

BEST PRACTICE



Active citizenship for renewable energy

Wolfhagen, Germany – 14 000 inhabitants

Remunicipalisation – community energy



Credits: Facebook, Energieoffensive Wolfhagen

In this city in Northern Hesse, the municipal energy company set the city on the path of 100% renewables by supporting the creation of a citizen cooperative.

Project in a Nutshell

The town of Wolfhagen was one of the first German cities to remunicipalise its electricity grid. In 2003, the then “stadtwerke” director convinced the local politicians to take advantage of E.ON’s expiring 20-year concession contract and reclaim control over the distribution network. After three years of intense negotiations, a deal was finally reached in 2006. Shortly after, the city set the objective of becoming 100% powered by renewables by 2015. In 2013, to make sure citizens could benefit from the switch to renewables, the town supported the creation of a citizens’ cooperative “BürgerEnergieGenossenschaft Wolfhagen”. A quarter of the energy company’s shares was sold to the cooperative, and the city used the money for building the needed infrastructure.

Impact & Next steps

The 100% renewable target was reached thanks to the construction of the city’s wind farm. The cooperative now owns 25% of its capital and contributes to the strategic orientations taken by the utility, with two representatives of the cooperative sitting in the nine-member supervisory board of the “stadtwerke”. Today, the cooperative’s shares provide members with decent dividends. The energy company makes a profit every year. It was able to pay back its loans but also to build a kindergarten. The number of the company’s employees has nearly doubled and it has won international prizes for its innovative projects on energy savings. Since 2005, some 284 municipalities have followed Wolfhagen’s lead, including Hamburg, the second largest city in Germany, in reclaiming power over the energy sector.

Replicability: Challenges & Success Factors

The municipalisation process was very intense and time-consuming. This was in part due to E.ON’s resistance, but also because such processes were uncommon at that time, therefore they needed to clarify a lot of technical, commercial and legal issues.



The construction of the local windfarm encountered opposition by some part of the local community: the turbines were supposed to be on the mountain overlooking the town. The municipality launched a wide debate to ensure that all stakeholders' point of views and worries could be addressed.

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<http://www.beg-wolfhagen.de/>

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