change and is more systematically considering energy/sustainability in important real-estate decisions. However, he has also observed that calling for behavioural change remains somewhat off-limits; user satisfaction and ensuring continuity remain the key principles driving the energy management system.

The current characterisation of the case is halfway between a reformative and a transformative outcome orientation, i.e., between Types 7 and 8, with the reformative nature dominating, and it is unlikely to change in the near future.

	Individual			Collective	
					
Reformative	1. Do their bit (in the household)	3. Do their bit (within organizations)	5. Make their voice heard	7. Do their share	9. Do the job
Transformative	2. Do their own (in the household)	4. Do it their way (within organizations)	6. Make their vote count	8. Go ahead	10. Make their claims

Main type: Do their share”

Reformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary types:

Go ahead

Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Do it their way (within organisations)

Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded agency





The aspects of energy citizenship

The pursuit of a more democratic energy future was not originally a main goal, in the sense that the mission was primarily set up for the sake of improving energy efficiency. On the other hand, **the initiative does involve the serious ambition of making energy efficiency a central concern for the university as an organisation, and accordingly, making it the subject of collective decision-making and conscious political choices.** In this sense, it was also a core concern, going clearly beyond merely formal changes.

The low level of involvement of the university community is a key concern in this case. **The coordinator of the mission considers it low, but he seeks to increase active, civic engagement in energy issues across the university.** In contrast, university authorities, technical services and some of the university community do not appear to consider 'effective citizen control' to be particularly low: channels have been set up through which people can express their voice, and there are policies in place that ensure the sufficient provision of energy services.

 Democratic energy future
Energy democracy is considered as a positive value, but it remains limited to formal energy democracy

Citizen control
Citizens' voices remain hardly heard or taken into account 



The energy efficiency mission is, as its name states explicitly, focused on energy efficiency. **Equity and justice are perhaps less of an issue as the mission is implemented within a university – the population that is addressed is relatively homogeneous and consists of employees and students rather than citizens.** Issues of equity and justice do come up in the context of major renovations that are planned – e.g., university authorities are sensitive to the disturbance and emotional distress caused by this to particular groups, and related to specific uses.

 Equity and justice
Justice or equity are essentially out of scope or restricted to access to market

The mission is focused on energy efficiency, driven both by financial and environmental objectives. The latter are explicitly addressed in the mission, which is connected to the Climate Plan 2030 that ULB has drawn up. However, **carbon footprints and climate targets are acknowledged only implicitly for now.**

Carbon limit
Implicit recognition of the carbon limit 

Environmental sustainability is a core issue; the mission revolves around the very challenge of operationalizing this. This means translating the general commitment of university to energy efficiency into concrete interventions, strategic management, systematic monitoring and evaluation, communication strategies, and human resource management that work towards this goal. **The mission involves the development of a holistic strategy.** Nevertheless, the coordinator feels that it could be more radical and have effects beyond the efficiency focus.

 Environmental sustainability
Environmental sustainability is a core issue, and is considered in goal setting

Further information



[facebook.com/ulbruxelles](https://www.facebook.com/ulbruxelles)



www.ulb.be/en/sustainability



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References

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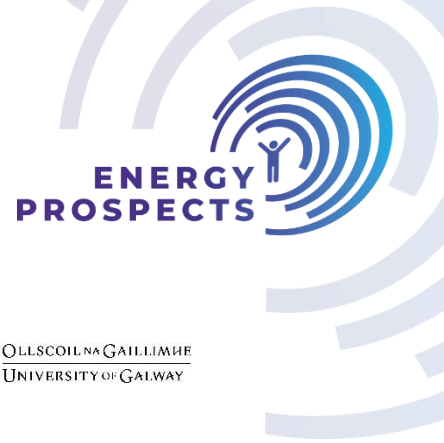
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