ENERGY PROSPECTS

SoLocal Energy

HOLISTIC

COLLECTIVE

URBAN

Summary

SoLocal Energy is part of a proactive and progressive energy transition. It aims to address global climate change from the bottom up by empowering the community. Based on corporate values oriented towards the common good, the initiative intends to get people from all population groups on board simultaneously. For this purpose, they have founded the non-profit association SoLocal Energy e.V. This serves as an umbrella for their various activities, from balcony power plants to neighbourhood climate circles to the self-build solar plant community, supplemented by various workshop and lecture formats.

Why is it a case of energy citizenship?

This is a case of ENCI since the motto of the association is *"Shaping […] climate change from the bottom in a visionary way!"* To do this, SoLocal Energy wants to contribute to addressing global climate change from below and empower the community. Their vision consists of putting a sustainable energy supply in the hands of citizens to achieve climate-just energy democracy. Their values are solidarity, justice, sustainability and personal responsibility.

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

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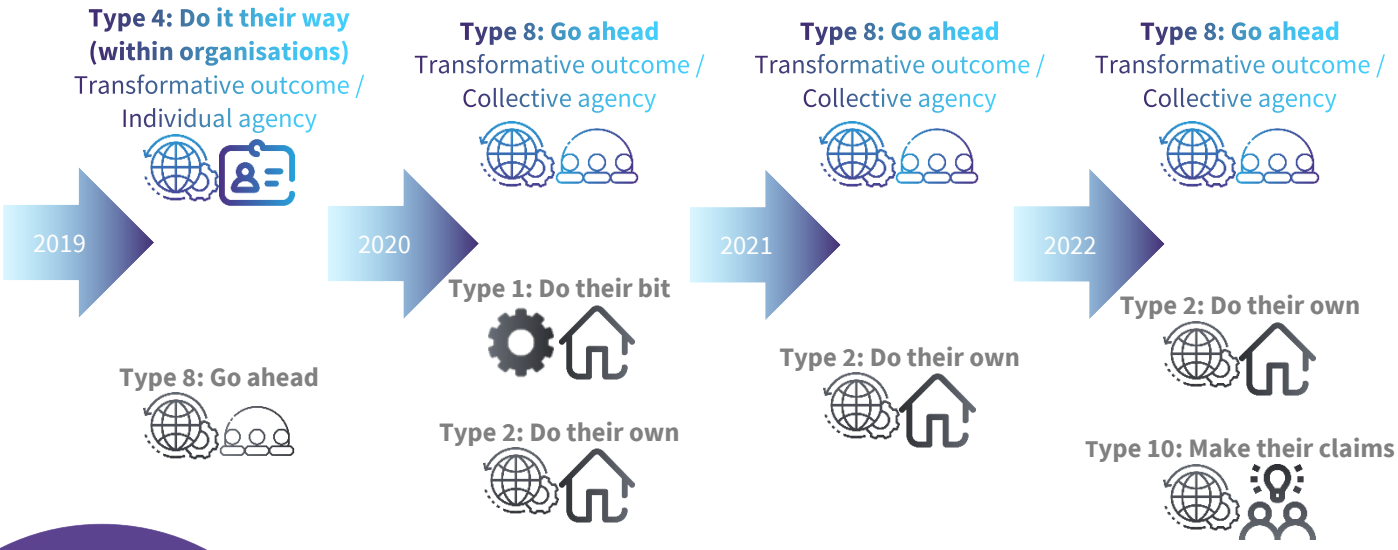
Goals

1. Addressing global climate change from the bottom up;
2. Contributing to the empowerment of individuals and the community with regard to the energy system;
3. Putting sustainable energy supply in the hands of citizens to achieve a climate-just energy democracy, including reducing energy poverty.

The story and the typology

The case started in 2019-2020 with support from an innovation fund (Hessen Ideen) at Kassel University. An NGO was established right at the start of the project to ensure the case's longer-term viability. However, even since 2020, the case has gone through several stages of development.



Case history summary

For the summary methodology, click HERE!

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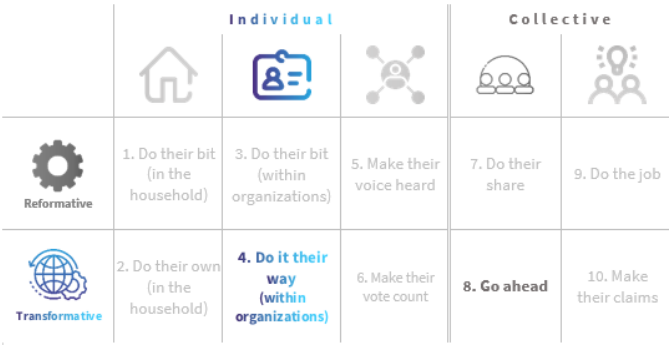
Phase 1: Creation of the case, 2019 - 2020

Three graduate students from Kassel University received funding from Hessen Ideen to establish SoLocal Energy. Thus, the case and the individuals starting it were organisationally embedded at the university. SoLocal Energy began its operations in January 2020 as an NGO, intended to be a citizen-based organisation.



Main type: Do it their way
Transformative outcome / Organisationally embedded individual agency
Secondary type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Collective agency

Phase 2: Assuming collective agency and enabling individual agency, 2020 - 2021

In the second phase, with the establishment of the Association, the case became independent and assumed collective, citizen-based (and hybrid) agency with a transformative outcome orientation. However, in addition to enabling collective agency, the case also empowers individuals to become energy citizens either in a relatively passive and reformative way when they install solar plants on balconies or in a more active and transformative way by teaching the people how to do the installation themselves. The organisers explain this process and how the second way of doing it progressively became the norm: "*In the beginning, we had this approach with the balcony power plants: We do complete installation and consulting and deliver them to people with a wheel and […] do everything and so on. In the meantime, we have taken more of an approach so that we can simply achieve more in the same amount of time by informing people, showing them how to do it and that they can do it themselves".*

Furthermore, SoLocal also started cooperating with similar organisations, e.g., they joined a network of self-build organisations.

Main type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary types:
Do their bit (in the household)
Reformative outcome / Private in the household agency
Do their own (in the household)
Transformative outcome / Private in the household agency

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Phase 3: SoLocal energy evolution, 2021 - 2022

In phase 3 of its evolution, SoLocal Energy focused more and more on enabling people to install renewable energy on balconies and rooftops themselves so that the association progressively abandoned installing the equipment, thus promoting a more transformative form of energy citizenship.

Main type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency
Secondary type: Do their own (in the household)
Transformative outcome / Private in the household agency

Phase 4: Current state and future, 2023 -

The initiative is currently undergoing some level of change. Indeed, the case actors themselves consider it an ongoing and evolving process through which they intend to move even further towards engaging people in the energy transition. Therefore, while some of their activities have become more "mainstream" (for example, installing balcony solar power plants), they intend to use the revenue from these activities to initiate and develop further innovative projects. Their objective is also to support (or become?) the social movement of local, DIY, individual and collective energy production. Moreover, a new secondary transformative and collective ideal type of energy citizenship emerged as the case was well-established by 2022, and it started playing a role as a social movement that is part of the local climate debate and policy-making.

In the future, the people involved in the case plan to reach out more to disadvantaged communities and strengthen their networking activities. In the longer run, the ambition of the case is clearly to enable citizens to take an increasingly active role in the energy system so they can be considered fully entitled stakeholders of its management.

Main type: Go ahead
Transformative outcome / Citizen-based and hybrid agency

Secondary types
Do their own (in the household)
Transformative outcome / Private in the household agency
Make their claims
Transformative outcome / Social movements agency

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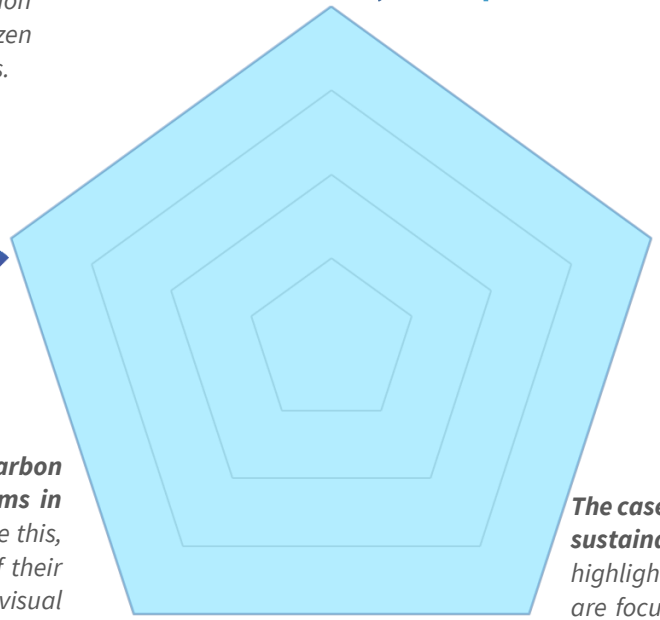
The aspects of energy citizenship

Solocal Energy actively promotes individual and self-organising community for the ownership of solar power plants as well as the creation of neighbourhood circles – all of which encompass many forms of ENCI and energy infrastructure ownership and participation, with the aim of involving disadvantaged users as well. Solocal Energy manages to make its voice heard in the public debate, thus ***ensuring the broad involvement of local citizens in the energy system while also providing a forum for deliberation for local people.***

Citizen control is ensured by the statutes of the Association *and is also required by law. Thus, among other principles, the following rules are observed: 1) "****each member shall have one vote****. The right to vote is transferable to other members. Each member may represent a maximum of two other members."2) Furthermore, "consensus decisions shall be sought; voting shall only take place after discussion without convergence of views." Making decisions based on citizen votes is compulsory, since they are following cooperative principles. Furthermore, the association has adopted the principles of sociocracy, which also enhances citizen control.*

Citizen control

Citizens exert effective control, and their votes have to be taken into account



The case explicitly recognises the ecological limit of carbon emissions, and the importance of renewable energy systems in avoiding carbon emissions. *In an effort to better communicate this, they display details about emissions avoided with the help of their activities on the internet site of the Association using visual representations.*

Carbon limit

Explicit recognition with mention/objective of reaching the max. carbon footprint

Democratic energy future

A more democratic energy future is a core concern of the case, and is part of the vision

FOCUS ON DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

*The case is accessible to all people who want to get involved, since membership fees can be freely determined based on the financial resources of members. However, the involvement of the Association in justice and equity issues goes way beyond simple membership in the association. Members believe that "****Electricity is an important prerequisite for participation in public life****" and that "****there is a basic right to energy.****" Accordingly, they want to enable everyone to have access to energy. Those who are cut off temporarily can borrow island balcony solar power plants from the Association.*

Equity and justice

Involvement is fully open

The case has a global/holistic approach to climate change and environmental sustainability *that they try to take into account in all their activities, e.g., as highlighted by their use of a cargo bike to transport the solar panels. Though they are focused on solar energy, whether at a small individual or larger collective scale, case members' goals extend beyond energy and are intended to achieve environmental sustainability in general, which is particularly clear in their effort to create neighbourhood circles for climate change. In this framework, the Association goes beyond a focus on energy and addresses issues related to climate-friendly cooking, mobility, etc.*

Environmental sustainability

Core issue, considered in goal setting

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Further information

facebook.com/SoLocalEnergy
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References

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Source of images

www.solocal-energy.de/

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