

BEST PRACTICE



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Community energy for a fair and smart grid

Ghent, Belgium – 7 085 inhabitants

PV – renovation – community energy

The city of Ghent initiated a very unique cooperation process with a number of local partners by launching the “Buurzame Stroom” (neighbourhood power) pilot scheme, which started operating in 2018.



Project in a Nutshell

The partners include two energy cooperatives, Ghent University (which acts as a trusted, neutral contributor), a social protection association (that is notably tasked with reaching out to vulnerable households) and the local distribution system operator. The plan of this ambitious consortium is to maximize the potential for locally generated energy in the neighbourhood, “equally sharing the costs and benefits without having to expand the present electricity grid”. The two cooperatives each have different missions and provide various engagement opportunities to citizens. Ecopower (the largest energy cooperative in Belgium) plays the role of aggregator, incentivizing and empowering households to better control their energy consumption through demand response management via smart meters and open data applications.

Impact & Next steps

The project focusses on a specific neighbourhood, with plans to install some 5 000m² of solar panels by the end of 2019, targeting residents with different profiles (migrant families, inhabitants in transit, elderly people and vulnerable social groups) and various types of building ownership structures. The cooperation of multi-stakeholders with strong involvement of citizens is proving very successful. The role of the city in the project is proving crucial as it supports the overall coordination, makes links with other initiatives in the city and between the various partners, including potential conflicts concerning the role and responsibility of each player. Overall, this “fair and smart” grid project is helping make solar energy profitable and affordable to a large group of stakeholders, optimising energy production at the local level by better matching supply and demand and creating a sense of community in the targeted neighbourhood thanks to a very collective and participative approach. Finally, the initiative proves instrumental in helping the city experiment new partnerships, frameworks and regulations on how to make local green energy production and supply a fair and profitable business model.



Replicability: Challenges & Success Factors

The success of the initiative lies in the unique cooperation between the different stakeholders. In particular, in the participation of two cooperatives, each with a different mission, but both providing various engagement opportunities to citizens. Ecopower, the largest energy cooperative in Belgium, plays the role of aggregator, incentivizing and empowering households to better control their energy consumption through demand response management via smart meters and open data applications. EnerGent provides citizens with the opportunity to invest in local solar power production by acquiring the photovoltaic panels.

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zonnestad@energent.be

<http://buurzamestroom.energent.be>

